

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)



EQIP is a new program developed to combine, and eventually replace, the functions of the Agricultural Reserve Program, Water Quality Incentives Program, Great Plains Conservation Program, and the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Program. The program will be implemented as a locally-led process to identify conservation concerns and set conservation priorities to address soil erosion, water quality, wildlife habitat, waste management, and other resource issues. State conservation priority areas have been identified by the State Technical Committee and conservation priority concerns have been established by local working groups consisting of local producers and other partners.

Under EQIP, 50% of program funding will go toward livestock-related conservation practices. Also, higher priority will be given to areas where state and local governments offer financial or technical assistance, or where agricultural improvements will help meet water quality objectives.

Landowners residing in conservation priority areas or having conservation priority concerns will be provided technical, educational, and financial assistance to address natural resource issues. EQIP offers contracts of up to 10 years for technical assistance and 75% cost-share payments for implementing conservation practices. All activities under contract are required to be carried out according to a written conservation plan.

Wildlife is benefited through increased water quality which provides higher quality wetlands, and through the establishment of valuable habitat designed to improve or protect water quality. For example, field borders, filter strips, and grass waterways used to control runoff from agricultural fields can be maintained in early successional habitats that are necessary for the survival of many species of songbirds and bobwhite quail, all of which are exhibiting population declines. Riparian buffer zones used to protect streams from runoff of pasture lands also can be highly productive areas for wildlife, providing cover, food, and travel corridors.

For more information concerning the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office, or call the Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Division at (770) 918-6416.

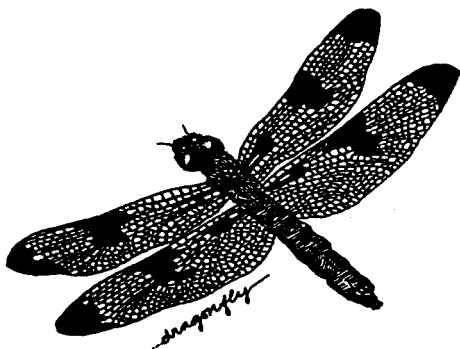
1996 Farm Bill Provides Opportunities for Wildlife

The 1996 Farm Bill programs now focus on the conservation of important resources across the landscape including wildlife. Sharing co-equal status with soil and water conservation, wildlife conservation on your land may make it possible for you to participate in programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

CRP is designed to protect highly erodible lands from wind and water erosion and has been expanded in the 1996 Farm Bill to include farmed wetlands, non-cropped wetlands, and cropland located within a Conservation Priority Area. A new ranking formula designed to measure environmental benefits will be applied to CRP applications giving higher priority to bids that incorporate wildlife "friendly" practices. Practices that can be chosen include: planting wildlife beneficial grasses and legumes (CP1), tree planting (CP3), establishing permanent wildlife habitat (CP4), and restoring wetlands (CP23).

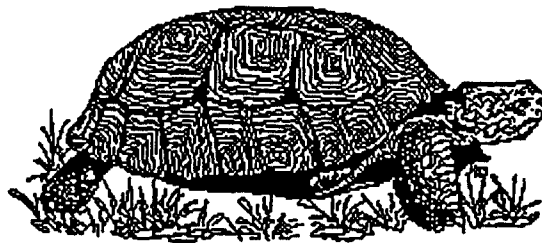


A continuous CRP sign-up for certain priority practices began in September 1996 and is still open. Priority practices covered under the continuous sign-up include: filter strips, grass waterways, shelter belts, wellhead protection areas, and riparian buffers. Other practices must be offered during the regular sign-up period. Regular sign-up is scheduled at the discretion of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.



WRP is a voluntary, wetland restoration program in which landowners maintain control of access to their land. Participating landowners can establish permanent or 30-year easements on their land and receive land value-based payments as well as cost-share payments for wetlands restoration. In addition, landowners may choose to enter a cost-share agreement where no easement is involved.

WHIP is designed to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners desiring to restore, develop, or enhance wildlife habitats on their land. Specifically, WHIP will aid the expansion of habitat for upland and wetland wildlife as well as threatened and endangered species.



EQIP is a new program that establishes conservation priority areas where significant soil, water, and natural resource concerns exist within a state. Though most practices will deal with livestock operations and their effects on soil erosion and water quality, there exists tremendous opportunity to improve wildlife benefits through this program. The establishment of wildlife habitats that serve as field borders, filter strips, vegetative waterways, and riparian buffer zones are examples of good water quality practices that should qualify for cost-share payments under this program.



Many of the wildlife habitats that can be affected positively through involvement in these Farm Bill programs have been declining steadily for many years. As a result, some of the wildlife species associated with these habitats also have experienced declining populations. For example, bobwhite quail populations have been declining for more than 30 years as early successional habitats have disappeared. There has been an associated drop in many songbird populations that rely on the same early-successional habitats. Developing high quality field borders, filter strips, and riparian buffers may help stem the tide against these alarming trends. And remember, considering wildlife habitat will improve your chances of having CRP offers accepted.

For more information about practices that can benefit wildlife, contact your local Wildlife Resources Division Game Management Office or call (770) 918-6416, or your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office. Contact your local Farm Service Agency (FSA) for CRP enrollment information.

THE CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) offers landowners incentives to conserve soil, water, and wildlife habitat. During scheduled sign-up periods, landowners can apply to enroll highly erodible land and other environmentally sensitive areas in the CRP. By enrolling land, a landowner can receive cost-share benefits and annual payments to implement conservation practices.

Landowners now have more choices than ever when enrolling. Practices that can be chosen include tree planting (CP3), planting wildlife-beneficial grasses and legumes (CP1), establishing permanent wildlife habitat (CP4), managing trees and vegetative cover already established (CP11), and wetlands restoration (CP23). When applying for CRP, be aware that a new ranking formula will be used. **This formula gives much higher priority to offers that provide cover that benefits wildlife and other environmental factors.**

Some wildlife beneficial practices allowed under CRP include:

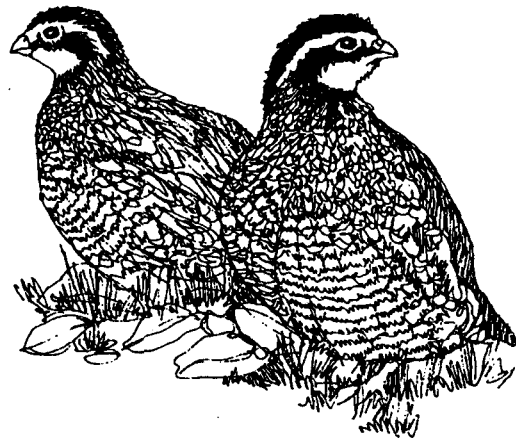
- ◆ Planting native grasses (CP2)
- ◆ Planting longleaf pines (CP3)
- ◆ Planting hardwoods (CP3A)
- ◆ Planting other CP3 pines at <500 trees per acre and maintaining 15-20% open land in native grasses, shrubs, and herbs
- ◆ Establishing permanent wildlife habitat (CP4)
- ◆ Thinning CP11 pines to <300 trees per acre and establishing and maintaining 15-20% open land in native grasses, shrubs, and herbs



How to know if your land is eligible:

- ◆ Must be considered highly erodible land according to conservation compliance provisions
- ◆ Be considered a farmed wetland
- ◆ Be devoted to a highly beneficial environmental practice such as filter strips, riparian buffers, grass waterways, wellhead protection areas, etc.
- ◆ Be subject to scour erosion
- ◆ Be located in a CRP conservation priority area
- ◆ Be cropland associated with, or surrounding, non-cropped wetlands





These habitat practices will help provide relatively high quality food and cover for many species of wildlife including bobwhite quail, a species experiencing drastic population declines throughout the Southeast since the 1960s. These practices will also benefit rabbits and a variety of songbird species. **Including wildlife habitat in your CRP offer, will increase your chances of acceptance.**

For more information about practices that can benefit wildlife, contact your local Wildlife Resources Division Game Management Office or call (770) 918-6416, or your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Office. For CRP enrollment information, visit your local Farm Service Agency Office.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

Devoted to Developing Quality Habitats

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) of the 1996 Farm Bill is devoted totally to the development of wildlife habitats across the nation. WHIP is designed to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners wishing to apply wildlife conservation practices on their land. The primary focus of the program is the enhancement, creation, or restoration of habitats for upland and wetland species, threatened and endangered species, fish and other types of wildlife.

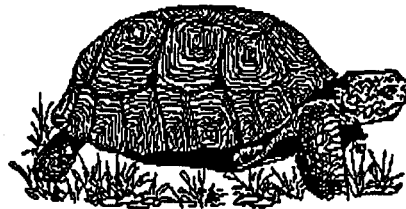
In Georgia, wildlife habitat was identified as one of the top three "Priority Conservation Concerns" by the State Technical Committee. Of particular concern are habitats for threatened and endangered species, bobwhite quail, neotropical songbirds, amphibians, and any beneficial wildlife habitats whose functions are being affected negatively by the presence of undesirable plant species.

WHIP objectives include: providing opportunity for involvement to all private landowners, restoring or enhancing native plant communities such as early successional habitats, riparian areas, longleaf pine communities, rare, threatened, and endangered species habitats, or isolated wetlands, improving water quality through hydrology restoration, and focusing on lands with existing resource management plans.

Priorities to be addressed by WHIP in Georgia are:

1) Species of concern

- Bobwhite quail and associated habitats
- Migratory neotropical birds
- Undesirable plant species
- Gopher tortoise and associated habitats



2) Application of the following practices

- Prescribed burning and fire break establishment
- Riparian buffers - trees
- Native grass planting
- Field borders
- Filter strips
- Wetland creation/restoration
- Hedgerow planting



3) Lands that border protected areas

Indiangrass

For more information on wildlife beneficial practices and the WHIP program, contact your local Wildlife Resources Division Game Management Office or call (770) 918-6416, or your Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office.

WETLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP)

The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) is designed to provide technical and financial assistance to landowners interested in restoring areas from cropland into wetlands. It focuses on restoration of wildlife habitats and improving water quality.

Landowners interested in participating in the WRP have three options from which to choose including permanent easements, 30-year easements, and restoration cost-share agreements.

Under the permanent easement option, landowners receive the appraised agricultural value of the land and 100% of wetlands restoration costs. In exchange for these payments, the landowner agrees to maintain the wetlands in perpetuity. Ownership of the property remains in the landowner's hands as do all decisions about access.

The 30-year easement offers landowners 75% of the appraised agricultural value of the land and 75% of restoration costs. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) assumes long-term management responsibility for the wetland. The landowner still maintains control of all access decisions.

The restoration cost-share agreement requires landowners to sign a long-term contract to restore wetlands. Agreements must be at least 10 years in duration after all practices have been installed. NRCS pays 75% of restoration costs and landowners are responsible for long-term management of the wetland. Restoration projects with high environmental benefits and low restoration costs receive highest priority.

Wetlands restoration provides many benefits to the environment and the landowner including improved water quality, reduced soil erosion, enhanced wildlife habitat, and increased recreational opportunities. For more information about the Wetlands Reserve Program contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Office.

