

Conservation Reserve Program - Kentucky Enhancement Program

Overview

USDA and the state of Kentucky have agreed to implement a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to restore up to 99,500 acres in south central Kentucky's Green River Watershed. Revitalizing this area will help protect Mammoth Cave National Park and the ecologically rich Green River.

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

Benefits

The Green River is one of North America's most diverse ecosystems and the most biologically abundant branch of the Ohio River System. The river flows unhindered for more than 100 miles through 8 counties and through Mammoth Cave National Park, the world's largest and most diverse cave system. The Kentucky CREP will ensure the long-term protection of water quality and habitat for a wide array of wildlife, including threat-

ened and endangered species.

Goals

The goals of the Kentucky CREP are to:

- Reduce by 10 percent the amount of sediment, pesticides, and nutrients entering the Green River and Mammoth Cave system by growing strips of grass and trees around streams and sinkholes;
- Protect wildlife habitat and populations, including threatened and endangered species;
- Restore riparian habitat along the Green River;
- Restore the subterranean ecosystem by targeting 1,000 high priority sinkholes.

Program Cost

The expected federal, state, and private cost over 15 years is more than \$105 million. Of that amount, \$88 million will come from the federal government and \$17 million from Kentucky. This does not include costs that may be borne by producers. Kentucky will also provide financial incentives to extend the life of the program and will seek to buy permanent conservation easements. A private organization, the Nature Conservancy, while not a party to the Kentucky CREP agreement, is also expected to provide incentives to farmers to help ensure full participation in CREP.

Eligible Areas

Producers can offer land in the watershed below the Green River Lake Dam. This includes areas adjacent to streams, rivers, and sinkholes and other land that meet CREP eligibility requirements.

Approved Conservation Practices

The CRP conservation practices approved for this program are:

- CP1 Introduced Grasses
- CP2 Native Grasses
- CP3 Tree Planting
- CP3A Hardwood Tree Planting
- CP4B Permanent Wildlife Habitat (corridors)
- CP4D Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP8A Grassed Waterways
- CP9 Shallow Waterways
- CP10 Grass Cover - Already Established
- CP11 Tree Cover - Already Established
- CP12 Wildlife Food Plots
- CP15A Permanent Vegetative Cover
- CP21 Filter Strips
- CP22 Riparian Buffer
- CP23 Wetland Restoration
- CP23A Wetland Restoration (non-flood plain)
- CP25 Rare or Declining Habitat
- CP29 Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer

Signup and Eligibility Requirements

Eligible producers can enroll in CREP through 10- to 15-year CRP contracts. Producers may extend the benefits of CREP through separate contracts with the state. Applicants must be able to offer eligible acreage and must satisfy the basic eligibility criteria for CRP. Land must be cropland that has been cropped 4 out of the past 6 years and is physically and legally capable of being cropped. 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

Kentucky 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. USDA 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 the riparian buffer practice, filter strip, grassed waterway, or wetland restoration practice. This payment is in addition to the 50 percent cost share assistance that USDA provides.

- Annual rental payment of 150 percent to 200 percent of the dryland cash rental rate, depending on the practice that is selected.
- Cost share assistance for installing the conservation practices on land that is retired.

In addition, Kentucky will offer one time lump sum incentive payments for permanent easements and will provide additional cost-share assistance.

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 USDA permits it for emergency purposes under normal CRP rules.

For More Information

For more information on the Kentucky CREP, contact your local USDA Service Center, Farm Service Agency (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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