



USDA announces wildlife habitat expansion & general 2010 CRP signup

By Agri-Pulse Staff

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Des Moines, Iowa, Feb. 27 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Saturday that USDA has approved an additional 300,000 acres for conservation projects under the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These additional areas include 150,000 acres for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative; 50,000 acres for the Duck Nesting Habitat Initiative; and 100,000 acres for the Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds Initiative. Vilsack made this announcement at the Pheasant Fest annual meeting.

“Increasing acreage caps to meet the demand for these critical programs will help us do more for wildlife on the same number of acres,” said Vilsack. “This is part of our efforts to target conservation to give the American taxpayer more bang for the buck in terms of improved water and air quality, reduced erosion, and benefits to the climate.”

Secretary Vilsack also announced that USDA would conduct a general CRP signup later this year, with program details and the specific signup start date to be announced upon completion of an Environmental Impact Statement.

“It is my goal to ensure that we maximize CRP enrollment - and holding a general CRP signup is an additional step we can take to enroll acres in this program,” said Vilsack.

Currently USDA’s SAFE portfolio includes 75 approved projects in 22 states covering up to 500,000 acres. With these additional acres, SAFE projects may now cover up to 650,000 acres. SAFE helps state and regional agencies, non-profit organizations and others address local wildlife objectives by partnering with farmers and ranchers to restore wildlife habitats. SAFE provides conservation partners the flexibility to create projects and install conservation practices that target the specific needs of highly valued wildlife species. By developing SAFE projects, these organizations and their partners enhance the effectiveness of CRP by helping to establish higher quality habitat and healthier ecosystems for species of concern and other wildlife.

Restoring an additional 50,000 acres of wetland ecosystems for the Duck Nesting Habitat Initiative will provide nesting ducks with critical habitat, food and nesting cover as well as security from predators. This habitat encompasses ecosystems in the Prairie Pothole

Region, including parts of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. The initiative also benefits other wildlife species, filters runoff, recharges groundwater supplies, protects drinking water and reduces downstream flooding. With the additional acres, the initiative is now authorized to cover up to 150,000 acres.

The Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds Initiative was created to provide 250,000 acres of early successional grass buffers along agricultural field borders. With these additional acres, upland bird habitat under the initiative may now total up to 350,000 acres. The initiative partners USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) with landowners, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 32 state fish and wildlife agencies, and numerous conservation and wildlife groups.

CRP is the nation's largest private land conservation program with authority to enroll 32 million acres. CRP is a voluntary program available to agricultural producers to help them safeguard environmentally sensitive land. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term, resource-conserving covers to improve the quality of water, control soil erosion and enhance wildlife habitat.

For more information on CRP and other FSA programs, visit your local FSA county office or <http://www.fsa.usda.gov>.

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