



The 2014 federal Farm Bill authorized voluntary conservation programs to help landowners enhance, restore or protect significant habitats such as wetlands, forests and grasslands. Many programs also are designed to help landowners protect water quality and prevent soil erosion. These programs provide one-time or annual payments to landowners. Some programs also provide partial or full payment of habitat restoration costs. Major programs include:

Wetland Reserve Easements:

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), administers this program. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to landowners wanting to enhance, restore or protect wetlands. Easement payments and restoration costs vary depending on whether land is cleared or forested and whether an easement is permanent or not. Per-acre payments to landowners also vary by state and county or parish. NRCS also pays up to 100 percent of restoration costs. To enroll land in a wetland reserve easement, landowners can apply through [local USDA Service Centers](#).

[READ MORE](#)

Conservation Reserve Program:

The Farm Service Agency (FSA), an agency of the USDA, administers this program. Landowners receive yearly rental payments, based on soil types, in exchange for agreeing to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and establish plant cover that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled are usually for 10 to 15 years. The programs goals are to improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. A variety of land types can be enrolled, including bottomland hardwood forests, longleaf pine forests, waterfowl habitat, upland bird habitat, floodplain wetlands, highly erodible land and others. Landowners can enroll through [local FSA Service Centers](#).

[READ MORE](#)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (incorporates the former Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program):

NRCS administers this program to help agricultural producers and others implement conservation practices on working lands. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastures and forests. Socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers; beginning or limited resource farmers and ranchers; and military veterans may be eligible for enhanced or advance payments. Goals of the program include water pollution reduction, water conservation, erosion reduction, promotion of habitat for at-risk wildlife and carbon sequestration. Payments to landowners can be up to 100 percent of the cost of planning and implementing conservation practices. Landowners can apply through [local NRCS Service Centers](#).

[READ MORE](#)

Conservation Stewardship Program:

NRCS administers this program to encourage agricultural producers and other landowners to maintain and improve existing conservation practices and implement new practices. Participants receive an annual land use payment for operation-level environmental benefits they produce. Payments rise as conservation results increase. Numerous types of conservation practices are encouraged, including those to protect water quality; enhance wetlands or grasslands; establish riparian forest buffers; establish waterfowl or shorebird habitat; improve wildlife habitat through controlled burning; and establish pollinator or beneficial insect populations. Landowners can apply through [local NRCS Service Centers](#).

[READ MORE](#)

Healthy Forests Reserve Program:

Through the Healthy Forests Reserve Program, NRCS helps landowners restore, enhance or protect privately owned forests to promote recovery of endangered or threatened species; improve plant and animal diversity; and enhance carbon sequestration. In the Lower Mississippi River region, landowners in Arkansas, Kentucky and Mississippi are eligible to apply for funding. The program offers various enrollment options, including 10-year restoration cost-share agreements, 30-year easements, 30-year contracts with Indian tribes and permanent easements. Landowners can apply through [local NRCS Service Centers](#) in the applicable states.

[READ MORE](#)

[Additional information on conservation programs authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill.](#)