

United States Department of Agriculture



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
339 Busch's Frontage Road, Suite 301  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Phone: 410-757-0861  
FAX: 410-757-0687  
www.md.nrcs.usda.gov

August 27, 2004

NATIONAL PLANNING PROCEDURES HANDBOOK (NPPH)  
180-VI  
AMENDMENT MD2 (Part 600.6, Exhibits)

Purpose. To distribute the revised Environmental Evaluation Checklist (MD-CPA-052) and instructions for use in Maryland.

Effective Date. Upon receipt.

Explanation. This Maryland amendment to the NPPH transmits the revised MD-CPA-052 (rev. 03-01-04) and its instructions.

For your convenience, we have incorporated these revised documents and the previously issued Maryland Resource Inventory Worksheets (MD-RES-001) and instructions into the latest version of the National Planning Procedures Handbook. National Amendment 4, dated March 2003, is a complete revision of the handbook.

Filing Instructions. File this amendment notice (green sheet) in the front of the NPPH.

Discard the previously issued version of the NPPH (Amendment 3) and replace it with Amendment 4, which includes the Maryland documents in Part 600.6.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark A. Waggoner", written over a horizontal line.

MARK A. WAGGONER  
State Resource Conservationist

Attachment

DIST: NPPH

## MARYLAND ENVIRONMENTAL EVALUATION CHECKLIST

### Background

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to evaluate the potential effects of their activities and programs on the quality of the human environment. The "human environment" includes natural resources (such as soil, water, air, plants, and animals), plus cultural resources and social and economic considerations. Although NEPA is concerned about all types of effects (both positive and negative), it is especially intended to help decisionmakers identify significant adverse impacts and avoid, minimize, or mitigate them.

During conservation planning, NRCS uses an environmental evaluation process to assess potential beneficial and adverse impacts of conservation practices, systems, or other activities that a client wants to implement. The amount of documentation that is required is based on the type, size, and complexity of the proposed project. It is not intended that many hours be spent documenting projects that have overall beneficial effects with little or no adverse effects.

### Instructions

The Maryland Environmental Evaluation (EE) Checklist, MD-CPA-052, provides a basic framework for documenting effects on resources and concerns that are important in Maryland. Use the EE Checklist to briefly describe the proposed conservation practices, systems, or other activities that may be implemented. Then summarize any resource concerns that you identified during the planning process, and document the effects of proposed actions on the various natural resources, cultural resources, and social and economic concerns.

For on-farm conservation planning, complete at least one EE Checklist for each new conservation plan (or plan revision) containing practices or activities that involve clearing, earthmoving, grading, shaping, filling, etc. Land-disturbing activities have the highest potential for significant adverse effects, especially during the construction phase. Generally, plans that contain engineering practices will require completion of an EE Checklist. Evaluate the effects of each plan as a whole, while keeping in mind the effects of individual practices or systems. If desired, you may use more than one EE Checklist per plan if the plan contains many different land uses, conservation practices, or conservation systems. For example, you could use one EE Checklist to document the effects of a pasture management system, and another EE Checklist to document the effects of a cropland management system on the same farm.

You may also use the EE Checklist to document the effects of a plan that includes only vegetative or management practices, such as conservation crop rotation, contour farming, filter strips, nutrient management, and riparian buffers. These are practices that don't involve land disturbance below an already disturbed plow zone, and are usually less likely to have adverse environmental effects. Caution: Be aware that significant changes in vegetative cover (such as from pastured wetland to wooded wetland) can adversely affect some protected resources (e.g., bog turtles). You must complete an EE Checklist if you know that protected resources are present on a property and could be affected by proposed practices, systems, or other activities.

Important Note: Cost-sharing programs and other funding sources may require more extensive use of the EE Checklist than described above. Check with the appropriate Program Manager for specific documentation requirements.

## 1. Part A, Resource Concerns.

- a. Summarize whether any natural resource concerns were identified during the planning process. Check (✓) the appropriate boxes.
- b. Note whether the planned treatment or activity meets the Quality Criteria for natural resources, again by checking the appropriate boxes. Quality Criteria are described in Section III-A of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).
- c. Use the "Comments" lines to add further explanation, if needed. If the planned treatment or activity will not meet the minimum Quality Criteria, briefly explain why in the space provided.

## 2. Part B, Protected Resources.

- a. Evaluate the effects of the proposed conservation practices, systems, or activities on significant natural and cultural resources. These are resources that occur within the work zone or are close enough to be affected by the proposed project.
- b. Check (✓) the available sources of information that were used, whether the resource is present or absent, and the probable effects of the proposed practices, systems, or activities on each resource. If you know that mitigation will be needed (for example, wetland mitigation) and the client has agreed to implement it, then evaluate the project's overall effect with mitigation included.
- c. You do not need to use every source of information that is listed in the EE Checklist. Some sources may be more useful than others, depending on the type of project you are working on and the quality of available data. Select the data sources that are best suited for your project.
- d. If a resource never occurs in an area (for example, if the county you are working in has no tidal waters and therefore cannot have a Maryland Critical Area or Coastal Zone Management Area), then just check the "Absent" box for that resource and go the next resource. There is no need to check any information sources for that item.
- e. As appropriate, indicate whether the proposed practices, systems, or activities are likely to need permits or approvals from regulatory agencies. Attach additional documentation as needed.
- f. Additional instructions for Item 1 (Waters of the State/United States): If regulated waters are present, check the water "use" category as listed by MDE (e.g., Use I, II, III, or IV).
- g. Additional instructions for Items 6 (Coastal Zone Management Area) and 8 (Prime Farmland): For on-farm conservation planning, you can skip evaluating these items if the proposed project consists only of implementing Best Management Practices. The use of Best Management Practices is consistent with state and federal policies for protecting these resources, and the effects on the Coastal Zone and Prime Farmland should always be beneficial.

### 3. Part C, Other Environmental Considerations.

Are you aware of other important environmental factors, safety issues, or legal constraints that could affect or be affected by the proposed practices, systems, or activities? If so, check (✓) "Yes" and briefly explain.

### 4. Part D, Public Interest and Social Concerns.

Are you aware of any social, economic, or other special concerns that relate to the proposed practices, systems, or activities? Will minority or low-income communities be adversely affected? (This is a federal "Environmental Justice" concern.) If you answer "Yes" to either of these questions, briefly explain.

### 5. Part E, Alternatives.

Sometimes a proposed conservation practice, system, or activity will have significant adverse effects on natural and cultural resources, and/or on social, economic, or other special concerns. Based on your answers in Parts A–D of the EE Checklist, will alternatives to the proposed practices, systems, or activities have to be considered in order to avoid or minimize significant adverse effects? If so, check (✓) "Yes" and briefly explain the other alternatives (including the "no project" option) and their effects. Attach additional sheets if you need more space.

### 6. Part F, Conclusion.

- a. Check (✓) the appropriate box to summarize the results of the environmental evaluation. If the proposed conservation practice, system, or activity will have no significant adverse effects on the environment, or if any significant adverse effects will be mitigated as part of the project, then check the "No adverse effects" box.
- b. If the project will have significant adverse effects that cannot or will not be mitigated, sufficiently minimized, or avoided, then check the "Adverse effects" box. Contact the Maryland NRCS State Biologist for guidance concerning additional environmental compliance and documentation requirements.
- c. The person who prepared the EE Checklist will sign and date the document in the spaces provided. The preparer's signature indicates that he/she used the best available information when preparing the document and arriving at a conclusion.
- d. For NRCS programs, NRCS is the Responsible Federal Agency for NEPA compliance. The Responsible Federal Official (in a field office, this is the District Conservationist) must sign the EE Checklist in the Responsible Federal Agency box unless he/she has already signed the form as the Preparer.
- e. When NRCS is providing technical assistance for FSA programs (e.g., for CRP), FSA will sign the NRCS EE Checklist as the Responsible Federal Agency.
- f. File the completed EE Checklist in the case file to provide supporting documentation for the conservation plan, and for future reference when working with the client.





B. PROTECTED RESOURCES (Continued)	Resource is:		Effect is:			Permits or approvals needed?	
	Present	Absent	Beneficial	Adverse	None	Yes	No
<p><b>8. PRIME FARMLAND</b> Land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. Identified by soil survey map units that meet these requirements. Federal projects should not cause unnecessary and irreversible conversion of prime farmland to nonagricultural uses.</p> <p>Information source(s) used:  <input type="checkbox"/> NRCS Maryland Field Office Technical Guide - Cropland interpretations  <input type="checkbox"/> Soil maps  <input type="checkbox"/> Field investigations <input type="checkbox"/> Other sources (describe):</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p><b>9. ARCHEOLOGICAL/ HISTORICAL SITE</b> A significant resource that is listed on, or eligible for listing on, the National Register of Historic Places.</p> <p>Information source(s) used:  <input type="checkbox"/> NRCS Maryland Field Office Technical Guide - Cultural Resources Information, National Register County Lists  <input type="checkbox"/> Landowner/landuser information  <input type="checkbox"/> Consultation with Maryland Historical Trust  <input type="checkbox"/> Field inspection for surface artifacts (describe field conditions):</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other sources (describe):</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<p><b>C. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS</b> Are you aware of other important factors that could affect (or be affected) by the proposed practices, systems, or activities? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Consider the presence of dump sites, hazardous materials, public or private pipelines, transmission lines, access roads, easements, or other legal restrictions. If "Yes," please explain.</p>							
<p><b>D. PUBLIC INTEREST AND SOCIAL CONCERNS</b> Are you aware of any social, economic, or other special concerns that relate to the proposed practices, systems, or activities? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Will there be any adverse effects on minority or low-income communities? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If you answer "Yes" to either of these questions, please explain.</p>							
<p><b>E. ALTERNATIVES</b> Will alternatives to the proposed practices, systems, or activities have to be considered in order to avoid or minimize significant adverse effects on natural and cultural resources, and/or on social, economic, or other special concerns? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No If "Yes," briefly explain here, or attach a separate page describing other alternatives (including "no project") and the effects of each alternative.</p>							
<p><b>F. CONCLUSION</b> Check <u>one</u> of the following boxes to summarize the results of this environmental evaluation:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>No Adverse Effects:</b> The proposed conservation practices, systems, or activities have been planned in accordance with NRCS policy, including compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations. <b>There will be no significant adverse effects</b> on the quality of the environment (or significant adverse effects, if any, will be mitigated). To the best of my knowledge, no further environmental analysis is needed. The client has been informed that he/she is responsible for obtaining any needed permits or approvals from federal, state, or local government agencies before any work is performed.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Adverse Effects:</b> The proposed conservation practices, systems, or activities <b>will have significant adverse effects</b> that cannot be mitigated, sufficiently minimized, or avoided. Additional documentation for environmental compliance, such as preparation of an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement may be required. Contact the Maryland NRCS State Biologist for additional guidance.</p>							
<p><i>This MD-CPA-052 has been prepared based on the best available information, and is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.</i></p>							
Signature of Preparer			Title & Agency/Company			Date	
<p>Responsible Federal Official (if not the same as Preparer) in NRCS or other federal agency responsible for NEPA compliance has reviewed this document and concurs with the above findings.</p>							
Signature of Responsible Federal Agency			Title & Agency			Date	