



Achieving Clean Water through the Farm Bill

Our shared natural heritage includes pristine lakes, lush wetlands, thriving rivers and two great oceans. Being good stewards and keeping these waters clean is important for many reasons. Clean, plentiful water is necessary for the health of humans, animals, plants and entire ecosystems. That is why conservation policy is such an important component of the Farm Bill.

The conservation policies and incentives established in the 2002 Farm Bill have benefited humans and our natural communities. By encouraging farmers to use water more efficiently, these programs are helping preserve rare species. The restoration of wetlands has also been an important step in improving water systems, flood control and plant and animal habitat in America. Conservation practices that keep water clean to protect plants and animals make aquatic systems healthier for the entire community.



Restoring Wetlands

What is the Wetlands Reserve Program?

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a nationwide voluntary program managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The program can pay up to 100 percent for the restoration of wetlands that have been drained for agricultural use. Of all the USDA conservation programs, WRP provides benefits to plants and animals that depend on wetlands and other adjacent aquatic ecosystems.

Benefits of Wetlands Restoration

- **Income** – Landowners benefit from the incentives offered by WRP. They receive payments for land restored to wetlands, enabling them to focus their resources on lands more suitable for agricultural production.
- **Habitat** – Wetlands provide a home to thousands of plants and animals, many of which are threatened or endangered.
- **Water Quality** – Wetlands collect sediment and pollutants. They also help to prevent erosion, keeping excess soil and mud from collecting in other water systems such as reservoirs.
- **Reduced Flooding** – A wetland can temporarily store excess water, allowing it to evaporate or filter into the ground. This reduces flooding and continues the fresh supply of underground water.

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Montana Arctic Grayling

The arctic grayling is a native river dwelling fish found in the Big Hole River in Montana. A prolonged drought has accelerated the decline of the last population of the grayling, which is now a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act.

EQIP Helps Grayling

Under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the NRCS offered \$562,000 in assistance to landowners in the spring of 2005. In 2004 the NRCS also awarded \$775,000 to landowners who assisted in conserving grayling habitat along the Big Hole River. A total of 15,848 acres of land along the river has been conserved. Conservation practices to improve grayling habitat include improving stream flow, delaying irrigation, using alternate water sources for crops and livestock, and improving riverbank habitat. These water-saving measures funded by EQIP improve the health of the river and may keep the grayling from being placed on the endangered species list.

Endangered Salmon

Many species of wild salmon are listed as endangered or threatened. In some states, runs are less than 10 percent of the numbers seen in the 19th century. Causes of salmon declines are complex and include habitat loss, hydroelectric facilities, hatchery practices and harvest levels.

WHIP Helps Salmon

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary Farm Bill program that provides technical and financial assistance to landowners to develop good in-stream and streamside salmon habitat on their property. Practices that support healthy salmon runs include keeping pollutants such as eroded soil and livestock waste out of our waters, maintaining sufficient water flows in rivers and streams, and protecting and restoring in-stream and streamside habitats.



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Salmon Successes

Landowners are making good use of WHIP. For example, in the state of Washington, ranchers worked with the NRCS and used a WHIP contract to manage their livestock by developing an alternate water source and putting



up fencing and planting along a stream. These improvements reduce erosion and protect salmon habitat. In 2005, Idaho received an additional \$322,000 to improve salmon habitat by shading streams, restoring spawning beds and removing barriers to upstream movement. In Maine, a watershed received a \$100,000 grant to prevent sediment from flowing into the Ducktrap River and disrupting Atlantic salmon spawning beds.

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