Conservation Planning Activity

# Forest Management Plan

## CPA 106

### Definition

A site-specific conservation plan that contains planned forest related conservation treatment activities for one or more resource concerns.

### Applicable Land Uses

This Conservation Planning Activity (CPA) applies to nonindustrial private forest land and other land uses where the participant's objective is to engage in forest-related and/or agroforestry conservation practices.

### REQUIREMENTS

### General Requirements

This CPA involves a Technical Service Provider (TSP), hired by a Farm Bill Program participant, providing a conservation plan to document participant objectives, benchmark (current) conditions, resource concerns, alternative actions, the evaluation of alternative actions, and the participant's preferred alternative with the intent to achieve specific ecological, economic and management objectives.

This activity will meet the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) planning criteria for one or more of the plant, animal, water, air, and soil resource concerns. The overall conservation plan must accomplish one or more purposes as described in the criteria and considerations for each conservation practice, as described in the conservation planning process and outlined in the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), steps 1-7. A summary of those seven steps is provided in Appendix A, *Conservation Planning Activity, General Requirements*, at the end of this document. Do not overlook the General Requirements – they are important for this CPA's development.

State-specific conservation planning reference information and technology is provided in the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG). The FOTG home page hyperlink is: https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/

### Technical Requirements

1) This CPA must be developed by a TSP who meets NRCS Forest Management Plan certification requirements.
2) This CPA must be developed at a property level, for all forested parcels on a property where one or more forestry-related conservation practices and management activities are planned to address one or more resource concerns. The plan documents long-term goals (Desired Future Condition, DFC), practices, alternatives, and strategies for forest management to provide for intended future uses.
3) The TSP must:
   a) Arrange a pre-work meeting between participant, TSP and NRCS field office in order to

establish collaboration and address any questions among the parties.

b) Maintain a written and date-ordered record of discussions with participants that are related to this planning activity.

c) Conduct an on-site inventory of participant's planning area to inventory the current land uses and land management systems in the operation.

d) Use NRCS-approved technology tools and protocols to assess resource concerns, as indicated in the state's FOTG, Section 3 and within certain Conservation Practice Standards (CPS), included in a state's FOTG, Section 4.

e) Collect and evaluate data on special environmental concerns, such as wetlands, endangered species, or cultural/historic sites on and near the planning area. NRCS needs this information to understand the effects implementing the conservation practices will have on the environment; and will use this information to complete an environmental evaluation (CPA-52).

f) Develop a minimum of one conservation alternative to meet the resource needs, participant's objective(s) and to adequately address the resource concern(s) that the participant chooses to address. The Resource Concerns list appears in the state's FOTG, Section 3. Contrast this alternative with the no-action alternative (what is predicted to happen if no action is taken).

g) Present and explain technically feasible conservation alternatives to the participant and obtain the participant's decision about what conservation practices to use, the practice location(s) and the schedule to guide sequential installation of conservation practices.

h) Produce conservation plan products (practice schedule, maps, and other useful supporting material) based on decisions reached in the previous item and in the **Technical Requirements** and **Deliverables** sections of this document.

4) The CPA product must:

a) Comply with Federal, Tribal, State, and local laws, regulations, and permit requirements and meet the participant's objectives.

b) Meet the NRCS planning criteria for one or more plant, animal, water, air, or soil resource concerns.

5) All conservation practices included in this CPA must align with CPS and Specifications found in state's FOTG, Section IV. Confirm practices are offered in a state by reading the state's FOTG, Section 4. The following list of conservation practices are commonly used in forestry and agroforestry planning:

| Code | Practice Name |
|---|---|
| 311 | Alley Cropping |
| 379 | Forest Farming |
| 380 | Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation |
| 381 | Silvopasture |
| 383 | Fuel Break |
| 384 | Woody Residue Treatment |
| 391 | Riparian Forest Buffer |
| 394 | Firebreak |
| 472 | Access Control |
| 490 | Tree/Shrub Site Preparation |
| 612 | Tree/Shrub Establishment |

| | |
|---|---|
| 654 | Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment |
| 655 | Forest Trails and Landings |
| 660 | Tree/Shrub Pruning |
| 666 | Forest Stand Improvement |

6) A combination of conservation practices is often necessary to meet the participant's objectives and the identified natural resource conservation concerns. NRCS conservation practices beyond the basic forestry and agroforestry practices may be included in this CPA, as appropriate, to address resource concerns and meet participant objectives. Below are examples of conservation practices commonly planned in combination with the basic forestry and agroforestry practices:

| Code | Practice name |
|---|---|
| 314 | Brush Management |
| 315 | Herbaceous Weed Treatment |
| 327 | Conservation Cover |
| 338 | Prescribed Burning |
| 342 | Critical Area Planting |
| 382 | Fence |
| 395 | Stream Habitat Improvement and Management |
| 420 | Wildlife habitat planting |
| 560 | Access Road |
| 578 | Stream Crossing |
| 580 | Streambank and Shoreline Protection |
| 595 | Integrated Pest Management |
| 643 | Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities |
| 644 | Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management |
| 645 | Upland Wildlife Habitat Management |
| 647 | Early Successional Habitat Development/Management |

## DELIVERABLES

The TSP must provide documentation showing all the tasks indicated in the **Technical Requirements** section, and this **Deliverables** section:

### Cover Page

The cover page must include the following:

1) CPA name and number.
2) Participant information: Name, farm bill program name, contract number (TSP obtains contract number from participant), land identification (e.g., state, county, farm, and tract number).
3) TSP name, TSP number, TSP expiration date, mailing address, phone number, email address.
4) A statement by the TSP that services meet the Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) requirements, such as:

    *I certify the work completed and delivered for this CPA:*

    - *Complies with all applicable Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws and regulations.*
    - *Meets the General and Technical Requirements for this CPA.*
    - *The planned practices are based on NRCSs CPSs in the state Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) where the practices are to be implemented.*

- *Is consistent with and meets the conservation goals and objectives for which the program contract was entered into by the participant.*
- *Incorporates alternatives that are both cost effective and appropriate to address the resource issue(s) and participant's objective(s).*

*TSP Signature* ______________________________ *Date* __________________

5) Participant's acceptance statement indicating:

   *I accept the completed CPA deliverables as thorough and satisfying my objectives.*

   *Participant Signature* ________________________ *Date* __________________

6) A designated space for an NRCS reviewer to certify the agency's acceptance of the completed CPA.

   *NRCS administrative review completion by:*

   *Signature* ____________________ *Title* ________________ *Date* ______________

## Notes and Correspondence

1) Provide notes, in date-order that:
   a) Document each interaction with the participant, results of that interaction, and the date of the interaction.
   b) Document the participant's objectives, which must be specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant. For example:
      i) Improve forest health and productivity.
      ii) Enhance habitat for a variety of wildlife species by creating a mosaic of different forest age classes.
      iii) Increase biodiversity by diversifying species composition.
      iv) Reduce plant pressure by controlling non-native invasive plants.
   c) Document each site visit, those present, the activity completed in the field, and results of each site visit.
   d) Provide initials of the note-maker, if more than one person provides the assistance.
2) Information provided to support the participant's understanding of the planned conservation practices such as applicable "Conservation Practice Overview" sheets from the FOTG, or other prepared material.
3) Provide copies of correspondence between the TSP and the participant relating to decision-making and completion of this CPA. For example, description of alternatives presented for evaluation and decision-making.

## Resource Inventory and Assessment Documentation

Results of resource assessment appropriate for the conservation needs and participant objectives are used to compare the benchmark condition with the planned alternative condition, including:

1) An in-depth stand-level resource inventory, assessment, and analysis are used to formulate management alternatives. Document findings on resource concerns, existing benchmark conditions, and provide stand-level descriptions and data summaries along with management

recommendations.

2) Forest stand inventories, including plot data, are used in summarizing stand attributes. Follow inventory guidance in NRCS Forestry Inventory Methods, Technical Note No. 190-FOR-01, Jul 2018. Document inventory methods utilized. Attach the forest inventory plot data.

3) A stand-level summary, for each stand, that includes:
   a) Forest type.
   b) Basal area.
   c) Trees per acre.
   d) % Stocking.
   e) Diameter distribution by species.
   f) Site indices for major species, estimated from published height-age curves.
   g) Stand health based on observations of insects and disease, fire fuels, invasive species, level of mortality, crown ratios, impacts of past management, etc.
   h) Estimate of current stand age, or age of dominant/co-dominant canopy trees, if an uneven-aged stand.
   i) Estimated canopy height for dominant and co-dominant trees.
   j) Noxious and invasive plant species.
   k) Presence of regeneration if pertinent to management recommendation.

4) Property level descriptions are typically needed for special environmental concerns due to their potential impact on management decisions. Describe benchmark (existing) conditions, past conditions, and any resource concerns or limitations, if relevant to stand management, associated with:
   a) Protected species and cultural resources.
   b) Adjacent stand or ownerships that present opportunities or limitations to management options.
   c) Recreation uses by the participant.
   d) Access to the stand and condition of roads, trails, landings, and stream crossings.
   e) Soil and site descriptions, including relevant soil interpretations, slope, topography, and aspect.
   f) Streams, wetlands, ponds, and lakes.
   g) Past management, harvesting, natural disturbances, and/or other land use history that has affected stand condition and/or growth potential.
   h) Grazing practices.
   i) Potential for carbon sequestration.
   j) Fish and wildlife species and habitat elements.
   k) Risk of insect and disease infestation.
   l) Reforestation and afforestation opportunities.
   m) Prescribed burning opportunities.

   n) Wildfire risk (surface and crown fires).
   o) Other important features as determined by the TSP.
5) Any additional assessments, maps, and sketches resulting from the planning process used in preparation and arriving at the alternative selected.
6) Any photographs or documentation used to support the determination documented.
7) Document the effects and consequences of each alternative on resources concerns. For example, how does the alternative affect erosion, terrestrial or aquatic habitat, or wildfire hazard?
8) Considerations to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects on unique resources and other soil, water, air, plants, animals (including livestock, fish, and wildlife), energy, or human concerns, as well as on special environmental considerations.
9) An evaluation of the alternatives' effects on the participant's land use, capital, labor, management, risk, profitability, and public health and safety.

## Maps

Maps for this CPA must include, but are not limited to:

1) General location map of the planning area showing access roads to the location.
2) A CPA map (this may consist of several maps to account for the entire planning area). This map will specifically include:
   a) Boundary lines for the Planning Land Units (PLUs) with labels (name, number, or both). A PLU is a unique geographic area, defined by a polygon, which has common land use and is owned, operated, or managed by the same participant or participants. The PLU is the minimum unit for planning.
   b) Land-use designation and any applicable land-use modifiers such as irrigation for each PLU, as appropriate. The NRCS-recognized land use names and land use modifiers are listed in the NPPH Definitions section. (Handbook 180, Part 600.2) Here is a link to the NPPH: https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewerFS.aspx?hid=44407
   c) Acreage for each PLU.
   d) Location of sensitive resources and setbacks, if applicable.
   e) Locations of planned and applied conservation practices.
   f) If the planning area includes nonprivate lands, such as Federal or Tribal lands, a land status map must be included to display land ownership categories (Private, State Trust, BLM, Tribal, and Territorial, etc.).
3) Soil interpretative map(s) and other natural resource maps used to support the planning activity.
4) All maps developed for the CPA will include:
   a) Map title.
   b) Participant's name.
   c) Assisted By [TSP planner's name].
   d) Name of applicable conservation district, county, and state.

e) Date prepared.

f) Map scale.

g) Information needed to locate the planning area, such as geographic coordinates, public land survey coordinates, etc.

h) North arrow.

i) Appropriate map symbols and a map symbol legend on the map or as an attachment.

## Practice Schedule

A record of the participant's decision, which includes:

1) A table, titled "Practice Schedule" indicating all of the following:

   a) Tract Number to have practice(s) installed.

   b) PLU (Field) number to have practice(s) installed.

   c) Practice Code and Practice Name (Codes and Names are used for conservation practices, conservation activities, enhancements, and bundles) to be implemented,

   d) Estimated amount of each practice to be implemented, and the practice's measurement units.

   e) Dates (month and year) the conservation activities are intended to be installed, or were previously installed.

   The Practice Schedule is used in conjunction with a conservation planning map to document the participant's decision and vision for conservation implementation. Table 1 provides an example Practice Schedule.

**Table 1. Example Practice Schedule**

| Tract Number | PLU (Field) # | Practice Code | Practice Name | Planned Amt | Practice Units | Planned Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1000 | 1 | 666 | Forest Stand Improvement | 24 | Ac. | April 2023 |
| 1000 | 1 | 384 | Woody Residue Treatment | 24 | Ac. | April 2023 |
| 1000 | 1 | 490 | Tree/Shrub Site Preparation | 24 | Ac. | August 2023 |
| 1000 | 1 | 612 | Tree/Shrub Establishment | 24 | Ac. | October 2023 |

2) Brief descriptions of the planned conservation practices to explain their use in the context of this plan. For example, "*Forest Stand Improvement - Treat species composition, stand structure or density by cutting or killing selected trees or understory vegetation to achieve desired forest conditions or obtain ecosystem services*."

## Deliver Completed Work

The TSP must:

1) Prepare and provide the participant with two sets of the items listed in Deliverables.

   a) One set is for the participant to keep.

   b) The other set is for sharing with the local NRCS Office.

   c) The TSP may transmit a set of the Deliverables to the local NRCS Office, if their participant has authorized it. It is recommended to provide NRCS field office an opportunity to review the CPA deliverables, prior to asking for its acceptance.

2) Upload electronic copies of all the items listed under the **Deliverables** heading on NRCS Registry.

## References

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Cultural Resources Handbook.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Field Office Technical Guide.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Forestry Inventory Methods, Technical Note No. 190-FOR-01. https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/OpenNonWebContent.aspx?content=42554.wba

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. National Environmental Compliance Handbook.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. National Planning Procedures Handbook.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. National TSP Resources. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/technical/tsp/?cid=nrcseprd1417414

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. National TSP Website. https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/technical/tsp/

# Appendix A - Conservation Planning Activity, General Requirements

## Overview

The Technical Service Provider (TSP) hired by a participant to complete this Conservation Planning Activity (CPA) is expected to complete conservation planning steps 1 through portions of 7 of the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) 9 step conservation planning process, as outlined in the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH). Those steps are described below. The NPPH may be consulted for more detailed descriptions of the steps. NPPH is located at the following link: https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewerFS.aspx?hid=44407.

## Identify Problems and Opportunities (Step 1)

Visit with the participant to identify and document existing, potential, and perceived natural resource problems, opportunities, and concerns in the planning area. The identified problems and opportunities as well as the participant objectives guide for the remainder of the planning process and are the basis for the purpose and need for action that are documented in NRCS Environmental Evaluation. This will include items such as soils, ecological sites or forage suitability groups, where applicable, and discuss opportunities to maintain and/or enhance resource conditions.

## Determine Objectives (Step 2)

Determine the participant’s planning objectives by developing an understanding with the participant of the desired future condition for the planning area, as compared to the existing conditions. This is the purpose for the participant to take action. It includes the desired resource uses, resource problem reductions, on-site and off-site ecological protection, and production concerns. As resources are inventoried, their interactions are analyzed, and alternatives formulated, objectives may need to be reviewed and modified.

## Inventory Resources (Step 3)

The resource inventory documents benchmark (current) conditions of natural resources in the CPA planning area. The inventory documentation requirements and resource concerns to be evaluated specifically for each CPA are provided in the CPA’s **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS** section. Use the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) Sections 1 and 2, plus Web Soil Survey (WSS) and other helpful resources to support the inventory. In addition, each CPA requires the following inventory documentation as applicable:

1) General description of the enterprise/operation.
2) Document any previously installed or implemented conservation practice(s) and indicate whether the existing practice(s) is currently accomplishing the conservation practice purpose indicated in the NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) in the state’s FOTG, Section 4.
3) Equipment, technology and management activities currently being used by the participant.
4) Soils, climate, topography.
5) Environmentally sensitive areas in and around the planning area, for example riparian areas, cultural resources and historic properties, habitat for rare or protected species, and wetlands.
6) The need for Highly Erodible Land or Wetland compliance determinations associated to the planning land unit.
7) Pertinent Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws, regulations, policies and their associate permit requirements.

8) Identification of existing conditions through a resource inventory.
9) After the prior steps, identity if/what you have learned about other relevant soil, water, air, plant and animal resource concerns.
10) Provide a landscape setting description explaining how surrounding management affects the property as well as how the participant's actions impact their neighbors. Consider aesthetic quality, privacy, wildlife movement and habitat, noxious weeds, urban encroachment, and wildland fire interface, if applicable.

## Analyze Resource Data (Step 4)

Run applicable resource assessment tools and compare the current (benchmark) conditions with the desired future conditions to identify resource concerns that need to be addressed. Analyses and documentation requirements are provided in the **Technical Requirements** and **Deliverables** sections.

Analyses documentation will include at a minimum:

1) Benchmark conditions.
2) Results of assessment tools (as applicable).
3) The need for conservation actions, in terms of a desired future condition.
4) NRCS resource concerns identified.

## Formulate Alternatives (Step 5)

Develop a minimum of two alternatives. The first is a ***no-action alternative*** in which current management activities are assumed to continue. The second is an ***action alternative*** identifying a conservation practice or a system of conservation practices and management activities to address the identified resource concern(s). Additional action alternatives may be developed to identify different ways of achieving participant objectives. Each action alternative must meet the participant's objectives and comply with Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws, regulations, and policies.

## Evaluate Alternatives (Step 6)

Evaluate the alternatives and describe the natural resource, environmental and socio-economic effects associated with each alternative. Review with NRCS and the participant the analysis of the resource inventory and the evaluation of alternatives. This information will provide the participant with information needed to select their preferred alternative.

When evaluating the no-action alternative, provide information to the participant about what will occur if current management activities continue, and no new practices are implemented.

When evaluating conservation practice effects, the short and long-term effect on natural resources and the applicability and effect on special environmental concerns identified in Step-3 (Resource Inventory) must be documented. Include recommendations that will avoid or mitigate any adverse effects on soil, water, air, plants, animals (including livestock, fish, and wildlife), energy, or socio-economic concerns, as well as on special environmental concerns.

Prepare the following documentation, at a minimum:

1) Documentation of alternatives discussed and site level resource inventory and assessment data, and analysis used to formulate management alternatives.

2) Considerations to avoid or mitigate any adverse effects on those unique resources and other soil, water, air, plants, animals (including livestock, fish, and wildlife), energy, or human concerns, as well as on special environmental considerations.
3) An evaluation of the alternative’s effects on the participant’s land use, capital, labor, management, risk, profitability, and public health and safety.

**Make Decisions (Step 7)**

Document the participant’s preferred alternative as a decision via a Conservation Plan Map and Practice Schedule.