

## Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

---

### Overview

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) is a competitive grants program authorized under Section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, and is only available for states and tribal governments.

The primary objective of the VPA-HIP is to encourage owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting, fishing and other compatible outdoor recreation activities under programs implemented by state or tribal governments.

Grantees that are states will have the grant amount reduced by 25 percent if opening dates for migratory bird hunting in the states are not consistent for residents and non-residents. This reduction does not apply to grantees that are tribal governments.

Regulations at 7 CFR part 1455 govern the VPA-HIP.

### Background

A number of states and tribal governments have public access programs. These programs provide financial incentives and technical or conservation-related services to landowners who allow authorized recreation on their land by the public, including hunting, fishing or other appropriate recreational activities. The goals of these programs include providing access for wildlife-dependent recreation; encouraging conservation, wildlife management and habitat enhancement; helping local economies that depend on revenue from outdoor enthusiasts and; preserving our nation's outdoor legacy and traditions. The majority of the existing public access programs have limited scope and budgets.

Twenty-five state fish and wildlife agencies and one tribal government entity have received VPA-HIP funding. Grantees have used the VPA-HIP funding to establish new public access programs, expand existing public access programs and/or enhance wildlife habitat in order to increase wildlife dependent outdoor recreational opportunities and improve associated experiences.

Receipt of VPA-HIP funding by state or tribal governments does not preempt liability laws that may apply; however, a number of states provide limited liability protection to landowners participating in state public access programs.

### How the Program Works

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) acting on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) will periodically announce a Request for Applications (RFA) through publication of the request on the federal government's grants portal at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

The RFA highlights considerations that should be adequately described in VPA-HIP applications. The RFA also identifies criteria that FSA can use to evaluate VPA-HIP applications to be approved and awarded funding. Following application submittal, a federal interagency panel reviews and scores applications using established evaluation criteria. FSA judges applicant capacity to deliver cost effective public access based in part on the panel's scoring and awards VPA-HIP funding accordingly.

Approved applicants must complete additional financial agreements and related assurances. For instance, before a VPA-HIP award is released, applicants must demonstrate that requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are met by completing a programmatic environmental assessment. Once in receipt of VPA-HIP funds, states and tribal governments abide by state regulations and procedures when establishing and delivering their public access programs to landowners through outreach, applications and local participation.

### **Funding Priorities**

Funding priority is given to applications that use VPA-HIP grant funding to address these objectives:

- Maximize participation by landowners;
- Ensure that land enrolled in the program has appropriate wildlife habitat;
- Provide incentives to strengthen wildlife habitat improvement efforts on Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) land;
- Supplement funding and services from other federal, state, tribal government or private resources that is provided in the form of cash or in-kind services and;

- Provide information to the public about the location of public access land.

### **Program Participation**

Only states and tribal governments are eligible to apply for and receive federal VPA-HIP grants. State fish and wildlife agencies in Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Game Commission), South Dakota, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin were awarded multi-year (contingent on the availability of out-year apportionment) VPA-HIP funding in 2010.

State fish and wildlife agencies in California, Georgia, Hawaii, Montana, North Dakota, Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission), Texas, Virginia, Washington, Wyoming and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation were awarded new or additional multi-year (contingent on the availability of out-year apportionment) VPA-HIP funding in 2011.

The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 extended the authorization of VPA-HIP through 2013, but funding is subject to an appropriation.

### **For More Information**

For more information on VPA-HIP, contact a local FSA office or visit FSA's website at [www.fsa.usda.gov/vpa](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/vpa).

*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 or 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, audiotope, 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.*