



CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR OPERATIONS

December 2018 Revision

Purpose

This document establishes a plan of action to execute an orderly shutdown of NRCS operations in the event of a funding lapse. This plan will be enacted through a notification to all employees from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Associate Chief at the direction of the Chief and in concert with the Farm Production and Conservation Mission Area Business Center.

Scope

The functions and activities described herein are to be executed in accordance with all applicable statutes, regulations, policies, and delegations of authority. The Anti-Deficiency Act (<http://www.gao.gov/legal/lawresources/antideficiency.html>) prohibits agencies from incurring obligations in advance of, or that exceed, an appropriation. Thus, an agency cannot incur obligations when the funding source for the obligation is an appropriation that has lapsed. Any activities that would incur a new obligation must be suspended and are prohibited. Activities that are under way that would lead to an increased obligation or incurred costs by NRCS must cease.

However, there are limited exceptions to this general rule, including obligations incurred performing activities that protect life and/or property, or incurred to accomplish an orderly shutdown of the normal functions of the agency. In the materials below these activities are referred to as “excepted activities,” and those employees designated to perform these activities are referred to as “excepted employees” during the period they are performing those activities.

High Level Summary

- All employees will be notified verbally of their furlough status (excepted or non-excepted) by their supervisor.
- Each employee is responsible for reporting to his/her supervisor on the first business day following a furlough announcement to confirm their completion of the shutdown checklist. All employees must ensure that their space is clean and free of perishable foods and trash, equipment is powered down, windows closed, and documents and equipment are secured (see Appendices F and G for a complete list of shutdown activities). Only employees whose physical space is secure and who are on approved telework may confirm completion of the shutdown checklist with their supervisor by telephone.
- An orderly shutdown of agency operations is expected to take place as expeditiously as possible.
- All employees are instructed to monitor the status of the government shutdown and agency operations via the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) website (www.opm.gov) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) website (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb>).
- On the first business day following enactment of an appropriation for the agency, either through a full-year appropriation or Continuing Resolution (CR), employees will be required to return to work as directed by OPM, OMB, or agency leadership. Employees should be aware that notification to

return to work may be given only through a status update on the OPM or OMB website. Employees should not expect written notification or notification by phone. Rather, employees are instructed to monitor the OPM and OMB websites, as described in the first bullet.

- Employees who are unavailable to report to work on the first business day following enactment of an appropriation for the agency, because of scheduled or unscheduled annual leave, illness, or other reason, must notify their supervisor within 24 hours following enactment of an appropriation for the agency.
- Senior leadership at national headquarters (NHQ), Centers, and States are responsible for identifying potential excepted employees for shutdown and communicating that information to the Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy (the Deputy). The Deputy will lead a process to determine the approved list of excepted employees. Excepted employees are those who are involved in the orderly shutdown of agency operations or are performing functions related to the protection of life or property. Agency-wide, this will be a very limited number.
- Updated phone trees for contact during shutdown should be verified and maintained in preparation.
- Senior leadership—including the Chief, Associate Chief, Agency Chief of Staff, Deputy Chiefs, Chief Executive Officers, Regional Conservationists, Division and Center Directors, and State Conservationists—as well as approved excepted employees and employees who are on call will retain government-issued cell phones to maintain contact for shutdown operations and emergencies. All other employees must leave government-issued cell phones, laptops, and other devices in a secure location at their duty station.

Communications Timeline

NRCS has prepared a contingency plan for an orderly approved shutdown of activities in the event of a lapse in appropriations. The timelines in this plan are the agency's intent; however, these timelines are subject to change based on Departmental guidance and expectations that may arise at the time of the shutdown. The following communications approach will keep the agency informed leading up to a potential shutdown:

- One week prior to possible shutdown: Associate Chief, Chief of Staff, Regional Conservationists, Deputy Chiefs, and other appropriate leadership identified by the Associate Chief, will notify the Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy regarding employees proposed for excepted status, with written justification. The Associate Chief will lead shutdown planning with the Regional Conservationists, Chief Executive Officers, and Deputy Chiefs to determine the approved list of excepted employees. This information will be confirmed with the Chief and maintained by the Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy and the appropriate organizational unit in the FPAC Business Center.
 - All proposed excepted employees are to be identified by name, title, function, and duty station location, and are persons who will either be engaged in protection of life or property, or whose presence will be required to perform functions associated with the orderly cessation of agency activities. Employees should be identified in

compliance with applicable human resource regulations and notified of their excepted status only after the list has been approved by the Chief.

- Three working days prior to possible shutdown:
 - 1) Employees are notified verbally by supervisors of their status as excepted or non-excepted and subsequent expectations during shutdown.
 - 2) A teleconference should be held with the appropriate Business Center personnel including the FPAC Chief of Staff, The Business Center Chief of Staff, The Chief Human Resources Officer; Director, Workforce Management Division; and Branch Chief, Employee and Labor Relations Services, will provide advance notice to union leadership from AFGE locals 3356, 3839, and 0055, regarding their role in preparing bargaining unit employees should a shutdown occur.
- When approved by the Department: Letter (email) sent from Associate Chief advising employees to make preparations for possible shutdown. The letter will include reminders regarding cancelling planned travel and meetings, and completing timesheets, and will provide shutdown checklists that will need to be completed within 4 hours of arriving at work on the first day of shutdown.
- One business day prior to possible shutdown: An agency leadership teleconference should be held where the Chief, Associate Chief, and Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy will review final preparations and responsibilities/expectations in the event of a shutdown.
- When provided by the Department: Letter (email) from the Assistant Secretary for Management, advising employees to make preparations for a shutdown.
- First day of the shutdown: Furlough notice sent to all non-excepted employees (email) by the Associate Chief. At the direction of the Chief, the Associate Chief will notify employees to begin shutdown procedures. Non-excepted employees are to complete shutdown activities defined on checklists within 4 hours of arrival at work. Once completed they will be placed on furlough. Excepted employees will be notified by their supervisors of their responsibility to remain for duty and will receive an email from the Associate Chief.

Additional items include:

 - Supervisors must complete the supervisor shutdown checklist and report status (email or phone) to their supervisor within four hours of initiating shutdown activities.
 - Associate Chief, Regional Conservationists, Deputy Chiefs, and the Agency Chiefs of Staff are responsible for verifying the completion of shutdown activities within their area of responsibility and reporting this status appropriately.
 - Associate Chief, Regional Conservationists, Deputy Chiefs, and the Agency Chiefs of Staff are responsible for reporting status (email or phone) completion of their shutdown activities to the Associate Chief and the Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy. The Associate Chief will report completion of shutdown activities to the Chief.

Other Communications:

- Letter to national and state partners (see Template in Appendix G).
- Letter to customers (see Template in Appendix G).
- Additional teleconferences will be held as needed with national and state leaders and stakeholders prior to a possible shutdown.

Prohibited Activities During Shutdown

All employees are responsible for taking necessary actions to implement an orderly and timely shutdown of operations. Work under NRCS authorities will cease during shutdown except for those activities designated as excepted by the Chief. Those employees identified as excepted can work during a shutdown only on designated excepted activities and should record their time accordingly. Excepted employees return to furlough status when excepted activities are completed. Some excepted activities do not require full-time work and the excepted employee's work schedule will be adjusted appropriately to carry out only the excepted activity(ies).

Below are prohibited activities for all employees identified as non-excepted. If there is a need for any of these activities to be completed during shutdown, and if the activity is consistent with activities approved by the Department, the Associate Chief may authorize the Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy to work with the Business Center to ensure the activity gets completed or instruct other organizational units within the agency that the activity is approved; approval will be on a case-by-case basis if warranted.

- Completion of any activities that are mission related.
- Awarding of contracts and/or small purchases.
- Hiring of personnel or extending the appointment of personnel whose appointments have expired, if doing so would result in unauthorized obligation of funds.
- Travel of persons and/or transportation of things; persons in travel status on the first day of shutdown must return to their duty stations as soon as possible.
- Attending or scheduling meetings, conferences, workshops, and seminars.
- New or continued employment of experts and consultants - such actions will incur a financial obligation which is prohibited during shutdown.
- Attending or scheduling training classes and/or other training activities.
- Use of equipment and utilities not related to excepted activities where their use creates liabilities for the government beyond those existing on the date of the funding lapse.
- Use of a government-owned mobile device by non-excepted employees is prohibited, except for pre-approved agency leaders to monitor shutdown activities and communicate emergencies that may arise.
- The use of vehicles by Agency non-excepted personnel or non-federal partners.
- Volunteering for functions related to official duties.

Employee Designations

An employee is designated in one of three categories, which indicate his/her responsibilities during shutdown. The categories are: excepted; excepted on-call or episodic; non-excepted.

- **Excepted:** those who are involved in the orderly shutdown of agency operations or are actively and regularly performing functions related to the protection of life or property, even if those activities are not full time (the employee should return to furlough status when the activities are complete). This category should represent the minimum number of employees required to implement approved excepted work.
- **Excepted On-Call or Episodic:** those employees who **may** be needed to perform functions related to the protection of life or property, or that perform excepted activities on an extremely limited or sporadic basis. Generally, these employees are called on to perform excepted activities on an as-needed basis to perform these functions.
- **Non-Excepted:** all other employees, including those who are responsible for reporting to work on the first day following shutdown notifications to execute individual shutdown activities (maximum of 4 hours) and will then be placed on furlough status. Employees may report to work by physically showing up to the office, or by checking in with supervisor while on approved telework schedule provided that the shutdown activities can be completed without a physical presence. Once in furlough status, they are responsible for monitoring the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) websites for when to report back to duty.

*There is an additional category termed "exempt" for Federal employees: **NRCS does not have any employees that are considered "exempt" for the purposes of shutdown.** Employees are "exempt" from furlough if they are not affected by a lapse in appropriations. This includes employees who are not funded by annually appropriated funds.*

Customer Service Team

The shutdown of operations will be accompanied by employee, customer, and partner questions and concerns. It is important to provide timely and consistent information that is in keeping with statute, regulation, and policy.

A temporary, cross-cutting Customer Service Team ("Team") will be available to address questions and respond to emergencies prior to, during, and after a possible shutdown. The Team will work in a cohesive and coordinated manner with the FPAC Business Center to ensure timely, accurate, and consistent responses to shutdown questions. In addition, the Team will inform the Mission Area Shutdown Committee, the Chief, Associate Chief and Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy on status of work and will elevate issues and opportunities that require higher level interaction or resolution. The makeup of the Customer Service Team will be as follows:

- Chief of Staff, Chair
- Associate Chief's Chief of Staff
- Chief of Staff, Regional Conservationists' Office
- Designated staff from the Management and Strategy Deputy Area
- Director, Financial Assistance Programs Division (FAPD)
- Director, Easement Programs Division (EPD)
- Director, Conservation Engineering Division

Shutdown Committee

See information in the Business Center plan for the FPAC Shutdown Committee. For NRCS, a temporary Shutdown Committee ("Committee") will guide the transition from full operational status to shutdown. The Committee will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the shutdown plan; providing related policy and procedural direction; ensuring coordination and consistency across functional areas troubleshooting challenges; and monitoring progress related to shutdown.

The complete membership of the Committee will be as follows:

- Associate Chief, Chair
- Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy, Vice Chair
- Chief of Staff
- Regional Conservationists
- Regional Conservationists' Chief of Staff
- Deputy Chief for Programs
- Deputy Chief for Science and Technology
- Deputy Chief for Soil Science and Resource Assessment

The Committee will be assisted by the Customer Service Team. Other positions may be called upon for assistance as opportunity warrants. In the event of a shutdown, the Agency will implement a two-phased approach to oversee shutdown activities and to monitor essential activities and respond to emergencies and activities. This approach will allow for enough staff to accomplish needed functions at the beginning of a possible shutdown and stand down to only a few essential staff should the shutdown last for more than three days.

- Days one through three of a possible shutdown: The Chief, the Shutdown Committee, and the Customer Service Team, will be designated as excepted or excepted on-call and will report to work. In addition, the Executive Assistant to the Chief and Associate Chief, if available, will be designated as excepted, on-call.

Information Technology

The FPAC Chief Information Officer (CIO) is responsible for ensuring an orderly shutdown of Information Technology (IT) Systems, as well as making sure excepted IT systems are available and operating with a high level of confidence:

- All government equipment (computers, laptops, iPhones, iPads, etc.) must be secured and may not be used during the shutdown except by those in excepted and excepted on-call or episodic status. Senior leadership (including the Chief, Associate Chiefs, Chiefs of Staff, Deputy Chiefs, Regional Conservationists, Division Directors, and State Conservationists) should retain a mobile device to receive information on shutdown status and communicate emergencies.
- If an employee is placed in furlough status, they are not to remotely access government networks or applications.
- Only excepted IT Systems, as identified by agency business leaders, and approved by the Associate Chief, with concurrence of the Under Secretary, will be available and operational.
- All non-excepted websites will be offline, and users will be redirected to a common splash page.
- Employees should reset active directory passwords and ensure they are synchronized with their mobile devices to ensure expiration does not occur during shutdown.
- The FPAC CIO will provide ongoing monitoring to ensure availability and proper functionality of excepted systems during shutdown.
- The FPAC CIO will identify the minimum information technology support required to maintain excepted IT services, systems and infrastructure.
- All IT system that are excepted during shutdown will be minimally maintained and will have the following message posted:

Due to Government shutdown:

(1) Information on the website may not be up to date.

(2) Transactions submitted via the website might not be processed until appropriations are enacted.

(3) The agency may not be able to respond to inquiries until appropriations are enacted.

The message may be adjusted to conform with Departmental directives.

Excepted IT Systems (As of November 2018) *

Name of System	Description	URL
Water and Climate Information Systems (WCIS)	WCIS provides access to snowpack and related climate data called SNOTEL (for Snowpack Telemetry), Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN) stations, as well as data from snow courses, stream flow stations, reservoirs, climate indices, National Weather Service COOP stations, 30-year normal, water supply forecasts, and more.	http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/
DamWatch	DamWatch helps watershed project sponsors monitor and manage dams that were built with assistance from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). By monitoring these structures, project sponsors can better prevent and protect against hazardous, costly and potentially catastrophic events.	https://nrcs.damwatch.us
Emergency Watershed Protection Tool	The EWPP Tool is a software application designed to help NRCS staff create and manage Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) projects more efficiently. The EWPP Tool follows the EWP process from the designation of a state disaster and submission of the EDR, through DSR preparation and submittal, to project and funding approval. The EWPP Tool is used to facilitate management of project funds and project tracking. The EWPP tool is the primary resource utilized to operate and manage the EWP program administration.	https://ewp.sc.egov.usda.gov/#!/main/home

*Identification of additional IT excepted systems is dependent on an assessment of needs to support any additional activities identified as excepted by the Chief, FPAC or the Secretary with guidance and approval of the USDA Office of Budget and Program Analysis and the Office of General Counsel.

Human Resources

In the event of a lapse in appropriations and government shutdown, supervisors must, in conformance with Departmental directives:

- Ensure notice is provided to all non-excepted employees that they are subject to being placed in furlough status.
- Ensure advance notice to all collective bargaining units is provided, as appropriate, concerning shutdown and furlough related topics. Initiate impact and implementation bargaining as appropriate.
- Cancel annual and sick leave during shutdown for all employees excepted and non-excepted, including leave already approved/commenced.

- Provide employees on a non-duty day for the first day of shutdown with activities they are required to complete as part of an orderly shutdown.
- Make prior arrangements with employees on telework, alternate work schedules, or leave without pay under Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), to complete shutdown activities.
- Inform individuals on detail to NRCS from non-Federal organizations (IPA assignments or contribution agreements) that they are subject to shutdown in the same manner as permanent employees.
- Inform NRCS employees on detail to Federal or non-Federal organizations that they are subject to furlough in the same manner as permanent employees.
- Inform temporary employees and students that they must be furloughed in the same manner as permanent employees.
- Inform Earth Team volunteers that volunteering is not an excepted activity.
- Inform employees who are in temporary housing awaiting permanent relocation that they cannot remain in those quarters.

Unemployment Benefits

While on furlough, employees may become eligible for unemployment compensation. State unemployment compensation requirements differ. In general, the law of the State in which an employee's last official duty station in Federal civilian service was located will be the State law that determines eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits. (See the Department of Labor website "Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees" at <http://workforcesecurity.doleta.gov/unemploy/unemcomp.asp>.)

Agencies or employees should submit questions regarding unemployment benefits to the appropriate State government (or District of Columbia) unemployment office. The Department of Labor website provides links to individual State offices at <http://www.servicelocator.org/OWSLinks.asp>.

The Federal Identification Code (FIC) needed for U.S. Department of Agriculture unemployment compensation applications is 445.

***If retroactive pay is approved, an employee is wholly responsible for repaying any unemployment compensation the employee may receive. ***

Ethics

Ethics rules apply to all employees, even in the event of shutdown. While on furlough, an individual remains an employee of the Federal Government. Therefore, executive branch-wide standards of ethical conduct and rules regarding outside employment continue to apply when an individual is furloughed (specifically, the executive branch-wide standards of ethical conduct found at 5 CFR part 2635). In addition, there are specific statutes which prohibit certain outside activities, and agency-specific supplemental rules that require prior approval of, and sometimes

prohibit, outside employment. NRCS employees who are required to file financial disclosures must continue to seek approval of any outside employment they wish to engage in prior to accepting such employment during a shutdown. Further, any NRCS employee who wants to engage in outside employment during a government shutdown that would be the same or similar to the type of work that the employee performs in his or her federal duties must seek prior approval for engaging in that outside employment.

For more information, please see Legal Advisory LA-13-11, dated September 30, 2013, <http://www.oge.gov/OGE-Advisories/Legal-Advisories/LA-13-11--Ethics-Laws-and-Regulations-Continue-to-Apply-to-Federal-Government-Employees-during-Furlough-Periods/>.

Travel

- Prior to shutdown, all vouchers from previous travel must be submitted and approved to help ensure payment prior to systems being shut down. If travel is taken close to a possible shutdown, payment may not be made until after the shutdown.
- During an extended shutdown event, government issued credit card companies will use a forbearance clause and will work with the government and employees on payments once returned to normal business operations. Employees whose government issued credits cards are in good standing will not move to delinquent status; however, if an employee was in delinquent status prior to the shutdown, then the account will continue in delinquent status until payment is made.
- All employees in travel status or on detail in another location must return to official duty stations as soon as possible once notified to begin shutdown activities.
- Employee change of duty station actions may be delayed, depending upon the individual circumstances.

Contracts, Grants, Agreements and Asset Management

Contracts, Grants and Agreements

NOTE: During the 2013 government shutdown, and initially in preparation for a possible shutdown during January 2018, NRCS followed the guidance below and is in Appendix H (Excepted Contracts Guidance). During January 2018, the Department issued its own guidance and a "decision tree" for identifying contracts that can continue during a shutdown. The guidance immediately below and that found in Appendix H, where it may possibly conflict with that issued by the Department, is currently being reviewed and updated, where needed.

- One week prior to a possible shutdown, the, State Conservationists, and National Headquarters Program Leaders, Deputy Chief Management and Strategy, working with appropriate Contracting Officers and Contracting Officer Representatives in the FPAC Business Center, must identify all contracts that are excepted and must remain in full effect to ensure the safety of life and/or property. Once OMB guidance is given, contracting officers will notify those contractors who will continue to perform excepted work.

- Work under NRCS authority and requiring NRCS support, oversight, assistance, etc. will cease during shutdown, unless determined to be an excepted activity by the Chief.
- For previously obligated and awarded contracts, grants, and agreements where it is not critical that NRCS provide oversight, supervision, support, or other assistance to the contractor's or grantee's continued performance during the lapse of operations, those contractors or grantees may continue.
- Contractors and grantees may not continue to work if they use NRCS space, government-issued devices, or any asset owned or leased by NRCS, unless the use of these assets are necessary to perform excepted activities.
- Identify any federal procurement actions (e.g., solicitations, bid openings) that may expire during a shutdown, and take appropriate action to extend, delay, or cancel those actions.

Asset Management

- All real property owned or leased by NRCS will not be available for use through the furlough unless utilized by an excepted employee or unless covered by the partner reimbursable agreement exception below. All expenses for fuel, utilities, supplies, etc., must be kept to the minimum required to perform excepted work.
- In locations where NRCS shares space with non-Federal partners and NRCS bears the costs for the space, partners will be prohibited from entering and using the office during the shutdown. Partners will not be able to use/access NRCS equipment, files, and other property.
- If the partner's space is segregated and separate from USDA space and they are paying all costs through a reimbursable agreement with NRCS, FSA, or RD, their operations may continue; however, they will still be prohibited from accessing and using Federal files, computers, other equipment, etc. All NRCS equipment, files, property and any segregated and/or separate space will be secured and locked for the duration of the shutdown.
- Utilities
 - Actions should be taken to keep utility costs to a minimum during shutdown period.
 - Utilities, such as heating, should be maintained at a minimum to prevent property damage (such as frozen pipes).
- In leased space, notify lessor about lapse in funding and reduce support services such as janitorial service (unless there are excepted employees in the building). Be sure trash is removed before lapse begins.
- Advise employees and lessor to secure the premises and power down systems (such as HVAC) and lighting as per a Federal holiday. Computers and other electronic items should be locked in a secure area.
- All personal property (vehicles, survey equipment, copiers, etc.) owned or leased by NRCS will not be available for use through shutdown unless utilized by an excepted employee while performing excepted activities. All expenses for utilities, supplies, etc., must be kept to the minimum required to perform excepted work and to conserve energy.

- Partners are prohibited from access to or use of NRCS equipment, files and other property. All NRCS equipment, files, space and property (including segregated and separate space) will be secured and locked for the duration of the shutdown.
- Leases will not be terminated in the event of shutdown; however, actions must be taken to secure real and personal property and conserve energy.
- The use of vehicles by non-federal partners or other non-excepted personnel is prohibited.
- Purchase and fleet cards will only be available for excepted activities during shutdown.
 - Employees using NRCS owned or leased vehicles must ensure they maintain the logs, as well as all receipts during their excepted work period.
 - All expenses should be kept to the minimum required to perform excepted services.
 - Fleet vehicles should be parked, and equipment secured at the designated garage(s) or authorized location(s) to prevent theft/damage, unless required for excepted functions.
- All supervisors must identify measures to secure records, personal property, real property, and facilities that will be maintained and protected during shutdown.

Financial Management

Budget and Financial Management will be managed by the FPAC Business Center. The Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMMI) System will be closed at the same time as shutdown. No transactions will be processed, including payments.

Time and Attendance

All employees must submit their timesheet for the pay period in which the shutdown is occurring, timekeepers must verify those timesheets, and managers/supervisors must certify the timesheets. Timekeepers will then send timesheets to NFC for processing.

Employees who are in excepted status and who work during shutdown must record their hours as usual in WebTA and also make note in WebTA notes section of their timesheet the hours worked during a shutdown.

Conservation Programs

During a shutdown, NRCS will not be implementing the shutdown plan at this time because mandatory funding and available carryover technical assistance funding is available to continue operations. However, during a shutdown, NRCS will continue to assess its available resources and may adjust its staffing situation as the furlough progresses.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program

During a shutdown, NRCS will review mandatory funding and available carryover technical assistance funding, USDA has determined that NRCS will not be implementing the shutdown plan at this time. NRCS will continue to assess its available resources and may adjust its staffing situation as the furlough progresses.

- Activities associated with exigencies under the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) are excepted because they perform functions necessary for imminent threats to the safety of human life or the protection of property. This includes carrying out Damage Survey Assessments after an event to determine if a potential project is eligible for EWPP assistance and is classified as an exigency and access to DamWatch (dam monitoring tool) and possibly other systems
- At any given time, NRCS generally has a number of EWPP exigency projects under implementation across the nation. During shutdown, these projects would continue forward and be serviced by designated excepted and/or excepted on-call or episodic employees. If a state has one or more EWPP exigency projects in implementation, a limited number of other personnel may be needed to direct, coordinate, and support these excepted and/or excepted on-call or episodic employees and their activities in the field. This will include a designated state Point of Contact (POC) to coordinate EWPP exigency activities within the state and with NHQ.
- One week prior to a possible shutdown, the Deputy Chief for Programs will identify the number of excepted and/or excepted on-call or episodic employees needed to perform critical work associated with EWPP exigencies and will send the list to the Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy.

Plant Materials Centers

Certain Plant Materials Centers (PMC) activities are considered excepted because they are required to protect federal property (i.e. - facilities and the germplasm). PMC excepted activities include:

- Checking PMC facilities, especially critical systems such as seed coolers, which store mission-critical germplasm for conservation activities.
- Addressing critical, unexpected facility maintenance needed to protect federal property.
- Maintaining potted plant materials in greenhouses or outdoor production areas by hand watering or checking that automated systems are operating properly.
- Maintaining seed and plant breeder and foundation production areas. Irrigation activities, chemical treatments, or weed control should be performed only if absolutely required to maintain the purity or viability of the seed or plant production.
- Harvesting breeder and foundation seed fields required to preserve the purity of the germplasm so that unharvested seed does not contaminate existing seed production fields.

The employees required to perform excepted activities will typically be one person per PMC. Time requirements will vary depending on the activities and volume at each location. Additional employees will be designated as excepted and/or excepted on-call or episodic if needed. Excepted and/or excepted on-call or episodic employees will be in furlough status when not performing excepted activities.

Some excepted activities at PMCs vary seasonally due to the seasonal nature of seed and plant production, requiring different amounts of staff and time to complete. One week prior to a possible shutdown, the Deputy Chief for Science and Technology will identify the number of excepted and/or excepted on-call or episodic employees needed to perform work and will send the list to the Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy. The number of employees and time required to perform excepted activities will be kept to a minimum.

- A communications protocol will be implemented between PMCs and National Headquarters (i.e. - the National Program Leader—Plant Materials) to support excepted activities at the PMCs.

Impact Assessment

During a shutdown, it is important to communicate clearly about the potential impacts in order to assist leadership in responding to Departmental, Administration, and Congressional inquiries. These inquiries focus on impacts to: 1) Program Delivery, 2) Customers, 3) Partners, and 4) Administrative Functions. For each of these categories, the agency must provide rapid responses based on best available information.

To better prepare for potential service disruptions, the Associate Chief will be responsible for obtaining high-level impact assessments from the FPAC Business Center Chief Executive Officers, and NRCS Deputy Areas one week prior to possible shutdown. These assessments will provide concrete estimates of impacts in the four (4) identified categories, including any supporting data or information as addendum. Appendix A includes an example of an impact summary from the October 2013 shutdown and a similarly conducted, updated assessment of potential impacts given the current state of selected agency activities should a shutdown be necessary. However, the items shown in the 2013 shutdown example and discussed in the update are not intended to limit the scope of impacts that could be included in an assessment developed in the event of a shutdown. All relevant items should be included in the assessment; for example, the assessment could include potential impacts on resource conditions. Final impact submissions must be provided to the Associate Chief before close of business on the final day before shutdown begins.

Post Furlough Activities

All employees are responsible for following guidance on OPM's and OMB's website related to status. Employees will be required to return to work as directed by OPM and/or OMB when an appropriation is enacted, either by a full-year appropriation or a CR.

Appendix A: Impacts Assessment

During a shutdown, NRCS will review mandatory funding and available carryover technical assistance funding, USDA has determined that NRCS will not be implementing the shutdown plan at this time. NRCS will continue to assess its available resources and may adjust its staffing situation as the furlough progresses.

Customers

- Each day of shutdown, an estimated 540 customers will be able to obtain NRCS **conservation planning assistance** in order to address resource issues, meet regulatory requirements, and prepare to participate in federal, state or local financial assistance programs. *[NRCS typically assists over 135,000 customers annually with conservation planning on about 37 million acres, much of that work occurs in the fall; on average 150,000 acres planned each day].*
- Each day of shutdown, customers are will receive NRCS **conservation technical assistance to implement conservation measures** on an estimated 200,000 acres of agricultural and forest land. October through November is a high work season for implementing existing contracts, so delays have a disproportionate impact on producers and conservation goals. Conservation work such as earthmoving and construction not completed before the first freeze will be delayed until the following year. *[NRCS typically assists customers annually with conservation implementation on about 47 million acres, much of that work occurs in the fall; on average nearly 200,000 acres are implemented each day]*

Partners

- Nearly 2,500 NRCS service center offices, 190 program delivery points, and 400 specialty program offices across the nation means that about 8,100 State and local partners will have access to the NRCS resources they need to deliver services. Conservation district staff rely heavily on NRCS offices, field equipment (survey and GPS), IT (computers, planning systems, servers), and vehicles to deliver State, local, and non-governmental conservation programs.
- Existing contribution agreements where partners are contributing a share, often 50 percent, of the resources will be executed if they depend on NRCS office space and resources, delaying conservation practice implementation.

Administrative

- **Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI):** Contract start dates for the following projects will not be impacted: Conservation Desktop (CD) and Mobile Planning Tool (MPT) Version 2, CD/MPT Version 3, CVD/MPT Version 4, CD/MPT Version 5, CD/MPT Version 6, Integrated Conservation Desktop Financial Assistance - Easements, Conservation Client Gateway Version 3.0. Delays in project start dates will directly impact the project schedule and expected deliverables, including CDSI functionality that is planned. Each week of slippage results in further delays in CDSI implementation and the benefits of conservation streamlining.

The following is a detailed status report on excepted personnel and activities which took place during shutdown related to Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) and Watershed Rehabilitation Program (WRP) for the October 2013 shutdown. Some of the line items are unique to the circumstances of the October 2013 shutdown (Colorado flooding/tropical storm Karen/SD blizzard). This reported should be developed and completed daily during a shutdown period to accurately capture those excepted activities which are being conducted for the protection of life and/or property.

Appendix B: Excepted Employees

Title	Roles and Responsibilities During Shutdown
Chief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate the order to execute shutdown procedures. • Lead engagement with the Department.
Chief of Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure communications consistency. • Provide impact analysis of shutdown.
Associate Chief	<p>In concert with the appropriate FPAC Business Center staffs,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee shutdown operations for employees and activities within the office of the ACC. • Ensure operational continuity for excepted employees and activities during shutdown. • Provide official notification to key officials to initiate shutdown procedures. • Lead shutdown and continuity processes • Prepare for start-up once appropriations have been designated. • Provide oversight of Emergency Watershed Protection Program, Dam Safety and Rehabilitation, and Plant Materials Centers, as needed. • Certify completion of agency shutdown and provide report to the Chief. • Lead in any continuity of operations issues in relation to emergency situations.
Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage shutdown operations and report progress. • Identify roles, responsibilities, activities, and timelines for shutdown. • Provide needed metrics and reports. • Perform operations necessary to notify contractors and recipients and suspend/stop work if needed in accordance with OMB, Department, and NRCS guidance.
Regional Conservationists and RC Chief of Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide guidance to and oversight of shutdown procedures of all NRCS state and field offices.
Deputy Chief for Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate shutdown procedures of all activities related to programs.
Deputy Chief for Science and Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate shutdown procedures for all employees and activities related to Science and Technology and provide guidance to continuing excepted activities.
Deputy Chief for Soil Science and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure appropriate shutdown procedures for all employees and activities related to SSRA.

Title	Roles and Responsibilities During Shutdown
Resource Assessment (SSRA)	
Director of Conservation Engineering Division	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide oversight to on-going and new exigent Emergency Watershed Protection Program projects (CO Fires, Floods, etc.) that will continue through shutdown.
Personnel Support to Emergency Watershed Protection Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide state level oversight to on-going exigent Emergency Watershed Protection Program projects (CO Fires, Floods, etc.) on identified projects that will continue through furlough to protect life and property (list may include State Conservationist, Assistant State Conservationists for Management and Strategy, Engineers, Construction Inspectors, Financial Resource Specialist, etc.). Justification for staff will need to be provided on each project listed.
Water and Climate Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain critical water climate information and snow survey program data that arises as an emergency.
Dam Safety and Rehabilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct activities to protect life and property in relation to NRCSS approximately 12,000 small watershed dams.
National Plant Materials Program Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide oversight and coordination of PMC excepted activities that will continue through shutdown.
Plant Material Center (PMC) Personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain federal property and mission-critical plant stock viability at plant materials centers; typically, 26 employees for routine excepted activities such as securing property and watering plant material, Additional PMC employees may be designated as ‘excepted on-call or episodic’ if needed to for specific seasonal duties: the number of staff and required hours depends on the season the shutdown occurs

Appendix C: Shutdown Committee

- The roles and responsibilities of the Shutdown Committee are as follows: Associate Chief Serve as committee Chair.
- Lead implementation of Shutdown Plan and status.
- Ensure coordination across functional areas.
- Ensure Chief is kept informed - elevate issues, challenges, and opportunities, as appropriate.
- Lead the application of lessons learned to normal operations, as appropriate.
- Ensure communication and coordination in a timely manner.

Chief of Staff:

- Lead development of any short and/or long-term assessment on impacts of shutdown.
- Identify opportunities for improvement.

Regional Conservationists:

- Ensure consistent and timely communication with states.
- Ensure consistency in shutdown activities across regions and states.
- Ensure timely identification of partner issues and consistent handling across regions and states.
- Collect and report to the Committee on lessons learned from state perspective.
- Gather needed input for any short and/or long-term assessments of shutdown impacts.

Deputy Chief for Programs:

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of programmatic issues.
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of shutdown on NRCS programs.
- Coordinate with NRCS Chief Information Officer and Chief Financial Officer on programmatic IT systems shutdown and interoperability.
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Strategic Planning and Accountability, Science and Technology, and Soil Science and Resource Assessment to assess and report on the impacts of shutdown on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.

Deputy Chief for Science and Technology:

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of science and technology issues.
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of shutdown on science and technology development and delivery.
- Coordinate with NRCS Chief Information Officer on science and technology IT applications shutdown.
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Strategic Planning and Accountability, Programs, and Soil Science and Resource Assessment to assess and report on the impacts of shutdown on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.

Deputy Chief for Soil Science and Resource Assessment:

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of soil science and resource assessment issues.
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of shutdown on soil science and resource assessment.

- Coordinate with NRCS Chief Information Officer on soil science and resource assessment IT applications start-up.
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Programs, Science and Technology, and Strategic Planning and Accountability to assess and report on the impacts of shutdown on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.

Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability:

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of strategic planning and accountability issues.
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of shutdown on strategic planning and accountability.
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Programs, Soil Science and Resource Assessment, and Science and Technology to assess and report on the impacts of shutdown on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.

Appendix D: Excepted Contracts Guidance

(Subject to adjustment due to any updated Departmental Guidance)

Excepted contracts

States and NHQ will identify federal contracts (governed by the Federal Acquisition Regulation) that must remain in full effect to ensure the safety of life and/or property (i.e., excepted contracts).

- The Associate Chief, State Conservationists, NHQ Programmatic Leaders and Deputy Chiefs, and their respective Contracting Officers and Contracting Officer Representatives in the FPAC Business Center must identify the contracts that are excepted and must continue.
- The Department of Justice and OMB have defined such contracts to be those for which the suspension of the function would imminently threaten the safety of human life or the protection of property.) To be excepted, the following two conditions must exist:
 - A reasonable and articulable connection between the obligation (i.e., a contract or grant) and the safety of life or the protection of property, **AND**
 - Some reasonable likelihood either the safety of life or the protection of property would be compromised in some significant degree by failure to carry out the function in question – and the threat to life or property can be reasonably said to be near at hand and demanding immediate response.
- Contracting Officers will notify contractors/vendors who have excepted contracts that their contracts will continue.
- Include in the notification the name and contact information for the Contracting Officer that will serve as the point of contact on the excepted contract during shutdown.
- States will notify NHQ of excepted contracts that will remain in effect. This notification will be sent to the Chief Procurement and Property Officer and the Chief of Staff to the Associate Chief for Operations. No specific format is required, but the following information should be included:
 - Contract number.
 - Contractor contact information.
 - Location of work to be performed.
 - Brief description of project.

Note: This notification cannot be issued to contractors until NRCS receives notification from OMB.

Non-excepted contracts (i.e., where there is no threat to life or property)

Upon the notification of the government shutdown, FPAC Business Center Contracting Officers, on behalf of NRCS, will:

- Issue notifications to suspend/stop work for non-excepted contracts where:
 - Performance would incur costs to the Agency.
 - Access to NRCS office locations would be prohibited.

- Supervision, oversight, or support by NRCS is required.
- Continuation would be a waste of taxpayer money (i.e., janitorial services).
- Notification to contractors will be in accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulation Subpart 42.13.
- Contracting Officers notify the FPAC Business Center Chief Acquisition Officer via e-mail that all stop work/suspension notices have been issued as required.

Note: The Integrated Acquisition System (IAS) will not be operational and all actions will be required to be completed manually. Upon return to work, all IAS actions will then be entered into the system.

Other Acquisitions Guidance

Routine, on-going operational and administrative activities relating to contract or grant administration (including payment processing) cannot continue when there is a shutdown. NRCS employees who perform activities associated with contract or agreement/grant administration (including oversight, inspection, payment, or accounting) should generally not continue work during shutdown, unless performing functions related to an excepted contract.

Extension or Cancellation of Procurement Actions

Contracting Officers will identify any federal procurement actions that may expire during shutdown.

- Contracting officers, in conjunction with State Leadership, must make a determination on contracts with options that may need to be exercised before the shutdown occurs.
- Contracting officers must review and identify impacts of shutdown on any solicitations, bid openings, etc., that will expire, or that are scheduled to be conducted during the potential shutdown period.
- Contracting officers will take the necessary actions to cancel, extend, or delay any of the above actions.

Contractors Performing Work On-Site at NRCS Offices/Locations:

Communicate possible suspension of work to contractor program managers for personnel working on-site at NRCS locations.

- Contracting Officers will notify appropriate Contractors' program managers of the potential to suspend/stop work on non-excepted contracts in the event of shutdown.
- Contracted staff should take appropriate actions on the last day of funding in anticipation of a potential shutdown.
- If/when a shutdown occurs, and upon the Contracting Officer's issuance of the suspension/stop work notice, the Contractors' program/project managers will notify their respective contracted employees.

Examples for Grants and Agreements (including Farm Bill program funded)

- For previously-awarded and obligated grants and agreements (including Farm Bill program funding):
 - These instruments remain in effect.
 - Partners/landowners/recipients should be notified they can continue the work of these agreements/grants to the extent that they can do so without any technical or other assistance from NRCS.
 - The notification should also indicate that until NRCS employees return and all operations are fully functional, payments will be delayed; therefore, any actions they take will be at their risk as no certifications, reimbursements, etc., will be conducted or processed.
- For previously awarded/obligated agreements with local sponsor organizations, who in turn solicit and enter into contracts for conservation work and the support and assistance by NRCS is not critical:
 - Parties to this type of agreement and action could proceed to solicit and award contracts at their own risk, as no technical assistance or administrative actions (e.g., reimbursement) from NRCS can be conducted during shutdown. Only at the time that all government functions are once again operational would NRCS be able to provide assistance and process payments.
- For technical services providers (TSPs) - for example, generally funded 50% by NRCS and 50% by a partner organization:
 - Since these agreements were previously executed and funds already obligated, TSPs may provide landowners and customers their services; however, no reimbursement or technical assistance from NRCS will occur during shutdown.
 - If NRCS support, assistance, or oversight is critical to the work, then work under these agreements must be suspended.

Depending upon the length of the shutdown, NRCS may need to issue supplemental guidance around excepted contracts, grants and agreements.

Appendix E: Start Up Plan

Purpose

This document establishes a plan of action to execute an orderly start-up of NRCS operations following the approval of funding for the current fiscal year. This plan will be enacted through a notification to all employees from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Associate Chief at the direction of the Chief, NRCS.

Scope

The functions and activities described herein are to be executed in accordance with all applicable statutes, regulations, policies, and delegations of authority.

High-Level Summary

- The NRCS Shutdown Plan instructed employees to monitor the status of the government shutdown and agency operations via the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) website (www.opm.gov) and news sources.
- Unless it is a regularly scheduled non-duty day or an employee is on approved leave or leave without pay under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), employees are expected to return to work the next work day following the President signing a bill funding the agency. Any delay in reporting for duty requires a request for leave that must be approved by the supervisor.
- An orderly start-up of agency operations is expected to take place as expeditiously as possible, so that service to customers can resume quickly.

Initial Communications Timeline

NRCS has prepared for an agency start-up following an approval of current fiscal year funding. In order to keep the agency informed during this start-up process the following communications will occur (note: Day 1 is the first full day of operations upon restoration of funding):

- Following approval of funding for the current fiscal year: Federal employees receive notification either from the OPM website or the news media that they should report for work on the next work day.
- Following approval of funding for the current fiscal year: The Chief Human Resources Officer, on behalf of Senior NRCS Leadership, will conduct a Labor-Management Teleconference to provide advance notice to union leadership from AFGE locals 3356, 3839, and 0055, regarding the operational status of the agency.
- Day 1: 9:00 am EST – Joint meeting of the Start-Up Committee and Start-Up Customer Service Team to initiate the Start-Up of NRCS Operations Plan
- Day 1: 1:00 pm EST – State Conservationists' Teleconference – Agency Chief will review the start-up plan with senior agency leaders and provide any guidance from the Department.

- Day 1: 2:30 pm EST – Assistant State Conservationists for Management and Strategy Teleconference –The Associate Chief, Chief of Staff, Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy will review the start-up plan, focusing on specific guidance for human resources, contracting, budget and finance, and information technology (IT), and provide any guidance from the Department.
- Day 1: 3:30 pm EST – State Program Managers’ Teleconference –Deputy Chief for Programs, FPAC Business Center Chief Procurement and Property Officer, and Chief Financial Officer will review the start-up plan, focusing on specific guidance for contracting, payments, and programs, and provide any guidance from the Department.
- Day 2: 9:00 am EST – Joint meeting of the Start-Up Committee and Start-Up Customer Service Team to continue implementation of the Start-Up of NRCS Operations Plan
- Day 2: 1:00 pm EST – State Teleconference focused on financial management– The Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy, along with appropriate Business Center staff and the Regional Conservationists, will review the start-up plan, focusing on specific guidance for payments and budgets, and provide any guidance from the Department.
- Day 2: 2:30 pm EST – State Human Resource Officers’ Teleconference –Chief Human Resources Officer and Director, the Workforce Management Division will review the start-up plan, focusing on specific guidance for human resources, and provide any guidance from the Department.
- Day 3: 9:00 am EST – Joint meeting of the Start-Up Committee and Start-Up Customer Service Team to continue implementation of the Start-Up of NRCS Operations Plan
- Day 3: 1:00 pm EST – State Conservationists’ Teleconference –Chief, Associate Chief and Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy will check status of operations start-up, gather information on major issues and needs related to start-up and post-shutdown activities, and provide any additional guidance.
- Other Communications:
 - Letter to partners from the Chief (nationally) and State Conservationists (state-wide) (see Template in Appendix L).
 - Letter to customers from the State Conservationists (see Template in Appendix L).
 - Additional teleconferences as needed with state leaders.

General Start-Up Procedures

All employees are responsible for taking necessary actions to restore the agency to a fully operational status. Key items to address include, but are not limited to:

- Turn off the out-of-office message for your Outlook email.
- Reset your voice mail message.
- Remove all signage indicating the office was closed because of the funding lapse.
- Restart computers and other IT devices according to guidance outlined in the Information Technology section of this plan.
- Resume use of transit benefits, if available where you work.

- Resume use of government-issued mobile devices, including cell and smart phones, tablets, and/or laptops for approved purposes.
- Resume use of government purchase, fleet and travel cards for appropriate government use.

Customer Service for Start-Up of NRCS Operations

The re-start of NRCS operations will be accompanied by many employee, customer, and partner questions and concerns. It is important for NRCS to provide timely and consistent information that is in keeping with statute, regulation, and policy, and that this information is accessible throughout NRCS.

A temporary cross-cutting Start-Up Customer Service Team (“Team”) will be available to address this need on Day 1 of the return of the NRCS workforce to duty status. The Team will work in a cohesive and coordinated manner to ensure timely, accurate, and consistent responses to shutdown/start-up questions from employees, customers, and partners. In addition, the Team will inform the Start-Up Committee on the status of its work and will elevate issues and opportunities that require higher level interaction or resolution.

The makeup of the Start-Up Customer Service Team will be as follows:

- Chief of Staff, Chair
- Chief of Staff, Regional Conservationists’ Office
- Director, Financial Assistance Programs Division (FAPD)
- Director, Easement Programs Division (EPD)
- Director, Engineering Division

Guidance for the Start-Up of NRCS Operations

A temporary Start-Up Committee (“Committee”) will guide the agency’s transition from shutdown to full operational status. The Committee will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the start-up plan; providing related policy and procedural direction; ensuring coordination and consistency across functional areas troubleshooting system and unique challenges; and monitoring progress related to restoring full operational status and in addressing employee, partner, and customer concerns.

Initially, the Committee will meet on at least a daily basis to assess progress and issues. As issues are resolved and progress continues, meetings may be less frequent. The Committee also will assess lessons learned from the shutdown and start-up and apply those to normal operations where applicable, and to plans prepared in the event of a future shutdown/start-up. The chair will be responsible for reporting progress and issues to the Chief. The Committee will be disbanded when the Chief has determined operations are back to normal and any major issues/challenges related to the shutdown have been resolved.

The Associate Chief will chair the Start-up Committee. The Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy will serve as vice chair. The complete membership of the Committee will be as follows:

- Associate Chief, Chair
- Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy, Vice Chair
- Chief of Staff
- Regional Conservationists
- Regional Conservationists' Chief of Staff
- Deputy Chief for Programs
- Deputy Chief for Science and Technology
- Deputy Chief for Soil Science and Resource Assessment

Other positions may be called upon for assistance as the issues, challenges, and opportunities warrant.

See Appendix K for a list of the specific duties of the Start-Up Committee.

Information Technology

The FPAC Chief Information Officer (CIO) is responsible for ensuring that Information Technology (IT) Systems are available and operating with a high level of confidence to perform agency business operations across the enterprises. Upon restoration of funding for the agency:

- FPAC CIO will restore all NRCS production IT systems, business tools, and websites to their last known state in order to conduct official NRCS business.
- FPAC CIO will coordinate with USDA-OCIO-ITS and NITC to ensure all interdependent and enterprise IT systems are online and available.
- Employees should retrieve all IT equipment (laptops, iPhone, iPads, etc.) from their secured location in order to conduct official NRCS business.
- Employees will restart their computers and other IT devices to ensure all memory, temporary files, and caches are cleaned, giving the computer a fresh start.
- Reset any expired passwords, and ensure that any associated equipment (e.g., smart phone, notebooks, iPad) is also updated.
- Employees should connect computers and laptops to the IT network to ensure all systems are updated with the appropriate security patches and system updates. As a result of IT systems being offline for several days this process may take up to 4 hours to complete. Do not turn off computers while the updates are in progress.
- FPAC CIO will work with USDA-OCIO-ITS to ensure technical issues submitted to the IT helpdesk are addressed completely and in a timely manner.

- FPAC CIO will provide ongoing monitoring to ensure availability and proper functionality of IT systems throughout the start-up and recovery process.
- FPAC CIO will provide Business Application help desk support for NRCS IT systems that support official business (i.e., ProTracts, WebTA, OIP, etc.). All other user technical issues should be submitted to the appropriate Tier 1 ITS Help Desk. Tier 1 IT helpdesk contact information is provided below:
 1. NRCS Business Applications Help Desk Numbers:
970-372-4200
 - OCIO-ITS Tier I - Help Desk
 - 202-690-1000
 - 1-877-873-0783
 - ServiceDesk-KC@KCC.usda.gov

Human Resources

The FPAC Business Center Director, Chief Human Resource Officer is responsible for ensuring that all Human Resources (HR) services and guidance is provided to NRCS employees, including HR Specialists in order to return to operations after a government shutdown due to a lapse in appropriations. The following attachments includes Human Resources Guidance (Appendix M), Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) (Appendix I), and Case File Note (Appendix N). In addition, the Start-Up Customer Service Team referred to previously is available to provide additional assistance.

- Return to Duty After Shutdown
 - Generally, employees are expected to return to work the next business day or scheduled work day following the approval of a budget or a continuing resolution.
 - If an employee received unemployment compensation and is paid retroactively for time during furlough the employee will be required to repay the unemployment compensation. For further guidance please visit <https://www.nfc.usda.gov/>
- Time and Attendance
 - Timekeepers must follow up with supervisors and employees to determine if corrected timesheets need to be prepared for pay periods affected by the furlough.
- Guidance for HR Staffing Specialist and Assistants
 - Proceed to process outstanding personnel actions.
 - Review expiration dates of certificates of eligible applicants and document the case file with the “Note to Case File” provided in Appendix N of this document.
 - If a vacancy announcement closed during the furlough, please work quickly to rate, rank, and notify applicants of their eligibility.
 - Issue certificates of eligible applicants to the hiring managers, when appropriate.
 - For case files that were affected by the furlough, please be sure to add the “Note to Case File” document, Appendix N for future auditing purpose.

- Performance Management
 - As appropriate, the Agency will request the Department to provide an extension on rating performance for the prior fiscal year as well as issuing new performance plans for the current fiscal year. Once the extension dates are received from the Department, all NRCS employees and supervisors will be notified.

Travel

The FPAC Business Center CFO is responsible for providing coordinated guidance to authorized agency travelers on issues that may have arisen because of the shutdown and furlough.

- Travelers should complete any outstanding travel vouchers immediately after NRCS has confirmed the operational status of all associated IT systems.
- The CFO is working with the Department’s Office of the Chief Financial Officer to determine policy regarding timely payment of travel card balances since NRCS employees did not have access to the travel system during the government shutdown. Once the Department makes its determination, the FPAC CFO will communicate the Department’s policy and guidance via an FM Communication and during an FM Conference call.

Contracts, Grants, Agreements, and Asset Management

The FPAC Business Center Chief Procurement and Property Officer is responsible for managing the resumption of functions related to acquisitions and procurements; contracts, grants, and agreements; and asset management (i.e., real and personal property). The expectation is that these activities will resume within two (2) working days following agency start-up.

Contracts, Grants and Agreements Guidance

- Contracts, Grants and Agreements under NRCS authority, and requiring NRCS support, oversight, assistance, will resume as determined by the Under Secretary.
- Contracting Officers will issue resume work orders (modifications) for those contracts that were suspended/stopped during the furlough.
- Interagency and other agreements will resume under the existing terms of the agreement.

Asset Management Guidance

- Personal property (vehicles, survey equipment, copiers, etc.) owned or leased by NRCS will be made safe, ready, and available for use by authorized Federal and non-Federal personnel. The use of vehicles by non-Federal partners or other agency personnel may resume according to the terms of existing agreements.
- Real property (buildings/office space) owned or leased by NRCS will be made safe and available for use by authorized Federal and non-Federal personnel and reopened to the public as appropriate.

Financial Management

The FPAC Chief Financial Officer (CFO) is responsible for ensuring that funding for agency operations is made available in a timely manner, and for ensuring that agency financial operations are properly resumed, including close-out of the prior fiscal year and completion of the financial audit.

Financial Management Modernization Initiative (FMMI) Accessibility

- The FMMI system is managed by the Department's Office of the Chief Financial Officer. It is anticipated that FMMI will be made available to all USDA agencies within the first business day after operations resume. The interface between FMMI and agency IT systems will be evaluated to ensure that it is functioning properly.
- Questions about FMMI access should be directed to the Financial Policy, Training and Systems Division at nrcs.fmmi@wdc.usda.gov for resolution.

Posting Prior Fiscal Year Obligations

- Valid and signed obligations for the prior fiscal year that were not entered into FMMI prior to the close of operations on September 30 cannot be entered directly by NRCS personnel. The FPAC Business Center will coordinate with NFC to have these obligations posted in FMMI.
- The appropriate Business Center unit will issue instructions within 48 hours after operations resume on how and by whom prior-year obligation information will be collected for entry by NFC.
- Year-end guidelines for adjustments in period 13 are still valid and should be followed if needed.

Discretionary funding

- New discretionary funding for the current fiscal year made available will be loaded into FMMI, reflecting the terms and conditions of the appropriations language and automatic apportionment by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- Carryover authority – Allowance holders are **NOT** to obligate carryover funding. Unobligated balances will be swept to the unallocated level in FMMI and made available for use in the current year. Carryover funding will be used for agency priorities as determined by the Chief, including:
 - Unobligated balances to be used for obligation in the prior fiscal year (see Posting Prior Year Obligations above).
 - Unobligated balances designated for previously approved specific purposes (e.g., CDSI, FTA).

Mandatory funding (Farm Bill conservation programs)

Mandatory funding will be made available based on terms and conditions of the appropriations language and OMB's automatic apportionment, as applicable.

Allocations

- Initial allocations, based on a percentage of the prior fiscal year final allocations, will be provided within five (5) days of resumption of full operation.
- Initial allocations will support agency operations during pendency of complete allocation process. The level provided will:

- Permit States to begin program operations while maintaining flexibility needed for making final allocations.
- Allowance holders will need to work with their budget officers to align resources as needed to ensure that critical obligations, including payroll, can be processed timely.

Farm Bill Programs

Shutdown may put a number of Farm Bill program activities on hold (e.g., payments for completed work, contract modifications, WRP wetland restoration). To ensure a consistent and orderly return to program operations:

- The FPAC CIO, CFO, and NRCS Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy and Deputy Chief for Programs will coordinate regarding the resumption of agency financial assistance systems to ensure that they are interfacing and functioning properly (e.g., ProTracts and FMMI). States will be notified as soon as testing is complete, and the systems are available for use.
- States must **NOT** submit any ProTracts payments until notified by the Deputy Chief for Programs that financial assistance systems are back on-line and functioning properly.
- States are asked to prioritize:
- Program activities placed on hold as a result of the shutdown. For example, payments that were ready to process or conservation practice check-outs that were scheduled by October 1st should be given priority as work resumes.
- Response to new requests resulting from the shutdown, such as check-out for work conducted during shutdown or contract modifications required as a result of shut-down related delays.

Initiation of Farm Bill program activities for the current fiscal year, such as obligations and payments, sign-ups, etc. will follow normal program guidance provided by the Deputy Chief for Programs.

Appendix F: Start Up Committee

The roles and responsibilities of the Start-Up Committee will be as follows:

Associate Chief

- Serve as chair of Committee;
- Guide implementation of start-up and post shutdown plan;
- Ensure coordination across functional areas;
- Ensure Chief is kept informed and elevate issues, challenges, and opportunities, as appropriate;
- Lead the application of lessons learned to normal operations, as appropriate; and
- Ensure communication and coordination in a timely manner with agency leadership.
- Deputy Chief for Management and Strategy serves as chair in absence of Associate Chief for Operations;
- Ensure coordination across functional areas; and
- Lead input and processes related to programs, science and technology, and soil survey and resource assessment.

Chief of Staff

- Lead development of any short- and/or long-term assessment of the impacts of shutdown;
- Facilitate communication with other Departmental Offices and Congressional staff, as appropriate; and
- Identify issues/opportunities for improvement.

Regional Conservationists

- Ensure consistent and timely communication with states;
- Ensure consistency in start-up and follow through across regions and states;
- Ensure timely identification of partner issues and consistent handling across regions and states;
- Collect and report to the Committee on lessons learned from a state perspective; and
- Gather needed input for any short- and/or long-term assessments of the impact of the shutdown.

Deputy Chief for Programs

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of programmatic issues;
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of the shutdown on NRCS programs;
- Coordinate with NRCS CIO and CFO on programmatic IT systems start-up and interoperability; and
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Strategic Planning and Accountability, Science and Technology, and Soil Science and Resource Assessment to assess and report on the

impacts of the shut down on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.

Deputy Chief for Science and Technology

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of science and technology issues;
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of the shutdown on science and technology development and delivery;
- Coordinate with NRCS CIO on science and technology IT applications start-up; and
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Strategic Planning and Accountability, Programs, and Soil Science and Resource Assessment to assess and report on the impacts of the shut down on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.

Deputy Chief for Soil Science and Resource Assessment

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of soil science and resource assessment issues;
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of shutdown on soil science and resource assessment;
- Coordinate with NRCS CIO on soil science and resource assessment IT applications start-up; and
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Programs, Science and Technology, and Strategic Planning and Accountability to assess and report on the impacts of the shut down on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.

Deputy Chief for Strategic Planning and Accountability

- Ensure coordination and timely handling of strategic planning and accountability issues;
- Provide assessment, analysis, and reports on the impact of shutdown on strategic planning and accountability;
- Coordinate with NRCS CIO on strategic planning and accountability IT applications start-up; and
- Coordinate with Deputy Chiefs for Programs, Soil Science and Resource Assessment, and Science and Technology to assess and report on the impacts of the shut down on conservation implementation, conservation effects and performance measures.