

State Conservation Commission Guidelines and Priorities for 2020

Guidelines

Two critical functions of the State Conservation Commission, as provided for in SDCL 38-7-3.1, are 1) development of the Coordinated Natural Resource Conservation Plan (Plan) and 2) allocation of grants from the Coordinated Natural Resource Conservation Fund (Fund).

The following guidelines are intended to assist conservation districts, Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry staff, and the Commission in the application, evaluation, selection and administration of grants, so that we can make the most effective use of the Fund in accomplishing the goals and objectives of the Plan. All guidelines are subject to change. New guidelines may be added upon periodic review and action by the Commission.

Project Duration, Readiness for Implementation, Partnerships

Given the high demand for funding of grants from the Fund, the Commission will look more favorably upon projects that are ready to implement, have participants lined up, and are of shorter duration. Projects that involve multiple districts and are leveraged with other funding partners will also be viewed more favorably.

Technical Assistance and Technician Grants

The Commission understands the importance of providing technical assistance for planning and implementation of certain practices. However, given the limited availability of funds, it is the Commission's intent to avoid on-going, direct grant funding for district technician positions, unless some extenuating circumstances prevails. Districts are encouraged to include technical assistance as an activity within a proposed grant project budget, seek cooperative agreements with NRCS for technical assistance, or pursue other appropriate ways to provide technical assistance.

Soil Health and Cover Crops

Soil health is clearly a high priority conservation issue. It represents a long term commitment for producers, involving several practices and a systems approach. The Commission will address this issue through grants from the Fund that provide incentive to producers to try certain soil health practices, and that will demonstrate practice benefits to other producers. Funding for such practices will therefore be limited in duration, scope, and amount per producer.

Livestock Health, Protection, Fabricated Windbreaks

According to the Plan, protection of livestock from severe weather events is not, in and of itself, a natural resource conservation need or benefit, nor a stated objective of the Plan. Therefore, project practices such as fabricated windbreaks, designed for the expressed primary benefit of livestock health and protection, will not be funded.

The Commission recognizes that certain conservation practices addressing needs for enhanced riparian habitat, grassland management, soil erosion protection, or water quality, can also address a desired need and benefit for livestock. However, it should be clearly evident in grant applications that the primary need being addressed and benefit to be realized from practices implemented are directly related to a natural resource conservation goal/objective stated in the Plan.

Shelterbelts/Tree Planting

Grants for funding of shelterbelts and tree plantings have traditionally been provided for projects in rural areas, providing conservation benefits for wildlife, wind erosion protection, and wind protection for livestock. Planting of trees for the primary purpose of “landscaping” in and around stand-alone dwellings in rural areas or housing developments will not be considered for funding.

Weed Control

Control of noxious weeds falls under the purview and jurisdiction of the State Weed and Pest Commission. Generally speaking, any grant applications addressing weed control needs will be referred to them. The Commission recognizes that certain “invasive species”, such as cedar or phragmites, may represent a natural resource conservation issue and fall within the scope of the Plan. Grant requests for such issues will be considered on their merits.

Funding Project Activities “Over and Above” Established District Services

The Commission understands the funding needs and limitations of the Conservation Districts. It desires to assist the Districts to the extent possible by making the most effective use of grants from the Fund. Grant funds are most effectively used when they are applied to District activities that are not already funded through a District enterprise or service for which they are being compensated. Administration oversight of grants at the Division staff level will reflect this.

Priorities

Generally speaking, Commission priorities for allocation of grants from the Fund will be what is in the goals and objectives of the Plan.

However, Administrative Rule 12:03:05:12 provides that “the commission may dedicate a portion of the annual appropriation for the coordinated soil and water conservation fund to use on sharing costs of any project that is determined by the commission to be a priority.”

In response to specific circumstances, such as a natural disaster, an emerging natural resource issue, or a unique conservation opportunity, the Commission may assign a higher priority to certain grants designed to address such circumstances.

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