

Current Program Sign-ups

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is the primary program available for farmland and wildlife conservation work, offering flat-rate payments for over 85 conservation practices such as nutrient management, grade stabilization, grassed waterways, prescribed grazing, and stream crossings. Wildlife practices are also eligible, including prairie planting, prescribed burning, invasive species control, brush removal, stream restoration, and pollinator habitat. The deadline to apply is **February 3, 2012**. All eligible applications will be evaluated and ranked for funding. For more information contact your local NRCS office: Iowa County, (608) 935-2791 x3; Dane County, (608) 224-3750; Green County, (608) 325-4195.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) CSP is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional ones on their operations. CSP provides financial and technical assistance to help land stewards conserve and enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land. CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or crops produced. For many farmers, CSP offers reward and recognition for the conservation they are already doing, plus a little extra incentive to try a few more or new practices. Eligible lands include cropland, pastureland, non-industrial private forestland, and tribal agricultural lands. For the 2011 sign up, average payments in Wisconsin were \$20 per acre for cropland, \$18 per acre for pasture, and \$4.58 per acre for woodland. Payments are made annually for each of the five years of the contract. Farmers will need to document their current and proposed conservation practices, which will be used to rank applications and determine payments. NRCS field staff will also conduct on-site field verifications of applicants' information. Application deadline for 2012 funding is **January 27, 2012**. For more information, visit www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov, or contact the NRCS office at the USDA Service Center serving your county: Iowa County, (608) 935-2791 x3; Dane County, (608) 224-3750; Green County, (608) 325-4195.

The Nature Conservancy has funding available to help a few landowners who want to establish prairie and improve the habitat on their property for grassland birds. This can include supplementing seed mixes on CRP, SAFE, or CREP plantings. The project must be 25 acres or more of a variety of flowers and grasses. Projects that are adjacent to existing grassland or prairie are especially desired and will receive special consideration. Contact Steve Richter for more information: srichter@tnc.org or 608-577-3076.

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Both of these programs are CRP off-shoots for certain geographic areas. Landowners with pasture or cropland within 150 feet of water may be eligible for CREP. Certain areas south of Highway 18 are eligible for extended CREP (within 1000 feet of water) and SAFE. After enrolling all of the 4,000 acres originally allotted, SAFE now has an additional 1,000 acres available. Both of these programs provide cost-sharing and annual payments to retire cropland and establish perennial grasses (including prairie).

Most practices also receive additional incentives, including up-front payments. Fields that were once in CRP are likely eligible. Sign-up is continuous. Contact your local Farm Services Agency office: Iowa County-(608) 935-2791 x2, Dane County-(608) 224-3767, Green County,(608) 325-4195.

Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will match your investment of time and/or money to help you achieve your land management goals, including removing brush from pasture or enhancing grassland, savanna, wetland, or stream habitat. Contact Mike Engel, Wildlife Biologist, at 608-221-1206 ext. 21 or Mike_Engel@fws.gov. More information can also be found at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/WisconsinPartners/index.html>.

Voluntary Public Access (VPA) VPA provides financial incentives to landowners who allow public access on their property for hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife observation. Counties within the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (Dane, Green and Iowa) are eligible for VPA enrollment. Stream and fishing access will be the focus in Southwest Wisconsin. Priority will be given to properties along high-quality trout and small-mouth bass streams with at least 25% usable wildlife habitat, and those near existing public fishing or hunting grounds.

VPA lease rates are determined by land type: Agriculture land - \$3/acre/year, Grassland/wetland - \$10/acre/year, or Forestland - \$15/acre/year. Lease agreement lengths will be up to three years, with leases ending on August 31, 2014. An up-front payment will be made at the beginning of the contract. The VPA Program was funded through a grant as part of the 2008 Farm Bill. VPA Program sign-up will continue until the grant money allocated to Wisconsin has been committed.

Please contact Michelle Shivy, VPA SW focus area Liaison, at 608-535-0664 or michelle.shivy@wisconsin.gov if you would like more information or are interested in enrolling in VPA. Information can also be found on the DNR's website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/vpa.htm>.