

Ranking Criteria for NRCS Programs – Fiscal Year 2024

Application Overview

Any applicant may submit an application for participation in ACEP, EQIP, CSP, or RCPP. The NRCS State Conservationist or Area Director, in consultation with the State Technical Committee, Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils, Local Work Groups, and other stakeholders, has developed the following ranking criteria to prioritize and select applications that best address the applicable program purposes and priority natural resource concerns in **IDAHO**.

The NRCS State Conservationist or Area Director will establish application batching periods and select the highest ranked applications for funding, based on applicant eligibility and the NRCS ranking process. In Fiscal Year 2024, NRCS will use the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) to assess and rank all eligible applications for NRCS conservation programs.

Inventory and Assessment in CART

CART is a decision support system designed to provide a consistent, replicable framework for the conservation planning process based on geospatially referenced information, client-provided information, field observations, and NRCS conservation planner expertise. CART is designed to assist NRCS conservation planners as they assess site vulnerability and existing conditions, and identify natural resource concerns for a unit of land.

CART assessments of existing management and conservation efforts are compared against conservation planning criteria thresholds to determine the additional level of conservation efforts needed to address identified natural resource concerns. NRCS uses the results to identify conservation planning activities for the client. NRCS also uses CART to consolidate resource data and program information to prioritize program delivery and report outcomes of NRCS investments in conservation.

In general, resource concerns fall into one of three categories for the assessment method used in CART to assess and document a resource concern:

- **Client Input/Planner Observation:** A streamlined list of options is presented to the planner to document the client’s activities and the planner’s observation of the resource concerns present. These observations are compared to the conservation planning criteria thresholds.
- **Procedural/Deductive:** A large group of resource concerns fall into this category and are assessed using a resource concern-specific evaluation tool or a list of inventory-like criteria. Due to the variability in State tools, assessment questions and answers will be broad in nature to allow States to align them with State conditions.
- **Predictive:** The remaining resource concerns are assessed using a predictive interactive model simulation. The CART systems attempt to replicate the outcomes related to the assessment threshold outcomes compared to the model outputs.

After identifying resource concerns and describing existing conditions, planned conservation practices and activities can be added to the existing condition to determine the state of the proposed management system. Practices that are needed to support primary conservation practices and activities are also identified, but do not add conservation management points to the total.

If the client is interested in financial assistance through an NRCS conservation program, the inventory and assessment information, along with client decisions related to conservation practice adoption, are directly and consistently transferred from the assessment portion of CART to the ranking portion of CART. Based on the transferred assessment information and the conservation practices proposed for implementation, CART identifies the appropriate program ranking pool(s).

Ranking in CART

In general, NRCS program ranking criteria uses the following guiding principles:

- Degree of cost-effectiveness of the proposed conservation practices and activities;
- The level of performance of proposed conservation practices and activities;
- Treatment of resource concerns or national priority resource concerns;
- Magnitude of the environmental benefits resulting from the treatment of resource concerns reflecting the level of performance of the proposed conservation practices and activities; and
- Compliance with Federal, State, local, or tribal regulatory requirements with regards to natural resources.

CART uses a set of National Ranking Templates developed for each NRCS program and initiative. The National Ranking Templates contain four parameters that are customized for each program to reflect the national level ranking criteria. The four parameters are:

1. **Land Uses** – NRCS has developed land use designations to be used by planners and modelers at the field and landscape level. Land use modifiers more accurately define the land’s actual use and provide another level of specificity and help denote how the land is managed. Land use designations and modifiers are defined in Title 180, National Planning Procedures Handbook, Part 600.
2. **Resource Concerns** – The resource condition that does not meet minimum acceptable condition levels as established by resource planning criteria. This implies an expected degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, or animal resource base to the extent that the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired. Because NRCS quantifies or describes resource concerns as part of a comprehensive conservation planning process, which includes client objectives, human and energy resources are considered components of the resource base.
3. **Practices** – A specific treatment used to address resource concerns, such as structural or vegetative measures, or management techniques that are planned and implemented in accordance with applicable standards and specifications.
4. **Ranking Component Weights** – A set of five components comprise the ranking score for an individual land-based assessment. The five components are:
 - a. **Vulnerability** – Site vulnerability is determined by subtracting the existing condition and existing practice scores from the thresholds. This score is weighted by ranking pool to address the resource concerns prioritized by that ranking pool.
 - b. **Planned Practice Effects** – The planned practice effect score is based on the sum of the planned practice on that land unit that addresses the resource concern. This score is

weighted by ranking pool to address the resource concerns prioritized by that ranking pool.

- c. **Resource Priorities** – National and State resource priorities are established to address the most critical land and resource considerations and are based on NRCS national and State priorities identified with input from national, State, and local stakeholders.
- d. **Program Priorities** – National and State program priorities are established to maximize program effectiveness and advance program purposes and are based on NRCS national and State priorities identified with input from national, State, and local stakeholders.
- e. **Cost Efficiency** – Summation of ‘Planned Practice Points’ divided by the log of the ‘Average Practice Cost’.

NOTE: The points for vulnerability, planned practice effects, and cost efficiency are garnered from the assessment portion of CART.

IDAHO created State-specific ranking pools within the above-described National Ranking Template parameters. The State ranking pools contain a set of questions that are divided into the following sections – applicability, category, program questions, and resource questions. Ranking pool customization allows States to focus funding on priority resource concerns and initiatives identified at the State level with input from NRCS stakeholders. Each eligible application may be considered for funding in all applicable ranking pools by program.

NRCS Resource Concerns

The following table lists the 47 resource concerns NRCS uses during the Conservation Planning process.

Categories	NRCS Resource Concerns
Soil	1. Sheet and rill erosion
	2. Wind erosion
	3. Ephemeral gully erosion
	4. Classic gully erosion
	5. Bank erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyance channels
	6. Subsidence
	7. Compaction
	8. Organic matter depletion
	9. Concentration of salts or other chemicals
	10. Soil organism habitat loss or degradation
	11. Aggregate instability
Water	12. Ponding and flooding
	13. Seasonal high-water table
	14. Seeps
	15. Drifted snow
	16. Surface water depletion
	17. Groundwater depletion
	18. Naturally available moisture use
	19. Inefficient irrigation water use
	20. Nutrients transported to surface water
	21. Nutrients transported to groundwater
	22. Pesticides transported to surface water

	23. Pesticides transported to groundwater
	25. Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater
	26. Salts transported to surface water
	27. Salts transported to groundwater
	28. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water
	29. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater
	30. Sediment transported to surface water
	31. Elevated water temperature
Air	32. Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors
	33. Emissions of greenhouse gasses (GHGs)
	34. Emissions of ozone precursors
	35. Objectionable odors
	36. Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen
Plants	37. Plant productivity and health
	38. Plant structure and composition
	39. Plant pest pressure
	40. Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation
Animals	41. Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates
	42. Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms
	43. Feed and forage imbalance
	44. Inadequate livestock shelter
	45. Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality, and distribution
Energy	46. Energy efficiency of equipment and facilities
	47. Energy efficiency of field operations

Program-Specific Information

PROGRAM QUESTIONS

1. Outcomes: The parcel application will directly contribute to the Long term protection of agricultural uses by limiting nonagricultural uses identified in the PPA attachment E "project outcomes".
2. Historically Underserved: Has the applicant self-certified as any class of Historically Underserved participant on the CPA-1200?
3. Partner Contribution: Application directly leverages NRCS RCPP funding with partner contributions for the entity held easement.

RANKING CRITERIA EXHIBIT

Exhibit ID. RCPP 2018 Farm Bill US-Held Easements National Ranking Template - Amended December 2023

NATIONAL RANKING TEMPLATE

TEMPLATE NAME

RCPP18 US-Held Easements - Amended October 2022

PROGRAM

RCPP18

LAND USES

MODIFIERS (the modifiers- must be met and are not or but and)

	Included		Included		Included		Included		Included		Included		Included		Included		Included		
Crop	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrigated	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hayed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drained	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forest	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrigated	<input type="checkbox"/>					Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Range	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>			Hayed	<input type="checkbox"/>			Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pasture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrigated	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hayed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Drained	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farmstead	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrigated	<input type="checkbox"/>					Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Developed Land	<input type="checkbox"/>			Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrigated	<input type="checkbox"/>					Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>							Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Rural Land	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrigated	<input type="checkbox"/>					Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>
Associated Ag Land	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Grazed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/>	Irrigated	<input type="checkbox"/>	Hayed	<input type="checkbox"/>			Organic	<input type="checkbox"/>	Water Feature	<input type="checkbox"/>	Protected	<input type="checkbox"/>	Urban	<input type="checkbox"/>

RESOURCE CONCERN CATEGORIES

	Min%	Default	Max%	Included
Air Quality emissions	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Emissions of greenhouse gases - GHGs	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Emissions of ozone precursors	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Objectionable odor	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Aquatic Habitat	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Elevated water temperature	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Concentrated Erosion	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Bank erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyances channels	0	34	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Classic gully erosion	0	33	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Ephemeral gully erosion	0	33	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Degraded Plant Condition	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Plant productivity and health	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Plant structure and composition	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Field Pesticide Loss	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pesticides transported to groundwater	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pesticides transported to surface water	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Field Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nutrients transported to groundwater	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nutrients transported to surface water	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sediment transported to surface water	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Fire Management	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation	0	100	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Inefficient Energy Use	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Energy efficient equipment and facilities	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Energy efficient farming/ranching practices and field operations	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Livestock Production Limitation	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Feed and forage balance	0	34	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Inadequate livestock shelter	0	33	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
distribution	0	33	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Long-term Protection of Land	30	95	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Loss of functions and values	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Threat of Conversion	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		50		<input type="checkbox"/>
Pest Pressure	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Plant pest pressure	0	100	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Salt Losses to Water	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Salt transported to groundwater	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Salt transported to surface water	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Soil Quality Limitations	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Aggregate instability	0	19	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Compaction	0	18	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Concentration of salts or other chemicals	0	17	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Organic matter depletion	0	16	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Soil organism habitat loss or degradation	0	15	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Subsidence	0	15	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Source Water Depletion	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Groundwater depletion	0	34	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Inefficient irrigation water use	0	33	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Surface water depletion	0	33	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Total		100		
Storage and Handling of Pollutants	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nutrients transported to groundwater	0	25	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nutrients transported to surface water	0	25	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater	0	25	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water	0	25	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Total		100			
Terrestrial Habitat	0	5	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates	0	100	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Total		100			
Weather Resilienc	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Drifted snow	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Naturally available moisture use	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Ponding and flooding	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Seasonal high water table	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Seeps	0	20	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Total		100			
Wind and Water Erosion	0	0	70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Sheet and rill erosion	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Wind erosion	0	50	100	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Total		100			
Resource Concern Categories Total		100			

Conservation Activities	CART Practices
Practices	See attached practice and activity list.

RANKING COMPONENT WEIGHTS	Min%	Default	Max%	Max Point	Ranking Algorithm Adjustments									
					Default	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Vulnerabilities	5	15	45		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>							
Planned Practice Points	5	5	5		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Resource Priorities	25	50	65		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
Program Priorities	25	30	65		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>									
Efficiency	0	0	0		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					<input type="checkbox"/>				
Total		100												

Practice Code	Practice Name
LTAPA	Acquisition Process – Appraisal
LTAPAU	Acquisition Process – Appraisal Update
LTAPBLR	Acquisition Process - Baseline Report
LTAPBS	Acquisition Process – Boundary Survey
LTAPCS	Acquisition Process – Closing Services
LTAPERS	Acquisition Process – Environmental Database Records Search
LTAPFP1	Acquisition Process – Full Phase I
LTAPIE	Acquisition Process - Ingress Egress
LTAPTR1	Acquisition Process – Appraisal Technical Review First Review
LTAPTR2	Acquisition Process – Appraisal Technical Review Second Review
LTAPTS	Acquisition Process – Title Search
LTPMAS	Long-Term Protection of Land – Maximum Duration Allowed by State Law
LTPPE	Long-Term Protection of Land – Permanent Easement