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ECOLOGICAL SCIENCE TECHNICAL NOTES - FOR IN SERVICE USE

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S.D.A., NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE - St. Paul, Minnesota

February 28, 2011

Subject: Conservation Planning Considerations for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP)

Series No.: Agronomy technical Note No. MN-28

Effective Date: Upon Receipt.

Purpose: To provide additional guidance when writing conservation plans for producers interested in participating in this program.

This note outlines considerations to be taken into account when addressing the resource concerns in conservation plans where the landowners' objective is to harvest and sell biomass.

Filing Instructions: This note is on line in section I of the eFOTG under Technical Notes & References by Discipline, Agronomy.

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Obtaining a Conservation Plan for Nonwoody Biomass

NRCS will provide conservation plans for farmers and ranchers who request them for the Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) and will do so under the conservation Technical assistance (CTA) program. These plans will be written following normal NRCS conservation planning guidance and policies in the General Manual and the Conservation Planning Procedures Handbook.

These plans will include the name of the Eligible Material Owner (EMO), his or her planning objectives, total acres and location where harvest or collection will occur. The plan will be completed for the fields where the harvest will occur and will address the resource concerns present on those field(s). The plan does not have to cover the entire agriculture operation.

When evaluating resource concerns for soil, the plan must ensure that there is enough residue left after biomass harvest to control erosion from wind or water to the tolerable soil loss levels, taking into account the other practices in the system. The plan also must ensure that soil quality is maintained. Soil quality is evaluated using the soil conditioning index (SCI). In order to maintain soil quality, the soil conditioning index must be equal to 0.0 or greater. Both soil erosion and the SCI are determined using the Revised Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE2) or the Wind Erosion Prediction System (WEPS) software. Printouts from either of these programs can be used to document the erosion level and the SCI for a conservation system being used on a field. These evaluations are included as a part of a conservation plan. This will help the producer estimate the volume of biomass that may be collected or harvested from the field.

Wildlife habitat is considered in the planning process and is evaluated using the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation System (WHES) or appropriate species guidesheets. When grasslands are being used for the biomass production, they have the potential to provide quality wildlife habitat when managed properly. The BCAP requires that harvest will take place after the primary nesting season. This date should be included in the conservation plan. See Biology Jobsheet #3 Grassland Management for Wildlife Habitat for additional recommendations.

In addition, a statement will be included in the plan that refers the EMO to the FSA attachment for specific BCAP requirements. This attachment, developed by FSA, will include the purpose of the harvest and the expected volume of biomass collected or harvested. Conservation plans should be reviewed with the participant and the normal plan approval process followed.