



SE Indiana GRP cow pasture. Photo taken by Robert Zupancic, NRCS Grazing Specialist



HFRP site in NE Indiana. Photo Bill Lambert, NRCS Area Easement Program Specialist



This publication is the third issue of a direct mail piece intended to provide information to holders of NRCS **Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)** and **Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)** easements, and to identify the activities that are taking place with respect to easements across Indiana.

GRP/HFRP

INDIANA ● GRP/HFRP ISSUE 3 ● JANUARY, 2015

Easement Owner Newsletter

IN THIS ISSUE...

Contact Information

Find out who to contact in case of easement questions.

Management Plan

It's time once again to review your grassland or forest management plan

Species Focus

Learn how HFRP is helping to save the Indiana Brown Bat.

2015 Monitoring

Learn more about participating in the 2015 monitoring process.

WHERE DID GRP GO?

With the passing of the new Farm Bill in February of 2014, several former easement programs were repealed, including the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). Rest assured your existing easement is still protected. These changes do not affect the management or maintenance requirements of any existing GRP easement. All Conservation Easement Deeds recorded under the former GRP remain in force and effect.

Changes to the easement programs affect new enrollments only. What was the GRP easements program is now rolled into the new Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE). While ACEP-ALE has many of the same goals as the GRP, including the protection of grazing and grassland systems,

it is structured more similarly to the former Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). This program is a cooperative agreement between NRCS and an interested agricultural land conservation entity. The entity applies for the program with the purpose of placing an easement on individual properties. The entity does not own the properties, but if its application is approved, it will hold a Conservation Easement Deed or similar document to protect the farming and grazing uses of the individual properties from development. Look for more information and public announcements over the next few months promoting the new program.

None of the changes in the Farm Bill impact the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP). The HFRP remains the same as it was under the previous Farm Bill.

SUCCESS STORIES

Photos in this newsletter are from easements within Indiana. They are all great reminders of the success of these programs. Over 880 acres of pastureland and 1200 acres of forestland have been protected with GRP and HFRP to date. Combined with 64,900 acres of wetlands through the Wetlands Reserve Program and 6,400 acres of floodplain through the Floodplain Easement Program, Indiana has a solid record of private land natural resources conservation through easements: over 76,000 acres total.

If you have photos or an easement success story you would like to share, please submit them to the NRCS State Easement Program Specialist at brianne.lowe@in.usda.gov. Over the next year we will be posting success stories and interviews on our website at: www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/newsroom/stories/. Stories and photos used in future publications will remain anonymous upon request.



United States Department of Agriculture

Helping People Help the Land

USDA is an equal opportunity employer and provider



UPDATING YOUR OPERATION MANAGEMENT PLAN

In preparation for a new year, it is time once again to review your grassland or forest management plan. If you are unsure how a new activity will affect your easement, be sure to ask first. The GRP and HFRP Conservation Deeds do place certain restrictions and requirements on the property.

If you have interest in changing your operation, whether it is changing the herd size, altering the forage species composition, implementing

forest stand improvement, or adding a planting, contact your local NRCS office. A list of local contacts can be found here: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>. The District Conservationist can help you develop a plan that will protect natural resources, follow program requirements, and still meet the needs of your changing operation. The updated management plan must be kept in the easement case file at the NRCS office for future reference.



Dogwood
Photo by Bill Lambert, NRCS



Indiana Bat
Photo by USF&W



Cardinal Flower
Photo by Bill Lambert, NRCS



GRP pasture
Photo by Robert Zupanic, NRCS

HFRP SPECIES FOCUS: INDIANA BAT

Last year we highlighted the roll HFRP plays in the conservation of the endangered northern copperbelly water snake. This year, we highlight the roll of HFRP in the protection of the Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*). The Indiana bat is incredibly small, weighing only one quarter of an ounce, or about three pennies. They are insect eaters and can consume up to half their body weight each night in insects. That may not seem like much, but that can add up to over 8,500 mosquitoes in a single night!

The Indiana bat is a social bat that hibernates through the winter in large groups in caves. In the summer, bats migrate to forested settings. Male bats roost alone or in small groups under loose tree bark during the day. Females form maternal colonies under loose bark. There they each raise a single young pup through the summer.

Disturbance to caves, the loss of forested habitat, as well as the introduction of the deadly fungal infection white-nosed syndrome, has led to the decline of the Indiana bat as well as several other species. To help protect the population that remains, careful planning for forest management is necessary.

Harvest activities must occur after the summer roosting season. Selective girdling of trees can create the snags with loose bark that the bats prefer. These snags also benefit other wildlife such as woodpeckers, wood ducks, owls, etc. It is possible to still utilize the timber production capabilities of your forest and preserve species such as the Indiana bat and northern copper belly water snake. All forest plans need to be reviewed and approved by both NRCS and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service prior to implementation. This review is to ensure the plan is compatible with endangered species requirements. Please contact your local District Conservationist for more information on the development of a forest management plan.

A list of local contacts can be found here: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.

Information above taken from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. 2006. Threatened and Endangered Species: Indiana Bat (*Myotis sodalis*) Fact Sheet. <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/endangered/mammals/inba/inbafactsht.html>.

2015 MONITORING HAS BEGUN

Each year, NRCS is responsible for verifying the condition of its easements. This includes the verification of ownership, as well as site conditions. Site condition checks may take place on site or via offsite methods using remote imagery. If you are interested in participating in the monitoring process, please contact your local NRCS District Conservationist to make arrangements. The contact numbers for the local field offices can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/.

Even if your site is not selected for an onsite monitoring visit, the local NRCS District Conservationist is available to answer any questions you may have about your easement, and to meet with you on site to discuss the management of your property. This is a great opportunity to discuss any concerns you may have, and for you and NRCS to evaluate the progress of the easement condition.