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USDA Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signups for 2023

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that agricultural producers and private landowners can begin applying for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) General signup starting **February 27 through April 7, 2023**. CRP is a cornerstone voluntary conservation program offered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and a key tool in the Biden-Harris administration's effort to address climate change and help agricultural communities invest in the long-term well-being of their land and natural resources.

Producers and landowners enrolled more than 5 million acres into CRP through signups in 2022, building on the acceptance of more than 3.1 million acres in the [largest Grassland CRP signup in history](#). There are currently 23 million acres enrolled in CRP, with 1.9 million set to expire this year. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) is aiming to reach the 27-million-acre cap statutorily set for fiscal year 2023.

General CRP

General CRP helps producers and landowners 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. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat, and restore wetlands.

Continuous CRP

Under Continuous CRP, producers and landowners can enroll in CRP throughout the year. Offers are automatically accepted provided the producer and land meet the eligibility requirements and the enrollment levels do not exceed the statutory cap. The Climate-Smart Practice Incentive is also available in the Continuous signup.

FSA offers several additional enrollment opportunities within Continuous CRP, including the Clean Lakes Estuaries and Rivers Initiative (CLEAR30), the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP), and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). The CLEAR30 Initiative, which was originally piloted in twelve states in the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay watershed, has been expanded nationwide, allowing producers and landowners to enroll in 30-year CRP contracts for water quality practices. Under this administration, FSA also moved SAFE practices back to the Continuous CRP signup, giving producers and landowners more

opportunities to participate in the initiative. Through the FWP, producers and landowners can enroll land in CRP as part of their efforts to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers, to improve both vegetation and water flow.

This administration has also made significant improvements to CREP, which leverages federal and non-federal funds to target specific State, regional or nationally significant conservation concerns. Specifically, USDA made significant improvements to CREP to reduce barriers and make the program more accessible to a broad range of producers and new types of partners.

These updates included flexibility for partners to provide matching funds in the form of cash, in-kind contributions, or technical assistance, along with an investment in additional staff to work directly with partners. Through CREP, for the first time ever, three Tribal Nations are now partnering with USDA to help conserve, maintain, and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Grassland CRP

FSA will announce the dates for Grassland CRP signup in the coming weeks. Grassland CRP is a working lands program, helping landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland and pastureland and certain other lands, while maintaining the areas as working grazing lands.

Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and provides important carbon sequestration benefits to deliver lasting climate outcomes.

How to Sign Up

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before their deadlines.

Producers with expiring CRP acres can use the Transition Incentives Program (TIP), which incentivizes producers who sell or enter a long-term lease with a beginning, veteran, or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who plans to sustainably farm or ranch the land.

More Information

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest voluntary private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits.

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Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters 2023

WHAT IS OPEN FIELDS?

Open Fields, administered through FWP's Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program (UGBEP), is a conservation-based incentive practice geared to **help landowners keep some land enrolled in CRP** and to provide public game bird hunting opportunities.

Montana has lost a significant amount of CRP in recent years, and more is scheduled to expire in the near future. Working together, we can help ensure game birds and other wildlife have productive nesting cover, conserve and improve soil health, and protect water quality.

PROGRAM DETAILS

- Landowners receive a one-time lease payment of \$5.00 per CRP acre (320-acre max) for each year remaining in their USDA contract.
- CRP is eligible for managed or emergency harvesting or routine grazing activities once in 5 years and when pre-approved by the USDA.
- All enrolled acres are open to free walk-in public access for game bird hunting with no further permission needed.
- Additional acres may be offered to help manage walk-in hunting.
- Landowners may enroll up to 320 CRP acres (maximum) per landownership. More than one application may be submitted if landownerships are at least ¼-mile apart.
- Open Fields contracts begin **September 1** and end **January 1** of the year the USDA contract expires.

PAYMENT EXAMPLE

(320 CRP acres) X (\$5 per acre) X (10-year enrollment) equals a one-time payment of \$16,000

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

- Bonus Payment of \$5.00 per acre for seeding CRP, up to 320 acres.
- CRP Re-enrollment: Additional incentives may be available for mid-contract management activities, such as light disking.

ELIGIBILITY

To be considered eligible, the following criteria must be met:

- All enrollments must be on private land that is legally accessible for walk-in game bird hunting.
- A minimum of 2 years remaining on your USDA contracts.
- Continuous CRP practices such as SAFE CRP maybe eligible for enrollment if the total access area is 100 acres or more.
- Agree to manage the CRP for wildlife
- Agree to allow free walk-in game bird hunting access

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Do you have CRP enrolled in FWP’s Block Management, UGBEP projects, or located on State Trust Lands? If so, you may be eligible to enroll in other UGBEP lease options. Contact FWP staff below to learn more.

Region(s)	Staff	Phone	Email

4	Matt Strauch, Great Falls	406-454-5870	mstrauch@mt.gov
5	Megan O'Reilly, Billings	406-247-2966	moreilly@mt.gov
6	Ken Plourde, Flaxville	406-474-2244	Kenneth.Plourde@mt.gov
7	Justin Hughes, Miles City	406-234-0922	Justin.Hughes@mt.gov
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