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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Natural Resources Conservation Service

[Docket No. NRCS-2026-0034]

Proposed Revisions to the National Handbook of Conservation Practices

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

ACTION: Notice of availability, request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is revising specific conservation practice standard (CPS) in the National Handbook of Conservation Practices (NHCP). NRCS is also giving the public an opportunity to provide comments on the proposed changes to the specific CPSs.

DATES: We will consider comments that we receive by **[INSERT DATE 30 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE *FEDERAL REGISTER*].**

ADDRESSES: We invite you to submit comments in response to this notice. You may submit your comments through one of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal*: Go to http://www.regulations.gov and search for Docket ID NRCS-2026-0034. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments; or
- *Mail or Hand Delivery:* Mr. J'Que C. Jones, National Agricultural Engineer, Conservation Engineering Division, NRCS, USDA, 1400 Independence Avenue, South Building, Room 4949, Washington, DC 20250. In your comment, please specify the Docket ID NRCS-2026-0034.

All comments received will be made publicly available on http://www.regulations.gov.

The copies of the proposed revised CPSs are available through http://www.regulations.gov by accessing Docket No. NRCS-2026-0034. Alternatively,

the proposed revised CPSs can be downloaded or printed from https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/conservation-practices.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. J'Que C. Jones at (443) 926-6957, or by email at jque.jones@usda.gov. Individuals who require alternative means for communication should contact the USDA TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and text telephone (TTY)) or dial 711 for Telecommunications Relay Service (both voice and text telephone users can initiate this call from any telephone).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

NRCS plans to revise the CPSs in the NHCP. This notice provides an overview of the planned changes and gives the public an opportunity to offer comments on the specific CPS and NRCS's proposed changes.

NRCS State Conservationists who choose to adopt these CPSs in their States will incorporate these CPSs into the respective electronic Field Office Technical Guide. These CPSs may be used in conservation systems that treat highly erodible land (HEL) or on land determined to be wetland. Section 343 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (Pub. L. No. 104-127) requires NRCS to make available for public review and comment all proposed revisions to CPSs used to conduct HEL and wetland provisions of the law.

Revisions to the National Handbook of Conservation Practices

The amount of proposed changes varies for each of the CPSs addressed in this notice. To fully understand the proposed changes, individuals are encouraged to compare these changes with the current version for each CPS, which can be found at: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/resources/guides-and-instructions/conservation-practice-standards.

NRCS is requesting comments on the following CPSs:

- Alley Cropping (Code 311);
- Amendments for Treatment of Agricultural Waste (Code 591);
- Anionic Polyacrylamide (PAM) Application (Code 450);
- Annual Forages for Grazing Systems (Code 513);
- Combustion System Improvement (Code 372);
- Compost Facility (Code 317);
- Dust Control from Unpaved Roads and Surfaces (Code 373);
- Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation (Code 374);
- Energy Efficient Building Envelope (Code 672);
- Energy Efficient Lighting System (Code 670);
- Herbaceous Weed Treatment (Code 315);
- Irrigation Land Leveling (Code 464);
- Land Clearing (Code 460);
- Livestock Pipeline (Code 516);
- Monitoring Well (Code 353);
- On-Farm Secondary Containment (Code 319);
- Prescribed Burning (Code 338);
- Road, Trail, and Landing Closure or Treatment (Code 654);
- Rock Wall Terrace (Code 555);
- Row Arrangement (Code 557);
- Short Term Storage of Animal Waste and By-Products (Code 318);
- Silvopasture (Code 381);
- Spring Development (Code 574);
- Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (Code 395);
- Trails and Walkways (Code 575);

- Tree-Shrub Site Preparation (Code 490);
- Waste Separation Facility (Code 632);
- Waste Treatment (Code 629);
- Wastewater Treatment, Milk House (Code 627);
- Water Well (Code 642);
- Waterspreading (Code 640); and
- Well Decommissioning (Code 351).

The following paragraphs highlight some of the proposed changes to each CPS:

Alley Cropping (Code 311): The CPS was revised to improve clarity and readability. The purposes were reduced from ten to five to focus on primary resource concerns addressed by the CPS, with secondary purposes moved to the "Considerations" section. New references were added to reflect current science on alley cropping systems.

Amendments for Treatment of Agricultural Waste (Code 591): Revisions to this CPS improve clarity, streamline and reduce duplicate information, and establish approval requirements for new products. The revisions are anticipated to have minimal impact on the planning, design, or implementation of this CPS. Changes to this CPS incorporate existing Safety Data Sheet (SDS) requirements to reduce redundancy and ensure consistent amendment-handling procedures. The revisions also consolidate and clarify requirements for new products, including the associated approval process. The purposes were updated to reflect current NRCS resource concerns.

Anionic Polyacrylamide (PAM) Application (Code 450): Minor rewording changes were made throughout the CPS to improve readability. An allowance for performance-based application adjustments was added to the "Surface irrigation" subsection within the "Additional Criteria for Reducing Soil Erosion by Water or Wind" section to provide flexibility for site-specific properties. The "Critical areas" subsection within this same section was updated to include drift-prevention criteria to reduce the risk

of spray drifting away from the target area. Updates were also made to the "General Considerations" section to include opportunities for source water protection.

Annual Forages for Grazing Systems (Code 513): This new CPS was developed from interim CPS of the same name (Code 810). This CPS provides guidance for establishing annual forages suitable for grazing to achieve one or more of the following purposes: meeting livestock nutritional requirements during periods of known forage quality deficit, reducing plant pest pressure on sites where perennial forages exist or will be established, reducing nutrient transport to surface or groundwater, or reducing soil compaction and improving soil aggregate stability. Major changes from the interim CPS focus on refining the purposes and associated criteria so they clearly and justifiably relate to one or more current NRCS resource concerns. Purposes more appropriately addressed by other CPS were removed. Purposes related to secondary or indirect benefits were moved to the "Considerations" section. References from the interim CPS were reviewed thoroughly, and those with limited or no applicability were removed. Additional references were added to support the new CPS purposes and criteria.

Combustion System Improvement (Code 372): Clarifications were made to the "Conditions Where Practice Applies" section, including clearer distinctions for when this CPS should and should not be used, along with guidance on when other CPS are more appropriate. Revisions to the "Purpose", "Criteria", "Considerations", "Plans and Specifications", and "Operation and Maintenance" sections provide expanded detail and clarity. States will now have the ability to develop a "prescriptive upgrades" list of practice implementation actions that have either been shown to inherently reduce air emissions or improve energy efficiency, or for which emissions reduction or energy efficiency improvements have already been demonstrated. Additional references were included to support the updated criteria and considerations.

Composting Facility (Code 317): A purpose related to energy conservation was removed because it was determined to be a secondary benefit. Criteria for in-vessel systems and compost intended for animal bedding were added, and setback distances from wells, streams, and other sensitive areas were adjusted. Minor changes were also made throughout the CPS to improve clarity and more accurately describe the CPS definition, purpose, criteria, and considerations.

Dust Control on Unpaved Roads and Surfaces (Code 373): The CPS name was changed from "Dust Control on Unpaved Roads and Surfaces" to "Dust Control on Traveled Surfaces" to shorten the name and to reflect that dust-reduction options apply to any travel surface subject to vehicle and machinery movement. Additional dust control options, along with associated criteria and considerations, were added for vehicle and machinery restrictions and surface improvements. These longer-lived dust control options also necessitated extending the CPS lifespan from 1 year to 3 years. Changes to the "Purpose", "Conditions Where Practice Applies", "Plans and Specifications", and "Operation and Maintenance" sections provide additional detail and clarity to accommodate adding vehicle and machinery restrictions and surface improvements to the CPS. Additional references were included to support the updated criteria and considerations.

Energy Efficient Agricultural Operation (Code 374): Changes were made in response to feedback from internal and external stakeholders to provide greater clarity on when and how the CPS should be used. Criteria were added to clarify that destruction, disposal, or recycling of replaced equipment is required to ensure increased operational efficiency and that energy-inefficient equipment is removed from service. The "Plans and Specifications" and "Operation and Maintenance" sections were revised to clarify documentation requirements needed to support proper implementation and operation of the CPS.

Energy Efficient Building Envelope (Code 672): Changes were made in response to feedback received from internal and external stakeholders to provide greater clarity on when and how the standard should be used. Criteria were added to clarify that destruction, disposal, or recycling of replaced components is required to ensure increased building envelope efficiency and that energy-inefficient components are removed from service. The "Plans and Specifications" and "Operation and Maintenance" sections were revised to clarify documentation requirements needed to support proper implementation and operation of the CPS.

Energy Efficient Lighting System (Code 670): Changes were made in response to feedback received from internal and external stakeholders to provide greater clarity on when and how the CPS should be used. Criteria were added to clarify that destruction, disposal, or recycling of replaced inefficient lamps and fixtures is required to ensure increased energy efficiency of lighting systems and that energy-inefficient equipment is removed from service. The "Plans and Specifications" and "Operation and Maintenance" sections were revised to clarify documentation requirements needed to support proper implementation and operation of the CP*S*.

Herbaceous Weed Treatment (315): Most revisions focus on formatting and rewriting content using plain language guidelines, including converting passive-voice statements to active voice. The purpose to "protect soils and control erosion" was removed because it is not a primary reason for selecting this CPS. The "Conditions Where Practice Applies" section was updated to more clearly identify where this CPS should be applied. The "General Criteria", "Additional Criteria", and "Considerations" sections were reorganized to improve readability and flow. The "Plans and Specifications" and "Operation and Maintenance" sections were reformatted into bulleted lists that follow the procedural order of operations. Additional references were added, and existing references were updated to their latest edition with hyperlinks.

Irrigation Land Leveling (Code 464): Updated the "Conditions Where Practice Applies" section to reflect the name change of CPS Code 462 to "Precision Land Forming and Smoothing." A new purpose, reducing energy use, was also added.

Land Clearing (Code 460): The "Purpose" section was revised to clarify and remove vague language. Additional criteria were added to address buffer width, timing of operations, and salvage harvest.

Livestock Pipeline (Code 516): Minor wording changes were made throughout the CPS to improve readability. The "flexible conduit design" subsection was updated to include the maximum permitted surge for high density polyethylene (HDPE) pipe. Within the "Considerations" section, a new subsection was added to address protection of the pipeline and appurtenances. The "Additional Considerations for Economics" subsection was updated to include the application of collapsible lay flat tubing.

Monitoring Well (Code 353): Expanded the CPS beyond monitoring components of animal-waste-related structures to support broader monitoring needs. The revised CPS requires using a licensed well driller who is trained and equipped to safely install monitoring wells, decontaminate reusable equipment, and properly dispose of potentially contaminated soil, groundwater, and disposable supplies. This update also requires a hydrogeologic site characterization report prior to or as part of planning, and a detailed report once wells are installed. Wells must be surveyed to 0.01 ft to accurately measure groundwater levels and groundwater elevations. Several well protection items were moved to the "Considerations" section to provide flexibility in selecting protective measures. Requirements for buffer zones around wells for various activities were moved to the "Operation and Maintenance" section. Additionally, the description of conditions requiring well decommissioning was expanded to address wells that no longer meet the intended purpose or are otherwise unserviceable.

On-Farm Secondary Containment (319): The requirement for maintaining the bottom of the facility at least 2ft above the seasonal high-water table, as well as the requirement for locating the facility in relation to the floodplain, was clarified. Added new criteria for vehicle filling areas and safety. The "Operation and Maintenance" section was reorganized to separate repair activities from inspection requirements. References were reviewed and updated.

Prescribed Burning (338): The revised CPS integrates regulatory compliance requirements by shifting from a flexible checklist to a structured, accountable, and integrated framework with broader ecological and regulatory alignment. The "Plans and Specifications" section was updated to provide burn plan requirements. The "Operation and Maintenance" section was updated to include clarity on roles and responsibilities when implementing a prescribed burn and post fire monitoring and evaluation metrics.

Road, Trail, and Landing Closure or Treatment (Code 654): The title was revised to "Road-Trail-Landing Closure or Treatment," replacing "and" with "or" to clarify that the CPS can be used either to treat existing roads, trails, and landings or to decommission them. The measurement unit was changed to square feet to align with how the CPS is planned and installed. The purposes were updated to align with resource concerns. In the "Criteria" section, air quality and wildlife habitat were moved from "General Criteria" to "Additional Criteria". The "Plans and Specifications" section was revised to provide specific planning elements that support efficient development of implementation requirements for closing or treating of roads, trails, landings, and staging areas.

Rock Wall Terrace (Code 555): No major changes to this CPS. An outdated reference was replaced with a current reference for design considerations using geotextile fabric. Minor rewording updates were made in the "Considerations" section to prevent potential misunderstandings.

Row Arrangement (Code 557): Minor editorial changes were made to the "Additional Criteria for Surface Drainage" section to improve clarity. The "Plans and Specifications" section was updated to include the location of utilities and related notification requirements.

Short Term Storage of Animal Waste and By-Products (Code 318): The purpose of providing flexibility in nutrient utilization was removed because it is duplicative of the purpose related to protecting surface and groundwater. The "Additional Criteria" for field stockpile areas were moved to the "General Criteria" section to apply to all situations. Minor edits were made throughout to provide clarity, improve readability, and consistency.

Silvopasture (Code 381): The CPS clarifies how to establish and manage a silvopasture system when trees are either removed from forest land or added to non-forest land. It also identifies site conditions where silvopasture is not appropriate. The purposes were revised to focus on the primary reasons for installing the CPS, including livestock shade and shelter, improved tree and forage productivity, and improved forage availability. Secondary benefits such as reduced soil erosion and improved wildlife habitat, water quality, biological diversity, and carbon storage were moved to the "Considerations" section. References were updated.

Spring Development (574): Several updates were made to expand landowner, planner, and design flexibility. These updates include clarifying that livestock can be excluded from the source area using methods other than fencing if desired, allowing the use of a pump when needed rather than only for moving water upgradient, and adding the installation of a water battery as a consideration for storing water during high flow seasons for use during low flow seasons. The "References" section was updated to support the changes made and associated CPS mentioned in the CPS were included. Additional minor wording changes were made throughout to improve readability.

Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (Code 395): The CPS name was shortened from "Stream Habitat Improvement and Management" to "Stream Habitat Improvement" to clarify that this is not a management CPS. The definition and purpose were revised to include rivers and associated floodplain and riparian areas, to increase flexibility for conservation planning. Criteria now includes maintaining or improving natural stream habitat and channel processes, revegetating areas near the installation site using applicable planting practices and specifications, and evaluating downstream risk associated with the placement or adjustment of in-stream structures. References were updated.

Trails and Walkways (Code 575): Clarifications were made throughout the "Criteria" section to improve readability. The "General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes" section now includes "tribal" laws as applicable laws for planning, designing, and constructing trails or walkways. Added technical references to the "Criteria" section, including American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE 7) and American Wood Protection Association (AWPA) standards to provide additional guidance for design and construction of trails and walkways. Text within the "General Criteria" and "General Considerations" sections was reorganized to place information in the appropriate sections. The "Considerations" section was condensed, and the References were updated to include the newly cited technical references and to reflect current versions of existing references.

Tree-Shrub Site Preparation (Code 490): The CPS was broadened to include other vegetation types beyond trees and shrubs. References to "tree" and "shrub" were removed, allowing the CPS to be applied to site preparation for establishing perennial vegetation more generally. The "Definition", "Purpose", and "Conditions Where Practice Applies" sections were refined for improved clarity. Criteria were reorganized by subject, and several additional criteria were removed to streamline the CPS. Some

considerations were revised and incorporated into the "Criteria" section where appropriate. Portions of the "Operations and Maintenance" section addressing chemical exposure were removed, as these requirements are already addressed in the "General Criteria" section. The References were updated with new supporting references, and an outdated reference was removed.

Waste Separation Facility (Code 632): A purpose related to manure handling was removed because it was not associated with a resource concern; the concept is now addressed under the "Conditions Where Practice Applies" section. The safety section was updated to include references to industry standards. The CPS also addresses a settling basin seepage issue, adds new criteria related to membrane filters, and includes minor edits throughout to clarify, ensure plain language, and align with current formatting requirements.

Waste Treatment (Code 629): Revisions to the CPS were minor and include adding a new safety requirement for storing chemical or biological agents. The CPS also includes minor updates throughout to improve clarity and to align with current formatting requirements, NRCS general writing guidelines, and plain language guidelines.

Wastewater Treatment, Milk House (Code 627): The Revisions to the CPS are minor and include adding flexibility for vegetative treatment in areas without a year-round growing season. Other changes include updated formatting and alignment with plain language guidelines.

Water Well (642): The most significant change to this CPS is moving aquifer testing from the "Criteria" section to the "Considerations" section to allow states more latitude in how they determine the maximum drawdown and pumping rate that a well and aquifer can provide. Requirements for an onsite investigation by a geologist have been changed to allow for a reconnaissance-level investigation, with or without geophysics, better reflecting current agency practices. The previous requirement to install ten feet of

casing when drilling into hard rock formations was eliminated to accommodate varying state regulations. Guidance for well development was expanded to provide more descriptive instruction. References throughout the CPS were updated, and requirements to follow external standards were removed; instead, the critical elements of those standards are incorporated directly into the CPS.

Waterspreading (Code 640): Language throughout the CPS was revised for improved clarity. The water impounding dike criteria previously included in the "Additional Criteria for Detention-Type Waterspreading Systems" section were removed; instead, the CPS now references the design criteria contained in NRCS CPS Dike and Levee (Code 356), for consistency. Wetland-related considerations were added to the "Considerations" section to ensure that potential impacts to wetlands are minimized, mitigated, or avoided whenever possible.

Well Decommissioning (Code 351): Several notable updates were made throughout the CPS. The definition was expanded to include devices similar to wells and piezometers. Revisions to the " Purpose" section directly align with NRCS resource concerns. An important enhancement allows for application of the CPS in situations where soil or groundwater is known or suspected to be contaminated. Requirements to follow American Standard for Testing and Material (ASTM) D5299 were streamlined; instead of referencing the full ASTM standard, important points were summarized into minimum requirements. Additional instructions were added for situations that require special procedures, including those involving artesian pressure, fractured rock, mine shafts, or caverns. Disinfection guidance was moved to the "Considerations" section, and a new consideration was added to address groundwater quality when selecting sealing materials.

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