

In April 2000, FSA authorized enhanced incentives to target highly environmentally-sensitive land for continuous sign-up participation which included: (1) An up-front Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) of \$100 to \$150 per acre (depending on the length of contract) for filter strips, riparian buffers, grassed waterways, field windbreaks, shelter belts, and living snow fences; (2) and a Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) equal to 40 percent of the cost of installing practices for all continuous sign-up practices. At that time, increased maintenance payments for certain practices were also added along with updated marginal pastureland rental rates to better reflect the agricultural value of these types of lands.

C. Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP)

FWP was established as a pilot program by the 2001 Agricultural Appropriations Act, Public Law 106–387, under which farmed wetland acres were made eligible to be enrolled through a continuous sign-up similar to that of CCRP for other high-priority conservation practices. Payments were commensurate with those provided to landowners who implemented CRP conservation practices like filter strips. The wetlands and associated buffers enrolled under the pilot program were limited to 500,000 acres in six States: Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota, with no more than 150,000 acres enrolled in any single State. Under the provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill, FWP will be expanded nationwide with an aggregate acreage cap of up to 1 million acres.

D. Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

In 1997, FSA implemented CREP as a joint Federal-State land retirement conservation program that uses the authorities of CRP in combination with State resources to target specific conservation and environmental objectives. It is a conservation partnership targeted to address specific State and nationally significant water quality, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat issues linked to agriculture and agricultural production activities.

III. Impacts Under the Alternatives Considered

FSA developed the Proposed Action Alternative based on provisions defined in the 2002 Farm Bill along with Agency scoping input provided before passage of the 2002 Farm Bill. FSA conducted formal public scoping for the PEIS and met with and solicited input from representatives of other Federal, State,

and local agencies and the general public. The public scoping meetings were held in six cities located around the country. FSA published notices in the **Federal Register** and national newspapers that the agency was preparing a PEIS and that input was being sought through multiple venues including the public scoping meetings, a toll-free phone line, regular mail, and e-mail. The Proposed Action and three Alternatives considered in detail in the PEIS represented a range of program implementation choices that reflected the array of ideas voiced and recommendations made during that scoping process. The following alternatives are presented in detail in the Final PEIS.

A. No Program Alternative (Baseline)

This alternative was used as an analytical device to establish a baseline upon which to evaluate the other alternatives. The analysis established a baseline by describing what would have happened if CRP had never been implemented.

B. No Action Alternative (Current Program)

Under this alternative, FSA administration of CRP/CCRP/CREP would continue as if the pre-2002 Farm Bill provisions remained in effect, including the 4.2 million-acre holdback for CCRP and CREP.

C. Proposed Action Alternative (FSA's Preferred Alternative)

The Proposed Action is for FSA to implement changes in General CRP/CCRP/CREP administration based on the requirements of the 2002 Farm Bill. Some of the changes include: increasing the enrollment authority, changing the eligibility and cropping history requirements, implementing a nationwide farmable wetland program, and several additional minor program changes. Environmental-based allocation under the general sign-up would continue. FSA plans to utilize CCRP and CREP in addition to General CRP in its administration of CRP in a balanced way to maximize conservation benefits while minimizing adverse environmental impacts.

D. Environmental Targeting Alternative

Under this alternative, FSA would alter the mix of program goals and change acreage allocations to include CREP and continuous sign-up practices in designated environmentally-sensitive areas. The CRP general sign-up would be eliminated and the benefits produced directly by use of the EBI would be lost. Administration of CRP would then be

accomplished using an environmental targeting approach that focuses program resources on addressing national or regional priority conservation goals. This targeting would be consistent with the current primary objectives of the program by targeting soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat objectives in ecological regions, river basins, or impaired watersheds. Different strategies for allocating the additional acreage under the program cap would be evaluated by FSA.

If this alternative were selected, there would be no general sign-up CRP. Therefore, the environmental targeting for general sign-up under the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) would be lost and there would be an increased risk in not enrolling all the acreage allocated under the 2002 Farm Bill. This would mean less soil, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat benefits because fewer acres would be enrolled than under the Proposed Action.

IV. Impacts Under the Alternatives

The environment affected by CRP consists of both the socioeconomic and natural environments associated with or affected by farming and farm conservation programs in the U.S. The natural environment includes the major terrestrial and aquatic eco-regions associated with eligible lands in the U.S. and associated sensitive resources, including:

- Soils.
- Soil and Wind Erosion (including Air Quality).
- Water Resources & Aquatic Species.
- Surface water.
- Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs).
- Groundwater.
- Floodplains.
- Riparian Areas.
- Wetlands.
- Vegetation.
- Grasslands.
- Forestlands.
- Invasive Species.
- Wildlife.
- Wildlife Recreation.
- Threatened and Endangered Species (T&E).

• The social and economic aspects of the affected environment consist of farming from a national perspective and of rural communities that may be affected by CRP enrollment.

The following section summarizes some of the effects that would be expected to occur to the above-mentioned resource areas under each of the four alternatives. Due to the large programmatic scale of CRP, the timing, location, and magnitude of the