



2011 Annual Report Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

This report contains fiscal year activity for the state of Colorado from the time period of October 2010 to September 2011.

Who We Are

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 farms and ranchlands.

Vision

Productive Lands -
Healthy Environment

Mission

Helping People Help the Land

“CRP has provided an economic benefit for rural communities and has kept our family and our community alive.”

NRCS Program Manager

Within the next five years, over **1.3 million acres** of CRP will come out of contract in Colorado, causing landowners and producers to reconsider the management of these lands. While some fields may return to cropland, many acres of CRP are environmentally sensitive and not suited to annual crop production.

The Program

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s single largest environmental improvement program and has proven to be one of the most effective.

The program allows landowners and operators to enter into 10- to 15-year contracts with USDA to convert highly erodible cropland and other environmentally sensitive cropland to vegetative cover such as introduced and native grasses, wildlife habitat and foodplot plantings, trees, filter strips, or riparian buffers.

In exchange, landowners receive annual rental payments for the land and costshare assistance for establishing certain conservation practices. CRP continues to be a popular conservation program in Colorado and in other Northern Plains states.

CRP Goals

- To reduce erosion
- To improve water quality
- To enhance wildlife habitat

Colorado CRP (as of September 2011)

- 2.2 million acres of cropland enrolled
- 12,281 contracts enrolled in CRP
- 36 out of 63 counties had contracts
- \$68 million total in rental payments annually

- \$34 per acre average rental payment
- 1,848 offers were accepted on 368,468 acres

CRP’s Continuous Sign-up

This feature of the program allows the landowner to establish certain conservation buffer practices on cropland and marginal pasture, and to enroll the land in CRP at any time without having to go through the process of submitting a competitive offer.

Competitive offers are required during “regular” CRP signups. Conservation buffers help to control potential pollutants and manage other environmental concerns, which include:

- Filter strips
- Field borders
- Grassed waterways
- Field windbreaks
- Shelterbelts
- Contour grass strips
- Riparian forest buffers

NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAM SUCCESS STORIES

Dust Settles on Baca County Thanks to CRP

Baca County, Colorado, located in the semi-arid, southeastern corner of the state, is considered by locals to be a land of sifting sand, constant breezes, abundant sunshine, and sporadic rainfall. Residents of Baca County take pride in their strong work ethic. This work ethic coupled with a fervent sense of stewardship toward the land has resulted in highly successful participation in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Baca County is comprised of 1,637,426 acres, including 887,096 acres of cropland used primarily for the production of forage, wheat, corn, grain sorghum and sunflowers. Of these cropland acres, more than 262,868 acres are enrolled in CRP.

Much of Baca County is sandy soil and the entire county is considered highly erodible - susceptible to the impacts of both wind and water erosion. During the midst of the dust bowl era in the 1930's and again during the severe drought of the 1950's, Baca County was hard-hit experiencing severe dust storms," dirt drifts", and buried fence rows. During that time, air quality was so poor that Baca County residents hung wet rags in their windows attempting to keep blowing soil out of their homes.

The 1986 CRP enrollment period presented Baca County producers with an opportunity to benefit financially while helping protect the precious and fragile cropland. Not wanting to relive the dust bowl days and recognizing a chance to protect and preserve their environment, landowner response to CRP was overwhelming. Baca County quickly reached the 25 percent acreage enrollment limitation. With still more interest in the CRP program, Baca County was one of only five Colorado counties to receive a special waiver allowing up to 30 percent of the county's cropland acres to be enrolled in CRP.

CRP practices in Baca County range from native, warm-season grass and legume mixtures to a combination of grasses and shrubs suitable for enhancing wildlife habitat. With the establishment of CRP acres, wildlife numbers in Baca County have increased - especially deer and various upland bird species.

"CRP has most definitely been instrumental in controlling erosion, preserving wildlife, and generating a healthier economy for Baca County's agricultural community. I view CRP as one of the most beneficial programs implemented for agriculture," said Rosalie Bitner, Baca County CRP landowner.

From 2001 to 2004, Baca County faced one of the worst drought periods on record, but this time, the land was prepared to weather the harsh conditions. The countryside was blanketed with vegetation planted through the CRP. The landscape was brown and dry, but no soil drifted into the neighboring fence rows and no blowing sand darkened the skies. The well-planned and maintained CRP practices helped ensure that air quality was not adversely affected by the dry, windy conditions.

Before CRP



After CRP

