

EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM (EWP)

FLOOD PLAIN EASEMENT OPTION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) that assists sponsors and landowners to protect lives and property from flooding or soil erosion after a natural disaster. The EWP Program is designed for emergency recovery work, including the purchase of floodplain easements. In communities impacted by constant flooding, an easement might be the best solution. Limited Resource Areas (LRAs) are a priority for available funding.

What is a floodplain easement?

A floodplain easement is a reserved interest in the land defined in a deed where the landowner conveys specific rights but retains ownership, title, and interest in the property.

NRCS may purchase floodplain easements as an emergency measure, and NRCS will only purchase easements from landowners on a voluntary basis. A floodplain easement conveys property rights to NRCS so that:

- the threat of damage to property is reduced or eliminated, and
- the floodplain may be restored and protected.

NRCS will pay landowners full fair market value based on an appraisal for the floodplain easement. Also, NRCS may provide up to 100 percent of the restoration and enhancement costs of the easement.

What lands are eligible?

Any land use is potentially eligible for a floodplain easement. Agricultural land, land with/without structures and communities with residential properties, are eligible if:

- The floodplain lands were damaged by flooding at least once within the previous year or have been subject to flood damage at least twice within the previous 10 years; or
- other lands within the floodplain would contribute to the restoration of the flood storage and flow, erosion control, or that would improve the practical management of the easement; or
- lands would be inundated or adversely impacted as a result of a dam breach.



What is a Limited Resource Area (LRA)

- A limited resource area is defined where housing values and income are less than a county's average and unemployment is at least twice the U.S. average. [Learn more](#)

Criteria for Assistance

All EWP work must provide protection from future flooding or soil erosion; reduce threats to life and property; restore the natural function to the watershed; and be economically and environmentally sound.

How Do I Obtain Assistance?

If your land has been damaged by flooding and meets the eligibility requirements, it may qualify for EWP assistance. To request assistance, contact your [USDA-NRCS EWP Program Manager](#).

Sponsorship

Project sponsor must be a State or political subdivision thereof, qualified Indian tribe or tribal organization, or unit of local government. Cities, Counties, and state conservation districts are the most common sponsors of EWP projects.



Before and after photographs of the Belfield Floodplain project

EWP Floodplain Easement Success Stories

Rhode Island - Pocasset River Belfield Floodplain Easement

The residents of Belfield Drive in Johnston, Rhode Island were constantly under water. They had endured two historic flood events; one in 2010 and another in 2018 which led to the collective decision to purchase a floodplain easement as a long-term solution for the community. Restoration included the removal of homes, relocating residents, removing structures to create a floodwater storage area and installing a box culvert to allow stormwater to flow under the road and back into the Pocasset River.

The benefit to the community included alleviating flood damage to the residents, reducing city emergency services for public health issues resulting from flood events, creating habitat for wildlife, providing safe access along the public right-of-way during flood events, and ensuring the land could only be used to store floodwater in the future.



Dunloup Creek Watershed Floodplain buyout plan and flooding

West Virginia - Dunloup Creek Floodplain Easement

Steep mountains and narrow valleys increased the velocity of flooding for 300 homes along the Dunloup Creek. Six flooding disasters since 2001 and other flooding incidents highlighted the need to find a solution to increase public safety for residents.

The only viable solution was to relocate the residents because of the extreme topography, tributary locations, and impacts from local coal mines. A total of 255 applications were received for the required voluntary buyout.

With overwhelming support from the community, the purchased homes will be removed so that the floodplain can be restored to its natural conditions.

The floodplain easement option enables the towns to thrive without having to live in constant fear of flooding.

More Information

To request EWP assistance, contact your [USDA-NRCS EWP Program Manager](#). Additional information on Watershed Programs is available from NRCS offices throughout the United States and the Caribbean and Pacific Islands areas.

For more information visit farmers.gov.

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