Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary, conservation program administered by NRCS that can provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices that address priority natural resource concerns.

- In consultation with the State Technical Committee and Local Work Groups, the State Conservationist has developed ranking pools and ranking criteria to focus EQIP funding for priority resource concerns and initiatives.
- NRCS uses the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) to assess the site vulnerability, existing conditions, and identify potential resource concerns on a unit of land. After CART assessment, NRCS uses CART Ranking to evaluate an application in all applicable ranking pools.
- The State Conservationist establishes batching periods to select the highest ranked applications for funding, contract approval is dependent on program eligibility determinations.
- Any interested farmer or rancher may submit an application for participation in EQIP.

Interested Applicants

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants should contact a NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

Visit https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/ to find the NRCS representative for your county.

Catastrophic Fire Recovery Ranking Pool

The conservation goals and funding priorities of the Catastrophic Fire Recovery ranking pool are to provide immediate resource protection in areas burned by catastrophic fires in the past three years on non-industrial private forestland (NIPF), grazing lands and croplands.

Priority resource concerns for NIPF and grazing lands include immediate soil erosion protection, minimize noxious and invasive plant proliferation, protect water quality, reduce fire hazard due to excess dead vegetation build-up, and restore livestock infrastructure necessary for grazing management. The State Conservationist has determined that the geographic scope of a Forest Management Plan and NIPF does not include areas within 100 feet from a building or a greater distance if required by state law, or local ordinance, rule, or regulation.

Priority resource concerns for cropland include immediate soil erosion protection and protect water quality from pollutants that have the potential to enter local streams and river from lands that have been damaged during wildfires and fire suppression activities.

The immediate consequence of fire is the potential for soil erosion. Intense heat from fire can cause the soil to repel water, a condition called hydrophobicity. The potential for severe soil erosion is a consequence of catastrophic wildfire because as a fire burns it destroys plant material and the litter layer that protects the soil from eroding during severe rainstorms and moving off- site to surface water bodies, roads and other sites.

Immediate action to control soil erosion on burned forestlands and agricultural lands include treatments such as using damaged trees or woody residues to slow runoff water, creating check dams in drainages, conservation covers, erosion control structures and spreading straw to protect the soil and reseeding efforts.

Most post-burn range sites are also susceptible to invasion by noxious weeds. Rangeland noxious weeds and soil erosion can be controlled through management and distribution of livestock to facilitate recovery

of burned sites most at risk for erosion and weed proliferation. In some cases, range planting may be necessary if range seed source is absent.

Many existing forestland and agricultural land access roads and culvert systems may be severely damaged during fire suppression activities. In addition, emergency roads created during the fire event may need to be addressed - both are potential sources of sediment and turbidity in surface water bodies. Riparian zones with heavy biomass accumulation are often high intensity fire areas where temporary access trails were built for fire suppression and these trails can be direct sediment sources to riparian streams as well.

Following catastrophic fires noxious and invasive plants often proliferate on post-burn sites. Forests that are not planted with tree seedlings within one growing season of the fire will result in shrub regeneration that can capture sites where natural regeneration is not present. These shrub communities can be very aggressive and within one season will dominate the forest site, increasing the intensity of reforestation practices such as herbicide application, mastication or brush raking to ensure the success of tree plantings.

Trees and other vegetation burned by the wildfire also can be a longer term future wildfire hazard and an immediate public safety hazard related to falling trees. When large quantities of trees and shrubs are severely burned, the dead vegetation presents a fire hazard due the accumulation of excess flammable woody biomass. This debris also inhibits fire area restoration efforts, such as reforestation, to reestablish a healthy, fire resilient forest. Practices that remove, reduce or reconfigure the excess woody debris will contribute to achieving restoration and public safety goals.

The following sections include the applicable land uses, resource concerns, and conservation practices for the ranking pool.

Land Uses

The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions. Below are the applicable land uses for the ranking pool.

Forest: Land on which the primary vegetation is tree cover (climax, natural or introduced plant community) and use is primarily for production of wood products or non-timber forest products.

Range: Land used primarily for the production of grazing animals. Includes native plant communities and those seeded to native or introduced species, or naturalized by introduced species that are ecologically managed using range management principles.

Crop: Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.

Pasture: Land composed of introduced or domesticated native forage species that is used primarily for the production of livestock. Pastures receive periodic renovation and cultural treatments, such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. Pastures are not in rotation with crops.

Farmstead: Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities.

Associated Agricultural Lands: Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.

Resource Concerns

The goal of conservation planning is to help each client attain sustainable use and sound management of soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resources, based on related human considerations (SWAPAE+H). Below is a list of priority resource concerns for the ranking pool.

SWAPAE+H	Resource Concern Category	Resource Concern
Soil	Concentrated Erosion	Bank erosion from streams, shorelines or water conveyance channels
		Classic gully erosion
		Ephemeral gully erosion
	Soil Quality Limitation	Aggregate instability
		Compaction
		Concentration of salts or other chemicals
		Organic matter depletion
		Soil organism habitat loss or degradation
		Subsidence
	Wind and Water Erosion	Sheet and rill erosion
		Wind erosion
Water	Field, Sediment, Nutrient, and Pathogen Loss	Nutrients transported to groundwater
		Nutrients transported to surface water
		Pathogens and chemicals from manure biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater
		Pathogens and chemicals from manure biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water
		Sediment transported to surface water
	Field Pesticide Loss	Pesticides transported to groundwater
		Pesticides transported to surface water
	Source Water Depletion	Groundwater depletion
		Inefficient irrigation water use
		Surface water depletion
	Storage and Handling of Pollutants	Nutrients transported to groundwater
		Nutrients transported to surface water
		Pesticides transported to surface water
		Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater
		Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water
	Weather Resilience	Drifted snow
		Naturally available moisture use
		Ponding and flooding
		Seasonal high water table
		Seeps

SWAPAE+H	Resource Concern Category	Resource Concern
Air	Air Quality Emissions	Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen
		Emissions of greenhouse gases - GHGs
		Emissions of ozone precursors
		Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors
		Objectionable odor
Plants	Degraded Plant Condition	Plant productivity and health
		Plant structure and composition
	Pest Pressure	Plant pest pressure
	Fire Management	Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation
Animals	Aquatic Habitat	Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms
		Elevated water temperature
	Livestock Production Limitation	Feed and forage balance
		Inadequate livestock shelter
		Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality, and distribution
	Terrestrial Habitat	Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates
Energy	Inefficient Energy Use	Energy efficient equipment and facilities
		Energy efficient farming/ranching practices and field operations

Conservation Practices

NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this ranking pool are listed in the below table. For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020.

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
362	Diversion	ft	10
382	Fence	ft	20
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
412	Grassed Waterway	ac	10
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation[1]	ac	15
460	Land Clearing	ac	10
462	Precision Land Forming	ac	10
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ft	15
472	Access Control	ac	10
484	Mulching	ac	1
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
500	Obstruction Removal	ac	10
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
548	Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment	ac	1
550	Range Planting	ac	5
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Protection	ac	10
570	Stormwater Runoff Control	no	1
572	Spoil Spreading	ac	1
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
606	Subsurface Drain	ft	20
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
630	Vertical Drain	no	10
636	Water Harvesting Catchment	no	20
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin	no	10
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	ft	10
655	Forest Trails and Landings	ft	5
666	Forest Stand Improvement	ac	10
910	TA Planning	no	1
911	TA Design	no	1
912	TA Application	no	1
913	TA Check-Out	no	1

[1]Conservation Practice Standard (CPS), 441 – Irrigation System, Microirrigation, is eligible to support establishment of non-production vegetative plantings only.