

Wetlands Reserve Program

Edward Wright
Environmental Liaison
USDA-NRCS

Phone: 386-329-4116

Fax: 386-329-4103

Cell: 561-248-3540

Email: edward.wright@fl.usda.gov

Purpose of Presentation

- To provide an overview of the Wetland Reserve Program
- Briefly explain Program Operations
- Explain the New Appraisal Procedure
- Review current status of WRP in Florida

Program Authorities

- The Wetlands Reserve Program is authorized under Subtitle D, Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3837-3837f)
- The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill), Public Law 107-171.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Administration

The NRCS shall consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the implementation of the program and in establishing program policies.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Program Objectives

To assist willing landowners to restore wetlands that have had wetland functions reduced or eliminated by agricultural production practices (including pasture and forestry).

- Must have been a wetland
- Must have been damaged
- Must be restorable

Wetlands Reserve Program

Enrollment Priorities

The NRCS shall place priority on the enrollment of those lands that will maximize wildlife values (especially related to enhancing habitat for migratory birds).

Wetlands Reserve Program

Additional Landowner Eligibility

- Applicants are ineligible if their average adjusted gross income (AGI) for the previous three years exceeds \$2.5 million (unless 75% or more is derived from agricultural activities).

Wetlands Reserve Program

Three ways to participate

- Permanent conservation easement with restoration
- 30-Year conservation easement with restoration
- Restoration cost share only (10yr. Agreement; No easement)

Wetlands Reserve Program

Cost Share Rates

Time

Restoration

Permanent
Easement

100%

30-Year

75%

Restoration Only

75%

Wetlands Reserve Program

Geographic Payment Cap Based on:

- University of Florida- IFAS " Florida Land Value Study"
- Improved Pasture Land Value

Wetlands Reserve Program

So. Florida Geographic Payment Cap

*Permanent
Easement*

\$5,895

*30 -Year
Easement*

\$4421.25

Wetlands Reserve Program

South: Manatee, Hardee, Highlands, Okeechobee,
Indian River, Sarasota, Desoto, Glades, St Lucie,
Martin, Lee, Charlotte, Hendry, Collier, Monroe,
Orange, Polk, Osceola

Southeast: Palm Beach, Broward, Dade

Application Process

- Producer/landowner file application with NRCS
- NRCS review applications and determine eligibility
- NRCS in consultation with USFWS do site visits and rank/prioritize applications
- Based on NRCS appraisal, the landowner accept or reject the offer.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Landowner Reserved Rights

- Title - Convey, transfer, and otherwise alienate.
- Quiet Enjoyment.
- Control of Access - Prevent trespass and control access.
- Recreational Use - Undeveloped recreational uses including hunting, fishing, and leasing of such rights.
- Subsurface Resources - Provided drilling/mining located outside boundaries.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Allowance of Compatible Uses

“The United States may authorize, in writing and subject to such terms and conditions the NRCS may prescribe at its discretion, the use of the easement area for compatible economics uses, including, but not limited to managed timber harvest periodic haying and grazing.”

Wetlands Reserve Program

Allowance of Compatible Uses

“Compatible use authorizations will only be made if such use is consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of the wetland and other natural values of the easement area. The NRCS shall prescribe the amount, method, timing, intensity, and duration of the compatible use.”

Wetlands Reserve Program

Definition of Restoration

- Rehabilitation of degraded or lost habitat in a manner such that the original vegetative community and hydrology are restored, to the extent practicable.
- However,
 - Restoration of pre-agricultural site conditions may be precluded by substantial offsite or onsite circumstances.
 - Achieving maximum wildlife benefits may require a diversity of habitat types that area different than the original plant community and hydrologic condition.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Restoration Plans Will:

- Provide maximum habitat for wetland dependant wildlife
- Identify how wetland ecosystem functions and values will be restored, improved, and protected with special emphasis on habitat for migratory birds, T&E species, and resident wetland dependant wildlife.
- Include necessary management guidelines.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Priority Ranking Factors

Habitat	45 points
Location	45 points*
Hydrology	75 points
Wildlife Species	20 points
Operation & Maintenance	15 points
Likelihood of success limits	-35 points

* All sites within the So. FL Ecosystem Restoration Area receives an Automatic 25 points.

WRP Program Funding

- State Conservationist request funds annually
- Historical funding in Florida: \$8-11M
- Applications are funded from priority list until all funds are obligated

WRP Appraisal Process

Examples

	Value Before Easement	Value After Easement	Value of Payment
	Agricultural Value	No Ag Value	100% of Ag Value
FL	Very Low , \$1,500/ac	\$0	\$1,500/ac Very little recreational (hunting) value
Rest of USA	Ag Value Higher \$3,000	\$0	\$3,000/ac Plus high recreational (hunting) value

	Highest & Best Use	No Ag Value	100% of Difference
FL	Very high \$7000	\$1,500	\$5,500
Rest of USA	\$3,000	\$1,500	\$1,500

Program Barriers

- The US Government does not share property title.
- Funds obligated in one year cannot be used to fund applications in a different year.
- Unused funds for a fiscal year must be returned to National Headquarters.

Our Challenge

- Market the WRP Program in light of the new appraisal process
- Get new applications into the system SOON!
- Seek out new funding partners
- Explore creative ways to fund new applications

The End

