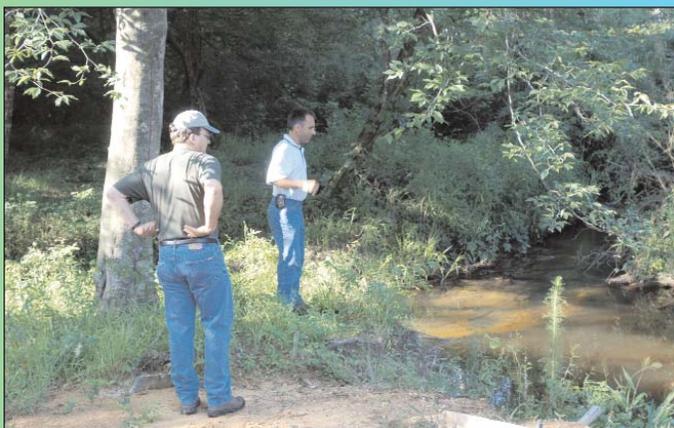


## NRCS CONSERVATION PLANNING

### WHAT IS CONSERVATION PLANNING?

*Conservation planning is a voluntary natural resource problem solving and management process.*

The planning process used by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is based on the premise that land users will make and implement sound resource management decisions if they understand their resources, recognize natural resource problems and opportunities, and understand the effects of their decisions. The success of conservation planning and implementation depends on the VOLUNTARY participation of clients.



Site specific natural resource problems and opportunities are identified and addressed during the planning process. Resource problems and opportunities include those identified by the client, those identified through the on-farm resource inventory process and those affected by Federal, state and local regulatory program requirements.

The NRCS objective in conservation planning is to help the client achieve sound use and management of **soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources** to prevent their degradation, assure their sustained use and productivity, and comply with regulatory requirements while considering economic and social needs. Planning to a Resource Management System (RMS) level is necessary to provide a minimum level of resource protection and to insure sustainability of the resource base.

The planning process is flexible when a client is ready, willing, and able to make and implement some, but not all, of the decisions necessary to achieve a RMS level of management. Future assistance will be directed toward planning and implementation at a RMS level. The rate of progress in implementing a RMS depends on the client's objectives and ability to make and implement conservation decisions, based on resource, economic, social, and public policy considerations. The planning process provides the framework for developing a CONSERVATION PLAN. Implementation of the plan may involve technical, educational and financial assistance from USDA and other sources.

### WHAT IS A RMS CONSERVATION PLAN?

A conservation plan is voluntary, site-specific, comprehensive and action oriented. It contains natural resource information, a record of decisions made by the client and a schedule of operations and activities needed to solve identified natural resource problems. A resource management system (RMS) is a combination of conservation practices and management activities for the treatment of all identified resource problems for soil, water, air, plants, and animals that meet or exceeds the level needed to insure resource sustainability.

### HOW IS THE PLANNING PROCESS INITIATED?

The process normally begins in one of two ways:

(1) The potential client may contact the local conservation district or NRCS to seek assistance; or

(2) the local conservation district or NRCS personnel may contact a potential client to offer assistance.



more

# Conservation Planning



## HOW DOES A RMS PLAN DIFFER FROM A CONSERVATION PROGRAM CONTRACT?

A RMS plan is simply an organized documentation of resource inventory information and planned actions, that, when implemented, will offer adequate protection to the natural resource base, assuring sustained productivity. The RMS plan itself is voluntary and does not legally obligate the client to a binding agreement.

USDA offers various conservation programs that provide financial assistance to help with implementation of conservation practices that may be included in the RMS plan. If the client wishes to voluntarily participate in a USDA financial assistance program, the RMS plan is used to develop a Contract Support Document. The Contract Support Document contains information that provides a detailed description of the client's and USDA's responsibilities for the implementation of conservation practices specified in the RMS plan when government financial assistance will be provided. A conservation program contract is the formal agreement that legally binds all parties involved to specific responsibilities and obligations. Once the client signs the contract, he has agreed to all of the conditions contained in it, and has legally obligated himself or his representative to meet the specified requirements for the duration of the contract period. A client's involvement in the development and implementation of a conservation plan is voluntary,

## WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A CONSERVATION PLAN DOCUMENT?

The plan document contains meaningful and useful information for the client.

It includes the following items in a folder or binder:

- A conservation district cooperator agreement
- A soil map with appropriate interpretations
- Appropriate worksheets developed with the client
- Appropriate available job sheets and other prepared material
- Operation and maintenance agreements and procedures
- A conservation plan map
- A record of clients' decisions
- Available maps, sketches, and designs resulting from the planning process that will be useful to the client in implementing the plan
- Information reflecting site-specific effects and impacts based on on-site visits



and the technical assistance required can be obtained without charge from NRCS. Participation in USDA financial assistance programs that can provide federal cost sharing assistance to install planned conservation practices requires entering into a legally binding contractual agreement with USDA.

*“Helping People Help the Land”*

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