

Idaho Supplement: General Manual Title 180 – Conservation Planning and Application –
Part 409 – Conservation Planning Policy

**ID 409.9 – Minimum Criteria to Achieve an NRCS Certified Conservation Planner
Designation in Idaho**

The following provides policy for NRCS Certification of Conservation Planners in Idaho.

- (a) Minimum conservation planning standards for NRCS and other providers of NRCS-related conservation planning for USDA-related assistance.
- (b) New NRCS employees with responsibility for conservation planning identified in their position description must become certified as a Basic Planner **within one year of completing the Idaho Conservation Planning Course and/or National Employee Development Center (NEDC) Boot Camp**. As a new employee works toward Basic Planner certification, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to provide on-the-job training in policy, procedures, and Resource Management System (RMS) planning.
- (c) Basic Planner certification enables the planner to assist clients in development of conservation plans and application of conservation systems. New NRCS employees who do not have Basic Planner certification can plan only under the direction of their supervisor. Conservation partnership employees and technical service providers who are providing planning assistance to land users for the purpose of NRCS program participation are required to have Basic Planner certification before providing planning assistance to NRCS clients.
- (d) Requirements to **obtain** Basic Planner certification:
 - 1) Self-paced AgLearn Conservation Planning Course Part 1.
 - 2) Completion of the Idaho Conservation Planning Course and/or the NEDC Boot Camp (at the discretion of the Area Conservationist).
 - 3) Completion of one conservation plan for a conservation planning unit (CMU) that contains multiple resource concerns and supporting documentation. When the conservation plan is at the progressive level a RMS alternative will be developed. Reference to an Idaho Department of Lands forestry plan or Conservation System Guide for the supporting documentation will not be accepted. The case file must include management plans, job sheets, and/or specifications for all planned practices (e.g., irrigation water management plan, pest management job sheet, fence specification, etc.). The Area Resource Conservationist (ARC) will review the conservation plan and supporting documentation.
 - i. The ARC will observe the planner in the field and evaluate the planner's involvement with the decision-maker (landowner or land operator) in the planning process, including adequately addressing all resource concerns associated with the CMU.
 - ii. Conservation plans that do not demonstrate the planner's use of the planning process will be returned to the planner, who must make corrections and re-submit the plan for review.

- iii. Planners who do not satisfactorily correct the plan after the first review must make additional changes as directed by the ARC and develop a second conservation plan for review and satisfactory completion.
- 4) Candidates for Basic Planner certification are responsible for submitting their plan and documentation in a timely manner to ensure that review and corrections can be completed within the certification period.
- (e) **Within one year** of receiving Basic Planner certification, NRCS employees with primary planning responsibility (i.e., GS-8 Soil Conservation Technicians; Soil, Range, and District Conservationists) must obtain Master Planner certification. Basic Planners without primary planning responsibility can receive Master Planner certification by completing the Master Planner certification requirements. Master Planners exemplify the spirit and intent of conservation planning by demonstrating knowledge of planning procedures for soil, water, air, plant, animal, energy, and human (SWAPAE+H) resource problems and RMS alternatives to solve those problems. They understand when an interdisciplinary planning approach is needed, and they can provide guidance/training to Basic Planners and non-certified new employees in the planning process.
- (f) Requirements to **obtain** Master Planner certification:
 - 1) Certification as a Basic Planner.
 - 2) Completion of two conservation plans on different land uses that contain multiple resource concerns with supporting documentation. When the conservation plan is at the progressive level, a RMS alternative will be developed. Reference to an Idaho Department of Lands forestry plan or Conservation System Guide for the supporting documentation will not be accepted. The case file must include management plans, job sheets, and/or specifications for all planned practices (i.e., irrigation water management plan, pest management job sheet, fence specification, etc.). Conservation plans and supporting documentation will be reviewed by the Technical Services Staff.
 - i. Conservation plans that do not demonstrate the planner's use of the planning process will be returned to the planner, who must make corrections and re-submit the plan for review.
 - ii. Planners who do not satisfactorily correct the plan after the first review must make additional changes as directed by the reviewer and develop a second conservation plan for review and satisfactory completion.
 - 3) Candidates for Master Planner certification are responsible for submitting their plan and documentation in a timely manner to ensure that review and corrections can be completed within the certification period.
- (g) Requirements to **maintain** Basic Planner certification:
 - 1) Annually develop conservation plans following NRCS planning policy and NPPH procedures and guidelines.
 - 2) Conservation plans are subject to annual review by Area and/or State Specialists during normal field office visits.

- 3) Every three years arrange for a Master Planner to conduct a detailed review of a conservation plan developed by the Basic Planner.
 - i. Conservation plans that do not meet planning procedures will be returned to the planner for corrections and re-submission for review.
 - ii. The Master Planner will certify to the ARC that the plan meets planning policy.
- (h) Requirements to **maintain** Master Planner certification:
 - 1) Annually develop conservation plans following NRCS planning policy and NPPH procedures and guidelines.
 - 2) Conservation plans are subject to annual review by Area and/or State Specialists during normal field office visits.
 - 3) Every three years arrange for the ARC to conduct a detailed review of a conservation plan developed by the Master Planner.
 - i. Conservation plans that do not meet planning procedures will be returned to the planner for corrections and re-submission for review.
- (i) Prior-service employees of NRCS, a Soil and Water Conservation District, or the Soil Conservation Commission.
 - 1) Returning NRCS, Soil and Water Conservation District, and Soil Conservation Commission employees who have resigned or retired may retain their planner certification (Basic or Master) status for one year without re-certification.
 - i. After one year, returning employees must meet certification as described above for Basic and Master Planner.
- (j) NRCS employees with planner certification from a state other than Idaho.
 - 1) NRCS employees hired from outside of Idaho whose position required planner certification must, within one year of employment, submit one conservation plan with supporting documentation for review. Reference to an Idaho Department of Lands forestry plan or Conservation System Guide for the supporting documentation will not be accepted.
- (k) Plans submitted for Basic Planner certification will be directed to the ARC for review and approval.
- (l) Plans submitted for Master Planner certification will be directed to the Technical Services Staff for review and approval.
 - 1) Individual planners must be listed by NRCS as being a “Certified” Conservation Planner. The State Conservationist will develop and maintain the list for Idaho.
 - 2) All NRCS employees with conservation plan responsibility will be required to complete the NEDC Environmental Compliance for Conservation Assistance (EC Level 1) course and three AgLearn courses: (1) Air Quality, Climate Change and Energy, (2) Why Do We Care About Energy, and (3) Energy Basics. New NRCS employees will be required to complete these courses within one year of employment.
- (m) Training

- 1) Certified conservation planners are responsible for keeping and maintaining their own Individual Development Plan (IDP) to reflect needed and completed conservation planning training to maintain or increase their proficiency level. Planners should review and update their IDP annually.
- 2) NRCS will provide conservation planning and other technical training on an ongoing basis.

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