

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Montana

Overview

The Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and the state of Montana have agreed on a plan to implement a Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to improve the water quality and enhance wildlife habitat in all or a portion of nine counties in Montana.

CREP combines an existing federal program, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), with state programs to provide a framework for USDA to work in partnership with state and local interests to meet state-specific environmental objectives. CRP is a CCC program implemented through the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

The Montana CREP partnership targets 26,000 acres in Montana located in nine designated Montana counties. These funds will help protect lakes and water courses through the establishment of tree buffers, the planting of native and other grasses, and the restoration of wetlands. Another aspect of the state's involvement in the program is to recognize the 200th anniversary of Lewis and Clark's historic 19th century trip west. Overall, the goal in Montana is to reduce the amount of sediment reaching streams.

Goals

The goals of the Montana CREP are to:

- Improve water quality of the Missouri and Madison River systems along 524 miles of watercourses by installing 26,000 acres of filter strips, riparian buffers, native grasses, wetlands, and wildlife habitat practices.

- Increase and create wildlife habitat.

Areas Included

Producers can offer eligible cropland and marginal pastureland in the Missouri and Madison River systems. This area includes Blaine, Broadwater, Cascade, Chouteau, Gallatin, Fergus, Lewis and Clark, Phillip, and Madison counties. Contact the local USDA Service Center for specific information concerning eligibility for CREP.

Program Benefits

The Montana CREP will help farmers improve the water quality of the Missouri and Madison River systems by reducing sediment and livestock and other nutrient runoff. Through CREP, Montana farmers will be able to buffer approximately 524 miles of watercourses. This will help lower water temperatures, increase dissolved oxygen and provide additional wildlife habitat.

Eligible Conservation Practices

To better serve program goals, specific CRP conservation practices have been identified for inclusion in the program. The practices are:

- CP1, Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes
- CP2, Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP4D, Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP9, Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife
- CP10, Vegetative Cover - Grass - Already Established
- CP21, Filter Strips
- CP22, Riparian Buffer
- CP23, Wetland Restoration

- CP23A, Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain
- CP25, Rare and Declining Habitat
- CP29, Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer
- CP30, Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer

Eligibility Requirements and Signup Date

Enrollment in the Montana CREP began on a continuous basis on January 1, 2003. Cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland is also eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as an eligible riparian buffer. Persons who have an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires.

Payments Under CREP

Generally, CREP participants are eligible for the following types of USDA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment: A one-time payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP procedure for land enrolled in a riparian forest buffer or grass filter strip practice. This payment is made soon after the contract has been signed and approved.
- Practice Incentive Payment: A one-time payment equal to about 40 percent of the eligible cost for establishing the riparian buffer or filter strip. This payment is in addition to up to 50 percent cost-share assistance that USDA will provide for installing eligible practices.
- Annual Rental Payment (with incentive) for the life of the

contract: Payment rates, plus an incentive payment of 20 percent of the calculated rate for dry land cropland and 40 percent of the established rate for dry land that is irrigated, and 40 percent of the established rate for marginal pastureland

- Cost-Share Assistance: assistance of up to 50 percent for the installation of the eligible conservation practices on enrolled land.
- Annual Maintenance Payment: in accordance with Handbook 2-CRP procedure.

In addition, Montana will offer the following payments (subject to some limits):

- A state cost-share payment of 50 percent of the eligible practice costs for CP2, CP4D, CP23, and CP25.
- A state cost-share payment of 10 percent for CP9, CP21 and CP22

Program Cost

Based on the initial implementation of the Montana CREP, which projected an enrollment of 26,000 acres, the expected combined financial federal and state obligation will be approximately \$57 million. Of that amount, \$41 million will come from USDA and \$16 million from the state and private sources. This does not include any costs that may be assumed by producers. USDA's share of the total program costs is approximately 72 percent and Montana's share is approximately 28 percent.

Enrollment Option

CREP is another option under the CRP that farmers may select to enhance their land; applicants may still enroll eligible land in the regular general CRP or continuous signup CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continu-

ous signup. The CREP enrollment process is on a continuous basis, and payments are at a higher effective rate.

Haying and Grazing

Haying and grazing currently are not permitted during the CRP contract period, unless USDA permits it for emergency purposes under normal CRP rules.

Additional Information

For further information, contact a local USDA Service Center, or local Soil and Water Conservation District office. Information may also be obtained from the FSA website at: www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

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