

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 (NPPH), Part 600, provides procedures and guidance on implementing this planning policy, including relationships to the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), electronic storage of data, technical handbooks, and program guidance in the planning process. The NRCS planning process and standards as outlined in the NPPH will be used for all conservation planning.
- D. In cases where NRCS is assisting, or is assisted by, other agencies or groups, 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 Island 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. The greatest value comes by having the client engaged in every step of the planning process. Through participation, the client develops an understanding of the natural resource issues, interactions, and treatments necessary for resource sustainability.
- B. The objective in conservation planning is to help each client attain sustainable use and sound management of soil, water, air, plant, animal, energy, and human resources. 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.
 - (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 for the treatment of all identified resource concerns for soil, water, air, plants, animals, energy, and humans that meets or exceeds the planning criteria in the FOTG.
 - (2) The conservation planning process is progressive when a client addresses only a limited number of resource concerns—or even a single resource concern alone—but does not achieve an RMS level of treatment. The rate of progress in moving to an RMS level 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 land manager's selected alternative.
- C. When programs or initiatives exist (for example, highly erodible land provisions) that define other levels of planning for specific resource issues, clients will be offered alternatives that, as a minimum, meet the criteria of those programs or provisions. 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, technical service providers (TSPs), and other appropriate sources. NRCS conservation planning assistance is based on ecological, economic, and social considerations relative to the resources. When NRCS provides conservation planning assistance, onsite visits with clients are an integral part of that assistance.

E. A conservation plan is the record of decisions and supporting information for treatment of a unit of land or water meeting planning criteria 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 solve identified natural resource concerns and takes advantage of opportunities. The needs of the client, the resources, and Federal, State, territorial, Tribal, and local requirements must be met. The conservation plan may include multiple components that provide practices and management activities for particular resources. It is the responsibility of the client to acquire any additional plan approvals needed to meet specific Federal, State, Tribal, or local program requirements. The following is a list of possible components of conservation plans and is not considered all-inclusive:

- (1) Comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP)
- (2) Irrigation water management (IWM) plan
- (3) Integrated pest management (IPM) plan
- (4) Forest management plan
- (5) Nutrient management plan
- (6) Grazing plan
- (7) Wildlife management plan
- (8) Conservation activity plans (CAPs)
- (9) Others as they are developed nationally or by States

F. Areawide conservation plans are voluntary, comprehensive plans for a watershed or other large geographic area. Areawide conservation planning will consider 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 natural 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, singly and in combination, as tools to solve natural resource concerns on a broad scale.

409.2 Conservation Planning Assistance Delivery

A. Conservation planning assistance provided by NRCS will be in compliance with all civil right acts, nondiscrimination statutes, and regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture.

B. NRCS traditionally provides conservation planning assistance on a request basis through mutual agreements and cooperative agreements with conservation districts and Tribal districts.

- (1) The mutual agreement establishes a partnership and a foundation for USDA agencies to cooperate with States, units of Government, territorial governments, Tribal governments, conservation districts, and Tribal districts.

Title 180 – General Manual

- (2) The cooperative working agreement supplements the mutual agreement and establishes the relationship between the partners and agencies of USDA, and between State conservation agencies, territorial or Tribal governments, and conservation districts or Tribal districts.
- (3) NRCS may enter into agreements with other organizations and units of Government to provide conservation planning assistance as mutually agreed upon.
- (4) The State Conservationist will assess and determine the level of NRCS assistance to be provided in areas without conservation districts. NRCS will provide assistance for programs mandated by Congress independent of a cooperative working agreement with the 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 affect 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, State, territorial, or Tribal land 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. The State Conservationist will determine when an agreement is required. See Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 525, for additional policy.

H. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements will be incorporated into all applicable steps and activities of NRCS-assisted planning activities and will not be considered as a separate process or requirement. See Title 190, General Manual (GM), Part 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), will be conducted for all NRCS planning activities and will be used to help determine the level of NEPA documentation required. Planners must identify the level of NEPA documentation required for each planning activity as early in the planning process as possible and incorporate activities 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) listed on the Form NRCS-CPA-52, “Environmental Evaluation Worksheet,” can be found in 180-NPPH, Part 600, Subpart H, Section 600.71, and in Title 190, National Environmental Compliance Handbook (NECH), Part 610.

409.3 Requirements for Providing Conservation Planning Assistance

A. All NRCS conservation planners must be certified. The CPTAD will establish minimum criteria to be met to be a “certified conservation planner” (see 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.9). State Conservationists may also certify conservation planners from partner agencies or organizations, as needed, following the same requirements as NRCS employees. Two subsets of conservation planning assistance will also be certified: “CNMP planners” (see 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.10) and “IPM specialists” (see 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.11). Additional subsets of conservation planning assistance categories may be developed by States. For certain service categories and CAPs listed on the TSP Web site, TSPs are required to be certified as conservation planners. For TSP planner certification requirements, refer to 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.9D(10).

- (1) A certified conservation planner is a person who possesses the necessary skills, training, and experience to implement the NRCS nine-step planning process to meet client objectives in solving natural resource concerns.
- (2) The certified 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 that treats resource concerns, meets client’s objectives, and meets all Federal policies.
- (3) The State Conservationist may establish additional certification levels and criteria as needed to cover degrees of scope and complexity in planning environments.

B. All conservation plans developed by NRCS or partner employees for NRCS purposes must be approved by an NRCS-certified conservation planner. 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-certified conservation planner indicates 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 will establish and implement a process to ensure training is provided to NRCS and partner employees delivering conservation planning services for the agency. This is to 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 certified conservation planner designations in addition to the requirements listed in 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.9.
- (3) Providing access to training through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training, or equivalent courses and methods developed outside of NRCS and approved by the State Conservationist as meeting the identified training need. Approval of equivalent courses will be done in consultation with the Director, CPTAD.
- (4) Ensuring that all individuals who approve conservation plans meet minimum NRCS-certified conservation planner requirements.
- (5) Ensure State training opportunities are also available to TSPs, particularly modules 6-8 of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course and the use of resource assessment tools.
- (6) Develop and keep current the State-specific training module for conservation planning certification and recertification of TSPs.

D. The State Conservationist will establish and maintain a list of all NRCS-certified conservation planners in the State, including NRCS employees, volunteers, conservation district employees, TSPs, and participating State agency employees.

E. The CPTAD will maintain a list in TechReg of all TSPs who meet national conservation planning criteria, as described in 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.9D(10).

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, Part 504. The State Conservationist may also directly certify qualified individuals, such as third-party vendors, as conservation planners contingent upon these individuals satisfying NRCS requirements. Whether providing assistance to a recommending organization or directly certifying a qualified individual, the State Conservationist must ensure that this assistance is consistent with existing NRCS policies and technical guidance.

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

H. Job approval authority for both engineering and ecological practices is a process separate from conservation planning certifications.

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, and partners on the NRCS network, will document and maintain conservation plan data using agency approved tools and the official planning database, National Planning and Agreements Database (NPAD). See 130-GM, Part 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 must 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. Plan Signatures

- (1) The plan is signed by an NRCS-certified conservation planner indicating the plan meets client objectives and all NRCS policy, procedures, and standards. 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.
- (2) The plan is signed by the customer indicating acceptance of the conservation system alternative.
- (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.

409.6 Conservation Planning Assistance That May Have International Impacts

Assistance provided must comply with 280-GM, Part 400, “International Conservation Programs.” State Conservationists must 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, Part 408, Subpart 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, Part 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. 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 must work with the public land management agency.

B. 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, OMB Circular A-95, Executive orders, departmental memoranda, and NRCS policy.

C. 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 Certified Conservation Planner Designation

A. Prerequisites

Individual must be one of the following:

- (i) An existing NRCS or partner employee
- (ii) A third-party vendor, including a TSP or an individual seeking TSP certification
- (iii) A volunteer

B. Policy References

- (1) 180-GM, Part 409
- (2) 180-NPPH, Part 600

C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- (1) At a minimum, NRCS-certified conservation planners must have an understanding of the following fundamentals:
 - (i) Crop production
 - (ii) Grazing systems
 - (iii) Plant growth
 - (iv) Soil-water-plant relationships
 - (v) Plant identification
 - (vi) Nutrient management
 - (vii) Erosion processes
 - (viii) Water quality
 - (ix) Scientific tools and models
 - (x) Animal production
 - (xi) Conservation practices and systems common to the work geographic area
 - (xii) Wildlife management
 - (xiii) State and local laws and regulations that may influence conservation planning
- (2) Candidates must possess and demonstrate the following knowledge, skills, and abilities:
 - (i) Knowledge of national conservation programs
 - (ii) Skill in applying the NRCS nine-step conservation planning process
 - (iii) Skill in assessing natural resource concerns
 - (iv) Ability to plan and implement conservation practices common to the geographic area
 - (v) Knowledge of NRCS FOTG standards and specifications for applicable conservation practices in the State and locality
 - (vi) Skill in applying approved erosion prediction technology

- (vii) Skill in using applicable site vulnerability assessment tools
 - (viii) Knowledge of Federal, State, territorial, Tribal, and local laws and regulations
 - (ix) Ability to accurately complete Form NRCS-CPA-52, “Environmental Evaluation Worksheet”
 - (x) Knowledge of policy and procedures to protect cultural resources and historic properties
 - (xi) Skill in communicating with landowners and operators
- (3) The State Conservationist may develop a list of additional qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for the certified conservation planner designation. TSPs are required to meet only the knowledge, skills, and abilities identified in paragraphs 409.9C (1) and (2).

D. Certification Requirements

- (1) States will follow all national requirements and any additional State requirements. For TSP certification requirements, paragraphs 409.9D (1) - (9) do not apply – skip to 409.9D(10).
- (2) The State Conservationist will establish a process and criteria to certify conservation planners.
- (3) NRCS certified conservation planner candidates must complete at least one field-reviewed RMS plan for a conservation management unit (CMU).
 - (i) The planner will be accompanied to the field by the State Conservationist designee to meet with the decisionmaker.
 - (ii) The candidate will be expected to demonstrate competency in the planning process and plan development.
 - (iii) The observer will evaluate the planner’s involvement with the decisionmaker (landowner or land operator) in the planning process and whether all resource concerns associated with the planning unit are adequately addressed.
 - (iv) Field-reviewed plans must be approved by the State Conservationist or designee prior to final delivery to the decisionmaker.
- (4) Candidates must meet any additional minimum qualifications and criteria for conservation planning assistance established by the State Conservationist.
- (5) The State Conservationist will establish a procedure for reviewing and approving conservation planner certifications for individuals relocating to their State.
- (6) Individuals working in multiple States as conservation planners must be certified in each State.
- (7) The State Conservationist may establish programs to certify third-party vendors and other individuals as conservation planners.
- (8) The State Conservationist will maintain a list of certified planners.
- (9) Training
 - (i) The State Conservationist will determine the type and minimum hours of training necessary to become a certified conservation planner.
 - (ii) Training may be provided through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training, or equivalent courses and methods approved by the State Conservationist as meeting the identified training requirement. The State Conservationist, in consultation with the Director, CPTAD, may grant approval for course equivalency in lieu of a NRCS formal training course.
 - (iii) State Conservationist may provide a letter waiving training requirements if an individual has previously demonstrated competence in RMS plan development.
 - (iv) NRCS certified conservation planners are responsible for keeping their own individual development plan updated to reflect conservation planning training needed and completed to maintain or increase their skill level.
 - (v) Individuals must complete all modules (1-9) of the “National NRCS Conservation Planning Course” or equivalent as approved by the State Conservationist. Attending Conservation Boot Camp may be substituted for the instructor-led modules 6-8.

(10) TSP National Certified Conservation Planner Requirements

- (i)** TSPs will obtain the certified conservation planner designation through the following national certification process.
- (ii)** TSP certified conservation planner candidates must complete the TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning Course, or an alternative approved by the Director, CPTAD.
- (iii)** TSP certified conservation planner candidates must complete modules 6-8 of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course, offered nationally or by any State, or an equivalent course as approved by the Director, CPTAD.
- (iv)** TSP certified conservation planner candidates must complete one field-reviewed RMS plan for a conservation management unit with a minimum of two land uses. TSPs seeking planning certification in multiple States are not required to submit additional plans for review.
 - The candidate will be accompanied to the field by a NRCS-certified conservation planner to meet with the plan decisionmaker.
 - The candidate will be 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, Part 504, Subpart C, Section 504.26B(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 with the State Conservationists concurrence.
- (v)** TSP certified conservation planner candidates must complete the following additional training. TSPs who have previously completed any of the following courses are not required to take the course again if proof of course completion is provided to the national TSP Program manager, unless required for recertification due to poor performance.
 - “Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide” (AgLearn)
 - “Environmental Evaluation Series No. 1: Primer on NRCS Environmental Compliance” (S&T Library)
 - “Environmental Evaluation Series No. 2: Documenting the Environmental Evaluation on the NRCS CPA-52 Environmental Evaluation Worksheet” (S&T Library)
 - “Cultural Resources Training, Part 1” (AgLearn)
 - “Introduction to Water Quality” (AgLearn)
 - Current wind and water erosion technologies training coordinated through a State NRCS office or an equivalent course approved by the Director, CPTAD
 - State-specific training module for each State where planning will be conducted
- (vi)** If all requirements are met, the national TSP Program manager will certify the TSP as a national certified conservation planner in TechReg.
- (vii)** TSPs obtaining the national certified conservation planner designation will be certified to conduct conservation planning in all States where they have completed the State-specific training module.

E. Maintaining Certification

- (1) Training to maintain and update conservation planning skills must, at a minimum, occur once every 3 years. 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.9E(1), does not apply to TSPs. For national requirements for TSPs to maintain conservation planning certification, see 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.9E(2).

- (i) The State Conservationist will determine the type and minimum hours of training necessary to maintain the certified conservation planner designation.
- (ii) NRCS certified conservation planners are responsible for maintaining their conservation planner certification. Maintaining certification includes completing necessary training to maintain and update skills.
- (2) TSP National Requirements for Maintaining Certification
 - (i) Each TSP certified conservation planner designation will 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, Part 504, Subpart C, Section 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(10)(iv).
 - (iv) The TSP must review the State-specific training module for each State they will recertify in so they can be aware of any updated information.

F. Quality Assurance

The State Conservationist is responsible for maintaining the certified conservation planner process and designation in the State quality assurance plan.

- (i) Each certified conservation planner's designation will be reviewed at least once every 3 years by the State Conservationist or designee.
- (ii) A sufficient number of conservation plans will be reviewed to determine that the conservation plans meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in 180-NPPH.
- (iii) If an individual fails to meet the criteria for the certified conservation planner designation, the status will be revoked and the individual must be recertified before providing conservation planning assistance.
- (iv) Applicants must present proof of training when seeking recertification.
- (v) If multiple certified planner levels exist, an individual could become decertified at a higher designated level while retaining a lower certification level.
- (vi) NRCS is responsible for TSP quality assurance.
- (vii) NRCS quality assurance policy and guidance can be found in 450-GM, Part 407, "Documentation, Certification, and Spot Checking."

409.10 Criteria to Achieve an NRCS Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner Designation

A. Prerequisites

- (1) Individual must be one of the following:
 - (i) An existing NRCS or partner employee
 - (ii) A third-party vendor, including a TSP or an individual seeking TSP certification
 - (iii) A volunteer
- (2) See 190-GM, Part 405, Section 405.11, for CNMP approval and signature requirements.

B. Policy References

190-GM, Part 405.

C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- (1) At a minimum, CNMP planners certified by NRCS in each State to develop and implement CNMPs must have understanding and knowledge of the following:
 - (i) How the FOTG relates to specific elements of the CNMP for which expertise is being provided.
 - (ii) How to apply the technical criteria associated with the various elements of a CNMP as contained in the NRCS FOTG.
 - (iii) How local, State, territorial, Tribal, and Federal laws and regulations affect the elements of a CNMP.
- (2) The State Conservationist may develop a list of additional qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for the certified CNMP planner designation. TSPs are required to meet only the knowledge, skills, and abilities identified in paragraphs 409.10C(1).

D. Certification Requirements

- (1) States will follow all national requirements and any additional State requirements. For TSP CNMP certification requirements, paragraphs 409.10D (1) - (8) do not apply – skip to 409.10D(8).
- (2) The State Conservationist will establish a State certification process and criteria to certify CNMP planners.
- (3) The State Conservationist will ensure that all pertinent State certification and licensing requirements (e.g., engineering license, engineering approval authority, and certified nutrient management consultant or specialist) are met as part of any program established.
- (4) The State Conservationist will establish a procedure for reviewing and approving CNMP planner designations for individuals relocating to their State.
- (5) The State Conservationist may establish programs to certify third-party vendors and other individuals.
- (6) The State Conservationist will maintain a list of NRCS-approved CNMP planners as well as any other specialists certified by NRCS in the State to develop and implement CNMPs. Each third-party certification program approved by NRCS will maintain a current list of specialists certified by that program and make it available to the State Conservationist. CPTAD will maintain a list of all TSPs who meet national and State certified CNMP criteria in TechReg.
- (7) Training
 - (i) The State Conservationist will determine the type and minimum hours of training necessary to become a certified CNMP planner.
 - (ii) Training may be provided through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training, or equivalent courses and methods approved by the State Conservationist as meeting the identified training requirement. The State Conservationist, in consultation with the Director, CPTAD, may grant approval for course equivalency in lieu of an NRCS formal training course.
 - (iii) Training provided by an NRCS-approved certifying organization may be substituted for NRCS training.
 - (iv) Certified planner candidates must complete the following:
 - The “National Conservation Planning Course, Part 1” (modules 1-5) or equivalent, as approved by the State Conservationist.
 - “NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems - A Primer,” and “NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems - Level 2,” in AgLearn, or equivalent as approved by the State Conservationist.

(8) TSP National CNMP Planner Designation Requirements

- (i)** TSPs will obtain the CNMP planner designation through the following national certification process.
- (ii)** TSP CNMP planner candidates must complete the TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning, or an alternative approved by the Director, CPTAD.
- (iii)** TSP CNMP planner candidates must complete modules 6-8 of the “NRCS Conservation Planning Course,” offered nationally or by any State, or an equivalent course as approved by the Director, CPTAD.
- (iv)** TSP CNMP planner candidates must complete the following additional training. TSPs who have previously completed any of the following courses are not required to take the course again if proof of course completion is provided to the national TSP Program manager, unless required for recertification due to poor performance.
 - “Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide” (AgLearn)
 - Current wind and water erosion technologies training coordinated through a State NRCS office or an equivalent course approved by the Director, CPTAD
 - “NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems, A Primer” (AgLearn)
 - “NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems, Level 2” (AgLearn)
 - “Air Quality, Climate Change, and Energy” (AgLearn)
 - “Air Quality Resource Concerns” (AgLearn)
 - “Air Quality Assessment Tool Webinar – Dairy, Swine or Poultry” (S&T Library)
 - “Introduction to Water Quality” (AgLearn)
 - “Nutrient Management, Modules 1-6” (AgLearn)
 - State-specific training module for each State where TSP will be developing CNMPs

E. Maintaining Certification

- (1) State Conservationist will determine the type and minimum hours of training necessary to maintain certification. 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.10E(1) does not apply to TSPs. For national requirements for TSPs to maintain conservation planning certification, see 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.10E(3).
- (2) NRCS and TSP certified CNMP planners are responsible for maintaining their certification. Maintaining certification includes completing necessary training to maintain and update skills.
- (3) TSP National Requirements for Maintaining CNMP Planner Certification**
 - (i)** Each TSP CNMP planner designation will 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.
 - (ii)** 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, Part 504, Subpart C, Section 504.26B(2) for plan reviews outside of resident States.
 - (iii)** If a TSP has not developed any CNMPs in the past 3 years, a new sample CNMP must be prepared for review.
 - (iv)** The TSP must review the State-specific training module for each State they will be recertified in, so they can be aware of any updated information.

F. Quality Assurance

- (1) The State Conservationist will include actions in the State quality assurance plan to ensure that the State reviews the CNMP certification program.

- (2) The State Conservationist or designee will review and verify the technical adequacy of each certified CNMP planner, including TSPs, at least once every 3 years. If an individual fails to meet the qualifications or criteria established for certified CNMP planner status, the certifying organization, whether it is NRCS or an NRCS-approved certifying organization, must revoke the status. When the status is revoked, the individual may seek recertification based on State-specific guidelines. Applicants must present proof of training when seeking recertification.
- (3) For each NRCS-certified CNMP planner, the State Conservationist or designee will 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.
- (4) NRCS quality assurance policy and guidance can be found in 450-GM, Part 407, "Documentation, Certification, and Spot Checking."

409.11 Criteria to Achieve an NRCS Certified Specialist in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Designation

A. Prerequisites

- (1) Individual must be one of the following:
 - (i) An existing NRCS or partner employee
 - (ii) A third-party vendor, including TSPs or individuals seeking TSP certification
 - (iii) A volunteer
- (2) Although certification is not required to develop or revise IPM components (IPM plan) of conservation plans nor to schedule practice 595 (IPM) in conservation plans, all persons who approve IPM components of conservation plans must be certified specialists in IPM. A certified conservation planner, as required by 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.3B, will approve the overall conservation plan.

B. Policy References

- (1) IPM (595) standard and specification
- (2) 190-GM, Part 404, Subpart A, Section 404.1B

C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- (1) The State Conservationist will address the following in establishing a program for certifying specialists who approve IPM components of conservation plans:
 - (i) An understanding of the conservation planning process.
 - (ii) An understanding of the production systems where pest management will be applied.
 - (iii) Skill in using the Windows Pesticide Screening Tool (WIN-PST) or other appropriate pest management environmental risk screening tools.
 - (iv) An understanding of local, State, territorial, Tribal, and Federal laws and regulations related to pest management.
 - (v) An understanding of natural resource concerns related to pest management activities.
 - (vi) An awareness of the content of NRCS pest management policy.
 - (vii) An understanding of the content and use of the NRCS FOTG.
 - (viii) Proficiency in applying the NRCS IPM 595 standard and specification.
- (2) The State Conservationist may develop a list of additional qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for the certified specialist in IPM designation. TSPs are required to meet only the knowledge, skills, and abilities identified in paragraphs 409.11C(1).

D. Certification Requirements

Title 180 – General Manual

- (1) States will follow all national requirements and any additional State requirements. For TSP integrated pest management specialist certification requirements, paragraphs 409.11D (1) - (8) do not apply – skip to 409.11D(9).
- (2) The State Conservationist will establish a process and criteria to certify specialists who approve IPM components of conservation plans.
- (3) The State Conservationist will ensure that all NRCS personnel who provide technical assistance for IPM are properly trained and meet applicable requirements for their positions as well as State or local licensing and certification requirements. In addition, the State Conservationist will establish a process to provide continuing education to maintain employee competency.
- (4) The State Conservationist will determine how competency will be demonstrated. The State Conservationist, in consultation with the Director, CPTAD, may grant approval for course equivalency in lieu of an NRCS formal training course. The following are minimum requirements:
 - (i) Successful completion of the “National Conservation Planning Course, Part 1” (modules 1-5) or equivalent.
 - (ii) Successful completion of the NRCS “Introduction to Water Quality Course” or equivalent.
 - (iii) Successful completion of the pest management track of the NRCS “Nutrient and Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Planning Course” or equivalent.
 - (iv) Demonstrated skill in using the WIN-PST or other appropriate pest management environmental risk screening tools.
 - (v) Demonstrated skill in developing the pest management component of a conservation plan based on the State IPM (FOTG Practice Code 595) conservation practice standard.
- (5) The State Conservationist will establish a procedure for reviewing and approving IPM specialist designations for individuals relocating to their State.
- (6) The State Conservationist may establish a program to certify third-party vendors and other private sector individuals, such as certified crop advisors and crop consultants. Existing programs from national certifying organizations; land grant universities; Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service; State government agencies; and other appropriately qualified entities may be utilized as components of the NRCS certification program in a State.
- (7) The State Conservationist will maintain a list of NRCS-approved IPM specialists as well as any other specialists certified by NRCS in the State as IPM specialists. Each third-party certification program approved by NRCS must maintain a current list of specialists certified by that program and must make it available to the State Conservationist. CPTAD will maintain a list of all TSPs who meet national and State pest management criteria in TechReg.
- (8) Training
 - (i) The State Conservationist will determine the type and minimum hours of training necessary to become a certified specialist in IPM.
 - (ii) Training may be provided through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training, or equivalent courses and methods approved by the State Conservationist as meeting the identified training requirement.
 - (iii) Training provided by an NRCS-approved certifying organization may be substituted for NRCS training.
- (9) TSP Certified Specialist in Integrated Pest Management Requirements**
 - (i)** TSPs will obtain the CNMP planner designation through the following national certification process.
 - (ii)** TSP certified IPM specialist candidates must complete the “TSP Orientation and Conservation Planning Course” or an alternative approved by the Director, CPTAD.

- (iii) TSP certified integrated pest management specialist candidates must complete the following additional training. TSPs who have previously completed any of the following courses are not required to take the course again if proof of course completion is provided to the national TSP Program manager, unless required for recertification due to poor performance.
 - “Introduction to the Field Office Technical Guide” (AgLearn)
 - “Introduction to Water Quality” (AgLearn)
 - Windows Pesticide Screening Tool (WIN-PST) training coordinated through a State NRCS office or an equivalent course for WIN-PST or other appropriate pest management screening tool approved by the Director, CPTAD
 - Pest management track of the “Nutrient and Pest Management Course” (AgLearn)
 - State-specific training module for each State where TSP will be developing pest management plans.
- (iv) TSP must complete any additional training or licensing required by State laws or regulations in the State where work is being performed.

E. Maintaining Certification

- (1) The State Conservationist will determine the type and minimum hours of training necessary to maintain certification. 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.11E(1) does not apply to TSPs. For national requirements for TSPs to maintain “certified specialist in integrated pest management” designation, see 180-GM, Part 409, Section 409.11E(3).
- (2) NRCS and TSP certified IPM specialists are responsible for maintaining their certification. Maintaining certification includes completing necessary training to maintain and update skills.
- (3) TSP National Requirements for Maintaining Certified Specialist in Integrated Pest Management Designation
 - (i) Each TSP “certified specialist in integrated pest management” designation will 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 IPM plans completed by the TSP in that State during the time period being reviewed.
 - (ii) If a TSP did not develop any IPM 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, Part 504, Subpart C, Section 504.26B(2) for plan reviews outside of resident States.
 - (iii) If a TSP has not developed any IPM plans in the past 3 years, a new sample IPM plan must be prepared for review.
 - (iv) The TSP must review the State-specific training module for each State they will be recertified in, so they can be aware of any updated information.

F. Quality Assurance

- (1) The State Conservationist will include actions in the State quality assurance plan to ensure that the State reviews the IPM certification program.
- (2) The State Conservationist or designee will review and verify the technical adequacy of each IPM specialist, including TSPs, at least once every 3 years. If an individual fails to meet the qualifications or criteria established for IPM certification, the IPM certification must be revoked. When the status is revoked, the individual may seek recertification as an IPM specialist based on State guidelines. Applicants must present proof of training when seeking recertification.
- (3) For each NRCS-certified IPM specialist, the State Conservationist or designee will review a sufficient number of that specialist’s IPM approvals to find out whether the plans or designs

Title 180 – General Manual

are developed and carried out according to NRCS conservation practice standards, policy, and technical criteria. NRCS staff may submit plans they developed or plans they approved by a third party.