



Conservation Planner Designation Policy

Iowa NRCS webinar

7-20-2017



Conservation Planning Policy

- ▶ 180-409-GM, 1st Ed, Amend 40, Jan 26 -2017
- ▶ All planners that were considered by their state as Certified Planners on or before 1/26/17 are considered Certified Planners.
- ▶ Anyone not considered a Certified Planner by that date will follow the new policy requirements.
- ▶ Certified Planners will have until 2/24/20 to complete new criteria.



Conservation Planner Role Designations

- **Apprentice Conservation Planner Role**
- **Certified Conservation Planner Role**
- **Master Certified Conservation Planner Role**
- **Technical Specialist Planner**, *under Subset of Conservation Planning Roles in policy*

**you can hold one Conservation Planner Role designation but you can hold other technical specialists designations.*



Subsets of Conservation Planning Roles include:

- ▶ CNMP Planner
 - *Will need to determine what this will look like for Iowa*
- ▶ Certified Specialist in Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
 - *Planners will need to be an IPM Specialist to approve 595 practices*
 - *Certified Planners will need to meet additional requirements for this subset role*
- ▶ States can add additional subsets




Apprentice Conservation Planner Role

- ▶ intended for new planners or for a position that does not require independently carrying out all phases of the 9-step planning process as a major part of its duties.
- ▶ not authorized to sign conservation plans or Block P of the CPA-52.
- ▶ can be active in the planning process
- ▶ Conservation technicians, 1 year soil conservationists, partner planners and others in consultation with their supervisor. Employees in consultation with their supervisor can achieve a higher planner role to meet their career goals.



Certified Conservation Planner Role

- ▶ is required of all NRCS employees who independently carry out all phases of the 9-step planning process as a major duty of their position.
- ▶ may approve or disapprove apprentice planners' work & signs conservation plans to indicate the plan meets client objectives & NRCS policy, procedures, and conservation practice standards.
- ▶ can sign the CPA-52 in Block P
- ▶ District conservationists, experienced soil conservationists, resource conservationists (*field*) and others in consultation with their supervisor.




Master Certified Conservation Planner Role

- ▶ in addition to Certified Conservation Planner Role:
 - ▶ leads in areawide conservation planning efforts or provides significant contribution to those efforts
 - ▶ leads in conservation planning training efforts
 - ▶ leads in quality control reviews & spot checks
- ▶ some of the needed requirements include:
 - ▶ Areawide conservation planning course
 - ▶ participates in (2) State QARs
 - ▶ assists with (2) State conservation planning training sessions
 - ▶ completes or significantly involved in an Areawide Conservation Plan



Technical Specialist Planner

- ▶ **Targeted to area & statewide technical assistance positions**
- ▶ Some of the requirements include:
 - ▶ Complete required apprentice planner training
 - ▶ modules 6-8
 - ▶ module 9 (*related to their area of expertise*)
- ▶ State Conservationists determine which positions should use the designation
- ▶ Provides technical assistance, technical guidance, & training to conservation planners (*related to their field of expertise*)
- ▶ Performs QARs & spot checks (*related to their field of expertise*) state
- ▶ In Iowa these positions include: state & area technical positions



Review requirements for each Planner Role

- ▶ Handout: attachment B to NB-180-17-2 CPA



National Certified Conservation Planner Database

- Each state populates the Access database for all Conservation Planner Roles & *subsets* of Conservation Planner Roles for NRCS & Partner employees.
- Allows data to go with employee as they go to other states.
 - A certified planner may need to work several months in the state before being assigned their planner designation for that State.
 - Any specific State requirements must be completed.
 - Conservation plans may be reviewed to demonstrate qualifications.
- Allows a state to certify or de-certify a designation.
- Reports function allows for querying information as needed.



Ag Learn

- AgLearn populates all requirements for the Planner Role designation chosen.
- AgLearn will state which courses you have already taken, *most of the time.*
- *Review all courses required, if you feel you have taken a course that Ag Learn doesn't show as taken, pull together documentation you have (i.e. course certificates, course attendees list, etc.) and give to your supervisor.*

Maintaining Conservation Planner Role Designations

- ▶ State Conservationist (or their designees) must review each planner's designation every 3 years in order to determine if it will be renewed.
 - ▶ This includes a review of records produced by the planner.
- ▶ Complete minimum of **40 contact hours** of continuing education during the 3 year cycle that focus on conservation planning, conservation practices, or new conservation technology.
- ▶ Minimum of 5 contact hours of the 40 must be focused on outreach/ customer service/ improving methods of business practices or operations/ increasing skills with voluntary conservation planning
- ▶ Course/ training completed to achieve a higher planner certification level may be counted as contact hours for a planner's current designation.
- ▶ Employee is responsible for completing & **documenting in AgLearn** the contact hours earned.
- ▶ Supervisor of employee will determine if the contact hour requirement is met.



Conservation Plan Signature

- ▶ All conservation plans developed by NRCS or partner employees for NRCS purposes must be approved (*signed*) by a **Certified** or **Master Certified Conservation Planner**.
- ▶ **The signature indicates that the conservation plans meets:**
 - ▶ the needs of the client
 - ▶ NRCS planning policy, procedures, & standards
 - ▶ any applicable program or provision requirements (i.e.. EQIP program rules, HEL / wetland provisions, etc.)



States



- ▶ Must follow all national minimum requirements for planner roles & may add additional State requirements need to comply with state law or meet special circumstances.
- ▶ We are not adding additional requirements at this time.
- ▶ Will need to list out Assessment Tools for Iowa that an Apprentice Conservation Planner must show they have the skills to use.
 - ▶ Current erosion prediction tools (RUSLE2 or WEPP, WEPS) and other tools designated by the supervisor needed for the field office location.



Job Approval Authority (JAA)

- Engineering JAA & Ecological Sciences JAA for Conservation Practices are now requirements for Conservation Planner designations.
- Corn Belt states worked together to create one document. It has been submitted to NHQ for approval.
- It is up to the States to determine what specific JAA will be needed for each Planner Role.



JAA National Database

- Access database
- Front end will be available for data entry by all Supervisors of Conservation Planners and Technical Specialists
- **3 Phases of JAA:**
 - Inventory & Evaluation/ Planning
 - Design/ Development
 - Construction/ Installation/ Certification
- Up to **5 Job Class levels** available for each
 - Most will have 3 levels utilized



JAA National Database continued...

- ▶ State Office will enter employees, supervisors (concurring officials) and technical discipline specialists
- ▶ We will then enter the JAA criteria
- ▶ Engineering JAA can also be entered into this database
- ▶ JAA levels will be required to have for each Conservation Planner Role



JAA National Database continued...

- ▶ Supervisors will need to make sure their employees are all in the database. They will be able to add and edit employee information.
- ▶ Supervisors can assign the practices they want their employees to have JAA for.
- ▶ **Technical Discipline Specialists** must approve the JAA.
- ▶ Supervisors will then need to Concur after the Technical Discipline Specialist's approval of the JAA.
- ▶ Trainings will need to be organized to help individual Conservation Planners gain the knowledge needed to receive JAA for practices they are not experienced in using.



Conservation Desktop

- ▶ Conservation Planner roles will be part of Conservation Desktop
- ▶ JAA will be part of the Conservation Desktop
- ▶ **Program Support Assistant** is another role identified
 - ▶ This includes: administrative assistants and farm bill specialists
 - ▶ Allow data entry into conservation desktop
 - ▶ i.e. field office Conservation Assistants, farm bill specialists, district employees functioning in an administrative capacity.



Important Dates

- ▶ March 31, 2017
 - ▶ Conservation Planner Database is updated to indicate the primary duty station county for each planner.
- ▶ May 5th, 2017
 - ▶ Ag Learn curriculum assignments assigned for each Conservation Planner based on their planner designation .
 - ▶ All Conservation Planners IDP's updated in AgLearn
- ▶ July 7, 2017
 - ▶ Employee training needs identified & plans to address those needs have been developed.
 - ▶ JAA for Ecological Sciences & Engineering practices identified for required criteria for each planner role designation.
- ▶ **August, 2017**
 - ▶ Distribute state's JAA Database front-end with instructions to users



Important Dates continued...

- **May 1, 2018**
 - All OJT & electronic training complete
- July 1, 2018
 - Engineering and Ecological JAA will be obtained
- **Sept, 2018**
 - Fully implement ESJAA for all personnel
- Jan 1, 2019
 - State instructor led training completed
 - Module 9 - RMS plan completed
- Jan 1, 2020
 - NEDC course training completed