



New Mexico Natural Resources Conservation Service Farm Bill Series

September 2008

Previewing the Farm Bill Part II - WHIP

This is the second part of a series on the 2008 Farm Bill. The first part reported on some of the key elements of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This brief article covers some of the noteworthy features of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program as defined in the new 2008 Farm Bill.

Like most new things, the 2008 Farm Bill has raised many questions.

The rule-making process for this major piece of legislation is currently underway, and how its conservation provisions may apply to a specific situation, as always, is best answered by a visit to your local Natural Resources Conservation Service field office when information becomes available.

We do have some information at this time, however, and as one wise woman said, "It is best to take this in small bites." Therefore, we wish to pass along what we know a piece at a time and in this article spotlights the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

- Authorized funding

Funding for WHIP is authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill at \$85 million per fiscal year through 2012. Actual funding will depend on the money appropriated by Congress which may or may not be the total amount authorized each year.

- Payment limitations

WHIP payments made, either directly or indirectly, to a person or legal entity, may not exceed \$50,000 per year.

Competition for funding is on a statewide basis.

- Changes in land eligibility

Non-agricultural lands, as well as state, county, or local government-owned lands are now ineligible for WHIP

Land eligible for WHIP includes:

- Private agricultural land
- Non-industrial private forest land
- Tribal land

The 2008 Farm Bill authorizes WHIP cost-share payments to be made to landowners to develop other types of wildlife habitat including habitat developed on pivot corners and irregular areas.

- Contract length

There has been no change in the provisions that state contracts are generally 5-10 years in length, depending on the practices installed. Shorter term agreements can be used to meet wildlife emergencies.

There is a new provision that states the total of WHIP funds available for use in long-term agreements to protect and restore plant and animal habitat is increased from 15 percent to 25 percent. Such agreements have a term of at least 15 years.

- Priorities

There is a new provision that states priority may be given to projects that address state, regional, and nation conservation initiatives.

To monitor the development of the rules guiding implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill conservation provisions, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2008/index.html>