



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Florida State

Overview

USDA and the State of Florida have launched a \$153 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to restore environmentally sensitive land in the Florida Everglades, its estuaries, and river lagoon systems.

CREP, which is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), uses Federal and state resources, through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), to meet state-specific environmental objectives and to safeguard environmentally sensitive land.

Under CREP, producers convert cropland to native grasses, trees, and other conservation practices to improve water quality, soil, and wildlife habitat. CREP provides rental payments, cost-share assistance, and other financial incentives to encourage producers to voluntarily enroll in 14- to 15-year CRP contracts.

Benefits

CREP has significant water quality and wildlife habitat benefits. When fully implemented, it protects waterways as well as substantially reduces the nitrogen and sediment deposition caused by agricultural practices.

The Florida CREP targets 30,000 acres in the Florida Everglades and protects the diverse ecosystem by reimbursing farmers to retire cropland and marginal pastureland.

Goals

The goals of the Florida CREP are to:

- Reduce average annual phosphorus loading to the Everglades Protection Area by approximately 100 metric tons through establishment of conservation practices;
- Increase the water storage capacity in the Lake Okeechobee and Indian River Lagoon watershed through wetland restoration/creation;
- Reduce pollutant loading from agricultural operations adjacent to the lower St. Johns River and in the Ocklawaha and Indian River Basin by at least 25 percent below modeled historic average annual loading;
- Provide substantial wildlife habitat enhancement for the preservation of natural diversity of Florida's biological resources, including threatened and endangered species associated with riparian and wetland habitats.

Program Costs

Based on the full implementation of the Florida CREP and an enrollment

of 30,000 acres, the Federal and State financial obligation will be approximately \$153 million over 15 years, with \$96 million provided by the Federal government and \$57 million provided by the State. This does not include any costs that may be borne by producers. The State's share is approximately 37 percent of the total program costs and the Federal government share is approximately 63 percent.

The State will:

- Offer participants a voluntary conservation easement for riparian buffers and restored wetlands either in permanent easements or in a 15-year State lease that will begin after the CREP contract expires;
- Provide additional cost-share assistance on implementation of the practices;
- Provide additional 50-percent cost-shares for permanent easements and 25 percent for 15-year conservation leases are available;
- Offer a one-time supplemental payment equal to 25 percent of the total of CRP rental payments for landowners who sign up for a voluntary permanent easement contract.

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Eligible Areas and Land Eligibility Requirements

Producers can offer eligible land within the Everglades and St. Johns-Ocklawaha-Indian River Lagoon Systems. Certain eligible land in the South Florida Water Management District and St. Johns Water Management District may also be enrolled.

Contact your local FSA office for specific information concerning your eligibility for CREP.

To be eligible for CREP, the applicant must also satisfy the basic eligibility criteria for CRP. Eligible land is:

- Cropland (including field margins) that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 4 of the previous 6 crop years from 1996 to 2001, and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity;
- Marginal pastureland that is suitable for use as a riparian buffer planted to trees or suitable to apply to either filter strips, grass waterways, contour grass strips, or shallow water areas for wildlife;
- Owned or operated for at least 1 year prior to enrollment.

Persons who have an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP until that contract expires.

Approved Conservation Practices

The following conservation practices may be eligible for land enrolled into the Florida CREP:

- CP21 - Filter Strip;
- CP22 - Riparian Buffer;
- CP23 - Wetland Restoration;
- CP3A - Hardwood Tree Planting;
- CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat – noneasement.
- CP9 - Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife

Note: CP3A & CP4D enrollment acreage will not exceed 5,000 acres.

Sign-up

Eligible producers may enroll in no less than 14-year or no more than 15-year CREP contracts.

Enrollment for CREP will be on a continuous basis beginning with a sign-up period to be announced at a future date.

CREP Payments

Participants enrolled in the Florida CREP may be eligible for annual rental payments, cost-share assistance for the installation of the conservation practices, and incentive payments. State lands are eligible only for cost-share assistance. No other payments are authorized on State lands. The rental payment will be calculated by FSA in accordance with the following schedule and CRP policy:

- For riparian buffers established only on land enrolled as marginal pastureland, the rental payment shall be determined using the county marginal pastureland average CRP rental rate within the respective county as the base rate;
- On land enrolled as cropland, the rental payment shall be determined using the calculated weighted average for the three predominant CRP soil rental rates on the enrolled acreage;
- An 80-percent incentive rate will be applied to the respective base rate for riparian buffers established on marginal pastureland and calculated weighted average for three predominant CRP soil rental rates on cropland;
- A maintenance payment-rate per acre, established according to CRP policy, will be included in the annual rental rate for the practices established;
- A 25-percent incentive payment for practice CP23, Wetland Restoration to restore natural hydrology;
- Filter Strip and Riparian Buffers; Signing Incentive Payments, and Practice Incentive Payments will apply.

FSA will pay up to 50 percent of the cost of installing eligible conservation practices as determined by FSA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Enrollment in Other Programs

CREP is another option that farmers may select to enhance

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their land; applicants may still enroll in the general CRP or continuous CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous CRP. Under CREP, applicants have the flexibility to extend conservation benefits through a state-funded program and thus increase the sum total of rental payments. Also, the enrollment process is on a continuous basis and payments are generally at a higher rate.

Haying and Grazing

Currently, haying and grazing are not permitted during the CRP contract period unless the Secretary of Agriculture permits it for emergency purposes.

For More Information

For more information on the Florida CREP, contact your local FSA Office. Additional program information is also available on FSA's Web site: www.fsa.usda.gov

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