



Emergency Watershed Protection Program/ Floodplain Easement Component

Questions and answers regarding the NRCS floodplain easement option...

Floodplain easements restore, protect, maintain, and enhance the functions of the floodplain. They also improve and conserve fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention, ground water recharge, and open space. In the long-term, they reduce Federal disaster assistance and safeguard lives and property from floods and erosion.

Following are some important questions and answers that can help you determine if a floodplain easement option is right for you and your land.

Q. What land is eligible?

A. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, through its Emergency Watershed Protection program, may purchase easements on any floodplain lands that have been impaired within the last 12 months or that have a history of repeated flooding (i.e., flooded at least two times during the past 10 years). Land within the breach inundation area of a dam for the purpose of preserving this land in a natural floodplain is also eligible. State and local governments are eligible to apply.

Q. Does a national emergency need to be declared for land to be eligible?

A. No. It is not necessary for a national emergency to be declared for an area to be eligible for assistance.

Q. How does the program work?

A. Under the floodplain easement option, a landowner voluntarily offers to sell to NRCS a permanent conservation easement that provides NRCS with full authority to restore and enhance the floodplain's functions and values.

Q. Can the land be used for other purposes?

A. At any time, a landowner may request authorization from NRCS to engage in other activities. However, allowable uses are restricted to only those that NRCS determines will further the protection and enhancement of the easement's floodplain functions and values. These compatible uses may include managed timber harvest, periodic haying, or grazing, but landowners should not plan for continued use of this land for routine haying, grazing, or cropping.

Q. How is payment determined?

A. In exchange for the floodplain easement, a landowner receives the lowest amount of one of the three following values as an easement payment:

- An area wide market analysis or survey;
- The amount corresponding to a geographical area rate cap (GARC), as determined by the Secretary in regulations; or
- The landowner offer.

Q. What does NRCS do with the land?

A. The easement provides NRCS with the authority to restore and enhance the floodplain's functions and values. NRCS may pay up to 100 percent of the restoration costs. To the extent practicable, NRCS actively restores natural features and characteristics of the floodplain by recreating the topographic diversity, increasing the duration of inundation and saturation, and providing for reestablishment of native vegetation. The landowner is provided the opportunity to participate in restoration efforts. Removal of structures that are an impediment to the proper functioning of the floodplain may be cost-shared.

Q. What landowner rights are retained?

A. Landowners retain several rights to the property, including quiet enjoyment, the right to control public access, and the right to undeveloped recreational use such as hunting and fishing.

Q. Who makes the “compatible use” determination?

A. NRCS determines the amount, method, timing, intensity, and duration of any compatible use that might be authorized. While a landowner can realize economic returns from an activity allowed for on the easement area, a landowner is not assured of any specific level or frequency of such use, and the authorization does not vest any right of any kind to the landowner. Cropping is not authorized and haying or grazing would not be authorized as a compatible use on lands that are being restored to woody vegetation.

Q. If I'm interested, what do I do next?

A. First, contact your local USDA-NRCS office. Our professional conservationists will outline the eligibility and application process and address other questions you may have.

For more information contact: Sean Duffey, Emergency Watershed Protection Program Coordinator, at (517) 324-5247 or at sean.duffey@mi.usda.gov or Tim Redder, Wetlands Reserve Program Coordinator, at (517) 324-5257 or tim.redder@mi.usda.gov.

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