USDA Announces CRP General Signup Ends February 12

Producers interested in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) 2021 general signup are reminded of the February 12, 2021 deadline to enroll. The competitive program, administered by USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA), provides annual rental payments for land devoted to conservation purposes.

Through CRP, farmers and ranchers establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. Farmers and ranchers who participate in CRP help provide numerous benefits to their local region and the nation’s environment and economy. CRP general signup is held annually and is competitive; general signup includes increased opportunities for wildlife habitat enrollment through the State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative.

New cropland offered in the program must have been planted for four out of six crop years from 2012 to 2017. Additionally, producers with land already enrolled but expiring on Sept. 30, 2021, can re-enroll this year. The acreage offered by producers and landowners is evaluated competitively; accepted offers will begin Oct. 1, 2021.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the United States. The program marked its 35-year anniversary in December 2020. Program successes include:

- Preventing more than 9 billion tons of soil from eroding, which is enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks.
- Reducing nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to annually tilled cropland by 95% and 85%, respectively.
- Sequestering an annual average of 49 million tons of greenhouse gases, equal to taking 9 million cars off the road.
- Creating more than 3 million acres of restored wetlands while protecting more than 175,000 stream miles with riparian forest and grass buffers, which is enough to go around the world seven times.
- Benefiting bees and other pollinators and increasing populations of ducks, pheasants, turkey, bobwhite quail, prairie chickens, grasshopper sparrows, and many other birds.

For more information, contact your local USDA service center. USDA Farm Service Agency office locator can be found at farmers.gov/service-locater.
Indiana State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE), Available only under General CRP Signup, February 12 Deadline

Indiana State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) is a program within the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) designed to have flexibility and diversity aimed at benefiting specific wildlife species such as the Henslow's Sparrow, Indiana Bat, Northern Bobwhite Quail and Ring-necked Pheasants. These SAFE practices are only available under General CRP Sign-up.

**Henslow's Sparrow**

The Henslow's Sparrow is a grassland dependent bird species that has suffered significant habitat loss and population decline throughout the state and is listed as a state endangered species. The Henslow's Sparrow is one of the smallest sparrows, and is a very secretive bird with a faint, short 2-syllable call that can be difficult to hear. Henslow's Sparrows typically feed on seeds and insects and will benefit from a diverse mix of grasses and forbs.

SAFE Henslow's Sparrow is only available under General CRP Sign-up with the following sub-practices:

- CP38E-CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP38E-CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP38E-CP12 - Wildlife Food Plot

SAFE Henslow's Sparrow is available in the following Indiana counties: Bartholomew, Clay, Dearborn, Decatur, Fayette, Franklin, Gibson, Jackson, Jennings, Knox, Monroe, Morgan, Owen, Sullivan, Union, Vermillion and Vigo.

CRP SAFE offers for Henslow's Sparrow will require the landowner to participate in more intensive wildlife management practices, create more flexibility for wildlife, and conduct a simple "presence/absence" survey of the targeted wildlife species.

Henslow's Sparrow SAFE offers must be a minimum of 5 acres.

Each offer must provide grassland nesting cover and adequate perching locations as described in the Technical Practice Requirements. Up to 2 additional habitat components are available as well (shrub planting and food plot).

All permanent grassland practices must meet the highest point mix criteria in the EBI ranking index. Additionally, forb mixtures enrolled in Henslow's Sparrow must include 9 forb species, three of which bloom in spring, summer and fall and contain at least 2 forbs that typically leave remnant Henslow's Sparrow perching locations.

All acreage enrolled under SAFE Henslow's Sparrow must complete “Management Activities” on the entirety of the tract enrolled. The balance of the acreage must be burned, disked, or sprayed once throughout the life of the contract (shrubs do not need to receive this treatment). Preferred management activities are diskng, burning, and spraying in that order. Combinations of these activities are permitted. At least one "Management Activity" must occur on no less than 25% of the enrolled acreage in years 4-7 of the contract period.

Shrub plantings are required when implementing sub-practice CP4D not to exceed 10% of the conservation cover. Shrub plantings on Henslow's Sparrow plantings are recommended to be less than 3' in height. It is also recommended to plant shrubs along field edges rather than within the center of the fields. Shrub plantings are not recommended for CP2 establishments for Henslow's Sparrow.

CP12 Food Plots are allowed but are not required (recommended).

Offers enrolled in the Henslow's Sparrow that agree to establish permanent grassland cover as a CP2 including 9 forb species, three of which bloom in spring, summer and fall and contain at least 2 forbs that typically leave remnant Henslow's Sparrow perching locations may be eligible for a one time incentive payment not to exceed
$100 per acre from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Division of Wildlife upon establishment of the cover. This incentive will be factored into cost-share calculations.

**Indiana Bat**

The Indiana Bat is an imperiled species that is both a federally and state listed endangered species. Indiana Bats are very small, weighing only one-quarter of an ounce (or the weight of 3 pennies). However, during flight they have a wingspan of 9 to 11 inches. Their fur is brown to black. During the winter they hibernate in caves and sometimes abandoned mines. During warmer months they roost under peeling bark of dead or dying trees. Indiana Bats mainly rely on forested habitats, including along riparian corridors of rivers, streams, and lakes, and primarily feed on insects.

SAFE Indiana Bat is only available under General CRP Sign-up with the following sub-practice:

- CP38C-CP3A - Hardwood Tree Planting

SAFE Indiana Bat is available in the following Indiana counties: Adams, Allen, Bartholomew, Blackford, Boone, Carroll, Cass, Clinton, Decatur, DeKalb, Delaware, Elkhart, Fountain, Fulton, Gibson, Grant, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Henry, Howard, Huntington, Jay, Johnson, Knox, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Lake, LaPorte, Madison, Marion, Marshall, Miami, Montgomery, Noble, Posey, Porter, Randolph, Rush, Shelby, Starke, Steuben, St Joseph, Tippecanoe, Tipton, Vanderburgh, Wabash, Warren, Wayne, Wells and Whitley.

Offers for Indiana Bat will require the participant to successfully establish and maintain a diversity of hardwood tree species that are beneficial to the target wildlife species.

Indiana Bat SAFE offers must be a minimum of 3 acres.

All Indiana Bat offers will follow specifications and FOTG guidelines and/or meet Indiana Seeding Tool requirements. In addition to following the FOTG specifications/Indiana Seeding Tool requirements, all tree plantings enrolled under the Indiana Bat shall consist of at least 8 hardwood tree species.

At least 10% of the planting shall be Shagbark Hickory (Carya ovata) or Shellbark Hickory (Carya laciniosa). Burr Oak (Quercus macrocarpa) or Swamp White Oak (Quercus bicolor), may be substituted for the hickory component on wet, poorly drained soils (where Shellbark is not available).

At least 30% of the planting shall be members of the red oak and white oak family, unless other equally or more desirable tree species for Indiana Bat can be substituted (e.g. elm, shagbark hickory).

Management activities will be required on practices enrolled in Indiana Bat. Preferred management activities for the Indiana Bat SAFE are spraying and mowing for weed control. Combinations of these practices are also allowed as acceptable management activities. At least one “management activity” must occur on all acreage enrolled in an Indiana BAT SAFE contract within years 4-7 of the contract period, while no more than 50% of the acreage can receive activity in any one year. Maintenance practices (noxious weed control, pruning, weed control) are also recommended as needed in accordance with guidelines in O/M sheets for tree establishments.

**Northern Bobwhite Quail**

The Northern Bobwhite Quail is a grassland species that has suffered significant habitat loss and population decline throughout the state. The Northern Bobwhite call is one of the most recognized bird sounds and easy to learn. The Northern Bobwhite can be found in permanent grassland habitats with open areas to allow for movement and for feeding on grains, seeds, forbs, berries, and insects. Bobwhites also need brushy areas for escape and winter cover.

SAFE Northern Bobwhite Quail is only available under General CRP Signup with the following sub-practices:

- CP38E-CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP38E-CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP38E-CP12 - Wildlife Food Plot
SAFE Northern Bobwhite Quail is available in the following counties: Blackford, Clark, Crawford, Daviess, Greene, Harrison, Jay, Jefferson, Lawrence, Ohio, Orange, Pike, Ripley, Scott, Spencer, Switzerland, Warrick, and Washington.

Offers for Northern Bobwhite Quail will require the landowner to participate in more intensive wildlife management practices, create more flexibility for wildlife, and conduct a simple "presence/absence" survey of the targeted wildlife species.

Northern Bobwhite Quail SAFE offers must be a minimum of 3 acres.

Each offer must consist of a minimum of permanent native grasses and forbs beneficial for nesting cover as described in the Technical Practice Requirements. Up to 2 additional habitat components are available as well (shrub planting and food plot).

All acreage enrolled under SAFE Northern Bobwhite Quail must complete "Management Activities" on the entirety of the tract enrolled. The balance of the acreage must be burned, disked, or sprayed once throughout the life of the contract (shrubs do not need to receive this treatment). Preferred management activities are disking, burning, and spraying in that order. Combinations of these activities are permitted. At least one "Management Activity" must occur on no less than 25% of the enrolled acreage in years 4-7 of the contract period.

Shrub/tree plantings are required when implementing sub-practice CP4D not to exceed 20% of the conservation cover. Shrub/tree plantings on subpractice CP2 is allowed (but not required) on up to 10% of the conservation cover.

CP12 Food Plots are allowed but are not required (recommended).

Offers enrolled in the Northern Bobwhite Quail that agree to maximize the diversity of their enrollment through implementation of shrub and food plot establishment along with the required herbaceous cover (permanent grasslands) may be eligible for a one time incentive payment not to exceed $100 per acre from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Division of Wildlife upon establishment of the cover. This incentive will be factored into cost-share calculations.

**Ring-necked Pheasant**

The Ring-necked Pheasant is a species that has suffered significant habitat loss and population decline throughout the state. Ring-necked Pheasants spend nearly their entire life on the ground with some sightings in shrubs. They prefer to run but can reach speeds up to 60 mph in flight. Pheasants are dependent on permanent grassland/forbs settings and eat insects, weed seeds and grain.

SAFE Ring-necked Pheasant is only available under General CRP Sign-up with the following sub-practices:

- CP38E-CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP38E-CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP38E-CP12 - Wildlife Food Plot

SAFE Ring-necked Pheasant is available in the following counties: Benton, DeKalb, Elkhart, Jasper, Kosciusko, LaGrange, Newton, Noble, Pulaski, Steuben, Warren, White and Whitley.

Offers for Ring-necked Pheasant will require the landowner to participate in more intensive wildlife management practices, create more flexibility for wildlife, and conduct a simple "presence/absence" survey of the targeted wildlife species.

Ring-necked Pheasant SAFE offers must be a minimum of 3 acres.

Each offer must consist of a minimum of permanent native grasses and forbs beneficial for nesting cover as described in the Technical Practice Requirements. Up to 2 additional habitat components are available as well (shrub planting and food plots).

All acreage enrolled under SAFE Ring-necked Pheasant must complete "Management Activities" on the entirety of the tract enrolled. Preferred management activities are disking, burning, and spraying in that order.
Combinations of these activities are permitted. At least one "Management Activity" must occur on no less than 25% of the enrolled acreage in years 4-7 of the contract period.

Shrub/tree plantings are required when implementing sub-practice CP4D not to exceed 20% of the conservation cover. Shrub/tree plantings on sub-practice CP2 is allowed (but not required) on up to 10% of the conservation cover.

CP12 Food Plots are allowed but are not required (recommended).

Offers enrolled in the SAFE Ring-necked Pheasant that agree to employ all 3 possible habitat components (shrub, food plot & native grass) may be eligible for a one time incentive payment not to exceed $100 per acre from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources - Division of Wildlife upon establishment of the cover. This incentive will be factored into cost-share calculations.

All accepted SAFE offers will receive a management plan developed by a Forester or Wildlife Biologist from either the Division of Forestry, Division of Fish and Wildlife, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, or other Technical Service Providers.

Other requirements and eligibility provisions apply. For more information, contact your local USDA service center. For more information, contact your local USDA service center. USDA Farm Service Agency office locator can be found at farmers.gov/service-locator.

Please contact your local county office promptly if you wish to submit an CRP offer and currently do not have an appointment scheduled.

All USDA Service Centers are open for business, including those that restrict in-person visits or require appointments. All Service Center visitors wishing to conduct business with FSA, Natural Resources Conservation Service or any other Service Center agency should call ahead and schedule an appointment. Service Centers that are open for appointments will pre-screen visitors based on health concerns or recent travel, and visitors must adhere to social distancing guidelines. Visitors are also required to wear a face covering during their appointment. Our program delivery staff will continue to work with our producers by phone, email, and using online tools. More information can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

Questions?
Please contact your local FSA Office.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).