



Employee Development Expectations for Soil Conservationist (SC)-GS-0457

These expectations are meant to demonstrate the progressive development by an employee during the first two years of employment and supplements their Performance Plan by detailing specific requirements.

This document should be a tool used by both an employee and supervisor to determine the needed training and Individual Development Plan (IDP) curriculum, so core competencies and qualifications are obtained.

At 0 – 6 months, the Soil Conservationist:

- Complete onboarding activities. Refer to onboarding checklist.
- Complete basic skills and abilities assessment (proficiencies with tools and knowledge application).
- Meet applicable field, area, and state office teams and staff.
- Learn and know where to locate and use Planning and Policy documents (eDirectives, National and State Bulletins, electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG)).
- Demonstrates knowledge of the content and sections of the Field Office Tech Guide.
- Has accessed AgLearn to complete introductory trainings as well as an IDP, in coordination with supervisor.
- Has accompanied a Soil Conservationist, Soil Conservation Technician, Soil Scientist, and/or engineer on visits with landowners for on-the-job training and customer service experience.

At 6 months, the Soil Conservationist:

- Has reviewed national, state and local [strategic plans](#) and understands agency mission, goals and priorities (and been provided the Organizational Chart of Agency).
- Can access [e-Directives](#) to study handbooks, manuals and policy and has obtained a copy of the [National Planning Procedures Handbook \(NPPH-180-Part 600\)](#).
- Has accessed [eFOTG](#), knows what information can be found per section and has obtained a copy of National and State Resource Concerns and Planning Criteria – Version 10/1/2013 (Resource Quality Criteria for RMS document).
- Can identify the common agricultural crops, plants, and land uses in the work area and can describe what farming operations, land management systems, implements, equipment and cultural resources are present.



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- Able to communicate effectively and establish productive relationships with customer and staff.
 - Can utilize Conservation Desktop/ArcGIS and geographic layers to locate a specific point/tract/farm of land for location, topography, aerial map, and soil map.
 - Has studied the soil survey of the management unit/ resource team (and accessed Web Soil Survey) for soil mapping units and soil descriptions and is working towards understanding each soil's capacity for soil loss to aid in determining vulnerability and/or limitations for planning purposes.
 - Following training, adheres to guidance and policies for Time and Accounting ([USDA Departmental Regulation](#) 4070-735-001); Employee Responsibility and Conduct (GM 360, Part 413); Ethics (GM 110, Part 405); and Safety and Physical Protection (GM 360, Part 420).
 - Reviewed Certified Conservation Planner requirements in Conservation Planning Policy (GM 180, Part 409) with supervisor and working towards obtaining appropriate certification.
 - Develops understanding of the importance for keeping NRCS-CPA-6 (Cons-6 Notes) in a timely, legible, and complete manner.
 - Takes "before" and "after" photographs of sites in the field to document the condition of the site prior to treatment and the improvement after treatment.
 - Understands the importance of the partnership of the District Board and Staff.
 - Has reviewed and understands the Memorandum of Agreement and Cooperative Agreement and understands how those agreements affect NRCS/SWCD operations.
 - Has attended one or more District Board meetings, as allowable and approved by the supervisor for meetings outside of the tour of duty.
 - Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of local area, land uses, and resource concerns.
 - Assists staff in conducting surveys and develops understanding of basic surveying principles.
 - Demonstrates the basic knowledge of employee engagement as a fundamental business concept in the effort to understand and describe the nature of the relationship between NRCS and its employees.



- Has accompanied the District Conservationist on visits with landowners who had potentially sensitive issues that needed to be resolved, and/or has observed the District Conservationist explaining requirements to landowners to guard against any future misunderstandings.

At 12 months, the Soil Conservationist:

- Recognizes and can explain the relationship between land uses, crops, management, and the content of conservation practices within a conservation plan and the resource conditions on-site.
- Understand and explain basic Farm Bill programs and state conservation programs rules and requirements to producers.
- Can identify the natural resource issues and concerns that are most critical in the management unit/resource team and can provide planning options for conservation practices according to standards and specifications, especially focusing on applicable rates and dates for vegetative practices.
- Aware of the need for conservation practices to fit within customer's production objectives and mesh well with the surrounding landscape.
- Knowledgeable of the [nine-step conservation planning process](#).
- Has achieved Conservation Planning Certification Level _____.
- Can complete Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations including gathering data in the field, calculates soil loss, and identifies alternatives for reducing soil loss.
- Has prepared basic conservation plans (using Conservation Desktop) for at least ten landowners.
- Has had experience in setting up and using a surveying instrument, using a rod, and recording the survey notes on at least ten sites.
- Can utilize the GPS equipment and Conservation Desktop/ ArcGIS to generate check-out, as-built and as-applied maps.
- Has spent time in the field with a Soil Scientist to observe the process of soil mapping and has demonstrated the knowledge and ability to identify prevalent soils in the county.
- Knowledgeable of the Food Security Act Manual and requirements for compliance on Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) for eligibility to USDA benefits and payments.



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- Participated in Farm Service Agency, Food Security Act 5% Compliance Reviews.
 - Taken part in the Area's 5% Conservation Practice Quality Reviews and understands importance of adhering to standards and specifications.
 - Has requested to participate on a technical or administrative team outside the employee's management unit/ service area.
 - Can accurately identify the Conservation Programs that are best suited for addressing resource problems on specific sites.
 - Assists the District Conservationist in screening and ranking program applications.
 - Has a working knowledge of Farm Bill programs application management and contract management.
 - Has met with SWCD Board Members to learn about their operation and had the Board Member familiarize them with the land uses in the part of the county where the board member lives.
 - Has interviewed a landowner who has been successful in implementing conservation practices and has prepared a narrative that highlights the landowner's accomplishments (the narrative is used in a news article or newsletter or in a power point or other presentation).
 - Makes presentations to the District Board about the resource problems that landowners want to address using cost-share funds (photographs or videos are used to illustrate the resource problems that have been identified on-site).
 - Has led at least one successful conservation-oriented event for outreach, education and/or communication of the opportunities and benefits of voluntary conservation.
 - If applicable, review Soil Conservation Promotion Guidance document.
 - If applicable, attended meetings of the state/area New Employee Cadre, utilized training (and network of colleagues) and demonstrated the ability to use the [nine-step conservation planning process](#).

At 18 months, the Soil Conservationist:

- Performs all routine duties with only limited supervision or assistance.
- Proficient in identifying resource concerns in the field by observing the landscape, assessing the problems, and discussing issues and objectives with the landowner (this



encompasses all areas of a planning unit including cropland, forest land, pastureland/rangeland, hayland, critical areas, streams and other water bodies). Understand how to plan, design, and install a practice in accordance with that standard to address identified resource concerns.

- Recognizes all applicable types of erosion and can identify the cause and potential solutions.
- Completes National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) evaluation, NRCS CPA 52 - Inventory of Resource Concerns, in accordance with established policy and guidelines with minimal supervision.
- Has obtained Engineering Job Approval Authority (EJAA) and Ecological Science Job Approval Authority (ESJAA) for the common practices in the management unit/ resource area, understands how to obtain increased Job Approval Authority, and has identified three additional practices for which increased Job Approval Authority is needed.
- Is comfortable in directing and carrying out all aspects of surveying (setting up and using an instrument, using a rod, recording the notes, and conducting a survey involving benchmarks, turning points and the calculations to close out).
- Prepares check-out and as-built notes in accordance with engineering note-keeping procedures.
- Pursue and serve in a temporary acting capacity with support from your respective supervisor.

At 24 months, the Soil Conservationist:

- Plans and manages own schedule and work assignments with only limited direction from supervisor.
- Can function independently in carrying out customer consultations, conservation planning and application activities.
- Proficient in explaining Farm Bill programs and state conservation programs to producers. This includes explaining program rules and requirements, handling producer interviews, and field reviews.
- Has experience in treating major resource concerns associated with cropland, forest land, pastureland/rangeland, hayland, and critical areas as applicable in the management unit/ resource area.
- Makes recommendations to the District Conservationist on how to accomplish the goals for the new fiscal year and identifies how those goals can be met without compromising



completing all tasks by established deadlines.

- Recognizes potentially sensitive issues and presents alternatives to those issues to the supervisor/landowner at a time and in a manner that will lead to a satisfactory outcome for both the agency and the landowner.
- Oversees office operations while the District Conservationist is on leave by monitoring correspondence, responding to clients that call or come in, and setting priorities to meet deadlines.
- As allowable, has aided in neighboring field offices to gain more diverse experience and exposure to the management styles of other District Conservationists.
- Is proficient in the use of all applicable business tools and the latest mobile technology (as deemed appropriate in your state) for conservation planning and implementation; RUSLE II/ IET, Conservation Desktop (CD), ProTracts, grazing tools and hand-held devices.
- Understands and can effectively relay to the landowner what needs to do in the next six to twelve months to remain in compliance with Farm Bill contract(s).
- Is familiar with the "Quality Assurance Management Guide" and understands what needs to be done to follow the items listed in the Guide.
- Has participated in at least one Quality Assurance Review or spot check conducted by the Area or State Staff.
- Introduces the District Board to a new, different, or innovative approach to meeting their conservation objectives.
- As allowable, attended at least one State Association of Conservation District Area meeting to gain an understanding of how the District Boards influence program policy and strategic direction.
- Identifies opportunities for outreach to underserved clients and develops and implements a strategy to reach those clients.
- Has made presentations on conservation topics/programs to at least two groups.
- If applicable, review state's Soil Conservation Promotion Guidance document.
- Has obtained Level _____ Conservation Planner certification.
- Obtained approximately 70% of Job Approval Authority (JAA) necessary to preform conservation planning and implementation in area of responsibility.



- Independently completes NEPA evaluation, NRCS CPA 52 - Inventory of Resource Concerns, in accordance with established policy and guidelines with minimal errors.

- Proficient and actively "engaged" in carrying out employee engagement principles and actions for positive outcomes to further the agency's mission, increase employee satisfaction and heighten the customer experience.



United States Department of Agriculture

Soil Conservationist (SC) Promotion Guidance (457 GS-5 to GS-7)

Job Description: This person assists the Supervisory Conservationist with the planning and implementation of total resource management systems; provides conservation planning assistance from initial evaluation to completion. This person possesses a practical knowledge of the methods and techniques of soil, water, and environmental conservation as they relate to agricultural operations and land use measures. They also help landowners with soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resource concerns.

To ensure field staff are meeting the standard for duties, competencies, and qualifications, all conditions below must be met. These duties, competencies, and qualifications are integrated in the field staff's current performance plan and/or Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Soil Conservationist Name _____ **Office:** _____

- Able to identify at least two resource concerns in the field (land use) and discuss with producers.
- Obtaining job approval authority (JAA) for basic engineering and ecological conservation practices common in the management unit. The appropriate JAA level is defined in the field staff's current performance plan and/or IDP.
- Can perform basic Conservation Desktop and ArcGIS tasks for conservation plan development.
- Demonstrates and meets the training curriculum requirement and develops conservation plans based on possession of Conservation Planner Level I role in accordance with National Conservation Planning Policy and state supplements.
- Provides technical guidance and assistance to producers in making minor revisions to conservation plans and contracts.
- Explains conservation programs with direct guidance using straightforward narrations of facts and uncomplicated descriptions of conservation practices.
- Understand and explain basic Farm Bill programs and state conservation program requirements with direct guidance using straightforward narrations of facts and uncomplicated descriptions of conservation practices to producers.
- Familiar with and understands ranking and processes of assigned Farm Bill Program (CSP, EQIP, etc.) applications and enters information into Conservation Desktop, CART and ProTracts.
- With direction from supervisor, completes contract reviews, modifications, and processes payments in ProTracts with minimal errors.

- Prepares supporting documentation for Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations and annual Food Security Act compliance reviews.
- Assists supervisor with office operations and walk-ins.
- Participates in outreach events and able to speak publicly in a small group setting.

Occupational Competencies (Must meet at least 4)

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defining Objectives | <input type="checkbox"/> Data Collection & Analysis | <input type="checkbox"/> Decision Support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering Design & Implementation | <input type="checkbox"/> Management Practice Application | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetative Practice Application |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up & Maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Assistance Programs Management | |

Foundational Competencies (Must meet at least 9)

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attention to Detail | <input type="checkbox"/> Accountability | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing & Prioritizing Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Representing the Agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Technology Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Awareness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptability & Flexibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Continuous Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity & Honesty | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress Tolerance & Resilience | <input type="checkbox"/> Oral Communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence & Negotiating | <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity & Innovation | <input type="checkbox"/> Decisive Judgement & Decision Making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service | |

State Competencies (Must meet at least #__) *

Optional State
Competency

Optional State
Competency

Optional State
Competency

***State Competencies may include: Employee Engagement, Contributions to the Team, etc.**

Note: One year of employment at the GS-5 level does not guarantee promotion to a GS-7.

I am certifying that the named soil conservationist meets the above stated conditions and competency requirements.

Name: _____

Title: _____



United States Department of Agriculture

Soil Conservationist (SC) Promotion Guidance (457 GS-7 to GS-9)

Job Description: This person assists the Supervisory Conservationist with the implementation of total resource management systems; provides conservation planning assistance from initial evaluation to completion. This person possesses a practical knowledge of the methods and techniques of soil, water, and environmental conservation as they relate to agricultural operations and land use measures. They also help landowners with soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resource concerns.

To ensure field staff are meeting the standard for duties, competencies, and qualifications, all conditions below must be met. These duties, competencies and qualifications are integrated in the field staff's current performance plan and/or Individual Development Plan (IDP).

Soil Conservationist Name: _____ **Office:** _____

- Able to identify multiple resource concerns in multiple fields (multiple land uses) and discuss with producers.
- Job approval authority (JAA) for basic engineering and ecological conservation practices common in the management unit. Increased authority from previously held GS-7 level. The appropriate JAA level is defined in the field staff's current performance plan and/or Individual Development Plan IDP.
- Fully utilizes Conservation Desktop and ArcGIS for conservation plan development.
- Possesses Conservation Planner Level 1 certification and is making progress on the training curriculum required for Level III planner certification, as demonstrated in ability to write a conservation plan (based on a Level IV certified planner's review and approval).
- Provides technical guidance and assistance to producers in making minor revisions to conservation plans and contracts with little to no oversight.
- Works with landowners to develop, implement, maintain, evaluate, and revise complex conservation plans without the assistance of others.
- Proficient in explaining Farm Bill programs and state conservation programs to producers. This includes explaining program rules and requirements, handling producer interviews, and field reviews.
- Proficiently ranks and processes Farm Bill program (CSP, EQIP, RCPP, etc.) applications and enter information into Conservation Desktop, CART, and ProTracts. This includes having appropriate supporting documentation.
- Performs conservation planning and implements full-cycle program sign-up, ranking, contracting, and payments. Independently completes contract reviews, modifications, and processes payments in ProTracts with minimal errors.

- Can complete Highly Erodible Land (HEL) determinations and annual Food Security Act compliance reviews. Prepares supporting documentation of the determination.
- Manages office operations and walk-ins while supervisor is out of the office.
- Participates in outreach events and able to speak publicly in a small group setting to include diverse communities.

Occupational Competencies (Must meet at least 7)

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Defining Objectives | <input type="checkbox"/> Data Collection & Analysis | <input type="checkbox"/> Decision Support |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering Design & Implementation | <input type="checkbox"/> Management Practice Application | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetative Practice Application |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Follow-up & Maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Assistance Programs Management | |

Foundational Competencies (Must meet at least 14)

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attention to Detail | <input type="checkbox"/> Accountability | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizing & Prioritizing Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Representing the Agency | <input type="checkbox"/> Technology Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational Awareness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptability & Flexibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Continuous Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Initiative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity & Honesty | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress Tolerance & Resilience | <input type="checkbox"/> Oral Communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Written Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence & Negotiating | <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity & Innovation | <input type="checkbox"/> Decisive Judgement & Decision Making |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Teamwork | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service | |

Leadership Competencies (Must meet at least 3)

- Assigning, Evaluating, & Monitoring Work
- Developing Others
- Human Resource Management
- Team Building
- External Awareness
- Vision
- Strategic Thinking & Action
- Relationship Management
- Leveraging Diversity
- Public Service Motivation

State Specific Competencies (Must meet at least #____) *

- Optional State Competency
- Optional State Competency
- Optional State Competency

***State Competencies may include: Employee Engagement, Contributions to the Team, etc.**

Note: One year of employment at the GS-7 level does not guarantee promotion to a GS-9.

I am certifying that the named soil conservationist meets the above stated conditions and competency requirements.

Name: _____

Title: _____