

TSP Express

A report for Technical Service Providers
August 2004 **Report No. 4**

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NRCS Revises “Not-to-Exceed” Rates



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) released revised “not-to-exceed” payment rates for TSPs in August 2004. Generally, payment rates have increased and there is greater flexibility in their use.

NTE rates are used when landowners contract with certified TSPs in the private sector.

NRCS revised the payment rates after considering public comments received from the first release in August 2003. As a result, the agency increased rates, built in more flexibility for their use, and significantly reduced inconsistencies in payment rates among neighboring states and regions.

NRCS uses its Technical Assistance Costs of Conservation Practices (TACCP) database to develop these rates. TACCP

contains estimates for time required for each skill needed to complete the tasks of planning, design, installation and checkout associated with each conservation practice.

The rates are based on typically sized conservation practice jobs within 214 time team regions (TTRs) nationwide. Each typically sized conservation practice job reflects the natural resource, regulatory, social and economic conditions that exist within each TTR.

NTE rates are established for each of the four major conservation practice tasks— planning, design, installation and checkout. NRCS has established NTE rates for 163 conservation practices used by the agency.

The revised NTE rates can be found <http://www.tsp-nte.nrcs.usda.gov>. The 2003 NTE rates can be found at <http://www.tsp-nte.nrcs.usda.gov/TSPNTE03Archive/>. Comments about the payment rates are welcomed at any time. Please send comments to Liu-Hsiung Chuang, USDA-NRCS, Resource Economics and Social Sciences Division, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Room 6141-S, Washington, D.C. 20250, phone: 202-720-7076 or Liu-Hsiung.Chuang@usda.gov.

NRCS Names National TSP Coordinator

NRCS has named Angel (Ahng hil) Figueroa as its National TSP Coordinator. His new duties include administering policies and procedures for TSP and providing support to state TSP coordinators.

Prior to assuming his new position in June 2004, Angel worked on policies and programs affecting animal agriculture in the Animal Husbandry and Clean Water Programs Division.

Angel began his career with NRCS as a soil conservationist in Massachusetts. He worked as a district conservationist at several locations there. He later transferred to Ohio, where he worked as a district conservationist, RC&D Coordinator and team leader.

Subsequently, he moved to North Dakota as an Area Conservationist and Assistant State Conservationist.

As NRCS Liaison to the U.S. Army at the Army Environmental Center, he conducted conservation activities in military installations worldwide, including the Republic of Korea. Angel completed international assignments for NRCS in Mexico and Nicaragua.

Angel can be reached at (202) 215-3852 (cell) or Angel.Figueroa@usda.gov.

Certified and Pending TSPs Exceeds 3000

The number of certified and pending TSPs has exceeded 3000, according to NRCS statistics available in Tech Reg, the agency's online registry for TSPs.

Statistics show the agency has registered 1,987 certified technical service providers and 1,281 pending applications, totaling 3,268 as of August 24, 2004.

TSPs can be individuals, private businesses, non-profit organizations or public agencies outside the U.S. Department of Agriculture that help agricultural producers apply conservation practices on the land.

TechReg contains much information relevant to TSPs. Please visit <http://techreg.usda.gov> to become familiar with this website.

TSPs Must Comply With Environmental Policy

NRCS published the National Environmental Compliance Handbook in October 2003 to help planners comply with Federal environmental requirements contained in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This act, which became law in 1970, holds Federal agencies accountable to the public for the environmental effects of their work.

TSPs will find this handbook very informative. It explains NRCS environmental compliance procedures, and as a result, serves as a good reference.

The handbook contains information about environmental evaluations—a required part of conservation planning and program delivery. The handbook includes instructions on how to document the results of the environmental evaluation process. The environmental evaluation includes environmental considerations as part of the conservation planning process, promotes efficiency in preparing environmental documentation, and provides a systematic framework for integrating the NRCS planning process and environmental requirements. It can even help you protect your clients from inadvertently violating certain environmental protection laws.

Click on http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov/scripts/lpsiis.dll/H/H_190_610_Content.htm for a complete copy of the National Environmental Compliance Handbook. Other policy and procedural guidance is available on the NRCS eDirectives Web site at <http://policy.nrcs.usda.gov>.

Opportunities Available for Private-Sector TSPs

Contract opportunities are available in 30 states for private-sector TSPs qualified to do nutrient management. Many of these contracts involve the development of comprehensive nutrient management plans (CNMPs), including nutrient management planning.

Individual states are using several processes to solicit vendors for these projects:

- Request for Proposals,
- Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity Contracts
- Grants

The following states have contracts valued at \$2,500 or more: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming. NRCS announcements can be found online at www.fedbizopps.gov.

Training Summit Attracted 50 Participants

More than 50 people attended a summit in St. Louis, Missouri June 23-25, 2004 to coordinate training for certified and prospective TSPs. Participants represented various universities, professional organizations, state governments and private companies. Although the meeting focused on TSP training needs, other key issues identified for further action include funding, certification, marketing, communications, proficiency development, and NRCS procedures. Participants developed an outcome statement and strategies to accomplish each issue.

NRCS' National Employee Development Center, which organized the summit, is addressing the identified training issues, including the development of a TSP orientation course and the proficiencies and competencies needed to become a TSP. A National Training Coordinating Group, formed from a cross section of summit participants, will select and oversee training strategies. The group held its first meeting August 25, 2004 in Fort Worth, Texas.

Training Opportunities Calendar

November 16-18, 2004

Comprehensive Management Nutrient Planning (CNMP)
Development Course
Indianapolis, Ind.

The CNMP Development Course has been offered previously by the University of Tennessee. That national course is now being offered at Iowa State University (ISU). Besides ISU, other sponsors include the University of Tennessee, Michigan State University, Purdue University, University of Idaho and NRCS.

For course registration and lodging information, please visit <http://www.uca.iastate.edu/mnet/nutrientmtg04/home.html>. For information to become a certified CNMP TSP, please visit <http://wastemgmt.ag.utk.edu/cnmpcertification.htm>.

FIELD FOCUS – MICHIGAN



District Conservationist Jennifer Taylor and Cultural Resources Specialist Andy Weir discuss potential Archaeological findings with a landowner in Branch County.

NRCS' State Office in Michigan received numerous requests for cultural resource investigations, but did not have a full-time cultural resource specialist to handle them.

As a result, the agency used the TSP process effectively to handle its workload by contracting directly with the Commonwealth Cultural Resources Group (CCRG) to conduct cultural resources investigations in Michigan.

Since October 2003, CCRG has conducted more than 600 cultural resource investigations. More than 90 have involved site visits.

Cultural resources assessments are a required component of conservation planning when soil disturbance will take place in implementing a conservation practice. Hundreds of conservation plans are written each year in Michigan and most require soil disturbance. Therefore, hundreds of cultural resource investigations must be conducted prior to implementing these conservation plans.

NRCS Field Office employees submit requests for cultural resources investigations directly to CCRG, with a copy sent to the designated cultural resources staff person in NRCS' State Office in Michigan. Many investigations can be conducted without a field visit by using historical records and other documentation to ascertain the probability of an existing culturally significant site. In some instances, CCRG will conduct a field visit with the local District Conservationist.

Many other states, including Maine, are contracting successfully for cultural resource services from private sector TSPs.

Connect to TSP Express and Other NRCS Publications Online

TSPs can subscribe to TSP Express, other NRCS newsletters and news releases on the Internet. The electronic subscription service, which NRCS began in 2003, alerts computer users to these information products and includes a link to view and download them.

Besides TSP Express, other newsletters include NRCS This Week, NRCS Technology News and Plant Materials eNews.

To subscribe to TSP Express and other NRCS publications online, visit <http://news-source.nrcs.usda.gov>. Enter an e-mail address to receive messages alerting you to these informational products. Select your publications. Click on the "subscribe to selected e-mail lists" bar to submit your selections.

For More Information

For more information on technical service providers, visit the TechReg site at <http://techreg.usda.gov>; write to Angel Figueroa, National TSP Coordinator, Science and Technology Deputy Area, USDA-NRCS, P.O. Box 2890, Washington, D.C. 20013; or send an e-mail to Angel.Figueroa@usda.gov.

State Technical Service Provider Contacts

<http://techreg.usda.gov/RptStateContact4Admin.aspx>

Your Feedback is Needed

This is the fourth issue of TSP Express, a report for TSPs. We are seeking topics for future issues. Please send comments to tspg@nrcs.usda.gov.

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