Part 502 – Reviews and Approvals

Subpart B – Technical and Policy Reviews

502.10 Plan Review

A. This subpart describes required procedures for technical and policy reviews of watershed project plans. All watershed project plan-EA and Plan-EISs must have technical and policy reviews.

(1) The State Conservationist (STC) is responsible for public and interagency participation throughout the project planning process, including scoping, public meetings, and required consultations.
(2) An interdisciplinary State-level technical review is conducted by NRCS State staff.
(3) National-level technical review is conducted by the National Water Management Center (NWMC).
(4) Public and interagency review is conducted consistent with procedures in Title 390, National Watershed Program Manual (NWPM), Part 502, Subpart C.
(5) Programmatic review is conducted by the appropriate national program manager: the national Watershed Surveys and Planning (WSP) Program manager for watershed project plans, the Watershed Operations Program manager for watershed plan modifications (both revisions and supplements), and the Watershed Rehabilitation Program manager for rehabilitation plans.

B. The STC must ensure that the technical and policy reviews of the plan have met the following criteria:

(1) Appropriate interdisciplinary planning and evaluation procedures have been followed, and a plan has been formulated that addresses the concerns of the sponsoring local organizations (SLO) and the mission of NRCS with consideration of economic, environmental, and social impacts.
(2) All surveys, investigations, consultation requirements, and analyses are coordinated and run concurrently with the development of the Plan-EA or Plan-EIS and are made in sufficient scope and intensity to support the project.
(3) Public and interagency participation are sufficient and properly planned, discussed, and documented in the plan.
(4) The plan clearly and correctly reflects watershed conditions and problems, with and without the project.
(5) The kind, nature, and estimated cost of measures to be installed including mitigation, are properly determined, displayed, and documented in the Plan-EA or Plan-EIS.
(6) The anticipated effects on the environment and on solving the problems, including the evaluation of benefits and impacts, have been determined and exhibited, and mitigation has been provided as appropriate.
(7) The manner of financing, installing, operating, and maintaining the project has been determined and discussed.
(8) The project, as formulated, meets the requirements of Public Law 83-566, NRCS policy, congressional criteria, Executive orders, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), P&G (as applicable), and other applicable laws and regulations.
(9) The plan conforms to established standards and NRCS requirements for technical quality.

(10) Requirements for permits, consultation and mitigation have been considered, evaluated and discussed in the development and evaluation of plan alternatives.
(11) The plan content and format conforms to the requirements of 390-NWPM, Part 501, Subpart D.

502.11 NRCS Reviews

A. State Staff Review

An internal interdisciplinary review of plans must be conducted by appropriate NRCS State staff to ensure that the problems identified, alternatives considered, preferred alternative, and effects are adequately described, and the plan has been developed in accordance with national policy.

B. National Water Management Center Review

(1) The STC must submit an unsigned draft watershed plan to the NWMC director, prior to interagency review circulation. Do not submit the draft plan for review until after undertaking any applicable public scoping meetings to ensure that the plan addresses and focuses on issues of concern to the public and other agencies and that it does not prejudice the evaluation or selection of any alternative.
(2) NWMC will conduct a thorough review and provide assistance on the unsigned draft watershed plan in conjunction with the STC to determine whether the draft plan follows the planning process, provides the rationale for plan selection, and conforms to NRCS policy and watershed planning standards including NEPA.
(3) NWMC will prepare written comments on the unsigned draft watershed plan and provide these to the STC and appropriate national program manager. Comments will include appropriate recommendations for resolving deficiencies.
(4) The STC will document the disposition for each NWMC comment, indicating the passages in the rewritten public review draft Plan-EA or Plan-EIS in which the comment was addressed.
(5) A copy of the final Plan-EA or Plan-EIS and comment disposition documentation must be provided to the NWMC director and the appropriate national program manager.

C. Programmatic Review

(1) After the National Water Management Center, public, and interagency review comments have been addressed, the NRCS national program managers must conduct a final review for programmatic compliance.

(i) The national program manager for the national WSP Program will conduct the final review of all watershed project plans for programmatic compliance. The watershed project plan must contain all required sections with sufficient detail as described in 390-NWPM, Part 501, Subpart D, "Watershed Project Plan Content and Format."
(ii) The national program manager for the National Watershed Operations Program will review all watershed operations modifications (revisions and supplemental watershed plans) for programmatic compliance.
(iii) The national program manager for the National Watershed Rehabilitation Program will review all Watershed Rehabilitation plans for programmatic compliance.

(2) The watershed project plan is complete when approved by the STC ensuring technical and policy adherence and reviewed by the WSP Program manager for programmatic compliance.