

TABLE OF CONTENTS
Template Overview and Instructions

Introduction to Template

Chapter 1 Background and Site Information.....

- Cover Page
- Property Location
- Location Map
- Documentation of Existing Fish & Wildlife Practices/History.....
- Resource Inventory
- Fish and Wildlife Resource Concerns

Chapter 2 Ecological and Cultural Features

- Wildlife Management Goals (Clients decisions).....
- Property Maps
- Landscape Setting
- Soils
- Air, Water and Soils Protection
- Plants, Animals, Trails, and other Cultural Features.....

Chapter 3 Existing Wildlife Habitat Condition

- Upland Habitat
- Fish & Wildlife Habitat Assessment.....
- State and Federal Threatened or Endangered Species - plants or animals
- Forest Setting
- Streams, Wetlands, Riparian Areas and Surface Water
- Rangeland Resources (*if applicable*)
- Invasive Plants and Animals

Chapter 4 Management Recommendations

- Management Objectives
- Management of Roads, Trails and Cultural Features
- Management Recommendations of Forest Resources
- Management Recommendations of Streams, Riparian Areas and other Water
- Maintenance and Monitoring of Conservation Practices.....

Management Activity Schedule and Tracking

Signatures and Approvals

Introduction to the Template

This guide was developed to assist you, the wildlife professional, in working with a landowner to develop a fish and wildlife habitat resources management plan, “*A template for your Fish & Wildlife Plans*”. We encourage you to work with the Landowner as a co-creator in the development of their plan. A landowner who is more involved in the development and has a clear understanding of what their plan outlines will be more likely to implement the management outlined in the plan.

This template allows landowners to participate in several different programs available to them through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) incentive programs.

NRCS provides financial assistance to private landowners to implement Fish and Wildlife related practices through Farm Bill and discretionary conservation programs. Assistance is also provided for multi-year and permanent easements to conserve wildlife land to meet program goals. There are several incentive programs including:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers financial and technical help to assist eligible participants with management practices on their lands; a wildlife management plan is required to participate.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) offers technical and cost-share assistance for landowners to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat; family forestland is eligible and forestry practices are encouraged.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers stewardship contracts to landowners who meet a certain threshold of land stewardship and agree to maintain and improve their land.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts.

For more information about NRCS programs refer to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/> or contact the local NRCS office.

A Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Plan shall be developed by certified Technical Service Provider or other natural resource professional. The plan will comply with Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws, regulations, and permit requirements. In accordance with Section 1240 (A), the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) program provides funding support through contracts with eligible producers to obtain services of certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs) for development an Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Plan. The Conservation Activity Plan will address NRCS quality criteria for

soil erosion, water quality, and other identified resource concerns. The specific criteria required for each type of certification for TSP is located on the TSP registry (TechReg) web site at: <http://techreg.usda.gov/>. Finally the plan will satisfy the participant's objectives in regard to fish and wildlife resources.

Cover Page: Owner and Plan Author

This section provides the contact information for the landowner and the plan preparer. Note the date when the plan was originally completed. Encourage the landowner to regularly review their plan, be sure to date and initial any updates or notes that they add. The Plan Author needs to sign this section.

Chapter 1 Background and Site Information

Property Location: complete as much as possible and then review with the landowner.

If they are planning on participating in a USDA Farm Bill program, then the landowner will need to register at the nearest USDA Service Center. Once registered, their property will be assigned a Farm Serve Agency (FSA) Farm Tract Number.

GPS coordinates are very helpful in locating relevant maps online.

- Total ownership acreage: the total acreage of the property
- Total forested acreage: the total acreage with trees
- Total acreage covered by plan: amount of acreage that will be described in this plan.

Location Map: Include a map identifying the roads and access to the property. This will be your basic road map with directions to the property.

Documentation of Existing Fish and Wildlife Practices /History: Most of this information will be provided by the landowner. The Planner can gather additional information about the area surrounding the property as needed. The Property History is a brief description of the history of the land and ownership including length of current ownership, past management activities, and surrounding environment (whether nearby property is developed, private woods, public forests, etc.). This information can be based on personal knowledge, property records, and local information sources as well as what evidence is seen on the ground.

Resource Inventory: Provide a broad inventory the fish and wildlife resources along with other existing conditions such as plants, riparian areas, forestland etc...

Fish and Wildlife Resource Concerns: Consider desired species, habitat improvement,

animal control, den sites, nest boxes, snag retention, access, hunting, and the current state of the habitat. What assistance is needed or information did you gather?

Chapter 2 Ecological and Cultural Features

Wildlife Management Goals: Ownership goals are at the heart of the plan; it describes what the landowner wants to gain from their property and resources. We encourage landowners to make a list of their goals and objectives that reflect their expectations, personal values, and the potential of their property. Their goal statements should broadly summarize their vision for their land, but should be specific enough to know if they are reaching them. If recreation is one of the landowner's goals for their woods then identify the resources and how they will be addressed in their management.

Property Maps: Collect the appropriate maps of the property (e.g., conservation plan, aerial photos, soils map, topographical map etc.) and compare or reconcile with any maps the landowner has. Maps are a valuable tool for forest owners and many mapping tools are now available online for them. For the property maps they will need to include the following:

Delineate property boundaries, forest stands, special sites, threatened and endangered species present, water resources, roads, existing practices, future conservation practices, scale, and a directional arrow.

Landscape Setting: How does surrounding management affect their property and how do the landowner's actions impact their neighbors? Consider aesthetic quality, wildfire concerns, privacy, wildlife movement and habitat, noxious weeds, urban encroachment, if applicable. Aesthetic qualities should be considered throughout this plan as it is being developed. For the topography and access information, these are estimates based on your experience on the property. For the slope section, include what percentage of land is in each category. Please include the watershed unit that is appropriate for the state.

Soils Information: Soils maps including legend, soil series, and interpretations can be obtained from the USDA NRCS published Soil Survey Report for the county the property is located in. For soil maps, NRCS has developed a web-based map-making tool for private landowners: <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>. Or you can check with the local NRCS office <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app>). Soil maps are required for NRCS incentive programs.

Air Quality: The NRCS helps private landowners conserve our natural resources, and air resources are among those. Our Air Quality resource concerns can be broadly classified into four air quality and atmospheric change issues: Particulate Matter, Ozone Precursors, Odor, Greenhouse Gases and Carbon Sequestration.

For each of these major issues the latest science and the most relevant technical tools are being applied so that NRCS personnel, cooperators and landowners can make the best decisions regarding air resources. Visit NRCS website for further air quality information.

Water, Wetlands, and Riparian Protection: The Nation's freshwater supply, shaped by rainfall, snowmelt, runoff and infiltration, is distributed unevenly across the landscape, throughout the seasons, and from year to year. In many areas, concerns are growing about the adequacy of the available ground and surface water supply and the quality of the water to support intended uses. Consider the best management practices that conserve and protect our nations waters.

Soil Protection: Consider steep slopes, woody debris retention, nutrient cycling, vehicle travel, soil compaction, flood runoff, livestock issues, silvopastures, and Best Management Practices (BMPs), if applicable. Include a soil map if desired (**Note:** required for NRCS).

BMPs are essential to ensuring the benefits for air, soil and water that are made possible through sound management of your woods. To find the BMPs in your state, visit www.treefarmssystem.org/woodlandresources/ and search by your state to find the link to BMPs.

Plants, Animals, Trails and other Cultural Features: NRCS is committed to "helping people help the land"—our mission is to provide resources to landowners to aid them with conservation. Ensuring productive lands in harmony with a healthy environment is our priority. When planning, ensure that historical and cultural features along with the people, plants and animals that use them are taken into consideration.

Chapter 3 Existing Habitat Management

Upland Habitat Management: Consider desired species, habitat improvement, animal control, den sites, nest boxes, snag retention, access, hunting, and the current state of the habitat. What assistance did you seek or information did you gather?

Fish, Wildlife Habitat Assessment and Evaluation: Consider the existing condition of the fish and wildlife on the property and make an assessment to the overall health of the species present.

State and Federal Threatened or Endanger Species: What assistance did you seek or information did you gather related to state and federal threatened or endangered species?

Forest Setting: Work with the landowner to complete this section so they can start to think about their long term goals. Ask the landowner:

- Are there any special sites that you and your family have that you want to

protect?

- From your personal knowledge or research, are there special sites, that threatened and endangered species might be using on your property (Reference: www.treefarmssystem.org/woodlandresources)
- Have you considered the long term forestry goals for the property? The landowner should identify their objectives for each woods, given the goals that they have outlined.

Stream, Wetlands and other Surface Water: Identify the existing conditions of the water resources on the property. List any environmental concerns that you have observed during the planning process that may be detrimental to water quality.

Rangeland Resources: If there is rangeland on the property then address that resource in this section.

Protection from Invasive Plants and Animals: Identify any invasive plant or animals species that you have observed throughout the planning process.

Other: Use this space to include information on any other natural resource enhancements and protection that are not included in the sections above.

Chapter 4- Management Recommendations

Management Objectives Identify the Best Management Practices (BMPs) that are essential to ensuring the benefits for soil, water, air, plants and animals that are made possible through sound management of your woods. See attachments 1& 2 for typical Conservation Practices and Biological Resources.

Management of Plants, Animals, Trails and Cultural Features

Consider general maintenance, erosion potential, BMPs, if applicable, road surface condition, road runoff, drain-dips, culverts, stream crossings, weed control, and time-of year use.

Are there archeologically, culturally, historically, geologically, biologically or ecologically valuable forests on the property that should be delineated and protected? What management recommendations do you have for these sites?

Special sites can also include sites that are designated by the landowner, and can

represent places or things that are important to them or their family.

Management Recommendations of Forest Resources For the management described in this section include the general management that relates to the natural resource elements found throughout the entire property. Consider using a range of integrated pest management including mechanical, physical, biological, cultural or chemical management. These activities include pruning, pre-commercial thinning from above/below, prescribed fires, sanitation, reforestation, salvage, etc. Consider natural seedling recruitment, planting, site preparation, and current conditions that might affect regeneration.

Management Recommendations of Streams, Riparian Areas and Other Water: Consider BMPs, if applicable, riparian habitat, wildlife, and road crossings. If a wetlands delineation map is available, include as a reference.

Maintenance and Monitoring of Conservation Practices: Each state NRCS office adds state specific information to these standards and specifications and can be viewed at the state's field office technical guide: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/index.html> After the management activity occurs, how often will the activity area be evaluated to ensure the overall forest management goals are being met?

Management Activity Schedule and Tracking: The landowner and planner, working together, will need to develop the schedule and he/she will be responsible for tracking activities (unless they have designated someone else to be in charge of implementing the management plan). Make sure the landowner understands and are comfortable with the dates documented for the different activities that have been outlined in the plan. This section includes the schedule of management activities for each practice and can be used by the landowner to track when the activities were completed and where the practice located. Encourage the landowner to update the schedule if an activity dates changes.

If the landowner is planning on applying for NRCS incentive programs, then the NRCS Practice Code will need to be included in this activity schedule. These codes can be found on the NRCS website. The National Handbook of Conservation Practices lists more than 170 practices. Virtually every conservation practice impacts fish and wildlife resources in some manner. The practices listed are specifically related to fish and wildlife resources. These practices will, when properly implemented and/or managed, positively affect biological resources.

Signatures and Approvals This plan will need to be signed and reviewed and approved by representatives for the programs in which the landowner would like to participate.

Deliverables for the Client – a hardcopy of the plan that includes:

- Cover page – name, address, phone of client and TSP; Total Acres of the Plan, signature blocks for the TSP, producer, and a signature block for the NRCS acceptance.
- Soils map and appropriate soil descriptions
- Resource assessment results (habitat assessment, etc.)
- For management practices. The planned practices and the site specific specifications on how each practice will be applied; when the practice will be applied, and the extent (acres or number) that will be applied.
- For engineering/structural practices. The planned practice when it will be applied and extent, and located on the conservation plan map.

Deliverables for NRCS Field Office:

- Complete Hardcopy and Electronic copy of the client's plan (MsWord copy). **Optional:** If a Conservation Plug-in version is provided to NRCS a Hardcopy of the plan, conservation plan map and soils map is not required.
- Digital Conservation Plan Map with fields, features, and structural practices located.
- Digital Soils Map.

References

1. National Planning Procedures Handbook
2. Field Office Technical Guide
3. National Biology Handbook
4. National Biology Manual
5. National Forestry Manual
6. National Forestry Handbook
7. National Environmental Compliance Handbook
8. TechReg Technical Service Provider Registry

Attachment 1

National Conservation Practice Standards Specific to Fish and Wildlife Resources

- **Aquaculture Ponds (397)**—A water impoundment constructed and managed for commercial aquaculture production. To provide suitable aquatic environment for producing, growing, and harvesting commercial aquaculture products.
- **Constructed Wetland (656)**—A wetland constructed for the primary purpose of water quality improvement; i.e., treatment of wastewater, sewage, surface runoff, milk-house wastewater, silage leachate, and mine drainage. Practice treats wastewater by the biological and mechanical activities of the constructed wetland.
- **Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647)**—Manage early plant succession to benefit desired wildlife or natural communities. Increase plant community diversity, provide wildlife habitat for early successional species and provide habitat for declining species.

- **Field Border (386)**—A strip of perennial grass or shrubs established at or around the edge of a field. Field borders provide productive habitat for wildlife that favor early successional habitats on agricultural landscapes.
- **Fish Passage (396)**—Eliminating or mitigating the effects of natural or artificial barriers, such as dams, culverts, or cross-channel structures to fish and other aquatic organisms. Allows for the unimpeded movement of aquatic organisms past stream barriers.
- **Fishpond Management (399)**—Developing or improving impounded water to produce fish and other aquatic organisms for domestic use or recreation. Provides a suitable aquatic environment for producing, growing, and harvesting fish or other aquatic organisms.
- **Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats (643)**—Restoring and conserving rare or declining native vegetated communities and associated wildlife species to restore and manage habitats degraded by human activity, increase native plant community diversity, or manage unique or declining native habitats.
- **Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390)**—Consists of grasses, grass-like plants, and forbs at the fringe of the water along watercourses. Provides habitat for aquatic and terrestrial organisms, improves and protects water quality, stabilizes the channel bed and stream banks, establishes corridors to provide landscape linkages among existing habitats, and fosters management of existing riparian herbaceous habitat to improve or maintain desired plant communities.
- **Shallow Water Management for Wildlife (646)**—Managing shallow water on agricultural lands and moist soil areas for wildlife habitat. Areas provide open water areas to facilitate waterfowl resting and feeding, and habitat for amphibians and reptiles that serve as important prey species for other wildlife.
- **Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395)**—Create, restore, maintain, or enhance physical, chemical, and biological functions of a stream system to provide desired quality and quantity of water, fish, and wildlife habitat, channel morphology and stability, and aesthetics and recreation opportunities.
- **Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)**—Creating, restoring, maintaining, or enhancing areas for food, cover, and water for upland wildlife and species that use upland habitat for part of their life cycle. Provide all of the habitat elements in the proper amounts and distribution, and manage the species to achieve a viable wildlife population within the species home range.
- **Wetland Creation (658)**—A wetland created on a site location that historically was not a wetland or was a wetland but with a different hydrology, vegetation type, or function than naturally occurred on the site. Create wetlands that have wetland hydrology, hydrophytic plant communities, hydric soil conditions, and wetland functions and/or values.
- **Wetland Enhancement (659)**—The modification or rehabilitation of an existing or degraded wetland where specific function and/or values are improved for the purpose of meeting specific project objectives. For example, managing site

hydrology for waterfowl or amphibian use, or managing plant community composition for native wetland hay production.

- **Wetland Restoration (657)**—A rehabilitation of a degraded wetland where soils, hydrology, vegetative community, and biological habitat are returned to the original condition to the extent practicable. To restore wetland conditions and functions that occurred on the disturbed wetland site prior to modification to the extent practicable.
- **Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644)**—Retaining, developing, or managing habitat for wetland wildlife. To maintain, develop, or improve habitat for waterfowl, furbearers, or other wetland-associated wildlife.
- **Wildlife Watering Facility (648)**—Constructing, improving, or modifying watering facilities or places for wildlife to obtain drinking water.

Attachment 2

Conservation Practices and Affected Biological Resources

Biological Resource	Relevant Practices
Aquatic Invertebrates —crayfish, snails, stoneflies, mayflies, riffle beetles	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management , Riparian Forest Buffer, Wetland Restoration
Terrestrial Invertebrates —earthworms, nematodes, dung beetles	Conservation Cover, Forest Stand Improvement, Prescribed Grazing
Pollinators —bees, butterflies, moths, birds, bats	Alley Cropping, Conservation Crop Rotation, Tree/Shrub Establishment, Early Successional Habitat Development/Management
Fish	Nutrient Management, Irrigation Water Management, Riparian Forest Buffer, Stream Habitat Improvement and Management, Wetland Restoration, Fish Passage
Amphibians	Pond, Stream Habitat Improvement and Management, Wetland Restoration
Reptiles	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Wetland Restoration, Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats

Birds	Hedgerow Planting, Early Successional Habitat Development/Management, Prescribed Burning, Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management, Shallow Water Management for Wildlife, Prescribed Grazing, Irrigation Water Management, Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats, Wetland Restoration, Field Border, Residue Management, No-Till and Strip Till, Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment, Riparian Buffer, Filter Strip, Forest Harvest Management,
Mammals	Brush Management, Prescribed Grazing, Wildlife Watering Facility, Fence, Forest Stand Improvement, Riparian Forest Buffer, Tree/Shrub Establishment, Conservation Cover, Stream Habitat Improvement and Management, Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment; Early Successional Habitat Development and Management, Prescribed Grazing, Structure for Water Control, Mine Shaft & Audit Closing, Forest Harvest Management, Pond