

People, Partnerships, and Communities

The Purpose of the People, Partnership, and Communities series is to assist The Conservation Partnership to build capacity by transferring information about social science related topics

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Social Sciences Team

Human Aspects of the Conservation Planning Environment

The conservation planning environment concept integrates human and natural factors in conservation planning decisions. The conservation planning environment concept is an integral part of a training course offered by the NRCS National Employee Development Center for all employees having conservation planning responsibilities.

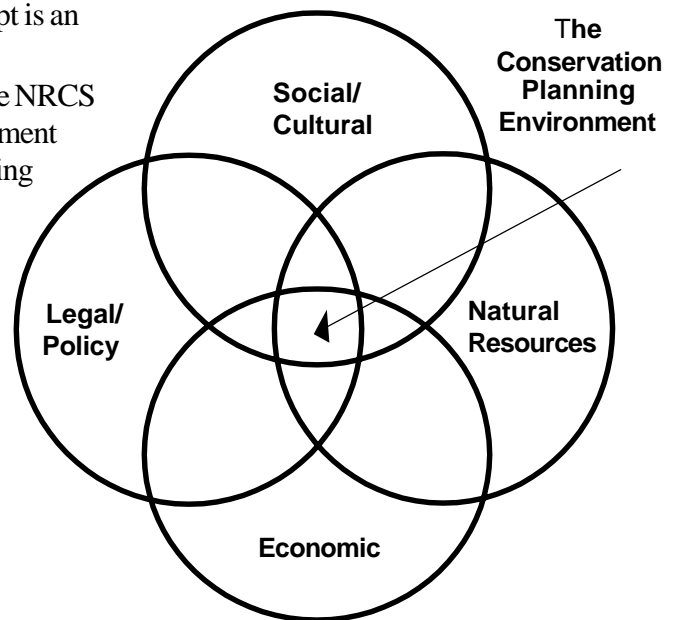
What is the Conservation Planning Environment?

The conservation planning environment is:

The sum of all factors and issues that influence the content of a conservation plan.

These factors and issues are divided into four classes: natural resources, social issues, economic issues, and policy and legal issues. The social, economic, and policy and legal portions of the conservation planning

environment all fall under “human” planning considerations. All four segments of the planning environment are considered equal parts of the decision-making process



and, therefore, are given equal weight during planning. The illustration shows that the conservation planning environment is the area where all four parts of the general environment intersect. Sound planning can be more easily achieved when all four factors are considered and integrated into final planning decisions.

Who Should Use the Conservation Planning Environment Concept?

All conservation planners who are responsible for producing individual or areawide conservation plans, or other planning instruments, should understand and use the conservation planning environment concept.

Why Should It Be Used?

The conservation planning environment concept is designed to move NRCS planners away from concentrating solely on natural resource problems and issues. Natural resource concerns are the start of the process when using the conservation planning environment concept. The focus of concern for both the planner and the client becomes those portions of the other three segments of the planning environment that impact conservation decisions.

How Do You Use the Conservation Planning Environment?

The simplest way to use the conservation planning environment concept is through exploring client wishes and needs. Early in the planning process, natural resource problems, opportunities, and concerns are identified. These resource concerns can then be used as the basis for listing factors that may influence planning under each of the four broad categories previously described.

There is no “set in concrete” way to use the conservation planning environment concept. You might simply create the following categories on a sheet of paper or a computer spreadsheet:

- Natural Resources
- Social/Cultural Concerns (human concern)
- Economic Considerations (human concern)
- Legal/Policy Concerns (human concern)

Under each “human” category, brainstorm possible factors that might influence planning decisions. Most of the concerns identified during the development of the planning environment can be documented as a “human” concern in the client’s plan. A legal constraint, for instance, may prevent the recommendation of a particular set of conservation practices in a particular habitat, such as a wetland. Similarly, a client’s economic situation may disallow the use of highly capital intensive practices. Significant pressure within a cooperators’ peer, socioeconomic, or ethnic group to resist technological change is a social factor that may influence which conservation practices a cooperators may feel comfortable choosing. For example, a “low-tech” solution may have more appeal than a “high-tech” approach.

The time taken to develop a comprehensive picture of the different parts of the planning environment will result in fewer delays. “Overlooked” regulatory concerns and plan revisions necessitated by the changing desires of both clients and their communities are examples of avoidable delays.

Additional examples of factors within the conservation planning environment might be:

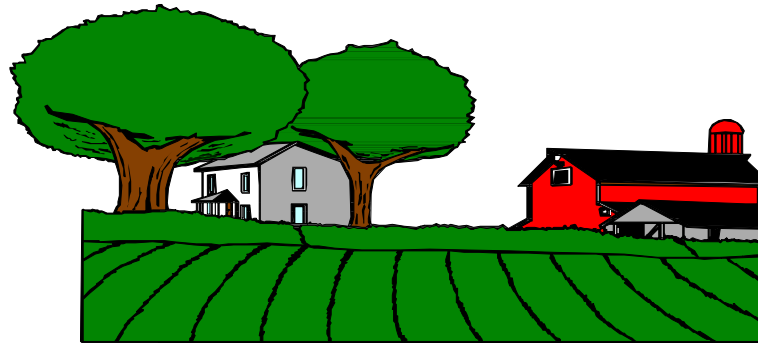
- Endangered species
- Lack of investment capital
- Religious proscription against using some technologies
- Poor range condition
- Poor markets for current crops
- Limits on available equipment

These examples indicate the large range of topics that may influence planning decisions. However, the range is limited to those factors which affect planning decisions. This means that, while many social, economic and cultural issues are present within any given community, consideration is given to only those issues that affect the plan.

Thinking in terms of the conservation planning environment allows planners to more easily integrate human concerns into the NRCS planning process. Economic, social, cultural, and legal considerations become equal and vital components of the process, rather than afterthoughts. The result of using the conservation planning environment concept will be less re-work due to overlooked decision factors, plans that better address all client needs, and plans that reflect multiple aspects of both client and community concerns and desires.

For More Information

For more information on the conservation planning environment, contact the National Employee Development Center concerning the Conservation Planning training course



For more information about the *Social Sciences Team*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider.