

## Part 600 – National Planning Procedures Handbook

### Subpart A – General

#### 600.0 Purpose

A. NRCS is USDA’s technical agency for providing assistance to private land managers, conservation districts, Tribes, and other organizations in planning and carrying out conservation activities and programs. The purpose of this handbook is to provide guidance on the planning process used by the NRCS and many of its partners for developing, implementing, and evaluating individual conservation plans and areawide conservation plans.



**Figure 600-A1:** Conservation Planning Pamphlet

B. A conservation plan is the record of decisions and supporting information for treatment of a unit of land 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 plan may include component plans that address one or more resource concerns. Example component plans include: comprehensive nutrient management plan, grazing plan, integrated pest management plan, wildlife management plan, etc. The needs of the client, the resources, and Federal, State, Tribal, territorial, and local requirements will be met.

C. NRCS provides conservation planning and technical assistance to individuals, groups, Tribes, and units of government to help plan and carry out conservation decisions to meet their objectives. This help includes onsite planning assistance in developing conservation plans. Conservation plans are

developed and implemented to protect, conserve, or enhance natural resources within the client's social and economic interests and abilities.

D. Natural resources are defined by NRCS to include soil, water, air, plants, animals, energy and human considerations (SWAPAE +H).

E. In 1947, Hugh Hammond Bennett identified the principles of conservation planning in his text, *Elements of Soil Conservation*. According to Bennett, an effective conservation planner must adhere to the following principles:

- (1) Consider the needs and capabilities of each acre within the plan
- (2) Consider the client's facilities, machinery, and economic situation
- (3) Incorporate the client's willingness to try new practices
- (4) Consider the land's relationship to the entire farm, ranch, or watershed
- (5) Ensure the conservationist's presence out on the land



**Figure 600-A2:** Hugh Hammond Bennett (right)

F. This handbook reaffirms these principles throughout the planning process for all land uses.

G. Planning involves more than considering individual resources. It focuses on the natural systems and ecological processes that sustain the resources. Ultimately, the Earth is one ecological system, embodying all the smaller subsystems into one interconnected system. The relationship between living organisms and the environment are part of an ecological system's complexity and are not fully understood. Predicting both onsite and offsite effects upon ecological components is essential and is an inherent part of conservation planning.

H. The role of humans is considered in the formulation and delivery of planning activities. Human values and activities influence the structure and functions of ecological systems. Human actions result in direct and indirect effects on natural resources, both detrimental and beneficial. The

challenge in conservation planning is to balance the short-term demands for goods and services with the long-term sustainability of ecological systems. A conservation plan facilitates a client to operate in an ecologically sustainable, economically sound, and socially acceptable manner within the client's social values.

I. Conservation planning can be implemented successfully using current knowledge and technology, while recognizing that the art and science of natural resource management will continue to evolve and will never be complete or finished. The planner strives to balance natural resource issues with economic and social needs through the development of the conservation plan.

J. When working with Tribal, Native Hawaiian, or Native Pacific Islander clients (indigenous peoples), NRCS can offer technical assistance to help increase their capacity to use the best of both agency methods and indigenous stewardship. The *Indigenous Stewardship Methods and NRCS Conservation Practices Guidebook* focused on Tribes and were developed to provide a sensitive process in which knowledge is shared, allowing planners to incorporate the indigenous knowledge into NRCS's assistance through its conservation practices. The indigenous perspective of living in harmony with the Earth and the agency perspective of scientific and experiential learning are portrayed in the words of the guidebook. Indigenous peoples' traditional resource management systems are based on a combination of traditional knowledge and contemporary resource management needs. Traditional knowledge is sustained and validated by continued application and adaptation, but without a contemporary operating context—our conservation practice standards—valuable traditional knowledge and traditional stewardship practices may be lost to all producers. NRCS's conservation planning procedures facilitate incorporation of traditional indigenous stewardship practices into producers' daily work.

K. The conservation planning process helps the planner and client accomplish the following:

- (1) Help protect, conserve, and enhance natural resources
- (2) Design alternatives that meet local resource planning criteria for identified resource issues
- (3) Include human concerns for achieving sustainable agricultural systems
- (4) Consider the effects of planned actions on interrelated geographical areas (i.e., looking offsite, beyond the planning unit boundary)
- (5) Consider and explain the interaction between ecological communities and society
- (6) Focus on ecological principles
- (7) Consider the effects, risks, and interactions of planned systems and practices on the natural resources, as well as economic and social considerations
- (8) Identify where indigenous stewardship methods might be needed or explored
- (9) Assist with development of plans, regardless of scale, which will help achieve the client's and society's objectives
- (10) Identify where knowledge, science, and technology need to be advanced
- (11) Assist with meeting requirements for NEPA, which is incorporated into all steps and activities of the conservation planning process (see Section 600.41, "Integrating NEPA into the Planning Process," for additional information)

L. The planning process establishes a framework for planning and applying conservation systems on individual land units for individuals and businesses, as well as, geographic areas involving multiple ownerships, with stakeholder input, for the development of areawide conservation plans.

M. Planning is complex and dynamic. Successful planning requires not only a high level of knowledge, skill, and ability on the part of the planner, but also the use of professional judgment.

N. To gain or maintain the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for conservation planning, this handbook may be used both for training purposes and as a reference guide.

O. Users of this handbook also need to become familiar with NRCS planning policy (Title 180, General Manual (GM), Part 409), program manuals, discipline manuals (agronomy, biology, economics, engineering, range, etc.), official soils data and interpretive information, the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), and user guides for approved automated planning tools. In addition, users need to be thoroughly familiar with NRCS policy and procedures for complying with NEPA and related environmental concerns (190-GM, Part 410, “Compliance with NEPA”; Title 190, National Environmental Compliance Handbook, Part 610); the Land Use Manual (see 310-GM); and the Farmland Protection Policy Act (see Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 523).

P. Planning by its nature is both progressive and adaptive. A first-time client may only be interested in a single practice to meet one of their resource concerns. By introducing the planning process, the client is presented a range of alternatives to address multiple resource concerns and ideally, to develop and implement an RMS. Planners and clients work closely together based on the client’s knowledge level and where they are in the planning process. It is important to continue assisting the client in addressing resource concerns by increasing the level of planning and implementation over time and ultimately achieving planned goals.

## 600.1 References

A. Public Laws.—Numerous Federal laws or regulations effect actions or activities relating to natural resource management. Some laws pertain only where public lands are part of the planning area and others are inclusive of all Federal actions, regardless of ownership. Information is available from a number of sources. This is not an all-inclusive list. States are encouraged to supplement this handbook by creating a list of Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws, regulations, etc., that effect natural resource management in their planning area. Examples include the following:

- (1) Public Law 95-341, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978
- (2) Public Law 96-95, the Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979
- (3) Public Law 95-95, the Clean Air Act
- (4) Public Law 100-4, the Clean Water Act
- (5) Public Law 101-508, the Coastal Zone Management Act
- (6) Public Law 104-231, the Electronic Freedom of Information Act Amendments of 1996
- (7) Public Law 93-205, the Endangered Species Act of 1973
- (8) Public Law 97-98, the Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981
- (9) Public Law 107-17, the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002
- (10) Public Law 104-127, the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996
- (11) Public Law 101-624, the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 (FACTA)
- (12) Public Law 110-234, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008
- (13) Public Law 99-198, the Food Security Act of 1985 (FSA) as Amended
- (14) Public Law 89-487, the Freedom of Information Act of 1966
- (15) Public Law 99-570, the Freedom of Information Reform Act of 1986
- (16) Public Law 95-265, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act
- (17) 16 U.S.C. Sections 703-712, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918
- (18) Public Law 91-190, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)
- (19) Public Law 89-665, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), Amended 2006
- (20) Public Law 101-601, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990
- (21) 54 Stat. Section 250, the Protection of Bald and Golden Eagles Act of 1990
- (22) Public Law 93-502, the Privacy Act of 1974
- (23) 30 Stat. Section 1121, the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899
- (24) Public Law 95-192, the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977
- (25) Public Law 106-229, the U.S. Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce Act (ESIGN) of 2000

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(26) Public Law 90-542, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968

B. Executive Orders.—Official documents, numbered consecutively, through which the President of the United States manages the operation of the Federal Government.

- (1) Executive Order 12898, Environmental Justice
- (2) Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management, May 1977
- (3) Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands
- (4) Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites
- (5) Executive Order 13089, Coral Reef Protection
- (6) Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species
- (7) Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments
- (8) Executive Order 13392, Improving Agencies Disclosure of Information

C. Other References to Assist in Planning

- (1) Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance
- (2) USDA Departmental Directives and Mandates
- (3) Other laws or regulations listed in NRCS program manuals
- (4) Indigenous Stewardship Methods and NRCS Conservation Practices Guidebook,
- (5) Coordinated Resource Management Guidelines, published by the Society for Range Management
- (6) *The Art of Communication* published by the Grazing Lands Technology Institute, available from the NRCS Distribution Center for Publications

D. Manuals.—Type of directive used by National Headquarters and State-level offices to issue policies and procedures on a specific subject.

- (1) General Manual
  - (i) 180-GM, Conservation Planning and Application
  - (ii) 190-GM, Ecological Sciences
  - (iii) 420-GM, Part 401, “Historic and Cultural Properties”
- (2) Manuals
  - (i) Conservation Planning and Application
    - Title 180, National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM), Parts 510 to 520
    - Title 180, National Operation and Maintenance Manual, Part 500
  - (ii) Ecological Sciences
    - Title 190, Rangeland Interagency Ecological Site Manual, Part 500
    - Title 190, National Agronomy Manual, Parts 500 to 509
    - Title 190, National Biology Manual, Parts 510 to 514
    - Title 190, National Forestry Manual, Parts 535 to 538
    - Title 190, National Plant Materials Manual, Parts 539 to 542
  - (iii) Engineering
    - Title 210, National Engineering Manual, Parts 500 to 506
  - (iv) Project Development and Maintenance
    - Title 390, National Watershed Program Manual
  - (v) Programs
    - Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual (CPM)
      - Part 500, “Locally Led Conservation”
      - Part 501, “USDA Conservation Program Delivery”
      - Part 502, “Terms and Abbreviations Common to all Programs”
      - Part 503, “Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) Procedures”
      - Part 504, “Technical Service Provider Assistance”

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- Part 506, “Conservation Programs Long Term Contracting”
- Part 508, “Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)”
- Part 509, “Equitable Relief from Ineligibility for Conservation Programs”
- Part 510, “Appeals and Mediation”
- Part 511, “Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)”
- Part 512, “Conservation Program Contracting”
- Part 513, “Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D)”
- Part 514, “Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)”
- Part 515, “Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)”
- Part 517, “Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)”
- Part 518, “Conservation Security Program (CSP)”
- Part 519, “Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)”
- Part 520, “Forestry Incentives Program (FIP)”
- Part 521, “Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)”
- Part 523, “Farmland Protection Policy Act”
- Part 524, “Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)”
- Part 525, “Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA)”
- Part 526, “NRCS Grants”
- Part 527, “Easement Common Provisions”

E. Handbooks.—Type of directive used by National Headquarters and State-level offices to issue detailed “how-to” procedures and processes on a specific subject. National program managers and technical specialists primarily generate these handbooks.

- (1) Conservation Planning and Application
  - (i) Title 180, National Planning Procedures Handbook, Part 600
  - (ii) Title 180, Technical Service Provider Handbook, Part 610
- (2) Ecological Sciences
  - (i) Title 190, National Cultural Resources Procedures Handbook, Part 601
  - (ii) Title 190, National Biology Handbook
  - (iii) Title 190, National Environmental Compliance Handbook
  - (iv) Title 190, National Forestry Handbook
  - (v) Title 190, National Range and Pasture Handbook
  - (vi) Title 190, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning Handbook, Part 620
- (3) Economics  
Title 200, National Resource Economics Handbook
- (4) Engineering  
Title 210, National Engineering Handbook Series
- (5) Project Development and Maintenance  
Title 390, National Watershed Program Handbook
- (6) Soil Survey  
Title 430, National Soil Survey Handbook
- (7) Technology
  - (i) Title 450, National Handbook of Conservation Practices
  - (ii) Title 450, National Water Quality Handbook

## F. Other

- (1) Bennett, Hugh H. 1947. Elements of Soil Conservation. McGraw-Hill, New York
- (2) Leopold, A. 1949. A Sand County Almanac. Oxford University Press

## 600.2 Definitions

This section defines terms that govern the conservation planning process. These terms are used by NRCS personnel and others to describe processes, activities, clients, and products of NRCS technical assistance. Other terms, used exclusively by certain NRCS disciplines, are defined in disciplinary manuals and handbooks and are not repeated here. Similarly, definitions of specific data elements used in information management systems are included in data dictionaries. For terms used to administer NRCS programs, see the abbreviations and terms in the 440-CPM, Part 502.

- (1) **Agricultural Land.**—Cropland, rangeland, pastureland, forest land, and other land on which crops, livestock, food, fiber, and other agricultural products are produced. This also includes tree farms and horse operations.
- (2) **Agricultural Operation.**—A parcel or parcels of land, whether contiguous or noncontiguous, constituting a cohesive management unit for agricultural purposes.
- (3) **Air Quality.**—An NRCS resource concern that includes airborne soil and smoke particulates that can cause safety-related problems, machinery and structure damage, health problems, deposition of airborne sediment in water conveyances, airborne chemical drift, odors, and fungi, molds, and pollen.
- (4) **Alternatives.**—One or more options provided to the client to solve resource concerns or address opportunities and achieve proper management of the resources.
- (5) **Alternative System.**—A conservation system that is presented to a client during the planning process as one of multiple alternatives to address resource concerns or opportunities. When a client decides which of the offered alternative systems will be implemented, the selected alternative becomes the planned system.
- (6) **Application (Financial Assistance Program).**—A written request for financial assistance for implementing conservation practices.
- (7) **Application (Practice).**—The act of installing planned conservation treatments and management measures that are documented in plans and case files. (See also “implementation.”)
- (8) **Areawide Conservation Plan.**—A plan developed with a client for a watershed or other geographical area as defined by the client and stakeholders. The areawide conservation plan addresses all resources identified, contains alternative solutions that meet the minimum planning criteria for each resource, and addresses applicable laws and regulations.
- (9) **Assessment.**—The act of assessing the physical condition or extent of management applied.
- (10) **Assessment Level.**—A statement describing the physical condition or extent of management applied that is used by planners to determine if the resource concern planning criteria have been met. There are two levels of assessment:
  - (i) **Screening Level.**—Simple true-false statements of easily observable conditions planners can use to identify sites that have little or no probability of needing additional treatment to address the specific resource concern. If the site meets the screening level criteria, then no other assessment is needed to document that planning criteria are met on this site.
  - (ii) **Basic Assessment Level.**—Criteria used when a site does not pass the screening level or when no screening level criteria are defined.
- (11) **Assessment Methods**
  - (i) **Procedural.**—For some resources, planners use well-defined procedures to acquire data used to determine the resource condition. An example of this approach is determining the ecological health of rangeland using the Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health protocol. The summary chart (Figure 600-C1, “Inventory Methods”) lists the procedural method for several resource concerns where a standard inventory and assessment procedures exist. The appropriate discipline handbook or manual may be consulted for more information.

- (ii) **Predictive.**—The condition of some resources is best assessed using models created to predict the probability of an outcome. Estimating sheet and rill erosion rates using RUSLE2 or WEPS to model wind erosion are examples of predictive modeling tools.
  - (iii) **Observation.**—Where standard procedures to measure or model the condition of resources do not exist, planners often rely on direct observation or information provided by the client through an interview. Classic gully is an example where observation is the accepted method of evaluating resource conditions. Through observation, the planner discerns the stability of side slopes, head-cutting activity, or erosion in the gully bottom. Observation always implies onsite investigation.
  - (iv) **Deduction.**—When it is impractical to measure, model, or observe resource conditions, planners may rely on reason to deduce the status of a resource. Often, the deductive approach is related to treatment standards. In this case, the planner must assume that a certain condition is met if specific treatment is applied, and, conversely, if the specific treatment is not applied, a less desirable condition will result. Planners must frequently rely on deductive methods to address offsite effects. For example, the delivery of dissolved nutrients to groundwater may not be a practical resource concern to measure, and until predictive tools are readily available, the planner can deduce whether or not a problem exists based on other sources of information. If a client utilizes all reasonable nutrient management techniques and has significantly modified the rate, timing, or both of nutrients applied to a field, the planner may deduce that the field in question is no longer a significant source of nutrients entering the groundwater.
- (12) **Assistance Notes.**—Notes maintained by planners in the case file for each client receiving planning and implementation assistance. These notes are to be a concise, factual, and chronological narrative of significant conservation activities and may summarize progress in planning and implementation. Assistance notes include both planner-entered and system-generated notes and may include text, audio, video, or photographic formats.
- (13) **Benchmark Condition.**—The present condition of identified resource and special environmental concerns that is used as a point of reference to measure changes in resource conditions resulting from conservation treatment. In addition to the benchmark condition, other points of reference are sometimes used for discussion and comparison purposes, especially in an areawide conservation planning situation (i.e., forecasting the resource conditions expected at some point in the future by maintaining current levels of resource management and treatment).
- (14) **Benchmark Narrative.**—A written statement of the benchmark condition. The narrative includes a description of the current conditions, crops, soils, major resource concerns, etc. It includes existing conservation practices that meet NRCS standards and those that do not. For areawide conservation plans, the narrative also includes information on future conditions if the problems are not treated.
- (15) **Benchmark Practices.**—Existing conservation practices included in the current management system for the planning unit. These practices meet NRCS standards and specifications.
- (16) **Break-Even Analysis.**—Estimates target values that would just cover the costs of production (i.e., “break-even”). For example, a client may want to know what the “break-even” yield is, given the cost of production and an expected price per unit of production. Break-even yield = (Total cost per acre)/(Price per bushel). Or a client may want to know at what price he or she will cover the costs of production given a yield. Break-even price = (Total cost per acre)/(Yield per acre).
- (17) **Brief Technical Assistance.**—Direct request from a client for natural resource information, data, or technical products received through office visits, phone calls, or written or electronic communication. Assistance is generally a single transaction or related to a specific site and does not result in a conservation plan.

- (18) **Case File.**—The record of resource information, decisions, and technical assistance for a specific client. A case file is established and maintained by the NRCS field office for each client that NRCS is providing continuing technical assistance. The case file will be maintained electronically to the greatest extent possible. Information not amenable to electronic format will be maintained in a hardcopy file.
- (19) **Certified Conservation Planner.**—A person who possesses the necessary skills, training, and experience to implement the NRCS nine-step planning process to meet client objectives of solving natural resource concerns. The certified conservation planner has demonstrated skill in assisting clients to identify resource concerns, to document the client’s objectives, to propose feasible solutions to identified resource concerns, and to lead the client to choose and implement an effective alternative that treats the resource concerns and meets the client’s objectives.
- (20) **Client.**—An individual, business, group, or unit of government that is the recipient of NRCS technical and financial assistance. NRCS clients, generally fall into two broad categories: individual owners, managers, partners or businesses, with primary responsibility for their business dealings with NRCS, and groups or local sponsoring organizations or other government officials, responsible for fulfilling requirements or exercising judgments consistent with law, Executive order, and established Federal policy. Examples of the first group include persons, groups, Tribes, corporations, and organizations. Examples of the second group include conservation districts and units of government.
- (21) **Common Land Unit (CLU).**—Closely related to the Farm Service Agency’s definition of a field, a CLU is the smallest land unit that has a permanent, contiguous boundary, common land cover and land management, common owner, and common producer association.
- (22) **Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP).**—Any combination of structural practices, management activities, or land management practices associated with crop or livestock production that collectively ensures that the purposes of crop or livestock production and preservation of natural resources (especially the conservation of air, soil, and water quality) are compatible.
- (23) **Comprehensive Plan.**—A plan for an area under the jurisdiction of a unit of government that may include, but is not limited to, policies, goals, and interrelated plans for private and public land use, transportation systems, community facilities, and capital improvements. The plan represents the decisions of local people as expressed through units of government. This type of plan may also be called a general plan, master plan, or a regional development plan.
- (24) **Comprehensive Planning.**—A continuing process by a unit of government that includes preparation of a comprehensive plan and adoption of the administrative and regulatory measures to implement and maintain the plan.
- (25) **Conservation.**—The use and management of natural resources according to principles that assure their sustained productivity.
- (26) **Conservation District.**—A subdivision of a State, Indian Tribe, or territory, organized pursuant to the State or territorial soil conservation district law, as amended, or Tribal law. They may be called soil conservation districts, soil and water conservation districts, resource conservation districts, land conservation committees, natural resource districts, or similarly legally constituted body.
- (27) **Conservation District Cooperator.**—Any client who has entered into a working relationship or cooperative agreement with a conservation district to work together in planning and carrying out natural resource use, development, and conservation on a specific land area.
- (28) **Conservation Effects.**—The anticipated or experienced results of applying one or more conservation treatments on a planning unit in a particular resource setting. They include both onsite and offsite results of applied conservation treatments. They are measures of a level of outcome and may be expressed in ecological, economic, or social terms.

- (29) **Conservation Effects Process.**—A process that supports the NRCS planning process. It uses worksheets, client case studies, and other technologies to document and estimate effects of benchmark systems and resource management systems, evaluate impacts, and gauge advantages and disadvantages to help the end user make informed conservation decisions.
- (30) **Conservation Management Unit (CMU).**—A field, CLU, group of fields, or other land units of the same land use and having similar treatment needs and planned management. A CMU, made up of one or more planning land units (PLU), has definite boundaries, such as fence, drainage, vegetation, topography, soil lines, or land use, and is used by the planner to simplify planning activities and facilitate development of management systems.
- (31) **Conservation Partners.**—Conservation districts, State or Tribal conservation agencies, and other cooperating groups of organizations at the field, State, regional, and national levels having common interests dealing with natural resource conservation.
- (32) **Conservation Plan.**—A record of the client’s decisions and supporting information for treatment of a unit of land 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 plan may include components such as comprehensive nutrient management plan, grazing plan, integrated pest management plan, etc. The needs of the client, the resources, and Federal, State, Tribal, and local requirements will be met.
- (33) **Conservation Planning.**—The activity of NRCS and others in helping a client use the planning process, which is intended to result in a conservation plan or an areawide conservation plan.
- (34) **Conservation Practice.**—A specific treatment, such as a structural or vegetative measure, or management technique, commonly used to meet specific needs in planning and implementing conservation, for which standards and specifications have been developed. Conservation practices are contained in the FOTG, Section IV, which is based on the National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP).
- (35) **Conservation Practice Certification.**—The process of confirming and documenting a conservation practice is installed and maintained according to the practice standard and specification.
- (36) **Conservation Practices Physical Effects (CPPE) Matrix.**—The matrix in the FOTG, Section V, that gives the physical effects of conservation practices on natural resources.
- (37) **Conservation System.**—A combination of conservation practices and resource management for the treatment of resource concerns.
- (38) **Conservation Treatment.**—Conservation practices, management measures, and works of improvement to solve or reduce the severity of natural resource use concerns or take advantage of resource opportunities.
- (39) **Coordinated Resource Management (CRM).**—A specific application of the planning process that utilizes a variety of clients, stakeholders, organizations, agencies, and others, and a variety of land ownerships, to address a multitude of resource or resource related problems, opportunities, or concerns. CRM is frequently accomplished through “consensus” involving participants that may or may not be land managers or have decision-making authority for the planning area involved. The planning area encompasses the geographical area defined by the parties involved in the CRM effort.
- (40) **Cost-Return Analysis.**—Comparison of the costs to returns (revenue) in an agricultural enterprise. Also referred to as the return on investment.
- (41) **Cultural Resource/Historic Property.**—Any prehistoric or historic district, site, building, structure or object included in or eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), including associated records and artifacts. These properties are taken into account and protected under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

- (42) **Cumulative Effect.**—The effect on the environment that results from the incremental effects of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-Federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time.
- (43) **Decisionmaker.**—An individual, business, group, unit of government, or other entity that has the authority by ownership, position, office, delegation, or otherwise to decide on a course of action.
- (44) **Desired Future Condition.**—A quantitative or qualitative expression of an ecological, economic, or social condition one is attempting to achieve. It is the goal to compare with the predicted outcomes of alternative implementation options.
- (45) **Ecological System.**—The organization and interactions of communities of living things, including humans, together with the chemical and physical factors in their environment.
- (46) **Environmental Assessment (EA).**—A concise public document that briefly provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare a more comprehensive environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact.
- (47) **Environmental Evaluation (EE).**—A concurrent part of the planning process in which the potential long-term and short-term impacts of an action on people, their physical or social surroundings, and nature are evaluated and alternative actions explored.
- (48) **Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).**—A document detailing the environmental impact of a proposed law, construction project, or other major action that may significantly affect the quality of the environment. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and various State environmental laws may require an EIS.
- (49) **Environmental Justice.**—Requires, per Executive Order 12898, that no program, procedure, or activity be carried out that has disproportionately adverse human health or environmental effects on minority or low-income populations.
- (50) **Erosion.**—The wearing away of the land surface by running water, waves, or moving ice and wind, or by such processes as mass wasting and corrosion (solution and other chemical processes). The term "geologic erosion" refers to natural erosion processes occurring over long (geologic) time spans. "Accelerated erosion" generically refers to erosion that exceeds what is presumed or estimated to be naturally occurring levels and that is a direct result of human activities (e.g., cultivation and logging).
- (51) **Facilitating Practice.**—A conservation practice that facilitates management or the function of another practice, or both, but does not achieve the desired effects on its own. Example: A fence is a facilitating practice for prescribed grazing. Prescribed grazing helps improve forage for livestock.
- (52) **Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).**—The official NRCS guidelines, criteria, and standards for planning and applying conservation treatments (450-GM, Part 401).
- (53) **Followup.**—The act of maintaining contact with the client to provide timely assistance in implementing decisions, keeping current with new technology, encouraging continued implementation, updating objectives and decisions in a conservation plan, and determining the conservation effects experienced.
- (54) **Geographic Database.**—A collection of spatial data and its attributes, organized for efficient storage and retrieval.
- (55) **Geospatial.**—Pertaining to the geographic location and characteristics of natural or constructed features and boundaries on, above, or below the earth's surface; especially referring to data that is geographic and spatial in nature
- (56) **Guidance Documents.**—Documents contained in the FOTG, Section III. They are examples of RMS options to treat the most commonly identified resource concerns and opportunities for each locally applicable major land use.

- (57) **Highly Erodible Land.**—A field where highly erodible land is predominant. HEL is considered to be predominant if either 33.33 percent or more of the total field acreage is identified as soil map units that are highly erodible or 50 or more acres in such a field are identified as soil map units that are highly erodible. For a specific definition of a highly erodible field as it relates to the Conservation Reserve Program, please consult 2-CRP.
- (58) **Historically Underserved.**—Underserved individuals and groups include those who have not participated in or have received limited benefits from USDA or NRCS programs that may improve their quality of life or the environment. Historically, the underserved are land managers who are socially disadvantaged, have limited resources, are beginning farmers or ranchers, or are American Indians or Alaskan Natives.
- (59) **Human Considerations.**—The potential social, economic, and cultural resource/historic property factors that are considered in the conservation planning process.
- (60) **Implementation.**—The act of installing planned conservation treatment and management measures that are documented in plans and case files. (See also “application.”)
- (61) **Indian Tribe.**—Any federally recognized Indian Tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. Section 1601 et seq.) that is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians.
- (62) **Indigenous.**—For purposes of this document, “indigenous” refers to populations or communities and their conservation technologies. According to a common definition used by many governments, indigenous peoples are those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived.
- (63) **Indigenous Stewardship Methods.**—Indigenous stewardship methods include the traditional manipulation (including spiritual interactions) of natural surroundings by indigenous people with the purpose of increasing production, improving plant and animal biodiversity, increasing soil health, and numerous other human and ecological benefits. This reciprocal use hinges on respect and spiritual interconnectedness with all of nature. These methods incorporate traditional knowledge generally defined as longstanding traditions and practices of certain regional, indigenous, or local communities.
- (64) **Interdisciplinary Planning.**—An interdisciplinary planning approach in which specialists and groups having different technical expertise act as a team to jointly evaluate existing and future environmental quality. The interdisciplinary group considers structure and function of natural resource systems, complexity of problems, and the economic, social, and environmental effects of alternative actions. Public participation is an essential part of effective interdisciplinary planning. Even if an NRCS employee provides direct assistance to an individual land user, the basic data used are a result of interdisciplinary development of guide and planning criteria.
- (65) **Internal Rate of Return.**—A financial analysis tool that estimates the interest rate which would make the present value of a stream of net cash revenues equal to zero. The resulting interest rate can be compared to the internal rate of returns of other investment alternatives to determine the alternative with the highest rate of return.
- (66) **Inventory.**—The identification of attributes, features, and other data pertaining to natural resources and special environmental concerns on and surrounding a planning area.
- (67) **Land Unit.**—Any area of land or water that is of concern in the planning process. (See also “planning land unit.”)
- (68) **Land-Use Designations.**—Client-specific land-use designations may be used on the plan map as desired. The NRCS land use designations are as follows:
- (i) **Crop.**—Land used primarily for the production of field crops or orchard crops alone or in association with sod crops.

- (ii) **Forest.**—Land on which the primary vegetation is forest (climax, natural or introduced plant community) and use is primarily for production of wood products.
- (iii) **Grazed Forest.**—Forest land that produces understory vegetation that is used for the production of livestock.
- (iv) **Grazed Range.**—Rangeland that is used primarily for the production of domestic livestock. It includes native plant communities and those seeded to native or introduced species, or naturalized by introduced species, that are ecologically managed using range management principles.
- (v) **Hay.**—Land on which perennial plants are managed and harvested for hay. (Annual plants planted for hay and forage crops in short-term rotation are cropland.)
- (vi) **Headquarters.**—Land used for dwellings, barns, pens, corrals, or other facilities used in connection with farm and ranch operations.
- (vii) **Mined.**—Land on which the soil has been disturbed by the mining of minerals.
- (viii) **Native or Naturalized Pasture.**—Forestland that is used primarily for the production of forage for grazing by livestock rather than for the production of wood products. Overstory trees are removed or managed to promote the native or introduced understory vegetation occurring on the site. This vegetation is managed for its forage value through the use of grazing management principles.
- (ix) **Natural Area.**—Land or water used for the preservation, protection, and observation of the existing resources, archaeological or historical interpretation, resource interpretation, or for aesthetic value. Some of these may be officially designated by legislation or other authorities.
- (x) **Pasture.**—Grazing lands composed of introduced or domesticated native forage species that are used primarily for the production of domestic livestock. They receive periodic renovation or cultural treatments, such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. They are not in rotation with crops.
- (xi) **Recreation.**—Land and water used and managed for recreational purposes.
- (xii) **Urban.**—Land occupied by buildings and related facilities used for residences, industrial sites, institutional sites, public highways, airports, and similar uses associated with towns and cities.
- (xiii) **Water.**—A geographic area whose dominant characteristic is open water, but that may include a large proportion of intermingled land, including coastal marsh lands.
- (xiv) **Watershed Protection.**—Land managed and used specifically for water production into streams, rivers, lakes, and aquifers.
- (xv) **Wildlife.**—Land or water used, protected, and managed primarily as habitat for wildlife.
- (69) **Land Use/Cover.**—A term that includes categories of land cover and categories of land use. Land cover is the vegetation or other kind of material that covers the land surface. Land use is the purpose of human activity on the land; it is usually, but not always, related to land cover. See section 600.78 for proposed land use designations and modifiers.
- (70) **Land Treatment Area (CNMP).**—Includes any land under control of the AFO owner or operator, whether it is owned, rented, or leased, and to which manure or process wastewater is, or might be, applied for crop, hay, pasture production, or other uses.
- (71) **Least-Cost Analysis (Cost-Effectiveness).**—Least-cost analysis identifies the least costly alternative (compared to all other alternatives), with the stipulation that all alternatives satisfy the client’s objective.
- (72) **Local.**—Pertaining to a specific location or area within a larger boundary. Examples include a county, a portion of a county, a watershed, or a multicounty region,
- (73) **Locally Led Conservation.**—A process used by local people to assess their natural resource conditions and needs, set goals, identify programs and other resources to solve those needs, develop proposals and recommendations, implement solutions, and measure their success.

- (74) **Local Work Group.**—A group made up of representatives of local offices of the Farm Service Agency, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), the conservation districts, and other Federal, State, Tribal, and local government agencies, including, Tribes, with expertise in natural resources who advise NRCS on decisions related to implementation of USDA conservation programs.
- (75) **Low-Initial-Cost Structures.**—Structures for treating resource concerns that are specifically designed for low initial cost for certain situations, recognizing that the operation and maintenance costs may be higher than those for conventional structures.
- (76) **Major Land Resource Area (MLRA).**—Broad geographic areas that are characterized by a particular pattern of geology – soils, climate, water resources, vegetation, and land use. Each MLRA in which rangeland and forestland occur is further broken into ecological sites.
- (77) **Management Measure.**—One or more specific actions that are not conservation practices described in the FOTG Section IV, but actions that have the effect of alleviating problems or improving the treatment of the resources.
- (78) **Management Practice.**—A conservation practice that requires regular input from the land manager. Examples include nutrient management, residue management, integrated pest management, etc. (See also “structural practice.”)
- (79) **Map Unit.**—A collection of areas defined and named the same in terms of their soil components or miscellaneous areas, or both.
- (80) **Measurement and Assessment Tools.**—Description of the technology or process for determining if assessment criteria are met.
- (81) **Minimum Level of Treatment.**—The specific conservation treatment NRCS requires that addresses a resource concern to a level that meets or exceeds the planning criteria according to NRCS technical guides.
- (82) **Mitigate (Mitigation).**—To moderate or alleviate the degree of effect on resource quality or condition. Mitigation includes the following:
- (i) Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action
  - (ii) Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation
  - (iii) Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment
  - (iv) Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action
  - (v) Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments
- (83) **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).**—The 1970 law that requires Federal agencies to consider the effects on the environment of proposed Federal actions. This act established the requirement for conducting environmental evaluations and for the preparation of environmental assessments and environmental impact statements.
- (84) **National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).**—The 1966 law that is intended to preserve historical and archaeological sites in the United States of America. The act created the National Register of Historic Places, the list of national historic landmarks, and the State historic preservation offices, and requires that Federal agencies take into account the effects of their funded and permitted projects on historic properties (buildings, sites, structures, etc.) through a process known as “section 106 review.”
- (85) **Natural Resource.**—Any naturally occurring resource needed by an organism, population, or ecological system. NRCS applies this term to soil, water, air, plants, animals, energy, and humans (SWAPAE+H).
- (86) **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).**—An agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture formerly called the Soil Conservation Service.

- (87) **Net Present Value Analysis.**—Net present value analysis converts future flows of benefits and costs to the present, thus allowing for comparisons of alternatives on a common time basis.
- (88) **Network Diagrams.**—NRCS prepares network diagrams of featured practices or related sets of practices that act together to achieve desired purposes. Network diagrams are flow charts of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects resulting from installation of the practices. Completed network diagrams are an overview of expert consensus on the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of installing proposed practices. They show the potential positive and negative outcomes of practice installation and are useful as a reference point for next steps and as a communication tool with partners and the public.
- (89) **No-Action Alternative.**—The projected future course of action that will occur if NRCS assistance is not provided.
- (90) **Nontechnical Soil Description.**—A layman’s description of soil properties and soil interpretations specific to a geographical location.
- (91) **Objectives.**—Objectives are quantitative or qualitative statements of desired future conditions as determined by the client.
- (92) **Offsite.**—Locations outside the planning area on which conservation treatment is being considered. It also refers to areas outside the planning unit that are considered for potential effects.
- (93) **Onsite.**—Locations within the planning area on which conservation treatment has direct effect.
- (94) **Operation and Maintenance (O&M).**—Work performed by the land manager to keep the applied conservation practice functioning for the intended purpose during its lifespan. Operation includes the administration, management, and performance of nonmaintenance actions needed to keep the completed practice safe and functioning as intended. Maintenance includes work to prevent deterioration of the practice, repairing damage, or replacement of the practice to its original condition if one or more components fail.
- (95) **Outreach.**—Activities to ensure that all programs and services are made fairly and equitably accessible to all customers.
- (96) **Partial Budgeting.**—Partial budgeting analysis is used to analyze only the change in costs and returns associated with the agricultural enterprise affected by the adoption of proposed alternatives.
- (97) **Personally Identifiable Information (PII).**—Information that can be used to uniquely identify, contact, or locate a single person or can be used with other sources to uniquely identify a single individual.
- (98) **Plan Map.**—A photograph, sketch or GIS document of a land area developed during the planning process that shows property boundaries, land unit boundaries, land use, physical features, location of planned and applied practices, and other features that are useful to the client in plan implementation.
- (99) **Planner.**—A person, qualified by training and experience, who effectively assists the client in completing the planning process. (See also “certified conservation planner.”)
- (100) **Planning Criteria.**—A quantitative or qualitative statement of a treatment level required to achieve a minimum level of treatment for a given resource concern for a particular land area. It is established in accordance with local, State, Tribal, territorial, and Federal programs and regulations in consideration of ecological, economic, and social effects. (See also “quality criteria.”)
- (101) **Planning Land Unit (PLU).**—A PLU is a unique geographic area, defined by a polygon, that has common land use and is owned, operated, or managed by the same client or clients. The PLU is the minimum unit for planning. (See also “land unit.”)
- (102) **Planning Process.**—The three-phase, nine-step process used by NRCS to help clients plan and apply conservation treatments or make land use and treatment decisions.

- (i) Phase I – Collection and Analysis
    - Step 1: Identify Problems and Opportunities
    - Step 2: Determine Objectives
    - Step 3: Inventory Resources
    - Step 4: Analyze Resource Data
  - (ii) Phase II – Decision Support
    - Step 5: Formulate Alternatives
    - Step 6: Evaluate Alternatives
    - Step 7: Make Decisions
  - (iii) Phase III – Application and Evaluation
    - Step 8: Implement the Plan
    - Step 9: Evaluate the Plan
- (103) **Planning Standard.**—The minimum quality level to which each step in the planning process must be carried out in order to help the client develop a successful plan. The standard establishes the condition expected to exist at the successful completion of each planning step.
- (104) **Planning Area.**—A planning area is generally the entire operating unit, but it can be a group (or groups) of fields with similar land use and management (see “conservation management unit”) in which the decision has been made to initiate the planning process. A field is normally the smallest increment for planning resource management systems or practices. However, in rare instances, a subfield (a field within a field – for example, the drainage area into a waterway and the outlet area below the waterway) may be appropriate. The planning area must be large enough to encompass the area that influences, and the area that is impacted by, the resource management system or practice being planned. (See “conservation management unit.”)
- (105) **Practice.**—Same as conservation practice.
- (106) **Practice Narrative.**—A brief, nontechnical description of the planned practice.
- (107) **Practice Specification.**—Practice specifications are detailed requirements for installing the practice in a State.
- (108) **Practice Standard.**—Practice standards define the practice and where it applies, and prescribes the minimum level of application and quality of materials.
- (109) **Private Land.**—Land that is not owned by a local, State, Tribal, territorial, or Federal governmental entity.
- (110) **Producer.**—An owner, operator, manager, landlord, tenant, or sharecropper who shares the risk of producing a crop and is entitled to share in the crop available for marketing from a farm or who would have shared, had the crop been produced (ERS definition).
- (111) **Production Area (CNMP).**—Includes the animal confinement, feed and other raw materials storage areas, animal mortality facilities, and the manure handling containment or storage areas.
- (112) **Progressive Planning and Implementation.**—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.
- (113) **Public Participation.**—An integral part of areawide conservation planning, it provides opportunities for the public to be involved in the interchange of data and ideas.
- (114) **Quality Criteria.**—A descriptive statement of desired resource condition and management, representing a level of use that is sustainable over the long term. Due to scientific and technical limitations, the establishment of quality criteria for all the NRCS resource concerns is an elusive goal. However, NRCS remains committed to using the latest tools and techniques that will continually move planning criteria in the direction of increased sustainability and the eventual establishment of true quality criteria for all resource concerns.

- (115) **Ranch.**—An area of landscape, including various structures, traditionally used for the grazing and production of domestic livestock or wildlife. A ranch may also have nontraditional uses and produce other goods and services as well as environmental and social benefits.
- (116) **Receipt for Services.**—Official agency record of service provided to, or of service refused or delayed by the agency, that is provided upon request of the client.
- (117) **Record of Decisions (Planning Term).**—A part of the conservation plan and case file documents that contain the decisions for the PLUs.
- (118) **Record of Decision (NEPA Term).**—A concise written rationale by the responsible Federal official regarding implementation of a proposed action requiring an environmental impact statement.
- (119) **Resource Concern.**—An expected degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, or animal resource base to the extent that the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired. Because NRCS quantifies or describes resource concerns as part of a comprehensive conservation planning process, that includes client objectives, human and energy resources are considered components of the resource base. See Exhibit 6 for a list and descriptions of specific resource concerns.
- (120) **Resource Management System (RMS).**—An RMS is a combination of conservation practices and resource management activities for the treatment of all identified resource concerns for SWAPAE+H resources that meets or exceeds the planning criteria in the FOTG.
- (121) **Resource Problem.**—The resource condition that does not meet the minimum acceptable condition levels as established by resource planning criteria shown in the FOTG, Section III.
- (122) **Resource Setting.**—A description of ecological characteristics, land use, and management important for comparison of resource information among planning units. Such background information also provides better understanding of the relative magnitude of resource concerns. An adequate description may include such information as dominant soils, range sites, important topographic or geomorphic characteristics, major land resource area, precipitation patterns, seasonal land use, climate, current resource conditions, type of operation, and relationships to streams, lakes, and aquifers.
- (123) **Risk Management.**—Risk management is the process of identifying potential risks from various courses of action or nonaction, gathering pertinent information relative to the risk, and then taking appropriate action to eliminate or minimize the risk as much as possible.
- (124) **Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation 2 (RUSLE2).**—A computer model containing both empirical and process-based science that predicts rill and interrill erosion by rainfall and runoff.
- (125) **Scoping.**—Scoping is the early, upfront, and open process to determine the extent of the significant issues, such as resource problems and concerns, regulatory requirements, etc., to be addressed in the planning process.
- (126) **Screening.**—The process to select, reject, consider, or group data, people, objects, or ideas by examining them systematically.
- (127) **Site-Specific Practice Effect.**—The expected effect that a particular conservation practice has on defined resource concerns or opportunities in a site-specific situation. This data represents the planner’s refinement of more general effects shown in the CPPE matrix in the FOTG, Section V.
- (128) **Soil Description.**—A listing of soil properties, both site and profile, specific to a geographical location.
- (129) **Soil Health.**—Soil health is used synonymously with soil quality. (See definition for “soil quality.”)
- (130) **Soil Quality.**—Soil quality is the capacity of a soil to perform functions critical to its intended use. In other words, how well a soil does what we want and need it to do. Soil quality is assessed by evaluating the physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of soil.

- Specific tests or indicators can be used to individually and holistically to assess the soils overall quality or health. The terms soil quality and soil health are used synonymously. Soil quality has two main components:
- (i) Inherent soil quality is the capacity to function based on soil forming factors at a geologic time scale.
  - (ii) Dynamic soil quality represents changes in function in response to human management or disturbance at a human (years, decades, or centuries) time scale. Soil health is a synonym of soil quality and usually refers to only the dynamic portion of soil quality.
- (131) **Spatial Data.**—Information about the location and shapes of geographic features, and the relationship between them, usually stored as coordinates and topology.
- (132) **Special Environmental Concern (SEC).**—Concerns (including human considerations) that are protected by law, Executive order, or agency policy and will need to be analyzed according to the laws, regulations, or Executive orders established to protect them. For example, a description of wetland impacts describe not only the acres involved, but the functions of those wetlands, based on a hydrogeomorphic model, and perhaps their value as wildlife habitat, according to the results of habitat evaluation procedures or habitat appraisal guides, as well. There might also be a need to discuss and support impacts on downstream water quality and any other effects the wetland may have within the ecosystem. The list of NRCS special environmental concerns is included on the NRCS-CPA-52 worksheet.
- (133) **Stakeholder.**—An individual or group of clients who may or may not be decisionmakers and who have an interest in or may be impacted by actions recommended through application of the planning process.
- (134) **State.**—Any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, or any territory or possession of the United States. Or, a condition of an ecological site's characteristics. As characteristics change, there is a transition to a new state. (See “vegetation state and transition pathway.”)
- (135) **Structural Practice.**—A practice that involves a constructed facility, land shaping, or permanent vegetative cover designed to preserve soil; reduce runoff of nutrients, sediment, and pesticides; enhance wildlife habitat; or for other purposes. Examples include animal waste facilities, terraces, grassed waterways, contour grass strips, filter strips, tail water pits, permanent wildlife habitat, and constructed wetlands. (ERS Definition) (See also “management practice.”)
- (136) **Sustainable Agriculture.**—Agriculture that involves the use of technologies to produce food and fiber in farming systems that are ecologically, economically, and socially beneficial.
- (137) **System.**—See “conservation system.”
- (138) **System Narrative.**—A description of the existing, proposed, or planned conservation practices and management measures associated with specific land units for a client and business. The description defines how well the system meets planning criteria, if at all. Alternative, planned, and completed systems meet planning criteria specified in the FOTG. Benchmark systems may not meet FOTG specifications; deficiencies may be noted in the description and system evaluation records.
- (139) **Technical Assistance.**—Help provided by NRCS and employees of other entities or agencies under the technical supervision of NRCS to clients to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to natural resource use.
- (140) **Technical Service Provider (TSP).**—An individual, private-sector entity, or public agency certified or approved by NRCS to provide technical services through NRCS or directly to program participants, as defined in 7 CFR Part 652.
- (141) **Technical Specialist.**—A person, qualified by training and experience, who effectively assists NRCS planners in completing the planning process. Examples: area and State soil

- scientists, biologists, engineers, economists, water quality specialists, or resource conservationists.
- (142) **Topology.**—The spatial relationship between connecting or adjacent features in a geographic data layer.
- (143) **Tribal Lands.**—All lands within the exterior boundaries of any Indian reservation and all dependent Indian communities. This definition is consistent with the definition in the NHPA; other statutes use alternate definitions.
- (144) **Unit of Government.**—A State, Tribal, or territorial government, together with its planning commissions, boards, agencies, and representatives. A municipality, county, town, parish, or other political subdivision of a State or territory, including its planning commissions, boards, agencies, and representatives having planning responsibility and concern over lands that it may or may not directly own or control.
- (145) **Values.**—Ideals, customs, attitudes, and beliefs used to judge the effects of conservation treatments as favorable or unfavorable. Includes individual client values as well as collective values of groups and society as a whole.
- (146) **Water Quality.**—Resource concerns or opportunities, including such concerns as excessive nutrients, pesticides, sediment, contaminants, and pathogens in surface waters and excessive nutrients and pesticides in ground waters.
- (147) **Watershed**
- (i) A total area of land above a given point on a waterway that contributes runoff water to the flow at that point.
  - (ii) A major subdivision of a drainage basin.
- (148) **Wind Erosion.**—The process of detachment, transport, and deposition of soil by wind.
- (149) **Wind Erosion Prediction System (WEPS).**—A model that simulates weather, field conditions, and wind erosion. Used for assessing soil loss by wind from agricultural fields and to assess plant damage, calculate suspension loss, and estimate PM-10 emissions from a field.
- (150) **Zoning.**—A means by which governmental authority is used to promote a specific use of land under certain circumstances. This power traditionally resides in the State, and the power to regulate land uses by zoning is usually delegated to minor units of government, such as towns, municipalities, and counties, through an enabling act that specifies powers granted and the conditions under which these are to be exercised.

### 600.3 Acronyms

These are common acronyms and initialisms used in this handbook. The list is not all-inclusive; see 440-CPM, Part 502, and 180-NFSAM, Part 514, for programmatic definitions and abbreviations.

- (1) AFO.—animal feeding operation
- (2) APEX.—Agricultural Policy/Environmental eXtender
- (3) AQ.—air quality
- (4) BMP.—best management practice
- (5) CAFO —concentrated animal feeding operation
- (6) CAP.—conservation activity plan
- (7) CD.—conservation district
- (8) CEAP.—conservation effects assessment project
- (9) CED.—conservation effects for decisionmaking worksheet
- (10) CEQ.—Council for Environmental Quality
- (11) CFR.—Code of Federal Regulations
- (12) CLU.—common land unit
- (13) CMU.—conservation management unit

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- (14) CNMP.—comprehensive nutrient management plan
- (15) CPPE.—conservation practice physical effects
- (16) CRM.—coordinated resource management
- (17) DC.—district conservationist or designated conservationist
- (18) DMS.—document management system
- (19) EA.—environmental assessment
- (20) EE.—environmental evaluation
- (21) EI.—erodibility index
- (22) EIS.—environmental impact statement
- (23) ESA.—Endangered Species Act
- (24) FA.—financial assistance
- (25) FARM.—financial assistance ranking model
- (26) FMP.—forest management plan
- (27) FONSI.—finding of no significant impact
- (28) FOTG.—Field Office Technical Guide
- (29) FPPA.—Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981
- (30) FSA.—Food Security Act of 1985, as amended
- (31) GM.—general manual
- (32) GIS.—Geographic Information System
- (33) GPS.—Global Positioning System
- (34) GRAS.—Grassland Resource Analysis System
- (35) HEL.—highly erodible land
- (36) IPM.—integrated pest management
- (37) IWI.—Index of Watershed Indicators
- (38) MLRA.—major land resource area
- (39) NEDC.—National Employee Development Center
- (40) NEDS.—National Employee Development staff
- (41) NEPA.—National Environmental Policy Act
- (42) NFSAM.—National Food Security Act Manual
- (43) NHCP.—National Handbook of Conservation Practices
- (44) NHPA.—National Historic Preservation Act
- (45) NHQ.—National Headquarters
- (46) NPPH.—National Planning Procedures Handbook
- (47) NRCS.—Natural Resources Conservation Service
- (48) NRHP.—National Register of Historic Places
- (49) O&M.—operation and maintenance
- (50) PCS.—pasture condition score
- (51) PII.—personally identifiable information
- (52) PLU.—planning land unit
- (53) RFO.—responsible Federal official
- (54) RHA.—rangeland health assessment
- (55) ROD.—record of decision
- (56) RMS.—resource management system
- (57) RUSLE2.—Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation 2
- (58) SEC.—special environmental concern
- (59) SEW.—system effects worksheet
- (60) SHPO.—State historic preservation office
- (61) SVAP2.—Stream Visual Assessment Protocol Version 2
- (62) TA.—technical assistance
- (63) T&E.—threatened and endangered
- (64) THPO.—Tribal historic preservation office

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- (65) TSP.—technical service provider
- (66) USDA.—U.S. Department of Agriculture
- (67) WC.—wetland compliance
- (68) WEPS.—Wind Erosion Prediction System
- (69) WHEG.—Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide
- (70) WHSI.—Wildlife Habitat Suitability Index
- (71) WinPST.—Windows Pesticide Screening Tool
- (72) WSS.—Web Soil Survey