
Title 180 – General Manual

Part 409 – Conservation Planning Policy

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Amended August 2024

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PART 409 – Conservation Planning Policy

Subpart A – General

Amended August 2024

409.0 General

A. Purpose

1. This general manual establishes policy for NRCS-designated conservation planners providing conservation planning assistance to clients. It also describes the process for achieving the conservation planner designation levels and specializations.
2. States may supplement this policy to provide specific guidance and comply with state, territorial, tribal, and local laws and regulations. State supplements must fit within the scope of this policy. Send a copy of the state supplement to the Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division (CPTAD) director for review and approval.

B. Responsibilities

1. The CPTAD director has national responsibility for the conservation planning policy.
2. The state conservationist is responsible for ensuring the conservation planning policy is implemented. This may be delegated to a designee.
 - a. All references within this policy to state conservationists include the Pacific Islands and Caribbean area directors.

C. References

1. Title 180 National Planning Procedures Handbook, Part 600 (180 H Part 600), provides procedures and guidance on implementing the NRCS conservation planning process.
2. Title 190 General Manual, Part 410 “Compliance with NEPA” (190 GM Part 410) covers compliance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).
3. Title 190 National Environmental Compliance Handbook, Part 610 (190 H Part 610) provides agency procedures and policy on compliance with NEPA and the Endangered Species Act.
4. Title 340 General Manual, Part 404 “Compliance Internal and External” (340 GM Part 404), provides policy on internal and external compliance, including state quality assurance and spot checks.

5. Title 390 National Watershed Program Manual, Parts 500 to 506 (390 M Parts 500–506), provides guidance on developing watershed project plans.
6. Title 400 General Manual, Part 400 “Public Participation Policy” (400 GM Part 400), establishes NRCS policy and objectives for public participation in NRCS programs and related responsibilities and activities.
7. Title 440 Conservation Programs Manual, Part 500 “Locally Led Conservation” (440 M Part 500), conveys NRCS policy for supporting locally led conservation efforts.
8. Title 440 Conservation Program Manual, Part 501 “USDA Conservation Program Delivery” (440 M Part 501), conveys NRCS policy for the role of local work groups and state technical committees in applicable conservation program delivery.
9. Title 440 Conservation Programs Manual, Part 504 “Technical Service Provider Assistance” (440 M Part 504), contains NRCS policy guidance and operating procedures for the administration and implementation of technical service provider program assistance.
10. Title 440 Conservation Programs Manual, Part 525 “Conservation Technical Assistance Program” (440 M Part 525), conveys policy and procedures for implementing the nine-step conservation planning process in the delivery of the Conservation Technical Assistance Program.
11. Title 450 General Manual, Part 407 “Documentation, Certification, and Spot Checking” (450 GM Part 407), provides policy and guidance on documentation, certifying completed work, and spot checking.

409.1 Conservation Planning Overview

- A. The objective in conservation planning is to help each client achieve sustainable use and 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 ensure their sustained use and productivity while considering the client’s economic and social needs. The conservation planning process may be applied at the scale of an individual’s land and across larger geographic areas. Conservation planning assistance is based on ecological, economic, and social considerations relative to the resources. The procedures and guidance for implementing the conservation planning policy are provided in 180 H Part 600.
- B. 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.
- C. Conservation planning assistance can be provided by NRCS staff, conservation district staff, conservation partners, technical service providers, or other appropriate conservation professionals.

1. In cases where NRCS is assisting or is assisted by other agencies, tribes, or groups such as conservation districts, plan formats may be modified to meet those specific client needs, provided that all applicable federal environmental and compliance requirements are met.
- D. Areawide conservation planning is voluntary, comprehensive planning for a community, watershed, landscape, or other large geographic areas and considers all the natural resources and social and economic factors affecting the local communities within the planning area.
1. Areawide plan development follows the established nine-step planning process to assist clients and stakeholders through a voluntary locally led effort that assesses their resource conditions and needs; sets goals; and identifies alternative actions, programs, and other resources to solve those needs. Where an areawide conservation planning effort is underway without authorized decision makers available, the product of step six is an areawide conservation assessment.
 2. 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 440 M Parts 500 and 501.
 3. Sponsoring local organizations may request areawide conservation planning assistance for developing or implementing a watershed project plan needed to participate in the Watershed Program. See 390 M Parts 500 to 506 for guidance on developing watershed project plans.
- E. The Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) is recognized as the NRCS business tool to document the resource concern assessment process consistent with the NRCS conservation planning process used with individuals. CART is required to be used across all agency conservation efforts for field scale conservation planning and financial assistance programs.

409.2 Conservation Planning Assistance Delivery

- A. Conservation planning assistance provided to clients for NRCS purposes must comply with all civil rights acts, nondiscrimination statutes, executive orders, and regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture and meet all applicable federal, state, territorial, tribal, and local laws, program rules, policy statements, and international agreements.
- B. NRCS traditionally provides conservation planning assistance on a request basis with conservation districts and tribal governments.
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. It is NRCS's policy to ensure that tribal rights and concerns are taken into account to remove impediments to working directly and effectively with tribes, and 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 action.
 - 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. If assistance on federal or state lands requires 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 440 M Part 525 for additional policy.
- E. Areawide conservation planning assistance can be initiated by NRCS based on local, state, or national priorities, programs, or initiatives or can be delivered to clients based on specific requests. 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.
- F. All NRCS-designated conservation planners will develop conservation plans that contain conservation practices that meet all NRCS standards and specifications as documented in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

409.3 Providing Conservation Planning Assistance

- A. General
 - 1. Conservation planning assistance provided on behalf of NRCS must be done by a conservation planner who possesses the necessary skills, training, and experience to implement the NRCS planning process to meet client objectives in solving resource concerns.

2. 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.
3. A conservation planner must have demonstrated skill in assisting clients in identifying resource concerns, expressing the client's short- and long-term objectives, proposing feasible solutions to resource problems, and encouraging the client to choose and implement an effective alternative system that treats resource concerns and meets the client's objectives and all federal policies, as well as state and local laws.

B. Conservation Planner Designations

1. There are four NRCS conservation planner designation levels that individuals can achieve to demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities. These levels build on each other. They are as follows:
 - a. Level 1 Conservation Planner
 - b. Level 2 Conservation Planner
 - c. Level 3 Certified Conservation Planner
 - d. Level 4 Certified Conservation Planner
2. Candidates must possess and demonstrate the core competencies identified in Subpart E for the specific conservation planner designation they attain.
3. Specializations are available as a subset of conservation planning roles and can be added to level 2, 3, or 4 designations. These specializations may be designated at the national or state level.
4. Both NRCS employees and partners (acting on behalf of NRCS) who independently assist customers through the nine-step conservation planning process (described in 180 H Part 600, Subparts B and C) are required to obtain the level 1, 2, 3, or 4 conservation planner designations.
 - a. Those acting on behalf of NRCS include cooperative and contribution agreement employees (as specified in the partnership agreement) and partner employees covered under the County Soil and Water Conservation Distribution Memorandum of Agreement.
5. State conservationists will determine the specific planner designation an individual must earn and maintain based on the individual's position, affiliation, and duties.
6. Tribal members or private sector service providers may be designated to any of the four planner roles based on agency need and approval by the state conservationist, as long as the designation requirements are met.

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 180 GM 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 Conservation Plan Documentation and Signature Requirements

- A. Signing Conservation Plans
 - 1. All conservation plans developed for NRCS purposes must be signed by an NRCS-designated level 3 or 4 certified conservation planner. This applies to all plans, regardless of the planner's affiliation.
 - a. The signature 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.
 - 2. 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 NRCS official required by that program.
 - 3. Conservation plans will be signed as indicated below in the order listed.
 - a. The plan must be signed by the NRCS-designated level 3 or 4 certified conservation planner.
 - b. The plan must be 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.
 - c. 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.
 - d. The plan may also be signed by level 1 or 2 conservation planners when appropriate to indicate who conducted the planning process and developed the conservation plan.
 - e. 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

- A. Assistance provided must comply with Title 280 General Manual, Part 400, "International Conservation Programs." State conservationists will contact the CPTAD director for guidance when conservation planning assistance is outside of the 50 states and U.S. territories, such as on land or property located on both sides of the U.S. border.

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

- A. NRCS policy and procedures on FOIA and PA are in National Instruction Title 120 Part 300, "Processing Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act (PA) Requests," and Title 120 General Manual, Part 408 "Records," Subpart C "Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act."

409.8 Public Participation in the Planning Process

- A. Public participation is an integral part of the NRCS planning process used by the locally led process and areawide planning and is described in 400 GM Part 400.
- B. 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.
- C. 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.
- D. 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.
- E. 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 and carefully consider all information presented and views expressed.

4. Acknowledge written comments (when applicable) and report decisions to the public.

PART 409 – Conservation Planning

Subpart B – Conservation Planner Designation Levels

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409.10 Conservation Planner Designation Levels and Authorities

A. Level 1 Conservation Planner

1. The level 1 conservation planner has completed the required courses to meet the following core competencies:
 - a. Conservation Planning Basics
 - b. Field Office Technical Guide Basics
 - c. Conservation Communication Basics
 - d. Cultural Resources Basics
 - e. Environmental Evaluations Basics
 - f. Soils Basics
 - g. Water Quality Basics
 - h. State-Specific Requirements
 - i. Verification
2. Exhibit 1, Figure 409E-1 lists the required courses to meet these core competencies.
3. The level 1 conservation planner can determine client objectives, conduct resource inventories, run assessment tools, and develop alternative solutions to address resource concerns for planning areas.
4. The level 1 conservation planner’s work must be reviewed and approved by a level 3 or 4 conservation planner before the final discussion of alternatives with the client.
5. The level 1 conservation planner may add their validation to the planner finalization section of environmental evaluations they help prepare. However, a level 3 or 4 conservation planner must also validate the planner finalization section to indicate concurrence.
 - a. Consult 190 GM Part 410, Subpart A, for agency policy on who should approve the environmental evaluation as the responsible federal official.

B. Level 2 Conservation Planner

1. Level 1 conservation planner designation is a prerequisite to achieving the level 2 conservation planner designation.

2. The level 2 conservation planner has completed the required courses to meet the following core competencies:
 - a. Conservation Planning Procedures
 - b. Water Quality Fundamentals
 - c. State-Specific Requirements
 - d. Verification
3. Exhibit 2, Figure 409E-2 lists the required courses to meet these core competencies.
4. The level 2 conservation planner can provide planning assistance and attain national or state level specializations.
5. Level 2 conservation planners with a specialization can sign component plans as per their specialization (i.e., Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan).
6. Level 2 conservation planners may add their validation to the planner finalization section of environmental evaluations they help prepare. However, a level 3 or 4 conservation planner must also validate the planner finalization section to indicate concurrence.
 - a. Consult 190 GM Part 410, Subpart A, for agency policy on who should approve the environmental evaluation as the responsible federal official.

C. Level 3 Certified Conservation Planner

1. The level 2 conservation planner designation is a prerequisite to achieving level 3 certified conservation planner designation.
2. The level 3 certified conservation planner has completed the required courses to meet the following core competencies:
 - a. Conservation Planning Procedures
 - b. Cultural Resources Evaluation Fundamentals
 - c. Environmental Evaluation Fundamentals
 - d. Conservation Compliance Fundamentals
 - e. Conservation Communication Fundamentals
 - f. Soil Health Fundamentals
 - g. Conservation Economics Fundamentals
 - h. Air Quality Fundamentals
 - i. State-Specific Requirements
 - j. Verification
3. Exhibit 3, Figure 409E-3 lists the required courses to meet these core competencies.
4. The level 3 certified conservation planner designation is the primary role for those regularly delivering conservation planning assistance to clients.
5. Level 3 certified conservation planners 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.

6. Level 3 certified conservation planners may attain a national or approved state specialization and sign component plans as per their specialization.
7. The level 3 certified conservation planner may approve or disapprove level 1 and 2 conservation planners' work and sign conservation plans to certify the plan meets client objectives and applicable NRCS policy, procedures, and conservation practice standards.
8. The level 3 certified conservation planner may validate the planner finalization section of an environmental evaluation.
 - a. NRCS-employed level 3 certified conservation planners must validate the planner finalization section of an environmental evaluation prepared by a level 1 or 2 conservation planner or non-NRCS planner to indicate their concurrence.
 - b. Consult 190 GM Part 410, Subpart A, for agency policy on who should approve the environmental evaluation as the responsible federal official.

D. Level 4 Certified Conservation Planner

1. The level 3 certified conservation planner designation is a prerequisite to achieving level 4 certified conservation planner designation.
2. The level 4 certified conservation planner has completed the required courses to achieve the following core competencies:
 - a. Conservation Planning Procedures
 - b. Advanced Conservation Communication
 - c. Advanced Conservation Economics
 - d. Advanced Resource Concerns and Discipline Knowledge
 - e. State-Specific Requirements
 - f. Verification
3. Exhibit 4, Figure 409E-4 lists the required courses to meet these core competencies.
4. The level 4 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 conservation planning process and conduct state-level reviews of conservation plans.
5. Level 4 certified conservation planners 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.
6. Level 4 certified conservation planners may attain a national or approved state specialization and sign component plans as per their specialization.
7. The level 4 certified conservation planner may approve or disapprove level 1 and 2 planners' work and sign conservation plans to certify the plan meets client objectives and applicable NRCS policy, procedures, and conservation practice standards.

8. The level 4 certified conservation planner may validate the planner finalization section of an environmental evaluation.
 - a. NRCS-employed level 4 certified conservation planners must validate the planner finalization section of an environmental evaluation prepared by a level 1 or 2 planner or non-NRCS planner to indicate concurrence.
 - b. Consult 190 GM Part 410, Subpart A, for agency policy on who should approve the environmental evaluation as the responsible federal official.

409.11 Achieving Designation

A. General

1. The state conservationist certifies individual conservation planner designations and specializations in their state in accordance with this policy.
2. States must follow all national minimum training requirements for conservation planner designation and specializations.
 - a. Additional state requirements may be added to comply with state laws or meet specific circumstances.
 - b. State requirements must be included in the state's supplement to this policy.
3. State conservationists may set time periods for individuals to achieve conservation planner designation roles.
 - a. For example: A soil conservationist will achieve the level 1 conservation planner role within 12 months, the level 2 conservation planner role within 18 months, and the level 3 certified conservation planner role within 2 years of the effective date of employment in the position. An area resource conservationist will achieve the level 4 certified conservation planner role within 18 months of the effective date of employment in the position.

B. Training

1. The state conservationist must ensure training is provided to NRCS staff, partner employees, and technical service providers (TSP) delivering conservation planning services for the agency. This includes the following actions:
 - a. Develop a state training plan and budget for conservation planning training.
 - b. Ensure state training opportunities are available to all existing designated and candidate conservation planners (including partner employees, other agency employees, tribal entities, TSPs, and other private sector planners), particularly the NRCS Conservation Planning: Part 2 course.
 - c. Develop and keep current the state-specific TSP training module for conservation planning designation and recertification of TSPs (available at [TSP State-Specific Training Modules](#)).

2. All individuals seeking an NRCS conservation planner designation must complete the core competency training requirements in subpart E corresponding to the desired designation level.
 - a. An individual with proof of course completion as part of the national requirements for any role will not have to take the course again unless retraining is identified as an appropriate response to a deficiency. See section 409.12(C) for more guidance.
3. National proficiency exams listed in subpart E may be used to meet certain course requirements for the conservation planner designations.
4. The TSP Branch chief or designee is responsible for coordinating and communicating TSP training opportunities and requirements.

C. Training Course Equivalency Requests

1. Using equivalent training courses in place of any required NRCS training courses in subpart E must be approved by the Conservation Planning Branch chief.
2. States may request a training course equivalency approval by submitting the following information to the Conservation Planning Branch chief:
 - a. Rationale for requesting a course equivalency.
 - b. If the course approval is for past delivered courses, future delivered courses, or both (include dates of past delivery, when available).
 - c. The agenda or curriculum of the training course.
 - d. Credentials and expertise of the course instructors or vendors.
 - e. A description of relevant materials and environments used for the requested course.
3. Upon receiving a request, the Conservation Planning Branch chief will consult with appropriate subject matter experts to evaluate the merits of the course for conservation planner designation.
4. If the course equivalency request is approved, the Conservation Planning Branch chief will provide a written response to the requesting state.
 - a. The requesting state must include the approved course equivalency in the state supplement under Subpart D, Section 409.30, “Reserved for State Equivalency Course List.” Credit will not be granted in AgLearn until the state supplement that includes the course equivalency has been published on eDirectives.
 - b. A substitute AgLearn item may be created and used for the original course.
 - c. The requesting state must ensure that individuals who complete the training course receive credit in AgLearn using the substitute AgLearn item.
5. If the course equivalency request is not approved:

- a. The Conservation Planning Branch chief will collaborate with subject matter experts to provide the requesting state a written explanation of the deficiencies in the training course.
- b. The requesting state may submit an updated course equivalency request for reconsideration to the Conservation Planning Branch chief. This request must include an explanation of how identified deficiencies have been addressed. The request will follow the same procedure as a new course equivalency request.

D. Recordkeeping

1. Individuals are responsible for keeping their own individual development plan or partner assignment plan updated in AgLearn to reflect conservation planning training needed and completed to maintain or increase their skill level.
 - a. The Conservation Planner Programs in AgLearn can be added to individual development plans or assignment plans and used to track trainings needed and completed for the national conservation planner designations.
2. The National Conservation Planner Database is the official record of non-TSP planners' designation levels and expiration dates.
 - a. The state conservationist is responsible for keeping the National Conservation Planner Database updated with current conservation planner information for the state, including NRCS employees, volunteers, conservation district employees, participating state agency employees, and other partner organizations.
 - (1) Updates will take place whenever changes in personnel or planner status takes place.
 - (2) When individuals have planner designations in multiple states, each state will manage separate records.
3. The NRCS Registry serves as the official record of TSP certification and expiration dates.

E. Privileges when Relocating or Working Across Multiple States

1. Although individuals 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.
2. State conservationists must establish a procedure for reviewing and assigning state conservation planner designations for individuals relocating to their state.
3. When level 3 and 4 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 3 or 4 certified conservation planners who are designated in that state. The planner may need to work several months in the state before being assigned the planner designation. Once the state conservationist is satisfied that the relocated planner has sufficient knowledge

of the state to independently provide planning assistance, the planner may be assigned the full designation.

4. 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.
5. For states with training requirements that surpass national minimum requirements, conservation planners must complete those state requirements before being assigned the planner designation for that state.
6. Individuals working in multiple states as a conservation planner must be assigned planner role designations by each state conservationist.

409.12 Maintaining Designation

A. General

1. Levels 2, 3, and 4 conservation planners must pass a quality assurance review during a repeating 3-year period (known as the recertification cycle) to maintain their current highest conservation planner designation.
 - a. The 3-year recertification cycle starts when an individual achieves a level 2, 3, or 4 conservation planner designation.
 - b. If a planner achieves a higher level conservation planner designation within a recertification cycle, the cycle starts over from the new designation date.
 - c. The last day of the 3-year recertification cycle is the expiration date for the planner's current highest designation. See section 409.12(C) on recertifying or suspending a planner's designation.

B. Quality Assurance Review for Planner Designations

1. The state conservationist must establish a procedure (which may be within the state quality assurance plan) to review the conservation plans of each level 2, 3, and 4 planner at least once every 3 years.
2. Enough conservation plans must be reviewed to determine that the conservation planner has developed conservation plans that meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH).
 - a. Exhibits 5 and 6 contain sample plan evaluation worksheets for individual and areawide conservation plans, respectively. States may use these or create their own plan evaluation worksheet.
 - b. If the conservation planner's conservation plan does not adhere to the policy and guidelines in NPPH, see section 409.12(C) for guidance on suspending the conservation planner's designation.
3. NRCS quality assurance policy and guidance can be found in 340 GM Part 404 and 450 GM Part 407.
4. NRCS is responsible for TSP quality assurance as found in 440 M § 504.24.

- C. Determining Recertification or Suspension of Conservation Planner Designation
1. The state conservationist is responsible for reviewing each planner's current highest designation in the state to determine if the planner's designation will be recertified or suspended.
 2. Recertification
 - a. A planner will be recertified at the end of the 3-year recertification cycle if the planner demonstrates the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to maintain the designation and any specializations by passing the conservation plan quality assurance review.
 3. Suspension
 - a. A planner's designation (or specialization, if applicable) will be immediately suspended if the planner fails to pass the conservation plan quality assurance review.
 - (1) An individual may have a higher planner designation suspended while keeping a lower designation and specialization. For instance, a level 3 certified planner could have that designation suspended but maintain a level 2 conservation planner designation with a specialization if the specialization passed the quality assurance review.
 - b. Findings, corrective actions, and instructions for recertification will be documented in writing.
 - (1) The state conservationist must develop a training plan before the individual is recertified and provides conservation planning assistance.
 4. After completing the conservation plan quality assurance review, the state conservationist must update the planner's designation record in the National Conservation Planner Database to reflect the review outcome.
 - a. Planners whose designation is recertified should have their designation expiration date updated to expire at the end of the next 3-year recertification cycle.
 - b. Planners whose designation is suspended should be marked "inactive" in the database.
 5. NRCS will manage TSP recertification in NRCS Registry.

PART 409 – Conservation Planning

Subpart C – Conservation Planner Specializations

Amended August 2024

409.20 General

- A. This subpart describes general requirements for national and state conservation planner specializations.
1. Overview
 - a. Conservation planner specializations (i.e., Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) specialty) can be added to level 2, 3, and 4 designations.
 - a. The prerequisite of all specializations is a level 2 conservation planner designation unless otherwise specified.
 - b. National specializations are identified in section 409.21.
 - c. State specializations will be identified in state supplements under Subpart D, section 409.31.
 2. Roles and Authorities
 - a. State conservationists must establish a process to review and approve conservation planner specializations for individuals in or relocating to their state.
 - b. Individuals seeking a specialization must be an existing NRCS or partner employee, a private sector service provider (including a technical service provider), or a volunteer providing service to NRCS.
 - c. Conservation planners who have a specialization may conduct all steps of the conservation planning process for component plans (as designated by the specialty they have achieved) without supervision.
 - a. A level 3 or 4 certified conservation planner designation is still required to approve an overall conservation plan.
 3. Achieving a Specialization
 - a. All individuals seeking specialization must complete the core competency training requirements listed in subparts D and E corresponding to the desired state or national specialization.
 - b. States must use the process described in subpart B to request any course equivalencies to meet the national training requirements.

4. Maintaining a Specialization
 - a. Maintaining a specialization follows the same quality assurance review process as part of the recertification cycle described in 180 GM § 409.12.
 - b. Planners must provide a component plan applicable to their specializations or an example of their work that showcases their technical adequacy for the quality assurance review. Section 409.21 states what each national specialization requires for the review.
 - c. The review will determine whether the specialization will be recertified or suspended.

409.21 National Specializations

A. NRCS CNMP Specialty

1. Roles and Authorities
 - a. See 190 GM Part 405 for CNMP approval and signature requirements.
 - b. Those with a CNMP specialty may not approve the overall conservation plan unless they are also designated as a level 3 or 4 certified planner.
2. Achieving Specialization
 - a. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
 - (1) To develop and implement CNMPs, those with a CNMP specialty must understand at minimum the following knowledge, skills, and abilities:
 - (a) How the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) relates to specific elements of the CNMP for which expertise is being provided.
 - (b) How to apply the technical criteria associated with the various elements of a CNMP in the NRCS FOTG.
 - (c) How local, state, territorial, tribal, and federal laws and regulations affect the elements of a CNMP.
 - b. Training
 - (1) States must follow all national requirements for the CNMP specialty and may add state requirements needed to comply with state laws, certifications, and licensing requirements or to meet special circumstances.
 - (a) Exhibit 7, Figure 409E-5, lists the required courses for the CNMP specialty.
 - c. State Certifications or License Requirements
 - (1) The state conservationist must ensure that candidates meet any state certification and licensing requirements (e.g., engineering license, engineering approval authority, certified nutrient management consultant or technical specialist).
 - d. Samples of Work
 - (1) Individuals must provide two completed CNMPs that meet all criteria in 190 GM Part 405 for review and approval.

3. Maintaining the CNMP Specialty
 - a. Maintaining the CNMP specialty follows the same quality assurance review process as part of the recertification cycle described in 180 GM § 409.12.
 - (1) Each planner seeking this specialty must provide at least one CNMP for the recertification review to determine if the plans or designs were developed and carried out according to NRCS conservation practice standards, policy, and CNMP technical criteria.
 - b. The review will determine whether the specialization will be recertified or suspended.

409.22 State Specializations

- A. State conservationists may propose state specializations. Submit the following information to the Conservation Planning Branch chief in a request for approval:
 1. Proposed duties and roles assigned to the specialization.
 2. Knowledge, skills, and abilities unique to the specialization.
 3. A list of core competencies and training requirements.
 4. Curricula and agendas for any required training that is offered outside of NRCS.
 5. A training plan for the delivery of required training.
- B. Upon receiving a request for a new specialization, the Conservation Planning Branch chief will consult with appropriate subject matter experts to evaluate the merits of the planning role.
- C. If the requested specialization is approved, the Conservation Planning Branch chief will provide an affirmative response to the requesting state.
 1. The requesting state will include the conservation planner specialization in a state supplement under Subpart D, section 409.31.
 2. The new specialty will not be included in the conservation planning database until the state supplement has been published to eDirectives.
- D. If the request is not approved:
 1. The Conservation Planning Branch chief will collaborate with subject matter experts to provide the requesting state a written explanation of the deficiencies identified.
 2. 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.

PART 409 – Conservation Planning Policy

Subpart D – State Specific Sections

Amended August 2024

409.30 Reserved for State Equivalency Course List

A. State Equivalency Course List Template

Figure 409D-1: State Equivalency Course List Template

Planner Designation	National Course Requirement	State Course Equivalency	Approved for Past Delivery, Future Delivery, or Both?

409.31 Reserved for State Specializations

PART 409 – Conservation Planning Policy
Subpart E – Exhibits

Amended August 2024

- Exhibit 1 Level 1 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements**
- Exhibit 2 Level 2 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements**
- Exhibit 3 Level 3 Certified Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements**
- Exhibit 4 Level 4 Certified Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements**
- Exhibit 5 Sample Worksheet to Evaluate Conservation Plans**
- Exhibit 6 Sample Worksheet to Evaluate Areawide Conservation Plans**
- Exhibit 7 NRCS CNMP Specialty Core Competencies and Course Requirements**

Exhibit 1 – Level 1 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Figure 409E-1: Level 1 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Core Competency	Course Requirements	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Conservation Planning Basics	<p>NRCS-NEDC-000019 Conservation Planning, Part 1 or NRCS-NEDC-000191 TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning (<i>TSPs Only</i>)</p>	AgLearn/Web-based	3 to 4	N/A
Conservation Planning Basics	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000008 Planning Criteria Training (OJT/State/National) or NRCS-NEDC-000486 Using Planning Criteria in Conservation Planning</p>	OJT/State/National or AgLearn/Web-based	8 or 3	N/A
Conservation Planning Basics	<p>Complete one of the following: NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000002 Conservation Planning Business Tool Training or NRCS-NHQ-000068 Conservation Desktop (CD) and Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) Local/State Hands-on Training</p> <p><i>Note: This training must cover the use of business tools through step 7 of the conservation planning process. TSPs are exempt from this training. Partners who do not have access to NRCS conservation planning business tools are also exempt from this training requirement so long as they are not using NRCS business tools. They should meet the conservation plan criteria in 180 H § 600.31.</i></p>	OJT/Local - Self-Certified or Local/State Hands-on Training Events	8 or 32	N/A

Core Competency	Course Requirements	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Field Office Technical Guide Basics	NRCS-NEDC-000149 Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide or NRCS-NEDC-000191 TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning (<i>TSPs Only</i>)	AgLearn/Web-based	4	NRCS-NHQ-000081 Field Office Technical Guide Basics
Conservation Communication Basics	NRCS-NEDC-000501 Conservation Skills for Conservation Professionals: The Art of Helping People Help the Land	AgLearn/Web-based	4	N/A
Cultural Resources Basics	NRCS-NEDC-000141 Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 1	AgLearn/Web-based	4	N/A
Environmental Evaluations Basics	NRCS-NHQ-000011 Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 1: Primer on NRCS Environmental Compliance and NRCS-NHQ-000012 Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No 2: Documenting the Environmental Evaluation	S&T Training Library for content; completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	2	NRCS-NHQ-000075 Level 1 Environmental Evaluation
Soils Basics	NRCS-NHQ-000009 Basic Soils and Web Soil Survey to Interpret Land Capabilities & Limitations (State Instructor Led) or NRCS-NEDC-000416 Using Basic Soil Survey Information in Conservation Planning	AgLearn/Instructor Led by State or AgLearn/Web-based	4	NRCS-NHQ-000077 Soils Interpretations

Core Competency	Course Requirements	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Water Quality Basics	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000038 Overview of Water Quality for Conservation Planners - No. 1 and NRCS-NHQ-000039 Nitrogen Management and Concerns – No. 2 and NRCS-NHQ-000040 Phosphorous Management and Concerns – No. 3 and NRCS-NHQ-000041 Sediment Management for Water Quality – No. 4</p>	AgLearn/Web-based	4 to 7	NRCS-NHQ-000078 Level 1 Water Quality Resource Assessment
State Specific Requirements	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000024 State-Specific Training & Required Deliverables-Level 1 Conservation Planner</p> <p><i>Note: This includes any additional training or licensing required by state laws or regulations in the state where work is being performed. TSPs must also take the TSP State Specific-Training Module for each state where they are seeking certification. Training modules are located at TSP State-Specific Training Modules.</i></p>	OJT/State/TSP Website; completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
Verification	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000025 Supervisor Certification for Level 1 Conservation Planner Role</p> <p><i>Note: For TSPs, verification in NRCS Registry meets this requirement.</i></p>	Completion marked in AgLearn	N/A	N/A

Exhibit 2 – Level 2 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Figure 409E-2: Level 2 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Prerequisite	Level 1 Conservation Planner Designation			
Conservation Planning Procedures	<p>NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000003 Conservation Planning Course: Part 2 Modules 6 to 8*</p> <p><i>Note: Archived course NRCS-NEDC-000164 (Conservation Planning Boot Camp) also meets this requirement</i></p>	Instructor Led by State or National	32	N/A
Water Quality Fundamentals	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000042 Water Bodies – No. 5 and NRCS-NHQ-000043 Pest Management and Water Quality Implications – No. 6 and NRCS-NHQ-000044 Water Management</p>	AgLearn/Web-based	4	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000079 Level 2 Water Quality Resource Assessment</p>

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
State-Specific Requirements	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000189 State-Specific Training & Required Deliverables – Level 2 Conservation Planner</p> <p><i>Note: This includes any additional training or licensing required by state laws or regulations in the state where work is being performed. TSPs must also take the TSP State-Specific Training Module for each state where they are seeking certification. Training modules are located at TSP State Specific Training Modules.</i></p>	OJT/State/TSP Website; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
Verification	<p>NRCS-NHQ-0000190 Supervisor Certification for Level 2 Conservation Planner Role</p> <p><i>Note: For TSPs, verification in NRCS Registry meets this requirement.</i></p>	Completion marked in AgLearn	N/A	N/A

Note: State deviation from the nationally approved Conservation Planning, Part 2 curriculum (beyond the state flexibility already built into the national curriculum) requires a course equivalency request for approval and must be included in the state supplement to this policy.

Exhibit 3 – Level 3 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Figure 409E-3: Level 3 Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Prerequisite	Level 2 Conservation Planner Designation			
Conservation Planning Procedures	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000015 Conservation Planning course Part 3: Module 9</p> <p><i>Note: This course requirement has a prerequisite of completing Conservation Planning Part 2: Modules 6 to 8.</i></p> <p><i>In Conservation Planning Part 3: Module 9, planners should document they developed an RMS-alternative and explained that alternative to their client.</i></p>	OJT; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	varies	N/A
Cultural Resources Evaluation Fundamentals	<p>NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-000001 Cultural Resources Training Series Part 2</p>	Instructor Led by State	16	N/A
Environmental Evaluation Fundamentals	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000013 Environmental Evaluation Webinar Series No. 3 to 11</p>	<p>S&T Training Library for content; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn</p>	11	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000080 Level 2 Environmental Evaluation</p>

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Conservation Compliance Fundamentals	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000010 Fundamentals of Highly Erodible Land & and Wetland Conservation Provisions (State Instructor led) or NRCS-NEDC-000409 Fundamentals of Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Provisions (Web-based)</p>	Instructor Led by State or AgLearn/Web-based	3 to 8	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000082 HELC/WC Compliance Provisions</p>
Conservation Communication Fundamentals	<p>State conservationist or designee may require one of the following advanced communications courses depending on the state's anticipated customer base: NRCS-NEDC-000045, NRCS-NEDC-000090, NRCS-NEDC-000147, NRCS-NEDC-000262, NRCS-NEDC-000334, NRCS-NEDC-000378, NRCS-NEDC-000247, NRCS-NHQ-000130, NRCS-NHQ-000137, NRCS-NEDC-000092</p> <p><i>Note: Course NRCS-NHQ-Local-000003 (Conservation Planning Part 2) and archived course NRCS-NEDC-000164 (Conservation Planning Boot Camp) both cover Conservation Communication Fundamentals so one of the above courses is not required to be taken for level 3 unless required by the state conservationist or designee.</i></p>	AgLearn/Instructor Led	varies	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000072 Conservation Communication</p>

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Soil Health Fundamentals	<p>NRCS-NEDC-000050 Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff (In person) or NRCS-NEDC-000488 Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff – Blended/Virtual Delivery or NRCS-NEDC-000430 Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff – Blended Delivery or NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-00004 Soil Health and Sustainability Training (State Equivalency) or NRCS-NHQ-000132 Soil Health Basics for TSPs (<i>TSPs Only</i>)</p> <p><i>Note: Course NRCS-NHQ-LOCAL-00004 is also used for state led courses where the state is putting the training on (but using the national curriculum).</i></p>	AgLearn/Instructor Led by State or AgLearn/Web-based	24	NRCS-NHQ-000076 Soil Health and Sustainability
Conservation Economics Fundamentals	<p>NRCS-NEDC-000498 Conservation Economics Webinar Series (ARCHIVED NRCS-NEDC-000017 Economics of Conservation Planning)</p>	AgLearn/Web-based	7	NRCS-NHQ-000074 Conservation Economics

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Air Quality Fundamentals	NRCS-NEDC-000253 Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy	AgLearn/Web-based	1.5	NRCS-NHQ-000070 Air Quality Conservation Basics
State-Specific Requirements	NRCS-NHQ-000027 State-Specific Training & Required Deliverables-Level 3 Certified Planner <i>Note: This includes any additional training or licensing required by state laws or regulations in the state where work is being performed. TSPs must also take the TSP State-Specific Training Module for each state where they are seeking certification. Training modules are located at TSP State Specific Training Modules.</i>	OJT/State/TSP Website; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
Verification	NRCS-NHQ-000023 Supervisor Certification for Level 3 Certified Conservation Planner Role <i>Note: For TSPs, verification in NRCS Registry meets this requirement.</i>	Completion marked in AgLearn	N/A	N/A

Exhibit 4 – Level 4 Certified Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Figure 409E-4: Level 4 Certified Conservation Planner Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Prerequisite	Level 3 Certified Conservation Planner Designation			
Conservation Planning Procedures	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000017 Assist with two state quality assurance reviews</p>	OJT; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
Conservation Planning Procedures	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000018 Serve as an instructor along with one or more Level 4 conservation planners or designee*</p> <p><i>Note: For two training sessions (may be state or national level courses). One may be outside of the planner's home state.</i></p>	OJT; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
Advanced Conservation Communication	<p>Complete one of the following courses: NRCS-NEDC-000045, NRCS-NEDC-000090, NRCS-NEDC-000147, NRCS-NEDC-000262, NRCS-NEDC-000334, NRCS-NEDC-000378, NRCS-NEDC-000247, NRCS-NHQ-000130, NRCS-NHQ-000137, NRCS-NEDC-000092</p> <p><i>Note: If one of these courses was taken in Level 3, that meets this requirement.</i></p>	AgLearn/Instructor Led	varies	NRCS-NHQ-000072 Conservation Communication

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Advanced Conservation Economics	<p>NRCS-NEDC-000505 Advanced Economics for Conservation Planners</p> <p>(ARCHIVED NRCS-NEDC-000017 Economics of Conservation Planning also meets this requirement)</p>	AgLearn/Instructor Led	24	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000074 Conservation Economics</p>
Advanced Resource Concerns and Discipline Knowledge	<p>NRCS-NHQ-000136 Advanced Resource Concerns and/or Discipline Knowledge Training Tracking – Level 4 Conservation Planner</p> <p><i>Note: Complete at least 5 advanced natural resources or discipline knowledge courses. Courses meeting this requirement must be from the list of approved sources below and approved by the state conservationist or their designee. See description in AgLearn for more information.</i></p> <p><i>Approved Sources: 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.</i></p>	Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	varies	N/A

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
State-Specific Requirements	NRCS-NHQ-000029 State-Specific Training & Required Deliverables – Level 4 Certified Planner	OJT/State; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
Verification	NRCS-NHQ-000026 Supervisor Certification for Level 4 Certified Conservation Planner Role	Completion marked in AgLearn	N/A	N/A

Exhibit 5 – Sample Worksheet to Evaluate 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 the listed information, where applicable, give a rating of “Satisfactory.”
 - For each component, if there is applicable information missing from what has been listed or the information is vague or unclear, give a rating of “Unsatisfactory.”
 - 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” column may be used to describe the reasons for the rating that was given.
- 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: _____

<p align="center">Conservation Plan Component</p>	<p align="center">Rating: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations</p>	<p align="center">Comments/Follow-up Actions</p>
<p>Identify Problems and Opportunities and Client Objectives</p> <p>Client information – the plan contains a record of discussions about the customer’s—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems, opportunities, and concerns associated with all natural resources of the land, operation, or both. • Production and business goals. • Desired future conditions for planning areas as compared to existing conditions. • Financial constraints and willingness to accept risk. • Facilities and machinery. • Managerial level. • Commitment to conservation. • Objectives. <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: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	Comments/Follow-up Actions
<p>Inventory Resources and Analyze Resource Data</p> <p>The plan contains basic operational information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the client’s planning land units. • A record of utilities, easements, and legal limitations associated with the property in question. • The land’s relationship to the entire operation or watershed. <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"> • Soils information. • Crop inventory. • Pasture inventory. • Rangeland inventory. • Forest management inventory. • Developed land inventory. • Associated land inventory. • Cultural resource and historic property inventory. <p>Upon field review, it is apparent that these inventories have been correctly completed and discussed with the client.</p>		

Conservation Plan Component	Rating: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	Comments/Follow-up Actions
<p>Existing condition data – the plan describes the type, extent, and location of—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing conservation and management practices. • Identified resource concerns, including the appropriate analysis tools used. • Human considerations. • Special environmental concerns. <p>Upon field review, it is obvious that the above items have been correctly and completely identified and discussed with the client.</p>		
<p>Formulate and Evaluate Alternatives</p> <p>The plan documents that—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The client has been provided with multiple feasible approaches to address their objectives and resource concerns. • The client has been given information that compares short-term and long-term ecological, economic, and social outcomes of the available practice options. <p>A field review reveals that all alternatives were appropriate and the client fully understood the advantages and disadvantages of each.</p>		
<p>Make Decisions and Implement Plan</p> <p>Record of client’s decisions – the plan contains—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A list of conservation practices and the planned amounts of each necessary to meet the planned level of treatment. • A realistic schedule for implementation of chosen practices • Assistance notes (e.g., CPA-6) or other documentation of the objectives of, discussions with, and decisions made by the client. 		

Conservation Plan Component	Rating: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	Comments/Follow-up Actions
<p>Implementation Requirements – 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"> • Designs, drawings, or illustrations. • Engineering notes. • Preparation for implementation. • Method or technique of implementation. • Required equipment. • Materials specifications, both natural and man-made. • Supporting practices. • Operation & maintenance. <p>Upon field review, it is apparent that the client has understood and agreed to the above details.</p>		
<p>Maps – conservation plan maps, soils maps, topographic maps, and other appropriate resource maps are included with the plan.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>When applicable, a field review reveals that the client understands the process and implications of HELC/WC determinations.</p>		

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 further required actions, if applicable:

Signature and Title of Reviewer:

Date:

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:

Signature:

Date:

Exhibit 6 – 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, give a rating of “Satisfactory.”
 - For each component, if there is applicable information missing from what has been listed, or if the information is vague or unclear, give a rating of “Unsatisfactory.”
 - 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” column 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: _____

<p style="text-align: center;">Areawide Conservation Plan Component</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rating: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Comments</p>
<p>The planner used an interdisciplinary team for plan development. Relevant NRCS and 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>		
<p>Decision maker and stakeholder project objectives are documented, including desired future conditions for the planning area as compared to existing conditions.</p> <p>Relevant investigations of the planning area were conducted with stakeholders to identify problems and opportunities.</p>		

Areawide Conservation Plan Component	Rating: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	Comments
<p>NRCS resource priorities for the planning area were determined by using the NRCS strategic plan, the Chief’s priorities, the state resource assessment, conservation districts’ long-range plans, local work groups’ priorities, watershed or basin management plans, and other local and state assessments.</p> <p>The plan documents communication of NRCS priorities to decision makers and stakeholders.</p>		
<p>Factors that may hinder or limit plan development or implementation have been accounted for in the plan, including—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project financial constraints and possible funding sources. • State, tribal, territorial, and federal laws, regulations, and mandates that currently affect or could affect existing operations. 		
<p>Natural Resource Inventory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of inventory detail has been tailored to the complexity of the resource setting and the identified problems, opportunities, and objectives. • Appropriate inventories for each land use have been conducted. • 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. • Infrastructure, utilities, easements, legal constraints, and determinations have been documented. • Stakeholders and decision makers have been encouraged to participate in resource inventory activities. 		
<p>Resource Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources have been analyzed using the appropriate tools, methods, handbooks, and manuals. • Cause-and-effect links have been established and resource concerns identified. 		

<p style="text-align: center;">Areawide Conservation Plan Component</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Rating: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Comments</p>
<p>Formulating Alternatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation systems and other treatments that will address the objectives, problems, and opportunities have been identified and documented with both land treatment (structural and non-structural) and preventative measures. • Stakeholders have been actively involved in formulating alternatives. • Each alternative’s effects on physical resource, social, and economic considerations have been quantified and expressed in monetary or qualitative terms. • The short- and long-term beneficial and adverse impacts of each alternative have been identified. • Alternatives include measures to mitigate any potential ecological damages. • NRCS programs, programs of other agencies, and other implementation and funding opportunities that may be available to implement alternatives have been identified. 		
<p>Documenting alternatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CPA-52 is used to document environmental effects. • 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"> ○ A description of the resource setting. ○ A description of the management system. ○ A complete list of the type, amount, and timing of actions involved in the management system that may change due to the plan. ○ Effects of the actions on the resources and human considerations. ○ Impacts of each alternative in comparison to the existing condition. 		

Areawide Conservation Plan Component	Rating: Unsatisfactory Satisfactory Exceeds Expectations	Comments
<p>Decision making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public response has been solicited through prepared notices and public meetings. Stakeholders and decision makers have agreed on an implementation strategy and schedule, including funding programs or authorities to pursue. 		
<p>Maps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate resource maps and maps of existing and planned conditions are included with the plan. 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. 		
<p>Supporting documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate designs, conservation practice specifications, estimated costs and conservation system descriptions have been included and provided to decision makers. Operation and maintenance agreements are included in the plan. Required permits have been listed. Land rights and treaty rights have been documented. Mitigation of lost environmental values has been detailed. 		
<p>Format – the plan is organized in a well-laid-out, easily understood, and logically sequenced manner.</p> <p>Upon field review, it is apparent that the stakeholders and decision makers are comfortable using and understand all materials they have been provided.</p>		

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 further required actions, if applicable:

Signature and Title of Reviewer:

Date:

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:

Signature:

Date:

Exhibit 7 – NRCS CNMP Specialty Core Competencies and Course Requirements

Figure 409E-5: NRCS CNMP Specialty Training Courses

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Prerequisite:	Level 2 Conservation Planner Designation			
Nutrient Management	NRCS-NEDC-000083 Nutrient Management Track 1, Part 1	AgLearn/Web-based	1	N/A
Nutrient Management	Complete either the Option 1 course or all three courses in Option 2: <u>Option 1:</u> NRCS-NHQ-000142 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner Certification (CNMP) Training coordinated by NAMNMT or equivalent state level training or <u>Option 2:</u> NRCS-NEDC-000115 Agricultural Waste Management Systems, A Primer; NRCS-NEDC-000116 Agricultural Waste Management Systems - Level 2; and NRCS-NEDC-000143 National Air Quality Assessment Tool Webinar Series 1 to 3. 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.	Option 1: National Animal Manure Nutrient Management Team (NAMNMT) or State Equivalent or Option 2: AgLearn/Web-based and S&T Training Library for content; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn	varies (24 to 45)	N/A

Core Competency	Course Requirement(s)	Training Source	Hours	Proficiency Exam
Nutrient Management	NRCS-NHQ-000040 Phosphorus Management and Concerns – No. 3	AgLearn/Web-based	1	
Nutrient Management	NRCS-NHQ-000145 Assessment tools training for Erosion and Nutrient Management specific to the planner's location	Local/State/National; Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
State-Specific Requirements	NRCS-NHQ-000144 State-Specific Training & Required Deliverables <i>Note: All planners must complete any additional training or licensing required by state laws or regulations in the state where work is being performed. TSPs must also complete the TSP State-Specific Training Module for each state where the TSP will be developing CNMPs. TSP State-Specific Training Modules are located at TSP State-Specific Training Modules.</i>	TSP Website / Completion marked/self-certified in AgLearn		N/A
Verification	NRCS-NHQ-000141 Supervisor Certification for the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan Specialty <i>Note: For TSPs, verification in NRCS Registry meets the supervisor certification requirement.</i> <i>All CNMP specialty candidates must provide two completed CNMPs for review and approval that will meet all criteria in 190 GM Part 405, "Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans"</i>	Completion marked in AgLearn		N/A