

For: State and County Offices

**Announcing Request for New or Modified
State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Proposals**

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Farm Programs



1 Overview

A Background

In 2007, FSA made available a new CRP initiative, SAFE. SAFE allows for partnership between State level FSA and a sponsoring entity to use CRP to establish habitat for target wildlife species. SAFE provides participants an opportunity to install conservation practices that restore vital habitat for target species.

On April 22, 2021, Notice CRP-929 announced all SAFE practices would be included in continuous signup and no longer offered in general signup. Moving SAFE to continuous signup only may impact some active projects and provide opportunities for new proposals.

B Purpose

This notice provides the following:

- announcement of opportunity to submit new proposals or modify existing SAFE projects

Note: All active SAFE projects that contained general CRP practices or a combination of general CRP and continuous CRP practices must submit a modification if the partners want to continue with the SAFE project. All active SAFE projects must be reviewed by the sponsor and FSA State Office to ensure conformity with this notice. If a State or sponsor elects to terminate a SAFE project, SED must send a memo notifying Conservation Division (CD) of the proposed termination by the deadline in paragraph 5.

- instructions and criteria for submitting to CD new SAFE proposals or existing SAFE project modifications

Disposal Date	Distribution
October 1, 2022	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices and NRCS

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1 Overview (Continued)

B Purpose (Continued)

- authorization of NRCS conservation practices for additional SAFE Grasses (CP38E) Practices:
 - Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647)
 - Wildlife Habitat Planting (420)
- authorization for annual plant covers when proposals include Early Successional Habitat Management for CRP Practice CP38E-4D
- authorization to provide C/S and practice incentive payment (PIP) at the time of re-enrollment when transitioning cover to a more diverse mix to meet SAFE cover requirements
- deadlines.

2 Policy

A Land Eligibility

Eligible land is cropland:

- according to 2-CRP, paragraph 151
- located within the defined SAFE project boundaries.

Note: Marginal pastureland is **not** eligible unless criteria are met for a threatened or endangered species with specific habitat needs of marginal pastureland. See 2-CRP, paragraph 181.

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2 Policy (Continued)

B Practices, Signup Type, and Contract Duration

Proposals may only include SAFE (CP38) practices and the associated authorized CRP sub-practices as follows.

SAFE Practice	Practice Type	Authorized CRP Sub-Practices
CP38A	Buffers	CP8A, CP15A, CP15B, CP21, CP22, CP33, CP43
CP38B	Wetlands	CP9, CP23, CP23A, CP27, CP28, CP37
CP38C	Trees	CP3, CP3A, CP5A, CP16A, CP17A, CP25, CP31
CP38D	Longleaf Pine	CP36
CP38E	Grass	CP1, CP2, CP4D, CP12 <u>1/</u> , CP18B, CP18C, CP24, CP25, CP42

1/ CP12 is only authorized in combination with certain conservation practices. The length of CRP-1 is determined by the contract duration of the companion practice. See 2-CRP, Exhibit 11.

The applicable CRP practice being used with a SAFE (CP38) practice is referred to as the sub-practice.

Participant must select a contract period between 10 or 15 years.

C Incentives

Incentives are authorized for all SAFE practices consistent with 2-CRP, subparagraph 66 D and Part 7, Section 2.

D Management Activity

SAFE proposals **must** include a minimum of 1 required management activity performed according to 2-CRP, paragraph 428.

SAFE proposals may include additional management activities as deemed advantageous for the habitat management for the targeted species.

Important: C/S is not authorized for management activities.

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2 Policy (Continued)

E Haying and/or Grazing

SAFE (CP38) practices are authorized for haying and/or grazing according to 2-CRP, Part 19. SAFE proposals may allow haying and/or grazing according to 2-CRP, Part 19 or proposals may restrict haying and/or grazing beyond 2-CRP, Part 19 policies. SAFE proposals may not include haying and/or grazing less restrictive than policies in 2-CRP, Part 19.

The SAFE proposal must clearly define the authorization or prohibition of haying and/or grazing on contract acreage. If the SAFE proposal prohibits all haying and/or grazing, then all contracts approved under the SAFE proposal will be prohibited from any type of haying and/or grazing – emergency or non-emergency. The SAFE proposal may provide different policies for emergency and non-emergency haying and/or grazing.

Note: If the SAFE proposal is silent on haying and/or grazing policy, all haying and/or grazing will be prohibited.

F Permissive and Restrictive Uses

SAFE (CP38) practices must comply with permissive and restrictive uses policy according to 2-CRP, Part 18. SAFE proposals may restrict uses beyond policies in 2-CRP, Part 18. SAFE proposals may not include less restrictive uses than policies in 2-CRP, Part 18.

G C/S

CCC may pay up to 50 percent of the eligible cost of establishing the approved cover. See 2-CRP, Part 15 for C/S policy.

Note: C/S and PIP are authorized at the time of re-enrollment of land into SAFE to transition cover to meet SAFE project requirements.

State Offices must develop a C/S table as illustrated in 2-CRP, Exhibit 11, as part of the 2-CRP State amendment for the SAFE practices and sub-practices selected. See 2-CRP, Exhibit 11, page 6 for an example.

3 SAFE Proposals

A New Proposal Development

A SAFE proposal may be submitted by any government entity, non-profit, or private organization. Proposals must be developed consistent with the criteria set forth in this paragraph and must comply with requirements in Exhibit 1.

Proposals must be based on existing CRP policies and CRP practices. Proposals are limited to SAFE practices (CP38) and applicable CRP sub-practices listed in subparagraph 2 B. Proposals may include multiple SAFE (CP38) practices if needed to address habitat needs of the target species.

States may have multiple active SAFE projects. SAFE project locations may overlap, although the projects must be addressing different habitat types or target species. SAFE proposals with overlapping locations of active SAFE projects for the same habitat type or target species will not be approved.

SAFE proposals that overlap existing CREP projects addressing the same resource concern and expected outcomes will not be approved.

Example: State A has a CREP agreement that targets Lesser Prairie Chickens in counties A, B, and C. State A shall not develop a SAFE proposal for Lesser Prairie Chicken that includes county A, B, or C.

A SAFE proposal must include 1 or more CRP sub-practices. CRP sub-practices may be included in the proposal without modification or may be modified to achieve the desired habitat goals. See subparagraph 2 B for a list of eligible sub-practices.

Example: SAFE practices intended to restore habitat for the benefit of Sharp-Tailed Grouse in Idaho may incorporate CP2 (Establishment of Permanent Native Grass) and CP4D (Permanent Wildlife Habitat) as best suited for the project, and these practices may be used under CP38E (Grass) without changes.

B Proposal Criteria

SAFE practices must be used to restore animal habitats of 1 or more of the following categories:

- rare, threatened, or endangered species
- species that have suffered a significant population decline
- species of greatest conservation need according to the State Wildlife Action Plan
- species that provide significant social or economic value to the community.

Note: This includes restoration of habitat for game species, such as pheasant or quail, salmon or steelhead streams, or other socially or economically significant species.

3 SAFE Proposals (Continued)

B Proposal Criteria (Continued)

SAFE proposals must define the project area. Project areas should be limited to the historic and current range of the target species.

Approved SAFE proposals are considered partnership agreements between USDA/FSA and the SAFE proposal sponsors.

Failure to adhere to SAFE provisions and guidelines may result in suspension or termination of the SAFE project.

Proposals must identify if haying and/or grazing will be allowed and include any additional restrictions, if applicable.

If applicable, proposals must identify if any additional restricted uses will be required beyond policies in 2-CRP, Part 18.

Proposal required information must be submitted according to Exhibit 1. Proposals that do not include required information will not be considered for approval.

C Practice Modifications

CRP practice policy in 2-CRP, Exhibit 11 may be modified to include additional requirements as needed to meet habitat needs of the target species. Proposed modifications to CRP practice requirements may not be less than policy in 2-CRP, Exhibit 11. Rationale for CRP practice modifications will be included in Section 4 of the proposal with supporting information based on scientific or expert judgement.

For approved SAFE projects, modified CRP practice requirements will only apply within the approved SAFE practice geographic area.

Example: The Sharp-Tailed Grouse Restoration SAFE practice (CP38E) could require all plantings (based on CP4D) to have 5 native species of grasses plus a requirement that Silver Sage Brush be a part of the planting.

The Sharp-Tailed Grouse Restoration SAFE practice (CP38E) could alter CP2 (Establishment of Permanent Native Grass) by the seeding rates or frequency of disturbance.

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3 SAFE Proposals (Continued)

D Additional Conservation Practices Authorized

Recognizing wildlife needs and conservation priorities vary across geographical and ecological regions. DAFP has authorized the use of the following conservation practices in the planning and implementation of SAFE CRP practice for targeted species.

Conservation Practice Standard	Authorized CRP SAFE Practices
Wild Habitat Planting (420)	CP38E-1, CP38E-2, CP38E-4D, CP38E-25, CP38E-42
Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647)	CP38E-4D, CP38D-36

In addition, the use of annual plants will be authorized for proposals, including CP38E-4D. The use of annual plants is restricted to proposals that include creating early successional plant conditions by applying conservation practice standard 647. If annual plant cover is included in the proposal to address early successional habitat needs, the proposal must justify the need by including additional information. See Exhibit 1, Part 4.11 for the required additional information for use of annual plant covers.

4 New or Modified Proposal Review

A New or Modified SAFE Proposals

All active SAFE projects that contained general CRP practices or a combination of general CRP and continuous CRP practices must submit a modification if the partners want to continue with the SAFE project. All active SAFE projects must be reviewed by the sponsor and FSA State Office to ensure conformity with this notice. If a State or sponsor elects to terminate a SAFE project, SED must send a memo notifying CD of the proposed termination by the deadline in paragraph 5.

New or modified SAFE proposals must be submitted to the FSA State Office for review. After a review for completeness, the FSA State Office will submit to the State Technical Committee for review. The State Technical Committee will report its recommendations to FSA STC. FSA STC will review all proposals and, considering State Technical Committee recommendations, will then forward their recommendations for implementation to CD. SED will certify that the new or modified SAFE proposals meet the criteria in Exhibit 1.

FSA STC must submit electronic copies of SED certification and the modified or new proposals to CD by email to David Taylor at david.taylor4@usda.gov by COB **June 24, 2022**.

Note: For questions, contact Alan Lange, Natural Resources Specialist.

All submitted SAFE proposals will be evaluated by a collaborative review team for conformity with this notice, CRP regulations, and the CRP authorizing legislation before issuing proposal approval.

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5 Deadlines

A Upcoming Deadlines

The upcoming deadlines are in this table.

Date	Action
April 25 through June 24, 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SAFE partners or stakeholders review existing SAFE projects and submit new or modified SAFE proposals to FSA.• FSA STC reviews proposals with the State Technical Committee.• SED certifies all existing SAFE projects and new and modified SAFE proposals meet required criteria and format according to this notice.• FSA State Office submits existing active projects and new and modified SAFE proposals to CD.

6 Action

A State Office Action

State Offices will:

- distribute this notice to the State Technical Committee and current or potential SAFE partners
- comply with the provisions of this notice and accept SAFE proposals that conform to Exhibit 1
- provide GIS shapefile of the proposal area boundaries in Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) shapefile format according to 1-GIS, Exhibit 31

Note: States must use the county boundary file located on the CITRIX I Drive at I:\Government Units\FSA_Counties_dd17.gdb.

- modify all active SAFE projects to ensure compliance with requirements in Exhibit 1

Note: If a State or sponsor elects to terminate a SAFE project, SED must send a memo notifying CD of the proposed termination by the deadline in paragraph 5.

- submit all new and modified SAFE proposals and required documents to David Taylor at david.taylor4@usda.gov at CD according to Exhibit 2 by **COB, June 24, 2022**

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6 Action (Continued)

A State Office Action (Continued)

- once SAFE projects are approved, FSA State Offices will collaborate with the partner on developing a fact sheet

Note: The State Office will reach out to provide guidance on development. Instructions from the National Office will be provided in future guidance.

- contact Alan Lange, Natural Resources Specialist, in the National Office with any questions about this notice.

SAFE Proposal Required Information**A SAFE Proposal Required Information and Format**

SAFE proposals will be formatted according to the following criteria:

- when possible, summarize information with bulleted lists, tables, or short narratives
- submit an electronic copy in Microsoft Word.

Include the following required information organized with the numbering, titling, and order as shown below. Proposals that do not include required information organized according to the following will not be considered.

1. Proposal Title and Sponsor Information

1.1. Proposal Title

1.2. Primary Sponsor Organization, Address, Telephone Number

1.3. Primary Sponsor Organization Point of Contact, Name, Title, Address, Telephone Number, email

1.4. Partner organizations including support for the proposal

2. Target Wildlife Species

2.1. List target animal or insect wildlife species, maximum 5

2.2. Brief biological description of the target species including lifecycle requirements and relevant facts

2.3. Information qualifying the target species meets 1 or more of the following criteria:

- rare, threatened, or endangered species
- species that have suffered a significant population decline
- species of greatest conservation need according to State Wildlife Action Plan
- species that provide significant social or economic value to the community

Provide information in summary format from reputable sources, such as peer reviewed publications, expert testimony, results of studies, etc. Unsubstantiated opinions or unsupported evidence will not be considered.

SAFE Proposal Required Information (Continued)**A SAFE Proposal Required Information and Format (Continued)****3. Proposal Location****3.1. Description of proposal location**

- 3.1.1. Current and historic range of target species
- 3.1.2. Description of the eco-region(s) the target species occupies
- 3.1.3. State(s) and county(s) included in the proposal area
- 3.1.4. HUC code (11- to 14-digit code)
- 3.1.5. Area of proposal location in acres
- 3.1.6. Description of land use in project area
 - 3.1.6.1. Agricultural production
 - 3.1.6.2. Existing wildlife habitat
 - 3.1.6.3. Urban land
 - 3.1.6.4. Other land use information impacting the target species
- 3.1.7. Brief description of existing conditions (human and environmental within the project area)
- 3.1.8. Other information of significance on the proposal location

3.2. Maps of proposal location (Include maps as an attachment in PDF format)

- 3.2.1. Current and historic range of target species
- 3.2.2. Proposal location including State and county boundaries
- 3.2.3. Land use and existing habitat types in proposal location
- 3.2.4. Map of SAFE proposal location with active CREP project location(s) within the State
- 3.2.5. Map of SAFE proposal location with active SAFE project location(s) within the State
- 3.2.6. Other maps of the proposal location impacting the target species

4. Proposal Description**4.1. Describe the goal of the project****4.2. List of SAFE practice (CP38) and CRP sub-practices in the following format:
CP38A-8A, CP38C-3, CP38D-36, CP38E-1, etc.****4.3. With each applicable CRP sub-practice, list the proposed additional requirements if applicable****4.4. Habitat type to be restored and how the habitat will meet the target species needs addressing information, such as connectivity and life cycle requirements****4.5. Required cover type and habitat management requirements, including details of plant species, habitat elements, and management techniques needed to meet the target species needs**

SAFE Proposal Required Information (Continued)**A SAFE Proposal Required Information and Format (Continued)****4. Proposal Description (Continued)**

- 4.6. Description required management activities that will be implemented according to 2-CRP, paragraph 428
- 4.7. Description of other Federal, State, local, and private efforts to achieve project goals and objectives
- 4.8. Description of how the proposal aligns with the State Wildlife Action Plan
- 4.9. Description of haying and grazing requirements or restrictions
- 4.10. Description of permissive and restricted uses if proposal contains additional restrictions beyond policies in 2-CRP, Part 18
- 4.11. If including conservation practice Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647) in the proposal **and** using annual plants to create early successional habitat, the following information must be included:
 - 4.11.1. How creating Early Successional Habitat (ESH) conditions with annuals are beneficial compared to applying disturbance to stands of perennials to create ESH
 - 4.11.2. Use of introduced or native annuals
 - 4.11.3. How often annuals will be seeded
 - 4.11.4. Percentage of contracted acres applying ESH management
 - 4.11.5. Strategy to control soil erosion and noxious weeds
 - 4.11.6. Approved annual plant species

5. Anticipated Outcomes

- 5.1. SAFE enrollment acreage and number of contract goals to meet habitat needs of targeted species for the SAFE proposal
- 5.2. Provide measurable outcomes and timeframes of when outcomes would be achieved
- 5.3. Describe benefits (including societal, recreational, economic, and environmental) of the proposed project
- 5.4. Describe how enrollment in the SAFE proposed project will assist to achieve goals of the State Wildlife Action Plan
- 5.5. Provide estimated State, local, and private partners out-of-pocket costs

SAFE Proposal Required Information (Continued)

A SAFE Proposal Required Information and Format (Continued)

6. Outreach

6.1. Describe the public outreach plan, including materials, media, and events needed to achieve project goals

6.2. Describe the plan to educate State FSA, NRCS, and partners who will be administering and planning to support the SAFE project

SAFE Proposal Requirements

Each proposal submitted to CD by the FSA State Office must include, at a minimum, all the following:

- copy of FSA STC minutes
- copy of NRCS State Technical Committee minutes
- SED certification that active SAFE projects and new or modified proposals meet the requirements of this notice
- shapefiles of proposed project area, according to 1-GIS, Exhibit 31
- proposal according to requirements in Exhibit 1
- 2-CRP amendment, including modifications to 2-CRP, Exhibit 11 practice write-up for SAFE.