

## **HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM (HFRP)**

### **Overview**

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is a voluntary program established for the purpose of restoring and enhancing forest ecosystems to: 1) promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, 2) improve biodiversity; and 3) enhance carbon sequestration. Program implementation has been delegated to the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The HFRP was signed into law as part of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. The program is authorized to be carried out from 2004 through 2008 and allow for up to 2 million acres.

### **Benefits**

Landowner protections will be made available to landowners enrolled in the HFRP who agree, for a specified period, to restore or improve their land for threatened or endangered species habitat. In exchange, they avoid certain regulatory restrictions under the Endangered Species Act on the use of that land.

The HFRP provides financial assistance in the form of easement payments and cost-share for specific conservation actions completed by the landowner.

### **Enrollment Options**

The Program offers three enrollment options:

- 1) A 10-year cost-share agreement; for which the landowner may receive 50 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices,
- 2) A 30-year easement, for which the landowner may receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 75 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices, or
- 3) An easement of not more than 99-years, for which landowners may receive 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 100 percent the average cost of the approved conservation practices.

### **Eligibility**

To be eligible for enrollment, land must be private land or Tribal lands which will restore, enhance, or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery of a threatened or endangered species, must improve biological diversity, or increase carbon sequestration.

Land enrolled in the HFRP must have a restoration plan. The cost effectiveness of each agreement or easement and associated restoration plans must maximize the environmental benefits per dollar expended.

- Restoration plans must have practices necessary to restore and enhance habitat for species listed as threatened or endangered or are candidates for the threatened or endangered species list.

- Technical assistance will be provided to help program participants in complying with the terms of restoration plans under the HFRP.

Historic forestland that has been converted to cropland would be eligible for HFRP if the cropland offered met the ranking criteria for: 1) promoting the recovery of threatened and endangered species, 2) improving biodiversity, or 3) enhancing carbon sequestration.

#### **Status of Program Implementation and Rule Making**

- NRCS announced the 2006 program sign-up in three pilot states—Maine, Mississippi, and Arkansas from June 19 through July 7, 2006.
- NRCS published an interim final rule in May 2006.