



*This publication is the first issue of a direct mail piece intended to provide information to holders of NRCS Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) and Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) and to identify the activities that are taking place with respect to easements across Indiana. This publication replaces the certified letters that have been sent to easement holders in the past.*

GRP/HFRP

INDIANA ● GRP/HFRP ISSUE 1 ● JANUARY, 2013

# Easement Owner Newsletter

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*Find out which NRCS employee to contact in case of easement questions.*

### Easements Provide Habitat

*Learn how many Indiana acres have been protected through GRP and HFRP.*

### Frequently Asked Questions

*Answers to all of your frequently asked easement questions.*

## IS YOUR MANAGEMENT PLAN UP-TO-DATE?

The Grasslands Reserve Program and Healthy Forests Reserve Program are working land easement programs. This means that the land may still be used for agricultural activities, grazing/pasturing in the case of GRP, and forestry in the case of HFRP. However, it is a requirement that a management plan be in place for these easements, and that the management plan meets the program's intent.

If you own a GRP easement, it is critical that you do not tear up your forage with any type of tillage. You must also contact NRCS prior to altering forage composition. Maintaining good "stop grazing"

heights on GRP is very important to preserve the integrity and quality of the forage stand and to help maintain adequate intake and nutritional requirements of the grazing livestock. Those heights are also important in maintaining good live roots, thereby improving drought tolerance and regrowth response, reducing erosion and runoff, and increasing infiltration. Remember, healthy soil, healthy plants, healthier animals.

In the case of HFRP, it is crucial that a management plan be created and approved by NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prior to any harvest or forest

management activities taking place, in order to ensure the protection of endangered species.

If you need to change your management plan to better meet the needs of the available resources and your operation, please contact your local NRCS office. NRCS staff will assist in the development of a conservation plan for your property, in conjunction with other professionals and experts. Together, we can maximize the productivity of your ground, while offering continued protection of our valuable natural resources, and ensuring program requirements are met.



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# EASEMENTS PROVIDE CRITICAL HABITAT

Here in Indiana, your easement is an important part of a broader picture. As of 2013, the Grasslands Reserve Program has protected 810 acres on 16 easements. The Healthy Forests Reserve Program has protected 1,156 acres on eight easements. These acres have been permanently protected from conversion, ensuring productive land for generations.

These easements also add to the larger easement program in Indiana which includes over 60,000 acres of Wetlands Reserve Program easements and 8,400 acres of Floodplain Easements. Combined, all of these acres offer extensive wildlife habitat, including critical habitat for threatened and endangered species, erosion protection, flood retention, and water quality improvement. Thank you for your participation in this effort!



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS...

### **Q: Are easements open to the public?**

No, the landowner of the easement land retains the right to control access to the land. NRCS retains the right to access the site to ensure easement terms and conditions are being met, but it is up to the landowner's discretion what type of access is granted to others.

### **Q: I have an HFRP easement. The emerald ash borer has damaged several trees in my woods. Am I allowed to have those trees removed?**

HFRP landowners are permitted to conduct routine forestry operations, management practices, and timber harvesting activities, as long as the activities are consistent with the Warranty Deed and are carried out in accordance with a management plan approved by NRCS. Please work with your local NRCS staff to develop a plan that works for your property. (Note: This does not necessarily apply to GRP land, contact your NRCS staff for more information).

### **Q: I have a GRP easement and would like to construct a barn for my animals. Is this permissible?**

Per the Warranty Easement Deed for GRP, the repair, maintenance or replacement of existing structures, listed in the original Baseline Report, and necessary to conduct common grazing practices on the easement, are permitted in the same location, within the existing footprint of the structures. Construction of new facilities is not permitted without prior approval, and must meet the program intent and related conservation values of the easement. If you are in doubt how the structure you are proposing fits within these deed requirements, please contact your local NRCS Office.

### **Q: I have observed invasive plants on my property. Will NRCS pay to have these controlled?**

First, it is important to determine if the plant you are observing is invasive, or is it noxious. In Indiana, it is landowner's legal obligation to control noxious weeds. Please consult the Weed List at: <http://plants.usda.gov/java/noxiousDriver> to determine if you have a noxious weed. If the invasive plant is not on this list, NRCS may be able to provide technical assistance with the development of an invasive species management plan. A *Compatible Use Authorization* must be requested and approved before any control activities may begin. In some instances, funds may be available to assist with invasive species control, but are not guaranteed. No government funds may be used to control noxious weeds.

### **Q: My easement is for sale. What does NRCS need to know?**

It is key during an ownership transfer to keep NRCS informed. In the warranty deeds for both GRP and HFRP there is a prohibition against subdividing a property. Please contact NRCS prior to any sales which may potentially subdivide the easement, as these may be prohibited. A copy of the warranty deed can be made available for you and the realtor to ensure information is available for the prospective buyer. When the easement does sell, please provide NRCS with the name of the new landowner so that NRCS can begin contacting them. If you are currently completing a restoration project on your land, a transfer agreement may be completed between you and the new owner to move responsibility of the restoration to the new owner.