



# **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 several Farm Bill conservation programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, producers and landowners receive financial and technical assistance to implement sustainable land management practices.**

# Guide to 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](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill) and [www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-bill](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-bill).

## *Need more technical or financial assistance?*



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/partners](http://www.fws.gov/partners) and [www.fws.gov/coastal](http://www.fws.gov/coastal).

## *Which Farm Bill conservation program is right for you?*

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



	Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
Goals	Protect environmentally sensitive agricultural lands	Enhance wildlife habitat on working agricultural lands and forests
Assistance Type	Technical and financial assistance	Technical and financial assistance
Conservation Approach	Retire croplands or pasture and establish vegetation that improves soil, air, water, and wildlife habitat quality or protect grasslands	Implement conservation practices that improve soil, air, water, and wildlife habitat quality
Land Types	Highly erodible agricultural lands, grasslands, marginal pastures, and degraded wetlands	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, private, non-industrial forests, and degraded wetlands
Applicant Eligibility	Landowners and agricultural producers, who have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months	Tribal, agricultural producers, and private, non-industrial forest owners
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage	No minimum acreage
Payment(s)	Annual rental payment, maintenance incentive, and cost-share payments for establishing conservation cover	Payments are based on conservation practices
Agreement Duration	Between 10 and 15 years	Up to 10 years
Enrollment	General: Periodic announcement Continuous: Ongoing	Ongoing
Administering Agency	Farm Service Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website (bitly.com shortened)	<a href="http://bit.ly/2c47Zf2">http://bit.ly/2c47Zf2</a>	<a href="http://bit.ly/1uHBe6Y">http://bit.ly/1uHBe6Y</a>

## Agricultural Conservation Easement Program



	Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)	Agricultural Land Easements (ALE)
<b>Goals</b>	Restore, protect, and enhance wetlands	Preserve working agricultural lands
<b>Assistance Type</b>	Technical and financial assistance	Technical and financial assistance
<b>Conservation Approach</b>	Restore and protect habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, and improve biological diversity, water quality, and flood control	Preserve working agricultural lands while improving soil, air, water, and wildlife habitat quality
<b>Land Types</b>	Farmed, converted, or degraded wetlands	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, and private non-industrial forests
<b>Applicant Eligibility</b>	Tribal governments and corporations, and private landowners	Tribal, state, and local governments, and non-governmental organizations that have land protection programs
<b>Minimum acreage</b>	Minimum acres vary by state	No minimum acreage; however, forests greater than 40 acres or 20% of the easement require a forest management plan
<b>Payment(s)</b>	50% to 100% of the restoration cost and easement value depending on contract duration	Up to 75% of the easement value depending on land type
<b>Agreement Duration</b>	30-year or permanent easements. 30-year contracts for Tribes	Permanent or maximum duration under state law
<b>Enrollment</b>	Ongoing	Ongoing
<b>Administering Agency</b>	Natural Resources Conservation Service	Natural Resources Conservation Service
<b>Website</b> (bitly.com shortened)	<a href="http://bit.ly/OVVQrA">http://bit.ly/OVVQrA</a>	<a href="http://bit.ly/OVVQrA">http://bit.ly/OVVQrA</a>





	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)
Goals	Maintain or improve conservation practices on agricultural lands	Restore, enhance, and protect forests
Assistance Type	Technical and financial assistance	Technical and financial assistance
Conservation Approach	Maintain or expand conservation practices that address CSP conservation priorities	Promote conservation that recovers endangered, threatened, and other at-risk species, enhance biodiversity, and carbon sequestration
Land Types	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, and private non-industrial forests	Non-industrial forests
Applicant Eligibility	Tribal, agricultural producers, and private, non-industrial forest owners	Tribal and non-industrial forest owners
Minimum acreage	No minimum acreage; however, entire operation must be enrolled	No minimum acreage
Payment(s)	Payment based on conservation performance	50% to 100% of the restoration costs and 75% to 100% of easement value depending on contract duration
Agreement Duration	5 years, with an option to renew for 5 years	10-year restoration agreements and 30-year or permanent easements for certain conservation actions. Additional 30-year contract for Tribes
Enrollment	Periodic enrollment announcement	Periodic enrollment announcement
Administering Agency	Natural Resources Conservation Service	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Website <small>(bitly.com shortened)</small>	<a href="https://bit.ly/2fN3TW7">https://bit.ly/2fN3TW7</a>	<a href="http://bit.ly/1js0RX2">http://bit.ly/1js0RX2</a>



	Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)	Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)
<b>Goals</b>	Promote collaboration among NRCS, agricultural producers, landowners, and other partners	Increase public access to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation
<b>Assistance Type</b>	Technical and financial assistance	Technical and financial assistance
<b>Conservation Approach</b>	Promote conservation activities that restore habitat and sustainable use of soil, water, and other resources	Encourage landowners to restore habitat and provide access for wildlife-dependent recreation
<b>Land Types</b>	Croplands, grasslands, rangelands, pastures, and non-industrial forests	Non-industrial forest, farm, or ranch lands
<b>Applicant Eligibility</b>	Tribal, state, and local governments, agricultural and forest associations, nongovernmental organizations, and educational institutions who assist private landowners	Tribal and state governments who assist private landowners
<b>Minimum acreage</b>	No minimum acreage	No minimum acreage
<b>Payment(s)</b>	Payment rates depend on program and project type	Payment varies depending on Tribal or state agreements
<b>Agreement Duration</b>	5 years or longer, with an option to renew for 5 years and extend for an addition year	Duration varies depending on Tribal and state agreements
<b>Enrollment</b>	Periodic request for proposals	Periodic request for proposals
<b>Administering Agency</b>	Natural Resources Conservation Service	Natural Resources Conservation Service and Tribal and state governments
<b>Website</b> (bitly.com shortened)	<a href="https://bit.ly/2fN3TW7">https://bit.ly/2fN3TW7</a>	<a href="http://bit.ly/1js0RX2">http://bit.ly/1js0RX2</a>



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service 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, the 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, which protect the restored habitat 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 NRCS' Working Lands for Wildlife 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).

## Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances

A Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances provides incentives for landowners to implement conservation practices that benefit target species. The agreement provides participating landowners with a permit assuring that they will not be required to implement additional conservation measures beyond those in the agreement if the target species is listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/2qo51U9> (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, harassment, etc.) 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 <http://bit.ly/2tUcDDn> (bitly.com shortened).

## Safe Harbor Agreement

A Safe Harbor Agreement provides assurances to landowners whose voluntary actions contribute to the recovery of a species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. If they fulfill the conditions of the agreement, the federal government will not require any additional or different management activities without the landowner's consent. Learn more at <http://bit.ly/2onZyio> (bitly.com shortened).

## 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 to help the applicant implement habitat conservation practices.

**WILDLIFE HABITAT** includes wetlands, forest, grasslands, and streams.