



Natural Resources Conservation Service Accomplishments Report FY 2002



The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

What We Do

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is the primary Federal agency that works with private landowners to help them protect their natural resources. The agency emphasizes voluntary, science-based conservation technical assistance; partnerships; incentive-based programs; and cooperative problem solving at the community level. The strength of NRCS is its workforce—some 12,000 individuals working side by side with many partners to help set conservation goals, work with people on the land, and provide services. These partners include conservation districts, state conservation agencies, resource conservation and development councils, and tribes. Local conservation districts—about 3,000 in all—are an important part of the conservation delivery system that is critical to natural resource accomplishments that benefit all Americans.

Strategic Goals

In fiscal year 2002, the agency continued its commitment to help individuals, communities, units of government, and tribes make

decisions about managing their lands and resources for productivity and long-term use. NRCS helped rural and urban communities curb erosion, conserve and protect water, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, and address other natural resource issues. Conservation accomplishments were achieved under four strategic goals:

- **Enhance natural resource productivity** to enable a strong agricultural and natural resource sector.
- **Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use** to ensure a high-quality environment.
- **Reduce risks from drought and flooding** to protect individual and community health and safety.
- **Deliver high-quality services to the public** to enable natural resource stewardship.

NRCS identified objectives and performance measurements for each goal. The work of the agency is accomplished through conservation planning and application, using technical assistance and financial incentives.

What We Achieved

Highlights of the accomplishments for fiscal year 2002 illustrate that conservation is the work of many—no one person or group can do it alone. The Nation's conservation efforts on private land ensure a healthy and productive land—sustaining food and fiber production, protecting watersheds and natural systems, enhancing the environment, and improving urban and rural landscapes.

Goal 1: Enhance natural resource productivity.

NRCS identified four objectives to address resource concerns that challenge continued productivity of privately owned agricultural lands:

—Maintain, restore, and enhance cropland productivity.

—Maintain, restore, and enhance irrigated land.

—Maintain, restore, and enhance grazing land productivity.

—Maintain, restore, and enhance forest land productivity.

Accomplishments:

NRCS helped landowners—

- Apply resource management systems on 9.6 million acres of cropland.
- Apply resource management systems on 12.9 million acres of grazing land.
- Apply erosion control measures on 7.1 million acres of cultivated cropland resulting in reducing soil loss by 68.3 million tons.
- Improve irrigation water management on 1.9 million acres and conserved 6.1 million acre-inches of water.



Conservation systems are designed to meet the needs of the land and landowners.

- Apply forest stand improvement (weeding and thinning) on 397,000 acres.
- Establish trees and shrubs on 483,000 acres.

Goal 2: Reduce unintended adverse effects of natural resource development and use.

NRCS identified five objectives to address the most pressing concerns affecting environmental quality of rural and urban landscapes:

—Protect farmland from conversion to nonagricultural uses.

—Promote sound urban and rural community development.

—Protect water and air resources from agricultural nonpoint sources of impairment.

—Enhance animal feeding operations to protect the environment.

—Maintain, restore, or enhance wetland ecosystems and fish and wildlife habitat.

Accomplishments:

- Helped landowners put conservation buffers on 581,000 acres to protect water quality and provide wildlife habitat.
- Created, restored, or enhanced wetlands on 376,000 acres.
- Helped landowners apply wildlife habitat management as a primary or secondary purpose on 12.5 million acres.
- Developed 5,200 comprehensive nutrient management plans and applied 3,350 plans.
- Helped agricultural producers apply nutrient management on 5.5 million acres.

- Helped producers apply pest management on 5.2 million acres.
- Entered into 89 cooperative agreements with state and local governments and nongovernmental organizations to protect an estimated 66,000 acres of farmland from conversion to nonagricultural uses through the Farmland Protection Program.
- Applied erosion control measures on 92,000 acres of urban and built-up land.
- Completed 4,145 resource conservation and development (RC&D) projects that improve the quality of life—including social, economic, and environmental concerns—in local communities across the Nation.

Goal 3: Reduce risks from drought and flooding.

NRCS identified two objectives to help landowners and land managers apply conservation systems to address the impacts of water shortages and flooding.

—Protect upstream watersheds from flood risk.

—Protect watersheds from the effects of chronic water shortages and risks from drought.

Accomplishments:

- Issued 11,411 water supply forecasts for Federal, state, and local water resource planning purposes to 157,000 water users and managers.
- Completed construction on 79 flood protection structures.
- Prepared 18 watershed infrastructure rehabilitation plans and rehabilitated 5 flood prevention structures.
- Applied conservation systems to address flooding concerns on 4.5 million acres.
- Applied conservation systems to address water supply concerns on 8.5 million acres.



Above and right: Sound resource information and technology enable producers to make wise land use decisions.



Goal 4: Deliver high quality services to the public.

NRCS identified three objectives to address the delivery of conservation services that lead to good natural resource stewardship.

—Deliver services fairly and equitably.

—Strengthen the conservation delivery system.

—Ensure timely, science-based information and technologies.

Accomplishments:

- Provided assistance to more than 3.1 million farmers, ranchers, and other customers.
- Provided assistance to a total of 265,000 female and minority customers.



- Established a field office on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in Minnesota.
- Mapped or updated 22.6 million acres of soils.
- Provided 288 soil surveys in digital format.
- Released 29 new conservation plants for commercial or private use and evaluated 444 plant materials studies.
- Provided data to 1.8 million customers through the PLANTS database website.
- Achieved a record year for the Earth Team volunteer program with more than one million hours being donated, a 19 percent increase in the number of volunteers, a 17 percent increase in the number of volunteer hours and a 5 percent increase in the number of NRCS offices using volunteers.

Left: Snow survey and water supply forecasting are valuable tools for reducing the damage from floods and drought.

Right: NRCS provides conservation assistance nationwide to a diverse population in rural and urban communities.

More Information

Additional information on the agency's programs and services can be found on the Web at: www.nrcs.usda.gov. Specific information on NRCS' Integrated Accountability System that brings together information about strategic planning, cost accounting, workforce analysis, performance plans, and other factors is on the Web at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/spa/accountabilityindex.html.

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