

February 2020



WestFAST News

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Chair – Patrick Lambert; Federal Liaison – Deborah Lawler

[USDA Invites Input on Regional Conservation Partnership Program Rule](#)

USDA/NRCS 02/12/20. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) seeks public comments on its interim rule for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), which helps partners develop and implement unique conservation solutions that engage farmers, ranchers and forest landowners. The rule – now available on the Federal Register – takes effect on publication and includes changes to the program prescribed by the 2018 Farm Bill.

“Through RCPP, we co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes,” said NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr. “We look forward to making available this improved, more flexible program to partners.”

The 2018 Farm Bill made RCPP a stand-alone program with its own dedicated funding, simplifying rules for partners and producers. Additionally, the 2018 Farm Bill reduces the number of funding pools and emphasizes partner reporting of conservation outcomes.

The updated program also expands flexibility for alternative funding arrangements with partners and availability of watershed program authorities to projects outside critical conservation areas.

Submitting Comments

NRCS invites comments on this interim rule through April 13 on the Federal Register <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/02/13/2020-01812/regional-conservation-partnership-program>. Electronic comments must be submitted through regulations.gov under Docket ID NRCS-2019-0012. All written comments received will be publicly available on regulations.gov as well.

NRCS will evaluate public comments to determine whether additional changes are needed. The agency plans on publishing a final rule following public comment review.

Applying for RCPP

Eligible partners include private industry, non-governmental organizations, Indian tribes, state and local governments, water districts and universities. Leveraging of NRCS funding is a key principle of RCPP. Partners are expected to make value-added contributions to amplify the impact of RCPP funding.

NRCS will make available \$300 million for projects in fiscal 2020. The agency anticipates making the first alternative funding arrangement (AFA) funding announcement in March, with the fiscal 2020 RCPP Classic announcement following in summer 2020. For more information, visit the RCPP webpage.

EPA Announces Funding for Infrastructure Projects to Protect Surface Water and Drinking Water in Four Region 7 States

EPA 02/12/20. Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the availability of \$2.7 billion for State Revolving Funds (SRFs) that assist states, tribes and territories with infrastructure projects that help protect surface water and provide safe drinking water to communities across the country.

“EPA’s decades-long commitment to water infrastructure has helped provide \$180 billion in project financing to over 41,000 water quality infrastructure projects and 15,000 drinking water projects across the country,” said EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. “In the past three years, the Trump Administration has accelerated EPA’s investment in infrastructure projects that modernize our nation’s water infrastructure and improve public health and the environment.”

Over the last three years, the EPA Region 7 states have been allocated approximately \$150 million per year for their Drinking Water and Clean Water SRF loan programs.

The 2020 annual allocation for the four EPA Region 7 states:

- Iowa - \$38.95 million
- Kansas - \$27.13 million
- Missouri - \$63.46 million
- Nebraska - \$19.12 million

The allocation to the SRF program includes over a third of the dollars provided to EPA by Congress and over 50% of the EPA Region 7 budget. The SRF programs fund a wide range of water infrastructure projects, including drinking water treatment and distribution systems, wastewater treatment and collection systems, and a variety of other projects related to preserving water quality,

pursuant to the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act.

In 2020, EPA is providing approximately \$1.6 billion in new federal grant funding for the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF). This funding is available for a wide range of water infrastructure projects, including modernizing aging wastewater infrastructure, implementing water reuse and recycling, and addressing stormwater. More than \$64 million in CWSRF grant funding is available to tribes, certain U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia for infrastructure projects.

EPA is also making available more than \$1.07 billion in new federal grant funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF). This funding can be used for loans that help drinking water systems install treatment for contaminants, improve distribution systems by removing lead service lines, and improve system resiliency to natural disasters such as floods.

In addition, more than \$50 million in DWSRF grant funding is available to tribes, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia to use for drinking water system upgrades.

This action supports EPA’s 50th anniversary celebration and its February theme of protecting America’s waters – including surface water protection, safe drinking water, and water infrastructure investments.

Background

Under the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs, EPA provides funding to all 50 states and Puerto Rico to capitalize SRF loan programs. The states and Puerto Rico contribute an additional 20% to match the federal grants. The 51 SRF programs function like infrastructure banks by providing low-interest loans to eligible recipients for drinking water and clean water infrastructure projects. As the loan principal and interest are repaid over time, it allows the state’s DWSRF and CWSRF to be recycled or “revolve.” As money is

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returned to the state's revolving loan fund, the state makes new loans to other eligible recipients. These funds can also be combined with EPA's Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loans to create a powerful, innovative financing solution for major infrastructure projects.

[Deadline to Apply for Natural Resources Conservation Funds Approaching - Nebraska](#)

NRCS 02/13/20. LINCOLN, Neb., – Farmers and ranchers interested in preventing erosion, improving soil health, conserving water and wildlife, or making any other natural resource conservation improvements to their property are encouraged to apply now for funding available from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. Those interested in receiving funding should sign up before March. 13, 2020.

According to Craig Derickson, state conservationist for NRCS in Nebraska, there are several options available to producers.

“NRCS has a whole suite of conservation programs available to farmers and ranchers looking for assistance in improving and protecting the natural resources on their ag land. These programs provide funding on cropland and rangeland, as well as for animal feeding operations and establishing or enhancing wildlife habitat and wetlands. NRCS staff can help landowners and operators identify their options,” Derickson said.

One of the most widely applied conservation programs in Nebraska is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The goal of EQIP is to provide a financial incentive to encourage landowners to install conservation practices that protect natural resources, resulting in cleaner air and water, healthy soil and more wildlife habitat.

Individuals interested in entering into an EQIP agreement may apply at any time, but the ranking of applications on hand to be considered for funding in

2020 will begin March. 13, 2020. The first step is to visit your local NRCS field office and complete an application.

For more information about the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and other conservation programs, visit your local NRCS field office, or [click here](#).

[NRCS Sets Conservation Program Funding Application Cutoff for March 13 - Montana](#)

NRCS 02/13/20. BOZEMAN, Mont., – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Montana has set a March 13, 2020, application cutoff for agricultural operators to be considered for the next conservation program funding cycle through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program.

“NRCS provides funding and technical assistance to help farmers, ranchers, and forestland owners implement conservation practices that provide environmental benefits to help sustain their operations,” said Tom Watson, NRCS State Conservationist for Montana. “Conservation work focused on local outcomes with the support of local partners and land managers achieves meaningful conservation across a landscape.”

Conservation funding is available for the following initiatives:

Capital 360 Forestry Project: This partnership project will improve forest health by integrating resource management across all administrative boundaries through reduction treatment projects strategically placed across Broadwater, Jefferson, Lewis and Clark, and Powell counties.

High Tunnel Systems: These systems extend the growing seasons for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner. High tunnel benefits

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include better plant and soil quality and fewer nutrients and pesticides in the environment.

Honey Bee Pollinators: Combats future honey bee declines by implementing conservation practices that provide forage for honey bees while enhancing habitat for other pollinators and wildlife.

National On-Farm Energy Initiative: Agricultural producers work with an NRCS-approved technical service providers to develop agricultural energy management plans or farm energy audits that assess energy consumption on an operation. NRCS may also provide assistance to implement recommended measures identified in the energy audit through the use of conservation practice standards.

National Organic Initiative: Producers currently certified as organic, transitioning to organic, or National Organic Program exempt will have access to a broad set of conservation practices to assist in treating their resource concerns while fulfilling many of the requirements in an Organic System Plan.

National Water Quality Initiative: Producers implement conservation systems to reduce nitrogen, phosphorous, sediment and pathogen contributions from agricultural land in the Lower Gallatin Watershed (Camp and Godfrey Creeks).

Sage Grouse Initiative: Landowners can work with NRCS on three different components to improve sage-grouse habitat. One is a general category to implement prescribed grazing management practices. The others are to seed cropland back to perennial species to improve the connectivity for sage-grouse that depend on large, intact landscapes and the removal of conifers to increase nest success rates.

Wildfire Adapted Missoula: A partnership project that addresses shared wildfire risk by mitigating current wildfire hazards surrounding the Missoula community via prescribed fire and thinning maintenance.

Targeted Implementation Plans: Montana NRCS targets its investments in very specific areas to achieve clearly defined natural resource goals as identified by local partners. This approach harnesses the power of multiple landowners in one area undertaking similar conservation projects to achieve a regional or landscape-scale result.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP): The RCPP promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. See existing RCPP Projects in Montana at <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/mt/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants to install or implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. In Montana, socially disadvantaged, limited resource, and beginning farmers and ranchers will receive a higher payment rate for eligible conservation practices applied.

NRCS accepts conservation program applications year-round; however, applications for the next funding consideration must be submitted by March 13, 2020. Applications made after the cutoff will be considered in the next funding cycle. Additional information is available on the Montana NRCS website at www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov under the Programs tab or by contacting your local USDA service center.

[NRCS Announces Application Deadline for EQIP and RCPP Sign-Ups - Idaho](#)

NRCS 02/18/20. BOISE, Idaho, February 18, 2020 –The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Idaho has a March 13, 2020, application deadline for Fiscal Year 2020 Environmental

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Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) projects. This includes currently funded Regional Conservation Partnership Program projects.

Applications for EQIP are accepted on a continuous basis, however, only the applications received by March 13, 2020 will be considered for funding during this particular cycle. Applications received after the deadline will be reviewed in subsequent cycles.

EQIP helps agricultural producers complete resource conservation projects and make conservation-related management changes on their farms or ranches. Conservation program participation is voluntary and helps private landowners and operators defray the costs of installing conservation practices.

For more information on these programs as well as eligibility requirements, stop by your local USDA service center or visit NRCS online at <http://www.id.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>.

[NRCS Announces EQIP Signup Deadline is March 20, 2020](#) – South Dakota

NRCS 02/19/20. Huron, S.D.,– U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials announce March 20, 2020, as the batching date for applications for the popular Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) administered by the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

“Now is the time to contact NRCS to begin developing conservation solutions on your farm or ranch. Local and regional technical specialists with the NRCS can help you develop a plan to address resource concerns. “Those with good conservation plans will be in a better position to apply for financial assistance since they have a solid conservation goals for their operation,” according to Jennifer Wurtz, EQIP Program Coordinator, with the NRCS, Huron, SD.

Applications are batched annually for funding consideration. This year, March 20, 2020, is the date by which an operator or landowner must sign an application at their local NRCS office for Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 funding consideration, says Wurtz. The batching date is for general funding opportunities as well as initiative funding such as Soil Health Initiative, Wildlife, Honey Bee Pollinator, Sage Grouse Initiative, National Water Quality Initiative, High Tunnel Systems, Organic, and On-Farm Energy to name a few.

“The EQIP Program provides financial and technical assistance to help farmers and ranchers voluntarily implement conservation practices to improve natural resources on working agricultural lands. Payment is provided for a variety of practices to address natural resource concerns such as water quality, grazing land health and productivity, soil erosion and soil quality, and wildlife habitat development.

Applications for all NRCS conservation programs are accepted continuously; however, the application batching date, or call for ranking, is annual. Wurtz says. “The batching deadline for this popular conservation program comes around quickly and the ranking process can be competitive.” Operators or landowners should apply early, not wait, to visit NRCS in their local U.S. Department of Agriculture Service Center.

For information about technical assistance and conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted offsite link image . For more information about EQIP or to apply, please contact your local NRCS office or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/Programs/FinancialAssistance/ EQIP offsite link image .

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[USDA Offers Renewal Options for Active Conservation Stewardship Program Contracts - Washington](#)

NRCS 02/21/20. SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash.

Agricultural producers wanting to enhance current conservation efforts are encouraged to renew their existing Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) contract.

Through CSP, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helps private landowners build their business while implementing conservation practices that help ensure the sustainability of their entire operation.

Participants with currently active CSP contracts from fiscal years 2014, 2015, and 2016 can access the benefits of an option to renew their contracts for an additional five years if they agree to adopt additional activities to achieve higher levels of conservation on their lands.

NRCS will mail contract renewal notification letters to all eligible participants, which will contain instructions on how to apply for renewal. Applications to renew expiring contracts are due by March 20, 2020.

Through CSP, agricultural producers and forest landowners earn payments for actively managing, maintaining, and expanding conservation activities like cover crops, ecologically-based pest management, buffer strips, and pollinator and beneficial insect habitat – all while maintaining active agricultural or forest production on their land. CSP also encourages the adoption of cutting-edge technologies and new management techniques such as precision agriculture applications, on-site carbon storage and planting for high carbon sequestration rate, and new soil amendments to improve water quality.

If you choose not to renew your existing CSP contract, NRCS will determine any new application you make under a CSP classic signup period

ineligible for 2 years following expiration of your existing contract. However, if you compete for a CSP renewal contract and your application does not rank high enough for funding, you may apply for consideration in a subsequent CSP signup period.

Producers interested in CSP renewal contracts are recommended to contact their local USDA service center.

[Utah NRCS Announces New EQIP Application Deadline - Utah](#)

NRCS 02/18/20. Salt Lake City, UT, – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced Friday, March 20, 2020, as the deadline to submit applications for Utah's Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program which helps producers make conservation work for them. Together, NRCS and producers invest in solutions that conserve natural resources for the future while also improving agricultural operations.

Through EQIP, NRCS provides agricultural producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls conservation practices. Using these practices can lead to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat, all while improving agricultural operations. Through EQIP, you can voluntarily implement conservation practices, and NRCS co-invests in these practices with you.

Financial assistance is now available in a variety of agricultural categories such as cropland, forestry, pasture operations, and organic. Several special projects are also available which address water quality, forestry management, improving pollinator populations and wildlife habitat, pasture improvements and many more. All available agricultural categories are listed on the Utah NRCS website under Ranking Criteria for NRCS Programs - Fiscal Year 2020.

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To participate in USDA conservation programs, applicants should be farmers or farm or forest landowners and must meet eligibility criteria. Applications signed and submitted to NRCS by the March 20 deadline will be evaluated for fiscal year 2020 funding.

To learn more about EQIP or other technical and financial assistance available through NRCS conservation programs, visit [Get Started with NRCS](#) or visit your local USDA Service Center.

[USDA Providing Funds to Protect and Restore Agricultural Working Lands, Grasslands and Wetlands across Nebraska](#)

NRCS 02/25/20. – USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is now accepting applications for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP). This program, created under the 2014 Farm Bill and reauthorized in the 2018 Farm Bill, provides funding for the purchase of conservation easements to help productive farm and ranch lands remain in agriculture and to restore and protect critical wetlands and grasslands.

Nebraska State Conservationist, Craig Derickson said, “Conservation easements are a good tool to ensure natural resources are conserved and protected for all Nebraskans. We encourage Indian tribes, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and private landowners to contact their local NRCS office to find out how to apply.”

The main goal of ACEP is to prevent productive agriculture land from being converted to non-agricultural uses and to restore and protect wetlands and wildlife habitat. Cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland and nonindustrial private forestland are eligible.

Applications can be submitted at any time, but to be considered for 2020 funding opportunities,

applications in Nebraska must be received by April 3, 2020. Applications are currently being accepted for both agricultural land and wetland reserve easements.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private and tribal landowners to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of conservation easements. Eligible landowners can choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement. Tribal landowners also have the option of enrolling in 30-year contracts.

A key option under the agricultural land easement component is the "grasslands of special environmental significance" that will protect high-quality grasslands that are under threat of conversion to cropping, urban development and other non-grazing uses. To qualify, the application would need to be in an area meeting the designated criteria.

All applications will be rated according to the easement’s potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds, fish and other wildlife. Eligible applicants will be compensated with a payment rate comparable to the local land use value.

Applicants will need to provide accurate records of ownership and ensure they have established current fiscal year ownership eligibility with USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA). Application information is available at your local USDA Service Center and at www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted.

“NRCS staff will work with all interested applicants to help them through the application process and provide one-on-one assistance to create the conservation easement option that works best for their farming or ranching operation,” Derickson said.

For more information about the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the programs and services it provides, visit your local USDA Service Center or www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

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USDA NRCS in Kansas Establishes Dates for Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Application Deadlines - Kansas

NRCS 02/25/20. SALINA, Kansas, — Kansas State Conservationist, Karen A. Woodrich, of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced today the statewide cutoff for fiscal year 2020 Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) funding. All Kansas agricultural producers and landowners may apply at any time. However, to be considered for 2020 funding opportunities for Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE), applications in Kansas must be received by Friday, March 27, 2020. Applications for Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) must be received by Friday, May 22, 2020. Please contact your local NRCS office or conservation district office for specific information for your county.

Created under the 2018 Farm Bill, this program provides funding for the purchase of conservation easements to help productive farm and ranch lands remain in agriculture and to restore and protect critical wetlands. There are two programs under ACEP, each with a different application process. Visiting the NRCS office will ensure the applicant receives guidance on the correct application process.

“Conservation easements provide many public benefits to Kansans, including the protection of open spaces, wildlife habitat, and wetland restoration and protection. We encourage private landowners, Tribes, and non-governmental organizations to contact their local NRCS office to apply,” said Woodrich.

The goal of ACEP is to protect land devoted to food production and wildlife habitat from being converted to non-agricultural uses and to restore

wetlands. ACEP is a voluntary program for landowners and tribal governments that leave a conservation heritage for their family and community. Landowners can choose between the ACEP–ALE or ACEP–WRE enrollments options. ALEs protect the long term viability of the nation’s food supply by preventing conversion of productive croplands and grasslands to non-agricultural uses. The WRE component restores wetlands to:

- provide habitat for wildlife, including threatened and endangered species
- improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals
- reduce flooding
- recharge groundwater
- protect biological diversity

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private and tribal landowners to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of conservation easements. Eligible landowners may choose to enroll in a permanent or 30-year easement. Tribal landowners also have the option of enrolling in 30-year contracts.

NRCS staff and partners will work with applicants to help them with the application process for WRE. Land trusts and other eligible entities in Kansas have several agreement types through which they can apply for assistance. Cooperative agreements have been used in the past and beginning this year, a program agreement option is designed to streamline ALE. Eligible entities are encouraged to apply for program agreements and work with landowners to help them through the application process for ALE and provide one-on-one assistance to create the conservation easement that works best for their farming or ranching operation.

All WRE applications will be ranked according to the easement’s potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds, fish, and other wildlife. Eligible applicants will be compensated with a payment rate based on an individual land appraisal, established Geographic

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Area Rate Cap (GARC), or landowner offer, whichever is less. The GARC rates are posted on the Kansas NRCS web site. The ALE conservation easements payment is determined by an appraisal completed on the property.

It is important that applicants provide accurate records of ownership to USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA). Application information is available at your local USDA Service Center and online at www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted.

For more information, visit the Kansas NRCS web site at www.ks.nrcs.usda.gov/programs or your local USDA Service Center. To find a service center near you, visit offices.usda.gov. Follow us on Twitter @NRCS_Kansas. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

[NRCS Announces FY2020 Sign-Up Deadline for Select Voluntary Conservation Programs - Wyoming](#)

NRCS 02/27/20. CASPER, Wyo., – Agricultural producers have until March 27 to apply for Fiscal Year 2020 funding for select Natural Resources Conservation Service programs in Wyoming.

NRCS Field Offices accept applications all year for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – EQIP. However, batching cutoff dates for applications are established for ranking and funding decisions. Consideration for this batching period is only given to signed applications that are on file by March 27, 2020.

The EQIP, AMA, and RCPP-EQIP programs are voluntary conservation programs that provide technical and financial assistance to eligible agricultural producers to address a wide variety of resource issues such as: water quality, inadequate fish and wildlife habitat, inefficient use of irrigation water, inadequate livestock water, invasive species,

wind and water soil erosion concerns, residue management and others.

Applications for General EQIP and AMA are being accepted.

Applications for the following RCPP-EQIP Subaccounts are being accepted:

Northeast Wyoming Sage-Grouse Enhancement

Securing the Grass-Highway for Wyoming Migrations

Another application sign-up date may be announced later in the year depending on available funding.

Please contact your local NRCS Field Office if you are interested in applying for any of these programs.

[USDA Announces Application Deadline for Conservation Stewardship Program Renewal Contracts – New Mexico](#)

NRCS 02/27/20. ALBUQUERQUE, NM – Participants enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with contracts that expire in 2020 are encouraged to meet with their local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office to discuss options to renew the contracts for a second five-year term. The deadline to apply for a renewal contract is March 20, 2020. A separate application deadline will be announced for the regular CSP sign-up. NRCS accepts applications year-round from agricultural producers who have established farm records with the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

Renewal contracts allow participants to receive annual payments for maintaining conservation on land enrolled in a CSP contract. Participants must agree to implement new activities that take conservation to a higher level. “New Mexico has over 100 contracts that are eligible for a renewal. Because of significant changes in CSP, these participants need to meet with their local office as

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soon as possible to submit their application. NRCS is taking steps to simplify the process, but participants should not hesitate to turn in their application as soon as possible since a delay could make them ineligible for the next two years,” said Xavier Montoya, NRCS New Mexico State Conservationist.

Participants interested in CSP should schedule a time to meet with NRCS to discuss the application materials, eligibility requirements, software that evaluates the agricultural operation, field procedures for evaluating the condition of the natural resources, and practices and enhancements that will meet their conservation objectives.

The options for CSP participation vary by contract year.

- Participants with a 2015 contract that has not expired may choose to either apply for a renewal this year, or extend the current contract for a 6th year and apply for a renewal next year. The one-year extension must be requested by March 13, 2020.
- Participants in an expired 2015 contract that was not a renewal are not eligible for CSP until a 2022 sign-up.
- Participants in an expired 2015 renewal contract may apply for a new contract under the regular sign-up this year.
- Participants with a 2014 contract that has not expired may apply for a renewal.
- Participants in a 2014 contract that has expired are not eligible for a renewal and may apply for a new contract in the regular sign-up.
- Participants with an active 2016 contract that is not a renewal may apply for a renewal.
- Participants with an active 2016 renewal contract that expires this year, completing 10 years of enrollment, are not eligible for another renewal and may apply for a new contract next year.

- Participants eligible for a renewal may be able to include public land that is part of the operation if eligibility requirements are met.
- Participants who are eligible for a renewal and choose not to apply will be ineligible for CSP for two years following the expiration of the current contract.
- Participants with an active contract that does not expire this year may submit an application to enroll public land and newly acquired private land that are part of the operation.

Changes to the Program

The 2018 Farm Bill authorizes important changes to the program including:

All applications are ranked and compete for funding including renewal applications.

Public land is now eligible. Applicants must have control of the land at the time of application and maintain control for the contract term.

Participants no longer need to be registered as the operator of record in the FSA farm records. However, participants must share in the risk of the agricultural operation and participate in day-to-day management activities.

Higher payment rates are now available for certain conservation activities including cover crops and advanced grazing management.

CSP now provides dedicated funding for organic and for transitioning to organic producers. At least 75% of the acres in the operation must be organic or transitioning to organic to compete in an organic fund account.

The \$40,000 annual payment limit has been removed. Payments are limited to \$200,000 per contract and to each individual participant or member of an entity. Contracts with joint operations have a higher contract limit of \$400,000. Payment limits do not apply to Tribes.

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About the Program

CSP is offered in all 50 states and the Pacific and Caribbean areas through continuous sign-ups. The program provides many benefits including increased crop yields, decreased inputs, wildlife habitat improvements and increased resilience to weather extremes. CSP is for working lands including cropland, pastureland, rangeland, nonindustrial private forest land and agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe.

More Information

For additional information about CSP, contact your local USDA service center and visit <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/nm/programs/financial/csp/>

[North Dakota NRCS Announces Application Deadline for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#)

NRCS 02/27/20. BISMARCK, ND, – North Dakota State Conservationist, Mary Podoll, announced FY2020 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) applications are due by Friday, March 27, 2020. All applications submitted by close of business will be considered for funding in fiscal year 2020.

EQIP is a voluntary program that provides financial assistance to help plan and implement conservation practices based on identified natural resource concerns, such as soil quality, water quality, water quantity, air quality, habitat quality, and energy.

Landowners and operators who are engaged in livestock, agricultural, or forest production on eligible land and have natural resource concerns may be eligible to participate in EQIP.

Through EQIP, NRCS works with producers to develop a conservation plan and a plan of operations that both identifies appropriate

conservation practices needed to address natural resource concerns and implement those identified conservation practices. Conservation plans must be developed for the entire land unit that will be included in the EQIP contract.

Applications are accepted on a continuous basis; however, applications must be submitted by close of business on March 27, 2020, to be considered for fiscal year 2020 funding.

To find out more about EQIP or to complete an application, please visit your local NRCS service center or visit our website at www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov/programs.

[Funding Available from USDA to Protect Groundwater - Nebraska](#)

NRCS 02/28/20. LINCOLN, Neb. – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service has funding available through its Source Water Protection Initiative to assist landowners in source water protection priority areas to install conservation practices. Interested landowners have until March 13, 2020, to apply.

Craig Derickson, state conservationist for NRCS in Nebraska said, “Since nearly all Nebraskans get their drinking water from groundwater, it’s important we work together to help protect this resource from contamination. This designated funding provides an opportunity for farmers and landowners to receive financial assistance to install conservation practices that help protect and improve water quality.”

The Source Water Protection priority area consists of 522 wellhead protection areas across the state, that are located around the public well sites supplying water for communities in Nebraska. In addition, the Phase 2-4 high nitrate areas and water quantity management areas that are managed by the NRDs have been included in this initiative.

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“The Source Water Protection Initiative is an exciting opportunity to improve and protect groundwater resources in Nebraska,” said Marty Link, Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy. “We look forward promoting this program with NRCS to help communities protect their drinking water supplies.”

Agricultural land located in the source water protection priority areas (see map) may be eligible to receive financial assistance. Nebraska NRCS is now accepting applications for source water protection funding. Approved applicants can receive funding to install conservation practices used to address water quality, that include:

- Nutrient management
- Irrigation water management
- Cover crops
- Conversion of flood to pivot or subsurface drip irrigation systems.

NRCS field office staff can determine if applicants are eligible for SWP priority area financial assistance. Applications are accepted anytime, but to receive funding this year, applications must be received by March 13, 2020. Visit your local NRCS field office to learn more.

Upcoming Meetings

[WSWC Spring \(192nd\) Meetings](#)

Washington, DC
March 31 – April 2, 2020

[Western Governors Association 2020 Annual Meeting](#)

Medora, ND
June 29-July 2, 2020

[WSWC Summer \(193rd\) Meetings](#)

Cody, WY
July 22-24, 2020

[WSWC Fall \(194th\) Meetings](#)

El Paso, TX
October 2020

Upcoming Events

[WestFAST Webinar: FAST 41: Best Practices for Permitting and Environmental Review Processes for Major Infrastructure Projects,](#)

March 25, 2020, 10AM Mountain

[WSWC-WWAO Research-to-Operations \(R2O\) Workshop](#)

Irvine, CA
April 22-23, 2020

[WestFAST Webinar: Leveraging Watershed Restoration to Improve Source Water Protection and Reduce the Risk of Wildland Fire,](#)

April 29, 2020, 10AM Mountain

[Annual Sub-seasonal-to-Seasonal \(S2S\) Workshop](#)

San Diego, CA
May 18-20, 2020

[The Second Colorado River Basin Data and Modeling Roundtable](#)

Albuquerque, NM
May 27-28, 2020

[Metadata Training Workshop: Albuquerque](#)

Albuquerque, NM
May 28, 2020

Other Federal News

USACE 02/02/20. [Army Corps flood fight teams working in Skagit and Snohomish River basins](#)

EPA 02/03/20. [Las Vegas Review-Journal: EPA administrator details sensible water rules, efforts to curb pollution](#)

EPA 02/03/20. [EPA at 50: EPA Celebrates Progress in Protecting America’s Waters](#)

NOAA 02/03/20. [Isn't there a lot of disagreement among climate scientists about global warming?](#)

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USBR 02/03/20. [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation: A Joint Commitment to the Nation's Water Infrastructure](#)

USACE 02/03/20. [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation: A Joint Commitment to the Nation's Water Infrastructure](#)

USACE 02/03/20. [CRSO EIS - January 2020 Update](#)

USBR 02/05/20. [Reclamation allocates \\$120 million to tribal water projects](#)

USBR 02/05/20. [Reclamation welcomes Talmadge Oxford as area manager for Columbia-Cascades Area Office](#)

NIDIS 02/05/20. [New Research on Conservation During Drought](#)

EPA 02/06/20. [EPA Announces First WIFIA Annual Report Highlighting \\$3.5 Billion in Infrastructure Funding](#)

NASA 02/06/20. [Arctic Ice Melt Is Changing Ocean Currents](#)

NRCS 02/06/20. [Snowpack More Than Doubles in Western Montana During January](#)

EPA 02/07/20. [U.S. EPA Announces \\$59 Million Water Infrastructure Loan to Coachella Valley Water District](#)

USDA/NRCS 02/07/20. [USDA to Invest \\$56 Million in 2020 to Help Farmers Improve Water Quality](#)

NPS 02/08/20. [Mudslides and Flooding Block Entrances to Mount Rainier National Park - Park staff work to evacuate residents and guests, and protect critical systems](#)

EPA 02/10/20. [EPA at 50: Progress in Protecting our Nation's Surface Waters](#)

USF&WS 02/10/20. [President Requests \\$1.4 Billion for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in FY](#)

[2021, Prioritizes Public Lands Access and Species Recovery](#)

USACE 02/10/20. [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Releases Work Plan for Fiscal 2020 Civil Works Appropriations](#)

USGS 02/10/20. [President Proposes \\$971.2 Million FY 2021 Budget for USGS](#)

EPA 02/11/20. [EPA Announces Appointment of John Busterud to Region 9 Administrator](#)

USACE 02/11/20. [20-005 Mill Creek Channel in Walla Walla worked as designed, says U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials: Walla Walla District Commander cites staff and community partnership, ready to help neighboring communities begin recovering from flooding](#)

USBR 02/11/20. [Reclamation awards \\$3.5 million for 19 projects that will inform water management decisions - Projects in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Washington selected](#)

USACE 02/12/20. [20-006 The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Mill Creek Flood Control Project Again Protected the City of Walla Walla From Devastation](#)

USACE 02/12/20. [President's Budget and Work Plan announcements tab \\$188 million for Sacramento District projects](#)

EPA 02/13/20. [Doug Benevento Nominated as EPA Deputy Administrator](#)

NOAA 02/13/20. [January 2020 was Earth's hottest January on record. The long-term trend of above-average temperatures continues](#)

NOAA 02/13/20. [February 2020 ENSO update: mind reading](#)

EPA 02/14/20. [EPA's First WIFIA Annual Report Highlights Heartland Communities' Commitment to Protecting Water Quality and Improving Infrastructure](#)

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USACE 02/14/20. [Corps of Engineers begins Lake Washington annual summer refill](#)

USDOI 02/19/20. [Trump Administration Optimizes Water Delivery and Increases Species Protection in California's Central Valley](#)

EPA 02/19/20. [EPA awards grant to Fort Lewis College team to develop innovative water technology - Students in Durango, Colorado among 18 teams selected nationwide](#)

EPA 02/19/20. [Missouri S&T Team Receives \\$25,000 EPA Grant for Freshwater Harmful Algal Blooms Project](#)

EPA 02/20/20. [EPA and USDA Announce Continued Commitment to Support Rural Water Systems](#)

EPA 02/20/20. [EPA Continues to Act on PFAS, Proposes to Close Import Loophole and Protect American Consumers](#)

EPA 02/20/20. [EPA Announces Proposed Decision to Regulate PFOA and PFOS in Drinking Water](#)

USDOI 02/20/20. [WTAS: Trump Administration Optimizes Water Delivery and Increases Species Protection in California's Central Valley](#)

USDOI 02/20/20. [Secretary Bernhardt's Statement on California's Lawsuit Against the Central Valley Project](#)

USDA/RD 02/20/20. [USDA and EPA Announce Continued Commitment to Support Rural Water Systems](#)

USDA/RD 02/20/20. [USDA Makes \\$7.5 Million in Technical Assistance and Training Grants Available for Disaster Recovery](#)

NOAA 02/20/20. [U.S. to triple operational weather and climate supercomputing capacity. Computing upgrade paves way for planned model improvements](#)

EPA 02/21/20. [What They Are Saying: EPA Announces Proposed Decision to Regulate PFOA and PFOS in Drinking Water](#)

USBR 02/21/20. [Reclamation provides \\$40.99 million in grants to improve water efficiency - Projects selected are in California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming](#)

NRCS 02/21/20. [NRCS Releases 'Conservation at Work' Videos](#)

EPA 02/24/20. [EPA at 50: Helping Address Emerging Water Challenges](#)

NRCS 02/24/20. [USDA NRCS Invests in Water Quality Initiative in Texas](#)

USDOI 02/25/20. [U.S. Senate Confirms Katharine MacGregor as Deputy Secretary of the Department of the Interior](#)

USFS 02/26/20. [USDA Invests More than \\$41 Million to Protect Communities from Wildfires, Restore Forest Ecosystems and Improve Drinking Water](#)

NRCS 02/26/20. [USDA Invests More than \\$41 Million to Protect Communities from Wildfires, Restore Forest Ecosystems and Improve Drinking Water](#)

USDA 02/28/20. [Today, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue announced Bette Brand will serve as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's \(USDA\) Rural Development \(RD\) Deputy Under Secretary following the retirement of Donald "DJ" LaVoy.](#)

USBR 02/28/20. [Reclamation and Contra Costa Water District advance plan to increase water reliability](#)

USBR 02/28/20. [Reclamation completes first group of congressionally-mandated Central Valley Project contract conversions](#)

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