

Purpose and Need

Program Policy

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National Watershed Program Manual

501.34 Purpose and Need for Action

The “Purpose and Need for Action” section of the watershed plan explains the underlying problems and opportunities and the goals to be achieved by NRCS and the SLO. This section begins with a clear and concise summary statement of the purpose and need for the proposed action. A discussion will then follow providing sufficient information to adequately demonstrate the underlying need and purpose for the proposed action.

National Watershed Program Handbook

601.34 Purpose and Need for Action

A. The “Purpose and Need for Action” section of the watershed plan should begin with a brief (one paragraph) statement that clearly states the purpose and need for the action. This will be followed by discussion sufficient to support these statements, describing the problems and opportunities and the goals to be achieved by NRCS and the SLO. It must include at least one of the eligible program purposes from 390-NWPM, Part 500, Subpart A, Section 500.3B. This is initially established in steps one and two of the NRCS planning process and should be further refined as scoping, resource analysis, and alternative analysis validate the needs and resource conditions. It is important to accurately craft this statement as it defines the range of reasonable alternatives that will be considered in the analysis.

B. The P&G and NEPA require all reasonable alternatives to be developed and evaluated. The purpose and need for action should be scoped to limit the range of alternatives, but not so limited as to preselect an alternative.

C. The purpose and need statement should be followed by supporting information that clearly quantifies the extent and magnitude of each need to be addressed. The supporting information should include:

- (1) What is being damaged?
- (2) How much damage is occurring?
- (3) Where does the damage occur?
- (4) How frequent is the damage?

D. The needs should be stated for both present and future conditions. These should be consistent with the conditions described in the “Affected Environment” section. Desired conditions for the future should also be explicitly stated. General graphic displays depicting trends and magnitude of resource and economic conditions are useful.

E. Some problems identified during the public participation process may prove to be irrelevant to the project. These problems should be identified in this section even though they may have not been thoroughly investigated, evaluated, or addressed in planning. If it is clear that nothing can be done to address a problem, this should be explained.

F. Opportunities for improving the quality of life and enhancing environmental values should be discussed. These opportunities must reflect specific effects desired by concerned groups and individuals.

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500.3 Eligible Purposes

A. General Purposes

(1) Section 1 of Public Law 83-566 sets forth three general purposes:

- (i) Preventing damage from erosion, floodwater, and sediment
- (ii) Furthering the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water
- (iii) Furthering the conservation and proper utilization of land

(2) Other resources not specifically mentioned in Public Law 83-566 may also be considered as appropriate, including air, cultural and historic resources, aesthetic resources, and others.

(3) To achieve these purposes, section 3 of Public Law 83-566 authorizes NRCS to provide technical assistance to sponsoring local organizations (SLOs) as may be necessary to prepare and implement watershed project plans. NRCS technical assistance includes the following:

- (i) Conduct investigations and surveys as necessary to prepare plans for works of improvement
- (ii) Prepare plans and estimates required for adequate planning and engineering evaluation
- (iii) Make allocations of costs to the various purposes to show the basis of such allocations and to determine whether benefits exceed costs
- (iv) Cooperate and enter into agreements with and to furnish financial and other assistance to one or more SLO
- (v) Obtain the cooperation and assistance of other Federal agencies in carrying out the purposes of this section
- (vi) Enter into agreements with landowners and operators, based on conservation plans that are developed in cooperation with and approved by the local soil and water conservation district, for the installation of soil and water conservation practices and measures needed to conserve and develop the soil, water, woodland, wildlife, energy, recreation and scenic resources, and water quality

B. Authorized Project Purposes

Sections 3 and 4 of Public Law 83-566 provide for Federal assistance for the following authorized project purposes.

(i) Flood Prevention (Flood Damage Reduction)

Flood prevention or flood damage reduction measures are installed to prevent or reduce damages caused by floodwater. Flood damage reduction is further defined as the control and disposal of surface water caused by abnormally high direct precipitation, stream overflow, or floods aggravated or caused by wind or tidal effects. Flood damage reduction and mitigation measures reduce or prevent floodwater damages by reducing runoff, erosion, and sediment; modifying the susceptibility of improvements in the floodplain to damage; removing damageable property from the floodplain; or reducing the frequency, depth, or velocity of flooding. Measures may also include actions that prevent encroachment into the floodplain.

(ii) Watershed Protection

- Watershed protection consists of onsite treatment of watershed natural resources concerns for the primary purpose of reducing offsite floodwater, erosion, sediment, and agriculture-related pollutants. Watershed protection plans may include ecosystem restoration type activities. Any practice or combination of practices listed in Title 450, National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP), may be considered for inclusion in the systems of practices included in a watershed protection project plan. Project measures for watershed protection include land treatment practices installed by land users to conserve and develop any of the following:

- Soil
- Water quality and quantity
- Woodland
- Fish and wildlife habitats
- Energy
- Recreation and scenic resources

• Public Law 83-566 requires that the SLO must “obtain agreements to carry out recommended soil conservation measures and proper farm (conservation) plans from owners of not less than 50 percent of the lands situated in the drainage area above each retention reservoir to be installed with Federal assistance.” USDA policy requires installation of land treatment practices necessary to ensure that at least 50 percent of the land upstream from any retention reservoir is adequately protected before beginning construction of the retention reservoir.

(iii) Public Recreation

Public recreation developments may be included in a watershed project plan when the SLO agrees to operate and maintain a reservoir or other area for public recreation. Project measures must include only minimum basic facilities needed for public health and safety and access to, and use of the area. Minimum basic facilities may include picnic areas, sanitary facilities, fishing piers, shelters, cooking grills, parking areas, swimming beaches, access roads, water, and trails. Also included are practices to provide needed access, water, and power.

(iv) Public Fish and Wildlife

Fish and wildlife development areas may be included in a watershed project plan when the SLO agrees to operate and maintain a reservoir or other area for public fish and wildlife access. Measures installed for public use of areas developed to improve the habitat or the environment for the breeding, growth, and development of fish and wildlife may be included in a watershed project plan.

(v) Agricultural Water Management

Agricultural water management includes drainage, ground water recharge, irrigation, water conservation, water quality improvement, and agricultural (including rural communities) water supply. Measures planned for these purposes are installed on non-Federal land by the SLO to benefit groups of landowners and communities. Measures on Federal land will be installed and maintained in accordance with mutually satisfactory arrangements among the SLO, the land administering agency, and NRCS.

(vi) Municipal and Industrial Water Supply

Municipal and industrial (M&I) water supply includes measures necessary to provide storage capacity in reservoirs to increase the availability of water for present and future municipal and industrial use. Needed outlet works and pipelines to convey water from the reservoir to the existing or proposed treatment facilities or water system are also considered project measures. The planning, design and installation of municipal and industrial water wells, water treatment plants, distribution systems, and electric distribution facilities fall outside the scope of the Watershed Program.

(vii) Water Quality Management

Water quality management measures provide water storage capacity in reservoirs for regulation of stream flow to improve water quality in streams.

(viii) Watershed Structure Rehabilitation

Watershed structure rehabilitation is covered in Public Law 83-566 Section 14, which authorizes financial assistance to local organizations to cover a portion of the costs of rehabilitating dams originally constructed as part of a project carried out under any of the following four authorities—Public Law 83-566, Public Law 78-534, the pilot watershed program authorized under the Department of Agriculture Appropriation Act of 1954, or the Resource Conservation and Development Program authorized by the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981.