

Conservation Reserve Program: Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative

Overview

USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative is aimed at creating 350,000 acres of habitat for the northern bobwhite quail and other grassland dependent birds.

Northern bobwhite quail are a native quail species with a historic range in 35 states. It is a valued component of farm landscapes, an important aspect of rural agriculture and an icon of the heritage of hunting. However, bobwhite populations have declined with their habitats disappearing in their historic range due to urbanization, increased grassland cultivation, and a transitioning of once grassy fields into forests – a process called succession.

The Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative introduces a conservation practice intended to create 350,000 acres of early successional grass buffers along agricultural field borders. The initiative partners FSA with landowners, the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, the Northern Bobwhite Technical Committee, 32 state fish and wildlife agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Quail Unlimited, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and other conservation groups, including local conservation districts.

Benefits

FSA estimates that the nesting and brood-rearing cover created by the initiative will increase bobwhite numbers by over 1 million birds annually. Planted buffers will also benefit reptiles, amphibians, aquatic species, and upland birds, many of which are being considered for listing as endangered species. Such bird species include the Bell's vireo, orchard oriole, painted bunting, loggerhead shrike, sedge wren, grasshopper sparrow, dickcissel, and Henslow's sparrow. In addition, the initiative will reduce soil erosion and protect water quality by trapping field sediments and nutrients.

Eligibility

Because the initiative is limited to 350,000 acres, enrollment is targeted to specific geographic areas in 31 states that have

the greatest potential to restore bobwhite habitat.

Before an acreage allocation is effective for a state, monitoring, evaluation and other support (outreach, technical assistance, etc.) are required.

To be eligible, cropland must be suitably located and adaptable to the establishment of bobwhite. In addition, the applicant must satisfy the basic eligibility and cropping history criteria for CRP. These requirements are listed in the CRP fact sheet, available at www.fsa.usda.gov/crp.

To determine individual eligibility for the initiative, landowners should check with their local FSA office.

Approved Conservation Practice

Program participants must apply conservation practice CP 33, Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds, around field edges of eligible cropland. The purpose of this practice is to provide food and cover for bobwhite in cropland areas. Secondary benefits may include reducing soil erosion from wind and water, increasing soil and water quality, and protecting and enhancing the on-farm ecosystem.

Buffer species may include native warm-season grass, legumes, wildflowers, forbs, and limited shrub and tree plantings, as specified in the program participant's approved USDA conservation plan.

Payments and Other Assistance

FSA will offer the following types of payments:

- Signing Incentive Payments of up to \$100 per acre;
- Practice Incentive Payments of up to 40 percent of the eligible establishment cost;
- Annual Rental Payments. Producers will receive annual rental payments for the length of the contract; and
- Cost-share assistance of up to 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable practice costs.

In addition, other groups may provide the following assistance:

- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and 32 state fish and wildlife agencies are expected to offer technical, monitoring, and evaluation assistance; and
- Quail Unlimited, the National Bobwhite Technical Committee, Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever, Ducks Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and other conservation groups including local conservation districts may provide outreach, technical expertise, and other assistance as appropriate.

Sign-up

Local FSA offices will take offers for the CRP Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative on a continuous basis, meaning eligible land may be enrolled at any time until the 350,000 acre cap is met.

For More Information

More information on the CRP Habitat Buffer for Upland Birds Initiative is available at local FSA offices and on FSA's web site at www.fsa.usda.gov

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