



National Conservation Planning Partnership

February 2019



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**



National Association of
Conservation Districts



NCDEA
National Conservation District
Employees Association



What is NCPP

- ▶ The National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCPP) represents the efforts of five key national conservation partners to reinvigorate conservation planning.



NCPP Partners

- ▶ Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
- ▶ National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD)
- ▶ National Association of State Conservation Agencies (NASCA)
- ▶ National Conservation District Employees Association (NCDEA)
- ▶ National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils (NARC&DC)



NCPP's Purpose

- ▶ To reinvigorate conservation planning by enhancing and strengthening the planning process and our partnership workforce.



NCPP Goals

- ▶ *Reinvigorate conservation planning*
- ▶ *Improve the partnership's capacity to deliver one-on-one conservation planning assistance*
- ▶ *Ensure the delivery of voluntary, science-based assistance*
- ▶ *Build and sustain a workforce of strong conservation planners across the partnership*



What Does NCPP Mean For You?

- ▶ Highly skilled and trained workforce
- ▶ Development of new tools and technology
- ▶ Ability to provide improved customer service
- ▶ An enhanced, united workforce for conservation
- ▶ The delivery of voluntary, science-based technical assistance



2018 Listening Sessions

- ▶ Eight Listening Sessions have been completed in the following states:
 - ▶ Indiana
 - ▶ Minnesota
 - ▶ Texas
 - ▶ Washington State
 - ▶ New York
 - ▶ Nebraska
 - ▶ North Carolina
 - ▶ Wyoming
- ▶ The purpose of the listening sessions is to share in-depth details on the status of conservation planning and its future and to hear feedback from all.

What We Achieved

- ▶ Eight diverse sessions conducted
- ▶ NRCS employees, partnership employees, state conservation partnership leaders, conservation district supervisors, volunteers, and agricultural producers participated
- ▶ Over 1,035 participants (in-person and on-line)
- ▶ Feedback was received verbally, written and electronically

HUGH HAMMOND BENNETT AWARD - NEW CATEGORY

- ▶ We established a new conservation planner category as part of the Hugh Hammond Bennett Award for Conservation Excellence. This award that was rolled out last year in honor of our founding father and as a way to recognize individuals who have exemplified outstanding service through development and implementation of sound conservation planning. Awards will be presented at the 2019 National NACD Conference in February.

NCPP WEBSITE AND COMMUNICATIONS

- ▶ NCPP leaders have identified a need to have a centralized location for information for our internal and external customers, as well as our partners, so we have begun efforts to build a website that will house many resources for planners and that will direct customers to the appropriate on-line assistance, such as farmers.gov. We are also looking at more efficient ways to communicate NCPP updates directly with employees and members without having to rely on each partner to forward information.

CONSERVATION PLANNING CERTIFICATION POLICY REVISIONS

The NRCS Conservation Planning Certification Policy that was released a year ago was revised in October of 2018 to clarify and fine-tune certification requirements.

<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/42771.wba>. Changes include:

- The Technical Specialist Planner was added to the section of the three primary designations, so it is no longer a separate section.
- The policy clarifies who is required to have planner designations:
- NRCS employees with conservation planning as a major duty included in their official position description.
- Partner organization or agency employees acting on behalf of NRCS and independently assisting customers through the nine-step conservation planning process for developing RMS or progressive conservation plans for NRCS conservation programs
- Other NRCS or partner employees, Tribal members or employees, or private sector service providers (including TSPs) may be designated any of the four planner roles based on agency need and approval by the State Conservationist.
- Clarification was provided for electronic signing of plans.
- Partner or private sector conservation planner (including TSPs) candidates will not be required to complete Conservation Planning Business Tools training if they do not have access to the appropriate NRCS conservation planning application.
- Training requirements for each planner designation and planning entity were modified, moved and/or further described.

TOOLS

- ▶ NRCS continues to move forward with development of the web-based planning and contracting software, Conservation Desktop. Conservation Desktop integrates a number of independent systems such as Conservation Client Gateway, Document Management System (DMS), as well as Customer Service Toolkit, and ProTracts.

- ▶ Conservation Desktop is now available with some functionality. Training for staff and partners has been initiated in many states and will continue as new versions with added features are released in 2019. Version 2.2 is planned for release in March or April of 2019 with the following functions:
 - Create and edit practices
 - Create conservation plan (record of decision) and plan maps
 - Request assistance for plans, site visits, or brief technical assistance
 - Manage state and local geospatial data
 - Manage state and service center cost lists
 - Manage document templates
 - Import Legacy Toolkit files to DMS
 - Enter non-USDA client information

TOOLS CONT.

A late summer 2019 toolkit replacement release (Version 2.3) is planned that will allow planners to:

- Generate soils maps and reports
- Create agreement items and submit to ProTracts
- Create schedule of operations 1155/1156
- Use GIS Tools - import/export shapefiles and easement tools
- Access integrated Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) information

NEW PARTNERS

- ▶ Conservation planning and its numerous benefits are of interest to many of our agricultural and conservation partners and affiliates and they are watching our progress with interest. NCPP leaders are currently discussing a strategy that will allow us to include a variety of public and private partners in future NCPP efforts, especially in outreach to our common constituents. Watch for more in the near future.
- ▶ We encourage you to continue to meet with your state's conservation partners and affiliates to discuss NCPP and how best to accomplish sound conservation planning. Please share this information with your employees and members to help us keep the communications channels open as we work together to provide high quality customer service for America's private landowners.

Summary of Recommendations

- ▶ **Communications.** Use clear and consistent messaging and guidance to improve internal communications.
- ▶ **Apply transparent, common-sense methodologies that are customer friendly.** Develop and support business tools that can be tailored to the locally established customer priorities. This in addition to a simplified access point, will reduce duplication and increase engagement to allow for expansion of technology that will improve the conservation planning process and address natural resource concerns.
- ▶ **Streamlining of current program policy to increase workload efficiencies.** Review and update policy to ensure ranking criteria is consistent with statutory requirements established for financial assistance programs. Improve the internal processes for programmatic decisions to increase program efficiency and quality assurance with the certainty our customers deserve and respect.

Summary of Recommendations

- ▶ **Training.** Expand the training options for delivering national, regional and state based training that will provide more realistic levels of training needed for NCPP employees and other participants, to ensure that we are able to address the producers' needs.
- ▶ **Field employees receive clear messaging of benefits of conservation planning implementation.** Use Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) or other modeling methods to communicate and quantify benefits and outcomes to help customers (internal and external alike) better understand the effectiveness of conservation practices. This in addition to a simplified planning process will increase customer engagement and allow for the continuous adoption of a conservation plan.



NCPP – Our Journey

Planning for Tomorrow. Together.

MOU Signed

- Conservation partners agree to work together to emphasize the critical role planning plays in voluntary conservation

Work Begins

- Bootcamp training for 350 partnership staff
- 250 new NRCS field staff hired
- Survey of employees and customers

Certification Policy Revised

- NRCS Planning Certification Policy revised
- Certification training needs identified
- *What Works in the Field* series

Work Continues

- Staff and Partner *Listening Sessions*
- Conservation Desktop
- Conservation Plan of the Future

Public Marketing

- Major marketing campaign
- Continued integration of tools and technology to streamline processes and create efficiencies for users

GOAL

A fully staffed team of trained conservation planners nationwide

2015

2016

2017

2018

FUTURE



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**



National Association of
Conservation Districts



Thank You!

USDA and its partners are equal opportunity providers, employers and lenders.