

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
210 Walnut Street, Room 693  
Des Moines, IA 50309-2180

February 10, 2009

GENERAL MANUAL (GM)  
180 – CPA  
AMENDMENT IA16 (Part 409)

SUBJECT: CPA – CONSERVATION PLANNING AND APPLICATION

Purpose. To amend Part 409 – Conservation Planning Policy.

Effective Date. Upon receipt.

Contact: If there are questions about this amendment, contact John Myers, State Resource Conservationist, at 515 323-2223 or [john.myers@ia.usda.gov](mailto:john.myers@ia.usda.gov).

Filing Instructions.

Remove

IA409.3, April 2007  
IA409.9, April 2007

File

IA409.3, February 2009, immediately after 409.3  
IA409.9, February 2009, immediately after 409.9  
IA409.12, February 2009, immediately after IA409.12, November 2001

/s/Richard Sims  
State Conservationist

Attachments

GM

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Title 180 – General Manual

Part 409 – Conservation Planning Policy

**IA409.3 Requirements for Providing Conservation Planning Assistance**

(a) Employees delivering conservation planning assistance will obtain and maintain an Iowa Conservation Planner Certification. Employees with conservation planning responsibilities must meet minimal levels of certification as follows:

- (3) (i) GS-457 Soil Conservationist:
    - District Conservationist: Level III.
    - Soil Conservationist, GS-9 and above: Level III.
    - Resource Conservationist, GS-9 and above: Level III.
    - Soil Conservationist GS-7: Level II.
    - Soil Conservationist GS-5: Level I.
  
  - GS-458 Soil Conservation Technician:
    - Soil Conservation Technician, GS 7 and above: Level II.
    - GS- 458 series will not be certified above Level II.
  - (ii) Required timeframes for employees to achieve these levels are:
    - GS 5 Level I: within 18 months of appointment.
    - GS 7 Level II: within 18 months of appointment.
    - GS 457-9 and above Level III: within 18 months after achieving Level II.
  - (iii) All field office employees with planning responsibilities are encouraged to obtain the required minimum level of certification as soon as possible. The training courses are available to all employees, and regardless of certification required, all employees are encouraged to complete all training courses.
  - (iv) Existing Certified Conservation Planners, who meet the qualifications as of February 28, 2009 will be certified as Level III Conservation Planners.
- (c) (2) Planner certification is effective for a three year period from the date of issuance and must be renewed prior to the expiration date.
- (e) (1) (i) NRCS will make the training and certification process available to all Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff and cooperating agency personnel who wish to participate.
  - (ii) SWCD and state employees with conservation planning responsibilities are encouraged to become Certified Conservation Planners.

Title 180 – General Manual

Part 409 – Conservation Planning Policy

**IA409.9 Minimum Criteria for NRCS and Other Providers of Conservation Planning and Related Assistance**

(a) It is NRCS policy to have adequately trained and well qualified employees to provide conservation planning assistance. GS-5 and above employees who provide conservation planning assistance will be provided training. Training will be provided in a variety of techniques; i.e. on-the-job, on-line, self-paced with materials, and classroom settings. (See IA409.12 Exhibit A for course descriptions.) Conservation Planner Certification will be issued upon the recommendation of the ASTC(FO) and completion of required training. This planning certification will be based on the level of training, complexity of the planning, experience, and proven competency. Conservation Planner Certification will be awarded upon demonstrating planning competency at three levels of complexity.

**Level I – Basic Planning:** Planning for one resource concern or a single program resource concern plan; i.e. WHIP and CRP, or specific conservation practices.

**Level II – Resource Management System (RMS):** Planning meets RMS level of treatment by addressing the Quality Criteria in Section III of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) for multiple resource concerns.

**Level III – Complex:** Planning may include Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP), agricultural waste management systems, and individual or group plans addressing multiple uses and resource concerns.

(b) Course/training requirements for Conservation Planner Certification by level:

(1) Level I – Certified Conservation Planner – Single Resource Planning.

Proficiency is demonstrated by a field review by the ASTC(FO) with the producer and planner of at least two conservation plans or contract plans addressing a minimum of one (1) resource concern.

The employee meets the training requirements for Level I by completing the following required training:

- Completion of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course, Parts 1, 2, and 3.
- Successful completion of the Iowa Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation Version 2.0 (RUSLE 2) practical exercise. Student will also demonstrate knowledge in the use of Universal Soil Loss Equation (USLE) for calculating the Erosion Index (EI) for use in the determination of HEL land.
- Cultural Resources Training Series, Modules 1-6 and Modules 7-8, field exercises.
- Completion of NRCS Environmental Compliance for Conservation Assistance training.

(2) Level II – Certified Conservation Planner – Resource Management Planning.

Planning meets (RMS) level of treatment by addressing the Quality Criteria in Section III of the Field Office Technical Guide.

Proficiency is demonstrated by a field review by the ASTC(FO) with the producer and planner of at least two independently prepared RMS conservation plans, addressing a

minimum of two (2) resource concerns. The employee obtains Level II status by completing Level I requirements as well as the following components:

- NRCS Introduction to Water Quality
- NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems – A Primer
- Completion of Iowa Prescribed Burning Training
- Nutrient Management Considerations in Conservation Planning Track 1 – Nutrient Management
- Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Planning Track 2 – Pest Management

(3) Level III – Certified Conservation Planner – Complex Resource Planning.

The employee has independently prepared a RMS level plan with three (3) or more resource concerns that may address soil quality, grazing systems, intensive use of computer models, etc. Planning meets the RMS level of treatment which addresses the Quality Criteria in Section III of the Field Office Technical Guide. In addition, the employee has demonstrated the ability to train and mentor others in the planning process.

Proficiency is demonstrated after the ASTC(FO) completes a field review with the producer and planner of at least one or more RMS conservation plans that address a minimum of three (3) resources concerns. The employee training requirements are met by completing all requirements for a Level II planner plus the following:

- NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems - Level 2
- Completion of a P Index proficiency practical exercise

(e) The following process will be used to issue Certified Conservation Planner status:

(1) NRCS, state, and SWCD field office employees will be certified by the appropriate ASTC(FO) with concurrence from the State Resource Conservationist (SRC).

(2) Other NRCS employees or cooperating agency personnel, by written request of their supervisor, may be certified by the State Resource Conservationist (or designee) with concurrence from the State Conservationist. This may include NRCS state office and area office employees that possess the knowledge and skills to do planning but it is no longer required in their current position.

(3) The SRC will maintain the Iowa Certified Conservation Planner database.

(f) Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC).

(1) Reviews of certified planners' conservation plans will be performed by ASTC(FO)s on a percentage of plans prepared from the prior year(s). All planners will have at least two plans reviewed during the three-year certification period. These reviews will be selected at random.

(2) The State Conservationist can revoke planning certification at any time if an individual fails to meet the criteria for the certified conservation planner and/or plans do not comply with NRCS planning policy and the procedures and guidelines listed in the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH).

(3) Supervisors will include the required courses on the employees Employee Development Plan with a schedule for completion.

(e) Certification and Recertification Process.

(1) Certification: It is the employee's responsibility to notify the ASTC(FO) upon completion of the required training for Conservation Planning certification. Applicants for Conservation Planner Certification must submit documentation to the ASTC(FO) that all necessary certification training requirements have been met. After review and approval of this documentation and confidence of the applicants skills and abilities, the ASTC(FO) will send a letter of acknowledgement, stating the level of planning certification achieved, to the State Resource Conservationist. The State Conservationist will then issue the certificate. Certification of a conservation planner will remain in effect for three years from the date of issuance.

(2) (i) Recertification: Renewal of the planner certification requires the ASTC(FO) to review two (2) independently prepared conservation plans during the 3-year certification period. One of the plans will be a field review to evaluate resource needs and completeness of the plan to reach the required level. Interviews with the producer may also be included. In addition the planner will attend 30 hours of resource management training in this period. The ASTC(FO) will make a recommendation in writing to the State Conservationist to recertify or withdraw certification.

(ii) The supervisor for those employees whose position no longer requires the writing of conservation plans; i.e. Area Resource Conservationist, but retains and possesses the adequate knowledge and skills as stated above, may be recertified by the State Conservationist upon recommendation of the supervisor.

**IA409.12 Exhibit A: Description of Training Requirements for Iowa Conservation Planner Certification**

**Conservation Planning.** This course will provide conservation planning training for working with individual clients. The course emphasizes the conservation planning process and developing quality, complete plans on the entire unit. The course is based on current conservation planning policy and the procedures and guidelines in the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH). The course is organized into three parts. Part 1, Modules 1-5 provides background and framework for conservation planning. Part 2, Modules 6-8 are the hands-on field application of the planning process. It includes classroom and field exercises. Part 3, Module 9 is the individual application of the conservation planning process utilizing the information learned in Parts 1 and 2. Part 3 is to be completed at the participant's work location with the assistance of the participant's supervisor. The ASTC(FO) is responsible for reviewing and determining the adequacy of the plan developed. This course is available at: <https://aqlearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Environmental Compliance for Conservation Assistance.** This course provides an overview of the environmental evaluation process and how the process is used to meet environmental requirements. The course also instructs students on completing the CPA-52, Environmental Evaluation Worksheet, and IA CPA-52, and integrating consideration of environmental requirements into the planning process. This course is available at: <https://aqlearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation Version 2 (RUSLE 2).** A practical exercise will be successfully completed. Training to complete this exercise may be self study, on-the-job, on-line, or other. The State Agronomist will provide multiple training opportunities annually.

**Prescribed Burning.** This is a basic awareness training consisting of a two-day training workshop (twelve hours classroom) offered annually by the Ecological Sciences staff, and four hours of self-paced CD instruction. Training will be offered annually.

**Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 1.** The purpose of this training is to increase awareness and knowledge of NRCS' cultural resources stewardship responsibilities. This initial training consists of six web-based modules. This course is available at: <https://aqlearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Cultural Resources Training Series, Part 2.** Two additional modules (7 & 8) tailored to state and regional cultural resources requirements have been developed by the NRCS State Cultural Resources Specialist. These modules consist of a video and a field exercise utilizing local experts. Training will be offered annually.

**Introduction to Water Quality.** A basic introduction to water quality issues, concerns, and policy. This course is offered by the NRCS National Employee Development Center (NEDC) on-line at: <https://aqlearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Nutrient and Considerations in Conservation Planning, Track 1 – Nutrient Management.**

This training course introduces NRCS' mission in the nutrient and pest management arena and how it relates to the RMS planning process. It also identifies regulatory requirements and partnership roles that help to define that mission. It provides the participant with a basic understanding of the science of nutrient and pest management, as well as environmental concerns associated with the use of nutrients and pest management measures, including environmental risk, and the processes that affect the fate and transport of nutrients and pesticides in the environment. Also covered are climate and water management planning considerations. This course is available at:

<https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Planning, Track 2 – Pest Management.**

This training introduces NRCS' mission in the pest management arena and how it relates to the RMS planning process. It provides the participant with a basic understanding of the science of pest management, as well as environmental concerns associated with the use of pest management measures, including environmental risk. The course contains a video that illustrates the challenges of pest management and six self-paced modules. Participants will use exercises and assessment tools in a facilitated session to reinforce and apply important concepts. The participant will prepare a pest management component of a RMS plan to complete the training. The ASTC(FO) will review the adequacy of this plan. This course is available at: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Agricultural Waste Management Systems – A Primer.** This training provides an overview of agricultural waste management systems. A basic overview of animal waste systems is available on-line through NRCS-NEDC at:

<https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Agricultural Waste Management Systems – Level II.** This course provides training on planning and designing agricultural waste management systems with emphasis on systems for livestock and poultry operations. It consists of 22 modules on a CD with a workbook for computer based training. Registration and instructions for obtaining materials are completed through NRCS-NEDC at: <https://aglearn.usda.gov/plateau/user/catalog/browseCatalog.do>.

**Phosphorus Index.** A practical exercise will be successfully completed. Training to complete this exercise may be self study, on-the-job, on-line, or other.