

BUFFERNOTES



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BUFFER NOTES

is written by the **National Association of Conservation Districts** in cooperation with the **Farm Service Agency**

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CRP: 1 MILLION NEW ACRES, 13 MILLION RE-ENROLLED



USDA has announced that it will accept one million acres offered under the Conservation Reserve

Program general sign-up and that CRP participants intend to re-enroll and extend contracts covering 13 million acres set to expire Sept. 20, 2007.

The 13 million acres are among 15.5 million acres set to expire in 2007. Following are some highlights of the new sign-up and the re-enrollments and extensions.

CRP general sign-up

For CRP general sign-up 33, which ran from March 27 to April 28, 2006, USDA selected 1 million acres of the 1.4 million acres offered. USDA selected the most environmentally fragile of the cropland acres offered, ranking offers based on cost and Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) factors of soil erosion, water quality, enduring benefits, air quality and wildlife enhancement.

The Farm Service Agency ranked all offers on the same basis and considered offers with an EBI score of at least 242 as acceptable for enrollment. The average EBI score

for all offers was 284.

The average rental rate per acre is \$53.44, and will provide annual rental payments of \$54 million to participants for the 1 million acres enrolled. This additional acreage raises the total CRP acreage to 36.68 million acres.

FSA received 22,990 offers for enrollment and accepted 18,140. Offers will become effective on Oct. 1, 2006.

The accepted acreage includes about 673,000 acres located within conservation priority areas, about 629,000 acres with an Erodibility Index (EI) of 8 or greater (highly erodible), and about 265,000 acres to be restored to rare and declining habitats. Also, offers involving more than 53,000 acres of new tree plantings, including over 16,000 acres of long leaf pine habitat, will be accepted.

Re-enrollments and extensions

CRP participants with land set to expire in 2007 intend to re-enroll or extend CRP contracts covering 13 million acres, almost 84 percent of the 15.5 million acres set to expire.

In 2004, President Bush directed USDA to offer re-enrollments and extensions of CRP contracts set to expire in

CREP FORUM: QUALITY & QUANTITY

The 2006 National CREP Forum Aug. 14-17 in Lincoln, Nebraska, offers a program loaded with learning and information-sharing opportunities. Among the highlights are sessions focusing on the ability of these federal-state conservation partnerships to address both water quality and quantity issues.

"CREP: Creative Solutions, Multiple Benefits, Many Partners," will gather partners from across the nation at The Cornhusker hotel. Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman and USDA Secretary Mike Johanns will be among speakers at the forum.

Registration deadline is Aug. 3. A working agenda, registration forms and other information are posted at <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/crep/crep.htm>.

The agenda includes updates on CREP, maintaining wildlife benefits, success stories, tours and other field opportunities. A dinner program Aug. 15 will celebrate 20 years of CRP.

Conference registration questions can be directed to Bobbie Kriz-Wickham at the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, 800-831-0550 or (402) 471-2341.

"CRP participants with land set to expire in 2007 intend to re-enroll or extend CRP contracts covering 13 million acres, almost 84 percent of the 15.5 million acres set to expire."

2007 through 2010. FSA contacted almost 158,000 CRP participants with contracts scheduled to expire in 2007 beginning on Jan. 31, 2006, to determine their interest in voluntarily continuing in CRP.

FSA has posted tables showing state and county acreage enrollment data at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp.htm>.

FSA used the EBI at the time of enrollment to determine eligibility for CRP re-enrollments



ENROLLMENT ACTIVITY AND NEWS

CRP wetland practice acres since 2002 total 224,842.

These include:

- Floodplain (CP23), 90,412 acres
- Farmable wetland (CP 27&28), 64,611
- Bottomland timber (CP31), 26,540
- Other wetland (CP9&30), 24,065
- Non-floodplain (CP23A), 19,214

Top states include:

Iowa, 60,844 acres
 Minnesota, 41,187
 Louisiana, 31,526
 South Dakota, 30,843
 Arkansas, 10,615
 North Dakota, 7,381
 Illinois, 6,728
 Michigan, 5,686
 Missouri, 5,544
 Indiana, 3,766

Thanks to Alexander Barbarika of FSA for the wetlands summer. The May 2006 CRP Monthly Summary can be viewed at www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp_statistics.htm.

or extensions, giving additional credit for contracts within national CRP conservation priority areas. FSA ranked individual contracts into one of five tiers based on the environmental benefits of the original EBI score. Eligible participants ranking in the first tier (between 81-100 percent) of the EBI could re-enroll their land in new 10-year contracts. Farmers and ranchers with wetlands in this top tier ranking were eligible for a 15-year contract.

Eligible participants ranking in the second tier (between 61-80 percent) could extend their CRP contracts for five years. Eligible participants ranking within the third tier (between 41-60 percent) could extend their CRP contracts by four years. Eligible participants ranking in the fourth tier (between 21-40 percent) could receive three-year extensions. Eligible participants ranking in the bottom tier could extend their contracts by two years.

FSA also notified almost 160,000 participants with contracts expiring between 2008 and 2010 of their opportunity to re-enroll and extend. Deadline for deciding was June 30, 2006. FSA said it will report the intentions of those contract holders later this summer.

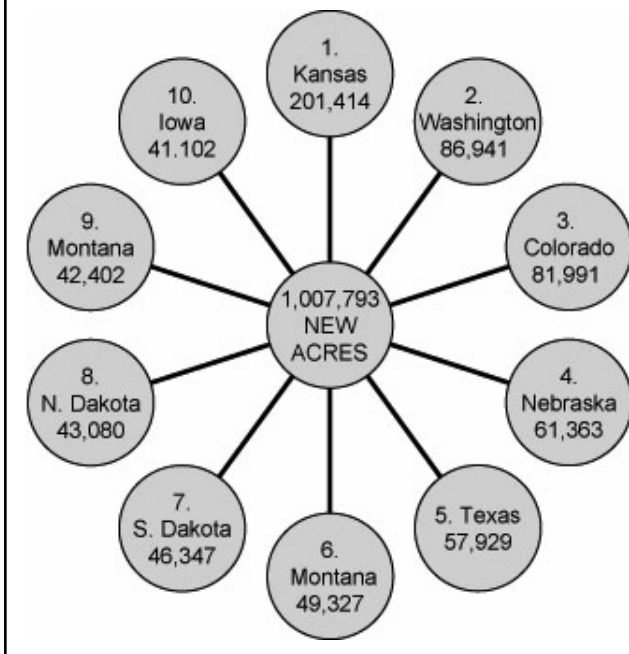
Compliance checks

Before approving re-enrolled or extended contracts, FSA will review the contract to ensure that the required cover is maintained and there is compliance with other contract provisions. In addition, participants must be able to show that they meet eligibility requirements for the new enrollment period. In the case of re-enrollments, updated rental rates will apply.

Other CRP initiatives

Of the 39.2 million acres authorized for CRP enrollment, about 3 million acres are reserved for special CRP initiatives that target the most pressing environmental needs. The initiatives include the continuous CRP sign-up; the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program; the

CRP 33 TOP 10 STATES BY ACREAGE



Farmable Wetlands Program; the Bottomland Hardwood Tree Initiative; the Presidential Quail Initiative; and the Wetlands Restoration Initiative.

EROSION SLIDES BY 43 PERCENT

USDA's National Resources Inventory (NRI) shows total soil erosion on cultivated and non-cultivated cropland in the U.S. decreased 43 percent between 1982 and 2003, sheet and rill erosion decreased 42 percent, and wind erosion decreased 44 percent. NRI is a statistical survey of natural resource conditions and trends on non-federal land.

"This remarkable decrease in soil erosion can be attributed to the extraordinary efforts by America's private landowners to conserve and protect agricultural lands," said Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns. "This report underscores the value of cooperative conservation through partnerships with our farmers and ranchers, who are among the best stewards of the land."

Nationwide, sheet and rill erosion - the removal of layers of soil by rainfall and runoff - on cropland dropped from 4 tons per acre per year in 1982

to 2.6 tons per acre per year in 2003. Wind erosion rates also dropped from 3.3 to 2.1 tons per acre per year.

The data also shows that 72 percent of the nation's cropland was eroding below soil loss tolerance rates, compared to 60 percent in 1982. Highly Erodible Land (HEL) being cropped is down to about 100 million acres, compared to 124 million acres in 1982. HEL cropland acreage eroding above soil loss tolerance rates declined 35 percent. Non-HEL cropland acreage eroding above soil loss tolerance rates decreased 45 percent between 1982 and 2003.

The Missouri and the Souris-Red-Rainy/Upper Mississippi River Basins - approximately 50 percent of U.S. cropland - experienced the most significant reductions in total erosion from 1982 to 2003. In the Missouri River Basin, which includes sections of Colorado, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and all of Nebraska, the average rate of soil erosion fell 3 tons per acre per year.

The Souris-Red-Rainy/Upper Mississippi River Basin, which includes sections of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, fell

2.5 tons per acre per year.

The NRI, conducted by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service in cooperation with Iowa State University, shows that the total tons of soil erosion declined in all major river basins. The study also shows a downward trend in both sheet and rill erosion and wind erosion continued through 2003.

For more information on the results of the cropland erosion study, visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI>. For soils information, visit <http://soils.usda.gov/>.

IDAHO GETS NATION'S 36TH CREP

A \$258 million CREP agreement for Idaho is the latest to include reduction of water consumption among program goals.

With the Idaho CREP in place, there are now 36 such agreements in 28 states. Nationwide, landowners on 31,646 farms participate in various state CREPs, protecting 807,343 acres, including 88,072 wetland acres.

The Idaho CREP will reduce irrigation water consumption in addition to improving water quality and fish and wildlife habitat in Idaho's Snake River, partners announced.

Participants will establish native grassland habitat to increase wildlife populations and groundwater quality, while reducing irrigation.

CREP is a federal-state cooperative conservation program that addresses targeted agricultural-related environmental concerns. With the Idaho CREP in place, the Commodity Credit Corp. now has 36 CREP agreements with 28 states. Nationwide, landowners on 31,646 farms participate in various state CREPs, protecting 807,343 acres, including 88,072 wetland acres.

"This is a winning agreement for all of Idaho," said Idaho Lt. Gov. Jim Risch. "The agreement benefits our agriculture community and protects the environment. After extensive research, we

have determined that this unique state-federal partnership will result in better water flows for spring users, improved water quality for everyone and an increase in wildlife habitat."

Idaho Senators Mike Crapo and Larry Craig and Congressmen Mike Simpson and C.L. "Butch" Otter issued a joint statement hailing the new CREP. "The CREP agreement envisions enrolling up to 100,000 acres of irrigated cropland in the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer and could reduce irrigated water use by 200,000 acre-feet annually. Groundwater levels will be increased under the plan, which would also establish new wetlands, grassland areas, and permanent vegetative cover for wildlife," the delegation said. "The CREP program will be an effective tool in replenishing the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer and helping Idaho meet its conservation goals."

The project area of eastern Idaho includes all or parts of 19 counties. In addition, all or parts of three other counties - Bannock, Bonneville and Power - will be eligible if the total CRP enrollment drops below 25 percent of the county's total cropland before the CREP project reaches the 100,000-acre enrollment target. Sign-up began May 30. Land enrolled in the program will remain under contract for 14 to 15 years, as specified in the contract.

CCC estimates the Idaho Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer CREP's total cost over a 15-year period will be \$258 million, with CCC contributing \$183 million and the state of Idaho \$75 million.

Over the course of the contracts, CREP participants will receive CCC incentive payments as applicable and cost-share assistance for installing approved conservation practices. CCC will also provide annual rental payments based on irrigated cash rents for the life of the contract. Idaho will provide incentive cost-share payments for CREP enrolled land, and buy out water rights on other land in the CREP project area.

More information:

<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/default.htm>.

STUDENTS SET OUT TO EXPLORE SUSQUEHANNA

A group of high school students set out June 18 to explore one of the East's major rivers. Team Susquehanna hit the water in Cooperstown, New York, launching what will become a once-in-a-life-time event for the 12 Pennsylvania students.

Expedition Susquehanna is a 30-day adventure down the Susquehanna River from New York to Maryland. By the time the team reaches the Chesapeake Bay, it will have traveled more than 400 miles, seeing both the pristine and the polluted, as well as talking to citizens about restoration efforts already under way.

This is the second expedition being sponsored by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the first held last year on the James River in Virginia. It is offered through CBF's environmental education program, which offers daily, weekly, and bi-weekly educational experiences for students and teachers throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. In Pennsylvania, CBF's Susquehanna Watershed Education Program (SWEP), runs educational programming eight months per year, getting

hundreds of students and their teachers out on to the Susquehanna River and local waterways.

The Expedition Susquehanna crew is made up of students who are active members of FFA. FFA is nationally known for its work in developing leadership skills in young adults through agricultural education, and CBF offers the nation's largest environmental education program. Taken in tandem, these strengths provide a background that will hone the young leaders' knowledge of agriculture and the environment, two of the region's most pressing issues.

Highlights of the expedition include exploring the Susquehanna's headwaters in Cooperstown, a two-day excursion into World's End State Park for fly-fishing, snorkeling, and water quality studies, and then paddling into the Meshoppen area.

A Web site was created for the trip. The site offers interactive maps, video and audio clips, photo galleries, and journals submitted by the students. Visit www.cbf.org/Susquehanna for more.

EQUIP QUALIFYING PROJECT DEADLINE IS EXTENDED

The deadline for completing environmental projects to



Expedition Susquehanna team members (from left) Brian Gray, Jessica Thomas, Travis Stotemyer and Suzanne Yocum snorkeled in the Loyalsock Creek to learn about hellbenders, prehistoric salamanders that live only in high quality streams. The team ran into high-water conditions due to heavy rains in the East in late June, so it waited until water levels dropped before continuing its trek.

qualify for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) energy cost assistance will be extended to September 1, 2006.

"Farmers and ranchers have put various conservation practices on hold because of the recent increases in the cost of energy," said Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns. "As part of our commitment to help mitigate the impact of high energy costs on agricultural producers, this cost adjustment and time extension will lessen the impact of energy prices on farmers and ranchers, while protecting our natural resources."

The earlier deadline was June 30th to receive the incentive payment for EQIP projects that have been delayed due to increasing energy costs. The EQIP energy cost assistance applies to regular EQIP projects, Ground and Surface Water Conservation EQIP projects and Klamath Basin EQIP projects.

The one-time payment adjustment applies only to participants who signed EQIP contracts in 2004 or earlier and will only be paid for practices that are completed between March 1 and September 1, 2006. Projects must be completed before payments can be made. The 15 percent payment increase will focus on a select list of specific practices that have

escalated in price by 20 percent or more because of rising energy costs and to practices most affected by increased costs in construction materials such as concrete, steel and plastic pipe.

NRCS RELEASES STRATEGIC PLAN

NRCS Chief Knight recently released the agency's new strategic plan, which outlines the long-term goals, objectives and strategies to achieve effective results for productive lands and a healthy environment.

"This plan sets the direction for NRCS and lays out forward-looking conservation priorities and goals," Knight said. "Our nation's farmers and ranchers are the best stewards of the land, and this strategic plan outlines how our agency will effectively serve them, while ensuring a healthy environment for all Americans."

Called "Productive Lands-Healthy Environment," the plan can be found on the national NRCS Web site at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/about/strategicplan/>. Hard copies are available at 1-888-LANDCARE.

NRCS activities will be guided by three overarching strategies-the watershed

approach, a market-based approach and cooperative conservation-as the agency works to achieve the six goals.

Information about NRCS and its programs and services can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>.

EMERGENCY CRP POSTPONED

WASHINGTON - FSA Administrator Teresa Lasseter announced this month that USDA is postponing the Emergency Forestry Conservation Reserve Program (EFCRP) sign-up, originally scheduled to begin June 19, 2006.

Action in Congress on a supplemental appropriations bill changed the terms of the Emergency Forestry Conservation Reserve Program. "USDA will postpone the originally scheduled sign-up in order to provide further information to applicants on how these changes may impact their applications. New sign-up dates will be announced in the near future," she said.

The measure, H.R. 4939, alters EFCRP, which will help landowners and operators restore and replant forestland damaged by the 2005 calendar year hurricanes. EFCRP fund-

ing was authorized by the Department of Defense, Emergency Supplemental Appropriations to Address Hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico, and Pandemic Influenza Act, 2006 (Pub. L. 109-148), and signed by President Bush on Dec. 30, 2005.

To be eligible for EFCRP assistance, an owner or operator must have experienced at least a 35 percent loss to merchantable timber on private non-industrial forestland due to one of the calendar year 2005 hurricanes.

The tree loss must have occurred in one of the 261 counties receiving presidential or secretarial primary disaster designations caused by 2005 Hurricanes Dennis, Katrina, Ophelia, Rita or Wilma. Loss assistance is unavailable in contiguous counties. A complete list of eligible counties in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Texas is available online at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas/publications/facts/html/hurrcounties06.htm>.



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