

Oklahoma Spavinaw Lake and Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Overview

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state natural resources conservation program that addresses state and nationally significant, agricultural-related environmental concerns. Through CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and state partners to voluntarily enroll in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in contracts of 10- to 15- years. Participants remove cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to grasses, forbs, shrubs, trees, other vegetation and wetlands. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) administers CRP and CREP on behalf of CCC.

The Spavinaw Lake and Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (Oklahoma CREP) is a partnership between USDA, the state of Oklahoma and other local partners. The program allows enrollment of up to 9,000 acres of eligible cropland or marginal pastureland in 14- or 15-year CRP contracts and provides for additional voluntary 15-year or permanent state easements within the Spavinaw Lake and Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller watersheds. Participants will establish riparian buffers and filter strips to reduce the flow of nutrients, sediment and other pollutants in the Spavinaw Lake and Illinois River/Lake Tenkiller watersheds. Oklahoma state partners will also enroll some adjacent forested acreage in a state incentive program and provide cost-share payments for some participants for winter livestock feeding facilities.

The primary goal of Oklahoma CREP is to enhance and protect water quality for drinking and wildlife habitat in the targeted waterways. The project area watersheds are in parts of Adair, Cherokee, Delaware, Mayes and Sequoyah counties.

Benefits

Oklahoma CREP will help improve the quality of project area waterways that serve as drinking water sources for area residents. The program will enhance the effectiveness of numerous other programs in the water-

shed that focus on reducing nutrients by filtering runoff, stabilizing stream banks and shading stream channels to enhance water quality. In addition, this project will improve wildlife habitat and preserve the diversity of Oklahoma's natural resources. It will increase the amount, quality and connectivity of protected riparian corridors, which many species depend upon for habitat and migration paths. The buffers and filter strips installed under Oklahoma CREP will enable farmers to protect water quality while maintaining the productivity of their farms.

Goals

The primary goals of Oklahoma CREP include:

- Conserving, restoring and protecting water quality and other natural resources within the targeted project area by installing and protecting riparian buffers. Through financial and technical assistance, the program will help eligible participants to protect water resources from current and future agricultural uses and development through voluntary 14- to 15-year CRP contracts and optional 15-year or permanent state easements;
- Providing demonstrations that encourage producers to view riparian area conservation practices as suitable and customary for their farms and ranches;
- Reducing the effects of agriculture on water resources by installing field buffers to filter and trap sediment, nutrients and bacteria;
- Reducing sediment loading by up to 3,702 tons, phosphorus loading by up to 19,825 pounds and nitrogen loading by up to 191,887 pounds annually; and
- Enrolling adjacent non-CREP riparian acreage into a state incentive program.

Eligibility Requirements

To participate in Oklahoma CREP, landowners must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Land must be marginal pastureland or cropland eligible for CRP as determined by FSA county committees;
- Land must have sites where filter strip

and riparian buffer practices are needed as determined by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service or technical service providers;

- Land must be located within the CREP project area;
- Other requirements as outlined in CRP national directives; and
- Some adjacent non-CRP forested land may also need to be conserved with fencing and cover measures. Land may also need to be enrolled in a state incentive program for producers to be eligible.

Sign-up and Contract Duration

USDA will accept offers for CRP contracts under this CREP on a first-come/first-served basis until the 9,000-acre goal is achieved and as long as there is statutory authority for CRP. Landowners enrolling in Oklahoma CREP will sign 14- or 15-year CRP contracts with CCC, and may also enter into longer-term easements with Oklahoma state authorities.

Approved Conservation Practices

Eligible conservation practices for Oklahoma CREP include:

- CP21 (Filter Strips) – up to 500 acres; and
- CP22 (Riparian Buffer) (Marginal Pastureland and Cropland) – up to 8,500 acres. Participants must implement this practice in accordance with FSA CRP national directives, except that the maximum average buffer width cannot exceed 300 feet.
- Additionally, CRP's "infeasible-to-farm" practice and payment provisions apply to cropland offers/contracts. These provisions allow CRP applicants with cropland offers/contracts to add small amounts of acreage that are impractical to farm to the CRP contract.

CCC's Role

CCC will provide \$16,552,000 under Oklahoma CREP to make the following payments:

- 50 percent of the reimbursable costs of establishing eligible CRP conservation

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- practices;
- A one-time Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) and a one-time Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) for practices CP21, Filter Strips and CP22, Riparian Buffer. CCC will treat these one-time payments as rental payments for CRP payment limitation purposes;
 - Rental payments based on the posted county dryland cropland soil rental rate per acre for the enrolled land:
1. On land enrolled as cropland, CCC will determine the base rental payment using the weighted average of the three predominant soils using posted soil rental rates; or
 2. On land enrolled as marginal pastureland under practice CP22, CCC will determine the base rental payment using the posted County Marginal Pastureland rental rates;
 3. CCC will add a 50 percent incentive payment to the base soil rental rate or marginal pastureland rate and issued as part of the annual rental. This payment component is considered a rental payment for payment limitation purposes;
 4. A maintenance incentive payment per acre in an amount according to FSA CRP national directives. This payment component is considered a rental payment for payment limitation purposes.

CCC will provide the following services under Oklahoma CREP:

- Accept CREP offers, approve contracts and administer CRP contracts;
- Work cooperatively with the state of Oklahoma to develop or review conservation plans on eligible acreage;
- Conduct compliance reviews;
- Provide technical assistance; and
- Following all applicable laws, share data with the state of Oklahoma to facilitate state monitoring efforts.

State of Oklahoma's Role

The state of Oklahoma will provide \$4,130,500 under Oklahoma CREP to make the following payments:

- Provide a minimum of \$2,322,000 in payments to producers within the CREP area as part of the state's required 20 percent matching funds for the following purposes:
1. To encourage producers to install additional riparian buffers and support best management practices on additional lands not enrolled in CREP within the

2. To encourage producers to restore stream banks and stream channels by applying conservation practices on additional lands not enrolled in Oklahoma CREP within the project area through enrollment in the state incentive program;
 3. To provide payments to livestock producers who enroll eligible cropland or marginal pastureland into Oklahoma CREP. Payments are equal to 50 percent of the cost-share for installing winter feeding facilities (combination of NRCS practice codes 561 and 313) on lands not enrolled in CREP through enrollment in the state incentive program;
 4. The state will administer easement provisions and ensure easement payments are paid directly to producers by the Tulsa Metropolitan Utilities Authority (TMUA), Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission (OSRC) or their representative. TMUA or OSRC or their designee will provide at least \$1,250,000 to producers who voluntarily enroll in a 15-year or permanent conservation easement in the state incentive program. Easement payments will be based on market-rate values.; and
 5. The state will provide cost-share payments to livestock producers who enroll eligible marginal pasture or cropland to fund fence installation through adjacent non-CRP forested land. The goal is to increase the connectivity of protected riparian areas through enrollment in the state incentive program
- Fund the state's annual environmental monitoring programs, including the assessment of the following: water quality in the Spavinaw and Lake Tenkiller watersheds; enrolled acres; conservation practices installed; effects of the practices; and any recommended project enhancements.

The state of Oklahoma will provide the following services under Oklahoma CREP:

- Identify producers willing to offer eligible land for enrollment in Oklahoma CREP;
- Provide technical assistance to implement the CREP;
- Coordinate with other natural resource conservation programs at the local, state and federal levels;
- During the period of a participant's CRP contract, temporarily release the

- participant from any state-held easement restrictions on crop production if such release is authorized by USDA in order to address a national emergency; and
- Provide staff to implement the program, monitor water quality and provide other services.

Cost

The total cost for Oklahoma CREP over a 15-year period is estimated at \$20.6 million, with CCC contributing \$16.5 million and the state of Oklahoma funding \$4.1 million.

CRP Enrollment

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers may select for their land. Applicants may still enroll eligible land in the general CRP or continuous sign-up CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through general and/or continuous sign-up. For instance, CREP payments are at a higher effective rate.

For More Information

For more information about FSA programs, visit <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/crp> online or your local USDA Service Center.

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