

2014 Farm Bill Programs

The 2014 Farm Bill was enacted on February 7, 2014. NRCS offers voluntary Farm Bill conservation program that benefit both agricultural producers and the environment.

Some program will be available immediately, while others will require limited time to be set up within the agency.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination between NRCS and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners. NRCS provides assistance to producers through partnership agreements and through program contracts or easement agreements.

RCPP combines the authorities of four former conservation programs – the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative and the Great Lakes Basin Program. Assistance is delivered in accordance with the rules of EQIP, CSP, ACEP and HFRP; and in certain areas the Watershed Operations and Flood Prevention Program.

Landscape Conservation Initiatives

NRCS uses Landscape Conservation Initiatives to accelerate the benefits of voluntary conservation programs, such as cleaner water and air, healthier soil and enhanced wildlife habitat. NRCS conservation programs help agricultural producers improve the environment while maintaining a vibrant agricultural sector.

These initiatives enhance the locally driven process to better address nationally and regionally important conservation goals that transcend localities. They build on locally led efforts and partnerships, and they're based on science. Through the initiatives, NRCS and its partners coordinate the delivery of assistance where it can have the most impact. Where applicable, NRCS works with regulators to help producers get predictability for their use of voluntary conservation systems or practices, giving them peace of mind they can sustain agricultural production in the future.

These landscape-level efforts have seen success across the country. From the removal of streams from federal impaired streams list to the determination not to list the greater sage-grouse and New England cottontail, NRCS works with producers that benefit wildlife, natural resources and agricultural operations across the country.

Since establishing the initiatives under the 2008 Farm Bill, NRCS has used successes and lessons learned to enhance the delivery of the initiatives. With tools like the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, the 2014 Farm Bill further emphasizes the focus on building effective partnerships and obtaining meaningful results for key natural resource concerns.

The Landscape Conservation Initiatives include:

- Water-Based Initiatives
- Wildlife- and Ecosystem-Based Initiatives
- Regional Pollinator Efforts
- Other Landscape-Level Efforts

Financial assistance

Introduction

NRCS offers voluntary programs to eligible landowners and agricultural producers to provide financial and technical assistance to help manage natural resources in a sustainable manner. Through these programs the agency approves contracts to provide financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns or opportunities to help save energy, improve soil, water, plant, air, animal and related resources on agricultural lands and non-industrial private forest land.

Financial Assistance Programs

Our financial assistance programs include the following:

The [Agricultural Management Assistance \(AMA\)](#) helps agricultural producers use conservation to manage risk and solve natural resource issues through natural resources conservation. NRCS administers the AMA conservation provisions while the Agricultural Marketing Service and the Risk Management Agency implement other provisions under AMA.

The [Conservation Stewardship Program \(CSP\)](#) helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

The [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in order to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation or improved or created wildlife habitat.

The [Water Bank Program \(WBP\)](#) on the land for the benefit of migratory wildlife such as waterfowl, conserves surface waters, reduces soil and wind erosion and contributes to flood control. WBP is only available in Minnesota, North and South Dakota.

Agricultural Management Assistance

Introduction

The Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to voluntarily address issues such as water management, water quality, and erosion control by incorporating conservation into their farming operations.

Producers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or to improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices, including soil erosion control, integrated pest management, or transition to organic farming.

AMA is available in 16 states where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

Program Features

- The program pays financial assistance of up to 75 percent of the cost of installing conservation practices.
- The total AMA payments shall not exceed \$50,000 per participant for any fiscal year.
- Participants are not subject to Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985; however participants are subject to Adjusted Gross Income provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985.
- Program offers an additional higher cost-share for historically underserved producers

Program Eligibility

- Be engaged in livestock or agricultural production and have annual potential sales of \$1,000 or more.
- Have an interest in the farming operation associated with the land being offered for AMA enrollment.
- Have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract.
- Be in compliance with the provisions for protecting the interests of tenants and sharecroppers, including the provisions for sharing AMA payments on a fair and equitable basis.
- Be within appropriate payment limitation requirements

Land Eligibility

Includes land:

- on which agricultural commodities or livestock are produced such as cropland, hayland, pastureland, rangeland, and grassland
- land used for subsistence purposes, private non-industrial forestland or other land on which agricultural products, livestock or forest-related goods are produced
- where risk may be mitigated through operation diversification or change in resource conservation practices.

Additional Information

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has leadership for the conservation provisions of AMA. The Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is responsible for an organic certification cost-share program and the Risk Management Agency (RMA) is responsible for mitigation of financial risk through an insurance cost-share program.

NRCS amended the rule governing AMA, to maintain consistency with EQIP. This is noted in the Final Rule for Changes to Existing Programs on the Federal Register website.

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

Introduction

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) was a voluntary conservation initiative that enabled the use of certain conservation programs along with resource of eligible partners to provide financial and technical assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands.

After announcement, eligible producers located in an approved project area were able to submit an application for any of the following available programs:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

Under CCPI, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) entered into partnership agreements with eligible entities that wanted to enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands. The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the authority for CCPI to the NRCS Chief.

Program Description

As allowed by the 2008 Farm Bill (2008 Act), NRCS may make Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) program resources available to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands who are located in an approved CCPI project area.

As authorized by Congress, this is not a grant program to partners. This is a program whereby partners with approved projects will enter into multi-year agreements with NRCS to help enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural lands and private nonindustrial private forest lands. One purpose of CCPI is to leverage resources of certain Federal government programs along with services and resources of non-Federal partners to implement natural resource conservation practices.

Proposals submitted by eligible partners are evaluated and competitively ranked for consideration of NRCS program to support the project. The RFP published to the Federal Register outlines the process

and requirements partners must use to submit proposals and CCPI requirements. The RFP also provides details regarding which programs are offered and funding availability each fiscal year.

Conservation Innovation Grants

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are competitive grants that stimulate the development and adoption of innovative approaches and technologies for conservation on agricultural lands. CIG uses Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) funds to award competitive grants to non-Federal governmental or nongovernmental organizations, American Indian Tribes, or individuals. Producers involved in CIG funded projects must be EQIP eligible.

Through CIG, NRCS partners with public and private entities to accelerate technology transfer and adopt promising technologies. These new technologies and approaches address some of the Nation's most pressing natural resources concerns. CIG benefits agricultural producers by providing more options for environmental enhancement and compliance with Federal, State, and local regulations.

CSP – Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program helps agricultural producers maintain and improve their existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resources concerns. Participants earn CSP payments for conservation performance - the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Benefits

Through CSP, participants take additional steps to improve resource condition including soil quality, water quality, water quantity, air quality, and habitat quality, as well as energy.

CSP provides two types of payments through five-year contracts: annual payments for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing practices; and supplemental payments for adopting a resource-conserving crop rotation. Producers may be able to renew a contract if they have successfully fulfilled the initial contract and agree to achieve additional conservation objectives. Payments are made soon as practical after October 1 of each fiscal year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous year.

Eligibility

Eligible lands include private and Tribal agricultural lands, cropland, grassland, pastureland, rangeland and nonindustrial private forest land. CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or type of crops produced, in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas. Applicants may include individuals, legal entities, joint operations or Indian tribes that meet the stewardship threshold for at least two priority resource concerns when they apply. They must also agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least one additional priority resource concern by the end of the contract.

Producers must have effective control of the land for the term of the proposed contract. Contracts include all eligible land in the agricultural operation.

EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers in order to address natural resource concerns and deliver environmental benefits such as improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, reduced soil erosion and sedimentation or improved or created wildlife habitat.

Benefits

Eligible program participants receive financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices, or activities like conservation planning, that address natural resource concerns on their land. Payments are made to participants after conservation practices and activities identified in an EQIP plan of operations are implemented. Contracts can last up to ten years.

Eligibility

Agricultural producers and owners of non-industrial private forestland and Tribes are eligible to apply for EQIP. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland and other farm or ranch lands.

Socially disadvantaged, beginning and limited resource farmers, Indian tribes and veterans are eligible for an increased payment rate and may receive advance payment of up to 50 percent to purchase materials and services needed to implement conservation practices included in their EQIP contract.

Applicants must:

- Control or own eligible land
- Comply with adjusted gross income limitation (AGI) provisions
- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation requirements
- Develop an NRCS EQIP plan of operations

Additional restrictions and program requirements may apply.

How to Apply

Visit your local USDA Service Center to apply or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted.

NRCS will help eligible producers develop an EQIP plan of operations, which will become the basis of the EQIP contract.

EQIP applications will be ranked based on a number of factors, including the environmental benefits and cost effectiveness of the proposal.

What's New in EQIP

- The former Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program was folded into EQIP.
- Advance payment opportunities now exist for veteran agricultural producers.
- Advance payments for socially disadvantaged, beginning and limited resource farmers, Indian tribes and veterans were raised from 30 percent to 50 percent.
- Payment limitations are set at \$450,000 with no ability to waive.

EQIP – Air Quality Initiative

The NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Air Quality Initiative provides financial assistance to implement conservation practices that address air resource issues for designated locations throughout the nation. Agricultural atmospheric related concerns include greenhouse gas emissions, ozone precursors, volatile organic compounds, airborne particulate matter, and some odor-related volatile compounds. For more information about agricultural air quality concerns, see the Air Quality topic.

Who Can Apply

Eligible applicants include individuals, legal entities, Indian Tribes, or joint operations engaged in agricultural production on eligible land that have an air quality related natural resource concern.

Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, private non-industrial forestland, and other farm or ranch lands. Producers must submit a program application and other documentation to support eligibility to be considered for financial assistance through EQIP.

AWEP – Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

Introduction

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) was a voluntary conservation initiative that provided financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to implement agricultural water enhancement activities on agricultural land to conserve surface and ground water and improve water quality.

As part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), AWEP operated through program contracts with producers to plan and implement conservation practices in project areas established through partnership agreements.

How AWEP Worked

Each fiscal year, NRCS made AWEP financial and technical assistance available to eligible owners and operators of agricultural lands who participated in approved AWEP project areas.

After the Chief announced approved AWEP project areas, eligible agricultural producers were able to submit a program application.

NRCS entered into partnership agreements with eligible entities and organizations that wanted to promote ground and surface water conservation or improve water quality on agricultural lands.

AWEP was not a grant program. Eligible partners entered into multi-year agreements with NRCS to promote ground and surface water conservation, or improve water quality on eligible agricultural lands. AWEP was intended to leverage investment in natural resources conservation along with services and non-Federal resources of other eligible partners.

Individual producers were not eligible to submit a partnership proposal.

WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) was a voluntary program for conservation-minded landowners who wanted to develop and improve wildlife habitat on agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Indian land.

The Agricultural Act of 2014 (enacted on February 7, 2014) repealed the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).

NRCS will continue to support existing active WHIP contracts entered into prior to passage of the Agricultural Act of 2014, using the rules and policy in effect at the time of contract obligations. Portions of the WHIP Statute were rolled into the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

WBP - Water Bank Program

Introduction

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Congress appropriated \$4 million to fund the Water Bank Program (WBP) and NRCS is opening enrollment into the program in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

The purposes of WBP include:

1. Preserving and improving major wetlands as habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife
2. Conserving surface waters
3. Reducing soil and wind erosion
4. Contributing to flood control
5. Improving water quality
6. Improving subsurface moisture
7. Enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape

WBP Focus for FY2015

WBP will focus on flood reduction this fiscal year. Severe flooding of agricultural land has been a problem in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, parts of which lie in the prairie pothole region. Eligible land for this year's WBP included flooded agricultural land, flooded hay, pasture or rangeland, and flooded private forestland.

The intent of WBP is to keep water on the land for the benefit of migratory wildlife such as waterfowl. Landowners and operators can sign new 10-year rental agreements to protect wetlands and provide wildlife habitat. Landowners receive annual payments for conserving and protecting wetlands and adjacent lands from adverse land uses and activities, such as drainage, that would destroy the wetland characteristics of those lands.

Participant Eligibility

To be eligible to participate in the WBP, a person must:

1. Be the landowner of eligible land for which enrollment is sought for at least two years preceding the date of the agreement unless new ownership was acquired by will or succession as a result of death of the previous owner; or
2. Have possession of the land by written lease over all designated acreage in the agreement for at least two years preceding the date of the agreement unless new ownership was acquired by will or succession as a result of death of the previous owner and will have possession over all the designated acreage for the agreement period.

Financial assistance will not be available for conservation practices through WBP. WBP participants who wish to establish or maintain conservation practices may apply for financial assistance through other NRCS or state financial assistance programs where available. NRCS will assist participants with developing a Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO) for the enrolled land and associated adjacent land when applicable.

Land enrolled in WBP may not be cropped. NRCS may authorize haying under limited circumstances, such as severe drought. NRCS may authorize grazing where necessary to enhance the wetland functions and values of the land under agreement.

Each participating farm or ranch will enter into a WBP agreement, which will become effective on January 1 of the calendar year in which the agreement is approved. For this signup period, agreements will be considered effective on January 1, 2015. WBP contracts are non-renewable, 10-year rental agreements. Rental payments are made annually.

EWP – Emergency Watershed Protection Program

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) was established by Congress to respond to emergencies created by natural disasters. The EWP Program is designed to help people and conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, drought, windstorms, and other natural occurrences. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the EWP Program; EWP-Recovery, and EWP-Floodplain Easement (FPE).

Who is Eligible?

EWP - Recovery

The EWP Program is a recovery effort program aimed at relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance, but must be represented by a project sponsor that must be a legal subdivision of the State, such as a city, county, township or conservation district, and Native American Tribes or Tribal governments.

NRCS may pay up to 75 percent of the construction cost of emergency measures. The remaining 25 percent must come from local sources and can be in the form of cash or in-kind services.

EWP - FPE

Privately-owned lands or lands owned by local and state governments may be eligible for participation in EWP-FPE. To be eligible, lands must meet one of the following criteria:

- Lands that have been damaged by flooding at least once within the previous calendar year or have been subject to flood damage at least twice within the previous 10 years
- Other lands within the floodplain are eligible, provided the lands would contribute to the restoration of the flood storage and flow, provide for control of erosion, or that would improve the practical management of the floodplain easement
- Lands that would be inundated or adversely impacted as a result of a dam breach

What Practice Measures Are There?

EWP – Recovery

EWP work is not limited to any one set of measures. It is designed for installation of recovery measures to safeguard lives and property as a result of a natural disaster. NRCS completes a Damage Survey Report (DSR) which provides a case-by-case investigation of the work necessary to repair or protect a site.

Watershed impairments that the EWP Program addresses are debris-clogged stream channels, undermined and unstable streambanks, jeopardized water control structures and public infrastructures, wind-borne debris removal, and damaged upland sites stripped of protective vegetation by fire or drought.

EWP – FPE

EWP-FPE easements are restored to the extent practicable to the natural environment and may include both structural and nonstructural practices to restore the flood storage and flow, erosion control, and improve the practical management of the easement.

Structures, including buildings, within the floodplain easement must be demolished and removed, or relocated outside the 100-year floodplain or dam breach inundation area.

EWP is designed for installation of recovery measures. Activities include providing financial and technical assistance to:

- remove debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges,
- reshape and protect eroded banks,
- correct damaged drainage facilities,
- establish cover on critically eroding lands,
- repair levees and structures, and
- repair conservation practices.

NRCS may purchase EWP easements "in lieu of recovery" on any floodplain lands that have been impaired within the last 12 months or that have a history of repeated flooding (i.e., flooded at least two times during the past 10 years). If it is more cost effective, EWP-Floodplain Easement (FPE) can be used as an alternative to EWP. See the comparison of EWP and EWP-FPE.

EWP work is not limited to any one set of prescribed measures. A case-by-case investigation of the work is made by NRCS.

Eligibility

Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance but must be represented by a project sponsor. Sponsors include legal subdivisions of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, conservation district, or any Native American tribe or tribal organization as defined in section 4 of the Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act.

Sponsor's Obligations

Sponsors are responsible for:

- providing land rights to do repair work
- securing the necessary permits
- furnishing the local cost share
- accomplishing the installation of work

Technical Assistance

Conservation Technical Assistance

The CTA Program provides land users with proven conservation technology and the delivery system needed to achieve the benefits of a healthy and productive landscape. The primary purposes of the CTA Program are to:

- Reduce soil loss from erosion
- Solve soil, water quality, water conservation, air quality, and agricultural waste management problems
- Reduce potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or drought
- Enhance the quality of fish and wildlife habitat
- Improve the long term sustainability of all lands, including cropland, forestland, grazing lands, coastal lands, and developed and/or developing lands
- Assist others in facilitating changes in land use as needed for natural resource protection and sustainability

Technical assistance is the help provided by NRCS, employees of other entities or agencies under the technical supervision of NRCS, to clients to address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources. The primary objectives of the CTA Program are to:

- Assist individuals or groups of decision makers, communities, conservation districts, units of State and local government, tribes, and others to voluntarily conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources

- Provide community, watershed, and area-wide technical assistance in collaboration with local units of government, to develop and implement resource management plans that conserve, maintain and improve natural resources
- Assist agricultural producers to comply with the Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland (Swampbuster) them to become eligible to participate in other Federal, State, and local conservation programs
- Provide soils information and interpretation to individuals or groups of decision makers, communities, States, and others to aid sound decision making in the wise use and management of soil resources
- Collect, analyze, interpret, display, and disseminate information about the status, condition, and trend of soil, water, and related natural Conservation Compliance Provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended
- Assist decision-makers to comply with Federal, State, tribal, and local environmental regulations and related requirements, and to prepare resources so that people can make informed decisions for natural resource use and management
- Assess the effects of conservation practices and systems on the condition of natural resources

CPGL - Conservation of Private Grazing Land

The Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL) initiative will ensure that technical, educational, and related assistance is provided to those who own private grazing lands. It is not a cost share program. This technical assistance will offer opportunities for: better grazing land management; protecting soil from erosive wind and water; using more energy-efficient ways to produce food and fiber; conserving water; providing habitat for wildlife; sustaining forage and grazing plants; using plants to sequester greenhouse gases and increase soil organic matter; and using grazing lands as a source of biomass energy and raw materials for industrial products.

Conservation of Private Grazing Land Program was authorized by the conservation provisions of the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform Act (1996 Farm Bill). The intent of this provision is to provide accelerated technical assistance to owners and managers of grazing land. The purpose is to provide a coordinated technical program to conserve and enhance grazing land resources and provide related benefits to all citizens of the United States. Currently, funds have not been appropriated for this program.

Easements

Protecting and Enhancing our Natural Resources

NRCS offers easement programs to landowners who want to maintain or enhance their land in a way beneficial to agriculture and/or the environment. All NRCS easement programs are voluntary. We provide technical help and financial assistance, but local landowners and organizations are needed to make NRCS easement programs successful.

Easement Programs

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) helps landowners restore, enhance and protect forestland resources on private lands through easements and financial assistance. Through HFRP, landowners promote the recovery of endangered or threatened species, improve plant and animal biodiversity and enhance carbon sequestration.

ACEP - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.

USDA Seeks Partner Proposals to Protect and Restore Critical Wetlands

NRCS is making \$15 million in financial and technical assistance available to help eligible conservation partners leverage local resources to voluntarily protect, restore and enhance critical wetlands on private and tribal agricultural land nationwide. The funding is provided through the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership, a special enrollment option under the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

Benefits

Agricultural Land Easements protect the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Land protected by agricultural land easements provides additional public benefits, including environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat and protection of open space.

Wetland Reserve Easements provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities.

Agricultural Land Easements

NRCS provides financial assistance to eligible partners for purchasing Agricultural Land Easements that protect the agricultural use and conservation values of eligible land. In the case of working

farms, the program helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including rangeland, pastureland and shrub land. Eligible partners include American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations that have farmland, rangeland or grassland protection programs.

Under the Agricultural Land component, NRCS may contribute up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement. Where NRCS determines that grasslands of special environmental significance will be protected, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.

Wetland Reserve Easements

NRCS also provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a wetland reserve easement. For acreage owned by an Indian tribe, there is an additional enrollment option of a 30-year contract.

Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership – The 2014 Farm Bill replaced the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program with the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership as an enrollment option under ACEP – WRE. WREP continues to be a voluntary program through which NRCS signs agreements with eligible partners to leverage resources to carry out high priority wetland protection, restoration and enhancement and to improve wildlife habitat.

Partner benefits through WREP agreements include:

- Wetland restoration and protection in critical areas
- Ability to cost-share restoration or enhancement beyond NRCS requirements through leveraging
- Able to participate in the management or monitoring of selected project locations
- Ability to use innovative restoration methods and practices

Eligibility

Land eligible for agricultural easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forest land. NRCS will prioritize applications that protect agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize the protection of contiguous acres devoted to agricultural use.

Land eligible for wetland reserve easements includes farmed or converted wetland that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. NRCS will prioritize applications based the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

To enroll land through agricultural land easements, NRCS enters into cooperative agreements with eligible partners. Each easement is required to have an agricultural land easement plan that promotes the long-term viability of the land.

To enroll land through wetland reserve easements, NRCS enters into purchase agreements with eligible private landowners or Indian tribes that include the right for NRCS to develop and implement a wetland reserve restoration easement plan. This plan restores, protects, and enhances the wetland's functions and values.

HFRP – Healthy Forests Reserve Program

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) helps landowners restore, enhance and protect forestland resources on private lands through easements and financial assistance. HFRP aids the recovery of endangered and threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, improves plant and animal biodiversity and enhances carbon sequestration.

Benefits

HFRP provides landowners with 10-year restoration agreements and 30-year or permanent easements for specific conservation actions. For acreage owned by an Indian tribe, there is an additional enrollment option of a 30-year contract. Some landowners may avoid regulatory restrictions under the Endangered Species Act by restoring or improving habitat on their land for a specified period of time.

Eligibility

HFRP applicants must provide proof of ownership, or an operator (tenant) must provide written concurrence from the landowner of tenancy for the period of the HFRP restoration agreement in order to be eligible. Land enrolled in HFRP easements must be privately owned or owned by Indian tribes and restore, enhance or measurably increase the recovery of threatened or endangered species, improve biological diversity or increase carbon storage.

Land enrolled in HFRP easements - must be privately owned or owned by Indian tribes and restore, enhance or measurably increase the recovery of threatened or endangered species, improve biological diversity or increase carbon storage.

Landscape Planning

Landscape planning is a natural resource problem solving and management process. The process integrates economic, social, and ecological considerations to meet private and public needs. This approach, which emphasizes desired future conditions, helps improve natural resource management, minimize conflict, and address problems and opportunities.

The success of landscape planning and implementation depends on the voluntary participation of communities, groups, individual clients, and others. The process is based on the premise that clients will make and implement sound decisions if they understand their resources, natural resource problems and opportunities, and the effects of their decisions. It enables them to analyze and work with complex natural processes in definable and measurable terms.

The planning process considers people and the resources they use or manage. Landscape planning is based on a desired future condition that is developed by the client for an individual conservation plan, or by the client and stakeholders, in the case of an area-wide conservation plan or assessment encompassing a watershed or other defined area.

Programs

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) - EWP safeguards lives and property from floods, drought, and the products of erosion on any watershed whenever fire, flood or any other natural occurrence is causing or has caused a sudden impairment of the watershed. Learn more about [EWP](#).

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) - WFPO provides technical and financial assistance to entities of State and local governments (project sponsors) for planning and installing watershed projects.

Watershed Surveys and Planning (WSP) - WSP authorizes NRCS to cooperate with Federal, State, and local agencies and Tribal governments to protect watersheds from damage caused by erosion, floodwater, sediment, and to conserve and develop water and land resources.

Watershed Operations - The Small Watershed Program works through local government sponsors and helps participants solve natural resource and related economic problems on a watershed basis in watersheds of 250,000 or fewer acres. Learn more about what some of the projects included about the Watershed Operations.

Watershed Rehabilitation - provides assistance to owners of a previously installed NRCS-assisted public dam and rehabilitation of the dam is needed to maintain the many benefits it provides.