

THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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Memorandum

Date: 1 November 1994

To: Chapter and Section Presidents, TWS

From: Thomas M. Franklin, Wildlife Policy Director

Re: Conservation Reserve Program

The Wildlife Society, as part of a 17 member coalition, is releasing "America needs the Conservation Reserve Program" a white paper and brochure that clearly describes the wildlife benefits for the Conservation Reserve Program (C.R.P.). The C.R.P. is the most important agricultural conservation program in practice today. The more than 36 million acres enrolled create grassland habitat valuable to wildlife, improve water quality and save tax-payers money. These benefits are clearly documented in the publications.

The 1995 Farm Bill is scheduled for re-authorization by Congress next year. It is imperative that an effective C.R.P. be included in the law. Contracts for part of the land currently enrolled expire this year, and if C.R.P. is not renewed, its enormous conservation benefits developed during the past ten years will be lost.

These C.R.P. materials will help conservationists as they express support for the C.R.P. to their congressional delegation and the Clinton Administration. Additional copies are available through the Wildlife Management Institute 1101 14th St. NW Suite 801, Washington D.C. 20005 (202) 371-1808, and more information on the C.R.P. is available through W.M.I. and The Wildlife Society headquarters.

America Needs



the
**Conservation
Reserve
Program**

The Conservation Reserve Program: **A Wildlife Conservation Legacy**

Wildlife Legacy Partners

Colorado Division of Wildlife

Delta Waterfowl

Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

National Audubon Society

National Rifle Association of America

Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

North Dakota Game and Fish Department

Ohio Division of Wildlife

Pheasants Forever

Quail Unlimited

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

The Wildlife Society

Wildlife Management Institute

Wisconsin Bureau of Wildlife Management

Single copies available from:

Wildlife Management Institute
1101 14th St. N.W., Suite 801
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-1808

October, 1994

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Executive Summary

CRP: A Wildlife Conservation Legacy

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pays farmers to retire highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive lands from crop production for 10 years and to convert them to perennial vegetation. Since its authorization in 1985, 36.4 million acres have been enrolled in CRP at an annual cost of \$1.8 billion.

CRP provides many conservation and economic benefits. CRP has reduced soil erosion by 700 million tons per year and simultaneously improved water quality by reducing sedimentation, pesticides and nutrients. Ring-necked pheasant populations have more than doubled in several states due to CRP and the program is credited with the reversal of declining populations of many other grassland wildlife species. Increased hunting associated with CRP has been a boost to rural economies and CRP is expected to provide between \$3.4 and \$11.2 billion in overall environmental benefits during the life of the program.

Six distinct features of CRP must be protected if it is to become a lasting wildlife conservation legacy for future Americans to enjoy.



CRP Features Important for Wildlife

1. Vast Amount of Acreage

CRP has created new grassland habitat for wildlife on an area twice the size of all national wildlife refuges and all state wildlife areas within the contiguous 48 states. The relationship between CRP size and its wildlife benefits is not proportional; large acreages are needed to produce measurable wildlife population responses.

2. Emphasis in the Prairies

About 87% of CRP has been restored to grassland or prairie habitat, the majority of which is in the Great Plains and prairie region. Nationwide, native prairies and grassland wildlife have undergone alarming declines. In some areas, CRP represents the majority of available grassland habitat for wildlife.

3. Large Blocks of Habitat

Large blocks (e.g., 80 acres and larger) of CRP have been critical in restoring wildlife affected by fragmentation of native prairie habitats.

4. Relatively Undisturbed Vegetation

CRP has provided undisturbed vegetative cover needed by wildlife for nesting and winter cover. Periodic disturbances to CRP every four to six years by burning, grazing or mowing can mimic natural disturbances and improve its productivity for wildlife.

5. Cover Types Suitable for Wildlife

Native grass mixtures, wildlife plantings, shallow wildlife ponds (wetlands) and food plots provide more wildlife benefits than monotypic tame grasses.

6. Protection of Diverse Habitats

While CRP initially targeted highly erodible lands, it also has restored wildlife habitats on previously cropped wetlands, floodplains and riparian areas adjacent to streams.

Policy Alternatives

CRP could provide greater cost effectiveness, including expanded conservation benefits, if the program were targeted more carefully to meet identified objectives. Various and sometimes competing objectives exist for CRP. Such objectives include wind erosion reduction, water quality improvement, commodity supply control and wildlife enhancement. Ideally, CRP should be targeted to meet multiple overlapping purposes.

Existing 10-year CRP contracts begin to expire in 1995. Without some follow-up program to maintain CRP lands in vegetative cover, 23 million acres are expected to come back into crop production. The purported obstacle for continuing CRP is funding. Economists estimate, however, that CRP saves federal taxpayers money by offsetting farm subsidies that would otherwise be paid for crops grown on CRP land.

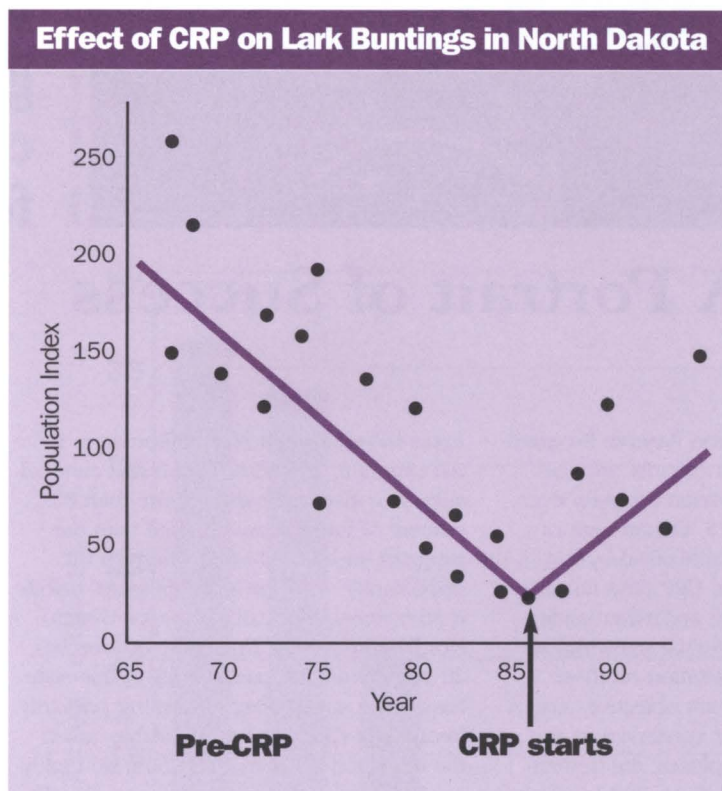
In the absence of CRP, it is also likely that the federal government will return to idling large acreages of cropland on an annual basis to prevent surplus crop production. In the past, such annual set-aside programs have produced few wildlife benefits and in some areas have proven to be detrimental to wildlife. Several policy alternatives exist for addressing the future of CRP. They include: 1) reauthorize CRP with better targeting and improved cost effectiveness; 2) take no action and allow existing CRP acres to return to crop production; 3) utilize multi-year set-asides with protective cover requirements instead of annual commodity set-asides; 4) use long-term or permanent easements to secure a portion of CRP grasslands; or 5) ensure protection of CRP lands through regulatory mechanisms including Swampbuster, Sodbuster and Conservation Compliance.

Beyond reauthorization, none of these alternatives are likely to yield a similar level of benefits to wildlife, the environment or agriculture as CRP.

Conclusion

CRP has been largely a grassland restoration program. CRP should remain predominantly a grassland restoration program because most marginal cropland was converted from native prairie, and many grassland wildlife populations have been in serious decline. A grassland restoration program also gives farmers opportunities to diversify their operations, and it maintains a readily available cropland reservoir as a hedge against agricultural shortages.

Increasing wildlife habitat and populations should be an explicit objective of future agricultural policies affecting CRP. The six features of CRP—vast amount of acreage, emphasis in the prairies, large blocks of habitat, relatively undisturbed vegetation, cover types suitable for wildlife, and protection of diverse habitats—should be emulated when formulating future agricultural conservation programs. While CRP is not the only program that could provide these features, it is the only established program that has proven successful in doing so.



CRP is demonstrating that declining populations of grassland wildlife such as the Lark Bunting, are reversible through large scale habitat restoration. **Source: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

The Conservation Reserve Program: A Wildlife Conservation Legacy

The Conservation Reserve Program: A Wildlife Conservation Legacy was developed by the following Wildlife Legacy Partners: Colorado Division of Wildlife, Delta Waterfowl, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, National Audubon Society, National Rifle Association of America, Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Ohio Division of Wildlife, Pheasants Forever, Quail Unlimited, South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, The Wildlife Society, Wildlife Management Institute and Wisconsin Bureau of Wildlife Management. This report was edited by Kathleen Rude. Design courtesy of Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; Linda Corti, Designer. Single copies of this report are available from the: Wildlife Management Institute, 1101 14th St NW, Suite 801, Washington, DC 20005 (202) 371-1808.

The Conservation Reserve Program



BOBOLINK © S. MACIOWSKI, U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

**“CRP is
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CRP: A Portrait of Success

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) may be the most broadly popular and successful conservation program ever implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Authorized by the 1985 Food Security Act, CRP pays farmers to retire highly erodible and other lands from crop production for 10 years and to establish perennial vegetation on those lands. Although the main objectives are to promote soil and water conservation and reduce commodity surpluses, the tremendous response by wildlife to CRP is widely recognized as a remarkable achievement.

CRP is praised by conservationists. It has established vitally needed grassland habitats. It has prevented almost 700 million tons of topsoil from eroding each year. It also has improved water quality and aquatic habitat by reducing sedimentation as well as pesticide and fertilizer runoff. According to USDA economists, CRP will provide between \$3.4 and \$11 billion in environmental benefits over the life of the current program.

CRP is overwhelmingly popular with farmers. More than 375,000 farmers in 47

states have enrolled 36.4 million acres in the program. Numerous state and national surveys consistently show more than 80 percent of farmers are satisfied with the program and would re-enroll given the opportunity. CRP provides financial stability to farmers. For example, according to North Dakota State University economists, 20 percent of CRP participants in that state have been able to stay in farming primarily because of CRP. The program has eased the transition away from farming on highly erodible and other marginal lands. Finally, CRP is helping to alleviate wildlife depredation problems on private farms in some areas by providing an alternative forage base that did not exist previously.

CRP has stimulated rural economic activity across the country through increased expenditures associated with hunting and other wildlife-related recreational activities. National Biological Survey (NBS) economists estimate that more than \$13 billion in resource-based benefits to society has been generated by CRP over the life of the program. For instance, increased pheasant populations in

South Dakota attracted almost 48,000 non-resident and 80,000 resident hunters in 1993. While engaged in this recreation, these hunters spent more than \$50 million in the state. In Jones County alone, increased hunting associated with CRP generated an estimated \$1 million in economic activity in the first six days of the 1993 pheasant season.

CRP is a sound investment for taxpayers. If CRP is fully reinstated, it will cost \$1.8 billion per year; this could save up to \$2 billion that otherwise would be paid out for the same acres through commodity programs and related crop loan, disaster and export enhancement programs. And in contrast to commodity programs that provide few public benefits, CRP offers taxpayers multiple benefits such as soil, water and wildlife conservation, in return for their money spent on the program.

Finally, no other conservation program has achieved such a dramatic response by wildlife in such a short period of time. CRP can be a lasting wildlife conservation legacy of the 20th century.

A Wildlife Conservation Legacy in Jeopardy

While CRP has been successful in meeting nearly all of its initial objectives, CRP's future is uncertain. Congress created CRP as a 10-year program, slated to end when the contracts expire. Contracts on 22.4 million acres (62 percent) of CRP expire in 1996 and 1997. Contracts on the remaining CRP lands expire over the subsequent 5 years.

The funds that had been allocated to CRP already have been sequestered for federal deficit reduction once the existing contracts expire. Unless Congress and the Administration take action, there will be no available funds to continue CRP, and most of the grassland habitat created by the program will revert to cropland.

Furthermore, because the full range of its benefits is not being included in most analyses, CRP's cost-effectiveness is being questioned. Total government expenditures for the program amount to about \$1.8 billion annually with an average cost of about \$50 per CRP acre. Congressional budget rules fail to recognize the vast commodity program savings, stimulus to rural economies and broad environmental benefits that, in sum, result in substantial net gains for taxpayers. Without reauthorization of CRP in some form, the United States will lose most of its \$20 billion investment in conservation.

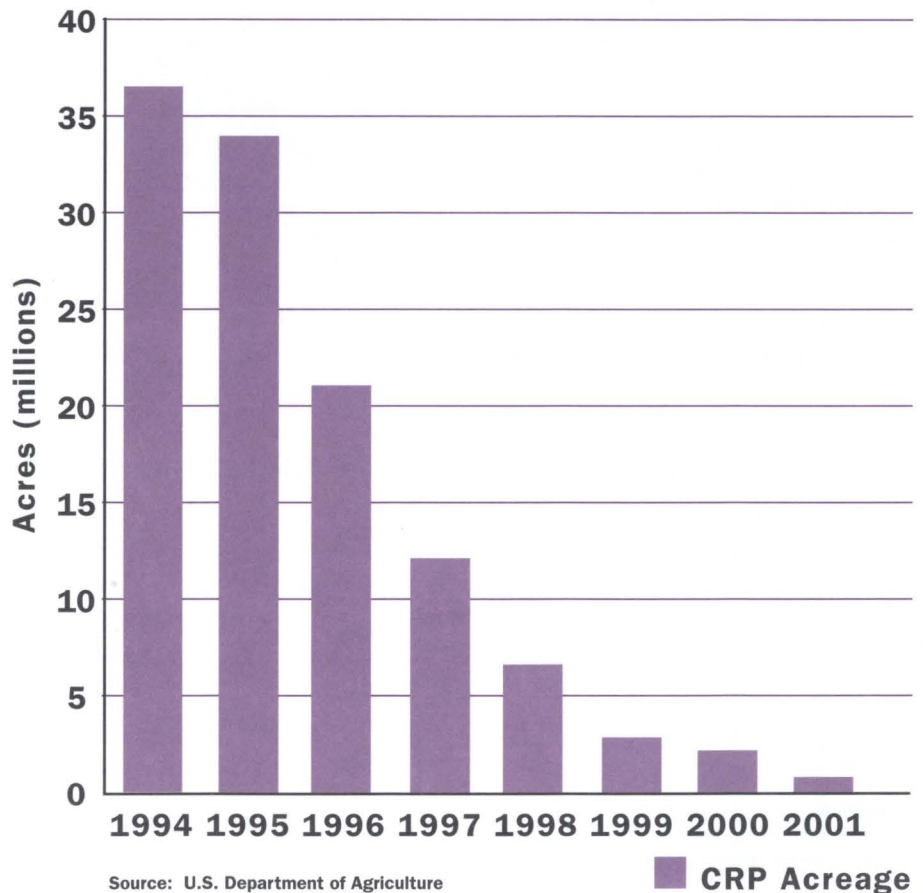
Those involved with wildlife conservation are extremely concerned about the future of CRP because no other federal agricultural conservation program provides as many wildlife benefits as does CRP.

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The two primary concerns are: the magnitude of the CRP program that will be reauthorized (if any); and the criteria used to target the new program. Decisions in both arenas will greatly affect CRP's future effectiveness for wildlife.

This paper provides a brief overview of the many benefits that CRP provides and then examines in detail the unique features of CRP that make this program so valuable to wildlife. Consequences of not reauthorizing the program are discussed and the effects of selected CRP policy alternatives on wildlife are evaluated. The hope is to synthesize sufficient information to guide Congressional and Administrative action to build a lasting wildlife legacy for future generations of Americans to enjoy.

Schedule of CRP Contract Expiration



CRP Benefits Wildlife

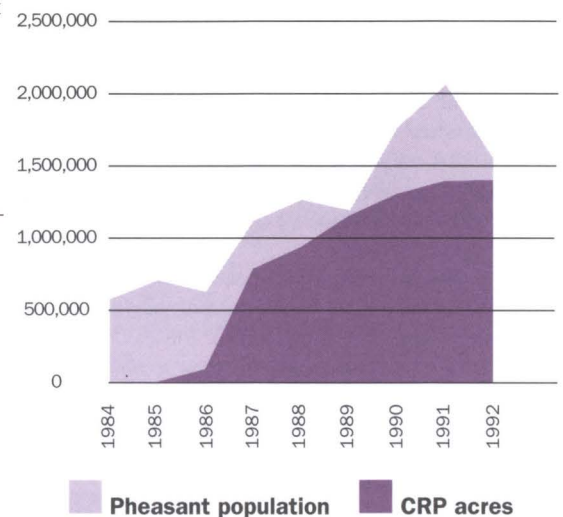
Over the past 50 years, evolving agricultural land-use practices have transformed the American landscape. Widespread land conversions combined with more intensive farming have caused corresponding declines in wildlife populations. This is especially true for wildlife species that depend on native prairie or grassland habitats.

The Great Plains has been characterized as one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. More than 95 percent of the original U.S. tallgrass prairie already has been converted to cropland this century. Available data indicate the conversion of mixed grass prairie ranges from 30 to 77 percent in the states, and estimates of shortgrass prairie conversion range among states from 20 to 80 percent. The majority of remaining prairie habitats are intensively grazed and have reduced value as wildlife habitat. The impact on prairie wildlife is dramatic.

Breeding bird survey trends demonstrate, for example, that many non-migratory species that once thrived in earlier mosaic cropland patterns—such as ring-necked pheasants and northern bobwhites have declined by more than 50 percent in parts of the East and Midwest because of habitat loss. Farther west, several subspecies of prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse are now listed or are candidates for listing on state or federal threatened and endangered species lists.

Shrinking grassland nesting habitat also has led to drastic reductions in populations of migratory wildlife. Biologists recently have determined that populations of grassland-nesting birds in the prairies have been declining faster (25 to 65 percent from 1980 to 1989) than any other bird group in North America. During the period from 1966 to 1991, lark buntings and grasshopper sparrows, for example, declined by more than 50 percent. This rate is steeper than the more publicized declines suffered by neotropical migrant forest songbirds. Duck populations also have plummeted over the last two decades. Mallards, blue-winged teal and pintails—all of which nest in upland grasses—have declined by 43, 45 and 71 percent respectively from their populations in the 1970s.

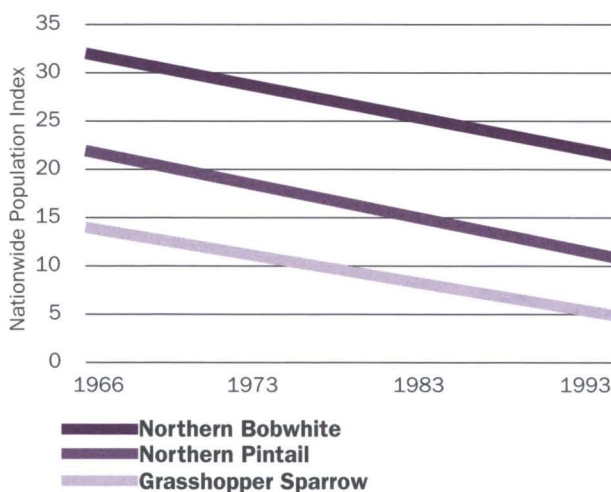
Ring-necked pheasant and CRP trends in Minnesota



Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

“CRP is demonstrating that these widespread population declines are reversible by extensive habitat restoration.”

Grassland wildlife population trends



Source: National Biological Survey

“Biologists recently have determined that populations of grassland-nesting birds in the prairies have been declining faster (25 to 65 percent from 1980 to 1989) than any other bird group in North America.”

CRP is demonstrating that these widespread population declines are reversible by extensive habitat restoration. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has estimated that three million additional ducks were produced in 1994 in the Dakotas and Montana because of CRP. In addition, recent analyses of data from the FWS's Breeding Bird Survey show that grasshopper sparrows, lark buntings and eastern meadowlarks actually are increasing in areas with high CRP enrollment. In Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio and South Dakota, CRP has more than doubled ring-necked pheasant populations. In Montana, statewide pheasant harvest has tripled since CRP began. In Texas, CRP has provided lesser prairie chickens with increased feeding, nesting and brood habitat in counties where they have been absent for decades.

Birds using CRP fields in the Northern Great Plains:

Mallard
 Northern Pintail
 Gadwall
 Northern Shoveler
 American Wigeon
 Green-winged Teal
 Blue-winged Teal
 Sharp-shinned Hawk
 Northern Harrier
 Ferruginous Hawk
 Swainson's Hawk
 Red-tailed Hawk
 American Kestrel
 Prairie Falcon
 Ring-necked Pheasant
 Gray Partridge
 American Bittern
 American Avocet
 Killdeer
 Marbled Godwit
 Upland Sandpiper
 Willet
 Wilson's Phalarope
 Ring-billed Gull
 Franklin's Gull
 Black Tern
 Mourning Dove
 Great Horned Owl
 Red-headed Woodpecker
 Short-eared Owl
 Northern Flicker
 Eastern Kingbird
 Western Kingbird
 Willow Flycatcher
 Horned Lark
 Barn Swallow
 Cliff Swallow
 Tree Swallow
 Bank Swallow
 Rough-winged Swallow
 Purple Martin
 Marsh Wren
 Sedge Wren
 Brown Thrasher
 American Robin
 Eastern Bluebird
 Sprague's Pipit
 Loggerhead Shrike
 Yellow Warbler
 Common Yellowthroat
 House Sparrow
 Bobolink
 Yellow-headed Blackbird
 Brewer's Blackbird
 Red-winged Blackbird
 Western Meadowlark
 Common Grackle
 Brown-headed Cowbird
 Orchard Oriole
 Northern Oriole
 American Goldfinch
 Dickcissel
 Savannah Sparrow
 Grasshopper Sparrow
 Baird's Sparrow
 Le Conte's Sparrow
 Sharp-tailed Sparrow
 Lark Bunting
 Vesper Sparrow
 Lark Sparrow
 Chipping Sparrow
 Song Sparrow
 Clay-colored Sparrow
 Chestnut-collared Longspur

Source: National Biological Survey

The FWS has documented 75 species of birds using CRP habitats in the Northern Great Plains. In Ohio, 43 species of birds use CRP fields. Most species using CRP habitats are several times more abundant on CRP than on nearby cropland. Researchers in the Midwest have found that grassland bird nests are 21 times more abundant in CRP fields than on cropland and 32 times more likely to hatch.

Big game wildlife such as elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer and pronghorns have responded surprisingly well to CRP habitats in western states. In Colorado and Oregon, forage on CRP lands has substantially reduced winter wildlife depredation on agricultural fields and haystacks. In the panhandle region of Oklahoma, CRP is responsible for a three-fold increase of pronghorns.

CRP has demonstrated high potential as a proactive management strategy to resolve some existing and future Endangered Species Act issues. The greater prairie chicken, formerly a state-listed endangered species in Colorado, was changed to threatened status in late 1993, because of substantial population and range increases fostered in part by CRP habitats. In Idaho, the Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, a candidate species for federal listing, is making a dramatic recovery on CRP lands. In the long term, CRP could prevent many species from becoming threatened or endangered.

Effect of CRP on Grassland Birds in North Dakota

Species	CRP Population Density (per. 1000 ac.)	Cropland Population Density (per. 1000 ac.)	Statewide population w/out CRP (% change)
Lark Bunting	66.3	6.7	-17.0
Grasshopper Sparrow	64.7	3.9	-20.5
Red-winged Blackbird	58.9	5.6	-11.9
Savannah Sparrow	29.5	3.2	-18.8
Western Meadowlark	25.2	5.0	-5.1
Bobolink	22.9	9.8	-10.7
Clay-colored Sparrow	17.1	0.1	-9.1
Common Yellowthroat	8.5	0.1	-9.3

Source: National Biological Survey

CRP Features Important for Wildlife

Six distinct features of CRP, in combination, seem to be most important in providing meaningful wildlife benefits: a vast amount of acreage, emphasis in the prairies, large blocks of habitat, relatively undisturbed vegetation, cover types suitable for wildlife, and protection of diverse habitats.

1. Vast Amount of Acreage

CRP's size—36.4 million acres—is a prominent reason the program is so beneficial to wildlife. The new habitat created by CRP totals more than the area of Iowa or Illinois. CRP is twice as large as the combined area of the National Wildlife Refuge System and all state-owned wildlife management areas in the contiguous 48 states. CRP has provided four times as much upland nesting habitat in the prairie pothole region as the combined efforts over the past 50 years of all the federal and state wildlife agencies operating in that region.

About one-fifth of the land area of the United States—more than 420 million acres—has been converted to cropland. Meaningful steps to restore wildlife populations in agricultural ecosystems can only be successful if conducted on a similarly large scale. Small-scale habitat restorations can boost local wildlife numbers on individual farms but generally has unmeasurable effects on wildlife populations at a statewide or national scale.

Top Ten CRP States

State	CRP Grassland (1000 Ac.)	Pre-CRP Grassland (1000 Ac.)	% Increase in Grassland Acres
TX	4,150	112,396	4%
ND	3,181	12,220	25%
KS	2,938	19,150	14%
MT	2,854	40,873	6%
IA	2,225	4,536	50%
SD	2,120	25,487	8%
CO	1,978	25,482	7%
MN	1,929	3,788	55%
MO	1,727	12,741	15%
NE	1,425	25,221	7%

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

2. Emphasis in the Prairies

The highest diversity of grassland-nesting birds in the United States occurs in the prairie region, the heartland of American agriculture. But due to the rarity of prairie and grassland habitats remaining in the Midwest and Great Plains, these birds and other prairie wildlife populations are suffering.

CRP is extremely effective in the restoration and conservation of prairie wildlife because it is largely a grassland program: 87 percent of CRP was established to grass-dominated cover and approximately two-thirds of CRP is located in prairie regions.

CRP has become the foremost program for restoring needed waterfowl habitat within the prairie pothole region, which is the highest priority under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan (NAWMP). Only by maintaining extensive grasslands in CRP or a similar program will the NAWMP meet its waterfowl population objectives. Similar conclusions have been drawn for a host of other declining grassland bird species. For these reasons, it is critical to maintain a large acreage of grassland habitat in the prairies to restore wildlife populations on national and continental scales.

3. Large Blocks of Habitat

For many grassland wildlife species, especially in the prairies, large blocks of undisturbed cover (e.g., 80 acres and larger) are critical for successful wildlife breeding and rebuilding of wildlife populations. In agricultural fields throughout the prairie pothole region, for example, small patches and strips of grass simultaneously attract ground-nesting birds and their predators, such as red foxes, raccoons and skunks. Predators can easily and efficiently search such small parcels of habitat and destroy the eggs, nests and adult birds.

CRP provides large blocks (up to thousands of acres) of habitat that prairie-nesting birds require. Prior to CRP, for example, only about 10 percent of duck nests in many areas of the prairie potholes were successful in hatching. As a result of CRP, duck nest success is 20 to 30 percent or more. This level of nest success is high enough to begin rebuilding continental duck populations.

Other species of grassland endemic birds such as lark buntings and prairie chickens have been severely impacted by habitat fragmentation. Large blocks of idle grass are much more attractive as nesting cover to such species than are small parcels or strips, even when cover conditions are optimal on the small plots. Studies have shown that brown-headed cowbirds are very effective at reducing songbird reproduction in small patches of habitat. Cowbirds are nest parasites that lay their eggs in nests of other songbirds, while weakening or destroying the host bird's young.

Outside the prairies, species associated with habitat edges and aquatic wildlife increase in priority. These species can benefit from habitats configured into smaller blocks, field borders and riparian strips.

A Wildlife Conservation Legacy

Alternative Habitat Configurations for Wildlife



Grassland Birds Need: Large Blocks

Farm Game Need: Edges and Odd Areas

Aquatic Wildlife Need: Filter Strips

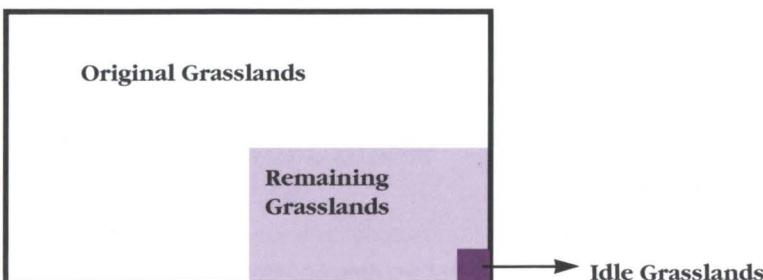
4. Relatively Undisturbed Vegetation

Nationwide, idle grass represents one of the rarest and most valuable habitats for wildlife in agricultural landscapes. Prior to CRP, idle grassland in the United States had been almost completely eliminated during this century. Therefore, the requirement for relatively undisturbed perennial cover probably is CRP's most unique and valuable feature for wildlife.

Nevertheless, native grassland habitats evolved under periodic disturbances. These disturbances can have a positive effect on plant diversity, as well as on plant and wildlife productivity. When judiciously planned and conducted, management practices such as burning, haying, grazing, mowing or disking—applied at four-to-six-year intervals and timed to reduce negative impacts to wildlife—can simulate natural disturbances. Such management can increase CRP's productivity and its benefits for wildlife.

In recognition of this fact, USDA is increasing the number of states in which wildlife habitat management practices such as strip disking are allowed. Increased reliance on state wildlife management professionals and other natural resource managers to formulate regional guidelines for vegetation management could further enhance wildlife habitat on CRP lands.

Nationwide U.S. Grassland Trends



Source: National Biological Survey

5. Cover Types Suitable for Wildlife

Twenty-three different conservation practices have been established on CRP lands, but 87 percent of the acreage is dominated by grass. In general, diverse covers consisting of native grass mixtures, wildlife plantings, shallow wildlife ponds (wetlands) and food plots provide more benefits to a greater diversity of wildlife than do monotypic (single-species) tame grass or introduced plantings.

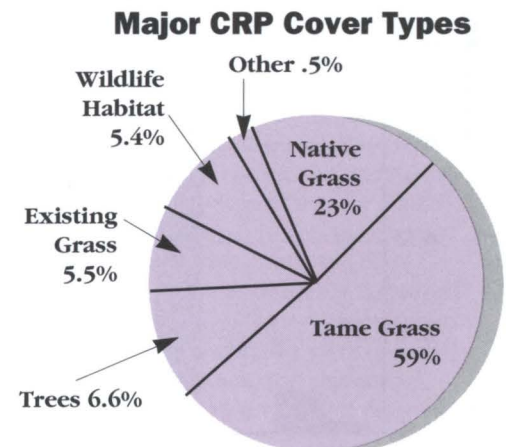
Benefits to wildlife have been greater where USDA worked closely with wildlife agencies to emphasize cover types that simultaneously benefited landowners and wildlife. For instance, warm-season grasses ideal for wildlife were utilized almost exclusively on CRP lands in Kansas. In other states, a mixture of grasses and forbs recommended by state fish and wildlife agencies also provides high quality habitat.

In contrast, in the Southeast, about three-fourths of CRP lands (1.3 million acres) is planted to loblolly pines, while most of the remainder (0.4 million acres) has monotypic stands of fescue grass. These two cover types provide little wildlife benefit. The habitat value of such monotypic stands could be improved by replacing or diversifying existing vegetation with local native grasses and forbs better suited for wildlife.

6. Protection of Diverse Habitats

Most land (76 percent) in CRP was enrolled under the highly erodible land criteria. Other criteria, however, have also been used to enroll environmentally valuable lands in CRP. These include standards for cropped wetlands, floodplains subject to scour erosion and riparian areas adjacent to streams and other water bodies. These latter areas represent a relatively small portion of total CRP acreage but can provide unique habitats important for wildlife.

Inclusion of cropped wetlands has been especially beneficial. North Dakota's three million acres of CRP contain some 114,000 individual wetlands. Such habitat—small wetlands interspersed among large tracts of idle grass—provides the basic elements of the prairie ecosystem and is premium quality habitat for wildlife in that part of the country.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Determining the Future of CRP

With CRP expiring in 1995, Congress will be addressing two distinct and important policy issues: the future of the CRP program and the future of the acres now enrolled in CRP. If CRP is not continued, conservationists must scramble to save as much of the perennial vegetation established by CRP as possible. If the program is reauthorized, decisions will be made on which existing CRP contracts to extend, how to extend them and what new acres to enroll.

In this section, the implications of reauthorization and of taking no action are discussed. Then several plausible policy alternatives for CRP are evaluated in terms of their benefits for wildlife conservation.

Reauthorization of CRP

If Congress chooses to reauthorize CRP or a similar program, several refinements likely will be incorporated to make it more cost efficient and effective in meeting societal objectives. A refined program could be better tailored to meet multiple objectives for soil, water and wildlife conservation.

CRP contracts providing multiple resource values likely would receive highest priority for enrollment. Such contracts would include lands containing previously cropped wetlands, floodplains and riparian areas even though they may not be highly erodible. New contracts may require that existing cover types be upgraded to those of higher environmental values.

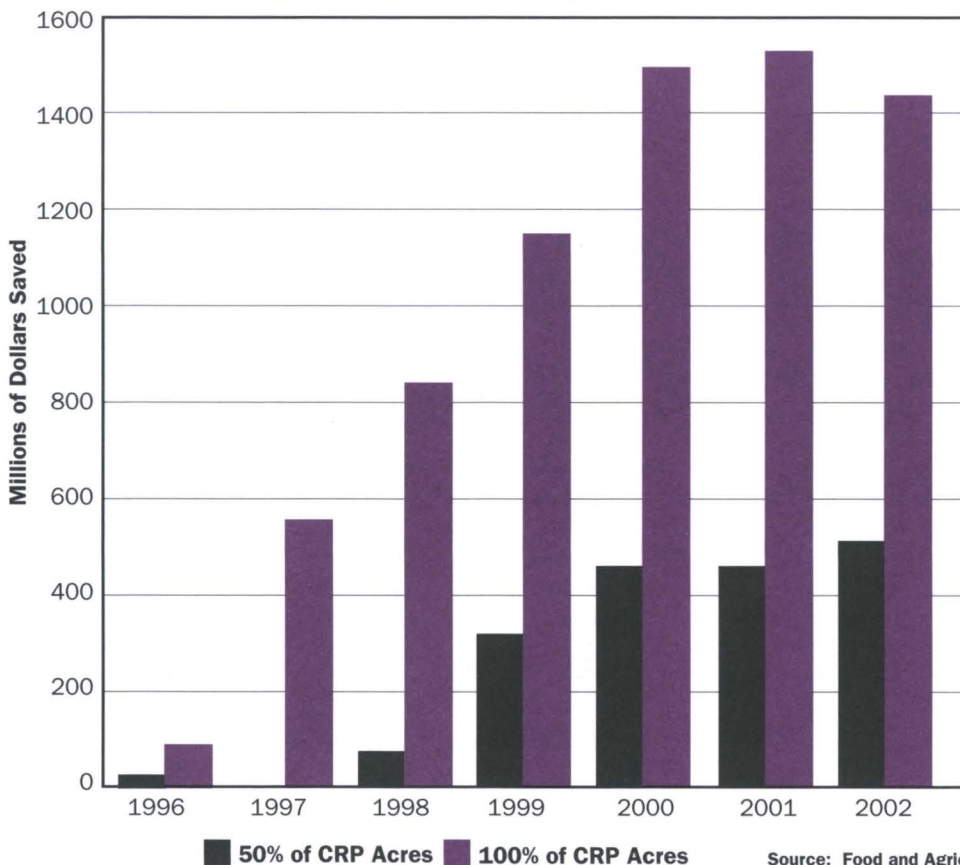
Some contracts are not likely to be extended, e.g., those on non-highly erodible lands or tracts planted to trees. About 9 million acres (24 percent) of CRP are not highly erodible. Of the 27 million acres (76 percent) of CRP that are highly erodible, about half (13 million acres) would be difficult to bring back into cost-effective production within soil erosion standards.

A new CRP program would still probably utilize contracts of 10 years or longer, but would and should include expanded use of long-term conservation easements at landowners' discretion. Re-enrollments and new enrollments undoubtedly would be better targeted to meet identified objectives such as wildlife restoration. Longer-lasting

changes may be included, such as retiring base acreage or requiring post-contract cropping within soil loss tolerance levels for new enrollments.

The size of a reauthorized CRP would depend primarily on the funds appropriated by Congress. Economists at the Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute project that a large CRP (75 to 100 percent of current size) would pay for itself. Every base acre enrolled in CRP is one for which commodity subsidies do not have to be paid. Thus, the annual upfront cost of \$1.8 billion for full extension of CRP would be more than offset by up to \$2 billion in commodity program savings. This favorable cost-benefit comparison does not even include the value of the vast environmental, economic, recreational and other societal benefits of CRP. Another recent economic analysis determined that in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Montana, South Dakota and North Dakota, CRP saved the federal treasury \$16 million in 1991 compared to commodity subsidy payments that would have been made in these six states without the program.

Commodity Program Savings with CRP Extension



Is CRP Too Costly?
 A recent study by Sparks Companies, Inc. predicts a fall in crop prices and net farm income if CRP is not reauthorized. Their analysis shows that when all CRP contracts are terminated, wheat and sorghum prices will drop 36 cents, barley 53 cents, corn by almost 6 cents, oats by 17 cents, rice by 12 cents/cwt, and cotton by almost 3 cents/lb leading to a significant reduction in farm income. Such a drop in crop prices could increase costs of commodity subsidies by another \$1.9 billion as well.

Source: Food and Agriculture Policy Research Institute

No Action

Since 1985, USDA has paid farmers to idle an average of about 60 million acres of cropland in annual or long-term set-aside programs, including CRP. Surplus cropland can be idled in ways that positively affect agriculture, society and the environment (for example, CRP) or in ways that negatively affect them (such as annual set-asides). CRP has demonstrated that surplus cropland can be retired for relatively long periods without adverse impacts to agriculture or farmers.

If Congress takes no action to renew CRP, program benefits will fade as most contracts expire. Under this “no action” alternative, conservationists would try to save as much perennial vegetative cover as possible, using alternative federal, state, local and private funding. Their success, however, would be extremely limited given that this alternative funding totals perhaps less than 1 percent of CRP’s current appropriation.

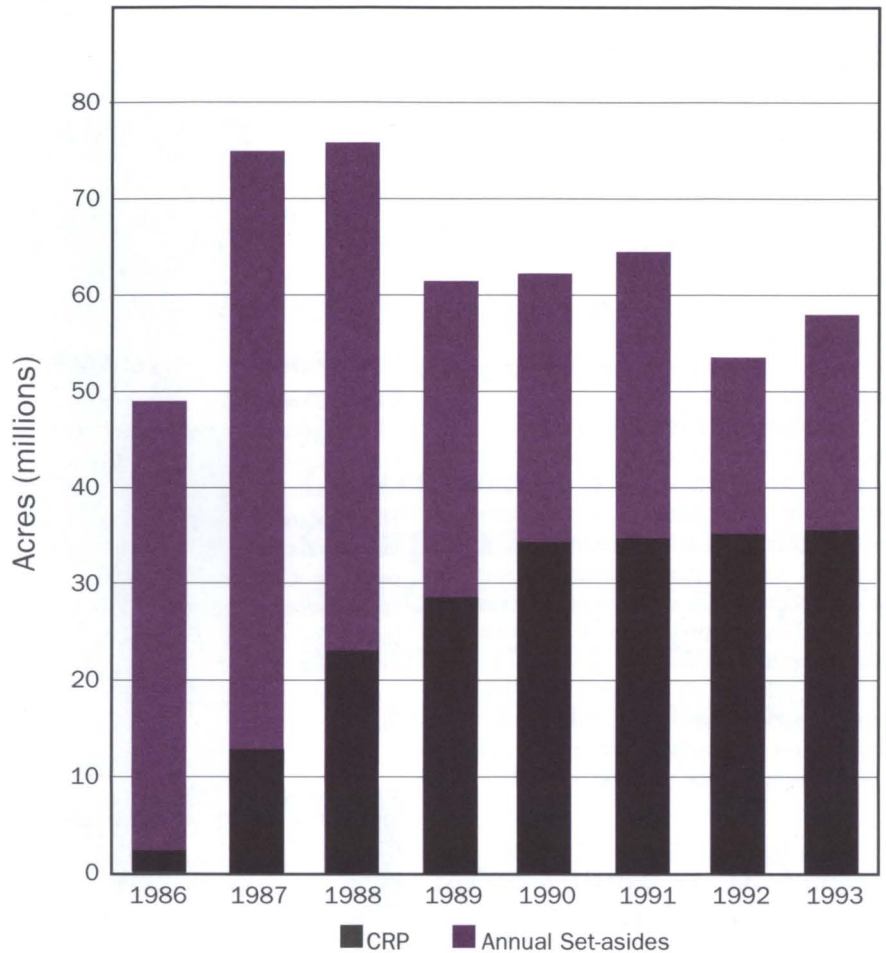
A significant portion of CRP’s erosion control and water quality benefits could be maintained on converted cropland through Conservation Compliance requirements. However, the vast majority of CRP’s wildlife benefits accruing from the undisturbed grassland habitat it established would be lost. Furthermore, because of the continuing need to idle surplus cropland, increases in annual set-aside acreage would further negatively impact wildlife.

Legislation already exists that allows for the continuation of CRP contracts issued during the first five years (1985-1990). The 1990 Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to either extend eligible high-priority contracts for 10 years or purchase long-term or permanent easements. The extent to which the Secretary will attempt to utilize such authority or Congress will appropriate the necessary funds is unknown.

What is known is that almost two-thirds of CRP (23 million acres) is base acreage that would be eligible for subsidy payments under current commodity support programs. Assuming that no alternate large-scale, long-term set-aside program existed, surveys show that, not coincidentally, 23 million acres of CRP acreage would return to commodity crop produc-

A Wildlife Conservation Legacy

Idled and Diverted Cropland



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

tion when existing CRP contracts expire; most of the rest would likely be hayed or grazed extensively. Thus, current U.S. agriculture policies will work at cross purposes to entice producers to undo the conservation work that CRP just finished paying them to do.

If CRP is not reauthorized or is scaled back significantly so that millions of acres return to commodity production, USDA will have no choice but to use alternate mechanisms to continue idling these acres. Consequently, annual set-asides under the Acreage Reduction Program or the 0-50/85 Program must increase proportionally.

This tradeoff—annual instead of multi-year or long-term set-asides—will negatively impact all interests, especially wildlife. Annual set-aside acreage generally provides poor or no wildlife habitat. Without incentives for establishing protective vegetative

cover producers respond by minimizing their investment in annual set-aside cover. In Ohio, for example, more than 70 percent of all annual set-aside fields surveyed provided no nesting opportunity for wildlife. Even when adequate vegetative cover is established on annual set-aside lands, USDA policies regarding compliance management and mandatory weed control can have devastating effects on wildlife. Studies in Minnesota reveal that annual set-aside creates an ecological trap for wildlife. Birds are enticed by early season cover to nest in set-aside acres. Then the nests, young and even some adults are destroyed as producers are required by USDA to mow or disk the cover during the peak of breeding activity. As a result, the amount of annual set-aside land generally is negatively correlated with wildlife populations in Minnesota.

Policy Alternatives for CRP

Multyear Set-asides:

Should CRP be eliminated, many of its features could be provided if USDA utilized multiyear set-asides with strong cover requirements instead of annual set-asides for most acres. CRP has demonstrated the practical and political viability of set-asides that last longer than one year.

Consequently, the Acreage Reduction Program could be modified to foster widespread use of three- to five-year set-asides in place of annual ones.

Multyear set-asides would provide large areas of undisturbed vegetation, in both blocks and strips, that could be suitable quality for wildlife. The designated set-aside acres would be the most marginal cropland on each participating farm and would include such environmentally valuable land as cropped wetlands and very highly erodible sites.

Sole reliance on multiyear set-asides has two fundamental shortcomings. First, the amount of set-aside acres required by USDA changes each year, occasionally

“If CRP is eliminated, many of its features could be provided if USDA utilized multi-year set-asides with strong cover requirements instead of annual set-asides for most acres. CRP has demonstrated the practical and political viability of set-asides that last longer than one year.”

dropping to zero. Such fluctuations in acreage requirements create a disincentive for producers wishing to invest in long-term protective vegetative cover. Second, acres included in a multiyear set-aside would be distributed more evenly across the country, and wildlife population gains in the Great Plains, where the majority of CRP currently exists, would be lost.

Long-term or Permanent Easements:

Long-term or permanent conservation easements can be an attractive substitute for 10-year contracts in some situations. The Wetlands Reserve Program has demonstrated that many farmers are willing to sell permanent easements on wetlands for approximately the market value of that land. The sum of 10 years of CRP payments may approach or exceed the easement value of the land under many contracts.

Landowners, however, may not be as agreeable to long-term or permanent easements on uplands that reliably and profitably produce crops. The 1994 Soil and Water Conservation Society national survey indicates that 18 percent of all current CRP participants would consider selling permanent easements on their land and that the average cost would be nearly \$1,000 per acre.

Landowner skepticism, legal considerations and political unpalatability limit the scope of easement acquisitions. A combination of long-term contracts and permanent easements may be necessary to create a land retirement program with the magnitude of CRP.

CRP Contract Holder Survey: 1990 vs. 1993

Post-Contract Plans for CRP:

	1990	1993
Return to cropping	53%	63%
Hay or graze	34%	23%
Keep in trees/wildlife	9%	9%
Sell or other use	4%	5%

Interest in Permanent CRP Easements:

	1990	1993
Percent of CRP acreage	27%	18%
Average Cost of Easement	\$773	\$1,000

Source: Soil and Water Conservation Society



“An alternative to incentive-based programs is reliance on disincentive and regulatory protection to deter the degradation of resources. Such programs as Swampbuster, Conservation Compliance and the federal Clean Water Act play an important role in conserving resources.”

Various compromises, however, could and should be explored. Easements of 20 to 30 years could be more acceptable to farmers and would provide more lasting benefits to the public than 10-year contracts. Longer term contracts of similar length with options for farmers to periodically “buy out” of future contract obligations by paying back previously received federal contract payments could be even more acceptable to landowners and would require much less legal maneuvering. Regardless of the mechanism to achieve such long-term protection, economic uses likely will be allowed, possibly reducing the wildlife habitat value.

Regulatory Protection:

An alternative to incentive-based programs is reliance on disincentive and regulatory protection to deter the degradation of resources. Such programs as Swampbuster, Conservation Compliance and the federal Clean Water Act play an important role in conserving resources. Twenty-six million acres (approximately 3/4) of CRP meet erodibility criteria requiring

implementation of a soil erosion plan under Conservation Compliance. Some of this land is so erosive that it is more likely to be hayed or grazed than recropped. Another 2 million acres could meet Swampbuster and Clean Water Act wetland definitions.

However, Conservation Compliance and Swampbuster have limitations that should be recognized. First, both programs protect soil, water or wildlife resources only on lands for which the producer participates in federal commodity programs. Second, both programs allow continuation of commodity crop production on affected lands. Thus, even when implemented appropriately and enforced rigidly, neither program will provide significant protection for the undisturbed wildlife habitat that CRP has created.

Another shortfall of such regulatory programs is that they can reduce degradation of existing resources, but have limited effect in improving them. Strong, well-funded incentive programs, when coupled with regulatory programs, provide the needed stimulus to substantially improve the resource status quo. If proven incentives are abandoned as a mechanism to provide wildlife habitat, the compliance approach could be modified to require suitable habitat on set-aside acres as a condition for receiving federal subsidies. This alternative approach would require strict cover requirements and enforcement.

“Long-term or permanent conservation easements can be an attractive substitute for 10-year contracts in some situations.”

Targeting CRP to Meet Objectives

If CRP is reauthorized, the program's objectives will most likely be evaluated and refined. CRP could provide even greater cost-effectiveness, including expanded conservation and other societal benefits, if the program is targeted more carefully to meet identified objectives. What, specifically, these objectives will be is a matter of debate. Policy makers may not adopt the original objectives of promoting soil and water conservation and reducing commodity surpluses. Conversely, they also may change the program's multipurpose focus to a single purpose focus.

Before examining the implications of various individual alternative objectives, it is important to emphasize that wildlife conservationists support agricultural programs that provide meaningful wildlife, water quality, soil conservation and other societal benefits. Thus, a future CRP ideally would be charged to achieve multiple purposes and would be large enough and targeted appropriately to do so. Such a program would require design and implementation features at the national, state and local levels to blend program elements to meet objectives in all of these important areas.

The most popular alternative objectives being considered for CRP are: wildlife, water quality, wind erosion and commodity supply control. Each one can dramatically affect the six CRP features beneficial to wildlife—a vast amount of acreage, emphasis in the prairies, large blocks of habitat, relatively undisturbed vegetation, cover types suitable for wildlife, and protection of diverse habitats. These four alternative objectives and their impacts on these features, and thus on wildlife, are addressed below.

Wildlife

A CRP with the primary objective of enhancing wildlife populations would be comparable in size to the current program, and would emphasize enrollment in the prairies. Within the prairies, large blocks of CRP grassland would be targeted to specific areas with high potential breeding activity by priority species. Tracts including small wetlands and their watersheds would be most valuable, providing benefits to the greatest number of species. CRP outside the prairies would occur mostly as smaller or partial fields, including wide field borders and riparian corridors.

Exchanging non-highly erodible land that is currently enrolled in CRP for highly erodible land not currently enrolled could be compatible with wildlife objectives. CRP acreage would be established or converted to cover types beneficial to wildlife, in consultation with state or federal wildlife biologists. Since idle vegetation is the most unique feature of CRP for wildlife, economic uses of the vegetation would be limited to minimize uncontrolled disturbances. However, active habitat management—judiciously conducted through guidelines to promote wildlife—would be allowed or even fostered on most tracts.

Also, refined targeting at the local level can further optimize wildlife benefits. For example, the FWS has demonstrated with population models that simply shifting the 25 to 30 percent of CRP acreage in North Dakota that is in areas of relatively low waterfowl productivity to pothole wetland areas with higher waterfowl productivity would increase waterfowl production on CRP lands by 26 percent above current levels, while saving \$6.1 million annually. This level of production across a broad area actually would be sufficient to begin rebuilding depleted duck populations. This process of trading up to higher quality CRP enrollments may require adjustments to county acreage caps.

“CRP could provide even greater cost-effectiveness, including expanded conservation and other societal benefits, if the program is targeted more carefully to meet identified objectives.”

Water Quality

A CRP targeted to improve water quality by reducing nonpoint source pollution would emphasize regions of the country that are subject to high rates of water erosion with high annual rainfall or subject to flash flooding. This shift would occur at the expense of areas with high wind erosion rates, since wind erosion is not considered a significant nonpoint source of water pollution. Thus, dominant CRP enrollment would shift from the Great Plains to the eastern and midwestern United States, with extra emphasis on conservation priority areas such as the Great Lakes, Mississippi River basin and the Chesapeake Bay.

Total CRP acreage would decrease by a degree of magnitude, since a huge land retirement program is not necessary to sufficiently improve water quality. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that three to seven million acres of filter strips nationwide would be adequate to solve most water quality problems caused by agriculture. Whole field enrollments would be replaced with buffer strips and partial fields adjacent to waterways, streams, lakes and wetlands. Cover types would be designed to best filter sediments and other pollutants. Economic uses that do not reduce the soil-saving capability of the vegetation likely would be allowed.

Some unique habitat types such as cropped wetlands, which themselves are not very erodible, would be lost from CRP. However, riparian areas and other wildlife corridors would receive increased emphasis.

“The benefits to fisheries and other aquatic life of a water quality-oriented CRP could be tremendous.”

The benefits to fisheries and other aquatic life of a water quality-oriented CRP could be tremendous. Some habitat for adaptable resident species of wildlife also might be provided in the eastern half of the United States, depending on cover types and management practices. In addition, riparian areas would provide valuable travel and migratory corridors for many wildlife species.

However, the wildlife benefits that CRP now provides to many species of grassland-nesting birds in the prairies would be lost. This group of species already is declining faster than any other group of birds in North America. Safe and attractive breeding habitat sufficient to stabilize and increase populations of these songbirds, raptors, shorebirds, prairie grouse and ducks can be provided only by large areas of relatively undisturbed blocks of grass.

Wind Erosion

A program targeted to reduce wind erosion likely would maintain a large acreage but would increase enrollment in the Great Plains wheat-growing country. Large blocks of CRP in grass cover would be emphasized in addition to extensive field windbreaks. Non-highly erodible land would be released from the program while new highly erodible land would be enrolled. Some unique habitat types such as cropped wetlands, which themselves are not erodible, might still be incorporated into large upland tracts. Economic uses such as haying, grazing and production of biomass for energy might be allowed. Allowing such uses would foster establishment of cover types designed to meet those needs, at the expense of wildlife habitat. Some county acreage caps may need to be waived to adequately address wind erosion.

CRP wind erosion reduction strategies could provide substantial wildlife benefits, primarily because of the prairie emphasis, extensive acreage and large blocks of cover. Wildlife benefits could be enhanced if enrollments to control wind erosion were targeted carefully to coincide with areas of high wildlife value. The magnitude of wildlife benefits would be dependent on the cover types established and the management of the cover for economic uses. If cover types were chosen and managed to optimize economic uses, wildlife benefits would be limited.

Commodity Supply Control

CRP has played an important role in limiting supplies and raising commodity prices. A recent study by the Sparks Companies, Inc. indicates that when all CRP contracts are terminated, the price of wheat and sorghum will drop 36 cents, barley 53 cents, corn by almost 6 cents, oats by 17 cents, rice by 12 cents and cotton by almost 3 cents, leading to a significant reduction in farm income. A CRP targeted to continue controlling supplies of certain major commodities would emphasize enrollment in the major production regions for the commodities of concern. An extensive program would be created as large blocks of cropland were enrolled.

This type of CRP could provide substantial benefits to wildlife in addition to commodity supply control assuming extensive enrollments of large CRP tracts in prairie wheat and corn country. However, targeting to areas, counties, or sites with maximum wildlife potential within the prairies probably would be minimal. In addition, the types of cover established and management practices allowed would likely receive limited attention, especially with respect to wildlife benefits. Finally, liberal economic uses probably would be encouraged for the purpose of minimizing program costs, thus reducing the habitat value.

“This type of CRP could provide substantial benefits to wildlife in addition to commodity supply control assuming extensive enrollments of large CRP tracts in prairie wheat and corn country.”

What others are saying about CRP

“CRP has restored pheasant populations in our state to levels that we haven’t seen for decades. For sportsmen, the ‘good old days’ are right now. It is essential that we maintain CRP in the 1995 Farm Bill.”
Doug Hansen, Director, South Dakota Division of Wildlife

“A broad coalition of conservation organizations has been brought together in support of CRP. We all recognize its importance to wildlife and are working together to see that it is continued.”
Matthew B. Connolly, Jr.
Executive Vice President, Ducks Unlimited Inc.

“Increased hunting associated with CRP has been an important boost to our rural economy. We need this program in our state now and in the future.”
The Honorable Edward T. Schafer, Governor, North Dakota

“The future of myriad game and nongame wildlife species depends on CRP. It is imperative the conservationists work with the agriculture community to support CRP and include it in the 1995 Farm Bill.”
Dr. Rollin Sparrowe, President, Wildlife Management Institute

“Our support of the Conservation Reserve Program remains strong, and the Service wants to work with our partners and the Department of Agriculture to develop fish and wildlife benefits in the 1995 Farm Bill that are even more cost effective and lasting.”
Mollie Beattie, Director, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

“We plan to work closely with the Congress to continue CRP in order to achieve our conservation, wildlife and agricultural objectives.”
The Honorable Mike Espy, Secretary of Agriculture

“While CRP may not be the only program that could provide this combination of benefits, it is the only program that has proven successful at doing so on such a large scale. America needs the Conservation Reserve Program.”

Conclusion

CRP has been successful because farmers, taxpayers, wildlife and the environment all benefit. Any future CRP should continue to address the multiple objectives of improving wildlife conservation, water quality, soil conservation and crop surpluses. Specifically, CRP should accomplish these objectives by remaining predominantly a grassland restoration program because: (1) the need for prairie restoration for wildlife is extremely great; (2) most marginal cropland and excess production capacity is located in the grass-dominated prairies; (3) grassland restoration gives farmers flexibility and opportunity to diversify future uses of their land; and (4) a readily available cropland reservoir is perceived by many as a needed hedge against future agricultural shortages.

No other federal agricultural conservation program provides as many economic, environmental and wildlife benefits as does CRP. The key to the program's wildlife success is its unique combination of six features—a vast amount of acreage, emphasis in the prairies, large blocks of habitat, relatively undisturbed vegetation, vegetation suitable for wildlife, and protection of diverse habitats.

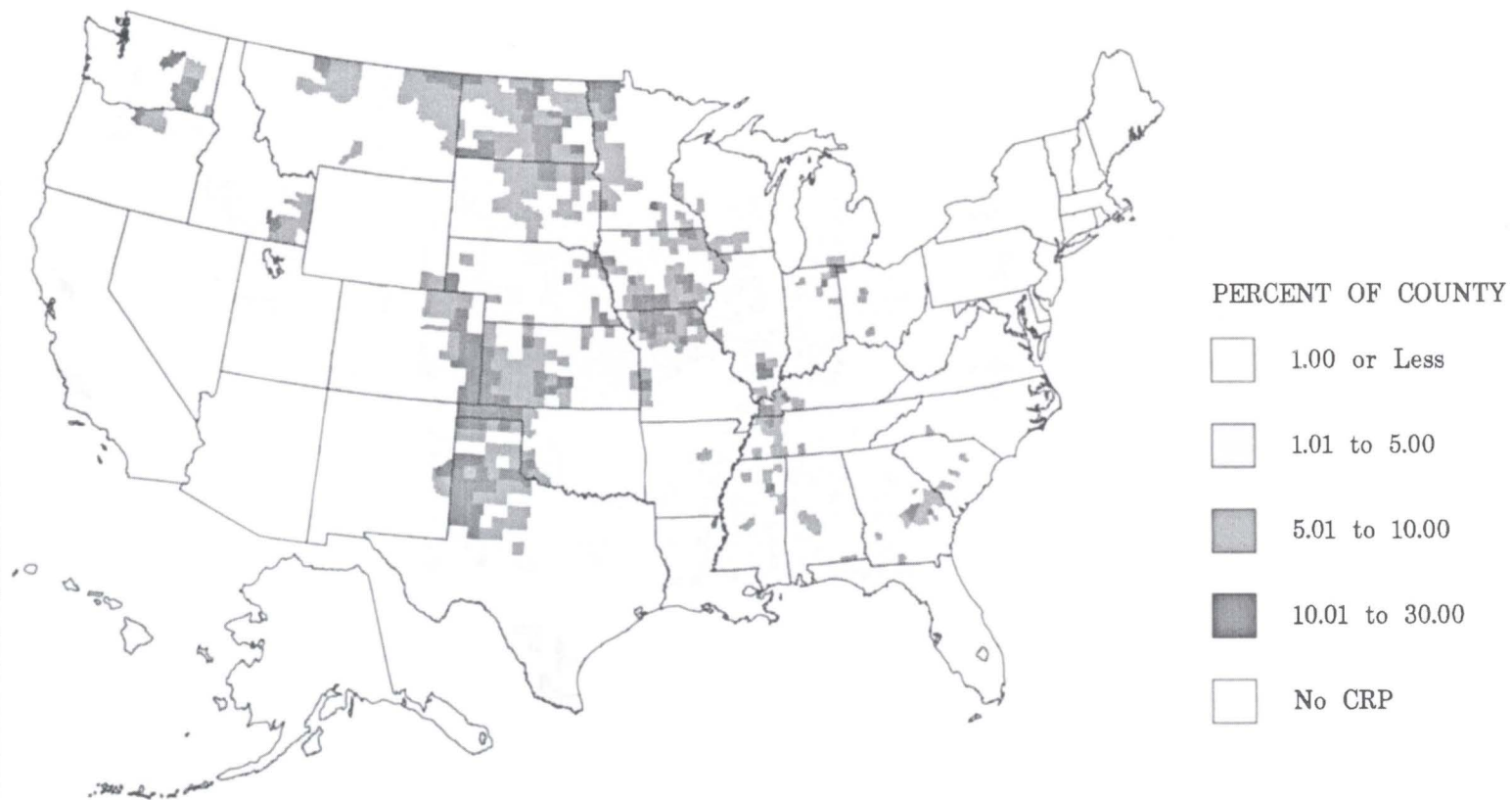
These existing six features should be considered and incorporated into a reauthorized CRP and into future agricultural conservation programs. In fact, wildlife population benefits through increased habitat should be made an explicit objective of all future agricultural conservation programs.

While CRP may not be the only program that could provide this combination of benefits, it is the only program that has proven successful at doing so on such a large scale. America needs the Conservation Reserve Program.

“No other federal agricultural conservation program provides as many economic, environmental and wildlife benefits as does CRP.”

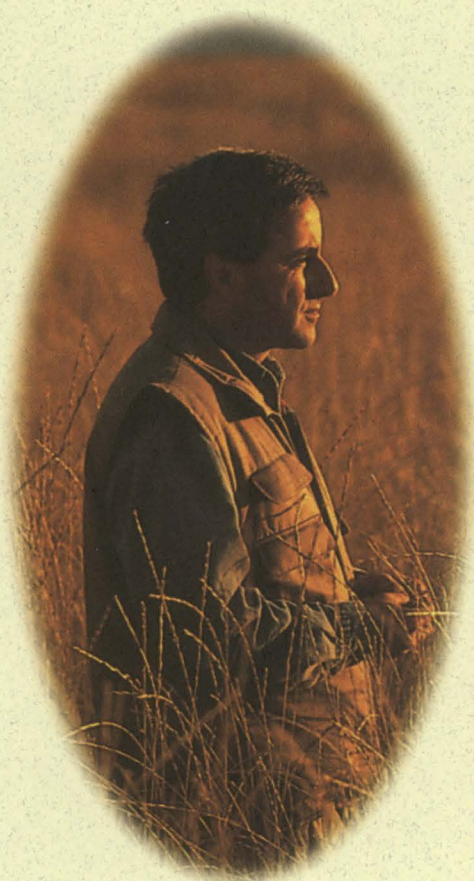
PERCENT OF COUNTY IN CRP

SIGNUPS 1-11



NATIONAL BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

America Needs



the

Conservation

Reserve

Program





The Conservation Reserve

Program has created more

than 36 million acres of

wildlife habitat. Yet most of

these grasslands and wetlands

could be lost if Congress and

the administration fails to

preserve this federal agricul-

ture program in the 1995

Farm Bill. Don't let this

wildlife legacy slip away.



We could lose one of our most important wildlife habitat programs

Unless Congress and the administration act, we will lose one of the most important wildlife habitat programs in the country—the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

CRP originally was designed to control soil erosion and reduce commodity surpluses by paying farmers to remove highly erodible lands from crop production for 10 years and plant them in grasses and other protective vegetation. To date, more than 375,000 farmers in 47 states have enrolled 36.4 million acres.

CRP has been successful because both farmers and the environment benefit. CRP has been an incredible boon for wildlife, especially grassland species. In addition, CRP has been extremely effective in reducing soil erosion and has improved water quality by reducing chemical pesticide use and soil run-off.



CRP costs less and provides more benefits



CRP is a sound investment. It costs less and provides more benefits, both environmental and agricultural, than federal commodity programs that are likely to take over if CRP is not continued.

Established under the 1985 Food Security Act, CRP contracts begin expiring in 1995 unless Congress and the administration act. Without CRP at least 23 million acres of wildlife habitat will be returned to crop production. The majority of the remaining CRP is expected to be extensively grazed or hayed, reducing its value to many grassland species. Water quality will diminish and a nearly \$20-billion investment in conservation will be lost.

No other federal agricultural conservation program provides as many economic, environmental and wildlife benefits as does CRP. America cannot afford to lose CRP.



Six CRP features valuable to wildlife

The Conservation Reserve Program contains six features that in combination make it particularly valuable for wildlife conservation. Specifically, CRP creates tens of millions of acres of habitat, with more than two-thirds in prairie regions where undisturbed grassland habitat is extremely rare. Much of CRP land is in large blocks planted to grasses and forbs suitable for prairie wildlife. The vegetation is left relatively undisturbed for 10 years, which is especially important for wildlife. And while the majority of land enrolled in CRP is upland, the program also has restored cropped wetlands, floodplains and other riparian areas.

1

Vast amount of acreage

CRP has created 36.4 million acres of wildlife habitat. This acreage is twice as large as the combined area of the National Wildlife Refuge System and all state-owned wildlife management areas in the contiguous United States. Habitat restoration of this magnitude is necessary to restore and sustain dwindling wildlife populations and to prevent possible additions to endangered species listings.

2

Emphasis in prairies

The Great Plains is one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. More than 95% of tall-grass prairie and up to 80% of mixed and shortgrass prairie have been converted to agriculture. Prairie wildlife suffer from the resulting lack of habitat. Fortunately, CRP is primarily a grassland program and more than two-thirds of CRP land is located in prairie regions. CRP has had a dramatic positive impact on dwindling grassland-nesting birds.

3

Large blocks of habitat

CRP lands often provide extensive habitat blocks (80 acres and larger) that otherwise are rare on agricultural lands. Many bird species in the prairies require large tracts of habitat for successful breeding. Small parcels of land and narrow strips of vegetation, such as are normal on farms without CRP, are easily searched by predators and offer little protection for nesting birds or their eggs.

4

Relatively undisturbed vegetation

Grasslands undisturbed by human activities represent one of the rarest and most valuable habitats for wildlife in agricultural landscapes. Thus, CRP's relatively idle vegetative cover is probably its most unique and valuable feature for wildlife. Periodic disturbances to CRP every four to six years by burning, grazing, mowing or haying could mimic natural disturbances. If these activities were judiciously managed to minimize negative impacts to nesting birds and other wildlife, they actually could improve productivity of the habitat for these species.

5

Vegetation suitable for wildlife

At least 87% of CRP lands is planted in grass-dominated cover. Wildlife prefer diverse mixtures of grasses and forbs as opposed to single-species plantings. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has worked closely with wildlife agencies in some states to emphasize mixtures of native and tame grasses and forbs that benefit both farmers and wildlife.

Diverse habitats protected

While CRP focuses on highly erodible soils, it also provides for the enrollment of other environmentally valuable lands. These include cropped wetlands, floodplains subject to scour erosion and other riparian areas. Inclusion of cropped wetlands has been particularly beneficial for breeding waterfowl and other migratory waterbirds. In North Dakota, for example, over 114,000 individual wetlands have been enrolled. These potholes are interspersed among large tracts of idle grasses, re-creating the basic components of the prairie ecosystem that are so critical for migratory birds and other wildlife there.



CRP reduces soil erosion & improves water and air quality

By retiring highly erodible lands, CRP has saved 700 million tons of topsoil each year from washing or blowing away. This reduces water pollution caused by the increased flow of sediments and the runoff of pesticides and fertilizers into rivers, streams and lakes. It also improves air quality by reducing the number and size of dust storms in the prairie region. CRP will provide between \$3.4 and \$11.2 billion in environmental benefits over the life of the current program, according to economists at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

If America saves CRP

Americans will GAIN:

- millions of acres of wildlife habitat
- soil erosion reduction
- improved water quality
- increased farm income
- stimulation of rural economies
- abundant recreational opportunities

Americans will AVOID:

- higher costs to taxpayers
- increased commodity surpluses
- costly environmental impacts
- unstable farm and rural economies



PAUL HORSTED

CRP helps farmers and stimulates local economics.
CRP is a good investment.

Farmers will lose if Congress does not continue CRP. Over the life of the program, CRP produced an increase in net farm income of \$9 to \$20 billion in the form of rental payments to farmers and increased prices for agricultural crops.

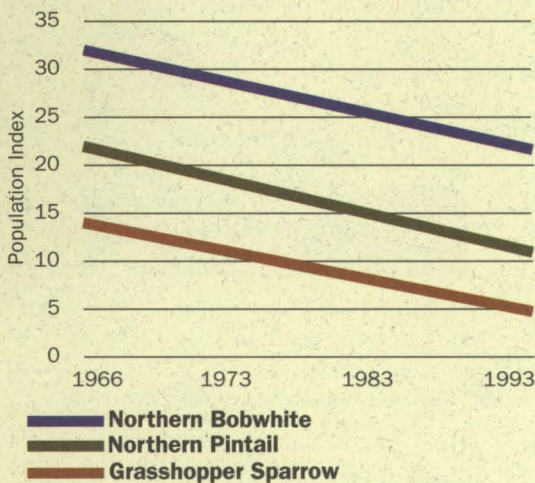
Rural communities have also reaped economic rewards from CRP and the wildlife it has rejuvenated and sustained. Wildlife-associated recreation on CRP lands has generated more than \$9 billion in revenues and has created numerous new jobs in rural areas over the life of the program. For instance, increased pheasant populations in South Dakota in 1993 alone attracted almost 130,000 sportsmen who spent more than \$50 million in the state.

Not only does CRP provide wildlife habitat, improve environmental quality, and benefit farmers, CRP also helps the American taxpayer. CRP costs millions less than the agricultural commodity programs that would replace it. CRP currently costs \$1.8 billion per year. If it is not continued, the commodity programs alone that replace it could cost as much as \$2 billion per year.

Grassland birds are rebounding under CRP

Nationwide, declines in grassland birds have been steeper, more consistent, and more geographically wide spread than that of any other group of North American birds. CRP has the potential to reverse these trends. CRP has provided four times as much grassland nesting habitat in the Great Plains as the combined efforts of all the federal and state wildlife agencies. More than 75 bird species use CRP lands in this valuable grassland region.

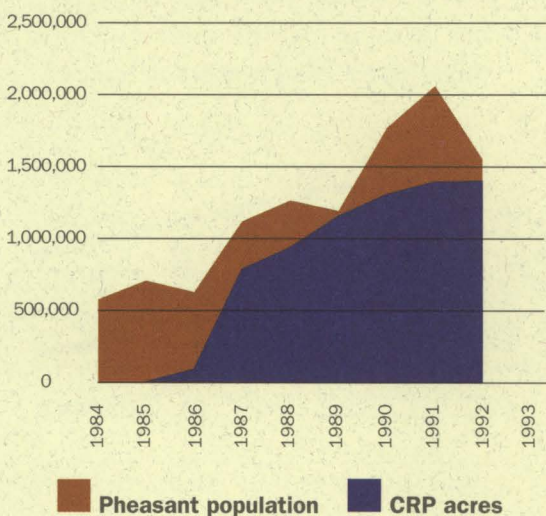
Grassland wildlife population trends



Waterfowl: Most prairie-nesting duck species have suffered dramatic population declines over the last two decades. Mallards, blue-winged teal and pintails, all of which nest in upland grasses, have declined by 43, 45 and 71% respectively since the 1970s. Waterfowl are now beginning to rebound under CRP. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimates that CRP is producing three million additional ducks in North and South Dakota alone this year. The objectives of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan—a blueprint for restoring continental populations of waterfowl—cannot be met without continuation of CRP.

Songbirds: Populations of grassland nesting birds, such as lark buntings and grasshopper sparrows, have declined by more than 50% since 1966. Thanks to CRP, many grassland birds now are actually increasing in areas with high CRP enrollment. Researchers have found that, in the Great Plains, grassland bird nests are 21 times more abundant in CRP than in cropland and are 32 times more likely to hatch.

Ring-necked pheasant and CRP trends in Minnesota



Upland Gamebirds: Two of the most popular upland gamebirds—ring-necked pheasant and northern bobwhite quail—have declined by 21% and 35% respectively during the last 30 years. However, in states such as North and South Dakota, Ohio and Minnesota, ring-necked pheasant populations have doubled in response to CRP. At the individual farm level, increases in ring-necked pheasant and northern bobwhite quail numbers have been even more dramatic. By creating new feeding, nesting and brood habitat in Texas, CRP also has reestablished lesser prairies chickens in counties where they have been absent for decades.

Threatened and endangered species:

The greater prairie-chicken, formerly a state-listed endangered species in Colorado, was changed to threatened status in late 1993, due in part to substantial population increases on CRP lands. In Idaho, Columbian sharp-tailed grouse, a candidate for federal listing as a threatened species, are making a dramatic recovery on CRP lands. CRP may be helping stabilize populations of many other species and preventing them from becoming threatened or endangered.

Congress and the administration hold the key to CRP's future

The only sure way to preserve the Conservation Reserve Program is through action by Congress and the administration. Your President, Secretary of Agriculture, representatives and senators need to know that CRP is a highly successful program where farmers, taxpayers, wildlife and the environment all come out winners. They do respond to your calls and letters. Your voice can make a difference in the future of our nation's wildlife.

Wildlife conservation coalition is working to extend CRP

CRP is such a vital program for our nation's wildlife that a coalition of wildlife conservation groups and government agencies is working to support extension of the Conservation Reserve Program. The coalition is also making recommendations for ways to improve CRP's effectiveness for wildlife and the environment. The coalition's analysis and program recommendations have been compiled in a paper, "The Conservation Reserve Program: Building a Lasting Wildlife Conservation Legacy," which is available at no charge.

“CRP has restored pheasant populations in our state to levels that we haven’t seen for decades. For sportsmen, the ‘good old days’ are right now. It is essential that we maintain CRP in the 1995 Farm Bill.”

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Director, South Dakota Division of Wildlife

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Matthew B. Connolly, Jr.

Executive Vice President, Ducks Unlimited Inc.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

To receive a single copy of the Coalition’s CRP paper, or for more information about CRP, contact the:

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Washington, DC 20005
(202) 371-1808.

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Colorado Division of Wildlife
Delta Waterfowl
Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
National Rifle Association of America
Nebraska Game and Parks Commission
North Dakota Game and Fish Department
Ohio Division of Wildlife
Pheasants Forever
Quail Unlimited
South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
The Wildlife Society
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