

Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA

§ 600.9

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.

AUTHORITY: 7 U.S.C. 1010-1011; 16 U.S.C. 590a-590f, 1001-1008, 2001-2009, 2203-2205, 3801 *et seq.*; 33 U.S.C. 701b-1.

SOURCE: 65 FR 14783, Mar. 20, 2000, unless otherwise noted.

§ 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