



THE WETLAND RESERVE PROGRAM, AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WETLAND RESTORATION ON PRIVATE LANDS

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The Wetland Reserve Program, commonly referred to as “WRP,” was created to restore wetlands that have been converted to agricultural uses. Most of these wetlands were cleared of trees many years ago and have been in cattle or row crop production ever since.

Landowners now have an opportunity to restore these wetlands to the native habitat with funding through WRP. Restoration consists of planting hardwood trees and creating wetland habitat by flooding some of the area with shallow water. Shallow water flooding is generally kept at a depth of less than 18 inches to 2 feet. According to Jeff Thurmond, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Wildlife Biologist, the best waterfowl habitat is only 4 to 6 inches deep.

LAND ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for WRP, the land must meet two specific requirements. First, it must be open: either in crop, pasture, or fallow ground. Second, there must be some wetland soils on the open land. These are commonly known as hydric soils. They occur in certain parts of river floodplains or in areas where water stands during the spring or summer.

CHOOSE FROM THREE OPTIONS

Landowners can choose from a 10-year cost-share agreement, a 30-year easement, or a permanent easement. The

10-year agreement covers 75% of the landowner’s costs of planting hardwood trees on the area and building a levee to flood some of the area with shallow water for wetland wildlife habitat. There is no easement with this agreement.

A second option is a 30-year easement. The landowner gets the same 75% cost-share rate for tree planting and levee building as with the standard cost-share agreement. However, the landowner will also receive a payment based on the value of a restrictive easement placed on the enrolled acres. This payment is paid based on 75% of the appraised value of the easement.

The next option is a permanent easement. The landowner gets 100% cost-share for tree planting and levee building, with a permanent easement. However, the landowner will also receive a payment based on the value of a restrictive easement placed on the enrolled acres. This payment is made based on 100% of the appraised value of the easement.

Let’s look at an example to clarify things. Let’s say the full fair market value of the property is determined to be \$2,600 per acre and the easement value is determined to be \$1,300. For WRP, these values would be determined by an appraiser paid for by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). For a permanent easement, the easement payment would be 100% of the appraised easement value, or \$1,300 per acre. For a 30-year easement, it would

be 75% of the appraised easement, or \$975 per acre. Keep in mind, this is just an example. Your land could appraise higher or lower.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

If an easement option is chosen, a landowner is actually selling the USDA certain rights for the length of the easement. Such a decision should not be taken lightly. Consult with your tax advisor, your attorney, and perhaps most importantly, your family, before making a decision to apply.

Some rights are sold to the USDA for the easement payment and will not be allowed during the easement period. Some of these rights include, but are not limited to, the right to graze livestock, the right to plant and harvest crops, and the right to harvest timber. A warranty easement deed detailing rights purchased by the USDA and other rights to be retained by the landowner will be attached to the property deed and recorded at the courthouse.

Landowners that do not wish to sell property rights can still choose to apply for the 75% cost-share agreement. Landowners should contact their local USDANatural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) field office to sign an application for any of the three options under WRP. You can also visit the Alabama USDA-NRCS website for more information: <http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp>. ☞