



# Resource Planning Guidebook Introduction

## Purpose of the Resource Planning Guidebook

The Resource Planning Guidebook (RPG) is a source book for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and other conservation partners in Illinois to use when facilitating locally-led planning. Locally-led resource planning, or “Areawide Planning,” as it’s called in the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook, is the problem-solving and management process NRCS uses to help clients develop resource plans that meet locally-identified objectives.

The resource planning process helps citizens develop productive partnerships, reach consensus, make decisions, and obtain financial and technical resources to carry out their ideas. This demands that NRCS/SWCD draw upon our many talents in facilitating, leading, partnering, and of course, our expertise in the natural resource sciences. One outcome of resource planning is the enhanced ability of communities to manage their natural resources to meet their goals. The Resource Planning Guidebook can help staff and citizens alike meet these challenges. The purpose of the Resource Planning Guidebook is to:

- Supplement National Planning Procedures Guidebook.
- Empower Conservation Partners to carry out resource planning.
- Assist communication between Conservation Partners and the public about the planning process.

## How To Use This Guidebook

The RPG complements the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH). The NPPH describes the policy and procedures pertaining to the resource planning process. To supplement this material, the RPG gives detailed “insider tips” for carrying out resource planning at the local level. The guidebook explains why a particular step is important and suggests how to do it. The RPG also includes “General Resources” which cover a variety of tasks and skills relevant during the entire planning project.

The Resource Planning Guidebook follows the Nine-Step, Three Phase planning process. It has practical ideas for implementing locally-led planning, gleaned from our experience working with Illinois communities. It will tell you what to do first and what comes next.

Refer to the RPG for help with identifying stakeholders, conducting effective meetings, involving the public, determining inventory needs, analyzing data, building local ownership of plans, implementing plans, and much more.

To help stakeholders understand the planning process, material in the RPG is suitable for distribution to the public. For example, share “Establishing Operating Procedures” when the locally-led committee is newly organized. “Working with the Media” will give the Planning Committee ideas for communicating their activities to the public. Use “Evaluating Alternatives” to help the Committee understand this critical step in selecting management strategies.

These and all other factsheets are protected in plastic sleeves in the Resource Planning Guidebook to ensure clean copies are available for you to duplicate. The Resource Planning Guidebook has also been formatted in a 3-ring binder to encourage you to add other material that you find helpful or to insert updated versions as changes are made.

Resource planning is driven by local needs, local people, and local action. The Resource Planning Guidebook can help you facilitate planning so that local people develop and implement plans to protect, conserve and enhance natural resources within their social, economic, and ecological interests.

*To learn more about resource planning in your community, contact the USDA NRCS Service Center nearest you. It is listed in the phone book under U.S. Government. In the appendix of the RPG is a list of all Illinois county NRCS/SWCD offices. The Illinois NRCS homepage can be found at [www.il.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov)*



# Why Resource Planning?

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## Why Resource Planning?

Do any of these describe the natural resource concerns in your community?

- ***The issues are so complex that people must work together to address them.***
- ***Everyone cannot agree about how to address the concerns.***
- ***Management strategies will take a long time to implement, and they will affect others.***
- ***Management strategies will require public funds or technical assistance to implement.***

Natural resource issues such as these can be most effectively addressed with the Resource Planning process. Locally-led resource planning is used to develop a resource management plan. The resource plan identifies actions that the community supports and strategies for how they will be accomplished. Because grant-making agencies often look for evidence of planning and public support as a criteria for funding, the resource plan can then be used to compete for funds to implement solutions.

## How do we do Resource Planning?

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) along with our partners, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), use Resource Planning to help communities develop resource management plans that meet locally-identified objectives. NRCS/SWCD facilitates this process when called upon by local people. Often the county SWCD will formally sponsor the planning effort, but the project may also be initiated by a municipality, a county agency, or concerned local citizens.

Moderately-sized watersheds comprise the typical planning area, although the same general process works equally well for large drainage basins, rural or urban towns, or single plots of land. Developing a resource

management plan takes about a year or two, depending on the size and complexity of the planning area.

## Planning Partners

Resource Planning essentially involves the interactions of three groups—a **Planning Committee**, a **Technical Advisory Committee**, and the **“public” or the community** of all people in the planning area.

*The Planning Committee* is a group of about 10 or 15 people who are typical of all the stakeholders in the planning area. Stakeholders are those who will be affected by or have an interest in what happens in the planning area.

*Stakeholders* on the Planning Committee may include:

- Residents and/or landowners
- Farm owners & operators
- Local municipal officials
- Business & industry representatives
- Environment & conservation groups
- Other special interest representatives

The Planning Committee begins by identifying the resource concerns and objectives in the planning area. Then with assistance from the technical advisors and with periodic input from the public, they develop a management plan to solve the problems. Finally, with partners in the community, the Planning Committee--or a new “Implementation Committee”--coordinates efforts to implement the plan.

*The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)* is made up of subject-area specialists from various public and private organizations. Technical advisors work as an interdisciplinary team to help the Planning Committee develop the management plan. The TAC inventories resources and formulates alternative solutions for the Planning Committee’s consideration. They help the Planning Committee understand impacts and effects of alternatives on the natural resources and the people in the planning area. Technical advisors are also called upon to help implement actions selected by the Planning Committee.

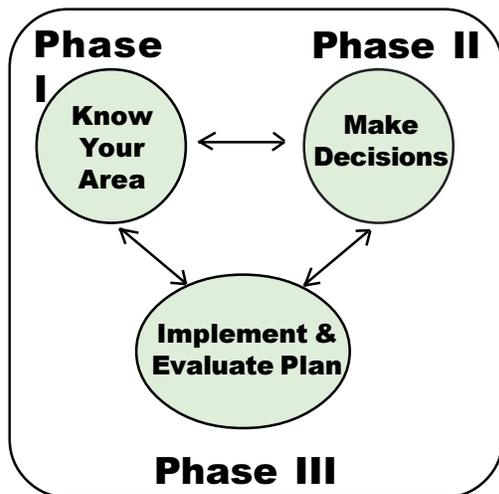
Technical Advisors may include:

- Federal and state natural resource agencies
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Universities and Cooperative Extension
- Local planning and zoning offices
- County Board members
- Public works departments
- Business and Industrial groups

The final resource plan must be acceptable to the *public*. The public are all stakeholders in the planning area. Some serve on the Planning Committee or Technical Advisory Committee. The remaining “non-committee” public contributes to the planning project by providing periodic input on their concerns, preferred alternatives, and desired outcomes.

### The Nine-Step, Three-Phase Planning Process

NRCS uses a Nine-Step, Three Phase Resource Planning process. Here are more details about each phase.



#### Phase One

This is the information-gathering and data-collection phase. Phase One has four steps:

- 1. Identify concerns and opportunities**
- 2. Determine objectives**
- 3. Inventory resources**
- 4. Analyze resource data**

First, the Planning Committee identifies their resource concerns and opportunities using a nominal group process. Then they identify their objectives, or “desired future conditions,” for each concern.

Next, technical advisors conduct inventories of the resources related to the concerns of the Planning Committee and analyze the data they gathered.

Beginning in Phase One, and continuing throughout the planning process, the Planning Committee will engage with the public. They can seek input, ideas, and suggestions via the media, presentations to community groups, public meetings, brochures, and exhibits. This public participation creates awareness about the

planning process and sets the stage for successful implementation of the final resource plan.

Phase One involves learning about the planning area. During this phase, the Planning Committee will learn about existing conditions, resource concerns, and opportunities. To understand the planning area, the Committee works with their technical advisors, conducts tours (for example, “Rapid Resource Appraisals”), brings in educational speakers, or networks with other Planning Committees.

#### Phase Two

Decisions about what to do are made during Phase Two. During the three steps of Phase Two, the Planning Committee will come to understand the variety of solutions to their concerns, and they’ll select preferred management alternatives. Phase Two involves:

- 5. Formulate alternatives**
- 6. Evaluate alternatives**
- 7. Make decisions**

Using the information they collected, the technical advisors suggest a number of alternatives that will meet the objectives identified by the Planning Committee. The Planning Committee evaluates these alternatives and makes decisions about which actions they advocate. These decisions and supporting information are then documented in the resource management plan.

#### Phase Three

Phase Three is the implementation and evaluation phase. There are two steps in Phase Three:

- 8. Implement the plan**
- 9. Evaluate the plan**

During this last phase, funds and technical assistance are sought to implement the various actions articulated in the resource plan. As the plan is implemented, the results are continuously evaluated and modifications made as necessary.

### Resource Planning

- Involves all stakeholders
- Uses consensus planning
- Identifies desired future conditions
- Inventories resources
- Determines priorities for action
- Builds local partnerships & coordinates with government
- Ensures implementation and follow-up

To learn more about resource planning in your community, contact the USDA NRCS Service Center nearest you. It is listed in the phone book under U.S. Government. In the appendix of the RPG is a list of all Illinois county NRCS/SWCD offices. The Illinois NRCS homepage can be found at [www.il.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.il.nrcs.usda.gov)



# Resource Planning Tips for Conservation Partners

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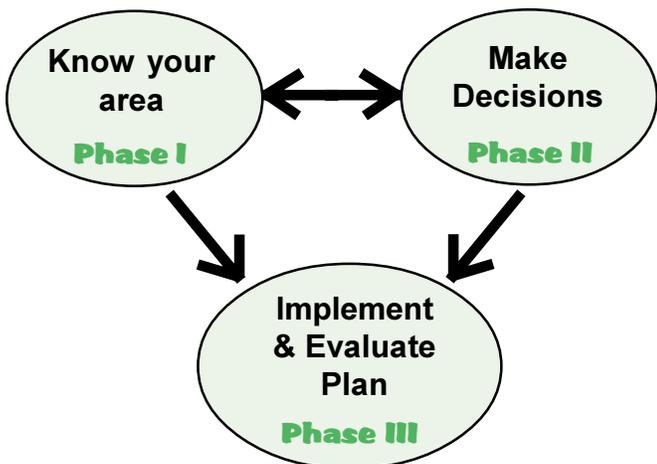
## Purpose

This information is for NRCS/SWCD staff and other partners as they facilitate locally-led planning. Included are suggestions for understanding the planning process, working as a team, and successfully interacting with Planning and Technical Advisory Committees.

## Understanding the Resource Planning Process

Whether we call it “resource planning,” “watershed planning,” “locally-led conservation planning,” or “area-wide planning”—it all follows the same Three-Phase process outlined in the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH). Review this handbook regularly, and make sure staff understands it.

## The NRCS Planning Process



## Committees are Key!

Essentially the process involves two committees—a *Planning Committee*, and a *Technical Advisory Committee*. The Planning Committee is a group of stakeholders who identify concerns in the area, develop a management plan to address the concerns, and

coordinate efforts to implement the plan by engaging with community partners. The Technical Advisory Committee inventories the resources and formulates alternative management strategies to solve problems identified by the Planning Committee. Technical advisors may also help implement actions selected by the Planning Committee.

## Committees Need a Helping Hand

Throughout the planning process, the Planning Committee will have many questions—how it is done, what assistance NRCS provides, the roles of specific NRCS/SWCD staff, how long it takes, who will do the data gathering, what they can expect to achieve. To help the Planning Committee understand the process, bring in a NRCS Resource Planning Specialist at the beginning to provide an overview of the process. Continually reinforce the message at each step by reviewing what was done at the last meeting, what is going to happen next, and why. Always show how each step will help them meet their goal of addressing resource concerns. Provide written materials such as selections from the Resource Planning Guidebook to augment their understanding. Use maps and other visual aids to facilitate meetings. Share examples of plans written by other committees as models of success. Bring in speakers from other local Planning Committees to share ideas.

Because resource planning takes time (up to 24 months in some cases), Planning Committee members may become discouraged and question the need for a resource plan. Sometimes a few committee members feel they already know the best solutions to the concerns, and are not interested in planning.

Remind the group that resource planning is *consensus planning*—working with stakeholders to identify solutions which are acceptable to all. If consensus already exists in the community about how to solve the problems, then possibly resource planning is not needed.

However, Planning Committees are usually created because the problems are very complex, the community lacks agreement on what actions to take, and the most acceptable solutions are not yet known or are not being implemented. If this is true for their planning area, they will likely benefit from a resource management plan. Although the Planning Committee can modify the process to suit their unique circumstances, they are most likely to succeed if the integrity of the process is generally maintained.

Elements such as involving all stakeholders, using brainstorming techniques to account for all perspectives, forming partnerships and considering multiple resources are critical to developing an acceptable plan that the community is willing to implement.

Further, resource planning helps the community compete for funds to implement resource management strategies. Grant-making agencies often look for evidence of sound, locally-led planning and a completed resource management plan as a criteria for funding.

### NRCS/SWCD Role

NRCS and SWCD *facilitate* locally-led resource planning. This means we help communities develop their own plans to address natural resource problems and to implement those plans. During the early stages, Planning Committees typically will need a great deal of assistance in understanding the planning process, developing meeting agendas, and working through the various steps of the process. As the committee develops, they will become less dependent on NRCS/SWCD assistance. Initially, it is probably better to be on the side of being too involved than not providing enough assistance. Communicate to the committee that they are an independent, locally-led group and we are here to help them meet their goal of addressing the resource issues that concern them.

### Working as a Team

The SWCD usually formally sponsors the planning project. The field office is the primary point of contact for the Planning and Technical Advisory Committees. The Resource Planning Specialist and other NRCS technical specialists provide on-going support to the field staff throughout the planning effort. All these NRCS-SWCD staff must work as a team to facilitate the locally-led planning effort.

Resource planning can be very challenging. Occasionally staff are new at this kind of planning. Accomplishing the primary goal— helping community members solve their natural resource problems— demands that staff work as a team.

Following the process outlined in the NPPH maximizes the possibility that the project will succeed. Each person should clearly understand their part in this process and be committed to carrying it out.

As new as locally-led planning is to you, you still probably know more about it than the community members with whom you are working. All you need to do is stay one step ahead of them! You can do that by communicating frequently with more experienced NRCS/SWCD planners.

Staff needs to communicate regularly among themselves to ensure consistent messages are conveyed to community members with whom they are working. Once the planning effort has begun, NRCS/SWCD staff who are working on the planning may wish to meet periodically to share ideas, address problems, and make sure everyone understands upcoming steps in the process.

### NRCS/SWCD Contact Person

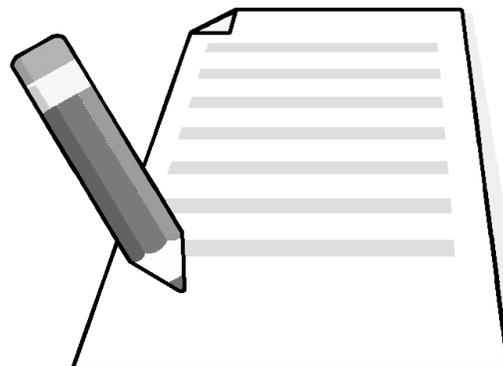
Initially there are a lot of new agency names and faces for the Planning and Technical Advisory Committees to sort out, so consider identifying one person from the field office as the Planning Committee's primary contact person or liason. This gives the Committees a person who they can consistently contact between meetings. The contact person is usually the District Conservationist, the Resource Conservationist, or the Soil Conservationist.

The contact person is responsible for communicating between the Planning and Technical Advisory Committees, the Technical Advisory Committee, and other NRCS/SWCD staff involved in the project. After each Planning Committee meeting, the contact person should follow-up with others as needed to review progress, ask questions, and get feedback.

At meetings with other NRCS/SWCD staff, the contact person should be prepared to review the progress of committee, explain concerns they have raised, seek answers to their questions, and get suggestions for future meeting agendas.

### Assisting With Agendas

At first, most Planning Committees will need help determining the items to cover at their meetings. For example, during early meetings they can identify their resource concerns, followed by one or more meetings where they identify their objectives. Later in the



process, the Planning Committee will need much less assistance from NRCS/SWCD. Modify staff involvement as appropriate.

Field staff should work with the Planning Committee to develop tentative agendas for two or three meetings in advance. Always ensure the next step. Encourage the Planning Committee to conclude each meeting by establishing the agenda for the next meeting.

### Assisting with Meetings

Field staff—especially the primary contact person—should attend all committee meetings. Initially, the field staff plays a big role in helping the Planning Committee conduct their meetings. This may involve reserving meeting rooms, bringing necessary materials and equipment to meetings, arranging chairs, and inviting and confirming facilitators and speakers. Later on, the Planning Committee usually assumes a larger role in organizing their meetings. SWCD staff might type and distribute committee meeting agendas because the Planning Committee typically does not have the resources to do this.

Arrive early enough to Planning Committee meetings to answer any last minute questions, set up chairs, lend support to facilitators, etc.

#### Before the meeting:

- Ask facilitators or people giving presentations if they will need special equipment, paper or markers
- Confirm speakers, other invited guests
- Bring copies of revised agenda
- Bring suggestions for next meeting's agenda
- Bring necessary equipment, paper and maps
- Set up the room with chairs and equipment
- Make sure you know your role

#### After the meeting:

- Update others on progress
- Mail agenda for next meeting
- Reserve meeting room for next meeting

Try to meet in rooms that are sized appropriately for the group. A room that is too large or formal can inhibit group discussion. Field staff should arrive before the meeting to arrange chairs, set up equipment, prepare coffee if desired, etc. Arrange chairs so committee members can face each other to encourage active participation. Seat Technical Advisors and visitors apart from the Planning Committee.

Bring name tags or tent cards if necessary and pass around a sign-up sheet to record attendance. Bring a map of the planning area. Give updated copies of the

## Purpose and Responsibility of the Committee:

When a committee is appointed, its purpose and responsibilities should be placed in writing, clearly defined. That is:

- 1) Members should understand why it was set up.
- 2) Members should know its assignments or task(s) to be accomplished.
- 3) Members should know when its assignments (tasks) are due (deadlines).
- 4) The committee should know how and when it is to report.

#### In addition, the committee should:

- 1) Have a name.
- 2) Be informed of its budget limitation.
- 3) Be informed of its relationship and/or shared responsibilities with other committees.

*Source: "Developing Effective and Efficient Local Committees," by Delwyn Dyer and Oscar Williams, Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities and Tuskegee U niv., Cooperating, 1999.*

agenda to members if it has been modified after mailing. Write the agenda on a flip chart for people to view throughout the meeting. Make a suggestion that meetings be held on a regular schedule in the same place (for example, 7:00 PM every other Monday or 3:00 PM on the second Wednesday of each month). Reserve the room for each meeting immediately after the previous meeting.

During meetings, staff should be ready to answer questions and to assist in accomplishing agenda items. Before a committee chairperson has been selected, the contact person may need to open the meeting by welcoming the group and initiating introductions. Later, the chairperson will open meetings. Encourage the chairperson to open meetings on time. This promotes timeliness among committee members. Stick to the designated agenda unless the committee decides as a group during the meeting to modify it. Inform participants who are on the agenda how much time is allotted to them. Strive to end the meeting at the designated time. Try to limit meetings to about two hours.



# Resource Planning As a Learning Experience

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## What is it?

Resource planning helps stakeholders become more knowledgeable about the natural resources in their communities. Stakeholder involvement in the resource planning process builds awareness of local issues, their management alternatives, and of the interrelationships between people and the natural world. This learning process is essential for the development of an effective management plan supported by the community.

## When do we do it?

Education is a consequence of the entire resource planning process. Learning opportunities are especially prevalent, however, during Phase One.

## How do we do it?

During the planning process, the Planning Committee will learn about:

1. The resource planning process.
2. General background information relevant to their concerns and objectives.
3. Specific conditions in the planning area, including the status of natural resources, management alternatives, and the acceptability of alternatives.

Here are some details on each of these topics:

### 1. The Resource Planning Process

Explaining the Nine Step, Three Phase Planning Process and introducing NRCS or other personnel who will be facilitating the project is the primary agenda item of initial Planning Committee meetings. Typically an NRCS Resource Planning Specialist or other specialist gives a formal presentation about the planning process, and answers questions. The Planning Committee may ask how much the planning effort will cost, how long the process will take, how the plan will be implemented, the extent of the committee's influence, and much more. Information about the planning process is continually reinforced throughout the project.

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will also need assistance understanding the resource planning process. Technical advisors will need to understand the objective of the process, their role in conducting inventories and recommending strategies, how their findings should be conveyed to the Planning Committee, how the TAC can communicate and coordinate with the Planning Committee, and more.

### 2. General Background Information

Technical experts can provide information about soil, water, air, plants, animals, and human considerations to enhance the knowledge of the Planning Committee. They can do this during educational presentations, site visits, tours, or distribution of print information. This information is usually general in nature--without details

about natural resource conditions in the specific planning area. Sharing such general information helps raise awareness of natural systems, and enhances understanding of resource inventories and management alternatives when they are completed.

Consider including educational presentations as agenda items during regularly scheduled Planning Committee meetings. Guest speakers from conservation organizations, research groups, or universities can be invited to meetings to give presentations relating to resource concerns. Popular topics include:

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>POTENTIAL SPEAKER</b>
Establishing Watershed Planning Committees	Chairs of other locally-led Planning Committees
Best Management Practices	NRCS/SWCD field staff
Stream Stabilization Techniques	NRCS Agricultural Engineers or Streambank Stabilization Specialist
Farmland Preservation	IL Dept. of Agriculture, American Farmland Trust, local land trusts
Growth Management	Regional, County, or municipal community planners
Economic Development	Community planners and other municipal officials
Regional Population Trends	Community planners and other municipal officials
Funding Opportunities	NRCS field staff, IL Dept. of Agriculture, IL Environmental Protection Agency, non-profit organizations
Effects of Urbanization on Stream Quality	IL Dept. of Natural Resources, community planners

“Rapid Resource Appraisals” (see factsheet on the same topic in the Resource Planning Guidebook) or other tours also provide an opportunity to bring in specialists to discuss topics of interest to the Planning Committee.

### **3. About the Planning Area**

With the assistance of technical advisors, by the end of the planning project the Planning Committee will be able to answer four key questions about the planning area:

- 1) “What are current conditions?”**
- 2) “What factors have created current conditions?”**
- 3) “What are the desired future conditions (objectives)?”**
- 4) “What are optimal alternatives for achieving the desired future conditions?”**

Answering these questions may sound overwhelming at first, but Planning Committees will have help from many Partners including natural resource experts, discussion facilitators, resource planning specialists, project coordinators, and local leaders. Plus, planning specialists help the Planning Committee focus their information needs on their key concerns. Work is therefore targeted to the areas most important to stakeholders.

## **The Next Step**

The Planning Committee often wants to share their growing knowledge of the planning area with the entire community of people who live, work and recreate there. To do this, they often include public information and education campaigns among the action items in the resource plan. They may also undertake some educational activities long before the resource plan is finalized, such as distributing a brochure or posters about the planning area. **2**



# Public Participation in Resource Planning

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## What is it?

Public participation is central to successful locally-led resource planning. A core working group of stakeholders spearheads the planning effort by serving as the Planning Committee. This partnership of local interests comes together to develop the resource plan. In addition, the Planning Committee periodically engages non-committee stakeholders in the planning process.

The “public” are all the stakeholders in the resource-planning area. The public includes those who serve on the Planning Committee, and those who are not actively involved in the planning process. This fact sheet focuses on *non-committee* members of the public, and ways that Planning Committees can understand and work with them. This information will help Planning Committees answer four questions:

- Why** is public participation in locally-led planning important?
- Who** should be involved?
- When** should they be involved?
- How** can they be involved?

## Why is it important?

Involvement of the public in the planning process is necessary for the Planning Committee to make better decisions. Public involvement results in decisions that have the support and commitment of the community, are responsive to local needs, and meaningfully reflect the wishes of the community.

Public participation also:

- Contributes the direct, immediate knowledge of community members about resource conditions.
- Reduces the likelihood of conflict, legal action or other delays and expenses by incorporating local issues and concerns early in the planning process.
- Improves citizen awareness of issues and increases public understanding of projects.
- Empowers citizens and helps them to understand that they can have positive effects and influence in their community.
- Increases the potential for plan implementation by demonstrating broad community support for its components.

## Who should be involved?

One way to think of the non-committee public is in four main groups:

1. Politicians
2. Decision-makers and power holders
3. Activists
4. Ordinary citizens

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The Planning Committee needs to reach all these members of the public. This may require different communication approaches for each group.

## When do we do it?

At a minimum, public input is critical at the following times during planning:

**1. Early in the process** to build support in the community for the planning effort.

**2. During development of the plan** to get input on:

- resource concerns
- objectives
- alternative strategies

**3. After the plan is completed** to inform the community about the plan and implementation efforts.

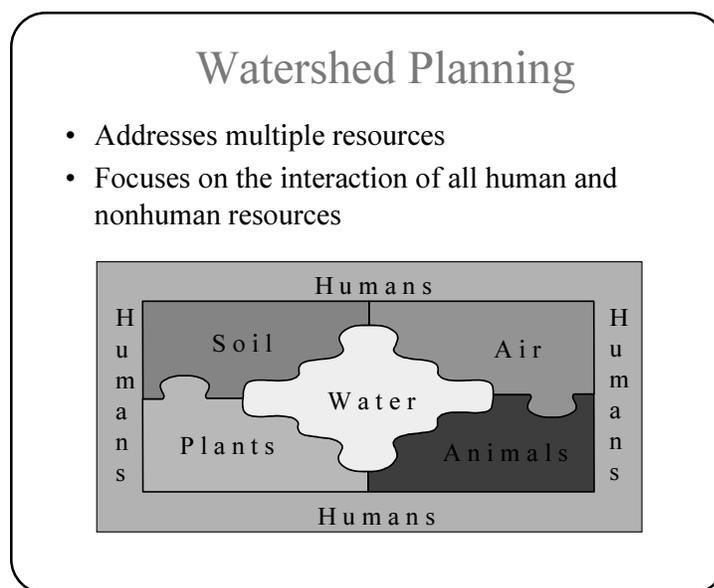
## How do we do it?

“Public participation” often brings to mind public meetings. While meetings are a useful tool for garnering public input, there are many, many other ways to obtain input from the public, such as citizen advisory panels, interviews, newsletters, charrettes, or focus groups.

The Planning Committee should select public participation methods based on the level of participation required to achieve their objectives. All public participation techniques vary in the extent to which they actively involve the public in the decision-making. Some techniques are suitable only to inform the public of decisions already made; others involve the public in all stages of the decision-making process.

The three categories below group public participation techniques according to the amount of input they yield for decision-making, and how helpful they are for the typical Planning Committee objectives in the context of locally-led planning.

When selecting public participation methods, the Planning Committee should also consider their commitment to obtain and use public input; expectations and needs of the public; availability of necessary skills, time, and other resources, including in some cases an experienced facilitator for some of the more complex methods.



## **How do we do it? (cont'd)**

### **Information-Only**

Information-only methods are essentially “take-it or leave-it” approaches. They are usually one-way communications, e.g., the Planning Committee prints a brochure to educate the public about their watershed. These methods may be appropriate during the earliest stages of the planning process to build support in the community for the planning effort, or after the plan is completed to keep the public informed about implementation. Information-only methods will not provide insight about the content of a resource plan desired by the public. Information-only techniques should not be used when people are expecting and want more involvement in the decision-making.

#### **Some Information-Only Methods**

- Print and distribute leaflets, newsletters, video
- Brief media through press releases and press conferences
- Give presentations at meetings of other local organizations
- Dedication ceremonies and tours

### **Consultation**

Consultation methods offer some choices to the public about what will happen. However, they do not provide an opportunity for people to develop their own ideas or participate in putting plans into action. Consultative methods may be appropriate when the Planning Committee wants input on the resource concerns which they have identified, the objectives they have developed, or the various alternatives suggested by Technical Advisors. Consultation is also appropriate to obtain information about existing ecological, socio-economic and political conditions in the planning area.

#### **Some Consultative Methods**

- Surveys
- Meetings or interviews with community leaders
- Advisory committees
- Simulations
- Design charrettes or other workshops

### **Collaboration**

Collaborative techniques entails the highest level of participation of the public in the decision-making process. Collaboration essentially means “deciding together” and involves developing ideas and options in partnership with others. As such, collaboration requires more time and the techniques are more complex. Collaborative public involvement entails multiple public participation techniques. Considered in its entirety, the NRCS locally-led resource planning process is essentially collaborative. Collaboration with the non-committee public may be appropriate to generate ideas about resource concerns, objectives, and alternatives, and to implement elements of the resource plan.

#### **Description of a Typical Collaboration Method**

1. Use information-only methods to start the process
2. Do stakeholder analysis to determine who should be involved
3. Form partnerships with stakeholder organizations for input and to carry out action items
4. Use brainstorming, Nominal Group Technique, citizen surveys, focus groups and other techniques to develop ideas and alternatives

## **For more information**

*For public participation assistance, contact the NRCS State Social Sciences Coordinator at (217) 398-5277 or consult the material used to develop this factsheet-- [The Guide to Effective Participation](#) by David Wilcox and available at <http://www.communities.org.uk/guide/main1.html>.*

*The Conservation Partnership has a series of booklets relevant to public participation including, Alliance Building, Information Gathering Techniques, Media Relations, Reaching Out to Minority Farmers, and Guide to Facilitating Strategic Planning Workshops. Contact the NACD Service Center at (800) 825-5547; fax: (713) 332-5259.*

# Working With the Media

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## What is it?

Use the local media as a tool to educate members of the community about the purpose and progress of the areawide planning effort. Inform the media about Planning Committee objectives, invite them to meetings, and include them on tours and other functions.

## Why is it important?

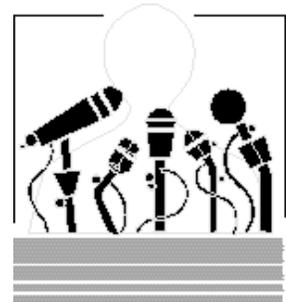
A successful planning effort requires cooperation, education, and action throughout the planning area. Working with the Planning and Technical Advisory Committees and partners is critical, but just as important is the task of keeping the larger public informed of planning activities. To develop a resource management plan that will be embraced by the community, local citizens must first understand the committee's purpose, the resource problems and issues, and the personal benefits of the final plan. The local media can help accomplish this. The media can also help educate residents about basic conservation concepts and issues.

## How do we do it?

Media coverage can be "hard news" --news about the river or creek and statistics on the quality of the habitat, or it can be "soft news" --feature stories about the people behind the plan, people that are making a difference by the little things they do. Give the media valuable background information on basic concepts like watersheds and how they function, soil erosion, wetlands, flooding issues, water quality, and the idea of interconnected ecosystems. Information of this kind can be used at any time and will provide meaningful support for your cause.

Try to have a single contact person represent the Planning Committee so that consistent messages are conveyed to the public. Good contact people are the Chair of the Planning Committee or an NRCS or SWCD representative who has worked well with the media in the past.

There are two approaches to working with the media during resource planning. The first strategy is to submit your own information and news releases to the local media. This is recommended during the early stages as the Planning Committee gets established, and especially if there is a considerable amount of conflict or disagreement within the group. By writing your own press releases, you control the content and timing of the information shared with the public.



At the appropriate time you can provide lists of identified and ranked resource concerns, desired future conditions, and alternatives to the media. When Technical Committees produce new inventory information or review previously compiled data, share these reports as well. Some of this information and these ideas have probably never made it to the public eye. Keep in the forefront how the final plan will benefit local residents. Keep reminding the public what it will mean to them.

Consider providing information for stories that profile committee members, agencies, and partners. There's always a good story about how people and partners are working together to address a common problem. Newspapers need stories like that and readers enjoy feature stories because they are about people.

Give the media a map of the watershed boundaries. They can run an article asking readers to see if they live in the watershed. Then provide a list of 'Do's and Don'ts' for homeowners, streamside landowners, businesses, and others within the watershed, telling them what they can do personally to protect the health of their watershed.

The second strategy is to let the media cover your committee's progress as you develop the resource plan. To do this successfully, involve the media early in the natural resource planning process. Let them "tell your story" as it unfolds with each meeting. If the media can attend the meetings, even better. This lets them in on the complexities of resource planning and helps them convey how important resource issues are to communities, businesses, farmers, and the future.

### Key Points

As this information becomes available, provide media packets with factsheets or information about:

- Committee members, mission statement, and purpose
- Identified resource problems
- Inventory data or local statistics
- Solutions/alternatives
- Watershed boundaries
- Agency profiles of all project partners
- Description of the NRCS resource planning process
- Tips on what local residents can do to improve water quality or reduce sedimentation



# Developing a Contact List

USDA • Natural Resources Conservation Service • July 1999

## What is it?

The Planning Committee and Technical Advisory Committee will be working with different agencies, organizations, and individuals throughout the Resource Planning process. Participants may not be familiar with everyone who attends meetings and provides data, information, and support.

One way to address this problem is to create a “contact list” of field staff and partners who are assisting with the planning process. The contact list provides a readily accessible list of people to call between meetings when the committees have questions.

Be sure to include the primary contact person (for example, the NRCS District Conservationist) plus other partners who are working on the planning project. If the planning area spans more than one county, include the District Conservationists, Resource Conservationists, and other technical specialists from all counties.

### Others to include on the contact list:

- Community Planner, NRCS
- Resource Conservationist, SWCD
- Biologist, USFWS
- Water Quality Specialist, EPA/IEPA
- Agricultural Engineer, NRCS
- Streambank Stabilization Specialist, NRCS
- Landscape Architect, NRCS
- Archeologist, NRCS
- Sociologist, NRCS
- Public Affairs Specialist, NRCS
- Other specialists from the private sector

Following is an example of a contact list that can be prepared by NRCS or partners for the benefit of the Planning Committee:

# Our Contact List

## Agencies & Organizations

### Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

An agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture whose mission is to protect, preserve, and enhance natural resources and the environment on private lands. Working with landowners and land managers for more than 60 years, NRCS specializes in conservation technology and practical natural resource solutions.

### Whatever County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

A locally led, grassroots organization whose mission and priorities are directed by local issues and governed by locally elected officials. SWCDs work to address conservation and natural resource issues within their district boundaries. The Districts work hand-in-hand with NRCS to accomplish mutual goals.

**Other local/federal partners** involved in the planning process--EPA, DNR, USFWS, FS, etc. Provide a brief overview of the function, purpose, or mission of each agency.

## Individuals & Technical Specialists

### Primary Contact Person during planning process:

Sally Smith, USDA-NRCS  
100 Residue Management Lane  
Farmtown, USA

PH: ( )  
FX: ( )

Les Erosion, District Conservationist, NRCS  
100 No Till Way  
Farmtown, USA

PH: ( )  
FX: ( )

Here, list the services and assistance the DC can provide--soils data, maps, land use information, farming practices in the region, technical assistance in designing and implementing conservation practices for rural and urban settings, etc. List those services appropriate for the planning area.

Lon Range, Resource Planning Specialist, NRCS  
1234 Conservation Lane  
Anytown, USA

PH: ( )  
FX: ( )

Diane Design, Engineer, NRCS  
Technical Hwy. 4  
Your Town, USA

PH: ( )  
FX: ( )

Here, list the services and assistance the RC can provide--facilitation, resource inventory data for the region or the watershed, watershed boundary information or maps, etc.

NRCS ILLINOIS

Resource  
Planning  
Guidebook

Factsheets

USDA NRCS  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

# Building Local Ownership of Resource Plans

USDA • Natural Resources Conservation Service • July 1999

## What is it?

A resource plan has local ownership when stakeholders in the planning area believe the plan reflects their interests, concerns and objectives. It's when local people feel the plan is "theirs" because they want it, they develop it, and they promote it throughout the planning area. Local ownership means stakeholders support and are involved in implementation of the plan. Local ownership also means the resource plan is a viable document that people look to for ways to manage their resources for a long time to come.

## Why is it important?

Local ownership is essential for successful resource planning. Without local ownership, resource plans risk never being finished, shelved and forgotten, or opposed by community members.

## When do we do it?

Local ownership begins during "pre-planning" and continues to develop throughout planning and implementation.

## How do we do it?

The entire planning process is intended to foster the involvement, commitment and independent initiative of local stakeholders. The single most important way to develop local ownership is to maintain the integrity of the planning process. The ultimate goal of the NRCS resource planning process is to enable local people to manage their resources in ways that are consistent with their ecological, economic and social interests. Ideally, Planning Committees go on to become on-going coalition groups that provide continual leadership for natural resource issues.

Local ownership begins with the formation of a citizen-based Planning Committee. The Planning Committee leads the planning project. Technical experts provide information, advice and process facilitation to help the Planning Committee achieve their goal of developing and implementing a resource management plan. Local ownership continues to develop with regular public input, Planning Committee participation in resource inventorying and evaluation, and stakeholder selection of preferred management strategies. Implementation strategies that actively involve stakeholders--volunteer activities, educational campaigns, grant-writing committees and more--keeps the plan in the purview of the local people.



Here are some tips for building local ownership.

Cultivate trusting relationships with communities before helping them identifying specific problems or needs. Get to know people and their communities. This familiarization enhances staff understanding of the resource issues in their language, not yours, and helps convey the benefits of natural resource management from their perspective.

Once the Planning Committee is formed, interests may ebb and flow. To ensure the process stays on course, help the committee maintain their focus, commitment and interest with the following:

- **Hold dynamic meetings (start and end on time, have a good agenda, keep it moving, get things done).**
- **Take action. Identify easy projects that are likely to succeed to do throughout the planning.**
- **Value participants' input.**
- **Find out participant's interests and involve them accordingly.**
- **Place participants on committees and empower them to execute their responsibilities.**
- **Make assignments and hold people accountable.**
- **Provide leadership opportunities.**
- **Engage a trained facilitator.**
- **Give feedback by documenting and sharing progress.**
- **Encourage participants to present and report at meetings.**
- **Encourage individual thinking and contribution.**
- **Make sure all members support decisions.**
- **Ensure the next step. Conclude all meetings and activities with a clear plan for what will happen next.**
- **Acknowledge good work.**

Everyone involved in the planning project is responsible for building local ownership. Each member of the Planning Committee has a responsibility to stay interested and engaged in the project, and to suggest changes when something is not working.

The Planning Committee leadership (for example, the Chairman, Vice-Chairman) helps foster local ownership by staying informed and involved in the process, and by ensuring work is completed and decisions executed.

NRCS/SWCD staff and technical experts also create local ownership. They maintain a commitment to the project and care about the group's progress. They monitor social and political factors that may affect the project's outcome, use good communication skills, are respectful of members, able to share responsibility and credit, and are patient, creative, and flexible!

**WARNING SIGNS!  
LACK OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP**



- **Group does not set meeting dates.**
- **Group does not select a Chairperson.**
- **Group does not develop meeting agendas.**
- **Members are reluctant to take on duties.**
- **Members are reluctant to come to meetings.**
- **Some members are involved only so that "nothing happens."**



# Assessing the Need for Resource Planning

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## What is it?

Assessing the need for resource planning involves working with stakeholders to determine whether a resource management plan is the appropriate way to address their concerns.

## When do we do it?

Generally, requests for resource planning are made by stakeholders in a watershed, community, or other planning area to the SWCD, NRCS or other Conservation Partners. Determining whether resource planning is warranted is the first activity NRCS and other partners will undertake with the stakeholders.

## How do we do it?

Resource planning is an area-wide planning process. Resource planning is not needed if the resource problems are only site-specific and remedied by conservation practices applied to the site. For example, gully erosion on a farm field or eroding banks of a livestock pond call for conservation treatment undertaken by the individual landowner. In contrast, area-wide resource planning is usually needed to resolve problems like flooding, stream sedimentation or water quality degradation occurring throughout a watershed or other planning area. Concerns such as these may be best addressed with the resource planning process when:

- Multiple stakeholders are affected by the problems but they lack consensus about what should be done.
- The problems are interrelated and complex.
- Solutions can only be implemented over a long period of time with the collaboration of many parties and public assistance.

When one or more stakeholders identify resource concerns for which they want assistance, consider the following points:

Determine if other stakeholders are experiencing similar resource problems. If further investigation identifies, for example, multiple streambank erosion sites or sediment problems from many construction sites, the resource concerns may be best addressed on an area-wide basis.

Solicit open discussion with other stakeholders within the area to measure their interest in a resource planning process. Resource planning is a locally-led process that requires strong stakeholder interest. A single citizen concerned about the problem is not sufficient for an effective areawide planning effort.

Review any past and current planning projects. In some cases past planning efforts are still applicable. Old resource plans may simply need to be updated, or new implementation strategies devised.

## The Next Step

After it's determined that resource planning is desired by the community and is appropriate, identify stakeholders to serve on the Planning Committee. See factsheet on "Identifying Stakeholders for the Planning Committee."

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# Identifying Stakeholders for the Planning Committee

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## What is it?

The Planning Committee is made up of about 15 people who are typical of all stakeholders in the planning area. *Stakeholders are those who have an interest in or may be affected by actions recommended in the resource management plan.* Stakeholders who serve on the Planning Committee are the primary decision-makers during the planning process. They work with technical advisors and interact with the public to develop a resource plan which can be supported and implemented in the planning area.

## When do we do it?

Begin assembling a Planning Committee after stakeholders request assistance and the initial assessment indicates that resource planning is appropriate (see fact sheet "Assessing the Need for Resource Planning").

## How do we do it?

In order to develop a plan that addresses all resource concerns and integrates ecological, economic, and social factors, multiple stakeholders interested in developing a management plan need to be identified.

Work with initial stakeholders to identify a total of 7 to 10 people who are interested in resource planning for their area. Select stakeholders who

- **Are able to represent the group as well as their individual interests;**
- **Can serve as decision makers in the planning area;**
- **Together, represent all of the social, economic, and cultural communities in the planning area;**
- **Together, represent all the different views, opinions, and interests in the area.**

Federal and state agencies should not be included on the Planning Committee. Instead, they serve as technical advisors or help facilitate the planning process. To do otherwise may weaken local leadership and acceptance of the plan.

Hold one or two "preplanning" meetings with the stakeholders. The purpose of these early meetings is for the group to understand the resource planning process, assess whether a resource plan is needed in their area, and determine whether they wish to participate in its development. Once this core group is committed to the project, they can expand their numbers if any critical stakeholder was overlooked during the early stages of the process.

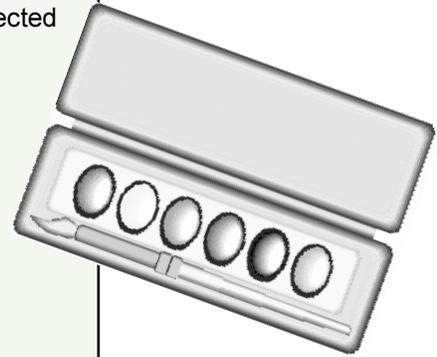
Limiting the Planning Committee to around 15 participants does not mean the committee makes decisions in a vacuum. The Planning Committee must periodically seek input from and provide information to the entire community of people in the planning area to ensure that the final plan is acceptable to all. See fact sheet on "Public Participation in Resource Planning" for more information.

## The Planning Committee

Made up of Stakeholders: 10-15 representatives all of whom have an interest in, or are affected by, the watershed.

The Committee may include:

- Residents
- Landowners
- Farm owners and operators
- Local municipal officials
- Business and industry representatives
- Environment and conservation groups
- Other special interest representatives



## The Next Step

Once the Planning Committee is organized, they'll want to establish operating procedures for how their group will function during the planning process. They should also agree on the planning area for which they will develop a resource plan. Refer to "Establishing Operating Procedures for the Planning Committee" and "Defining the Planning Area."



# Establishing Operating Procedures for the Planning Committee

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## What is it?

Operating procedures address how the Planning Committee members will function as a team. Operating procedures are not directly related to the substantive resource issues the Planning Committee is working to solve. Rather, they concern procedural things such as who will chair the committee, how member absences will be handled, who will take meeting minutes, and how agendas will be distributed.

Operating procedures for Planning Committees are similar to the bylaws of boards, councils and commissions. However, because the newly-formed, volunteer Planning Committee does not have legal responsibility for the operation and management of an organization, the formal written bylaws typical of boards is not warranted. Instead, it's usually sufficient for the Planning Committee to make decisions about the procedures that will be effective throughout the planning process, and document them in the meeting minutes. Later, if the committee reorganizes as a membership group accepting public funds, applies for non-profit status, or achieves some other legally-recognized status, then more formal documentation of procedures will be needed.

## When do we do it?

Discussion about procedures which will guide the activities and functions of the Planning Committee should take place during the first few meetings.

## Why do we do it?

Making procedural decisions early on helps move the Planning Committee from a disparate group of individuals to a cohesive, organized committee. Operating procedures helps the Planning Committee stay focused throughout the planning on the resource problems and solutions. Meetings are not spent debating what to do about an absent committee member or deciding who should take notes. A consistent record of committee proceedings is maintained. Members know who to call with questions between meetings, and they're confident of when the committee will normally meet. In short, operating procedures adds consistency and reliability to the planning process, and helps the committee get things done.

## How do we do it?

Decisions about operating procedures are made by the Planning Committee. With assistance from a facilitator, resource planning specialist, District Conservationist, or other key individual, the Planning Committee should discuss the following:

### • *Planning Committee Leadership*

The Planning Committee selects a Chairperson. Some Planning Committees chose two Co-Chairs to share responsibilities. The Chairperson is the primary liaison between the Planning Committee and NRCS (and other Conservation Partners who are lending planning support). The Chairperson works with the Planning Committee to establish meeting agendas. He or she is responsible for sending correspondence to Planning Committee members between meetings,

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communicating with the Technical Advisory Committee, and in general, working with NRCS and other partners to make sure the planning effort is proceeding on schedule. The Chairperson is often designated as the primary contact person who can answer questions and provide information to the public.

The Planning Committee decides how a Chairperson will be selected. Typically one or more people on the Planning Committee volunteers to act as the Committee Chairperson. Sometimes, members will nominate someone. If more than one person is interested, the Planning Committee may want to vote and “elect” the person receiving the most votes.

#### • *Attrition and Absenteeism*

The Planning Committee decides how absences among Planning Committee members will be handled. People occasionally miss meetings. Most committees establish a procedure for member absences which indicate if an individual misses a meeting, then the decisions made at missed meetings cannot be disputed by the absent member. In another words, the process continues even if someone cannot attend a meeting.

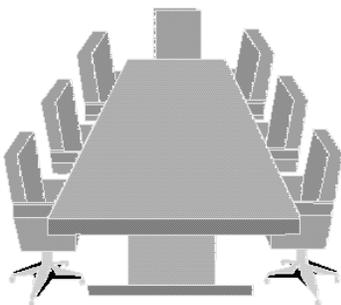
On occasion, people may also need to drop out of the planning process. Adding new members can be problematic in the middle of the planning process because new members may not agree with what has taken place, and “starting over” may be discouraging to the rest of the committee. On the other hand, new stakeholders should generally agree with the decisions of the Planning Committee because the Planning Committee should be representative of all the views and interests in the planning area.

In any case, one or two people resigning from the Planning Committee usually does not cause problems and does not warrant replacing them. However, if many people are no longer participating, then it may suggest that interest and support for the planning is lacking. Heavy attrition warrants an honest look at whether the community supports and is interested in the planning project.

#### • *Tenure*

The planning process tends to take a year or more. Usually Planning Committee members want to stay involved through the entire process. After the management plan is completed, give everyone an opportunity to end their participation with a sense of accomplishment and provide closure for a job well done. Then, any individuals who wish to remain active during the implementation of the plan can chose to do so, and those who don't can end their participation.

It is important to distinguish between the tenure expected of members during the planning phase compared to tenure during implementation. To successfully complete a resource plan, consistent participation from the same group of stakeholders is needed. However, once the resource plan is completed, a more fluid mix of participants to guide implementation is preferred. Of course, not all Planning Committees formally “reinvent” themselves as Implementation Committees, but if they do, the goal is generally to have an on-going advisory committee that can help insure implementation of the plan. Because these implementation committees may be indefinitely active, it's critical that new stakeholders continually become involved.



#### • *Meeting Location*

A regular meeting time and place helps committee members consistently attend meetings. The Planning Committee decides how often they will meet, and for how long. Many committees meet once a month, though meeting more frequently can move things along faster. It's best to limit any meeting to two hours, except for special events like watershed tours or conferences.

#### • *Decision Making Process*

The Planning Committee determines how they will make decisions. Most substantive decisions are best made by consensus. The group has consensus when everyone can support the decision. With consensus, each person may not agree with every aspect of the decision, but they can lend their support to it. Less substantive decisions, such as who will chair the committee, can be made by vote.

#### • *Authority in Decision Making*

Usually, each stakeholder on the Planning Committees has equal decision-making status. The Chairperson may act as the spokesperson for the group, but does not have more authority than anyone else. Furthermore, each committee member represents the community at large.

#### • *Other Issues*

Other procedural issues that the Planning Committee will want to address include how agendas will be distributed, confidentiality of meeting discussions, public communication, and roles and responsibilities of members.

### **The Next Step**

After the Planning Committee has established their operating procedures and agreed on the planning area (see "Defining the Planning Area"), they will need to identify the resource concerns. Refer to the factsheet "Identifying Resource Concerns."

### **For more information**

*"Developing Effective and Efficient Local Committees,"* by Delwyn Dyer and Oscar Williams, Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities and Tuskegee Univ., Cooperating, 1999.

*"Developing Effective Boards, Councils, or Commissions,"* by Delwyn Dyer and Oscar Williams, Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities and Tuskegee Univ., Cooperating, 1999.



# Defining the Planning Area

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## What is it?

The area needing resource planning often seems obvious. Bank erosion and sedimentation in a local stream, for example, requires addressing conditions throughout the stream's "watershed," or all the land that drains to the stream.

On closer examination, however, watershed terminology is not always so simple. It is possible to define almost an infinite number of watershed boundaries, depending on the reference point. One small stream drains to successively larger streams. Should the planning consider the smallest drainage area, called the *catchment*? Or should the plan address the *subwatershed*, *watershed*, or *subbasin* level?

No matter the terms used, it's critical to clearly define the boundaries of the planning area. The planning area will focus the identification of problems and opportunities, the inventory work, and the development of management strategies. The stakeholders who should be represented on the Planning Committee will also be defined by the planning area.

## When do we do it?

The planning area needs to be identified during the initial pre-planning meetings with stakeholders.

## How do we do it?

Usually resource planning is conducted on a watershed basis. In general, watershed-based planning is advantageous because it gives a systems perspective for problem-solving, works across political boundaries, and is the most effective way of addressing nonpoint source pollution. Experts say the optimal watershed size for effective resource planning is about 5 to 20 square miles, but the NRCS resource planning process also works in smaller or larger watersheds.

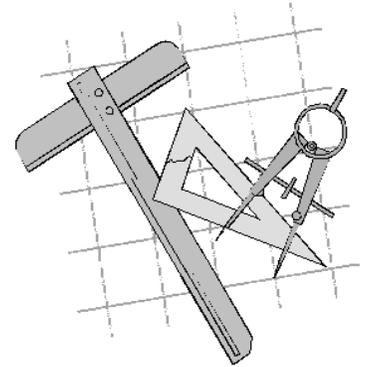
The NRCS District Conservationist and other resource professionals will help stakeholders identify the drainage area relevant to their concerns. Start by reviewing a watershed map such as the NRCS Hydrologic Unit map. The Illinois EPA has also delineated over 800 watersheds for planning purposes. All upstream watershed acreage should be included in the planning area, while downstream acreage is usually limited to a juncture with the next major waterbody.

Along with stakeholder input, consider the conservation activities of Conservation Partners. Try to limit the size of the watershed because the larger the watershed, the more complicated the planning process— especially when watersheds cross state lines. Also, larger watersheds necessitate more general plans, which tend to be less effective.

Typically this analysis results in a planning area encompassing all the land draining a large community stream (usually named), and one or more (often unnamed) small creeks or drainage ditches.

**The following are some indications that the planning area is appropriately defined:**

- There are similar stakeholder concerns throughout the watershed.
- There is consistent resource conditions, land uses, and planning issues throughout the watershed.



Occasionally resource planning is not conducted on a watershed scale. Instead, the planning may be done for a karst area, an oil brine damage area, a mine-reclamation area, for a single community, or a county. The same considerations for watershed-based planning apply for non-watershed resource planning. Boundaries are suggested by the types of resource issues, community interests and geographical considerations. All public and private lands necessary to effect change should be included. Local stakeholders should help finalize planning area boundaries.

### **The Next Step**

After the Planning Committee has defined on the planning area, they will begin Step 1 of the resource planning process. Refer to the factsheet “Identifying Resource Concerns.”

# Identifying Resource Concerns

**Step  
1**
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## What is it?

The resource concerns identified by the Planning Committee will guide the entire planning process. The inventory work of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will focus on these resource concerns. The TAC will identify potential management strategies for the concerns, and those strategies which the Planning Committee endorses will be promoted in the final management plan.

## When do we do it?

After a committee of representative stakeholders has been formed, the committee has discussed the procedural issues that will guide the planning process, and they've defined the planning area, then it is time to identify the resource concerns. Identifying resource concerns is the first step in the Nine-Step, Three-Phase Planning Process.

## How do we do it?

Use a facilitator to help the Planning Committee prepare a list of the resource concerns in the planning area. As always, the facilitator should be viewed by the Planning Committee as a neutral party. For this reason, a Planning Committee member should never facilitate the discussion about resource concerns, and sometimes local field staff should refrain from facilitating. Instead, try using a trained facilitator from outside the planning area. During the discussion of resource concerns, it is usually adequate to have the discussion facilitator also record all the ideas, though a separate recorder can be used.

Here is the process for the facilitator to use with the Planning Committee:

1.) Begin by explaining to the Planning Committee why they are identifying their concerns for the planning area, and how these concerns will guide the work of the Technical Advisory Committee and the entire planning process.

2.) Next, explain they will use a technique called "brainstorming" to prepare a list of resource concerns. Give an overview of the brainstorming process:

### Brainstorming...

- Effectively gets people "out of the box," and allows them to think more creatively
- Energizes the group
- Generates many good ideas

“ Each member takes turns identifying a concern in the planning area, until there are no new concerns. The Planning Committee avoids lengthy discussion about the merits of each person's concerns. Instead, everyone identifies all their concerns no matter how trivial or controversial. Then, they rank the entire list so those concerns that are most important to most members of the group will be addressed in the planning process. Also, at this time the Planning Committee should avoid discussing ways to solve the problems identified by the group. The primary role of the TAC is to identify potential solutions to the concerns for the Planning Committee's consideration, so lengthy discussions about how to solve the problems will occur later in the planning process. ”

3.) Review some basic groundrules with the Planning Committee before the brainstorming begins. The committee should add any additional groundrules they think are important. If the Planning Committee veers off track during the discussion (for example, if they begin to debate someone's ideas), the facilitator intervenes and reminds the group of the groundrules. Here's a list of commonly used groundrules:

#### Brainstorming Ground Rules...

- Leave rank and status at the door
- No criticism or evaluation
- Quantity and exaggeration is welcome
- Record all ideas
- Everyone participates
- There are no wrong ideas
- Build on the ideas of others



4.) After the brainstorming process and the groundrules are explained, the facilitator asks each person to silently write down all their concerns for the planning area. The facilitator asks "What are your concerns in this area?" After people stop writing, go around the room and ask each person to share their ideas. Record each idea on a flip chart in the front of the room. Here are some tips for effective recording of ideas:

- Always record ideas in the participant's words only. The facilitator/recorder should never paraphrase. Instead, ask participants to paraphrase their own ideas so the recorder can write it succinctly.
- Leave plenty of space on each page so that similar ideas can be written together.
- Set up several flip charts so the recorder can write on multiple sheets of paper with less page turning.
- As ideas are recorded on the flip chart pages, have someone besides the facilitator (e.g., field staff) post pages on the walls where the Planning Committee can see them.

5.) After there are no new ideas, the entire list of ideas is reviewed and similar ideas grouped together. Always ask the person who offered an idea whether it fits with another idea before merging them. Work with the Planning Committee to ensure the final list has discrete ideas which do not overlap with any other ideas. Also make sure everyone understands the meaning of each idea. Put letters beginning A, B, C, etc. next to each idea or cluster of merged ideas so it's clear to everyone which ideas comprise the list of concerns. Avoid using numbers. Then, review the list to see how many concerns were identified. At their discretion, the Planning Committee may wish to narrow down and prioritize their list. As a general rule, about ten or fewer concerns is usually manageable.

6.) To reduce the list of concerns, each person identifies their top concerns and a tally is made of the top scoring ideas for the entire committee. This is called the "Nominal Group Process" and it helps the Planning Committee quickly reach consensus on their top concerns. If the committee wants a list of the five most important concerns, each person will identify their top five concerns. If they want ten concerns, each person identifies their top ten concerns. The Nominal Group Process is an effective way of eliminating less critical concerns while avoiding contentious discussion.

To use the Nominal Group Process, give each person the appropriate number of sticky dots (i.e., five or ten dots, depending on the size of the desired final list of concerns). Give the group five or ten minutes to privately write down the letters of the concerns that are most important to them. When everyone is finished, have them place their sticky dots next to those concerns on the posted flip charts. Add up the number of "votes" each idea received. Eliminate low scoring ideas. Review the final list with the Planning Committee, and review how the list will be used.

## The Next Step

After the resource concerns are identified, the Planning Committee will indicate their objectives or "Desired Future Conditions" for each concern. The Planning Committee and the field staff will also identify technical experts who can address their concerns as part of a Technical Advisory Committee. During this period, the Planning Committee may also want to conduct a tour of the watershed or planning area, if they haven't already done so. Refer to the fact sheet about "Conducting Rapid Resource Appraisal Tours" for ideas.



# Determining Objectives

Step 2

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## What is it?

Objectives are the goals the Planning Committee is working towards or intending to accomplish. Objectives are also known as “Desired Future Conditions” in the NRCS-National Planning Procedures Handbook. They are the Planning Committee’s expression of the desired future state of the resources compared to existing conditions. Objectives can be quantitative (expressed in numbers) or qualitative (expressed in words). For quantitative objectives, target values can be set depending on the availability of data.

## When do we do it?

The Planning Committee determines their objectives after they have identified the resource concerns in the planning area. Determining objectives usually takes place around the third or fourth Planning Committee meeting.

## Why is it important?

The Planning Committee needs to reach consensus about their objectives, and capture the objectives in writing. Reaching consensus and documenting the results is important for several reasons. Discussing objectives among Planning Committee members provides an opportunity for the committee to work out their differences early in the planning process. Without clearly stated objectives that all support, the Planning Committee will later find it difficult to select and endorse solutions to the resource problems. Further, the objectives are critical information for the Technical Advisory Committee. The Technical Advisory Committee uses the objectives to understand what the Planning Committee wants to accomplish, and they identify solutions to the resource problems that can meet these objectives.

## How do we do it?

A facilitator is used to solicit and record the objectives of the group. The facilitator sets the tone and the atmosphere of the meeting by helping participants feel comfortable with each other and encouraging participation. As always, the facilitator is a neutral party. When objectives are being developed, it is particularly important that the facilitator not be perceived as having any personal preferences as to what should happen in the planning area. For this reason, a Planning Committee member should never facilitate the discussion about objectives, and occasionally local field staff should refrain from facilitating. Instead, try using a trained facilitator from outside the planning area.

### Brainstorming “Ground Rules”

- Everyone participates
- No evaluating ideas
- Think BIG
- Leave rank at the door
- Be brief
- Be specific

For each resource concern, have the facilitator lead the Planning Committee through the following questions. All three questions should be answered for each resource concern.

**1. What desired future conditions do we want to achieve with respect to the resource problem?** (Other ways to prompt discussion include: What do we want to happen with this resource problem? In what condition do we want the resource to be? Develop a goal statement for each resource problem.)

**2. What do we know about this problem?** (Ask the committee to describe the

problem: What is happening? Where is it occurring? Why is it occurring? How long has it been happening? Has the intensity of the problem changed? What sources of information are available about the problem?)

**3. What do we need to know about this problem?** (Ask the committee: What questions do we have about this problem that need to be answered in order to solve it? What questions need to be answered in order to implement our solutions?)

Initial discussions typically require objectives be stated in qualitative, or narrative terms. After the technical advisors complete the inventories and devise management strategies, the objectives can be quantified with target values based on the benchmark conditions.

It may take several meetings to record the Planning Committee's objectives, comments and questions for all the resource concerns. The results of these discussions should be typed and distributed to all members for their review. Changes can be made immediately if necessary, or additional changes might be made later in light of findings by the Technical Advisory Committee.

If necessary, the Planning Committee can prioritize their objectives. Consider prioritizing objectives if they identify more than a few objectives for each resource concern. To prioritize objectives, use the same ranking technique explained in the RPG factsheet, "Identifying Resource Concerns."

### Why ask "What do we know?" and "What do we need to know?"

The purpose of questions #2 and #3 is to document the exiting knowledge among committee members about the resource problems, and identify areas they feel need to be further investigated. Information about "what is known" and "what needs to be known" can help the Technical Advisory Committee target their inventory work.

Stakeholders also tend to raise issues during the discussion that can potentially sidetrack their progress towards reaching consensus about objectives. For example, during the discussion someone may ask why the problem is occurring. Or another person may counter someone's opinion by citing a lack of information about some aspect of the problem. Recording these comments with Questions # 2 and #3 validates their concerns while avoiding having to answer the questions at this time. It is important to remember that technical questions about why or where problems are occurring or how the problems should be solved are left to the technical advisors as the planning project unfolds.

The facilitator's challenge is to keep this discussion focused on what the Planning Committee wants to achieve, while minimizing conversation about related issues. There will be time later to discuss these issues. Help the Planning Committee understand that their why, how and what questions are being recorded and the Planning Committee's goals documented so that the Technical Advisory Committee can provide answers for the committee's consideration.

In practice, people share their thoughts without necessarily connecting them to one of the three questions. That is, the facilitator may encourage the group to identify their objectives for a water quality problem, when someone calls out, "But how do we know the regulatory standard is fair?". The facilitator should acknowledge the comment, record it under the question, "What do we need to know?" and then continue soliciting comments. Because this is the way this exercise tends to proceed, it's helpful to use three flip charts, each headed by one of the questions. This allows the facilitator to record comments under the appropriate topic as they are offered.

**Key Points**

- Initially, most objectives will be stated qualitatively. Later, inventory work can help the Committee quantify their goals.
- Let the Committee set initial objectives (what, where, how much) for each problem.
- Encourage the committee to establish priority objectives.
- Help the committee begin thinking about who can provide technical expertise for each resource concern.

## The Next Step

After objectives are identified, it's time to organize the Technical Advisory Committee using the list of resource concerns and objectives. Also, help the Planning Committee develop a mission statement for their committee. Refer to the factsheets on "Setting Up the Technical Advisory Committee" and "Developing a Mission Statement."

# Developing a Mission Statement

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## What is it?

The mission statement is the Planning Committee's description of who they are and what they're trying to accomplish. The mission statement says:

- Who we are
- Why we exist
- What we do
- What we stand for

By answering these questions, the mission statement gives the group strategic direction. It serves as a guide for decision making and goal development.

## Why is it important?

The mission statement informs people in the planning area about the committee and the planning process. Local community groups see the committee's mission statement in promotional brochures and other correspondence. It is included in the resource plan and in grant applications to inform stakeholders and funding agencies. The mission statement helps the media accurately convey the Planning Committee's intentions and activities to the public.

The mission statement also helps the Planning Committee stay focused. The process of developing the mission statement clarifies areas of agreement and disagreement, and ensures common understanding is reached early in the planning process. The mission statement articulates the focus and direction of the Planning Committee. This facilitates their decision-making later in the planning process. The mission statement can help keep the Planning Committee motivated, by giving a clear verbal reminder of the group's purpose and objectives.

Finally, the mission statement can demonstrate the organizational relationship between the Planning Committee and related organizations. For example, if the Planning Committee acts as a citizen advisory committee to the County Board, then the Planning Committee's mission statement usually acknowledges that relationship. This helps clarify how the Planning Committee relates to other organizations in the planning area.

## How do we do it?

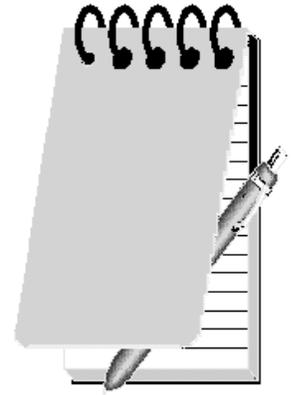
Using the assistance of a facilitator, an easy way to develop a mission statement is as follows:

- Write the following questions on a flip chart:
  1. Who are we?
  2. What do we do?
  3. Why do we exist?
  4. What do we stand for?



The facilitator asks the group, brainstorming-fashion, to provide their answers until each topic is fully addressed.

- All answers are posted around the room so that group members can see what's been written.
- Next, each member of the group is asked to privately draft a mission statement utilizing all or part of the information in front of them. Allow about 20 minutes for this, or until most people have finished writing.
- Everyone--or those who wish to do so--shares their mission statement with the entire group.
- The shared mission statements are written so that everyone can see them at the same time.
- Next, with the group's input, the facilitator underlines key phrases or words that are common among the various statements.
- Using consensus, the group selects one or two of the statements to work on. These are modified until the group devises a statement all can support.



Once developed, a typed copy of the mission statement should be provided to all group members. A large copy of it should be on display at all future group meetings.

### Example Mission Statements

- 1) *To develop, enhance and protect the ecological and socioeconomic values of the natural resources while continuing private ownership.*
- 2) *The objective of the Planning Committee is to develop a Comprehensive Management Plan for the natural resources in the entire Embarras River Basin. They hope to unite private citizens, public groups, and government agencies to address the resource problems related to watershed management.*
- 3) *We the members of the Nippersink Creek Watershed Planning Committee, have a vision for the watershed that will:*
  - *Include a water quality suitable for a full range of recreational activities*
  - *Maintain, protect and enhance a balanced watershed fishery*
  - *Preserve and enhance an ecosystem that supports a balanced wildlife habitat*
  - *Adequately handle surface water runoff*
- 4) *The mission of the Planning Committee is to develop and encourage the funding and implementation of a long-range plan among landowners, government entities, and other appropriate groups which will help ensure safety to human inhabitants through proper enhancement, management and protection of the ecological and socioeconomic resources within the Blackberry Creek Watershed. This will include but not be limited to stormwater management, groundwater quality, aesthetic values, wildlife protection, and reduction in flood damages.*

### The Next Step

The Planning Committee will establish a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), if they haven't already done so. Refer to the factsheet, "Setting Up The Technical Advisory Committee" for suggestions. They'll also work with the TAC to determine their inventory needs. See the factsheet "Determining Inventory Needs" for more information on this issue.

# Scoping the Planning Process

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## What is it?

Scoping is used to determine what is important to investigate during the planning process. It involves identifying which concerns, actions, and impacts will be addressed in the Resource Plan.

## Why is it important?

Scoping allows stakeholders and technical experts to put their limited financial and technical resources towards investigating the most critical issues in the planning area.

## When do we do it?

Scoping occurs throughout Phase One and Phase Two.

## How do we do it?

Scoping comes into play during

1. identification of resource concerns, and
2. evaluation of impacts and effects of alternatives.

### Identifying Resource Concerns

The number of concerns in a planning area is potentially unlimited. During the brainstorming sessions, the Planning Committee identifies all their concerns. (See fact sheet, "Identifying Resource Concerns"). They group the concerns in a way that provides a logical framework for problem definition, and for the analysis and comparison of alternatives later on. For example, similar concerns may be combined as "Water Quality", "Residential Development", "Forest Management", and "Farmland Preservation".

Each concern is rated for its importance to the local people. The Planning Committee might use the Nominal Group Process to rank their concerns in order of priority, or they can rate the significance of each concern as high, moderate, low or none.

Regardless of how they do it, the scoping process means technical advisors base their inventory and evaluation work on the concerns that are most significant to stakeholders. The final resource plan explains why certain resource issues are most significant to stakeholders.

### Evaluating Alternatives

Scoping is the process that is used to identify all the resource issues that need to be investigated in order to assess the effects/impacts of alternative solutions. Each management alternative will have effects and impacts on the resources in the planning area. In addition to affecting the targeted resource problem, a management alternative may affect related resources. For example, installing a flood-control dam on a river can reduce the targeted flooding problem. In addition,

this alternative will affect water quality, threatened and endangered species, and adjacent land use. At a minimum, inventory information will be needed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (see factsheet on this same topic), other environmental laws, and state or federal program requirements. Agencies which provide financial support to the Planning Committee may also require information. For most management alternatives, the following issues are usually critical:

- Cultural resources
- Threatened and endangered species
- Water quality
- Erosion
- Wetlands
- Human health and safety
- Environmental justice or equity

Those concerns that were considered, but found to not require detailed discussion in the plan are also identified. The relative insignificance of these issues should be agreed upon by all parties involved in the planning.

Here's an example outcome of the scoping process:

Resource Concerns	Significance to Stakeholders	Significance to Decision-Making	Remarks
<b>Soil</b> Sedimentation	High	High	Filling in lake
<b>Water</b> Water quality	Moderate	Moderate	
<b>Air</b> No identified concerns			
<b>Plant</b> State-designated Natural Areas	High	Moderate	Posen Woods
<b>Animal</b> Threatened and Endangered species	Moderate	High	Indiana Bat habitat <sup>1</sup>
<b>Human</b> Cultural resources	Moderate	Moderate	

<sup>1</sup> Early in the planning, stakeholders ranked the importance of threatened and endangered species as a "moderate" concern. However, during inventorying technical advisors discovered that the project area included habitat for the endangered Indiana Bat. National and state requirements therefore dictated a full accounting of this resource issue.



# Setting Up the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

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## What is it?

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is a team of professionals who conduct resource inventories, evaluate the inventory data, and suggest management strategies that may meet the objectives identified by the Planning Committee.

## When do we do it?

After the Planning Committee has identified their resource concerns and objectives during Steps 1 and 2, they can begin putting together a TAC.

## How do we do it?

With assistance from NRCS-SWCD, the Planning Committee can identify possible TAC members by reviewing their list of the resource concerns and naming one or more individuals who have expertise in these areas. Typically, TAC members are drawn from local government, non-profit and private organizations, and state and federal agencies. Appropriate individuals are those who have experience with the resource issues and the willingness to assist with the planning effort. Local experts are particularly valuable because they have intimate knowledge of the project setting. Some Planning Committee members with expertise in the issues may wish to also serve on the TAC. The following are some of the organizations that may contribute TAC members.

### Local Organizations

- Soil and Water Conservation District
- Planning and zoning office
- County Board
- Business and industrial groups
- Public works departments
- Financial Institutions
- Neighborhood & Homeowners Assc.
- Non-Profits

### State Government

- University Cooperative Extension
- Department of Agriculture
- Department of Natural Resources
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Department of Commerce/Community Affairs

### Federal Government

- USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
- USDA-Farm Service Agency
- USDA-Rural Development
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Army Corps of Engineers

Once people are identified, they should be personally contacted to ask if they are interested in serving as a technical advisor during the planning. Briefly describe the planning project and why technical advisors are needed. Follow this initial phone call with a formal letter of invitation on Soil and Water Conservation District or other organizational stationery. The letter typically states the nature of the problems motivating the planning project and the time, date, and place of the first

TAC meeting. The letter should be signed by the Planning Committee chairperson and sponsoring organizations, such as the SWCD.

Those invited to participate on the TAC have an initial meeting where they learn about the planning process, the resource concerns, and their role in the project. During this meeting NRCS or SWCD staff familiar with resource planning (for example, the Resource Planning Specialist or District Conservationist) can explain the TAC role in inventorying, evaluating, developing management strategies, and in some instances assisting with implementation. The first TAC meeting can be attended by the entire Planning Committee, to give the Planning Committee and TAC an opportunity to get to know each other and discuss the issues. The Chair of the Planning Committee should lead the first meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee. The NRCS District Conservationist and a SWCD representative should also be present.

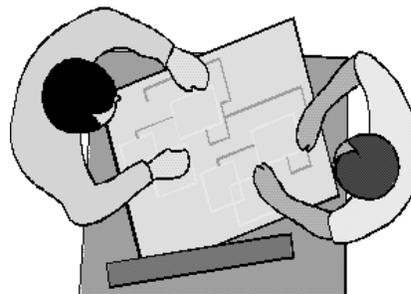
Technical Advisory Committee members usually complete their work individually or as small teams, and periodically report results back to the entire TAC. To guide their work, the TAC may want to write a "Plan of Operations". This document spells out the resource concerns each TAC member (or team of TAC members) will work on, the various "Action Items" needing to be addressed during inventory and evaluation, and the anticipated completion dates. NRCS or SWCD staff can help the TAC write their work plan.

Sometime during the first couple TAC meetings, a Chair for the TAC should be named. The TAC Chair will coordinate the TAC activities, work closely with the Planning Committee Chair, and help facilitate communication among everyone involved in the planning project.

Communication is also enhanced by having NRCS/SWCD staff serve in a liaison role. The NRCS District Conservationist is well suited for this position as they have helped develop the Planning Committee at the outset and are usually part of the Technical Advisory Committee. An SWCD staff person or Board member is also good for this position. Between meetings, the liaison helps the Planning Committee and TAC Chairs relay problems, results and questions. Using phone, letters, or e-mail reduces the need during inventory and evaluation work for meetings of the entire TAC.

## **The Next Step**

Once the Technical Advisory Committee is organized, they will begin collecting data about conditions in the planning area. The factsheet, "Conducting Resource Inventories" gives more information about inventorying.





# Conducting Resource Inventories

Step  
**3**

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## What is it?

“Resource inventories” are information about current conditions in the planning area. Resource inventories detail the condition of soil, water, air, plant, animal and human resources (SWAPA+H).

## Why is it important?

Resource inventories provide factual, objective data about the planning area, and are vital for sound decision-making. Resource inventories are needed to determine the severity of resource concerns, identify opportunities for improvement, and determine which strategies may be most appropriate given conditions in the planning area. They help local stakeholders understand the human interaction with the environment, and interrelationships among resources in the planning area. Inventories provide a description of current conditions— called “benchmarks”— which are compared with future conditions desired by the Planning Committee. Inventories are also used to forecast potential impacts resulting from various resource management alternatives.

## When do we do it?

Resource inventories are compiled after the Planning Committee has identified the resource concerns and objectives in the planning area. This is Step 3 of Phase One of the resource planning process.

## How do we do it?

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is primarily responsible for compiling resource inventories. They are occasionally assisted by members of the Planning Committee. At a minimum, the Planning Committee should advise the TAC on where they believe problems are occurring, the severity of problems, and any questions they have about the resource concerns (see “Determining Objectives”). The TAC and the Planning Committee should communicate throughout the inventory work.

Technical advisors use various methods and procedures to collect inventory data. Inventory methodology is not detailed in this fact sheet. Instead, page 2 of this fact sheet lists typical inventories that are conducted and the specialists who can help get them done.

In addition to conducting inventories for resources related to the concerns and opportunities identified by the Planning Committee, the TAC may suggest more areas that need to be investigated. The scoping process (see fact sheet, “Scoping the Planning Process”) helps to identify which inventories need to be conducted.

# Potential Inventories and their Characteristics

## SOIL--

Erosion- Sheet and Rill Erosion, Ephemeral Erosion, Classic Gully Erosion, Streambank Erosion, Scour Erosion, Road Banks, and Construction Site Erosion, Wind Erosion

Condition- Soil Tilth, Soil Compaction, Soil Contaminants (Chemical, Animal Waste, Fertilizer, Pesticide)

Deposition-Onsite and Offsite Damages, Onsite and Offsite Safety Issues

### *Specialists who can assist with inventories:*

*NRCS State Geologist, NRCS State Soil Scientist, NRCS State Agronomist, NRCS Planning Engineers, NRCS State Streambank Stabilization Specialist, NRCS FOD Resource Soil Scientist, NRCS FOD Agronomist/Water Quality Specialist, NRCS FOD Engineer, Univ. of IL Cooperative Extension, Natural Resource Management Specialist, IDOA BLWR Watershed Management Specialist, IDOA, BLWR Sustainable Agriculture Specialist.*

## WATER--

Quantity- Excess Amounts, Inadequate Outlets, Deficient Amounts, Restricted Capacity Water Bodies, Streams, Lakes

Quality - Chemical, Physical and Biological conditions:  
Groundwater-Pesticides, Nutrients, Salinity, Heavy Metals, Pathogens

Surface Water-Pesticides, Nutrients, Pathogens, Sediment, Low Dissolved, Oxygen, Salinity, Heavy Metals, Temperature

### *Specialists who can assist with inventories:*

*NRCS State Water Quality Specialist, NRCS State Environmental Specialist, NRCS State Biologist, NRCS FOD Biologist, NRCS FOD Agronomist/Water Quality Specialist, NRCS Engineers, IL State Water Survey Geologist, IL State Geological Survey Geologist, IL EPA, US EPA, IDNR Ground Water Specialist, IDNR EcoWatch Program coordinators, Local EcoWatch Volunteers.*

## AIR--

### Quality

- Particulates
- Odors
- Chemical Drift
- Fungi, Molds, & Pollens

### *Specialists who can assist with inventories:*

*IDOA Livestock Specialist, IEPA, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Local County Health Department*

## PLANTS--

### Suitability

Plants are unsuitable, Adaptability

### Condition

Productivity, Health and Vigor

### Management

Establishment, Growth and Harvest, Nutrient Management, Pests

### Threatened and Endangered Species

### Environmental Evaluations

### Grassing Land Management Evaluations

### *Specialists who can assist with inventories:*

*NRCS Agroforester, NRCS State Biologist, NRCS State Environmental Specialist, NRCS FOD Biologist, NRCS Grazing Land Specialist, Illinois Natural History Survey Biologists, IDNR Wildlife Biologists, IDNR Fisheries Biologist.*

## ANIMALS--

### Habitat

Food, Wildlife Habitat, Cover and Shelter, Quantity and Quality of Drinking Water

### Management

Population/Resource Balance, Animal Health

### Threatened and Endangered Species

### Environmental Evaluations

### *Specialists who can assist with inventories:*

*NRCS State Biologist, NRCS State Environmental Specialist, NRCS FOD Biologist, NRCS Grazing Land Specialist, University of IL Cooperative Extension Livestock Production Specialist, IDNR Wildlife Biologists and the IDNR Fisheries Biologist.*

## HUMAN FACTORS--

### Social and Economics Considerations- Cost

Effectiveness, Financial Conditions, Market Conditions, USDA Farm Programs, Sustainability of Ag Systems, Attitudes, Values, Public Health and Safety, Client Characteristics, Client Expectations, Risk Tolerance or Aversion, Employment Trends, Population Trends, Land Use Trends, Acceptability of Alternatives, Farmland Protection

Cultural Considerations- Absence or Presence of artifacts, Significance of Artifacts Present, Effects of Alternatives

### *Specialists who can assist with inventories:*

*NRCS State Economist, NRCS Agricultural Economist, NRCS State Sociologist, NRCS State Archeologist, NRCS Field Cultural Resources Coordinators.*

## **Additional Considerations**

Before beginning inventory work, the TAC reviews existing data. For example, look at previously-developed resource plans, community plans, demographic studies, and floodplain studies. In some cases, data from these studies only needs to be updated for current conditions.

Occasionally, cost considerations or lack of technical staff make it impossible to gather all the information needed for a full inventory of certain resources. In these situations, the TAC makes the recommendation that funding should be sought to complete the inventory. A typical example is when a watershed lacks a hydrologic model to accurately assess the impact of various flood-mitigation measures. The TAC might identify general strategies for reducing flooding, but also recommend that a hydrologic model eventually be developed to better gauge the impacts of each alternative.

The inventory process includes documenting the data found. Worksheets help the TAC document the inventory data in an easy-to-understand format. Examples of these worksheets are: the Problems Identification Worksheet that is contained in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide, the Woodland Planning Worksheet, the Sheet and Rill Erosion Worksheet, or the Grazing Land Evaluation Worksheet.

Inventory documentation includes a description of the methodology used to complete the inventories, a detailed description of the TAC findings and interpretation of results, and identification of additional information, if any, that needs to be collected in subsequent studies. This inventory information is reviewed by the Planning Committee.

## **For more information**

For additional guidance on conducting resource inventories, see the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). Also contact NRCS resource specialists for assistance.

## **The Next Step**

As inventory information is compiled, the data needs to be analyzed. See fact sheet, "Analyzing Resource Data " for more information about Step 4.



# National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

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## What is it?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), signed into law on January 1, 1970, requires Federal agencies to consider the effects of proposed Federal actions on the human environment. This Act and regulations require in some cases, environmental assessments and environmental impact statements.

## Why is it important?

NEPA is a tool to foster better decision-making. The NEPA process is intended to help public officials and locally-led planning groups make decisions that are based on an understanding of environmental and human consequences, and to take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment.

## When do we do it?

In site-specific planning, the decision-maker is often the landowner instead of NRCS. That is the case when NRCS is providing pure technical assistance and simply helping the landowner decide what to do. There are other circumstances when NRCS is giving advice and recommendations about what conservation practices or systems would help the landowner meet their personal goals. In these cases, NRCS has no real control over what kind of action will ultimately result, so no federal action has occurred that triggers NEPA requirements.

However, once financial assistance is provided to the landowner, federal action has occurred, and NEPA requirements are triggered. For this reason, when NRCS provides technical assistance, NRCS will immediately complete an environmental evaluation and complete the NRCS-CPA-52 form. This document can constitute the environmental assessment that NRCS requires for activities involving a single landowner, if properly documented.

During locally-led resource planning, it makes sense for NRCS to follow the NEPA process. In doing so NRCS can consider the cumulative effects of its activities. This is required not only by the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations, but NRCS regulations as well.

The goal of both NEPA and the NRCS resource planning process is to help stakeholders make informed and environmentally-sensitive decisions about their resources. Incorporating NEPA in the planning process gives stakeholders complete information and promotes consistency in their decision-making.

Furthermore, at the time NRCS provides technical assistance NRCS may not know whether financial assistance will also eventually be provided. Complying with NEPA early in the planning process enables federal funding to be used later without having to do additional documentation or perform additional analysis.

NRCS' NEPA requirements for Resource Planning involving federal technical and/or financial assistance are as follows:

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• An *Environmental Evaluation (EE)* is always required, unless the planning effort proceeds directly to an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement.

• An *Environmental Assessment (EA)* is required when the EE indicates that further investigation is needed.

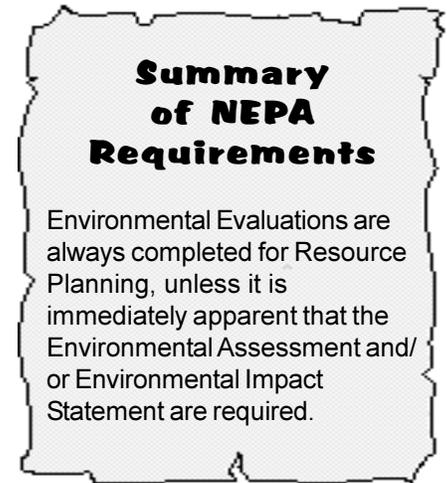
• An *Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)* is required when....

1. The project involves stream channel realignment or work to modify channel capacity by deepening or widening where significant aquatic or wildlife habitat exists. The EE will determine if the channel supports significant aquatic or wildlife habitat.

2. The project requires Congressional action.

3. The project involves a broad Federal assistance program administered by NRCS when the environmental evaluation indicates there may be significant cumulative impacts on the human environment.

4. The project involves other major Federal actions that are determined, after environmental evaluation, to affect significantly the quality of the human environment. If it is difficult to determine whether there is significant impact on the human environment, it may be necessary to complete the EE and prepare an EA in order to decide if an EIS is required.



## How do we do it?

Following is more information about Environmental Evaluations, Assessments and Impact Statements.

### Environmental Evaluations (EE)

An EE is a brief evaluation of potential impacts of projects on the ecological and human environment. NRCS completes an EE during resource planning. The planning intensity, public participation, and documentation of actions will depend on the scope of the planning process (refer to RPG factsheet “Scoping the Planning Process”).

Attached to this factsheet is NRCS-CPA-52. Use this form to complete an Environmental Evaluation during resource planning. This form may be copied and used to document environmental impacts of a proposed plan where a more detailed Environmental Assessment is not required.

### The inventories needed to do an EE include:

1. All environmental concerns within the area. *This is completed during Phase One.*

2. An evaluation of how all relevant resources will be affected by the action. *This is completed during Phase II of planning process.* For most projects, the most critical issues that must be investigated include:

- Cultural resources
- Natural areas
- Threatened and endangered species
- Water quality
- Erosion
- Wetlands
- Human health and safety
- Environmental justice or equity

3. How alternatives will avoid or minimize negative impacts, or plan to mitigate for losses. *This is completed during Phase II of planning process.*

### Environmental Assessment (EA)

An EA is used to determine whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is needed. The EA includes a brief description of the need for the proposed activity, possible alternatives to the proposed activity, and persons consulted. The EA documents potential environmental and human impacts of a project and assesses whether those impacts are significant. An EA will result in either a "Finding of No Significant Impact," or a "Notice of Intent to Develop an Environmental Impact Statement."



An Environmental Assessment (EA) is required if:

1. The proposed action is *not* a major Federal action positively or negatively affecting the quality of the human environment, OR
2. It is not *known* whether or not the proposed action is a major Federal action positively or negatively affecting the quality of the human environment.

### Environmental Impact Statement

If the proposed action is a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required. The EIS details all environmental, social, and economic impacts of the project. Preparation of the EIS gives the public an opportunity to contribute to the decision making process. The result of the EIS is publication of a "Record of Decision" identifying which alternative was selected and why.

### For More Information

The NRCS Environmental Specialist can help stakeholders address NEPA issues. Contact the Environmental Specialist at the NRCS State Office in Champaign, Illinois. For additional guidance, consult the following publications:

- General Manual 190, Part 410 - Compliance with NEPA.
- Environmental Technical Note No. IL-3, May 1994.

# Understanding Communities for Successful Resource Planning

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## What is it?

The term “community” often brings to mind cities, suburbs, villages, or farm towns. A planning area might include all these communities defined by geography. Communities defined in ways other than geography may also be significant in the planning area. For example, in a watershed there may be a community of farmers and a community of nonfarmers, or a community of urbanites and a community of suburbanites.

This fact sheet gives suggestions for learning about the social, cultural, and economic aspects of *geographically-defined* communities. Much of this information, however, is also relevant for other communities of interest in the planning area.

Social, cultural, and economic characteristics of communities concern people and their relationships with each other. They include demographics (age, race, income, etc.), attitudes and values, information networks, how decisions are made and problems resolved, and the availability of resources. Some other community characteristics relate to how people identify themselves and their town, their collective history and how it affects them today, local leadership and social divisions, and how the community manages change.

### What's the difference between a community's “culture” and “cultural resources”?

One definition of *community culture* is “A complex learned and shared system of human behavior, including the way people think about things, as well as more overt physical behaviors. The codes, customs, habits, and understandings of one's own culture is taken for granted and assumed ‘normal.’” (*Social Sciences Institute*)

“*Cultural resources* are all the past activities and accomplishments of people. They include buildings, objects, locations, and structures that have scientific, historic and cultural value. The cultural resources that NRCS deal with most often are known as historic properties. These may be prehistoric or historic districts, sites, buildings, structures, features, or objects.”

For information about identifying cultural resources in a planning area, see the Appendix of the RPG.

## Why is it important?

Understanding communities in a planning area is necessary in order to:

- Evaluate existing resource conditions, causes and impacts (including impacts on people).
- Assess the effects of alternatives, including effects expected if resource concerns remain untreated.

Understanding communities is also critical for a successful planning process. Socio-economics affects the locally-led resource planning process and its outcomes, generally influencing:

- Conflict, cohesion and public involvement during the planning
- Decisions about management alternatives
- Whether and how the plan is implemented

Consider a few fictitious examples of how resource planning is affected by social, economic and cultural community characteristics. Naturally these scenarios don't exemplify all communities, but they do highlight the importance of social, cultural, and economic considerations in resource planning.

- A small town struggles with the locally-led process because their local leadership capacity is limited by population decline and residents who are primarily elderly or very young.
- A wealthy community adopts a resource plan advocating innovative land management practices because its strong local economy supports risk-taking.
- Minority stakeholders in a rural watershed are hesitant to participate on a Planning Committee because in that area they are less involved in community affairs.
- Farmers in an agricultural watershed oppose nonfarmer involvement to address contamination of the town's water supply from agricultural chemicals because they feel it is an agriculturally-related issue.

## **When do we do it?**

Socio-economic and cultural information is collected by technical specialists during Step 3 of Phase One, when resources are inventoried. Also, throughout the entire planning process the Planning Committee uses and enhances their understanding of communities in the planning area.

## **How do we do it?**

"Community Profiles" or "Social Profiles" document the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of communities for resource planning. Community profiles are usually geographically based (e.g., a profile is written for all the municipalities in a watershed) but sometimes profiles are done for specific social groups, such as the landowners in a planning area, or the limited resource farmers in a planning area.

Methods of understanding socio-economics of communities depends on the project, the communities, and the resources available to collect, analyze and interpret the information. Like other inventories, community profiles can take days, weeks or months, depending on resources available and level of detail desired.

Consider two main categories of information about communities:

1. *Primary data*: First-hand interaction with the communities, including interviews with community leaders, review of newspapers, focus groups, and citizen surveys.
2. *Secondary data*: Population, housing, economic, and agricultural census data collected at national, state and local level by various agencies.

The easiest and most effective way to learn about communities is to check the census (secondary data source) and talk with people who live, work and visit there (primary data source).

A basic community profile may include some or all of the following information:

INFORMATION	SOME SOURCES
<p>Total population</p> <p>Percent population change in last 10 and 20 years</p> <p>Population over age 65 and under 18</p> <p>Minority populations</p> <p>Female headed households</p> <p>Families below poverty level</p> <p>Attitudes, beliefs, and values</p> <p>Local economy and employment</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Governance, leadership and decision making</p> <p>Infrastructure and public services</p> <p>Public safety and health</p> <p>Information networks</p> <p>Religious and spiritual practices</p> <p>Local arts, history and traditions</p> <p>Local identity</p> <p>Cultural resources</p> <p>Total number of housing units &amp; persons per housing unit</p> <p>Number of units without complete plumbing</p> <p>Number of owner occupied housing units</p> <p>Median rent and median value of owner-occupied units</p> <p>Percent vacant units</p>	<p>Decennial census or other censuses<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Decennial census or other censuses</p> <p>Primary information sources<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Decennial census, other censuses and primary information sources</p> <p>Decennial census, other censuses and primary information sources</p> <p>Primary information sources</p> <p>NRCS Cultural Resources Specialist</p> <p>Decennial census or other censuses</p>
<p><b>Farm data</b></p> <p>Size of farm population</p> <p>Number of farms</p> <p>Types of farms</p> <p>Size of farms</p> <p>Type of farm ownership</p> <p>Absentee owners</p> <p>Demographic characteristics of farmers</p>	<p>Agricultural census</p>
<p>Farmer values, attitudes, values</p>	<p>Primary information sources</p>
<p><sup>1</sup> <i>The U.S. Census is generally preferred because it is conducted nationwide, readily available, and comparable for other areas. The most recent decennial census is the 1990 U.S. Census of Population and Housing, available at libraries and on the Internet. Other censuses include state and local surveys, also available at libraries.</i></p>	
<p><sup>2</sup> <i>Interviews with community leaders, review of local newspapers, focus groups, citizen surveys, etc.</i></p>	

Here are some topics you may want to cover during conversations with people who know about communities in the planning area:



## Sample Questions for Community Leaders



**Demographics.** What are the basic population statistics (size, density, spacial distribution, ethnicity, poverty, employment) in the community? What are the important sub-groups (e.g., ethnic, religious)? How do these groups vary in their values, objectives, and priorities?

**Economic conditions.** How would you describe the economic health of the community (average per capita income, poverty rate, families receiving public assistance, etc.)? Describe the businesses and industries in this community. What sectors of the community's economy is doing better or worse? How has this changed over time? Why?

**Decision-making.** Who are the community leaders? Who do community members trust? How are decisions usually made? Who are the typical decision makers?

**Conflict resolution.** How is conflict usually handled in the community? Are there certain key conflicts that are still important to the community?

**Social divisions.** On what basis are social divisions defined? Who is "in" and who is not? Why?

**Problem-solving experience.** What issues concern the community? Has the community been through other locally-led projects? What partnerships exist and what can they do? What money has been brought in to the community? What cooperative projects has the community undertaken? What referendums have passed and failed? What are existing laws and ordinances significant to the issues.

**Trends.** What population, land use and economic trends is the community experiencing? How are these trends being received by the community? How is the community managing change?

**Values and norms.** What are the dominant values in the community? Especially relevant may be attitudes toward growth and development, natural resource stewardship, agriculture, education, etc. How conservative and risk adverse is the community? How innovative is the community?

**Identity of community.** Is the community identity tied to agriculture? That is, do people think "We're a farm town"? Other community identities may be "a traditional, conservative community," "a family town," a "commuting suburb", etc.

### For more information

Contact the NRCS Sociologist and NRCS Economist. Also refer to sources used to develop this factsheet:

Soil Conservation Service, USDA. Technical Note Sociology No. N3 "Suggested Data Sources for Sociological Analysis," May 1989.

USEPA Office of Sustainable Ecosystems and Communities, "Community Cultural Profiling Guide: Understanding a Community's Sense of Place." Undated.



# Analyzing Resource Data

Step 4

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### What is it?

Analysis of resource data involves the review and interpretation of the resource inventories.

### Why is it important?

Resource data analysis helps technical advisors and the Planning Committee use the information to full advantage. Studying the resource data reveals how individual resources relate to each other, and identifies causes and effects. Analysis also helps technical advisors present the information in a meaningful way to the Planning Committee.

### When do we do it?

Although “conducting resource inventories” is Step 3 of the planning process, and “analyzing resource data” is Step 4, in reality these two activities usually occur at the same time. As resource data is accumulated, technical advisors are continually evaluating the results to determine if more investigation is needed for that particular resource, or if techniques for other resources need to be changed in light of the findings.

### How do we do it?

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is primarily responsible for analyzing the resource inventory data, but they seek input from the Planning Committee and if necessary, use the expertise of additional agencies and groups. Manual and automated data analysis tools are used during this step. These include but are not limited to the models, GIS analysis, and Site Specific Physical Effects Worksheet in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide, Section V. Although they are not detailed in this fact sheet, the TAC is encouraged to use such models during data analysis.

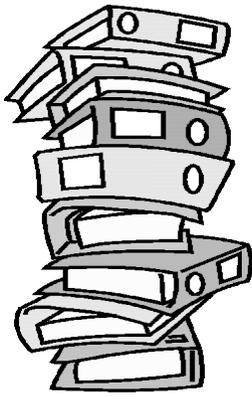
The TAC determines the type of analysis needed based on the resource concerns, opportunities and objectives of stakeholders. They also consider the planning scope, potential for adverse impacts, and the ecological and human setting of the planning area. Data analysis is comprehensive. It addresses all ecological, economic, and social factors.

The TAC uses data analysis to determine present conditions in the planning area. Working with the Planning Committee, the TAC also evaluates whether present conditions meet their objectives.

Data analysis is used to identify present and future resource trends and for ways to moderate those trends. The TAC identifies causes and effects— asking, “why is this occurring?” to identify causes and “what is occurring?” to identify effects.

The results of the analysis is communicated in a format easily understood by the Planning Committee, other local groups, and the general public.

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#### KEY POINTS

- **Involve the Planning Committee, other agencies and local groups in data analysis.**
- **Establish a schedule for completing resource inventories and data analysis.**
- **Consider public opinion and communicate frequently with the Planning Committee.**
- **Review existing reports and studies for relevant data and data analysis. How do the findings compare?**

#### **For more information**

The NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) provides a list of resource analysis methods for most resources. Also contact NRCS resource specialists for assistance.

#### **The Next Step**

After resource inventory data is collected and analyzed, the Planning Committee reviews the results of Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 in their entirety. Review the resource concerns, opportunities, and objectives which were initially identified to see if revisions should be made given the inventory findings of the Technical Advisory Committee. New concerns may have been identified, objectives may need to be changed, or new opportunities may have been revealed.

Once the problems, opportunities and objectives are finalized, the plan moves into Phase Two. Technical advisors will formulate management alternatives that can meet the Planning Committee's objectives. Refer to "Developing Alternatives" for more information about Step 5 in Phase Two.



# Developing Alternatives

Step 5

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## 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.

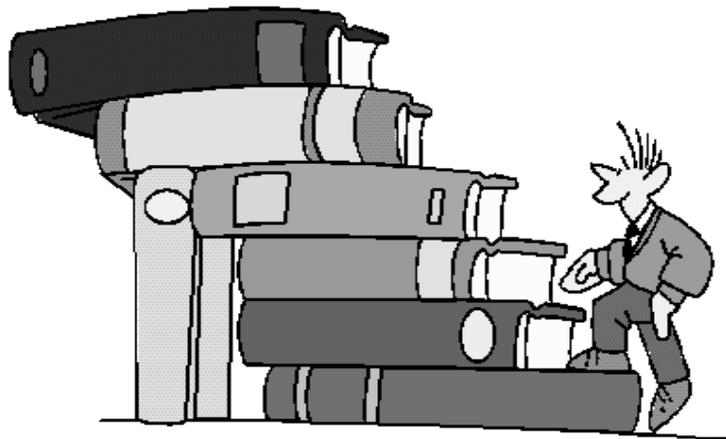
## Additional Suggestions

- 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.





# Evaluating Alternatives

Step 6

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## What is it?

The purpose of evaluating alternatives is to help the Planning Committee make sound decisions about which management strategies they will advocate in the resource plan. Alternatives are evaluated to determine their effectiveness in addressing the concerns, taking advantage of opportunities, and meeting objectives in the planning area.

## When do we do it?

Evaluating alternatives is Step 6 of Phase Two in the Resource Planning Process.

## How do we do it?

After alternatives or strategies have been identified, the Planning Committee and Technical Advisory Committee evaluate the acceptability of the alternatives. A facilitator is used during this step, and technical advisors are available to provide information and answer questions.

Evaluate alternatives by examining the benefits and drawbacks of each alternative. During the evaluation of alternatives, careful consideration is given to social, economic, and ecological factors that influence the predicted outcome. Encourage discussion and use visual aids to help explain alternatives. Technical advisors can prepare technical specifications and a short concise narrative for each alternative. For each alternative include costs, and positive and negative benefits.

The Planning Committee considers the “effects” and the “impacts” of each alternative. The alternatives are compared to benchmark conditions to evaluate their ability to solve problems, meet quality criteria and meet the Planning Committee’s objectives. Technical advisors can help the committee evaluate the effects of each alternative and describe the impacts. The effects are outcomes or results of the management strategy. Impacts are the differences between initial conditions and the effects of the alternatives. Here is an example:

- The “benchmark” is a soil loss of 20 tons per acre per year.  
*(This is the present condition.)*
- The “effect” of one alternative is soil loss of 4 tons per acre per year.  
*(This is the effect of one alternative strategy.)*
- The “impact” is soil loss reduced 16 tons per acre per year.  
*(This is the difference between the benchmark condition and the effect of the alternative.)*

Alternatives are compared based on their potential to bring about the desired future conditions identified by the Planning Committee. They are also evaluated by their effect on other resource conditions using the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) quality criteria. Limitations to using FOTG quality criteria is that they do not cover all ecological, economic, and social considerations that can be used for evaluating alternatives. Another way to evaluate alternatives is to use an Evaluate Alternatives Worksheet. An example worksheet follows.



Public review or comment may be needed during the evaluation of alternatives. This will help inform the Planning Committee about the various effects and acceptability of the alternatives.

During this step, give some thought as to how the strategies might be implemented. Identify NRCS programs, programs of other agencies, and other funding opportunities that may be available to implement the alternatives. Doing this helps in the evaluation of alternatives by providing information about how feasible they may be. The Planning Committee may also need to revisit the objectives and mission statement in order to determine if they need to be changed in light of the range of possible management alternatives suggested by the Technical Advisory Committee.

### **The Next Step**

After alternatives have been evaluated, the next step is to make decisions as to which alternatives are the most acceptable to the Planning Committee and other stakeholders. These decisions will be documented in the resource plan. The factsheet "Making Decisions" gives suggestions for Step 7.

# Making Decisions

**Step  
7**

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## What is it?

Making decisions involves the Planning Committee selecting the preferred management alternatives among those identified by technical advisors. The preferred strategies will be documented in the resource plan.

## When do we do it?

Decisions about alternatives are made during Step 7 of Phase Two of the Resource Planning Process. Decision-making occurs after each alternative is evaluated for the ecological, economic and social effects and impacts as well as for their acceptability to the community.

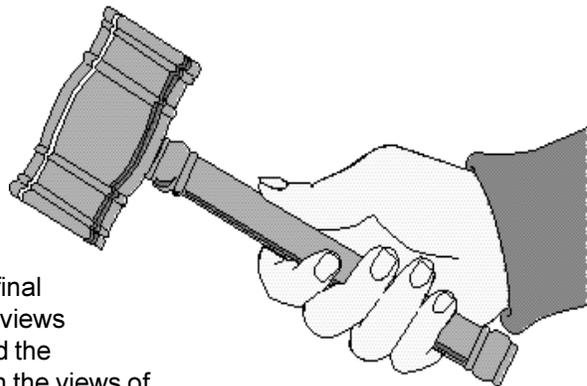
## How do we do it?

Making decisions involves using information generated during the “evaluation step” about the economic viability, social and political acceptability, and environmental integrity of each alternative.

The Planning Committee— assisted by a facilitator— reviews the evaluation information for each alternative. During this review, there should be a lot of discussion among Planning Committee members about the pros and cons of the strategies, how each member views the alternatives, how achievable the alternatives may be, and whether the alternatives can be supported by the community. This discussion is the primary opportunity for the Planning Committee to assess the acceptability and feasibility of the various management strategies.

During the decision-making discussion, the various differences among committee members in values, objectives or concerns may come to a head. Conversations may become heated as members take a stand for or against a strategy. Effective ground rules for discussions and a skilled facilitator is therefore crucial at this step. Technical advisors should be present to answer questions, clarify information, and provide feedback.

Occasionally the Planning Committee contracts with a technical writer to draft the resource plan. At a minimum, the technical writer will want to be present during discussions about alternatives.



It is important to note that the final resource plan must reflect the views of the Planning Committee (and the community at large) rather than the views of the technical writer.

It is often useful to make decisions about the whole range of alternatives in a single meeting. This may entail an entire day devoted to this task, because oftentimes the Technical Advisory Committee recommends many management strategies. Stopping discussions and starting again a week or two later may inhibit the decision-making process. It is harder for people to remember all the strategies, keep in mind their various interrelationships, and account for concerns and comments during the discussions.

### **Remember Public Input!**

Public input is critical during both evaluation of alternatives (Step 6) and during decision-making (Step 7). Public participation reveals information about socio-economic impacts, effects and acceptability which is critical for the Planning Committee to make sound decisions. Public input can be obtained in a variety of ways. Another fact sheet in the Resource Planning Guidebook gives suggestions about how to conduct public input during the planning process. If the Planning Committee makes decisions in isolation from the community, it risks the plan being rejected or never implemented. Therefore, no matter how it's done, public input is most useful during the evaluation and decision-making steps rather than only after the plan is drafted. One outcome of this public review process may be a need to modify concerns, revise objectives, or restate effects. Giving adequate time and attention to this stakeholder review process will pay off in a better resource plan that is more likely to stand the test of time.

### **Tips for Decision-Making**

- Making good decisions requires understanding the economic, social and environmental advantages and disadvantages of each alternative.
- Stakeholders, through a facilitated process, should be given the opportunity to review the proposed alternatives. Technical advisors should be available during discussions.
- The results of public input and review should be documented in the resource management plan.

## **The Next Step**

Decisions will be documented in a “draft” resource plan, along with a description of the planning process, inventory data, implementation strategies and other information deemed important by the Planning Committee. This draft resource plan will be reviewed by the local agencies and interest groups, and their comments incorporated into the final plan. Refer to “Resource Plan Format and Content.”

Once decisions are reached, implementation strategies for achieving the alternatives are devised. This means that the resource plan will include implementation information indicating who, what, when, and how the actions will be applied to the planning area. See factsheet “Implementing the Resource Plan” for advice on how to implement the resource plan.

# Resource Plan Format and Content

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## What is it?

The Resource Plan describes the planning process and documents all its outcomes—the concerns and objectives of stakeholders, resource inventories, resource management strategies, and implementation information.

## Why is it important?

The Resource Plan provides written guidance to local people about the management of their resources over time. The plan demonstrates broad community support for the identified resource management alternatives. It informs grant-making agencies and technical experts who help with implementation about current conditions in the planning area, the interests of stakeholders, and their preferred strategies for managing natural resources.

## When do we do it?

Writing the Resource Plan begins after resource inventorying has been completed and the Planning Committee has identified their preferred management alternatives.

## How do we do it?

Resource Plans come in a variety of formats. Some are professionally produced glossy publications with photos and drawings; others are text-only documents prepared on a home computer. To keep the plan reader-friendly, technical details might be provided in appendices. Or a single Resource Plan might consist of several different documents—a leaflet highlighting major elements of the plan, a simplified plan for the general public, and detailed technical information for stakeholders who will be directly involved in implementation.

No matter how its formatted, most stakeholders have found the following topics to be necessary minimum elements of an effective resource plan.

- Title Page
- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Description of the Planning Area
- Public Participation
- Problems, Opportunities and Objectives
- Scope of the Plan
- Comparison of Alternatives
- Recommended Alternatives
- Implementation
- Supporting Maps and Data

In addition, if the Planning Committee received funding from any organization for the purpose of developing a resource management plan, they'll need to ensure their plan meets the requirements of that organization. Here's more information about each topic.

**Title Page** - This page indicates the name of the planning area (watershed, city, etc.) and its location; who developed the plan (usually the Planning Committee); supporting partners (usually SWCD, NRCS, etc.); and the date the plan was completed.

**Executive Summary** - This is a brief overview of the plan. The summary is less than two pages in length. Nothing is included here that is not described in detail in the body of the plan. In addition to informing the reader about the contents of the plan, the summary is useful for related publications, to distribute at meetings and other events, and to provide to the media.

**Introduction** - The purpose of the introduction is to help the reader understand the rationale for the planning action. It introduces the resource concerns, objectives, and goals of stakeholders. Unique circumstances in the planning area which motivated the planning project are included here. Identify all people who served on the Planning Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee. Acknowledge all organizations that provided input, sponsored the project, and otherwise contributed to the development of the plan.

**Description of the Planning Area** - This section describes the planning area for all “SWAPA+H” elements— or for the Soil, Water, Air, Plants, Animals and Humans. The sources of this ecological and human information are the resource inventories developed by the Technical Advisory Committee (refer to “Conducting Resource Inventories”).

Land use changes and current management activities are particularly critical for understanding the physical setting of the planning area. Describe the present land use and predicted future land use. Long-range trends for social and economic conditions affecting land use and management are also forecasted. This information is needed in order to forecast expected conditions with and without implementation of the resource management alternatives.

At a minimum, include the following information about physical conditions in the planning area:

- Land Use
- Agriculture
- Soils
- Water Resources
- Climate
- Erosion
- Sedimentation
- Forestry Resources

Include at least the following information about human aspects of the planning area:

- Demographics
- Cultural Resources
- Relevant regulations, activities and programs
- Employment, development, and population trends
- Recreation
- Attitudes and values

**Public Participation** - This section documents the opportunities provided for public participation throughout the planning process— from the initial request for NRCS/SWCD assistance to preparation and distribution of the final plan. Describe the citizen-based Planning Committee. Include a description of all public input activities initiated by the Planning Committee, the names of participating organizations, and the results. Refer to “Public Participation in Resource Planning.”

**Problems, Opportunities and Objectives** - This section details the problems needing to be solved, existing opportunities, and the goals and objectives of stakeholders in the planning area (see fact sheets “Identifying Resource Concerns” and “Determining Objectives”). This information demonstrates the need for resource planning. It also justifies the implementation of the resource management strategies that are advocated in the plan.

Each problem or opportunity is quantified and its extent and magnitude clearly explained. Resource inventories compiled by the Technical Advisory Committee are used to quantify existing conditions. Discuss problems and opportunities for both current and expected future conditions.

**Scope of the Plan** - Scoping is used to determine what is important to investigate during the planning process. It involves determining the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts that need to be considered (see “Scoping the Planning Process”). This section describes the scoping process. Items which were considered during the planning, such as cultural resources, threatened and endangered species, human health and safety, water quality, or wetlands are described here.

This section also indicates which issues were considered, but found to not require detailed discussion in the plan. The relative insignificance of these issues should be agreed upon by all parties involved in the planning.

**Comparison of Alternatives** - This section conveys why certain management strategies are being advocated by the Planning Committee. It describes the development and comparison of alternatives and the selection of recommended actions (see “Evaluating Alternatives”).

Describe each alternative action, including the “no action” alternative. Include information about impacts and effects of each alternative for SWAPA +H concerns. For each alternative, describe any required mitigation, including costs and impacts.

**Recommended Actions** - Identify the resource management strategies preferred by stakeholders in the planning area (see “Making Decisions”). These are the strategies that stakeholders will work to implement. Describe in detail all activities. For structural measures, review avoidance, minimization, and compensatory mitigation, if needed. Also indicate the permits required for the projects. Describe the costs of the proposed actions, who is responsible for them, and how success will be measured.

**Implementation** - The Implementation section of the plan is a schedule detailing who, when, and how the preferred actions will be implemented. (Refer to “Implementing the Resource Plan”).

**Supporting Maps and Data** - Provide as a minimum the following support maps: location map, project area map, potential mitigation areas. Also include in this section any additional data not otherwise detailed in the plan, such as Technical Advisory Committee reports.

### **The Next Step**

After a draft of the plan is written, it is distributed to the Planning Committee, the Technical Advisory Committee, all interested stakeholders, and everyone who will be involved in implementation. After all comments and concerns have been addressed, the final plan is similarly distributed, and implementation formally begins. The fact sheet “Implementing the Resource Plan” provides more information about implementation.



# Obtaining Funding For Plan Implementation

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## What is it?

**“Where can we get the money to solve our problem?”**

Most resource planning groups start and end with this question.



Resource planning is “program neutral”--meaning the plan identifies ways to manage resources regardless of the sources of funding. However, program neutral planning does not imply that the Planning Committee ignores financial issues. In fact, funding is an integral part of the planning and implementation process. Most alternatives have some cost associated with their implementation. Even producing and distributing the plan document costs money.

## When do we do it?

Once the plan begins to take shape, the Planning Committee, with assistance from technical advisors, starts looking for ways to fund their ideas.

## How do we do it?

Getting the funds to carry out stakeholder ideas involves commitment, energy, and time. But the most important elements of successful funding are already in place: A viable, organized stakeholder coalition, systematic consideration of goals, needs, and alternatives...all documented in a resource management plan. In Illinois, local, state, and federal government programs are available for landowners and communities to protect, enhance and restore natural resources. Non-profit organizations and private industry also provide assistance.

The Planning Committee actively searches for the opportunities to apply for funding. They may need to enlist help from the local SWCD, city, village, or county government. Consider creating a “Grant Writing” team with partners who have experience with grants.

The Illinois Natural Resources Coordinating Council has developed a booklet titled *“Landowners Guide to Natural Resource Management Incentives,”* which describes 19 Cost-Share incentive programs and 10 programs that provide technical assistance. This booklet describes 13 Property Tax Incentive opportunities landowners can use. Contact Illinois Department of Natural Resources for this publication.

### Ways To Get Funding

- Check the INTERNET for opportunities. A good place to start is the Foundation Center at <http://fdncenter.org/>.
- Visit the library for information.
- Contact local agency representatives.
- Contact private conservation groups.

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Two other useful publications are available from USDA's Agricultural Research Service and the National Agricultural Library. Contact the NRCS State Office in Champaign for more information on these publications:

- *"A Guide to Funding Resources,"* Rural Information Center Publication Series, No. 56 (September 1997).
- *"Federal Funding Sources for Rural Areas: Fiscal Year 1999,"* Rural Information Center Publication Series, No. 66 (August 1998).

### Activities That Require Little Money

- Hold tours and educational field days.
- Write news articles.
- Give talks to local civic organizations.
- Attend local meetings to publicize projects.

Following is a summary of financial assistance opportunities for natural resource management, including:

- A list of cost share/incentive programs technical assistance programs and property tax incentives,
- a summary of grant information for urban and rural community conservation projects,
- a list of EPA financial assistance programs.

For assistance with these or other opportunities, contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service at the USDA Service Center for your County.

## **The Next Step**

The Planning Committee develops an implementation schedule to include in the resource plan. The implementation schedule lists potential funding sources and assigns responsibility to individuals who will write applications for funding. The Planning Committee--or new "Implementation Committee"-- continues to meet regularly to ensure the plan is implemented.

As funding sources are sought, some projects will begin being implemented. The resource plan continues to be distributed and promoted throughout the planning area. Evaluation of projects and the plan as a whole also begins. Refer to "Evaluating the Resource Plan" for ideas on Step 9 of Phase Three.



# Implementing the Resource Plan

**Step 8**

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**What is it?**

Implementing the resource plan involves carrying out the intended management strategies. The resource plan includes information about how the plan will be implemented. This implementation information details where, how, who, and when various actions will be taken.

**When do we do it?**

In theory, plan implementation occurs after a written resource management plan is finalized. In practice, however, some elements of the plan may be implemented before the plan is finalized and distributed throughout the planning area.

**How do we do it?**

Implementation of areawide resource plans requires the participation of citizens and local, state, and federal partners. Implementation entails using the resource plan to seek financial and technical support from many sources, meeting program requirements and deadlines, and designing, laying out, constructing, inspecting, and maintaining practices.

Typically, the Planning Committee is responsible for ensuring the resource plan is implemented. This often entails reconfiguring the Planning Committee into a new "Implementation Committee." Doing this gives closure to stakeholders who have been actively involved in the long planning process. Some Planning Committee members may choose to not take part in the implementation activities, and new stakeholders can be invited to help.

Implementation Committees often organize themselves as "Friends of" or "Coalition" groups. They may have many citizen members, a Board of Directors, and non-profit status. These coalitions spearhead projects, act as community advisors and advocates for the plan, and seek project funds. Their membership tends to be fluid with new stakeholders continually participating.

To help coordinate multiple activities and participants, the Implementation Committee should strategize about what needs to be done to apply the practices recommended in the plan. Regardless of whether it's included in the resource plan or documented separately, some kind of implementation strategy is necessary to determine how the actions in the plan will be applied. This will ensure that the plan is actually carried out, rather than shelved and forgotten.

Occasionally, some implementation has occurred before the resource plan is finalized. Grant money may have been obtained, floodprone homes bought out, or demonstration projects installed. The Implementation Committee should review the Resource Plan and identify any actions that are currently being pursued, and anything else that needs to be done to complete these projects. Then, for the remaining actions they should determine:

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**Which activities should be a priority?** Initially consider tackling easy projects that are not controversial to build confidence and community support. Also prioritize projects based on how serious the need is and how likely it is to be successful.

**Where will the activities take place?** Locations probably were identified in the resource plan, but additional surveying or more detailed data collection may need to be done.

**Who are the responsible parties to implement the actions, and what sources of technical assistance is available to help?** Consider local, state, and federal agencies, as well as non-profit and for-profit organizations.

**How will the actions be financed?** Consider staffing needs and opportunities for local communities to provide matching monetary and non-monetary contributions.

**When will the actions take place?** Devise a tentative implementation timetable to guide the work.

## Additional considerations



- Keep the public informed and involved. Try demonstration projects, kick-off campaigns, field days, newsletters, and regularly report activities in local media and to community leaders. Seek citizen volunteers and community groups to participate, so results happen and community support increases.
- Particularly for the design and installation of structural practices, coordination at multiple levels will be needed for the survey, design, layout, certification, and maintenance of work.
- Identify projects for which financial assistance is needed. Include in the implementation strategy any steps that need to be taken to obtain funding. Identify who will apply for grants and any additional documentation that may be needed.
- Identify any mitigation issues, environmental requirements, and other information needed to implement the plan. Items to consider include federal, state and local permitting requirements, interagency agreements, and other laws and executive orders, such as NEPA and those concerning threatened and endangered species, historic properties, and cultural resources.
- Coordinate implementation with other planning and implementation bodies, especially with county, municipal neighborhood, and growth management plans. Also coordinate with the independent conservation activities of individual landowners, local municipalities, and non-government organizations.
- Identify land rights and permits that will need to be secured. Ensure all parties clearly understand their responsibilities, and that project sponsors secure necessary permits such as dam safety permits and those required under Sections 401 & 404 of the Clean Water Act.
- Identify the agreements that will be needed for cooperative projects, and for the operation and maintenance of completed projects. Consider contracting issues--for example, long-term contracts needed for upland treatments.
- Consider documenting the implementation approach, including:

- Tasks
- Responsible Persons or Organizations
- Sources of Funding and In-kind Services/Amount
- Scheduled Start Date/Scheduled Finish Date
- Actual Start/Actual Finish

Implementation Activities			
Task	Responsible Person	Sources of funds	Schedule dates
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

## The Next Step

Continual evaluation of the resource plan follows plan implementation. "Evaluating the Resource Plan" gives suggestions for Step 9.



# Evaluating the Resource Plan

Step  
**9**

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## What is it?

Evaluating the resource plan involves assessing the effectiveness of the implemented plan to ensure desired results are being achieved. Plan evaluation provides information about how implementation is proceeding, and if necessary, reveals why actual results differ from what was desired and anticipated. Plan evaluation also provides an opportunity for stakeholders to modify their objectives and actions.

## When do we do it?

Plan evaluation and plan implementation go hand in hand. As projects are implemented, their outcomes are evaluated. Subsequent actions may be modified in light of the findings.

In addition to continual evaluation, stakeholders may want to work with technical advisors to conduct a systematic plan evaluation at a specific future time. For example, stakeholders may want to do an annual plan evaluation and update.

## How do we do it?

Evaluation of the plan is conducted by stakeholders in the planning area with assistance from technical experts. Usually stakeholders are represented by the coordinating committee--or "Implementation Committee"--which was formed to coordinate implementation of the plan. To evaluate the effectiveness of the resource management plan over time, the Implementation Committee needs to be a viable and on-going organization. Evaluation also requires continued support from technical experts, and direct input from stakeholders who carry out the projects specified in the plan.

A necessary first step for plan evaluation is to identify the purpose of doing the evaluation. Stakeholders can ask themselves, "How will we use the results of the evaluation?" Stakeholders may want to evaluate some projects to determine if similar projects should be undertaken again; they may want to document results to provide progress reports to partners; or they may need to evaluate the plan in order to revise it in the future.

Details on how to conduct the analysis of specific projects is provided in various NRCS technical manuals and program manuals. During evaluation of the plan, the actual ecological, economic, and social effects and impacts are reviewed and compared to those anticipated by stakeholders. Significant differences are addressed by stakeholders, partners and technical experts.

## The Next Step

Resource management never ends. Conditions change, new opportunities arise, public support for particular projects wanes or increases and additional projects are identified. Stakeholders continually respond to these challenges, evaluating the successes and failures of the plan and modifying it as necessary.

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# Inventories and Evaluations (I & E)

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## What is it?

The Resource Planning process requires basic information about resource conditions in the planning area. Present and future conditions are assessed using Inventories and Evaluations (I&E).

## Why is it important?

I&E is used by the Planning Committee to quantify resource concerns and to develop strategies to address them.

## When do we do it?

I&E procedures are used during Phase One, when resources in the planning area are inventoried and the data is analyzed. See the RPG fact sheets "Conducting Resource Inventories" and "Analyzing Resource Data".

## How do we do it?

The Appendix to the Resource Planning Guidebook includes methods that can be used to develop some inventories and evaluations. These methods are not the only way to complete I&E. Technical advisors who assist the Planning Committee may use other methods. Also, the Appendix does not include procedures for all the I&E that may need to be done. Rather, included here are procedures for those I&E that are most commonly completed by NRCS/SWCD field staff. Other critical I&E may concern water quality, farmland protection, land use change, socio-economics, woodlands, and wildlife habitat. In all cases, technical specialists with NRCS and Partners are available to assist with inventories and evaluations.