

## **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary, conservation program administered by NRCS that can provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices that address natural resource concerns. The purpose of EQIP is to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals; to optimize environmental benefits; and to help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

## **EQIP Application Sign-up and Cut-off Dates**

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round, but establishes cutoff dates to make funding selections for eligible, screened, and ranked applications.

To be ready for EQIP funding consideration, interested applicants will need to: (1) Develop a conservation plan, (2) Submit an application, (3) Meet program eligibility requirements, and (4) Approve their 'EQIP schedule of operations'.

The time needed to complete a conservation plan and process eligibility can vary, from a few weeks to more than a month, depending on the complexity of the farming operation.

## **Develop a Conservation Plan**

A conservation plan includes all practices, regardless of the program's financial assistance, that a producer or landowner has agreed to adopt for the agricultural operation and/or associated agricultural lands. Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan.

## **Submitting an Application**

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing and submitting the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation or non-industrial private forest land.

## **Program Eligibility Requirements**

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

## **'EQIP schedule of operations'**

The basis for an application is the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and is derived from the applicant's conservation plan. The EQIP 'schedule of operations' identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, timing of the implementation, practice location, and payment rates.

## **EQIP Screening, Ranking and Funding**

EQIP funding decisions are based on an application evaluation process that includes screening tools and ranking criteria. Screening tools are worksheets used to prioritize an application based on factors such as: a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'. Ranking criteria considers the anticipated benefit of a conservation system, or practice, in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' to a natural resource concern.

### **About the Greater Sage Grouse Working Initiative**

The purpose of the Greater Sage Grouse Initiative is to focus on increasing and improving occupied, suitable, and potential breeding habitat, supporting Greater Sage Grouse recovery. The Greater Sage Grouse Initiative can provide payment assistance for specific practices that provide significant resource benefit to create, improve, or enhance populations of and habitat for the Greater Sage Grouse.

The Greater Sage Grouse Initiative addresses needs of one of the seven species identified under the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Initiative. WLFW is effort between the NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) that leverages capabilities and resources, targets assistance where it is most needed, cooperatively engages state and local partners, and works collaboratively with agricultural producers, forest land managers, and Tribes.

NRCS and FWS have selected eight at-risk species whose decline can be reversed given sufficient resources and landowner participation. Working Lands for Wildlife will promote voluntary, incentive-based conservation on private and Tribal lands.

The Greater Sage Grouse Initiative is a partnership with the objective to provide accelerated financial and technical assistance to producers to enhance populations of and habitat for wildlife on working agricultural lands. WLFW to enhance habitat for the Greater Sage Grouse is offered in ten other states: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

The approved practice list is included in this document. Applications will be screened and ranked at the field office level using factors that address the above cited objectives and provide the most environmental benefit towards protecting or improving wildlife habitat.

### **NRCS Field Office Contact Information**

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants in *Alpine, Inyo, Lassen, Modoc and Mono counties* should contact the NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

#### **USDA-NRCS, Alpine County**

Minden Service Center  
(775) 782-3661  
Jim Gifford, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Modoc County**

Alturas Service Center  
(530) 233-8868  
Bryon Hadwick, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Inyo County**

Bishop Field Center  
(760) 872-6111  
Rob Pearce, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Northern Mono County**

Minden Service Center  
(775) 782-3661  
Jim Gifford, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Lassen County**

Susanville Service Center  
(530) 257-7272  
Eric Pietz, District Conservationist

#### **USDA-NRCS, Southern Mono County**

Bishop Field Center  
(760) 872-6111  
Rob Pearce, District Conservationist

### Land Uses for the Greater Sage Grouse Initiative

Only applications for agricultural operations that address resource concerns on at least one land use type listed below will be considered for financial assistance from this initiative. The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- **Cropland:** Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- **Pasture:** Land composed of introduced or domesticated native forage species that is used primarily for the production of livestock. Pastures receive periodic renovation and cultural treatments, such as tillage, fertilization, mowing, weed control, and may be irrigated. Pastures are not in rotation with crops.
- **Range:** Land used primarily for the production of grazing animals. Includes native plant communities and those seeded to native or introduced species, or naturalized by introduced species that are ecologically managed using range management principles.
- **Farmstead:** Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities.
- **Associated Agricultural Lands:** Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as idle center pivot corners, odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.
- **Irrigated:** Where an operational irrigation system is present and managed to supply irrigation water.
- **Grazed:** Where grazing animals impact how land is managed.
- **Wildlife:** Where the applicant is actively managing for wildlife.

### Resource Concerns for the Greater Sage Grouse Initiative

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this initiative. The descriptions below are general NRCS natural resource definitions, applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- ❖ **INADEQUATE HABITAT FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE** – Quantity, quality or connectivity of food, water, cover/shelter, habitat continuity and/or space is inadequate to meet requirements of identified fish, wildlife or invertebrate species.
  - **Habitat Degradation:** Conserving existing habitat and restoring habitat improves the odds that fish and wildlife communities will thrive. The availability and arrangement of food, water, cover, shelter, habitat continuity and space determine the number of organisms that a region can support, also known as carrying capacity. Increasing carrying capacity is critical to attaining long-term population stability.

### Eligible NRCS Conservation Practices

All conservation practices planned for financial assistance must be included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and address a resource concern identified in this initiative. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this initiative are listed in the below table.

Every contract for this initiative must include at least one core practice unless the contract will complete a conservation system that supports core practices that are documented as already applied on the land under contract.

- Core conservation practices are critical to addressing the targeted resource concern(s) for the Greater Sage Grouse Initiative and achieving the desired environmental outcome(s).
- Supporting practices are those practices needed to make the core practices function properly or to address a specific site or condition related to the identified resource concern(s).

All conservation plans selected for financial assistance through the Greater Sage Grouse EQIP Initiative must include documentation that an alternative containing the core practices was presented to the decision-maker.

For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link for NRCS conservation practice standards:

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11\\_001020](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020)

**Table 1. Core Conservation Practices**

Practice Code	Core Conservation Practice Name	Units	Lifespan
645	Upland Wildlife Habitat Management	ac	1

**Table 2. Supporting Conservation Practices**

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Units	Lifespan
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
328	Conservation Crop Rotation	ac	1
338	Prescribed Burning	ac	1
340	Cover Crop	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
378	Pond	no	20
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	ft	15
382	Fence	ft	20
383	Fuel Break	ac	10
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
388	Irrigation Field Ditch	ft	15
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15

Practice Code	Supporting Conservation Practice Name	Units	Lifespan
394	Firebreak	ft	5
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
442	Sprinkler System	ac	15
443	Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface	ac	15
449	Irrigation Water Management	ac	1
472	Access Control	ac	10
484	Mulching	ac	1
500	Obstruction Removal	ac	10
511	Forage Harvest Management	ac	1
512	Forage and Biomass Planting	ac	5
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
521A	Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	no	20
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
548	Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment	ac	1
550	Range Planting	ac	5
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	ac	10
574	Spring Development	no	20
576	Livestock Structure Shelter	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
590	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
595	Integrated Pest Management	ac	1
595	Wetland Enhancement	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
642	Water Well	no	20
643	Restoration and Management of Rare or Declining Habitats	ac	1
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management	ac	1
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	ft	10
657	Westland Restoration	ac	15