



FIRST NATIONS
DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

STEWARDING NATIVE LANDS:

**Conservation Planning
Curriculum for Native
American Ranchers**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2021 First Nations published the 2nd edition of *Stewarding Native Lands A Conservation Planning Guide for Native American Ranchers*. Between November 2021 and December 2023 First Nations staff hosted 13 conservation planning workshops and trainings in Native communities across New Mexico and Arizona. This guide was created to support Native American ranchers in the development of conservation plans that can assist in addressing natural resource concerns, meet conservation practice standards and specification and increase community members opportunities to participate in USDA programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

In June 2022 First Nations started its Advancing Native Ecological Stewardship project. The intent of the project was threefold, to advance efforts addressing ecological and land management issues resulting from climate change, develop resources to increase community and producer capacity to implement community-driven conservation planning strategies, and increase the capacity of Native youth by providing tools and knowledge to conduct conservation practices in their communities.

This curriculum is a resource created under the Advancing Native Ecological Stewardship Project that can guide Native American ranchers and community members through the development of a comprehensive conservation plan that has the potential to improve soil health and water quality, strengthen land and natural resources management systems, and prioritize cultural resources protection in keeping with Native values of respect for the environment.

INTRODUCTION

Across the nation climate change is impacting tribes and Native communities. Although the impacts of climate change are varied and uncertain tribes and Native communities face shared direct impacts to natural resources, which influence environmental, social, political, and economic factors. There is an urgency to address climate impacts by establishing and enforcing policies that protect culturally relevant species, building community capacity to manage natural resources, and developing and implementing adaptation or conservation plans.

A conservation plan is a site-specific project or proposition that can support Native American ranchers to make informed decisions about their land. Every piece of land is unique in terms of ecosystems and resources and a conservation plan can be essential in assessing and addressing natural resource concerns related to soil, water, animals, plants, air, energy, and human interaction. Implementing and maintaining conservation practices can protect cultural resources; sustain natural resources; create or improve wildlife habitat; strengthen local food systems; and improve water, soil, and air quality.

To address climate impacts Native community members – farmers, ranchers, hunters, fishers, and so on - are working towards a shared vision, which will establish pathways that build adaptive capacity and advance ecological stewardship efforts.

Conservation Planning Curriculum For Native American Ranchers

The Conservation Planning Curriculum for Native American Ranchers was created to assist Native American ranchers and community members in advancing ecological stewardship efforts. This curriculum will allow individuals to apply their land-based traditional knowledge in conjunction with western science to develop a landowner-driven conservation plan. The curriculum is comprised of several materials including a guide, workbook, and a series of PowerPoints. The curriculum is broken up into four sections: Planning, Monitoring, Identifying, and Technical Assistance. Although this curriculum focused on conservation practices that will help ranchers address resource concerns, most of the concepts can be applied to assist farmers as well.

A CONSERVATION PLANNING GUIDE FOR NATIVE AMERICAN RANCHERS

The Conservation Planning Guide is designed to assist Native American ranchers in the development of conservation plans that will address natural resource concerns and increase opportunities to participate in USDA programs like USDA-EQIP. This guide outlines the NRCS Nine-Step Conservation Planning Process and highlights key components that will facilitate the successful management of natural resources including understanding the basic principles of range management and developing a written conservation plan that identifies and prioritizes the work to accomplish conservation goals and address natural resource concerns.

RESOURCES:

- **Stewarding Native Lands: A Conservation Planning Guide for Native American Ranchers**

CONSERVATION PLANNING WORKBOOK

The Conservation Planning Workbook is designed to guide individuals through the conservation planning process. Tips and guiding questions are provided throughout the workbook to help individuals process and reflect on information and complete documentation necessary to submit a conservation plan. Similar to the Conservation Planning Curriculum, the Conservation Planning Workbook is broken up into four sections: Planning, Monitoring, Identifying, and Technical Assistance. These sections have corresponding PowerPoints that should accompany progress through the workbook. Additional resources are provided throughout the workbook to guide individuals on a successful conservation planning journey including blank forms that can be completed and submitted for your conservation plan.

RESOURCES:

- **Conservation Planning Workbook**

Section 1 - Planning

Native American ranchers work to keep environmental systems in balance with social, cultural, and economic systems. This balance lies in the management of soil, water, air, plants and animals, and energy resources on every acre of one's land, and action addressing resource concerns such as erosion, groundwater depletion, and wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation, among others. Before monitoring and identifying conservation practices, becoming familiar with the conservation planning process and learning how to create an inventory map and records are essential first steps to develop of a conservation plan. The first section of the curriculum will lay a foundational understanding of conservation planning basics.

RESOURCES:

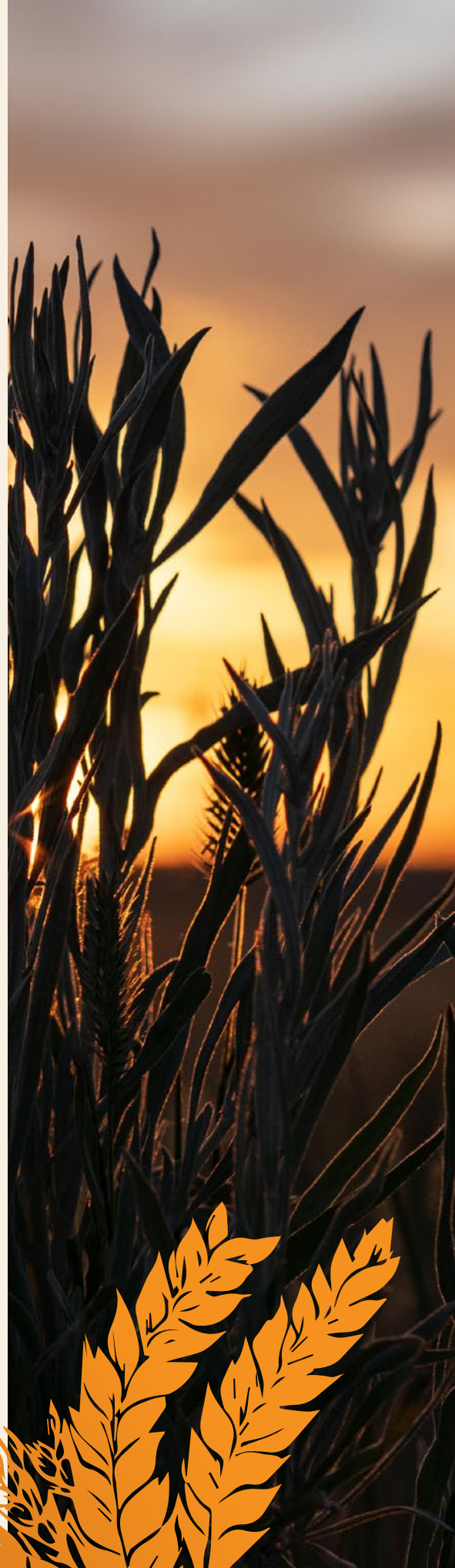
- Conservation Planning Process
- Principles of Range Management
- Ecological Site Composition & Biomass
- Developing a Conservation Plan

Section 2 – Monitoring

Land-based traditional knowledge is invaluable for understanding ecological processes, species interactions, and how to manage resources sustainably. Native peoples have always observed changes in natural systems and adapted accordingly. This section will build on land-based knowledge and provide information about western science data collection methods that are necessary to build a vegetation inventory, assess rangeland health, and ground truth soil and ecological sites. This section outlines NRCS resource concerns, which will inform the development of site-specific goals and objectives to address in a conservation plan.

RESOURCES:

- Rangeland Monitoring
- Goals and Objectives
- NRCS Resource Concerns



Section 3 – Identifying

Native worldviews, identity, and cultural practices are tied to the land. Holistic values-centered relationships inform the prioritization of ecosystem health and protection of natural resources, both of which complement conservation practices. This section guides through the steps to identify conservation practices necessary to achieve goals for the land and address resource concerns. Developing and evaluating alternatives, finalizing goals and objectives, and identifying conservation practices are some of the steps outlined in this section. A broad understanding of the NRCS Conservation Planning Process should be attained upon the completion of this section.

RESOURCES:

- **Field Office Technical Guide and Handbook**
- **Conservation Practice Standards**
- **Resource Management System Alternative**
- **Implementing a Conservation Plan**

Section 4 – Technical Assistance

The final section of this curriculum provides additional resources that cover environmental law, range health, rangeland plants, and plant production & initial stocking rate topics. This section also contains blank conservation plan forms that can be completed and submitted to USDA NRCS. Assistance may be required to complete the forms needed for a conservation plan - reach out to representatives from NRCS, BIA, a Cooperative Extension Office, or First Nations Development Institute for help. If you're interested in receiving technical assistance or support from First Nations Development Institute please contact info@firstnations.org.

RESOURCES:

- **Environmental Law**
- **Range Health**
- **Rangeland Plants**
- **Plant Production & Initial Stocking Rate**

