

# BUFFERNOTES



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### BUFFER NOTES

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## CRP HAS MANY FACES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The Conservation Reserve Program has major impacts in some parts of the country and little or none in others.

While these and other regional differences emerged, some consistent themes also echoed when members of the National Association of Conservation Districts' Agricultural Lands Resources Committee discussed the program recently.

The committee focused on CRP and other agricultural lands conservation matters when it met Dec. 5-6 in Washington, D.C. Representatives of the Farm Service Agency's Conservation and Environmental Programs Division and the Natural Resources Conservation Service were also on hand.

In one exercise, committee members and meeting participants took turns providing regional perspectives on CRP.

The committee includes rep-



Members of the National Association of Conservation Districts' Agricultural Lands Resources Committee and advisors met in early December in Washington, D.C., to discuss the Conservation Reserve Program and other agricultural land conservation issues.

representatives from NACD regions across the country. Several committee members are farmers or ranchers, while others are conservation district, state association or con-

servation commission employees. For more details on their perspectives, see page 3.

Issues that emerged during the information sharing are included in the box below:

### -- Key CRP Issues --

- CRP workload needs will be heavy in coming years
- Program flexibility is needed
- CRP cannot match land values and/or rental rates in some areas
- CREP and CCRP are valuable because they are flexible
- Program acceptance varies widely across the country, and often within states and regions
- CRP is being used to address multiple resource issues, including erosion control, air quality, water quality and quantity, and wildlife habitat
- Conversion of some CRP lands to other uses may have adverse environmental impacts, while conversion of other lands back to agriculture may be desirable
- Wildlife benefits achieved through the program continue to grow

**"Just do it," is what Chase Heyman says about conservation. He has put that into practice on his Enterprise Hill Farm in Ohio and as a 45-year conservation district board member. See a story on page 3.**



## ENROLLMENT ACTIVITY AND NEWS

The following information is excerpted from FSA's November 2005 CRP Monthly Summary. "Enrollment and Activity and News" is a regular feature in BufferNotes.

Continuous sign-up No. 30 is projected to reach 385,000 acres, 48 percent ahead of fiscal year 2004 sign-up No. 28 (285,000 acres) and 15 percent below FY 2003 sign-up (445,000 acres).

As of November 2005, wetland practice contracts in general and continuous sign-up total 1,966,890 acres.

Upland habitat buffers (CP33) totaled 69,760 acres, including 18,211 acres in Illinois and 13,679 in Kansas.

Total CRP enrollment as of November was 35,859,268. Of that, 32,539,405 acres were in general CRP. A total of 3,183,097 acres were in CCRP or CREP.

USDA's policy for general contracts expiring in 2007 through 2010 can be viewed at [www.fsa.usda.gov/pas](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas).

The full September 2005 CRP Monthly Summary can be viewed at [www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp\\_statistics.htm](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp_statistics.htm).

The average national rental rate for all CRP signups is \$48.57 per acre. Maryland has the highest average at \$121.45 per acre, and Wyoming the lowest, at \$27.48.

## DISTRICTS SEE CONTINUING ROLE IN CRP WORK

America's conservation districts have been key Conservation Reserve Program partners for two decades. With contracts on 28 million acres of CRP lands to be re-enrolled, extended or expire between 2007-2010, districts and their conservation partners will be asked to provide important services to landowners.

Authorized in 1985, CRP has evolved to provide significant gains in controlling soil erosion, addressing water quality concerns and enhancing wildlife habitat.

While CRP is an agricultural lands program, it is also being used today to address water quality issues in urban areas. There's a growing interest in using CRP to address water quantity issues, too.

How do conservation districts fit into the CRP picture today?

Districts across the country frequently offer a full range of services to landowners, including tree and native grass sales, planting services, equipment rentals and maintenance. That's especially so in the Great Plains, Midwest and Southeast, according to an NACD survey.

NACD's Conservation District Forestry Activity Survey reported that conservation districts sold nearly 19 million trees and shrubs in the year 2000, and CRP was cited as a major driver of those sales. Nearly 400 districts offered tree planters for rent, most of them in NACD's North Central Region. Many districts own seed drills used for establishing native grasses.

State associations in North Dakota and Washington have their own nurseries, which have distributed millions of trees, many of them to districts for CRP plantings.

It takes many hands to make CRP work. The key partner is the landowner who is interested in general CRP, continuous CRP and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program. That landowner may

have learned about the program through conservation district education and outreach efforts, such as field tours, newsletters and direct mailings.

## CCRP, CREP offer options

CCRP has been responsible for establishing almost 2.4 million acres of conservation practices nationwide. In several states, programs fund the hiring of conservation district technicians who provide technical assistance to landowners on CREP and CCRP contracts. State governments and groups like Pheasants Forever and Quail Unlimited provide support for these programs. Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Oregon are among the states where technicians work out of conservation district offices to promote CRP practices.

CREP, the federal-state partnership, provides an opportunity to address resource concerns that are specific to states and their waterways. Conservation districts have a variety of roles in CREP, from promotion and technical assistance to program administration.

Districts are among major partners in the internationally recognized New York City Watershed Program, which uses a landscape-scale water quality program to protect drinking water supplies for more than 8 million people. The program has helped the city to avoid spending billions of dollars on water treatment facilities.

Pennsylvania has two CREPs that cover a large portion of the state. The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts administers the state's portion of both CREPs. Districts provide technical assistance and other services.

Illinois has enrolled about 110,000 acres in CREP, the majority of them in permanent easements. Conservation districts hold title to the easements. They were responsible for hiring attorneys, surveyors and title companies to process the easements. Districts were reimbursed for costs and received an administrative fee. Districts also did most of the

legwork in the CREP, providing technical assistance and other services. For their work, districts received reimbursements of up to 14 percent of the value of the enrollment, up to a total of \$4,500.

District involvement varies across the country, but thousands of landowners make their local conservation districts the first stop for assistance. With CRP at an important crossroads in the next few years, districts and other partners will be called upon to provide more services.

## NACD PREPARING TA REPORT ON CRP WORKLOAD

NACD plans to submit a report to the Farm Service Agency in January on options to address CRP technical assistance needs in the coming years.

The ability to deliver technical assistance will be important as contracts on 28 million acres of CRP lands are re-enrolled and extended or allowed to expire between 2007-2010. CRP technical assistance requirements have also increased as the program has broadened. CCRP, CREP and targeted CRP initiatives have added new opportunities to accomplish conservation gains, but also require increased technical assistance for landowners.

NACD signed a contract with FSA in September 2005 to identify and report on options to address TA workload issues. Conservation districts are longstanding partners of FSA and NRCS. Under CRP, districts are given a role in the legislative language, including approving the producer's conservation plan.

"Our plan is to include a full range of options for FSA. That will include a role or roles for NRCS, state agencies, conservation districts, nonprofit groups, private sector providers, and others," said NACD President Bill Wilson. "We believe it makes sense to use much of the existing USDA technical assistance infrastructure, including the

## 'JUST DO IT,' SAYS VETERAN CONSERVATIONIST

Chase Heyman has retired from the Huron Soil and Water Conservation District Board in Ohio after a 45-year tenure, but his conservation work on the family farm and in the district will endure.

"Just do it," is what he says about good conservation. His son, Kurt, has heard that message. Kurt serves on the neighboring Erie County Soil and Water Conservation District Board and has taken a leadership role nationally, serving on NACD's Agricultural Lands Resources Committee.

Heyman's Enterprise Hill Farms "was installing buffers before cost share was available," says District Conservationist Mike Patterson. The operation has more than 11 acres of grassed waterways and more than 24 acres of grass buffers. Son Kurt offers this perspective: "You should do it whether you get paid or not, because it's the right thing to do."

The farm was enrolled in the Conservation Security Program in 2005. A signing ceremony was held at the farm and attended by NRCS State

Conservationist Terry Cosby.

"Chase has been a strong advocate and a living example of a true conservationist," says District Administrative Assistant/Coordinator Alisa Schaffer. "His farming operation demonstrates the importance of preventing soil erosion, implementing sound drainage practices, establishing good woodland management, utilizing crop rotations, and using improved agronomic techniques. He and his large family have worked hard to be successful."

Chase Heyman began his work with the Huron District in 1961. Over the years, he has hosted numerous Future Farmers of America land judging contests, conservation field days and tours.

In addition to his work with the district, he has been a 33-year member of the FSA County Committee, a 30-year member of the Sunrise Cooperative Board, and a nine-year member of the Erie Basin Resource Conservation and Development Council.

He is credited with being instrumental in the formation



**Chase Heyman (center) received the Cardinal Award from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Soil and Water. With him in this photo are Fred Hammon (left), administrator for the Division of Soil and Water, and David Hanselmann, chief for the Division of Soil and Water.**

of the Honey Creek No-Till Demonstration Project in the late 1970s, which led to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency special Lake Erie Accelerated Conservation Tillage Project in the 1980s. He also helped the Huron District secure three EPA 319 Grants for projects in the Huron and Vermilion river basins.

Heyman's efforts haven't gone unnoticed. He received the 2005 Cardinal Award from Ohio Department of Natural Resources, honoring him for

demonstrating exceptional awareness and concern for ideals reflected in the department's mission. In 2004, he received the Ohio Conservation Supervisor Award sponsored by the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation District Employees Association. In 2003, he and his family were honored with the Ohio Conservation Farm Family Award sponsored by the Ohio Farmer magazine and the Ohio DNR Division of Soil and Water Conservation.

Field Office Technical Guide, conservation practice standards, and, where appropriate, the personnel associated with this infrastructure rather than invent a new and separate one for one conservation program." Wilson conveyed those remarks to the NRCS National Leadership Team earlier this year.

NACD staff has worked with both NRCS and FSA state and national offices in preparing the report. In addition, NACD's Agricultural Lands Resources Committee met in Washington, D.C., in December to develop draft recommendations and provide guidance from a producer and local government perspective.

Also attending the meeting were FSA Conservation and Environmental Programs Division staff, including director Robert Stephenson, Assistant Director Mike Linsenbigler and CRP Program Manager Bev

Preston. Gus Jordan participated on behalf of NRCS. NACD Executive Director Krysta Harden and President Wilson were also on hand for part of the meeting.

### NACD COMMITTEE OFFERS CRP PERSPECTIVES

Members of the National Association of Conservation Districts' Agricultural Lands Resources Committee offered varied perspectives on CRP when the committee met recently in Washington, D.C.

Contracts on 28 million acres of CRP land will be re-enrolled, extended or ended between 2007-2010. There will be impacts from any of those scenarios, as committee members noted in information sharing. Here's a summary of comments.

Texas has more than 4 million acres of CRP land. NACD South Central Region representative William Thomas Jr. said he favors CRP re-enrollments where possible. "I'm interested in seeing the program maintained, but I am concerned about workloads," said the Richards, Texas, rancher.

**Economics will affect conversion** where agricultural land values are high, noted Henry County, Illinois, corn and soybean producer Jerry Snodgrass. "Where rental rates are high, some landowners will take land out of CRP due to the fact that they can get more for cropland than CRP," said Snodgrass. Acceptance of CCRP and CREP has been broad across the state, Snodgrass added. "CCRP or CREP is on almost every farm in some areas," he said.

**If CRP lands are converted back to cropland**, some dry regions may see wind erosion

increases, said Paul Stoker of Othello, Washington. "In dry areas, we could have large acreages go out of CRP, and that will have a negative environmental impact," said Stoker, a Pacific Region representative and member of the Grant Conservation District Board in Washington.

Southwest Regional Representative Randy Loutzenhiser said there are similar concerns about CRP conversion in Colorado. "In Colorado, a lot of land was broken out (plowed) that shouldn't have been. It's very susceptible to wind erosion. Thank goodness there is CRP out there," said Loutzenhiser, a rancher and member of the Flagler Conservation District Board in Colorado.

**In other regions, runoff may increase** as lands are converted, said Greg Foley of the Kansas State Conservation Commission.

**CRP "took out big chunks**

of land” in Montana, said Committee Chair Luther Waterland, representing the Northern Plains Region. “A lot of young farmers were kept out because CRP kept rental rates high” in his region, said Waterland, a rancher and member of the Carter County Conservation District Board. One strategy for the future of much CRP land may be to keep the land planted to grass and to allow haying and grazing, he added.

**Development is driving rental rates upward** in parts of the country, several committee members said. “Development hurts. It’s driving land rates up in parts of the South,” said Southeast Region representative Jim Summers of The Iredell Soil and Water Conservation District in Statesville, North Carolina.

Northeast Region Representative Terry Pepper noted that land values in his home state of Delaware sometimes reach \$70,000 to \$90,000 per acre, so CRP isn’t an option for many landowners.

“**CRP is here to stay,**” said Paul Kalass, representing the National Conservation District Employees Association. Kalass, a technician in the Goodhue County Soil and Water Conservation District in Minnesota, cited water quality gains and reduced erosion as

positives. “For the most part, it has been good. More flexibility is needed. We should work with it and improve it,” he said of the program.

**The need for flexibility** was voiced several times. “Not all wellhead protection needs to be in a circle,” said Debra Ryun, executive director of the Conservation Districts of Iowa, who represented state conservation district association executives at the meeting.

**Much general CRP land isn’t being managed well,** added Kurt Heyman, North Central Region representative. CREP and CCRP land, on the other hand, “is really protecting resources,” he said. “In our area, there are a lot of waterways and buffers. That’s a good thing,” said Heyman, a farmer and member of the Erie Soil and Water Conservation District board.

**CRP and CREP are tools** to enhance both water quality and quantity, said Foley. “We need additional acres,” he said. Nebraska’s CREP was designed to address water quantity concerns, and the proposed Colorado CREP would do the same, Foley said.

## RADIO SHOW TO FOCUS ON PLAYAS

The High Plains Public Radio Network will begin in

2006 to take the message of conserving playas and other wetlands and prairies to listeners across four states in the region. A new show, “Playa Country,” will be broadcast to listeners across the entire network, which reaches all of western Kansas, part of southeastern Colorado and much of the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles.

The show is produced for the network by Playa Lakes Joint Venture, a partnership of conservation groups, federal and state wildlife agencies, businesses and High Plains landowners and residents. Dale and Marcie Robinson of Boy/Girl Audio provide on-air talent and technical production for the show. It will focus on the values of playas and efforts to conserve them, as well as other wetlands, rivers, streams and grasslands. Shows will feature interviews with landowners, biologists, resource managers, community leaders and others who are actively conserving wildlife habitat in the region.

Playas are shallow, seasonal wetlands that serve as recharge basins for the Ogallala Aquifer and provide critical habitat for hundreds of wildlife species. The wetlands are specific to the High Plains region, with more than 60,000 in a six-state area of Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

For more information on playas and the new radio show, visit the Joint Venture Web site at [www.pljv.org](http://www.pljv.org) or the High Plains Public Radio Web site at [www.hppr.org](http://www.hppr.org).

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