



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural Resources
Conservation
Service

P.O. Box 2890
Washington, D.C.
20013

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NHCP-1L

NATIONAL HANDBOOK OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES NOTICE 113 450-VI

Purpose: To provide: 1) an updated "Preface" for the National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP); 2) "Guidelines for Developing SCS Conservation Practice Standards;" and 3) an example draft NHCP standard prepared using a revised format.

Effective Date: This notice is effective when received.

Background: Conservation practice standards contained in the NHCP have evolved over the last 25 years in accordance with advancement of farming and ranching techniques used throughout the country and with changes in technology. There is a continuing need to maintain practice standards to keep abreast of rapid changes in technology and to ensure that they address multiple resources. In some instances, existing standards have not been revised in a timely manner.

Furthermore, during this period, a wide array of styles and procedures has been used in preparing standards. As a result, inconsistencies in form and content have become commonplace and have now become a concern that must be addressed.

Additionally, various laws passed over the last several years have led to increased cooperation between local, State, and Federal agencies and others concerned with conservation and protection of natural resources. Increasingly, SCS material is being used by other government and private organizations. SCS standards need to provide a professional and uniform appearance.

As part of an overall effort to provide updated Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) materials, several individual disciplinary groups have reviewed current NHCP standards to determine the need for developing new standards, or for combining or changing existing standards. Recommendations resulting from these reviews have been adopted and will help ensure that standards: 1) provide timely incorporation of new technology; 2) address multiple resource concerns; 3) provide consistent format and content of practice standards; 4) enhance interagency cooperation with regard to development of standards; and 5) account for the varied conservation activities expected of our agency in the 1990's. The work of these groups has been coordinated through the National Conservation Practice Standards Subcommittee (NCPSS) of the National Technical Guide Committee (NTGC). The resulting guidelines for developing practice standards and the revised format transmitted by this notice reflect both an interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approach to development of standards.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS),
formerly the Soil Conservation Service, is an agency of
the Department of Agriculture

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Explanation: The attachment “Guidelines for Developing SCS Conservation Practice Standards” describes revised procedures for preparation of all conservation practice standards (including interim standards) to be used in SCS technical or financial assistance work.

All new standards (including interim standards or existing standards revised for technical reasons) prepared after receipt of this notice are to follow the new format. States are to consult with the appropriate discipline specialist at National Technical Centers (NTC) when they desire to develop new standards.

In some instances, State conservation agencies that incorporate SCS FOTG material in laws, rules, and regulations governing conservation activities in that State may have concerns with the revised format. Such concerns are to be mutually resolved in consultation with NTC.

Existing standards contained in Section IV of Field Office Technical Guides do not have to be immediately revised solely to accommodate the new format. Revision of existing national standards will be made under leadership of NCPSS in an orderly manner. Revised national standards are to then be incorporated directly or supplemented as needed and then incorporated in Section IV in a timely manner and are to follow the new format.

Practice standards in effect at the time the client makes a decision regarding a course of action (Step 7 of the Conservation Planning Process) will normally be used for practice implementation, unless public health, safety, or welfare are adversely affected. In some instances, clients may prefer to have practice designs based on updated standards. A copy of all outdated standards is to be retained in SCS office files until such standards are no longer relevant to any active conservation plan or contract. Where formal contracts (e.g., long-term agreements) are involved, copies of outdated standards are to be retained for the period of time required by the pertinent SCS policy governing the specific program.

An example draft standard utilizing the new guidelines and format is attached.

Filing: Replace the current “Preface” in NHCP with the enclosed revised version. File the “Guidelines for Developing SCS Conservation Practice Standards” directly behind the “Preface”.

Subpart B - National Handbook of Conservation Practices of 450-GM (Part 401) is currently being revised to reflect these changes.

Questions regarding the format for preparation of standards using the new guidelines should be directed to the chair, NTC Technical Guide Committee. Technical questions should be directed to the appropriate NTC discipline specialist.

Additional copies of this notice may be obtained from the Consolidated Forms and Publications Distribution Center (CFPDC), formerly known as the Landover Forms Warehouse (e.g. Central Supply) by ordering NHCP-1L.

ROBERT R. SHAW
Deputy Chief for Technology

Attachment

Dist: NHCP

PREFACE

The National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP) establishes national standards for conservation practices commonly used to treat natural resource problems (soil, water, air, plants, and animals). Each national practice standard includes the following components: name; unit of measurement; code number; definition; purposes; conditions where practice applies; criteria; considerations; plans and specifications; and operation and maintenance.

Conservation practice standards are based on research, conservation field trials, and accumulated knowledge and experience. Practices are combined to make up conservation management systems in accordance with policy in 450-GM **(Part 401)**.

Practice standards are included in Field Office Technical Guides (FOTG) for each Soil Conservation Service (SCS) field office, and establish the quality requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purposes. Standards in the NHCP can be used directly or the individual sections can be supplemented to adapt the requirements to state or local needs.

Standards guide the preparation of specifications for individual practice applications on specific field sites. Specifications themselves are not a part of practice standards.

Although this handbook is prepared primarily for use by SCS personnel, it is available for others having an interest in or a responsibility for natural resource conservation activities.

III. DESCRIPTION OF SECTIONS IN SCS CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARDS:

Each SCS conservation practice standard is to contain all of the following items or sections unless otherwise noted.

NAME, CODE, AND UNIT OF MEASUREMENT - These items are established nationally and are not to be supplemented by States or NTC'S.

DEFINITION- This section briefly describes the practice. "Purposes" supported by the practice, or "Criteria" for design, installation, or performance of the practice, are addressed in other sections of the standard and are not to be part of the definition. "Definition" is established nationally and is not to be supplemented by states or NTC'S.

PURPOSES- This section lists the primary reasons for which the practice is applied. Each purpose identifies a resource problem the practice can be specifically designed to treat, such as those identified in Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE) in Section V, Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). For each purpose listed, corresponding limits of design are described in the CRITERIA section. Secondary or incidental benefits which may accrue from implementing the practice, but which are not recognized primary reasons for using the practice, are not included.

Example of purpose for the practice "Terrace": To
reduce sheet and rill erosion
Example of secondary or incidental benefit for the
practice "Terrace": Improvement of wildlife cover

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES - This section describes the land uses and site conditions that affect suitability or function of the practice. Conditions where the practice is applicable and conditions for which the practice is unsuitable are explained. Limitations on the extent of the practice standard set by SCS policy are also included in this section.

CRITERIA - This section contains guidance for design of the practice to accomplish one or more identified purposes. Specific criteria are included for each of the "Purposes" identified in the standard.

Criteria are expressed in terms of allowable limits for design parameters, acceptable installation processes, or performance requirements. Limits for design parameters include such items as minimum allowable hydraulic capacity, minimum service life, maximum allowable velocity, required seed quality, and minimum plant heights. Acceptable installation processes include such items as types of equipment to be used, sequencing and timing of field operations, and safety requirements (e.g., warning signs or ventilation requirements). Performance requirements define the condition to be achieved and include such

items as percent residue cover, stand density of established vegetation, earth fill densities, and required strength and durability of construction materials.

Minimum and/or maximum dimensions which satisfy the allowable limits for design parameters, acceptable installation processes, and/or performance requirements may also be described. Examples are maximum dimensions for strip widths; minimum side slope ratios; minimum top widths; minimum and maximum mulching rates; and minimum fill material heights above conduits.

Criteria are either described in this section or established by reference to other documents such as the Engineering Field Handbook or appropriate publications of universities or research agencies. Reference material supporting criteria are not to be included in this section.

Design tools (procedures, graphs, tables, computer programs, equations, and/or other design aids) are not criteria and are not to be included in this section. Design tools are used to develop designs which meet the practice criteria. They may be referenced in this section if specific tools are to be used for practice design.

CONSIDERATIONS - This section contains recommendations of additional elements of design which do not affect the conservation function of the practice and are therefore not accounted for as "Criteria". They may address the effects of other practices in the conservation management system, or the requirements of the overall farming operation on the design, installation, operation, or maintenance of the practice.

Guidance for conservation planning decisions is not included in practice standards. This information is contained in the National Planning Manual or in Sections III or V of the FOTG.

If there are no special "Considerations" (other than those normally involved in practice planning, design, or operation and maintenance), the following statement is to be included in this section:

"No special considerations have been identified for this practice."

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS - This section contains a statement that plans, and specifications are to be prepared for specific field sites, based on the standard. Plans and specifications include construction plans, drawings, job sheets, construction specifications, narrative statements in conservation plans, or other similar documents. These documents are to specify the requirements for installing the practice, such as the kind, amount, or quality of materials to be used, or the timing or sequence of installation activities.

General specifications applicable to all sites within a state or geographic area may be prepared and preprinted to assist in preparation of site-specific specifications. Specifications themselves are not a part of the practice standard.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE - This section describes the minimum requirements needed in an Operation and Maintenance plan for the practice. (O&M)

O&M consists of the repetitive actions needed to insure that practices perform adequately throughout their expected life. Operation encompasses normal management actions such as mowing for weed control; periodic opening and closing of water supply gates; and other similar actions. Maintenance involves corrective actions such as needed repairs due to normal "wear and tear"; replacement of components of the practice at periodic times during the life of the practice; and other similar activities.

O&M requirements shall be included as an identifiable part of the design developed for a specific site. Depending on the scope of the project, this may be accomplished with brief statements in the plans and specifications; the conservation plan narrative; or as a separate O&M plan.

This section is not applicable for a few practices. In these instances, the following statement is to be included in this section:

"Operation and maintenance requirements are not applicable for this practice."

REFERENCES - This section may be added by NTC or States as needed to incorporate a list of publications helpful in planning or implementation of the practice. These publications are in addition to those referred to in the CRITERIA section. National conservation practice standards will not include this section.

IV. FORMAT OF NATIONAL CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARDS:

All SCS conservation practice standards are to be prepared using the format on the following page.

SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

OFFICIAL PRACTICE NAME
(Unit of Measurement)
CODE XXX

DEFINITION

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PURPOSES

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CONSIDERATIONS

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CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

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PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

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CRITERIA

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OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

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Drawing or Photograph of Practice (Optional)

SCS, (NHCP or Abbreviation of State) (month, year)

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, and updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Soil Conservation Service.

EXAMPLESOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARDCROSS WIND STRIPCROPPING
(acre)
Code 589

DEFINITION

Growing crops in strips established across the prevailing wind erosion direction, arranged so that strips with cover resistant to wind erosion are alternated with strips susceptible to erosion.

PURPOSES

This practice may be applied as part of a conservation management system to support one or more of the following purposes:

- *Reduce wind erosion
- *Reduce transport and deposition of windborne sediment and sediment-borne contaminants offsite
- *Protect growing crops from damage by windborne soil particles

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to all cropland and other land where crops are grown.

This standard applies to any field divided into three or more cross-wind strips which do not exceed 660 feet in width.

CRITERIA



CONSIDERATIONS



PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS



OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE



SCS, NHCP
(month, year)

Conservation practice standards are reviewed periodically, updated if needed. To obtain the current version of this standard, contact the Soil Conservation Service.