

# Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool



## Overview

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) is currently undergoing development with its first version expected for release in fall 2019. Planners will utilize CART to assess clients' resource concerns, planned practices, and site vulnerability as part of the conservation planning process and will rank client applications for NRCS program funding. CART ranking applies to all programs, including easements. To start a CART assessment, clients will select land units for evaluation in CART (all land uses will be available for selection). A base land inventory will be completed and the tool will use geospatial analysis to identify resource concern potential and vulnerabilities, as well as identify resource concern priorities, intersecting program ranking pools, and special resource concern areas (such as priority watersheds). Planners can also identify and assess resource concerns not captured by geospatial analysis. After the inventory assessment, planners can select conservation practices to create alternative plans for the client to address any resource concerns. Clients will then have the opportunity to select which ranking pools they would like to apply for to be evaluated for funding. Figure 1 is an example of a graph CART will provide that highlights the client's score for different resource assessments and the score after implementing planned conservation practices. Figures 2 and 3 (next page) highlight different map layers Planners can include in ranking pools to analyze applications.

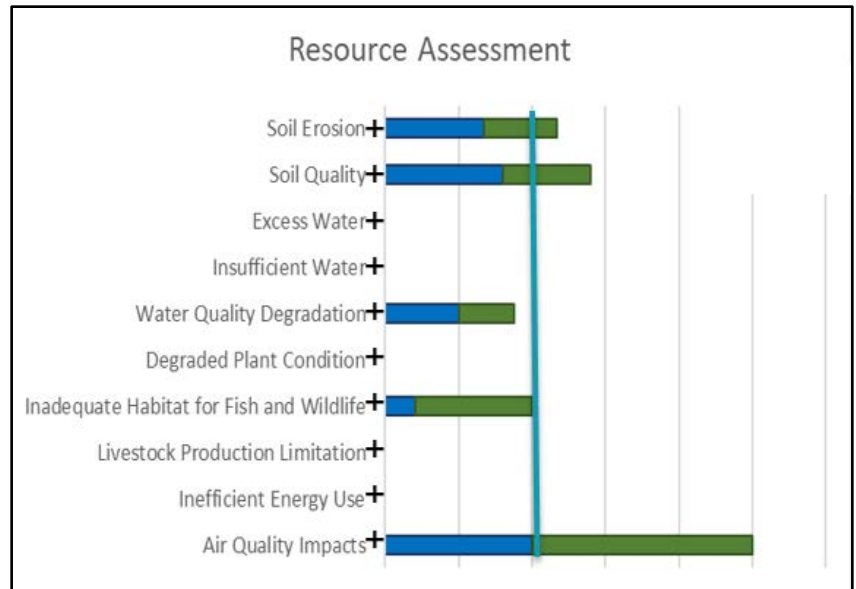
## Benefits

A main benefit of CART is that it provides NRCS State staff the flexibility to:

- Create ranking pools;
- Add map layers;
- Select priority ranking factors (such existing with a priority watershed or priority species habitat area);
- Select resource concern priorities (such as soil erosion or water quality degradation); and
- Determine the weight that existing site vulnerability, planned practices, and the efficiency score have in the ranking pool.

## Next Steps

CART is currently undergoing design and development. Version 1.0 is expected to be released in fall 2019.



**Figure 1: Example comparison of a client's current situation and alternative plan. The vertical blue line represents the threshold for each resource concern.**



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Figure 2: Planners can select map layers to evaluate funding pool priority areas, such as within National Water Quality Initiative watersheds.

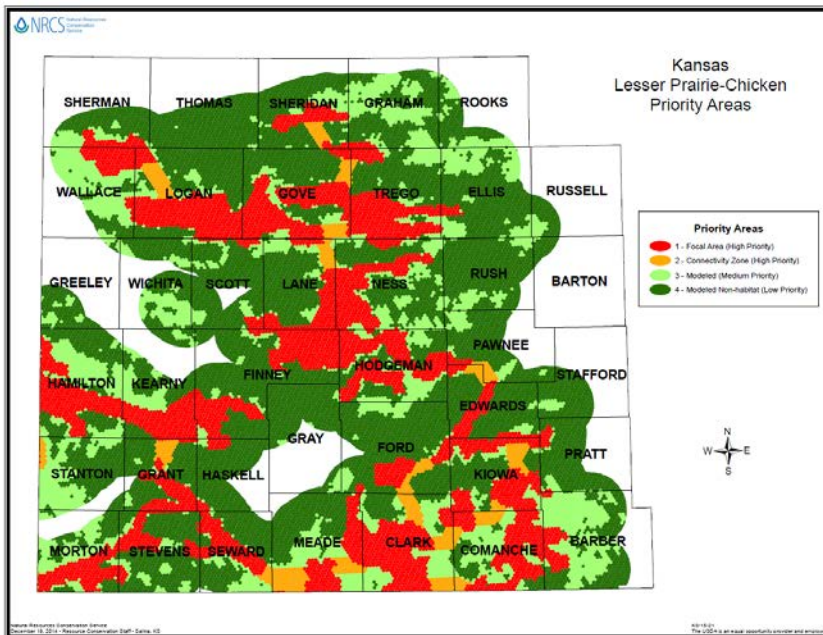
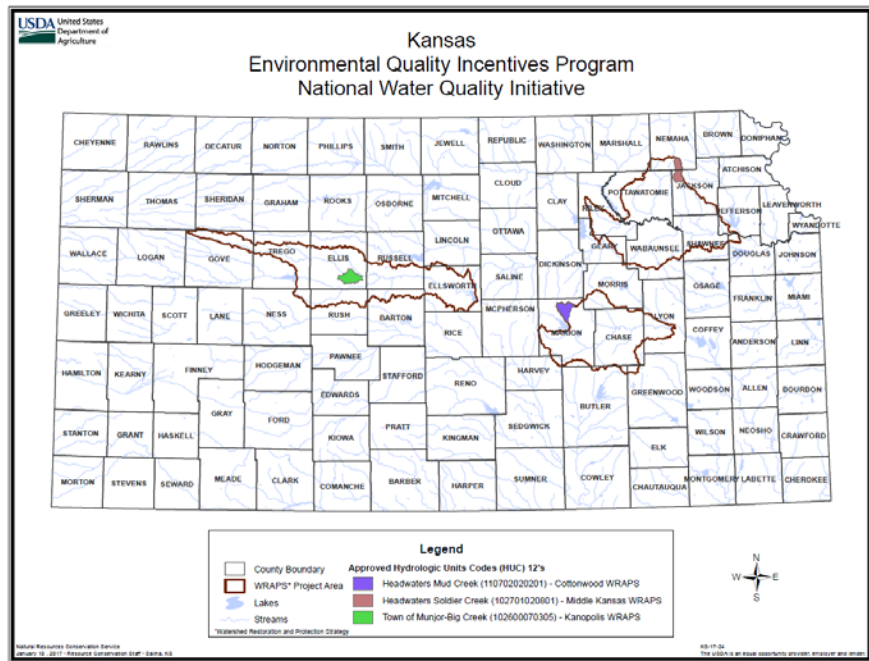


Figure 3: Planners can select map layers to evaluate funding pool priority areas, such as critical species habitat like the Lesser Prairie-Chicken.

