

Wetland Reserve Program

Agency/Organization: Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS)

Program: **Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)**

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Program Description:

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program offering technical and financial support to help landowners protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The NRCS goal is to achieve the greatest wetland function and value possible, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. Enrolled lands are mostly high-risk agricultural lands located in flood prone areas. WRP offers an opportunity to establish long-term land and wildlife conservation through easements and cost-shared restoration practices.

Assistance Type: Financial, Technical, Easements

Financial Assistance: The program offers three enrollment options:

Permanent Easement. This is a conservation easement in perpetuity. Easement payments for this option equal the lowest of three amounts: the agricultural value of the land, an established payment cap, or an amount offered by the landowner. In addition to paying for the easement, USDA pays 100 percent of the costs of restoring the wetland.

30-Year Easement. Easement payments through this option are 75 percent of what would be paid for a permanent easement. USDA also pays up to 75 percent of restoration costs.

For both permanent and 30-year easements, USDA pays all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, charges for abstracts, survey and appraisal fees, and title insurance.

Restoration Cost-Share Agreement. This is an agreement (generally for a minimum of 10 years) to re-establish degraded or lost wetland habitat. USDA pays up to 75 percent of the cost of the restoration activity. This enrollment option does not place an easement on the property. Other agencies, conservation districts, and private conservation organizations may provide additional incentive payments as a way to reduce the landowner's share of the costs.

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ELIGIBILITY

Landscape Type: Wetlands, Agriculture, Pastureland

Resource Type: Water Quality, Wildlife

Criteria: Land must be restorable and suitable for wildlife habitat. This includes: wetlands farmed under natural conditions; farmed wetlands; prior converted cropland; farmed wetland pasture; farmland that has become a wetland as a result of flooding; range land, pasture, or production forest land where the hydrology has been significantly degraded and can be restored; riparian areas which link protected wetlands; lands adjacent to protected wetlands that contribute significantly to wetland functions and values; and/or previously restored wetlands.

To offer a conservation easement, the landowner must have owned the land for at least 7 years prior to enrolling it in the program, unless the land was inherited, the landowner exercised the landowner's right of redemption after foreclosure, or the landowner can prove the land was not obtained for the purpose of enrolling it in the program. Other exceptions may apply. To participate in a restoration cost-share agreement, the landowner must show evidence of ownership.