

What the New Farm Bill Means for Wildlife

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Many wildlife-friendly programs have been reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2008 (Farm Bill). These programs enhance, create and protect critical and essential wildlife habitat. The programs include, but are not limited to the following:

- WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
- WRP – Wetland Reserve Program
- CRP – Conservation Reserve Program
- EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Farm Bill programs are voluntary. Privately owned and Tribal Lands are eligible to participate in the programs. Landowners receive technical and financial assistance to develop upland, wetland, riparian and aquatic habitat on their property. These areas provide valuable habitat for threatened and endangered species, declining wildlife, migratory birds and waterfowl, and many local wildlife species.

Many practices are available to improve wildlife habitat. Some practices are unique to a specific program, but there is some overlap. Several types of financial incentives are available to landowners to provide or enhance valuable wildlife habitats on their property. These incentives include practice payments, rental rates, and even easement payments. Practice payments provide a one-time reimbursement (usually 50-75 percent of cost) to implement certain conservation practices. Rental rates are paid yearly to retire marginal pasture or cropland for a certain period. Easement payments provide substantial financial incentives to protect and enhance critical habitat for 30 years to perpetuity.

A variety of beneficial practices are available to landowners. Certain practices such as longleaf tree planting, hardwood tree planting, and native warm season grass planting restore entire ecosystems. These ecosystems provide essential habitat to a whole host of wildlife species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Cost assistance is available for site preparation, planting, and maintenance of these specific plant communities.

Practices such as wildlife opening construction, legume planting, strip disking, field borders, and hedgerow establishment are

very beneficial to maintain quality wildlife habitat. Prescribed burning, firebreak construction, herbicide release applications, low density loblolly pine planting, and timber thinning are other eligible cost-share practices that benefit wildlife and promote healthy forests.

Wetland enhancement, creation, and restoration are additional practices that landowners may choose to implement on their properties. These practices may include dike construction, ditch plugs, shallow water management, and hardwood tree planting. Wetlands are most noted for the essential habitat they provide for migratory waterfowl, migratory birds, and threatened and endangered species. One third of all threatened and endangered species live only in wetlands, while one-half use wetlands for at least

one of their life requirements. In addition to benefitting wildlife, wetlands benefit people by storing floodwater, recharging ground water, filtering pollutants, and providing recreation.

Because wetlands provide a multitude of benefits for wildlife and people, the Farm Bill has strong incentives for wetland restoration. Alabama has been allocated 2,600 acres and millions of dollars for wetland restoration alone for fiscal year 2009. Several more million will be available for restoration of other declining habitats. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information on wildlife and conservation practices available through the Farm Bill. ♣

