



Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative 40 New Conservation Planner Positions (Statewide)

Overview

Producers across Illinois are on the front lines of ensuring global food security and protecting the state's land, water, and other natural resources for future generations. Conservation districts along with the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) play a critical role in achieving this goal by providing producers with technical assistance, resources, and tools to implement effective conservation practices on their lands. IDOA through the Partners for Conservation program supports all 97 Conservation districts across the state. These Conservation district professionals are trusted advisors within their local communities and play a key role in educating producers, facilitating the conservation planning process, and working with producers to design and implement the most effective conservation systems for their operations. These proven conservation practices – such as cover cropping, nutrient management, and forest stand improvement – can increase production, enhance resilience, and improve biodiversity, land, and water quality in communities across the state.

The USDA's Natural Resource Conservation (NRCS) staff, in coordination with partners such as state departments of agriculture and conservation districts, implement critical USDA working lands conservation programs, like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These programs provide resources that allow farmers, foresters, and ranchers to conserve land and water, protect water quality, and improve soil health. NRCS employees often work hand-in-hand with IDOA and conservation district staff to inform producers about conservation opportunities, develop conservation plans, and ultimately help landowners implement effective conservation practices.

As producer demand for conservation grows, resources and staff for our federal and local conservation workforces are often stretched thin. Over the past decade, USDA and their conservation partners have struggled to keep staffing levels on pace with attrition. Although NRCS has made progress by adding 3,000 workers over the past two years, there remain critical staff shortages at NRCS. This capacity issue has a very real impact on the administration of conservation programs, conservation planning, and producers' access to technical assistance, as well as staff morale.

Conservation staffing concerns also extend beyond NRCS. Other state, local, and private conservation professionals, including conservation districts, often struggle to reach and maintain adequate staffing levels. A 2021 Soil and Water Conservation Society poll of 1,715 public and private conservation practitioners found that 90 percent of respondents reported that a lack of conservation practitioners negatively impacts conservation momentum. Seventy-eight percent agreed that a lack of field staff reduces an organizations' capacity to get conservation on the ground.

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We need to inspire, educate, and provide more opportunities for the next generation to enter the conservation workforce. From elementary school to college – we need young people to understand the importance of conservation and provide them with the requisite tools and pathways to secure conservation careers.

IDOA in partnership with its Partners for Conservation program is already taking action to bolster the conservation workforce pipeline. With funding from the state legislature, IDOA is positioned to work closely with NRCS to develop a capacity building program to prepare high school and college students for conservation careers. The program will promote NRCS and conservation districts as employers of choice for diverse populations and develop future leaders in agriculture and conservation. Although IDOA in partnership with the state legislature has taken steps to address this growing issue, we recognize that there is much more left to do. Inspiring young professionals to become passionate about conservation, providing additional education opportunities, introducing students to conservation careers, bolstering training programs, and increasing compensation for conservation professionals are just some of the things we need to make progress on if we are going to address this challenge.

The purpose of this agreement is to allow the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA) to tackle the conservation staffing capacity challenges and expand Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy efforts in Illinois, increase Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) technical assistance to Illinois CRP participants, and to increase general conservation planning assistance to Illinois landowners, users, and producers.

The project will allow the addition of up to 40 conservation planners across the state of Illinois. The conservation planners will be recruited and supervised by IDOA and hired by a subcontract hiring agent. The staff will be located in NRCS or IDOA offices across the state (see map below for initial locations). Staff locations will be evaluated based on NRCS and IDOA conservation planning workload needs, space availability, and the local office's capacity to engage the additional staff. The conservation planners will increase CRP technical assistance for planning, implementation, and maintenance. They will increase capacity to develop new conservation plans and to conduct conservation implementation follow-up to improve conservation successes.

The conservation planners will also support the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRs) efforts as the latest bi-annual report indicates an increase in overall nutrients being lost to Illinois streams and rivers. In addition, the new planners will be able to assist with the IDOA conservation programs to increase overall producer opportunities to participate in state and federal conservation programs.

Employment type: Contractual position with benefit package

For more information or to apply, contact:

Dr. Michael Woods, Manager
Division of Natural Resources | Illinois Department of Agriculture
Michael.Woods@illinois.gov | 217-785-5478

Job Title: Education and Development Coordinator

Job Status: Contractual

Start Date: ASAP

Reports to: IDOA Division of Natural Resources Manager

Salary Range: \$55,000 - \$66,000

Benefits: Full benefit package available

Primary Location: Springfield, Illinois (blended virtual option possible)

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Job Description: The Education and Development Coordinator works alongside the Conservation Planning team to plan, develop and administer education and development initiatives that advance conservation practices across the state along with providing vital communication support to the initiative. Successful candidates have excellent communication skills, adept at creating curriculum for secondary, post-secondary and community programs as well as being highly efficient in working with a database, organizing, and implementing special events and promoting the overall mission of the IDOA, NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) conservation planning initiative.

Primary responsibilities include:

- Evaluates the educational needs of a multi-faceted community and customizes the educational program to fit community needs, monitors support and enrollment activities. Provides area and/or division reports to the administrative team, including enrollment reports and class success rates. Develops new classes and events and selects repeat classes and events.
- Administers the delivery of classes and events including evaluating curriculum, developing course titles and writing/editing course descriptions, assessing production and promotional costs and tuition and fees, and coordinating locations, times, and other logistics. Prepares budgets for upcoming classes and events.
- Monitors educational programs to ensure they meet quality control standards by conducting needs assessments, designing learning environments, reviewing class evaluations, and providing instructor training and evaluation.
- Provides input to the departmental budget process and monitors program budgets considering grant directives and conservation mission and goals; authorizes budget expenditures.
- Develops positive working relationships with industry partners, high schools, and colleges (community and 4 year) departments; and interacts with industry/academic staff regarding planning, coordination and requesting services.
- In collaboration with the project team, provide input to the initiative marketing/outreach plans. Promotes classes and programs, including market research, surveys, publicity, and market analysis.
- Assists with the development of the initiatives short- and long-range goals and its mission by providing information on the relevance of educational programs offered enrollment statistics and profitability.
- Represents the Conservation Initiative in the local professional community and statewide; may serve on internal/external committees and community advisory boards.
- Coordinates with statewide conservation planners that represent the initiative and provide direct project services and outreach.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

- Knowledge of community access and involvement strategies

- Knowledge of adult learning theory, needs assessment, curriculum development and evaluation
- Knowledge of public relations and marketing principles
- Knowledge of program/project planning principles and techniques
- Skill in project management and independent problem solving
- Skill in defining and conducting needs assessments
- Skill in marketing and promoting programs
- Skill in compiling and analyzing data
- Skill in analyzing processes and making recommendations for improvement
- Skill in researching, analyzing, and applying relevant information to the development of processes and programs
- Ability to manage multiple projects
- Ability to assess the consequences and outcomes of program initiatives
- Ability to coordinate activities with other internal departments and the community
- Ability to prepare reports related to operational activities, including statistical analysis
- Ability to utilize computer technology used for communication, data gathering and reporting
- Ability to communicate effectively through oral and written mediums
- Ability to learn and utilize social media platforms and websites for programmatic updates
- Ability to maintain a driver's license and insurance and be on travel status as needed

Preferred Qualifications:

- Excellent written and verbal communication skills and knowledge of education/communication principles and practices
- Skilled at educational development and delivery (in person and virtually)
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate and effectively interact with people across cultures, ranges of ability, genders, ethnicities, and races
- Proficient in the use of various Microsoft Office Suite programs
- Experience working within a database system and understanding data management.
- Experience using graphic design platforms
- Knowledge of website management and social media platforms
- Experience prioritizing and following through with minimal direction
- Attention to detail, project management skills, and being highly organized

Education and Experience:

Bachelor's degree from a four-year college or university and/or equivalent work experience in the field.

Other Position Factors:

Equal Employment Opportunity and Civil Rights: Actively supports the Equal Opportunity and Civil Rights Programs and assures the delivery of agency programs and services are carried out in accordance with policy and procedures without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation and marital or family status.

Safety and Health: Performs duties in a supportive manner of a safe and healthy work environment. The incumbent exercises caution and maintains all safety requirements when exposed to dangerous objects, chemicals, and extreme temperatures.

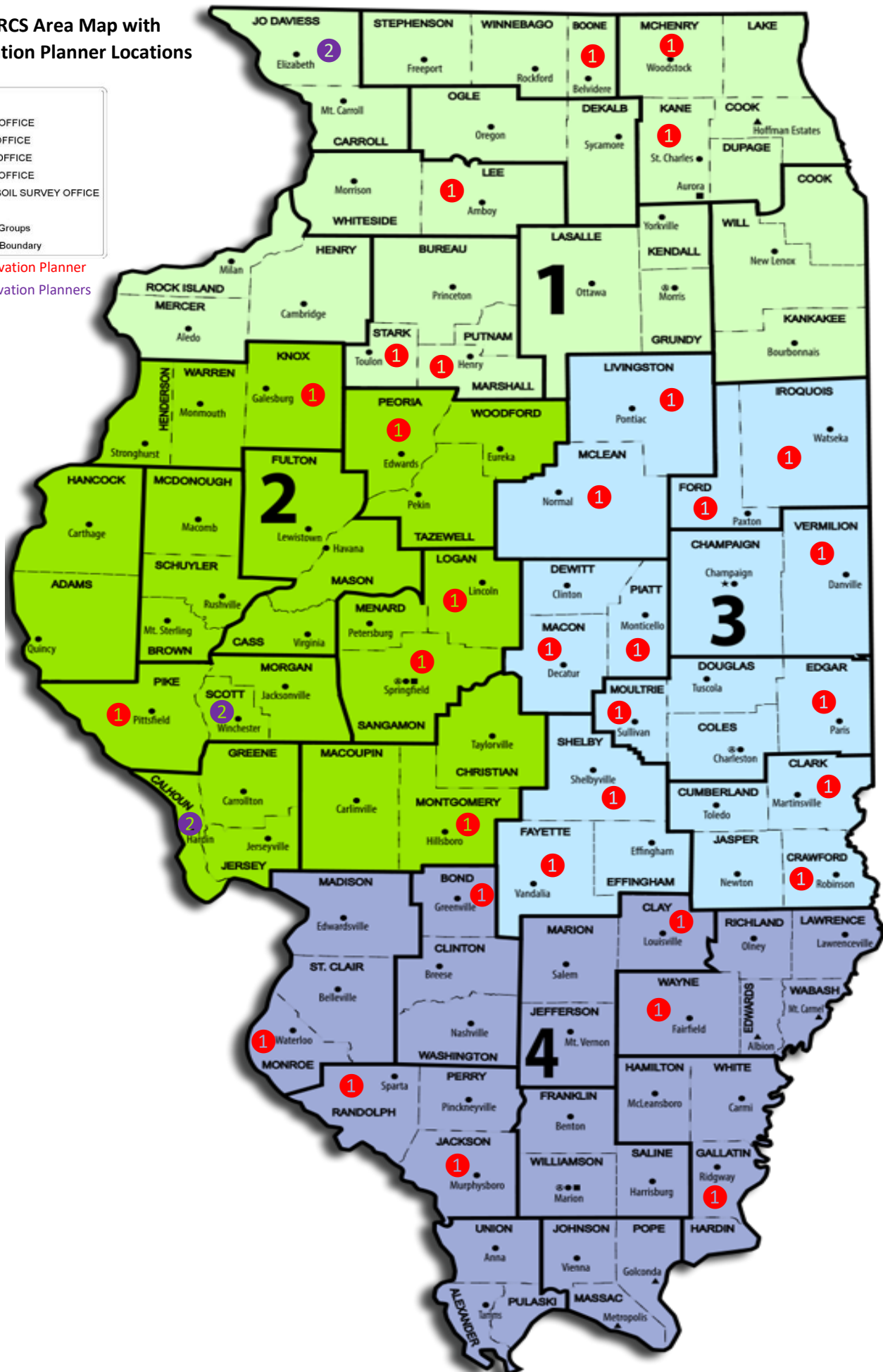
Condition of Employment: Motor vehicle operator: Must possess and maintain a valid state motor vehicle operator's license for the type of vehicle(s) operated to perform the duties of this position. This may require the operation of a motor vehicle in both public and private roads during daylight hours and occasionally after dark.

Illinois NRCS Area Map with Conservation Planner Locations

Legend

- ★ STATE OFFICE
- AREA OFFICE
- FIELD OFFICE
- ▲ SWCD OFFICE
- MLRA SOIL SURVEY OFFICE
- Ⓜ VTC
- District Groups
- County Boundary

- ① Conservation Planner
- ② Conservation Planners



EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION

PERSONAL INFORMATION

FULL NAME: _____ DATE: _____
First Middle Last

ADDRESS: _____
Street Address Apt/Suite
City State Zip Code

E-MAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

DATE AVAILABLE: _____

POSITION APPLIED FOR: (Please check all that apply) _____

Conservation Planner
(Preferred Work County/
Review Attached Map)

Communication and Marketing Coordinator

Education and Development Coordinator

Program Coordinator

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

EMPLOYMENT DESIRED FULL-TIME PART-TIME

EMPLOYMENT ELIGIBILITY

ARE YOU LEGALLY ELIGIBLE TO WORK IN THE U.S? YES NO

HAVE YOU EVER WORKED FOR THIS EMPLOYER? YES* NO

*IF YES, WRITE THE START AND END DATES: _____

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN CONVICTED OF A FELONY? YES* NO

*IF YES, PLEASE EXPLAIN: _____

EDUCATION

HIGH SCHOOL: _____

High School Graduate or GED? YES NO Name of School

COLLEGE: _____

CITY / STATE: _____

NUMBER OF YEARS ATTENDED: _____

GRADUATE? YES NO DEGREE: _____

COLLEGE: _____

CITY / STATE: _____

NUMBER OF YEARS ATTENDED: _____

GRADUATE? YES NO DEGREE: _____

OTHER: _____

CITY / STATE: _____

NUMBER OF YEARS ATTENDED: _____

DEGREE/CERTIFICATION: _____

OTHER: _____

CITY / STATE: _____

NUMBER OF YEARS ATTENDED: _____

DEGREE/CERTIFICATION: _____

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYER 1: _____

Company / Individual

City

State

POSITION TITLE: _____

FROM: _____ TO: _____

AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED PER WEEK _____

RESPONSIBILITIES:

EMPLOYER 2: _____
Company / Individual

City State

POSITION TITLE: _____

FROM: _____ TO: _____

AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS WORKED PER WEEK _____

RESPONSIBILITIES:

* PLEASE ATTACH ADDITIONAL EMPLOYER INFORMATION ON SEPERATE SHEET OF PAPER INCLUDING ALL DETAILS ABOVE or ATTACH RESUME

REFERENCES
(PROFESSIONAL ONLY)

FULL NAME: _____ RELATIONSHIP: _____
First Last

COMPANY: _____ TITLE: _____

E-MAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

FULL NAME: _____ RELATIONSHIP: _____
First Last

COMPANY: _____ TITLE: _____

E-MAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

FULL NAME: _____ RELATIONSHIP: _____
First Last

COMPANY: _____ TITLE: _____

E-MAIL: _____ PHONE: _____

BACKGROUND CHECK CONSENT

IF ASKED, ARE YOU WILLING TO CONSENT TO A BACKGROUND CHECK? YES NO

DISCLAIMER

Applicant understands that this is an Equal Opportunity Employer and committed to excellence through diversity. In order to ensure this application is acceptable, please print or type with the application being fully completed in order for it to be considered.

Please complete each section EVEN IF you decide to attach a resume.

I, the Applicant, certify that my answers are true and honest to the best of my knowledge. If this application leads to my eventual employment, I understand that any false or misleading information in my application or interview may result in my employment being terminated.

SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

PRINT NAME _____

Please submit application along with cover letter (optional) and resume (optional) to:

Michael Woods, Division Manager, Division of Natural Resources
Michael.Woods@illinois.gov