

PART 417 - Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority
Oregon State Bulletin

OR417.0 Purpose

The purpose of the ecological sciences job approval authority (ESJAA) process is to ensure the competency of NRCS employees and partner employees to plan, design, and install ecological science (ES) conservation practices and associated enhancements. Controlling factors for assignment of Job Class for OR NRCS ES practices are maintained in the Oregon Skills Matrix database.

OR417.1 Background

Conservation practices and associated enhancements have the potential to affect the environment, natural resources, and public health and safety. Depending on the size, location, and complexity of the work, failure of a conservation practice or enhancement could cause environmental damage, unacceptable economic risk, significant property damage, health impairment, and even loss of life.

The ESJAA process ensures the competency of NRCS employees and partner employees to plan, design, and install conservation practices or enhancements that, with proper operation and maintenance, will perform the intended functions for the established conservation practice lifespan. ESJAA additionally serves to substantiate and maintain the credibility and trust of NRCS with State boards of licensure, accrediting organizations, other agencies, units of government, and the public. ESJAA policy does not apply to technical service providers (TSPs).

A qualified person who has appropriate ESJAA may plan, design, supervise the installation of, and verify completion of the conservation practice or its associated enhancement. While others may assist with planning, design, or installation of a conservation practice or associated enhancement, accomplishment of each phase of the work requires the oversight and approval of a person with appropriate ESJAA.

The ESJAA process is designed to ensure technical assistance will result in practices and enhancements which—

1. Address the identified resource concern(s).
2. Comply with NRCS standards, technical criteria, and policies.
3. Function as planned to address the requirements of site-specific concerns.
4. Provide cost-effective solutions with consideration given to installation, operation, and maintenance costs.

OR417.2 Definitions

1. Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority (ESJAA): The certification granted to an individual who has demonstrated the appropriate knowledge, skills, and abilities to plan, design, and certify installation of a given ecological sciences (ES) practice. ESJAA is only granted after a supervisor concurs with a recommendation in Skills Matrix. ESJAA also applies to enhancements associated with base conservation practices. ESJAA does not apply to CPA, DIA, CEMAs.
2. Job Class: Subdivision within ESJAA for conservation practices based on controlling factors

- of scale, complexity, and risk.
3. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs): Competencies required for ESJAA to plan, design, and install, and certify the conservation practice according to the requirements of the conservation practice standard (CPS).
 4. Controlling Factors: Elements which describe the scale, complexity, or hazard potential, with a given practice.
 5. Practice Phase: ESJAA generally applies to three practice phases:
 - A. Inventory and evaluation (I&E): Planning a practice that is appropriate to treat the identified resource concern. (Refer to ESJAA Crosswalk for requirements.)
 - B. Design: Development of the conservation practice requirements, specifications, or implementation requirements that meet the requirements in the conservation practice standard. (Refer to ESJAA Crosswalk for requirements.)
 - C. Installation oversight and certification: Installation oversight and/or verification that the practice meets the approved designs and intended purpose. (Refer to ESJAA Crosswalk for requirements.)
 6. State Discipline Lead (SDL): The state's discipline lead for a given conservation practice standard and its associated ESJAA as designated by the State Resource Conservationist.
 7. Designated Basin Lead (DBL): An employee or partner possessing ESJAA for ecological conservation practices who has been named by the Basin Team Leader (BTL) as the local lead for that discipline within their basin. Designated Basin Leads may be designated by practice or by state discipline: agronomy, forestry, biology, grazing lands.
 8. Basin Resource Conservationist (BRC) for Technology: A Level 3 or higher certified planner possessing ESJAA for ecological conservation practices who has been hired by the Basin Team Leader as the technical lead for the basin.
 9. Skills Matrix: Oregon NRCS's official ESJAA management and documentation tool.
 10. ESJAA Crosswalk: Oregon's dynamic matrix showing requirements to obtain ESJAA for each practice and phase (I&E, Design, installation/certification).
 11. Partner Employee: a non-NRCS employee that provides a variety of technical and planning functions under a formal agreement or MOU authorized by the State Conservationist.

OR417.3 Responsibilities

1. The State Resource Conservationist (SRC) will—
 - A. Evaluate the functionality of ESJAA policy and process during field office or basin Quality Assurance Reviews or spot checks to determine functionality, ease of understanding and use, and applicability to Oregon goals and objectives.
 - B. Update state instructions regarding ESJAA as needed at STC discretion.
 - C. Identify the State Discipline Lead for each ES conservation practice standard.
 - D. Establish appropriate level of ESJAA for conservation practices associated with planner certifications.
 - E. Lead the implementation of ESJAA for ES conservation practices and enhancements within Oregon.
 - F. Solicit a list of DBLs annually from the BTLs.
2. State Discipline Leads (SDLs) will—
 - A. Provide leadership and oversight of training activities required to obtain or maintain ESJAA as described in the ESJAA Crosswalk.
 - B. Adhere to national and state policies that govern ESJAA delegation for conservation practices.

- C. Review and update job classes and associated controlling factors as needed.
 - D. Review work products at the request of BTLs, BRCs, or DBLs.
 - E. Consider prior work experience and education as a substitute for any NEDC course requirements to obtain or retain ESJAA in lieu of the criteria in the ESJAA Crosswalk. No other substitutes or waivers will be permitted.
 - F. Work with the BRCs and DBLs to ensure they have appropriate ESJAA.
 - G. Recommend ESJAA for NRCS employees or partner employees who have demonstrated competence.
3. Basin Team Leader (BTL) will—
- A. Provide the State Resource Conservationist (SRC) with a list of DBLs at the start of each fiscal year and when changes are made or necessary throughout the year.
 - B. Work with the SRC to determine appropriate corrective action necessary when ESJAA improvement opportunities are identified.
4. Designated Basin Leads (DBLs) and the Basin Resource Conservationists (BRCs) will—
- A. Request assistance from the SDLs when ESJAA needs exceed basin KSAs.
 - B. Work with field offices to identify training needs and submit training needs requests through the state's annual training needs inventory process when the needs exceed basin KSAs.
 - C. Recommends ESJAA for NRCS employees or partner employees within their respective basin who have demonstrated competence.
 - D. Notify SRC or SDL to elevate concerns or issues pertaining to an employee's ESJAA.
 - E. Request ESJAA from BRC or SDL directly for themselves.
 - F. Only approve ESJAA for the basin in which the BTL has designated.
5. Conservationists with supervisory responsibilities will—
- A. Ensure NRCS employees or partner employees who have appropriate ESJAA to plan, design, or install/certify conservation practices maintain their ESJAA for conservation practices necessary for addressing local resource concerns.
 - B. Identify training, experience acquisition, or other means needed to obtain and maintain the ESJAA of direct reports.
 - C. Request assistance when pending tasks exceed the ESJAA of direct reports.
 - D. Review recommendations for ESJAA for NRCS employees or partner employees from the SRC, SDLs, BRCs, and DBLs and take appropriate action, including concurring in Skills Matrix.
 - E. Review existing ESJAA for employees incoming from other states to determine applicability to NRCS-OR within 90 days of onboarding. NRCS-OR will honor ESJAA delegated from other states and areas within the state at supervisory discretion. The BRC will determine the appropriate Job Class conversion, if needed, when controlling factors differ from the previous state. Supervisors should consider employee's ability to successfully plan, design, and check out the practice in Oregon, before making a recommendation. Supervisors are not required to adopt all the employee's ESJAA received in another state; they may select none, some, or all, based on discretion and/or ability.
 - F. Review individuals' ESJAA on a 3-year cycle, or more often, if necessary, to ensure NRCS employees and partner employees are maintaining the technical competency and state and local licensure requirements commensurate with the ESJAA job class level.
 - G. Provide training on how to access and navigate the Skills Matrix to obtain personal

Skills Matrix JAA report.

6. All NRCS technical employees will—
 - A. Maintain a copy of their record of ESJAA (report from Skills Matrix) and maintain their skill levels for the conservation practices for which they have ESJAA.
 - B. Refer to Skills Matrix prior to planning a conservation practice or enhancement to ensure they meet minimum competency for that practice, or the base practice for an associated enhancement, and any controlling factors.
 - C. Utilize the ESJAA Crosswalk to determine the requirements to obtain any or all the three phases of ESJAA for desired practice and submit to appropriate BRC or DBL.
 - D. Request phases of ESJAA using basin protocols, at the Basin Team Leader's discretion.
 - E. Include supervisor in requests/correspondence for ESJAA.
 - F. Review and maintain KSAs related to the practice in which the planner is requesting ESJAA.
7. Partner employees will—
 - A. Be evaluated and assigned an appropriate ESJAA on the same basis as NRCS employees when such authority does not conflict with Federal, State, Tribal, or local law.
 - B. Follow NRCS technical employee process to obtain or maintain ESJAA for conservation practices necessary for addressing local resource concerns.
 - C. Be subject to the same quality assurance processes as NRCS employees.
 - D. Obtain and provide written permission from their non-USDA organization supervisor to seek NRCS ESJAA.
 - E. Include NRCS supervisor in requests/correspondence regarding ESJAA.

OR417.4 Delegating Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority (ESJAA)

Only the SRC, SDLs, BRCs, and DBLs have permission to enter ESJAA recommendations into the Skills Matrix database.

1. The SRC will—
 - A. Delegate ESJAA to SDLs.
 - B. Delegate ESJAA to BRCs, DBLs, or partner employees located outside of NRCS basin or field offices, and other staff as appropriate, during extenuating circumstances.
 - C. Delegate ESJAA to BRC or DBL in the absence of SDL.
2. SDLs will—
 - A. Delegate ESJAA to BRCs, DBLs, state staff, or statewide partners in coordination with the SRC.
 - B. Delegate ESJAA to NRCS employees or partner employees when requested by the BRC or DBL.
 - C. Only delegate ESJAA that is equal or less than their own, not higher.
 - D. Only delegate ESJAA that is equal to the work product supplied by the NRCS employee or partner employee.
3. BRCs/DBLs will—
 - A. Delegate ESJAA to NRCS employees or partner employees within their assigned work area at the request of the field staff or partner employee's supervisor.
 - B. Request ESJAA from SDLs for NRCS employees or partner employees when the

- request exceeds the ESJAA of the BRC and DBL.
- C. Only delegate ESJAA that is equal or less than their own, not higher.
 - D. Only delegate ESJAA that is equal to the work product supplied by the NRCS employee or partner.
4. NRCS employees and/or partner employees (e.g. SWCD, ODF, etc.) will—
- A. Obtain written concurrence from their supervisor to pursue or obtain ESJAA, including the ESJAA practice, phase, and job class.
 - B. Include their supervisor in ESJAA correspondence, including when the request for ESJAA is made.
 - C. Request ESJAA from the appropriate BRC/DBL.
 - D. Request ESJAA from the SDL if the partner has statewide responsibilities, in which case the SDL will coordinate with the respective BRCs.
 - E. Complete work products and trainings necessary prior to requesting ESJAA from their supervisor.
5. NRCS employees with supervisory responsibilities will—
- A. Obtain ESJAA job class requests from NRCS employees or partner employees.
 - B. Review work products to determine if the request is acceptable.
 - C. Request the NRCS and/or partner employee's work products be reviewed by the BRCs and/or DBLs to consider ESJAA.
 - D. Concur with ESJAA delegation in Skills Matrix.
 - E. Provide or facilitate training, field reviews, feedback on work products if the ESJAA request is unsuccessful.

OR417.6 Ecological Sciences Job Approval Authority Review

Not more than one original work is required to determine technical competency for all ES practices except the following practices:

1. Aquatic Organism Passage (396)
2. Brush Management (314)
3. Contour Farming (330)
4. Contour Orchard and Other Perennial Crops (331)
5. Early Successional Habitat Management (647)
6. Firebreak (394)
7. Forest Stand Improvement (666)
8. Fuel Break (383)
9. Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment (548)
10. Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315)
11. Nutrient Management (590)
12. Pest Management Conservation System (595)
13. Prescribed Burning (338)*
14. Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Communities (643)
15. Shallow Water Development and Management (646)
16. Stream Crossing (578)
17. Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395)
18. Wetland Creation (658)
19. Wetland Enhancement (659)
20. Wetland Restoration (657)
21. Woody Residue Treatment (384)

22. Interim Practices (800 series)

For the above list of practices, a minimum of two original examples are required to obtain all phases of ESJAA, except for Prescribed Burning (338) which will require three products in accordance with national policy.

All documents submitted for review must be free of errors that may lead to technical failures.

Technical failures include items such as:

1. Failure to properly identify resource concerns and utilize appropriate conservation practice(s) to address the identified resource concern(s).
2. Failure to complete necessary field inventory or complete the assessment of natural resource concern(s) to identify applicable practices.
3. Failure to consider the findings and effects documented in the Environmental Evaluation, such as installing practices without regard to Cultural Resources or the Endangered Species Act or other local, state, or federal rules, regulations, and laws.
4. Failure to follow criteria defined in the NRCS conservation practice standard required by the resource concern during planning and implementation.

Templates or copies from other staff will not be accepted as original work. All requirements to obtain each phase of ESJAA for each conservation practice are documented in the ESJAA Crosswalk. The Oregon ESJAA Crosswalk is a dynamic matrix and therefore only current electronic versions should be used to ensure accurate requirements and expectations.

ESJAA does not expire. NRCS employees and partner employees will retain approved ESJAA unless a deficiency is found during a spot check or other review, or when a change in job class criteria occurs. When deficiencies are documented during a review, the BTL or SRC, as applicable, ensures corrective action is taken to either adjust the ESJAA appropriately. Corrective action is at the discretion of the SRC and BTL and may include training requirements, additional IR review periods, on-the-job training (OJT), or recommendation of ESJAA removal. When an SDL, BRC, and/or DBL document repeat JAA deficiency offenses on a conservation practice during any quality assurance activity, even after corrective actions had previously been taken, the State Conservationist will be notified for potential removal of that conservation practice ESJAA for the NRCS or partner employee and will decide on the action to be taken.

ESJAA reviews will be conducted concurrently with annual 5-percent spot checks, conservation planning certification reviews, and field office QARs to minimize the workload for field offices.