

For: State and County Offices

**Monitoring for the Wildlife Habitat for Upland Birds Initiative**

Approved by: Acting Deputy Administrator, Farm Programs



**1 Overview**

**A Background**

On October 1, 2004, signup began in 35 States for CP33, Wildlife Habitat for Upland Birds. In partnership with State Wildlife Agencies and nongovernmental organizations, such as Quail Unlimited and the Southeast Quail Study Group, monitoring and evaluation plans are required in States with an allocation of acres for CP33. Some States have raised certain questions about CP33 monitoring requirements. Frequently asked questions are addressed in Exhibit 1. These questions were discussed on August 17, 2004, in a conference call with State Offices.

**B Purpose**

This notice clarifies requirements for:

- establishing a State Monitoring Plan (Plan)
- authorizing the Plan
- implementing the Plan, including required and suggested elements of the Plans, goals for monitoring, approval and implementation schedule for monitoring, and for CP33.

**2 Establishing Monitoring for CP33 Enrolled Acres**

**A State Monitoring Plans**

Before States can approve offers under CP33, the Plan must be approved by STC. NRCS and State Wildlife Agency biologists and quail researchers are collaborating through the Southeast Quail Study Group and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies to agree on the elements that should be in every Plan to allow FSA to understand the trends in bird population changes attributable to the Wildlife Habitat for Upland Birds Initiative.

<b>Disposal Date</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
February 1, 2005	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices

**2 Establishing Monitoring for CP33 Enrolled Acres (Continued)**

**B State Wildlife Teams (SWT's)**

FSA shall establish and chair a SWT that includes NRCS, FWS, State biologists from the State Wildlife Agencies, and other organizations with expertise in upland birds, including Bobwhite Quail, to design a Plan for CP33.

Recommendations shall be presented to the State Technical Committee for review. The goal of this Plan is to document changes in upland bird populations attributable to the CP33 practice. State Technical Committee recommendations must be provided to STC for consideration and final determination.

Each State's SWT should coordinate with SWT's of other States as Plans are developed, both to improve interoperability of regional national data and to share ideas on how to maximize the benefits of data collection.

SWT's are encouraged to refine and improve their Plans as new information becomes available, including the set of minimum elements currently under development by researchers associated with the Southeast Quail Study Group. The set of minimum elements will be provided as soon as it is available.

SWT's may choose to include these elements, as well as other factors in their Plans, to meet regional, State, and local needs, to better reflect conditions, or for any other technical, scientific, or policy basis. State Technical Committees and STC's should allow integration and refinement of the Plans as needed, and are urged to approve these refinements in the Plans, either with additional formal review or through a more general authorization to SWT to proceed using its best professional judgment.

SWT's must meet to create Plans as soon as possible to develop and recommend a draft Plan.

After developing the draft Plan, SWT will recommend the Plan to the State Technical Committee for its consideration, evaluation, and recommendation to STC.

**C STC Action**

STC shall review and approve the Plan upon recommendation from the State Technical Committee.

When STC does not approve the Plan recommended by the State Technical Committee, STC must:

- submit the Plan to CEPD
- include justification for not approving the Plan.

**Note:** CEPD will make a determination as to whether to approve, reject, or modify the Plan.

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### 2 Establishing Monitoring for CP33 Enrolled Acres (Continued)

#### D Initiating Enrollment Under CP33

When a Plan has been approved by either STC or the CRP Program Manager, COC's may begin approving CP33 offers after October 1, 2004, provided all other requirements are met. If a Plan is accepted after October 1, 2004, the State may begin enrollment immediately.

### 3 Action

#### A State Office Action

State Offices shall:

- coordinate and participate in SWT
- review this notice and forward it to the County Office
- ensure that the State Technical Committee reviews and provides recommendations for the Plan for CP33
- ensure that the State Technical Committee meets to review and accept the Plan
- ensure County Office review
- forward a copy of the Plan to Sally Benjamin, FSA National Wildlife Biologist, at [Sally.Benjamin@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:Sally.Benjamin@wdc.usda.gov).

#### B County Office Action

County Offices shall:

- review and follow the guidance in this notice
- not approve offers for enrollment under CP33 before approval of the Plan
- review the Plan and share it with producers and the public.

**Frequently Asked Questions for CP33, Wildlife Habitat Initiative for Upland Birds***1. Why is monitoring required for this practice?*

FSA requires scientific data to demonstrate that CP33 practices have a positive effect for upland birds. Also, the professional wildlife community needs scientific data on upland birds and the benefits of practices, such as CP33. Other CRP activities also are required to monitor and evaluate performance. CREP proposals, for example, must have a monitoring and evaluation component to evaluate the accomplishments of the program.

*2. How extensive is the monitoring requirement?*

Intensive monitoring is necessary in the 20 States with 95 percent of the acreage allotment (see Question 6). Lesser monitoring (see Question 7) is acceptable in the remaining 15 States, although some form of monitoring is desirable in all States.

*3. Can States begin accepting offers before a Plan is in place?*

No. States **do have to have** an approved Plan before the State can begin accepting offers under CP33. States **do not** need to have baseline data from this autumn to enroll acres in the program. Approved Plans **may be changed**, if necessary, to make them more effective or more efficient. Updates, revisions, and refinements are encouraged to improve efficacy and efficiency of the monitoring of CP33.

*4. What will be monitored?*

Bird population trends, in particular Bobwhite Quail and songbirds such as Dickcissel, Indigo Bunting, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern/Western Meadowlark, Grasshopper Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird, and Loggerhead Shrike, will be monitored. Temporal changes in vegetation and habitat structure will also be monitored.

*5. Who performs the monitoring? How is it funded?*

The workload for developing and implementing monitoring will be dealt with by State wildlife biologists. Cost is estimated at approximately \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year per State for the 20 States requiring intensive monitoring. Costs will be lower for the other 15 States.

*6. Which States require intensive monitoring?*

There are 20 States representing, in total, 95 percent of the CP33 available acres. The States include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, and Virginia.

**Frequently Asked Questions for CP33, Wildlife Habitat Initiative for Upland Birds (Continued)***7. Which States require less intensive monitoring?*

The 15 States include Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Michigan, Maryland, New Jersey, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

*8. How will monitoring areas be selected?*

A random sample of contracts, stratified by State, will be drawn from the FSA CRP contract database. Selection of individual fields and determination of the number of fields/contracts to be sampled will have to be made at the county level. Individual County Offices will be visited to secure information regarding number of fields, individual field size, landowner contact information, and spatial data. This information will be used to contact landowners to explain the monitoring program and gain access to their fields as authorized FSA representatives.

*9. Will center pivot irrigation corners qualify?*

No. Center Pivot Irrigation Corners shall not qualify under CP33 unless the buffer area includes the perimeter of the field, as well as the corners. Offering the corners only is not acceptable.

*10. What incentives are offered for sign-ups?*

SIP and PIP apply to CP33. The 20 percent incentive does **not** apply. The error in the fact sheet has been corrected.

*11. What is the contract length?*

Ten years, to encourage maintenance of early succession stages on CP33 acres.

*12. What mid-contract management requirements apply?*

STC will develop specific management recommendations typically in year 3. The habitat should be disturbed through disking, herbicide application, or prescribed burning. Habitat value for quail will deteriorate in about 4 years without disturbance.

*13. Will weed-control be required?*

Noxious weed and invasive species control is appropriate, but it is important to strike the proper balance to maximize habitat quality. Some plants that may have been historically viewed as “undesirable” are actually very desirable for wildlife. Ragweed, for example, is very desirable in quail habitat.