

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Vermont

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the State of Vermont have launched a \$2 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to protect the 490-square-mile Lake Champlain and its tributaries and the Connecticut River Basin and its tributaries.

CREP uses federal and state resources to safeguard environmentally sensitive land through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Producers enrolled in CRP remove lands from agricultural production and plant native grasses, trees, and other vegetation to reduce sediment runoff and improve the quality of water and wildlife habitat. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. CREP provides rental payments and other financial incentives to encourage producers to voluntarily enroll in 10- to 15-year CRP contracts.

Benefits

CREP will safeguard cropland or marginal pastureland surrounding streams and rivers that flow into Lake Champlain. Program participants will establish tree buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways, and wetlands. These conservation practices are designed to reduce phosphorus loading to the lake by over 96,000 pounds per year. Phosphorus reduction is a key to restoring the environmental

health of Lake Champlain, a crucial link in the Hudson-Saint Lawrence waterway. The buffers are specifically designed to trap sediment, nutrients, and pollutants and provide wildlife habitat for a wide array of species, including lake sturgeon and upland bird species.

Goals

The goals of the Vermont CREP are to:

- Reduce phosphorus loading to Lake Champlain by 48.3 tons per year.
- Enhance wildlife and aquatic habitat.

Program Cost

The expected combined federal and state obligation is \$2.1 million over 15 years, with \$1.46 million from FSA and \$640,000 from Vermont. This does not include any costs that may be borne by producers. Vermont's share is approximately 20 percent of the total program costs; FSA's share is approximately 80 percent.

Eligible Areas

Producers can offer land in the Lake Champlain Basin, which includes: Lamoille, LaPlatte, Mettawee, Missiquoi, Poultney, Winooski Rivers and Otter Creek areas. In addition, producers can offer land in the Connecticut River Basin, which includes: Black, Connecticut, Deerfield,

Ompompanoosuc, Ottaquechee, Passumpsic, Saxtons, Stevens, Waits, Wells, White, and William rivers areas. To find out if your operation is located within the project area, contact your local FSA office.

Approved Conservation Practices

The following conservation practices may be eligible for enrollment into the Vermont CREP:

- CP8A Grass Waterways
- CP21 Filter Strips
- CP22 Riparian Buffer
- CP23 Wetland Restoration

Signup and Eligibility Requirements

Eligible producers can enroll in 10- to 15 year CRP contracts. Producers may extend the benefits of the program through separate contracts with the state. Applicants must be able to offer eligible acreage and satisfy the basic eligibility criteria for CRP. Land must be cropland that has been cropped 4 out of the past 6 years (2002-2007) and is physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible provided it is suitable for use as a riparian buffer planted to trees. Applicants must generally have owned or operated the land for at least one year prior to enrollment. Persons with an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that

contract expires.

CREP Payments

Vermont CREP participants are eligible for four types of USDA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment - a one-time payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for land enrolled in a riparian buffer practice, filter strip, or grassed waterway. FSA makes this payment soon after the contract has been signed.
- Practice Incentive Payment - payment equal to about 40 percent of the total cost for establishing riparian buffers, grass waterways, and filter strips. This payment is in addition to the 50 percent cost share assistance that FSA provides.
- Annual rental payment of about 200 percent of the maximum average soil rental rate for the county in which the land is located, which includes an incentive payment of 100 percent of the base soil rental rate for CRP.
- Cost share assistance for installing the conservation practices on enrolled land.

Enrollment in Other Programs

Applicants may still enroll in general or continuous signup CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous signup. For instance, the CREP enrollment process is on a continuous basis and payments are at a higher effective rate.

Haying and Grazing

Haying and grazing is not allowed during the CRP contract period unless FSA permits it for emergency purposes under normal CRP rules.

For More Information

For more information on the Vermont CREP, contact your local FSA office, or Soil and Water Conservation District office. Additional information is also available on FSA's web site at: www.fsa.usda.gov

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