

Conservation Planning – Part 1

Modules 1-5

Module 1 – How NRCS Will Do Business

- History
- Conservation Partnership
- How we do business in the conservation planning arena

Module 1 - History

Drought conditions, conversion of fragile lands to cropland and conventional farming practices created a dust bowl led to creation of Soil Erosion Service (SES) in 1935.



Module 1 - History

- 1937 Soil Conservation Service (SCS) was established to work with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (part of state government) – Hugh Hammond Bennett was first chief of the SCS
- States entered into agreements with the Department of Agriculture.
- Conservation Districts set priorities, asked SCS to help landowner to view problems, provide assistance and recommend solutions.

Module 1 - History

- Over time a shift was made to provide a comprehensive look at the natural resources contained in a planning unit to address soil, water, air, plants, animals, energy and human considerations.
- Soil Conservation Service was renamed Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 1994.
- Landowner participation was voluntary.

Hugh Hammond Bennett Principals of Planning:

- Needs/capabilities of each acre
- Consider client capabilities, knowledge, facilities, machinery and economic situation
- Willingness to try new practices
- Relationship of land to farm, community, watershed
- Planning done in the field with decision-maker

End of Module 1

History

Conservation Partnership

How we do business in the
conservation planning arena

Module 2 – Planning Policy and Guidance

- Highlights of conservation planning and related policy
- Programs and how they relate to planning process

NRCS Policy

- Policies set the parameters for our work. They are the direct result of legislation, departmental regulations, or agency rules.
- Some NRCS policy, such as the Privacy Act, is only applicable to TSPs if they are under contract to NRCS.
- TSPs under contract directly with the producer/landowner are not obligated to follow this policy.
- However, many of the policies you will be introduced to here, such as Cultural Resource policy, are important to your clients, who are under contractual obligation to follow the policy.
- For that reason, it is important for the TSP to have an understanding of federal policy.

NRCS Planning Policy

- The use of a three phased, nine step planning process to accomplish resource management (National Planning Procedures Handbook).
- The NRCS objective is to help the client bring about the sound use and management of soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources to prevent their degradation and assure their sustained use and productivity, through the use of resource management systems.
- The NRCS Conservation Planning process will encompass development of resource management systems. In the case of specific purpose programs, the client may only be required to select and implement management systems that address specific resources and specific resource considerations.
- Human considerations (economic and social), related to the resources, will be addressed.
- **All NRCS conservation planners and technical service providers will be certified.**
- All plans developed with the assistance of NRCS and partner employees will be approved by an NRCS or partner certified planner.

NRCS Program Policy

- Goes by the individual program rules and includes landowner and land eligibility, eligible and in-eligible costs, etc.
- Here are some policies you may encounter when using [EQIP](#):
 - In Forestland, the landowner has to have a current Forest Management Plan to be eligible for this program.
 - Current Forest Management Plan is defined as meeting one of three standards:
 - US Forest Service Stewardship Plan
 - State Forester approved plan
 - NRCS approved plan
 - Conservation Activity Plans can only be certified by a TSP certified in that CAP.

- Financial Assistance Program Contracts are with eligible landowners or producers on eligible land
- Financial Assistance Program funds are developed into “pools” or categories according to land use or type of resource concern. For example:
 - Land Use Categories might be: Cropland, Pasture, Forestland
 - Resource Concerns might be: Wildlife, T&E Species, Animal Waste, Energy

- Other Policies Important to TSPs:
 - If you are hired by NRCS to provide technical services, you are expected to abide by federal policy in addition to other stipulations which may be dictated in the contract, TSPs receiving direct payment from NRCS must comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX or the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act.
- Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and Privacy Act (PA) - The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides public access to records of the Executive Branch. It is a federal statute which allows any person the right to obtain federal agency records unless the records (or part of the records) are protected from disclosure by any of the nine exemptions contained in the law. FOIA is particularly of interest to TSPs because it has an impact on your ability to obtain producer records.

To obtain landowner/
producer
information from
NRCS, the
landowner must
complete and sign
an “Authorization
for Release of
Information” Form.

Print Form



Authorization for Release of Information

Some of the information that the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff gathers for your farm or agricultural operation (e.g., farm and field boundaries, acres, resource concerns, conservation practices,) is protected from disclosure by NRCS through Section 1619 of the 2008 Farm Bill. NRCS must have your permission to share your farm information with others. Please indicate by initialing in the boxes below which, if any, of the following limited releases of information you will allow to facilitate review of your proposed conservation practices and/or to help promote conservation programs of NRCS:

Please initial the boxes for the conditions you will allow NRCS to share information about your agricultural operation.

In order to meet obligations of environmental and historic preservation laws, we are required as a federal agency to disclose actions which might impact these resources (see associated information sheets). We must have your written permission to share the location of your agricultural operation, and to describe the proposed federal action (i.e., conservation practice designs, their anticipated environmental effect) with others. If NRCS cannot consult as required by law, NRCS will not be able to assist you with the practices which affect protected resources.

The program participant and landowner, if different, **give consent** for NRCS to release pertinent information about the affected property and proposed conservation practices and its supporting data for consultation, as needed, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-Fisheries, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, the Maine Department of Marine Resources, the Maine Natural Areas Program, the State Historic Preservation Officer, tribes and Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, and other appropriate parties. The information to be released would be pertinent for compliance with the Endangered Species Act, the Magnuson-Stevens Act - Essential Fish Habitat, the National Historic Preservation Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, and other environmental laws and regulations.

Note: If the land is leased, the landowner's signature must also be obtained.

- Release of your non personal farm information to technical service providers (TSPs) or contractors selected to help plan and/or implement conservation practices on your farm.
- Conservation Plan Review with the _____ Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) at a public meeting.
- Discussion of the application of practices on your farm at public meeting of the _____ SWCD for consideration of conservation awards/recognition, workshops or tours.
- Refer other farmers to talk to you regarding installed conservation practices.

(more)

- Information about Conservation Program Contract (CPC) applicants is generally not released to the public because individual privacy rights must be protected. Non-releasable information regarding CPC applicants includes:
 - Names
 - Addresses
 - Telephone Numbers
 - Social Security or Tax Identification Numbers
 - Amount of federal funds requested

Once the applicant has signed a Program Contract, NRCS can release the following information:

- Names
- Limited Address (state, city, and/or county*)
- Amount of federal funds requested
- **Additional restrictions about the release of address information apply to some corporate and nonprofit Business types. Consult General Manual Title 120, Part 409 for more guidance.*

Other Policies Important to TSPs:

- A TSP may make a FOIA request to obtain this information. One use for this type of information would be to establish a mailing list for marketing your services.
- Examples of information that may be routinely provided **without** a FOIA request are:
 - Publications, soil surveys, brochures
 - Job sheet templates
 - Press releases
 - Permanent directives (including manuals, handbooks, General Manual parts, technical notes, technical releases, and material from the Field Office Technical Guide such as standards and specifications, soil data, resource management systems, cost-return data, and non-copyrighted references. You will be advised if the request is for materials normally sold to the public through the National Technical Information Service (NTIS) or the Government Printing Office (GPO) as listed in National Engineering Manual 210-545.14.)

- If NRCS contracts your services directly, you should take particular care in protecting privacy matters pertaining to:
 - A Producer's commercial and/or financial matters.
 - Information that could cause substantial harm to the producer's competitive position.
 - Information which might impair the ability of the government to obtain necessary information from this producer in the future.
 - Release of confidential producer records and information could result in one year in jail and/or a \$5000.00 fine. You, and your employees, are prohibited from discussing a producer's NRCS file information with anyone outside the scope of the practice or project that you are working on at the time.

End of Module 2 – Planning Policy and Guidance

- Highlights of conservation planning and related policy
- Programs and how they relate to planning process

Module 3 – Key Elements

Key elements of planning

Three phase, nine-step planning process

Module 3 – Key Elements

Planner – primary element in planning

Client

Process

Plan

Partnership

Key Element - Planner

Provides technical assistance, guide the planning process

Help inventory, analyze the resources, develop plan

Helps implement the plan and determine impacts

Key Element - Planner

Does not:

- Make decisions for the client

- Serve as an agent for the client in dealing with contractors, other agencies, etc.

- Make promises that can't be delivered

- Misrepresent a practice or a system

Key Element - Process

Voluntary

On-Going

Ecological and Human Concerns

Desired Future Conditions

Resource Management System

Consideration of On-Site and Off-Site Impacts

Key Element - Plan

Conservation Activity Plan – preliminary/sub conservation plan (developed by TSPs may have further restrictions/considerations to address ESA, Cultural Resources requirements for federally funded plans).

Individual Conservation plan that meets all restrictions/considerations mentioned above.

Areawide Conservation plan

Comprehensive plan with a Unit of Government

Key Element - Partnership

Working with private, State, Federal partners provides

Additional staff needs

Specialized technical assistance

Implementation programs and funding

Resource data

Three Phase, nine-step planning process

- **Phase I - Collection and Analysis (Understanding the Problems and Opportunities)**
 1. Identify Problems
 2. Determine Objectives
 3. Inventory Resources
 4. Analyze Resource Data

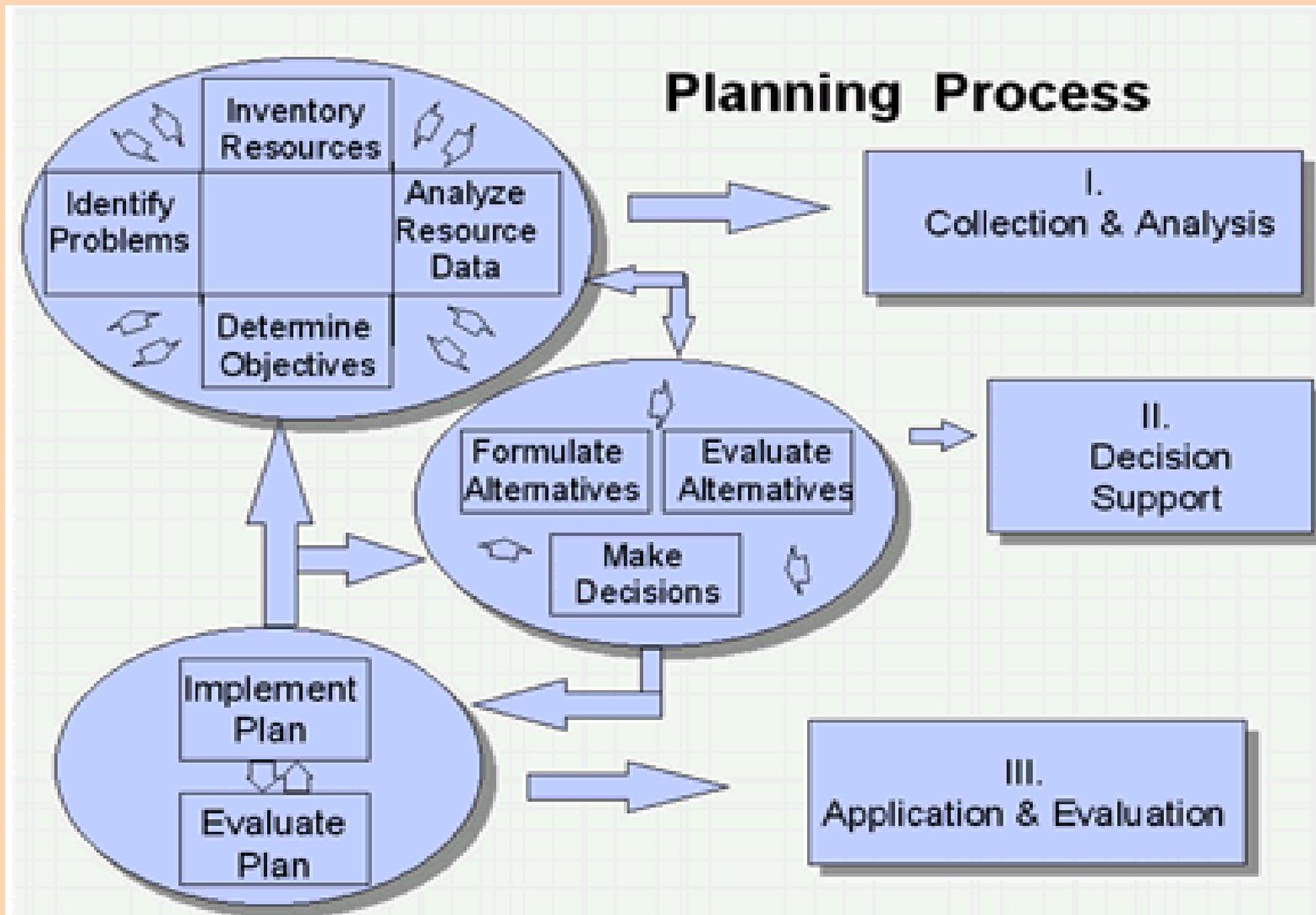
Three Phase, nine-step planning process

- **Phase II - Decision Support (Understanding the Solutions)**
- 5. Formulate Alternatives
- 6. Evaluate Alternatives
- 7. Make Decisions

Three Phase, nine-step planning process

- **Phase III - Application and Evaluation (Understanding the Results)**
 8. Implement the Plan
 9. Evaluate the Plan

Dynamic planning process



Avoid

- Identify problem (planning step 1)
 - Jump to conclusion (planning step 7)
 - Install a practice (planning, step 8)
- National Planning Procedures Handbook
 - Provide guidance on planning

End of Module 3 – Key Elements

Key elements of planning

Three phase, nine-step planning process

Module 4 – Planning Environment Components and Interrelationships

- Planning Environment:
 - the variables which may have an effect on a client's decisions - resource problems and opportunities, economic opportunities and constraints, social issues and concerns, and legal and policy requirements

Module 4 – Planning Environment Components and Interrelationships

- Natural Resources
- Special Environmental Concerns
- Economic and social considerations
- NEPA policy issues

Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE)

Conservation Practice	Resource Concern Category	Positive numbers indicate a lessening of the resource concern (an improvement). Negative numbers (red-shaded cells) indicate an intensifying of the resource concern (a detriment). The range is from 5 to -5. Blank indicates no effect.								
655-Forest Trails and Landings (ac)	Air Quality									
	Domestic Animals									
	Fish & Wildlife									
	Plant Condition	Wildfire Hazard(3)	Noxious and Invasive Plants(-1)							
	Soil Condition	Damage from Sediment Deposition(1)								
	Soil Erosion	Road, road sides and Construction Sites(2)	Classic Gully(2)							
	Water Quality	Excessive Suspended Sediment and Turbidity in Surface Water(2)								
	Water Quantity	Reduced Storage of Water Bodies by Sediment Accumulation(1)	Reduced Capacity of Conveyances by Sediment Deposition(1)	Inadequate Outlets(1)						

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Module 5: Resource Management Systems (RMS)

- Definition
- Tools used to develop RMS

RMS Process

- Embedded in the nine-step planning process
- Develop sound resource management system without creating new problems.
- Treatment of identified problems to a sustainable level.
- Quality Criteria and tools are listed in Section III of the electronic Field Office Technical Guide

Section III eFOTG

End of Module 5: Resource Management Systems (RMS)

- Definition
- Tools used to develop RMS