



# MISSISSIPPI FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

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374

February 23, 2004

Conservation Operations Division  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
PO Box 2890  
Washington, DC 20013-2890

RE: Conservation Security Program; Comments on Proposed Rule

Dear USDA-NRCS:

The Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Conservation Security Program (CSP) proposed rule. This new program, as authorized by the FSRI Act of 2002, has the opportunity to provide stewardship-minded farmers and ranchers with new levels of financial and technical conservation assistance on working lands.

We understand that strict implementation timelines and even stricter budgetary constraints will dampen the spirits of those producers seeking participation into an entitlement program that emphasizes working land conservation. We urge the USDA to seek flexible, inclusive methods of implementation that allows for as many producers as eligible to be accepted into the program. It is unfortunate that USDA must develop and implement rules for an under funded program after years of anticipated introduction of this program.

The proposed rule indicates that USDA will delineate priority watersheds for CSP implementation for at least the first year of the program. We urge USDA to use various sources of information from various agencies when making program-eligible watershed determinations. USDA should request information from the states as to which watersheds would benefit the most from being named a CSP priority watershed.

We are concerned about the proposed language regarding the ability of producers to show control of agricultural land for the life of the contract. An inflexible rule may cause some producers to be ineligible for the CSP. CSP contracts should be flexible and forgiving enough to allow for unforeseen events such as farmers losing access to lands previously under control of the active farmer. CSP contracts should be allowed to be modified without penalties to reflect uncontrollable circumstances. Just as farmers and ranchers have to be flexible in their planting, grazing, harvesting, etc. decisions due to weather, markets, labor, etc., the USDA should also be flexible enough to allow producers the opportunity work towards exemplary stewardship by means of the CSP.

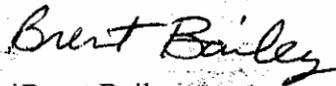
We appreciate USDA's efforts to develop a workable CSP through public comments and the public listening forums held around the country. We urge USDA to utilize funding

sources in a way that expedites full program availability to all U.S. farmers and ranchers. Long term budgeting and funding for this program is a major concern.

We agree with the concept of this program to reward those producers performing superb conservation practices in their farming operations. However, we feel the goal of the program should be to ultimately work with and entice producers to reach for and achieve Tier III conservation.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the CSP proposed rule. We look forward to working with our state-level NRCS officials to implement the CSP.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brent Bailey".

Brent Bailey  
NER Director

# Colorado River Basin

344

## Salinity Control Forum



### MEMORANDUM 04-13

**TO:** Work Group Members  
**FROM:** Jack A. Barnett, Executive Director  
**SUBJECT:** USBR PROJECTS/Lower Basin Study  
**DATE:** February 17, 2004

#### GOVERNORS

Janet Napolitano, AZ  
 Arnold Schwarzenegger, CA  
 Bill F. Owens, CO  
 Kenny Guinn, NV  
 Bill Richardson, NM  
 Olene S. Walker, UT  
 Dave Freudenthal, WY

#### FORUM MEMBERS

##### Arizona

Thomas G. Carr  
 Larry R. Dozier  
 Linda C. Taunt

##### California

Gerald R. Zimmerman  
 Celeste Cantú  
 Dennis Underwood

##### Colorado

Kent H. Holsinger  
 Rod Kuharich  
 Mark T. Pifer

##### Nevada

Phillip S. Lehr  
 Allen Biaggi  
 Freeman Johnson

##### New Mexico

John R. D'Antonio

##### Utah

D. Larry Anderson  
 Randy Crozier  
 Don A. Ostler

##### Wyoming

Patrick T. Tyrrell  
 Dan S. Budd  
 Gary Beach

#### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jack A. Barnett

The Lower Colorado River Region of the USBR is moving ahead with plans for a study of salinity issues across the region. The study will look also at the benefits to the Lower Region because of our Title II efforts. It looks like they will have something like \$130,000 to \$150,000 for perhaps each of the next three or four fiscal years to accomplish their work.

Between now and the next Work Group meeting, there is a planned scoping session and the Forum will be represented. Attached is a paper that, with a few modifications, they plan to put out to invited scoping session participants to stimulate their thinking. The work is to be done out of the USBR's Phoenix office and Darlene Tuel (602-216-3918) is taking the lead in this effort.

Perhaps this subject should be on the next Work Group agenda.

np  
 attachment

cc: Larry Dozier, Tom Carr, Linda Taunt, All Interested Federal Representatives

## **Lower Basin Salinity Management Study To Optimize Collective Efforts in the Colorado River Basin**

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program (CRBSCP) has identified and implemented an impressive array of salinity source control programs in the upper Colorado River basin. The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Forum (Forum) estimates the Program has resulted in the control of 772,627 tons of salt per year which has reduced Colorado River salinity by 65 milligrams per liter (mg/L). The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) estimates savings of about \$88 million per year from the reduced salinity.

The Forum notes in its latest program review that substantially more salt needs to be removed or prevented from entering the River by year 2020 to continue to meet the numeric salinity criteria set on the lower Colorado River. Through presently identified projects and a program of inviting local water agencies to propose localized projects in the Upper Basin, there appears to be ample opportunity to maintain a viable salinity control program. The Forum's key initiatives are these:

- Fund construction, operation, and maintenance of salinity control projects that will continue to reduce salt loading of the river.
- Increase efforts to educate water users and other beneficiaries about the salinity control program and the benefits of providing strong support.
- Seek a long-term commitment by all CRBSCP participants to control salinity for sustained use of the River.

At the same time, water agencies in the Lower Basin are planning desalting projects to reduce the salinity of river water after they have diverted it. Their needs are to reduce the importation of salt into their service areas and to improve opportunities for recycling of the water they distribute. This is occurring in central Arizona and southern California.

Thus, salinity control in the Colorado River Basin is being conducted on two fronts geographically and programmatically--upstream in supply areas and downstream in use areas. Work on each front is based on its associated physical needs and the institutional framework governing its scope.

This duality suggests that there is an economic interface between the two modes of control that is worth investigating. The monetary investments in salinity control are large, emphasizing the need to pursue efficient and economical ways to deal with salinity reduction. There are many questions to be explored. What future salinity patterns or fluctuations do Lower Basin agencies need to prepare for in their Colorado River water? What can be learned from the types of salinity control measures in the Upper Basin and their beneficial effect on Lower Basin water supply? What are the relative economics of upstream salt removal and area-of-use salt removal? Under what circumstances is it

advantageous to participate in local salinity management efforts individually? Under what circumstances is it advantageous to join with other agencies to develop combined projects? What economies of scale are there and how do they operate? And how might the relationships we perceive today change with time?

It appears the time is ripe for a study of the directions that salinity control efforts are heading, and to apply economic theory to see what that suggests in terms of how and where investments should be channeled. This is the foundation of the proposed study by Reclamation.

The goal of the Lower Basin Salinity Management Study is to identify the most efficient and economic way that Basin interests can collectively manage the growing salinity of the Colorado River. Study elements will include determining the salinity control project cost range (per unit of salinity reduction), from local to watershed, for Lower Basin water agencies using Colorado River water. Physical options examined will range from individually financed local salinity control to strengthened participation with many other utilities in watershed salinity control.

A model, such as Reclamation's Central Arizona Salinity Study (CASS) economic model, may help answer questions related to the economic benefit of salinity control, including:

- Has the full cost (direct and first use indirect) of salinity been determined for all use areas and use sectors?
- Are there other costs and associated factors that should be included?
- How do past reports estimating future salinity damage compare to actual salinity damages?

An initial workshop is planned to help scope the study. A group of state and local water managers will be invited to attend, describe their salinity-related problems and concerns, and provide insight into ways and means to address these concerns. Building on this, the desired outcome of the workshop is to provide Reclamation with the following:

- Gather specific information on salinity-related problems and needs of large and small water agencies;
- Develop through discussion a realistic sense of scope and direction for the study;
- Learn what interests water agencies have in the study and what resources they may be able to contribute; and
- Explore the possibility of forming a work group with which to coordinate the study.

322



# Land Stewardship Project

2919 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406

Phone: (612) 722-6377 Fax: (612) 722-6474 www.landstewardshipproject.org

Dear LSP member,

February 16, 2004

Last month, we sent you an update on the **Conservation Security Program (CSP)**, which has been a major policy priority of our organization for several years. As you know, LSP members played a major role nationally in conceiving of the basic idea of the CSP, developing it as public policy, and advancing it through Congress. For LSP, the Conservation Security Program as passed by Congress embodies a long-time motto of our organization – “Our Soil, Our Farmers, Our Future.”

On January 2, USDA issued their proposed rules for how the CSP should be run. The public was given 60 days (until March 2) on which to comment on the USDA draft rules. A number of you have already sent comments in to USDA, either by email or letter – thank you! Many of you also sent comments back to us at Land Stewardship Project after the last mailing, which was very helpful. (Those comments, however, don't count as official comments to USDA, unless you also sent them to USDA.)

**Now is the time for us to pile on the support for a CSP that will make a difference to America's farmlands, farmers, and communities. Major changes are needed to USDA's proposed rules in order to make this program work.**

Getting lots of written comments (mail or email) into USDA is important for two main reasons:

1. We need to show the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at USDA how to run this program so CSP truly does help secure long-lasting stewardship of our nation's working farmlands and support conservation-minded family farmers for doing the right thing.
2. We need to show the Bush Administration the broad and deep support for this important program. President Bush is again proposing steep cuts to CSP.

Please review the enclosed fact sheet and sample comment letter. The sample comment letter makes several points we believe are important for us to drive home to USDA, and includes on the back side space for additional comments. I have also enclosed an envelope addressed to USDA in Washington for you to use to send in your comments. Of course, please feel free to write and send in your own letter to USDA – that would be great. **But I urge you by all means, please do comment. This is a critical time in which the future of the CSP hangs in balance. Our organization has done great work thus far in advancing this policy, which we believe can do much good. Let's bring it home.**

You can simply sign and send in the letter provided. Or, you can sign the front of the sample letter, and write some additional comments on the back. Or you can write your own letter. All are valuable ways to speak out. USDA must receive the comments by March 2, so do it today or tomorrow – don't wait! Of course, if you have any questions, please feel free to call us at the LSP Policy Office at 612-722-6377.

Thank you for your concern and support,

Mark Schultz  
Policy Program Director

I do not feel well enough acquainted  
in this field to make any comments  
and as it is well past 2/2/04 I don't  
believe I would of any help.

R Howell

Conservation Security Program Comments  
ATTN: David McKay  
NRCS Conservation Operations Division  
P.O. Box 2890  
Washington, DC 20013

323

I am writing to suggest important changes to the USDA's proposed rules for the operation of the Conservation Security Program (CSP). I support the CSP as a nationwide conservation program focused on working farmlands and which would reward the best, and motivate the rest. As intended by Congress, the CSP should be open to all farmers in the U.S. practicing effective conservation.

First, USDA should issue a supplement to the rule, which would be open for public comment for 30 days. This should be done immediately to fix major problems with the proposed rules issued on January 2, 2004, which are not consistent with the law authorizing the CSP nor with the funding allocated by Congress making CSP an uncapped national entitlement program.

In addition,

1. USDA's preferred approach in the proposed rule would severely and unnecessarily prevent most farmers from gaining access to the CSP. USDA must adhere to the law, and to the recently appropriated full funding of CSP by Congress, and make CSP available nationwide to all farmers practicing effective conservation. The USDA needs to get rid of the idea of restricting sign-up for CSP to a few selected watersheds and undefined categories.
2. The USDA's proposed rules fail to make anywhere close to adequate payments for environmental benefits being produced by farmers currently practicing effective conservation. The best way to secure the vital conservation of our soil and other resources is to recognize and reward it when and where it is being done. Paying the best practitioners for results is sound economics and smart policy, providing both reward and motivation. CSP base payments should be set at the local rental rates based on land capability without the 90% reduction proposed by USDA. Enhanced payments should reward the most environmentally-beneficial systems and to the maximum extent possible pay for results. The enhanced payments should not be treated as cost-share but rather as real bonuses to reward exceptional performance.
3. CSP needs to recognize and reward resource-conserving crop rotations and managed rotational grazing as proven conservation farming systems that deliver environmental benefits to society. Both are specifically mentioned for enhanced payments in the CSP statute. The final rule should highlight substantial enhancement payments for these systems, as well as payments for management of existing practices.
4. USDA should not penalize farmers for shifting former cropland to pasture as part of a managed grazing system. Former or potential cropland that is pastured and put into a managed rotational grazing system must receive equal payment rates to other cropland, and not the lower rate of pastureland. The rules should establish base payments based on NRCS land capability classes, not current land use.
5. CSP should allow farmers with USDA-approved organic certification plans under the National Organic Program to simultaneously-certify under both the National Organic Program and CSP, if they meet the standards of both. No need to tie farmers up in red tape.

Sincerely,

*Mary Abendroth*  
*Member Land Stewardship Project*

(Additional comments on back)

## Additional Comments:

1. NRCS is seeking comments on the idea of a one-producer, one-contract approach to CSP contracts, as a way to provide the fairest treatment of all producers and to guard against program fraud and abuse. Do you agree with this approach? Do you agree that all CSP payments should also be attributed to real persons (not various corporate or business entities)? And do you agree that the payment limits set in the law (\$20,000 per year for Tier 1, \$35,000 per year for Tier 2, and \$45,000 per year for Tier 3) should be maintained? *yes*

2. NRCS is proposing that CSP contracts in general not be renewable, except in special circumstances. The law, on the other hand, leaves it up to the farmer to decide if he or she wants to renew the contract, and USDA would renew unless the farmer was not fulfilling the contract. Do you agree that CSP contracts should be renewable, as part of an ongoing program, and not limited to one-time contracts? *yes*

3. Your additional comments on CSP and the USDA's proposed rules:

*Promoting, protecting and maintaining the health of our air, water and soil should be a top priority of our government; on a par with any other program to protect the well-being of the people, in opposition to forces that would lower the quality of our lives and our earth. Strengthen the proposed rules, don't weaken them.*

Name (if not signed on front):

*ML*