

## **News Release**

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### **USDA AND NORTH CAROLINA PARTNER ON CONSERVATION PROGRAM EXPANSION TO PROTECT MORE RIVER BASINS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. - April 30, 2008 - The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency (FSA) Administrator Teresa Lasseter today announced that USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and the State of North Carolina are expanding their joint Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) agreement to further protect critical river areas.

"FSA is proud to collaborate with North Carolina on this important agreement that will improve water quality, protect drinking water supplies and enhance fisheries and wildlife habitats," said Lasseter.

Signup for the program begins May 1, 2008. North Carolina's original CREP agreement was signed in March 1999 and was developed to help protect the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System (APES), including the Neuse, Tar-Pamlico, Chowan and Jordan Lake Watershed. Prior to 1999, the APES experienced excessive nutrient and sediment loading.

This expanded CREP agreement targets nine of North Carolina's 17 river basins: the Neuse, Tar-Pamlico, Chowan, Lumber, White Oak, Yadkin-PeeDee, Cape Fear (including Jordan Lake), Roanoke and Pasquotank. The CREP seeks 85,000 acres of riparian and 15,000 acres of non-riparian wetlands within the project basins. More information about this project can be found in the program fact sheet at: [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA\\_File/nccrep.pdf](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/nccrep.pdf). Sign up is set to begin May 1, 2008.

#### Eligible Practices

To be eligible for this program, an agricultural producer's land must meet specific eligibility requirements. If land does not meet CREP criteria, producers may also offer eligible acreage for continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) signup.

The following eligible practices may be established under this program:

- Tree Planting, CP3 (Shortleaf Pine only)
- Hardwood Tree Planting, CP3A
- Filter Strip, CP21
- Riparian Buffer, CP22
- Wetland Restoration, CP23
- Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain, CP23A
- Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands, CP31

#### Rental, Cost-share and Incentive Payments

Under this program, participants will receive annual rental payments and other incentives from CCC and the State of North Carolina for voluntarily enrolling land in contracts. The annual rental payment is based on the soil rental rate as calculated by the FSA. It includes an incentive payment based on the conservation practice installed. Incentive rates will be 70 percent for filter strips and 100 percent for riparian buffers, tree planting and wetland restoration.

The CCC will pay up to 50 percent of the cost of installing conservation practices. The total of all cost-share payments will not exceed 100 percent of a participant's out-of-pocket expenses.

In addition, a one-time payment equal to 25 percent of the cost of restoring hydrology for wetland restoration practices will be paid to eligible producers. For producers who enroll solely in a 10-year CRP contract under CREP, the State of North Carolina will pay 25 percent of the established costs of approved conservation practices. For producers who enroll solely in a CRP contract greater than 10 years and up to 15 years, the state will pay 30 percent of the established costs of approved conservation practices. For producers who enroll in an optional 30-year conservation easement for riparian buffers, filter strips or tree practices, the state will pay 40 percent of the established costs of approved conservation practices plus a one-time incentive payment of \$250 per acre for cropland and marginal pastureland. For producers who enroll in an optional permanent easement for riparian buffers, wetland restoration or tree practices, the state will pay 50 percent of the established costs of approved conservation practices plus a one-time incentive payment of \$1,000 per acre for cropland or marginal pastureland, and any additional eligible existing non-CRP forested buffer land voluntarily enrolled.

The total cost for the State of North Carolina CREP over a 15-year period is estimated at \$275 million for a total enrollment of 100,000 acres. North Carolina will contribute at least 20 percent of the overall annual program cost.

A component of the CRP, CREP is a federal-state natural resources conservation program that addresses state and nationally significant agricultural-related environmental concerns. Under CREP, program participants receive financial incentives from CCC to voluntarily enroll in contracts of 10 to 15 years. Participants remove cropland and marginal pastureland from agricultural production and convert the land to native grasses, trees and other vegetation. The CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. FSA administers CRP on behalf of CCC.

NOTE: Farm Service Agency (FSA) news releases are available on the Web at FSA's home page: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>.

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