NRCS

Natural Resources Conservation Service
United States Department of Agriculture

Farm Bill 2002

Questions and Answers

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

September 2004

Q. What is the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)?

A. WHIP is a voluntary program that encourages creation of high quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations of National, State, Tribal, and local significance. Through WHIP, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides cost-share payments for development and protection of upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas.

Q. Where are WHIP applications accepted?

A. WHIP applications are accepted at local USDA Service Centers or conservation district offices. They also may be accepted by cooperating conservation partners approved or designated by NRCS.

Q. What land is eligible for WHIP?

A. Eligible lands include privately owned land; Federal land when the primary benefit is on private or Tribal land; State and local government land on a limited basis; and Tribal land.

Q. I do not currently participate in Farm Bill programs. Am I eligible to participate in WHIP?

A. You are welcome to participate in the program. If you enroll land in the program, you will need to meet certain conservation compliance which include highly erodible land/wetland conservation requirements.

Your local NRCS office will assist you with these program requirements.

Q. Could the Adjusted Gross Income provision of the 2002 Farm Bill impact my participation in WHIP?

A. Yes, if you have an average adjusted gross income exceeding $2.5 million for the three tax years immediately preceding the application year, you are not eligible to receive program benefits or payments. However, an exemption is provided in cases where 75 percent of the adjusted gross income is derived from farming, ranching, or forestry operations.

Q. How long in duration are WHIP agreements?

A. WHIP provides cost-share payments to landowners under agreements that are usually 5 to 10 years in duration, depending upon the practices to be installed. There are shorter-term agreements to install practices that are needed to meet wildlife emergencies, as approved by the NRCS State Conservationist. NRCS also can enter into 15-year agreements with program participants who wish to undertake habitat development practices on essential plant and animal habitat. Up to 15 percent of WHIP funds are available for 15-year agreements.

Q. What is the minimum acreage required or the maximum acreage or payments allowed?

A. NRCS does not place limits on the number of acres that can be enrolled in the program or the amount of payment made; however, some States may choose to establish such requirements. NRCS welcomes projects that provide valuable wildlife habitat and does not want to discourage any landowner who desires to implement practices that will improve habitat conditions for declining species.

Q. Who determines which applications are funded

B. NRCS selects applications based on State developed ranking processes that achieve State specific wildlife goals and objectives. Local work groups provide input to the State Technical Committee that works with the State Conservationist to develop a State WHIP plan. The ranking process is derived from the priorities identified in the State WHIP plan.

Q. Are landowners required to give the public access to land developed or protected under WHIP?

A. No. Landowners can prevent trespass and control access by the general public. The landowner must allow NRCS access to the area to monitor the effectiveness of the practices during the agreement period.

For More Information
If you need more information about WHIP, please contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the World Wide Web at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farmbill/2002/

Visit USDA on the Web at:
http://www.usda.gov/farmbill

Note: This is not intended to be a definitive interpretation of farm legislation. Rather, it is preliminary and may change as USDA develops implementing policies and procedures. Please check back for updates.