

Chapter 1 General Conservation Practice Standards Information

Preface

The National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP) establishes Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) national standards for conservation practices commonly used to improve natural resources with respect to soil, water, air, plants, and animals plus humans (SWAPA+H). National Conservation Practice Standards can be used within a State without modification, or they can be rewritten to include additional requirements to meet State or local needs. Because of wide variations in soils, climate, and topography, States may need to add special provisions or provide additional details in the conservation practice standards. State laws and local ordinances or regulations may dictate more stringent criteria. As a minimum, all practice standards adopted for use in a State will contain the name or abbreviation of the State in the footer of the standard. These revised local standards are to be equal to or more rigorous than the national standard. Conservation practice standards are located in section IV of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

NRCS is the lead U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agency for providing conservation technical assistance and planning on privately owned lands. Various Federal, State, and local laws passed during the last several years have increased cooperation between NRCS and its partners that are concerned with conservation and protection of natural resources. Other government and private organizations use NRCS' FOTG material

to assist or supplement their conservation efforts.

Conservation practice standards in the NHCP evolved in accordance with advancement in farming and ranching techniques used throughout the world and with changes in technology as documented by research, conservation field trials, and accumulated experience. Conservation practice standards, the associated conservation practice physical effects (CPPE) matrix, and other associated documents need to be reviewed and maintained periodically to stay current with changes in technology and to ensure that they address multiple resources. Reviews ensure that standards:

- Provide timely incorporation of new technologies,
- Address multiple resource concerns,
- Are consistent in format and content,
- Enhance interagency cooperation with regard to development of conservation practice standards, and
- Account for the varied conservation activities expected of NRCS in the future.

The guidelines outlined in the NHCP for developing practice standards will result in multidisciplinary contributions during the standards development process. As outlined in the General Manual (GM) 450 Part 401 Subpart A, B, or C, all NRCS employees are responsible for assuring that conservation practice standards include up-to-date information and technology. National policy and the conservation practice standards are developed for the protection of the resources, landowner, conservation

contractors, Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) employees, and NRCS employees. When a conservation practice is installed according to criteria specified in the conservation practice standard:

Landowners receive a conservation product that addresses or mitigates the identified resource concern,

Contractors and/or Technical Service Providers understand their responsibility to provide a quality job product on the ground and are not required to warranty a product beyond the requirements of the standard, and

NRCS is protected by being assured that its employees are working within the scope of their employment.

The NHCP contains current National Conservation Practice Standards. The NHCP also contains guidance and direction on maintaining conservation practice standards, offers several methods for obtaining the standards, and encourages involvement in the process to develop new or revise current conservation practice standards. NHCP exhibits 1 through 7 in this handbook provide additional information and guidance to the policies and procedures outlined in GM 450 Part 401 Subpart B.

Although the handbook is prepared primarily for use by NRCS personnel, the handbook is available for anyone having an interest in or a responsibility for conservation of natural resources.