

**Part 409 – Conservation Planning Policy**

**NC409.0 General**

- A. The purpose of this supplement is to establish and define the conservation planner certification process in North Carolina (NC). This supplement also establishes NC’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NC-NRCS) policy for providing conservation planning assistance. This policy and procedures described herein supplement the National Conservation Planning Policy in Title 180, General Manual (GM), Part 409, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed., Amend., 41, May 2017.
- C. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) planning procedures and standards as described and defined in the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH), as well as the conservation practice standards found in the electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG), will be used for all conservation planning activities and financial assisted programs in NC.

**NC409.1 Conservation Planning Overview**

- A. Conservation planning is recognized as the cornerstone of the NRCS conservation delivery system. A conservation plan that meets NRCS national and state policies and procedures must be developed to document the provision of technical assistance and to support all financial assistance program contracts.
- B. The goal of all conservation planning in NC is the development and implementation of a Resource Management Systems (RMS). For routine conservation planning technical assistance and financial assisted programs, National Environmental Evaluation NRCS-CPA- 52 form (CPA-52), shall include an explanation of alternatives needed to meet RMS criteria that will treat soil, water, air, plant, animal, energy and human (SWAPAE+H) resource concerns identified by the planner for a planning area or land unit, regardless of whether or not the client is able to implement a RMS level of treatment.
  - (2) Whenever an RMS level of treatment is not possible due to economic, social, cultural or other factors, the procedures for progressive planning as defined in the NPPH must be followed. The CPA- 52 form should be used to document this process.
  - (3) The CPA- 52 form, Conservation Plan, assistance notes, and other records of the planning process should reflect the planner’s understanding of natural resource concerns and client’s objectives. Client engagement with the planner in the planning process is reflected by their (client) understanding of the problems, issues, interactions and treatments needed for resource sustainability.
- G. For the purpose of achieving a conservation planner designation, planners are required to develop a RMS level Conservation Plan and record the planning process using the CPA- 52 form. The CPA-52 form, Section H, shall, at a minimum, include the following three alternatives: No Action, RMS Alternative, and Client’s Alternative.

**NC409.2 Conservation Planning Assistance Delivery**

- E. The Assistant State Conservationists for Field Operations (ASTC-FO) will identify those complex situations requiring area-wide planning, appropriate specialists to serve on interdisciplinary area-wide planning teams, and early-scoping processes required to assess the need for NRCS services and resources before committing area-wide planning assistance. Membership of area-wide planning teams will be identified based on the needs of specific projects. The State Resource Conservationist (SRC) and the NC NRCS Leadership Team will make similar determinations when needed for area-wide planning that spans multiple NRCS administrative areas.

- H. NC guidance and procedures for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when projects are assisted by NRCS, can be found in NC Supplement to GM190, Title 410, Subpart A.

### **NC409.3 Requirements for Providing Conservation Planning Assistance**

- A. It is NRCS policy to have adequately trained and well-qualified employees to provide conservation planning assistance. For NC, employees and partners seeking to become Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planners (CNMP), certified specialist in Integrated Pest Management (CSIPM), and/or Technical Specialist Planners (TSPlanner), must first reach the Certified Conservation Planner (CCP) level before achieving these specialty designations.
- B. Non-certified NRCS employees and other non-certified individuals may provide support and assistance in the planning process only when supervised by an employee with a CCP or Master Certified Conservation Planner (MCCP) designation. CCP and MCCP employees approving conservation plans and environmental evaluations (CPA-52 form, section Q-S), must validate them with their signature. For the CPA-52 form, the signature of validation must be affixed to section P-second signature line.
- C. In NC, the following NRCS positions are expected to actively pursue the training, experience, and plan development requirements required to obtain their conservation planner designation: Soil Conservation Technicians (SCTs), Soil Conservationists (SCs), Supervisory Soil Conservationist (SSCs), and Area Resource Conservationists (ARCs).
  - (1) Employee training plans shall be developed to reflect the Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSAs) and training requirements outlined for conservation planners in NC. List of training needs required for conservation planner certification is found in the [“\*Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC\*” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1).
  - (2) List of qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)) required for conservation planner certification, is found in the [“\*KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC\*” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).
- D. The official repository, source, and record for NC Conservation Planner Certification (CPC) will be the NRCS CPC interactive map.

### **NC409.5 Documentation of Conservation Planning Data and Signature Requirements**

- D. For ALL NRCS related conservation planning activities, the CPA-52 form will be saved electronically in the “Determinations Folder” of the National Planning and Agreements Database (NPAD) (i.e. Toolkit or Conservation Desktop).
- F. Plan Signatures
  - (4) For Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland Compliance (WC), only NRCS-employees with a CCP or MCCP designation can approve and sign HEL/WC Plans.
  - (5) For Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP), only planners with a CNMP designation can sign the CNMP signature page.
  - (6) For Integrated Pest Management Plans (IPMs), only planners with a CSIPM designation can approve and sign IPMs.

## NC409.9 Criteria to Achieve a NRCS Conservation Planner Role Designation

### C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- (3) List of qualifications (knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs)) required for conservation planner certification, is found in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).

### D. Conservation Planner Role Designation Requirements

- (1) The process for becoming an ACP (see [NC-CP-SOP-02](#)), CCP (see [NC-CP-SOP-03](#)), and MCCP (see [NC-CP-SOP-04](#)) starts on the date of commencement of employment and it is expected to take up to three years to complete. The administrative procedures and timelines will occur in this manner (see [NC-CP-SOP-01](#) for general process flowchart):
  - (i) The NRCS Technical Supervisor (herein referred as the Supervisory Soil Conservationist (SSC)), will perform the Administrative Review and Concurrence for candidate employees within their work unit and within 45-working days from the date of receipt of the request by the employee. The ARCs will perform the Technical Competency Determination for field employees in their administrative area and within 45-working days from the date of receipt of the request by the SSC. The ASTC-FOs will perform the Final Approval Review for field employees in their administrative area and within 30-working days from the date of receipt of the request by the ARC. The ECS-Conservation Planning Specialist (CPS) will complete the Final Certification Review for all employees in NC and within 30-working days from the date of receipt of the request by the ASTC-FO (or designee). (*Note-Exception to these timeframes may be granted by the STC on a case-by-case basis based on documented workload or personnel circumstances. Requests must be sent in writing (via email) to the STC for evaluation and approval. The ASTC-FO, SRC, and NRCS employee will be notified of the final decision within 45-working days from the issuance of the request.*)
    - The Administrative Review and Concurrence is an administrative function. The RMS plan and final evaluation for conservation planner designation, will be reviewed by the SSC, to ensure that all required documentation is present and concurrence will be provided that the employee has obtained the required training (formal and OJT) and completed the applicable prerequisites and certifications as documented in the IDP and Form [NC-CPA-05](#) Parts I, II, IV and V. In addition, on-site technical quality assurance review and on-going feedback is expected at this stage before submittal for AO review.
    - The Technical Competency Determination is a technical function completed by the Area Resource Conservationist (ARC) and shall be based on the candidate’s knowledge, training, experience, and demonstrated technical competence documented in the IDP and Form [NC-CPA-05](#) Parts II through V. The ARC will ensure the candidate has reached the desired planning technical competency consistent with this policy before approving the technical competency determination. This technical determination also consists of one (1) field-reviewed RMS plan.
    - The Final Approval Review is an administrative function completed by the ASTC-FOs, and shall be based on the outcome of the administrative review and concurrence, and first-level technical competency determination documented in Form [NC-CPA-05](#) Part V. The ASTC-FOs performing the final approval review will evaluate the request and

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ensure the administrative concurrence and first-level technical competency determination are consistent with this policy before final approval is issued.

- The Final Certification Review is both a technical and an administrative function delegated to the ECS-Conservation Planning Specialist (CPS) and shall be based on the outcome of the final approval review documented in Form [NC-CPA-05](#) Part V. The CPS will evaluate the request (Parts I through V) and ensure the technical competency determination and final approval review are consistent with this policy before final certification is issued.
- (ii) Unless otherwise noted in this supplement, all administrative information and supporting documentation for review described herein, shall be transmitted electronically through the NC SharePoint site ([Conservation Planner Certification \(CPC\) Tracker](#)). Employees involved at all levels of the CPC review process (e.g. submittal, administrative review and concurrence, technical competency determinations, final approval review, and final certification review) are responsible for notifying the next person in-line and candidate via email when the CPC information is uploaded or when an action is completed in the CPC Tracker on the NC SharePoint site.
- (iii) The order and process candidate planners are required to follow to achieve a CCP or MCCP designation include;
- Assess training requirements for conservation planner role (see NC-CPA-03) and KSAs proficiency levels (see NC-CPA-04) with the NRCS SSC.
  - Develop a 3-year Individual Development Plan (IDP) using the Agency’s latest learning management system. IDPs will include core ENG or ES JAA practices needed to achieve assigned planner role.
  - Complete the required conservation planner trainings and knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) to the desired level as identified in the IDP.
- This will be accomplished through; On-the-Job-Training (OJT), formal trainings through AgLearn and Science & Technology Webinars (S&T), NEDC or other supported training venues.
- Supervisors shall utilize IDPs to review and outline employee’s training progression and KSA development on a yearly basis (e.g. mid-year and end-of-year reviews, once a quarter, etc.).
- Supervisors should review KSAs as part of the employee’s performance reviews and note any changes from their previously recorded levels. In addition, supervisors should discuss future training opportunities and performance measures that will facilitate an employee to meet or surpass the desired KSA levels for conservation planner certification.
- (iv) Complete and submit RMS level plans at the field boundary level as outlined in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1).

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- RMS Plan Submission for CCPs- Planners will develop two (2) RMS-level plans at the field boundary for a minimum of three (3) landuses. One (1) of the three (3) landuses must be cropland or pasture and contain a Nutrient Management (NM) and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) component. Planners may choose from the following landuses: Cropland, Pasture, Hayland, Forest, Forest-wildlife, or Farmstead. The STC may adjust landuse requirements when opportunities for the development of RMS-level plans are extremely limited at the county-level. Requests will be evaluated and considered only on a case-by-case basis. The request must be sent in writing (via email) to the STC for evaluation and approval. The ASTC-FO, SRC, and NRCS employee will be notified of the final decision within 30-working days from the issuance of the request.
  - Areawide Plan Submission for MCCPs- Planners will provide significant contribution in the first seven (7) steps of the conservation planning process for one (1) Areawide conservation plan submitted for review and approval by the State Conservationist's designee. The Areawide plan will contain alternatives that meets the identified Desired Future Conditions of the stakeholder(s). This requirement may be fulfilled as an individual or as a member of a team.
  - RMS Plan development shall be the last step in the certification process. All training requirements must be completed and desired KSA levels reached prior to RMS Plan submittal for final certification review.
- (v) Process for the Final Certification Review - The candidate, with the assistance from the first-line NRCS supervisor, will document in AgLearn completion of all required trainings, KSAs, and JAA proficiency levels as listed in the employee's IDP and planner curricula. The candidate will then submit all the required documentation along with the RMS-level plans for review.
- For Field Employees- Form [NC-CPA-05](#) Parts I-V and ALL relevant documentation will be submitted by the candidate in electronic format to the NRCS SSC for a NRCS Administrative Review and Concurrence. The SSC will then forward the request to the Area Resource Conservationist (ARC) for a Technical Competency Determination. The ASTC-FO will then review and complete the Final Approval Review and submit to the state's Conservation Planning Specialist (CPS) for a Final Certification Review. After confirming the candidate meets the established conservation planner certification criteria, the state's CPS will issue a certificate illustrating the conservation planner designation and date of expiration. The certificate will expire 3-years from the date it is issued.
  - For Area Office Employees- Form [NC-CPA-05](#) Parts I-V and ALL relevant documentation will be submitted by the candidate in electronic format to the ARC for a NRCS Administrative Review and Concurrence and Technical Competency Determination. The ASTC-FO will then review and complete the Final Approval Review and submit to the state's Conservation Planning Specialist (CPS) for a Final Certification Review. After confirming the candidate meets the established conservation planner certification criteria, the state's CPS will issue a certificate illustrating the conservation planner designation and date of expiration. The certificate will expire 3-years from the date it is issued.

- **For State Office Employees-** Form [NC-CPA-05](#) Parts I-V and ALL relevant documentation will be submitted by the candidate in electronic format to the SRC for a NRCS Administrative Review and Concurrence, Technical Competency Determination, and Final Approval Review. The SRC (or designee) will then submit to the state’s Conservation Planning Specialist (CPS) for a Final Certification Review. After confirming the candidate meets the established conservation planner certification criteria, the state’s CPS will issue a certificate illustrating the conservation planner designation and date of expiration. The certificate will expire 3-years from the date it is issued.
- (2) In NC, the STC delegates the designation of conservation planner roles to the SRC (or ECS designee). In NC, the following positions have been identified to complete the training, experience, and plan development expectations necessary to obtain a conservation planner role designation:
- (i) Soil Conservation Technicians (SCT) - All NRCS SCT positions located at the field level are expected to actively pursue the training, experience, and plan development requirements necessary to obtain their ACP designation.
  - (ii) Soil Conservationists (SC), Supervisory Soil Conservationists (SSCs), and Area Resource Conservationists (ARCs) - All NRCS SC, SSC, and ARC positions located at the field and area office level are expected to actively pursue the training, experience, and plan development requirements necessary to obtain their CCP designation.
  - (iii) Ecological Sciences and Area Office Staff- At a minimum, the ECS- Conservation Planning Specialist and one (1) Area Resource Conservationist (ARC) in each NRCS area office are expected to actively pursue the training, experience, and plan development requirements necessary to pursue the MCCP designation.
- (3) The training and certification criteria for becoming an ACP, CCP, or MCCP in NC is listed in the following categories:
- (i) Apprentice Conservation Planner (ACP)
    - Training- Complete the training deliverables for the ACP role listed in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1):
      - In addition to the national training requirements for ACP, NC planners are required to complete the following courses:
        - Organic 101: Introduction to Organic (AgLearn-USDA-ORGANIC101)
        - Energy Basics (AgLearn-NRCS-NEDC-000255)
        - Agricultural Waste Management Systems-A Primer Level 1 (AgLearn-NRCS-NEDC-000115)
    - KSAs- Meet desired KSAs competency levels for the ACP designation listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).
    - Job Approval Authority (JAA)- At a minimum, achieve inventory and evaluation JAA for conservation practices common to NC (see paragraph NC409.9D(4)).

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(ii) Certified Conservation Planner (CCP)

- Training- Complete the training deliverables for the CCP role listed in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1):

- In addition to the national training requirements for CCP, NC planners are required to complete the following courses:

-- Agricultural Waste Management Systems - Level 2 (Aglearn-AgLearn-NRCS-NEDC-000116)

- KSAs- Meet desired KSAs competency levels for the CCP designation listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).
- Job Approval Authority (JAA)- At a minimum, achieve inventory and evaluation JAA for conservation practices common to NC (see paragraph NC409.9D(4)).

(iii) Master Certified Conservation Planner (MCCP)

- Training- Complete the training deliverables for the MCCP role listed in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1):

- KSAs- Meet desired KSAs competency levels for the MCCP designation listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).
- Job Approval Authority (JAA)- At a minimum, achieve inventory and evaluation JAA for conservation practices common to NC (see paragraph NC409.9D(4)).

(4) JAA-Achieve Ecological Sciences (ES) inventory and evaluation JAA for the following core conservation practices common to NC (list can also be accessed through the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2):

- (i) Conservation Crop Rotation (328), Residue and Tillage Management-No Till (329), Critical Area Planting (342), Field Border (386), Cover Crops (340), Mulching (484), Forage and Biomass Planting (512), Prescribed Grazing (528), Nutrient Management (590), Pest Management (595), and Tree/Shrub Establishment (612).

- (ii) The STC may adjust required core JAA conservation practices when landuse or landscape features prevent an employee from gaining the expected and desired planning KSAs for a conservation practice or system. Requests will be evaluated and considered only on a case-by-case basis, and must be sent in writing (via email) to the STC for evaluation and approval. The ASTC-FO, SRC, and NRCS employee will be notified of the final decision within 45-working days from the issuance of the request.

(5) Transfers to NC- Reviews for incoming certified planners will be completed by the appropriate first-line technical competency reviewer (i.e. ARC for NRCS Administrative Areas/Field Offices employees or SRC for SO employees) within 90-working days of the employee’s entry at their new duty station.

- (i) Procedures for reviewing and assigning conservation planner designations for planners transferring to NC is described in [NC-CP-SOP-09](#) and shall be accomplished in the following manner:
  - Planners can maintain the same certification level but will have 3-years from their official start date in NC to satisfactorily complete all required NC training as identified in the “Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” (NC-CPA-03) (see Exhibit 1) and “KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” (NC-CPA-04) (see Exhibit 2). Failure to complete these requirements will result in the suspension of assigned planner designation(s).
  - Employees who have met the conservation planner training requirements and KSAs criteria for NC, will request a final certification review as described in paragraph NC409.9D1 (v).
- (12) NC procedures for reviewing and assigning conservation planner designations for Technical Service Providers (TSPs) National Certified Conservation Planner individuals are described in [NC-CP-SOP-10](#).

E. Maintaining Conservation Planner Role Designations

- (2) NC procedures for maintaining, reviewing, and recertifying conservation planner designations is described in [NC-CP-SOP-08](#) and shall be accomplished in the following manner:
  - (i) Prior to the Conservation Planner certification expiring, the planner will complete Form NC-CPA-05 Part V, and follow the submittal procedures described in paragraph NC409.9D(1).
    - The planner is responsible for submitting a complete and accurate Form NC-CPA-05 Part V with all applicable documentation to the first-line technical supervisor (SSC, ARC, or SRC), at a minimum, forty five (45) working days prior to certification expiration date. (*Note- Planner certification will not be suspended when pending administrative procedures and timeframes extend past the expiration date*).
    - Employees involved at all levels of the recertification review process (e.g. administrative review and concurrence, technical competency determination, final approval review, and final certification review) shall complete these tasks within 10-working days of receipt of request and will notify the planner and next person in-line via email when an action is completed.
    - The NRCS SSC and ARC are responsible for verifying and confirming the following recertification requirements have been met before submittal to the ASTC-FOs.
      - Forty (40) hours of continuing education unit hours (CEUs) are properly documented and have been met during the 3-year recertification period.
      - No significant planning issues have been noted in program appraisals or other field office Quality Assurance Reviews (QAR's). (*Note- significant planning issues include but are not limited to: undocumented resource concerns, undocumented RMS alternatives, undocumented projected effects on social, economic, and ecological resources on the NRCS-CPA-52 Form, planning is non-compliant with NEPA, lack of competency in planning conservation practices following eFOTG practice standards.*)

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- The ASTC-FO is responsible for reviewing, confirming, and issuing the final approval review for recertification.
  - The state CPS is responsible for reviewing and reissuing a new certificate with expiration date.
  - If a planner fails to complete the recertification process, their planner designation will be suspended. Planners shall refer to the suspension process described in paragraph NC409.9E (4) below.
- (4) The State Conservationist’s review of each planner designation will conclude with a determination of whether the planner’s designation will be—
- (i) Renewed
  - (ii) Suspended
    - If a planner fails to meet the recertification requirements, the certification will be suspended. Suspension of conservation planner designation is described in [NC-CP-SOP-12](#) and shall be transmitted (via email) through the submittal of NC-CPA-05 Part VI. The Improvement Plan (IP) will be reviewed by the STC (or designee) to ensure technical competency and training needs are addressed.
    - The Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations (ASTC-FO) will submit the request to the STC for the suspension of employee’s certification within thirty (30) working days of discovering and documenting noncompliance with this policy. *Note- Prior to submitting the suspension request, the ASTC-FO (or designee) will develop an IP in direct consultation with the employee’s supervisor (i.e. SSC, SWCD Admin. Supervisor, Dept. Head, SWCD Board Chairperson, DSWC Admin Supervisor, etc.).*
    - The STC will make the final decision and notify the ASTC-FO and SRC within thirty (30) working days from the date the ASTC-FO submits the request.
    - After approval is issued by the STC, the ASTC-FO (or designee) will direct the employee to complete the training and/or improve identified deficiencies in the IP. For administrative procedures, refer to paragraph NC409.9E (2).
    - Upon completion of the IP, the planner shall refer to paragraph NC409.9E (2) for administrative procedures. Upon IP submittal by the planner, the following timeframes apply: The ASTC-FO (or designee) will verify completion of IP and forward to ECS-CPS within forty (45) working days of the employee’s written notification of IP completion. The STC (or designee) will review and reissue the certification within thirty (30) working days from the date the written notification is submitted by the ASTC-FO’s.
- (6) Continuing Education Requirements
- (iii) In NC, guidelines for earning continuing education contact hours is provided in [NC-CEUs-05- “CP CEUs Contact Hours Guidelines”](#):
    - NC-CEUs-05-Table I- “*Guidelines for Earning CP CEUs Contact Hours*”.
    - NC-CEUs-05-Table II- “*Guidelines for Accrediting CEUs Contact Hours*”.
- (7) Determination of Credit

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- (i) Training events have to meet one (1) of the following parameters for the approval of CEUs in NC. (see [NC-CEUs-02-“Parameters for Approval of CP Continuing Education Unit Hours \(CEUs\)”](#)):
- Advance application of the National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH) planning process. (e.g. NRCS nine-step planning process);
  - Advance application of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that are incorporated in all steps and activities of NRCS-assisted planning activities. (e.g. Environmental Evaluation (EE), Environmental Assessment (EA), Environmental Evaluation Worksheet (NRCS-CPA-52), Special Environmental Concerns (SECs));
  - Be relevant to planning and or application of Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) conservation practices. (e.g. Any Engineering or Ecological Sciences conservation practice standard listed in NC’s FOTG);
  - Advances the knowledge base in one of the following Planning Specialist designation: Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner Specialist (CNMP), Certified Specialist in Integrated Pest Management (CSIPM), Technical Specialist Planner (TSPlanner). (e.g. Enhances technical knowledge (theory or practical application) specific to the scientific or technical discipline held by the planner (i.e. CNMP, CSIPM, TSPlanner);
  - Advance skills and work-practices in the delivery of voluntary conservation planning and implementation assistance. (E.g. course or activity has content areas that focus on outreach or customer service, Civil Rights Title VI, other.);
  - Satisfies planner curricula or training requirements as identified in the planner’s Individual Development Plan (IDP) or “Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” (e.g. NC-CPA-03-Exhibit 1);
  - Increases planning Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs) as identified in the planner’s “KSA’s for Conservation Planning in NC” (e.g. NC-CPA-04-Exhibit 2).
- (ii) Approval of CEUs. NC procedures for the approval of CEUs in NC is described in [NC-CEUs-01-“Standard Operating Procedure for the Approval, Recording, & Tracking of Continuing Education Unit Hours \(CEUs\)”](#).
- National, State, Area, or Multicounty training events will be evaluated by the ECS-Conservation Planning Specialist.
  - Local trainings, webinars, OJT, or other events will be evaluated on an individual basis by the planner seeking CEUs. Planners will confirm whether training event meets the CEUs approval parameters described in paragraph NC409.9E (7).

### (8) Record Keeping

- (i) Planners are solely responsible for recording, tracking, and maintaining records of CEUs earned. Planners must also provide proof of attendance for conservation planner recertification. Planners will use [NC-CPA-06-“CP Continuing Education Units \(CEUs\)”](#)

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[Tracking Record](#), for recording, tracking, and meeting National and State record keeping guidelines and requirement.

- (ii) In addition to meeting the NC requirement described in paragraph NC409.9I (8)(i) above, training event(s) will be documented and successively recorded in the agency's latest and approved learning management system by the end of each Fiscal Year. NC guidelines for the documenting of CEUs is described in [NC-CEUs-04-“Minimum CP CEUs Documentation Guidelines for Training Events held at the Local Level”](#).
- (iii) Planners with the following specialty designations: CNMP, CSIPM, and TSPlanner, are required to earn a minimum of 6 CEUs related to their specialty designation. These hours may be part of the forty (40) contact hours earned during the 3-year recertification period.
- (iv) Approved Training Sources-Technical training provided by the following agencies on topics described in paragraph NC409.9I (7)(i), is considered eligible for meeting CEUs requirements:
  - NRCS (including national and state-offered events, Science & Technology webinars, NEDC trainings)
  - NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, Division of S&W Conservation
  - S&W Conservation Districts, District, Employees Association, National
  - Association of Conservation Districts
  - NC Cooperative Extension Service
  - NC Forest Service
  - NC Wildlife Resources Commission
  - Programs of the American Society of Agronomy
  - Programs of the American Society of America
  - NC Foundation of S&W Conservation
  - Other as approved by the SRC or ECS-designee.

### (9) Exemptions From Continuing Education Requirements

- (i) Exemptions are summarized in [NC-CEUs-05](#) Table III-*Guidelines for Exempting CEUs Contact Hours*.
  - Retirees and others returning to active practice of conservation planning after more than 5 years of inactivity, must be recertified based on a training plan developed by an ARC (for Field employees) or ECS-Specialist (for SO employees).

(10) NC procedures for maintaining, reviewing, and recertifying Technical Service Providers (TSP) designations is described in [NC-CP-SOP-11](#).

## F. Quality Assurance

- (viii) NC Quality Assurance Review (QAR) procedures for certified planners will be completed as its own separate category in the North Carolina Quality Assurance Plan.
  - The ASTC-FO is responsible for quality assurance reviews of NRCS and partner certified planners within their administrative area. The ASTC-FO (or designee) will

ensure employees are meeting the continuing education training requirements (40-hours of CEUs during a 3-year recertification period) and developing conservation plans that meet NRCS planning procedures and policies.

- In addition to the formal Field Office Appraisals, the ASTC-FO (or designee) may review conservation plans selected for annual practice spot-checks and/or in any occasion that requires review of a conservation plan outside the routine quality assurance process.
- Each conservation planner's designation will be reviewed at least once every three (3) years by the ASTC-FO (or designee). QARs observations and findings will be documented following NC's latest procedures and guidelines. If findings warrant the suspension of conservation planner designation, the ASTC-FO will follow the procedures described in paragraph NC409.9E (4).
- At a minimum, three (3) conservation plans (one (1) of the three (3) plans must be cropland or pasture), will be reviewed to determine if the conservation plans meet the NRCS planning policy and follow the procedures and guidelines listed in 180-NPPH.

#### **NC409.10 Criteria to Achieve a NRCS Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planner Designation**

##### **A. Prerequisites**

- (3) Only planners with a CNMP designation can sign the CNMP signature page, certifying the sufficiency of the supporting documentation and overall technical adequacy of the complete CNMP.
- (4) In NC, planners must be CCP certified before the CNMP designation is achieved.

##### **C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities**

- (1) KSAs- Meet desired KSAs competency levels for CCP and CNMP designations listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).

##### **D. Certification Requirements**

- (2) The process and administrative procedures and timelines for becoming a CNMP will occur as described in paragraph NC409.9D (1) (see [NC-CP-SOP-06](#) for process flowchart). The certification criteria for becoming CNMP in NC is listed in the following categories:
  - (i) Training- Complete the training deliverables for CNMP role listed in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1).
  - (ii) KSAs- Meet desired KSAs competency levels for CCP and CNMP designations listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).
  - (iii) JAA- Achieve JAA for all practice phases in Nutrient Management, Practice Code 590.

- (4) Transfers-Procedures for reviewing and assigning conservation planner designations to CNMP individuals transferring to NC is described in paragraph NC409.9D (5) (see [NC-CP-SOP-09](#) for process flowchart).

(7) Training

- (iv) The training criteria for CNMP certification can be found in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1). In addition to the national training requirements for CNMP, NC planners are required to complete the following courses:

- National and state ACP and CCP training curricula (see [NC-CPA-03](#))
- Nutrient Management Training (Classroom-North Carolina State University)
- JAA for Nutrient Management (Practice Code 590)

E. Maintaining Certification

- (1) CNMPs must earn a minimum of six (6) CEUs related to the CNMP role during a 3-year designation cycle in order to maintain their certification. These contact hours may be obtained anytime during the applicable designation period, and may also be part of the planner’s forty (40) CEUs earned during a 3-year cycle for a CCP or MCCP recertification (see NC-CEUs-05 Table I).
- (i) CNMPs are required to have demonstrated continued competence in planning CNMP under the 590 practice standard. NC procedures for maintaining, reviewing, and recertifying conservation planner designation(s) is described in paragraph NC409.9E (2).
- (2) NC procedures for the approval, record keeping, training sources, accreditation, maintenance, and exemptions of CEUs is described in paragraph NC409.9E (2)(7)(8)(9).

F. Quality Assurance

- (1) NC QAR procedures for CNMP designations will be completed as described in paragraph NC409.9F.
- (2) Suspension-Procedures for the suspension of CNMP designation will completed as described in paragraph NC409.9E (4).

**NC409.11 Criteria to Achieve a NRCS Certified Specialist in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Designation**

A. Prerequisites

- (2) In NC, only CSIPMs can provide technical assistance to producers on pest management. “Pest management components” of conservation plans are defined as application of the conservation practice Integrated Pest Management (Code 595).
- (3) In NC, only planners with a CSIPM designation can approve and sign Integrated Pest Management Plans (IPMs).
- (4) In NC, planners must be CCP certified before the CSIPM designation is achieved.

- (5) According to North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services (NCDA&CS) Pesticide Section licensing requirements, an appropriate categorical license is necessary only when an individual is applying pesticides in the course of work responsibilities; is a dealer selling restricted use pesticides; or is a pest consultant receiving a fee for pesticide recommendations.

C. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- (2) KSAs- Meet desired KSAs competency levels for CCP and CSIPM designations listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).

D. Certification Requirements

- (2) The process and administrative procedures and timelines for becoming a CSIPM will occur as described in paragraph NC409.9D (1) (see [NC-CP-SOP-07](#) for process flowchart). The certification criteria for becoming CSIPM in NC is listed in the following categories:
  - (i) Training- Complete the training deliverables for CSIPM role listed in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1).
  - (ii) KSAs- Meet desired KSAs competency levels for CCP and CSIPM designations listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).
  - (iii) JAA- Achieve JAA for all practice phases in Integrated Pest Management, Practice Code 595.
- (5) Transfers-Procedures for reviewing and assigning conservation planner designations to CSIPM individuals transferring to NC is described in paragraph NC409.9D (5) (see [NC-CP-SOP-09](#) for process flowchart).
- (8) Training
  - (i) The training criteria for CSIPM certification can be found in the [“Conservation Planner Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1). In addition to the national training requirements for CSIPM, NC planners are required to complete the following courses:
    - National and state ACP and CCP training curricula (see [NC-CPA-03](#))
    - Integrated Pest Management- Environmental Risk Assessment, Evaluation, and Mitigation Techniques (Classroom-USDA-NRCS)
    - JAA for Integrated Pest Management (Practice Code 595)

E. Maintaining Certification

- (1) CSIPMs must earn a minimum of six (6) CEUs related to the CSIPM role during a 3-year designation cycle in order to maintain their certification. These contact hours may be obtained anytime during the applicable designation period, and may also be part of the planner’s forty (40) CEUs earned during a 3-year cycle for a CCP or M CCP recertification (see NC-CEUs-05 Table I).
  - (i) CSIPMs are required to have demonstrated continued competence in planning IPMs under the 595 practice standard. NC procedures for maintaining, reviewing, and recertifying conservation planner designation(s) is described in paragraph NC409.9E (2).

- (2) NC procedures for the approval, record keeping, training sources, accreditation, maintenance, and exemptions of CEUs is described in paragraph NC409.9E (2)(7)(8)(9).

F. Quality Assurance

- (1) NC QAR procedures for CSIPM designations will be completed as described in paragraph NC409.9F.
- (2) Suspension- Procedures for the suspension of CSIPM designation will completed as described in paragraph NC409.9E (4).

**NC409.12 Criteria to Achieve Technical Specialist Planner Designation**

B. Administration

- (1) The process and administrative procedures and timelines for becoming a TSPlanner will occur as described in paragraph NC409.9D (1) (see [NC-CP-SOP-05](#) for process flowchart). Procedures for reviewing and assigning conservation planner designations to TSPlanner individuals transferring to NC is described in paragraph NC409.9D (5) (see [NC-CP-SOP-09](#) for process flowchart).

C. Requirements for Designation

- (1) KSAs-Meet desired KSAs competency levels for CCP and TSPlanner designations listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2). Desired KSAs competency levels for the assigned conservation planner designation listed in the [“KSAs for Conservation Planning in NC” \(NC-CPA-04\)](#) (see Exhibit 2).
  - (i) Candidate planners shall make a formal request in writing to the SRC (or designee) to determine the required KSAs in their area of expertise. ECS-Section will issue desired level of KSAs needed for specialist planner designation on Form NC-CPA-04 (Exhibit 2).
- (2) The training criteria for becoming TSPlanner in NC is listed in the following categories;
  - (viii) Training- Complete the training deliverables for TSPlanner role listed in the [“Conservation Certification Training Requirements in NC” \(NC-CPA-03\)](#) (see Exhibit 1). In addition to the national training requirements for TSPlanner, NC planners are required to complete the following courses:
    - In NC, planners must be CCP certified before the TSPlanner designation is achieved.
    - National and state ACP and CCP training curricula (see [NC-CPA-03](#)).
    - JAA for conservation practices common to the employee’s discipline and area of expertise. ECS-Section will determine the conservation practice(s) and level of JAA needed for specialist planner designation on Form NC-CPA-04 (Exhibit 2).

D. Maintaining Certification

- (2) NC procedures for the approval, record keeping, training sources, accreditation, maintenance, and exemptions of CEUs is described in paragraph NC409.9E (2)(7)(8)(9).

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(iii) TSPlanners must earn a minimum of thirty (30) CEUs related to their specialty role during a 3-year designation cycle in order to maintain their certification. These contact hours may be obtained anytime during the applicable designation period, and may also be part of the planner's forty (40) CEUs earned during a 3-year cycle for a CCP or MCCP recertification (see NC-CEUs-05 Table I).

- TSPlanners are required to have demonstrated continued competence in conservation practices common to their discipline and area of expertise. NC procedures for maintaining, reviewing, and recertifying conservation planner designation(s) is described in paragraph NC409.9E (2).

### E. Quality Assurance

- (1) NC QAR procedures for TSPlanner designations will be completed as described in paragraph NC409.9F.
- (4) Suspension Procedures for the suspension of TSPlanner designation will completed as described in paragraph NC409.9E (4).