§ 1491.20 Cooperative agreements.

(a) NRCS, on behalf of CCC, shall enter into a cooperative agreement with those entities selected for funding. Once a proposal is selected by the State Conservationist, the entity must work with the State Conservationist to finalize and sign the cooperative agreement, incorporating all necessary FRPP requirements. The cooperative agreement must address:

1. The interests in land to be acquired, including the United States’ right of enforcement as well as the form and other terms and conditions of the easement deed;

2. The management and enforcement of the rights on lands acquired with FRPP funds;

3. The responsibilities of NRCS;

4. The responsibilities of the eligible entity on lands acquired with FRPP funds;

5. The allowance of parcel substitution upon mutual agreement of the parties; and

6. Other requirements deemed necessary by NRCS to meet the purposes of this part or protect the interests of the United States.
(b) The term of cooperative agreements shall be a minimum of five years for certified entities and three years for other eligible entities.

(c) The cooperative agreement shall also include an attachment listing the parcels accepted by the State Conservationist. This list shall include landowners’ names and addresses, acreage, the estimated fair market value, the estimated Federal contribution, and other relevant information. An example of a cooperative agreement shall be made available by the State Conservationist.

§ 1491.21 Funding.

(a) Subject to the statutory limits, the State Conservationist, in coordination with the cooperating entity, shall determine the NRCS share of the cost of purchasing a conservation easement or other interest in the land.

(b) NRCS may provide up to 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement, as determined in §1491.4(g). An entity shall share in the cost of purchasing a conservation easement in accordance with the limitations of this part.

(c) A landowner may make donations toward the acquisition of the conservation easement.

(d) The entity must provide a minimum of 25 percent of the purchase price of the conservation easement.

(e) FRPP funds may not be used for expenditures such as appraisals, surveys, title insurance, legal fees, costs of easement monitoring, and other related administrative and transaction costs incurred by the entity.

(f) If the State Conservationist determines that the purchase of two or more conservation easements are comparable in achieving FRPP goals, the State Conservationist shall not assign a higher priority to any one of these conservation easements solely on the basis of lesser cost to FRPP.

(g) Environmental Services Credits.

(1) NRCS asserts no direct or indirect interest in environmental credits that may result from or be associated with an FRPP easement.

(2) NRCS retains the authority to ensure that the requirements for FRPP-funded easements are met and maintained consistent with this part.

(3) If activities required under an environmental credit agreement may affect land covered under a FRPP easement, landowners are encouraged to request a compatibility assessment from the eligible entity prior to entering into such agreements.

§ 1491.22 Conservation easement deeds.

(a) Under FRPP, a landowner grants an easement to an eligible entity with which NRCS has entered into an FRPP cooperative agreement. The easement shall require that the easement area be maintained in accordance with FRPP goals and objectives for the term of the easement.

(b) Pending offers by an eligible entity must be for acquiring an easement in perpetuity, except where State law prohibits a permanent easement. In such cases where State law limits the term of a conservation easement, the easement term shall be for the maximum allowed under state law.

(c) The entity may use its own terms and conditions in the conservation easement deed, but a conservation easement deed template used by the eligible entity shall be submitted to the NRCS National Headquarters within 30 days of the signing of the cooperative agreement. The conservation easement deed templates must be reviewed and approved by the NRCS National Headquarters in advance of use. NRCS reserves the right to require additional specific language or to remove language in the conservation easement deed to protect the interests of the United States. The Chief may exercise the option to promulgate standard minimum conservation deed requirements as a condition for receiving FRPP funds.

(d) The conveyance document must include a “right of enforcement” clause. NRCS shall specify the terms for the “right of enforcement” clause to read as set forth in the FRPP cooperative agreement. This right is a vested property right and cannot be condemned by State or local government.

(e) As a condition for participation, a conservation plan shall be developed by NRCS in consultation with the landowner and implemented according to the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide.