

SUBCHAPTER A—GENERAL

PART 600—ORGANIZATION

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§ 600.1 General.

(a) The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was authorized by the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103-354, 7 U.S.C. 6901 note) and established by Secretary's Memorandum 1010-1 (2.b.6), *Reorganization of the Department of Agriculture*, to provide national leadership in the conservation, development, and productive use of the Nation's natural resources. Such leadership encompasses the conservation of soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources with consideration of the many human (economic and sociological) interactions. NRCS is the Federal agency that works with landowners on private lands to help them conserve their natural resources. NRCS employees are highly skilled in many scientific and technical specialties, including soil science, soil conservation, agronomy, biology, agroecology, range conservation, forestry, engineering, geology, hydrology, wetlands science, cultural resources, and economics. NRCS was formerly the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) which was established by the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 (Pub. L. 74-46, 49 Stat. 163 (16 U.S.C. 590 (a-f))). NRCS has responsibility for three major areas:

- (1) Soil and water conservation;
- (2) Natural resource surveys including soil surveys, resources inventory, snow surveys, and water supply forecasting; and

(3) Community resource protection and management including watershed projects, river basin studies and investigations, resource conservation and development areas, land evaluation and site assessment, and emergency watershed protection. In addition, NRCS has leadership for the Wetlands Reserve Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative, Farmland Protection Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Forestry Incentives Program, and Conservation Farm Option. NRCS provides technical support for the Conservation Reserve Program.

(b) The NRCS organization consists of a National Headquarters located in Washington, DC; six regional offices; 50 state offices and two equivalent offices in the Caribbean Area and the U.S. Trust Territories of the Pacific Basin Area; approximately 2,500 field offices and 300 specialized offices; 26 plant materials centers; 17 major land resource area soil survey offices; nine national centers; and seven national institutes. A Chief who reports to the USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment heads NRCS.

§ 600.2 National headquarters.

(a) *Chief.* The Chief, with assistance of the Associate Chief, is responsible for administering a coordinated national program of natural resource conservation; planning, directing, and coordinating all program, technical, and administrative activities of NRCS; developing policies and procedures; correlating NRCS conservation programs with other agencies; accepting departmental leadership for programs for other activities assigned by the Secretary of Agriculture; and serving as Equal Employment Opportunity Officer for NRCS.

(b) *Deputy chiefs.* Five deputy chiefs assist the Chief as follows:

(1) *Deputy Chief for Management.* The Deputy Chief for Management is responsible for policies, guidelines, and standards for management services,

human resources management, financial management, information technology, administrative support (providing a coordinated administrative management program for National Headquarters activities), NRCS outreach, training, and correspondence management. This deputy chief also is responsible for the activities of three national centers: business management, information technology, and employee development.

(2) *Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability.* The Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability is responsible for policies, guidelines, and standards for strategic and performance planning, budget planning and analysis, and operations management and oversight.

(3) *Deputy Chief for Programs.* The Deputy Chief for Programs is responsible for policies, guidelines, and standards for conservation operations, resource conservation and community development, watersheds and wetlands, international programs, conservation compliance activities, conservation programs funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation, and animal husbandry and clean water programs.

(4) *Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment.* The Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment is responsible for policies, guidelines, and standards for NRCS technical activities, and provides leadership for soils, resource inventory, and resource assessment. This deputy chief also is responsible for the activities of two national centers (soil survey and cartography and geospatial) and two national institutes (soil quality and natural resources inventory and analysis).

(5) *Deputy Chief for Science and Technology.* The Deputy Chief for Science and Technology is responsible for policies, guidelines, and standards for the agency, and provides leadership for resource economics and social sciences, conservation engineering, and ecological sciences. This deputy chief also is responsible for the activities of four national centers (water and climate, water management, soil mechanics, and plant data) and five national institutes (grazing lands technology, social sciences, watershed science, wetlands

science, and wildlife habitat management). This deputy chief, working closely with the deputy chiefs for Management and Soil Survey and Resource Assessment, provides overall direction for the National Science and Technology Consortium.

(c) *National Science and Technology Consortium.* The consortium consists of three divisions, four centers, five technical institutes, and several cooperating scientists under the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology; two divisions, two centers, and two technical institutes under the Deputy Chief for Soil Survey and Resource Assessment; and one division and three centers under the Deputy Chief for Management.

(1) *Centers.* The nine centers provide specific products and services that maintain and enhance the technical quality of the agency. The centers are: water and climate, water management, soil mechanics, plant data, soil survey, cartography and geospatial, information technology, business management, and employee development.

(2) *Institutes.* The seven institutes are: soil quality, natural resources inventory and analysis, grazing lands technology, social sciences, watershed science, wetlands science, and wildlife habitat management. The institutes provide training; develop technical materials; and acquire, develop, and transfer needed technology in special emphasis areas so field employees can better serve their customers. The institutes often establish partnerships with other Federal agencies, universities, and public and private organizations.

(3) *Cooperating Scientists.* Cooperating scientists work in the areas of soil erosion and sedimentation, air quality, and agroforestry. These scientists are located at various universities and research centers.

(d) *Civil Rights.* The Civil Rights staffs provide coordination, assistance, and recommendations to the Chief on civil rights employment and program compliance issues.

(e) *Legislative Affairs.* The Legislative Affairs Staff provides coordination and assistance to the Chief on legislative affairs issues and activities.

(f) *Conservation Communications.* The Conservation Communications Staff is

responsible for communications, volunteer programs, conservation education, and public affairs activities.

(g) *Strategic Natural Resource Issues.* The Strategic Natural Resource Issues Staff is responsible for coordinating priority strategic issues as determined by the Chief.

§ 600.3 Regional offices.

Each regional office is under the direction and supervision of a regional conservationist. Regional offices are responsible for

- (1) Providing agency leadership, guidance, coordination, and partnering for solutions to regional resource issues;
- (2) Program implementation, consistency, and accountability;
- (3) Region-wide strategic planning, performance measurement, and operations management;
- (4) Administrative operations and support;
- (5) Fund integrity and accountability;
- (6) Technical quality of work; and
- (7) All NRCS activities in the region.

Regional offices are located in Beltsville, Maryland; Atlanta, Georgia; Fort Worth, Texas; Madison, Wisconsin; Lincoln, Nebraska; and Sacramento, California.

§ 600.4 State offices.

Each office is under the direction and supervision of a State conservationist. Each State conservationist is responsible for NRCS programs in a State. The Pacific Basin Area Office, under the direction and supervision of a director, serves the U.S. Trust Territories in that area. The Caribbean Area Office, under the direction and supervision of a director, serves the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Directors of the Pacific Basin and Caribbean areas have the same responsibility and authority as a State conservationist. All references to State conservationists in this chapter include the directors of the Pacific Basin and Caribbean areas.

§ 600.5 Area offices.

Each area office is under the direction and supervision of an area conservationist or assistant State conservationist for field operations who is

responsible for NRCS activities in the geographical area served by the area office. Usually the geographical area includes multiple field offices and counties. Many area offices now consist of teams working on a watershed or other geopolitical basis.

§ 600.6 Field offices.

Each field office is under the direction and supervision of a district conservationist who is responsible for NRCS activities in the geographical area served by the field office. Usually the geographical area of a field office includes one or more conservation districts and one or more counties. Field offices are generally collocated with other USDA agencies in USDA Service Centers.

§ 600.7 Specialized field offices.

Other field offices serve specialized activities, such as watershed protection and flood reduction projects, construction projects, resource conservation and development areas, and soil survey activities. State conservationists designate direction and supervision of these offices.

§ 600.8 Plant materials centers.

Plant materials centers (PMC) assemble and test plant species for conservation uses. Usually a PMC serves two or more States, and is under the jurisdiction of the State conservationist where the center is located. Each PMC is directed and supervised by a manager who is responsible to a State office specialist/manager as designated by the State conservationist.

§ 600.9 Major land resource area soil survey offices.

The United States is divided into 17 major land resource areas (MLRA) for the purpose of soil survey production. Major land resource area soil survey offices (MO) provide the technical leadership, coordination, and quality assurance for all soil survey project activities within the respective MLRA. Each MO serves two or more States (except for the MO in Alaska), and is under the jurisdiction of the State conservationist where the office is located. Each MO is directed and supervised by

a leader who is designated by the State conservationist.

PART 601—FUNCTIONS

Sec.

601.1 Functions assigned.

601.2 Functions reserved to the Secretary of Agriculture.

601.3 Defense responsibilities.

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§ 601.1 Functions assigned.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the Federal agency that works with private landowners to conserve their natural resources. NRCS employees help land users and communities approach conservation planning and implementation with an understanding of how natural resources relate to each other and to people—and how human activities affect those resources. The agency emphasizes voluntary, science-based assistance, partnerships, and cooperative problem solving at the community level. The mission of NRCS is to work on the Nation's non-Federal lands to conserve, improve, and sustain natural resources. The following functions support the mission.

(a) NRCS facilitates and provides conservation technical assistance at the local level that helps people assess their natural resource conditions and needs, set goals, identify programs and other resources to address those needs, develop proposals and recommendations, implement solutions, and measure their success. The agency's role is to assist with:

- (1) Resource inventories,
- (2) Resource assessments,
- (3) Planning assistance, and/or
- (4) Technical assistance.

(b) NRCS provides technical assistance through local conservation districts to land users, communities, watershed groups, Federal and State agencies, other partners, and customers.

(c) NRCS provides assistance on a voluntary basis.

(d) The agency's work focuses on soil, water, air, plant, and animal conservation including erosion reduction, water quality improvement, wetland restoration and protection, fish and wildlife habitat improvement, range management, stream restoration, water management, and other natural resource issues.

(e) Through the conservation operations program, NRCS maintains a cadre of conservationists and interdisciplinary technical experts who provide landowners with advice and recommendations. Science based procedures and techniques are based on new knowledge and research provided by the Agricultural Research Service and others. NRCS developed and maintains a system of directives—including manuals, handbooks, and technical references—to institutionalize new methods, procedures, and standards used to deliver technical assistance at the field level.

(f) NRCS has general responsibility for administration of the following programs:

(1) Conservation operations, authorized by the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 and the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977. Activities include:

(i) Conservation technical assistance to land users, communities, units of State and local government, and other Federal agencies in planning and implementing natural resource solutions to reduce erosion, improve soil and water quantity and quality, improve and conserve wetlands, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, improve air quality, improve pasture and range conditions, reduce upstream flooding, and improve woodlands. Assistance is also provided to implement the highly erodible land (HEL) and wetland conservation (Swampbuster) provisions and—on a reimbursable basis—the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended by the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 and Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996. NRCS technical field staff make HEL and wetland determinations and assist land users to develop and implement conservation plans needed