

Position Classification Standard for Soil Conservation Series, GS-0457

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SERIES DEFINITION

This series includes positions involving the performance of professional work in the conservation of soil, water, and related environmental resources to achieve sound land use. Conservation work requires knowledge of: (a) soils and crops; and (b) the pertinent elements of agronomy, engineering, hydrology, range conservation, biology, and forestry; and (c) skill in oral and written communication methods and techniques sufficient to impart these knowledges to selected client groups.

This standard supersedes and is to be substituted for the Position Classification Standard for the Soil Conservation Series, GS-0457, issued in February 1970.

SERIES COVERAGE

In recent years, certainly within the last ten, there has been an enormous expansion in the agricultural production of the United States. Serious, widespread, and often critical soil erosion losses have become evident. Although sound conservation measures are available for application, the circumstances leading to the erosion typically require renewed conservation efforts, modification of traditional practices, and introduction of new methods.

The emphasis on accelerated production has led to a dramatic increase in the use of chemicals on the land and consequent heightened pollution of river basins, including reservoirs, streams, and lakes. Landowners¹ with property near urban centers and confronted by high property taxes have often exploited the soil to maximize profits before finally selling their land to commercial developers. Where previously conservation measures such as strip cropping and contour farming were practiced, the use of large combines and plows has often eliminated many of these measures as they can be obstacles to the physical movement of machinery.

Underground water levels are dropping in several regions where extensive irrigation is practiced, natural recharge is inadequate and the consequent depleted water levels alter agricultural land usage. Surface waters become vital, even critical, to continued production. This leads to the construction of dams and reservoirs which in turn affect stream flows and wildlife habitats.

Soil and water conservation is dependent upon a harmonious relationship among environmental elements which include soil, water, plant, and animal resources. The soil conservationist advises landowners of agricultural, commercial, residential, or public land about planned treatment of their property and how treatment can preserve, improve, and protect soil capabilities. Typically, the soil conservationist provides assistance to land users through a conservation or water management district which is a local unit of government organized under State law or tribal organization. Soil conservationists plan terraces, ponds, and earthen dams; select cropping

¹ The term "landowner" as used in this standard is the owner of the land, renter, manager, or leaseholder eligible for soil and water conservation treatment practices.

methods to reduce erosion; design windbreaks for center pivot irrigation; develop pasture and hayland conservation plans; identify flood plains and aquifers for local government units; and develop conservation measures to reduce pollutants reaching waterways—sediment, pesticides, nutrients, organic wastes, salts, residue from saline soil and mine tailings. They persuade landowners to adopt conservation tillage cultivation methods which reduce soil loss due to wind erosion and reduce energy costs. Rural landowners are assisted in the management of habitats for a variety of wildlife including game, waterfowl, and fish, which also leads to the conservation of soil and the enhancement of water quality.

Some soil conservationists must be knowledgeable about the use of laser beams in the leveling of fields, the sowing of seeds by airplane, and continuous cropping methods. Many advise local groups on the development of watershed projects which leads to reduction of erosion, siltation, flooding, and the provision of recreational opportunities such as fishing, boating, and swimming.

Soil conservationists advise landowners and conservation organizations on the benefits of agricultural preservation legislation which limit local government taxing rates and eliminate ordinances which inhibit normal agricultural practices considered offensive to nonagricultural neighbors. The soil conservationist also gives advice and assistance to resource conservation districts concerning the development of standards for diking, flooding, draining, filling and dredging sloughs, wetlands, and marshes.

Many soil conservationists directly advise and support conservation district members as the latter deliberate, discuss, plan, and carry out soil and water conservation policies, programs, and local activities. Soil conservationists must be sensitive to the political makeup of the jurisdictions forming the area served and know the economic characteristics of the rural and/or urban region including principal financial institutions, agricultural market centers, and agrobusiness firms. Knowledge of cultural and ethnic values and practices of the population served including, where applicable, those of local Indian tribes, is a paramount occupational requisite.

EXCLUSIONS

Excluded from this series are the following classes of positions:

1. Positions requiring practical knowledge of soil, water, and environmental conservation methods and techniques, agricultural operations, and land use measures to advise landowners on the effectiveness of soil and water conservation practices. These positions are classified in the [Soil Conservation Technician Series, GS-0458](#).
2. Positions involving professional and scientific work in the investigation of soils, their management, and their adaptation for alternative uses are classified under the [Soil Science Series, GS-0470](#).

3. Positions involving the performance of professional basic and applied research on water and water resources including the collection, measurement, analysis, and interpretation of information on water resources, are classified in the [Hydrology Series, GS-1315](#).
4. Positions which involve the performance of professional and scientific work applying fundamental principles of the plant, soil, and related sciences to the improvement, production, management, and utilization of field crops, pasture and cover crops, turf and related types of vegetation. Such positions are classified in the [Agronomy Series, GS-0471](#). Positions requiring performance of scientific research, or professional work in the behavior, breeding, or culture of fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental trees and shrubs are classified in the [Horticulture Series, GS-0437](#).
5. Positions concerned with the development, production, conservation, management and utilization of forest resources where the emphasis of the work requires primarily a professional knowledge of forestry are classified in the [Forestry Series, GS-0460](#).
6. Positions concerned with conservation structures or systems which require knowledge of one or more of the agricultural sciences, including soil conservation, and full professional knowledge and competence in engineering are classified in the [Agricultural Engineering Series, GS-0890](#).
7. Positions which require primarily the application of professional knowledge and competence in range conservation or management. This work involves inventorying, analyzing, protecting, utilizing, and managing the natural resources of rangelands and related grazing lands; regulating grazing on public rangelands and assisting private and Indian landowners to plan and apply range conservation programs on rangelands. Such positions are classified in the [Rangeland Management Series, GS-0454](#).
8. Positions concerned with the development of plans that apply to communities such as urban or rural neighborhoods, villages, Indian reservations, cities, counties, regions, States or the entire Nation where the work requires professional knowledge and competence in community planning. These positions are classified in the [Community Planning Series, GS-0020](#).
9. Positions involving professional work in the planning and design of land areas, analysis of land characteristics, operational requirements, land use intensities, ground and water forms, plant forms, structures, roads, and walks to serve aesthetic, functional, economic and other interrelated purposes. These positions are classified in the [Landscape Architecture Series, GS-0807](#).

10. Positions which involve research or other professional scientific work in the field of botany, including plant taxonomy, morphology, ecology, and ethnobotany. Such work is classified in the [Botany Series, GS-0430](#).

TITLES

The basis title for positions in this series is Soil Conservationist.

(c)The title *Supervisory Soil Conservationist* is the title for positions which meet or exceed the criteria of the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#) for evaluation as a supervisor.

GRADING OF POSITIONS

The factor level descriptions are provided in this standard may be used to classify nonsupervisory soil conservation positions.

Excluded from the coverage of the grade level criteria in this standard are the following categories of positions:

- *Research* -- Research positions should be evaluated by reference to the [Research Grade Evaluation Guide](#). The guide may also be used to evaluate the research portion of mixed positions.

- *Education-Training* -- The [Grade Level Guide for Instructional Work](#) provides classification criteria for soil conservation employees engaged in education.

- *Supervision* -- Supervisory positions should be evaluated by reference to the [General Schedule Supervisory Guide](#).

Evaluation Notes

Positions should be evaluated on a factor-by-factor basis, using one or more of the comparable Office of Personnel Management benchmarks or by reference to the (c) Factor Level Description for the Soil Conservation Series. Only the designated point values may be used. More complete instructions for evaluating positions are contained in the [Introduction to the Position Classification Standards](#).

GRADE CONVERSION TABLE

Total points on all evaluation factors are converted to GS grade as follows:

GS Grade	Point Range
5	855-1100
6	1105-1350
7	1355-1600
8	1605-1850
9	1855-2100
10	2105-2350
11	2355-2750
12	2755-3150
13	3155-3600
14	3605-4050
15	4055- up

OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

Soil conservationists typically provide assistance to landowners through local conservation districts. Technical assistance and cost-sharing payments serve as the principal means for accomplishing conservation goals at the district level. Through the Agricultural Conservation Program and similar programs soil conservationists prepare conservation plans, and design and lay out soil and water conservation measures for eligible landowners. Under provisions of Public Law 83-566, Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, soil conservationists advise local government units on combining conservation measures to reduce erosion, siltation, and flooding and provide guidance on the planning of water control structures on upstream tributaries.

The Great Plains Conservation Program authorizes funds for long-term contracts with land users to protect and improve the national resources of the Great Plains which are vulnerable to recurring drought and wind erosion loss.

Under the Rural Clean Water Program soil conservationists cooperate with landowners in the preparation and application of water quality plans to control sources of water pollution.

Public Law 93-320 (Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program) serves as the basis for cost-sharing measures supporting the planning and installation of salinity control practices along the Colorado River.

Soil conservationists work closely with landowners to design and apply practices including land leveling, water control structures, sprinkler irrigation, ditch lining, and pipelines serving two or more farms.

Through the Federal Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972, technical assistance involving the design and installation of animal waste control systems is made available to landowners; communities receive assistance to develop methods for the recycling of organic wastes through use of agricultural land.

The Resource Conservation and Development Program approved by Congress in 1962 provides local government sponsors with aid to develop land and water resources for agricultural, municipal, or industrial use and for recreation and wildlife. Soil conservationists advise these sponsors on planning criteria and aid on implementing area conservation measures. Under Public Law 83-566, soil conservationists conduct river basin studies and participate in the development of water control measures for watershed projects.

Soil conservationists work with landowners to select plant materials which protect the soil from erosion damage and provide wildlife food and cover. The use of shrubbery also serves as an effective windbreak.

FACTOR LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS

FACTOR 1, KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED BY THE POSITION

This factor measures the nature, character, type and extent of the information or occupational facts which the soil conservationist must understand to perform acceptable, satisfactory work (e.g., steps, procedures, practices, rules, policies, theories, principles, and concepts). Factor 1 measures the nature and extent of the skills needed to apply required soil conservation knowledge. To be used as a basis for selecting a level under this factor, a knowledge must be required and applied.

There is a close relationship among the factor level descriptions as each ascending level requires greater soil conservation knowledge, or equivalent experience ranging from a knowledge of basic principles to mastery of the field. Soil conservation planning assignments and advisory work for governmental and civic organizations range from performing trainee tasks to multicomunity conservation projects.

The soil conservationist combines methods and skills of varied disciplines including agronomy, engineering, geology, biology, range conservation, forestry, and wildlife management to apply sound soil and water conservation measures.

This factor is closely related to Factor 4, Complexity. Consequently, the level selected under Factor 4 should be fully compatible with the level selected under this factor.

Level 1-5-750 Points

Knowledge of the fundamental theories, principles, concepts, and methodologies of the soil conservation profession, related biological and physical sciences, and pertinent engineering practices which provides a foundation for performance of developmental assignments and advancement to higher level work. Typically this knowledge is gained through a curriculum leading to a bachelor's degree in agriculture with a major in either soil conservation, agronomy, forestry, or a closely related agricultural field.

OR

Equivalent knowledge and skill.

Illustrations:

- Completes developmental tasks which include learning the following: the use of soil survey data, type of surveys, survey instruments, techniques of crop and pasture management, irrigation systems, site selection for conservation practices, installation of conservation measures including woodland improvement, preservation of wildlife habitats, and plant materials compatible with local environmental conditions.
- Observes soil conservationist develop comprehensive land use plans and assists by gathering crop history, drainage and field data, and preparing planning maps; subsequently prepares conservation plan where precedent conservation practices for similar land units are established and applied and no change in landowner objectives are involved.
- Works with experienced soil conservation technicians to evaluate onsite urban, rural, or wetland conservation needs, and applies land treatment measures and installation of erosion and water control structures.
- Searches files and other sources for information on soil and water conservation topics and prepares factual articles for local media; attends meetings of local community and rural groups to explain basic conservation practices to landowners.

Level 1-6 -- 950 Points

Knowledge of the principles and methodology of the soil conservation profession, related sciences, and pertinent engineering practices coupled with additional occupational experience or relevant graduate study sufficient to independently carry out recurring standard conservation planning assignments. The assignments are limited by conditions such as:

- The soil and water conservation planning work typically is accomplished by applying conventional and established methods and techniques involving stable

agricultural or community environment with limited technical changes to agency procedures anticipated.

- The performance of limited phases of local soil and water conservation programs that do not require significant adaptations or modifications of precedent or applicable guidelines; work typically is coordinated with the assignments of professional conservationists.

OR

Equivalent knowledge and skill.

Illustrations:

- Knowledge and skill sufficient to develop soil, water, and resource conservation plans for landowners, conservation groups, and units of local government involving a variety of soil patterns and conservation practices including contour farming, terraces, tillage, drainage, farm ponds, diversions, strip cropping, crop rotation, tree planting, and waterways.
- Knowledge and skill sufficient to advise sponsors of resource conservation and development organizations on sound soil and water conservation plans, conduct studies on land and water use and river basins, and recommend erosion and sediment controls and provide technical assistance related to planning of flood water retention storage, recreational facilities, and wildlife cover and habitat.
- Knowledge and skill sufficient to advise community and rural III organizations and groups on the development of conventional conservation plans involving proposed subdivision sites and needed erosion control measures, protection of urban slopes from surface water run-off damage, and interpretation of soil surveys for community owned land sites.
- Knowledge and skill sufficient to develop standard conservation farm plans for Indian and non-Indian land units.

Level 1-7-1250 points

Professional knowledge of a broad range of soil and water conservation principles and techniques and skill sufficient to analyze complex natural resource factors and interpret related social and economic conditions, and devise and implement cohesive, short- and long-term conservation plans or comprehensive, integrated resource development projects.

Knowledge of related physical and biological sciences including soils and plant science, hydrology, forestry, range conservation, and applicable elements of engineering sufficient to: (1) recommend optimum and alternative natural resource development strategies; or (2) design

and conduct feasibility studies for multipurpose conservation projects; or (3) formulate difficult major resource conservation cost-sharing proposals.

Knowledge of and skill in written and oral communication techniques sufficient to clearly explain and describe soil and water conservation issues, problems, and solutions to diverse groups of rural and community landowners, residents and agrobusiness representatives.

Knowledge and skill sufficient to logically organize and present appropriate data supporting comprehensive conservation measures, plans, and objectives.

Illustrations:

- Knowledge and skill sufficient to: (1) advise elected members of the local soil conservation board on proposed community land use and water control ordinances such as aquifer protection plans, long-range board goals, e.g., water supply system for wetland area, and annual priorities; (2) serve as an agency representative on agricultural conservation program committee where there are community landowners serving, and which develops conservation objectives and evaluates landowner requests for long-term, cost-sharing contractual assistance by determining compatibility with conservation goals including urban community interests.
- Knowledge and skill sufficient to provide soil and water conservation technical assistance of a nonengineering character to community sponsors of a watershed project requiring the construction of a floodwater retarding structure (e.g. earthen dam, 8 meters (25 feet) high and 762 meters (2,500 feet) in length), channel improvement work at three sites, culvert modifications and land treatment measures to control accelerated erosion and sediment loss; conservation plans to protect a residential area and State park from serious flooding damage and soil erosion.
- Knowledge and skill sufficient to: (1) serve as an advisory member of a resource conservation and development project formed to conserve, develop, and utilize complex natural resources; (2) provide conservation planning services to representatives of local government units, resource conservation districts, and area development associations; and (3) demonstrate integrated conservation methods including efficient irrigation and land leveling techniques, treatment of critical erosion and sediment problems, development of fish and wildlife resources, and improvement of recreational land use area.
- Knowledge and skill sufficient to advise numerous tribal governing units and conservation enterprises on the development and implementation of land use plans and soil and moisture programs where tribal representatives continuously change objectives, intense intertribal competition disrupts planned usage of water supplies, limited tribal government and individual landowner income severely

limit conservation alternatives, and the geographic area served consists of a large region.

OR

Equivalent knowledge and skill.

Level 1-8 -- 1550 Points.

Expert knowledge of soil conservation concepts, principles, laws, programs and precedents sufficient to develop, propose, and recommend substantial program innovations, significant program changes or alternate courses of critical management action, and skill in applying recent advances and research findings on land and water use planning to the resolution of controversial issues and in the development of soil and water conservation program criteria.

Comprehensive knowledge of natural resource planning methods, measures and techniques, and skill in extending and modifying these criteria to apply to unique, highly complex critical conservation problems. Comprehensive knowledge of program appraisal techniques, and the effective management of agency financial resources in a highly competitive budgetary environment to formulate new conservation priorities and multiyear objectives.

OR

Equivalent knowledge and skill.

Illustrations:

- Knowledge and skills sufficient to: (1) formulate appraisal and evaluation criteria applicable to agencywide soil conservation programs administered through State, area, and local offices, and design alternative approaches modifying or changing resource conservation priorities involving significant comprehensive data analysis, interpretation, and subsequent development of pilot project effort; (2) demonstrate favorable cost-benefit ratio of implementing preferred, high priority, soil erosion and flood drainage measures in a 13-State region and assess national implications of pilot project upon completion.
- Knowledge of the principles, laws, methods, and techniques of soil and water conservation sufficient to serve as a program expert advising principal program managers at the national and State office levels (ten State program directors) by interpreting new broad conservation and river salinity legislative requirements and developing policy guidelines for their implementation.
- Knowledge and skills sufficient to: (1) provide technical direction, guidance and coordination for a very broad, highly active soil and water conservation program administered through a number of subordinate soil conservationists assigned geographic units and a small specialized staff of engineers, agronomists, soil scientists, and administrative personnel; (2) resolve novel, complex conservation

problems in a changing rural-urban environment with continuing conflicts involving multiple units of government including two councils of government, well-organized consultative conservation groups, and large acreage of cropland or idle cropland classified in the moderately severe erosion category; and (3) organize, plan, and develop several watershed projects encompassing more than 2,000,000 acres and to develop multiple sponsor support, funding resources, and extensive conservation construction efforts.

Level 1-9 -- 1850 Points

Mastery of a range of specialized areas within the field of soil conservation sufficient to originate concepts and effect new developments applicable to emerging agency functions of national magnitude and with long-term purposes. Establishment of a function requires that the conservationist obtain senior executive management commitment of considerable agency human and financial resources. Typically the soil conservationist is recognized as a national or international expert in a specialized area or function within the field of soil conservation.

OR

Equivalent knowledge and skills.

Illustration:

- Knowledge of soil conservation and related sciences and skill sufficient to:
(1) serve as a national authority on conservation planning, developing technical and feasible program guidance which provides direction to each principal State conservationist and the national technical center directors; (2) recommend agency research priorities as member of a national committee designated by the agency director; (3) evaluate principal agency soil conservation and water quality programs and recommend long-range solutions including legislative alternatives to reconcile or resolve major operational issues; (4) prepare substantive material covering national soil conservation and water quality topics, achievements, and new program proposals for use by the agency director in making operative and policy changes; and (5) design interagency memorandums of understanding to achieve agreement with another Federal agency for mutual cooperation in the funding and implementation of national land and water conservation activities.

FACTOR 2, SUPERVISORY CONTROLS

"Supervisory controls" cover the nature and extent of direct or indirect controls exercised by the supervisor, the individual soil conservationist's responsibilities, and review of completed conservation assignments.

Controls are exercised by the supervisor, typically the State, area, or district conservationist, in the way assignments are made, instructions and suggestions are given, priorities and deadlines are set involving the application of national, State, area, and local requirements and objectives and boundaries (geographic and/or administrative) are defined.

Employee responsibility depends on the extent to which the soil conservationist is expected to develop the sequence and timing of various aspects of the work such as participation in preparing the annual plan of operations to modify or recommend modification of instructions, e.g., State or area office technical guidance, and to participate in establishing priorities and defining objectives including recommendation of program goals at the request of elected conservation bodies.

The degree of review of the completed soil conservation assignment, plan, project, or study depends upon the nature and extent of the review, e.g., close and details review of each phase of the assignment; spot check of finished work for accuracy, and review only for adherence to policy.

Level 2-1 -- 25 points

Specific assignments are made by the supervisor or higher grade soil conservationist who maintains close control and guidance over the work. Clear, specific and complete instructions accompany the assignment.

The soil conservationist carries out assigned duties as instructed conferring with the supervisor when the original instructions are found to be inadequate.

The conservation assignment is checked either in progress or when completed for accuracy, adequacy, and adherence to oral and written instructions and agency procedures.

Level 2-2 -- 125 Points

The supervisor, who typically is an area or district soil conservationist, gives the soil conservationist tasks, assignments, or responsibilities and specifies limitations, quality and quantities expected, deadlines and priority of work efforts.

The soil conservationist initiates efforts to perform soil and water conservation activities and is provided additional guidance to resolve problems and unanticipated complications. Work

assignments are designed to provide the employee experience in the full range of soil conservation work assigned the local organization.

The completed conservation work is reviewed to determine the adequacy of the methods, techniques, and practices applied, their sequence and interrelationships, attainment of operational objectives, and compliance with agency technical standards.

Level 2-3-275 Points

The supervisor or higher grade soil conservationist makes assignments to the employee by describing and classifying their objectives, priority levels, and completion period.

The soil conservationist prepares and carries out successive planning and installation procedures to effect a conservation action, applying agency technical criteria, practices, and previous experience to achieve sound land and water use management. Conservation assignments, which involve situations or circumstances where precedent actions are not clear or applicable, are discussed with the supervisor and agency specialists to devise a course of action.

Completed soil conservation and water improvement projects, plans, measures or practices are evaluated for technical soundness, consistency with agency requirements, and conformity with conservation goals.

Level 2-4 -- 450 Points

The supervisor formulates and sets prevailing conservation objectives and human, financial and administrative resources available to accomplish the work. Time constraints, annual plan of operation, and State, area or district conservation program elements are developed through employee-supervisor consultations.

The soil conservationist plans and completes the assigned work devising effective actions or responses which resolve barriers or obstacles to implementation of sound conservation measures. The work is coordinated with agency specialists and community representatives. Resourcefulness is demonstrated by the soil conservationist when explaining conservation programs including their scope, anticipated impact, and constraints.

The soil conservationist may design the approach to be applied to the assignment such as developing specific criteria to control land usage in a severely eroded area. During the course of the work, the soil conservationist advises the supervisor of conservation planning progress for a project or assigned land units and of potential controversies especially those involving significant groups of organized landowners and/or area development sponsors.

Completed work is reviewed by the supervisor and periodically by higher level agency teams for effectiveness in meeting formal state and local objectives and compatibility with criteria set by other government and community organizations where the agency has agreed to participate in mutual conservation efforts.

Level 2-5 -- 650 Points

The supervisor provides general information concerning agency conservation policy and the administrative framework which serve as the principal basis for management control.

The soil conservationist: (1) exercises initiative and provides leadership in the planning, coordinating, and administering of broad agency functions, projects or studies; and (2) must be sensitive to current trends, national study results, and proposed, substantive program changes in the course of exercising technical responsibilities.

A soil conservationist working at this level provides authoritative far-reaching technical expertise influencing the implementation of key agency programs. Work results are normally accepted without significant change. When work is reviewed, attention is typically focused on achievement of program objectives, effect of advice, or contribution to the field of soil conservation.

FACTOR 3, GUIDELINES

This factor covers the nature of guidelines and the judgment needed to apply them. As soil conservation assignments vary in the specificity, applicability, and availability of guidelines, the constraints and judgmental demands placed upon employees also are dependent upon occupational circumstances.

The existence of specific technical specifications, instructions, handbooks, procedures, and agency policy statements may constrain the possibility of making or recommending decisions or course of conservation actions. However, in some cases where there is an absence of technical criteria or procedures or there are only broad objectives, considerable judgment and discretion may be exercised by the soil conservationist in researching soil and water conservation literature and developing new methods, techniques, and steps to resolve soil erosion and water control problems.

Guidelines should not be confused with or substituted for the knowledge and skills described under Factor 1, Knowledge Required by the Position. For purposes of this factor, guidelines refer to legislation, standard or established guides, precedents, methods, procedures, and techniques including but not limited to:

- Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, Public Law 74-46, 49 Stat. 163, 16 U.S.C. 590, April 27, 1935, regarding the implementation of soil and water conservation programs through conservation districts;
- Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954, Public Law 83-566, 68 Stat. 666, 16 U.S.C. 1001, August 4, 1954, concerning watershed protection and flood prevention projects and river basin investigations;

- Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, Public Law 84-1021, 70 Stat. 1115, 16 U.S.C., August 7, 1956. (Great Plains Conservation Program);
- Agriculture, Rural Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations, Fiscal Year 1980, 93 Stat. 835, November 9, 1979, regarding water quality improvement practices and control of contributing pollution sources;
- Agency conservation planning manual;
- Endangered Species Act of 1973;
- Agency program manuals;
- State government soil and water conservation statutes, county and local government ordinances and codes, tribal constitutions;
- Annual plans of operations;
- Agency engineering handbook applicable to soil and water conservation plans and practices;
- Agency cost-sharing criteria for agricultural conservation, rural clean water, and water bank programs;
- Agency soil surveys;
- Standard textbooks, professional literature, and reference files on soil and water conservation plans and projects.

Level 3-1 -- 25 Points

Specific written and oral guidelines directly covering soil and water conservation assignments are applicable and immediately available. The soil conservationist performs assigned work in strict conformity to guidelines; where an exception may be operationally necessary, reference to the supervisor must be made for authority to deviate from original procedures.

Level 3-2 -- 125 Points

Applicable guidelines include local annual plans of operations, soil survey data, hydraulic tables, engineering handbooks, agency cost-sharing criteria, survey instructions, and watershed and resource conservation and development plans.

The soil conservationist exercises limited judgment at this level in selecting a conservation planning technique from among several alternatives and occasionally makes minor adjustments to an established farm plan with uncomplicated soil, land, and water resource features.

Where conservation guidelines are not directly applicable, the soil conservationist confers with a higher grade specialist or supervisor.

Level 3-3 -- 275 Points

The soil conservationist typically refers to State and area annual operating plans and long-range conservation goals, agency-developed national and State technical guides and handbooks, State and local laws, and studies published by agricultural colleges and universities.

The soil conservationist frequently interprets, selects, and adjusts agency program criteria, standards and specifications, when developing watershed, resource conservation and development, or water control plans. Often conservation objectives, agronomy conditions, soil characteristics, and financial resources require in-depth analyses where guidelines are only partially applicable. In most work situations, the soil conservationist evaluates the assembled data and alternatives and recommends a specific conservation action.

Level 3-4 -- 450 Points

The guidelines usually are general in nature and only partially applicable to soil conservation program issues, and far-reaching planning efforts that generally involve significant resource conservation management projects or activities. Available criteria are often inadequate for resolving contested, difficult questions such as the optimum course of planning for a resource conservation project in an urban-rural area experiencing rapid population growth and property use changes and where there are a number of community sponsors with different conservation objectives.

The soil conservationist must use initiative and experienced judgment gained through work related problem solving operations to modify accepted conservation methods and practices and develop techniques appropriate for the successful treatment of the soil and/or water resource deficiencies encountered.

Level 3-5 -- 650 Points

At this level, firm guidance, precedents, and institutional norms are frequently absent. Basic legislation and related history, policy statements by top management, and research findings published by public and private groups provide an operative framework of reference. As a technical authority, the soil conservationist exercises considerable discretion and judgment to develop and shape program guidance, criteria, and directives derived from the evaluations of a broad array of comprehensive studies, evaluation projections, data, and conclusions.

FACTOR 4, COMPLEXITY

This factor covers the nature, number, variety, and intricacy of tasks, steps, processes, or methods in the work performed; the difficulty in identifying what needs to be done; and the difficulty and originality involved in performing the work.

The evaluation of soil conservation work under this factor requires analysis of a number of interrelated elements, including the objectives of local, State and Federal governmental units, physical land characteristics, availability of financial resources, population distribution between rural and urban areas, and new agricultural techniques, equipment, and plant materials. Specifically, the soil conservationist must assess the capability and deficiencies of individual land units with the capability and objectives of the landowner; in some cases involving governmental units, the total physical, social, and economic resources of a geographic area must be considered in the development of a comprehensive land use plan.

Level 4-2 -- 75 Points

Assignments consist of duties which provide the soil conservationist with experience in the principal occupational methods, techniques, and practices, including the planning and application of soil and water conservation measures. Work typically involves obtaining physical land data, preparing planning maps, observing members of soil and water conservation governmental units deliberate on conservation policies, and composing factual news articles.

The duties performed supplement previous professional academic studies or equivalent experience and, although similar to practical resource conservation work, are designed to lead to more complex professional assignments. Problems are readily resolved by application of basic soil conservation concepts, methods, and established practices.

Level 4-3 -- 150 Points

At this level, the soil conservationist performs resource planning assignments involving rural and urban landowners and which require the interpretation of soil, water, and other environmental data to develop sound land use efforts. Different conservation methods, measures, and practices are applied to a variety of land units that are affected by soil erosion and frequently in need of improved water management.

The soil conservationist considers the advantages, disadvantages, and interrelationships of alternative conservation techniques and advises landowners on courses of action to be effected through conservation plans for lands used for agricultural, recreational, commercial, residential, or community purposes.

Assignments typically are performed by applying sound soil conservation methods and techniques which may be adapted by the soil conservationist to local conditions.

Level 4-4 -- 225 Points

Conservation assignments usually involve developing a broad variety of soil and water conservation plans, projects, and measures for a diversified group of landowners including State and county governments, townships, and autonomous districts such as the irrigation, wetland, resource conservation, watershed, drainage, and flood prevention units of local government.

The soil conservationist assesses proposed resource development plans characterized by a number of complications such as insufficient financial basis, conflicting viewpoints among sponsors, incompatible land treatment measures, unusual soil conditions, varied area land ownership pattern-small-medium-large tracts with widely different use objectives, inadequate ground-water data, need to refine standard conservation planning measures, zoning impediments, expanding population, lack of coordination among conservation development staffs or incomplete agricultural waste management guidelines for pollution control measures.

The soil conservationist independently evaluates objectives for natural resource conservation projects or designated conservation jurisdiction, analyzes comprehensive physical, social, and economic data and determines appropriate criteria, standards, and techniques applicable to the assignment. Typically, conservation methods and measures are extended or skillfully adjusted facilitating accomplishment of sound resource development under diverse environmental and/or community circumstances.

Level 4-5 -- 325 Points

Assignments are varied and diverse at this level and involve broad, different soil conservation activities or subject matter. The soil conservationist performs substantive review and analysis of proposed or current policies or measures affecting an extensive geographic area, critical program, or densely populated zone; formulates the study framework to systematically gather resource data for the evaluation of novel or untested conservation approaches or methods, and, as appropriate, recommends alternative, courses of action.

Typically, the soil conservationist is considered an expert capable of resolving sensitive problems or issues characterized by conflicting demands on area natural resources, multiple political jurisdictions with competing conservation objectives, and continuous special study efforts requiring substantial compromises with conservation criteria.

The soil conservationist applies vigorous, imaginative efforts to develop new planning solutions or criteria involving land and water resources; anticipates long-term conservation issues and devises solutions resolving controversial, opposing viewpoints sustained by established, highly motivated interest groups.

Level 4-6 -- 450 Points

Work at this level typically consists of performing broad functional assignments of an emerging, intensive nature where paramount soil and water conservation issues are largely undefined and involve significant problems with far-reaching, future implications.

Decision making is frequently a prolonged, difficult, analytical process with few precedents available and may require concurrent supporting efforts by natural resource conservation experts within and outside the agency.

The soil conservationist completes courses of action which provide the basis for and influence the administration of pilot conservation projects and programs which often change previous agency operating objectives.

FACTOR 5, SCOPE AND EFFECT

This factor covers the relationship between the nature of the soil conservation work, i.e., the purpose, breadth, and depth of the assignment, and the effect of work products including soil conservation plans and water control measures or services within the organization and outside public and private bodies such as local and State units of government, civic groups, and academic centers.

Effect measures such as things as whether or not the work output facilitates the work of others, provides timely services of a personal nature, or impacts on the adequacy of research conclusions. The concept of effect alone does not provide sufficient information to properly understand and evaluate the impact of the position. The scope of the work completes the picture allowing consistent evaluations.

Only the effect of properly performed work is to be considered.

Factor 5-1 -- 25 Points

The purpose of the developmental assignments performed is to provide the inexperienced soil conservationist with opportunities to plan the development and conservation of soil and water resources through specific limited tasks. These assignments are structured to give the trainee soil conservationist progressive experience and include tasks involving local government operations and land and water use laws that are designed to prepare the individual for more responsible duties.

The effect of the work is to facilitate the efforts of other soil conservationists in the immediate organizational unit.

Level 5-2 -- 75 Points

The purpose of the work is to prepare conservation plans for individual land units where objectives are specific, physical land features are common to the area and responsive to established conservation measures, and to provide the soil conservationist with advanced developmental assignments covering the principal soil conservation techniques and practices.

Work efforts contribute to the efficient performance of conservation planning and related application efforts by higher grade conservationists.

Level 5-3 -- 150 Points

The purpose of the work, which typically consists of professional and administrative assignments, is to advise and motivate individuals and organized groups of landowners and representatives of governmental agencies in the evaluation of conventional soil erosion problems, water quality and control conditions, and different local government jurisdictional roles. The soil conservationist prepares land and water treatment plans, measures, and techniques and recommends their adoption.

The work performed by the soil conservationist affects the adequacy of conservation program activities in a rural and/or urban area, the attainment of annual plan of operation objectives, and agency credibility among program participants.

Level 5-4 -- 225 Points

The purpose of the work is to develop and interpret natural resource planning criteria including soil and water conservation techniques and specifications applicable to: (1) complex resource conservation development and/or watershed projects involving numerous community and State government representatives with divergent and frequently opposing conservation interests and objectives; and (2) land and/or water resources involving competing landowners' objectives (e.g., agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, or recreational use).

The work affects the accomplishment of significant soil and water conservation in an economically important sector of the State or a large geographic zone and contributes to the efficient operation of other government agencies.

Level 5-5 -- 325 Points

Soil conservationists at this level typically resolve critical resource conservation problems, often involving multiple related disciplines, develop new standards, guidance and approaches, and provide expert advice to program managers covering a broad range of soil and water conservation activities.

Work results affect the conclusions or actions of other experts and influence agency administration of a major conservation program.

Level 5-6 -- 450 Points

The purpose of the work is to plan, organize, develop, and administer conservation programs which are usually agencywide in scope and importance. At this level the work of the soil conservationist is typically directly related to the achievement of a principal agency mission (through a national-regional-state and community organizational structure) and may contribute to the development of legislation for national soil and water conservation programs or amendments.

The decisions and recommendations of the soil conservationist have a long-range effect on the administration of key agency programs and on the goals of major public; and private conservation organizations.

FACTOR 6, PERSONAL CONTACTS

This factor includes face-to-face contacts and telephone and radio dialogue with persons not in the supervisory chain. (NOTE: Personal contacts with supervisors are covered under Factor 2, Supervisory Controls.) Levels described under this factor are based on what is required to make the initial contact, the difficulty of communicating with those contacted, and the setting in which the contact takes place (e.g., the degree to which the soil conservationist and those contacted recognize their relative roles and authorities).

Above the lowest levels, points should be credited under this factor only for contacts which are essential for successful performance of the work and which have a demonstrable impact on the difficulty and responsibility of the work performed.

The relationship of Factors 6 and 7 presumes that the same contacts will be evaluated for both factors. Therefore, use the personal contacts which serve as the basis for the level selected for Factor 7 as the basis for selecting a level for Factor 6.

Level 6-1 -- 10 Points

The personal contacts are with soil conservation technicians and other soil conservationists in the immediate office and/or with the public in a controlled situation (e.g., providing conservation literature to a visitor).

Level 6-2 -- 25 Points

Personal contacts are with employees in the same agency, outside the immediate organization, such as soil scientists, civil engineers, range conservationists, agronomists, biologists, foresters, and supporting technicians.

Contacts are also made with individual landowners, representatives of commercial companies, members of civic groups, and students.

These contacts generally are routine and within a structured setting.

Level 6-3 -- 60 Points

Contacts are nonroutine and made with professional and administrative personnel outside the agency (e.g., members of conservation boards, representatives of tribal bodies, Federal, State, county, and municipal agencies). Contacts also include representatives of the press, radio, and television, regional consumer groups, contractors, university professors, and regional environmental groups.

Level 6-4 -- 110 Points

Personal contacts are with senior executive officials at the national or international levels including Members of Congress and their key staff, top officials of the Office of Management and Budget and other Federal agencies, national officers of conservation and environmental associations, State governors, mayors of large cities, and nationally recognized media reporters, announcers, or commentators.

FACTOR 7, PURPOSE OF CONTACTS

The purpose of personal contacts ranges from factual exchange of information to situations involving significant or controversial issues and differing conservation viewpoints, goals or objectives. The personal contacts which serve as the basis for the level selected for this factor must be the same as the contacts which are the basis for the level selected for Factor 6.

Level 7-1 -- 20 Points

Contacts are for the purpose of obtaining and exchanging factual information related to performance of soil and water conservation assignments such as gathering field data for the preparation of a farm conservation plan. This level is generally associated with trainee and developmental soil conservation positions.

Level 7-2 -- 50 Points

The purpose of the contacts is to advise on the development of soil and water conservation measures, plan and coordinate the implementation of a range of technical practices, and recommend alternative conservation solutions. Individuals and community and government representatives contacted at this level are pursuing mutual goals and generally are cooperative.

Level 7-3 -- 120 Points

The purpose of the contacts is to persuade influence and encourage unconvinced, indecisive individuals and organizations to agree upon conservation goals and objectives. The soil conservationist overcomes initial reluctance by emphasizing technical advantages and gains to be accomplished through adoption of a specific conservation course of action. At this level, the

soil conservationist uses tact and diplomacy to achieve a working consensus among parties who have dissimilar opinions.

Level 7-4 -- 220 Points

Soil conservationists at this level negotiate formal or working agreements involving significant, sensitive issues of a far-reaching nature. Through conferences, presentations and meetings the employee develops compromises or alternatives on controversial soil and water conservation legislation, program changes, or critical problem areas requiring the subordination of diverse, competing organizational priorities by parties strongly advocating opposite viewpoints.

FACTOR 8, PHYSICAL DEMANDS

The "Physical Demands" factor covers the requirements and physical demands placed on the soil conservationist by the work assignment. This includes physical characteristics and abilities (e.g., specific agility and dexterity requirements) and the physical exertion involved in the work (e.g., climbing, lifting, pushing, balancing, stooping, kneeling, crouching, crawling, or reaching). To some extent the frequency or intensity of physical exertion must also be considered (e.g., a job requiring prolonged standing involves more physical exertion than a job requiring intermittent standing).

NOTE: Regulations governing pay for irregular or intermittent duty involving unusual physical hardships or hazard are in subpart I of part 550 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

Level 8-1 -- 5 Points

The work is sedentary and usually performed while the soil conservationist is seated at a desk. There is some walking and travel to attend meetings away from the worksite.

Level 8-2 -- 20 Points

The work requires regular and recurring physical exertion related to conservation work requiring walking on rough terrain, jumping ditches and furrows, or climbing steep banks.

FACTOR 9, WORK ENVIRONMENT

The "Work Environment" factor considers the risk and discomfort in the soil conservationist's physical surroundings or the nature of the work assigned and the safety regulations required. Although the use of safety and occupational health precautions can practically eliminate a certain danger or discomfort, such situations typically place additional demands upon the employee in carrying out safety and occupational health regulations and techniques. **NOTE:** Regulations governing pay for irregular or intermittent duty involving physical hardship or hazard are in subpart I of part 550 of title 5, Code of Federal Regulations.

Level 9-1 -- 5 Points

The work is usually performed in an office environment requiring common sense precautions typical of this setting.

Level 9-2 -- 20 Points

The work involves regular and recurrent exposure to operating agricultural equipment or earth moving operations, adverse weather such as snow and icy field conditions, and unimproved roads. Protective equipment is necessary on construction sites.