United States Department of Agriculture
NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Idaho Bulletin: 300-12-19
Subject: Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Working Lands for Wildlife Incentive Program Sage-grouse Initiative
Date: April 24, 2012

Action Dates: May 21 2012 - Application Cut-Off
May 25, 2012 - All Apps Entered into ProTracts and Pending Letters Sent
June 8, 2012 – Eligibility, Ranking, Cost Estimates,
June 29 , 2012 - Contracts Obligated

Purpose. To provide guidance for the fiscal year (FY) 2012 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Sage–grouse Initiative.

Expiration Date. September 30, 2012

Background. This Idaho bulletin provides guidance in delivering conservation assistance through a National EQIP and WLFW Sage-grouse Initiative (SGI). The purpose of these initiatives is to provide assistance to producers to implement practices that will alleviate or reduce threats to sage-grouse. Initiative funds may only be used to address sage-grouse habitat improvement in the area within the **Sagegrousehab_id_blm_2011.shp** file that is in the F: drive. The sage-grouse habitat improvement area only includes a portion of Idaho in Divisions 3, 4, 5 and 6. The WLFW initiative is funded through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).

Explanation. This bulletin provides guidance to Idaho employees for implementation of the National EQIP and WLFW Sage-grouse Initiative (SGI). A producer can sign up for either EQIP or WLFW SGI. The program specific requirements such as eligibility and payment limitations will be applied to applications and subsequent contracts.

All EQIP SGI applicants must meet Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) eligibility requirements in order to participate. The EQIP producer eligibility requirements can be found in the Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Section 515.51. The EQIP land eligibility requirements can be found in the CPM, Section 515.52.

All WLFW applicants must meet Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) eligibility requirements in order to participate. The WHIP (WLFW) producer eligibility requirements can be found in the Conservation Programs Manual (CPM), Section 517.22A. The WHIP (WLFW) land eligibility requirements can be found in the CPM, Section 517.22I.

Please complete the following items by Friday, **June 8, 2012:**

- Update eligibility in ProTracts (AD-1026, CCC-931, and CCC-901 or CCC-902 must be on file).
- Enter Direct Deposit (SF-1199A) and ensure that Vendor Code is **Active** in Protracts.
- Enter Dun and Bradstreet Number (DUNS) for applications submitted by entities and joint operations using an Employer Identification Number (EIN).
- Rank all eligible applications.
- Ensure applicants that have self-certified as Historically Underserved complete the HU worksheet.
- For applications containing engineering practices, assure NRCS personnel with the proper "Planning" and "Design" engineering job approval authority have reviewed the proposed conservation practices. Lessees must provide written permission from the landowner to install, operate and maintain "non-management" practices on land they are operating.
- Field Office staff will provide details to the applicant on self certification of "control" of the land for the contract period and explain what records need to be available from the applicant if requested.

Ranking Criteria have been established in ProTracts for EQIP and WHIP (WLFW) under SGI and will be used to rank applications according to the activities planned during the conservation planning process. Geodata will be uploaded to provide Sage-grouse habitat boundaries and four breeding density map shape files to be used in the ranking process. The data will be located on servers in the applicable areas under F:\geodata\project_data\CDCEO\Sagegrousehab_id_blm_2011.

The Sage-grouse Initiative Threat Checklist (attached) will be used to determine the number and type of threats associated with sage-grouse and the treatments the producer is ready, willing, and able to address. This checklist will be the basis for the conservation program contract and will ensure that funds are being used on conservation practices addressing identified threats. If there are no identified threats on the land offered for enrollment, the application is ineligible for the WLFW and EQIP Sage-grouse Initiative.

Conservation Planning activities including field inventory, Sage-grouse Initiative Threat Checklist and Toolkit plan development will be completed prior to ranking of applications. Toolkit plan narratives have been uploaded for use in the conservation plans. All SGI narratives will include "SGI" as part of the narrative name. These "SGI" narratives are to be the only narratives used for the plans and are not to be changed from what has been uploaded for program use. Conservation practices have been identified that are needed to address threats associated with sage-grouse habitat. Natural resource concerns with appropriate conservation practices from the Field Office Technical Guide directly related to sage-grouse habitat improvement and associated treatment of threats will be used and will be the basis for the conservation plan. All practices will be planned with (645) – Upland Wildlife Habitat Management as the core practice and in accordance with the Conservation Measures for each practice identified in the Conference Report for the NRCS Sage-grouse Initiative. The (645) Construction Specification Worksheet will be completed for all plans. Sage-grouse initiative prescribed grazing jobsheets will be used to document (645) options for grazing management.

Funding Pools will be established in ProTracts for EQIP and WHIP. The funding pools have been assigned the account type of "Sage-grouse" to ensure national consistency.

Payment Schedules have been developed to support the FY 2012 Sage-grouse Initiative. The District Conservationist will need to upload the payment schedules to the local F: drive for use in Toolkit.

After applications have been determined eligible, and ranking is complete, the following steps will be completed for contract development:

1. The State Programs staff will pre-approve applications as funds are available. Notification will be sent via email.
2. Upload the contract to ProTracts, check rules, and ensure that all information is accurate on the application and applicant info screens.
3. Email the State Programs staff to request approval.
4. Once approved, print the NRCS-CPA-1202, Appendix and NRCS-CPA-1155 to obtain participant signatures.
5. Send NRCS-CPA-52 Environmental Evaluation Worksheet via e-mail or fax to the State Biologist for approval as a part of the second level review for applications that contain “public” lands.
6. Send documents, along with the completed second level review checklist, via e-mail or fax to Financial Management for second level review.
7. When you are notified that the State Programs staff has signed and obligated the contract, print the 1155 and 1202 signature pages and place them in the case file.

Questions on the content of this bulletin should be directed to the Area Farm Bill Specialist or Area Biologist.

/s/
JEFF BURWELL
State Conservationist

Attachments: SGI Threat Checklist