USDA NRCS
United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Farm Bill 2008

At a Glance:

Wetlands Reserve Program

May 2008

Overview

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners and Tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring eligible land from agriculture. Over 1.9 million acres are currently enrolled in WRP.

Wetlands provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species; improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals; reduce flooding; recharge groundwater; protect biological diversity; and provide opportunities for educational, scientific, and limited recreational activities.

The program offers three enrollment options:

1. *Permanent Easement* is a conservation easement in perpetuity. USDA pays 100 percent of the easement value and up to 100 percent of the restoration costs.

2. *30-Year Easement* is an easement that expires after 30 years. USDA pays up to 75 percent of the easement value and up to 75 percent of the 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.

3. *Restoration Cost-Share Agreement* is an agreement to restore or enhance the wetland functions and values without placing an easement on the enrolled acres. USDA pays up to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

Legislative Changes

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) changes the process for determining the easement value, directing the Secretary of Agriculture to pay the lowest of:

- the fair market value of the land according to the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practices or an area-wide market analysis;
- the geographic area rate cap as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture; or
- the landowner's offer.

Other important legislative changes include:

- The total number of acres that can be enrolled in the program is 3,041,200 – an increase of 766,200 additional acres.
- Payments for easements valued at $500,000 or more will be made in at least five annual payments.
- For restoration cost-share agreements, annual payments may not exceed $50,000 per year.
- No easement shall be created on land that has changed ownership during the preceding 7 years.
- Eligible acres are limited to private and Tribal lands.

More Information

For more information and updates about WRP and other Farm Bill topics, please refer to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Web site http://www.usda.gov/farmbill or the Natural Resources Conservation Service Web site http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp

For updated information specific to NRCS Michigan go to www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov

To view NRCS Program proposed regulations during the public comment period go to: www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html

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