

Program – Agency:

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Landowner Requirements:

The landowner must have owned or operated the land ≥ 12 months prior to entering into a WRP contract. In addition, the landowner's average adjusted gross income must be $< \$2.5$ million over last 3 years (unless $\geq 75\%$ of income comes from farming, ranching or forestry).

Lands Eligible:

There are 8 categories of eligible lands:

- 1) Agricultural lands including:
 - a) wetlands farmed under natural conditions
 - b) commenced conversion wetland
 - c) farmed wetlands
 - d) farmed wetland pasture
 - e) prior converted cropland
 - f) substantially altered by flooding
- 2) Former or degraded wetlands on range, pasture, hayland, and/or forest production land used currently or previously for food or fiber production are eligible when hydrology:
 - a) has been essentially removed so wetland functions essentially removed
 - b) will be substantially restored if accepted into WRP
- 3) Riparian areas eligible providing:
 - a) area establishes link between wetlands protected by easement or other measure
 - b) average width ≤ 300 ft per side, unless ecological values warrant larger area
 - c) connects eligible areas that are ≥ 1 mi apart
- 4) Adjacent lands contributing significantly to wetland function provided they do not add up to $>50\%$ of easement, including:
 - a) Adjacent upland buffer and associated sites
 - b) Created and artificial wetlands
 - c) Non-cropped natural wetlands in excess of 10% of total offered restorable wetland offer of overall easement acreage
- 5) Previously restored wetlands under another government or private conservation program and meet NRCS restoration standards can get:
 - a) Permanent easement on lands not currently subject to > 30 year easement
 - b) 30 year easement on lands not currently subject to > 5 year easement
- 6) Lands substantially altered by flooding that will not likely alter flood damaged condition during easement term and wetland soil/conditions will likely develop over time

7) Lands in Water Bank Program (WBP) that if not enrolled in WRP will likely return to cropping, grazing, or timber harvest at WBP contract expiration

8) Problem soils supporting or potential to support hydrophytic vegetation even if not considered hydric soil

Under certain situations, other land types can be donated and therefore be included under WRP easement restrictions but these lands will not be paid for by WRP.

Only 10% of the agricultural lands in any given parish or county can be enrolled in WRP unless specific allowances have been made to raise this percentage.

Agreement Length:

10 or 30 year or Permanent

Benefits:

For permanent easements, the NRCS pays 100% of the restoration costs and offers a 1-time payment that equals the lowest of 3 values:

- 1) the agricultural value of the land
- 2) the Payment Cap (e.g., Louisiana = \$800/acre), or
- 3) your own bid offer (offering below your land's value increases chances of getting accepted)

For 30 year easements, NRCS pays 75% of the restoration costs and offers a 1-Time Payment that is 75% of the amount offered for permanent easements.

For 10 year agreement, NRCS pays 75% of the restoration costs.

Acceptable Practices:

WRP contracts require $\geq 70\%$ of site be restored to original/historic native vegetative community (or be suitable for declining species if species used in ranking process).

The remaining $\leq 30\%$ of the site can be an alternative natural community for species of concern (e.g., shallow water area for waterfowl).

Under WRP, the landowner retains 5 general rights on the contracted land:

- 1) Title
- 2) Quiet enjoyment
- 3) Control access
- 4) Recreational use (however, piers, boat docks, etc prohibited)
- 5) Subsurface resources (providing mining or drilling located off site)

All other uses on the contracted land must be applied for through a Compatible Use Authorization (CUA) established in writing and subject to revision by the NRCS. CUA's that are generally approved on WRP lands include:

- 1) Establishment/maintenance of wildlife food plots (Comprising $< 5\%$ of the site and must be placed to minimize habitat fragmentation).
- 2) Management of hydrology (e.g., manipulate water levels using water control)

structures)

3) Road establishment/maintenance

4) Irrigation wells

5) Firebreaks

6) Timber harvest that benefits the resource

7) Grazing, as annually determined by NRCS

8) Haying/mowing provided that:

a) Occurs only once between July 1 and Sept 1

b) No grazing occurs during the same year

c) Adequate vegetative regrowth is available for winter and spring

d) It provides for access to manage the site

e) It maintains wildlife food plots

Prohibited Practices:

The following activities are specifically prohibited on lands under a WRP contract: agricultural production for human use, surface mining, biomass production, drainage or other water level alteration, commercial wild rice or cranberry production, and commercial seed production. Road or trail establishment and crayfish, catfish, or bait fish farming are prohibited if they will negatively affect the area. Landowner cannot receive mitigation credits for land under a WRP contract.