

enrollment in General CRP sign-up acreage and its associated benefits to wetland areas would be decreased under this alternative.

States with CREP Agreements would see additional benefits associated with grasslands in areas targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of native grass species establishment conservation practices. Overall, enrollment in General CRP sign-up acreage and associated benefits to grasslands would be decreased under this alternative.

States with CREP Agreements would see additional benefits associated with forestlands targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of tree planting conservation practices. The direct positive impact of forestland restoration would benefit local CREP regions in a State by improving and protecting soil quality, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and by creating more opportunities to enjoy nature. Benefits on forestlands if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to address forestland restoration and protection would be most beneficial in the current Longleaf Pine CPA and other National Forestland areas in ecological impairment. Overall, enrollment in General CRP sign-up acreage and associated benefits to forestlands would be decreased under this alternative.

Wildlife

States with CREP Agreements would see additional wildlife benefits in areas targeted if approved practices consist of wildlife enhancement or wetland restoration conservation practices. Positive benefits to wildlife could be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted at specifically addressing wildlife habitat enhancement by utilizing collaborative decision making of all interested parties and an ecosystem-driven conservation initiative. Overall enrollment in General CRP sign-up acreage and associated benefits would be decreased under this alternative.

Benefits to T&E species and their habitat are not as likely at this level unless the species or habitat targeted encompasses large geographic areas, multiple States, or numerous watersheds. States with CREP Agreements would see additional T&E species and habitat benefits in areas targeted if approved practices consist of conservation practices targeting the species or species habitat in question.

Socioeconomic

Insignificant effect would be demonstrated on agricultural

employment at the regional and State level with a potential 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 at the regional or national level. There would likely be a change in the regional distribution of enrolled land with the decreased probability of the enrollment of entire fields providing a benefit in the increased supply of rental land. A potential increase in the supply of cropland and a possible reduction in enrollment due to it being a voluntary program would not ensure that all allocated acres are enrolled. The cost would be prohibitive. Some currently participating communities may experience reduced benefits. These impacts would be more concentrated in communities located in or near areas of program.

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

Soils

Cumulative positive impacts on soils would continue as CRP is reauthorized and contracts are approved for 10 to 15 years with additional acreage allocated toward the program. The increased acreage could potentially reduce soil erosion by another 40 million tons. Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help reduce soil erosion and reduce sediment runoff on these land types. An increase in the cropping history requirement has the potential to moderately impact soils by targeting cropland that has been under more intensive production and thus possibly more vulnerable to wind and water erosion than currently required to enroll in CRP. However, positive impacts would continue on those already vegetative areas because the new cropping history provision makes the breaking of new ground to create a cropping history impossible. Infeasible-to-farm areas smaller than 50 percent of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to some enhancement of soil quality, but only if enrolling it would contribute to reduced soil erosion rates. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit soils by not removing the established vegetative cover. The potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields would decrease. Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting will increase plant diversity and vigor. These practices should not produce any adverse impacts on soils

because they must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval. CREP Agreements would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to soil quality. Continued positive impacts on long-term soil quality would occur if States place CREP land under easement. Associated soil benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP is opened to all States.

Water Quality

Major positive impacts on surface water quality would continue as CRP is reauthorized and contracts are approved for 10 to 15 more years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring acres. A 40-million ton decrease in sediment would correlate to an increase in water quality and a decrease in nutrient and pesticide loads. Positive impacts in terms of reduced nonpoint source (NPS) pollutant loading to achieve TMDL's would occur when producers enroll land that has been cropped (4 out of 6 years prior to 2002 Farm Bill enactment), but the impact would be important only if contract land is located within a watershed having NPS issues. Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help improve water quality and reduce sediment runoff on these land types. Infeasible to farm areas smaller than 50 percent of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to the enhancement of water quality, but only if conservation practices targeted at improving water quality are adopted. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and decreasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields. Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting practices should not produce adverse impacts on surface water based on the premise that the practices must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval. Associated water quality benefits of wetlands would increase as FWP goes nationwide. CREP Agreements would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to water quality. CCRP would provide buffers along streams to reduce sediment runoff and subsequent water quality improvements would give direct positive benefits to aquatic species.

There would be continued cumulative positive impacts on groundwater quality