



FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Helping Landowners Manage Their Lands

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (Farm Bill) provides billions of dollars annually for voluntary habitat conservation on private lands under agricultural production and non-industrial forest use. Through the Farm Bill conservation programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, producers and landowners can receive financial and technical assistance to implement sustainable land management practices.

March 2025

Guide to the 2018 Farm Bill Conservation Programs



Through the Farm Bill conservation programs, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency offer financial and technical assistance to landowners and agricultural producers to voluntarily implement conservation practices that will benefit the environment and agricultural operations. Learn more at www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill and www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-bill.

Need more help?



The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Coastal Program work with willing partners to conserve habitats that benefit fish, wildlife, and people. These programs also provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and agricultural producers and help them to access resources available through the Farm Bill conservation programs. Learn more at www.fws.gov/program/partners-fish-and-wildlife and <https://www.fws.gov/program/coastal>.



Glossary

A **CONSERVATION EASEMENT** is a legal agreement where a landowner voluntarily places restrictions on a property to preserve the ecological value of the land.

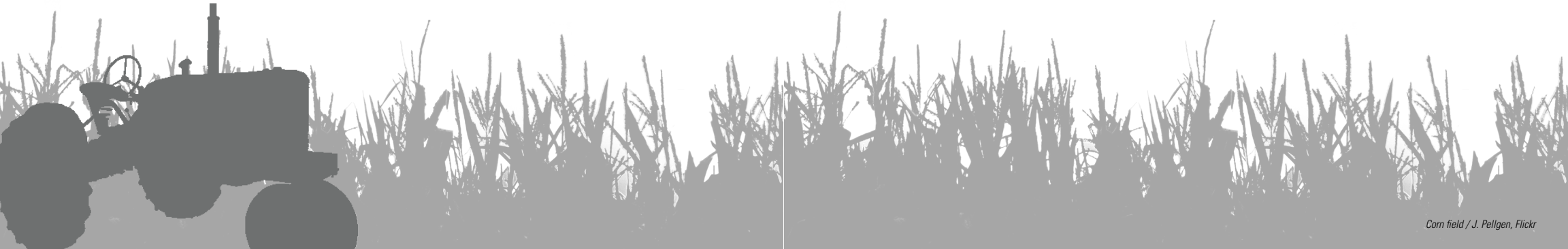
A **NON-INDUSTRIAL FOREST** is a privately owned forest where the landowner does not own a forest products manufacturing facility.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE is expertise provided by federal agencies and others to help the applicant implement habitat conservation practices.

WILDLIFE HABITAT includes wetlands, forests, grasslands, and streams.

Which Farm Bill conservation program is right for you?

Agricultural Lands	Wetlands	Forest Lands
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conservation Reserve Program• Environmental Quality Incentives Program• Wetland Reserve Easements• Agricultural Land Easements• Conservation Stewardship Program• Regional Conservation Partnership Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conservation Reserve Program• Environmental Quality Incentives Program• Wetland Reserve Easements• Regional Conservation Partnership Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Environmental Quality Incentives Program• Agricultural Land Easements• Conservation Stewardship Program• Healthy Forest Reserve Program• Regional Conservation Partnership Program





Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)



“The Farm Bill conservation programs are great examples of public-private partnerships that underlie wildlife management in our country.

Landowners can improve their agricultural operations, while helping wildlife and other public resources, such as clean air and water. It’s a true win-win!”

— Steve Jester, Executive Director, Partnerscapes

Goals	Protect environmentally sensitive agricultural lands
Conservation Approach	Retire croplands or pasture and establish vegetation that improves soil, air, water, and wildlife habitat quality. Conserve grasslands
Land Types	Highly erodible agricultural lands, grasslands, marginal pastures, and degraded wetlands
Applicant Eligibility	Landowners and agricultural producers, who have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage
Payment(s)	Annual rental payment, maintenance incentive, and cost-share payments for establishing conservation cover
Agreement Duration	Between 10 and 15 years
Enrollment	General CRP: Periodic enrollment announcement Continuous CRP: Ongoing
Administering Agency	Farm Service Agency
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	http://bit.ly/2c47Zf2



Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

Goals	Restore, protect, and enhance wetlands
Conservation Approach	Restore and protect habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, and improve biological diversity, water quality, and flood control
Land Types	Farmed, converted, or degraded wetlands
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal governments and corporations, and private landowners
Minimum acreage	Minimum acres vary by state
Payment(s)	50% to 100% of the restoration cost and easement value depending on contract duration
Agreement Duration	30-year, permanent easements, or maximum duration under state law. 30-year contract option for Tribes
Enrollment	Ongoing
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	http://bit.ly/OVVQrA

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)

Goals	Preserve working agricultural lands
Conservation Approach	Preserve working agricultural lands while improving soil, air, water, and wildlife habitat quality
Land Types	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, and private non-industrial forests
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal, state, and local governments, and non-governmental organizations that have land protection programs
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage; however, forests larger than 40 acres or 20% of the easement require a forest management plan
Payment(s)	Up to 75% of the easement value depending on environmental significance of the land
Agreement Duration	Permanent or maximum duration under state law
Enrollment	Ongoing
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	http://bit.ly/OVVQrA



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Goals	Enhance wildlife habitat, soil, and water quality on working agricultural lands and forests
Conservation Approach	Implement conservation practices that improve soil, air, water, and wildlife habitat quality
Land Types	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, private non-industrial forests, and degraded wetlands
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal, agricultural producers, and private non-industrial forest owners
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage
Payment(s)	Payments are based on conservation practices
Agreement Duration	Up to 10 years
Enrollment	Ongoing
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	http://bit.ly/1uHBe6Y

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Goals	Maintain, improve, or expand conservation practices on agricultural lands
Conservation Approach	Maintain or expand conservation practices that address CSP conservation priorities
Land Types	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, and private non-industrial forests
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal, agricultural producers, and private non-industrial forest owners
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage; however, entire operation must be enrolled
Payment(s)	Payment based on conservation performance
Agreement Duration	5 years, with an option to renew for 5 years
Enrollment	Ongoing
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	https://bit.ly/2fN3TW7



Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)

Goals	Restore, enhance, and protect forests
Conservation Approach	Promote conservation activities that recover endangered, threatened, and other at-risk species; enhance biodiversity; and help carbon sequestration.
Land Types	Non-industrial forests
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal and non-industrial forest owners
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage
Payment(s)	50% to 100% of the restoration costs and 75% to 100% of easement value depending on contract duration
Agreement Duration	10-year restoration agreements and 30-year or permanent easements for certain conservation actions. Additional 30-year contract for Tribal participants.
Enrollment	Periodic enrollment announcement
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	http://bit.ly/1js0RX2

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Goals	Promote collaboration among NRCS, agricultural producers, landowners, and other partners
Conservation Approach	Promote conservation activities that restore habitat and sustainable use of soil, water, and other resources
Land Types	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, and non-industrial forests
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal, state, and local governments; agricultural and forest associations; nongovernmental organizations; and educational institutions who assist private landowners
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage
Payment(s)	Payment rates depend on program and project type
Agreement Duration	5 years or longer, with an option to renew for 5 years and extend for an additional year
Enrollment	Annual request for proposals and renewals
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	https://bit.ly/2SSwRrB



Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

Goals	Increase public access to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation
Conservation Approach	Encourage landowners to restore habitat and provide access for wild-life-dependent recreation
Land Types	Non-industrial forest, farm, or ranch lands
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal and state governments who assist private landowners
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage
Payment(s)	Payment varies depending on Tribal or state agreements
Agreement Duration	Duration varies depending on Tribal or state agreements
Enrollment	Private landowners enroll with Tribal and state agencies
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service and Tribal and state governments
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	https://bit.ly/2YfHn2f

Program requirements and conditions may vary by state. For specific details, please check with your state NRCS or FSA office.





Farm Bill Partnerships

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Coastal Program provide financial and technical assistance to landowners and agricultural producers who want to enhance the productivity of their public and private working lands and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

We help partners to access resources available through the Farm Bill conservation programs and plan and implement voluntary agricultural and habitat conservation practices. From the mountains to the shores, we work to improve the productivity of working lands for future generations.



Coastal Program



J. Wright, USFWS



J. Wright, USFWS

Undersized road culverts obstruct fish passage and threaten public safety with accelerated flows, erosion, and flooding. In Maine, the Appalachian Mountain Club, NRCS, and the Coastal Program are working together to replace undersized culverts with bridges, using EQIP assistance provided by NRCS. Located in a private non-industrial forest, these photographs show the undersized culvert (left) and the new bridge (right) over a brook trout tributary to the Penobscot River.



Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program



USFWS

In Washington, the native prairie is a rare ecosystem that supports many unique plants and animals. A private landowner worked with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Center for Natural Lands Management to restore 25 acres of prairie by using prescribed fire and native plantings.

EQIP assistance provided by NRCS installed fencing and constructed watering areas for cattle that helped to restore the prairie and improve cattle management. The restored habitat is protected in perpetuity under ALE.



USFWS

In Utah, a private landowner worked with the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to restore 250 acres of grassland. Previously in small grain production, the landowner decided to restore grassland to compliment wildlife benefits associated with an adjacent Utah waterfowl management area.

NRCS provided CSP assistance to prepare the site, purchase native seeds, and plant native grasses. The restored habitat will benefit waterfowl, long-billed curlew, burrowing owls, and pollinators.

Maintaining Working Lands and Conserving Wildlife



Working Lands for Wildlife

Landowners who enroll in the NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) will receive assistance to implement and maintain conservation practices that benefit target species. Enrollment also provides landowners with the regulatory predictability of knowing they have addressed any endangered species issues resulting from their conservation practices for up to 30 years, if practices are maintained. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/2uSfDgY> (bitly.com shortened).

Habitat Conservation Plan

A Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) establishes a partnership among federal agencies and private landowners to conserve ecosystems that benefit fish and wildlife. The HCP is part of an incidental take permit application, which allows the applicant to proceed with an activity that would otherwise result in the unlawful take (e.g., harm or harassment) of a listed species under the Endangered Species Act. The HCP describes the anticipated effects of the proposed taking, how impacts will be minimized or mitigated, and how the HCP activities will be funded. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can provide assistance to landowners to design a project to avoid take. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/3AJ7H6R> (bitly.com shortened).

Conservation Benefit Agreement

Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances and Safe Harbor Agreements have been combined into a single agreement called a Conservation Benefit Agreement (CBA). A CBA is a voluntary agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a private or other non-federal property owner. The agreement encourages landowners to implement conservation actions that benefit species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act and/or at-risk non-listed species. In exchange, the landowner receives assurances that the Service will not require any additional conservation actions without their consent. Learn more at <https://bit.ly/3Uf50Tf> (bitly.com shortened).



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