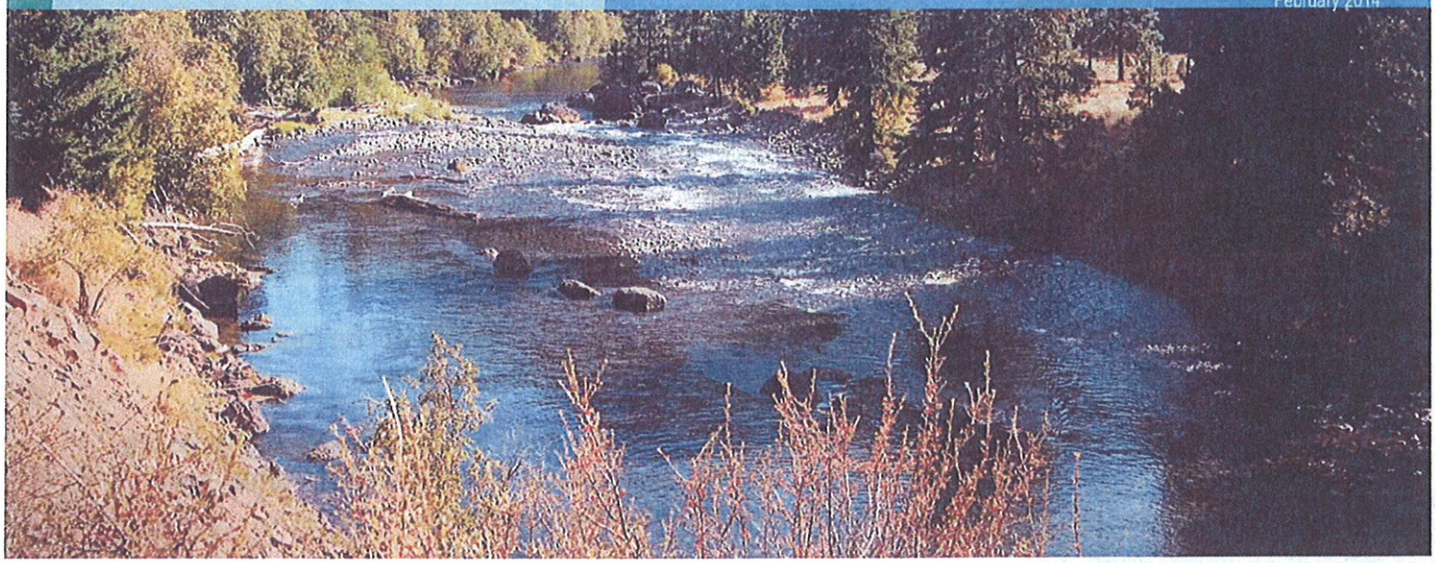
USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Water Bank Program (WBP) Fact Sheet

February 2014



Water Bank Program (WBP)

In fiscal year (FY) 2014, Congress appropriated $4 million to fund the Water Bank Program (WBP) and NRCS is opening enrollment into the program in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

The purposes of WBP include (1) preserving and improving major wetlands as habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife, (2) conserving surface waters, (3) reducing soil and wind erosion, (4) contributing to flood control, (5) improving water quality, (6) improving subsurface moisture, and (7) enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape.

WBP agreements are not subject to the Farm Bill payment eligibility requirements including the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions or the adjusted gross income limitations.

WBP contracts are non-renewable, 10-year rental agreements. Rental payments are made annually.

Financial assistance will not be available for conservation practices through WBP.
WBP participants who wish to establish or maintain conservation practices may apply for financial assistance through other NRCS or state financial assistance programs where available. NRCS will assist participants with developing a conservation plan of operations (CPO) for the enrolled land and associated adjacent land when applicable.

A WBP agreement shall be executed for each participating farm or ranch and the agreement will become effective on January 1 of the calendar year in which the agreement is approved. For this signup period, agreements will be considered effective on January 1, 2014.

Land enrolled in WBP may not be cropped. NRCS may authorize haying under limited circumstances, such as severe drought. NRCS may authorize grazing where necessary to enhance the wetland functions and values of the land under agreement.

NRCS will prioritize applications as follows::

- High – Cropland impacted by flooding.
- Medium – Pasture, hay and range lands impacted by flooding.
- Low – Forest and other lands impacted by flooding.

Eligible applications from the High category will be funded first followed by the Medium and Low categories.

The State-established ranking criteria will emphasize the project's environmental benefits, cost, availability of matching funds, and significance of wetland functions and values.

WBP payment rates include

1. $50/acre/year for cropland
2. $35/acre/year for pasture and range land (grazing lands)
3. $20/acre/year for forestland

Important Dates

- WBP application period is from March 17 to April 18, 2014.
- States will approve agreements by June 6, 2014.
- 2014 WBP annual rental payments will be issued by July 25, 2014.