Purpose

The State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative restores vital habitat in order to meet high priority state wildlife conservation goals. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) provides farmers and landowners with several opportunities like this to achieve many conservation goals. Participation in the Lower Rio Grande Valley Thornscrub SAFE Initiative allows landowners to restore Tamaulipan thornscrub habitat for the endangered ocelot and other wildlife species by creating and maintaining 5,000 acres of native woody shrub and grassland habitat in Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy and Willacy counties.

Benefits

The potential benefits of this SAFE Initiative include:
- Habitat restoration for south Texas wildlife
- Removal of less productive cropland acres to reduce losses to low yield (whole fields and field borders/pivot corners)
- Erosion and runoff prevention
- Water quality and aquifer recharge improvement
- Carbon sequestration

Eligibility

CRP enrolls existing cropland into conservation cover. Land offered for enrollment must satisfy basic CRP eligibility and cropping history requirements. Landowners should check with their local FSA office to determine individual eligibility.

Practice Requirements

Contracted acres must be planted and managed to an approved mix of native grasses, wildflowers, and forbs, or woody shrubs according to NRCS practice standards for 327 - Conservation Cover, 420 - Wildlife Habitat Planting, and 612 - Shrub Establishment. Only native plant species are permitted. Maintenance and management activities are required according to program guidelines.

Financial Assistance

Financial assistance through this SAFE Initiative may include:
- 50% cost share for practice establishment
- 10-15 year contracts
- 85% Soil Rental Rate annual payments possible for Permanent Wildlife Habitat (CP4D) and Rare and Declining Habitats (CP25) whole-field enrollments
- 90% Soil Rental Rate payments, 32.5% Signing Incentive Payment, and 5% Practice Incentive Payments may be possible for Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds for field edges or pivot corners (CP33).
More Information

This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only; other restrictions may apply. For details, contact your local FSA office. To find your local service center and USDA Farm Service Agency office: farmers.gov/service-center-locator