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VIRGINIA TECHNICAL GUIDE
NOTICE 450-15-422

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Purpose: To transmit the revised Form NRCS-CPA-52, "Environmental Evaluation Worksheet" dated April 2013 referenced in Title 190, National Environmental Compliance Handbook, Part 610; and National Instruction 190-305. The Resource Concerns and Special Environmental Concerns have been updated in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) to reflect changes to the Environmental Evaluation Worksheet.

Effective Date: October 1, 2013

Filing Instruction: The revised Form NRCS-CPA-52 can be accessed electronically in Section III under "Guidance Documents" in Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) and the Virginia NRCS SharePoint Site. Resource Concern Information Sheets can be found in Section III of the FOTG under "Resource Concerns and Planning Criteria" and the Special Environmental Concerns can be accessed in Section II of the FOTG. The link to the Virginia electronic FOTG can be accessed at: <http://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov>

Background: Form NRCS-CPA-52, "Environmental Evaluation Worksheet," was last revised in June 2010. Since that time, "Energy" has been added as a resource concern, and modifications have been made to restructure other resource concerns to support the streamlined delivery of conservation assistance.

Explanation: The following summarizes the changes incorporated in this version of Form NRCS-CPA-52:

- Drop-down boxes in section F for the resource concerns and existing/benchmark conditions now include the restructured list of resource concerns.
- The term "Quality Criteria" (QC) has been changed to "Planning Criteria" (PC) to be consistent with the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) terminology.
- A separate section has been added for "Energy Resource Concerns."
- Short and long term effects have been removed but should be considered along with the the impacts of an action when documenting the effects of the alternatives.
- Changes to the "Special Environmental Concerns" (SEC) include the following:
 - The new requirements to document SEC benchmark/existing conditions.
 - The addition of links to SEC "Guide Sheets" and new SEC "Fact Sheets" that are found in Section II of the FOTG and located in separate tabs of the form.
 - The drop-down list for each SEC has been changed to include only "No Effect" or "May Effect."
 - Several of the guide sheets have been revised and minor edits were made to others:

- The Threatened and Endangered (T&E) and Cultural Resources Guide Sheets have been revised to reflect NRCS and State policy.
 - New guide sheets were added for “Natural Areas” and “Scenic Beauty.”
 - The “Riparian Area Management” Guide Sheet has been revised to be consistent with policy to allow NRCS to continue providing assistance when adverse effects may result.
- All references and citations have been updated.
 - The Field Inventory Guide Sheet has been updated to reflect new resource concerns.
 - Instructions have been modified regarding changes in the form.

NRCS is required to conduct an Environmental Evaluation (EE) for all planning and financial assistance. The results of the EE are documented on the NRCS-CPA-52, “Environmental Evaluation Worksheet.” NRCS conducts an EE as required by our NEPA implementing regulations, concurrent with the conservation planning process. The NRCS-CPA-52 provides for documenting that part of the planning process, and is designed to assist NRCS with compliance requirements for applicable Federal laws, regulations, Executive Orders, and policy. By conducting an EE, NRCS is able to identify the appropriate level of environmental documentation required:

- (1) Determine that the proposed action is not a “Federal action” as defined by NEPA
- (2) Provide the necessary documentation required for actions that NRCS and USDA have categorically excluded under NEPA
- (3) Provide documentation and verification of existing NRCS programmatic NEPA documents that have adequately analyzed the proposed actions
- (4) Make an inform decision as to whether or not to prepare either an EA or an EIS

Conservation plans are the basis for all assistance NRCS provides to clients and the basic tool for clients to manage their natural resources. Conservation planning is conducted with the client, working progressively towards a Resource Management System (RMS) level of management. The recent revision to the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) removed the reference that at least one alternative must meet RMS quality criteria. This coincides with the National Environmental Compliance Handbook which requires NRCS to describe the Benchmark or Existing Condition, and to describe at least one proposed action or alternative, including the no action alternative.

The SRC monthly webinar on October 16 at 8am will review the revised form and the major changes associated with it.

Contact: If you have any questions, please contact Chad Wentz, State Resource Conservationist at 804-287-1668.



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