

SUMMARY

S.1 Background and Organization of Summary

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program for agricultural landowners and operators, who receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving covers on eligible land. The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), in most cases, makes annual rental payments based on the dry land agricultural rental value of the land, and it provides cost-share assistance for up to 50 percent of the participant's costs in establishing approved conservation practices. Participants enroll in CRP contracts for 10 to 15 years. The program is administered by the CCC through the Farm Service Agency (FSA), with program support provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Forest Service, Cooperative State Research and Education Extension Service, State forestry agencies, and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

CRP is the Federal Government's single largest environmental improvement program on private lands. Through voluntary partnerships between individuals and the Government, CRP provides incentives and assistance to farmers and ranchers for establishing conservation practices that have a beneficial impact on resources both on and off the farm. CRP encourages farmers to voluntarily plant permanent covers of grass and trees on land that is subject to erosion—vegetation that safeguards millions of acres of American topsoil from erosion, improves water quality, provides food and habitat for wildlife, and protects ground and surface water by reducing water runoff and sedimentation.

This Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) analyzes the impacts associated with the reauthorization of the CRP with the provisions defined in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill). It also evaluates the impacts of alternatives to that Proposed Action.

This Summary presents a synopsis of the PEIS and is organized for ease of reading as follows, with the PEIS source chapters indicated:

- S.2 Purpose and Need for the Action (Chapter 1)
- S.3 Affected Environment (Chapter 2)
- S.4 Current Conservation Reserve Program (Chapter 3)
- S.5 Alternatives including the Proposed Action (Chapter 4)
- S.6 Comparison of Impacts of the CRP Program Alternatives (Chapter 4, based on the impacts analyzed in Chapter 5)

S.2 Purpose and Need for the Action

FSA's Proposed Action is **CRP Program Implementation and Expansion**. The **Purpose of the Proposed Action** is to promulgate regulations to implement the reauthorized CRP with the provisions defined in the 2002 Farm Bill. The **Need for the Proposed Action** is to fulfill FSA

responsibility as assigned by the Secretary of Agriculture to administer certain conservation provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill.

To implement the Proposed Action, FSA would incorporate the provisions of the recently enacted 2002 Farm Bill into the CRP regulations and revise the CRP Handbook. The 2002 Farm Bill, which governs Federal farm programs for the next 6 years, was signed into law on May 13, 2002. The Farm Bill reauthorizes the CRP through 2007, and stipulates the following changes be made to CRP:

- Increase the acreage enrollment authority to 39.2 million acres;
- Expand the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) nationwide with an aggregate acreage cap of 1,000,000 acres;
- Change the cropping history requirement to be 4 out of 6 years;
- Provide a 1-year extension for certain contracts on land planted to hardwood trees;
- Allow producers to enroll entire fields through the continuous CRP when more than 50 percent of the field is enrolled as a buffer and the remainder of the field is infeasible to farm;
- Allow landowners to continue existing vegetative cover, where practicable and consistent with the objectives of CRP; and
- Provide for managed haying (including for biomass), grazing, and construction of wind turbines on CRP lands.

S.3 Affected Environment

The environment affected by CRP consists of both the socioeconomic and natural environments associated with or affected by farming and farm conservation programs in the United States (U.S.). The natural environment includes the major terrestrial and aquatic ecoregions associated with eligible lands in the U.S. and associated sensitive resources, including:

- **Soils**
 - Soil and Wind Erosion (including Air Quality)
- **Water Resources & Aquatic Species**
 - Surface water
 - Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs)
 - Groundwater
 - Floodplains
 - Riparian Areas
 - Wetlands
- **Vegetation**
 - Grasslands
 - Forestlands
 - Invasive Species
- **Wildlife**
 - Wildlife Recreation
 - Threatened and Endangered Species

The social and economic aspects of the affected environment consist of farming from a national perspective and of rural communities that may be affected by CRP enrollment.

S.4 Current Conservation Reserve Program

CRP was initiated by Congress in Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, was extended by the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990. It was then extended to 2002 by the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996, and has currently been authorized through 2007 by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. Table S.4-1 outlines the various CRP activities that occurred between 1986-2001.

<i>Table S.4-1 CRP Activities between 1986-2001</i>	
Year (s)	Activity
1986-1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signups 1-9 conducted; 33.9 million acres enrolled • Eligibility primarily based on erosion and erodibility potential • Rental payments subject to State or sub-State maximum acceptable rental rates (not pre-announced)
1988-1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility expanded to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cropland within 100 feet of water body or wetland Cropped wetlands Cropland subject to scour erosion
1990-1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signups 10-12 conducted; 2.5 million acres enrolled • Eligibility changed to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National conservation priority areas (Chesapeake Bay, Long Island Sound, and Great Lakes watersheds) State water quality priority areas (USDA or EPA/State designated watersheds) • Additional high priority conservation practices • Cropped wetland eligibility canceled • Provisions for competitive enrollment based on cost and environmental benefits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soil-specific maximum rental payment rates (not pre-announced) “Black box” environmental benefits index (EBI)
1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year extensions offered for contracts expiring 9/30/1995 • Early-contract termination offered for selected contracts • Signup 13 conducted, enrolling 684,000 acres approved for enrollment, using revised “open” EBI and pre-announced maximum soil rental payment rates
1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year extensions offered for contracts expiring 9/30/1996 • Early-contract termination offer continued • Continuous signup began for selected high-priority conservation practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-competitive enrollment, with added financial incentives Additional practices, wellhead protection areas, and marginal pasture for water quality
1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General signup provisions revised, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prairie pothole National conservation priority area established Eligibility of cropped wetlands reinstated EBI revised to include wildlife habitat, air quality, and enduring benefits factors Wildlife habitat benefits given priority equal to water quality and soil erosion benefits • General signup 15 conducted; 16.7 million acres enrolled • General signup 16 conducted; 5.9 million acres enrolled

Table S.4-1 CRP Activities between 1986-2001

Year (s)	Activity
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY 1997 continuous signup 14 conducted; 561,000 acres enrolled • Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) established Targeted enrollment under State/Federal partnership Additional financial incentives, States provide 20 percent of total costs
1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administration establishes 4 million-acre continuous signup goal among strategies in joint USDA/Environmental Protection Agency "Clean Water Action Plan" • General signup 18 conducted; 4.8 million acres enrolled Longleaf pine National conservation priority area added • FY 1998 continuous signup 17 conducted; 218,000 acres enrolled
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General signup 20 conducted; 2.3 million acres enrolled • FY 1999 continuous signup 19 conducted; 268,000 acres enrolled
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FY 2000 continuous signup 21 conducted; 119,000 acres enrolled • Signup 21 ended in June when additional continuous signup enhancements adopted • Continuous signup enhancements included: Up-front signing incentive payments (SIP) Practice incentive payments (PIP) Increased maintenance payment allowance Updated marginal pastureland rental payment rates • FY 2000 continuous signup 22 began in June; 209,000 acres enrolled
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-year extension of contracts expiring 9/30/2001 • FY 2001 continuous signup 23 conducted; 470,000 acres enrolled • Farmable Wetlands Pilot Program implemented Limited to 500,000 acres in 6 States Farmed and prior converted wetlands of 5 acres or less. Limited to total upland/wetland of 40 acres per tract

S.4.1 General Sign-up CRP

General Sign-up was established in its current form in 1985 and has become USDA’s largest land retirement program. It is administered by USDA’s FSA and is funded through the CCC. This long-term land retirement program offers farm owners or operators with an annual per-acre rental payment and up to half the cost of establishing a permanent long-term conserving cover, in exchange for retiring environmentally sensitive land for a minimum of ten years to a maximum of fifteen years. Producers offer land for competitive bidding based on an Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) during periodic announced signups.

S.4.2 Conservation Reserve Program Continuous Sign-Up

Continuous Sign-Up (CCRP) was initiated by FSA, with four million acres (under the CRP acreage cap) being reserved for continuous sign-up enrollment. Continuous sign-up allows enrollment of land in riparian buffers, filter strips, grass waterways, and other high priority practices, without competition. Land suitable for these high-priority practices can be enrolled without competition and generally at higher annual payment rates than land enrolled in a general CRP sign-up with all eligible land being automatically accepted into the program. In April 2000, USDA announced that FSA would enhance incentives for continuous signup participation, which included an up-front Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) of \$100 to \$150 per acre (depending on the length of contract) for filter strips, riparian buffers, grassed waterways, field windbreaks,

shelter belts, and living snow fences and a Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) equal to 40 percent of the cost of installing practices for certain continuous sign-up practices. At that time, increased maintenance payments for certain practices were also added along with updated marginal pastureland rental rates to better reflect the market value of these types of lands.

S.4.2.1 Farmable Wetlands Program

The Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) started as a pilot program authorized by the 2001 Agricultural Appropriations Act. In this Act, certain small non-floodplain farmed wetland acres were eligible to be enrolled through the continuous sign-up process. Payments were to be proportionate with those provided to landowners who implemented CRP conservation practices like filter strips. The wetlands and associated buffers enrolled were limited to a total of 500,000 acres in 6 States: Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, with no more than 150,000 acres being enrolled in any single State

S.4.4 Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a joint Federal-State land retirement conservation program that uses the authorities of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in combination with State resources to target specific conservation and environmental objectives of a State and the Nation (7 CFR Pt. 1410.50(b)). It was initiated in 1997 and is funded by the CCC. It is a results-oriented, community-based conservation partnership program targeted to address specific State and nationally significant water quality, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat issues linked to agriculture.

S.5 Alternatives including the Proposed Action

S.5.1 Scoping for the CRP Programmatic EIS

FSA based its CRP Proposed Action on provisions defined in the 2002 Farm Bill. Internal scoping conducted before the 2002 Farm Bill was also used in developing the Proposed Action. FSA then conducted formal scoping for the CRP PEIS, meeting with and soliciting input from representatives of other Federal, State, and local agencies, and the general public. Public scoping meetings were held in six cities located around the country. The Federal Register and national newspapers published notices that FSA was preparing a PEIS and that input was being sought through public scoping meetings, a toll-free phone line, regular mail, and email. The Proposed Action and Alternatives reflect ideas voiced and recommendations made during that scoping process.

S.5.2 Definition of CRP Program Alternatives

Four Program Alternatives described here were analyzed in detail for environmental impacts:

1. No Program-Baseline
2. Continue with the Current Program-No Action
3. Implement the Changes from the 2002 Farm Bill-Proposed Action
4. Environmental Targeting

No Program (Baseline)

This alternative is used as an analytical device to establish a baseline upon which to evaluate the other alternatives. The analysis for this alternative is based on the requirement that administration of land-idling programs would revert to the permanent legislation.

This alternative represents a true baseline rather than a "permanent legislation" alternative, since not enough information exists to define the latter. The analysis establishes a baseline by describing what would happen if CRP had never happened.

No Action (Current Program)

Under this alternative, FSA administration of the CRP/CCRP/CREP would continue as if the pre-2002 Farm Bill provisions remained in effect, including the 4.2 million-acre holdback for CCRP and CREP. The risk associated with this alternative would be that CCRP and CREP could possibly not be allocated any additional acreage.

Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is for FSA to implement changes in General CRP/CCRP/CREP administration based on the requirements of the 2002 Farm Bill. Some of the changes include: increasing the enrollment authority, changing the eligibility and cropping history requirements, implementing a nationwide farmable wetland program, and several additional minor program changes. Environmental-based allocation under the general sign-up would continue. Chapter 4 discusses in detail the changes in the CRP general provisions, CCRP, and CREP programs that are evaluated in this PEIS under the Proposed Action.

The risk associated with this alternative would be less than that of the No Action Alternative or Environmental Targeting Alternative. The acreage allocated under the new programmatic cap (39.2 million acres) could solely be used for general sign-up CRP, if so determined by the Secretary, with no additional acreage being allocated to CCRP or CREP. However, FSA plans to utilize CCRP and CREP in addition to General CRP in its administration of CRP.

Environmental Targeting

Under this alternative, FSA would alter the mix of program goals and change acreage allocations to include CREP and continuous sign-up practices in designated environmentally-sensitive areas.

The CRP general sign-up would be eliminated. The implicit benefits produced by the EBI would be lost. However, that loss of implicit environmental benefits would be offset by the explicit environmental targeting of areas for enrollment under this alternative. Administration of CRP would then be done using an environmental targeting approach that focuses program resources on addressing national or regional priority conservation goals. This targeting would be consistent with the current primary objectives of the program by targeting soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat objectives in ecological regions, river basins, or impaired watersheds. Different strategies for allocating the additional acreage under the program cap will be evaluated by FSA.

The risk associated with this alternative would be that there would be no general sign-up CRP. Thus, the environmental targeting for general sign-up under the EBI would be lost, and the likelihood would be decreased of enrolling all the acreage allocated under the 2002 Farm Bill. Further, there would be soil, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat benefits because fewer acres would likely be enrolled than under the Proposed Action.

S.6 Comparison of the Impacts of the CRP Program Alternatives

Table S.6-1 compares the potential environmental impacts resulting from each of the alternatives analyzed in this PEIS. Potential environmental impacts can be positive or adverse, and can occur at different magnitudes. The impact definitions that were used to describe potential environmental impacts in this PEIS are defined below.

Positive Impact:

- A beneficial change in the condition or appearance of the resource or a change that moves the resource toward a desired condition.

Adverse Impact:

- A change that moves the resource away from a desired condition or detracts from its appearance or condition.

Minor Impact:

- A change in a resource occurs, but the change is barely perceptible and would not alter the condition or appearance of the resource.

Moderate Impact:

- A noticeable change in a resource occurs, and this change alters the condition or appearance of the resource, but the integrity of the resource remains intact.

Major Impact:

- A substantial change in a resource occurs, and this change is highly noticeable and measurably alters the condition or appearance of the resource.

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Soils	<p>Soil erosion rates would most likely be greater than 1.9 billion tons/year.</p> <p>Due to increased soil erosion rates, soil quality and productivity would also be adversely impacted.</p>	<p>Soil erosion has decreased by 450 million tons since CRP's inception and additional soil erosion rate reductions would continue under this alternative.</p> <p>Soil quality has increased due to more topsoil left on the land and would continue as additional acreage is enrolled.</p>	<p>Cumulative positive impacts on soils would continue as CRP contracts are extended for 10-15 more years with additional acreage allocated toward the program. The increased acreage could potentially reduce soil erosion by another 40 million tons.</p> <p>Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help reduce soil erosion and reduce sediment runoff on these land types.</p> <p>An increase in the cropping history requirement has the potential to moderately impact soils by targeting cropland that has been under more intensive production and thus possibly more vulnerable to wind and water erosion than currently required to enroll in CRP. However, positive impacts would continue on those already vegetative areas because the new cropping history provision makes the breaking of new ground to create a cropping history impossible.</p> <p>Infeasible-to-farm areas smaller than 50% of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to some enhancement of soil quality, but only if enrolling it would contribute to reduced soil erosion rates.</p> <p>The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit soils by not removing the established vegetative cover. The potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields would decrease.</p> <p>Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting will increase plant diversity and vigor, while managed grazing has the potential to do the same. These practices should not produce any adverse impacts on soils based on the premise that it must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval.</p> <p>CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to soil quality. Continued positive impacts on long-term soil quality would occur if States place CREP land under easement.</p> <p>Associated soil benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP is opened to all States.</p>	<p>States with CREPs would see additional soil erosion reduction in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of permanent vegetative cover and approved soil conservation practices.</p> <p>Under most targeting scenarios, erosion could increase as other objectives are emphasized.</p> <p>Minor benefits on soil erosion could be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to specifically address soil erosion by utilizing collaborative decision making of all interested parties and an ecosystem driven conservation initiative. Because of location, gross sheet and rill erosion may be less.</p> <p>Associated soil benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP is opened up to all States.</p> <p>Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage would decrease under this alternative. As this enrollment declines, national benefits of soil erosion reduction would be significantly less.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Surface Water	<p>Surface water quality would be substantially worse due to the loss of multiple benefits provided by vegetative cover established under CRP over the last 16 years.</p> <p>Impact on surface water quality would be significant, and more streams would have a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) listing due to the fact that agricultural lands have been cited as the number one pollutant of surface waters.</p>	<p>Surface water quality would continue to improve as producers enroll land under CRP, thus reducing runoff containing sediments, nutrients, and pesticides.</p> <p>TMDL-listed streams would decrease as cropland is enrolled, but this would be based on the conservation practices installed on contract land and whether they directly target the impairments causing the listing.</p>	<p>Continued major positive impacts on surface water quality as CRP contracts are extended for 10-15 more years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring acres.</p> <p>A 40 million ton decrease in sediment would correlate to an increase in water quality and a decrease in nutrient and pesticide loads.</p> <p>Positive impacts in terms of reduced non-point source (NPS) pollutant loadings to achieve TMDLs would occur when producers enroll land that has been more intensively cropped (4 out of 6 years), but the impact would be important only if contract land is located within a watershed having NPS issues.</p> <p>Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help improve water quality and reduce sediment runoff on these land types.</p> <p>Infeasible to farm areas smaller than 50% of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to the enhancement of water quality, but only if conservation practices targeted at improving water quality are adopted.</p> <p>The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and decreasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields.</p> <p>Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting should not produce adverse impacts on surface water based on the premise that it must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval.</p> <p>Associated water quality benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP goes nationwide.</p> <p>CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to water quality.</p> <p>CCRP would provide buffer along streams to reduce sediment runoff and subsequent water quality improvements would give direct positive benefits to aquatic species.</p>	<p>States with CREPs would see additional water quality benefits in areas targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of water quality enhancement conservation practices.</p> <p>Moderate positive impacts on water quality could be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to address water quality impairments by using collaborative decision making of all interested parties and an ecosystem driven conservation initiative. This idea would be most beneficial when addressing effects in the Gulf of Mexico and the Chesapeake Bay Region.</p> <p>TMDL-listed streams would decrease based on the specific environmental targeting of those watersheds in the National Environmental Target Area (NETA) that have been identified as contributors to the large-scale water quality impairment problem.</p> <p>Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage would decrease under this alternative. As this enrollment declines, so would the positive impacts these acres play at maintaining good water quality.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Groundwater	<p>Groundwater quality and drinking water sources would be adversely impacted due to increased contamination by pesticides and fertilizers from land that would have been enrolled in CRP. Conservation practices targeting water quality improvement would therefore not be implemented.</p>	<p>Drinking water sources and groundwater in general would see a continued positive impact on both water quality and quantity, as cropland is taken out of production and enrolled in CRP. This would result in reduced levels of pesticides and fertilizers being used.</p>	<p>Continued cumulative positive impacts on groundwater quality as CRP contracts are authorized for 10-15 more years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring ones.</p> <p>Drinking water sources and groundwater in general would see a continued positive impact on both water quality and quantity, as cropland is taken out of production and enrolled in CRP. This would result in reduced levels of pesticides and fertilizers being used.</p> <p>Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help improve groundwater quality and reduce chemical leaching on these land use types.</p> <p>An increase in the cropping history requirement has the potential to produce a positive impact on groundwater by targeting cropland that has been under more intensive production and thus possibly more vulnerable to leaching than currently required to enroll in CRP.</p> <p>Infeasible to farm areas less than 50% of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to some enhancement of groundwater quality, but only if conservation practices targeted at improving water quality are installed.</p> <p>The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and decreasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields.</p> <p>Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting should not produce adverse impacts on surface water based on the premise that it must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval.</p> <p>Associated groundwater quality benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP goes nationwide.</p> <p>CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to groundwater quality.</p>	<p>States with CREPs would see additional groundwater quality benefits if areas targeted by approved CREP agreements is a known groundwater source area and if approved practices consist of water quality enhancement conservation practices.</p> <p>No real national impacts to groundwater quality can be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to specifically address groundwater quality impairments. This would be due to the fact that groundwater issues tend to be more localized and would therefore be better addressed through the CREPs.</p> <p>TMDL-listed streams could decrease based on the specific environmental targeting of those watersheds in the NETAs that have been identified as having common groundwater quality problems.</p> <p>Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage would decrease under this alternative along with the subsequent positive impacts on groundwater quality and quantity.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Aquatic Species	<p>Aquatic habitat and associated water quality would be severely impacted due to high nutrient, pesticide and sediment runoff from Highly Erodible Land (HEL) on cropland.</p> <p>See Surface and Groundwater impacts for No Program.</p>	<p>Decreased sediment transport rates would produce a positive impact on aquatic species as further cropland is enrolled in CRP.</p> <p>Maintenance of high dissolved oxygen levels and cool water temperatures for aquatic organisms would continue as agricultural land is enrolled as wetland buffers.</p>	<p>The expansion of FWP would allow for an increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide, decreasing the rate of sediment transport to adjacent water bodies and increasing the associated aquatic species benefits described under the No Action Alternative. The limitation of wetland size would also be increased from 5 acres to 10 acres, increasing the potential acreage of aquatic habitat.</p> <p>Continued beneficial impacts on aquatic species as described under no action for an additional 10-15 years.</p> <p>Increase in potential acreage that could benefit aquatic species by 2.8 million acres.</p> <p>Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting should not produce adverse impacts to aquatic species based on the premise that requirements for these practices must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval, so aquatic species associated with the environmentally targeted enrolled land are not adversely affected.</p> <p>CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to aquatic species.</p> <p>CCRP would provide buffers along streams to reduce sediment runoff, and subsequently improve water quality, which would have direct positive benefits on aquatic species.</p>	<p>States with CREPs would see additional water quality benefits in areas targeted by approved CREP agreements, which would provide aquatic species with the optimal conditions for species success, but only if approved practices consist of water quality enhancement conservation practices that have been proven to directly benefit aquatic species and their associated habitat.</p> <p>Minor national benefits to aquatic species could be accomplished by targeting water quality issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds that are impaired severely.</p> <p>Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to aquatic species would decrease under this alternative.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Floodplains	<p>Decreased floodplain function due to a decrease in permanent vegetative cover and an increase in soil erosion, sediment, and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands.</p> <p>Decrease in associated wetland restoration and riparian areas benefiting floodplain function.</p>	<p>Increased floodplain function due to an increase in permanent vegetative cover and a decrease in soil erosion, sediment, and contaminant runoff from agricultural lands.</p> <p>Increase in associated wetland restoration and riparian areas benefiting floodplain function.</p>	<p>Continued beneficial impacts to floodplains as described under No Action for an additional 10-15 years.</p> <p>Increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to floodplains by 2.8 million acres.</p> <p>Continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with floodplains for an additional year.</p> <p>Beneficial impacts to floodplains in States with CREPs in place would be the same as those described under the No Action Alternative. Also, permanent easements under CREP would provide continued maintenance of floodplains functions and values.</p>	<p>Beneficial impacts to floodplains as described under No Action in States with CREPs.</p> <p>Positive benefits to floodplains could be accomplished by targeting floodplain and related resource issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds.</p> <p>Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to floodplains would be decreased under this alternative.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Riparian Areas	<p>Decreased riparian area function due to a decrease in permanent vegetative cover and an increase in soil erosion, sedimentation, and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands.</p> <p>Decrease in riparian area restoration by 400,000 acres.</p>	<p>Improvement and restoration of natural riparian area functions through increased vegetative cover, and reduced sediment and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands.</p> <p>Increase in riparian areas by 400,000 acres.</p>	<p>Continued beneficial impacts to riparian areas as described under No Action for an additional 10-15 years.</p> <p>Increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to riparian areas by 2.8 million acres.</p> <p>Continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with riparian areas for an additional year.</p> <p>Benefits from devotion of marginal pastureland to vegetation, particularly trees in riparian areas.</p> <p>The use of CCRP would target riparian areas by protecting them as buffers with permanent vegetative cover, which would reduce runoff.</p> <p>The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP will benefit associated riparian areas.</p> <p>Beneficial impacts to riparian areas in States with CREPs in place would be the same as those described under the No Action Alternative. Also, permanent easements under CREP would provide continued maintenance of these riparian areas functions and values.</p> <p>Permitting haying and grazing in response to drought or other emergency may have minor impacts on riparian areas.</p> <p>Potential increase in eligible acreage for buffer establishment when more than 50% of the field is eligible for enrollment and the other half is infeasible to farm.</p> <p>Increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide through FWP expansion will benefit eligible associated riparian areas.</p>	<p>Beneficial impacts to riparian areas as described under No Action in States with CREPs.</p> <p>Positive benefits to riparian areas can be accomplished by targeting riparian area and related resource issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds.</p> <p>Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and its associated benefits to riparian areas would be decreased under this alternative.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Wetlands	<p>Decreased benefits to wetlands due to increased soil erosion rates, sedimentation, and contaminant runoff from farmlands.</p> <p>Increase in continued use of farmed wetlands and associated uplands by approximately 3 million acres.</p> <p>Potential increase in wetland conversion caused by agricultural producers not participating in USDA programs regulated by Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.</p> <p>Decrease in wetland restoration by 1.6 million acres</p> <p>Decrease in wetland water quality from the loss of 600,000 acres of filter strips and wetland buffers.</p>	<p>Improved water quality from the reduction in sediment and contaminant runoff from agricultural lands.</p> <p>Restored wetland function to 542,278 acres of farmed wetlands and protection of 2.8 million acres of natural and farmed wetlands from agricultural runoff.</p> <p>Additional 1.6 million acres of wetland restoration.</p> <p>Additional 600,000 acres of filter strips and wetland buffers protecting wetland water quality.</p>	<p>Continued beneficial impacts to wetlands as described under No Action for an additional 10-15 years.</p> <p>Increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to wetlands by 2.8 million acres.</p> <p>Land eligibility for CRP re-enrollment will extend associated beneficial impacts to wetlands for another 10 to 15 years.</p> <p>Continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with wetlands for an additional year.</p> <p>Increase in potential wetland acres from conversion of marginal pastureland to wetlands.</p> <p>The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP will benefit wetland water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and increasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed-up fields.</p> <p>Beneficial impacts to wetland water quality from increased conservation of surface and groundwater in agricultural operations.</p> <p>Increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide through FWP expansion.</p> <p>Increased potential wetland function through FWP expansion of allowable wetland restoration acreage from 5 to 10 acres.</p> <p>State CREPs could target sensitive areas with large numbers of wetlands, and permanent easements could provide protection of wetlands and associated buffers.</p>	<p>Beneficial impacts to wetlands as described under No Action in States with CREPs</p> <p>Benefits to wetlands could be accomplished by targeting wetland and related resource issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds.</p> <p>Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and its associated benefits to wetland areas would be decreased under this alternative.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Grasslands	Without CRP, 25 million actively enrolled acres most likely would not have been planted to conservation cover and it might be assumed that the realized positive impacts of that cover type on cropland would be absent or considerably less.	Native and introduced grass species would continue to be planted on eligible cropland, thus producing residual benefits to water quality and soils.	Grasslands throughout the country would benefit as more acreage is enrolled implementing the establishment of grass cover. However, new EBI scoring is currently being worked on in connection with development of new regulations to implement CRP in accordance with the provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill.	States with CREPs would see additional benefits associated with grasslands in areas targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of native grass species establishment conservation practices. Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to grasslands would be decreased under this alternative.

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Forestlands	<p>Incurred benefits of forestlands to water quality, wildlife, and soil stabilization would not have occurred in the absence of CRP.</p> <p>Incentives to enroll land devoted to Longleaf Pine would not exist.</p>	<p>Cropland enrolled and planted to tree practice acreage would continue to cleanse runoff water, silt, and pollutants, thereby protecting and improving streams while simultaneously providing food and shelter for wildlife.</p> <p>The Longleaf Pine Conservation Priority Area (CPA) would continue to see enrollment of additional tree planting acres and thus provide additional positive benefits to water, soils, and wildlife in that region.</p>	<p>Continued ecological benefits associated with tree planting conservation practices would continue for an additional 10-15 years.</p> <p>Additional croplands enrolled and planted with tree practices would continue to cleanse silt and pollutants from runoff water, especially if installed in riparian areas, thereby protecting and improving streams while simultaneously providing food and shelter for wildlife for an additional 10-15 years of CRP contracts.</p> <p>Marginal pastureland in additional tree practice acreage would continue to be enrolled along with other continuous practices that involve tree plantings, such as: shelter belts, field windbreaks, and living snow fences implemented on sensitive cropland enrolled. However, the new provision would allow grasses, forbs, and shrubs to be planted on marginal pastureland along with trees, resulting in a positive impact through the creation of habitat from which multiple species may benefit.</p> <p>State CREPs would target areas where plantings of certain species, such as hardwoods, would improve local ecosystems and provide associated benefits to water quality and wildlife.</p>	<p>States with CREPs would see additional benefits associated with forestlands targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of tree planting conservation practices. The direct positive impact of forestland restoration would benefit local CREP regions in a State by improving and protecting soil quality, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and by creating more opportunities to enjoy nature.</p> <p>Benefits on forestlands if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to address forestland restoration and protection. Would be most beneficial in the current Longleaf Pine CPA and other National Forestland areas in ecological impairment.</p> <p>Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to forestlands would be decreased under this alternative.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Wildlife	<p>There would be significant negative impacts on local wildlife populations along with the availability of localized wildlife-based recreation, like viewing, hiking, hunting, and fishing.</p>	<p>Areas devoted to permanent vegetation, wildlife habitat, and wetlands would continue to provide critical elements for species as more CRP acreage is enrolled.</p> <p>Conservation Practice (CP) enrollment targeted toward wildlife habitat enhancement would continue to provide critical resources and establish corridors between fragmented habitats.</p> <p>Continued benefits from the availability of wildlife-based recreation.</p> <p>Wetland restoration would continue to benefit waterfowl and upland game bird species and provide valuable habitat.</p> <p>Wetland buffer CPs would continue to provide additional habitat and protection from human disturbance.</p>	<p>Land with wildlife habitat benefits could be increased by almost 3 million acres. However, the amount of quality habitat would be dependant on the types of vegetation planted.</p> <p>Managed haying, grazing and harvesting, along with wind turbine placement, if done correctly and in accordance with conservation plans, would have little or no impact on resident wildlife.</p> <p>Permitting existing cover to continue, where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP, would continue to have lasting positive impacts on wildlife habitat already established with vegetative cover. This would be true as long as the maintenance schedule documented in the conservation plan is followed.</p> <p>An increase in acreage allocated to CRP could increase the amount of upland game habitat, habitat used by birds and Neotropical migrants, and the amount of protected wetlands, simultaneously and proportionally increasing the recreation chances for those people who like to bird watch, hunt, fish, and to enjoy nature.</p> <p>State CREPs would target specific areas with needs associated with wildlife habitat protection and restoration and achieve additional benefits. Permanent protection of wildlife through the use of easements could also be achieved with the use of State CREPs.</p> <p>CCRP could provide positive benefits to certain wildlife species by establishing buffers, both grassed and forested.</p>	<p>States with CREPs would see additional wildlife benefits in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of wildlife enhancement or wetland restoration conservation practices.</p> <p>Positive benefits to wildlife could be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted at specifically addressing wildlife habitat enhancement by utilizing collaborative decision making of all interested parties and an ecosystem-driven conservation initiative.</p> <p>Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits would be decreased under this alternative.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
<p>Threatened & Endangered (T&E) Species</p>	<p>Continued agricultural practices could have a significant adverse impact on numerous T&E species, but to what extent and to which species is unknown.</p> <p>There are some threatened and endangered species credited with utilizing CRP-created habitat.</p>	<p>Continued enhancement of wildlife habitat could produce positive impacts on T&E species.</p>	<p>Additional acreage allocated to CRP could potentially have a positive impact on almost 3 million additional acres of protected land that could be used, in part, as habitat by many T&E species.</p> <p>If it is found that the land improvements created by CRP conservation practices provide a net conservation benefit for T&E species, then the landowner could enter into a Safe Harbor Agreement with the USF&WS, which benefits T&E species while giving the landowners assurances from additional restrictions.</p> <p>States with CREPs would see additional T&E species and habitat benefits in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of conservation practices targeting the species or species habitat in question.</p>	<p>Benefits on T&E species and their habitat are not as likely at this level unless the species or habitat targeted encompasses large geographic areas, multiple States, or numerous watersheds.</p> <p>States with CREPs would see additional T&E species and habitat benefits in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of conservation practices targeting the species or species habitat in question.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Economic Impacts	<p>On a national level, without CRP, the change in acreage planted to the major crops is expected to be minimal. However, at the local or regional level, there could be a moderate increase in planted acreage creating economic benefits arising from the additional need for farm labor, as well as demand for the services of agricultural businesses.</p> <p>Possible loss of recreational opportunities.</p> <p>Possible increased uncertainty of producer income, particularly for those non-farming landowners and part-time farmers. Magnitude of uncertainty likely to be greater at the county or community level than nationally.</p>	<p>No adverse impact on farm employment at the regional or State level. Possible adverse impacts at the county or community level. Insufficient research to support a definitive conclusion as to the magnitude.</p> <p>Minimal impact of CRP on cropland supply.</p>	<p>Potential insignificant adverse impact on agricultural employment in areas gaining in CRP enrollment; and potential insignificant adverse impact on agricultural employment in areas losing CRP enrollment</p> <p>No impact on agricultural land rents at the regional and national level.</p> <p>Reallocation of income within the local economy with possible increased agricultural output, income in non-agricultural sectors of the economy, additional spending on agricultural inputs, and decreased recreational spending. Reallocation could affect leakage of value added from the local economy.</p> <p>Potential beneficial, long-term and nominal to moderate increase in agricultural land values from a reduction in the cropland supply and the capitalization of CRP income into land value.</p> <p>Potential increases in recreational opportunities and shifts in recreational opportunities between regions.</p> <p>Provides certainty to the participants of CRP-related income over the long term.</p>	<p>Insignificant effect on agricultural employment at the regional and State level.</p> <p>Possible increased uncertainty of producer income, particularly for those non-farming landowners and part-time farmers. Magnitude of uncertainty likely to be greater at the county or community level than at the regional or national level.</p> <p>Likely change in the regional distribution of enrolled land.</p> <p>Decreased probability of the enrollment of entire fields providing a benefit in the increased supply of rental land.</p> <p>Potential increase in the supply of cropland.</p> <p>Possible reduction in enrollment due to it being a voluntary program, which will not ensure that all allocated acres are enrolled.</p> <p>Cost would be prohibitive.</p>

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Economic Impacts (Continued)	<p>Long term expansion of cropland supply could be beneficial for tenants, lowering rents. In the short term, the increased supply of cropland could raise rents due to temporary increase in productivity.</p> <p>Potentially significant decline in pheasant habitat and recreational benefits nationally and regionally. Potentially significant decline in wildlife viewing benefits in the Northern and Southern Plains States. Potentially modest decline in wildlife viewing benefits in the Northeastern region.</p>	<p>On a national and regional level, the effect of CRP land rent appears to be insignificant. At the state, county or township level, the impact may be adverse and nominal to moderate in magnitude.</p> <p>No change in recreational benefits.</p>		

Table S.6-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Social Impacts	<p>Land use decisions by producers and owners disconnected from environmental consideration and based on maximizing market income.</p> <p>Social community impacted by erosion from unused excess capacity.</p> <p>Losses in soil quality, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat gains.</p>	<p>Landowners benefit from environmental improvements and stable income stream.</p> <p>Local communities benefit from enhanced recreation and lower costs to residents and industry from air and water improvements.</p> <p>Potentially adverse impacts to tenant farmers and new farm startups.</p> <p>Some potential for access to program benefits for minority and limited resource farmers.</p>	<p>Impacts similar to those identified under no action alternative.</p> <p>Changes improve program performance and increase flexibility but do not substantially alter program effects on social community.</p>	<p>Some currently participating communities may experience reduced benefits.</p> <p>Impacts more concentrated in communities located in or near areas of program</p>