

that contribute to a productive and efficient agriculture and increase the attractiveness of rural America and are in line with goals and objectives of conservation districts. This is best accomplished by considering the landscape visual resource when providing planning assistance to individual landowners, groups, units of government, and watershed and resource conservation development project sponsors. NRCS responsibilities in recreation also offer opportunities to develop the scenic beauty of the rural landscape. Department of Agriculture Secretary's Memorandum 1695, May 28, 1970, "Protecting and Improving The Quality of the Environment," includes scenic beauty as an objective of the Department's programs.

(b) *Policy.* NRCS will: (1) Provide technical assistance with full consideration of alternative management and development systems that preserve scenic beauty or improve the visual resource; (2) emphasize the application of conservation practices having scenic beauty or visual resource values particularly in waste management systems; field borders, field windbreaks, wetland management, access roads, critical area treatment; design and management of ponds, stream margins, odd areas, and farmsteads; siting or positioning of structures and buildings to be in harmony with the landscape while reducing the potential for erosion; using native and other adaptable plants for conservation which enhance scenic beauty and create variety while linking beauty with utility; (3) promote personal pride in landowners in the installation, maintenance, and appearance of conservation practices and their properties; (4) select suitable areas for waste products and use of screens to hide "eyesore" areas, and (5) encourage conservation districts to include practices which promote scenic beauty in their annual and long-range programs.

(c) *Responsibility.* The Natural Resources Conservation Service will provide technical assistance through conservation districts to landowners, operators, communities, and state and local governments in developing programs relating to scenic beauty.

(1) *NRCS national office.* The Administrator will:

(i) Assign appropriate NRCS national office leadership to insure that enhancement of scenic beauty is included in national information, policy, guidelines, standards, guides to specifications for conservation practices without impairing basic soil and water conservation functions.

(ii) Emphasize in plant material center management and in plant materials functions that locating and evaluating plants for forage, erosion control, and recreation or wildlife uses be carried out with full attention to visual resource value.

(2) *NRCS state office.* The state conservationist will:

(i) Assign appropriate staff member(s) to provide leadership in carrying out scenic beauty policy and procedure within the state.

(ii) Develop and keep current a landscape management plan to improve and maintain the appearance of all real properties under NRCS control, and provide appropriate assistance to owners and managers of properties leased or rented by NRCS.

(iii) Give emphasis to preserving scenic beauty and contributing to the visual resource in the NRCS information program whenever opportunities exist.

(d) *Coordination and implementation.*

(1) The governing body of each conservation district will be encouraged to revise or update its district program to appropriately provide for beautification of the countryside through applicable land use changes and effective soil and water conservation treatment.

(2) In providing assistance to watershed and resource conservation and development project sponsors and other resource planning groups for soil, water, and related resources, emphasis will be given to measures that preserve natural beauty or contribute to the quality of the visual resource.

(3) Local organizations and groups interested in scenic beauty will be contacted and consulted for cooperation in and coordination with NRCS and conservation district efforts.

§ 650.25 Flood-plain management.

Through proper planning, flood plains can be managed to reduce the

threat to human life, health, and property in ways that are environmentally sensitive. Most flood plains are valuable for maintaining agricultural and forest products for food and fiber, fish and wildlife habitat, temporary flood-water storage, park and recreation areas, and for maintaining and improving environmental values. NRCS technical and financial assistance is provided to land users primarily on non-Federal land through local conservation districts and other State and local agencies. Through its programs, NRCS encourages sound flood-plain management decisions by land users.

(a) *Policy*—(1) *General*. NRCS provides leadership and takes action, where practicable, to conserve, preserve, and restore existing natural and beneficial values in base (100-year) flood plains as part of technical and financial assistance in the programs it administers. In addition, 500-year flood plains are taken into account where there are “critical actions” such as schools, hospitals, nursing homes, utilities, and facilities producing or storing volatile, toxic, or water-reactive materials.

(2) *Technical assistance*. NRCS provides leadership, through consultation and advice to conservation districts and land users, in the wise use, conservation, and preservation of all land, including flood plains. Handbooks, manuals, and internal memoranda set forth specific planning criteria for addressing flood-plain management in NRCS-assisted programs. The general procedures and guidelines in this part comply with Executive Order (E.O.) 11988, Floodplain Management, dated May 24, 1977, and are consistent with the Water Resources Council’s Unified National Program for Floodplain Management.

(3) *Compatible land uses*. The NRCS Administrator has determined that providing technical and financial assistance for the following land uses is compatible with E.O. 11988:

(i) Agricultural flood plains that have been used for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, or oilseed for at least 3 of the 5 years before the request for assistance; and

(ii) Agricultural production in accordance with official State or designated area water-quality plans.

(4) *Nonproject technical and financial assistance programs*. The NRCS Administrator has determined that NRCS may not provide technical and financial assistance to land users if the results of such assisted actions are likely to have significant adverse effects on existing natural and beneficial values in the base flood plain and if NRCS determines that there are practicable alternatives outside the base flood plain. NRCS will make a case-by-case decision on whether to limit assistance whenever a land user proposes converting existing agricultural land to a significantly more intensive agricultural use that could have significant adverse effects on the natural and beneficial values or increase flood risk in the base flood plain. NRCS will carefully evaluate the potential extent of the adverse effects and any increased flood risk.

(5) *Project technical and financial assistance programs*. In planning and installing land and water resource conservation projects, NRCS will avoid to the extent possible the long and short-term adverse effects of the occupancy and modification of base flood plains. In addition, NRCS also will avoid direct or indirect support of development in the base flood plain wherever there is a practicable alternative. As such, the environmental evaluation required for each project action (§ 650.5 of this part) will include alternatives to avoid adverse effects and incompatible development in base flood plains. Public participation in planning is described in § 650.6 of this part and will comply with section 2(a)(4) of E.O. 11988. Floodplain management requires the integration of these concerns into NRCS’s National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for project assistance programs as described in Section 650 of this part.

(6) *Real property and facilities under NRCS ownership or control*. NRCS owns or controls about 30 properties that are used primarily for the evaluation and development of plant materials for erosion control and fish and wildlife habitat plantings (7 CFR Part 613, Plant Materials Centers, 16 U.S.C. 590 a-e, f, and 7 U.S.C. 1010-1011). If NRCS real properties or facilities are located in the base flood plain, NRCS will require

an environmental evaluation when new structures and facilities or major modifications are proposed. If it is determined that the only practicable alternative for siting the proposed action may adversely affect the base flood plain, NRCS will design or modify its action to minimize potential harm to or within the flood plain and will prepare and circulate a notice explaining why the action is proposed to be located in the base flood plain. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) flood insurance maps, other available maps, information, or an onsite analysis will be used to determine whether the proposed NRCS action is in the base flood plain. Public participation in the action will be the same as described in §650.6 of this part.

(b) *Responsibility.* NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to land users primarily through conservation districts, special purpose districts, and other State or local subdivisions of State government. Acceptance of this assistance is voluntary on the part of the land user. NRCS does not have authority to make land use decisions on non-Federal land. NRCS provides the land user with technical flood hazard data and information on flood-plain natural values. NRCS informs the land user how alternative land use decisions may affect the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, human safety, property, and public welfare. Alternatives to flood-plain occupancy, modification, and development are discussed onsite with the land user by NRCS.

(1) *NRCS National Office.* (§600.2 of this part). The NRCS Administrator, state conservationist, and district conservationist are the responsible Federal officials in NRCS for implementing the policies expressed in these rules. Any deviation from these rules must be approved by the Administrator. The Deputy Administrator for Programs has authority to oversee the application of policy in NRCS programs. Oversight assistance to state conservationists for flood-plain management will be provided by the NRCS technical service centers (§600.3 of this part).

(2) *NRCS state offices.* (§600.4 of this part). Each state conservationist is the responsible Federal official in all

NRCS-assisted programs administered within the State. He or she is also responsible for administering the plant materials centers within the State. The state conservationist will assign a staff person who has basic knowledge of landforms, soils, water, and related plant and animal ecosystems to provide technical oversight to ensure that assistance to land users and project sponsors on the wise use, conservation, and preservation of flood plains is compatible with national policy. For NRCS-assisted project actions, the staff person assigned by the state conservationist will consult with the local jurisdictions, sponsoring local organizations, and land users, on the basis of an environmental evaluation, to determine what constitutes significant adverse effects or incompatible development in the base flood plain. The state conservationist is to prepare and circulate a written notice for NRCS-assisted actions for which the only practicable alternative requires siting in a base flood plain and may result in adverse effects or incompatible development. The NRCS NEPA process will be used to integrate flood-plain management into project planning and consultations on land use decisions by land users and project sponsors.

(3) *NRCS field offices.* The district conservationist (§600.6 of this part) is delegated the responsibility for providing technical assistance and approving financial assistance to land users in nonproject actions, where applicable, and for deciding what constitutes an adverse effect or incompatible development of a base flood plain. This assistance will be based on official NRCS policy, rules, guidelines, and procedures in NRCS handbooks, manuals, memoranda, etc. For NRCS-assisted nonproject actions, the district conservationist, on the basis of the environmental evaluation, will advise recipients of technical and financial assistance about what constitutes a significant adverse effect or incompatible development in the base flood plain.

(c) *Coordination and implementation.* All planning by NRCS staffs is interdisciplinary and encompasses the six NEPA policy statements, the WRC Principles and Standards, and an

equivalent of the eight-step decision-making process in the WRC's February 1978 Floodplain Management Guidelines. NRCS internal handbooks, manuals, and memoranda provide detailed information and guidance for NRCS planning and environmental evaluation.

(1) *Steps for nonproject technical and financial assistance programs.* (i) NRCS assistance programs are voluntary and are carried out through local conservation districts (State entities) primarily on non-Federal, privately owned lands.

(ii) After the land user decides the type, extent, and location of the intended action for which assistance is sought, the district conservationist will determine if the intended action is in the base flood plain by using HUD flood insurance maps, and other available maps and information or by making an onsite determination of the approximate level of the 100-year flood if maps or other usable information are lacking.

(iii) If the district conservationist determines that the land user's proposed location is outside the base flood plain, and would not cause potential harm within the base flood plain, NRCS will continue to provide assistance, as needed.

(iv) If the district conservationist determines that the land user's proposed action is within the base flood plain and would likely result in adverse effects, incompatible development, or an increased flood hazard, it is the responsibility of the district conservationist to determine and point out to the land user alternative methods of achieving the objective, as well as alternative locations outside the base flood plain. If the alternative locations are determined to be impractical, the district conservationist will decide whether to continue providing assistance. If the decision is to terminate assistance for the proposed action, the land user and the local conservation district, if one exists, will be notified in writing about the decision.

(v) If the district conservationist decides to continue providing technical and financial assistance for a proposed action in the base flood plain, which is the only practicable alternative, NRCS may require that the proposed action

be designed or modified so as to minimize potential harm to or within the flood plain. The district conservationist will prepare and circulate locally a written notice explaining why the action is proposed to be located in the base flood plain.

(2) *Steps for project assistance programs.* (i) NRCS project assistance to local sponsoring organizations (conservation districts and other legal entities of State government) and land users is carried out primarily on non-Federal land in response to requests for assistance. NRCS helps the local sponsoring organizations prepare a plan for implementing the needed resource measures.

(ii) NRCS uses an interdisciplinary environmental evaluation (§650.6 of this part) as a basis for providing recommendations and alternatives to project sponsors. Flood-plain management is an integral part of every NRCS environmental evaluation. NRCS delineates the base flood plain by using detailed HUD flood insurance maps and other available data, as appropriate, and provides recommendations to sponsors on alternatives to avoid adverse effects and incompatible development in base flood plains. NRCS will develop, as needed, detailed 100-year and 500-year flood-plain maps where there are none.

(iii) NRCS's NEPA process (part 650 of this chapter) is used to integrate the spirit and intent of E.O. 11988 Sections 2(a) and 2(c) into agency planning and recommendations for land and water use decisions by local sponsoring organizations and land users.

(iv) NRCS will terminate assistance to a local sponsoring organization in project programs if it becomes apparent that decisions by land users and local jurisdictions concerning flood-plain management would likely result in adverse effects or incompatible development and the environmental evaluation reveals that there are practicable alternatives to the proposed project that would not cause adverse effects on the base flood plain.

(v) In carrying out the planning and installation of land and water resource conservation projects, NRCS will avoid, to the extent possible, the long-

term and short-term adverse effects associated with the occupancy and modification of base flood plains. In addition, NRCS will also avoid direct or indirect support of development in the base flood plain wherever there is a practicable alternative. Where appropriate, NRCS will require design modifications to minimize harm to or within the base flood plain. NRCS will provide appropriate public notice and public participation in the continuing planning process in accordance with NRCS NEPA process.

(vi) NRCS may require the local government to adopt and enforce appropriate flood plain regulations as a condition to receiving project financial assistance.

(3) *Actions on property and facilities under NRCS ownership or control.* For real property and facilities owned by or under the control of NRCS, the following actions will be taken:

(i) Locate new structures, facilities, etc., outside the base flood plain if there is a practicable alternate site.

(ii) Require public participation in decisions to construct structures, facilities, etc., in flood plains that might result in adverse effects and incompatible development in such areas if no practicable alternatives exist.

(iii) New construction or rehabilitation will be in accordance with the standards and criteria of the National Flood Insurance Program and will include floodproofing and other flood protection measures as appropriate.

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PARTS 651-652 [RESERVED]

PART 653—TECHNICAL STANDARDS

Sec.

653.1 General.

653.2 Technical standards and criteria.

653.3 Adaptation of technical standards.

653.4 Availability of technical standards.

AUTHORITY: 7 CFR 2.62.

SOURCE: 43 FR 58079, Dec. 12, 1978, unless otherwise noted.

§ 653.1 General.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is responsible for the technical adequacy of conservation

practices installed under all NRCS programs, and those practices applied under programs administered by the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS) where NRCS has the technical responsibility. NRCS technical or financial assistance will be provided when the practices are applied according to established technical standards.

§ 653.2 Technical standards and criteria.

Technical standards and criteria have been established for all conservation practices. They provide the guidance and direction needed to assure that the practices meet the intended purpose and are of the quality needed to assure lasting for the design life. Standards and criteria are developed in consultation with universities, research institutions, and individual industrial and private firms and individuals. Research information and practical experience are used in setting standards. Changes and new technical standards and criteria are prepared in the same manner as set out above.

§ 653.3 Adaptation of technical standards.

Technical standards and criteria developed on a national basis may require special adaptation to meet local needs. These adaptations must be approved by the Administrator of the Natural Resources Conservation Service or his designee.

§ 653.4 Availability of technical standards.

Information on technical standards used by NRCS is available at field, area, or State offices of NRCS.

PART 654—OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Subpart A—General

Sec.

654.1 Purpose and scope.

654.2 Definitions.

Subpart B—Federal Financially-Assisted Projects

654.10 Operation and maintenance agreement.