

## SECTION III - RESOURCE QUALITY CRITERIA

### Quality Criteria

#### Introduction

Quality Criteria (QC) establishes the minimum treatment level necessary to adequately address the resource concerns that are identified during the planning process for development of a Resource Management System (RMS). The RMS criteria are met when treatment has been planned that, when applied, will resolve all of the identified resource problems 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 according to Conservation Practice Standards in Section IV, FOTG.

In some instances, individual decisionmaker action(s) cannot solve an existing conservation problem in accordance with these criteria. In these instances, an opportunity exists for group planning, project measures, or multi-program activities to meet the respective quality criteria. In cases where the decisionmaker cannot solve the problem as an individual, the criteria will be met when the land under the control of the decisionmaker does not adversely contribute to the problem.

The use and implementation of the quality criteria must be consistent with federal, state, tribal, and local laws and regulations.

In those instances where management of water is restricted because of policy and laws, such as those pertaining to wetlands, the criteria will be met if policy and laws are followed.

For an Acceptable Management System (AMS) the appropriate quality criteria must be developed, approved by the State Conservationist, and documented in Section III, FOTG.

#### Purpose

The purpose of "Quality Criteria" is to provide Utah field offices with minimum quality and treatment criteria for soil, water, air, plants, and animal resources as planned for at the RMS level. The State Conservationist is responsible for establishment of the criteria. Field offices may modify the quality criteria, with concurrence from the State Conservationist, only if field office criteria are stricter than the state criteria. The State Conservationist must approve isolated cases, such as described under the Quality Criteria for Water Quantity, Water Management.

The listing of the categories of resources, considerations, and sub-considerations correspond to the column headings found in the "Conservation Practices Physical Effects" (CPPE) matrix located in Section V, FOTG, except where some items have been combined for brevity. They represent all resource considerations described in Field Office Technical Guide Policy, GM-450, Part 401.

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#### Establishment of Quality Criteria

In order to establish quality standards for technical assistance, as it affects the five resources of soil, water, air, plants, and animals, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has adopted policy that provides for defining *Quality Criteria* for these resources. This in turn serves as the *Standard* by which the adequacy of planned treatment and management may be compared. Policy concerning this subject is found in NRCS GM 450, Part 401, Technical Guides.

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

1. For purposes of consistency across state lines, the natural resource concern, description of the concern, and the national quality criteria were established nationally and are not to be changed by states. Natural resource concerns are worded such that they denote a resource concern or problem. Some of the national resource concerns are not considered to be of concern in Utah. Where this is the case, Utah has entered in the state quality criteria column that the concern is not applicable (N/A). The description of the resource concerns are written to “describe” rather than “define” the resource concern.
2. Quality criteria statements reflect a minimally acceptable condition of the resource. Where it was not possible or feasible to state criteria in such a manner, a treatment standard was used in lieu of resource condition. A *treatment standard* describes the results expected from applying conservation practices or lists the conservation practices that will be implemented. A treatment standard will achieve an acceptable, but perhaps not quantifiable, level of condition.

Examples of Quality Criteria:

- a. For Sheet, Rill, and Wind Erosion: Soil loss values for sheet, rill, and wind erosion does not exceed the Soil Loss Tolerance "T".

AND

- b. For Ephemeral Gully Erosion: If ephemeral gully erosion is discernable, vegetative and/or structural practices will be planned to provide control for storm events that are less than a 10-year (24-hour) frequency.

The two example statements above represent how statements were developed. Example a. states a *condition* of the resource in measurable terms. Example b. represents a *treatment standard* in terms of indicators and practices that will achieve an acceptable condition.

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- Established criteria represent a MINIMUM level that is acceptable to NRCS for a resource or resource consideration. Because resource considerations, as written in policy, are problem oriented, criteria in effect state the "acceptable level of degradation" of a resource.

The concept of criteria representing a minimally acceptable level serves several purposes:

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Sets limits of degradation	Indicates no problem
-----Quality Level-----	-----
Indicates problem	Establishes degree of restoration required
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- Where possible QUANTIFIABLE units of measure such as tons/acre, %, mg/l, grams/cubic foot, and ppm, are used. However, it is difficult to assign such values to the resource considerations in all cases as displayed in the effects matrix (CPPE) of Section V, FOTG. In these cases it was more practical to express criteria in such terms as; not discernable, none, stable, detectable, no measurable reduction, presence, absence, etc. Although such terms may not clearly quantify, they express a quality level that can be recognized in the field. Terms for criteria state "when enough is enough" so that conservation planners know when planned treatment is adequate.
- Criteria levels are assumed to be ATTAINABLE with current technology and existing conservation practices and relate directly to an acceptable PLANNING level. Quality criteria represent a level that SUSTAINS the use and productivity of the resource indefinitely. Quality levels are assumed to be USABLE, MEASURABLE, OR RECOGNIZABLE, at field level.
- Assessment tools for quality criteria evaluation are generally, but not always, listed in order of sophistication beginning with visual assessments. Assessment tools may consist of tools such as visual assessment tools, tools used for actual measurement of the condition, indices that help describe a condition, computer models that predict conditions, or manuals and handbooks that are used to evaluate a resource concern. The tools may vary by land use or setting.

### Definitions

Quality Criteria - Refers to the quality level, state, or condition of the resource that NRCS considers being minimally acceptable. All technical assistance provided to resource users will be directed toward achieving the quality criteria established for soil, water, air, plants, and animals. Resource quality criteria provide a means of determining the adequacy of NRCS technical assistance to land users by evaluating the ability of planned Resource Management Systems to achieve quality levels in an acceptable time frame.

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Quality criteria for the five resources, and their considerations, may vary by land use. Quality criteria for a particular resource consideration are the same whether a problem relating to that resource exists or not.

Resources and Considerations - Field Office Technical Guide Policy lists five resources for NRCS to include in all technical assistance efforts. The resources are soil, water, air, plants, and animals. The policy contains specific considerations related to each of the resources for which quality criteria were developed. Both the resources and their respective considerations are addressed individually.

Treatment Standards - Refers to the planned and/or applied conservation measures necessary to achieve Quality Criteria for the resources of concern. Even as resource quality criteria provide a "goal," Treatment Standards provide the "means" by which to reach that goal. Treatment standards are the basis for Resource Management Systems and serve as the measure of adequacy of planned treatment.

### Criteria Guidelines

- When component levels are stated in laws and regulations, quality criteria must meet those levels.
- Any application of agricultural chemicals must comply with manufacturer recommendations and the manufacturer label.

### Application of RMS Criteria

Additional considerations useful in the RMS planning process include economic, social, or cultural resource conditions. The differing economic, social, or cultural resource situations of a decisionmaker will determine the type and degree of treatment attained at any point in time. Where a RMS is not attainable at the present time, the progressive planning process (the incremental process of building a plan consistent with the decisionmaker's ability to plan and implement) may be used to ultimately achieve a RMS. The progression on individual planning units should always be toward the planning and implementation of a RMS.

The following guidelines should be applied to determine the practical limits of resource planning in formulating a RMS for the given economic, social, and cultural conditions:

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#### Human Considerations

These guidelines are designed as a checklist for planners to consider the human aspects in formulating and evaluating a RMS.

##### A. Economics

1. Cost Effectiveness - There is a reasonable relationship between the cost of the system and the changes in resource conditions it brings about.
2. Financial Condition - There is an ability to acquire funds to install and maintain the system over time without destroying the financial viability of normal farm operations.
3. Markets - There are adequate and available markets for affected farm enterprise products.
4. Input Level - There are adequate or sufficient management skills, land, labor, material, and equipment present or obtainable to operate and maintain the system.
5. Base Acreage - Base acreage for USDA programs is adequately maintained.
6. USDA Programs - The system would not preclude a normal degree of participation in USDA programs.
7. Sustainability - There is a reasonable expectation of long-term profitability for the operation as a whole.

##### B. Social Considerations

1. Public Health and Safety - Local community standards regarding public health and safety are followed.
2. Values - Social, family, and religious values and societal goals are considered.
3. Client Characteristics - Client characteristics including age, planning horizon, special emphasis groups, and resources are considered.
4. Risk Tolerance/Aversion - The degree of risk is reasonable compared to the alternative.
5. Tenure - Tenure or time available does not affect the ability to install, manage, or maintain the system.

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#### C. Cultural Considerations

1. Absence or Presence - Absence or presence of cultural resources must be established. The definition of cultural resources is that used by the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO).
2. Qualified cultural resources personnel will determine significance of resources based on the criteria of National Register of Historical Places and other acceptable cultural resources criteria.