

## Part 409 – Conservation Planning Policy

### 409.0 General

- A. This document establishes NRCS policy for providing conservation planning assistance to clients. The director of the Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division (CPTAD) has national responsibility for conservation planning policy.
- B. States may supplement this policy, as needed, to provide specific guidance and to comply with State, territorial, Tribal, and local laws and regulations. State supplements must fit within the scope of this policy. A copy of the State supplement must be sent to the Director, CPTAD, for review and approval.
- C. Title 180, National Planning Procedures Handbook, Part 600 (180-NPPH-600), provides procedures and guidance on implementing the NRCS conservation planning process.
- D. In cases where NRCS is assisting, or is assisted by, other agencies, Tribes, or groups, including conservation districts, NRCS planning procedures and plan format may be modified to meet those specific client needs, provided that all applicable Federal environmental and compliance requirements are met.
- E. All references within this policy to State conservationists include the directors of the Pacific Islands and Caribbean Areas.

### 409.1 Conservation Planning Overview

- A. Conservation plans are the basis for all assistance NRCS provides to clients and the basic tool for clients to manage their natural resources. Client participation in all steps of the planning process is encouraged to bring the most value to the process.
- B. The objective in conservation planning is to help each client attain sustainable use and sound management of soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resources, based on related human considerations. The purpose is to prevent the degradation of resources and to ensure their sustained use and productivity, while considering the client's economic and social needs. Conservation planning assistance is based on ecological, economic, and social considerations relative to the resources.
  - (1) Conservation planning is conducted with the client, working progressively towards a resource management system (RMS) level of management. An RMS is a combination of conservation practices and resource management activities that treats all identified resource concerns for soil, water, air, plants, animals, and energy, to a level that meets or exceeds the planning criteria in the FOTG.
  - (2) The conservation planning process is considered progressive when a conservation plan addresses only a limited number of resource concerns—or even a single resource concern—and consequently does not achieve an RMS level of treatment. The rate of progress in moving to an RMS level plan will depend on the client's desires and constraints.
  - (3) A conservation plan is developed for one or more planning land units and documents the client's selected alternative.
  - (4) When NRCS provides conservation planning assistance, onsite visits with clients are an integral part of that assistance to fully understand the landscape, resources and human values involved.

C. When programs, provisions, or initiatives exist (e.g., highly erodible land conservation provisions) that define other specific levels of planning for a resource issue, clients will be offered alternatives that, at a minimum, meet the criteria of those programs, provisions, or initiatives. The conservation planner will encourage these clients to develop a conservation plan that follows the nine steps of conservation planning and address planning criteria for identified resource concerns. This will help the client identify and address resource concerns and provide a plan to use with other conservation related programs.

D. Short- and long-term resource management objectives of NRCS's clients are addressed through the development of individual conservation plans and areawide plans where clients develop plans with conservation planning assistance from NRCS, conservation districts, private sector consultants and contractors, technical service providers (TSPs), and other appropriate sources.

E. A conservation plan is a record of the client's decisions and supporting information for treatment of a unit of land for one or more identified natural resource concerns as a result of the planning process. The plan describes the schedule of implementation for practices and activities needed to address identified natural resource concerns and takes advantage of opportunities. The needs of the client, the resources, and Federal, State, Tribal, and local requirements will be met.

F. Areawide conservation plans are voluntary, comprehensive plans for a watershed or other large geographic area. Areawide conservation planning considers all-natural resources within the planning area, as well as social and economic considerations. Plan development follows the established planning process to assist local people, through a voluntary locally led effort that assesses their resource conditions and needs, sets goals, and identifies programs, alternative actions, and other resources to solve those needs. As a result, proposals are developed and recommendations are made to address those needs, implement solutions, and measure their success. A locally led effort considers all pertinent Federal, State, Tribal, territorial, and local conservation programs and private sector programs as tools to solve resource concerns on a broad scale. See Title 390, National Watershed Programs Manual, Part 505, for guidance for developing watershed project plans.

G. A nationally supported tool that automates and streamlines the resource concern assessment process (e.g. Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool or Conservation Desktop) can be used to document meeting FOTG planning criteria for conservation program planning purposes. Although an automated assessment tool may not directly rely on the assessment methodology identified in the planning criteria, it utilizes similar inputs to provide thresholds to document whether planning criteria have been achieved.

## **409.2 Conservation Planning Assistance Delivery**

A. Conservation planning assistance provided by NRCS must comply with all civil rights acts, nondiscrimination statutes, and regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture.

B. NRCS traditionally provides conservation planning assistance on a request basis through working agreements with conservation districts and Tribes.

(1) NRCS may enter into working agreements with other organizations and units of Government to provide conservation planning assistance as mutually agreed upon.

(2) The State conservationist will assess and determine the level of NRCS assistance to be provided in areas without conservation districts. NRCS may provide assistance for programs mandated by Congress independent of a working agreement with a conservation district.

C. As a Federal agency, NRCS recognizes and acknowledges its trust responsibilities to Indian Tribes and is committed to Government-to-Government relationships with each Tribe. It is NRCS's

policy to ensure that Tribal rights and concerns are taken into account, to take appropriate steps to remove impediments to working directly and effectively with Tribes, and to work with Tribes to achieve self-sufficiency. Based on its commitment to the Government-to-Government relationship and its trust responsibilities, NRCS will—

- (1) Operate within a Government-to-Government relationship with federally recognized Indian Tribes.
- (2) Consult, to the greatest extent practicable and permitted by law, with Indian Tribal Governments before taking action that affects federally recognized Indian Tribes.
- (3) Assess the impact of agency activities on Tribal trust resources and ensure that Tribal interests are considered before the activities are undertaken.
- (4) Remove procedural impediments to working directly with Tribal Governments on activities that affect trust property or Governmental rights of the Tribes.
- (5) Work cooperatively with other agencies to accomplish these goals established by Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments.

D. NRCS assistance to clients must meet all applicable Federal, State, territorial, Tribal, and local laws, program rules, policy statements, Executive orders, and international agreements.

E. Areawide conservation planning, especially for those situations with complex objectives, requires the use of interdisciplinary teams of specialists in the planning effort.

F. In complex situations, NRCS will employ an early scoping process to determine expected needs for NRCS services and other resources before committing to planning assistance.

G. If assistance on Federal or State lands require a significant amount of NRCS resources beyond the scoping process completed early in the planning process, an agreement that provides for reimbursement of NRCS services must be executed. All Tribal lands are excluded from this requirement. The State conservationist will determine when an agreement is required. See Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual, Part 525 (440-CPM-525), for additional policy.

H. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements must be incorporated into all applicable steps and activities of NRCS-assisted planning activities and may not be considered as a separate process or requirement. See Title 190, General Manual, Part 410 (190-GM-410), for NRCS policy and procedures on compliance with NEPA. The level of NEPA documentation will depend on findings during the scoping process or the environmental evaluation (EE). The EE, which may lead to an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), must be conducted for all NRCS planning activities and is used to help determine the level of NEPA documentation required. The level of NEPA documentation required for each planning activity must be identified as early in the planning process as possible and activities incorporated into each planning step to ensure that information required for NEPA documentation is developed simultaneously with the plan document. Specific guidance related to general NRCS environmental compliance for NEPA, as well as all special environmental concerns (SECs) can be found in Title 190, National Environmental Compliance Handbook, Part 610 (190-NECH-610). The EE process is documented using nationally approved business tools. Form NRCS-CPA-52 is used to document the environmental evaluation.

### **409.3 Requirements for Providing Conservation Planning Assistance**

#### **A. Conservation Planner Designations**

- (1) A conservation planner is a person who possesses the necessary skills, training, and experience to implement the NRCS planning process to meet client objectives in solving resource concerns. The conservation planner has demonstrated skill in assisting clients to

- identify resource problems, to express the client’s short- and long-term objectives, to propose feasible solutions to resource problems, and encourages the client to choose and implement an effective alternative system that treats resource concerns, meets client’s objectives, and meets all Federal policies.
- (2) NRCS recognizes the following conservation planner designations:
    - (i) Conservation Planner Level I (formerly Apprentice conservation planner).
    - (ii) Specialty Conservation Planner Level II (specialty planner designations found in 409.10 and 409.12 and includes the former technical specialist planner).
    - (iii) Certified Conservation Planner Level III (Certified conservation planner).
    - (iv) Certified Conservation Planner Level IV (Master certified conservation planner).
  - (3) The following persons are required to obtain the Level I, III, or IV conservation planner designations as defined in 180-GM-409-409.9:
    - (i) NRCS employees with conservation planning as a major duty included in their official position description.
    - (ii) Partner organization or agency employees, including conservation districts, acting on behalf of NRCS and independently assisting customers through the nine-step conservation planning process for developing RMS or progressive conservation plans for NRCS conservation programs.
  - (4) Other NRCS or partner employees, Tribal members or employees, or private sector service providers (including TSPs) may be designated any of the four planner roles based on agency need and approval by the State conservationist.
  - (5) State conservationists or their designees will determine the specific planner designation an individual must earn and maintain based on the individual’s position, affiliation, and duties.
  - (6) The Level II conservation planner designation is a subset of conservation planning roles and may be designated at the national or State level, such as “CNMP planner” (see 180-GM-409-409.10).

B. All conservation plans developed for NRCS purposes must be signed by an NRCS-designated Level III or IV conservation planner. This includes but is not limited to plans developed by NRCS employees, partner employees, other agency employees, Tribal entities, or private sector service providers (including TSPs). When a conservation plan is being used to meet specific USDA program requirements under the authority of NRCS, such as highly erodible land compliance, it must also be approved by the appropriate NRCS official, as required by that program. The signature of the NRCS conservation planner certifies that the conservation plan meets the needs of the client; NRCS conservation planning policy, procedures, and standards; and any applicable program or provision requirements.

C. The State conservationist must establish and implement a process to ensure training is provided to NRCS and partner employees delivering conservation planning services for the agency. This must include the following actions:

- (1) Developing State training needs and budgets for conservation planning training.
- (2) Developing a list of qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for conservation planner designations in addition to the requirements listed in 180-GM-409-409.9C.
- (3) Providing employees access to training through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training (OJT), or equivalent courses and methods developed outside of NRCS and approved by the State conservationist and Conservation Planning Branch Chief as meeting the identified training need. Use of equivalent courses in lieu of formal NRCS courses will be done in consultation with the Conservation Planning Branch Chief.
- (4) Ensuring that all individuals who certify conservation plans meet minimum NRCS Level III or IV conservation planner requirements.

- (5) Ensuring State training opportunities are available to all existing and candidate designated conservation planners (including partner employees, other agency employees, Tribal entities, TSPs or other private sector planners), particularly part 2 of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course and the use of resource assessment tools.
- (6) Developing and keeping current the State-specific training module for conservation planning certification and recertification of TSPs.

D. The State conservationist will maintain a list using the national conservation planner registry for all conservation planners in the State, including NRCS employees, volunteers, conservation district employees, participating State agency employees, and other partner organizations.

E. A list of all TSPs who meet national conservation planner designation requirements, as described in 180-GM-409-409.9D(12) will be maintained in the TSP online registry.

F. The State conservationist may enter into agreements with non-NRCS sources to become recommending organizations to certify conservation planners in accordance with procedures in 440-CPM-504. The State conservationist may also directly certify qualified individuals, such as third-party vendors, as conservation planner's contingent upon these individuals satisfying NRCS requirements. Whether providing assistance to a recommending organization or directly certifying a qualified individual, the State conservationist will ensure that this assistance is consistent with existing NRCS policies and technical guidance.

G. All NRCS-designated conservation planners will develop conservation plans that contain conservation practices that meet all NRCS standards and specifications as documented in the FOTG.

#### **409.4 Planning on Units That Cross a State, County, or Field Office Boundary**

A. NRCS assistance on an individual planning area that crosses a State, county, or field office boundary is the responsibility of the field office where the majority of the land is located, unless otherwise agreed to by the client and respective State conservationists (see section 409.6 for work along international borders). Conservation planning will be consistent with the FOTG covering the area where the land is located.

B. For assistance to groups or units of Government on a planning area that crosses a State boundary, the State conservationists, in consultation with the client, will determine by mutual consent which State will have the lead responsibility for providing planning and other technical assistance.

#### **409.5 Documentation of Conservation Planning Data and Signature Requirements**

A. NRCS employees, partner employees, and others on the NRCS network must document and maintain conservation plan data using agency-approved tools and the official planning database, the National Planning and Agreements Database (NPAD). See 130-GM-408 for mandatory electronic field office business tools.

B. The following terms are important to maintaining electronic conservation plan data:

- (1) Planning Land Unit (PLU).—A PLU is a unique geographic area, defined by a polygon, that has a common land use and land use modifier and is owned, operated, or managed by the same clients.
- (2) Spatial Data.—Information about the location and shapes of geographic features and the relationship between them; it is usually stored as coordinates and topology.
- (3) Topology.—The spatial relationship between connecting or adjacent features in a geographic data layer.

- (4) Geographic Database.—A collection of spatial data and their attributes organized for efficient storage and retrieval.
- C. To ensure data integrity and to implement a national planning database that is current, accurate, and useful for modeling and reporting purposes—
- (1) The PLUs for all active conservation planning will be spatially located (digitized and attributed) in the proper geographic data layer (active PLU layer) in the agency’s official conservation planning database.
  - (2) Each PLU in the active PLU layer will be associated with a unique geospatial boundary (polygon).
  - (3) The following horizontal topology is required for PLUs in the active PLU layer:
    - (i) No overlapping of adjacent PLU boundaries (polygons)
    - (ii) No stacking of PLUs (polygons)
  - (4) All planned conservation practices will be spatially located with its standard geometry (point, line, or polygon) in the proper geographic data layer (practice layer) in the agency’s official conservation planning database.
- D. The NRCS copy of the conservation plan and associated documents and worksheets will be maintained in combination of hardcopy and electronically, as appropriate.
- E. Conservation plan documents may be made available to the customer in electronic format, hardcopy, or both.
- F. Conservation plans will be signed as indicated below in the order listed.
- (1) The plan is signed by an NRCS-designated Level III or IV conservation planner certifying the plan meets client objectives and all NRCS policy, procedures, and standards.
  - (2) The plan is signed by the decision maker, indicating acceptance of the conservation system alternative. Other associated customers may sign based on the wishes of the decision maker.
  - (3) The plan may be signed by the conservation district, per NRCS and conservation district policy as specified under mutual, cooperative working, operational, and contribution agreements and in accordance with the confidentiality provisions of section 1619 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008.
  - (4) The plan may also be signed by Level I or II conservation planners when appropriate to designate who conducted the planning process and developed the conservation plan.
  - (5) Some Federal, State, Tribal, or local program requirements may call for additional signatures. These additional approvals are not required by NRCS but may be necessary to meet the client’s objectives. Therefore, it is the client’s responsibility to obtain these additional signatures.

#### **409.6 Conservation Planning Assistance That May Have International Impacts**

Assistance provided will comply with 280-GM-400, “International Conservation Programs.” State conservationists will contact the CPTAD for further guidance when conservation planning assistance is outside of the 50 States and U.S. territories, such as planning on a tract of land or property that is located on both sides of the U.S. border.

#### **409.7 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966 and Privacy Act (PA) of 1974**

NRCS policy and procedures on FOIA and PA are contained in National Instruction (NI) 120-300 and 120-GM-408-C.

## **409.8 Public Participation in the Planning Process**

- A. Public participation is an integral part of the NRCS planning process and is described in 400-GM-400. Opportunities for public participation and involvement will be provided throughout the planning process to provide for a full partnership when working with groups (not acting as individuals), communities, and units of Government. The locally led process and areawide planning utilize public participation.
- B. Individual conservation plans do not normally require public participation except when required by State, Tribal, or local laws or when they include public lands. For conservation plans involving public lands, the client will work with the public land management agency.
- C. Every areawide conservation planning effort will include a public participation component to the extent determined by the State conservationist. Requirements for public participation are specified in NEPA, Executive orders, departmental memoranda, and NRCS policy.
- D. In its public participation activities, NRCS will—
  - (1) Provide opportunities for the public to contribute information and express opinions at various stages of the planning process, decision-making process, or both.
  - (2) Inform the public early and throughout the process regarding NRCS policy, program development, and NRCS-assisted resource planning.
  - (3) Evaluate, then carefully consider all information presented and views expressed.
  - (4) When applicable, acknowledge written comments and report decisions to the public.

## **409.9 Criteria to Achieve an NRCS Conservation Planner Role Designation**

- A. Prerequisites
  - Individual must be one of the following:
    - (1) An existing NRCS or partner employee
    - (2) A private sector service provider, including a TSP or an individual seeking TSP certification
    - (3) A volunteer for (2) or (3)
- B. Policy References
  - (1) 180-GM-409
  - (2) 180-NPPH-600
  - (3) 190-GM-417
- C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
  - (1) At a minimum, NRCS-designated conservation planners must have a basic understanding of agricultural production systems, economics, plant and animal sciences, ecological systems, natural resources, State and local environmental laws and regulations, and conservation practices common to the region where they work.
  - (2) Candidates must possess and demonstrate the core competencies identified for the specific conservation planner designation.
- D. Conservation Planner Role Designation Requirements
  - (1) States must follow all national minimum requirements for designating conservation planner roles and may add additional State requirements needed to comply with State law or meet special circumstances. State requirements must receive concurrence from the Conservation Planning Branch Chief. For specific TSP planner designation requirements, see section 409.9D(12).

- (2) State conservationists designate conservation planner roles in their States. This authority may be delegated to others by the State conservationist.
- (3) The following conservation planner designations are available as appropriate for an individual's position and duties. See section 409.3A for who may need these designations.
  - (i) Level I Conservation Planner (formerly apprentice conservation planner)
    - The Level I conservation planner is not a certified conservation planner and is not authorized to certify conservation plans as indicated in 409.5F(1).
    - The Level I conservation planner role may lead to other planner roles or be an end point for those who do not need the more advanced training and are not required to review and approve other planners' work.
    - The Level I conservation planner may determine client objectives, conduct resource inventories, run assessment tools, and develop alternative solutions to address resource concerns for planning areas.
    - The Level I conservation planner's work must be reviewed and approved by a Level III or IV conservation planner prior to the final discussion of alternatives with the client. This includes review and approval of an environmental evaluation documenting the planning work on the NRCS-CPA-52.
    - The Level I conservation planner may add their signature to EEs they help complete, in the appropriate space. However, a Level III or IV conservation planner must also indicate their concurrence in each EE by adding their signature, in the appropriate space, before a Responsible Federal Official completes their determinations on the EE.
    - For NRCS employees with conservation planning being a major duty included in their position description, State conservationists may set time periods to achieve the Level I conservation planner role (e.g., a soil conservationist will achieve the Level I conservation planner role within 12 months of their effective date of employment in that position).
    - Complete the core competency requirements for Level I conservation planner in 409.15 Exhibit 3 to achieve the Level I planner designation.
    - National proficiency exams may be utilized to meet certain course requirements for the Level I conservation planner. See 409.16 Exhibit 4 for list of approved national proficiency exams.
  - (ii) Level II Specialty Conservation Planner
    - Level II conservation planners are a subset of conservation planners that are specialists, such as Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planners and technical specialist planners.
    - The Level II conservation planner may conduct all steps of the conservation planning process without supervision for plans as designated by the specialty they have achieved. Specialties will be identified in National policy, 409.10, or state supplements, 409.12.
    - For NRCS employees with specialty planning being a major duty included in their position description, the State conservationist may set time periods to achieve a Level II conservation planner role (e.g., a soil conservationist will achieve the Level II CNMP planner role within 2 years of their effective date of employment in that position).
    - Level II conservation planner candidates must complete the required training for Level I conservation planner and the minimum core competency requirements for Level II specialty conservation planner in 409.15 or 409.12 as appropriate to achieve the Level II planner designation.



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- National proficiency exams may be utilized to meet certain course requirements for the Level II conservation planner. See 409.16 for list of approved national proficiency exams.
  - State Conservationists may designate Level II Conservation Planner roles for their State with approval by the Conservation Planning Branch Chief.
  - States may request approval of the requirements, duties and core competencies for new Level II conservation planner designations by submitting the following information to the Conservation Planning Branch Chief.
    - Proposed duties and requirements for the role
    - A core competency list with course and training requirements
    - The agenda or curriculum for any training courses not already included in another planning role or EDS approved course
    - Credentials and expertise of course instructors as appropriate
    - A description of relevant materials and environments utilized for the requested course as appropriate
  - Upon receiving a request for a new Level II conservation planning role, the Conservation Planning Branch Chief, will consult with appropriate subject matter experts (SMEs) to evaluate the merits of the planning role.
  - If the requested conservation planning Level II role is approved, the Conservation Planning Branch Chief will provide a response to the requesting State.
  - The requesting State will include the conservation planner Level II role in their State supplement to 180-GM-409-409.12 State Planner Designations.
  - The new role will not be included in the conservation planning database until the State supplement has been published.
  - If the request is not approved:
    - The Conservation Planning Branch Chief will collaborate with SMEs and EDS to provide the requesting State a written explanation of the deficiencies that prevented it from approval.
    - The requesting State may submit an updated request for reconsideration to the Conservation Planning Branch Chief. This request must include an explanation of how identified deficiencies have been addressed. The request for reconsideration will follow the same procedure as a new request.
- (iii) Level III Certified Conservation Planner
- The Level III certified conservation planner designation is the primary role for those regularly delivering conservation planning assistance to clients.
  - The Level III certified conservation planner may conduct all steps of the conservation planning process without supervision for progressive and resource management system level plans for all land uses and resource concerns common to their work area.
  - Level III certified conservation planners may:
    - Approve or disapprove Level I conservation planners' work and sign conservation plans to certify the plan meets client objectives and meets applicable NRCS policy, procedures, and conservation practice standards.
    - Sign an environmental evaluation prepared by a planner with lower level certification, or non-NRCS planner, in the appropriate space.
    - When NRCS employees with Level III certification are also designated as a Responsible Federal Official (RFO) by the state conservationist, they may complete all parts of the EE.

- For NRCS employees with conservation planning being a major duty included in their position description, the State conservationist may set time periods to achieve the Level III certified conservation planner role (e.g., a soil conservationist will achieve the Level III certified planner role within 2 years of their effective date of employment in that position).
  - Complete the required training for Level I conservation planner and the core competency requirements for Level III in 409.15 to achieve the Level III Certified Conservation Planner designation.
  - National proficiency exams may be utilized to meet certain course requirements for the Level III certified conservation planner. See 409.16 for list of approved national proficiency exams.
- (iv) Level IV Certified Conservation Planner
- The Level IV certified conservation planner designation is an advanced role for those planners having the experience, knowledge, skill and ability to address complex planning situations, train others in the application of the conservation planning process and conduct State-level reviews of conservation plans.
  - The Level IV certified conservation planner may conduct all steps of the conservation planning process without supervision for progressive and resource management system level plans for all land uses and resource concerns common to their State.
  - The Level IV certified conservation planner may:
    - Approve or disapprove Level I planners' work and sign conservation plans to certify the plan meets client objectives and meets applicable NRCS policy, procedures, and conservation practice standards.
    - Sign an environmental evaluation prepared by a planner with lower level certification, or non-NRCS planner, in the appropriate space.
    - When NRCS employees with Level IV certification are also designated as a Responsible Federal Official (RFO) by the state conservationist, they may complete all parts of the EE.
  - For NRCS employees with conservation planning being a major duty included in their position description, the State conservationist may set time periods to achieve the Level IV certified planner role (e.g., an area resource conservationist must achieve the Level IV certified conservation planner role within 18 months of their effective date of employment in that position).
  - Complete the required training for Level I and Level III conservation planner and the core competency requirements for Level IV in 409.15 to achieve the Level IV Certified Conservation Planner designation.
  - National proficiency exams may be utilized to meet certain course requirements for the Level IV certified conservation planner. See 409.16 for list of approved national proficiency exams.
- (4) Although employees designated as any of the four conservation planner roles retain their designation when relocating to another State, they may not immediately have full privileges in that State.
- (i) The State conservationist will establish a procedure for reviewing and assigning State conservation planner designations for individuals relocating to their State.
  - (ii) When Level III and IV certified conservation planners are relocated or detailed to a State where they have not yet been assigned a planner designation, their work must be reviewed by Level III or IV certified planners who are designated in that State. Once the State conservationist or his or her designee is satisfied that the relocated planner has

sufficient knowledge of the State to independently provide planning assistance, he or she may assign the planner the full designation for that State. The planner may need to work several months in the State before being assigned their planner designation for their State. The planner should also be marked “complete” in AgLearn as having met the requirements for the specific State. See the employee, supervisor, and training officer guides for details.

- (iii) Submission and review of conservation plans produced at the former duty station may be used to demonstrate qualifications at the discretion of the State conservationist.
  - (iv) For States with training requirements that surpass national minimum requirements (see section 409.9D(1)), conservation planners must complete those State requirements prior to being assigned the planner designation for that State.
  - (v) Once the planner has been designated as one of the four roles, their record can be transferred through the National Conservation Planner Database from the previous State to the new State. See the “National Conservation Planner Database User Guide” for detailed instructions for transferring a planner record from one State to another.
- (5) Individuals working in multiple States as a conservation planner must be assigned planner role designations by each State conservationist.
  - (6) The State conservationist may establish programs to designate third-party vendors and other individuals as conservation planners. These programs should meet the minimum requirements in section 409.9D(3).
  - (7) Required training may be provided through NRCS training courses, OJT, or external courses and other methods approved by the State conservationist and Conservation Planning Branch Chief as meeting an identified training requirement. Use of external courses or other methods to meet an identified training requirement will be done in consultation with the Conservation Planning Branch Chief. An individual with proof of completing a course as part of the minimum national requirements for any role, will not have to take the course again unless retraining is identified as an appropriate response to a deficiency observed during the State quality assurance process. See paragraphs E and F below.
  - (8) Use of equivalent courses in lieu of required formal NRCS courses must be approved by the Conservation Planning Branch Chief.
    - (i) States may request approval of training course equivalency in lieu of required training by submitting the following information to the Conservation Planning Branch Chief:
      - Is the course approval for past delivered courses, future delivered courses or both (include dates of past delivery, when available)
      - The agenda or curriculum for the training course
      - Credentials and expertise of course instructors
      - A description of relevant materials and environments utilized for the requested course
    - (ii) Upon receiving a request for use of equivalent courses or State soil health training, the Conservation Planning Branch Chief, will consult with appropriate subject matter experts (SMEs) and EDS to evaluate the merits of the course for conservation planning designation.
    - (iii) If the requested training course is approved, the Conservation Planning Branch Chief will provide a response to the requesting State.
      - The Director, EDS, will assist the requesting State with the development of an AgLearn item that may be used as substitute item for the original course (For approved State soil health training, use item number NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000004). The requesting State will ensure that individuals who complete (or completed if the course was previously provided) the training course receive credit in AgLearn using the substitute AgLearn item.

- The requesting State will include the approved course equivalency in their State supplement to 180-GM-409-409.11, “Reserved for State Equivalency Course List.” Credit will not be granted in AgLearn until the State supplement with the new course has been published.
- (iv) If the request for equivalency or State soil health training is not approved:
- The Conservation Planning Branch Chief will collaborate with SMEs and EDS to provide the requesting State a written explanation of the deficiencies in the training course that prevented it from approval.
  - The requesting State may submit an updated request for reconsideration to the Conservation Planning Branch Chief. This request must include an explanation of how identified deficiencies have been addressed. The request for reconsideration will follow the same procedure as a new request.
- (9) The State conservationist is responsible for keeping the national conservation planner database updated with current conservation planner information for their State.
- (i) Updates will take place whenever changes in personnel or planner status takes place.
- (ii) When employees have planner designations in multiple States, each State will manage the records separately.
- (10) NRCS conservation planners are responsible for keeping their own individual development plan updated in AgLearn to reflect conservation planning training needed and completed to maintain or increase their skill level.
- (11) TSP National Conservation Planner Requirements
- (i) TSPs obtain conservation planner designations by completing the requirements in 409.15 with the following exceptions:
- TSP planner designation candidates will complete the “TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning Course” in lieu of “Conservation Planning Part 1.”
  - TSP Level I conservation planner candidates must complete one field-reviewed RMS plan for a conservation management unit with a minimum of two land uses (e.g., cropland and farmstead). TSPs seeking planning designation in multiple States are not required to submit additional plans for review to each State.
    - The candidate must be accompanied to the field by a NRCS certified Level III or IV conservation planner to meet with the plan decision maker.
    - The candidate is expected to demonstrate competency in the planning process, to include the appropriate resource assessment tools and plan development.
    - The field reviewed conservation plan will be submitted to the State conservationist for the State where the plan was developed with a letter from the reviewer acknowledging the field review and recommendation for certification. The plan review process will follow the policy outlined in 440-CPM-504-C-504.24E(2), for plan review submission, review, and recommendation.
    - If the State conservationist concurs with the recommendation, the letter will be forwarded to the national TSP program manager documenting the State conservationist’s concurrence.
  - TSP conservation planner candidates will not be required to complete Conservation Planning Business Tools training or have a supervisor sign off on any of the requirements.
- (ii) State-specific training modules for each State where planning will be conducted must be completed for all planner designations.
- (iii) The TSP must complete any additional training or licensing required by State laws or regulations in the State where work is being performed.

- (iv) When all requirements are met, the national TSP program manager will certify the TSP at the appropriate planner designation.
- (v) National proficiency exams may be utilized to meet certain course requirements for the conservation planner designations. See 409.16 for list of approved national proficiency exams.
- (vi) TSPs obtaining planner designation through this process will be allowed to conduct conservation planning in all States where they have completed the State-specific training module and meet any additional training or licensing required by State law or regulation in the State where work is being performed.
- (vii) A TSP designated as a certified conservation planner prior to October 2018 and comes up for renewal under this policy will be grandfathered as a Level III certified conservation planner until the following certification renewal date (3 years from being grandfathered). At their next renewal date, the TSP must have completed all required training under the current Level III certified conservation planner policy to maintain their planner designation. Not completing all required training will result in the TSP losing his or her planner designation or being designated Level I conservation planner provided he or she has completed the requirements for the Level I designation.
- (viii) A TSP who is a certified conservation planner (equivalent to Level III) may add their signature to EEs they help complete, in the appropriate space, before a Responsible Federal Official completes their determinations on the EE. A TSP never signs an EE as the Responsible Federal Official.

#### E. Maintaining Conservation Planner Role Designations

- (1) 180-GM-409-409.9E(2)-(9) do not apply to TSPs. National requirements for TSPs to maintain conservation planning designation are provided in 180-GM-409-409.9E(10).
- (2) State conservationists will establish a process and assign tasks to review each planner's designation at least once every 3 years.
- (3) The State conservationist's review will include a review of records produced by the planner during the current designation period to determine if the planner has completed all of the following:
  - (i) Demonstrated they have maintained or improved upon the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to earn their designation.
  - (ii) Completed a minimum of 40 contact hours of continuing education during the 3-year cycle that are related to conservation planning, conservation practices, or new conservation technology. These contact hours may be obtained anytime during the applicable designation period.
- (4) The State conservationist's review of each planner designation will conclude with a determination of whether the planner's designation will be—
  - (i) Renewed.
  - (ii) Suspended. Findings, corrective actions and instructions for completion will be documented in writing.
- (5) Upon completion of a designation review, the State conservationist or their designee must update the planner's record in the national planner database to reflect the outcome of the designation review.
  - (i) Planners are responsible for maintaining their individual planner designation. Maintaining planner designation includes keeping track of completed trainings and reviewing and updating their individual development plan in AgLearn annually with their supervisor.
  - (ii) Training progress and knowledge, skills, and abilities must be reviewed with supervisors during annual performance reviews.

- (6) Continuing Education Requirements
- (i) A minimum of 5 contact hours of the required 40 contact hours must be earned by successfully completing a course or activity that has content areas that focus on outreach or customer service, or improving methods of business practices or operations or otherwise advancing skills and work-practices as applicable to the delivery of voluntary conservation planning and implementation assistance.
  - (ii) Courses and training completed to achieve a higher planner certification level may be counted as continuing education contact hours for a planner’s current designation.
  - (iii) Continuing education contact hours may be earned through NRCS or privately funded as follows:
    - Successful completion of a college course
    - Successful completion of a continuing education course
    - Successful completion of a short course, tutorial, or distance-education course offered through correspondence, recordings, or the internet
    - Presenting or attending qualifying webinars, seminars, in-house courses, workshops, or professional or technical presentations made at meetings, conventions, or conferences
    - Teaching or instructing items listed above
    - Authoring published papers, articles, books, or accepted licensing examination items
    - Reading current technical articles or books relating to conservation planning or related discipline
    - Active participation in professional or technical societies
    - Active participation in educational outreach activities pertaining to conservation planner designation that involve high school students, college students, or adults
    - OJT provided by a discipline specialist
  - (iv) A continuing education contact hour is defined as 1 hour of instruction or presentation. The conversion of other units of credit to contact hours is provided in figure 409-1.
  - (v) Recertification and continuing education hours should be recorded in NRCS’s official learning management system (AgLearn).

**Figure 409-1: Conversion of Other Units of Credit to Contact Hours**

1 college or unit semester hour	45 Contact Hours
1 college or unit quarter hour	30 Contact Hours
1 hour of professional-level coursework, webinar, seminar, or professional meeting, convention, or conference either attending or presenting	1 Contact Hour
*For teaching in this category, multiply the units of credit by two, but the following exception applies: <i>Credit is only available for teaching the <b>first</b> presentation of a training program, not for subsequent presentations.</i>	
Each published peer-reviewed paper or article in the planner’s area of professional practice	10 Contact Hours
Each published non-peer-reviewed paper or article in the planner’s area of professional practice	5 Contact Hours

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Active participation as an officer or committee member in a scientific professional organization or society	2 Contact Hours (For each organization, per year performed.)
1 hour of conservation outreach activity or OJT provided by a discipline specialist	1 Contact Hour (Limited to 6 contact hours for outreach and 10 contact hours for OJT during a 3-year designation cycle)
1 hour reading current technical articles or books	1 Contact Hour (Limited to 10 contact hours during a 3-year designation cycle)

(7) Determination of Credit

- (i) The State conservationist has final authority with respect to approval of courses, credit, and other methods of earning credit.
- (ii) Credit for university or college approved courses will be based upon course credit established by the institution attended.
- (iii) Credit for qualifying seminars and workshops will be based on 1 contact hour for each hour of attendance. Attendance at qualifying programs presented at professional or technical society meetings will earn contact hours for the actual time of each program.
- (iv) Credit for active participation in professional and technical societies (limited to 2 contact hours per organization, per year served) requires that a conservation planner serve as an officer or actively participate in a committee of the organization. Contact hours are not creditable until 12 months of performance in the role have been completed.

(8) Recordkeeping

- (i) Planners are responsible for maintaining their own records and for providing documentation that contact-hour requirements needed for re-designation are met during the 3-year designation period. In addition, planners should record the details of the training in NRCS's official learning management system (AgLearn). Please see the employee guide for additional information. Planners should consult their supervisor or training officer for additional information and assistance.
- (ii) Planners are responsible for maintaining records to be used to support credits claimed. Copies of these records should be uploaded in AgLearn when marking completions for the recertification training. Records required include, but are not limited to—
  - A log showing the type of activity claimed, sponsoring organization, location, duration, instructor's or speaker's name, and contact hours earned.
  - Attendance verification records in the form of completion certificates or other documents supporting evidence of attendance.
  - Other acceptable training records, including—
    - Training certificate with the planner's name and date on the certificate.
    - Training recorded in the planner's AgLearn Record of Learning.
    - A training event sign-in sheet accompanied by an agenda that identifies all of the following:
      - Title of the training event
      - Provider of the training
      - Summary of the technical training
      - Duration of technical training
      - Date of the training

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- A log of OJT experience listing the subject, the time spent doing the activity, the instructor or mentor's name, and a description of the outcome for each OJT event (e.g., design completed, specification written, reviewed for job approval authority, etc.).
  - (iii) State conservationists may determine the record types and may determine additional contact hours are required in a State to maintain conservation planner designations.
  - (iv) State conservationists may establish a list of programmatically approved, non-NRCS technical training providers that are qualified to provide credit for meeting this requirement (e.g., a State department of agriculture, cooperative extension service, State natural resource agencies, Tribal natural resource agencies, and scientific-discipline-related professional organizations and societies).
- (9) Exemptions from Continuing Education Requirements
- (i) Planners may submit a written request to the State conservationist for an exemption from a portion of the continuing professional training requirements for one of the following reasons:
    - A planner serving on temporary duty assignment exceeding 120 consecutive days in a year is exempt from obtaining 10 of the contact hours required during the renewal period.
    - A planner serving in an active duty military assignment lasting more than 120 consecutive days in a year is exempt from obtaining 10 of the contact hours required during the renewal period.
    - A planner experiencing physical disability, illness, or other extenuating circumstances may apply for an exemption of some or all of the contact hours or an extension of time to obtain the credits, subject to the review and approval of the State conservationist or their designee. Supporting documentation will be furnished to the State conservationist or designee.
    - Conservation planners who become inactive through retirement or other circumstances and return to active practice of conservation planning as an NRCS employee, partner employee, or volunteer within 5 years must earn a minimum of 10 continuing education contact hours before regaining conservation planner designation. Retirees and others returning to active practice of conservation planning after more than 5 years of inactivity must be recertified based on a training plan developed by the State conservationist's designee.
    - Conservation planners who become inactive due to lack of use or lack of redesignation but continue to work in an NRCS field, area, or State office (e.g., promoted to a nonplanner position) are exempt from the continuing education requirements. In the event such an individual elect to return to active practice of conservation planning, a minimum of 10 continuing education contact hours and appropriate job approval authority must be earned before regaining Level I, III, or IV planner status.
- (10) TSP National Requirements for Maintaining Planner Designation
- (i) Each TSP's planner designation must be reviewed at least once every 3 years by the State conservationist or designee in the TSP's resident State.
    - The review will be based on conservation plans completed by the TSP in that State during the time period being reviewed.
    - Conservation plans reviewed may be progressive, so an RMS planned level of treatment is not required.
  - (ii) If a TSP did not develop any conservation plans in the resident State during the review period, the State conservationist of the TSP's resident State, after consultation with the



national TSP Program manager, will have the review completed by a State where the TSP did work during the review period. Refer to policy in 440-CPM-504-C-504.26B (2) for plan reviews outside of resident States.

- (iii) If a TSP has not developed any conservation plans in the past 3 years, a new plan must be prepared for review as outlined in section 409.9D(11)(i).
- (iv) The TSP must review the State-specific training module for each State in which he or she will recertify so as to be aware of any updated information.

#### F. Quality Assurance

- (1) The State conservationist is responsible for maintaining the conservation planner designation process in the State quality assurance plan.
  - (i) Each conservation planner's designation must be reviewed at least once every 3 years by the State conservationist or designee.
  - (ii) A sufficient number of conservation plans must be reviewed to determine that the conservation plans meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in NPPH.
  - (iii) If an individual fails to demonstrate competence for the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for conservation planner designation, the role will be suspended and the individual must be recertified before providing conservation planning assistance, based on a training plan developed by a State conservationist designee.
  - (iv) Applicants must present proof of training met to maintain their planner designation during planner role designation reviews.
  - (v) An individual may have a higher planner designation suspended while retaining a lower designation. For instance, a Level III certified planner could have that designation suspended but maintain a Level I conservation planner designation.
  - (vi) NRCS is responsible for TSP quality assurance.
  - (vii) NRCS quality assurance policy and guidance can be found in 450-GM-407, "Documentation, Certification, and Spot Checking."

### **409.10 National Level II Conservation Planner Designations**

#### A. NRCS Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner

- (1) General
  - (i) Individual must be an existing NRCS or partner employee, a private sector service provider (including TSP) or an individual seeking TSP certification, or a volunteer providing service to NRCS.
  - (ii) See 190-GM-405-B-405.11, for CNMP approval and signature requirements.
  - (iii) CNMP planners may not approve the overall conservation plan unless also designated as Level III or IV certified planner.
- (2) Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
  - (i) At a minimum, CNMP planners designated by NRCS in each State to develop and implement CNMPs must understand the following:
    - How the FOTG relates to specific elements of the CNMP for which expertise is being provided
    - How to apply the technical criteria associated with the various elements of a CNMP as contained in the NRCS FOTG
    - How local, State, territorial, Tribal, and Federal laws and regulations affect the elements of a CNMP

- (ii) The State conservationist may develop a list of additional qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for the CNMP planner designation. TSPs are required to meet only the knowledge, skills, and abilities identified in section 409.10A(2)(i).
- (3) Certification Requirements
- (i) States must follow all national requirements and any additional State requirements. For TSP CNMP certification requirements, see section 409.10(A)(5).
  - (ii) The State conservationist must establish a State certification process and criteria to certify CNMP planners.
  - (iii) The State conservationist must ensure that all pertinent State certification and licensing requirements (e.g., engineering license, engineering approval authority, certified nutrient management consultant or technical specialist) are met as part of any program established.
  - (iv) The State conservationist must establish a procedure for reviewing and approving CNMP planner designations for individuals relocating to their State.
  - (v) The State conservationist may establish programs to certify third-party vendors and other individuals who are not TSPs.
  - (vi) State conservationists are responsible for keeping the national conservation planner database updated with current CNMP planner information for their States. Each third-party certification program approved by NRCS must maintain a current list of specialists certified by that program and make it available to the State conservationist. CPTAD must maintain a list of all TSPs who meet national and State certified CNMP criteria in the TSP online registry.
- (4) Training
- (i) The State conservationist may require additional training necessary to receive the CNMP planner designation in their State.
  - (ii) Training may be provided through NRCS training courses, OJT, or equivalent courses and methods approved by the State conservationist and CPTAD as meeting the identified training requirement. The State conservationist, in consultation with the Director, CPTAD, may grant approval for course equivalency in lieu of any required State or national NRCS training course.
  - (iii) Training provided by an NRCS-approved certifying organization may be substituted for NRCS training.
  - (iv) CNMP planner designation candidates must be Level I conservation planners and complete the core competency requirements for Level II Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner in 409.15 Exhibit 3 to achieve the Level II CNMP planner designation:
    - CNMP planner designation candidates must provide two completed CNMPs for review and approval that will meet all criteria in 190-GM-405, “Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans.”
  - (v) National proficiency exams may be utilized to meet certain course requirements for the Level II CNMP planner designation. See 409.16 Exhibit 4 for list of approved national proficiency exams.
- (5) TSP National CNMP Planner Designation Requirements
- (i) TSPs will obtain the CNMP planner designation by completing requirements in section 409.15.
  - (ii) TSP CNMP planner candidates must complete the “TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning” course in lieu of “Conservation Planning, Part 1”.
  - (iii) TSP CNMP planner candidates must complete the following additional training:

- State-specific training module for each State where the TSP will be developing CNMPs (TSP website).
  - Additional training or licensing required by State laws or regulations in the State where work is being performed.
- (6) Maintaining Certification
- (i) State conservationist will determine the type and minimum hours of training necessary to maintain certification. 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.10A(6)(i) does not apply to TSPs. For national requirements for TSPs to maintain conservation planning certification, see 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.10A(6)(iii).
  - (ii) NRCS and TSP CNMP planners are responsible for maintaining their designations. Maintaining designation includes completing necessary training to maintain and update skills.
  - (iii) TSP National Requirements for Maintaining CNMP Planner Certification:
    - Each TSP CNMP planner designation must be reviewed at least once every 3 years by the State conservationist or designee in the TSP’s resident State. The review will be based on CNMPs completed by the TSP in that State during the time period being reviewed.
    - If a TSP did not develop any CNMPs in the resident State during the review period, the State conservationist of the TSP’s resident State, after consultation with the national TSP Program manager, will have the review completed by a State where the TSP did work during the review period. Refer to policy in 440-CPM-504-C-504.26B(2) for plan reviews outside of resident States.
    - If a TSP has not developed any CNMPs in the past 3 years, a new sample CNMP must be prepared for review.
    - The TSP must review the State-specific training module for each State in which they will be redesignated so they aware of any updated information.
- (7) Quality Assurance
- (i) The State conservationist must include actions in the State quality assurance plan to ensure that the State reviews the CNMP certification program.
  - (ii) The State conservationist or designee must review and verify the technical adequacy of each CNMP planner designation, including TSPs, at least once every 3 years. If an individual fails to meet the qualifications or criteria established for the CNMP planner designation, the certifying organization, whether it is NRCS or an NRCS-approved certifying organization, must suspend the status. When the status is suspended, the individual may seek redesignation based on State-specific guidelines. Applicants must present proof of training when seeking recertification.
  - (iii) For each CNMP planner designation, the State conservationist or designee must review a sufficient number of that planner’s CNMPs to find out whether the plans or designs are developed and carried out according to NRCS conservation practice standards, policy, and CNMP technical criteria.
  - (iv) NRCS quality assurance policy and guidance can be found in 450-GM-407, “Documentation, Certification, and Spot Checking.”

#### B. Technical Specialist Planner

- (1) The technical specialist planner designation is an optional designation that provides States a means to ensure those who serve in area or statewide technical assistance positions are capable of providing conservation planning assistance that is aligned with the agency’s conservation planning procedures, and other requirements. The criteria for the technical

specialist planner designation also support the agency’s maintenance of the professional knowledge and skills necessary to provide leadership in the area of expertise they have responsibility for. After considering the technical specialist planner designation policy in its entirety, State conservationists can determine which specialist positions in the State may use the designation.

- (2) Employees with the technical specialist planner designation may also be designated one of the other three planner roles.
- (3) The technical specialist planner may:
  - (i) Provide training on components of conservation planning that relate to their areas of expertise on all land uses.
  - (ii) Provide support for areawide conservation planning efforts within the State.
  - (iii) Perform quality assurance reviews and spot checks for conservation practices and conservation plans.
  - (iv) Within their area of specialization, approve or disapprove Level I planners’ work and sign conservation plans to certify the plan meets client objectives and meets applicable NRCS policy, procedures, and conservation practice standards.
  - (v) Sign an environmental evaluation prepared by a planner with lower level certification, or non-NRCS planner, in the appropriate space.
  - (vi) When NRCS employees with Level II Technical Specialist Planner certification are also designated as a Responsible Federal Official (RFO) by the state conservationist, they may complete all parts of an EE within their area of specialization.
- (4) Candidates must demonstrate to the State conservationist or their designee an ability to review conservation plans that meet criteria in the NPPH as well as environmental evaluations (e.g. NRCS-CPA-52) prepared by conservation planners to ensure all resource concerns, client objectives, and special environmental concerns have been identified and adequately addressed by the alternatives developed.
- (5) To earn the technical specialist planner designation, the candidate must meet all of the following criteria and record completions in AgLearn:
  - (i) Complete the core competency requirements for Level II Technical Specialist Planner in 409.15 Exhibit 3 to achieve the Level II Technical Specialist Planner designation.
    - Complete the national and State training required for the Level I conservation planner designation if the candidate does not already meet the requirements for a Level III or Level IV conservation planner designation.
    - Complete two quality assurance activities that evaluate conservation plans and practice implementation related to their area or areas of expertise to the satisfaction of the technical supervisor.
    - Deliver two State or national technical training programs that instruct other conservation planners in using NRCS planning procedures relative to their position’s area of expertise.
    - Complete State-identified training and required deliverables that are applicable to the specialist’s discipline area. States may develop training requirements that are unique for each discipline for which the “technical specialist planner” designation will be used.
  - (ii) National proficiency exams may be utilized to meet certain course requirements for the Level II Technical Specialist Planner designation. See 409.16 Exhibit 4 for list of approved national proficiency exams.

### **409.11 Reserved for State Equivalent Course list**

### **409.12 Reserved for State Level II Planner Designations**

### **409.13 Exhibit 1 – Sample Worksheet to Evaluate Conservation Plans Submitted as Part of Conservation Planner Role Designation**

Instructions for using this worksheet:

- When using this worksheet, review the indicated conservation plan components.
  - For each component, if the plan contains and thoroughly represents all of the listed information, where applicable, a rating of “Satisfactory” must be given for that component.
  - For each component, if there is applicable information missing from what has been listed, or the information is vague or unclear, a rating of “Unsatisfactory” must be given for that component.
  - For each component, if the information provided goes beyond what has been listed or shows an exceptional level of effort and understanding from the planner, a rating of “Exceeds Expectations” may be given.
  - The “Comments” section may be used to describe the reasons for the rating that was given for each component.
  
- When making the final assessment at the end of this worksheet, review the ratings that were given to each component.
  - If all components were rated as “Satisfactory,” then the conservation plan “meets” all of the conservation plan requirements.
  - If one or more of the components were rated as “Unsatisfactory,” then the conservation plan “does not meet” all of the requirements, and corrective or other further actions should be listed for the planner.
  - If one or more of the components were rated as “Exceeds Expectations” and none of the components were rated as “Unsatisfactory,” then the conservation plan “exceeds” all of the conservation plan requirements.
  - The reviewer may leave comments or follow-up actions for the conservation planner.

Conservation Planner: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Conservation Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p><b>Identify Problems and Opportunities and Client Objectives</b></p> <p>Client information – the plan contains a record of discussions about the customer’s—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Problems, opportunities, and concerns associated with all natural resources associated with their land, operation, or both</li> <li>- Production and business goals</li> <li>- Desired future conditions for planning areas as compared to existing conditions</li> <li>- Financial constraints and willingness to accept risk.</li> <li>- Facilities and machinery</li> <li>- Managerial level</li> <li>- Commitment to conservation</li> <li>- Objectives</li> </ul> <p>When reviewing the plan in the field and speaking with the customer, it is obvious that the above items have been discussed.</p>		

Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p><b>Inventory Resources and Analyze Resource Data</b></p> <p>The plan contains basic operational information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identification of the client’s planning land units</li> <li>- A record of utilities, easements, and legal limitations associated with the property in question</li> <li>- The land’s relationship to the entire operation or watershed</li> </ul> <p>Upon field review, it is apparent that the client understands how the above constraints affect their planning process.</p>		
<p>Resource inventories – the plan includes, where applicable, the appropriate technical worksheets for—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Soils information</li> <li>- Crop inventory</li> <li>- Pasture inventory</li> <li>- Rangeland inventory</li> <li>- Forest management inventory</li> <li>- Developed land inventory</li> <li>- Associated land inventory</li> <li>- Cultural resource and historic property inventory</li> </ul> <p>Upon field review, it is clear that these inventories have been correctly completed and discussed with the client.</p>		

Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p>Existing condition data – the plan describes the type, extent, and location of—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Existing conservation and management practices</li> <li>- Identified resource concerns, including the appropriate analysis tools used</li> <li>- Human considerations</li> <li>- Special environmental concerns</li> </ul> <p>Upon field review, it is obvious that the above items have been correctly and completely identified and discussed with the client.</p>		
<p><b>Formulate and Evaluate Alternatives</b></p> <p>The plan documents that—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The client has been provided with multiple feasible approaches to address their objectives and resource concerns</li> <li>- The client has been given information that compares short-term and long-term ecological, economic, and social outcomes of the available practice options</li> </ul> <p>A field review reveals that all alternatives were appropriate, and the client fully understood the advantages and disadvantages of each.</p>		



Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p><b>Make Decisions and Implement Plan</b></p> <p>Record of client’s decisions – the plan contains—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A list of conservation practices and the planned amounts of each necessary to meet the planned level of treatment</li> <li>- A realistic schedule for implementation of chosen practices</li> <li>- Assistance notes (e.g. CPA-6) or other documentation of the objectives of, discussions with, and decisions made by the client</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Implementation Requirements</b> – detailed information concerning the practices contained in the plan and made available to the client, including, where applicable—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designs, drawings, or illustrations</li> <li>- Engineering notes</li> <li>- Preparation for implementation</li> <li>- Method or technique of implementation</li> <li>- Required equipment</li> <li>- Materials specifications, both natural and man-made</li> <li>- Supporting practices</li> <li>- Operation &amp; maintenance</li> </ul> <p>Upon field review, it is clear that the client has understood and agreed to the above details.</p>		

Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p>Maps – conservation plan maps, soils maps, topographic maps, and/or other appropriate resource maps are included with the plan. Upon field review, it is apparent that the client has received and understands the included maps. The maps accurately describe and depict conditions of the client’s circumstances.</p>		
<p>Determinations – the appropriate HELC and WC determinations have been documented, where applicable. When applicable, a field review reveals that the client understands the process and implications of HELC/WC determinations.</p>		
<p>Environmental documentation – the plan contains an environmental evaluation (NRCS-CPA-52), and any other documents needed to meet the requirements of NEPA or other applicable environmental requirements, such as the Endangered Species Act. A field review shows the forms have been accurately and comprehensively completed.</p>		

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<b>Conservation Plan Component</b>	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	<b>Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations</b>	
RMS – the plan provides for the treatment of all identified resource concerns.		
Other Supporting Documentation – a field review reveals that additional written materials, photographs, audio, or video files are appropriate, relevant, and complement the plan. This includes documentation of applied conservation practices.		
Receipt for Services – plan documentation includes customer’s request for assistance, service provided, and offer of receipt to the customer		
Conservation District – information appropriate and relevant to the plan with regard to the conservation district, cooperator agreement, or other applicable documentation is included with the plan		
Format – the plan is organized in a well laid out, easily understood, and logically sequenced manner. Upon field review, it is apparent that the client is comfortable using and understands all materials they have been provided.		

**Reviewer assessment:**

This conservation plan

\_\_\_\_\_ does not meet                      \_\_\_\_\_ meets                      \_\_\_\_\_ exceeds

all of the conservation plan requirements for NRCS conservation planner role designation or redesignation. Further required actions, if any, are listed below.

Comments and/or further required actions, if applicable:

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Signature:

Date:

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**Planner acknowledgement:**

I have read and understand all elements, ratings, and results of this conservation plan review. The assessment has been explained to me by the reviewer, and I am aware of and understand any further actions that are required regarding this conservation plan submitted for conservation planner role designation or redesignation.

Comments:

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Signature:

Date:

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## 409.14 Exhibit 2 – Sample Worksheet to Evaluate Areawide Conservation Plans

Instructions for using this worksheet:

- When using this worksheet, review the indicated conservation plan components.
  - For each component, if the plan contains and thoroughly represents all of the listed information, where applicable, a rating of “Satisfactory” must be given for that component.
  - For each component, if there is applicable information missing from what has been listed, or if the information is vague or unclear, a rating of “Unsatisfactory” must be given for that component.
  - For each component, if the information provided goes beyond what has been listed or shows an exceptional level of effort and understanding from the planner, a rating of “Exceeds Expectations” may be given.
  - The “Comments” section may be used to describe the reasons for the rating that was given for each component.
- When making the final assessment at the end of this worksheet, review the ratings that were given to each component.
  - If all components were rated as “Satisfactory,” then the conservation plan “meets” all of the conservation plan requirements.
  - If one or more of the components were rated as “Unsatisfactory,” then the conservation plan “does not meet” all of the requirements, and corrective or other further actions should be listed for the planner.
  - If one or more of the components were rated as “Exceeds Expectations” and none of them were rated as “Unsatisfactory,” then the conservation plan “exceeds” all of the conservation plan requirements.
  - The reviewer may leave comments or follow-up actions for the conservation planner.

Conservation Planner: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Areawide Conservation Plan: \_\_\_\_\_

Areawide Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p>The planner utilized an interdisciplinary team for plan development. Relevant NRCS and/or non-NRCS technical specialists were regularly consulted throughout the planning process. When NRCS did not possess the appropriate technology or resources, applicable agencies, groups, or other entities were asked to participate in the planning process.</p>		
<p>The planner identified decision makers and stakeholders associated with the planning area by consulting NRCS past clients, nongovernment partner entities, conservation and water resource districts, and other Federal, State, Tribal, and local government agencies.</p> <p>Decision maker and stakeholder meetings and discussions are documented in assistance notes or other documentation. Relevant information about each entity and their role is recorded.</p>		

Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
Decision maker and stakeholder project objectives are documented, including desired future conditions for the planning area as compared to existing conditions. Relevant investigations of the planning area were conducted with stakeholders to identify problems and opportunities.		
NRCS resource priorities for the planning area were determined by utilizing the NRCS strategic plan, the Chief’s priorities, the State resource assessment (SRA), conservation districts’ long-range plans, local work groups’ priorities, watershed or basin management plans, and other local and State assessments.  The plan documents communication of NRCS priorities to decision makers and stakeholders		
Factors that may hinder or limit plan development or implementation have been accounted for in the plan, including— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Project financial constraints and possible funding sources</li> <li>- State, Tribal, territorial, and Federal laws, regulations, or mandates that currently affect or could affect existing operations</li> </ul>		

Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p>Natural Resource Inventory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The level of inventory detail has been tailored to the complexity of the resource setting and the identified problems, opportunities, and objectives</li> <li>- Appropriate inventories for each land use have been conducted</li> <li>- Existing conditions have been recorded, including resources; types, amounts, and timing of operations and activities; and effectiveness of existing management measures and practices in addressing resource concerns</li> <li>- Infrastructure, utilities, easements, legal constraints, and determinations have been documented</li> <li>- Stakeholders and decision makers have been encouraged to participate in resource inventory activities</li> </ul>		
<p>Resource Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resources have been analyzed using the appropriate tools, methods, handbooks, and manuals</li> <li>- Cause-and-effect links have been established and resource concerns identified</li> </ul>		



Conservation Plan Component	Rating	Comments
	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
<p>Formulating alternatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conservation systems and other treatments that will address the objectives, problems and opportunities have been identified and documented, with both land treatment (structural and nonstructural) and preventative measures</li> <li>- Stakeholders have been actively involved in formulating alternatives</li> <li>- Each alternative’s effects on physical resources, social, and economic considerations have been quantified and expressed in monetary or qualitative terms</li> <li>- The short-term and long-term beneficial and adverse impacts of each alternative have been identified</li> <li>- Alternatives include measures to mitigate any potential ecological damages</li> <li>- NRCS programs, programs of other agencies, and other implementation and funding opportunities that may be available to implement alternatives have been identified</li> </ul>		
	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments</b>

<p><b>Conservation Plan Components</b></p>	<p><b>Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations</b></p>	
<p>Documenting alternatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The CPA-52 is used to document environmental effects</li> <li>- Documentation and presentation of alternatives is in the same format as the existing conditions, is easy to understand, and contains—                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A description of the resource setting</li> <li>• A description of the management system</li> <li>• A complete list of the type, amount, and timing of actions involved in the management system that may change as a result of the plan</li> <li>• Effects of the actions on the resources and human considerations</li> <li>• Impacts of each alternative in comparison to the existing condition</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
<p>Decision making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public response has been solicited through prepared notices and public meetings</li> <li>- Stakeholders and decision makers have agreed on an implementation strategy and schedule, including funding programs or authorities to pursue</li> </ul>		
	<p><b>Rating</b></p>	<p><b>Comments</b></p>

<b>Conservation Plan Component</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations</b>	
<p>Maps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appropriate resource maps and maps of existing and planned conditions are included with the plan</li> <li>- Stakeholders and decision makers have reviewed the maps and used them in the decision-making process. The maps accurately describe and depict conditions of the planning area</li> </ul>		
<p>Supporting documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Appropriate designs, conservation practice specifications, estimated costs and conservation system descriptions have been included and provided to decision makers</li> <li>- Operation and maintenance agreements are included in the plan</li> <li>- Required permits have been listed</li> <li>- Land rights and treaty rights have been documented</li> <li>- Mitigation of lost environmental values has been detailed</li> </ul>		
	<b>Rating</b>	<b>Comments</b>

Conservation Plan Component	Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	
Format – the plan is organized in a well-laid-out, easily understood, and logically sequenced manner. Upon field review, it is apparent that the stakeholders and decision makers are comfortable using and understand all materials they have been provided.		

**Reviewer assessment:**

This areawide conservation plan

\_\_\_\_\_ does not meet                      \_\_\_\_\_ meets                      \_\_\_\_\_ exceeds

all of the areawide conservation plan requirements. Further required actions, if any, are listed below.

Comments and/or further required actions, if applicable:

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Signature:

Date:

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**Planner acknowledgement:**

I have read and understand all elements, ratings, and results of this conservation plan review. The assessment has been explained to me by the reviewer, and I am aware of and understand any further actions that are required regarding this areawide conservation plan.

Comments:

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Signature:

Date:

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**409.15 Exhibit 3 - Core Competencies and Course Requirements for Level I, II, III and IV Conservation Planner Designations**

\* Note: Conservation Planning, Part 2 curriculum is available in the EDS course library for states to use. Access to the library can be obtained by submitting a ticket through Service Now. State deviation from the nationally approved Conservation Planning, Part 2 curriculum (beyond the State flexibility already built into the national curriculum) will require a course equivalency approval and should be added to the state supplement.

\*\*Note: Technical Service Provider (TSP) specific requirements are noted where applicable. Additional Technical Service Provider Designation and Maintenance Requirements are outlined in 180-GM-409, part 409.9(D)(11) and part 409.9(E)(10).

**Level I Conservation Planner**

<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
Conservation Planning and Field Office Technical Guide Basics	NRCS Planners: Conservation Planning Part 1	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation Planning Part 1 (NRCS-NEDC-000019)</li> </ul>
	**Technical Service Providers only: TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• **Technical Service Provider Planners only: TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning (NRCS-NEDC-000191)</li> </ul>
	Planning Criteria Training	AgLearn/Web-based	Complete one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning Criteria Training (NRCS-NHQ-000008)</li> <li>• Using Planning Criteria in Conservation Planning (NRCS-NEDC-000486)</li> </ul>
	Conservation Planning Business Tools Training (e.g. CD and CART) – This training must cover the use of business tools through step 7 of the conservation planning process.	One-on-One/local-Self-Certified or State or National courses	Complete one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation Planning Business Tool Training (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000002)</li> <li>• CD V2R3 and CART Local/State Hands-on Training (NRCS-NHQ-000068)</li> </ul>
	** Technical Service Providers are not required to complete this training		
Introduction to Field Office Technical Guide	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Field Office Technical Guide (NRCS-NEDC-000149)</li> </ul>	

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<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
Cultural Resources Basics	Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 1	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 1 (NRCS-NEDC-000141)</li> </ul>
Environmental Evaluations Basics	Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 1: Primer on NRCS Environmental Compliance	S&T Webinar Training Library for content; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 1: Primer on NRCS Environmental Compliance (NRCS-NHQ-000011)</li> </ul>
	Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 2: Documenting the Environmental Evaluation	S&T Webinar Training Library for content; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 2: Documenting the Environmental Evaluation (NRCS-NHQ-000012)</li> </ul>
Soils Basics	Basic Soils & Web Soil Survey to Interpret Land Capabilities & Limitations	State-Led/Self-Certified or online course	<p>Complete one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic Soils and Web Soil survey to Interpret Land Capabilities and Limitations (NRCS-NHQ-000009)</li> <li>Using Basic Soil Survey Information in Conservation Planning (NRCS-NEDC-000416)</li> </ul>
Water Quality Basics	Water Quality Series 1: Overview of Water Quality Resource Assessment	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water Quality Series 1: Overview of Water Quality Resource Assessment (NRCS-NHQ-000038)</li> </ul>
	Water Quality Series 2: Nitrogen Management and Concerns	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water Quality Series 2: Nitrogen Management and Concerns (NRCS-NHQ-000039)</li> </ul>
	Water Quality Series 4: Sediment Management	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water Quality Series 4: Sediment Management (NRCS-NHQ-000041)</li> </ul>
	Water Quality Series 5: Water Bodies	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water Quality Series 5: Water Bodies (NRCS-NHQ-000042)</li> </ul>
State Specific Requirements	State Specific Training & Required Deliverables-Level I Planner **Technical Service Providers must take	OJT/local-Self-Certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State Specific Training &amp; Required Deliverables-Level I Planner (NRCS-NHQ-000024)</li> </ul>

<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
	State Specific Training listed on the TSP Website		
Demonstrated Competence	Supervisor certification for Level I Conservation Planner Role **Does not apply to Technical Service Providers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervisor certification for Level I Conservation Planner Role (NRCS-NHQ-000025)</li> </ul>

**Level II Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner**

<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
Conservation Planning Procedures	Level 1 Conservation Planner	Planner Certification	N/A
	Conservation Planning Course, Part 2, Modules 6-8	Instructor Led by State or National	Complete one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Conservation Planning Course, Part 2, Modules 6-8 (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000003)</li> <li>Conservation Boot Camp (NRCS-NEDC-000164)</li> </ul>
Nutrient Management	Water Quality Series: Phosphorous Management and Concerns	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water Quality Series: Phosphorous Management and Concerns (NRCS-NHQ-000040)</li> </ul>
	Nutrient Management Track 1, Part 1	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nutrient Management Track 1, Part 1 (NRCS-NEDS-000083)</li> </ul>
	CNMP Training	National Animal Manure Nutrient Management Team (NAMNMT) or State Equivalent  AgLearn/S&T Training Library  S&T Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“CNMP Training” coordinated by NAMNMT or equivalent state level training</li> </ul> OR the combination of all three following courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems - A Primer” (NRCS-NEDC-000115)</li> <li>“NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems - Level 2” (NRCS-NEDC-000116)</li> </ul>

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Core Competencies	Course Requirement	Source(s)	Course Name and Number
		Training Library for content; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Air Quality Assessment Tool Webinar: Dairy, or Swine, or Poultry (Note: There is one webinar for each class of livestock – dairy, swine, and poultry. The minimum requirement is viewing a webinar for one of the livestock classes.)</li> </ul>
	Assessment tools training for Erosion and Nutrient Management specific to the planner’s location	National, State or OJT	
**Technical Service Providers only: Additional Training Requirements	State-specific training module for each State where the TSP will be developing CNMPs	TSP Website	
	Additional training or licensing required by State laws or regulations in the State where work is being performed.		
Demonstrated Competence	<p>Supervisor certification for Level II Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner Role</p> <p>**Supervisor Certification does not apply to Technical Service Providers</p> <p>Note: CNMP planner designation candidates (including Technical Service Providers) must provide two completed CNMPs for review and approval that will meet all criteria in 190-GM-405, “Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans.”</p>		



**Level II Technical Specialist Planner**

<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
Conservation Planning Procedures	Level 1 Conservation Planner	Planner Certification	N/A
	Conservation Planning Course, Part 2, Modules 6-8	Instructor Led by State or National	Complete one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Conservation Planning Course, Part 2, Modules 6-8 (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000003)</li> <li>• Conservation Boot Camp (NRCS-NEDC-000164)</li> </ul>
	Conservation Planning Course, Part 3, Module 9  Note: This involves completing a conservation plan, including RMS alternatives, that is related to the candidate’s position and area of expertise, then earning a satisfactory in-field review by the State conservationist’s designee	OJT-Self-Certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation Planning Course, Part 3, Module 9 (NRCS-NHQ-000015)</li> </ul>
Cultural Resources Evaluation Fundamentals	Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 2	Instructor Led by State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 2 (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000001)</li> </ul>
Environmental Evaluation Fundamentals	Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 3-11	S&T Webinar Training Library for content; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 3-11 (NRCS-NHQ-000013)</li> </ul>
Area of Expertise Specific Requirements	Complete two quality assurance activities that evaluate conservation plans and practice implementation related to their area or areas of expertise to the satisfaction of the technical supervisor.	OTJ/Local	

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<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
	Deliver two State or national technical training programs that instruct other conservation planners in using NRCS planning procedures relative to their position's area of expertise.	OTJ/Local	
State Specific Requirements	State-identified training requirements that are applicable to the specialist's discipline area.	OTJ/Local	
Demonstrated Competence	Supervisor certification for Level II Technical Specialist Planner Role **Supervisor Certification does not apply to Technical Service Providers		

**Level III Conservation Planner**

<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
Conservation Planning Procedures	Level 1 Conservation Planner	Planner Certification	N/A
	Conservation Planning Course, Part 2, Modules 6-8	Instructor Led by State or National	Complete one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Conservation Planning Course, Part 2, Modules 6-8 (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000003)</li> <li>Conservation Boot Camp (NRCS-NEDC-000164)</li> </ul>
	Conservation Planning Course, Part 3, Module 9	OJT-Self-Certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conservation Planning Course, Part 3, Module 9 (NRCS-NHQ-000015)</li> </ul>
Environmental Evaluation Fundamentals	Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 3-11	S&T Webinar Training Library for content; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 3-11 (NRCS-NHQ-000013)</li> </ul>

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Core Competencies	Course Requirement	Source(s)	Course Name and Number
Cultural Resources Evaluation Fundamentals	Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 2	Instructor Led by State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 2 (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000001)</li> </ul>
Conservation Compliance Fundamentals	Fundamentals of Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Provisions training	State-Led/Self-Certified or online course	<p>Complete one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fundamentals of Highly Erodible Land &amp; and Wetland Conservation Provisions (State-led) (NRCS-NHQ-000010)</li> <li>• Fundamentals of Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Provisions (Web-based) (NRCS-NEDC-000409)</li> </ul>
Conservation Communication Fundamentals	Conservation Communications basics level course, such as Conservation Panning Part 2 (national approved curriculum), Boot Camp, or a state-led training approved as equivalent (if you've already completed a Working Effectively Series or the Conservation Communication proficiency exam, that meets this requirement)	AgLearn/Instructor Led	<p>Complete one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Conservation Planning Course, Part 2, Modules 6-8 (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000003)</li> <li>• Conservation Boot Camp (NRCS-NEDC-000164)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Livestock Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000045)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with American Indians (NRCS-NEDC-000090)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Alaskan Natives (NRCS-NEDC-000147)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Hispanic Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000262)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Asian-American Pacific Islander Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000334)</li> <li>• Improving Conservation Delivery to Women Landowners and Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000378)</li> <li>• Extending Outreach to All Customers (NRCS-NEDC-000247)</li> </ul>

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<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Effectively with Organic Producers (NRCS-NHQ-000130)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Plain Sect Producers (NRCS-NHQ-000137)</li> </ul>
Conservation Economics Fundamentals	Economics of Conservation Planning Course	AgLearn/Instructor Led	Complete one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economics of Conservation Planning (NRCS-NEDC-000017)</li> <li>• Conservation Economics Webinar Series (NRCS-NEDC-000498)</li> </ul>
Soils Health Fundamentals	Soil Health and Sustainability Training	AgLearn/Instructor Led by State	Complete one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff course (NRCS-NEDC-000050, NRCS-NEDC-000488, and NRCS-NEDC-000430)</li> <li>• Soil Health and Sustainability Training (State Equivalency) (NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000004)</li> <li>• **Technical Service Provider Planners only: Soil Health Basics for TSPs (NRCS-NHQ-000132)</li> </ul>
Water Quality Fundamental	Water Quality Series: Phosphorous Management and Concerns	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Quality Series: Phosphorous Management and Concerns (NRCS-NHQ-000040)</li> </ul>
	Water Quality Series: Pest Management and Water Quality Implications	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Quality Series: Pest Management and Water Quality Implications (NRCS-NHQ-000043)</li> </ul>
	Water Quality Series: Water Management	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water Quality Series: Water Management (NRCS-NHQ-000044)</li> </ul>
Air Quality Fundamentals	Air Quality, Climate Change and Energy	AgLearn/Web-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Air Quality, Climate Change and Energy (NRCS-NEDC-000253)</li> </ul>
State Specific Requirements	State Specific Training & Required	OJT/local-Self-Certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Specific Training &amp; Required Deliverables-</li> </ul>

(180-409-GM, 1st Ed., Amend. 46, July 2021)

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<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
	Deliverables-Level III Certified Planner **Technical Service Providers must take State Specific Training listed on the TSP Website		Level III Certified Planner (NRCS-NHQ-000027)
Demonstrated Competence	Supervisor certification for Level III Certified Conservation Planner Role **Does not apply to Technical Service Providers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervisor certification for Level III Certified Conservation Planner Role (NRCS-NHQ-000023)</li> </ul>

**Level IV Conservation Planner**

<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Course Name and Number</b>
Conservation Planning Procedures	Level III Conservation Planner	Planner Certification	N/A
	Completed two state quality reviews	OJT-Self-Certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NRCS-NHQ-000017</li> </ul>
	Serve as an instructor along with one or more Level IV conservation planners or State Conservationist designees for two conservation planning training sessions (State or National)	OJT-Self-Certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NRCS-NHQ-000018</li> </ul>
Conservation Communication (Advanced)	Conservation Communications assumes the basic requirement has been met in Level III. Level IV requirement is at least one advanced level course, such as a Working Effectively Series, or completion of the Conservation Communication proficiency exam	AgLearn/Instructor Led	<p>Meet Level III basic conservation communications requirement AND complete one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working Effectively with Livestock Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000045)</li> <li>Working Effectively with American Indians (NRCS-NEDC-000090)</li> <li>Working Effectively with Alaska Natives (NRCS-NEDC-000147)</li> </ul>

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Core Competencies	Course Requirement	Source(s)	Course Name and Number
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Effectively with Hispanic Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000262)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Asian-American Pacific Islander Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000334)</li> <li>• Improving Conservation Delivery to Women Landowners and Producers (NRCS-NEDC-000378)</li> <li>• Extending Outreach to All Customers (NRCS-NEDC-000247)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Organic Producers (NRCS-NHQ-000130)</li> <li>• Working Effectively with Plain Sect Producers (NRCS-NHQ-000137)</li> </ul>
Conservation Economics	Economics of Conservation Planning Course	AgLearn/Instructor Led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economics of Conservation Planning Course (NRCS-NEDC-000017)</li> </ul>
Advanced Resource Concerns and/or discipline knowledge	<p>Completed at least 5 advanced natural resources and/or discipline knowledge courses</p> <p>Note: Courses meeting this requirement must be approved by the State conservationist or their designee</p>	<p>AgLearn/Instructor Led/Web-based/State-Led/ State Departments of Agriculture/ Cooperative Extension Services/ State Natural Resource Agencies/Tribal Natural Resource Agencies/Scientific discipline-related professional organizations and societies/ Community Colleges, Colleges, and Universities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NRCS-NHQ-000136</li> </ul>
State Specific Requirements	<p>State Specific Training &amp; Required Deliverables-Level IV Certified Planner</p> <p>**Technical Service</p>	OJT/local-Self-Certified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Specific Training &amp; Required Deliverables-Level IV Certified Planner (NRCS-NHQ-000029)</li> </ul>

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Core Competencies	Course Requirement	Source(s)	Course Name and Number
	Providers must take State Specific Training listed on the TSP Website		
Demonstrated Competence	Supervisor certification for Level IV Certified Conservation Planner Role **Does not apply to Technical Service Providers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supervisor certification for Level IV Certified Conservation Planner Role (NRCS-NHQ-000026)</li> </ul>

**409.16 Exhibit 4 - Proficiency Exams**

Core Competencies	Course Requirement	Course Number	Proficiency Exam
Conservation Planning and Field Office Technical Guide Basics	Introduction to Field Office Technical Guide	NRCS-NEDC-000149	Field Office Technical Guide Basics (NRCS-NHQ-000081)
Cultural Resources Basics	Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 1	NRCS-NEDC-000141	Level 1 Cultural Resources (NRCS-NHQ-000073)
Environmental Evaluations Basics	Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 1: Primer on NRCS Environmental Compliance	NRCS-NHQ-000011	Level 1 Environmental Evaluation (NRCS-NHQ-000075)
	Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 2: Documenting the Environmental Evaluation	NRCS-NHQ-000012	
Soils Basics	Basic Soils & Web Soil Survey to Interpret Land Capabilities & Limitations	NRCS-NHQ-000009 or NRCS-NEDC-000416	Soils Interpretations (NRCS-NHQ-000077)
Water Quality Basics	Water Quality Series 1: Overview of Water Quality Resource Assessment	NRCS-NEDC-000038	Level 1 Water Quality Resource Assessment (NRCS-NHQ-000078)
	Water Quality Series 2: Nitrogen Management and Concerns	NRCS-NEDC-000039	
	Water Quality Series 4: Sediment Management	NRCS-NEDC-000041	
	Water Quality Series 5:	NRCS-NEDC-000042	

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<b>Core Competencies</b>	<b>Course Requirement</b>	<b>Course Number</b>	<b>Proficiency Exam</b>
	Water Bodies		
Environmental Evaluation Fundamentals	Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 3-11	NRCS-NHQ-000013	Level 2 Environmental Evaluation (NRCS-NHQ-000080)
Conservation Compliance Fundamentals	Fundamentals of Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Conservation (WC) Provisions training	NRCS-NHQ-000010	HELC/WC Compliance Provisions (NRCS-NHQ-000082)
Conservation Communication	Conservation Communications (Working Effectively Series meets this requirement)	NRCS-NEDC-000045 or NRCS-NEDC-000090 or NRCS-NEDC-000147 or NRCS-NEDC-000262 or NRCS-NEDC-000334 or NRCS-NEDC-000378 or NRCS-NEDC-000247 or NRCS-NEDC-000164 or NRCS-NHQ-000130 or NRCS-NHQ-000137	Conservation Communication (NRCS-NHQ-000072)
Conservation Economics Fundamentals	Economics of Conservation Planning Course	NRCS-NEDC-000017 or NRCS-NEDC-000498	Conservation Economics (NRCS-NHQ-000074)
Soils Health Fundamentals	Soil Health and Sustainability Training	NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000004	Soil Health and Sustainability (NRCS-NHQ-000076)
Water Quality Fundamental	Water Quality Series: Phosphorous Management and Concerns	NRCS-NHQ-000040	Level 2 Water Quality Resource Assessment (NRCS-NHQ-000079)
	Water Quality Series: Pest Management and Water Quality Implications	NRCS-NHQ-000043	
	Water Quality Series: Water Management	NRCS-NHQ-000044	
Air Quality Fundamentals	Air Quality, Climate Change and Energy	NRCS-NEDC-000253	Air Quality Conservation Basics (NRCS-NHQ-000070)