



## Washington State Fact Sheet

June 2008

# State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)

## Overview

The State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative aims to provide wildlife habitat for high value species on private land. The initiative is a state and federal partnership designed to meet state wildlife priorities. It is part of the Farm Service Agency's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and is implemented in cooperation with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. SAFE is a voluntary program.

Cooperating landowners receive rental payments, establishment and maintenance cost-share and incentive payments in return for entering a contract to provide specific wildlife habitat.

## Land Eligibility

Four projects have been approved for Washington state. Land with a cropping history and within the project areas is eligible for SAFE enrollment. Land must have been cropped at least four years between 1996 and 2001 to have a cropping history. Summer fallow and CRP are considered cropped.

### Coastal Roosevelt Elk SAFE

The project includes land in portions of Clallam, Grays Harbor, Mason and Pacific counties.

The goal of the Washington Coastal Roosevelt Elk SAFE project is to enroll 500 acres to increase habitat for the declining

Olympic elk herd. Elk herds throughout the Olympic Peninsula have declined by 30 percent due to increased mortality or decreased productivity from declining habitat quality and quantity. Besides increasing habitat, SAFE will improve the vegetation for elk. This will enhance adult and calf survival rates and boost the elk population. Additionally, multiple wetland-dependent bird species, many of which are declining, will benefit from this project including shorebirds, swans and other waterfowl.

### Columbia Basin SAFE

The project includes land in the Warden area of Grant County and the Mesa area of Franklin County.

The goal of the Washington Columbia Basin SAFE project is to enroll 500 acres to benefit ringnecked pheasant and California quail. In addition, the project will benefit at-risk species such as the burrowing owl and Washington ground squirrel, which are known to inhabit irrigated circle corners and other unfarmed areas.

### Palouse Prairie SAFE

The project includes land primarily in northern and eastern Whitman County.

The goal of the Washington Palouse Prairie SAFE is to enroll 2,000 acres to improve and increase Palouse Prairie habitat for a variety of wildlife species by re-establishing

diverse stands of grasses, forbs and shrubs.

Converting cropland to fields and corridors of permanent native plant communities will benefit wildlife species, including at-risk wildlife, such as grassland- and shrubland-nesting birds, and native pollinators. Among the species that would benefit from this SAFE project are the grasshopper sparrow, short-eared owl, merlin, Swainson's hawk, savannah sparrow, long-billed curlew, Townsend's big-eared bat, northern alligator lizard and western toad. Native butterflies that require plants of the Palouse Prairie would benefit from this project. They include Boisduval's blue, Gillette's checkerspot, Sheridan hairstreak, immaculate green hairstreak, square spotted blue and dun skipper.

Resident upland and big game species such as ring-necked pheasant and white-tailed deer also will benefit. Establishing buffers around and near existing remnants of the Palouse Prairie will benefit rare and threatened plants and the giant Palouse earthworm.

### Shrub-steppe SAFE

The project includes land in the Crab Creek drainage in Lincoln, Grant and Adams counties, the southwest portion of the Colville Indian Reservation, and the South Moses Coulee in Grant County.

The goal of the Eastern Washington Shrub-steppe SAFE

is to enroll 5,200 acres to benefit shrub-steppe bird species that have declined because of ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation throughout the West. These are at-risk species with federal or state listing status that use the land in the project area: sharptailed grouse, sage grouse, sage sparrow, sage thrasher and loggerhead shrike. The grasshopper sparrow, savannah sparrow and Brewer's sparrow will benefit from the SAFE project.

## Payments

Landowners who voluntarily agree to 10-15 year contracts will receive the following payments:

- Signing Incentive - \$100 per acre, except for re-enrolled CRP.
- Practice Incentive - 90 percent cost-share to install conservation practices.
- Maintenance payments - \$2 per acre, per year for weed control.
- Annual rental payment - based on the weighted average soil rental rate for the soils in the offered acreage.

SAFE contracts begin the first of the month following FSA approval of the contract. For example, if a contract is approved June 15, it will become effective and annual rental payments will begin to accrue on July 1.

## Payment Limitation

Annual rental payments, including the incentives, are subject to a payment limitation of \$50,000 per person per year.

The limit applies collectively to all CRP contracts the producer has throughout the U.S. There is no limit on the cost-share payments.

## Contract Requirements

Landowners entering into a SAFE contract are required to plant specific wildlife seed mixes for food and cover. Weed control is required on SAFE acreage. Contract requirements are specific to each SAFE project.

Technical assistance to develop a conservation plan will be provided by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The SAFE contract will be approved after all required documents are completed and signed, including:

- SAFE worksheet
- SAFE contract
- Conservation plan
- Landlord/tenant certification
- Payment limitation forms
- Conservation compliance form
- FSA acreage measurement (a small fee applies).

## Access

Hunting and other public access to land enrolled in the SAFE program will be at the landowner's discretion.

## Sign-Up Process

Landowners wishing to participate in the SAFE program

may apply at their local Farm Service Agency office beginning June 30, 2008. Applications are accepted year-round. It is a non-competitive sign-up process, unlike regular CRP. After an application is submitted, a no-obligation eligibility review will be conducted and landowners are provided a final opportunity to decide whether to enroll land in the program.

## Additional Information

For more information about SAFE, contact your local USDA Service Center or Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologist. Also, visit the FSA website at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/wa> or the WDFW website at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>.

This fact sheet is a summary of the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program and is not intended to cover all situations or program provisions.

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