

**Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP)  
Announcement of Funding, Proposal Requirements, and Review Criteria**

**Agency:** United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

**Action:** Notice of request for proposals through Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) -WREP.

**Dates:** Eligible partners should submit proposals for ACEP-WREP by email; complete proposals must be received on or before **Monday, November 30, 2020**.

**Address:** Applicants must submit electronic proposals to the appropriate state contact, **Tim Landreneau, Assistant State Conservationist – Easement Programs at [tim.landreneau@usda.gov](mailto:tim.landreneau@usda.gov)**. If submitting more than one proposal, submit each proposal separately.

**Overview:** WREP is a component of ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) through which NRCS enters into agreements with eligible partners to target and leverage resources to address high priority wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement activities and improve wildlife habitat on eligible lands. Potential partners may submit WREP proposals for an individual landowner project, watershed, or geographic area. WREP partners are required to contribute financial or technical assistance match as detailed below. All projects funded through WREP must meet all ACEP-WRE eligibility and program requirements. All WREP transactions will be processed through normal NRCS contracting procedures.

Only State and local units of government, Indian Tribes, and nongovernmental organizations are eligible to submit a proposal and enter into WREP agreements with NRCS. For the purposes of WREP, a nongovernmental organization is an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986. Individual landowners may not submit WREP proposals through this submission process. However, once a WREP agreement has been entered into by NRCS and the partner, eligible landowners may apply for WREP through their local NRCS office. As part of the WREP agreement, approved partners may also help facilitate the submission of landowner applications, provide additional technical or financial assistance to landowners, and provide other resources as defined in the agreement.

Benefits to the partners in WREP agreements include—

- Involvement in wetland protection, restoration and enhancement in high-priority areas.
- Ability to cost-share restoration or enhancement components beyond those required by NRCS.
- Opportunity to leverage funding to critical resource concerns.
- Opportunity to target outreach and enrollment based on priorities identified by partners and supported by NRCS.
- Opportunity to use innovative restoration methods and practices.
- Ability to maximize habitat benefits on new and existing enrollments.

- Ability of partners to utilize their expertise in easement acquisition and restoration to assist NRCS with achieving wetland protection and restoration goals

**Availability of Funding:** NRCS is announcing the availability of up to \$30 million in financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance (TA) funds through the FY 2021 WREP announcement. For WREP, funds are available nationwide to eligible participants through approved partnership projects. Proposals will be selected and agreements executed by the date listed in the attached timeline.

Under WREP, NRCS enters into multi-year agreements with eligible State and local governments, nongovernmental organizations, and Indian Tribes to target and leverage resources to carry out high priority wetland protection, restoration and enhancement activities and to improve wildlife habitat and water quality on new enrollments. Eligible partners should submit complete proposals to the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist or Director.

**FY 2021 WREP Funding Options and Match Requirements:**

In FY 2021, NRCS will make up to \$30 million in WREP funds available. Proposal budgets should include a breakdown of project activities and indicate whether the source of funds are NRCS FA, NRCS TA or partner contributions towards FA or TA. Funds may be obligated with partners as soon as agreements are signed (if cost-share contracts are a component of the Program Agreement) and with individual landowners for WRE acquisition. All funds not obligated before the end of FY 2021 are not guaranteed.

For all proposals, partners must provide a cash and/or in-kind match towards easement acquisition due diligence costs or actual easement restoration costs.

Partner contributions must equal at least 10 percent of the total estimated FA cost for easement acquisition related costs and restoration implementation costs. Proposals that provide partner contributions greater than 10 percent will be given higher consideration in the selection process.

- Partner contributions cannot be used towards actual easement acquisition (easement purchase).
- Funds to be used for outreach activities completed under this agreement are limited to no more than 10 percent of the overall partner contribution and must be identified as TA match.

NRCS will make funds available for agreements that will result in new enrollments of eligible land under a permanent easement, a 30-year easement, or a 30-year contract on acreage owned by Indian Tribes.

- **FA funds** for acquisition will be provided directly to the eligible landowner(s) through an appropriate enrollment agreement
- **FA funds** for easement acquisition due diligence costs or actual restoration costs may be obligated to a project partner through a WREP Program Agreement or to landowners, vendors, or other partners through standard obligation processes.

- **TA funds** for performance of enrollment, due diligence , acquisition support, planning, and restoration activities. These activities may include, but are not limited to, assisting with obtaining, reviewing, and summarizing title or environmental search products; assisting NRCS staff in evaluating and documenting land eligibility; and planning and/or design of the ACEP-WRE project restoration in accordance with NRCS planning procedures and practice standards and specifications. These funds may be provided directly to the partner through a WREP Program Agreement.

Proposals that provide the maximum partner resources as indicated in the Attachment A- WREP Evaluation Sheet will be given higher consideration in the selection process. Partners may also provide incentives to landowners to participate in WREP; however, incentive payments are not considered as part of the match requirement. Incentives include signup bonuses, practice incentive payments, or similar activities not funded through ACEP-WRE.

**Proposal Submission, Review and Notification:** The potential partner must submit proposal by email to the appropriate State contact listed above. The entire project proposal, not including letters of support, must not exceed 15 pages in length, including summary, responses to the information requested in the “Proposal Requirements” section of this announcement, maps, reference materials and other supporting documents. The proposal must follow the format and address all criteria outlined in this announcement and the “Proposal Requirements” section to be considered. The proposal ranking sheet may be used as a guide to assist in developing proposals.

The proposal must include sufficient detail to allow NRCS to evaluate the partner’s priority resource concerns, objectives, cost, and expected outcomes. In order to support this, the partner is required to indicate on the Attachment A WREP Proposal Evaluation Form the page in their proposal where each ranking factor they expect to receive points for is supported. NRCS will review, evaluate, and rank proposals based on the criteria set forth in this announcement. The final proposal is the only document NRCS will use in the evaluation process. The State Conservationist or Director will conduct the initial evaluation of the proposal and will then forward recommended proposals to the NRCS National Headquarters (NHQ) by the date listed attached timeline for final review and selection. Prior to submission of recommended proposals to NHQ, State Conservationists and Directors may contact partners to provide input into the proposal if changes are needed. Potential partners should note that, depending upon available funding and agency priorities, NRCS may offer less financial or technical assistance than the amount requested in the proposal and may require adjustments to the proposal as a condition of recommendation for approval.

If a project is multistate in scope, the proposal must be sent to the State Conservationist or Director in which most of the project area is located; however, the partner is also responsible for obtaining input from all affected State Conservationists or Directors in developing the proposal.

Partners whose proposals are selected will receive an official letter of notification. Upon notification of selection, the partner should contact the appropriate State Conservationists or Director to develop the required agreement and determine other project implementation requirements.

Incomplete proposals and those that do not meet the requirements set forth in this notice will not be considered, and written notification to this effect will be provided. Partner submissions of proposals that are not selected will also be provided written notification. Partner proposals may be withdrawn by written notice to the appropriate State Conservationist or Director at any time prior to selection or execution.

**Proposal Requirements:** The proposal must include the following:

- (1) **Proposal Cover Sheet and Summary.** The first few pages of the proposal must include—
  - (a) Project title.
  - (b) Project director or manager name, telephone, mailing address, and email address.
  - (c) Name and contact information for lead partner submitting the proposal and other collaborating partners.
  - (d) Total amount and type of funds being requested: FA or FA/TA combination.
  - (e) Short, general summary of project, including—
    - (i) Potential acres to be enrolled in the project area.
    - (ii) A description of the purpose and goals of the proposed WREP project.
    - (iii) The project objectives and resource concerns to be addressed.
    - (iv) The geographic location including the States and counties. Include a general location map.
    - (v) Proposed project start and end dates that do not exceed five (5) consecutive years.

- (2) **Detailed Project Description.** Information provided in the proposal must include—
  - (a) A description of the watershed characteristics within the designated focus area covered by the proposal including a detailed map that indicates the desired individual project locations. The description should include information related to land use types, vegetation, soils, hydrology, potential sources of water quality impairments, occurrences of at-risk species, proximity to other protected areas, and a summary of resource concerns.
  - (b) A description of the partners and the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of the partners. Proposals that include resources from partners other than the lead partner must include a letter or other documentation confirming the commitment of resources.
  - (c) A description of the project duration, plan of action, and project implementation schedule. Project proposals may not exceed five (5) years.
  - (d) A description of the financial or technical assistance resources that are requested both in total and annually through WREP and the non-Federal resources provided by the partners that will be leveraged by the Federal contribution.
  - (e) Total budget for the project, including all partner resources that will be leveraged for the project and the amount of WREP being requested for project broken out by fiscal year with totals. Include a description of the amount of funds needed annually for FA or TA funds and the anticipated activities and outcomes broken out by year.

*Note: All funding beyond FY 2021 is subject to change based on availability of funds. NRCS reserves the right and authority to reduce or discontinue project benefits to support this partner agreement based upon funds availability, changes in agency priorities, or inability of partner to deliver resources or provisions of this agreement. Easement, associated restoration agreements and cost share agreements executed with individual landowners are assured of funding for the entire length of the approved*

*obligating document and not subject to provisions of this Program Agreement regarding fund availability.*

- (f) A description of non-Federal resources that will be available for implementation of the proposal. Proposals that include additional non-Federal resources may be given higher consideration in the selection process. Proposals must include a letter or other documentation confirming the commitment of resources from each partner. The partner must clearly state how they intend to leverage Federal funds along with partner resources. Landowner contributions in the implementation of agreed-to wetland restoration and enhancement practices may not be considered any part of a match from the potential partner for purposes of WREP. Partners will also be required to submit a plan for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting progress and outcomes toward achieving the objectives of the agreement.
  - (g) An estimate of the percentage of potential landowners or an estimate of the percentage of acres likely to be enrolled within the project area, compared to the total number of potential landowners or acres located in the project area. A statement of how the partner will encourage participation to guarantee success of the project. It is not necessary for a target area to involve multiple landowners to be selected. Projects will be evaluated based on the ecological merits of the proposal, contributions by the partners, and other identified evaluation criteria.
  - (h) A statement describing **specifically** how the partner will provide outreach, especially to encourage participation by Indian Tribes, beginning farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, veteran farmers or ranchers, and limited-resource farmers or ranchers.
  - (i) A description of the wetland protection, restoration and enhancement activities, associated outcomes to be implemented during the project timeframe, and the general sequence of implementation of the project. Activities may include those efforts undertaken by the partner and those that the partner requests NRCS to address through financial support.
- (3) **Project Natural Resource Objectives and Actions.** The proposal must—
- (a) Identify and provide detail about the natural resource concerns to be addressed and how the proposal's objectives will address those concerns. Objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, results oriented, and include a timeline for completion.
  - (b) For each objective, identify the actions to be completed to achieve that objective and address the identified natural resource concern. Specify which actions are to be addressed through this project using WREP assistance and which are being addressed through alternate non-Federal funding sources or other resources provided.
  - (c) Identify the total acres within the project area that require wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement.

### **For more information on WREP**

Please visit the [National WREP Website](#)

### **Partner Proposal Workshop**

There will be a virtual Partner Proposal Workshop on October 22, 2020 to discuss FY2021 program and ranking criteria changes. If you are interested in attending this workshop, please e-

mail Lisa McCauley, WREP National Program Manager, at [lisa.mccauley@usda.gov](mailto:lisa.mccauley@usda.gov). This session will be recorded and the recording will be available on the National WREP Website.

**State Conservationist or Director Proposal Review:** Partners must submit complete proposals by the date listed attached timeline to the appropriate State Conservationist or Director, who will evaluate proposals for—

- (1) Potential duplication of efforts with other projects or existing programs.
- (2) Adherence to, and consistency with, proposal requirements and program regulation, including requirements related to land and landowner eligibility and other program requirements.
- (3) Expected benefits for project implementation in their States.
- (4) Other issues or concerns of which the State Conservationist or Director is aware that should be considered.
- (5) General recommendation for denial or approval of the project.

If a project is multistate in scope, the State in which the majority of the project area is located will be the lead State responsible for reviewing the proposal and submitting recommendations to NHQ. The lead State will ensure that the other affected States have been fully informed of the proposals and provided an opportunity for input.

**National Review and Selection of Proposals:** The appropriate State Conservationist or Director will review proposals and forward recommendations, with justification, to EPD by the date listed attached timeline for review and selection. The Chief will give a higher priority to proposals that—

1. Significantly include partner contributions to provide technical, planning and restoration assistance per program policy to assist NRCS in implementing the program.
2. Specifically addresses a location within one of the initiative areas identified on the [NRCS FY2021 Conservation Initiatives Map](#).
3. **Clearly describes** existing and planned outreach efforts to promote participation of beginning farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, and Indian Tribes.
4. Has a high potential to improve habitat for migratory birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife.
5. Identifies direct benefits to wetland dependent Federal or State listed threatened and endangered species.

**Proposals will be reviewed and selected by January 15, 2021.** The WREP proposal timeline provides additional time for WREP partners and NRCS staff to prepare new ACEP-WRP enrollments for submission and review in order to be obligated by the end of Federal Fiscal Year deadlines.

**Partnership Agreement:** Upon proposal selection, NRCS will enter into a WREP Program Agreement with the partner(s) as the mechanism for partner participation in WREP. At a minimum, the agreement will address—

- (a) The role of the partner.
- (b) The role of NRCS.
- (c) The format and frequency of reports that is required as a condition of the agreement.
- (d) The plan of work and budget to identify NRCS and partner contribution, as well as other

- funding sources (if applicable) for financial or technical assistance.
- (e) The specified project schedule and timeframe.
  - (f) If TA funds are part of the agreement, they will be obligated under an associated Cost Share Contract with the partner or with a third party.
  - (g) Other requirements deemed necessary by NRCS to achieve purposes of the ACEP-WRE.

**Landowner Applications and Eligibility Requirements:** Once NRCS selects a partner's proposal, landowners within the selected project area may submit an application directly to NRCS for participation in ACEP-WRE. Individual landowner applications will be evaluated and ranked along with other applications in the WREP project area, watershed, or geographic project area, when applicable, to ensure that the properties selected for funding will achieve project objectives.

All projects funded through WREP must meet all ACEP-WRE eligibility and program requirements and all transactions will be processed through normal contracting procedures. The land eligibility criteria for WREP are the same as for AEP-WRE and are listed in 7 CFR Section 1468.30. Wetland restoration and enhancement actions will be designed to improve water quality and maximize wildlife habitat benefits and wetland functions and values in accordance with the ACEP-WRE regulation, 7 CFR Part 1468, and NRCS conservation practice standards and specifications. Additionally, the successful restoration of land and the resultant wetland values must take into consideration the cost of such restoration, as required by the ACEP statute and reflected in the ACEP regulation at 7 CFR Part 1468, Subpart C. Proposals must conform to the ACEP-WRE guidelines for restoration and management of lands subject to a ACEP-WRE easement.

## WREP Evaluation Form

WREP Evaluation Form					
	<b>Spreadsheet #</b>				
	<b>Project Name</b>				
	<b>State</b>				
	<b>Partner</b>				
	<b>Acres</b>				
	<b>Dollars</b>				
	<b>Ranking Score</b>				
<b>Minimal Score to be Considered for Funding is 200pts</b>					
Question	Maximum Points Available	Ranking Criteria	Partner to note page in proposal where ranking factors are supported.	Ranking Score	Reviewer Comments
		<b>Partnership Contributions - 215 Points</b> To what extent does the proposal significantly include partner contributions to provide technical, planning and restoration assistance per program policy to assist NRCS in implementing the program? (Points will awarded based on the significance of these cash or in-kind matching contributions towards the overall estimated acquisition due diligence costs and actual restoration costs.)			
1	65	Partner will provide administrative support for processing WRE applications-may include; assist landowners and NRCS field staff with completing all required forms for the program; determine land and landowner eligibility; work with landowners to ensure offered areas have appropriate legal access; review title and all exceptions and work to clear title encumbrances that are not compatible with a WRE prior to acquisition; acquire and evaluate Environmental Due Diligence reports; acquire boundary surveys or appraisals for offered easement areas-per NRCS specifications.			
2	65	Partner will provide technical services which may include planning and/or design of the WRE project restoration-per NRCS specifications. (NRCS will spot check only)			
3	65	Partner will provide administrative and/ or technical support which may include; acquire restoration contractors, complete permitting requirements or complete construction oversight and design check out-per NRCS specifications. (NRCS will spot check only)			
4	20	Partner will provide a financial contribution of at least 25% of the actual restoration costs of new easements enrolled through this project			
<b>Further goals and objectives of NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives - 80 points</b>					
5	80	Does the proposal specifically address habitat needs in a location within one of the initiative areas on the FY 2020 Conservation Initiatives Map and describe how it will benefit the goals and objectives of the initiative? (Y/N)			
<b>Includes targeted outreach efforts to Underserved Groups 10 points</b>					
6	10	Does the proposal clearly describe existing and planned outreach efforts to promote participation of beginning farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, and Indian Tribes? (Y/N)			
<b>Identifies Resource Outcomes - 95 points</b>					
7	45	Does the proposal have a high potential to improve habitat for migratory birds and other wetland-dependent wildlife? (Y/N)			
8	50	Does the proposal identify direct benefits to wetland dependent Federal or State listed T&E species? (Y/N)			
	<b>400</b>	<b>Total Points Available</b>			

Letter of Support from State Conservationist  
 Additional Partner Support Included

**Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 Timeline Targets for WREP: Entering into New Agreements and Obligations**

<b>ACEP FY 2021 New Enrollment Actions</b>	<b>Completion Date*</b>	<b>Notes</b>
States will publish availability of funds for WREP along with notice of request for proposal.	No Later Than October 15, 2020	
WREP Proposal Workshop for State NRCS Easement Staff (MS Teams) - Recorded	October 15, 2020	Update on FY2021 program changes and ranking criteria.
Partner Proposal Workshop (MS Teams) - Recorded	October 22, 2020	Opportunity to discuss FY2021 program changes and ranking criteria with NRCS National Program Managers.
<b>Proposal deadline for partner submissions to States</b>	<b>November 30, 2020</b>	<b>Partners will submit completed proposals to States for consideration and ranking.</b>
States will submit eligible proposals to NHQ EPD for consideration	December 11, 2020	States will work with partners to finalize budget and review with partners. Post proposal submission to <a href="#">EPD SharePoint site</a> and notify WREP National Program Manager via email.
National Review Board ranks and prioritizes proposals and makes recommendation to Chief	December 30, 2020	Proposals are ranked and prioritized. Evaluate budgetary impacts. Develop recommendations for Chief.
Chief makes proposal selection and EPD communicates decisions back to States.	January 15, 2021	
States notify partners of proposals selected for funding.	January 20, 2021	States communicate with partners to ensure awarded proposal amount is sufficient to implement proposal.
States announce approved WREP proposals for FY 2021	January 20, 2021	Public announcement. This allows for 2 weeks. News release. Departmental coordination. Letter of selection sent to partners approved and letter of non-selection sent to any who didn't rank high enough to be funded this year.
States complete WREP Program Agreement Template and attachments and send to EPD for review.	February 15, 2021	EPD reviews to ensure policy is followed
EPD approves and authorizes State to execute agreements	February 30, 2021	Agreements signed by partner(s) and then STC
States provide a copy of executed agreement to EPD	March 30, 2021	WREP National Program Manager completes NEST data fields to make agreement active and notifies states it is approved and to request funding (link to request funding will be provided at this time).
States request allocations for WREP funding	April 15, 2021	Notify WREP National Program Manager via email when request has been completed.