

**For:** Kansas and Nebraska State and County Offices

**Joint Kansas and Nebraska Migratory Bird State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement Project Approval**

**Approved by:** Acting Deputy Administrator, Farm Programs



**1 Overview**

**A Background**

On January 3, 2017, USDA announced the approval of a new CRP State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Project in Kansas and Nebraska. The project seeks to improve habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl, shorebirds, and water birds by restoring playa lakes. Playas are essential to the ecological integrity of much of the Great Plains.

Playas are round shallow depressions in an otherwise flat landscape which fill with freshwater after spring rainstorms. Some playas are also fed by water from underlying aquifers, which may bring salt with it as it percolates up through the soil. Playas are important for storing water in an area that receives little precipitation (less than twenty inches per year), providing irrigation water, and seasonally recharging the Ogallala Aquifer.

Playas need periodic flooding and drying to remain productive and biologically diverse. This hydrologic disturbance regime enhances decomposition and allows various plant and animal communities to emerge at different times throughout the natural cycle. It is estimated that playas collectively support over 300 species of plants.

Playas also support a wide variety of wildlife as well, providing habitat diversity in areas otherwise dominated by agriculture. Some species, such as several amphibians, native to the high plains survive only because of the existence of playas. More than 250 species of birds have been recorded as frequenting the playas. It is estimated that two million waterfowl commonly winter in the playas of the Southern High Plains. Playas also serve as important stop-over areas during migration for birds and monarch butterflies that winter farther south.

<b>Disposal Date</b>	<b>Distribution</b>
January 1, 2018	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices, NRCS Offices, and State SAFE Partnering Agencies

## Notice CRP-825

### 1 Overview (Continued)

#### A Background (Continued)

To protect this important resource, many farmers are adopting playa-friendly farming techniques like planting native vegetation around playas to filter sediment, fertilizer, and pesticides from agricultural runoff. This is important because sediment in runoff can fill playas reducing their capacity to hold water, recharge the Ogallala Aquifer, and provide wildlife benefit.

FSA previously announced 20,000 acres of CRP enrollment were being made available to assist farmers engaged in playa lake restoration and conservation through this SAFE project. The acreages will initially be split evenly between Kansas and Nebraska, with 10,000 acres being allocated to each State.

The Kansas and Nebraska CRP Migratory Birds, Butterflies, and Pollinator SAFE project will use a novel market-based approach for signup that enables landowners to submit offers that they are willing to accept as an annual payment for enrolling in CRP.

**Note:** CRP offer amounts, with the exception of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, are capped at a maximum of \$300 per acre a year.

Unlike other CRP conservation practices concerning wetland restoration, there are no signing incentive payments (SIP) or soil rental rate (SRR) incentives available for this CRP SAFE project.

In addition to restoring playa lakes and helping recharge the Ogallala Aquifer, conservation covers buffering the restored wetlands will be established to seeding mixes that contain a variety of native forbs, legumes, and other perennial flowering plants to enhance habitat for both migrating and resident wildlife and pollinators, including monarch butterflies.

#### B Purpose

This notice provides guidance for applicable County Offices and COCs in Kansas and Nebraska to begin accepting offers from eligible landowners and agricultural producers wanting to enroll their eligible land in the CRP Kansas and Nebraska Migratory Bird Playa Lakes SAFE and restore playa lake wetlands.

#### C Contact

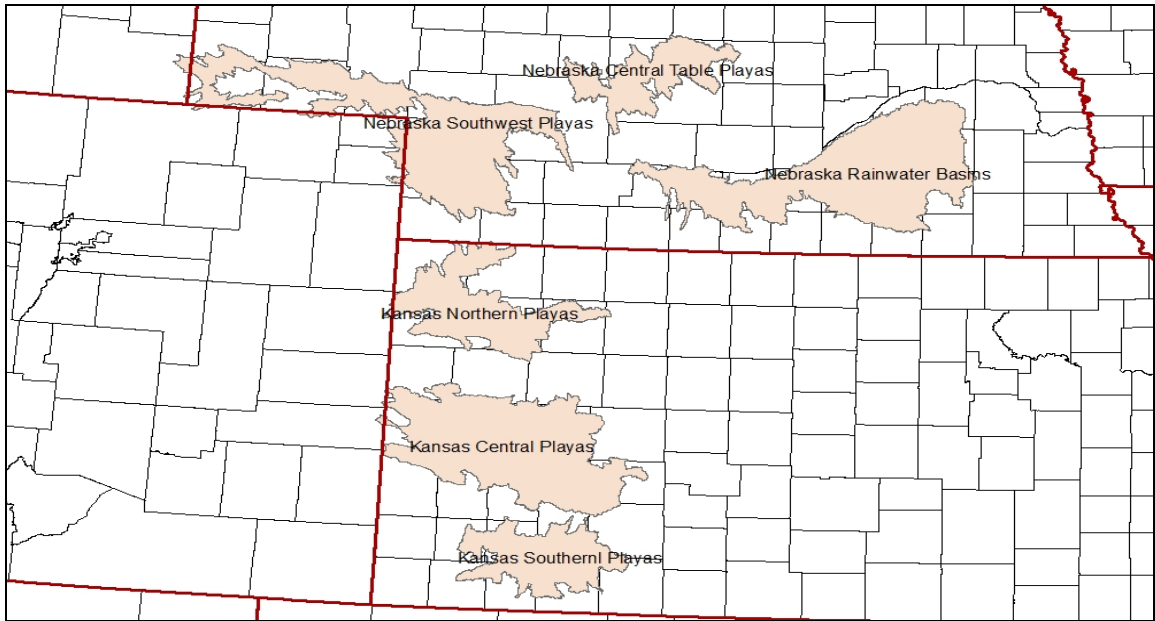
For questions about this notice, contact David Hoge by either of the following:

- email to [david.hoge@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:david.hoge@wdc.usda.gov)
- telephone to 202-720-7674.

2 Policy

A SAFE Project Area

Playas can be found individually or in clusters of several playas across Kansas and Nebraska. The locations of these various playas can be segregated into six distinct areas. Eligibility to participate in the Kansas and Nebraska Migratory Bird Playa Lakes SAFE is limited to those landowners and agricultural producers interested in enhancing existing playas or restoring historic playas located within one of these distinct areas across western Kansas and southern Nebraska.



B Eligible Land

Participation in the CRP Kansas/Nebraska Migratory Bird Playa Lakes SAFE is limited to cropland within the project areas and meeting criteria identified in 2-CRP, paragraph 151. The land being offered must be located in its entirety within the designated SAFE project area and must contain at least one existing playa to be protected or a historic playa being restored.

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### 2 Policy (Continued)

#### C Authorized Conservation Practices

Within this SAFE project, the only authorized CRP conservation practice is the CP38B-23A for restoring playa lakes and surrounding upland buffer.

Appropriate technical practices to be applied include Conservation Cover (327), Range Planting (550), Rare and Declining Habitat (643), Wetland Wildlife Habitat (644), Upland Wildlife Habitat (645), Early Successional Habitat (647), Wetland Restoration (657), and Wetland Enhancement (659).

#### D Practice Requirements

Minimum and maximum size of the CP38B-23A conservation practice for which cost share is authorized under this project is 2 acres and 160 acres, respectively. Where field size allows, the minimum average buffer width shall be 120 feet and the ratio of upland acres to wetland acres shall not exceed 4 to 1. Maximum buffer width is constrained by the 4 to 1 ratio.

Conservation covers shall be established to seeding mixes comprised of native species appropriate to ecological site descriptions consistent with NRCS field office technical guides and conservation plans written for CRP participants and 2-CRP National Handbook requirements.

**Note:** Trees are not eligible. Maintenance provisions require that noxious weeds and trees must be controlled in order to remain in compliance with the CRP contract.

#### E Mid-Contract Management

This practice shall have periodic management activities performed, according to the conservation plan, during the life of the CRP-1, as determined by the COC. The conservation cover shall be disturbed on a rotational basis by light disking, prescribed burning, selective herbicide application, managed harvesting, routine grazing, or other methods approved by the STC; however, routine grazing is the preferred management activity.

Grazing of the conservation covers for management activity will be allowed only after the buffer areas have been adequately established. Grazing plans will be designed to promote grazing after July 15 and the completion of nesting and brood rearing for resident birds.

#### F Contract Length

The duration of the CRP-1 is 10 to 15 years.

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### 2 Policy (Continued)

#### G Payments

Payments consist of annual payments, cost share for establishment and mid-contract management, and a one-time practice incentive payment (PIP). There is neither a signing incentive payment (SIP), nor soil rental rate (SRR) incentive.

**Note:** FSA County Offices through their outreach efforts are encouraged to make landowners aware that they are free to submit an offer up to a maximum of \$300 per acre per year that they are willing to accept to enroll land under this particular CRP SAFE project.

#### H Technical Responsibility

Technical responsibility for this practice is assigned to NRCS, State fish and wildlife agency, Joint Ventures, or TSP.

### 3 Offers

#### A Signup Process

Like other CRP SAFE projects, offers to enroll in this CRP SAFE project will be received on a continuous basis, provided acres under CRP national enrollment authority and CRP SAFE project enrollment caps are available.

Landowners may submit offers for the Kansas Nebraska Migratory Bird Playa Lakes SAFE using CRP-1 and CRP-2C as per 2-CRP, paragraph 211. The CRP-2C shall be completed for all acreage on which producers want to submit a request for enrollment. Landowners shall indicate the acreage to be enrolled in CRP SAFE and identify the acreage offered on digital imagery.

Before submitting CRP-2C to NRCS or TSP, the COC (or CED) shall determine whether all eligibility requirements in 2-CRP, paragraph 181 are met. The NRCS or TSP will complete a site visit to determine whether the land offered is suitable for wetland restoration and whether the wetland restoration is needed and feasible to solve the resource concern.

The producer will not be limited to the calculated maximum payment rate in item 20 of the CRP-2C based on the three predominate soils and maximum acreage payment rate calculation and may offer any amount up to a maximum of \$300 per acre per year in item 9 "Rental Rate Per Acre Offered." The offer amount provided by the landowner (Rental Rate Per Acre Offered, item 9) will be used to score and rank the offer.

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### 3 Offers (Continued)

#### A Signup Process Continued)

Eligible offers to participate in this CRP SAFE project will be periodically batched, ranked and selected based on their offer amount.

**Note:** The first batching period will conclude March 31, 2017.

Those eligible offers not selected will be held for consideration during the next scheduled batching period. Unsuccessful offers can be modified and re-submitted to improve their competitiveness.

#### B Selection of Offers

SAFE offers will compete for enrollment on the basis of offer amount. A ranking procedure had been developed to identify offers that compare favorably to offers relatively close by and to all offers received.

The lower the offer amount, the most likely an offer will be accepted.

Kansas offers and Nebraska offers will be considered separately.

Not all offers will be accepted/ FSA reserves the right to reject any offer. Furthermore, accepted offers are subject to availability of acres under the:

- 24 million acre statutory cap
- 20,000 acre CRP SAFE project cap.

County Offices will use CRP-26 to notify producers whose offers were rejected. Appeal rights of the producer are described in 1-APP.

**Notice CRP-825**

**4 Automation**

**A Offer Process**

County Offices will use Tool for Environmental Resource Results Assessment (TERRA) and Conservation On-Line System (COLS) to process offers for Kansas/Nebraska Migratory Birds SAFE signup.

Step	Action																																	
1	Delineate acres to be offered with the TERRA. The following practice will be available for selection: CP38B-23A.																																	
2	<p>After completing a TERRA scenario, process offers through the COLS.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> The COLS_SAFE_User_Guide can be found at the following url:  <a href="https://sharepoint.fsa.usda.net/mgr/dafp/CEPD/Automation/Reports/Forms/AllItems.aspx">https://sharepoint.fsa.usda.net/mgr/dafp/CEPD/Automation/Reports/Forms/AllItems.aspx</a>.</p>																																	
3	<p>Modifications to the software will allow the “Rental Rate Offer” to exceed the calculated “Maximum Payment Rate” and will be considered an ‘Eligible’ offer.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Maximum Payment Rate</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Rental Rate Offer</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Annual Contract Payment</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">\$32.35</td> <td style="text-align: center;">45.45</td> <td style="text-align: center;">\$115.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3" style="text-align: center;"> <input type="button" value="Calculate Annual Contract Payment"/> </td> </tr> </table>   <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">Practice Code</th> <th style="text-align: right;">Practice Acres</th> <th style="text-align: right;">SIP Payment Years</th> <th style="text-align: right;">SIP Incentive Rate/Acre (\$)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>CP38B-23A</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2.54</td> <td style="text-align: right;">10</td> <td style="text-align: right;">10.00</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Total</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>2.54</b></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Re-Enrolled Acres</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>0.00</b></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>SIP Payment Acres</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>2.54</b></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>SIP Payment Amount</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;"><b>254.00</b></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>	Maximum Payment Rate	Rental Rate Offer	Annual Contract Payment	\$32.35	45.45	\$115.00	<input type="button" value="Calculate Annual Contract Payment"/>			Practice Code	Practice Acres	SIP Payment Years	SIP Incentive Rate/Acre (\$)	CP38B-23A	2.54	10	10.00	<b>Total</b>	<b>2.54</b>			<b>Re-Enrolled Acres</b>	<b>0.00</b>			<b>SIP Payment Acres</b>	<b>2.54</b>			<b>SIP Payment Amount</b>	<b>254.00</b>		
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4	<p>Obtain required signature(s) and enter the “Date participant delivers offer” into COLS to submit the offer for ranking. The offer must be in an eligible submitted status to qualify. COLS will not allow any offer that has not been ranked “Accepted” by the National Office to be submitted for plan.</p>																																	

## Notice CRP-825

### 4 Automation (Continued)

#### B Project Area

The CRP Migratory Bird/Playa Lake SAFE is approved for use in the following counties in Kansas: Cheyenne (20023), Clark (20025), Finney (20055), Ford (20057), Gove (20063), Graham (20065), Grant (20067), Gray (20069), Greeley (20071), Hamilton (20075), Haskell (20081), Hodgeman (20083), Kearny (20093), Lane (20101), Logan (20109), Meade (20119), Ness (20135), Rawlins (20153), Scott (20171), Seward (20175), Sheridan (20179), Sherman (20181), Stevens (20189), Thomas (20193), Wallace (20199), and Wichita (20203).

The CRP Migratory Bird/Playa Lake SAFE is approved for use in the following counties in Nebraska: Adams (31001), Banner (31007), Butler (31023), Chase (31029), Cheyenne (31033), Clay (31035), Custer (31041), Dawson (31047), Deuel (31049), Dundy (31057), Fillmore (31059), Franklin (31061), Frontier (31063), Furnas (31065), Garden (31069), Gosper (31073), Hall (31079), Hamilton (31081), Harlan (31083), Hayes (31085), Hitchcock (31087), Jefferson (31095), Kearney (31099), Keith (31101), Kimball (31105), Lincoln (31111), Logan (31113), Nuckolls (31129), Perkins (31135), Phelps (31137), Polk (31143), Saline (31151), Seward (31159), Thayer (31169), Valley (31175), Webster (31181), and York (31185).

#### C Authorized Conservation Practices

Only one conservation practice, CP38B-23A, is authorized to be used in both States.

### 5 Action

#### A State Office Action

State Offices shall:

- forward copies of this notice to the:
  - State NRCS office
  - State fish and wildlife agency office
  - appropriate Joint Venture office
- follow the provisions of this notice.



**5 Action (Continued)**

**B County Office Action**

County Offices shall:

- make preparation for CRP continuous signup a high priority when setting workload priorities and scheduling office activities
- follow the provisions of this notice.