

Section III-B. Conservation Systems Guides Introduction – Pacific Islands Area

A Conservation System Guide (CSG) is a new type of guidance document. CSG is a term developed to denote information regarding most frequently used conservation systems used within an area for all land uses treated. In Hawaii, CSGs were developed for Common Resource Areas (CRAs). In the Pacific Basin, CSGs were developed for Major Land Resource Areas (MLRAs). Section III of the FOTG includes information about Hawaii CRAs and the Pacific Basin MLRAs.

The information entered in each CSG includes baseline conditions for the CRA or MLRA, Resource Management Systems (RMSs), practices comprising the most frequently encountered systems, the effects of those systems on resource concerns for which they are created, and the allocation in percent of the effect of the system to the practices comprising the system.

CSGs are derived from existing RMS information in the FOTG and are developed on a computer web-based electronic system. The CSGs replace any existing Resource Management System Guidance Documents and any Benchmark System Worksheets and Options Worksheets in Section III of the FOTG. Although the documents have been archived, they will be kept in the FOTG binders and eFOTG for use as a reference.

CSGs are available at the following website addresses:

Employee Access – RMS - All Areas:

<http://ias.sc.egov.usda.gov/auth/CSG/FindGuide.aspx>

Public Access – RMS for All Areas: Electronic Field Office Technical Guide, Section III, B. Guidance Documents – Conservation System Guides:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/index.html>

Example Conservation System Guide

Included in this section is an example CSG printout for a crop commonly grown in the area. The CSG includes:

- A Baseline Description which includes the CRA characteristics such as type of vegetation, topography, climate and soils.
- The identification of the resource concerns which are applicable to the CRA. The resource concerns are divided into measurable resource concerns and non-measurable resource concerns. Resource concerns that do not currently have readily available means of being measures are considered non measurable.
- A listing of the Conservation Systems developed for the CRA. The example CRA includes at least one Resource Management Systems (RMS) which meets or exceeds the quality criteria for resource sustainability for all the identified resource concerns on pineapple cropland in the CRA. All Progressive Systems developed have been inactivated and are no longer available for use.

Example Conservation Systems

Following the CSG printout the RMS developed for it. Each includes:

- A Baseline Description which includes information similar to what is included in the CSG printout such as type of vegetation, topography, climate and soils.
- A System Effects & Impacts section. This section includes the evaluation of the impact of the system on the identified measurable resource concerns.
 - **Threshold Value:** Initial uses of the Threshold Values will include accounting for performance measures that need to compare the field condition to the Threshold Value. This value is set by legal requirements and agency policy. An example is Soil Loss Tolerance or “T” and the performance measure that accounts for the acres that were reduced from above “T” to below “T”. Other potential used include Farm Bill program tools for ranking, eligibility, etc.
 - **Baseline Condition:** This is the general tendency within any specific Common Resource Area for the resource concern. It represents the typical or average values or condition that exists for all identified resource concerns appropriate to the land use.
 - **Benchmark Condition:** The present condition or situation that is used as a point of reference to measure change in resource conditions resulting from conservation treatment. This connotes field-specific conditions as defined in the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH). It the situation that exists on a specific operating unit when the inventory or first planning steps are completed for that operating unit.
 - **System Effect:** The anticipated or experienced results of applying one or more conservation treatments on a planning unit in a particular resource setting. They include both on-site and off-site results of applied conservation treatments. (NPPH 600.6-5)
 - **System Impact:** The difference between the anticipated effects of alternative treatment in comparison to existing or benchmark condition effects. System Impact = Baseline Condition – System Effect (NPPH 600.6-6)
- A listing of practices in the system and the allocation in percent of the effect of the system to each practice.

Further Enhancements of Conservation Systems

Much of the effects and impacts data for each resource concerns and the percent of the effect per practice in the Conservation Systems have not been completed at this time. Beginning Fiscal Year 2005, the NRCS Performance Reporting System (PRS) required a minimum amount of information within each CSG for each land use within each Common Resource Area (CRA). States were to complete the following:

- Develop CSG for each applicable land use in each CRA. This includes urban land, if reporting of plans and practices is expected on urban lands;
- Identify the primary resource concern for each Conservation System;
- Populate the threshold value for Soil Erosion - Sheet and Rill resource concerns for each CSG, as applicable;

- Populate the threshold value for Soil Erosion - Wind resource concerns for each CSG, as applicable;
- Populate the threshold value for Water Quantity - Inefficient water use on irrigated lands resource concerns for each CSG, as applicable;
- Populate the threshold value for Water Quantity - Inefficient water use on nonirrigated lands resource concerns for each CSG, as applicable;

Other resource concern information will likely become mandatory in the future as NRCS continues to negotiate our performance goals with the Office of Management Budget and the Department. Guidance on the list of national performance measures and the computation methodology will be forthcoming.