

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Wetland Reserve Easements



Protecting and Enhancing Our Natural Resources

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers easement programs to landowners who want to maintain or enhance their land in a way beneficial to agriculture and the environment. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands, wetlands, and their related benefits.

Wetland Reserve Easements

NRCS provides assistance directly to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program. The landowner voluntarily limits future use of the land, yet retains private ownership. NRCS and the landowner work together to develop a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the wetland.

Benefits include restoring, protecting and enhancing wetland ecosystems, preventing soil erosion, reducing flooding, developing wildlife habitat including threatened and endangered species habitat, improving water quality, recharging groundwater and protecting biological diversity.

The program offers landowners two enrollment options:

- **Permanent Easements:** A conservation easement in perpetuity; NRCS pays up to 100% of the easement value and restoration costs.
- **30-Year Easements:** Easement expires after 30 years; NRCS pays up to 75% of the easement value and restoration costs

For acreage owned by an Indian tribe, there is a 30-year contract enrollment option. Program payment rates are commensurate with 30-year easements.

Landowner Eligibility

All persons listed on the ownership deed must be in compliance with highly erodible land, wetland conservation provisions, and meet adjusted gross income limitations of the Food Security Act of 1985. WRE additionally requires ownership of the land for the last two years.

Land Eligibility

Lands that may be eligible for WRE include:

- farmed or converted wetlands that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored;
- croplands or grasslands subject to flooding;
- riparian areas that link protected wetland areas;
- Conservation Reserve Program lands with wetlands;
- wetlands restored through another program; and
- associated adjacent lands that present ecological benefits to the easement.

NRCS will prioritize WRE applications based on the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wetland dependent wildlife.

Funding for the programs is through the Farm Bill and is reauthorized every five years. Due to limited funding, the program has become very competitive with only high quality projects accepted.

How to Apply

Landowners may apply at any time for WRE by contacting their local NRCS Service Center assigned to the county in which the land is located. For more information visit www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov.



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