

WFPO

Request for NRCS Planning Assistance

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**Title 390, National Watershed Program Manual (NWPM), 4th Edition, April 2014
500.20 Request for NRCS Planning Assistance**

State Conservationists are required to conduct a Preliminary Investigation Feasibility Reports (PIFR) for Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) Program projects prior to requesting funding for planning. The PIFR is a brief study, using existing data and field information. The purpose of the investigation is to provide reasonable assurance that a feasible plan can be developed that addresses one or more Public Law 83-566 purposes and that there are no apparent insurmountable obstacles.

Start of the Process (Preapplication Requirements)

- The Sponsoring Local Organization (SLO) requests, in writing to the State Conservationist, Watershed Program planning assistance for a potential watershed project.

NRCS State PIFR Responsibilities

- After State NRCS receives a request for planning assistance from the SLO for a potential watershed project, State NRCS requests funding from Headquarters. Once that funding is received the State NRCS will prepare the PIFR to determine the feasibility of the potential project and its eligibility for the Watershed Program.
- If a PIFR is undertaken, the STC must notify in writing the Governors concerned, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and all other Federal agencies concerned with a decision to initiate any survey or field investigation involving water resources development work and furnish them with appropriate information regarding the scope, nature, status, and results of such survey or investigation (Executive Order 10584 Section 3).
- Initial consultation with Indian Tribes that may be impacted by the potential watershed project will occur during the development of the PIFR. (NHPA- 36 CFR 800 and Executive Order 13175).

SLO Request for Planning Assistance

- Once the PIFR is completed, it is the responsibility of the SLO to request NRCS planning assistance and authorization to develop either a watershed project plan under Public Law 83-566 or a sub-watershed plan under Public Law 78-534, including an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS). An application for assistance will consist of the following items:
 - A copy of the State Conservationist approved PIFR
 - Letter of Request for Planning Assistance

NRCS State Authorization Submittal to Headquarters

Will include:

- A copy of the PIFR and a plan of work
- The designated State agency's current priority rating for the watershed application
- An estimate of the cost of plan development for NRCS, contracted expertise outside of NRCS, or both
- A list of the SLOs, the name and address of the current chair, and the name of the person designated as the contact for all the SLOs
- Statements by the SLO confirming its understanding of the commitments it has made, a self-evaluation of the depth and likely commitment of support for the project being planned, its authority and willingness to obtain real property rights, and its willingness to use the power of eminent domain

Amendments to a Submitted Application (if applicable)

The State Conservationist must have prior approval of the Chief to amend a planning authorization in order to add or change a purpose. Requests for approval will include a revised preliminary investigation feasibility report that clearly identifies watershed problems, proposed alternatives, and the revised plan of work. There will also be an explanation of why the original proposal should be changed.

Timeframes and Options

- After the SLO submits the assistance request letter to the State Conservationist, the State NRCS requests funds to prepare a PIFR.
 - Assistance request letters are accepted year around. Please coordinate with the Nebraska NRCS Watershed Planning Coordinator.
- Once State NRCS receives funding it has 12 months to complete the PIFR.
 - Timeframe for completion will depend on NRCS State work capacity.
 - SLO will be given PIFR format to encourage local collection of existing information to help expedite PIFR development.
 - The final PIFR document is a State NRCS document but draft development by the SLO greatly expedites the 12-month timeline.
 - It is State NRCS responsibility to determine feasibility and ensure all application requirements are met prior to finalizing the State NRCS PIFR.
- SLO options for assisting in PIFR development.
 - Coordinate when asked by State NRCS as they prepare the entire PIFR.
OR may get a head start
 - Utilize SLO resources to develop a draft PIFR to help expedite PIFR development and provide State NRCS a draft document. State NRCS can provide:
 - WFPO PIFR Format
 - PIFR Guidance template
 - State NRCS PIFR example
- Once a PIFR is completed by State NRCS and if the project is determined to be feasible then the SLO applies for assistance using the SF-424 form.