

Natural Resources Conservation Service Southeast American Indian Work Group



Southeast American Indian Work Group members visit with NRCS Associate Chief Dana York (c) during the 2007 American Indian Alaska Native Employees Training Conference in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Assisting Leadership in Indian Country Today

Rev 6-08

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Chapter 1

Role of NRCS in the Southeast American Indian Work Group



Our Vision

Productive Indian lands that use the effective traditional and innovative conservation techniques to sustain the natural resources.

Our Mission

To provide leadership that creates opportunities for information exchange and training between work group members, American Indians and other organizations that results in increased conservation of natural resources on American Indian Lands, increased employment of American Indians by USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and sustains the preservation of cultural resources and traditional values.



Background

NRCS has over 70 years experience in working with private landowners across the nation to provide technical and financial assistance in conserving their natural resources. As an agency, NRCS has led the way to assist Indian Tribes by establishing offices in Indian Country as defined by the U.S. Congress, the President of the United States, and USDA-NRCS policies. Native American governments are sovereign nations existing within the boundaries of the United States and have special legal and political relationships with the United States. NRCS is striving to establish effective relationships with those sovereign governments by consulting with Indian Nations on a government-to-government basis and making agreements for the betterment of natural resources, economic development, health, and educational needs.

The Southeast American Indian Work Group was created in 1996 to ensure the delivery of those same services to American Indians in the nine southeast states. Originally, the members of the work group included one NRCS staff person from each state who was appointed by the NRCS State Conservationist to serve as either the state Special Emphasis Program Manager or as an American Indian Liaison to one or more Tribes within the state. Leadership was provided by the Regional Conservationist, a staff person from the Regional Office, and a state conservationist who served as a “Work Group Champion.” The work group continues to operate with representatives from each

state, with leadership provided by the champion state conservationist, and with guidance from Indian Elders.

The NRCS Southeast American Indian Work Group includes the following states:

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1) Alabama | 4) Kentucky | 7) South Carolina |
| 2) Florida | 5) Mississippi | 8) Tennessee |
| 3) Georgia | 6) North Carolina | 9) Virginia |

There has been discussion of expanding to include the northeast states; however, so far this has not proven feasible and the Elder Council feels that the current size is most advantageous for networking and solving common issues.

Today, the Southeast American Indian Work Group has transitioned into an effective networking group who shares information, organizes regional meetings, recruits employees, and involves the American Indians in conservation work.

Our Values

1. The work group will ensure that USDA program delivery is provided to all American Indians, including but not limited to, federally recognized, state recognized, and community-based Tribes, and individual American Indian landowners.
2. The work group will respect the cultural and traditional values of each Tribe through guidance provided by the Southeast Elder Advisory Council.
3. The work group will provide high quality standards of work on Indian land.
4. The work group will strive to improve quality, accountability, effectiveness, and consistency of conservation assistance to sustain and improve Tribal natural resources.

Customers, Services, and Products

Customers	Services	Products
➤ Elders	➤ Conservation Technical Assistance	➤ Best Management Practices
➤ Tribal Administration	➤ Consulting	➤ Conservation Plans
➤ Department Heads	➤ Advising	➤ Critical Preliminary Findings
➤ Tribal Members	➤ Finding Financial Assistance	➤ Survey Reviews
➤ Division Directors		➤ Comprehensive Studies
➤ State Conservationists		➤ Educational Programs
➤ NRCS Employees		➤ Information

Value of Work Group to Chief and Agency Leadership

- Establishes a formal network for communications between NRCS and the numerous American Indian Tribes, community based organizations, and American Indian individuals.
- Provides a feedback mechanism on how well policies and requirements are being implemented.
- Improves accountability by providing information on agency performance and evaluating effectiveness and efficiency of NRCS programs, activities, and operations in Indian Country.
- Increases the knowledge and skill of the staff working with the American Indians.

Chapter 2

The Elders – A Southeast American Indian Advisory Council



Early in the process, it was realized that the work group would benefit from following an Indian tradition of seeking advice and guidance from Indian Elders. Currently, each state is invited to have an Elder representative who serves on the Southeast American Indian Advisory Council.

Appointment of an Elder is usually done in consultation between the NRCS State Conservationist and the NRCS staff person serving on the work group. The Elder is chosen due to their knowledge of American Indian affairs in that state. They may be a chief or assistant chief; however, that is not a requirement. The invitation should be discussed with the Elder first, then formalized in a letter from the NRCS State Conservationist.

Expectations of Elders

- Knowledgeable about American Indian affairs in the appointing state.
- Provide guidance to the work group representative and the NRCS State Conservationist on NRCS programs and services and how they impact the American Indians.
- Attend some of the monthly teleconferences of the work group.
- Review material and provide input to the work group representative.
- Participate in the Program Delivery Meeting sponsored by the work group.

The Elders are an integral part of the work group and are invited to all meetings and teleconferences. They are treated with respect for their knowledge and wisdom and for the many hours that they have volunteered to assist NRCS.

Current Elders Serving On Southeast American Indian Advisory Council

Elder	Tribe	State
Mr. Billy Smith	Poarch Band of Creek Indians	Alabama
Mr. Richard Bowers	Big Cypress Seminole Tribe	Florida
Principal Chief Marian McCormick	Tama Tribal Town	Georgia
Ms. Virginia Willis	Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians	Mississippi
Mr. Jerry Wolfe	Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	North Carolina
Mr. Gilbert Blue	Catawba Indian Nation	South Carolina
Mr. Cubert Bell	Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians	Tennessee
Assistant Chief Warren Cook	Pamunkey Indian Tribe Reservation	Virginia

Elders Recommendations to Work Group

The following five questions were posed by the American Indian Liaisons to the Tribal Elders representing their states. These are the direct responses of the Elders.

1. What are some of your Tribal natural resource concerns?
 - a. Protection of the water quality.
 - b. City removing large volume of water from river.
 - c. Wetlands protection which will also protect the native cultural resources that are being inundated.
 - d. Concern over pesticide use on rented cropland.
 - e. Water quality and quantity.
 - f. Forest management.
 - g. Cultural resources.
 - h. Erosion.
 - i. Education for future generations.
 - j. Have Tribal leaders send out surveys for all members to list their resources concerns.
 - k. Water contamination.
 - l. Ponds on Tribal land.
 - m. Soil erosion.

2. How can we encourage more participation in the NRCS programs?
 - a. By getting the word out to the Tribal Leaders and Elders.
 - b. Holding meetings in the Tribal Communities.
 - c. Educate and inform agricultural producers by discussing Farm Bill programs at monthly meetings.
 - d. Meeting with Tribal leaders.
 - e. Meetings for Tribal members/landowners.
 - f. Hold the American Indian Program Delivery Training Meetings.
 - g. Work with other Tribal organizations to get NRCS program information out.

3. How can we identify the American Indian farmers who would participate in NRCS programs?
 - a. Holding a meeting at the Tribal Grounds would make most more at ease.
 - b. Advertise in the local papers that you are holding a meeting for American Indian farmers to acquaint them with NRCS programs.
 - c. Too little land is farmed by Indians to worry about it.
 - d. A list of agricultural producers that are Tribal members can be obtained from Tribal leadership headquarters.
 - e. Tribal Census - Each Tribe is required to have a data base of their membership; most of them will share their membership list, especially if it is an opportunity to help their members.

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- f. The Tribes are able to send out surveys to their members. This would be an excellent way to obtain the Tribal members who are farmers or producers.
 - g. Hold conservation tour to show completed conservation practices and have success stories given by participants.
4. How do you feel about your role as a Southeast Elder for NRCS?
- a. It is an honor to represent my people. I am able to find out about the concerns of my people and take it back to the Tribe and let them know how to tap into these programs. The Elders used to travel to other areas and find out what is working with other Tribal groups, but have not had the opportunity to do so in a few years. I enjoy working with NRCS and other Tribal Elders.
 - b. I am comfortable with progress I have made. Can always do more.
 - c. I am very proud to be serving as an Elder Advisory Council member for the Southeast American Indian work group.
 - d. I am honored to be a spokesman for my Tribe, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians.
 - e. I see all Tribal Elders as role model for our future generation of young people, and this is very important to me.
 - f. I believe that the Southeast Elder Advisory Council is working, but we need to get more involved.
 - g. Confusing and inactive.
5. What is your role as a Southeast Elder for NRCS?
- a. To let NRCS know what the concerns of my Tribe are and how NRCS can best serve and reach the Tribal community.
 - b. To take back to my people how to work with NRCS and how to help Tribal people be more at ease with the government programs.
 - c. Possibly set up times that NRCS can work with a group of Tribal farmers.
 - d. Offer advice to NRCS and producers on issues of mutual importance.
 - e. To help educate NRCS and ensure that Tribal protocol is used.
 - f. To help ensure that the Tribe and its leaders are open to working with NRCS and participate in NRCS programs available to them to address resource concerns.
 - g. Make sure that regular meetings between NRCS and Tribal leaders are held to maintain and improve relationships.
 - h. Educate new Tribal leaders in the USDA programs available to help the Tribe and Tribal members.

Chapter 3 Work Group Structure



NRCS Staff Serving American Indians in the Southeast

The NRCS Southeast American Indian Work Group consists of nine members who are appointed by their respective NRCS State Conservationists to represent the state. Leadership is provided by the Work Group Champion who is appointed by the East Regional Assistant Chief. The work group has sustained a breadth of program knowledge by having representatives from many different positions in the agency.

Current Southeast American Indian Work Group Membership

Person	Work Group Position	Work Title	State
Gary Kobylski	Work Group Champion	State Conservationist	Alabama
Edith Morigeau	Advisor	National Tribal Relations Coordinator	USDA/NRCS Headquarters

Person	Work Group Position	Work Title	State
David Elliott	Tribal Liaison – PT	Conservation Technician	Alabama
John Harper	SEPM	RC&D Coordinator	Florida
Debbie Henry	SEPM and Tribal Liaison	Conservation Technician	Georgia
Pat Green	SEPM	RC&D Coordinator	Kentucky
Tim Oakes	Tribal Liaison – FT	Soil Conservationist	Mississippi
John McCoy	Tribal Liaison – FT	Soil Conservationist	North Carolina
Cliff Eaddy	SEPM	District Conservationist	South Carolina
Phillip Dixon	SEPM	District Conservationist	Tennessee
Robin Smith	SEPM	RC&D Secretary	Virginia

In addition, guidance is provided to the work group from the Elders who serve on the Southeast American Indian Advisory Council

Chapter 4 Work Group Goals August 2007



Summary of Goals

- Goal 1** Increase the conservation of natural resources on American Indian land including reservation, Tribal, and privately owned lands.

- Goal 2** Sustain and establish, where needed, working relationships with American Indians so they are familiar with the services available and know where to go to receive assistance.

- Goal 3** Enhance the knowledge of NRCS leadership about the conservation needs of American Indians and the unique definition of responsibilities to provide services.

- Goal 4** Improve the knowledge and skills of NRCS employees who work with American Indians.

Detailed Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Goal 1 Increase the conservation of natural resources on American Indian land including reservation, Tribal, and privately owned lands.

Objective A: Liaisons and SEPM's provide support to field staff in how to assist American Indians.

Objective B: Host an annual Regional Program Delivery workshop for American Indian Tribal officials and NRCS staff to improve working relationships and knowledge about effect conservation strategies.

- Strategy 1 Include success stories to show American Indians commitment to conservation.
- Strategy 2 Provide training to NRCS field staff on how to improve services.
- Strategy 3 Include USDA officials to sustain and improve the working relationship with Indian Leaders.
- Strategy 4 Support attendance by Tribal elders by including them on the program.
- Strategy 5 Gain insight from Tribal Elders by having them provide words of wisdom and guidance during opening sessions.

Goal 2 Sustain and establish, where needed, working relationships with American Indians so they are familiar with the services available to them and know where to go to receive assistance.

Objective A: Strengthen the involvement of the Southeast American Indian Work Group Elders Council.

- Strategy 1 Annually host a teleconference for the elders to provide feed back.
- Strategy 2 Develop written guidelines about the Elders Council role and how they are appointed.

Objective B: Provide each federal and state Tribe with current information about NRCS programs.

- Strategy 1 Mail information annually regarding services available and past NRCS success stories in working with American Indians.
- Strategy 2 Host meetings for the Tribes.
- Strategy 3 Attend Tribal natural resources meetings.

Objective C: All federally recognized Tribes have an NRCS liaison to ensure a government-to-government consultative process is sustained.

Strategy 1 Liaison communicates regularly with Tribal representatives on natural resources issues.

Objective D: SEPMS establish contacts with and provide information to 90 percent of state recognized Tribes.

Objective E: Provide information to community based American Indian Groups on an as needed basis.

Goal 3

Enhance the knowledge of NRCS leadership about the conservation needs of American Indians and the unique definition of responsibilities to provide services.

Objective A: Provide an annual report to the NRCS Regional Assistant Chief regarding activities of the Southeast American Indian Work Group

Objective B: Offer training for NRCS leadership at the Program Delivery Workshop.

Objective C: Provide six success stories to the Tribal Relations Coordinator to share with leadership each year.

Goal 4

Improve the knowledge and skills of NRCS employees who work with American Indians.

Objective A: Host regular teleconferences for Southeast American Indian Work Group members to network and share information.

Objective B: Southeast American Indian Work Group members provide information to NRCS employees within their state on how to effectively establish relations and work with American Indians.

Objective C: Increase membership involvement with the National American Indian Alaska Native Employees Association (AIANEA).

Objective D: Ensure Southeast American Indian Work Group members attend NRCS training courses and other classes on establishing and sustaining effective working relationships with Tribes.

Objective E: Develop Thunder Sheets on nine success stories and share with appropriate leadership.

- Strategy 1 Develop success stories.
- Strategy 2 Consolidate the stories.
- Strategy 3 Publish the one page Thunder Sheet with brief summaries of the stories (annually in January).

Chapter 5 Tribes, Groups Served, and NRCS Staff



The states committed to this work group range north to Virginia and south to Florida with the western boundary set by Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky. The Tribes within those lands have a tremendous variety of customs, traditions, and resources available to them.

NRCS Staff Serving Tribes

State	Fed Tribes	State Tribes	Organized Community Based Tribes	Part Time SEPM	Liaison Full Time	Liaison Part Time	Outreach Coord. Full Time	Outreach Coord. Part Time	Tribal Coord. Part Time
Alabama	1	9		1		1		1	
Florida	2	2	2	1		1			1
Georgia	-	3		1		1		1	
Kentucky	-		1	1					
Mississippi	1			1	1				
North Carolina	1	8	3	1	1			1	
South Carolina	1	5	7	1				1	
Tennessee	-	8	13	1				1	
Virginia	-	8	4	1					
TOTALS	6	35	27	9	2	3	0	5	1

- SEPM = Special Emphasis Program Manager, which is a collateral duty.
- American Indian Liaisons are assigned to a specific Tribe and can be part- or full-time in that capacity.
- Outreach Coordinators serve many types of underserved customers including American Indians.
- Tennessee and North Carolina have part-time Outreach Coordinators; however, they do not traditionally work with the American Indians.

Federally Recognized Tribes in the Nine Southeast States

State	Name of Tribe	Number of Members	Approximate Acreage in Reservation	Approximate Acreage in Tribal Land
AL	Poarch Band of Creek Indians	2,479	386 acres	7008 acres
FL	Miccosukee Tribe of Florida	600	75,000 acres	-
	Seminole Tribe of Florida Big Cypress and Brighton	6,350	89,000 acres	-
GA	No Federal Tribes	-	-	-
KY	No Federal Tribes	-	-	-
MS	Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians	8,760	35,000 acres	2,600 acres
NC	Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	14,000+	56,875 acres	-
SC	Catawba Indian Nation	2700	711 acres	633 acres
TN	Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians	(same as MS)	-	150
	Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians	(same as NC)	-	30
VA	No Federal Tribes	-	-	-

Tribal Lands refer to non-reservation acreage.
All acreage is estimated and not an exact figure.

State Recognized Tribes in the Nine Southeast States

State	Tribe Name	Number of Members	Approximate Acres in State Reservation	Approximate Acreage in Tribal Land
AL	Echota Cherokee Tribe of Alabama	33,000	0	100 acres
	Cherokee Tribe of Northeast Alabama	4,900	0	10 acres
	Ma-Chis Lower Creek Indian Tribe of Alabama	5,000	0	10 acres
	Star Clan of Muscogee Creeks	350	0	20 acres
	Cher-O-Creek Intra Tribal Indians	350	0	5 acres
	MOWA Band of Choctaw Indians	9,000	0	25 acres
	Piqua Shawnee Tribe	250	0	0
	United Cherokee Ani-Yun-Wiya Nation	500	0	.5 acres
FL	Perdido Bay Tribe	245	0	0
	Santa Rosa Creek Indian Tribe	159	0	35 acres
	Muscogee Nations of Florida	260	0	10 acres
GA	Lower Muskogee Creek Tribe	3,000	0	80 acres
	Georgia Tribe of Eastern Cherokee	450	0	0
	Cherokee of Georgia Tribal Council	450	0	30 acres
KY		0	0	0
MS		0	0	0
NC	Coharie Intra-Tribal Council	0	0	0
	Cumberland Co. Association For Indian People	0	0	0
	Haliwa-Saponi Tribe	0	0	0
	Lumbee Tribe of NC.	40,000 +	0	0
	Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation	0	0	0
	Sappony	0	0	0
	Waccamaw-Siouan Tribe	0	0	0
SC	Chaloklowa Chickasaw Indian People	0	0	0
	Eastern Cherokee, Southern Iroquois and United Tribes of S.C. Inc.	0	0	0
	Natchez Tribe of South Carolina	0	0	0
	Pee Dee Indian Tribe of Beaver Creek	0	0	0
	Piedmont American Indian Association, Lower Eastern Cherokee Nation of South Carolina	0	0	0
	Wassamasaw Tribe of Varnertown Indians	0	0	0
TN		0	0	0
VA	Pamunkey Indian Tribe Reservation	80	1,200 acres	0
	Mattaponi Reservation		150 acres	900 acres
	Nansemond Tribe	300	0	Unknown
	Chickahominy Tribe	750	0	200 acres
	Eastern Chickahominy Tribe	150	0	Unknown
	Rappahannock Indian Tribe	300	0	119 acres
	Upper Mattaponi	100	0	20 acres
	Monacan	900	0	118 acres

Tribal Lands refer to non-reservation acreage.
All acreage is estimated and not an exact figure.

Chapter 6 Success Stories



While the biggest success story of the work group is the increased involvement of all of the Southeast states NRCS staff with the American Indians, three success stories are offered here:

- A. Trail of Tears Corn
- B. Use of EQIP Funds on Indian Lands and
- C. Program Delivery Meetings Hosted by the Southeast Work Group.

A. “Trail of Tears” Corn Harvest

By Debbie T. Henry, American Indian Tribal Liaison for NRCS in Georgia

In the spring of 2002, the staff of the Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center planted some of the original corn seed carried on the “Trail of Tears” 1838 Indian Removal. This seed has been given to several Tribes and Tribal members throughout Georgia to plant on their land. The corn has been used for educational purposes, as well as providing food for their families.

The White Eagle Corn is commonly referred to as the “Trail of Tears” corn because it was carried by the Cherokee as they traveled west on the Trail of Tears. It is a Blue and White Dent Corn that was well adapted to the needs of America’s early farmers: high ear placement facilitated hand picking and tall stalks provided a good source of food for cattle. It is a beautiful white and blue corn with a red cob. Young corn is a substantial flavorful sweet corn; mature it makes a good blue corn flour. Occasionally there will be an all-blue ear. This variety of corn is considered very sacred to the American Indians as they have special ceremonies where they offer prayers blessing the seed and Mother Earth. At times the image of a white eagle can be seen in the kernels.

In March of 2007, Debbie Henry, American Indian/Alaskan Native Special Emphasis Program Manager and Tribal Liaison for Georgia, traveled to Alabama and delivered some of the corn to the Poarch Band of Creek Indians (a federally recognized Tribe) as well as nine state recognized Tribes. This seed was also sent to Tribes in Mississippi and Kentucky to plant for educational use as well as food for Tribal members.

Due to a continued interest in this project, our seed supply was depleted. James E. Tillman Sr., Georgia NRCS State Conservationist, agreed to support the planting of another crop to replenish our seed bank. The heirloom grower, located in Oklahoma, that supplied NRCS with the corn for the 2002 crop was contacted and we were able to obtain some more of this very sacred seed.

In the spring of 2007, personnel of the Jimmy Carter Plant Materials Center planted a second crop. On August 23, a group of twelve NRCS employees and five Earth Team Volunteers gathered to hand-pick the 2007 crop of “Trail of Tears” corn. The yield was very good and we have already filled two requests for seed. We sent some to members of the Mattaponi Indian Tribe in Virginia and to the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

In Oklahoma we are working with a representative from the National Society for American Indian Elderly (NSAIE) who is partnering with the Red Earth Action Project to plant conservation/community gardens. They will use the corn from the gardens to feed low income and elderly in the Cherokee Nation.

B. Use of NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives (EQIP) Funds on Indian Lands

The EQIP program has proved to be a tremendous opportunity for the Tribes within our Southeast Work Group boundaries to enhance, improve, and preserve their natural resources. By forming strong relationships between NRCS and the Tribal leaders, we have several Tribes that are now participating in the EQIP program.

Currently NRCS has obligated over \$7,993,000 dollars in EQIP contracts with Tribes and individual American Indian landowners in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Mississippi. These contracts address resource concerns on cropland, pastureland, and forestland on Tribal lands.

Some example practices that are being installed include: wells, watering facilities and pipelines, cross fencing, shade structures, and heavy use areas on pastureland, cropland conversion, and water disposal systems on cropland, control burning, permanent fire lane construction, tree planting, critical area treatment, and restoration and management of declining habitat on forestland. It is through NRCS programs such as EQIP that gives Tribes, as well as individual American Indian landowners, the necessary funding to install conservation practices which help people help the land.

C. Tribal Program Delivery Initiative Meetings hosted by the Southeast Work Group

The Southeast Work Group hosted Tribal Program Delivery Initiative meetings in 2000, 2002, 2003, and 2005 to develop and improve working relationships with the Tribes throughout the Southeast. The meetings were all hosted by a Tribe on Tribal lands where there could be two-way communication about the programs offered by the NRCS and the type of services needed by the Tribes to effectively manage their natural resources.

The stated objectives of the meetings were to:

- Communicate with Tribal leaders about how to access NRCS programs and services to American Indian producers and landowners.
- Provide a listening forum to surface concerns that Southeastern Tribes have in accessing NRCS conservation programs and services.
- Demonstrate ways that NRCS employees can work more effectively with American Indians and American Indian Tribal ways of government.
- Share information about new technical service providers.
- Encourage the formation of Tribal conservation districts.
- Provide opportunity for input on the Farm Bill.

Most of the states involved sponsored representatives from at least one of their Tribes to attend the meeting. In addition to the NRCS Tribal liaisons, the SEPMS and state conservationists from most of the states attended. Speakers included a wide range of federal agency representatives from USDA headquarters which included NRCS, Rural Development (RD), and the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

A highlight at each meeting was receiving guidance and input from the work group Elders Council who offered many insights into the difficulties that need to be overcome to establish effective conservation programs on Tribal lands. Another highlight was the tour of Tribal grounds that included conservation practices that had been installed.

Chapter 7

Background Material for Plan Development



The following information was gathered to prepare this plan and is offered as background material to more fully understand the work of this group.

Southeast Work Group

“I think that due to the fact that everyone is from the Southeast and in the South everyone tries to be friendly, it overflows in our work group and the entire work group tries to be friendly with each other. In NRCS it is like a big family and in our small work group it is like a smaller family trying to promote American Indian/Alaska natives. This work group is very positive and I am lucky to have been a part of this effort in my career.”

Participants: Philip Dixon, Debbie Henry, Patrick Green, David Elliott, Roel Herrera, Tim Oaks, and Patricia Tyrrell

Strengths of Work Group

- Elder’s Advisory Council members contribute to knowledge base.
- Regional coverage of nine states.
- Great working relationship with understanding and concern for American Indian values and Involvement in NRCS program implementation.
- In existence since 1996.
- Work group has built an incredible trust with Tribes.
- Good working relationships between work group members.
- Friendships among SEPM's and Liaisons.
- Common issues addressed between states.
- The strength of work group comes from the work group members.
- Small enough group to make plans and decisions.
- Recognized nationally by NRCS and Indian groups.
- Learning from members about American Indian programs and program delivery.
- A one-on-one personal contact with group members is very effective to learn and communicate.
- Members positively influence the American Indian/Alaska Native customers.
- Good support from NRCS State Conservationists.
- Plays a big role in USDA program delivery to Southeast Indian Country.
- Provide wisdom, knowledge, and direction for NRCS to be more effective and efficient when working within Indian Country.
- Consistency between work group and Tribes.

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- Consistency on Farm Bill programs between work group, national leadership, and Tribes.
 - Work group has a direct relationship with NRCS State Conservationists and direct connection with Regional staff working as liaisons to Tribes.
 - Initiate consultation with American Indian Tribes on a government-to-government basis.
 - Provide quality guidance to leadership on Indian issues, i.e., conservation, cultural, environments, policies, and politics.
 - Have a history of holding members accountable for planned actions.

Weakness of Work Group

- Only work group contact is via monthly teleconferences.
- Member's dedication can cause different degrees of participation.
- Not being able to sit down face-to-face and discuss work group issues, i.e., work group plan.
- Lack of funding and financial support for the work group.
- Lack of funding for the Indian Program Delivery Training Workshops.
- Different supervisors with different priorities.
- No annual meetings or training sessions for Tribal involvement.
- Lack of regular participation by the national program manager.
- Individuals must work independently to solve their unique problems.
- Not enough publicity to Indian Country concerning success of conservation work with the Tribes.

Upcoming Opportunities for Work Group

- Group is a working proto-type for other regions across the country.
- Opportunity to help other Tribes, whether in our region or not, to have the relationship we share in our region.
- Good experience for what it takes to work successfully with Tribes.
- Good exposure to program delivery for Tribes.
- Excellent networking about what works and does not work with Tribes.
- Annual or bi-annual meetings for one day would build capacity of group.
- Successful projects will add to our validity as a work group.
- Opportunity for Tribal leaders and Tribal members to come together with NRCS leadership to discuss the concerns, issues, and success stories within the Southeast at Program Delivery meetings.
- Program Delivery Trainings provides Tribes that participate in USDA programs a way to share their success stories.
- Annual program delivery needs to be emphasized.
- Opportunity to work closer at the state level with Tribes.
- Presentations and past videos that would help assist other Tribes strengthen their communication with NRCS.

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- Possibility for more Tribes to become involved.
 - Helping Tribes convey their needs in a sensible manner within the framework of NRCS.
 - Effectively promote partnerships between Tribes and NRCS.
 - Build strong partnerships with NRCS and Tribes based on conservation of natural resources.
 - Expansion of partnership to include sister agencies.

Threats to the Work Group

- Need for increased NRCS management support.
- Increased number of members from expanding the East Region Work Group.
- Lack of support from some states.
- Lack of support from state recognized Indian Tribes.
- Loss of funding and budget cuts.
- Lack of interest by some state work group representatives.

Chapter 8

History of Tribal Relations



Relationship of NRCS and Federal Recognized Tribes and State Tribes

Background

- Historically the relationship was viewed with skepticism and negativism. Consultation was not attempted and trust had not been achieved.
- Many Tribes had a lack of understanding about NRCS business operations with customer and partners.
- NRCS lacked the man-power or time to address Tribal technical conservation issues.
- Tribes not responding to current NRCS program delivery methods were dismissed as not interested. NRCS was not aware of Tribal protocol or government-to-government consultation methods or the uniqueness of the individual Tribes.
- Tribe's only full time contact was with the BIA/BLM or Department of Interior.
- Tribes (638) take control of programs from BIA. NRCS not informed of transfer of programs.
- No MOU between NRCS/BIA/FSA.
- Cultural resources and social issues were not considered to be a factor in planning.

Results of Improved Relations (Accomplished Goals)

- Improved communications between NRCS employees and Tribal government has improved distribution of work and consultation with governments.
- NRCS has provided training for government employees "Working More Effectively with American Indians."
- MOU is established (government-to-government) with federally recognized Tribes.
- NRCS provides more outreach to state recognized Tribes and American Indians.
- NRCS develops Agricultural Resources Management Plans on Tribal lands.
- Trust is being established between NRCS and Tribes.
- Tribes have requested technical assistance and cost-share funding from NRCS.
- Tribes developed new MOU's with USDA-NRCS and other federal agencies.
- Increased trust and better quality reviews for the respective agencies.
- Improved ability of NRCS to reach agreement on corrective actions recommended by Tribes.
- NRCS in the Southeast Region creates SERAIW.
- Establishment of Tribal NRSS Offices on Tribal lands.

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- Conservation practices being applied with and without cost-share program moneys.
 - Cultural Resources Program agreements are signed.
 - American Indian's in the southeast begin to participate in USDA programs.

Activities and Successes

In October 2000, a program initiative and client listening session for issues and concerns was held in Choctaw, Mississippi, hosted by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians. Over 60 representatives from sixteen federally recognized Tribes attended with nine state recognized Tribes. A similar meeting was held in 2001 with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians at Cherokee, North Carolina. Then we went back to Choctaw, Mississippi, in 2002. In 2003, we gathered in Florida where the Miccosukee Tribe of Florida hosted. In 2005, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians hosted in Atmore, Alabama.

- Resulted in legislation that Tribes were mentioned 91 times in 2002 Farm Bill.
- Resulted in the formation of a Southeast Region Elders Advisory Council.
- Improved delivery of services to the Southeast Region Tribes.
- Consultation and Trust agreements and mandates being met.
- Program funding to Tribes increased.
- Tribal participation in programs increased.
- NRCS/SEAIWG assists in the management planning of over 200,000 acres of Tribal Lands across the southeast.
- Established two full-time and one part-time positions at Tribal headquarters providing improved agency assistance to Tribes.
- Development and implementation of five Southeast Region workshops that also included training covering the National Environmental Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Historic Preservation Act and Cultural Awareness.
- Development and implementation of multi-state workshops emphasizing improvement in the technical quality for Indian Country in the Southeast.
- Assisting Tribes in enrolling in FAS as Farms and increase awareness of USDA programs such as EQIP, WHIP, CRP, PL 566, and others has led to over 17 million dollars in cost-share funding.
- Streamlining and improving EQIP to fit Tribal administrative processes.
- Facilitated American Indian Program Initiative in four states and six federally recognized Tribes.
- Enhanced implementation of natural resource-based soil survey projects and re-energized coordination with USDA-NRCS and the Extension Indian Reservation Program (EIRP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW), the USDA Forest Service (USDA-FS), and federal and state Tribal partners.
- Production of over 19 cable video news stories about natural resource concerns on Tribal lands.

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- Advising and consultation to the six federal recognized Tribes within the Southeast Region on natural resources and USDA programs.
 - Advising the 35 state recognized Tribes in the Southeast on USDA programs and conservation practices.
 - Production of over 160 news articles on Tribal conservation and educational practices.
 - Incorporation of new air resource concerns into the General Manual and the National Planning Procedures Handbook.
 - Rating of conservation practices for the air resource in the Conservation Practice Physical Effects matrix.

Action Plan Summary

The Southeast American Indian Workgroup is proud of the accomplishments that have been made within Indian Country in the Southeast. While these accomplishments have been a huge step in the right direction, it is the goal of our workgroup to continue to see NRCS, Tribes, and American Indian individuals reach new heights as we work together to protect, maintain, and enhance our natural resources.

We as a work group hope this document provides a history of where we have been and a guide to where we want to be with our activities in the Southeast Region.

This plan was approved by the Southeast American Indian Work Group on May 21, 2008.



CLIFF EADDY
SEAIW Chair



GARY KOBYSKI
SEAIW Champion