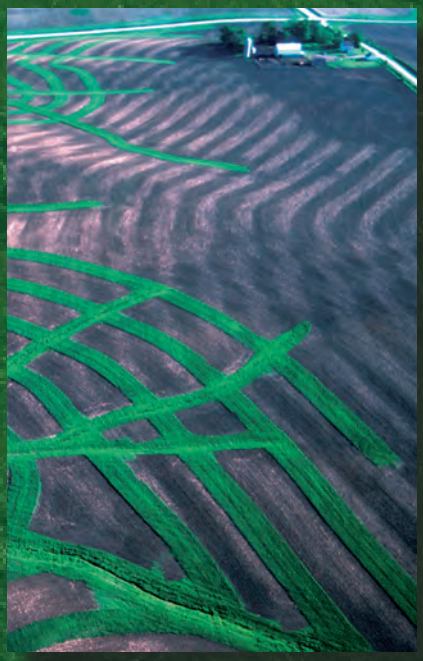
Draft

Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Conservation Reserve Program

USDA

FSA

FARM SERVICE AGENCY



July 2014

Draft

SUPPLEMENTAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Farm Service Agency
United States Department of Agriculture

Abstract

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) proposes to implement changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) identified in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill). The CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 (1985 Farm Bill), as amended, and is governed by regulations published in 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 1410. The CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, the CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. The CRP is a CCC program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) with the support of other Federal and local agencies.

The Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190), implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 CFR 1500-1508), and the FSA's implementing regulations *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799).

The 2014 Farm Bill extends enrollment authority for the CRP to 2018 and aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As the FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative. Other elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to the FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action Alternative. In addition, the FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing. The SPEIS addresses the following alternatives:

No Action Alternative. The non-discretionary changes identified in the 2014 Farm Bill include:

- *Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities* – grasslands that would have been previously eligible for the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), are now eligible for enrollment in the CRP and enrollment would be limited to no more than 2 million acres. Authorized activities on grasslands would be the same as those previously authorized under the GRP.

- *Final Year of Contract* – a CRP participant would be allowed to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program and perform activities to improve or maintain the existing conservation system during the year prior to the expiration of the contract. Likewise, expiring CRP land can be enrolled in a new program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, without violating the contract.

Proposed Action. The discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, as well as additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment and expanding the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing, include:

- *Targeted Enrollment* – in addition to the long-standing General and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods, the FSA proposes to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land through a reverse auction approach for select conservation practices. Targeted enrollment could enable the FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap, while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit.
- *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies* – the State Technical Committee must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is: at least once every 5 years, but no more frequently than once every 3 years for managed harvesting, and not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing. Harvesting and grazing activities still must avoid the Primary Nesting Season.
- *Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional Conservation Practices* – the Secretary would be afforded the discretionary authority to make additional conservation practices, that currently are ineligible for any type of haying or grazing, to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during wide-spread drought conditions. Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed conservation practices would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or Federal agencies.

To comment on the Draft SPEIS, please use one of the following methods:

Regular Mail:

c/o Cardno TEC
11817 Canon Blvd., Suite 300
Newport News, VA 23606

Internet:

http://crpspeis.com

www.regulations.gov

Email:

CRPComments@cardnotec.com

For additional information, please contact:

Nell Fuller
National Environmental Compliance Manager
Farm Service Agency, USDA
Mail Stop 0513, Office 4715
1400 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20250
nell.fuller@wdc.usda.gov

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), proposes to implement programmatic changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) based on those changes included in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill). The CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, the CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. The CRP is a CCC program administered by the FSA with the support of other Federal and local agencies.

This document is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190), implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and the FSA's implementing regulations *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799). The Proposed Action being addressed in this document is programmatic in nature and some of the components have been analyzed previously in other NEPA documents; therefore, this document is a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) and examines only those aspects of the program not covered in previous analyses.

PROPOSED ACTION AND NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

The FSA proposes to implement changes to the CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill, which extends the enrollment authority for the CRP to 2018. The 2014 Farm Bill aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As the FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative. Other elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to the FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action. In addition, the FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought-designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

No Action Alternative. The non-discretionary changes identified in the 2014 Farm Bill include:

- *Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities* – grasslands that would have been previously eligible for the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), are now eligible for enrollment in the CRP and enrollment is limited to no more than 2 million acres. Authorized activities on grasslands would be the same as those previously authorized under the GRP.
- *Final Year of Contract* – a CRP participant is allowed to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program and perform activities to improve or maintain the existing conservation system during the year prior to the expiration of the contract. Likewise, expiring

CRP land can be enrolled in a new program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, without violating the contract.

Proposed Action. The discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, as well as additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment and expanding the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing, include:

- *Targeted Enrollment* – in addition to the long-standing General and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods, the FSA proposes to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land through a reverse auction approach for select conservation practices. Targeted enrollment could enable the FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap, while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit.
- *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies* – the State Technical Committee must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is: at least once every 5 years, but no more frequently than once every 3 years for managed harvesting, and not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing. Harvesting and grazing activities still must avoid the Primary Nesting Season.
- *Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional Conservation Practices* – the Secretary would be afforded the discretionary authority to make additional conservation practices, that currently are ineligible for any type of haying or grazing, to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during wide-spread drought conditions. Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed conservation practices would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or Federal agencies.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The SPEIS analyzes the potential environmental consequences from implementation of the Proposed Action on the natural and human environment. Resources addressed in the SPEIS include: vegetation, wildlife, protected species, soils, surface water, groundwater, floodplains, wetlands, air quality, recreation, and socioeconomics. In accordance with CEQ guidelines, the environmental consequences of the No Action Alternative are provided to serve as a baseline against which to measure the potential impacts of the Proposed Action. A summary of the environmental consequences by resource is provided in **Table ES-1**.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Vegetation	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Retain or restore up to 2 million acres of grasslands. • Short-term negative impacts to vegetation from the potential to spread noxious weeds during authorized maintenance activities and grazing. • Long-term benefits to grasslands, particularly within the Great Plains Ecoregion. • Grazing and other authorized activities would be performed in accordance with Grazing Management Plans. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term, minor impacts to vegetation during allowable activities to improve conservation cover. • Long-term benefits to vegetation by keeping land in conservation, preventing development.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Higher quality land expected to enroll by targeting certain conservation practices. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Short-term negative impacts to some types of vegetation from reduced growth period between harvesting or grazing activities. • Long-term positive benefits from maintaining early successional grasslands through harvesting or grazing activities. • Improved plant diversity, composition, and function with managed harvesting or grazing, in accordance with Conservation Plans. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Consecutive years of haying or grazing the same acreage would reduce the growth period and could result in long-term negative impacts to some types of vegetation.
Wildlife	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Retain or restore up to 2 million acres of grassland habitat. • Grassland wildlife, especially in the Great Plains Ecoregion would receive long-term benefits from habitat conservation, particularly grassland bird species. • Grazing and other authorized activities would be done in accordance with Grazing Management Plans. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term minor disturbance to wildlife from allowable activities to improve conservation cover. • Long-term benefits to wildlife and habitats by allowing acreage to remain in conservation and not development.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to wildlife expected from enrollment of higher quality or sensitive lands into conservation practices. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Harvesting could have beneficial or detrimental impacts depending on the timing, methods, and habitat. • Harvesting could produce detrimental impacts to ground-nesting birds and direct mortality for smaller animals. • Routine grazing could produce negative impacts to wildlife from direct competition for resources, trampling, and displacement. • Harvesting and grazing could result in routine disturbance necessary to maintain healthy grasslands or early successional habitats, thereby offering increased habitat diversity, which provides long-term benefits to wildlife. • Managed harvesting and routine grazing would continue in accordance with Conservation Plans to support local wildlife and habitat. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Short-term impacts to wildlife from altering food abundance and availability, changing habitat, disturbance, and direct mortality. • Approval by the State Technical Committee (STC) and a modified Conservation Plan would be required to ensure activities are appropriate to local conditions and to ensure there are no long-term negative impacts to wildlife.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Protected Species	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Retain or restore up to 2 million acres of grassland habitat. • Protected species, especially grassland species in the Great Plains Ecoregion, would receive long-term benefits from habitat conservation. • Grazing and other authorized activities would be done in accordance with Grazing Management Plans and would ensure protected species are not impacted. *Final Year of Contract* • Potential for short-term minor disturbance to protected species from allowable activities to improve conservation cover. • Long-term benefits to protected species by allowing acreage to remain in conservation and not development.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to protected species from enrollment of land with highest environmental benefit. • Site specific environmental evaluation would determine presence of protected species and establish best management practices (BMPs) or specific mitigation measures to ensure protection during installation or maintenance of practices. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • General impacts to protected species the same as those described for wildlife/vegetation. • Site specific environmental evaluation would determine presence of protected species and establish BMPs or specific mitigation measures for harvesting or grazing activities. • In accordance with Farm Service Agency (FSA) policy, activities would not be authorized if protected species would be negatively impacted. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • General impacts to protected species would be similar to those described for wildlife/vegetation. • Site specific environmental evaluation would determine presence of protected species and establish BMPs or specific mitigation measures for emergency haying or grazing activities.
Soils	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Short-term negative impacts, such as compaction and soil loss, from installation of conservation practices or other authorized activities. • Long-term benefits to soils by maintaining vegetation cover and limiting agricultural land use, which would reduce potential for soil erosion. *Final Year of Contract* • Temporary, localized soil impacts may occur from allowable activities to improve conservation cover during final year of contract. • Long-term beneficial impacts to soils from land remaining in conservation.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to soils by better targeting those lands with the highest potential for erosion. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Potential for short-term, localized impacts to soils from compaction due to concentrated hoof action; however, BMPs to ensure dispersion of livestock would be used. • Short-term, localized impacts from reducing the vegetation growth period between activities which could potentially increase erosion from exposed soil. • Conservation Management Plan would include site specific BMPs for harvesting or grazing activities. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Short-term impacts to soils would be the same as those described for managed harvesting and routine grazing.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Surface Water	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Short-term negative impacts due to soil loss during installation of the conservation practice and authorized activities. • Maintaining native vegetation cover and minimizing agricultural conversion would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides, and metals into adjacent surface waters. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term, localized impacts to surface water from improvement activities due to soil erosion. • Long-term benefits to surface water from land remaining in conservation cover.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to surface water by targeting areas where conservation benefits would be greatest. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Potential for negative impacts to surface water would occur from increase soil erosion due to vegetation loss and soil compaction which could increase runoff potential. • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would minimize or eliminate the potential for long-term negative impacts to surface waters. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • The required site specific Conservation Plan and oversight by the STC would reduce the potential for long-term impacts to surface water.
Groundwater	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Reduced demand for groundwater irrigation. • Short-term impacts from conservation practice installation in areas with shallow groundwater aquifers are possible. • Long-term benefits to groundwater likely due to maintenance of vegetative cover, which increases soil permeability relative to developed areas. *Final Year of Contract* • Long-term benefits to groundwater by land remaining in conservation, and a reduction in demand on groundwater required by agricultural practices.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to groundwater from enrollment, reduction in irrigation demand, reduction of fertilizer and pesticide use, increased infiltration, and aquifer replenishment. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Little to no direct impact on groundwater would occur from managed harvesting and routine grazing frequency changes. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Little to no direct impact on groundwater would occur from emergency haying and grazing changes.
Floodplains	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Restoration and maintenance of grasslands would provide long-term benefits to adjacent floodplains by minimizing runoff and soil loss. • Minimizing or preventing development would have beneficial impacts to floodplains. *Final Year of Contract* • Long-term benefits would occur to floodplains by retaining land in conservation cover and prohibiting development.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to floodplains are expected from enrollment of • lands in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), particularly environmentally sensitive lands. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would prohibit or minimize potential impacts to floodplains. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would prohibit or minimize potential impacts to floodplains.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Wetlands	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Potential short-term negative impacts to adjacent wetlands from installation of conservation practice. • Long-term benefit to wetlands from maintaining grasslands through soil stabilization, reduced runoff, and reduced development. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term negative impacts to wetlands from approved improvement activities during final year of contract. • Long-term benefits to adjacent or downstream wetlands from reduced development, runoff, and use of agricultural inputs.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to wetlands from enrollment of lands into the CRP. • Conversion of land to conservation practice would improve quality and function of wetlands. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Adjusted frequencies for managed harvesting and routine grazing would not have any direct impacts to wetlands. • Site specific BMPs identified in the Conservation Plan would minimize or eliminate negative impacts to wetlands. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Consecutive years of haying or grazing the same acreage could have long-term negative impacts to wetland and riparian areas.
Air Quality	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Enrollment of up to 2 million acres of grassland vegetation would continue greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction through carbon sequestration. • Little or no change is expected to baseline air quality conditions. *Final Year of Contract* • Maintaining land in conservation cover would have beneficial impacts to air quality through continued carbon sequestration and reduced GHG emissions.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Enrollment of land in the CRP would be beneficial to air quality through reduced emissions from equipment, greater soil stability due to permanent covers, and increased potential for long-term carbon sequestration, when compared to agricultural production. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Change in managed harvesting frequencies would not have significant impacts due to the short time frame of the activity and the large geographic area over which it would occur. • Managed harvesting would not impact grassland cover ability to sequester carbon. • Changing allowable frequency for grazing is not likely to increase methane emissions (a GHG) as the livestock are likely already present in the vicinity. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Short-term impacts to the ability of conservation cover to sequester carbon through loss of living biomass.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Recreation	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Recreation would benefit over the long-term from improved water quality and wildlife habitat by maintaining grassland vegetation cover. *Final Year of Contract* • Long-term benefits to recreation through maintenance of conservation cover that would improve wildlife-related recreation.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Potential impacts to recreation would be dependent on where Targeted Enrollment occurred; some regions have higher recreational expenditures on the CRP lands than others. • In the long-term, Targeted Enrollment would likely have beneficial impacts by enrolling lands with the greatest conservation benefit, thereby increasing wildlife-related recreational opportunities. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Adjusting frequencies is not likely to have any appreciable impact on recreation. • Maintenance of quality conservation cover through approved harvesting and grazing activities would continue to have an overall benefit to recreational activities in the longterm. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Similar to managed harvesting and routine grazing, little to no direct impact on recreation from emergency haying and grazing activities would be expected.
Socioeconomics	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Enrolling grasslands in the CRP would not have any appreciable impact on socioeconomics. *Final Year of Contract* • Allowing enrollment in a long-term conservation easement during the final contract year would have long-term benefits to the socioeconomics of the local area. • Allowing a seamless transition from the CRP to another conservation program reduces the risk to the contract holder, and prevents the likelihood of agricultural conversion.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Using Targeted Enrollment to complement the existing Continuous and General Sign-up processes would not result in effects to the economy or communities. • Because of the focus on lands with the greatest environmental benefit, general societal benefits from conservation could be realized at a lower cost than could be realized using other enrollment methodologies. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Managed harvesting and routine grazing activities have minor, localized socioeconomic benefits; adjusting the frequencies would not result in any changes to existing conditions. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Implementation would result in regional and local benefits to producers and suppliers to maintain herds during long, severe drought conditions.

Note: BMP = best management practice; CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; Farm Service Agency = FSA; GHG = greenhouse gas; STC = State Technical Committee

(This page intentionally left blank)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures

List of Tables

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMA	Agricultural Management Assistance
BCAP	Biomass Crop Assistance Program
BMP	best management practice
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation
CCPI	Cooperative, Conservation Partnership Initiative
CEC	Commission for Environmental Cooperation
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CH_4	Methane
CO_2	carbon dioxide
CO_2e	carbon dioxide equivalent
CP	conservation practice
CPA	Conservation Priority Area
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
CSP	Conservation Stewardship Program
CTA	Conservation Technical Assistance
CWA	Clean Water Act
EA	Environmental Assessment
EE	Environmental Evaluation
eFOTG	Field Office Technical Guide
EI	Erodibility Index
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
ERS	Economic Research Service
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FAPRI	Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FRPP	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FWP	Farmable Wetland Program
FY	fiscal year
GHG	greenhouse gas
GRP	Grassland Reserve Program
HEL	highly erodible land
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
LIP	Landowner Incentive Program
N_2O	nitrous oxide
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NASS	National Agriculture Statistics Service
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act

NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOA	Notice of Availability
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOI	Notice of Intent
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRWA	National Rural Water Association
OEP	Outreach and Education Program
PEA	Programmatic Environmental Assessment
PEIS	Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
PIP	Practice Incentive Payment
PNS	Primary Nesting Season
ROD	Record of Decision
SAFE	State Areas for Wildlife Enhancement
SEIS	Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
SIP	Signing Incentive Payment
SPEIS	Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
STC	State Technical Committee
TMDL	total daily maximum load
TSP	Technical Service Provider
U.S.	United States
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USC	U.S. Code
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USDOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
USEPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WHIP	Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
WRP	Wetlands Reserve Program

1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The United States (U.S.) Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), proposes to implement programmatic changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) based on those changes included in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (herein referred to as the 2014 Farm Bill). The CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 (1985 Farm Bill), as amended, and is governed by regulations published in 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 1410. The CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, the CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. The CRP is a CCC program administered by the FSA with the support of other Federal and local agencies.

This document is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190); implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 CFR 1500-1508); and the FSA's implementing regulations *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799). The Proposed Action being addressed in this document is programmatic in nature and some of the components have been analyzed previously in other NEPA documents; therefore, this document is a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) and examines only those aspects of the program not covered in previous analyses.

1.1.1 Other NEPA Documents Incorporated by Reference

Over the last decade, the FSA has completed extensive NEPA analysis pertaining to the CRP and components of the program. This SPEIS will incorporate, by reference, other applicable NEPA documentation as appropriate and will supplement the NEPA document prepared for the 2008 Farm Bill, *Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (2010 CRP SEIS) (USDA 2010). As such, only those changes to the CRP in the 2014 Farm Bill that have not been adequately addressed in other NEPA documentation will be addressed in this SPEIS. For further information or full copies of any of the NEPA documents listed below, please visit the FSA NEPA website (http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd). Other applicable NEPA documentation includes the following as described below.

Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program (USDA 2003). This Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) evaluated environmental consequences of changes to the CRP under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill). Changes included:

- Increased the acreage enrollment authority to 39.2 million acres.
- Expanded the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) nationwide with an aggregate acreage cap of 1 million acres.
- Allowed a 1-year extension for certain contracts on lands planted with hardwood trees.

- Allowed participants to enroll entire fields through certain continuous CRP practices when more than 50 percent of the field is enrolled as buffer and the remainder of the field is infeasible to farm.
- Allowed participants to continue existing vegetative cover, where practicable and consistent with the goals of the CRP.
- Provided for managed haying, grazing, and construction of wind turbines on CRP land.

The PEIS also addressed an Environmental Targeting Alternative in which the FSA would alter the mix of program goals and adjust acreage allocations to include Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Continuous Sign-up practices in designated environmentally sensitive areas. Under the targeting alternative, the CRP General Sign-up would have been eliminated; however, the Environmental Targeting Alternative was not selected as the FSA's preferred alternative. A Record of Decision (ROD) for the PEIS was issued in May of 2003 that implemented the proposed changes described above.

Programmatic Environmental Assessments (PEAs) for the CREP. The CREP was first implemented in 1997 as a component of the CRP. The CREP targets high-priority conservation issues of both local and national significance and focuses on impacts to water supplies, loss of critical habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species, soil erosion, and reduced habitat for fish populations. States, tribes, local governments, or local nongovernment entities and the FSA enter into legal CREP Agreements to address particular agriculture-related environmental issues of state or national significance. The CREP Agreements define the goals and objectives of the CREP, establish which conservation practices (CPs) would be authorized, and set the CREP boundary. The appropriate level of NEPA analysis is completed prior to implementation of any CREP. Over 36 CREP PEAs have been prepared and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued for each PEA.

Environmental Assessments (EAs) for Managed Haying and Grazing. In 2006, a legal settlement was signed between the National Wildlife Federation and the FSA that mandated allowable frequencies for managed haying and grazing on CRP lands in some states, and established Primary Nesting Season (PNS) dates during which no haying or grazing could occur. The settlement stipulated that if a state wanted to change these mandated terms, an EA would have to be developed to address the potential impacts associated with managed haying and grazing. In 2010, 13 EAs were completed that analyzed proposed variations on allowable frequencies and/or changes to PNS dates on CRP contracts. A FONSI was issued for each EA. The states addressed in these EAs included Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Managed haying and grazing is limited to those lands with the following CPs: CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes), CP2 (permanent native grasses), CPs 4B and 4D (permanent wildlife habitat), CP10 (grass vegetative cover), CP18B (permanent vegetation to reduce salinity), and CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant vegetation). Managed haying and grazing can be used as a management practice if it is included in the CP and the activity must benefit the CRP cover.

Preliminary Environmental Assessment for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the Conservation Reserve Program (USDA 2008). This PEA evaluated only those mandatory changes to CRP reauthorized with new Title II provisions enacted by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill). Other changes were addressed in the 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010). A FONSI was issued in December of 2008 for the following proposed changes to the CRP:

- Expanded FWP land eligibility to include constructed wetlands developed to receive flow from a row crop; land devoted to commercial pond-raised aquaculture; land subject to natural overflow of a prairie wetland; buffer acreage associated with wetlands, constructed wetlands, and aquaculture ponds; and buffer land on flooded farmland that would enhance wildlife benefits adjacent to natural overflow of a prairie wetland.
- Limited FWP enrollment to 40 acres for farmable wetlands and constructed wetlands; 20 acres for flooded prairie wetland; and acreage for aquaculture pond and associated buffer to be determined by the Secretary in consultation with the State Technical Committee (STC).
- Authorized cost sharing for thinning of certain tree stands to improve wildlife benefits and the condition of resources on the land.
- Established new limits and possible waiver from the adjusted gross income limitation for environmentally sensitive land of special significance.

Preliminary Environmental Assessment for the Grassland Reserve Program (USDA 2009). The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a Continuous Sign-up program administered jointly by the FSA and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The purpose of the GRP, as amended in the 2008 Farm Bill, is to provide assistance to landowners and operators to protect grazing uses and related conservation values on eligible private range and pasture lands. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land, while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding. This is subject to restrictions during the nesting season for birds in the local area that are in significant decline or are conserved in accordance with Federal or state law, as determined by the State Conservationist. The PEA addressed changes to the eligibility criteria, enrollment options, and a reduction in the enrollment cap presented in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, eligible land was expanded to include land historically dominated by grassland, forbs, or shrubland when it contains historical or archaeological resources or would address issues raised by state, regional, and national conservation priorities. In addition, the 2008 Farm Bill removed the minimum eligible acreage enrollment of 40 contiguous acres. The 2008 Farm Bill also removed the option of enrolling land in 30-year contracts or easements. Eligible lands may be enrolled in 10-, 15-, or 20-year rental contracts, a permanent easement, or an easement at the maximum duration allowed under state law. The enrollment cap also was reduced to 1.22 million acres from the 2 million acres allowed under the 2002 Farm Bill. A FONSI was issued in August of 2009.

2010 Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (USDA 2010). This SEIS examined various alternatives associated with implementing discretionary changes to the CRP consistent with the 2008 Farm Bill and supplemented the 2003 CRP PEIS. In addition to updating the cropping history requirements to 4 of 6 years from 2002 through 2007, the 2008 Farm Bill included changes to several provisions including:

- Reduced the enrollment acreage cap to 32 million acres.
- Revised the CRP purposes to explicitly include addressing issues raised by state, regional, and national conservation initiatives.
- Allowed for alfalfa alone in an approved rotation practice with an agricultural commodity to contribute towards crop history requirements.

- Granted authority to exclude acreage enrolled under Continuous Sign-up and the CREP from the 25 percent county cropland limitation, with county government approval.
- Required management by the participant throughout the contract term to implement the Conservation Plan.
- Provided exceptions to general prohibitions on use including:
  - Managed harvesting with appropriate vegetation management during named periods and with a payment reduction.
  - Managed harvesting for biomass with appropriate vegetation management during named periods and with a payment reduction.
  - Grazing of invasive species with appropriate vegetation management during named periods and with a payment reduction.
  - Required payment reduction for installation of wind turbines.
  - Required use of annual survey of dryland and cash rental rates by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).
- Added measures for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as well as limited resource farmers and ranchers and Indian tribes to participate in conservation programs.
- Allowed for development of habitat for native and managed pollinators, and encouraged use of CPs that benefit them.

The 2010 CRP SEIS addressed the no action alternative and two action alternatives for the provisions described above. Alternative 1 allowed for full implementation of the applicable 2008 Farm Bill provisions. Alternative 2 allowed for discretion in the implementation of some elements of the CRP in accordance with the applicable 2008 Farm Bill. A ROD was issued in July of 2010 selecting Alternative 1 for implementation.

2012 Preliminary Environmental Assessment for Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands (USDA 2012). This PEA evaluated the environmental consequences associated with authorizing emergency haying and grazing of certain CPs, traditionally not eligible for haying and grazing, as a means to alleviate local impacts to farmers and ranchers resulting from extreme drought and high temperatures during 2012. The CPs covered in this PEA included CP8 (grass waterways), CP23 (wetland restoration), CP23A (non-floodplain wetlands), CP25 (rare and declining habitat) – limited to haying only, CP27 (farmable wetlands), CP28 (farmable wetland buffers), CP37 (duck nesting habitat), and CP41 (flooded prairie farmable wetlands).

A modified Conservation Plan addressing protected species, cultural resources, and any extraordinary circumstances is required before emergency haying and grazing can be initiated. State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) land targeting threatened and endangered species and critical habitat are not eligible for emergency haying and grazing. Useful life easements and any land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent water body are not eligible for emergency haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing may not occur during the PNS. Emergency haying and grazing may occur any year before or after managed haying and grazing; however, managed haying and grazing may not be undertaken on acreage that was harvested under emergency provisions until the established frequency interval under managed provisions expires. Further restrictions on emergency haying and grazing of these previously ineligible CPs included:

- Emergency grazing:
  - May occur for up to 90 calendar days, before September 30.
  - One 30 calendar day extension may be authorized, before September 30.
  - May be authorized for an extension of up to 15 calendar days because of flooding,before September 30.
  - Shall leave at least 25 percent of each field or contiguous CRP fields ungrazed for wildlife, or graze not more than 75 percent of the stocking rate determined by the NRCS or a Technical Service Provider (TSP).
- Emergency haying:
  - May occur for up 60 calendar days, before September 30.
  - Extensions are not authorized.
  - Shall leave at least 50 percent of each field or contiguous fields unhayed for wildlife.
  - Is limited to one cutting.
- Haying and grazing cannot occur on the same acreage.

This document only provided NEPA coverage for emergency haying and grazing of these CPs for 2012 within counties classified as "abnormally dry" or Drought Level D0 status and above in accordance with the Drought Monitor. All emergency haying had to be completed by August 31, 2012 and all grazing had to be completed by September 30, 2012. A Mitigated FONSI was issued in August of 2012.

1.1.2 CRP Overview

The 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010) provided a thorough description of the CRP, eligibility requirements, enrollment options, conservation planning, contract maintenance, and payments; a brief overview and an update of the program statistics, as appropriate, are provided in this SPEIS.

The CRP was established by the Food Security Act of 1985 and farmland enrollment began in 1986. The program is governed by regulations published in 7 CFR 1410. The CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, the CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. Funding for the CRP is provided by CCC and governed by acreage caps set by the Farm Bill. Technical support is provided by:

- USDA NRCS
- USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- State forestry agencies
- Local soil and water conservation districts
- Other non-Federal providers of technical assistance

Producers can enroll in the CRP using one of two procedures: (1) offer lands for General Sign-up enrollment during specific sign-up periods and compete with other offers nationally, based upon the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI); or (2) enroll environmentally desirable land to be devoted to certain

CPs under CRP Continuous Sign-up provisions, if certain eligibility requirements are met or if a state and county are involved in a CREP, and the land qualifies.

As of October 2013, there were nearly 26 million acres enrolled in the CRP: 19.8 million acres under General Sign-up and 5.8 million acres under Continuous Sign-up, including 1.3 million acres in CREP and 0.3 million acres in FWP. **Figure 1.1-1** illustrates enrolled acreage within the continental U.S. **Appendix A** provides a description of the CPs and current enrollment acreage.

1.1.2.1 Conservation Planning

Prior to contract acceptance, a site specific Environmental Evaluation (EE) is completed by the NRCS or an approved TSP during the conservation planning process. The NRCS or a TSP is responsible for the site specific EE, technical leadership, and technical concurrence on Conservation Plans and any revisions. Similarly, they are responsible for collecting the data needed for the FSA to ensure compliance with the NEPA; the National Historic Preservation Act; the Endangered Species Act (ESA); and other related laws, regulations, and Executive orders (EOs). The site specific EE process is consistent with the FSA's *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799) and the FSA's Handbook on *Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices* (1-EQ). The FSA reviews and/or completes sections of the site specific EE to document that the FSA has completed any required consultation with regulatory agencies. The site specific EE, previous programmatic NEPA documentation, and this SPEIS together provide full NEPA coverage for each CRP contract.

An approved Conservation Plan is required prior to the CRP contract execution/implementation. The approved plan is developed by the participant in coordination with the local NRCS representative or authorized TSP. The approved Conservation Plan must:

- Contain all the practices necessary to successfully establish and maintain the vegetative cover on all proposed CRP acres including seeding mix design, planting densities and layout, water supply and drainage, thinning schedules, etc.
- Be technically adequate to meet the objectives of the CRP.
- Incorporate all Federal, state, and local permit requirements for use of agricultural chemicals such as fertilizer, herbicides, and pesticides.
- Be reviewed and approved by the conservation district.
- Ensure the conservation cover is not disturbed during the PNS.
- Incorporate and adhere to county specific guidance from the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards, identified in the Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG), and in state or county specific technical notes.

In addition, the Conservation Plan includes a grazing, haying, or biomass harvest plan or a plan for the installation of wind turbines for all CRP lands where these activities are authorized and the participant desires to implement these activities. The haying and grazing activities must not defeat the purpose of the CRP contract and must be consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The Conservation Plan also includes any best management practices (BMPs) or measures to be employed to benefit and/or avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to those resources specific to those lands being proposed for enrollment. CRP participants must maintain the CRP vegetative cover in accordance with their approved Conservation Plan to control erosion, noxious weeds, rodents, insects, etc.

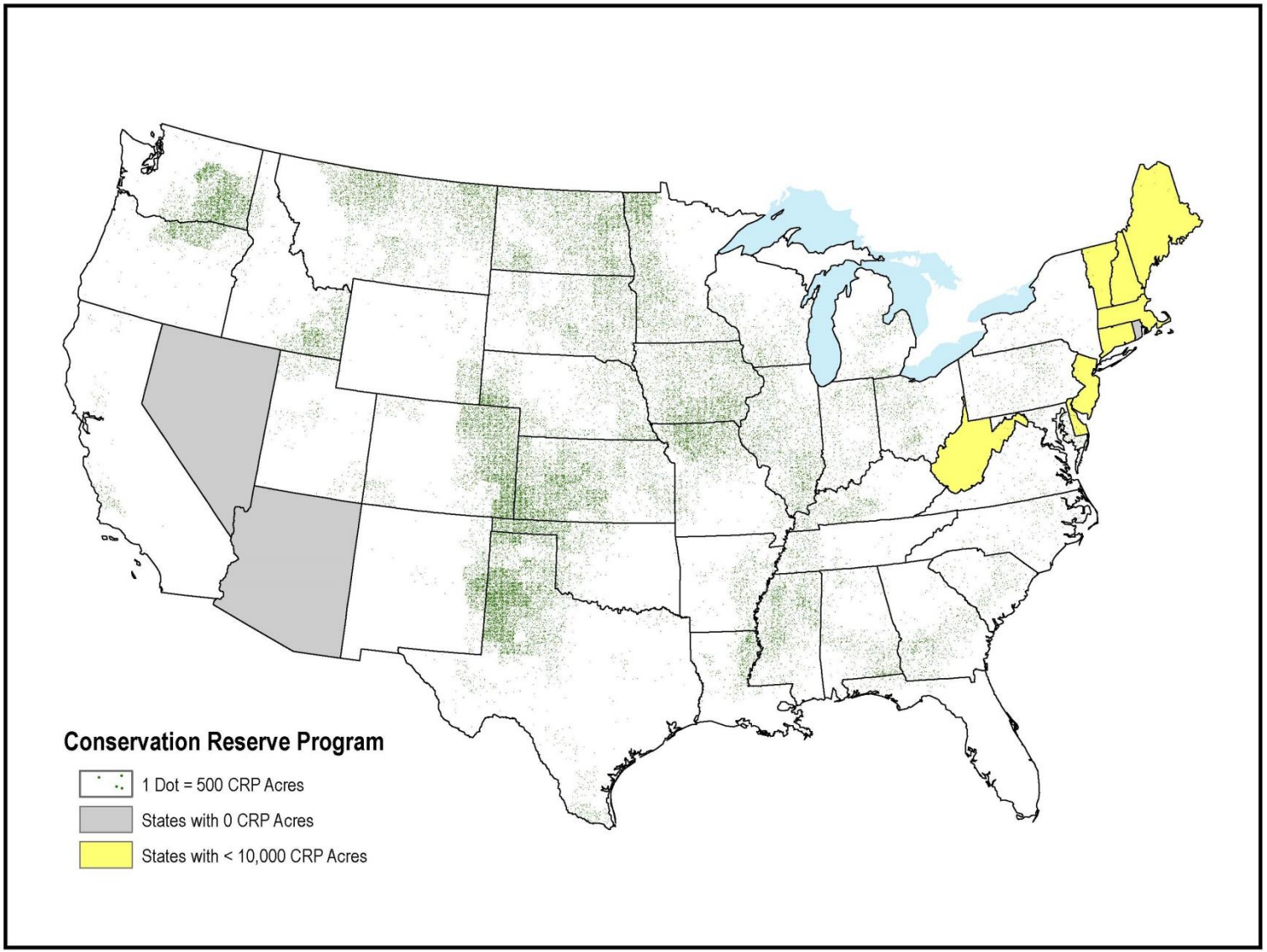


Figure 1.1-1. Enrolled Acreage within the Continental U.S.

1.1.2.2 Contract Maintenance

CRP participants must maintain the conservation cover in accordance with their Conservation Plan without cost-share to control erosion, noxious weeds, rodents, insects, and other pests for the life of the CRP contract. The timing and duration of maintenance activities are developed in consultation with the NRCS or a TSP and may include prescribed burning, disking, or spraying herbicides or insecticides. Periodic mowing and mowing for cosmetic purposes are prohibited. Various forms of haying and grazing can be used to maintain the CRP cover on authorized CPs: CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes), CP2 (permanent native grasses), CPs 4B and 4D (permanent wildlife habitat), CP10 (grass vegetative cover), CP18B (permanent vegetation to reduce salinity), and CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant vegetation).

Mid-contract management activities are mandatory for all contracts entered into after 2003 and include prescribed burning, tree thinning, disking, interseeding, mowing, and herbicidal control of invasive species. Mid-contract management on these contracts is eligible for up to 50 percent cost-share, must be included in the Conservation Plan, and must be designed to ensure vegetation and wildlife benefits, while providing protection of soil and water resources. The management activities are state specific and developed by a team to include the NRCS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), state wildlife agencies, and other appropriate agencies. These management activities can be used to ensure plant diversity and wildlife benefits to improve or enhance important habitat to the state. In addition to important wildlife, these mid-contract management activities could be used as a means for improving pollinator habitat to help address the decline in pollinator health (such as honey bees, wild bees, and other beneficial insects to crops and plants) and Colony Collapse Disorder. Mid-contract management activities generally must occur before the end of year 6 of a 10-year contract, or the end of year 9 of a 15-year contract.

1.1.2.3 Payments

The FSA provides CRP participants with annual rental payments per acre enrolled for the duration of the contract, and up to 50 percent one-time cost-share for establishing the approved CPs. Incentives are also available for Continuous Sign-up enrollment. An additional incentive payment of up to 20 percent of the annual payment may be provided for CP8A (grass waterways), CP21 (filter strips), CP22 (riparian buffers), and CP5A (field windbreak establishment). If land is located within U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)-designated wellhead protection areas, an additional 10 percent may be added to the soil rental rate. An upfront Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) of up to $150 per acre is offered for enrollment into certain practices. Likewise, a Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) equal to 40 percent of eligible installation costs may also be paid for enrollment into certain practices. Both SIPs and PIPs are paid after contract approval and all eligibility requirements have been satisfied. No more than 50 percent of the cost of establishing a conservation cover on eligible cropland may be paid by the FSA for an approved practice. Seven CPs are authorized for a $2 to $5 per acre maintenance incentive payment: CP16A (shelterbelt establishment), CP17A (living snow fences), CP21 (filter strips), CP22 (riparian buffers), CP5A (field windbreak establishment), CP29 (marginal pastureland wildlife habitat buffers), and CP30 (marginal pastureland wetland buffers). CREP contracts may be eligible for additional incentive payments offered by the state or private partners depending on the CREP Agreement. CRP payments provided from 2009 to 2013 are summarized in **Table 1.1-1.**

Table 1.1-1. CRP Payments, 2009-2013 ($1,000)					
CRP Payments	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Annual Rental Payments	$1,720,631	$1,709,079	$1,634,979	$1,677,694	$1,595,653
SIPs and PIPs	$71,683	$70,181	$71,788	$56,888	$37,072
Cost-share[1]	$74,947	$66,721	$99,322	$99,990	$84,076
Haying and Grazing Adjustments	($12,504)	($9,518)	($14,262)	($29,293)	($5,946)
TOTAL	**$1,854,757**	**$1,836,463**	**$1,791,827**	**$1,805,279**	**$1,710,855**

Note: [1] Mid-contract management payments included in cost-share amounts.
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to implement programmatic changes to the CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill and other discretionary program aspects. The need for the Proposed Action is to fulfill the FSA's responsibility to administer the CRP while improving the program's functionality and maintaining the conservation benefits.

1.3 NEPA PROCESS

The NEPA requires consideration of environmental issues in Federal agency planning and decision making. It requires Federal agencies to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for any major Federal action with potentially significant impacts to the human environment. The CEQ and FSA NEPA regulations define the steps and milestones in the environmental impact analysis process. The major milestones include:

1. *Announce an EIS is being prepared*. A Notice of Intent (NOI) is published in the Federal Register.
2. *Conduct Scoping*. This is the first major step in identifying the relevant issues to be analyzed in depth and eliminating the issues that are not relevant. To accomplish this, the FSA actively solicits comments from the public, local governments, Federal and state agencies, and stakeholders, thereby ensuring that relevant concerns and issues about the proposed changes to the CRP are included in the analysis. FSA officially requested that NRCS participate as a Cooperating Agency during the scoping process. The Scoping period lasts for 45 days.
3. *Prepare and publish a Draft SPEIS*. The first comprehensive document for public, agency, and stakeholder review is the Draft SPEIS. It examines the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action, all reasonable alternatives as determined during Scoping, and the No Action Alternative. To ensure the widest dissemination possible, the Draft SPEIS is distributed to all agencies, public, and stakeholders that specifically request a copy; national and regional offices of all relevant Federal regulatory agencies; and cooperating agencies (if applicable). In addition, the Draft SPEIS is published on a public website (www.CRPSPEIS.com) and the FSA's website (http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd). A Notice of Availability (NOA) is filed with the USEPA and announced in the Federal Register. Publication of the NOA initiates the 45-day public comment period.

4. *Solicit Public Comment*. The FSA's goal during the NEPA process is to provide the public and other interested parties ample opportunity to comment on the analyses presented in the Draft SPEIS. This is accomplished through public meetings. The FSA performs density analyses of participation in the CRP or those participants potentially impacted by the proposed changes to the CRP to determine appropriate locations for hosting public meetings. The public meetings serve as an open forum for discussion of the Proposed Action, alternatives, the analyses approach, and findings, and provides a direct feedback mechanism for the public and agencies to provide comments on the Draft SPEIS. All substantive comments received during the public comment period are considered in the preparation of, and are appended to, the Final SPEIS, and disclosed to the decision-maker in that phase of the NEPA process.
5. *Prepare a Final SPEIS*. Following the public comment period, a Final SPEIS is prepared. This document is a revision of the Draft SPEIS, which includes consideration of all substantive comments and FSA responses. A NOA is filed with the USEPA and announced in the Federal Register. Publication of the NOA initiates the 30-day waiting period.
6. *Issue a ROD*. The final step in the NEPA process is the ROD, which will be released no earlier than 30 days after public release of the Final SPEIS. This decision document identifies the alternative selected for implementation by the decision-maker and any mitigation measures (above and beyond those already required by permits, regulations, or carried out as part of the normal management policies) to be carried out by the FSA to reduce impacts, if needed. The ROD will be made available on the project website (www.CRPSPEIS.com) and the FSA's website (http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd).

The following sections describe the steps that have been achieved thus far in the NEPA process for this SPEIS.

1.3.1 Notification

Official notification of the FSA's intent to prepare the CRP SPEIS began with publication of the NOI on November 29, 2013 in the Federal Register (**Appendix B**). The project website was activated on the day the NOI was released and the official scoping comment period began.

1.3.2 Scoping

Scoping is an early and open process for: (1) actively bringing the public and other interested parties into the decision-making process, (2) determining the scope of issues and impacts to be addressed, (3) identifying all reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Action, and (4) meeting both the CEQ and FSA NEPA implementing regulations that require a scoping process in the development of an SPEIS. Comments were received through the project website/email system, mail, fax, and www.regulations.gov.

Eight comment letters were received during the scoping comment period from Federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as private organizations and members of the concerned public. The comment letters could be broken into 55 individual comments covering a range of topics including proposed Farm Bill changes, CRP maximum enrollment and acreages, regional differences in haying and grazing impacts, lack of thorough environmental and socioeconomic impact analysis in previous NEPA documentation related to the Farm Bill, and CRP funding policy. The comments provided during the scoping period were considered in developing the Proposed Action and the SPEIS environmental consequences to ensure these concerns were adequately addressed. The scoping summary report is available upon request.

1.4 RELEVANT STATUTES, EOS, AND PERMITS

A variety of laws, regulations, and EOs apply to actions undertaken by Federal agencies and form the basis of the analyses prepared in this SPEIS. These include but are not limited to:

- National Historic Preservation Act
- ESA
- Clean Water Act (CWA)
- Clean Air Act
- EO 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- EO 11988, Floodplain Management
- EO 11990, Protection of Wetlands
- Coastal Zone Management Act

Other Federal permits, licenses, and entitlements may be required in implementing the Proposed Action. These permits and licenses would be identified and obtained as part of the site specific EE and may include:

- ***CWA, Section 401*** (Water Quality Certification). Pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA, Federal permits for projects in wetlands or waterways must be certified by the state licensing or permitting agency to ensure that state water quality standards are met.
- ***CWA, Section 402*** (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System). The USEPA currently regulates stormwater discharges from construction sites that are 1 acre or larger. Documenting project compliance with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System general permit involves preparation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan and submittal to the USEPA of a NOI to Discharge. Projects that require a Section 402 permit also need a Section 401 permit.
- ***CWA, Section 404*** (Wetlands). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regulates the placement of dredged or fill material in Waters of the U.S., which includes some wetlands, pursuant to 33 CFR 320-332. Work and structures that are located in, or that affect, navigable Waters of the U.S., including work below the ordinary high water mark in non-tidal waters, also are regulated by the USACE. Projects requiring a Section 404 permit also need a Section 401 permit.
- ***ESA, Section 7.*** The ESA provides for the conservation of species and ecosystems that are in danger of becoming extinct. It also applies to candidate species that have been recommended for listing as threatened or endangered of becoming extinct. The harming or harassing of listed animal species and removing or reducing listed plant species are prohibited. Site specific consultation with the USFWS would be undertaken to ensure no adverse effects to threatened or endangered species would occur from the Proposed Action. Actions that have the potential to adversely affect a protected species could require additional NEPA documentation. In general, it is against FSA policy to fund activities that would adversely affect protected species (FSA Handbook: Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices, 1-EQ).

- ***National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106.*** Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires Federal agencies to consider the effects of their actions on historic properties before undertaking a project. A historic property is defined as any cultural resource that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation oversees Section 106 and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800). Most consultation is done with the appropriate State Historic Preservation Office or Tribal Historic Preservation Office. In general, it is against FSA policy to fund activities that are likely to cause an adverse impact on historic properties unless mitigation measures can be undertaken to avoid or lesson the adverse impacts (FSA Handbook: Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices, 1-EQ).

1.5 SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF SPEIS

Since the CRP is a national program, the geographic scope of this SPEIS covers the entire continental U.S. Given the broad nature of the program, this document is programmatic and is intended to provide the basis for site specific NEPA documentation that would occur prior to enrollment of any land into the CRP. The resource categories determined relevant to this SPEIS include biological resources (vegetation, wildlife, and protected species); water resources (surface water, groundwater, wetlands, and floodplains); soils; air quality; recreation; and socioeconomics. The organization of this SPEIS is as follows:

- **Chapter 1** (this chapter) provides background information relevant to the Proposed Action and discusses its purpose and need.
- **Chapter 2** presents the Proposed Action, No Action Alternative, alternatives eliminated from detailed consideration, and a comparison of the alternatives.
- **Chapter 3** outlines and justifies resources evaluated or dismissed from in-depth analysis in this SPEIS, and describes baseline conditions or "affected environment" (i.e., the conditions against which the potential impacts of the Proposed Action or alternatives are measured) for each of the resource areas.
- **Chapter 4** provides a description of the potential environmental impacts/consequences of the Proposed Action and alternatives.
- **Chapter 5** includes an analysis of potential cumulative effects. Cumulative effects include evaluation of the Proposed Action in relation to past, present, and/or future foreseeable actions within the affected environment. This chapter also includes a discussion of the irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.
- **Chapter 6** contains mitigation measures required to reduce or eliminate the potential adverse impacts of the Proposed Action.
- **Chapter 7** contains references cited in preparation of this SPEIS, including correspondence.
- **Chapter 8** provides a list of SPEIS preparers.
- **Chapter 9** lists persons and agencies contacted and the distribution list for the document.
- **Chapter 10** provides an index.

A variety of appendices are included to provide supporting technical documentation.

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 OVERVIEW OF CHANGES TO THE CRP FROM THE 2014 FARM BILL

The FSA proposes to implement changes to the CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill, which extends the enrollment authority for the CRP to 2018, as well as other discretionary measures to improve the functionality and conservational benefits of the program. The 2014 Farm Bill aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As the FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative. Other elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action. In addition, the FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

Some of the changes in the 2014 Farm Bill are administrative in nature, would not result in major changes to the current administration of the program, or have been addressed in other NEPA documents concerning the CRP (see **Section 1.1.1**). These changes are not addressed in this SPEIS. A summary of the changes to the CRP is provided in **Table 2.1-1**. This table describes the discretionary and non-discretionary measures, existing NEPA coverage for each change, and whether that change requires analysis in this SPEIS. All of the changes are discussed in more detail in the following sections. For convenience, the SPEIS section where the change is discussed is noted in the table.

Table 2.1-1. Summary of the Changes to the CRP

Changes	Description	Authority	Existing NEPA Coverage	Included in SPEIS?	SPEIS Section Reference
Maximum Enrollment	Maximum enrollment gradually reduced from 32 to 24 million acres by fiscal year 2017.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2010	No	2.2.1
FWP	Created permanent program from pilot program established by 2008 Farm Bill and sets enrollment cap at 750,000 acres.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2008	No	2.2.2
Tree Thinning	Reduce payment authority to $10 million, allows for incentive payments .	Non-discretionary	USDA 2008	No	2.2.3

Table 2.1-1. Summary of the Changes to the CRP

Changes	Description	Authority	Existing NEPA Coverage	Included in SPEIS?	SPEIS Section Reference
Early Termination of Contracts	Provides contract termination opportunity in 2015 for contracts that have been in place for at least 5 years, with exceptions.	Non-discretionary	None	No	2.2.4
Managed Harvesting, Prescribed and Routine Grazing Payment Reduction	Requires rental payment reduction of at least 25 percent. No payment reduction for beginning farmer or rancher for grazing.	Discretionary	USDA 2010	No	2.2.5
Transition Option	Provides authority for $33 million to facilitate transfer of land from retired owners to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.	Non-discretionary	None	No	2.2.6
Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction	Removes the requirement to reduce rental payments.	Non-discretionary	None	No	2.2.7
Prescribed Grazing Frequency	Allows annual grazing for control of invasive plants.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2010	No	2.2.8
Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities	Allows up to 2 million acres of certain grasslands to be eligible for the CRP under Continuous Sign-up. Authorized activities differ from other CRP contracts.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2009	No Action Alternative	2.3.1
Final Year of Contract	Allows enrollment in Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program during final year of contract.	Non-discretionary	None	No Action Alternative	2.3.2

Table 2.1-1. Summary of the Changes to the CRP					
Changes	**Description**	**Authority**	**Existing NEPA Coverage**	**Included in SPEIS?**	**SPEIS Section Reference**
Targeted Enrollment	Alternative enrollment strategy to be used to meet enrollment caps while maintaining conservation benefit.	Discretionary	None	Proposed Action	2.4.1
Managed Harvesting Frequency	Sets minimum frequency of once in 5 years, and maximum frequency of once in 3 years.	Discretionary	USDA 2010, State specific EAs	Proposed Action	2.4.2
Routine Grazing Frequency	Sets maximum frequency to no more than once every 2 years.	Discretionary	USDA 2010, State specific EAs	Proposed Action	2.4.2
Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional CPs	Discretionary measure for meeting needs of producers during severe drought conditions.	Discretionary	USDA 2012	Proposed Action	2.4.3

Note: CP = conservation practice; CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; EA = Environmental Assessment; FWP = Farmable Wetland Program; NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act; SPEIS = Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement; USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture

2.2 CHANGES TO THE CRP NOT ADDRESSED IN THE SPEIS

2.2.1 Maximum Enrollment Authority Changes

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, the maximum acreage authorized for enrollment in the CRP at any one time was limited to 32 million acres (16 U.S. Code [USC] 3831(d)). Currently, there are 26 million acres enrolled in the CRP. There are approximately 9 million acres set to expire from 2014 through 2018. Under the 2014 Farm Bill, the enrollment authority for the CRP would be gradually reduced to 24 million acres (**Table 2.2-1**).

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

Given the contracts that are scheduled to expire over the next 5 years, the number of acres enrolled in the CRP would be below the statutory maximum acreage cap due to attrition alone. The expiring acres would allow for enrollment to continue in all years under the 2014 Farm Bill even with the reduced enrollment cap (2014 through 2018). The 2010 CRP SEIS analyzed a discretionary alternative to reduce the maximum enrollment to 24 million acres (USDA 2010). That analysis concluded that reducing the enrollment cap would decrease the potential for beneficial environmental impacts. Over the next few years, expiring acres coupled with the reduced capability to enroll or re-enroll land would likely result in some conservation lands returning to agricultural production. Since the reduced acreage cap is a mandatory change, and since the 2010 CRP SEIS provided analysis of a maximum enrollment option of

24 million acres, that analysis is incorporated by reference into this SPEIS and the mandatory reduction in the maximum enrollment authority does not require additional analysis.

Table 2.2-1. Maximum Enrollment Changes Under 2014 Farm Bill (million acres)

Fiscal Year (FY)	Maximum Enrollment	Expiring Acres	Cumulative Enrollment (Current – Expiring)[1]	Estimated Available Acres for Future Enrollment
2014	27.5	2.0	24	3.5
2015	26	1.7	22.3	3.7
2016	25	1.2	21.1	3.9
2017	24	2.6	18.5	5.5
2018	24	1.5	17	7

Note: [1] Cumulative enrollment is calculated by subtracting the expiring acres from the current year actual enrollment. For 2013, there are 26 million acres enrolled in CRP. This column does not account for any new enrollment or renewal of expiring contracts.

2.2.2 FWP Enrollment Changes

The FWP enrollment was limited to 1 million acres nationally and no more than 100,000 acres in any one state under the 2008 Farm Bill (16 USC 3831(d)). The program is designed to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers to improve both vegetation and hydrology. Restoring wetlands improves groundwater quality, prevents soil erosion, reduces downstream flood damage, helps trap and break down pollutants, and provides habitat for water birds and other wildlife.

Producers can enroll on a Continuous Sign-up basis until the national or state limits are reached. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. To be eligible for enrollment, land must meet one of the following criteria:

- A wetland (including a converted wetland) that has a cropping history during at least 3 of the immediately preceding 10 crop years.
- Land that includes, or will include, a constructed wetland to receive surface and subsurface flow from row-crop agricultural production for the purpose of removing nitrogen in addition to other wetland functions.
- Land devoted to commercial pond-raised aquaculture during any year from 2002 through 2007.
- Any cropland that was cropped during at least 3 of 10 years between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2002, and was subject to the natural overflow of a prairie wetland.

Participants in the program agree to: restore the hydrology of the wetland to the maximum extent practicable; establish vegetative cover which may include emerging vegetation in water and bottomland hardwoods, cypress, or other appropriate tree species; and prohibit commercial use of the enrolled land. Enrolled land cannot exceed 40 acres per tract; of this, no more than 40 acres may be for wetlands or constructed wetlands and no more than 20 acres may be for intermittently flooded prairie wetlands. CPs authorized under the FWP are CP27 (farmable wetlands), CP28 (farmable wetland buffers), CP39 (constructed wetlands), CP40 (aquaculture wetland restoration), and CP41 (flooded prairie wetlands) (see **Appendix A** for description of all CPs).

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

Changes in the 2014 Farm Bill include a mandatory reduction in the enrollment authority for the FWP to 750,000 acres nationally. Currently there are approximately 340,000 acres enrolled. The *PEA for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the CRP* (USDA 2008) analyzed a total acreage cap of 1 million acres, assessed changes to the eligible land criteria and enrollment parameters, and allowed state allotments to increase from 100,000 to 200,000 acres. The statutory change to reduce the maximum enrollment authority to 750,000 acres would allow for 410,000 acres of farmable wetlands to be enrolled in the program. The reduction in enrollment from 1 million acres authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill to the 750,000 acres mandated by the 2014 Farm Bill is not analyzed since there is no discretion for any other level. Additionally, the mandatory reduced acreage cap is not expected to affect actual enrollment, as enrollment historically has been well below the cap.

2.2.3 Tree Thinning Payment Changes

Tree thinning was authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill when performed as part of normal forestry management on CRP lands to improve land cover or tree stands during contract management activities. Tree thinning is a voluntary management activity that is eligible for cost-share payment if included in an approved Conservation Plan. The 2008 Farm Bill provided for $100 million during 2008-2012 for cost-share payments for thinning activities as authorized (16 USC 3841(a)(1)(A)). This provision applies to tree practices, as well as CP5A (windbreaks), CP16A (shelterbelts), CP22 (riparian buffers), and CP4B (wildlife corridors) (see **Appendix A** for description of all CPs). Tree thinning benefits the vegetative conservation cover by reducing competition among plants that may diminish the desired species composition and plant stand structure designed to meet a particular conservation objective; improving the health and vigor of plants that may have suffered damage or disease; and reducing wildfire hazards by removing excess fuels.

As defined in the 2008 Farm Bill, the primary purpose of tree thinning on the CRP must be to improve the wildlife benefits and resource conditions on the land. The producer may dispose of or use the materials for commercial purposes (e.g., wood pulp, mulch) without a rental payment reduction provided that removal of the refuse enhances wildlife, reduces undesirable insect and disease infestation, and/or reduces wildfire hazards. Under the 2008 Farm Bill, the producer did not have to forego the annual rental payment for the year in which the thinning occurred if the refuse was used for commercial purposes.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill reduces the payment authority for tree thinning activities to $10 million and authorizes incentive payments. The statutory change allows the Secretary to provide incentives to owners and operators to conduct practices and utilize management tools that would promote forest management, enhance the overall health of tree stands, improve the condition of resources, or provide valuable habitat for wildlife. Such practices and management tools should be used to encourage landowners to promote pine savannah habitat or conduct other beneficial habitat practices such as tree thinning, disking, and prescribed burning. Expanding the funding authority to provide cost-share for tree thinning activities was analyzed in the *PEA for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the CRP* (USDA 2008). The socioeconomic analysis for tree thinning activities concluded that the impacts would be neutral based on the assumption that a producer would likely choose forestry management practices based on the expected economic return from the activities after their costs. Since cost-share for thinning activities must be provided not less than 2 years and not more than 4 years from planting new stands or thinning existing

stands under new CRP contracts, tree thinning would likely be considered a relatively higher cost-management option due to the additional uncovered costs for infrastructure required for thinning and removal of refuse.

Since enactment of the 2008 Farm Bill, less than $50,000 in cost-share payments have been provided for tree thinning activities, indicating this provision is not widely used. Therefore, the statutory reduction in funding available for tree thinning activities would not represent a real change in current use of the funds. However, under the changes, incentive payments would be authorized, which in turn may increase tree thinning activities (incentive payments would be more attractive than cost-share payments), and this payment authority may be used more fully. Reducing the payment authority would not change any environmental or socioeconomic benefits being realized under this provision. The change is administrative in nature and the expected environmental and socioeconomic impacts would be similar to those analyzed in previous NEPA documents (USDA 2008); therefore, changes to tree thinning payments do not require further analysis in this SPEIS.

2.2.4 Early Termination of Contracts

Early termination of CRP contracts was authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill for contracts signed prior to January 1, 1995 as long as the contract has been in place for at least 5 years (16 USC 3835(e)). The following lands were not eligible for early contract termination:

- Filterstrips, waterways, strips adjacent to riparian areas, windbreaks, and shelterbelts.
- Land with an erodibility index of more than 15.
- Other land of high environmental value (including wetlands), as determined by the Secretary.

If a contract is terminated under this provision prior to the end of the fiscal year (FY) in which an annual rental payment is due, the producer receives only a prorated annual rental payment to cover the portion of the year the land was under contract.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill modifies the early termination provision to include an opportunity during FY 2015 for early contract termination of CRP contracts, provided the contract has been in place for at least 5 years. Early land preparation activities would be allowed in accordance with national policy (2-CRP Handbook, paragraph 637). The following lands would not be eligible for early contract termination:

- Land devoted to hardwood trees.
- Wildlife habitat, duck nesting habitat, pollinator habitat, upland bird habitat buffer, wildlife food plots, SAFE, shallow water areas for wildlife, and rare and declining habitat.
- Farmable wetlands and restored wetlands.
- Land that contains diversions, erosion control structures, flood control structures, contour grass strips, living snow fences, salinity reducing vegetation, cross wind trap strips, or sediment retention structures.
- Land located within a Federally-designated wellhead protection area.
- Land that is covered by an easement under the CRP.
- Land located within an average width, according to the applicable NRCS eFOTG, of a perennial stream or permanent water body.

- Land enrolled under the CREP.

Taking the above exceptions into consideration, less than 3 million acres of CRP land could be eligible for early termination (see **Appendix C** for eligible acreage by state). Early termination of contracts was previously authorized and the change would not offer any discretion for implementation and represents an administrative change that does not require further NEPA analysis. The removal of these acres from the CRP could allow for additional acres to be enrolled under General or Continuous Sign-ups.

2.2.5 Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction Changes

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, managed harvesting and routine grazing required a payment reduction of the annual payment to be commensurate with the economic value of the haying and grazing activity (16 USC 3832(d)).

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill requires a payment reduction of at least 25 percent for both managed harvesting and routine grazing. This statutory change codifies the existing administrative procedure related to these practices. The 2008 Farm Bill called for the payment reduction to be commensurate with the economic value of harvesting and grazing activity. Because it was determined to be infeasible to assess the actual value of activities undertaken by CRP participants, a payment reduction of 25 percent was established and evaluated in the 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010); therefore, these changes do not require further analysis in this SPEIS.

2.2.6 Transition Option Funding

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, a retiring farmer or rancher was eligible for an additional 2 years of annual rental payments if the land was transferred to a beginning farmer or rancher, or a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who is not a family member (16 USC 3835(c)(1)(iii)). The beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher is able to make improvements to CRP land 1 year prior to termination of the CRP contract for the purpose of returning some or all of the land to production using sustainable grazing or crop production methods.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, up to $25 million was authorized to facilitate the transfer of land from a retiring farmer or rancher to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher (7 USC 2279(e)(7)). Nearly all of the funding authorization was used for this purpose.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, the authorization to facilitate this transfer would be increased by an additional $8 million (for a total of $33 million) and would expand the eligibility to include veteran farmers or ranchers (as defined in Section 2501(e) of the Food Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, USC 2279(e)). It is expected that all of the additional funding authorization ($8 million) would be used and would not represent a significant change with respect to socioeconomic conditions. This is an administrative and statutory change and does not require further analysis in this SPEIS.

2.2.7 Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, emergency haying and grazing required the same rental payment reduction that was required for any authorized haying or grazing activity (16 USC 3832(d)), which was defined as a value commensurate with the economic value of the activity.

Justification for Elimination from SPEIS

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, harvesting, grazing, or other commercial use of the forage in response to a drought, flooding, or other emergency is authorized without any reduction in the rental rate. In response to worsening drought conditions in recent years, the rental payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing was reduced to as low as 10 percent in 2012. As analyzed in the 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010) and the 2012 *PEA for Emergency Drought Response on CRP Lands* (USDA 2012), emergency haying and grazing provides short-term, minor, beneficial socioeconomic effects to the local and regional communities where these activities occur. As addressed in those documents, the decision to implement emergency haying and grazing hinges on the value of the activity and whether or not it would exceed the rental payment reduction. While removing this payment reduction may potentially increase emergency haying and grazing activities and create a slightly more beneficial socioeconomic effect, this change would not fundamentally alter the analysis provided in previous documents (USDA 2010, 2012). Therefore, this change does not require further analysis in this SPEIS.

2.2.8 Prescribed Grazing Frequency

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized the use of prescribed grazing to control invasive plant species provided that activities do not defeat the purpose of the CRP contract and are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat (16 USC 3832 (a)(8)(C)). The 2010 CRP SEIS evaluated the impacts of prescribed grazing in compliance with a Grazing Management Plan, part of the Conservation Plan that includes frequency, timing, stocking rates, and type of grazing animal.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, prescribed grazing to control invasive plant species can be conducted annually, essentially providing clarification that such grazing can occur as determined in consultation with the STC. In 2012, there were approximately 650 acres where prescribed grazing was used.

2.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As the FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative.

2.3.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Native grasslands in the central U.S. are considered one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. Historically, grasslands and shrublands occupied approximately 1 billion acres of the lower 48 states. Approximately half of that area has been converted to cropland, urban land, and other uses (Wood and Williams 2005). Non-Federally owned grasslands (pastureland and rangeland) currently cover around 529 million acres (NCRS 2013). The remaining grassland resources are threatened by conversion into cropland, development of parcels for home sites, invasion of woody or non-native species, and urban and exurban development. The GRP was developed to assist in protecting native grasslands and managed rangelands.

Prior to the 2014 Farm Bill, the GRP was jointly administered by the FSA and NRCS with the purpose of providing assistance to landowners and operators to protect grazing uses and related conservation values on eligible private range and pasture lands. Enrollment options included long-term contracts (10, 15, or 20

years) or permanent easements. As of 2013, there were 396,261 acres enrolled in GRP easements and 1,337,450 acres enrolled in contracts (for a total of approximately 1.7 million acres).

The 2014 Farm Bill makes grasslands, which would have been previously eligible for the GRP, eligible for enrollment in the CRP. The eligibility requirements and authorized activities are the same as those previously defined for the GRP. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding. Eligible land includes privately owned grasslands, including Tribal lands, that:

- Contain forbs or shrubs (including rangeland and improved pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use.
- Are located in an area that has been historically dominated by grasslands.
- Could provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value if the land is retained in the current use or restored to its natural condition.

Site specific EEs are required prior to enrollment in the CRP. A Grazing Management Plan is required and developed in accordance with the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook. The Grazing Management Plan includes a Conservation Plan, Restoration Plan, and any applicable grazing management systems. These plans must comply with all Federal, state, local, and Tribal regulations and permit requirements; and include a schedule of operations for implementation and maintenance of practices with a description of the grazing management system, permissible and prohibited activities, applicable information on species in the local area that are in significant decline, and a description of the USDA's right of ingress and egress. Permitted activities on enrolled land include:

- *Grazing* – The participant reserves the right to graze the land in a manner consistent with maintaining the viability of the grass, shrub, forb, and wildlife species indigenous to the locality. Grazing related activities such as fencing and livestock watering, brush management, and use of prescribed fire are permitted.
- *Haying, mowing, and seed production* – Haying, mowing, and harvesting of seed is permitted, except on designated areas during nesting and brood-rearing seasons for birds whose populations are in significant decline.
- *Fire pre-suppression* – Construction and rehabilitation of fire breaks and the use of prescribed fire to reduce wildfire hazard is permitted, except during nesting and brood-rearing seasons for birds whose populations are in significant decline.
- *Recreational uses* – The participant reserves the right to recreational uses such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching as long as the usage does not adversely affect the land for the purposes identified by the easement or rental contract.
- *Subsurface resources* – If a third party owns the oil, gas, geothermal resources, or minerals on the property, the NRCS performs a mineral assessment to identify the potential for development of minerals on the site. If the development of subsurface resources would adversely affect the conservation values of the land, the contract would be subject to termination.
- *Renewable energy* – Installation of renewable energy sources for power generation is authorized, provided their placement is consistent with the grazing uses and other conservation values of the program. Wind power generating facilities are not authorized without site specific NEPA analysis

that determines there would be no adverse impacts to protected species, cultural resources, or the human environment.

Under the 2014 Farm Bill, the GRP is repealed as a stand alone program and the land eligibility requirements for the CRP are amended to include the eligibility requirements for grasslands as described above. Grasslands enrollment would be limited to no more than 2 million acres at any given time and would count against the total CRP enrollment acreage cap. Enrollment would occur through Continuous Sign-up. Grasslands would be enrolled in 10- or 15-year contracts like other CRP acreage. Since one of the primary purposes of the GRP was to protect grazing uses in addition to conservation, the authorized activities on enrolled grasslands are different than the authorized activities on other CRP lands and include the following:

- Common grazing practices, including maintenance and necessary cultural practices, on the land in a manner consistent with maintaining the viability of grassland, forb, and shrub species appropriate to that locality.
- Haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production, subject to appropriate restrictions during the nesting season for birds in the local area that are economically significant, in significant decline, or conserved in accordance with Federal or state laws.
- Fire suppression, fire-related rehabilitation, and construction of fire breaks.
- Grazing-related activities, such as fencing and livestock watering.

The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes the Secretary to grant priority to lands expiring from current CRP contracts that will retain grass cover. This change accommodates acreage that previously would have been eligible for rental contracts under the GRP for working grasslands. The authorized activities are the same as those currently authorized on existing GRP contracts and easements. Under the CRP, eligible grasslands would only be enrolled in 10- or 15-year contracts. Enrolling grasslands in easements would not be allowed under the CRP, but would be allowed under the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, discussed in **Section 2.3.2**.

2.3.2 Final Year of Contract

A provision in the 2014 Farm Bill allows a CRP participant to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program during the year prior to expiration of the contract. Likewise, a new stipulation in the Farm Bill would allow CRP land to be enrolled in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program without violation of the contract. Rental payments could be reduced commensurate with the number of months left on the contract at the time of the transfer.

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving and maintaining existing conservation systems. The program pays participants for conservation performance – the higher the performance, the higher the payment. Land is enrolled in 5-year contracts through Continuous Sign-up. The program addresses seven resource concerns (soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plant resources, and animal resources) as well as energy. Each NRCS State Conservationist, in consultation with the STC and local working groups, focuses the program on three to five priority resource concerns for their state. Under the 2014 Farm Bill, CRP land may be enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program during the final year of the CRP contract as long as the conservation activity required under the program is consistent with the existing CPs and avoids the PNS.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. In general, the program combines the purposes of the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), GRP, and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. The goals of the program are to:

- Restore, protect, and enhance wetlands on eligible land.
- Protect the agricultural use and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses of that land.
- Protect grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring and conserving eligible land.

Two easement options would be available under this program: (1) an agricultural land easement for the purpose of protecting natural resources and the agricultural nature of the land while allowing the landowner to continue agricultural production and related uses as approved by the Secretary; and (2) a wetland easement for the purpose of protecting wetlands, including farmed or converted wetlands. Eligible land would be enrolled in 30-year easements (wetland easement only), permanent easements, or easements for the maximum duration allowed under applicable state laws.

Compensation for the permanent easement would be determined based on the lowest of the fair-market value of the land, an amount corresponding to a geographical cap as determined by the Secretary, or the offer made by the landowner. Compensation for 30-year wetland easements would be not less than 50 percent, but not more than 75 percent, of the compensation that would be paid for a permanent wetland easement. Cash payment for the easement would be provided in no more than 10 annual payments, depending on easement value. Financial assistance to carry out the establishment of conservation measures and practices, and protect wetland functions and values, including maintenance activities, would also be provided. Establishment of conservation measures and practices would be required to avoid the PNS.

CRP land may be enrolled in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program without violating the CRP contract. Since this is a new program and full details are not yet known, this SPEIS assumes enrollment would be allowed during the final year of the contract, as described for the Conservation Stewardship Program. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is managed by NRCS. The NEPA analysis for this new program is not covered in this SPEIS.

2.4 PROPOSED ACTION

Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to the FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action. In addition to those Farm Bill elements, the FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands, and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought-designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

2.4.1 Targeted Enrollment

The 2014 Farm Bill would reduce the maximum enrollment for the CRP to 24 million acres by 2017 (see **Section 2.2.1**). To continue to obtain the maximum benefit to soils, wildlife, and water quality from the CRP, the FSA is proposing an additional method for enrolling lands to meet specific conservation goals and objectives. Under the Proposed Action, in addition to the long-standing General and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods, the FSA proposes to target enrollment through a reverse-auction approach

for select CPs. Targeted Enrollment could enable the FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit. This approach would have an annual enrollment period, sign-up, and offer selection. The addition of a Targeted Enrollment option would not replace the long-standing General and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods, but would supplement those methods.

The FSA could target the enrollment of specified practices, groups of practices, or specific types of lands in order to meet environmental goals and maximize environmental benefit of enrolled acres, much like state or other conservation initiatives. The initiatives and specific practices to be involved could vary annually depending on the conservation need, enrollment goals, and funding availability.

The same land eligibility requirements and allowable practices for Continuous and General Sign-up would apply to lands enrolled using Targeted Enrollment. Eligible participants would submit offers to enroll land and provide a proposed rental rate for the offered acres. There would be no cap on the rental rate; however, cost would be a factor considered in selecting offers. All submitted offers received during the sign-up would be grouped according to practice or group of practices. Offers within each group would be selected on the basis of cost or, in those situations when a suitable benefits metric exists, cost-benefit ratio. As with other CRP enrollment methodologies, a site specific EE and a Conservation Plan would be required for enrolled lands.

A similar concept to increase migratory bird habitat was recently introduced by The Nature Conservancy through a program called BirdReturns. Under this program, rice farmers in the Central Valley along the Pacific Flyway are paid to keep their fields temporarily flooded with irrigation water after the rice harvest to provide much needed resting and feeding habitat for migrating shorebirds (The Nature Conservancy 2013). Enrollment in the program is through a reverse auction in which rice farmers submit offers and are selected based on cost. The pilot program performed in the fall of 2013 was successful, and The Nature Conservancy hopes to increase the number of shorebirds that stop in the Central Valley substantially. Establishing a Targeted Enrollment method for the CRP that utilizes a reverse auction concept could have similar success and help increase CRP participation.

2.4.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Various forms of harvesting and grazing practices are used to maintain the CRP cover and improve the quality and performance of the vegetative cover. The specific CP determines which harvesting or grazing provision is authorized. Prior to implementing harvesting or grazing, a producer must submit a request to the local FSA office, and obtain a modified Conservation Plan for the activity that is in compliance with the NEPA and all other applicable Federal and state laws and regulations (see **Section 1.1.2.2**). The Conservation Plan requires several site specific inventories, measures to meet specific objectives, the methods and BMPs to control or mitigate impacts, and contingency and monitoring plans. A resource assessment must be conducted that identifies resources present (vegetative cover, water sources, soils) and their condition, existing structures (fences, natural barriers) and facilities (location of gates, watering areas), and a site plan as appropriate. An assessment of forage suitability must be completed, identifying the key forage species and associated acreage. The Conservation Plan includes the appropriate conservation practice standards as defined in the NRCS Practice Standards for Forage Harvest Management (Code 511) and/or Prescribed Grazing (Code 528). The standards define BMPs to ensure the activity maintains vegetative cover, minimizes soil erosion, protects water quality, and protects wildlife habitat quality.

Table 2.4-1 provides a summary of harvesting and grazing provisions authorized for CRP land. Harvesting or grazing cannot occur during the PNS, and the CRP vegetative cover must be established for 12 months prior to implementing the activity. Ineligible acreage includes land enrolled in useful life easements, land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent waterbody, and land devoted to any other practice not authorized for harvesting or grazing. Harvesting and grazing cannot occur on the same acreage in the same year.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized managed harvesting and routine grazing of the CRP, replacing managed haying and managed grazing authority for new contracts. Managed harvesting includes the periodic removal of vegetation for livestock feeding (haying) or biomass (harvesting). Biomass harvest includes removing material, thinnings, or invasive species from CRP for uses other than a livestock foodsource. Routine grazing is the allowance of livestock to periodically graze CRP land to maintain the cover and improve the quality and performance of the vegetation. Managed grazing (same activity as routine grazing) is only authorized for contracts approved before July 28, 2010 and is not affected by changes in the 2014 Farm Bill. **Figure 2.4-1** illustrates the average acres by state of managed harvesting during 2009 through 2013. **Figure 2.4-2** illustrates the average acres by state of routine grazing during 2011 through 2013 (routine grazing is applicable to contracts approved after 2010). **Tables 2.4-2 and 2.4-3** provide the total acres and contracts harvested or grazed from 2009 through 2013. As detailed in these tables, harvesting was far more utilized than grazing from 2009 through 2013. The average acreage harvested and grazed during this time period accounts for approximately 3 percent of the total CRP acreage (26 million acres enrolled in CRP). The average number of contracts harvested and grazed each year accounts for approximately 2 percent of the total CRP contracts (nearly 700,000 total CRP contracts).

Table 2.4-1. Summary of Current Harvesting and Grazing Provisions

Activity	Eligible CPs[1]	Other Provisions
Managed Harvesting - Hay or Biomass	CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes) CP2 (permanent native grasses) CP4B (permanent wildlife habitat corridors) CP4D (permanent wildlife habitat) CP10 (vegetative cover, grass established) CP18B (permanent covers reducing salinity) CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant covers)	• No more frequent than once every 3 years • Not authorized during PNS • Up to 120 calendar days after the end of PNS • Limited to one cutting • Emergency haying or grazing restarts the clock
Routine Grazing	CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes) CP2 (permanent native grasses) CP4B (permanent wildlife habitat corridors) CP4D (permanent wildlife habitat) CP10 (vegetative cover, grass established) CP18B (permanent covers reducing salinity) CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant covers)	• Frequency and duration determined through consultation with STC • No more frequent than once every 3 years • Not authorized during PNS • Emergency haying or grazing restarts the clock

Note:
[1] *See **Appendix A** for full description of all CPs*
CP = conservation practice; PNS = Primary Nesting Season

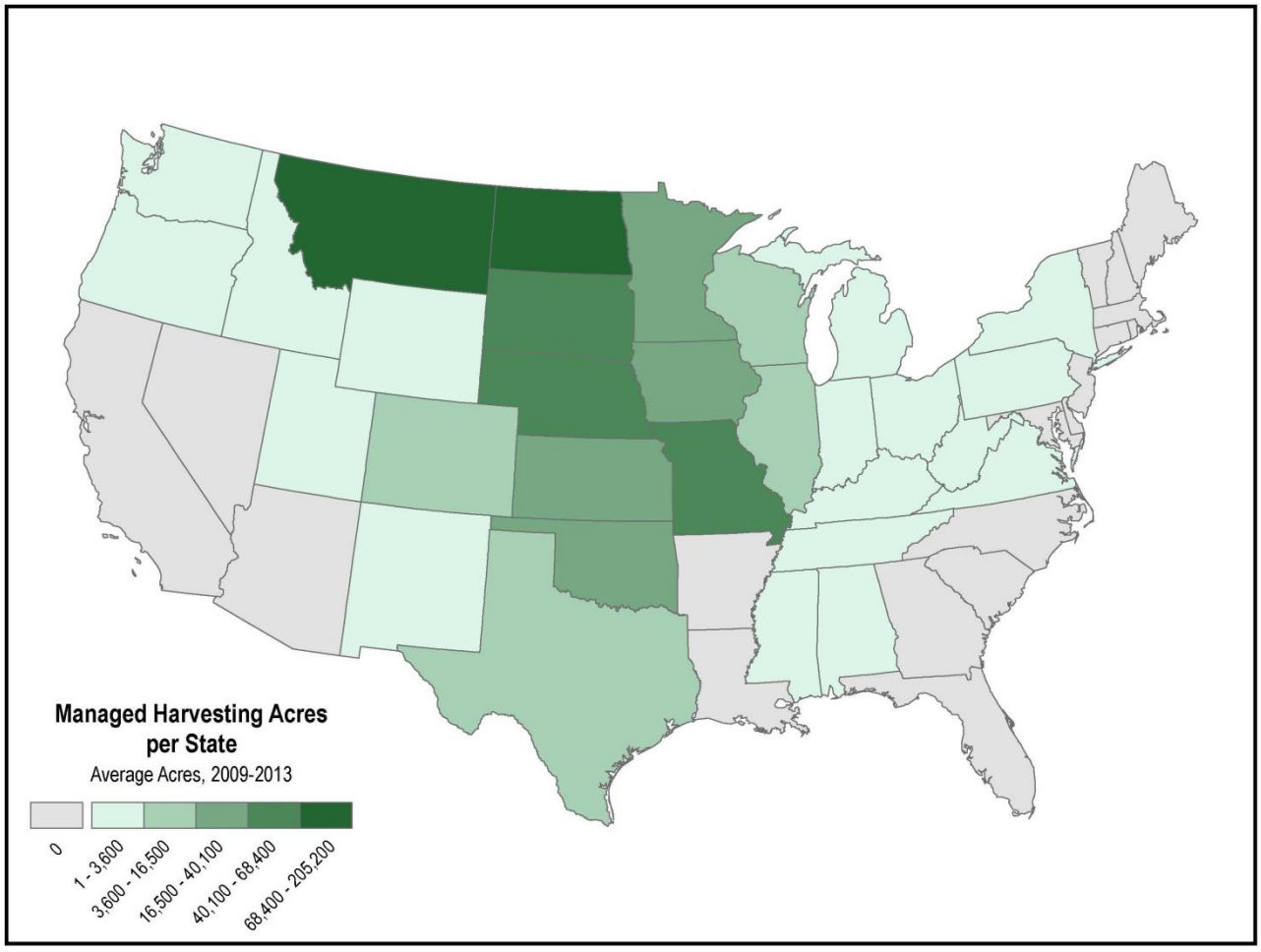


Figure 2.4-1. Managed Harvesting (Average Acres per Year, 2009-2013)

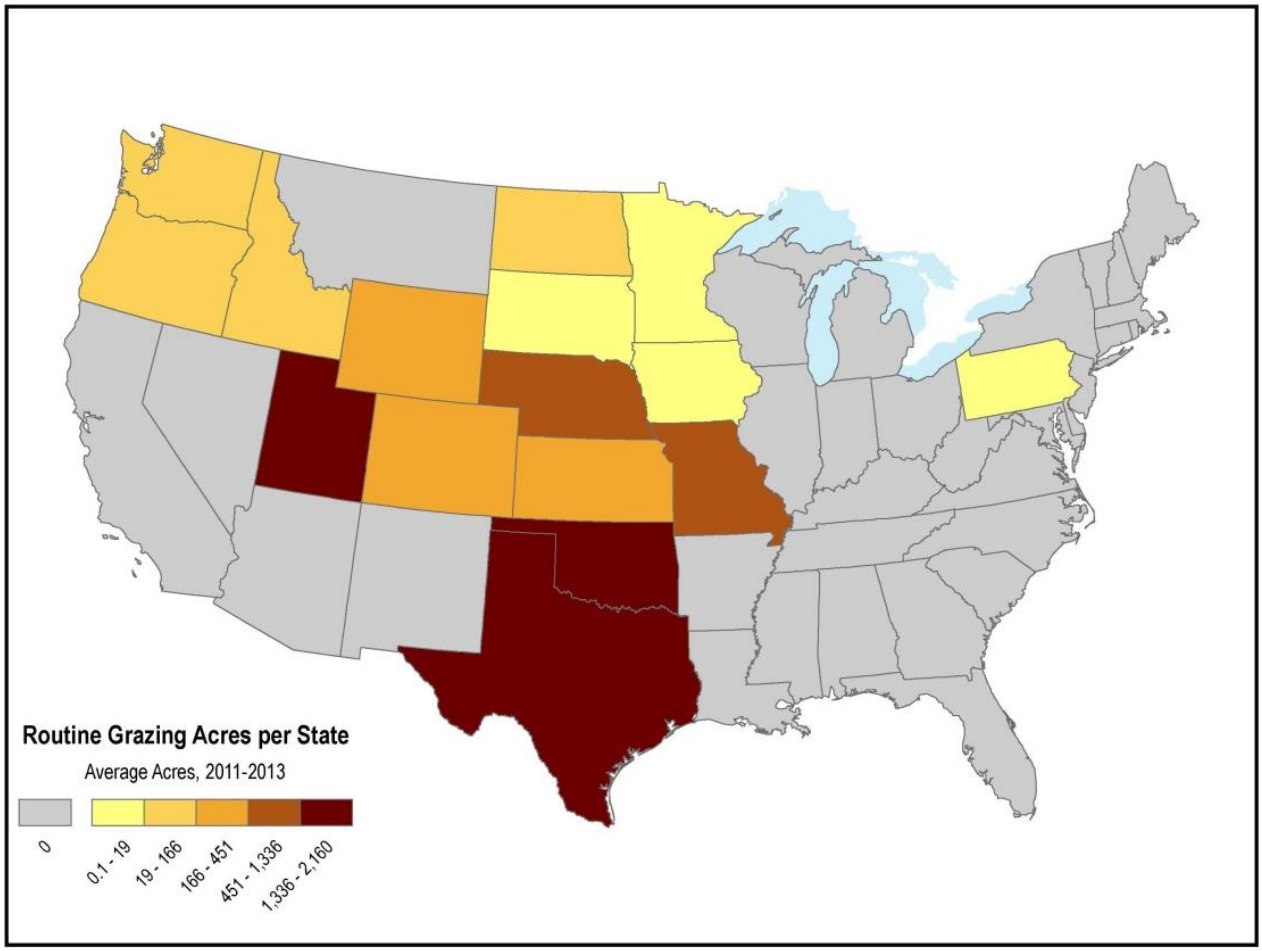


Figure 2.4-2. Routine Grazing (Average Acres per Year, 2011-2013)

Table 2.4-2. Acres Harvested or Grazed, 2009-2013				
Year	**Managed Harvesting**	**Managed Grazing[1]**	**Routine Grazing**	**Total**
2009	1,188,476	247,635	n/a	1,436,111
2010	529,201	134,564	n/a	663,765
2011	915,999	131,172	13,676	1,060,847
2012	691,158	64,734	3,385	759,277
2013	624,556	102,009	11,702	738,267
Total	**3,949,390**	**680,114**	**28,763**	**4,658,267**
Average per Year[2]	**789,878**	**136,023**	**9,587**	**931,653**

Note:
[1] *Managed grazing only authorized for contracts approved prior to July 28, 2010. Acreage provided in this table to provide a frame of reference for how much grazing occurs on CRP acreage.*
[2] *For reference, 26 million acres are enrolled in CRP.*
n/a = not applicable

Table 2.4-3. Number of Contracts Harvested or Grazed, 2009-2013				
Year	**Managed Harvesting**	**Managed Grazing[1]**	**Routine Grazing**	**Total**
2009	17,471	2,430	n/a	19,901
2010	11,542	1,296	n/a	12,838
2011	18,178	1,325	147	19,650
2012	14,594	851	445	15,890
2013	12,022	802	66	12,890
Total	**73,807**	**6,704**	**658**	**81,169**
Average per Year[2]	**14,761**	**1,341**	**219**	**16,234**

Note:
[1] *Managed grazing only authorized for contracts approved prior to July 28, 2010. Number of contracts provided in this table to provide a frame of reference for how many CRP contracts utilize grazing.*
[2] *For reference, there are 699,470 CRP contracts total.*
n/a = not applicable

The 2014 Farm Bill continues to allow for managed harvesting (hay or biomass) of CRP acres provided these activities are included in the Conservation Plan and are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The STC must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is at least once every 5 years (1/5), but no more frequently than once every 3 years (1/3).

Currently, four states (Arizona, California, Colorado, and Nevada) allow for less frequent managed harvesting of once every 10 years (1/10) as detailed in **Table 2.4-4**. All other states allow managed

harvesting either 1/3 or 1/5 and would not be affected by this change (**Appendix D**). The proposed changes to managed harvesting would require these four states to have more frequent harvesting than currently allowed (harvesting at least once in every 5 contract years). As shown in **Table 2.4-4**, Colorado is currently the only one of these four states where managed harvesting occurs; future managed harvesting in this state would be permitted to occur more often than it is currently.

Table 2.4-4. Managed Harvesting Changes

	Average Acres Harvested (2009-2013)	Current Allowable Frequency	Proposed Allowable Frequency
Arizona	0	1/10	1/5
California	0	1/10	1/5
Colorado	71,997	1/10	1/5
Nevada	0	1/10	1/5

The 2014 Farm Bill also continues to allow for routine grazing of CRP acres, provided these activities are included in the Conservation Plan and are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The STC would develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and stocking rates for the lands that are suitable for grazing. The STC would establish the periods during which routine grazing can occur such that the frequency is not more than once every 2 years (1/2), taking into consideration regional differences such as: climate, soil type, and natural resources; the number of years that should be required between routine grazing activities; and how often during a year routine grazing should be allowed to occur. The current allowable frequency for routine grazing varies by state, but it is currently no more frequently than once every 3 years (1/3) (**Appendix D**). Under the 2014 Farm Bill, states would have more flexibility to allow for more frequent routine grazing if approved by the STC. **Table 2.4-5** highlights those states that currently utilize routine grazing and the potential frequency change.

Table 2.4-5. Routine Grazing Frequency Changes

State	Average Acres (2011 – 2013)	Current Allowable Frequency	Potential Allowable Frequency
Colorado	248	1/5	1/2
Idaho	166	1/5	1/2
Iowa	19	1/3	1/2
Kansas	287	1/3	1/2
Minnesota	4	1/3	1/2
Missouri	800	1/3	1/2
Nebraska	1,336	1/3	1/2
North Dakota	110	1/5	1/2
Oklahoma	2,160	1/3	1/2
Oregon	148	1/5 (east); 1/3 (west)	1/2

Table 2.4-5. Routine Grazing Frequency Changes			
State	**Average Acres (2011 – 2013)**	**Current Allowable Frequency**	**Potential Allowable Frequency**
Pennsylvania	8	1/3	1/2
South Dakota	3	1/5	1/2
Texas	2,148	1/3	1/2
Utah	1,616	1/3	1/2
Washington	85	1/5 (east); 1/3 (west)	1/2
Wyoming	450	1/5	1/2
U.S. Total Average per Year	**9,587**		

2.4.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

Emergency haying and grazing of CRP acreage may be authorized to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by severe drought or a similar natural disaster. Emergency haying and grazing generally is intended for periods of drought or excessive moisture of such magnitude that livestock producers nationally or across large areas are faced with culling herds or livestock losses. Emergency haying and grazing generally are not authorized for situations where livestock producers suffer inconveniences in forage availability or prices because of less than ideal production or over-utilization of acreage not under the CRP contract.

Authorization for emergency haying and grazing is granted if either the Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs or FSA State Committee determines it is warranted and the FSA Conservation and Environmental Programs Division concurs. Eligibility is based on evidence submitted by County Committees that the county is suffering from a 40 percent or greater loss of normal hay and pasture production due to drought, or because excessive moisture conditions and/or precipitation levels indicate an average of 140 percent or greater increase in normal precipitation during the 4 most recent consecutive months, plus the days in the current month before the date of request.

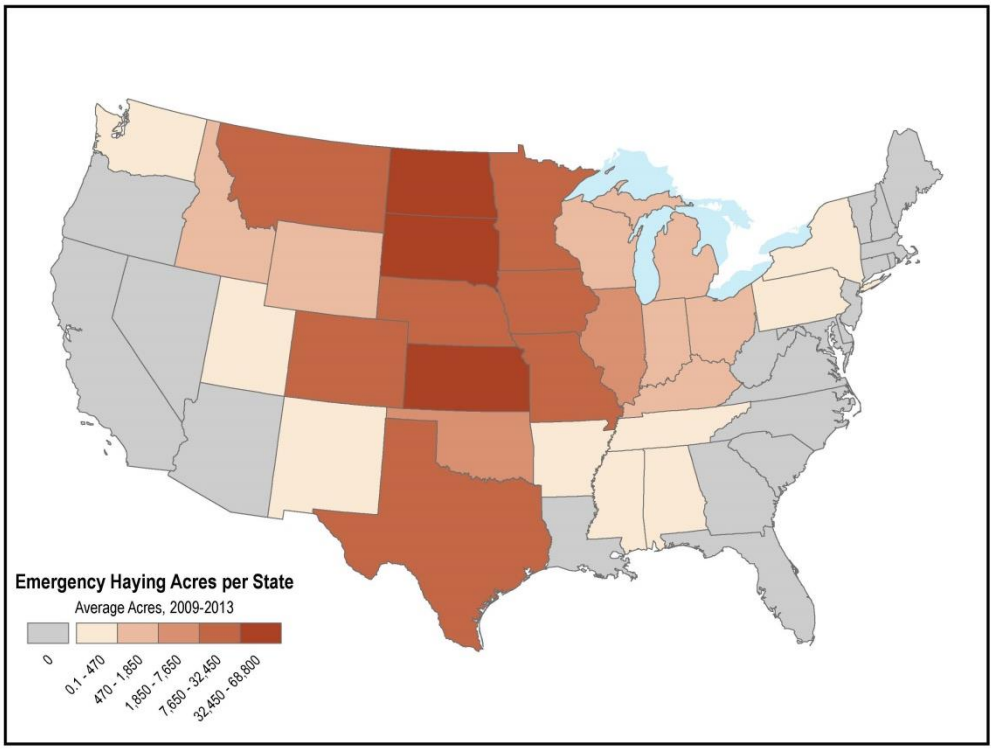
The U.S. Drought Monitor provides a weekly summary and map of drought conditions. The monitor is produced jointly by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), USDA, and National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Drought Monitor identifies general drought areas and designates droughts by intensity, with D1 being the least intense and D4 being the most intense. **Table 2.4-6** provides a description of the drought levels and the possible impacts during these conditions.

Table 2.4-6. Drought Levels		
Category	**Description**	**Possible Impacts**
D0	Abnormally Dry	Going into drought: short-term dryness slowing planting, growth of crops or pastures Coming out of drought: some lingering water deficits; pastures or crops not fully recovered
D1	Moderate Drought	Some damage to crops, pastures; streams, reservoirs, or wells low; some water shortages developing or imminent; voluntary water-use restrictions requested
D2	Severe Drought	Crop or pasture losses likely; water shortages common; water restrictions imposed
D3	Extreme Drought	Major crop/pasture losses; widespread water shortages or restrictions
D4	Exceptional Drought	Exceptional widespread crop/pasture losses; shortages of water in reservoirs, streams, and wells creating water emergencies

Emergency haying and grazing is limited to the acreage physically located within the boundary of the eligible county or portion of the county. Emergency haying or grazing may be approved if a county is designated at least as drought level "D2 – Severe Drought." **Figure 2.4-3** illustrates the average acres where emergency haying and grazing were permitted from 2009 through 2013. **Table 2.4-7** provides acreage and number of contracts hayed or grazed under emergency provisions from 2009 through 2013.

Table 2.4-7. Emergency Haying and Grazing, 2009-2013				
Year	**Emergency Haying Contracts**	**Emergency Haying Acres**	**Emergency Grazing Contracts**	**Emergency Grazing Acres**
2009	304	9,235	34	5,517
2010	195	6,871	15	601
2011	2,998	164,318	6,259	847,755
2012	43,382	1,408,992	13,271	1,410,935
2013	5,718	211,268	3,665	488,183
Total	**52,597**	**1,800,684**	**23,244**	**2,752,991**
Average per Year[1]	**10,519**	**360,137**	**4,649**	**550,598**

Note:
[1] *For referece, there are 26 million acres of CRP land and 699,470 CRP contracts total.*



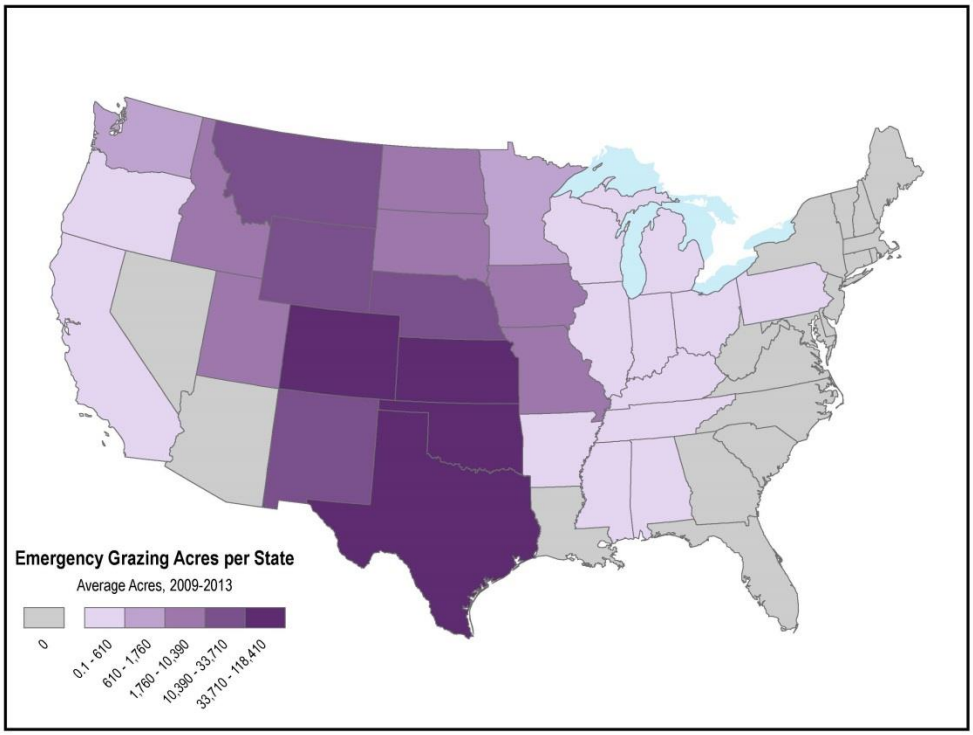


Figure 2.4-3. Emergency Haying and Grazing (Average Acres per Year, 2009-2013)

Acreage currently eligible for emergency haying and grazing is the same as the acreage eligible for managed haying and grazing and includes land devoted to practices: CP1, CP2, CP4B, CP4D, CP10, CP18B, and CP18C (see **Appendix A** for description of all CPs). Emergency haying and grazing may not occur during the PNS. Further restrictions apply to eligible practices as follows:

- Emergency grazing:
  - May occur for up to 90 calendar days, before September 30.
  - One 30 calendar day extension may be authorized, before September 30.
  - May be authorized for an extension of up to 15 calendar days because of flooding, before September 30.
  - Shall leave at least 25 percent of each field or contiguous CRP fields ungrazed for wildlife, or graze not more than 75 percent of the stocking rate determined by the NRCS or a TSP.
- Emergency haying:
  - May occur for up 60 calendar days, before September 30.
  - Extensions are not authorized.
  - Shall leave at least 50 percent of each field or contiguous fields unhayed for wildlife.
  - Is limited to one cutting.

Haying and grazing cannot occur on the same acreage. Currently, ineligible acreage for emergency haying and grazing includes useful life easements, any land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent water body, and any land enrolled in a CP not authorized for emergency haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing may occur any year before or after managed haying and grazing; however, managed haying and grazing may not be undertaken on acreage that was harvested under emergency provisions until the established frequency interval under managed provisions expires (see **Section 2.4.2** for additional details on frequency intervals).

In July 2012, in an effort to provide help to livestock producers during the most wide-spread drought in the U.S. in seven decades, Secretary Vilsack used his discretionary authority to allow lands that are not yet classified as "D2-Severe" but that are "D0-Abnormally dry" to be used for haying and grazing. An EA was prepared to address potential environmental consequences from authorizing emergency haying and grazing within drought-designated counties (D0 and higher) on certain CPs currently ineligible for haying and grazing only during FY 2012 (USDA 2012, see **Section 1.1.1**). A Mitigated FONSI was issued in August of 2012.

The Proposed Action includes affording the Secretary the discretionary authority to make additional CPs that are currently ineligible for any type of haying and grazing to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during wide-spread drought conditions (**Table 2.4-8**). Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed CPs in drought-designated areas (D2 or greater) would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or Federal agencies. Emergency haying and grazing would continue to be prohibited during the PNS and other restrictions as noted above still would apply.

Table 2.4-8. Proposed CPs Eligible for Emergency Haying and Grazing in Drought-Designated Areas	
CP8	Grass waterways, noneasement
CP21	Filter strips
CP22	Riparian buffers
CP23	Wetland restoration
CP23A	Wetland restoration, non-floodplain
CP25 (haying only)	Rare and declining habitats
CP27	Farmable wetlands
CP28	Farmable wetland buffers
CP37	Duck nesting habitat
CP39	Constructed wetland
CP41	Flooded prairie farmable wetlands

Note:
*See **Appendix A** for description of all CPs.*
CP = conservation practice

2.5 ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED

When the NOI was published, the 2014 Farm Bill had not been passed by Congress and two versions of the Farm Bill were being considered (Senate and House versions). Since it was not known at that time when the Bill would be passed, separate alternatives for the Senate version of the Farm Bill (Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2014) and the House version of the Farm Bill (Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2014) were considered. However, the 2014 Farm Bill was passed by Congress during preparation of the SPEIS and the two alternatives were eliminated from consideration. The provisions originally included in the two separate alternatives were very similar to those ultimately passed in the 2014 Farm Bill. As such, all scoping feedback remained applicable and was considered when developing the updated alternatives and analyses presented in the SPEIS.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This chapter describes the existing environmental and socioeconomic conditions to serve as a baseline to which the potential impacts of the Proposed Action will be compared in Chapter 4. This SPEIS focuses descriptions of the potentially affected lands and resources on those lands that either are eligible to be enrolled in the CRP under the 2014 Farm Bill provisions, or are on lands currently enrolled in the program. As such, these potentially affected lands include any of the following:

- Cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity during 4 of the 6 previous years and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity.
- Cropland with a weighted average Erodibility Index (EI) for the three predominant soils on the acreage offered of 8 or higher (considered highly erodible land [HEL]).
- Land currently enrolled in the CRP scheduled to expire September 30 of the FY the acreage is offered for enrollment.
- Cropland located within a National- or state-designated Conservation Priority Area (CPA).
- Environmentally sensitive land of special significance.
- Land suitable for riparian buffers, wildlife habitat buffers, wetland buffers, filter strips, wetland restoration, grass waterways, field windbreaks, shelterbelts, living snow fences, contour grass strips, salt tolerant vegetation, or shallow water areas for wildlife.
- Land within a USEPA-designated public wellhead area.

Additional eligibility requirements with respect to grasslands have been defined in the 2014 Farm Bill to include privately owned grasslands, including Tribal lands, that:

- Contain forbs or shrubs (including rangeland and improved pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use.
- Are located in an area that has been historically dominated by grasslands.
- Could provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value if the land is retained in the current use or restored to its natural condition.

In compliance with NEPA CEQ regulations, and the FSA procedures for implementing the NEPA, the description of the affected environment focuses on only those resources potentially subject to impacts. In addition, the level of analysis should be commensurate with the anticipated level of impact. This SPEIS supplements the 2010 CRP SEIS and, as such, descriptions of the affected environment tier to that document. In many resource areas, a brief summary is provided along with relevant updated information. For more detailed descriptions of the affected environment, refer to the 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010).

Applying the CEQ guidelines, the discussion of the affected environment and associated environmental impact analysis presented herein focuses on Biological Resources (vegetation, wildlife, and protected species), Soils, Water Resources (surface water, groundwater, floodplains, and wetlands), Air Quality, Recreation, and Socioeconomics.

3.1 RESOURCES ELIMINATED

CEQ regulations (1501.7(a)(3)) indicate that the lead agency should identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues that are not important or that have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they would not have a significant effect on the human or natural environment. This SPEIS supplements the 2010 CRP SEIS; the following resources were eliminated from detailed analysis in that document and are also eliminated in this SPEIS:

Noise. Implementing the Proposed Action would not permanently increase ambient noise levels at or adjacent to CRP lands. Noise from heavy equipment is common on agricultural lands that could be enrolled in the CRP. The potential for increased noise levels associated with implementing CPs would be minor, temporary, and localized, and would cease once implementation of the approved CPs was completed.

Other Protected Resources. The lands eligible for the CRP are privately owned; therefore, there is limited potential for impacts to National Natural Landmarks, Federal Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National or State Parks, or Federal or State Wildlife Refuges. A site specific resource inventory would be conducted prior to enrollment in the CRP; proposed activities that have the potential to affect a Protected Resource would be identified and the FSA would coordinate with the responsible land managing agency regarding potential impacts.

Wild and Scenic Rivers. This SPEIS does not address specific locations to be enrolled in the CRP at this time; therefore, impacts to designated Wild and Scenic Rivers are not addressed. The FSA would conduct a site specific EE prior to approval of CRP enrollment. If a Wild and Scenic River is within the project area, or the project has the potential to affect a Wild and Scenic River, the FSA would initiate consultation with the appropriate river-administering agency (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, USFWS, or USFS).

Cultural Resources. This SPEIS does not address specific locations to be enrolled in the CRP; therefore, cultural resources are not analyzed in this SPEIS. As with all CRP land enrollment, a site specific EE would be conducted prior to approval of any CRP contracts during the conservation planning process, or when existing Conservation Plans are modified to permit new activities such as harvesting or grazing. The likely impact of CRP enrollment on cultural resources would not be greater than expected for normal agricultural production since the majority of the lands in the program are required to have been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity to be eligible for the CRP during 4 of the 6 previous years.

Prime and Unique Farmland. The majority of lands eligible for enrollment in the CRP are highly erodible or are marginal pastureland, which do not meet the definition of Prime and Unique Farmland, as defined by the Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981, and it is therefore eliminated from further analysis.

Environmental Justice. EO 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations* was enacted to ensure that the environmental effects of Federal actions do not fall disproportionately on low-income and minority populations.

Recent farm legislation has included incentives for socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and Indian tribes to increase access to conservation programs by making them eligible for more favorable payment

and enrollment terms than other farmers received. A recent evaluation of these incentives found that farmers with limited farm sales and income, and farmers belonging to segments of the population that have historically been subject to discrimination, such as African American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic, Asian American, or Pacific Island farmers, comprise as much as 17 percent of the farm population (USDA 2009). The evaluation found that from 2004 to 2007, about 12 percent of the CRP participants were limited-resource and socially-disadvantaged farmers. The evaluation also found that these farmers participated differently in conservation programs with conservation priorities and levels of payments focused more on environmentally sensitive lands (USDA 2009).

The FSA actively ensures that minority and low-income populations have access to and information about the FSA programs through its Outreach and Education Program (OEP). OEP provides information and technical assistance about FSA programs to farmers and ranchers with the goal of increasing participation of underserved populations, including limited resource farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers. Additionally, the OEP staff works with states to encourage socially disadvantaged groups to participate in local governance activities and with community groups, colleges, minority associations, and Tribally-controlled colleges to provide technical assistance, training, and enhanced program delivery to those populations.

The FSA also has an Office of Civil Rights, which includes the Compliance and Program Analysis Branch. The Compliance Branch ensures nondiscrimination in program delivery, including the CRP. The Compliance and Program Analysis Branch is required (by USDA Directive 4300-4) to review and approve each Civil Rights Impact Analysis, which is required prior to issue of any significant new FSA regulation.

The Office of Civil Rights has determined that the CRP and its inherent provisions is a voluntary program open to all eligible participants, including minorities, women, and persons with disabilities with no regard of their race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, or marital/familial status.

The FSA procedures as well as state and site specific EAs and EEs, compliance with other regulations, mitigations, and conservation planning ensure no significant environmental or social impacts occur and that minorities and low-income populations are not disproportionately impacted.

3.2 VEGETATION

3.2.1 Definition of Resource

Vegetation, for the purposes of this SPEIS and subsequent analysis, refers to the plant species, both native and introduced (including invasive and noxious species) that characterize a region. This analysis focuses on the vegetation found on those lands eligible for enrollment in the CRP or those lands already enrolled in the program.

3.2.2 Affected Environment

Because of the large geographic scope of the CRP, the analysis for vegetation will focus on Level I Ecoregions of the U.S. Ecoregions have relatively homogenous vegetation, soils, climate, and geology. Vegetation and vegetative communities are dependent on climate and soils, so ecoregions give an approximation of the vegetative communities that may be present throughout a large land area (Commission for Environmental Cooperation [CEC] 1997).

Within the contiguous lower 48 states, there are ten Level I Ecoregions (CEC 1997): Northern Forests, Northwestern Forested Mountains, Marine West Coast Forest, Eastern Temperate Forests, Great Plains, North American Deserts, Mediterranean California, Southern Semiarid Highlands, Temperate Sierras, and Tropical Wet Forests (**Figure 3.2-1**). Because these regions have similar climate and soils, among other characteristics, their boundaries are independent of political boundaries. **Table 3.2-1** gives a brief description of vegetative communities of each ecoregion. Alaska does not have a large amount of land in agricultural production or a large enrollment in the CRP; therefore, the ecoregions present solely in Alaska are not described in **Table 3.2-1**.

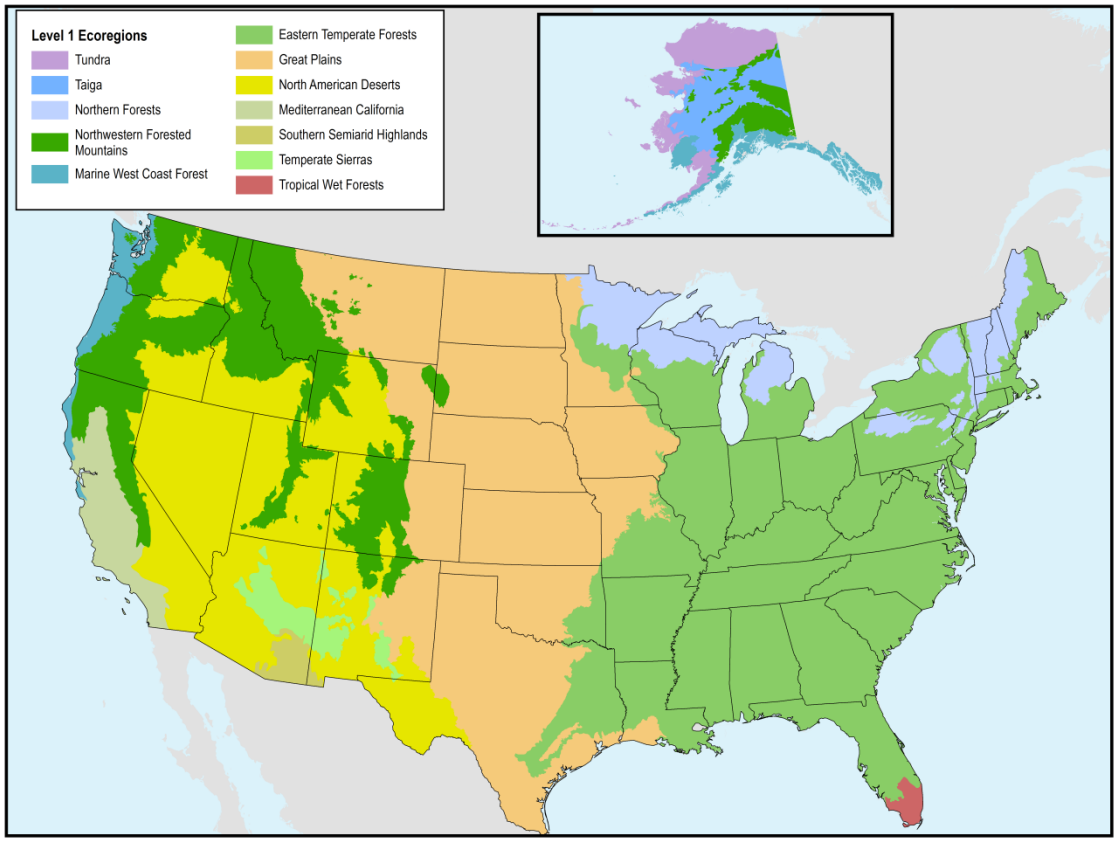


Figure 3.2-1. Level I Ecoregions of the U.S.

Table 3.2-1. Level I Ecoregion Descriptions and Approximate Areas in the Lower 48 States		
Name	**Vegetation Community Description**	**Approximate Acreage (%)**
Northern Forests	Supports generally closed stands of conifers, largely white and black spruce, jack pine, balsam fir, and tamarack. Towards the south, there is a wider distribution of white birch, trembling aspen, balsam poplar, white and red pine, sugar maple, beech, red spruce, and various species of oak. Areas of shallow soils and exposed bedrock are common and tend to be covered with a range of vegetative communities, dominated by lichens, shrubs, and forbs.	89,916,224 (5%)
Northwestern Forested Mountains	Vegetative cover is extremely diverse. Alpine environments contain herb, lichen, and shrub associations; whereas subalpine environments have tree species such as lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, silver fir, grand fir, and Engelmann spruce. With decreasing elevation, vegetation of the mountainous slopes and rolling plains turns into forest characterized by ponderosa pine, interior Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, and trembling aspen in much of the southeast and central portions; and western hemlock, western red cedar, Douglas fir, and western white pine in the west and southwest. White and black spruce dominate the plateaus of the north. Shrub vegetation found in the dry southern interior includes big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and antelope bitterbrush. Most of the natural grasslands that existed in the dry south have been replaced by urban settlement and agriculture.	203,184,145 (11%)
Marine West Coast Forest	Variations in altitude create widely contrasting ecological zones within the region. Zones range from mild, humid coastal rain forest to cool boreal forests and alpine conditions at higher elevations. The temperate coastal forests are composed of mixtures of western red cedar, yellow cedar, western hemlock, Douglas fir, Pacific silver fir, Sitka spruce, California redwood, and red alder. Many areas still contain old growth forest. In drier rain-shadow areas, Garry oak and Pacific madrone occur with Douglas fir. Subalpine forests are characterized by mountain hemlock and Pacific silver fir. Alpine tundra conditions are too severe for growth of most woody plants, except for dwarf forms. This zone is dominated by shrubs, herbs, mosses, and lichens.	20,737,771 (1%)
Eastern Temperate Forests	These forests form a dense canopy consisting mostly of tall broadleaf, deciduous trees and needle-leaf conifers. Beech-maple and maple-basswood forest types occur widely, especially in the eastern reaches. Mixed oak-hickory associations are common in the Upper Midwest, changing to oak-hickory-pine mixed forest in the south and the Appalachians. Various species of oaks, hickories, maples, and pines are common. Other wide-ranging species include ashes, elms, black cherry, yellow poplar, sweet gum, basswood, hackberry, common persimmon, eastern red cedar, and flowering dogwood.	619,453,910 (32%)

Table 3.2-1. Level I Ecoregion Descriptions and Approximate Areas in the Lower 48 States		
Name	**Vegetation Community Description**	**Approximate Acreage (%)**
Great Plains	This ecoregion is found in the central part of the continent and is the largest of all the ecoregions. This ecoregion was once covered by natural grasslands that supported rich and highly specialized plant and animal communities. The interaction of climate, fire, and grazing influenced the development and maintenance of the Great Plains. Rainfall increases from west to east, defining different types of native prairie. Short-grass prairie occurs in the west in the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains, with mixed-grass prairie in the central Great Plains, and tallgrass prairie in the wetter, eastern region. This ecoregion is distinguished by little topographic relief, domination of the landscape by grasslands, a paucity of forests, and a climate ranging from subhumid to semiarid.	553,053,237 (29%)
North American Deserts	This region exhibits a great deal of altitudinal, latitudinal, and landform diversity. A variety of vegetation communities exist, but low-growing shrubs and grasses predominate. This region is distinguished from the adjacent Northwest Forested Mountains Ecoregion by its aridity, unique shrub and cactus vegetation with lack of trees, and generally lower relief and elevations.	349,631,214 (18%)
Mediterranean California	This ecoregion is relatively small and found on the western coast. It is distinguished by its warm and mild Mediterranean climate, shrubland vegetation of chaparral mixed with areas of open grassland and open oak woodlands, and its agriculturally productive valleys. It also has a high human population in extensive urban areas.	40,488,931 (2%)
Southern Semiarid Highlands	Characteristic natural vegetation, which is greatly diminished or altered, consists of grasslands and combinations of grasslands with scrublands and forests in the transition zones. Dominant grass species are blue-stem, threeawn, galleta, and muhly grass. Mesquite and acacia may be found in some shrub and treed areas. Oak and western juniper are common at the foot of the Sierras.	10,542,250 (<1%)
Temperate Sierras	Vegetation can be evergreen or deciduous, primarily being composed of conifers and oaks. Vegetative cover may comprise one to three tree layers, one or two shrub layers, and an herbaceous stratum. Mountain cloud forest occurs in some areas.	26,894,936 (1%)
Tropical Wet Forests	This ecoregion is represented by the southern tip of Florida in the U.S. It is characterized by widespread flooded marshes and swamps (both saltwater and freshwater), with characteristic mangrove vegetation found in the Everglades.	5,370,539 (<1%)

Source: CEC 1997.

As shown in **Figure 3.2-1 and Table 3.2-1**, in the lower 48 states, the majority of the land area falls into Eastern Temperate Forests or the Great Plains (over 60 percent of the contiguous U.S.). Though Alaska has a large land area and can be classified by ecoregion, it makes up little of the land currently enrolled in CRP (see **Section 3.2.2 and Figure 3.2-2**).

Lands that are eligible for the CRP can occur in any ecoregion. In general, lands that are eligible for the CRP include the following:

- Croplands – lands used for the production of adapted crops for harvest, including cultivated and uncultivated crops.

- Hayland – cropland managed for the production of forage crops that are machine harvested, including grasses, legumes, or a combination of both.
- Horticultural cropland – cropland used for growing fruit, nuts, berries, vineyards, and other bush fruit and similar crops including nurseries or ornamental plantings.
- Irrigated cropland – land that shows evidence of being irrigated by ditches, pipes, or other conduits during the year of inventory or of having been irrigated during 2 or more of the last 4 years.
- Pastureland – land managed primarily for the production of introduced forage plants for livestock grazing, which may consist of a single species in a pure stand, a grass mixture, or a grass-legume mix.
- Rangeland – land where plant cover is composed principally of native grasses, grass-like plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing and browsing, and introduced forage species that are managed like rangeland.

Additionally, the CRP may include environmentally desirable lands that do not fit into the aforementioned categories. These lands may be wetlands, riparian areas, or rare and declining habitats.

3.2.2.1 Current CRP Enrollment

As shown in **Figure 3.2-2**, current CRP enrollment is concentrated in the Great Plains and Eastern Temperate Forests Ecoregions. Because of the variation in enrollment across ecoregions, changes to the CRP would be expected to affect ecoregions differently.

Table 3.2-2. Current CRP Enrollment by Level I Ecoregion

Level I Ecoregion	Acres	Percentage
Northern Forests	204,583	1%
Northern Forested Mountains	912,574	4%
Marine West Coast Forest	5,138	<1%
Eastern Temperate Forests	5,595,101	22%
Great Plains	16,634,042	65%
North American Deserts	2,167,351	9%
Mediterranean California	73,485	<1%
Temperate Sierras	1,009	<1%
Total	**25,593,283**	**100%**

Note: CRP = Conservation Reserve Program

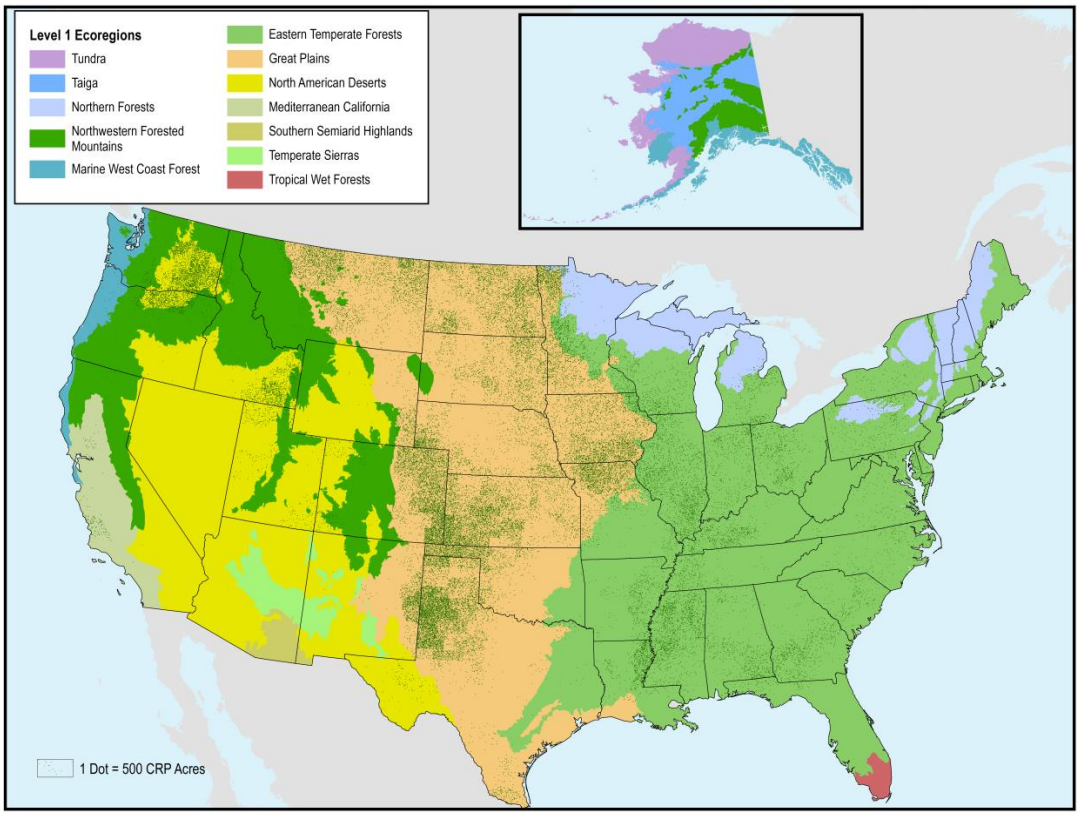


Figure 3.2-2. Current CRP Enrollment by Level I Ecoregion

3.2.2.2 Invasive and Noxious Plant Species

An invasive species is defined as a species that is non-native to the ecosystem and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health (USDA 2012). According to the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, noxious species are those species classified as undesirable, harmful, exotic, injurious, or poisonous, pursuant to state or Federal law. Additionally, many states have lists of weed species and methodologies prescribed for their control. CRP Conservation Plans are required to have provisions for identification, control, or eradication of invasive or noxious species (USDA 2013). **Section 3.1.2.1** of the 2010 CRP SEIS covers invasive and noxious plant species thoroughly, and provides a list of the major economically and ecologically important invasive species in the U.S. (USDA 2010). This document also provides a thorough discussion on the rationale for using non-native vegetation under certain environmental conditions for the purposes of establishing CRP conservation cover. Also covered in **Section 3.1.2.2** of the 2010 CRP SEIS, are common invasive species that impact the CRP including kudzu, yellow starthistle, and common buckthorn. A brief discussion of their habitats, potential causes of spread, and control measures also are included (USDA 2010).

Invasive species can have significant negative impacts on biological resources, including decreases in native wildlife and plant populations. Invasive species generally are introduced from other parts of the world and, as such, have no natural competitors or limiting factors and can out-compete native species and even alter entire ecosystem composition.

Eradication or control of invasive species can be difficult and expensive, and often requires multiple control methods to be effective. Application of herbicide, grazing, burning, mechanical control (such as cutting or excavating), and mowing are all methods that are used, usually in combination with one another, to control invasive species and noxious weeds. Relying heavily on one method may result in a species adapting defenses against that control method, rendering it less effective.

The expansion of invasive and noxious weeds is associated with ground disturbing activities, including the grazing of livestock. Grazing livestock can disturb soils and transport seeds in their coats or through eating and excreting seeds elsewhere. Poorly managed grazing is more likely to spread invasive and noxious weeds than aid in their control. Conservation Plans and Grazing Management Plans include methodologies for the identification, control, and eradication of noxious weeds and invasive species.

3.3 WILDLIFE

3.3.1 Definition of Resource

Wildlife refers to the animal species (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, and fish/shellfish), both native and introduced, that characterize a region.

3.3.2 Affected Environment

As with vegetation, the large geographic scale of the program prohibits the listing of all species that may be present on lands that are already enrolled or are eligible for enrollment. This discussion will instead focus on wildlife habitat, and the importance the CRP has played in habitat conservation over its 29-year lifespan.

During the past 40 years, wildlife populations have declined throughout the entire U.S. (NRCS 2009). Declines have occurred largely due to loss of wildlife habitat attributed to intensive farming, forest management, deforestation, advanced natural succession, fire-exclusion, invasion of exotic plants, and urbanization (NRCS 2009).

Agriculture dominates human uses of land. In the U.S., non-Federal, rural land uses comprise around 71 percent of the lower 48 states (approximately 1.4 billion acres) (NRCS 2013). In 2010, approximately 917 million acres (47 percent) of the lower 48 states were devoted to cropland, the CRP, pasture, or rangeland uses (NRCS 2013). How these lands are managed or maintained can have large impacts on the structure and function of ecosystems and the wildlife populations that these ecosystems support.

Often agricultural lands can provide forage and cover for wildlife in the form of large monoculture fields. Lands enrolled in the CRP that may be adjacent to such fields create or maintain habitat diversity, which in turn can benefit wildlife populations. A dynamic mosaic environment is most beneficial for supporting wildlife diversity (USDA 2010).

Across the plains states of the central U.S., grassland losses to other land uses continue. From 2006 to 2011, more than 1.3 million acres of grassland was converted to cropland across the northern Great Plains. In the Prairie Pothole Region, more than two-thirds of the original 90 million acres of native grasslands have been converted to other uses (Ducks Unlimited 2013). The Prairie Pothole Region is the most important breeding area in the nation for many duck species, with estimates that as many as 21 percent of all breeding ducks from the North American breeding bird survey area occur in the Prairie Pothole Region of the Dakotas (Reynolds 2005). CRP fields have been shown to have benefits to a

variety of grassland bird species. However, while the CRP has been beneficial to breeding grassland birds, restored grasslands and conservation cover do not benefit all native wildlife (Johnson 2005). Johnson (2005) has noted that maintaining extant native prairie should be a high priority for the conservation of birds, as well as many other animal and plant species. Lands in the CRP provide nesting, migratory, and wintering habitat for a number of species during all periods of the year, including browse for game and non-game mammals and birds, nesting habitat for waterfowl and other birds, and native vegetation communities that can benefit all native species. With every iteration of the Farm Bill, wildlife benefits have become more strongly represented in the CRP, and many CPs are implemented with wildlife conservation as their primary goal (Farrand and Ryan 2005). Wildlife response to CRP is a multi-scale phenomenon dependent on vegetation structure and composition within the planting; practice-level factors such as size and shape; its landscape context; and temporal factors (Farrand and Ryan 2005). Changes to CPs and the CRP will have unique impacts to each species, benefiting some and having negative impacts on others. Studies indicate that vegetation conditions outside of the CRP land may have a larger impact on avian populations than the CRP land itself, and it is thought that the same may be true for wildlife (Farrand and Ryan 2005). Few large-scale studies of CRP benefits to wildlife have been done, with the greatest body of knowledge being its use by grassland bird species.

The scale of impacts to wildlife is directly related to the benefits that habitat can produce. Habitat fragmentation, which occurs when a large region of habitat is broken down into smaller patches, also affects wildlife. Habitat fragmentation is detrimental to species that require large contiguous patches of land and beneficial to others that may favor smaller edge habitats. Many wildlife species depend on a minimum habitat patch size to maintain viable breeding populations. Fragmentation can create patches that are too small to support some wildlife species.

Wildlife generalist species, those species that can utilize a wide variety of habitat types for forage and cover, tend to thrive in disturbed and fragmented habitats. Conversely specialists, those species that have very narrowly defined habitat requirements, are more likely to be affected by habitat loss and fragmentation. Agricultural practices have the effect of fragmenting natural habitat by replacing natural lands with large monoculture stands. CRP plantings and conserved native grasslands can alleviate some of the habitat fragmentation through the enrollment of large-scale CRP fields or use of CPs (like wildlife corridors) that benefit wildlife. Targeted enrollment could be used to connect fragmented habitat into intact parcels that provide adequate sized tracts of wildlife habitat; this use would be particularly important for species such as the lesser prairie chicken which requires large contiguous tracts of habitat.

3.4 PROTECTED SPECIES

3.4.1 Definition of Resource

Protected species, for the purposes of this analysis, are those species Federally designated as threatened or endangered under the ESA of 1973 (16 USC 1531 et seq.) or species that are considered candidates for being listed as threatened or endangered. ESA requires Federal agencies to ensure that the actions they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of their critical habitat. As of March 2014, 643 threatened and endangered animals and 874 threatened and endangered plants were listed in the U.S. (USFWS 2014a). Of the 1,517 threatened or endangered species, 661 have Federally designated critical habitat. Critical habitat is defined as specific geographic areas that contain features essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special

management and protection. Critical habitat may include areas that are not currently occupied by the species, but that will be needed for its recovery (USFWS 2014b).

3.4.2 Affected Environment

The Endangered Species Preservation Act was passed by Congress in 1966, and expanded the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to manage and administer the National Wildlife Refuge System. This was an attempt to preserve the endangered vertebrates by establishing habitat refuges and prohibiting the taking of these animals on these lands. This was updated in 1969, and again in 1973 with the ESA. The ultimate goal of the ESA is to conserve threatened and endangered plant and animal species by listing species in this condition and improving their status until they can finally be removed from the list

USFWS is the lead Federal agency governing terrestrial and freshwater threatened and endangered species, while NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regulates marine threatened and endangered species. Federal agencies proposing activities that have the potential to impact threatened and endangered species must consult with USFWS and/or NMFS. Protected species often have very specific habitat requirements or occupy a specialized niche in an ecosystem.

As discussed in the 2010 CRP SEIS, habitat destruction is the most important factor leading to a species being listed as threatened or endangered. Habitat loss plays a role in approximately 95 percent of those species Federally listed (NRCS 2013). Habitat destruction and land cover and land use change have impacted nearly every habitat and ecosystem. Agriculture represents a major contributor to habitat destruction, and now occupies approximately 47 percent of the U.S. land area (NRCS 2013). Agriculture directly replaces natural habitat with cultivated croplands, and can result in soil erosion, pollution from agricultural inputs, and pollution from runoff into aquatic habitats.

Federally protected species may permanently or temporarily (in the case of migratory species) occupy lands eligible for or enrolled in the CRP. Many of the CPs implemented have the potential to benefit protected species, just as they do for other wildlife species. However, CRP has specific CPs (CP25 [Rare and Declining Habitats] and CP38 [SAFE]) that focus on enrolling lands in National CPAs. These CPs may be particularly beneficial to protected species.

As with all CRP enrollment, prior to approval, a site specific survey would be conducted to determine the potential for the presence of any protected species or critical habitat. If required, consultation with USFWS or NMFS would be completed in the event that a CP (including associated maintenance, management, and harvesting such as haying or grazing) may affect a listed species. If negative impacts to a listed species are identified, it is not likely the land would be enrolled and/or the proposed maintenance, management, or harvest activity would be approved.

3.5 SOILS

3.5.1 Definition of Resource

Soil is a composed of minerals and organic matter formed from the weathering of bedrock and other parent materials, as well as decaying plant matter. Soil properties include color, texture, particle size, moisture, and chemistry. The national system of soil classification identifies sets of soil properties and groups them into 12 taxonomic orders, which are further divided into groups, families, and series: Alfisols, Andisols, Ardisols, Entisols, Gelisols, Histosols, Inceptisols, Molisols, Oxisols, Spodosols, Utisols, and Veritsols (NRCS 2014a, 2010).

3.5.2 Affected Environment

Soils have a range of functions including regulating water, sustaining plant and animal life, filtering potential pollutants, cycling nutrients, and supporting buildings and structures. The capacity of a given soil to provide these functions can be affected by erosion, which is the wearing away by wind and water. The erosion potential of the thousands of soil units found throughout the U.S. is directly related to soil type, presence and type of vegetation/ground cover, amount of existing disturbance, and weather conditions. The EI is a numerical expression of the potential of a soil to erode (NRCS 2014b). The EI is calculated by dividing the potential erodibility for each soil by the soil loss tolerance value estimated for the soil. The soil loss tolerance value represents the maximum annual rate of soil erosion that could take place without causing a decline in long-term productivity. The EI takes into consideration climatic factors and the physical and chemical properties of the soil. The higher the EI, the greater the need to protect the soil from practices that lead to erosion. HEL is defined to have an EI of at least 8 (NRCS 2014b). The majority of land enrolled under CRP General Sign-up contracts are HEL. While the General Sign-up reduces the amount of rill and sheet erosion on HEL, Continuous Sign-up buffer practices, such as CP8A, CP15A, CP15B, CP21, CP22, CP28, CP29, and CP30, filter and trap sediment and nutrients that flow across the established buffer (USDA 2010). Refer to **Section 3.9** of the 2010 CRP SEIS for more detailed information on how the EI is calculated, as well as areas within the U.S. that have critical issues with sediment and nutrient loss, wind erosion, and soil quality degradation.

One of the primary goals of the CRP is to implement conservation measures that will protect soils from soil erosion. Land enrolled in the CRP is required to have an approved Conservation Plan to ensure the installed CPs meet their intended purpose. Conservation measures and BMPs to reduce soil erosion are site specific and may include the use of establishing vegetative cover to reduce exposed soil and define acceptable haying and grazing activities. Detailed information regarding soils and their distribution within the U.S. are located in **Section 3.9** of the 2010 CRP SEIS.

3.6 SURFACE WATER

3.6.1 Definition of Resource

For the purposes of this SPEIS, surface water refers to rivers, streams, creeks, lakes, reservoirs, and other impoundments that support everyday life through provision of water for drinking and other public uses, irrigation, and industry. The principal law governing pollution of the nation's surface water resources is the CWA. The CWA utilizes water quality standards, permitting requirements, and monitoring to protect water quality. The USEPA sets the standards for water pollution abatement for all Waters of the U.S. under the CWA programs but, in most cases, gives qualified states the authority to issue and enforce water quality certification permits.

3.6.2 Affected Environment

Because of the geographic scale of the CRP, it is not possible or practical to describe all surface waters that occur on lands currently enrolled or eligible for enrollment. For this analysis, surface waters will be characterized broadly and impacts to the quality or quantity of surface waters will be assessed qualitatively.

3.6.2.1 Surface Water Quantity

According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), 28 percent of the total surface water usage is for irrigation (USGS 2009). The amount of water being used for irrigation has been trending down since the 1990s as has the total amount of land being irrigated. In general, this overall decrease can be attributed to climate, crop type, advances in irrigation efficiency, and higher energy costs. The majority of water withdrawals (85 percent) of both surface water and groundwater and the majority of irrigated acres (74 percent) were in the 17 conterminous western states. More than half (52 percent) of the total irrigated acreage occurs in California, Nebraska, Texas, Arkansas, and Idaho (USGS 2014). These five states experience an average of less than 20 inches of annual precipitation, leading to the need to provide supplemental water to support crop production. In the arid west and mountain states, surface water is the primary source for irrigation and 64 percent of all irrigation withdrawals of surface water come from just four states: California, Idaho, Colorado, and Montana.

The CRP affects surface water quantity in the U.S. by taking land out of agricultural production to establish CPs, reducing the amount of surface water used for irrigation purposes. In general, the more land enrolled in the CRP, the less land that is irrigated and thus less surface water is used for irrigation purposes. As more acreage is enrolled in the CRP, especially in areas where surface water is the primary irrigation source, stream flows and lake/reservoir levels have the potential to increase since less water is being diverted to irrigation.

3.6.2.2 Surface Water Quality

The quality of surface waters is determined by the physical and chemical properties of the surrounding landscape. Topography, soil properties, vegetative cover, and climate all have an influence on water quality. Runoff caused by rain, snow melt, or irrigation can affect surface water quality by depositing sediment, minerals, or other contaminants into surface waters. Surface runoff is influenced by meteorological factors such as rainfall intensity and duration, and physical factors such as land use, vegetation cover, soil type, and topography. The USEPA assesses pollution of surface waters in the U.S. The most recent National Water Quality Inventory (completed in 2009, using information from 2004) is detailed in the 2010 CRP SEIS and summarized here. This report assessed approximately 30 percent of surface waters in the U.S. and found that 44 percent of assessed stream miles and 64 percent of assessed lakes were not clean enough to provide public uses such as fishing and swimming. Surface waters with degraded water quality that do not meet minimum water quality standards are classified under the CWA as "impaired waters." Section 303(d) of the CWA establishes a process for waters that do not meet clean water standards to be identified on a state-by-state basis. Total daily maximum loads (TMDLs) of specific pollutants are developed for priority waters to identify the amount of a specific pollutant that may be discharged into a water body while still ensuring that water quality standards are met. Since 1995, the number of TMDLs has been increasing with the top three causes of surface water impairment being pathogens, sediment, and nutrients (USEPA 2014a).

Degradation of surface waters from irrigation practices occurs through non-point source pollution. Non-point source pollution occurs when water, from irrigation or precipitation, runs over the land picking up pollutants along the way and then deposits them into a water body. The surrounding land use determines the type and severity of non-point source pollution, which is the leading cause of water quality degradation in the U.S. According to the USEPA, agricultural land use activities represent the primary source of impairment to rivers and streams (USEPA 2009). When the land use changes so does the impact

it has on the water quality. Such changes and impacts can be negative or positive, depending on the type and amount of land use change.

Non-point source pollution associated with agricultural land use practices impacts water quality through runoff laden with sediment, nitrogen, phosphorous, and/or pesticides. These four pollutants have the potential to create adverse effects on human health and the natural environment. Loose or barren soils, along with fertilizer and/or pesticide application from agricultural land uses, cause these pollutants to enter surface waters by way of runoff. Nutrient-laden runoff causes algal blooms in the Gulf of Mexico, and can severely deplete oxygen levels causing fish kills. Nitrogen and phosphorous from fertilizers used on agricultural lands are the chief contributing pollutants to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone (USEPA 2014b), a 'dead zone' where excessive algal blooms and die offs have eliminated all available oxygen.

Under the CRP, agricultural producers can retire highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive cropland and pasture for a 10- to 15-year contract period. During this time, farmland is converted to grass, trees, wildlife cover, or other conservation uses that provide environmental benefits, including surface water quality improvement (USDA 2011). Eliminating nutrients and pesticide application on active agricultural land is a primary factor in achieving the water quality goals of CRP. CRP buffers including grass filter strips, grassed waterways, field windbreaks, wetland restoration, and riparian buffers are all CPs that provide benefits to water quality by reducing soil erosion and the amount of pollutants reaching water bodies.

A reduced amount of nitrogen and phosphorous leave CRP fields through runoff and percolate. The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) has developed models that indicate that 623 million pounds less nitrogen and 124 million pounds less phosphorous left fields due to the CRP in FY 2011, a 95 and 86 percent reduction, respectively (USDA 2011). The FAPRI model estimated that CRP buffers intercepted 377 million pounds of nitrogen and 76 million pounds of phosphorus nationally in 2011. Grass and tree plantings in 2011 are estimated to have reduced nitrate loss, a form of nitrogen that contributes to the formation of hypoxic zones, by 107 million pounds. The CRP restored and constructed wetlands convert nitrate/nitrogen into atmospheric nitrogen, which has an improvement to water quality (USDA 2011). As of 2013, there were 26 million acres of land enrolled in the CRP. Prior to being accepted into the CRP, a site specific EE is performed, potential impacts to surface waters are assessed and, where needed, BMPs and mitigations are prescribed to ensure no negative impacts to surface waters occur.

3.7 GROUNDWATER

3.7.1 Definition of Resource

Groundwater is water that flows underground and is stored in natural geologic formations called aquifers. As with surface water, because of the geographic scale of the CRP and because the locations of lands that will be enrolled is not known, it is not possible to describe all groundwater resources that could be affected by the program. This analysis focuses on groundwater quality and quantity in areas eligible for enrollment in the CRP or those areas already enrolled in the program.

3.7.2 Affected Environment

Groundwater is an important natural resource that provides freshwater for public consumption, agriculture, and industry. In 2005, approximately 23 percent of the freshwater used in the U.S. was

supplied by groundwater, and 68 percent of the groundwater withdrawn was used for irrigation purposes. The use of groundwater in the U.S. more than doubled from 1950 to 1975, from 34 billion gallons per day to 83 billion gallons per day. From 1975 to 2005, the total use of groundwater remained relatively stable, with only slight fluctuations over that time frame (USGS 2014a).

One of the main benefits of the CRP is the reduction of contaminated runoff (primarily nitrates) and sedimentation from cropland, which helps protect groundwater quality (USDA 2010). Converting cropland to conservation cover also reduces the amount of groundwater needed for irrigation which enhances groundwater recharge. As of September 2013, over 21 million acres of land were enrolled in general CRP, and approximately 5.5 million acres of land were enrolled in continuous CRP (USDA 2013).

Agricultural production also affects groundwater quality through chemical pollution. Products like fertilizer and pesticides that are applied to agricultural lands can infiltrate into groundwater and reduce water quality (USGS 2014b). **Section 5.3.1** of the 2010 CRP SEIS covers groundwater quantity and quality in further detail.

3.8 FLOODPLAINS

3.8.1 Definition of Resource

Floodplains are low, relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters. EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, sets forth the responsibilities of Federal agencies for reducing the risk of flood loss or damage to personal property, minimizing the impacts of flood loss, and restoring the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains. Floodplains are typically described as areas likely to be inundated by a particular flood. The 100-year floodplain is an area that has a 1 percent chance of being flooded in any given year.

3.8.2 Affected Environment

There are floodplains located throughout the U.S. in areas adjacent to surface waters. Historically, floodplains have been converted into agricultural areas due to the high nutrient load from sediment deposition during flood events. The conversion of floodplains to agricultural land has caused loss of habitat and reduced flood storage capacity. The modification and channelization of rivers in the U.S. has also contributed to an increase in development within floodplain areas.

CPs used for the CRP include the restoration of riparian areas and wetlands (CP22 and CP23) that occur within floodplains. These practices help stabilize stream banks and increase floodplain function. USDA maintains a policy that prior to implementation of any project or program, any impacts to floodplains must be evaluated (USDA 2014). **Section 3.4.1** of the 2010 CRP SEIS covers floodplains in more detail.

3.9 WETLANDS

3.9.1 Definition of Resource

Wetlands are defined by USACE as those areas characterized by a prevalence of vegetation adapted to saturated soil conditions and that are identified based on specific soil, hydrology, and vegetation criteria defined by USACE (USACE 1987, 2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2010e, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Wetlands associated with running water systems and typically found along rivers, creeks, and drainage

ways, with a defined channel and floodplain are referred to as riparian wetlands The CWA established a program to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into wetlands. The CWA further provides for regulations and procedures for the protection of wetlands and compensation for unavoidable impacts.

EO 11990 provides another layer of wetland protection. The purpose of EO 11990 is to "minimize the destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands." To meet these objectives, the EO requires Federal agencies, in planning their actions, to consider alternatives to wetland sites and limit potential damage if an activity affecting a wetland cannot be avoided. The EO applies to the acquisition, management, and disposition of Federal lands and facilities construction and improvement projects that are undertaken, financed or assisted by Federal agencies; any Federal activities and programs affecting land use including, but not limited to, water and related land resources planning, regulation, and licensing activities.

The Food Security Act of 1985 contains provisions to discourage the conversion of wetlands into cropland. The swampbuster provisions deny Federal Farm Program benefits to producers who convert or modify wetlands for agricultural purposes as defined in the Food Security Act of 1985, Title XII.

3.9.2 Affected Environment

Wetlands are described as the transitional lands between terrestrial and deepwater habitats where the water table usually is at or near the land surface or the land is covered by shallow surface water. Most CRP wetlands are not transitional areas, but rather depressional wetlands found in the Great Plains. These types of wetlands form in topographical depressions when water from precipitation, groundwater, or surface flows accumulate. Common examples include playa lakes, vernal pools, and prairie potholes. In wetlands, the upper part of the soil profile is saturated for sufficient duration during the growing season for soil organisms to consume available oxygen creating anaerobic soil conditions unsuitable for most plants. Soils formed under these conditions are called “hydric” and the plants adapted to these conditions are called “hydrophytes.” Wetland hydrology, hydric soils, and hydrophytic vegetation are the three major indicators used to identify and characterize wetlands.

3.9.2.1 Functions and Values

Wetlands perform many ecological functions that are important to society such as improving water quality; recharging groundwater; providing natural flood control; and supporting a wide variety of fish, wildlife, and plants. Wetlands can maintain good water quality and improve degraded water quality of surface waters by intercepting and treating surface runoff. Suspended sediments and contaminants in the water are trapped, retained, and/or transformed through a variety of biological and chemical processes before they reach downstream water bodies.

3.9.2.2 Current Distribution and Conditions

The total wetland acreage in the lower 48 states is estimated to have declined from more than 220 million acres 3 centuries ago to 110.1 million acres in 2009. An estimated 95 percent of all wetlands were freshwater and 5 percent were in the marine or estuarine (saltwater) systems. Estuarine emergent (salt marsh) wetland was the most prevalent type of all estuarine and marine intertidal wetlands. Salt marsh made up an estimated 66.7 percent of all estuarine and marine wetland area. Forested wetlands made up the single largest category (49.5 percent) of wetland in the freshwater system. Freshwater emergents made up an estimated 26.3 percent, shrub wetlands 17.8 percent, and freshwater ponds 6.4 percent by area

Overall, there was a slight increase in freshwater wetland area between 2004 and 2009. Freshwater ponds continued to increase in area, although the rate of pond development slowed from previous reporting periods. Freshwater vegetated wetlands continued to decline, although at a reduced rate. This most-recent annual rate of loss represented a reduction in the loss rate of roughly 50 percent since 2004. Declines in freshwater forested wetland area (633,100 acres) negated area gains in freshwater emergent and shrub categories. Forested wetlands sustained their largest losses since the 1974 to 1985 time period. Freshwater wetland losses continued in regions of the country where there has been potential for wetlands to come into conflict with competing land and resource development interests.

Between 2004 and 2009, 489,600 acres of former upland were re-classified as wetland. These increases were attributed to wetland re-establishment and creation on agricultural lands and other uplands with unknown land use including undeveloped land, lands in conservation programs, or fallow lands. The rate of wetland re-establishment increased by an estimated 17 percent from the previous study period (1998 to 2004). Conversely, the estimated wetland loss rate increased 140 percent during the same time period and, as a consequence, national wetland losses have outdistanced gains.

The cumulative effects of losses in the freshwater system have had consequences for hydrologic and ecosystem connectivity. In certain regions, profound reductions in wetland extent have resulted in habitat loss, fragmentation, and limited opportunities for re-establishment and watershed rehabilitation (Dahl 2011).

3.10 AIR QUALITY

3.10.1 Definition of Resource

The primary air quality effects that would be associated with the Proposed Action involve either the release or mitigation of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Other air quality impacts related to emissions by farm equipment or operations, such as nitrogen oxide emissions particulate, are generally measured by potential violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Due to the nature of the Proposed Action -- its geographic scale, the uncertainty of where the CRP will be implemented, the short-term and localized nature of CRP associated activities, and because CPs are designed to minimize impacts to air quality -- NAAQS violations would not occur as a result of implementing CRP changes.

Agricultural activities contribute directly to emissions of GHGs including carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), and nitrous oxide (N_2O) through a variety of processes such as the operation of internal combustion engines, enteric fermentation by livestock, agricultural soil management, manure management, field burning, and other practices. Carbon sequestration can mitigate GHG emissions by removing CO_2 from the atmosphere and storing it in plant matter and soils. Carbon sequestration is the process by which atmospheric CO_2 is taken up by trees, grasses, and other plants through photosynthesis and stored as carbon in biomass and soils. **Section 3.10** of the 2010 CRP SEIS includes detailed data on GHG emissions, carbon sequestration, and relationship to global climate change. These data have not changed and the information is incorporated by reference in this section.

3.10.2 Affected Environment

When the CRP was originally established with the Food Security Act of 1985, the stated purpose was to assist owners and operators of agricultural land in conserving and improving soil, water, and wildlife resources. GHG mitigation has recently been included among the six ranking criteria used to prioritize

lands for enrollment in the CRP. This is to recognize that conversion of croplands to long-term vegetative cover to promote carbon sequestration is a GHG mitigation measure and provides long-term benefit (Jones et al. 2013). According to the USDA, "Cropped land converted to CRP stores carbon because the land is not cultivated and trees or grasses are planted to provide carbon inputs. Including hay or pasture in rotations also increases carbon inputs, and carbon losses are lower because the land is not tilled during the hay or pasture phase of the rotation" (USDA 2011).

The FSA reports that the CRP sequesters more carbon on private lands than any other Federally administered program (USDA 2013). The annual carbon sequestration rate estimated by USDA for the 26 million acres enrolled in the CRP for FY 2013 was 38 million metric tons carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e) (USDA 2013). CO_2e is a measure used to combine different GHG emissions into a single number using their global warming potential (USDA 2010). An additional 6 million metric tons CO_2e of GHG emissions were eliminated on CRP lands through reduced energy and fertilizer use (USDA 2013). Therefore, the estimated annual GHG reduction for CRP was 45 million tons CO_2e in FY 2013.

When CRP land is returned to cropping, the stock of carbon sequestered in the soil and other biomass during program participation would be released and some of the potential for long-term sequestration is lost. A recent analysis found that an estimated 68 percent of the carbon sequestered in CRP grassland was released when it was returned to cropping after the CRP contract ended (Jones et al. 2013).

3.11 RECREATION

3.11.1 Definition of Resource

Recreation includes outdoor activities that have the potential to occur on land enrolled in the CRP or those eligible for enrollment in the CRP. Typical activities would be hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, and camping. CRP participants may allow recreational activities on enrolled lands as long as the activity doesn't detract from the conservation purpose.

3.11.2 Affected Environment

Existing conditions for outdoor recreation are documented in the 2010 CRP SEIS (see **Section 3.12.2**) and are incorporated here by reference. Recent survey data and analyses are included to update the information previously included in the 2010 CRP SEIS.

3.11.2.1 Outdoor Recreation Trends

The 2010 CRP SEIS used the most recent data available from the USFWS in the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (USFWS 2007) to support outdoor recreation trends and impacts. The USFWS has since published results from the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (USFWS 2014). The 2011 survey data reported that nationally, the number of individuals 16 years or older who participated in fishing, hunting, and/or wildlife-watching has increased by 3 percent from more than 87 million to 90 million. As shown in **Table 3.11-1**, wildlife watching has about twice the participation as hunting and fishing. (Note that sportspersons are also counted as wildlife-watching participants if they engage in both activities.) The survey data support the observation that participation in outdoor recreation has increased, with fishing showing the largest increase in participation between 2006 and 2011.

Table 3.11-1. Wildlife-Associated Recreation Participation Trends (2006 and 2011)			
	2006	**2011**	**Change**
	Thousands	**Thousands**	**Percent**
Total wildlife-related recreationists	87,465	90,108	3%
Total sportspersons	33,916	37,397	10%
Anglers	29,952	33,112	11%
Hunters	12,510	13,674	9%
Total wildlife-watching participants	71,132	71,776	1%
Around the home	67,756	68,598	1%
Away from home	22,977	22,496	-2%

USFWS national survey data also show that expenditures for wildlife recreation also increased between 2006 and 2011. As shown in **Table 3.11-2**, total estimated wildlife-associated expenditures increased nationally from $136.4 billion in 2006 to $144.7 billion in 2011. The largest increase in expenditures was for hunting activities.

Table 3.11-2. Wildlife-Associated Recreation Expenditure Trends (2006 and 2011)				
	2006		**2011**	
	$ Billion	**Percent**	**$ Billion**	**Percent**
Total wildlife-related recreation expenditures	**136.4**	**100**	**144.7**	**100**
Fishing expenditures, total	**47.0**	**100**	**41.8**	**100**
Trip-related	19.9	42	21.8	52
Equipment	20.9	45	15.5	37
Other	6.2	13	4.5	11
Hunting expenditures, total	**25.5**	**100**	**33.7**	**100**
Trip-related	7.5	29	10.4	31
Equipment	12.0	47	14.0	41
Other	6.1	24	9.3	28
Wildlife-watching expenditures, total	**50.9**	**37**	**54.9**	**38**
Trip-related	14.4	28	17.3	31
Equipment	25.9	51	27.2	49
Other	10.7	21	10.5	19

In addition to participation and expenditure data, the 2011 survey included data about the location and target species for hunting activities. The target species for hunters in 2011 based on participation numbers and hunting effort (reported as hunting days) were deer, wild turkey, squirrel, ducks, rabbit, pheasant, and other species. Of the 13.7 million individuals that reported their hunt location information in the 2011 survey, 84 percent spent a portion of their hunt on private land. In addition, a majority of their hunting effort (78 percent of their hunting days) were spent on private land. In the 2011 survey, sportspersons

reported owning over 180 million acres of land for hunting and fishing activities as well as spending more than $9.2 billion on this land ownership. An additional 430 million acres were reported to be leased by sportspersons in 2011 for a reported expenditure of $1.4 billion.

3.11.2.2 Rural Tourism

The 2010 CRP SEIS used data from several studies to support the findings that rural areas that focused on recreational development and rural tourism aspects experienced greater socio-economic well-being than those that did not (Reeder and Brown 2005). On-farm recreation is an important source of farm-related income. Sometimes called agri-tourism, farm recreation refers to a wide variety of activities including hunting, fishing, horseback riding, ranch stays, winery tours, on-farm rodeos, and petting zoos.

The USDA-NASS 2012 Census of Agriculture includes updated information about farm recreation in the U.S. (Economic Research Service [ERS] 2008). In 2012, more than 33,000 farms, representing about 2 percent of farms nationwide, reported income from agri-tourism and recreational services; this is an increase in the number of farms reporting recreation services in 2007 (NASS 2014). Total reported income nationally from agri-tourism and recreational services was more than $700 million in 2012 compared to $566 million in 2007. However, average earnings per farm decreased in 2012 to $21,300 from $24,300 reported in 2007 (NASS 2014). Agricultural survey data indicate that outdoor recreation (hunting, fishing, and horseback riding) is the largest component of farm recreation, generating 43 percent of recreation income nationwide (ERS 2008). Regionally, about half of all recreation farms reported in the 2012 Census of Agricultural were located in the southern U.S.

3.11.2.3 Recreation Effects from CRP

A recent meta-analysis of the economic benefits of the CRP by Wu and Weber (2012) found that recreational benefits amounted to $963 million annually or about $29 per CRP acre per year (expressed in 2011 dollars). The recreational benefits estimated by Wu and Weber are based on the assumption that "CRP improves environmental quality, which leads to enhanced ecosystem health in general and increased public enjoyment of recreational activities in particular."

A study by Sullivan et al. (2004), found that recreation expenditures on farms enrolled in the CRP ranged from a low of less than $100,000 per year in the ERS Eastern Uplands region to a high of $15,400,000 in the Heartland Region as reported for 2001 (**Table 3.11-3)**.

Table 3.11-3 Range of Recreational Expenditures on Farms Enrolled in the CRP

ERS Region	Recreational Expenditures on Farms Enrolled in the CRP (thousands of dollars)
Basin and Range	$3,100
Eastern Uplands	< $100
Fruitful Rim	$600
Heartland	$15,400
Mississippi Portal	$1,600
Northern Crescent	$7,100
Northern Great Plains	$6,300
Prairie Gateway	$2,100
Southern Seaboard	$2,600

Source: Sullivan et al. 2004 using data from 2001 Agricultural Resource Management Survey.
Note: CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; ERS = Economic Research Service

3.12 SOCIOECONOMICS

3.12.1 Definition of Resource

Socioeconomic analyses evaluate how the conditions of a community or Region of Influence would be affected by the Proposed Action through changes in the rate of population growth, changes in the demographic characteristics, and changes in employment. This section tiers to the 2010 CRP SEIS and provides a brief update for those socioeconomic conditions relevant to this SPEIS.

3.12.2 Affected Environment

The total number of farms in the U.S. declined in 2012 to just over 2.1 million from the 2.2 million farms in 2007. These farms have a combined land area of just over 914 million acres (NASS 2014). The average farm size increased 3 percent between 2007 and 2012 to 434 acres; in 2012, 85 percent of the farms were less than 500 acres (NASS 2014). In 2012, approximately 75 percent of the farms were in the economic class of less than $50,000 in market value of agricultural products and Federal farm program payments, a decrease of approximately 3 percent from 2007. The number of farms in the economic class of more than $1 million increased slightly between 2007 and 2012 (NASS 2014). Average farm market value of agricultural products increased approximately 39 percent to $187,093 per farm, credited primarily to the increased prices. The value of crops increased by almost 50 percent between 2007 and 2012 (NASS 2014).

As of 2012, mean farm household income was $108,844, approximately 53 percent higher than the U.S. mean household income of $71,274. This was the largest gap since 1973. Government payments to farms, including the CRP, increased less than 1 percent in 2012. On average, 14 percent of farms received conservation payments in 2012, with 12.3 percent of working farms receiving land retirement payments (e.g., CRP) and 2.5 percent of working farms receiving working lands program payments

(e.g., Environmental Quality Incentive Program). Small family farms comprised 76 percent of the farms that received conservation payments, accounting for 59 percent of the value of conservation payments.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter describes potential environmental consequences associated with implementation of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. CEQ regulations implementing the NEPA state that the environmental consequences discussion shall include any direct and indirect impacts and an evaluation of significance. This discussion addresses all resource areas described in Chapter 3.

4.1 OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM CHANGES AND ANALYSIS APPROACH

The purpose of the SPEIS is to provide sufficient information for the decision maker(s) to make an informed decision on the discretionary program changes that would result from the 2014 Farm Bill (Proposed Action). The significance or importance of impacts is determined by evaluating the Proposed Action against the No Action Alternative using existing environmental standards, thresholds, guidelines, or objectives established by Federal regulations. The significance criteria and approach to analysis vary by resource area.

It should be noted that this SPEIS examines the effects of implementing various changes to a nationwide voluntary program. As such, the geographic scope of the program is both extensive and largely unknown. Therefore, the utility and availability of modeling and quantitative analysis is limited for most resources. The document also is a supplemental document and, as such, will tier to and incorporate by reference other existing NEPA documents as appropriate, limiting new analyses to those program components that have not been examined previously. The potential impacts of implementing the program changes will be discussed on a national or regional level, as appropriate. Site specific EE would occur prior to enrollment of land into the program. This SPEIS and the site specific EE will provide the full NEPA coverage.

The No Action Alternative in this SPEIS is a continuation of the CRP to include those non-discretionary program changes required by the 2014 Farm Bill. The No Action Alternative is included in this analysis in accordance with CEQ guidelines to serve as the baseline against which to measure the potential impacts associated with the proposed discretionary changes to the program (Proposed Action). The components of the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action are as follows.

No Action Alternative:

- *Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities* – grasslands that would have been previously eligible for the GRP, would now be eligible for enrollment in the CRP and enrollment would be limited to no more than 2 million acres. Authorized activities on grasslands would be the same as those previously authorized under the GRP.
- *Final Year of Contract* – a CRP participant would be allowed to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program and perform activities to improve or maintain the existing conservation system during the year prior to the expiration of the contract. Likewise, expiring CRP land can be enrolled in a new program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, without violating the contract.

Proposed Action:

- *Targeted Enrollment* – in addition to the long-standing General and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods, the FSA proposes to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land

through a reverse auction approach for select conservation practices. Targeted enrollment could enable the FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap, while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit.

- *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies* – the STC must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is: at least once every 5 years, but no more frequently than once every 3 years for managed harvesting, and not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing. Harvesting and grazing activities still must avoid the PNS.
- *Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional Conservation Practices* – the Secretary would be afforded the discretionary authority to make additional conservation practices, that currently are ineligible for any type of haying or grazing, to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during wide-spread drought conditions. Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed conservation practices would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or Federal agencies.

4.2 VEGETATION

4.2.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to vegetation would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action would remove land with unique communities or habitat, threaten the long-term viability of the conservation cover, or result in population-level changes that could alter ecosystems at a landscape level.

4.2.2 No Action Alternative

4.2.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Allowing grasslands formerly eligible for enrollment in the GRP to be enrolled into the CRP would result in retaining or restoring up to 2 million acres of grasslands in areas where such communities were historically dominant. This enrollment would result in long-term benefits to grasslands, which would be particularly realized in the Great Plains Ecoregion, where grasslands were historically maintained by fires and grazing by native ungulates. Grazing, mowing, haying, and harvesting would maintain grassland communities by controlling the growth of woody plants and maintaining early successional stages. A wider range of maintenance activities as well as regular grazing would be permitted on these newly eligible grasslands than on traditional CRP lands, which would be a minor change relative to the total CRP enrollment. Short-term negative impacts to vegetation, including the spread of noxious weeds, could occur during maintenance, grazing, and other allowable activities. However, all activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, including a Grazing Management Plan, developed for each enrolled unit of land. Conservation Plans contain a strategy and schedule of treatments and activities that would occur on enrolled lands, ensuring long-term benefits to vegetation and protection of natural resources.

4.2.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to vegetation by allowing acreage to stay in conservation, preventing development. While there would be minor, localized, short-term impacts to vegetation from allowable activities to improve the conservation cover, long-term

benefits to vegetation are expected. The goal of the Conservation Stewardship Program is to maintain high quality conservation, and producers are paid based on the performance of the conservation cover. This non-discretionary change in the Farm Bill has the potential to have beneficial impacts in all ecoregions equally; however, since the CRP is concentrated in the Great Plains and Eastern Temperate Forest ecoregions, the opportunity for conservation is greatest in these areas.

4.2.3 Proposed Action

4.2.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in the CRP would be expected to benefit vegetation, regardless of whether lands are enrolled using the traditional Continuous or General Sign-ups or the proposed Targeted Enrollment. The CRP establishes or restores vegetation in order to meet the program goals of improving surface water and groundwater quality, controlling soil erosion, and enhancing wildlife habitat. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in the CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit. Targeted enrollment could provide long-term benefits to areas of especially sensitive vegetative communities, if they were so targeted. Such benefits could occur throughout the U.S. in any ecoregion.

Installation and maintenance of CPs would create temporary, short-term negative impacts to vegetation. Noxious weeds and invasive species would continue to be controlled through approved methods as designated by required Conservations Plans. These methods would be created to reflect local conditions and needs for each tract of land enrolled. Once a CP is established, long-term beneficial impacts to vegetation would be realized. The CRP has been shown through numerous academic and USDA-funded studies to be largely beneficial to native vegetation and for maintaining vegetative communities.

One way conservation benefit has been measured over large scales and timeframes is through the Conservation Effects Analysis Project. This is a multiagency effort to quantify the effects of conservation practices and programs to further develop the science base for monitoring the agricultural landscape for environmental quality. With regard to studies detailing the beneficial impacts of CPs on vegetation, the *Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Conservation Programs* (ed. Haufler 2005) and *Fish and Wildlife Response to Farm Bill Conservation Practices* (ed. Haufler 2007) are long-form literature reviews that illustrate the benefits of converting agricultural fields into native and planted vegetation cover. Benefits are widely distributed and include, but are not limited to, increased habitat diversity, improved habitat for grassland bird species, and better nest success for waterfowl (Haufler 2005, 2007). Though wildlife ultimately benefit, their benefit hinges on healthy, productive vegetative habitat, which the CRP helps to provide. Recently, the USGS assembled an annotated bibliography of *CRP Contributions to Wildlife Habitat, Management Issues, Challenges, and Policy Choices* (Allen and Vandever 2012). This provides brief summaries of numerous studies and illustrates benefits on a wide variety of issues regarding the CRP and, in particular, habitat creation and its general ecosystem benefits.

4.2.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include site specific BMPs to help reduce the potential for negative environmental impacts. Additional protection measures include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS

established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock. The frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC and depend on the vegetation characteristics of a particular region. While the CRP can occur anywhere in the U.S., existing CRP acreage is predominantly located in the Great Plains and Eastern Temperate Forest ecoregions of the U.S. Impacts from managed harvesting and routine grazing are most likely to occur within the grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains.

Managed Harvesting

Managed harvesting (typically mowing or haying) would be allowed to occur no more frequently than once every 3 years (same as current allowance), but not less frequently than once in 5 years. This would require four states (California, Colorado, Arizona, and Nevada) that currently allow managed harvesting once every 10 years, to have more frequent managed harvesting of at least once every 5 years on new contracts. It should be noted that currently only Colorado has CRP acreage that has managed harvesting activities (see **Table 2.4-2**). The more frequent harvesting in these states would reduce the growing period between harvests, which may cause short-term negative impacts to some types of vegetation. When performed in accordance with established guidelines, managed harvesting can be an effective tool for maintaining early successional stages of vegetative communities. Specific impacts to vegetation would vary by ecoregion and species composition. Based on the averages from 2009 to 2013, the majority of areas that are used for managed harvesting are Montana, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, which roughly corresponds to the northern areas of the Great Plains. Generally, native grasses depend on frequent disturbance in order to thrive, and planted forage species are chosen for their benefits to both the ecosystem and for forage utility.

Routine Grazing

Under the Proposed Action, states would have more flexibility in establishing the allowable frequencies for routine grazing while still taking into consideration regional differences in vegetation. As with managed harvesting, routine grazing impacts would vary widely depending on the ecoregion within which they occur and the allowable frequency established by the STC. Based on the averages from 2011 to 2013, the majority of the areas used for routine grazing are Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah (see **Figure 2.4-2** and **Table 2.4-3**), which generally corresponds to the southern areas of the Great Plains and a small portion of the North American Desert. In general terms, grazing can have positive benefits to vegetation. For instance, DiDonato (2006) found that livestock grazing is an effective tool for maintaining open grasslands and oak savannah communities, and Redmon (undated whitepaper) concluded that grazing of pasture could be done in a sustainable manner and even enhance the pasture/forage environment, if done correctly. Plant species diversity was maintained or increased by mowing and grazing in native tallgrass prairie (Collins et al. 1998). Long-term studies of seasonal versus yearlong grazing systems in grass and shrub communities in Arizona, provided no detectable differences in vegetation change between the two systems over 34 years (Mashiri et al. 2008). Spasojevic et al. (2010) concluded that grazing in conjunction with prescribed burning could restore plant species and trait composition (different species that have similar traits) within 3 years. Conversely, Belsky and Blumenthal (1997) concluded that grazing forest understory in the southwestern U.S. could have detrimental impacts for forest ecosystems and species composition. This highlights the need for STC guidance for correct grazing applications based on local conditions.

As discussed above, the change in grazing frequency could lead to long-term beneficial impacts to vegetation. Typical grazing lands and pasture lands are areas that evolved from the frequent disturbance from fire and large herbivores. If the stocking rate is managed properly for each enrolled parcel of land, vegetation and habitat benefits are likely, even with an increased frequency of grazing. With proper management, plant diversity, composition, and function can be improved through grazing techniques, especially within the Great Plains Ecoregion. Grazing in other ecoregions could result in less positive habitat benefits, as the other ecoregions did not evolve under heavy, seasonal grazing conditions. As noted above, the site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum grazing limits for the contract and include site specific BMPs to help reduce the potential for negative environmental impacts.

4.2.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow the FSA to expand the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing in areas designated D2 or greater to CPs where other types of harvesting or grazing are not authorized (CPs 8, 21, 22, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41). A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on these additional practices during 2012 found that there would be no lasting significant impacts to vegetation, as long as the haying and grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the guidance and approval of the STC and NRCS Conservationist (USDA 2012).

Under the Proposed Action, emergency haying and grazing of these CPs could be implemented in consecutive years. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought, repetitive haying or grazing of riparian and wetland areas may lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Consecutive years of haying or grazing of the same acreage would reduce the growing period between activities and have short-term negative impact on some types of vegetation. Wetland and riparian areas offer refuge during times of drought stress, as drier conditions would affect these areas last since they are natural drainages. If consecutive years were allowed for grazing or haying of the same acreage, care must be exercised to ensure that the CP cover is not negatively impacted in the long term. Vegetation impacts could vary drastically by ecoregion, with more arid climates potentially experiencing greater short-term impacts. Vegetation changes in wetlands are correlated with grazing intensity, and could affect the habitat value of wetlands (Jones et al. 2010). As with managed harvesting and routine grazing, input from the STC is critical to ensure emergency haying and grazing are appropriate, based on local conditions. Continued monitoring of haying and grazing of these practices would be recommended to ensure that lasting damage to vegetation and conservation covers from consecutive years of emergency haying and grazing activities did not occur.

Grazing also has the potential to spread invasive and noxious species. Some species can spread by attaching seeds to livestock coats, while others may use livestock manure as a means of dispersal. The modified Conservation Plan required for any emergency haying or grazing activities would address the potential for spread of noxious weeds and invasive species.

4.3 WILDLIFE

4.3.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to wildlife would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action would remove land with unique communities or habitat, result in population-level changes that could alter

ecosystems at a landscape level, or result in the violation of any Federal laws or regulations that protect wildlife resources.

4.3.2 No Action Alternative

4.3.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Allowing grasslands to be enrolled into the CRP would result in retaining or restoring up to 2 million acres of grasslands in areas where such communities were historically dominant. This would result in long-term benefits to native wildlife. Such benefits would be particularly realized in the Great Plains Ecoregion, where fires and grazing by native ungulates historically maintained grassland ecosystems. Wildlife species that are not adapted to grassland ecosystems could be negatively affected by restoring and maintaining such areas. Haufler and Ganguli (2007) have noted that grassland CPs offer some of the greatest benefits to wildlife that inhabit an increasingly threatened habitat. Other research has shown that the CRP grassland CPs have been beneficial to many, but not all, species of grassland birds (Johnson 2005, Farrand and Ryan 2005). Even though it has been shown that grassland restoration can benefit wildlife, particularly grassland birds (Wood and Williams 2005), native prairie is preferable habitat to many grassland birds and wildlife (Johnson 2005). Mammalian predators such as red foxes, swift foxes, and coyotes have been shown to avoid planted grasslands in favor of adjacent natural grasslands (Kamler et al. 2003, 2005). Schwartz and Whitson (1987) also noted that reconstructed tallgrass prairie provided sub-optimal habitat for common prairie mammals due to the low abundance of forbs, low vegetation diversity, and high vegetation biomass. However, even with sub-optimal habitat for some native wildlife, enrolled grasslands would reduce habitat fragmentation and provide cover and forage for certain species.

Grazing, mowing, haying, and harvesting would maintain grassland communities by controlling the growth of woody plants and maintaining early successional stages, thus providing long-term benefit to native wildlife. This wider range of maintenance activities, as well as the regular grazing that would be permitted on these newly eligible grasslands, could cause short-term negative impacts to wildlife including disturbance and direct mortality. However, all activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including wildlife.

4.3.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to wildlife by allowing acreage to remain in conservation, preventing development. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would temporarily disturb wildlife in the area and possibly temporarily remove habitat. This disturbance would be similar in nature to routine maintenance and management activities, and would not be allowed to occur during the PNS. Once restored, the conservation cover is expected to continue to provide high quality wildlife habitat. The primary goals of the Conservation Stewardship Program are to improve water and air quality as well as plant and animal resources, and producers are paid based on the performance of the cover; therefore, the quality of the conservation cover may increase with a transition to this program.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: the WRP, GRP, and Farm and

Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling the expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term wildlife benefits. Given the reduced maximum enrollment authority for the CRP, facilitating an easy transition to these other conservation programs would allow for continued conservation and, thus, wildlife benefits from CRP land.

4.3.3 Proposed Action

4.3.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in the CRP would be expected to benefit wildlife on enrolled lands, regardless of the enrollment methodology used. Among the goals of the CRP is restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in the CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit to wildlife. Reynolds (2005) discussed the impact of the enrollment of approximately 4.7 million acres of cropland into the CRP in the Prairie Pothole Region of the Dakotas and concluded that the CRP in this region has significantly increased duck productivity. This area was historically the largest duck breeding area in North America, but due to agricultural conversion, the area is only a tiny fraction of what it once was. The Nature Conservancy recently used a reverse auction to enroll rice farms in California's Central Valley. Farmers were paid to keep their fields temporarily flooded with irrigation water after the rice harvest to provide resting and feeding habitat for migrating shorebirds along the Pacific Flyway (The Nature Conservancy 2013). Establishing a Targeted Enrollment method for the CRP that utilizes a reverse auction concept could have similar success and help to increase CRP participation in key habitats. Benefits such as this could occur throughout the U.S. in any ecoregion. Installation and maintenance of CPs would create temporary, short-term negative impacts to vegetation. But once a CP is established, long-term beneficial impacts to wildlife would be realized.

4.3.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would still be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include BMPs to help reduce negative environmental impacts. Additional protection measures include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock. The frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC and depend on the environmental characteristics of a particular region. Managed harvesting or routine grazing activities would still be required to avoid the PNS.

While the CRP can occur anywhere in the U.S., the CRP is predominantly located in the Great Plains and Eastern Temperate Forest ecoregions. Impacts from managed harvesting and routine grazing are most likely to occur within the grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains and can be beneficial, detrimental, short-term, or long-term depending on what characteristics of the ecosystem are being monitored. Native habitats are dynamic systems that move through successional stages, and CRP conservation covers are designed to mimic that successional progression to some degree. For instance, native grasslands evolved in response to periodic fire and seasonal grazing from large herbivores. Managed harvesting and routine

grazing practices seek to emulate these natural events. Periodic disturbance can result in high habitat diversity, which in turn results in more attractive wildlife habitat.

Managed Harvesting

Managed harvesting (typically mowing or haying) would be allowed no more frequently than once every 3 years (same as current allowance), but not less frequently than once in 5 years. This would require four states (California, Colorado, Arizona, and Nevada) that allow managed harvesting once every 10 years, to mandate managed harvesting in at least once every 5 years. It should be noted that currently only Colorado has CRP acreage that has managed harvesting activities (see **Table 2.4-2**). Managed harvesting can be an effective tool for maintaining early successional stages of native or planted grasslands. Harvesting of CRP lands can have both beneficial and detrimental impacts to wildlife. The severity and longevity of impacts depends on methods and timing. Some bird species respond positively to harvesting, especially those species that prefer shorter vegetation height and sparse vegetation. Conversely, many species show reduced density the year after harvesting (Johnson 2005). As noted in the 2010 CRP SEIS, direct mortality of many small wildlife species can occur from harvesting of CRP land (USDA 2010).

Routine Grazing

Under the Proposed Action, states would have more flexibility in establishing the allowable frequencies for routine grazing (which can be as frequent as once every 2 years) while still taking into consideration regional differences such as climate, soil type, and natural resources; the number of years that should be required between routine grazing activities; and how often during a year routine grazing should be allowed to occur. Native and managed lands have very complex relationships within the ecosystem. For example, grazing can impact avian species (and other wildlife) both directly and indirectly. Common ways grazing indirectly impacts avian species are by altering the vegetation condition, thereby altering food abundance (seeds, insects); foraging site conditions (food availability); and cover for protection (thermal), escape, or breeding (courtship, nests) (NRCS 2006). Grazing in turn can create situations that are beneficial to some species, but detrimental to others.

Depending on timing and stocking rates, grazing can impact avian species through direct disturbance, nest trampling, and direct mortality of young. Some bird species have been observed to avoid grazed CRP lands (NRCS 2006; Lupis et al. 2006). Avoidance of grazing activities during the PNS reduces the potential direct and indirect impacts to bird species. At light to moderate stocking rates, grazing does not appear to result in any significant losses to nongame birds (Kennedy et al. 2001). As described for vegetation impacts (see **Section 4.2.3.2**), this again highlights the importance of the STCs with regard to proper decision making, as each region and locale would have varied conditions and varied impacts.

4.3.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow the FSA to expand the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing in areas designated D2 or greater to CPs where other types of harvesting or grazing are not authorized (CPs 8, 21, 22, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41). A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on these additional practices during 2012 found that as long as the haying or grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the guidance and approval of the STC and NRCS Conservationist, there would be no lasting significant impacts to wildlife (USDA 2012).

Under the Proposed Action, emergency haying and grazing could be implemented in consecutive years. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought, the repetitive grazing of riparian and wetland areas may lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Wetland and riparian areas offer refuge to wildlife during times of drought stress, as drier conditions would affect these areas last since they are natural drainages. If grazing and/or haying were allowed for consecutive years, care must be exercised to ensure that the CP cover is not negatively impacted in the long term, which would have negative impacts to the wildlife that naturally inhabit these areas.

Wildlife habitat impacts could vary drastically by ecoregion, with more arid climates potentially experiencing greater short-term impacts. Grazing of these areas would also lead to increased competition between wildlife and livestock, since these areas are usually not grazed. Haying or grazing in these particular CPs would generally have the same short-term impacts as described for managed harvesting and routine grazing including altering food abundance and availability, changing habitat, introducing disturbance, and causing direct mortality (NRCS 2006). Additionally, haying and grazing impacts to surface waters could result from increased runoff of pollutants, potentially affecting aquatic wildlife by reducing water quality. As with managed harvesting and routine grazing, STC guidance and adherence to grazing guidelines detailed in modified Conservation Plans would ensure local conditions are considered. In addition, allowing haying or grazing within these expanded CPs would require approval from certain Federal and state agencies prior to the activity. Continued monitoring of haying and grazing of these practices would be recommended to ensure that lasting damage to wetland and riparian habitat and conservation covers from emergency haying and grazing activities did not occur. As with all haying and grazing activities that occur on CRP lands, a site specific Conservation Plan would be required prior to any activities.

4.4 PROTECTED SPECIES

4.4.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to protected species would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action would result in the take of a Federally listed plant or animal species, or an impact on any designated critical habitat. Any necessary consultation with the USFWS or NMFS would occur during the site specific EE.

4.4.2 No Action Alternative

4.4.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Impacts to protected species that could result from enrolling grasslands into the CRP and implementing the activities allowable on such lands would be similar to those described for vegetation and wildlife (see **Sections 4.2.2.1** and **4.3.2.1**). Restoring or maintaining native grasslands would be expected to benefit native wildlife and vegetation, including protected species, in the long term. Grazing, mowing, haying, and harvesting would maintain grassland communities but could also cause short-term negative impacts including disturbance and direct mortality. As with vegetation and wildlife, potential impacts to protected species would be dependent on the habitat requirements and life history of each species. The likelihood of impacting protected species is minimized since site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in the CRP. Any protected species identified would trigger consultation with the USFWS or NMFS, as required, to ensure that negative impacts to protected species do not occur. Additionally, all

activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including vegetation and wildlife.

4.4.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to protected species by allowing acreage to remain in conservation, preventing development. Potential short-term impacts and long-term benefits to protected species would be the same as those described for wildlife and vegetation (see **Sections 4.3.2.2** and **4.2.2.2**, respectively). Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would temporarily disturb wildlife in the area and possibly temporarily remove habitat. This disturbance would be similar in nature to routine maintenance and management activities, and would not be allowed to occur during the PNS. In addition, any protected species within or near the CRP land would be protected through established BMPs and mitigations included in the Conservation Management Plan. Once restored, the conservation cover is expected to continue to provide high quality wildlife habitat, which could include habitat that supports protected species.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: the WRP, GRP, and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term benefits to protected species.

4.4.3 Proposed Action

4.4.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in the CRP could benefit protected species on enrolled lands, regardless of the enrollment methodology used. Under the Proposed Action, Targeted Enrollment would be available as a means of enrolling lands with the greatest environmental benefit. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in the CRP, potentially resulting in a greater benefit to protected species, if they occur on or near enrolled lands. Impacts to protected species would be expected to be similar those described for vegetation and wildlife (see **Sections 4.2.3.1** and **4.3.3.1**, respectively**).** Prior to enrollment, all sites would undergo a site specific EE to identify the presence of any protected species. If potential impacts to protected species would be likely, as determined by the site specific evaluation, consultation with the USFWS or NMFS, as applicable, would be required. Site specific EE and any required consultation with the USFWS or NMFS would prevent negative impacts to protected species.

4.4.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would still be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include BMPs to help reduce negative environmental impacts, as well as any specific mitigation requirements for protected species. Additional protection measures include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock. The frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC and depend on the

environmental characteristics of a particular region. Managed harvesting or routine grazing activities would still be required to avoid the PNS.

The general impacts to protected species from the changes in allowable frequencies for managed harvesting and routine grazing would be the same as those described for vegetation and wildlife (see **Sections 4.2.3.2** and **4.3.3.2**, respectively). Whether managed harvesting or routine grazing is beneficial or adverse to a protected species depends on the habitat and life cycle needs of the species present. The site specific EE of lands proposed for enrollment in the CRP would determine the presence of protected species and include consultation with the USFWS or NMFS, as appropriate. In accordance with FSA policy, if unavoidable negative impacts to protected species are identified, the proposed management activity would not be approved.

4.4.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow the FSA to expand the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing in areas designated D2 or greater to CPs where other types of harvesting or grazing are not authorized (CPs 8, 21, 22, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41). A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on these additional practices during 2012 found that as long as the haying or grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the guidance and approval of the STC and NRCS Conservationist, there would be no lasting significant impacts to protected species (USDA 2012).

Potential impacts to protected species from consecutive years of emergency haying or grazing of the same acreage would be similar to those described in **Sections 4.2.3.3** and **4.3.3.3**. BMPs and required mitigation defined in the Conservation Plan, in addition to approval from the STC and certain Federal and state agencies, ensures that protected species would not be negatively impacted by emergency haying or grazing activities. As described above for managed harvesting and routine grazing (see **Section 4.4.3.2**), the site specific EE of lands proposed for enrollment in the CRP would determine the presence of protected species and include consultation with the USFWS or NMFS, as appropriate. As with managed harvesting and routine grazing, STC guidance is critical for creating Conservation Plans based on local conditions.

4.5 SOILS

4.5.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to soil resources would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action resulted in a permanent increase in erosion or the erodibility of soils, altered soil characteristics that would threaten the viability of conservation cover, or impacts to unique soil conditions in sensitive habitats.

4.5.2 No Action Alternative

4.5.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining native grasslands would be expected to benefit soils in the long term. The stabilization of soils through limiting development and agricultural uses of the land would reduce the potential for soil erosion. The activities authorized for grasslands were designed to increase soil stability and decrease soil loss from wind and water erosion. Benefits would include the long-term improvement of

soil quality and stability resulting from protective soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient, and pesticide management; and minimization of soil disturbance.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts such as compaction and soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to soils would be realized on grasslands enrolled in the CRP. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in the CRP and would ensure minimal impacts to soils. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including soils.

4.5.2.2 Final Year of Contract

CRP contract holders would be allowed to conduct improvement activities on their lands during the final year of the contract if those lands are to be enrolled into the Conservation Stewardship Program or the Agricultural Easement Program, allowing for an easier transition from the CRP to long-term or permanent easements. Soil quality and soil erosion are two of the primary concerns to be addressed by the Conservation Stewardship Program. Improvements to the conservation cover (similar to maintenance or management activities) are allowed prior to enrollment in the Conservation Stewardship Program as long as the activities are consistent with the purpose of the cover. Temporary, localized, and minor impacts to soils would occur from those authorized land improvements during the final year of the CRP, which would not occur otherwise; however, long-term beneficial impacts to soils would occur from the enrollment in conservation easements. Stabilizing soils through continued enrollment in conservation programs results in reduced erosion potential and improved soil quality.

4.5.3 Proposed Action

4.5.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Targeted Enrollment could encourage the enrollment of lands or use of CPs with the highest potential benefit to soils. The beneficial impacts to soils associated with the CRP would continue and may increase due to any focus on CPs or conservation goals that benefit soils and protect environmentally sensitive land, including areas with high EI ratings.

4.5.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would still be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include BMPs to help reduce soil erosion. BMPs include, but are not limited to, measures to maintain adequate ground cover, litter, and canopy, and reduce soil compaction. Restrictions on harvesting and grazing that would protect soils are built in to the provisions and include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock.

Harvesting and grazing frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC, and would incorporate consideration of the soil characteristics of the enrolled land. Managed harvesting (typically mowing or haying) would be allowed no more frequently than once every 3 years (same as current allowance), but not less frequently than once in 5 years. As discussed previously, this change only affects

managed harvesting in Colorado. Under the Proposed Action, states would have more flexibility in establishing the allowable frequencies for routine grazing (can be as frequent as once every 2 years) while still taking into consideration regional differences such as climate, soil type, and natural resources; the number of years that should be required between routine grazing activities; and how often during a year routine grazing should be allowed to occur.

The USDA uses the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation to measure soil loss. This equation takes into account rainfall/runoff, soil erodibility, slope length, slope steepness, cover management, and supporting practices. As analyzed in several state specific EAs and prior CRP NEPA documents, changing the frequency of harvesting or grazing would affect only the cover management factor. In general, harvesting would leave the ground cover. Ground cover can help with infiltration, slowing runoff, and can reduce rain drop impact energy. Grazing may temporarily remove the ground cover through hoof action in areas where livestock concentrate. Ground cover is minimally affected by harvesting and grazing, since a minimum plant height of 2 to 10 inches (depending on the species) must remain after harvesting or grazing activities in accordance with NRCS Practice Standards. This stabilizes soils. The potential short-term impacts to soils would vary depending on the soil type and conditions, species composition of ground or canopy cover, and time needed for re-growth. However, even with more frequent grazing or harvesting, the impacts to soils would be localized, temporary, and minimal.

4.5.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing- Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CP8, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP27, CP28, CP37, CP39 and CP41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during widespread drought conditions, as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would require approval from the STC and certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to soils would be similar to those described above for haying and grazing frequency changes.

4.6 SURFACE WATER

4.6.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to surface water resources would be considered significant if the Proposed Action adversely affects water quality or quantity, threatens or damages unique hydrologic characteristics, or violates established laws or regulations. Potential impacts to surface waters would be site specific and depend on the CPs to be installed, therefore, analysis of potential impacts to surface water on the programmatic and national scale will be largely qualitative.

4.6.2 No Action Alternative

4.6.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would benefit surface waters for the duration of the CRP contracts. The stabilization of soils through maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land, would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides, and metals into adjacent surface waters. Grasslands provide greater permeability than developed areas or bare soil, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface and into adjacent surface waters. This helps maintain stream integrity by regulating runoff that can affect water quality. The activities authorized for grasslands were designed to increase soil stability and decrease soil loss from wind and water erosion. Conservation

and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates and schedules, reducing the potential for nutrient runoff and overgrazing. Benefits of enrolling grasslands into the CRP would include the long-term improvement of surface water quality resulting from protective soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient, and pesticide management; minimization of soil disturbance; and grazing management.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts to surface waters due to soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to surface waters would be realized. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in the CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including surface waters.

4.6.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to surface water quality and quantity by maintaining conservation covers and keeping lands out of production agriculture, which could require water for irrigation. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would be similar to maintenance and management activities, and would result in temporary land disturbance which may temporarily degrade water quality in nearby surface waters from sediment-laden runoff. Established BMPs in the Conservation Management Plan would reduce the likelihood of surface water impacts during the improvement activities. The primary goals of the Conservation Stewardship Program are to improve water quality and quantity through high-performing conservation covers; therefore, the beneficial impacts to water resources may increase from the transition of CRP land to this program.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: the WRP, GRP, and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term improvements to water quality and increased water quantity. Allowing CRP land to remain in conservation through an easement would continue to reduce the demand for irrigation, thus increasing stream flows and available surface water supplies.

4.6.3 Proposed Action

4.6.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in the CRP would be expected to benefit surface waters adjacent to or downstream from enrolled lands, regardless of whether the lands are enrolled using the traditional Continuous or General Sign-ups or the proposed Targeted Enrollment since one of the goals of the CRP is improving surface water quality. Enrollment of lands into the CRP through any means would benefit surface water quantity by lessening the demand for use in irrigation, thus increasing stream flows and available surface water supplies in areas where surface waters are used for irrigation. Surface water quality also would benefit from the CRP covers reducing erosion and runoff of pollutants. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in the CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit overall. If lands or CPs that affect water quality improvement were targeted using this proposed methodology, benefits to water quality could be greater than for traditional CRP Sign-ups. One study of the benefits of utilizing reverse-auction methods to enroll lands in conservation found a seven-fold

increase in the reduction of phosphorous runoff per dollar spent as compared to the USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (Selman et al. 2008). As with other resources and other enrollment methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of the CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.6.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would still be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. Potential negative impacts to surface water quality not directly related to frequency of harvesting or grazing are addressed by NRCS Practice Standards and are included in the Conservation Plan. Surface water quality is affected by soil and nutrients transported off the field through runoff. Conservation covers significantly reduce the amount of soil runoff, which in turn correlates with reduced sedimentation and nutrient loads in nearby waterbodies. In addition, CRP covers often create buffers between waterbodies and actively farmed fields, reducing the amount of sediment-laden runoff in surface waters.

Livestock having access to surface waterbodies may pollute water with nutrients mobilized by damage to streambanks and vegetation from trampling, and the addition of manure. However, grazing activities cannot occur within 120 feet of a permanent waterbody and these areas must be fenced to confine livestock, thus minimizing the potential for these types of impacts. Therefore, the primary potential for impacts to surface water stems from the possibility of increased soil erosion caused by loss of vegetation, as well as compaction of soils from livestock that could lead to excessive runoff if not controlled.

As described in previous sections on vegetation and soils (see **Sections 4.2.3.2** and **4.5.3.2**), when performed in accordance with established guidelines, managed harvesting and routine grazing can be effective tools for maintaining early successional stages of vegetative communities and adjusting the frequencies has little long-term impact on the vegetation and soil cover. NRCS Practice Standards and the associated BMPs would require that a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of stubble remain after harvesting or grazing, minimizing the potential for increased erosion, which in turn reduces the potential for increased sedimentation in nearby waterbodies. As noted in **Section 4.5.3.2**, the potential short-term impacts to soils would vary depending on the soil conditions, species composition of ground or canopy cover, and time needed for re-growth. Establishing stocking rates suitable for the specific forage and other conditions on the property ensures that grazing livestock are adequately dispersed, thus reducing the potential for soil compaction which could increase runoff. However, even with more frequent grazing or harvesting, the impacts to soils would be localized, temporary, and minimal. Given the minimal impacts to vegetation and soils, the potential impacts to surface water quality from increased sedimentation also would be localized, temporary, and minimal.

4.6.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CP8, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP27, CP28, CP37, CP39 and CP41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during widespread drought conditions as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would require approval from certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to surface water would be similar to those described above for managed harvesting and routine grazing.

4.7 GROUNDWATER

4.7.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to groundwater would be considered significant if the Proposed Action significantly reduced groundwater quantity or quality on lands that are eligible for enrollment in the CRP or currently are enrolled.

4.7.2 No Action Alternative

4.7.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would provide benefits to groundwater for the duration of the CRP contracts.In addition to reducing the demand for groundwater irrigation, maintaining grasslands would provide greater permeability than developed areas, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface and into adjacent surface waters. Increased soil permeability increases the rate of replenishment of aquifers, providing long-term benefits to groundwater quality and quantity. Conservation and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates, stocking schedules, and pesticide management. While there could be temporary, negative impacts to groundwater in areas with shallow aquifers during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to groundwater quality and quantity would be realized on grasslands enrolled in the CRP. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in the CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including groundwater.

4.7.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to groundwater quality and quantity. Allowing CRP land to remain in conservation through a long-term enrollment program or an easement would continue to reduce the demand for irrigation derived from groundwater sources. In addition, conservation covers reduce runoff and allow for increased infiltration of rainwater and snowmelt, replenishing groundwater sources.

4.7.3 Proposed Action

4.7.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in the CRP would be expected to benefit groundwater regardless of whether lands are enrolled using the traditional Continuous or General Sign-ups or the proposed Targeted Enrollment, by lessening the demand for irrigation in areas where aquifers are used as a source of water for agricultural production. Groundwater quality and quantity would also benefit from CRP covers reducing runoff, reducing fertilizer and pesticide use, and increasing infiltration times and aquifer replenishment. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment, would increase the quality of lands enrolled in the CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit overall. If lands or CPs that affect groundwater or surface water quality or quantity were targeted using this proposed methodology, benefits to groundwater could be greater than for traditional CRP Sign-ups. As with other resources and other enrollment

methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of the CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.7.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would not have any appreciable impacts on groundwater. The potential indirect impacts to groundwater are similar to those described for surface water (see **Section 4.6.3.2**) and stem from the removal of vegetation to a degree that increases erosion potential, and sedimentation or contamination of surface waters that replenish groundwater. As described in that section, NRCS Practice Standards and the associated BMPs reduce the potential for these impacts. Similarly, protection measures are in place to maintain adequate vegetation cover that would allow for continued infiltration of rainwater and snowmelt that would replenish groundwater sources.

4.7.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CP8, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP27, CP28, CP37, CP39 and CP41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during widespread drought conditions, as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would require approval from certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to groundwater would be similar to those described above for managed harvesting and routine grazing (see **Section 4.7.3.2**).

4.8 FLOODPLAINS

4.8.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to floodplains would be considered significant if the Proposed Action reduced the natural function of floodplains, thereby increasing flooding potential or the severity of flooding events.

4.8.2 No Action Alternative

4.8.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would benefit floodplains adjacent to CRP lands for the duration of the contracts. The stabilization of soils through maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land would provide greater soil permeability and would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, and metals into adjacent floodplains and surface waters. Grasslands provide greater permeability than developed areas or bare ground, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface, helping to maintain the integrity of riparian areas by regulating runoff. Conservation and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates and schedules, reducing the potential for nutrient runoff into floodplains. Benefits of enrolling grasslands into the CRP would include the long-term protection of soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient and pesticide management; minimization of soil disturbance; and grazing management.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts to floodplains due to soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to floodplains would be realized. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in the CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including floodplains.

4.8.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would generally provide long-term benefits to floodplains and their flood storage capacity. Maintaining the established conservation cover would prevent development within floodplains on the CRP land. Floodplains provide a natural area for floodwaters to accumulate, preventing floodwaters from having damaging effects to developed areas or significantly increasing surface water flows, which increases erosion potential.

4.8.3 Proposed Action

4.8.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

As with surface water and groundwater, enrolling land in the CRP would be expected to benefit floodplains adjacent to or downstream from enrolled lands, regardless of whether lands are enrolled using the traditional Continuous or General Sign-ups or the proposed Targeted Enrollment. Enrollment of lands into the CRP through any means would benefit floodplains by reducing the volume of runoff and improving the quality of waters reaching floodplains from over-surface flow and subsurface flows from aquifers. Using this enrollment methodology to target enrollment and restoration of floodplains, or other practices that would improve surface water or groundwater, could result in a greater conservation benefit to floodplains per conservation dollar spent, as compared to traditional CRP Sign-ups. As with other resources and other enrollment methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of the CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.8.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would have minimal impacts to floodplains. The potential indirect impacts to floodplains would stem from vegetation losses to a degree that increases the erosion potential, which in turn could affect the flood storage capacity of floodplains. As described in **Section 4.2.3.2,** the required NRCS Practice Standards and associated BMPs reduce the potential for this to occur. In addition, floodplains in the local vicinity would be identified in the Conservation Management Plan, and specific BMPs or mitigation measures would be developed prior to allowing any harvesting or grazing activity.

4.8.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CP8, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP27, CP28, CP37, CP39 and CP41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during widespread drought conditions, as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would require approval from certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to floodplains would be similar to those described above for managed harvesting and routine grazing (see **Section 4.8.3.2**).

4.9 WETLANDS

4.9.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to wetlands could be considered significant if implementation of an action threatened or damaged unique hydrologic characteristics, or violated established laws or regulations. Analysis of potential impact

to wetlands from implementation of the Proposed Action will be qualitative because of the scale of the proposed program changes.

4.9.2 No Action Alternative

4.9.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would benefit adjacent wetlands for the duration of the CRP contracts. The stabilization of soils, through maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land, would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides, and metals into adjacent wetlands. Grasslands provide greater permeability than developed areas, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface and into adjacent surface waters and wetlands, helping to maintain the integrity of riparian areas. Conservation and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates and schedules, reducing the potential for nutrient runoff. Benefits of enrolling grasslands into the CRP would include the long-term protection of soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient and pesticide management; minimization of soil disturbance; and grazing management.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts to wetlands due to soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements would be realized in wetlands adjacent to grasslands enrolled in the CRP. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in the CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including wetlands.

4.9.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program could provide long-term benefits to wetlands adjacent to or downstream from CRP lands. Providing a means to keep land in conservation could result in reduced use of water for irrigation; less erosion of soils; and reduced runoff of nutrients, pesticides, and other chemicals as compared to agriculture or development. All of these benefits would positively affect adjacent or downstream wetlands by preserving wetland hydrology and health. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would be similar to maintenance and management activities, and would result in temporary land disturbance, which may temporarily impact wetlands or riparian areas. Established BMPs in the Conservation Management Plan would reduce the likelihood of wetland or riparian impacts during the improvement activities.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: the WRP, GRP, and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term wetland benefits. Allowing CRP land, particularly land enrolled in CPs specifically for wetlands or riparian buffers, to remain in conservation through a long-term contract or an easement would allow for the continued protection of wetlands and riparian areas.

4.9.3 Proposed Action

4.9.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

As with floodplains, enrolling land in the CRP would be expected to benefit wetlands adjacent to or downstream from enrolled lands, regardless of the enrolled method used. Enrollment of lands into the CRP through any means would benefit wetlands by improving floodplain function, reducing the volume of runoff, and improving the quality of waters reaching floodplains from over-surface flow and subsurface flows from aquifers. If floodplains, surface waters, or wetlands, or CPs that support the quality and function of those resources, were targeted for enrollment using this methodology, greater benefit to wetlands could be realized as compared traditional CRP Sign-ups. As with other resources and other enrollment methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of the CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.9.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would not have any appreciable impacts to wetlands. The potential indirect impacts to wetlands are the same as those described for surface water (see **Section 4.6.3.2**) and stem from the removal of vegetation to a degree that increases erosion potential, and sedimentation or contamination of nearby surface waters. As described in that section, harvesting or grazing activities are prohibited within 120 feet of waterbodies, including wetlands. In addition, the Conservation Management Plan would include site specific BMPs or mitigations to avoid or reduce potential impacts to wetlands from these activities. Similarly, NRCS Practice Standards ensure that adequate vegetation cover would remain after completion of any harvesting or grazing activity to reduce erosion potential and sedimentation within nearby wetland areas.

4.9.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing- Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CP8, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP27, CP28, CP37, CP39 and CP41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during widespread drought conditions, as determined by the Secretary. A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on these additional practices during 2012 found that as long as the haying or grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the guidance and approval of the STC and NRCS Conservationist, among other stipulations, there would be no lasting significant impacts to wetlands (USDA 2012). In addition, the USFWS uses haying of wetland areas as a management technique to encourage waterfowl usage in the Wildlife Refuge System (USFWS 2013).

As described in previous sections, under the Proposed Action emergency haying and grazing of these CPs could be implemented in consecutive years. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought, the repetitive haying or grazing of riparian and wetland areas may lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Wetland and riparian areas offer refuge during times of drought stress, as drier conditions would affect these areas last since they are natural drainages. If consecutive years were allowed for grazing and/or haying, care must be exercised to ensure that the CP cover is not negatively impacted in the long term.

4.10 AIR QUALITY

4.10.1 Significance Criteria

An impact would be considered significant if changes to the CRP would decrease GHG emissions reductions substantially from baseline FY 2013 levels of 45 million metric tons CO_2e annually.

4.10.2 No Action Alternative

4.10.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

A recent study by the UDSA's ERS on the role of agriculture in reducing greenhouse gas emissions (Horowitz and Gottlieb 2010) found that the majority of the GHG emissions reductions for the CRP is occurring on grasslands. This study found that about 23.5 million acres of the 33 million acres enrolled in General Sign-up CRP were in grassland vegetation, or about two-thirds of total enrollment in March 2008. Given that this pattern of enrollment by vegetation type has not changed substantially, making certain grasslands eligible for the CRP would support continued GHG emissions reductions at or near baseline levels. If enrollment patterns change substantially, particularly an increase in enrollment from the Delta and Southeast regions where trees are a large portion of total enrollment, there could be an annual increase in carbon sequestration rates for the CRP. Therefore, given the uncertainty of future enrollment patterns by region and vegetation type, and that baseline GHG emissions reduction rates are based on a pattern where two-thirds of CRP lands are grassland, the grassland eligibility would have no change or detrimental impacts on air quality.

4.10.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to air quality by providing a means for lands to remain in conservation rather than returning to agricultural production or being developed. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would be similar to maintenance and management activities, and would result in short-term, localized, and minor land disturbance, which may temporarily increase fugitive dust and GHG emissions from the use of machinery. However, these activities are consistent with baseline GHG emissions levels and reduction estimates. Maintaining CRP land in conservation would have beneficial impacts to air quality through continued carbon sequestration and reduced GHG emissions.

4.10.3 Proposed Action

4.10.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in the CRP would benefit air quality regardless of whether lands are enrolled using the traditional Continuous or General Sign-ups or the proposed Targeted Enrollment. Such benefits would result from reduced emissions from equipment, greater soil stability resulting from permanent covers, and increased potential for long-term carbon sequestration as compared to land in agricultural production. Additionally, Targeted Enrollment would provide a means for targeting lands or CPs for carbon sequestration potential. As such, though the CRP enrollment cap will be reduced over the next 3 years, the carbon sequestration potential may not be reduced proportionally if lands or practices with higher than average carbon sequestration rates are targeted. Quantification of these potential benefits is not currently possible because the initiatives and the specific practices to be involved would vary annually, depending

on the specific conservation goals and enrollment availability. Therefore, the overall impact of incorporating the Targeted Enrollment approach would be to potentially improve the sequestration capabilities of the acreage through CPs that target or incidentally result in carbon sequestration.

4.10.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, four states (Arizona, California, Nevada and Colorado) would be required to have more frequent harvesting (haying) activities, where those activities are requested, than what is currently authorized. More frequent harvesting would result in increased GHG emissions from harvesting equipment operations. However, this increase is not expected to be significant since managed harvesting currently occurs only in Colorado (72,000 average acres from 2009 through 2013). In addition, managed harvesting would occur during a short period of time dispersed over a large geographic area; it would not occur on all CRP acres in any given year, so the emissions that result would be localized and temporary and would not contribute measurably to regional emissions. Grassland conservation covers increase soil carbon by decreasing oxidation and increasing the amount of roots and standing biomass. Managed harvesting does not remove roots and a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of stubble must remain after the harvest, therefore, adjusting the frequencies would not affect the ability of the conservation cover to sequester carbon.

Grazing activities on CRP land increase the presence of ruminators that generate CH_4 (a GHG) as a result of consumption of biomass. However, livestock used for grazing are likely already within the general vicinity of the CRP field (if not on the exact farm), and grazing of the CRP field would not represent an increase in the CH_4 produced in the area. Changing the allowable frequency of grazing activities would cause any change to GHG emissions. Implementation of the established BMPs in the Conservation Management Plan (i.e., stocking rates and dispersion of livestock) limits the potential for grazing activities to remove the ground cover through hoof action where livestock concentrate; therefore, the ability of the conservation cover to sequester carbon would not be significantly impacted. Any ground cover impacts would be temporary and localized.

4.10.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing- Additional CPs

The expansion of emergency haying and grazing activities to CPs not previously authorized for any haying or grazing activity would have temporary, negative impacts to carbon sequestration due to the loss of some of the living biomass. Emergency haying and grazing must be included in the Conservation Plan and these activities (like all haying and grazing activities) must leave a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of cover, reducing the potential for negative impacts. The sequestering of carbon varies, depending on many factors including the geographic location of the acreage. In areas such as the humid, temperate southeast, generally higher levels of carbon are sequestered in soils. The impact of losses would vary by location as specific regions of the U.S. are more susceptible to drought conditions (Southwest, Great Plains). Wetland and riparian areas are some of the richest sources of sequestered carbon. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought as a product of climate change, the consistent haying or grazing of riparian and wetland areas could lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Continued monitoring of these practices would be necessary to ensure that lasting damage to vegetation and conservation covers from emergency haying and grazing activities did not occur.

4.11 RECREATION

4.11.1 Significance Criteria

Recent trends in outdoor recreation participation in the U.S. have been positive in both the number of participants and the number of participant days. Based on these on-going trends, as well as parallel data that can be derived from CRP outdoor recreation effects, impacts to recreational resources would be considered significant if there were long-term reductions in participation or expenditures for outdoor recreation after implementation of an alternative. Positive recreation impacts would be indicated by increased participation and expenditures; detrimental impacts would be indicated by decreases. The amount, type, size, and location of lands enrolled in the CRP, as well as established trends in recreation participation, are considered to determine the effect of the alternatives on recreation.

4.11.2 No Action Alternative

4.11.2.1 Grassland Eligibility and Authorized Activities

The enrollment of newly eligible grasslands into the CRP and the activities authorized on those lands would not be expected to impact recreation. As with all CRP land, participants enrolling grasslands would reserve the right to recreational uses of the land. About two-thirds of current CRP acres are in grassland practices. Allowing for the enrollment of up to 2 million acres of grasslands would not result in changes in recreational participation or expenditures. The benefits to recreation that result from enrollment in the CRP would continue.

4.11.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would not change recreation participation patterns, and would provide long-term benefits to recreation by providing a means to keep land in conservation. Maintaining CRP land in conservation would also allow the land to continue to be used for recreational activities. Improving the conservation cover would have benefits to wildlife habitat and water quality in the area, which in turn would improve wildlife related recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, bird watching, and hiking.

4.11.3 Proposed Action

4.11.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Though recreation benefits from the CRP vary widely by region, Targeted Enrollment is not expected to result in a shift in the geographic patterns of participation in the CRP. Positive impacts to outdoor recreation would be directly related to shifts in the quality of CRP lands. Since the goal of Targeted Enrollment is to increase the environmental benefit of CRP lands, lands enrolled using this method would likely result in greater benefit to vegetation, wildlife habitat, and water quality than lands enrolled by other means. This would result in better quality recreational opportunities, and higher recreation participation and expenditures.

4.11.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would have a net negligible impact on recreation. Managed harvesting can be an effective tool for maintaining CRP cover,

which in turn has long-term beneficial impacts to vegetation and wildlife habitat. Quality CRP cover maintained through appropriate harvesting and grazing activities would have long-term benefits to wildlife-related recreation. There would also be minor, short-term detrimental impacts to recreation associated with reduced access to, or availability of, particular locations during harvesting or grazing activities.

4.11.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The expansion of emergency haying and grazing activities to CPs not previously authorized for any haying or grazing activity would have a negligible impact on recreation. As described in **Section 4.11.3.2**, short-term impacts on recreation associated with reduced access to availability of particular locations during haying or grazing activities may occur.

4.12 SOCIOECONOMICS

4.12.1 Significance Criteria

A significant impact on socioeconomic conditions would be a change that is outside the normal or anticipated range of those conditions that would flow through the remainder of the economy and community creating substantial adverse effects in housing, employment, demographic trends, or business sectors. Anticipated changes to the statewide or national economy that are greater than agriculture's normal contribution could be considered significant, as this could affect the general economic climate of other industries on a much greater scale.

4.12.2 No Action Alternative

4.12.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

The GRP is a working lands program that is currently in existence and has been fully analyzed as part of the 2009 GRP PEA (USDA 2009). It is anticipated that there would not be any significant socioeconomic changes to the economy or community from enrolling grasslands that were formerly eligible for the GRP into the CRP. The 2009 PEA found that the GRP was a beneficial program in whole and could have the potential to delay the conversion of grassland areas to other higher input agricultural uses (e.g., croplands) or for non-agricultural development. Though grassland eligibility would reduce the availability of land for other CRP CPs, the loss associated with that potential acreage would be minor compared to the overall CRP acreage. Maintaining working lands over the contract period would continue to use agricultural sector merchants and labor, as currently being utilized by those producers.

4.12.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would generally have long-term benefits to socioeconomics of the local area. Transitioning expiring CRP land to one of these programs allows the continuation of government payments to the contract holder in a seamless transition from one program to the next. The inclusion during the final year of the CRP contract reduces the risk to the contract holder. The risk would be associated with the uncertainty of returning the acreage to agricultural production, selling the acreage for development or continued agricultural production, or rebidding the acreage into a new CRP contract.

CRP enrollment and expiration data from 2006 to 2013 indicate that over 44 percent of expiring acres re-enrolled in the CRP or about two-thirds of total enrollment in the CRP. Given the new reduced maximum

enrollment authority (24 million by 2018), the likelihood of re-enrollment may be reduced. Contracting with a conservation program would provide an alternative for those acres not eligible for re-enrollment in the CRP, as well as free up capacity under the CRP acreage cap. Therefore, this non-discretionary change would not have a socioeconomic effect.

4.12.3 Proposed Action

4.12.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Using Targeted Enrollment to complement the existing Continuous and General Sign-up processes would not result in effects to the economy or communities. Funding of the CRP would continue to be allocated year to year based on annual budgets, and would not be affected by use of this enrollment method. Because the CRP is a voluntary program, locations of lands that would be enrolled are unknown; however, the geographic distribution of participation in the CRP would not be affected by use of Targeted Enrollment. Temporary impacts to local economies that result from retirement of active agricultural land (lower demand for agricultural labor, inputs, and services) would be the same under this enrollment method as other existing methods. Targeted Enrollment would be used to enroll a subset of CRP acreage and could vary as to timing, location, CPs, and environmental benefit metrics. Therefore, it is unlikely a Targeted Enrollment would have a widespread effect on CRP enrollment, or farming practices and income. Because Targeted Enrollment would focus on lands with the greatest environmental benefit, general societal benefits from conservation could be realized at a lower cost than could be realized using other enrollment methodologies.

4.12.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Managed harvesting and routine grazing provides minor, beneficial socioeconomic effects to the local and regional communities where these activities occur. Managed harvesting and routine grazing typically produce minor benefits due to their small size on CRP acreage, as compared to overall acreage being used for harvesting and grazing within the region. Adjusting the allowable frequency of managed harvesting or routine grazing would not fundamentally alter the socioeconomic analysis associated with implementation of managed harvesting and routine grazing that has been provided in previous NEPA documentation (USDA 2010, USDA 2003, and state specific EAs). As such, implementing the Proposed Action would not result in changes to farming income or participation, and would not have socioeconomic effects on the economy or community.

4.12.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

Under the Proposed Action, the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing would be expanded during times of severe drought (D2 or greater). From a socioeconomic perspective, the impacts from emergency haying and grazing would be similar to those from other types of haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing would be undertaken only on an as-needed basis during periods of severe climatic conditions, which could produce economic hardships to farm households on a regional basis and trickle into the broader regional and larger economy. The overall amount of acreage would be relatively minor when compared to regional available acreage for these activities, and would assist producers in staging herd culls, rather than being forced to large-scale culls. Such large-scale or unplanned culls could negatively affect the price of livestock, and reduce the short-term ability to rebuild herds once climatic conditions improve. As such, implementing the Proposed Action would result in regional and local

benefits to producers and suppliers to maintain herds during long, severe-drought conditions. Therefore, there would be positive changes to farming income during drought, resulting in a socioeconomic benefit.

5.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

5.1 DEFINITION

CEQ regulations stipulate that cumulative effects analysis consider the potential environmental impacts resulting from the incremental impacts of a Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative effects most likely arise when a relationship exists between a Proposed Action and other actions expected to occur in a similar location or during a similar time period. Actions overlapping with or in proximity to the Proposed Action would be expected to have more potential for a relationship than those more geographically separated. Similarly, actions that coincide in time, even partially, tend to have the potential for cumulative effects.

The CRP is designed to support implementation of long-term conservation measures to improve the quality of groundwater and surface water, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. The geographic scale of the voluntary program is national and includes U.S. territories. While the scope of the program is potentially nationwide, the land that is eligible for enrollment in the CRP is cropland that has been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity for 4 of the previous 6 crop years and is physically and legally capable of being planted (no planting restrictions due to an easement or other legally binding instrument) in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. As such, the scope of the cumulative impacts analysis, like the analysis of direct and indirect effects, includes such lands nationwide.

5.2 PAST, PRESENT, AND REASONABLY FORESEEABLE ACTIONS

The affected environment for this cumulative impact analysis includes the lands within the U.S. and its territories eligible for enrollment and currently enrolled in the CRP, and those lands potentially affected by changes to the CRP in the 2014 Farm Bill. For the purposes of this analysis, other Federal voluntary conservation programs that could affect agricultural lands are the primary sources of information used in identifying past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. In addition to the CRP, there are numerous other conservation programs administered by the USDA in which privately owned agricultural lands may be qualified. A brief overview of these USDA and other Federal conservation programs is provided in **Table 5.2-1**.

The primary goal of many of these programs is to protect specific, privately owned lands due to their unique or potential ecological, conservation, or recreational value. In addition to Federal programs, states, regions, or local governments may also have similar programs (given the exhaustive list of those programs, they will not be included in this SPEIS). Other Federal conservation programs in concert with the CRP have positive impacts on natural and socioeconomic resources, but it follows that reductions in these programs would also have negative impacts. The majority of these programs are funded through Congressional authorization at specified funding levels per year, while others are discretionarily funded through annual appropriations. Mandatory spending may be lowered through appropriations or legislative acts (including limits on acreage accepted into programs). Conservation measures undertaken on working farmlands in order to qualify for certain other USDA benefits (such as crop insurance) include practices to conserve highly erodible soils and minimization of impacts to wetlands, which also benefit soil, water

quality, wetlands, and air quality. Many of these programs have similar or complementary benefits as the CRP.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Agriculture Conservation Easement Program/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	The 2014 Farm Bill establishes the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The program consolidates the goals of the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) but does not affect the validity or terms of any FRPP, GRP, or WRP contract, agreement, or easement entered into prior to the date of enactment on February 7, 2014 or any associated payments required to be made in connection with an existing FRPP, GRP, or WRP contract agreement or easement. The program provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, the NRCS helps Indian tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, the NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.
Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program/NRCS	Provides cost share to agricultural producers who voluntarily incorporate conservation practices (CPs) onto their land. This program is available in Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, non-industrial forestland, and other private land that produces crops or supports livestock. Contracts range from 3 to 10 years. Landowners must agree to maintain cost-share practices for the life of the contract; eligible structural and/or vegetative CPs are determined by the NRCS State Conservationist and State Technical Committee (STC). Federal cost-share rate is 75 percent of the cost of the eligible practice, not to exceed $50,000 per participant per fiscal year (FY).
Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP)/Farm Service Agency (FSA)	The BCAP assists agricultural and forest land owners and operators with matching payments for the cost of collection, harvest, storage, and transportation of eligible material for use by a qualified biomass conversion facility. The program also supports the establishment and production of eligible crops to be converted to bioenergy
Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	The purpose of this program is to protect coastal and estuarine lands that are deemed important for their ecological, conservation, recreational, historical, or aesthetic values. The program provides Federal matching funds to states for the purchase of significant coastal or estuarine lands, or conservation easements on such lands from willing private land owners within a state's coastal zone or coastal watershed boundary.
Conservation Operations – Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)/NRCS	Under the Conservation Operations – CTA program, assistance is provided to producers and land owners who voluntarily apply natural resource conservation systems, consisting of one or more practices, on private and other non-Federal lands. Eighty percent of the spending in the Conservation Operations program funds technical support to provide conservation planning and implementation assistance by field staff.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)/NRCS	This voluntary program provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on cropland, grazing land, and (within limits) forest land located on farms. To participate in the program, farmers and ranchers must, at minimum: (1) have already addressed at least one resource concern throughout their farm and (2) agree to address at least one additional priority resource concern (priorities set by the USDA) during the 5-year contract term. The 2014 Farm Bill increased the program's focus on generating additional conservation benefits, removed the limitation on the number of non-industrial private forest land acres that can be enrolled in the CSP, and increased flexibility to enroll expiring CRP land. A person or legal entity may not receive more than $200,000 during FYs 2014 through 2018.
Cooperative, Conservation, Partnership Initiative, (CCPI)/NRCS	A voluntary conservation initiative that combines CPs with specific partner programs to provide assistance to private land owners. Eligible programs include: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forests, and are eligible for the EQIP, WHIP, or CSP may apply for financial assistance. The land must be within an approved CCPI project area.
Emergency Conservation Program/FSA	Provides emergency funding and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters and for carrying out emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought.
Emergency Watershed Protection Program/NRCS	The objective of this program is to assist sponsors and individuals in implementing emergency measures to mitigate potential hazards caused by natural disasters. Activities include providing both financial and technical assistance for runoff retardation and erosion prevention. This program is divided into two categories: the Traditional Program and the Floodplain Easement Program. The Traditional Program provides funding for activities such as cleaning debris from clogged waterways, restoring vegetation, and stabilizing river banks. The Floodplain Easement Program provides for the purchase of easements as an emergency measure for the restoration, protection, and enhancement of the functions of floodplains. The easement gives the NRCS the authority to restore and enhance floodplain functions and values; NRCS may pay up to 100 percent of restoration costs. Landowners retain several property rights and may include managed timber harvest and periodic haying or grazing, as determined by the NRCS.
EQIP/NRCS	Provides producers with financial and technical assistance for implementing and managing a wide range of CPs consistent with crop and livestock production. Sixty percent of overall program funding is targeted to natural resource concerns related to poultry and livestock production. The remainder is directed toward practices that address conservation priorities on working cropland.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Farmable Wetland Program (FWP)/FSA	FWP is a voluntary program designed to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers to improve both vegetation and water flow. Participants must agree to restore the wetland, establish plant cover, and not use enrolled land for commercial purposes. Plant cover may include plants that are partially submerged or specific types of trees. Contracts are for 10 to 15 years. The 2014 Farm Bill reduces the FWP acreage to 750,000 acres nationally.
Forest Legacy Program/U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and State Governments	This program, in partnership with states, is designed to encourage the protection of privately owned forests. The program encourages and supports acquisition of conservation easements that restricts development, requires sustainable forestry practices, and protects other values. Landowners prepare a multiple resource management plan; the Federal government may fund up to 75 percent of project costs, with the remaining 25 percent coming from state, local or private sources. Goals of the Forest Legacy Program include protection of wildlife, habitat, biodiversity, threatened and endangered species, water quality, wetlands, riparian buffers, and recreational areas.
GRP/NRCS, FSA, and USFS	A voluntary program designed to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on private property. The program objective is to conserve vulnerable grasslands from conversion to cropland or other uses and maintain viable ranching operations. This program emphasizes support for working grazing operations; enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity; and protection of grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under threat of conversion to cropping, urban development, and other activities that threaten grassland resources. The 2014 Farm Bill repealed the GRP as a stand-alone program.
Healthy Forests Reserve Program/NRCS	A voluntary program for the purpose of restoring and enhancing forest ecosystems to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, improve biodiversity, and enhance carbon sequestration. In order to be eligible, the land restored would enhance or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery of a threatened or endangered species, improve biological diversity, or increase carbon sequestration. Landowners who enroll in the program and restore or improve their land for threatened or endangered species habitat avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land protected under the Endangered Species Act. The owner may elect one of the following: • 10-year cost-share agreement and receive 50 percent CP cost; • 30-year easement and receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land and 75 percent of the average cost for CP installment; or • 99-year easement and receive 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land and 100 percent of the CP installation cost.
Highlands Conservation Act/U.S. Department of the Interior (USDOI) and USFS	The purpose of this Act is to recognize the significance of water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational, and cultural resources of the Highlands region. The Act assists the states of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania with the protection of land and natural resources of high conservation value within the Highlands region. The state acquires land or an interest in land from willing sellers for permanent protection. Potential lands are identified by the USFS; the USDOI provides matching funds, not to exceed 50 percent of the total cost for acquisition.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)/USFWS	Provides Federal grant funds to protect and restore habitats on private lands in order to benefit Federally listed, proposed, or candidate species and other species the states determine to be at risk. Grant funds may be used to provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners for habitat protection and restoration.
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative/NRCS	The NRCS and its partners assisted producers in selected watersheds within the Mississippi River Basin to voluntarily apply CPs to avoid, control, and trap nutrients in runoff; improve habitat for wildlife; and maintain agricultural productivity. The 12 participating states are Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. This initiative was offered in FYs 2010 through 2013. Watersheds were selected based on the largest impact on reducing downstream nutrient loads. Payments were based on the estimated cost of implementing or performing CPs and the estimated cost of income forgone by the producer (income lost from a change in land use or land taken out of production and accepting less farm income in exchange for improved resource conditions).
Renewable Energy Production Tax Credit (PTC)/USDOE and Internal Revenue Service (IRS)	The PTC is applied to taxpayers that sell electricity to an unrelated person that is produced from qualified energy resources at a qualified facility during a 10-year period beginning on the date the facility was placed in operation, provided it occurred before the tax credit's expiration date. This PTC is available to businesses that pay Federal corporate taxes. Qualified resources include wind, closed-loop biomass, open-loop biomass, geothermal energy, solar energy, small irrigation power, municipal solid waste, and qualified hydropower production.
Renewable Energy Production Incentive/USDOE and IRS	This program was designed to complement the Renewable Energy PTC and is available to non-profit electrical cooperatives, public utilities, state governments, commonwealths, territories, and possessions of the U.S., as well as Indian Tribal governments and Native Corporations. It provides incentive payments for energy produced and sold by new, qualified renewable-energy facilities for the first 10 years of their operation, provided it occurs before the end of FY 2015. Qualified systems include solar, wind, geothermal (with restrictions), biomass (excluding municipal solid waste), landfill gas, methane from livestock, and ocean resources (e.g., tidal, wave, current, and thermal).
Source Water Protection Program/FSA and National Rural Water Association (NRWA)	A joint project between the FSA and NRWA to help prevent source water pollution in 43 states through voluntary practices installed at the local level by producers. Rural Source Water technicians work with the FSA and NRCS to create operating plans that identify priority areas. Technicians facilitate the creation of local teams to collaborate on the development of local plans to promote clean groundwater. The plans outline the voluntary measures that local producers can install on their lands to prevent source water pollution.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program	This program provides grants to states and Tribal governments to be used to encourage producers to voluntarily make privately held farm, ranch, and forest lands available for public access for wildlife-dependent recreation. Programs are administered by state and Tribal governments. Programs would strengthen habitat improvement programs on land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) by providing incentives to increase hunting and other recreational access. This grant money can be used in conjunction with other Federal, state, or Tribal resources to achieve program goals.
Watershed Program/NRCS	The Watershed Program is implemented through Watershed Surveys and Planning, Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations, and Watershed Rehabilitation. The NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to plan and install projects on private lands for the purpose of watershed protection; flood mitigation; water quality improvements; soil erosion reduction; rural, municipal and industrial water supply; irrigation; water management; sediment control; fish and wildlife enhancement; wetlands and wetland function creation and restoration; groundwater recharge; easements; wetland and floodplain conservation easements; hydropower; and watershed dam rehabilitation. Under the Watershed Program, the NRCS cooperates with state and local agencies to carry out works of improvement for soil conservation and for other purposes including flood prevention; conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water; and conservation and proper utilization of land.
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program/NRCS	A voluntary program that provides matching funds to state, Tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to purchase conservation easements from farmers and ranchers to keep their lands in agriculture. State, Tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations purchase conservation easements from landowners, who in turn (1) agree not to convert their land to non-agricultural uses and (2) develop and implement a Conservation Plan for any highly erodible land. Landowners are paid fair market value based on standard real property appraisal methods. The 2014 Farm Bill repeals this program.
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)/NRCS	A voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property and provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife practices and protection. The 2014 Farm Bill repeals this program.
WHIP/NRCS	Provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat on agricultural land. The 2014 Farm Bill repeals this program.

Note: AMA = Agricultural Management Assistance; BCAP = Biomass Crop Assistance Program; CCPI = Cooperative, Conservation Partnership Initiave; CP = conservation practice; CREP = Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program; CSP = Conservation Stewardship Program; CTA = Conservation Technical Assistance; EQIP = Environmental Quality Incentives Program; FRPP = Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program; FSA = Farm Service Agency; FWP = Farmable Wetland Program; FY = fiscal year; GRP = Grassland Reserve Program; IRS = Internal Revenue Service; NRCS = Natural Resources Conservation Service; PTC = Production Tax Credit; STC = State Technical Committee; USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture; USDOI = U.S. Department of the Interior; USFS = U.S. Forest Service; WHIP = Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program; WRP = Wetlands Reserve Program

5.3 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ANALYSIS

Several of the proposed changes to the 2014 Farm Bill were not analyzed in this SPEIS because those aspects of the program have been covered in other recent NEPA analyses. Both the discretionary and non-discretionary changes to CRP are considered in this cumulative impacts analysis. The following sections provide a summary of the impacts anticipated to result from all changes to CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill and additional discretionary measures.

5.3.1 Grassland Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Allowing grasslands formerly eligible for enrollment in GRP to be enrolled into CRP would result in retaining or restoring up to 2 million acres of grasslands in areas where such communities were historically dominant. Because GRP would be repealed, the incorporation of these program elements into CRP represents no net change to program effects. No direct or indirect significant negative impacts and no contribution to negative cumulative impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts would be realized through the creation and restoration of grassland habitat, preservation of soils, and improvements to water quality. Enrolling grasslands in CRP along with other conservation programs such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Conservatoin Stewardship Program (CSP), would continue to provide positive long-term environmental impacts for grasslands. While GRP was repealed as a stand along program in the 2014 Farm Bill, the goals of that program have been consolidated under the new comprehensive Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Producers interested in establishing long-term contracts for grasslands would be able to enroll in CRP, while producers interested in establishing an easement could now enroll in the new program.

5.3.1.1 Biological Resources

Making grasslands that were formerly eligible for GRP, eligible for enrollment in CRP would be expected to contribute positively to long-term cumulative benefits to grassland vegetation and ecosystems as well as the wildlife and protected species that inhabit grasslands and adjacent aquatic habitats where water quality improvements could occur. Such benefits would be particularly realized in the Great Plains Ecoregion. In the short-term, maintenance activities could contribute to the spread of noxious weeds but this would be controlled by adhereance to Grazing Management Plans.

5.3.1.2 Soils

Restoring or maintaining native grasslands would be expected to contribute to cumulative benefits to soils in the long-term. CRP and other programs that limit development and agricultural uses of the land, would preserve soils, increase soil stability and reduce wind and water erosion. In the short-term, installation of CPs and maintenance activities could cause soil compaction and loss through exposure of soils to erosion.

5.3.1.3 Water Resources

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would contribute to long-term cumulative benefits to surface water, groundwater, floodplains and wetlands for the duration of CRP contracts. Maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land through CRP and other conservation programs would: stabilize soils; reduce transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides and metals into adjacent surface waters wetland and floodplains; and allow for greater permeability increasing the quantity and quality of

groundwater. In the short-term surface waters, wetlands, and floodplains could be negatively affected by runoff of soils during installation of CPs and maintenance activities.

5.3.1.4 Air Quality

Given that more than two-thirds of CRP is grassland vegetation, allowing up to 2 million acres of grassland that would have formerly been eligible for GRP to enroll in CRP is not expected to contribute cumulatively in any change to carbon sequestration rates or rates of reduction in GHGs.

5.3.1.5 Social Resources

The enrollment of newly eligible grasslands into CRP is not expected to contribute to any change in recreation land uses or expenditure, as owners of all CRP lands retain the right to control access, including to recreation, on their lands and off-site benefits would not be expected to change. Given that GRP was in existence since 2003, making grasslands that were formerly eligible for enrollment in GRP available to CRP would not contribute to any change to the economy or community.

5.3.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing lands to enroll into either the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program during the final year of the CRP contract is not anticipated to contribute to any negative cumulative impacts. Allowing producers to make necessary land improvements during the final year of CRP contracts would promote enrollment into these programs and increase the quality of the existing conservation cover. This would be expected to contribute to long-term positive cumulative impacts to all resources. Streamlining the enrollment process to these long-term easement programs may encourage producers to keep their land in conservation instead of returning to agricultural production or development. Land expiring from CRP could remain in conservation through these other programs allowing for new land to be enrolled in CRP ultimately reducing agricultural inputs.

5.3.2.1 Biological Resources

Allowing preparation for and enrollment in conservation programs during the final year of CRP contract would be expected to result in land remaining in conservation rather than returning to agricultural production or being developed. This would contribute to long-term cumulative benefits to vegetation, wildlife, and protected species. As with grasslands above, short-term impacts to vegetation and disturbance to wildlife could occur during activities designed to improve conservation cover.

5.3.2.2 Soils

Streamlining conversion of CRP to other conservation programs would be expected to result in maintaining conservation covers in the long-term, contributing to positive cumulative impacts including the stability of soils, improvement in soil quality, and reduced soil loss to wind and water erosion. In the short-term, disturbance of soils resulting from land preparation could contribute to soil loss.

5.3.2.3 Water Resources

Measures that encourage land to remain in conservation would be expected to contribute positively to cumulative effects to water resources including surface water, groundwater, wetlands and floodplains in the long-term. Maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land through easement programs would reduce the transport of pollutants into adjacent surface waters, wetlands, and floodplains,

and allow for greater permeability increasing the quantity and quality of groundwater. In the short-term, land preparation activities could contribute to negative impacts to surface water quality and floodplains as a result of erosion of soils.

5.3.2.4 Air Quality

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would contribute to positive cumulative effects to air quality through continued carbon sequestration and reduced GHG emissions.

5.3.2.5 Social Resources

Providing a means for former agricultural lands to remain in conservation would not appreciably contribute to cumulative impacts to recreation. Cumulative benefits to vegetation and wildlife would result in improved wildlife and water related recreational opportunities. Since a large percentage of expiring CRP land is reenrolled in CRP or another conservation program, allowing land preparation and enrollment in these easement programs is not expected to contribute to any change in the economy or community.

5.3.3 Targeted Enrollment

Targeted Enrollment would allow FSA to meet environmental goals by focusing on specified practices, groups of practices or specific types of land. This method would supplement General and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods and would allow FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap of 24 million acres nationally while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit. The Targeted Enrollment of particularly environmentally sensitive agricultural lands to meet conservation goals would be expected to contribute positively to beneficial impacts when considered with other conservation programs, particularly those initiatives that target specific land. Combining Targeted Enrollment with other specific initiatives or programs could be used to generate even greater beneficial impacts than one program alone.

5.3.3.1 Biological Resources

Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, contributing to long-term positive cumulative effects to biological resources. If lands or practices were targeted to provide greatest benefit to vegetation or wildlife habitats, a greater contribution to positive impacts to these resources could result.

5.3.3.2 Soils

Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, contributing to long-term positive cumulative effects to soils. If CPs or goals were targeted to provide greatest benefit to soils, a greater contribution to positive impacts could result.

5.3.3.3 Water Resources

Enrolling land in CRP using any enrollment method would contribute to positive cumulative impacts to surface waters quality and quantity, and the function of floodplains and wetlands adjacent to and downstream from enrolled lands as well as groundwater quality and quantity. Targeting enrollment of

lands to achieve greater benefit to water resources would result in even greater contribution to positive cumulative effects.

5.3.3.4 Air Quality

As with biological and water resources, enrolling lands in CRP using Targeted Enrollment or any enrollment methodology would contribute positively to cumulative impacts to air quality by increasing carbon sequestration in conservation covers and reducing the use of machinery that could produce GHGs. Targeting enrollment of lands with greater carbon sequestration potential could result in an even greater contribution to positive effects.

5.3.3.5 Social Resources

Because it would focus on lands with the greatest environmental benefit, Targeted Enrollment would contribute to positive cumulative effects to recreation by preserving, improving, and restoring wildlife habitat and water quality. Targeted Enrollment is not expected to contribute to cumulative effects to socioeconomic measures since it would not affect funding or practices on CRP lands.

5.3.4 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

The proposed changes to allowable frequencies of managed harvesting and routine grazing would not result in widespread effects. More frequent managed harvesting would occur in only four states, only one of which currently has contracts where managed harvesting is allowed. More frequent routine grazing could be allowed in all states, only 16 of which currently have contracts where routine grazing is allowed. Actual frequencies of managed harvesting and routine grazing would still be determined by STC based on local conditions and would be conducted in compliance with Conservation Plans and BMPs. This proposed change is not expected to contribute to any cumulative impacts. Managed harvesting, haying, or grazing activities allowed on other conservation lands typically also requires a Conservation Management Plan or similar that considers the appropriate methods and timing for the local conditions where the activity would occur.

5.3.4.1 Biological Resources

Proposed changes to managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to biological resources because the participation in these practices is minor compared with overall CRP enrollment and the development of Conservation Plans, Grazing Management Plans, and site specific EEs prior to enrollment would prescribe sustainable grazing rates and prevent impacts to protected species.

5.3.4.2 Soils

As with biological resources, the proposed changes to managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to soils. Participation in these practices is minor compared with CRP enrollment and Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to soils.

5.3.4.3 Water Resources

As with biological resources and soils, the proposed changes to managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to water resources. Participation in

these practices is minor compared with CRP enrollment. Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to surface water, groundwater, wetlands and floodplains. Additionally the exclusion of harvesting and grazing within 120 feet of a body of water would prevent impacts.

5.3.4.4 Air Quality

Though more frequent harvesting and grazing would result in increased GHG emissions from harvesting equipment operations and ruminators, these activities are not expected to contribute to GHG emissions or reduce carbon sequestration because participation in these activities is low and is geographically dispersed.

5.3.4.5 Social Resources

More frequent harvesting and grazing would not contribute to impacts to recreation or socioeconomics. Though individual producers may economically benefit from these activities, participation is low and geographically widespread.

5.3.5 Emergency Haying and Grazing

No significant cumulative impacts would be expected from expansion of emergency haying and grazing in CPs that have not previously allowed the activity. Allowing emergency haying and grazing on these CPs would only be authorized under severe drought conditions with full concurrence from the Secretary, National FSA office, STC, and appropriate state agencies. Several restrictions and stipulations for haying and grazing on these sensitive lands are in place to provide protection and long-term viability of the cover. This provision combined with other emergency programs provides assistance to producers during times of severe need, lessoning economic hardships.

5.3.5.1 Biological Resources

Similar to managed harvesting and routine grazing, allowing additional CPs to be grazed and hayed under emergency conditions would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to biological resources because of the infrequent use and wide geographic distribution of such activities. Additionally, modified Conservation Plans would serve to protect biological resources.

5.3.5.2 Soils

Allowing additional CPs to be grazed and hayed under emergency conditions would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to soils because of the infrequent use and wide geographic distribution of such activities. Additionally, modified Conservation Plans would serve to minimize impacts to soils.

5.3.5.3 Water Resources

As with biological resources and soils, expanding emergency haying and grazing to additional CPS would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to water resources. The need for emergency haying and grazing has been historically low compared with CRP enrollment. Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to surface water, groundwater, wetlands and floodplains. Additionally the exclusion of harvesting and grazing within 120 feet of a body of water would prevent impacts.

5.3.5.4 Air Quality

Though expanding emergency haying and grazing could result in localized increases in GHG emissions from harvesting equipment operations and ruminators, these activities are not expected to contribute cumulatively to GHG emissions or reduce carbon sequestration because participation in these activities is low, drought is relatively infrequent and the lands that would be affected are geographically dispersed.

5.3.5.5 Social Resources

Expanding emergency haying and grazing to additional CPs would not contribute to cumulative impacts to recreation or socioeconomics. Though individual producers may economically benefit from these activities, participation is low, infrequent, and geographically widespread.

5.4 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

NEPA requires that environmental analysis include identification of any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved should an action be implemented. Irreversible and irretrievable resource commitments are related to the use of nonrenewable resources and the effects that the use of these resources has on future generations. Irreversible effects primarily result from the use or destruction of a specific resource that cannot be replaced within a reasonable time frame. Irretrievable resource commitments involve the loss in value of an affected resource that cannot be restored as a result of the action. For the Proposed Action, each of the 2014 Farm Bill changes analyzed would result in no irreversible or irretrievable resource commitments.

6.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of mitigation is to eliminate potential negative impacts of an action on affected resources or to reduce an impact to less than significant. CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.20) state that mitigation includes:

- Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
- Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
- Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.
- Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

6.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Regulations established by CEQ state that all relevant reasonable mitigation measures that could alleviate the significant environmental effects of an action must be identified, even if they are outside the jurisdiction of the lead agency or the cooperating agencies. This serves to alert agencies or officials who can implement these extra measures, and will encourage them to do so. The lead agency for the alternatives analyzed is FSA.

6.3 MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no anticipated significant impacts associated with the Proposed Action addressed in this SPEIS therefore, no specific mitigation measures are required. The negative impacts are expected to be temporary and localized in nature, and they would occur primarily during preparation of the land for installation of conservation covers and maintenance activities as described in previous NEPA documentation concerning CRP. The temporary, localized impacts to biological, soils, and water resources during preparation of the land for installing a CP or maintenance activities may be minimized through the implementation of BMPs such as the installation of silt fencing, temporary covers, vegetative filter strips, or retention basins, as prescribed in site specific Conservation Plans.

Prior to execution of the CRP contract, NRCS would complete a site specific EE that would reveal any protected resources on or adjacent to the proposed program lands. When sensitive resources, such as nesting birds or cultural resources are present or in the vicinity of the proposed lands for enrollment, consultation with the appropriate regulatory agency would occur as outlined in the FSA Handbook *Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices, 1-EQ (Revision 1).* Specific mitigation measures necessary to reduce or eliminate the potential localized negative impacts to those sensitive resources would be identified prior to enrollment. If the EE concludes that species or critical habitat protected under ESA or cultural resources are potentially present, and the proposed conservation activity on the land is determined to have negative impacts, it is not likely the land would be eligible for that activity.

(This page intentionally left blank)

7.0 REFERENCES

Purpose and Need (Section 1.0)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2012. Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands. Farm Service Agency. August.

USDA. 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

USDA. 2009. Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the Grassland Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. January.

USDA. 2008. Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the Conservation Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. November.

USDA. 2003. Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. January.

Description of Proposed Action (Section 2.0)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). 2013. Summary Report 2010 National Resources Inventory. United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, D.C. and Center for Survey Statistics Methodology, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

The Nature Conservancy. 2013. Precision Conservation. Accessed at: http://www.conserveca.org/blog_multimedia/precision-conservation.xml, May 2014.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2012. Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands. Farm Service Agency. August.

USDA. 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

USDA. 2009. Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the Grassland Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. January.

USDA. 2008. Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the Conservation Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. November.

Wood, F. and J. Williams. 2005. The Grassland Reserve Program: New Opportunities to Benefit Grassland Wildlife. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Affected Environment (Section 3.0)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

Resources Eliminated (Section 3.1)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2009. National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2007 Census of Agriculture. December 2009.

Vegetation (Section 3.2)

Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). 1997. Ecological Regions of North America: Toward a Common Perspective. Accessed at: ftp://ftp.epa.gov/wed/ecoregions/cec_na/CEC_NAeco.pdf, March 2014.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2013. Agricultural Resource Conservation Program for State and County Offices. 2-CRP. Revision 5. Farm Service Agency. Washington, D.C.

USDA. 2012. National Invasive Species Information Center. Accessed at: http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/laws/execorder.shtml March 2014.

USDA. 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

Wildlife (Section 3.3)

Ducks Unlimited. 2013. Conservation Reserve Program: Working with Farmers, Ranchers, and Wildlife.

Farrand, D.T. and M.R. Ryan. 2005. Impact of the Conservation Reserve Program on Wildlife Conservation in the Midwest. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Johnson, D.H. 2005. Grassland Bird Use of Conservation Reserve Program Fields in the Great Plains. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). 2013. Summary Report 2010 National Resources Inventory. United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, D.C. and Center for Survey Statistics Methodology, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

NRCS. 2009. Managing Working Lands for Northern Bobwhite. U.S. Department of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service Bobwhite Restoration Project. Washington, D.C.

Reynolds, R.E. 2005. The Conservation Reserve Program and Duck Production in the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

Protected Species (Section 3.4)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). 2013. Summary Report 2010 National Resources Inventory. United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, D.C. and Center for Survey Statistics Methodology, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 2014a. Summary of Listed Species Listed Populations and Recovery Plans. Accessed via web at: http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/pub/boxScore.jsp March 19, 2014.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 2014b. Listing and Critical Habitat Frequently Asked Questions. Accessed at: http://www.fws.gov/endangered/what-we-do/critical-habitats-faq.html, March 19, 2014.

Soils (Section 3.5)

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). 2014a National Soil Survey Handbook, Title 430-VI. Accessed at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/survey/?cid=nrcs142p2_054242, March 3, 2014.

NRCS. 2014b. Soil Erosion. Accessed at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/nra/nri/?cid=stelprdb1, March 3, 2014.

NRCS. 2010. Keys to Soil Taxonomy, Eleventh Edition.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

Surface Water (Section 3.6)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2011. Conservation Reserve Program Annual Summary Report.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). 2014a. Watershed Assessment, Tracking & Environmental Results. National Summary of State Information. Accessed at: http://ofmpub.epa.gov/waters10/attains_nation_cy.control, March 21, 2014.

USEPA 2014b. Mississippi River Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force. Hypoxia 101. Accessed at: http://www.epa.gov/msbasin/hypoxia101.htm

USEPA 2009. National Water Quality Inventory: Report to Congress. EPA 841-R-08-001. January 2009.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). 2014. The USGS Water Science School. Accessed at: http://water.usgs.gov/edu/wuir.html, March 21, 2014.

USGS 2009. Estimated Use of Water in the United States in 2005.

Groundwater (Section 3.7)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2013. Conservation Reserve Program Monthly Summary – September 2013.

USDA. 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). 2014a. Groundwater Use in the United States. Accessed at https://water.usgs.gov/edu/wugw.html.

USGS. 2014b. A Whole-System Approach to Understanding Agricultural Chemicals in the Environment. Fact Sheet 2009-2042. Accessed at: http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2009/3042/.

Floodplains (Section 3.8)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2014. Floodplains are Riparian Areas, Too. Accessed at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/mt/water/?cid=nrcs144p2_057478.

Wetlands (Section 3.9)

Dahl, T.E. 2011. Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States 2004-2009. U.S. Department of the Interior. USFWS. Washington DC 108pp.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). 2012a. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Eastern Mountains and Piedmont Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR128-09.

USACE. 2012b. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Hawaii and Pacific Islands Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR12-5.

USACE. 2012c. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Northcentral and Northeast Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR12-1.

USACE. 2010a. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Alaska Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR07-24.

USACE. 2010b. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plain Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR10-20.

USACE. 2010c. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Great Plains Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR10-1.

USACE. 2010d. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Midwest Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR10-16.

USACE. 2010e. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Western Mountains, Valleys, and Coastal Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR10-3.

USACE. 2008. Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Arid West Region. Version 2.0 ERDC/EL TR08-28.

USACE. 1987. Corps of Engineers Wetlands Delineation Manual. Technical Report Y-81-1.

Air Quality (Section 3.10)

Jones, C., C. Nicerson, and M. Sperow. 2013. Greenhouse Gas Mitigation from the Conservation Reserve Program: The Contribution of Post-Contract Land Use Change. August.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2013. Environmental Benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program. USDA Farm Service Agency Economic and Policy Analysis.

USDA. 2011. USDA Agricultural and Forestry Greenhouse Gas Inventory: 1990-2008, Technical Bulletin 1930. Office of the Chief Economist.

USDA. 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

Recreation (Section 3.11)

Economic Research Service (ERS). 2008. Land-Use and Economic Implications of Expiring CRP Contracts. The Conservation Reserve Program: Economic Implications for Rural America.

NASS. 2014. National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2012 Census of Agriculture. Accessed at: http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/, May 2014.

Reeder, R. and D. Brown. 2005. Recreation, Tourism, and Rural Well-Being. Economic Research Report Number 7.

Sullivan, P., D. Hellerstein, L. Hansen, R. Johansson, S. Koenig, R. Lubowski, W. McBride, D. McGranahan, S. Vogel, M. Roberts, and S. Bucholtz. 2004. Conservation Reserve Program Boosts Outdoor Recreation in Rural Communities. Amber Waves, Volume 5, Issue 5.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2014. 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation. Accessed at: http://www.census.gov/prod/www/fishing.html.

USFWS. 2007. 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation.

Wu, J. and B. Weber. 2012. Implications of a Reduced Conservation Reserve Program. The Conservation Crossroads in Agriculture: Insight from Leading Economists.

Socioeconomics (Section 3.12)

NASS. 2014. National Agricultural Statistics Service. 2012 Census of Agriculture. Accessed at: http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/, May 2014.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2010. Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. June.

Environmental Consequences (Section 4.0)

Vegetation (Section 4.2)

Allen, A.W. and M.W. Vandever. 2012. Conservation Reserve Program Contributions to Wildlife Habitat, Management Issues, Challenges, and Policy Choices – An Annotated Bibliography. USGS Scientific Investigations Report 2012-5066, 185p.

Belsky, A.J. and D.M. Blumenthal. 1997. Effects of Livestock Grazing on Stand Dynamics and Soils in Upland Forests of the Interior West. Conservation Biology. 11(2): 315-327. April.

Collins, S.L., A.K. Knapp, J.M. Briggs, J.M. Blair, and E.M. Steinauer. 1998. Modulation of Diversity by Grazing and Mowing in Native Tallgrass Prairie. Science. Vol. 280. May.

DiDonato, J. 2006. Endangered Amphibian Research within Grazed Colorado Grasslands. Grazing for Biological Conservation. Proceedings from Cal-Pac Society for Range Management Symposium. June 23, 2006.

Haufler, J.B., editor. 2007. Fish and Wildlife Response to Farm Bill Conservation Programs. The Wildlife Society. Technical Review 07-1.

Haufler, J.B., editor. 2005. Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Conservation Programs: 2000-2005 Update. The Wildlife Society. Technical Review 05-2.

Jones, W.M, L.H. Fraser, and P.J. Curtis. 2010. Plant Community Functional Shifts in Response to Livestock Grazing in Intermountain Depressional Wetlands in British Columbia, Canada. Biological Conservation. 144 (1): 511-517.

Mashiri, F.E., M.P. McClaran, and J.S. Fehmi. 2008. Short-and Long-term Vegetation Change Related to Grazing Systems, Precipitation, and Mesquite Cover. Rangeland and Ecology Management. 63: 368-379. July.

Redmon, L.A. Undated. Grazing Management and the Environment. White Paper. AgriLife Extension. Texas A&M System.

Spasojevic, M.J., R.J. Aicher, G.R. Koch, E.S. Marquardt, N. Mirotchnick, T.G. Troxler, and S.L. Collins. 2010. Fire and Grazing in a Mesic Tallgrass Prairie: Impacts on Plant Species and Functional Traits. Ecology. 91(6): 1651-1659.

USDA. 2012. Programmatic Environmental Assessment Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands. Farm Service Agency. August.

Wildlife (Section 4.3)

Farrand, D.T. and M.R. Ryan. 2005. Impact of the Conservation Reserve Program on Wildlife Conservation in the Midwest. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Haufler, J.B. and A.C. Ganguli. 2007. Benefits of Farm Bill Grassland Conservation Practices to Wildlife. In Fish and Wildlife Response to Farm Bill Conservation Practices, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 07-1, September. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Johnson, D.H. 2005. Grassland Bird Use of Conservation Reserve Program Fields in the Great Plains. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Kamler. J.F., W.B. Ballard, and P.R. Lemons. 2005. Home Range and Habitat Use of Coyotes in an Area of Native Prairie, Farmland, and CRP Fields. American Midland Naturalist. 153: 396-404.

Kamler, J.F., W.B. Ballard, E.B. Fish, P.R. Lemons, K. Mote, and C.C. Perchellet. 2003. Habitat Use, Home Ranges, and Survival of Swift Foxes in A Fragmented Landscape: Conservation Implications. Journal of Mammology 84(3): 989-995.

Kennedy, C.I., J.A. Jenks, and K.F. Higgins. 2001. Effects of Grazing Conservation Reserve Program Lands in North Dakota on Birds, Insects, and Vegetation. Proceedings of the South Dakota Academy of Science. Volume 80.

Lupis, S.G., T.A. Messmer, and T. Black. 2006. Gunnison Sage-Grouse Use of Conservation Reserve Program Fields in Utah and Response to Emergency Grazing: A Preliminary Evaluation. Wildlife Society Bulletin 34 (4) 957-962.

Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). 2006. Migratory Bird Responses to Grazing. Wetlands Reserve Program Grassland Workgroup Report. United States Department of Agriculture. Washington, D.C.

Reynolds, R.E. 2005. The Conservation Reserve Program and Duck Production in the U.S. Prairie Pothole Region. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Schwartz, O.A. and P.D. Whitson. 1987. A 12-year Study of Vegetation and Mammal Succession on a Reconstructed Tall-grass Prairie in Iowa. American Midland Naturalist 117(2) 240-249.

The Nature Conservancy. 2013. Precision Conservation. Accessed at: http://www.conserveca.org/blog_multimedia/precision-conservation.xml, May 2014.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2012. Programmatic Environmental Assessment Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands. Farm Service Agency. August.

USDA. 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Farm Service Agency. June.

Wood, F. and J. Williams. 2005. The Grassland Reserve Program: New Opportunities to Benefit Grassland Wildlife. In Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Programs: 2000-2005 Update, editor J.B. Haufler. Technical Review 05-2, October. The Wildlife Society. Bethesda, Maryland.

Protected Species (Section 4.4)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2012. Programmatic Environmental Assessment Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands. Farm Service Agency. August.

Surface Water (Section 4.6)

Selman, M., S. Greenhalgh, M. Taylor, and J. Guiling. 2008. Paying for Environmental Performance: Potential Cost Savings Using a Reverse Auction in Program Sign-up. World Resources Institute Policy Note: Environmental Markets: Farm Bill Conservation Programs No. 5. June.

Wetlands (Section 4.9)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2012. Programmatic Environmental Assessment Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands. Farm Service Agency. August.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2013. Compatibility Determination. Haying for Habitat Management. Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area.

Air Quality (Section 4.10)

Horowitz, J. and J. Gottlieb. 2010. The Role of Agriculture in Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Economic Brief Number 15. September. USDA Economic Research Service.

Socioeconomics (Section 4.12)

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). 2010. Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. June.

USDA. 2003. Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. January.

USDA. 2009. Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the Grassland Reserve Program. Farm Service Agency. January.

8.0 LIST OF PREPARERS

Name, Project Role	Affiliation	Education and Experience
Dana Banwart *Project Manager*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	B.S. Biology Years of Experience: 15
Elizabeth Burak *Deputy Project Manager*	Ecosphere Environmental Services	M.S. Biology Years of Experience: 17
Michael Harrison *Environmental Analyst*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	M.S. Environmental Science Years of Experience: 10
Carolyn Dunmire *Economist and Environmental Analyst*	Ecosphere Environmental Services	M.S. Engineering Economic Systems Years of Experience: 24
Rae Lynn Schneider *Economist*	Integrated Environmental Solutions	Masters Public Policy Years of Experience: 14
John Lowenthal *Environmental Analyst*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	M.S. Biology Years of Experience: 27
John Stephen Anderson *Environmental Analyst*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	B.S. Environmental Science Years of Experience: 4
Lesley Hamilton *Environmental Analyst*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	B.A. Chemistry Years of Experience: 24
SunTemple Helgren *Environmental Analyst*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	B.S. Geography/Environmental Studies Years of Experience: 18
Kevin Allen *GIS Support*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	B.S. Communications Years of Experience: 8
Cindy Lancaster *Technical Editor*	Ecosphere Environmental Services	B.S. English Years of Experience: 25
Sharon Simpson *Project Administration*	Cardno TEC, Inc.	A.S. Science Years of Experience: 11

(This page intentionally left blank)

9.0 DISTRIBUTION LIST

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 1
5 Post Office Square, Suite 100
Boston, MA 02109-3912

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 2
290 Broadway
New York, NY 10007-1866

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 3
1650 Arch St
Philadelphia, PA 19103-2029

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 4
Sam Nunn Atlantic Federal Center
61 Forsyth Street, SW
Atlanta, GA 30303-3104

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 5
77 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60604-3507

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 6
Fountain Place 12th Floor, Suite 1200
1445 Ross Avenue
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 7
11201 Renner Boulevard
Lenaxa, KS 66219

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 8
1595 Wynkoop St.
Denver, CO 80202-1129

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

Environmental Protection Agency
Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue, Suite 900
Seattle, WA 98101

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 1
911 N.E. 11th Avenue
Portland, OR 97232-4181

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 2
500 Gold Avenue SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 3
5600 American Boulevard West, Suite 990
Bloomington, MN 55437-1458

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 4
1875 Century Boulevard, Suite 400
Atlanta, Georgia 30345

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 5
300 Westgate Center Drive
Hadley, Massachusetts 01035

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 6
134 Union Boulevard
Lakewood, CO 80228

U.S .Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 7
1011 E. Tudor Road
Anchorage, AK 99503-6119

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 8
2800 Cottage Way W-2606
Sacramento, CA 95825

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 9
1849 C St., NW
Mail Stop 3238 MIB
Washington, D.C. 20240

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
4401 N Fairfax Drive
Mailstop 670 ARLSQ
Arlington, VA 22203

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
Ecological Sciences Division
14th and Independence Ave, SW
Mail Stop 0513
Washington, DC 20250

(This page intentionally left blank)

10.0 INDEX

(This page intentionally left blank)

APPENDIX A
DESCRIPTION OF THE CPS AND CURRENT ENROLLMENT

(This page intentionally left blank)

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP1	Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes	To establish new or maintain existing vegetative cover of introduced grasses and legumes on eligible cropland that will enhance environmental benefits.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	3,201,303
CP2	Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses	To establish new or maintain existing vegetative cover of native grasses on eligible cropland that will enhance environmental benefits.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	7,122,363
CP3	Tree Planting	To establish new or maintain existing stand of trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	515,944
CP3A	Hardwood Tree Planting	To establish and maintain a new stand of or an existing stand of predominantly hardwood trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits. For CRP purposes, Longleaf Pine and Atlantic White Cedar shall be treated as hardwood trees, if planted at rates appropriate for the site index.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	634,410
CP4B	Permanent Wildlife Habitat (Corridors), Noneasement	To establish a permanent wildlife corridor between 2 existing wildlife habitat areas that are not connected by a suitable corridor for environmental benefits, and to enhance the wildlife in the designated or surrounding area.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	6,412
CP4D	Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Noneasement	To establish new or maintain existing permanent wildlife habitat cover to enhance environmental benefits for the wildlife habitat of the designated or surrounding areas.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	2,280,109
CP5A	Field Windbreak Establishment, Noneasement	To establish windbreaks to improve the environmental benefits on a farm or ranch to reduce cropland erosion below soil loss tolerance and enhance the wildlife habitat on the designated area.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	93,964
CP6	Diversions	Structures designed to divert water away from farmland and farm buildings, and from agricultural waste systems, in order to reduce runoff damage, control erosion, and protect terrace systems from degrading.	General	40
CP7	Erosion Control Structures	Structures such as dikes on river and stream banks to prevent loss or damage to land uses and protect adjacent facilities.	General	28
CP8A	Grass Waterways, Noneasement	To convey runoff from terraces, diversions, or other water concentrations without causing erosion or flooding and to improve water quality.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	132,061

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP9	Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife	To develop or restore shallow water areas to an average depth of 6 to 18 inches for wildlife. The shallow water area must provide a source of water for wildlife for the majority of the year, with the exception that for areas west of the 100th meridian that receive less than 25 inches of annual precipitation, the shallow water area must provide a source of water for wildlife for a minimum of 4 months of the year. This is not a pond development or wetland restoration practice; however, this practice may be constructed on suitable hydric and nonhydric soils.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	32,995
CP10	Vegetative Cover – Grass – Already Established	Beginning March 14, 2011, CP10 is no longer available for new offers. For offers submitted before March 14, 2011, this practice code is to used to identify land under CRP-1, if a grass cover approved for the applicable signup is already established or not under CRP-1, with a grass cover approved for the applicable signup already established.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	5,155,376
CP11	Vegetative Cover – Trees – Already Established	Beginning March 14, 2011, CP11 is no longer available. For offers submitted before March 14, 2011, this practice code is used to identify land established to trees that is under CRP-1 at the time the acreage is offered and the producer elects to reoffer the acreage to be devoted to trees. Thinning and/or creating open areas in eligible existing tree stands are not a separate practice. The open areas shall be considered CP11.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	472,590
CP12	Wildlife Food Plot	To establish annual or perennial wildlife food plots that will enhance wildlife and wildlife habitat.	General, Continuous CREP	66,010
CP15A	Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips), Noneasement	To establish strips of permanent vegetative cover generally following the contour on eligible cropland alternated with wider cultivated strips farmed on the contour that will reduce erosion and control runoff. This practice is not to develop or establish wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	64,982
CP15B	Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips) on Terraces	To establish vegetative cover on terraces to enhance water quality and reduce soil erosion. This practice is only applicable on terraces that are no longer under practice lifespan to ensure that the long-term functions of the terrace are maintained. This practice is not to develop or establish wildlife habitat. Wildlife concerns may be considered when making determinations about seed varieties.	[b]	[b]
CP16A	Shelterbelt Establishment, Noneasement	To establish shelterbelts on a farm or ranch to enhance the wildlife habitat on the designated area, save energy, or protect farmsteads or livestock areas.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	36,190
CP17A	Living Snow Fences, Noneasement	To establish living snow fences on a farm or ranch to manage snow, provide living screen, or enhance the wildlife habitat on the designated area.	Continuous Non-CREP	6,556

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP18B	Establishment of Permanent Vegetation to Reduce Salinity, Noneasement	To either establish permanent salt tolerant vegetative cover within saline seep areas or establish permanent vegetative cover in areas causing seeps, including trees or shrubs, on eligible cropland that will improve the environmental benefits of a farm or ranch. The cover must address the resource problem with the minimum acreage needed to control the saline seep.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	228,717
CP18C	Establishment of Permanent Salt Tolerant Vegetative Cover, Noneasement	To establish permanent salt tolerant vegetative cover on eligible cropland with existing high water tables that will improve the environmental benefits of a farm or ranch. The cover must address the resource problem with the minimum acreage needed to control the saline seep.	[c]	[c]
CP21	Filter Strips	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	908,260
CP22	Riparian Buffer	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body; to create shade to lower water temperature to improve habitat for aquatic organisms; and to provide a source of detritus and large woody debris for aquatic organisms and habitat for wildlife.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	852,378
CP23	Wetland Restoration	To restore the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to agricultural use. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with NRCS or TSP.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	1,069,814
CP23A	Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain	To restore the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to agricultural use. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with NRCS or TSP.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	263,367
CP24	Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover as Cross Wind Trap Strips	To establish 1 or more strips, varying in size, of permanent vegetative cover resistant to wind erosion perpendicular to the prevailing wind direction on eligible cropland with a wind erosion EI greater than or equal to 4 that will reduce on-farm wind erosion, trap wind-borne sediments and sediment borne contaminants, and help protect public health and safety.	Continuous Non-CREP	301

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP25	Rare and Declining Habitat	To restore the functions and values of critically endangered, endangered, and threatened habitats. The extent of the restoration is determined by the specifications developed at the state level.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	1,737,861
CP 26	Sediment Retention Control Structure	Structures such as earth embankments or a combination ridge and channel designed to form a sediment trap and temporary water retention basin.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	63
CP27	Farmable Wetlands Pilot Wetland	To restore the functions and values of wetlands that have been devoted to agricultural use. Hydrology and vegetation must be restored to the maximum extent possible, as determined by USDA.	Farmable Wetland	85,779
CP28	Farmable Wetlands Pilot Buffer	To provide a vegetative buffer around wetlands (CP27) to remove sediment, nutrients, and pollutants from impacting the wetland and to provide wildlife habitat for the associated wetland.	Farmable Wetland	195,966
CP29	Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body. By restoring native plant communities, characteristics for the site will assist in stabilizing stream banks, reducing flood damage impacts, and restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	118,722
CP30	Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body. The practice will enhance and/or restore hydrology and plant communities associated with existing or degraded wetland complexes. The goal is to enhance water quality, reduce nutrient and pollutant levels, and improve wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	41,149
CP31	Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands	To establish and provide for the long-term viability of a bottomland hardwood stand of trees that will control sheet, rill, scour, and other erosion; reduce water, air, or land pollution; restore and enhance the natural and beneficial functions of wetlands; promote carbon sequestration; and restore and connect wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	100,460
CP32	Expired CRP Hardwood Tree Planting on Marginal Pastureland	To identify land established to trees that was under CRP-1 that expired September 30, 2001, or before, at the time the acreage is offered and the producer elects to reoffer the acreage to be devoted to hardwood trees.	General	8,358

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP33	Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds	To provide food and cover for quail and upland birds in cropland areas. Secondary benefits may include reducing soil erosion from wind and water, increasing soil and water quality, and protecting and enhancing the on-farm ecosystem. Apply this practice around field edges of eligible cropland that is suitably located and adaptable to the establishment of wildlife habitat for primarily quail and upland bird species. Upland habitat buffers will be allowed to re-vegetate by natural herbaceous succession, and/or will be established to adapted species of native, warm-season grass, legumes, wildflowers, forbs, and limited shrub and tree plantings, as specified according to an approved conservation plan.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	246,952
CP34	Flood Control Structure	To create a man-made structural barrier capable of temporarily impounding or managing run-off water for potential flood damage reduction and water quality benefits.	Continuous CREP	69
CP35A	Emergency Forestry – Longleaf Pine – New	To establish a stand of primarily longleaf pine in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits.	d	d
CP35B	Emergency Forestry – Longleaf Pine – Existing	To enhance site characteristics to support an understocked stand made up of primarily longleaf pine that will provide significant environmental benefits.	d	d
CP35C	Emergency Forestry – Bottomland Hardwood – New	To establish and provide for the long-term viability of a bottomland hardwood stand of trees that will control sheet, rill, scour, gully, and other erosion; reduce water, air, or land pollution; restore and enhance the natural beneficial functions of wetlands; promote carbon sequestration; and restore and connect wildlife habitat.	d	d
CP35D	Emergency Forestry – Bottomland Hardwood – Existing	To enhance site characteristics of understocked stand of existing bottomland hardwood. The understocked stand must also provide for the long-term viability of bottomland hardwood trees that have been impacted by the 2005 hurricanes deemed as viable timber stand by a forester. The bottomland hardwood stand will control sheet, rill, scour, and other erosion; reduce water, air, or land pollution; restore and enhance the natural and beneficial functions of wetlands; promote carbon sequestration; and restore and connect wildlife habitat.	d	d
CP35E	Emergency Forestry – Softwood – New	To establish a stand of trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits for acreage damaged by the 2005 hurricanes.	d	d
CP35F	Emergency Forestry – Softwood – New	To enhance an existing understocked stand of trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits for acreage damaged by the 2005 hurricanes.	d	d

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP35G	Emergency Forestry – Upland Hardwood – New	To establish a stand of trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits for acreage damaged by the 2005 hurricanes.	[d]	[d]
CP35H	Emergency Forestry – Upland Hardwood – Existing	To enhance site characteristics of an existing stand of trees that were damaged by the 2005 hurricanes. The stand must be a viable understocked stand as determined by a certified forester and provide environmental benefit.	[d]	[d]
CP35I	Emergency Forestry – Mixed Trees – Existing	To enhance an existing understocked stand of trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits for acreage damaged by the 2005 hurricanes.	[d]	[d]
CP36	Longleaf Pine – Establishment	To re-establish longleaf pine stands at densities that benefit wildlife species and protect water quality.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	117,122
CP37	Duck Nesting Habitat	To enhance duck nesting habitat on the most duck-productive areas of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota to restore the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to agricultural use. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with FSA and NRCS or TSP.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	232,482
CP38A	SAFE Buffers	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	1,043
CP38B	SAFE Wetlands	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	6,316
CP38C	SAFE Trees	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	17,407
CP38D	SAFE Longleaf Pine	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	292
CP38E	SAFE Grass	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	815,854
CP39	FWP Constructed Wetland	To develop a constructed wetland to treat effluent from row crop agricultural drainage systems. The constructed wetland system is designed to reduce nutrient and sediment loading and provide other water quality benefits while providing wildlife habitat.	Farmable Wetland	271
CP40	FWP Aquaculture Wetland Restoration	To restore habitat or the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to commercial pond-raised aquaculture. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with NRCS or TSP.	Farmable Wetland	16,309

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP41	FWP Flooded Prairie Wetland	To restore the functions and values of wetlands that have been subject to natural overflow of a prairie wetland. Hydrology and vegetation must be restored to the maximum extent possible, as determined by USDA.	Farmable Wetland	39,286
CP42	Pollinator Habitat	To establish habitat to support a diversity of pollinator species.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	53,015

***Notes*:**

[a] Enrollment as of September 2013.

[b] September 2013 summary report does not distinguish between acreage for CP15A and CP15B.

[c] September 2013 summary report does not distinguish between acreage for CP18B and CP18C.

[d] September 2013 summary report does not list any acreage for any CP35 practice.

(This page intentionally left blank)

APPENDIX B
NOTICE OF INTENT

(This page intentionally left blank)

Notices

Federal Register
Vol. 78, No. 230
Friday, November 29, 2013

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Farm Service Agency

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program

AGENCY: Commodity Credit Corporation and Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Intent (NOI); request for comments.

SUMMARY: This notice announces that the Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), intends to complete a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) assessing the environmental impacts of potential changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The intent of this notice is to provide an initial summary introduction to the alternatives being considered for potential changes to CRP, and to request comments on these proposed alternatives. The input we receive as a result of this notice will enable us to refine the alternatives, begin to evaluate their impacts, and document results in the scoping report as required by NEPA.

DATES: We will consider comments that we receive by January 13, 2014. Comments received after this date will be considered to the extent possible.

ADDRESSES: We invite you to submit comments on this NOI. In your comments, include the volume, date, and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* Go to *http://www.regulations.gov.* Follow the online instructions for submitting comments;
- *Online:* Go to *www.CRPSPEIS.com.* Follow the online instructions for submitting comments;
- *Email: CRPcomments@cardnotec.com.*
- *Fax:* (757) 594–1469.
- *Mail, Hand Delivery, or Courier:* CRP SPEIS, c/o Cardno TEC, Inc., 11817 Canon Blvd., Suite 300, Newport News, VA 23606.

All written comments will be available for inspection online at www.regulations.gov and in the Office of the Director, Conservation and Environmental Programs Division, FSA, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Room 4709 South Building, Washington, DC 20250, during business hours between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. A copy of this notice is available through the FSA home page at *http://www.fsa.usda.gov/.*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For questions, contact Nell Fuller, National Environmental Compliance Manager, telephone: (202) 720–6303. For the documents discussed in this notice, go to *www.CRPSPEIS.com.*Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the USDA Target Center at (202) 720–2600 (voice and TDD).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: As required by NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), FSA is assessing potential changes to CRP in 2014 by preparing a SPEIS (2014 CRP SPEIS), to provide FSA decisionmakers, other agencies, Tribes, and the public with an analysis that evaluates program effects in appropriate contexts, describes the intensity of adverse as well as beneficial impacts, and addresses cumulative environmental impacts associated with proposed programmatic changes to CRP. CRP was first authorized in the Food Security Act of 1985, Public Law 99–198, 99 Stat. 1509–1514 (16 U.S.C. 3831–3836), and is governed by regulations in 7 CFR part 1410. CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. CRP is a CCC program administered by FSA with the support of other Federal, State, and local agencies and organizations. More information on CRP is available at *http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSAwebapp?area=home&/subject=copr&/topic=crp.*

Over the last decade, FSA has completed extensive NEPA analysis pertaining to CRP and components of the program. The 2014 CRP SPEIS will tier to (that is, it will focus on analyzing the new changes and incorporate and augment the prior analyses) and incorporate by reference other applicable NEPA documentation, as appropriate, and supplement the 2010 CRP SEIS. As such, only those proposed changes to CRP that have not been adequately addressed in other NEPA documentation will be addressed in the 2014 CRP SPEIS. Other applicable NEPA documentation can be found at *www.CRPSPEIS.com* and includes:

- The 2003 CRP Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and resulting Record of Decision (ROD), which evaluated the environmental consequences of changes to CRP under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Public Law 107–171 (which is commonly known as the 2002 Farm Bill).
- The 2008 13 state-level CRP Environmental Assessments (EAs) and resulting Findings of No Significant Impacts (FONSI), which analyzed the environmental impacts of managed haying and grazing variations on CRP contracts.
- The 2008 CRP Programmatic EA (PEA) and FONSI, which evaluated mandatory changes to CRP reauthorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Public Law 10–246 (2008 Farm Bill).
- The 2010 CRP SEIS and ROD, which evaluated changes to CRP enacted by the 2008 Farm Bill and supplemented the 2003 CRP EIS.
- The 2012 CRP PEA and FONSI, which evaluated the environmental consequences associated with authorizing emergency haying and grazing of CRP conservation practices (CPs) that had previously been ineligible, and helped alleviate local impacts to farmers and ranchers as a result of extreme drought and high temperatures during 2012.

Building on that NEPA documentation, the 2014 CRP SPEIS

will help FSA review potential alternatives to, and environmental impacts expected to result from, proposed changes to CRP. The results of the 2014 CRP SPEIS and subsequent ROD will be used in implementing and modifying CRP administration and will also serve as guidance to FSA decision-makers when considering proposed CRP changes.

The SPEIS process provides a means for the public, other agencies, and Tribes to provide input on program implementation alternatives and their impacts, and other environmental concerns. We encourage you to participate in helping to define the scope of the draft 2014 CRP SPEIS.

Summary Description of Preliminary Alternatives

To initiate the process, FSA has developed a set of preliminary alternatives to be studied and impacts to be analyzed in the draft 2014 CRP SPEIS. At this time, FSA is proposing three alternatives (the No Action alternative and two action alternatives). The No Action alternative (continuation of CRP as it is currently administered and analyzed in the 2010 CRP SEIS) will be evaluated as required by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR parts 1500–1508).

FSA expects legislative changes to CRP in the next Farm Bill (or other relevant legislation). Although the timing of the next legislative change to CRP is uncertain, to be able to implement the changes expeditiously, FSA is getting a start on the analysis of potential changes by including potential legislative changes in the alternatives. As a starting point for the required NEPA analysis that will be required before FSA can implement regulatory changes when the Farm Bill is enacted, FSA determined that using the proposals most recently passed by the House and the Senate, respectively, was reasonable. Because those proposals may change, it did not seem prudent to detail those proposed changes in this notice; the alternatives will be revised as needed in response to legislation and public and other input. To see the details that FSA is working from, refer to *www.CRPSPEIS.com* for the text of the House and Senate proposals used as our starting point. At this point, the two separate CRP proposals, however they are eventually modified, will be the foundation for our proposed federal actions, and are therefore included as separate alternatives. They are similar, but have some differences, and as discussed below, are not the sole components of the action alternatives.

When the next Farm Bill is enacted (or any other legislative change to CRP), the resulting legislative changes to CRP will be used along with the public and other input to this NOI to fully articulate the alternatives and their impacts, which will be fully described in the resulting scoping report.

FSA has developed the two action alternatives that include the provisions from each of the respective proposed legislative changes to CRP, as well as the following discretionary considerations, to ensure that the 2014 CRP SPEIS captures the full range of potential alternatives, impacts, and issues anticipated: Administrative, staffing, and budgetary considerations; efficiency and jurisdiction concerns; and other factors. The alternatives and impacts will be amended, as appropriate, based on input from the public, other agencies, and Tribes during the scoping process, as well as by any legislative changes to CRP.

Both of the two action alternatives include a gradual reduction of the CRP enrollment cap by 20 to 25 percent over the next 5 years. In the 2014 CRP SPEIS, FSA will analyze discretionary measures to meet the proposed mandatory reduction in enrollment while maintaining the maximum environmental benefit realized from the program.

Other discretionary provisions, which FSA identified separately from any pending legislative changes, to be addressed in the 2014 CRP SPEIS include:

- Changing the enrollment cap on the Farmable Wetlands Program;
- Reducing incentive and cost-share payments for tree thinning activities;
- Evaluating other forms or processes for enrollment under continuous sign-up;
- Adding flexibility for haying and grazing, including emergency haying and grazing on otherwise ineligible CRP CPs (as addressed in the 2012 CRP PEA and FONSI); and
- Providing transition options for expiring contracts to enroll in other conservation programs.

Signed on November 21, 2013.

Candace Thompson,

Acting Executive Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation, and Acting Administrator, Farm Service Agency.

[FR Doc. 2013–28520 Filed 11–27–13; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–05–P

CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

Agenda and Notice of Public Meeting of the New York Advisory Committee

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to the provisions of the rules and regulations of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission), and the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), that a planning meeting of the New York Advisory Committee to the Commission will convene at 12 p.m. (EST) on December 12, 2013. The purpose of the meeting is project planning to discuss the scope of the Advisory Committee's project on disparate treatment of youth in the New York correctional system.

These meetings will be conducted via conference call. Members of the public, including persons with hearing impairments, who wish to listen to the conference call should contact the Eastern Regional Office (ERO), ten days in advance of the scheduled meeting, so that a sufficient number of lines may be reserved. You may contact the Eastern Regional Office by phone at 202–376–7533—persons with hearing impairments would first call the Federal Relay Service at 1–800–977–8339 and give them the ERO number 202–376–7533—or by email at *ero@usccr.gov.* Those contacting ERO will be given instructions on how to listen to the conference call.

Members of the public who call-in can expect to incur charges for calls they initiate over wireless lines, and the Commission will not refund any incurred charges. Callers will incur no charge for calls they initiate over land-line connections to the toll-free telephone number.

Members of the public are entitled to submit written comments. The comments must be received in the regional office by January 14, 2014. Comments may be mailed to the Eastern Regional Office, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 1150, Washington, DC 20425, faxed to (202) 376–7548, or emailed to *ero@usccr.gov.* Persons who desire additional information may contact the Eastern Regional Office at 202–376–7533.

Records generated from this meeting may be inspected and reproduced at the Eastern Regional Office, as they become available, both before and after the meeting. Persons interested in the work of this advisory committee are advised to go to the Commission's Web site, *www.usccr.gov,* or to contact the Eastern Regional Office at the above phone number, email or street address.

APPENDIX C
ESTIMATED ACREAGE ELIGIBLE FOR EARLY-OUT OPTION

(This page intentionally left blank)

Estimated CRP Acreages Eligible for Early Out Option				
State	**Total CRP Acres**	**Ineligible Acres**	**Eligible Acres**	**Percent Eligible**
ALABAMA	310,178	284,357	25,821	8
ALASKA	578	578	0	0
ARKANSAS	236,863	228,668	8,195	4
CALIFORNIA	81,028	73,583	7,445	9
COLORADO	1,902,116	1,834,515	67,601	4
CONNECTICUT	57	3	54	94
DELAWARE	6,177	6,147	30	1
FLORIDA	43,409	36,231	7,178	17
GEORGIA	302,073	227,852	74,220	25
HAWAII	21	21	0	0
IDAHO	600,029	544,055	55,974	9
ILLINOIS	925,480	873,053	52,427	6
INDIANA	240,788	208,721	32,068	13
IOWA	1,465,696	1,411,593	54,104	4
KANSAS	2,288,739	2,076,508	212,231	9
KENTUCKY	279,857	273,491	6,366	2
LOUISIANA	307,828	297,830	9,997	3
MAINE	8,903	7,043	1,860	21
MARYLAND	68,624	66,672	1,951	3
MASSACHUSETTS	10	10	0	0
MICHIGAN	176,917	142,435	34,482	20
MINNESOTA	1,310,196	1,163,333	146,863	11
MISSISSIPPI	751,923	707,292	44,630	6
MISSOURI	1,044,546	1,015,048	29,498	3
MONTANA	1,765,562	1,228,716	536,846	30
NEBRASKA	848,061	743,269	104,792	12
NEW HAMPSHIRE	9	9	0	0
NEW JERSEY	2,088	1,899	190	9
NEW MEXICO	262,013	259,610	2,403	1
NEW YORK	43,073	33,692	9,381	22
NORTH CAROLINA	101,464	94,166	7,298	7
NORTH DAKOTA	1,637,692	1,342,627	295,065	18
OHIO	281,649	242,358	39,292	14
OKLAHOMA	758,254	686,177	72,077	10
OREGON	546,661	454,333	92,328	17
PENNSYLVANIA	135,944	134,948	996	1
PUERTO RICO	755	734	21	3
RHODE ISLAND	28	28	0	0
SOUTH CAROLINA	112,998	96,962	16,036	14
SOUTH DAKOTA	937,606	833,734	103,873	11
TENNESSEE	146,969	142,865	4,104	3
TEXAS	3,044,640	2,632,188	412,453	14
UTAH	174,920	167,863	7,056	4
VERMONT	2,430	2,430	0	0
VIRGINIA	46,703	41,973	4,730	10
WASHINGTON	1,370,482	991,735	378,747	28
WEST VIRGINIA	2,210	2,107	103	5
WISCONSIN	265,077	241,642	23,434	9
WYOMING	196,937	194,688	2,248	1
Total	**25,583,943**	**22,5979,62**	**2,985,981**	**12**

Note: *2009 Contracts and earlier only.

(This page intentionally left blank)

APPENDIX D
ALLOWABLE FREQUENCY OF HAYING AND GRAZING AND PRIMARY NESTING SEASON BY STATE

(This page intentionally left blank)

State	Primary Nesting Season	Managed Harvesting Allowable Frequency	Managed Grazing Allowable Frequency[1]
Alabama	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Alaska	May 15 – Jun 25	1/3	1/3
Arizona	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/10	1/10
Arkansas	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
California	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/10	1/3
Colorado	Mar 15 – Jul 15	1/10	1/5
Connecticut	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Delaware	Apr 15 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Florida	Mar 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Georgia	Apr 1 – Aug 31	1/3	1/3
Hawaii		1/3	1/3
Idaho*	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/5	1/5
Illinois	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Indiana	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Iowa	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Kansas*	Apr 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Kentucky	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Louisiana	Apr 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Maine	May 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Maryland	Apr 15 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Massachusetts	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Michigan	Apr 1 – Jul 31	1/3	1/3
Minnesota (north)	Jun 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Minnesota (south)	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Mississippi	Apr 1 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Missouri	May 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Montana*	May 15 – Jul 15	1/5	1/5
Nebraska*	May 1 – Jul 15	1/5	1/3
Nevada	May 1 – Jul 15	1/10	1/10
New Hampshire	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
New Jersey	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
New Mexico*	Mar 1 – Jul 1	1/5	1/3
New York	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
North Carolina	Apr 15 – Sep 15	1/3	1/3
North Dakota*	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/5	1/5
Ohio	Mar 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Oklahoma*	May 1 – Jul 1	1/3	1/3
Oregon (east)*	Mar 1 – Jul 15	1/5	1/5
Oregon (west)*	Mar 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Pennsylvania	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Rhode Island	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
South Carolina	Apr 1 – Sep 1	1/3	1/3
South Dakota*	May 1 – Aug 1	1/5	1/5
Tennessee	Apr 15 – Jul 1	1/3	1/3
Texas*	Mar 1 – Jul 1 (haying) March 1 – Jun 1 (grazing)	1/3	1/3
Utah*	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Vermont	Apr 15 – Jul 31	1/3	1/3
Virginia	Apr 15 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Washington (east) *	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/5	1/5
Washington (west)*	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/3	1/3
West Virginia	Mar 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Wisconsin	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Wyoming*	May 15 – Jul 15	1/5	1/5

Notes:

* These states have a state specific EA that determined Managed Haying and Grazing Frequency and/or Primary Nesting Season dates.

[1] Routine Grazing frequencies are the same as managed grazing frequencies.

(This page intentionally left blank)