

# Planning



## Getting Started with a Conservation Plan

As a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract nears its end, landowners will be making decisions on what to do next with their land.

Before deciding what to do when a CRP contract expires, it is important to consider several factors including soil productivity and limitations, past yields, commodity prices, production, conversion or renovation costs, and other required investments.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) encourages landowners to visit their local NRCS field office for assistance with developing a comprehensive conservation plan prior

to making a decision on expired CRP contracts.

An NRCS-approved conservation plan is critical and is developed by first understanding the resource needs and a landowner's desired land use goals, then created based on sound, scientific practices.

These assessments help NRCS technicians develop solutions that best match each landowner's goals with the needs of the land.

At the very least, expired CRP contracts, which will be returned to crop production needs to get an updated conservation plan on file since many parcels are operating under outdated plans.



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The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to help agricultural producers and others care for the land.

NRCS has six mission goals that include:

- High quality, productive soils
- Clean and abundant water
- Healthy plant and animal communities
- Clean air
- An adequate energy supply; and
- Working farm and ranch lands

[www.co.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov)

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## Options for Expired Conservation Reserve Program Lands in Colorado



Helping People  
Help the Land

# Overview

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) protects millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion and is designed to safeguard the Nation's natural resources.

Acreage enrolled in the CRP is planted to resource-conserving vegetative covers, making the program a major contributor to increased wildlife populations in many parts of the country.

Over two million acres of Colorado's grasslands are currently listed within the CRP with contracts expiring through 2013.

Due to changes in the 2008 Farm Bill, agricultural producers having these grasslands may find little opportunity to re-enroll their land in the CRP.

According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, if a large portion of expiring CRP acres go back into cropland, Colorado will lose many of its important conservation benefits accrued over the lifetime of the contracts that established these grasslands including reduced soil erosion and improved wildlife habitat.

However, if some of the expiring CRP lands are kept in grass and managed for other uses, many of the conservation benefits realized during the CRP contracts could be maintained or enhanced.



# Options



## Options for Expiring Conservation Reserve Program Lands

### Conversion to Grazing Land

#### REQUIREMENTS AND OPTIONS

- ♦ Develop a conservation plan that outlines grazing management and development needs
- ♦ Install identified conservation measures for proper grazing distribution
- ♦ If using Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds to install identified practices, producer **MUST WAIT UNTIL CRP CONTRACT EXPIRES**
- ♦ May be able to locate and use other funds to begin some work prior to contract expiration
- ♦ Conservation Easements
- ♦ Grassland Reserve Program (grazing land only)

### Conservation Reserve Program -

encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland or other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as tame or native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filterstrips, or riparian buffers.

- ♦ Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (crop and grass lands)

### Conversion to Cropland

#### REQUIREMENTS AND OPTIONS

- ♦ Develop a conservation plan to maintain compliance and program eligibility
- ♦ Identified measure must be installed within the first year
- ♦ Must address Threatened and Endangered Species and Species of Concern
- ♦ Current policy allows some work to begin up to five months prior to expiration of contract
- ♦ Will be at least until July 2010 before income begins
- ♦ Will again be subject to market and weather changes, both negative and positive.

### Enrollment in Continuous CRP

- ♦ **SAFE** - The new State acres for wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program focuses on high priority wildlife habitat areas, and aims to retain desirable cover to halt the decline of numerous at-risk species.
- ♦ **CREP** - the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program helps protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, and restore wildlife habitat.
- ♦ **High priority conservation practices** - an opportunity to re-enroll a portion of expired land into Continuous CRP and focuses on environmentally sensitive land.

### NRCS Programs that Can Help:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP)
- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
- Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP)