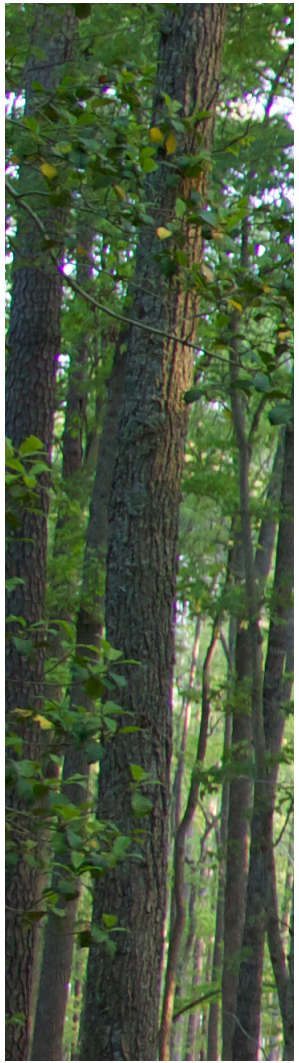
FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

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.



Forest / USFWS

Guide to the 2018 Farm Bill Conservation Programs

USDA NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service FSA Farm Service Agency

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.

Need more help?

Partners for Fish & Wildlife Coastal Program

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife and Coastal Programs work with willing partners to conserve habitats that benefit fish, wildlife, and people. These programs provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and agricultural producers and helping them access Farm Bill conservation programs and resources to support habitat conservation.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program Webpage

Coastal Program Webpage



Freshwater Farms Reserve, California / USFWS

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.

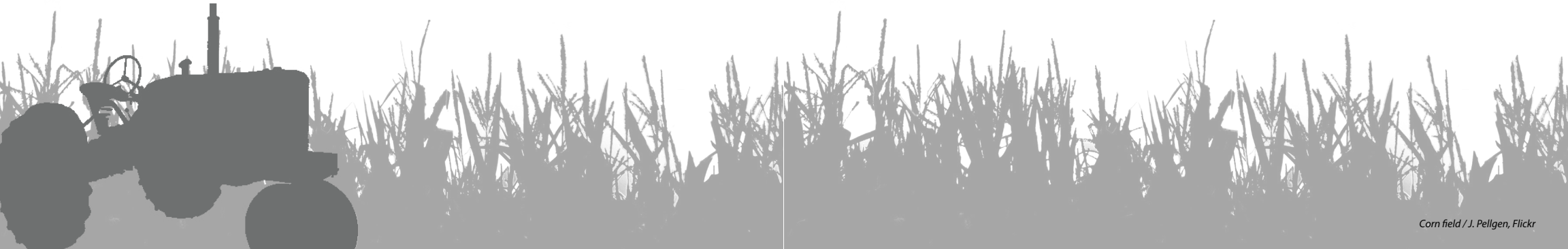
A **NON-INDUSTRIAL FOREST** is a privately owned forest where the landowner does not own a forest products manufacturing facility.

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
• Conservation Reserve Program • Environmental Quality Incentives Program • Wetland Reserve Easements • Agricultural Land Easements • Conservation Stewardship Program • Regional Conservation Partnership Program	• Conservation Reserve Program • Environmental Quality Incentives Program • Wetland Reserve Easements • Regional Conservation Partnership Program	• Environmental Quality Incentives Program • Agricultural Land Easements • Conservation Stewardship Program • Healthy Forest Reserve Program • Regional Conservation Partnership Program



Corn field / J. Pellgen, Flickr



"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

USDA U.S. Department of Agriculture

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

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 (bitly.com shortened)	http://bit.ly/2c47Zf2

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

U.S. Department of Agriculture

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 or 30-year contract option for Tribes.
Enrollment	Ongoing.
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service.
Website (bitly.com shortened)	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 (bitly.com shortened)	http://bit.ly/OVVQrA

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

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 (bitly.com shortened)	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 (bitly.com shortened)	https://bit.ly/2fN3TW7

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

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 (bitly.com shortened)	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 (bitly.com shortened)	https://bit.ly/2SSwRrB

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

U.S. Department of Agriculture

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 wildlife-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 (bitly.com shortened)	https://bit.ly/2YfHn2f

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



Henry McLin, Creative Commons

Farm Bill Partnerships

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and Coastal Program provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and agricultural producers to improve working lands and enhance fish and wildlife habitat.

We help partners access Farm Bill conservation resources and plan and implement voluntary conservation practices that benefit both agriculture and wildlife. From mountain forests to coastal shores, we're working together to sustain productive lands and healthy habitats for future generations.

Coastal Program



USFWS



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's Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) will receive assistance to implement and maintain conservation practices that benefit target species. Enrollment also provides landowners with the potential for regulatory predictability for up to 30 years by implementing and maintaining conservation practices that address endangered species issues.

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.

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.

Whooping cranes / USFWS



October 2026

(Front Cover) Cows / USFWS
(Back Cover) Horses / The Shared Experience, Flickr