



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

ASSISTANCE FOR FOREST LANDOWNERS

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Introduction

- ▶ The U.S. Department of Agriculture's NRCS is a federal agency that emphasizes voluntary, science-based assistance to agricultural producers and owners of non-industrial private forestland.
- ▶ Non-regulatory
- ▶ Provide free-of-charge services including technical and financial assistance.
- ▶ NRCS was created in 1935 and back then was called the "Soil Conservation Service". The federal government realized the need for an agency to give voluntary advice and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers because of the devastating effects of the dust bowl.



NRCS Assistance

NRCS works with private farmers, ranchers and non-industrial forest landowners across the country to help conserve natural resources.

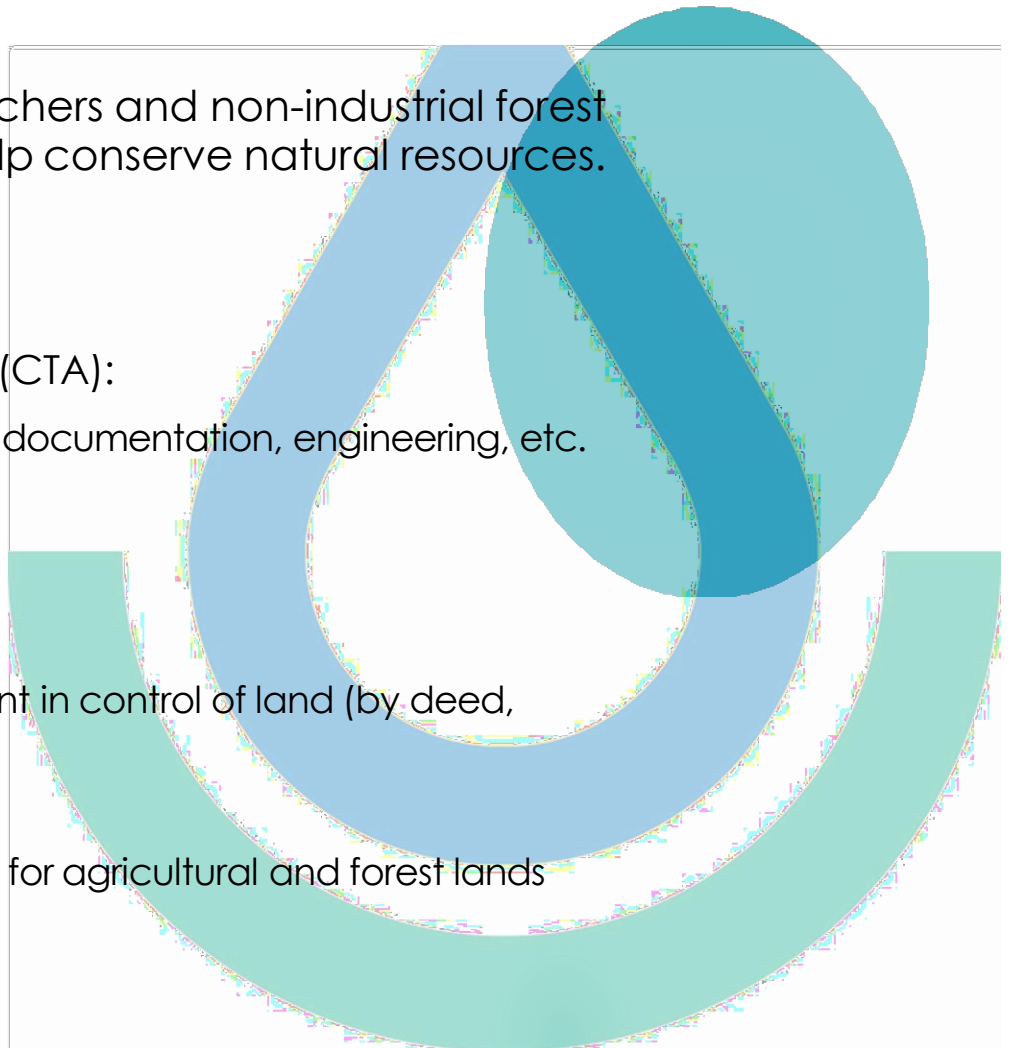
Technical assistance –

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA):

- ▶ Offers expertise, technical planning, documentation, engineering, etc.
- ▶ Does not offer funding to clients

Financial assistance –

- ▶ Offer financial assistance to applicant in control of land (by deed, lease, or agreement)
- ▶ Financial assistance is contractual
- ▶ Financial assistance is only available for agricultural and forest lands



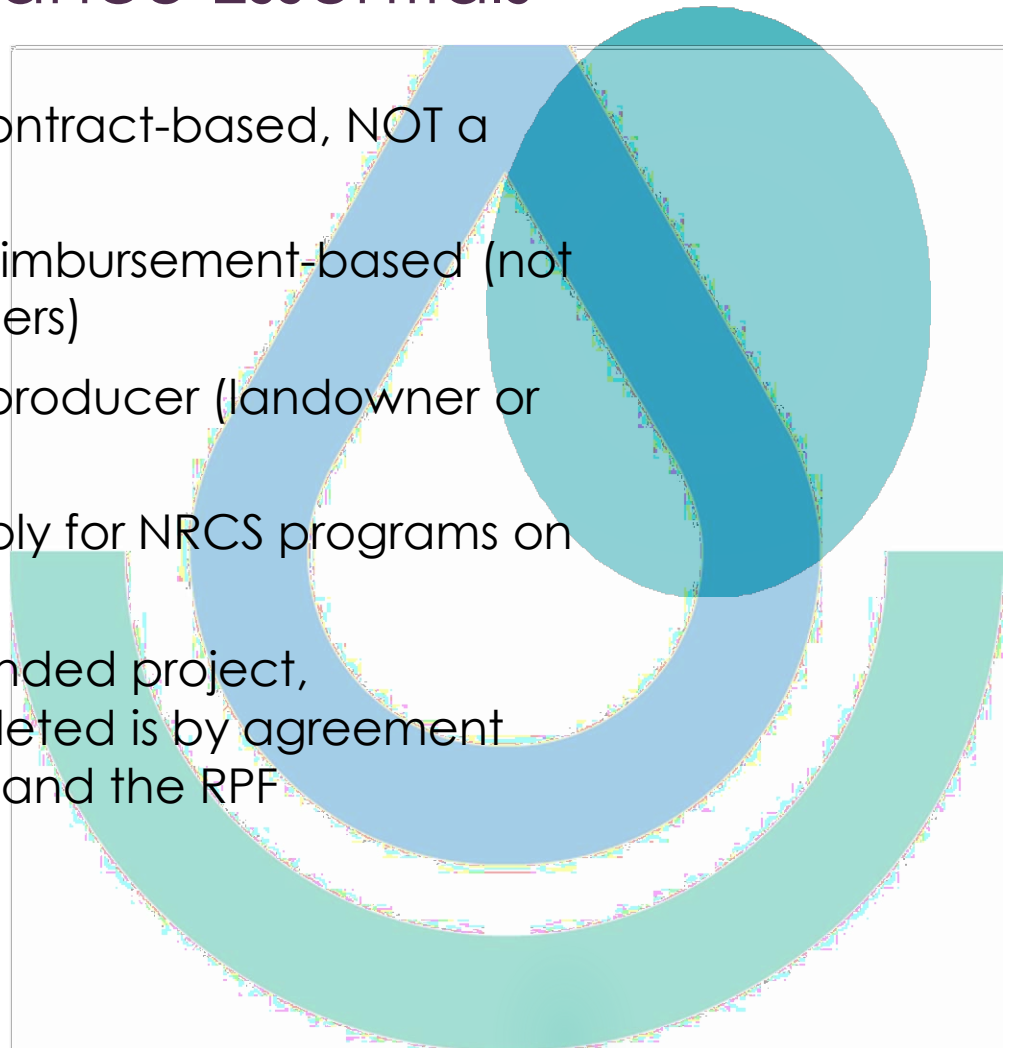
Programs – Financial Assistance

- ▶ Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- ▶ Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- ▶ Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)



NRCS Financial Assistance Essentials

- ▶ NRCS financial assistance is contract-based, NOT a grant program
- ▶ NRCS financial assistance is reimbursement-based (not paid up front to contract holders)
- ▶ An NRCS contract is with the producer (landowner or person in control of the land)
- ▶ RPFs or consultant cannot apply for NRCS programs on behalf of a landowner
- ▶ If an RPF works on an NRCS funded project, compensation for work completed is by agreement between the contract holder and the RPF



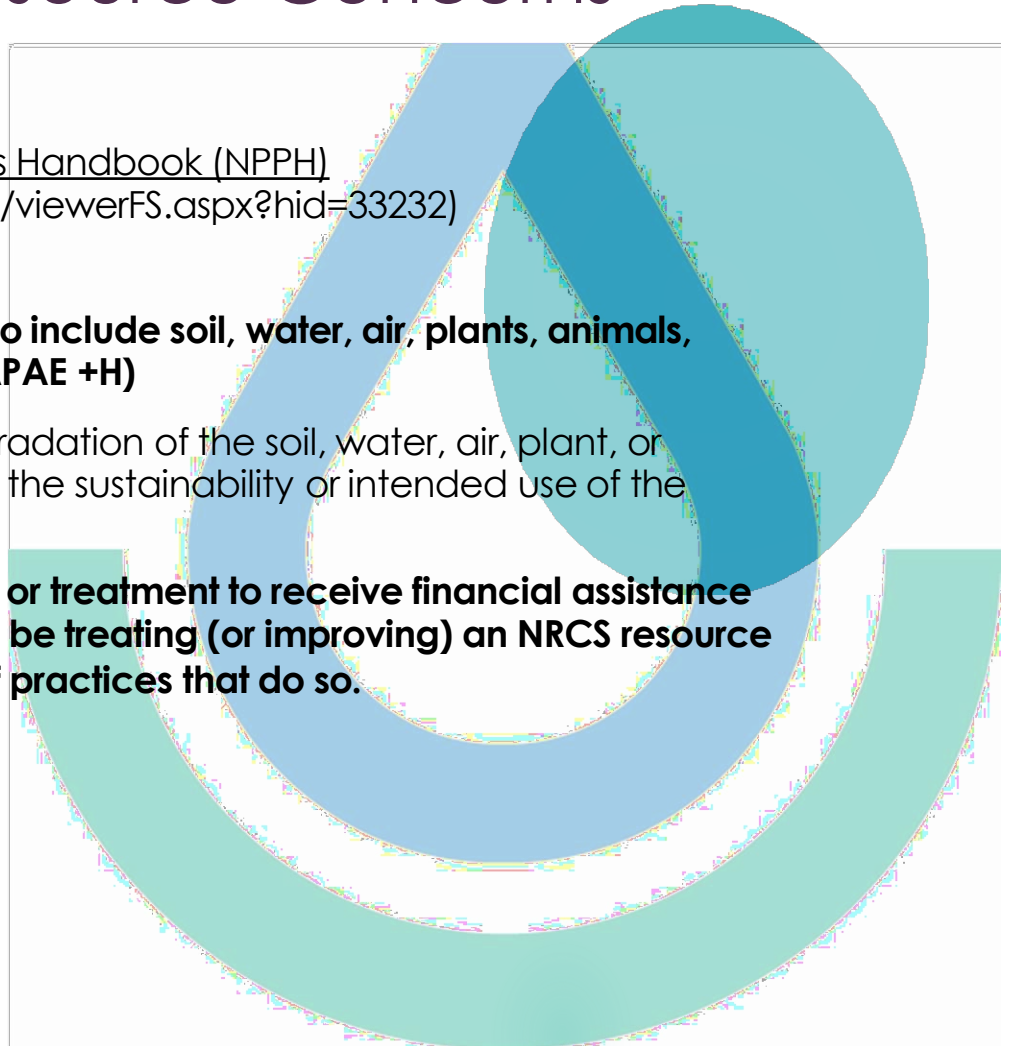
The NRCS Lens – “Resource Concerns”

NRCS National Planning and Procedures Handbook (NPPH)
(<https://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/viewerFS.aspx?hid=33232>)

Natural resources are defined by NRCS to include soil, water, air, plants, animals, energy and human considerations (SWAPAE +H)

Resource Concern—“An expected degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, or animal resource base to the extent that the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired.” – NPPH

****In order for an on-the-ground practice or treatment to receive financial assistance in an NRCS contract, it must be shown to be treating (or improving) an NRCS resource concern, or be part of a series or suite of practices that do so.**



NRCS Resource Concerns Pertaining to Forestland

- ▶ Degraded plant condition
 - ▶ Undesirable plant productivity and health
 - ▶ Inadequate structure and composition
 - ▶ Excessive plant pest pressure
 - ▶ Wildfire hazard, excessive biomass accumulation
- ▶ Water Quality Degradation
 - ▶ Excessive sediment in surface water
 - ▶ Elevated water temperature
- ▶ Soil Erosion
 - ▶ Concentrated flow erosion (gullies from road infrastructure)
- ▶ Inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife (food, water, cover/shelter, continuity)



Common NRCS Forestland Practices

Vegetation Related

- 666 – Forest Stand Improvement
- 660 – Tree pruning
- 384 – Woody Residue Treatment - slash disposal
- 383 – Fuel break
- 612 – Tree establishment
- 391 – Riparian forest buffer
- 314 – Brush management
- 394 – Firebreak

Water Quality Related

- 560 – Access road
- 578 – Stream crossing
- 587 – Structure for water control
- 468 – Lined waterway or outlet (rip rap)
- 350 – Sediment basin
- 580 – Streambank protection
- 654 – Road closure and treatment



Program Eligibility

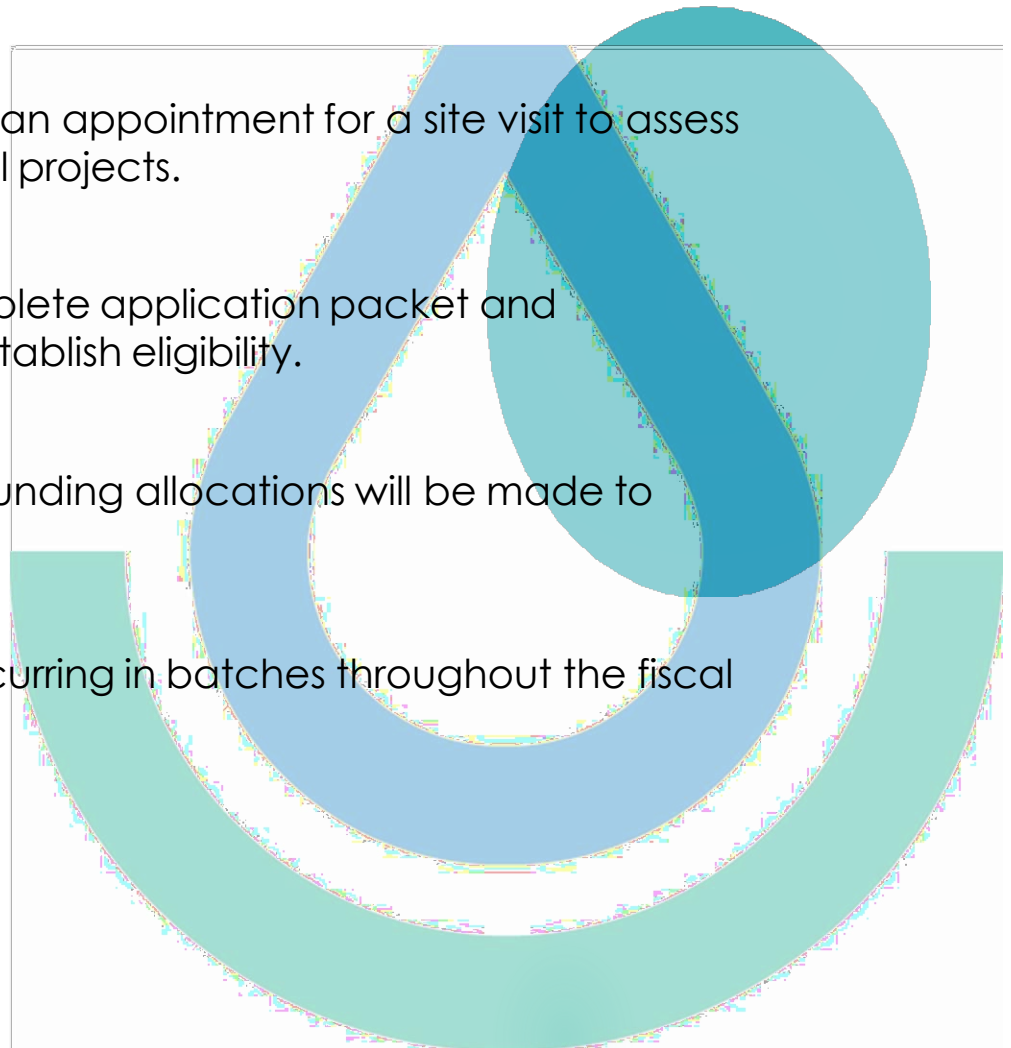
- ▶ Applicants must:
 - ▶ Control or own eligible land
 - ▶ Comply with adjusted gross income limitation (AGI) provisions
 - ▶ Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements
 - ▶ Forestland applicants must have some type of forest management plan.

- ▶ Historically Underserved (Socially disadvantaged, beginning, and limited resource farmers) applicants are eligible for an increased payment rate



Application Process

- ▶ Contact NRCS planner to make an appointment for a site visit to assess resource concerns and potential projects.
- ▶ Work with a NRCS office to complete application packet and FSA (Farm Service Agency) to establish eligibility.
- ▶ Application will be ranked and funding allocations will be made to highest ranked projects.
- ▶ Funding allocations are now occurring in batches throughout the fiscal year.



EQIP Contract

- ▶ If selected for funding the application will be reviewed for NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Compliance
 - ▶ Threatened and Endangered species
 - ▶ Cultural Resources
 - ▶ Etc.
- ▶ Contract will be awarded with practices scheduled within a 2-3 year timeframe.
- ▶ Completed work is allocated as reimbursement payment for practices that meet NRCS specifications.
- ▶ Payment rate is fixed



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<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/california>

