

PART 1940 - GENERAL

Subpart G - Environmental Program

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Authority: 7 U.S.C. 1989; 42 U.S.C. 1480; 7 CFR 2.23; 7 CFR 2.70

Part 1940 - General

Subpart G - Environmental Program

§1940.301 Purpose.

(a) This subpart contains the major environmental policies of Rural Development. It also provides the procedures and guidelines for preparing the environmental impact analyses required for a series of Federal laws, regulations, and Executive orders within one environmental document. The timing and use of this environmental document within the Rural Development decision-making process is also outlined.

(b) This subpart is intended to be consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508. CEQ's regulations will not be repeated in this subpart except when essential for clarification of important procedural or substantive points. Otherwise, citations to applicable sections of the regulations will be provided. The CEQ regulations will be available at all Rural Development offices.

(c) This subpart is designed to integrate the requirements of NEPA with other planning and environmental review procedures required by law, or by Agency practice, so that all such procedures run concurrently rather than consecutively. The environmental document, which results from the implementation of this Subpart, provides on a project basis a single reference point for the Agency's compliance and/or implementation of the following requirements and policies:

- (1) The National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. 4321
- (2) Safe Drinking Water Act - Section 1424(e), 42 U.S.C. 300h
- (3) Endangered Species Act, 16 U.S.C. 1531
- (4) Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, 16 U.S.C. 1271
- (5) The National Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 470 (See Subpart F of Part 1901 of this chapter for more specific implementation procedures.)
- (6) Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act, 16 U.S.C. 469 (See Subpart F of Part 1901 of this chapter for more specific implementation procedures.)

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- (7) Coastal Zone Management Act - Section 307(c)(1) and (2), 16 U.S.C. 1456
- (8) Farmland Protection Policy Act, Subtitle I, Public Law 97-98
- (9) Coastal Barrier Resources Act, Public Law 97-348
- (10) Executive Order 11593, Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment (See Subpart F of Part 1901 of this chapter for more specific implementation procedures.)
- (11) Executive Order 11514, Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Quality
- (12) Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management
- (13) Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands
- (14) Title 7, Part 1b and 1c, Code of Federal Regulations, Department of Agriculture's National Environmental Policy Act; Final Policies and Procedures
- (15) Title 7, Part 3100, Code of Federal Regulations, Department of Agriculture's Enhancement, Protection, and Management of the Cultural Environment (See Subpart F of Part 1901 of this chapter for more specific implementation procedures.)
- (16) Title 7, Part 658, Code of Federal Regulations, Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, Farmland Protection Policy
- (17) Title 7, Part 12, Code of Federal Regulations, Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation.
- (18) Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy (See Exhibit A of this subpart.)
- (19) Departmental Regulation 9500-4, Fish and Wildlife Policy

(d) The primary objectives of this subpart are for the Agency to make better decisions by taking into account potential environmental impacts of proposed projects and by working with Rural Development applicants, other Federal agencies, Indian tribes, State and local governments, and interested citizens and organizations in order to formulate actions that advance the program goals in a manner that will protect, enhance, and restore environmental quality. To accomplish these objectives, the identification of potentially significant impacts on the human environment is mandated to occur early in the Agency's planning and decision making processes. Important decision points are identified. The completion of the environmental review process is coordinated with

these decision points, and this review must be completed prior to the Agency's first major decision on whether or not to participate in the proposal. This early availability of the results of the environmental review process is intended to ensure that Agency decisions are based on an understanding of their environmental consequence, as well as the consequences of alternative courses of action.

(e) Reducing delays, duplication of effort, and superfluous analyses are provided for in this subpart. Rural Development environmental documents are to be supported by accurate analyses and will concentrate on the issues that are timely and relevant to the action in question, rather than amassing needless detail. Such documents and their preparation and review will be coordinated with other Federal or State agencies jointly participating in proposed actions or related actions, in order to avoid duplication of effort, and to achieve a coordinated and timely response.

(f) Public involvement is desirable, and to facilitate public involvement, environmental documents will be available to interested citizens as early in the decision making process as possible and before decisions are made. Provisions are included for citizens or interested parties to express their views and any concerns.

(g) The Rural Development officials responsible for the environmental review process are identified.

(h) The Rural Development actions covered by this subpart include (1) financial assistance to include grants, loans, and guarantees, (2) subdivision approvals, (3) the management, leasing and sale of inventory property, and (4) other major federal actions such as proposals for legislation and the issuance of regulations.

§1940.302 Definitions. Following is a list of definitions that apply to the implementation of this subpart. Please note that §1940.301(b) of this subpart refers to the Council on Environmental Quality's Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508. Consequently, the definitions contained in Part 1508 of the Council's regulations apply to this subpart, as well as those listed below.

(a) Emergency circumstance. One involving an immediate or imminent danger to public health or safety.

(b) Environmental review documents. The documents required by this subpart for the purpose of documenting Rural Development's compliance with the environmental laws and regulations applicable to the Rural Development actions covered in this subpart. These documents include (1) Form RD 1940-22, "Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions," (2) Form RD 1940-21, "Environmental Assessment for Class I Action,"

(3) Environmental Assessment for Class II Actions (Exhibit H of this subpart), and (4) Environmental Impact Statements (EIS).

(c) Flood or flooding. A general and temporary condition of partial or complete inundation of land areas, from the overflow of inland and/or tidal waters, and/or the rapid accumulation or runoff of surface waters from any source. Two important classifications of floods are as follows.

(1) A one-percent chance flood or base flood - A flood of a magnitude that occurs once every 100 years on the average. Within any one-year period there is one chance in 100 of the occurrence of such a flood. Most importantly, however, the cumulative risk of flooding increases with time. Statistically, there is about one chance in five that a flood of this magnitude will occur within a 20-year period, the length of time commonly defined as the useful life of a facility. Over a 30-year period, the life of a typical mortgage, the probability of such a flood occurring increases to greater than one chance in four.

(2) A 0.2-percent chance flood - A flood of a magnitude that occurs once every 500 years on the average. (Within any one-year period there is one chance in 500 of the occurrence of such a flood.) As with the one-percent chance flood, the cumulative risk of this flood occurring also increases with time.

(d) Floodplains. Lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters, including flood-prone areas of offshore islands. At a minimum, floodplains consist of those areas subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year. The term floodplain will be taken to mean the base floodplain, unless the action involves a critical action, in which case the critical action floodplain is the minimum floodplain of concern.

(1) Base floodplain (or 100-year floodplain) - The area subject to inundation from a flood of a magnitude that occurs once every 100 years on the average (the flood having a one-percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year).

(2) Critical action floodplain (or 500-year floodplain) - The area subject to inundation from a flood of a magnitude that occurs once every 500 years on the average (the flood having 0.2-percent chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year).

(e) Indirect impacts. Those reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts that result from the additional public facility, residential, commercial, or industrial development or growth that a federally financed project may cause, induce or accommodate. Consequently, indirect impacts often occur later in time than the construction of the Federal project and can be removed in distance from the construction

site. For example, a water transmission line may be designed to serve additional residential development. The environmental impacts of that residential development represent an indirect impact of the federally funded water line. Those indirect impacts which deserve the greatest consideration include changes in the patterns of land use, population density or growth rate, and the corresponding changes to air and water quality and other natural systems.

(f) Mitigation measure. A measure(s) included in a project or application for the purpose of avoiding, minimizing, reducing or rectifying identified, adverse environmental impacts. Examples of such measures include:

- (1) the deletion, relocation, redesign or other modifications of the project's elements;
- (2) the dedication to open space of environmentally sensitive areas of the project site, which would otherwise be adversely affected by the action or its indirect impacts;
- (3) soil erosion and sedimentation plans to control runoff during land-disturbing activities;
- (4) the establishment of vegetative buffer zones between project sites and adjacent land uses;
- (5) protective measures recommended by environmental and conservation agencies having jurisdiction or special expertise regarding the project's impacts;
- (6) storm water management plans to control potential downstream flooding effects that would result from a project;
- (7) zoning; and
- (8) reuse of existing facilities as opposed to new construction.

(g) No-action alternative. The alternative of not approving an application for financial assistance, a subdivision feasibility analysis, or an Agency proposal.

(h) Practicable alternative. An alternative that is capable of attainment within the confines of relevant constraints. The test of practicability, therefore, depends upon the particulars of the situation under consideration and those constraints imposed by environmental, economic, legal, social and technological parameters. This test, however, is not limited by the temporary unavailability of sufficient financial resources to implement an alternative. That is, alternatives cannot be rejected solely on the basis of moderately increased costs. The range of alternatives that must be analyzed to

determine if a practicable alternative exists includes the following three categories of alternatives:

- (1) Alternative project sites or designs,
- (2) Alternative projects with similar benefits as the proposed action, and
- (3) The no-action alternative.

(i) Preparer of Environmental Review Documents. The Rural Development official who is responsible for reviewing the potential environmental impacts of the proposed action and for completing the appropriate environmental review document. Under the circumstances indicated, the following Agency positions and divisions will act as the preparer of the environmental review documents covered by this subpart.

(1) County Office - When the approval official for the action under review is located at the County Office level, that official will prepare, as required, Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions and Class I and Class II assessments.

(2) District Office - When the approval official for the action under review is located at the District Office level, that official will prepare, as required, Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions and Class I and Class II assessments or may delegate this responsibility to either

(i) the District Office staff member having primary responsibility for assembling the associated preapplication, application or other case materials, analyzing the materials and developing recommendations for the approval official, or

(ii) a County Office staff member having the same responsibilities as the District Office member, if the action is initiated at the County Office level.

(3) State Office Program Chief - For actions approved within the State Office, the Chief will prepare, as required, Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions and Class I and II assessments or may delegate this responsibility to either

(i) the appropriate State Office Loan Specialist, if not the State Environmental Coordinator (SEC),

(ii) an architect or engineer on the Chief's staff who is not the SEC, or

(iii) a District or County Office staff member located within the office in which the action is initiated and having the responsibilities outlined in paragraph (i)(2)(i) of this section.

(4) State Environmental Coordinator - EIS's for actions within the approval authority of County Supervisors, District Directors, and State Office officials.

(5) Assistant Administrators for Programs - Checklists, assessments, and EIS's for all actions initiated within their program office.

(6) Program Support Staff - Checklists, assessments, and EIS's that the Deputy Administrator for Program Operations requests be done.

(j) Water resource project. Includes any type of construction which would result in either impacts on water quality and the beneficial uses that water quality criteria are designed to protect or any change in the free-flowing characteristics of a particular river or stream to include physical, chemical, and biological characteristics of the waterway. This definition encompasses construction projects within and along the banks of rivers or streams, as well as projects involving withdrawals from, and discharges into such rivers or streams. Projects which require Corps of Engineers dredge and fill permits are also water resource projects.

§1940.303 General policy.

(a) Rural Development will consider environmental quality as equal with economic, social, and other relevant factors in program development and decision making processes.

(b) In assessing the potential environmental impacts of its actions, Rural Development will consult early with appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies and other organizations to provide decision-makers with both the technical and human aspects of environmental planning.

(c) When adverse environmental impacts are identified, either direct or indirect, an examination will be made of alternative courses of action, including their potential environmental impacts. The objective of the environmental review will be to develop a feasible alternative with the least adverse environmental impact. The alternative of not proceeding with the proposal will also be considered particularly with respect to the need for the proposal.

(d) If no feasible alternative exists, including the no-action alternative, measures to mitigate the identified adverse environmental impacts will be included in the proposal.

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(e) The performance of environmental reviews and the consideration of alternatives will be initiated as early as possible in the Rural Development application review process so that the Agency will be in the most flexible and objective position to deal with these considerations.

§1940.304 Special policy.

(a) Land use.

(1) Rural Development recognizes that its specific mission of assisting rural areas, composed of farms and rural towns, goes hand-in-hand with protecting the environmental resources upon which these systems are dependent. Basic resources necessary to both farm and rural settlements include important farmlands and forestlands, prime rangelands, wetlands, and floodplains. The definitions of these areas are contained in the Appendix to Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy, which is included as Exhibit A of this subpart. For assistance in locating and defining floodplains and wetlands, the locations and telephone numbers of the Federal Emergency Management Administration's regional offices have been included as Exhibit J of this subpart, and similar information for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wetland Coordinators has been included as Exhibit K of this subpart. Given the importance of these resources, as emphasized in the Departmental Regulation, Executive Order 11988, "Floodplain Management," and Executive Order 11990, "Protection of Wetlands," it is Rural Development's policy not to approve or fund any proposals that, as a result of their identifiable impacts, direct or indirect, would lead to or accommodate either the conversion of these land uses or encroachment upon them. The only exception to this policy is if the approving official determines that

(i) there is no practicable alternative to the proposed action,

(ii) the proposal conforms to the planning criteria identified in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, and

(iii) the proposal includes all practicable measures for reducing the adverse impacts and the amount of conversion/encroachment.

(A) For Farmer Program loans and guarantees, and loans to Indian Tribes and Tribal Corporations, Exhibit M of this subpart imposes additional and more restrictive requirements regarding wetland and highly erodible land conservation.

(B) Unless otherwise exempted by the provisions of Exhibit M, the proceeds of any Farmer Program loan or loan to an Indian Tribe or Tribal Corporation made or guaranteed by Rural Development cannot be used

(1) for a purpose that will contribute to excessive erosion of highly erodible land (as defined in Exhibit M) or

(2) for a purpose that will contribute to conversion of wetlands (as defined in Exhibit M) to produce an agricultural commodity.

(2) It is also recognized that unless carefully reviewed, some proposals designed to serve the needs of rural communities can adversely affect the existing economic base and settlement patterns of the community, as well as create development pressures on land and environmental resources essential to farm economies. An example of such a proposal might be the extension of utilities and other types of infrastructure beyond a community's existing settlement pattern and into important farmlands for the purpose of commercial or residential expansion, even though there is available space within the existing settlement pattern for such expansion. Not only may the loss of important farmlands unnecessarily result, but the community may be faced with the economic costs of providing public services to outlying areas, as well as the deterioration of its central business or commercial area; the latter may not be able to compete with the newer, outlying commercial establishments. These results are undesirable, and to avoid their occurrence, projects designed to meet rural community needs (i.e., residential, industrial, commercial, and public facilities) will not be approved unless the following conditions are met.

(i) The project is planned and sited in a manner consistent with the policies of this section, the Farmland Protection Policy Act, and Departmental Regulation 9500-3 (Exhibit A of this subpart).

(ii) The project is not inconsistent with an existing comprehensive and enforceable plan that guides growth and reflects a realistic strategy for protecting natural resources, and the project is compatible, to the extent practicable, with State, unit of local government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland. (If no such plan or policies exist, there is no Rural Development requirement that they either be prepared and adopted, as further specified in paragraph (a)(3) of this section.)

(iii) The project will encourage long-term, economically viable public investment by fostering or promoting development patterns that ensure compact community development, that is, development that is limited to serving existing settlement patterns or is located in existing settlement patterns, e.g., the rehabilitation and renovation of existing structures, systems and neighborhoods; infilling of development; the provision of a range of moderate-to-high residential densities appropriate to local and regional needs. When these development patterns or types are not practicable, the development must be contiguous with the existing settlement pattern and provide for a range of moderate-to-high residential densities appropriate to local and regional needs. It is recognized that some Rural Development Community Programs projects are designed to serve rural residents, such as rural water and waste disposal systems and, therefore, cannot be limited in service area to those areas contiguous with existing settlement patterns. These types of projects will be designed to primarily serve existing structures and rural residents in noncontiguous areas. Any additional capacity within the system will be limited to meet reasonable growth needs, and, to the extent practicable, be designed to meet such needs within existing settlements and areas contiguous to them.

(3) The conditions specified in paragraph (a)(2) of this section should not be construed as advocating excessive densities, congestion, or loss of open space amenities within rural communities. Desirable living conditions can be obtained under these objectives, along with economic and social benefits for the community and the surrounding farm operations. Additionally, these conditions should not be construed as requiring localities to develop plans which contain the conditions. In any instance in which these planning conditions or criteria do not exist within the project area, project reviews will not be postponed until the criteria are adopted. Rather, projects will be reviewed and funding decisions made in light of a project's consistency with the contents of this subpart (excluding paragraph (a)(2)(ii) of this section, which would not be applicable).

(b) Endangered species. Rural Development will not authorize, fund, or carry out any proposal or project that is likely to

(1) jeopardize the continued existence of any plant or wildlife species listed by the Secretary of Interior or Commerce as endangered or threatened; or

(2) destroy or adversely modify the habitats of listed species when such habitats have been determined critical to the species'

existence by the Secretary of Interior or Commerce, unless Rural Development has been granted an exemption for such proposal by the Endangered Species Committee pursuant to paragraph (h) of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

(c) Wild and scenic rivers. Rural Development will not provide financial assistance or plan approval for any water resource project that would have a direct and adverse effect on the values for which a river has been either included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System or is designated for potential addition. Additionally, Rural Development will not approve or assist developments (commercial, industrial, residential, farming or community facilities) located below or above a wild, scenic or recreational river area, or on any stream tributary thereto which will invade the area or unreasonably diminish the scenic, recreational, and fish and wildlife values present in the area.

(d) Historic and cultural properties. As part of the environmental review process, Rural Development will identify any properties that are listed in, or may be eligible for, listing in the National Register of Historic Places and are located within the project's area of potential environmental impacts. Consultations will be undertaken with State Historic Preservation Officers and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, through the implementation of Subpart F of Part 1901 of this chapter, in order to determine the most appropriate course of action for protecting such identified properties or mitigating potential adverse impacts to them.

(e) Coastal barriers. Under the requirements of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act, Rural Development will not provide financial assistance for any activity to be located within the Coastal Barrier Resources System unless

(1) such activity meets the criteria for an exception, as defined in Section 6 of the Act, and

(2) consultation regarding the activity has been completed with the Secretary of the Interior.

(f) Water and energy conservation. Rural Development will encourage the conservation of water and energy in the development of its programs and policies and will encourage applicants to incorporate all economically feasible water and energy-saving features and designs within their proposals.

(g) Intergovernmental initiatives on important land resources. On a broader scale, Rural Development will advocate, in cooperation with other USDA agencies (through the USDA State-level committee system), the retention of important farmlands and forestlands, prime rangeland, wetlands and floodplains whenever proposed conversions to other uses

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(1) are caused or encouraged by actions or programs of a Federal Agency, or

(2) require licensing or approval by a Federal Agency, unless other needs clearly override the benefits derived from retention of such lands.

(h) Water quality. Rural Development will not provide financial assistance to any activity that would either impair a State water quality standard, including designated and/or existing beneficial uses that water quality criteria are designed to protect, or that would not meet antidegradation requirements.

§1940.305 Policy implementation.

(a) Environmental impact analysis. The implementation of the environmental impact analysis requirements described in this subpart serves as the primary mechanism for Rural Development as follows:

(1) incorporating environmental quality considerations into Rural Development program and decision-making processes,

(2) obtaining the views of the public and government agencies on potential environmental impacts associated with Rural Development projects, and

(3) using all practicable means to avoid or to minimize any possible adverse environmental effects of Rural Development actions.

(b) Natural resource management. The State Director will develop a natural resource management guide. This guide will serve as an essential mechanism for implementing §1940.304 of this subpart; and, therefore, the guide must be consistent with and reflect the objectives and policies contained in §1940.304 of this subpart. At the same time, however, it must be tailored to take into account important State, regional, and local natural resource management objectives. The guide will be issued as a State Supplement for prior approval. The basic content, purposes, and uses of the guide are enumerated in Exhibit B of this subpart and can be summarized as follows:

(1) The guide will serve as a mechanism for assembling an inventory of the locations within the State of those natural resources, land uses, and environmental factors that have been specified by Federal, State and local authorities as deserving some degree of protection or special consideration;

(2) The guide will summarize the various standards or types of Federal, State, or local protection that apply to the natural resources, land uses, and environmental factors listed in the inventory; and

(3) Applications for individual projects must be reviewed for consistency with the guide.

(c) Intergovernmental initiatives. When commenting on proposed Federal actions subject to environmental impact statements, Rural Development commentors will focus on the consistency of these actions with the appropriate State natural resource management guide. A similar focus or element will be addressed in Rural Development's review of the Environmental Protection Agency's 201 Wastewater Management Plans.

(d) Farmland Protection Policy Act and Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy. The natural resource management guide serves as a tool for implementing the requirements of the Act and the Departmental Regulation at the broad level of implementing the Agency's programs at the State level. These requirements must also be followed in the review of applications for financial assistance or subdivision approval, as well as the disposal of real property. Rural Development's implementation procedures for the project review process are contained in Exhibit C of this subpart.

(e) Endangered Species. Rural Development will implement the consultation procedures required under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act as specified in 50 CFR 402. It is important to note that these consultation procedures apply to the disposal of real property and all Rural Development applications for financial assistance and subdivision approval, including those applicants which are exempt from environmental assessments. Rural Development's implementation procedures are contained in Exhibit D of this subpart.

(f) Wild and scenic rivers. Each application for financial assistance or subdivision approval and the proposed disposal of real property will be reviewed to determine if it will affect a river or portion of it, which is either included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, designated for potential addition to the system, or identified in the Nationwide Inventory prepared by the National Park Service (NPS) in the Department of the Interior (DOI). Rural Development's procedures for completing this review are contained in Exhibit E of this subpart.

(g) Historic and cultural properties.

(1) As part of the environmental review process, Rural Development will identify any properties that are listed in or may be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, and located within the area of potential environmental impact. Identification will consist of consulting the published lists of the National Register and formally contacting and seeking the comments of the appropriate State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Since it is not always possible from the consultation with the SHPO to determine whether historic and cultural properties are present within the project's area of environmental impact, it may be

necessary for Rural Development to consult public records and other individuals and organizations, such as university archaeologists, local historical societies, etc. These latter discussions should take place before initiating a detailed site survey since they may provide reliable information that obviates the need for a survey. However, whenever insufficient information exists to document the presence or absence of potentially eligible National Register properties and where the potential for previously unidentified properties is recognized by Rural Development, the SHPO, or other interested parties, Rural Development will conduct the necessary investigations to determine if such properties are present within the area of potential environmental impact. Rural Development will involve the SHPO in the planning and formulation of any historic, cultural, architectural or archaeological testing, studies or surveys conducted to investigate the presence of such properties and will utilize persons with appropriate knowledge and experience.

(2) If the information obtained, as a result of the consultation and investigations conducted by Rural Development, indicates the presence of an historic or cultural property within the area of potential environmental impact that, in the opinion of the SHPO and Rural Development, appear to meet the National Register Criteria (36 CFR 60.4), the property will be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. If the SHPO and Rural Development do not agree on the property's eligibility for the National Register or if the Secretary of the Interior or the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation so requests, Rural Development will request a determination of eligibility from the Keeper of the National Register in accordance with 36 CFR 63. Consultations will be initiated with the SHPO and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation in accordance with 36 CFR 800, through the implementation of Subpart F of Part 1901 of this chapter, to determine the most appropriate course of action to protect all National Register and eligible properties within the area of potential environmental impact.

(3) Further instructions detailing the procedures to be followed in considering and protecting historic and cultural properties and the responsible Agency officials are contained in Subpart F of Part 1901 of this Chapter. These procedures will be followed whenever a proposal, considered by Rural Development, has the potential to affect National Register or eligible properties.

(h) Coastal barriers. In those States having coastal barriers within the Coastal Barrier Resources System, each application for financial assistance or subdivision approval, as well as the proposed disposal of real property, will be reviewed to determine if it would be located within the system, and, if so, whether the action must be denied on this basis or meets the Act's criteria for an exception. To accomplish the review, all affected State, District and County Offices will maintain a current set of maps, as issued by DOI, which depict those

coastal barriers within their jurisdiction that have been included in the system. Rural Development's implementation procedures for accomplishing this review requirement and for consulting as necessary with DOI are contained in Exhibit F of this subpart. The exceptions to the restrictions of the Coastal Barrier Resources Act are contained in Exhibit L of this subpart.

(i) Water and energy conservation. Water and energy conservation measures will be considered at both the program and project level in a manner consistent with program regulations.

(j) Noise abatement. For purposes of assessing noise impacts and for determining the acceptability of housing sites in terms of their exposure to noise, Rural Development has adopted and follows the standards and procedures developed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and contained in 24 CFR 51 of Subpart B entitled, "Noise Abatement and Control."

(k) Water quality. Each application for financial assistance or subdivision approval and the proposed disposal of real property will be reviewed to determine if it would impair a State water quality standard or meet antidegradation requirements. When necessary, the proposed activity will be modified to protect water quality standards, including designated and/or existing beneficial uses that water quality criteria are designed to protect, and meet antidegradation requirements.

§1940.306 Environmental responsibilities within the National Office.

(a) Administrator. The Administrator of Rural Development has the direct responsibility for Agency compliance with all environmental laws, Executive orders, and regulations that apply to Rural Development's program and administrative actions. As such, the Administrator ensures that this responsibility is adequately delegated to Agency staff and remains informed on the general status of Agency compliance, as well as the need for any necessary improvements. The Administrator is also responsible for ensuring that the Agency's manpower and financial needs for accomplishing adequate compliance with this subpart are reflected and documented in budget requests for departmental consideration.

(b) Deputy Administrator Program Operations.

(1) The Deputy Administrator for Program Operations has the delegated overall Agency responsibility for developing and implementing environmental policies and compliance procedures, monitoring their effectiveness, and advising the Administrator on the status of compliance, to include recommendations for any necessary changes in this subpart. The incumbent is also responsible for developing and documenting, as part of the Agency's budget formulation process, the manpower and financial needs necessary to implement this subpart.

(2) The specific responsibilities of the Deputy Administrator Program Operations are as follows:

- (i) Provide for the Agency an interdisciplinary approach to environmental impact analysis and problem resolution, as required by the CEQ regulations;
- (ii) Provide the leadership and technical expertise for the implementation of the Agency's environmental policies with special emphasis being placed on those policies relating to natural resource management, energy conservation, and orderly community development;
- (iii) Coordinate the implementation of this subpart with affected program offices;
- (iv) Provide policy direction and advice on the implementation of this subpart to Agency staff, particularly to SECs and technical support personnel within State Offices;
- (v) Consult and coordinate, as needed or upon request, with the Department's interagency committees dealing with environmental, land use, and historic preservation matters;
- (vi) Monitor the Agency's record in complying with this subpart;
- (vii) Provide training programs and materials for the Agency staff assigned the functions identified in this subpart;
- (viii) Review, as necessary, applications for funding assistance, proposed policies and regulations, and recommend their approval, disapproval, or modification after analyzing and considering their anticipated adverse environmental impacts, their benefits, and their consistency with the requirements of this subpart;
- (ix) Develop and direct Agency procedures for complying with environmental legislation, Executive orders, and regulations, including, but not limited to, those listed in §1940.301(c) of this subpart;
- (x) Maintain a position identified as the Senior Environmental Specialist (hereafter called the Environmental Specialist), who will serve as the responsible Agency official under the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, maintain liaison on environmental matters with interested public groups and Federal

agencies, and serve as the focal point for developing and coordinating the Agency's procedures for the requirements listed in §1940.301(c) of this subpart; and

(xi) Review and evaluate legislative and administrative proposals in terms of their environmental impact.

(c) Assistant Administrators for Programs. The Assistant Administrators for Programs will:

(1) Ensure, as necessary, that environmental assessments and EISs for proposed program regulations are prepared by their staff;

(2) Ensure that all proposed actions that fall under the requirements of this subpart, and that are submitted to the National Office for approval or concurrence, contain adequate analyses and documentation of their potential environmental impacts (Transfer of program funds from National Office to State Office control to enable the State Office to approve an application is not considered to be National Office approval of or concurrence in an application);

(3) Consider and include, in the development of program regulations, feasible policies and mechanisms that promote program goals in a manner that either enhances environmental quality or reduces unnecessary adverse environmental impacts; and

(4) Designate one or more staff members to serve as a program environmental coordinator, having generally the same duties and responsibilities within the program office as the SEC has within the State Office (See §1940.307(b) of this subpart).

§1940.307 Environmental responsibilities within the State Office.

(a) State Director. The State Director will:

(1) Serve as the responsible Rural Development official at the State Office level for ensuring compliance with the requirements of this Subpart; and

(2) Appoint one individual to serve as the SEC. Thereafter, the SEC will report directly to the State Director on the environmental matters contained in this Subpart.

(b) State Environmental Coordinator (SEC). The SEC will:

(1) Act as advisor to the State Director on environmental matters and coordinate the requirements of this subpart;

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- (2) Review those Agency actions which are not categorically excluded from this subpart (see §1940.311 and §1940.312 of this subpart) and which require the approval and/or clearance of the State Office and recommend to the approving official either project approval, disapproval, or modification after analyzing and considering the
- (i) anticipated adverse environmental impacts,
 - (ii) the anticipated benefits, and
 - (iii) the action's consistency with this subpart's requirements;
- (3) Represent the State Director at conferences and meetings dealing with environmental matters of a State Office nature;
- (4) Maintain liaison on State Office environmental matters with interested public groups and local, State, and other Federal agencies;
- (5) Serve as the State Director's alternate on State-level USDA committees dealing with environmental, land use and historic preservation matters;
- (6) Solicit, whenever necessary, the expert advice and assistance of other professional staff members within the State Office in order to adequately implement this subpart;
- (7) Provide technical assistance as needed on a project-by-project basis to State, District, and County Office staffs;
- (8) Develop controls for avoiding or mitigating adverse environmental impacts and monitor their implementation;
- (9) Provide assistance in resolving post-approval environmental matters at the State Office level;
- (10) Maintain records for those actions required by this subpart;
- (11) Coordinate for the State Director the development of the State Office natural resource management guide;
- (12) Provide direction and training to State, District, and County Office staffs on the requirements of this subpart; and
- (13) Coordinate for the State Director the monitoring of the State Office's compliance with this subpart and keep the State Director advised of the results of the monitoring process.

(c) Program Chiefs. State Office Program Chiefs will:

(1) Be responsible for the adequacy of the environmental impact reviews required by this subpart for all program actions to be approved at the State Office level or concurred in at that level;

(2) Coordinate the above reviews as early as possible with the SEC, so that the latter can assist in addressing the resolution of any unresolved or difficult environmental issues in a timely manner; and

(3) Incorporate into projects and actions measures to avoid or reduce potential adverse environmental impacts identified in environmental reviews.

§1940.308 Environmental responsibilities at the District and County Office levels.

(a) The District Director will be responsible for carrying out the actions required by this subpart to be completed at the District Office level.

(b) The County Supervisor will be responsible for carrying out the actions required by this subpart to be completed at the County Office level.

(c) In discussing Rural Development assistance programs with potential applicants, District Directors and County Supervisors will inform them of the Agency's environmental requirements, as well as the environmental information needs and responsibilities that Rural Development applicants are expected to address. (See §1940.309 of this subpart.)

§1940.309 Responsibilities of the prospective applicant.

(a) Rural Development expects applicants and transferees (and in the case of the loan guarantee programs, borrowers and transferees) to consider the potential environmental impacts of their requests at the earliest planning stages and to develop proposals that minimize the potential to adversely impact the environment. Prospective applicants should contact County Supervisors or District Directors, as appropriate, to determine Rural Development's environmental requirements as soon as possible after they decide to pursue Rural Development financial assistance.

(b) As specified in paragraph (c) of this section, applicants for Rural Development assistance will be required to provide information necessary to Rural Development to evaluate their proposal's potential environmental impacts and alternatives to them. For example, the applicant will be required to provide a complete description of the project elements and the proposed

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site(s) to include location maps, topographic maps, and photographs when needed. The applicant will also be required to provide data on any expected gaseous, liquid and solid wastes to be produced, including hazardous wastes as defined by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act or State law, and all permits and/or correspondence issued by the appropriate local, State, and Federal agencies which regulate treatment and disposal practices.

(c) Form RD 1940-20, "Request for Environmental Information," will be used for obtaining environmental information from applicants whose proposals require an environmental assessment under the requirements of this subpart. These same applicants must notify the appropriate State Historic Preservation Officer of the filing of the application and provide a detailed project description as specified in Item 2 of Form RD 1940-20 and the FMI. If the applicant's proposal meets the definition of a Class II action as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart, all of Form RD 1940-20 must be completed. If the applicant's proposal meets the definition of a Class I action as defined in §1940.311 of this subpart, the entire form need not be completed, but just the face of the form and categories (1), (2), (13), (15), (16), and (17) of Item 1b of the FMI. As an exception to the foregoing statement, an applicant for an action that is normally categorically excluded but requires a Class I assessment for any of the reasons stated in §1940.317(e) of this subpart is not required to complete Form RD 1940-20. Additionally, for Class I actions within the Farm Programs, a site visit by the Rural Development official completing the environmental assessment obviates the need for the applicant to complete any of the form, and the adoption by Rural Development of a Soil Conservation Service (SCS) environmental assessment or evaluation for the action obviates the need to complete the form for either a Class I or Class II action.

(d) Applicants will ensure that all required materials are current, sufficiently detailed and complete, and are submitted directly to the Rural Development office processing the application. Incomplete materials or delayed submittals may seriously jeopardize consideration or postponement of a proposed action by Rural Development.

(e) During the period of application review and processing, applicants will not take any actions with respect to their proposed undertakings which are the subject of the application and which would have an adverse impact on the environment or limit the range of alternatives. This requirement does not preclude development by applicants of preliminary plans or designs or performance of other work necessary to support an application for Federal, State, or local permits or assistance. However, the development of detailed plans and specifications is discouraged when the costs involved inhibit the realistic consideration of alternative proposals.

(f) Applicants are required to provide public notification and to fully cooperate in holding public information meetings as described in §§1940.318(e), 1940.320(c) and (g), and 1940.331(b) and (c) of this subpart.

(g) Any applicant that is directly and adversely affected by an administrative decision made by Rural Development under this subpart may appeal that decision under the provisions of Subpart B of Part 1900 of this chapter.

§1940.310 Categorical exclusions from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews.

(a) General guidelines. The following actions have been determined not to have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, either individually or cumulatively. They will not be subject to environmental assessments or impact statements. It must be emphasized that even though these actions are excluded from further environmental reviews under NEPA, they are not excluded from either the policy considerations contained in §§1940.303 through 1940.305 of this subpart or from compliance with other applicable local, State, or Federal environmental laws. Also, the actions preceded by an asterisk (*) are not excluded from further review depending upon whether in some cases they would be located within, or in other cases, potentially affect

- (1) a floodplain,
- (2) a wetland,
- (3) important farmlands, or prime forestlands or rangelands,
- (4) a listed species or critical habitat for an endangered species,
- (5) a property that is listed on or may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places,
- (6) an area within an approved State coastal zone management program,
- (7) a coastal barrier or a portion of a barrier within the Coastal Barrier Resources System,
- (8) a river or portion of a river included in, or designated for, potential addition to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System,
- (9) a sole source aquifer recharge area, or

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(10) a State water quality standard (including designated and/or existing beneficial uses and antidegradation requirements).

(i) Whether location within one of the preceding resource areas is sufficient to require a further review or a potential impact to one of them must also be identified to require a review is determined by Rural Development's completion of Form RD 1940-22 in accordance with the FMI and §1940.317 of this subpart.

(ii) When the categorical exclusion classification is lost, as specified in §1940.317 of this subpart, the action must be reviewed under the requirements of paragraph (g) of that section. This requirement serves to implement Section 1508.4 of the CEQ regulations which requires Federal agencies to detect extraordinary circumstances in which a normally excluded action may have a significant environmental effect.

(iii) Further guidance on the use of these exclusions is contained in §1940.317 of this subpart.

(b) Housing assistance.

* (1) The provision of financial assistance for the purchase of a single family dwelling or a multi-family project serving no more than four families, i.e. units;

* (2) The approval of an individual building lot that is located on a scattered site and either not part of a subdivision or within a subdivision not requiring Rural Development's approval;

* (3) Rehabilitation, replacement, or renovation of any existing housing units, with no expansion in the number of units;

(4) Self-Help Technical Assistance Grants;

* (5) The approval of a subdivision that consists of four or fewer lots and is not part of, or associated with, building lots or subdivisions;

(6) Technical Supervisory Assistance Loans and Grants;

(7) Weatherization of any existing housing unit(s), unless the property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may be eligible for listing, or is located either within the Coastal Barrier Resources System or in a listed or potentially eligible historic district, in which case the application will require a Class I assessment as specified in §1940.317(g) of this subpart;

(8) The financing of housing construction or the approval of lots in a previously approved Rural Development subdivision provided that

(i) the action is consistent with all previously adopted stipulations for the multi-family housing project or subdivision, and

(ii) the Rural Development environmental impact review that was previously completed for the original application is still current with respect to applicable environmental requirements and conditions present at the site, and it assessed the lots or expansion for which approval is being requested;

(9) The purchase of any existing, non-Rural Development owned housing unit(s), unless the property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places or may be eligible for listing, or is located either within a 100-year floodplain, the Coastal Barrier Resources System, or in a listed or potentially eligible historic district, in which case the application will require a Class I assessment as specified in §1940.317(g) of this subpart; and

(10) Appraisals of nonfarm tracts and small farms for rural housing loans.

(c) Community and business programs and nonprofit national corporations loan and grant program.

* (1) Financial assistance directed to existing businesses, facilities, and/or structures that does not involve new construction or large increases in employment; does not involve a facility that presently or previously produced or stored hazardous waste or disposed of hazardous waste on the facility's property; and does not result in the increased production of gaseous, liquid, or solid wastes, or a change in the type or content of such wastes as long as waste production, handling, treatment and disposal practices presently comply with applicable Federal, State and local regulations and there is no history of violations. If any of these waste production, handling, treatment, disposal or compliance criteria cannot be met, a Class I assessment must be initiated to include a narrative discussion of the types and quantities of wastes produced and the adequacy of the treatment, storage, and disposal practices, if the involved wastes meet the criteria for a Class I assessment contained in §1940.311(b)(3)(iii) of this subpart. If not, a Class II assessment must be completed.

* (2) Projects that solely involve the acquisition, construction, reconstruction, renovation, or installation of facilities, structures or businesses, for replacement or restoration purposes,

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with minimal change in use, size, capacity, purpose or location from the original facility (e.g., replacement in-kind of utilities such as water or sewer lines and appurtenances, reconstruction of curbs and sidewalks, street repaving, and building modifications, renovations, and improvements);

(3) Project management actions relating to invitation for bids, contract award, and the actual physical commencement of construction activities;

(4) Financial assistance for a technical assistance grant under the nonprofit national corporation loan and grant program;

(5) Projects that solely involve the purchase and installation of office equipment, public safety equipment, or motor vehicles; and

(6) Amendments to approved projects meeting the criteria of paragraph (e)(2) of this section.

(d) Farm programs.

(1) Financial assistance for the purchase of an existing farm, or an enlargement to one, provided no shifts in land use are proposed beyond the limits stated in paragraphs (d)(10) and (11) of this section;

(2) Financial assistance for the purchase of livestock and essential farm equipment, including crop storing and drying equipment, provided such equipment is not to be used to accommodate shifts in land use beyond the limits stated in paragraphs (d)(10) and (11) of this section;

(3) Financial assistance for

(i) the payment of annual operating expenses, which does not cover activities specifically addressed in this section or §§1940.311 or 1940.312 of this subpart;

(ii) family living expenses, and

(iii) refinancing debts;

* (4) Financial assistance for the construction of essential farm dwellings and service buildings of modest design and cost, as well as repairs and improvements to them;

(5) Financial assistance for onsite water supply facilities to serve a farm dwelling, farm buildings, and livestock needs;

(6) Financial assistance for the installation or enlargement of irrigation facilities, including storage reservoirs, diversion dams, wells, pumping plants, canals, pipelines, and sprinklers designed to irrigate less than 80 acres, provided that neither a State water quality standard, a property listed or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a river or portion of a river included in, or designated for, potential addition to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, nor a wetland is affected. If a wetland is affected, the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart. Potential effects to a water quality standard, an historic property or the Wild and Scenic Rivers System require that a review be initiated under a Class I assessment as specified in §1940.317(g) of this subpart.

(7) Financial assistance that solely involves the replacement or restoration of irrigation facilities, to include those facilities described in paragraph (d)(6) of this section, with minimal change in use, size, capacity, or location from the original facility(s) provided that neither a State water quality standard, a property listed or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a river or portion of a river included in or designated for potential addition to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, nor a wetland is affected. If a wetland is affected, the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart. Potential effects to a water quality standard, an historic property, or the Wild and Scenic Rivers System require that a Class I assessment be completed as specified in §1940.317(g) of this subpart. Also, to qualify for this exclusion, the facilities to be replaced or restored must have been used for similar irrigation purposes at least two out of the last three consecutive growing seasons. Otherwise, the action will be viewed as an installation of irrigation facilities.

(8) Financial assistance for the development of farm ponds or lakes of no more than 5 acres in size, provided that, neither a State water quality standard, a property listed or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a river or portion of a river included in or designated for potential addition to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, nor a wetland is affected. If a wetland is affected, the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart. Potential effects to a water quality standard, an historic property, or the Wild and Scenic Rivers System require that a review be initiated under a Class I assessment as specified in §1940.317(g) of this subpart;

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- * (9) Financial assistance for the conversion of
 - (i) land in agricultural production to pastures or forests, or
 - (ii) pastures to forests;

* (10) Financial assistance for land-clearing operations of no more than 15 acres, provided no wetlands are affected, and financial assistance for any amount of land involved in tree harvesting conducted on a sustained yield basis and according to a Federal, State or other governmental unit approved forestry management and marketing plan; and

(11) Financial assistance for the conversion of no more than 160 acres of pasture to agricultural production, provided that in a conversion to agricultural production no State water quality standard or wetlands are affected. If a wetland is affected, the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart. If a water quality standard would be impaired or antidegradation requirement not met, a Class I assessment is required as specified in §1940.317 (g) of this subpart.

(e) General exclusions.

(1) The award of financial assistance for planning purposes, management and feasibility studies, or environmental impact analyses;

(2) For actions other than those covered by Exhibit M of this subpart, loan-closing and servicing activities, transfers, assumptions, subordinations, construction management activities and amendments and revisions to approved projects, including the provision of additional financial assistance that do not alter the purpose, operation, location, or design of the project as originally approved;

(3) The issuance of regulations and instructions, as well as amendments to them, describing administrative and financial procedures for processing, approving, and implementing the Agency's financial assistance programs;

(4) Procurement activities for goods and services, routine facility operations, personnel actions, and other such management activities related to the operation of the Agency;

(5) Reduction in force or employee transfers resulting from workload adjustments, reduced personnel or funding levels, skill imbalances, or other similar circumstances; and

*(6) The lease or disposal of real property by Rural Development whenever the transaction is either not controversial for environmental reasons or will not result in a change in use of the real property within the reasonably foreseeable future.

§1940.311 Environmental assessments for Class I actions.

The Agency's proposals and projects that are not identified in §1940.310 of this subpart as categorical exclusions require the preparation of an environmental assessment in order to determine if the proposal will have a significant impact on the environment. For purposes of implementing NEPA, the actions listed in this section are presumed to be major Federal actions. If an action has a potential to create a significant environmental impact, an EIS must be prepared. (In situations when there is clearly a potential for a significant impact, the EIS may be initiated directly without the preparation of an assessment.) It is recognized that many of the applications funded annually by Rural Development involve small-scale projects having limited environmental impacts. However, because on occasion they have the potential to create a significant impact, each must be assessed to determine the degree of impact. The scope and level of detail of an assessment for a small-scale action, though, need only be sufficient to determine whether the potential impacts are substantial and further analysis is necessary. Therefore, for the purpose of implementing NEPA, Rural Development has classified its smaller scale approval actions as Class I actions. The format which will be used for accomplishing the environmental assessment of a Class I action is provided in Form RD 1940-21. An important aspect of this classification method is that it allows Rural Development's environmental review staff to concentrate most of its time and efforts on those actions having the potential for more serious or complex environmental impacts. Additional guidance on the application of NEPA to Class I actions is provided in §1940.319 of this subpart.

(a) Housing assistance. If either of the following actions is an expansion of a previously approved Rural Development housing project, see §1940.310(b)(8) of this subpart to determine if it meets the requirements for a categorical exclusion. In the case of an expansion for which an environmental assessment was not done for the original Rural Development project, the size of the proposal for assessment purposes is determined by adding the number of units in the original project(s) to those presently being requested.

(1) Financial assistance for a multi-family housing project, including labor housing which comprises at least 5 units, but no more than 25 units; and

(2) Financial assistance for or the approval of a subdivision, as well as the expansion of an existing one which involves at least 5 lots but no more than 25 lots; and

(3) Financial assistance for a housing preservation grant.

(b) Community and business programs and nonprofit national corporations loan and grant program. Class I assessments will be prepared for the following categories:

(1) Financial assistance for water and waste disposal facilities and natural gas facilities that meet all of the following criteria:

(i) There will not be a substantial increase in the volume of discharge or the loading of pollutants from any existing or expanded sewage treatment facilities, or a substantial increase in an existing withdrawal from surface or ground waters. A substantial increase may be evidenced by an increase in hydraulic capacity or the need to obtain a new or amended discharge or withdrawal permit.

(ii) There will not be either a new discharge to surface or ground waters or a new withdrawal from surface or ground waters such that the design capacity of the discharge or withdrawal facility exceeds 50,000 gallons per day and provided that the potential water quality impacts are documented in a manner required for a Class II assessment and attached as an exhibit to the Class I assessment.

(iii) From the boundaries listed below, there is no extension, enlargement or construction of interceptors, collection, transmission or distribution lines beyond a one-mile limit estimated from the closest point of the boundary most applicable to the proposed service area:

(A) The boundary formed by the corporate limits of the community being served.

(B) If there are developed areas immediately contiguous to the corporate limits of a community, the boundary formed by the limits of these developed areas.

(C) If an unincorporated area is to be served, the boundary formed by the limits of the developed areas.

(iv) The proposal is designed for predominantly residential use with other new or expanded users being small-scale, commercial enterprises having limited secondary impacts.

(v) For a proposed expansion of sewage treatment or water supply facilities, such expansion would serve a population

that is no more than 20 percent greater than the existing population.

(vi) The proposal is not controversial for environmental reasons, nor have relevant questions been raised regarding its environmental impact which cannot be addressed in a Class I assessment.

(2) Financial assistance for group homes, detention facilities, nursing homes, or hospitals, providing a net increase in beds of not more than 25 percent or 25 beds, whichever is greater; and

(3) Financial assistance for the construction or expansion of facilities, such as fire stations, retail stores, libraries, outpatient medical facilities, service industries, additions to manufacturing plants, office buildings, and wholesale industries, that:

(i) Are confined to single, small sites; and

(ii) Are not a source of substantial traffic generation; and

(iii) Do not produce either substantial amounts of liquid or solid wastes or any of the following type(s) of wastes:

(A) Gaseous, liquid, or solid waste that is hazardous, toxic, radioactive, or odorous;

(B) Either a liquid waste, whether or not disposed of on-site, that cannot be accepted by a publicly owned treatment works without first receiving pretreatment, or a liquid waste discharge that is a Point source subject to a Federal, or State discharge permit; or

(C) Gaseous waste or air pollutant that will be emitted either from a new source at a rate greater than one hundred tons per year or from an expanded source at a rate greater than twenty-five tons per year.

(4) Financial assistance for a livestock-holding facility or feed-lot meeting the criteria of §1940.311(c)(8) of this subpart.

(c) Farm Programs. In completing environmental assessments for the following Class I actions and the Class II actions listed in §1940.312(d), special attention will be given to avoiding a duplication of effort with other Department agencies, particularly SCS. For applications in which the applicant is receiving assistance from other agencies, technical assistance from SCS, for example, Rural Development will request from that agency a copy of any applicable environmental review

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conducted by it and will adopt that review if the requirements of §1940.324 of this subpart are met. Rural Development will work closely with the other Federal Agencies to supplement previous or ongoing reviews whenever they cannot be readily adopted.

- (1) Financial assistance for the installation or enlargement of irrigation facilities including storage reservoirs, diversion dams, wells, pumping plants, canals, pipelines, and sprinklers designed to irrigate at least 80 acres, but no more than 160 acres and provided that no wetlands are affected, in which case the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart;
- (2) Financial assistance for the development of farm ponds or lakes of more than 5 acres in size, but no more than 10 acres, provided that no wetlands are affected. If wetlands are affected, the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart;
- (3) Financial assistance for land-clearing operations encompassing over 15 acres, but no more than 35 acres, provided that no wetlands are affected. If wetlands are affected, the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart;
- (4) Financial assistance for the construction of energy producing facilities designed for on-farm needs such as methane digestors and fuel alcohol production facilities;
- (5) Financial assistance for the conversion of more than 160 acres of pasture to agricultural production, but no more than 320 acres, provided that in a conversion to agricultural production no wetlands are affected, in which case the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart;
- (6) Financial assistance to grazing associations;
- (7) Financial assistance for the use of a farm or portion of a farm for recreational purposes or nonfarm enterprises utilizing no more than 10 acres, provided that no wetlands are affected. If wetlands are affected, the application will fall under Class II as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart; and
- (8) Financial assistance for a livestock-holding facility or feedlot having a capacity of at least one-half of those listed in §1940.312(c)(9) of this subpart. (If the facility is located near a populated area or could potentially violate a State water quality standard, it will be treated as a Class II action as required by §1940.312(c)(10) of this subpart.)

(d) General.

(1) Any Federal action which is defined in §1940.310 of this subpart as a categorical exclusion, but which is controversial for environmental reasons, or which is the subject of an environmental complaint raised by a government agency, interested group, or citizen;

(2) Loan-closing and servicing activities, transfers, assumptions, subordinations, construction management activities, and amendments and revisions to all approved actions listed either in this section or equivalent in size or type to such actions and that alter the purpose, operation, location or design of the project as originally approved;

(3) The lease or disposal of real property by Rural Development which meets either of the following criteria:

(i) The lease or disposal may result in a change in use of the real property in the reasonably foreseeable future, and such change is equivalent in magnitude or type to either the Class I actions defined in this section or the categorical exclusions defined in §1940.310 of this subpart; or

(ii) The lease or disposal is controversial for environmental reasons, and the real property is equivalent in size or type to either the Class I actions defined in this section or the categorical exclusions defined in §1940.310 of this subpart.

§1940.312 Environmental assessments for Class II actions.

Class II actions are basically those which exceed the thresholds established for Class I actions and, consequently, have the potential for resulting in more varied and substantial environmental impacts. A more detailed environmental assessment is, therefore, required for Class II actions in order to determine if the action requires an EIS. The format that will be used for completing this assessment is included as Exhibit H of this subpart. Further guidance on Class II actions is contained in §1940.318 of this subpart. Class II actions are presumed to be major Federal actions and are defined as follows:

(a) Housing assistance. If either of the following actions is an expansion of a previously approved Rural Development housing project, see 1940.310(b)(8) of this subpart to determine if it meets the requirements for a categorical exclusion, otherwise it is a Class II action.

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§1940.312 (a) (Cont.)

(1) Financial assistance for a multi-family housing project, including labor housing, which comprises more than 25 units; and

(2) Financial assistance for, or the approval of, a subdivision as well as the expansion of an existing one, which involves more than 25 lots.

(b) Community and business programs and nonprofit national corporations loan and grant program.

(1) Class II actions are those which either do not meet the criteria for a categorical exclusion as stated in §1940.310 of this subpart, a Class I action as stated in §1940.311 of this subpart, or involve a livestock-holding facility or feedlot meeting the criteria for a Class II action as defined in paragraphs (c)(9) and (10) of this section; and

(2) Non-technical assistance grant or loan guarantee under nonprofit national corporation loan and grant program.

(c) Farm programs. In completing environmental assessments for the following actions, Rural Development will first determine if the applicant has sought technical assistance from the Soil Conservation Service (SCS). If not, the applicant will be requested to do so. Subsequently, an approved loan will be structured so as to be consistent with any conservation plan developed with the applicant by SCS. However, the Rural Development approving official need not include an element of the conservation plan within the loan agreement if that official determines that the element is both nonessential to the accomplishment of the plan's objectives and so costly as to prevent the borrower from being able to repay the loan. The SCS environmental review will be adopted by Rural Development if the requirements of §1940.324 of this subpart are met.

(1) Financial assistance for the installation or enlargement of irrigation facilities including storage reservoirs, diversion dams, wells, pumping plants, canals, pipelines, and sprinklers either designed to irrigate more than 160 acres or that would serve any amount of acreage and affects a wetland;

(2) Financial assistance for the development of farm ponds or lakes either larger than 10 acres in size or for any smaller size that would affect a wetland;

(3) Financial assistance for land-clearing operations either encompassing more than 35 acres or affecting a wetland, if less than 35 acres is involved;

(4) Financial assistance for the construction or enlargement of aquaculture facilities;

- (5) Financial assistance for the conversion of more than 320 acres of pasture to agricultural production or for any smaller conversion of pasture to agricultural production that affects a wetland;
- (6) Financial assistance to an individual farmer or an association of farmers for water control facilities such as dikes, detention reservoirs, stream channels, and ditches;
- (7) Financial assistance for the use of a farm or portion of a farm for recreational purposes or nonfarm enterprises either utilizing more than 10 acres or affecting a wetland, if less than 10 acres is involved;
- (8) Financial assistance for alteration of a wetland;
- (9) Financial assistance for a livestock-holding facility or feedlot located in a sparsely populated farming area having a capacity as large or larger than one of the following capacities; 1,000 slaughter steers and heifers; 700 mature dairy cattle (whether milkers or dry cows); 2,500 swine; 10,000 sheep; 55,000 turkeys; 100,000 laying hens or broilers when facility has unlimited continuous flow watering systems; 30,000 laying hens or broilers when facility has liquid manure handling system; 500 horses; and 1,000 animal units from a combination of slaughter steers and heifers, mature dairy cattle, swine, and sheep; (The term "animal unit" means a unit of measurement for any animal feeding operation calculated by adding the following numbers: the number of slaughter and feeder cattle multiplied by 1.0, plus the number of mature dairy cattle multiplied by 1.4, plus the number of swine weighing over 25 kilograms (approximately 55 pounds) multiplied by 0.4, plus the number of sheep multiplied by 0.1, plus the number of horses multiplied by 2.0) and
- (10) Financial assistance for a livestock-holding facility or feedlot which either could potentially violate a State water quality standard or is located near a town or collection of rural homes which could be impacted by the facility, particularly with respect to noise, odor, visual, or transportation impacts and having a capacity of at least one-half of those listed in paragraph (9) of this section.

(d) General.

- (1) Any action which meets the numerical criteria or other restriction for a Class I action contained in §1940.311 of this subpart, but is controversial for environmental reasons. If the action is the subject of isolated environmental complaints or any

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questions or concerns that focus on a single impact, air quality, for example, the analysis of such a complaint or questions can be handled under the assessment format for a Class I action, Form RD 1940-21, as explained in §1940.319 of this subpart. When several potential impacts are questioned, however, the assessment format (Exhibit H of this subpart) for a Class II action must be used to address these questions;

(2) Loan-closing and servicing activities, transfers, assumptions, subordinations, construction management activities and amendments and revisions to all approved actions listed either in this section or equivalent in size or type to such actions and that alter the purpose, operation, location, or design of the project as originally approved;

(3) The approval of plans and State Investment Strategies for Energy Impacted Areas, designated under Section 601 Energy Impacted Area Development Assistance Program, as well as the applications for financial assistance (excluding the award of planning funds) for Energy Impact Areas;

(4) Proposals for legislation as defined in CEQ's regulations, Section 1508.17;

(5) The issuance of regulations and instructions, as well as amendments to these, that describe either the entities, proposals and activities eligible for Rural Development financial assistance, or the manner in which such proposals and activities must be located, constructed, or implemented; and

(6) The lease or disposal of any real property by Rural Development which either does not meet the criteria for a categorical exclusion as stated in §1940.310(e)(6) of this subpart or a Class I action as stated in §1940.311(d)(3) of this subpart.

§1940.313 Actions that normally require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The environmental assessment process will be used, as defined in this subpart, to identify on a case-by-case basis those actions for which the preparation of an EIS is necessary. Given the variability of the types and locations of actions taken by Rural Development, no groups or set of actions can be identified which in almost every case would require the preparation of an EIS.

§1940.314 Criteria for determining a significant environmental impact.

(a) EISs will be done for those Class I and Class II actions that are determined to have a significant impact on the quality of the human

environment. The criteria for determining significant impacts are contained in Section 1508.27 of the CEQ regulations.

(b) In utilizing the criteria for a significant impact, the cumulative impacts of other Rural Development actions planned or recently approved in the proposal's area of environmental impact, other related or similarly located Federal actions, and non-federal related actions must be given consideration. This is particularly relevant for frequently recurring Rural Development actions that on an individual basis may have relatively few environmental impacts but create a potential for significant impacts on a cumulative basis. Housing assistance is one such example. Consequently, in reviewing proposals for subdivisions and multi-family housing sites, consideration must be given to the cumulative impacts of other federally assisted housing in the area, including Rural Development's. The boundaries of the area to be considered should be based upon such factors as common utility or public service districts, common watersheds, and common commuting patterns to central employment or commercial areas. Additionally, the criteria for significant impacts utilized by the other involved housing agency(s) (VA and HUD, for example) must be reviewed when there is a potential for cumulative impacts. Rural Development will consult with HUD for determining a significant impact whenever the total of HUD and Rural Development housing units being planned within a common area of environmental impact exceeds the HUD thresholds listed in its NEPA regulations. (See 24 CFR Part 50).

(c) Because the environmental values and functions of floodplains and wetlands are of critical importance to man, and because these areas are often extremely sensitive to man-induced disturbances, actions which affect wetlands and floodplains will be considered to have a significant environmental impact whenever one or more of the following criteria are met:

- (1) The public health and safety are identifiably affected, that is, whenever the proposed action may affect any standards promulgated under the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. 300f et seq.), the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.) or similar State authorities.
- (2) The preservation of natural systems is identifiably affected, that is, whenever the proposed action or related activities may potentially create or induce changes in the existing habitat that may affect species diversity and stability (both flora and fauna and over the short and long term) or affect ecosystem productivity over the long term.
- (3) The proposal, if located or carried out within a floodplain, poses a greater than normal risk for flood-caused loss of life or property. Examples of such actions include facilities which produce, use, or store highly volatile, toxic, or water-reactive

materials or facilities which contain occupants who may not be sufficiently mobile to avoid the loss of life or injury during flood and storm events, (i.e., hospitals, nursing homes, schools).

§1940.315 Timing of the environmental review process.

(a) The Rural Development office to which a potential applicant would go to seek program information and request application materials will notify the applicant of the major environmental requirements applicable to the type of assistance being sought. Emphasis should be placed on describing Rural Development's natural resource management policies, the nature and purpose of the environmental impact assessment process, and the permissible actions of the applicant during this process.

(b) When a preapplication is either filed by the applicant or required by Rural Development for a project not categorically excluded, the prospective applicant will be requested to complete Form RD 1940-20 at the time of the issuance of Form AD-622, "Notice of Preapplication Review Action," or other notice inviting an application. Form AD-622 will clearly inform the applicant that during the period of application review, the applicant is to take no actions or incur any obligations which would either limit the range of alternatives to be considered or which would have an adverse effect on the environment, and that satisfactory completion of the environmental review process must occur prior to the issuance of the letter of conditions for Community Programs and prior to loan approval for all other programs where a preapplication is used. Rural Development must make its environmental reviews simultaneously with other loan processing actions so that they are an integral part of the loan process. Whenever the potential for a major adverse environmental impact is recognized, such as issues pertaining to floodplains, wetlands, endangered species, or the need for an EIS, priority consideration will be given to resolving this issue by appropriate Rural Development staff. Loan processing need not cease during this resolution period, but loan processing actions will not be taken that might limit alternatives to be considered or whose outcome may be affected by the environmental review. The environmental impact review (whether a categorical exclusion, environmental assessment or EIS) must be completed prior to the issuance of the letter of conditions for Community Programs, prior to issuance of a conditional commitment for the Business and Industry and Farmer Program Guaranteed Loan Programs, and either prior to loan approval or obligation of funds, whichever occurs first, for all other programs where a preapplication is used. As an exception, however, whenever an application must be submitted to the National Office for concurrence or approval, the environmental review must be completed prior to and included in the submission to the National Office. The environmental impact review is not completed by Rural Development until all applicable public notices and associated review periods have been completed and Rural Development has taken any necessary action(s) to

address comments received. The exception to the provisions of this paragraph is contained in §1940.332 of this subpart.

(c) When a preapplication is not filed, the prospective applicant will be required to complete Form RD 1940-20 at the earliest possible time after Rural Development is contacted for assistance but no later than when the application is filed with the appropriate Rural Development office. (For the exception to this statement as regards Farm Programs' Class I actions, see §1940.309(c) of this subpart.) Rural Development will not consider the application to be complete, until Rural Development staff have completed the environmental impact review, whether an assessment or EIS.

(d) For those applications that meet the requirements of a categorical exclusion, Form RD 1940-22 will be completed by Rural Development as early as possible after receipt of the application. The application will not be considered complete until either the checklist is successfully completed or the need for any further environmental review is identified and completed.

§1940.316 Responsible officials for the environmental review process.

(a) Approving official. With the exception of paragraph (b)(2) of this section, the Rural Development official responsible for executing the environmental impact determination and environmental findings for a Class I or Class II action will be the official having approval authority for the action as specified in Subpart A of Part 1901 of this chapter (available in any Rural Development office).

(b) State Office level.

(1) When the approval official is at the State Office level, the responsible Program Chief will have the responsibility for preparing the appropriate environmental review document. Whenever the Chief delegates this responsibility in accordance with §1940.302(i) of this subpart, the Chief is responsible for reviewing the environmental document to ensure that it is adequate, that any deficiencies are corrected, and that it is signed by the preparer. When the document is satisfactory to the Chief, the Chief will sign it as the concurring official. When no delegation occurs, the Chief will sign as the preparer. If the environmental review document is either a Class I or Class II assessment, it must be provided to the SEC for review prior to being submitted to the approval official for final determinations. The SEC will review the assessment and provide recommendations to the approval official.

(2) Whenever the preparer and the SEC do not concur on either the adequacy of the assessment or the recommendations reached, the State Director, whether or not the approving official, will make

the final decision on the matter or matters in disagreement. The State Director will also make the final decision whenever a State Office approving official disagrees with the joint recommendations of the preparer and the SEC. In either case, should the State Director desire, the matter will be forwarded to the National Office for resolution. The Program Support Staff will coordinate its resolution with the appropriate Assistant Administrator. Failure of these parties to resolve the matter will require a final decision by the Administrator. The State Director should also request the assistance of the National Office on actions that are too difficult to analyze at the State Office level.

(c) District or County Office level. The approval official for the action under review will be responsible for preparing the appropriate environmental review document and completing the environmental findings and impact determinations for Class I and Class II assessments, except in the circumstances outlined in paragraph (d) of this section. Whenever the approval official delegates the preparation of the environmental review in accordance with §1940.302(i) of this subpart, the approval official must, after exercising the same responsibilities assigned to the Program Chief as indicated in paragraph (b)(1) of this section, sign the environmental review document as the concurring official. Both District Directors and County Supervisors will contact, as needed, the SEC for technical assistance in preparing specific environmental review documents.

(d) Multi-level review. When the approval official is at the County Office or District Office level but the action must be forwarded to the State Office for concurrence, the responsible Program Chief will perform the responsibilities of the concurring official with respect to the environmental review document and the SEC will review it, if a Class I or Class II assessment, in a similar manner as indicated in paragraph (b) of this section. Responsibilities similar to those of the Program Chief will exist for the District Director when the County Supervisor forwards an action to the District Office for concurrence.

(e) Reservation of authority. The Administrator reserves the right to request a State Director to forward to the National Office for review and approval any action which is highly controversial for environmental reasons, involves the potential for unique or extremely complex environmental impacts or is of national, regional, or great local significance. State Directors have a similar right with respect to District and County Offices.

§1940.317 Methods for ensuring proper implementation of categorical exclusions.

(a) The use of categorical exclusions exempts properly defined actions or proposals from the review requirements of NEPA. It does not exempt

proposals from the requirements of other environmental laws, regulations or Executive orders. Each proposal must be reviewed to determine the applicability of other environmental requirements. Extraordinary circumstances may cause an application to lose its categorical exclusion and require a Class I environmental assessment, as further specified in paragraph (e) of this section. Section 1508.4 of CEQ's regulations state that "any procedures under this section will provide for extraordinary circumstances in which a normally excluded action may have a significant environmental effect." For example, an application for approval of a subdivision of four lots is normally excluded from a NEPA review (see §1940.310 (b)(5) of this subpart) but is not exempt from the requirements of Executive Order 11990, "Protection of Wetlands." In the processing of this application, Rural Development must determine if a wetland is to be impacted. Assuming that the development of the proposed subdivision site necessitates the filling of 2 acres of wetland, such a potential wetland impact, under the requirements of §1940.310(a) of this subpart, represents an extraordinary circumstance that causes the application to lose its categorical exclusion. An environmental assessment for a Class I action must then be initiated. This assessment serves the purposes of providing for the extraordinary circumstance by analyzing the degree of potential impact and the need for further study as well as completing and documenting Rural Development's compliance with the Executive order. In this particular example, unless an alternative site could not be readily located and the approving official wanted to further pursue consideration of the application, the environmental assessment would determine that there was a significant impact and an EIS would be required. (See §1940.314 of this subpart.)

(b) The approving official for an action will be responsible for ensuring that no action which requires an environmental assessment is processed as a categorical exclusion. In order to fulfill this responsibility, Form RD 1940-22 will be completed for those actions that would normally be categorically excluded and as further defined in paragraph (c) of this section. When Form RD 1940-22 must be prepared and the approving official delegates its preparation in accordance with §1940.302(i) of this subpart, the approving official must sign the form as the concurring official. If that approving official must, prior to approval, forward the action to a District or State Office for review, a second concurrence must be executed by the Program Chief or District Director, as determined by the level of review being conducted. The checklist is filed with the application and serves as Rural Development's documentation of compliance with the environmental laws, regulations and Executive Orders listed on the checklist. Whenever the preparer is within the State Office or is in the National Office, the Rural Development office where the processing of the application was initiated is responsible for providing sufficient site and project information in order to complete the checklist.

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(c) Form RD 1940-22 need not be completed for all categorical exclusions as defined in §1940.310 of this subpart but only for those listed below. This list identifies the exclusions by their subject heading and paragraph number within §1940.310 of this subpart. Additionally, for the housing assistance exclusion identified in §1940.310(b)(8), for farm programs exclusions listed in §1940.310(d)(2) and (3), and for community and business programs exclusions processed under §1940.310(e)(2) of this subpart, a notation must be made in the docket materials or running record for the action by the processing official that the specific criteria of the applicable exclusion have been met for the action under review.

- (1) Housing assistance - (b)(1),(2),(3),(5),(7), and (9)
- (2) Community and Business Programs - (c)(1) and (2)
- (3) Farm Programs - (d)(1) through (11)
- (4) General exclusions - (e)(2), if action covered by Exhibit M of the subpart, and (6)

(d) In applying the definition of a categorical exclusion to a project activity, the preparer must consider the following two elements in addition to the specific project elements for which approval is requested.

(1) If the application represents one of several phases of a larger proposal, the application will undergo the environmental review required for the elements or the size of the total proposal. For example, if approval of a four-lot subdivision is requested and the application evidences or the reviewer knows that additional phases are planned and will culminate in a 16-lot subdivision, the categorical exclusion does not apply and an environmental assessment for a Class I action must be initiated and must address the impact of developing 16 lots. Should the applicant subsequently apply for approval of any of these additional phases, no further environmental assessment will be required as long as the original assessment still accurately reflects the environmental conditions found at the project site and the surrounding areas.

(2) If the application represents one segment of a larger project being funded by private parties or other government agencies, the size and elements of the entire project are used in determining the proper level of environmental assessment to be conducted by Rural Development. If an environmental assessment is required, it will address the environmental impacts of the entire project.

(e) Under any one of the following circumstances, an action that is normally categorically excluded loses its classification as an exclusion and must be reviewed in the manner described in paragraph (g) of this section. The following listing corresponds to the list of land uses and environmental resources contained in part 2 of Form RD 194022.

- (1) Wetlands - the proposed action
 - (i) would be located adjacent to a wetland or a wetland is within the project site and
 - (ii) the action would affect the values and functions of the wetland by such means as converting, filling, draining, or directly discharging into it;
- (2) Floodplains - the proposed action
 - (i) includes or involves an existing structure(s) located within a 100-year floodplain (500-year floodplain if critical action), or
 - (ii) would be located within a 100-year floodplain (500-year floodplain if critical action) and would affect the values and functions of the floodplain by such means as converting, dredging, or filling or clearing the natural vegetation;
- (3) Wilderness (designated or proposed) - the proposed action
 - (i) would be located in a wilderness area or
 - (ii) would affect a wilderness area such as by being visible from the wilderness area;
- (4) Wild or Scenic River (proposed or designated or identified in the Department of the Interior's nationwide Inventory) - the proposed action
 - (i) would be located within one-quarter mile of the banks of the river
 - (ii) involves withdrawing water from the river or discharging water to the river via a point source, or
 - (iii) would be visible from the river;
- (5) Historical and Archaeological Sites (listed on the National Register of Historic Places or which may be eligible for listing) - the proposed action

- (i) contains a historical or archaeological site within the construction site or
 - (ii) would affect a historical or archaeological site;
- (6) Critical Habitat or Endangered/Threatened Species (listed or proposed) - the proposed action
- (i) contains a critical habitat within the project site,
 - (ii) is adjacent to a critical habitat, or
 - (iii) would affect a critical habitat or endangered/threatened species;
- (7) Coastal Barrier Included in Coastal Barrier Resources System - the proposed action would be located within the Coastal Barrier Resources System;
- (8) Natural Landmark (listed on National Registry of Natural Landmarks) - the proposed action either
- (i) contains a natural landmark within the project site or
 - (ii) would affect a natural landmark;
- (9) Important Farmlands - the proposed action would convert important farmland to a nonagricultural use(s) except when the conversion would result from the construction of on-farm structures necessary for farm operations;
- (10) Prime Forest Lands - the proposed action would convert prime forest land to another use(s), except when the conversion would result from the construction of on-farm structures necessary for farm operations;
- (11) Prime Rangelands - the proposed action would convert prime rangeland to another use(s) except when the conversion would result from the construction of on-farm structures necessary for farm operations;
- (12) Approved Coastal Zone Management Area - the proposed action would be located within such area and no agreement exists with the responsible State agency obviating the need for a consistency determination for the type of action under consideration;
- (13) Sole Source Aquifer Recharge Area - the proposed action would be located within such area and no agreement exists with the

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) obviating the need for EPA's review of the type of action under consideration; and

(14) State Water Quality Standard - the proposed action would impair a water quality standard, including designated and/or existing beneficial uses, or would not meet applicable antidegradation requirements for point or nonpoint sources.

(f) From the above paragraph (e), it should be noted that the location within the project site of any of the land uses and environmental resources identified in paragraphs (e) (1), (2), (9), (10), (11), (12), and (13) of this section is not sufficient for an action to lose its categorical exclusion. Rather, the land use or resource must be affected in the case of paragraphs (e) (1), (2), (9), (10), and (11) of this section. For paragraphs (e) (12), (13) and (14) of this section, further review and consultation can be avoided by written agreement with the responsible agency detailing the types of actions not requiring interagency review.

(g) Whenever a categorical exclusion loses its status as an exclusion for any of the reasons stated in paragraph (e) of this section, the environmental impacts of the action must be reviewed through the preparation of a Class I assessment, Form RD 1940-21. Not all of the procedural requirements for a Class I assessment apply in this limited case, however. The following exemptions exist:

- (1) No public notice provisions of this subpart apply.
- (2) The applicant does not complete Form RD 1940-20.
- (3) The action does not require a Class II assessment should more than one important land resource be affected.

§1940.318 Completing environmental assessments for Class II actions.

(a) The first step for the preparer (as defined in §§1940.302(i) and 1940.316 of this subpart) is to examine Form RD 1940-20 submitted by the applicant to determine if it is complete, consistent, fully responsive to the items, signed, and dated. If not, it will be returned to the applicant with a request for necessary clarifications or additional data.

(b) Once adequate data has been obtained, the assessment will be initiated in the format and manner described in Exhibit H of this subpart. In completing the assessment, appropriate experts from State and Federal agencies, universities, local and private groups will be contacted as necessary for their views. In so doing, the preparer should communicate with these agencies or parties in the most appropriate and expeditious manner possible, depending upon the

seriousness of the potential impacts and the need for formal documentation. Appropriate experts must be contacted whenever required by a specific provision of this subpart or whenever the preparer does not have sufficient data or expertise available within Rural Development to adequately assess the degree of a potential impact or the need for avoidance or mitigation. Comments from an expert must be obtained in writing whenever required by a specific provision of this subpart or the potential environmental impact is either controversial, complex, major, or apparently major. When correspondence is exchanged, it will be appended to the assessment. Oral discussions should be documented in the manner indicated in Exhibit H of this subpart. On the other hand, there is no need for the preparer to seek expert views outside of the Agency when there is no specific requirement to do so and the preparer has sufficient expertise available within Rural Development to assess the degree of the potential impact and the need for avoidance or mitigation.

(c) At the earliest possible stage in the assessment process, the preparer will identify the Federal, State, and local parties which are carrying out related activities, either planned or under way. Discussions with the applicant and Rural Development staff familiar with the project area should assist in this identification effort. If there is a potential for cumulative impacts, the preparer will consult with the involved agencies to determine the nature, timing and results of their environmental analysis. These consultations will be documented in the assessment and considered or adopted when making the environmental impact determination. (See §1940.324 of this subpart concerning adoption of assessments.) If it is determined that the cumulative impacts are significant, the preparer will further contact the involved Federal agencies and attempt to determine the lead Federal Agency as discussed in §§1940.320(b) and 1940.326 of this subpart.

(d) Consultations similar to those discussed in paragraph (c) of this section will also be undertaken with those Federal and State agencies which are directly involved in the Rural Development action, either through the provision of financial assistance or the review and approval of a necessary plan or permit. For example, a construction permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers may be required for a project. In such an instance, the environmental assessment cannot be completed until the preparer has either reviewed the other Agency's completed environmental analysis or consulted with the other Agency and is reasonably sure of the scope, content, and expected environmental impact determination of the forthcoming analysis and has so documented for the Rural Development assessment this understanding. If the other Agency believes that the project will have a significant impact, a joint or lead impact statement will be prepared. If the other Agency does not believe a significant impact will occur, the preparer will consider this finding and its supporting analysis in completing the Rural Development environmental impact determination.

Guidance in adopting an environmental assessment prepared by another Federal Agency is provided in §1940.324 of this subpart.

(e) For actions having a variety of complex or interrelated impacts that are difficult for the preparer to assess, consideration should be given to holding a public meeting in the manner described in §1940.331(c) of this subpart. Such meetings should not be assumed as being limited to projects for which EISs are being prepared. Such a meeting can serve a useful purpose in better defining and identifying complex impacts, as well as locating expertise with respect to them. The results of a public meeting and the follow-up from it can also serve as a valuable tool in reaching an early understanding on the potential need for an EIS. When identified impacts are difficult to quantify (such as odor and visual and community impacts) or controversial, a public information meeting should be held near the project site in order to reach a better understanding of the magnitude of the impact and the local area's concern about it. Whenever held, it should be announced and organized in the manner described in Section 1940.331(c). However, a transcript of the meeting need not be prepared, but the preparer will make detailed notes for incorporation in the assessment. (See §1940.331(c) of this subpart.)

(f) Throughout this assessment process, the preparer will keep in mind the criteria for determining a significant environmental impact. If at any time in this process it is determined that a significant impact would result, the preparer will so notify the approving official. Those actions specified in §1940.320 of this subpart will then be initiated, unless the approving official disagrees with the preparer's recommended determination, in which case further review of the determination may be required as explained in §1940.316 (b),(d) and (e) of this subpart. As soon as possible after the need for an EIS is determined, the applicant will also be advised of this in writing, as well as re-informed of the limitations on its actions during the period that the EIS is being completed. (See §1940.309(e) of this subpart.) The applicant's failure to comply with these limitations will be considered as grounds for postponement of further consideration of the application until such problem is alleviated.

(g) Similarly, throughout the assessment process, consideration will be given to incorporating mechanisms into the proposed action for reducing, mitigating, or avoiding adverse impacts. Examples of such mechanisms which are commonly referred to as mitigation measures include the deletion, relocation, redesign or other modifications of the project elements; the dedication of environmentally sensitive areas which would otherwise be adversely affected by the action or its indirect impacts; soil erosion and sedimentation plans to control runoff during land-disturbing activities; the establishment of vegetative buffer zones between project sites and adjacent land uses; protective measures recommended by environmental and conservation

agencies, including but not limited to interstate, international, Federal, State, area-wide, and local agencies having jurisdiction or special expertise regarding the action's impacts; and zoning. Mitigation measures must be tailored to fit the specific needs of the action, and they must also be practical and enforceable. Mitigation measures which will be taken must be documented in the assessment (Item XIX of Exhibit H of this subpart), and include an analysis of their environmental impacts and potential effectiveness and placed in the offer of financial assistance as special conditions or in the implementation requirements when the action does not involve financial assistance. These measures will be consistent with the basic goal of the proposed action and developed in consultation with the appropriate program office.

(h) As part of the assessment process, the preparer will initiate the consultation and compliance requirements for the environmental laws, regulations, and Executive orders specified in the assessment format. The assessment cannot be completed until compliance with these laws and regulations is appropriately documented. The project's failure to meet the requirements specified in Item 10b of Form RD 1940-21 for a Class I action and Item XXIb of Exhibit H of this subpart for a Class II action will result in postponement of further consideration of the application until such problem is alleviated.

(i) When the preparer has completed the assessment, the related materials and correspondence utilized will be attached. The preparer will then either recommend to the approving official that the action has the potential for significantly affecting the quality of the human environment or will recommend that the action does not have this potential and, therefore, the preparation of an EIS is not necessary. (Item 10a of Form RD 1940-21 for Class I action and item XXIa of Exhibit H of this subpart for a Class II action.) The recommended environmental findings will also be completed. (Item 10b of Form RD 1940-21 for a Class I action and Item XXIb of Exhibit H of this subpart for a Class II action.) In those instances specified in §1940.316, the assessment will then be forwarded to the concurring official and, as required, to the SEC for review. The concurring official will coordinate, as necessary, with the preparer any questions, concerns or clarifications and complete and document the review prior to the assessment being submitted to the approving official or the SEC. The SEC will coordinate with the concurring official in a similar fashion whenever the latter's review is required.

(j) The approving official will review the environmental file and recommendations. The official will then execute the environmental impact determination and findings. If the conclusions reached are that there is no significant impact and there is compliance with the listed requirements, the format contained in Exhibit I of this subpart will be used. If a significant impact is determined, the steps specified in

§1940.320 of this subpart will be initiated for the preparation of the EIS. If a determination is made that the proposed action does not comply with the environmental requirements that are explained in this subpart and listed in Item 10b of Form RD 1940-21 for a Class I action or Item XXlb of Exhibit H of this subpart for a Class II action and there are no feasible alternatives (practicable alternatives when required by specific provisions of this subpart), modifications, or mitigation measures which could comply, the action will be denied or disapproved. If the approving official's determination or findings differ from the recommendations of the preparer, concurring official or the SEC, this difference will be addressed in the manner specified in §1940.316 of this subpart.

(k) When there is no need for further review as discussed in paragraph (j) of this section and findings of compliance and a determination of no significant impact are reached, the assessment process is conditionally concluded. To conclude the assessment, the applicant will then be requested to provide public notification of these results as indicated in §1940.331(b)(3) of this subpart. The approving official will not approve the pending application for at least 15 days from the date the notification is last published. If comments are received as a result of the notification, they will be included in the environmental assessment and considered. Any necessary changes resulting from this consideration will be made in the assessment, impact determinations, and findings. If the changes require further implementation steps, such as the preparation of an EIS, they will be undertaken. If there are no changes in the findings and determinations, the approving official may continue to process the application. The environmental documents, i.e., the assessment, related correspondence, Form RD 1940-20, and the finding of no significant impact will be included with the approval documents which are assembled for review and clearance within the approving office.

(l) Whenever changes are made to an action or comments or new or changed information relating to the action's potential environmental effects is received after the assessment is completed but prior to the action's approval, such change, comment, or information will be evaluated by the approving official to determine the impact on the completed assessment. Whenever the contents or findings of that assessment are affected, the assessment process for that action will be revised and any other related requirement of this subpart met. Changes to an action in terms of its location(s), design, purpose, or operation will normally require, at a minimum, modification of the original assessment to reflect such change(s) and the associated environmental impacts.

(m) When comments are received after the action has been approved, the approving official will consider the environmental importance of the comments and the necessity and ability to amend both the action, with

respect to the issue raised and the action's stage of implementation. The National Office may be consulted to assist in determining whether there are any remaining environmental requirements which need to be met under the specific circumstances. A similar procedure will be followed when new or changed information is received after project approval. Amendments and revisions to actions will be handled as specified in §§1940.310 through 1940.313 of this subpart.

§1940.319 Completing environmental assessments for Class I actions.

(a) As stated in this subpart, a main purpose of Form RD 1940-21, is to provide a mechanism for reviewing actions with normally minimal impacts and for documenting a finding of no significant impact, as well as compliance determinations for other applicable environmental laws, regulations and policies. The second major purpose is to serve as a screening tool for identifying those Class I actions which have more than minimal impacts and which, therefore, require a more detailed environmental review.

(b) The approach to reviewing a Class I action under the assessment format of Form RD 1940-21 is exactly the same as for a Class II action. The preparer (as defined in §§1940.302(i) and 1940.316 of this subpart) must become familiar with the elements of the action, the nature of the environment to be affected, the relationship to any other Federal actions or related nonfederal actions, and the applicable environmental laws and regulations.

(c) The data submission requirements placed on the applicant for a Class I action are not as extensive as for a Class II action. The requirements are limited to completing the face of Form RD 1940-20, as well as categories (1), (2), (13), (15), (16), and (17) of Item 1b of the FMI, whenever a previously completed environmental analysis covering these categories is not available. Should it later be determined that the magnitude of the Class I action's impact warrants a more detailed assessment, the applicant will be required to submit the remaining items of the data request. Additionally, the circumstances under which Rural Development does not require the submission of Form RD 1940-20 by an applicant whose proposed action requires a Class I assessment are specified in §1940.317(f) of this subpart.

(d) The preparer must ensure that the data received from the applicant is complete, consistent, signed and dated before initiating the assessment. If it is not, the applicant will be required to make the necessary changes and clarifications. The reviewer must also ensure that the application properly meets the definition of a Class I action. Phased or segmented projects, as discussed in §1940.317(d) of this subpart, will be identified and the elements and the size of the entire project used to classify the action.

(e) An important element of this assessment is to determine if the action affects an environmental resource which is the subject of a special Federal consultation or coordination requirement. Such resources are listed in the assessment format, Form RD 1940-21, and include wetlands, floodplains, and historic properties, for example. If one of the listed resources is to be affected, the preparer must demonstrate the required compliance by accomplishing the review and coordination requirements for that resource. Documentation of the steps taken and coordination achieved will be attached. However, if more than one listed resource is to be affected, this will be viewed as the action having more than minimal impacts and the environmental assessment format for a Class II action will be initiated except if the action under review is an application for a Housing Preservation Grant.

(f) Similarly in completing item 3, General Impacts of Form RD 1940-21, the assessment format for a Class II action must be initiated if more than one category of impacts cannot be checked as minimal. If there is a single category which needs analysis, this can be accomplished by attaching an appropriate exhibit addressing the questions and issues for that impact, as specified in the environmental assessment format for a Class II action. See §1940.311(b)(1) of this subpart for when an attached discussion of water quality impacts is mandatory.

(g) The comments of State, regional, and local agencies obtained through applicable permit reviews or the implementation of Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs, will be incorporated into the assessment, if this review applies to the action. The receipt of negative comments of an environmental nature will warrant the initiation of a more detailed assessment under the format for a Class II action (Exhibit H of this subpart). Also, the issue of controversy must be addressed, and if the action is controversial for environmental reasons, the environmental assessment format for a Class II action (Exhibit H of this subpart) will be completed. However, if the action is the subject of isolated environmental complaints or any questions or concerns that focus on a single impact, air quality, for example, the analysis of such complaints or questions can be handled under the assessment format for a Class I action. This analysis will then be provided by the approving official to the party or parties which raised the matter with Rural Development. When several potential impacts are questioned, however, the more detailed assessment format will be accomplished to address these questions.

(h) The potential cumulative impacts of this action, particularly as it relates to other Rural Development actions recently approved in the area or planned, will be analyzed. If the cumulative impact is not minimal and, for example, cumulatively exceeds the criteria and thresholds discussed in paragraphs (e), (f) and (g) of this section, the environmental assessment format for a Class II action will be

completed. The actions of other Federal agencies and related nonfederal actions must also be assessed on this basis. When there is a Federal action involved, the environmental review conducted by that Agency will be requested and, if it sufficiently addresses the cumulative impact, can be utilized by the preparer as the Rural Development assessment, assuming the impacts are not significant. (See §1940.324 of this subpart.) If the other Agency is doing or planning an EIS, the preparer will inform that Agency of our action and request to be a cooperating agency.

(i) The preparer will have the responsibility of initiating the assessment format for a Class II action (Exhibit H of this subpart) whenever the need is identified. This should be done as early as possible in the review process. The preparer should not complete the assessment for a Class I action when it is obvious that the assessment format for a Class II action will be needed. The preparer will simply start the more detailed assessment and inform the applicant of the additional data requirements.

(j) Exhibit I will be completed by the approval official in the same instances for a Class I assessment as for a Class II assessment. However, public notification of Rural Development's finding of no significant environmental impact will not be required for a Class I assessment. Also, special provisions for completing a Class I assessment for an action that is normally categorically excluded but loses its classification as an exclusion are contained in §1940.317(g) of this subpart. With the exception of the two preceding sentences, all other procedural requirements of the assessment process, such as the timing of the assessment and the limitations on the applicant's actions, apply to a Class I assessment.

§1940.320 Preparing EISs.

(a) Responsibility. Whenever the District Director or County Supervisor determines there is a need to prepare an EIS, the State Director will be notified. The EIS will be prepared at the State Office and the State Director will assume the responsibility for preparing it. The State will in turn notify the Administrator of these EISs, as well as those needed EISs identified by a State Office review. EISs will be prepared according to this section. The State Director will be responsible for actions initiated within the State. However, in so doing, the State Director will consult with the National Office to determine that the document meets the requirements of NEPA. State Directors will be responsible for issuing such EISs. However, unless delegated authority by the Administrator, based upon a demonstrated capability and experience in preparing EISs, the State Director will not issue the EIS until reviewed and approved by the Administrator.

(b) Organizing the EIS process. Prior to initiating the scoping process outlined below, the preparer of the EIS will take several organizational steps to ensure that the EIS is properly coordinated and completed as efficiently as possible. To accomplish this, the below-listed parties need to be identified in advance; the list should be expanded as familiarity with the project increases. Those parties falling within the first four groups should be formally requested to serve as cooperating agencies. If any of these agencies appear to be a more appropriate lead agency than Rural Development (using the criteria contained in section 1501.5(c) of the CEQ regulations), consultations should be initiated with that agency to determine the lead agency. If difficulties arise in completing this determination, the National Office will be consulted for assistance. All of the parties identified below will be sent a copy of the notice of intent to prepare the EIS and an invitation to the scoping meeting, as discussed in paragraph (c) of this section.

- (1) All Federal and State agencies that are being requested to provide financial assistance for the project or related projects;
- (2) All Federal agencies that must provide a permit for the project should it be approved;
- (3) All Federal agencies that have a specific environmental expertise in major environmental issues identified to date;
- (4) The Agency responsible for the implementation of the State's environmental impact analysis requirement, if one has been enacted or promulgated by the State;
- (5) All Federal, State, and local agencies that will be requested to comment on the draft EIS;
- (6) All individuals and organizations that have expressed an interest in the project; and
- (7) National, regional, or local environmental organizations whose particular area of interest corresponds to the major impacts identified to date.

(c) Scoping process. As soon as possible after a decision has been made to prepare an EIS, the following process will be initiated by the preparer for identifying the major issues to be addressed in the EIS and for developing a coordinated government approach to the preparation and review of the EIS.

- (1) The first step in this process will be the publication of a notice of intent to prepare the EIS. The notice will indicate that an EIS will be prepared and will briefly describe the

proposed action and possible alternatives; state the name, address, and phone number of the preparer, indicating that this person can answer questions about the proposed action and the EIS; list any cooperating agencies, and include the date and time of the scoping meeting. If the latter information is not known at the time the notice of intent is prepared, it will be incorporated into a special notice, when available, and published and distributed in the same manner as the notice of intent. It will be the responsibility of the preparer of the EIS to inform the National Office of the need to publish a notice of intent which will coordinate the publication of the notice in the Federal Register. For requirements relating to the timing and publication of the notice of intent within the project area, as well as the applicant's responsibilities for the notice, see §1940.331(b) of this subpart.

(2) A scoping meeting will be held. To the extent possible, the scoping meeting should be integrated with any other early planning meetings of the Agency or other involved agencies. The scoping meeting will be chaired by the preparer of the EIS and will be organized to accomplish the following major purposes (as well as other purposes listed in Part 1501.7 of the CEQ regulations).

(i) Invite the participation of affected Federal, State, and local agencies, any affected Indian Tribe, the proponent of the action, and any interested parties including those who may disagree with the action for environmental reasons;

(ii) Determine the scope and the significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the EIS;

(iii) Identify and eliminate, from detailed study, the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the statement to a brief presentation of why they will not have a significant effect on the human environment or providing a reference to their coverage elsewhere;

(iv) Allocate assignments for preparation of the EIS among the lead and cooperating agencies, with the lead Agency retaining responsibility for the statement;

(v) Indicate any public environmental assessments and other EISs which are being or will be prepared that are related to, but are not part of, the scope of the impact statement under consideration;

(vi) Identify other environmental review and consultation requirements so the lead and cooperating agencies may prepare

other required analyses and studies concurrently with, and integrated with, the environmental impact statement; and

(vii) Indicate the relationship between the timing of the preparation of environmental analyses and the Agency's tentative planning and decision making schedule;

(3) Minutes of the scoping meeting, including the major points discussed and decisions made, will be prepared and retained by the preparer of the EIS as part of the environmental file. The preparer will offer, during the scoping meeting, to send copies of the minutes to any interested party upon written request.

(d) Interdisciplinary approach. The EIS will be prepared using an interdisciplinary approach that will ensure the integrated use of the natural and social sciences and the environmental design arts. The disciplines of the preparers will be appropriate to address the potential environmental impact associated with the project. This can be accomplished both in the information collection stage and the analysis stage by communication and coordination with environmental experts at local, State and Federal agencies (particularly cooperating agencies) and universities near the project site. When needed information or expertise is not readily available, these needs should be met through procurement contracts with qualified consulting firms. Consulting firms can be utilized to prepare the entire EIS or portions of it as specified in §1940.336 of this subpart.

(e) Content and format of EIS. The EIS will be prepared in the format and manner described in Part 1502 of the CEQ regulations. There is a great deal of specific guidance in that Part which will not be repeated here.

(f) Circulation of the EIS. Rural Development will circulate for review and comment the draft and final EIS as broadly as possible. Therefore, it will be necessary for the preparer to have sufficient copies printed or reproduced for this purpose. In identifying the parties to receive a draft EIS, the same process should be utilized as is employed for inviting participants to the scoping meeting. (See paragraph (b) of this section.) Special emphasis should be given to transmitting the draft to those agencies with jurisdiction or expertise on the proposed action's major impacts, as well as those parties who have expressed an interest in the action. The final EIS will be provided to all parties that commented on the draft EIS.

(g) Filing of the EIS. The Deputy Administrator for Program Operations or any State Director that has been delegated the authority to prepare an EIS must file the EIS with EPA in accordance with Part 1506.9 of the CEQ regulations. The official filing date for an EIS is the day that it is received by EPA's Office of Federal Activities.

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§1940.320 (g)(Cont.)

Filing of the EIS cannot occur until copies of the EIS have been transmitted to commenting agencies and made available to the public. Transmittal of the EIS must, therefore, occur either prior to its being filed with EPA (received by EPA) or no later than close of business of the same day that it is filed.

(h) Public information meetings. A public information meeting, as specified in §1940.331(c)(1) of this subpart, will be held near the project site to discuss and receive comments on the draft EIS.

(i) Response to comments. The preparer of the EIS will respond to comments on the draft EIS as required by part 1503.4 of the CEQ regulations. The major and most frequently raised issues during the public information meeting will also be identified and addressed.

(j) Timing of review. The preparer of the EIS will be responsible for ensuring that the timing requirements for Rural Development actions and the review periods for draft and final EISs are fully met (Part 1506.10 of CEQ regulations). Prescribed review periods are calculated from the date that EPA's Office of Federal activities publishes in the Federal Register a notice of availability for the EIS. Any request to reduce a prescribed review period will be made to EPA in accordance with Part 1506.10(d) of the CEQ regulations.

§1940.321 Use of completed EIS.

(a) The final EIS will be a major factor in the Agency's final decision. Agency staff making recommendations on the action and the approving official will be familiar with the contents of the EIS and its conclusions and will consider these in formulating their respective positions with respect to the action. The final EIS and all comments received on the draft will accompany the proposal through the Rural Development final clearance process. The alternatives considered by the approving official will be those addressed in the final EIS.

(b) As part of this review process, the preparer of the EIS will complete the recommendations listed in Item XXIb and c of Exhibit H of this subpart and provide them to the approving official prior to a final decision.

§1940.322 Record of decision.

Upon completion of the EIS and its review within Rural Development and before any action is taken on the decision reached on the proposal, the approving official will prepare, in consultation with the preparer of the EIS, a concise record of the decision which will be available for public review. The record will:

(a) State the decision reached;

(b) Certify that the timing requirements for the EIS process have been fully met;

(c) Identify all alternatives considered in reaching the decision specifying the alternative or alternatives that were considered to be environmentally preferable and discuss the relevant factors (environmental, economic, technical, statutory mission and, if applicable, national policy) that were considered in the decision;

(d) State whether all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the alternative selected have been adopted, and if not, why not; and

(e) If any mitigation measures have been adopted, specify the monitoring and enforcement program that will be utilized.

§1940.323 Preparing supplements to EIS's.

(a) Either the State Office or the National Office, as appropriate, will prepare supplements to either draft or final EIS's if:

(1) A substantial change or changes occur in the proposed action and such changes are relevant to the environmental impacts previously presented; and

(2) Significant new circumstances or information arise which are relevant to environmental concerns and bear on the proposed action or its impacts.

(b) If the preparer of the draft or final EIS determines that the changes or new circumstances referenced in paragraph (a) of this section do not require the preparation of a supplemental EIS, the preparer will complete an environmental assessment for a Class II action which will document the reasons for this determination.

(c) The preparer will be responsible for advising the approving official of the need for a supplement. The latter will make the Agency's formal determination in a manner consistent with §1940.316 of this subpart.

(d) All of the requirements of this subpart that apply to the completion of an initial EIS apply to the completion of a supplement with the exception of the scoping process, which is optional. Additionally, if the approving official believes that there is a need for expedited or special procedures in the completion of a supplement, the approval of CEQ must first be obtained by the Administrator for any alternative procedures. The final supplement will be included in the project file or docket and used in the Agency's decision making process

RD Instruction 1940-G
§1940.323 (d) (Cont.)

in the same manner as a final EIS. (See §1940.321 of this subpart and in particular subparagraphs (f), (g), and (j) of that Section as well as Part 1502.9(c)(4) of the CEQ regulations for associated circulation, filing, and timing requirements.)

§1940.324 Adopting of EIS or environmental assessment prepared by other Federal Agency.

(a) Rural Development may adopt an EIS or portion thereof prepared by another Federal Agency after completion if:

(1) An independent review of the document is conducted by the preparer of the Rural Development environmental review and it is concluded that the document meets the requirements of this subpart; and

(2) If the actions covered in the EIS are substantially the same as those proposed by Rural Development and the environmental conditions in the project area have not substantially changed since its publication, Rural Development will recalculate the EIS as a "final" and so notify the public as specified in Section 1940.331(b) of this subpart. The final EIS will contain an appropriate explanation of the Rural Development involvement and will be sent to all parties who would typically receive a draft EIS published by Rural Development. If there are differences between the actions or the environmental conditions as discussed in the original EIS, that EIS will be updated to cover these differences and recalculated as a draft EIS with the public so notified. From that point, it will be reviewed and processed in the same manner as any other Rural Development EIS. For circulation, filing, and timing requirements, see subparagraphs (f), (g), and (j) of Section 1940.320 of this subpart as well as Parts 1506.3(c), 1506.9, and 1506.10 of the CEQ regulations.

(b) If the adopted EIS is not final within the agency that prepared it, or if the action it assesses is the subject of a referral under Part 1504 of the CEQ regulations, or if the statement's adequacy is the subject of a judicial action which is not final, Rural Development must so specify and provide an explanation in the recalculated EIS.

(c) After recalculation (whether as a draft or final), the EIS will be reviewed and processed in the same manner as any other Rural Development EIS.

(d) Rural Development may also adopt all or part of environmental assessments or environmental reviews prepared by other Federal agencies. In this case, only paragraph (a)(1) of this section applies. If the requirements of that paragraph can be met except for the fact that the Federal agency whose assessment is to be adopted has no preliminary public notice requirements similar to Rural Development's (See §1940.331(b)(4) of this subpart), the assessment can be adopted without Rural Development publishing a preliminary public notice. Additionally, when all of another Federal

agency's assessment is adopted, without supplementation, for a Class II action and a finding of no significant environmental impact (Exhibit I of this subpart) is reached by the proper Rural Development official, no public notification of Rural Development's finding of no significant environmental impact is required if:

- (1) The other Federal agency or its designee published a similar finding in a newspaper of general circulation in the vicinity of the proposed action;
- (2) The other Federal agency's or its designee's public notice clearly described the action subject to the Rural Development environmental review; and
- (3) The other Federal agency's or its designee's public notice was published less than eighteen months from the date Rural Development adopted the assessment.

§1940.325 Rural Development as a cooperating Agency.

(a) Rural Development will serve as a cooperating Agency when requested to do so by the lead Agency for an action in which Rural Development is directly involved or for an action which is directly related to a proposed Rural Development action. An example of the latter would be a request from EPA to participate in an EIS covering its sewage treatment plans for a community, as well as the community's water system plans pending before Rural Development. A memorandum of understanding or other written correspondence will be developed with the lead agency in order to define Rural Development's role as the cooperating agency. The State Director will coordinate Rural Development's participation as a cooperating Agency for an action at the State Office level. The Administrator will have the same responsibility at the National Office level.

(b) When requested to be a cooperating Agency on a basis other than that discussed above, the State Director will consider the expertise which Rural Development could add to the particular EIS process in question and existing workload commitments. If a decision is made on either of these two bases not to participate as a cooperating Agency, a copy of the letter signed by the State Director or Administrator and so informing the lead Agency will be sent to CEQ.

(c) As a cooperating Agency, Rural Development will participate in the development and implementation of the scoping process. If requested by the lead Agency, provide the lead Agency with staff support and descriptive materials with respect to the analyses of the Rural Development portion of the action(s) to be covered, review and comment on all preliminary draft materials prior to their circulation for public review and comment, and attend and participate in public meetings called by the lead Agency concerning the EIS.

(d) The State Director will request the lead Agency to fully identify the Agency's involvement in all public documents and notifications.

(e) Rural Development will use the EIS as its own as long as Rural Development's comments and concerns are adequately addressed by the lead Agency and the final EIS is considered to meet the requirements of this subpart. It will be the responsibility of the preparer of the Rural Development environmental review document to formally advise the approving official on these two points. The failure of the lead Agency's EIS to meet either of these stipulations will require Rural Development to follow the steps outlined in §1940.324 of this subpart prior to the approving official's decision on the Rural Development action.

§1940.326 Rural Development as a lead Agency.

(a) When other Federal agencies are involved in a Rural Development action or related actions that require the preparation of an EIS, the preparer will consult with these agencies to determine a lead Agency for preparing the EIS. The criteria for making this determination will be those contained in Part 1505.5 of the CEQ regulations. If there is a failure to reach a determination within a reasonably short time after consultation is initiated, the National Office will be contacted. The assistance of CEQ will then be requested by the Administrator in order to conclude the determination of a lead Agency.

(b) When acting as lead Agency, the Rural Development preparer will request other Federal and State agencies to serve as cooperating agencies on the basis of the guidance provided in §1940.320(b) of this subpart. A memorandum of understanding or other written correspondence should be developed with a cooperating agency in order to define that agency's role in the preparation of the EIS.

§1940.327 Tiering.

To the extent possible, Rural Development may consider the concept of tiering in the preparation of environmental assessments and EISs. Tiering refers to the coverage of general matters in broader environmental impact statements, such as one done for a national program or regulation, with subsequent narrower statements or environmental analyses incorporating by reference the broader matters and concentrating on the issues specific to the action under consideration. Tiering can be used when the sequence of analysis is from the program level to site-specific actions taken under that program or from an initial EIS to a supplement which discusses the issues requiring supplementation.

§1940.328 State Environmental Policy Acts.

(a) Numerous States have enacted environmental policy acts or regulations similar to NEPA, hereafter referred to as State NEPA's. It is important that Rural Development staff have an understanding of which States have such requirements and how they apply to applicant's proposals. It will be the responsibility of each State Director to determine the applicable State requirements and to establish a working relationship with the State personnel responsible for their implementation.

(b) In processing projects located within States having State NEPA's, the preparer of the Rural Development assessment will determine as early as possible in the assessment process whether the project falls under the requirements of the State NEPA. If it does, one of the following cases will exist and the appropriate actions specified will be taken.

(1) The applicant has complied with the State's NEPA, and it was determined under the State's requirements that the proposed project would not result in sufficient potential impacts to warrant the preparation of an impact statement or other detailed environmental report required by the State NEPA. This finding or conclusion by the State will be considered in the Rural Development's review, and any supporting information used by the State will be requested. However, the State's finding can never be the total basis for Rural Development's environmental impact determination. An independent and thorough review in accordance with the requirements of this subpart must be conducted by the preparer.

(2) The applicant has complied with the State NEPA, and it was determined under its implementing guidelines that a significant impact will result. This fact will be given great weight in the Agency's environmental determination. However, the State's definition of significant environmental impact may encompass a much lower threshold of impacts compared to Rural Development's. In such a case, if the preparer does not believe that a significant impact will result under Agency guidelines for determining significant impacts, the environmental assessment will be prepared and include a detailed discussion with supporting information as to why the environmental reviewer's recommendation differs from that of the State's. However, the assessment cannot be completed until the State's impact statement requirements have been fulfilled by the applicant and the resulting impact statement has been reviewed by the preparer. An environmental impact determination will then be executed based upon the assessment and the statement.

(c) It should be emphasized that at no time does the completion of an impact statement under the requirements of a State NEPA obviate the requirement for Rural Development to prepare an impact statement. Consequently, as soon as it is clear to the preparer that the Agency will have to

prepare a statement, every attempt should be made to accomplish the statement simultaneously with the State's. Coordination with State personnel is necessary so that data and expertise can be shared. In this manner, duplication of effort and the review periods for the separate statements can be minimized. This process clearly requires a close working relationship with the appropriate State personnel.

§1940.329 Commenting on other Agencies' EIS's.

(a) State Directors are authorized to comment directly on EIS's prepared by other Federal agencies. In so doing, comments should be as specific as possible. Any recommendations for the development of additional information or analyses should indicate why there is a need for the material.

(b) Comments should concentrate on those matters of primary importance to Rural Development and on areas of Agency expertise, such as rural planning and development. Any potential conflicts with Rural Development programs, plans, or actions should be clearly identified. Special attention should be given to the relationship of the alternatives under study to the State Office's natural resource management guide and the objectives of the Department's land use regulation (Exhibit A of this subpart). Copies of comments addressing land use questions will be provided to the appropriate chairman of the USDA State-level committee dealing with land use matters.

(c) Whenever a State Director has serious concerns over the acceptability of the anticipated environmental impacts, the State Director will notify the Administrator.

§1940.330 Monitoring.

(a) Rural Development staff who normally have responsibility for the post approval inspection and monitoring of approved projects will ensure that those measures which were identified in the preapproval stage and required to be undertaken in order to reduce adverse environmental impacts are effectively implemented.

(b) This staff, as identified in paragraph (a) of this section, will review the action's approval documents and consult with the preparer of the action's environmental review document prior to making site visits or requesting project status reports in order to determine if there are environmental requirements to be monitored.

(c) The preparer will directly monitor actions containing difficult or complex environmental special conditions.

(d) Before certifying that conditions contained within offers of financial assistance have been fully met, the responsible

monitoring staff will obtain the position of the preparer for those conditions developed as a result of the environmental review.

(e) Whenever noncompliance with an environmental special condition is detected by Rural Development staff, the preparer and the SEC will be immediately informed. The approving official will then take appropriate steps, in consultation with the responsible program office, the SEC and preparer, to bring the action into compliance.

§1940.331 Public involvement.

(a) Objective. The basic objective of Rural Development's public involvement process is threefold. It is to ensure that interested citizens can readily obtain knowledge of the environmental review status of Rural Development's funding applications, have the opportunity to input into this review process before decisions are made, and have access to the environmental documents supporting Rural Development decisions.

(b) Public notice requirements.

(1) For projects that undergo the preparation of an environmental impact statement, the first element of formal public participation in the EIS process involves the publication of the notice of intent to prepare an EIS. The content of the notice of intent and its publication by Rural Development in the Federal Register are explained in §1940.320 of this subpart. With respect to notification within the project area, the applicant will be requested to publish a copy of the notice of intent and the date of the scoping meeting in the newspaper of general circulation in the vicinity of the proposed action and in any local or community-oriented newspapers within the proposed action's area of environmental impact. The notice will be published in easily readable type in the nonlegal section of the newspaper(s). It will also be bilingual if the affected area is largely non-English speaking or bilingual. Individual copies of the notice will be sent by the applicant to the appropriate regional EPA office, any State and regional review agencies established under Executive Order 12372; the State Historic Preservation Officer; local radio stations and other news media; any State or Federal agencies planning to provide financial assistance to this or related actions or required to review permit applications for this action, any potentially affected Indian Tribe; any individuals, groups, local, State, and Federal agencies known to be interested in the project; affected property owners; and to any other parties that Rural Development has identified to be so notified. It will also be posted at a readable location on the project site. The applicant will provide Rural Development with a copy of the notice as it appeared in the newspaper(s), the date(s) published, and a list of all parties receiving an individual notice.

Publication and individual transmittal of the notice for the scoping meeting will be accomplished at least 14 days prior to the date of the meeting.

(2) Coincident with the distribution of either a draft or final EIS, a notice of the statement's availability will be published within the project area in the same manner as a notice of intent to prepare an EIS. Rural Development will request EPA to publish in the Federal Register a notice of the statement's availability in accordance with EPA's requirements and pursuant to Part 1506.10 of the CEQ regulations.

(3) For Class II actions that are determined not to have a significant environmental impact, the Agency will require the applicant to publish a notification of this determination. This notice will be published in the same manner as a notice of intent to prepare an EIS but will appear for at least 3 consecutive days if published in a daily newspaper or otherwise in two consecutive publications. Individual copies will be sent to the same parties that are required to be sent a notice of intent, as specified in paragraph (b)(1) of this section, with the exception of local radio stations and other news media. Also, there is no requirement to post this notice on the project site. The applicant will provide Rural Development with a copy of this notice, the dates the notice was published, and a list of all parties receiving an individual notice. This notification procedure does not apply to actions reviewed solely on the basis of a Class I assessment.

(4) The public notice procedures for actions that will affect floodplains, wetlands, important farmlands, prime rangelands or prime forest lands are contained in Exhibit C of this subpart. These procedures apply to actions that require either an EIS, Class II assessment or Class I assessment. However, whenever an action normally classified as a categorical exclusion requires a Class I assessment because of a potential impact to one of these important land resources, no public notice procedures apply in the course of completing the Class I assessment. When applicable to an action, as specified in Exhibit C of this subpart, these public notice procedures can apply at two distinct stages. The first stage, a preliminary notice, applies to any of the five important land resources. The second stage, a final notice, is followed by a fifteen-day public review period and applies only to actions that will impact floodplains or wetlands. For Class II actions, this final notice procedure must be combined with any applicable finding of no significant environmental impact, which is described in paragraph (b)(3) of this section. Individual copies of the preliminary and final notices will be sent to the same parties that are required to be sent a notice of a finding of no significant impact, as specified in paragraph (b)(3) of this

section, with the following exception. Whenever property owners affected by proposed mitigation measures, such as proposed hook-up restrictions on portions of water or sewer lines that will traverse floodplains, are advised of these proposed measures in a preliminary notice, these property owners need not be sent copies of the final notice as long as the mitigation measures in the final notice are unchanged from the preliminary notice and no property owners raised objections or concerns over the mitigation measures.

(5) The public notice requirements associated with holding a public information meeting are specified in paragraph (c) of this section.

(c) Public information meetings.

(1) Public information meetings will be held for an action undergoing an EIS as specified in §1940.320 of this subpart. As part of the EIS process, a public information meeting will be held near the project site to discuss and receive comments on the draft EIS. It will be scheduled no sooner than 15 days after the release of the draft EIS. It will be announced in the same manner as the scoping meeting, and the list of parties receiving an individual notification will also be developed in the same manner. The meeting will be chaired by the State Director or a designee and will be fully recorded so that a transcript can be produced. The applicant will be requested to assist in obtaining a facility for holding the meeting. To the extent possible, this meeting will be combined with public meetings required by other involved agencies.

(2) Whenever a public information meeting is held as part of the completion of an environmental assessment, it will be scheduled, announced, and held in generally the same manner as a public information meeting for an EIS. However, a minimum of 7 days advance notice of the meeting is sufficient, and a transcript of the meeting will not be required. Rather a summary of the meeting to include the major issues raised will be prepared by the Rural Development official who chaired the meeting.

(d) Distribution of environmental documents. Rural Development officials will promptly provide to interested parties, upon request, copies of environmental documents, including environmental assessments, draft and final environmental impact statements, and records of decision. Interested parties can request these materials from the appropriate State Director or approval official for project activities and from the Administrator on other activities subject to environmental review.

§1940.332 Emergencies.

(a) Action Requiring EIS. When an emergency circumstance makes it necessary to take an action with significant environmental impact without observing the provisions of this subpart or the CEQ regulations, the Administrator will consult with CEQ about alternative arrangements before the proposed action is taken. It must be recognized that CEQ's regulations limit such arrangements to actions necessary to control the immediate impacts of the emergency. Other actions remain subject to NEPA review. For purposes of this subpart, an emergency circumstance is defined as one involving an immediate or imminent danger to public health or safety.

(b) Action Not Requiring EIS. When an emergency circumstance makes it necessary to take an action with apparent non-significant environmental impact without observing the provisions of this subpart or the CEQ regulations, the Administrator will be so notified. The Administrator reserves the authority to waive or amend all procedural aspects of this subpart relating to the preparation of environmental assessments including but not limited to the applicant's submission of Form RD 1940-20, public notice requirements and/or their associated comment periods, the timing of the assessment process, and the content of environmental review documents. Alternative arrangements will be established on a case by case basis taking into account the nature of the emergency and the time reasonably available to respond to it. These alternative arrangements will, to the extent possible, attempt to achieve the substantive requirements of this subpart such as avoiding impacts to important land resources, when practicable, and minimizing potential adverse environmental impacts. In all cases, the environmental findings and determinations required for Class I and Class II assessments must be executed by the appropriate Rural Development officials prior to approval of the action and be based upon the best information available under the circumstances and the prescribed alternative arrangements. (Refer to paragraph (a) of this section should the approval official for the action determine that an EIS is necessary.) Additionally, all applicable consultation and coordination procedures required by law or regulation will be initiated with the appropriate Federal or State agency(s). Such procedures will be accomplished in the most expeditious manner possible and modified to the extent necessary and mutually agreeable between Rural Development and the affected agency(s). The provisions of this paragraph are limited to the same emergency circumstances and scope of action as specified in paragraph (a) of this section.

§1940.333 Applicability to planning assistance.

The award of Rural Development funds for the purpose of providing technical assistance or planning assistance will not be subject to any environmental

review. However, applicants will be expected to consider in the development of their plans and to generally document within their plans:

- (a) The existing environmental quality and the important environmental factors within the planning area, and
- (b) The potential environmental impacts on the planning area of the plan as well as the alternative planning strategies that were reviewed.

§1940.334 Direct participation of State Agencies in the preparation of Rural Development EISs.

Rural Development may be assisted by a State Agency in the preparation of an EIS subject to the conditions indicated below. At no time, however, is Rural Development relieved of its responsibilities for the scope, objectivity, and content of the entire statement or any other responsibility under NEPA.

- (a) The Rural Development applicant for financial assistance is a State Agency having statewide jurisdiction and responsibility for the proposed action;
- (b) Rural Development furnishes guidance to the State Agency as to the scope and content of the impact statement and participates in the preparation;
- (c) Rural Development independently evaluates the statement and rectifies any major deficiencies prior to its circulation by the Agency as an EIS;
- (d) Rural Development provides, early in the planning stages of the project, notification to and solicits the views of any land management entity (State or Federal Agency responsible for the management or control of public lands) concerning any portion of the project and its alternatives which may have significant impacts upon such land management entities; and
- (e) If there is any disagreement on the impacts addressed by the review process outlined in paragraph (d) of this section, Rural Development prepares a written assessment of these impacts and the views of the land management entities for incorporation into the draft impact statement.

§1940.335 Environmental review of Rural Development proposals for legislation.

- (a) As stated in §1940.312(d)(4) of this subpart, all Rural Development proposals for legislation will receive an environmental assessment. The definition of such a proposal is contained in Section 1508.17 of the CEQ regulations.
- (b) The environmental assessment and, when necessary, the EIS will be prepared by the responsible Agency staff that is developing the legislation.

RD Instruction 1940-G
§1940.335 (Cont.)

(c) If an EIS is required, it will be prepared according to the requirements of Section 1506.8 of the CEQ Regulations.

§1940.336 Contracting for professional services.

(a) Assistance from outside experts and professionals can be secured for the purpose of completing EISs, assessments, or portions of them. Such assistance will be secured according to the Federal and Agriculture Procurement Regulations contained in Chapters 1 and 4 of Title 48 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

(b) The contractor will be selected by Rural Development in consultation with any cooperating agencies. In order to avoid any conflict of interest, contractors competing for the work will be required to execute a disclosure statement specifying that they have no financial or other interest in the outcome of the project.

(c) The Administrator will provide the State Director with a proposed scope of work for use in securing such professional services.

(d) Applicants will not be required to pay the costs of these professional services.

§1940.337 - §1940.349 [Reserved]

§1940.350 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number.

The collection of information requirements in this regulation has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget and has been assigned OMB control number 0575-0094.

Attachments: Exhibits A, B, C, D, E, F, G (Reserved), H, I, J, K, L,
and M

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Exhibit A not automated see manual.

Development and Implementation of
Natural Resource Management Guide

1. The State Director shall complete the natural resource management guide within 12 months from the effective date of this Subpart and issue the guide as a State supplement after prior approval by the Administrator. A summary of the basic content, purposes, and uses of the guide is contained in §1940.305 of this Subpart. The guide shall be prepared in draft form and be provided for review and comment to USDA agencies, appropriate Federal and State agencies, State and regional review agencies assigned the consultation requirements of Executive Order 12372, as well as interested localities, groups, and citizens. Also at least one public information meeting shall be held on the draft which shall be followed by a 30-day period for the submission of public comments. Public notification of this meeting shall be made in the same manner as the notification process for a scoping meeting. (See §1940.320(c) of this Subpart). Additionally, the public shall be informed that copies of the draft guide will be made available from the State Office upon request. After completion of this public review, the draft will be revised as necessary in light of the comments received and provided as a final draft State Supplement to the Administrator for review and approval. Any concerns and comments of the Administrator will be addressed by the State Director and the guide completed. Upon the Administrator's approval and the fulfillment of the requirements of paragraph 4. of this Exhibit, the natural resource management guide shall then become part of any program investment strategies developed by the State Director for the purpose of addressing the rural needs of the state. Although a 12-month period has been established for the completion of a natural resource management guide, this deadline is not to be construed as curtailing or postponing the implementation of existing environmental laws, regulations, Executive orders or the Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy, with respect to individual project reviews, nor giving anyone any rights or claims with respect to the completion or content of the guide.

2. The natural resource management guide needs to be developed in full recognition of its role as an internal Agency planning tool and with sensitivity to the Agency's mission.

3. After the Administrator approves the natural resource management guide, it will become effective 4 months from that date. This interim period shall be used to inform local, State, and Federal agencies, localities, organizations, and interested citizens of the content of the guide. In

this manner, those parties intending to seek Rural Development assistance or to coordinate Rural Development assistance programs with their own programs will be able to gain for their planning needs an understanding of our guide.

4. Completed natural resource management guides shall be reviewed every 2 years and updated by the State Director to reflect newly identified geographical areas of concern or policy revisions at the national, State, regional or local level. They will also be revised, as necessary, through appropriate guidance from the Administrator. Revisions shall be transmitted to the Administrator for postapproval and shall be considered approved if either no comments are raised by the administrator within 30 days of receipt of the State Director's transmittal letter or the Administrator specifically approves them before the 30 days expire. Public review of a revision will not be required. However, if in the opinion of the State Director the proposed revision will substantially change the previously adopted natural resource management guide, a public review shall be conducted of the revision in the same manner as that described in paragraph 1 of this Exhibit for the development of the original guide. Such review shall occur prior to the transmittal of the revision to the Administrator. If the State Director believes that at the expiration of any 2-year review period there is need to update the guide, a statement to this effect shall be filed with the Administrator.

5. The foundation for the natural resource management guide is the identification of the types of land uses or environmental factors deserving attention and their geographical location within the State. An inventory or listing shall be developed, therefore, of the important land uses within the State. This inventory will be accomplished by assembling existing data and information compiled by those Federal, State, and local agencies that have jurisdiction or expertise regarding the land uses or environmental factors. At a minimum, the inventory shall consist of available documents, listings, maps, or graphic materials describing the location of the following:

a. National Register of Historic Places to include monthly supplements as designated by the Department of the Interior (DOI), and the State Historic Preservation Plans. This list is issued as a State Supplement to Subpart F or Part 1901 of this Chapter.

b. Rivers designated as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System and rivers under study for inclusion in the system, as published by DOI;

c. Important farmlands;

- d. Prime rangelands;
- e. Prime forestlands;
- f. Wetland inventory;
- g. Floodplain inventory as issued by the Federal Emergency Management Administration;
- h. Endangered Species and Critical Habitats as listed or proposed for listing by the Department of Commerce (DOC) and DOI;
- i. Sole source aquifer recharge areas as designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA);
- j. Air Quality Control Regions as designated by EPA;
- k. National Registry of Natural Landmarks as published by DOI;
- l. Coastal Barrier Resources System;
- m. State inventories or planning documents identifying important land uses, particularly those not covered by the above items, such as wildlife refuges, important habitats, and areas of high water quality, or scenic or recreational value;
- n. Agricultural districts or other similar zoning classifications for agricultural land protection; and
- o. Coastal Zone Management Areas.

6. The Administrator shall be responsible for assisting State Directors in obtaining listings and inventories of resources protected by Federal statutes and regulations. The State Director has the responsibility for assembling documents on important environmental resources or areas identified in State and substate laws, regulations, plans, and policies.

7. Development of the inventory by the State Director will require consultation and assistance from a variety of agencies and experts. This consultation should begin with Department agencies and be accomplished through appropriate, State-level USDA committees. The objective should be to determine the land classification data that has been compiled and that which is in the process of being compiled either by USDA agencies or their counterparts

at the state level. The Memorandum of Understanding executed in May 1979 between the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and Rural Development should be utilized as the basis for seeking SCS's assistance in this data collection effort. (See RD Instruction 2000-D, Exhibit A, which is available in any Rural Development Office.) Direct contacts should then be made with State agencies, in particular with the appropriate office of State planning, to determine the availability of State inventories and State land use policies and priorities. Similar discussions should be held with substate regional planning agencies and clearinghouses with assistance being provided in this effort by District Directors. County Supervisors shall contact local officials and shall be responsible for being familiar with and for assembling similar inventories, land use policies, or protective requirements developed by the local government agencies within the supervisor's territorial jurisdiction.

8. Another important element of the natural resource management guide shall be the examination of any major environmental impacts on the State or a substate area resulting from the cumulative effects of Rural Development-assisted projects over the last several years. In this examination, particular emphasis should be given to the cumulative impacts of water resource projects such as irrigation systems. This should be done in consultation with experts within the appropriate State agencies and the U.S. Geological Survey. The housing programs should also be given a particular emphasis with respect to their cumulative impacts. More detailed guidance on the accomplishment of this cumulative impact section of the natural resource management guide, as well as the overall content of the guide, shall be provided by the Administrator. In preparing the State's natural resource management guide and in assembling inventories of critical resources, Agency staff should not lose sight of the basic purposes of this effort. The development of lengthy and complex guides and the amassing of huge inventories is not our goal. In the end, the material must be useable and serve as a tool for better decision making. The basic purposes of this guide and inventory, then, are to provide a basis for developing comprehensive, statewide, rural development investment strategies that (i) do not conflict with Federal, State, and local mandates to preserve and protect important land and environmental resources, (ii) that do not create short- or long-term development pressures which would lead to the unnecessary conversion of these resources, and (iii) which effectively support and enhance Federal, State, and local plans to preserve these resources.

Implementation Procedures for the Farmland
Protection Policy Act; Executive Order 11988,
Floodplain Management; Executive Order 11990, Protection
of Wetlands; and Departmental Regulation 9500-3,
Land Use Policy

1. Background. The Subtitle I of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981, Public Law 97-98, created the Farmland Protection Policy Act. The Act requires the consideration of alternatives when an applicant's proposal would result in the conversion of important farmland to nonagricultural uses. The Act also requires that Federal programs, to the extent practicable, be compatible with State, local government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland. The Soil Conservation Service (SCS), as required by the Act, has promulgated implementation procedures for the Act at 7 CFR Part 658 which are hereafter referred to as the SCS rule. This rule applies to all federal agencies. The Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy (the Departmental Regulation), also requires the consideration of alternatives but is much broader than the Act in that it addresses the conversion of land resources other than farmland. The Departmental Regulation is included as Exhibit A to this subpart and affects only USDA agencies. For additional requirements that apply to some Farmer Program loans and guarantees and loans to an Indian Tribe or Tribal Corporation and that cover the conservation of wetlands and highly erodible land, see Exhibit M of this subpart.

2. Implementation. Each proposed lease or disposal of real property by Rural Development and application for financial assistance or subdivision approval will be reviewed to determine if it would result in the conversion of a land resource addressed in the Act, Executive Orders, or Departmental Regulation and as further specified below. Those actions that are determined to result in the lease, disposal or financing of an existing farm, residential, commercial or industrial property with no reasonably foreseeable change in land use and those actions that solely involve the renovation of existing structures or facilities would require no further review.* Since these actions have no potential to convert land uses, this finding would simply be made by the preparer in completing the environmental assessment for the action. Also, actions that convert important farmland through the construction of on-farm structures necessary for farm operations are exempt from the farmland protection provisions of this Exhibit. For other actions, the following implementation steps must be taken:

*See special procedures in item 3 of this Exhibit if the existing structure or real property is located in a floodplain or wetland.

a. Determine whether important land resources are involved. The Act comes into play whenever there is a potential to affect important farmland. The Departmental Regulation covers important farmland as well as the following land resources: prime forest land, prime rangeland, wetlands and floodplains. Hereafter, these land resources are referred to collectively as important land resources. Definitions for these land resources are contained in the Appendix to the Departmental Regulation. The SCS rule also defines important farmland for purposes of the Act. Since the SCS's definition of prime farmland differs from the Departmental Regulation's definition, both definitions must be used and if either or both apply, the provisions of this Exhibit must be implemented. It is important to note the definition of important farmland in both the SCS rule and the Departmental Regulation because it includes not only prime and unique farmland but additional farmland that has been designated by a unit of State or local government to be of statewide or local importance and such designation has been concurred in by the Secretary acting through SCS. In completing the environmental assessment or Form RD 1940-22, "Environmental Checklist For Categorical Exclusions," the preparer must determine if the project is either located in or will affect one or more of the land resources covered by the SCS rule or the Departmental Regulation. Methods for determining the location of important land resources on a project-by-project basis are discussed immediately below. As reflected several times in this discussion, SCS personnel can be of great assistance in making agricultural land and natural resource evaluation, particularly when there is no readily available documentation of important land resources within the project's area of environmental impact. It should be remembered that Rural Development and SCS have executed a Memorandum of Understanding in order to facilitate site review assistance. (See RD Instruction 2000-D, Exhibit A, available in any Rural Development office.)

(1) Important Farmland, Prime Forest Land, Prime Rangeland - The preparer of the environmental review document will review available SCS important farmland maps to determine if the general area within which the project is located contains important farmland. Because of the large scale of the important farmland maps, the maps should be used for general review purposes only and not to determine if sites of 40 acres or less contain important farmland. If the general area contains important farmland

or if no important farmland map exists for the project area, the preparer of the environmental review will request SCS's opinion on the presence of important farmland by completing Form AD-1006, "Farmland Conversion Impact Rating," according to its instructions, and transmitting it to the SCS local field office having jurisdiction over the project area. This request will also indicate that SCS's opinion is needed regarding the application to the project site of both definitions of prime farmland, the one contained within its rule and the one contained within the Departmental Regulation. SCS's opinion is controlling with respect to the former definition and advisory with respect to the latter. No request need be sent to SCS for an action meeting one of the exemptions contained in item number 2 of this exhibit.

(2) Floodplain - Review the most current Flood Insurance Rate Map or Flood Insurance Study issued for the project area by the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA). Information on the most current map available or how to obtain a map free of charge is available by calling FEMA's toll free number 800-6386620. When more specific information is needed on the location of a floodplain, for example, the project site may be near the boundary of a floodplain; or for assistance in analyzing floodplain impacts, it is often helpful to contact FEMA's regional office staff. Exhibit J of this subpart contains a listing of these regional offices and the appropriate telephone numbers.

If a FEMA floodplain map has not been prepared for a project area, detailed assistance is normally available from the following agencies: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), SCS, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), or appropriate regional or State agencies established for flood prevention purposes.

(3) Wetlands - FWS is presently preparing wetland maps for the nation. Each FWS regional office has a staff member called a Wetland Coordinator. These individuals can provide updated information concerning the status of wetland mapping by FWS and information on State and local wetland surveys. Exhibit K of this subpart contains a listing of Wetland Coordinators arranged by FWS regional office and geographical area of jurisdiction. If the proposed project area has not been inventoried, information can be obtained by using topographic and soils maps or aerial

photographs. State-specific lists of wetland soils and wetland vegetation are also available from the FWS Regional Wetland coordinators. A site visit can disclose evidence of vegetation typically associated with wetland areas. Also, the assistance of FWS field staff in reviewing the site can often be the most effective means. Because of the unique wetland definition used in Exhibit M of this subpart, SCS wetland determinations are required for implementing the wetland conservation requirements of that Exhibit.

b. Findings

(1) Scope - Although information on the location and the classification of important land resources should be gathered from appropriate expert sources, as well as their views on possible ways to avoid or reduce the adverse effects of a proposed conversion, it must be remembered that it is Rural Development's responsibility to weigh and judge the feasibility of alternatives and to determine whether any proposed land use change is in accordance with the implementation requirements of the Act and the Departmental Regulation. Consequently, after reviewing as necessary, the project site, applicable land classification data, or the results of consultations with appropriate expert agencies, the Rural Development preparer must determine, as the second implementation step, whether the applicant's proposal:

(a) Is compatible with State, unit or local government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland; and

(b) Either will have no effect on important land resources; or

(c) If there will be a direct or indirect conversion of such a resource, (i) whether practicable alternatives exist to avoid the conversion; and

(d) If there are no alternatives, whether there are practicable measures to reduce the amount of the conversion.

(2) Determination of No Effect - If the preparer determines that there is no potential for conversion and that the proposal is compatible, this determination must be so documented in the environmental assessment for a Class II action or the appropriate compliance blocks checked in the Class I assessment or Checklist for Categorical Exclusions based on whichever document is applicable to the action being reviewed.

(3) Determination of Effect or Incompatibility - Whenever the preparer determines that an applicant's proposal may result in the direct or indirect conversion of an important land resource or may be incompatible with State, unit of local government, or private programs and policies to protect farmland, the following further steps must be taken.

(a) Search for Practicable Alternatives* - In consultation with the applicant and the interested public, the preparer will carefully analyze the availability of practicable alternatives that avoid the conversion or incompatibility. Possible alternatives include:

- (i) The selection of an alternative site;
- (ii) The selection of an alternative means to meet the applicant's objectives; or
- (iii) The denial of the application, i.e., the no-action alternative.

When the resource that may be converted is important farmland, the preparer will follow the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA) point system contained within the SCS rule in order to evaluate the feasibility of alternatives. When the proposed site receives a total score of less than 160 points, no additional sites need to be evaluated.

*When the action involves the disposal of real property determined not suitable for disposition to persons eligible for Rural Development's financial assistance programs, the consideration of alternatives is limited to those that would result in the best price.

Rather than use the SCS LESA point system, the State Director has the authority to use State or local LESA systems that have been approved by the governing body of such jurisdiction and the SCS state conservationist. After this authority is exercised, it must be used for all applicable Rural Development actions within the jurisdiction of that approved LESA system.

(b) Inform the Public - The Departmental Regulation requires us in Section 6, Responsibilities, to notify the affected landholders at the earliest time practicable of the proposed action and to provide them an opportunity to review the elements of the action and to comment on the action's feasibility and alternatives to it. This notification requirement only applies to Class I and Class II actions and not to categorical exclusions that lose their status as an exclusion for any of the reasons stated in §1940.317(e) of this subpart. The notification will be published and documented in the manner specified in §1940.331 of this subpart and will contain the following information:

(i) A brief description of the application or proposal and its location;

(ii) The type(s) and amount of important land resources to be affected;

(iii) A statement that the application or proposal is available for review at an Rural Development field office (specify the one having jurisdiction over the project area); and

(iv) A statement that any person interested in commenting on the application or proposal's feasibility and alternatives to it may do so by providing such comments to Rural Development within 30 days following the date of publication. (Specify the Rural Development office processing the application or proposal for receipt of comments.)

Further consideration of the application or proposal must be delayed until expiration of the public comment period. Consequently, publication of the notice as early as possible in the review process is both in the public's and the applicant's interest. Any comments received must be considered and addressed in the subsequent Agency analysis of alternatives and mitigation measures. It should be understood that scheduling a public information meeting is not required but may be helpful based on the number of comments received and types of issues raised.

(c) Determine Whether Practicable Alternative Exists

(i) Alternative exists - If the preparer concludes that a practicable alternative exists, the preparer will complete step 2 b (3) (e) (ii) of this exhibit and transmit the assessment for the approving official's review in the manner specified in §1940.316 of this subpart. If the findings of this review are similar to the preparer's recommendation, Rural Development will inform the applicant of such findings and processing of the application will be discontinued. Should the applicant still desire to pursue the proposal, the applicant is certainly free to do so but not with the further assistance of Rural Development. Should the applicant be interested in amending the application to reflect the results of the alternative analysis, the preparer will work closely with the applicant to this end. Upon receipt of the amended application, the preparer must reinstitute this implementation process at that point which avoids the duplication of analysis and data collection undertaken in the original review process.

If the results of the approving official(s) review differs from the preparer's recommendations, the former will ensure that the findings are appropriately documented in step 2 b (3) (e) (ii) of this exhibit and any remaining consideration given to mitigation measures, step 2 b (3) (d) of this exhibit.

(ii) No Practicable Alternative Exists - On the other hand, if the preparer concludes that there is no practicable alternative to the conversion, the preparer must then continue with step 2 b (3) (d) of this exhibit, immediately below.

(d) Search for Mitigation Measures - Once the preparer determines that there is no practicable alternative to avoiding the conversion or incompatibility, including the no-action alternative, all practicable measures for reducing the direct and indirect amount of the conversion must be included in the application. Some examples of mitigation measures would include reducing the size of the project which thereby reduces the amount of the important land resource to be converted. This is a particularly effective mitigation measure when the resource is present in a small area, as is often the case with wetlands or floodplains. A corresponding method of mitigation would be to maintain the project size or number of units but decrease the amount of land affected by increasing the density of use. Finally, mitigation can go as far as the selection of an alternative site. For example, in a housing market area composed almost entirely of important farmland, any new proposed subdivision site would result in conversion. However, a proposed site within or contiguous to an existing community has much less conversion potential, especially indirect potential, than a site a mile or two from the community. The LESA system can also be used to identify mitigation measures when the conversion of important farmland cannot be avoided.

(e) Document Findings - Upon completion of the above steps, a written summary of the steps taken and the reasons for the recommendations reached shall be included in the environmental assessment along with either one of the following recommendations as applicable. The following example assumes that important farmland is the affected resource and that the inappropriate phrase within the brackets would be deleted.

(i) The application would result in the direct or indirect conversion of important farmland and (is/is not) compatible with State, unit of local government, or private programs and policies to protect farmland. It is recommended that Rural Development determine, based upon the attached analysis, that there is no practicable alternative to this and that the application contains all practicable measures for reducing the amount of conversion (or limiting the extent of any identified incompatibility.)

(ii) The application would result in direct or indirect conversion of important farmland and (is/is not) incompatible with State, unit of local government, or private programs and policies to protect farmland. It is recommended that Rural Development determine, based upon the attached analysis, that there is a practicable alternative to this action, and that processing of this application be discontinued.

(f) Implement findings - The completed environmental assessment and the Agency's determination of compliance with the Act, the Departmental Regulation and Executive orders will be processed and made according to §1940.316 of this subpart. Whenever this determination is as stated in step 2 b (3) (e) (i) above, the action will be so structured as to ensure that any recommended mitigation measures are accomplished. See §1940.318(g) of this subpart. Whenever the determination is as stated in step 2 b (3) (e) (ii) above, the applicant shall be so informed and processing of the application discontinued. Any further Rural Development involvement will be as specified in Item 2 b (3) (c) (i) of this exhibit.

3. Special Procedures and Considerations When a Floodplain or Wetland Is The Affected Resource Under Executive Order 11988 and 11990.

a. Scope.

(1) Geographical Area - The geographical area that must be considered when a floodplain is affected varies with

the type of action under consideration. Normally the implementation procedures beginning in Item 2a of this Exhibit are required when the action will impact, directly or indirectly, the 100-year floodplain. However, when the action is determined by the preparer to be a critical action, the minimum floodplain of concern is the 500-year floodplain. A critical action is an action which, if located or carried out within a floodplain, poses a greater than normal risk for flood-caused loss of life or property. Critical actions include but are not limited to actions which create or extend the useful life of the following facilities:

- (a) Those facilities which produce, use, or store highly volatile, flammable, explosive, toxic or water-reactive materials;
- (b) Schools, hospitals, and nursing homes which are likely to contain occupants who may not be sufficiently mobile to avoid the loss of life or injury during flood and storm events;
- (c) Emergency operation centers or data storage centers which contain records or services that may become lost or inoperative during flood and storm events; and
- (d) Multi-family housing facilities designed primarily (over 50 percent) for handicapped individuals.

(2) Threshold of Impact - The Executive orders differ from the Act and the Departmental Regulation in that the Executive orders' requirements apply not only to the conversion of floodplains or wetlands but to any impacts upon them. Impacts are defined as changes in the natural values and functions of a wetland or floodplain. Therefore, there would be an impact to a floodplain whenever either (a) the action or its related activities would be located within a floodplain, or (b) the action through its indirect impacts has the potential to result in development within a floodplain. The only exception to this statement is when the preparer determines that the locational impact is minor to the extent that the floodplain's or wetland's natural values and functions are not affected.

b. Treatment of Existing Structures.

(1) Non-Rural Development-Owned Properties - The Executive orders can apply to actions that are already located in floodplains or wetlands; that is, where the conversion has already occurred. The implementation procedures beginning in item 2a of this exhibit must be accomplished for any action located in a floodplain or wetland and involving either (a) the purchase of an existing structure or facility or (b) the rehabilitation, renovation, or adaptive reuse of an existing structure or facility when the work to be done amounts to a substantial improvement. A substantial improvement means any repair, reconstruction, or improvement of a structure the cost of which equals or exceeds 50 percent of the market value of the structure either (a) before the improvement or repair is started, or (b) if the structure has been damaged, and is being restored, before the damage occurred. The term does not include (a) any project for improvement of a structure to comply with existing State or local health sanitary or safety code specifications which are solely necessary to assure safe living conditions or (b) any alteration of a structure listed on the National Register of Historic Places or a State Inventory of Historic Places.

(2) Rural Development-Owned Real Property - The requirement in paragraph 3 b (1) immediately above also applies to any substantial improvements made to Rural Development-owned real property with the exception of the public notice requirements of this exhibit. Irrespective of any improvements, whenever Rural Development real property located in a floodplain or wetland is proposed for lease or sale, the official responsible for the conveyance must determine if the property can be safely used. If not, the property should not be sold or leased. Otherwise, the conveyance must specify those uses that are restricted under identified Federal, State, and local floodplains or wetlands regulations as well as other appropriate restrictions, as determined by the Rural Development official responsible for the conveyance, to the uses of the property by the leasee or purchaser and any successors, except where prohibited by law. Appropriate restrictions will be developed in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as specified in the Memorandum of Understanding with FWS contained in Subpart LL of Part 2000 of this chapter. Applicable restrictions will be incorporated into quitclaim deeds with the consent and approval of the Regional

Attorney, Office of the General Counsel. Upon application by the owner of any property so affected and upon determination by the appropriate Rural Development official that the condition for which a deed restriction was imposed no longer exists, the restriction clause may be released. A listing of any restrictions shall be included in any notices announcing the proposed sale or lease of the property. At the time of first inquiry, prospective purchasers must be informed of the property's location in a floodplain or wetland and the use restrictions that will apply. A written notification to this effect must be provided to the prospective purchaser who must acknowledge the receipt of the notice. See Item 3 d of this exhibit and Subpart C of Part 1955 of this Chapter for guidance on the proper formats to be used with respect to notices and deed restrictions. The steps and analysis conducted to comply with the requirements of this paragraph must be documented in the environmental review document for the proposed lease or sale.

c. Mitigation measures.

(1) Alternative Sites - As with the Act and the Departmental Regulation, the main focus of the review process must be to locate an alternative that avoids the impact to a floodplain or wetland. When this is not practicable, mitigation measures must be developed to reduce the impact which in the case of a floodplain or wetland can include finding another site, i.e., a safer site. The latter would be a site at a higher elevation within the floodplain and/or exposed to lower velocity floodflows.

(2) Nonstructural Mitigation Measures - Mitigation measures under the Executive orders are intended to serve the following three purposes: reduce the risks to human safety, reduce the possible damage to structures, and reduce the disruption to the natural values and functions of floodplains and wetlands. More traditional structural measures, such as filling in the floodplain, cannot accomplish these three purposes and, in fact, conflict with the third purpose. Nonstructural flood protection methods, consequently, must be given priority consideration. These methods are intended to preserve, restore, or imitate

natural hydrologic conditions and, thereby, eliminate or reduce the need for structural alteration of water bodies or their associated floodplains and wetlands. Such methods may be either physical or managerial in character. Nonstructural flood protection methods are measures which:

(a) Control the uses and occupancy of floodplains and wetlands, e.g., floodplain zoning and subdivision regulation;

(b) Preserve floodplain and wetland values and functions through public ownership, e.g., fee title, easements and development rights;

(c) Delay or reduce the amount of runoff from paved surfaces and roofed structures discharged into a floodway, e.g., construction of detention basins and use of flow restricting barriers on roofs;

(d) Maintain natural rates of infiltration in developed or developing areas, e.g., construction of seepage or recharge basins and minimization of paved areas;

(e) Protect streambanks and shorelines with vegetative and other natural cover, e.g., use of aquatic and water-loving woody plants;

(f) Restore and preserve floodplain and wetland values and functions and protect life and property through regulation, e.g., flood-proofing building codes which require all structures and installations to be elevated on stilts above the level of the base flood; and

(g) Control soil erosion and sedimentation, e.g., construction of sediment basins, stabilization of exposed soils with sod and minimization of exposed soil.

(3) Avoid Filling in Floodplains - As indicated above, the Executive orders place a major emphasis on not filling in floodplains in order to protect their natural values and functions. Executive Order 11988 states "agencies

shall, wherever practicable, elevate structures above the base flood level rather than filling in land."

d. Additional Notification Requirement.

(1) Final Notice - Where it is not possible to avoid an impact to a floodplain or wetland and after all practicable mitigation measures have been identified and agreed to by the prospective applicant, a final notice of the proposed action must be published. This notice will either be part of the notice required for the completion of a Class II assessment or a separate notice if a Class I assessment or an EIS has been completed for the action. The notice will be published and distributed in the manner specified in §1940.331 of this subpart and contain the following information.

(a) A description of the proposed action, its location, and the surrounding area;

(b) A description of the floodplain or wetland impacts and the mechanisms to be used to mitigate them;

(c) A statement of why the proposed action must be located in a floodplain or a wetland;

(d) A description of all significant facts considered in making this determination;

(e) A statement indicating whether the actions conform to applicable State or local floodplain protection standards; and

(f) A statement listing other involved agencies and individuals.

(2) Private Party Notification - For all actions to be located in floodplains or wetlands in which a private party is participating as an applicant, purchaser, or financier, it shall be the responsibility of the approving official to inform in writing all such parties of the hazards associated with such locations.

4. The Relationship of the Executive Orders to the National Flood Insurance Program.

The National Flood Insurance Program establishes the floodplain management criteria for participating communities as well as the performance standards for building in floodplains so that the structure is protected against flood risks. As such, flood insurance should be viewed only as a financial mitigation measure that must be utilized only after Rural Development determines that there is no practicable alternative for avoiding construction in the floodplain and that all practicable mitigation measures have been included in the proposal. That is, for a proposal to be located in the floodplain, it is not sufficient simply to require insurance. The Agency's flood insurance requirements are explained in Subpart B of Part 1806 of this chapter (RD Instruction 426.2). It should be understood that an applicant proposing to build in the floodplain is not even eligible for Rural Development financial assistance unless the project area is participating in the National Flood Insurance Program.

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Implementation Procedures For the
Endangered Species Act

1. Rural Development shall implement the consultation procedures required under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act as specified in 50 CFR 402. It is important to note that these consultation procedures apply to the disposal of real property by Rural Development and to all Rural Development applications for financial assistance and subdivision approval, including those applications which are exempt from environmental assessments. (See Section 1940.310.) Unless repeated in this paragraph, the definitions for the terms utilized are found in 50 CFR 402.02.
2. State Directors shall ensure that State, District, and County Offices maintain current publications of listed and proposed species as well as critical habitats found in their respective jurisdictions.
3. When an application to Rural Development involves financial assistance or permit approval from another Federal agency(s), the Rural Development reviewer shall work with the other Agency to determine a lead Agency for the consultation process. When Rural Development is not the lead Agency, the reviewer shall ensure that the lead Agency informs the appropriate Area Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), or Regional Director, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), of Rural Development's involvement.
4. Each disposal action, application for financial assistance or subdivision approval shall be reviewed by the Rural Development official responsible for completing environmental assessments in order to determine if the proposal either may affect a listed species or critical habitat or is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of a proposed critical habitat.
 - a. For applications subject to environmental assessments, this review shall be accomplished as part of the assessment.
 - b. For those applications that are excluded from an environmental assessment, this review shall be documented as part of Form RD 1940-22, "Environmental Checklist For Categorical Exclusions," and shall be accomplished as early as possible after receipt of the application and prior to approval of the application.
 - c. For applications subject to an environmental impact statement, Rural Development shall request from the Area Manager, FWS, and the Regional Director, NMFS, a list of the proposed and listed species that may be in the area of the proposal. Within 30 days, the FWS and NMFS will respond to Rural Development with this list. Rural Development shall then conduct, as part of the process of preparing the draft environmental impact statement, a biological assessment of these species to determine which species are in the area of the proposal and how they may be affected. This biological assessment should be completed within 180 days or a time mutually agreed upon between Rural Development and FWS or NMFS. Upon completion of the biological assessment, if Rural Development determines either that

the proposal may affect a listed species or critical habitat or is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of proposed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat, the formal consultation procedures shall be initiated as specified in paragraph 7b below. To the extent practical, these procedures shall be concluded and their results reflected in the draft EIS. For all draft EISs in which Rural Development determines there will be no affect upon a listed or proposed species or critical habitat and FWS or NMFS indicated the presence of such species upon the initial inquiry, a copy of the draft shall be provided to that agency for review and comment.

5. As indicated in paragraph 4 above, the focus of this review process is to determine if the proposal will affect a listed species or critical habitat or is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of a proposed critical habitat. Because this impact terminology is specific to the Act, it is important to understand its meaning.

a. To jeopardize the continued existence of a species means to engage in a project which reasonably would be expected to reduce the reproduction, numbers, or distribution of a listed species to such an extent as to appreciably reduce the likelihood of the survival and recovery of that species in the wild. The level of reduction necessary to constitute jeopardy would be expected to vary among listed species.

b. The destruction or adverse modification of a critical habitat means a direct or indirect alteration of critical habitat which appreciably diminishes the value of that habitat for survival and recovery of a listed species. Such alterations include but are not limited to those diminishing the following requirements for:

(i) Space for individual and population growth and for normal behavior;

(ii) Food, water, air, light, minerals, or other nutritional or physiological requirements;

(iii) Cover or shelter;

(iv) Sites for breeding, reproduction, or rearing of offspring; and

(v) Habitats that are protected from disturbances or are representative of the geographical distribution of listed species.

6. It is also important to note that the consultation procedures differ when the subject of the consultation is a listed species or critical habitat as opposed to a proposed species or critical habitat. The latter are defined as those that the Secretary of Interior or Commerce are considering for listing and have so proposed through notification in the Federal Register. When listed species or critical habitats are involved, Rural Development shall initiate formal consultation procedures whenever it determines that a proposed project may affect them, either beneficially or adversely. For proposed species or critical habitats, Rural Development shall first determine if the proposed project is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of proposed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of proposed critical habitat. Whenever this determination is made, Rural Development shall confer with the appropriate agency identified in paragraph 7 of this Exhibit and, in so doing, shall focus on (i) determining the status of the listing process, and (ii) attempting to cooperatively develop alternatives or measures for inclusion in the project that avoid or mitigate the identified adverse impacts. The results of this process shall be documented in the environmental review being done for the proposed project and, if this review is an environmental assessment, shall be an important factor in determining the need for an environmental impact statement. No action shall be taken by the approving official on the application until the requirement to confer on proposed species or critical habitat has been completed. Paragraphs 7 through 9 of this Exhibit outline the formal consultation procedure for listed species or critical habitats.

7. In initiating the review process for a project, the list of species and critical habitats, including proposed, shall be examined to determine the potential for impacts. Projects planned within established communities are less likely to affect listed or proposed species or their critical habitat. Projects to be located in remote areas, heavily forested areas and/or previously undisturbed areas are more likely to affect these species. For projects located in such areas, the reviewer shall, at a minimum, discuss the project's potential impact on listed or proposed species with officials of the appropriate State wildlife protection agency or the Area Manager, FWS, or the Regional Director, NMFS, as appropriate. The latter organization generally has responsibility for marine species. The specific list of species under NMFS's jurisdiction can be found at 50 CFR 222.23(a) and 227.4. Such discussions shall be considered as informal consultations and are not a substitute for the required consultation process outlined below.

a. Whenever the reviewer, after reviewing the list and contacting appropriate experts, formally determines that the proposal will have no affect on a listed or proposed species or its critical habitat, these review procedures are completed, unless new information comes to light as discussed in paragraph 9 of this Exhibit, or consultation is requested by the appropriate Area Manager, FWS, or Regional Director, NMFS.

b. If the reviewer determines there may be an effect on a listed species or a critical habitat or is unable to make a clear determination, the reviewer shall so inform the SEC (assuming the reviewer is not the SEC). The latter shall either (i) convey a written request for consultation, along with available information to the appropriate Area Manager, FWS or Regional Director, NMFS, for the Federal region where the proposal will be carried out, or (ii) request Program Support Staff (PSS) to perform such consultation. Rural Development shall initiate this formal consultation process and not the applicant. See paragraph 4.c. of this Exhibit for initiating consultation where an environmental impact statement is being done for the application. Until the consultation process is completed, as outlined in 50 CFR 402.04, Rural Development shall not approve the application. Should the need for consultation be identified after application approval, Rural Development shall refrain from making any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources which would foreclose the consideration of modifications or alternatives to the identified activity or program.

8. Several possible responses may result from initiation of the formal consultation process with each requiring further specific actions.

a. Whenever the Area Manager, FWS, or Regional Director, NMFS, informs Rural Development that insufficient information exists to conclude the consultation process, the SEC with assistance as feasible from the FWS or NMFS and State sources of expertise shall then obtain additional information and conduct, as needed, biological surveys or studies to determine how the proposal may affect listed species or their critical habitat. The cost and performance of such studies shall be handled in the same manner as in the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement. (See §1940.336 of this Subpart.)

b. Whenever the Area Manager, FWS, or Regional Director, NMFS, responds that the proposal will either promote the conservation of a listed species or is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed or proposed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of its critical habitat, the Rural Development reviewer shall formally make a similar determination, attaching the response as documentation. This concludes the formal consultation process unless new information comes to light as discussed in paragraph 9 of this Exhibit.

c. Whenever the results of the consultation process include recommendations by the Area Manager, FWS, or Regional Director, NMFS, for modifications to the project which would enhance the conservation and protection of a listed species or its critical habitat, the State Director shall review these recommendations and require that they be incorporated into the project as either design

changes or special conditions to the offer of assistance. If the State Director does not believe the recommendations can be so adopted, the Administrator shall be requested to review the recommendations and to assist in the further resolution of the matter.

d. Whenever the appropriate Area Manager, FWS, or Regional Director, NMFS, determines that the proposal is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of a listed species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of its critical habitat, the Rural Development applicant shall be so informed and the project denied on this basis. However, if the State Director believes that funding or approval of the application is (i) of national, regional, or great local significance, and (ii) that there are no reasonable and prudent alternatives to avoiding the listed species impact, the State Director can request the Administrator, through PSS, to review the proposal and the results of the consultation process. Based upon this review, the Administrator shall either inform the State Director that a request for an exemption from Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is not warranted and the application shall be denied or, if the Administrator believes it is warranted, shall request an exemption from the Endangered Species Committee established by Section 7(e) of the Act. No action shall be taken by the State Director on the application until the Administrator informs the State Director of the results of the exemption request.

9. Once completed, the consultation process shall be reinitiated by Rural Development or upon request of the appropriate Area Manager, FWS, or Regional Director, NMFS, if:

- a. New information or modification of the proposal reveals impacts that may affect listed or proposed species or their habitats; or
- b. A new species is listed that may be affected by the proposal.

10. In completing the above compliance procedures, particularly when consulting with the referenced agencies, formally or informally, the preparer of the environmental review document will request information on whether any Category I or Category II species may be present within the project area. These are candidate species; they are presently under consideration for listing under Section 4 of the Endangered Species Act. Category I species are those for which FWS currently has substantial data on hand to support the biological appropriateness of proposing to list the species as endangered or threatened. Currently data are being gathered concerning essential habitat needs and, for some species, data concerning the precise boundaries of critical habitat designations. Development and publication of proposed rules on such species is anticipated. Category II comprises species for which information now in the possession of the FWS indicates that proposing to list the species as endangered or threatened is possibly appropriate but for which conclusive data on biological vulnerability and threat(s) are not currently available to presently

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10 (Cont.)

support proposed rules. Whenever a Category I or II species may be affected, the preparer of the environmental review document will determine if the proposed project is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the species. Whenever this determination is made, the same compliance procedures specified in paragraph 6 of this exhibit for a proposed species will be followed. The purpose of the requirements of this paragraph is to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act as well as Departmental Regulation 9500-4, Fish and Wildlife Policy, which specifies that USDA agencies will avoid actions which may cause a species to become threatened or endangered. (Added 10-19-88, Special PN)

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Implementation Procedures For The
Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

1. Each application for financial assistance or subdivision approval as well as the proposed disposal of real property by Rural Development shall be reviewed to determine if it will affect a river or portion of it which is either included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, designated for potential addition to the system, or identified in the Nationwide Inventory prepared by the National Park Service (NPS) in the Department of the Interior. The Nationwide Inventory identifies those river segments that, after preliminary review, appear to qualify for inclusion in the system. (For purposes of this Subpart, river segments in the Nationwide Inventory shall be treated the same as segments within the system with the exception of paragraph 8.) For applications subject to environmental assessments, the review shall be accomplished as part of the assessment. For applications that are excluded from an environmental assessment, this review shall be documented as part of Form RD 1940-22, "Environmental Checklist For Categorical Exclusions," within the reviewing office and shall be accomplished as early as possible after receipt of the application and prior to approval of the application. The Rural Development official responsible for completing the environmental assessment shall accomplish this review. (See §1940.316 of this Subpart.)

2. In order to effectively implement this review, State Directors shall ensure that State, District and County Offices maintain current listings of rivers within their respective States that are included in or designated for potential addition to the system as well as those identified in the Nationwide Inventory prepared by NPS.

3. For applications for water resources projects, as defined in §1940.302(i) of this Subpart, the purpose of this review shall be to determine whether the proposal would have a direct and adverse effect on the values which served as the basis for the river's inclusion in the system or designation for potential addition. For other applications, the purpose of the review shall be to determine if the proposal would invade the river area or unreasonably diminish the scenic, recreational, and fish and wildlife values present in the area. To make these determinations, the reviewer shall consult with the appropriate regional office of NPS if the proposal (i) would be located within one-quarter mile of the banks of the river, (ii) involves withdrawing water from the river or discharging water to the river via a point source, or (iii) would be visible from the river. The appropriate regional office of the Forest Service (FS) shall be contacted under similar circumstances when the effected river is on FS lands. Consultation shall be initiated by a written request for comments on the potential impacts accompanied by a description of the project and its location. The reviewer shall consult in other instances when the likelihood of an impact on a river in the system is identified as part of the environmental review. When the reviewer determines there is no potential impact on such a river, the documentation of this determination

concludes the review process, unless reinitiation is required under paragraph 10 of this Exhibit. In all other cases, the review is completed as specified below in paragraphs 4 through 9 of this Exhibit.

4. If the review is at the County or District Office level, the reviewer can request the State Director (see §1940.307 of this subpart) to perform the above consultation. The State Director can in turn make a similar request of the National Office. If not requested to perform the consultation for applications approvable at the County and District Office levels, the SEC shall be informed whenever NPS or FS advises that there is a potential for an adverse impact on a river within the system or that protective measures need to be included or designed into the proposal. In all cases, consultation shall be initiated by Rural Development and not the applicant. Until consultation is complete, Rural Development shall not approve the application. Should the need for consultation be identified after application approval, Rural Development shall, if still within its power at the time of identification, refrain from making any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources which would foreclose the consideration of modifications or alternatives to the project.

5. If NPS or FS advises there is no potential for an adverse effect as described in paragraph 3 of this Exhibit, this review process is concluded, unless the need to reinitiate arises. (See paragraph 10 of this Exhibit.)

6. Whenever the results of the consultation process include recommendations by NPS or FS to modify the proposal in order to avoid an adverse effect, as described in paragraph 3 above, the State Director shall review these recommendations and require that they be incorporated into the project as either design changes or special conditions to the offer of assistance. If the State Director does not believe that the Regional Director's recommendations can be so adopted, the Administrator shall be requested to review the recommendations and to assist in the further resolution of the matter.

7. If NPS or FS advises that the proposal will have an unavoidable adverse effect, as described in paragraph 3 of this Exhibit, on a river segment which is either included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System or designated for potential addition to the system, the Rural Development applicant will be informed by the reviewing office and the application denied on this basis. However, if the State Director disagrees with this determination, the State Director can request the Administrator to review the proposal and attempt to further resolve the matter. The specific reasons for disagreement along with supporting documentation must be included in such a request. Based upon a review of this request, the Administrator shall either inform the State Director that no further consultation is

warranted and the application shall be denied or shall request the headquarters staff of NPS or FS to further review the matter. No action shall be taken by the State Director on the application until the Administrator informs the State Director of the results of this further review and consultation.

8. If NPS or FS advises that the proposal will have an adverse effect, as described in paragraph 3 of this Exhibit, on a river segment identified in the Nationwide Inventory, the reviewer shall further consult with NPS or FS in order to formulate adequate measures or modifications to avoid or mitigate the potential adverse effect. The purposes of such measures or modification is to ensure that the proposal does not effectively foreclose the designation of a wild, scenic, or recreational river segment. Once concurrence is reached and documented with NPS or FS regarding modifications, the State Director shall require that they be incorporated into the proposal as either design changes or special conditions to the offer of assistance. If the State Director is not able to reach an agreement with NPS or FS on appropriate modifications, the Administrator shall be requested to assist in the further resolution of the matter.

9. If an application involves financial assistance or persist approval from another Federal Agency, the Rural Development reviewer shall work with the other agency(s) to determine a lead Agency for the consultation process. When Rural Development is not the lead Agency, the reviewer shall ensure that the lead Agency informs NPS or FS of Rural Development's involvement.

10. Once completed, the consultation process shall be reinitiated by Rural Development if new information or modification of the proposal reveals impacts to a river within the System or Nationwide Inventory.

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Implementation Procedures for the Coastal Barrier Resources Act

1. The Act applies to barrier islands that Congress has designated for inclusion in the Coastal Barrier Resources System. Since coastal barriers are only found in East and Gulf Coast States, no other State Offices fall under the requirements of the Act and, therefore, need be concerned with these implementation procedures.
2. On coastal barriers that are included in the system, the Act prohibits any new expenditures or new financial assistance by the Federal Government. There are some limited exceptions that are contained in Section 6 of the Act and listed in Exhibit L of this Subpart. Consequently, all of the following actions must be reviewed by the environmental reviewer to determine if they would be located within the System: any application for financial assistance, any proposed direct expenditure of Rural Development funds for construction or maintenance purposes, any request for subdivision approval, and any proposed disposal of real property that includes any form of financial assistance or subsidy to the purchaser. The boundaries of the system can be determined by reviewing a series of maps passed with the legislation and distributed by the Department of the Interior. Each State Director is responsible for ensuring that those field offices having components of the system within their jurisdictions are aware of the system's boundaries therein.
3. Exhibit L lists the six categories of exceptions, that is, those actions that may be taken within the system. No exception may be implemented, however, without first consulting with the Secretary of the Interior. It should also be noted that the sixth category is more limited than the first five. Besides meeting the consultation requirement for this sixth category, the sponsoring Agency must also determine whether the proposed exception is consistent with the purposes of the Act.
4. For those actions that are reviewed and determined not to be within the System, the environmental reviewer must document this result by checking the appropriate compliance blocks on either Form RD 1940-22, "Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions," or Form RD 1940-21, "Environmental Assessment for Class I actions," or by so stating this result in the environmental assessment for Class II Actions (Exhibit H), depending upon whichever format is applicable to the action under, review.
5. For those actions that would be located within the system, one of the following two steps must be taken:

a. If the environmental reviewer concludes that the action does not meet the criteria for an exception, as listed in Exhibit L, the reviewer shall so inform the approving official and a final determination made in the manner indicated in §1940.316 of this Subpart. If this determination is consistent with the environmental reviewer's conclusion, the action must be denied by the approving official and the affected applicant or party informed of the reason for denial. If it is determined that the action may qualify for an exception, the steps identified in Item b immediately below must be implemented prior to a decision on this question.

b. If the environmental reviewer concludes that the proposed action may meet the exception criteria, the approving official must be so informed. Whenever the approving official agrees or makes a similar determination as a result of the review conducted in Item (a) immediately above, consultation shall be initiated with the Secretary of the Interior by either the State Director or the Administrator for a National Office activity. Rural Development shall request the Secretary's views as to whether the exception criteria are met and shall provide the Secretary with the following information:

- (1) A detailed description of the action and its location;
- (2) A description of the affected environment within the System and the impacts of the proposed action;
- (3) The applicable exception criteria and Rural Development's reasons for believing they apply to this action; and
- (4) If a Section 6(a)(6) exception is claimed, Rural Development's reasons for believing the action to be consistent with the purposes of the Act.

Should the Secretary concur in the exception criteria being met, that portion of the environmental assessment relating to compliance with the Act shall be completed and the corresponding documentation attached. Should the Secretary not concur, a final decision on the approval or denial of the action must be made by the Administrator.

Environmental Assessment for Class II Actions

In completing this assessment, it is important to understand the comprehensive nature of the impacts which must be analyzed. Consideration must be given to all potential impacts associated with the construction of the project, its operation and maintenance, the operation of all identified primary beneficiaries, and the attainment of the project's major objectives, whether they be an increased housing stock, community improvement, economic development, or greater agricultural productivity. This last category, the attainment of the project's major objectives, often induces or supports changes in population densities, land uses, community services, transportation systems and resource consumption. The scope of the assessment is broadened even further when there are related activities involved. The impacts of these activities must also be assessed.

The preparer will consult as indicated in §1940.318(b) of this Subpart with appropriate experts from Federal, State, and local agencies, universities, and other organizations or groups whose views could be helpful in the assessment of potential impacts. In so doing, each discussion which is utilized in reaching a conclusion with respect to the degree of an impact will be summarized in the assessment as accurately as possible and include the name, title, phone number, and organization of the individual contacted, plus the date of contact. Related correspondence should be attached to the assessment.

The Rural Development environmental assessment shall be prepared in the following format. It shall address the listed items and questions and contain as attachments the indicated descriptive materials, as well as the environmental information submitted by the applicant, Form RD 1940- 20, "Request for Environmental Information."

The assessment has been designed to cover the wide variety of projects and environments with which the Agency deals. Consequently, not every issue or potential impact raised in the assessment may be relevant to each project. The purpose of the format is to give the preparer an understanding of a standard range of impacts, environmental factors, and issues which may be encountered. In preparing an assessment, each topic heading identified by a Roman numeral and each environmental factor listed under topic heading IV, such as air quality, for example, must be addressed.

The amount of analysis and material that must be provided will depend upon the type and size of the project, the environment in which it is located, and the range and complexity of the potential impacts. The amount of analysis and detail provided, therefore, must be commensurate with the magnitude of the expected impact. The analysis of each environmental factor (i.e., water quality) must be taken to the point that a conclusion can be reached and supported concerning the degree of the expected impact with respect to that factor.

For example, a small community center may not require detailed information on air emissions or solid waste management, but an industrial facility would. Similarly, an irrigation project for a farming operation would concentrate on such factors as water quality and fish and wildlife, rather than land use changes. The extension of a water or sewer system or the approval of a subdivision, on the other hand, would have to give close attention to all factors, with potential land use changes being a particularly important one.

I. Project Description and Need

Identify the name, project number, location, and specific elements of the project along with their sizes, and, when applicable, their design capacities. Indicate the purpose of the project, Rural Development's position regarding the need for it, and the extent or area of land to be considered as the project site.

II. Primary Beneficiaries and Related Activities

Identify any existing businesses or major developments that will benefit from the project and those which will expand or locate in the area because of the project. Specify by name, product, service, and operations involved.

Identify any related activities which are defined as interdependent parts of a Rural Development action. Such undertakings are considered interdependent parts whenever they either make possible or support the Rural Development action or are themselves induced or supported by the Rural Development action or another related activity. These activities may have been completed in the very recent past and are now operational, or they may reasonably be expected to be accomplished in the near future. Related activities may or may not be federally permitted or assisted. When they are, identify the involved Federal Agency(s).

In completing the remainder of the assessment, it must be remembered that the impacts to be addressed are those which stem from the project, the primary beneficiaries, and the related activities.

III. Description of Project Area

Describe the project site and its present use. Describe the surrounding land uses; indicate the directions and distances involved. The extent of the surrounding land to be considered depends on the extent of the impacts of the project, its related activities, and the primary beneficiaries. Unique or sensitive areas must be pointed out. These include residential, schools, hospitals, recreational, historical sites, beaches, lakes, rivers, parks, floodplains, wetlands, dunes, estuaries, barrier islands, natural landmarks, unstable soils, steep slopes, aquifer recharge areas, important farmlands and forestlands, prime rangelands, endangered species habitats, or other delicate or rare ecosystems.

Attach adequate location maps of the project area, as well as (1) a U.S. Geological Survey "15 minute" ("7 1/2 minute," if available,) topographic map which clearly delineates the area and the location of the project elements, (2) the Department of Housing and Urban Development's floodplain map(s) for the project area, (3) site photos, (4) if completed, a standard soil survey for the project, and (5) if available, an aerial photograph of the site. When necessary for descriptive purposes or environmental analysis, include land use maps or other graphic information. All graphic materials shall be of high quality resolution.

IV. Environmental Impact

1. Air Quality - Discuss, in terms of the amounts and types of emissions to be produced, all aspects of the project including beneficiaries' operations and known indirect effects (such as increased motor vehicle traffic) which will affect air quality. Indicate the existing air quality in the area. Indicate if topographical or meteorological conditions hinder or affect the dispersal of air emissions. Evaluate the impact on air quality given the types and amounts of projected emissions, the existing air quality, and topographical and meteorological conditions. Discuss the project's consistency with the State's air quality implementation plan for the area, the classification of the air quality control region within which the project is located, and the status of compliance with air quality standards within that region. Cite any contacts with appropriate experts and agencies which must issue necessary permits.

Indicate whether silvicultural, agricultural or other operations will employ open burning. If so, discuss whether local or State requirements exist for permitting such burning and generally discuss their content. If no permit requirements exist, discuss the type and quantity of burning to be undertaken and the methods to reduce smoke and to mitigate its adverse impacts.

2. Water Quality - Discuss, in terms of amounts and types of effluents, all aspects of the project including primary beneficiaries' operations and known indirect effects which will affect water quality. Indicate the existing water quality of surface and/or underground water to be affected. Evaluate the impacts of the project on this existing water quality. Indicate if an aquifer recharge area is to be adversely affected. If the project lies within or will affect a sole source aquifer recharge area as designated by EPA, contact the appropriate EPA regional office to determine if its review is necessary. If it is, attach the results of its review.

Indicate the source and available supply of raw water and the extent to which the additional demand will affect the raw water supply. Describe the wastewater treatment system(s) to be used and indicate their capacity and their adequacy in terms of the degree of treatment provided. Discuss the characteristics and uses of the receiving waters for any sources of discharge. If the treatment system(s) are or will be inadequate or overloaded, describe the steps being taken for necessary improvements and their completion dates. Compare such dates to the completion date of the Rural Development project. Analyze the impacts on the receiving water during any estimated period of inadequate treatment.

Discuss the project's consistency with the water quality planning for the area, such as EPA's Section 208 areawide waste treatment management plan. Discuss the project's consistency with applicable State water quality standards to include a discussion of whether or not the project would either impair any such standard or fail to meet antidegradation requirements for point or nonpoint sources. Describe how surface runoff is to be handled and the effect of erosion on streams.

Evaluate the extent to which the project may create shortages for or otherwise adversely affect the withdrawal capabilities of other present users of the raw water supply, particularly in terms of possible human health, safety, or welfare problems.

For projects utilizing a groundwater supply, evaluate the potential for the project to exceed the safe pumping rate for the aquifer to the extent that it would (1) adversely affect the pumping capability of present users, (2) increase the likelihood of brackish or saltwater intrusion, thereby decreasing water quality, or (3) substantially increase surface subsidence risks. For projects utilizing a surface water supply, evaluate the potential for the project to (1) reduce flows below the minimum required for the protection of fish and wildlife or (2) reduce water quality standards below those established for the stream classification at the point of withdrawal or the adjacent downstream section.

Cite contacts with appropriate experts and agencies that must issue necessary permits.

3. Solid Waste Management - Indicate all aspects of the project including primary beneficiaries' operations, and known indirect effects which will necessitate the disposal of solid wastes. Indicate the kinds and expected quantities of solid wastes involved and the disposal techniques to be used. Evaluate the adequacy of these techniques especially in relationship to air and water quality. Indicate if recycling or resource recovery programs are or will be used. Cite any contacts with appropriate experts and agencies that must issue necessary permits.

4. Land Use - Given the description of land uses as previously indicated, evaluate (a) the effect of changing the land use of the project site and (b) how this change in land use will affect the surrounding land uses and those within the project's area of environmental impact. Particularly address the potential impacts to those unique or sensitive areas discussed under Section III, Description of Project Area, which are not covered by the specific analyses required in Sections V-XI. Describe the existing land use plan and zoning restrictions for the project area. Evaluate the consistency of the project and its impacts with these plans. For all actions subject to the requirements of Exhibit M of this subpart indicate (a) whether or not highly erodible land, wetland or converted wetland is present, (b) if any exemption(s) applies to the requirements of Exhibit M, (c) the status of the applicant's eligibility for an Rural Development loan under Exhibit M and (d) any steps the applicant must take prior to loan approval to retain or regain its eligibility. Attach a completed copy of Form SCS-CPA-26, "Highly

Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Determination," for the action.

5. Transportation - Describe available facilities such as highways and rail. Discuss whether the project will result in an increase in motor vehicle traffic and the existing road's ability to safely accommodate this increase. Indicate if additional traffic control devices are to be installed. Describe new traffic patterns which will arise because of the project. Discuss how these new traffic patterns will affect the land uses described above, especially residential, hospitals, schools, and recreational. Describe the consistency of the project's transportation impacts with the transportation plans for the area and any air quality control plans. Cite any contact with appropriate experts.

6. Natural Environment - Indicate all aspects of the project including construction, beneficiaries' operations, and known indirect effects which will affect the natural environment including wildlife, their habitats, and unique natural features. Cite contacts with appropriate experts. If an area listed on the National Registry of Natural Landmarks may be affected, consult with the Department of Interior and document these consultations and any agreements reached regarding avoidance or mitigation of potential adverse impacts.

7. Human Population - Indicate the number of people to be relocated and arrangements being made for this relocation. Discuss how impacts resulting from the project such as changes in land use, transportation changes, air emissions, noise, odor, etc. will affect nearby residents and users of the project area and surrounding areas. Discuss whether the proposal will accommodate any population increases and, if so, describe the potential impacts of these increases on the area's public and community services such as schools, health care, social services, and fire protection. Cite contacts with appropriate experts.

8. Construction - Indicate the potential effects of construction of the project on air quality, water quality, noise levels, solid waste disposal, soil erosion and siltation. Describe the measures that will be employed to limit adverse effects. Give particular consideration to erosion, stream siltation, and clearing operations.

9. Energy Impacts - Indicate the project's and its primary beneficiaries' effects on the area's existing energy supplies. This discussion should address not only the direct energy utilization, but any major indirect

utilization resulting from the siting of the project. Describe the availability of these supplies to the project site. Discuss whether the project will utilize a large share of the remaining capacity of an energy supply or will create a shortage of such supply. Discuss any steps to be taken to conserve energy.

10. Discuss any of the following areas which may be relevant: noise, vibrations, safety, seismic conditions, fire-prone locations, radiation, and aesthetic considerations. Cite any discussion with appropriate experts.

V. Coastal Zone Management Act *

Indicate if the project is within or will impact a coastal area defined as such by the State's approved Coastal Zone Management Program. If so, consult with the State agency responsible for the Program to determine the project's consistency with it. The results of this coordination shall be included in the assessment and considered in completing the environmental impact determination and environmental findings (Item XXI below).

* Complete only if coastal or Great Lakes State.

VI. Compliance with Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's Regulations

In this Section, the preparer shall detail the steps taken to comply with the above regulations as specified in Subpart F of Part 1901 of this Chapter. First, indicate that the National Register of Historic Places, including its monthly supplements, has been reviewed and whether there are any listed properties located within the area to be affected by the project. Second, indicate the steps taken such as historical/archaeological surveys to determine if there are any properties eligible for listing located within the affected area. Summarize the results of the consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and attach appropriate documentation of the SHPO's views. Discuss the views of any other experts contacted. Based upon the above review process and the views of the SHPO, state whether or not an eligible or listed property will be affected.

If there will be an effect, discuss all of the steps and protective measures taken to complete the Advisory Council's regulations. Describe the affected property and the nature of the effect. Attach to the assessment the results of the coordination process with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

VII. Compliance with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

Indicate whether the project will affect a river or portion of it which is either included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System or designated for potential addition to the system. This analysis shall be conducted through discussions with the appropriate regional office of the National Park Service or the Forest Service when its lands are involved, as well as the appropriate State agencies having implementation authorities. See Exhibit E for specific implementation instructions for this Act. A summary of discussions held or any required formal coordination shall be included in the assessment and considered in completing the environmental impact determination and environmental findings (Item XXI below).

VIII. Compliance with the Endangered Species Act

Indicate whether the project will either (1) affect a listed endangered or threatened species or critical habitat or (2) adversely affect a proposed critical habitat for an endangered or threatened species or jeopardize the continued existence of a proposed endangered or threatened species. This analysis will be conducted in consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service, when appropriate. Any formal or informal consultations conducted with these agencies as well as any State wildlife protection agency will also address impacts to Category I and Category II species. See Exhibit D of this subpart for specific implementation instructions.

The results of any required coordination shall be included in the assessment along with any completed biological opinion and mitigation measures to be required for the project. These factors shall be considered in completing the environmental impact determination.

IX. Compliance with Farmland Protection Policy Act, SCS's Implementation Rule, and Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy.

Indicate whether the project will either directly or indirectly convert an important land resource(s) identified in the Act or Departmental Regulation, other than floodplains or wetlands which should be addressed below in Item X of this exhibit. If a conversion may result, determine if there is a practicable alternative to avoiding it. If there is no such alternative, determine whether all practicable mitigation measures are included in the project. Document as an attachment these determinations and the steps taken to inform the public, locate alternatives, and mitigate potential adverse impacts. See Exhibit C of this subpart for specific implementation guidance.

X. Compliance with Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management, and Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands

Indicate whether the project is either located within a 100-year floodplain (500-year floodplain for a critical action) or a wetland or will impact a floodplain or wetland. If so, determine if there is a practicable alternative project or location. If there is no such alternative, determine whether all practicable mitigation measures are included in the project and document as an attachment these determinations and the steps taken to inform the public, locate alternatives, and mitigate potential adverse impacts. See the U.S. Water Resource Council's Floodplain Management Guidelines for more specific guidance as well as Exhibit C of this Subpart.

XI. Compliance with Coastal Barrier Resources Act

Indicate whether the project is located within the Coastal Barrier Resources System. If so, indicate whether or not the project meets an exception criteria under the Act and the results of any consultation with the Secretary of the Interior regarding its qualification as an exception. See Exhibit F of this Subpart for specific implementation instructions as well as Exhibit G for a listing of the exception criteria. (Those States not having any components of the system within their jurisdiction need not reference this item in their assessments.)

XII. State Environmental Policy Act

Indicate if the proposed project is subject to a State environmental policy act or similar regulation. Summarize the results of compliance with these requirements and attach available documentation. (See §1940.328 of this Subpart for further guidance.)

XIII. Consultation Requirements of Executive Order 12372,
Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs

Attach the comments of State, regional, or local agencies (if this review process is required for the project) and respond to all comments that deal with the subject matters discussed in this assessment format or are otherwise of an environmental nature.

XIV. Environmental Analysis of Participating Federal Agency

Indicate if another Federal Agency is participating in the project either through the provision of additional funds, a companion project, or a permit review authority. Summarize the results of the involved Agency's environmental impact analysis and attach available documentation. (See §1940.318(d) of this Subpart for further guidance.)

XV. Reaction to Project

Discuss any negative comments or public views raised about the project and the consideration given to these comments. Indicate whether a public hearing or public information meeting has been held either by the applicant or Rural Development to include a summary of the results and any objections raised. Indicate any other examples of the community's awareness of the project, such as newspaper articles or Public notifications.

XVI. Cumulative Impacts

Summarize the cumulative impacts of this project and the related activities. Give particular attention to land use changes and air and water quality impacts. Summarize the results of the environmental impact analysis done for any of these related activities and/or your discussion with the sponsoring agencies. Attach available documentation of the analysis.

XVII. Adverse Impact

Summarize the potential adverse impacts of the proposal as pointed out in the above analysis.

XVIII. Alternatives

Discuss the feasibility of alternatives to the project and their environmental impacts. These alternatives should include (a) Rural Development

alternative locations, (b) alternative designs, (c) alternative projects having similar benefits, and (d) no project. If alternatives have been fully discussed above in any of Items VI through X, simply reference that discussion.

XIX. Mitigation Measures

Describe any measures which will be taken or required by Rural Development to avoid or mitigate the identified adverse impacts. Analyze the environmental impacts and potential effectiveness of the mitigation measures. Such measures shall be included as special requirements or provisions to the offer of financial assistance or other appropriate approval document if the action does not involve financial assistance.

XX. Consistency with Rural Development Environmental Policies

Discuss the project's consistencies and inconsistencies with the Agency's environmental policies and the State Office's Natural Resource Management Guide. See §1940.304 and §1940.305 for a discussion of these policies and Exhibit B for a discussion of the guide.

XXI. Environmental Determinations

The following recommendations shall be completed:

- a. Based on an examination and review of the foregoing information and such supplemental information attached hereto, I recommend that the approving official determine that this project will have () a significant effect on the quality of the human environment and an Environmental Impact Statement must be prepared. Will not have () a significant effect on the quality of the human environment.
- b. I recommend that the approving official make the following compliance determinations for the below-listed environmental requirements.

Not In In Compliance	In Compliance	
_____	_____	Clean Air Act
_____	_____	Federal Water Pollution Control Act

_____	_____	Safe Drinking Water Act - Section 1424(e)
_____	_____	Endangered Species Act
_____	_____	Coastal Barrier Resources Act
_____	_____	Coastal Zone Management Act - Section 307(c)(1) and (2)
_____	_____	Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
_____	_____	National Historic Preservation Act
_____	_____	Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act
_____	_____	Subtitle B, Highly Erodible Land Conservation, and Subtitle C, Wetland Conservation, of the Food Security Act
_____	_____	Executive Order 11988, Floodplain Management
_____	_____	Executive Order 11990, Protection of Wetlands
_____	_____	Farmland Protection Policy Act
_____	_____	Departmental Regulation 9500-3, Land Use Policy
_____	_____	State Office Natural Resource Management Guide

c. I have reviewed and considered the types and degrees of adverse environmental impacts identified by this assessment. I have also analyzed the proposal for its consistency with Rural Development environmental policies, particularly those related to important farmland protection, and have considered the potential benefits of the proposal. Based upon a consideration and balancing of these factors, I recommend from an environmental standpoint

RD Instruction 1940-G
Exhibit I

SUBJECT: Finding of No Significant Environmental Impact and
Necessary Environmental Findings for (insert name,
location, and any identification number of project)

TO: Project File

The attached environmental assessment for the subject proposal has been prepared and reviewed by the appropriate Rural Development official(s). After reviewing the assessment and the supporting materials attached to it, I find that the subject proposal will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not necessary.

I also find that the assessment properly documents the proposal's status of compliance with the environmental laws and requirements listed therein.

Insert signature and
title of approving official
as specified in
§1940.316 of this Subpart.

Date

oOo

Locations and Telephone Numbers of Federal Emergency Management
Administration's Regional Offices

<u>Federal Region</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>FTS Number*</u>	<u>Commercial Number</u>
I	Boston, MA	223-4741	(617) 223-4741
II	New York, NY	264-8980	(212) 264-8980
III	Philadelphia, PA	597-9416	(215) 597-9416
IV	Atlanta, GA	257-2400	(404) 881-2400
V	Chicago, IL	353-1500	(312) 353-1500
VI	Dallas, TX	749-9201	(817) 387-5811
VII	Kansas City, MO	758-5912	(816) 374-5912
VIII	Denver, CO	234-2553	(303) 234-2553
IX	San Francisco, CA	556-8794	(415) 556-8794
X	Seattle, WA	396-0284	(206) 481-8800

*This is the main number for the regional office. For floodplain information, ask for the Natural and Technological Hazards Division.

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Locations and Telephone Numbers of U.S. Fish and
Wildlife Service's Wetland Coordinators

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is presently preparing the National Wetlands Inventory. Each regional office of the FWS has named a staff member as a Wetland Coordinator. These individuals can provide updated information concerning existing State and local wetland surveys and Federal inventories. Listed below are the FWS regional offices and their areas of responsibility.

Region I

Portland, OR FTS 429-6154
Commercial (503) 231-6154

Areas Covered: California Hawaii
Idaho Nevada
Oregon Washington
U.S. Pacific Trust, Territories and Possessions

Region II

Albuquerque, NM FTS 474-3152
Commercial (505) 766-2914

Areas Covered: Arizona New Mexico
Oklahoma Texas

Region III

Twin Cities, MN FTS 725-3593
Commercial (612) 725-3593

Areas Covered: Illinois Minnesota
Indiana Ohio
Michigan Wisconsin

Region IV

Atlanta, GA FTS 242-6343
Commercial (404) 221-6343

Areas Covered: Alabama Mississippi
Arkansas North Carolina
Florida Panama Canal Zone
Georgia Puerto Rico
Kentucky South Carolina
Louisiana Tennessee
Virgin Islands

Region V

Newton Corner, MA FTS 829-9379
Commercial (617) 965-5100
Ext. 379

Areas Covered: Connecticut New Jersey
Delaware New York
District of Columbia Pennsylvania
Maine Rhode Island
Maryland Vermont
Massachusetts Virginia
New Hampshire West Virginia

Region VI

Denver, CO FTS 234-5586
Commercial (303) 234-5586

Areas Covered: Colorado Nebraska
Iowa North Dakota
Kansas South Dakota
Missouri Utah
Montana Wyoming

Alaska Area Office

Anchorage, AK Commercial (907) 263-3403

National Office

St. Petersburg, FL FTS 826-3624
Commercial (813) 893-3624

Exceptions to Restrictions of Coastal Barrier Resources Act

Section 6 Exceptions*

(a) Notwithstanding Section 5, the appropriate Federal officer, after consultation with the Secretary, may make Federal expenditures or financial assistance available within the Coastal Barrier Resources System for-

(1) Any use or facility necessary for the exploration, extraction, or transportation of energy resources which can be carried out only on, in, or adjacent to coastal water areas because the use or facility requires access to the coastal water body;

(2) The maintenance of existing channel improvements and related structures, such as jetties, and including the disposal of dredge materials related to such improvements;

(3) The maintenance, replacement, reconstruction, or repair, but not the expansion, of publicly owned or publicly operated roads, structures, or facilities that are essential links in a larger network or system;

(4) Military activities essential to national security;

(5) The construction, operation, maintenance, and rehabilitation of Coast Guard facilities and access thereto; and

(6) Any of the following actions or projects, but only if the making available of expenditures or assistance therefore is consistent with the purposes of this Act:

(A) Projects for the study, management, protection and enhancement of fish and wildlife resources and habitats, including, but not limited to, acquisition of fish and wildlife habitats and related lands, stabilization projects for fish and wildlife habitats, and recreational projects.

(B) The establishment, operation, and maintenance of air and water navigation aids and devices, and for access thereto.

(C) Projects under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (16 U.S.C. 4601-4 through 11) and the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (16 U.S.C. 1452 et seq.).

(D) Scientific research, including but not limited to aeronautical, atmospheric, space, geologic, marine, fish and wildlife and other research, development and applications.

*Quoted from Section 6 of the Act, P.L. 97-348.

(E) Assistance for emergency actions essential to the saving of lives and the protection of property and the public health and safety, if such actions are performed pursuant to Sections 305 and 306 of the Disaster Relief Act of 1974 (42 U.S.C. 5145 and 5146) and Section 1362 of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 4103) and are limited to actions that are necessary to alleviate the emergency.

(F) The maintenance, replacement, reconstruction, or repair, but not the expansion, of publicly owned or publicly operated roads, structures, or facilities.

(G) Nonstructural projects for shoreline stabilization that are designed to mimic, enhance, or restore natural stabilization systems.

(b) For purposes of Subsection (a)(2), a channel improvement or a related structure shall be treated as an existing improvement or an existing related structure only if all, or a portion, of the moneys for such improvement or structure was appropriated before the date of the enactment of this Act.

Implementation Procedures for the Conservation of Wetlands
and Highly Erodible Land Affecting Farmer Program Loans and
Loans to Indian Tribes and Tribal Corporations

1. Background. This exhibit implements the requirements of Subtitle B, Highly Erodible Land Conservation, and Subtitle C, Wetland Conservation, of Title XIII of the Food Security Act of 1985, Public Law 99-198. The purposes of these Subtitles are to: reduce soil loss due to wind and water erosion; protect the Nation's long term capability to produce food and fiber; reduce sedimentation; improve water quality; assist in preserving the Nation's wetlands; create better habitat for fish and wildlife through improved food and cover; and curb production of surplus commodities by removing certain incentives for persons to produce agricultural commodities on highly erodible land or converted wetland.
2. Applicability. The provisions of this exhibit apply to insured and guaranteed Farmer Program loans and loans to Indian Tribes and Tribal Corporations, subordinations, transfers and assumptions of such loans and leases and credit sales of inventory property. For the purpose of this exhibit, "Farmer Program loans" means Farm Operating Loans, Farm Ownership Loans, Emergency Loans, and Soil and Water Loans. As used in this exhibit, the word loan is meant to include guarantee as well. Applicant means an applicant for either an insured or guaranteed loan and borrower means a recipient of either an insured or guaranteed loan.
3. Rural Development prohibited activities. Unless otherwise exempted by the provisions of this exhibit, the proceeds of any Farmer Program loan or loan to an Indian Tribe or Tribal Corporation made or guaranteed by Rural Development will not be used either (a) for a purpose that will contribute to excessive erosion of highly erodible land, or (b) for a purpose that will contribute to conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity. (See §12.2(a)(1) of Subpart A of Part 12 of Subtitle A of Title 7, which is Attachment 1 of this exhibit and is available in any Rural Development office, for the definition of an agricultural commodity.) Consequently, any applicant proposing to use loan proceeds for an activity contributing to either such purpose, will not be eligible for the requested loan. Any borrower that uses loan proceeds in a manner that contributes to either such purpose will be in default on the loan.

- a. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) definitions.

In implementing this exhibit, Rural Development will use the USDA's definitions of the terms found at §12.2 of Subpart A of Part 12 of Subtitle A of Title 7 (Attachment 1 of this exhibit which is available in any Rural Development office).

b. Highly erodible land conservation.

Rural Development will conclude that excessive erosion of highly erodible land results or would result whenever (1) a field on which highly erodible land is predominant, as determined by the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), is or would be used to produce an agricultural commodity without conformance to a conservation system approved either by SCS or the appropriate conservation district, as evidenced by a statement from SCS, and (2) such field is not exempt from the provisions of this exhibit.

c. Wetland conservation.

Rural Development will conclude that a conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity has occurred or will occur whenever, as determined by SCS, (1) a wetland has or will be drained, dredged, filled, leveled, or otherwise manipulated (including any activity that results in impairing or reducing the flow, circulation, or reach of water) that makes possible the production of an agricultural commodity without further application of the manipulations described herein if (a) such production would not have been possible but for such action and (b) before such action such land was wetland and was neither highly erodible land nor highly erodible cropland; and (2) neither the affected wetland nor the activity affecting the wetland is exempt from the provisions of this exhibit.

d. Use of loan proceeds.

To use loan proceeds for a purpose that contributes to either the excessive erosion of highly erodible land or the conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity means that loan proceeds will or have been used in a way that contributes to either excessive erosion of highly erodible land or the conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity by paying the costs of any of the following:

- (1) The purchase of the affected land;
- (2) Necessary planning, feasibility, or design studies;
- (3) Obtaining any necessary permits;

(4) The purchase, contract, lease or renting of any equipment or materials necessary to carry out the land modification or conversion to include all associated operational costs such as fuel and equipment maintenance costs;

(5) Any labor costs;

(6) The planting, cultivating, harvesting, or marketing of any agricultural commodity produced on nonexempt highly erodible land to include any associated operational or material costs such as fuel, seed, fertilizer, and pesticide costs;

(7) Within the crop year in which the wetland conversion was completed plus the next ten crop years thereafter, the planting, cultivating, harvesting, or marketing of any agricultural commodity produced on the affected land to include any associated operational or materials costs such as fuel, seed, fertilizer and pesticide costs; or

(8) For the same time period as in subparagraph 3 d (7) above, any costs associated with using for on-farm purposes an agricultural commodity grown on the affected land.

(9) Additionally, if loan proceeds will be or have been substituted to pay other costs at anytime during the life of the loan so that non-loan funds can be used to pay any of the above costs, it is deemed that loan proceeds will be or have been used for a purpose that contributes to the prohibited activities described in this paragraph.

4. Prohibited activities under other USDA financial assistance programs. Unless otherwise exempted, a person becomes ineligible for a variety of USDA financial assistance programs if that person produces in any crop year an agricultural commodity on either a field on which highly erodible land is predominant or a converted wetland. This ineligibility extends to any commodity produced during the crop year that the prohibited action occurs. The programs for which the person would be ineligible include price support payments, farm storage facility loans, disaster payments, crop insurance, payments made for the storage of an agricultural commodity, and payments received under a Conservation Reserve Program Contract. Farmer Program applicants and borrowers and applicants for, and borrowers of, loans to Indian Tribes and Tribal Corporations, therefore, can be affected not only by the Rural Development prohibited activities but also by the broad USDA sweep of the Subtitle B and C restrictions. Should such an applicant rely or plan

to rely on any of these other USDA financial assistance programs as a source of funds to repay its Rural Development loan(s) and then fail to meet the other program(s)' eligibility criteria related to wetland or highly erodible land conservation, repayment ability to Rural Development or the lender of an Rural Development guaranteed loan may be jeopardized. Consequently, those applicants who are applying for a loan and those borrowers who receive a loan after the effective date of Subtitles B and C, as designated in Part 12 of Subtitle A of Title 7, and who include in their projected sources of repayment, potential funds from any USDA program subject to some form of Subtitle B or C restrictions will have to demonstrate as part of their applications, and for borrowers, as part of their farm plan of operation, their ability to meet the other program(s)' eligibility criteria. Failure to meet the criteria will require the applicant or borrower either to document an alternative, equivalent source of revenues or, if possible, agree to undertake any steps necessary to gain eligibility for the other program(s). See paragraph 6 of this exhibit for a discussion of such steps.

5. Applicant's responsibilities.

a. Required information. Every applicant for a Farmer Program loan or a loan to an Indian Tribe or Tribal Corporation will be required to provide the following information and, as applicable, certification as part of the application for financial assistance. An application will not be considered to be complete until this information and certification are provided to Rural Development. Once an applicant has provided Rural Development with information from SCS on the presence of any highly erodible land, wetland, or converted wetland this information need not be provided again for a subsequent loan unless there is either a change in the property upon which Rural Development loan proceeds will be applied or a change in the previous information, such as a change in the status of an exemption. There is a continuing responsibility on Rural Development borrowers using other USDA financial assistance programs for repayment purposes to provide the County Supervisor with an executed copy of any similar certification required by the other USDA agency at the time of each required certification.

(1) A statement from the SCS indicating whether or not the applicant's farm property or properties contain either highly erodible land, wetland, or converted wetland and, if so, whether or not the applicant qualifies for a particular exemption to the provisions of this exhibit and as further detailed in paragraph 11 below. The property or properties will be listed and described in accordance with the

Agriculture Stabilization and Conservation Service's (ASCS) farm records system. SCS's execution of Form SCS-CPA-26, "Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Determination," is necessary to meet this information requirement.

(2) If either highly erodible land, wetland, or converted wetland is present, the applicant's properly executed original or carbon copy of Form AD-1026, "Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Certification."

b. Required actions.

If at any time during the application review process any of the information or basis for an applicant's certification changes, the applicant (or the lender in the case of a guaranteed loan) must immediately notify Rural Development. If an applicant intends to produce an agricultural commodity on a nonexempt field on which highly erodible land is predominant, the applicant must develop a conservation system approved by SCS or the appropriate conservation district, demonstrate that it is or will be in compliance with the system at the time the field is to be used, and provide SCS's concurrence with this position.

6. Rural Development's application review. The Rural Development County Supervisor will review the information provided by the applicant from SCS regarding the presence of any highly erodible land, wetland, or converted wetland and any possible exemptions and take the actions warranted by the presence of one or more of the circumstances described below. In carrying out these actions, Rural Development will consider the technical decisions rendered by the SCS and the ASCS, as assigned to these agencies by Subparts A, B, and C of Part 12 of Subtitle A of Title 7 and further explained in this exhibit, to be final and controlling in the remaining Rural Development decision making process for this exhibit. It must also be understood that the definition of a wetland used by SCS in implementing this exhibit applies only to this exhibit and not to other wetland protection provisions of Subpart G of Part 1940.

a. No highly erodible land, wetland, or converted wetland present.

The requested loan can be approved under the provisions of this exhibit and, except for documenting this result in accordance with paragraph 8 of this exhibit, no further action is required.

b. Converted wetland present.

The County Supervisor will consult with the applicant (and lender, in the case of a guaranteed loan) and the appropriate local office of the ASCS in order to determine if the converted wetland qualifies for the exemption specified in subparagraph c (1) of paragraph 11 of this exhibit. If so, no further action is necessary with respect to the converted wetland except for documenting the result. If the converted wetland does not qualify for an exemption, the County Supervisor will complete one or both of the following steps as the identified circumstances dictate.

(1) Step one. Review both the date that the wetland was converted and the proposed use of loan proceeds in order to determine if loan proceeds will be used for a prohibited activity as defined in subparagraph d of paragraph 3 of this exhibit. If not, the County Supervisor will so document this as specified in paragraph 8 of this exhibit; complete step two immediately below; and, if an insured loan will be approved, notify the applicant in writing, coincident with the transmittal of Form RD 1940-1, "Request For Obligation of Funds" and by using Form Letter 1940-G-1, "Notification of The Requirements of Exhibit M of RD Instruction 1940-G," that the loan approval instruments will contain compliance requirements affecting the applicant's converted wetland. If loan proceeds will be used for a prohibited activity, the applicant (and lender, in the case of a guaranteed loan) will be advised of the applicant's ineligibility for the Rural Development loan being requested. The applicant (and lender, in the case of a guaranteed loan) will be advised of any modifications to the application that could cure the ineligibility. Not growing an agricultural commodity on the converted wetland would cure the ineligibility, but the substitution of non-Rural Development funds to grow an agricultural commodity on the converted wetland would not.

(2) Step two. The County Supervisor will review the applicant's sources of loan repayment to determine if they include funds from a USDA financial assistance program(s) subject to wetland conservation restrictions. If so, the County Supervisor will implement the actions in subparagraph e of this paragraph.

c. Highly erodible land or wetland present.

The County Supervisor will discuss with the applicant (and lender, in the case of a guaranteed loan) and review the intended uses of

the Rural Development loan proceeds as evidenced in any relevant application materials.

(1) Proceeds to be used for prohibited activity. If proceeds would be used for a prohibited activity, the applicant (and lender, in the case of a guaranteed loan) will be advised of its ineligibility for the Rural Development loan. The applicant (and lender, in the case of a guaranteed loan) will be informed of any modifications to its application that could cure the ineligibility, including financially feasible eligible loan purposes that could be helpful in implementing a conservation plan or installing a conservation system, should either be an appropriate cure. Substitution of non-Rural Development monies to accomplish the prohibited activity would not cure the ineligibility, but actual elimination of the activity from the applicant's farm plan of operation would.

(2) Proceeds not to be used for a prohibited activity. If loan proceeds are not planned to be used for a prohibited activity, the County Supervisor will perform the following tasks:

(a) Document the above determination in the applicant's file as specified in paragraph 8 of this exhibit.

(b) If an insured loan will be approved and the requirements of subparagraph c (2)(c) of this paragraph do not apply, notify the applicant in writing, coincident with the transmittal of Form RD 1940-1, "Request For Obligation of Funds," and by using Form Letter 1940-G-1, "Notification of The Requirements of Exhibit M of RD Instruction 1940-G," that the loan approval instruments will contain compliance requirements affecting the applicant's highly erodible land and/or wetland.

(c) Review the term of the proposed loan and take the following actions, as applicable.

(i) Loan term exceeds January 1, 1990, but not January 1, 1995. If the term of the proposed loan expires within this period and the applicant intends to produce an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land that is exempt from the restrictions of this exhibit until either 1990 or two years after the SCS has completed a soil survey for the

borrower's land, whichever is later, the County Supervisor will determine if it is financially feasible for the applicant, prior to loss of the exemption, to actively apply a conservation plan approved by SCS or the appropriate conservation district. See §12.23 of Subpart A of Part 12 of Subtitle A of Title 7, which is Attachment 1 of this exhibit and is available in any Rural Development office, for a definition of actively applying a conservation plan. Prior to loan approval, the applicant, the lender, (if a guaranteed loan is involved), Rural Development and SCS will resolve any doubts as to what extent production would be able to continue under application of a conservation plan and as to the financial implications on loan repayment ability from both the potential costs of actively applying the conservation plan and the potential loss of revenues from any reduced acreage production base. The loan approval official will determine the financial implications of actively applying a conservation plan to the applicant's highly erodible land by developing a projected farm plan of operation or other farm financial projections that reflect adequate repayment on the full scheduled installments for all debt obligations at the time the conservation plan is being actively applied. If in making this determination, loan repayment ability cannot be demonstrated, Rural Development will deny the loan application. If loan repayment ability can be demonstrated and an insured loan will be approved, the applicant will be advised in writing, coincident with the transmittal of Form RD 1940-1, "Request For Obligation of Funds," and using Form Letter 1940-G-1, "Notification of The Requirements of Exhibit M of RD Instruction 1940-G," that the loan approval instruments will contain compliance requirements affecting the applicant's highly erodible land. The applicant will also be advised that a statement from the SCS issued prior to either January 1, 1990, or two years after the SCS has completed a soil survey of the applicant's land (whichever is later) and stating that the applicant is actively applying an approved conservation plan will be considered adequate demonstration of compliance on the highly erodible land affected by the 1990 deadline.

(ii) Loan term exceeds January 1, 1995. If the term of the proposed loan would exceed this date and the borrower intends to produce an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land that is exempt from the restrictions of this exhibit up until that date (see subparagraph b (4) of paragraph 11 of this exhibit) the County Supervisor will determine if it is financially feasible for the applicant, after January 1, 1995, to produce an agricultural commodity on the highly erodible land in compliance with a conservation system approved by SCS or the appropriate conservation district. Prior to loan approval, the applicant, the lender (if a guaranteed loan is involved), Rural Development and SCS will resolve any doubts as to what extent production would be able to continue under a conservation system and as to the financial implications on loan repayment ability from both the potential costs of the conservation system and the potential loss of revenues from any reduced acreage production base. The loan approval official will determine the financial implications of compliance with a conservation system using the financial projection method(s) indicated in subparagraph c (2) (c) (i) of this paragraph. If loan repayment ability cannot be demonstrated, the application will be denied. If loan repayment ability can be demonstrated and an insured loan will be approved, the applicant will be advised in writing, coincident with the transmittal of Form 1940-1, "Request For Obligation of Funds," and using Form Letter 1940-G-1, "Notification of The Requirements of Exhibit M of RD Instruction 1940-G," that the loan approval instruments will contain compliance requirements affecting the applicant's highly erodible land. The applicant will also be advised that a statement from SCS issued prior to January 1, 1995, and stating that the applicant is in compliance with an approved conservation system will be considered adequate demonstration of compliance.

(d) Implement the actions in subparagraph e of this paragraph if the applicant plans to repay a portion of the loan with funds from a USDA financial assistance

program subject to wetland or highly erodible land conservation restrictions.

d. Highly erodible land present that was or is planted in alfalfa.

If the applicant plans to cultivate highly erodible land for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity and that highly erodible land during each of the 1981 to 1985 crop years was planted in alfalfa in a crop rotation determined by SCS to be adequate for the protection of highly erodible land, the applicant is exempt until June 1, 1988, from the requirement to fully implement an approved conservation system on the highly erodible land. The County Supervisor, following procedures similar to those indicated in subparagraph c (2)(c)(i) of this paragraph, will determine if it is financially feasible for the applicant to apply a conservation system to the highly erodible land prior to the loss of the exemption on June 1, 1988. If loan repayment ability cannot be demonstrated, the application will be denied. If loan repayment ability can be demonstrated and an insured loan will be approved, the applicant will be advised in writing that the loan approval instruments will contain compliance requirements affecting the applicant's highly erodible land. The applicant will also be advised that a statement from SCS issued prior to June 1, 1988 and stating that the applicant is in compliance with an approved conservation system will be considered adequate demonstration of compliance with this requirement.

e. Highly erodible land, wetland, or converted wetland present and applicant intends to use other USDA financial assistance programs(s), including crop insurance, to repay Rural Development loan.

The County Supervisor will consult with the applicant (and lender, in the case of a guaranteed loan) and the other USDA agency(s) to determine if the applicant is eligible for the latter's financial assistance. If not eligible, the applicant will have to demonstrate that an alternativesource(s) of repayment will be available in order for further processing of the application to proceed.

7. Required provisions in loan approval documents.

a. Insured loan

(1) Promissory Notes. For all loans to which this exhibit applies, all promissory notes must contain the provision indicated

below: (Form RD 1940-17, "Promissory Note," has been revised so that the language will no longer be inserted as an addendum, but the following provision must be inserted as an addendum to Form RD 440-22, "Promissory Note (Association or Organization)," if the loan is being made to an Indian Tribe or a Tribal Corporation.)

"Addendum for Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation"

Addendum to promissory note dated _____ in the amount of \$ _____ at an annual interest rate of _____ percent. This agreement supplements and attaches to the above note.

Borrower recognizes that the loan described in this note will be in default should any loan proceeds be used for a purpose that will contribute to excessive erosion of highly erodible land or to the conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity, as further explained in 7 CFR Part 1940, Subpart G, Exhibit M. If (1) the term of the loan exceeds January 1, 1990, but not January 1, 1995, and (2) Borrower intends to produce an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land that is exempt from the restrictions of Exhibit M until either January 1, 1990 or two years after the U.S. Soil Conservation Service (SCS) has completed a soil survey for the Borrower's land, whichever is later, the Borrower further agrees that, prior to the loss of the exemption from the highly erodible land conservation restrictions found in 7 CFR Part 12, Borrower must demonstrate that Borrower is actively applying on that land which has been determined to be highly erodible a conservation plan approved by the SCS or the appropriate conservation district in accordance with SCS's requirements. Furthermore, if the term of the loan exceeds January 1, 1995, Borrower further agrees that Borrower must demonstrate prior to January 1, 1995, that any production after that date of an agricultural commodity on highly erodible land will be done in compliance with a conservation system approved by SCS or the appropriate conservation district in accordance with SCS's requirements.

(Name of Borrower)

(Signature of Executive Official)

(Signature of Attesting Official)

- (2) Mortgages, deeds of trust and security agreements.

State Directors will consult with the Office of General Counsel and ensure that for all loans to which this exhibit

applies a covenant is included in all mortgages, deeds of trust, and security agreements which reads as indicated below. Form RD 440-15, "Security Agreement (Insured Loans to Individuals)," and Form RD 440-4, "Security Agreement (Chattels and Crops)," have been revised accordingly. Equivalent forms required in State supplements must be similarly revised.

[For mortgages or deeds of trust:]

"Borrower further agrees that the loan(s) secured by this instrument will be in default should any loan proceeds be used for a purpose that will contribute to excessive erosion of highly erodible land or to the conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity, as further explained in 7 CFR Part 1940, Subpart G, Exhibit M."

[For security agreements:]

"Default shall also exist if any loan proceeds are used for a purpose that will contribute to excessive erosion of highly erodible land or to the conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity, as further explained in 7 CFR Part 1940, Subpart G, Exhibit M."

b. Guaranteed loans.

(1) Form RD 449-14, "Conditional Commitment for Guarantee," and Form RD 1980-15, "Conditional Commitment for Contract of Guarantee (Line of Credit)." These forms must contain a condition that includes the following provisions:

(a) Informs the lender that Rural Development's commitment is conditioned upon loan proceeds not being used for a purpose that will contribute to excessive erosion of highly erodible land or to the conversion of wetlands to produce an agricultural commodity, as explained in this exhibit;

(b) Informs the lender of the lender's monitoring responsibilities under paragraph 10 of this exhibit; and;

(c) Requires the lender, for all borrowers having highly erodible land, wetland, or converted on their farm properties, to include provisions in its loan

instruments similar to those contained in subparagraphs a (1) and (2) of this paragraph.

(2) Lender's loan and security instruments. These instruments must be modified as specified in subparagraph b (1)(c) of this paragraph.

8. Required Rural Development documentation. The actions taken and determinations made by Rural Development to comply with the provisions of this exhibit will be documented as part of the environmental review of the application. All actions subject to this exhibit will undergo at a minimum the completion of Form RD 1940-22, "Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions." On the reverse of this form, the preparer will document as applicable (a) whether or not highly erodible land, wetland, or converted wetland is present, (b) if any exemption(s) applies, (c) the status of the applicant's eligibility for an Rural Development loan under this exhibit, and (d) any steps the applicant must take prior to loan approval to retain or regain its eligibility. If the application under review meets the definition of a Class I action as defined in §1940.311 of this subpart, the above documentation will be included as an exhibit to Form RD 1940-21, "Environmental Assessment for Class I Action." If the application meets the definition of a Class II action as defined in §1940.312 of this subpart, the required documentation will be included within the Class II assessment under the discussion of land use impacts. See paragraph IV. 4. of Exhibit H of this subpart. Once an applicant's farm property has undergone an environmental review covering the provisions of this exhibit, the County Supervisor reviewing a subsequent loan request need not require the applicant to obtain further site information from SCS as long as there is no change in the farm property to be affected or any applicable exemptions.

9. Borrowers' responsibilities. In addition to complying with any loan requirements resulting from Rural Development's implementation of this exhibit, a borrower must within ten days of receipt inform, in writing, the lender of a guaranteed loan and the County Supervisor for an insured loan of any ineligibility determinations received from other USDA agencies for violations of wetland or highly erodible land conservation restrictions. A borrower also has the responsibility to consult with the lender or County Supervisor, as applicable, if at any time the borrower is uncertain as to the borrower's duties and responsibilities under the loan provisions.

10. Rural Development and lender monitoring. As an element of insured loan servicing, to include development of a farm plan of operation for an upcoming crop year, scheduled farm visits, or other contacts with

borrowers, Rural Development staff will review and analyze the borrower's compliance with the provisions of this exhibit and any related loan requirements. If at anytime Rural Development becomes aware of the borrower's violation of these provisions or related loan requirements, the borrower will be informed that the affected loan(s) is in default. In addition to directly monitoring borrowers, the County Supervisor will receive and review the monitoring results of other USDA agencies having restrictions on wetland and highly erodible land conservation. Whenever these results indicate that a borrower may have violated the loan conditions, the County Supervisor will further analyze the matter and respond, as indicated in this paragraph, should a violation be determined. Lenders of Rural Development guaranteed loans must also monitor compliance as part of their servicing responsibilities.

11. Exemptions and determining their applicability. Following is a list of exemptions from the provisions of this exhibit as well as a description of how Rural Development will apply the exemptions to a proposed loan or activity under a loan. This list is intended to provide guidance on implementing the exemptions contained in Subparts A, B, and C of Part 12 of Subtitle A of Title 7 (Attachment 1 of this exhibit which is available in any Rural Development office) and does not modify or limit any of those exemptions.

a. Exemption from wetland and highly erodible land conservation.

Any loan which was closed prior to December 23, 1985, or any loan for which either Form RD 1940-1, "Request for Obligation of Funds," Form RD 449-14, "Conditional Commitment for Guarantee," or Form RD 1980-15, "Conditional Commitment for Contract of Guarantee (Line of Credit)," was executed prior to December 23, 1985, is exempt from the provisions of this exhibit.

b. Exemptions from highly erodible land conservation. The following exemptions exist from the restrictions on highly erodible land conservation. Whenever the County Supervisor is required to consult with another USDA agency in applying these exemptions, the County Supervisor's review of a properly completed Form SCS-CPA-26 will be considered adequate consultation if the needed information is presented on the form and no questions are raised by the Rural Development review.

(1) Any land upon which an agricultural commodity was planted before December 23, 1985, is exempt for that particular planting. The County Supervisor will consult with the appropriate local ASCS office in applying this exemption and

the ASCS determination is controlling for purposes of this exhibit.

(2) Any land planted with an agricultural commodity during a crop year beginning before December 23, 1985, is exempt for that particular planting. Rural Development will consult with the ASCS State Executive Director and the latter's position will be controlling in determining the date that the crop year began.

(3) Any land that during any one of the crop years of 1981 through 1985 was either (a) cultivated to produce an agricultural commodity, or (b) set aside, diverted or otherwise not cropped under a program administered by USDA to reduce production of an agricultural commodity, is exempt until the later of January 1, 1990, or the date that is two years after the date that the SCS has completed a soil survey of the land. To apply this exemption, the County Supervisor will consult with ASCS to determine from the latter's records whether or not the land was cultivated or set aside during the required period. The ASCS determination will be controlling. However, the date of completion for any SCS soil survey will be determined by SCS and used by the County Supervisor.

(4) Beginning on January 1, 1990, or two years after SCS has completed a soil survey for the land, whichever is later, and extending to January 1, 1995, any land that qualified for the exemption in subparagraph b (3) of this paragraph is further exempt if a person is actively applying to it a conservation plan that is based on the local SCS technical guide and properly approved by the appropriate SCS conservation district or the SCS. To apply this exemption as well as the exemptions specified in subparagraphs b (5), (6), (7), and (8) of this paragraph, the County Supervisor will consult with the appropriate local SCS office and the SCS position will be controlling.

(5) Highly erodible land within a conservation district and under a conservation system that has been approved by a conservation district after the district has determined that the conservation system is in conformity with technical standards set forth in the SCS technical guide for such district is exempt.

(6) Highly erodible land not within a conservation district but under a conservation system determined by SCS to be adequate

for the production of a specific agricultural commodity or commodities on any highly erodible land is exempt for the production of that commodity or commodities.

(7) Highly erodible land that is planted in reliance on a SCS determination that such land was not highly erodible is exempt. The exemption is lost, however, for any agricultural commodity planted after SCS determines that such land is highly erodible land.

(8) Highly erodible land planted or to be planted in an agricultural commodity that was planted in alfalfa during each of the 1981 to 1985 crop years in a crop rotation determined by SCS to be adequate for the protection of highly erodible land is exempt until June 1, 1988, from the requirement that the highly erodible land be planted in compliance with an approved conservation system.

- c. Exemptions from wetland conservation. The following exemptions exist from the restrictions on wetland conservation. Whenever the County Supervisor is required to consult with another USDA agency in applying these exemptions, the County Supervisor's review of a properly completed Form SCS-CPA-26 will be considered adequate consultation if the needed information is presented on the form and no questions are raised by the Rural Development review.

(1) A converted wetland is exempt if the conversion of such wetland was completed or commenced before December 23, 1985. The County Supervisor will consult with ASCS whose determination as to when conversion of a wetland commenced will be final for Rural Development purposes. Additionally, the County Supervisor will request evidence of ASCS's consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on each commenced determination reached for an Rural Development applicant or borrower. SCS will determine if a wetland is a converted wetland using the criteria contained in §12.32 of Subpart C of Part 12 of Subtitle A of Title 7 (Attachment 1 of this exhibit which is available in any Rural Development office). Under these criteria, however, a converted wetland determined to be exempt may not always remain exempt. The criteria include the provision that if crop production is abandoned on a converted wetland and the land again meets the wetland criteria, that land has reverted to a wetland and is no longer exempt. For purposes of Rural Development inventory farm properties, crop production will be considered to have been abandoned on a converted wetland either at the

earlier of the time the former owner so abandoned crop production or at the time Rural Development caused crop production to be abandoned after the property came into Rural Development's inventory. While in its inventory Rural Development will not lease the converted wetland for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity. Whether or not the wetland criteria are met on the abandoned land will be determined by SCS immediately before Rural Development's lease or sale of the property.

(2) The following are not considered to be a wetland under the provisions of this exhibit: (a) an artificial lake, pond, or wetland created by excavating or diking non-wetland to collect and retain water for purposes such as water for livestock, fish production, irrigation (including subsurface irrigation), a settling basin, cooling, rice production, or flood control; (b) a wet area created by a water delivery system, irrigation, irrigation system, or application of water for irrigation and (c) lands in Alaska identified by SCS as having a predominance of permafrost soils. The County Supervisor will consult with SCS regarding the application of this exemption as well as the remaining exemptions in this paragraph and the SCS position will be controlling.

(3) A wetland is exempt if the production of an agricultural commodity is possible (a) as a result of a natural condition, such as drought, and (b) without action by the producer that destroys a natural wetland characteristic. This exemption is lost whenever condition (a) or (b) no longer exists.

(4) Production of an agricultural commodity on a converted wetland is exempt if SCS determines that the effect of such action, individually and in connection with all other similar actions authorized in the area by USDA agencies, on the hydrological and biological aspect of wetland is minimal.

12. Appeals. Any applicant or borrower that is directly and adversely affected by an administrative decision made by Rural Development under this exhibit may appeal that decision under the provisions of Subpart B of Part 1900 of this chapter (see especially §1900.55).

13. Working with other USDA agencies.

a. Coordination. Rural Development State Directors will consult with SCS State Conservationists and ASCS State Executive Directors to assess and coordinate loan processing workloads in order to minimize delays in responding to Rural Development requests for site information or for the application of the exemptions contained in paragraph 11 of this exhibit. State Directors will ensure that

Rural Development field staff understand and can use the ASCS farm records system and will request ASCS training as needed. Also, management systems for sharing the information discussed in subparagraph b of this paragraph will be established.

b. Information exchange. Rural Development State Directors will develop with ASCS State Executive Directors a system for Rural Development to routinely receive notification whenever a violation has occurred under ASCS's wetland and highly erodible land conservation restrictions. Rural Development State Directors will in turn provide to any interested USDA agency the following information.

- (1) Upon request, copies of site information or exemption decisions made by SCS for Rural Development application reviews;
- (2) Upon request, copies of exemption decisions made by Rural Development; and
- (3) Notice of any violations of the provisions of this exhibit identified by Rural Development as a result of the monitoring activities identified in paragraph 10 of this exhibit.

14. Relationship of the requirements of this exhibit to the wetland protection requirements of Exhibit C of this subpart. The provisions of this exhibit determine (a) whether or not an applicant for a Farmer Program insured or guaranteed loan or a loan to an Indian Tribe or Tribal Corporation is eligible to be considered for such a loan, and (b) whether or not a recipient of such a loan is properly using the loan proceeds with respect to the requirements of this exhibit. On the other hand, the requirements in Exhibit C of this subpart regarding wetland protection cover all Rural Development loan and grant programs and address not questions of eligibility but the potential environmental impacts of a proposed action on a wetland and alternatives to the action. Consequently, those applications covered by this exhibit and which may be approved under this exhibit must also meet the requirements of Exhibit C of this subpart. For example, an application covered by this exhibit (M) that proposed to convert a wetland into a tree farm would be exempt from this exhibit (M) because trees are not an agricultural commodity, i.e., there is no conversion in order to produce an agricultural commodity. However, before Rural Development could make the loan, the requirements of Exhibit C of this subpart would have to be met to include an Rural Development finding that no practicable alternative exists to the conversion of the wetland. In summary, any proposed wetland conversion that is not prohibited by this exhibit (M) must next meet the requirements of Exhibit C of this subpart before Rural Development approval of the requested financial assistance could be provided.

Exhibit M, Attachment 1 not automated see manual