



Remember: A fence is a barrier  
only when you don't have a plan!!

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION NOTE

FOR IN-SERVICE USE

### THE CONSERVATION PLANNING PROCESS & HUMAN CONSIDERATIONS

#### INTRODUCTION

Planning (thinking, considering) what you're going to do before you do it should be a vital part of all development processes. Planning is a tool which can be used by NRCS conservationists to "help landowners set goals and make decisions about the use of natural resources in a way that ensures a healthy and productive land."<sup>1</sup> This framework assists the development of conservation plans based on sound, sustainable ecological, *economic*, and *social considerations*.

#### THE PLANNING PROCESS<sup>2</sup>

The NRCS planning process is a dynamic, iterative model consisting of nine basic steps which can be grouped into three main phases. First, information is collected and analyzed which becomes the *benchmark* situation for subsequent alternative performance evaluations. Second, the information accumulated is used to formulate/analyze various alternative combinations by giving the decisionmaker enough depth of analysis to make decisions. Finally, an alternative is implemented and its performance measured. This final step is very important as it lays the groundwork for the future development of more comprehensive, effective planning scenarios.

##### Phase I - Collection and Analysis

- 1) Identify Problems
- 2) Determine Objectives
- 3) Inventory Resources
- 4) Analyze Resource Data

<sup>1</sup> To Whom It May Concern, Midwest Region Whole-Farm Planning Workshop, presentation by Chief Paul W. Johnson, November 1995.

<sup>2</sup> The Planning Process, Part 600.11, 180-vi-NPPH, revision 1, January 1996.

## Phase II - Decision Support

- 1) Formulate Alternatives
- 2) Evaluate Alternatives
- 3) Make Decisions

## Phase III - Application and Evaluation

- 1) Implement Plan
- 2) Evaluate Plan

### THE CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM<sup>3</sup>

These steps should lead to the development of a Conservation Management System (CMS) which combines management and conservation practices that, when installed, will achieve a *specified level of treatment* for all resources. The two basic levels of CMS are: *Resource Management System (RMS)* and *Acceptable Management System (AMS)*.

1. RMS is a combination of "management and conservation practices that, when installed, will *prevent degradation and permit sustained use of the natural resources* (soil, water, air, plants, and animals) by meeting specific quality criteria."
2. AMS is a combination of "management and conservation practices that *meet specific quality criteria* for the natural resources that are *feasible within the economic and social constraints* identified for a *specific geographic area*."

### HUMAN CONSIDERATIONS<sup>4</sup>

The basic key to the development of an RMS/AMS is an understanding of how and why people act the way they do in various situations. This key can be identified through consideration of the human elements of economic, social and cultural considerations. These elements need to be taken into account as early as possible in the planning process. Without an understanding of these key elements, an RMS/AMS will be developed, considered and implemented with less of a chance to sustain and enhance the physical and human considerations affecting the decisionmakers environment.

Economic considerations are closely linked to individual and/or group goals. While farmers do think about preserving and increasing income, minimizing costs and reducing risk and uncertainty, maximum money profit is not all a farmer considers. For example, a farmer may loathe taking a chance on increasing net returns if he feels "too much debt doubles the weight on your horse and puts another in control of the reins."<sup>5</sup> These values cannot be priced in a market environment but do figure significantly in any decision making.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. #2.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. #2.

<sup>5</sup> Don't Squat With Yer Spurs On!, November 26, 1996.

Social considerations relate mainly to family, religious and societal values. These values are what makes the farmer tick. These values, not always obvious or easily understood, are what determines how and why a farmer makes decisions made affecting the farm.

Cultural considerations relate to the absence/presence of "the traces of all of the past activities and accomplishments of people."<sup>6</sup> These traces may be tangible or intangible and can stop or enhance federal assistance.

### SUMMARY

The guiding principle of planning is to *help* in decisionmaking. Physical and human considerations, combined with alternative conservation measures, offer an endless variety of possibilities which can make decisionmaking impossible. However, planning affords a method of arrangement which can include at least positive, negative, or neutral value judgments to be made. Planning allows the most crucial key in most activities to be used to best advantage - common sense.

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