

PART 409 – Conservation Planning

Subpart C – Conservation Planner Specializations

Amended August 2024

409.20 General

- A. This subpart describes general requirements for national and state conservation planner specializations.
1. Overview
 - a. Conservation planner specializations (i.e., Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) specialty) can be added to level 2, 3, and 4 designations.
 - a. The prerequisite of all specializations is a level 2 conservation planner designation unless otherwise specified.
 - b. National specializations are identified in section 409.21.
 - c. State specializations will be identified in state supplements under Subpart D, section 409.31.
 2. Roles and Authorities
 - a. State Conservationists must establish a process to review and approve conservation planner specializations for individuals in or relocating to their state.
 - b. Individuals seeking a specialization must be an existing NRCS or partner employee, a private sector service provider (including a technical service provider), or a volunteer providing service to NRCS.
 - c. Conservation planners who have a specialization may conduct all steps of the conservation planning process for component plans (as designated by the specialty they have achieved) without supervision.
 - a. A level 3 or 4 certified conservation planner designation is still required to approve an overall conservation plan.
 3. Achieving a Specialization
 - a. All individuals seeking specialization must complete the core competency training requirements listed in subparts D and E corresponding to the desired state or national specialization.
 - b. States must use the process described in subpart B to request any course equivalencies to meet the national training requirements.

4. Maintaining a Specialization
 - a. Maintaining a specialization follows the same quality assurance review process as part of the recertification cycle described in 180 GM § 409.12.
 - b. Planners must provide a component plan applicable to their specializations or an example of their work that showcases their technical adequacy for the quality assurance review. Section 409.21 states what each national specialization requires for the review.
 - c. The review will determine whether the specialization will be recertified or suspended.

409.21 National Specializations

A. NRCS CNMP Specialty

1. Roles and Authorities
 - a. See 190 GM Part 405 for CNMP approval and signature requirements.
 - b. Those with a CNMP specialty may not approve the overall conservation plan unless they are also designated as a level 3 or 4 certified planner.
2. Achieving Specialization
 - a. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities
 - (1) To develop and implement CNMPs, those with a CNMP specialty must understand at minimum the following knowledge, skills, and abilities:
 - (a) How the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) relates to specific elements of the CNMP for which expertise is being provided.
 - (b) How to apply the technical criteria associated with the various elements of a CNMP in the NRCS FOTG.
 - (c) How local, state, territorial, tribal, and federal laws and regulations affect the elements of a CNMP.
 - b. Training
 - (1) States must follow all national requirements for the CNMP specialty and may add state requirements needed to comply with state laws, certifications, and licensing requirements or to meet special circumstances.
 - (a) Exhibit 7, Figure 409E-5, lists the required courses for the CNMP specialty.
 - c. State Certifications or License Requirements
 - (1) The state conservationist must ensure that candidates meet any state certification and licensing requirements (e.g., engineering license, engineering approval authority, certified nutrient management consultant or technical specialist).
 - d. Samples of Work
 - (1) Individuals must provide two completed CNMPs that meet all criteria in 190 GM Part 405 for review and approval.

3. Maintaining the CNMP Specialty
 - a. Maintaining the CNMP specialty follows the same quality assurance review process as part of the recertification cycle described in 180 GM § 409.12.
 - (1) Each planner seeking this specialty must provide at least one CNMP for the recertification review to determine if the plans or designs were developed and carried out according to NRCS conservation practice standards, policy, and CNMP technical criteria.
 - b. The review will determine whether the specialization will be recertified or suspended.

409.22 State Specializations

- A. State Conservationists may propose state specializations. Submit the following information to the Conservation Planning Branch chief in a request for approval:
 1. Proposed duties and roles assigned to the specialization.
 2. Knowledge, skills, and abilities unique to the specialization.
 3. A list of core competencies and training requirements.
 4. Curricula and agendas for any required training that is offered outside of NRCS.
 5. A training plan for the delivery of required training.
- B. Upon receiving a request for a new specialization, the Conservation Planning Branch Chief will consult with appropriate subject matter experts to evaluate the merits of the planning role.
- C. If the requested specialization is approved, the Conservation Planning Branch chief will provide an affirmative response to the requesting state.
 1. The requesting state will include the conservation planner specialization in a state supplement under Subpart D, section 409.31.
 2. The new specialty will not be included in the conservation planning database until the state supplement has been published to eDirectives.
- D. If the request is not approved:
 1. The Conservation Planning Branch Chief will collaborate with subject matter experts to provide the requesting state a written explanation of the deficiencies identified.
 2. The requesting state may submit an updated request for reconsideration to the Conservation Planning Branch Chief. This request must include an explanation of how identified deficiencies have been addressed. The request for reconsideration will follow the same procedure as a new request.