


MEMORANDUM
2024-011

DATE: December 29, 2023

TO: All Soil and Water Conservation Districts

FROM: Jim Plassmeyer, Director 
Soil and Water Conservation Program

SUBJECT: District Specialist Progression Line and Administrative Grant

Progression Line

Since implementation of the District Staff Progression Line in 2016, the Soil and Water Conservation Program has worked with the Program Delivery and District Operations Committee to gather feedback and workshop ideas for improvements that fit within available appropriations and provide a better compensation package for district employees. Thanks to the time and dedication from everyone involved, a new iteration of the progression line will go into effect on January 1, 2024, with additional phases planned for implementation in April and July of 2024. This increase will be for hours worked beginning January 1, 2024. Any January payroll for hours worked in December will still need to be paid at the previous stipend.

The new progression line and updated appendix are attached and can be found on the soil and water districts intranet.

The only portion of the progression line that goes into effect on January 1, 2024 are changes to the DSI-IV positions. The DSV level will be available beginning April 1, 2024 and the DSVI will tentatively come on line in July. As in the past, stipend increases will only be available if all applicable documentation has been received in the program office prior to the start of the quarter in which they will go into effect and all increases must be approved by the board and documented in the official meeting minutes.

Starting with this version of the progression line, district boards are allowed flexibility to start an employee above the DS1 level if the applicant meets minimum qualifications and steps are followed as outlined in the appendix.

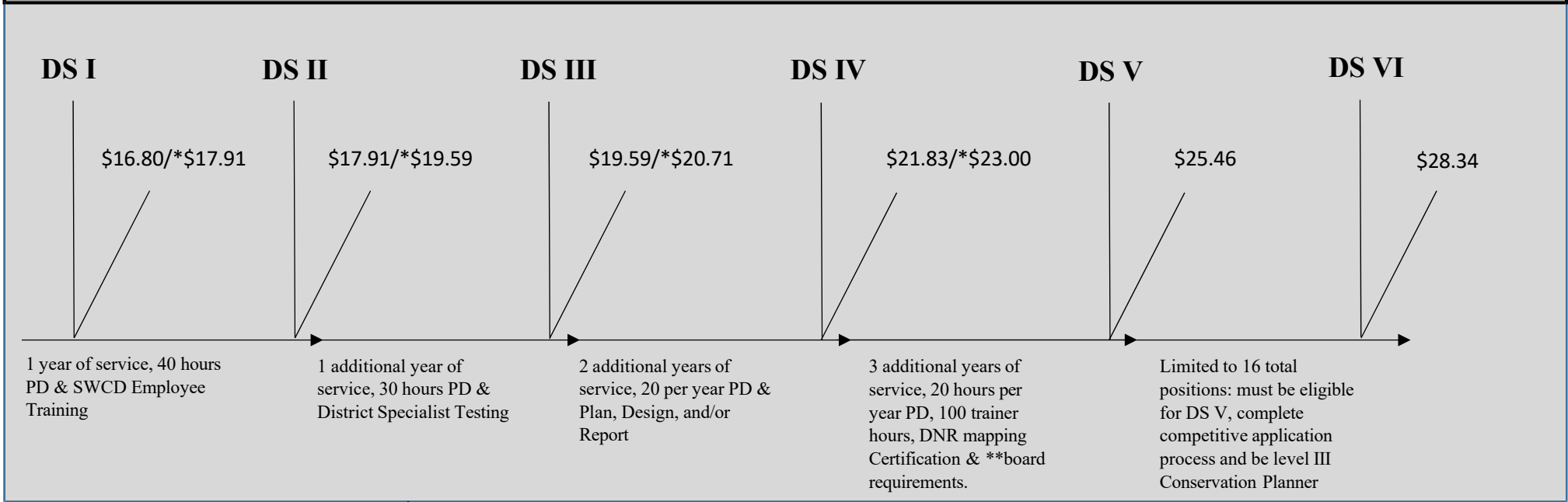
04 Administrative Grant

As we are all aware, inflation has been significant for several years, and districts have expressed concern about the amount of funding available in the administrative grant. Currently, each district receives a minimum of \$12,000 annually with some additional funding available to districts that outsource payroll and those that are not co-located with the USDA. Effective this fiscal year (FY24) each district will receive an additional \$1,000 in your administrative grant. The administrative grant is typically split equally across all four quarters of the year, so you will see an additional \$750 in your 3rd quarter allocation, and an additional \$250 each quarter thereafter.

Each district will receive an updated allocation sheet with your 3rd quarter allocation that includes this administrative funding and any increased employee stipends. If you have any questions, please reach out to your district coordinator.

Attachment

District Specialist Progression



***Higher amounts reflected for levels I-IV are for shared employees**

****Board requirements are: Minimum of 6 meetings with a quorum and 6 cumulative hours of approved training obtained by the board in the last 12 month period.**

District Specialist Testing (Must pass 5 of 7)
Conservation Practices Soils Basic Survey Conservation Planning District Operations Financial MoSWIMS

Fulfill 2 out of 3 categories and attend Grazing School

Plan
Conservation Planner Level 1
Design
Engineering Job Approval (Level 2) OR Grazing Job Approval OR Nutrient Certification OR Ecological Sciences
Report
Document Management System

State Stipend only increased at the quarter (July 1, Oct. 1, Jan. 1, and Apr. 1) and if all requirements have been met and appropriate documentation is received. In order to receive any stipend increase an employee must have a satisfactory performance appraisal within the last 12 months.

See the Progression Line Appendix for more details.

Appendix to District Specialist Progression Line

New employees will only be approved for a DSI stipend with the following exceptions:

1. They have previously worked for a Missouri Soil and Water Conservation District and left the position in good standing at a higher level, in which case, they may be hired at their former level and will be allowed 6 months to meet the current eligibility requirements. If the current requirements are not met in that time period, their state provided stipend will be reduced to a DSI.
2. They have obtained a technical school degree (2 year) or higher in agriculture, natural resource management, surveying, or other closely related field as determined by the program office, or they have 2 years of experience with another agency in soil and water conservation (e.g. NRCS, DNR, similar programs in other states) or extensive survey or conservation practice design and construction experience obtained in an applicable (as determined by the program office) private sector job.

If a candidate meets either of the above listed criteria, the district may request through a board signed letter that they be approved to hire the candidate at a higher level. The program office will ultimately determine what state stipend is available.

Section 1: District Specialist I to District Specialist II

- In order to progress from a DSI to DSII the employee must:
 1. Have served for at least one year in the position.
 2. Attend the Introduction to Missouri Soil and Water Conservation Districts training provided by any District Coordinator. To document your attendance at the Introduction to Missouri Soil and Water Conservation Districts training, a certificate will be provided by the Soil and Water Conservation Program.
 3. Receive a satisfactory performance appraisal from the board of supervisors in the prior 12 months. Performance appraisals must be documented in the official board minutes.
 4. Complete at least 40 hours of approved professional development in the prior 12 months.

Section 2: District Specialist II to District Specialist III

- In order to progress from a DSII to DSIII the employee must:
 1. Have served for at least one additional year at the DSII level.
 2. Pass five of the seven District Specialist Testing categories. District Specialist Testing includes passing five of seven test. The testing is administered by the Soil and Water Conservation Program and is available online through MoSWIMS. The seven test include soils, conservation planning, district operations, MoSWIMS, financial, survey and conservation practices. A score of 70% or greater is needed to pass each test.

3. Receive a satisfactory performance appraisal from the board of supervisors in the prior 12 months. Performance appraisals must be documented in the official board minutes.
4. Complete at least 30 hours of approved professional development in the prior 12 months.

Section 3: District Specialist III to District Specialist IV

- In order to progress from a DSIII to DSIV the employee must:
 1. Have served for at least two additional years at the DSIII level, meet two of the three Plan, Design, and Report categories, and attend an MU/NRCS Grazing School. **The SWCD board should direct the SWCD employee to the certifications that will provide the most assistance to the landowners in their county.** The Grazing School requirement only applies to SWCD employees that work for SWCDs that have funds in the grazing resource concern.
 2. Receive a satisfactory performance appraisal from the board of supervisors in each of the prior 12 month periods (1 per year).
 3. Complete at least 40 hours of approved professional development in the prior 24 months (20 per year).
- **To meet the Plan category**, the employee must attain Conservation Planner Level I. Please refer to AgLearn for the requirements for Conservation Planner Level I. Instructions for adding the Level 1 planning program into the employee's IDP in AgLearn can be found on the NRCS Conservation Planning page at [NRCS Conservation Planning | Missouri Soil and Water \(mosoilandwater.land\)](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/soilandwater).

The certification from AgLearn will serve as the documentation that the employee is has completed the required coursework for the Conservation Planner Level I. The Conservation Planner Level I training curriculum can be obtained from your NRCS District Conservationist

- **To meet the Design category**, the employee must meet one of the following five options:
 - Engineering Job Approval Authority (Level 2) –
 - In order to receive this certification the employee must be assigned engineering job approval authority level 2 for inventory and evaluation, design and construction responsibility for one practice defined by the standards in Section IV of the NRCS Technical Guide. See pages 3 and 4 for further guidance.
 - Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority (ESJAA)
 - In order to receive this certification the employee must attain the appropriate level of job class by practice for at least one of the three resource concerns. The three resource concerns are Sheet/Rill and Gully Erosion, Sensitive Areas, and Woodland Erosion. This will be documented on the appropriate resource concern ESJAA Certification Form found [here](#) See pages 5 and 6 for further guidance.
 - Grazing Job Approval Authority
 - In order to receive this certification the employee must attain the appropriate level of job class for each specific grassland management conservation practices and supporting practices that are utilized in the development of a prescribed grazing system. This will be documented on the Grazing Certification Job Approval Authority Form found at

<https://mosoilandwater.land/sites/mosoilandwater/files/Grazing%20JAA%20Certification%20Form%208-2020.pdf>. See page 7 for further guidance.

- Nutrient Management Certification
 - In order to receive this certification the employee must be certified in nutrient management by NRCS.
- **To meet the Report category**, the employee must be certified on one of the following three categories:
- Document Management System
 - 1. Finalize documents to Scan and Upload to Document Management System (DMS) information
 - 2. Assemble Contract Files and Documentation
 - 3. Manage Correspondence (Letters)
 - 4. Data Entry for Conservation Desktop and Progress Reporting System Data Entry
 - See pages 8 and 9 for further guidance.

Section 4: District Specialist IV to District Specialist V

- In order to progress from a DSIV to DSV, the employee must:
 1. Have served for at least three additional years at the DSIV level.
 2. Receive a satisfactory performance appraisal from the board of supervisors in each of the prior 12 month periods (1 per year).
 3. Complete at least 20 hours of approved professional development in the prior 12 months
 4. DNR Mapping Tool
 - a. Complete a mapping tool training course and submit a map that meets all Program Office Standards. Certification will be granted by the program office and the certificate of completion will serve as documentation.
- **The DSV stipend is not permanent. In order to maintain eligibility, the employee must meet the above requirements on an annual basis and provide a minimum of 100 hours of training to other district specialists. Requirements are reviewed on July 1 each year.**

Section 5: District Specialist VI

- In order to progress to a DSVI, the employee must:
 1. Meet all requirements to serve as a DSV.
 2. Have a letter of recommendation from their board.
 3. Possess the appropriate signature authority for their area as designated by the program office with input from MASWCD and MASWCDEA.
 4. Be selected through the competitive DSVI application process.
- In order to maintain status as a DSVI, the following must be completed on an annual basis:
 - a. Maintain designated signature authority
 - b. Complete 20 hours of approved professional development.

- c. Complete at least 200 hours of work for districts outside of their administrative district, but within their MASWCD area. This could include training staff, designing practices, or using relevant signature authority to review and sign plans, designs, and contracts.
- d. Obtain a satisfactory annual performance appraisal from their administrative board of supervisors.

Section 6: Board Requirements

- In order to be eligible for any employee to receive a DSV or DSVI stipend, the **board** must meet the following requirements annually:
 1. Complete performance appraisals on all employees.
 2. Hold a minimum of six meetings with a quorum.
 3. Receive a cumulative six hours of approved training.

DESIGN CATEGORY

Engineering Job Approval Authority (Level 2)

Engineering Job Approval Authority policy is contained in NRCS Title 210 National Engineering Manual (NEM) Part 501, Subpart A and in Missouri supplement to Part 501, Subpart A – Review and Approval (<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/>).

From NEM MO501.1 (March 2012):

Non-NRCS employees in Missouri operating under the technical supervision of an NRCS employee but who are not federal employees and who are not licensed to practice engineering in the state may be assigned job class I or II engineering approval authority for practices defined by the following standards in section IV of the Technical Guide:

- (i) Diversion (362)
- (ii) Grassed Waterway (412)
- (iii) Irrigation Land Leveling (464)
- (iv) Pipeline (516) (Except those connected to a source or supply used for human consumption)
- (v) Spring Development (574)
- (vi) Surface Drain Field Ditch (607)
- (vii) Terrace (600)
- (viii) Watering Facility (614)
- (ix) Underground Outlet (620)
- (x) Water and Sediment Control Basin (638) (Maximum fill height of 5 ft measured from natural ground at centerline of embankment)
- (xi) Well Decommissioning (351)

From NEM MO501.4 (March 2012):

- (3) Missouri Engineering Job Approval Delegation

(i) Engineering job approval authority may be provided for inventory and evaluation, design or construction responsibility. (See Section 501.9)

(ii) Engineering job approval authority must be recommended by an NRCS engineer. Generally, the area engineer or service area engineer will recommend engineering job approval authority for area and field office personnel. The state conservation engineer will determine and assign engineering job approval for state office staff and area or service area engineers. The recommended engineering job approval authority chart for NRCS employees will be reviewed by the person's administrative supervisor. Job approval charts for non-NRCS employees will be reviewed by the district conservationist and by the organization employing the individual. In a case where the recommending engineer is the administrative supervisor, the State Conservation Engineer will concur with the engineering job approval chart.

(iii) Engineering job approval authority will be delegated to employees based on demonstrated competence, training received, and experience at the various stages of planning, design, and construction. A sustained workload is necessary to retain competence and engineering job approval authority for an engineering practice. When more than 3 years have passed since the employee designed a practice, or one with similar components, consideration should be given to reducing the level of delegated authority for that practice. Job approval authority for all employees must be reviewed at least once every 3 years.

(iv) The Missouri NRCS job approval database will be used to document a person's job engineering approval authority. The approval levels will be printed on the MO-ENG-C12 form. Signed copies of the printed forms will be given to the person receiving engineering job approval and a signed copy will be filed in the area office. The database with the engineering approval authority for all persons in Missouri will be maintained by the state conservation engineer.

(v) Employees must sign the Engineering Approval Authority ethics statement before the approval authority is valid.

Grazing School Requirement

Any SWCD employee that is employed by an SWCD that receives cost-share funds in the grazing resource concern must attend an NRCS/MU grazing school. If the employee is not included on the attendee list maintained by the program office, documentation of attendance must be provided by the district.

Ecological Science Job Approval Authority

Within this category, SWCP practices were grouped by resource concern and NRCS practices used to address these resource concerns were identified. The three resource concerns are Sheet/Rill and Gully Erosion, Sensitive Areas, and Woodland Erosion. In order to meet the ESJAA category, employees must attain the appropriate level of job class by practice phase for at least one of the three resource concerns. Design phase will include preparation of all associated documents that support the conservation plan and contract development. This will include Conservation Desktop developed plan,

CPA-52, job sheets, specifications, etc. The conservation plan will need to be reviewed and signed by a Certified Conservation Planner.

Missouri Ecological Science Job Approval Authority Fact Sheets have been developed for each ecological science practice and provide additional information on job classes, controlling factors, knowledge, skills, abilities needed, and common associated practices. These fact sheets are found in the conservation practice standard folder in Section IV of the Missouri Field Office Technical Guide:

<https://efotg.sc.egov.usda.gov/#/details>

Specific ESJAA for each conservation practice needed to address the resource concerns are found in the following tables. **If a practice listed in the tables is not utilized in your district you only need to fulfill the Inventory and Evaluation requirement listed in the tables below.**

Ecological Science Job Approval Authority - Sheet/Rill and Gully Erosion			
Conservation Practices	Job Class by Practice Phase		
	Inventory and Evaluation (I&E)	Design and Development of Conservation Practice Requirements *	Installation Oversight and Certification
Access Control (472)	3	3	3
Conservation Crop Rotation (328)	1	1	1
Contour Buffer Strips (332)	2	2	2
Cover Crop (340) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	2	2	
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Type of Site Prep</i>	2	2	2
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Slope</i>	3	3	3
Fence (382)	3	2	2
Forage and Biomass Planting (512) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	4	4	4
Prescribed Grazing (528) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	3	3	3
Residue and Tillage Management No-Till (329)	1	1	1
Stripcropping (585) - <i>Slope</i>	2	2	2
Stripcropping (585) - <i>Crop Type</i>	1	1	1
Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)	3	2	2
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490)	3	3	3
Windbreak (380)	3	2	2

Ecological Science Job Approval Authority - Sensitive Areas			
Conservation Practices	Job Class by Practice Phase		
	Inventory and Evaluation (I&E)	Design and Development of Conservation Practice Requirements *	Installation Oversight and Certification
Access Control (472)	3	3	3
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Type of Site Prep</i>	2	2	2
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Slope</i>	3	3	3
Fence (382)	3	2	2
Field Border (386)	3	2	2
Filter Strip (393) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	2	2	2
Forage and Biomass Harvest Management (511)	1	1	1
Riparian Forest Buffer (391) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	2	2	2
Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	2	2	2
Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)	3	2	2
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490)	3	3	3
Windbreak (380)	3	2	2

Ecological Science Job Approval Authority - Woodland Erosion			
Conservation Practices	Job Class by Practice Phase		
	Inventory and Evaluation (I&E)	Design and Development of Conservation Practice Requirements *	Installation Oversight and Certification
Access Control (472)	3	3	3
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Type of Site Prep</i>	2	2	2
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Slope</i>	3	3	3
Fence (382)	3	2	2
Forest Trails and Landings (655)	3	3	3
Tree/Shrub Establishment (612)	3	2	2
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation (490)	3	3	3

The certification form for ecological sciences must be signed by the employee, a SWCD board member and NRCS. This form is located on the SWCD intranet.

Grazing Job Approval Authority

Within this category, specific grassland management conservation practices and supporting practices that are utilized in the development of a prescribed grazing system have been identified. In order to meet the Grazing JAA category, employees must attain the appropriate level of job class for each conservation practice identified in the table below. Design phase will include preparation of all associated documents that support the conservation plan and contract development. This will include Conservation Desktop developed plan, CPA-52, job sheets, specifications, etc. The conservation plan will need to be reviewed and signed by a Certified Conservation Planner.

Grazing Certification Job Approval Authority Matrix (Ecological Science and Engineering JAA)			
Conservation Practice	Job Class by Practice Phase		
	Inventory and Evaluation (I&E)	Design and Development of Conservation Practice Requirements *	Installation Oversight and Certification
<i>Grassland Practices</i>			
Brush Management (314)	2	2	2
Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315)	2	2	2
Fence (382)	3	3	3
Forage and Biomass Planting (512) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	4	4	4
Forage Harvest Management (511)	1	1	1
Prescribed Grazing (528) - <i>All Controlling Factors</i>	3	3	3
<i>Supporting Practices</i>			
Access Control (472)	3	2	2
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Type of Site Prep</i>	2	2	2
Critical Area Planting (342) - <i>Slope</i>	3	3	3
Heavy Use Area Protection (561)**	1	1	1
Integrated Pest Management (595) - <i>Pest. Loss Pathways</i>	2	0	0
Integrated Pest Management (595) - <i>Land Use</i>	1	0	0
Livestock Pipeline (516)**	2	2	2
Silvopasture Establishment (381)	1	0	0
Spring Development (574)**	2	1	2
Watering Facility (614)**	2	2	2

**Requires Engineering Job Approval Authority - Approval is based on the individual's training, experience, and demonstrated competence. Employees shall not approve designs or certify construction for practices that exceed their maximum approval limit. However, employees (working under the direction of person approving) can complete work on practices above their limit and submit for approval.

The certification form for grazing certification must be signed by the employee, a SWCD board member and NRCS. This form is located on the SWCD intranet.

Nutrient Management Certification

Nutrient management certification may be obtained through NRCS.

REPORT CATEGORY

- **To meet the Report category**, the employee will demonstrate the ability to perform the following overarching tasks. NRCS will assist with providing the initial training to SWCD staff assisting field offices in the management of documents needed for Farm Bill contracts. Workload will vary across FOSAs. Local District Conservationists will assist by providing workload tasks.

1. Finalize documents to Scan and Upload to Document Management System (DMS) information
2. Assemble Contract Files and Documentation
3. Manage Correspondence (Letters)
4. Data Entry for Conservation Desktop and Progress Reporting System Data Entry

Within these tasks, activities may include the following as needed throughout a fiscal year:

Actions	Deliverables
Gathers appropriate contract folder information for CSP and EQIP program enrollments	Scan and upload CSP and EQIP contracts into DMS as per DMS User Guide
	Scan and upload contract documents prior to and after obligations
	Work with participants to obtain final signatures. Document signature dates in Protracts field. Scan and upload documents signed by participant
Work directly with field and Area Staff to insure transfer of information from Protracts is completed	Ensure that documents from Protracts are loaded directly to DMS as applicable. Including signed contract documents, completed payment checklists
Review contract forms, documents, notes, etc.	Assemble and maintain six part contract file folders- includes EQIP, CSP and CTA programs.
Work directly with field staff to insure proper documents are available for printing	Print and file documents relating to contract: 1202, contract reviews, etc.
Collect items needed for six part folder	Complete six part folder checklist
Identify with field and area staff those older contracts that need to be disposed of.	Complete disposition of older contracts in accordance to policy
Document in folder and electronically any actions that this position is involved with related to the individual contract	Complete written assistance notes within contracts of actions taken
Review with field and area staff as needed appropriate contract information for program participants	Print out contract information packet to provide to participants. Schedule appointments with participants as needed to review contracts with technical staff and insure final detailed plans are provided.

Reviews contract folder information and work with field/area staff to assist on required program letters. Different contract related letters will be needed based on the status of the contract.	Prepare, print and mail contract practice reminder letters. All letters are physically filed in contract folder
	Prepare, print and mail contract application deferral letters. All letters are physically filed in contract folder.
	Prepare, print and mail contract obligation letters. All letters are physically filed in contract folder.
	Prepare, print and mail program eligibility letters. All letters are physically filed in contract folder.
	Prepare, print and mail application approval letters. All letters are physically filed in contract folder.
	Prepare, print and mail status review notification letters.
Review with field and area staff need for contract cancellation and/or termination request packets	Scans needed cancellation and termination materials to Area Office
Reviews with field staff any requests (form AD-1026) for HELC/WC prepares administrative information as needed	Scan and copy HELC/WC AD-1026 determination requests
Collects from field staff HELC/WC determination materials	Print and mail determinations including certified determinations-includes letters, forms, maps, etc.
Reviews with field and area staff any requests for audit data calls	Gathers and submits required information for audit data calls
Review Program Applications-form CCC-1200	Enter Program Applications (Form CCC-1200) into Protracts
Conservation Desktop plan follow-up	Insure that practices are applied in Conservation Desktop after certification for all state cost share plans.
Reviews contracts as requested and identifies eligibility issues	Coordinates with FSA to address contracts with error messages on eligibility issues.
Manages Receipt for Service entries for Field Office as needed	Tracks and enters Receipt for Service entries to insure for services provided by local field offices as assigned.
Average Cost Database updating	Collects receipts and enters data into the average cost database based on annual deadlines for local field offices as assigned.

The certification form needed to document DMS is located on the SWCD intranet site at the following location https://mosoilandwater.land/sites/mosoilandwater/files/dms-certification_0.pdf

Professional Development

- In order for professional development (PD) to be counted towards annual requirements, the following criteria must be met
 - Must be relevant to your position as a district specialist (determined by program office)
 - Must be put on by University of MO Extension (Credits will be determined by MU) or NRCS (Credits determined by NRCS) or have documented pre-approval from program office management.
 - Must be recorded in MoSWIMS as training and reported using the PD reporting form found on the districts intranet. The PD reporting form is used to document training hours for district staff and boards. Each district should maintain one copy of the form (staff and board on the same copy). The completed form must be submitted to the program office by the end of the fiscal year being reported and be available upon request to verify hours needed for progression line advancement.

Trainer Hours

- In order for time to be counted towards the trainer requirement for the DSV and DSVI, the time must be recorded in MOSWIMS using the code for trainer and recorded using the PD reporting form found on the districts intranet. When providing training while working on a specific practice, the time still needs to be reported towards that practice. In the timesheet once the practice is selected, there is an option to select training to document to the trainer hours.

Annual Board Training

- The board training requirement for levels 5 and six of the progression line is a minimum of 6 hours cumulatively for the board. This means that a single member could obtain the training for the whole board, however it is strongly suggested that all board members actively engage in some training annually. In order to be counted towards this requirement, all board training must be pre-approved by the program office. The board attended training must be reported using the PD reporting form found on the districts intranet.