

**CONSERVING HABITAT
THROUGH THE FEDERAL FARM BILL**
A Guide for Land Trusts and Landowners

Acknowledgements

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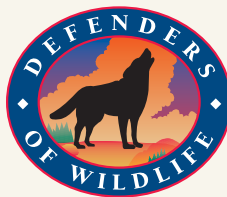




Table of Contents

Introduction 3
 Acronyms Used in This Guide 4

I. Getting the Lay of the Land: The Basics 5
 History of the Farm Bill 5
 Economic and Wildlife Value of the Bill 5
The Players 8
 U.S. Department of Agriculture 8
 Farm Service Agency 8
 Natural Resources Conservation Service 8
 Conservation Districts 10
 State Technical Committees 10
 Local Working Groups 10
 Where You Fit In 10
The Programs 11
 Land Protection 11
 Restoration and Land Improvement 11
 Grants and Other Programs 12
 Available Funding 12
 Eligibility Requirements 12
 Choosing the Right Program 13
 Additional Resources 13

II. Getting with the Programs: The Details 17
Land Protection Programs 17
 Conservation Easements 17
 Wetlands Reserve Program 17
 Farm and Ranchland Protection Program 22
 Grassland Reserve Program 27
 Healthy Forests Reserve Program 32
 Land Retirement and Rentals 34
 Conservation Reserve Program 34
 Fee-Simple Acquisition 40
 Community Forest and Open Space
 Conservation Program 40
Restoration and Land Improvement Programs 41
 Restoration and Cost-share 41
 Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program 41
 Environmental Quality Incentives Program 43
 Green Payments 46
 Conservation Stewardship Program 46
 Partner Programs 49
 Cooperative Conservation
 Partnership Initiative 49
 Grants and Other Programs 51
 Conservation Innovation Grants 51
 Renewable Energy: Biomass Crops
 Assistance Program 51
 Environmental Credits 53

III. Getting Down to Business: Practical Pointers 55
 Finding More Information 55
 Preparing a Conservation Plan 55
 Seeking Technical Assistance 56
 Combining and Layering Programs 57
 Getting Reimbursed 57
 Satisfying Match Requirements 57
 Leveraging Other Funds 57

**IV. Getting the Most Out of the Farm Bill:
 Secrets to Success 61**
 Cultivate Partnerships 61
 Join Your State Technical Committee 61
 Market the Farm Bill Programs 61
 Reach Out to Absentee Landowners 62
 Create Conservation Landscapes Through
 Targeted Outreach 62
 Contribute Non-Farm Bill Funds 64
 Provide Technical Assistance 64

Appendices
 1. Summary of Major Farm Bill Conservation
 and Forestry Program 66
 2. NRCS Conservation Practices Beneficial to Wildlife 68
 3. NRCS State Offices 69
 4. FSA State Offices 70

Endnotes 72



If you care about private land conservation, you can't afford not to know the federal Farm Bill, the single greatest source of private land conservation funding in the United States.

The 2008 Farm Bill offers more incentives than ever to help private landowners conserve and improve farms, ranches, prairies, wetlands and forests. And whether you're interested in protecting wildlife habitat or rural lifestyles from the threat of development, restoring stream flows for better trout fishing or making your agricultural practices more sustainable, the Farm Bill has programs to help you.

The Beneficiaries: Private Lands and Wildlife

Private agricultural landowners are the primary recipients of Farm Bill conservation funds. With more than two-thirds of the continental United States privately owned and managed—most as working farms, ranches and forests (Fig. 1)—the majority of the U.S. land base is eligible for Farm Bill dollars. Not only do these working lands provide the critical life support systems we depend on such as food, fiber, clean air and water, but they are also absolutely essential to fish and wildlife populations. The same features that make land ideal for agriculture and human settlement—gentle topography, fertile soils and close proximity to water—also provide excellent habitat. In fact, private lands support more species diversity than either state or federally protected conservation lands,¹ and our stewardship of these lands will ultimately determine the fate of many vulnerable populations.

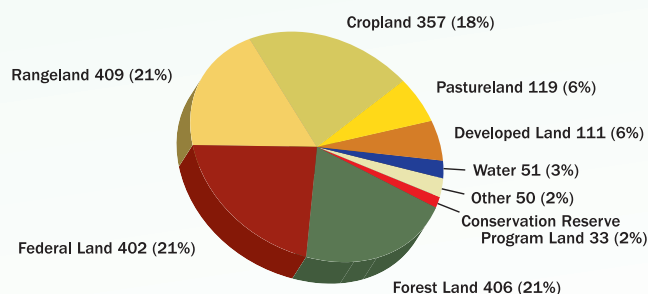
Farm Bill conservation programs are not just about farming. Many of the conservation practices included in the programs are specifically aimed at preserving, enhancing and restoring wildlife and ecosystem integrity. Many other common agricultural practices funded through the Farm Bill, such as cover crops and nutrient management, have secondary benefits to wildlife through healthier waters, air and soil. In reality, most practices in the Farm Bill conservation programs have habitat benefits, and savvy use of the programs can maximize these benefits.

Unrealized Potential

The conservation funding available under the 2008 Farm Bill actually grew at a time when many other sources of conservation dollars were being pinched. However, despite more than \$24 billion in funding available to support landowners through Farm Bill conservation programs, the federal agencies charged with administering these programs are often not able to realize the full potential of the programs. Chronic underfunding and low staffing levels often prevent agency staffs from conducting outreach to new landowners or targeting program delivery in priority landscapes. Many offices must work hard just to keep pace with the administrative requirements of existing applications.

Farm Bill program implementation is therefore capacity-limited not dollar-limited. Realizing the full potential of this funding will require more “boots on the ground”—more partners to get the word out and to provide assistance to landowners. Land trusts and landowners like you can help build this capacity and accelerate enrollment simply by being knowledgeable about Farm Bill program opportunities, passing this knowledge on to friends, neighbors and partners and sharing success stories. Land trusts or individuals with greater capacity can go even further by providing technical support and fundraising assistance.

Fig. 1. 2007 U.S. land use
(in millions of acres and percent surface area)



Source: NRCS 2007 National Resource Inventory

Land Trust + Landowner = Leverage

It's no secret that working lands are increasingly threatened by poorly planned growth, risking both agricultural lifestyles and critical environmental services. In addition, 21st century challenges such as invasive species and climate change now threaten to unravel what's taken decades to conserve. More than ever before, private landowners and their partners must work together to get the tools and financial support they need to preserve, restore and manage our working landscapes.

As well-known and respected members of local communities, land trusts can be valuable partners to farmers and ranchers. Land trusts routinely provide advice on conservation options and can alert landowners to new opportunities. Through some Farm Bill programs, land trusts can work with landowners to permanently protect agricultural lands through conservation easements. Trusts with greater capacity can provide technical assistance, assist with fundraising and connect landowners with important partners who can help plan and implement conservation practices. And some land trusts also own land themselves, making them eligible to enroll their own properties in some Farm Bill programs. The opportunities for partnerships are many, and together land trusts and landowners can maximize the value of these important programs—for production and for the land.

To find your nearest local land trust, visit the Land Trust Alliance website: www.lta.org.

Let This Be Your Guide

This guide provides the boots-on-the-ground information and tools you need to become a knowledgeable source of information on Farm Bill conservation programs. It includes:

- ◆ A concise introduction to the Farm Bill and its conservation programs, the agencies involved and general eligibility requirements;
- ◆ Detailed but accessible information on each of the most relevant conservation programs offered through the 2008 Farm Bill;
- ◆ Time-saving tips for choosing the right program, navigating the application process and increasing the competitiveness of your applications to improve your chances of securing funding;
- ◆ Recommendations on how to use the Farm Bill strategically and how to influence its implementation and local priorities;
- ◆ Case studies to illustrate how land managers have concretely and creatively leveraged Farm Bill dollars to maximize benefits;
- ◆ Guidance on working with local U.S. Department of Agriculture agency representatives and partnering with conservation organizations, landowners and others.

Whether you're a landowner, land trust or farm operator interested in learning more about using Farm Bill conservation programs, what you need to know—from basic background information to program details, from practical pointers to secrets to success—is right here in this guide.

NOTE: The technical content of this guide is based on the 2008 Farm Bill. Some of the details may change with future authorizations of the Farm Bill, but the general guidance and practical pointers offered in this guide should remain relevant.

ACRONYMS USED IN THIS GUIDE

AGI	Adjusted Gross Income
BCAP	Biomass Crops Assistance Program
CCPI	Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
CFOSP	Community Forest and Open Space Program
CIG	Conservation Innovation Grants
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
CSP	Conservation Stewardship Program
EBI	Environmental Benefits Index
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
FMV	Fair Market Value
FOTG	Field Office Technical Guide
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FRPP	Farm and Ranchland Protection Program

GARC	Geographic Area Rate Cap
GRP	Grassland Reserve Program
HELC	Highly Erodible Land Conservation
HFRP	Healthy Forest Reserve Program
LWG	Local Work Group
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Services
SAFE	State Acres For wildlife Enhancement
STC	State Technical Committee
TSP	Technical Service Provider
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
WC	Wetland Conservation
WHIP	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
WREP	Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program
WRP	Wetland Reserve Program



Getting the Lay of the Land: The Basics

HISTORY OF THE FARM BILL

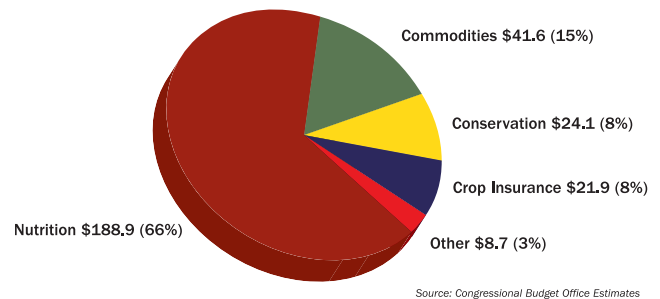
Covering much more than just farms, the federal Food, Conservation and Energy Act (Public Law 110-246), or Farm Bill for short, is a wide-ranging package of laws governing food, fiber, nutrition assistance, conservation, energy, rural development and other related policies. Since its initial passage in 1933, a new iteration of the Farm Bill has been reauthorized every four to six years. Natural resource conservation made its first major appearance in the 1985 bill.

The 1985 bill's Conservation Title included measures to halt new tillage of highly erodible land and wetlands and created the popular Conservation Reserve Program, which pays producers to take highly erodible land out of production to conserve soil.

With each subsequent reauthorization of the bill, conservation programs constituted an increasingly greater share of the overall portfolio. Meanwhile, the focus of the programs evolved to address not only soil conservation but also wetland protection and restoration, forest conservation, water and air quality improvement, wildlife habitat creation and carbon sequestration. The increasing emphasis on conservation programs and the inclusion of wildlife habitat and biodiversity as a focus of many programs demonstrates a growing recognition by the U.S. Congress that a healthy environment is essential for both people and agriculture.

The 2008 Farm Bill was signed into law on June 18, 2008, and includes more than \$284 billion in authorized federal funding between 2008 and 2012 (Figure 2). While conservation programs are receiving a relatively small piece of the overall pie, the \$24 billion in authorized funding to carry out these programs is not insignificant. In fact, the major Conservation Title programs and the two relevant Forestry Title programs described in this guide represent the single greatest source of funding for private lands conservation.

Fig. 2. 2008 Farm Bill distribution of spending (FY 2008-2017) at enactment
(in billions of dollars and percent of total funding)



ECONOMIC AND WILDLIFE VALUE OF THE BILL

Although many Farm Bill conservation programs focus on preserving and improving agricultural operations, all contain significant provisions that benefit wildlife habitat. Impressive wildlife benefits have been documented on lands enrolled in Farm Bill programs. Waterfowl and grassland birds in particular have experienced nationally significant population boosts through programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program. Other studies show substantial benefits to fish, mammals, amphibians and pollinators through Farm Bill programs.² Wildlife also gain from water and air quality improvements that many programs achieve through nutrient and sediment management, riparian buffer restoration and other conservation practices.

CASE STUDY

FARM BILL PROGRAMS BRING NEW MEXICO RANCH BACK TO LIFE

In 1956, Sid Goodloe saw great potential in an over-grazed, eroded and brush-infested ranch in the south-central mountains of New Mexico. He purchased the 3,400-acre property and began his quest to restore Carrizo Valley Ranch to its former health. In the more than half a century since, Sid has relied on numerous Farm Bill and other cost-share programs—many hearkening back to the days of the Soil Conservation Society (the precursor to the Natural Resources Conservation Service)—for water development, noxious weed control, fencing and maintenance of restored areas. Through these programs, Sid was able to put the ranch on the road to recovery.

Sid quickly learned that if the watershed is functioning properly, everything else falls into place. Enhanced wildlife habitat and increased livestock production were some of the immediate benefits he noticed. With invasive plants eliminated, mule deer were attracted to the savanna and calf weights increased. The improvements continued with each subsequent Farm Bill cost-share project. Thinning or removing over-abundant juniper stands that had

expanded due to fire suppression allowed water, once sucked up by their thirsty roots, to flow freely again. Eroded grazing lands now restored support lush vegetation for the cattle that rotate through them.

Other game species like deer, antelope and wild turkeys have joined mule deer on the high-quality savannas now widespread on the ranch. As a result, fee hunting has become a major source of income.

Today Carrizo Valley Ranch, although always a work in progress, is a model of sustainable ranching and ecosystem health. “Without the help of cost-share programs, we could not have accomplished even half of this, says Sid. “These programs were essential to bringing this ranch back to life”.



Carrizo Valley Ranch in the 1950s (top) and today.

These practices don't just benefit the environment; people and pocketbooks benefit, too. Farm Bill conservation programs reduce topsoil and water loss, increase yield, stem erosion along stream corridors and create recreational opportunities such as hunting and fishing. Consider these conservation practices and their benefits to producers:

◆ **Fencing streams improves cattle health.**

Fencing cattle out of streams, ponds and seeps and creating off-stream water sources for them through programs such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program can reduce livestock injuries and the spread of disease while actually encouraging water consumption by cattle. Cattle have been shown to prefer clean off-stream water sources over streams or ponds. Providing alternative water sources outside of fenced areas can lead to significant gains in weight and milk production while protecting sensitive riparian habitats and improving water quality downstream.³

◆ **Maintaining habitat for bees and butterflies increases crop yields.**

One out of every three crops we produce depends on insect pollinators such as bees, butterflies and moths. Maintaining pollinator habitat on farms can significantly improve yield of insect-pollinated crops⁴ such as hybrid sunflowers and cherry tomatoes. Restoring field edges and hedgerows or retiring unproductive fields and planting them to native grasses and shrubs provides essential habitat for pollinators, retaining their valuable—and free—services. Congress recognized the crucial services of pollinators, and creating pollinator habitat is now encouraged in each of the 2008 Farm Bill conservation programs.

◆ **Rotational grazing improves trout health.**

Rotational grazing on rangeland in the West can benefit both livestock and trout. Trout were double the weight and 1.3 inches longer in rotationally grazed areas than in continuously grazed areas.⁵ Rotational grazing promotes growth of riparian vegetation that supports abundant insect populations that trout depend on as a staple of their diet. Trout eat insects that fall in from streamside vegetation as well as aquatic insects that live among leaves fallen from surrounding trees. They can consume up to five times the number of insects in areas that are grazed rotationally than in areas where grazing is not managed.

◆ **Converting to grazing increases profits.**

Farmers who switched from managing a feedlot to a system where cattle harvest and fertilize their own forage through rotational grazing were rewarded with healthier cattle, lower farm expenses and higher quality soils.⁶ Dairy farmers participating in a Management Intensive Grazing (MIG) study generated more than \$1,100 higher profit per farm on average than confinement farms. Soils on pasture lands are also healthier, containing 20 to 50 times more bacteria and fungi, three to four times more earthworms and some of the highest root concentrations of all crops. Well-managed pastures also provide habitat for grassland birds and other wildlife and have very low nutrient and sediment runoff rates.



THE PLAYERS

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the federal agency that oversees Farm Bill conservation program implementation. The two primary implementing agencies under USDA are the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Both agencies have a local presence in approximately 2,300 of the 3,000 U.S. counties and a long history of local conservation efforts. These agencies, along with landowners and Conservation Districts, are central to delivering conservation practices on the ground. Each of these agencies is described in brief below.

FARM SERVICE AGENCY

Born of necessity in 1933 amid the Great Depression, the original goal of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) was to protect farmers and farm income through a variety of loan, commodity supply and price-support programs. Today, FSA's responsibilities are broad and encompass many services including:

- ◆ Serving as a safety net for America's farmers through the administration of farm commodity programs;
- ◆ Providing credit to agricultural producers who are unable to obtain private, commercial credit;
- ◆ Offering loans to beginning, minority and female farmers and ranchers;
- ◆ Purchasing and delivering commodities for domestic and international programs that help feed America's school children and hungry people around the globe; and
- ◆ Conserving natural resources through the Conservation Reserve Program.

FSA administers its programs through a network of state and county offices. Currently, there are 2,346 FSA state and county offices and service centers in the continental U.S. and additional offices in Hawaii and some American territories.

FSA COUNTY COMMITTEES

More than 7,700 farmers and ranchers serve as county committee members in FSA county offices nationwide to help deliver FSA programs in their local communities. Serving on these committees is an important way for landowners to participate in local conservation decision-making. The committee is elected by other producers and any producer who meets basic eligibility requirements can serve. FSA County Committee members decide which FSA programs are implemented countywide, establish allotments and yields and oversee commodity price-support loans and payments;

the Conservation Reserve Program; Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation; incentive, indemnity and disaster payments for commodities and other farm disaster assistance.

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides technical support to FSA for implementation of the Conservation Reserve Program and administers the remainder of the conservation programs described in this guide with the exception of the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program, which is administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

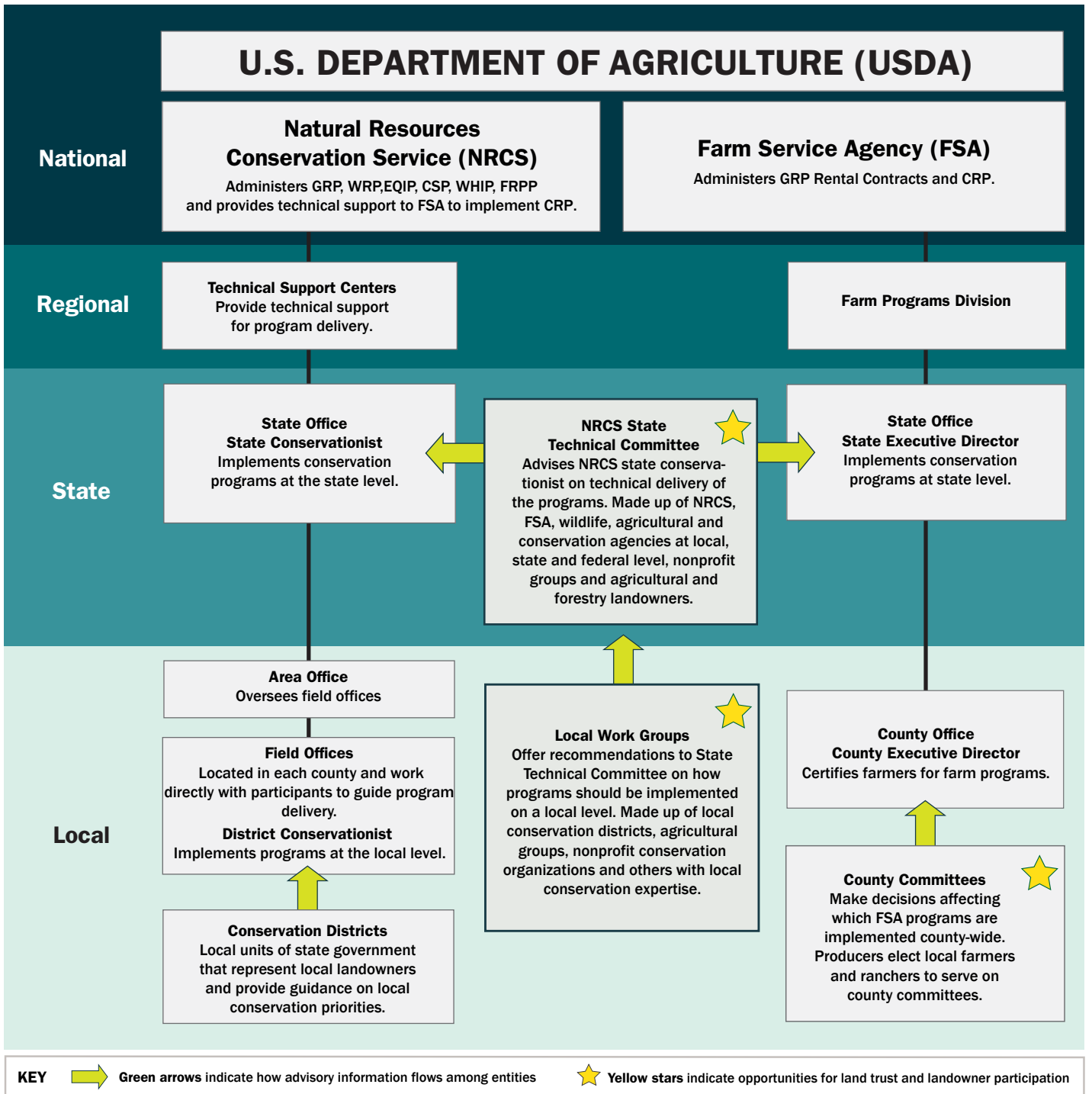
NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers to conserve natural resources. The agency, originally founded in 1933 as the Soil Erosion Service and renamed the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) in 1935, was borne in response to the Dust Bowl that devastated the U.S. heartland during the Great Depression. Though SCS was founded primarily to address serious soil erosion, its mission steadily broadened over the decades. This evolution is reflected in the diverse technical disciplines of its workforce, which includes soil conservationists, soil scientists, range conservationists, engineers, hydrologists, economists, biologists, foresters and environmental scientists. With this broader mission, the agency's name was changed to the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 1994.

NRCS divides the United States into three administrative regions, each headed by a regional assistant chief. Each state also has a state conservationist, who oversees conservation programs within their area, and support staffs to deliver the nuts and bolts of conservation programs.

The structure of each state office varies, but the most common arrangement is an area office that oversees field offices located in each county. The field offices work most directly with program participants. Most do not have biologists and depend on state office biologists or, in areas that have them, area office biologists for technical support. Each field office is typically operated by a district conservationist. Forming a strong relationship with your district conservationist can greatly facilitate development of individual projects in your region.

Although NRCS's mission and program responsibilities have grown over its eight decades of existence, the total number of employees has actually decreased since the release of the 1985 Farm Bill due to chronic underfunding. This has presented challenges in getting otherwise excellent Farm Bill conservation programs delivered at a local level and has led to a growing number of partnerships with other agencies, nongovernment organizations and third-party technical service providers.

Fig.3. Farm Bill players from national to local level



CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Conservation Districts were created in the 1930s with the understanding that widespread soil loss is best addressed through decisions made at the state and local levels. The Conservation District is made up of a voluntary board of directors representing local landowners who provide guidance on local conservation priorities to NRCS and others. Some districts have taxing authority, but many are funded by federal, state and local governments, often supplemented by grants from organizations to carry out specific tasks. Others rely primarily on volunteer assistance. Better funded districts often have staff that complements NRCS Field Offices.

Local Conservation Districts are aggregated into state associations of Conservation Districts which, in turn, are members of the National Association of Conservation Districts. Each of these organizations represents the issues and concerns of local districts in the development of state and national agricultural conservation policy. The districts are important partners for NRCS in determining and implementing conservation priorities.

STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEES

The Food Security Act of 1985 (now the 1985 Farm Bill) directed NRCS to establish State Technical Committees (STCs) that would more broadly involve others from the agricultural and conservation communities in the design and delivery of Farm Bill conservation programs at state and local levels. Becoming an official member of your STC is an excellent way to influence Farm Bill program delivery and priorities.

State Technical Committees serve as an advisory body to NRCS state conservationists and FSA state executive directors but have no implementation or enforcement authority. It is the responsibility of the STC to make recommendations on the technical and program delivery aspects of Farm Bill programs such as conservation practices, ranking criteria for program participation, cost-share and incentive rates.

By law, members of an STC include NRCS, FSA, the U.S. Forest Service, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the state fish and wildlife agency, the state forester, the state

water resources agency, the state department of agriculture, associations of soil and water conservation districts, agribusiness and nonprofits with demonstrable conservation expertise, owners of non-industrial private forest lands, and producers representing the variety of crops and animals raised in the state.

State Technical Committee meetings are open to the public and anyone can request to become a member. By serving on these committees, members of the fish and wildlife community can contribute ideas and suggest priorities related to Farm Bill programs at the state level. To become an official member, inquire with your NRCS state conservationist.

LOCAL WORK GROUPS

Local Work Groups (LWGs) offer recommendations to STCs and NRCS on the implementation of conservation programs in their areas. LWGs are composed of Conservation District officials, FSA County Committees, agricultural groups representing locally raised crops and animals, non-industrial private forest land groups, nonprofit conservation organizations and other professionals representing agricultural and conservation interests and the soil, water, plant, wetland and wildlife sciences. As with STCs, it is important that advocates for fish, wildlife and plants become active in LWGs.

WHERE YOU FIT IN

Landowners, including land trusts, interested in applying for Farm Bill funding usually deal directly with the local field or county office, depending on the program of interest. Getting to know your local agency representatives and building strong and trusting partnerships is essential if you want to take full advantage of all the Farm Bill conservation programs have to offer.

If you are also interested in helping to guide or set local or state policies, consider joining your STC (or various subcommittees within the STC that focus on specialty issues), LWG, FSA County Committee or your Conservation District's board.



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THE PROGRAMS

Farm Bill conservation programs are described under three broad categories in this guide: land protection; restoration and land improvement; grants and other programs. Within the land protection and land restoration categories, programs are further classified by the type of assistance (easement, rentals, acquisition, cost-share, etc.) they provide.

LAND PROTECTION

Land protection programs are for safeguarding or retiring land through permanent or short-term (30-year) conservation easements, rental contracts or fee-simple acquisition.

Three programs provide payments to compensate landowners for selling a conservation easement on their land: the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP).

FRPP and GRP allow nonfederal entities such as land trusts to hold easements. Under WRP and HFRP, the federal government is the exclusive holder of the easements. The GRP has both a federal and a nonfederal easement option.

Rental programs include the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and its offshoots, the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). These programs provide incentives to landowners to temporarily give up some uses of their land,

such as crop production, development or cattle access, in exchange for annual rental payments and restoration cost-share. Although temporary, rental programs provide tremendous value to wildlife. In the prairie pothole region alone, CRP encompasses nearly 5 million acres—roughly an area the size of Massachusetts—and contributes significantly to the production of ducks and grassland birds.⁷

Only one land protection program, the Community Forest and Open Space Program (CFOSP) provides compensation to purchase fee-title lands from willing sellers, but this program has yet to be funded as of spring 2010.

RESTORATION AND LAND IMPROVEMENT

Programs in this category are for restoring land or improving its management through cost-share, green payments and partnerships.

The two primary restoration cost-share programs are the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Both provide payments to offset the cost of adopting conservation practices. EQIP offers additional compensation for income lost due to the adoption of a conservation practice. The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers green payments—incentives to reward landowners for maintaining or initiating conservation activities on agricultural land.

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) sets aside funds from WHIP, EQIP and CSP to fund special local and regional restoration and improvement initiatives involving groups of farmers or ranchers working with USDA, conservation organizations, state and tribal agencies or other entities.

GRANTS AND OTHER PROGRAMS

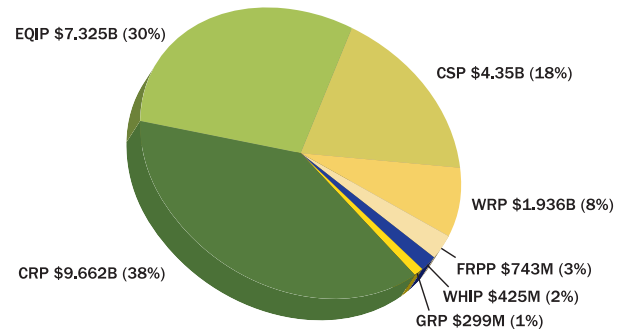
This catch-all category covers two programs: Conservation Innovation Grants (CIGs) and the Biomass Crops Assistance Program (BCAP). CIGs provide funding and technical assistance for creative conservation projects. BCAP, encourages farmers to grow biofuel crops.

AVAILABLE FUNDING

Collectively, the 2008 Farm Bill dedicates more than \$24 billion in private land conservation funding over a five-year period, with a significant portion going to CRP and EQIP (Figure 4). An additional \$9.75 million per year was authorized through the U.S. Forest Service to implement the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (not shown in figure). Together, these programs represent enormous opportunities to protect and restore natural lands.

All of the programs described in this guide also include technical assistance provided free of charge by NRCS.

Fig. 4. 2008 Farm Bill conservation program funding (FY 2008-2017) at enactment



ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Each Farm Bill program includes its own land and/or applicant eligibility requirements. Landowners (including land trusts where appropriate) are almost always the primary applicant and decision-makers for Farm Bill programs. In some cases—particularly for short-term contracts—leaseholders may also participate if the landowner concurs. With the exception of the Healthy Forests Reserve Program, all applicants must meet the following basic eligibility requirements to participate in USDA programs:



Adjusted Gross Income

Eligibility is based on the amount of income derived from different sources. Applicants, including land trusts, cannot receive benefits from USDA conservation programs if their annual adjusted gross income (AGI) for non-farm income exceeds \$1,000,000 (\$2,000,000 for a married couple) unless at least two-thirds of their total AGI is derived from farming, ranching and forestry operations. The FSA administrator or NRCS chief may waive the AGI limits on a case-by-case basis for the protection of environmentally sensitive land of special significance. Interested parties that may not meet AGI requirements should consult the agencies to determine eligibility before proceeding with enrollment in conservation programs.

Conservation Compliance

All applicants who wish to receive benefits from USDA must be in compliance with the Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill. HELC provisions were enacted to control soil erosion and require that farmers prevent soil loss through conservation measures. WC provisions were enacted to reduce wetland loss and conversion for agriculture. Landowners are discouraged from draining, filling or otherwise altering wetlands. Failure to comply with HELC and WC provisions may result in the loss of USDA program benefits, which can be significant. All producers currently receiving USDA commodity, credit or conservation benefits should already be in compliance.

Producers enrolling in a conservation program for the first time who have not worked with USDA before and who have highly erodible land must also create a soil conservation plan (see page 55) to participate. A USDA representative can help you create this plan.

Forms for AGI (form CCC-926) and HELC and WC determination (form AD-1026) are available online at: www.ocio.usda.gov/forms/index.html. (Type the form number in the search box on the left of the web page).

Farm Registration

All participants in Farm Bill programs are required to register their property with FSA. Registered farms are assigned a unique tract and farm number, which is required for all program applications. **All applicants must have tract or farm number(s) before completing the conservation enrollment process.** If you don't, contact your USDA Service Center to have one assigned. You can find your service center at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html#state.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PROGRAM

Choosing the right Farm Bill conservation program from the many available options is not as daunting as it may seem at first. Start with the tables on the next two pages. These tables break down the land protection programs (Table 1) and the restoration and land improvement programs (Table 2) according to the conservation activities they fund.

You may find that several programs might work for you. In this case, start with the program that best addresses the range of conservation activities you wish to complete and work down the list until you've found a good fit. Follow this up with a call or visit to your local service center to discuss your options. Consider exploring more than one program if you want to undertake a wide variety of conservation activities (like restoring a wetland on one part of an operation and improving cropping practices on another).

For a quick summary of the programs you're interested in, see Appendix 1, a table that shows the purpose, eligibility requirements, payments and incentives, and application information for each program.

Tip

Don't wait until the last minute to get your projects in the queue for USDA program funding. Check the national and state agency websites regularly for the latest program information and deadlines. Apply early and avoid the rush of applicants just before announced sign-up or ranking periods. In addition, getting your funding requests in before April of each year improves your chances of receiving funding and also keeps you in the running for any year-end surplus funds. The USDA fiscal year ends on September 30 and any funds unspent as of July of that year are often reallocated to priority states or programs with a demonstrated backlog of projects. Thus, even if the program you're interested in is out of funds, you may still receive funding through year-end reallocations. Projects not funded or submitted before reallocation begins are not considered until the following fiscal year and, in some cases, you may need to reapply.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Much more information, including specific deadlines and downloadable applications, is available online. For national program information, visit the national NRCS or FSA websites: www.nrcs.usda.gov or www.fsa.usda.gov.

For state-specific program information, including ranking information and application periods and deadlines, which are different in every state, visit the state NRCS websites, which can be accessed at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html#state. (For a directory of state NRCS offices, see Appendix 3. For FSA office listings, see Appendix 4.)

For more information on 2008 Farm Bill programs, see the Intermountain West Joint Venture, Field Guide, accessible at <http://iwjv.org>, and the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Grassroots Guide to the Farm Bill at <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide>.

Table 1: Land Protection Programs - Permanent and Short-term Easements, Rental Contracts and Land Acquisition

What do you want to protect?	Which programs can you use?		FRPP	HFRP	GRP	WRP	CRP			CFOSP
	Farm and Ranchland Protection Program	Healthy Forests Reserve Program	Grassland Reserve Program	Wetlands Reserve Program	Conservation Reserve Program	Continuous Conservation Reserve Program	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program		
Working farms, ranches or forests	PE	PE, SE	PE						F	
Highly erodible agricultural fields					R					
Natural forests		PE, SE		PE, SE						
Riparian buffers and other environmentally sensitive lands						R	R/PE*			
Grazing or natural grass lands	PE		R, PE, SE							
Wetlands		PE, SE		R, PE, SE		R				

*CREP easements available only in certain states

Legend	
	Programs to explore first
	Other programs that may fund this activity
PE	Permanent easement
SE	Short-term easment
R	Rental contract
F	Fee-simple acquisition

Table 2: Restoration and Land Improvement Programs: Restoration or Cost-share Payments and Green Payments

Conservation Activities: What Do You Want to Do?	Which programs can you use? **									
	HFRP	GRP	WRP	CRP			WHIP	EQIP	CSP	
	Healthy Forests Reserve Program	Grassland Reserve Program *	Wetlands Reserve Program	Conservation Reserve Program	Continuous Conservation Reserve Program	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	Environmental Quality Incentives Program	Conservation Stewardship Program	
Restore whole agricultural fields to natural cover										
Restore riparian buffers (forested)										
Restore native Grasslands and Shrublands										
Restore forested uplands (excluding riparian areas)										
Restore wetlands										
Restore in-stream habitat										
Restore pollinator habitat										
Restore field borders to natural cover										
Manage nutrient or sediment runoff from agricultural fields										
Manage forests or woodlots										
Manage manure										
Manage invasive species										
Install fencing for rotational grazing or to keep livestock out of sensitive areas										
Conduct a prescribed burn										
Manage pests (including predator deterrence)										
Reduce greenhouse-gas emissions from manure										
Install structural practices (e.g. livestock watering facility, stream crossing etc.)										

*Restoration through GRP must be in conjunction with a GRP easement or rental contract

**All programs provide cost-share funding with exception of CSP, which provides 'green payments' for adopting conservation practices

Legend	
Programs to explore first	
Other programs that may fund this activity	



Getting with the Programs: The Details

LAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS: CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Wetlands Reserve Program

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provides technical and financial assistance to help landowners restore, protect and enhance wetlands, including adjacent areas important to their function, through easements and restoration cost share. WRP has restored large tracts of wetlands including projects that exceed 10,000 acres. As of 2008, more than 2 million acres were protected through WRP, greatly benefiting wildlife, particularly along major migratory bird flyways and in regions where large wetland complexes can be created (Fig. 5, page 19). The 2008 Farm Bill reauthorized WRP and established a new acreage cap of approximately 3 million acres by 2012. The 2008 bill also provided additional guidance through WRP for the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP).

Under WREP, states, non-governmental organizations and others may partner with USDA to select and fund projects in state-designated priority wetland restoration areas such as floodplains and riparian areas. Funding and enrollment opportunities for WREP agreements are listed on the state NRCS websites as they become available.

ENROLLMENT OPTIONS

WRP offers four different enrollment options for private landowners:

- 1. Permanent Easement:** A conservation easement in perpetuity. NRCS holds title to the easement and participants must abide by the terms of a WRP easement deed. Cost-share is available to carry out restoration plans.
- 2. 30-Year Easement:** An easement held by NRCS that expires after 30 years and includes cost-share to offset a portion of the restoration costs.
- 3. Restoration Cost-Share Agreement:** A 10-year agreement to restore or enhance wetlands without placing an easement on the enrolled acres. NRCS pays a portion of the restoration costs plus maintenance.
- 4. Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program:** Leverages non-Farm Bill dollars and is subject to criteria in specific geographic locations.

ELIGIBILITY

Lands must:

- ◆ Be privately or tribally owned farmed or converted wetlands, including former or degraded wetlands, as well as any adjacent land dependent on, or that would contribute significantly to, the wetlands;
- ◆ Maximize wildlife benefits, wetland values and functions and have a high likelihood of successful restoration as determined by NRCS in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

NOTE: Lands enrolled in CRP that are highly likely to be returned to production at the end of the CRP contract are also eligible. CRP lands that have timber stands or that were converted to trees are NOT eligible.

Participants must:

- ◆ Own the land for at least the seven years prior to enrollment for the easement options. However, NRCS may make an exception if the land was not acquired for the purposes of putting it into WRP or if it is of significant environmental value.
- ◆ Meet Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) requirements and be in compliance with Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) and Wetland Conservation (WC) provisions. (see page 13)

Tip

If you have owned agricultural land for fewer than seven years and would like to enroll it in WRP, check with your NRCS representative to see if you can get an exemption.

EASEMENT COMPENSATION

NRCS bases compensation for permanent and 30-year easements on whichever of the following is lowest:

- ◆ Fair market value of the land according to the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practices (USPAP) or an area-wide market analysis;
- ◆ Applicable geographic area rate cap (see page 20); or
- ◆ Landowner's offer.

WREP easement payments with reserved grazing rights are reduced to 75 percent of the geographic area rate cap to accommodate the retained grazing rights.

For all easements, NRCS pays all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, charges for abstracts, survey and appraisal fees and title insurance.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

1. **Permanent Easement:** NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value (subject to a geographic area rate cap—see page 20) and up to 100 percent of the restoration costs. Maintenance is also eligible for cost-share assistance;
2. **30-Year Easement:** NRCS pays 75 percent of the easement value (subject to a geographic area rate cap—see page 20) and up to 75 percent of restoration costs;
3. **Restoration Cost-Share Agreement:** NRCS pays 75 percent of the restoration costs plus maintenance;
4. **Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program:** Varies by geographic location.

Easement Payment Distributions

If the permanent or 30-year easement is valued at \$500,000 or less, payment is distributed in one lump sum or in up to 30 annual payments per the request of the participant. Permanent or 30-year easements valued at greater than \$500,000 must have at least five and no more than 30 annual payments. In some circumstances, the Secretary of Agriculture can allow a waiver and make one lump-sum payment if the project would further the purposes of the WRP program, which all projects should presumably do. If you prefer a lump-sum payment, ask for a waiver.

Restoration Cost-share Limits

The total amount of annual payments a landowner or legal entity receives for restoration cost-share agreements can not exceed \$50,000 per year—per participant, NOT per project. If you have multiple projects or properties enrolled in WRP, you will receive no more than \$50,000 for all projects combined in a single year.

Participants can use other non-USDA conservation program funds, including state and federal, to match WRP cost share. Funded activities must comply with the WRP contract and, together with USDA funds, cannot exceed 100 percent of the total actual cost of restoration. If they do, NRCS will reduce payments proportionately.

RANKING CRITERIA

States can place higher priority on certain geographic regions of the state where restoration will help achieve state or regional goals.

NRCS must give priority to acquiring permanent rather than short-term easements and easements with habitat value for migratory birds and other wildlife.

Higher priority may also be given to offers that:

- ◆ Provide higher conservation value;
- ◆ Are most cost-effective for the environmental benefits gained;
- ◆ Leverage federal funds with additional financial contributions from the landowner or other third party;
- ◆ Best achieve the purpose of the program;
- ◆ Have lower on-farm and off-farm threats such as development of nearby land;
- ◆ Voluntarily accept a lesser payment than NRCS offers



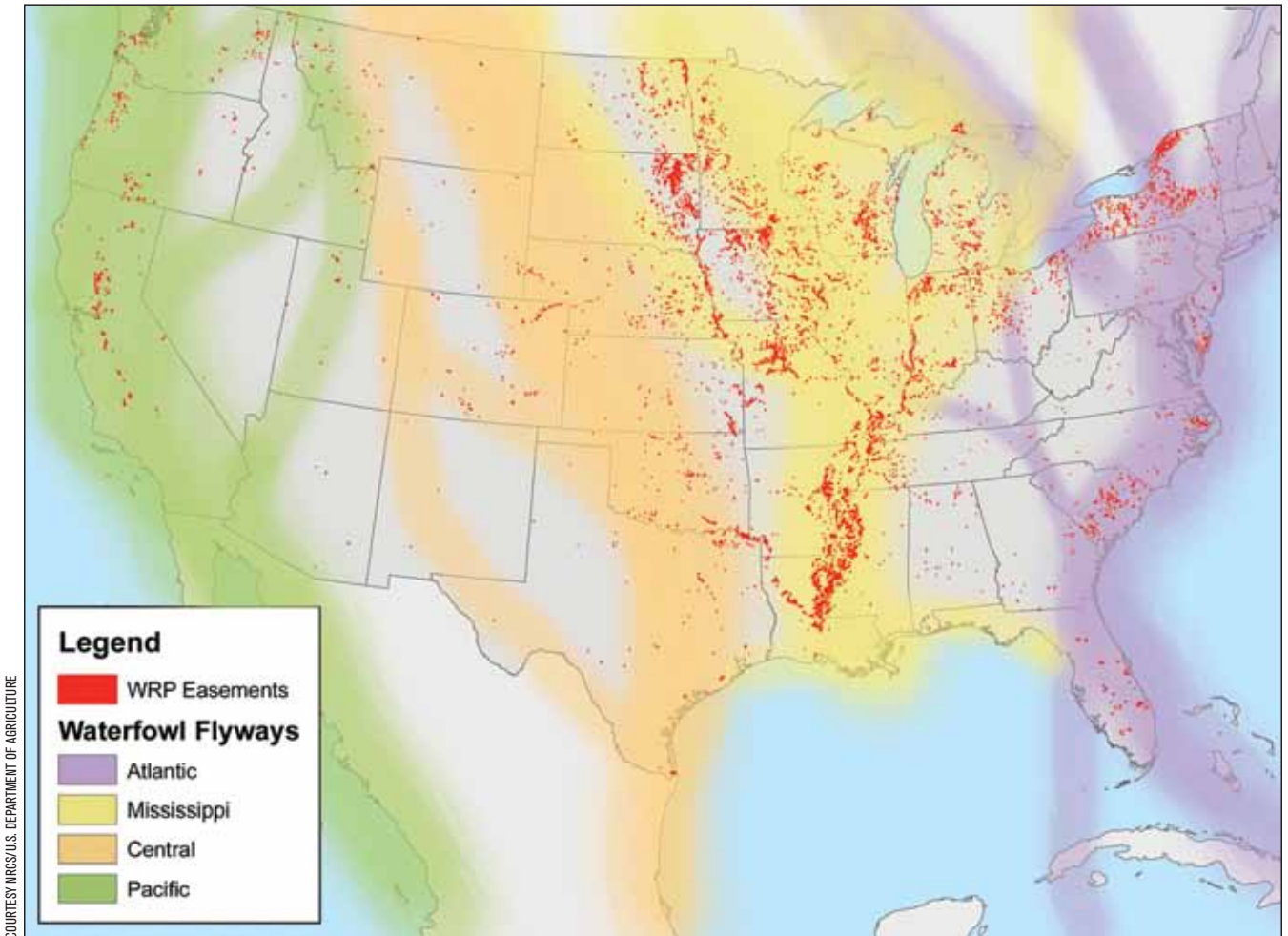
LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

In exchange for easement payments, landowners agree to limit use of the land to certain economic activities such as hunting, fishing and quiet recreational use. In addition, you cannot place structures on the easement or otherwise impact wetland functions and values. You also must agree to restore and maintain wetland functions and values according to a wetland easement conservation plan that NRCS will assist in developing. Managed grazing and timber harvest, along with other uses, can be authorized by NRCS if it is deemed compatible with the easement’s wetland values.

HOW TO APPLY

Enrollment in WRP is competitive and applications are accepted on a continuous basis. Ranking and project selection periods occur one or more times per year and are announced on the state NRCS websites. Applications are available at the local NRCS Service Center or on the state NRCS websites.

Fig. 5. WRP Easements protect millions of acres along the major waterfowl flyways



EASEMENT COMPENSATION AND CAPS

For each of the four easement programs, USDA provides at least 50 percent, but often up to 100 percent, of the easement value depending on the enrollment option chosen. How easement value is determined, however, varies from program to program (Table 5).

For the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) and the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), easement value is determined through a standard market appraisal process. For the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) and Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP), however, easement compensation may be capped by an NRCS-determined geographic area rate cap (GARC).

GARCs represent the per-acre value a landowner can receive for a given easement. Most government

easement purchase programs require these caps to ensure that taxpayer dollars are not used to purchase land at above fair market value and to reduce administrative costs.

The state conservationist determines and regularly updates GARCs. Some states use a statewide cap; others have GARCs that vary by region (Fig. 6) or county.

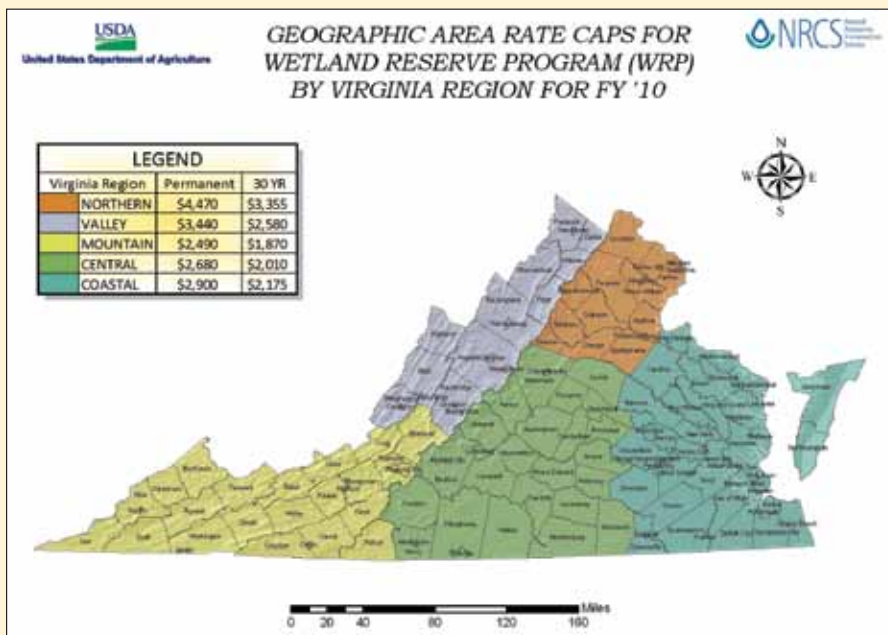
Different land uses (for example, irrigated, non-irrigated, pasture) may also receive unique per-acre values. In many but not all cases, the GARC is lower than the appraised fair market value for the appraised region.

For the latest GARCs for your area, visit your state NRCS website or contact your local office.

Program	Method
Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)	USPAP* or the UASFLA† (Yellow Book)
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	Lowest of: 1) appraised fair market value through USPAP; 2) geographic rate cap; or 3) landowner offer
Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	USPAP
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	Lowest of :1) appraised fair market value; 2) geographic rate cap; or 3) landowner offer

* Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Process
 † Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (Yellow Book)

Fig. 6. GARCs vary by region in Virginia



COURTESY NRCS/US. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

CASE STUDY

WETLAND RESTORATION PROVES LUCRATIVE

Oregon farmer Mark Knaupp has spent the last 18 years restoring wetland habitat on his 1,200-acre grass seed farm. To date, Mark has restored 320 acres of wetlands using WRP funds and has also created a 106-acre wetland mitigation bank. The remainder of his property is in grass seed cultivation. WRP allows Mark to combine his more than 25 years of farming experience with his passion for wildlife, wetland restoration and waterfowl hunting.

Mark's restoration success story began in 1992 when he embarked on his first restoration project—a 20-acre shallow pond for waterfowl. In 1995, he also noticed a particularly soggy piece of land along a slough had become

difficult to farm, so he decided to enroll 320 acres of the surrounding bottomlands in the WRP program. He then used the easement payment from WRP to buy an adjacent 180 acres of productive farmland and essentially traded it for prime wildlife habitat.

“Buying the land, farming it and then enrolling it in the WRP and restoring it to wetland was a great business decision,” says Mark. Within five years of restoring the wetland, thousands of native plants, including some rare species, had sprung up on their own and wildlife returned almost immediately. Every fall through spring, thousands of ducks, geese, shorebirds and swallows return to the wetlands as do countless breeding

birds each summer, including some not commonly seen in the region. Mark loves watching the birds return to his land. “It’s amazing how the vegetation comes back and how the habitat develops,” says Mark. “It’s all happened very fast. The birds found it and moved into it very quickly.”

Maintaining the wetland requires about two weeks of work per year, primarily to remove invasive plants. Enrolling in WRP does require some patience to navigate the process, but on balance, Mark is grateful for the help from the WRP “They allowed me to get my money out of the property and restore habitat at the same time. It’s the best of both worlds for me.”



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LAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS: CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program

© PHIL HOGAN, NRCS

THE DETAILS

The Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP) helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture, including working forest land or forested areas that buffer or protect agriculture from development and other nonagricultural use. This is accomplished through easements with third party “entities” such as land trusts, governmental organizations and others authorized to hold conservation easements. FRPP can be a baseline tool for protecting habitat values. Once enrolled, landowners can use other Farm Bill cost-share programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to further improve the quality of the land for farming and wildlife. The 2008 Farm Bill authorizes enrolling an additional 1,220,000 acres through 2012.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, the role of NRCS has changed from a purchaser of conservation easements to a facilitator and funder of those purchases through cooperative agreements with land trusts and other entities. Easements must be permanent (or the maximum duration allowed by state law) and land trusts may use their own terms and conditions in the easement deeds provided they are approved by NRCS in advance. NRCS retains a right of enforcement to inspect and enforce the easement should the land trust fail to do so, but does not hold or co-hold the easement title.

ELIGIBILITY

Lands must:

- ◆ Be private cropland, rangeland, grassland, pasture land or forest land that contributes to the economic viability of a farm, ranch or timber operation or serves as a buffer to protect such an operation from development; and
- ◆ Contain at least 50 percent prime, unique, statewide or locally important farmland unless otherwise determined by the state conservationist, and/or contain a historical or archaeological resource on the state or national register or be formally eligible for the national register; and
- ◆ Be subject to a pending offer by an eligible entity such as a land trust; and
- ◆ Not include forest on greater than two-thirds of the easement area. (Land in the process of natural regeneration to tree cover, including cutover forest or abandoned farmland, is also eligible if it is not currently being developed for nonforest use.)



Participants must:

- ◆ Be an individual, legal entity or Indian tribe (government and nongovernment organizations are NOT considered to be eligible landowners); and
- ◆ Meet adjusted gross income requirements (see page 13); and
- ◆ Be in compliance with highly erodible land conservation (HELC) (see page 13) and wetland conservation (WC) provisions.

“Entity” Eligibility (for Easement Holders)

To receive cost-share for easement purchases under FRPP, NRCS must deem a land trust an “eligible entity.” Eligible entities can enter into short-term agreements (three to five years) with NRCS, during which time they can apply for cost-share assistance to purchase easements from interested landowners. To qualify, an entity must:

- ◆ Be a federally recognized Indian tribe, state, unit of local government or non-governmental organization with a farmland protection program that purchases easements for the purpose of protecting agriculture and related conservation values;
- ◆ Have the capability to acquire, monitor and enforce easements including sufficient numbers of staff dedicated to easement stewardship.

“Certified Entity” Eligibility (for Easement Holders)

Eligible entities may become “certified entities” if they can demonstrate that they meet more stringent criteria. Certified entities enter into long-term agreements (five or more years) with NRCS, during which time they can apply for cost-share assistance to purchase easements. To qualify as a certified entity, a land trust must:

- ◆ Have a demonstrated ability to complete easement acquisitions in a timely fashion, monitor easements on a regular basis and enforce the provisions of the deeds;
- ◆ Have experience enrolling projects in FRPP;
- ◆ Have a sufficiently capitalized fund expressly dedicated for management, monitoring and enforcement of easements.

EASEMENT COMPENSATION

An appraisal using either the Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) or the Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA or “Yellow Book”) determines the value of the conservation easement. The land trust chooses which evaluation method to use and NRCS reviews the appraisal.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

NRCS provides cost-share of up to 50 percent of the appraised fair-market value (FMV) of the easement, and the land trust contributes the balance of the cost. Landowner donations can be part of this contribution, but land trusts are responsible for providing at least 25 percent of the purchase price of the easement (FMV minus landowner donation). Other grant funds from local or state programs may be used for the match. Formerly capped at 25 percent of the easement value in the 2002 Farm Bill, landowner donations are now unrestricted in the 2008 Farm Bill, greatly incentivizing easement purchase through bargain sales.

The greater the donation from the landowner, the smaller the cash responsibility of the land trust (see Table 4). Once the landowner donation exceeds one third of the easement value, the basis of the minimum land trust share is 25 percent of the purchase price. Prior to this threshold, the land trust share is based on the appraised FMV. NRCS pays the remainder of the cost.

NOTE: NRCS funds cannot be used for appraisals, surveys, title insurance, legal fees, easement monitoring costs and other related administrative expenses. The land trust and/or landowner must cover these costs or obtain them from another entity.

Table 4. FRPP Payment Provision Scenarios (based on an easement with an appraised fair market value of \$100,000)

Scenario	Appraised Fair Market Value	Landowner Donation (Percent of Value)	Basis of Minimum Entity Share	Purchase Price	Minimum Entity Cash Share (Percent Basis)	Maximum NRCS Share (Percent of Value)
1	\$100,000	Zero	Appraised Fair Market Value		\$50,000 50%	\$50,000 50%
2	\$100,000	\$10,000 10%	Appraised Fair Market Value		\$40,000 40%	\$50,000 50%
3	\$100,000	\$20,000 20%	Appraised Fair Market Value		\$30,000 30%	\$50,000 50%
4	\$100,000	\$30,000 30%	Appraised Fair Market Value		\$20,000 20%	\$50,000 50%
5	\$100,000	\$33,333 33.33%	25% of Purchase Price	\$66,667	\$16,667 25%	\$50,000 50%
6	\$100,000	\$40,000 40%	25% of Purchase Price	\$60,000	\$15,000 25%	\$45,000 45%
7	\$100,000	\$50,000 50%	25% of Purchase Price	\$50,000	\$12,500 25%	\$37,500 37.5%
8	\$100,000	\$60,000 60%	25% of Purchase Price	\$40,000	\$10,000 25%	\$30,000 30%
9	\$100,000	\$70,000 70%	25% of Purchase Price	\$30,000	\$7,500 25%	\$22,500 22.5%
10	\$100,000	\$80,000 80%	25% of Purchase Price	\$20,000	\$5,000 25%	\$15,000 15.0%
11	\$100,000	\$90,000 90%	25% of Purchase Price	\$10,000	\$2,500 25%	\$7,500 7.5%

Source: NRCS Draft FRPP Manual

RANKING CRITERIA

All applications for enrollment in FRPP must be scored and ranked according to national and state criteria. The chief of NRCS sets the national criteria. The state conservationist, with advice from the State Technical Committee, sets state criteria.

National criteria, the basis for at least half of the ranking score, include:

- ◆ Percent of prime, unique and important farmland in the parcel;
- ◆ Percent of cropland, pastureland, grassland and rangeland in the parcel;
- ◆ Ratio of the total acres of land in the parcel to the average farm size in the county;
- ◆ Decrease in the percentage of farm and ranch land acreage in the county in which the parcel is located between the last two USDA censuses of agriculture;

- ◆ Population growth and density in the county;
- ◆ Proximity of the parcel to other lands that protect agriculture and conservation values;
- ◆ Proximity to other agricultural operations and infrastructure.

State criteria include but are not limited to:

- ◆ The location of a parcel in an area zoned for agricultural use;
- ◆ The performance of a land trust in managing and enforcing easements (how long the land trust has been in existence cannot be used as a factor);
- ◆ Social, economic, historical, archeological and environmental benefits;
- ◆ Location within geographic regions where enrollment of the parcel will help achieve national, state or regional conservation goals;
- ◆ Diversity of natural resources to be protected.

The existence of a farm or ranch plan that encourages long-term farming viability, the landowner's willingness to provide public access and the score in the Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA—a system that scores and ranks agricultural land based on soil quality, development threat and agricultural and public values) may also factor in the ranking process.

The state conservationist must make the full list of national and state ranking criteria available to the public. Projects of similar natural resource value cannot be preferentially selected based solely on their cost to FRPP.

LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

Landowners are responsible for upholding the terms of the easement drafted in partnership with the “entity” land trust and approved by NRCS. This includes agreeing not to convert their land to non-agricultural uses and to limit impervious surface development to no more than 2 percent of the FRPP easement area unless a waiver is granted. Subdivision is also generally not allowed, although some farm building construction may be included in the terms. Landowners must also agree to develop and implement a conservation plan (see page 55) in consultation with NRCS. Forest land greater than 10 acres or 10 percent of the easement area must have a forest management plan.

HOW TO APPLY

Because funding is provided to the land trust or other protection entity rather than to the landowner, landowners should approach their local land trust or other eligible entity first to determine if there is interest in participating in FRPP to protect land in the region. If there is, the land trust or other eligible entity will work directly with you and NRCS to submit an application for funds to purchase the easement.

To find your nearest local land trust, visit the Land Trust Alliance website: www.lta.org.

Your county agriculture department is also a good place to inquire about local agricultural protection programs.

Land trusts interested in holding FRPP easements first must submit an application to the state conservationist to determine their eligibility to participate and whether or not they qualify as an eligible entity. If you already have a cooperative agreement with NRCS, you can skip this step, but you must reapply for eligibility when the term of the cooperative agreement expires. Once eligibility is determined, land trusts can continually submit applications throughout the year for cost-share funding.

The state conservationist announces one or more ranking dates each fiscal year at least 60 days prior to ranking. Funds are awarded to selected entities to pursue the easements or contracts. Projects not selected for funding are purged from the application list on September 30 of each year, unless a land trust requests that your projects remain on the list for funding consideration in the next fiscal year.

WHERE TO GET MATCHING FUNDS

Coming up with matching dollars can be one of the most difficult aspects of FRPP, particularly when landowners cannot donate any portion of the easement value. Fortunately, many states and even counties and municipalities have agricultural protection programs, often referred to as Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easement (PACE) programs, which can match FRPP dollars. As of 2009, 27 states had authorized state-level PACE programs and at least 77 independently funded local programs are operating in 19 states.⁸ PACE programs can be administered by federal, state or local governments or non-governmental organizations.

Visit the Farmland Information Center website for a list of state and local PACE programs: www.farmlandinfo.org.

CASE STUDY

PROTECTING ENDANGERED SPECIES HABITAT THROUGH FRPP

In the Kern River Valley of California, Bruce and Sylvia Hafenfeld run a cattle operation on a mixture of private, Forest Service and Audubon California lands. Hafenfeld Ranch, in business for more than a century in the southern Sierra Nevadas, includes dense riparian habitats that support the federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher. “Our family has been providing prime habitat for flycatchers along the streams and irrigation ditches that have been part of our normal ranching activities for decades, and my son wants to continue this tradition,” says Bruce Hafenfeld.

So when the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers expressed a need for willow flycatcher mitigation under the Endangered Species Act, the Hafenfelds proposed that a conservation easement be allowed on their ranch instead of the traditional fee-title acquisition of the property to meet mitigation requirements.

The partners agreed to the easement and the Hafenfelds worked with NRCS through FRPP to develop the easement, using the mitigation funds as the required FRPP match. “This project exemplifies the importance of looking beyond traditional measures of preserving wildlife to include

private landowners as an integral component,” says Steve Thompson of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The easement will forever protect the property from development, and the land continues to provide flycatcher habitat as part of its agricultural use. The Hafenfelds now adjust the timing of cattle grazing in riparian areas to protect the mixed understory that breeding

flycatchers and other wildlife species prefer.

Realistically, Hafenfeld says, neither environmental groups nor the government can afford to buy and manage all the land. “You need dedicated people on the land caring for it. It doesn’t take a brain surgeon to figure out that ranchers are the most cost-effective and efficient way to do this.”



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LAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS: CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Grassland Reserve Program

Grassland ecosystems are the most threatened habitats in the United States⁹ with dramatic declines of more than 99 percent for tallgrass and more than 70 percent for mixed grass prairies. The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) was created to help landowners and operators protect grazing lands and grassland conservation values, including biodiversity, on private lands through short-term rental contracts and permanent easements. GRP emphasizes:

- ◆ Supporting grazing operations;
- ◆ Maintaining and improving plant and animal biodiversity; and
- ◆ Protecting grasslands and shrublands from the threat of conversion to uses other than grazing.

As of 2008, 250 GRP easements covered more than 115,000 acres in 38 states, and 2,632 total rental contracts protected more than 562,000 acres. The 2008 Farm Bill authorized an increase in the national acreage cap that will allow more than 1.2 million additional acres to enter the program by 2012. The program also gives priority for enrollment to acreage expiring from the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), but limits it to 10 percent of the total acres enrolled in any year.

New Partnership Opportunity for Land Trusts

The 2008 Farm Bill has a new provision, modeled after the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program, which allows land trusts and other eligible entities to enter into cooperative agreements with NRCS to write, own and enforce easements under GRP. Easements must be permanent (or the maximum duration allowed by state law), and land trusts can use their

own terms and conditions in the easement if a template is approved by NRCS in advance. NRCS retains a right to inspect and enforce the easement should the land trust fail to do so, but does not hold or co-hold the easement.

ENROLLMENT OPTIONS

GRP offers four different land protection options:

1. **Rental Contract:** An agreement of 10, 15 or 20 years to maintain, protect and if necessary, restore grassland values and functions. If restoration is necessary, participants develop a restoration plan with NRCS and receive cost-share assistance to carry out the plan.
2. **Permanent Easement in Partnership with NRCS:** A conservation easement in perpetuity. NRCS holds title to the easement and participants must abide by the terms of a standard GRP easement deed. Cost-share is available to carry-out restoration plans when needed.
3. **Permanent Easement in Partnership with an Eligible Entity:** A permanent conservation easement held by a land trust or other eligible entity through a cooperative agreement with NRCS. Land trusts can use their own easement terms and conditions in accordance with the goals of GRP, provided NRCS approves them. The land trust is responsible for enforcement of the easement terms and grazing plan, but NRCS can enforce the easement if the land trust fails to do so. Land trusts are responsible for the cost of any restoration required but may enter into agreements with governmental or private organizations to carry out easement stewardship activities approved by NRCS.

4. Transfer of a Permanent Easement to an Eligible Entity:

Transfer of an easement held by NRCS to an eligible entity that furthers the purpose of GRP must be done with the authorization of the landowner and approval of the NRCS chief. Once transferred, the land trust or other eligible entity assumes responsibility for administering and enforcing the easement, including any restoration costs required. NRCS retains the right to periodic inspections and enforcement.

ELIGIBILITY

Lands must:

- ◆ Be private or tribal grassland or land that contains forbs or shrubs (including improved rangeland and pastureland) on which grazing is the predominant use; or
- ◆ Be located in an area that historically had been dominated by grasses, forbs, or shrubs that can be used for grazing and related conservation uses; and
- ◆ Provide habitat for ecologically significant animal or plant populations if retained in its current use or restored to a natural condition; or
- ◆ Contain historical or archeological resources; or
- ◆ Address issues raised by state, regional and national conservation priorities; or
- ◆ Be previously enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program if the land is of high ecological value and threatened with conversion to non-grazing uses.

Land already protected under an existing contract, easement or deed that protects grassland functions and values is not eligible for enrollment (fee-simple lands owned by a conservation organization, for example).

Participants must:

- ◆ Be the landowner for easement participation;
- ◆ Be the landowner, hold a lease or otherwise have control of the eligible acreage being offered for enrollment in rental agreements;
- ◆ Be in compliance with Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation provisions (see page 13);
- ◆ Meet the adjusted gross income requirements (see page 13).



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“ENTITY” ELIGIBILITY

Land trusts can enter into cooperative agreements with NRCS to receive cost-share for easement purchases under GRP similar to agreements developed under FRPP. To do this, NRCS must deem a land trust an “eligible entity.” Eligible entities must have:

- ◆ A charter describing a commitment to long-term conservation of agricultural lands, rangeland or grassland for grazing purposes;
- ◆ Enough staff to acquire, monitor, enforce and take care of easements;
- ◆ An existing dedicated account for easement management, monitoring and enforcement.

EASEMENT COMPENSATION

Because landowners can continue to gain economic benefit from grazing activities under GRP, the maximum amount that NRCS will pay for easements cannot exceed the value of the easement minus the value of the retained grazing rights. Baseline easement value will be the lowest of:

- ◆ The fair market value (FMV) of the easement as determined by the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practices (USPAP) or an area-wide market analysis; or
- ◆ A geographic area rate cap (see page 20); or
- ◆ The landowner's offer.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

Nationally, no more than 60 percent of GRP funds can be used to purchase easements of any kind and no more than 40 percent can be used for rental contracts.

Easements Held by NRCS

Landowners receive 100 percent of the easement value (not to exceed FMV minus grazing value) and up to 100 percent of any restoration costs from NRCS. Maintenance costs are the responsibility of the landowner. Easement payments to the landowner are made in a single lump-sum payment unless otherwise requested. USDA will pay all administrative costs associated with easement recording such as appraisals, surveys, title insurance and legal fees.

Easements Held by Land Trusts

Under this option, NRCS provides up to 50 percent of the purchase price of the easement value (not to exceed FMV minus grazing value minus landowner donation), and the land trust is responsible for at least an equivalent amount. There is no limit on the amount a landowner can donate. Land trusts and/or landowners assume all administrative costs such as appraisals, surveys, title insurance, legal fees and easement monitoring. They also assume all costs of restoration and rehabilitation and are not eligible for restoration cost-share.

PICK YOUR BEST EASEMENT OPTION

Landowners can choose to work on a GRP easement option with either an eligible entity, such as a land trust, or with NRCS. Land trusts have the choice of referring landowners to NRCS or holding the easements themselves. So what's the difference and why choose one over another?

For landowners, working through a land trust may actually be more cost-effective because NRCS may cap easement compensation through Geographic Area Rate Caps that are often lower than the fair market value (FMV) of the easement. Land trusts are not subject to this cap and can therefore offer landowners the full FMV of the easement.

For land trusts, connecting landowners with NRCS to participate in the federal easement option is a more affordable option, because land trusts must come up with at least 50 percent of the purchase price to hold easements on their own and also pay for up-front costs, restoration and long-term monitoring. However, when funds are available and capacity is sufficient, land trusts that enter into cooperative agreements with NRCS to purchase and hold GRP easements may actually increase their chances of protecting important land by offering a stronger financial incentive to landowners. Because GRP funding is limited, easement projects that leverage partner dollars and benefits are also likely to rank higher in the GRP project selection process and be preferentially selected for funding.

RENTAL CONTRACTS

In exchange for enrollment, participants receive annual payments of up to 75 percent of the grazing value for the duration of the contract. If restoration is required, NRCS provides cost-share assistance of up to 50 percent of the estimated cost to restore the land. Landowners are responsible for maintaining conservation practices.

Rental rates are predetermined by county based on soil productivity and pasture land rates used for other programs. FSA posts these county rates, which are generally between \$5 and \$16.50 per acre, at www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_Notice/grp_17.pdf.

Tip

Rental rates through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) can be higher than what GRP offers. Explore your eligibility through CRP first, if the more limited grazing and haying allowed under CRP is not a concern.

RESTORATION COST-SHARE

Annual restoration payments are capped at \$50,000 per landowner and landowners have three years to establish the practices. Participants can use other non-USDA conservation programs, including state and federal funds, to match GRP cost-share but the total amount received by the participant cannot exceed 100 percent of the cost of restoration. USDA can reduce the amount of cost-share distributed through GRP so the amount does not exceed the total cost. No more than one USDA program can be used to address the same practice on the same land, but other USDA programs can be used to address issues not covered under the GRP contract (i.e. non-grassland related practices).

RANKING CRITERIA

Applications for enrollment in GRP are scored and ranked according to state-specific ranking criteria. Criteria are developed by the NRCS state conservationist and FSA state executive director, with advice from the State Technical Committee using national guidelines.

Priority is given to projects that protect:

- ◆ Grazing operations;
- ◆ Grasslands and land that contains forbs and shrublands at the greatest risk of conversion to nongrazing uses;
- ◆ Areas with significant biodiversity value;
- ◆ Expired CRP acres.

In ranking projects submitted by land trusts and other eligible entities, NRCS can give priority to projects that:

- ◆ Best leverage nonfederal funds;
- ◆ Offer more than 50 percent of the purchase price.

States can emphasize enrollment of unique grasslands or certain geographic areas and establish separate ranking pools to address specific state, regional and national conservation priorities, such as those laid out in the State Wildlife Action Plans and other regional or state plans. Land trusts, landowners and other interested partners can influence the selection of geographic or habitat priorities by serving on the State Technical Committee.

Tip

Maximize your competitiveness by restoring your land before you apply for GRP funding. GRP is a relatively small financial assistance program and dollars for restoration are limited. As a result, USDA usually gives priority to projects in relatively good condition rather than ones that require restoration agreements. Get your land GRP-ready through well-funded programs such as EQIP or other non-USDA restoration programs that often have higher cost-share rates than GRP. Once the land is restored, you'll have a competitive edge when you apply for a GRP easement.

LANDOWNER RESPONSIBILITIES

Participants in any of the GRP enrollment options must develop and implement a grazing management plan approved by NRCS. Grazing-related activities such as prescribed grazing or burning, fencing, watering and feeding livestock, managing wildlife habitat and haying, mowing and harvesting are acceptable on all GRP lands provided they are consistent with the plan. For example, a plan may include restrictions on haying, mowing or grazing during the nesting season for imperiled bird species. A restoration agreement may also be needed but is not required. In exchange for annual payments, participants enrolled in rental contracts must agree to suspend any cropping activities and any development rights on the land for the period of the contract. Easement participants must relinquish development rights and eliminate any cropping activities, and landowners must agree to maintain restoration practices for their expected lifespan.

HOW TO APPLY

NRCS and FSA jointly administer GRP. Applications for enrollment in any of the program options are accepted throughout the year at local USDA Service Centers. The NRCS state conservationist and FSA state executive director establish one or more ranking periods per year to review and approve applications. Ranking periods are posted in program outreach materials available at the service centers or online at your state NRCS website. Unfunded applications remain on file until they are funded or withdrawn by applicants.

Tip

Turned down for a GRP rental contract because of limited funding? Consider the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP, see page 42). CSP provides incentive payments through five-year contracts (as opposed to 10, 15 or 20 years under GRP). CSP contracts support many of the activities covered under GRP and can be renewed if you meet the contract terms and agree to continue making conservation improvements.

HOW TO ENHANCE THE WILDLIFE VALUE OF GRP

Go Native

The 2008 Farm Bill revised the focus of GRP from protecting, conserving and restoring “grassland resources” on private lands to protecting “grazing and related conservation values.” This new focus on grazing brings relaxed restoration requirements: projects can now use species “common to the locality” rather than “native and naturalized” plant species. By working with NRCS to ensure that grassland restoration agreements include a diverse list of species native to the area that also provide high-quality forage for livestock, landowners can improve the quality of their land for wildlife and improve their chances of being selected for funding. GRP emphasizes maintaining and improving plant and animal biodiversity, so landowners who include native species in their restoration plans are likely to fare better in the selection process.

Think Regionally

USDA recognizes the value of native grasslands and emphasizes this by giving states the authority to assign these lands priority in the ranking criteria. Land trusts can help USDA to advance the landscape-scale wildlife value of GRP by reaching out to landowners in state priority areas and informing them of the opportunity to protect and restore their grasslands through GRP. Landowners in priority regions are also likely to rank more highly and be accepted into the program. By taking it a step farther and becoming a member of the State Technical Committee, land trusts and landowners can help decide which areas are priorities for GRP funding.





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LAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS: CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Healthy Forests Reserve Program

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is authorized under the Forestry Title of the Farm Bill, not the Conservation Title. The purpose of the program is to restore and protect forest ecosystems to help recover threatened and endangered species, candidate species and other species of concern, improve biodiversity and enhance carbon sequestration. HFRP offers both easements and restoration agreements. Easements may allow activities such as hunting and fishing, managed timber harvest or periodic haying and grazing, if they are compatible with the purposes of the easement. Landowners enrolled in HFRP who are restoring or improving their land for threatened or endangered species can work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to develop Safe Harbor Agreements or Candidate Conservation Agreements. In exchange, they are formally assured by the FWS that they will not be subject to additional regulations should their actions result in harm to the population of a listed species they have benefitted. Congress authorized an additional \$9.75 million per year to implement the HFRP.

ENROLLMENT OPTIONS

HFRP allows restoration agreements, easements and short-term contracts. All participating landowners must implement a restoration plan. This plan, developed in coordination with NRCS, FWS and/or the National Marine Fisheries Service

(NMFS), outlines the actions necessary to restore, protect, enhance and maintain habitat and improve the well-being of imperiled species. Technical assistance may also be provided by the Forest Service. Options include:

- 1. 10-year Restoration Cost-Share Agreement:** The landowner receives cost-share to implement an approved restoration plan over the course of 10 years.
- 2. Permanent Easement:** Purchased and held by NRCS, this is the maximum easement duration allowed by state law.
- 3. 30-year Easement:** An easement purchased and held by NRCS for 30 years. Tribal 30-year contracts are also offered under similar terms.

ELIGIBILITY

Lands must:

- ◆ Be privately or tribal-owned non-industrial forest and non-forest or adjacent lands that contribute to the integrity of the forest ecosystem; and
- ◆ Have a high likelihood to restore, enhance or improve the health of a federally listed threatened or endangered species or candidates for listing; state-listed species; or special concern species; or

- ◆ Improve biological diversity or increase carbon sequestration.

Lands protected by an easement or deed restriction that already protects fish and wildlife are NOT eligible for enrollment

Participants must:

- ◆ Be the legal landowner of the property offered.

NOTE: Landowners are not required to meet the AGI and Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation provisions of the Farm Bill to participate. Land trusts are not eligible landowners, because the lands they own are already considered protected.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

Nationally, no more than 60 percent of funds can be used for easement purchases and no more than 40 percent can be used for restoration cost-share agreements. Easement value is determined using the Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP). Payments to landowners are made in one lump sum or no more than 10 annual payments.

Permanent Easement

Landowners receive not less than 75 percent or more than 100 percent of the fair market value (FMV) of the easement plus up to 100 percent of the cost to restore the land.

30-year Easement or Contract

NRCS pays no more than 75 percent of the fair market value of the easement and no more than 75 percent of the cost to restore the land.

10-year Restoration Cost-share Agreement

NRCS pays up to 50 percent of the average cost of restoring the land. Average costs of individual restoration practices are determined on a regional basis to ensure the closest possible alignment with actual costs.

Participants are eligible to receive cost-share for the first 10 years of a restoration agreement or easement. Beyond this time, landowners are responsible for maintaining the required habitat conditions for the estimated lifespan of the practice.

RANKING CRITERIA

Ranking and distribution of funds for HFRP projects occur at the national level. The chief of NRCS solicits proposals of priority areas for funding consideration from the state conservationists. State conservationists, with input from the State Technical Committees or other organizations with relevant technical expertise, determine and submit their state's priority project areas, which the chief evaluates and ranks. The top-ranking project areas receive HFRP funds for distri-

bution. Due to the limited pool of funds, not every state will be selected for funding.

States that do receive HFRP funding publicly solicit applications from eligible landowners in the approved project areas. Project applications are ranked according to specific state-level criteria, and the highest-ranking applications are funded.

NRCS, in coordination with FWS and the NMFS, gives priority to landowner applications that include one or more of the following goals:

- ◆ Provide the greatest conservation benefit to threatened and endangered species and species that are candidates for listing or are identified as state species of conservation concern;
- ◆ Improve biodiversity values and/or support significant forest ecosystem functions and values;
- ◆ Offer the greatest potential for carbon sequestration;
- ◆ Maximize the contribution of non-federal funds;
- ◆ Maximize the environmental benefits per dollar expended.

Landowners can also increase the probability of being selected by offering to accept a lesser payment than NRCS is providing.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Landowners enrolled in easement options provide NRCS with the title and interest in the easement for the duration of the term for which they are restoring or maintaining habitat. They must also agree to carry out the terms of the restoration agreement with technical assistance and cost-share from NRCS. Landowners have the option of entering into voluntary landowner protections such as Safe Harbor Agreements for threatened and endangered species and Candidate Conservation Agreements for candidate species. These agreements protect landowners from additional regulation associated with a listed or candidate species.

HOW TO APPLY

Check with your local NRCS Service Center to see if HFRP funding is available in your state. As of 2010, 13 states have received funding for HFRP projects: Arkansas, California, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Maine, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon and Pennsylvania. Program sign-up opportunities are announced as they become available.

LAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS: LAND RETIREMENT AND RENTALS

Conservation Reserve Program

NOTE: The complete rules for the 2008 Farm Bill Conservation Reserve Program have not been published, because the required Environmental Impact Statement is pending. The following program summary is based on the draft rules released in 2009 and operation of the program for the past several decades. Check with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for the most current information.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is the oldest Farm Bill conservation program and the largest in terms of both funding and acreage. CRP is a voluntary program created to help agricultural landowners temporarily remove erosion-prone lands from agricultural production and establish natural covers. The wildlife benefits are significant and CRP has been modified to promote specific fish and wildlife conservation objectives. CRP offers three different enrollment options: general sign-up CRP and two offshoot programs, the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program CCRP and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Each has its own focus, eligibility requirements, payments and incentives (Table 5).

Participants in all CRP programs receive annual rental payments as compensation for putting agricultural lands into conservation cover and cost-share assistance for restoring and managing enrolled land.

Extensive research on the impacts of CRP highlights dramatic positive impacts on many species of wildlife, especially grassland birds and waterfowl. Researchers estimate that CRP has helped produce more than 26 million additional ducks in the prairie pothole region between 1992 and 2004, 30 percent more than areas without CRP cover.¹⁰ A similar study on grassland birds in the prairie pothole region predicted a loss of 1.8 million sedge wrens, grasshopper sparrows, dickcissels, bobolinks and western meadowlarks without CRP land.¹¹

At the close of 2008, approximately 34.7 million acres were enrolled in CRP. With increasing agricultural commodity prices and noncompetitive rental payments, the enrolled acreage fell to 31.1 million acres as of the end of 2009, of which 4.4 million acres are in the continuous CRP (CCRP) targeting conservation buffers and other partial-field conservation practices.

The 2008 Farm Bill requires FSA to conduct annual rental rate surveys to update rates, keep them competitive with commodity prices and provide a greater incentive for enrollment. USDA released the first-ever county-level rental rates on May 1, 2010, which are searchable online at http://quickstats.nass.usda.gov/?source_desc=CCROP&commodity_desc=RENT.

NOTE: GRP also offers rental contracts in some states, but in this guide it is covered in the previous section on conservation easements, its primary focus.

Although 10- to 15-year rental contracts are the norm for all CRP programs, some states may also offer temporary or permanent easement options under CREP with nonfederal support. CRP allows limited haying outside the nesting season, managed grazing (including to control invasives) and the placement of wind turbines in certain situations with a reduction in payments.

ENROLLMENT OPTIONS

1. General CRP Sign-up (CRP):

Focuses on enrolling whole fields into conservation cover. Depending on ecological site conditions, cover may be grass and forbs or trees. Applications are accepted from landowners and competitively selected during designated sign-up periods, which generally take place no more than once a year and up to several years apart.

2. Continuous CRP Sign-up (CCRP):

Focuses on enrolling environmentally desirable land and adopting high-priority conservation practices such as riparian buffers, wildlife habitat buffers, wetland restoration, grass waterways and other partial-field conservation practices. The program is noncompetitive and continuous; landowners can enroll eligible land in CCRP at any time and be automatically accepted. Participants in CCRP are eligible for greater financial incentives than general CRP.

Continuous sign-up covers a variety of programs and practices particularly beneficial to fish and wildlife conservation. In some cases, groups such as Quail Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited and the National Wild Turkey Federation can provide outreach, technical expertise and other assistance to facilitate delivery of the following major habitat-focused CCRP initiatives:

Wetland Restoration Initiative (Conservation Practice 23)

A 500,000-acre initiative that enrolls acres within the 100-year floodplain, this practice is designed to restore wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to agricultural use. The objective is to prevent degradation of the wetland area, increase sediment trapping, improve water quality, prevent erosion and provide habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.



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Wetland Restoration Non-floodplain Initiative (Conservation Practice 23a)

This practice is designed to restore the wetlands and playa lakes outside the 100-year floodplain that provide vital habitat for many wildlife species, filter runoff, recharge groundwater supplies and sequester carbon. Playas do not have to be certified wetlands to be enrolled. The enrollment goal is 250,000 acres.

Duck Nesting Habitat Initiative (Conservation Practice 37)

This practice restores wetlands outside the 100-year floodplain that benefit ducks nesting in the prairie pothole region. The goal is 100,000 acres of wetlands and adjacent uplands, critical habitat and nesting cover for ducks, sandhill cranes and other wildlife. With full enrollment, this initiative can increase duck numbers by an estimated 60,000 birds annually and benefit many other species. (This estimate was made before the competitive demand for biofuel production on agricultural land limited the number of acres likely to be enrolled.)

Bottomland Hardwood Initiative (Conservation Practice 31)

The goal of this practice is to restore floodplains primarily through the restoration of bottomland hardwoods. This 500,000-acre initiative is intended to provide wildlife habitat, improve air and water quality and offer carbon sequestration benefits.

Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds (Conservation Practice 33)

This practice addresses the decreasing numbers of northern bobwhite and species that depend on similar habitat. The goal is to establish cover around field edges and eligible crops. Buffer plant species may include native warm-season grass, legumes, wildflowers, forbs and limited shrub and tree plantings. The acreage cap is 250,000 acres in specific geographic areas in 35 states.

Longleaf Pine (Conservation Practice 36)

The longleaf pine ecosystem once covered as much as 90 million acres of the Southeast, but through land use change and forest conversion, approximately three million acres remain. This practice pays landowners to establish and manage longleaf pine and native grass and forb cover and aims to restore 250,000 acres across nine states.

Option	Focus	Land Eligibility	Payments and Incentives
Conservation Reserve Program General Sign-up	Restore whole fields to natural cover to reduce erosion	Highly erodible land that has been cropped 4 of the 6 years prior to 2008 or marginal pasture land suitable for buffers	Annual rental payments; Cost share up to 50% of the cost to restore the land; \$5/acre maintenance payment
Continuous Conservation Reserve Program	Enhance environmentally sensitive lands on partial fields through practices such as riparian buffers, wetlands and wildlife habitat	Same as general CRP but also suitable for one or more priority practices	Same as general CRP plus signing bonuses of \$100-\$150/acre; practice incentives of up to 40% of the cost of restoration; other bonuses where they apply
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	Work in partnership to enhance water quality and wildlife habitat in state or regional priority areas, often through riparian buffers, on partial fields	Land in designated state or regional priority areas suitable for conservation practices identified by the state	Same as general CRP plus state incentives such as additional cost share, signing and other bonuses, tax credits, easement options and/or other incentives determined by the state

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (Conservation Practice 38)

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) targets geographically defined areas supporting specific wildlife species. SAFE projects are usually developed by partnerships of wildlife experts in state and federal agencies, the public, nonprofit organizations and others. Projects are reviewed by the State Technical Committees and approved by wildlife professionals and FSA. There are currently 75 SAFE projects in 31 states. Examples of projects approved for SAFE include:

- ◆ **Arkansas Grass SAFE** to restore early successional habitat to benefit northern bobwhite quail and other grassland birds.
- ◆ **Indiana Bat SAFE** to enroll 2,100 acres in CRP to restore forest habitat for this imperiled bat.
- ◆ **New York Grassland SAFE** to restore 4,900 acres of grassland habitat to improve populations of declining grassland bird species.
- ◆ **Colorado Lesser Prairie Chicken SAFE** to enroll 2,900 acres of short and midgrass sand sagebrush prairie to enhance lesser prairie chicken habitat.
- ◆ **Tennessee Wetlands SAFE** to enroll 500 acres in CRP to restore habitat for amphibians, reptiles, crustaceans, waterfowl and shorebirds.

To determine if a SAFE project is located in your region, visit the fact sheets at: www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/safepr08.pdf and www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/safepr208.pdf.

3. CREP Sign-up

Involves partners such as FSA, NRCS, state agencies and occasionally private groups in addressing high-priority conservation issues of state or national significance, such as declining habitat for wildlife and soil erosion and water quality in specific geographic areas. Because CREP combines federal, state and other resources, participating landowners can receive significantly greater financial and technical assistance through CREP than through other CRP initiatives. Each CREP initiative has its own acreage caps and specific eligible conservation practices. Landowners can generally enroll until the acreage cap is met. The combination of federal and partner incentives can even result in a profit to participants, making the CREP program very attractive to landowners.

ELIGIBILITY

Participants in CRP, CCRP and CREP must:

- ◆ Be private individuals, tenants leasing eligible land and/or land trusts; and

- ◆ Have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the CRP sign-up period, unless one of the following is true:

- The land was acquired due to the previous owner's death;
- The land changed ownership due to foreclosure and the owner's timely exercise of the right of redemption in accordance with state law;
- The land was recently changed ownership and the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

For general CRP sign-up, lands must:

- ◆ Be cropland (including field margins) that has been planted with an agricultural commodity four of the previous six crop years from 1996 to 2001 and meets one of the following criteria:
 - Has a weighted average erosion index (potential erosion of a soil divided by the soil's sustainable-use level) of 8 or higher;
 - Is expiring from CRP;
 - Is located within a national or state CRP conservation priority area. National priority areas in the 2008 bill include the Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Long Island Sound, long-leaf pine and prairie pothole regions;
 - Is certain marginal pastureland suitable for use as a riparian buffer or for similar water quality purposes.

CASE STUDY

KARNER BLUE BUTTERFLIES FIND NEW HOPE THROUGH SAFE

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For continuous CRP sign-up, lands must:

- ◆ Meet the land eligibility requirements for general CRP. In addition, land located in public wellheads (the recharge areas above public wells) designated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) may also be eligible for enrollment.
- ◆ Be eligible and suitable for supporting one or more of the following practices:
 - Riparian buffers
 - Wildlife habitat buffers
 - Wetland buffers
 - Filter strips
 - Wetland restoration
 - Grass waterways
 - Shelterbelts
 - Living snow fences
 - Contour grass strips
 - Salt-tolerant vegetation
 - Shallow-water areas for wildlife

For CREP sign-up, lands must be:

- ◆ Within the boundaries of the CREP project areas located in specific geographic areas defined by the state and able to support the specific conservation practices required to address identified conservation issues.

Landowners can contact their local FSA offices to determine if their region is involved in a CREP project.

The Karner blue butterfly is a federally endangered species found in prairie and savanna habitats throughout the upper Midwest and parts of New England. Habitat loss and the consequent decline in the butterfly larva's sole food source—wild blue lupine—are driving widespread population declines of this species.

The sandy soils of the Eau Claire River Valley in western Wisconsin were once home to unique short-grass prairie habitat where Karner blues thrived. With help from the many farmers in the valley and their partners through SAFE, the region now offers a promising new opportunity to bring back the Karner blue.

In partnership with USDA, the West

Wisconsin Land Trust (WWLT) and a number of state, federal, university and non-government partners proposed a new State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement project to restore short-grass prairie habitat for Karner blues on 1,500 acres of farmland. To create the right habitat conditions, the partners developed a specialized prairie seed mix that includes wild blue lupine and several important nectar plants.

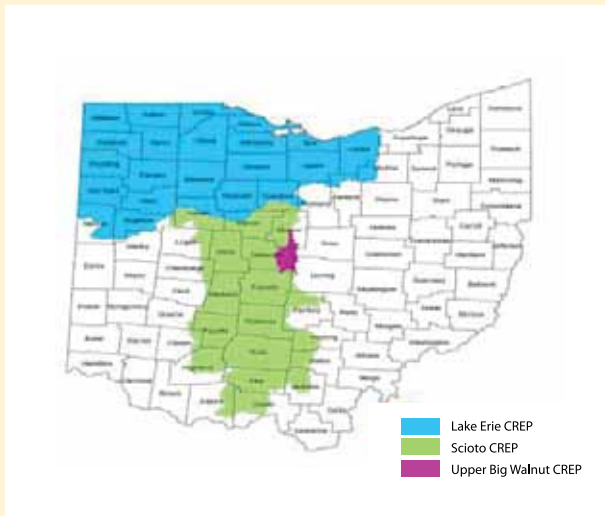
Landowners participating in the Karner blue butterfly SAFE receive attractive incentives to restore and manage the short-grass prairie habitats. "These landowners have developed a curiosity and then a passion for developing butterfly habitat," says Andrew Bourget of FSA. "Because the project is part of the Conservation Reserve Program, landowners already felt comfortable participating."

With the targeted outreach efforts and technical assistance of all partners, more than 1,100

acres were enrolled in more than 26 different contracts within the first two years of the project. The West Wisconsin Land trust and their partners at the University of Wisconsin documented the condition of the habitat before planting and continue to monitor the establishment of prairie plants and butterfly use.

At last check, prairie plants, including young lupine, were beginning to emerge on several farms. Although it is still too early to attract Karner blues, the developing prairies are providing new habitat for countless plants and animals, including other insect pollinators, and birds. "So much of our habitat restoration and protection comes from the efforts of private landowners," says Paula Kleintjes, a biology professor at the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. "We greatly appreciate their initiative and are grateful to be able to help out".





A GOOD EXAMPLE: CREP IN OHIO

Ohio has three active CREP projects (as of 2009) that leverage resources from a variety of federal, state, municipal and nonprofit sources. Significant incentives are available for landowners with eligible land within the Lake Erie, Scioto and Upper Big Walnut priority areas, including:

- ◆ A one-time sign-up incentive payment of \$140 to \$150 per acre for land enrolled in a riparian forest buffer or grass filter strip practice;
- ◆ A one-time practice incentive payment of approximately 40 percent of the eligible cost for establishing the riparian buffer or filter strip. This payment is in addition to the 50 percent cost-share assistance provided by USDA;
- ◆ An annual rental payment of 175 percent to 200 percent of the calculated soil rental rate for installing particular practices;
- ◆ A one-time incentive payment, through the local Soil and Water Conservation District and the city of Columbus of \$60 per acre for land devoted to specific practices;
- ◆ A direct payment through the city of Columbus to sign up for a voluntary perpetual easement option;
- ◆ A one-time incentive payment through the Ohio Division of Wildlife of up to \$40 per acre for installing and seeding warm season grasses;
- ◆ A one-time incentive payment through the Division of Wildlife and Ducks Unlimited of \$500 per acre (for up to 10 acres) for wetland restoration in exchange for a 20- or 30-year contract.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

All CRP initiatives provide annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to restore land. Additional incentives are available for specific practices or initiatives.

CRP Payments

FSA provides CRP participants with the following incentives:

- ◆ **Annual Rental Payments:** FSA bases per-acre rental rates on the relative productivity of the soils within each county. The maximum CRP rental rate for each offer is calculated in advance of enrollment. Producers can offer land at that rate or at lower rental rate to increase the likelihood of acceptance. The amount any landowner or legal entity can receive in rental payments is limited to \$50,000 per year.
- ◆ **Cost-share Assistance:** FSA provides participants with cost-share assistance of up to 50 percent of the eligible cost to restore the land.
- ◆ **Maintenance Incentive Payments:** Annual rental payments can include an additional amount up to \$5 per acre per year as an incentive to perform certain maintenance activities. This is particularly important for wildlife, since vegetative cover can change and become unfavorable to wildlife over time. A disturbance activity such as disking or burning can set back succession and enhance benefits to wildlife.
- ◆ **Other Incentive Payments:** FSA can offer an additional one-time incentive payment of 25 percent of the cost of restoring site hydrology.

CCRP Payments

In addition to the incentives available through general CRP, FSA provides special incentives to participants in CCRP that can include:

- ◆ A bonus of up to 20 percent of the annual rental rate for establishing windbreaks, filter strips, grass waterways and riparian buffers;
- ◆ An additional 10 percent of the annual rental rate for land located in EPA-designated wellhead protection areas;
- ◆ An up-front sign-up bonus of \$100 per acre (\$150 per acre for 15 year contracts) for some, but not all, practices;
- ◆ A practice incentive bonus payment of 40 percent of the eligible cost to establish some, but not all, practices. Payment is distributed once the practice is established.

CREP Payments

CREP participants receive the same financial benefits as participants enrolled in general CRP (annual rental payments, 50 percent cost share, maintenance payments). However, because CREP combines state, federal and other partner resources, enrolled landowners typically receive a variety of additional incentives, sometimes resulting in a profit to participants. Incentives vary by state and project but can include one or more of the following:

- ◆ Additional cost share assistance;
- ◆ Per-acre sign-up incentive payments;
- ◆ A bonus on the annual rental payments;
- ◆ State tax credits;
- ◆ Permanent or short-term easement options;
- ◆ Other incentives as determined by the state.

RANKING CRITERIA

Applications for general sign-up CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible application is ranked in comparison to all other applications and selections are made based on these rankings. As of 2007, FSA used the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits of land offered:

- ◆ Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from natural cover on contract acreage (100 points);
- ◆ Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff and leaching (100 pts);
- ◆ On-farm benefits from reduced erosion (100 points);
- ◆ Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period (50 pts);
- ◆ Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion (45 points);
- ◆ Cost (25+ points).

A new EBI is expected to be developed on release of final rules. The current EBI is available at: www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/crpebi03.pdf

Tip

Rack up points by maximizing the wildlife value of your land—the single greatest way to improve the chances of your offer being accepted. CRP is a competitive program limited to just 32 million acres of eligible croplands nationwide. Maximizing the number and diversity of native grasses and trees used as cover is one way to earn more points. You can subdivide fields and offer only the most environmentally sensitive land to score high in the water quality and air quality categories and gain a competitive edge.

The 2008 Farm Bill calls for addressing issues raised by state, regional and national wildlife conservation plans such as the State Wildlife Action Plans. States are encouraged to incorporate these plans into program priorities, scoring criteria, focal areas and other special initiatives. Offering land within state or nationally determined priority areas for wildlife can be worth an additional 30 points.

If you are willing to reduce your annual payment rates or forfeit cost-share funding, you'll have an added competitive edge. But keep in mind that maximizing points in the wildlife, water- and air-quality categories has the greatest impact on the total score. Depending on competition in the region, accepting reduced financial incentives may not be necessary.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

All participants must implement a conservation plan (see page 55) that covers management of the land and the specific issues such as soil erosion and wildlife habitat. Any haying, grazing and/or harvesting must be in compliance with the management plan and must not occur during the nesting season of grassland birds.

HOW TO APPLY

FSA administers CRP with technical support from NRCS, state forest agencies or other technical service providers. Applications are available at local FSA field offices.

You can apply for general CRP sign-up only during designated periods announced by FSA. In the past, this has been an annual announcement, but that could change at any time, so check with FSA regularly. Meanwhile, you can enroll in CCRP or CREP any time through your local FSA office. Enrollment in these initiatives is subject to the acreage limit, but no other constraints on sign-ups are expected in the near future.

LAND PROTECTION PROGRAMS: FEE-SIMPLE ACQUISITION

Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program

NOTE: As of spring 2010, no rules had been published or funding established for this program. The following summary is based on the statutory language only. Check with your state forester for the current status.

The Forest Service administers the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (CFOSP), which provides grants to local governments, nonprofit organizations and Indian tribes to purchase private forest lands that are economically, environmentally or culturally important and threatened with conversion to nonforest uses. Acquired lands must allow public access for recreational use and purchasing entities are encouraged to use the forestlands as working forests to provide economic benefit and local jobs to the surrounding communities. Forests purchased through this program cannot be sold or converted.

ELIGIBILITY

Land must:

- ◆ Be private land threatened by conversion;
- ◆ Be at least one acre in size;
- ◆ Include at least 10 percent forest cover.

Participants must:

- ◆ Be eligible entities (authorized to purchase land). These entities include land trusts and other non-governmental conservation groups, and local municipalities;

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

The program provides federal cost-share of 50 percent of the cost to acquire the property. Eligible entities must provide the remaining 50 percent in non-federal match, which can include cash, donations or other in-kind contributions. Entities that sell or convert forest land purchased under this program must reimburse the government in an amount equal to the sale price or the current appraised value of the land, whichever is greater.

HOW TO APPLY

Submit an application to the state forester or equivalent in response to a national request for proposals by the Forest Service. Your application must include a description of the land and a forest plan describing the community benefits, including public access, of protecting the land. The Forest Service is responsible for final allocation decisions.



RESTORATION AND LAND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS: RESTORATION AND COST-SHARE

NOTE: Several of the programs described in previous sections also provide restoration cost-share through rental contracts (CRP, CREP, GRP), easements (GRP, HFRP, WRP) or independent restoration agreements (WRP). In addition, the restoration cost-share programs (WHIP, EQIP) and green payment program (CSP) detailed on the following pages can often be coupled with easement programs such as FRPP to improve their wildlife value. (See Table 7 on page 54 for a summary of how programs can be used together.)

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is the only Farm Bill program devoted solely to fish and wildlife habitat. Agricultural land is also defined more broadly in the WHIP program than in other Farm Bill programs. This looser interpretation allows non-farmed acres that may not otherwise be eligible for assistance through other programs to be improved for wildlife habitat.

WHIP provides financial and technical assistance to help participants develop and improve habitat for wildlife populations of local, regional and national significance. WHIP contracts generally last from one to 10 years, although 25 percent of the national funds can now be used to enter into long-term agreements (15 or more years). Long-term contracts address state, regional and national conservation initiatives such as at-risk species or habitats. These contracts can also incorporate a higher rate of cost-share assistance. To date, the WHIP program has enrolled more than 4 million acres of wildlife habitat through more than 25,000 contracts. The 2008 Farm Bill authorized \$85 million per year for WHIP.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible lands must be:

- ◆ Private agricultural land (public lands are no longer eligible), non-industrial private forest land, and tribal land;
- ◆ Cropland, grassland, rangeland, pasture and other land suitable for fish and wildlife habitat on which agricultural products are, or have the potential to be, produced;
- ◆ Incidental lands such as cropped woodland, marshes and other areas provided they support, or have the potential to support, production.

Participants must:

- ◆ Own or be in control of the land for the term of the contract, including land trusts that own land;
- ◆ Be in compliance with the Adjusted Gross Income limits and the Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation provisions (see page 13);

- ◆ Be in compliance with the terms of all other USDA conservation program contracts to which the applicant is a party.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

WHIP provides cost-share of up to 75 percent for developing fish and wildlife habitat through contracts of one to 10 years. Historically underserved producers, such as new, socially disadvantaged or limited-resource farmers or ranchers and Indian tribes, may receive the applicable payment rate plus an additional rate that is not less than 25 percent above the applicable rate but not more than 90 percent of the estimated costs of establishing the practice. Long-term projects that protect or restore critical wildlife habitat for a term of 15 years or more are also eligible for up to 90 percent cost share. NRCS determines which projects are eligible for long-term agreements.

Total WHIP payments to a person or legal entity cannot exceed \$50,000 per year regardless of the number of contracts that person or entity holds.

Other Federal Cost-share Provisions

Participants cannot use more than one USDA program for the same conservation practices. However, WHIP can be combined with other USDA programs that cover conservation practices other than those proposed in the WHIP contract (see Table 7). If a participant receives financial assistance from other federal (non-USDA) sources for the proposed activities, WHIP payments are reduced accordingly so as not to exceed the federal cost-share limit of 75 percent, with one exception: Species or habitats deemed to be of special significance may receive other federal dollars to provide a greater cost-share incentive, sometimes up to 100 percent.

RANKING CRITERIA

WHIP priorities are determined at both the national and the state level. NRCS is authorized to prioritize projects that address state, regional and national conservation plans such as the State Wildlife Action Plans, North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative. The 2008 Farm Bill also includes

a requirement for states to encourage creation of pollinator habitat, although it is not yet listed as an explicit national priority. Individual states, however, can include state priorities for pollinator habitat in the ranking process and some states have already done so. Attending State Technical Committee meetings is one way to encourage the inclusion of pollinators or other priority species in state ranking criteria.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES

- ◆ Restore declining or important native fish and wildlife habitats (including pollinators);
- ◆ Protect, restore, develop or enhance habitat to benefit at-risk species such as candidate species and state-listed threatened and endangered species;
- ◆ Reduce the impacts of invasive species on fish and wildlife habitats;
- ◆ Protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife habitats.

STATE RANKING

NRCS state priorities are guided by the national priorities listed above. In some cases, the NRCS state conservationist can establish priority landscapes or habitats where WHIP dollars are focused to maximize benefits. Applications may be evaluated on some or all of the following criteria:

- ◆ Contribution to resolving a national, regional or state habitat concern;
- ◆ Inclusion in an established wildlife priority area;

- ◆ Long-term benefits obtained from the project;
- ◆ How self-sustaining the proposed practices are;
- ◆ Availability of matching funds or willingness to accept a reduced payment;
- ◆ Cost of restoration activities;
- ◆ Willingness of the applicant to complete habitat restoration activities within the first two years of the contract.

Tip

Projects that address at-risk species or habitats identified by the state WHIP committee are likely to qualify for long-term agreements of 15 years or more and more generous cost-share. They are also likely to rank higher in the application evaluation process. These projects serve the dual purpose of targeting wildlife and habitat needs and giving farmers a greater financial incentive to participate.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

Participants agree to develop and follow a WHIP conservation plan and to maintain conservation practices for their expected lifespan, even if those practices extend beyond the contract length.

HOW TO APPLY

NRCS is responsible for providing financial and technical assistance. Applications are available through your local NRCS field office.



RESTORATION AND LAND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS: RESTORATION AND COST-SHARE

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is to promote agricultural production and environmental protection as compatible goals. EQIP covers a wide range of conservation practices that help farmers and ranchers address threats to soil, water, air and related resources such as pollinators, at risk species and threats from invasive species. The 2008 Farm Bill added forest management, energy conservation and practices related to organic production to the mix.

EQIP provides technical and financial assistance to cover conservation activities and to replace any income lost to further a conservation objective such as delayed grazing to promote establishment of nesting cover. Contracts can run from one to 10 years, but most are for two or three years. With a Congressional authorization of \$7.325 billion through 2012, EQIP is one of the best-funded Farm Bill programs. To date, EQIP has implemented practices on more than 143 million acres through more than 300,000 contracts.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible lands must be:

- ◆ Private and tribal cropland, grassland, rangeland, pasture, wetlands, non-industrial private forest land and other agricultural land on which farm or forest-related products or livestock are produced;
- ◆ Public lands, such as grazing allotments, that are actively managed as part of a participant's private operation and on which the proposed conservation activities would directly benefit the private holdings.

Participants must;

- ◆ Be an agricultural or forestry producer;
- ◆ Be in compliance with the Highly Erodible Lands Conservation and Wetland Conservation provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill and meet Adjusted Gross Income requirements (see page 13);
- ◆ Own or have control of the land for the length of the contract period (tenants must provide written concurrence from the landowner to establish any structural practices).

PAYMENT PROVISIONS**Restoration Payments and Income Compensation**

EQIP provides payments of up to 75 percent of costs associated with planning, design, materials, equipment,

installation, labor, management, maintenance or training, and up to 100 percent of the estimated income sacrificed by a producer to implement conservation practices. Historically underserved producers, including limited resource, beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, are eligible for an increased payment rate not to exceed 90 percent of the estimated project costs. Underserved producers can also receive, in advance, up to 30 percent of the anticipated costs for purchasing materials or services.

The 2008 Farm Bill allows NRCS to accord "great significance" to certain conservation practices, which means additional points in the ranking process and higher payment rates for income compensation. These practices include:

- ◆ Nutrient, residue or air quality management;
- ◆ Invasive species management;
- ◆ Pollinator habitat;
- ◆ Animal carcass management technology;
- ◆ Pest management.

Pest management covers any insect, disease, noxious plant or animal that is adversely affecting crops or livestock and a broad range of methods, including predator deterrence measures such as fencing or range riders that prevent livestock loss due to wolves in regions of the West. Eligible practices are determined at the state level.

Payment Limitations

Payments are capped at \$300,000 per person or legal entity over a six-year period. However, waivers can be granted to raise the limit to \$450,000 for projects of special environmental significance. Projects that qualify for this waiver must:

- ◆ Have clear documentation that the project will have substantial positive impacts on critical resources such as at-risk species and drinking water supplies;
- ◆ Clearly address a national priority and state, tribal or local priorities;
- ◆ Assist the participant in complying with federal, state, tribal and local regulatory requirements.

Assistance to organic producers is based on producers agreeing to develop and carry out organic system plans for organic certification under the National Organic Program. Payments for conservation practices related to converting to organic production are capped at \$20,000 per year or \$80,000 during any six-year period.

Cost-share Considerations

Producers can receive assistance from other non-USDA federal, state, private or nonprofit sources. However, if the total contributions from all sources exceed 100 percent of the estimated costs to implement the practices, NRCS reduces payments accordingly. Participants cannot use more than one USDA program to address the same practice but can use other USDA programs if the programs are addressing different practices.

RANKING CRITERIA

The EQIP program is competitive and all applications are ranked according to local, state and national criteria. Applications are funded in ranking order until funds are exhausted.

National Priorities

All applications must address at least one national priority from the following list:

- ◆ Promotes at-risk species habitat conservation;
- ◆ Reduces nonpoint source pollution such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or excess salinity in impaired watersheds; surface and groundwater contamination and contamination from concentrated animal feeding operations;
- ◆ Conserves ground and surface water resources;
- ◆ Reduces emissions such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides (NOx), volatile organic compounds and ozone precursors and depleters that degrade air quality;
- ◆ Reduces soil erosion and sedimentation.

State Priorities

Applications meeting one or more of the national priorities are ranked according to the following state criteria:

- ◆ How cost-effective the proposed conservation practices are;
- ◆ Priority of the resource concerns being addressed;
- ◆ How effectively and comprehensively the project addresses the identified concerns;
- ◆ Willingness of the landowner to quickly complete conservation activities;
- ◆ Degree of expected environmental benefit;
- ◆ Long-term value and sustainability of the practices;
- ◆ Potential of project to improve existing conservation practices or systems or complete a conservation system.

Ranking Pools

All applications are grouped according to the primary resource (soil, air, water, habitat, etc.) or agricultural operation (crop, forestry or livestock) addressed, then evaluated against others meeting similar criteria. NRCS cannot assign a higher rank to a project solely based on cost if other projects have comparable environmental value, nor can it give preferential treatment to an applicant based on farm size.

Tip

Have a say in the ranking factors for your state. Since each state determines its own set of factors, becoming a member of your State Technical Committee is the most effective way to ensure that the habitat issues most important to you are covered.

Special Initiatives

The state conservationist, with advice from the State Technical Committee, can also establish special ranking pools for specific geographic areas or resources of concern such as a wildlife migration corridor, at-risk species, watershed, airshed or other area of special significance. Partners from other agencies, tribes or conservation groups can contribute additional financial and technical resources to help implement these initiatives, providing a greater incentive for landowners to enroll.

Tip

Team up to help direct EQIP dollars to important regions or resources of concern in your state. The state conservationist, with advice from the State Technical Committee, ultimately decides which, if any, EQIP special initiatives are established, but land trusts, landowners and other conservation partners can help guide these decisions by developing proposals that clearly define the need for, and benefits of, new special initiatives. Recruiting additional partners to contribute matching funds or technical assistance to landowners is particularly valuable and demonstrates concrete support for your proposals. Bring your proposals directly to your State Technical Committee. Better yet, join your state committee or sit on a subcommittee. Committee work is an ideal way to build credibility, propose and discuss ideas and form new partnerships to advance habitat conservation priorities.

CASE STUDY

WHIP AND EQIP IN ACTION

In Texas, the Lesser Prairie-chicken occurs only on private lands. Farm Bill programs offer 50 percent to 75 percent cost-share to restore or enhance habitat for this species—not enough to make it worthwhile for some landowners. To change that, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, June Leland Wildlife Foundation, Sibley Nature Center, and Playa Lakes Joint Venture pooled their resources to pay landowners a \$20-per-acre incentive for enrolling in WHIP, EQIP and other Farm Bill programs that benefit prairie-chickens.

In southwestern Montana, EQIP funds bolstered by a special initiative are helping to preserve the habitat of the Arctic grayling, a fish that is a candidate for federal endangered species listing. Several years of drought and low flows in the Upper Big Hole River, the last native habitat for the grayling in the continental United States, threaten this member of the salmon family. The EQIP special initiative funds helped compensate landowners for shortening their irrigation season, keeping the river running at no less than 20 cubic feet per second throughout the summer despite continued drought and unfavorable snowpack conditions.



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PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

All participants in EQIP must develop an EQIP plan of operations that includes specific conservation and environmental objectives to be met and the schedule for implementing and maintaining practices. For forest producers, a forest management plan must be part of the plan. All practices must be maintained for their estimated lifespan, even if it extends beyond the EQIP contract length. To receive payment, participants must certify that each practice has been completed.

HOW TO APPLY

NRCS is responsible for technical assistance and administration of the EQIP program. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis throughout the year with periodic ranking periods. Any producer with eligible land can apply and applications can be obtained at the local NRCS Service Centers.

RESTORATION AND LAND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS: GREEN PAYMENTS

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), previously known as the Conservation Security Program, rewards producers for conservation performance. Producers earn payments to improve, maintain and manage existing conservation activities and undertake additional ones on working farms and forests. The higher the conservation performance is ranked, the more a producer is paid. Program goals include improving soil, air and water quality, increasing biodiversity and pollinator habitat, sequestering carbon and reducing greenhouse gas emissions and conserving water and energy use. CSP is authorized to enroll nearly 13 million acres each fiscal year, for a total of more than 50 million acres enrolled by the end of the five-year life of the 2008 Farm Bill.

CSP payments reward producers for:

- ◆ Improving, maintaining and managing existing conservation practices;
- ◆ Installing and adopting additional conservation practices;
- ◆ Adopting resource-conserving and other beneficial crop rotations;
- ◆ Conducting on-farm conservation research and demonstration activities and pilot-testing new technologies or innovative conservation practices.

For a list of resource enhancement activities and practices that might be considered, visit: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/special_pdfs/CSP_Conservation_Activity_List.pdf.

ELIGIBILITY

Lands must:

- ◆ Constitute the entire agricultural operation, whether or not it is contiguous, owned or rented;
- ◆ Be private cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial forest land or agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe or other incidental land on which agricultural resource concerns could be addressed;
- ◆ Have been in crop production for four of the six years prior to June 18, 2008, to qualify as crop land (as opposed to pasture, range or forest land).

Land enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Grassland Reserve Program and former Conservation Security Program are not eligible for enrollment in CSP. However, a participant may count acres enrolled in WRP, GRP or CRP as part of the entire agricultural operation to qualify for CSP. A participant may also remove acreage from a CSP contract to place it into WRP, GRP or CRP

Participants must:

- ◆ Be the registered operator and have reasonable assurance of control of the land for the length of the contract period;
- ◆ Be in compliance with Highly Erodible Land, Wetland Conservation, and Adjusted Gross Income provisions (see page 13).
- ◆ Already be adequately addressing at least one resource concern such as soil, water or wildlife to a good stewardship level; and
- ◆ Address at least one additional priority resource concern to a good stewardship level by the end of the conservation stewardship contract.

Resource Concerns

Each state establishes three to five resource concerns that are a priority for all or part of the state. Resource concerns, which may include soil erosion, soil, air and/or water quality, water conservation, wildlife, biodiversity or energy, are posted on the state NRCS websites accessible at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html. In the 2009 sign-up, 77 percent of the ranking pools had wildlife habitat as one of their priority resource concerns, a percentage exceeded only by plants/biodiversity and water quality.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

Annual Payments

CSP awards participants annually for establishing and adopting conservation activities and for managing and improving existing activities. Annual payments are based on:

- ◆ Costs incurred by implementing the activities, including planning, design, materials, equipment, installation, labor, management, maintenance and training;
- ◆ Income forfeited by the producer;
- ◆ Expected environmental benefits.

Annual payments are not calculated in the traditional ways (percentage of cost or per-acre rate). Instead, a unique rate is calculated for each producer using the NRCS Conservation Management Tool (CMT), which calculates performance points for existing conservation activities (baseline inventory) and additional points for new practices or “enhancements” committed to for the contract period, such as hay harvesting, silvopasture, creating shallow-water habitat, patch-burning to improve habitat, establishing wildlife corridors and restoring prairie. Total performance points, total acreage and NRCS-calculated land-use payment rate (Table 6) are used to determine the annual payments:

$$\text{Annual CSP Payment} = \text{Total Land-use Acres} \times \text{Total Performance Points} \times \text{Land-use Payment Rate}$$

The national average payment to participants is \$18 per acre; however, the actual payment received varies according to the type of land enrolled and practices adopted (Table 6).

For a complete list of CSP baseline inventory factors and new enhancements and practices go to: http://nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html.

For a list of maximum points available for each enhancement, visit the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition website: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/special_pdfs/CSP_Conservation_Activity_List.pdf.

Supplemental Payments

Participants who adopt or enhance existing resource-conserving crop rotations are also eligible for bonus payments in addition to the annual payment. Supplemental payment rates are also based on costs incurred, income forfeited and expected environmental benefits. The current rate is \$16 per acre.

Type of Land	Payment Rate (\$)
Cropland	0.061/ performance point
Non-industrial private forest	0.016 /performance point
Pasture	0.033 /performance point
Range	0.012/performance point
Supplement for adopting resource-conserving crop rotation	16.00/acre

NOTE: The total amount of payments a given participant can receive is capped at \$40,000 per year and \$200,000 over the five-year contract period. CSP payments do not cover practices implemented with other USDA funds.

Tip Maximize your payment performance points by agreeing to implement as many conservation practices and enhancements as you can. About 50 percent of your payment will be for existing activities and 50 percent for new enhancements and new practices.

CSP participants must determine how much a new enhancement or practice might cost them. CSP pays for the environmental benefits, based on the points awarded, and that payment may be more or less than what it costs to implement the practices on the ground.

RANKING CRITERIA

NRCS ranks all applications according to total points received and allocates funds, starting from the top-ranking proposals, until the state’s allotted acreage enrollment is reached. The ranking system is based on how much farmers and ranchers have already done and how much more they are willing to do to address natural resource concerns. Ranking pools are established for each identified geographic area and applicants compete for funding against others facing similar resource challenges. Separate ranking pools are also established for beginning and socially disadvantaged farmers and 5 percent of allocated acres are set aside for each of these groups. Landowners who also wish to enroll forest land must submit a separate application, which will also be ranked separately. The primary ranking factors are:

- ◆ Baseline level of conservation on the ground at the time of application;
- ◆ How much the proposed conservation activities increase conservation performance over the baseline;
- ◆ Number of priority resource concerns to be addressed;
- ◆ Extent to which other resource concerns (in addition to the priority concerns) will be addressed;
- ◆ The cost-effectiveness of achieving environmental benefits relative to similarly beneficial contracts.

In practice, NRCS uses the least-cost factor solely as a tie-breaker after ranking proposals based on the first four criteria.

Tip

Improve your baseline to boost your ranking. As the new CSP gets more popular, it will get more competitive. To improve your baseline score, and therefore increase your chances of selection, make some improvements before you apply. Also, make sure at least one priority resource concern already meets the stewardship threshold at time of enrollment. The CMT can determine this for you. The tool is not currently available online but may be in the future. Until then, your local NRCS representative can walk you through the CMT calculation and assessment process. A visit to your local NRCS office is a good first step because there are other programs that might share costs or provide other financial help to make changes before you enroll in CSP. In particular, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial assistance for fixing particular conservation problems or developing a comprehensive plan. If you're more interested in moving forward with a single conservation improvement, EQIP may be more appropriate and sometimes provide more financial assistance than a full CSP contract. Also, if you don't rank highly enough to get into CSP the first time you submit an application, you can resubmit and try again during the next ranking period.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSIBILITIES

You must agree to implement an approved stewardship plan and to maintain conditions to at least the same level that existed at the time of application. You also agree to adopt at least one additional activity in the first year of the contract and any additional activities by the third year of the contract according to the plan.

HOW TO APPLY

Use the preliminary self-screening checklist to determine if CSP is the right program for you:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/new_csp/csp.html.

If you decide to move forward, applications for CSP are available at your local NRCS field office. The CMT is not currently available online, but your local NRCS representative can walk you through the CMT process to see if your current performance meets or exceeds stewardship thresholds for any priority resource concerns.

For more details on the CSP program, see the Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's *Landowner Guide to the Conservation Stewardship Program*: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/CSPguide>.

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) supports special local and regional conservation projects that involve groups of farmers or ranchers in partnership with USDA, nongovernmental organizations, state

CASE STUDY

CSP AT WORK IN MINNESOTA'S RED LAKES WATERSHED



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The Red Lakes watershed in northern Minnesota includes 1.3 million acres of forests, lakes and farmland. Although only 9 percent of the watershed is in agricultural use, water quantity management, pasture management, erosion and water quality are major resource concerns.

Fourteen farmers within the watershed were approved for the Conservation Security Program (the CSP precursor) contracts in 2006, nearly 40 percent of which included habitat management activities. Participating farmers were paid for a variety of practices beneficial to wildlife including avoiding haying during the nesting season, leaving wide swaths of uncut forage as habitat and using a "flushing bar", an extension on harvesting equipment that flushes birds and mammals from the fields to reduce wildlife mortality. Other farmers received funding to improve grazing and pasture management, reduce the impact of livestock on waterways and to reduce or selectively target the use of pesticides on crops. Contracts under the new CSP work similarly and cover activities like these and many more.

RESTORATION AND LAND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS: PARTNER PROGRAMS

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

and tribal agencies and/or other entities. For each year from 2009 through 2012, USDA is reserving 6 percent of the total funds or total acres from the Conservation Stewardship Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program for the initiative. This translates into more than \$100 million a year for special cooperative conservation projects.

The CCPI is primarily focused on state and local conservation priorities, with 90 percent of funds and acres reserved for projects chosen at the state level. The remaining 10 percent is for multi-state CCPI projects selected through a national competitive process. Overhead or administrative costs of partners are not covered by funds provided through CCPI. Project partnership agreements with USDA can run for up to five years with appropriate technical and financial assistance provided by NRCS to achieve project objectives.

The purpose of CCPI is to do one or more of the following:

- ◆ Address conservation priorities on a local, multi-state or regional level;
- ◆ Encourage producers to cooperate in meeting regulatory requirements;
- ◆ Encourage producers to cooperate in installing and maintaining conservation practices that affect multiple farms or ranches;
- ◆ Promote the development and demonstration of innovative conservation practices and delivery methods.

ELIGIBILITY

Participants must enter into partnerships that include one or more of the following:

- ◆ State and local governments;
- ◆ Indian tribes;
- ◆ Producer associations;
- ◆ Farmer cooperatives;
- ◆ Academic institutions; or
- ◆ Nongovernmental organizations.

Lands must be:

- ◆ Eligible for WHIP, EQIP and/or CSP in order to participate in CCPI.

PAYMENT PROVISIONS

Basic rules for each applicable conservation program apply, such as those governing payment limitations and conservation compliance. Beyond these rules, CCPI projects can apply for adjustments to CSP, EQIP or WHIP practices, specifications or payment rates to:

- ◆ Better reflect unique local circumstances and purposes; and
- ◆ Provide preferential enrollment to producers who are eligible for the applicable program and participating in the partnership project.

CCPI projects can include funding and assistance from one or all eligible programs. A CCPI special project can also dovetail with a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) or Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) project, such that the land retirement aspect of a project comes via CREP or WREP and the working lands aspect through CCPI. Adjoining states can also get together on projects where the targeted watershed or ecoregion crosses state boundaries.

RANKING CRITERIA

NRCS gives priority to applications that:

- ◆ Involve a high percentage of agricultural producers;
- ◆ Significantly leverage nonfederal financial and technical resources and coordinate with other local, state, or federal efforts;
- ◆ Result in significant conservation on the ground; or
- ◆ Provide innovation in conservation methods and delivery.

HOW TO APPLY

CCPI agreements are competitive and entered into with NRCS at either the national or state level. A request for proposals is announced annually on the NRCS state or national website. About \$58 million in program assistance was available in 2009, including about \$6 million reserved for national competition for multi-state projects.

An application for a CCPI partnership agreement requires the following information:

- ◆ A description of the conservation objectives of the agreement;
- ◆ Expected level of participation by agricultural producers in the area;
- ◆ Partnership to be developed;
- ◆ Amount of Farm Bill conservation funding requested;
- ◆ Amount of nonfederal contributions (in cash or in kind) that will be brought to the table; and
- ◆ A plan for monitoring, evaluating and reporting on progress made toward achieving objectives.

CASE STUDY

RESTORING RANGLANDS FOR PRIORITY BIRDS IN MONTANA

Prairies are among the most imperiled and least protected of all ecosystems, leading to precipitous declines in many grassland wildlife populations. Eastern Montana is a stronghold for imperiled grassland and sagebrush birds such as the long-billed curlew, Sprague's pipit and mountain plover. Recognizing that restoring vital grassland habitat in this area of Montana can help reverse population declines of these birds, the Environmental Defense Fund in partnership with the Ranchers Stewardship Alliance, The Nature Conservancy and the World Wildlife Fund secured a \$670,000 CCPI grant to encourage private stewardship of priority ranchlands.

Through this initiative, EDF and its partners are encouraging adoption of beneficial management practices for a suite of prairie birds that are priority species in Montana. Priority lands are largely privately owned and managed for livestock production, underscoring the need to work in partnership with private ranchers in ways that also improve ranching livelihoods. The partners are significantly leveraging federal funding with nonfederal contributions to provide financial incentives and technical assistance to private landowners and local conservation organizations in targeted regions, ultimately enhancing up to 20,000 acres of globally important grasslands for birds and other wildlife.



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GRANTS AND OTHER PROGRAMS

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS

The Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) program is a subprogram of EQIP. Its goal is to stimulate the development, adoption and transfer of innovative conservation approaches and technologies that improve agricultural or forestry operations and enhance the environment. Grants are awarded competitively to nonfederal governmental or nongovernmental organizations, tribes or individual landowners. Grants require a 50 percent matching contribution from nonfederal sources, of which up to half may be in-kind match.

Examples of projects supported by CIG include innovative streambank stabilization efforts, pollinator habitat enhancement, development of carbon sequestration incentives on private forest lands, invasive species management and marketing projects to encourage landowner participation in best management practices. Individual landowners and land trusts such as Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and West Virginia's Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust are past recipients of CIG grants.

Funding for the CIG program is announced once a year and funds are awarded through a nationwide competition. Some states also offer a state-based competition. Awards for the 2009 grants ranged from \$30,000 to more than \$800,000.

For updated information and a list of funded projects, visit the NRCS CIG Web page: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cig/index.html>.

RENEWABLE ENERGY: BIOMASS CROP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP) is the only Farm Bill program dedicated to the production of biofuels. BCAP is a new program established in the Energy Title of the 2008 Farm Bill and administered by FSA.

The goal of BCAP is to promote cultivation of bioenergy crops that show exceptional promise for producing highly energy-efficient bioenergy or biofuels. Cropping systems must preserve natural resources and the crops grown cannot be invasive or used primarily for food or animal feed.

CASE STUDY

CIG HELPS RESTORE WEST VIRGINIA STREAM BANKS

When seven owners of adjoining river-front land, much of it badly eroded after years of unrestricted cattle access, approached Nancy Ailes, executive director of the Cacapon and Lost Rivers Land Trust, for help she knew she had an opportunity. The land trust has been working since 2000 to protect a network of connected lands in eastern West Virginia, an area nationally recognized for its smallmouth bass fishing and regionally known for its white-water rafting and abundant wildlife. Nancy had long ago established partnerships with West Virginia University (WVU) and the Canaan Valley Institute and knew they also had a keen interest in improving water quality in the region.

Together they applied for, and ultimately secured, a \$650,000 Conservation Innovation Grant through USDA and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to help the landowners address their erosion problems.

Grant funds are covering the design and implementation of a streambank stabilization project using innovative natural stream design techniques to restore the natural shape of the banks, redirect high flows away from fragile banks and provide fish habitat along one mile of the Cacapon River corridor. Funds are also allocated for planting riparian buffers, including pollinator species and warm-season grasses to hold the soil and filter nutrients. WVU will research the effectiveness

of these techniques. Each of three selected landowners is receiving funding to compensate for removing their land from production, similar to rental payments through CREP. A portion of Nancy's salary is also covered to help coordinate the project.

"Readying yourself for opportunities like this is the most important thing you can do," says Ailes. "Our strategic approach to land protection laid the initial groundwork but landowner trust and outside partnerships were also important contributors to securing this grant." The partners plan to use the success and credibility they establish through these initial projects to build more widespread support in the farming community for stream restoration projects.



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Participants can enter into a five-year agreement with USDA for annual or perennial crops or a 15-year agreement for woody biomass that provides:

- ◆ Annual incentive payments;
- ◆ Cost-share payments of up to 75 percent of the cost to establish perennial biomass crops; and
- ◆ A matching payment of up to \$45 per ton of biomass to assist with collection, harvest, storage and transport of BCAP crops to a biomass conversion facility.

Participating farmers must be near a biomass conversion facility and have an agreement with that facility to accept the crops produced.

NOTE: As of spring 2010, FSA was still conducting an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the BCAP program regulations. Until the EIS is complete, FSA is not accepting applications for BCAP.

For more information on the BCAP program, visit: <http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/>

THE FARM BILL AND OTHER RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES

Wind Energy

The Farm Bill allows landowners to construct wind turbines on land enrolled in the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with a reduction in payment equal to the estimated economic value generated through wind development. Turbine numbers and siting must be approved by USDA and undergo an environmental analysis that complies with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Among other things, the analysis must consider the potential impact of turbine construction on wildlife, especially at-risk species, and other natural or cultural resources. Wind turbines can only be authorized if they are expected to have minimal or no impact on the conservation values protected through the contract or easement.

Solar Power

GRP allows for installation of solar panels or arrays on enrolled land provided that grazing and grassland values are not impacted. Similar to wind development, any installation of solar panels must first be approved by USDA and preceded by a site-specific NEPA analysis.

ENVIRONMENTAL CREDITS

Enrolling in Farm Bill conservation programs is likely to generate environmental credits for ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, nutrient reduction, habitat creation and other benefits that can be sold or traded in voluntary or regulatory markets. For example, restoring forested riparian buffers on farmlands can reduce harmful greenhouse gases by absorbing carbon dioxide (generating carbon credits) and reduce sediment and nutrient runoff to waterways (generating nutrient credits).

USDA considers any credits generated as a result of Farm Bill programs the property of the participant, which means you are free to sell credits on the open market and keep any profits made even while receiving Farm Bill funds to implement practices. However, USDA must ensure that you are meeting Farm Bill requirements and that any activities to obtain environmental credits are aligned with the requirements of your contracts, easement deeds or conservation plans. If you are considering selling environmental credits, requesting a compatibility assessment from USDA beforehand is strongly encouraged. You should also make sure you understand the requirements of any markets in which you're interested in participating as there may be restrictions on the use of federal funds.



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Getting Down To Business: Practical Pointers

FINDING MORE INFORMATION

Additional information about Farm Bill programs, application requirements, deadlines and other details is readily available in a number of places. Local USDA offices are often the best places to start if you have questions or need more information (see Appendix 2 for office listings).

For national-level program eligibility and incentives information, visit the national NRCS or FSA websites:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/

www.fsa.usda.gov

Individual program pages list one or more program managers or specialists you can contact for national-level questions on that program.

Each state also has its own NRCS website featuring state-specific information such as application deadlines and enrollment periods, special initiatives, state ranking criteria, priority areas and contact information for local field offices:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/organization/regions.html#state.

You can also call or visit your state NRCS office.

Electronic Field Office Technical Guide

For more technical information, explore the Electronic Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG), a searchable database of location-specific information in your state and county. The eFOTG covers eligible practices, practice standards, payment rates, soil information, natural history and much more. It is available online at:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/.

The eFOTG has five sections, each featuring a different subset of technical information:

Section I. General References: State maps, descriptions of major land resource areas, watershed information, links to NRCS reference manuals and handbooks, conservation practice costs, agricultural laws and regulations, cultural resources and legally protected plant and animal species.

Section II. Soil and Site Information: Detailed information about soil, water, air, plant, and animal resources, NRCS soil surveys, hydric soils interpretations, ecological site descriptions, forage suitability groups, cropland production tables, wildlife habitat evaluation guides, water quality guides and related information.

Section III. Conservation Management Systems: NRCS quality criteria, which establish standards for resource conditions to ensure sustained use.

Section IV. Practice Standards and Specifications: NRCS Conservation Practices and Practice Standards, which define the practice and where it applies.

Section V. Conservation Effects: Background information on how conservation practices affect each identified resource concern in the state.

NOTE: Much of the information contained in eFOTG is highly technical. Section I (payment information and cost data for practices and programs) and Section IV (requirements for installing conservation practices) are the most relevant for landowners and land trusts. A call to your local field office is the easiest way to request and discuss most information found in the eFOTG.

PREPARING A CONSERVATION PLAN

All individuals participating in Farm Bill conservation programs must have or develop a current conservation plan to receive Farm Bill funds. NRCS staff devises these plans according to a standard and efficient nine-step process that includes continuous input from you. The plan describes only what you have agreed to do and includes a schedule for carrying out each activity. In addition to helping you develop your plan, NRCS can provide free technical assistance to help you implement it.

Understanding the NRCS conservation planning process is essential to playing an informed role in communicating clearly with NRCS staff during the process. To read more about the planning process, visit the eFOTG website.

NOTE: All conservation plans are compilations of NRCS “conservation practices,” discrete conservation or management activities needed to address the resource concerns outlined in the plan. Practices can include such activities as planting a riparian buffer or other vegetation, installing a structure like a composting facility, managing land through prescribed fire or forest stand improvement and many more. To view the full list of conservation practices, visit the NRCS website:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/Standards/nhcp.html.

For a list of practices particularly beneficial for wildlife, see Appendix 3.

Tip

If necessary, you can use EQIP or CSP payments to help offset the costs involved in developing conservation plans, including the fees of third-party providers of conservation planning technical assistance. Farm owners and operators may want to consider this option either for wildlife-specific planning or for comprehensive, total-resource, whole-farm conservation planning.

SEEKING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

NRCS provides free assistance with the planning and implementation phases of any Farm Bill conservation project. In fact, free technical assistance from NRCS is even available to those not currently participating in programs. However, given the growing number of conservation programs and individual contracts that must be managed, local NRCS staff may not have the capacity to provide adequate help for every project on a timely basis. That's where third-party technical service providers and contractors come in.

Technical Service Providers

To help compensate for staffing shortfalls, the Farm Bill allows for agreements with third party technical service providers (TSPs). TSPs can be individuals, nonprofit organizations (including land trusts), private businesses or government agencies that are certified by NRCS to provide technical help with project planning, design and implementation.

TSPs are enlisted in one of two ways:

1. Many states develop cooperative agreements between NRCS and another partner with specific expertise. For example, NRCS often provides funds to state wildlife agencies to provide technical assistance to participants enrolled in the WHIP program. Like technical assistance provided directly through NRCS, working with a TSP through a cooperative agreement incurs no costs to landowners.
2. Alternatively, landowners can directly hire an approved third-party provider. Participants choosing this option are responsible for negotiating the terms and payment for the work to be done with the TSP and must pay for services up front. NRCS reimburses the landowner for their expenses up to a "not-to-exceed rate" established for each state and practice (see <http://techreg.sc.egov.usda.gov/NTE/TSPNTE2/index.asp> for current TSP payment rates). Any amount exceeding this rate is the responsibility of the participant. Certified TSPs by state and county are listed at <http://techreg.usda.gov/CustLocateTSP.aspx>.

Contractors

While approved TSPs offer guidance on the technical aspects of planning, designing and executing your project, any capable contractor can help with less technical project components such as planting trees, installing fencing or controlling invasive species. Alternatively, or in conjunction, volunteers or landowners themselves can also perform such



tasks and this time can be counted as an in-kind matching contribution. Conservation Districts often maintain lists of potential contractors qualified to perform various practice activities. Farmers and ranchers who have already adopted conservation practices can also recommend contractors.

Hired contractors must meet the criteria outlined in the practice standards developed for each conservation practice and have a clear understanding of the broader goals to be achieved. For example, preventing erosion into a stream may be the ultimate goal, not simply the near-term objective of planting native trees. A good contractor will understand how their work contributes to the bigger-picture conservation goals you're aiming for, which, of course, can only be communicated once you develop an understanding of the program practices, cost-lists and specifications necessary to achieve your goals.

GETTING REIMBURSED

Most cost-share programs reimburse 50 percent to 75 percent of the typical cost to carry out the activities outlined in the conservation plan, although some provide significantly more. Cost-share amounts are determined on a per-unit (acre or feet, for example) basis and are often based on the typical per-unit cost of each practice for a particular locality, not the actual cost. Thus, participants sometimes pay more than or less than their "official" share of the total cost. For other practices, NRCS may cap the total payments at a not-to-exceed maximum. NRCS no longer requires landowners to submit receipts or bills to get reimbursement, but such documents are often required to determine that practices are in compliance with standards.

SATISFYING MATCH REQUIREMENTS

While NRCS often provides a significant amount of funding, participants must fund any remainder needed to complete the projects. This participant contribution is often termed "match." You can meet match requirements through cash contributions, in-kind contributions of equipment, materials and labor, or a combination of the above.

Do It Yourself

Consider John, a farmer in Delaware interested in restoring an eroded stream channel and a forested riparian buffer on unproductive farmland through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). The total eligible cost of the project is \$100,000, which includes design, supplies, labor, equipment and other costs. NRCS will cover up to 75 percent of the approved costs to restore the land (\$75,000), leaving John responsible for \$25,000. John can meet his match through direct payment of cash to purchase supplies and hire contractors to design and carry out the restoration work. Or John can do some of the work such as planting trees himself and submit that as an in-kind contribution. If he also owns heavy machinery or other equipment that is used to prepare the site or to plant the trees, John can donate its use as in-kind match, too.

Recruit Volunteers

Recruiting volunteers is another way to get in-kind assistance to help meet your match. Local community groups and nonprofit organizations such as land trusts, friends groups and Audubon chapters often have volunteer programs you can tap for on-the-ground help with Farm Bill projects. Defenders of Wildlife, for example, has a national Wildlife Volunteer Corps that mobilizes local volunteers to work with resource agencies and other groups on wildlife and habitat improvement projects. For more information, go to: www.defenders.org/take_action/wvc/index.php.

LEVERAGING OTHER FUNDS

You can also leverage numerous nonfederal and federal (non-USDA) grants and other funding sources to meet your match requirements. Partnering with land trusts and other conservation organizations that have an interest in your project is an excellent way to enlist help in securing joint grant funding for Farm Bill program projects. However, because each program is different, it is important to understand matching contribution requirements before seeking additional funds.

Federal funds: If additional federal grants are secured, USDA may proportionately decrease its contribution so as not to exceed the total federal contribution limit. Note that the federal cost-share limit varies by program and may not be the same as the program's cost-share limit. For example, in some Farm Bill programs such as EQIP, the program cost-share limit is 75 percent but the federal cost-share limit may be up to 100 percent of the project's cost. This means you can secure additional (non-USDA) federal funding to supply the remainder of the cost with no reduction in funds by USDA.

In the case of WHIP, however, the program limit of 75 percent cost-share from NRCS is the same as the federal limit. Securing a federal grant to provide the remaining 25 percent of the project cost would not benefit you financially. USDA would simply reduce their portion to 50 percent so that the total federal contribution would remain at 75 percent. Your local NRCS representative can explain federal match requirements for each program, so check with him or her before pursuing any federal grant opportunities.

Nonfederal funds: In all cases, nonfederal funding of any kind can be used to fulfill the entirety of your match requirement without an accompanying decrease in USDA's contribution. The availability of supplementary funding is often an important determinant of a landowner's ability to participate.

COMBINING OR LAYERING FARM BILL PROGRAMS

You can maximize the economic and wildlife value of the Farm Bill programs with creative layering or stacking of programs (Table 7). As a very simple example, a property could first be protected with an easement using funds from the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). Later, programs like Environmental Quality Incentives Program

(EQIP) or WHIP can be used to develop a detailed conservation plan for the property, restore wildlife or other natural resources and improve farm management and operations. A landowner could then enroll in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to help maintain established practices and adopt additional conservation practices.

Most programs can either be combined on a single property (non-overlapping) or layered with each other (overlapping). However, two USDA programs cannot be used to address the same conservation practice on the same land. In other words, no double-dipping. For example, if a property is enrolled in the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) and is undergoing grassland restoration, the landowner cannot use a program like WHIP or EQIP to implement grassland practices. He or she could, however, use those programs to stabilize a stream bank by planting hardwoods or to improve or restore a wetland.

Combining Easement Programs

Generally, easement programs cannot be layered. A farmer with an FRPP easement, for example, is not eligible to enroll those acres in another easement program such as the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) or GRP. However, she can use more than one easement program provided the easements do not physically overlap on the land. For example, this farmer may elect to use WRP to protect important wetlands on her property and then use FRPP in partnership with a land trust to protect the remainder of the land. This option optimizes the needs of the land, the landowner and the land trust. Because the different easements are protecting different conservation values—wetland habitat and function in the case of the WRP easement and farming operations and prime soils in the case of the FRPP easement—each easement is protecting or restoring conservation values at the highest level.

From a financial perspective, using multiple easements is economical to both the land trust and the landowner. For example, because WRP is strictly a federal easement purchase program, NRCS covers the entire cost of the WRP easement (subject to the geographic rate cap). The land trust and landowner are only responsible for the FRPP easement portion. Donating an FRPP easement on the remainder of the land may now be an affordable option for the landowner, or, if funds are available, purchasing an FRPP easement on the remainder of the land may now be an affordable option for the land trust. When financial resources are limited, such creative options offer the means to ensure that important lands are protected.

Table 7. Layering Farm Bill Conservation Programs: Can They Be Used Together?

Easement Programs	Non-Easement Programs†						
	CSP‡	WHIP	CRP	CREP	GRP-restoration	WRP-restoration	EQIP
GRP - easement	no	yes*	no	no	yes	no	yes*
GRP - rental	no	yes*	no	no	yes	no	yes*
FRPP - easement	yes	yes	yes	yes	N/A	no	yes
WRP - easement	no	no	no	no	N/A	yes	no
HFRP - easement	no	no	no	no	N/A	no	no
* Programs can be used together on non-overlapping practices. Participants cannot be paid by two different programs for the same practice.							
† Most non-easement programs can be used together provided that they are addressing non-overlapping conservation practices.							
‡ A farm may have some land in CRP or WRP provided that all the operating (nonretired) land is part of the CSP contract.							

CASE STUDY

PROTECTING GRAZING LANDS AND WILDLIFE WITH MULTIPLE EASEMENTS

In the spring of 2003, Liz M., a grass-based dairy farmer and award-winning artisan cheese maker, contacted the Connecticut Farmland Trust (CFT) and NRCS about permanently protecting her land. Liz's farm, nestled in the southeast corner of Connecticut, was not a state priority for agricultural protection, however, and thus did not rank highly enough to be considered by the State Farmland Preservation Program. Likewise, her local municipality did not have a funded preservation program to provide federal FRPP matching funds.

Liz learned that her land did meet several of the habitat priorities in the State Wildlife Action Plan, including imperiled grassland and box turtle habitat and a priority watershed for Atlantic salmon restoration. Since she used the land primarily for grazing, she worked with NRCS to pursue funding for a GRP easement. GRP policy prohibits enrolling more than 10 percent of nongrassland habitats, so the GRP easement applied to just the grassland portion of her farm, leaving the rest unprotected. Liz wanted to protect the entire property, so she then donated an easement to CFT that included the remaining woodland, wetland and farmstead portions. The CFT easement covers the entire farm,



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including the newly developed GRP easement, ensuring that the property cannot be subdivided in the future.

“One of the lessons that I took away from this process is that there are many possible combinations of tools and programs that can be pieced together to make conservation work for both the land and the farmer,” says Liz. “CFT and NRCS helped us put together a very workable conservation plan that we couldn’t have created on our own.”

Liz has since taken her stewardship one step farther and used GRP restoration funding to install fencing and an access lane to keep cattle out of the wetland areas. She also used EQIP funding for a new watering system that greatly improved her rotational grazing system. Inspired by the success of the project, Liz has become a strong advocate for land conservation in her community. She is involved with the new local land trust and actively promoting local municipal policies that are farm and wildlife friendly.



Getting the Most Out of the Farm Bill: Secrets to Success

CULTIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Private landowners who participate in Farm Bill programs have successfully established habitats beneficial to wildlife populations locally, regionally and even nationally. Continuing the wildlife legacy of these programs depends on the support and participation of partners across the conservation spectrum.

Partnerships are more important now than ever because Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff levels have not kept pace with the tremendous expansion of available conservation programs and funding. Total NRCS staff numbers have actually declined over the past decades despite a five-fold increase in the amount of financial assistance available to landowners.¹² This inverse relationship between staff capacity and an increasing workload has hampered delivery of conservation programs.

Building partnerships with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) and seeking opportunities to help them implement Farm Bill programs on the ground can be the key to advancing habitat conservation in your area and is the real secret to success with Farm Bill conservation programs. Indeed, all the secrets to success shared here are rooted in cultivating these and other partnerships.

JOIN YOUR STATE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

State Technical Committees (STCs) serve as the advisory board to the NRCS state conservationist and provide guidance on a host of programmatic decisions including conservation practices, ranking criteria, outreach strategies, cost-share and incentive rates and program priority areas. There are also subcommittees that focus in-depth on specific resources or programs such as forestry issues or the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). Meetings are open to the public and can range from quarterly to annual gatherings depending on the state. Anyone can request to become a member.

Attending meetings or, even better, becoming an official member of the committee gives you an important seat at the table for decisions that affect wildlife and ecosystems in your area. Land trusts have a direct stake in implementing some easement programs and reaching out to landowners for participation in cost-share programs, so it is essential that they become part of the discussion. Likewise, landowners provide a local voice for the needs of their producer groups to ensure

that all appropriate interests are considered. Working with the committee will also keep you and your interests closely connected to updates and new decisions while creating opportunities to forge new relationships with important people in the agriculture and conservation communities.

To be considered for official inclusion on the State Technical Committee, write to the NRCS state conservationist and relay your interest and credentials. For contact information, see Appendix 3, call your local NRCS field office or visit your state NRCS website.

MARKET THE FARM BILL PROGRAMS

Some NRCS and FSA staffs simply do not have the time or resources to market Farm Bill programs and the habitat conservation practices they encourage. Partners, however, can play a vital role in providing additional capacity. Land trusts, individual landowners and other partners can fill capacity gaps by building expertise on conservation programs and becoming a source of information to their local communities and neighbors.

Individual landowners who have successfully used the programs can maximize the environmental value of their projects by encouraging their neighbors to participate. Word-of-mouth promotion is often the best way to build local support and widespread use of conservation programs. Landowners who sign-up for Farm Bill conservation programs are often motivated by others who have participated and shared their positive experience. In regions with high ecological value, this neighborly approach can have a “multiplier effect,” creating valuable multi-landowner conservation hubs or continuous riparian buffers that span property boundaries.

Land trusts can reach hundreds of landowners through outreach efforts that inform local communities of program opportunities. Even small land trusts with limited capacity have an important role to play simply by disseminating information, helping interested landowners with program selection and connecting them with NRCS or FSA staff in their region. Because land trusts are often nongovernmental and popular and trusted members of their communities, landowners may actually be more comfortable talking about program options with land trusts than with government employees. Land trusts with greater capacity can even help landowners design conservation plans in partnership with NRCS, raise matching dollars and provide volunteers for restoration projects.

REACH OUT TO ABSENTEE LANDOWNERS

Defined as individuals who own land but do not live on or manage the land themselves, absentee landowners can be a particularly important ownership group to target in outreach efforts. Nationally, absentee landowners represent nearly 40 percent of agricultural landowners and own a similar percentage of agricultural acreage, although many state percentages rise much higher (see Tables 8 and 9). They may include retired farmers and ranchers who moved away, landowners who purchased land for hunting, fishing or other recreational uses, or individuals who inherited the land.

Many absentee landowners do not have a traditional agricultural background and will instead lease their land to a local tenant to manage. As a result, they are often overlooked by natural resource organizations that help to deliver Farm Bill conservation programs and tend to participate less than on-site landowners in state and federal conservation programs. Low participation rates should not be misconstrued as a sign of disinterest, however, as recent surveys indicate that absentee

landowners value wildlife, conservation and recreation over other land uses.^{13,14} In addition, because need for income may not be a major influence on land-use decision-making, financial constraints may not be the determining factor in whether or not to enter into a cost-share or easement program that requires a landowner matching contribution.

Land trusts and other conservation partners may find absentee landowners a particularly interested audience and the potential to engage them in Farm Bill conservation programs is high. To identify absentee landowners, you can obtain lists of landowners from the local USDA office or county assessor's office or compile them from plat books. Just make sure the ownership information and addresses are up to date.

CREATE CONSERVATION LANDSCAPES THROUGH TARGETED OUTREACH

Targeted outreach by land trusts and landowners can enhance ecosystem benefits through the creation of large

Table 8: Top 10 States: Highest Percentage of Agricultural Absentee Landowners

		Absentee Landowners	Acres Owned by Absentee Landowners
1	Louisiana	71%	50%
2	Connecticut	60%	55%
3	Illinois	59%	64%
4	Indiana	58%	55%
5	North Dakota	55%	48%
6	Ohio	53%	53%
7	Nebraska	52%	48%
8	South Carolina	52%	47%
9	New Hampshire	52%	42%
10	Maryland	51%	57%

Table 9: Top 10 States: Highest Percentage of Agricultural Land Owned by Absentee Landowners

		Absentee Landowners	Acres Owned by Absentee Landowners
1	Alaska	34%	87%
2	Delaware,	32%	73%
3	Illinois	59%	64%
4	Maryland	51%	57%
5	Connecticut	60%	55%
6	Indiana	58%	55%
7	Kansas	46%	54%
8	North Carolina,	49%	54%
9	Ohio	53%	53%
10	Louisiana	71%	50%

CASE STUDY

FAMILY RANCH TAKES GOOD STEWARDSHIP BEYOND PROPERTY LINES

The Stone Family, owners of Yolo Land and Cattle in Yolo County, California, has used innovative and sustainable land practices on their 7,500-acre ranch for more than 30 years. Their conservation efforts have improved the land, water and wildlife of their ranch and surrounding ranches—not to mention their bottom line.

With assistance from NRCS and partners like Audubon California, the Stones are gradually restoring native vegetation using shrubs, trees and perennial grasses. The deep-rooted native perennial grasses stay green and provide forage further into the dry summer season while improving the health of the soil and offering cover and food to wildlife. Many miles of fencing supported by cost-share funding allow the Stones to use prescribed grazing techniques, rotating their livestock through the ranch to improve the health of the animals and keep invasive vegetation down. Wildlife-friendly fences keep livestock out of ponds and streams, and cattle drink clean water pumped to solar-powered watering facilities. The restoration work, supported by at least five NRCS cost-share programs, has provided a double economic return, increasing not only the carrying capacity of the ranch

conservation landscapes. Conservation hubs are especially attainable in Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) watersheds, State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) project areas or other state-identified priority areas where enhanced cost-share and other financial incentives make enrollment particularly attractive for landowners. Being knowledgeable about where these priority areas exist in your state will help you market the programs more effectively in your region.

Farm Bill programs also offer countless opportunities to develop and implement entirely new projects using Farm Bill funds in priority areas. For example, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) gives the states authority to allocate a portion of their program dollars to special initiatives focused on particular regions or resources of concern, including wildlife. WHIP often targets program dollars toward specific habitats or species identified in state wildlife plans, such as early successional birds in New York and migratory songbirds in Virginia. Similar opportunities are available through the Grassland Reserve Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and Conservation Reserve Programs as the 2008 Farm Bill gave states new authority to link these programs with state and regional conservation plans like the State Wildlife Action Plans.

Special targeted initiatives are often driven by partners such as fish and wildlife agencies and conservation nonprofits, including land trusts and groups that represent private landowners. Partners develop conservation initiatives that can be supported through Farm Bill dollars and then pool skills and resources, such as technical expertise, outreach, equipment and funds, to enhance benefits to landowners and wildlife. For example, groups such as the state fish and wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever have identified potential projects and then worked to assist landowners through the process or have provided additional technical or material assistance.

To develop a special initiative in your state, first talk with other partners that may be interested in conserving the target area and determine what, if any, additional resources you could collectively offer. Once a project idea has been formed, discuss this with your NRCS state conservationist. Projects are ultimately reviewed and selected by the State Technical Committee, which makes the final determination of which ones to support. If your project includes additional financial and technical support, it will be particularly valuable as this support helps incentivize enrollment in priority areas by reducing the cost-share burden to landowners and leverages Farm Bill dollars.

*Rancher
Hank Stone*

but also improving its aesthetics, allowing the Stones to host events such as tours and weddings that provide additional income.

“Many people who come to us for conservation help come seeking answers and fixes for one problem—erosion or invasive species, water issues or whatever it may be,” says Phil Hogan, Yolo County District Conservationist for NRCS in California. “But the Stones have tackled and achieved improvements in each resource: soil, water, native plants and wildlife habitat. They are big-picture people.” And their good stewardship doesn’t end at the ranch boundaries. The Stones, have expanded these benefits by involving neighbors, partners and the public in their efforts. For example, Scott Stone worked with Audubon California to convince 26 neighbors to take part in a landscape-scale effort with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection



LEFT © PHIL HOGAN, NRCS; RIGHT © MCK GALLAGHER, NRCS

to control brush encroachment through prescribed fire. Together, they put together the largest vegetation plan in the State.

The Stones recognize the value of keeping their ranch in operation, especially in an area with strong pressure to convert larger ranches to small “ranchettes.” Fortunately for the watershed and those who live in it, the Stone ranch will remain a ranch forever. In 2005, they placed a conservation easement on the property with the California Rangeland Trust, permanently protecting the ranch and serving as a model to other ranchers considering protecting their land in a similar way.

CONTRIBUTE NON-FARM BILL FUNDS

Marketing fish and wildlife conservation practices requires more than just convincing potential participants that it is the right thing to do. Most of them understand that. Many Farm Bill programs require participants to provide 50 percent of the project cost or more, a burden that many farmers are unable to carry. Some of the required investment can be in the form of in-kind contributions and services, but even materials and labor are limited commodities in working agricultural landscapes. Financial help and fundraising assistance from partners can be the tipping point that moves a landowner to enroll. Supplemental funding can also be a barometer of the conservation community's support of the project, which may provide a competitive advantage in the NRCS ranking process.

Providing additional financial assistance can be as simple as providing volunteer labor or equipment on restoration projects or as sophisticated as securing partners, technical assistance and additional capital to establish new Farm Bill initiatives. Partners can also contribute by helping to raise matching funds from other grant sources for high-priority projects in partnership with landowners. Fundraising often requires a fairly substantial investment in time and resources, so take care to select projects that target relatively large, environmentally significant lands where a landowner would

not otherwise be able to enroll without outside help. In some cases, land trusts can assist landowners by working directly with NRCS and FSA on behalf of the landowners to design conservation strategies that best address wildlife needs (see case study below).

PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Technical assistance is always in demand and you can help build NRCS' network of technical expertise by becoming a technical service provider (TSP). TSPs are certified by NRCS to deliver technical assistance to landowners on particular natural resource topics (see "Securing Technical Assistance," page 54). Any individual or organization with applicable technical skills can apply to become a TSP.

TSPs are especially needed in the Northeast, Southeast and much of the West,¹⁵ and in resource categories underrepresented by the existing TSP network. As of 2006, nearly all TSP certifications were in categories related to cropland or cropping systems, with particular emphasis on nutrient management.¹⁶ However, services such as conservation planning, streambank stabilization, grazing management, wildlife habitat development and related practices are also greatly needed. Currently, relatively few TSPs are certified for practices requiring ecological or wildlife expertise or practices applicable to grazing

CASE STUDY

PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE TARGETS DECLINING TROUT IN MONTANA

Working together and pooling resources is yielding maximum Farm Bill program benefits for a couple of Montana native trout species in decline. Since 2004, NRCS has allocated approximately 20 percent of its annual EQIP funding in Montana for special initiatives that address key resource concerns in a focused and partnership-based manner. The NRCS Missoula Natural Resource Area, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP), FWS, Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) and the Blackfoot Challenge collaborated for one such effort, a regionally focused initiative to address the needs of the two declining native fish species most likely to benefit from

habitat conservation on private lands in the Blackfoot River Watershed: the threatened bull trout and the West-slope cutthroat trout, a Montana species of concern.

The initiative encourages private landowners to implement projects that contribute substantially to the recovery of these imperiled fish species in a region of the state where some of the most genetically pure

strains and viable populations are found. The initiative is based on the comprehensive Blackfoot River Restoration Action Plan completed by Montana FWP's Fisheries Division, which also serves as the basis for ranking applications. The Powell County Conservation District and TU also contribute on-the-ground staff time, along with NRCS, to carry out this special initiative.



BULL TROUT © ROGER TABOR/USFWS

lands or other land types such as wetlands. A nationwide network of specialized TSPs that covers the full spectrum of programmatic expertise ensures more effective use of conservation practices and the highest quality assistance for wildlife and cropland practices.

To learn more about becoming a TSP, go to:

<http://techreg.usda.gov/TSPApplicationIntro.aspx>

This website describes what is required for certification in the particular service you or your organization can offer. Once certification requirements are met, TSPs are placed on an “approved list,” which landowners can search to select service providers to contact. TSPs set the payment rates for their services and are not required to adhere to the “not-to-exceed” payment rates when negotiating with landowners.

CASE STUDY

WORKING TOGETHER TO RESTORE THE TETON RIVER

The Teton Regional Land Trust (TRLT) in southeastern Idaho has been helping landowners restore habitat in the Teton River Basin since 1990. Boasting extraordinary wetland and riparian habitats, Teton Basin was recently identified as the highest priority landscape within the greater Yellowstone ecosystem.¹⁷ The region is a hotspot for imperiled species such as Yellowstone cutthroat trout, trumpeter swans, long-billed curlews and Columbian sharp-tailed grouse.

In the early 2000s, a private ranching family contacted TRLT for help protecting 250 acres of active cattle ranchlands and over one mile of the Teton River through permanent conservation easements. Inter-

ested in improving fish and wildlife habitat on their ranch, the family then worked with NRCS to enroll in EQIP. With help from TRLT, NRCS and other partners then fenced cattle out of their entire stretch of the Teton River.

In areas with particularly eroded stream banks, more aggressive restoration techniques were used to recontour and revegetate the banks. TRLT was actively involved in raising matching dollars for the project through grants from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Trout Unlimited, Defenders of Wildlife and others. The land trust, on behalf of the family, also worked closely with the NRCS district conservationist to

craft a wildlife-friendly grazing, restoration and management plan and brought in volunteers to help with tree planting efforts on community work-days.

The extra resources provided by TRLT allowed the family to invest additional funding in fencing portions of the river corridor, protecting the restoration project and riparian habitat from unmanaged cattle grazing. The family was then able to contribute this as in-kind match. “The most successful projects,” says Bonnie Self, TRLT operations director, “require collaboration from a variety of partners including landowners, nonprofits, state agencies, private foundations and federal programs like those in the Farm Bill.”

LEFT & RIGHT © TETON REGIONAL LAND TRUST



Appendix 1. Summary of Major Farm Bill Conservation and Forestry programs

	Program	Purpose	Who is Eligible to Participate?	What Land is Eligible?	
Land Protection Programs					
Easements	Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)	Permanently protect agricultural land	Legal owner; Land trusts can hold easements	Private agricultural land, including non-industrial forest land, that contains at least 50% prime, unique, statewide or locally important farmland; Forest land cannot exceed 2/3rds of the easement area	
	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Permanently protect and restore forests for recovery of listed species, improve biodiversity and enhance carbon sequestration	Legal owner; Land cannot already be under conservation ownership	Private or tribal forest land that protects listed species and biodiversity or enhances carbon sequestration	
	Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	Permanently protect, restore and enhance wetlands	Legal owner, including land trusts	Private or tribal former wetlands that were farmed or converted prior to 1985; adjacent land on which enrollment will maximize wildlife and wetland values and functions	
Easements and Rentals	Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	Protect grazing land and biodiversity through permanent easements and short-term rental contracts	Rental program: legal owner or operator for the duration of the agreement; Easements: legal owner; Land trusts can hold easements	Private or tribal grasslands or grazing lands; expiring CRP acres	
	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program* (CREP)	Restore and protect environmentally sensitive lands, such as streamside buffers, in state or regional priority areas	Legal owners and/or operators, including land trusts	Agricultural lands within state-identified priority areas	
Rentals	Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	Protect highly erodible land by restoring whole fields or portions of fields to natural cover through 10-15 year rental contracts	Legal owner and/or operator for duration of the agreement, including land trusts	Highly erodible land, wetland, streamside areas in pastureland that have been planted 4 of the previous 6 years to crops. Land in an EPA-designated well-head area also eligible under Continuous CRP	
Acquisition	Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program	Protect environmentally or economically important forest lands at risk of conversion	Local governments or non-government organizations such as land trusts purchase private land from willing sellers	Private forest lands threatened with conversion	
Restoration and Management Programs					
Restoration Payments	Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	Create or improve wildlife habitat on agricultural land	Legal owner or operator of the land for duration of the agreement, including land trusts.	Private or tribal agricultural or non-industrial forest land that is currently or has the potential to produce forest or agricultural products	
	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Improve farming practices that benefit agricultural production and soil, air, water and wildlife resources	Legal owner or operator of the land for the duration of the agreement	Private or tribal land where agricultural or forest products are produced; Public land that is managed as part of a private agricultural operation.	
Green Payments	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) (formerly Conservation Security Program)	Provide incentive payments to reward landowners for maintaining or adopting new conservation activities on agricultural land	Legal owner or operator of the land for the duration of the agreement	Private or tribal agricultural land, and incidental non-industrial forest land that has been in cropland 4 of the 6 years prior to 2008.	

*Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) easements are available in certain states only

	Payments and Incentives	When are Applications Accepted?
	NRCS provides up to 50% of the cost of the easement; land trusts are responsible for at least 25% of the purchase price; remainder can be in cash or through land donation.	Continuously. Applications selected one to two times annually
	1) Permanent Easements: 75%-100% of the easement value; 2) 30-yr Easement: up to 75% of the easement value; 3) 10-yr Cost-Share: 50% cost-share to establish practices	During designated sign-up periods announced by the state
	1) Permanent Easements: 100% of easement value and restoration costs; 2) 30-year Easements/Contracts: 75% of easement value and restoration costs; 3) Restoration agreement: 75% of restoration costs	Continuously. Applications selected one or more times annually
	1) Easements through NRCS: 100% of easement value and 100% restoration cost-share; 2) Easements through land trust partner: 50% of easement value from NRCS and 50% through other sources, including land donations; 3) Rental contracts: rental rates equal to 75% of the grazing value plus 50% restoration cost-share	Continuously. Applications selected one to two times annually
	Same as CRP (below) with added incentives that may include additional cost-share, rental payments, tax incentives, signing bonuses, easements and more.	Continuously.
	Annual rental rates and 50% cost-share to restore land; Other incentives may apply for certain CRP practices and additional incentives are available for CCRP contracts	General CRP: during designated sign-up periods once per year; Continuous CRP: continuously
	Federal cost-share of 50% of the acquisition cost; Remaining 50% can be cash or in-kind	TBD
	Cost-share up to 75%; Historically underserved producers and certain practices in long-term contracts can receive up to 90% cost-share.	Continuously
	Cost-share up to 75% and up to 100% of income foregone; Historically underserved producers eligible for up to 90% cost-share and for advance payments up to 30% of the cost to install practices.	Continuously with ranking occurring one or more times per year
	Annual payments for costs incurred, income foregone and environmental benefit. Bonus payments for adopting resource-conserving crop rotations.	Continuously

Appendix 2: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Practices Beneficial to Wildlife		
Practice	Code	Definition and Use
Alley Cropping	311	Trees or shrubs (ideally native) are planted in sets of single or multiple rows with agronomic, horticultural crops or forages produced in the alleys between the sets of woody plants
Animal Trails and Walkways	575	Establish lanes or travelways that facilitate animal movement. This practice can be used to divert animals away from natural streams, ponds and springs and toward more appropriate water sources.
Channel Bank Vegetation	322	Establishing and maintaining (ideally native) vegetative cover on channel banks, berms, spoil and associated areas to reduce erosion
Channel Stabilization	584	Measures to stabilize the bed or bottom of a channel
Conservation Cover	327	Establishing and maintaining vegetative cover on channel banks, berms, spoil and associated areas to reduce erosion
Constructed Wetland	656	An artificial ecosystem with hydrophytic vegetation for water treatment; include appropriate native vegetation from the region to maximize wildlife benefits
Contour Buffer Strips	322	Narrow strips of permanent, herbaceous vegetative cover established around a hill slope, and alternated down the slope with wider cropped strips that are farmed on the contour. Include native forbs and grasses to maximize wildlife benefits
Cover Crop	340	Grasses, legumes and forbs planted as seasonal cover on cropped fields to reduce erosion. Use of native species with wildlife value will maximize wildlife benefits. This practice is ideal for creating seasonal pollinator habitat.
Critical Area Planting	342	Establishing permanent (ideally native) vegetation on sites that have or are expected to have high erosion rates, and on sites that have physical, chemical or biological conditions that prevent the establishment of vegetation with normal practices.
Early Successional Wildlife Habitat/ Management	647	Manage early plant succession to benefit desired wildlife or natural communities.
Field Border	386	A strip of permanent (ideally native) vegetation established at the edge or around the perimeter of a field. This practice can be highly beneficial to pollinators, birds and small mammals.
Filter Strip	393	A strip or area of herbaceous (ideally native) vegetation that removes contaminants from overland flow.
Fish Passage	396	Modification or removal of barriers that restrict or impede movement or migration of fish or other aquatic organisms.
Fish Pond Management	399	Managing impounded water for the production of fish or other aquatic organisms.
Forest Stand Improvement	666	The manipulation of species composition, stand structure and stocking by cutting or killing selected trees and understory vegetation to improve forest health.
Grassed Waterway	412	A shaped or graded channel that is established with suitable (ideally native) vegetation to carry and slow surface water runoff to a stable outlet.
Hedgerow Planting	422	Establishment of dense (ideally native) vegetation in a linear design to achieve a natural resource conservation purpose. Hedgerows provide important cover for early successional wildlife species like bobwhite quail and for pollinators.
Herbaceous Wind Barriers	603	Herbaceous vegetation established in rows or narrow strips in the field across the prevailing wind direction to reduce wind erosion.
Multi-Story Cropping	379	Existing or planted stands of trees or shrubs that are managed as an overstory with an understory of woody and or non-woody plants that are grown for a variety of products.
Nutrient Management	590	Managing the amount, source, placement, form and timing of the application of plant nutrients and soil amendments to reduce pollution to water bodies.
Pasture and Hay Planting	512	Establishing forage species. Using a broad diversity of native species will best benefit wildlife and pollinators
Pest Management	595	Using environmentally sensitive prevention, avoidance, monitoring and suppression strategies to manage weeds, insects, diseases, animals and other organisms (including invasive and non-invasive species), that directly or indirectly cause damage or annoyance. Pest management can also include predator deterrence measures like fencing to deter wolves in some states.
Pond	378	A water impoundment made by constructing an embankment or by excavating a pit or dugout. Ensuring native vegetated banks will increase the wildlife value of this practice.
Prescribed Burning	338	Controlled fire applied to a predetermined area. Fire can be used to set back vegetation in open habitats, control invasives and manage forest ecosystems among other wildlife-friendly practices.
Prescribed Forestry	409	Managing forested areas for forest health, wood and/ or fiber, water, recreation, aesthetics, wildlife habitat and plant biodiversity.
Prescribed Grazing	528	Managing the harvest of vegetation with grazing and/or browsing animals.
Range Planting	550	Establishment of adapted (ideally native) perennial vegetation such as grasses, forbs, legumes, shrubs and trees.
Restoration of Rare and Declining Habitats	643	Restoring and managing rare and declining habitats and their associated wildlife species to conserve biodiversity.
Riparian Forest Buffer	391	An area of predominantly trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to water courses or waterbodies. Buffers at least 300 feet wide composed of native vegetation are ideal for wildlife but smaller buffers also have important wildlife values.
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	390	Grasses, grass-like plants and forbs that are tolerant of intermittent flooding or saturated soils and that are established or managed in the transitional zone between terrestrial and aquatic habitats.
Shallow Water Development and Management	646	The inundation of lands to provide habitat for fish and/or wildlife.
Silvopasture Enhancement	381	An agroforestry application establishing a combination of trees or shrubs and compatible forages on the same acreage. Using native species with wildlife value will maximize wildlife benefits.
Streambank and Shoreline Protection	580	Treatment(s) used to stabilize and protect banks of streams or constructed channels and shorelines of lakes, reservoirs or estuaries.
Stream Habitat Improvement and Enhancement	395	Maintain, improve or restore physical, chemical and biological functions of a stream, and its associated riparian zone, necessary for meeting the life history requirements of desired aquatic species.
Tree/ Shrub Establishment	612	Establishing woody plants by planting (ideally native) seedlings or cuttings, direct seeding or natural regeneration.
Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	645	Provide and manage upland habitats and connectivity within the landscape for wildlife.
Wetland Creation	658	The creation of a wetland that was historically non-wetland.
Wetland Restoration	657	The rehabilitation of a degraded wetland or the reestablishment of a wetland so that soils, hydrology, vegetative community, and habitat are a close approximation of the original natural condition that existed prior to modification to the extent practicable.
Wetland Wildlife Habitat and Management	644	Retaining, developing or managing wetland habitat for wetland wildlife.
Windbreak / Shelterbelt Establishment	380	Windbreaks or shelterbelts planted in single or multiple rows of trees or shrubs in linear configurations to reduce wind erosion.

NRCS State Offices				
STATE	ADDRESS	CITY	PHONE	WEBSITE
Alabama	3381 Skyway Drive	Auburn	334-887-4588	www.al.nrcs.usda.gov/
Alaska	800 W. Evergreen Avenue, Suite 100	Palmer	907-761-7760	www.ak.nrcs.usda.gov/
Arizona	230 N. First Avenue, Suite 509	Phoenix	602-280-8801	www.az.nrcs.usda.gov/
Arkansas	Room 3416, Federal Building, 700 West Capitol Ave.	Little Rock	501-301-3100	www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/
California	Richard E. Lyng USDA Service Center, 430 G Street #4164	Davis	530-792-5600	www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/
Colorado	655 Parfet St, Room E200C	Lakewood	720-544-2810	www.co.nrcs.usda.gov/
Connecticut	344 Merrow Road, Suite A	Tolland	860-871-4011	www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/
Delaware	1221 College Park Drive, Suite 100	Dover	302-678-4160	www.de.nrcs.usda.gov/
Florida	2614 N.W. 43rd Street	Gainesville	352-338-9500	www.fl.nrcs.usda.gov/
Georgia	355 East Hancock Ave, Stop Number 200	Athens	706-546-2272	www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov/
Hawaii	300 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 4-118	Honolulu	808-541-2600	www.hi.nrcs.usda.gov/
Idaho	9173 W. Barnes Drive, Suite C	Boise	208-378-5700	www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/
Illinois	2118 W. Park Court	Champaign	217-353-6600	www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/
Indiana	6013 Lakeside Boulevard	Indianapolis	317-290-3200	www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/
Iowa	210 Walnut Street, Room 693	Des Moines	515-284-6655	www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/
Kansas	760 South Broadway	Salina	785-823-4500	www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/
Kentucky	771 Corporate Drive, Suite 210	Lexington	859-224-7350	www.ky.nrcs.usda.gov/
Louisiana	3737 Government Street	Alexandria	318-473-7751	www.la.nrcs.usda.gov/
Maine	967 Illinois Avenue, Suite #3	Bangor	207-990-9100	www.me.nrcs.usda.gov/
Maryland	339 Busch's Frontage Road, Suite 301	Annapolis	410-757-0861	www.md.nrcs.usda.gov/
Massachusetts	451 West Street	Amherst	413-253-4350	www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/
Michigan	3001 Coolidge Road, Suite 250	East Lansing	517-324-5270	www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov/
Minnesota	375 Jackson Street, Suite 600	St. Paul	651-602-7900	www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/
Mississippi	100 W. Capitol Street, Suite 1321 Federal Bldg.	Jackson	601-965-5205	www.ms.nrcs.usda.gov/
Missouri	Parkade Center, Suite 250, 601 Business Loop 70 West	Columbia	573-876-0900	www.mo.nrcs.usda.gov/
Montana	10 East Babcock Street, Federal Building, Room 443	Bozeman	406-587-6811	www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/
Nebraska	Rm 152, Federal Building, 100 Centennial Mall North	Lincoln	402-437-5300	www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/
Nevada	1365 Corporate Blvd	Reno	775-857-8500	www.nv.nrcs.usda.gov/
New Hampshire	Federal Building, 2 Madbury Road	Durham	603-868-7581	www.nh.nrcs.usda.gov/
New Jersey	220 Davidson Ave 4th Floor	Somerset	732-537-6040	www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/
New Mexico	6200 Jefferson NE	Albuquerque	505-761-4400	www.nm.nrcs.usda.gov/
New York	441 South Salina Street, Suite 354	Syracuse	315-477-6504	www.ny.nrcs.usda.gov/
North Carolina	4407 Bland Rd., Suite 117	Raleigh	919-873-2100	www.nc.nrcs.usda.gov/
North Dakota	220 East Rosser Avenue, Federal Building, Room 270	Bismarck	701-530-2000	www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov/
Ohio	200 North High Street, Room 522	Columbus	614-255-2472	www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/
Oklahoma	100 USDA, Suite 206	Stillwater	405 742-1204	www.ok.nrcs.usda.gov/
Oregon	1201 NE Lloyd Blvd, Suite 900	Portland	503-414-3200	www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/
Pennsylvania	One Credit Union Place, Suite 340	Harrisburg	717-237-2100	www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov/
Rhode Island	60 Quaker Lane, Suite 46	Warwick	401-828-1300	www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/
South Carolina	1835 Assembly Street, Room 950	Columbia	803-253-3935	www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov/
South Dakota	200 Fourth Street SW, Room 203	Huron	605-352-1288	www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov/
Tennessee	675 U.S. Courthouse, 801 Broadway	Nashville	615-277-2531	www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov/
Texas	101 South Main	Temple	254-742-9800	www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/
Utah	125 South State Street, Room 4402	Salt Lake City	801-524-4550	www.ut.nrcs.usda.gov/

Vermont	356 Mountain View Drive, Suite 105	Colchester	802-951-6796	www.vt.nrcs.usda.gov/
Virginia	1606 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 209	Richmond	804-287-1691	www.va.nrcs.usda.gov/
Washington	316 W. Boone Ave., Suite 450	Spokane	509-323-2900	www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/
West Virginia	1550 Earl Core Road, Suite 200,	Morgantown	304-284-7540	www.wv.nrcs.usda.gov/
Wisconsin	8030 Excelsior Drive	Madison	608-662-4422	www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov/
Wyoming	100 East B Street, 3rd Floor	Casper	307-233-6750	www.wy.nrcs.usda.gov/
Caribbean Area Office (Puerto Rico)	IBM Plaza, Suite 604, 654 Munoz Rivera Ave.	San Juan	787-766-5206	www.pr.nrcs.usda.gov/
Pacific Basin Office	SAME AS HAWAII STATE OFFICE			www.pia.nrcs.usda.gov/

Farm Service Agency State Offices

STATE	ADDRESS	CITY	PHONE	WEBSITE
Alabama	4121 Carmichael RD, Suite 600	Montgomery	334-279-3500	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=al&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Alaska	800 West Evergreen Ave., Suite 216	Palmer	907-761-7738	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ak&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Arizona	230 N. 1st Avenue, Suite 506	Phoenix	602-285-6300	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=az&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Arkansas	700 W Capitol Ave Suite 3416	Little Rock	501-301-3000	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ar&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
California	430 G Street, Suite 4161	Davis	530-792-5520	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ca&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Colorado	655 Parfet Street, Ste E-305	Lakewood	720-544-2876	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=co&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Connecticut	344 Merrow Road Suite B	Tolland	860-871-2944	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ct&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Delaware	1221 College Park Drive, Suite 201	Dover	302-678-4250	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=de&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Florida	P.O. Box 141030	Gainesville	352-379-4500	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=fl&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Georgia	355 East Hancock Avenue, Stop 100	Athens	706-546-2266	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ga&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Hawaii	737 Bishop Street, Suite 2340	Honolulu	808-441-2704	www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/sto_staff.pdf
Idaho	9173 West Barnes Drive	Boise	208-378-5650	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=id&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Illinois	3500 Wabash Ave.	Springfield	217-241-6600	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=il&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Indiana	5981 Lakeside Boulevard	Indianapolis	317-290-3030	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=in&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Iowa	10500 Buena Vista Ct	Urbandale	515-254-1540	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ia&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Kansas	3600 Anderson Avenue	Manhattan	785-539-3531	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ks&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Kentucky	771 Corporate Drive, Ste.100	Lexington	859-224-7601	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ky&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Louisiana	3737 Government Street	Alexandria	318-473-7721	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=la&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Maine	967 Illinois Ave	Bangor	207-990-9100	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=me&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Maryland	339 Buschs Frontage Rd	Annapolis	443-482-2760	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=md&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Massachusetts	445 West Street	Amherst	413-253-4500	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ma&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Michigan	3001 Coolidge Rd, Suite 350	East Lansing	517-324-5110	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=mi&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Minnesota	375 Jackson Street, Suite 400	St. Paul	651-602-7700	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=mn&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing

Mississippi	6311 Ridgewood Road Suite W100	Jackson	601-965-4300	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ms&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Missouri	601 Business Loop 70 W Suite 250	Columbia	573-876-0926	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=mo&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Montana	10 E Babcock Street	Bozeman	406-587-6872	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=mt&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Nebraska	7131 A Street	Lincoln	402-437-5581	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ne&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Nevada	1755 E. Plumb Ln #202	Reno	775-784-5411	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=nv&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
New Hampshire	53 Pleasant St, Room 1601	Concord	603-224-7941	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=nh&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
New Jersey	163 Rt. 130, Bldg. 2, Suite E	Bordentown	609-298-3446	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=nj&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
New Mexico	6200 Jefferson NE, Suite 211	Albuquerque	505-761-4900	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=nm&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
New York	441 South Salina Street, Suite 536	Syracuse	315-477-6300	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ny&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
North Carolina	4407 Bland Road, Suite 175	Raleigh	919-875 - 4800	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=nc&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
North Dakota	1025 28TH ST S	Fargo	701-239-5224	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=nd&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Ohio	200 North High St. Room 540	Columbus	614-255-2441	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=oh&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Oklahoma	100 USDA, Suite 102	Stillwater	405-742-1130	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ok&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Oregon	7620 SW Mohawk	Tualatin	503-692-6830	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=or&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Pennsylvania	One Credit Union Place, Suite 320	Harrisburg	717-237-2117	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=pa&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Rhode Island	60 Quaker Lane Suite 40	Warwick	401-828-8232	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ri&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
South Carolina	1927 Thurmond Mall, Suite 100	Columbia	803-806-3830	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=sc&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
South Dakota	200 4TH ST SW	Huron	605-352-1160	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=sd&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Tennessee	801 Broadway, Suite 675	Nashville	615-277-2600	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=tn&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Texas	2405 Texas Ave S	College Station	979-680-5150	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=tx&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Utah	125 South State	Salt Lake City	801-524-4530	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ut&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Vermont	356 Mountain View Drive Suite 104	Colchester	802-658-2803	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=vt&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Virginia	1606 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 138	Richmond	804-287-1500	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=va&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Washington	316 W. Boone Avenue, Ste #568	Spokane	509-323-3000	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=wa&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
West Virginia	1550 Earl Core Road, Suite 102	Morgantown	304-284-4800	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=ww&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Wisconsin	8030 Excelsior Drive, Suite 100	Madison	608-662-4422	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=wi&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Wyoming	951 Werner Court, Ste 130	Casper	307-261-5231	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=wy&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Puerto Rico	654 Muñoz Rivera Ave., 654 Plaza Suite 829	Hato Rey	787-294-1615	www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=pr&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Virgin Islands	SAME AS FLORIDA STATE FSA OFFICE			www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/stateoffapp?mystate=vi&area=home&subject=landing&topic=landing
Pacific Basin	SAME AS HAWAII STATE OFFICE			

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