



Congratulations!

You are now a member of America's premier conservation family, the Earth Team.

As an Earth Team volunteer, you will be working side by side with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's corps of professional conservationists. Like you, they are committed to helping people protect and conserve the Earth's natural resources.

Although we can't pay you for your efforts, I hope that you find reward in learning new skills, meeting new people and being part of a dedicated conservation effort.

Thank you for joining the Earth Team. You are one of us. Welcome to the team!

State Conservationist



The mission of the Earth Team is to provide leadership for a volunteer workforce that conserves, protects and sustains our natural resources.

The job of conserving renewable natural resources cannot be done by government alone. The collective talents and energies of private individuals and groups are also needed. Since 1981 the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has provided an opportunity for volunteers to use their talents and abilities on behalf of conservation. These volunteers are the Earth Team.

General Information

As a volunteer, you will receive no salary or wages. NRCS can, however, pay for incidental expenses you incur while giving your time and talents to further the agency's mission. You also may be authorized to travel, and you will be reimbursed accordingly.

You are not a federal employee, but you are protected under the Workers' Compensation Program and Tort Claims Act.

Qualifications

- Earth Team volunteers must be at least 14 years old.
- Volunteers do not have to be citizens of the United States, but they should be citizens of allied countries.
- Family members and relatives of NRCS employees may be volunteers. So may employees of other federal agencies and departments. NRCS employees may also volunteer, but they may not perform services for which they were hired or appointed.
- Hosted volunteers may serve as Earth Team volunteers. Hosted volunteers receive pay from sources other than NRCS.
- Earth Team volunteers may be signed up as individuals or as members of a group enlisted to work on a special project. The group leader is responsible for completing the group application

form, and will be asked to provide the names of each group member. The leader also must provide his or her Social Security number, date of birth and signature.

Tour of Duty

You will negotiate your tour of duty (the hours you plan to work) with your NRCS supervisor. The hours will depend on your availability and NRCS needs and priorities.

Timekeeping

It is very important for you to keep an accurate record of the actual hours you work, since you are protected under the Workers' Compensation Program and the Tort Claims Act. The Earth Team's Time and Attendance form (NRCS-PER-004) makes it easy for you to record and report your hours on a monthly basis.

Supervision and Work Performance

You are responsible for performing the work described in your job description and other duties as agreed to by your supervisor. Your supervisor must ensure that you are adequately trained for work assignments and that you receive adequate supervision and guidance.

Safety

NRCS is concerned about safety. No job is so urgent that it cannot be completed safely. Volunteers must follow the same safety precautions and use the same safety equipment as NRCS employees.

Injuries

If you are injured on the job, you must immediately report the injury to your supervisor. This should be done regardless of how insignificant the injury may initially appear. This will protect you if complications develop later. You will also need to complete Form CA-1, Employee's Notice of Injury. You may be eligible for benefits under the Workers' Compensation Program.

Use of Government Tools, Equipment and Vehicles

You may be issued tools, equipment, vehicles, or other government property necessary for you to perform your job.

You are responsible for returning all assigned items. If you lose or damage equipment, you must immediately report it to your supervisor. If the loss or damage is caused by your negligence, you could be required to pay for the equipment.

The state conservationist has established a policy covering the types of computer work that volunteers are allowed to perform. If there is a question about a specific computer project, your supervisor will consult with the state computer security officer.

You may drive a government vehicle if you have written authorization, a valid state driver's license and a document identifying you as a volunteer. An Earth Team identification card or a USDA identification card clearly marked "volunteer" may be used for this purpose. If you have an accident – including any incident causing minor scratches or dents – report it to your supervisor immediately.

Credit for Work Experience

Earth Team volunteers will receive credit for their work when applying for future NRCS job openings if the work represents qualifying experience for the NRCS position. A case file is established for each volunteer. This case file can be used as documentation of volunteer duties for government or non-government

employment. A complete job description and documentation of any special training received are essential documents to the case file.

Any products you create or produce as an Earth Team volunteer become the property of the United States government, and it cannot be sold or copyrighted. This includes, but is not limited to, software, printed materials and photographs.

Training

Volunteers have the same training opportunities as federal employees. If you and your supervisor decide formal training is needed for you to perform your job, your supervisor should request it.

Volunteer Responsibility and Conduct

Because the Natural Resources Conservation Service has a responsibility to gain public acceptance and support for its programs and services, volunteers are expected to dress and conduct themselves in a way that reflects well on the agency. While serving as an NRCS volunteer, you are subject to the same responsibilities and guidelines for conduct and ethics to which federal employees are expected to adhere.



The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

On April 27, 1935, Congress approved and established a national policy for soil and water conservation. Public Law 74-46 established the Soil Conservation Service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop and implement a long-term program of soil and water conservation. In October 1994 the Soil Conservation Service became the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Overview of the Natural Resources Conservation Service

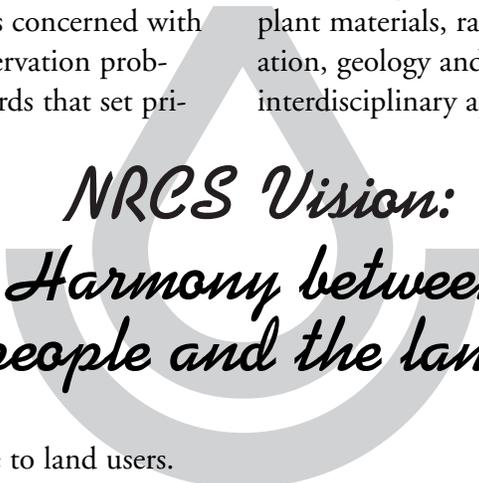
NRCS helps individuals, groups, organizations, cities, towns, county governments, state governments, and other units of local government reduce the costly waste of land and water resources, and helps put these national assets to good use. NRCS promotes conservation practices that reduce soil erosion, keep streams clean and prevent flooding. NRCS also promotes creating and protecting wetlands and other important wildlife habitat.

NRCS provides assistance to land users through nearly 3,000 local conservation districts. Local land users concerned with finding solutions to conservation problems serve on district boards that set priorities for their conservation districts.

Professional soil conservationists perform the key role of providing onsite technical assistance to land users. These NRCS employees are skilled in applying the combined expertise of the physical, biological and social sciences to the solutions for land-use problems. Soil conservationists are able to call on other NRCS technical staff, including soil sci-

entists, economists, engineers, and specialists in agronomy, biology, forestry, plant materials, range management, recreation, geology and public affairs. This interdisciplinary approach to solving

resource problems ensures full consideration of alternative conservation uses and treatments.



*NRCS Vision:
Harmony between
people and the land.*

NRCS works closely with other USDA agencies, civic organizations and schools to educate and inform the public about efforts to conserve, maintain and improve natural resources and the environment.

How NRCS and Conservation Districts are Organized

NRCS is an agency within the United States Department of Agriculture. The NRCS chief reports to the assistant secretary for natural resources and environment. The assistant secretary is part of the secretary of agriculture's staff. The secretary of agriculture is appointed by, and reports directly to, the president of the United States.

There are NRCS state offices in each of the 50 states as well as in Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Samoan Islands. The state conservationist is the top NRCS official in each state. The state conservationist is responsible for operations within his or her state or territory. State conservationists report to regional conservationists, who report to the NRCS chief.

Headquartered at state offices are various specialists who give technical support and guidance to field offices. Some states are divided into multi-county areas, each with an area office. Area offices are headed by area conservationists, and are staffed with additional specialists to assist personnel located in the field offices within their area.

As mentioned earlier, conservation districts are units of government organized by local residents under state law. Districts operate on the premise that local people

know more about local problems than anyone else. Consequently, a nationwide natural resources conservation program is largely under local control.

The laws governing districts vary among states, but most are considered legal subdivisions of state or county government. Most districts follow county borders.

Under state law, each conservation district is responsible for soil and water conservation work within its boundaries. District governing boards generally consist of five district directors. Their jobs are to plan and carry out long-range programs based on the conservation work needed in their area.

At the request of the district board, NRCS assigns a staff to provide technical assistance to the district and its cooperating land users. To receive most kinds of NRCS assistance, a land user, organiza-

tion or agency simply requests it. Land users usually sign cooperative agreements with the district.

On-site assistance is provided to farmers, ranchers, foresters, and others in planning and carrying out a long-term conservation program to meet their needs and the needs of their land.

NRCS employees work closely with employees of other USDA agencies, primarily the Farm Service Agency, the Cooperative Extension Service, and Rural Development. NRCS also works closely with the U.S. Forest Service and agencies within the U.S. Department of Interior.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers various conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program and parts of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Rural Development (RD), provides loans for single-family housing, multi-family

housing, water and sewer, community facilities and business loans. RD also helps communities with strategic planning, financial assistance, developing partnerships, and technical assistance.

The Cooperative Extension Service provides information and education to land users.

In addition to working one-on-one with land users, NRCS employees use many public information activities to educate and inform the public. Efforts are multiplied by using newspapers, radio, television, group meetings, tours, demonstrations, and other public information outlets and methods.

Hugh Hammond Bennett, the founder of the soil conservation movement, set a trend of working with the media that still exists within NRCS. The agency employs public information specialists, but the responsibility for working with the media is shared by all NRCS employees.

Code of Responsibility for Volunteers



Be sure

Know that you really want to help people.

Be convinced

Do not offer your services unless you believe
in the value of what you are doing.

Accept the rules

There may be a good reason for them.

Speak up

Ask about things you do not understand.

Be willing to learn

Training is essential to performing any job well.

Welcome supervision

You will do a better job and enjoy it more if you
know that you are doing what is expected.

Be dependable

Do what you have agreed to do.
Do not make a promise you cannot keep.

Be a team player

The lone operator is out of place
in today's complex community.

V O L U N T E E R
Bill of Rights


1. You have the right to be treated as a coworker, not just free help.
2. You have the right to a suitable assignment, with consideration for personal preference, temperament, life experience, education, and employment background.
3. You have the right to know as much about the agency as possible, including its policies, people and programs.
4. You have the right to training that is thoughtfully planned and effectively presented.
5. You have the right to continuing education on the job, as a follow up to initial training; information about new developments; and training for greater responsibility.
6. You have the right to receive sound guidance and direction from someone who is experienced, patient, well informed, and willing to devote time to you.
7. You have the right to a variety of experiences gained by advancing to assignments of more responsibility or by transferring from one activity to another.
8. You have the right to be heard.
9. You have the right to be recognized.
10. You have the right to receive enabling funds when needed and when available for official travel or other matters.

E A R T H T E A M



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E A R T H T E A M

Volunteer Orientation

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