

If you are considering enrolling your property into a Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easement, please read and understand the following information prior to your enrollment. This fact sheet contains information on the rights you retain as a landowner and the restrictions placed on the easement area.

Facts about 30-year and Permanent Easements

What you need to know

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is the nation's premiere wetland restoration program. In Wisconsin alone, nearly 55,000 acres have been restored and protected through WRP. The program has been successful, in part, because of the unique partnership between NRCS and the landowner. WRP offers landowners financial benefits for restoring and protecting their drained wetlands. In turn, the landowner agrees to allow NRCS the rights of access, management and monitoring in the easement area.

If you are considering enrolling your property in WRP, there are several **important** factors to consider. In essence, the federal government is buying most of the land rights to the easement area in order to maximize the functions and values of the wetland. This means that NRCS has the authority to undertake, at its own expense or on a cost share basis with the landowner, **any** activity to restore, manage and monitor the easement area, including marking the boundary. NRCS may enhance the easement area in order to improve the wetland and wildlife habitat (with the exception that it does not adversely affect a neighboring landowner or any non-easement lands).



Landowners' Rights

The landowner retains four basic rights:

- the right to sell the property
- the right to private access (no public access is required unless navigable water is involved and a direct connection exists)
- the right to recreational use including hunting, fishing, trapping and other quiet uses
- the right and responsibility to pay taxes (be sure to talk to your tax consultant about any tax changes)

Restrictions

Permanent structures, of any kind, are not allowed on the easement area. Any existing structures must be removed prior to the recording of the easement. These may include structures such as sheds, duck blinds, deer blinds, and campers. (Hunting blinds existing on easements accepted prior to Oct. 1, 2000 are exempt, however a compatible use permit must be filed and no improvement or maintenance is allowed). Hunting blinds that are removed at the end of the season are permitted.

Access roads within an easement boundary are not **guaranteed** to remain functional or passable. They may be allowed to remain with a compatible use permit, however, if selling the property, these internal roads or trails should not be defined as **permanent** vehicle accesses.

Permanent structures of any sort are not allowed on the easement area.

Compatible Use Permits

Landowners may request compatible use permits for certain landuse activities. Any activity that affects vegetation or alters wildlife patterns requires a compatible use permit. **Only** activities that are consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement goals for the easement area will be authorized. These permits will specifically define the activity, method, frequency, timing, intensity and duration of the compatible use, and will be reviewed/ approved annually. Some compatible uses include:

- timber harvest, in consultation with a professional forester and wildlife manager, **if required to achieve or protect wildlife habitat and wetland function.**
- haying, mowing or grazing **to maintain wildlife habitat and wetland functions and values** (allowed once annually between July 15th and September 1st).
- wildlife food plots planted with an approved mix of grains such as millet, buckwheat, corn (< 25%), sorghum or sunflowers. Food plots may not exceed 5% of the easement area or five acres in size.
- mowing, for access roads and nature trails, or to manage and maintain structures such as embankments. Access roads or nature trails may not exceed ten feet in width, or be mowed shorter than three inches in height.

Monitoring the Easements

NRCS is required to monitor WRP easements through aerial photography annually and by a site visit at least once every three years. Monitoring is necessary to ensure that full wetland functions and values are achieved and maintained, to detect violations, to direct the course of management, and to maintain a good working relationship between the landowner and NRCS. A point of access will be defined on the easement for purposes of monitoring and evaluation.

Weed Control

Noxious weed control is the responsibility of the landowner. Contact NRCS prior to weed control activities, or for weed management recommendations.

Special Note

WRP easements have significant restrictions. They are a permanent or long term commitment. It is important that you completely understand the terms and conditions of the easement. Please take the time to discuss your enrollment with a WRP representative.

Process to Enroll in WRP

The application process takes time and includes:

1. Application
2. Site visit to determine eligibility
3. Ensure no unenrolled lands will be affected by the restoration
4. Easement boundary description
5. Ranking of applications
6. Selection of projects for funding
7. Preliminary Survey and Design
8. Real Estate Appraisal of easement area
9. Offer to purchase
10. Acceptance of offer
11. Title clearance
12. Easement recording
13. Final Title Policy
14. Payment for Easement
15. Final Survey and Design
16. Local, State and Federal Permits
17. Contracting for restoration
18. Construction
19. Management and Monitoring

This is a complex process and may take a year or more to complete.

For more information about WRP contact NRCS at your local USDA Service Center or on the web at www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov under Programs.