

# Fiscal Year 2007 Accomplishments

## Helping People Help the Land

NRCS achieves its mission, "Helping People Help the Land," through the delivery of technical and financial assistance. The primary services provided by NRCS field office staffs are assistance in developing conservation plans and in applying and maintaining the conservation practices called for in those plans. NRCS also is responsible for providing science-based resource data, technical tools, and information needed for good stewardship.

Comprehensive conservation plans are the first step in managing land sustainably. In fiscal year (FY) 2007, NRCS helped people develop conservation plans for 45.4 million acres of land.

In FY 2007, NRCS helped producers and other land managers implement conservation practices and management on 47.4 million acres. These practices will result in maintaining and enhancing soil quality, water quality, water management and conservation, wildlife habitat, and air quality.

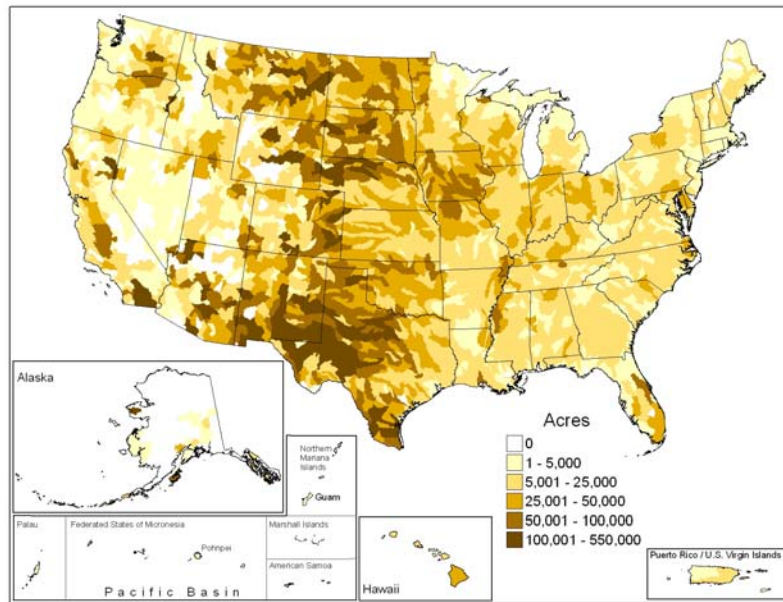


Figure 1. Land where NRCS helped people develop or revise conservation plans in FY 2007.

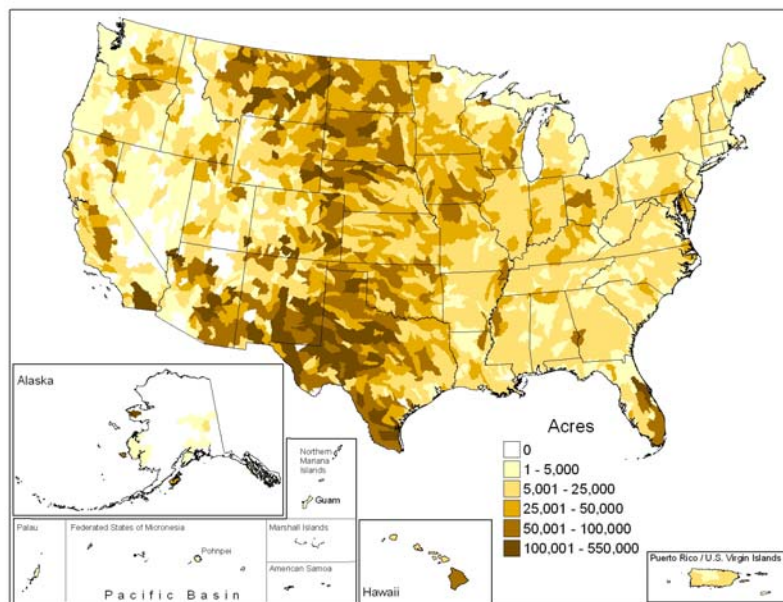


Figure 2. Land where NRCS helped people implement conservation practices in FY 2007.

**Vision:  
Productive Lands –  
Healthy Environment**

The landscape that Americans want provides both a productive agricultural sector and a high quality environment. Productive use of privately owned cropland, rangeland, pastureland, and forest land is essential to the Nation’s security and the health and well-being of its citizens. These lands form the foundation of a substantial and vibrant agricultural economy that provides food, fiber, forest products, and energy for the Nation. They also produce environmental benefits that people need – clean and abundant water, clean air and healthy ecosystems.

**Mission Goals**

NRCS mission goals articulate in broad terms the benefits the Nation expects the Agency’s activities and programs to help people achieve:

- High quality, productive soils
- Clean and abundant water
- Healthy plant and animal communities

In addition to meeting measurable targets related to these goals, NRCS is also developing technical tools and helping people work toward related concerns:

- Clean air
- Adequate energy supply
- Preservation of working farms and ranches

**NRCS Products and Services**

NRCS provides products and services to ensure a healthy and productive land that sustains food and fiber production, protects watersheds and natural systems, enhances the environment, and improves urban and rural landscapes. NRCS has five business lines: conservation planning and technical consultation, conservation implementation, natural resource inventory and assessment, natural resource technology transfer, and financial assistance. Figure 3 below shows the staff time devoted to each business line in FY 2007. The products and services delivered through these business lines are essential to resource managers seeking to be good stewards of natural resources. The following pages show key accomplishments in each business line in FY 2007.

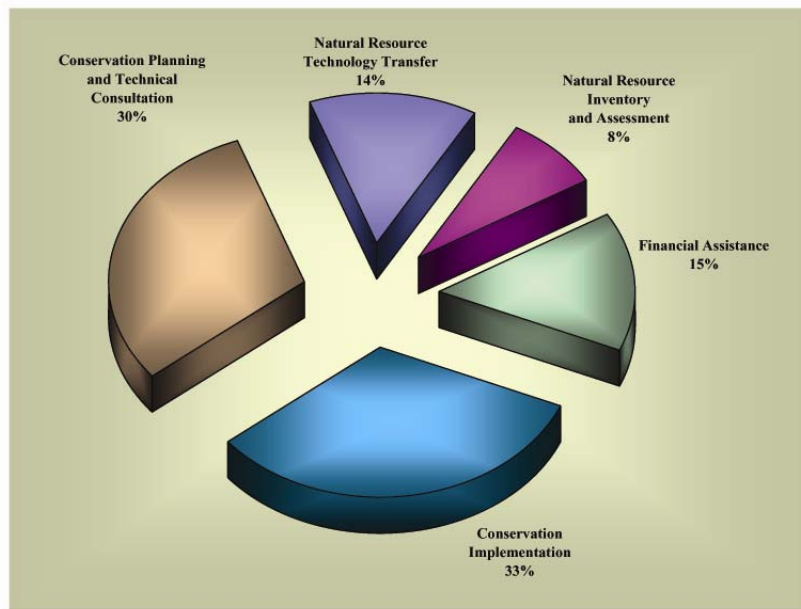


Figure 3. NRCS staff time in FY 2007, by agency business line.

Source: NRCS CIS report 1.3.

Time for each business line includes necessary administrative and management activities to support the front line employees as well as time spent directly in producing and delivering the products and services included in the line.

## Conservation Implementation

NRCS helps customers install conservation practices and systems on their land that meet established technical standards and specifications and result in improved treatment of natural resources. In FY 2007, NRCS helped producers and others implement practices to make progress toward each of the agency's three foundation mission goals.

### Goal: High Quality, Productive Soils

- Assisted land users in applying conservation practices on 15.9 million acres of cropland. Nearly 14.1 million acres of the cropland acres were treated to improve soil quality.

### Goal: Clean and Abundant Water

- Assisted livestock producers with the completion of all needed practices on more than 4,400 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMP).
- Assisted producers in applying conservation practices to improve water quality on more than 32.4 million acres.
- Assisted producers in conserving water and improving irrigation efficiency on more than 2 million acres.
- Rehabilitated or removed 13 dams to ensure stability of the structure and reduce risk posed by aging infrastructure.
- Completed 564 long-term contracts (all measures installed) for water quality improvement.

### Goal: Healthy Plant and Animal Communities

- Assisted land users in applying conservation practices on 28.9 million acres of grazing and forest land to improve the resource base.
- Assisted land users with wildlife management practices resulting in improved fish and wildlife habitat quality on more than 14 million acres.
- Assisted in creating, restoring or enhancing 285,487 wetland acres.

### Key Performance Measures

Table 1 shows measures on which NRCS reports quarterly as part of the USDA response to the President's initiative on budget and performance integration. The targets shown were set in the President's budget for FY 2007. After the Continuing Appropriations Resolution for 2007 was passed, agency leadership adjusted the targets to reflect funding availability. Performance is shown for the major programs; additional acres were treated with other programs.

Table 1: Performance on key measures, FY 2005-2007

Goal	Performance Measure	Program	FY 2005 Actual	FY 2006 Actual	FY 2007 Target	FY 2007 Actual
High Quality, Productive Soils	Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality, million acres	CTA	6.0	6.4	6.0	7.3
		EQIP	2.2	3.4	5.0	5.3
Clean and Abundant Water	Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans applied, number	CTA	2,421	2,269	1,900	1,911
		EQIP	2,032	2,774	3,000	2,490
Healthy Plant and Animal Communities	Grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve the resource base, million acres	CTA	7.5	11.8	8.0	14.2
		EQIP	8.0	12.2	13.0	16.5
	Wetlands created, restored or enhanced, acres	CTA	53,502	65,344	51,300	62,093
		WRP	180,360	181,979	156,000	149,326
		CRP	50,937	61,280	58,500	68,835

Source: NRCS Performance Results System  
 CTA Conservation Technical Assistance; EQIP Environmental Quality Incentives Program; Wetlands Reserve Program;  
 CRP Conservation Reserve Program

## Conservation Planning and Technical Consultation

NRCS provides data, information, and technical expertise that helps people collect and analyze information to identify natural resource problems and opportunities, clarify their objectives, and formulate and evaluate alternatives. NRCS encourages land managers to develop plans that address more than one resource goal. Planning assistance to individuals is accomplished primarily through the Conservation Technical Assistance program.

### Planning

Planning assistance provided in FY 2007 enabled people to develop:

- Conservation plans on more than 45.4 million acres, including:
 

Cropland	15.4 million acres
Grazing Land	26.5 million acres
Forest Land	1.4 million acres
  
- 5,205 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans on livestock operations.
  
- 912 watershed or area-wide conservation plans. Of these, 680 were developed under the Resources Conservation & Development Program.
  
- 3 Watershed Inventories and Analysis Studies, 1 Floodplain Management Study, and 7 Small Watershed Plans (PL-566) were developed under the Watershed Surveys and Planning program.

### Technical Consultation

Data on planning assistance include only assistance that resulted in development of a plan recorded in the NRCS National Conservation Plan Database. In addition, employees provide technical assistance that involves a single transaction for services and is not expected to result in a formal plan recorded in agency files. Examples include tasks such as helping to conduct an inventory of natural resources of a site or responding to requests for technical information or other technical products. These tasks generally last from 15 minutes to several hours each. In FY 2007, NRCS employees reported spending almost 200 staff years of time providing such assistance and recorded more than 798,000 instances of brief technical assistance.

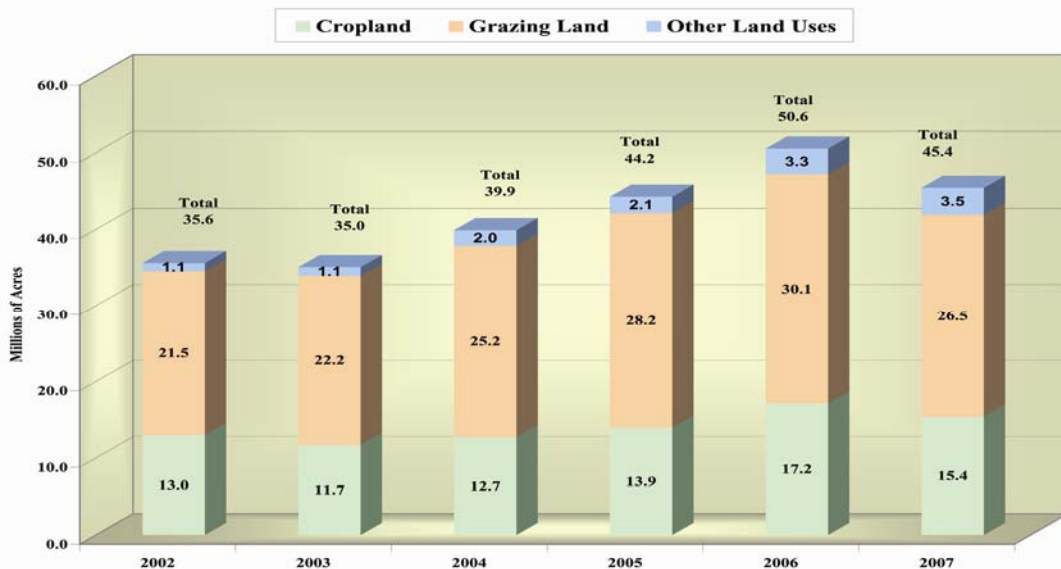


Figure 4. Conservation plans developed or updated, FY 2002-2007.

## Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment

NRCS assesses, acquires, develops, interprets, analyzes, and delivers natural resource data and information to enable knowledge-based natural resource planning and decision making at all landscape scales.

### Soil Survey and Snow Survey

In FY 2007, NRCS:

- Published 105 legacy surveys covering about 50 million acres on the Web. These are available on the Web at: <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>
- Mapped or updated soil surveys for 36.4 million acres.
- Digitized 238 soil surveys to national digitizing standards. The surveys cover 36.4 million acres. A total of 2,968 digitized surveys are now available. This is part of an initiative to digitize all modern soil surveys.
- Issued 12,141 water supply forecasts by the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting program.

### Assessing Conservation Effects

Work continued on the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) in the form of a workshop on managing agricultural landscapes for environmental quality, completion of the NRI-CEAP Cropland Survey, publication of a CEAP bibliography on the effects of conservation practices on wetlands, and release of a literature synthesis on the effects of conservation practices on fish and wildlife.

### Rapid Watershed Assessment

In FY 2007, NRCS continued to test the Rapid Watershed Assessment approach as a methodology for local decision makers to set priorities and determine the best actions to achieve their goals. Rapid Watershed Assessments (RWA) have been funded in 297 watersheds through FY 2006 and FY 2007 Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative grants (CCPI). In FY 2006, CCPI funded 134 assessments on 8-digit hydrologic unit code watersheds. Of those, 12 were funded to complete more detailed watershed plans using information compiled through the RWA process. In FY 2007, \$2 million was used to fund 163 RWAs on various sized watersheds to determine the most efficient scale for watershed planning. There are 2,264 8-digit hydrologic unit code watersheds in the United States. NRCS, in partnership with other Federal agencies, is developing a national system that will delineate, number, and name hydrologic units at the 10- and 12-digit scale.

## Natural Resource Technology Transfer

NRCS develops, documents, and distributes a wide array of technology pertaining to resource assessment, conservation planning, and conservation system installation and evaluation, including computer applications, standards and guidance documents, criteria, and plant materials.

### Plant Materials

In FY 2007, the Plant Materials Centers (PMC):

- Released 21 new plant materials to commercial growers.
- Prepared and transferred 459 plant materials technical documents to customers.
- Established a new PMC in Fallon, Nevada.

### Tools and Standards

New or revised technology NRCS released in FY 2007 included:

- An Energy Estimator to look at energy cost variables such as heat, light, and ventilation in poultry, swine and dairy housing.
- A computer program and user's guide to assist engineers, conservationists, and engineering technicians in the design of ponds and structures.



- Stream Restoration Design Handbook, which includes 1,700 pages of detailed design guidance and encourages locally-led, public involvement in restoration planning and implementation.
- Updated standards for about 12 percent of the agency's conservation practices, including creation of two new practice standards.

**Conservation Innovation Grants**

To accelerate the development and transfer of new technology, NRCS awarded competitive grants to eligible entities, including State and local agencies, non-governmental organizations, Tribes, or individuals. These Conservation Innovation Grants utilize EQIP funds.

**Technical Service Providers**

An aspect of technology transfer that has increased under the FY 2002 Farm Bill is certification of non-Federal technical service providers (TSPs) to assist participants of agency programs. NRCS has established processes to certify individuals and to enter into agreements with governmental and non-governmental entities to provide services. In FY 2007, NRCS signed agreements with 296 newly certified individual TSPs, and re-certified 119 individual TSPs. This brings the total available to the public to more than 1,300 individual TSPs and 113 businesses. Practices implemented with the technical assistance of TSPs in FY 2007 included pest management, nutrient management, upland wildlife habitat management, conservation crop rotation, comprehensive nutrient management plans, and livestock waste storage facilities.

**Financial Assistance**

NRCS provides financial assistance to encourage the adoption of land treatment practices that have been proven to provide significant public benefits. Financial assistance is awarded to participants who voluntarily enter into contracts, easements, and agreements to conserve natural resources. The 2002 Farm Bill significantly increased the financial assistance available through programs NRCS administers. Financial assistance includes cost share and incentive payments and stewardship payments. NRCS also makes payments to acquire easements to protect environmentally important land.

**Cost Share/ Incentive Payments**

Cost-share payments reimburse program participants for part of the expense of installing one or more conservation practices as agreed through a program contract. Incentive payments encourage participants to perform management practices that they would not initiate without assistance. Table 2 shows FY 2007 program funds available for obligation to program participants. Table 3 shows number of contacts and acres included in contracts funded in FY 2007.

**Easements**

NRCS funds conservation easements as a mechanism to protect sensitive lands and vanishing landscapes. In exchange for a payment, a landowner sells specific rights or interests to conserve and protect the natural resource, while maintaining ownership, general control of the property and certain other rights defined by specific program provisions. Each easement ensures the natural resource is protected for the long-term or in perpetuity. Table 4 shows the cumulative easements acquired through NRCS programs since the beginning of each program.

Table 2. Financial assistance funds appropriated or apportioned in FY 2007, all programs

Farm Bill Programs	(\$ in 1,000s)	Discretionary Programs	(\$ in 1,000s)
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	812,023	Flood Prevention (PL 534)	1,589
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	32,461	Watershed Protection (PL 566)	1,951
Wetlands Reserve Program	255,000	Emergency Watershed Protection	8,910
		Watershed Rehabilitation	14,284
		Healthy Forest Reserve Program	2,349

Table 3. Cost share, incentive, and easement contracts, FY 2007

Program	Cost share, incentives restoration		Easements	
	Number	Acres	Number	Acres
Environmental Quality Incentives Program	41,700	17,100,000		
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	2,100	350,000		
Wetlands Reserve Program	123	17,544	503	77,182
Healthy Forest Reserve Program	3	196,972	16	1,276
Grassland Reserve Program			14	59,663
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program				47,061

Table 4. Cumulative acres under easement

Program	Acres
Wetlands Reserve Program	1,582,320 <sup>1</sup>
Grassland Reserve Program	114,063
Healthy Forest Reserve Program	3,152
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program	386,674 <sup>2</sup>
Emergency Watershed Protection Program	212,672

<sup>1</sup> WRP easements perfected.

<sup>2</sup> Easements acquired.

## Agency Workforce

Most NRCS employees work in field offices across the Nation. Employees in 2,785 field offices provide customers a wide variety of technical and financial assistance through the agency's five business lines. Field office staff work side-by-side with employees of the local conservation districts and State conservation agencies. These offices function as clearinghouses for natural resource information, helping people gain access to knowledge and assistance available from local, State, regional, and national sources. In 419 other field offices, employees provide more specialized services, for example the rural community development assistance provided through Resource Conservation and Development offices.

Employees in the field are supported by NRCS specialists who provide technical and administrative support, conduct natural resource inventories, and develop new conservation technologies, ensuring that the Agency maintains the ability to provide consistently accurate information and high quality technical services.

Over the period 2002-2007, as NRCS responsibilities and workload have increased, the agency workforce has decreased slightly (Figure 5.)

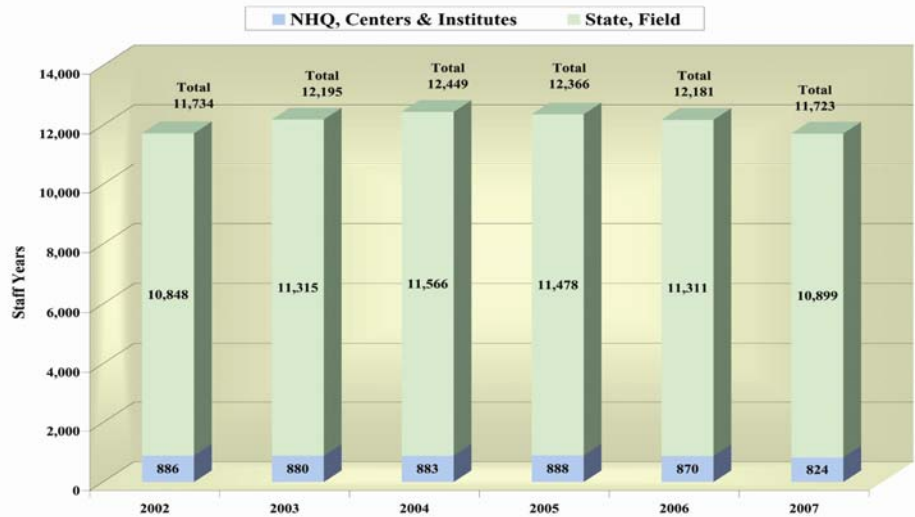


Figure 5. NRCS workforce, in FTEs, FY 2002 - 2007.

Source: NRCS CIS reports

## Cooperative Action

Conservation of private lands depends on the efforts of many individuals, groups and governmental entities working together. NRCS supports the achievement of local, State, regional, and national conservation goals through partnerships with State conservation agencies, local conservation districts, resource conservation and development councils, tribal governments, community groups and others.

## Overarching Strategies

In FY 2007, NRCS continued to focus on initiatives that expand cooperative efforts to address water quality issues with a market-based approach. Examples include:

- Partnering with Colorado State University, Agricultural Research Service and Environmental Protection Agency to develop a new tool to determine available nitrogen for trade in emerging water quality markets. The Nitrogen Trading Tool (NTT) is a web-based model that measures the changes in nitrogen losses based on changed management practices. In FY 2007, the NTT prototype was completed.
- Developing a new reference for understanding environmental credit trading. The NRCS Environmental Credit Trading Handbook is to be available for use by NRCS staff and partners.
- Conducting an evaluation of the potential for water quality credit trading in the Chesapeake Bay region and determining the appropriate Federal role. Provided assistance to Maryland Department of Agriculture in developing a Nonpoint Source Credit Trading Policy to be utilized in a Chesapeake Bay Water Quality Credit Trading Pilot project. The project is funded through a 2007 NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant.

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