

**VILAS COUNTY LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION
Conservation Cost Share Program Policy – Tier Level Practices**

I. AUTHORIZATION

On October 16, 2012, the Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Committee (LCC) adopted the following policy in regard to Conservation Cost Share program practices that are offered to private landowners through the Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Department. Conservation practices that are offered to private landowners are defined under ATCP 50 Administrative Rule – Soil and Water Resource Management Program. Each of the cost-sharable conservation practices available to landowners are placed into one of three tier levels of grant funding that are defined in this policy. When a private landowner voluntarily participates in the Conservation Cost Share Program starting on or after January 1, 2013, the policy will become applicable when they enter into a contract agreement with Vilas County. All tier level cost share practices and rates are subject to the terms and conditions set forth in this policy.

II. PURPOSE

The intent of this policy is to clarify what conservation practices are available to private landowners in Vilas County under the Conservation Cost Share Program and in which percentage level of grant coverage those practices will be cost shared.

III. OBJECTIVES

- To initiate a cost containment measure that will serve to divide the grant funding received in Vilas County annually to provide conservation projects to as many private landowners as possible in a given year.
- To offer cost-sharing grant incentives to private landowners who voluntarily choose to implement conservation practices on their land.
- To prioritize the conservation practices implemented on the land that will meet goals and objectives outlined in the most current Land and Water Conservation Resource Management Plan.

IV. ADMINISTRATION

Administration of tier level cost share practices and this policy will be the responsibility of the Vilas County Conservationist. The Conservationist will oversee the review process for all conservation cost share applications that are submitted to the Land and Water Conservation office. The appropriate cost share rate for each project being implemented at the site will then be determined. If the landowner believes that they may qualify for economic hardship status, the Conservationist will require that the landowner submit further documentation to determine eligibility (refer to *Determination of Economic Hardship* below).

V. PROCEDURES

Conservation practices are divided among three tier levels outlined below in order of increased potential intensity of soil erosion or pollution on the landscape, to groundwater or to surface water resources.

TIER I Practices and Cost Share Rate:

In general, Tier I practices provide funding for practices that have minor erosion or pollution potential, normal toe erosion of banks, or to improve wildlife or fishery habitats. The County's portion of cost share for Tier I practices will be up to 50% of the total cost of a project. There will be no set maximum cost for any practice installed unless otherwise noted on the attached Table 1 and limited to the remaining annual grant funding available to the county. Practices in this category include: Riparian Buffers, Streambank and Shoreland Protection, Field Windbreaks, Residue Management, Strip-cropping, Terrace Systems, Wetland Development or Restoration (refer to Table 1).

TIER II Practices and Cost Share Rate:

In general, Tier II practices provide funding for practices that have increasing levels of soil erosion or pollution potential, to create wildlife or fishery habitat, or to install soft agricultural practices. The County's portion of cost share for Tier II practices will be up to 60% of the total cost of a project. There will be no set maximum cost for any practice installed unless otherwise noted on the attached Table 2 and limited to the remaining annual grant funding available to the county. Practices in this category include: Access Roads and Cattle Crossing, Animal Trails and Walkways, Contour Farming, Cover Crop, Critical Area Stabilization, Diversions, Filter Strip, Grade Stabilization Structure, Roofs, Roof Runoff Systems, Sediment Basins, Sinkhole Treatment, Subsurface Drains, Underground Outlets, Water and Sediment Control Basins, Waterway Systems (refer to Table 2).

TIER III Practices and Cost Share Rate:

In general, Tier III practices provide funding for practices that have major levels of soil erosion or pollution potential, to create management plans, or to install hard agricultural practices. The County's portion of cost share for Tier III practices will be up to 70% of the total cost of a project. There will be no set maximum cost for any practice installed unless otherwise noted on the attached Table 3 and limited to the remaining annual grant funding available to the county. Practices in this category include: Manure Storage System, Manure Storage System Closure, Barnyard Runoff Systems, Heavy Use Area Protection, Livestock Fencing, Milking Center Waste Control Systems, Livestock Watering Facilities, Nutrient Management, Pesticide Management, Prescribed Grazing, Relocation / Abandon Animal Feeding Operations, Waste Transfer System, Wastewater Treatment, Strips, Well Decommissioning (refer to Table 3).

Economic Hardship:

If the landowner qualifies for economic hardship status as determined by the county, the county's share of the cost share grant for each of the tier levels will increase by 20%, and the hourly rate technical service fees associated with normal cost share projects will be waived. The landowner will still be responsible for paying the application fee of \$25, the contract processing fee of \$50, and the optional project permit fee of \$100 (if applicable). Tier I cost share rate will increase to 70%; Tier II cost share rate will increase to 80%; and Tier III cost share rate will not exceed 90% of the total cost of an installed practice.

Determination of Economic Hardship:

- A. If a landowner believes they may qualify for economic hardship status under ATCP 50.42 (4), the Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Committee will require the landowner to submit a financial statement prepared according to generally accepted accounting principles. This financial statement may be compiled, reviewed or audited; however, it must contain a balance sheet and income statement and should be in sufficient details to determine the following:
 - 1) The landowner will be unable to pay the normal landowner share of the practice(s) installed, and
 - 2) The landowner would be able to pay for the installed practice(s) at the economic hardship rate.

- B. The Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Committee will also require the landowner to certify in a sworn affidavit (a form will be provided by the department), a full and true disclosure of the landowner's financial condition, including documents used to support the economic hardship. If it becomes necessary to copy those records for our files, the department will protect those records from public disclosure to the extent allowable under Wisconsin's Public Records Law.

- C. Review of the landowner request for economic hardship status will take place during the next regularly scheduled Land and Water Conservation Committee meeting following submittal of the financial statement. Elected officials of the Land and Water Conservation Committee will make the final determination of economic hardship status within a reasonable time period not to exceed two months following the submittal of the financial statement.

VI. ENFORCEMENT

Enforcement of this policy will be the responsibility of the Vilas County Conservationist. All landowners who participate in the Conservation Cost Share Program will be responsible for paying all assessed charges and fees associated with their project(s). For more information on the fee schedule, refer to the Vilas County Land and Water Conservation Technical Service Fee Policy.