

LP5 Land Assessment Information Sheet

Site assessment involves several steps and some detective work. You can start by collecting information, but it is just as important to visit the site and keep track of what you find out. You also may need to identify experts to help you assess specific issues such as the condition of buildings, soils or water quality. Here are some tools and resources to help you get started.

ONLINE TOOLS

Google Earth: for recent and past imagery

<https://google.com/earth/>

NRCS Climate Center: a source of climate patterns, water and soil moisture conditions

<http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/climate/>

NRCS Web Soil Survey: soil maps and interpretations and access to soil survey information

<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/>

Plant Hardiness Zones Map: growing season information

<https://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/>

USDA Geospatial Data Gateway: maps, aerial photos

<https://datagateway.nrcs.usda.gov/>

OTHER RESOURCES

Conservation Districts

Conservation districts are local units of government established under state law to carry out natural resource management programs. District staff can give you maps, help you evaluate soils and develop conservation plans. The National Association of Conservation Districts has a directory of the 3,000 districts across the country. To find a conservation district near you, visit:

<http://www.nacdnet.org/general-resources/conservation-district-directory/>

Cooperative Extension System

The Cooperative Extension System is a nationwide, non-credit educational network. Each state and U.S. territory has a state office at its land-grant university and a network of field offices with specialists who provide useful, research-based information about local agriculture, agricultural services and markets and may assist with soil testing. To find Extension specialists near you visit: <https://nifa.usda.gov/land-grant-colleges-and-universities-partner-website-directory>

Local Government Offices

County and municipal offices house a wealth of information on local land use policy as well as individual parcels. They also have experts who can talk to about community conditions or issues affecting a particular site, such as an assessor, building inspector or planner. Many have information available online, but it is also a good idea to visit in person.

Here is a list of the kinds of information you can collect from a county or municipal office:

- Ownership
- Property taxes
- Easements, liens and other restrictions
- Maps and photos
- Local comprehensive/master plan and other community plans
- Zoning maps
- Ordinances, zoning and other local policies that affect agriculture

Real Estate Agents

Real estate agents are licensed to help customers buy, sell and rent properties. They can provide parcel specific information and data about sale prices, local tax rates and community amenities.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

NRCS is an agency within the United States Department of Agriculture that helps farmers and ranchers manage and conserve natural resources. NRCS conservationists offer technical and financial assistance including help developing and implementing conservation plans. They usually can be found in USDA service centers. To find one near you, visit:

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/contact/local/?cid=nrcsdev11_000242

Water Quality Testing

If the site receives water from a public water system, you can obtain a water quality report from the local water authority. These reports are produced annually and contain information on contaminants found, possible health effects and the water's source. If the site has a private water source, a local health department may help you test for bacteria or nitrates. If not, you can have your water tested by a state certified laboratory. You can find one in your area by visiting:

<https://www.epa.gov/waterlabnetwork>