Idaho State Instruction:	Program-17
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Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Protocols

These protocols are to be used with the Idaho payment schedules to determine the appropriate practice payment rates to use in the development of EQIP contracts. They also provide state-specific guidance for the EQIP to be used in addition to policy contained in the Programs Manual 530, and National Planning Procedures Handbook.

Applications will be assessed and ranked in the applicable Geographic Area (GA) ranking pool where they are located; this will be determined by the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) based on where planned land units (PLUs) are located. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) planner will determine which categories within the GA each application may be ranked in using criteria established for each category. An application must be ranked in each category in which it meets the criteria.

Field offices are encouraged to complete one assessment and practice schedule per project when possible. If there is a legitimate reason operationally or operation is extremely diverse and covers multiple geographic areas the applicant can choose to submit separate applications. The field office must determine if there is a legitimate separation of the operation to justify separate applications. If this option is utilized, a separate practice schedule and assessment must be developed for each project, and ranking scores will be based on each application's merit. Field office should not guide applicants to request separate applications.

If the application is administered by a neighboring team or if multiple applications will be serviced across teams, the Team Leads shall coordinate to ensure applications are evaluated as consistently as possible.

For applications that facilitate a change in land use see CPM 530.403C for requirements and Assessing Land Use Changes Guide Sheet-AUG 2022 for detailed recommendations on CART evaluations.

Additional funds may be requested by field offices anytime during the funding period. Teams may enter their requests on the Funds Request Tracker by March 27 for the first request and May 29 for the second request. If limited funds are received from National, it is the State Conservationist's discretion on how to distribute the funds received.

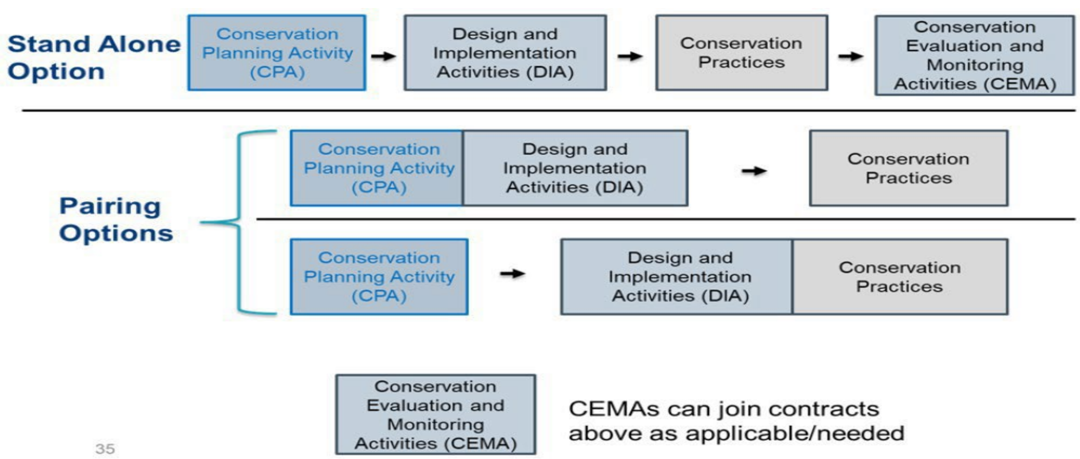
National Initiatives and required categories:

- **National Air Quality Initiative (NAQI):** Applications are eligible for this category if practices will improve wildfire risk on Forest or Range land use or if practices will improve wind erosion in eligible areas. See NAQI State Instruction for more information.
- **Regenerative Pilot Program (RPP):** Applications are eligible for this category if the whole farm was assessed for all resource concerns. Contracts are for 5 years with CEMA 216 Soil Health Testing planned in the first and last year of the contract. See RPP State Instruction for more information.
- **National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI):** Applications are eligible for this category if practices will improve water quality or water quantity and the majority of PLUs fall within one of the approved priority areas and the majority of funds that will be contracted to address the proposal's objectives. See NWQI State Instruction for more information and map of approved watersheds.
- **Working Lands for Wildlife – Sage Grouse Initiative (WLFW – SGI):** Applications are eligible for this category if threats to Sage Grouse are identified on the checklist and fall within the Sage Grouse National layer boundary. In addition, the majority of funds that will be contracted must benefit the initiative objectives. See WLFW-SGI State Instruction for more information.
- **Working Lands for Wildlife – Migratory Big Game Initiative (WLFW – MBGI):** Applications are eligible for this category if there will be improvements to Big Game migration or habitat and the majority of funds that will be contracted benefit the initiative objectives. See WLFW-MGBI State Instruction for more information.
- **WaterSMART:** Applications are eligible for this category if the majority of PLUs in the application fall within the WaterSMART priority area boundary for each proposal listed below and the majority of funds that will be contracted address the proposal's objectives. After category preapprovals, funds remaining in each GA WaterSMART category will be reallocated to other WaterSMART area categories. Approved priority areas are in Teams 7,9,10, and 16.
- **Joint Chiefs:** Applications are eligible for this category if the majority of PLUs in the application fall within the North Idaho Highway 95 Hazardous Fuels priority area boundary (located in Team 1 and 2) and the majority of funds that will be contracted benefit the proposal's objectives.
- **Beginning Farmer or Rancher:** Applications must be ranked in this category if the applicant self-certified they met the definition of a beginning farmer or rancher on the program application.
- **Socially Disadvantaged Farmer or Rancher:** Applications must be ranked in this category if the applicant self-certified they met the definition of a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher on the program application.

State Priorities:

- **Water Conservation:** Water Management Entity or Group applications may be ranked in this category if a complete project description was submitted to the state office by the established deadline and the project was determined eligible. Funds will be requested during the additional funds request timeframe for this category.
- **Cheatgrass Challenge:** This category will be offered in all applicable geographic areas, however only applications within approved priority areas directly treating cheatgrass may be ranked in this category. Projects will be submitted to Lacey Clarke, Cheatgrass Challenge Coordinator, by **February 27, 2026.** Funds will be requested for approved priority areas during the additional funds request timeframe.
- **CPA/DIA/CEMA:** Teams may choose to have a separate category for CPA/DIA/CEMAs but will need to utilize part of the LWG budget to fund this category. If a separate category is not offered, all applications for these activities must be ranked in LWG categories with a ranking question awarding points for these activities.

Applications for Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs), Conservation and Evaluation Monitoring Activities (CEMAs), and Design and Implementation Activities (DIAs) may be stand-alone contracts or combined with other practices as shown below:



If an applicant is interested in a CPA and in implementing other conservation practices, two applications should be entered into Protracts, and two practice schedules must be created in Conservation Desktop (CD). However, if they are interested in a DIA and in implementing other conservation practices, only one application and one practice schedule are needed. When the DIA/CEMA is supporting the conservation practice(s) the application should be ranked in any applicable category the primary practice is eligible for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 activity descriptions are available on the National Conservation Activities Website.

Payment Schedule: The FY26 payment schedule has both base and implementation scenarios. When reviewing the scenarios in the payment schedule, if the practice has both base and implementation scenarios listed, the planner must schedule both in the same contract item number (CIN). There must be technical justification to schedule multiple CINs for the same practice within the contract. Contact an engineer, area resource conservationist, or State Technical Specialist to discuss specific contract scenarios.

- **Source Water Protection Practices:** Scenarios for Source water practices will be available in all EQIP categories. Refer to Source Water State Instruction for the list of eligible practices and additional guidance for when to select the "Source Water Protection" (Wp) scenario. If an applicant is "Historically Underserved" (HU), select the 'HU' designated scenario rather than the 'Wp'.
- **High Priority Practices:** The 2018 Farm Bill authorized increased payments for up to 10 high priority practices. The State Conservationist in consultation with the State Technical Committee selected the practices identified below. These practices will be designated on the payment schedule as "High Priority Practices" (Pr) and are eligible for the higher payment rate in all categories. The regular payment rate will still be available in the payment schedule but should not be selected. If an applicant is 'HU' select the 'HU' designated scenario rather than 'Pr'.

327-Conservation Cover	520-Pond Sealing, Compacted Soil Treatment
329-Residue Management, No-Till	550-Range Planting
342-Critical Area Planting	580-Streambank and Shoreline Protection
345-Residue Management, Reduced-Till	612-Tree/Shrub Establishment
391-Riparian Forest Buffer	649-Structures for Wildlife

State Direction:

Replacement of any structural or vegetative practice must meet the following requirements.

- The existing practice must have exceeded the practice lifespan.
- Installation of the practice must improve a resource concern.

Management Practices: Refer to 530/406 B(4)(ii) for policy on management practices.

When management practices will be applied in a rotation and fields may not receive treatment every year, flexibility can be incorporated into the contract by scheduling the practice on all fields that could potentially have the practice implemented, but only contracting the number of acres anticipated to be applied.

> Example: If a producer has 1000 acres in an alfalfa/grain rotation, but only 300 acres is typically in grain each year, a planner may build flexibility into the contract by planning 340 - Cover Crops on all fields (e.g., 1000 acres), but reduce the contracted amount to only include the number of acres expected to be in grain each year (e.g., 300 acres).

Considerations: This scenario would allow for the producer to receive a payment for the anticipated 300 acres that will be planted, even though the exact fields that will be in grain in a given year are unknown at obligation. The practice 340 – Cover Crops will be considered as an 'existing practice' on all fields that have the practice applied at least once during the duration of the contract.

The actual applied amount should be entered into the certification and payment window in Protracts. Other scenarios, including those resulting in increases in extent of the contracted amount may be considered on a case-by-case basis for enrolled fields in the contract modification process.

The following management practices have a practice cap of $30,000 per year:

- Cover Crops (340)
- Residue and Tillage Management, Reduced Till (345)
- Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till (329)
- Nutrient Management (590)
- Pest Management Conservation System (595)

Brush Management (314) or Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315): 530.406 B (4) (i) - These vegetative practices can be scheduled for up to 3 payments on the same land when control of pervasive species requires multiple treatments and/or types of treatment. The practice may not be scheduled multiple times per year. Additional conservation practices may need to be applied to address resource concerns.

The list of species approved for multiple treatments can be found in the Idaho CPS 315 or CPS 314. Additional species for CPS 314 and CPS 315 may be allowed with an approved variance from the State Rangeland Specialist/SRC via email.

High Tunnel System (325) and Low Tunnel System (821): Financial assistance is capped at $8,000 for each practice. The High Tunnel System and Low Tunnel System practices are eligible on existing cropland only. The land must have at least one year of crop history and be in compliance with Erodible Land Conservation/Wetland Conservation (HELC/WC) provisions to be eligible. Newly broken sod is not eligible.

Fence (382): See Idaho NRCS Fence State Instruction for more information.

Irrigation Systems:

Irrigation History – EQIP policy requires that land must have been irrigated 2 out of the last 5 years in order to be eligible for an irrigation-related practice. When determining irrigation history for each year, consider the following examples.

- **Example 1:** A producer has a 100-acre crop field, but due to poor irrigation infrastructure, water has only been applied to the top 50 acres in the last several years. Given the producer has a water right for the entire acreage, all acres are in cropland, and the existing irrigation system was laid out to cover the entire field, the entire field would be considered eligible.

- **Example 2:** A producer has a 100-acre field with 15 acres of scattered rocky outcrop/rangeland areas and rock piles. The field has been irrigated consistently; however, the existing flood system never irrigated the range/rock pile areas. In this case, 85 acres would be considered eligible, and the project may proceed as long as the water right covers the entire field*.
- **Example 3**: A producer has two adjacent fields, one crop and one pasture, both with a water right. He runs irrigation water through a field ditch at the top of the pasture which exhibits natural subbing, and only actively irrigates the adjacent crop field. In this example, the crop field would be considered eligible; however, none of the acres in the pasture would be eligible.*

***Financial assistance is not available for any acres considered to be ineligible.**

Water Right Requirement – ALL acres under the <u>planned</u> system must have a valid water right. If the planned system is in any way contingent on a water right transfer the transfer must be approved by the Idaho Department of Water Resources prior to **obligation**. A water right transfer is a *permanent or long- term change* to a water right's point of diversion, place of use, period of use, and/or nature of use.

Pivot Irrigation Systems – Financial assistance will not be provided for the acres under an end gun.

Renovation of Existing Sprinkler System – Renovation of an existing pivot or linear is allowable to convert from a high-pressure to a low-pressure system or to implement variable rate scenarios, provided that a higher level of conservation benefit (e.g., irrigation water conservation efficiency) can be documented.

Renovation will only be allowed if it is more cost-effective than an alternative replacement system. Renovation is not allowed to replace components that are required to be maintained for normal operation of the system. Other sprinkler types are not eligible for this option.

Micro-Irrigation System (441): Costs for delivery pipelines and associated structures needed to get water to the field(s) where the system is installed are not included and must be specified as separate components when necessary. All fields on which the system will be located during the term of the contract will be included in the contract by entering the total acres of these fields in the ‘treated acres’ box and entering the tract number(s) in the ‘legal description’ button.

Irrigation Water Conveyance (430): Guidance for contracting pipelines that deliver water to a field: Some or all the practices may not occur within the land unit(s) boundary. This is acceptable if the resource concerns are improving on the land enrolled. Practices will be planned in CD where they will physically occur but attributed to the field they benefit. Control of land and concurrence are required.

Obstruction Removal (500): It is not appropriate to use this practice for the removal of concrete ditches when converting to sprinklers.

Ponds (378) and Sediment Basins (350): Financial assistance will be based on the number of cubic yards certified, not moved. Ponds (378) are only eligible for FA for development of livestock water.

Pumping Plant (533) with Variable Speed or Frequency Drive (VSD/VFD): The drive shall be evaluated and considered for financial assistance based on the pumping systems potential for energy savings. To be eligible a VSD or VFD (including control) must be calculated to produce an annual energy savings of greater than 10%. The energy savings calculation shall be completed by or concurred by anyone with the appropriate JAA for 533.

Soil Carbon Amendment (336): When scheduling the Soil Carbon Amendment practice, contract Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activity (CEMA) 216 – Soil Health Testing in the contract to evaluate the benchmark condition and post application condition one year after application. The Conservation Practice Soil Carbon Amendment (336) requires a pre-application soil test for organic matter content as well as a post amendment application soil organic matter test at least one year later. This soil health test requires geo-located sampling points that will provide a better comparison of the benchmark and post application soil organic matter improvements.

Water Well (642): Financial assistance for this practice is only allowable for livestock water wells. Dry wells (unsuccessful) will receive no payments.