

SUMMARY OF CULTURAL RESOURCES PROCEDURE

General Overview

NRCS policy and procedure regarding the protection of cultural resources and the consideration of the potential effects NRCS undertakings may have on them can be found in the NRCS General Manual 420, Part 401:

http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/GM/GM_420_401.htm

This part of this section is intended to be a very cursory summary.

All actions by NRCS that may affect cultural resources are considered undertakings. NRCS has classified the conservation practices listed in Section IV of this FOTG as reviewable or not reviewable depending on their likelihood to affect cultural resources, whether archeological, historical, or cultural in nature. A flow chart of the overall cultural resources review process accompanies this part of Section II. The flow chart is intended to convey key process points, decision points, and documentation requirements for successful reviews.

Undertakings that are not conservation practices (e.g. leases, soil survey characterization pits) are addressed in NRCS GM 420, Part 401, these often require cultural resources review, and that reference must be consulted. These types of actions would require a NE-CPA-52 for planning purposes and would include the required "Cultural Resources Evaluation Procedure Guide Sheet" attached.

There are five general essential steps in considering cultural resources in conservation planning.

- a. **Determine the nature of the assistance.** Determine if the practice is listed in Section IV as a reviewable or not reviewable practice. Note that new practices or those needing revised specifications should be reviewed to determine if they might affect cultural resources.

This most important fundamental step is carried out by the field office, and it corresponds to step 1 in the accompanying flow chart.

- b. **Identify cultural resources in the assistance area.** This should be carried out by NRCS employees who have completed the basic cultural resources training, at a minimum (modules 1-8). Others who can help are the Field Office Cultural Resources Coordinator (FOCRC), and the Cultural Resources Specialist (CRS). Identification, to be effective, should always be done in the early stages of planning. Always check the field office cultural resources map first. This indicates if there are any known cultural resources (particularly archeological sites) in the area. The map shows only known sites; it in no

way obviates the necessity of looking on the ground to identify unknown resources. This process corresponds to steps 2 through 10 in the accompanying flowchart and may be carried out by the field office, the FOCRC, or the CRS.

- c. ***Avoid adverse effects on cultural resources.*** If resources are identified the preferred course of action is to avoid the resource. Defining the extent of the resource, in order to determine if it is avoided, is often problematic. The CRS is to be consulted about avoiding such resources. This step often occurs prior to assessing the significance of a cultural resource due to time and cost factors. Avoidance is documented with the CRS, and occurs at the culmination of the identification steps.
- d. ***Determine significance if avoidance is not feasible.*** The CRS must be directly involved in evaluating the significance or importance of any cultural resources identified. This occurs in steps 10 through 15 of the accompanying flow chart, and increasingly involves the CRS and external parties, such as the SHPO and (or) Tribal government.
- e. ***Develop measures to mitigate adverse effects.*** If it is not possible to avoid a significant cultural resource, mitigation is normally proposed. This likely will include additional investigation. Decisions regarding mitigation always involve the landowner, cooperators, SHPO, CRS and other at the NRCS State Office, the SHPO and affected Tribal governments.

These steps should be documented at a minimum at the field office level on the NE-CPA-52 "Cultural Resources Evaluation Procedure Guide Sheet". Other documentation may be required including a technical report completed by the CRS.