

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer

### Overview

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state cooperative conservation program that addresses targeted agricultural-related environmental concerns. CREP participants voluntarily enroll in 14- to 15-year Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts with USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). Participants receive financial incentives, cost-share assistance and rental payments in exchange for removing cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production. Converting enrolled land to native grasses, trees and other vegetation improves soil retention and water, air and wildlife habitat quality. CRP and CREP are authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

The Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer CREP targets the enrollment of up to 100,000 acres of eligible irrigated cropland to reduce irrigation water use, increase water quality, reduce soil erosion and sedimentation and increase wildlife populations. The CREP agreement is a partnership between United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)/CCC and the state of Idaho. In addition to CREP payments, Idaho state water authorities will enter into state water use contracts with participants on CREP-enrolled land to help ensure that irrigation water is conserved during the 14- to 15-year CRP contract periods.

### Benefits

Enrolling up to 100,000 acres of eligible cropland will significantly reduce irrigation water consumption. The CREP will improve water quantity and quality in the Snake River and its tributaries by reducing agricultural chemicals and sediments. Establishing permanent vegetative cover will provide wildlife habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species.

### Goals

The goals of the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer CREP, when fully enrolled, include:

- Reducing irrigation water use by up to 200,000 acre-feet annually by reducing or ceasing water application on up to 100,000 irrigated cropland acres;
- Improving the Snake River's water quality and flow by increasing the aquifer's groundwater levels and tributary spring water discharge by up to 180 cubic feet per second;
- Establishing permanent vegetative covers to increase wildlife habitat and reduce the amount of agricultural chemicals, non-point source contaminants and sediment entering the water;
- Improving habitat and populations of sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse and other grassland-nesting birds by establishing up to 100,000 acres of native grassland habitat in the priority area;
- Enhancing habitat for fish species by increasing stream flow;
- Improving water quality by reducing soil erosion and non-point pollution adjacent to streams and rivers; and
- Reducing irrigation water pumping power consumption by 300-350 million kilowatt hours annually.

### Eligibility Requirements

The Eastern Snake River Aquifer CREP Project area of eastern Idaho includes all or parts of the following counties: Ada, Bingham, Blaine, Butte, Camas, Cassia, Clark, Custer, Elmore, Fremont, Gooding, Jefferson, Jerome, Lemhi, Lincoln, Madison, Minidoka, Owyhee and Twin Falls. In addition, all or parts of Bannock, Bonneville and Power counties will be eligible if the total

CRP enrollment drops below 25 percent of the county's total cropland before the CREP project reaches the 100,000 acre enrollment target.

Cropland must be eligible for CRP under normal CRP rules. In this CREP project area, irrigated cropland must be located within a state CRP Conservation Priority Area, or meet CRP's highly erodible land eligibility requirements.

In addition, cropland must:

- Have been irrigated by ground or surface water sources other than the main stem of the Snake River, at a rate no less than ½-acre-foot per acre for 4 out of the 6 years, 2002-2007;
- Have been irrigated or included in an IDWR mitigation plan within 24 months prior to offer submission; and
- Be physically and legally capable of being irrigated in a normal manner at the time offers are submitted.

(Note: Non-irrigated center pivot corners will not be eligible for enrollment in this project.)

Before CCC can approve a CREP contract, the producer must enter into a water use contract with the state of Idaho. The contract, "Agreement Not to Divert Water from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer," covers all irrigated cropland to be enrolled in CREP. Other conditions also apply.

### Sign-up and Contract Duration

The CREP sign-up began May 30, 2006, and will continue until enrollment goals are attained. Enrolled land remains under contract for 14- to 15- years, as specified in the contract.

**Approved Conservation Practices**

To better serve program goals, CCC has approved the following CRP conservation practices (CP) for the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer CREP:

- CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses;
- CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Noneasement;
- CP12 - Wildlife Food Plot;
- CP22 - Riparian Buffer (cropland only); and
- CP25 - Rare and Declining Habitat.

**CCC Payments**

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

- **Signing Incentive Payment:** One-time additional payment consistent with Handbook 2-CP for land enrolled in CP22. This payment is made after the contract has been signed and approved.
- **Practice Incentive Payment:** One-time additional rental payment equal to 40 percent of the eligible reimbursable cost to establish CP22.
- **Cost-share Assistance:** Up to 50 percent cost-share of reimbursable costs to install approved conservation practices.
- **Annual Rental Payment:** Annual payment based on posted irrigated rental rates for each enrolled irrigated acre in which an "Agreement Not to Divert Water from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer" has been secured under the CREP at the per-acre rates. The per-acre maximum irrigated rental rate is the sum of:
  1. The posted per-acre weighted-average irrigated cropland rental rate; and
  2. A per-acre maintenance incentive payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for applicable practices.

**State of Idaho Payments**

Subject to contract terms and certain limitations, the state of Idaho will provide the following payments and assistance:

- **Idaho Incentive Payment:** One-time payment of \$30 per acre to participants who:
  1. Have been diverting groundwater from the CREP project's incentive area; and
  2. Enter into an "Agreement Not to Divert Water from the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer" for the contract's duration.
- **Water Rights Acquisition:** Provide \$5 million to purchase permanent private water rights within the CREP project area, most of which will not pertain to CRP acreage enrolled under this CREP.
- Pay all costs associated with the CREP annual monitoring programs.
- Provide technical assistance to help participants develop conservation plans.
- Contribute substantial additional funding for water management activities, natural resource planning, CREP operations staffing and related functions consistent with the goals of the CREP project.

**Cost**

The total cost over a 15-year period is estimated at \$258 million with CCC contributing \$183 million, or 71 percent, and the state of Idaho funding \$75 million, or 29 percent. The \$258 million does not include any costs that may be assumed by producers.

**CRP Enrollment**

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select to enhance their land. Applicants may still enroll eligible land in the general CRP or continuous sign-up CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through general and/or continuous sign-up. For instance, CREP payments are at a higher effective per-acre payment rate because the payments are based on prevailing irrigated cash rental rates.

**Haying and Grazing**

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

**For More Information**

More information on the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer CREP is available at local Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices and on FSA's Web site at [www.fsa.usda.gov/crp](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp)

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