



Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

The Bottom Line:

“Thousands of landowners, with the assistance of the Wetland Reserve Program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, have voluntarily restored over 1, 275,000 acres of wetlands and associated habitats on their lands across the United States.”

Program Background:

- The Wetland Reserve Program, or WRP, is a voluntary, incentive-based conservation program authorized by the “Farm Bill.”
- The program provides financial and technical assistance to landowners desiring to restore and conserve wetlands on their property.
- Landowners provide the government with either a perpetual or 30-year conservation easement on the affected lands. In a minority of cases, the landowner enters into a shorter term management agreement. The easements are attached to the deed and remain with the land and future owners.
- The private landowner retains ownership of all rights except those specifically related to wetland functions and values covered by the easement. The landowner controls access to the land (except that granted to the government for easement administration), and makes all decisions about hunting and other uses of the land.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) manages the program.
- Congress provides a budget for WRP with the goal of restoring 250,000 acres annually, up to a total of 2,275,000 acres. The program currently has over 1,275,000 acres enrolled.
- Landowners with eligible lands compete for the limited financial assistance available each year. In fiscal year 2002, landowners enrolled 250,000 acres in the program but almost 500,000 acres were excluded due to insufficient WRP funds.
- Each state’s NRCS office is solely responsible for selection of the lands that are enrolled in the program.
- For more detail about the WRP and the financial and technical assistance it offers for wetlands restoration and conservation, visit the USDA’s website at www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp/.

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Ducks Unlimited's Role in the WRP:

- DU has long worked with legislators and agency representatives to develop and authorize this program, and to help insure it receives as much funding as possible each year.
- Across the country, DU has restored hundreds of thousands of acres of wetlands for the program because of our recognized expertise in wetland conservation.
- In partnership with the NRCS on many WRP projects, DU designs levees and water control structures to restore hydrology, develops plans for restoring vegetation and other habitat characteristics and oversees the restoration work.
- DU is fully reimbursed by NRCS for all design and restoration work.
- DU does not exercise any management control over lands in WRP, including access for hunting or other purposes.
- DU's primary interest is to insure that these wetland conservation projects are designed and restored to best provide wetlands functions and values for waterfowl and other wildlife while meeting overall program requirements and landowners' desires.

Importance of the WRP to Waterfowl:

- The WRP has worked with thousands of landowners to restore over 1,275,000 acres of wetlands across the country.
- In the Mississippi Alluvial Valley, an internationally-important region for waterfowl, the WRP has conserved and restored over 400,000 acres of land in the three states of Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi alone. However, these states have lost over 20,000,000 acres, or 57%, of their wetlands, so there is still much to do!
- The WRP is a critically important tool with which DU, USDA, private landowners and other program partners are able to restore, manage and conserve wetlands across the nation. Many more landowners than can be funded desire to conserve wetlands through the WRP. It is vital that support for this program be maintained and expanded to benefit waterfowl and waterfowl hunting.