



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

## FARM BILL 2008

# WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP)

Fact Sheet - February 2011

### **WRP Overview:**

The goal of Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is to attain the greatest wetland functions and values, while optimizing wildlife habitat on all enrolled acres. WRP is:

- voluntary program;
- provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners;
- addresses wetland, wildlife habitat, and related natural resource concerns on private lands WRP provides landowners technical and financial assistance to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands;
- landowners will be asked to retire marginal land from agriculture.

### **Texas has three priority areas for targeting wetland restoration projects under the Wetlands Reserve Program:**

1. Playa lakes and coastal depressions.
2. Bottomland hardwoods in the Trinity River watershed.
3. All other wetlands within the state.

### **What Lands Qualify?**

To be eligible for WRP, land must be restorable and be suitable for wildlife benefits. This includes:

- wetlands farmed under natural conditions;
- farmed wetlands;
- prior converted cropland;
- farmed wetland pasture;
- farmland that has become a wetland as a result of flooding;
- rangeland, pasture, or production forestland where the hydrology has been significantly degraded and can be restored;
- riparian areas which link protected wetlands;
- lands adjacent to protected wetlands that contribute significantly to wetland functions and values; and
- previously restored wetlands (Conservation Reserve Program [CRP] land is eligible if it meets WRP requirements).

### **Land that is adjacent to eligible land may be enrolled if it will maximize wildlife benefits and:**

- is farmed wetland and adjoining land is enrolled in CRP with the highest functions and values and is likely to return to production after leaving CRP,
- is a riparian area along streams or other waterways that will link wetlands protected by an easement, or at least seventy percent of project area will be restored to the original condition to the extent possible.

### **How Does WRP Work?**

1. Landowners and tribes may file an application for a conservation easement or cost-share agreement with NRCS. Applicants are volunteering to limit future use of offered acres, but retain private ownership.
2. All applications will be ranked using the Wetlands Reserve Program, Texas Ranking Criteria.
3. Ranking will be made in consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

### **WRP offers three enrollment options:**

**Permanent Easement.** This is a conservation easement in perpetuity. Easement payment will be the lesser of: the agricultural value of the land, an established payment cap, or an amount offered by the landowner. In addition to paying for the easement, USDA pays 100 percent of the costs of restoring the wetland.

**30-Year Easement.** This is a conservation easement lasting 30 years. Easement payments are 75 percent of what would be paid for a permanent easement. USDA also pays 75 percent of restoration costs.

**Restoration Cost-Share Agreement.** This is an agreement (generally for a minimum of 10 years in duration) to reestablish degraded or lost wetland habitat. USDA pays 75 percent of the cost of the restoration activity. This does not place an easement on the property. The landowner provides the restoration site without reimbursement.



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### **Eligibility**

**Landowner.** To offer a conservation easement, the landowner must have owned the land for at least 7 years prior to enrolling the land in the program unless the land was inherited or the landowner can prove the land was not obtained for the purpose of enrolling it in the program. To participate in a restoration cost-share agreement, the landowner must show evidence of ownership unless it is determined by the State Conservationist that:

- (i) The land was acquired by will or succession as a result of the death of the previous landowner;
- (ii) The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure on the land and the owner of the land immediately before the foreclosure exercises a right of redemption from the mortgage holder in accordance with State law; or
- (iii) The land was acquired under circumstances that give adequate assurances, as determined by NRCS, that such land was not acquired for the purposes of placing it in the program, such as demonstration of status as a beginning farmer or rancher.

NRCS will pay compensation to landowner for 30 year and permanent easements accepted for WRP. 30 year contracts will be compensated at 75 percent of that which is payment for permanent easements as determined by the following methods:

- the fair market value of the land using the Uniform Standard for Professional Appraisal Practice, or base on an area-wide analysis or survey; or
- the geographic area rate cap determined by State Conservationist in consultation with State Technical Committee; or
- the landowners offer.

**Ineligible Land.** Ineligible land includes wetlands converted after December 23, 1985; lands with timber stands established under a CRP contract; Federal lands; and lands where conditions make restoration impossible.

### **Uses of WRP Land**

A landowner continues to control access to the land--and may lease the land--for hunting, fishing, and other undeveloped recreational activities. At any time, a landowner may request that additional activities be evaluated to determine if they are compatible uses for the site. This request is needed for such activities as permission to cut hay, graze livestock or harvest wood products. Compatible uses are allowed if they are fully consistent with the protection and enhancement of the wetland.