



Natural Resources Conservation Service

3381 Skyway Drive
Auburn, Alabama 36830

Subject: PGM – Implementing PL566 Irrigation Projects in the Choc-Pea Project Area

Date: October 21, 2020

To: NRCS Alabama Staff implementing PL566 Irrigation Projects in the Choc-Pea project area.

The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance to Field Office (FO) staff who will be participating in the planning and implementation of PL566 Irrigation projects in the Choc-Pea Project Area. To ensure technical adequacy in all phases of the planning and implementation process of the PL566 irrigation project, the following Environmental Compliance and Engineering Items must be adhered to.

As with all NRCS financial assistance programs, the local District Conservationist (DC) must ensure all items in the CPA-52 are addressed per NRCS policy before submitting the contract to the State Committee for signature. Funding cannot proceed for any project with significant environmental impacts. Templates can be found on the State Office (SO) Shared Drive under PUB/CPA52/Irrigation.

The FO must adhere to the cultural resources process outlined in the electronic Field Technical Office Guide (eFOTG). Projects are not cleared for construction until a survey is completed by the Cultural Resources Specialist (CRS), as applicable, and the signed Cultural Resource Review (CRR) form is returned to the Field Office. If findings of cultural resources surveys by the CRS require consultation with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO), then cultural resources are not cleared until the CRS receives this concurrence in writing and notifies the FO and returns a signed CRR form.

Please keep in mind that consultation is a lengthy process and both the SHPO and THPO have until 30 days *after* the receipt of consultation documents to respond. If the project or a portion of the project requires that the agency or landowner applies for a permit from another agency, a receipt or waiver of that permit by another agency does not mean that cultural resources are cleared for the project; thus, the CRR process outlined in the eFOTG must still be completed. It is important that applicants inform NRCS if they have applied for a permit from another agency and if they have received a permit or permit waiver, and that this information is relayed to the State Office and CRS as soon as possible.

For Threatened & Endangered Species, refer to your 12-digit HUC map layer and the attached Conservation Practice Matrix to identify practices, such as pumping plants, which require consultation. The NRCS State Wildlife Biologist will make a habitat assessment to determine if formal consultation with the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) is required. If consultation with USFWS is required, as soon as the preliminary irrigation design is provided, it will be forwarded to USFWS, along with other appropriate documentation. This process could take up to 90 days from the time USFWS receives the package.

Landowner information may not be shared with regulatory agencies without the landowners written permission. The attached Voluntary Authorization for Release Information template may be used for this purpose.

The attached examples of engineering design documents are required to complete the engineering design process. The engineering design must be stamped by an Alabama professional engineer or a certified irrigation designer (CID).

The vendor shall follow the attached design template and provide a stamped engineering design of the irrigation system. The vendor or landowner needs to submit the stamped design to the local DC. The DC shall verify all the required documentation is in the vendor's design submittal and then the DC will submit the stamped design to their Resource Engineer for review and concurrence. The Resource Engineer will request SO review for practices above the Resource Engineer's approval authority:

1. With the stamped design, a stamped sprinkler package along with the stamped Center Pivot Evaluation and Design (CPED) is required. The design package will not be concurred upon unless there is a sprinkler package and a CPED run included. Once the pivot has been installed, NRCS will verify drop lengths, type of sprinklers, sprinkler spacing, etc. according to the sprinkler package.
2. In addition to a stamped design, a pump test is required for well-supplied irrigation systems. Designs will not be concurred upon unless a pump test is provided. All pump tests must be completed by a licensed Alabama well driller. For surface water irrigation systems, permitting will be required and needs to be documented in the case file. The local DC must work with the State Biologist and CRS to ensure all permitting requirements are completed and signed by the appropriate permit issuing authority.
3. The vendor is also required to submit an Irrigation Water Management Plan (IWMP) or provide proof that a subscription for Irrigation Water Management was purchased from the vendor with the design.
4. All center pivots are required to be low pressure systems with drop nozzles. NRCS will not accept any designs with "low-pressure sprinklers" on top of the pivot.

5. All center pivot systems utilizing surface water intakes are **required** to be floating intakes.
6. A pre-construction meeting is required, and the AL-ENG-57 form is to be signed and dated by the participant and NRCS. In the pre-construction meeting, the FO must be sure to identify and list important milestones in the project such as: verifying trench depth, pipe material, pipe size, thrust blocks, etc.
7. Photographic documentation **must** be obtained at all phases of the construction process. Payment will **not** be issued to the participant unless there is adequate photo documentation (i.e. size and type of pipeline, depth of trench, thrust blocks and location of thrust blocks, etc.). Photographs are required of anything that is below the ground surface. Photo documentation of above ground items will be taken during checkout as well as photos of the pivot operating as designed.
8. With all types of NRCS financial assistance the participant must sign O&M's for Conservation Practices 430, 449, 533, 442, 642, etc.... as we would with regular EQIP.
9. Before final payment, signatures are required from the LO, vendor, electrician, well driller, etc. Utilize attached Alabama Irrigation Initiative Checkout draft.docx.
10. Inform the landowner/farmer either 90 days before or after irrigation system is in operation to apply for a permit/certification with State of Alabama Office of Water Resources.

Any questions related to this memo may be directed to Brandon McCray Assistant State Conservationist – Partnerships at 334-887-4500 or by email at brandon.mccray@usda.gov.



BEN MALONE
State Conservationist

Attachments:
AL-ENG-442B
Voluntary Authorization for Release Information
Alabama Irrigation Initiative Certification
Conservation Practice Matrix 2019
Engineering Standards and Specifications
Design Documents