

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program - Arkansas Illinois River Watershed

Overview

The state of Arkansas Illinois River Watershed Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the state of Arkansas. The program seeks to enroll 15,000 acres of eligible marginal pastureland and cropland in 14 to 15 year contracts within the Illinois River watershed. The project will establish or restore riparian forest buffers and wildlife habitat buffers by planting native grasses, forbs, trees, and shrubs. This CREP project area includes parts of Benton and Washington Counties. The primary goals of the project are to enhance wildlife habitat and improve water quality by filtering agricultural runoff.

The 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) 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 native grasses, trees and other vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. FSA administers CRP and CREP on behalf of CCC.

Benefits

The Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP will help:

- Remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow.
- Restore native plant communities, stabilize stream banks, and reduce flood damage impacts.
- Create shade to lower water temperature to improve habitat for aquatic organisms.
- Provide a source of detritus and large woody debris for aquatic organisms and habitat for wildlife.

In addition, this project will enhance habitat for the preservation of natural diversity of Arkansas' biological resources, including many species of concern that may be threatened or endangered. The project seeks to reduce the amount of sediments and nutrients entering streams from agricultural sources, and restore habitat for both terrestrial and aquatic species through a voluntary, incentive-based program.

Goals

The goals of the Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP are to:

- Enroll up to 15,000 acres of eligible marginal pastureland and cropland in riparian buffers to improve and protect the water quality of the Illinois River watershed.
- Enhance the effectiveness of numerous on-going programs in the watershed area that filter runoff, stabilize streambanks, shade stream channels, and improve aquatic habitat.
- Enhance habitat for the preservation of natural diversity by

increasing the amount, quality, and connectivity of protected riparian corridors which many species depend upon for habitat and migration paths.

- Reduce sediment deposited into waterways towards a goal of 10,000 tons annually.

Eligibility Requirements

The following are some of the eligibility requirements producers and their land must meet in order to be enrolled in the Arkansas Illinois River CREP:

- Land enrolled under the riparian buffer practice must have a minimum average width no less than 50 feet and a maximum average width no greater than 300 feet.
- Land in offers must be at least 1-tenth of an acre or more.
- CRP contracts must follow the CRP regulations at 7 CFR part 1410, FSA National Directives, and the provisions of the Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP agreement.

In addition, cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Marginal pastureland along streams, watercourses and certain upland areas are also eligible for enrollment according to FSA national directives and the Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP agreement.

Other requirements may also apply. Interested producers should contact their local FSA service center for specific information regarding their eligibility for this CREP.

Sign-up and Contract Duration

Sign-up in the Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP will continue until enrollment goals are met, or until CRP authority expires, whichever comes first. Land enrolled under this program will remain under contract for a minimum of 14 years, but no more than 15 years, as specified in the contract.

Approved Conservation Measures

Acreage goals and conservation practices (CP) under the Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP follow:

- CP22 Riparian Buffer (Cropland and Marginal Pastureland) – 9,750 acres;
- CP29 Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer (Marginal Pastureland) – 5,250 acres.

CCC Payments

Arkansas CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of USDA payments (subject to contract terms and certain limitations):

- Annual Rental Payment: An annual rental payment according to FSA CRP national directives and the Arkansas CREP agreement. The maximum annual rental rate is based on posted CRP rental rates and is calculated as follows:
 1. For enrolled cropland, CCC will determine the base rental payment per acre using the weighted average soil rental rates for the three predominant soils; or
 2. For marginal pastureland enrolled in CP22 and/or CP29, CCC will determine the base rental payment per acre using the County Marginal Pastureland rental rate; plus
 3. A 50 percent incentive payment

- added to the base soil rental rate or marginal pastureland rate; plus
- 4. A per-acre maintenance incentive payment as provided under normal CRP rules.
- Signing Incentive Payment: A one-time additional payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for land enrolled in practice CP22 (Riparian Buffer) and practice CP29 (Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer). This payment is made after the contract has been signed and approved.
- Practice Incentive Payment: A one-time additional rental payment equal to 40 percent of the eligible reimbursable cost for establishment of practice CP22 and practice CP29.
- Cost-share assistance: 50 percent cost-share of reimbursable costs to install approved conservation practices.
- Cost-share assistance: Up to 50 percent for approved management activities according to national CRP directives.

State of Arkansas Payments and Provisions

The state of Arkansas will provide the following payments (subject to contract terms and certain limitations):

- In partnership with the Arkansas Natural Resources Commission, the state will make a one-time lump sum payment of \$200 per acre to all landowners who enroll in the Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP.
- The state will allow eligible participants to utilize a riparian and wetland restoration state tax credit for out-of-pocket costs incurred as part of the CREP practice installation.
- Provide the opportunity to all CREP participants on a voluntary basis to enroll federal con-

- tract acres in a state permanent or long-term easement.
- Pay all costs associated with the state’s annual environmental monitoring programs.
- Provide administrative and technical assistance to implement the CREP.

Cost

The total cost for the Arkansas Illinois River Watershed CREP over the life of the project is estimated at \$25 million for a total enrollment of 15,000 acres. The state of Arkansas will contribute about \$6 million as support of the overall program cost.

For More Information

For more information on CRP continuous sign-up, contact your local FSA office or visit www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all of part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Stop 9410, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call toll-free at (866) 632-9992 (English) or (800) 877-8339 (TDD) or (866) 377-8642 (English Federal-relay) or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish Federal-relay). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.