



Evaluating Alternatives

Step
6

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What is it?

The purpose of evaluating alternatives is to help the Planning Committee make sound decisions about which management strategies they will advocate in the resource plan. Alternatives are evaluated to determine their effectiveness in addressing the concerns, taking advantage of opportunities, and meeting objectives in the planning area.

When do we do it?

Evaluating alternatives is Step 6 of Phase Two in the Resource Planning Process.

How do we do it?

After alternatives or strategies have been identified, the Planning Committee and Technical Advisory Committee evaluate the acceptability of the alternatives. A facilitator is used during this step, and technical advisors are available to provide information and answer questions.

Evaluate alternatives by examining the benefits and drawbacks of each alternative. During the evaluation of alternatives, careful consideration is given to social, economic, and ecological factors that influence the predicted outcome. Encourage discussion and use visual aids to help explain alternatives. Technical advisors can prepare technical specifications and a short concise narrative for each alternative. For each alternative include costs, and positive and negative benefits.

The Planning Committee considers the “effects” and the “impacts” of each alternative. The alternatives are compared to benchmark conditions to evaluate their ability to solve problems, meet quality criteria and meet the Planning Committee’s objectives. Technical advisors can help the committee evaluate the effects of each alternative and describe the impacts. The effects are outcomes or results of the management strategy. Impacts are the differences between initial conditions and the effects of the alternatives. Here is an example:

- The “benchmark” is a soil loss of 20 tons per acre per year.
(This is the present condition.)
- The “effect” of one alternative is soil loss of 4 tons per acre per year.
(This is the effect of one alternative strategy.)
- The “impact” is soil loss reduced 16 tons per acre per year.
(This is the difference between the benchmark condition and the effect of the alternative.)

Alternatives are compared based on their potential to bring about the desired future conditions identified by the Planning Committee. They are also evaluated by their effect on other resource conditions using the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) quality criteria. Limitations to using FOTG quality criteria is that they do not cover all ecological, economic, and social considerations that can be used for evaluating alternatives. Another way to evaluate alternatives is to use an Evaluate Alternatives Worksheet. An example worksheet follows.



Public review or comment may be needed during the evaluation of alternatives. This will help inform the Planning Committee about the various effects and acceptability of the alternatives.

During this step, give some thought as to how the strategies might be implemented. Identify NRCS programs, programs of other agencies, and other funding opportunities that may be available to implement the alternatives. Doing this helps in the evaluation of alternatives by providing information about how feasible they may be. The Planning Committee may also need to revisit the objectives and mission statement in order to determine if they need to be changed in light of the range of possible management alternatives suggested by the Technical Advisory Committee.

The Next Step

After alternatives have been evaluated, the next step is to make decisions as to which alternatives are the most acceptable to the Planning Committee and other stakeholders. These decisions will be documented in the resource plan. The factsheet "Making Decisions" gives suggestions for Step 7.