



Conservation Reserve Program: Upland Bird Habitat

OVERVIEW

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program. FSA contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed, but instead used for conservation benefits.

One feature of CRP is designed to create up to 500,000 acres of habitat for upland and grassland dependent birds. Upland birds include the northern bobwhite quail, pheasant, prairie chicken, mourning dove, wild turkey, finches, sparrows, red-winged blackbirds, meadowlark, bobolinks, and other species. The common name for this feature is the "CRP Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative," or CP33.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

Participants in the Conservation Reserve Program establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as "covers") to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years.

Under "continuous enrollment authority," land may be enrolled in CRP at any time. Certain eligibility requirements still apply, but applicants are not subject to competitive bidding.

The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, authorized CRP. The program is also governed by regulations published in 7 CFR, part 1410. The program is implemented by FSA on behalf of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation.

HABITAT BUFFER FOR UPLAND BIRDS INITIATIVE (CP33)

The Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative is part of the Conservation Reserve Program designed to convert marginally productive cropland along the

borders of agricultural fields into grass buffers that create more habitats for upland birds.

One particular upland bird species that benefits from the program is the northern bobwhite, a quail species native to farm landscapes and an icon of the heritage of hunting. Populations have declined from habitat losses and fragmentation due to urbanization, modern agricultural practices, and a transition of former grassy fields into forests — a process called succession.

BENEFITS

FSA estimates that the "covers" created by the program, which helps with nesting and brood-rearing, will increase bobwhite numbers by over 1 million birds annually. The covers also will benefit reptiles, amphibians, aquatic species and other upland birds, many of which are under consideration for designation as an endangered species. Such bird species include the Bell's vireo, orchard oriole, painted bunting, loggerhead shrike, sedge wren, grasshopper sparrow, dickcissel, and Henslow's sparrow, among others. Also, the vegetation established by this program will reduce soil erosion and protect water quality by trapping field sediments and nutrients.

ELIGIBILITY

Enrollment is targeted to geographic areas with the greatest potential to restore northern bobwhite habitat. The applicant must satisfy the basic eligibility and cropping history criteria for CRP. To determine individual eligibility for the initiative, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation or contact your local FSA county office at offices.usda.gov.

APPROVED CONSERVATION PRACTICE

Participants also must establish the proper vegetative species required for the Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative. The vegetation is designed to provide food and cover for the upland

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birds. Secondary benefits may include reducing soil erosion from wind and water, increasing soil and water quality, and protecting and enhancing the ecosystem on the farm. Species may include native warm-season grass, legumes, wildflowers, forbs, and limited shrub and tree plantings, as specified in the program participant's approved USDA conservation plan.

PAYMENTS AND OTHER ASSISTANCE

FSA will offer the following types of payments:

- Signing incentive payments of \$150 per acre;
- Practice incentive payments of up to 40 percent of the eligible establishment cost;
- Annual rental payments for the length of the contract and;
- Cost-share assistance of up to 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable practice costs.

In addition, other groups partner with FSA and can provide assistance. These groups include the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, the National Bobwhite Technical Committee, the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies and its member state agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Quail Unlimited, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and other conservation groups, including local conservation districts.

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state fish and wildlife agencies are expected to offer technical, monitoring and evaluation assistance;
- Quail Unlimited, the National Bobwhite Technical Committee, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and other conservation groups including local conservation districts may provide outreach, technical expertise and other assistance as appropriate.

ENROLLING IN THE PROGRAM

Local FSA offices will take offers for the CRP "Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative" on an ongoing basis. Eligible land may be enrolled at any time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about FSA and its conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation, or contact your local FSA county office at <http://offices.usda.gov>.

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