
Collaborative Community Engagement: Facilitating Multi-County Feedback to Prioritize NRCS Funding

— Jessica Ferris and Andrea Albertin —

NRLI Practicum
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USDA-NRCS Financial and Technical Assistance

NRCS staff work with producers to develop a **Conservation Plan** to address an environmental need or concern

Plan outlines activities or practices to reach a producer's objectives

Once a plan has been signed, producers are eligible to receive financial assistance



Local Working Groups



Purpose:

To ensure local priorities regarding soil, water, and resource management are communicated to NRCS for grant funding allocations.

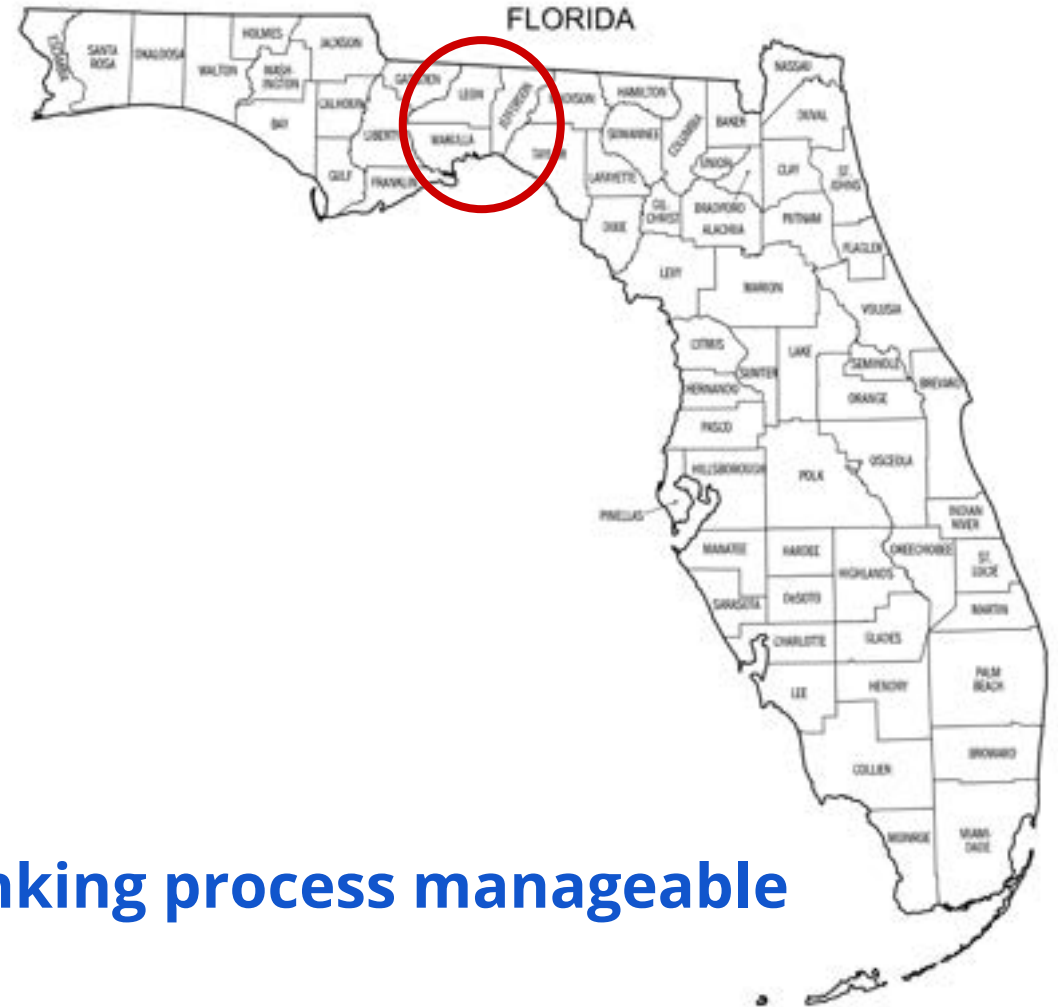
Local working groups are composed of:

- Agricultural producers
- Owners/operators of nonindustrial private forest land
- Professionals representing agricultural and natural resource interests
- Individuals interested in soil, water, wetlands, plants, forestry, and wildlife sciences

Practicum Issue

- Low attendance at annual NRCS-Local Working Group meetings
- Format for feedback changed in 2024 from individual county submissions to multicounty
- NRCS Monticello District Conservationist tasked to submit [top 10 resource concerns](#) for from from a list of **47**

Goals: [Increase participation & make ranking process manageable](#)



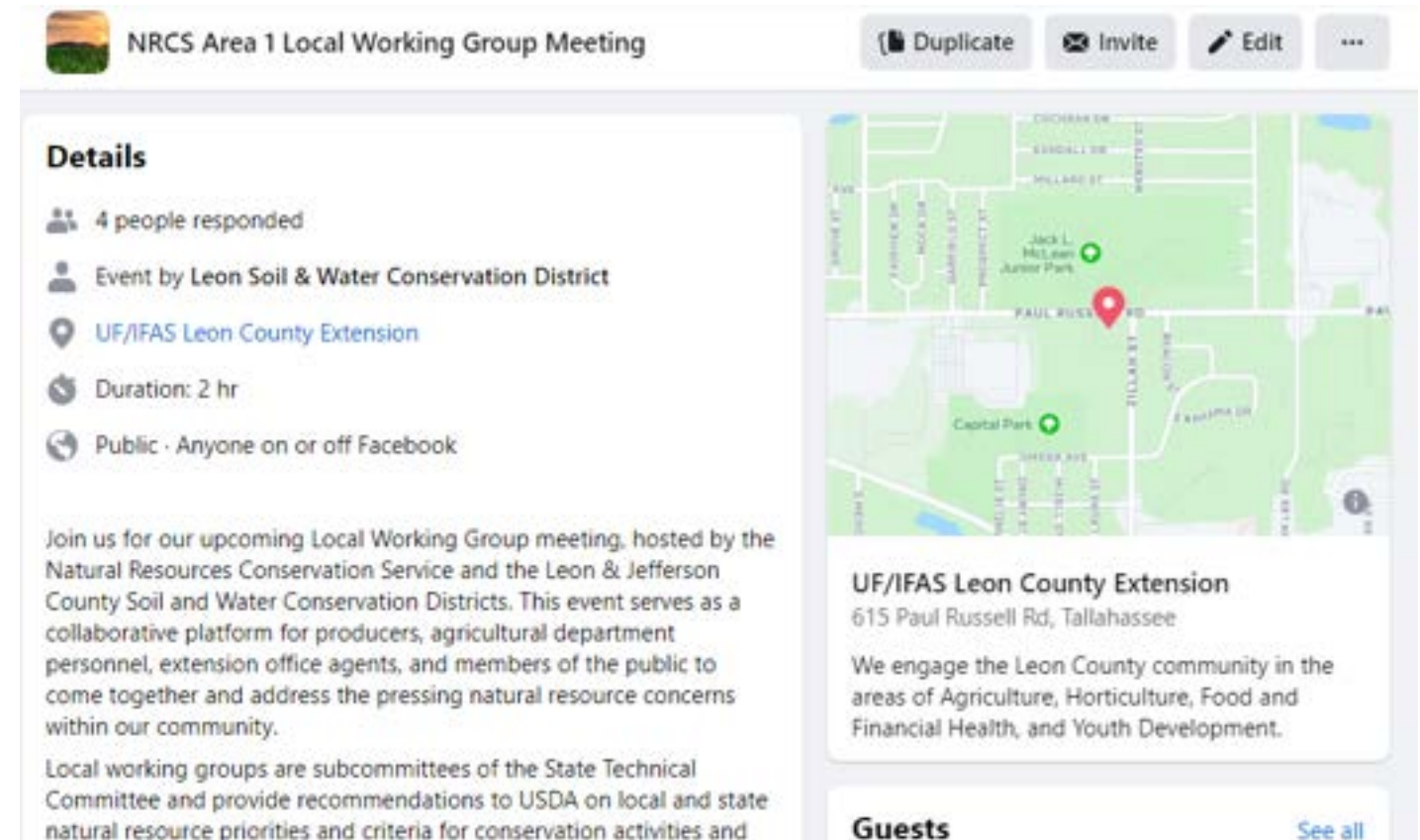
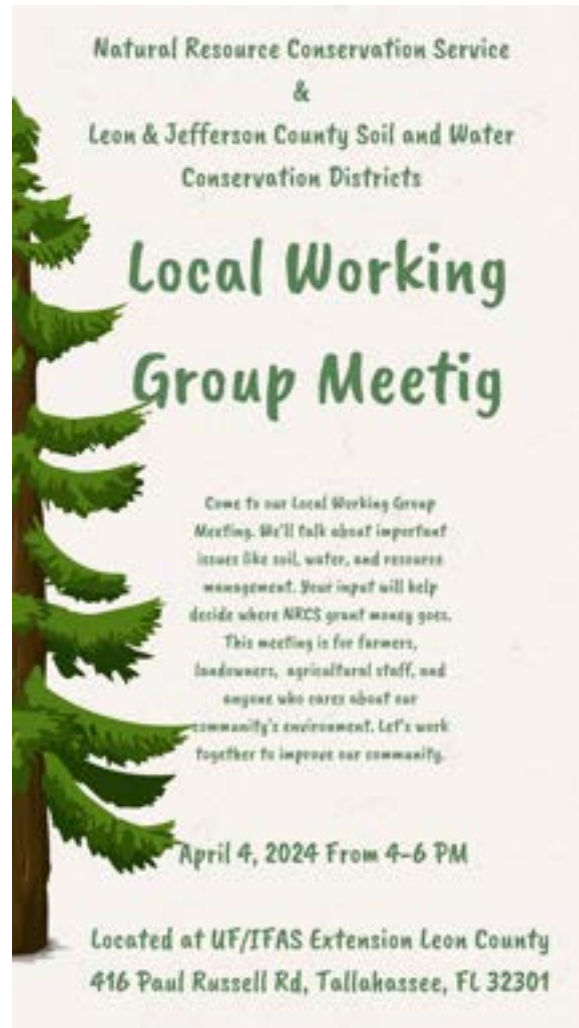


Relevant groups

- Agricultural producers
- Owners/operators of nonindustrial private forest land
- Professionals representing agricultural and natural resource interests



Increasing stakeholder participation



NRLI Techniques Utilized

- Situation Assessment Matrix
- Process Agenda
- Setting the stage
- Participant introductions
- Meeting process description

NRCS-Local Working Group Meeting



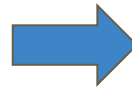
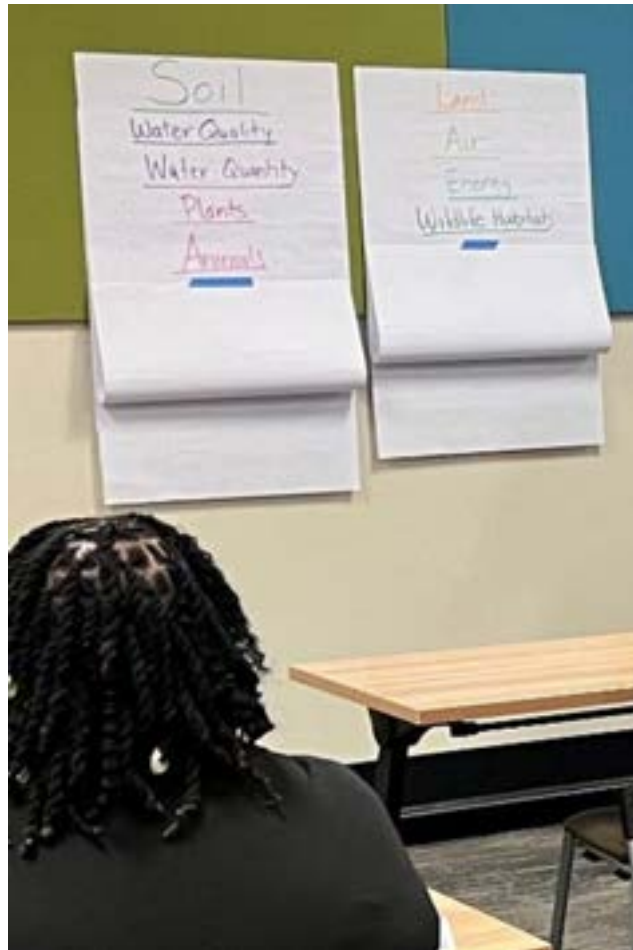
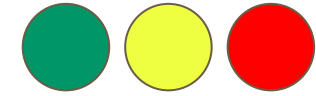
Categorizing and defining resource concerns

Placed concerns into 9 broad categories:

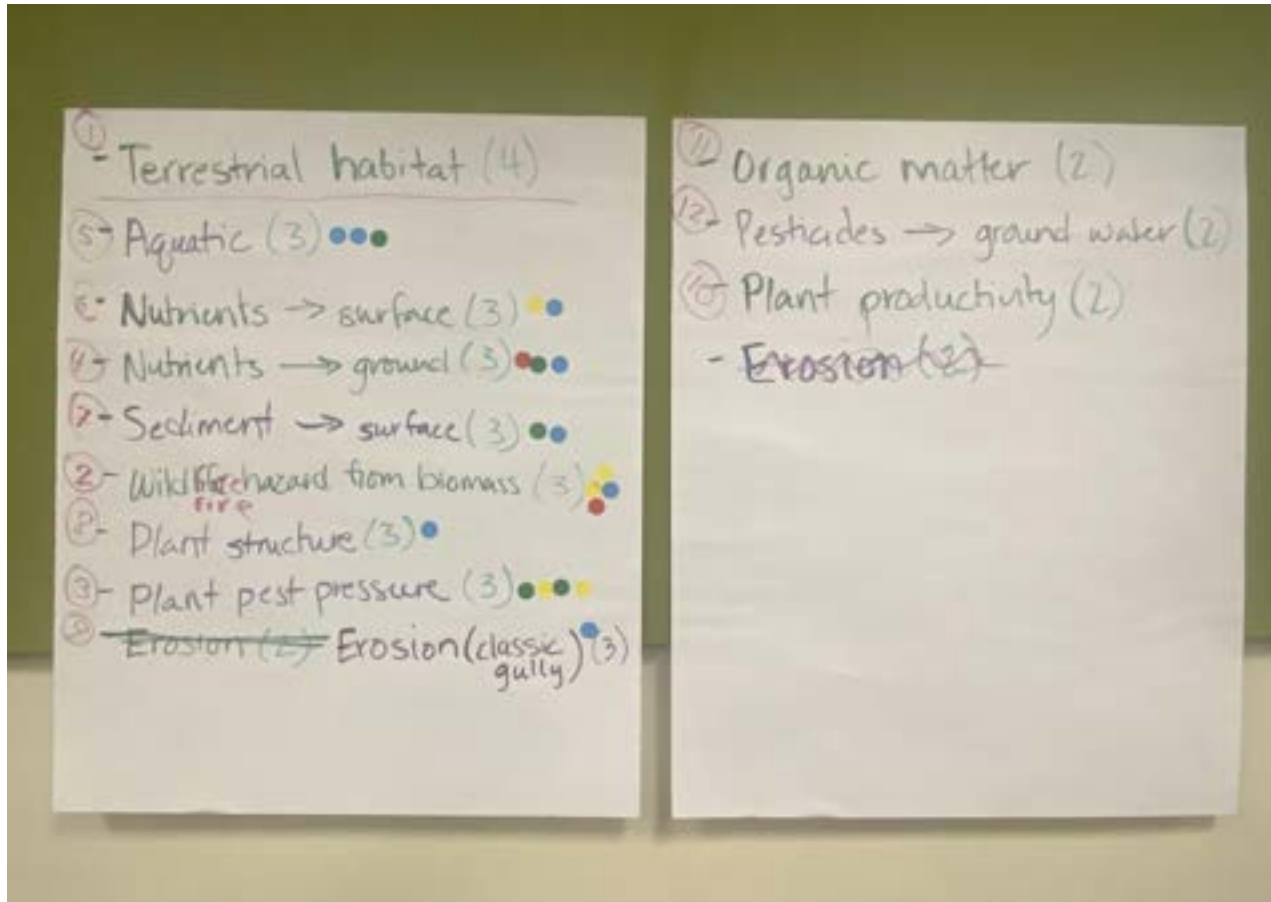
- Soil
- Water Quality
- Water Quantity
- Plants
- Animals Land
- Air
- Energy
- Wildlife habitats

Soil • Sheet and Rill Erosion • Wind Erosion • Ephemeral Gully Erosion • Classic Gully Erosion • Bank Erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyance channels • Subsidence • Compaction • Organic matter depletion • Concentration of salts or other chemicals • Soil organism habitat loss or degradation • Aggregate instability	Water Quality • Nutrients transported to surface water • Nutrients transported to groundwater • Pesticides transported to surface water • Pesticides transported to groundwater • Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water • Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater • Salts transported to surface water • Salts transported to groundwater • Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water • Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater • Sediment transported to surface water • Elevated water temperature
Water Quantity • Ponding and flooding • Seasonal high water table • Seeps	Plants • Plant productivity and health • Plant structure and composition • Plant pest pressure

Eliminating categories and ranking resource concerns



Outcome



1. Terrestrial habitat
2. Wildfire hazard from biomass
3. Plant pest pressure
4. Nutrients transfer to groundwater
5. Aquatic habitat
6. Nutrients transfer to surface water
7. Sediment transfer to surface water
8. Plant structure
9. Classic gully erosion
10. Plant productivity

Lessons learned

- Priority list depends on who attends the meeting
- Concerted outreach strategy is needed to ensure representative feedback
- Small group allowed for candid discussions among participants
- Ranking so many parameters is difficult and could have been exacerbated by a larger group
- Handouts were indispensable



Next Steps

Debrief with Doug Ulmer

- Discuss what worked and what didn't
- Potential template for other LWG meetings

Continue collaboration efforts with NRCS and Extension to help clarify assistance process and accessibility



Questions?

Jessica Ferris

Government Consultant
jessicabferris@gmail.com

Andrea Albertin

UF/IFAS Extension
albertin@ufl.edu

