

as CRP is reauthorized and contracts are approved for 10 to 15 years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring ones.

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. Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help improve groundwater quality and reduce chemical leaching on these land use types. An increase in the cropping history requirement has the potential to produce a positive impact on groundwater by targeting cropland that has been under more intensive production and thus possibly more vulnerable to leaching than currently required to enroll in CRP. Certain infeasible to farm areas less than 50 percent of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to some enhancement of groundwater quality, but only if conservation practices targeted at improving water quality are installed. 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 should not produce adverse impacts on surface water based on the premise that it must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval. Associated groundwater quality benefits of wetlands would increase as FWP goes expands to all States. CREP Agreements would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to groundwater quality.

Floodplains, Riparian Areas, and Wetlands

The expansion of FWP would allow for an increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide, decreasing the rate of sediment transport to adjacent water bodies and increasing the associated aquatic species benefits described under the No Action Alternative. The size of eligible wetlands would be increased from 5 acres to 10 acres, providing an increase in potential acreage that could benefit aquatic species by 2.8 million acres. Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting should not produce adverse impacts to aquatic species based on the premise that requirements for these

practices must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval, so aquatic species associated with the environmentally targeted enrolled land are not adversely affected. CREP Agreements would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to aquatic species. CCRP would provide buffers along streams to reduce sediment runoff, and subsequently improve water quality, which would have direct positive benefits on aquatic species.

Beneficial impacts to floodplains, as described under the No Action Alternative, 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. There would be an increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to floodplains by 2.8 million acres. There would be continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with floodplains for an additional year. Beneficial impacts to floodplains in States with CREP Agreements in place would be the same as those described under the No Action Alternative. Also, permanent easements under CREP would provide continued maintenance of floodplains functions and values.

Beneficial impacts to riparian areas, as described under the No Action Alternative, would continue as CRP is reauthorized and contracts are approved for 10 to 15 years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring ones. There would be an increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to riparian areas by 2.8 million acres and continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with riparian areas for an additional year. There would also be benefits from devotion of marginal pastureland to vegetation, particularly trees in riparian areas. The use of CCRP would target riparian areas by protecting them as buffers with permanent vegetative cover, which would reduce runoff. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP will benefit associated riparian areas. Beneficial impacts to riparian areas in States with CREP Agreements in place would be the same as those described under the No Action Alternative. Also, permanent easements under CREP would provide continued maintenance of these riparian areas functions and values. Permitting haying and grazing in response to drought or other emergencies should have minor impacts on riparian areas.

Potential increase in eligible acreage for buffer establishment when more than 50 percent of the field is eligible for enrollment and the other half is infeasible to farm. The increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide through FWP expansion will benefit eligible associated riparian areas.

Beneficial impacts to wetlands, as described under the No Action Alternative, would continue as CRP is reauthorized and contracts are approved for 10 to 15 years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring ones. There would be an increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to wetlands by 2.8 million acres. Land eligibility for CRP re-enrollment will extend associated beneficial impacts to wetlands for another 10 to 15 years. There would be continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with wetlands for an additional year and an increase in potential wetland acres from conversion of marginal pastureland to wetlands. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP will benefit wetland water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and increasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed-up fields. There would be beneficial impacts to wetland water quality from increased conservation of surface and groundwater in agricultural operations. An increased distribution of wetland restoration and buffer acreage would potentially be seen nationwide through the expansion of FWP. Wetland functions would potentially increase through FWP expansion of allowable wetland restoration acreage from 5 to 10 acres. State CREP Agreements could target sensitive areas with large numbers of wetlands and permanent easements could provide protection of wetlands and associated buffers.

Natural Vegetation

Grasslands throughout the country would benefit as more acreage is enrolled implementing the establishment of grass cover. However, new EBI scoring is currently being developed in connection with new regulations to implement CRP in accordance with the provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill. Ecological benefits associated with tree planting conservation practices would continue for an additional 10 to 15 years. Additional croplands enrolled and planted with tree practices would continue to cleanse silt and pollutants from runoff water, especially if installed