



Restoring North Dakota's Wetlands through the Wetlands Reserve Program

Towner County
Land Value for 30 year WRP
Easement/Contract: \$562.50/Acre
(Valid through September 2009)



February 2009

Contact your local NRCS office for more information.

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What is the Wetlands Reserve Program?

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is the Nation's premier wetlands restoration program. It is a voluntary program that offers landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) manages the program, as well as provides technical and financial assistance to landowners who participate in WRP.

Wetlands Reserve Program:

- Is a volunteer program offered nationwide.
- Offers payment, based on the agricultural value, for wetlands and associated uplands that have been degraded or converted to agricultural uses.
- Pays up to 75 percent reimbursement for restoration costs.
- Allows landowner to retain control of access – public access is not required.
- Landowner maintains ownership of land – they have the right to hunt, fish, trap, and pursue other undeveloped and appropriate recreational uses.
- Allows for land to be sold.
- Provides additional benefits for the entire community:
 - improved water quality
 - enhanced habitat for wildlife
 - reduced soil erosion
 - reduced flooding
 - improved water supply.

Eligibility

Landowner

To participate in a 10-year restoration cost-share agreement, you need to show evidence of ownership. To offer a WRP easement, you must have owned the land for at least seven years prior to enrollment, with limited exceptions.

Land

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

- Wetlands cleared and/or drained for farming, pasture, or timber production.
- Lands adjacent to restorable wetlands that contribute significantly to wetland functions and values.
- Degraded wetlands.
- Upland areas needed to provide an adequate ecological buffer or that otherwise contribute to defining a manageable boundary.
- Drained wooded wetlands where hydrology will be fully restored.
- Existing or restorable riparian habitat corridors that link protected wetlands.
- Lands substantially altered by flooding where there is a likelihood of successful wetland restoration at a reasonable cost.

Ineligible Land

- Wetlands converted after December 23, 1985.
- Certain Conservation Reserve Program contract lands where trees have been successfully established.
- Government lands.
- Lands where conditions make restoration impossible.



Landowner Use and Responsibility

In all cases, the landowner retains ownership and responsibility for the land, including any property taxes based on its assessed value as wetland or nonagricultural land. Landowner is responsible for control of noxious weeds. The landowner controls access to the land; has the right to hunt, fish, trap, and pursue other undeveloped and appropriate recreational uses; and may sell or lease land enrolled in WRP.

The landowner may request uses that are compatible with protecting and enhancing the wetland and associated upland habitat. For example, NRCS may approve haying, grazing, or harvesting of timber under certain conditions, depending on amount, method, timing, and duration. On an annual basis, landowners may make compatible-use requests throughout the life of the easement or agreement.



Landowner Options

In North Dakota WRP offers two options to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands and associated uplands: 10-year restoration cost-share agreements, or 30-year easements.

Restoration Cost-share Agreements

This is a 10-year agreement to restore degraded or destroyed wetlands and associated upland habitat. USDA pays up to 75 percent of the cost of the restoration. No easement is placed on the property and there is no easement or other land incentive payment.

30-Year Easements

These easements expire at the end of 30 years. USDA will pay 75 percent of the lesser value of an market analysis or appraisal, the geographic area rate cap or landowner offer. USDA will pay 75 percent of the restoration costs and conservation partners may pay the remaining 25 percent. USDA will pay appraisal, legal survey and title costs associated with establishing the easement.

How to Enroll

Landowners may sign up at the local NRCS office. Periodically during the year, NRCS will rank all eligible applications for funding consideration.

1. Sign-up

Begin by making an appointment with your local NRCS office. At that time, you may:

- Review eligibility and easement requirements.
- Submit a signed application form. (The application is NOT a commitment by the landowner.)

2. Preliminary restoration plan and cost estimate

NRCS will visit the site and evaluate the land's eligibility. Then, the landowner, with help from NRCS, develops a preliminary plan for restoring wetland functions. The plan includes types of management, vegetative and structural practices necessary, and estimates costs associated with restoration. The preliminary restoration plan provides reliable cost estimates that are used for ranking applications.

3. Notification of acceptance

All applicants will be notified of the status of their application, and whether it has been tentatively accepted. Upon acceptance the NRCS will determine the agricultural value of the offered land. The landowner will then be offered a payment amount for the 30-year easement option.



4. Easement or agreement process begins

Agreements

Once the project is approved for funding, the landowner signs an agreement that allows NRCS to proceed with restoration implementation.

Easements

Once the landowner accepts the offer by signing the Option Agreement, the easement acquisition process begins. NRCS will acquire title insurance and a legal land survey in order to record the easement. The easement is then recorded, the landowner paid, and the wetland restored according to the restoration plan.

Benefits of Wetlands Conservation

Source of income – Wetlands restoration frequently can be targeted to marginal lands that tend to be higher risk in terms of agricultural income. Payments the landowner receives from easements may supplement income from the more productive agricultural lands on the farm. Often, these payments provide landowners with the necessary financial resources to continue farming.

Water quality improvement and sediment filtration – Wetlands filter and collect sediment from runoff water, helping prevent mud from clogging lakes and reservoirs farther downstream.

Habitat for wildlife – Wetlands provide migration, breeding, nesting, and feeding habitat for millions of waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife. Wetlands are home to thousands of different plant and animal species, many of which are threatened and endangered. Wetlands also provide winter cover for pheasants and other upland wildlife.

Flood reduction – Many wetlands store water temporarily, allowing the water to percolate into the ground or evaporate. This temporary storage reduces the peak water flow after a storm.

Water Supply – Wetlands are reservoirs for rainwater and runoff, providing needed water for wildlife and improving soil moisture for forage production. Wetlands also help recharge groundwater aquifers.

Recreation and aesthetics – Many individuals and organizations are interested in wetland recreation activities such as wildlife watching and hunting. Wetlands, and the ecological diversity they provide, add beauty to any landscape.