

Part 320 – Guidance for Implementing Conservation Planning Activity, Design and Implementation Activity, and Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity

Subpart A - Purpose, Background and General Instructions

320.0 Purpose

To provide guidance to NRCS State Conservationists, Directors of the Pacific Islands and Caribbean Areas, National Technology Support Center Directors, and National Headquarters regarding the implementation of Conservation Activities.

320.1 References

- A. Title 440 Conservation Program Manual, Part 530, “Working Lands Conservation Manual”
- B. Title 440, Conservation Program Manual, Part 504, “Technical Service Provider Manual”

320.2 Definitions

- A. Conservation Planning Activity (CPA): An activity that results in a conservation plan consistent with steps 1-7 of the NRCS conservation planning process. The CPA will document client decisions regarding selected alternatives including identification of desired primary and supporting practices that the client would like to use to treat identified resource concerns.
- B. Design and Implementation Activity (DIA): An activity that allows for development of specific practice designs, management prescriptions, or other instructions that allow the client to implement the conservation practice or system of conservation practices. A DIA is consistent with Step 8 of the NRCS conservation planning process. (Does not include assistance with conservation practice installation, review, and checkout)
- C. Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity (CEMA): An activity that includes evaluation, monitoring, testing, or assessment for a specific purpose, to complete practice implementation requirements, or to determine the effectiveness of conservation practices and activities. A CEMA is consistent with Step 9 of the NRCS conservation planning process but may be used at any point in the planning process.

320.3 Background

As outlined in this instruction, NRCS conservation activities include planning, design, implementation, and monitoring tasks carried out by technical service providers (TSP) or other third-party service providers (Providers) for NRCS conservation program purposes. NRCS has reorganized and renamed Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) into three new categories—CPA, DIA, and CEMA. NRCS broke these activities out to clarify which phase of the NRCS conservation planning process the TSP/Provider will be supporting.

320.4 General Instructions

- A. For a list of available CPAs, DIAs, and CEMAs and their associated codes see Exhibit 320.10.
- B. CPA, DIA, and CEMA documents are located at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/eqip/?cid=nrcseprd1833492> and States should place this link in section III of the State Field Office Tech Guide (FOTG).
- C. Activate the Activities in the Conservation Practice Data Entry System (CPDES).
- D. Using CPAs, DIAs, and CEMAs
 - (1) NRCS must determine whether use of a CPA(s), DIA(s), and/or CEMA(s) is a necessary and efficient way to provide an NRCS client with technical assistance.
 - (2) Once it is determined that a CPA(s), DIA(s), and/or CEMA(s) is necessary, NRCS works with the client to determine which of these activities will be planned to meet the identified objective, see Exhibit 320.11.
 - (3) Client applies for and receives a financial assistance program contract which includes a CPA(s), DIA(s), and/or a CEMA(s). The client is now an NRCS program participant.
 - (i) Participant selects a TSP/Provider, as applicable to complete the contracted activity(s).
 - (ii) If desired, participant authorizes NRCS to release relevant casefile information to identified TSP/Provider. NRCS can provide participant with Form NRCS-CPA-1270 for this purpose. This form is also available through e-Forms.
 - (iii) The NRCS field staff should coordinate with the participant and TSP/Provider to ensure all parties understand the CPA, DIA, and/or CEMA requirements.
 - (4) The TSP/Provider completes the CPA, DIA, and/or CEMA following the guidance in the corresponding CPA, DIA, and CEMA document.
 - (i) States are not authorized to develop supplements to the nationally approved CPA, DIA, and CEMA documents.
 - (5) TSP/Provider provides NRCS and the participant required deliverables.
- E. NRCS acceptance and certification of completed CPA, DIA, and/or CEMA
 - (1) NRCS verifies the required deliverables provided by TSP/Provider are all present, and if complete, follows appropriate contracting payment procedures.
 - (2) If incomplete, NRCS will explain to participant and TSP/Provider what is missing so that the TSP/Provider can correct the deficiency.

320.5 Financial Assistance Program Contracting

- A. To meet the objectives of the client, NRCS will provide maximum flexibility when scheduling CPA(s), DIA(s), and/or CEMA(s) in a financial assistance program contract.
- B. The following are permissible contracting options (see Figure 320-A1 for a visual representation)
 - (1) Stand Alone Option.—NRCS can schedule a CPA, DIA, and CEMA as the only contract item.
 - (2) Pairing Option.—NRCS may pair certain combinations of conservation activities together, or pair an activity with a conservation practice in a contract as follows:
 - (i) A CPA can be paired with a DIA.
 - (ii) A DIA can be paired with a conservation practice(s).

Note: A CEMA can also be scheduled with either of the above combinations, or can be included with a “stand alone” CPA, DIA, or conservation practice contract.

C. CPA, DIA, and conservation practices cannot be grouped together in the same contract, unless the CPA is to develop a plan for another resource concern, land use, etc., unrelated to the DIA and conservation practices also included in the contract.

Figure 320-A1: Visual Respresentation of Contracting Options

