

Background

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for people who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private land. Participants can receive both technical and financial assistance to improve or develop terrestrial or aquatic habitat on their land. Most land is eligible for WHIP, which provides the opportunity to improve wildlife habitat on land that may not be eligible for other programs. The program is flexible and allows participants to use almost any practice that will enable them to meet habitat objectives. Through WHIP, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides both technical assistance and cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Kansas WHIP Priorities Plan and Eligible Practices

The NRCS, with advice from the Kansas Technical Committee, identified the following priorities for the Kansas WHIP plan:

- Grassland birds with emphasis on bobwhite quail, ring-neck pheasant, and prairie chicken (lesser and greater).
- Threatened and endangered (T&E) species and species in need of conservation (SINC).
- Natural communities to include prairies, wetlands, and riparian areas.

These priorities are consistent with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) Strategic Plan. KDWP has identified upland birds as a priority through their Upland Bird Initiative.

How WHIP works

Participants who own or control land agree to prepare and implement a wildlife habitat

development plan. NRCS offers participants technical and financial assistance for the establishment of fish and wildlife habitat improvement practices. In addition, if the landowner agrees, cooperating state wildlife agencies and nonprofit or private organizations may provide expertise or additional funding to help complete a project.

Cost-Share Assistance and Contract Length

Financial assistance is available to apply conservation systems that improve wildlife habitat. The NRCS and the participant sign and enter into a WHIP contract for 5 to 10 years.

Eligibility

Eligible lands under the program are:

- Privately owned land;
- Federal land when the primary benefit is on private or Tribal land;
- State and local government land on a limited basis; and
- Tribal land.

If land is determined eligible, NRCS places emphasis on enrolling:

- Habitat areas for wildlife species experiencing declining or significantly reduced populations;
- Practices beneficial to fish and wildlife that may not otherwise be funded; and
- Wildlife and fishery habitats identified by local and state partners and Indian Tribes in each state.

Partnership Involvement

Funding for WHIP and other conservation programs was greatly increased in the 2002 Farm Bill and will require additional wildlife technical assistance from partner agencies. Several wildlife groups and agencies have on-going working relationships with NRCS and can assist with the increased technical assistance demands, such as: the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks (KDWP) has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with NRCS whereby KDWP provides a biologist assigned to each of the five NRCS area office staffs to provide biological assistance to the field offices.

Since 2003, the NRCS and the KDWP entered into the State's first contribution agreement for technical services. Through this contribution agreement, KDWP biologists will be available to assist landowners in the development of Wildlife Habitat Development Plans on their lands. The biologists will assist and guide landowners through the planning process as well as through the procedures involved in applying for, implementing and maintaining a WHIP contract.

Other Partners

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is involved in a three-way agreement with KDWP and NRCS to provide technical assistance through their Partners for Wildlife Program.

An MOU also exists with the Kansas Forest Service (KFS) whereby the KFS provides technical assistance to NRCS primarily for forestry activities through their district foresters, some of which are located in the NRCS area offices.

Through a cooperative working agreement with the State Conservation Commission (SCC), NRCS administers a staff member to serve as a conservation buffer coordinator within the state. The Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams (KAWS) also assists with program outreach efforts for riparian and aquatic habitat.

Private organizations, such as Pheasants Forever (PF) and Quail Unlimited (QU), have a large presence in the State. Through their local chapters, these groups work with private landowners and managers providing financial assistance for local

wildlife habitat projects. NRCS has MOU's with PF and QU. PF is developing Habitat Crews across the Midwest to complete habitat projects resulting primarily from Farm Bill programs. Ducks Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, Audubon of Kansas, Kansas Ornithological Society, Kansas Wildlife Federation, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, and The Nature Conservancy also have a presence in the state. Any other group that has a wildlife interest is invited to be a partner in WHIP.

For More Information

If you would like more information about WHIP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov>

Visit USDA on the Web at:

<http://www.usda.gov/farmbill>



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