INSTRUCTION FOR SPOT CHECKING PROCEDURES

A. General

Spot check reviewers will have a Job Approval Authority (JAA) level of 3 or 4 for each Conservation Practice designated for review. The State Resource Conservationist (SRC) and State Conservation Engineer (SCE) shall develop and maintain a database of all Maine spot check reviewers’ JAA’s.

1. Persons performing spot checks will participate in annual Maine spot check training. Developing and coordinating this training will be the responsibility of the SRC.

B. State Office

1. The ASTC for Operations, in conjunction with the SRC and SCE, will determine which field offices will be selected for Agronomic, Biology, Forestry or Engineering reviews. ASTC for Operations will update the Quality Assurance Plan and notify District Conservationist (DC) of the selections no later than February 1st of each fiscal year. Additional offices may be added later in the fiscal year by the ASTC for Operations to capture the sample size needed for certain practices.

2. Each quarter the ASTC for Operations will provide the SRC, Technical Service Provider (TSP) Coordinator and the SCE a cumulative list of certified practices and completed Conservation Activity Plans (CAPs) with an estimate of needed spot checks to date.

3. The ASTC for Operations may delegate spot check authority to field office personnel on an as-needed basis. Delegated field office personnel must complete the Maine spot check training prior to performing spot checks.

4. When appropriate, Maine NRCS may bring specialized staff from other states to spot check complex practices. The out-of-state spot check reviewer does not need to complete the Maine spot check training to conduct spot checks.

C. Field Office

1. The DC is responsible for scheduling all non-TSP related spot checks for the current fiscal year by September 15th. All spot checks and final reports will be completed by December 30th for prior fiscal year work.

2. Field offices shall run error checks on practice application reports quarterly to ensure field office records are correct and up to date.

D. TSP Practices/Conservation Activity Plans

1. The ASTC for Programs will provide the ASTC for Operations and the TSP Coordinator a list of Certified TSP Practices and CAPs quarterly which includes

   (ME Instruction 450-380 – July 2012)
name of primary and secondary TSPs. The TSP Spot Check Reviews for each field office will be derived from this quarterly report. Spot checks of TSPs will follow National Policy (GM-Title 450, Part 407, Subpart C), which requires spot checks on 10% of practices for the first three years and on 5% thereafter.

2. By September 15th of each year, the TSP Coordinator will work with discipline specialists to contact field offices and schedule spot checks.

3. TSP-assisted practice deficiencies will be referred to the TSP State Coordinator for follow up. Actions that are not resolved within the specified time period will be addressed by the TSP State Coordinator. Supporting documentation and recommended actions will be issued to the State Conservationist (STC). If appropriate, Program Non-Compliance Issues will be addressed by the ASTC for Programs.

E. Spot Checking Procedure

1. In cases where several disciplines overlap, combining spot checks is encouraged. At a minimum, spot checks will include at least one field office personnel and the spot check reviewer.

2. In the case of TSP spot checks, field office personnel participation is encouraged, but not mandatory. The spot check reviewer will request the field office to phone the participant/landowner and inform them of the need to a site visit for a TSP spot check. The spot check reviewer will then coordinate dates/times with the participant/landowner, the TSP and the DC. It is not required that the landowner/participant, DC or TSP be present for the spot check. However, some practices will require that the landowner or TSP be present unless GPS coordinates are available to locate practices. The DC is not required to sign the TSP spot check form. The final form will be submitted to the TSP State Coordinator with copies to the DC and ASTC for Operations.

3. Practices will be selected randomly; considerations, however, will be given to time and travel constraints unless otherwise directed by the ASTC for Operations.

4. Field visits are crucial and should be incorporated in the review process when possible. In cases where field visits are not feasible, the spot check reviewer will rely on photographic evidence and field office documentation to inspect the practice. The spot check reviewer may also interview the producer as a means to determine practice installation details.

5. Items to be reviewed in a spot check include, but are not limited to, those listed on the GM 450-ME407.3 Spot Check Form.

(ME Instruction 450-380 – July 2012)
6. The spot check findings will be recorded on the ME407.30 Spot Check Form. The persons performing the spot check and the DC’s signatures are required on the ME407.30 Spot Check Form for NRCS employee applied practices. This form will record the following:

   a. Commendations: Those practices installed above and beyond NRCS Standards and Specifications.
   b. Recommendations: Practices where the field staff can improve their work, but were not in violation of NRCS policy of practice standards and specifications.
   c. Action Items: Areas where practice installation was substandard or NRCS policy was violated and immediate corrective action is required. The ASTC – Special Projects will monitor the spot check Action Register and send out reminders to responsible persons quarterly to help assure completion of items.

7. A “Summary of Findings” will be provided by the spot check reviewer the day of the office/field quality review. This will take place either in person, or via teleconference for DC’s with multiple offices, and will include Commendations, Recommendations and Action Items. At a minimum the person performing the spot check and the DC will be present for the summation. A signature on the ME407.3 Spot Check Form will not be required until the final report is finalized within 15 days after the review. In the case of TSP Spot Checks, the Summary of Findings is recommended but not required.

8. ASTC for Operations will negotiate completion dates of Action Items of work completed by NRCS employees with DCs and will post on a statewide Action Register spreadsheet. The DCs will provide follow up documentation to ASTC for Special Projects quarterly until work is completed. The ASTC for Operations will verify that the Action Items have been completed with random checks of completed work. This will occur during Performance Reviews, Operation Reviews or other Field Office visits.

9. The TSP Coordinator will negotiate completion dates of Action Items of work completed by TSPs and will post on statewide Action Register.

10. Urgent items will be addressed immediately or according to agreed upon deadlines. In cases where program policy violation is suspected, DC and ASTC for Operations will consult with ASTC for Programs.

For questions on the Spot Checking Procedure, contact Cathee Pullman, State Resource Conservationist, at 207-990-9570 or email Cathee.pullman@me.usda.gov

(ME Instruction 450-380 – July 2012)