



## Proposed Adoption of Hydrology Indicators and Revisions to State Off-Site Manual for Wetland Identification

### **Background**

Per National Bulletin-190-21-6 ECS – Template Hydrology Indicators for the Identification of Farmed Wetlands, States are encouraged to evaluate and adopt hydrology indicators, reflective of local conditions, which meet the required long-term inundation criteria.

Per Final Rule HEL and WC Provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended (7 CFR 12): States will clarify how wetland hydrology is identified for farmed wetlands by defining indicators of long-term inundation (ponding or flooding), through consultation with the NRCS State Technical Committee. Hydrology indicators will be transparent to the public through the local NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

Farmed Wetlands (FW) is defined (in part) as:

*“a wetland that prior to December 23, 1985, was manipulated and used to produce an agricultural commodity at least once before December 23, 1985, and on December 23, 1985, did not support woody vegetation, and met the following hydrologic criteria: (i) if not a playa, pocosin, or pothole, experienced inundation for 15 consecutive days or more during the growing season or 10 percent of the growing season, whichever is less, in most years (50 percent change or more), which requisite is determined through...”*

Currently, NRCS Nebraska utilizes the hydrology indicators described in the Great Plains and Midwest Regional Supplements to the 1987 USACE Wetland Delineation Manual.

### **Proposed Farmed Wetland (FW) Hydrology Indicators**

Surface Water ♦ Water Marks ♦ Sediment Deposits ♦ Drift Deposits ♦ Algal Mat or Crust ♦ Surface Soil Cracks ♦ Sparsely Vegetated Concave Surfaces ♦ Water Stained Leaves ♦ Aquatic Invertebrates ♦ Perennial Obligative Plant Species ♦ Evidence of Long-Term Ponding on Aerial Imagery

### **USDA-NRCS Nebraska State Off-Site Manual (SOSM)**

The State Off-Site Methods (SOSM) for wetland identification is required by NRCS to outline the methods to conduct offsite Certified Wetland Determinations for Food Security Act purposes in Nebraska. The SOSM is designed to give consistency among NRCS field offices and technical personnel completing certified wetland determinations. These methods are based on the offsite wetland determination tools described in the National Food Security Act Manual (NFSAM).

USDA-NRCS Nebraska is proposing the following revisions to the SOSM:

- ♦ Include reference scenarios for applicability of on-site method requirement.
- ♦ Specify the location of the State Conservationist’s roster of agency experts (Job Approval Authority list).
- ♦ Expand on the capacity to utilize reference sites in evaluating hydrophytic vegetation.
- ♦ Include adopted hydrology indicators for the identification of farmed wetland.

### **USDA-NRCS Wetland Compliance (WC) Team**

The WC Team concept in Nebraska began in 2018 when NRCS transitioned from servicing wetland requests at field offices to servicing requests with a dedicated team. NRCS made the wetland determination process more efficient by utilizing off-site techniques to complete determinations in a timely manner. WC Team members are responsible for completing preliminary wetland determinations as well as reconsiderations and restoration/mitigation requests. NRCS will continue to improve the wetland determination process to assist agricultural producers in Nebraska.

