

Wetlands Reserve Program

photo: NRCS Oklahoma



Benefits of WRP include habitat for wildlife and migratory birds, as well as water quality, flood storage and recreational opportunities.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) was created as a voluntary land retirement program designed to assist eligible landowners in restoring and protecting wetlands using three options. These options include permanent easements, 30-year easements, or restoration cost-share agreements.

The main focus of WRP in Oklahoma has been to provide habitat for wildlife and migratory birds including threatened and endangered species. Other benefits of wetlands include water quality, flood storage, erosion control, and recreational opportunities.

Nationally, WRP authorizes land enrollment up to a total of 1,075,000 acres by the year 2002. Because WRP is funded through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), funding is not the limiting factor for implementation. Congress limits the number of acres that can be enrolled each year. As a result, other conservation agencies or organizations can provide additional assistance to reduce landowners' share of the costs if needed to encourage participation.

In the area of permanent and 30-year easements, Oklahoma funded 104 applications from June 1994, through September 2000, resulting in 27,330 acres being enrolled. In 2000, a total of 18 applications covering 2,961 acres were approved for permanent and 30-year easements. Voluntary restoration cost-share

agreements total 21 on 1,829 acres. Currently, there are 40 applications for \$4.5 million covering over 5,000 acres.

In Oklahoma, the types of Wetlands Reserve Program restoration projects most often fall into the following categories: floodplain restoration, playa restoration, and riparian corridors. All three categories have their own unique characteristics and successful outcomes.

The main function of playa restoration is for migrating waterfowl production, while the functions for floodplain restoration, in addition to migratory waterfowl habitat, are expanded to include containing flood flows and to improve and protect water quality. Riparian corridors connect protected areas, providing a safe corridor for wildlife. Special emphasis is placed on restoration of shallow water conditions by filling old drainage ditches, constructing low dikes, and installing water control structures to regulate water depths. Re-establishment of natural vegetation such as bottomland hardwoods, herbaceous wetland plants, and native grasses is also an integral component of restoration efforts.

As a national agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has the primary responsibility for the Wetlands Reserve Program, and also has the authority to develop cooperative agreements with outside conservation groups who can assist with its implementation. The Natural Resources Conservation Service also can delegate its authority for monitoring,

managing, and enforcing easements to state or other federal agencies that have the resources to do the job.



Almost any former or degraded wetland is eligible for WRP, as long as the wetland is restorable and will provide wildlife benefits. The exceptions are converted wetlands in violation of the swampbuster provision of the 1985 Farm Bill, land established in trees under the Conservation Reserve Program, and federally owned land.

photos: NRCS Oklahoma

Eligible lands include:

- ✓ Prior converted cropland
- ✓ Wetland farmed under natural conditions
- ✓ Farmed wetland
- ✓ Farmed wetland pasture
- ✓ Farmland that has developed wetland functions as a result of flooding
- ✓ Rangeland, pasture or production forestland on which hydrology can be restored
- ✓ Other associated wetlands
- ✓ Riparian areas that link protected wetlands
- ✓ Associated uplands

Successful Projects:

Red Slough Wetland Restoration Project

The Red Slough Project in far southeastern Oklahoma is an over 7,300 acre project located in McCurtain County. This project ranks as one of the largest contiguous WRP projects in the nation. The Red Slough project encompasses the majority of the Push Creek bottomlands that were drained and leveled years ago for the production of rice, corn, soybeans and other crops. Through a partnership

with landowners, the local conservation district, the Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Conservation Fund, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has acquired easements and facilitated fee title acquisition of properties by conservation interests. This brought about a

tremendously exciting wetland restoration effort. The site is visited annually by numerous species of migratory birds such as shorebirds, waterfowl, and songbirds. Many other wildlife species dependent on this type of wetland habitat, have returned or increased in population.

Custer County

A.K. Manahan, a northeast Custer County, Oklahoma resident, purchased 160 acres with the ideas of managing it for waterfowl and deer. The majority of the farm has a high water table and surface lows that had been ditched by a previous owner.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service Clinton Field Office worked with Mr. Manahan to offer an application for a 10 year cost share contract on 67 acres. After the approval of the application, survey and design work began. Practices included a water control structure, a series of islands for loafing and escape cover for waterfowl, trees for a travel corridor for deer, and a border fence to exclude livestock.

Construction was completed in October 2000, with fencing, vegetation, and tree planting to be carried out in 2001. This project also allowed A.K. to apply for other funds through the Partners for Wildlife.

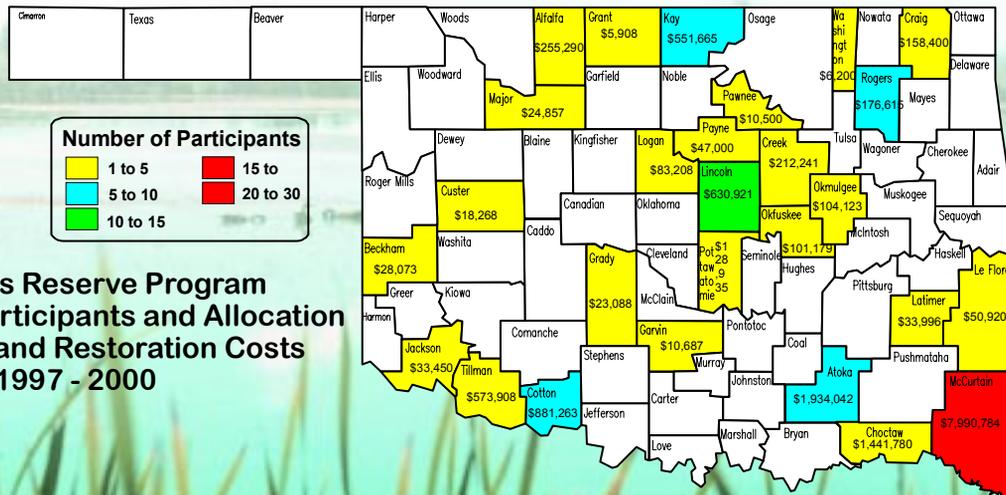


photo: USDA

