

## Part 512 – Conservation Systems and Plans

### Subpart B – Documenting Conservation Plans and HEL Conservation Systems

#### IA512.10 Requirements of an HEL Conservation Plan

##### C. Requirements of a Conservation Plan

(3) When providing planning activities to meet the needs of the resource and the goals and objectives of the client: Conservation Planners will use the predominant highly erodible (HEL) soil map unit when planning with Producers on HEL fields. The Conservation Planner will use the predominant non highly erodible (NHEL) soil map unit when planning for a NHEL field. In some cases, the Conservation Planner should suggest that the Producer treat portions of the field which contain more erosive soils as a different planning unit when the soils can be managed separately.

The Conservation Planner must ensure that the resulting conservation plan will, at a minimum, meet the highly erodible land compliance requirements.

(4) When planning to meet the requirements of the 1985 Food Security Act (as amended), the Conservation Planner is directed to use the “predominant highly erodible soil map unit in the highly erodible field” (NFSAM 512.0(E)).

## Choosing the soil map unit within a planning map unit (PLU) to use for the Sheet and Rill (RUSLE2/WEPP/IET) and Iowa P-Index Risk Assessments.

Guidance developed for conservation partners including Technical Service Providers (TSP).

### Sheet and Rill Erosion Risk Assessments

To determine the planning soil for a PLU (i.e. field) to use in RUSLE2 and WEPP:

1. Determine whether the field is Highly Erodible Land (HEL) or Non-Highly Erodible Land (NHEL) using the FSA map for the tract. The producer can obtain this map from the FSA office.
2. Determine the HEL and NHEL status of the soil map units. Access the list in [Field Office Technical Guide](#) (<select a state>, <select a county>, <Section II>, <Soil Information>, <Soil Survey Area>, <Select a county>, <Soils Tables>, <county – *Highly Erodible Land List (frozen)*>)
3. *If the field is HEL* use the predominant HEL soil – the HEL soil map unit with the most acres – for planning.
4. *If the field is NHEL* use the predominant NHEL soil – the NHEL soil map unit with the most acres – for planning.

If you encounter problems with the above procedure, contact the local NRCS office for guidance to determine the HEL/NHEL status of the field or soil. Potential issues could include:

- the HEL/NHEL designation for the field on FSA map is missing or does not appear correct;
- the *Highly Erodible Land List (frozen)* does not list a soil or contains naming or other discrepancies with the current soil survey map units; or
- the field contains a Potentially Highly Erodible Land (PHEL) soil that could be predominant.

### Excess Nutrients to Surface Water Risk Assessment using the Iowa P-Index

- Use the same soil used in RUSLE2/WEPP to represent the field in the Iowa P-Index to assess the risk of phosphorus delivery to surface water.
- Utilize field observation, soil maps, aerial photos, and/or LIDAR images to identify if there are areas of the field that are more erosive and/or otherwise more at risk to deliver nutrients to surface water than the predominant soil area and if they are significant enough to be of concern. The amount of phosphorus delivered to surface water is disproportionately higher from the steeper parts of the field and parts of the field near water. The rule of thumb is that 80% of the P delivered comes from 20% of the field, so identifying these areas is important.
- *If no more-at-risk areas exist*, document in the Conservation Assistance Notes (NRCS-CPA-6).
- *If more-at-risk areas exist*,
  - o use RUSLE2/WEPP and the Iowa P-Index on a representative soil in the identified areas to assess the risk and to determine additional conservation practices for consideration to treat the area. *Treating this area is not required.*
  - o Document the more-at-risk area of the field, the RUSLE2/WEPP and Iowa P-Index reports, the conservation practices that would address the resource concern, and the producer's decision in the Conservation Assistance Notes, the Environmental Evaluation, and/or the Record of Decisions, as appropriate.
- Note that a similar reasoning and procedure may be used for other water quality degradation concerns where using the predominant soil for planning may not assess a significant risk of the transport of pesticides, pathogens, and sediments to surface water.