



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program – Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin

OVERVIEW

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are partners in implementing a voluntary Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to enroll up to 40,000 acres in Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango, Warren, Washington and Westmoreland counties to improve surface water quality, groundwater quality and wildlife habitat through establishment of riparian buffers, native and other grasses, shallow water areas for wildlife, grassed waterways and the restoration of wetlands. The Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin CREP will also contribute towards decreasing the Gulf of Mexico’s hypoxia zone through nutrient loading reduction.

BACKGROUND

CREP is a part of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a federally funded voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers so that environmentally sensitive agricultural land is not farmed or ranched, but instead used for conservation benefits. CRP participants establish permanent, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees (known as “covers”) to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat. In return, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 and was reauthorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014.

With CREP, high-priority conservation goals are identified by the state, and then federal funds are supplemented with non-federal funds to achieve those goals.

Through the Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin CREP, federal and state resources are made available to program participants to voluntarily enroll in CRP for a minimum of 10-year, not

to exceed 15-year, contracts. Participants remove cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to grasses, trees, and other vegetation or restore wetlands. This will improve water quality, reduce the amount of sediment, phosphorous, nutrients and other pollutants entering waterbodies, and improve wildlife habitat.

GOALS

The goals of the Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin CREP are to:

- Restore and protect wetlands;
- Reduce the amount of sediment, nutrients and other pollutants entering the Ohio River and other waterbodies;
- Establish riparian habitat corridors next to streams, estuaries and wetlands;
- Establish permanent cover on highly erodible land to reduce erosion, enhance water quality and create wildlife habitat; and
- Improve water quality to facilitate the health of fish and wildlife populations.

ELIGIBLE CONSERVATION PRACTICES

The following specific CRP conservation practices are available:

- CP1, Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes;
- CP2, Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses;
- CP4D, Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Non-Easement;
- CP8A, Grass Waterways;
- CP9, Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife;
- CP12, Wildlife Food Plot;
- CP15A, Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips);
- CP21, Filter Strips;
- CP22, Riparian Buffer;
- CP23, Wetland Restoration;

FACT SHEET

CREP - Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin

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- CP29, Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer;
- CP30, Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer; and
- CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds.

ENROLLMENT AND ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Signup for the Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin CREP is on a continuous basis. To be eligible, land must be located in the project area and be either cropland or marginal pastureland. Cropland must meet cropping history criteria and be physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity. Marginal pastureland is also eligible for enrollment provided it is suitable for use as an eligible riparian buffer. Persons who have an existing CRP contract are not eligible for CREP on that land until the CRP contract expires.

PAYMENTS

Under the Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin CREP, eligible participants may receive the following payments:

- A one-time signing incentive payment (SIP) of \$100 per acre for installing practices CP8A, CP21, CP22, CP29 and CP30; or \$150 per acre for installing practice CP23 or CP33. Example: 30 acres enrolled to be devoted to practice CP33 results in a \$4,500 (30 acres times \$150) SIP. This payment is made soon after the contract has been signed and approved.
- A one-time practice incentive payment (PIP) for installing practices CP8A, CP9, CP15A, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP29, CP30 and CP33. The PIP is equal to 40 percent of the total eligible cost of installing the practice. Example: Producer's total eligible cost for installing the practice is \$2,000. The PIP would be \$800 (\$2,000 times .40).
- An annual rental payment consisting of:
 - o A base soil rental rate, determined by the three predominant soils of the eligible land offered;
 - o An incentive payment, as a percentage of the base soil rental rate, based on the practice

- and land offered; and
- o A maintenance payment, determined by the practice offered.
- For practices CP1, CP2, CP4D and CP12, the incentive payment is based on the erodibility index (EI) of the land offered, as follows:
 - o 0.75 times the base soil rental rate for land with $8 \leq EI \leq 12$;
 - o 1.5 times the base soil rental rate for land with $12 < EI \leq 20$;
 - o 1.75 times the base soil rental rate for land with $20 < EI \leq 25$;
 - o 2.0 times the base soil rental rate for land with $25 < EI \leq 30$; and
 - o 2.25 times the base soil rental rate for land with $30 < EI$.
- For practices CP8A, CP9, CP15A, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP29, CP30 and CP33, the incentive payment is 1.5 times the base soil rental rate.
- A cost-share payment of up to 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable cost of installing the approved practice.

In addition, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania provides eligible participants a cost-share payment of up to 50 percent of the practice installation cost, subject to certain limits, for most of the eligible practices.

EXAMPLES

An Erie County producer elects to enroll 40 acres of highly erodible cropland to be devoted to permanent native grasses (practice CP2) in a 15-year contract. The EI of the land is 22. The base soil rental rate for the land is \$52 per acre. The incentive payment is \$91 per acre (\$52 times 1.75). The producer's annual rental rate will be \$143 per acre, for a total annual rental payment of \$5,720 (\$143 times 40 acres). The producer will receive a total of \$85,800 in annual rental payments over the 15-year life of the contract. The producer will have no out-of-pocket costs for installing the practice because of the federal and state cost-share payments. In addition, the producer will receive \$2,000 from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for enrolling the land in the Pennsylvania Game Commission Program.

A Mercer County producer elects to enroll 10 acres of cropland to be devoted to a riparian buffer (practice CP22) in a 15-year contract. The base soil rental rate for the land is \$51. The incentive payment is \$77 per acre (\$51 times 1.5). The annual maintenance rate is \$10 per acre. The producer's annual rental rate will be \$138 per acre (\$51 + \$77 + 10) for a total annual rental rate of \$1,380 (\$138 times 10 acres). In addition, the producer will receive a one-time SIP of \$1,000. The producer will have no out-of-pocket costs for installing the riparian buffer because of the federal and state cost-share payments.

Note: The preceding are examples only.

ENROLLMENT OPTIONS

CREP is another option under CRP that farmers and ranchers may select to enhance their land. Eligible producers may still enroll eligible land in CRP through general or continuous signup; however, the Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin CREP provides additional benefits not available through general and/or continuous enrollment. Under the Pennsylvania Ohio River Basin CREP, producers receive higher incentive payments and have longer contract lengths that increase the total amount of rental payments received.

HAYING AND GRAZING

Haying and grazing are not allowed during the CRP contract period unless authorized by USDA. Contact your local FSA office for information about authorized haying and grazing activities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This fact sheet is provided for informational purposes only; other restrictions or requirements may apply. For more information on CREP, contact your local FSA office. To find your local FSA county office, visit <http://offices.usda.gov>. To learn more about FSA conservation programs, visit www.fsa.usda.gov/conservation.

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