



*Washington Fact Sheet*

# State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Washington Ferruginous Hawk

Updated May 2017

## Overview

The Ferruginous Hawk SAFE is a new initiative of the familiar Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Like traditional CRP, SAFE is a voluntary program that pays eligible landowners and operators to address priority natural resource concerns. Unlike traditional CRP, SAFE signup is non-competitive and offers more financial benefits. Landowners, including those with previous CRP, in Adams, Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties may be eligible to participate in this initiative.

The ferruginous hawk is the largest hawk species in North America and is reliant on shrub-steppe habitat for both nesting and foraging. Due primarily to habitat loss, ferruginous hawk populations are declining. They are a species of federal special concern and are threatened in Washington.

Ferruginous hawks primarily forage in territory around their nesting sites. Hawks are also sensitive to disturbance near the nest. Therefore, land enrolled in SAFE must be near potentially active nests and planted to grass, broadleaf forbs and shrubs that provide quality wildlife habitat.



**Ferruginous Hawk Project SAFE Area**

## Benefits

Landowners will benefit from reliable annual income. SAFE provides a way to enroll land in CRP on a non-competitive basis. Removing difficult to farm or low productive areas can increase the average profit on remaining cropland. Landowners familiar with CRP will find many similarities. Because SAFE is a CRP initiative, contracts will look familiar. The main difference is the program has more cost-share dollars, a signing incentive for land not previously in CRP and an option for a longer contract. Also, SAFE permits a 2-stage planting scenario to allow for chemical broadleaf control the first growing season. Landowners may also just enjoy increased wildlife on acres enrolled in SAFE.

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SAFE will increase the amount of foraging and nesting habitat available for ferruginous hawks. Also, it will help provide habitat for numerous other wildlife species. Ferruginous hawks feed on small mammals, such as cottontail rabbits and ground squirrels, which will benefit from additional habitat. SAFE acres will provide important nesting and brood-rearing habitat for at-risk species, such as migratory songbirds. Also, new habitat will benefit game species, such as ring-necked pheasant and mule deer.

## Goals

The goal of the Ferruginous Hawk SAFE is to enhance foraging habitat and buffers around ferruginous hawk nests in Adams, Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties of eastern Washington by:

- establishing shrubs, grasses and broadleaf forbs on cropland to provide quality habitat
- buffering and expanding upon remnant native shrub-steppe and grassland habitat near ferruginous hawk nests.

## Eligible Areas and Land Eligibility Requirements

The project area includes portions of Adams, Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties in eastern Washington. Eligible land must:

1. Have been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity, including CRP or rotational crops, during 4 of the 6 crop years from 2008-2013; **and**
2. Be within the designated project boundaries (see map). To find out if your operation is located within the project area, contact your Farm Service Agency office in Adams, Benton, Franklin, or Walla Walla counties.

## Approved Conservation Practices

The following conservation practices may be eligible for land enrolled into the Ferruginous Hawk SAFE:

1. CP38E Grass
  - Minimum 7 total species: 3 grasses, 3 forbs (1 may be introduced), and big sagebrush (by seed).
2. CP38A Buffers
  - Forested riparian buffers typically 50-180 feet wide on cropland or pastureland bordering perennial or seasonal streams that will support trees and shrubs.

## Sign-up and Payments

SAFE enrollment is on a continuous basis starting May 13, 2013. Landowners can sign up at their local FSA office in Adams, Benton, Franklin and Walla Walla counties for 10- to 15-year SAFE CRP contracts. Enrollment is approved on a first-come, first-served basis. FSA will stop approving contracts when the acreage cap of 20,000 acres is reached.

Hawk SAFE participants are eligible for four types of USDA payments:

- Signing Incentive Payment – a one-time payment of \$75 per acre for land not previously enrolled in CRP
- Practice Incentive Payment – equal to about 40 percent of establishment costs
- Cost-share assistance – 50 percent of establishment costs (same as traditional CRP)
- Annual rental payment – same as traditional CRP.

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## **Payment Limitation**

Annual rental payments, including the incentives, are subject to a payment limitation of \$50,000 per person, per year. The limit applies collectively to all CRP contracts the producer has throughout the U.S. There is no limit on the cost-share payments.

## **Contract Requirements**

Participants entering into a SAFE contract are required to have in place, or plant, specific seed mixes for wildlife food and cover that are similar to those required for traditional CRP. Weed control is required on SAFE acreage just like with traditional CRP. A list of seed mixes is available from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW).

A 2-stage planting scenario to allow for chemical broadleaf control the first growing season is an option for SAFE seedings. Grasses may be planted the first year and forbs the second year. Native vegetation may take several growing seasons to fully establish. The potential of invasion by non-native weedy species makes staged plantings much more successful. A planting and maintenance schedule will be developed as part of a conservation plan with NRCS.

## **Access**

Hunting or other public access to land enrolled in the SAFE program will be at the landowner's discretion just like with traditional CRP.

## **Additional Information**

For more information about SAFE, contact your local USDA Service Center or Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologist.

This fact sheet is a summary of the SAFE program and is not intended to cover all situations and program provisions.

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