

## Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan Criteria

### Practice/Activity Code (142) (No.)

#### 1. Definition

A fish and wildlife habitat plan is a site specific plan developed for a client who is ready to plan and implement decisions with consideration for fish and wildlife habitat and other biological resources. A Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan:

- a. Meets Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) quality criteria for fish and wildlife habitat and other identified resource concerns;
- b. Complies with Federal, State, tribal and local laws, regulations and permit requirements;
- c. Addresses the client's objectives.

#### 2. Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Plan Criteria

This section establishes the minimum criteria to be addressed in the development of Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plans.

##### A. General Criteria

1. An Environmental Evaluation (EE) (CPA 52) is to be prepared for all activity plans to demonstrate NRCS compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Endangered Species Act, Environmental Justice, Air Quality, and other designated environmental concerns and environmental laws. The environmental effects from the activity plans on environmental resource concerns should be clearly documented on the EE (Form CPA-52). The following is abbreviated guidance for preparation of the EE:
  - a. Planners and TSPs should follow the EE guidance delineated in the National Environmental Compliance Handbook.
  - b. The EE describes the existing conditions for all applicable resource concerns.
  - c. The EE will assess the resources potentially impacted by the no action, proposed action and any reasonable alternatives.
  - d. Guide sheets will accompany the EE, as needed, to provide information on how to assess and deal with special environmental concerns.
  - e. The findings section of the EE is to identify whether NRCS has determined based on the analysis of the EE: (1) that a site specific environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) should be prepared based on the significance of potential impacts, or (2) the EE can be tiered to a State, regional, or national programmatic EA or EIS because the proposed effects have been sufficiently analyzed in a State, regional, national programmatic EA or EIS.
  - f. TSP and planners are required to complete NRCS' Level I Environmental Compliance training prior to prepare any EE Form CPA 52.
2. A Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan shall be developed by certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs). In accordance with Section 1240 (A), the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) program provides funding support through contracts with eligible producers to obtain services of certified TSPs for development of Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plans. The specific TSP criteria required for Fish and Wildlife Habitat Plan

development is located on the TSP registry (TechReg) Web site at:  
<http://techreg.usda.gov/>.

B. Fish and Wildlife Plan Criteria

- (a) A fish and wildlife activity conservation plan will address related NRCS quality criteria for soil erosion, water quality, and other identified habitat resource concerns.
- (b) The plan will comply with Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws, regulations, and permit requirements.
- (c) Satisfy the participant's goals and objectives in regard to fish and wildlife resources.

C. Background and Site Information

- (a) Landowner information – name, address, operation, size
- (b) Location and plan map of parcel
- (c) Documentation of existing practices/history
- (d) Resource inventory
- (e) Fish and wildlife resource concerns

D. Client Objectives

- (a) Manage working lands for fish and wildlife habitat
- (b) Increase populations of selected species or groups
- (c) Maintain populations of selected species or groups
- (d) Improve habitat for aquatic, wetland, and terrestrial species
- (e) Considerations for pollinator habitat and pollinator protection

E. Document Existing Conditions

- (a) Conservation plan map – boundaries, fields, scale, streams, surface waters, wetlands, fences, riparian areas, land uses, etc.
- (b) Soils map – legend, interpretations for fish and wildlife resources
- (c) Client's decisions – conservation practices needed to achieve objectives
- (d) Habitat assessment, evaluations, or Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) models
- (e) Current management activities
- (f) Carrying capacity for selected species/resources

F. Desired Future Conditions/Goals

- (a) Fish and wildlife population levels
- (b) Restoration of fish and wildlife species or habitat types
- (c) Sustainability of fish and wildlife populations/habitat
- (d) Indices of Biological Integrity

- G. Assessing/Monitoring of fish and wildlife populations using state specific habitat assessment guides. Habitat evaluations and Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) models for many fish and wildlife species are available to guide the planner in formulating alternatives for the land owner/participant. The alternative(s) selected are implemented through one or more conservation practices that provide or improve needed habitat elements.
- H. Conservation Practices and/or Activities and Support Documents
- (a) Fish and wildlife-related Conservation Practice Standards. The National Handbook of Conservation Practices lists more than 170 practices. Virtually every conservation practice impacts fish and wildlife resources in some manner. The practices listed in Attachment 1 are specifically related to fish and wildlife resources. These practices will, when properly implemented and/or managed, positively affect biological resources. Attachment 2 relates conservation practices to groupings of biological resources.
  - (b) Habitat assessment guides (State specific).
  - (c) Stream Visual Assessment Protocol 2 (SVAP2) assists the planner with determining current stream and riparian conditions, identifying specific features potentially affecting habitat quality, and determination of quality criteria for stream and riparian habitat.
  - (d) Requirements from State-specific Field Office Technical Guide
- I. References
- (a) National Planning Procedures Handbook
  - (b) Field Office Technical Guide
  - (c) National Biology Handbook
  - (d) National Biology Manual
  - (e) National Forestry Manual
  - (f) National Forestry Handbook
  - (g) National Environmental Compliance Handbook
  - (h) TechReg Technical Service Provider Registry

**3. Deliverables for the Client – a hardcopy of the plan that includes:**

- Cover page – name, address, phone of client and TSP; Total Acres of the Plan, signature blocks for the TSP, producer, and a signature block for the NRCS acceptance.
- Soils map and appropriate soil descriptions
- Resource assessment results (wind and water erosion, water availability, habitat assessments/evaluations, soil fertility, and others that may be applicable)
- For management practices, the planned practices and the site specific specifications on how each practice will be applied, when the practice will be applied, the extent (acres or number) that will be applied, and operation and maintenance required.

- For engineering/structural practices; the planned practice when it will be applied and extent, operation and maintenance requirements, and location on the conservation plan map.

#### 4. Deliverables for NRCS Field Office:

- Electronic copy of the client's plan (MSWord copy)
- Digital Conservation Plan Map with fields, features, and structural practices located
- Digital Soils Map
- Completed Environmental Evaluation (Form CPA 52) and appropriate worksheets, including reports to the field office on the results of any inventory and identification they carry out for the plan

### Attachment 1 - Typical Conservation Practices/Fish and Wildlife Resources

<b>National Conservation Practice Standards Specific to Fish and Wildlife Resources</b>
<b>Aquaculture Ponds (397)</b> —A water impoundment constructed and managed for commercial aquaculture production. To provide suitable aquatic environment for producing, growing, and harvesting commercial aquaculture products.
<b>Constructed Wetland (656)</b> —A wetland constructed for the primary purpose of water quality improvement; i.e., treatment of wastewater, sewage, surface runoff, milk-house wastewater, silage leachate, and mine drainage. Practice treats wastewater by the biological and mechanical activities of the constructed wetland.
<b>Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647)</b> —Manage early plant succession to benefit desired fish, wildlife or natural communities. Increase plant community diversity, provide wildlife habitat for early successional species and provide habitat for declining species.
<b>Field Border (386)</b> —A strip of perennial grass or shrubs established at or around the edge of a field. Field borders provide productive habitat for wildlife that favor early successional habitats on agricultural landscapes.
<b>Fish Passage (396)</b> —Eliminating or mitigating the effects of natural or artificial barriers, such as dams, culverts, or cross-channel structures to fish and other aquatic organisms. Allows for the unimpeded movement of aquatic organisms.
<b>Fishpond Management (399)</b> —Developing or improving impounded water to produce fish and other aquatic organisms for domestic use or recreation. Provides a suitable aquatic environment for producing, growing, and harvesting fish or other aquatic organisms.
<b>Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats (643)</b> —Restoring and conserving rare or declining native vegetated communities and associated fish and wildlife species to restore and manage habitats degraded by human activity, increase native plant community diversity, or manage unique or declining native habitats.

**Riparian Forest Buffer (391)** –Consists of predominantly trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to and up-gradient from watercourses or water bodies. Creates shade to lower or maintain water temperatures to improve habitat for aquatic organisms, provides a source of detritus and large wood to the stream corridor, reduces excess amounts of sediment, organic material, nutrients and pesticides in surface runoff and reduces excess nutrients and other chemicals in shallow ground water flow, reduces pesticide drift entering the water body, and improves riparian plant communities for fish and wildlife habitats..

<p><b>Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390)</b>—Consists of grasses, grass-like plants, and forbs at the fringe of the water along watercourses. Provides habitat for aquatic and terrestrial organisms, improves and protects water quality, stabilizes the channel bed and streambanks, establishes corridors to provide landscape linkages among existing habitats, and fosters management of existing riparian herbaceous habitat to improve or maintain desired plant communities.</p>
<p><b>Shallow Water Management for Wildlife (646)</b>—Managing shallow water on agricultural lands and moist soil areas for wildlife habitat. Areas provide open water areas to facilitate waterfowl resting and feeding, and habitat for amphibians and reptiles that serve as important prey species for other wildlife.</p>
<p><b>Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395)</b>—Create, restore, maintain, or enhance physical, chemical, and biological functions of a stream system to provide desired quality and quantity of water, fish and wildlife habitat, channel morphology and stability, and aesthetics and recreation opportunities.</p>
<p><b>Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)</b>—Creating, restoring, maintaining, or enhancing areas for food, cover, and water for upland wildlife and species that use upland habitat for part of their life cycle. Provide all of the habitat elements in the proper amounts and distribution, and manage the species to achieve a viable wildlife population within the species home range.</p>
<p><b>Wetland Creation (658)</b>—A wetland created on a site location that historically was not a wetland or was a wetland but with a different hydrology, vegetation type, or function than naturally occurred on the site. Create wetlands that have wetland hydrology, hydrophytic plant communities, hydric soil conditions, and wetland functions and/or values.</p>
<p><b>Wetland Enhancement (659)</b>—The modification or rehabilitation of an existing or degraded wetland where specific function and/or values are improved for the purpose of meeting specific project objectives. For example, managing site hydrology for waterfowl or amphibian use, or managing plant community composition for native wetland hay production.</p>
<p><b>Wetland Restoration (657)</b>—A rehabilitation of a degraded wetland where soils, hydrology, vegetative community, and biological habitat are returned to the original condition to the extent practicable. To restore wetland conditions and functions that occurred on the disturbed wetland site prior to modification to the extent practicable.</p>
<p><b>Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644)</b>—Retaining, developing, or managing habitat for wetland wildlife. To maintain, develop, or improve habitat for waterfowl, furbearers, or other wetland-associated wildlife.</p>
<p><b>Wildlife Watering Facility (648)</b>—Constructing, improving, or modifying watering facilities or places for wildlife to obtain drinking water.</p>

## Attachment 2 - Conservation Practices and Affected Biological Resources

<b>Biological Resource</b>	<b>Relevant Practices</b>
<b>Aquatic Invertebrates</b> —crayfish, snails, stoneflies, mayflies, riffle beetles	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management , Riparian Forest Buffer, Wetland Restoration
<b>Terrestrial Invertebrates</b> —earthworms, nematodes, dung beetles	Conservation Cover, Forest Stand Improvement, Prescribed Grazing
<b>Pollinators</b> —bees, butterflies, moths, birds, bats	Alley Cropping, Conservation Crop Rotation, Tree/Shrub Establishment, Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
<b>Fish</b>	Nutrient Management, Irrigation Water Management, Riparian Forest Buffer, Stream Habitat Improvement and Management, Wetland Restoration, Fish Passage
<b>Amphibians</b>	Pond, Stream Habitat Improvement and Management, Wetland Restoration
<b>Reptiles</b>	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Wetland Restoration, Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats
<b>Birds</b>	Hedgerow Planting, Early Successional Habitat Development/Management, Prescribed Burning, Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Shallow Water Management for Wildlife, Prescribed Grazing, Irrigation Water Management, Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats, Wetland Restoration, Field Border, Residue Management, No-Till and Strip Till, Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment, Riparian Buffer, Filter Strip, Forest Harvest Management,
<b>Mammals</b>	Brush Management, Prescribed Grazing, Wildlife Watering Facility, Fence, Forest Stand Improvement, Riparian Forest Buffer, Tree/Shrub Establishment, Conservation Cover, Stream Habitat Improvement and Management, Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment; Early Successional Habitat Development and Management, Prescribed Grazing, Structure for Water Control, Mine Shaft & Audit Closing, Forest Harvest Management, Pond