

**Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)  
NRCS Virginia - ACEP-WRE Ranking Criteria Worksheet FY2023**

**1) Hydrology and Soil**

***Hydrology Restoration Need and Percent Restorable Hydrology - Extend to which ACEP-WRE purposes would be achieved on the offered land.***

Determine proportion/percentage of the offered wetland / hydric soil in all land categories.

Exclude non-hydric acres in the calculation.

Consider the impacts to hydrology described above and the current stressors to the ecosystem that will remain after restoration.

Hydrology restoration potential, which must comprise at least 50 percent of the points for conservation benefits, should take into consideration:

The extent to which the original hydrology can be restored;

The extent to which the potential hydrology restoration or enhancement practices will successfully provide hydrologic conditions that are suitable for the needs of the native wetland-dependent wildlife species that occurred in the area and are appropriate to support the wetland functions and values being restored or enhanced on the site.

Physical site characteristics that affect hydrology restoration potential, including but not limited to—

\* Soil properties, such as soil texture, soil structure, and soil drainage classes.

\* Landscape features, such as geomorphic position, slope, and water table depths.

\* Flooding characteristics, including frequency, timing, duration, depth, and sources.

\* The source of the hydrology, the degree and type of hydrologic manipulation, existing connectivity and barriers to connectivity with hydrology sources.

\* As applicable, the reliability and availability of the water delivered through water rights, and the degree of reliance on such water rights to successfully restore hydrology.

**Pts. Available Points**

**30**

5 0% - 25% Restorable Hydrology of the Offered Wetland

10 26%-50% Restorable Hydrology of the Offered Wetland

20 51%-75% Restorable Hydrology of the Offered Wetland

30 76%-100% Restorable Hydrology of the Offered Wetland

**Water Rights Applied to Hydric Soil** - As applicable, the reliability and availability of the water delivered through water rights, and the degree of reliance on such water rights to

**2) successfully restore hydrology.**

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Water Delivered through Water Rights**

10 0% to 25% Depends on Reliability and Availability of Water Rights

Greater than 26% and less than or equal to 50% Depends on Reliability and Availability of

8 Water Rights

Greater than 51% and less than or equal to 75% Depends on Reliability and Availability of  
5 Water Rights  
Greater than 76% and less than or equal to 100%Depends on Reliability and Availability of  
0 Water Rights

### 3) Historic Wetland Loss

Use MRLC NLCD EVA Tool indicating extent of wetland loss by county from 2001-2019 -  
Example ---Values vary but this question tends to favors urbanizing areas -% loss in  
Fredericksburg -9.19; Loudoun -1.35; Suffolk -.6; Arlington -1.53; Albemarle +1.29;  
Hanover -.85; Chesterfield -1.77 -italics for review and will not be included in posted tool

#### Available Points

10

- 10 Over 1% extent of historic wetland loss  
0 Under 1% extent of historic wetland loss

### 4) PROXIMITY AND CONNECTIVITY TO PROTECTED LANDS

Points are awarded to properties that are adjacent to or near already protected areas, i.e. state-owned lands, federally-owned lands, existing WRP/WRE easements and other permanent conservation easements held by other entities. Assess via the VA DCR Natural Heritage Data Explorer or the National Conservation Easement Database.

#### Available Points

30

#### Pts. Location Priority

- 30 Adjacent or adjoining protected property as described above  
20 Within 1 mile of protected property  
10 Within 1-5 miles of protected property  
0 Greater than 5 miles from protected property

### WILDLIFE HABITAT – THREATENED, ENDANGERED, and / or AT RISK SPECIES (refer to 5) signed statement)

Points in this category will not be routinely awarded and are only justified when either 1) accompanied by an opinion of a qualified professional wildlife biologist (e.g. State Biologist, PLB, etc.), or 2) verified by T&E GIS layer within Conservation Desktop.

#### Available Points

10

#### Pts. Importance of Habitat to Threatened, Endangered or At Risk Species

- 10 Offered acres have known and verified use by State and or Federal T&E Species  
8 Offered acres will create habitat for use by State and or Federal T&E Species  
5 Offered acres will create habitat for State Wildlife Action Plan Species  
0 None of above

### 6) Buffer, Adjacent Area

The extent of beneficial adjacent land uses is a factor for sustaining long term function and values.

#### Available Points

30

**Pts. Percentage of Wetland Portion Protected by a Buffer**

- 30 75% to 100% of the restorable wetland is protected by a buffer of 1,000+ feet in width.
- 20 75% to 100% of the restorable wetland is protected by a buffer 500 to 1,000 feet in width.
- 15 50% to 74% of the restorable wetland is protected by a buffer of 1,000+ feet in width.
- 10 50% to 74% of the restorable wetland is protected by a buffer 500 to 1,000 feet in width.
- 5 25% to 49% of the restorable wetland is protected by a buffer of 1,000+ feet in width.
- 0 25% to 49% of the restorable wetland is protected by a buffer 500 to 1,000 feet in width.

**7) Habitat Restored for Migratory Birds**

Habitat that will be restored for the benefit of migratory birds and wetland-dependent wildlife, including diversity of wildlife that will be benefitted or life-cycle needs that will be addressed.

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Habitat Restored for the benefit of Migratory Birds & Wetland Dependent Wildlife**

- 0% to 25% Of Proposed Easement Area Habitat will be restored benefiting Migratory birds and wetland-dependent wildlife
- 0
- Greater than 26% and less than or equal to 50% Of Proposed Easement Area Habitat will be restored benefiting Migratory birds and wetland-dependent wildlife
- 5
- Greater than 51% and less than or equal to 75% Of Proposed Easement Area Habitat will be restored benefiting Migratory birds and wetland-dependent wildlife
- 8
- Greater than 75% and less than or equal to 100% Of Proposed Easement Area Habitat will be restored benefiting Migratory birds and wetland-dependent wildlife
- 10

**8) Habitat diversity and complexity to be restored**

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Habitat Diversity and Complexity Restored**

- 10 Yes. - Habitat Diversity and Complexity will be Restored
- 0 No. - Habitat Diversity and Complexity will not be Restored

**9) Restoration of Native Vegetative Communities**

Points awarded based on assessment in Natural Heritage Data Explorer (NHDE) Conservation Planning- ECOLOGICAL CORES. Enrollment acres are fully or partially within the specified category.

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Restoration of Native Vegetative Communities**

- 10 Offered acres are located within high to outstanding categories
- 0 Offered acres are located within general to moderate categories

**10) Proximity to 303(d) Water Bodies**

“303(d)” is a designation for an impaired and threatened waterway (stream / river segments, lakes), which the Clean Water Act requires all states to submit for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) approval. The Va. Dept. of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is the agency in Va. that is responsible for designating, monitoring and reporting impaired waters to the EPA.

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. 303d Impaired Waterbody**

- 10 Property is located in a 303d impaired waterbody
- 0 Property is NOT located in a 303d impaired waterbody

**11) Capacity of Wetland to improve Water Quality**

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Improve Water Quality**

- 10 The wetland has the capacity to improve water quality
- 0 The wetland DOES NOT have the capacity to improve water quality

**12) Water Quality Benefits Increased Water Storage in the Soil Profile**

Water quantity benefits through increased water storage in the soil profile or through groundwater recharge; attenuation of floodwater flows.

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Water Quality Benefits**

- 10 Yes
- 0 No

**13) Carbon Sequestration**

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Carbon Sequestration**

- 10 There is an opportunity for carbon sequestration
- 0 There is NOT an opportunity for carbon sequestration

**14) Improving climate Change Resiliency**

**Available Points**

**10**

**Pts. Improving Climate Change Resiliency**

- 10 There is an opportunity for improving climate change resiliency
- 0 There is NOT an opportunity for improving climate change resiliency

**15) Location and Size of Restored Wetland Area**

WRE LOCATION AND SIZE OF RESTORED WETLAND AREA (not entire easement area)

The extent to which the purpose of WRE would be achieved on the land (size) is a scalable factor dependent on which geographic region the offered acreage is located.

**Available Points**

**15**

Pts. **Blue Ridge and West; Piedmont; Coastal Plain**

15 2+ acres; > 10 acres; < 25 acres

0 <2 acres; < 10 acres; < 25 acres

**16) On/Off Farm Environmental Threats if the land is used to Produce Agricultural Commodities**

**Available Points**

**15**

Pts. **Environmental Threats if the land is used to Produce Agricultural Commodities**

There are on-farm off-farm environmental threats if the land is used for agricultural  
0 commodities production.

There are NOT on-farm and off-farm environmental threats if the land is used for  
15 agricultural commodities production.

**17) Duration of Agreement**

NRCS Regulations stipulate priority funding based on type of easement term offered.

**Available Points**

**20**

Pts. **Easement Term**

20 Permanent Easement

0 30 Year Easement

**18) Existing Conservation Project**

NRCS Regulations stipulate placing a higher priority on existing conservation projects through programs like CRP. (E.g. High priority is placed on land that is currently enrolled in CRP in a contract that is set to expire within one year from the date of easement application. And it is farmed wetland, and could return to production after the land leaves CRP.) The conservation project must meet NRCS standards and specifications for wetland restoration and be deemed to meet the criteria of a wetland. These do not include projects to be funded under WRE without significant changes: e.g. WRE does not fund ponds, shallow water areas for wildlife, or dikes over existing wetlands.

**Available Points**

**15**

Pts. **Existing Conservation Project**

15 Expiring CRP

8 Former WHIP, Partners for Wildlife, DU, or other wetland restoration project

0 None or conservation project that does not meet wetland criteria

**19) Restoration Cost - Contract Type**

NRCS regulations stipulate consideration of costs in its prioritization of applications.

Landowner acknowledges that projected restoration practices, locations, extents, quantities, and associated costs developed by NRCS are subject to change and that NRCS has final discretion on the implementation of the WRPO. The Landowner must identify their preferred method for NRCS to provide financial assistance for restoration on the Property: Landowner Contract (Conservation Program Contract, similar to other NRCS programs), or Federal Contract (requires a high cost in NRCS staff resources.)

The landowner's signature will be required on this.

**Available Points**

**15**

**Pts. Cost of Contract Type for Implementation**

15 Low Cost – Landowner Contract (Conservation Program Contract)

0 High Cost – Federal Contract – high cost in NRCS staff resources.

**20) Alternative Community**

Does the proposed restoration exceed a threshold of 30% alternative community, over the historic community?

**Available Points**

**15**

**Pts. Alternative Community**

0 The proposed restoration does exceed a threshold of 30% alternative community.

15 The proposed restoration does NOT exceed a threshold of 30% alternative community.

**21) Existing Easements on Property**

This question relates to the presence or absence of existing easements on the application property. An existing easement may impact the eligibility and valuation of the potential enrollment. (Any easements will show up in the title search to be ordered by NRCS, but it is less costly to know about it at this time, during the ranking process.) At this time the answer to this question does not have points assigned to it

**Available Points**

**0**

**Pts. Names of Types of Other Easements and Who Holds the Easements**

0

**22) Restoration Cost - Cost Effectiveness**

NRCS regulations stipulate consideration of costs in its prioritization of applications. Cost effectiveness of enrolling the land to maximize the environmental benefits per dollar expended, applications that have a lower cost per environmental benefit ratio will receive higher rankings.

**Available Points**

**25**

**Pts. Cost in Order of Magnitude**

25 Low Cost – including natural regeneration, burning, seeding and low cost exclusion fencing

Medium Cost – including spot control of invasives, low density tree and/or shrub planting,

15 high cost exclusion fencing, alternative watering facility, earthen ditch plugs

High Cost – including high density tree and/or shrub planting, access road, stone or rock  
0 ditch plugs.

### **23) Restoration Funding from LO or Partner**

Other (NON-NRCS) Restoration Funding (from Landowner or Partner)

Whether the landowner or another person or entity is offering to contribute financially to the cost of the easement or other interest in the land to leverage Federal funds. The landowner or a partner organization will provide goods and services equivalent to the following proportion of the total project restoration cost.  
The landowner's signature is required.

#### **Available Points**

**20**

Pts. **Percent of Costs borne by landowner or partner**

- 20 75% to 100% of restoration costs
- 15 50% to 74% of restoration costs
- 10 25% to 49% of restoration costs
- 5 5% to 24% of restoration costs
- 0 NRCS will bear 96% to 100% of the restoration costs

### **24) Length of Time Since Last Timber Harvest**

Length of Time Since Last Timber Harvest (complete harvest or thinning not for wildlife habitat management)

#### **Available Points**

**10**

Pts. **Length of Time since last timber harvest**

- 10 >20 years
- 5 10-20 years
- 0 <10 years

### **25) Reduction of NRCS COST: LO Payment (Easement Acquisition)**

Landowners may voluntarily offer their eligible acres to NRCS at a discount below the Fair Market Easement Value (FMEV) in order to make the project more competitive among its peers. Landowners must provide their NRCS District Conservationist with a separate written offer on the Landowner's Bid Worksheet to earn points under this criterion. District Conservationist should transmit a copy of the landowner's offer to the State Office along with the application packet.

New in FY-16: The landowner payment will be determined by an individual property appraisal to determine the "Fair Market Easement Value" (FMEV.) The Owner's Bid will be expressed as a percentage, rather than a dollar figure. E.g. If the Owner's Bid is "90% of the FMEV", and the FMEV is determined to be \$3,000 (later by appraisal), then the Bid indicates the owner will accept \$2,700 per acre.

#### **Available Points**

**15**

Pts. **FMEV Reduction According to Owner's Bid**

- 15 < or = 70% of FMEV
- 10 71% to 80% of FMEV
- 5 81% to 90% of FMEV
- 0 91% to 100% of FMEV

**26) Extent to which ACEP-WRE purposes would be achieved**

<b>Available Points</b>	<b>25</b>
25 ACEP-WRE purposes would be achieved	
0 ACEP-WRE purposes would not be achieved	

**27) The Productivity of the Offered Land**

<b>Available Points</b>	<b>10</b>
10 Offered land is in productivity	
0 Offered land is not in productivity	

<b>Program and Resource Priorities</b>	<b>400</b>
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