



## **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Michigan NRCS Environmental Team**

### **Applicable Laws and Environmental Team Members**

The NRCS mission is to provide leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, improve, and sustain our natural resources and environment. Every NRCS employee is responsible for supporting this mission, including the environmental component. As a federal agency, there are numerous federal, state and local requirements impacting the delivery of NRCS technical and financial assistance, such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the Clean Water Act, the Executive Order on Environmental Justice, and other similar federal, state, tribal and local mandates. While NRCS employees are not necessarily experts in each of these laws and other mandates, they are to be aware of applicable requirements and know where to obtain relevant information so that necessary factors are considered and actions are taken in a timely manner.

Some environmental requirements, such as NEPA, must be carried out by NRCS. However, other requirements, such as certain Clean Water Act permit requirements, are applicable to the NRCS client. In such cases, NRCS must ensure it does not assist clients to violate environmental requirements and may have to condition financial assistance on issuance of a permit by another agency.

NRCS is not in a regulatory role and is not responsible for enforcing environmental laws or regulations. However, NRCS can and should provide technical and financial assistance so its clients can proactively identify potential environmental issues and avoid violating requirements. Each state has appointed an Environmental Liaison who is in an excellent position to identify data, tools and information needed by field personnel to help NRCS clients address their natural resource concerns in a way that also achieves social and economic goals. NRCS Environmental Liaisons are also in a position to identify emerging environmental issues and to ensure that National Headquarters staff is aware of issues that are particularly controversial or have significance beyond state boundaries.

NRCS in Michigan has selected an Environmental Team to assist NRCS field employees. A directory of the Environmental Team is attached. It includes each member's name, address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. This directory is provided so NRCS can more easily access information concerning environmental activities.



## **National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)**

The overarching national environmental policy is set out in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). In NEPA, Congress stated that the Federal Government's continuing policy is to create and maintain conditions under which people and nature can exist in productive harmony and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans. According to NEPA, the Federal Government shall:

- fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
- assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
- attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
- preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
- achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
- enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources. (NEPA, Section 101)

NEPA contemplates integration with planning and other environmental review requirements, such as ESA, NHPA, and Clean Water Act permit requirements.

## **NRCS NEPA Policy**

NRCS has integrated the "spirit" of NEPA into its mission and vision. Each of the goals set out in Section 101 of NEPA is also part of NRCS' vision for "Harmony between People and the Land" and NRCS' mission to partner to help conserve, improve and sustain natural resources and the environment. Because of the NRCS mission, the mandates of NEPA, and the parallels between the two, NRCS will make no program or resource decision without considering the affect of that decision on the environment. NEPA and other environmental laws and regulations require developing or referencing certain documentation and undertaking certain consultations. NRCS will make no program or resource decision without first fulfilling these obligations.

This raises the role of the Environmental Liaison and the Environmental Team to one of critical importance. Among other things, these individuals are charged to "integrate the requirements of NEPA with other planning and environmental review procedures required by law or by agency practice so that all such procedures run concurrently rather than consecutively." 40 CFR 1500.2(c). In addition to being mandated by law, NEPA is a common-sense framework that is easily integrated into the NRCS planning process. Complying with NEPA also ensures NRCS has properly coordinated its actions with other interested individuals and organizations and fully considered relevant public opinion and the



best available scientific information concerning the affect of its proposed actions on the use of local natural resources. It is, therefore, NRCS environmental policy to fully integrate NEPA and other environmental requirements into the NRCS planning procedures.

## **Environmental Liaison and Team Members**

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