

Key Insights into Conservation Planning

- In 1947, Hugh Hammond Bennett identified the principles of conservation planning in his text, “*Elements of Soil Conservation.*”

According to Bennett, an effective conservation planner must adhere to the following principles:

- Consider the needs and capabilities of each acre within the plan
 - Consider the farmer’s facilities, machinery, and economic situation
 - Incorporate the farmer’s willingness to try new practices
 - Consider the land’s relationship to the entire farm, ranch, or watershed
 - Ensure the conservationist’s presence out on the land
- Conservation planning is a natural resource problem solving and management process, which integrates economic, social, and ecological considerations to meet private and public needs.
 - Planning involves more than just considering individual resources. It focuses on the natural systems and ecological processes that sustain the resources.
 - This process considers people and the resources they use or manage and enables clients and planners to analyze and work with complex natural processes in definable and measurable terms through a “nine step, three phase framework.”
 - Conservation planning helps clients, planners, and others view the environment as a living system of which humans are an integral part.
 - Conservation planning emphasizes desired future conditions by and for a client in an individual conservation plan. But it can also entail areawide conservation plan or assessment that encompasses a watershed or other defined area and includes a client and multiple stakeholders.
 - Conservation planners strive to balance natural resource issues with economic and social needs through the development of resource management systems (RMS). This type of planning is complex and dynamic.
 - The planning process is based on the premise that clients will make and implement sound decisions if they understand their resources and the effects of their decisions, as well as natural resource problems and opportunities present on the land. This approach helps improve natural resource management, minimize conflict, and address problems and opportunities.
 - Successful planning requires not only a high level of knowledge, skills, and abilities on the part of the planner, but also the exercise of professional judgment.
 - Ultimately, the success of the conservation planning and implementation process as a whole depends on the voluntary participation of clients.



Conservation Planning Glossary

- **Conservation planning** - Conservation planning is a natural resource problem solving and management process. The process integrates economic, social (cultural resources are included with social), and ecological considerations to meet private and public needs. This approach, which emphasizes desired future conditions, helps improve natural resource management, minimize conflict, and address problems and opportunities.
- **Conservation plan** - A conservation plan identifies the customer's conservation objectives and assesses and analyzes the natural resources issues on that customer's land related to soil, water, animals, plants, air, energy, and human interaction. The plan offers alternatives, documents decisions, records progress and tracks successful completion of conservation practices and systems. It helps provide guidance and direction for continued maintenance of conservation systems once established. The conservation plan includes tools and resources customized specifically for each customer, like a land use map, soils information, photos, inventory of resources, economic costs and benefits, schedule of recommended practices, maintenance schedules, and engineering notes — all based on the producer's goals and the resource needs. The plan is written in a clear, step-by-step format that meets each individual customer's needs. Customers choose options that suit their circumstances and time schedule. The conservation planning process is a collaboration between the conservation planner and the customer. Conservation planners are there every step of the way to assist customers with implementation as needed.
- **Land use** - Cropland, forestland, pastureland, and rangeland comprise the major land uses in the United States and the land uses receiving the majority of the conservation treatment that address our soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources.
- **Land use modifier** - Modifiers provide another level of specificity and help denote what the land is managed for. The modifiers are: Irrigated, Wildlife, Grazed, Drained, Organic, Water Feature, Protected, Hayed, Urban.
- **Conservation or land management unit (CMU/LMU)** - A field, group of fields, or other land units of the same land use and having similar treatment needs and planned management. A CMU is a grouping by the planner to simplify planning activities and facilitate development of conservation management systems.
- **Resource concern** - A resource concern is the resource condition that does not meet minimum acceptable condition levels as established by resource planning criteria shown in a state's [Field Office Technical Guide \(FOTG\)](#), Section III. This implies an expected degradation of [the soil, water, air, plant, animal, or energy \(i.e. "SWAPA + HE"\) resource base](#) to the extent that the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired.
- **Technical guides** - Technical guides are the primary scientific references for the NRCS. They contain technical information about the conservation of soil, water, air, and related plant and animal resources in the FOTG for each state.
- **Planning / quality criteria** – Planning / quality criteria are quantitative or qualitative statements of the minimum level of treatment required to address a given resource concern. Planning criteria are established for all NRCS resource concerns and may be assessed using specific tools and technical guides or through client input and planner observation as listed in this document.
- **Conservation practice standard (i.e. conservation practice, practice, best management practice, BMP, conservation activity, project)** - A conservation practice standard contains information on why and where the practice is applied, and it sets forth the minimum quality criteria that must be met during the application of that practice in order for it to achieve its intended purpose(s). See the list below of conservation practices NRCS recognizes nationwide. Each standard is adapted on a state level.
- **Enhancement** – An enhancement is a conservation activity used to treat natural resources and improve conservation performance. Enhancements are designed to maintain or exceed the quality criteria, or stewardship level, for the resource concern
- **Bundle** - CSP applicants who want to increase their conservation stewardship even further may consider "bundles" of enhancement activities. Some enhancements work together to provide increased conservation benefits when they are implemented as a group. Producers may consider adopting these enhancement groups or "bundles" on their operation. Each bundle has three or more required enhancements, and for some bundles, the applicant has the option to pick additional enhancements from a select list that addresses specific resource concerns. Bundles have enhancements grouped according to land use – crop, pasture, range and forest, as well as agency initiatives such as Long Leaf Pine, Mississippi River Basin, Buffers, and Working Lands for Wildlife. Bundles receive a higher level of financial assistance to encourage the holistic approach to generate additional conservation benefits.