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## Part 409 - Conservation Planning Policy

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#### NE409.9 Minimum Criteria to Achieve an NRCS Certified Conservation Planner Designation

- A. NRCS employees and partner employees who are required to complete conservation planning certification are as follows:
- (1) Nebraska NRCS employees (GS-9 and above) or partner employees that have conservation planning and application assistance as a primary duty of their job (i.e., Resource Conservationists, Range Conservationists, Soil Conservationists) are required to:
    - (i) Complete Level II requirements.
    - (ii) Maintain their Level II Planner status.
  - (2) Other employees who provide conservation planning and application assistance but do not have conservation planning assistance as a primary duty must be certified at a Level 1 or higher (including part-time positions).
  - (3) Only NRCS employees and partner employees who obtain and maintain certification and JAA will be authorized to sign NRCS planning documents for USDA programs. If the required certification level is not maintained or is removed, individuals will need to re-quality as stated below for planner status.
- B. General Requirements for Conservation Planning Certification for All Planning Levels.
- (1) The employee understands the three-phase, nine-step planning process and has effectively demonstrated this with clients in completing the planning process, following policy and procedures established in the Field Office Technical Guide and the National Planning Procedures Handbook
  - (2) The employee successfully completed NEDC Conservation Planning Modules 1-5 and 6-8 or its equivalent.
  - (3) Employees who have at least 10 years of experience in conservation planning are considered to have the equivalent of NEDC Conservation Planning Modules 6-8, and are not required to complete this week long course.
  - (4) The certified conservation planner must have inventory and evaluation job approval authority at the appropriate level for the practices included in the conservation plan being reviewed. If the planner does not have JAA that gives them appropriate responsibility limits for inventory and evaluation a planner who does will need to sign the plan.
  - (5) Resource Management System (RMS) plans submitted for certification and recertification review must meet NRCS national and State policy.
  - (6) Plans submitted for review must be less than two years old.
  - (7) The following NRCS land uses are considered separate land uses for determining the level of conservation planning certification:
    - (i) Cropland - Dryland
    - (ii) Cropland - Irrigated
    - (iii) Forest
    - (iv) Grazed Forest
    - (v) Grazed Range
    - (vi) Hay
    - (vii) Headquarters
    - (viii) Mined
    - (ix) Native or Naturalized Pasture
    - (x) Natural Area
    - (xi) Pasture
    - (xii) Recreation
    - (xiii) Urban
    - (xiv) Water
    - (xv) Watershed Protection

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(xvi) Wildlife

- (8) Complete a field review of a RMS plan with client and designated state specialist.
- (9) Planner level status will be made upon completion of the general status will be made upon completion of the general requirements, requirements for the certification level, and submittal of completed copy of.
  - (i) NE-CPA-90, "Agronomic/Vegetative Practice Job Approval Authority (JAA),"
  - (ii) NE-CPA-91, "Conservation Plan Review Form,"
  - (iii) NE-CPA-92, "Conservation Planner Certification,"

C. Requirements for the four Planner Certification Levels:

- (1) Level 1 Journeyman Planner Status -
  - (i) A RMS conservation plan with at least one (1) land use covered by the plan.
  - (ii) Not Applicable to GS-454, GS-457, GS-458, GS-471, and GS-486 Series, but is applicable to all other Series.
- (2) Level I Planner Status -

A RMS conservation plan with a minimum of two (2) land uses covered by the plan.
- (3) Level II Planner Status-
  - (i) A RMS conservation plan with a minimum of three (3) land uses; or one complex conservation plan with two (2) land uses, (i.e., demonstrate capability to work with complex plan planning situations, such as, soil quality, grazing systems, intensive use of computer models, etc.).
  - (ii) Demonstrated knowledge of natural resource conservation and related sciences including agronomy, forestry, range, hydrology, biology, and engineering.
- (4) Level III Professional Planner Status -
  - (i) A RMS conservation plan with at least four (4) land uses; or one complex conservation plan with three (3) land use (i.e., demonstrate capability to work with complex planning situations, such as, soil quality, grazing systems, intensive use of computer models, etc.).
  - (ii) The employee has demonstrated the ability to train and mentor others in the p1anning process.

D. NRCS Recertification Requirements:

- (1) Each certified conservation planner's designation will be reviewed at least once every three years by the State Conservationist designee. Designees are:
  - (i) Certified Planners at equivalent or higher planner level of planning certification.
  - (ii) State Specialist.
- (2) The process used for plan recertification wil1 use the same forms as used for the initial planning certification; however, verification in the field with the client is optional. District Conservationist (DC) informs the State Resource Conservationist (SRC) when employee is recertified and at what level and provides a properly completed copy of NE-CPA-90 "Agronomic/Vegetative Practice Job Approval Authority (JAA)" and NE-CPA-91 "Conservation Plan Review Form," and NE-CPA-92 "Conservation Planner Certification."
  - (i) OPTION 1. A certified conservation planner will keep his existing level of Conservation Planner [i.e., Level I (Journeyman or Planner), Level II and Level III (Professional Planner)] status as long as the following two items are completed:
    - Completion of Continuing education credits (which would enhance knowledge conservation planning or conservation practices) Continuing Education requirements:
      - Six continuing education credits will be earned at least once every three years. In general a full day training workshop would be two credits, a half day or less workshop, training, or net meeting would be one credit.
      - The number of continuing education credits will be assigned by the Instructor of the training.
      - NRCS certified conservation planners are responsible for maintaining their own records of training completed and providing the information to NRCS to document as meeting the minimum certification requirements over the past three years.
    - Completion of any RMS conservation plan which is reviewed by the STC designee to determine the conservation plans meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in the NPPH.

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(ii) OPTION 2. Completion of a RMS plan encompassing the minimum land uses for the required Planner certification level which is reviewed by the STC designee to determine that the conservation plans meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in the NPPH.

NE409.10 Technical Approval Authorities for Wetland Conservation Provisions

A. Wetland Compliance Job Approval Authority (JAA) must be maintained for NFSAM Wetland Determinations, Functional Assessments and Mitigation planning. Each employee's JAA status will be maintained by the Nebraska State Office on the shared drive located at O:\FO\_Outgoing\Wetlands. This policy sets forth NRCS procedures for establishing Job Approval Authority for wetland conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended and for compliance with Executive Order 11990 Protection of Wetlands as outlined in General Manual Title 190 Part 410.26. Wetlands JAA requirements for NRCS, Technical Service Providers (TSPs), or partner employees completing these tasks for NRCS are broken into the three categories as follows:

(1) NFSAM Wetland Determinations:

- (i) Complete Corps of Engineers Regulatory IV training, OR NEDC training "Wetland Identification & Delineation for NRCS."
- (ii) Attend Nebraska NRCS wetland regulation and delineation training and attend at least one refresher course once every five years.
- (iii) Complete at least one wetland determination every five years.

(2) Functional Assessments:

- (i) Attend Nebraska NRCS wetland functional assessment/mitigation workshop and attend at least one refresher course once every five years.
- (ii) Submit initial functional assessment to the Nebraska State Office Wildlife Biologist for review/approval.
  - Submitted packet must include NE~CPA-FSA-9.
  - Submitted packet must include NE-CPA-FSA-10.

(iii) Complete at least one functional assessment every five years thereafter.

C. Mitigation Planning

- (i) Complete all requirements list under (2) Functional Assessments above.
- (ii) Submit initial mitigation plan to Nebraska State Office Wildlife Biologist for review/approval.
- (iii) Complete at least one mitigation plan every five years thereafter.

NE409.11 Technical Service Providers of Conservation Planning Assistance

Technical Service Providers must meet the same requirements as Nebraska NRCS employees for Certified Conservation Planners, CNMP Certified Specialists, Nutrient Management Planning Specialists or Pest Management Planning Specialists.

NE409.12 Minimum Criteria for NRCS Certified Nutrient Management Planning Specialist

A. NRCS Nutrient Management Specialist Certification Requirements:

(1) An NRCS Certified Nutrient Management Specialist candidate must be currently approved as a certified conservation planner in Nebraska and have an up-to-date Employee Development Plan (EDP) that includes the following minimum criteria:

- (i) Completion of the NEDC course "Introduction to Water Quality."
- (ii) Completion of the Nutrient Management portion of NEDC course "Nutrient and Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Planning."
- (iii) Demonstrated skill in developing the nutrient management component of a conservation plan based on the Nutrient Management (Code 590) conservation practice standard, and the ability to plan and implement the common conservation practices associated with nutrient management planning in the employee's work location at a proficiency level of "4 – Apply Independently."
- (iv) Knowledge of NRCS Field Office Technical Guide standards and specifications for conservation practices associated with nutrient management planning important within Nebraska and as identified by the Resource Conservation staff.
- (v) Skill in applying the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation and the Wind Erosion Equation at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply Independently" for common site conditions in the employee's work location.

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- (vi) An understanding of the production systems (cropping and livestock) where nutrient management will be applied
  - (vii) An understanding of the NRCS policy and other applicable requirements for nutrient management; and ability to recommend conservation practices or management techniques, which may improve nutrient management plans and reduce the potential for off-site transport of nutrients.
  - (viii) An awareness of the content of NRCS nutrient management policy.
  - (ix) Demonstrated skill in using the Phosphorus Index, and/or other appropriate nutrient management environmental risk screening tools, including the Leaching Index, and any other locally important tools at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply Independently" for common site conditions in the employee's work location.
  - (x) Knowledge of federal, state, tribal, and local laws and regulations, especially those related to nutrient management at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply Independently."
- (2) Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the minimum criteria in A. above have been met. Supervisor concurrence is required for the candidate to become certified as a Nutrient Management specialist.
- (3) Candidates must complete at least three conservation plans with nutrient management practices. One plan must be field reviewed by a Conservation Planning Certification Review Team member or a level 2 or higher Certified Conservation Planner. If the candidate has completed a conservation plan certification within the last year, they may use the same plan for this purpose as long as the plan included nutrient management (this may be the same plan used for pest management certification).
- (4) NRCS certified Nutrient Management Specialists are responsible for keeping their own employee/individual development plans updated. Training to maintain and update conservation planning skills must, at a minimum, occur annually. The State Conservationist may require the completion of specific training in order to maintain and update planning skills. In this case, all certified nutrient management specialists will be notified that attendance at specific training events is mandatory.
- (5) The State Conservationist will make the final determination regarding action taken when a Certified Nutrient Management Specialists does not achieve a successful review during a regularly scheduled Technical Quality Assurance review. A successful review is one in which the planner is found to have followed all applicable NRCS policy and procedure for nutrient management planning.

B. NRCS Nutrient Management Specialist Recertification Requirements:

- (1) Must recertify every three years.
- (2) The process used for Nutrient Management Planning Specialist must be a certified conservation planner in Nebraska (NE-CPA-92) and have an up-to-date Agronomic/Vegetative Job Approval Authority (NE-CPA-90). One of the following two options may be used:
  - (i) OPTION 1. Completion of Continuing education credits and current Conservation Planning Certification.
    - Continuing Education credit requirements:
      - Six continuing education credits (which would enhance knowledge conservation planning or conservation practices with at least two credits related to nutrient management) will be named every three years. In general a full day training/workshop would be two credits, a half day or less workshop, training, or net meeting would be one credit. Nutrient credits earned for CNMP can also be used for nutrient management.
      - The number of continuing education credits will be assigned by the Instructor of the training.
      - NRCS certified Nutrient Management Planning Specialist are responsible for maintaining their own records of training completed and providing the information to NRCS to document as meeting the minimum certification requirements over the past three years.
    - Current Conservation Planning Certification
  - (ii) OPTION 2. Completion of a RMS plan that includes nutrient management (Code 590) conservation practice standard encompassing the minimum land uses for the required Planner certification level will be reviewed to determine that the conservation plans meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in the NPPH

NE409.13 Minimum Criteria for NRCS Certified Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) Planning Specialist

A. NRCS CNMP Planning Specialist Certification Requirements:

- (1) An NRCS CNMP certified specialist candidate must be currently approved as a certified conservation planner in Nebraska and have an up-to-date Employee Development Plan (EDP) that includes the following minimum criteria:
  - (i) Completion of all criteria for a certified Nutrient Management Specialist.

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(ii) Completion of the USDA-NRCS NEDC course "Agricultural Waste Management Systems I - A Primer."

(iii) Completion of the USDA-NRCS NEDC course "Agricultural Waste Management Systems II."

(iv) Skill in applying specific elements of a CNMP, including:

- Manure and Wastewater Handling, Storage and Transfer - Demonstrated skill and proficiency to effectively plan and apply the conservation components and activities associated with the production facility, feedlot, manure and wastewater storage and treatment structures and areas, and any areas or mechanisms used to facilitate transfer of manure and wastewater. The following are required:
- Working knowledge of the information contained in the NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems Level 2 Course.
- Knowledge adequate to plan and implement conservation practices typically used to address this element of a CNMP at a proficiency level of "4 – Apply Independently." Proficiency in engineering practices will be demonstrated by attaining Inventory & Evaluation Job Approval Authority for each of the identified common conservation practices.
- Nutrient Management - Demonstrated skill and proficiency to effectively plan and apply the conservation components and activities associated with the requirements for land application of all nutrients and organic by-products (e.g., animal manure, wastewater; commercial fertilizers, crop residues, legume credits, irrigation water, etc.) that must be evaluated and documented for each Conservation Management Unit. The following knowledge, skills, and abilities are required:
- Working knowledge of the information contained in the NRCS Introduction to Water Quality Course.
- Working knowledge of the information in the NRCS Nutrient and Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Planning Course, as it pertains to nutrient management.
- Demonstrated skill in using the Phosphorus Index and/or other appropriate nutrient management environmental risk screening tools, including the Leaching Index.
- Skill in developing a plan to address nutrient management in compliance with the Nutrient Management (Code 590), Waste Management (code 633), and as appropriate, the Irrigation Water Management (Code 449) conservation practice standards.
- Land Treatment Practices - Demonstrated skill and proficiency to effectively plan and apply the conservation components and activities associated with the land on which manure and wastewater from an animal feeding operations will be applied. The following knowledge and skills are required:
- Knowledge of the NRCS conservation planning process, as described in the National Planning Procedure Handbook (NPPH), consisting of nine steps divided into three phases.
- Skill in applying soil loss and/or wind erosion prediction tools, as appropriate.
- Knowledge adequate to design and implement conservation practices common to the geographic area at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply Independently." Proficiency in engineering practices will be demonstrated by attaining Inventory & Evaluation Job Approval Authority for each of the identified common conservation practices.

(v) Knowledge of federal, state, tribal, and local laws and regulations related to manure, fertilizer, and waste water at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply independently."

(2) Candidates must complete at least one conservation plan that includes appropriate practices (land treatment on application sites, nutrient management, waste storage and transfer, and recordkeeping) for a CNMP. The plan must be field reviewed by a Conservation Planning Certification Team member or a level 2 or higher Certified Conservation Planner with experience in CNMP planning. If candidates have completed a conservation plan certification within the past year, they may use the same plan for this purpose as long as the plan contains minimum CNMP elements.

(3) Certified CNMP Specialists are responsible for keeping their own employee development plans updated. Training to maintain and: update conservation planning skills must, at a minimum, occur annually. The State Conservationist may require the completion of specific training in order to maintain and update planning skills. In this case, all certified nutrient management specialists will be notified that attendance at specific training events is mandatory.

(4) The State Conservationist will make the final determination regarding action taken when a Certified Pest Management Specialist does not achieve a successful review during a regularly scheduled Technical Quality Assurance review. A successful review is one in which the planner is found to have followed all applicable NRCS policy and procedures for comprehensive nutrient management planning.

B. NRCS CNMP Planning Specialist Recertification Requirements:

(1) Must recertify every three years.

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- (2) The process used for CNMP Planning Specialist must be a certified conservation planner in Nebraska (NE-CPA-92) and have an up-to-date Agronomic/Vegetative Job Approval Authority (NE-CPA-90). One of the following two options may be used:
- (i) OPTION 1. Completion of Continuing education credits and current Conservation Planning Certification.
    - Continuing Education credit requirements:
    - Six continuing education credits (which would enhance knowledge conservation planning or conservation practices with at least two credits related- to CNMP) will be earned every three years. In general a full day training/workshop would be two credits, a half day or less workshop, training, or net meeting would be one credit. The same credits for nutrient management can also be used for CNMP credits.
    - The number of continuing education credits will be assigned by the Instructor of the training.
    - NRCS certified CNMP Planning Specialist are responsible for maintaining their own records of training completed and providing the information to NRCS to document as meeting the minimum certification requirements.
    - Current Conservation Planning Certification
  - (ii) Option 2. Completion of a RMS conservation plan that includes required CNMP elements (land treatment on application sites, nutrient management, waste storage and transfer, and record keeping) encompassing the minimum land uses for the required Planner certification level will be reviewed to determine that the conservation plans meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in the NPPH. Technical Service Providers must meet the same requirements as Nebraska NRCS employees for Certified Conservation Planners, CNMP Certified Specialists, Nutrient Management Planning Specialists or Pest Management Planning Specialists.

NE409.14 Minimum Criteria for NRCS Certified Pest Management Specialist

A. NRCS Pest Management Specialist Certification Requirements:

- (1) An NRCS certified Pest Management Specialist candidate must be currently approved as a certified conservation planner in Nebraska and have an up-to-date Employee Development Plan (EDP) that includes the following minimum criteria:
- (i) Completion of the USDA-NRCS NEDC course "Introduction to Water Quality" or equivalent.
  - (ii) Completion of the Pest Management portion of USDA-NRCS NEDC course "Nutrient and Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Planning."
  - (iii) Demonstrated skill in developing the pest management component of a conservation plan based on the state Pest Management (Code 595) conservation practice standard, and the ability to plan and implement the common conservation practices associated with pest management planning in the employee's work location at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply independently."
  - (iv) Knowledge of NRCS Field Office Technical Guide standards and specifications for conservation practices associated with pest management planning and identified as important in Nebraska by the Resource Conservation staff.
  - (v) Skill in applying the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation and the Wind Erosion Equation at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply Independently" for common site conditions in the employee's work location.
  - (vi) An understanding of the production systems where pest management will be applied.
  - (vii) An understanding of natural resource concerns related to pest management activities.
  - (viii) An awareness of the content of NRCS pest management policy.
  - (ix) Demonstrated skill in using the Windows Pesticide Screening Tool (WIN-PST) and/or other appropriate pest management environmental risk screening tools, at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply independently" for common site conditions in the employee's work location.
  - (x) Knowledge of federal, state, tribal, and local laws and regulations and especially those related to pesticide use at a proficiency level of "4 - Apply Independently."
- (2) Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the minimum criteria in A. above have been met. Supervisor concurrence is required for the candidate to become certified as a Pest Management Specialist.
- (3) Candidates must complete at least three conservation plans that include pest management practices; at least one plan must include WIN-PST analysis. One plan must be field reviewed by a Conservation Planning Certification Team member or a level 2 or higher Certified Conservation Planner. If candidates have completed a conservation plan certification within the past year, they may use the same plan for this purpose as long as the plan includes pest management (this may be the same plan used for nutrient management certification).
- (4) NRCS certified Pest Management Specialists are responsible for keeping their own employee development plans updated. Training to maintain and update conservation planning skills must, at a minimum, occur annually. The State

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Conservationist may require the completion of specific training in order to maintain and update planning skills. In this case, all certified pest management specialists will be notified that attendance at specific training events is mandatory.

(5) The State Conservationist will make the final determination regarding action taken when a Certified Pest Management Specialist does not achieve a successful review during a regularly scheduled Technical Quality Assurance review. A successful review is one in which the planner is found to have followed all applicable NRCS policy and procedures for comprehensive nutrient management planning.

B. NRCS Pest Management Specialist Recertification Requirements

(1) Must recertify every three years.

(2) The process used for Pest Management Specialist must be a certified conservation planner in Nebraska (NE-CPA-92) and have an up-to-date Agronomic/Vegetative Job Approval Authority (NE-CPA-90). One of the following 2 options may be used:

(i) OPTION 1. Completion of continuing education credits and current Conservation Planning Certification that included pest management (Code 595) conservation practice standard and a WIN-PST analysis.

- Continuing Education Requirements:
- Six continuing education credits (which would enhance knowledge conservation planning or conservation practices with at least two credits related to pest management will be earned every three years. In general a full day training/workshop would be two credits, a half day or less workshop, training, or net meeting would be one credit.
- The number of continuing education credits will be assigned by the Instructor of the training.
- NRCS certified Pest Management Specialists are responsible for information to NRCS to document as meeting the minimum certification requirements.
- Current Conservation Planning Certification.

(ii) OPTION 2. Completion of a RMS conservation plan that includes pest management (595) conservation practice standard and a WIN-PST analysis encompassing the minimum land uses for the required Planner certification level will be reviewed to determine that the conservation plan meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in the NPPH. Technical Service Providers must meet the same requirements as Nebraska NRCS employees for Certified Conservation Planners, CNMP Certified Specialists, Nutrient Management Planning Specialists or Pest Management Planning Specialists.

NE409.15 Prescribed Burn Policy

NRCS personnel must be adequately trained and receive certification and job approval authority to provide assistance to clients regarding the conservation practice, Prescribed Burning (338) during the planning process. Prescribed Burning Job Approval Authority will be assigned to personnel by the State Rangeland Management Specialist. Nebraska Prescribed Burn Policy supports the NRCS Policy on Prescribed Burning on Grazing Lands, GM Part 413 and Appendix A of the National Range and Pasture Handbook. [http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/references/public/NE/NRPH\\_NE\\_Appendix\\_A\\_Prescribed\\_Burn\\_Policy.pdf](http://efotg.nrcs.usda.gov/references/public/NE/NRPH_NE_Appendix_A_Prescribed_Burn_Policy.pdf).