

Guidelines for PIA Planners or Staff Seeking Job Approval Authority and Certifications for Ecological Conservation Practices.

It is PIA policy to award Ecological Practice Job Approval Authority (JAA)/Certifications to Planners where possible and appropriate. JAA/Certifications will be awarded based on demonstrated knowledge, skill and ability. This requires considerable familiarity, communication, cooperative exchange and patience between Technical Discipline Specialists and Planners regarding their work. Technical Discipline Specialists must have a reasonable degree of confidence that a Planner has a strong technical understanding of an ecological practice in order to award JAA/Certifications for that practice.

PIA Area Office and Field Office Planners will be eligible for JAA after working with the applicable Technical Discipline Specialist according to the following guidelines for each given practice:

1. **PIA JAA:** Ecological Practice JAA may only be awarded or delegated by:
 - a. The Assistant Director for Technology (ADT).
 - b. The applicable Resource Technology Team (RTT) Technical Discipline Specialist, each having Level V JAA for all practices within their discipline.
 - c. Area Technical Discipline Specialists (ARCs, Agronomists, etc.) who have been awarded JAA for practices by RTT Technical Discipline Specialists pursuant to Item No. 9 below.
2. **Types of JAA:** There are three types of JAA. Each requires different knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to conduct that particular job, and therefore different types of documentation to demonstrate technical competency for that job.
 - a. Inventory & Evaluation (I&E): These are one's KSAs to conduct a proper I&E on a client's land to 1) Correctly identify the resource problems, opportunities, and concerns; 2) Inventory the natural resources and analyze the resource information to clearly define the natural resource conditions, and; 3) Formulate and evaluate alternatives, i.e., the appropriate Conservation Practice or suite of practices, to address the resource problems. I&E KSAs are typically applied during Steps 1-7 of the Planning Process. Note: If a particular Program Payment Schedule Conservation Practice Scenario is selected, then I&E results and documentation must support that Scenario. For example, if the Brush Management (314) "Heavy" Scenario is selected, then an inventory of weed stem species, sizes and quantities is required to justify selection of that Scenario.
 - b. Design JAA: For Ecological Conservation Practices, "Design JAA" is the PIA Jobsheet. This is perhaps the most important step in getting quality conservation on the ground. A well prepared Jobsheet ensures that the client has adequate information and understanding to implement, operate, and maintain the planned conservation systems. Jobsheets clearly and concisely communicate site-specific NRCS standards and specifications for each client. Good Jobsheets lead to successful implementation of conservation practices. Design KSAs are applied during Step 8 of the Planning Process.
 - c. Implementation JAA: These are the KSAs needed to correctly certify practice installation according to the standards and specifications outlined in the Jobsheet. Use a Practice Certification Worksheet, if available, to document implementation. A well-prepared Certification Worksheet or proxy will document pertinent practice installation data, such as methods, amount applied (feet, acres, number, tons), timing, survival rate, species planted, spacing, practice function, record keeping, O&M, installation deficiencies, etc. Implementation KSAs are applied during Step 8 of the Planning Process.
3. **Requesting JAA:** Planners seeking any type of JAA at any given level shall develop and submit sets of appropriate planning documents (hereafter "document sets") for review by the

applicable Technical Discipline Specialist. The Planner must be the original “author.” Such materials may be submitted individually or in batches for specific JAA requests or simply as part of ongoing planning work. Documents required for each type of JAA are summarized here:

JAA for Inventory & Evaluation	JAA for Design	JAA for Implementation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan map • PIA Technical Note(s) if applicable • Planner’s Notes • A completed Conservation Planning Technical Note #1, Parts 1, 2, & 3 • Inventory data analyses that establish a resource problem baseline, e.g., RUSLE2, SCI, WEPS, WinPST runs, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation Plan Schedule • Plan map • Jobsheet • Inventory data analyses specific to that Conservation Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan map showing practice installation • CPA 1155/1156 if applicable • Completed and Signed Certification Worksheet • Photo documentation form, if applicable • Field check-out notes

4. **Awarding JAA:** The quantity of document sets required for review and prospective award of JAA depends on the quality of the work submitted. As a general guideline, review of document sets for one to two (1-2) plans/contracts will typically be required for a given “simple” practice (e.g. Woody Residue Treatment, Deep Tillage, Hedgerow Planting). Three or more (3+) plans/contracts may be required for more technically complex practices (e.g. Tree/Shrub Establishment, Filter Strip, multiple-species Upland Wildlife Habitat Management). Greater or fewer document sets may be required for review at the sole discretion of the reviewing Technical Discipline Specialist, further subject to the following:
 - a. If one or more edits of major technical importance or many edits of minor technical importance are required, the Planner may be asked to submit new/additional sets of appropriate documents for review.
 - b. JAA can only be awarded for a particular JAA type and level after at least one submitted document set is reviewed that either needs no edits or requires few edits of minor technical significance. At their option, a Technical Discipline Specialist can complete the process of awarding JAA to a particular Planner by interviewing or having a conversation with that Planner to ensure adequate technical understanding of each practice.
 - c. JAA shall be awarded at the Job Class level (i.e. I through V) equivalent to or lower than the highest level represented in all document sets submitted for review for each given practice, with one exception: RTT Technical Discipline Specialists can award JAA one level higher at their sole discretion.
 - d. Past work may be submitted for review if the document set is tied to the current PIA practice standard, and the document set was “authored” by the requesting Planner.
 - e. The issuing Technical Discipline Specialist shall award JAA on form GM 180, Part 409 - PI Exhibit G “Job Approval Authority for Ecological Conservation Practices.”
5. **Practice Certifications:** For practices where Certifications are awarded rather than JAA, the JAA process described above will be the same. However, additional items or actions may also be required. Consult Exhibit D for Nutrient Management Certification and Exhibit F for Integrated Pest Management Certification for more details. Certifications shall only be awarded by RTT.
6. **Tracking JAA and Certifications:** RTT shall maintain a PIA Master JAA Tracking database (currently on SharePoint) to record all JAA/Certifications awarded and/or rescinded. This database shall be edited and updated only by RTT staff once all signatures on Exhibit G are in order. The ADT, or his designee, shall review and purge the PIA Master JAA Tracking database of expired JAA at the end of each quarter. The ADT will send a summary of the purged records to the affected employees as well as to the applicable Assistant Director for Field Operations and

District Conservationist. However, it remains the sole responsibility of the employee who's been awarded JAA to maintain a copy of their signed Exhibit G, as documentation of their JAA award(s). Exhibit G is the official record of JAA award. Both RTT and Area Technical Discipline Specialists shall individually maintain a tracking worksheet (using a standard format) to record their reviews of document sets submitted by each employee, for each Conservation Practice, to ensure all such reviews are appropriately credited towards prospective award of JAA. Area staff shall provide copies of their tracking worksheets to RTT upon request from the ADT.

7. **JAA and Certification Lifespans, Expiration and Renewal:** JAA or Certifications awarded to a particular individual for a particular practice are valid for three years from the date of award. When JAA for a particular practice is awarded incrementally (I&E, Design, Implementation at different times), the three year period shall begin or be extended from the most recent reward date. It is the sole responsibility of the Planner to track their JAA/Certification expiration dates for each conservation practice. Planners can renew their current JAA by submitting at least one new document set relating to each type of JAA for review at any point during the three year period for which their JAA is valid. If the new document set(s) passes review as detailed in Item No. 4b, the JAA shall be extended three years from the date of the review. If a Planner's previous JAA expires, they must re-initiate the full JAA review process detailed in Item No. 4.
8. **Rescinding JAA/Certifications:** Important Note - PIA employees who sign off on document sets for their own work or that of others are accountable for thorough and proper technical reviews. If any PIA employee appears to be inappropriately using their JAA and/or Certifications, such privileges may be reduced or rescinded. Potential abuses will be evaluated by the applicable RTT Technical Discipline Specialist who will make a recommendation to the ADT. The ADT will then either deny or concur with the recommendation. If the ADT concurs, the action will be recorded on Exhibit H, PIA Job Approval Authority Rescission Form, with copies sent to the affected planner and her/his supervisor. The PIA Master JAA Tracking database will be updated accordingly. If there is ever a question on the adequacy or appropriateness of a proposed practice or method, it is best to consult directly with RTT.
9. **Technical reviews and JAA awards by Area Technical Discipline Specialists:** Area technical staff may request JAA as described above. Once such staff have earned JAA, they may in turn review document sets and award JAA following the methods outlined in this document within these additional guidelines:
 - a. When requesting JAA, Area Technical Discipline Specialists may submit appropriate document sets developed by themselves *or* those developed by a planner which the Area Specialist has reviewed and to which they have appended their review comments.
 - b. When reviewing document sets and/or awarding JAA, Area Technical Discipline Specialists, their prospective approvals shall not exceed the type and level of JAA that they have earned.
 - c. The awarding Area Technical Discipline Specialist shall always notify and copy Exhibit G to the ADT and appropriate RTT Technical Discipline Specialist on any JAA award transmittal, otherwise such awards will be considered void.

Frequently asked questions regarding JAA:

1. Why is JAA awarded at different times for I&E, Design, and Implementation? It is possible to be awarded JAA for one, two or all three levels at one time. Many times I&E and Design documents can be reviewed by the applicable Discipline Specialist at the same time prior to contracting and initiation of field work. Implementation JAA can be awarded after field work has been completed after review as detailed above. JAA may be awarded for all three levels simultaneously if a Planner with applicable JAA other than the applicable Discipline Specialist initially approved a document set for I&E and Design, and the required supporting documents for all three levels are subsequently given to the Discipline Specialist for review.
2. Why are there multiple Job Classes (I through V), if I provide technically adequate documents covering work for one acre, why can't I be approved for projects representing 1,000 acres? Different Job Classes in part directly represent the level of knowledge and experience that a particular person has. Some types of conservation work become more complex at larger scales, and additional considerations may need to be addressed compared to smaller jobs. Also, as the scale, level of effort and investment gets greater, review and approval by those with more knowledge and experience becomes more important. For these reasons it is important for Planners seeking JAA to demonstrate their ability and success at different levels. These points said, requests with supporting rationale for modified quantities (e.g. feet, acres, etc.) required for Job Classes relating to any Conservation Practice are welcomed – please send such requests to the ADT and applicable Discipline Specialist.