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KANSAS BULLETIN NO. KS300-12-34

Subject: LTP—Easement Monitoring

Action required by: Field Office—July 15, 2012
Area Office—August 1, 2012

Purpose. To provide guidance for completing annual monitoring requirements for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Easement Programs for fiscal year (FY) 2012.

Expiration Date. September 30, 2013

Background. Since 1995, the Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has protected thousands of acres on hundreds of Kansas properties through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), the Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program (EWRP), the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and the Emergency Watershed Protection Program for Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE). As a result, NRCS has a long-term responsibility to ensure the different program objectives are achieved and statutory requirements are met on these lands. Program specific monitoring policy is in place to help NRCS meet these responsibilities and maintain working relationships with landowners. Additionally, the Statement of Federal Financial Accounting Standards 29 (SFFAS 29) considers easements held by the United States as Stewardship Lands which must be accounted for as part of the agency's annual financial accountability reporting. The SFFAS 29 requires that the "Condition" of all Stewardship Lands be reported regularly. Therefore, monitoring procedures and policy have been revised through the issuance of Circular 21 in June 2011 and Title 440 Conservation Programs Manual, Part 527, Easement Stewardship Lands Monitoring and Condition Documentation, January 2012.

Due to the revised policy, Kansas NRCS is currently in a period of transitioning from the monitoring process used in years past to that process outlined in the circular.

Attached is a list of the monitoring methods to be completed for WRP, EWRP, GRP and EWPP-FPE easements. Additionally, guidance on the different types of monitoring as well as the [new monitoring worksheet](#) that is to be completed for every easement follows.

Methods of Monitoring

The following monitoring methods apply to all Stewardship Lands.

Ownership Review—involves making landowner contact to verify ownership. No on-site visit is required. This method of monitoring is only applicable in the year immediately following on-site monitoring that did not require any administrative follow-up (e.g., development of a Compatible Use Authorization), corrective actions, or have violations. Question 1 is to be completed on the Annual Monitoring Worksheet.

Off-site—is a review of the most recent aerial photography available. Currently, this is done at the state office (SO) level. In the future, this will be performed by remote sensing labs using GeoObserver. In the years off-site monitoring is conducted, field offices (FO) will need to perform ownership verification and provide an Annual Monitoring Worksheet with Question 1 completed to the SO.

(more)

Dist: A, F, S, Ramsey

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Summary Review—this method is only applicable after the Stewardship Land has been attained but before restoration has been completed. A summary review includes a cursory on-site visit and landowner contact to verify ownership. Questions 1-4 are to be completed on the Annual Monitoring Worksheet.

On-site Monitoring—is the most thorough monitoring method involving a landowner contact to verify ownership, use of the most current available aerial photography, and completing an appropriate biological assessment. Landowners will be notified prior to each field inspection of the enrollment area and provided an opportunity to participate. All questions are to be completed on the Annual Monitoring Worksheet.

Ownership verification must be completed through some form of landowner contact. Methods may include phone contact, letters, post cards, etc. Passive methods may be used such as a postcard that only needs returned if land ownership has changed or assistance is requested.

Documentation for all FY 2012 easement monitoring is to be entered into the National Easement Staging Tool (NEST) by August 31, 2012. In order for the SO to meet the NEST data entry deadline, monitoring required by the FOs needs to be forwarded to the AO by July 15, 2012. The AO should have all monitoring worksheets forwarded to the SO by August 1, 2012, either electronically or hard copy. Please route the Annual Monitoring Worksheets to the SO as soon as they are completed; do not wait to batch and send several reviews at once.

AO and FO staffs are encouraged to wait on conducting On-site or Summary Reviews until they have received scheduled training on Circular 21 and the changes to the monitoring policy. Circular 21 training has been completed for Areas 2 and 3. Training has been scheduled for Area 1 on March 6, 2012, and for Area 4 on May 9, 2012.

Direct completed monitoring worksheets or questions regarding the new monitoring process to Steven M. Ramsey, Economist, at steve.ramsey@ks.usda.gov or 785-823-4517.

(Signed)

ERIC B. BANKS
State Conservationist

Attachment