



# Developing Alternatives

Step  
**5**

USDA • Natural Resources Conservation Service • July 1999

## What is it?

Alternatives are the resource management strategies identified by the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). The TAC develops alternatives that can solve the problems and meet the objectives of the Planning Committee. The Planning Committee reviews the alternatives with help from technical advisors. Those that the Planning Committee feels it can endorse are then included in the Resource Plan.

## When do we do it?

Alternatives are formulated after the inventory data has been analyzed.

## How do we do it?

The Technical Advisory Committee develops alternatives based on their resource inventories and analysis of the resource data. In addition to formulating strategies that will solve the problems identified by the Planning Committee, they consider acceptability to stakeholders, NRCS quality criteria, existing opportunities, and ways to prevent additional problems from occurring. Management system templates and the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) are used to develop alternatives.

The Planning Committee should be involved throughout the process of formulating alternatives so that decisionmaking is improved and the acceptability of solutions is continually considered. Typically, this involvement is accomplished via periodic informal presentations from technical advisors to the Planning Committee about the progress of the Technical Advisory Committee. Further, participation of one or more members of the Planning Committee on the TAC helps facilitate communication among the two groups.

Initially, multiple solutions are identified for the Planning Committee's consideration. These may include structural approaches (e.g., floodwalls or streambank stabilization measures), non-structural measures (e.g., flood-proofing or emergency evacuation procedures), market-based measures (e.g., incentive payments), and institutional approaches (e.g., regulations or buyouts). Multiple alternatives give the Planning Committee the opportunity to select the best approaches given the unique social, political, economic, and cultural considerations in their area.

## Additional Suggestions

- Technical advisors need to rely heavily on the problem statements and objectives identified by the Planning Committee early in the planning process. Review meeting minutes and other notes taken during the meetings to understand the Planning Committee's concerns and objectives. Planning Committee perceptions are critical to identifying appropriate alternatives.

- Strive for different and innovative solutions, and avoid dwelling on costs during the early stages of identifying alternatives.
- Make a preliminary evaluation of the effects of the alternatives, including an estimate of future conditions if no action is taken. Effects should include estimates of ecological, social, economic, and other consequences of the alternatives.
- Avoid the need for environmental mitigation by developing alternatives that avoid cultural, social, and ecological damages. If alternatives cannot avoid negative impacts, try to minimize impacts, or plan to mitigate for losses per the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Estimated costs to mitigate any potential ecological damages need to be shared with the Planning Committee.
- Prepare a concise summary of each alternative with maps and other supporting data to help the Planning Committee understand the suggestions.

### **The Next Step**

After alternatives have been identified, the solutions need to be evaluated and decisions made as to which alternatives are most acceptable to the Planning Committee and other stakeholders. Refer to the factsheet "Evaluating Alternatives" for more information about Step 6.

