

Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Expanded in 2010

Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the state of Illinois have expanded the existing Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to include the Kaskaskia River Watershed.

The original Illinois CREP targeted the Illinois River Watershed and authorized enrollment of up to 232,000 acres of eligible land. Since 1998, landowners have voluntarily enrolled 126,500 acres. This expansion will allow enrollment of the remaining 105,500 acres in both the Illinois River and Kaskaskia River Watersheds. CREP is now available to landowners in 68 counties within the two watersheds.

CREP is a federal, state, and local natural resource partnership. Its purpose is to address water quality and wildlife issues by reducing sediment and nutrient runoff and enhancing wildlife habitats. Through CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from FSA and the state of Illinois to voluntarily enroll in the program and extend FSA's 15-year CRP contract through 15 year, 35 year, or permanent state conservation easements.

Benefits

CREP is a partnership between landowners, land operators, governmental entities and non-governmental organizations to address watershed quality problems such as nonpoint sediment and nutrient impacts and loss of quality wildlife and fish habitats.

Goals

The overall goal of the Illinois CREP is to provide producers in the Illinois and Kaskaskia rivers watersheds an opportunity to voluntarily restore riparian buffers, grassland and wetland areas, and certain highly erodible

acres in exchange for financial and technical assistance. These practices will assist in erosion control, sediment reduction, nutrient reduction, water retention, and restoration and enhancement of critical habitats for rare and declining fish and wildlife species and for state- and federally-listed threatened and endangered species.

Specific goals include:

- Reducing the amount of silt and sedimentation entering the main stem of the Illinois and Kaskaskia rivers by 20 percent;
- Reducing the amount of phosphorus and nitrogen in the Illinois and Kaskaskia rivers by 10 percent;
- Increasing by 15 percent the populations of waterfowl, shorebirds, grassland birds, and state- or federally-listed threatened and endangered species such as bald eagles, egrets and herons in the Illinois River and Kaskaskia River watersheds;
- Increasing the native fish and mussel stocks by 10 percent in the lower reaches of the Illinois River (Peoria, LaGrange and Alton reaches); and
- Helping to meet federal goals to reduce nitrogen loading to the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico thereby helping to reduce hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

Eligible Areas

The Illinois CREP now includes all or portions of these 68 counties in the Illinois and Kaskaskia rivers watersheds:

Adams, Bond, Brown, Bureau, Calhoun, Cass, Champaign, Christian, Clinton, Coles, Cook, DeKalb, De Witt, Douglas, DuPage, Effingham, Fayette, Ford, Fulton, Greene, Grundy, Hancock, Henderson, Henry, Iroquois, Jefferson, Jersey, Kane,

Kankakee, Kendall, Knox, Lake, LaSalle, Lee, Livingston, Logan, McDonough, McHenry, McLean, Macon, Macoupin, Madison, Marion, Marshall, Mason, Menard, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Moultrie, Peoria, Perry, Piatt, Pike, Putnam, Randolph, Sangamon, Schuyler, Scott, Shelby, Stark, St. Clair, Tazewell, Vermilion, Warren, Washington, Will, and Woodford.

Conservation Practices

Specific conservation practices have been identified within this CREP project where, if established, will assist federal and state partners in meeting the CREP program goals for improving water quality by controlling erosion, reducing sediment, improving water retention and nutrient uptake.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) practices offered for enrollment under the CREP are:

- CP-2 Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses;
- CP-3 Tree Planting;
- CP-3A Hardwood Tree Planting;
- CP-4D Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Non-easement;
- CP-9 Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife;
- CP-11 Vegetative Cover – Trees Already Established;
- CP-12 Wildlife Food Plot;
- CP-21 Filter Strips;
- CP-22 Riparian Buffer;
- CP-23 Wetland Restoration;
- CP-25 Rare and Declining Habitat.

Sign-up and Eligibility Requirements

Enrollment began Dec. 1, 2010. Cropland must meet CRP land eligibility criteria to be considered eligible for enrollment.

- Producers voluntarily enter into

contracts with the federal government for 14 to 15 years and agree to remove enrolled lands from agricultural production and devote them to an approved practice and then have the opportunity to voluntarily enroll the land under a state conservation easement for 15 or 35 years or permanently and receive additional incentives;

- Two categories of land are eligible: 1) Flooded and/or wetland riparian areas that are within the 100-year floodplain of the Illinois and Kaskaskia rivers and their tributary stream systems or wetlands restoration located in the watersheds that are either a farmed wetland, a prior converted wetland or a wetland farmed under natural conditions; 2) Highly erodible riparian areas defined for CREP as immediately adjacent to the 100-year floodplain and with a weighted erodibility index of eight or greater.

CREP Payments

FSA payments include:

- **Cost Share:** 50 percent of eligible reimbursable practice establishment costs.
- **Practice Incentive Payment:** A one-time payment equal to 40 percent of the eligible installation costs for CP-9, CP-21, CP-22 and CP-23.
- **Signing Incentive Payment:** A one-time payment of consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for CP-21, CP-22 and CP-23.
- **Annual Rental Payment:** Payment made annually based on the cropland or marginal pastureland values.
- **Incentive Payments:** A payment annually, as a percentage of the base rental rate, of 30 percent for lands qualifying within the 100-year floodplain or as wetlands; or 20 percent for lands qualifying as highly erodible riparian areas and immediately adjacent to the 100-year floodplain.
- **Maintenance Incentive Payment:** A payment for installation of permanent fencing and/or water

facility development for practices CP-21 and CP-22.

The state of Illinois will offer the following payments:

- A one-time payment for a state conservation easement with a 15-year, 35-year or permanent duration with the payment amount dependent upon the length of the easement;
- Up to 50 percent reimbursement of the cost to implement approved conservation practices on lands that are enrolled in conservation easements.

Enrollment in CRP

Producers enrolled in the Illinois CREP also may be eligible to enroll in general and continuous sign-up of other practices under FSA's CRP. CREP offers producers another option to voluntarily enroll and enhance their land under the CRP and provides additional benefits and extended resource protection not available through other CRP enrollment options.

How to Participate

Interested producers should contact the county FSA office or local Soil and Water Conservation District office. Additional information also is available on FSA's website at www.fsa.usda.gov.

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