



Agricultural Marketing Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Resource Document for Completing Environmental Screening
Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Cooperative Agreement
Program

May 2024

Overview

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has developed an environmental screening process to assist states with reviewing Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) Cooperative Agreement Program sub-award projects for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other Federal environmental statutes. Resources for this process can be found on the [RFSI NEPA Resources website](#). Please visit this website and read this entire document before contacting the RFSI team for environmental review assistance.

Awardees are strongly encouraged to identify and enlist their state/territory NEPA expert(s) to assist them with completing environmental reviews for the RFSI program.

Consistent with 40 CFR 1506.1, **no elements of a proposed grant project should be started until the application is approved and authorized for funding by AMS.** This includes activities funded by the grant program as well as connected actions¹, such as site preparation, construction, clearing of land, and other actions.

Two forms were designed to walk states through the environmental screening process, the [Environmental Pre-Screening Worksheet \(AMS-ENV-A or Form A\)](#) and the [Environmental Screening Worksheet \(AMS-ENV-B or Form B\)](#).

All project applications, at a minimum, must include form [AMS-ENV-A](#) as documentation for the environmental review. In some cases, form [AMS-ENV-B](#) will also be required.

To complete the two screening forms, information from the following resources should be utilized:

1. Project narrative submitted as part of the application package by the Applicant.
2. [Applicant Environmental Questionnaire](#) completed by the Applicant.²
3. Project location provided by the Applicant. The exact location of the project is necessary and can be provided using GPS coordinates and/or a location map.
4. Available desktop resources (refer to the Environmental Law and Policy Review section, on page 3 below).

On both Form A and Form B, a brief description of the specific proposed action(s) should be provided in Box 1C, such as building construction, equipment purchase(s), approximate acreage, connected actions, etc. Additional details may be provided under the respective “Additional Comments” boxes or as attachments to the forms.

If there is additional project- or site-specific information required to complete the environmental screening process that was not provided by the applicant in the project narrative or Applicant Environmental Questionnaire, the applicant should be contacted to obtain the necessary information. All documentation received from the applicant, as well as supporting documentation obtained through the review of desktop resources, such as map printouts and resource lists, must be maintained and submitted to AMS to fully document and support the answers provided on the environmental review forms.

¹ Connected actions are those automatically triggered by the proposed actions, which may require environmental impact statements or cannot or will not proceed unless other actions are taken previously or simultaneously.

² If the Applicant Environmental Questionnaire was not submitted with the initial project application package, this should be sent to the applicant to complete. The information provided in the questionnaire should be verified for accuracy using the desktop tools referenced in this document.

[Form AMS-ENV-A: Environmental Pre-Screening Worksheet](#)

States reviewing grant projects for environmental compliance should start by completing Sections 1 through 5 of Form A, which includes the following pre-screening questions in Section 2:

- *Does the project involve any ground-disturbing activities?*
- *Does the project involve any vegetation or habitat removal?*
- *Will the project alter a structure greater than 50 years of age or the general aesthetic of the property (i.e., new interior or exterior configuration)?*
 - To help make this determination, review local assessor records, Google Earth historical imagery, and any applicant-provided information.
- *Is there an adjacent river, stream, or water body?*
 - **This requires documentation.** Review the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) [Wetlands Mapper](#) to determine if the project site is located adjacent to a river, stream, or water body. Print out the map provided and include it with your review submission to AMS.
- *Will there be a permanent increase in noise, odor, or traffic as a result of the project?*
- *Will the project increase the emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and/or nitrous oxide (increased use of internal combustion engines, manure management, etc.)?*

If unable to answer any of the questions on Form A with the information initially submitted, the state will contact the applicant to obtain the necessary additional information before proceeding.

[Form AMS-ENV-B: Environmental Screening Worksheet](#)

If any of the questions in Section 2 of Form A are answered “Yes,” then Sections 1 through 7 of Form B must be completed.

Section 2 of Form B requires effect determinations for a variety of environmental resources covered under NEPA. The user must first determine if the resource is located within the area of potential effect for a project and secondly if the proposed action has the potential to impact the resource. The Environmental Law and Policy Review section, below on page 3, presents a brief overview of the review process for each component, primary desktop tools recommended for use, details for required consultations and coordination with government agencies, and required supporting documentation to include with the completed screening forms.

Environmental Law and Policy Review

Threatened & Endangered Species or Critical Habitat and Migratory Birds	
Review Process	<p>Using the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) web tool, identify your project location and receive an official species list of T&E species and Migratory Birds. This webpage also contains helpful videos and FAQs at the bottom of the page. Follow the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Click 'Get Started' and then click 'Ok'2. Search or zoom to find the project location3. Draw the area where activities will occur by selecting the 'Polygon' tool4. Confirm the area where project activities will occur and modify if necessary5. Click 'Continue'6. Click 'Define Project' to generate an Official Species List7. Create login if you do not already have one8. Enter a project title and description9. Select 'Start Review'10. Select 'Continue'11. Select 'Yes, Request a Species List' and answer questions appropriately:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does this project require an Official Species List? (<i>yes</i>)• Is this project being conducted, permitted, funded, or licensed by a Federal agency? (<i>yes</i>)• Does your project fall under any of the following special project authorities? (<i>none</i>)• What kind of organization are you working for directly? (<i>state/territory agency</i>)• Who is the Lead Federal Agency for this project? (<i>There is another agency that is the lead agency</i>)• Are you a designated non-federal representative? (<i>yes</i>)• What is your role in this project? (<i>supporting project proponent</i>)• What agency do you work for? (<i>select agency</i>)• What kind of organization is the lead agency for this project? (<i>Federal agency</i>)• Who is the lead agency? (<i>Agricultural Marketing Service</i>)• Enter your contact information and your project information. (<i>Project type is 'Federal grant/loan related'</i>)• Select 'Submit Official Species List Request'12. Save the Official Species List and include it with your review package submitted to AMS. Refer to "Consultation" (below) to determine if a "no effect" determination can be made.13. Follow prompts to evaluate using Determination Keys, if applicable14. Follow prompts to analyze project, if applicable15. Download documentation16. Save and include all documentation with your review and submit to AMS <p>Also review the Essential Fish Habitat Mapper following the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Click 'Essential Fish Habitat Mapper'2. Choose a council (region of the U.S.)3. Click 'Generate Report'4. Search or zoom to find the project location5. Click 'Print Report'6. Save the Report and include it with your review package submitted to AMS <p>If any type of habitat for a listed species exists, whether it is critical or non-critical habitat, potential effects must be analyzed.</p>

Consultation

The preparer can make a “No Effect” determination without further consultation if:

- Habitat for listed species does not exist or there is no change in land use.
- The Official Species List did not identify any listed or proposed species or designated or proposed critical habitat within the project's action area.
- The Official Species List may have identified listed or proposed species or designated or proposed critical habitat in the project area, but the project's field surveys and/or existing information demonstrate that there are no species found and no suitable habitat or designated or proposed critical habitat within the project's action area.
- Suitable habitat may be identified, however, there is no reasonable evidence of the presence of listed or proposed species in the project's action area.
- The type and scope of the project is such that it would have no effect on listed species or their critical habitat.

If “Not Likely to Adversely Affect (NLAA)”, informal consultation with [USFWS](#) and/or the [National Marine Fisheries Service \(NMFS\)](#) (the Services) should be initiated. The field office to contact for your project location will be on the Official Species List letterhead, and details of how to submit an informal consultation will be outlined in the Official Species List document. AMS is providing to states a Designation of Non-Federal Representative memo to facilitate informal consultations between the states and USFWS and NMFS. When requesting an informal consultation, states may be required to submit the Designation of Non-Federal Representative with their request. If adverse effects are likely, formal consultation is required. Contact AMS if a formal consultation is necessary.

After reviewing the consultation request, the Services will either concur with the determination that effects are not likely to be adverse (ending the consultation process) or determine that effects are likely to be adverse, which would require formal consultation to discuss alternatives and/or mitigation measures.

If likely to result in adverse effects, an incidental take permit would be required. The USFWS Incidental Take Permits Associated with a Habitat Conservation Plan [webpage](#) and the NOAA Fisheries Permits [webpage](#) provide permitting guidance.

Documentation

The IPaC Official Species List and Essential Fish Habitat Report should be included as supporting documentation for the environmental review and determination, in addition to consultation or permitting records, if applicable.

Cultural or Historic Resources

Review Process

Identifying if a Cultural or Historic Resource exists within the area of potential effect (APE) may require a consultation (see “Consultation” section, below). Also, review the [National Register of Historic Places](#) (NRHP) to identify any listed resources that may be located near the project site and within the area of potential effects following the steps below:

1. Scroll down to the map
2. Identify any nearby historic resources
3. Search or zoom to find the project location
4. Click on any resources near the project site
5. For any resources that are within the area of potential effects and may be impacted, print the digitized documentation (scroll to the bottom of the pop-up box for a link).

Consultation

If the project activity involves (1) ground disturbance of any previously undisturbed area, or (2) structural changes of buildings 50 years or greater, or (3) has the potential to impact any listed resources identified within the area of potential effects, consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)/Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) is required.

If consultation is necessary, follow the steps below:

1. Identify consulting parties, such as the SHPO, THPO(s), landowners, and other interested stakeholders. Use the [National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers Directory](#) to locate the appropriate SHPO and the [Tribal Directory Assessment Tool](#) to locate the THPO(s). Each State and Tribal office will have their own process for initiating consultation.
2. Draft consultation letters using the [template provided](#) by AMS outlining the effect determination for the activity on the resource. Photographs of the site(s) will need to be included in your consultation package. **Note:** AMS must sign THPO consultation letters. Once signed by AMS, the state will send the letter to the appropriate office along with any other project data or relevant information.
3. Submit your consultation request using the guidelines specified by each state/tribe, if available. Tribal consultations should be sent by regular mail unless the Tribe indicates another method is preferred.
4. SHPOs and THPOs have 30 days to respond. If no response is received within the given timeframe, the project can proceed. If a response is received within the given timeframe, review the response, and proceed in accordance with their response.

Documentation

NRHP records of any nearby listed resources should be included in your environmental review package for AMS, in addition to copies of consultation letters that were sent, and the responses received, if applicable.

Coastal Barrier Resources	
Review Process	<p>Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) units are in 23 states and territories along the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico coasts. There are no CBRS units along the Pacific coast.</p> <p>The CBRS Validation Tool is a self-serve tool accessible through the CBRS Mapper that allows you to select a particular location and produce a document which indicates whether that location is within or outside of a CBRS.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Select “CBRS Validation Tool” in the upper right hand corner 2. Click on the pin icon to select your point of interest 3. Zoom in and left click to drop the pin at your location 4. Enter address or description of point location 5. Enter name 6. Click “Certify and Create PDF” 7. Save the “Coastal Barrier Resources System Mapper Documentation” printout to include in your review package submission to AMS
Consultation	<p>Consultation with USFWS must occur before implementing any activity within a CBRS. The consultation will determine if the activity is eligible for Federal funding, as shown in the Consultations Flow Chart.</p> <p>Refer to the USFWS CBRS Consultation webpage for additional information on the consultation process.</p>
Documentation	<p>A copy of the “Coastal Barrier Resources System Mapper Documentation” printout for the project should be included in addition to copies of consultation letters, if applicable.</p>

Coastal Zone	
Review Process	<p>Applicable to: AL, AK, AS, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, GU, HI, IL, IN, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MP, MS, NH, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OR, PA, PR, RI, SC, TX, VI, VA, WA, and WI</p> <p>Determine if the proposed action is located inside the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) boundary following the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search or zoom to find the project location 2. Determine whether or not the project site is located within the CZMA boundary 3. Take a screenshot of the map 4. Save the map to include in your review package to AMS
Consultation	<p>If the proposed project has construction activity, or activity within or outside the coastal zone that affects any land, water use, or natural resource of the coastal zone, a consistency determination must be prepared and submitted to the lead state agency. If a potential impact exists, an official letter or form from the state’s coastal zone management program office accepting the coastal consistency determination must be attached.</p> <p>Refer to the CZMA Quick Reference for additional information.</p>
Documentation	<p>A screenshot of the CZMA boundary map for the project area should be included in addition to a copy of the consistency determination, if applicable.</p> <p>If the project does not occur in AL, AK, AS, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, GU, HI, IL, IN, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MP, MS, NH, NJ, NY, NC, OH, OR, PA, PR, RI, SC, TX, VI, VA, WA, or WI no documentation is required to support a “no impact” determination.</p>

Wilderness Areas	
Review Process	<p>Determine if the proposed action is located within one mile of a wilderness area following the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search or zoom to find the project location 2. Identify any nearby designated wilderness areas 3. Take a screenshot of the map 4. Save the map and submit it with your review package to AMS
Consultation	<p>If the project is located within or near a wilderness area, evaluate if the proposed action will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop land within or near the boundary of the wilderness • remove a significant portion of vegetation or wildlife or • create a disturbance or nuisance that was not there. <p>If yes, consultation with the appropriate lead agency is required. Wilderness areas are managed by the National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services, and the U.S. Forest Service. The Wilderness Connect Agencies webpage can be used to determine the appropriate management agency to consult with.</p>
Documentation	<p>A screenshot of the wilderness area map for the project site should be included in addition to copies of consultation letters, if applicable.</p>

Wild and Scenic Rivers/Nationwide Rivers Inventory

Review Process

Review the [Nationwide Rivers Inventory](#) (NRI) website and the [National Wild and Scenic Rivers System](#) (WSR) website to determine where these resources are in relation to the project location.

1. Search or zoom to find the project location
2. Identify any nearby rivers on the NRI and/or WSR
3. Take a screenshot of the maps
4. Save the maps and submit them with your review package to AMS

Consultation

If the project is within a river corridor of a designated NRI and/or WSR, and has the potential to adversely affect the river because it does any of the following, consultation with the management agency should be conducted:

- is located within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile from the banks of the WSR or NRI, or $\frac{1}{2}$ mile for Alaska
- involves withdrawing water from or discharging water into the designated river
- is visible from the WSR or NRI
- produces noxious odor noticeable from the WSR or NRI
- produces objectionable noise which can be heard on the WSR or NRI
- alters the free-flowing nature of the WSR or NRI

Refer to the [NPS Consultation Instructions webpage](#) for additional information on the consultation process.

Documentation

A screenshot of the NRI map and the WSR map for the project area should be included in addition to copies of consultation letters, if applicable.

National Natural Landmarks	
Review Process	<p>Verify if a national natural landmark is in the vicinity of the proposed action following the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search or zoom to find the project location 2. Identify any nearby national natural landmarks 3. Take a screenshot of the map 4. Save the map and submit it with your review package to AMS
Consultation	<p>If a national natural landmark is nearby and can potentially be impacted by the proposed action, consultation with the NPS is required. Potential impacts include physical destruction or alteration of the property as well as impairing overall public enjoyment of the site; that is, reduced visibility, permanently increasing noise or odors, or restricting access. The NPS National Natural Landmarks Program webpage provides contact information for the various regions.</p>
Documentation	<p>A screenshot of the national natural landmarks map for the project site should be included in addition to copies of consultation letters, if applicable.</p>
Sole Source Aquifers	
Review Process	<p>Identify any sole source aquifer present in the activity area and determine whether it may be affected by the proposed activity following the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search or zoom to find the project location 2. Identify any nearby sole source aquifers 3. Take a screenshot of the map 4. Save the map and submit it with your review package to AMS
Consultation	<p>If a proposed action may affect a sole source aquifer, the regional U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) office should be allowed the opportunity to review the activity. The EPA Regional and Geographic Offices webpage provides regional office information.</p>
Documentation	<p>A screenshot of the sole source aquifer map for the project area should be included in addition to copies of correspondence with the EPA, if applicable.</p>

Floodplains

Review Process

Review the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) National Flood Hazard Layer \(NFHL\) Viewer](#) to determine if the proposed action is within a floodplain following the steps below:

1. Search or zoom to find the project location
2. Determine the project location's flood zone classification
3. Use the NFHL Print Tool to print the map (the icon for the tool looks like a toolbox and is located in the upper left corner of the mapping window)
4. Save the map and submit it with your review package to AMS

If the project is located within a floodplain, consider location or design alternatives, such as elevating structures above the base flood level.

Note: If the current flood insurance rate map for the area does not exist, or if more specific information is needed, contact the FEMA [regional office](#) or the appropriate state agency established for flood prevention purposes.

Consultation

If there are adverse effects to floodplains that cannot be avoided, special public notice provisions apply. If the activity requires development in a floodplain, a floodplain development permit is required.

If it is believed that a property was inaccurately identified as a Special Flood Hazard Layer, FEMA's Change Your Flood Zone Designation [webpage](#) provides information on how to submit a Letter of Map Change request.

The review of the proposed activity by the local environmental permitting office serves as consultation for floodplain resources.

Documentation

A copy of the floodplain map for the project area should be included in addition to copies of correspondence with FEMA, if applicable.


Wetlands	
Review Process	<p>Review the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) Wetlands Mapper to determine if the project site is located inside or near a delineated wetland following the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search or zoom to find the project location 2. Review the project area for any nearby wetlands 3. Click 'Print' 4. Enter a title for the printout and click 'Print' 5. Save the map and submit it with your review package to AMS
Consultation	<p>If the project has the potential to impact wetlands, a Section 404 permit would need to be obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE); however, before this permit can be issued, a Section 401 Certification must first be obtained from the state.</p> <p>Locate the appropriate USACE International Boundary Map https://usace.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=7344e62432694199af7790aa47a32fdd to begin. The applicant is responsible for obtaining all requisite permits and covering related costs.</p> <p>Obtaining the appropriate permits for the proposed activity is considered consultation for wetlands.</p>
Documentation	<p>A copy of the wetlands map for the project area should be included in addition to copies of permits, mitigation plans, and compliance monitoring, if applicable.</p>

Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Prime & Unique Farmlands

Review Process

For activities involving new structures, the expansion of existing structures, wastewater structures, or possible resource impacts not considered under the applicable Programmatic Environmental Assessment, which may have direct and indirect impacts on soils and other important land resources, further evaluation may be required. Review the project description and other project-specific information for potential direct or indirect impacts to land or soil resources, and identify the type, magnitude, and duration of any potential impacts.

Step 1: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) [Web Soil Survey](#) (WSS) provides soil data and information produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. Use the WSS to obtain soil characteristics for the project area following the steps below:

1. Click 'Start WSS'
2. Click 'Address' on the left menu to open the drop-down list
3. Enter the address of the project location in the text box and click 'View'
4. Create an Area of Interest (AOI) for the proposed project – select the AOI polygon tool () and draw a polygon that covers the project area (double-click to complete the shape)
5. Under the 'Shopping Cart' tab on the top ribbon, click 'Checkout' and 'Ok'. This will generate a 'Custom Soil Resource Report,' which details the Map Units, or soils types within the AOI
6. Review the Map Units for indicators of HEL and Prime & Unique Farmlands
7. Save this report and submit with your review to AMS

Step 2: NRCS WSS soils type(s) should then be compared to the state-specific lists that can be found using the [NRCS Field Office Technical Guide](#).

1. Select your state/territory
2. Select Section 2: Natural and Cultural Resources Information
3. Select soils information provided by each state including HEL lists typically organized by county and farmland classification information
4. Print available resources showing whether soil types in the Area of Interest are/are not Highly Erodible

Additional available web data sources may be accessed, including county land information or county GIS data, to identify records of HEL determinations by NRCS for the project area. You can [contact your NRCS State office using this directory](#).

Consultation

NRCS oversees HEL programs that subject cropland to the provisions of the Food and Security Act; however, there are no required consultations specific to soils. If important land resources could be affected, consultation with NRCS is required to determine appropriate mitigation measures or alternatives to the proposed action.

Documentation

Provide a copy of the NRCS WSS soils report, documentation of any other relevant soil characteristics, and available HEL determination records for the project location.

Section 303(d) Listed Waterway

Review Process

Review EPA's [How's My Waterway](#) to determine if any nearby waterways are impaired following the steps below:

1. Search or zoom to find the project location
2. Review the project area for any nearby impaired waterways
3. Click the printer icon
4. Enter a title in the text box
5. Click 'Download Printable Map'
6. Save

Consultation

If the proposed activities have the potential to impact any surface waters, impaired or otherwise, through point source pollution, a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit may be required. The EPA's NPDES Permit Basics [webpage](#) includes general information on the permitting process. Most states have been authorized to manage the permitting process. The permitting process serves as consultation for surface water impacts.

Documentation

If a potential impact to surface waters exists, mitigation measures, including reference to required permits, management plans, and compliance monitoring, should accompany the environmental review.

Environmental Justice Communities	
Review Process	<p>Determine if the proposed action has the potential to impact disadvantaged communities, using the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) following the steps below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Search or zoom to find the project location 2. Click on the project location to determine whether or not it is considered disadvantaged 3. Right click and select 'Print' or take a screenshot of the map and determination 4. Save the printout and submit it with your review package to AMS
Consultation	<p>There is no government agency consultation required for disadvantaged communities; however, outreach to the community may be required dependent upon implications of the proposed action.</p>
Documentation	<p>Provide a copy of the CEJST map.</p>

In addition to the resource-specific desktop tools presented above, there are more general tools that can be used to assess multiple resource areas or site-specific and regional conditions in one application, including:

- EPA's [NEPAssist](#) is an application that facilitates the environmental review process and project planning in relation to environmental consideration by drawing environmental data dynamically from EPA GIS databases and web services and providing immediate screening of environmental assessment indicators for a user-defined area of interest.
- EPA's [EnviroAtlas Interactive Map](#) provides access to 500+ maps and multiple analysis tools for analyzing watersheds, elevation changes, land cover, and more.

If, after utilizing the above information, you have questions about the environmental review process or project specific questions, please contact us at RFSI@usda.gov.