United States Department of Agriculture

NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

Prairie Pothole Region Fact Sheet

Alternative Uses of Restored Wetlands on Expiring CRP

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Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants who restored wetlands have made a significant contribution to improve wildlife habitat. As CRP contracts expire, landowner(s) will need to decide whether to maintain those restored wetlands or convert them to conditions existing prior to CRP. The following are some options to consider when making that decision.

CRP Wetland Retention:
Restored wetlands, buffers and uplands can be re-enrolled in the continuous CRP. Various wetland practices are available depending on location and acreage cap in South Dakota. CP23, CP23A, CP27/CP28, CP37 and CP38 are continuous CRP practices that can be used to re-enroll restored wetland acres and associated uplands. In many cases, the current CRP cover will be accepted without any modifications. Contact the local USDA Service Center to determine the CRP practice best suited for your situation.

Mitigation:
After a CRP contract expires, landowners with an interest in a long-term agreement can be compensated to use restored wetlands as mitigation. Ditch plugs do not need to be removed and then re-installed for a wetland to be used for mitigation credits. Potential buyers of mitigation credits include USDA participants who want to drain wetlands to improve production.

Landowners have the option of setting up a mitigation bank from which they can sell mitigation credits. Mitigation banking is an efficient and effective method to meet wetland mitigation needs for projects or activities that impact wetlands. The mitigation bank will have an established number of mitigation credits available for use. Mitigation credits, that an expired CRP field can yield, will vary depending on the acreage of wetlands restored and the extent of drainage in place prior to restoration.

Wetlands totally drained or filled prior to December 23, 1985, and that are considered a prior converted (PC) wetland will garner the most credits. Partially drained or filled wetlands (FW) prior to December 23, 1985, existing wetlands (W) and a 30-foot upland buffer around the perimeter can also yield mitigation credits but usually at a reduced rate.

If landowners have restored wetlands on expiring or expired CRP contract acres and you are interested in using them for mitigation credits, contact the local NRCS office prior to making the decision to remove ditch plugs.

The price of wetland mitigation credits varies depending on current land prices, the tract of land and other factors.

Wildlife Habitat:
Wetlands and associated grasslands provide excellent habitat for migratory waterfowl and shore birds. They also provide excellent

habitat for resident wildlife species, especially during the winter. Ring-necked pheasants and white-tailed deer use cattails and other wetland vegetation to survive harsh winters. These heavily vegetated wetlands frequently provide better winter habitat than minimally designed multi-row tree and shrub plantings.

Management of restored wetlands for wildlife habitat depends on the group of wildlife that interest you. While cattail wetlands provide excellent winter habitat for ring-necked pheasants, white-tailed deer and furbearers, their value as waterfowl and shorebird habitat is limited due to lack of open water and exposed shoreline. Cattail wetlands also provide blackbird roosting habitat, which can negatively impact crop production depending on the size and location of the wetland.

Restored wetlands have contributed to the recovery of waterfowl populations since the 1980s. Wetland management can vary according to species goals. Management through grazing, burning, mowing, sediment removal or spraying can reduce cattails and provide waterfowl and shorebird habitat while reducing blackbird roosting sites. However, these management practices could reduce white-tailed deer and ring-necked pheasant winter cover.

Forage Production:
If the expired CRP contract will remain in perennial vegetation, restored wetlands can increase forage available for grazing or hay production. Depending on vegetation type, wetlands can produce over two tons of forage per acre. Restored wetlands can provide livestock forage throughout the growing season when used as part of a grazing system. Depending on the size and depth of the restored wetland, the basin can also provide livestock water, especially early in the grazing season. Livestock grazing can have impacts on cattail choked wetlands. Cattle will graze cattails allowing for other wetland species to grow in the wetland. Reducing cattails will provide more open water area for waterfowl and the potential to create greater species diversity in the wetland.

Photo courtesy of Central Grassland Research Extension Center

Flood Water Retention and Water Quality Improvement:
Restored wetlands within a watershed play an important role in the reduction of downstream flooding, pollution abatement, and ground water recharge. Water stored in wetlands and the time lag created for water to filter through wetlands reduces flood peaks, improves water quality by reducing nutrients and sediment load and replenishes aquifers by increasing ground water recharge.

For additional information regarding any of these options contact the local USDA Service Center-NRCS office.