

# Section III

## Resource Quality Criteria

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### INTRODUCTION TO QUALITY CRITERIA

Quality criteria establish the minimum treatment level necessary to adequately address the natural resource considerations that are identified during the planning process for the development of a Resource Management System (RMS). Resource concerns are listed in Table 1 for each resource (Soil, Water, Air, Plants and Animals).

Not all resource concerns have quality criteria that can be quantified or have assessment tools that can measure changes in the resource. Table 1 "Quality Criteria", identifies the resource concerns where quality criteria can be quantified and an assessment tool is available to measure changes in the resource. This table lists minimum treatment criteria for natural resource planning at the RMS level.

All resource concerns including those without established quality criteria are listed on the Field Inventory Guide Sheet which is found within NE-CPA-52 "Environmental Evaluation". This checklist provides planners with a comprehensive list of potential planning concerns. NE Conservation Planning Form NE-CPA-52 "Environmental Evaluation for Conservation Planning" will be used to document whether or not the conservation plan meets the established quality criteria requirements for the identified resource concerns. At least one of the planned alternatives must meet the established quality criteria for all identified resource concerns. To determine if a given conservation practice meets the

quality criteria for a given resource concern, refer to the Conservation Practice Physical Effects Worksheet for that practice located in Section V of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). Resource concerns are listed in the first column and practice effects are listed in the second column. Resource concerns that do not have established quality criteria and others that are not listed in Table 1 **still need to be addressed** if they have been identified as a resource concern in step 1 of the planning process.

### DEFINITIONS

#### NRCS Policy

NRCS policy on Resource Management System Quality Criteria and Guidance Documents can be found in Part 401 Technical Guides Title 450 of the General manual.

#### Benchmark Condition

The present condition or situation used as a point of reference to measure change in resource conditions resulting from conservation treatment.

#### Common Resource Areas

A geographical area where resource concerns, problems, and treatment needs are similar. Landscape conditions, soil, climate, human considerations, and other natural resource information are used to determine the geographical boundaries of the common resource area.

#### Conservation Management System

A combination of conservation practices and resource management that achieve a specific level of treatment of soil, water, air, plant, and/or animal resource concerns.

## Section III

### Planning Resource Management Systems

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#### **Conservation Plan**

A record of the client's decisions and supporting information, for treatment of a unit of land or water as a result of the planning process that meets the FOTG quality criteria for each natural resource (soil, water, air, plant, and animal), including economic and social considerations. A conservation plan includes decisions that meet the required level of treatment for a specific program or initiative if the client is made aware of alternative treatments, but is not ready to commit to a resource management system level of treatment. The plan describes the schedule of operations and activities needed to solve the identified natural resource concerns and problems.

#### **Conservation Treatment**

Any and all conservation practices, management measures, and works of improvement that have the purpose of alleviating resource concerns, solving or reducing the severity of natural resource use problems or taking advantage of resource opportunities.

#### **Progressive Planning**

A point in the planning process where the client is ready willing and able to make some but not all of the decisions necessary to achieve resource sustainability for soil, water air, plants and animals.

#### **Quality Criteria**

The treatment level required to achieve a resource management system for identified resource concerns for a particular land use.

#### **Resource Management System**

A conservation system that meets or exceeds the quality criteria in the FOTG for resource sustainability for all identified resource concerns for soil, water, air, plants and animals.

#### **Resource Concern**

A subset of a resource consideration that more specifically identifies or narrows the scope of analysis of a resource consideration. Assessment models/tools, direct measurements, observations and concerns identified by clients are utilized to identify concerns. Refer to Table 1 for resource concerns that have quality criteria established and Exhibit 1" in the NPPH for a complete list.

#### **Resource Consideration**

Elements or conditions of the natural resources that may be sensitive to change by natural forces or human activity.

#### **Resource Problem**

A condition related to one or more resource concerns that does not meet the minimum acceptable quality criteria shown in the FOTG, Section III.

#### **Treatment Standards**

Refers to the planned and/or applied conservation measures necessary to achieve quality criteria in the resources of concern. Resource quality criteria provide a "goal", while treatment standards provide the "means" by which to reach that goal. Treatment standards are the basis for RMS and serve as the measure of adequacy for planned treatment.

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### ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALITY CRITERIA

In the establishment of criteria, the following basic rules were followed for consistency and uniformity.

1. Quality Criteria statements reflect a minimally acceptable **CONDITION** of the resource. Quality Criteria are quantifiable and have a tool to provide measurement. All resource concerns that may be addressed during the planning process may not have established quality criteria.
2. Established criteria represent a **MINIMUM** level that is acceptable for a resource or resource concern. Because resource concerns, as written in policy, are problem oriented, criteria in effect state the acceptable level of change in a resource.
3. Quality Criteria are quantifiable. Terms for criteria must state clearly "*when enough is enough*", so that planners know when planned treatment is adequate.
4. Quality Criteria levels must be **ATTAINABLE** with current technology and approved conservation practices.
5. Quality Criteria relate directly to a **RMS PLANNING** level.
6. Quality Criteria of the resource represents a level that **SUSTAINS** the use and productivity of the resource indefinitely. There may be some negative short term effects on the resources to obtain the long term positive effects.

7. Quality Criteria levels should be **USABLE, MEASURABLE, and/or RECOGNIZABLE.**

### APPLICATION OF QUALITY CRITERIA

Quality Criteria establishes the minimum treatment level necessary to adequately address the resource concerns identified during the planning process for the development of a RMS.

The RMS criteria are met when treatment has been planned that, when applied, will resolve all of the identified resource problems (concerns) according to the Quality Criteria. The RMS will be considered applied when all of the conservation practices that make up the system have been installed, implemented or applied according to Practice Standards and Specifications in Section IV of the FOTG.

In some instances, actions by individual decisionmakers cannot solve the resource concerns because it involves more than one decisionmaker. In these instances, group planning, project measures or utilization of several programs may be required to meet the respective Quality Criteria. In cases where the decisionmaker can not solve the problem as an individual, quality criteria will be met when the land under the control of the decisionmaker does not contribute to the problem.

The use and implementation of these criteria will be consistent with federal, state, local laws and regulations.