

Federal Farm Bill Conservation Programs

Incentives for Wildlife Habitat Enhancement



Historically, provisions for the conservation of soil and water quality were the Farm Bill's primary objectives. Those pieces of legislation had significant positive impacts on wildlife species in certain areas of the country, most notably for pheasants in the Midwest and waterfowl in the mid-continent region. However, benefits for wildlife in the Southeast were few, with most acreage enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), going into loblolly pine tree plantings or other practices with limited wildlife benefits.

Significant changes in the 1996 Farm Bill gave wildlife habitat co-equal status with soil and water conservation as priorities. In addition, several new programs were added which allowed landowners to receive cost-share and/or annual rental payments for implementing practices, which create or enhance quality wildlife habitat. Among the programs available to the private landowner for enhancing wildlife habitat were CRP, Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) and Stewardship Incentives Program (SIP).

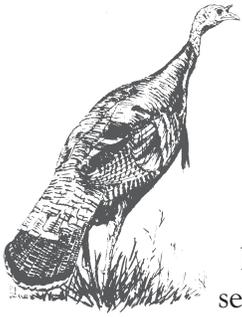
The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 was landmark legislation for conservation funding and focusing on environmental issues. These new programs assisted farmers and ranchers in meeting environmental challenges on their land. The 2002 Farm Bill simplified existing programs and created new programs to address high priority environmental and production goals and enhances the long-term quality of our environment and conservation of our natural resources. The Bill also stated, in effect, "...bobwhite quail are a valued traditional symbol of farmed landscapes....the conservation programs of this farm bill have large potential to contribute to bobwhite quail habitat objectives. President Bush announced on August 4, 2004 the creation of a new 250,000-acre field border practice, "Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds (CP33)," in the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP). CCRP, a streamlined variant of the Conservation Reserve Program, is designed to place a variety of buffer practices on working cropland, to enable mutual accommodation of cropping and conservation. A notable feature of the CCRP is its continuous signup process, whereby producers with

eligible land can apply any working day of the year and be accepted immediately, instead of having to wait for periodic competitive signups. Most CCRP practices are designed primarily for sediment retention and water quality improvement, with only marginal wildlife benefits. CP33 is designed and intended as a wildlife practice.

The conservation programs in each Farm Bill has evolved to provide financial incentives to establish beneficial management practices on land to not only protect soil and water but to enhance habitat for a number of wildlife species. Simply put, it means there has never been a better time to utilize existing programs to assist with wildlife habitat enhancement on your property! So if you have an interest in improving wildlife habitat on your property, please use this brochure to learn more about the wildlife habitat options available in Federal Farm Bill Conservation Programs and contact your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office for further information on the programs and sign-up procedures. Additional sources of information and assistance are also listed for your convenience.



CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP)



The **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**, administered by FSA, offers landowners incentives to conserve soil, water, and wildlife habitat. Landowners can apply to enroll highly erodible land and other environmentally sensitive areas in CRP. By enrolling land, a landowner can receive annual rental payments and cost-share to implement conservation practices.

Landowners must submit offers for CRP contracts at the local FSA office during sign-up periods announced by the Secretary of Agriculture. Changes in the CRP bid and ranking procedures now favor those landowners willing to implement "wildlife friendly" practices.

Some beneficial wildlife practices available:

General Sign Up Practices

- Planting native grasses (CP2)
- Planting longleaf or loblolly pines spacing appropriate for wildlife and according to management plan and maintaining 15-20% open land in native grasses, shrubs and herbs (CP3)
- Establishing permanent wildlife habitat (CP4D)
- Loblolly pines established at or thinned as needed to provide 15-20% openings of native herbaceous and/or shrub planting or natural regeneration best suited for wildlife (CP11)

Continuous Sign Up Practices

- Filter strips (CP21)
- Riparian buffers (CP22)
- Wetlands restoration (CP23)
- Marginal pastureland wildlife habitat buffer (CP29)
- Bottomland hardwood establishment on wetlands (CP31)
- Habitat buffers for upland birds (CP33)
- Longleaf planting (CP36)
- Native warm season grasses, forbs and legumes for nesting and brood-rearing. State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (CP38) is currently only available in selected counties.

Eligibility:

To be eligible, your land must meet one of the following criteria:

- Must be cropland planted to an agricultural commodity at least 4 of 6 years during 2002-2007
- Currently enrolled in CRP with a contract expiring this year

- Marginal pastureland if appropriate for offered practice

If the land meets one of the above criteria, then it is eligible if it fits at least one of the following categories:

- Highly erodible land
- Cropped wetland
- Devoted to certain environmental priority practices
- Subject to scour erosion
- Located in a CRP National or State Conservation Priority Area
- Be cropland associated with, or adjacent to, non cropped wetlands
- Or meets criteria necessary for continuous sign up

Sign-ups:

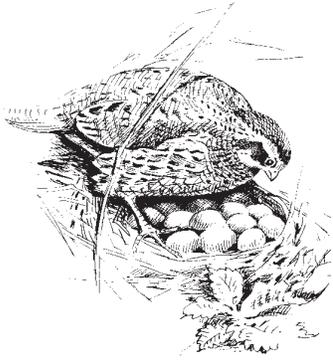
- Where: County Farm Service Agency (FSA) office
- When: General sign-up periods announced by USDA. Continuous sign up can be enrolled at any time.

Financial Assistance:

Per acre rental payments for 10 to 15 years; 90% cost-share for practice establishment. Numerous additional incentives available for Continuous Signup Practices.



WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)



The **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** was established by the 1996 Farm Bill for the purpose of making technical and financial assistance available to landowners to develop, enhance, and restore upland wildlife, wetland wildlife, and other types of wildlife habitat.

In South Carolina, WHIP is specifically targeted towards developing, restoring, and enhancing habitat for the following "priority species":

- Bobwhite quail and associated grassland/shrub songbirds
- Wintering waterfowl and shorebirds
- Threatened and Endangered Species

WHIP Objectives in South Carolina:

- Restore early successional habitat for bobwhite quail and associated grassland/shrub songbirds
- Restore historical rice field and marshland habitat for wintering waterfowl and shorebird habitat
- Restore Longleaf Pine ecosystem
- Restore and enhance trout stream habitat in the Upstate of South Carolina
- Restore and enhance habitat for the threatened and endangered species of South Carolina

Some beneficial wildlife practices available under WHIP include:

- Permanent firebreak establishment
- Field borders and filter strips (native vegetation only)
- Conservation Cover-Native warm season grasses/legumes
- Prescribed burning (for low basal areas only)
- Forest Stand Improvement-Mechanical or Herbicide
- Invasive Plant Control: Brush Management and Herbaceous Weed Control
- Wetland Habitat Management Enhancement

Eligibility:

All privately owned lands in South Carolina are eligible for WHIP. Projects will be ranked based upon wildlife benefits for the targeted species and cost effectiveness of the proposed project.

Financial Assistance:

Funding is available from NRCS for up to 75% of the cost of establishment of eligible practices and up to 90% for Historically Underserved applicants. Contracts are for 2 to 5 years.

Sign ups:

Applications for WHIP are accepted on a continuous basis, however, NRCS establishes application "cut-off" or submission deadline dates for evaluation and ranking of eligible applications. Competition for contracts is statewide. Contact your local NRCS office for more information or assistance.



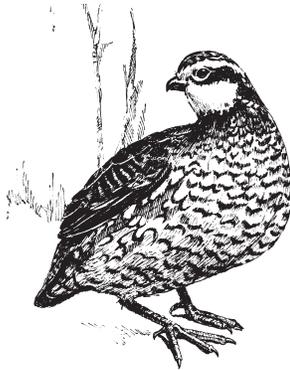
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is a voluntary program designed to identify conservation concerns and set conservation priorities to address soil erosion, water quality, wildlife habitat and other resource issues.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) clarifies EQIP purposes to include forest management and energy conservation, as well as practices related to organic production and fuels management. Practices such as field borders, filter strips, tree shrub establishment and conservation cover, designed to protect water quality, may also be maintained as early successional habitats to benefit bobwhite quail and other species. Riparian (streamside) buffer zones used to protect streams from runoff can also be highly productive areas for wildlife, providing food, cover and travel corridors.

Objectives of EQIP:

- Reduce nonpoint source pollution
- Reduce emissions that contribute to air quality impairment



- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation on agricultural lands into the state's waters
- Promote at-risk species habitat conservation

Eligibility:

Landowners who are engaged in crop or livestock production are eligible for the program. Eligible land includes cropland, pasture, and private non-industrial forestland. Priority will be given to water conservation or irrigation efficiency applications that will reduce water use or where the producer agrees not to use any associated water savings to bring new land under irrigation production. Applications that improve conservation practices or systems already in place at the time of offer acceptance will also be given priority.

Financial Assistance:

Cost-share is available for up to 75% of the cost of establishment of the eligible practices and up to 90% for Historically Underserved applicants. Agreements are for 2 to 5 years with a maximum of 10 years.

Sign-ups:

Applications for EQIP are accepted on a continuous basis, however, NRCS establishes application "cut-off" or submission deadline dates for evaluation and ranking of eligible applications. Competition for contracts is county wide. Contact your local NRCS office for more information or assistance.

WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP)

The **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** is designed to help eligible landowners protect, restore, and enhance wetlands. Under this program, landowners enter into a permanent easement, a 30-year easement, or a 10-year wetlands restoration agreement in exchange for a portion of the restoration costs. USDA NRCS provides financial and technical support to conserve wetlands. The landowner maintains full control over access and retains the right to enjoy non-developed recreational activities such as hunting and fishing. Other uses must be approved.

Objectives:

Restore, enhance, and protect wetlands on private or tribal property.

Eligibility:

Eligible lands include any areas where the natural wetland condition has been altered and a high potential

for restoration exists. Inclusion of non-wetland areas needed to buffer the restored wetland from disturbances is encouraged. Owners must have owned the land for 7 or more years. Land currently enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), or land with trees established under CRP, is not eligible. Hardwood timber clear-cuts are not eligible for 7 years post cutting.

Financial Assistance:

Permanent Easement – USDA pays 100 percent of the easement value and up to 100 percent of the restoration costs.

30-Year Easement- 75% of what would be paid for a permanent easement and restoration costs. Easement recording costs are also paid.

Sign-ups:

Continuous sign-up at USDA NRCS offices. Competition for contracts is statewide.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (FSP)

The **Forest Stewardship Program (FSP)** is a federally funded program administered by the South Carolina Forestry Commission. Landowners are furnished a written management plan prepared by a team of natural resource professionals and tailored to fit the landowner's objectives for the property. Objectives include wildlife, timber, recreation, soil and water

conservation, and aesthetics. All landowners who own at least 10 acres with at least 5 acres of woodland are eligible for FSP. There is no upper limit on acreage. For more information on the Forest Stewardship Program, contact the local office of the South Carolina Forestry Commission (SCFC) or contact the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources' regional offices.

GRASSLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP)

The **Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)** is a voluntary conservation program that helps landowners and operators restore grassland and protect it from conversion, while maintaining the areas as grazing lands, and enhancing plant and animal biodiversity. The program is administered by NRCS and FSA. Applications may be filed for a rental contract or an easement. Eligible land, privately or tribally owned, contains grasses, forbs or shrubs or is land that is located in an area that historically has been dominated by grassland, forbs or shrubs and has potential to provide

habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses while still retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding, subject to certain restrictions during nesting seasons of bird species that are in significant decline or are protected by Federal or State law. Permanent easements are purchased at fair market value, minus grazing value, and cropland base is permanently eliminated. It is a continuous sign up program.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (CSP)

The **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** is administered by NRCS and runs from 2009-2012. The purpose is to reward good stewardship and provide incentives to address additional resource concerns on working lands. Eligible land is tribal agricultural lands, private agricultural lands, and incidental non-industrial private forest lands not currently enrolled in CRP, WRP or GRP. The entire operation must be enrolled and must include all eligible land operated under

the applicant's control for the term of the proposed contract. Contracts are for five years. Sign up is continuous with at least one ranking period in the first quarter of each fiscal year. Two types of payments are offered: 1. Annual payments for installing and adopting new additional activities, and improving, maintaining and managing existing activities. 2. Supplemental payment for the adoption of resource-conserving crop rotations.

Professionals are available and willing to assist you in enrolling in any of the Farm Bill programs.

For more information, please contact any of the agencies listed below:

- SCDNR
PO Box 167
Columbia, SC 29202
803-734-3609
- Natural Resources
Conservation Service
Contact Local County Office
or call: 803-765-5686
- Soil & Water
Conservation Districts
Contact Local County Office
or call: 803-734-9100
- South Carolina
Forestry Commission
Contact Local County Office
or call: 803-896-8800
- Farm Service Agency
Contact Local County Office
or call: 803-806-3830
- US Fish and Wildlife Service
Contact: 843-727-4707

www.dnr.sc.gov



The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, disability, religion or age. Direct all inquiries to the Office of Human Resources, PO Box 167, Columbia, SC 29202.

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