

## Wetlands reserve overview

**By Janet Lagler**

*Natural Resources Conservation Service*

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provides technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners to address wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.

The voluntary program provides an opportunity for landowners to receive financial incentives to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture.

### Benefits

WRP participants benefit by:

- Receiving financial and technical assistance in return for restoring and protecting wetlands;
- Seeing a reduction in problems associated with farming difficult areas, and;

Having incentives to develop wildlife recreational opportunities on their land.

Wetlands benefit all Nebraskans by providing fish and wildlife habitat; improving water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals; reducing flooding; recharging ground water; protecting biological diversity; and providing opportunities for educational, scientific, and recreational activities.

### How WRP Works

The program offers enrollment options:

1. Permanent Easement. This is a conservation easement in perpetuity. Easement payments are usually based on the Nebraska Geographical Area Rate Caps (GARCs). In addition to paying for the easement, USDA pays up to 100 percent of the costs of restoring the wetland.
  2. 30-Year Easement. Easement payments through this option are 75 percent of what would be paid for a permanent easement. USDA also pays up to 75 percent of the restoration costs.
- Landowners should contact their local USDA Service Center for an application.

### Eligibility

To be eligible for WRP, land must be restorable and be suitable for wildlife benefits, which include:

- Farmed wetlands;
- Converted wetlands (prior to Dec. 23, 1985);
- Former or degraded wetlands;
- Lands substantially altered by flooding
- Uses of WRP Land

On acres subject to a WRP easement, the landowner controls access to the land and may lease the land for hunting, fishing, and other undeveloped recreational activities. At any time, a landowner may request that additional activities be evaluated by NRCS to determine if they are compatible uses for the site.

This request may include such items as permission to cut hay, graze livestock, or harvest wood

products.

Compatible uses are allowed if they are consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of the wetland. In the case of the Reserved Grazing Rights easement, landowners retain the right to graze the land with an approved grazing plan.

For more information about WRP, please contact your local USDA Service Center 352-4776 ext 3. Information is also available at [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/).

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