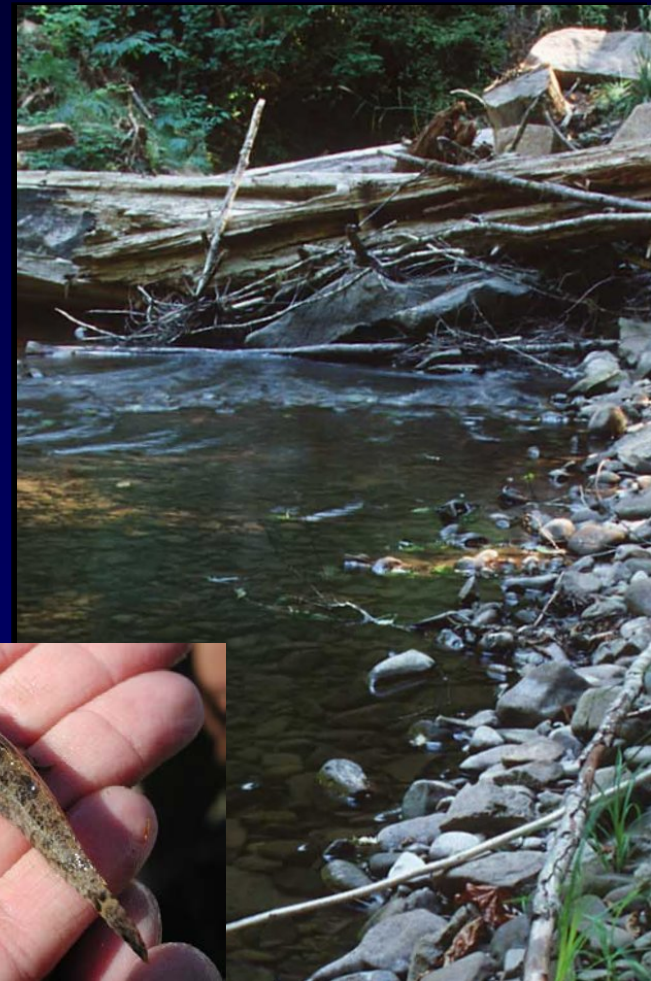


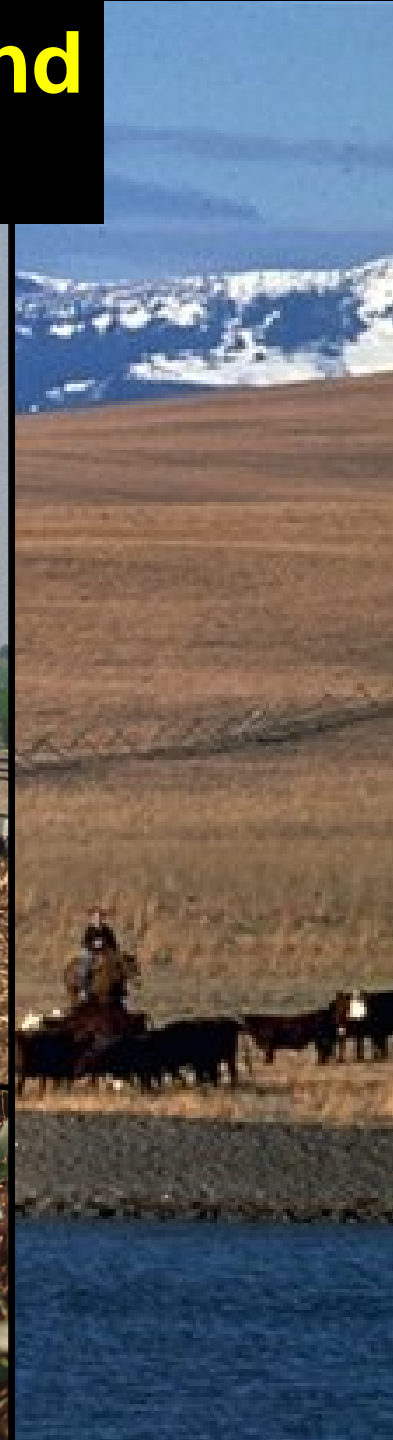
Fish, Wildlife, and Wetlands

Policies and Programs

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Conservation Planning
Module 6B - 2013



**Everything we do on the land
affects Fish and Wildlife!**





This was a joint effort of:
Major Contributors:
AND WITH SUPPORT FROM:
Conservation Organizations:
• National Wildlife Federation
• National Wildlife Refuge System
• Phasants Forever
• State Fish and Wildlife
Management Institute
• Conservation Service, Wildlife

*A celebration of wildlife habitat
on private lands*



Fish and Wildlife-Associated Recreation:*

Participants: 90.1 million
Expenditures: \$\$144.7 billion

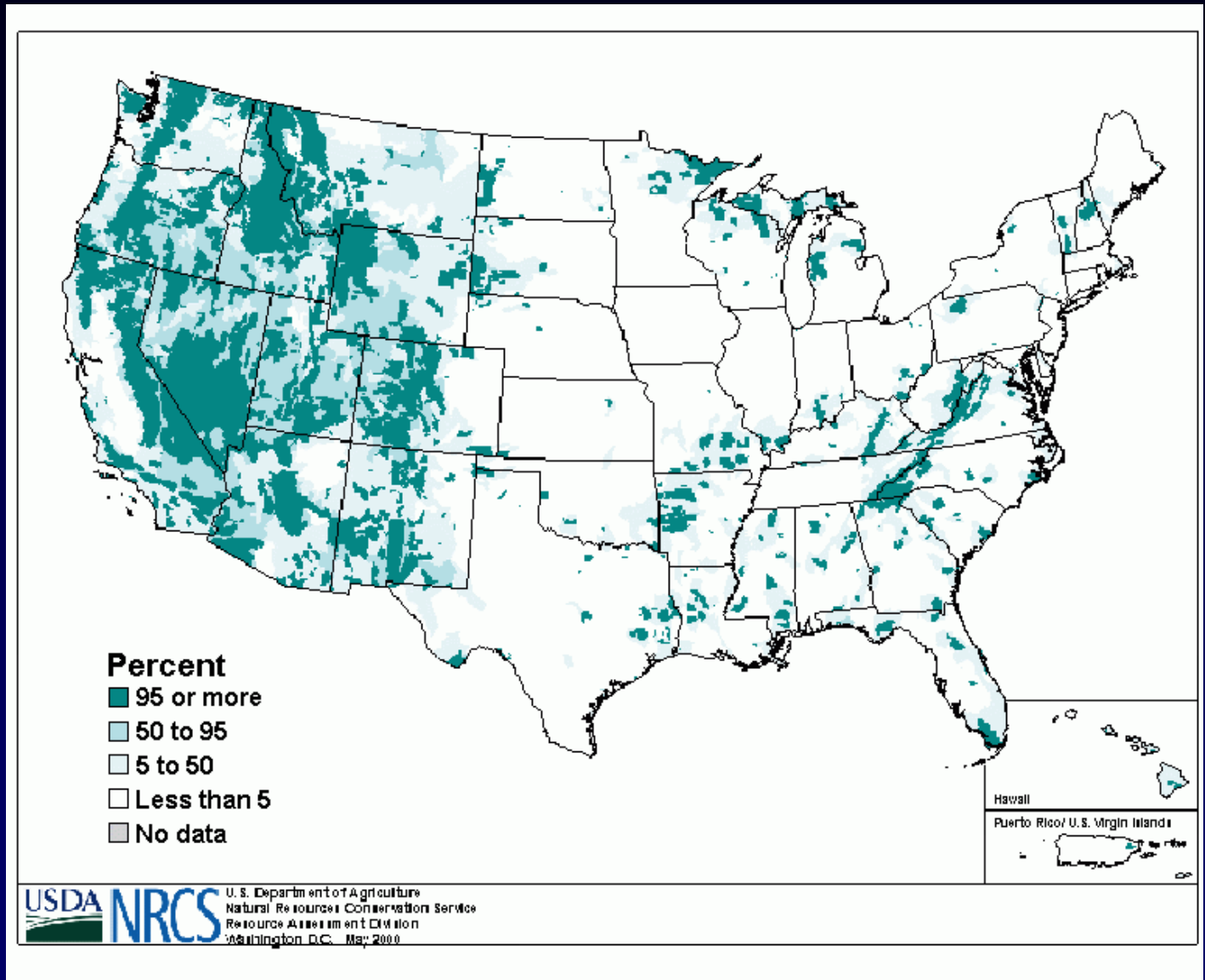
Hunting and fishing expenditures: \$57 billion
Wildlife Watching Expenditures: \$38 billion

***USFWS 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and
Wildlife-Associated Recreation**



70 % of the Nation's lands are private

Fish and
wildlife don't
recognize
boundaries



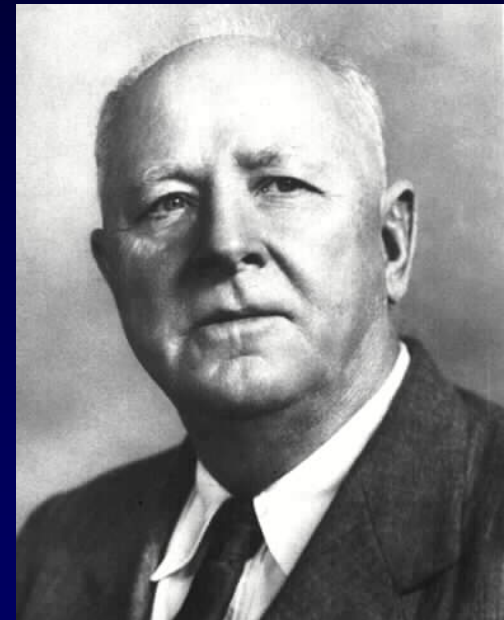
Wildlife has always been an integral part of the NRCS (SCS) comprehensive program for soil and water conservation





Aldo Leopold (1887-1948),
considered the father of
wildlife ecology

At the encouragement of Aldo Leopold, Hugh Hammond Bennett included wildlife management as a practice in one of the nation's first soil conservation demonstration projects (Coon Creek, WI, 1933).



Hugh Hammond Bennett
(1881-1960), father of soil
conservation and founder of
the Soil Erosion Service (1933)

At Leopold's suggestion, Ernest G. Holt was hired as the biologist on the Coon Creek Project's interdisciplinary staff. Holt aggressively pursued incorporating wildlife management into the landowner's conservation plans, and later went on to become the first Chief Biologist of the SCS in 1935.



Ernest Holt (1889 - 1983)



Coon Creek Watershed in late 1930's

The “Soil Conservation Act” of 1935 created SCS, and included wildlife as part of its original conservation mission--as a resource related to soil and water

For over 50 years the SCS (NRCS) has provided wildlife technical assistance to farmers and ranchers under this basic authority



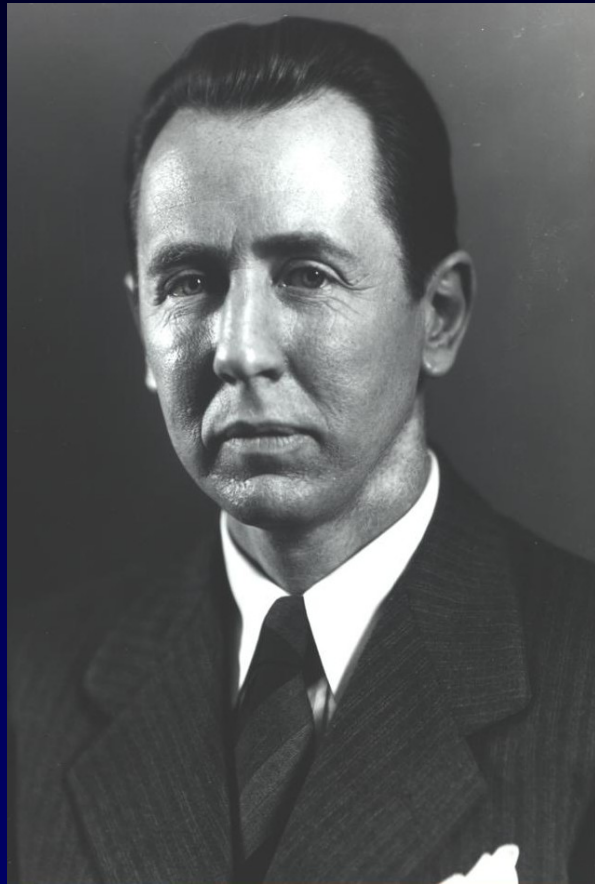
Hugh Hammond Bennett went on to become the agency's first chief (1935) and continued his support for wildlife.

Hugh Hammond Bennett (from a speech at the 1938 annual conference in Washington, D.C.) --

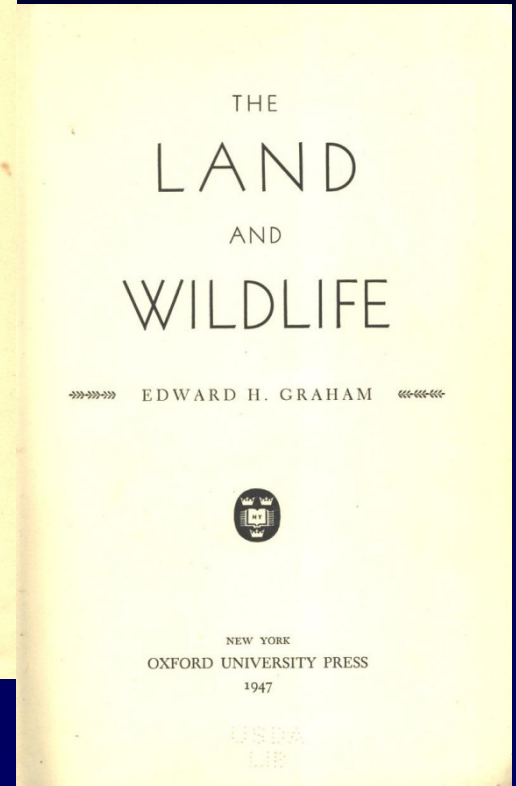
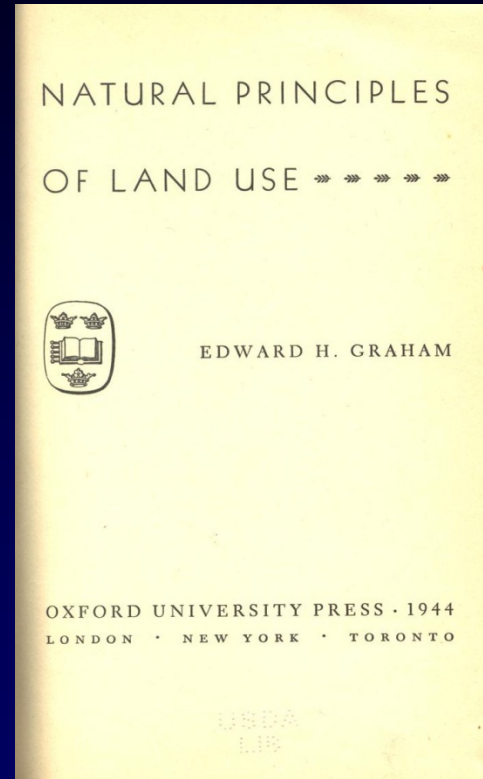
"Wherever we go as a Service you may rest assured that our integrated coordinated program of soil and water conservation goes with us. Wildlife management is definitely a part of that program."



The second SCS Chief Biologist also made significant contributions to incorporating fish and wildlife in the agency's conservation program.



Edward H. Graham
(1902 – 1966)



Author: *Natural Principles of Land Use* (1944),
The Land and Wildlife (1947)

Even with a rich wildlife history, clear wildlife authorities, and Ed Graham's books to reinforce the importance of wildlife in the agency's conservation mission, the early history of fish and wildlife in the Service is checkered (at best).

Early conflicts:

- drainage of wetlands
- channelization of streams
- brush removal and control
- dams and fish barriers
- struggle to consider wildlife on par with other resources





Because of its status as a “related resource”, wildlife was sometimes relegated to a secondary role in the conservation planning process

Lessons learned:

- Fish and wildlife habitat should always be a primary consideration in conservation planning, even on lands that are intensively used for agriculture
- Should never be confined just to odd areas of the farm or to land capability class VIII lands (“wildlife lands”)
- The key is to incorporate habitat features (on all lands) that are complimentary to the primary land use
- Sometimes, because of its economic or aesthetic importance, wildlife is the primary land use



Big changes in wildlife emphasis came
with the 1985 Farm Bill

**USDA soil erosion data and public concern
for the loss of wetlands influenced
the development of the 1985 Farm Bill.**


**The 1985 Food Security Act is considered by
many to be the most pivotal piece of
conservation legislation in the last
half Century**



Food Security Act of 1985

Goal of reducing soil erosion and wetland loss

Aligned USDA conservation and commodity programs



The 1985 Food Security Act introduced new innovative programs and concepts that provided a “carrot and stick” approach to conservation.

- Conservation Reserve Program - Incentive based program to voluntarily establish permanent vegetative cover on highly erodible land
- Sodbuster - Loss of USDA program benefits for “breaking out” land that would become highly erodible
- Swampbuster - Loss of USDA program benefits for converting wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity
- Conservation Compliance - Landusers farming highly erodible land had to implement a conservation plan or lose USDA program benefits



Conservation Reserve Program

First sign-up in 1986; included wildlife habitat and shallow water development as eligible practices

Enrollment goal of 40-45 million acres

33.9 million acres actually enrolled
(roughly 10% of all U.S. cropland)



Additional fish and wildlife authority has come with each new Farm Bill

1990 Farm Bill:

Extended CRP to 1995; focus on improved environmental benefits, particularly water quality

Extended Swampbuster's scope to include penalties for all ag-related wetland conversions

Established pilot Wetland Reserve Program to provide incentives for restoring wetlands converted to agriculture

1996 Farm Bill Emphasized Wildlife

CRP

WRP

WHIP

CREP

EQIP





Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996

Reauthorized CRP and WRP until 2002

Started Continuous CRP Sign-up and
authorized the Conservation Reserve
Enhancement Program (CREP)

Began Environmental Benefits Index



Environmental Benefits Index

Ranking focuses on 5 factors

- 1) Soil erosion control
- 2) Water quality protection
- 3) Creation of wildlife habitat
- 4) Long-term benefits
- 5) Cost per acre enrolled

Elevates wildlife to co-equal status with soil erosion and water quality

Wetland restoration, creation and enhancement practices typically rank high

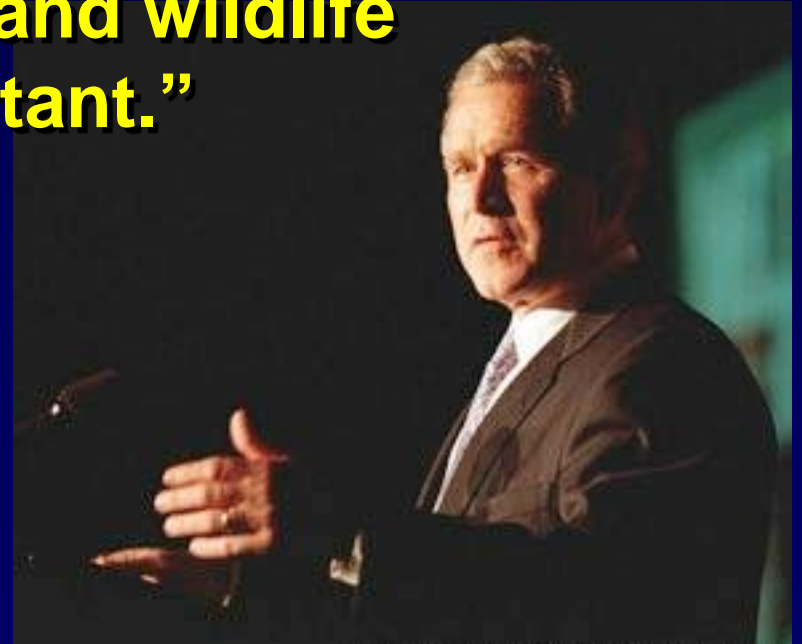


2002 Farm Bill

“....the bill will greatly enhance the abilities of our farmers and ranchers to protect wetlands, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and that's important.”

Remarks of President George W. Bush
upon signing the Farm Bill.

May 13, 2002





2008 Farm Bill

- **The conservation provisions in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) will provide conservation opportunities for farmers and ranchers for years to come. The new provisions build on the conservation gains made by farmers and ranchers through the 1985, 1996 and 2002 Farm Bills. They simplify existing programs and create new programs to address high priority environmental goals.**

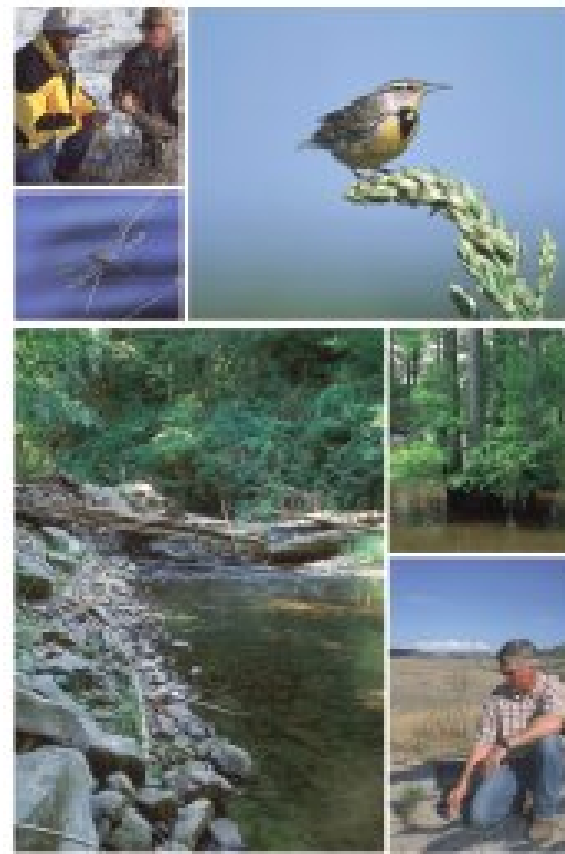
The primary NRCS policy reference for fish and wildlife is the National Biology Manual (NBM)

Contains a basic description of the authorities and programs through which NRCS fish and wildlife assistance is provided



Aquatic and Terrestrial Habitat Resources

National Biology Manual



The National Biology Handbook is a companion document (to the NBM)

Contains technical methods and procedures for fish, wildlife, and wetlands conservation

Also, refers to other technical guidance documents for providing fish, wildlife, and wetlands assistance

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

National Biology Handbook

Aquatic and Terrestrial Habitat Resources

July 2003

DRAFT



Specific policies relating to fish, wildlife, and wetlands:






USDA Fish and Wildlife Policy

NRCS provides fish and wildlife habitat assistance to landowners in accordance with the USDA Fish and Wildlife Policy (USDA Reg. 9500-4, 8/22/83)

“It is the policy of USDA to assure that the values of fish and wildlife are recognized, and that their habitats, both terrestrial and aquatic, including wetlands, are recognized, and enhanced, where possible, as the Department carries out its overall missions.”



NRCS further defines its policy for delivery of fish and wildlife habitat assistance in its Ecosystem-Based Assistance Policy 130 GM, part 406.

A couple of important points in that policy:

- (a) It is NRCS policy to provide ecosystem-based assistance (EBA) to all our customers to help them improve ecosystem health, restore damaged ecosystems, and sustain natural resources.
- (g) EBA will be implemented through the NRCS Planning Process Handbook (9 steps of planning) and will use the guidelines located in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).



Section II – Natural resources information:

- endangered species lists and maps
- soils-wildlife interpretations
- ecological site descriptions

Section III – Resource management systems and quality :

Resource management systems are developed for wildlife habitat considering food, cover, and quantity and quality of drinking water. For these items a minimum of 50 percent of the habitat potential for the species of concern is achieved regardless of land use.



Section IV – Practice standards and specifications:

Contains the fish, wildlife, and wetlands practice standards and specifications that are applicable to each field office. The standards establish the minimum level of acceptable quality for planning, designing, installing, operating, and maintaining practices. Specifications are the site-specific “how to” guidance for practice installation. Example practices:

- upland wildlife habitat management (645)
- wetland wildlife habitat management (644)
- wetland restoration (657)
- wetland creation (658)
- wetland enhancement (659)
- restoration and management of rare or decl. habitats (643)



Section V – Conservation effects:

This section provides indicators of the impact of conservation practices and systems on natural and cultural resources.

* Remember everything affects fish and wildlife, and other practices (not just the wildlife practices) can be used to improve fish and wildlife habitat or designed to avoid or minimize adverse fish and wildlife impacts.

Other NRCS policies related to fish, wildlife, and wetlands:





National Environmental Policy Act (1969), GM 190, Part 410

- Requires federal agencies to consider impacts of their actions on the environment
- An Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared by Federal agencies before undertaking a significant Federal action
- Other Federal actions (that are not excluded), must be supported by an environmental assessment



Wetlands Protection Policy (7 CFR 650.26, GM 410.26)

- Restricts NRCS technical assistance in wetlands
- Policy has become progressively more restrictive over time

Current Policy:

“It is the policy of NRCS to protect and promote wetland functions and values in all NRCS planning and application assistance.”

- Basically, NRCS can provide technical assistance that diminishes wetland functions only if no practicable alternative exists and unavoidable losses are mitigated
- Requires the skills and abilities to identify and delineate wetlands



NRCS Endangered Species Policy: GM 410.22

“NRCS is committed to supporting its customers and partners by providing technical and financial assistance to conserve and improve natural resources on private lands. Within this framework, NRCS shall also provide for the conservation of Federally listed and proposed species and designated and proposed critical habitat.”

- Section 7 requires consultation with FWS for Federal activities that “may affect”
- Requires a basic understanding of the practices that may affect listed species
- Requires knowledge of the geographic distribution and habitat requirements of listed species

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affects Fish and Wildlife!**

