

## Areas expanded for Platte-Republican CREP

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the state of Nebraska have agreed to expand the eligible land available to enroll in the Platte-Republican Resources Area Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

The agreement also includes new optional voluntary easements to permanently retire irrigation water use and updates the federal irrigated rental rates for irrigated cropland enrolled in this CREP to reflect prevailing cash rents.

These updated rental rates range from \$120 to \$180 per year depending on the type of irrigation used and watershed location within the project area.

“This CREP partnership will continue to reduce ground and surface water use on irrigated cropland to help alleviate stress on water resources,” said Farm Service Agency administrator Bruce Nelson. “This agreement also will reduce sediment, nutrient and pesticide loadings into Nebraska rivers and lakes and enhance wildlife.”

This CREP agreement will target water conservation along the Republican and Platte rivers from the Wyoming border to Central Nebraska. The agreement covers up to 100,000 cropland acres near the two rivers and their tributaries.

The expanded project area now will include Pumpkin Creek in Banner County and the South Platte River and Lodgepole Creek in Cheyenne, Deuel and Kimball counties.

The program will help protect lakes and water sources through the establishment of native grass plantings, permanent wildlife habitat covers, filter strips, riparian buffers and the restoration of wetlands.

The CREP program is a cooperative project among producers, FSA and Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), the state of Nebraska and local water authorities. The objective of this partnership will be to promote water conservation by reducing the use of irrigation water and at

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the same time accrue the benefits of improved water quality and enhancement of wildlife habitat. This project also will help conserve energy by reducing consumption of fossil fuels used to power irrigation systems that pump surface and groundwater.

The goals of the Platte-Republican CREP, when fully enrolled, include:

Reducing the use of cropland irrigation by 125,000 acre-feet annually;

Increasing surface and groundwater retention by 85,000 acre-feet of water annually within priority area reservoirs, groundwater tables and streams and;

Providing up to 85,000 acres of native grassland habitat for wildlife in the priority area and increasing the populations of pheasants and other ground nesting birds by 25% in the area.

Currently, over 45,000 acres have been enrolled in the Platte-Republican Resources Area CREP since April 2005.

The state will contribute 20% of the overall annual program costs through contributions of cash and in-kind services such as current water conservation, water quality and wildlife enhancement activities within the CREP area.

The state of Nebraska provides cost-share payments to qualifying participants, funding for monitoring and evaluation projects and a full-time CREP project coordinator to oversee project operations. In-kind services valued at \$3.1 million per year have been pledged by local and state agencies, including natural resources districts, irrigation and power districts, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

CREP is a voluntary program that assists participants in implementing conservation practices on environmentally sensitive land. In return for enrolling eligible land for a 10- to 15-year period,

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participants receive annual rental payments paid on a per-acre basis, cost-share assistance and other financial incentives.

CREP combines an existing CCC program, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), with state programs to meet specific state and national environmental objectives. CREP partnerships with states, tribal governments and private groups provide a coordinated approach to addressing critical conservation issues of the state and nation.

When necessary, participants are allowed to temporarily apply limited amounts of irrigation water to their fields after the CRP contracts begin to help establish permanent vegetative covers.

Interested farmers and ranchers may contact the local USDA Service Center for further information on eligibility requirements and application procedures.