

Ranking Criteria for New Hampshire NRCS ACEP-ALE

Fiscal Year 2022

Application Overview

Any applicant may submit an application for participation in ACEP-ALE. The NRCS State Conservationist or Area Director, in consultation with stakeholders including the State Technical Committee, Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils, and Local Work Groups, has developed the following ranking criteria to prioritize and select applications that best address the applicable program purposes and priority natural resource concerns in New Hampshire.

The NRCS State Conservationist will establish application batching periods and select the highest ranked applications for funding, based on applicant eligibility and the NRCS ranking process. The NRCS State Conservationist in consultation with the State Technical Committee may also establish a minimum ranking threshold for making continuous selections ahead of application batching periods. Applications that rank below the minimum ranking threshold can be considered for funding after the established application batching periods. In Fiscal Year 2022, NRCS will use its Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) to assess and rank all eligible applications for NRCS conservation programs. However, a manual calculation for the sum of points earned from the program and resource consideration questions will be used to determine applications meeting the minimum threshold for continuous selection. The minimum threshold for continuous selection will be 50% of the total available points or 200 out of the 400 total available points. A manual calculation will allow conservation partners that don't have access to CART the ability to screen applications based on the following New Hampshire ranking criteria and forecast potential for continuous selection versus selection after established batching periods.

Inventory and Assessment in CART

CART is a decision support system designed to provide a consistent, replicable framework for the conservation planning process based on geospatially referenced information, client-provided information, field observations, and NRCS conservation planner expertise. CART is designed to assist NRCS conservation planners as they assess site vulnerability and existing conditions, and identify natural resource concerns on a unit of land.

In CART, assessments of existing management and conservation efforts are compared against conservation planning criteria thresholds to determine the level of conservation effort needed to address identified natural resource concerns. The results are then used to inform NRCS conservation planning activities for the client. NRCS also uses CART to consolidate resource data and program information to prioritize program delivery and report outcomes of NRCS investments in conservation.

In general, resource concerns fall into one of three categories for the assessment method used in CART to assess and document a resource concern:

- **Client Input/Planner Observation:** A streamlined list of options is presented to the planner to document the client input and/or planner observation of the resource concerns present. These observations are compared to the conservation planning criteria thresholds.
- **Procedural/Deductive:** A large group of resource concerns fall into this category and are assessed using a resource concern-specific tool or a list of inventory-like criteria. Due to variability in State tools, assessment questions and answers will be broad in nature to allow States to more carefully align them with State conditions.

- **Predictive:** The remaining resource concerns are assessed using a predictive interactive model simulation. The CART systems attempt to replicate the outcomes related to the assessment threshold being met or not compared to the model outputs.

After identifying resource concerns and describing existing conditions, planned conservation practices and activities can be added to the existing condition to determine the state of the proposed management system. Supporting practices that are needed to support primary conservation practices and activities are also identified, but do not add conservation management points to the total.

If the client is interested in financial assistance through an NRCS conservation program, the inventory and assessment information, along with client decisions related to conservation practice adoption, are directly and consistently transferred from the assessment portion of CART to the ranking portion of CART. Based on the transferred assessment information and the conservation practices proposed for implementation, CART identifies the appropriate program ranking pool(s).

Ranking in CART

In general, NRCS program ranking criteria uses the following guiding principles:

- Degree of cost-effectiveness of the proposed conservation practices and activities;
- The level of performance of proposed conservation practices and activities;
- Treatment of multiple resource concerns or national priority resource concerns;
- Magnitude of the environmental benefits resulting from the treatment of resource concerns reflecting the level of performance of proposed conservation practices and activities; and
- Compliance with Federal, State, local or tribal regulatory requirements with regards to natural resources.

CART uses a set of National Ranking Templates developed for each NRCS program and initiative. The National Ranking Templates contain four parameters that are customized for each program to reflect the national level ranking criteria. The four parameters are:

1. **Land Uses** - NRCS has developed land use designations to be used by planners and modelers at the field and landscape level. Land use modifiers more accurately define the land's actual use and provide another level of specificity and help denote how the land is managed. Land use designations and modifiers are defined in Title 180, National Planning Procedures Handbook, Part 600.
2. **Resource Concerns** - An expected degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, or animal resource base to the extent that the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired. Because NRCS quantifies or describes resource concerns as part of a comprehensive conservation planning process, that includes client objectives, human and energy resources are considered components of the resource base.
3. **Practices** - A specific treatment used to address resource concerns, such as structural or vegetative measures, or management techniques, which are planned and implemented in accordance with applicable standards and specifications.
4. **Ranking Component Weights** – A set of five components comprise the ranking score for an individual land-based assessment. The five components are:
 - a. **Vulnerability** - Site vulnerability is determined by subtracting the existing condition and existing practice scores from the thresholds. This score is weighted by ranking pool to address the resource concerns prioritized by that ranking pool.

- b. **Planned Practice Effects** - The planned practice effect score is based on the sum of the planned practice on that land unit which addresses the resource concern. This score is weighted by ranking pool to address the resource concerns prioritized by that ranking pool.
- c. **Resource Priorities** - National and State resource priorities are established to address the most critical land and resource considerations and are based on NRCS national and State priorities identified with input from National, State, and local stakeholders.
- d. **Program Priorities** - National and State program priorities are established to maximize program effectiveness and advance program purposes and are based on NRCS national and State priorities identified with input from National, State, and local stakeholders.
- e. **Cost Efficiency** – Summation of ‘Planned Practice Points’ divided by the log of the ‘Average Practice Cost’.

NOTE: The points for vulnerability, planned practice effects, and cost efficiency are garnered from the assessment portion of CART.

New Hampshire created State-specific ranking pools within the above-described National Ranking Template parameters. The State ranking pools contain a set of questions that are divided into the following sections – applicability, category, program questions, and resource questions. Ranking pool customization allows States to focus funding on priority resource concerns and initiatives identified at the State level with input from NRCS stakeholders. Each eligible application may be considered for funding in all applicable ranking pools by program.

NRCS Resource Concerns

The following table lists the 47 Resource Concerns NRCS uses during the Conservation Planning process.

| Categories | NRCS Resource Concerns |
|-------------|--|
| Soil | 1. Sheet and rill erosion |
| | 2. Wind erosion |
| | 3. Ephemeral gully erosion |
| | 4. Classic gully erosion |
| | 5. Bank erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyance channels |
| | 6. Subsidence |
| | 7. Compaction |
| | 8. Organic matter depletion |
| | 9. Concentration of salts or other chemicals |
| | 10. Soil organism habitat loss or degradation |
| | 11. Aggregate instability |
| | 12. Ponding and flooding |
| | 13. Seasonal high-water table |
| | 14. Seeps |
| | 15. Drifted snow |
| | 16. Surface water depletion |
| | 17. Groundwater depletion |
| | 18. Naturally available moisture use |
| | 19. Inefficient irrigation water use |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Water | 20. Nutrients transported to surface water |
| | 21. Nutrients transported to groundwater |
| | 22. Pesticides transported to surface water |
| | 23. Pesticides transported to groundwater |
| | 24. Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water |
| | 25. Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater |
| | 26. Salts transported to surface water |
| | 27. Salts transported to groundwater |
| | 28. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water |
| | 29. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater |
| | 30. Sediment transported to surface water |
| 31. Elevated water temperature | |
| Air | 32. Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors |
| | 33. Emissions of greenhouse gasses (GHGs) |
| | 34. Emissions of ozone precursors |
| | 35. Objectionable odors |
| | 36. Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen |
| Plants | 37. Plant productivity and health |
| | 38. Plant structure and composition |
| | 39. Plant pest pressure |
| | 40. Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation |
| Animals | 41. Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates |
| | 42. Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms |
| | 43. Feed and forage imbalance |
| | 44. Inadequate livestock shelter |
| | 45. Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality and distribution |
| Energy | 46. Energy efficiency of equipment and facilities |
| | 47. Energy efficiency of farming/ranching practices and field operations |



Ranking Pool Report

Ranking Pool: NH FY22 ALE

Program: ACEP

Pool Status: Active

States: NH (Admin)

Template: ACEP-ALE General (Program Agreements)

Template Status: Active

Last Modified By: Ian Rodgers

Last Modified: 12-07-2021

Land Uses

| Land Use | Modifier 1 | Modifier 2 | Modifier 3 | Modifier 4 | Modifier 5 | Modifier 6 |
|--------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Crop | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Forest | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Range | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Pasture | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Farmstead | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Developed Land | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Water | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Other Rural Land | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Associated Ag Land | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |

Resource Concern Categories

| Categories | | | |
|--|-------|-----------|-------|
| Category | Min % | Default % | Max % |
| Concentrated erosion | 0 | 5 | 30 |
| Degraded plant condition | 0 | 5 | 50 |
| Field pesticide loss | 0 | 5 | 20 |
| Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss | 0 | 5 | 50 |
| Livestock production limitation | 0 | 5 | 50 |
| Long term protection of land | 40 | 45 | 75 |
| Pest pressure | 0 | 5 | 20 |
| Salt losses to water | 0 | 5 | 20 |
| Soil quality limitations | 0 | 5 | 50 |
| Source water depletion | 0 | 5 | 40 |
| Storage and handling of pollutants | 0 | 5 | 40 |

Categories

| Category | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Wind and water erosion | 0 | 5 | 40 |

Concentrated erosion

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|--|-------|-----------|-------|
| Bank erosion from streams, shorelines or water conveyance channels | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Classic gully erosion | 0 | 40 | 100 |
| Ephemeral gully erosion | 0 | 40 | 100 |

Degraded plant condition

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|---------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Plant productivity and health | 0 | 50 | 100 |
| Plant structure and composition | 0 | 50 | 100 |

Field pesticide loss

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|---|-------|-----------|-------|
| Pesticides transported to groundwater | 0 | 50 | 100 |
| Pesticides transported to surface water | 0 | 50 | 100 |

Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|---|-------|-----------|-------|
| Nutrients transported to groundwater | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Nutrients transported to surface water | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to groundwater | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to surface water | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Sediment transported to surface water | 0 | 20 | 100 |

Livestock production limitation

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|---|-------|-----------|-------|
| Feed and forage balance | 0 | 40 | 100 |
| Inadequate livestock shelter | 0 | 15 | 100 |
| Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality and distribution | 0 | 45 | 100 |

Long term protection of land

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|----------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Threat of conversion | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Pest pressure

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|---------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Plant pest pressure | 0 | 100 | 100 |

Salt losses to water

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|------------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Salts transported to groundwater | 0 | 50 | 100 |
| Salts transported to surface water | 0 | 50 | 100 |

Soil quality limitations

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|---|-------|-----------|-------|
| Aggregate instability | 0 | 15 | 100 |
| Compaction | 0 | 15 | 100 |
| Concentration of salts or other chemicals | 0 | 15 | 100 |
| Organic matter depletion | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Soil organism habitat loss or degradation | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Subsidence | 0 | 15 | 100 |

Source water depletion

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|----------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Groundwater depletion | 0 | 35 | 100 |
| Inefficient irrigation water use | 0 | 35 | 100 |
| Surface water depletion | 0 | 30 | 100 |

Storage and handling of pollutants

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|---|-------|-----------|-------|
| Nutrients transported to groundwater | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Nutrients transported to surface water | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Pesticides transported to surface water | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to groundwater | 0 | 20 | 100 |
| Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to surface water | 0 | 20 | 100 |

Wind and water erosion

| Resource Concern | Min % | Default % | Max % |
|------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Sheet and rill erosion | 0 | 50 | 100 |
| Wind erosion | 0 | 50 | 100 |


Practices

| Practice Name | Practice Code | Practice Type |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Acquisition Process - Environmental Database Records Search | LTAPERS | Easements |
| Acquisition Process - Environmental Database Records Search Update | LTAPERSU | Easements |
| Acquisition Process - Appraisal Technical Review First Review | LTAPTR1 | Easements |
| Acquisition Process - Appraisal Technical Review Second Review | LTAPTR2 | Easements |
| Long-Term Protection of Land - Maximum Duration Allowed by State Law | LTPMAS | Easements |
| Long-Term Protection of Land - Permanent Easement | LTPPE | Easements |

Ranking Weights

| Factors | Algorithm | Allowable Min | Default | Allowable Max |
|--------------------------|-----------|---------------|---------|---------------|
| Vulnerabilities | Default | 5 | 10 | 20 |
| Planned Practice Effects | Default | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Resource Priorities | Default | 35 | 40 | 50 |
| Program Priorities | Default | 40 | 45 | 50 |
| Efficiencies | Default | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Display Group: NH FY22 ALE (Active)

 An asterisk will be displayed to show that it is a conditional section or conditional question.

Survey: Applicability Questions

| Section: Applicability | | |
|------------------------|----------------|--------|
| Question | Answer Choices | Points |
| Located in NH? | Yes | -- |
| | Otherwise | -- |

Survey: Category Questions

| Section: Categories | | |
|---------------------|----------------|--------|
| Question | Answer Choices | Points |
| Located in NH? | YES | -- |
| | NO | -- |

Survey: Program Questions

| Section: Program Questions | | |
|---|---|--------|
| Question | Answer Choices | Points |
| Percent of the offered parcel containing prime farmland soils, soils of statewide agricultural importance, or locally important agricultural land. | <10% PUS/L | 0 |
| | 10-33% Prime, Unique, Statewide/Locally Important | 25 |
| | 34%-66% PUS/L | 45 |
| | 67%-100% PUS/L | 60 |
| Presence of cropland, pastureland, grassland/hayland, or nonindustrial private forest land in parcel to be protected. | Cropland | 10 |
| | Pastureland | 10 |
| | Grassland/hayland | 7 |
| | Nonindustrial Private Forestland | 3 |
| Ratio of the total acres of land in the parcel to be protected to average farm size in the county according to the most recent USDA Census of Agriculture | Less than county average | 0 |
| | Equal to or greater than county average | 5 |
| Decrease in the percentage of acreage of farm and ranch land in the county in which the parcel is located between the last two USDA Censuses of Agriculture. | Decrease in agricultural land use | 10 |
| | Increase in agricultural land use | 0 |
| Decrease in the percentage of acreage of permanent grassland, pasture, and rangeland, other than cropland and woodland pasture, in the county in which the parcel is located between the last two USDA Censuses of Agriculture. | Decrease in percentage of acreage | 5 |
| | Increase in percentage of acreage | 0 |
| Percent population growth in the county as documented by the U.S. Census | Above NH average | 10 |
| | Below NH average | 0 |
| Population density (population per square mile) as documented by the most recent U.S. Census. | Above state average | 5 |
| | Below state average | 0 |
| Existence of a farm or ranch succession plan or similar plan established to address agricultural viability for future generations. | YES | 5 |
| | NO | 0 |
| Proximity of the parcel to other permanently protected agricultural land. | Directly abuts protected agricultural land | 20 |
| | Is within 2.5 miles from protected agricultural land | 15 |
| | is between 2.6 and 5 miles from protected agricultural land | 10 |
| | Is greater than 5 miles from protected agricultural land | 0 |
| Proximity of the parcel to other agricultural operations and agricultural infrastructure. | Directly abuts other ag land OR is within 2 miles of ag infrastructure | 10 |
| | Is within 2 miles of other ag land OR between 2.1 and 5 miles from ag infrastructure | 5 |
| | is between 2.1 to 5 miles from other ag land OR between 5.1 and 10 miles from ag infrastructure | 2 |
| | Is greater than 5 miles from other ag land OR greater than 10 miles from ag infrastructure | 0 |

Section: Program Questions

| Question | Answer Choices | Points |
|---|----------------|--------|
| Does the parcel connect two or more protected parcels devoted to agricultural use? | YES | 7 |
| | NO | 0 |
| Percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement that is the eligible entity's own cash resources for payment of easement compensation to the landowner and comes from sources other than the landowner. | <10% | 0 |
| | 10-25% | 5 |
| | 26-50% | 15 |
| | 51% or more | 20 |
| Does the applicant meet the NRCS definition of a veteran farmer or rancher (VFR)? | YES | 10 |
| | NO | 0 |
| Did the applicant participate in the CRP Transition Incentives Program (TIP), and has the land included in the ACEP-ALE application come out of CRP within the last two years? | YES | 1 |
| | NO | 0 |
| Is land currently enrolled in CRP in a contract that is set to expire within one year and is grassland that would benefit from protection under a long-term easement or is land under a CRP contract that is in transition to a covered farmer or rancher pursuant to 16 U.S.C 3835(f). | YES | 1 |
| | NO | 0 |
| Land is grassland of special environmental significance that would benefit from protection under a long-term easement. | YES | 1 |
| | NO | 0 |

Survey: Resource Questions

Section: Resource Questions

| Question | Answer Choices | Points |
|---|--|--------|
| The parcel contains a site of cultural or historical significance that is currently listed or was formally determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places OR currently listed on the NH Department of Historic Resources or is included in the State Historic Preservation Office Inventory. | YES | 10 |
| | NO | 0 |
| Proximity of parcel to other permanently protected nonagricultural lands (such as forestlands and wetlands). | Directly abuts protected nonagricultural land | 30 |
| | Is within 2.5 miles | 20 |
| | is between 2.6 and 5 miles | 10 |
| | is greater than 5 miles | 0 |
| Percent of parcel that lies within any of the 4 Food Desert categories OR lies within 5 miles of any of the 4 Food Desert categories. | 0-50% of parcel is within a Food Desert category | 20 |
| | 51-100% of parcel is within a Food Desert category | 40 |
| | Parcel lies within 5 miles of any Food Desert category | 10 |
| | Parcel is greater than 5 miles from a Food Desert Category | 0 |

Section: Resource Questions

| Question | Answer Choices | Points |
|--|---|--------|
| <p>Conservation practices are actively being applied or maintained to address identified resource concerns. Practices can include, but are not limited to: Riparian Forest Buffers, Soil Health Assessments (soil analysis, plantings to increase soil organic matter, crop rotations to minimize pest management, etc.), Nutrient/Grazing/Integrated Pest Management plans (being ACTIVELY applied), Storm Water Runoff (such as roof/ground gutters), Erosion Control (such as contour farming, no till seeding, cover crops, water bars, vegetated forest trails and log landings, etc.), Agricultural drainage systems have been maintained (grassed waterways, drainage ditches, etc.) allowing land to continue to be actively managed as cropland, hayland, or pastureland.</p> | Riparian Forest Buffers | 10 |
| | Soil Health Assessments | 10 |
| | Nutrient/Grazing/Integrated Pest Management plans | 10 |
| | Storm Water Runoff | 10 |
| | Erosion Control | 10 |
| | Maintaining Agricultural drainage systems | 10 |
| | Other (including wildlife related practices) | 10 |
| | None | 0 |
| <p>The eligible entity has elected to develop and periodically update an Agricultural Land Easement Plan (ALEP). NOTE: If the eligible entity agrees to develop an ALEP (including any component plans, except HEL plans) as a condition of selection and funding, the eligible entity is responsible for the development and maintenance of such plans.</p> | YES | 15 |
| | NO | 0 |
| <p>The project is located within a defined source water protection area.</p> | In SWPA | 20 |
| | Otherwise | 0 |
| <p>Majority of the offered area is mapped as the Highest Ranked Habitat in the NH Wildlife Action Plan (Greater than 50% Tier 1 Highest Ranked Habitat in NH WAP and/or Tier 2 Highest Ranked Habitat in Biological Region).</p> | YES | 20 |
| | NO | 0 |
| <p>Does the applicant meet the NRCS definition (see page 6 of form NRCS-CPA-41A) of a Beginning Farmer or Rancher, Limited-Resource Farmer or Rancher, or Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher?</p> | YES | 15 |
| | NO | 0 |