

CLASSIFICATION OF CONSERVATION PRACTICE EFFECTS ON CULTURAL RESOURCES IN MISSISSIPPI

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and 36 CFR 800 require that NRCS take into account the effects of its undertakings on historic properties.

The term **undertaking** is defined in 36CFR800.16(y) as:

“...a project, activity, or program funded in whole or in part under the direct or indirect jurisdiction of a Federal agency, including those carried out by or on behalf of a Federal agency; those carried out with Federal financial assistance; and those requiring a Federal permit, license or approval.”

Historic properties are cultural resources (sites, objects, buildings, structures) that qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

In order to identify which NRCS actions will qualify as undertakings for the purposes of determining their potential effects on cultural resources, Mississippi conservation practices have been classified as Undertakings (U), Exempt (E), or Exempt-Review (E-R) – *Table 1*. The criteria for classification are the potential for the practice to affect significant cultural resources. A conservation or management system involving more than one type of practice covering the same geographic area is an undertaking if any practice within that area is classified as an Undertaking.

Mississippi conservation practices are identified in the NRCS Mississippi Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/index.html>. Classifications are based on General Manual 420 part 401.40 through 420 part 401.42 and the practice descriptions found in Section IV National Practice Standards and Mississippi Practice Specifications of the FOTG.

Some practices are listed in Table 1 twice because they may be carried out using different methods. For example, *Forest Site Preparation* (490) may be accomplished through the use of chemical (Exempt) or mechanical (Undertaking) methods. Follow the procedures for the methods appropriate to the planned practice.

Undertakings (U): Conservation practices that have the potential to affect cultural resources when installed according to standard NRCS criteria are considered undertakings. Normally, any heavy equipment use, ground disturbance, land clearing, or new construction is included in this category. The effects can be immediate (an effect caused by the installation process) or distant (an effect that can reasonably be expected to occur as a result of installation), and direct (an effect that impacts the resource) or indirect (an effect that causes a visual impact on an historic district). Practices that are classified as undertakings require a cultural resources review and evaluation to determine if historic properties are located within or near the Area of Potential Effect (APE).

Exempt (E): Conservation practices that do not affect cultural resources are considered exempt. These practices are generally management related, do not have any physical effects, and do not alter cultural resources. For practices that are classified as Exempt, a statement should be included on the MSEE-CPA-52 form in the Comments field to document that cultural resources were considered and the practice determined to be exempt from further review.

Exempt-Review (E-R): Conservation practices that can alter land use or ground cover conditions at cultural resources locations, but the effects are considered minor or beneficial are classified as exempt-review. Exempt-Review practices should be documented on the MSEE-CPA-52 form and, if know cultural resources are present within or near the APE, forwarded to the CRS/CRC for a Mississippi State Site Files Review.