USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

State Technical Committee 3-17-26

MARYLAND

Overview

- Opportunities for partners to review practice standards – federal register
- Changes NRCS can make to practice standards after federal register review
- Recent changes to practice standards
- Overview of payment scenarios
- Recent Changes to payment scenarios

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Practice Standards - Partner review and comments

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What Are Conservation Practice Standards

- NRCS Conservation Practice Standard (CPS) are the building blocks of Conservation planning and implementation
- They define what a practice is, its purpose and minimum criteria needed for planning, design, installation and maintenance
- Ensures consistency and quality across states
- Sometimes referred to as Best Management Practices

Plan → Design → Install → Maintain

How Standards are Developed

- Developed national by NRCS using
  - Peer-reviewed research (ARS, universities)
  - Industry standards (ASTM, ANSI, engineering bodies)
- Reviewed internally by NRCS Technical Specialists
- Interim Practice Standards may be issued when a new practice is needed quickly and vetted in participating states
- Final Standards are posted on NRCS's national website

Draft → Technical Review → Interim (Optional) → National Standard

Public can Participation in CPS Review

- Standards undergo a review and update cycle to stay aligned with science and policy
- Before a new or revised national standard is finalized, there is an opportunity for public review and comments
- Proposed CPS revision are posted as NHCP Notices, where anyone can view drafts and submit comments
  - https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/conservation-practices

National vs State Standards

- States must follow the national minimum standards but
  - States may adopt additional more restrictive criteria where needed to address local resource concern or legal requirements
  - Changes must go through the state CPS Review Process before approval
- Helps ensure that practices are locally appropriate while maintaining national consistency

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NRCS changes to Practice standards - Maryland

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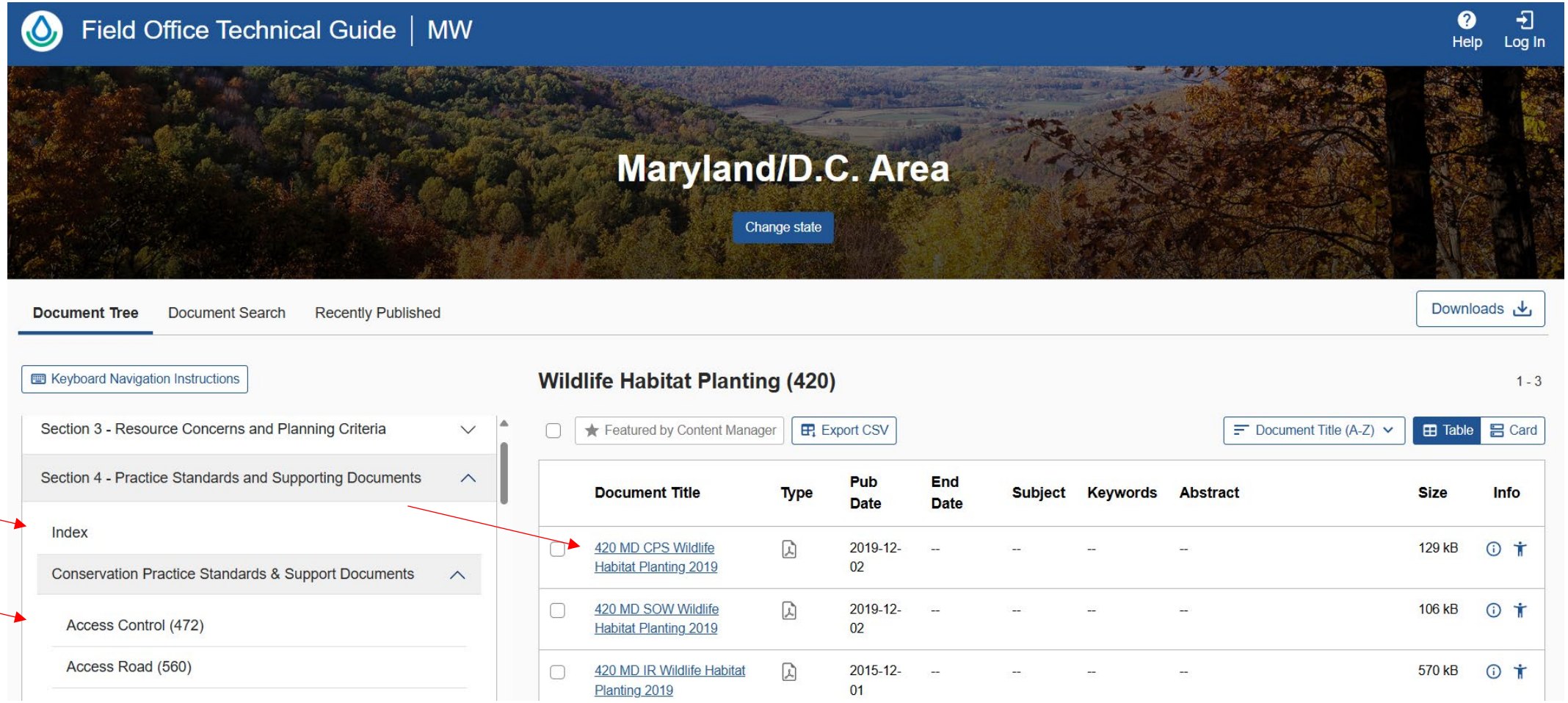
Practice Standards

- Practice standards found in the Field Office Technical Guide for each state



Practice Standard Revisions

- **Definition** – no changes
- **Purpose** – no changes
- **Conditions Where Practice Applies** – state specific additions
- **Criteria** – can be more restrictive but not less restrictive
- **Considerations** – state specific additions or restrictions
- **Plans and Specifications** – state specific changes
- **Operation and Maintenance** – state specific
- **References**

United States Department of Agriculture

420-CPS-1

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CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

WILDLIFE HABITAT PLANTING

CODE 420

(ac)

DEFINITION

Establishing wildlife habitat by planting herbaceous vegetation or shrubs.

PURPOSE

This practice is used to accomplish one or both of the following purposes–

- Improve degraded wildlife habitat for the target wildlife species or guild (i.e., a group of species that utilizes the same habitat type)
- Establish wildlife habitat that resembles the historic, desired, and reference native plant community

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies to all lands where inadequate wildlife habitat is identified as a primary resource concern and a plant community inventory or wildlife habitat evaluation indicates a benefit in altering the current vegetative conditions (species diversity, richness, structure, and pattern) by establishing herbaceous plants and/or shrubs. The use of annuals that persist over the life of the practice, and annuals that serve as a nurse crop to support the establishment of the persistent vegetative species are appropriate under this conservation practice.

This practice does not apply to—

- Planting of trees. For such plantings, use the Maryland NRCS Conservation Practice Standard for Tree/Shrub Establishment (Code 612).
- Wildlife plantings requiring repeated cultivation and planting. For such plantings, use Maryland NRCS Conservation Practice Standards for Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 644) or Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 645).
- Plantings with a principal goal of providing forage for livestock or other domesticated animals (e.g., domesticated elk, bison, and deer). For such plantings, use the Maryland NRCS Conservation Practice Standard for Forage and Biomass Planting (Code 512).
- Plantings where erosion control or water quality is a primary resource concern. For such plantings, use Maryland NRCS Conservation Practice Standards for Conservation Cover (Code 327), Critical Area Planting (Code 342), Filter Strip (Code 393), or Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (Code 380).
- Treatment of noxious woody or herbaceous vegetation, when aggressive efforts are required and frequent monitoring of treatment efforts is necessary. Use Maryland NRCS Conservation Practice Standards for Brush Management (Code 314) and Herbaceous Weed Treatment (Code 315), as applicable, when the resource concern is a degraded plant condition due to very difficult to control

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Identify the target wildlife species or guild and implement all vegetative establishment measures needed to meet minimum NRCS planning criteria of "50 percent of the habitat potential for the species of concern" (USDA, NRCS. 2003) as identified in a State-approved habitat evaluation protocol (e.g., Maryland Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Worksheets and Guides). In these habitat evaluation protocols, this is reflected by a score of at least 0.5.

Identify the target habitat conditions to be created with the establishment of selected plant materials. The targeted habitat conditions will include a description of plant species richness, diversity, pattern, and structure. The target conditions include species that do not require annual cultivation and annual planting. Refer to the Maryland Wildlife Habitat Planning Guide for general information, recommendations, and specifications for developing and managing various natural habitat types; use the *Maryland Conservation Planting Guide* to select appropriate plant species.

Inventory or assess the adjacent plant communities to determine sensitivity to potential risk of introducing unwanted species (noxious, invasive, and aggressive natives) into sensitive adjacent habitats. This assessment includes risks associated with ingress and egress of people and equipment, and the introduction of new plant materials. Implement actions necessary to address identified risks.

Design wildlife plantings with respect to season of use, life history, home range, condition of adjacent habitats, and landscape context.

Evaluate the location and value of the habitat for the target species or guild, versus risks to nontarget species (e.g., predation of ground-nesting birds in linear and edge-of-field plantings, insecticide impacts on invertebrates, and potential of the new habitat to encourage use by unwanted wildlife). Adjust the species, location, or design accordingly.

Wildlife plantings can create safety concerns for humans and wildlife when such habitat is located near transportation and utility infrastructure. Locate plantings away from transportation and utility infrastructure, when safety hazards to wildlife or humans are identified.

Use only plant species that are noninvasive and adapted to the site. Refer to the list of *Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Difficult to Control Plants in Maryland*, and do not use species in Table 1 or introduced species in Table 2 of the list.

CONSIDERATIONS

Many grassland habitats historically lacked a woody component. Adding shrubs into these habitats can be detrimental to many native wildlife species.

Land use and habitat in the associated landscape may influence the ability to achieve wildlife population and management goals. Establish project outcome goals with consideration of adjacent habitats.

Consider the potential for volunteer invasive species that could pose establishment or management risks. Include mitigation for these risks in the establishment, maintenance, and management plans, when appropriate.

Establishing the desired plant community on a disturbed site may require a staged approach. For example, a disturbed site may require 1–2 years of plantings of annuals or crops using Maryland NRCS Conservation Practice Standards for Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 645), Conservation Crop Rotation (Code 328), or Cover Crop (Code 340) to build soil organic matter and to control noxious weeds and other aggressive plants.

Consider the management requirements for maintaining the planting, and the available resources for implementing management.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

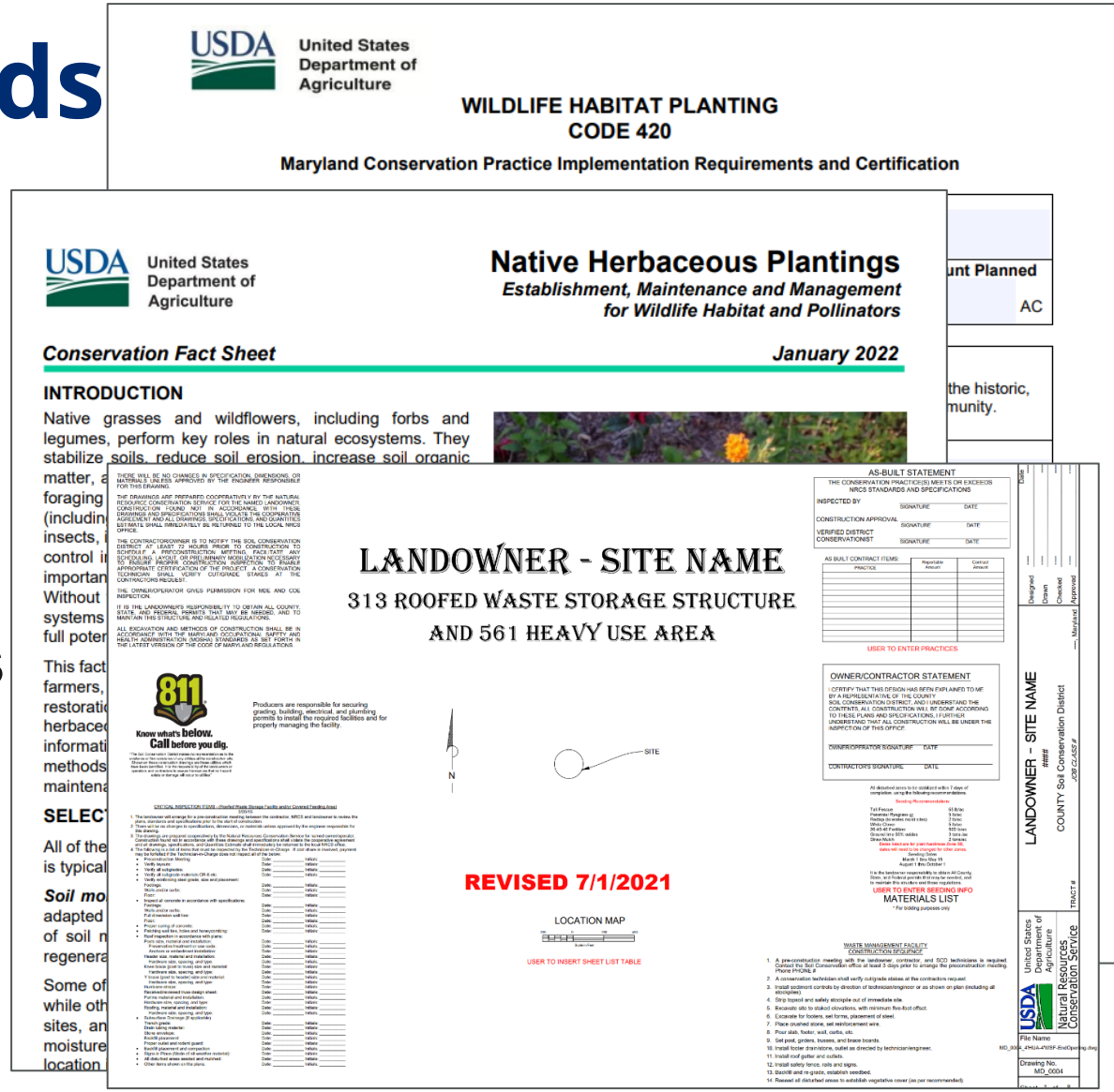
Develop plans and specifications for each treatment unit according to the criteria. Include in the plan, a detailed implementation schedule with success criteria that covers the entire practice life-span.

The completed 420 IR sheet can serve as the plan and specifications for this practice. The following items shall be addressed, as appropriate:

- List the desired wildlife species or group(s) of species.
- Describe the desired vegetative conditions such as species composition, age, structure, or density.
- Document baseline conditions and planned conditions using the appropriate Maryland Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Worksheet(s) or Guides.
- Identify control treatments for noxious, invasive, undesirable, and competing plant and animal species necessary to restore the site to the desired conditions.
- List any associated practices that must be implemented with this practice, such as Herbaceous Weed Treatment (Code 315), Brush Management (Code 314), Fence (Code 382), and Stream Crossing (Code 578).
- Describe site/seedbed preparation methods.
- Provide fertilizer application methods and rates (if applicable).
- Provide planting methods and rates.
- Provide for supplemental water (if applicable).
- Provide for protection of plantings (if applicable).

Upload Practice Standards to FOTG – Document Management System

- Create Implementation Requirement Sheets
- Create Fact Sheets – planning guides
- Create standard designs for CAD



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Recent Changes to Practice Standards

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Shallow Water …

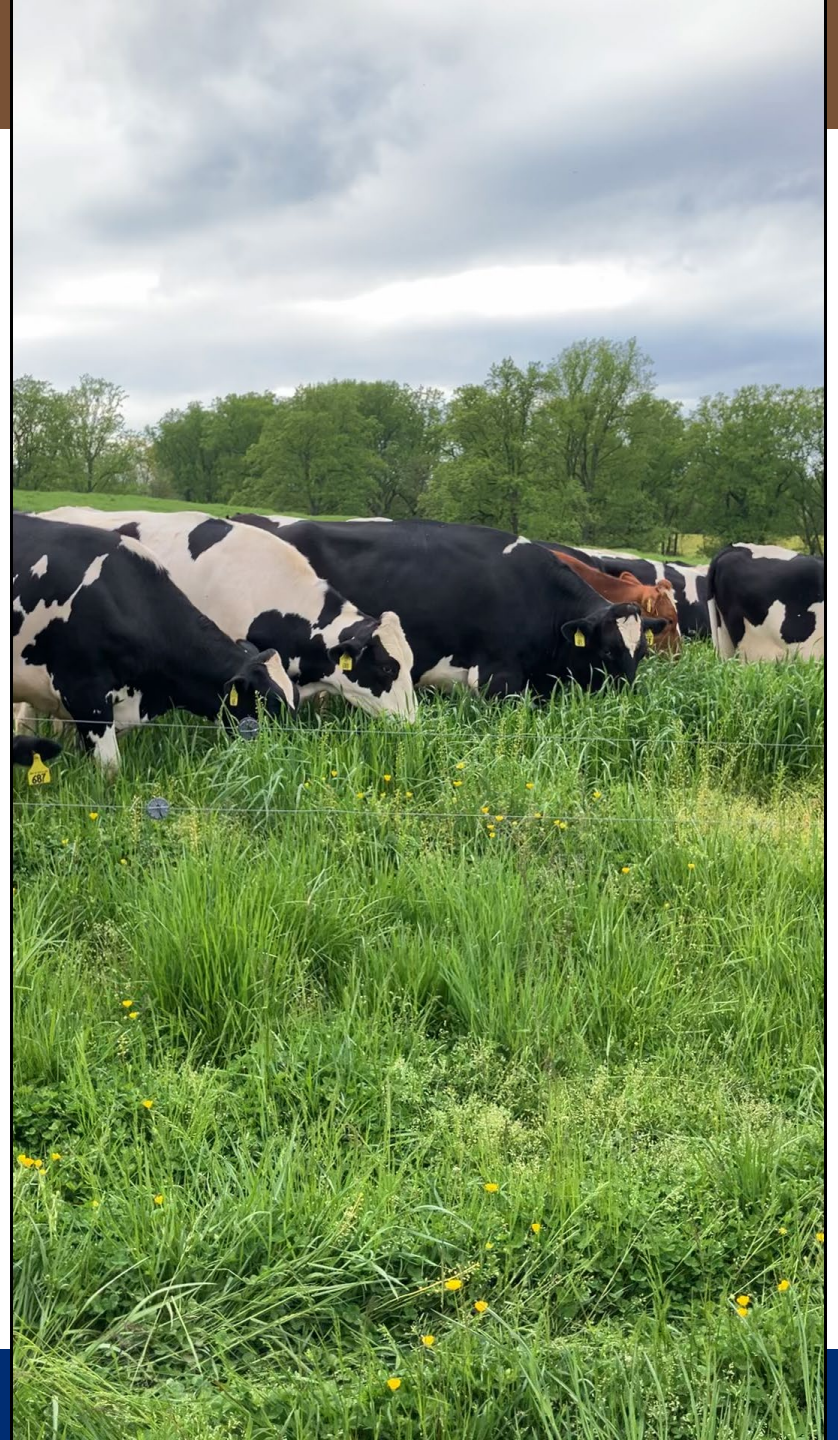
- Practice Code **646**
- **Was** Shallow Water Development and Management
- **Now** **Seasonal Water Management for Wildlife - 646**
- Now **only management** practice
- Raising and lowering the water

Seasonal Water Management for Wildlife

- The shallow ponded area where water will be managed seasonally for wildlife is comprised of other practices:
- Including:
  - Wetland Restoration – 657
  - Wildlife Habitat Planting – 420
  - Structure for Water Control – 587
  - Dike – 356
  - Diversion – 362

528 Grazing…

- Practice Code 528
- **Was** Prescribed Grazing
- Now **Grazing Management**
- Primarily a name change
  - “Prescription” implies strict schedule
  - Flexible & adaptive management
  - Forage & soil health
    - Plant height – start/stop grazing
    - Adequate Rest & Recovery



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Overview of Payment Scenarios

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Example Scenario

After Situation: A Precision Nutrient Application system will be developed to meet the current Nutrient Management (590) CPS General and Additional Criteria with nutrient management intensity sufficient to address site-specific risks for nutrient loss. Development and implementation of the NM system is based on site-specific risk assessment of comprehensive, site-specific conditions for the application of nutrients for each nutrient loss pathway that can negatively impact soil, water and air quality with excess nutrient loss. The NM system utilizes the 4Rs of nutrient stewardship and SMART Nutrient Management – the right Source, right Method, right Rate, and right Timing to meet both plant productivity and natural resource conservation goals. Utilizing GIS and GPS technologies, nutrients are applied based on soil test results for each grid or management zone using automated variable rate application equipment. Records provided annually include, the current soil test reports, planned nutrient application rates for each grid or management zone (prescription maps) and/or as applied maps, source, timing, and placement of all nutrients applied, actual crop yields and/or generated yield maps.

Associated Practices: Additional practices may be required to ensure effective implementation. The costs associated with these practices are not included in the current practice scenario.

Resource Concerns: The conservation practice standard provides implementation specifications to achieve the desired conservation objective(s) by addressing identified natural resource concern(s).

Cost Components

- Determined at the National level
- Based on cost of typical implementation scenarios
- Include the most commonly used components
- Payment rate is a percentage of scenario cost – Typically 75%

Feature Measure: acres treated

Scenario Unit: Acre

Scenario Typical Size: 40.00

Cost Summary:

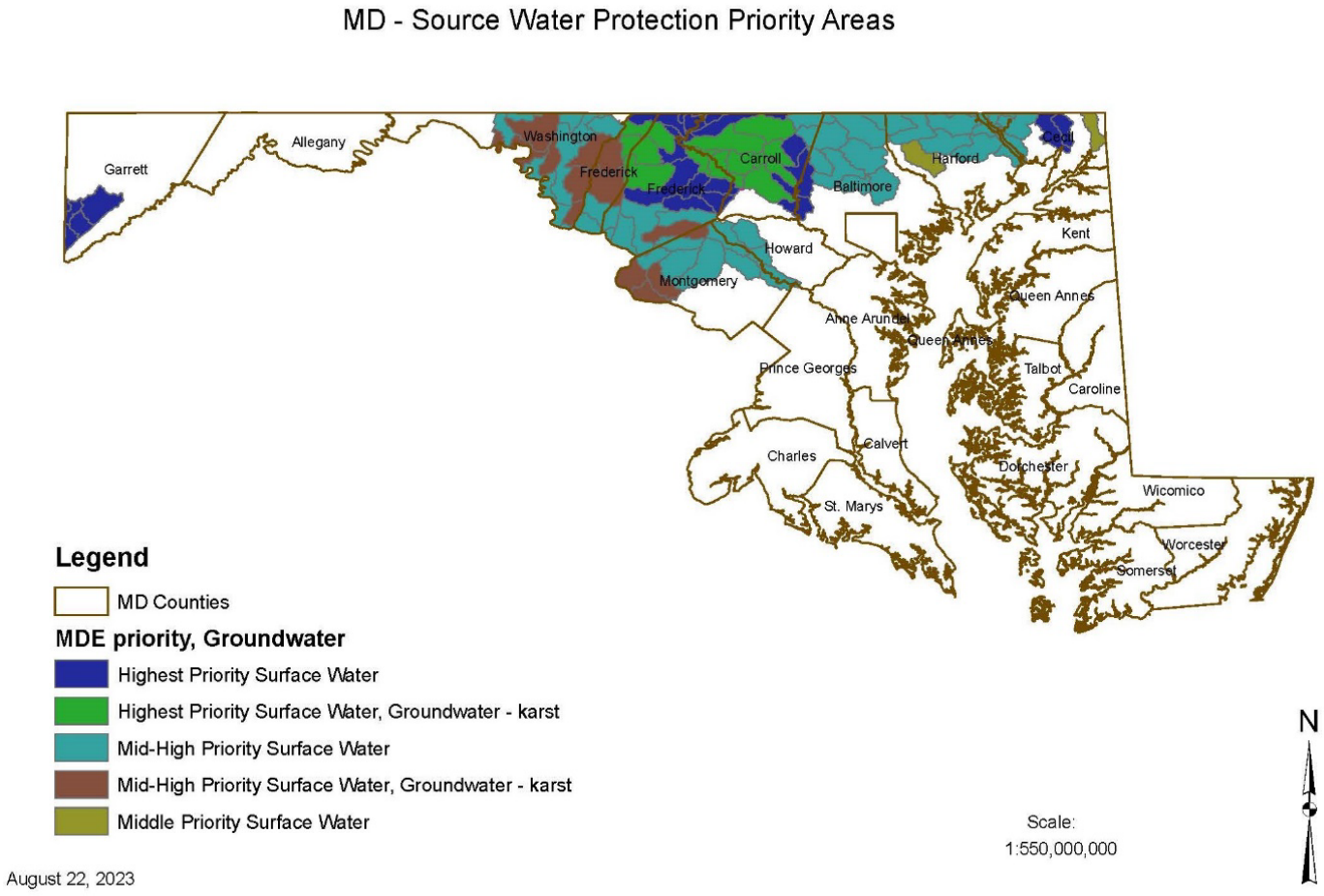
Cost Category	Total Cost	Scenario Cost/Unit
Materials	$936.85	$23.42
Equipment Installation	$1,205.24	$30.13
Labor	$2,387.67	$59.69
Mobilization	$0.00	$0.00
Acquisition of Technical Knowledge	$239.83	$6.00
Foregone Income	$0.00	$0.00
Risk	$0.00	$0.00
Total	$4,769.60	$119.24

Special Rates in EQIP

- Historically underserved (HU) - Special Rate
  - Self certify as Limited Resource, Beginning Farmer, Socially Disadvantaged or Veteran
- Priority Practices – Maryland has 5 High Priority practices (90%)
  - 313 – Waste Storage Facility
  - 647 – Early Successional Habitat Development/Mgt
  - 657 – Wetland Restoration
  - 658 – Wetland Creation
  - 666 – Forest Stand Improvement

Special Rates in EQIP

- 26% of the state designated as Source Water Protection Area (SWPA)
- Identified SWPA priority practices receive 90% of the scenario cost



Special Rates in CSP

There are a few practices within CSP that receive a higher rate

- Cover Crop
- Resource Conserving Crop Rotation (RCCR)
- Improved Resource Conserving Crop Rotation (IRCCR)
- Advanced Grazing Management (AGM)

Payment Scenario Changes FY26

- Payment Scenarios have become national rather than regional
- More general in most cases
- Less region specific

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Recent Changes to Payment Scenarios

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Payment Scenario Changes FY26

- Nationwide number of scenarios was reduced about 30-fold
- Guidance to planners – select the **best fit scenario**
- New structure – **base cost + implementation cost**
  - Payment rates were analyzed
  - Not used on all practices or scenarios
  - Similar to fixed costs

Base + Implementation Cost Example

Livestock Pipeline, High-Density Polyethylene

1 base cost	$1,337.23
1,500 lb pipe @ $4.73/lb	$7,095.00
Total =	$8,432.23

Note that pipe is paid by the pound, field offices have a calculator to assist in converting.

516	Livestock Pipeline	High-Density Polyethylene, Base Cost		No	$1,337.23
516	Livestock Pipeline	High-Density Polyethylene, Implementation Cost		Lb	$4.73

New Payment Scenarios - Fence

- Temporary/Portable fence – invaluable tool for grazing management
  - polywire
  - electric netting
  - Paid by the foot
- Virtual Fence
  - Year 1 – 382 Fence
    - Base (number, 1 for the system) & Implementation (per head)
    - Transmitter Station (if system requires > 2)
  - Years 2 – 5 paid under 528 Grazing Management
    - Implementing the virtual fence in a grazing system
    - Per head (covering annual subscription, batteries, etc.)

Payment Scenario Changes FY26 – Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Habitats – Oyster Bars

- Used to have 3 scenarios: place 2” shell, place 4” shell, and bagged dredging
- Now only Bagged Dredging payment scenario
  - we still plan the appropriate habitat restoration method
  - will use only payment scenario we have

Questions?

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