

EXHIBIT H - To National Instruction 440-310

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) Classic and Renewals Ranking Guidance

- 1) States must create ranking pools in CART based on the available National Ranking Templates and guidance in 440-CPM-530-Q-530.301A.
- 2) At a minimum, States must establish separate ranking pools, using Exhibit J, “CSP General National Ranking Template – Amended October 2022,” for each of the following—
 - a) Agricultural land – Classic
 - b) Agricultural land – Renewal
 - c) Agricultural land – BFR
 - d) Agricultural land – Renewal – BFR
 - e) Agricultural land – SDFR
 - f) Agricultural land – Renewal – SDFR
 - g) Agricultural land – Organic (only one pool for both certified and transitioning)
 - h) Agricultural land – Renewal – Organic (only one pool for both certified and transitioning)
 - i) Nonindustrial private forest land (NIPF) – Classic
 - j) NIPF – Renewal
 - k) NIPF – BFR
 - l) NIPF – Renewal – BFR
 - m) NIPF – SDFR
 - n) NIPF – Renewal – SDFR
- 3) States must establish renewal ranking pools equivalent to their classic ranking pools, using Exhibit I, “CSP-FY 23 Renewals National Ranking Template – Amended November 2021.” However, this does not mean that the renewal ranking pools must match the classic ranking pools in terms of weights, questions, or priority resource concern categories.
- 4) States have the option to establish separate organic fund pools for NIPF – Classic and NIPF – Renewal based on applicability in the State.
- 5) States must NOT select the “organic” modifier for any land use included in an organic ranking pool.
- 6) States must include the following land uses within any agricultural or NIPF ranking pool template—
 - a) Agricultural land—crop, pasture, range, associated agricultural land, and farmstead
 - b) NIPF—forest, associated agricultural land, and farmstead
- 7) Resource Concern Categories—
 - a) States must establish the weights for applicable resource concern categories based on the following guidelines—
 - i) The eight State priority resource concern categories must have a weight between 5 percent and 30 percent
 - ii) Non-priority resource concern categories must not exceed a weight of 5 percent
- 8) Applicability Questions—
 - a) States must use the following questions to determine applicability for specific ranking pools—
 - i) For the organic ranking pools, is 75 percent or more of the land in the operation certified or transitioning? (Yes = applicable; No = not applicable)
 - ii) For the BFR ranking pools, did the applicant self-certify as a beginning farmer or rancher on the NRCS-CPA-1200, “Conservation Program Application?” (Yes = applicable; No = not applicable)
 - iii) For the SDFR ranking pools, did the applicant self-certify as a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher on the NRCS-CPA-1200, “Conservation Program Application?” (Yes = applicable; No = not applicable)
 - b) States may establish other text questions for the applicability question or select “User declined” under the “Ranking Status” as determined by the State.

Example: States may decide that it is acceptable for planners to select “User declined” to turn off the renewal ranking pools when the application is for a new CSP classic application or vice versa. Otherwise, States may add in an applicability question, such as, “Is this a CSP classic application?” that will require the user to enter a justification for selecting “No.”

9) Ranking Questions—

- a) States must include the following ranking questions under the “program questions” for all BFR and SDFR ranking pools only—
 - i) Does the applicant meet the NRCS definition of a veteran farmer or rancher (VFR)? (Yes/No) (20 pts)
 - ii) Did the applicant participate in the CRP Transition Incentives Program (TIP), and land included in the CSP application has come out of CRP within the last two years? (Yes/No) (5 to 20 pts)
- b) At a minimum, States must develop the program questions and resource questions using the following criteria—
 - i) The natural resources conservation and environmental benefits that result from the conservation treatment on all State-identified priority resource concern categories at the time of application (i.e., existing stewardship);
 - ii) The degree to which the proposed conservation activities increase natural resource conservation and environmental benefits (i.e., additional conservation); and
 - iii) Other consistent criteria the State establishes to ensure that State and local priority resource concern categories are effectively addressed.
- c) Example questions—
 - i) (Select ONE) At the time of application, the applicant meets—
 - 4-8 State priority resource concern categories across all land uses included in the operation. (180 pts)
 - 1-3 State priority resource concern categories across all land uses included in the operation. (150 pts)
 - 6-8 State priority resource concern categories across all land uses included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated ag land). (145 pts)
 - 3-5 State priority resource concern categories across all land uses included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated ag land). (125 pts)
 - 1-2 State priority resource concern categories across all land uses included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated ag land). (100 pts)
 - 4-8 State priority resource concern categories on at least one land use included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated ag land). (50 pts)
 - 1-3 State priority resource concern categories on at least one land use included in the operation (excluding farmstead and associated ag land). (25 pts)
 - ii) (Select ONE) By the end of the contract, the applicant will implement additional conservation activities across the operation that allows the producer to—
 - Exceed the stewardship threshold for more than 3 additional resource concern categories on at least two land uses. (200 pts)
 - Exceed the stewardship threshold for 2-3 additional resource concern categories on at least two land uses. (150 pts)
 - Exceed the stewardship threshold for 1 additional resource concern category on at least two land uses. (125 pts)
 - Exceed the stewardship threshold for more than 3 additional resource concern categories on one land use. (100 pts)
 - Exceed the stewardship threshold for 2-3 additional resource concern categories on one land use. (75 pts)
 - Meet the stewardship threshold for 2-3 additional resource concern categories on at least two land uses. (50 pts)

- Meet the stewardship threshold for 1 additional resource concern category on at least two land uses. (25 pts)
 - Meet the stewardship threshold for 2-3 additional resource concern categories on one land use. (10 pts)
- d) States must not exceed 200 points per category—program questions and resource questions.
- e) States may use the program questions, resource questions, or both to incorporate questions that target local and State priorities based on input from the State Technical Committee, Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils, and local work groups.
- f) Practice code E300GCI will only be used for CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative contracts.