

EXHIBIT AK to National Instruction 440-310 (Remove this exhibit since this national initiative ended in FY21.)

EQIP Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) New England Cottontail (NEC) Ranking Guidance

- 1) States must create ranking pools using the EQIP WLFW NEC National Ranking Template and guidance in 440-CPM-530-D-530.34 and -530-R-530.401A.
- 2) This ranking pool/spending plan will be tied to the “WLFW NEC” account name in Protracts.
- 3) NI-440-307.32 provides instructions for any ESA compliance associated with WLFW NEC under a conference opinion.
- 4) Applicability:
 - a) The following question **must be used** in the “Applicability” section of the ranking pool display group for NEC:
 - i) Does the PLU intersect the national WLFW NEC project boundary layer? Filename: “WLFW_NewEngland_Cottontail_ProjectBndy” in CART geoportal?
 - ii) States must use the national layer for WLFW NEC project boundary.
 - iii) Land unit qualification equals any.
- 5) Resources:
 - a) The following questions **must be included** in the “Resources” section of the ranking pool display group for WLFW NEC:
 - i) Habitat priority – Reference again “WLFW_NewEngland_Cottontail_ProjectBndy” in CART geoportal. **Only choose one answer** (100 points max).
 - (1) PLU is within NEC project boundary = 100
 - (2) PLU intersects NEC project boundary = 50
 - (3) Any other answer = 0
 - ii) Direct Target Species Benefits - **Only choose one answer** (50 points max).
 - (1) NEC occupancy verified on the PLU in past 3 years = 50
 - (2) NEC occupancy verified adjacent to PLU in past 3 years = 40
 - (3) NEC occupancy verified within dispersal distance (1-4 miles) of the PLU in past 3 years = 30
 - (4) Any other answer = 0
 - iii) Threats - **Only choose one answer** (NEGATIVE points).
 - (1) Eastern cottontail documented on the PLU = **(-20)**
 - (2) Eastern cottontail documented adjacent to the PLU = **(-15)**
 - (3) Eastern cottontail documented within 1/2 mile of PLU = **(-10)**
 - (4) Any other answer = 0
 - iv) Landscape Position of the PLU - **Only choose one answer** (50 points max).
 - (1) PLU is in a landscape with other suitable NEC habitat adjacent = 50
 - (2) PLU is in a landscape with other suitable NEC habitat within 1 mile = 30
 - (3) PLU is in a landscape with other suitable NEC habitat within 4 miles = 20
 - (4) Any other answer = 0

- 6) States must not exceed 200 points per category - Resource and Program Questions.
- 7) Tie Breaker—States must use the efficiency score calculated in the CART ranking when a tie breaker is needed between one or more EQIP applications. When using the tie breaker, NRCS will select the application with the highest efficiency score first.

Updated August 6, 2021.