



Trends Toward More Habitat: NRCS Contributions on Privately Owned Lands

Did You Know?

How are we doing in this country—on our privately owned lands—in our quest to provide for the needs of fish and wildlife? Here are some highlights on the progress America's farmers and ranchers are making, with the help of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and many others.

NRCS Funding for Healthier Habitat

- Funding for conservation programs on private lands is now referred to in billions of dollars rather than millions—\$17 billion in conservation in the 2002 farm bill.
- The Wetlands Reserve Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Conservation Reserve Program, and the Grassland Reserve Program are directly contributing wildlife habitat to the agricultural landscape. Financial and technical assistance for the Wetlands Reserve Program alone accounts for more than \$240 million in 2006. Wetlands provide habitat for hundreds of species of wildlife.
- Funding for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program will grow to \$360 million over the next six years. With landowner contributions, the investment is nearly three quarters of a billion dollars specifically for wildlife habitat.

- NRCS has allocated \$178.4 million for the Grassland Reserve Program, for protecting grasslands and habitat conservation for grassland dependent birds and animals through rental agreements or easements.

Results From Conservation Funding: Healthy Habitat on the Land

- The more than 35 million acres of grasses and trees in the Conservation Reserve Program alone is a cumulative habitat area larger than the entire National Wildlife Refuge system and all state-owned wildlife areas combined, not counting Alaska. The 2002 Farm Bill increased the number of acres authorized for CRP enrollment by 3 million—up to 39.2 million acres. CRP's Farmable Wetland Program was extended to all States and the cap increased to 1 million acres. CRP habitat is being improved as lessons are learned.

- In 2005 alone NRCS helped improve upland wildlife habitat management on more than 9 million acres.
- EQIP, WRP, and WHIP also contribute to the protection of aquatic habitats including coral reefs in Florida, the Pacific Basin, and the Caribbean Area.
- NRCS programs have led to a net increase rather than an annual loss of wetlands on agricultural lands. Since 1992, nearly 1.7 million acres have been enrolled in Wetlands Reserve Program contracts to be restored to wetlands.
- In just the last two years, over 200,000 acres each year has been enrolled in WRP. Imagine the wildlife that could be supported on wetland habitat on a football field, then multiply that by 400,000—that's the land that will be devoted long-term to wildlife habitat from just two years through WRP.



Mule Deer in velvet on FT Ranch, Colorado.

- The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program has invested \$142 million through more than 15,000 contracts since the year 2000. The goals are to enhance or manage habitat for species including the grasshopper sparrow, bobwhite quail, greater sage-grouse, short-eared owl, Karner-blue butterfly, gopher tortoise, Louisiana black bear, Eastern collared lizard, Bachman's sparrow, ovenbird, Topeka shiner, acorn woodpecker, and others.
- The eelgrass restoration project in Rhode Island is an ongoing project that was started in 2001, and supported with \$737,000 in 2004. Tens of thousands of eelgrass plants have been harvested and transplanted.
- \$5 million was provided through the Grassland Reserve Program to protect Sage Grouse habitat in western states.
- The SCS/NRCS watershed program has created more than 300,000 acres of surface water in 11,000 watershed dams, and enhanced more than 10 million acres of upland wildlife habitat and 170,000 acres of wetland habitat through the years.
- Gary Turbak, National Wildlife magazine, on CRP: "CRP has helped triple the pheasant population in South Dakota and double it in North Dakota, Minnesota and Ohio. In Missouri, more than half of all bobwhite nests occur in grass planted through the program, even though it covers only 15 percent of the landscape. Thanks to CRP, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse are on the increase in Colorado, and prairie chickens have quadrupled their numbers in Minnesota and have returned to parts of Texas where they haven't been seen in years. Although habitat in CRP covers only 6 percent of the land in this region, it produces nearly one-third of the duck nests."

Improved Technical Abilities, Partnerships

- In 2005, The NRCS employed 140 biologists compared to 91 in 1985 and 84 in 1990. In addition, partnering agencies have provided over 200 biologists to help landowners plan and implement conservation practices through farm bill programs.
- A \$1.2 million grant for 11 selected studies in nine states is part of a Bobwhite Quail initiative. The studies support a project to create 250,000 acres of early successional bobwhite quail habitat under CRP.
- The quail study is one of more than 70 cooperative projects undertaken by NRCS to develop and transfer new technology on wildlife habitat to NRCS field offices.
- The NRCS has partnered for years with numerous wildlife organizations, and more recently has formalized relations with organizations including The Nature Conservancy, the National Wild Turkey Federation, Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Quail Unlimited, the Wildlife Society, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Wildlife Management Institute, Bat

Conservation International, Partners for Reptiles and Amphibian Conservation, National Audubon Society, and others.

Other NRCS Contributions for Wildlife Habitat

...In fiscal years 2004 and 2005, NRCS targeted \$5 million in Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) funds for special projects to help protect greater sage grouse habitat in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah and Washington...an additional \$600,000 in Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) funds to help landowners in 21 states improve fish and wildlife habitat on their private lands...to support a goal to create, improve, and protect at least three million wetland acres over the next five years, the FY2005 budget request includes an increase of \$1.5 billion for wetlands restoration (53%) over FY2001...\$3.5 million for Atlantic and Pacific Salmon habitat restoration projects through 2004 WHIP funds...the Conservation Security Program rewards producers in every State for their land stewardship, including their help to fish and wildlife. ■

For more information visit www.usda.nrcs.gov or call 202.720.3210



Bobwhite quail on Project Wings site in Georgia. Project implemented by NRCS, RC&D, and Georgia Power Company.

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