

PI 409.0 General

- (a) This document establishes Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) policy for providing conservation planning assistance to clients. The Director of the Conservation Operations Division (COD) has the functional oversight for this policy. As part of this oversight, the Director COD will establish a tracking and quality assurance system to assess the progress of states in implementing conservation planning training, certification and maintenance programs.
- (b) **The Director of the Pacific Islands Area (Director-PI) has supplemented the national policy, shown in bold text, to provide specific guidance for implementation in the Pacific Islands Area (PI).** A copy of each PI supplement will be sent to the Regional Conservationist (RC) and Director, COD.
- (c) The National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) provides procedures and guidance on implementing this planning policy, including relationships to the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG), electronic storage of data, technical handbooks, and program guidance in the planning process. The NRCS planning process and standards as outlined in the NPPH will be used for all conservation planning activities. **All conservation practices planned and scheduled for application in the field will meet the standards and specifications outlined in the eFOTG. All references to the eFOTG in this policy refer to the web version of the Pacific Islands Area eFOTG, commonly referred to as the eFOTG.**
- (d) **All conservation planning assistance, regardless of its association with a NRCS cost-share program, will have the same level of planning and documentation required by PI policy and the NPPH. In situations where NRCS is assisted by other agencies or groups, NRCS planning procedures and plan format will be consistent with the NPPH and PI policy.**

PI 409.1 Conservation Planning Objective

- (a) The objective in conservation planning is to help each client attain sustainable use and sound management of soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources. The purpose is to prevent the degradation of resources and to ensure their sustained use and productivity, while considering the client's economic and social needs.
 - (1) The NRCS conservation planning process emphasizes development of resource management systems (RMS). An RMS is a combination of conservation practices and resource management activities for the treatment of all identified resource concerns for soil, water, air, plants, animals, and humans that meets or exceeds the quality criteria in the FOTG for resource sustainability.
 - (2) The minimum level of treatment to strive for in the planning process is the RMS. Progressive planning is used to work toward an RMS when a client is ready, willing and able to make some, but not all of the decisions necessary to achieve an RMS level of management.
- (b) When programs or initiatives exist, for example, Highly Erodible Land provisions, that define other levels of planning for specific resource issues, clients will be offered alternatives that, as a minimum, meet the criteria of those programs. However, the conservation planner will

encourage the client, who is a participant in programs that are related to specific resource issues, to develop an RMS plan or progressive plan as appropriate. This will help the client identify and address all resource concerns and provide a plan to use with other existing or future programs.

- (c) Resource management objectives of NRCS' clients are addressed through the development of individual conservation plans, areawide conservation assessments, and areawide conservation plans. Clients develop plans and assessments with conservation planning assistance from NRCS, conservation districts, Resource Conservation Development Councils, and other appropriate sources. NRCS conservation planning assistance is based on ecological, economic, and social considerations relative to the resources. When NRCS provides conservation planning assistance, on-site visits with clients are an integral part of that assistance.
- (d) Conservation Plans are the basis for all assistance NRCS provides to clients and the basic tool for them to manage their natural resources. The conservation plan, however, is just one product of the planning process. The greatest value comes by having the client engaged in every step of the planning process. The client develops an understanding of the natural resource issues, interactions and treatments necessary for resource sustainability.

PI 409.2 Conservation Planning Assistance Delivery

- (a) All citizens will have equal access to NRCS programs. Assistance provided will be in compliance with all Civil Right Acts, Non-discrimination statutes, and regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture.
- (b) NRCS traditionally provides conservation planning assistance on a request basis.
 - (1) Assistance is given on individual land units through conservation districts and tribal districts based on a mutual agreement and a cooperative working agreement. The mutual agreement establishes a partnership and a foundation for USDA agencies to cooperate with States, units of government, tribal governments, conservation districts and tribal districts.
 - (2) The cooperative working agreement supplements the mutual agreement and establishes the relationship between the partners and agencies of USDA, and between State conservation agencies or tribal governments and conservation districts or tribal districts.
 - (3) NRCS may enter into agreements with other organizations and units of government to provide conservation planning assistance as mutually agreed upon. The State Conservationist will determine the level of NRCS assistance to be provided in areas without conservation districts. NRCS will provide assistance for programs mandated by Congress independent of a cooperative working agreement with the conservation district.
- (c) NRCS has a "Trust" responsibility to deliver service to American Indian tribes through a government to government relationship. Law, policy, and other directives require government to government responsibilities.

- (1) Executive memos direct Federal agencies to remove procedural impediments to working effectively with tribal governments in the delivery of programs and services, and to develop the best mechanism for delivering programs and services to tribes through the consultative process.
 - (2) A tribe may determine that a conservation district is not wanted or needed and that another mechanism fits their situation better.
 - (3) The **Director-PI** will consult with federally recognized tribes to determine the optimum means of delivering NRCS programs and services.
 - (4) Every effort will be made to fulfill NRCS' government to government responsibilities.
- (d) In providing assistance, NRCS will comply with all applicable Federal, State, and local laws, program rules, policy statements, executive orders, and international agreements.
- (e) **Areawide conservation planning, especially for those situations with complex objectives, requires the use of interdisciplinary teams of specialists in the planning effort. Requests for use of interdisciplinary teams for areawide planning will be made in writing to the Director-PI through the appropriate supervisory channels.**
- (f) **In complex situations, the Director-PI may employ an early scoping process to determine expected needs for NRCS services and other resources before committing to the planning effort. As these situations arise, they are to be elevated through the appropriate supervisory channels for recommendation to the Director-PI.**
- (g) Assistance on Federal or State land that will require a significant amount of NRCS resources beyond the required scoping process completed early in the planning process, will be based on an agreement that provides for reimbursement of NRCS services. The **Director-PI** will determine when an agreement is required.

PI 409.3 Requirements for Providing Conservation Planning Assistance

- (a) **In the Pacific Islands Area (PI), the Assistant Director for Technology has the functional oversight for conservation planner certification policy, and establishes minimum criteria to be met for conservation planner certification. All Pacific Islands Area NRCS employees who have conservation planning in their position description must be certified as Conservation Planners within 24 months of their date of hire. Employees who move into a position with conservation planning responsibilities must become certified within 12 months of starting the new position. NRCS employees who have transferred into the Pacific Islands Area and have completed certification requirements in another state are to provide documentation of their certification credentials for review by their supervisor, who provides a recommendation to the Assistant Director for Technology. If it is determined that PI certification requirements have been satisfactorily met, the employee will be granted certification. If not, the identified additional PI requirements must be met within 12 months of the review. Achieving and maintaining the appropriate PI planning certification(s) is the responsibility of the employee. Training needed to obtain and maintain certifications will be identified and included in the person's Employee Development Plan.**
- (1) A certified conservation planner is a person who possesses the necessary skills, training, and experience to implement the NRCS nine-step planning process to meet client objectives in solving natural resource problems.

- (2) The certified conservation planner has demonstrated skill in assisting clients to identify resource problems, to express the client's objectives, to propose feasible solutions to resource problems, and leads the client to choose and implement an effective alternative that treats resource concerns and meets client's objectives.
- (3) **The following NRCS planner certifications are established for the Pacific Islands Area:**
 - (i) **Conservation Planner Certification**
 - (ii) **Specialist Certification for Elements of a CNMP**
 - (A) **Manure and Wastewater Specialist**
 - (B) **Land Treatment Specialist**
 - (C) **Nutrient Management Specialist (also applicable to non-CNMP)**
 - (iii) **Pest Management Specialist Certification**

Definitions and criteria for these certifications are covered in this policy (see PI 409.9, PI 409.10 and PI 409.11).

- (b) All plans developed with the assistance of NRCS and partner employees will be approved by an NRCS or partner certified conservation planner. When a conservation plan is being used to meet specific USDA program requirements under the authority of NRCS, it must be approved by the appropriate NRCS official. For example Highly Erodible Land Compliance, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wetland Restoration Program planning approval is a responsibility that cannot be delegated.
- (c) **The Director-PI** will establish and implement a process to ensure training is provided to employees. This is to include the following actions:
 - (1) Development of **PI** training needs and budgets for conservation planning training.
 - (2) The **Director-PI** will develop a list of qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for certified conservation planner designations in addition to the requirements listed in GM-180, Part 409.9. These qualifications should include knowledge of the following fundamentals such as:
 - (i) Crop production
 - (ii) Grazing systems
 - (iii) Plant growth
 - (iv) Soil-water-plant relationships
 - (v) Plant identification
 - (vi) Nutrient uptake
 - (vii) Erosion processes
 - (viii) Water quality
 - (ix) Proficiency in scientific tools and models
 - (x) Animal production
 - (xi) Conservation practices and systems common to the work area
 - (xii) Wildlife management

- (xiii) State and local laws and regulations that may influence conservation planning
- (3) Training must be provided through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training or equivalent courses and methods approved by the **Director-PI** as meeting the identified training need. Approval of equivalent courses will be done in consultation with the Director, National Employee Development Center.
- (4) The **Director-PI** will ensure that all NRCS employees that approve conservation plans meet minimum NRCS certified conservation planner requirements.
- (d) **The Assistant Director of Technology will establish and maintain a list of NRCS certified conservation planners and other certification designations in the Pacific Islands Area consisting of NRCS employees and employees of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.**
- (e) The **Director-PI** may approve non-NRCS sources to certify conservation planners in accordance with procedures in the Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Part 504. The **Director-PI** may also directly certify qualified individuals, such as third party vendors, as conservation planners contingent upon these individuals satisfying NRCS requirements. Whether providing assistance to an approve source, or directly certifying a qualified individual, the **Director-PI** will ensure that this assistance is consistent with existing NRCS policies and technical guides. As a minimum:
 - (1) The **Director-PI** is required to provide organizations that are interested in becoming approved sources with the minimum criteria that NRCS uses to certify conservation planners.
 - (2) An NRCS approved source will maintain and make it accessible to the **Director-PI**, an up-to-date list of the conservation planners it has certified.

PI 409.4 Planning on Units that Cross a State, County, or Field Office Boundary

- (a) NRCS assistance on an individual land unit that crosses a State, county or field office boundary is the responsibility of the field office where the headquarters of the land unit is located, or as otherwise agreed upon by the client and the respective State Conservationists. Conservation planning will be consistent with the FOTG covering the area where the land unit is located.
- (b) For assistance to groups or units of government on a land unit that crosses a State boundary, the State Conservationists, in consultation with the client, will determine by mutual consent which State will have the lead responsibility for providing planning and other technical assistance.

PI 409.5 Documentation of Conservation Planning Data

- (a) **The Conservation Plan of Operations will be documented in electronic format using Customer Service Toolkit. A paper copy of the planning documentation used to assist the client in the**

decision making process and implementation of the conservation practices will be maintained in the field office file. It shall contain maps, planning and implementation notes, and supporting documentation. The content and format of this documentation shall be consistent with the NPPH.

PI 409.6 Conservation Planning Assistance that may have International Impacts

Assistance provided will be in compliance with National Instruction 280-301, International Conservation Assistance. The **Director-PI** will provide access to instructions for affected field offices as appropriate.

PI 409.7 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) of 1966 and Privacy

NRCS policy and procedures on FOIA and PA are contained in National Instruction 120-310 and GM-120, Part 408, Subpart C.

PI 409.8 Public Participation in the Planning Process

- (a) Public participation is an integral part of the NRCS planning process, and is described in GM-400, Part 400. Opportunities for public participation and involvement will be provided throughout the planning process to provide for a full partnership when working with groups (not acting as an individual), communities, and units of government. Individual conservation plans do not require public participation.
- (b) Every areawide conservation planning effort will include a public participation component to the extent determined by the **Director-PI**. Public participation activities are to be consistent with the requirements of applicable Federal statutes, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), Civil Rights requirements and State statutes.

PI 409.9 Minimum Criteria to Achieve an NRCS Certified Conservation Planner Designation

- (a) **Candidates for NRCS-Certified Conservation Planner status must complete all modules of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course (modules 1 - 9) or equivalent, as determined and approved by the Director-PI. The Director-PI may provide the person a letter of waiver of this requirement, if the individual has previously demonstrated competence in RMS plan development.**
- (b) Candidates must possess and demonstrate the following knowledge, skills and abilities:
 - (1) Awareness of the National Conservation Program.

- (2) Skill in applying the NRCS Conservation Planning Process.
 - (3) **Ability to plan and implement conservation practices common to the geographic area, consistent with job approval authorities as described in PI 409.12.**
 - (4) Knowledge of NRCS Field Office Technical Guide standards and specifications for applicable conservation practices in the State and locality.
 - (5) Skill in applying approved erosion prediction technology (Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation and the Wind Erosion Equation).
 - (6) Skill in using applicable site vulnerability assessment tools.
 - (7) **Knowledge of Federal, State, and local laws and regulations. This includes knowledge of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), with special consideration for endangered species and cultural resources.**
- (c) **The Director-PI has established the following additional minimum criteria to achieve an NRCS certified conservation planner designation:**
- (1) **Candidates must complete the NEDC Cultural Resources Training Series (modules 1-8) or equivalent as determined and approved by the Director-PI.**
 - (2) **Candidates must receive training on compliance with the Endangered Species Act. This training may be provided by the NRCS, USFWS, or other appropriate sources.**
 - (3) **Employees with technical responsibilities that provide support to conservation planning efforts must at minimum, complete modules 1-5 of the Conservation Planning Course. Supervisors of these individuals will determine the need for additional training and/or certification requirements.**
- (d) **Completion of Module 9 of the NRCS Conservation Planning Course will require candidate planners to develop and present to the client at least two Resource Management System (RMS) alternatives on at least one Conservation Management Unit within the client's operating unit. Alternatives will include an appropriate combination of engineering and ecological sciences conservation practices to address identified resource problems. The client may decide to accept one of the RMS alternatives or decide to implement only part of an alternative (progressive implementation). If progressive implementation is chosen, the client will be informed as to the extent to which their decisions impact resource concerns that are not being addressed. Conservation Planning Technical Note 1, Resource Problem Worksheet, will be used to document the level of treatment chosen by the client.**
- (1) **The candidate planner will be required to meet with the client throughout the development of the plan. At a minimum, a certified planner or a person designated by the Assistant Director for Technology will accompany the candidate planner to observe as inventory data is gathered and alternatives are offered to the client.**
 - (2) **The candidate will be expected to demonstrate competency in the planning process and plan development.**
 - (3) **The observer will evaluate the planner's involvement with the decision-maker (landowner or land operator) in the planning process and whether all resource concerns associated with the CMU are adequately addressed. **The Conservation Plan Review Worksheet (Exhibit A) will be used to document the review of conservation planning activities. All identified deficiencies will be rectified prior to submitting the plan for approval.****
 - (4) **The field-reviewed plans must be approved by the Assistant Director for Technology or designee prior to final delivery to the client. Once the plan is approved and delivered to the client, the candidate will finalize and submit to the Assistant Director**

for Technology the “Conservation Planner Certification Worksheet” (Exhibit B) for Director’s approval of certification.

- (e) The Conservation Planner certification designation is valid for a 3 year period unless revoked. Training to maintain certification status and update conservation planning skills is required as an on-going process within each 3-year cycle of recertification.
 - (1) NRCS Certified Conservation Planners must obtain at least 12 hours of approved training during a 3-year period to maintain Certified Conservation Planner designation. Approved training is training, both formal and informal, that addresses conservation planning skills and approved as such by the supervisor of the Certified Conservation Planner.
 - (2) Training needed as well as received will be documented on the Employee Development Plan by the employee and the employee’s supervisor.
 - (3) Assistant Directors for Operations are to provide the Assistant Director for Technology an annual update on the status of completion of minimum training requirements for all certified planners in their Area.
- (f) Quality assurance protocol will be utilized by the Director-PI for purposes of validating current certification status as well as for validating recertification.
 - (1) Each certified conservation planner’s designation will be reviewed every three years by the Assistant Director for Technology, and documented on the “Conservation Planner Recertification Worksheet” (Exhibit C).
 - (2) An annual review will be conducted of at least one conservation plan prepared by a certified conservation planner during the previous 12 months to determine that NRCS planning policy and NPPH procedures are being followed. This review will be conducted by the Assistant Director for Technology or designee, and documented on the “Conservation Plan Review Worksheet” (Exhibit A).
 - (3) If the individual fails to meet the criteria for the certified conservation planner designation, the certification status will be revoked and the individual must be recertified before providing direct conservation planning assistance. Specific guidance will be provided to the employee on steps necessary to re-establish certification. Certification must be re-established within 6 months of the revocation.
 - (4) If multiple certified planner levels exist, an individual could become decertified at a higher designated level while retaining a lower certification level.

PI 409.10 Minimum Standards for Providers of Conservation Technical Assistance Associated with Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans

- (a) A comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP) describes and documents a conservation system within a conservation plan that is unique to animal feeding operation.
 - (1) At a minimum, a CNMP must address quality criteria to the sustainable level for soil erosion and water quality for the planning unit associated with the animal feeding operation. Conservation planning activities associated with the development of a

CNMP, however, should attempt to achieve a CNMP that addresses quality criteria to the RMS level for all five natural resources (soil, water, air, plants, and animals).

- (2) Any CNMP that is developed by a NRCS or partner employee will have the plan approved by a NRCS certified conservation planner, as defined by GM-180, Part 409.3 or GM-180, Part 409.9.
- (b) A CNMP may be comprised of six possible elements **(four of the six are required)**:
- (1) **Manure and Wastewater Handling and Storage. This element is a required part of a CNMP and is usually approved by an engineer who has the appropriate job approval authority for the planned practice(s). However, basic systems such as a composting facility and dry litter storage can be signed and approved by a certified conservation planner who has adequate job approval authority for the practices.**
 - (2) **Land Treatment Practices. This element is a required part of a CNMP and is planned and approved by a certified conservation planner. The planner is certifying that all lands on which manure is spread is free of gully erosion, meets soil loss tolerance for sheet and rill erosion, and setbacks and buffers meet water quality criteria at the RMS level.**
 - (3) **Nutrient Management. This element is a required part of a CNMP. A certified planner can develop the nutrient management plan, but it must be approved by a certified specialist for nutrient management. The nutrient management plan requires the certified planner or specialist to conduct an inventory of all lands receiving land-applied manure as a nutrient supplement, analyze the erosion, runoff and leaching risks, and develop a nutrient balance based on the amount of land on which the manure is applied.**
 - (4) **Record Keeping. This element is a required part of a CNMP and requires a certified conservation planner but does not require approval by a certified specialist. It requires the planner to define and inform the landowner of the record keeping requirements that must be maintained to meet state and local permit requirements, manage manure applications, and ensure that the CNMP plan is being followed and correctly implemented.**
 - (5) **Feed Management. This element is only a required part of a CNMP in instances where land applied nutrients could be reduced by application of the eFOTG conservation practice standard Feed Management (practice code 592). The plan will be prepared and discussed with the client by an animal nutritionist or someone with appropriate job approval authority for the Feed Management practice.**
 - (6) **Other Utilization Options (Optional)**
- (c) All the elements, except Record Keeping, are technical in nature and require a certain level of acquired expertise to adequately address. To adequately address a specific element of a CNMP would require the planning and implementation of conservation practices that address the resource concerns identified for that specific element. An individual that has demonstrated a competency in planning and implementing conservation practices associated with one or more of the specific elements of a CNMP would qualify to be designated a “certified specialist”, **provided all other PI requirements are met.**

- (d) Record Keeping is a task completed solely by the owner and/or operator and is not an element that involves an approval by a certified specialist.
- (e) **The Feed Management element has a NRCS conservation practice standard associated with its development and implementation, but the Other Utilization Options at present does not. The Other Utilization Options element is a consideration in the planning process and does not require NRCS certification.**
- (f) **The Assistant Director for Technology and State Conservation Engineer, or their designees, will review the training completed and at least one CNMP prepared by a candidate before approval as a certified specialist is designated for one or more of the CNMP elements. A list of employees and partner employees receiving the certified specialist designation will be maintained by the Assistant Director for Technology.**
 - (1) **Nutrient Management addresses all forms of nutrients. As such, the Specialist certification is applicable for both CNMP as well as non-CNMP. Approval for Nutrient Management Specialist will be based on review of the training completed and at least one Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP or non-CNMP) prepared by the candidate.**
- (g) This paragraph establishes the minimum requirements associated with certification of individuals who will approve the development and / or design and implementation of elements of a CNMP. **In addition, all pertinent State certification and licensing requirements (e.g. engineering license, certified nutrient management specialist) must be met.**
 - (1) **General Requirements. The following are the general requirements for completion of certification for any of the CNMP elements.**
 - (i) **Completion of the NRCS NEDC Conservation Planning Course, modules 1-5.**
 - (ii) **An awareness of agricultural waste management systems equivalent to the information contained in the NRCS NECD course “Agricultural Waste Management Systems: A Primer Course”.**
 - (iii) **The ability to use the contents of the NRCS eFOTG as related to specific elements of the CNMP.**
 - (iv) **An understanding of the criteria associated with the various elements of a CNMP as contained in the “NRCS Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning Technical Guidance” in the NPPH.**
 - (v) **An understanding of the applicable Federal, State and local laws and regulations that impact the elements of a CNMP.**
 - (2) **Requirements Specific to Elements of a CNMP.**
 - (i) **Manure and Wastewater Handling and Storage. Certification will be documented using “Specialist Certification for CNMP Elements Worksheet” (Exhibit D)**
 - (A) **Knowledge adequate to design and implement conservation practices typically used to address this element of a CNMP. When structural design and planning are required to modify existing or add new structures as part of this element, appropriate registration as a professional engineer and / or engineering approval authority is required. Typical practices include:**
 - **Animal Mortality Facility (316)**
 - **Closure of Waste Impoundments (360)**

- Composting Facility (317)
 - Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline (430)
 - Manure Transfer (634)
 - Roof Runoff Structure (558)
 - Solid/Liquid Waste Separation Facility (632)
 - Waste Storage Facility (313)
 - Waste Treatment Lagoon (359)
- (B) Working knowledge of the information contained in the NRCS Agricultural Waste Management Systems Level 2 Course, or equivalent.
- (ii) Land Treatment Practices. **This element addresses the land on which manure and wastewater from an animal feeding operation will be applied, and must be approved by a certified conservation planner. In addition, the following specific knowledge and skills are required. Certification will be documented using “Specialist Certification for CNMP Elements Worksheet” (Exhibit D).**
- (A) Skill in applying soil loss and / or wind erosion prediction tools, as appropriate.
- (B) **Skill in using site vulnerability assessment tools. Acceptable tools allowable for use in the Pacific Islands Area include: the latest versions of RUSLE and the Phosphorus Runoff Risk Evaluator (PRRE); HI Water Quality Technical Note No. 1 (Water Quality Risk Assessment); HI Water Quality Technical Note No. 5 (Soil Leaching and Surface Loss Potentials); HI Water Quality Technical Note No. 11 (Water Budget Worksheet) - for use in Hawaii; and, as it becomes available, the Nitrogen Risk Evaluator (NRE).**
- (C) Knowledge of the NRCS conservation planning process.
- (D) Knowledge adequate to design and implement conservation practices common to the geographic area.
- (iii) Nutrient Management. **Nutrient Management Specialist Certification is also required to approve nutrient management plans that are not associated with a CNMP, such as when inorganic fertilizers, manures and organic by-products are used to enhance soil fertility to improve plant productivity. Certification will be documented using “Specialist Certification for CNMP Elements Worksheet” (Exhibit D).**
- (A) Working knowledge of the information contained in the NRCS Introduction to Water Quality Course, or equivalent.
- (B) **Skill in using site vulnerability assessment tools. Acceptable tools allowable for use in the Pacific Islands Area include: the latest versions of RUSLE and the Phosphorus Runoff Risk Evaluator (PRRE); HI Water Quality Technical Note No. 1 (Water Quality Risk Assessment); HI Water Quality Technical Note 5 (Soil Leaching and Surface Loss Potentials); HI Water Quality Technical Note No. 11 (Water Budget Worksheet) - for use in Hawaii; and, as it becomes available, the Nitrogen Risk Evaluator (NRE).**

(C) Working knowledge of the information in the NRCS Nutrient and Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Course, as it pertains to nutrient management, or equivalent.

(D) Skill in developing a plan to address the nutrient management conservation practice in compliance with the NRCS Nutrient Management (FOTG Practice Code 590), and, as appropriate, Irrigation Water Management (FOTG Practice Code 449) **and Waste Utilization (Practice Code 633)** conservation practice standard(s).

(h) Training.

Training for any CNMP certification must be provided through NRCS training courses, on-the-job training, or equivalent courses and methods approved by the Assistant Director for Technology and the State Conservation Engineer as meeting the identified training requirement. The Director-PI, in consultation with the Director, National Employee Development Center, will grant approval for course equivalency in lieu of an NRCS formal training course.

(i) Maintaining Certifications.

NRCS Certified Specialists in CNMP elements must obtain at least 12 hours of approved training during the 3 year certification period to maintain certification as specialists in CNMP elements. Training that counts toward the 12 hours is training that addresses CNMP issues that have been approved by the employee's supervisor as addressing a CNMP element. Needed training will be documented on the Employee Development Plan and recorded by the employee and the employee's supervisor.

(j) Quality Assurance.

The Director-PI will address maintenance of the certified specialist designation through quality assurance protocol. A review will be conducted at least once every three years of each certified specialist designation. A sufficient number of plans and/or design reviews will be completed by the Assistant Director for Technology and the State Engineer, or their designees, to determine whether the plans and/or designs developed and implemented meet NRCS conservation practice standards and policy, and the intent of the Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan Technical Guidance. Recertification will be documented on the "Specialists Recertification Worksheet" (Exhibit E). If an individual fails to meet the qualifications or criteria established for a certified specialist designation, the status will be revoked and the individual must re-certify. Specific guidance will be provided to the employee on steps necessary to re-establish certification.

(k) Certified Specialists

The Assistant Director for Technology will maintain a list of certified specialists for elements of a CNMP.

PI 409.11 Minimum Standards for Pest Management Assistance

(a) NRCS roles in pest management are:

- (1) Evaluating environmental risks associated with probable pest management recommendations.
 - (2) Developing appropriate mitigation alternatives to minimize environmental risks.
 - (3) Assisting clients to adopt Integrated Pest Management (IPM) that helps protect natural resources.
 - (4) Assisting clients to develop and implement an acceptable pest management component of their overall conservation plan.
- (b) **All NRCS personnel who provide technical assistance for pest management must be properly trained and meet applicable requirements for their positions as well as State or local licensing and/or certification requirements. In addition, personnel must seek and obtain continuing education and training to maintain technical competency.**
- (c) **Although certification is not required to develop or revise pest management components of conservation plans, all persons who approve pest management components of conservation plans must be certified specialists in pest management. A certified conservation planner will approve the overall conservation plan. The Assistant Director for Technology will maintain a list of specialists certified in pest management.**
- (d) The **Director-PI** must establish a program to certify specialists who approve pest management components of conservation plans, including:
- (1) NRCS employees
 - (2) Volunteers
 - (3) Employees of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and State Conservation agencies that have requested to participate.
- (e) The **Director-PI** may establish a program to certify third party vendors and other private sector individuals such as certified crop advisors and consultants. Existing programs from national certifying organizations, land grant universities, Cooperative State Research Education, and Extension Service, State government agencies and other appropriately qualified entities may be utilized as components of the NRCS certification program in a State.
- (f) **NRCS certified specialists in pest management must obtain at least 12 hours of approved training during the 3 year certification period to maintain certification of Pest Management Specialist. Approved training is training that addresses pest management issues and has been approved as such by the certified specialist's supervisor. Approved training received must be documented on the Employee Development Plan and recorded by the employee and the employee's supervisor. Assistant Directors of Operations are to inform the Assistant Director for Technology of specialists that have completed the minimum training requirement. In addition, a sufficient number of reviews will be completed by the Assistant Director for Technology or designee, to determine whether the pest management component of the conservation plan developed and implemented meets NRCS conservation practice FOTG standards and pest management policy. Recertification will be documented on the "Specialists Recertification Worksheet" (Exhibit E). If an individual fails to meet the qualifications or criteria established for a certified specialist designation, the status will be revoked and the individual must re-certify. Specific guidance will be provided to the employee on steps necessary to re-establish certification.**
- (g) The **Director-PI** must address the following in establishing a program for certifying specialists who approve pest management components of conservation plans:

- (1) An understanding of the conservation planning process.
- (2) An understanding of the production systems, where pest management will be applied.
- (3) An understanding of local, State, and Federal laws and regulations related to pest management.
- (4) An understanding of natural resource concerns related to pest management activities.
- (5) An awareness of the content of NRCS pest management policy.
- (6) An understanding of the content and use of the NRCS FOTG.
- (7) Proficiency in applying the NRCS pest management standard (FOTG Practice Code 595).

(h) The following items are required for certification as a specialist in pest management:

- (1) Successful completion of the web-based “NRCS Conservation Planning” course modules 1-5.**
- (2) Successful completion of the web-based “NRCS Introduction to Water Quality” course, or equivalent.**
- (3) Successful completion of the pest management track of the NRCS web-based portion of “Nutrient and Pest Management Considerations in Conservation Planning” course.**
- (4) Demonstrated competency in using the Windows Pesticide Screening Tool (WINPST). A review of work done using WINPST will be conducted by a certified conservation planner that has pest management specialist certification, or a higher level specialist.**
- (5) Demonstrated skill in developing the pest management component of a conservation plan based on the eFOTG Pest Management (code 595) standard and specification. A review of the pest management component of a conservation plan developed by a candidate for certification will be conducted by a certified conservation planner that has pest management specialist certification, or a higher level specialist.**
- (6) The planner requesting certification will provide documentation of the above requirements for pest management certification in writing to the Assistant Director for Technology. Certification will be documented using the “Pest Management Certification Worksheet” (Exhibit F).**

PI 409.12 Job Approval Authorities

- (a) Job approval authorities are part of the overall NRCS process use to ensure both efficiency and quality during the planning, design and implementation of conservation plans and their associated practices. Job approval authorities are used to:**
- (1) Ensure that personnel resources are used efficiently by delegating approval authority at the local level.**
 - (2) Communicate to NRCS and non-NRCS personnel, the extent of their technical authorities, and their responsibilities associated with the planning, design and application of conservation plans and associated conservation practices.**
 - (3) Provide for implementation of conservation practices that, with proper operation and maintenance, will support resource management systems and perform their intended function for the appropriate life span of the practice.**
 - (4) Ensure that technical work complies with established practice standards, as well as applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations and codes.**
- (b) Establishment of approval authority levels for conservation practices.**

- (1) The job approval authority level is based on the individual's training, experience and proven competence along with the level needed to complete assigned duties within the employee's specific work area.
 - (2) The current and required job approval authority levels of each employee will be annually reviewed and updated, as needed, by the employee's supervisor.
 - (3) Job approval authorities are assessed and delegated by demonstrated ability. A person who is assessing an employee's job approval authority level will review products that the employee has produced and know the quality of the employee's work. Evidence that an employee has attended a training course is not necessarily a measure of their skill or ability. Approval authorities are developed for the following categories:
 - (i) Engineering practices
 - (ii) Ecological practices
 - (4) Job approval authorities are valid for 3 years. Demonstrated ability based on plan preparation, practice implementation or other basis must be re-authorized no less than once every 3 years.
 - (5) Job approval authorities for Conservation District (CD) employees will only be valid when work is conducted for NRCS and is subject to quality assurance reviews. Job approval authorities for CD employees doing non-NRCS work will only be valid if quality assurance is specifically addressed by an agreement between NRCS and the CD.
- (c) Execution of Job Approval Authority. The following guidelines will be used in determining job approval authority levels:
- (1) Engineering Practices. Refer to guidance in 210-V-NEM, Part 501
 - (2) Ecological Practices. There are three categories of approval authorities for ecological practices that will be used in the Pacific Islands Area. They are Inventory and Evaluation, Design, and Implementation. In addition, each practice is assigned one or more limiting factors. Limiting factors are items such as precipitation area, project size, slope or other factors that describe the scope of the practice. Job approval authorities are assigned based on the maximum scope for which an employee is qualified to work independently on each of the three components shown below.
 - (i) Inventory and Evaluation. An individual with Inventory and Evaluation approval will have adequate knowledge, skills and abilities to independently identify resource concerns, and select appropriate conservation practices for development of resource management system alternatives. The individual must be able to plan practices or systems that will be technically, socially and economically feasible, meet the objectives of the client and solve identified resource problems.
 - (ii) Design. An individual with design approval will have adequate knowledge, skills and abilities to independently design site-specific NRCS conservation practices including design drawings, specifications, job sheets and operation/maintenance requirements. The individual must be able to prepare complete designs and specifications that will meet NRCS standards and the objectives of the conservation plan.
 - (iii) Implementation. An individual with application approval will have adequate knowledge, skills and abilities to independently assist a client with layout and installation of a practice and to certify the installed practice as meeting applicable

NRCS standards. The individual must be able to determine if the completed practice is functional and installed according to site-specific practice specifications.

- (3) Assigning job approval authority for ecological practice standards. Formal assignment of approval authority to NRCS and partner personnel is by issuance of “Job Approval Authority for Ecological Conservation Practices” (Exhibit G).
- (4) Delegation of approval authority for ecological practice standards. See “Job Approval Authority for Ecological Conservation Practices” (Exhibit G). Original delegation or a revision of the approval authority is initiated by a request from the employee with concurrence from their supervisor.
 - (i) NRCS practice job approval authority is only delegated or approved by authorized NRCS employees. Authorized employees will typically be area and state level technical discipline specialists, but can include other NRCS employees, as approved by the Assistant Director for Technology.
 - (ii) The authorized employee completes the Job Approval Authority for Ecological Conservation Practices worksheet (Exhibit G) showing recommended approval limits, by class, for each of the three categories of technical assistance for each appropriate practice.
 - (iii) The recommending specialist signs and dates the completed Job Approval Authority for Ecological Conservation Practices worksheet (Exhibit G) and submits to the employee’s supervisor for concurrence. Discipline specialists will normally submit a separate worksheet for practices within their discipline, but may combine multi-discipline recommendations on a single form when it is convenient.
 - (iv) Site-specific practice designs provided to a client shall indicate the employee’s job class authority level on the Job Sheet developed for the practice.
- (5) Job Approval Authority, Efficiency, Employee Development and Quality Assurance. The job approval authority process should be utilized to increase efficiency in planning and application of conservation practices and resource management systems, as well as aiding in employee development. Supervisors should match specific needs at the work location with the job approval authorities of individuals located there.
 - (i) When a need for additional approval authority is determined, those needs should be identified on Employee Development Plans and appropriate training should be requested and scheduled.
 - (ii) Quality assurance will be conducted in accordance with GM 450, Part 407 and be consistent with the Pacific Islands Area Quality Assurance Plan.