

# Environmental Quality Incentives Program Contributions to Fish and Wildlife Conservation

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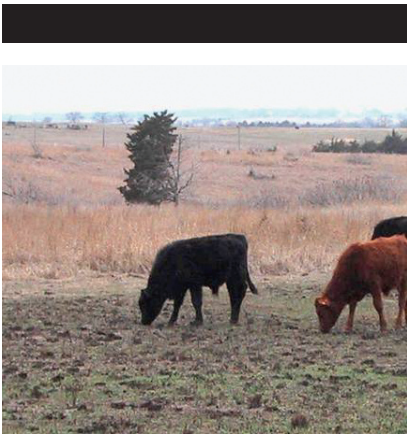
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## Abstract

*The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program whereby the U.S. Department of Agriculture provides technical and financial assistance to active farmers and ranchers to address natural resource concerns such as soil conservation, water quality and quantity, nutrient management, and fish and wildlife habitat. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is working with these landowners to maximize the environmental benefits gained for the expenditures made in the program. Funding has expanded significantly under the 2002 Farm Bill, with the amount of annual funding authorized reaching \$1.3 billion by fiscal year 2007. The EQIP has been used to implement a wide variety of practices that are considered beneficial to many species of fish and wildlife. The NRCS is also beginning to use EQIP to address the needs of declining and other at-risk fish and wildlife species. Few data are available that document fish and wildlife response to EQIP. Program implementation to date is summarized, and recent information on planning of practices with the potential to benefit fish and wildlife resources is examined.*

## Introduction

Since the 1940s, agricultural production has transformed landscapes in North America and elsewhere (National Research Council 1989). Production systems and advancing technology have enabled greater commodity outputs necessary to feed a growing global population. These changes have also generated concern regarding environmental and ecological degradation associated with modern agriculture (Freemark



Fire and livestock grazing are used to create structural heterogeneity in tallgrass prairie. (S. Fuhlendorf, Oklahoma State University)

1995). Beginning with the Conservation Title of the 1985 Food Security Act, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs have been largely targeted toward addressing these concerns.

Set-aside programs that remove parcels of land from crop production have been an effective means of providing wildlife habitat on agricultural landscapes (Van Buskirk and Willi 2004). Farm Bill conservation programs that involve set-aside or land retirement, such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), are recognized for providing fish and wildlife habitat benefits (see papers on these programs elsewhere in this volume).

Sustainable farming measures and practices applied within and around active croplands such as grassed waterways, field borders, hedgerows and other conservation buffers, and certain cultural practices have been recognized for providing wildlife habitat on agricultural landscapes (Carlson 1985, Jahn and Schenck 1991). Similarly, integrating grazing practices based on ecological principles on rangelands can be an effective means of supporting fish and wildlife populations on grazing lands used for livestock production (Fuhlendorf and Engle 2001).

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program is USDA's primary cost-share program for assisting farmers and ranchers to address natural resource issues on working croplands and rangelands they own and manage. All land-management actions have the potential to affect fish and wildlife resources in some way. Targeted toward America's production-oriented cropland, rangelands, and forests, EQIP has the potential to provide significant benefits to fish and wildlife associated with these largely private lands. Esser et al. (2000) recognized this potential in their description of the program during the first few years of operation. This paper updates program implementation information and summarizes literature describing EQIP benefits to fish and wildlife resources.

## Program Description

The Natural Resources Conservation Service works cooperatively with agricultural producers to deliver EQIP. Established in the 1996 Farm Bill, the program provides cost-share and technical assistance to farmers and ranchers through voluntary contracts to address threats to soil, water, and related natural resources, including grazing lands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat. Appendix 1 contains the program purposes as defined by the 2002 Farm Bill.

Structural and management practices included in conservation plans developed by NRCS or qualified technical service providers are eligible for up to 75% cost-share (up to 90% for beginning and limited resource producers). General descriptions of various program elements, along with key program changes made by the 2002 Farm Bill, are provided in Table 1. Additional information on the specifics of program operation is provided at <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip>>.

Table 1. Comparison of Environmental Quality Incentives Program elements between the 1996 and 2002 Farm Bills.

Program element	1996 Farm Bill	2002 Farm Bill
Authorized funding level	\$200 million/year	Fiscal Year (FY) 2003: \$700 million FY 2004: \$1 billion FY 2005: \$1.2 billion FY 2006: \$1.2 billion FY 2007: \$1.3 billion
Cost-share level	Up to 75% of client cost	Up to 75% of client cost; up to 90% cost-share for limited resource and beginning farmers and ranchers
Program targeting	Funding targeted to geographic priority areas	No required geographic targeting
Contract duration	5 to 10 years	1–10 years after practice installation
Payment limits to participants	\$10,000 per year \$50,000 per contract	\$450,000 per individual or entity
Program funds targeted to livestock operations	At least 50%	60% target
Eligibility of large confined animal-feeding operations	Ineligible for cost-share on animal waste storage and treatment	Eligible for cost-share on animal waste storage and treatment when part of a comprehensive nutrient-management plan

## Program Funding and Enrollment

Authorized funding levels for EQIP have increased substantially under the 2002 Farm Bill. However, there remains far greater demand for the program than it can address (Table 2). As directed by statute, greater than 50% of funds are being directed to address natural resource concerns related to livestock operations. Approximately 75% of cost-share payments made during fiscal year (FY) 2004 were in support of practices relating to animal waste practices and fencing, soil erosion and sediment control, and irrigation (Table 3).

Table 2. Contract and fund obligation information for Environmental Quality Incentives Program during fiscal years 2002–2004.

Program activity	Fiscal year		
	2002	2003	2004
No. of contracts established	19,817	30,251	46,413
Cost-share funds obligated	\$322,193,226	\$483,483,746	\$718,150,476
Livestock-related cost-share obligated	no data	\$323,053,083	\$449,558,698
No. of unfunded applications	70,495	174,062	135,394
Unfunded cost-share	\$1,486,944,435	\$3,070,533,611	\$2,204,438,291

Source: USDA System 36 database.

Table 3. Payments made during fiscal year (FY) 2004 for practices approved in contracts accepted into the program during FY 1997–2004.

Practices related to:	Amount disbursed
Animal waste practices, plus fencing	\$68,130,224
Soil erosion and sediment control	\$58,292,173
Irrigation practices	\$76,220,632
Grazing lands practices	\$44,057,740
Total <sup>a</sup>	\$269,225,386

Source: USDA System 36 database.

<sup>a</sup> Approximately \$22 million was provided for practices in other categories.

A wide variety of structural and cultural conservation practices are cost-shared through EQIP to address a broad range of natural resource issues on active agricultural operations. Appendix 2 provides a list of practices planned and applied during FY 2004. While the information provided in Appendix 2 applies to just 1 year of program activity, it provides an illustration of the diversity of practices supported by the program. For further illustration, practices generally recognized as providing substantial potential to directly benefit fish and wildlife are highlighted.

The majority of EQIP planning activity during FY 2004 centered on addressing soil and water resource concerns in dry-land and irrigated cropping operations and grazing systems. Livestock production facility practices planned during FY 2004 include 14,487 barnyard runoff management systems, 3,805 composting facilities, 101,184 manure transfer facilities, 22,999 roof runoff structures, 235,909 waste storage facilities, and 241,572 livestock watering facilities (Appendix 2). Cropland system practices planned in FY 2004 include 258,048 irrigation systems, over 2,631 miles of irrigation water conveyance ditches and pipelines, nutrient management plans on nearly 3.9 million acres, over 6,789 miles

of pipeline, residue management plans on over 2.8 million acres, nearly 558 miles of subsurface drains, 4,739 miles of terraces, over 642 miles of underground outlets, and over 934 miles of windbreak/shelterbelts to be established. Practices planned on grazing lands include over 13,788 miles of fence and prescribed grazing on over 9 million acres (Appendix 2).

## Fish and Wildlife Benefits

Esser et al. (2000) found no specific assessments documenting fish and wildlife response to EQIP. Our review of the literature did not identify any significant assessments conducted since 2000 specifically related to EQIP. However, our appreciation for the potential of EQIP-funded practices to support a wide variety of fish and wildlife continues to emerge. We present several examples of habitat improvements and other practices where EQIP is being used to the benefit of fish and wildlife resources.

### *Invasive Species*

Invasion of native ecosystems by non-indigenous species has become a major issue influencing the integrity of natural ecosystems and the welfare of native plants and animals they support (Westbrooks 1998). In an effort to address the growing problem of invasive species control and management, EQIP is beginning to support projects that control invasive species as a primary concern (Figure 1). Although the number of contracts affected is still a small percentage of contracts established in FY 2004 (<0.5%), the potential for the use of EQIP to address invasive species issues is apparent. In some instances, the impact of invasive species is the primary limiting factor for fish and wildlife populations.



Rangeland watering trough for livestock. (G. Wilson, USDA-NRCS)

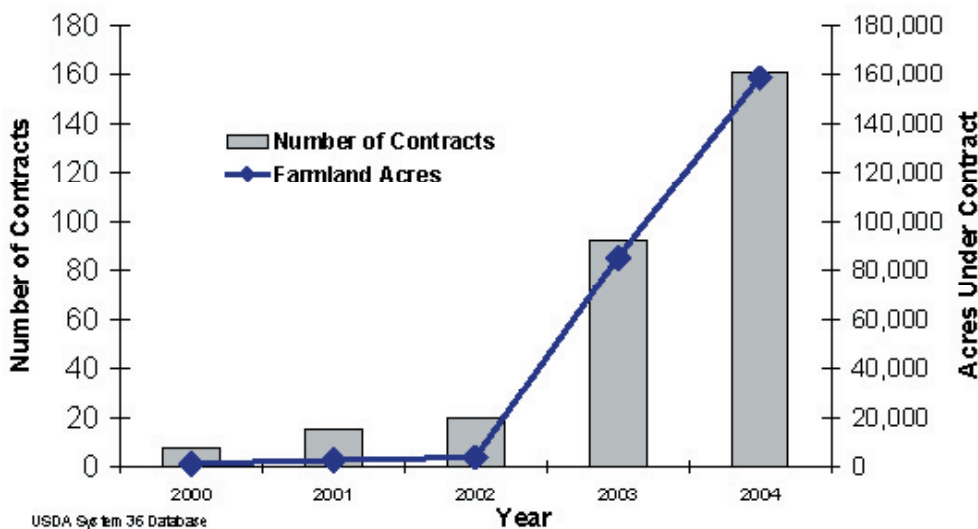


Figure 1. Number of EQIP contracts and acres under contract. Primary resource concern: invasion of non-indigenous species, 2000–2004.

### *Threatened and Endangered Species*

Whereas the majority of EQIP practices address other resource concerns as described above, EQIP is also being used to address habitat needs of



threatened, endangered, and other at-risk plant and animal species. Figure 2 illustrates the growth of the use of EQIP in recent years to address threatened and endangered species needs. The acres under contract reflect the total acreage of farm or ranch lands associated with contracts enrolled under this objective; an unknown percentage of acres under contract were actually treated to address listed species needs. The increase in use of EQIP to address listed species reflects the increasing focus NRCS is placing on targeting at-risk and declining species. A variety of practices are being applied to benefit a diversity of listed species across the country, and the geographic distribution of these practices aligns with where opportunities to affect listed species exist (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Number of EQIP contracts and acres under contract. Primary resource concern: threatened and endangered species, 2000–2004.

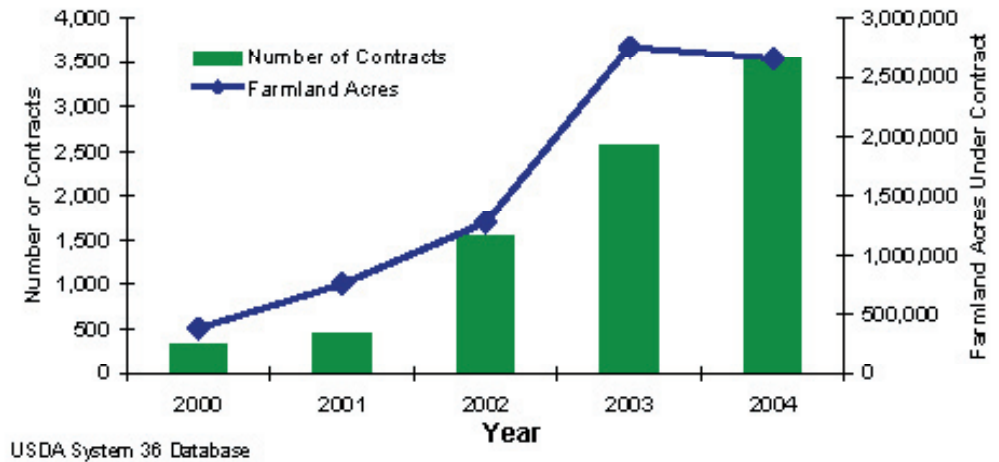
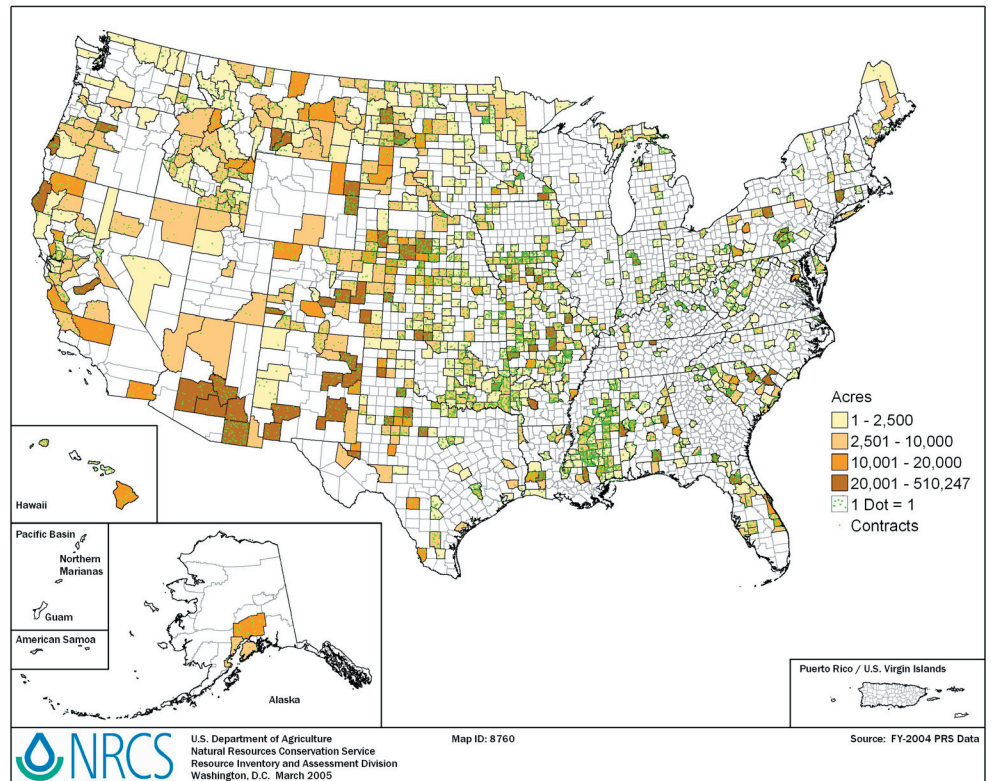


Figure 3. EQIP acres of land where threatened and endangered species was a primary resource concern, 2000–2004.



One example of the use of EQIP to benefit at-risk species is the case of the arctic grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*), a species that is a candidate for listing as threatened within its range in Montana and Wyoming. The arctic grayling is a salmonid that requires high-quality, cold-water streams and lakes to survive. Practices funded by EQIP helped arctic grayling survive in Montana during severe drought conditions. In June 2003, landowners along Montana's Big Hole River agreed to shorten their irrigation season on 14,304 acres of agricultural land to maintain river flows to support this fish. Landowners received nearly \$800,000 in EQIP cost-share funds to implement water-conservation practices in the watershed. Irrigators ceased water withdrawal early and installed 12 new off-stream livestock water facilities to enable restriction of livestock access to the stream. Typical low-water flows in the Big Hole River occur at the end of August. In recent years, water levels have dropped to as low as 6 cubic feet per second (cfs) in late summer; arctic grayling need a minimum of 20 cfs of flow to survive in this reach. On 10 August 2003, water levels were at 28 cfs, a level twice as high as the previous year. Montana's Fish and Wildlife and Parks biologists gave EQIP much of the credit for helping the arctic grayling survive the drought and perhaps helping to keep the species off the endangered species list.

The NRCS is currently using EQIP to support the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program by working with producers in to implement on-farm salinity control measures in 6 project areas in western Colorado, eastern Utah, and southwestern Wyoming. Wildlife conservation and mitigation measures are included. Additional information on EQIP activities in these salinity areas can be accessed at <[www.usbr.gov/uc/progact/salinity/index.html](http://www.usbr.gov/uc/progact/salinity/index.html)> and <[www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/salinity/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/salinity/)>.

Farmers and ranchers in the Klamath Basin in Oregon and California are working with conservation agencies and organizations to address water needs to sustain environmental quality and agricultural production. EQIP is among the programs providing direct assistance to producers to address water flow issues to benefit threatened and endangered fish species. See that following web pages for additional information on conservation efforts in the Klamath Basin: <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/klamath/images/BrochureProgressReport2004.pdf>> and <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/klamath/klamplan.html>>.

In FY 2005, NRCS is increasing emphasis on assisting producers implement measures to benefit the greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), a species that has been declining in recent decades and has been considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act. In response to congressional language encouraging USDA to enhance its efforts for

greater sage-grouse conservation, NRCS is making \$2 million of EQIP funds available for projects to address sage-grouse habitat in FY 2005.

### *In-field Conservation Practices*

Many conservation practices applied to cropping systems have direct and indirect benefits to fish and wildlife. Practices that reduce soil erosion and sediment loss to streams invariably help protect surface water quality necessary for healthy stream biota (Robinson 1990). Estimates of soil-erosion rates on croplands show a reduction of 42% between 1982 and 2001 (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Resources Inventory data). Nearly all of this reduction has been due to the application of conservation practices, including those cost-shared under EQIP. Practices that provide food and cover for upland wildlife in crop fields are also beneficial to terrestrial species in intensively managed agricultural landscapes.

Miranowski and Bender (1982) identified wildlife benefits from the installation of conservation practices that reduce soil erosion. They concluded that by reducing soil loss from 8.3 tons/acre to 5.2 tons/acre through the use of conservation tillage, their general wildlife habitat index score for an agricultural landscape within the Iowa River Basin was raised from 0.08 to 0.15. By installing other conservation practices to reduce soil loss in addition to conservation tillage, their habitat index score was raised to 0.30. In croplands in Saskatchewan, minimally tilled crop fields have been shown to support higher relative abundance of birds than conventionally tilled fields (Shutler et al. 2000). Although tillage operations may result in some mortality, others have documented the benefits of conservation tillage to nesting birds and other wildlife over conventional tillage operations (Rodgers and Wooley 1983, Warburton and Klimstra 1984, Duebbert and Kantrud 1987, Best 1986, Lokemoen and Beiser 1997, Martin and Forsyth 2003).

Warner and Brady (1994) indicated that the net effect of a combination of conservation practices (i.e., conservation system) may be beneficial to wildlife. Their conservation system of practices included conservation tillage, contour strip cropping, grassed backslope terraces, and field borders. When properly operated and maintained, most conservation practices can benefit wildlife. Grassed waterways, farmstead windbreaks, crop rotations, and effective nutrient and tillage management can provide wildlife cover while reducing the delivery of sediments and related pollutants to riparian, wetland, and other aquatic habitats (Robinson 1988, 1990). Structural and cultural conservation practices installed through incentive programs such as EQIP and/or applied to meet conservation compliance requirements (Brady, *this volume*) result in sustainable agricultural systems that provide greater benefits to many species of



fish and wildlife than conventional systems (Jahn and Schenck 1991). As noted, individual conservation practices have been shown to provide fish and wildlife habitat. Although additional study is needed to document the combination of practices on wildlife (Freemark 1995), the cumulative effect of a system of conservation practices applied to landscapes that are intensively used and managed for crop production is likely much more effective than application of individual practices.

Conservation practices planned during FY 2004 reveal the potential of EQIP to improve fish and wildlife habitat conditions in cropped landscapes (Appendix 2). Buffer practices such as field borders (over 432 miles planned), grassed waterways (104,315 acres), riparian forest buffers (7,178 acres) and windbreak/shelterbelts (over 934 miles planned) provide habitat structure and water-quality functions. In-field practices such as nutrient management (over 3.8 million acres planned) and residue management (over 2.8 million acres planned) help reduce soil erosion and sediment and excess nutrient transport to waterways. With proper planning, EQIP has the potential to positively affect millions of acres of cropland habitats.

### *Rangeland Practices*

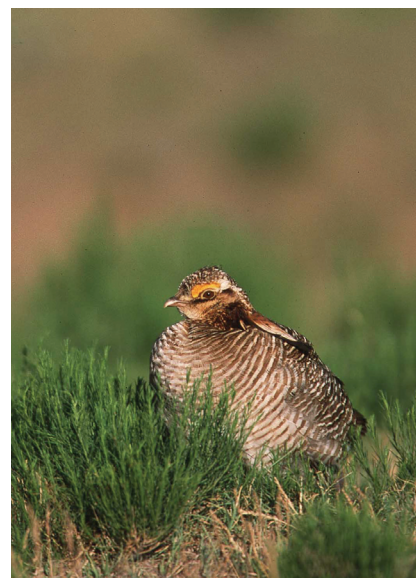
Rangeland systems of the United States have been impacted by a variety of factors, including elimination of native grazers, introduction of tame grasses and domestic livestock, suppression of fire, conversion to cropland, and other modifications associated with human habitation and development (Knight et al. 2002). Restoring heterogeneity to homogenized range landscapes to echo conditions that occurred before European settlement has been suggested as a means of promoting biological diversity and wildlife habitat on rangelands used by domestic livestock (Fuhlendorf and Engle 2001). Practices such as rotational grazing and controlled patch burning can be used to foster disturbance regimes that have historically driven natural rangeland ecology (Fuhlendorf and Engle 2004).

A number of EQIP practices have great potential to contribute to increasing the extent and heterogeneity of fish and wildlife habitat quality on rangelands. Although these practices can benefit a wide variety of species associated with rangelands, EQIP has also been recognized for its potential to specifically improve habitat conditions for high-priority wildlife such as prairie grouse (sage-grouse, prairie-chickens [*Tympanuchus* spp.], sharp-tailed grouse [*Tympanuchus phasianellus*]) (Riley 2004). This is primarily because the majority of EQIP funds are targeted toward addressing natural resource issues related to livestock production, and funding levels are significant compared to other public and private efforts engaged in prairie grouse conservation matters. Practices planned during FY 2004 that provide fish and wildlife habitat



Contour strip cropping to reduce erosion. (L. Betts, USDA-NRCS)

Lesser prairie-chicken in New Mexico. (G. Kramer, USDA-NRCS)



potential on grazing lands include brush management (over 1.4 million acres planned), fencing (13,788 miles planned), prescribed burning (200,806 acres planned), and prescribed grazing (over 9 million acres planned). Although these practices have substantial potential to provide habitat value, there is not an effective way of characterizing how fish and wildlife habitat was factored into the thousands of plans involved. Since EQIP is targeted to a range of natural resource concerns, habitat considerations may or may not have a great influence on the specifications that guide how individual practices are planned and installed.

### *Habitat Practices*

Many multipurpose conservation practices have the potential to provide significant benefits to fish and wildlife, as described above (e.g., conservation cover, field borders, riparian forest buffers, hedge rows, prescribed grazing and burning, conservation tillage, etc.—see practices in bold print in Appendix 2). There are also a number of practices with purposes weighted more heavily toward fish and wildlife resource concerns. These practices are more likely to be designed in a manner that will provide greater fish and wildlife benefit per unit effort than other more general purpose practices. Data from Appendix 2 were extracted to construct Table 4, which illustrates the level of effort supported by EQIP during FY 2004 directed toward these fish and wildlife-oriented practices.

Table 4. Practices with fish and wildlife resource concerns as the primary objective planned and applied under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program during fiscal year (FY) 2004.

<b>Conservation practice (units)</b>	<b>NRCS code</b>	<b>Planned<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Applied<sup>b</sup></b>
Early successional habitat development/ management (acres)	647	2,746	173
Fish passage (no.)	396	5	1
Fishpond management (no.)	399	46	34
Restoration and management of declining habitats (acres)	643	3,270	107
Riparian herbaceous cover (acres)	390	804	79
Shallow water management for wildlife (acres)	646	6,549	1,381
Stream habitat improvement and management (acres)	395	8,119	2,320
Upland wildlife habitat management (acres)	645	973,119	1,345,495
Wetland creation (acres)	658	205	101
Wetland enhancement (acres)	659	827	167
Wetland restoration (acres)	657	1,088	9,582
Wetland wildlife habitat management (acres)	644	15,100	26,097
Wildlife watering facility (no.)	648	191	35

Source: NRCS Performance Results System.

<sup>a</sup> Practices planned during FY2004 that were approved for cost-share under EQIP contracts.

<sup>b</sup> Practices approved for cost-share under EQIP contracts established in FY 2004 or prior years and installed during FY 2004.

Over 99% of the acreage reported in Table 4 is encompassed by the Upland Wildlife Habitat Management practice. This is an umbrella practice that encompasses a broad array of upland habitat establishment and management actions to support many different types of upland wildlife. Without knowing the specifics contained in the many EQIP conservation plans involving this practice, it is difficult to draw conclusions on the type of benefits that are being realized by the program.

There are several conservation programs that, while different from EQIP, have some similarity in purpose. Primary objectives of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) and WRP are to promote fish and wildlife habitat. EQIP has multiple resource objectives including reducing soil erosion and improving water quality, along with addressing fish and wildlife habitat concerns. As previously stated, EQIP is oversubscribed. When developing conservation plans with clients, planners may direct participants who are primarily interested in fish and wildlife to programs such as WHIP or WRP, provided their lands are eligible for enrollment in these programs. Alternatively, since WHIP and WRP are also oversubscribed (Gray et al., *this volume*; Rewa, *this volume*), planners may work to integrate fish and wildlife habitat considerations into EQIP conservation plans, thereby increasing habitat benefits achieved through EQIP.

As the growth of EQIP has expanded over the years (Table 2), so has its capability to improve fish and wildlife habitats. While the majority of practices are targeted toward soil and water conservation, nutrient management, and other production-oriented conservation practices (Table 3), EQIP is being used to put a significant amount of habitat on the ground. The fish and wildlife-oriented practices presented in Table 4 represent a small fraction of the overall EQIP effort (see Appendix 2). However, wildlife work in EQIP for some practices is comparable to the effort being made by WHIP (e.g., Upland Wildlife Habitat Management practice FY 2004 planning for EQIP and WHIP was reported as 973,119 acres and 659,735 acres, respectively). For other practices, EQIP contributions are substantially less than the more fish and wildlife-targeted WHIP (e.g., the number of fish passage structures reported as planned in FY 2004 under WHIP and EQIP were 106 and 5, respectively). An important note is that many EQIP practices planned may be subsequently withdrawn and not implemented by producers. For example, approximately 14.6% of wildlife habitat related practices contracted under EQIP between 1997 and 2000 were withdrawn (Cattaneo 2003). Since participants in programs such as WHIP are primarily interested in fish and wildlife habitat management, withdrawal rates are likely substantially lower.

## Knowledge Gaps

Esser et al. (2000) concluded that additional monitoring and research was needed in 2000 to adequately assess the value of practices installed under EQIP to fish and wildlife. Our review of the literature indicates that that need remains unmet. Specifically, a more concerted effort is needed to assess the effects of all conservation practices supported by EQIP and other conservation programs on fish and wildlife response. Practice data presented in this paper will assist literature reviewers currently working with The Wildlife Society to characterize fish and wildlife response to specific conservation practices (to be produced as a companion document to this publication). In addition, efforts are being made through the USDA Conservation Effects Assessment Project to develop protocols for assessing fish and wildlife benefits provided by conservation practices installed under EQIP and other conservation programs.

Where EQIP is used to target specific fish and/or wildlife issues, studies are needed to document how the taxa targeted respond to program efforts. EQIP is a large program affecting millions of acres of agricultural lands every year. Better means of tracking projects with the primary purpose of benefiting fish and wildlife are needed, including details on what species are targeted and what measures are undertaken to benefit those species. For example, better information on actions taken under the Upland Wildlife Habitat Management practice is needed to determine how fish and wildlife response can be assessed. Conservation plans and contracts under EQIP require completion of environmental evaluations (on Form CPA-52). Data used for these evaluations and documentation of proposed effects need to be collected and analyzed.

## Conclusion

The use of agricultural landscapes in the United States for production of food and fiber is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. Measures to integrate conservation of fish and wildlife and other natural resources into the production of crops and livestock are being taken to foster biodiversity on and sustainability of these agricultural lands. The welfare of many species of fish and wildlife depends on the ability of agricultural landscapes to provide habitats necessary for survival (Peterjohn 2003). Voluntary efforts of producers through conservation plans and practices supported by EQIP can play a major role in restoring and maintaining wildlife habitats on actively managed croplands and rangelands.

The significant funding made available for EQIP by the 2002 Farm Bill makes the program a significant tool for landowners and natural resource managers concerned with fish and wildlife conservation. With proper



planning, fish and wildlife habitat can be emphasized in EQIP while addressing soil and water resource concerns. While data are lacking on how wildlife has responded to EQIP to date, practices targeted to address declining or at-risk and other fish and wildlife imply that substantial benefits are being realized through the program. Additional study is needed to document the extent and character of these benefits.

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# Appendix 1. EQIP program purposes as defined by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill).

## **SEC. 1240. [16 U.S.C. 3839aa] PURPOSES**

The purposes of the environmental quality incentives program established by this chapter are to promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals, and to optimize environmental benefits, by—

- (1) assisting producers in complying with local, State, and national regulatory requirements concerning—
  - (A) soil, water, and air quality;
  - (B) wildlife habitat; and
  - (C) surface and ground water conservation;
- (2) avoiding to the maximum extent practicable, the need for resource and regulatory programs by assisting producers in protecting soil, water, air, and related natural resources and meeting environmental quality criteria established by Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies;
- (3) providing flexible assistance to producers to install and maintain conservation practices that enhance soil, water, related natural resources (including grazing land and wetland), and wildlife while sustaining production of food and fiber;
- (4) assisting producers to make beneficial, cost effective changes to cropping systems, grazing management, nutrient management associated with livestock, pest or irrigation management, or other practices on agricultural land; and
- (5) consolidating and streamlining conservation planning and regulatory compliance processes to reduce administrative burdens on producers and the cost of achieving environmental goals.

## Appendix 2. Practices planned and applied under EQIP during FY 2004.

While all practices potentially affect fish and wildlife, practices generally recognized for the potential to directly benefit fish and wildlife are identified by bold text.

<b>Conservation Practice (NRCS practice code) (units reported)</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Applied</b>
Access Road (560) (ft)	1,755,377	359,001
Agrichemical Mixing Facility (702) (no)	151,313	10,618
Agrichemical Mixing Station, Portable (703) (no)	600	
Agricultural Fuel Containment Facility (701) (no)	2,985	9
Agro Tillage (761) (ac)		7
Air Management (705) (ac)	207,336	24,834
Alley Cropping (311) (ac)	820	716
Alum treatment of Poultry Litter (786) (no)	3,519	267
Anaerobic Digester, Ambient Temperature (365) (no)	2	1
Anaerobic Digester, Controlled Temperature (366) (no)	4	
Animal Mortality Facility (316) (no)	1,723	54
Animal Trails and Walkways (575) (ft)	259,912	67,165
Anionic Polyacrylamide (PAM) Erosion Control (450) (ac)	8,546	659
Aquaculture Ponds (397) (ac)	1,831	
Atmospheric Resource Quality Management (370) (ac)	1,514	0
Barnyard Runoff Management (707) (no)	14,487	31
Bedding (310) (ac)	17	98
Bio-Filter (793) (no)	3	
<b>Brush Management (314) (ac)</b>	<b>1,465,377</b>	<b>364,950</b>
Channel Bank Vegetation (322) (ac)	1,271	12
Channel Stabilization (584) (ft)	33,217	4,822
Cistern (708) (no)	7	
Clearing and Snagging (326) (ft)	4,100	2,000
Closure of Waste Impoundment (360) (no)	930	45
Composting Facility (317) (no)	3,805	2,975
<b>Conservation Cover (327) (ac)</b>	<b>10,366</b>	<b>6,341</b>
Conservation Crop Rotation (328) (ac)	901,806	551,302
Constructed Wetland (656) (no)	4	



<b>Conservation Practice (NRCS practice code) (units reported)</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Applied</b>
Contour Buffer Strips (332) (ac)	565	650
Contour Farming (330) (ac)	73,535	58,856
Contour Orchard and Other Fruit Area (331) (ac)	756	830
Controlled Stream access for Livestock Watering (730) (no)	3,570	630
Corral Dust Control (no. and ac.) (785) (no)	1,205	184
Cover Crop (340) (ac)	274,013	75,597
Critical Area Planting (342) (ac)	27,968	6,064
Cross Slope Farming (733) (ac)	161	
Cross Wind Ridges (589A) (ac)	1,096	1,732
Cross Wind Stripcropping (589B) (ac)	319	
Cross Wind Trap Strips (589C) (ac)	956	329
Cut Bank Stabilization (742) (ac)	1,765	1,600
Dam (402) (no)	22	1
Dam, Diversion (348) (no)	27	6
Deep Tillage (324) (ac)	34,329	9,245
<b>Dike (356) (ft)</b>	<b>579,392</b>	<b>127,900</b>
Diversion (362) (ft)	1,525,510	284,335
Drainage Water Management (554) (ac)	2,082	626
Dry Hydrant (432) (no)	12	4
<b>Early Successional Habitat Development/Management (647) (ac)</b>	<b>2,746</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>Fence (382) (ft)</b>	<b>72,801,299</b>	<b>16,594,527</b>
<b>Field Border (386) (ft)</b>	<b>5,585,776</b>	<b>1,328,318</b>
Filter Strip (393) (ac)	10,826	3,489
Firebreak (394) (ft)	3,026,943	677,488
<b>Fish Passage (396) (no)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Fishpond Management (399) (no)</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>34</b>
Forage Harvest Management (511) (ac)	115,839	54,294
Forest Site Preparation (490) (ac)	33,475	8,287
<b>Forest Stand Improvement (666) (ac)</b>	<b>68,755</b>	<b>30,517</b>
Forest Trails and Landings (655) (ac)	4,653	5,900
Grade Stabilization Structure (410) (no)	24,613	3,260
Grade Stabilization Structure-Tire Bales (790) (no)	1	
<b>Grassed Waterway (412) (ac)</b>	<b>104,315</b>	<b>8,893</b>
Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment (548) (ac)	49,538	8,803
Heavy Use Area Protection (561) (ac)	722,887	33,025

<b>Conservation Practice (NRCS practice code) (units reported)</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Applied</b>
<b>Hedgerow Planting (422) (ft)</b>	<b>204,001</b>	<b>555,997</b>
Herbaceous Wind Barriers (603) (ft)	3,810,530	
Hillside Ditch (423) (ft)	216,445	51,405
Improved Water Application (743) (ac)	381	128
Incinerator (769) (no)	129	52
Infiltration Ditches (753) (ft)	1,172	300
Irrigation Canal or Lateral (320) (ft)	2,781	9,350
Irrigation Field Ditch (388) (ft)	154,379	23,281
Irrigation Land Leveling (464) (ac)	126,476	126,807
Irrigation or Regulating Reservoir (552) (no)	205	25
Irrigation Storage Reservoir (436) (ac-ft)	31,735	442
Irrigation System, Microirrigation (441) (no)	19,773	2,841
Irrigation System, Sprinkler (442) (no)	220,564	26,722
Irrigation System, Surface and Subsurface (443) (no)	16,025	2,450
Irrigation System, Tailwater Recovery (447) (no)	1,686	49
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Corrugated, Ribbed or Profile wall thermal pipeline (794) (ft)	11,913	10,638
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Ditch and Canal Lining, Flexible Membrane (428B) (ft)	82,241	23,232
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Ditch and Canal Lining, Galvanized Steel (428C) (ft)	110	
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Ditch and Canal Lining, Nonreinforced Concrete (428A) (ft)	1,053,267	282,122
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline, Aluminum Tubing (430AA) (ft)	17,384	5,455
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline, High-Pressure, Underground, Plastic (430DD) (ft)	7,251,859	3,682,862
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline, Low-Pressure, Underground, Plastic (430EE) (ft)	3,624,958	1,198,368
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline, Nonreinforced Concrete (430CC) (ft)	10,540	
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline, Reinforced Plastic Mortar (430GG) (ft)	1,100	
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline, Rigid Gated Pipeline (430HH) (ft)	1,827,532	464,555
Irrigation Water Conveyance, Pipeline, Steel (430FF) (ft)	14,286	6,682
Irrigation Water Management (449) (ac)	799,351	267,158
Land Clearing (460) (ac)	504	55
Land Grading (744) (ac)	693	82
Land Smoothing (466) (ac)	6,765	1,251
Lined Waterway or Outlet (468) (ft)	49,910	6,244
Livestock Shade Structure (717) (no)	3	1
Livestock Use Area Protection (757) (ac)	761,887	38,523
Long Term No. Till (778) (no)	12,937	4,831

<b>Conservation Practice (NRCS practice code) (units reported)</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Applied</b>
Manure Transfer (634) (no)	101,184	2,947
Milking Center Wastewater Treatment System (719) (no)	329	6
Mulching (484) (ac)	34,689	243
Nutrient Management (590) (ac)	3,889,489	1,195,881
Obstruction Removal (500) (ac)	7,646	101
Open Channel (582) (ft)	23,690	7,124
Pasture and Hay Planting (512) (ac)	508,013	149,050
Pathogen Management (783) (ac)	2,209	
Pest Management (595) (ac)	2,636,632	850,914
Pipeline (516) (ft)	35,849,891	11,032,141
Planned Grazing System (762) (ac)	36,569	50,440
<b>Pond (378) (no)</b>	<b>35,774</b>	<b>26,784</b>
Pond Sealing or Lining, Bentonite Sealant (521C) (no)	200,108	6
Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane (521A) (no)	78,336	12,244
Pond Sealing or Lining, Soil Dispersant (521B) (no)	75	3
Precision Land Forming (462) (ac)	3,209	711
<b>Prescribed Burning (338) (ac)</b>	<b>200,806</b>	<b>43,461</b>
<b>Prescribed Grazing (528) (ac)</b>	<b>1,404,366</b>	<b>904,679</b>
<b>Prescribed Grazing (528A) (ac)</b>	<b>7,624,246</b>	<b>4,768,032</b>
Pumping Plant (533) (no)	7,531	679
Range Planting (550) (ac)	217,448	48,407
Rangeland Fertilization (721) (ac)	447	
Record Keeping (748) (no)	35,174	31,165
Recreation Land Grading and Shaping (566) (ac)	1	
Recreation Trail and Walkway (568) (ft)	8,501	
<b>Residue Management -Direct Seed (777) (ac)</b>	<b>133,015</b>	<b>24,700</b>
<b>Residue Management, Mulch Till (329B) (ac)</b>	<b>846,668</b>	<b>285,649</b>
<b>Residue Management, No-Till/Strip Till (329A) (ac)</b>	<b>1,516,465</b>	<b>474,288</b>
<b>Residue Management, Ridge Till (329C) (ac)</b>	<b>32,290</b>	<b>9,383</b>
<b>Residue Management, Seasonal (344) (ac)</b>	<b>282,690</b>	<b>237,439</b>
<b>Restoration and Management of Declining Habitats (643) (ac)</b>	<b>3,270</b>	<b>107</b>
Rice Water Control (746) (ac)	87	
Rinsate Management (764) (ft <sup>3</sup> )	1	1
<b>Riparian Buffers - Vegetative (759) (ac)</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Riparian Forest Buffer (391) (ac)</b>	<b>7,178</b>	<b>2,413</b>

<b>Conservation Practice (NRCS practice code) (units reported)</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Applied</b>
Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390) (ac)	804	79
Road/Landing Removal (722) (ac)		2
Rock Barrier (555) (ft)	830	330
Roof Runoff Structure (558) (no)	22,999	3,276
Row Arrangement (557) (ac)	744	682
Runoff Management System (570) (ac)	15	7
Sediment Basin (350) (no)	13,009	64
<b>Shallow Water Management for Wildlife (646) (ac)</b>	<b>6,549</b>	<b>1,381</b>
Silage Leachate Collection and Transfer (765) (ft <sup>3</sup> )	12	
Silvopasture Establishment (791) (ac)	67	
Sinkhole and Sinkhole Area Treatment (725) (no)	10	9
Soil Salinity Control (738) (ac)	26,036	6,181
Soil Salinity Management-Nonirrigated (571) (ac)	13,385	5,581
Spoil Spreading (572) (ft)	24,649	1
Spring Development (574) (no)	2,410	1,077
Stream Crossing (728) (no)	23,161	104
<b>Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395) (ac)</b>	<b>8,119</b>	<b>2,320</b>
Streambank and Shoreline Protection (580) (ft)	615,617	160,772
Stripcropping (585) (ac)	6,860	1,553
Stripcropping, Field (586) (ac)	3,472	208
<b>Structure for Water Control (587) (no)</b>	<b>41,082</b>	<b>7,561</b>
Subsurface Drain (606) (ft)	2,946,072	463,054
Surface Drainage, Field Ditch (607) (ft)	322,420	1,200
Surface Drainage, Main or Lateral (608) (ft)	52,737	3,500
Surface Roughening (609) (ac)	8,493	14,786
Surface Wetting (760) (ac)	11	1
Temporary Steel Windbreak (771) (no)	13,038	3
Terrace (600) (ft)	25,025,835	6,020,058
Toxic Salt Reduction (610) (ac)	17,775	11,356
Transition to Organic Production (789) (ac)	6,884	1,920
<b>Tree/Shrub Establishment (612) (ac)</b>	<b>47,637</b>	<b>13,589</b>
Tree/Shrub Pruning (660) (ac)	51,708	383
Underground Outlet (620) (ft)	3,394,228	757,821
<b>Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645) (ac)</b>	<b>973,119</b>	<b>1,345,495</b>
Use Exclusion (472) (ac)	160,595	25,629





<b>Conservation Practice (NRCS practice code) (units reported)</b>	<b>Planned</b>	<b>Applied</b>
Vegetative Barrier (601) (ft)	10,500	4,600
Vertical Drain (630) (no)	294	39
Waste Facility Cover (367) (no)	12,667	
Waste Field Storage Area (749) (no)	16	6
Waste Storage Facility (313) (no)	235,909	79,604
Waste Treatment Lagoon (359) (no)	108	32
Waste Utilization (633) (ac)	563,208	112,981
Waste Water & Feedlot Runoff Control (784) (ac)	161,617	910
Waste Water Irrigation (732) (ac)	20	18
Wastewater Treatment Strip (635) (ac)	31,394	1
Water and Sediment Control Basin (638) (no)	108,976	8,964
Water Harvesting Catchment (636) (no)	5	2
Water Well (642) (no)	18,831	1,595
Watering Facility (614) (no)	241,572	21,583
Waterspreading (640) (ac)	398	171
Well Decommissioning (351) (no)	2,066	1,542
Well Plugging (755) (no)	2	1
Well Testing (731) (no)	17	80
<b>Wetland Creation (658) (ac)</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Wetland Enhancement (659) (ac)</b>	<b>827</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>Wetland Restoration (657) (ac)</b>	<b>1,088</b>	<b>9,582</b>
<b>Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644) (ac)</b>	<b>15,100</b>	<b>26,097</b>
<b>Wildlife Watering Facility (648) (no)</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380) (ft)</b>	<b>4,934,765</b>	<b>1,753,327</b>
<b>Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation (650) (ft)</b>	<b>969,648</b>	<b>204,164</b>

# The Conservation Security Program: A New Conservation Program That Rewards Historic Land Stewards Who Have Applied and Managed Effective Conservation Systems

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## Abstract

*The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, prairie land, improved pasture, and rangeland, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agriculture operation. In the first signup, CSP was offered in 18 watersheds located in 22 states. In 2005, the program is available in all 50 states, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin. The program provides equitable access to benefits to all producers, regardless of size of operation, crops produced, or geographic location.*

## Introduction

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill) (Pub. L. 107-171) amended the Food Security Act of 1985 to authorize the Conservation Security Program (CSP). The CSP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The CSP is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. The CSP identifies and rewards those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations (NRCS 2004).

The program provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal



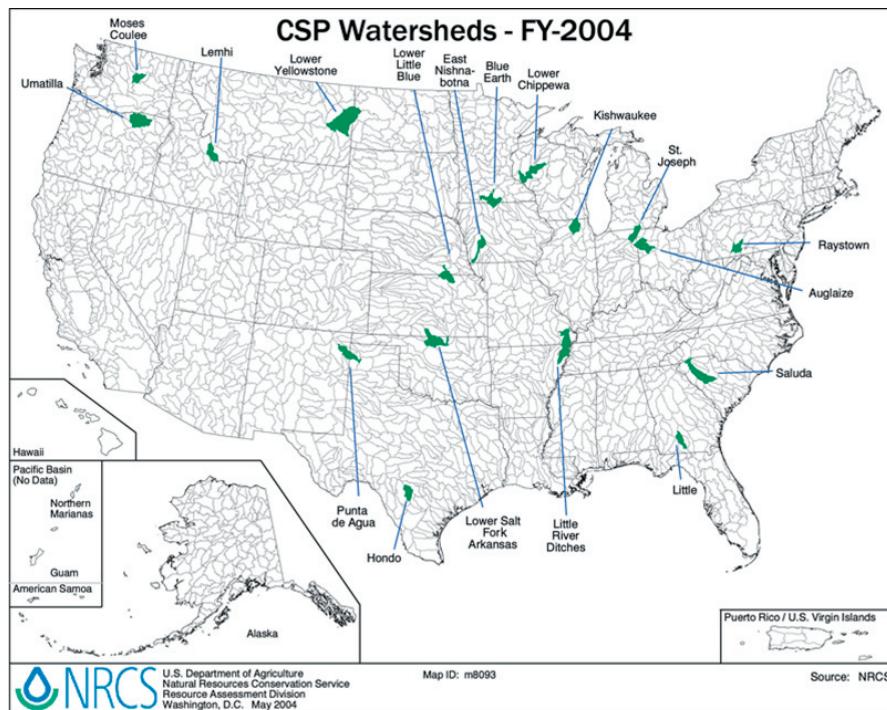
Contour buffer strips in highly erodible cropland. (T. McCabe, USDA-NRCS)

life, and other conservation purposes on tribal and private working lands. Working lands include cropland, grassland, vineyards/orchards, prairie land, improved pasture, and rangeland, as well as forested land that is an incidental part of an agricultural operation (NRCS 2004). The CSP will help producers maintain conservation stewardship and implement additional conservation practices that provide added environmental enhancement, while creating powerful incentives for other producers to meet those same standards of conservation performance.

## Watershed Selection

For CSP, NRCS decided on a staged, watershed-based implementation process. This was done for economic and administrative reasons. Focusing on high-priority watersheds reduced both the administrative burden and costs of processing a large number of applications for which funding was not available. For the 2004 CSP sign-up, 18 watersheds in 22 states (some watersheds were in multiple states) were selected (Figure 1). There were several criteria for selecting the 18 watersheds. These included watersheds that had a wide variety of eligible land uses, have a history of good land stewardship on the part of landowners, have high-priority resource issues to be addressed, and have technical tools necessary, such as digitized soils information, to streamline program implementation. There were 2,200 CSP contracts signed in the 18 watersheds selected for the FY 2004 sign-up. These contracts accounted for 1.9 million acres entering the program.

Figure 1. Map of watersheds included in CSP in 2004. There were 2,200 CSP contracts signed in these 18 watersheds in the contiguous U.S. for the fiscal year 2004



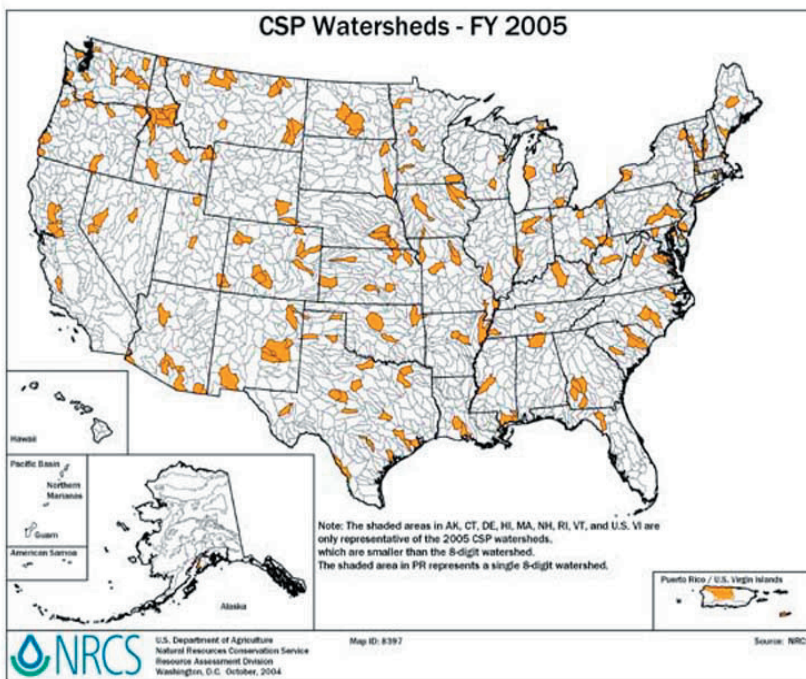


Figure 2. Map of 202 CSP watersheds for 2005.

For the FY 2005 CSP signup, land in 202 watersheds representing every state and the Caribbean will be eligible to participate in the program (Figure 2). Combined, these watersheds cover a little more than 83 million acres. The same criteria were used to select these watersheds as were used to select the watersheds in the FY 2004 signup.

The intent of the program is to rotate watersheds available for CSP on an 8-year cycle. Each year, approximately one-eighth of the nation's 2,119 watersheds will be eligible for the signup. Producers who aren't eligible for the signup can utilize other funding and technical programs offered by NRCS and other state, federal, and private partners to help them achieve a higher level of conservation so that they can apply for CSP in the future.

## Land Eligibility

To be eligible for CSP, the producer and the producer's operation must meet the following basic criteria:

- The land must be privately owned or tribal land, and the majority of the land must be located within one of the selected watersheds.
- The applicant must be in compliance with highly erodible and wetland provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, have an active interest in the agricultural operation, and have control of the land for the life of the contract.
- The applicant must share in the risk of producing any crop or livestock and be entitled to a share in the crop or livestock marketed from the operation.



Once basic eligibility is met, all applicants must meet the following minimum tier eligibility and contract requirements, plus any additional requirements in the signup announcement:

- For Tier I, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) standards on part of the agricultural operation prior to acceptance.
- For Tier II, the producer must have addressed water quality and soil quality to the FOTG standards on the entire agricultural operation prior to acceptance and agree to address 1 additional resource by the end of the contract period.
- For Tier III, the producer must have addressed all resource concerns to a resource-management system level that meets the FOTG standards on the entire agricultural operation prior to acceptance and must agree to additional enhancement activities outlined in the signup announcement.

Soil-quality practices include crop rotations, cover crops, tillage practices, prescribed grazing, and providing adequate wind barriers. Water-quality practices include conservation tillage, filter strips, terraces, grassed waterways, managed access to streams, nutrient and pesticide management, prescribed grazing, and irrigation water management.



Proper nutrient management of hog manure. (T. McCabe, USDA-NRCS)

## Potential Impacts on Wildlife Habitat

The potential for improving wildlife habitat across the landscape through the CSP is enormous. By using the watershed approach, states can target locally or nationally significant wildlife species or habitat types that are in critical need of improvement. By concentrating the management activities in selected watersheds, the benefits can be far greater than if the same management activities were scattered across a state. If installed and managed with wildlife as a consideration, the conservation practices applied to address soil and water quality for CSP will also add to the wildlife habitat benefit.

Each state develops a list of conservation practices or enhancements (activities) for which producers can receive payments. The state then sets a per-acre payment or a fixed payment amount per activity. For example, a state may offer to pay \$5 per acre for inter-seeding native forbs into established nonnative grass stands. An example of a fixed payment is a state that pays \$250 per vernal pool that a producer creates and maintains. These payments are made each year for the life of the contract. Since the CSP is intended to reward producers who are good land stewards, these payments can be made for activities that producers have already installed, as well as for activities the producers are willing to install.

In Tier I and Tier II, a producer is not required to address wildlife habitat concerns. In Tier III, a producer must meet FOTG standards for wildlife. However, producers may elect to receive payments for wildlife habitat activities in any tier. Figure 3 shows a breakdown of payments for habitat-management enhancements by watershed and tier for the 2004 CSP contracts. These payments totaled approximately \$960,000. Some watersheds had producers receiving payments for wildlife habitat activities in all 3 tiers while producers in other watersheds only received payments in 1 or 2 tiers. Samples of various activities producers received payments for included constructing brush piles; establishing habitat transition zones using native vegetation beneficial to wildlife; controlling access to sensitive designated wildlife or riparian areas; reducing livestock grazing to 50% of the recommended carrying capacity; installing resting, basking, and hibernation structures for amphibians and reptiles; and managing the land to improve wildlife habitat evaluation scores above the minimum quality criteria required by NRCS policy to meet the FOTG standards. These are just a few of the many activities states were willing to pay producers for improving or maintaining wildlife habitat.

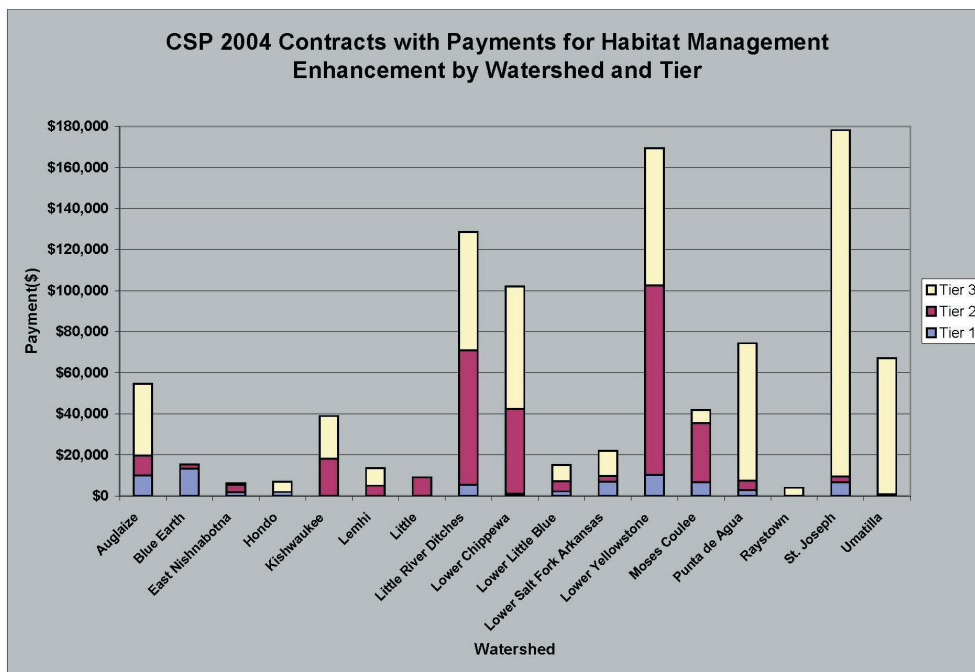


Figure 3. Breakdown of payments for habitat-management enhancements by watershed and tier for the fiscal year 2004 CSP contracts.

## Conclusions

At this time, there is not a national database that gives a breakdown of the acres or individual activities installed by watershed. Currently, to get this information, an individual would have to go to each state, and in some cases, each watershed and review the contracts. Once this information is available on a national database, information such as acres of field borders established and maintained, acres of riparian areas excluded from grazing, acres of grazing land and pasture managed for wildlife,

and acres of various wetland types created will be readily available. This information will help managers and researchers assess the effectiveness of the Conservation Security Program.

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# Participant Observations on Environmental and Social Effects of the Conservation Reserve Program: Results of a National Survey

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## Abstract

*A national survey of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contractees was completed to obtain information about environmental and social effects of the program on participants, farms, and communities. Over 75% of respondents believed CRP benefits to wildlife were important. Seventy-three percent of respondents observed increased numbers of wildlife associated with CRP lands. A majority of respondents (82%) believed the amount of assistance furnished by the U.S. Department of Agriculture related to planning and maintaining wildlife habitat associated with CRP lands was appropriate. The majority of respondents reported CRP benefits, including increased quality of surface and ground waters, improved air quality, control of drifting snow, and elevated opportunities to hunt or simply observe wildlife as part of daily activities. Income stability, improved scenic quality of farms and landscapes, and potential increases in property values and future incomes also were seen as program benefits. Negative aspects, reported by less than 30% of respondents, included seeing the CRP as a source of weeds, fire hazard, and attracting unwanted requests for trespass.*

## Introduction

Those with the greatest potential to observe changes resulting from U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation policies are those who live on the land affected. Over the years, personal communications with farm operators enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) suggest that wide-ranging personal and social effects of the program have not been formally recognized. To many, the CRP has delivered an increased abundance of wildlife, reduced erosion, more aesthetically pleasing landscapes, financial stability,



White-tailed deer in Iowa. (USDA-NRCS)

control of drifting snow, and an agricultural landscape that cultivates recreational and social interactions among family and friends. From a national perspective, these conservation benefits may appear unquantifiable and relatively unimportant. To these individuals, however, these assets delivered by adoption of USDA conservation policies are not trivial. An appreciation of such unrecognized effects can improve our understanding of environmental and social implications of long-term conservation programs within agricultural ecosystems.

In 2001, a survey was completed by the U.S. Geological Survey at the request of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to collect information pertaining to environmental and social benefits of the CRP (Allen and Vandever 2003). The survey was delivered to 2,212 CRP participants across the 10 USDA Farm Production Regions (FPR). Survey response rate was 65%.

This chapter provides a brief summary of results of the survey presented primarily through a discussion of findings at the national level, and furnishes more detailed information presented by FPR of both positive and negative effects of the CRP as seen by those enrolled in the program. The complete report can be downloaded from the FSA web site at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crpinfo.htm>.

## **Participant Observations on Environmental and Social Effects of the Conservation Reserve Program**

### *Environmental Benefits*

Eighty-five percent of survey respondents said the CRP has contributed to diminished erosion of soil (Table 1). The effect the CRP has had on wildlife associated with agricultural landscapes is illustrated by 73% of respondents reporting an increased abundance of wildlife associated with lands enrolled in the program. From a national perspective, 75% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that CRP benefits to wildlife are important and requirements to periodically improve habitat quality are a reasonable expectation of participation in the program. Although 38% of respondents reported that the CRP provided more opportunities to hunt and 12% found increased opportunities to lease land for hunting, nearly 60% of respondents believe the improved ability to simply observe wildlife was an important benefit of the program.



Table 1. Survey respondent identified environmental and social benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program by U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Production Region (FPR). Numbers represent percentage of respondents by FPR and combined national response ( $n = 1,412$ ).

Benefit	Farm Production Region <sup>a</sup>										
	PAC	MTN	NP	SP	LAK	CB	DLT	SE	APL	NE	NATL
Improved control of soil erosion	93.4	87.9	84.9	90.7	76.6	89.3	79.4	85.2	88.1	74.1	85.4
Positive changes in wildlife populations	82.0	69.7	77.1	67.4	75.2	72.7	75.8	68.9	69.5	62.1	73.2
Increased opportunities to observe wildlife	62.3	50.5	55.8	45.3	72.0	58.6	67.7	57.4	61.0	60.3	59.4
Improved water quality	45.9	28.3	38.0	22.1	36.2	48.2	23.8	37.7	45.8	27.6	38.8
Increased opportunities to personally hunt	27.9	22.2	42.8	24.4	40.8	37.0	61.9	37.7	32.2	41.4	37.6
Improved scenic quality of farm or landscape	37.7	33.3	35.3	30.2	40.8	37.3	42.9	45.9	45.8	29.3	37.4
Improved control of drifting snow	41.0	56.6	51.2	33.7	34.9	22.3	0.0	0.0	11.9	8.6	30.5
Improved air quality	54.1	40.4	31.4	45.3	21.1	21.6	30.2	45.9	32.2	15.5	29.2
Increased permanence of surface water	36.1	21.2	19.8	25.6	19.7	27.3	20.6	18.0	23.7	27.6	23.7
Potential increase in future income (e.g., timber sales)	8.2	8.1	8.9	9.3	15.6	9.8	65.1	73.8	33.9	13.8	16.7
Increased opportunities to lease land for hunting	9.8	9.1	19.4	15.1	8.7	6.6	23.8	19.7	13.6	10.3	11.9
No positive effects	0.0	2.0	0.0	1.2	1.4	0.9	1.6	1.6	1.7	3.4	1.1

<sup>a</sup> Farm Production Region: APL (Appalachian): Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina; CB (Corn Belt): Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio; DLT (Delta): Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi; LAK (Lake States): Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan; MTN (Mountain): Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico; NATL (National): Results for all FPRs combined; NE (Northeast): Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware; NP (Northern Plains): North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas; PAC (Pacific): Washington, Oregon, California; SE (Southeast): Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida; SP (Southern Plains): Oklahoma, Texas.

Slightly more than 29% and 39% of respondents acknowledged improvements in air and water quality, respectively. Improved control of drifting snow was recognized by 30.5% of survey respondents. Over 23% of respondents believed the CRP contributed to greater permanence of surface waters. Improvement in the aesthetic quality of agricultural landscapes was cited as a CRP benefit by 37% of respondents.

In addition to responding to formal questions in the survey many respondents “wrote-in” additional benefits derived from the CRP. Other positive aspects described included enhancement of soil organic matter and fertility improving potential future productivity of CRP lands, retention of water from rain and snow, and prevention of erosion on lands adjacent to CRP acres. Other environmental benefits included reappearance of springs below CRP fields, less debris in streams, and improved quality of well water.

### *Economic and Social Benefits*

Respondents to the CRP survey described benefits of the program as elevation of grain prices, assistance in paying taxes, assured income to support retirement, provision of additional income to support continued operation of the farm, an increase in overall farm property values, stabilization of farm income, and savings in operation costs by not having to farm corners and small fields. Some respondents stated the CRP has enabled them to take land out of production that they knew should have never been farmed. Nearly 17% of respondents saw the CRP as contributing to their future income either through future sale of timber resources, improved fertility of soils, or increased recreational value of their land.

Enhanced recreation opportunities from the CRP. (G. Kramer, USDA-NRCS)



Social benefits described were diverse and included satisfaction from doing something favorable for the environment, having hay to give neighbors in time of need, providing a place for children and grandchildren to camp or play, provision of sites for local schools to hold conservation/ecology classes, and providing places for family/friends to hunt and socialize. Lower use of agricultural chemicals, diminished noise from equipment and other farm operations, and helping to prevent unwanted urban expansion/development also were attributed to the CRP. By far, the majority of comments focused on increased numbers and variety of wildlife associated with CRP lands. Numerous individuals stated the enhanced presence of wildflowers and insects were an unforeseen but welcome benefit of the program.

## Negative Aspects of the CRP

Not all perceptions concerning environmental and social effects of the CRP were positive. Almost 29% of respondents viewed CRP lands as a source of weeds (Table 2). Similarly, 13% of respondents perceived the CRP as making their farm, or landscape, appear untidy or poorly managed. The CRP was viewed as a potential fire hazard by 19% of those responding to the survey. Four percent of respondents felt that too much land had been taken out of production and enrolled in the CRP. Likewise, 8% of respondents believed that the program had a negative effect on local economies due to lower production of crops and related impacts on local agricultural-based businesses. Conversely, others expressed apprehension about too many acres of highly erodible land going back into production due to more stringent enrollment requirements in recent CRP signups.

Table 2. Negative aspects of the Conservation Reserve Program as identified by survey respondents by U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Production Region (FPR). Numbers represent percentage of respondents by FPR and combined national response ( $n = 1,412$ ).

Negative effect	Farm Production Region <sup>a</sup>										
	PAC	MTN	NP	SP	LAK	CB	DLT	SE	APL	NE	NATL
Source of weeds	34.5	23.7	29.7	22.8	32.2	33.6	14.1	13.6	26.3	21.1	28.8
Potential fire hazard	44.8	46.4	24.7	30.4	19.6	8.9	17.2	15.3	10.5	1.8	19.3
Attracts unwanted requests for permission to hunt	20.7	12.4	20.5	16.5	12.6	23.3	14.1	13.6	15.8	7.0	18.0
Makes farm appear unkempt or poorly managed	12.1	9.3	6.2	11.4	18.7	14.2	18.7	8.5	22.8	14.0	13.1
Attracts unwanted wildlife	10.3	8.2	7.7	11.4	7.9	11.0	4.7	3.4	7.0	5.3	8.7
Negative effects on local economy	20.7	23.7	11.2	16.5	3.7	3.9	4.7	1.7	3.5	3.4	7.8
Too much cropland taken out of production	3.4	8.2	3.1	5.1	3.3	3.4	7.8	5.1	3.5	5.3	4.1
No negative effects	25.9	24.7	7.7	40.5	40.7	13.3	54.7	39.0	47.4	52.6	25.4

<sup>a</sup> Farm Production Regions: APL (Appalachian): Kentucky, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina; CB (Corn Belt): Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio; DLT (Delta): Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi; LAK (Lake States): Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan; MTN (Mountain): Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico; NATL (National): Results for all FPRs combined; NE (Northeast): Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware; NP (Northern Plains): North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas; PAC (Pacific): Washington, Oregon, California; SE (Southeast): Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida; SP (Southern Plains): Oklahoma, Texas.

In relation to wildlife, 18% of respondents indicated that the CRP had caused problems due to greater numbers of wildlife. The CRP has attracted unwanted wildlife that includes an increase in insects, deer (*Odocoileus* spp.), coyotes (*Canis latrans*), predators, and other “varmints”. Eighteen percent of respondents attributed an increase in unwelcome requests for permission to hunt to presence of the CRP. One of the most commonly voiced concerns was trespass and an apparent presumption by some individuals that CRP lands were open to public hunting. In some cases, the increase in habitat quality furnished by the CRP resulted in more requests from strangers to have access to land for hunting.

## Satisfaction with U.S. Department of Agriculture Performance

Overall, survey respondents appreciated the high quality of information and assistance in CRP enrollment and administration furnished by the USDA. Eighty-two percent of respondents believed that the amount of assistance furnished by USDA related to planning and maintaining wildlife habitat associated with CRP lands was appropriate. Only 2% believed that too much aid in relation to wildlife issues was furnished. Slightly more than 15% of respondents advocated more awareness of wildlife needs, while 11% believed that wildlife had received excessive attention in CRP enrollment criteria. Almost 16% of respondents thought that not enough assistance was furnished, while 55% felt that they had been well informed about why specific types of CRP management practices were required to maintain or improve wildlife habitat. In contrast, 38% of respondents felt they had been only partially informed, and 7% said they had not been informed about these requirements at all.

Nearly half (49%) of respondents to the survey wished to see the CRP continue relatively unchanged. Many respondents indicated a willingness to implement management to maintain vegetation quality and wildlife habitat but seek financial assistance, educational materials, and technical assistance to do so. Written comments by respondents indicated a desire for more on-the-ground technical assistance, simplification of paperwork, integration of periodic use or management to maintain long-term quality of grasslands, and greater amounts of information and conservation options that extend beyond CRP lands into entire agricultural ecosystems.

## Summary

The goal of the participant survey was to describe largely intangible, undocumented environmental and personal effects of the CRP as seen by those most affected. Because the agricultural community and American public value environmental health and because conservation

programs have long-term effects on the social fabric of rural communities, improvement in program performance has become an increasingly important goal of USDA conservation policies (USDA 2001). Appropriate incentives for agriculture to deliver societal benefits beyond production of food and fiber will require a thorough understanding of ecological as well as social and economic issues as affected by agricultural and land-use policies (Robertson et al. 2004).

Not all conclusions about program performance must be made upon years of data and analysis of results. While scientific evaluation is unquestionably needed, straightforward observations and uncomplicated statements from those who have seen their land change in response to conservation after decades, or even generations, of production reflect the perceived value of the program. Recognition of opinions and constraints expressed by participants is essential for refinement in administration and management of lands enrolled in conservation programs. Individual benefits may be imperceptible at the national scale but knowledge of local, personal profits, and successes ultimately will support greater involvement in conservation programs, thereby improving the connection of agriculture to rural and national environmental health.

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