

National Conservation Planning Partnership

Roadmap to Conservation Planning



Conservation Planning for the Future

American farmers and ranchers are faced with a seemingly impossible task today — to sustainably feed a rapidly growing global population and ensure food security on an ever decreasing number of farmable acres. They must do this while still providing clean water, wildlife habitat, and other ecosystem services that agricultural lands provide for society. And, at the same time, they face annual market uncertainty and small profit margins that challenge their ability to keep operating as family businesses in rural America.

More than ever before, the vitality of American agriculture, grazing lands, and privately owned forests relies on sound, state-of-the-art, science-based information delivered to landowners through modern software, tools, and highly trained technical specialists. As conservationists, we recognize the importance of this one-on-one personalized advice and planning assistance.

For this reason, the National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP) was formed to emphasize the critical role better planning plays in advancing voluntary conservation efforts on private lands and enhancing conservation delivery to our customers.

Our Goals

NCP has four overarching objectives:

1. Reinvigorate conservation planning;
2. Improve the partnership’s capacity to deliver one-on-one conservation planning assistance;
3. Ensure the delivery of voluntary, science-based assistance;
4. Build and sustain a workforce of strong conservation planners.

We are Working to Address Your Needs

We have been working with the help of four subcommittees to ensure we are meeting our customers’ expectations for the challenges ahead for conservation and agriculture.

- Communication and Messaging
- Partnership and Leveraging Capacity
- Training, Certification, Technical Processes and Tools
- Performance, Goals, Outcomes and Accountability

What is NCPP?

The National Conservation Planning Partnership (NCP) represents the efforts of five key national conservation partners to reinvigorate conservation planning by enhancing and strengthening the effectiveness of planning and our partnership workforce.

In 2015, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the National Association of Conservation Districts, the National Association of State Conservation Agencies, the National Conservation District Employees Association, and the National Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils signed a memorandum of understanding to bring our staff and members’ greatest skills, strengths, and passion to this endeavor.

As NCP efforts grow, we are looking to expand the partnership to leverage all of the possible resources in the conservation planning arena.



Below are a few of our accomplishments to date:

Communication and Messaging Efforts

- Internal NCPP publication developed and distributed to explain our purpose and goals.
- New NCPP logo and communications plan developed to brand and deliver our collaborative efforts.
- FAQ publication for new policy roll-out developed and distributed to states.
- Completed survey of employees, partners and landowners to identify training and marketing needs.
- Redesigned conservation planning folders featuring (cropland, rangeland, animal husbandry, specialty crop).
- Developed #FridaysOnTheFarm stories, highlighting farmers that have benefited from conservation planning.
- Completed five of eight planned listening sessions to enhance the customer experience.
- National Conservation Planning Symposium was held in conjunction with HHB facility opening in Lincoln, NE. **Technology**

Access and Improvements

- Implementation of Document Management System, to streamline the management of financial assistance contracts.
- National Conservation Planner Database developed with ~7,200 planners inputted, including 1,600 partners.
- Roll-out and expansion of the Conservation Client Gateway for land-users and business entities.
- Customer Service Toolkit updates that increase user productivity.
- Testing of Conservation Desktop was completed with over 100 participants including a few partner participants.
- States have appointed POCs that will lead work on current and future Conservation Desktop activities.
- Delivered a nationwide integrated CDSI training to staff and partners.
- CPTAD and partner leaders identifying strategies to refine partner planner data in the conservation planner database.
- Roll-out of release of Conservation Desktop, train-the-trainer sessions, and user testing with over 100 participants.

Training Access and Opportunities

- Delivered Conservation Boot Camp employee development training to 112 District employees and 150 NRCS.
- Reduced costs by promoting state-led or regionally customizing Conservation Boot Camp training.
- CPTAD has partnered with the Support Centers to coordinate training development/curriculum and address training needs.
- Updated policy with new conservation planner role designations and training requirements. (January 26, 2017).
- Development of web-based training is ongoing and will be provided for all employees and conservation partners alike.
- States and centers proposed “conservation plans of the future” in response to customer feedback.
- Policy Circular issued providing guidance on approval of state sponsored courses and equivalent courses for soil health.
- National Instructions were issued for providing partner access to AgLearn.
- Workshops were held to assist states with updating their state supplements for conservation planner certification.
- Agreement executed with University of Wisconsin to develop training for states to use in implementing CP policy.
- Agreements with ASA, ASWM, SRM executed to develop training for planners and engage professional societies and orgs.

Process Improvements and Resource Leveraging

- Collaborating with private sector partners who can provide precision agriculture and economic data for producers.
- Developed core competencies for job approval authorities, alleviating concerns for employee KSAs.
- Program support specialists and assistants to assist field offices with ProTracts, FundMgr, and FATracker and related tasks.
- Hired 250 additional field level technical staff to strengthen the certified conservation planning cadre in high workload areas.
- Agreement with NACD to provide additional CTA in urban small farmers and organic and specialty crop growers.
- Agreement with NARC&DC to demonstrate the high tunnel conservation practice for Tribal communities.
- Completion of job approval authority review.
- Established Partner Advisory Committee to gather input from partners on implementation of the CP Policy.

NCPP's next steps are to:

- Continue implementation of the new Conservation Planning Certification Policy and Procedures.
- Continue revision of Conservation Planning Modules 1-8 and Area Wide Conservation Planning.
- Continue work converting the Economics of Conservation Planning training to an online format.
- Pilot Conservation Planner Internship Framework in FY19.
- Develop proficiency exams for conservation planner designations to efficiently prioritize resources.
- Enter into more agreements with professional organizations to increase availability of specialized continuing ed courses.
- Expand NCP database to include a geospatial mapping tool and portal to allow states to enter and manage data effectively.
- Integrate RSET and other technical tools and Client Gateway into Conservation Desktop for 2018 release.
- Develop a streamlined approach for conservation practice standards.
- Finalize resource concerns, improve screening and assessments to create efficiencies, while maintaining technical integrity