Agricultural Conservation Easement Program:
Wetland Reserve Easement Component

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers conservation easement purchases to eligible landowners through the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program Wetland Reserve Easement component (ACEP-WRE). ACEP-WRE is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring eligible land from active agriculture.

Restoration methods can include the installation of ditch plugs, excavation of shallow depressions, removal of berms, as well as tree and shrub planting and other methods to restore the wetland hydrology, soil, and vegetation to a site. Land that was drained for agricultural purposes and frequently floods, or is difficult to produce crops on because of wet conditions, is likely eligible for ACEP-WRE. Other examples of eligible land include areas along rivers that link protected wetlands, and lands adjacent to protected wetlands that contribute to wetland functions and values.

What are the Benefits of Wetlands?

This program focuses on wetlands because of all of the benefits they provide to people, wildlife and the environment. Wetlands provide critical habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species and waterfowl. Land in Vermont enrolled in the NRCS wetlands program have shown increases in diversity of bird species and fish spawning. Conservation easements have also been credited with protecting rare, threatened and endangered species in Vermont.

Wetlands also improve water quality by filtering sediments, nutrients and chemicals; reduce flooding; recharge groundwater; protect biological diversity; and provide opportunities for educational, scientific, and recreational activities such as hiking and nature photography. Our world, and that of future generations, will not be the same without taking steps to protect and restore critical wetland systems.

Left: A pied-billed grebe, listed as a Species of Special Concern in Vermont, is spotted during monitoring of a property enrolled in a wetland reserve easement with NRCS.

Wetland Reserve Easement site before restoration

Wetland Reserve Easement site after restoration

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Enrollment Options

ACEP-WRE offers two enrollment options:

- A Permanent Easement is a conservation easement in perpetuity. USDA pays 100 percent of the easement value and up to 100 percent of the restoration costs. In exchange for this easement, the landowner agrees to sell the development and agricultural rights from the land.
- A 30-Year Easement is an easement that expires after 30 years. USDA pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value and 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

In most cases the per acre value of an easement is based on a region-wide estimate of market values for different types of land. For both permanent and 30-year easements, USDA and/or conservation partners pay all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, costs associated with a survey, any appraisal fees, and title insurance.

More Information

Applications for NRCS programs are accepted on a continuous basis at local USDA Service Centers.

Landowners who are interested in the ACEP - WRE program are encouraged to apply at their local USDA Service Center or contact NRCS Wetland Specialist, Jim Eikenberry, at 802-951-6796 ext. 239 or email james.eikenberry@vt.usda.gov. Vermont NRCS County office locations can be found online at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/vt/contact/.

Partnerships for Wetlands and Wildlife

NRCS works in close partnership with our colleagues from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) conservation office to implement programs that protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat for the benefit of all Vermonters.

United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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