



# FACT SHEET



## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Washington State – April 2010

### **Overview**

CREP is part of the Farm Service Agency's (FSA's) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The Washington CREP provides incentives to restore and improve salmon and steelhead habitat on private land. It is a Federal-State partnership between FSA and the Washington State Conservation Commission.

CREP is a voluntary program. The most prominent practice is restoration of a forested riparian buffer. In December 2009, three additional practices were added to target water quality issues: riparian hedgerows, grass filter strips, and wetland enhancement.

Land enrolled in 10-15 year CREP contracts is removed from production and grazing. In return, landowners receive annual rental, incentive, maintenance, and cost share payments for establishing one of the CREP practices. The enrolled land must be removed from production during the contract period.

All CREP practices must be established according to Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) standards and specifications. Technical assistance to design and install the practices is provided by NRCS and local conservation districts.

### **Program Flexibility**

CREP recognizes site variability. Buffer widths vary based on local site conditions. The buffer boundary can be moved towards or away from the stream at different locations to meet landowner needs, as long as the buffer practice standards are met.

### **Recent Improvements**

The CREP enhancements approved in December of 2009 are the addition of: 15'-wide hedgerow buffers along smaller streams; grass filter strips upstream of salmon reaches; and wetland enhancement and buffers for wet areas connected to salmon reaches. In addition, certain types of horticulture lands are now eligible for CREP. These include orchards, berry farms, and vineyards.

### **Eligible Land**

Eligible land must (1) have the required cropping history, (2) be able to support the required vegetation, and (3) be parallel and adjacent to an eligible stream. For the cropping history requirement, the land must meet one of the following:

- Cropland planted to annual crops, perennial grasses or legumes, or used as summer fallow, 4 of the 6 years 1996-2001. Perennial grasses or legumes must have been planted during 1996-2001. Orchards, berry farms and vineyards must have been in production 4 of the 6 years.
- Pasture land. This land may be enrolled in the forested riparian buffer or hedgerow buffer.

There is no minimum or maximum acreage to enroll.

### **Eligible Streams**

For the CREP forested riparian buffer, there are 10,000 miles of streams designated as eligible. These are streams where riparian habitat is a significant limiting factor for salmon and steelhead.

Hedgerows are eligible along designated streams and other water courses within 10 stream miles of a designated stream reach. Hedgerows are a dense growth of shrubs and small trees that improve shade, leaf litter, bank stability and some filtering capability. Hedgerows can only be planted on water courses that are less than 15' wide.

Grass filter strips, are allowed on streams within a watershed basin that contains a designated stream reach. They cannot be enrolled along a designated, salmonid-bearing stream, but only on water courses that drain, directly or indirectly, into a designated stream.

Wetland enhancement reaches must be adjacent and connected to a designated stream reach.

### **Eligible Participants**

The operator of record and landowner(s) are eligible to participate in the contract. The land must have been owned or operated for at least 12 months prior to offering it for CREP.

### **Forested Riparian Buffers**

Forested buffers must be planted to native trees and shrubs suitable to the site. Grasses will also be included if necessary. Native grasses will be used if available or comparable introduced grasses if natives are not available or successful. The buffer may include a grass strip on the outside edge if needed to address concentrated flows entering the buffer. The minimum buffer width of the forested riparian buffer is 35 feet and the maximum is 180 feet.

### **Hedgerow Buffers**

Hedgerows are a 15 foot buffer planted to woody vegetation. The species planted must again be natives, but a greater utilization may be made of shrub-type species. These buffers are limited to salmonid bearing streams 15 feet wide or less when the stream is full to its bank.

### **Grass Filter Strips**

Grass filter strip widths can range from 20' to 120' depending on the design requirements. Enrollment is limited to non-salmonid bearing water courses within the watershed containing a designated stream, as described above. In high rainfall areas, filter strips may need to be clipped periodically to remove vegetative buildup. Any material removed must be destroyed without economic benefit.

### **Wetland Enhancement**

Wetland enhancement practices help restore the functionality of wetland ecosystems. Enrolled wetland must be hydrologically connected to a designated stream. The enrolled area would include the wetland and a surrounding buffer not to exceed three times the wetland acreage. The buffer will be planted to native and/or introduced species suited for the site.

### **Fencing and Livestock Water Developments**

Under all CREP practices except wetland enhancements, existing livestock operations can receive the cost share reimbursement discussed below to fence livestock out of the buffer and establish livestock water. These practices must be located at, or near, the outside edge of the buffer and certain reimbursement limits apply.

### **Contract Length and Start Date**

The applicant can choose a 10- to 15-year contract. The contract can start upon approval or be delayed up to 6 months after approval, at the participant's discretion. A number of steps must be completed before a contract can be approved. These include:

- a determination that the stream reach and land are eligible
- a determination that the participants are eligible
- completion and approval of payment eligibility forms for USDA programs
- establishment of the participant's land and farming operation in USDA records
- development of a conservation plan
- environmental impact and historical preservation review and consultations, if necessary
- determination of the exact acreage enrolled.

Participants must work with both the contracting agency (FSA) and technical agency (NRCS or conservation district) to obtain a contract, implement the practices, certify performance and receive reimbursement.

### **Continuous Signup**

CREP signups are accepted year round. Producers can initiate an offer at any time, and once eligibility has been determined, can proceed with contract development.

### **Financial Reimbursement**

Program participants are eligible for the following financial reimbursements on enrolled land.

**Annual rental payments.** Annual rental payments are based on "soil rental rates (SRR)," which are in turn based on dryland agricultural rents in the county, adjusted for the enrolled soils' inherent productivity. CREP rental rate incentives are based on the average SRR for the site times the following incentive rates:

- 200% for forested riparian buffers and wetland enhancements
- 175% for hedgerow buffers
- 150% for grass filter strips.

Average SRRs for enrolled land can vary from \$50 to \$215, times the percentages above.

Annual rental payments are divided among the participants based on their share of the CRP contract. They are issued in arrears shortly after October 1 each year.

**Signing Incentive Payments (SIP).** SIPs are equal to \$100 per enrolled acre and are issued shortly after the contract is approved. SIPs are also divided based on each participant's share on the contract.

**Cost share reimbursement for establishment.** Cost share is issued in two components. The components are limited to normal, eligible installation costs approved by FSA, and all are issued after installation of the practice. Partial payments can be earned as portions of the practice installation are accomplished. The two components include:

- 50% cost share payments from FSA
- 10% cost share payments from Washington State, through the conservation district

**Practice incentive payment.** A 40% "practice incentive payment (PIP)" is available, but it may not be issued until the entire practice is installed. See Practice Installation Loans below.

**Maintenance Payments.** After the CREP practice is installed, Washington State will pay maintenance payments equal to 100% of the eligible costs of maintaining the cover to specifications for up to 5 years. To request this payment, participants must submit receipts or other cost documents to support

their claim. These payments will be issued by the local conservation district.

**Practice Installation Loans.** Installing certain CREP practices, especially forested buffers, can be expensive. The FSA 50% cost share and 10% State cost share can be issued in increments as installation occurs. However, the 40% PIP cannot be issued until the installation is complete. To limit the financial burden, conservation districts can provide 0% interest loans for the PIP portion of reimbursement. Conservation districts have more information on these loans.

### **Payment Limitation**

FSA annual rental payments, including the incentives, SIPs and PIPs, are subject to the \$50,000/year payment limitation that applies to all other CRP payments the participants may earn. There is no limitation on cost share payments or the State maintenance payments other than eligible cost caps.

### **Binding Contract on Participants and Successors**

CREP contracts are a 10-15 year binding agreement on the participants. Withdrawing from a CREP contract during this period will generally require the refund of all payments received. In addition, if the land is sold or transferred, the successor must agree to assume the contract or all payments must be refunded. Applications should discuss their long term obligations with FSA staff before signing a CREP contract.

### **For More Information**

For more information about CREP, contact your local FSA, NRCS or Conservation District. After an application is submitted, a no-obligation eligibility review will be conducted, and you will be provided a final opportunity to decide if you want to enroll the land.

Also visit our website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/wa](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/wa).

This Fact Sheet is a summary of CREP, and is not intended to cover all situations or program provisions. **Contact your local FSA, NRCS or Conservation District for specific questions about your land.**

"The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all 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, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited 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, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer."