



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Ohio Scioto River Watershed

Overview

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state natural resource conservation program that addresses state and nationally significant agricultural related environmental problems. Under CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) to voluntarily enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in contracts of up to 15-years. Participants remove cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees and other vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

The Ohio Scioto River Watershed CREP targets the enrollment of 70,000 acres of land in 31 counties in the Scioto River Watershed. Of this amount, 5,000 acres are targeted for voluntary permanent conservation easements granted to the State of Ohio.

The program is a cooperative project among landowners, FSA, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). Other partners include the City of Columbus, the Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever, Ohio Farm Bureau Federation and Ohio State University.

Benefits

The program will reduce agricultural pollution, soil erosion and the risk of downstream flooding throughout the watershed. This will improve drinking water for Columbus and surrounding communities. The program will help restore wildlife habitat for abundant species, including 33 threatened or endangered fish and mussel species. In addition, the CREP will reduce atmospheric emissions by sequestering soil carbon and will help reduce hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

Goals

The goals of the Ohio Scioto River Watershed CREP are to:

- Enroll 70,000 acres of eligible cropland and marginal pastureland into CREP for the establishment of grass filter strips, controlled drainage water management components, riparian forest buffers, wetlands and wildlife habitat;
- Seek 5,000 acres of state permanent conservation easements through state and private contributions;
- Improve the quality of public drinking water supplies in Columbus, Ohio, and surrounding communities;
- Ensure that water quality standards are in accordance with the Clean Water Act;
- Reduce agricultural chemicals in public water supplies to below acceptable levels provided in the Environmental Protection Act.
- Annually reduce:
 - Sediment loading by 20 percent, from 350,000 metric tons to 280,000 metric tons.
 - Phosphorus loading by 20 percent, from 1,000 metric tons to 800 metric tons.
 - Nitrate-N loading by 30 percent, from 20,000 metric tons to 14,000 metric tons.
- Restore wetlands to improve water quality in the affected watersheds;
- Increase wildlife habitat by at least 15 percent to benefit wetland, grassland and riparian corridor species, such as migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, neo-tropical migrant birds, non-game grassland birds, reptiles and amphibians.
- Improve the distribution and abundance of 31 threatened or endangered fish and mussel species, including:
 - Clubshell mussel, federally endangered.
 - Northern riffleshell mussel, federally endangered.
 - Washboard mussel, state endangered.
 - Scioto Madtom fish, federally endangered.
 - Spotted Darter fish, state endangered.
- Reduce atmospheric emissions by planting hardwood trees, bottomland hardwood

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forests and long-term grass covers that will sequester an additional 1 billion pounds of soil carbon; and

- Reduce nutrient loading to waters that may contribute to hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico by installing riparian buffers adjacent to rivers and streams.

Areas Included

Landowners can offer eligible cropland and marginal pastureland adjacent to waterways in the Scioto River Watershed. This area includes 31 Ohio counties: Adams, Allen, Auglaize, Champaign, Clark, Clinton, Crawford, Delaware, Fairfield, Fayette, Franklin, Greene, Hardin, Highland, Hocking, Jackson, Knox, Licking, Logan, Madison, Marion, Morrow, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Richland, Ross, Scioto, Union, Vinton and Wyandot.

Eligibility

In addition, cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland along streams, watercourses and certain upland areas is also eligible for enrollment.

Persons who have acreage under an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are ineligible for CREP on that acreage until that contract expires. Other requirements will also apply. Interested producers should contact their local FSA county office for specific information regarding their eligibility for CREP.

Sign-up and Contract Duration

Sign-up for the CREP will be announced later by the State and continues until enrollment goals are attained, or through Dec. 31, 2007, whichever comes first. Land enrolled in the program remains under contract for a period of 14 to 15 years, as specified in the contract.

Approved Conservation Measures

To better serve program goals, the following CRP conservation practices are approved for the Ohio Scioto River Watershed CREP:

- CP1 - Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes (a minimum of three cool-season grasses and one forb required);
- CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses;
- CP3 - Tree Planting;
- CP3A - Hardwood Tree Planting;
- CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Noneasement;
- CP9 - Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife;
- CP10 - Vegetative Cover - Grass - Already Established;
- CP15A - Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips);
- CP21 - Filter Strips;
- CP22 - Riparian Buffer;
- CP23 - Wetland Restoration;
- CP23A - Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain;
- CP25 - Rare and Declining Habitat;
- CP29 - Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer;
- CP30 - Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer; and

- CP31 - Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands.

Payments

Subject to contract terms and certain limitations, CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of FSA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment: A one-time payment of \$100 to \$150 per acre for land enrolled under approved conservation practices. This payment is made after the contract has been signed and approved.
- Practice Incentive Payment: A one-time payment equal to 40 percent of the eligible reimbursable cost of approved conservation practices.
- Wetland Restoration Incentive Payment: A one-time payment that is 25 percent of the required hydrologic restoration costs for conservation practices CP23 and CP23A.
- Cost-share Assistance: Cost-share of up to 50 percent for the installation of approved conservation practices.
- Annual Rental Payment: An annual payment for the life of the contract. The payment consists of three components:
 - Base Soil Rental Rate, which is determined by calculating the normal CRP weighted average soil rental rate for the three predominant soil types using the current posted soil rental rates for cropland offers. For marginal pastureland, the base rental rates for cropland will be used.

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- Incentive Payment of 150 percent for land established as a CP1 or CP10 practice; 175 percent for land established as a CP3, CP4D, CP15A or CP21 practice; 200 percent for land established as a CP2, CP3A, CP4D, CP9, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP29, CP30 or CP31 practice; and 0 percent for land established as a CP21 practice or land enrolled under infeasible-to-farm provisions.
- Annual Maintenance Payment in an amount consistent with applicable CRP procedures.
- Make one-time incentive payments of up to \$500 per acre for certain wetland restoration and wildlife habitat practices, not to exceed 10 acres per tract.
- Offer voluntary permanent conservation easements on 5,000 enrolled acres to be funded by the Nature Conservancy, other private partners and, if available, through the state.
- Provide appropriate technical and other program assistance.

Cost

The total cost over a 15-year period is estimated at \$207.3 million, with FSA contributing \$151.3 million and the State of Ohio and local partners funding \$56 million. The \$207.3 million does not include any costs that may be assumed by producers.

Partnerships and Assistance

The State of Ohio, in collaboration with public and private partners, will:

- Contribute no less than 20 percent of the overall annual program costs, including payments to participants and in-kind contributions to private and public partners such as SWCD, the City of Columbus and non-governmental organizations.
- Enter into separate cost-share agreements and make incentive payments for livestock exclusion fencing for riparian land in a CP21, CP22, CP25, CP29, CP30 or CP31 practice.
- Make one-time incentive payments of up to \$40 per acre for the installation of warm season grass seedings.

CREP and CRP

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select to enhance their land; applicants may still enroll eligible land in the regular general CRP or continuous sign-up CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous sign-up. For instance, CREP payments are at a higher effective rate.

Note: Haying and grazing are not permitted during the CRP contract period unless FSA allows them for emergency or managed haying and grazing purposes, if applicable, under normal CRP rules.

More Information

More information on the Ohio Scioto River Watershed CREP is available at local FSA county offices, on FSA's Web site at: www.fsa.usda.gov and on ODNR's Web site at: www.dnr.state.oh.us/odnr/soil+water.

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