



February 22, 2019

Natural Resources  
Conservation Service

Montana State Office

10 East Babcock  
Street, Room 443  
Bozeman  
Montana, 59715

Voice 406.587.6811  
Fax 855.510.7028

**MONTANA BULLETIN NUMBER 180-19-01**

**SUBJECT:** CPA – Long Range Planning to Support Montana Focused Conservation

**TO:** All Employees

**Purpose:** To provide general guidance on Long Range Plan (LRP) structure, review procedures, and completion deadlines to deliver Montana Focused Conservation (MFC)

**Expiration Date:** December 31, 2019

DUE DATE	ACTION REQUIRED
December 31, 2019	LRP completed for every TIP submitted for FY2020 funding
December 31, 2020	LRPs completed for every county in Montana

**Background.** Montana Focused Conservation was adopted in FY2019 as a new, enhanced approach to delivering Farm Bill programs. A transition process, timeline, and deadlines have been developed that will result in full adoption and complete implementation of MFC by FY2021. Per MT Bulletin 300-19-02, LRPs were not required for any Targeted Implementation Plan (TIP) submitted by the February 1, 2019, due date. This Bulletin transmits version 1.0 of the Montana LRP template, and outlines a phased approach to deadline setting for LRP review and completion. Subsequent TIP guidance and timelines will be addressed in forthcoming Programs (FA) bulletins.

**Explanation:** Long Range Plans are an essential element of our new approach to working with producers and partners to deliver Farm Bill programs—Montana’s Focused Conservation. Across Montana, we need county-wide documents that:

- Present a vision of collaborative, effective land stewardship,
- Describe the baseline resource conditions,
- Detail past conservation efforts,
- Describe desired future outcomes, and
- Outline a prioritized list of resource concerns and solutions from which TIPs can be generated and submitted for funding consideration.

This Bulletin formally transmits version 1.0 of our Montana LRP template. The template is called version 1.0 because we intend to revise the structure as needed with your collective input as Montana planners begin working with partners, producers, and local entities to develop LRPs. This version is intended to kickstart the LRP process, provide a structural outline for LRP development, and start conversations in your Locally Led Conservation efforts and Local Working Groups about how to focus conservation

delivery to provide measurable landscape benefits. Montana NRCS intends to harvest and incorporate the input and experience of our producers and partners to create and maintain a collaborative approach to delivering MFC through LRP and TIP development.

State Office Technical staff stand ready to assist with LRP production and will be reviewing draft LRPs when prepared. Please place a copy of Draft LRPs in the appropriate [County subfolder](#) on the NRCS Montana SharePoint for review by State Office specialists. Staff will review sections relevant to their disciplines and offer comments for readability, suggestions for additional or alternative resource-related analysis, and other editorial input intended to support your efforts and encourage consistency across LRPs. State Office staff review is required prior to finalizing LRPs. However, field and area staff reserve final decisions on LRP content, unless a major issue is identified during the review process.

State Office technical review will be expedient and responsive to local timelines as we individually and collectively pursue MFC. As LRPs are drafted and submitted for review, we will continue to build a [library of assets, resources, and standard text](#) on the NRCS Montana SharePoint that can be used for later LRP development. I have appointed and convened a MFC Steering Committee composed of State, Area and Field office staff. One of their primary duties is to collect input and needs regarding MFC delivery and connect these issues to the larger group or individuals responsible such that solutions can be found. Secondly, the Steering Committee will provide a discussion forum for working through our full transition into MFC by FY2021. Successful delivery of MFC will require a collaborative approach, and that includes meaningful engagement and assistance from the State Office that is responsive to our collective needs.

**Long Range Plan production deadlines are presented at the beginning of this bulletin. Simply, no TIPs will be considered for funding in FY2020 unless a final LRP is completed by December 31, 2019. Every county in Montana will have a final LRP by December 31, 2020.** While the attached outline presents what should be considered as some basic, fundamental LRP content, there is always room for creativity and flexibility within the sideboards of the outline that best fit your planning area.

Stepwise transition to full implementation of MFC requires setting hard deadlines with no exceptions. I appreciate your willingness to embrace and help deliver MFC, and believe we have a great opportunity to start delivering conservation that will move the needle across several resource concerns in Montana. Focused Conservation will enable us to better describe the magnitude of the currency in which we are trading—positive conservation outcomes delivered in a manner that improves working lands across our state.

Thanks for all you do,

/s/

TOM WATSON  
State Conservationist

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Attachment

Montana LRP Template version 1.0



# MONTANA Focused Conservation

## Long Range Planning Template Version 1.0

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### Section I. Introduction

Set up the goals and objectives for the Long Range Plan (LRP)

- Vision (e.g. Shared responsibility and commitment to local action achieves effective land stewardship.)
- Mission (e.g. To build alliances and strategically invest to effectively solve natural resource problems in Montana.)
- State the Purpose(s) of the plan (These plans will be living documents. While the Vision and Mission may not change appreciably, goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics will as we learn more about the process, conservation areas of interest, partner collaboration, achieve objectives, etc. Can have multiple, nested goals, objectives, tactics.)
- Identify all entities (including NRCS) who participated in the development of the plan.
- Specify the time frame covered by the LRP, as well as planned timelines for updating the LRP.

### Section II. Natural Resource Inventory

Gather inventory data that describe the natural resource baseline condition across the county. Use maps, graphs, tables, text, and images as needed to best portray the situation. Consider combining data as appropriate for better analysis. Also consider looking at general agriculture and demographic trends over time to better define who our Customers and potential Partners should be.

#### Humans

- Land Cover/Land Use
- Land Ownership
- Land Cover/Land Use & Ownership Combined
- Census and Social Data (NASS Ag census)
- Number, Types and size of Farms (NASS Ag census)

- Forest/Woodland Owners (other specialty production/operations)

### **Soil**

- Topographic map(s) with elevations and significant named features
- Common Resource Area(s)
- Prime Agricultural soils, HEL soils, Hydric soils, etc.

### **Water**

- Precipitation
- Watersheds and Streams
- Irrigated Lands, Water Rights and Irrigation Districts
- Stream Flow Tables and/or Graphs
- Water Quality Impairment and TMDL stream(s) on 303 (d) list
- Groundwater resources and Drinking Water supplies

### **Air and Energy**

- Nonattainment and Maintenance areas for Air Quality standards
- Visibility standards
- Utility/Power Company coverage areas or transmission lines

### **Plants and Animals**

- Riparian/Buffer areas and land use
- Designated Federal or State Wildlife Conservation Areas and areas of opportunity
- Confined Animal Feeding Areas
- Priority Species
- Federal Threatened or Endangered Species
- State Species of Concern
- Sensitive or declining plant communities (sagebrush, aspen stands, fens, etc.)
- Invasive Species priority areas

When complete, as supported by maps and other relevant data, this section should answer the following questions in narrative format:

1. What is the current state of the natural resources in the county?

2. What are the county demographics (producers, farms/ranches, etc.)?

### **Section III. Conservation Activity Analysis**

Compile existing data and characterize conservation activities that have occurred in the county over the last 5 to 10 years. This section should involve input from key partners and stake holders, as well as describe non-NRCS conservation efforts. Prime data sources may include: scientific documents, previous local, state and federal plans (e.g., DEQ, Watershed Groups/Councils, District, county), landscape assessments, Watershed profiles, workload analyses, and surveys. Local knowledge is essential to characterize past and current farm bill implementation, engage Local Working Groups early and often. Useful data and items to consider include:

- IDEA data (NRCS Conservation Practice application and extent data)
- Partner conservation efforts
- Over the last 5 to 10 years, what changes have occurred because of conservation activities?
- In general, what resource concerns remain and need treatment
- What new resource concerns are appearing?

When complete, as supported by maps and other relevant data, this section should answer the following questions in narrative format:

1. What conservation work has been accomplished in the county to address natural resource issues:
  - a. By NRCS?
  - b. By partner agencies?
  - c. By private citizens?
2. In general, what natural resource concerns remain that need to be addressed?
3. In your initial analysis, which of these might best be addressed with NRCS investment?

## Section IV. Natural Resource Problems and Desired Future Outcomes

Based on Section II (Natural Resources Inventory), characterize natural resource problems, conservation opportunities, and desired outcomes for the future of the county. Focused conservation issues should be presented and developed in this section, with a clear vision for how natural resource problems will be treated over stated plan timeframes.

- Describe each resource concern to which focused conservation will be applied. Develop text that allows the reader to visualize/characterize each resource concern, describe the severity and extent, areas and people affected, impacts on water quality and/or other natural resources, and the consequences of taking no action.
- Resource Trends. Describe how resource concerns and associated problems have changed over time and present a forecast of future conditions without action.
- Present an analysis of products and services demand. Consider including regulatory compliance (e.g. CNMP), regulatory avoidance (historically, sage grouse listing), unmet needs of prior year program sign ups, and analyses from ranking tools (CAET, CART). This analysis should link with other products and services demands such as conservation planning, engineering design production, construction scheduling, and other factors that may limit conservation production or describe unmet needs.
- Statements of Desired Future Condition for each Resource Problem. Clearly present your goals for each problem with specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound descriptors.
- Objectives. Develop one or more measurable long-range objectives for each goal.

When complete, using the format outlined above, this section should answer the following questions for EACH identified resource concern/problem:

1. Description of the resource concern

- a. What is the scope of the problem (i.e., size, geographic location, type of producers, etc.)?
  - b. What is the impact of the problem across the county or watersheds that cross county lines if not addressed?
  - c. Who does this problem affect?
  - d. Who has already been involved in addressing the problem? Who are the interested partners?
2. Resource Trends
    - a. How has the resource concern changed over time? Has it increased or decreased? Why? What are the causes or driving factors?
  3. What DON'T you know?
    - a. What do you still need to learn to clearly outline the problem and describe the desired future condition?
    - b. How are you going to gather that information and from whom?
  4. Statement of Desired Future Condition—Picture yourself and your county five years down the road.
    - a. When this resource concern is addressed, what does the landscape look like?
    - b. What percent of the problem has been addressed? Is this enough?
    - c. Clearly identify how you know when you've addressed the resource concern at a meaningful level (moved the needle) and are moving on.
  5. Objective. You've identified the problem and what you want the landscape to look like when its solved. In general terms, identify the measurable steps that need to be taken to get from problem to Desired Future Condition. In addition, you should initially be able to estimate:
    - a. How many years will it take to achieve the Desired Future Condition?
    - b. What amount of financial assistance will it take to achieve the Desired Future Condition?

## **Section V. Prioritization of Natural Resource Problems and Desired Outcomes**

Prioritize and rank the natural resource problems identified in Section IV. Consider the following when determining top priority issues and opportunities:

1. Does addressing the problem support the NRCS' Vision and Mission?



2. What is the capability of the field office and partners to achieve identified goals?
3. What are the values and expectations of the community?
4. Is the cost to implement the projects feasible with the amount of funding that can be leveraged by NRCS and partners?
5. What legislation, regulations, or other sideboards impact the resource concerns identified?
6. Do the resource concerns meet the national, state, and local objectives?

When complete, using the format outlined above, this section should also answer the following questions for EACH prioritized resource concern:

1. What decision-making process did you use to select this as a resource priority?
  - a. How was the Local Work Group and Area tied into the decision-making process?
  - b. How did you determine that the producers are ready, willing, and able to participate?
  - c. How did you determine that the partners are onboard and ready, willing and able to contribute?
  - d. What additional information do you need to determine an effective baseline against which progress will be measured?
2. How will you measure success?
3. How does this resource concern lend itself to NRCS investment?

## **Section VI. Targeted Implementation Plans (TIP) and Investment Portfolios**

Develop specific strategies (TIPs) to focus conservation efforts on identified priority resource concerns and specific geographic areas over the timespan covered by the LRP.

- Targeted Implementation Plans. Identify specific action items developed in Sections IV and V achievable in the timeframe outlined in Section I. Identify action items from each TIP and use to develop an annual plan of work for the county.
- Technology Transfer and Outreach. Present a general description of how you will conduct technology transfer within your county—that is, how you will get the word out about focused conservation applied, and the outcomes of that conservation. Telling your story will be an important

outreach component and may elicit additional customer and partner involvement over time.

*NOTE: This template represents Montana NRCS' initial effort in assisting our staff with the development of Long Range Plans. The section headings, sub-headings, and suggestions are intended to reflect major elements of LRP content and are subject to change as our efforts evolve.*

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