

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Nebraska Platte-Republican Resources Area

### Overview

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the State of Nebraska launched a \$158 million Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement for the Platte-Republican Resources Area. The Platte-Republican CREP will reduce irrigation water use, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat through establishment of vegetative cover. Saving water will also replenish streams, rivers and reservoirs and enhance wildlife.

CREP uses federal and state resources to safeguard environmentally sensitive land through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Land enrolled in CRP is planted primarily to grasses and trees to improve water and soil quality and wildlife habitat. CRP was authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. CREP provides rental payments and other financial incentives to encourage producers to enroll voluntarily in 10 to 15-year CRP contracts.

### Benefits

The Platte-Republican Resources Area CREP will significantly reduce the consumptive use of water for irrigation and the amount of agricultural chemicals and sediment entering waters of the state from agricultural lands and transportation corridors. The reduction of ground and surface water use and of non-point source contaminants, through establishment of permanent vegetative cover, will also enhance associated wildlife habitat, both terrestrial and aquatic.

### Goals

The goals of the Platte-Republican CREP are to:

- Reduce the application of water for cropland irrigation in the priority area by 125,000 acre-feet annually from current irrigated usage levels.
- Increase surface and groundwater retention by a target amount of 85,000 acre-feet of water annually within priority area reservoirs, groundwater tables and streams.
- Provide up to 15,000 additional acres of conservation buffers and restored wetlands.
- Reduce the application of commonly used triazine products on crops by approximately 93,000 pounds annually.
- Reduce leaching of nitrate compounds into project area streams and groundwater by 5,900,000 pounds annually.
- Reduce the agricultural application of phosphate products by farmers by approximately 2,440,000 pounds annually, when fully enrolled, from existing application rates in the priority area.
- Assist community public water supplies (surface and groundwater) by reducing nitrogen and phosphorus levels from agricultural activities.
- Provide educational assistance to project priority area irrigators to develop a more efficient use of applied water, nutrients, and herbicides.
- Provide up to 85,000 additional acres of native grassland habitat for wildlife in the priority area, increasing the populations of pheasants and other ground nesting birds by 25 percent in the area.

- Reduce the total consumption of fossil fuels for irrigation by 350,000 gallons and electricity use by 10 million kilowatt hours.

### Program Cost

The expected combined federal and state obligation is approximately \$158 million for optional 10- to 15-year contracts with \$122 million coming from FSA and \$36 million from Nebraska. This does not include any costs that may be borne by producers.

### Eligible Areas and Eligibility Requirements

The project area includes the Platte and Republican Rivers and their tributaries in southern and western Nebraska. Producers who are located in the project area and meet the eligibility requirements identified for the Nebraska CREP may be eligible. To find out if your operation is located within the project area, contact your local FSA office.

To be eligible for CREP, the applicant must also satisfy the basic eligibility criteria for CRP.

Irrigated and non-irrigated cropland may be eligible for enrollment. For irrigated cropland to be eligible it must meet land eligibility requirements:

- Cropland that has been cropped 4 out of the 6 years, in 2002-2007;
- Cropland that is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity and capable of being irrigated when offered for enrollment; and
- A Nebraska State Water

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Use Contract is entered into between the producer and the State of Nebraska covering the irrigated cropland acres.

For non-irrigated (dry land) cropland to be eligible for enrollment, the land must meet the above eligibility requirements and be a center-pivot corner enrolled with the adjacent irrigated center-pivot cropland area.

### Approved Conservation Practices

The following conservation practices may be eligible for land enrolled into the Nebraska Platte-Republican CREP:

- CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses;
- CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat;
- CP21 - Filter Strips;
- CP22 - Riparian Buffer;
- CP23 - Wetland Restoration;
- CP23A - Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain;
- CP25 - Rare and Declining Habitat.

### Acreage Limitations

For the Platte-Republican CREP, enrollment is permitted for up to 100,000 acres of eligible cropland. Cropland and conservation practice limitations are:

- CP2, CP4D, and CP25: up to 85,000 acres;
- CP21 and CP22: up to 10,000 acres;
- CP23 and CP23A: up to 5,000 acres.

For the Republican River Basin Area, up to 50,000 acres may be enrolled.

For the Platte River Basin Area, up to 50,000 acres may be enrolled as follows:

- Up to 40,000 acres may be

enrolled in the designated area below Lake McConaughy.

- Up to 10,000 acres may be enrolled in the designated area above Lake McConaughy.

For the Platte River Basin Area, the 10,000 acres are further divided as:

- Up to 5,000 acres, served solely by groundwater wells, may be enrolled.
- Up to 5,000 acres, served by either groundwater wells and/or surface water allocation, may be enrolled.

### Sign-up and Contract Duration

Sign-up for the CREP will continue until enrollment goals are attained, and as long as there is statutory authority for CRP. Land enrolled in the program remains under contract for a period of 10 to 15 years, as specified in the contract.

Applicants must generally have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to enrollment. Persons with an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are ineligible for CREP until that contract expires.

### CREP Payments

Nebraska CREP participants may be eligible for the following payments from USDA:

- Annual rental payments based on irrigated rental rates for each eligible enrolled irrigated acre in which a State Water Use Contract has already been secured.
- Annual rental payments based on dryland cropland rental rates for each eligible enrolled dryland crop acre.
- Cost-share payments for 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable costs for establishment of approved conservation prac-

tices.

- A one-time Signing Incentive Payment consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for each eligible acre enrolled for each full year of the contract for eligible practices.
- A one-time Practice Incentive Payment equal to 40 percent of the total eligible cost of practice installation consistent with Handbook 2-CRP for eligible practices.
- A one-time incentive payment equal to 25 percent of the cost of restoring the hydrology of the site for practices CP23 and CP23A.

### CREP and CRP

CREP is not the only option that farmers may select to enhance their land; applicants may still enroll in the general CRP or continuous CRP. However, CREP provides additional benefits not available through the general and/or continuous CRP.

### For More Information

For more information on the Nebraska CREP, contact your local FSA office. Additional information is also available on FSA's Web site at: [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

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