United States
Department of
Agriculture

10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE CONSERVATION PLANNING POLICY

1. Are we able to grandfather our conservation planners?

All employees and partners are required to meet the new policy requirements.

However, a “Transition Plan” has been established to allow for a 3-year grace period for individuals who, as of February 2017, were designated in the National Conservation Planner Database as apprentice, certified, master certified or technical specialist conservation planners. These individuals will retain their designation throughout the transition period, while working to fulfill any unmet training requirements outlined in the policy amendment.

Individuals are not required to retake training they have previously completed. Once a planner meets the new policy requirements for their role and the supervisor has validated that the planner curriculum is complete, they may begin attaining continuing education contact hours.

Individuals who have not completed the national and state requirements for their assigned planner role by the end of the transition period will have their current designation suspended until such time that the role designation requirements are completed or the individual is assigned to another planner role that can be met with their qualifications.

2. Can I get credit for training taken in the past?

Yes—Individual training history from ICAMS and EmPowHR may be ported over to AgLearn for credit.

Other options are also available for training where the records are missing from the AgLearn history and courses taken in the past that are similar to the current requirements:

State-led Courses - State training officers are able to validate completion for all state-led training courses previously completed.

National Employee Development Center (NEDC) Courses – State training officers may contact Jessica Smith (Jessica.L.Smith@ftw.usda.gov) at NEDC to receive credit in AgLearn.

Equivalent Courses – By following the approval process outlined in Policy Circular 180-17-2, states may request for similar training courses to be approved as equivalents. All training approved as equivalents will be published in the state’s supplement to GM-180 Part 409.

3. How many of the required courses for each designation are web-based vs on-the-job training?

The vast majority of the training requirements are web-based. Most of the state-led requirements may be completed using on-the-job training or by other means determined by the state.

Apprentice Conservation Planner
14 requirements: 8 web-based, 2 instructor-led, 4 on-the-job training
[no courses are required to be NEDC instructor-led]

Certified Conservation Planner
Apprentice planner requirements plus 22 additional requirements: 15 web-based, 4 instructor-led, 3 on-the-job training [only 2 courses are NEDC instructor-led]

Master Certified Conservation Planner
Certified planner requirements plus 5 additional requirements: 1 instructor-led, 4 on-the-job training [1 course NEDC instructor-led]

Technical Specialist Planner
Apprentice planner requirement plus 14 additional requirements: 8 web-based, 2 instructor-led, 4 on-the-job training

For more information download your copy of the Conservation Planner Designation Curricula - http://bit.ly/2q37btU.

4. How are each of the different training types documented?

Employees and partners are encouraged to read and download our Training Guides for more in-depth information on documentation procedures.

Training Guide for Supervisors and Field Employees - http://bit.ly/2pYOut7.
Training Guide for Training Officers - http://bit.ly/2q0B5Bb.

5. How much flexibility do we have within the policy for training?

Ultimately, states are in control of quality assurance on state-led requirements.

State conservationists are responsible for managing training resources and if necessary deciding the priority for training attendance.

As outlined in Policy Circular 180-17-2 that was announced via NB 180-17-3, states may also request approval for equivalent courses for any of the requirements in the new policy, including those that are web-based. If approved, the equivalent courses go into the state's supplement to GM-180 Part 409 as a record.

Whenever possible, web-based and train-the-trainer options are being made available to states to reduce travel costs. These options were first announced in Attachment C to NB 180-17-2. Another National Bulletin with more details and a request for train-the-trainer cadres is expected to be published in the near future.

6. How do states avoid having all planners recertified at the same time?

Recertification is triggered exactly three years after the supervisor validates that the planner curriculum for an individual has been fully completed.

If States have a large number of planners who need additional courses prior to completing the transition, States are advised to offer the needed instructor-led trainings to their planners in phases.

For example, one-third of the planners would get access to Economics of Conservation Planning in year 1, one-third in year 2, and one-third in year 3—allowing for variation in training completion dates, and therefore variation in when recertification is needed.

7. How do conservation planners track and document continuing education contact hours?

Planners will use the recertification items built into AgLearn, and may upload documentation of their completion. Supervisors and Training Officers can also pull reports on this.

Additional reference materials are available for download online:

Training Guide for Supervisors and Field Employees - http://bit.ly/2pYOut7
Continuing Education Contact Hours Tracking - http://bit.ly/2pscX6h

8. What are the continuing education requirements for conservation planners?

Forty hours of continuing education is required for each 3-year recertification cycle.

Once a planner meets the new policy requirements for their role and the supervisor has validated that the curriculum is complete, they may begin attaining continuing education contact hours.

A reference and tracking guide for earning continuing education contact hours is available at http://bit.ly/2pscX6h

9. What role do state training officers play in implementing the conservation planning policy?

State training officers are the primary points of contact with the National Employee Development Center (NEDC), and can assist with getting any NEDC or state-led course completions marked.

Training officers can also pull reports, manage training histories, and manage data for state leaders so that decisions can be made to best facilitate implementation of the Conservation Planning Policy.

Visit our Conservation Planner Designation Resources SharePoint site for more information: http://bit.ly/2q34M2u.

10. Are we required to give partners the same access to training resources as NRCS employees?

Yes. In order for our partners to continue to assist us in providing high quality conservation planning assistance, it is imperative that they are provided adequate access to training resources.

Any partner independently providing customer assistance with one or more of the 9 Steps of Conservation Planning must have received the necessary training to attain the appropriate conservation planner designation for their role.

We are also required to provide AgLearn access and account for the IDP training needs of individuals who do not currently have a LincPass. Directions on the process are available online at http://bit.ly/2r9LCbl.

A forthcoming National Instruction will also provide a step-by-step walkthrough of this process.