

environmental effects will differ under the various alternatives.

A. No Program Alternative (Eliminate CRP)

Soil

Soil erosion rates would most likely be greater than 1.9 billion tons/year. Due to increased soil erosion rates, soil quality and productivity would also be adversely impacted.

Water Quality

Surface water quality would be substantially worse due to the loss of multiple benefits provided by vegetative cover established under CRP over the last 16 years. Impact on surface water quality would be significant and more streams would have a TMDL listing.

Groundwater quality and drinking water sources would be adversely impacted due to increased contamination by pesticides and fertilizers from land that would have been enrolled in CRP. Conservation practices targeting water quality improvement would, therefore, not be implemented.

Aquatic habitat and associated water quality would be severely impacted due to high nutrient, pesticide, and sediment runoff from cropland. See Surface and Groundwater impacts for No Program.

Floodplains, Riparian Areas, and Wetlands

Floodplain function would be decreased due to a decrease in permanent vegetative cover and an increase in soil erosion, sediment, and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands. There would also be a decrease in associated wetland restoration and riparian areas benefiting floodplain function; a decrease in riparian area function due to a decrease in permanent vegetative cover and an increase in soil erosion, sedimentation, and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands; and a decrease in riparian area restoration by 400,000 acres.

Wetlands benefits would decrease due to increased soil erosion rates resulting in sedimentation and contaminant runoff from farmlands. There would be an increase in continued use of farmed wetlands and associated uplands by approximately 3 million acres and a potential increase in wetland conversion caused by agricultural producers not participating in USDA programs regulated by Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. An estimated 600,000 acres of filter strips and wetland buffers would not be

installed as a result of selecting this alternative.

Natural Vegetation

Without CRP, 25 million enrolled acres most likely would not have been planted to conservation cover and it might be assumed that the realized positive impacts of that cover type on cropland would be absent or considerably less. Incurred benefits of forestlands to water quality, wildlife, and soil stabilization would not have occurred in the absence of CRP. Incentives to enroll land devoted to the Longleaf Pine Conservation Priority Area (CPA) would not exist.

Wildlife

There would be significant negative impacts on local wildlife populations along with the availability of localized wildlife-based recreation such as viewing, hiking, hunting, and fishing. Continued agricultural practices could have a significant adverse impact on numerous T&E species but to what extent and to which species is unknown. There are some T&E species credited with utilizing CRP-created habitat.

Socioeconomic

On a national level, without CRP, the change in acreage planted to the major crops is expected to be minimal. However, at the local or regional level, there could be a moderate increase in planted acreage creating economic benefits arising from the additional need for farm labor, as well as demand for the services of agricultural businesses. There could also be a possible loss of recreational opportunities and a possible increased uncertainty of producer income, particularly for those non-farming landowners and part-time farmers. The magnitude of uncertainty is likely to be greater at the county or community level than nationally.

Long-term expansion of cropland supply could be beneficial for tenants, lowering rents. In the short term, the increased supply of cropland could raise rents due to temporary increase in productivity. A potentially significant decline in pheasant habitat and recreational benefits nationally and regionally would be seen in the absence of CRP, thus, potentially significantly declining of wildlife viewing benefits currently seen in the Great Plains. A potential modest decline in wildlife viewing benefits in the Northeastern region would also be seen.

Land-use decisions made by producers disconnected from environmental consideration would be based on maximizing market income.

This would result in losses in soil quality, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat gains.

B. No Action Alternative (Continue CRP as Previously Implemented)

Soils

Soil erosion has decreased by 450 million tons since CRP's inception and additional soil erosion rate reductions would continue under this alternative. Soil quality has increased due to more topsoil left on the land and would continue as additional acreage is enrolled.

Water Quality

Surface water quality would continue to improve as producers enroll land under CRP, thus reducing runoff containing sediments, nutrients, and pesticides. TMDL-listed streams would decrease as cropland is enrolled but this would be based on the conservation practices installed on contract land and whether they directly target the impairments causing the listing.

Drinking water sources and groundwater in general would see a continued positive impact on both water quality and quantity, as cropland is taken out of production and enrolled in CRP. This would result in reduced levels of pesticides and fertilizers being used. Decreased sediment transport rates would produce a positive impact on aquatic species as further cropland is enrolled in CRP. Maintenance of high dissolved oxygen levels and cool water temperatures for aquatic organisms would continue as agricultural land is enrolled as wetland buffers.

Floodplains, Riparian Areas, and Wetlands

Floodplain function would increase due to an increase in permanent vegetative cover and a decrease in soil erosion, sediment, and contaminant runoff from agricultural lands. There would be an increase in associated wetland restoration and riparian areas benefiting floodplain function. Also, there would be an improvement and restoration of natural riparian area functions through increased vegetative cover, and reduced sediment and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands. There would also be an increase in riparian areas by 400,000 acres.

Water quality would improve from the reduction in sediment and contaminant runoff from agricultural lands. Wetland function would be restored to 542,278 acres of farmed wetlands and protection of 2.8 million acres of natural and farmed wetlands