



Fact Sheet

Cultivating Conservation in the United States

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“Keeping wildlife acres as a whole is very important to us... We really like the easement idea, that this land would never be developed.”

- Jutta Kuenzler, NC farmer, talking about WRP

Some of the nation’s most successful voluntary conservation programs take place under the federal Farm Bill. Across the country, farmers are protecting wildlife habitat, controlling soil erosion and reducing polluted runoff with technical and financial assistance from Farm Bill programs. Yet these popular programs are woefully under-funded. Many landowners nationwide who would like to do more for fish and wildlife are turned away for a lack of funds.

With Congress set to begin writing a new Farm Bill in 2006, it is the perfect time for sportsmen and women, bird watchers, and other outdoor enthusiasts to weigh in for better funding for these programs. These programs serve both to support the bottom line of family farmers and forest owners, as well as securing fish and wildlife resources for our children’s future.

INADEQUATE FUNDING

Nationally, at least three out of every four agricultural producers who attempt to enroll in a voluntary Farm Bill conservation program are turned away due to a lack of funding. A few examples of the large “backlog” of applicants turned away in Fiscal Year 2004 from the Grasslands Reserve (GRP), Wetlands Reserve (WRP) and Wildlife Habitat Incentive (WHIP) Programs:

Program	Funded	Unfunded
GRP	283,338 acres	6,241,587 acres
WRP	189,144 acres	535,932 acres
WHIP	\$ 27,107,036	\$ 10,703,909

Efforts to ensure the future of our nation’s fish and wildlife must involve private landowners as partners. The good news is that many landowners are ready and willing to improve their farming and forestry practices and to set aside some

lands in order to provide wildlife habitat and buffers for our rivers, streams, lakes and ponds. Many have already done so, with clear benefits for fish, wildlife, and water quality.



Conservation Reserve Program land in Idaho

COURTESY OF NRCS



Conservation Reserve Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pays farmers annual rental payments under 10-15 year contracts, to set aside marginal land. The program also pays up to half the cost of establishing conservation practices that address soil erosion, water quality, wetland and forest enhancement, and wildlife management. Examples of these practices include establishing vegetative cover or trees on erodible cropland, planting native grasses, thinning or conducting controlled burning of pine forests, and placing filterstrips along stream banks to stem polluted runoff and provide habitat for wildlife. As of the beginning of 2006, a total of 35,912,497 acres were enrolled in the CRP program nationwide.



COURTESY OF NRCS

Improved forest management can benefit wild turkey populations

DAVID DAVIS IS PROUD TO BE A PART OF SOLUTION for declining sage grouse populations, which once flourished in western Washington, but have since declined by about 75 percent. Davis and his fellow farmers in Douglas County, Washington have turned nearly 186,000 acres of wheat into sage grouse habitat since CRP was created in 1985. “The birds were disappearing until CRP got going,” Davis says. “This summer, I saw 10 or 12 young sage grouse cross the road just before harvest. I’ve never seen that before.” Davis’s success is being repeated in Oregon, Idaho and Montana, where greater sage grouse also are using CRP habitat.

Grassland Reserve Program

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program that enables landowners to restore or protect native grasslands on portions of their property. Maintaining and restoring these grasslands helps to preserve a declining ecosystem while also providing areas of land valuable to hunters and other recreational land users. Congress authorized the program in the 2002 Farm Bill for a maximum of 2 million acres. This cap was reached in 2005.



COURTESY OF NRCS

Lesser Prairie Chicken is just one declining grassland species that stands to benefit from the Grasslands Reserve Program

JEFF BASFORD OWNS A FARM IN DODGE COUNTY, MN. According to NRCS, Mr. Basford was able to create valuable wildlife habitat through the Grassland Reserve Program while working to achieve his land management goals. A wide range of wildlife, including many bird species, have benefited from the planting of native grasses on the farm. “You know that old saying: If you make it they will come. Well, they did,” said Basford. The native warm season grasses have provided valuable habitat in both the summer and winter seasons for pheasant populations, according to NRCS.

Wetland Reserve Program

The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) allows interested farmers the opportunity to restore, maintain and protect wetlands on their property. Farmers can either sign up for a 10 year cost-share agreement, or 30 year or permanent conservation easements, with restoration cost share funding. Most lands restored under WRP are marginal, high risk, flood-prone lands. The WRP enables landowners to take these lands out of production and restore them to beneficial use as wetland wildlife habitat. As of fiscal year 2005, a total of 9,293 projects, involving 1,775,864 acres, had been enrolled in WRP.

ONE OF THE FIRST WRP PROJECTS IN MICHIGAN, THE PORTAGE RIVER RESTORATION, has become a perfect example of what can happen when a farmer is willing to take marginal cropland out of production and put it towards a higher use. According to NRCS, this 180 acre wetland restoration located in Jackson County, restored 80 acres of marsh and 100 acres of grassy wetlands and uplands – perfect fall migratory staging and breeding habitat for Sandhill cranes and other migratory waterfowl. This part of Michigan has one of the highest nesting densities of Sandhill cranes in all of North America thanks in part to wetland restorations projects such as this one. The land remains in private ownership, with a permanent easement to protect it into the future.



COURTESY OF NRCS

Wetlands Reserve Program project in Wisconsin

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program that pays up to 75 percent of the cost to private land owners of enhancing wildlife habitat on their land. The program is not limited to agricultural lands, but is open to any private landowners who would like to create wildlife-friendly habitat enhancements to a portion of their land, such as restoring native prairie grasses, performing forest management practices, or improving aquatic areas. A total of \$32,509,489 was allocated to the states for WHIP projects in FY 06.

IN MOORE COUNTY, NC, THE WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM is helping a local community partner with an equestrian facility with the overall goal of restoring longleaf pine savanna that, according to NRCS will be beneficial to local wildlife. The hope is that the new habitat will be beneficial to the endangered Red cockaded-woodpeckers as well as other types of wildlife, including amphibians, reptiles and grass and shrub- breeding birds. Winter fires are being used to clear the forest floor, allowing for increased sunlight and improved habitat conditions.



COURTESY OF NRCS

Pheasant populations have increased greatly under the Conservation Reserve Program

“We don’t want to put a plow to this kind of ground... but if farmers lose their CRP payments, they will have to tear out the grass and sagebrush and plant crops in order to cover property taxes and other overhead.”

Jim Davis, President, WA Farmer’s Union



Through farm bill conservation programs, farmers can protect both wildlife and their bottom lines.

Conservation Security Program

Unlike programs that pay farmers to set aside certain lands, the Conservation Security Program (CSP) rewards agricultural producers for environmentally-friendly measures they are willing to undertake on the lands that they keep in production. Currently there are 171 farms with CSP contracts in the state of North Carolina. The program was established in the 2002 Farm Bill, but has thus far only been implemented in a few watersheds per state due to limited funding. The program pays producers on a sliding scale according to the number, type and extent of conservation measures they agree to implement. Eligible lands include grasslands, cropland, improved pasture, range land and some forest land.

IN KANSAS, THE ANDREW E. LARSON SR. TRUST has a tier III Conservation Security Program contract that is providing benefits to wildlife. Currently, according to NRCS, the project is using wildlife habitat management practices to leave standing crop residue that will act as a winter cover for many bird species. This crop residue acts as an important resting site for migratory birds. The Trust is also using CSP money to enhance irrigation efficiency, as well as ensuring a more efficient application of fertilizers and pesticides, both benefits to water quality and fish species.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

In order to ensure a strong future for conservation programs that can make the difference for our nation's fish and wildlife, contact your Congressional Representatives and let them know about the importance of expanding funding for Farm Bill conservation programs in the next Farm Bill and of fully funding existing conservation programs.

U.S. Capital Switchboard:
(202) 224-3121

Forested Land

Nine out of ten forest owners rank wildlife management as one of their top priorities. Despite the critical need for more funding for private forestland management practices, forest programs received very little funding under the 2002 Farm Bill. To manage national forests appropriately to ensure the future of forest wildlife, the next Farm Bill needs to vastly expand private, voluntary conservation programs for forest land. The Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) is a voluntary program for family forest owners. Currently nationwide, the FLEP program has suffered multiple budget setbacks that have prevented the program from functioning efficiently. This lack of funding has inhibited the program from furthering enhancement of forest wildlife habitat. The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) assists family forest owners in developing management plans for their forests.

Although \$100 million dollars was guaranteed for the FLEP program in the 2002 Farm Bill, only \$35 million has been released to date for the program, \$40 million was borrowed for fire fighting and not repaid, and \$25 million was cancelled by the administration.

THE POWERS FAMILY OF ST. PAULS, NC, own over 300 acres of agricultural land and upland pine forest, mostly long-leaf pine. Ruffin Powers promotes early succession habitat for the benefit of bobwhite quail and other species using a combination of no-till farming, disking, mowing, chemical control, woodland thinnings, prescribed burning, and field border maintenance. In 2004 and 2005, Powers was able to utilize the Forest Land Incentive Program to help pay for prescribed burning on 27 acres of thinned pine woodlands, and to remove dense hardwood sapling competition within a pine stand. A visit to Mr. Powers' property enables one to see the results of his dedication and enthusiasm - improved brooding, nesting, and foraging sites for quail.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

JULIE SIBBING
Sibbing@nwf.org
202-797-6832
National Wildlife Federation
1400 16th Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036