

Ranking Criteria for NRCS Programs

Application Overview

An applicant may submit an application to participate in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), or Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The NRCS state conservationist or area director, in consultation with the State Technical Committee, Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils, local workgroups, and other stakeholders, has developed the following ranking criteria to prioritize and select applications that best address the applicable program purposes and priority natural resource concerns in **New Hampshire**.

The state conservationist or area director will establish application batching periods and select the highest ranked applications for funding based on applicant eligibility and the NRCS ranking process. In fiscal year **2026**, NRCS will use the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) to assess and rank all eligible applications for NRCS conservation programs.

Inventory and Assessment in CART

CART is a decision support system that provides a consistent, replicable framework for the conservation planning process based on geospatially referenced information, client-provided information, field observations, and NRCS conservation planner expertise. CART helps NRCS conservation planners assess site vulnerability and existing conditions and identify natural resource concerns.

CART assessments of existing management and conservation efforts are compared against conservation planning criteria thresholds to determine the additional level of conservation efforts needed for addressing natural resource concerns. NRCS uses the results to identify conservation planning activities for the client. CART consolidates resource data and program information to prioritize program delivery and report outcomes of NRCS investments in conservation.

In general, resource concerns fall into one of three categories used to assess and document a resource concern:

- **Client Input/Planner Observation:** A streamlined list of options is presented to the planner to document the client's activities and the planner's observation of the resource concerns.
- **Procedural/Deductive:** A large group of resource concerns fall into this category and are assessed using a resource concern-specific evaluation tool or a list of inventory-like criteria. Due to the variability in state tools, assessment questions and answers will be broad in nature to allow states to align them with state conditions.
- **Predictive:** The remaining resource concerns are assessed using a predictive interactive model. The CART system attempts to replicate the outcomes related to the assessment threshold outcomes compared to the model outputs.

After identifying resource concerns and describing existing conditions, planned conservation practices and activities can be added to the existing condition to determine the state of the proposed management system. Practices needed to support primary conservation practices and activities are also added but do not increase conservation management points.

If the client is interested in financial assistance through an NRCS conservation program, the inventory and assessment information, along with client decisions related to conservation practice adoption, are transferred from the assessment portion to the ranking portion of CART. CART identifies the appropriate program ranking pools based on the transferred assessment information and the conservation practices proposed for implementation.

Ranking in CART

In general, the ranking criteria uses the following guiding principles:

- Degree of cost effectiveness of the proposed conservation practices and activities;
- The level of performance of proposed conservation practices and activities;
- Treatment of resource concerns or national priority resource concerns;
- Magnitude of the environmental benefits resulting from the treatment of resource concerns reflecting the level of performance of the proposed conservation practices and activities; and
- Compliance with federal, state, local, or tribal regulatory requirements for natural resources.

CART uses national ranking templates developed for each NRCS program and initiative. The templates have four parameters that are customized for each program. The four parameters are:

1. **Land Uses.** NRCS has developed land use designations to be used by planners and modelers at the field and landscape level. Land use modifiers more accurately define the land's actual use and how it is managed. Land use designations and modifiers are defined in Title 180 National Planning Procedures Handbook, Part 600.
2. **Resource Concerns.** The resource condition that does not meet minimum acceptable condition levels of the resource planning criteria. This implies an expected degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, or animal resource base that will impair the sustainability or intended use of the resource. Because NRCS quantifies or describes resource concerns as part of a comprehensive conservation planning process, which includes client objectives, human and energy resources are considered components of the resource base.
3. **Practices.** A specific treatment used to address resource concerns, or management techniques that are planned and implemented per applicable standards and specifications.
4. **Ranking Component Weights.** A set of five components that form the ranking score for an individual land-based assessment. The five components are:
 - a. **Vulnerability.** Site vulnerability is determined by subtracting the existing condition and existing practice scores from the thresholds. This score is weighted based on the resource concerns prioritized by that ranking pool.

- b. **Planned Practice Effects.** The planned practice effect score is based on the sum of the planned practice addressing the resource concern on a land unit. This score is weighted by ranking pool to address the resource concerns prioritized by that ranking pool.
- c. **Resource Priorities.** National and state resource priorities are established to address the most critical land and resource considerations and are based on NRCS national and state priorities identified with input from national, state, and local stakeholders.
- d. **Program Priorities.** National and state program priorities are established to maximize program effectiveness and advance program purposes and are based on NRCS national and state priorities identified with input from national, state, and local stakeholders.
- e. **Cost Efficiency.** Sum of planned practice points divided by the log of the practice efficiency factor, which is assigned for each asset-narrative.

Note: The points for vulnerability, planned practice effects, and cost efficiency are from the assessment portion of CART.

New Hampshire created state-specific ranking pools within these national ranking template parameters. The state ranking pools include questions that are divided by sections: applicability, category, program questions, and resource questions. Ranking pool customization allows states to focus funding on priority resource concerns and initiatives identified at the state level with input from NRCS stakeholders. Each eligible application may be considered for funding in all applicable ranking pools.

NRCS Resource Concerns

The NRCS resource concerns for conservation planning are:

Soil

- Soil Erosion (Sheet and rill erosion)
- Wind erosion)
- Soil Erosion (Ephemeral gully erosion)
- Soil Erosion (Classic gully erosion)
- Soil Erosion (Bank erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyance channels)
- Soil Health (Subsidence)
- Soil Health (Compaction)
- Soil Health (Organic matter depletion)
- Soil Health (Concentration of salts or other chemicals)
- Soil Health (Soil organism habitat loss or degradation)
- Soil Health (Aggregate instability)

Air

- Air Quality (Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors)

- Air Quality (Emissions of greenhouse gasses-GHGs)
- Air Quality (Emissions of ozone precursors)
- Air Quality (Objectionable odors)
- Air Quality (Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen)

Plants

- Plant Health (Plant productivity and health)
- Plant Health (Plant structure and composition)
- Plant Health (Plant pest pressure)
- Wildfire Hazard (Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation)

Animals

- Terrestrial Habitat (Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates)

- Aquatic Habitat (Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms)
- Aquatic Habitat (Elevated Water Temperature)
- Livestock Health (Feed and forage imbalance)
- Livestock Health (Inadequate livestock shelter)
- Livestock Health (Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality, and distribution)

Energy

- Energy Use (Energy efficiency of equipment and facilities)
- Energy Use (Energy efficiency of field operations)

Water

- Water Quantity (Ponding and flooding)
- Water Quantity (Seasonal high-water table)
- Water Quantity (Seeps)
- Water Quantity (Drifted snow)
- Water Quantity (Surface water depletion)
- Water Quantity (Groundwater depletion)
- Naturally available moisture use

- Water Quantity (Inefficient irrigation water use)
- Water Quality (Nutrients transported to surface water)
- Water Quality (Nutrients transported to groundwater)
- Water Quality (Pesticides transported to surface water)
- Water Quality (Pesticides transported to groundwater)
- Water Quality (Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water)
- Water Quality (Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater)
- Water Quality (Salts transported to surface water)
- Water Quality (Salts transported to groundwater)
- Water Quality (Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water)
- Water Quality (Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater)
- Water Quality (Sediment transported to surface water)

Program-Specific Information

The following national ranking criteria are included in the Program Questions section of ranking pools for ACEP-WRE, with the weighting of each question based on state-level priorities:

- Cost effectiveness of enrolling the land to maximize the environmental benefits per dollar expended; applications that have a lower cost per environmental benefit ratio will receive higher rankings.
- Whether the landowner (or another person or entity) is offering to contribute financially to the cost of the easement or other interest in the land to leverage Federal funds.
- Extent to which ACEP-WRE purposes would be achieved on the offered land.
- The productivity of the offered land.
- The on-farm and off-farm environmental threats if the land is used to produce agricultural commodities.

The following state ranking criteria are included in the Resource Questions section of ranking pools for ACEP-WRE, with the weighting of each question based on state-level priorities:

The conservation and environmental benefits of obtaining an easement or other interest in the land, including but not limited to—

- Habitat that will be restored for the benefit of migratory birds and wetland-dependent wildlife, including diversity of wildlife that will be benefitted or life cycle needs that will be addressed
- Extent and use of habitat that will be restored for threatened, endangered, or other at-risk species or number of different at-risk species benefitted
- Protection or restoration of native vegetative communities
- Habitat diversity and complexity to be restored
- Proximity and connectivity to other protected habitats
- Extent of beneficial adjacent land uses
- Extent of wetland losses within a geographic area, including wetlands generally or specific wetland types
- Capacity of the wetland to improve water quality
- Water quantity benefits through increased water storage in the soil profile or through groundwater recharge attenuation of floodwater flows
- Proximity to impaired water bodies
- Carbon sequestration
- Improving climate change resiliency
- Hydrology restoration potential, which must comprise at least 50 percent of the points for conservation benefits, should take into consideration:
 - The extent to which the original hydrology can be restored
 - The extent to which the potential hydrology restoration or enhancement practices will successfully provide hydrologic conditions that are suitable for the needs of the native wetland-dependent wildlife species that occurred in the area and are appropriate to support the wetland functions and values being restored or enhanced on the site
 - Physical site characteristics that affect hydrology restoration potential, including but not limited to—
 - o Soil properties, such as soil texture, soil structure, and soil drainage classes
 - o Landscape features, such as geomorphic position, slope, and water table depths
 - o Flooding characteristics, including frequency, timing, duration, depth, and sources
 - o The source of the hydrology, the degree and type of hydrologic manipulation, existing connectivity and barriers to connectivity with hydrology sources
 - o As applicable, the reliability and availability of the water delivered through water rights and the degree of reliance on such water rights to successfully restore hydrology

Ranking Pool Report

Ranking Pool NH ACEP-WRE General FY2026
Ranking Pool

Program ACEP-WRE

Pool Status Active

Tags

Template ACEP-WRE

Template Status Active

Existing Practice Included No

Last Modified By Brooke Stubbs

Last Modified 01/06/2026

National Pool No

Include States NH (Admin)

Land Uses and Modifiers

Land Use	Grazed	Wildlife	Irrigated	Hayed	Drained	Organic	Water Feature	Protected	Urban	Aquaculture
Associated Ag Land	--	--	--	--	N/A	--	--	--	--	--
Crop	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Forest	--	--	--	N/A	N/A	--	--	--	--	--
Other Rural Land	--	--	--	N/A	N/A	--	--	--	--	--
Pasture	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Range	--	--	N/A	--	N/A	--	--	--	--	--
Water	N/A	--	N/A	N/A	N/A	--	--	--	--	--

Resource Concern Categories

Categories			
Category	Min %	Default %	Max %
Animals (Aquatic habitat)	10	20	80
Animals (Terrestrial habitat)	10	20	80
Long term protection of land	10	10	80
Plants (Degraded plant condition)	0	5	70
Plants (Fire management)	0	2	5
Plants (Pest pressure)	0	5	70
Soil (Concentrated erosion)	0	5	70
Soil (Wind and water erosion)	0	5	15
Water (Field pesticide loss)	0	5	70
Water (Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss)	0	5	70
Water (Salt losses to water)	0	3	5
Water (Source water depletion)	0	5	70

Categories

Category	Min %	Default %	Max %
Water (Storage and handling of pollutants)	0	5	70
Water (Weather resilience)	0	5	20

Animals (Aquatic habitat)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Aquatic Habitat (Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms)	50	67	100
Aquatic Habitat (Elevated water temperature)	0	33	50

Animals (Terrestrial habitat)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Terrestrial Habitat (Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates)	100	100	100

Long term protection of land

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Loss of functions and values	85	95	100
Threat of conversion	0	5	15

Plants (Degraded plant condition)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Plant Health (Plant productivity and health)	0	50	100
Plant Health (Plant structure and composition)	0	50	100

Plants (Fire management)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Wildfire Hazard (Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation)	100	100	100

Plants (Pest pressure)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Plant Health (Plant pest pressure)	100	100	100

Soil (Concentrated erosion)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Soil Erosion (Bank erosion from streams, shorelines or water conveyance channels)	0	70	100
Soil Erosion (Classic gully erosion)	0	15	50
Soil Erosion (Ephemeral gully erosion)	0	15	50

Soil (Wind and water erosion)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Soil Erosion (Sheet and rill erosion)	0	85	100
Soil Erosion (Wind erosion)	0	15	100

Water (Field pesticide loss)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Water Quality (Pesticides transported to groundwater)	0	50	75
Water Quality (Pesticides transported to surface water)	25	50	100

Water (Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Water Quality (Nutrients transported to groundwater)	0	35	100
Water Quality (Nutrients transported to surface water)	0	28	100
Water Quality (Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to groundwater)	0	4	15
Water Quality (Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to surface water)	0	4	15
Water Quality (Sediment transported to surface water)	0	29	100

Water (Salt losses to water)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Water Quality (Salts transported to groundwater)	0	50	100
Water Quality (Salts transported to surface water)	0	50	100

Water (Source water depletion)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Water Quantity (Groundwater depletion)	25	40	60
Water Quantity (Surface water depletion)	40	60	75

Water (Storage and handling of pollutants)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Water Quality (Nutrients transported to groundwater)	0	50	100
Water Quality (Nutrients transported to surface water)	0	50	100
Water Quality (Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to groundwater)	0	--	100
Water Quality (Petroleum, heavy metals and other pollutants transported to surface water)	0	--	100

Water (Weather resilience)

Resource Concern	Min %	Default %	Max %
Water Quantity (Drifted snow)	0	--	25
Water Quantity (Naturally available moisture use)	0	10	25
Water Quantity (Ponding and flooding)	0	45	100
Water Quantity (Seasonal high water table)	0	35	100
Water Quantity (Seeps)	0	10	25

Practices

Practice Name	Practice Code	Practice Narratives	Practice Type
Brush Management	314	00N, 03N	Conservation Practices
Herbaceous Weed Treatment	315	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Conservation Cover	327	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Cover Crop	340	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Critical Area Planting	342	00N	Conservation Practices
Dam, Diversion	348	00N	Conservation Practices
Well Decommissioning	351	00N	Conservation Practices
Diversion	362	00N, 01N, 02N, 03N	Conservation Practices
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment and Renovation	380	00N	Conservation Practices
Fence	382	00N, 03N, 04N	Conservation Practices
Woody Residue Treatment	384	00N, 01N, 02N	Conservation Practices
Field Border	386	00N	Conservation Practices
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	390	00N, 01N, 02N, 03N	Conservation Practices
Riparian Forest Buffer	391	00N, 03N	Conservation Practices
Filter Strip	393	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	395	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Aquatic Organism Passage	396	00N	Conservation Practices
Grade Stabilization Structure	410	00N	Conservation Practices
Grassed Waterway	412	00N	Conservation Practices

Practice Name	Practice Code	Practice Narratives	Practice Type
Wildlife Habitat Planting	420	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Land Smoothing	466	00N	Conservation Practices
Access Control	472	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Mulching	484	00N, 02N, 03N	Conservation Practices
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	490	00N	Conservation Practices
Obstruction Removal	500	00N	Conservation Practices
Grazing Management	528	00N, 02N, 03N, 04N	Conservation Practices
Pumping Plant	533	00N, 02N	Conservation Practices
Drainage Water Management	554	00N, 02N, 03N	Conservation Practices
Access Road	560	00N	Conservation Practices
Trails and Walkways	575	00N	Conservation Practices
Stream Crossing	578	00N, 01N, 02N	Conservation Practices
Streambank and Shoreline Protection	580	00N, 02N	Conservation Practices
Channel Bed Stabilization	584	00N	Conservation Practices
Structure for Water Control	587	00N	Conservation Practices
Nutrient Management	590	00N, 06N, 07N, 08N	Conservation Practices
Pest Management Conservation System	595	00N, 05N, 06N, 07N	Conservation Practices
Surface Drain, Field Ditch	607	00N	Conservation Practices
Tree/Shrub Establishment	612	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Underground Outlet	620	00N	Conservation Practices
Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities	643	00N, 01N, 02N	Conservation Practices
Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management	644	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	645	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Early Successional Habitat Development-Mgt	647	00N	Conservation Practices
Structures for Wildlife	649	00N	Conservation Practices
Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation	650	00N	Conservation Practices
Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	654	00N	Conservation Practices

Practice Name	Practice Code	Practice Narratives	Practice Type
Forest Trails and Landings	655	00N	Conservation Practices
Constructed Wetland	656	00N	Conservation Practices
Wetland Restoration	657	00N, 01N	Conservation Practices
Wetland Enhancement	659	00N	Conservation Practices
Forest Stand Improvement	666	00N	Conservation Practices
Acquisition Process - Appraisal	LTAPA	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Appraisal Update	LTAPAU	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Boundary Survey	LTAPBS	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Closing Services	LTAPCS	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Environmental Database Records Search	LTAPERS	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Full Phase I	LTAPFP1	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Ingress Egress	LTAPIE	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Appraisal Technical Review First Review	LTAPTR1	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Appraisal Technical Review Second Review	LTAPTR2	00N	Easements
Acquisition Process - Title Search	LTAPTS	00N	Easements
Long-Term Protection of Land - Permanent Easement	LTPPE	00N	Easements

Ranking Weights

Factors	Algorithm	Allowable Min	Default	Allowable Max
Vulnerabilities	Default	10	20	30
Planned Practice Effects	Default	5	5	10
Resource Priorities	Default	20	50	70
Program Priorities	Default	15	25	50
Efficiencies	Default	0	0	0

Display Group: NH 2026 ACEP-WRE General (Active)



An asterisk will be displayed to show that it is a conditional section or conditional question.

Survey: Applicability Questions

Section: Applicability		
Question	Answer Choices	Points

Section: Applicability

Question	Answer Choices	Points
Application is for land located within the State of NH	YES	--
	NO	--

Survey: Category Questions

Section: Category

Question	Answer Choices	Points
Application is for land located within the State of NH	YES	--
	NO	--

Survey: Program Questions

Section: Program Questions

Question	Answer Choices	Points
Estimated Restoration Cost:	\$0 - \$25,000	15
	\$25,001 - \$100,000	10
	>\$100,000	5
Financial contributions provide at least 25% of the easement purchase and restoration costs determined by NRCS.	YES	10
	NO	0
Extent to which program purposes would be achieved on the offered land. Select all that apply.	Habitat protection for wetland dependent endangered threatened species or federally at-risk species or state species of concern or species of greatest conservation need.	25
	Protection and improvement of water quality and groundwater recharge.	15
	Attenuation of floodwater.	10
	None of the above	0
The offered area contains the following percent of somewhat poorly to very poorly drained soils:	>50%	25
	20 - 50%	10
	10 - 20%	5
	<10%	0

Survey: Resource Questions

Section: Resource Questions

Question	Answer Choices	Points
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Section: Resource Questions

Question	Answer Choices	Points
What is the proximity and connectivity to other permanently protected lands?	Direct wetland/Riparian area connection	40
	Direct upland connection	20
	No direct connections	0
Habitat will be restored to provide lifecycle needs for wetland dependent threatened, endangered or at-risk species of concern.	Federal T&E species	40
	State T&E species	30
	Federally at risk	20
	State species of concern or species of greatest conservation need	10
	No priority species	0
Rare or exemplary native plant communities will be protected or restored	YES	10
	NO	0
Extent of NH Wildlife Action Plan habitat tiers	Greater than 50% of the offered area is mapped as Tier 1 Highest Ranked Habitat	50
	Greater than 50% of offered area is mapped as either Tier 1 Highest Ranked Habitat or Tier 2 Highest Ranked Habitat in Biological Region	25
	Less than 50% of offered area is mapped as either Tier 1 or Tier 2 Highest Ranked Habitat in Biological Region	10
Offered area is located within a 303d Impaired Waters Area	YES	10
	NO	0
Resource concerns can be addressed to restore site hydrology and degraded habitat - Select all resource concerns that apply:	Natural site hydrology and aquatic habitat will be restored to a degraded perennial stream.	50
	Excessive bank erosion will be stabilized	40
	Changes to land use and management will be applied to improve water quality and wildlife habitat by taking agricultural land out of active production.	30
	Changes to land use and management will be applied to improve water quality and wildlife habitat by aligning forest management with wildlife habitat goals as the primary objective.	30

Detailed Assessments

Name	Type	Jurisdiction	Status
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