

Strategic Planning in NRCS

What is a strategic plan?

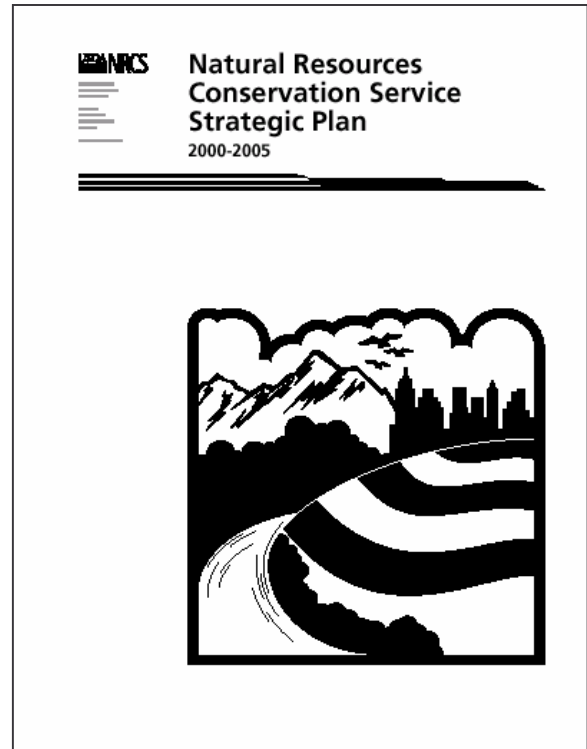
The purpose of a strategic plan is to formulate long term goals and objectives consistent with an organization's fundamental mission. A strategic plan also identifies how an organization intends to fulfill its mission and achieve these long term goals.

Strategic plans set the direction for the agency and provide the framework for many other operational processes.

Strategic planning in NRCS involves all levels of the agency as well as the Conservation Partnership, Tribes, government agencies, and other stakeholders. It is a continuous process by which the agency envisions its future and identifies the procedures, operations, and resources necessary to achieve that future.

The strategic plan serves as the blueprint for the agency budget formulation and is the foundation for resource allocation, performance planning, business plans, and performance measurement.

NRCS strategic planning activities are conducted in accordance with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977, the President's Management Agenda, and USDA guidelines.



How is the NRCS Strategic Plan developed?

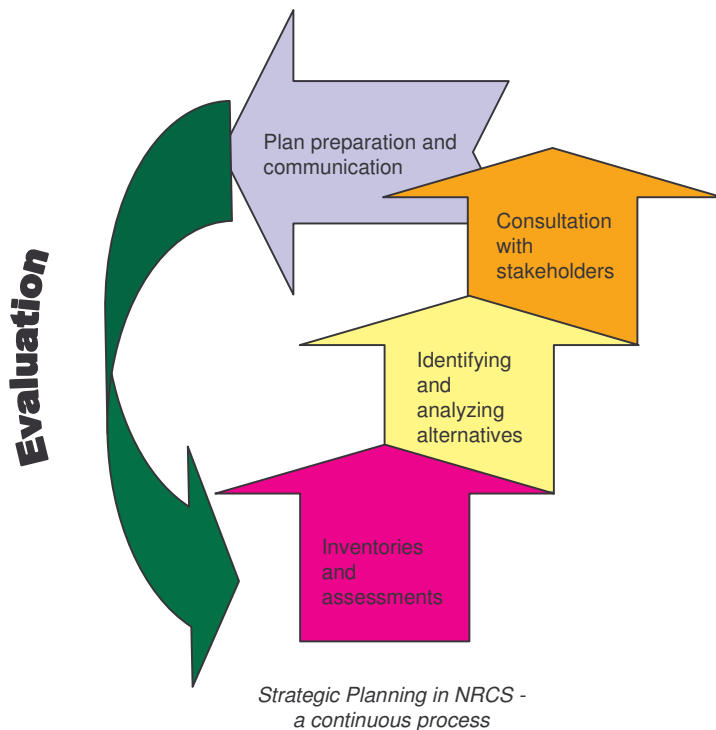
NRCS strategic planning efforts are continuous processes that include:

Inventories and Assessments - This involves gathering broad scale information regarding the nation's resource condition and identifying resource issues. Information gathered at all levels of the agency is used, including data gathered through the locally led process.

Identifying and Analyzing Alternatives - The NRCS strategic plan is based on science-based resource analyses and assessments of data from internal and external sources. Alternative methods and strategies to achieve goals are identified and analyzed.

Consultation and Reaching Consensus - Strategic planning in NRCS is conducted in consultation with stakeholders: Conservation Partnership, government agencies, Tribes, and interest groups. The general goals, objectives, and performance targets are developed and agreed upon.

Plan Preparation, Communication, and Evaluation - The strategic plan is developed, and the plan is communicated to all levels of the agency and to all stakeholders.



How does the Government Performance and Results Act affect strategic planning?

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) brought new attention to strategic planning in Federal agencies. GPRA requires that cabinet-level agencies develop and periodically update strategic plans. GPRA brings a renewed focus on setting outcome-oriented goals and measuring progress toward those goals. In addition, GPRA defines a structure and schedule for agency strategic planning.

The first round of agency GPRA strategic plans were submitted in September 1997 (for 1997-2002). Plans must be updated at least every three years.

What is in the Strategic Plan?

Strategic plans contain a fundamental set of components that describe agency purpose and intended direction over a prescribed period. GPRA requires most, but not all, of the following components:

Mission - comprehensive statement expressing the purpose of the organization.

Vision - statement of the "ideal" state pursued by the organization.

Guiding Principles - philosophy that steers the organization in delivering services and accomplishing its mission.

Situation Analysis - description of key internal and external trends that are likely to have an impact on the agency over the time period of the plan.

Goals - statements that describe the agency's destination, direction, and intent for the next 5 or more years.

Where to get more information about the NRCS Strategic Plan

If you are interested in receiving more detailed information, visit the NRCS *Accountability Website* at www.nrcs.usda.gov/accountability. The **NRCS FY2000-2005 Strategic Plan** is available in pdf format; for additional information, call the NRCS, Strategic and Performance Planning Division at (202) 690-0467.

What is in the Strategic Plan? (continued)

Objectives - initiatives that implement the goals. Objective are precise statements of the desired results of completing a series of action steps.

Performance Measures and Targets - precise milestones for each objective that will help the agency evaluate progress toward the objective and the goal that it supports.

Linkage of General Goals to Annual Performance Plan – description of the relationship between annual goals in the performance plan and the general goals and objectives in the strategic plan.

Resources Needed – description of the human, capital, information, and other resources and the operational processes, skills, and technology needed to achieve the agency goals; highlighting where significant change from currently available resources will be needed.

Program Evaluations – description of how the results of programs or policy will be evaluated. Include plans for formal assessment of the results and a schedule for future program evaluations.

Role of External Entities – description of the role and contributions made by non-Federal entities in the preparation of the plan.

How will the NRCS Strategic Plan be used?

The strategic plan is the foundation for all agency activities: performance planning, business planning, resource allocation, and performance measurement.

It provides the criteria for making day-to-day or long term organizational decisions and provides a template against which these decisions are evaluated.

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