

## APPENDIX C: NON-FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO PRIVATE LANDOWNERS

### **Bayou Preservation Association - BPA**

**Program Description:** The Bayou Preservation Association (BPA), a nonprofit organization, was founded in 1966 to prevent the concrete channelization of a segment of Buffalo Bayou. Since that beginning, BPA has expanded its purpose to protect and restore many of the functions of Texas' bayous.

**How the Program Works:** Lands may be accepted through conveyance of conservation easement or lease, transferring fee title ownership, entering into a management agreement, or registering the property as an example of good land stewardship with a willing landowner.

**Regional Use:** Statewide

**Eligibility:** Contact BPA's office for specific eligibility requirements.

**Contact:** Bayou Preservation Association, P.O. Box 980863, Houston, Texas, 77098, (281) 992-8134

### **Challenge Cost Share Program - CCSP**

**Program Description:** In 1988, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) launched the Challenge Cost Share Program (CCSP) to manage, restore, and enhance fish and wildlife resources and natural habitats on public and private lands. The program is a partnership with non-federal public and private institutions, organizations, and individuals. The CCSP allows the USFWS to provide matching funds for projects that support the management, restoration, and protection of natural resources on more than 500 National Wildlife Refuges, 70 fish hatcheries, research facilities, and on private lands.

**How the Program Works:** The USFWS provides up to 50 percent of the total project cost, while the partners provide no less than 50 percent of the cost. The partner may contribute cash, material, equipment, land, or water.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** Public and private lands are eligible. Funds provided by the USFWS for projects cannot be matched with other federal funds.

**Contact:** Challenge Cost Share Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Refuges and Wildlife, 500 Gold Avenue, SW, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103, (505) 248-6824.

### **Conservation Farm Option - CFO**

**Program Description:** The Conservation Farm Option (CFO) is a pilot program created by Section 335 of the 1996 Farm Bill to foster and test innovation in two arenas-program administration and application of emerging conservation technologies. The goals of the CFO are conservation of soil, water, and related resources, water quality protection and improvement, wetland restoration, protection and creation, wildlife development and protection and other conservation purposes. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will supervise technical aspects of the program, as well as oversight and evaluation, while the Farm Service Agency (FSA) will handle administrative and financial matters. Any other conservation agencies, organizations or consultants may assist in organizing projects, developing conservation plans, contributing matching monies or other resources, and implementing practices.

**How the Program Works:** The CFO will provide cost-share and annual incentive payments to individual producers who sign 10-year contracts. The annual CFO would replace any other contracts and payments the producer may already be receiving. Individual producers and groups of producers may submit proposals, as well as organized associations or other entities on behalf of producers. CFO will offer continuous sign-up. All proposals will be submitted to the USDA national office for evaluation and selection by an interagency review team. In general, there are no restrictions to the type of proposals that may be submitted, except that they must provide environmental benefits. Proposals will be ranked on a variety of factors, such as project size, rate of participation, type of resource problems, types of conservation practices, innovation, cost effectiveness, partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation plans. Plans that address priority resource problems--including wildlife habitat needs-identified and documented by the Local Working Groups (L WG) will receive preference. Producers accepted into the CFO must prepare a detailed Conservation Farm Plan describing all practices and the schedule of implementation. Upon final approval by NRCS, the plan becomes the basis for a CFO contract.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide

**Eligibility:** Any wheat, feed grain, cotton or rice farmer who has a production flexibility contract with FSA under the Agricultural Market Transition Act.

**Contact:** Conservation Farm Option, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 101 S. Main Street, Temple, Texas 76501-7682, (254) 742-9800.

### **Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)**

**Program Description:** The CPGL program was created by Section 386 of the 1996 Farm Bill and is the first ever conservation program specifically targeted to private grazing land. The purpose of the program is "to conserve and enhance private grazing land resources and provide related benefits to all citizens of the United States." This program, created in response to the privately sponsored "Grazing Lands Conservation initiative," will offer landowners the opportunity and assists them to better manage their grazing lands to protect soil, conserve water, provide wildlife habitat and sustain forage production. Conserving and improving wildlife and fish habitat are among several explicit statutory goals.

**How the program Works:** The CPGL essentially is an educational and technical assistance program administered by the NRCS and modeled on that agency's traditional conservation operations. That is, technical assistance is provided through Conservation Districts (CD) to owners of grazing land on request. Cost-share or incentive payments, contracts and easements are not authorized. Earmarked funds are provided to NRCS to add grazing specialists to strengthen that agency's expertise and outreach capability. Under the Program, Grazing Management Districts (GMD) will be formed to demonstrate and promote scientifically sound grazing practices. A GMD would have an associated technical advisory committee composed of ranchers, farmers and technical experts.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** Any private, state-owned, tribally-owned and any other non-federal rangeland, pastureland, grazed forestland and hayland is eligible.

**Contact:** Conservation of Private Grazing Land, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 101 S. Main Street, Temple, Texas 76501-7682, (254) 742-9800.

### **Conservation Reserve Program - CRP**

**Program Description:** The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a large scale cropland retirement program that was created in the 1985 Farm Bill and amended in 1990 and 1996. It was conceived as a

dual-purpose commodity supply control and soil erosion reduction program, but has evolved into a multipurpose conservation program. Major goals of the CRP include reducing soil erosion and sedimentation, improving water quality, maintaining fish and wildlife habitat, and providing support income to the landowner. Under the program, farmers can receive 1) annual rental payments for the land; 2) cost-sharing; and 3) technical assistance to plant vegetation for conservation. The CRP is administered by the FSA in cooperation with the NRCS, Texas Agricultural Extension Service (TABS), State Forestry Agencies, and local soil and water conservation districts.

**How the Program Works:** Two versions of the CRP are now available to farmers - traditional CRP and continuous signup CRP. Under the traditional CRP, farmers can bid to enroll their highly erodible land or land in a special emphasis watershed in the CRP program during specified sign-up periods at their local FSA office. Under the continuous sign-up CRP, there is a continual application period and automatic acceptance for all eligible applicants. Under the both CRP versions, the farmers' bid state the annual rental payments (up to a certain bid cap) that the farmer would be willing to accept for enrolling their lands in the program. For the continuous CRP, FSA can accept rental payments that exceed the rental payment bid cap. Conservation plans describing the conservation and maintenance measures to be carried out by the landowner during the contract term must also be submitted and agreed upon by the landowner and the NRCS District Conservationist.

FSA generally offers contracts under the CRP for 10 to 15 years, but also has the authority to utilize easements in certain situations. Annual rental payments may not exceed \$50,000 per person per year. By law, payments cannot be higher than the local rental rates for comparable land. Rental payments are not counted against payment limitations applicable to commodity price support and production adjustment programs.

In addition to rental payments, CRP provides cost-share incentives. The CRP participants can receive up to 50 percent cost-share from FSA for establishing vegetation. Once the land has been accepted into the Reserve program, the land cannot be farmed during the term of the contract.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** The CRP eligibility is available to any farmer who has lands containing marginal pasture land suitable for a riparian buffer or cropland with recent cropping history that meets specific requirements. Certain lands with an expiring Water Bank Program contracts may also be eligible for CRP. More information on specific cropland requirements under CRP can be obtained from FSA.

**Contact:** Conservation Reserve Program, Farm Service Agency, P.O. Box 2900, College Station, Texas 77841, (409) 260-9235.

## **Environmental Quality Incentives Program - EQIP**

**Program Description:** The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a land management program designed to address a wide array of priority natural resource concerns. EQIP was authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill to replace four smaller, pre-existing agriculture conservation programs - the Agriculture Conservation program, the Water Quality Incentives Program, the Great Plains Conservation Program and the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program. Its purposes include conserving and enhancing soil, water, and related natural resources, including grazing land, wetlands and wildlife habitat. Other purposes include maximizing environmental benefits per dollars expended and assisting farmers and ranchers in complying with federal and state environmental laws. Lands covered by the program include cropland, rangeland, pasture, forestland, and other farm and ranch lands.

**How the Program Works:** To participate in EQIP, farmers and ranchers apply at the local USDA Service Center. Applications are accepted continuously, but only periodically are they ranked and selected by NRCS and approved for funding by FSA. All funded EQIP activities are carried out according to a pre-approved site-specific conservation plan submitted by the participant. The plan is required to address at least one of the priority concerns of the local area. Benefits available to the program participants include

cost-share, incentive payments, educational and technical assistance. The benefits that farmers and ranchers can qualify for vary depending on the land management practices outlined in the conservation plan and the extent of the project.

The NRCS has primary administrative responsibility, but is required to get FSA concurrence for policies, priorities and guidelines. EQIP is implemented by the concept of "locally led conservation," using the L WG convened by Conservation Districts.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** Virtually any farmer or rancher can apply for benefits under EQIP. However, only those persons actively engaged in livestock, or agricultural production are eligible to receive EQIP assistance.

**Contact:** Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 101 S. Main Street, Temple, Texas 76501-7682, (254) 742-9800.

### **Forestry Incentives Program - FIP**

**Program Description:** The Forestry Incentives Program (FIP) program was created in 1973 for the purposes of increasing the Nation's supply of timber products from private non-industrial forest lands and conserve and improve the environment. The program may apply to wetlands conservation and restoration of wooded swamps. The FIP provides technical and cost-share assistance to landowners participating in anyone of the four national forestry practices eligible under FIP. These practices include: tree planting, improving a stand of forest trees, site preparation for natural regeneration of trees, and special forestry practices. The FIP is jointly administered by the NRCS and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in cooperation with the Texas Forest Service (TFS).

**How the Program Works:** Landowners apply for participation in the program at the county NRCS office. Upon request from NRCS, the TFS examines the property, develops the Forest Management Plan, and certifies the need for the practice. The TFS will also provide technical advice and help locate approved vendors for accomplishing the work. The TFS must certify that the work has been completed in accordance with the approved plan before payment is made to the landowner by the county NRCS office. Cost-share assistance cannot exceed 65 percent of the actual, average, or estimated cost of performing the practice. The maximum cost-share that a participant can receive annually for forestry practices under FIP is \$10,000. All FIP practices require a minimum 10-year maintenance agreement from the landowner.

**Regional Use:** Primarily in East Texas Pineywoods. The FIP is offered only in designated counties where a suitable number of ownerships, each capable of producing at least 50 cubic feet of timber per year, exist.

**Eligibility:** The FIP is limited to landowners of 10 to 1,000 acres. Exceptions to the acreage limitation may be obtained for up to 5,000 acres. Ornamental, Christmas tree production, and orchard tree plantings are not eligible-for FIP funding.

**Contact:** Forestry Incentives Program, Texas Forest Service, College Station, Texas 77843-2136, (409) 845-2641.

### **Legacy Land Trust**

**Program Description:** Legacy Land Trust is a non-profit land trust established in 1996 to protect open space, particularly those adjacent to natural bayous, in order to protect water quality and habitat and wildlife values in a 13-county geographic area surrounding Houston.

**How the Program Works:** Legacy Land Trust works primarily through the development of land preservation agreements, otherwise known as conservation easements, with private landowners.

**Regional Use:** 13-county area surrounding Houston, Texas.

**Eligibility:** Contact Legacy Land Trust's office for specific eligibility requirements.

**Contact:** Legacy Land Trust, P.O. Box 980816, Houston, Texas 77098-0816, (713)-524-2100

### **North American Wetlands Conservation Act of 1989 - NAWCA.**

**Program Description:** The North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), established in 1989, encourages partnerships among public agencies and other interests within the United States, Canada and Mexico to 1) protect, enhance, restore, and manage wetland ecosystems and other habitats for migratory birds, fish, and wildlife in North America; 2) maintain current or improved distribution of migratory bird populations; and 3) sustain an abundance of waterfowl and other migratory birds consistent with the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and international treaty obligations.

The Act provides funding for wetlands conservation projects involving acquisition, restoration, and enhancement. Funding is approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) based on recommendations from the North American Wetlands Conservation Council (Council). The USFWS coordinates with the Council on the NA WCA and can provide assistance to landowners to develop proposals for submission to the Council and MBCC. Funding for the Act is appropriated by Congress and has ranged up to \$15 million a year.

**How the Program Works:** Proposals may be submitted by any group or individual by April 1 and August 1. Funding becomes available following MBCC approval, which occurs approximately five months following application submission. A proposal must describe how the proposed work fits into a larger project (if applicable); the need for the proposal; where the work is to be done; the affect of the proposal on animals, plants and wetland functions; how much the project will cost; and partner commitments and responsibilities. A grant application instruction booklet outlining the above information in more detail is available through your USFWS Regional Office (see contact below) or the North American Wetlands Conservation Act representative.

The NAWCA grants require a minimum one-to-one grant match from a non-federal source, such as a state, non-profit group, or the landowner, or a combination of these. Proposals with higher match ratios are preferred. Annual payments for leases or easements require a minimum 10-year agreement and demonstration projects require a minimum 5-year agreement.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide

**Eligibility:** Projects involving acquisition, restoration, enhancement, creation, management, and other activities that conserve wetland ecosystems and the fish and wildlife that depend on such habitats are eligible for the Act or matching partner funds. Areas of special concern and larger areas are usually given priority in grant consideration.

**Contact:** North American Wetlands Conservation Act, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, NM 87103-1306, (505) 248-6876; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, (512) 389-4578.

### **North American Waterfowl Management Plan Joint Venture Projects--NAWMP**

**Program Description:** The North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP) was signed in 1986 between the United States and Canada to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands important to waterfowl and other wetland-dependent bird species. Mexico has recently signed the NA WMP as well. The NAWMP's primary objective is to return waterfowl populations to levels observed in the 1970s, when fall flights exceeded 80 million ducks. The plan is implemented at the grassroots level by partnerships called

Joint Ventures. Wetlands identified under NAWMP as "areas of major concern" for waterfowl habitat (e.g., migration, nesting and forage areas) are targets for these joint ventures.

**How the Program Works:** Joint Venture Management Boards, consisting of federal, state, and private agencies and private individuals, have been established to coordinate work within the Joint Venture areas. Because most lands in Texas are privately owned, landowner involvement is crucial for the joint ventures to succeed. Private landowners of wetlands significant to waterfowl may receive technical and financial assistance through a variety of cooperative programs within their geographic area. Participation is not exclusive to individual landowners, however. Corporations such as Phillips Petroleum, Exxon, DuPont, and Central Power and Light in Corpus Christi have all become involved in wetland conservation projects on their land and/or participate in various joint venture projects.

The Plan also supports research on wetlands restoration, wetlands status surveys, and wetlands inventories.

**Regional Use:** There are currently eleven habitat joint ventures underway in the United States. Principal areas targeted by the plan are the Atlantic Coast from Maine to Florida; the Lower Mississippi River region; the Upper Mississippi River-Great Lakes region; the Gulf Coast; the Playa Lakes region of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Colorado; California's Central Valley; the Pacific Coast; the Rainwater Basin; the Prairie Pothole region of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Iowa; the Intermountain West; and San Francisco Bay.

**Eligibility:** Any landowner (federal, state, group, or individual) with property of significance to waterfowl and other wetland-dependent species who wishes to restore or enhance the land may apply through the specific Joint Venture Management Board. Both financial and technical assistance may be available.

In Texas, three joint ventures exist: The Gulf Coast Joint Venture (GCN), the Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLN), and the Lower Mississippi River Valley Joint Venture (LMVN). The Prairie Wetlands Project (PWP) has been created as part of the GCN. These programs are summarized below.

**Contact:** North American Waterfowl Management Plan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, P.O. Box 1306, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87103-1306, (505) 248-6634; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, (512) 389-4578.

### **Natural Resources Conservation Service Technical Assistance - NRCS (TA)**

**Program Description:** The Natural Resources Conservation Service is the technical arm of USDA. Technical assistance and information is available for: 1) wetlands determinations for wetland protection and management programs; 2) developing conservation plans for protecting and managing wetlands; 3) providing income-producing alternatives for use and management of wetlands; 4) developing standards and specifications and designing and installing conservation measures for wetland restoration, creation, and enhancement; 5) providing information on plant materials for wetland planting; providing soil surveys and information for identifying, planning, and managing wetlands.

**How the Program Works:** Landowners request technical assistance through local soil and water conservation districts. Technical assistance and information is provided according to local priorities and available resources.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide. Also include territories of the United States.

**Eligibility:** Landowners who sign agreements with local soil and water conservation districts can receive technical services for managing, using, enhancing, creating, and restoring wetlands.

**Contact:** Natural Resources Conservation Service Field Offices located in many locations in Texas. Look in the phone directory under U.S. Government or call NRCS State Headquarters in Temple, Texas at (254) 742-9800.

## **Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFWP)**

**Program Description:** The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFWP), also known as the Private Lands Assistance and Restoration Program, offers technical and cost-share assistance to landowners who wish to restore wildlife habitat, including degraded or converted wetlands and those upland habitats that meet specific eligibility criteria. The objectives of PFWP programs are to restore, enhance, and manage wetlands for fish and wildlife habitat; promote profitable land use for agricultural, industry, and private landowners; and promote a wise and lasting landuse ethic.

The program focuses on reestablishment of original natural communities. Special consideration is given to projects that: (a) contribute to the survival of endangered, threatened, or candidate species, or migratory birds of management concern; (b) contribute to meeting the goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan; (c) are located very close to existing habitat so that fragmentation of habitats would be reduced and recolonization by a full component of native plants and animals could easily occur; (d) contribute to the restoration of globally or nationally imperiled natural communities; (e) will result in a self-sustaining system that is not dependent on artificial structures (although projects using levees, dikes, and diversion terraces with water-level control devices, for example, are frequently funded; (f) will use native self-propagating species; or (g) provide education/outreach opportunities.

**How the Program Works:** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service may provide assistance to landowners ranging from giving informal advice on a design and location of a potential restoration project, to designing and funding restoration projects under a formal cooperative agreement with the landowner. Restoration efforts may include, but are not limited to, plugging drainage ditches, installation of water control structures, fencing riparian areas to exclude livestock, and restoring native vegetation. The landowner contacts the USFWS and an onsite visit is arranged to discuss landowner's needs and ideas for the property. If cost shared assistance is requested, the landowner and USFWS staff work together to prepare a Habitat Restoration Proposal for the project, which is submitted to the USFWS. Generally, cooperative agreements that are longer in duration are preferable to those of shorter duration. Cooperative agreements may not be less than 10 years. Cost-shared assistance is available up to 100 percent; however, funding is more probable with some cost-shared assistance. Demonstration projects may be less than 10 years in duration. Project terms less than 10 years may be cost-shared up to 50 percent and may not exceed \$5,000. Demonstration projects greater than 10 years may have a greater cost share and higher total costs.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** Subject to priority and preference factors stated above, any wetland is eligible for restoration with technical and financial assistance by the USFWS. Upland habitats are eligible for financial assistance only if their restoration will contribute to certain program goals. Once the agreement period has expired, the landowner is not obligated to follow the Cooperative Agreement guidelines. Agricultural practices with conservation purposes are allowed on restoration sites.

**Contact:** Partners for Wildlife Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 17629 El Camino Real, Suite # 211, Houston, Texas 77058 (281) 286-8282.

**Program Description:** The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) provides technical assistance to persons desiring to include wildlife management considerations in present and future land use practices. This service is strictly advisory and is provided without charge to cooperating landowners. The goal of the Private Lands Enhancement Program (PLEP) is to provide expertise to land managers in the conservation and development of wildlife habitat and the various wildlife populations that utilize that habitat.

**How the Program Works:** Upon the landowners' written request, the TPWD biologist schedules a personal meeting and a property inspection with the landowner. The landowner defines the various needs and uses of the property and establishes objectives for wildlife conservation. The biologist then

recommends actions to achieve the landowner's objectives. A written management plan may be developed upon request. Components of the plan may include objectives, past history, and an explanation of proper harvest and surveying techniques. Wildlife biologists will continue to assist landowners through periodic visits to help interpret survey information and formulate harvest recommendations.

**Regional Use:** Statewide.

**Eligibility:** Landowners interested in conserving and managing wildlife habitats on their property are eligible.

**Contact:** Private Lands Enhancement Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, (512) 389-4395.

### **Private Lands Initiative - PLI**

**Program Description:** The Texas Private Lands Initiative (PLI) is a voluntary program in which landowners work with TPWD and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to enhance wildlife habitat through partnerships. The PLI applies to a variety of landscapes in Texas, including wetlands such as bottomland hardwoods, playa lakes, and riparian areas. The TPWD had identified 16 types of projects to enhance habitat on private lands. In wetland areas, these projects may include moist-soil management, fencing, planting, and pumping agreements. These projects offer landowners a unique opportunity to use their wetlands as demonstration sites for future projects.

**How the Program Works:** Projects under the PLI are cost-shared by the landowner and NFWF, while TPWD offers technical assistance and program coordination. Funding is dependent on availability of grants.

**Regional Use:** Statewide.

**Eligibility:** Wetland projects must be a minimum 10 year (negotiable) commitment and the landowner is obligated to maintain the improvements include planting a diverse mixture of legumes and grass surrounded by a 4-strand barbed wire fence in playa lakes. Assistance is available on other improvements as well. No cost-sharing is available to reverse damage in playa basins caused by livestock grazing, such as soil erosion and runoff.

**Contact:** Private Lands Initiative, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, (512) 389-4395.

### **Stewardship Incentive Program – SIP and Forest Stewardship Program - FSP**

**Program Description:** Both programs involve the development of a Forest Stewardship Plan designed to accommodate the needs of both the landowner and the natural resources on the property. The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) provides technical assistance to help landowners enhance and protect the timber, fish, and wildlife habitat, water quality, wetlands, and recreational and aesthetic values of their property. The Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP) provides cost share assistance to private landowners for implementing the stewardship plans developed under the FSP. Upon approval of the plan, cost-shared assistance is provided through SIP. The guidelines for SIP define eight major categories for funding: Management Plan Development, Reforestation and Afforestation, Forest and Agroforest Improvement, Windbreak and Hedgerow Establishment, Riparian and Wetlands Protection and Improvement, Fisheries Habitat Enhancement, Wildlife Enhancement, and Forest Recreation Enhancement.

Both FSP and SIP are administered by the TFS in cooperation with the USFS. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides administrative assistance.

**How the Program Works:** The USFS staff or certified consultants work with private landowners to develop a multi-use Forest Stewardship Plan that details the project's activities to protect and enhance forest resources. Existing management plans can be modified to meet Forest Stewardship Plan guidelines. Once a forest management plan has been developed and approved, up to 75 percent cost-share is provided through SIP to fund the plan's projects. Payments may not exceed \$10,000 per landowner per fiscal year. To receive financial assistance, landowners must agree to manage the land according to the plan for at least ten years. Significant accomplishments are recognized by designating the landowner Forest Steward, which gives public recognition to the landowner.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide. Available statewide in Texas for wetlands.

**Eligibility:** Eligible landowners must have an approved Forest Stewardship Plan. Landowners owning between 10 and 1,000 acres of forest land who do not derive most of their income from timber manufacturing on the property are eligible. Authorizations may be obtained of up to 5,000 acres. Forest land is defined as rural land with at least 16 percent canopy cover or other land capable of supporting at least 10 cubic feet of wood per acre per year under natural conditions. Christmas tree, orchard, or ornamental plantations are ineligible.

**Contact:** Stewardship Incentive Program - Forest Stewardship Program, Texas Forest Service, College Station, Texas 77843-2136, (409) 845-2641.

### **Texas Prairie Wetlands Project - TPWP**

**Program Description:** The Texas Prairie Wetlands Project (TPWP), designed to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture (GCJV), is a partnership effort to restore, create, or enhance wetlands beneficial for waterfowl and other wildlife use. The TPWP projects include management of water on cropped lands, restoration of converted wetlands, enhancement of natural wetlands, or creation of wetlands on non-wetland sites.

**How the Program Works:** Landowners interested in creating and maintaining habitat for waterfowl or other wildlife on their property for a prescribed period are offered financial and technical assistance through the Texas Prairie Wetlands Project office. The landowner may also contact the Service, NRCS, TPWD, and Ducks Unlimited (DU), who will coordinate with the PWP office. Cost-shared assistance of up to 75 percent is available (100 percent where supplemental water is provided by the landowner), but average costs to PWP must not exceed \$200 per acre. In return, the landowner and PWP agree on management practices in the Wetland Development Agreement (WDA). The WDA is a management plan designed to satisfy the landowner as well as provide sufficient habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Technical assistance for creating, restoring, and maintaining habitat is provided through both on-site and county workshops. The PWP allows for normal rotations in agriculture.

**Regional Use:** Twenty-eight coastal counties in Texas.

**Eligibility:** Private landowners and farm operators (landowners must co-sign agreements) within the 28 county project area are eligible. A landowner is limited to one cost-shared wetland agreement per calendar year.

**Contact:** Texas Prairie Wetlands Project, Prairie Wetlands Project Office, 312 S. Main Street, Room 310, Victoria, Texas 77901, (512) 576-0282; 2205 Avenue I #114, Rosenberg, Texas, (281) 341- 7968.

### **Voluntary Debt-for-Nature Contracts - VDFNC**

**Program Description:** The FSA allows for borrowers to enter into Conservation Contracts (CC) in exchange for reducing the amount of agricultural loans that must be repaid to the government.

**How the Program Works:** The CC may be for a period of 10, 30 or 50 years. The amount of debt canceled is proportionate to the length of protection. Borrowers who agree to a 50-year CC will receive the maximum amount of debt to be written down. Borrowers who agree to a 30- or 10-year contract will receive 60 and 20 percent of the maximum write down, respectively.

The authority for a CC applies to private land that is 1) used as security for existing or new USDA Farm Program Loans, and 2) suitable for conservation, recreation and wildlife habitat purposes. The suitability of the land offered for a CC is determined by an interagency Contract Review Team composed of representatives of FSA, the NRCS and the USFWS, along with any other conservation agency or organization that accepts an invitation to participate. Eligible lands include wetlands, wildlife habitat of local, regional or national importance, upland and highly erodible land. The CC requires that no agricultural production takes place on the subject land for the duration of the contract. The Contract Review Team also develops a Management Plan to include any special conditions needed in the contract.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** Every borrower with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) loans secured by real estate is potentially eligible, whether the borrower is delinquent or current in making payments, or is simply applying for a new loan.

**Contact:** Voluntary Debt-for-Nature Contracts, Farm Service Agency, P.O. Box 2900, College Station, Texas 77841, (409) 260-9235.

### **Wetland Habitat Alliance of Texas – WHAT**

**Program Description:** The Wetland Habitat Alliance of Texas (WHAT) is an organization dedicated to preserving Texas wetlands by raising public awareness and appreciation of wetlands and funding projects to protect, enhance, and restore natural wetlands. WHAT also provides youth and adult education and serves as a liaison to the government, conservation organizations, hunters, and the general public.

**How the Program Works:** WHAT solicits funds for projects such as management of water on cropped wetlands, restoration of converted wetlands, enhancement of natural wetlands, and creation of wetlands on non-wetland sites. Interested landowners can receive up to 100 percent financial assistance in return for a minimum 10-year agreement.

The cooperator maintains ownership of the land upon completion of the project. The cooperator and WHAT agree to any proposed development on the land before an agreement is sealed. The NRCS will verify the operable conditions; WHAT will pay costs and provide technical assistance to cooperators within the specifications of the agreement. WHAT is interested in working with landowners to find an agreement acceptable to all parties involved.

**Regional Use:** Statewide.

**Eligibility:** Any landowner interested in accomplishing the same goals as WHAT is eligible to participate.

**Contact:** Wetland Habitat Alliance of Texas (WHAT), 118 E. Hospital, Suite 208, Nacogdoches, Texas 75961, (409) 569-9428.

### **Wetlands Reserve Program - WRP**

**Program Description:** The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) was authorized by the 1990 Farm Bill. The WRP is a voluntary land retirement program exclusively applicable to wetlands offering landowners a chance to receive payments for restoring or protecting wetlands on their property. The WRP provides a unique opportunity for farmers to retire marginal agricultural lands and reap the many benefits of having

wetlands on their property. Under WRP, the NRCS staff work with participating landowners to secure conservation easements and provide cost-sharing assistance for wetlands restoration.

**How the Program Works:** Three WRP protection options are available to landowners under the WRP-- permanent easements, 3D-year easements, restoration cost share agreements of a 10-year minimum duration. The level of federal protection depends on the duration of protection. The permanent easement option generally is 100 percent of the agricultural value or established area cap and USDA pays 100 percent of the restoration costs. The 3D-year easement option pays 75 percent of the agricultural value or established area cap and USDA pays 75 percent of the restoration costs. With the restoration cost-share agreement there is no incentive payments. While the law allows for the purchase of either permanent or 3D-year easements, priority will be given to permanent easements. Landowners will be responsible for taxes on easement lands. However, taxes will likely be minimal as the land will not be used for crop production. The landowner maintains ownership of the land and maintains the easement. Public access is not allowed unless desired by the landowner.

Farmers interested in participating in the WRP should apply to the program through their county Natural Resources Conservation Service office at any time. The NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will determine eligibility of the acres offered, by ranking them according to: 1) duration of the easement offer, 2) hydrology restoration potential, 3) habitat value for migratory birds and other wildlife, 4) wetland functions and values, 5) location significance, 6) wetland management requirements, 7) physical site condition, and 8) over-all cost. Applications with the most environmental benefits and least costs will be selected.

A restoration plan will be developed for the area. The landowner is given detailed information on what the restoration will be and how much funding will be provided, then makes a decision to enter the program or end further consideration.

Total easement payments for permanent easements may not exceed \$550 per acre or appraised agricultural value, whichever is less. For 30-year easements, the landowner can receive up to 75 percent or appraised agricultural value not to exceed \$412.50 per acre.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** Lands eligible for WRP include restorable wetland areas that have been used intensively for cropping and forage production. For a forage production area to be eligible, the natural wetland vegetation must have been removed, mainly through management practices. Adjacent land deemed necessary to protect the restored wetland also will be included. The WRP lands must contain a substantial amount of restorable wetland. Limited areas of natural wetland, plus non-wetland areas needed to buffer the wetland from disturbance or to establish reasonable field boundaries, may be included.

Wetlands enrolled in the CRP may be eligible to transfer over into the WRP program. CRP land enrolled prior to November 28, 1990 or CRP land likely to return to production after the CRP contract expires are examples of CRP land eligible to transfer into the WRP.

**Contact:** Wetlands Reserve Program, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 101 S. Main Street, Temple, Texas 76501-7682, (254) 742-9800.

## **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program - WHIP**

**Program Description:** Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), was created by section 387 of the 1996 Farm Bill, is a land management program that helps private landowners plan and pay for wildlife habitat improvements. Specifically it will help landowners to develop upland wildlife, wetland wildlife, threatened and endangered species, fish, and other types of wildlife. The program is administered by the NRCS, but is developed in conjunction with State Technical Committees, as well as other federal and state agencies and conservation partners.

**How the Program Works:** WHIP provides technical and cost share assistance, but contrary to its name, incentive payments cannot be made under the current law. WHIP is funded through monies from the CRP up to a total of \$50 million through the year 2002. The program will provide up to 75 percent of the cost of installing and maintaining practices. The remaining 25 percent of the cost may be paid by the landowner or any other nonfederal conservation partners. Additional incentives, above the cost of installation, may be provided by conservation partners to enhance participation. To participate in the program, landowners must submit an application during an announced sign-up period. Wildlife Habitat Develop Plans (WHDP) are then developed by NRCS to address wildlife goals, the habitat practices for meeting them, as well as installation and maintenance practices. Following the sign-up period, the WHDP's are ranked by the NRCS State Conservationist.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** Most privately-owned land is eligible under the program, provided this land is not enrolled in other federal programs and does not have a restrictive easement. Lands need not be in agriculture to be eligible.

**Contact:** Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Natural Resources Conservation Service, 101 South Main, Temple, Texas 76501-7682, (254) 742-9800.

### **Coastal Zone Management Administration Implementation Awards Program – CZMA / IAP**

**Program Description:** Assists states in implementing and enhancing Coastal Zone Management Programs. Grants available for coastal management and protection, access improvements, hazard management, planning, growth and development management, and demonstration projects.

**How the Program Works:** Formula grants are provided to the states for approval projects through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Grants can be used for the activities outlined in the above program description. In some states coastal coordination councils have been established to provide program oversight and project review and approval.

**Regional Use:** Nationwide.

**Eligibility:** All coastal states including the Great Lake States, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the trust territories of the Pacific and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

**Contacts:** National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce, National Ocean Service Office of Ocean Resources Conservation and Assessment, 1309 E-W Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, (301) 713-315.5 extension 195; Texas Coastal Coordination Council, 1700 Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas 78711-1495, (512) 463-5385.