

Information and Guidance for Evaluating the Economic, Social and Cultural Resource Conditions for Acceptable Management Systems

This guidance enables State Conservationists (STCs) and other Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) employees working with the SCD or other concerned representatives of society to:

- Evaluate the economic, social and cultural conditions in a resource area
- Determine if an Acceptable Management System (AMS) is necessary, and
- Determine the conditions when AMS will apply.

In addition, this guidance may help NRCS employees determine the level of treatment or quality criteria required by an AMS.

Background

NRCS's mission is to protect, restore and improve soil, water and other resources. NRCS accomplishes that mission by providing technical assistance to land users to help them develop and implement a Conservation Management System (CMS). Two types of CMS are considered here. They are: Resource Management Systems (RMS) and Acceptable Management Systems (AMS).

A **Resource Management System** is the combination of conservation practices and management identified by land or water users that, when installed, will prevent degradation and permit sustained use by meeting criteria established in the Field Office Technical Guide

(FOTG) for treatment of soil, water, air, plant and animal resources. Each land user will be offered an RMS option if one can be developed. Where an individual is unable to agree to protect the resources to an RMS level of treatment at the present time, but where they may be able to achieve that level of protection in the future, NRCS will provide assistance to implement conservation treatments that achieve some resolution of the identified resource problems. These treatments are considered a part of "progressive planning" towards an RMS.

An **Acceptable Management System** is a combination of conservation practices and management that meets criteria established in the FOTG by the STC with National Technical Center (NTC) concurrence that is feasible within the social, cultural or economic constraints identified for the resource condition. AMS were designed to help accomplish societal goals yet avoid undue punishment of a group of land users in those instances where the aforementioned social, cultural or economic conditions prevent the feasible achievement of an RMS. AMS are not normally developed to meet the individual needs of a single land user.

AMS information and guidance – The information on the following pages offers guidance on how cultural resources economic and sociological conditions affect the development of an AMS.

Cultural Resources

Resource Management Systems will ordinarily be developed in accordance with the cultural resource policies established in GM 420 Part 401. This guidance is published for use where an otherwise desirable candidate RMS is found that has the potential to cause cultural resources conflict in a resource area. To warrant authorization of an AMS for resolving cultural resources concerns, each of the following assessment characteristics must be present.

- A. Cultural resources must be present within the area of activity. Site definition criteria shall be developed in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SBPO). It is NRCS's policy to avoid any impact on cultural resource sites when possible.
- B. The cultural resources must be significant. Cultural resources are considered significant if they qualify for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places as concurred in by the SHPO. The resource's condition must be evaluated by qualified personnel.
- C. The candidate RMS or AMS will have adverse effects on the cultural resources. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation criteria on adverse effects will be used to make this determination. State laws differ on disturbance and treatment of human remains and special consideration of these remains will be adopted. Special planning criteria must be developed for national historic landmarks if these are present in a planning area.

When the preceding assessment characteristics are met, the following guidelines are used to help select another RMS or develop a replacement AMS:

- A. Select practices that have a neutral or positive effect on the qualities of the cultural resource that make it eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Examples of appropriate considerations are:
 - cultivation should be no deeper than present plowzone
 - displacement or degradation of objects and features is minimized
 - physical disturbance is not greater than present condition
 - surface site stability increased by vegetative or structural practices
- B. Develop criteria for considering economic/social options for mitigating adverse effects. Lessening adverse effects may include:
 - minimizing the degree of effect by such as realignment or relocation of proposed activity
 - rectifying effects by repair, rehabilitation, or restoration of the affected cultural resource
 - reduction of the effect over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action
 - compensation for the effect by moving or documenting the cultural resource, such as conducting data recovery.

Economics

Where concerns have been raised about the economic feasibility of a candidate RMS or AMS, NRCS should evaluate that management system using the following questions:

- A. What is the ability of the affected enterprise to pay for the candidate RMS/AMS?
 - Cost effectiveness – Are there acceptable relationships between the costs of the candidate RMS/AMS and the changes it brings about?
 - Financial condition – Is there the ability to acquire funds to install and maintain the RMS/AMS without destroying the viability of normal farm operations?
 - Markets – Are markets adequate and available for affected farm enterprise products?
- B. Are inputs available to install and maintain a candidate RMS or AMS?
 - Input level – Are there adequate or sufficient management skills, land, labor and equipment present to operate and maintain the RMS or AMS?
- C. Is the candidate RMS or AMS compatible with participation in government programs?
 - Cost sharing – Is cost sharing adequate and available for key practices within the RMS or AMS?
 - Base acreage – Does the RMS or AMS maintain base acreage for USDA programs?
 - Is eligibility for USDA programs maintained?