

EXHIBIT B – To National Instruction 440-310

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Wetland Reserve Easement WRE Ranking Guidance

ACEP-WRE Ranking is subject to change pending the Farm Bill 2018 Final Rule publication

(A) ACEP – Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

- (1) A single national ranking template has been developed for ACEP-WRE enrollments. States must create at least one ranking pool in CART based on this available national ranking template for general ACEP-WRE enrollments. States may create additional ranking pools from the ACEP-WRE national ranking template for other applicable ACEP-WRE enrollment options offered within the State, such as ACEP-WRE reservation of grazing rights, ACEP-WRE bog turtle initiative, in areas with approved Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program agreements, or conversion of 30-year easement duration to permanent projects. States also have the option to create separate ranking pools in CART for the ACEP-WRE national ranking template for other State-identified resource concerns and priorities (see NI 440-310.1D).
- (2) States also have the option to create categories within a single funding pool instead of or in addition to creating separate ranking pools (see NI 440-310.1D).
- (3) Points for ranking questions in the program priority and resource priority sections cannot exceed a total of 400 points.
- (4) For ACEP-WRE, the States may develop the individual ranking questions used to address the required ranking criteria. These State-developed ranking questions must be included in the program priority or resource priority sections as identified below.
 - (i) The following ranking criteria must be addressed in State-developed ranking questions included in the program priorities section of the ranking pool display group for every ACEP-WRE ranking pool:
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - Extent to which ACEP-WRE purposes would be achieved on the offered land
 - The productivity of the offered land
 - The on-farm and off-farm environmental threats if the land is used for the production of agricultural commodities
 - (ii) The following ranking criteria must be addressed in State-developed ranking questions included in the resource priorities section of the ranking pool display group for every ACEP-WRE ranking pool:
 - The conservation and environmental benefits of obtaining an easement or other interest in the land, including but not limited to—
 - 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;

- Extent and use of habitat that will be restored for threatened, endangered, or other at-risk species or number of different at-risk species benefitted;
 - Protection or restoration of native vegetative communities;
 - Habitat diversity and complexity to be restored;
 - Proximity and connectivity to other protected habitats;
 - Extent of beneficial adjacent land uses;
 - Extent of wetland losses within a geographic area, including wetlands generally or specific wetland types;
 - Capacity of the wetland to improve water quality;
 - Water quantity benefits through increased water storage in the soil profile or through groundwater recharge Attenuation of floodwater flows;
 - Proximity to impaired water bodies;
 - Carbon sequestration;
 - Improving climate change resiliency.
 - 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.
- (iii) States may also include ranking questions that prioritize, in the program priorities section:
- Certain land types or geographic regions of the State where restoration of wetlands may better achieve State and regional goals and objectives
 - Land that is currently enrolled in CRP in a contract that is set to expire within 1 year from the date of application and is farmed wetland and adjoining land that has the highest wetland functions and values and is likely to return to production after the land leaves CRP
- (iv) For ACEP-WRE, the requirement to provide higher ranking consideration to longer-term enrollments has been automatically included in the planned practice points calculated in the assessment portion of CART, based upon the selection of the easement program practice identifying the enrollment length (perpetual or 30-years)
- (v) See 440-CPM, Part 528.111, for additional information on ACEP-WRE ranking procedures.
- (vi) For applications converting an existing 30-year easement to permanent easement, that are not required to be ranked, however, in order to implement the Conservation Desktop and CART workflow a ranking pool must be developed.

- States will need to assess the 30-year easement for the resource consideration of Long-Term Protection of Land, loss of functions and values and plan the appropriate practices to acquire the permanent easement including LTPPE, permanent easement.
- The ranking pool display group should be created using the following parameters:
 - Applicability section – should be a text based question, “Is this assessment for a easement duration conversion from 30-Years to Permanent?”
 - Category section – should be a question developed based on State preference, for example “Is this assessment located in [State]?”
 - Program Priorities section – should be a text based question, “Has the State Conservationist determined that the additional protection is of significant environmental value for this assessment?”
 - Resource Priorities section – should be a text based question, “Is the existing 30-year easement in compliance based on the most recent monitoring report and has no outstanding violations or enforcement issues?”