

Conservation Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2020



Conservation Programs

NRCS field staff completed 100% of the annual program work for Farm Bill programs in spite of extremely challenging circumstances. Accomplishments for fiscal year 2020 for our main conservation programs are as follows:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):

- Obligated over 880 contracts on over 335,000 acres providing over \$24 million in assistance.
- 179 of these contracts served Beginning Farmers and Ranchers. This is a 5% increase in the amount of beginning producers served in 2019. These contracts provided nearly \$7 million in assistance.
- 26 of these contracts served Limited Resource, Socially Disadvantaged or Veteran Farmer/Ranchers providing over \$680,000 in assistance.

Top 10 Conservation Practices implemented through EQIP:

1. Cover Crop
2. Brush Management
3. Watering Facility
4. Irrigation Water Management
5. Fence
6. Pumping Plant
7. Conservation Crop Rotation
8. Livestock Pipeline
9. Water Well
10. Terrace

Natural
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Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- Obligated over 220 contracts on nearly 500,000 acres providing \$20 million in assistance.

Top Practices/Enhancements implemented through CSP:

1. Prescribed Grazing
2. Cover Crops
3. Pest Management
4. Irrigation Water Management
5. Tree/Shrub Plantings
6. Nutrient Management
7. Conservation Cover
8. Brush Management
9. Herbaceous Weed Treatment

CSP-Grassland Conservation Initiative

- Obligated nearly 200 contracts on over 10,000 acres providing over \$900,000 in assistance.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

- Received 9 new agreements on over 1,100 acres providing over \$4 million in assistance.
- Closed 11 ACEP-WRE Easements on over 1,000 acres.
- Easement Acquisition Dollars: Over \$3 million.

Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)

- Received 1 new agreement on 8,900 acres providing nearly \$3 million in assistance.
- Received 2 closed ACEP-ALE easements on over 4,000 acres.
- Federal Easement Acquisition Dollars: Over \$675,000.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Wetland Reserve Easements (RCPP-WRE)

- Received 1 new agreement on 47 acres providing over \$133,000 in assistance.

Agricultural Land Easements (RCPP-ALE)

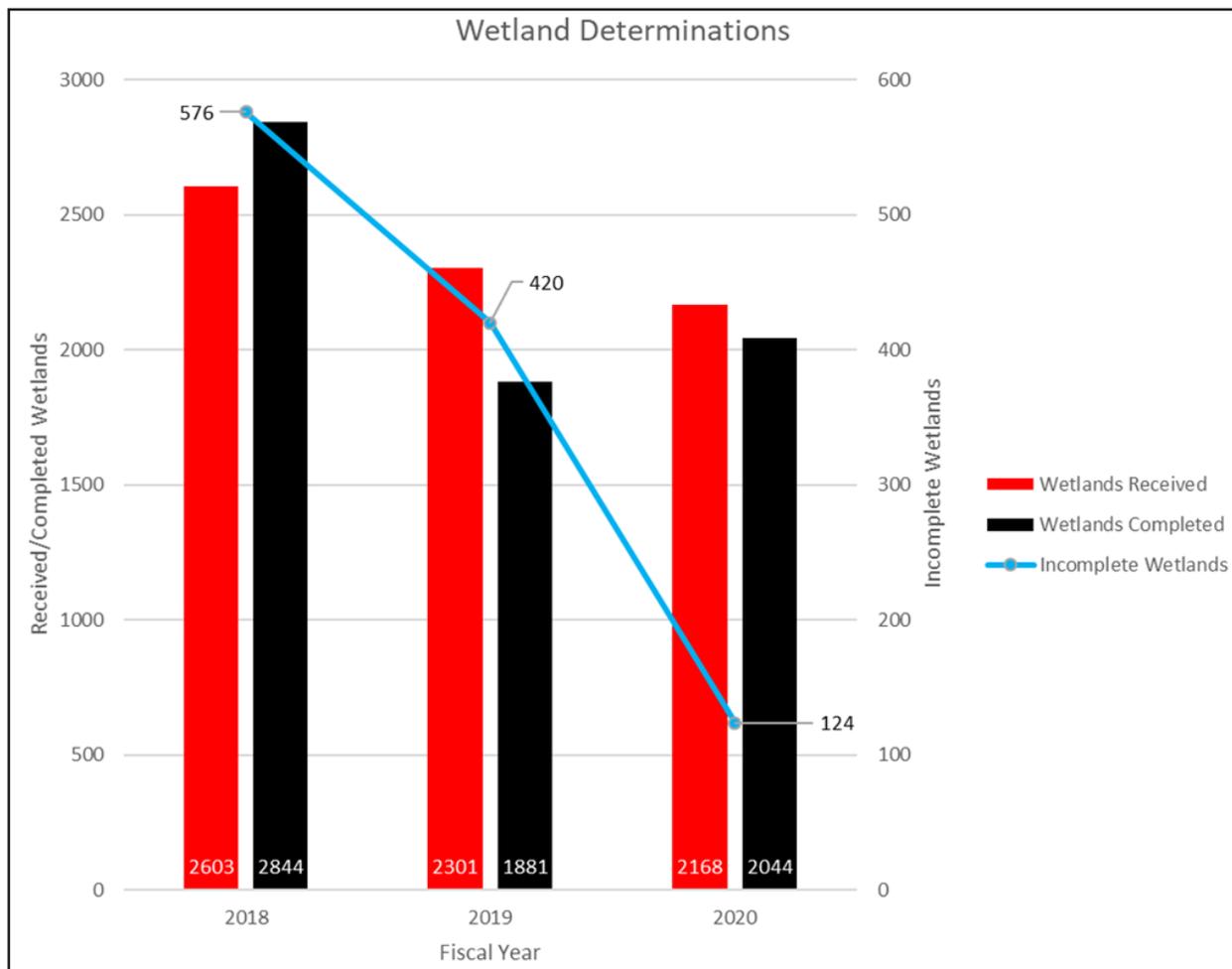
- Received 5 closed RCPP-ALE Easements on 655 acres requiring over \$650,000 to acquire the easement.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE)

- Received 21 eligible applications on 5,590 acres providing over \$20 million in assistance.
- Received 7 applications for possible agreements on over 4,500 acres. The funding needed for these agreements is over \$16.5 million.

Wetlands Team

The wetlands team concept in Nebraska began in 2018 when NRCS transitioned from servicing wetland requests at field offices to servicing requests with a dedicated wetlands team. NRCS made the wetland determination process more efficient by utilizing off-site techniques to complete determinations in a timelier manner. Nebraska NRCS has averaged 2,350 wetland determination requests over the last three years. Wetlands team staff increased from seven employees in 2018 to 13 dedicated employees in 2020. The increase in staff correlates directly with the increase in the number of determinations completed, as shown in the graph below. Wetlands team members are responsible for completing preliminary wetland determinations as well as reconsiderations and restorations/mitigations requests. NRCS will continue to improve the wetland determination process to assist agriculture producers in Nebraska as effectively as possible.



As members of the Nebraska NRCS Wetlands Team increased so did the number of wetland determinations completed.



Helping People Help the Land.

Engineering

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP,) Watershed Flood Protection Operations (WFPO) Programs

- Worked with 20 sponsors on EWP projects totaling nearly \$10 million.
- Total amount of EWP, WFPO, Rehabilitation and Remediation Payments made in FY20 = over \$2 million.
- FY2020 watershed acres enrolled as part of a Watershed Agreement = nearly 2 million acres.
- Total number of new EWP and WFPO agreements built and implemented in FY20 = 32.
- Total number of agreement and contract amendments processed and implemented in FY20 (i.e.: time extensions, additional funds, etc.) = 12.
- Total number of new Indefinite Delivery and Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) - Engineering Contracts built and implemented in FY20 = 2.
- Total number of current/active EWP, WFPO, Rehabilitation and Remediation Agreements managed by NRCS in Nebraska = 47.
- Total number of current/active IDIQ Engineering Contracts managed by NRCS in Nebraska = 4.

Soil Health Impact

In 2020, the Nebraska NRCS Soil Health Team has prioritized outreach and partnerships, while adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Team used innovative approaches to provide soil health trainings and hosting soil health workshops for NRCS conservation planners, partners, and Nebraska's agricultural producers across the state.

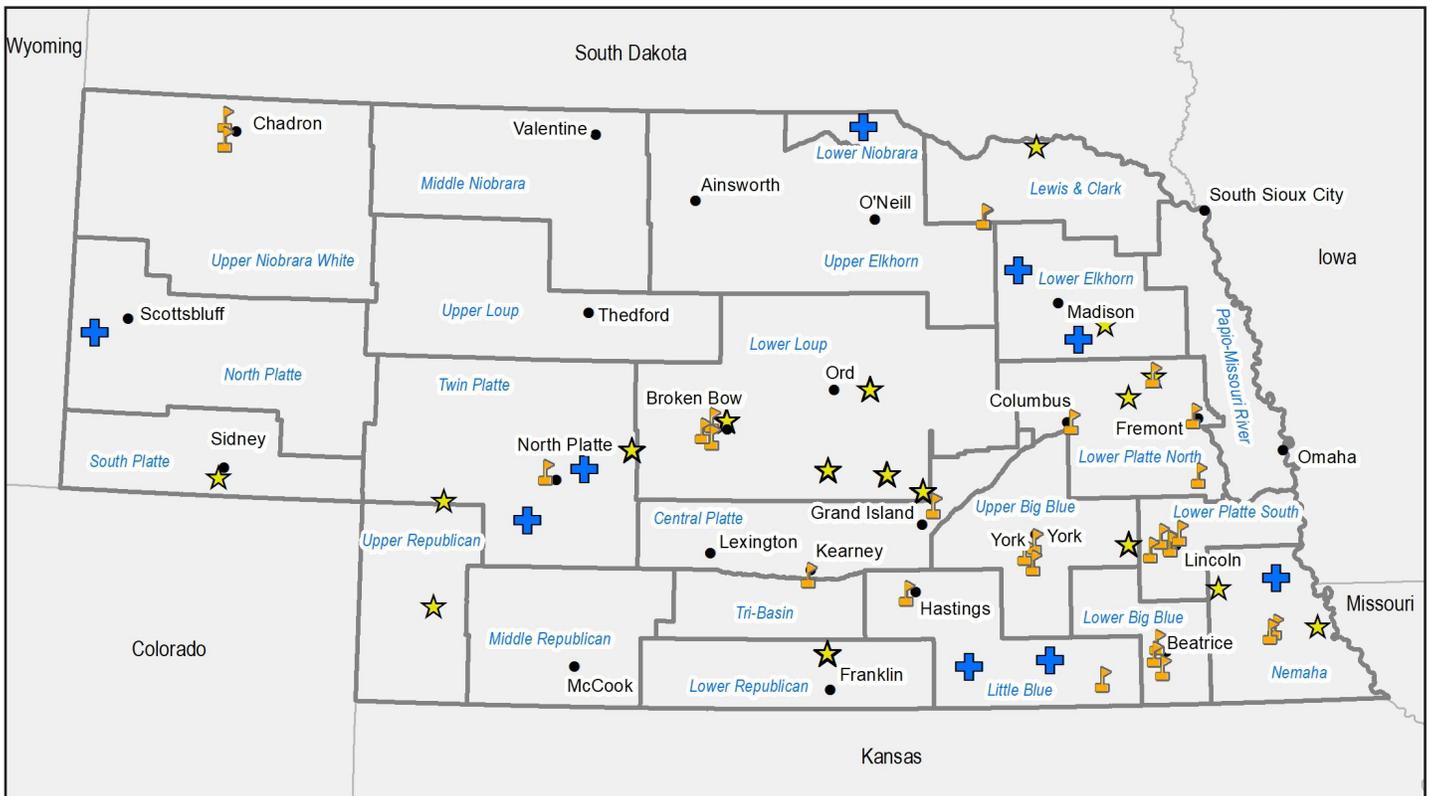
Additionally, the Team inventoried soil physical, chemical, and biological properties from over 25 study sites, representing Nebraska's croplands and rangelands.

In these challenging times, the Team will continue their efforts to promote natural resource conservation in Nebraska in partnership with Nebraska's farmers and ranchers.

Soil health outreach efforts are shown in the map below.

-  = FY20 Soil Health Outreach Events
-  = Rangeland Soil Health Study Areas
-  = Cropland Soil Health Study Areas

Soil Health Outreach Efforts Across Nebraska During FY2020



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Success Stories

Perkins County Wetlands

When people think of the high plains of southwest Nebraska, most may not think about wetlands. But, this area is home to several wetlands that are critical to waterfowl and other wildlife. The NRCS in Grant, Neb., has been working with landowners to restore some of these wetlands.

Through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), landowners are provided funds to restore wetland acres on their farms. NRCS Resource Conservationist Claudia Stevenson said, "These acres are enrolled in a component of CRP into a practice called the Migratory Bird, Butterfly, and Pollinator Habitat State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (Migratory Bird SAFE). This practice focuses on conserving wetlands and gives landowners the opportunity to set the payment rate they wish to receive to offset the removal of the restored wetland acres from production. This helps make this sort of conservation work not only good for wildlife but isn't detrimental to the farmer's bottom line."

This program proved to be very popular with producers in the Perkins County area with 25 applications approved for wetland restorations through this CRP practice. A total of 48 wetlands were restored, including the one shown below, which totaled nearly 190 acres and included over 570 acres of upland habitat.



Expanding the Use of Cover Crops

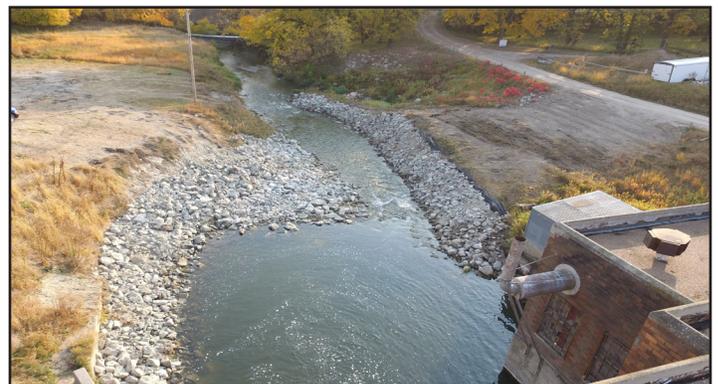
Zach and Cory Masat farm in Antelope County. They enrolled part of their farm in an EQIP cover crop contract, which provided funds to plant covers. Their 30 acre field was seeded into a terminated cereal rye cover crop. The Masats also have cattle. Zach and Cory grew their own rye cover crop seed and will follow that with a 12-way grazing mix. They utilize the cover crops as not only a soil health measure, but a grazing source. The Masat brothers liked how covers worked so well they are expanding the cover crops into non-EQIP contract acres.



Zach Masat and his son Hank in the rye field where they grew their own cover crop seed.

Mill Pond Bank Restoration

Mill Pond in Cherry County had its plunge pool rock riprap compromised during the 2019 Bomb Cyclone. NRCS worked with the Middle Niobrara NRD through the Emergency Watershed Protection program to help repair the damage. The project brought stability to the downstream side of the structure by replacing riprap and seeding native grass on both sides of the channel. Chandler Schmidt, watershed coordinator with the MNNRD said, "If we endure another storm as such, that should withstand the amount and volume of water the dam endured during that bomb cyclone. All in all, the project turned out to be great, so far. We will see how it does handle the next big storm episode."



Mill Pond before EWP repairs (top) and after.

