

**USDA
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CONSERVATION
SERVICE**

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Helping People Help the Land

Since 1935, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has provided assistance to America's private land owners and managers in conserving their soil, water, and other natural resources. NRCS employees provide technical assistance based on sound science and suited to a customer's specific needs. We provide financial assistance for many conservation activities. Participation in our programs is voluntary.

- Our Conservation Technical Assistance program provides voluntary conservation technical assistance to land-users, communities, state and local government, and other Federal agencies in planning and implementing conservation systems.
- Our science and technology activities provide technical expertise in clean water, ecological sciences, engineering, resource economics, and social sciences.
- Our soil science programs provide leadership for soil surveys and for the National Resources Inventory, which assesses natural resource conditions and trends in the United States.

Success! Grassland Bird Habitat at the Negri-Nepote Native Grassland Preserve

About 5 years ago, the Township of Franklin in Somerset County purchased land and contacted NRCS about creating a management plan for wildlife. A conservation plan was developed with the help of the NRCS local office and NJ Audubon.



Once the conservation plan was completed, the township applied for and received financial assistance through the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program to implement the plan.

Native grasses were established to provide high-quality breeding habitat for grassland-nesting birds—declining species that include

vesper, grasshopper, and Henslow's sparrows, eastern meadowlark, bobolink, and upland sandpiper. A companion wildflower seeding mix was used to provide pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and other pollinators important to local farmers.

The state threatened grasshopper sparrows were observed nesting at Negri-Nepote just one year after seeding the native grasses at the site!

Old clay drain tiles that had been installed to drain hydric soils for farming were broken up.

This restored about two-acres of wetlands on the property. The seasonal wetland now provides stopover habitat for migratory shorebirds,

wading birds and waterfowl, and habitat for local resident wildlife such as reptiles and amphibians.

When NRCS first visited the site, gullies covered the slopes of an eroding farm field. Today native grasses, wildflowers and wetland plants cover the 150-acre property. Local wildlife and local wildlife enthusiasts have found a home at the Negri-Nepote Preserve.

Partners in this success include NJ Audubon, the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District, Franklin Township, and the local Boy Scouts.



**Conservation Planning
on Open Space
in New Jersey**



A Primer for Land Managers

Conservation Planning is Investing in Our Future

Each parcel of preserved open space has a unique history of previous management for different purposes. Choosing to "let nature take its own course" on these lands allows any negative side effects from these previous management systems to continue to affect the natural resources on that land.

When soil is damaged by human activity, inhabited by invasive earthworms, or eroded or disturbed by past farming, the ecosystem will usually take a century or two to fix itself. In the meantime water is discharged from the land too fast and water quality is affected by eroding sediment. Flooding and stream

bank erosion result, and base flows in streams decline. Plant and animal habitats suffer.

By evaluating the present condition and establishing a management plan to correct deficiencies, you can guide a smooth transition to restoring a healthy soil and meeting the new goals of the individual/community. This is called Conservation Planning.

What is a Conservation Plan?

A conservation plan combines your land management skills and goals with the science-based knowledge and tools of the professional conservation planner.

With Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) advice, land managers select the

best combination of conservation practices to meet natural resource needs and individual/community or organizational management goals.

The conservation plan is a written record of the land management decisions and the

conservation practices and systems planned for your land.

Carrying out the plan will achieve the goals of protecting the environment both on and off the land, as well as meeting your local management objectives.

"Understanding the resources you have...is the first step toward protecting and enhancing the natural resources for all of us."

A Conservation Plan Includes:

- Landowner/manager determined objectives and goals;
- Aerial photograph and diagram of the property;
- Soils map and soils descriptions;
- Resource inventory data which can include cultural resources, prime and unique lands, production potential, or potential wildlife habitat types;
- List of the treatment and management decisions, including specific job sheets for carrying out activities;
- Location and schedule for applying conservation practices and systems; and
- Plan of operation and maintenance for the conservation practices and systems.



NRCS Planner reviewing conservation alternatives in the field with land managers.

Steps in Developing Your Plan

"NRCS assistance requires evaluation to ensure all conservation systems meet state and federal regulations and have a net positive effect on the environment."

Once a request for assistance is received, a local Conservationist meets with the decision makers to walk the land. Together they determine the land use and management objectives, inventory the existing resource conditions, and evaluate the current management system.

The Conservationist develops alternatives to

improve the resource condition. Each alternative includes the potential impacts, both positive and negative, using the scientific standards of the NRCS.

It's the land manager's job to determine which alternative best fits the operation, budget, and objectives for the land and develop a schedule for implementation. The conservation plan is

then assembled, reviewed and approved by the local Soil Conservation District, and delivered to the decision maker.

The final step is to implement the plan, evaluate the results, and make modifications as needed and as objectives change.

NRCS Requirements



NRCS uses scientific data to develop alternatives that have a net positive impact.

NRCS assistance is a "Federal Action" that requires an evaluation to ensure the proposed conservation systems meet the requirements of state and federal laws and regulations.

The evaluation also serves as a check to make sure the plan would have a net

positive effect on the environment.

NRCS uses science-based quality criteria for the protection of Soil, Water, Air, Plants and Animals when proposing alternatives.

NRCS is also required to evaluate special environmental, economic and social

considerations in planning, such as:

- Cultural Resources
- Wetlands
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Flood Plain Management
- Prime Farmlands
- State Regulations (Highlands, Pinelands)

Contact NRCS

NRCS provides technical assistance in New Jersey through six local Service Center offices and one regional office. Contact your local office for more information, or visit us at www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov.

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1971 Jacksonville-Jobstown Rd,
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Hackettstown Service Center
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