

Part 501 – Development of Watershed Project Plans

Subpart B – Project Plan Requirements

501.10 Planning Standards and Criteria

Watershed Program planning will be conducted in accordance with all of the following guidance documents, regulations, and Executive orders:

- (1) Title 390, National Watershed Program Handbook (NWPH).
- (2) Title 180, National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), Part 600
http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/H/H_180_600.htm.
- (3) Title 190, National Environmental Compliance Handbook (NECH), Part 610.
- (4) NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) and Conservation Practice Physical Effects (CPPE).
- (5) Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies (P&G).
- (6) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).
- (7) 40 CFR Parts 1500 to 1508, “NEPA Regulations.”
- (8) 7 CFR Part 650, “Compliance with NEPA”
http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_05/7cfr650_05.html.
- (9) Title 190, General Manual (GM), Part 410, Subpart B, Section 410.27, “Channel Modification Guidelines.”
- (10) Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs
<http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12372.html>.
- (11) Executive Order 10584, Administration of Public Law 83-566.
- (12) Section 106 of Public Law 89-665, National Historic Preservation Act.
- (13) Section 7 of Public Law 93-205, Endangered Species Act.
- (14) Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management
<http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/pdf/eo-11988.pdf>.
- (15) Council on Environmental Quality – NEPA’s Forty Most Asked Questions
<http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/40/40p3.htm>.
- (16) For other applicable laws, regulations, and Executive orders; see 390-NWPM, Part 500, Subpart D, Section 500.32, (in this manual).

501.11 Water Resource Projects

Watershed Program project plans must be designed to accomplish one or more of the purposes described in 390-NWPM, Part 500, Subpart A, Section 500.3 (of this manual). The watershed planning process must identify the most economically, socially, and environmentally acceptable means of achieving the selected purposes. Watershed Program project plans are either “water resource projects” or “non-water-resource projects.”

A. Water Resource Projects

- (1) For the purposes of this manual, a “water resource project” includes projects meeting all of the following criteria:
 - (i) Projects having one or more of the following purposes: flood damage reduction, water supply, water-based recreation, water quality management (as defined in the Public Law 83-566 Section 4), and large scale irrigation or drainage projects

- (ii) Implemented by one or more “local organizations” (that is an SLO as defined by Public Law 83-566 Section 2)
- (2) Water resource project plans must be formulated in accordance with all requirements of the Economic and Environmental Principles and Guidelines for Water and Related Land Resources Implementation Studies (P&G). Formulation will be based on the stated purpose and the need for action. The National Economic Development (NED) alternative will be developed and is the alternative that reasonably maximizes net economic benefits consistent with protecting the nation’s environment.

B. Non-Water-Resource Projects

- (1) Watershed projects that do not meet both criteria of a water resource project (for example, address one of the five identified purposes above **and** are implemented by an SLO) and locally implemented projects (implemented without NRCS watershed program financial assistance) are considered for the purposes of the manual to be “non-water-resource projects.” Non-water-resource projects include watershed protection, land treatment, habitat restoration, and ecosystem restoration projects.
- (2) Non-water-resource project plans must be formulated in accordance with P&G procedures, but development of the NED alternative is not required. The recommended alternative plan must be the least costly socially and environmentally acceptable method of achieving the agreed-upon level of resource protection.

501.12 Plan Formulation

A. Alternatives

- (1) All reasonable alternatives that address the purpose and need for action must be presented in the watershed project plan, including those not within the program authorities of the NRCS and those not preferred by sponsors. The future-without-project (FWOP) conditions or no-action alternative must also be presented in each watershed project plan.
- (2) For alternatives that were eliminated from detailed study, the rationale for this elimination will be provided. All alternatives developed or considered will be documented as part of the administrative record.
- (3) All relevant public and NRCS identified resource concerns noted during scoping must be addressed by one or more alternatives and analyzed in the Plan-EA or Plan-EIS.
- (4) For a watershed project plan involving flood protection, consideration must be given to alternative measures to prevent or reduce flood damage, including but not limited to the following:
 - (i) Floodproofing of structures
 - (ii) Floodplain regulation
 - (iii) Acquisition of floodplain lands for recreational, fish and wildlife, and other public purposes
 - (iv) Moving buildings and facilities
 - (v) Conversion of land use to forest
- (5) Project land treatment measures will not be formulated to address onsite economic benefits such as reducing production costs or increasing yields. However, onsite benefits should be included in the documentation and evaluation of the alternative plans. All costs, including operation, maintenance, and replacement costs, expected to be incurred over the period of analysis must be included.

B. Future-Without-Project or No Action Alternative

The proposed action and alternatives will be formulated to meet the objectives of the project. The impacts of the proposed action and alternatives are to be measured from the projected future-without-project (FWOP) conditions. The projected FWOP conditions must be forecast in order to provide the basis for comparison among alternatives. The projected FWOP condition is known as the no-action alternative under NEPA. The effects of other programs and compliance with existing laws will be considered in projecting FWOP conditions.

C. Evaluation Period

The evaluation period (evaluated life, project life, or design life) must not exceed 100 years after the completion of installation. The period of analysis (installation period plus project life) must be the same for all alternatives (P&G Section 2.1.2). Measures in a plan may have different design lives, depending on the design features and materials used in construction. Replacement costs must be included if the evaluation period exceeds the life of a measure.

D. Enhancement and Mitigation of Environmental Values

- (1) Enhancement.—For purposes of this manual, the word “enhancement” is defined as environmentally beneficial activities undertaken by the sponsor or others that are beyond the “appropriate mitigation” requirements of NEPA.
 - (i) NRCS will encourage the SLO to include features in watershed project plans that will preserve, create, or otherwise enhance wetlands, fish and wildlife habitats, landscape resources, cultural resources, important farmland and forest land, prime rangeland, and other important resources where feasible. These enhancement measures must be sponsored by the SLO. Watershed Program funds may not be utilized for enhancement features.
 - (ii) Fish and wildlife enhancement measures proposed by Federal or State fish and wildlife agencies will be included if they are technically feasible and are acceptable to the SLO and NRCS. If additional sponsors are needed to fund and carry out the recommended fish and wildlife measures, NRCS will assist in obtaining their participation. Costs for fish and wildlife enhancement measures will be allocated to the fish and wildlife purpose.
- (2) Mitigation.—Appropriate mitigation will be included in all plans.
 - (i) Mitigation measures to offset or reduce adverse environmental, visual, scenic, and social effects of alternatives will be determined in consultation with the appropriate Federal and State agencies and disclosed in the watershed project plan-EA or Plan-EIS. Mitigation measures will preferably be established in the watershed but may be established outside the watershed if no other alternative exists. Costs for mitigation measures will be allocated to the purposes of the work that produces the need for mitigation. The Plan-EA or Plan-EIS is to address and evaluate the effects and significance of any proposed mitigation measures.
 - (ii) The STC must ensure that the planned mitigation measures are properly installed, operated, and maintained by the sponsor. The watershed project plan-EA/FONSI or Plan-EIS/ROD must specify how all mitigation addressed in the document will be implemented. If appropriate, a monitoring plan for mitigation effectiveness must be addressed in the ROD as required by NEPA.