

Healthy Forests Reserve Program OKLAHOMA

Ozark Plateau Karst Dependent Species Conservation Initiative



Questions and Answers

Q: What is the Healthy Forests Reserve Program?

A: The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is a voluntary program established for the purpose of restoring and enhancing forests ecosystems to:

- promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species;
- improve biodiversity; and
- enhance carbon sequestration

Q: What are the eligibility requirements?

A: To be eligible for enrollment, land must be private land or Tribal lands in Oklahoma which will:

- restore, enhance, or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery of a threatened and endangered species;
- improve biological diversity; and
- increase carbon sequestration

Q: What counties in Oklahoma have the HFRP?

A: The program is available in the following five counties:

- Adair
- Cherokee
- Delaware
- Part of Ottawa
- Part of Sequoyah

Q: What are the listed threatened and endangered species targeted for habitat and population recovery activities in Oklahoma?

A: Species targeted are:

- Gray Bat
- Ozark Big-eared Bat
- Ozark Cavefish

Q: How do landowners apply for the program?

A: Landowners may obtain HFRP application packets at their local USDA-NRCS Field Service Center.

Applications for HFRP will be evaluated periodically.



NRCS photo

Q: Do the threatened and endangered species need to be present to qualify?

A: No, but applications that have caves with known populations verified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of threatened and endangered species will be given the highest priority. Also, priority will be given to applications that:

- benefit more than one threatened and endangered species;
- are within close proximity of lands with caves with existing populations of threatened and endangered species; and
- have prime foraging habitat for the bat species
- have a higher per dollar benefit



Ozark Cavefish

Photo by Daniele Fenolio

Q: Does the HFRP offer enrollment options?

- A:** The program has four enrollment options:
- A 10-year cost-share agreement, for which the landowner may receive up to 50 percent of the average cost of approved conservation practices.
 - A 30-year easement, for which the landowner may receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus up to 75 percent of the average cost of the approved restoration practices.
 - A permanent easement, for which the landowners may receive 100 percent of the easement value and up to 100 percent of the average cost of approved restoration practices.
 - A 30-year contract, on lands which title is held by individual Indians and Indian tribes. The 30-year contract will be paid the same as a 30-year easement, 75 percent of the equivalent value of a conservation easement, plus up to 75 percent of the average cost of restoration practices.

Q: What are a participant's requirements under a HFRP easement?

A: When a landowner enrolls in one of the HFRP easements options, a landowner shall grant an easement to the United States. The easement shall require:

- That the easement area is maintained in accordance with HFRP goals and objectives for duration of the term of the easement including the restoration, protection, enhancement, maintenance, and management of habitat for listed species within a forest ecosystem's functions and values.
- For the duration of its term, the easement shall require, at a minimum, that the landowner and the landowner's heirs, successors and assigns shall cooperate in the restoration, protection, enhancement, maintenance, and management of the land in accordance with the easement and with the terms of the HFRP restoration plan.
- The easement shall grant to the United States through the NRCS:
 1. A right of access to the easement area;
 2. The rights, title, and interest to the

- easement area as specified in the conservation easement deed; and
- 3. The right to perform restoration, protection, enhancement, maintenance, and management activities on the easement area.

- The landowner shall convey title to the easement which is acceptable to the NRCS.
- The landowner shall warrant that the easement granted to the United States is superior to the rights of all others, except for exceptions to the title which are deemed acceptable by NRCS.

Q: How are HFRP easement payments provided?

A: A participant may request a lump sum payment or annual payments (up to 10 years).



Ozark Big-Eared Bat Lump Nose

Photo by Richard Stark-USFWS

Q: Who controls access to lands enrolled in a HFRP easement?

A: The landowner retains complete control of access. However, NRCS retains access rights to the easement area for the purposes of enforcing the easement deed and carrying out restoration, protection, enhancement, management, and monitoring activities.

Q: How is easement value determined?

A: Easement values are determined by a professional appraisal of the difference in the appraised fair market value of the parcel before the easement is in place and the appraised fair market value of the parcel after the easement is in place.

Q: How are applications selected for HFRP?

A: Applications are selected according to ranking and evaluation criteria developed at the state level within broad national guidelines.

Q: Are wildlife food plots allowed in HFRP?

A: Wildlife food plots are allowed in the program, but will only be located where planned in the HFRP restoration plan and cannot be harvested for seed, grain, hay, or fodder. Food plots are limited to native plant species; can be no more than five percent of the total easement area; and must have an approved HFRP Compatible Use.

Q: What conservation practices are eligible for financial assistance under HFRP?

A: The conservation practices available for financial assistance under HFRP are:

- forest stand improvement
- tree/shrub planting
- tree/shrub site preparation
- prescribed burning
- firebreak
- fence
- pest management
- structure for water control
- brush management
- riparian forest buffer

Q: Is land enrolled in the HFRP required to have a forest management plan?

A: Yes, the approved management activities must be described in the HFRP management plan to insure program objectives are achieved.

Q: What is a restoration plan?

A: A restoration plan has all practices necessary to restore and enhance habitat for species listed as threatened and endangered in the HFRP area.

Q: How will the presence of threatened and endangered species affect the future use of lands enrolled in HFRP?

A: During the contract or easement period, landowners will be required to manage the lands enrolled in HFRP according to a plan that will maximize habitat for threatened and endangered species. However, at the end of the contract or easement period, NRCS can work with participants to develop an agreement with the USFWS that will protect their lands from new restrictions where management has resulted in increased habitat or populations of threatened and endangered species. The protections are based on establishing a baseline population or habitat value at the time the land is enrolled in HFRP. The only requirement is that the participant does not take any action that would reduce the population or habitat below the baseline condition. In some cases, the baseline condition may be zero, and there would be no future restrictions on lands coming out of the program.



NRCS photos