

in riparian areas, thereby protecting and improving streams while simultaneously providing food and shelter for wildlife for an additional 10 to 15 years of CRP contracts. Marginal pastureland in additional tree practice acreage would continue to be enrolled along with other continuous practices that involve tree plantings, such as: Shelter belts, field windbreaks, and living snow fences implemented on sensitive cropland enrolled. However, the new provision would allow grasses, forbs, and shrubs to be planted on marginal pastureland along with trees, resulting in a positive impact through the creation of habitat from which multiple species may benefit. State CREP Agreements would target areas where plantings of certain species, such as hardwoods, would improve local ecosystems and provide associated benefits to water quality and wildlife.

#### Wildlife

Land with wildlife habitat benefits could be increased by almost 3 million acres. However, the amount of quality habitat would be dependent on the types of vegetation planted. Managed haying, grazing and harvesting, along with wind turbine placement, if done correctly and in accordance with conservation plans, would have little or no impact on resident wildlife. Permitting existing cover to continue, where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP, would continue to have lasting positive impacts on wildlife habitat already established with vegetative cover. This would be true as long as the maintenance schedule documented in the conservation plan is followed. An increase in acreage allocated to CRP could increase the amount of upland game habitat, habitat used by birds and neo-tropical migrants and the amount of protected wetlands, simultaneously and proportionally increasing the recreation chances for those people who like to

bird watch, hunt, fish, and to enjoy nature. State CREP Agreements would target specific areas with needs associated with wildlife habitat protection and restoration and achieve additional benefits. Permanent protection of wildlife through the use of easements could also be achieved with the use of State CREP Agreements. CCRP could provide positive benefits to certain wildlife species by establishing grassed and forested buffers.

Additional acreage allocated to CRP could potentially have a positive impact on almost 3 million additional acres of protected land that could be used, in part, as habitat by many T&E species. States with CREP Agreements would see additional T&E species and habitat benefits in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of conservation practices targeting the species or species habitat in question.

#### Socioeconomic

There would be insignificant adverse impacts on agricultural employment in areas gaining in CRP enrollment and potential insignificant adverse impacts on agricultural employment in areas losing CRP enrollment. No impact would be predicted on agricultural land rents at the regional and national level. Reallocation of income within the local economy with possible increased agricultural output, income in non-agricultural sectors of the economy and additional spending on agricultural inputs. Reallocation could affect leakage of value added from the local economy. There would be potential beneficial, long-term and nominal to moderate increase in agricultural land values from a reduction in the cropland supply and the capitalization of CRP income into land value. A potential increase in recreational opportunities and shifts in recreational opportunities between regions would provide certainty to the participants of CRP-related income over the long term.

The impacts would be similar to those identified under No Action Alternative. The changes would improve program performance and increase flexibility but would not substantially alter program effects on social community.

#### V. Rationale for Decision

The Proposed Action Alternative complies with the 2002 Farm Bill, provides FSA the most flexibility in terms of program implementation and environmental targeting, increases the significant positive benefits of CRP, and is the most balanced approach to achieving long-term program goals. The No Program Alternative was used as an analytical baseline. The Current Program Alternative would continue to produce positive benefits but without the enhancements of the 2002 Farm Bill. The Environmental Targeting Alternative runs a risk of under-enrollment and, therefore, lost environmental benefits. Many of the beneficial aspects of the environmental targeting alternative are already included in the proposed action through CREP and CCRP.

#### VI. Implementation and Monitoring

FSA will implement CRP, CREP, CCRP and FWP in a manner that provides the greatest amount of benefits to the environment while causing the least amount of adverse impacts. FSA will ensure that impacts are minimized through a process of completing site specific environmental evaluations for each approved contract as well as programmatic environmental assessments for CREP agreements.

Signed in Washington, DC, on May 2, 2003.

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Corporation.*

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