# **Conservation planning with NRCS**: The foundation to apply for NMDA's Healthy Soil Program grants

**Presented by:**
**NMDA Healthy Soil Program** co-leads Dean Bruce & Katie Crayton
**USDA-NRCS-New Mexico Desiree Chavez**

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# Welcome, Housekeeping, and Agenda



We invite you to **introduce yourself in the chat,** noting **where you are in New Mexico** and **what type of land you manage** (cropland, rangeland, etc.)

**DURING the presentation**:

- You'll learn about **NMDA's Healthy Soil Program** grants
- You'll also learn about **conservation planning with NRCS**
- Please **stay muted** with your **camera turned off** to preserve bandwidth.
- Place any questions in **the chat**.

**AFTER the presentation:**

- Please **raise your hand and we'll invite you to unmute** to ask questions in real time.
  - We'll address **questions *specific* to NRCS conservation planning** for NMDA's Healthy Soil Program grant applicants
  - What's **eligible for purchase will be covered in a *future* webinar**.

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# **Who can apply** for NMDA's Healthy Soil Program grants?



## 1. ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

- New Mexico's "**local governmental [entities] with proven land management capacity to support healthy soil"**, including:
  - Pueblos, tribes, and nations
  - Acequias
  - Land grants
  - Soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs)
  - NMSU Cooperative Extension Service
  - Other **parties meeting the Eligible Entity definition above**

Apply for up to $100,000

## 2. INDIVIDUAL APPLICANTS



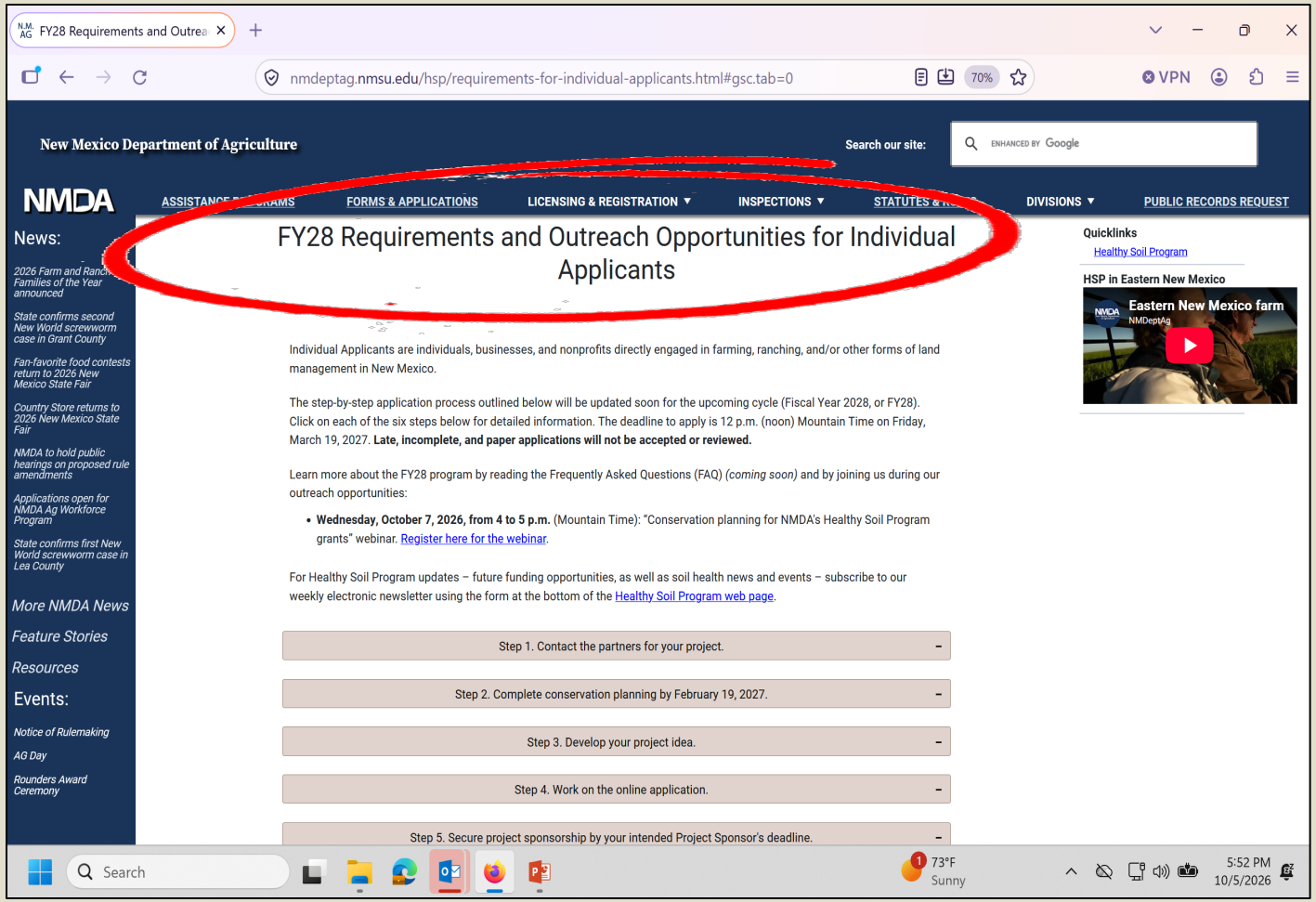
- New Mexico's **non-governmental parties that are directly engaged in farming, ranching, or another form of land management:**
  - Individuals, businesses, and nonprofits

- To apply for NMDA's Healthy Soil Program grants, **Individual Applicants must:**
  - **Complete conservation planning with NRCS by Feb. 19**
  - **Secure project sponsorship** from their SWCD or tribal government

Apply for up to $24,999.99

**Deadline for *both* applicant types to submit their online applications for grants:**
**March 19, 2027, at 12 p.m. (noon)**

# This webinar is exclusively for **Individual Applicants…**

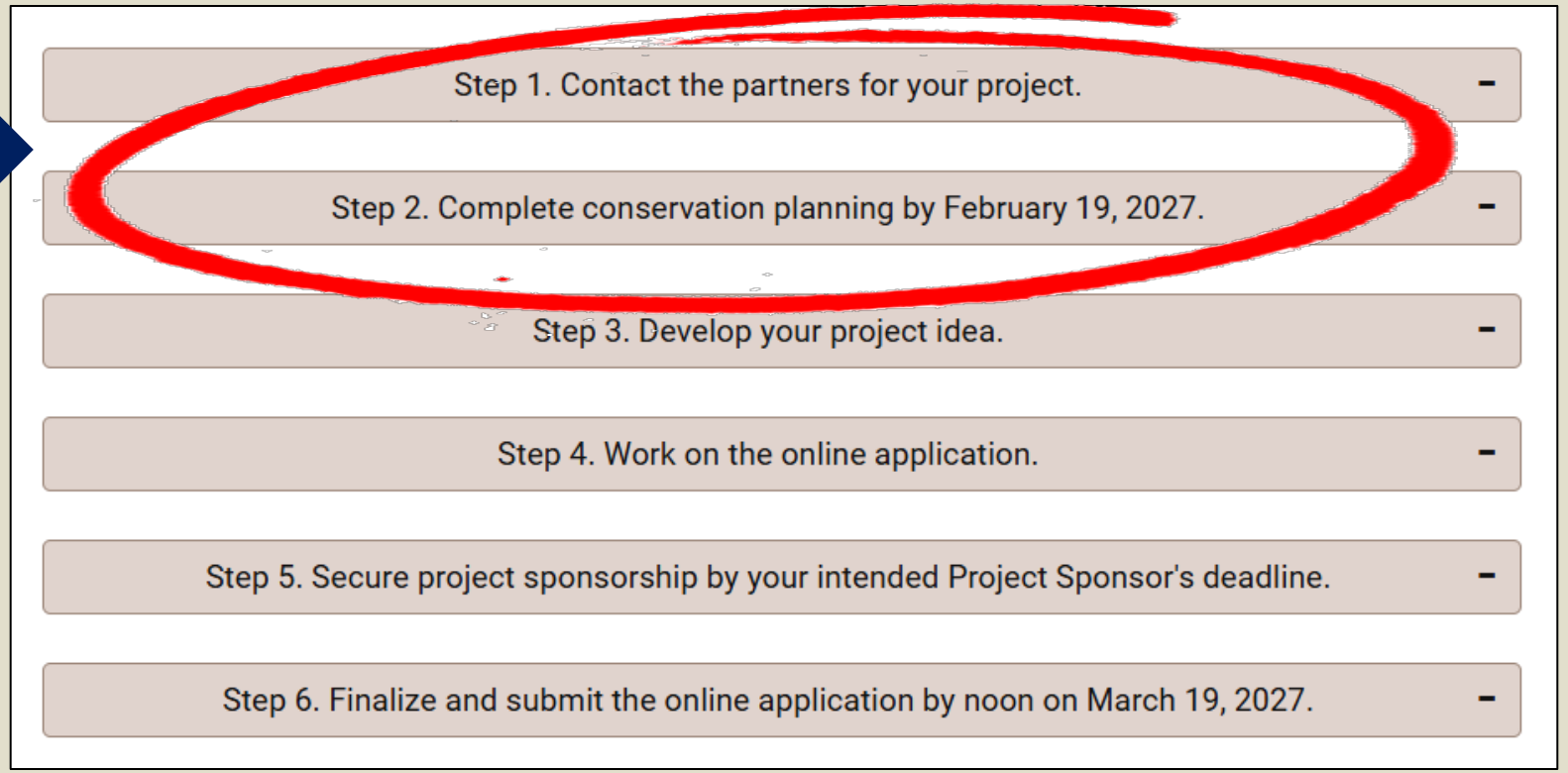



…,and this webpage is **where you'll find everything you need to apply for a grant** from NMDA's Healthy Soil Program.

It outlines the **sequential, step-by-step process** Individual Applicants must follow.

https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/hsp/**requirements-for-individual-applicants**.html

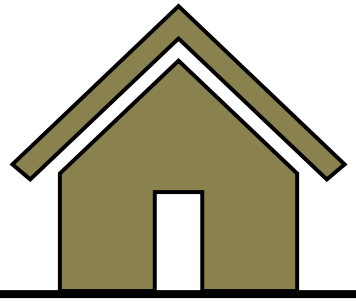
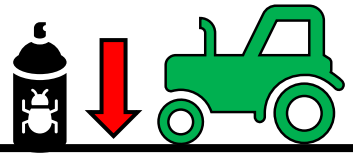
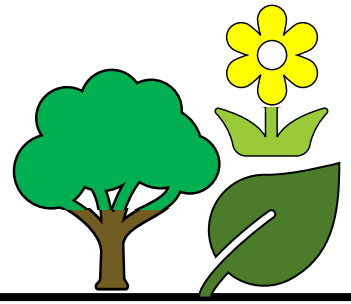
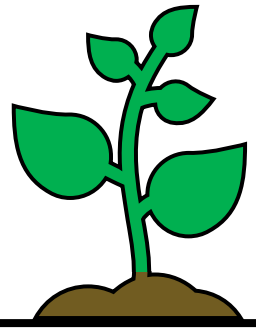
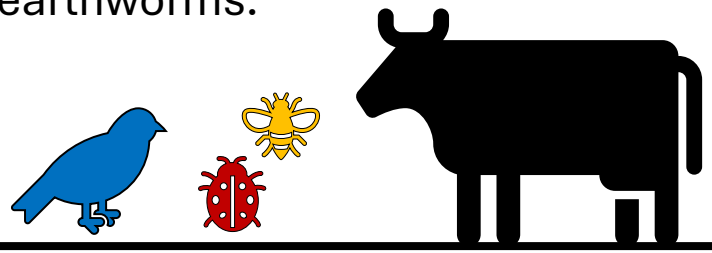
# ...and this webinar is exclusively about **Steps 1 and 2** for Individual Applicants




Again, this is the **sequential**, **step-by-step application process for Individual Applicants** outlined at https://nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/hsp/**requirements-for-individual-applicants**.html

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# To qualify for NMDA's Healthy Soil Program grants, projects must address 1+ of the 5 soil health principles

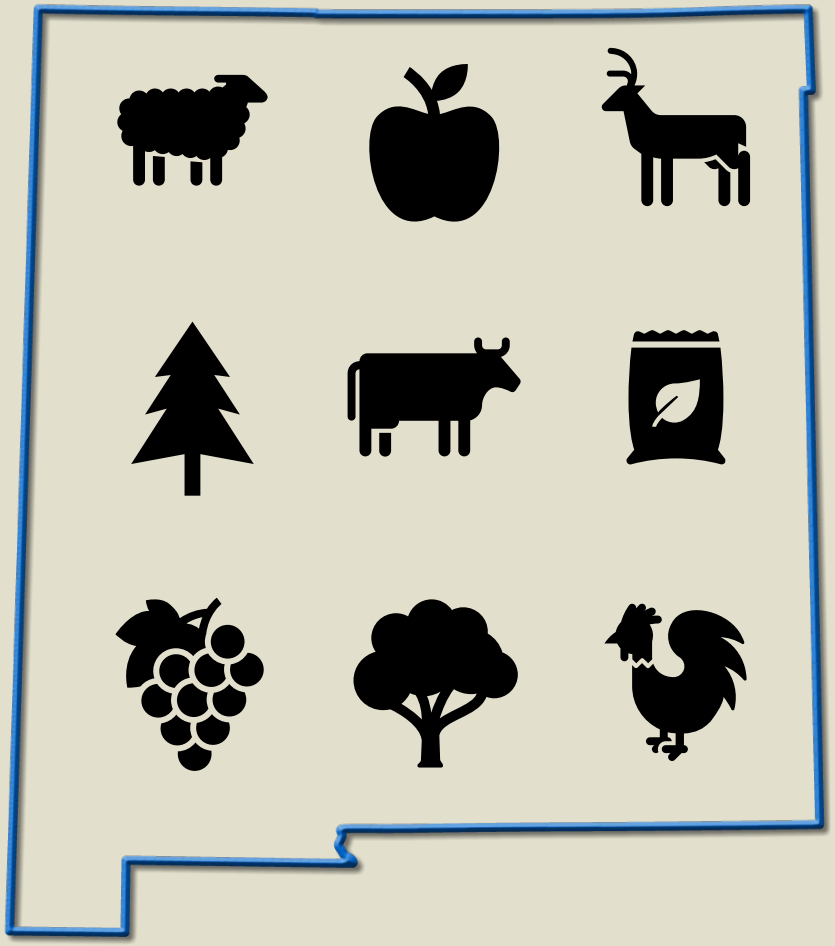
| The 5 soil health principles | **1.** Keep soil **covered**. | **2.** Minimize **disturbance on cropland** and minimize **external inputs**. | **3.** Maximize **biodiversity.** | **4.** Maintain **a living root.** | **5. Integrate animals into land management**, including grazing animals, birds, beneficial insects or keystone species, such as earthworms. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| |  |  |  |  |  |
| **EXAMPLES of practices arising from the 5 soil health principles** | • Planting a cover crop<br>• Leaving crop residues in the field to decompose<br>• Prescribed grazing to maintain cover on rangeland | • Minimizing tillage on cropland<br>• Minimizing farm inputs (herbicide, pesticide, fungicide, etc.) | • Growing different plants<br>• Increasing the diversity of a crop rotation<br>• Managing grazing to promote rangeland diversity | • Growing long-season crops<br>• Planting a cover crop following a short-season crop | • Planting pollinator habitat<br>• Grazing crop residues<br>• Following a bale-grazing plan<br>• Following a prescribed grazing plan |

# **When can projects happen** under NMDA's Healthy Soil Program?

**Projects can last nearly 15 months**, starting mid-July 2027 and ending September 2028



# **Where can projects happen** under NMDA's Healthy Soil Program?



- Anywhere in **New Mexico**
- **On any type of operation, and on any amount of land:** cropland (*all food, fuel, and fiber*), rangeland, irrigated pasture, forest land…in orchards, vineyards, gardens
- **Any manner of ownership**: you own it, you lease it, you manage it on another's behalf
  - **You must have landowner permission** to implement a soil health project on land you don't own
- Projects can be measured in **acres or square feet**

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# Why is **conservation planning with NRCS** part of NMDA's Healthy Soil Program?

- **Conservation planning is a process** that identifies soil health-related resource concerns on the land you manage

- The process of conservation planning **provides you with recommended conservation practices**, plus various alternatives that you can choose from to help you improve your soil

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# Conservation planning with NRCS-New Mexico

Presented by:
**Desiree Chavez Acting Area Resource Conservationist**
**USDA NRCS NM**

# What is **the Natural Resources Conservation Service?**




**A Brief History of NRCS:**

- **1933**: Formed as the Soil Erosion Service in response to the Dust Bowl crisis.
- **1935**: Renamed Soil Conservation Service (SCS) under USDA. Led by Hugh Hammond Bennett, it focused on preventing soil erosion.
- **1940s–1980s**: Expanded to include watershed protection, flood control, and technical support for farmers on conservation practices.
- **1994**: Renamed to Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to reflect a broader mission — not just soil, but water, air, plants, and animals.
- **Today**: NRCS provides technical and financial help to private landowners to improve conservation and sustainability on working lands.

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# What is **conservation planning**?

- NRCS conservation planning is a **collaborative, step-by-step process** where NRCS planners work with landowners **to develop a plan to manage and protect natural resources** on their land

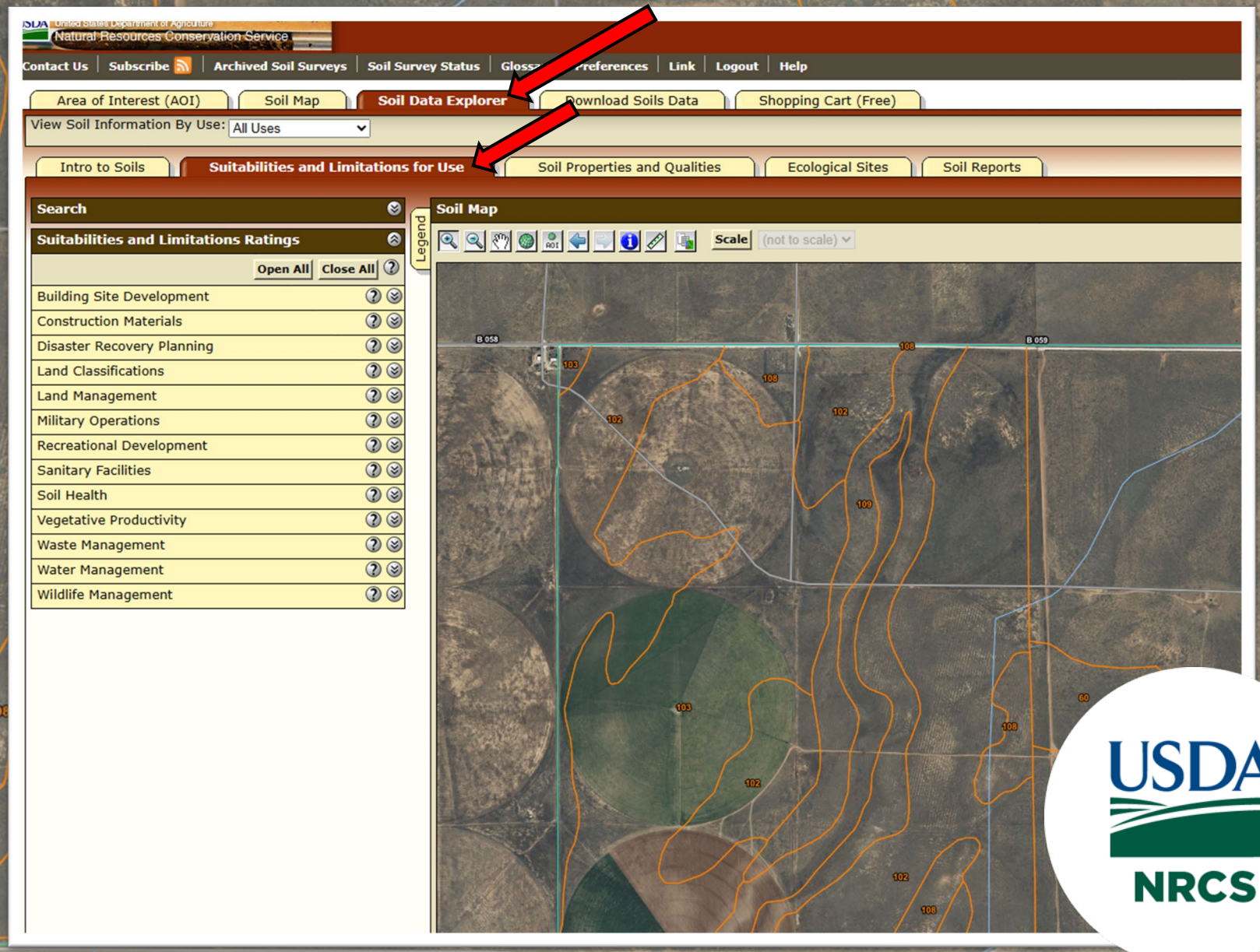
## The 9 Steps of Conservation Planning:

1. Identify problems and opportunities
2. Determine objectives
3. Inventory resources
4. Analyze resource data
5. Formulate alternatives
6. Evaluate alternatives
7. Make decisions
8. Implement the plan
9. Evaluate the plan

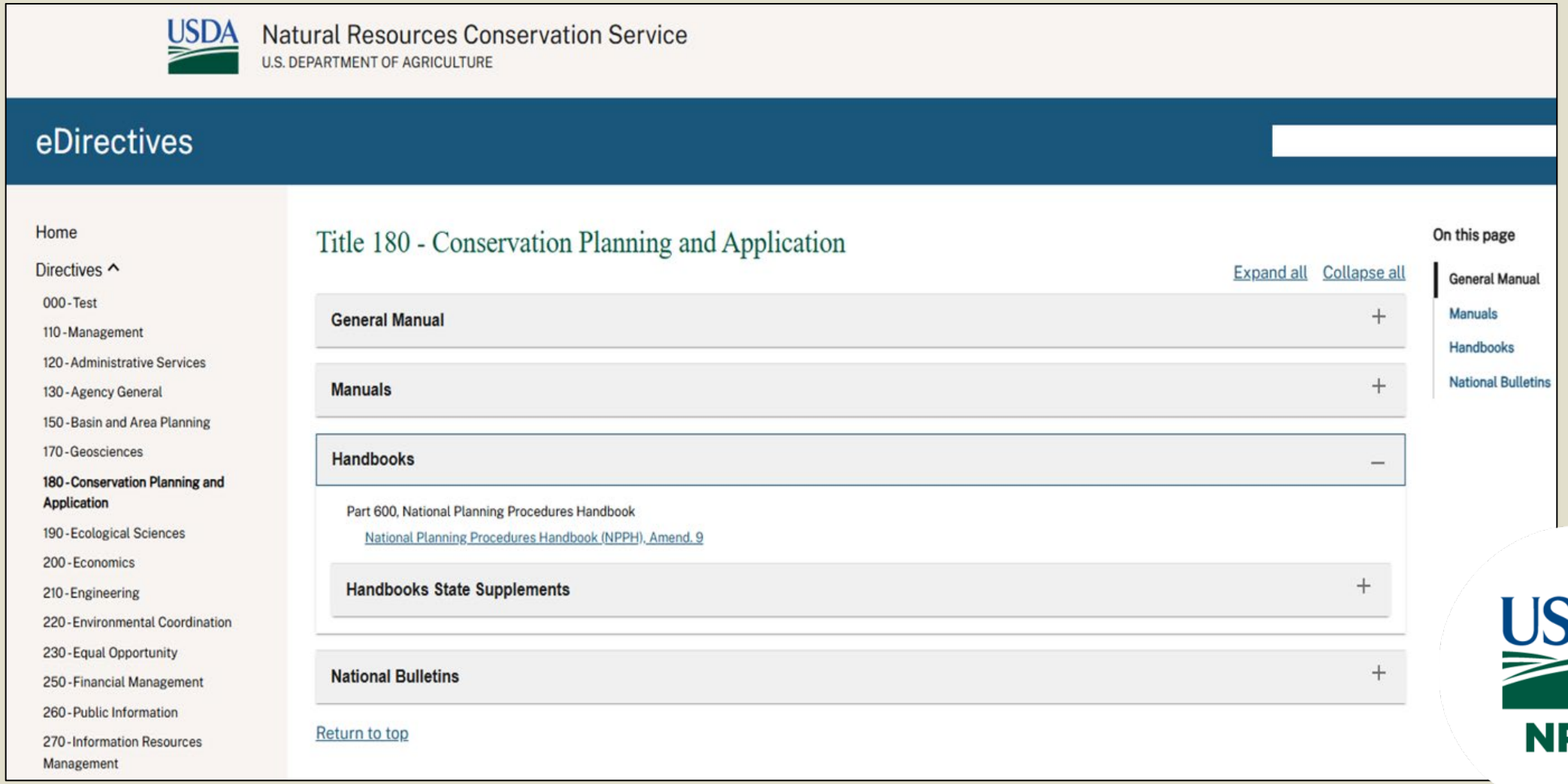
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# Useful Information Prior to Site Visit

- Map of location
- Operation history (irrigation, cropping, grazing, etc.)
- Web Soil Survey information

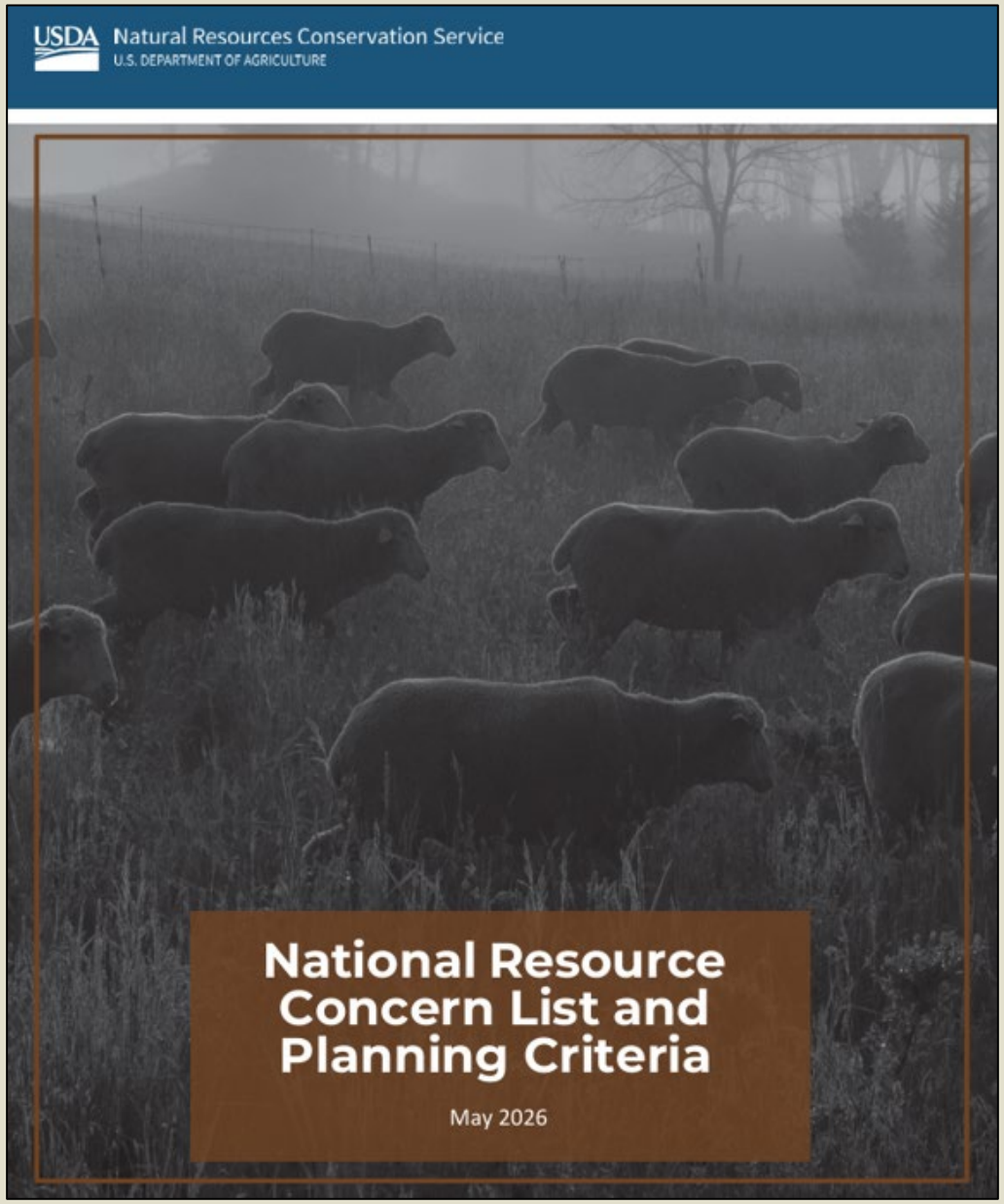


# National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH)




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# Resource Concerns and Tools From NPPH




**Organic matter depletion**

Management-induced depletion of any pools of soil organic matter resulting in limited soil function and processes that support plant productivity, biological activity, and water and nutrient cycling.

**Objective:** Maintain, increase, and improve soil organic matter.

**When land use is: Crop, Other Rural Land, Developed Land, or Associated Ag Land**

| Tools | Planning Criteria |
|---|---|
| National or State In-Field Soil Health Assessment Worksheet | Soil organic matter indicators do not meet the criteria in the assessment worksheet |
| Client input and planner observation<br>**or**<br>Soil test results<br>**or**<br>Current NRCS wind or water erosion technology | Implementing a Soil Health Management System that addresses organic matter depletion<br>**or**<br>Soil test shows organic matter, labile carbon, or labile bioavailable nitrogen trends at or above typical value for a high functioning soil for that specific management unit and site conditions<br>**or**<br>Improved organic matter over many years<br>**or**<br>Soil Condition Index is positive<br>**and**<br>Positive trend in organic matter subfactor |

**When land use is: Forest**

| Tools | Planning Criteria |
|---|---|
| Client input and planner observation | The plant litter (e.g., leaves, stems, branches) in various stages of decomposition, herbaceous vegetation, and biological crusts cover is more than 85% of the floor to provide a protective cover for the soil |

**When land use is: Range**

| Tools | Planning Criteria |
|---|---|
| Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health (IIRH) | Soil/Site Stability and Biotic Integrity attributes: slight t moderate or less<br>**or**<br>Soil Surface Loss or Degradation Indicator 9: slight to moderate or less |



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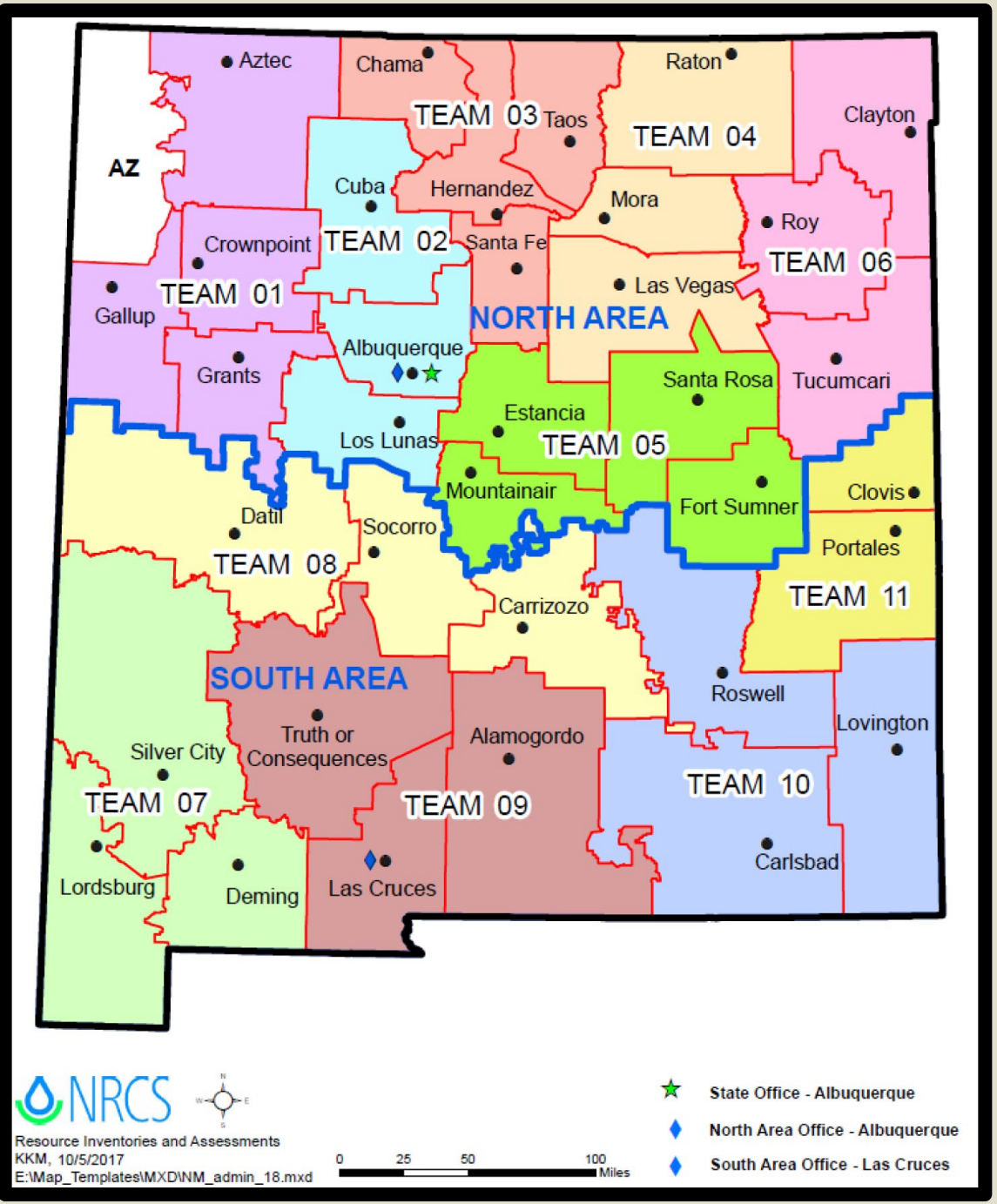
# How long does it take to complete conservation planning with NRCS?

- **Contact your local NRCS Field Office as soon as possible** to schedule assistance
- The process shouldn't take longer than 2 weeks once a conservation planner is assigned to you *(depending on Field Office workload and staffing challenges)*





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# Where do I find NRCS?

- NRCS in New Mexico has **staff across the state** to meet the unique resource needs of our farmers and landowners.
- There are **35 USDA Service centers located across the state** which provide customer service at the local level.
- NRCS NM is led by the State Office in Albuquerque.
- The state is then divided into a North Area (Teams 1-6) and South Area (Teams 7-11).

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# What's the best way to contact NRCS?

**Call, email, or stop by**
your local service center
after doing a simple internet search
or after using this QR code

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

USDA NRCS

# Alternative NRCS-certified Conservation Planners

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) in New Mexico
with staff certified to do **conservation planning for NMDA's Healthy Soil Program**

- Border SWCD
- Carlsbad SWCD
- Carrizozo SWCD
- Chaves SWCD
- Ciudad SWCD
- Coronado SWCD
- East Rio Arriba SWCD
- East Torrance SWCD
- Taos SWCD
- Tierra Y Montes SWCD
- Upper Hondo

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# Where to find – and how to contact – **your local SWCD**




https://www.nmacd.org/directories

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# Alternative NRCS-certified Conservation Planners

- New Mexico Healthy Soil Working Group
  - nmhealthysoil.org
- **Warren Edaakie**
  Traditional Lands Program Coordinator
  NM Healthy Soil Working Group
  505-850-4993 (cell)
  warren@NMhealthysoil.org
- **Navona Gallegos**
  Education Coordinator
  NM Healthy Soil Working Group
  505-670-6596 (cell)
  navona@nmhealthysoil.org




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# NMDA's Conservation Planning Templates

**Fiscal Year 2028 (FY28)**

**NMDA's Healthy Soil Program**

**Conservation Planning Template required for Individual Applicants with CROPLAND**
**USDA-NRCS in-field assessment and recommendations**

**NOTE:** Conservation planning with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a **pre-application requirement** for Individual Applicants seeking Healthy Soil Program grants. If you are applying for a grant with a project that will occur on cropland, you must submit this template (or an existing conservation plan from NRCS) as part of your application. **This template was not designed for the Individual Applicant to complete themselves. This template *must* be completed by a USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)* certified conservation planner on or before February 19, 2027**. Failure to submit an NRCS conservation plan or this template (completed by a USDA certified conservation planner, including the planner's signature) as part of your Healthy Soil Program application will render your application incomplete and thus ineligible.

**NOTE:** NMDA's Healthy Soil Program requires grant applicants to upload a soils map (using https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/) as part of their online application. Because such a map indicates different soil types within the project site and is essential to the conservation planning process, NMDA recommends that all applicants create and study this map *prior to* their conservation-planning appointment with NRCS.

Farmer/Land Manager: _____

Farm Location: (Physical Address, Section/Range/Township, Latitude/Longitude)

_____

County: _____

Field names with associated acres / square footage:

| Field name/number | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Acres / sq. ft. | | | | | | | | | |

**FOR THE INDIVIDUAL APPLICANT:** Using only the space below, describe your soil health-related goals.

FY 2028

Page **1** of **4**

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# Final Thoughts: Don’t wait to complete Steps 1 and 2 of your step-by-step application process.

- **Step 1: Contact the partners for your project.**
  - Your local SWCD or tribal government for project sponsorship
  - USDA-NRCS for conservation planning

- **Step 2: Complete conservation planning by February 19, 2027.**

  - Schedule an appointment with NRCS (or one of the alternative NRCS-certified conservation planners) for conservation planning **as soon as possible**

  - Local staffing and/or workload could determine **the time needed to complete conservation planning**

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# Questions?

- Learn more about **NMDA's Healthy Soil Program**
  - **Subscribe for a brief weekly email** by completing the form at the bottom of our homepage: www.nmdeptag.nmsu.edu/healthy-soil-program.html
  - Email hsp@nmda.nmsu.edu
  - Call 575-646-2642

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- Learn more about **conservation planning with NRCS-New Mexico**
  - https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/nm-contacts

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