Agenda

RESTORE Colorado – Seth Gallagher, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Overview of Farm Bill Programs – Noe Marymor, NRCS Area 2 Biologist

Role of STC CO Wildlife Subcommittee – Krystal Phillips, NRCS State Biologist

An explanation of your role as a member – Krystal Phillips, NRCS State Biologist


Question and Answer Session – All NRCS Biologists
RESTORE Colorado

Seth Gallagher, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
NRCS
2018 Farm Bill Programs Crash Course

Noe Marymor, Area 2 Wildlife Biologist
Natural Resources Conservation Service
August 2020
What We’ll Cover

2018 Farm Bill Overview
General Participant Eligibility
Environmental Quality Incentives Program
Conservation Reserve Program
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
Conservation Stewardship Program
Conservation Technical Assistance
But First, Some Terms...

NRCS = Natural Resources Conservation Service
FSA = Farm Services Agency
EQIP = Environmental Quality Incentives Program
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program
ACEP = Agricultural Conservation Easement Program
  ◦ ACEP – WRE = Wetland Reserve Easements
  ◦ ACEP – ALE = Agricultural Land Easements
CSP = Conservation Stewardship Program
CTA = Conservation Technical Assistance
What is the 2018 Farm Bill?

Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018

One of the many 5-year revisions to the 1985 Food Security Act
  ◦ FY19-FY23

Title II = Conservation Title
  ◦ NRCS, FSA Programs and Spending
2018 Farm Bill Spending

- Nutrition 76%
- Conservation 7%
- Commodity 7%
- Crop Insurance 9%
- Other 1%

Total outlays = $428 billion

Source: USDA Economic Research Service, based on Congressional Budget Office, Farm Spending
Participant Eligibility for Farm Bill Programs

Compliance with Highly Erodible Lands and Wetland Compliance Provisions of the Farm Bill
- Must farm to accepted minimum erosion levels
- Limits new hydrological manipulation of wetlands for farming purposes

Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)
- Income of less than $900,000 unless 2/3 of that income is from agricultural operations
- Rare exceptions to AGI
Environmental Quality Incentives Program

“EQIP”

Provides financial incentives and technical assistance to implement conservation activities on agricultural and non-industrial private forestland

Offers ~50-65% cost-share

Contracts typically last 2-5 years
Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Types of Projects
◦ Grazing management and associated infrastructure
◦ Irrigation water management
◦ Soil health/crop rotations/cover crops
◦ Wildlife plantings
◦ Forest health treatments
◦ Stream restoration
◦ And more
Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Eligibility

◦ Must be a land owner or operator
◦ Land must be used for agricultural production or NIPF (Non-Industrial Private Forestland)
◦ Public land is allowable if the application is from a private lessee (State land board, BLM, etc)

Applications taken year-round. Batched once per year for competitive ranking and funding.
NRCS EQIP Spending

Local EQIP Funding Priorities are supposed to be developed with input from “Local Working Groups” (LWGs) which are partnership meetings led by local Conservation Districts.
NRCS EQIP Spending

50% to livestock projects
10% to wildlife projects
5% to Beginning Farmer and Ranchers
5% to Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers

Other subaccounts:
- Organic Transition
- Air Quality
- Ogallala Aquifer
- High Tunnel
Colorado EQIP Funding

Annual EQIP allocations vary from year to year but are generally $30 - 40 million
Conservation Reserve Program

“CRP”

Voluntary long-term cropland retirement program

Contracts administered by the Farm Service Agency

Technical assistance provided by NRCS
Conservation Reserve Program

Program Purposes

◦ Prevent Soil Erosion

◦ Protect Water Quality

◦ Provide Wildlife Habitat
CRP Comes in Four Different Flavors

General CRP

Continuous CRP

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

CRP Grasslands
Current CRP Enrollment

October 2019

Total: 22 million acres

Prepared by FPAC-SC/EPAD/REB
CRP 2020 - 2022 Expiring Acres

As of Oct 2019

Total: 12.4 million acres

Prepared by FPAC/EPAD/REB

Data as of October 2019
General CRP

10-year contracts

Land must meet a specific cropping history

Planted to permanent vegetation of varying quality

Payments:
- Annual rental payment based on soil quality and county cash rent rates
- Cost-share for establishing vegetation

Enrollment open once a year
- Competitive ranking process
- Environmental Benefits Index (EBI)
General CRP

Required to maintain the quality of the planted stand over the life of the contract

Limited opportunities for haying and grazing

◦ In drought – may be able to hay/graze with no financial penalty
◦ Non-drought – may be able to hay/graze with financial penalty
Continuous CRP

Smaller conservation practices
- Windbreaks, field buffers, playa buffers, small pollinator plots

Applications taken on a first come, first served basis

Non-competitive

10-15 year contracts

Payments:
- Annual rental payment based on soil quality and county cash rent rates
- Slightly higher annual payments than General CRP
- Cost-share for establishing vegetation
SAFE

“State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement”

Previously a CCRP Practice

Currently an option of planted cover in General CRP for which applicants receive additional ranking points

Special seedmix requirements

Special restrictions on haying and grazing

Special stand management requirements
Colorado SAFE Projects

### Upland Bird
- Greater prairie chicken, ring-necked pheasant, bobwhite quail, grasshopper sparrow
- Northeast corner of Colorado

### Lesser Prairie Chicken
- Southeast corner of Colorado

### Plains sharp-tailed grouse
- Northern Weld, Logan and Sedgwick counties

### West Slope Grouse
- Greater sage grouse, Gunnison sage grouse, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse
- Portions of the west slope, primarily in NW Colorado

### Shortgrass
- No longer accepting new enrollments but older contracts are active until they expire
Other CRP Enrollments

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

- Partnership projects to address very specific natural resource concerns

- In Colorado, used to retire wells and convert to permanent grass cover in the Republican and Rio Grande Basins.
Other CRP Enrollments

CRP Grasslands

- Purpose is to keep grasslands in permanent grass cover and not converted to crop or other uses.

- 10-15 year contracts

- Annual rental payment for a grazing any lands according to an NRCS grazing plan that maintains the current range quality
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

“ACEP”

Two Parts

◦ ACEP- Wetland Reserve Enhancement (ACEP-WRE)

◦ ACEP – Agricultural Working Lands (ACEP-ALE)
ACEP-WRE

30 year and permanent conservation easements to protect wetlands

Easements held by NRCS

All agricultural and development rights are sold to NRCS

Landowner retains right of fee title and quiet enjoyment

Payments depend on easement term and other factors but have generally been capped at 85% of Fair Market Value of the land.
Any activities on the easement must occur with a Compatible Use Authorization (CUA) granted by NRCS.

- Grazing
- Weed Control
- Hydrology Management
- Road mowing
- etc
Most WRE easements are in the San Luis Valley and lower South Platte basins
ACEP-ALE

Agricultural Land Easements
- to protect working farms and ranches from development

Grants to land trusts and third party easement holders
- Purchase development rights
- Working lands

Eligibility
- Must contain prime or unique soils, certain archeological or cultural resources, protect ag uses.
Conservation Stewardship Program

Compensates landowners for the conservation work they’re already doing on their land and incentivizes additional conservation practices.

Must meet a minimum threshold of conservation being done at time of program application.

Must address additional resource concerns before the end of the contract.
Conservation Stewardship Program

- 5 Year contracts
- Must include all land in an agricultural operation
- Competitive ranking process
Conservation Stewardship Program

Payments

- Payments are based on the amount of conservation currently implemented plus what additional activities landowners choose to adopt.

- Annual payments capped at $40,000/year.

- Contracts last 5 years.
Commonly used wildlife activities in CSP

Wildlife friendly haying
Small pollinator plantings
Wildlife friendly grazing
Snags for tree roosting bats
Leaving standing grain for wildlife
Conservation Technical Assistance

NRCS provides free guidance to landowners and operators on assessing natural resource concerns and implementing conservation activities.
Questions?

USDA is an Equal Opportunity Employer, Provider, and Lender.
Role of STC Wildlife Subcommittee - Policy

An NRCS Wildlife Subcommittee has an advisory role within the State Technical Committee (STC) which is outlined in NRCS amended 7 CFR §610.24.

The STC provides recommendations for establishing technical guidelines and program criteria and priorities necessary to carry out conservation provisions of the Farm Bill. Although the State Technical Committee has no implementation or enforcement authority, USDA considers the Committee's recommendations. The NRCS State Conservationist chairs the committee and its members are composed of individuals and groups who represent a variety of natural resource sciences and occupations including soil, water, air, plants, wetlands, and wildlife.

The NRCS State Technical Committee policy defines the purpose, responsibilities, membership composition, etcetera of a Committee.
NRCS Colorado STC Wildlife Subcommittee

The current NRCS Colorado STC Wildlife Subcommittee chairperson is Terry Fankhauser, Executive Vice President of Colorado Cattlemen’s Association - terry@coloradocattle.org or (303) 431-6422.

NRCS Colorado STC Wildlife Subcommittee Purpose:

Provide recommendations to the STC on landscape management to address wildlife issues across USDA – NRCS programs in Colorado, including, but not limited to:

- incorporating priorities of the Colorado state wildlife action plan and similar plans;
- developing landscape management strategies to improve overall habitat function based on ecological site capabilities;
- advancing wildlife initiatives, programs, and practices; and
- maintaining/establishing program wildlife rankings, priorities, and geospatial focus/priority areas within Colorado.
Your role as a member of the NRCS Colorado STC Wildlife Subcommittee

Conservation partners are an integral part of the NRCS Colorado State Technical Committee (STC) and your membership is advisory in nature.

Members are encouraged to participate in opportunities related to the beforementioned purpose of NRCS Colorado STC Wildlife Subcommittee.

The NRCS Colorado STC Wildlife Subcommittee is not a voting body. However, the chairperson will ensure that a collective recommendation is made to the STC and will identify if there were concerns expressed and/or if it was not unanimous.

Members are urged to bring forward (from those agency’s, organization’s, or group’s they represent) any needs, comments, issues or solutions for the NRCS Colorado STC Wildlife Subcommittee to consider and/or address.

INCLUSIVE – ADVISORY – COLLABORATIVE
NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW)

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) - A Partnership for Conserving Landscapes, Communities & Wildlife

WLFW partnership uses a targeted, win-win approach to improving agricultural productivity and enhancing wildlife habitat.

How?

• WLFW uses a voluntary, innovative approach to benefit high-priority habitat for targeted species of wildlife that are declining or listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

• Through USDA Farm Bill programs, producers can receive technical and financial assistance to restore and improve habitat on their land while strengthening their agricultural operations.

• WLFW gives peace of mind to participating producers that if they maintain the conservation practices and systems that benefit the targeted species, they can continue their farming, ranching and forest operations and remain compliant with the ESA regulatory responsibilities for up to 30 years.

To learn more visit NRCS Colorado Working Lands for Wildlife in Colorado
Re-evaluation schedule for Colorado’s NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Initiatives

Sage Grouse Initiative (FY21-25)
Scheduled Monday, 8/10.

Great Plains Grasslands Initiative (FY21-25)
Rebuild Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative as a broader Great Plains-wide grasslands initiative.
Scheduled Tuesday, 8/18.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (FY21-23)
Scheduled Tuesday, 8/25.

State evaluation criteria for each initiative:
1. Primary threats to target;
2. GIS files identifying priority areas;
3. Primary practices used for each threat;
4. Annual acreage goals; and
5. Estimated Financial Assistance needs from each Farm Bill Program.

DUE Tuesday, 9/1
Questions?

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Post Training Evaluation Survey

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/B57VSDT