Part 180 – Conservation Planning and Application

Subpart 398 – Electronic Field Office Business Tools Management

398.0 Purpose

To provide guidance for managing and naming Conservation Desktop (CD) Case Files, Planning Land Units (PLUs), Practice Schedules, Practices Layer, Conservation Practice Symbology, naming conventions for the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART), and Farmers.gov Integration.

398.1 References

180-GM Part 409.4. Planning on Units That Cross a State, County, or Field Office Boundary

A. NRCS assistance on an individual planning area that crosses a State, county, or field office boundary is the responsibility of the field office where the majority of the land is located, unless otherwise agreed to by the client and respective State conservationists. Conservation planning will be consistent with the FOTG covering the area where the land is located.

180-GM Part 409.5 Documentation of Conservation Planning Data and Signature Requirements

A. NRCS employees, partner employees, and others on the NRCS network must document and maintain conservation plan data using agency-approved tools and the official planning database, the National Planning and Agreements Database (NPAD).
B. (1) - Planning Land Unit (PLU). - A PLU is a unique geographic area, defined by a polygon, that has a common land use and land use modifier and is owned, operated, or managed by the same clients.

440-GM Part 402.5 Mandatory Electronic Field Office Business Tools

A. Conservation Desktop (CD) is the application NRCS uses for documenting conservation planning information and producing conservation plans. CD is integrated with the Program Contracts System (ProTracts) and the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART). CD stores data in the National Planning and Agreements Database (NPAD).
D. The Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) is the application used to assist conservation planners to assess site vulnerability, existing conditions, and potential resource concerns on a unit of land. The tool helps a planner assess and document if planning criteria have been achieved or if additional conservation practices or activities are necessary. This information is used to build a conservation plan for the client and the tool captures this information for use in ranking of conservation program applications. CART will be used for resource assessment for all conservation technical assistance activities unless specific program policy or guidance requires a different assessment method.

180-NPPH Part 600.31 Conservation Plan

A. (2) Types of Maps (i) A conservation plan map. This may consist of several map documents to account for the entire planning area. The plan map and record of client decisions are used to together to show when, where and to what extent a practice will be installed. This map is required for all conservation plans. The conservation plan map will specifically include the following items:

- Boundary lines for the PLUs with identifiers (PLU name, PLU number, or both)
- Land-use designation and applicable land use modifiers for each PLU
- Acreage for each PLU
- Location of planned and applied conservation practices that are less than the full footprint of the PLU (planned/applied acres < PLU acres), using NRCS map symbols

398.2 Background

In an effort to achieve a consistent, quality product using the mandatory business tools, Iowa NRCS is implementing a statewide policy for the use of CD and CART. This policy includes standard naming conventions for the CD Case File, Practice Schedule (conservation plan), and CART Assessment as well as standard symbology for all practices. Implementing this policy must occur for consistency, effectiveness, and improved efficiency. It is expected that every employee that works with CD and CART will fully adhere to this guidance.

398.3 Conservation Desktop Case File

Case Files will be created and maintained in the county where the ground is physically located by owner name and tract number in Conservation Desktop (CD). Existing Case File names and/or tracts can be updated using the Rename Case menu.

- For individuals, the Company/Business Name will be the last name, space, first name; space and the middle initial (if applicable): Smith Kelly
- For entities, the Company/Business Name will be the entity name: Smith Farms LLC
- The Identifier will be the tract number, entered as “t” followed by the tract number: t1234
- If land is administered by FSA outside the county, the first 3 letters of the FSA county name and a dash (-) will be added in front of the tract number. Example: land located in Story County but administered by Polk County FSA. The CD Case File will be created in Story County and named Smith Kelly pol-t###.

For <u>program applications</u> that contain more than one tract of land, such as CSP, EQIP, and RCPP, a <u>Case File</u> will be created in the county where the application will be maintained.

- Company/Business Name will be the program applicant.
    - Follow the guidance above for the Company/Business Name.
- Identifier will be entered as:
    1. Program Acronym (e.g., CSP, EQIP, RCPP, etc.) followed by FY or FY (for multiple application scenarios) followed by
    2. Last 2 digits of the program year.
        - Examples: CSPFY23 or FY23
- Example Case File name: Smith Kelly---CSPFY23

For easement applications, a Case File will be created in the county where the application will be maintained.

- Company/Business Name will be the program acronym.
    - e.g., ACEP-ALE, FRPP, ACEP-WRE, etc.
- Identifier will be entered as:
    - Last 5 characters of the agreement number.
- Example Case File name: ACEP-WRE 016KT

398.4 Planning Land Units

The General Manual defines Planning Land Units (PLUs) as “a unique geographic area, defined by a polygon, that has a common land use and land use modifier and is owned, operated, or managed by the same clients” (180-GM, Part 409.5 B. (1)).

All land units are edited and attributed in the Case PLU layer of the owner’s tract Case File. **Note:** Be aware of easements that are adjacent to land units. Do not overlap land units on an easement boundary. Easements that are closed will have a reconciled or locked boundary.

The Case PLU outer tract boundary must follow the FSA Common Land Unit (CLU) layer. The Case PLU fields should be consistent with FSA CLU boundaries but may be merged or split for conservation planning purposes to reflect common management. Follow the guidance below. If the FSA CLU layer does not reflect management on the ground, the producer needs to visit with FSA to adjust the boundaries. **Reminder:** The CART assessment is based on geospatial information of the PLU. Merging or splitting PLUs may skew assessment results.

- Before merging or splitting FSA PLUs, consider implications to the producer for Highly Erodible Land (HEL) compliance requirements. Refer to Title 180 National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM) Part 511, Subpart B, Section 511.10 Field Boundaries and Field Redefinition. Consider common management and predominant soils.
- PLU boundaries must be relatable to the client.
- Do not merge multiple land uses (e.g., crop and pasture).
- CRP land units will be maintained as separate fields and must follow the FSA CLU. See Iowa Instruction 180-397 Conservation Reserve Program Conservation Plan Documents for more information.
- Conservation practices within a field (e.g., terraces, grassed waterways, field borders, contour buffer strips, etc. not in CRP) may be merged into the larger field. Ponds (used as a water supply for livestock) and trees/brushy areas may be merged into pasture if fences do not separate these areas.
- If subfields are needed for the purposes of conservation planning, fields will be split and renumbered with the parent field plus a letter.
  Example: field 1 is split and becomes 1A and 1B.
- If land units need to be modified for the purposes of a program, guidance will be provided in the current year program bulletin.

398.5 Practice Schedule

Practice Schedules allow planners to develop alternatives that address identified resource concerns. Practice Schedules will document the client’s decision for conservation practice implementation on the appropriate PLUs. Practice Schedules will be used by CART to document resource concern assessment and rank farm bill applications. A Case File may have multiple schedules to accommodate multiple CART Assessments. Practice Schedules may be updated as decisions change.

Practice Schedules for farm bill programs can contain practices considered for funding and practices not considered for funding. Practices considered for funding must have the “Seek Funding” box checked in CART.
If separate Practice Schedules are used, follow the naming conventions below.

- General Conservation Schedules - CTA FY<Fiscal Year> Example: CTA FY23
- CRP - CRP<SU##> Example: CRP SU59
    - Multiple CRP Contracts - CRP<SU##CP##> Example: CRP SU59CP21
- CSP Schedules – CSP FY<Year> Example: CSP FY23
- EQIP Schedules – EQIP FY<Year> Example: EQIP FY23
- RCPP Schedules – RCPP FY <Year> Example: RCPP FY23
- Multiple Program Schedules – FY<Year> Example: FY23
- ACEP Schedules
    - ACEP Restoration Schedule <Easement Program> <last 5 digits of NEST ID> Example: ACEP-WRE 12345
    - ACEP Stewardship Schedule – Stewardship FY<Year> Example: Stewardship FY23
    - ACEP Compatible Use Authorization – CUA FY<Year> <Purpose (e.g., Structural Maintenance, Management, etc.)> Example: CUA FY23 Mgmt

398.6 Practices Layer

The Practices layer will contain all conservation planning decisions and practice application(s) associated with the schedule. All planned and applied practices will be entered as the appropriate practice type (point, line, or polygon).

398.7 Conservation Practice Symbology

National map symbols were developed for CD and **must be used for all conservation planning and documentation of practice application.**

National Planning Procedures Handbook specifies the location of planned and applied conservation practices that are less than the full footprint of the PLU must be included in the conservation plan map using NRCS map symbols (180-NPPH 600.31(2)(i)). *Note: Full field practices are **not** required to be displayed on the conservation plan map.*

If there are symbology needs that are specific to a program, guidance will be provided.

398.8 CART Assessments

The CART Assessment Name will default to the Practice Schedule Name. Example: EQIP FY23.

Reassessed Assessments default to the original Assessment name with an asterisk (*) (example: EQIP FY22*) and may be renamed.

398.9 Farmers.gov Integration

Clients with E-Authentication can view documents uploaded to the Document Management System (DMS) in Farmers.gov. Clients can view all conservation documents associated to them as well as documents associated to a particular agreement ID or conservation practice.

Additionally, clients can view land units and Practice Schedules. Clients can be associated at the Case File level and Practice Schedule level in CD.

- All clients associated at the Case File level can view active land units (planned or locked status).
- All clients associated at the Practice Schedule level can view the Practice Schedule when the “Viewable in Farmers.gov” is selected in the Manage Practice Schedule menu.

Conservation planners need to ensure documents loaded into DMS and information entered in CD are accurate and maintained for clients to access.

Clients can submit these requests in Farmers.gov:

- Apply for a Financial Assistance Program
- Technical Assistance for natural resource concern
- Brief Technical Assistance Request
- New Conservation Plan Request
- Practice Certification Request
- Practice Completion Request

Several documents are enabled to be e-signed in Farmers.gov. In order for a document to show, the document must be uploaded to DMS. In some cases, an NRCS employee must sign before the document is ready for the client to e-sign. For example, an NRCS-CPA-1245 requires a technical official to sign the document first. In those cases, the version of tdocument containing the technical signature must be uploaded to DMS before the document will be enabled for the client signature in Farmers.gov. Documents available for e-signature include the Conservation Plan, NRCS-CPA-1155, NRCS-CPA-1156, NRCS-CPA-1200, NRCS-CPA-1202, NRCS-CPA-1245, and SF-1199A.

Note: NRCS and partner employees do not have access to Farmers.gov at this time.