Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Conservation Reserve Program

USDA

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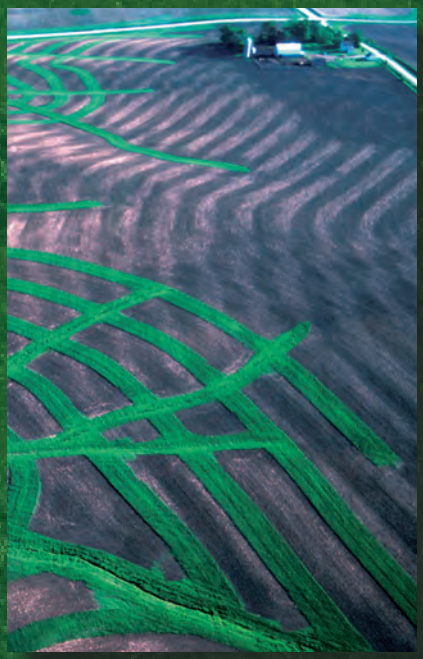
FARM SERVICE AGENCY



December 2014

Final

SUPPLEMENTAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Farm Service Agency
United States Department of Agriculture

Abstract

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) proposes to implement changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) identified in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill). CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 (1985 Farm Bill), as amended, and is governed by regulations published in 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 1410. CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. CRP is a CCC program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) with the support of other Federal and local agencies.

The Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190), implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1500-1508), and FSA's implementing regulations *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799).

The 2014 Farm Bill extends enrollment authority for CRP to 2018 and aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative. Other elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action Alternative. In addition, FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing. The SPEIS addresses the following alternatives:

No Action Alternative. The non-discretionary changes identified in the 2014 Farm Bill include:

- *Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities* – grasslands that would have been previously eligible for the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) are now eligible for enrollment in CRP and enrollment would be limited to no more than 2 million acres. Authorized activities on grasslands would be the same as those previously authorized under GRP.
- *Final Year of Contract* – a CRP participant would be allowed to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program and perform activities to improve or maintain the

existing conservation system during the year prior to the expiration of the contract. Likewise, expiring CRP land can be enrolled in a new program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, without violating the contract.

- *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* - The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes emergency haying and grazing without reduction in rental rate. Prior to this, a standard 25 percent payment reduction (in 2012 and 2013 a payment reduction of 10 percent was used in response to severe drought) was assessed on producers who utilized emergency haying and grazing.

Proposed Action. The discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, as well as additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment and expanding the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing, include:

- *Targeted Enrollment* – FSA proposes to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land using reverse auctions. Targeted enrollment could enable FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap, while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit.
- *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies* – the State Technical Committee must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is: at least once every 5 years, but no more frequently than once every 3 years for managed harvesting, and not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing. Harvesting and grazing activities still must avoid the Primary Nesting Season.
- *Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional Conservation Practices* – the Secretary would be afforded the discretionary authority to make additional conservation practices, that currently are ineligible for any type of haying or grazing, to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during severe drought conditions. Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed conservation practices would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or Federal agencies.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), proposes to implement programmatic changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) based on those changes included in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (2014 Farm Bill). CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. CRP is a CCC program administered by FSA with the support of other Federal and local agencies.

This document is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (Public Law 91-190), implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500-1508), and FSA's implementing regulations *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799). The Proposed Action being addressed in this document is programmatic in nature and some of the components have been analyzed previously in other NEPA documents; therefore, this document is a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) and examines only those aspects of the program not covered in previous analyses.

PROPOSED ACTION AND NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

FSA proposes to implement changes to CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill, which extends the enrollment authority for CRP to 2018. The 2014 Farm Bill aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative. Other elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action. In addition, FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought-designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

No Action Alternative. The non-discretionary changes identified in the 2014 Farm Bill include:

- *Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities* – grasslands that would have been previously eligible for the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) are now eligible for enrollment in CRP and enrollment is limited to no more than 2 million acres. Authorized activities on grasslands would be the same as those previously authorized under GRP.
- *Final Year of Contract* – a CRP participant is allowed to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program and perform activities to improve or maintain the existing conservation system during the year prior to the expiration of the contract. Likewise, expiring

CRP land can be enrolled in a new program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, without violating the contract.

- *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* - The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes emergency haying and grazing without reduction in rental rate. Prior to this, a standard 25 percent payment reduction (in 2012 and 2013 a payment reduction of 10 percent was used in response to severe drought) was assessed on producers who utilized emergency haying and grazing.

Proposed Action. The discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, as well as additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment and expanding the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing, include:

- *Targeted Enrollment* – FSA proposes to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land using reverse auctions. Targeted enrollment could enable FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap, while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit.
- *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies* – the State Technical Committee must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is: at least once every 5 years, but no more frequently than once every 3 years for managed harvesting, and not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing. Harvesting and grazing activities still must avoid the Primary Nesting Season.
- *Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional Conservation Practices* – the Secretary would be afforded the discretionary authority to make additional conservation practices, that currently are ineligible for any type of haying or grazing, to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during severe drought conditions. Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed conservation practices would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or Federal agencies.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

The SPEIS analyzes the potential environmental consequences from implementation of the Proposed Action on the natural and human environment. Resources addressed in the SPEIS include: vegetation, wildlife, protected species, soils, surface water, groundwater, floodplains, wetlands, air quality, recreation, and socioeconomics. In accordance with CEQ guidelines, the environmental consequences of the No Action Alternative are provided to serve as a baseline against which to measure the potential impacts of the Proposed Action. A summary of the environmental consequences by resource is provided in **Table ES-1**.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Vegetation	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Retain or restore up to 2 million acres of grasslands. • Short-term negative impacts to vegetation from the potential to spread noxious weeds during authorized maintenance activities and grazing. • Long-term benefits to grasslands, particularly within the Great Plains Ecoregion. • Grazing and other authorized activities would be performed in accordance with Grazing Management Plans. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term, minor impacts to vegetation during allowable activities to improve conservation cover. • Long-term benefits to vegetation by keeping land in conservation, preventing development. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Likely to result in increased use of emergency haying or grazing within authorized counties. • Periodic, emergency haying of CRP grasslands found to have no enduring detrimental effects.	*Targeted Enrollment* • More environmentally sensitive land expected to enroll by targeting certain CPs. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Short-term negative impacts to some types of vegetation from reduced growth period between harvesting or grazing activities. • Long-term positive benefits from maintaining early successional grasslands through harvesting or grazing activities. • Improved plant diversity, composition, and function with managed harvesting or grazing, in accordance with Conservation Plans. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Consecutive years of haying or grazing the same acreage would reduce the growth period and could result in long-term negative impacts to some types of vegetation.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Wildlife	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Retain or restore up to 2 million acres of grassland habitat. • Grassland wildlife, especially in the Great Plains Ecoregion would receive long-term benefits from habitat conservation, particularly grassland bird species. • Grazing and other authorized activities would be done in accordance with Grazing Management Plans. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term minor disturbance to wildlife from allowable activities to improve conservation cover. • Long-term benefits to wildlife and habitats by allowing acreage to remain in conservation and not development. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Temporary alteration of vegetation structure would impact cover for wildlife which provides protection from predators and cover for nesting and rearing young. • Direct impacts related to mortality of individual animals from impacts with harvesting machinery.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to wildlife expected from enrollment of higher quality or sensitive lands into CPs. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Harvesting could have beneficial or detrimental impacts depending on the timing, methods, and habitat. • Harvesting could produce detrimental impacts to ground-nesting birds and direct mortality for smaller animals. • Routine grazing could produce negative impacts to wildlife from direct competition for resources, trampling, and displacement. • Harvesting and grazing could result in routine disturbance necessary to maintain healthy grasslands or early successional habitats, thereby offering increased habitat diversity, which provides long-term benefits to wildlife. • Managed harvesting and routine grazing would continue in accordance with Conservation Plans to support local wildlife and habitat. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Short-term impacts to wildlife from altering food abundance and availability, changing habitat, disturbance, and direct mortality. • Approval by the STC and a modified Conservation Plan would be required to ensure activities are appropriate to local conditions and to ensure there are no long-term negative impacts to wildlife.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Protected Species	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Retain or restore up to 2 million acres of grassland habitat. • Protected species, especially grassland species in the Great Plains Ecoregion, would receive long-term benefits from habitat conservation. • Grazing and other authorized activities would be done in accordance with Grazing Management Plans and would ensure protected species are not impacted. *Final Year of Contract* • Potential for short-term minor disturbance to protected species from allowable activities to improve conservation cover. • Long-term benefits to protected species by allowing acreage to remain in conservation and not development. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Temporary alteration of vegetation structure would impact cover for wildlife which provides protection from predators and cover for nesting and rearing young. • Protected species and measures to protect them would be identified during the site-specific EE.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to protected species from enrollment of land with highest environmental benefit. • Site specific EE would determine presence of protected species and establish BMPs or specific mitigation measures to ensure protection during installation or maintenance of CPs. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • General impacts to protected species the same as those described for wildlife/vegetation. • Site specific EE would determine presence of protected species and establish BMPs or specific mitigation measures for harvesting or grazing activities. • In accordance with FSA policy, activities would not be authorized if protected species would be negatively impacted. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • General impacts to protected species would be similar to those described for wildlife/vegetation. • Site specific EE would determine presence of protected species and establish BMPs or specific mitigation measures for emergency haying or grazing activities.
Soils	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Short-term negative impacts, such as compaction and soil loss, from installation of CPs or other authorized activities. • Long-term benefits to soils by maintaining vegetation cover and limiting agricultural land use, which would reduce potential for soil erosion. *Final Year of Contract* • Temporary, localized soil impacts may occur from allowable activities to improve conservation cover during final year of contract. • Long-term beneficial impacts to soils from land remaining in conservation. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Repetitive years of haying and grazing could increase bare soils and the amount of time bare soils are exposed which makes the soils susceptible to wind or rain erosion.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to soils by better targeting those lands with the highest potential for erosion. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Potential for short-term, localized impacts to soils from compaction due to concentrated hoof action; however, BMPs to ensure dispersion of livestock would be used. • Short-term, localized impacts from reducing the vegetation growth period between activities which could potentially increase erosion from exposed soil. • Conservation Plan would include site specific BMPs for harvesting or grazing activities. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Short-term impacts to soils would be the same as those described for managed harvesting and routine grazing.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences

Resource	No Action Alternative	Proposed Action
Surface Water	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Short-term negative impacts due to soil loss during installation of the CP and authorized activities. • Maintaining native vegetation cover and minimizing agricultural conversion would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides, and metals into adjacent surface waters. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term, localized impacts to surface water from improvement activities due to soil erosion. • Long-term benefits to surface water from land remaining in conservation cover. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Potential for negative impacts to surface water would occur from increased soil erosion due to vegetation loss and soil compaction which could increase runoff potential. • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would minimize or eliminate the potential for long-term negative impacts to surface waters.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to surface water by targeting areas where conservation benefits would be greatest. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Potential for negative impacts to surface water would occur from increased soil erosion due to vegetation loss and soil compaction which could increase runoff potential. • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would minimize or eliminate the potential for long-term negative impacts to surface waters. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • The required site specific Conservation Plan and oversight by the STC would reduce the potential for long-term impacts to surface water.
Groundwater	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Reduced demand for groundwater irrigation. • Short-term impacts from CP installation in areas with shallow groundwater aquifers are possible. • Long-term benefits to groundwater likely due to maintenance of vegetative cover, which increases soil permeability relative to developed areas. *Final Year of Contract* • Long-term benefits to groundwater by land remaining in conservation, and a reduction in demand on groundwater required by agricultural practices. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Little to no direct impact on groundwater would occur from emergency haying and grazing.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to groundwater from enrollment, reduction in irrigation demand, reduction of fertilizer and pesticide use, increased infiltration, and aquifer replenishment. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Little to no direct impact on groundwater would occur from managed harvesting and routine grazing frequency changes. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Little to no direct impact on groundwater would occur from emergency haying and grazing changes.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Floodplains	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Restoration and maintenance of grasslands would provide long-term benefits to adjacent floodplains by minimizing runoff and soil loss. • Minimizing or preventing development would have beneficial impacts to floodplains. *Final Year of Contract* • Long-term benefits would occur to floodplains by retaining land in conservation cover and prohibiting development. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Little to no direct impact to floodplains from emergency haying and grazing.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to floodplains are expected from enrollment of • Lands in the CRP, particularly environmentally sensitive lands. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would prohibit or minimize potential impacts to floodplains. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would prohibit or minimize potential impacts to floodplains.
Wetlands	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Potential short-term negative impacts to adjacent wetlands from installation of CPs. • Long-term benefit to wetlands from maintaining grasslands through soil stabilization, reduced runoff, and reduced development. *Final Year of Contract* • Short-term negative impacts to wetlands from approved improvement activities during final year of contract. • Long-term benefits to adjacent or downstream wetlands from reduced development, runoff, and use of agricultural inputs. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Potential for negative impacts to wetlands would occur from increased soil erosion due to vegetation loss and soil compaction which could increase runoff potential. • Site specific BMPs included in the Conservation Plan would minimize or eliminate the potential for long-term negative impacts to wetlands.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Long-term benefits to wetlands from enrollment of lands into CRP. • Conversion of land to conservation practice would improve quality and function of wetlands. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Adjusted frequencies for managed harvesting and routine grazing would not have any direct impacts to wetlands. • Site specific BMPs identified in the CPs would minimize or eliminate negative impacts to wetlands. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Consecutive years of haying or grazing the same acreage could have long-term negative impacts to wetland and riparian areas.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Air Quality	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Enrollment of up to 2 million acres of grassland vegetation would continue GHG emissions reduction through carbon sequestration. • Little or no change is expected to baseline air quality conditions. *Final Year of Contract* • Maintaining land in conservation cover would have beneficial impacts to air quality through continued carbon sequestration and reduced GHG emissions. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Short-term impacts to the ability of conservation cover to sequester carbon through loss of living biomass.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Enrollment of land in CRP would be beneficial to air quality through reduced emissions from equipment, greater soil stability due to permanent covers, and increased potential for long-term carbon sequestration, when compared to agricultural production. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Change in managed harvesting frequencies would not have significant impacts due to the short time frame of the activity and the large geographic area over which it would occur. • Managed harvesting would not impact grassland cover ability to sequester carbon. • Changing allowable frequency for grazing is not likely to increase CH_4 emissions (a GHG) as the livestock are likely already present in the vicinity. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Short-term impacts to the ability of conservation cover to sequester carbon through loss of living biomass.
Recreation	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Recreation would benefit over the long-term from improved water quality and wildlife habitat by maintaining grassland vegetation cover. *Final Year of Contract* • Long-term benefits to recreation through maintenance of conservation cover that would improve wildlife-related recreation. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Little to no impact to recreation from emergency haying and grazing.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Potential impacts to recreation would be dependent on where Targeted Enrollment occurred; some regions have higher recreational expenditures on CRP lands than others. • In the long-term, Targeted Enrollment would likely have beneficial impacts by enrolling lands with the greatest conservation benefit, thereby increasing wildlife-related recreational opportunities. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Adjusting frequencies is not likely to have any appreciable impact on recreation. • Maintenance of quality conservation cover through approved harvesting and grazing activities would continue to have an overall benefit to recreational activities in the long term. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Similar to managed harvesting and routine grazing, little to no direct impact on recreation from emergency haying and grazing activities would be expected.

Table ES-1. Summary of Environmental Consequences		
Resource	**No Action Alternative**	**Proposed Action**
Socioeconomics	*Grasslands Eligibility* • Enrolling grasslands in CRP would not have any appreciable impact on socioeconomics. *Final Year of Contract* • Allowing enrollment in a long-term conservation easement during the final contract year would have long-term benefits to the socioeconomics of the local area. • Allowing a seamless transition from CRP to another conservation program reduces the risk to the contract holder, and prevents conversion to non-agricultural uses. *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* • Slight socioeconomic benefit to producers from the ability to maintain herds during long, severe drought conditions.	*Targeted Enrollment* • Using Targeted Enrollment to complement the existing Continuous and General Sign-up processes would not result in effects to the economy or communities. • Because of the focus on lands with the greatest environmental benefit, general societal benefits from conservation could be realized at a lower cost than could be realized using other enrollment methodologies. *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing* • Managed harvesting and routine grazing activities have minor, localized socioeconomic benefits; adjusting the frequencies would not result in any changes to existing conditions. *Emergency Haying and Grazing* • Implementation would result in regional and local benefits to producers to maintain herds during long, severe drought conditions.

Note: BMP = best management practice; CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; Farm Service Agency = FSA; GHG = greenhouse gas; STC = State Technical Committee; CP = Conservation Practices; EE = Environment Evaluation; CH_4 = methane.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMA	Agricultural Management Assistance
BCAP	Biomass Crop Assistance Program
BMP	best management practice
CCC	Commodity Credit Corporation
CCPI	Cooperative, Conservation Partnership Initiative
CEC	Commission for Environmental Cooperation
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CH_4	Methane
CO_2	carbon dioxide
CO_2e	carbon dioxide equivalent
CP	conservation practice
CPA	Conservation Priority Area
CREP	Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
CRP	Conservation Reserve Program
CSP	Conservation Stewardship Program
CTA	Conservation Technical Assistance
CWA	Clean Water Act
EA	Environmental Assessment
EE	Environmental Evaluation
eFOTG	Field Office Technical Guide
EI	Erodibility Index
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EO	Executive Order
EQIP	Environmental Quality Incentives Program
ERS	Economic Research Service
ESA	Endangered Species Act
FAPRI	Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
FRPP	Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
FSA	Farm Service Agency
FWP	Farmable Wetland Program
FY	fiscal year
GHG	greenhouse gas
GRP	Grassland Reserve Program
HEL	highly erodible land
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
LIP	Landowner Incentive Program
NAAQS	National Ambient Air Quality Standards
NASS	National Agriculture Statistics Service
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NMFS	National Marine Fisheries Service
NOA	Notice of Availability

NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NOI	Notice of Intent
NRCS	Natural Resources Conservation Service
NRWA	National Rural Water Association
OEP	Outreach and Education Program
PEA	Programmatic Environmental Assessment
PEIS	Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
PIP	Practice Incentive Payment
PL	Public Law
PNS	Primary Nesting Season
ROD	Record of Decision
SAFE	State Areas for Wildlife Enhancement
SEIS	Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement
SIP	Signing Incentive Payment
SPEIS	Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
STC	State Technical Committee
TMDL	total daily maximum load
TSP	Technical Service Provider
U.S.	United States
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
USC	U.S. Code
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
USDOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
USEPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
USFS	U.S. Forest Service
USFWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
USGS	U.S. Geological Survey
WHIP	Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program
WRP	Wetlands Reserve Program

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1.0 PURPOSE AND NEED

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The United States (U.S.) Department of Agriculture (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), proposes to implement programmatic changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) based on those changes included in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Public Law [PL] 113–79, herein referred to as the 2014 Farm Bill), as well as other discretionary measures to improve the functionality and conservation benefits of the program. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 (1985 Farm Bill), as amended, and is governed by regulations published in 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) part 1410. CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. CRP is a CCC program administered by FSA with the support of other Federal and local agencies.

This document has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (PL 91-190); implementing regulations adopted by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) (40 CFR 1500-1508); and FSA's implementing regulations *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799). The Proposed Action being addressed in this document is programmatic in nature and some of the components have been analyzed previously in other NEPA documents; therefore, this document is a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) and examines only those aspects of the program not covered in previous analyses.

1.1.1 Other NEPA Documents Incorporated by Reference

Over the last decade, FSA has completed extensive NEPA analysis pertaining to CRP and components of the program. This SPEIS will incorporate, by reference, other applicable NEPA documentation as appropriate and will supplement the NEPA document prepared for the 2008 Farm Bill, *Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement* (2010 CRP SEIS) (USDA 2010). As such, only those changes to CRP in the 2014 Farm Bill that have not been adequately addressed in other NEPA documentation will be addressed in this SPEIS. For further information or full copies of any of the NEPA documents listed below, please visit FSA NEPA website (http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd). Other applicable NEPA documentation includes the following as described below.

Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program (USDA 2003). This Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) evaluated environmental consequences of changes to CRP under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (2002 Farm Bill). Changes included:

- Increased the acreage enrollment authority to 39.2 million acres.
- Expanded the Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) nationwide with an aggregate acreage cap of 1 million acres.
- Allowed a 1-year extension for certain contracts on lands planted with hardwood trees.

- Allowed participants to enroll entire fields through certain continuous CRP practices when more than 50 percent of the field is enrolled as buffer and the remainder of the field is infeasible to farm.
- Allowed participants to continue existing vegetative cover, where practicable and consistent with the goals of CRP.
- Provided for managed haying, grazing, and construction of wind turbines on CRP land.

The PEIS also addressed an Environmental Targeting Alternative in which FSA would alter the mix of program goals and adjust acreage allocations to include Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and Continuous Sign-up practices in designated environmentally sensitive areas. Under the targeting alternative, the CRP General Sign-up would have been eliminated; however, the Environmental Targeting Alternative was not selected as FSA's preferred alternative. A Record of Decision (ROD) for the PEIS was issued in May of 2003 that implemented the proposed changes described above.

Programmatic Environmental Assessments (PEAs) for the CREP. CREP was first implemented in 1997 as a component of CRP. CREP targets high-priority conservation issues of both local and national significance and focuses on impacts to water supplies, loss of critical habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species, soil erosion, and reduced habitat for fish populations. States, tribes, local governments, or local nongovernment entities and FSA enter into legal CREP Agreements to address particular agriculture-related environmental issues of state or national significance. The CREP Agreements define the goals and objectives of the CREP, establish which conservation practices (CPs) would be authorized, and set the CREP boundary. The appropriate level of NEPA analysis is completed prior to implementation of any CREP. Over 36 CREP PEAs have been prepared and a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was issued for each PEA.

Environmental Assessments (EAs) for Managed Haying and Grazing. In 2006, a legal settlement was signed between the National Wildlife Federation and FSA that mandated allowable frequencies for managed haying and grazing on CRP lands in some states, and established Primary Nesting Season (PNS) dates during which no haying or grazing could occur. The settlement stipulated that if a state wanted to change these mandated terms, an EA would have to be developed to address the potential impacts associated with managed haying and grazing. In 2010, 13 EAs were completed that analyzed proposed variations on allowable frequencies and/or changes to PNS dates on CRP contracts. A FONSI was issued for each EA. The states addressed in these EAs included Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

Managed haying and grazing is limited to those lands with the following CPs: CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes), CP2 (permanent native grasses), CPs 4B and 4D (permanent wildlife habitat), CP10 (grass vegetative cover), CP18B (permanent vegetation to reduce salinity), and CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant vegetation). Managed haying and grazing can be used as a management practice if it is included in the conservation plan and the activity must benefit CRP cover.

Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the Conservation Reserve Program (USDA 2008). This EA evaluated only those mandatory changes to CRP reauthorized with new Title II provisions enacted by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill). Other changes were addressed in the 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010). A FONSI was issued in December of 2008 for the following proposed changes to CRP:

- Expanded FWP land eligibility to include constructed wetlands developed to receive flow from a row crop; land devoted to commercial pond-raised aquaculture; land subject to natural overflow of a prairie wetland; buffer acreage associated with wetlands, constructed wetlands, and aquaculture ponds; and buffer land on flooded farmland that would enhance wildlife benefits adjacent to natural overflow of a prairie wetland.
- Limited FWP enrollment to 40 acres for farmable wetlands and constructed wetlands; 20 acres for flooded prairie wetland; and acreage for aquaculture pond and associated buffer to be determined by the Secretary in consultation with the State Technical Committee (STC).
- Authorized cost sharing for thinning of certain tree stands to improve wildlife benefits and the condition of resources on the land.
- Established new limits and possible waiver from the adjusted gross income limitation for environmentally sensitive land of special significance.

Environmental Assessment for the Grassland Reserve Program (USDA 2009). The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a Continuous Sign-up program administered jointly by FSA and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The purpose of GRP, as amended in the 2008 Farm Bill, is to provide assistance to landowners and operators to protect grazing uses and related conservation values on eligible private range and pasture lands. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land, while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding. This is subject to restrictions during the nesting season for birds in the local area that are in significant decline or are conserved in accordance with Federal or state law, as determined by the State Conservationist. The PEA addressed changes to the eligibility criteria, enrollment options, and a reduction in the enrollment cap presented in the 2008 Farm Bill.

The 2008 Farm Bill expanded eligible land to include land historically dominated by grassland, forbs, or shrubland when such land contains historical or archaeological resources or would address issues raised by state, regional, and national conservation priorities. In addition, the 2008 Farm Bill removed the minimum eligible acreage enrollment of 40 contiguous acres. The 2008 Farm Bill also removed the option of enrolling land in 30-year contracts or easements. Eligible lands may be enrolled in 10-, 15-, or 20-year rental contracts, a permanent easement, or an easement at the maximum duration allowed under state law. The enrollment cap also was reduced to 1.22 million acres from the 2 million acres allowed under the 2002 Farm Bill. A FONSI was issued in August of 2009.

2010 Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (USDA 2010). This SEIS examined various alternatives associated with implementing discretionary changes to CRP consistent with the 2008 Farm Bill and supplemented the 2003 CRP PEIS. In addition to updating the cropping history requirements to 4 of 6 years from 2002 through 2007, the 2008 Farm Bill included changes to several provisions including:

- Reduced the enrollment acreage cap to 32 million acres.
- Revised CRP purposes to explicitly include addressing issues raised by state, regional, and national conservation initiatives.
- Allowed for alfalfa alone in an approved rotation practice with an agricultural commodity to contribute towards crop history requirements.

- Granted authority to exclude acreage enrolled under Continuous Sign-up and CREP from the 25 percent county cropland limitation, with county government approval.
- Required management by the participant throughout the contract term to implement the Conservation Plan.
- Provided exceptions to general prohibitions on use including:
    - Managed harvesting with appropriate vegetation management during named periods and with a payment reduction.
    - Managed harvesting for biomass with appropriate vegetation management during named periods and with a payment reduction.
    - Grazing of invasive species with appropriate vegetation management during named periods and with a payment reduction.
    - Required payment reduction for installation of wind turbines.
    - Required an annual survey of dryland and cash rental rates by the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS).
- Added authority for incentives for socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers as well as limited resource farmers and ranchers and Indian tribes to participate in conservation programs.
- Allowed for development of habitat for native and managed pollinators, and encouraged use of CPs that benefit them.

The 2010 CRP SEIS addressed the no action alternative and two action alternatives for the provisions described above. Alternative 1 allowed for full implementation of the applicable 2008 Farm Bill provisions. Alternative 2 allowed for discretion in the implementation of some elements of CRP in accordance with the applicable 2008 Farm Bill. A ROD was issued in July of 2010 selecting Alternative 1 for implementation.

2012 Programmatic Environmental Assessment for Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands (USDA 2012). This PEA evaluated the environmental consequences associated with authorizing emergency haying and grazing of certain CPs, traditionally not eligible for haying and grazing, as a means to alleviate local impacts to farmers and ranchers resulting from extreme drought and high temperatures during 2012. The CPs covered in this PEA included CP8 (grass waterways), CP23 (wetland restoration), CP23A (non-floodplain wetlands), CP25 (rare and declining habitat) – limited to haying only for this year, CP27 (farmable wetlands), CP28 (farmable wetland buffers), CP37 (duck nesting habitat), and CP41 (flooded prairie farmable wetlands).

A modified Conservation Plan addressing protected species, cultural resources, and any extraordinary circumstances is required before emergency haying and grazing can be initiated. State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) land targeting threatened and endangered species and critical habitat are not eligible for emergency haying and grazing. Useful life easements and any land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent water body are not eligible for emergency haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing may not occur during the PNS. Emergency haying and grazing may occur any year before or after managed haying and grazing; however, managed haying and grazing may not be undertaken on acreage that was harvested under emergency provisions until the established frequency interval under managed provisions expires. Further restrictions on emergency haying and grazing of these previously ineligible CPs included:

- Emergency grazing:
  - May occur for up to 90 calendar days, before September 30.
  - One 30 calendar day extension may be authorized, before September 30.
  - May be authorized for an extension of up to 15 calendar days because of flooding, before September 30.
  - Shall leave at least 25 percent of each field or contiguous CRP fields ungrazed for wildlife, or graze not more than 75 percent of the stocking rate determined by NRCS or a Technical Service Provider (TSP).
- Emergency haying:
  - May occur for up 60 calendar days, before September 30.
  - Extensions are not authorized.
  - Shall leave at least 50 percent of each field or contiguous fields unhayed for wildlife.
  - Is limited to one cutting.
- Haying and grazing cannot occur on the same acreage.

This document only provided NEPA coverage for emergency haying and grazing of these CPs for 2012 within counties classified as "abnormally dry" or Drought Level D0 status and above in accordance with the Drought Monitor. All emergency haying had to be completed by August 31, 2012 and all grazing had to be completed by September 30, 2012. A Mitigated FONSI was issued in August of 2012.

1.1.2 CRP Overview

The 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010) provided a thorough description of CRP, eligibility requirements, enrollment options, conservation planning, contract maintenance, and payments; a brief overview and an update of the program statistics, as appropriate, are provided in this SPEIS.

CRP was established by the Food Security Act of 1985 and farmland enrollment began in 1986. The program is governed by regulations published in 7 CFR 1410. CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost-share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. Funding for CRP is provided by CCC and governed by acreage caps set by the Farm Bill. Technical support is provided by:

- USDA NRCS
- USDA National Institute for Food and Agriculture
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS)
- State forestry agencies
- Local soil and water conservation districts
- Other non-Federal providers of technical assistance

Producers can enroll in CRP using one of two procedures: (1) offer lands for General Sign-up enrollment during specific sign-up periods and compete with other offers nationally, based upon the Environmental Benefits Index; or (2) enroll environmentally desirable land to be devoted to certain CPs under CRP

Continuous Sign-up provisions, if certain eligibility requirements are met or if a state and county are involved in a CREP, and the land qualifies.

As of September 2014, there were nearly 25.5 million acres enrolled in CRP: 19.7 million acres under General Sign-up and 5.7 million acres under Continuous Sign-up, including 1.3 million acres in CREP and 0.3 million acres in FWP (USDA 2014). **Figure 1.1-1** illustrates enrolled acreage within the continental U.S. **Appendix A** provides a description of the CPs and current enrollment acreage.

1.1.2.1 Conservation Planning

Prior to contract acceptance, a site specific Environmental Evaluation (EE) is completed by NRCS or an approved TSP during the conservation planning process. NRCS or a TSP is responsible for the site specific EE, technical leadership, and technical concurrence on Conservation Plans and any revisions. Similarly, they are responsible for collecting the data needed for FSA to ensure compliance with NEPA; the National Historic Preservation Act; the Endangered Species Act (ESA); and other related laws, regulations, and Executive Orders (EOs). The site specific EE process is consistent with FSA's *Environmental Quality and Related Environmental Concerns – Compliance with NEPA* (7 CFR 799) and FSA's Handbook on *Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices* (1-EQ). FSA reviews and/or completes sections of the site specific EE to document that FSA has completed any required consultation with regulatory agencies. The site specific EE, previous programmatic NEPA documentation, and this SPEIS together provide full NEPA coverage for each CRP contract.

An approved Conservation Plan is required prior to CRP contract execution/implementation. The approved plan is developed by the participant in coordination with the local NRCS representative or authorized TSP. The approved Conservation Plan must:

- Contain all the practices necessary to successfully establish and maintain the vegetative cover on all proposed CRP acres including seeding mix design, planting densities and layout, water supply and drainage, thinning schedules, etc.
- Be technically adequate to meet the objectives of CRP.
- Incorporate all Federal, state, and local permit requirements for use of agricultural chemicals such as fertilizer, herbicides, and pesticides.
- Be reviewed and approved by the conservation district.
- Ensure the conservation cover is not disturbed during the PNS.
- Incorporate and adhere to county specific guidance from the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards, identified in the Field Office Technical Guide (eFOTG), and in state or county specific technical notes.

In addition, the Conservation Plan includes a grazing, haying, or biomass harvest plan or a plan for the installation of wind turbines for all CRP lands where these activities are authorized and the participant desires to implement these activities. The haying and grazing activities must not defeat the purpose of CRP contract and must be consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The Conservation Plan also includes any best management practices (BMPs) or measures to be employed to benefit and/or avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to those resources specific to those lands being proposed for enrollment. CRP participants must maintain CRP vegetative cover in accordance with their approved Conservation Plan to control erosion, noxious weeds, rodents, insects, etc.

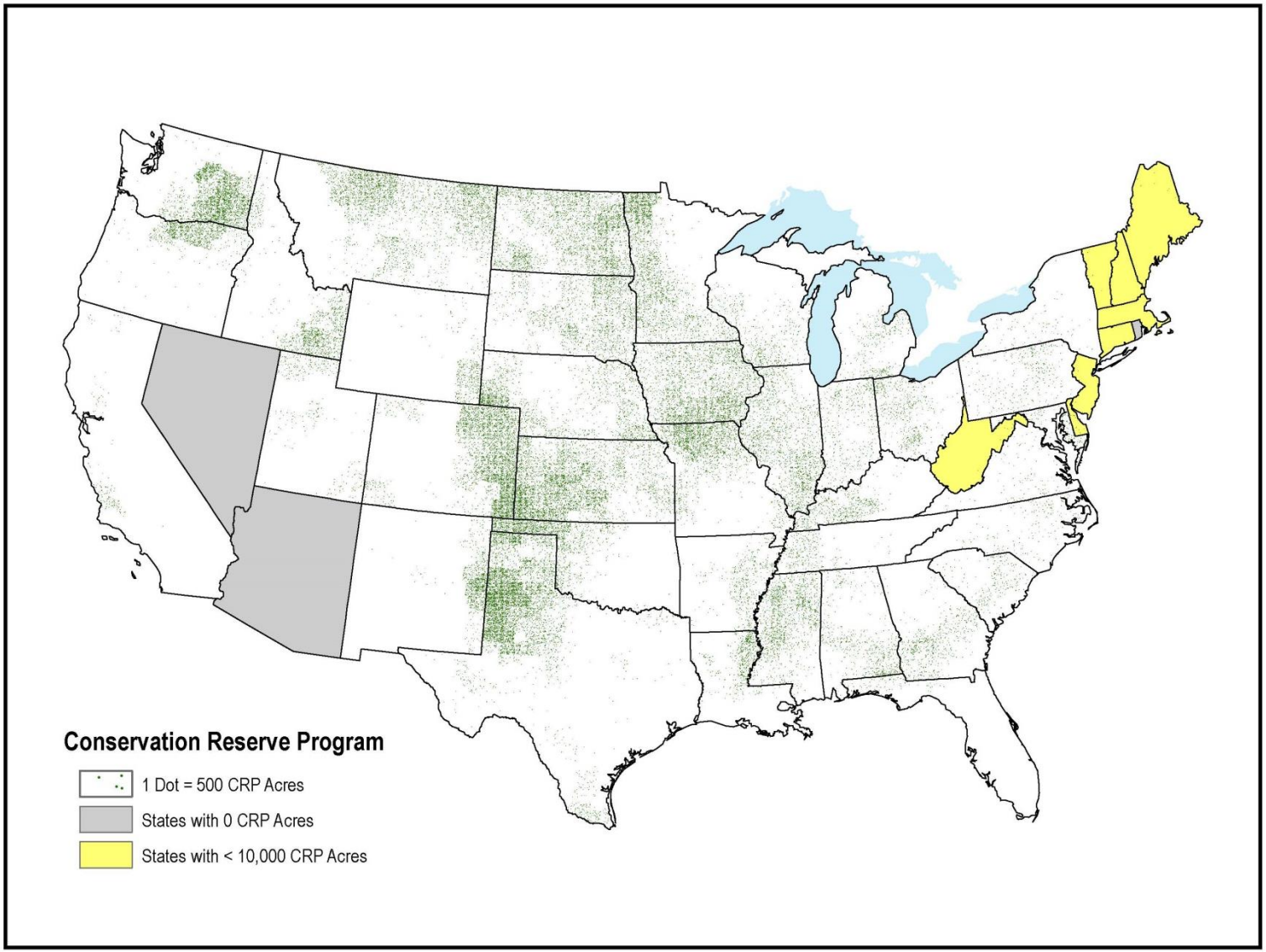

Figure 1.1-1. Enrolled Acreage within the Continental U.S.

1.1.2.2 Contract Maintenance

CRP participants must maintain the conservation cover in accordance with their Conservation Plan without cost-share to control erosion, noxious weeds, rodents, insects, and other pests for the life of CRP contract. The timing and duration of maintenance activities are developed in consultation with NRCS or a TSP and may include prescribed burning, disking, or spraying herbicides or insecticides. Periodic mowing and mowing for cosmetic purposes are prohibited. Various forms of haying and grazing can be used to maintain the CRP cover on authorized CPs: CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes), CP2 (permanent native grasses), CPs 4B and 4D (permanent wildlife habitat), CP10 (grass vegetative cover), CP18B (permanent vegetation to reduce salinity), and CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant vegetation).

Mid-contract management activities are mandatory for all contracts entered into after 2003 and include prescribed burning, tree thinning, disking, interseeding, mowing, and herbicidal control of invasive species. Mid-contract management on these contracts is eligible for up to 50 percent cost-share, must be included in the Conservation Plan, and must be designed to ensure vegetation and wildlife benefits, while providing protection of soil and water resources. The management activities are state specific and developed by a team to include NRCS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), state wildlife agencies, and other appropriate agencies. These management activities can be used to ensure plant diversity and wildlife benefits to improve or enhance important habitat to the state. In addition to important wildlife, these mid-contract management activities could be used as a means for improving pollinator habitat to help address the decline in pollinator health (such as honey bees, wild bees, and other beneficial insects to crops and plants) and Colony Collapse Disorder. Mid-contract management activities generally must occur before the end of year 6 of a 10-year contract, or the end of year 9 of a 15-year contract.

1.1.2.3 State Technical Committees

STCs are used to provide information, analysis, and recommendations to NRCS and other USDA agencies responsible for natural resource conservation activities and programs under Title XII of the Food and Security Act of 1985, as amended. In accordance with 7 CFR Part 610, Subpart C, NRCS has established a technical committee in each State to assist in making recommendations relating to the implementation and technical aspects of natural resource conservation activities and programs to include the CRP. It is the responsibility of the STC to:

- Provide information, analysis, and recommendations to USDA on conservation priorities and criteria for natural resources conservation activities and programs, including application and funding criteria, recommended practices, and program payment percentages.
- Identify emerging natural resource concerns and program needs.
- Recommend conservation practice standards and specifications.
- Recommend State and national program policy based on resource data.
- Review activities of the local working groups to ensure State priorities are being addressed locally.
- Make recommendations to the State Conservationist on requests and recommendations from local working groups.

- Assist NRCS with public outreach and information efforts and identify educational and producers' training needs.

The STC is chaired by the State Conservationist. The Committee is composed of agricultural producers, owners and operators of nonindustrial private forest land, and other professionals who represent a variety of interests and disciplines in the soil, water, wetlands, plant, and wildlife resources. Each STC must include a representative from all of the following:

- NRCS
- FSA
- FSA State Committee
- USFS
- National Institute of Food and Agriculture
- Each of the federally recognized American Indian Tribal governments and Alaskan Native Corporations encompassing 100,000 acres or more in the State
- Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- State departments and agencies within the State, including:
    - Agricultural agency
    - Fish and wildlife agency
    - Forestry agency
    - Soil and water conservation agency
    - Water resources agency
- Agricultural producers representing the variety of crops and livestock or poultry raised within the State
- Owners of nonindustrial private forest land
- Nonprofit organizations that demonstrate conservation expertise and experience working with agricultural producers in the State
- Agribusiness
- Other Federal agencies and persons knowledgeable about economic and environmental impacts of conservation techniques and programs as determined by the State Conservationist

STCs meet at least twice a year. All STC meetings are open to the public and announced via a widely distributed newspaper(s) as well as on the NRCS State website at least 14 days prior to the meeting. Individuals attending STC meetings are given an opportunity to address the committee and present their opinions and recommendations. All comments received at STC meetings are summarized and presented at the following meeting and are also posted on the NRCS State website. A summary of all STC meetings is available within 30 calendar days of the meeting, distributed to committee members, and made available on the NRCS State website. The State Conservationist informs the STC on any decisions made in response to recommendations or comments received.

1.1.2.4 Payments

FSA provides CRP participants with annual rental payments per acre enrolled for the duration of the contract, and up to 50 percent one-time cost-share for establishing the approved CPs. Some practices are

eligible for Signing Incentive Payments (SIPs) and Practice Incentive Payments (PIPs). CREP contracts may be eligible for additional incentive payments offered by the State or private partners depending on the CREP Agreement. **Appendix B** provides a summary of CPs, sign-up type, contract length, and incentives. CRP payments provided from 2009 to 2013 are summarized in **Table 1.1-1.**

Table 1.1-1. CRP Payments, 2009-2013 ($1,000)

CRP Payments	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Annual Rental Payments	$1,720,631	$1,709,079	$1,634,979	$1,677,694	$1,595,653
SIPs and PIPs	$71,683	$70,181	$71,788	$56,888	$37,072
Cost-share[1]	$74,947	$66,721	$99,322	$99,990	$84,076
Haying and Grazing Adjustments	($12,504)	($9,518)	($14,262)	($29,293)	($5,946)
TOTAL	**$1,854,757**	**$1,836,463**	**$1,791,827**	**$1,805,279**	**$1,710,855**

Note: [1] Mid-contract management payments included in cost-share amounts.
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; SIP = Signing Incentive Payment; PIP = Practice Incentive Payment.

1.2 Purpose and Need

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to implement programmatic changes to the CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill and other discretionary program aspects. The need for the Proposed Action is to fulfill FSA's responsibility to administer CRP while improving the program's functionality and maintaining the conservation benefits.

1.3 NEPA Process

NEPA requires consideration of environmental issues in Federal agency planning and decision making. It requires Federal agencies to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for any major Federal action with potentially significant impacts to the human environment. CEQ and FSA NEPA regulations define the steps and milestones in the environmental impact analysis process. The major milestones include:

1. *Announce an EIS is being prepared*. A Notice of Intent (NOI) is published in the Federal Register.
2. *Conduct Scoping*. This is the first major step in identifying the relevant issues to be analyzed in depth and eliminating the issues that are not relevant. To accomplish this, FSA actively solicits comments from the public, local governments, Federal and state agencies, and stakeholders, thereby ensuring that relevant concerns and issues about the proposed changes to CRP are included in the analysis. FSA officially requested that NRCS participate as a Cooperating Agency during the scoping process. The Scoping period lasts for 45 days.
3. *Prepare and publish a Draft SPEIS*. The first comprehensive document for public, agency, and stakeholder review is the Draft SPEIS. It examines the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action, all reasonable alternatives as determined during Scoping, and the No Action Alternative. To ensure the widest dissemination possible, the Draft SPEIS is distributed to all agencies, public, and stakeholders that specifically request a copy; national and regional offices of all relevant Federal regulatory agencies; and cooperating agencies (if applicable). In addition, the Draft SPEIS is published on a public website (www.CRPSPEIS.com) and FSA's website

(http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd). A Notice of Availability (NOA) is filed with USEPA and announced in the Federal Register. Publication of the NOA initiates the 45-day public comment period.

4. *Solicit Public Comment*. FSA's goal during the NEPA process is to provide the public and other interested parties ample opportunity to comment on the analyses presented in the Draft SPEIS. This is accomplished through public meetings. FSA performs density analyses of participation in CRP or those participants potentially impacted by the proposed changes to CRP to determine appropriate locations for hosting public meetings. The public meetings serve as an open forum for discussion of the Proposed Action, alternatives, the analyses approach, and findings, and provides a direct feedback mechanism for the public and agencies to provide comments on the Draft SPEIS. All substantive comments received during the public comment period are considered in the preparation of, and are appended to, the Final SPEIS, and disclosed to the decision-maker in that phase of the NEPA process.
5. *Prepare a Final SPEIS*. Following the public comment period, a Final SPEIS is prepared. This document is a revision of the Draft SPEIS, which includes consideration of all substantive comments and FSA responses. An NOA is filed with the USEPA and announced in the Federal Register. Publication of the NOA initiates the 45-day waiting period.
6. *Issue a ROD*. The final step in the NEPA process is the ROD, which will be released no earlier than 30 days after public release of the Final SPEIS. This decision document identifies the alternative selected for implementation by the decision-maker and any mitigation measures (above and beyond those already required by permits, regulations, or carried out as part of the normal management policies) to be carried out by FSA to reduce impacts, if needed. An NOA for the ROD will be published in the Federal Register. The ROD will also be made available on the project website (www.CRPSPEIS.com) and FSA's website (http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd).

The following sections describe the steps that have been achieved thus far in the NEPA process for this SPEIS.

1.3.1 Notification

Notification of FSA's intent to prepare the CRP SPEIS began with publication of the NOI on November 29, 2013 in the Federal Register (**Appendix C**). The project website was activated on the day the NOI was released and the official scoping comment period began.

1.3.2 Scoping

Scoping is an early and open process for: (1) actively bringing the public and other interested parties into the decision-making process, (2) determining the scope of issues and impacts to be addressed, (3) identifying all reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Action, and (4) meeting both CEQ and FSA NEPA implementing regulations that require a scoping process in the development of an SPEIS. Comments were received through the project website/email system, mail, fax, and www.regulations.gov.

Eight comment letters were received during the scoping comment period from Federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as private organizations and members of the concerned public. The comment letters could be broken into 55 individual comments covering a range of topics including proposed Farm Bill changes, CRP maximum enrollment and acreages, regional differences in haying and

grazing impacts, lack of thorough environmental and socioeconomic impact analysis in previous NEPA documentation related to the Farm Bill, and CRP funding policy. The comments provided during the scoping period were considered in developing the Proposed Action and the SPEIS environmental consequences to ensure these concerns were adequately addressed. The scoping summary report is available upon request.

1.3.3 Draft SPEIS

The Draft SPEIS Public Comment Period began with an NOA released in the Federal Register on July 15, 2014 (79 FR41247-41249). This NOA provided a summary of the changes to CRP, the Proposed Action, and the No Action Alternative. Also included in the NOA was a description of how to provide comments, as well as a list of the dates, times, and locations of the five public meetings that were held as a part of the public involvement process.

Five public meetings were held to inform the public and to solicit comments on the draft SPEIS. The meeting locations, dates, and times are shown below in **Table 1.3-1**.

Table 1.3-1. Public Meeting Dates, Times, and Locations

July 21, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Hilton Garden Inn, Spokane Airport 9015 West SR Highway 2 Spokane, WA 99224
July 22, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Holiday Inn, Great Falls 1100 5th Street, South Great Falls, MT 59405
August 4, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Plains Cotton Cooperative Association 3301 East 50th Street Lubbock, TX 79404
August 5, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Stillwater Library 1107 S Duck Street, Stillwater, OK 74074
August 6, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Moorhead Area Conference Center 1080 28th Avenue, South Moorhead, MN 56560

Eighteen comments were received during the comment period. Those 18 comments included 75 individual issues to be considered in the Final SPEIS. **Table 1.3-2** provides a breakdown of the individual comments by category.

Table 1.3-2 Number of Comments Received by Category	
Comment Category	**Number of Comments**
Alternatives	1
Cumulative Impacts	3
Early Termination of Contracts	2
Emergency Haying and Grazing	22
FWP	1
Final Year of Contract	1
Grassland Enrollment	14
Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction	1
Intermittent and Seasonal Use of Buffers	1
Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	11
Maximum Enrollment Cap	1
Protected Species	1
Targeted Enrollment	12
Wind Turbines	4
Total	**75**

Note: FWP = Farmable Wetlands Program.

The Comment Summary Report is provided in **Appendix D**. This report provides additional detail on the Draft SPEIS comment process, a copy of the NOA, copies of all public meeting materials, and responses to all 75 substantive comments and how they were addressed in the Final SPEIS.

1.3.4 Final SPEIS and ROD

The Final SPEIS (this document) incorporates substantive comments received from the public and interested stakeholders during the Draft SPEIS Public Comment Period, as appropriate. The NOA of the Final SPEIS was published in the Federal Register. The Final SPEIS is available for public review for 45 days. The ROD will be released at the conclusion of the Final SPEIS review period.

1.4 Relevant Statutes, EOs, and Permits

A variety of laws, regulations, and EOs apply to actions undertaken by Federal agencies and form the basis of the analyses prepared in this SPEIS. These include but are not limited to:

- National Historic Preservation Act 1966 (PL 89-665; 80 Stat. 915; 16 U.S. Code [USC] 470 et seq.), as amended
- ESA of 1973 (PL 93-205; 16 USC § 1531 et seq.)
- Clean Air Act, as amended (PL 88-206; 42 USC § 7401 et seq.)
- Clean Water Act (CWA), as amended (PL 107-303; 33 USC § 1251, et seq.)
- EO 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations
- EO 11988, Floodplain Management
- EO 11990, Protection of Wetlands

Other Federal permits, licenses, and entitlements may be required in implementing the Proposed Action. These permits and licenses would be identified and obtained as part of the site specific EE and may include:

- ***CWA, Section 401*** (Water Quality Certification). Pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA, Federal permits for projects in wetlands or waterways must be certified by the state licensing or permitting agency to ensure that state water quality standards are met.
- ***CWA, Section 402*** (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System). USEPA currently regulates stormwater discharges from construction sites that are 1 acre or larger. Documenting project compliance with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System general permit involves preparation of a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan and submittal to USEPA of an NOI to Discharge. Projects that require a Section 402 permit also need a Section 401 permit.
- ***CWA, Section 404*** (Wetlands). The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) regulates the placement of dredged or fill material in Waters of the U.S., which includes some wetlands, pursuant to 33 CFR 320-332. Work and structures that are located in, or that affect, navigable Waters of the U.S., including work below the ordinary high water mark in non-tidal waters, also are regulated by USACE. Projects requiring a Section 404 permit also need a Section 401 permit.
- ***ESA, Section 7.*** ESA provides for the conservation of species and ecosystems that are in danger of becoming extinct. It also applies to candidate species that have been recommended for listing as threatened or endangered of becoming extinct. The harming or harassing of listed animal species and removing or reducing listed plant species are prohibited. Site specific consultation with USFWS would be undertaken to ensure no adverse effects to threatened or endangered species would occur from the Proposed Action. Actions that have the potential to adversely affect a protected species could require additional NEPA documentation. In general, it is against FSA policy to fund activities that would adversely affect protected species (FSA Handbook: Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices, 1-EQ).
- ***National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106.*** Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires Federal agencies to consider the effects of their actions on historic properties before undertaking a project. A historic property is defined as any cultural resource that is included in, or eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places. The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation oversees Section 106 and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800). Most consultation is done with the appropriate State Historic Preservation Office or Tribal Historic Preservation Office. In general, it is against FSA policy to fund activities that are likely to cause an adverse impact on historic properties unless mitigation measures can be undertaken to avoid or lesson the adverse impacts (FSA Handbook: Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices, 1-EQ).

1.5 SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION OF SPEIS

Since CRP is a national program, the geographic scope of this SPEIS covers the entire U.S. Given the broad nature of the program, this document is programmatic and is intended to provide the basis for site specific NEPA documentation that would occur prior to enrollment of any land into CRP. The resource categories determined relevant to this SPEIS include biological resources (vegetation, wildlife, and protected species); water resources (surface water, groundwater, wetlands, and floodplains); soils; air quality; recreation; and socioeconomics. The organization of this SPEIS is as follows:

- **Chapter 1** (this chapter) provides background information relevant to the Proposed Action and discusses its purpose and need.
- **Chapter 2** presents the Proposed Action, No Action Alternative, alternatives eliminated from detailed consideration, and a comparison of the alternatives.
- **Chapter 3** outlines and justifies resources evaluated or dismissed from in-depth analysis in this SPEIS, and describes baseline conditions or "affected environment" (i.e., the conditions against which the potential impacts of the Proposed Action or alternatives are measured) for each of the resource areas.
- **Chapter 4** provides a description of the potential environmental impacts/consequences of the Proposed Action and alternatives.
- **Chapter 5** includes an analysis of potential cumulative effects. Cumulative effects include evaluation of the Proposed Action in relation to past, present, and/or future foreseeable actions within the affected environment. This chapter also includes a discussion of the irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources.
- **Chapter 6** contains mitigation measures required to reduce or eliminate the potential adverse impacts of the Proposed Action.
- **Chapter 7** contains references cited in preparation of this SPEIS, including correspondence.
- **Chapter 8** provides a list of SPEIS preparers.
- **Chapter 9** lists persons and agencies contacted and the distribution list for the document.
- **Chapter 10** provides an index.

A variety of appendices are included to provide supporting technical documentation.

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2.0 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 OVERVIEW OF CHANGES TO CRP FROM THE 2014 FARM BILL

FSA proposes to implement changes to CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill, which extends the enrollment authority for CRP to FY2018, as well as other discretionary measures to improve the functionality and conservation benefits of the program. The 2014 Farm Bill aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative. Other elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action. In addition, FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

Some of the changes in the 2014 Farm Bill are administrative in nature, would not result in major changes to the current administration of the program, or have been addressed in other NEPA documents concerning CRP (see **Section 1.1.1**). These changes are not addressed in this SPEIS. A summary of the changes to CRP is provided in **Table 2.1-1**. This table describes the discretionary and non-discretionary measures, existing NEPA coverage for each change, and whether that change requires analysis in this SPEIS. All of the changes are discussed in more detail in the following sections. For convenience, the SPEIS section where the change is discussed is noted in the table.

Table 2.1-1. Summary of the Changes to CRP

Changes	Description	Authority	Existing NEPA Coverage	Included in SPEIS?	SPEIS Section Reference
Maximum Enrollment	Maximum enrollment gradually reduced from 32 to 24 million acres by FY 2017.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2010	No	2.2.1
FWP	Created permanent program from pilot program established by 2008 Farm Bill and sets enrollment cap at 750,000 acres.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2008	No	2.2.2
Tree Thinning	Reduce payment authority to $10 million, allows for incentive payments.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2008	No	2.2.3
Early Termination of Contracts	Provides contract termination opportunity in FY 2015 for contracts that have been in place for at least 5 years, with exceptions.	Non-discretionary	None	No	2.2.4

Table 2.1-1. Summary of the Changes to CRP

Changes	Description	Authority	Existing NEPA Coverage	Included in SPEIS?	SPEIS Section Reference
Managed Harvesting, Prescribed and Routine Grazing Payment Reduction	Requires rental payment reduction of at least 25 percent. No payment reduction for beginning farmer or rancher for prescribed or routine grazing.	Discretionary	USDA 2010	No	2.2.5
Transition Option	Provides authority for $33 million to facilitate transfer of land from retired owners to beginning or socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers.	Non-discretionary	None	No	2.2.6
Prescribed Grazing Frequency	Allows annual grazing for control of invasive plants.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2010	No	2.2.7
Intermittent and Seasonal Use	Allows for intermittent and seasonal use of vegetative buffer practices incidental to agricultural production on adjacent lands.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2010	No	2.2.8
Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities	Allows up to 2 million acres of certain grasslands to be eligible for CRP under Continuous Sign-up. Authorized activities differ from other CRP contracts.	Non-discretionary	USDA 2009	No Action Alternative	2.3.1
Final Year of Contract	Allows enrollment in Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program during final year of contract.	Non-discretionary	None	No Action Alternative	2.3.2
Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction	Removes the requirement to reduce rental payments.	Non-discretionary	None	No Action Alternative	2.3.3
Targeted Enrollment	Implements targeted enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands through reverse auctions to help continue to meet reduced enrollment cap.	Discretionary	None	Proposed Action	2.4.1
Managed Harvesting Frequency	Sets minimum frequency of once in 5 years, and maximum frequency of once in 3 years.	Discretionary	USDA 2010, State specific EAs	Proposed Action	2.4.2.1
Routine Grazing Frequency	Sets maximum frequency to no more than once every 2 years.	Discretionary	USDA 2010, State specific EAs	Proposed Action	2.4.2.2

Table 2.1-1. Summary of the Changes to CRP					
Changes	**Description**	**Authority**	**Existing NEPA Coverage**	**Included in SPEIS?**	**SPEIS Section Reference**
Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional CPs	Discretionary measure for meeting needs of producers during severe drought conditions.	Discretionary	USDA 2012	Proposed Action	2.4.3

Note: CP = conservation practice; CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; EA = Environmental Assessment; FWP = Farmable Wetland Program; NEPA = National Environmental Policy Act; SPEIS = Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement; USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture; FY = Fiscal Year.

2.2 CHANGES TO CRP NOT ADDRESSED IN THE SPEIS

2.2.1 Maximum Enrollment Authority Changes

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, the maximum acreage authorized for enrollment in CRP at any one time was limited to 32 million acres (16 USC 3831(d)). Currently, there are 25.5 million acres enrolled in CRP. There are approximately 7 million acres set to expire from 2015 through 2018. Under the 2014 Farm Bill, the enrollment authority for CRP would be gradually reduced to 24 million acres.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

Given the contracts that are scheduled to expire over the next 5 years, the number of acres enrolled in CRP would be below the statutory maximum acreage cap due to attrition alone (**Table 2.2-1**). The expiring acres would allow for enrollment to continue in all years under the 2014 Farm Bill even with the reduced enrollment cap (2014 through 2018). The 2010 CRP SEIS analyzed a discretionary alternative to reduce the maximum enrollment to 24 million acres (USDA 2010). That analysis concluded that reducing the enrollment cap would decrease the potential for beneficial environmental impacts.

Over the next few years (2014 through 2018), expiring acres coupled with the reduced capability to enroll or re-enroll land could result in some conservation lands returning to agricultural production, however, given recent evaluations it is unlikely that all expiring land would convert back to production. In an evaluation of National Resource Inventory data conducted in 2010, it was found that 45 percent of the acreage that exited CRP in 2007 was still grassland in 2010 (NRCS 2013).

Since the reduced acreage cap is a mandatory change, and since the 2010 CRP SEIS, provided analysis of a maximum enrollment option of 24 million acres, that analysis is incorporated by reference into this SPEIS and the mandatory reduction in the maximum enrollment authority does not require additional analysis.

Table 2.2-1. Available Acreage for CRP Enrollment, FY2015 – FY2018	
	Acreage (millions)
Enrollment as of October 2014	24.2
Early Contract Termination (estimate)	0.5
Expiring September 2015	1.9
Expiring September 2016	1.2
Expiring September 2017	2.6
Expiring September 2018	1.5
Total Available (FY2015 - FY2018)	7.7

2.2.2 FWP Enrollment Changes

FWP enrollment was limited to 1 million acres nationally and no more than 100,000 acres in any one state under the 2008 Farm Bill (16 USC 3831(d)). The program is designed to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers to improve both vegetation and hydrology. Restoring wetlands improves groundwater quality, prevents soil erosion, reduces downstream flood damage, helps trap and break down pollutants, and provides habitat for water birds and other wildlife.

Producers can enroll on a Continuous Sign-up basis until the national or state limits are reached. Contract duration is between 10 and 15 years. To be eligible for enrollment, land must meet one of the following criteria:

- A wetland (including a converted wetland) that has a cropping history during at least 3 of the immediately preceding 10 crop years.
- Land that includes, or will include, a constructed wetland to receive surface and subsurface flow from row-crop agricultural production for the purpose of removing nitrogen in addition to other wetland functions.
- Land devoted to commercial pond-raised aquaculture during any year from 2002 through 2007.
- Any cropland that was cropped during at least 3 of 10 years between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2002, and was subject to the natural overflow of a prairie wetland.

Participants in the program agree to: restore the hydrology of the wetland to the maximum extent practicable; establish vegetative cover which may include emerging vegetation in water and bottomland hardwoods, cypress, or other appropriate tree species; and prohibit commercial use of the enrolled land. Enrolled land cannot exceed 40 acres per tract; of this, no more than 40 acres may be for wetlands or constructed wetlands and no more than 20 acres may be for intermittently flooded prairie wetlands. CPs authorized under FWP are CP27 (farmable wetlands), CP28 (farmable wetland buffers), CP39 (constructed wetlands), CP40 (aquaculture wetland restoration), and CP41 (flooded prairie wetlands) (see **Appendix A** for description of all CPs).

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

Changes in the 2014 Farm Bill include a mandatory reduction in the enrollment authority for the FWP to 750,000 acres nationally. Currently there are approximately 340,000 acres enrolled. The *PEA for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the CRP* (USDA 2008) analyzed a total acreage cap of 1 million acres, assessed changes to the eligible land criteria and enrollment parameters, and allowed state

allotments to increase from 100,000 to 200,000 acres. The statutory change to reduce the maximum enrollment authority to 750,000 acres would allow for 410,000 acres of farmable wetlands to be enrolled in the program. The reduction in enrollment from 1 million acres authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill to the 750,000 acres mandated by the 2014 Farm Bill is not analyzed since there is no discretion for any other level. Additionally, the mandatory reduced acreage cap is not expected to affect actual enrollment, as enrollment historically has been well below the cap.

2.2.3 Tree Thinning Payment Changes

Tree thinning was authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill when performed as part of normal forestry management on CRP lands to improve land cover or tree stands during contract management activities. Tree thinning is a voluntary management activity that is eligible for cost-share payment if included in an approved Conservation Plan. The 2008 Farm Bill provided for $100 million during 2008-2012 for cost-share payments for thinning activities as authorized (16 USC 3841(a)(1)(A)). This provision applies to tree practices, as well as CP5A (windbreaks), CP16A (shelterbelts), CP22 (riparian buffers), and CP4B (wildlife corridors) (see **Appendix A** for description of all CPs). Tree thinning benefits the vegetative conservation cover by reducing competition among plants that may diminish the desired species composition and plant stand structure designed to meet a particular conservation objective; improving the health and vigor of plants that may have suffered damage or disease; and reducing wildfire hazards by removing excess fuels.

As defined in the 2008 Farm Bill, the primary purpose of tree thinning on CRP land must be to improve the wildlife benefits and resource conditions on the land. The producer may dispose of or use the materials for commercial purposes (e.g., wood pulp, mulch) without a rental payment reduction provided that removal of the refuse enhances wildlife, reduces undesirable insect and disease infestation, and/or reduces wildfire hazards. Under the 2008 Farm Bill, the producer did not have to forego the annual rental payment for the year in which the thinning occurred if the refuse was used for commercial purposes.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill reduces the payment authority for tree thinning activities to $10 million and authorizes incentive payments. The statutory change allows the Secretary to provide incentives to owners and operators to conduct practices and utilize management tools that would promote forest management, enhance the overall health of tree stands, improve the condition of resources, or provide valuable habitat for wildlife. Such practices and management tools should be used to encourage landowners to promote pine savannah habitat or conduct other beneficial habitat practices such as tree thinning, disking, and prescribed burning. Expanding the funding authority to provide cost-share for tree thinning activities was analyzed in the *PEA for Select Provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill Regarding the CRP* (USDA 2008). The socioeconomic analysis for tree thinning activities concluded that the impacts would be neutral based on the assumption that a producer would likely choose forestry management practices based on the expected economic return from the activities after their costs. Since cost-share for thinning activities must be provided not less than 2 years and not more than 4 years from planting new stands or thinning existing stands under new CRP contracts, tree thinning would likely be considered a relatively higher cost-management option due to the additional uncovered costs for infrastructure required for thinning and removal of refuse.

Since enactment of the 2008 Farm Bill, less than $50,000 in cost-share payments have been provided for tree thinning activities, indicating this provision is not widely used. Therefore, the statutory reduction in

funding available for tree thinning activities would not represent a real change in current use of the funds. However, under the changes, incentive payments would be authorized, which in turn may increase tree thinning activities (incentive payments would be more attractive than cost-share payments), and this payment authority may be used more fully. Reducing the payment authority would not change any environmental or socioeconomic benefits being realized under this provision. The change is administrative in nature and the expected environmental and socioeconomic impacts would be similar to those analyzed in previous NEPA documents (USDA 2008); therefore, changes to tree thinning payments do not require further analysis in this SPEIS.

2.2.4 Early Termination of Contracts

Early termination of CRP contracts was authorized under the 2008 Farm Bill for contracts signed prior to January 1, 1995 as long as the contract has been in place for at least 5 years (16 USC 3835(e)). The following lands were not eligible for early contract termination:

- Filterstrips, waterways, strips adjacent to riparian areas, windbreaks, and shelterbelts.
- Land with an erodibility index of more than 15.
- Other land of high environmental value (including wetlands), as determined by the Secretary.

If a contract is terminated under this provision prior to the end of the fiscal year (FY) in which an annual rental payment is due, the producer receives only a prorated annual rental payment to cover the portion of the year the land was under contract.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill modifies the early termination provision to include an opportunity during FY 2015 for early contract termination of CRP contracts, provided the contract has been in place for at least 5 years. Early land preparation activities would be allowed in accordance with national policy (2-CRP Handbook, paragraph 637). The following lands would not be eligible for early contract termination:

- Land devoted to hardwood trees
- Wildlife habitat, duck nesting habitat, pollinator habitat, upland bird habitat buffer, wildlife food plots, SAFE, shallow water areas for wildlife, and rare and declining habitat
- Farmable wetlands and restored wetlands
- Land that contains diversions, erosion control structures, flood control structures, contour grass strips, living snow fences, salinity reducing vegetation, cross wind trap strips, or sediment retention structures
- Land located within a Federally-designated wellhead protection area
- Land that is covered by an easement under CRP
- Land located within an average width, according to the applicable NRCS eFOTG, of a perennial stream or permanent water body
- Land enrolled under CREP

Taking the above exceptions into consideration, approximately 2.7 million acres of CRP land could be eligible for early termination in 2015 (see **Appendix E** for eligible acreage by state). **Table 2.2-2** provides the acreage eligible for early termination by the CP installed. As shown, the majority of the eligible acreage is enrolled in CP2 (native grasses). Early termination of contracts was previously

authorized and the change would not offer any discretion for implementation and represents an administrative change that does not require further NEPA analysis. The removal of these acres from the CRP could allow for additional acres to be enrolled under General or Continuous Sign-ups. As noted above in **Section 2.2.1**, an evaluation of National Resource Inventory data conducted in 2010 found that 45 percent of the acreage that exited CRP remained grassland after exiting the program (NRCS 2013). While it is likely some acreage would convert to agricultural production, recent evaluations have shown that many expiring acres remain in conservation or are otherwise undeveloped.

Table 2.2-2 Eligible Acreage for Early Termination by CP

CP	Eligible Acreage
CP1 (Introduced Grasses and Legumes)	246,349
CP2 (Native Grasses)	1,374,172
CP3 (Tree Planting)	56,011
CP10 (Vegetative Cover – Grass)	894,350
CP11 (Vegetative Cover – Trees)	92,441
Total	**2,663,325**

Note: CP = conservation practice.

2.2.5 Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction Changes

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, managed harvesting and routine grazing required an annual payment reduction commensurate with the economic value of the haying and grazing activity (16 USC 3832(d)).

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill requires a payment reduction of at least 25 percent for both managed harvesting and routine grazing. This statutory change codifies the existing administrative procedure related to these practices. The 2008 Farm Bill called for the payment reduction to be commensurate with the economic value of harvesting and grazing activity. Because it was determined to be infeasible to assess the actual value of activities undertaken by CRP participants, a payment reduction of 25 percent was established and evaluated in the 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010); therefore, these changes do not require further analysis in this SPEIS.

The 2014 Farm Bill also permits beginning farmers or ranchers to utilize prescribed or routing grazing without a payment reduction if the activity is consistent with the soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and avoids the nesting season for birds in the local area that are economically significant, in significant decline, or conserved in accordance with Federal or state law. Prescribed grazing is allowing livestock to graze where kudzu or other invasive species have infested the CRP acreage. Prescribed grazing is not currently subject to a payment reduction in any situation; therefore, the provision in the 2014 Farm Bill does not represent a change in the current administration. Routine grazing is allowing livestock to periodically graze CRP land to maintain the cover and improve the quality and performance of the vegetation and is subject to frequency limits established by the state (**Section 2.4.2.2** will further discuss frequency changes for routine grazing). Both activities must be covered in the Conservation Plan and are subject to all other grazing provisions described in the CRP Handbook. The number of CRP contract holders that are beginning farmers or ranchers is not known. In 2012, the number of beginning farmers was down 20 percent from 2007 according to the Agricultural Census; nearly 172,000 farmers nationwide were operators of their current farm for fewer than five years (NASS 2014). While allowing routine grazing to occur without a payment reduction on these limited acres may slightly increase the amount of

routine grazing that occurs, this increase is not expected to be substantially greater than what occurs currently and has been analyzed in previous NEPA documents (USDA 2010 and state specific EAs).

2.2.6 Transition Option Funding

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, a retiring farmer or rancher was eligible for an additional 2 years of annual rental payments if the land was transferred to a beginning farmer or rancher, or a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher who is not a family member (16 USC 3835(c)(1)(iii)). The beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher is able to make improvements to CRP land 1 year prior to termination of the CRP contract for the purpose of returning some or all of the land to production using sustainable grazing or crop production methods.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, up to $25 million was authorized to facilitate the transfer of land from a retiring farmer or rancher to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher (7 USC 2279(e)(7)). Nearly all of the funding authorization was used for this purpose.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes up to $33 million to facilitate this transfer and would expand the eligibility to include veteran farmers or ranchers (as defined in Section 2501(e) of the Food Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, USC 2279(e)). It is expected that all of the additional funding authorization would be used and would not represent a significant change with respect to socioeconomic conditions. This is an administrative and statutory change and does not require further analysis in this SPEIS.

2.2.7 Prescribed Grazing Frequency

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized the use of prescribed grazing to control invasive plant species provided that activities do not defeat the purpose of the CRP contract and are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat (16 USC 3832 (a)(8)(C)). The 2010 CRP SEIS evaluated the impacts of prescribed grazing in compliance with a Grazing Management Plan, part of the Conservation Plan that includes frequency, timing, stocking rates, and type of grazing animal.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill would allow prescribed grazing to control invasive plant species to be conducted annually, essentially providing clarification that such grazing can occur as determined in consultation with the STC. In 2013 (the most current year of data available), there were approximately 650 acres where prescribed grazing was used.

2.2.8 Intermittent and Seasonal Use

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized routine grazing on CRP contracts to include “incidental” grazing. Incidental grazing is authorized on certain CPs (CP8A: grass waterways, CP15A: contour grass strip, CP21: filter strips, and CP33: upland bird habitat buffer) for the gleaning of crop residue in an adjacent non-CRP field or before the harvest of a small grain. Incidental grazing is only authorized if the CRP acreage to be grazed is not separated from the cropland by a fence. Incidental grazing requires 25 percent payment reduction, must be covered in the Conservation Plan, and must avoid the PNS.

Justification for Elimination from the SPEIS

The 2014 Farm Bill contains specific language which allows for the intermittent and seasonal use of vegetative buffer practices incidental to agricultural production on lands adjacent to the buffer provided this use does not destroy the permanent vegetative cover. This is an activity that already occurs under the current administration of the program and would not change under the 2014 Farm Bill. The permitted use of vegetative buffers would continue to adhere to requirements outlined in the CRP handbook:

- Grazing is incidental to the gleaning of the crop residue in a field, or before the harvest of a small grain.
- Grazing occurs after the participant harvests crops from within the surrounding field, or during the dormant period of a small grain intended for harvest.
- Grazing shall not occur during the PNS.
- All livestock shall be removed from CRP acreage no later than two months after incidental grazing begins.
- CRP practice cover must be fully established and certified by NRCS.
- Grazing will not adversely affect the purpose and performance of the practice.
- The participant agrees to a 25 percent payment reduction and to re-establish any cover destroyed or damaged at their own expense.

2.3 NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative.

2.3.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Native grasslands in the central U.S. are considered one of the most endangered ecosystems in North America. Historically, grasslands and shrublands occupied approximately 1 billion acres of the lower 48 states. Approximately half of that area has been converted to cropland, urban land, and other uses (Wood and Williams 2005). Non-Federally owned grasslands (pasture land and rangeland) currently cover around 529 million acres (NRCS 2013). The remaining grassland resources are threatened by conversion into cropland, development of parcels for home sites, invasion of woody or non-native species, and urban and exurban development. GRP was developed to assist in protecting native grasslands and managed rangelands. The program emphasizes support of grazing operations, maintaining and improving plant and animal biodiversity, and protecting grasslands and shrublands under threat of conversion to cropping, urban development, and other non-grazing uses.

Prior to the 2014 Farm Bill, GRP was jointly administered by FSA and NRCS with the purpose of providing assistance to landowners and operators to protect grazing uses and related conservation values on eligible private range and pasture lands. Enrollment options included long-term contracts (10, 15, or 20 years) or permanent easements. As of 2013 (the most current year of data available), there were 396,261 acres enrolled in GRP easements and 1,337,450 acres enrolled in contracts (for a total of approximately 1.7 million acres).

The 2014 Farm Bill makes grasslands, which would have been previously eligible for GRP, eligible for enrollment in CRP. The eligibility requirements and authorized activities are the same as those previously defined for GRP. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seed production. Eligible land includes privately owned grasslands, including Tribal lands, that:

- Contain forbs or shrubs (including rangeland and improved pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use, and
- Are located in an area that has been historically dominated by grasslands; and
- Could provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value if the land is retained in the current use or restored to its natural condition.

Site specific EEs are required prior to enrollment in CRP. A Grazing Management Plan is required and developed in accordance with the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook. The Grazing Management Plan includes a Conservation Plan, Restoration Plan, and any applicable grazing management systems. These plans must comply with all Federal, state, local, and Tribal regulations and permit requirements, and include a schedule of operations for implementation and maintenance of practices with a description of the grazing management system, permissible and prohibited activities, applicable information on species in the local area that are in significant decline, and a description of the USDA's right of ingress and egress. All permitted activities must be performed in accordance with NRCS practice standards and other established policies. Permitted activities on enrolled land include:

- *Grazing* – The participant reserves the right to graze the land in a manner consistent with maintaining the viability of the grass, shrub, forb, and wildlife species indigenous to the locality. Grazing related activities such as fencing and livestock watering, brush management, and use of prescribed fire are permitted.
- *Haying, mowing, and seed production* – Haying, mowing, and harvesting of seed is permitted, except on designated areas during nesting and brood-rearing seasons for birds whose populations are in significant decline.
- *Fire pre-suppression* – Construction and rehabilitation of fire breaks and the use of prescribed fire to reduce wildfire hazard is permitted, except during nesting and brood-rearing seasons for birds whose populations are in significant decline.
- *Recreational uses* – The participant reserves the right to recreational uses such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching as long as the usage does not adversely affect the land for the purposes identified by the easement or rental contract.
- *Subsurface resources* – If a third party owns the oil, gas, geothermal resources, or minerals on the property, NRCS consults with a geologist to perform a mineral assessment to identify the potential for development of minerals on the site. If the development of subsurface resources would adversely affect the conservation values of the land, the contract would be subject to termination.
- *Renewable energy* – Installation of renewable energy sources for power generation is authorized, provided their placement is consistent with the grazing uses and other conservation values of the program. Wind power generating facilities are not authorized

without site specific NEPA analysis that determines there would be no adverse impacts to protected species, cultural resources, or the human environment.

The 2014 Farm Bill repeals GRP as a stand-alone program, and the land eligibility requirements for CRP are amended to include the eligibility requirements for grasslands as described above. Grasslands enrollment would be limited to no more than 2 million acres at any given time and would count against the total CRP enrollment acreage cap. Enrollment would occur through Continuous Sign-up. Grasslands would be enrolled in 10- or 15-year contracts like other CRP acreage. Since one of the primary purposes of GRP was to protect grazing uses in addition to conservation, the authorized activities on enrolled grasslands under these eligibility requirements are different than the authorized activities on other CRP lands and include the following:

- Common grazing practices, including maintenance and necessary cultural practices, on the land in a manner consistent with maintaining the viability of grassland, forb, and shrub species appropriate to that locality.
- Haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production, subject to appropriate restrictions during the nesting season for birds in the local area that are economically significant, in significant decline, or conserved in accordance with Federal or state laws.
- Fire suppression, fire-related rehabilitation, and construction of fire breaks.
- Grazing-related activities, such as fencing and livestock watering.

The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes the Secretary to grant priority to lands expiring from current CRP contracts that will retain grass cover. To maximize enrollment of grasslands providing the most conservation value while maintaining the statutory maximum enrollment cap of two million acres, different factors, as determined by CCC, may be considered from time to time for priority purposes to accomplish the goals of the program. Those factors and ranking criteria are still under development but may include:

- Existence of expiring CRP land;
- Row crop to grassland conversion;
- Existence of expiring GRP land;
- Existing grassland;
- Existence of multi-species cover;
- Livestock grazing operation;
- State priority enrollment criteria (non-land based) and state focus area (land based); and
- Other considerations as determined by CCC.

The authorized activities are the same as those currently authorized on existing GRP contracts and easements. Under CRP, eligible grasslands would only be enrolled in 10- or 15-year contracts. Enrolling grasslands in easements would not be allowed under CRP, but would be allowed under the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, discussed in **Section 2.3.2**. Enrolled land under the eligibility requirements described above would receive annual payments in an amount not to exceed 75 percent of the grazing value of the land covered by the contract.

2.3.2 Final Year of Contract

A provision in the 2014 Farm Bill allows a CRP participant to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program during the year prior to expiration of the contract. Likewise, a new stipulation in the Farm Bill would allow CRP land to be enrolled in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program without violation of the contract. Rental payments could be reduced commensurate with the number of months left on the contract at the time of the transfer.

The Conservation Stewardship Program is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving and maintaining existing conservation systems. The program pays participants for conservation performance – the higher the performance, the higher the payment. Land is enrolled in 5-year contracts through Continuous Sign-up. The program addresses seven resource concerns (soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plant resources, and animal resources) as well as energy. Each NRCS State Conservationist, in consultation with the STC and local working groups, focuses the program on three to five priority resource concerns for their state. Under the 2014 Farm Bill, CRP land may be enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program during the final year of the CRP contract as long as the conservation activity required under the program is consistent with the existing CPs and avoids the PNS. Expiring CRP land must remain in conservation and cannot be converted to agricultural production in order to be eligible for this option. Improvements to the installed CP are allowed prior to enrolling in the program and would be similar to activities authorized for mid-contract maintenance.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. In general, the program combines the purposes of the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), GRP, and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. The goals of the program are to:

- Restore, protect, and enhance wetlands on eligible land.
- Protect the agricultural use and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses of that land.
- Protect grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring and conserving eligible land.

Two easement options would be available under this program: (1) an agricultural land easement for the purpose of protecting natural resources and the agricultural nature of the land while allowing the landowner to continue agricultural production and related uses as approved by the Secretary; and (2) a wetland easement for the purpose of protecting wetlands, including farmed or converted wetlands. Eligible land would be enrolled in 30-year easements (wetland easement only), permanent easements, or easements for the maximum duration allowed under applicable state laws.

Compensation for the permanent easement would be determined based on the lowest of the fair-market value of the land, an amount corresponding to a geographical cap as determined by the Secretary, or the offer made by the landowner. Compensation for 30-year wetland easements would be not less than 50 percent, but not more than 75 percent, of the compensation that would be paid for a permanent wetland easement. Cash payment for the easement would be provided in no more than ten annual payments, depending on easement value. Financial assistance to carry out the establishment of conservation measures and practices, and protect wetland functions and values, including maintenance activities, would

also be provided. Establishment of conservation measures and practices would be required to avoid the PNS.

CRP land may be enrolled in the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program without violating the CRP contract. Since this is a new program and full details are not yet known, this SPEIS assumes enrollment would be allowed during the final year of the contract and the land must remain in conservation, as described for the Conservation Stewardship Program. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is managed by NRCS. The NEPA analysis for this new program is not covered in this SPEIS.

2.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing of CRP acreage may be authorized to provide relief to livestock producers in areas affected by severe drought or a similar natural disaster. Emergency haying and grazing are intended for periods of drought or excessive moisture of such magnitude that livestock producers nationally or across large areas are faced with culling herds or livestock losses. Emergency haying and grazing are not authorized for situations where livestock producers suffer inconveniences in forage availability or prices because of less than ideal production or over-utilization of acreage not under the CRP contract.

Authorization for emergency haying and grazing is granted if either the Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs or FSA State Committee determines it is warranted and FSA Conservation and Environmental Programs Division concurs. Determinations for authorizing emergency haying and grazing are made on a county-by-county basis. Eligibility is based on evidence submitted by County Committees that the county is suffering from a 40 percent or greater loss of normal hay and pasture production due to drought, or because excessive moisture conditions and/or precipitation levels indicate an average of 140 percent or greater increase in normal precipitation during the four most recent consecutive months, plus the days in the current month before the date of request.

The U.S. Drought Monitor provides a weekly summary and map of drought conditions. The monitor is produced jointly by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), USDA, and National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The Drought Monitor identifies general drought areas and designates droughts by intensity, with D1 being the least intense and D4 being the most intense. **Table 2.3-1** provides a description of the drought levels and the possible impacts during these conditions.

Table 2.3-1. Drought Levels		
Category	**Description**	**Possible Impacts**
D0	Abnormally Dry	Going into drought: short-term dryness slowing planting, growth of crops or pastures Coming out of drought: some lingering water deficits; pastures or crops not fully recovered
D1	Moderate Drought	Some damage to crops, pastures; streams, reservoirs, or wells low; some water shortages developing or imminent; voluntary water-use restrictions requested
D2	Severe Drought	Crop or pasture losses likely; water shortages common; water restrictions imposed
D3	Extreme Drought	Major crop/pasture losses; widespread water shortages or restrictions
D4	Exceptional Drought	Exceptional widespread crop/pasture losses; shortages of water in reservoirs, streams, and wells creating water emergencies

Emergency haying and grazing are limited to the acreage physically located within the boundary of the eligible county or portion of the county. Emergency haying or grazing may be approved if a county is designated at least as drought level "D2 – Severe Drought." Acreage eligible for emergency haying and grazing includes acreage devoted to: CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes), CP2 (permanent native grasses), CP4B (permanent wildlife habitat corridors), CP4D (permanent wildlife habitat), CP10 (vegetative cover), CP18B (permanent covers reducing salinity), CP18C (permanent salt tolerant covers) (see **Section 2.4.3** for proposal to expand the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing). Ineligible acreage includes acreage devoted to useful life easements and land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent water body. Producers wishing to utilize emergency haying or grazing must obtain a modified Conservation Plan to include haying or grazing requirements as determined by NRCS. Emergency haying and grazing cannot occur during the PNS, except at the discretion of the Secretary during extreme conditions determined on a case-by-case basis (this is very uncommon).

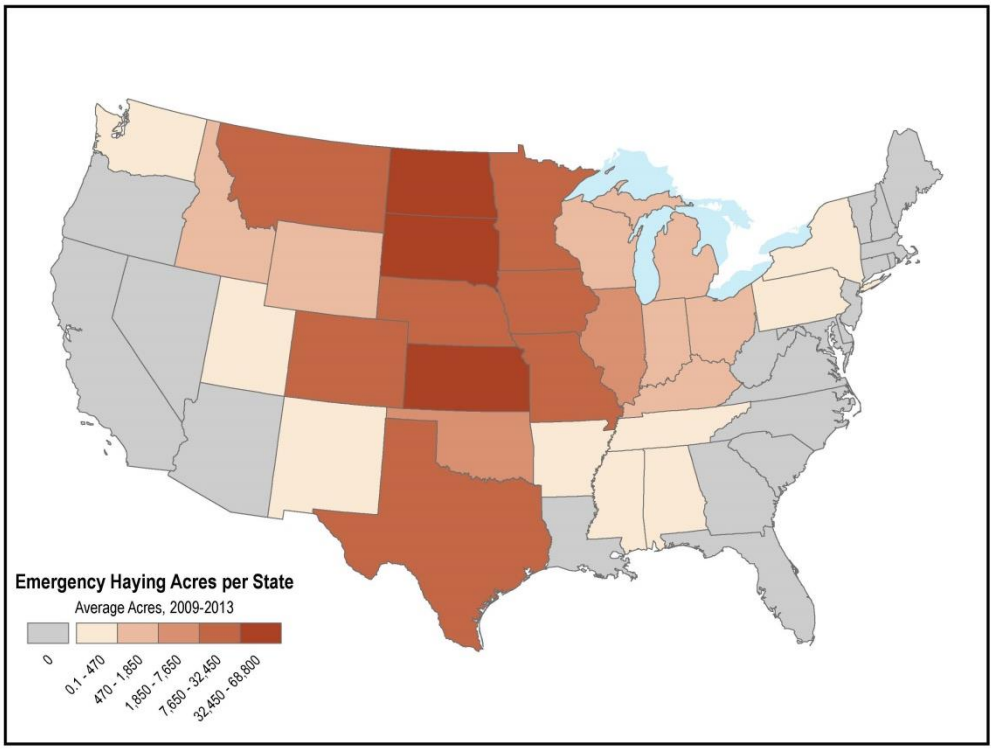
Figure 2.3-1 illustrates the average acres where emergency haying and grazing were permitted from 2009 through 2013. **Tables 2.3-2 and 2.3-3** provide acreage and number of contracts hayed or grazed under emergency provisions from 2009 through 2013.

Table 2.3-2. Emergency Haying and Grazing Acres, 2009-2013					
Year	**Emergency Haying**	**Emergency Grazing**	**Total Emergency Haying and Grazing**	**Total CRP**	**Percentage Where Emergency Haying or Grazing Occurred**
2009	9,235	5,517	14,752	33,721,252	0.04
2010	6,871	601	7,472	31,298,245	0.02
2011	164,318	847,755	1,012,073	31,124,371	3.25
2012	1,408,992	1,410,935	2,819,927	29,525,599	9.55
2013	211,268	488,183	699,451	26,838,152	2.60
Total	**1,800,684**	**2,752,991**	**4,553,675**		
Average per Year	**360,137**	**550,598**	**910,735**		

Note: CRP = Conservation Reserve Program.

Table 2.3-3. Emergency Haying and Grazing Contracts, 2009-2013					
Year	**Emergency Haying**	**Emergency Grazing**	**Total Emergency Haying and Grazing**	**Total CRP**	**Percentage Where Emergency Haying or Grazing Occurred**
2009	304	34	338	759,668	0.04
2010	195	15	210	744,642	0.02
2011	2,998	6,259	9,257	753,130	1.23
2012	43,382	13,271	56,653	738,544	7.67
2013	5,718	3,665	9,383	699,470	1.34
Total	**52,597**	**23,244**	**75,841**		
Average per Year	**10,519**	**4,649**	**15,168**		

Note: CRP = Conservation Reserve Program.



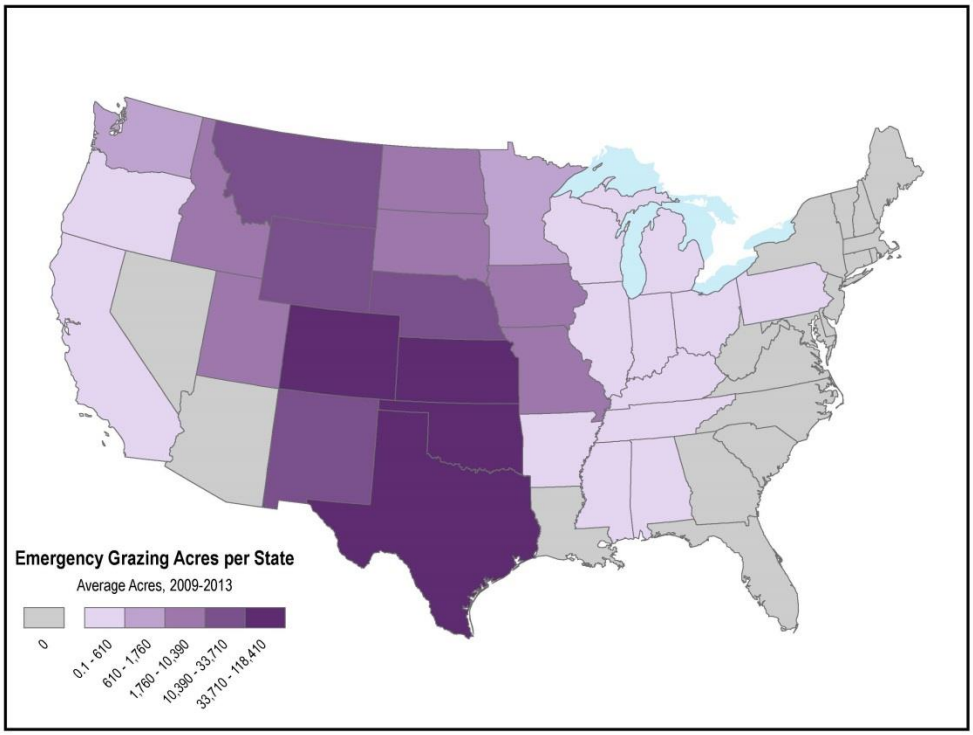


Figure 2.3-1. Emergency Haying and Grazing (Average Acres per Year, 2009-2013)

The 2014 Farm Bill authorizes the harvesting, grazing, or other commercial use of the forage in response to a drought, flooding, or other emergency without any reduction in the rental rate. In response to worsening drought conditions in recent years, the rental payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing was reduced to 10 percent in 2012 and 2013. All other years have assessed the standard 25 percent payment reduction.

In a national survey of CRP participants, the most extensive emergency use of CRP was in the Northern Plains and Southern Plains; with 3 percent of respondents in the Northern Plains indicating they had applied emergency haying or grazing five times, and 7 percent of respondents in the Southern Plains had used CRP acres for emergency forage four times (Allen and Vandever 2003).

Table 2.3-4 shows the acreage eligible for emergency haying and grazing each year compared to the acreage actually hayed or grazed under emergency provisions. Removing the required payment reduction could result in more haying and grazing under emergency provisions. As illustrated in **Table 2.3-4**, emergency haying and grazing occurred on a small percentage of the CRP land that was eligible for emergency haying or grazing (3.5% to 13.9%) regardless of the payment reduction assessed. Emergency haying and grazing activities would need to continue to be closely monitored by the STC (which includes state fish and wildlife agencies) and take into consideration local conditions (see **Section 1.1.2.3** for information on STC membership and responsibilities).

Table 2.3-4 Acreage Eligible for Emergency Haying and Grazing

Year	Payment Reduction	Acres Eligible for Emergency Haying or Grazing	Acres where Emergency Haying or Grazing Occurred
2009	25%	419,000	14,752 (3.5%)
2010	25%	178,000	7,472 (4.2%)
2011	25%	7,279,000	1,012,073 (13.9%)
2012	10%	22,062,000	2,819,927 (12.8%)
2013	10%	10,145,000	699,450 (6.9%)

2.4 PROPOSED ACTION

Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance, but details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action. In addition to those Farm Bill elements, FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands, and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought-designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

2.4.1 Targeted Enrollment

The maximum enrollment authority for CRP has been continuously reduced since the 2002 Farm Bill. The 2014 Farm Bill would further reduce the maximum enrollment for CRP to 24 million acres by FY 2017 (see **Section 2.2.1**). The reduced enrollment authority creates additional challenges for FSA to ensure enrolled land has the greatest potential for maximizing environmental benefits to meet program goals. Several initiatives and programs have been developed over the years to target enrollment of environmental resources of concern at the local, state, regional and national level to include Continuous Sign-ups, CREP, FWP, SAFE, and several other CPs established to meet a specific resource concern or environmental goal.

FSA utilizes Continuous Sign-ups to target environmentally sensitive lands. As of September 2014, there were over 5.7 million acres enrolled under Continuous CRP. Unlike General Sign-ups, currently land can be offered for Continuous CRP throughout the year and offers are not ranked like the General Sign-up process. Environmentally sensitive land may include, but is not limited to, agricultural land prone to erosion, pasture or agricultural land that borders river or stream banks, or field margins. Continuous CRP land eligibility requirements also take into consideration the type of CP the owner wishes to install. This enrollment targets land for the following CPs:

- Buffers for wildlife habitat
- Wetlands buffer
- Riparian buffer
- Wetland restoration
- Filter strips
- Grass waterways
- Shelter belts
- Living snow fences
- Contour grass strips
- Salt tolerant vegetation
- Shallow water areas for wildlife

CREP was first implemented in 1997 as a component of Continuous CRP to better target state environmental resource issues. CREP is a partnership between the states and/or Tribal governments and the Federal Government to address a high priority environmental problem. CREPs can focus on impacts to water supplies, loss of critical habitat for threatened and endangered wildlife species, soil erosion, and reduced habitat for fish populations as some examples. Land offered for CREP is also enrolled under the Continuous enrollment process, and as of September 2014, there were over 1.2 million acres of land enrolled under CREP.

FWP is a Continuous Sign-up program to restore farmable wetlands and associated buffers by improving the land's hydrology and vegetation. Restoring wetlands reduces downstream flood damage, improves surface and groundwater quality, and recharges groundwater supplies. CPs applicable to FWP include: CP27 (farmable wetlands), CP28 (farmable wetland buffers), CP39 (constructed wetlands), CP40 (aquaculture wetland restoration), and CP41 (flooded prairie wetlands). As of September 2014, there were nearly 340,000 acres enrolled in FWP (see **Section 2.2.2** for FWP enrollment changes).

SAFE is a highly successful Continuous CRP initiative that addresses state and regional high priority wildlife objectives. The CP developed for SAFE is intended to improve, connect, or create higher quality habitat to promote healthier ecosystems in areas identified as essential to effective management of high priority species. As of September 2014, there were nearly 900,000 acres enrolled in SAFE.

In addition to the specific initiatives and programs discussed above, several CPs are considered a form of targeting and were developed to address a specific region or conservation issue such as pollinator habitat, duck nesting habitat, etc. **Table 2.4-1** provides examples of CPs that are a form of targeted enrollment as well as the current enrollment statistics for each.

Table 2.4-1. Examples of Targeted Enrollment CPs

CPs	Current Enrollment (Acres)
CP25: Rare and Declining Habitat	1,704,537
CP31: Bottomland Hardwood Trees	112,863
CP33: Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds	248,642
CP36: Longleaf Pine Establishment	119,909
CP37: Duck Nesting Habitat	269,350
CP42: Pollinator Habitat	66,472

Note: CP = conservation practice.

The demand and need for conservation is increasing as budgetary and statutory constraints have tightened, motivating FSA to explore alternative ways to enroll acres. To increase the environmental benefits generated per Federal dollar spent, FSA is proposing to pilot a reverse auction approach when targeting enrollment for certain current or new initiatives. A reverse auction is simply a process in which many "sellers" compete with each other for the attention of a single "buyer" who then selects the most attractive offers from them. A carefully conceived reverse auction will motivate producers to submit a bid near to the minimum amount they are willing to accept to enroll in CRP. By then selecting the offers that generate the most environmental benefits per unit cost, FSA can efficiently allocate the budget.

FSA could implement a reverse auction to target enrollment of specified practices, groups of practices, or specific types of lands in order to meet environmental goals and maximize the environmental benefit of enrolled acres. The initiatives and specific practices to be involved could vary annually depending on the conservation need, enrollment goals, and funding availability. Like with current conservation initiatives, FSA would work with the STC and other Federal, regional, state, and local partners to determine practices or lands that could be targeted to address local, regional, or national resource concerns through this enrollment process. While the reverse auction appears to hold considerable promise for CRP, FSA would safely implement the reverse auction on a small scale as a proof-of-concept pilot to determine its effectiveness and applicability to the future of CRP. **Appendix F** provides a simulation of a potential reverse auction for CRP. Utilizing a reverse auction approach for targeted enrollment would have the following key features:

- A specific enrollment period would be defined annually; one sign-up and offer selection period with clearly defined eligibility requirements, anticipated conservation goal, and enrollment target.
- The specific conservation goal, initiative, geographic or otherwise targeted areas would be determined by FSA with input from national, regional, state, or local partners, providing flexibility to meet a variety of conservation goals.
- Eligible participants submit offers that include the desired, eligible practice and bid amount, which is unconstrained by a cap to encourage enrollment.
- When environmental other benefits can be treated as constant across offers, offers can be selected on the basis of cost. As necessary and feasible, selection can consider benefits as well. Either way, program benefits per dollar spent could be maximized.

In 2007, a reverse auction was used successfully to pay farmers to implement BMPs that reduced phosphorous pollution to local waterways. Under this pilot project, there were limited USDA

Conservation Innovation Grant funds available to support this conservation effort in the Conestoga watershed in Pennsylvania. The project highlighted the importance of considering both the environmental outcome as well as the price of the BMP before allocating funding. The results from this auction are useful because they revealed: (1) the price farmers were willing to accept for implementing a BMP or retiring land; (2) the cost-effectiveness of each BMP; and (3) the environmental outcome each bid achieved. Accepting bids based on the lowest cost phosphorous reductions ensured that the most cost-effective reductions submitted to the auction were purchased. The project was estimated to result in over 92,000 pounds of phosphorous reductions (Greenhalgh et al. 2007).

A similar concept to increase migratory bird habitat was recently introduced by The Nature Conservancy, who hopes to substantially increase the number of shorebirds that stop in the Central Valley through a program called BirdReturns. Under this program, rice farmers in the Central Valley along the Pacific Flyway are paid to keep their fields temporarily flooded with irrigation water after the rice harvest to provide much needed resting and feeding habitat for migrating shorebirds (The Nature Conservancy 2013). Enrollment in the program is through a reverse auction in which rice farmers submit offers and are selected based on cost. After a successful pilot in the fall of 2013, demand to enroll in the program more than doubled for the second sign-up in the fall of 2014. As a result, the Nature Conservancy plans to have sign-ups in both the spring and fall of 2015.

With the reduction in maximum enrolled acres to 24 million by FY 2017, utilizing a reverse auction for targeting enrollment of certain practices, groups of practices, or other initiatives as determined by FSA could have similar success and help increase CRP participation and increase environmental benefits of the program.

2.4.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Various forms of harvesting and grazing practices are used to maintain CRP cover and improve its quality and performance. The specific CP determines which harvesting or grazing provision is authorized. Prior to implementing harvesting or grazing, a producer must submit a request to the local FSA office and obtain a modified Conservation Plan for the activity that is in compliance with NEPA and all other applicable Federal and state laws and regulations (see **Section 1.1.2.2**). The Conservation Plan requires several site specific inventories, measures to meet specific objectives, methods, and BMPs to control or mitigate impacts, and contingency and monitoring plans. A resource assessment must be conducted that identifies resources present (vegetative cover, water sources, soils) and their condition, existing structures (fences, natural barriers) and facilities (location of gates, watering areas), and a site plan, as appropriate. An assessment of forage suitability must be completed, identifying the key forage species and associated acreage. The Conservation Plan includes the appropriate CP standards as defined in the NRCS Practice Standards for Forage Harvest Management (Code 511) and/or Prescribed Grazing (Code 528). The standards define BMPs that will be used to ensure the activity maintains vegetative cover, minimizes soil erosion, protects water quality, and protects wildlife habitat quality.

Table 2.4-2 provides a summary of harvesting and grazing provisions authorized for CRP land. Harvesting or grazing cannot occur during the PNS, which is established based on recommendations by USFWS, and CRP vegetative cover must be established for 12 months prior to implementing the activity. Ineligible acreage includes land enrolled in useful life easements, land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent waterbody, and land devoted to any other practice not authorized for harvesting or grazing. Harvesting and grazing cannot occur on the same acreage in the same year.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized managed harvesting and routine grazing of the CRP, replacing managed haying and managed grazing authority for new contracts. Managed harvesting includes the periodic removal of vegetation for livestock feeding (haying) or biomass (harvesting). Biomass harvest includes removing material, thinnings, or invasive species from CRP for uses other than a livestock foodsource. Routine grazing is allowing livestock to periodically graze CRP land to maintain the cover and improve the quality and performance of the vegetation. Managed grazing (same activity as routine grazing) is only authorized for contracts approved before July 28, 2010 and is not affected by changes in the 2014 Farm Bill. **Figure 2.4-1** illustrates the average acres by state of managed harvesting during 2009 through 2013 (2013 is the most recent available data for harvesting and grazing). **Figure 2.4-2** illustrates the average acres of routine grazing by state during 2011 through 2013 (routine grazing is applicable to contracts approved after 2010). **Tables 2.4-3 and 2.4-4** provide the total acres and contracts harvested or grazed from 2009 through 2013. As detailed in these tables, harvesting was far more utilized than grazing from 2009 through 2013. The average acreage harvested and grazed during this time period accounts for approximately 2 to 4 percent of the total CRP acreage. The average number of contracts harvested and grazed each year accounts for approximately 2 to 3 percent of the total CRP contracts. See **Appendix G** for percentage of CRP acres harvested and/or grazed by state from 2009 through 2013.

Table 2.4-2. Summary of Current Harvesting and Grazing Provisions

Activity	Eligible CPs[1]	Other Provisions
Managed Harvesting - Hay or Biomass	CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes) CP2 (permanent native grasses) CP4B (permanent wildlife habitat corridors) CP4D (permanent wildlife habitat) CP10 (vegetative cover, grass established) CP18B (permanent covers reducing salinity) CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant covers)	• No more frequent than once every 3 years • Not authorized during PNS • Up to 120 calendar days after the end of PNS • Limited to one cutting • Emergency haying or grazing restarts the clock
Routine Grazing	CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes) CP2 (permanent native grasses) CP4B (permanent wildlife habitat corridors) CP4D (permanent wildlife habitat) CP10 (vegetative cover, grass established) CP18B (permanent covers reducing salinity) CP18C (permanent salt-tolerant covers)	• Frequency and duration determined through consultation with STC • No more frequent than once every 3 years • Not authorized during PNS • Emergency haying or grazing restarts the clock

Note: [1] See **Appendix A** for full description of all CPs.
CP = conservation practice; PNS = Primary Nesting Season; STC = State Technical Committee.

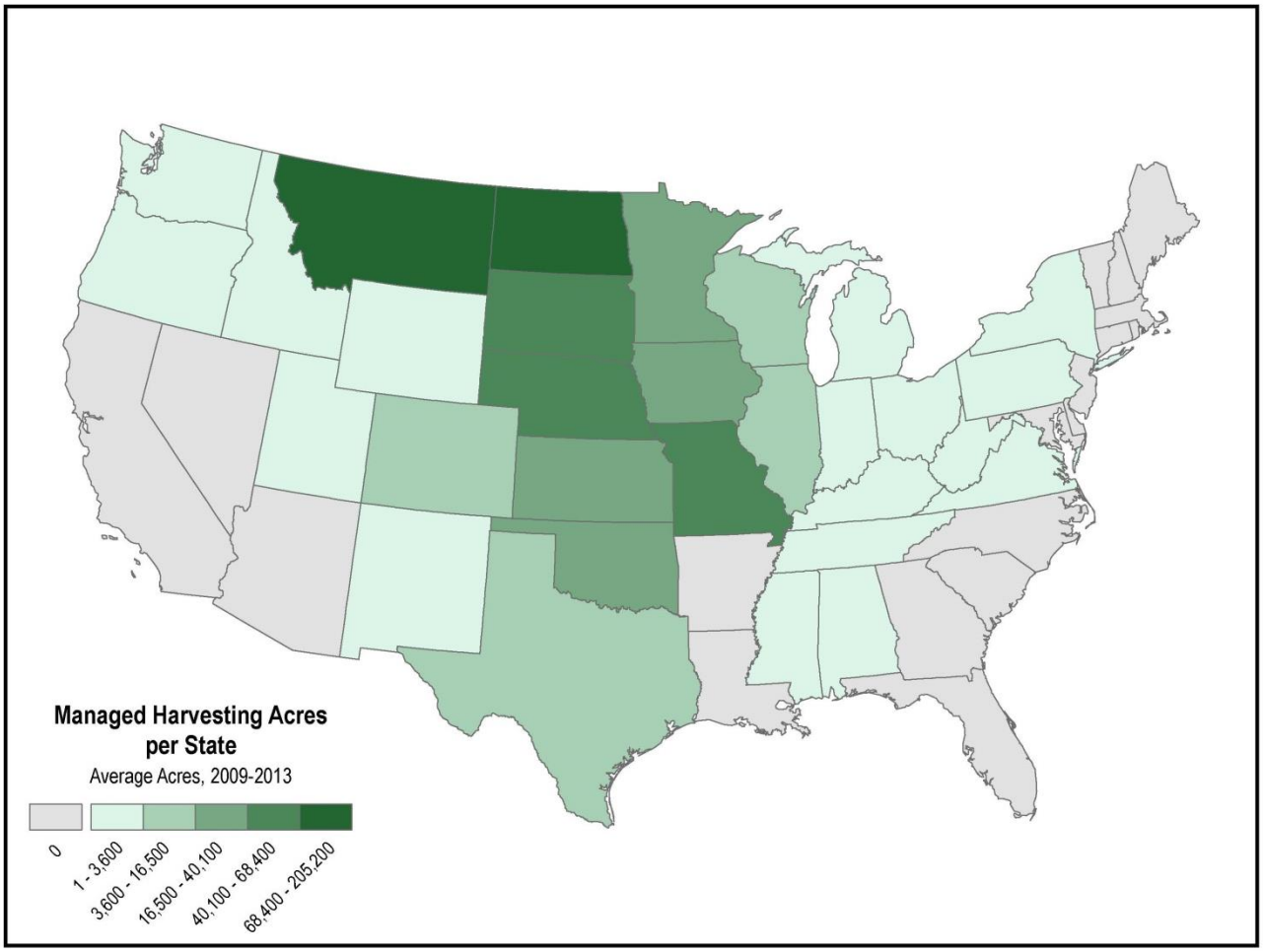


Figure 2.4-1. Managed Harvesting (Average Acres per Year, 2009-2013)

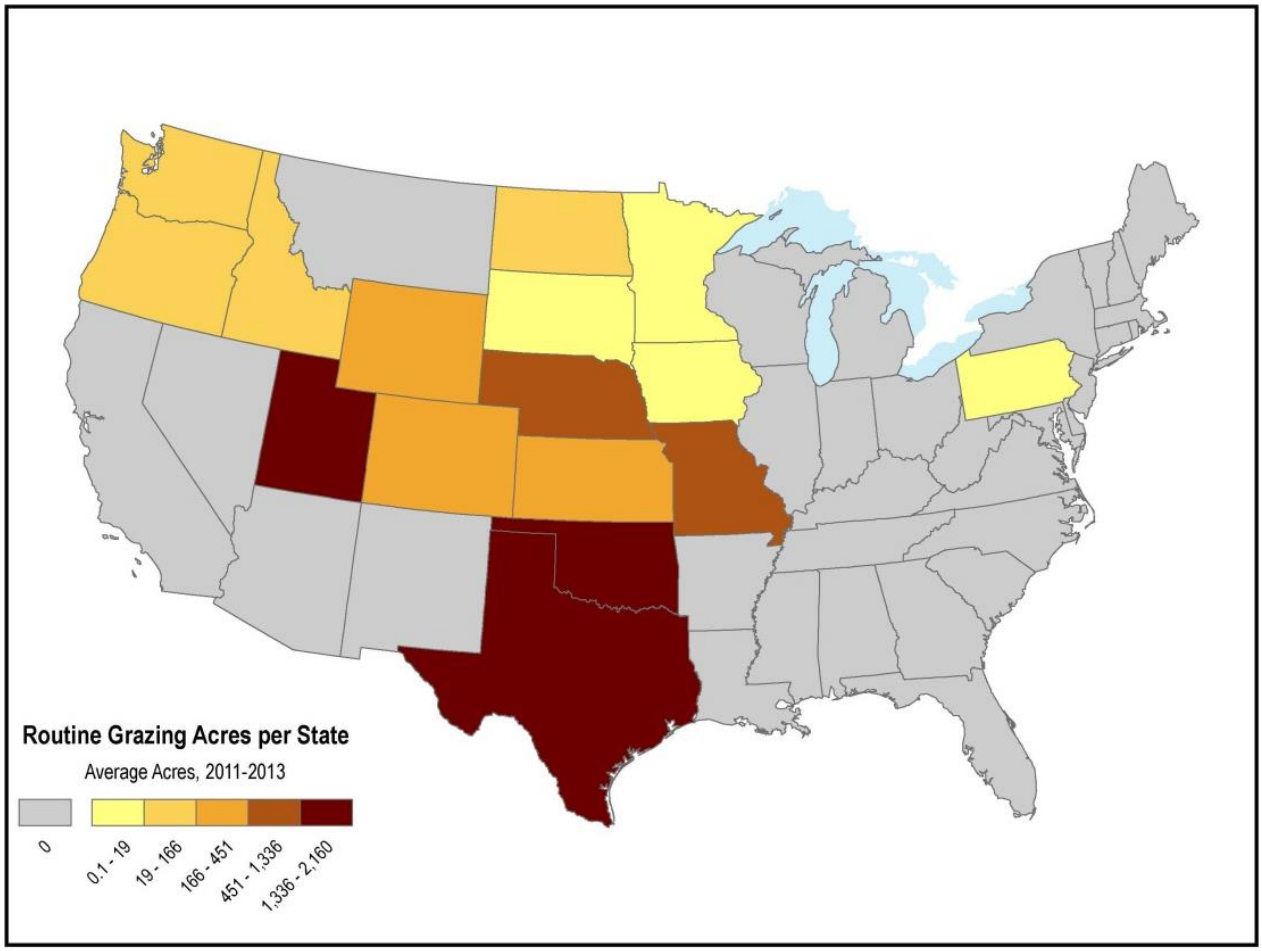


Figure 2.4-2. Routine Grazing (Average Acres per Year, 2011-2013)

Table 2.4-3. Acres Harvested or Grazed, 2009-2013

Year	Managed Harvesting	Managed Grazing[1]	Routine Grazing	Total Harvesting and Grazing	Total CRP	Percentage Harvested or Grazed
2009	1,188,476	247,635	n/a	1,436,111	33,721,252	4.2
2010	529,201	134,564	n/a	663,765	31,298,245	2.1
2011	915,999	131,172	13,676	1,060,847	31,124,371	3.4
2012	691,158	64,734	3,385	759,277	29,525,599	2.6
2013	624,556	102,009	11,702	738,267	26,838,152	2.8
Total	**3,949,390**	**680,114**	**28,763**	**4,658,267**		
Average per Year	**789,878**	**136,023**	**9,587**	**931,653**		

Note:[1] Managed grazing only authorized for contracts approved prior to July 28, 2010. Acreage provided in this table to provide a frame of reference for how much grazing occurs on CRP acreage.
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; n/a = not applicable.

Table 2.4-4. Number of Contracts Harvested or Grazed, 2009-2013

Year	Managed Harvesting	Managed Grazing[1]	Routine Grazing	Total Harvesting and Grazing	Total CRP	Percentage Harvested or Grazed
2009	17,471	2,430	n/a	19,901	759,668	2.6
2010	11,542	1,296	n/a	12,838	744,642	1.7
2011	18,178	1,325	147	19,650	753,130	2.6
2012	14,594	851	445	15,890	738,544	2.2
2013	12,022	802	66	12,890	699,470	1.8
Total	**73,807**	**6,704**	**658**	**81,169**		
Average per Year	**14,761**	**1,341**	**219**	**16,234**		

Note: [1] Managed grazing only authorized for contracts approved prior to July 28, 2010. Number of contracts provided in this table to provide a frame of reference for how many CRP contracts utilize grazing.
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; n/a = not applicable.

2.4.2.1 Managed Harvesting

The 2014 Farm Bill continues to allow for managed harvesting (hay or biomass) of CRP acres provided these activities are included in the Conservation Plan and are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The STC must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is at least once every 5 years (1/5), but no more frequently than once every 3 years (1/3) (see **Section 1.1.2.3** for additional information on STCs). Managed harvesting is not authorized to occur within the PNS. States wishing to change the PNS must comply with NEPA and other environmental regulations; this SPEIS does not address changes to PNS dates.

Currently, most states allow managed harvesting either 1/3 or 1/5 and would not be required to change these frequencies under the 2014 Farm Bill. Managed harvesting would continue in accordance with the existing frequencies covered by previous NEPA (previous CRP EISs or state-specific EAs) since they are within the parameters defined in the Farm Bill (at least 1/5, but no more than 1/3). See **Appendix H** for current allowable frequencies of managed harvesting by state.

Four states (Arizona, California, Colorado, and Nevada) allow for less frequent managed harvesting of once every 10 years (1/10). In accordance with the 2014 Farm Bill, these four states would be required to have more frequent harvesting than currently authorized (harvesting at least once in every 5 contract years) on contracts that wish to use managed harvesting to maintain the CRP cover. As shown in **Table 2.4-5**, Colorado is currently the only one of these four states where managed harvesting has occurred during the last Farm Bill period (2009-2013). There is no land enrolled in CRP in Arizona or Nevada. **Table 2.4-6** shows the CRP acreage in each of these four states by the CPs eligible for managed harvesting (as of October 2013). It should be noted that while almost all of CRP in Colorado is eligible for managed harvesting (98 percent), on average less than 1 percent of CRP land was harvested during 2009-2013 (see **Appendix E** for percentage of CRP acres harvested or grazed by state from 2009-2013).

This SPEIS analyzes more frequent managed harvesting (1/5) in these states according to the statutory change in the 2014 Farm Bill.

Table 2.4-5. Managed Harvesting Changes

	Total Acres Harvested (2009-2013)	Current Allowable Frequency	Proposed Minimum Allowable Frequency
Arizona	0	1/10	1/5
California	0	1/10	1/5
Colorado	71,997	1/10	1/5
Nevada	0	1/10	1/5

Table 2.4-6. Current CRP Acres Eligible for Managed Harvesting in Arizona, California, Colorado, and Nevada

State	CP1	CP2	CP4B	CP4D	CP10	CP18	Total Eligible Acres (% of CRP)[1]
Arizona	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
California	17,871	941	0	9,954	50,080	0	78,846 (95%)
Colorado	69,234	898,045	0	464,957	506,314	7	1,938,557 (98%)
Nevada	0	0	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)

Note: [1] Enrollment data as of September 2014.
[2] See **Appendix A** for description of all CPs.
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; CP = conservation practice; % = percent.

2.4.2.2 Routine Grazing

The 2014 Farm Bill continues to allow for routine grazing of CRP acres, provided these activities are included in the Conservation Plan and are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat. The STC would develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and stocking rates for the lands that are suitable for grazing. Under the 2014 Farm Bill, the STC would have more flexibility in establishing the frequency at which routine grazing can occur such that the frequency is not more than once every 2 years (1/2). In determining the allowable frequency, the STC must take into consideration regional differences such as: climate, soil type, and natural resources; the number of years that should be required between routine grazing activities; and how often during a year routine grazing should be allowed to occur. Routine grazing is not authorized to occur within the PNS. States wishing to change the PNS must comply with NEPA and other environmental regulations.

Currently, the allowable frequency for routine grazing varies by state, but it is no more frequently than once every 3 years (1/3) (**Appendix H**). Under the 2014 Farm Bill, states would have more flexibility to allow for more frequent routine grazing if approved by the STC. **Table 2.4-7** highlights those states that utilize routine grazing and the potential frequency change. This SPEIS analyzes routine grazing frequency on a programmatic level since states would not be required to change the allowable frequency for routine grazing, but would have flexibility to adjust frequencies based on their specific local conditions. The desired frequency changes could vary greatly across states and even within an individual state. Many states have a state-specific EA for the currently authorized haying or grazing frequencies and this SPEIS does not affect those EAs. Similarly, some states or areas that have existing additional restrictions in place for the frequency of harvesting or grazing are not affected by this change (i.e., the Biological Opinion for Implementation of CRP on Lesser Prairie Chicken Range). Any state wishing to adjust the routine

grazing frequency must review the proposed frequency for compliance with NEPA taking into consideration: the local circumstances; desired change; existing NEPA coverage; and concurrence from the STC and state agencies.

Table 2.4-7. Routine Grazing Frequency Changes

State	Average Acres (2011 – 2013)	Current Allowable Frequency	Potential Allowable Frequency
Colorado	248	1/5	1/2
Idaho*	166	1/5	1/2
Iowa	19	1/3	1/2
Kansas*	287	1/3	1/2
Minnesota	4	1/3	1/2
Missouri	800	1/3	1/2
Nebraska*	1,336	1/3	1/2
North Dakota*	110	1/5	1/2
Oklahoma*	2,160	1/3	1/2
Oregon*	148	1/5 (east); 1/3 (west)	1/2
Pennsylvania	8	1/3	1/2
South Dakota*	3	1/5	1/2
Texas*	2,148	1/3	1/2
Utah*	1,616	1/3	1/2
Washington*	85	1/5 (east); 1/3 (west)	1/2
Wyoming*	450	1/5	1/2
U.S. Total Average per Year	**9,587**		

Note: * These states have a state-specific EA for current allowable frequencies.
EA = Environmental Assessment; U.S. = United States.

2.4.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

Acreage eligible for emergency haying and grazing, is the same as the acreage eligible for managed haying and grazing, includes land devoted to practices: CP1 (introduced grasses and legumes), CP2 (native grasses), CP4B (wildlife habitat corridor), CP4D (permanent wildlife habitat), CP10 (existing grasses and legumes), CP18B (salinity reducing vegetation), and CP18C (salt tolerant vegetation) (see **Appendix A** for description of all CPs). Emergency haying and grazing may not occur during the PNS, except at the discretion of the Secretary during extreme conditions determined on a case-by-case basis (this is very uncommon). Further restrictions apply to eligible practices as follows:

- Emergency grazing:
  - May occur for up to 90 calendar days, before September 30.
  - One 30 calendar day extension may be authorized, before September 30.

    - May be authorized for an extension of up to 15 calendar days because of flooding, before September 30.
    - Shall leave at least 25 percent of each field or contiguous CRP fields ungrazed for wildlife, or graze not more than 75 percent of the stocking rate determined by NRCS or a TSP.
- Emergency haying:
    - May occur for up 60 calendar days, before September 30.
    - Extensions are not authorized.
    - Shall leave at least 50 percent of each field or contiguous fields unhayed for wildlife.
    - Is limited to one cutting.

Haying and grazing cannot occur on the same acreage. Ineligible acreage for emergency haying and grazing includes useful life easements, any land within 120 feet of a stream or other permanent water body, and any land enrolled in a CP not authorized for emergency haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing may occur any year after managed haying and grazing; however, managed haying and grazing may not be undertaken on acreage that was harvested under emergency provisions until the established frequency interval under managed provisions expires (see Section 2.4.2 for additional details on frequency intervals).

The Proposed Action addressed in this SPEIS includes affording the Secretary the discretionary authority to make additional CPs that are currently ineligible for any type of haying and grazing to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during severe drought conditions (D2 or greater; see **Section 2.3.3** for information on Drought conditions). Additional CPs to be eligible are provided in **Table 2.4-8**. Eligibility requirements for authorizing these CPs would remain the same as the current administration, i.e., the county must be suffering from a 40 percent or greater loss of normal hay and pasture production due to drought, or because excessive moisture conditions and/or precipitation levels indicate an average of 140 percent or greater increase in normal precipitation during the four most recent consecutive months. The additional CPs to be authorized under emergency conditions would depend on the local conditions and recommendations from the STC; that is, the STC can recommend to the Secretary which of these CPs to authorize during individual emergency situations or conditions. Authorizing emergency haying and grazing of any of these CPs would not be a permanent authorization, but rather authorized on a case by case basis. Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed CPs in drought-designated areas (D2 or greater) would require concurrence and approval by the STC and state and/or Federal wildlife agencies. Emergency haying and grazing would continue to be prohibited during the PNS, unless authorized by the Secretary during extreme conditions determined on a case-by-case basis, and other restrictions as noted above still would apply.

Table 2.4-8. Proposed CPs Eligible for Emergency Haying and Grazing in Drought-Designated Areas	
CP8	Grass waterways, noneasement
CP21	Filter strips
CP23	Wetland restoration
CP23A	Wetland restoration, non-floodplain
CP25 (grazing only)	Rare and declining habitats
CP27	Farmable wetlands
CP28	Farmable wetland buffers
CP37	Duck nesting habitat
CP39	Constructed wetland
CP41	Flooded prairie farmable wetlands

Note: See **Appendix A** for description of all CPs.
CP = conservation practice.

2.5 ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED

When the NOI was published, the 2014 Farm Bill had not been passed by Congress and two versions of the Farm Bill were being considered (Senate and House versions). Since it was not known at that time when the Bill would be passed, separate alternatives for the Senate version of the Farm Bill (Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2014) and the House version of the Farm Bill (Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act of 2014) were considered. However, the 2014 Farm Bill was passed by Congress during preparation of the SPEIS and the two alternatives were eliminated from consideration. The provisions originally included in the two separate alternatives were very similar to those ultimately passed in the 2014 Farm Bill. As such, all scoping feedback remained applicable and was considered when developing the updated alternatives and analyses presented in the SPEIS.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

This chapter describes the existing environmental and socioeconomic conditions to serve as a baseline to which the potential impacts of the Proposed Action will be compared in Chapter 4. This SPEIS focuses descriptions of the potentially affected lands and resources on those lands that either are eligible to be enrolled in CRP under the 2014 Farm Bill provisions, or are on lands currently enrolled in the program. As such, these potentially affected lands include any of the following:

- Cropland that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity during 4 of the 6 years prior to 2014 and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity.
- Cropland with a weighted average Erodibility Index (EI) for the three predominant soils on the acreage offered of 8 or higher (considered highly erodible land [HEL]).
- Land currently enrolled in CRP scheduled to expire September 30 of the FY the acreage is offered for enrollment.
- Cropland located within a National- or state-designated Conservation Priority Area (CPA).
- Environmentally sensitive land of special significance.
- Land suitable for riparian buffers, wildlife habitat buffers, wetland buffers, filter strips, wetland restoration, grass waterways, field windbreaks, shelterbelts, living snow fences, contour grass strips, salt tolerant vegetation, or shallow water areas for wildlife.
- Land within a USEPA-designated public wellhead area.

Additional eligibility requirements with respect to grasslands have been defined in the 2014 Farm Bill to include privately owned grasslands, including Tribal lands, that:

- Contain forbs or shrubs (including rangeland and improved pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use, and
- Are located in an area that has been historically dominated by grasslands; and
- Could provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value if the land is retained in the current use or restored to its natural condition.

In compliance with NEPA CEQ regulations, and FSA procedures for implementing NEPA, the description of the affected environment focuses on only those resources potentially subject to impacts. In addition, the level of analysis should be commensurate with the anticipated level of impact. This SPEIS supplements the 2010 CRP SEIS and, as such, descriptions of the affected environment tier to that document. In many resource areas, a brief summary is provided along with relevant updated information. For more detailed descriptions of the affected environment, refer to the 2010 CRP SEIS (USDA 2010).

Applying the CEQ guidelines, the discussion of the affected environment and associated environmental impact analysis presented herein focuses on Biological Resources (vegetation, wildlife, and protected species), Soils, Water Resources (surface water, groundwater, floodplains, and wetlands), Air Quality, Recreation, and Socioeconomics.

3.1 RESOURCES ELIMINATED

CEQ regulations (1501.7(a)(3)) indicate that the lead agency should identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues that are not important or that have been covered by prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues in the document to a brief presentation of why they would not have a significant effect on the human or natural environment. This SPEIS supplements the 2010 CRP SEIS; the following resources were eliminated from detailed analysis in that document and are also eliminated in this SPEIS:

Noise. Implementing the Proposed Action would not permanently increase ambient noise levels at or adjacent to CRP lands. Noise from heavy equipment is common on agricultural lands that could be enrolled in CRP. The potential for increased noise levels associated with implementing CPs would be minor, temporary, and localized, and would cease once implementation of the approved CPs was completed.

Other Protected Resources. The lands eligible for CRP are privately owned; therefore, there is limited potential for impacts to National Natural Landmarks, Federal Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, National or State Parks, or Federal or State Wildlife Refuges. A site specific resource inventory would be conducted prior to enrollment in CRP; proposed activities that have the potential to affect a Protected Resource would be identified and FSA would coordinate with the responsible land managing agency regarding potential impacts.

Wild and Scenic Rivers. This SPEIS does not address specific locations to be enrolled in CRP at this time; therefore, impacts to designated Wild and Scenic Rivers are not addressed. FSA would conduct a site specific EE prior to approval of CRP enrollment. If a Wild and Scenic River is within the project area, or the project has the potential to affect a Wild and Scenic River, FSA would initiate consultation with the appropriate river-administering agency (Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, USFWS, or USFS).

Cultural Resources. This SPEIS does not address specific locations to be enrolled in CRP; therefore, cultural resources are not analyzed in this SPEIS. As with all CRP land enrollment, a site specific EE would be conducted prior to approval of any CRP contracts during the conservation planning process, or when existing Conservation Plans are modified to permit new activities such as harvesting or grazing. The likely impact of CRP enrollment on cultural resources would not be greater than expected for normal agricultural production since the majority of the lands in the program are required to have been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity to be eligible for CRP during 4 of the 6 previous years.

Prime and Unique Farmland. The majority of lands eligible for enrollment in CRP are highly erodible or are marginal pastureland, which do not meet the definition of Prime and Unique Farmland, as defined by the Farmland Protection Policy Act of 1981, and it is therefore eliminated from further analysis.

Environmental Justice. EO 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations* was enacted to ensure that the environmental effects of Federal actions do not fall disproportionately on low-income and minority populations.

Recent farm legislation has included incentives for socially disadvantaged farmers, ranchers, and Indian tribes to increase access to conservation programs by making them eligible for more favorable payment and enrollment terms than other farmers received. An evaluation of these incentives found that farmers with limited farm sales and income, and farmers belonging to segments of the population that have

historically been subject to discrimination, such as African American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic, Asian American, or Pacific Island farmers, comprise as much as 17 percent of the farm population (NASS 2009). The evaluation found that from 2004 to 2007, about 12 percent of CRP participants were limited-resource and socially-disadvantaged farmers. The evaluation also found that these farmers participated differently in conservation programs with conservation priorities and levels of payments focused more on environmentally sensitive lands (NASS 2009).

FSA actively ensures that minority and low-income populations have access to and information about FSA programs through its Outreach and Education Program (OEP). OEP provides information and technical assistance about FSA programs to farmers and ranchers with the goal of increasing participation of underserved populations, including limited resource farmers and socially disadvantaged farmers. Additionally, the OEP staff works with states to encourage socially disadvantaged groups to participate in local governance activities and with community groups, colleges, minority associations, and Tribally-controlled colleges to provide technical assistance, training, and enhanced program delivery to those populations.

FSA also has an Office of Civil Rights, which includes the Compliance and Program Analysis Branch. The Compliance Branch ensures nondiscrimination in program delivery, including CRP. The Compliance and Program Analysis Branch is required (by USDA Directive 4300-4) to review and approve each Civil Rights Impact Analysis, which is required prior to issue of any significant new FSA regulation.

The Office of Civil Rights has determined that CRP and its inherent provisions is a voluntary program open to all eligible participants, including minorities, women, and persons with disabilities with no regard of their race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, or marital/familial status.

FSA procedures, as well as state and site specific EAs and EEs, compliance with other regulations, mitigations, and conservation planning ensure no significant environmental or social impacts occur and that minorities and low-income populations are not disproportionately impacted.

3.2 VEGETATION

3.2.1 Definition of Resource

Vegetation, for the purposes of this SPEIS, refers to the plant species, both native and introduced (including invasive and noxious species) that characterize a region. This analysis focuses on the vegetation found on those lands eligible for enrollment in CRP or those lands already enrolled in the program.

3.2.2 Affected Environment

Because of the large geographic scope of CRP, the analysis for vegetation will focus on Level I Ecoregions of the U.S. Ecoregions have relatively homogenous vegetation, soils, climate, and geology. Vegetation and vegetative communities are dependent on climate and soils, so ecoregions give an approximation of the vegetative communities that may be present throughout a large land area (CEC 1997).

Within the contiguous lower 48 states, there are ten Level I Ecoregions (CEC 1997): Northern Forests, Northwestern Forested Mountains, Marine West Coast Forest, Eastern Temperate Forests, Great Plains, North American Deserts, Mediterranean California, Southern Semiarid Highlands, Temperate Sierras, and

Tropical Wet Forests (**Figure 3.2-1**). Because these regions have similar climate and soils, among other characteristics, their boundaries are independent of political boundaries. **Table 3.2-1** gives a brief description of vegetative communities of each ecoregion. Alaska does not have a large amount of land in agricultural production or a large enrollment in CRP; therefore, the ecoregions present solely in Alaska are not described in **Table 3.2-1**.

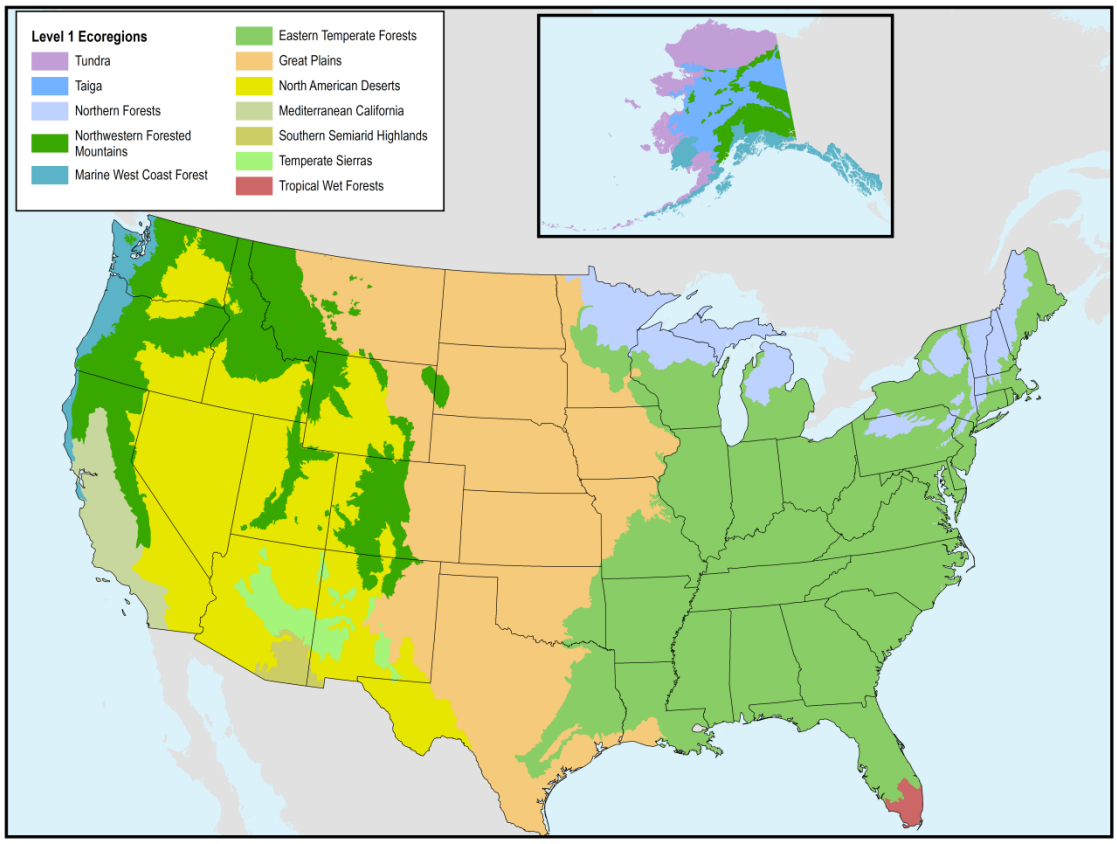


Figure 3.2-1. Level I Ecoregions of the U.S.

Table 3.2-1. Level I Ecoregion Descriptions and Approximate Areas in the Lower 48 States

Name	Vegetation Community Description	Approximate Acreage (%)
Northern Forests	Supports generally closed stands of conifers, largely white and black spruce, jack pine, balsam fir, and tamarack. Towards the south, there is a wider distribution of white birch, trembling aspen, balsam poplar, white and red pine, sugar maple, beech, red spruce, and various species of oak. Areas of shallow soils and exposed bedrock are common and tend to be covered with a range of vegetative communities, dominated by lichens, shrubs, and forbs.	89,916,224 (5%)
Northwestern Forested Mountains	Vegetative cover is extremely diverse. Alpine environments contain herb, lichen, and shrub associations; whereas subalpine environments have tree species such as lodgepole pine, subalpine fir, silver fir, grand fir, and Engelmann spruce. With decreasing elevation, vegetation of the mountainous slopes and rolling plains turns into forest characterized by ponderosa pine, interior Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, and trembling aspen in much of the southeast and central portions; and western hemlock, western red cedar, Douglas fir, and western white pine in the west and southwest. White and black spruce dominate the plateaus of the north. Shrub vegetation found in the dry southern interior includes big sagebrush, rabbitbrush, and antelope bitterbrush. Most of the natural grasslands that existed in the dry south have been replaced by urban settlement and agriculture.	203,184,145 (11%)
Marine West Coast Forest	Variations in altitude create widely contrasting ecological zones within the region. Zones range from mild, humid coastal rain forest to cool boreal forests and alpine conditions at higher elevations. The temperate coastal forests are composed of mixtures of western red cedar, yellow cedar, western hemlock, Douglas fir, Pacific silver fir, Sitka spruce, California redwood, and red alder. Many areas still contain old growth forest. In drier rain-shadow areas, Garry oak and Pacific madrone occur with Douglas fir. Subalpine forests are characterized by mountain hemlock and Pacific silver fir. Alpine tundra conditions are too severe for growth of most woody plants, except for dwarf forms. This zone is dominated by shrubs, herbs, mosses, and lichens.	20,737,771 (1%)
Eastern Temperate Forests	These forests form a dense canopy consisting mostly of tall broadleaf, deciduous trees and needle-leaf conifers. Beech-maple and maple-basswood forest types occur widely, especially in the eastern reaches. Mixed oak-hickory associations are common in the Upper Midwest, changing to oak-hickory-pine mixed forest in the south and the Appalachians. Various species of oaks, hickories, maples, and pines are common. Other wide-ranging species include ashes, elms, black cherry, yellow poplar, sweet gum, basswood, hackberry, common persimmon, eastern red cedar, and flowering dogwood.	619,453,910 (32%)

Table 3.2-1. Level I Ecoregion Descriptions and Approximate Areas in the Lower 48 States

Name	Vegetation Community Description	Approximate Acreage (%)
Great Plains	This ecoregion is found in the central part of the continent and is the largest of all the ecoregions. This ecoregion was once covered by natural grasslands that supported rich and highly specialized plant and animal communities. The interaction of climate, fire, and grazing influenced the development and maintenance of the Great Plains. Rainfall increases from west to east, defining different types of native prairie. Short-grass prairie occurs in the west in the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains, with mixed-grass prairie in the central Great Plains, and tallgrass prairie in the wetter, eastern region. This ecoregion is distinguished by little topographic relief, domination of the landscape by grasslands, a paucity of forests, and a climate ranging from subhumid to semiarid.	553,053,237 (29%)
North American Deserts	This region exhibits a great deal of altitudinal, latitudinal, and landform diversity. A variety of vegetation communities exist, but low-growing shrubs and grasses predominate. This region is distinguished from the adjacent Northwest Forested Mountains Ecoregion by its aridity, unique shrub and cactus vegetation with lack of trees, and generally lower relief and elevations.	349,631,214 (18%)
Mediterranean California	This ecoregion is relatively small and found on the western coast. It is distinguished by its warm and mild Mediterranean climate, shrubland vegetation of chaparral mixed with areas of open grassland and open oak woodlands, and its agriculturally productive valleys. It also has a high human population in extensive urban areas.	40,488,931 (2%)
Southern Semiarid Highlands	Characteristic natural vegetation, which is greatly diminished or altered, consists of grasslands and combinations of grasslands with scrublands and forests in the transition zones. Dominant grass species are blue-stem, threeawn, galleta, and muhly grass. Mesquite and acacia may be found in some shrub and treed areas. Oak and western juniper are common at the foot of the Sierras.	10,542,250 (<1%)
Temperate Sierras	Vegetation can be evergreen or deciduous, primarily being composed of conifers and oaks. Vegetative cover may comprise one to three tree layers, one or two shrub layers, and an herbaceous stratum. Mountain cloud forest occurs in some areas.	26,894,936 (1%)
Tropical Wet Forests	This ecoregion is represented by the southern tip of Florida in the U.S. It is characterized by widespread flooded marshes and swamps (both saltwater and freshwater), with characteristic mangrove vegetation found in the Everglades.	5,370,539 (<1%)

Source: CEC 1997.
Note: U.S. = United States.

As shown in **Figure 3.2-1 and Table 3.2-1**, in the lower 48 states, the majority of the land area falls into Eastern Temperate Forests or the Great Plains (over 60 percent of the contiguous U.S.). Though Alaska has a large land area and can be classified by ecoregion, it makes up little of the land currently enrolled in CRP (see **Section 3.2.2 and Figure 3.2-2**).

Lands that are eligible for the CRP can occur in any ecoregion. In general, lands that are eligible for CRP include the following:

- Croplands – lands used for the production of adapted crops for harvest, including cultivated and uncultivated crops.
- Hayland – cropland managed for the production of forage crops that are machine harvested, including grasses, legumes, or a combination of both.
- Horticultural cropland – cropland used for growing fruit, nuts, berries, vineyards, and other bush fruit and similar crops including nurseries or ornamental plantings.
- Irrigated cropland – land that shows evidence of being irrigated by ditches, pipes, or other conduits during the year of inventory or of having been irrigated during 2 or more of the last 4 years.
- Pastureland – land managed primarily for the production of introduced forage plants for livestock grazing, which may consist of a single species in a pure stand, a grass mixture, or a grass-legume mix.
- Rangeland – land where plant cover is composed principally of native grasses, grass-like plants, forbs, or shrubs suitable for grazing and browsing, and introduced forage species that are managed like rangeland.

Additionally, CRP may include environmentally desirable lands that do not fit into the aforementioned categories. These lands may be wetlands, riparian areas, or rare and declining habitats.

3.2.2.1 Current CRP Enrollment

As shown in **Figure 3.2-2**, current CRP enrollment is concentrated in the Great Plains and Eastern Temperate Forests Ecoregions. Because of the variation in enrollment across ecoregions, changes to CRP would be expected to affect ecoregions differently.

Table 3.2-2. Current CRP Enrollment by Level I Ecoregion

Level I Ecoregion	Acres	Percentage
Northern Forests	204,583	1%
Northern Forested Mountains	912,574	4%
Marine West Coast Forest	5,138	<1%
Eastern Temperate Forests	5,595,101	22%
Great Plains	16,634,042	65%
North American Deserts	2,167,351	9%
Mediterranean California	73,485	<1%
Temperate Sierras	1,009	<1%
Total	**25,593,283**	**100%**

Note:
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program
This table utilizes county data to calculate the acreage within each Ecoregion. The most current county level GIS data is September 2013; therefore, total acreage reported in this table is slightly higher (approximately 150,000 acres) than enrollment data reported in Sections 1.0 and 2.0 of this SPEIS.

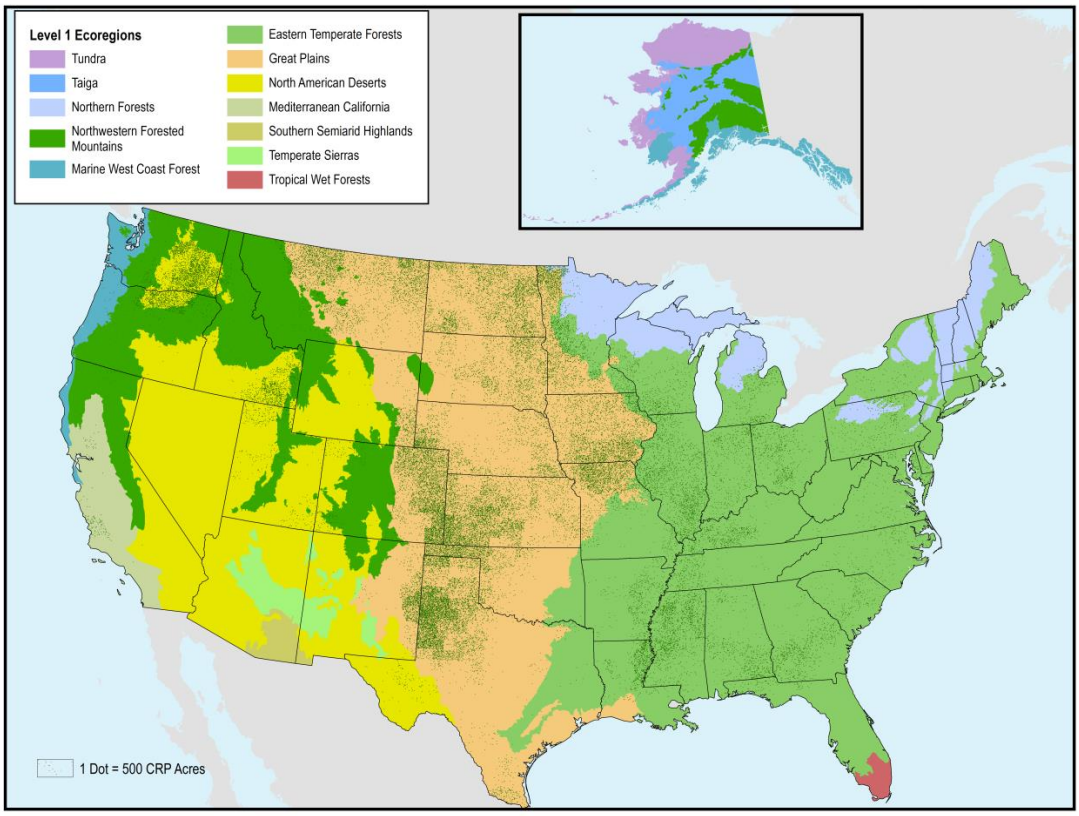


Figure 3.2-2. CRP Enrollment by Level I Ecoregion

3.2.2.2 Invasive and Noxious Plant Species

An invasive species is defined as a species that is not native to an ecosystem and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health (USDA 2012). According to the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, noxious species are those species classified as undesirable, harmful, exotic, injurious, or poisonous, pursuant to state or Federal law. Additionally, many states have lists of weed species and methodologies prescribed for the control of invasive and noxious plants. CRP Conservation Plans are required to have provisions for identification and control or eradication of invasive or noxious species (USDA 2013). **Section 3.1.2.1** of the 2010 CRP SEIS covers invasive and noxious plant species thoroughly, and provides a list of the major economically and ecologically important invasive species in the U.S. (USDA 2010). This document also provides a thorough discussion on the rationale for using non-native vegetation under certain environmental conditions for the purposes of establishing CRP conservation cover. Also covered in **Section 3.1.2.2** of the 2010 CRP SEIS, are common invasive species that impact the CRP including kudzu, yellow starthistle, and common buckthorn. A brief discussion of their habitats, potential causes of spread, and control measures also are included (USDA 2010).

Invasive species can have negative impacts on biological resources, including reductions in native wildlife and plant populations. Invasive species generally are introduced from other parts of the world

and, as such, have no natural competitors or limiting factors and can out-compete native species and even alter entire ecosystem composition.

Eradication or control of invasive species can be difficult and expensive, and often requires multiple control methods to be effective. Application of herbicide, grazing, burning, mechanical control (such as cutting, excavating and mowing) are all methods that are used, usually in combination with one another, to control invasive species and noxious weeds. Relying heavily on one method may result in a species adapting defenses against that control method, rendering it less effective.

The establishment or spread of invasive and noxious weeds is associated with ground disturbing activities, including the grazing of livestock. Grazing livestock can disturb soils and transport seeds in their coats and droppings. Poorly managed grazing is more likely to spread invasive and noxious weeds than aid in their control. Conservation Plans and Grazing Management Plans include methodologies for the identification, control, and eradication of noxious weeds and invasive species.

3.3 WILDLIFE

3.3.1 Definition of Resource

Wildlife refers to the animal species (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, and fish/shellfish), both native and introduced, that characterize a region.

3.3.2 Affected Environment

As with vegetation, the large geographic scale of the program prohibits the listing of all species that may be present on lands that are already enrolled or are eligible for enrollment in CRP. This discussion will instead focus on wildlife habitat, and the importance CRP has played in habitat conservation over its 29-year lifespan.

During the past 40 years, wildlife populations have declined throughout the entire U.S. (NRCS 2009). Declines have occurred largely due to loss of wildlife habitat attributed to intensive farming, forest management, deforestation, advanced natural succession, fire-exclusion, invasion of exotic plants, and urbanization (NRCS 2009).

Agriculture dominates human uses of land. In the U.S., non-Federal, rural land uses comprise around 71 percent of the lower 48 states (approximately 1.4 billion acres) (NRCS 2013). In 2010, approximately 917 million acres (47 percent) of the lower 48 states were devoted to cropland, CRP, pasture, or rangeland uses (NRCS 2013). How these lands are managed or maintained can have large impacts on the structure and function of ecosystems and the wildlife populations that these ecosystems support.

Often agricultural lands can provide forage and cover for wildlife in the form of large monoculture fields. Lands enrolled in CRP that may be adjacent to such fields create or maintain habitat diversity, which in turn can benefit wildlife populations. A dynamic mosaic environment is most beneficial for supporting wildlife diversity (USDA 2010).

Across the plains states of the central U.S., grasslands are being lost to other land uses. From 2006 to 2011, more than 1.3 million acres of grassland was converted to cropland across the northern Great Plains. In the Prairie Pothole Region, more than two-thirds of the original 90 million acres of native grasslands have been converted to other uses (Ducks Unlimited 2013). The Prairie Pothole Region is the most important breeding area in the nation for many duck species, with estimates that as many as

21 percent of all breeding ducks from the North American breeding bird survey area occur in the Prairie Pothole Region of the Dakotas (Reynolds 2005). CRP fields have been shown to have benefits to a variety of grassland bird species. However, while CRP has been beneficial to breeding grassland birds, restored grasslands and conservation cover do not benefit all native wildlife (Johnson 2005). Johnson (2005) has noted that maintaining extant native prairie should be a high priority for the conservation of birds, as well as many other animal and plant species. Lands in CRP provide nesting, migratory, and wintering habitat for a number of species during all periods of the year, including browse for game and non-game mammals and birds, nesting habitat for waterfowl and other birds, and native vegetation communities that can benefit all native species. With every version of the Farm Bill, wildlife benefits have become more strongly represented in CRP, and many CPs are implemented with wildlife conservation as their primary goal (Ryan 2005). Wildlife response to CRP is a multi-scale phenomenon dependent on vegetation structure and composition within the planting; practice-level factors such as size and shape; its landscape context; and temporal factors (Ryan 2005). Changes to CPs and CRP will have unique impacts to each species, benefiting some and having negative impacts on others. Studies indicate that vegetation conditions outside of the CRP land may have a larger impact on avian populations than CRP land itself, and it is thought that the same may be true for wildlife (Ryan 2005). There are few large-scale studies of CRP benefits to wildlife, with the greatest body of knowledge being its use by grassland bird species.

The scale of impacts to wildlife is directly related to the benefits that habitat can produce. Habitat fragmentation, which occurs when a large region of habitat is broken down into smaller patches, also affects wildlife. Habitat fragmentation is detrimental to species that require large contiguous patches of land and beneficial to others that may favor smaller edge habitats. Many wildlife species depend on a minimum habitat patch size to maintain viable breeding populations. Fragmentation can create patches that are too small to support some wildlife species.

Wildlife generalist species, those that can utilize a wide variety of habitats, tend to thrive in disturbed and fragmented habitats. Conversely, specialists, those species that have very narrowly defined habitat requirements, are more likely to be affected by habitat loss and fragmentation. Agricultural practices have the effect of fragmenting natural habitat with large monoculture stands. CRP plantings and conserved native grasslands can alleviate some of the habitat fragmentation through the enrollment of large-scale CRP fields or use of CPs (like wildlife corridors) that benefit wildlife. Targeted enrollment could be used to connect fragmented habitat into intact parcels that provide adequate sized tracts of wildlife habitat; this use would be particularly important for species such as the lesser prairie chicken which requires large contiguous tracts of habitat.

3.4 PROTECTED SPECIES

3.4.1 Definition of Resource

Protected species, for the purposes of this analysis, are those species Federally designated as threatened or endangered under the ESA (16 USC 1531 et seq.) or species that are considered candidates for being listed as threatened or endangered. The ESA requires Federal agencies to ensure that the actions they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species, or result in the destruction or adverse modification of their critical habitat. As of March 2014, 643 threatened and endangered animals and 874 threatened and endangered plants were listed in the U.S. (USFWS 2014a). Of the 1,517 threatened or endangered species, 661 have Federally

designated critical habitat. Critical habitat is defined as specific geographic areas that contain features essential to the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and that may require special management and protection. Critical habitat may include areas that are not currently occupied by the species, but that will be needed for its recovery (USFWS 2014b).

3.4.2 Affected Environment

The Endangered Species Preservation Act was passed by Congress in 1966, and expanded the authority of the Secretary of the Interior to manage and administer the National Wildlife Refuge System. This was an attempt to preserve endangered vertebrates by establishing habitat refuges and prohibiting the taking of these animals on these lands. This was updated in 1969, and again in 1973 with the ESA. The ultimate goal of the ESA is to conserve threatened and endangered plant and animal species by listing species in this condition and improving their status until they can finally be removed from the list

USFWS is the lead Federal agency governing terrestrial and freshwater threatened and endangered species, while NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) regulates marine threatened and endangered species. Federal agencies proposing activities that have the potential to impact threatened and endangered species must consult with USFWS and/or NMFS. Protected species often have very specific habitat requirements or occupy a specialized niche in an ecosystem.

As discussed in the 2010 CRP SEIS, habitat destruction is the most important factor leading to a species being listed as threatened or endangered. Habitat loss plays a role in approximately 95 percent of those species Federally listed (NRCS 2013). Habitat destruction and land cover and land use change have impacted nearly every habitat and ecosystem. Agriculture represents a major contributor to habitat destruction, and now occupies approximately 47 percent of the U.S. land area (NRCS 2013). Agriculture directly replaces natural habitat with cultivated croplands, and can result in soil erosion, pollution from agricultural inputs, and pollution from runoff into aquatic habitats.

Federally protected species may permanently or temporarily (in the case of migratory species) occupy lands eligible for or enrolled in CRP. Many of the CPs implemented have the potential to benefit protected species, just as they do for other wildlife species. However, CRP has specific CPs (CP25 [Rare and Declining Habitats] and CP38 [SAFE]) that focus on enrolling lands in National Conservation Priority Areas. These CPs may be particularly beneficial to protected species.

As with all CRP enrollment, prior to approval, a site specific survey would be conducted to determine the potential for the presence of any protected species or critical habitat. If required, consultation with USFWS or NMFS would be completed in the event that a CP (including associated maintenance, management, and harvesting such as haying or grazing) may affect a listed species. If negative impacts to a listed species are identified, it is not likely the land would be enrolled and/or the proposed maintenance, management, or harvest activity would be approved.

3.5 SOILS

3.5.1 Definition of Resource

Soil is composed of minerals and organic matter formed from the weathering of bedrock and other parent materials, as well as decaying plant matter. Soil properties include color, texture, particle size, moisture, and chemistry. The national system of soil classification identifies sets of soil properties and groups them into 12 taxonomic orders, which are further divided into groups, families, and series: Alfisols, Andisols,

Ardisols, Entisols, Gelisols, Histosols, Inceptisols, Molisols, Oxisols, Spodosols, Utisols, and Veritsols (NRCS 2014a).

3.5.2 Affected Environment

Soils have a range of functions including regulating water, sustaining plant and animal life, filtering pollutants, cycling nutrients, and supporting buildings and structures. The capacity of a given soil to provide these functions can be affected by erosion, the wearing away by wind and water. The erosion potential of the thousands of soil units found throughout the U.S. is directly related to soil type, presence and type of vegetation/ground cover, amount of existing disturbance, and weather conditions. The EI is a numerical expression of the potential of a soil to erode (NRCS 2014b). The EI is calculated by dividing the potential erodibility for each soil by the soil loss tolerance value estimated for the soil. The soil loss tolerance value represents the maximum annual rate of soil erosion that could take place without causing a decline in long-term productivity. The EI takes into consideration climatic factors and the physical and chemical properties of the soil. The higher the EI, the greater the need to protect the soil from practices that lead to erosion. HEL is that which has an EI of at least 8 (NRCS 2014b). The majority of land enrolled under CRP General Sign-up contracts are HEL. Continuous Sign-up buffer practices, such as CP8A, CP15A, CP15B, CP21, CP22, CP28, CP29, and CP30, filter and trap sediment and nutrients that flow across the established buffer (USDA 2010). Refer to **Section 3.9** of the 2010 CRP SEIS for more detailed information on how the EI is calculated, as well as areas within the U.S. that have critical issues with sediment and nutrient loss, wind erosion, and soil quality degradation.

One of the primary goals of CRP is to implement conservation measures that will protect soils from erosion. Land enrolled in CRP is required to have an approved Conservation Plan to ensure the installed CPs meet their intended purpose. Conservation measures and BMPs to reduce soil erosion are site specific and may include the use of establishing vegetative cover to reduce exposed soil and the definition of acceptable haying and grazing activities. Detailed information regarding soils and their distribution within the U.S. are located in **Section 3.9** of the 2010 CRP SEIS.

3.6 SURFACE WATER

3.6.1 Definition of Resource

For the purposes of this SPEIS, surface water refers to rivers, streams, creeks, lakes, reservoirs, and other impoundments that support everyday life through provision of water for drinking and other public uses, irrigation, and industry. The principal law governing pollution of the nation's surface water resources is the CWA. The CWA utilizes water quality standards, permitting requirements, and monitoring to protect water quality. USEPA sets the standards for water pollution abatement for all Waters of the U.S. under the CWA programs, but, in most cases, gives qualified states the authority to issue and enforce water quality certification permits.

3.6.2 Affected Environment

Because of the geographic scale of CRP, it is not possible or practical to describe all surface waters that occur on lands that are enrolled or eligible for enrollment. For this analysis, surface waters will be characterized broadly, and impacts to the quality or quantity of surface waters will be assessed qualitatively.

3.6.2.1 Surface Water Quantity

According to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), 28 percent of the total surface water usage is for irrigation (USGS 2009). The amount of water being used for irrigation has been trending down since the 1990s, as has the total amount of land being irrigated. In general, this decrease can be attributed to climate, crop type, advances in irrigation efficiency, and higher energy costs. The majority of water withdrawals (85 percent) of both surface water and groundwater and the majority of irrigated acres (74 percent) were in the 17 conterminous western states. More than half (52 percent) of the total irrigated acreage occurs in California, Nebraska, Texas, Arkansas, and Idaho (USGS 2014). These five states experience an average of less than 20 inches of annual precipitation, leading to the need to provide supplemental water to support crop production. In the arid west and mountain states, surface water is the primary source for irrigation and 64 percent of all irrigation withdrawals of surface water come from just four states: California, Idaho, Colorado, and Montana.

CRP affects surface water quantity in the U.S. by taking land out of agricultural production to establish CPs, reducing the amount of surface water used for irrigation purposes. In general, the more land enrolled in CRP, the less land that is irrigated and thus less surface water is used for irrigation purposes. As more acreage is enrolled in CRP, especially in areas where surface water is the primary irrigation source, stream flows and lake/reservoir levels have the potential to increase since less water is being diverted to irrigation.

3.6.2.2 Surface Water Quality

The quality of surface waters is determined by the physical and chemical properties of the surrounding landscape. Topography, soil properties, vegetative cover, and climate all have an influence on water quality. Runoff caused by rain, snow melt, or irrigation can affect surface water quality by depositing sediment, minerals, or contaminants into surface waters. Surface runoff is influenced by meteorological factors such as rainfall intensity and duration, and physical factors such as land use, vegetation cover, soil type, and topography. USEPA assesses pollution of surface waters in the U.S. The most recent National Water Quality Inventory (completed in 2009, using information from 2004) is detailed in the 2010 CRP SEIS and summarized here. This report assessed approximately 30 percent of surface waters in the U.S. and found that 44 percent of assessed stream miles and 64 percent of assessed lakes were not clean enough to provide public uses such as fishing and swimming. Surface waters with degraded water quality that do not meet minimum water quality standards are classified under the CWA as “impaired waters.” Section 303(d) of the CWA establishes a process for waters that do not meet clean water standards to be identified on a state-by-state basis. Total daily maximum loads (TMDLs) of specific pollutants are developed for priority waters to identify the amount of a specific pollutant that may be discharged into a water body while still ensuring that water quality standards are met. Since 1995, the number of TMDLs has been increasing with the top three causes of surface water impairment being pathogens, sediment, and nutrients (USEPA 2014a).

Degradation of surface waters from irrigation practices occurs through non-point source pollution. Non-point source pollution occurs when water, from irrigation or precipitation, runs over the land picking up pollutants along the way and then deposits them into a water body. The surrounding land use determines the type and severity of non-point source pollution, which is the leading cause of water quality degradation in the U.S. According to USEPA, agricultural land use activities represent the primary source of impairment to rivers and streams (USEPA 2009). When the land use changes so does the impact it has

on the water quality. Such changes and impacts can be negative or positive, depending on the type and amount of land use change.

Non-point source pollution associated with agricultural land use practices impacts water quality through runoff laden with sediment, nitrogen, phosphorous, and/or pesticides. These four pollutants have the potential to create adverse effects on human health and the natural environment. Loose or barren soils, along with fertilizer and/or pesticide application from agricultural land uses, cause these pollutants to enter surface waters by way of runoff. Nutrient-laden runoff causes algal blooms in the Gulf of Mexico, and can severely deplete oxygen levels causing fish kills. Nitrogen and phosphorous from fertilizers used on agricultural lands are the chief contributing pollutants to the Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone (USEPA 2014b), a 'dead zone' where excessive algal blooms and die offs have eliminated all available oxygen.

Under CRP, agricultural producers can retire highly erodible and other environmentally sensitive cropland and pasture for a 10- to 15-year contract period. During this time, farmland is converted to grass, trees, wildlife cover, or other conservation uses that provide environmental benefits, including surface water quality improvement (USDA 2013). Eliminating nutrients and pesticide application on active agricultural land is a primary factor in achieving the water quality goals of CRP. CRP buffers including grass filter strips, grassed waterways, field windbreaks, wetland restoration, and riparian buffers are all CPs that provide benefits to water quality by reducing soil erosion and the amount of pollutants reaching water bodies.

A reduced amount of nitrogen and phosphorous leave CRP fields through runoff and percolate. The Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute (FAPRI) has developed models that indicate that565 million pounds less nitrogen and 113 million pounds less phosphorous left fields due to CRP in FY 2013, a 95 and 86 percent reduction compared to land that is cropped, respectively (USDA 2013). The FAPRI model estimated that CRP buffers intercepted 377 million pounds of nitrogen and 76 million pounds of phosphorus nationally in 2011. Grass and tree plantings in 2011 are estimated to have reduced nitrate loss, a form of nitrogen that contributes to the formation of hypoxic zones, by 107 million pounds. CRP buffers, grass and tree plantings, and restored and constructed wetlands all intercept and reduce nitrogen and phosphorous, which has an improvement to water quality (USDA 2013). As of 2014, there were 25.5 million acres of land enrolled in CRP. Prior to being accepted into CRP, a site specific EE is performed, potential impacts to surface waters are assessed and, where needed, BMPs and mitigations are prescribed to ensure no negative impacts to surface waters occur.

3.7 GROUNDWATER

3.7.1 Definition of Resource

Groundwater is water that flows underground and is stored in natural geologic formations called aquifers. As with surface water, because of the geographic scale of CRP and because the locations of lands that will be enrolled are not known, it is not possible to describe all groundwater resources that could be affected by the program. This analysis focuses on groundwater quality and quantity in areas eligible for enrollment in CRP or those areas already enrolled in the program.

3.7.2 Affected Environment

Groundwater is an important natural resource that provides freshwater for public consumption, agriculture, and industry. In 2005, approximately 23 percent of the freshwater used in the U.S. was

supplied by groundwater, and 68 percent of the groundwater withdrawn was used for irrigation purposes. The use of groundwater in the U.S. more than doubled from 1950 to 1975, from 34 billion gallons per day to 83 billion gallons per day. From 1975 to 2005, the total use of groundwater remained relatively stable, with only slight fluctuations over that time frame (USGS 2014a).

One of the main benefits of the CRP is the reduction of contaminated runoff (primarily nitrates) and sedimentation from cropland, which helps protect groundwater quality (USDA 2010). Converting cropland to conservation cover also reduces the amount of groundwater needed for irrigation, which enhances groundwater recharge. As of September 2014, over 19 million acres of land were enrolled in general CRP, and approximately 5.7 million acres of land were enrolled in continuous CRP (USDA 2014).

Agricultural production also affects groundwater quality through chemical pollution. Products like fertilizer and pesticides that are applied to agricultural lands can infiltrate into groundwater and reduce water quality (USGS 2014b). **Section 5.3.1** of the 2010 CRP SEIS covers groundwater quantity and quality in further detail.

3.8 FLOODPLAINS

3.8.1 Definition of Resource

Floodplains are low, relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters. EO 11988, *Floodplain Management*, sets forth the responsibilities of Federal agencies for reducing the risk of flood loss or damage to personal property, minimizing the impacts of flood loss, and restoring the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains. Floodplains are typically described as areas likely to be inundated by a particular flood. The 100-year floodplain is an area that has a 1 percent chance of being flooded in any given year.

3.8.2 Affected Environment

There are floodplains located throughout the U.S. in areas adjacent to surface waters. Historically, floodplains have been converted into agricultural areas due to the high nutrient load from sediment deposition during flood events. The conversion of floodplains to agricultural land has caused loss of habitat and reduced flood storage capacity. The modification and channelization of rivers in the U.S. has also contributed to an increase in development within floodplain areas.

CPs used for CRP include the restoration of riparian areas and wetlands (CP22 and CP23) that occur within floodplains. These practices help stabilize stream banks and increase floodplain function. USDA maintains a policy that prior to implementation of any project or program, any impacts to floodplains must be evaluated (USDA 2014). **Section 3.4.1** of the 2010 CRP SEIS covers floodplains in more detail.

3.9 WETLANDS

3.9.1 Definition of Resource

Wetlands are defined by USACE as those areas characterized by a prevalence of vegetation adapted to saturated soil conditions and that are identified based on specific soil, hydrology, and vegetation criteria defined by USACE (USACE 1987). Wetlands associated with running water systems and typically found along rivers, creeks, and drainage ways, with a defined channel and floodplain are referred to as riparian

wetlands The CWA established a program to regulate the discharge of dredged or fill material into wetlands. The CWA further provides for regulations and procedures for the protection of wetlands and compensation for unavoidable impacts.

EO 11990 provides another layer of wetland protection. The purpose of EO 11990 is to "minimize the destruction, loss, or degradation of wetlands and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands." To meet these objectives, the EO requires Federal agencies, in planning their actions, to consider alternatives to wetland sites and limit potential damage if an activity affecting a wetland cannot be avoided. The EO applies to the acquisition, management, and disposition of Federal lands and facilities construction and improvement projects that are undertaken, financed or assisted by Federal agencies; any Federal activities and programs affecting land use including, but not limited to, water and related land resources planning, regulation, and licensing activities.

The Food Security Act of 1985 contains provisions to discourage the conversion of wetlands into cropland. The swampbuster provisions deny Federal Farm Program benefits to producers who convert or modify wetlands for agricultural purposes as defined in the Food Security Act of 1985, Title XII.

3.9.2 Affected Environment

Wetlands are described as the transitional lands between terrestrial and deepwater habitats where the water table usually is at or near the land surface or the land is covered by shallow surface water. Most CRP wetlands are not transitional areas, but rather depressional wetlands found in the Great Plains. These types of wetlands form in topographical depressions when water from precipitation, groundwater, or surface flows accumulates. Common examples include playa lakes, vernal pools, and prairie potholes. In wetlands, the upper part of the soil profile is saturated for sufficient duration during the growing season for soil organisms to consume available oxygen creating anaerobic soil conditions unsuitable for most plants. Soils formed under these conditions are called “hydric” and the plants adapted to these conditions are called “hydrophytes.” Wetland hydrology, hydric soils, and hydrophytic vegetation are the three major indicators used to identify and characterize wetlands.

3.9.2.1 Functions and Values

Wetlands perform many ecological functions that are important to society such as improving water quality; recharging groundwater; providing natural flood control; and supporting a wide variety of fish, wildlife, and plants. Wetlands can maintain good water quality and improve degraded water quality of surface waters by intercepting and treating surface runoff. Suspended sediments and contaminants in the water are trapped, retained, and/or transformed through a variety of biological and chemical processes before they reach downstream water bodies.

3.9.2.2 Current Distribution and Conditions

The total wetland acreage in the lower 48 states is estimated to have declined from more than 220 million acres three centuries ago to 110.1 million acres in 2009. An estimated 95 percent of all wetlands were freshwater and 5 percent were in the marine or estuarine (saltwater) systems. Estuarine emergent (salt marsh) wetland was the most prevalent type of all estuarine and marine intertidal wetlands. Salt marsh made up an estimated 66.7 percent of all estuarine and marine wetland area. Forested wetlands made up the single largest category (49.5 percent) of wetland in the freshwater system. Freshwater emergent made up an estimated 26.3 percent, shrub wetlands 17.8 percent, and freshwater ponds 6.4 percent by area.

Overall, there was a slight increase in freshwater wetland area between 2004 and 2009. Freshwater ponds continued to increase in area, although the rate of pond development slowed from previous reporting periods. Freshwater vegetated wetlands continued to decline, although at a reduced rate. This most-recent annual rate of loss represented a reduction in the loss rate of roughly 50 percent since 2004. Declines in freshwater forested wetland area (633,100 acres) negated area gains in freshwater emergent and shrub categories. Forested wetlands sustained their largest losses since the 1974 to 1985 time period. Freshwater wetland losses continued in regions of the country where there has been potential for wetlands to come into conflict with competing land and resource development interests.

Between 2004 and 2009, 489,600 acres of former upland were re-classified as wetland. These increases were attributed to wetland re-establishment and creation on agricultural lands and other uplands with unknown land use including undeveloped land, lands in conservation programs, or fallow lands. The rate of wetland re-establishment increased by an estimated 17 percent from the previous study period (1998 to 2004). Conversely, the estimated wetland loss rate increased 140 percent during the same time period, and, as a consequence, national wetland losses have outdistanced gains.

The cumulative effects of losses in the freshwater system have had consequences for hydrologic and ecosystem connectivity. In certain regions, profound reductions in wetland extent have resulted in habitat loss, fragmentation, and limited opportunities for re-establishment and watershed rehabilitation (Dahl 2011).

3.10 AIR QUALITY

3.10.1 Definition of Resource

The primary air quality effects that would be associated with the Proposed Action involve either the release or mitigation of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Other air quality impacts related to emissions by farm equipment or operations, such as nitrogen oxide emissions particulate, are generally measured by potential violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Due to the nature of the Proposed Action -- its geographic scale, the uncertainty of where CRP will be implemented, the short-term and localized nature of CRP associated activities, and because CPs are designed to minimize impacts to air quality -- NAAQS violations would not occur as a result of implementing CRP changes.

Agricultural activities contribute directly to emissions of GHGs including carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), and nitrous oxide through a variety of processes such as the operation of internal combustion engines, enteric fermentation by livestock, agricultural soil management, manure management, field burning, and other practices. Carbon sequestration can mitigate GHG emissions by removing CO_2 from the atmosphere and storing it in plant matter and soils. Carbon sequestration is the process by which atmospheric CO_2 is taken up by trees, grasses, and other plants through photosynthesis and stored as carbon in biomass and soils. **Section 3.10** of the 2010 CRP SEIS includes detailed data on GHG emissions, carbon sequestration, and relationship to global climate change. These data have not changed and the information is incorporated by reference in this section.

3.10.2 Affected Environment

When CRP was originally established with the Food Security Act of 1985, the stated purpose was to assist owners and operators of agricultural land in conserving and improving soil, water, and wildlife resources. GHG mitigation has recently been included among the six ranking criteria used to prioritize

lands for enrollment in CRP. This is to recognize that conversion of croplands to long-term vegetative cover to promote carbon sequestration is a GHG mitigation measure and provides long-term benefit (Jones et al. 2013). According to USDA, "Cropped land converted to CRP stores carbon because the land is not cultivated and trees or grasses are planted to provide carbon inputs. Including hay or pasture in rotations also increases carbon inputs, and carbon losses are lower because the land is not tilled during the hay or pasture phase of the rotation" (USDA 2013).

FSA reports that CRP sequesters more carbon on private lands than any other Federally administered program (USDA 2013). The annual carbon sequestration rate estimated by USDA for the 26 million acres enrolled in CRP for FY 2013 was 38 million metric tons carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e) (USDA 2013). CO_2e is a measure used to combine different GHG emissions into a single number using their global warming potential. An additional 6 million metric tons CO_2e of GHG emissions were eliminated on CRP lands through reduced energy and fertilizer use (USDA 2013). Therefore, the estimated annual GHG reduction for CRP was 45 million tons CO_2e in FY 2013.

When CRP land is returned to cropping, the stock of carbon sequestered in the soil and other biomass during program participation would be released and some of the potential for long-term sequestration is lost. A recent analysis found that an estimated 68 percent of the carbon sequestered in CRP grassland was released when it was returned to cropping after the CRP contract ended (Jones et al. 2013).

3.11 RECREATION

3.11.1 Definition of Resource

Recreation includes outdoor activities that have the potential to occur on land enrolled in CRP or those eligible for enrollment in CRP. Typical activities would be hunting, fishing, hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, and camping. CRP participants may allow recreational activities on enrolled lands as long as the activity doesn't detract from the conservation purpose.

3.11.2 Affected Environment

Existing conditions for outdoor recreation are documented in the 2010 CRP SEIS (see **Section 3.12.2**) and are incorporated here by reference. Recent survey data and analyses are included to update the information included in the 2010 CRP SEIS.

3.11.2.1 Outdoor Recreation Trends

The 2010 CRP SEIS used the most recent data available from USFWS in the 2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (USFWS 2007) to support outdoor recreation trends and impacts. USFWS has since published results from the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation (USFWS 2014). The 2011 survey data reported that nationally, the number of individuals 16 years or older who participated in fishing, hunting, and/or wildlife-watching has increased by 3 percent from more than 87 million to 90 million. As shown in **Table 3.11-1**, wildlife watching has about twice the participation as hunting and fishing. (Note that sportspersons are also counted as wildlife-watching participants if they engage in both activities.) The survey data support the observation that participation in outdoor recreation has increased, with fishing showing the largest increase in participation between 2006 and 2011.

Table 3.11-1. Wildlife-Associated Recreation Participation Trends (2006 and 2011)			
	2006	**2011**	**Change**
	Thousands	**Thousands**	**Percent**
Total wildlife-related recreationists	87,465	90,108	3%
Total sportspersons	33,916	37,397	10%
Anglers	29,952	33,112	11%
Hunters	12,510	13,674	9%
Total wildlife-watching participants	71,132	71,776	1%
Around the home	67,756	68,598	1%
Away from home	22,977	22,496	-2%

USFWS national survey data also show that expenditures for wildlife recreation also increased between 2006 and 2011. As shown in **Table 3.11-2**, total estimated wildlife-associated expenditures increased nationally from $136.4 billion in 2006 to $144.7 billion in 2011. The largest increase in expenditures was for hunting activities.

Table 3.11-2. Wildlife-Associated Recreation Expenditure Trends (2006 and 2011)				
	2006		**2011**	
	$ Billion	**Percent**	**$ Billion**	**Percent**
Total wildlife-related recreation expenditures	**136.4**	**100**	**144.7**	**100**
Fishing expenditures, total	**47.0**	**100**	**41.8**	**100**
Trip-related	19.9	42	21.8	52
Equipment	20.9	45	15.5	37
Other	6.2	13	4.5	11
Hunting expenditures, total	**25.5**	**100**	**33.7**	**100**
Trip-related	7.5	29	10.4	31
Equipment	12.0	47	14.0	41
Other	6.1	24	9.3	28
Wildlife-watching expenditures, total	**50.9**	**37**	**54.9**	**38**
Trip-related	14.4	28	17.3	31
Equipment	25.9	51	27.2	49
Other	10.7	21	10.5	19

In addition to participation and expenditure data, the 2011 survey included data about the location and target species for hunting activities. The target species for hunters in 2011 based on participation numbers and hunting effort (reported as hunting days) were deer, wild turkey, squirrel, ducks, rabbit, pheasant, and other species. Of the 13.7 million individuals that reported their hunt location information in the 2011 survey, 84 percent spent a portion of their hunt on private land. In addition, a majority of their hunting effort (78 percent of their hunting days) were spent on private land. In the 2011 survey, sportspersons

reported owning over 180 million acres of land for hunting and fishing activities, as well as spending more than $9.2 billion on this land ownership. An additional 430 million acres were reported to be leased by sportspersons in 2011 for a reported expenditure of $1.4 billion.

3.11.2.2 Rural Tourism

The 2010 CRP SEIS used data from several studies to support the findings that rural areas that focused on recreational development and rural tourism aspects experienced greater socio-economic well-being than those that did not (Reeder and Brown 2005). On-farm recreation is an important source of farm-related income. Sometimes called agri-tourism, farm recreation refers to a wide variety of activities including hunting, fishing, horseback riding, ranch stays, winery tours, on-farm rodeos, and petting zoos.

The USDA-NASS 2012 Census of Agriculture includes updated information about farm recreation in the U.S. (ERS 2008). In 2012, more than 33,000 farms, representing about 2 percent of farms nationwide, reported income from agri-tourism and recreational services; this is an increase in the number of farms reporting recreation services in 2007 (NASS 2014). Total reported income nationally from agri-tourism and recreational services was more than $700 million in 2012 compared to $566 million in 2007. However, average earnings per farm decreased in 2012 to $21,300 from $24,300 reported in 2007 (NASS 2014). Agricultural survey data indicate that outdoor recreation (hunting, fishing, and horseback riding) is the largest component of farm recreation, generating 43 percent of recreation income nationwide (ERS 2008). Regionally, about half of all recreation farms reported in the 2012 Census of Agricultural were located in the southern U.S.

3.11.2.3 Recreation Effects from CRP

A recent meta-analysis of the economic benefits of CRP by Wu and Weber (2012) found that recreational benefits amounted to $963 million annually, or about $29 per CRP acre per year (expressed in 2011 dollars). The recreational benefits estimated by Wu and Weber are based on the assumption that "CRP improves environmental quality, which leads to enhanced ecosystem health in general and increased public enjoyment of recreational activities in particular."

A study by Sullivan et al. (2004) found that recreation expenditures on farms enrolled in CRP ranged from a low of less than $100,000 per year in the Economic Research Service (ERS) Eastern Uplands region to a high of $15,400,000 in the Heartland Region as reported for 2001 (**Table 3.11-3)**.

Table 3.11-3 Range of Recreational Expenditures on Farms Enrolled in the CRP

ERS Region	Recreational Expenditures on Farms Enrolled in the CRP (thousands of dollars)
Basin and Range	$3,100
Eastern Uplands	< $100
Fruitful Rim	$600
Heartland	$15,400
Mississippi Portal	$1,600
Northern Crescent	$7,100
Northern Great Plains	$6,300
Prairie Gateway	$2,100
Southern Seaboard	$2,600

Source: Sullivan et al. 2004 using data from 2001 Agricultural Resource Management Survey.
Note:
CRP = Conservation Reserve Program; ERS = Economic Research Service

3.12 SOCIOECONOMICS

3.12.1 Definition of Resource

Socioeconomic analyses evaluate how the conditions of a community or Region of Influence would be affected by the Proposed Action through changes in the rate of population growth, changes in the demographic characteristics, and changes in employment. This section tiers to the 2010 CRP SEIS and provides a brief update for those socioeconomic conditions relevant to this SPEIS.

3.12.2 Affected Environment

The total number of farms in the U.S. declined in 2012 to just over 2.1 million from the 2.2 million farms in 2007. These farms have a combined land area of just over 914 million acres (NASS 2014). The average farm size increased 3 percent between 2007 and 2012 to 434 acres; in 2012, 85 percent of the farms were less than 500 acres (NASS 2014). In 2012, approximately 75 percent of the farms were in the economic class of less than $50,000 in market value of agricultural products and Federal farm program payments, a decrease of approximately 3 percent from 2007. The number of farms in the economic class of more than $1 million increased slightly between 2007 and 2012 (NASS 2014). Average farm market value of agricultural products increased approximately 39 percent to $187,093 per farm, credited primarily to the increased prices. The value of crops increased by almost 50 percent between 2007 and 2012 (NASS 2014).

As of 2012, mean farm household income was $108,844, approximately 53 percent higher than the U.S. mean household income of $71,274. This was the largest gap since 1973. Government payments to farms, including CRP, increased less than 1 percent in 2012. On average, 14 percent of farms received conservation payments in 2012, with 12.3 percent of working farms receiving land retirement payments (e.g., CRP) and 2.5 percent of working farms receiving working lands program payments

(e.g., Environmental Quality Incentive Program [EQIP]). Small family farms comprised 76 percent of the farms that received conservation payments, accounting for 59 percent of the value of conservation payments.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

This chapter describes potential environmental consequences associated with implementation of the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. CEQ regulations implementing NEPA state that the environmental consequences discussion shall include any direct and indirect impacts and an evaluation of significance. This discussion addresses all resource areas described in Chapter 3.

4.1 OVERVIEW OF PROGRAM CHANGES AND ANALYSIS APPROACH

The purpose of this SPEIS is to provide sufficient information for the decision maker(s) to make an informed decision on the discretionary program changes that would result from the 2014 Farm Bill (Proposed Action). The significance or importance of impacts is determined by evaluating the Proposed Action for compliance with existing environmental standards, thresholds, guidelines, or objectives established by Federal regulations. The significance criteria and approach to analysis vary by resource area.

It should be noted that this SPEIS examines the effects of implementing various changes to a nationwide voluntary program. As such, the geographic scope of the program is both extensive and largely unknown. Therefore, the utility and availability of modeling and quantitative analysis is limited for most resources. The document also is a supplemental document and, as such, will tier to and incorporate by reference other existing NEPA documents as appropriate, limiting new analyses to those program components that have not been examined previously. The potential impacts of implementing the program changes will be discussed on a national or regional level, as appropriate. Site specific EE would occur prior to enrollment of land into the program. This SPEIS and the site specific EE will provide the full NEPA coverage.

The No Action Alternative in this SPEIS is a continuation of CRP to include those non-discretionary program changes required by the 2014 Farm Bill. The No Action Alternative is included in this analysis in accordance with CEQ guidelines to serve as the baseline against which to measure the potential impacts associated with the proposed discretionary changes to the program (Proposed Action). The components of the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action are as follows.

No Action Alternative:

- *Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities* – grasslands that would have been previously eligible for GRP would now be eligible for enrollment in CRP, and enrollment would be limited to no more than 2 million acres. Authorized activities on grasslands would be the same as those previously authorized under GRP.
- *Final Year of Contract* – a CRP participant would be allowed to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program and perform activities to improve or maintain the existing conservation system during the year prior to the expiration of the contract. Likewise, expiring CRP land can be enrolled in a new program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, without violating the contract. CRP land enrolled under this provision must remain in conservation.
- *Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction* – emergency haying and grazing within authorized counties would be allowed without a payment reduction. This activity would still require a Conservation Plan and must avoid the PNS.

Proposed Action:

- *Targeted Enrollment* – FSA proposes to continue to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land through a reverse auction approach for select CPs. Targeted enrollment could enable FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap, while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit.
- *Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies* – the STC must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is: at least once every 5 years, but no more frequently than once every 3 years for managed harvesting, and not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing. Harvesting and grazing activities still must avoid the PNS.
- *Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional CPs* – the Secretary would be afforded the discretionary authority to make additional CPs, that currently are ineligible for any type of haying or grazing, to be eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during drought conditions (D2 or greater). Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed CPs would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or Federal agencies.

4.2 VEGETATION

4.2.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to vegetation would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action would remove land with unique communities or habitat, threaten the long-term viability of the conservation cover, or result in population-level changes that could alter ecosystems at a landscape level.

4.2.2 No Action Alternative

4.2.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Allowing grasslands formerly eligible for enrollment in GRP to be enrolled into CRP would result in retaining or restoring up to 2 million acres of grasslands in areas where such communities were historically dominant. This enrollment would result in long-term benefits to grasslands, which would be particularly realized in the Great Plains Ecoregion, where grasslands were historically maintained by fires and grazing by native ungulates. Grazing, mowing, haying, and harvesting would maintain grassland communities by controlling the growth of woody plants and maintaining early successional stages. A wider range of maintenance activities as well as regular grazing would be permitted on these newly eligible grasslands than on traditional CRP lands, which would be a minor change relative to the total CRP enrollment. Short-term negative impacts to vegetation, including the spread of noxious weeds, could occur during maintenance, grazing, and other allowable activities. However, all activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, including a Grazing Management Plan, developed for each enrolled unit of land. Conservation Plans contain a strategy and schedule of treatments and activities that would occur on enrolled lands, ensuring long-term benefits to vegetation and protection of natural resources.

4.2.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to vegetation by allowing acreage to stay in conservation, preventing development. While there would be minor, localized, short-term impacts to vegetation from allowable activities to improve the conservation cover, long-term benefits to vegetation are expected. The goal of the Conservation Stewardship Program is to maintain high quality conservation, and producers are paid based on the performance of the conservation cover. This non-discretionary change in the 2014 Farm Bill has the potential to have beneficial impacts in all ecoregions equally; however, since CRP is concentrated in the Great Plains and Eastern Temperate Forest ecoregions, the opportunity for conservation is greatest in these areas.

4.2.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions with respect to wildlife and other protected resources. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions are noted in **Section 2.3.3.**

Emergency haying and grazing is expected to result in impacts similar to those described for haying and grazing in previous NEPA documents (USDA 2010a and state-specific EAs). Removing the payment reduction would likely result in an increase of emergency haying and grazing activities within counties where it is authorized.

Emergency haying and grazing can occur in consecutive years, unlike managed harvesting or routine grazing. Repeated approval of emergency haying and grazing has been a concern among USDA, CRP contract holders and stakeholders interested in maximizing the conservation potential of CRP grasslands. As a result, a study was performed to determine the effects of emergency haying on vegetative characteristics within selected CRP fields in the northern Great Plains (Allen et al. 2001). As reviewed in Allen et al. (2001), emergency haying and grazing were authorized in some regions of the Great Plains and Midwest in as many as 8 years of the initial 10 years of CRP contracts. The Great Plains have had the most extensive emergency use of CRP (Allen and Vandever 2003). The results from this investigation suggest that periodic, emergency haying of CRP grasslands has had no enduring detrimental effects on grass density, forb density, litter cover, or litter depth within fields dominated by intermediate wheatgrass, the dominant species planted in the fields that were included in this study. Sixty-two percent of the sampled fields were harvested two or more times. While most counties were authorized for emergency haying or grazing in 6 or more years of the study, the majority of the fields were hayed three times or less (see **Section 2.3.3** for additional historical information on where emergency haying or grazing has occurred). In most cases, operators hayed approximately the same portion of the field each year in which emergency haying was permitted. Periodic haying appeared to inhibit weed growth and favor the persistence of alfalfa (Allen et al. 2001).

While studies like Allen et al. (2001) have shown that periodic harvesting of CRP does not have detrimental impacts, it is still imperative that the STC consider specific local conditions of the counties being considered for emergency haying or grazing. The potential for impacts would be greater in those locations with extensive emergency use of CRP like the Great Plains. However, it should be noted that

producers are required to re-establish the CRP cover if the cover fails as a result of emergency haying or grazing.

4.2.3 Proposed Action

4.2.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in CRP would be expected to benefit vegetation, regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program. CRP establishes or restores vegetation in order to meet the program goals of improving surface water and groundwater quality, controlling soil erosion, and enhancing wildlife habitat. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit. Targeted Enrollment could provide long-term benefits to areas of especially sensitive vegetative communities, if they were so targeted. Such benefits could occur throughout the U.S. in any ecoregion.

Installation and maintenance of CPs would create temporary, short-term negative impacts to vegetation. Noxious weeds and invasive species would continue to be controlled through approved methods as designated by required Conservations Plans. These methods would be created to reflect local conditions and needs for each tract of land enrolled. Once CPs are established, long-term beneficial impacts to vegetation would be realized. CRP has been shown through numerous academic and USDA-funded studies to be largely beneficial to native vegetation and for maintaining vegetative communities.

One way conservation benefit has been measured over large scales and timeframes through the Conservation Effects Analysis Project. This is a multiagency effort to quantify the effects of conservation practices and programs to further develop the science base for monitoring the agricultural landscape for environmental quality. With regard to studies detailing the beneficial impacts of CPs on vegetation, the *Fish and Wildlife Benefits of Farm Bill Conservation Programs* (ed. Haufler 2005) and *Fish and Wildlife Response to Farm Bill Conservation Practices* (ed. Haufler 2007) are long-form literature reviews that illustrate the benefits of converting agricultural fields into native and planted vegetation cover. Benefits are widely distributed and include, but are not limited to, increased habitat diversity, improved habitat for grassland bird species, and better nest success for waterfowl (ed. Haufler 2005, 2007). Though wildlife ultimately benefit, their benefit hinges on healthy, productive vegetative habitat, which CRP helps to provide. Recently, USGS assembled an annotated bibliography of *CRP Contributions to Wildlife Habitat, Management Issues, Challenges, and Policy Choices* (Allen and Vandever 2012). This provides brief summaries of numerous studies and illustrates benefits on a wide variety of issues regarding CRP and, in particular, habitat creation and its general ecosystem benefits.

4.2.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include site specific BMPs to help reduce the potential for negative environmental impacts. Additional protection measures include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock. The frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC and depend on the vegetation characteristics of a particular region. While CRP can occur anywhere in the U.S., existing CRP acreage is predominantly located in the Great Plains and

Eastern Temperate Forest ecoregions Impacts from managed harvesting and routine grazing are most likely to occur within the grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains.

Managed Harvesting

Managed harvesting (typically mowing or haying) would be allowed to occur no more frequently than once every 3 years (same as current allowance), but not less frequently than once in 5 years. This would require four states (California, Colorado, Arizona, and Nevada) that currently allow managed harvesting once every 10 years, to have more frequent managed harvesting of at least once every 5 years on new contracts where managed harvesting to maintain CRP is desired. It should be noted that currently only Colorado has CRP acreage that has managed harvesting activities (see **Tables 2.4-6 and 2.4-7**); therefore, this analysis will focus on Colorado.

Direct impacts to vegetation from harvesting activities would vary by ecoregion and species composition. Like most CRP in the continental U.S., most of the CRP land in Colorado is located within the Great Plains ecoregion (see **Figure 3.2-2**). CRP fields in Colorado likely contain both warm and cool season grasses. Warm season grasses typically grow from the spring warm-up to late summer; however, they begin to decline in nutrition around mid-July as they shift from vegetative growth to reproductive growth. Cool season grasses initiate growth earlier in the spring compared to warm season grasses and become semi-dormant around June typically. These grasses regrow in the fall (usually around September) when temperatures decrease, provided there is adequate precipitation (USDA 2010b).

Most range plants can withstand defoliation during dormant periods when plants are inactive, at the onset of growth, or during active growth. A critical time for plants is from floral initiation through seed development post bloom, generally from mid-May to mid-July, when plants have high energy requirements for seed production (USDA 2010b). Potential impacts to vegetation could occur in settings with cool season grasses if haying occurs too early in midsummer; cutting dormant cold season grasses at this time could diminish the health and vigor of these plants. Warm season grassland plants shift from producing leaves to flowers and seeds in midsummer; extensive cutting after this shift could cause substantial cover loss that would not recover prior to frost.

Managed harvesting can be an effective tool for maintaining early successional stages of vegetative communities since grazing alone cannot control woody plant encroachment without overgrazing the native plants. In some areas, undesirable woody species encroach upon CRP lands. As discussed in previous EAs, harvesting to manage woody plant encroachment is practical if conducted every three years, otherwise woody plants become too large at any other interval to allow future harvesting (USDA 2010b). More frequent managed harvesting in Colorado (once every 5 years) in accordance with NRCS conservation practice standards would have long-term benefits on the plant community with few negative effects. The removal of plant material through harvesting would stimulate plant vigor. The loss of vegetation would be a short-term impact which would, when adequate leaf area is reserved, recover through plant re-growth following harvesting if there is sufficient time and precipitation prior to frost. If minimum plant heights (2-6 inches) are maintained in accordance to Colorado NRCS Practice Standard 511 Forage Harvest Management, plant survival and long-term viability is likely.

Managed harvesting cannot occur during the PNS, March 15 to July 15 for Colorado, which roughly corresponds to a critical time for plants to allow for floral initiation and seed development. Hay quality would be highest in mid-July, when haying would be allowed in Colorado, for warm season grass species and then decline until the beginning of the next growing season. To maximize hay quality and enable

plants sufficient time to recover before frost, haying should occur as close to the end of the PNS as possible for those fields planted with warm season species. For fields planted with cool season species, hay quality would be low by mid-July. Hay quality in cool season grasses would not increase until the onset of growth in September and continue until winter dormancy.

Managed harvesting must be included in the Conservation Plan and adhere to a number of site-specific criteria such as timing of the cut, minimum stubble height, and measures to limit invasive species establishment to ensure CRP fields remain healthy and meet their intended purpose. Generally, native grasses depend on frequent disturbance in order to thrive, and planted forage species are chosen for their benefits to both the ecosystem and for forage utility. In a series of state-specific EAs (New Mexico, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and Oregon) for managed harvesting and grazing, no significant negative impacts to vegetation were found to occur from increasing the frequency of managed harvesting from once every 10 years to once every 5 years (see **Section 1.1.1**). Increasing the required frequency for managed harvesting to at least once every 5 years is likely to enhance vegetation through increased plant stand health and vigor, diversity in structure, and increased productivity of grassland plants.

Routine Grazing

Under the Proposed Action, states would have more flexibility in establishing the allowable frequencies for routine grazing while still taking into consideration regional differences in vegetation. As with managed harvesting, routine grazing impacts would vary widely depending on the ecoregion within which they occur and the allowable frequency established by the STC. Based on the averages from 2011 to 2013, the majority of the areas used for routine grazing are Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah (see **Figure 2.4-2** and **Table 2.4-7**), which generally corresponds to the southern areas of the Great Plains and a small portion of the North American Desert. In general terms, grazing can have positive benefits to vegetation. For instance, DiDonato (2006) found that livestock grazing is an effective tool for maintaining open grasslands and oak savannah communities, and Redmon (undated whitepaper) concluded that grazing of pasture could be done in a sustainable manner and even enhance the pasture/forage environment, when implemented correctly. Plant species diversity was maintained or increased by mowing and grazing in native tallgrass prairie (Collins et al. 1998). Long-term studies of seasonal versus yearlong grazing systems in grass and shrub communities in Arizona, provided no detectable differences in vegetation change between the two systems over 34 years (Mashiri et al. 2008). Spasojevic et al. (2010) concluded that grazing in conjunction with prescribed burning could restore plant species and trait composition (different species that have similar traits) within 3 years. Conversely, Belsky and Blumenthal (1997) concluded that grazing forest understory in the southwestern U.S. could have detrimental impacts for forest ecosystems and species composition. This highlights the need for STC guidance for correct grazing applications based on local conditions (see **Section 1.1.2.3** for additional information on STC).

As discussed above, the change in grazing frequency could lead to long-term beneficial impacts to vegetation. Typical grazing lands and pasture lands are areas that evolved from the frequent disturbance from fire and large herbivores. If the stocking rate is managed properly for each enrolled parcel of land, vegetation and habitat benefits are likely, even with an increased frequency of grazing. With proper management, plant diversity, composition, and function can be improved through grazing techniques, especially within the Great Plains Ecoregion. Grazing in other ecoregions could result in less positive habitat benefits, as the other ecoregions did not evolve under heavy, seasonal grazing conditions. As noted above, the site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum grazing limits for the contract and include site specific BMPs to help reduce the potential for negative environmental impacts.

4.2.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow FSA to expand the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing in areas designated D2 or greater to CPs where other types of harvesting or grazing are not authorized (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41). A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on most of these additional practices during 2012 found that there would be no lasting significant impacts to vegetation, as long as the haying and grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the guidance and approval of the STC and NRCS Conservationist (USDA 2012).

Emergency haying and grazing of these CPs could be implemented in consecutive years. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought, repetitive haying or grazing of riparian and wetland areas may lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Consecutive years of haying or grazing of the same acreage would reduce the growing period between activities and have short-term negative impacts on some types of vegetation. Wetland and riparian areas offer refuge during times of drought stress, as drier conditions would affect these areas last since they are natural drainages. If consecutive years were allowed for grazing or haying of the same acreage, care must be exercised to ensure that the CP cover is not negatively impacted in the long term. Vegetation impacts would vary drastically by ecoregion, with more arid climates potentially experiencing greater short-term impacts.

Vegetation changes in wetlands are correlated with grazing intensity, and could affect the habitat value of wetlands (Jones et al. 2010). Riparian habitat is the most productive and possibly the most sensitive of the North American habitats; however, these areas may also be the most resilient of ecosystems following disturbance (Kauffman et al. 1983). A study by Kaufman et al. (1983) observed that the growing season of an ungrazed moist meadow occurred approximately two weeks later than that of a grazed moist meadow. The dense litter layer in the ungrazed meadow probably kept the soil temperature lower than that of the grazed area, which prolonged the initiation of the growth period. This same observation has been made in burned areas where the litter layer has been removed (Kauffman et al. 1983). In a situation of consecutive years of grazing on the same acreage, the growing season could be slightly altered until the litter layer would be allowed to build up. The PNS varies by state, but generally covers the critical time period for plants (mid-May to mid-July). A slight alteration in the initiation of growth would not substantially increase vegetation exposure to grazing during these critical time periods.

In a continuation of the Kauffman et al. 1983 study, it was found that species diversity was relatively stable in grazed moist meadows; however, structural diversity of woody plant communities was affected through declines in density and growth of riparian obligate tree species. Establishing a uniform level of utilization or herbaceous stubble height after grazing to maintain riparian values is not successful since each plant community responds differently to grazing (Green and Kauffman 1995). Haying would result in a uniform habitat structure and may have similar impacts to density and growth of tree species.

Numerous studies on rangelands throughout the world have demonstrated that continuous grazing of moderate intensity does not degrade rangeland productivity or species composition. Under continuous grazing situations, livestock repeatedly select the same areas to graze resulting in grazing patches of lightly foraged and heavily foraged areas. These grazing patches result in higher levels of heterogeneity at small scales (Fuhlendorf and Engle 2001). As studied in Mashiri et al. (2008), arid and semi-arid ecosystems have a slow response to grazing practices and many decades of observations were needed before grazing effects were revealed. This study analyzed 34 years of data to determine if there were

detectable differences in the vegetation from two different grazing systems: (1) seasonal rotation in which livestock were removed from the field for a period of time each year; and (2) year-long or continuous grazing. Based on 34 years of data, implementing a seasonal rotation grazing system did not produce a change in the vegetation within 34 years in this ecosystem.

As with managed harvesting and routine grazing, input from the STC is critical to ensure emergency haying and grazing of any of these additional CPs are appropriate, based on local conditions. Continued monitoring of haying and grazing of these practices would be recommended to ensure that lasting damage to vegetation and conservation covers from consecutive years of emergency haying and grazing activities did not occur. In addition, it should be noted that producers are required to re-establish CRP cover if the cover fails as a result of emergency haying or grazing.

Grazing also has the potential to spread invasive and noxious species. Some species can spread by attaching seeds to livestock coats, while others may use livestock manure as a means of dispersal. The modified Conservation Plan required for any emergency haying or grazing activities would address the potential for spread of noxious weeds and invasive species.

4.3 WILDLIFE

4.3.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to wildlife would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action would remove land with unique communities or habitat, result in population-level changes that could alter ecosystems at a landscape level, or result in the violation of any Federal laws or regulations that protect wildlife resources.

4.3.2 No Action Alternative

4.3.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Allowing grasslands to be enrolled into CRP would result in retaining or restoring up to 2 million acres of grasslands in areas where such communities were historically dominant. This would result in long-term benefits to native wildlife. Such benefits would be particularly realized in the Great Plains Ecoregion, where fires and grazing by native ungulates historically maintained grassland ecosystems. Wildlife species that are not adapted to grassland ecosystems could be negatively affected by restoring and maintaining such areas. Haufler and Ganguli (2007) have noted that grassland CPs offer some of the greatest benefits to wildlife that inhabit an increasingly threatened habitat. Even though it has been shown that grassland restoration can benefit wildlife, particularly grassland birds (Wood and Williams 2005), native prairie is preferable habitat to many grassland birds and wildlife (Johnson 2005). Mammalian predators such as red foxes, swift foxes, and coyotes have been shown to avoid planted grasslands in favor of adjacent natural grasslands (Kamler et al. 2003, 2005). Another study also noted that reconstructed tallgrass prairie provided sub-optimal habitat for common prairie mammals due to the low abundance of forbs, low vegetation diversity, and high vegetation biomass (Schwartz and Whitson research reviewed in Allen and Vandever 2012). However, even with sub-optimal habitat for some native wildlife, enrolled grasslands would reduce habitat fragmentation and provide cover and forage for certain species.

Grazing, mowing, haying, harvesting, and prescribed fire would maintain grassland communities by controlling the growth of woody plants and maintaining early successional stages, thus providing long-

term benefit to native wildlife. This wider range of maintenance activities, as well as the regular grazing that would be permitted on these newly eligible grasslands, could cause short-term negative impacts to wildlife including disturbance and direct mortality. However, all activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including wildlife.

4.3.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to wildlife by allowing acreage to remain in conservation, preventing development. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would temporarily disturb wildlife in the area and possibly temporarily remove habitat. This disturbance would be similar in nature to routine maintenance and management activities, and would not be allowed to occur during the PNS. Once restored, the conservation cover is expected to continue to provide high quality wildlife habitat. The primary goals of the Conservation Stewardship Program are to improve water and air quality as well as plant and animal resources, and producers are paid based on the performance of the cover. Therefore, the quality of the conservation cover may increase with a transition to this program.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: WRP, GRP, and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling the expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term wildlife benefits. Given the reduced maximum enrollment authority for CRP, facilitating an easy transition to these other conservation programs would allow for continued conservation and, thus, wildlife benefits from CRP land.

4.3.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions with respect to wildlife and other protected resources. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

Emergency haying and grazing is expected to result impacts similar to those that result from haying and grazing described in previous NEPA documents (USDA 2010 and state-specific EAs). Removing the payment reduction would likely result in an increase of emergency haying and grazing activities within counties where it is authorized.

As discussed in **Sections 4.2.2.3 and 4.2.3.2** and many other NEPA documents (USDA 2010 and state-specific EAs), haying and grazing activities (emergency or managed) temporarily alter the vegetation composition, density, and structure. Changes in vegetation structure potentially impact cover for wildlife including protection from predators, cover associated with reproductive success (nesting and rearing young), and food sources (USDA 2010). Direct impacts to wildlife are related to mortality of individual animals from impacts with machinery. Ground-nesting grassland birds are particularly susceptible to direct impacts of haying. Long-term habitat use by grassland birds and other wildlife is influenced by vegetation productivity and structure. As discussed in Allen et al. (2001), variability in vegetation

structure can increase the diversity of avian use because the number of micro edges and diversity of insects is greater compared to dense, uniform stands of grass. Periodic disturbance of grass/legume cover is recommended to maintain desirable vegetative characteristics for upland, ground nesting birds.

The direct impacts to wildlife from emergency haying and grazing activities are reduced by implementing site-specific BMPs defined in the Conservation Plan, limiting haying to 50 percent of a field which leaves some wildlife habitat, and avoiding the PNS. While studies like Allen et al. (2001) have shown that periodic harvesting of CRP does not have detrimental impacts, it is still imperative that the STC consider specific local conditions and important wildlife of the counties being considered for emergency haying or grazing. The potential for impacts from consecutive years of harvesting CRP would be greater in those locations with extensive emergency use of CRP like the Great Plains.

4.3.3 Proposed Action

4.3.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in CRP would be expected to benefit wildlife on enrolled lands, regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program. Among the goals of CRP is restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit to wildlife. Reynolds (2005) discussed the impact of the enrollment of approximately 4.7 million acres of cropland into CRP in the Prairie Pothole Region of the Dakotas and concluded that CRP in this region has significantly increased duck productivity. This area was historically the largest duck breeding area in North America, but due to agricultural conversion, the area is only a tiny fraction of what it once was. The Nature Conservancy recently used a reverse auction to enroll rice farms in California's Central Valley. Farmers were paid to keep their fields temporarily flooded with irrigation water after the rice harvest to provide resting and feeding habitat for migrating shorebirds along the Pacific Flyway (The Nature Conservancy 2013). Establishing a Targeted Enrollment method for CRP that utilizes a reverse auction concept could have similar success and help to increase CRP participation in key habitats. Benefits such as this could occur throughout the U.S. in any ecoregion. Installation and maintenance of CPs would create temporary, short-term negative impacts to wildlife. But once a CP is established, long-term beneficial impacts to wildlife would be realized.

4.3.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include BMPs to help reduce negative environmental impacts. Additional protection measures include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock. The frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC and depend on the environmental characteristics of a particular region. Managed harvesting or routine grazing activities would still be required to avoid the PNS.

While CRP can occur anywhere in the U.S., CRP is predominantly located in the Great Plains and Eastern Temperate Forest ecoregions. Impacts from managed harvesting and routine grazing are most likely to occur within the grassland ecosystems of the Great Plains and can be beneficial, detrimental, short-term, or long-term depending on what characteristics of the ecosystem are being monitored. Native habitats are

dynamic systems that move through successional stages, and CRP conservation covers are designed to mimic that successional progression to some degree. For instance, native grasslands evolved in response to periodic fire and seasonal grazing from large herbivores. Managed harvesting and routine grazing practices seek to emulate these natural events. Periodic disturbance can result in high habitat diversity, which in turn results in more attractive wildlife habitat.

Managed Harvesting

Managed harvesting (typically mowing or haying) would be allowed no more frequently than once every 3 years (same as current allowance), but not less frequently than once in 5 years. This would require four states (California, Colorado, Arizona, and Nevada) that allow managed harvesting once every 10 years, to mandate managed harvesting in at least once every 5 years. It should be noted that currently only Colorado has CRP acreage that has managed harvesting activities (see **Tables 2.4-5 and 2.4-6**); therefore, this analysis will focus on Colorado.

A broader review of fish and wildlife response to Farm Bill conservation practices was undertaken in a series of papers published by The Wildlife Society in partnership with Conservation Effects Assessment Project, including several concerning grasslands. The review provides a useful summary of the issues surrounding estimating the benefits of CRP to wildlife, including potential impacts of planting particular conservation covers and vegetation management, how problems with existing datasets have structured analyses, and the complexity of addressing the habitat needs of many different types of wildlife that are often conflicting. The major conclusions are: (1) Conservation Plans should be designed for priority wildlife species for lands best suited to meet that particular species' need; (2) the benefits for a particular species depend in part on the management of surrounding sites as well as the land in question; and (3) the benefits of grassland establishment and management are location- and species-specific, hence, in order to benefit the most wildlife within CRP land, the timing and frequency of management actions should be planned to create and maintain diversity of grassland successional stages over large areas.

Harvesting of CRP lands can have both indirect and direct impacts to wildlife. The severity and longevity of impacts depends on methods and timing of the activity. Indirect impacts to wildlife are those effects associated with alterations to the vegetation as described in **Section 4.2.3.2.** One of the benefits of managed harvesting includes maintenance of the grassland environment by preventing succession to more woody vegetation. Harvesting can be a lower impact method of vegetation control than fire, disking, and herbicide application. Changes in vegetation structure potentially impact wildife habitat including protection from predators, cover needed with reproduction (nesting and rearing young), and food sources (USDA 2010). Direct impacts to wildlife are related to mortality of individual animals from impacts with machinery, and the direct impact of machinery on nesting and rearing of young. Ground-nesting grassland birds are particularly susceptible to direct impacts of haying.

Changing the allowable managed harvesting frequency from once every 10 years to once every 5 years has been previously analyzed for several states to include: Idaho, New Mexico, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, western Oregon, South Dakota, eastern Washington, and Wyoming. All of these analyses found that increasing the frequency of allowable managed harvesting would not have a significant impact to wildlife. These previous analyses determined that the potential negative impacts to wildlife, specifically grassland bird species, are limited with implementation of standard managed harvesting restrictions to include:

- Avoiding the PNS which covers most of the peak breeding season for most grassland bird species.
- Limiting harvesting to 50 percent of the field which provides refuge habitat for wildlife fleeing machinery, as well as additional undisturbed habitat for nesting and rearing young.
- Mortality and other direct impacts only potentially occur during the harvesting activity.

In addition, the amount of grassland habitat that either would be eligible for managed harvesting or has historically been hayed is relatively small. The single most significant impact to wild bird populations is loss of habitat (USDA 2010). Studies have shown that CRP provides localized benefits for many species of grassland birds, and in order to maintain the health, vigor, and optimal structure of the habitat periodic disturbance must occur, whether through managed harvesting or other means. While some mortality is expected from managed harvesting activities, the small amount of total grassland available for managed harvesting and the portion of eligible land that has historically been managed harvested would limit the negative impacts to grassland bird populations. Given the overall benefits to habitat from managed harvesting for grassland birds and the low potential mortality, no significant impact to grassland birds would occur from increasing the allowable frequency for managed harvesting in Colorado if established CPs, procedures, and guidelines are followed, and the Conservation Plan is adapted to resource conditions on the land just prior to engaging in managed harvesting.

Routine Grazing

Under the Proposed Action, states would have more flexibility in establishing the allowable frequencies for routine grazing (which can be as frequent as once every 2 years) while still taking into consideration regional differences such as climate, soil type, and natural resources; the number of years that should be required between routine grazing activities; and how often during a year routine grazing should be allowed to occur. Native and managed lands have very complex relationships within the ecosystem. For example, grazing can impact avian species (and other wildlife) both directly and indirectly. Common ways grazing indirectly impacts avian species are by altering the vegetation condition, thereby altering food abundance (seeds, insects); foraging site conditions (food availability); and cover for protection (thermal), escape, or breeding (courtship, nests) (NRCS 2006). Grazing in turn can create situations that are beneficial to some species, but detrimental to others.

Depending on timing and stocking rates, grazing can impact avian species through direct disturbance, nest trampling, and direct mortality of young. Some bird species have been observed to avoid grazed CRP lands (NRCS 2006; Lupis et al. 2006). Avoidance of grazing activities during the PNS reduces the potential direct and indirect impacts to bird species. At light to moderate stocking rates, grazing does not appear to result in any significant losses to nongame birds (Kennedy et al. 2001). As described for vegetation impacts (see **Section 4.2.3.2**), this again highlights the importance of the STCs with regard to proper decision making, as each region and locale would have varied conditions and varied impacts.

4.3.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow FSA to expand the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing in areas designated D2 or greater to CPs where other types of harvesting or grazing are not authorized (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41). A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on most of these additional practices during 2012 found that as long as the haying or grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the

guidance and approval of the STC and NRCS Conservationist, there would be no lasting significant impacts to wildlife (USDA 2012).

Emergency haying and grazing could be implemented in consecutive years. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought, the repetitive haying or grazing of riparian and wetland areas may lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Wetland and riparian areas offer refuge to wildlife during times of drought stress, as drier conditions would affect these areas last since they are natural drainages. If grazing and/or haying were allowed for consecutive years, care must be exercised to ensure that the CP cover is not negatively impacted in the long term, which would have negative impacts to the wildlife that naturally inhabit these areas.

Wildlife habitat impacts could vary drastically by ecoregion, with more arid climates potentially experiencing greater short-term impacts. Grazing of these areas would also lead to increased competition between wildlife and livestock, since these areas are usually not grazed. Haying or grazing in these particular CPs would generally have the same short-term impacts as described for managed harvesting and routine grazing, including altering food abundance and availability, changing habitat, introducing disturbance, and causing direct mortality (NRCS 2006). Additionally, haying and grazing impacts to surface waters could result from increased runoff of pollutants, potentially affecting aquatic wildlife by reducing water quality. As with managed harvesting and routine grazing, STC guidance and adherence to grazing guidelines detailed in modified Conservation Plans would ensure local conditions are considered. In addition, allowing haying or grazing within these expanded CPs would require approval from STCs and state wildlife agencies prior to the activity. Continued monitoring of haying and grazing of these practices would be recommended to ensure that lasting damage to wetland and riparian habitat and conservation covers from emergency haying and grazing activities did not occur. As with all haying and grazing activities that occur on CRP lands, a site specific Conservation Plan would be required prior to any activities.

4.4 PROTECTED SPECIES

4.4.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to protected species would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action would result in the take of a Federally listed plant or animal species, or an impact on any designated critical habitat. For all enrollment in CRP, site specific EEs would be required. Any protected species identified by the EE would trigger consultation with USFWS and/or NMFS, as required, to ensure that negative impacts to protected species do not occur.

4.4.2 No Action Alternative

4.4.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Impacts to protected species that could result from enrolling grasslands into CRP and implementing the activities allowable on such lands would be similar to those described for vegetation and wildlife (see **Sections 4.2.2.1** and **4.3.2.1**). Restoring or maintaining native grasslands would be expected to benefit native wildlife and vegetation, including protected species, in the long term. Grazing, mowing, haying, harvesting, and prescribed fire would maintain grassland communities but could also cause short-term negative impacts including disturbance and direct mortality. As with vegetation and wildlife, potential impacts to protected species would be dependent on the habitat requirements and life history of each

species. The likelihood of impacting protected species is minimized since site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in CRP. Any protected species identified would trigger consultation with USFWS or NMFS, as required, to ensure that negative impacts to protected species do not occur. Additionally, all activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including vegetation and wildlife.

4.4.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to protected species by allowing acreage to remain in conservation, preventing development. Potential short-term impacts and long-term benefits to protected species would be the same as those described for wildlife and vegetation (see **Sections 4.3.2.2** and **4.2.2.2**, respectively). Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would temporarily disturb species in the area and possibly temporarily remove habitat. This disturbance would be similar in nature to routine maintenance and management activities, and would not be allowed to occur during the PNS. In addition, any protected species within or near CRP land would be protected through established BMPs and mitigations included in the Conservation Plan. Once restored, the conservation cover is expected to continue to provide high quality wildlife habitat, which could include habitat that supports protected species identified during the site-specific EE.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: WRP, GRP, and the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term benefits to protected species.

4.4.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions with respect to wildlife and other protected resources. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

The general impacts to protected species from removing the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing activities would be the same as those described for vegetation and wildlife (see **Sections 4.2.2.3 and 4.3.2.3**, respectively). Whether emergency haying or grazing is beneficial or adverse to a protected species depends on the habitat and life cycle needs of the species present. The site specific EE of lands proposed for enrollment in CRP would determine the presence of protected species and include consultation with USFWS or NMFS, as appropriate, to ensure that negative impacts to protected species do not occur. Implementing emergency haying or grazing on CRP would require a modified Conservation Plan with site specific BMPs for these activities. In accordance with FSA policy, if unavoidable negative impacts to protected species are identified, the proposed management activity would not be approved.

As noted in a recent Biological Assessment for CRP and the Lesser Prairie Chicken, FSA shares the concern that widespread haying and over-grazing of CRP under drought conditions may compromise the ability of these grasslands to provide year-round escape and thermal cover during the winter and nesting cover the following spring for Lesser Prairie Chicken at least until the return of normal precipitation

patterns (USFWS 2014). FSA is committed to working closely with NRCS, state fish and wildlife agencies, and other conservation partners to minimize long-term impacts of emergency haying and grazing of CRP on Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat. It is the intention of FSA that managed harvesting, managed and routine grazing, and emergency haying and grazing be properly utilized to produce a mosaic of vegetation structure and composition to benefit the Lesser Prairie Chicken (USFWS 2014).

In addition to restrictions noted in CRP handbook that apply to all acreage where emergency haying and grazing occurs, FSA would also comply with the restrictions and conservation measures specified in the USFWS Biological Opinion with respect to emergency haying and grazing of CRP within Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat. That is, within Lesser Prairie Chicken focal areas, connectivity/expansion zones and in other habitat areas in proximity to known populations, the combination of managed harvesting, managed/routine grazing, and emergency haying and grazing of CRP would be limited to once in a 3 year period unless determined that site, forage, and climatic conditions would provide forage for livestock and suitable habitat conditions to meet Lesser Prairie Chicken needs (USFWS 2014).

To date, other species specific Biological Opinions have not been developed. As noted above, the site specific EE would determine the presence of protected species and appropriate conservation measures would be included in the Conservation Plan for all activities that would occur on CRP land. Consultation with USFWS and NMFS would occur during the site specific EE, as appropriate.

4.4.3 Proposed Action

4.4.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in CRP could benefit protected species on enrolled lands, regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program. Under the Proposed Action, Targeted Enrollment would be available as a means of enrolling lands with the greatest environmental benefit. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, potentially resulting in a greater benefit to protected species, if they occur on or near enrolled lands. Impacts to protected species would be expected to be similar to those described for vegetation and wildlife (see **Sections 4.2.3.1** and **4.3.3.1**, respectively**).** Prior to enrollment, all sites would undergo a site specific EE to identify the presence of any protected species. If potential impacts to protected species would be likely, as determined by the site specific EE, consultation with USFWS or NMFS, as applicable, would be required. Site specific EE and any required consultation with USFWS or NMFS would prevent negative impacts to protected species.

4.4.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include BMPs to help reduce negative environmental impacts, as well as any specific mitigation requirements for protected species. Additional protection measures include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock. The frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC and depend on the environmental characteristics of a particular region. Managed harvesting or routine grazing activities would still be required to avoid the PNS.

The general impacts to protected species from the changes in allowable frequencies for managed harvesting and routine grazing would be the same as those described for vegetation and wildlife (see **Sections 4.2.3.2** and **4.3.3.2**, respectively). Whether managed harvesting or routine grazing is beneficial or adverse to a protected species depends on the habitat and life cycle needs of the species present. The site specific EE of lands proposed for enrollment in CRP would determine the presence of protected species and include consultation with USFWS or NMFS, as appropriate, to ensure no impacts to protected species would occur. In accordance with FSA policy, if unavoidable negative impacts to protected species are identified, the proposed management activity would not be approved.

As noted in **Section 4.4.2.3**, within Lesser Prairie Chicken focal areas, connectivity/expansion zones, and in other habitat areas in proximity to known populations, the combination of managed harvesting, managed/routine grazing, and emergency haying and grazing of CRP would be limited to once in a 3 year period unless determined that site, forage, and climatic conditions would provide forage for livestock and suitable habitat conditions to meet Lesser Prairie Chicken needs (USFWS 2014). For CRP land within Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat, site specific grazing plans would be designed to produce optimum Lesser Prairie Chicken habitat conditions, including restoring, enhancing, and maintaining vegetative structure providing appropriate nesting habitat, and providing an adequate cover of forbs and higher insect abundance associated with brood habitat (USFWS 2014).

4.4.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow FSA to expand the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing in areas designated D2 or greater to CPs where other types of harvesting or grazing are not authorized (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41). A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on most of these additional practices during 2012 found that as long as the haying or grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the guidance and approval of the STC and NRCS Conservationist, there would be no lasting significant impacts to protected species (USDA 2012).

Potential impacts to protected species from consecutive years of emergency haying or grazing of the same acreage would be similar to those described in **Sections 4.2.3.3** and **4.3.3.3**. BMPs and required mitigation defined in the Conservation Plan, in addition to approval from the STC and certain Federal and state agencies, ensures that protected species would not be negatively impacted by emergency haying or grazing activities. As described above for managed harvesting and routine grazing (see **Section 4.4.3.2**), the site specific EE of lands proposed for enrollment in CRP would determine the presence of protected species and include consultation with USFWS or NMFS, as appropriate, to ensure impacts to protected species do not occur. As with managed harvesting and routine grazing, STC guidance is critical for creating Conservation Plans based on local conditions. As noted in **Sections 4.4.2.3**, specific restrictions and conservation measures for the Lesser Prairie Chicken with respect to emergency haying and grazing would also apply to these additional CPs.

4.5 SOILS

4.5.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to soil resources would be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action resulted in a permanent increase in erosion or the erodibility of soils, altered soil characteristics that

would threaten the viability of conservation cover, or impacts to unique soil conditions in sensitive habitats.

4.5.2 No Action Alternative

4.5.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining native grasslands would be expected to benefit soils in the long term. The stabilization of soils through limiting development and agricultural uses of the land would reduce the potential for soil erosion. The activities authorized for grasslands were designed to increase soil stability and decrease soil loss from wind and water erosion. Benefits would include the long-term improvement of soil quality and stability resulting from protective soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient, and pesticide management; and minimization of soil disturbance.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts such as compaction and soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to soils would be realized on grasslands enrolled in CRP. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in CRP and would ensure minimal impacts to soils. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including soils.

4.5.2.2 Final Year of Contract

CRP contract holders would be allowed to conduct improvement activities on their lands during the final year of the contract if those lands are to be enrolled into the Conservation Stewardship Program or the Agricultural Easement Program, allowing for an easier transition from CRP to long-term or permanent easements. Soil quality and soil erosion are two of the primary concerns to be addressed by the Conservation Stewardship Program. Improvements to the conservation cover (similar to maintenance or management activities) are allowed prior to enrollment in the Conservation Stewardship Program as long as the activities are consistent with the purpose of the cover. Temporary, localized, and minor impacts to soils would occur from those authorized land improvements during the final year of CRP, which would not occur otherwise; however, long-term beneficial impacts to soils would occur from the enrollment in conservation easements. Stabilizing soils through continued enrollment in conservation programs results in reduced erosion potential and improved soil quality.

4.5.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

USDA uses the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation to measure soil loss. This equation takes into account rainfall/runoff, soil erodibility, slope length, slope steepness, cover management, and supporting practices. As analyzed in several state specific EAs and prior CRP NEPA documents, haying or grazing would affect only the cover management factor. In general, haying would leave the ground cover. Ground cover can help with infiltration, slowing runoff, and can reduce rain drop impact energy. Grazing may temporarily remove the ground cover through hoof action in areas where livestock concentrate. Ground

cover is minimally affected by haying and grazing, since a minimum plant height of 2 to 10 inches (depending on the species) must remain after harvesting or grazing activities in accordance with NRCS Practice Standards. This stabilizes soils. The potential short-term impacts to soils would vary depending on the soil type and conditions, species composition of ground or canopy cover, and time needed for re-growth. Repetitive years of haying and grazing of the same acreage under emergency conditions could increase the amount of bare soils and also the amount of time that bare soils are exposed, which makes the soils susceptible to wind or rain erosion. Producers are required to re-establish CRP cover if the cover fails as a result of emergency haying or grazing. Local conditions must be monitored and considered by the STC when requesting authorization for emergency haying and grazing.

4.5.3 Proposed Action

4.5.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Targeted Enrollment could encourage the enrollment of lands or use of CPs with the highest potential benefit to soils. The beneficial impacts to soils associated with CRP would continue and may increase due to any focus on CPs or conservation goals that benefit soils and protect environmentally sensitive land, including areas with high EI ratings.

4.5.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would still be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. The site specific Conservation Plan would establish the maximum harvesting and grazing limits for the contract and include BMPs to help reduce soil erosion. BMPs include, but are not limited to, measures to maintain adequate ground cover, litter, and canopy, and reduce soil compaction. Restrictions on harvesting and grazing that would protect soils are built in to the provisions and include limiting haying to no more than 50 percent of the field, setting a stocking rate at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates, and requiring adherence to the NRCS Conservation Practice Standards that stipulate harvest criteria and measures to ensure dispersion of livestock.

Harvesting and grazing frequencies would still be coordinated and approved by the STC, and would incorporate consideration of the soil characteristics of the enrolled land. Managed harvesting (typically mowing or haying) would be allowed no more frequently than once every 3 years (same as current allowance), but not less frequently than once in 5 years. As discussed previously, this change only affects managed harvesting in Colorado. Under the Proposed Action, states would have more flexibility in establishing the allowable frequencies for routine grazing (can be as frequent as once every 2 years) while still taking into consideration regional differences such as climate, soil type, and natural resources; the number of years that should be required between routine grazing activities; and how often during a year routine grazing should be allowed to occur.

As noted in **Section 4.5.2.3**, harvesting and grazing would affect only the cover management factor in the Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation that measures soil loss. In general, harvesting would leave the ground cover. Ground cover can help with infiltration, slowing runoff, and can reduce rain drop impact energy. Grazing may temporarily remove the ground cover through hoof action in areas where livestock concentrate. Ground cover is minimally affected by harvesting and grazing, since a minimum plant height of 2 to 10 inches (depending on the species) must remain after harvesting or grazing activities in accordance with NRCS Practice Standards. This stabilizes soils. The potential short-term impacts to soils

would vary depending on the soil type and conditions, species composition of ground or canopy cover, and time needed for re-growth. However, even with more frequent grazing or harvesting, the impacts to soils would be localized, temporary, and minimal.

4.5.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing- Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during drought conditions (D2 or greater), as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would be determined on a case by case basis and require approval from the STC and certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to soils would be similar to those described above in **Sections 4.5.2.3 and 4.5.3.2**.

4.6 SURFACE WATER

4.6.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to surface water resources would be considered significant if the Proposed Action adversely affects water quality or quantity, threatens or damages unique hydrologic characteristics, or violates established laws or regulations. Potential impacts to surface waters would be site specific and depend on the CPs to be installed; therefore, analysis of potential impacts to surface water on the programmatic and national scale will be largely qualitative.

4.6.2 No Action Alternative

4.6.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would benefit surface waters for the duration of the CRP contracts. The stabilization of soils through maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides, and metals into adjacent surface waters. Grasslands provide greater permeability than developed areas or bare soil, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface and into adjacent surface waters. This helps maintain stream integrity by regulating runoff that can affect water quality. The activities authorized for grasslands were designed to increase soil stability and decrease soil loss from wind and water erosion. Conservation and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates and schedules, reducing the potential for nutrient runoff and overgrazing. Benefits of enrolling grasslands into CRP would include the long-term improvement of surface water quality resulting from protective soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient, and pesticide management; minimization of soil disturbance; and grazing management.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts to surface waters due to soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to surface waters would be realized. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including surface waters.

4.6.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to surface water quality

and quantity by maintaining conservation covers and keeping lands out of production agriculture, which could require water for irrigation. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would be similar to maintenance and management activities, and would result in temporary land disturbance which may temporarily degrade water quality in nearby surface waters from sediment-laden runoff. Established BMPs in the Conservation Plan would reduce the likelihood of surface water impacts during the improvement activities. The primary goals of the Conservation Stewardship Program are to improve water quality and quantity through high-performing conservation covers; therefore, the beneficial impacts to water resources may increase from the transition of CRP land to this program.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: WRP, GRP, and the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term improvements to water quality and increased water quantity. Allowing CRP land to remain in conservation through an easement would continue to reduce the demand for irrigation, thus increasing stream flows and available surface water supplies.

4.6.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

Surface water quality is affected by soil and nutrients transported off the field through runoff. Conservation covers significantly reduce the amount of soil runoff, which in turn correlates with reduced sedimentation and nutrient loads in nearby waterbodies. In addition, CRP covers often create buffers between waterbodies and actively farmed fields, reducing the amount of sediment-laden runoff in surface waters.

Livestock having access to surface waterbodies may pollute water with nutrients mobilized by damage to streambanks and vegetation from trampling, and the addition of manure. However, emergency haying and grazing activities cannot occur within 120 feet of a permanent waterbody and these areas must be fenced to confine livestock, thus minimizing the potential for these types of impacts. Therefore, the primary potential for impacts to surface water stems from the possibility of increased soil erosion caused by loss of vegetation, as well as compaction of soils from livestock that could lead to excessive runoff. NRCS Practice Standards and the associated BMPs would require that a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of stubble remain after haying or grazing, minimizing the potential for increased erosion, which in turn reduces the potential for increased sedimentation in nearby waterbodies. As described in **Section 4.5.2.3**, repetitive haying and grazing under emergency conditions could increase the amount of bare soil and the amount of time that bare soils are exposed, which in turn could exacerbate this potential impact. Producers are required to re-establish CRP cover if the cover fails as a result of emergency haying or grazing. Local conditions must be monitored and considered by the STC when requesting authorization for emergency haying and grazing.

4.6.3 Proposed Action

4.6.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in CRP would be expected to benefit surface waters adjacent to or downstream from enrolled lands, regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program since one of the goals of CRP is improving surface water quality. Enrollment of lands into CRP through any means would benefit surface water quantity by lessening the demand for use in irrigation, thus increasing stream flows and available surface water supplies in areas where surface waters are used for irrigation. Surface water quality also would benefit from CRP covers reducing erosion and runoff of pollutants. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit overall. If lands or CPs that affect water quality improvement were targeted, benefits to water quality could be greater than for traditional CRP Sign-ups. One study of the benefits of utilizing reverse-auctions to enroll lands in conservation found a seven-fold increase in the reduction of phosphorous runoff per dollar spent as compared to USDA's EQIP (Greenhalgh et al. 2007). As with other resources and enrollment methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.6.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, a modified Conservation Plan would still be required regardless of the frequency allowed for managed harvesting or routine grazing. Potential negative impacts to surface water quality not directly related to frequency of harvesting or grazing are addressed by NRCS Practice Standards and are included in the Conservation Plan. Surface water quality is affected by soil and nutrients transported off the field through runoff. Conservation covers significantly reduce the amount of soil runoff, which in turn correlates with reduced sedimentation and nutrient loads in nearby waterbodies. In addition, CRP covers often create buffers between waterbodies and actively farmed fields, reducing the amount of sediment-laden runoff in surface waters.

Livestock having access to surface waterbodies may pollute water with nutrients mobilized by damage to streambanks and vegetation from trampling, and the addition of manure. However, grazing activities cannot occur within 120 feet of a permanent waterbody and these areas must be fenced to confine livestock, thus minimizing the potential for these types of impacts. Therefore, the primary potential for impacts to surface water stems from the possibility of increased soil erosion caused by loss of vegetation, as well as compaction of soils from livestock that could lead to excessive runoff if not controlled.

As described in previous sections on vegetation and soils (see **Sections 4.2.3.2** and **4.5.3.2**), when performed in accordance with established guidelines, managed harvesting and routine grazing can be effective tools for maintaining early successional stages of vegetative communities, and adjusting the frequencies has little long-term impact on the vegetation and soil cover. NRCS Practice Standards and the associated BMPs would require that a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of stubble remain after harvesting or grazing, minimizing the potential for increased erosion, which in turn reduces the potential for increased sedimentation in nearby waterbodies. As noted in **Section 4.5.3.2**, the potential short-term impacts to soils would vary depending on the soil conditions, species composition of ground or canopy cover, and time needed for re-growth. Establishing stocking rates suitable for the specific forage and other conditions on the property ensures that grazing livestock are adequately dispersed, thus reducing the potential for soil compaction which could increase runoff. However, even with more frequent grazing or harvesting, the

impacts to soils would be localized, temporary, and minimal. Given the minimal impacts to vegetation and soils, the potential impacts to surface water quality from increased sedimentation also would be localized, temporary, and minimal.

4.6.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during drought conditions (D2 or greater) as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would be determined on a case by case basis and require approval from the STC and certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to surface water would be similar to those described **Sections 4.6.2.3 and 4.6.3.2**.

4.7 GROUNDWATER

4.7.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to groundwater would be considered significant if the Proposed Action significantly reduced groundwater quantity or quality on lands that are eligible for enrollment in CRP or currently are enrolled.

4.7.2 No Action Alternative

4.7.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would provide benefits to groundwater for the duration of the CRP contracts. In addition to reducing the demand for groundwater irrigation, maintaining grasslands would provide greater permeability than developed areas, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface and into adjacent surface waters. Increased soil permeability increases the rate of replenishment of aquifers, providing long-term benefits to groundwater quality and quantity. Conservation and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates, stocking schedules, and pesticide management. While there could be temporary, negative impacts to groundwater in areas with shallow aquifers during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to groundwater quality and quantity would be realized on grasslands enrolled in CRP. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including groundwater.

4.7.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to groundwater quality and quantity. Allowing CRP land to remain in conservation through a long-term enrollment program or an easement would continue to reduce the demand for irrigation derived from groundwater sources. In addition, conservation covers reduce runoff and allow for increased infiltration of rainwater and snowmelt, replenishing groundwater sources.

4.7.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified

Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

Emergency haying and grazing would not have any appreciable impacts on groundwater. The potential indirect impacts to groundwater are similar to those described for surface water (see **Section 4.6.2.3**), and stem from the removal of vegetation to a degree that increases erosion potential and sedimentation or contamination of surface waters that replenish groundwater. As described in that section, NRCS Practice Standards and the associated BMPs reduce the potential for these impacts. Similarly, protection measures are in place to maintain adequate vegetation cover that would allow for continued infiltration of rainwater and snowmelt that would replenish groundwater sources. In addition, producers are required to re-establish CRP cover if the cover fails as a result of emergency haying or grazing.

4.7.3 Proposed Action

4.7.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in CRP would be expected to benefit groundwater, regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program, by lessening the demand for irrigation in areas where aquifers are used as a source of water for agricultural production. Groundwater quality and quantity would also benefit from CRP covers reducing runoff, reducing fertilizer and pesticide use, and increasing infiltration times and aquifer replenishment. It is expected that using Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, resulting in a greater environmental benefit overall. If lands or CPs that affect groundwater or surface water quality or quantity were targeted using this proposed methodology, benefits to groundwater could be greater than for traditional CRP Sign-ups. As with other resources and enrollment methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.7.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would not have any appreciable impacts on groundwater. The potential indirect impacts to groundwater are similar to those described for surface water (see **Section 4.6.3.2**), and stem from the removal of vegetation to a degree that increases erosion potential and sedimentation or contamination of surface waters that replenish groundwater. As described in that section, NRCS Practice Standards and the associated BMPs reduce the potential for these impacts. Similarly, protection measures are in place to maintain adequate vegetation cover that would allow for continued infiltration of rainwater and snowmelt that would replenish groundwater sources.

4.7.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during drought conditions (D2 or greater), as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would be determined on a case by case basis and require approval from the STC and certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to groundwater would be similar to those described in **Sections 4.7.2.3 and 4.7.3.2**).

4.8 FLOODPLAINS

4.8.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to floodplains would be considered significant if the Proposed Action reduced the natural function of floodplains, thereby increasing flooding potential or the severity of flooding events.

4.8.2 No Action Alternative

4.8.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would benefit floodplains adjacent to CRP lands for the duration of the contracts. The stabilization of soils through maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land would provide greater soil permeability and would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, and metals into adjacent floodplains and surface waters. Grasslands provide greater permeability than developed areas or bare ground, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface, helping to maintain the integrity of riparian areas by regulating runoff. Conservation and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates and schedules, reducing the potential for nutrient runoff into floodplains. Benefits of enrolling grasslands into CRP would include the long-term protection of soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient and pesticide management; minimization of soil disturbance; and grazing management.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts to floodplains due to soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements to floodplains would be realized. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including floodplains.

4.8.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would generally provide long-term benefits to floodplains and their flood storage capacity. Maintaining the established conservation cover would prevent development within floodplains on CRP land. Floodplains provide a natural area for floodwaters to accumulate, preventing floodwaters from having damaging effects to developed areas or significantly increasing surface water flows, which increases erosion potential.

4.8.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

The potential indirect impacts to floodplains would stem from vegetation losses to a degree that increases the erosion potential, which in turn could affect the flood storage capacity of floodplains. As described in **Section 4.2.2.3**, the required NRCS Practice Standards and associated BMPs reduce the potential for this to occur. In addition, floodplains in the local vicinity would be identified in the Conservation Plan, and

specific BMPs or mitigation measures would be developed prior to allowing any haying or grazing activity.

4.8.3 Proposed Action

4.8.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

As with surface water and groundwater, enrolling land in CRP would be expected to benefit floodplains adjacent to or downstream from enrolled lands, regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program. Enrollment of lands into CRP through any means would benefit floodplains by reducing the volume of runoff and improving the quality of waters reaching floodplains from over-surface flow and subsurface flows from aquifers. Using this enrollment methodology to target enrollment and restoration of floodplains, or other practices that would improve surface water or groundwater, could result in a greater conservation benefit to floodplains per conservation dollar spent, as compared to traditional CRP Sign-ups. As with other resources and other enrollment methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.8.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would have minimal impacts to floodplains. The potential indirect impacts to floodplains would stem from vegetation losses to a degree that increases the erosion potential, which in turn could affect the flood storage capacity of floodplains. As described in **Section 4.2.3.2,** the required NRCS Practice Standards and associated BMPs reduce the potential for this to occur. In addition, floodplains in the local vicinity would be identified in the Conservation Plan, and specific BMPs or mitigation measures would be developed prior to allowing any harvesting or grazing activity.

4.8.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during drought conditions (D2 or greater), as determined by the Secretary. Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would require approval from certain Federal and state agencies. As with all haying and grazing activities, a site specific Conservation Plan would be developed prior to the activities. Impacts to floodplains would be similar to those described above in **Sections 4.8.2.3 and 4.8.3.2**).

4.9 WETLANDS

4.9.1 Significance Criteria

Impacts to wetlands could be considered significant if implementation of the Proposed Action threatened or damaged unique hydrologic characteristics, or violated established laws or regulations. Analysis of potential impact to wetlands from implementation of the Proposed Action will be qualitative because of the scale of the proposed program changes.

4.9.2 No Action Alternative

4.9.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would benefit adjacent wetlands for the duration of the CRP contracts. The stabilization of soils, through maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land, would reduce the transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides, and metals into adjacent wetlands. Grasslands provide greater permeability than developed areas, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil rather than flow across the surface and into adjacent surface waters and wetlands, helping to maintain the integrity of riparian areas. Conservation and Grazing Management Plans would ensure appropriate stocking rates and schedules, reducing the potential for nutrient runoff. Benefits of enrolling grasslands into CRP would include the long-term protection of soil cover; retention of organic matter; vegetation, nutrient and pesticide management; minimization of soil disturbance; and grazing management.

While there may be temporary, negative impacts to wetlands due to soil loss during the installation of CPs and other authorized activities (e.g., fencing, construction of firebreaks, brush management), long-term improvements would be realized in wetlands adjacent to grasslands enrolled in CRP. Site specific EEs would be undertaken prior to enrolling any lands in CRP. All activities on enrolled lands would be implemented in compliance with a Conservation Plan, ensuring long-term protection of natural resources, including wetlands.

4.9.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program could provide long-term benefits to wetlands adjacent to or downstream from CRP lands. Providing a means to keep land in conservation could result in reduced use of water for irrigation; less erosion of soils; and reduced runoff of nutrients, pesticides, and other chemicals as compared to agriculture or development. All of these benefits would positively affect adjacent or downstream wetlands by preserving wetland hydrology and health. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would be similar to maintenance and management activities, and would result in temporary land disturbance, which may temporarily impact wetlands or riparian areas. Established BMPs in the Conservation Plan would reduce the likelihood of wetland or riparian impacts during the improvement activities.

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill that would consolidate the conservation goals of three current programs: WRP, GRP, and the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. Enrolling expiring CRP land into long-term (30-year) or permanent easements (or the maximum allowed by the state) would ensure long-term wetland benefits. Allowing CRP land, particularly land enrolled in CPs specifically for wetlands or riparian buffers, to remain in conservation through a long-term contract or an easement would allow for the continued protection of wetlands and riparian areas.

4.9.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50

percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

The potential indirect impacts to wetlands are the same as those described for surface water (see **Section 4.6.2.3**), and stem from the removal of vegetation to a degree that increases erosion potential and sedimentation or contamination of nearby wetlands. As described in that section, haying or grazing activities are prohibited within 120 feet of waterbodies, including wetlands. In addition, the Conservation Plan would include site specific BMPs or mitigations to avoid or reduce potential impacts to wetlands from these activities. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought, repetitive haying or grazing of the same acreage may lead to long-term detrimental impacts to some conservation covers. If consecutive years were allowed for grazing and/or haying, care must be exercised to ensure that the CP cover is not negatively impacted in the long term. However, it should be noted that producers are required to re-establish CRP cover if the cover fails as a result of emergency haying or grazing.

4.9.3 Proposed Action

4.9.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

As with floodplains, enrolling land in CRP would be expected to benefit wetlands adjacent to or downstream from enrolled lands, regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program. Enrollment of lands into CRP through any means would benefit wetlands by improving floodplain function, reducing the volume of runoff, and improving the quality of waters reaching surface waters and floodplains from over-surface flow and subsurface flows from aquifers. If floodplains, surface waters, or wetlands, or CPs that support the quality and function of those resources, were targeted for enrollment using this methodology, greater benefit to wetlands could be realized as compared to traditional CRP Sign-ups. As with other resources and enrollment methodologies, installation and maintenance of CPs could create temporary, short-term negative impacts. Long-term beneficial impacts of CRP are realized once CPs are established.

4.9.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would not have any appreciable impacts to wetlands. The potential indirect impacts to wetlands are the same as those described for surface water (see **Section 4.6.3.2**), and stem from the removal of vegetation to a degree that increases erosion potential and sedimentation or contamination of nearby wetlands. As described in that section, harvesting or grazing activities are prohibited within 120 feet of waterbodies, including wetlands. In addition, the Conservation Plan would include site specific BMPs or mitigations to avoid or reduce potential impacts to wetlands from these activities. Similarly, NRCS Practice Standards ensure that adequate vegetation cover would remain after completion of any harvesting or grazing activity to reduce erosion potential and sedimentation within nearby wetland areas.

4.9.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing- Additional CPs

The Proposed Action would allow certain CPs (CPs 8, 21, 23, 23A, 25, 27, 28, 37, 39, and 41) to be made eligible for emergency haying and grazing during drought conditions (D2 or greater), as determined by the Secretary. A recent NEPA analysis for a one-time approval for emergency haying and grazing on most of these practices during 2012 found that as long as the haying or grazing was conducted in accordance with the modified Conservation Plan and under the guidance and approval of the STC and

NRCS Conservationist, among other stipulations, there would be no lasting significant impacts to wetlands (USDA 2012). In addition, USFWS uses haying of wetland areas as a management technique to encourage waterfowl usage in the Wildlife Refuge System (USFWS 2013).

Potential impacts to wetlands from authorizing emergency haying and grazing of these additional CPs would be the same as those described under vegetation (**Section 4.2.3.3**) and wildlife (**Section 4.3.3.3**). Authorizing these CPs would be determined on a case by case basis and require approval form the STC and certain Federal and state agencies. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought, the repetitive haying or grazing of riparian and wetland areas may lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Wetland and riparian areas offer refuge during times of drought stress, as drier conditions would affect these areas last since they are natural drainages. If consecutive years were allowed for grazing and/or haying, care must be exercised to ensure that the CP cover is not negatively impacted in the long term.

4.10 AIR QUALITY

4.10.1 Significance Criteria

An impact would be considered significant if changes to CRP would decrease GHG emissions reductions substantially from baseline FY 2013 levels of 45 million metric tons CO_2e annually.

4.10.2 No Action Alternative

4.10.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

A recent study by the UDSA's ERS on the role of agriculture in reducing GHG emissions (Horowitz and Gottlieb 2010) found that the majority of the GHG emissions reductions for CRP is occurring on grasslands. This study found that about 23.5 million acres of the 33 million acres enrolled in General Sign-up CRP were in grassland vegetation, or about two-thirds of total enrollment in March 2008 when the study occurred. Given that this pattern of enrollment by vegetation type has not changed substantially, making certain grasslands eligible for CRP would support continued GHG emissions reductions at or near baseline levels. If enrollment patterns change substantially, particularly an increase in enrollment from the Delta and Southeast regions where trees are a large portion of total enrollment, there could be an annual increase in carbon sequestration rates for CRP. Therefore, given the uncertainty of future enrollment patterns by region and vegetation type, and that baseline GHG emissions reduction rates are based on a pattern where two-thirds of CRP lands are grassland, implementing new grasslands eligibility would have no change or detrimental impacts on air quality.

4.10.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would provide long-term benefits to air quality by providing a means for lands to remain in conservation rather than returning to agricultural production or being developed. Allowable activities to improve the conservation cover would be similar to maintenance and management activities, and would result in short-term, localized, and minor land disturbance, which may temporarily increase fugitive dust and GHG emissions from the use of machinery. However, these activities are consistent with baseline GHG emissions levels and reduction estimates. Maintaining CRP land in conservation would have beneficial impacts to air quality through continued carbon sequestration and reduced GHG emissions.

4.10.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Emergency haying and grazing would be allowed to occur within authorized counties without a payment reduction. Producers wishing to implement emergency haying and grazing would obtain a modified Conservation Plan that would consider local conditions. Emergency haying is limited to no more than 50 percent of the field, and stocking rates are set at no more than 75 percent of the NRCS established rates. Eligibility requirements and other restrictions were noted in **Section 2.3.3**.

Grassland conservation covers increase soil carbon by decreasing oxidation and increasing the amount of roots and standing biomass. Emergency haying does not remove roots and a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of stubble must remain after the harvest; therefore, these activities would not affect the ability of the conservation cover to sequester carbon. Grazing activities on CRP land increase the presence of ruminators that generate CH_4 (a GHG) as a result of consumption of biomass. However, livestock used for emergency grazing are likely already within the general vicinity of CRP field (if not on the exact farm), and grazing of CRP field would not represent an increase in the CH_4 produced in the area. Emergency haying and grazing would not cause any change to GHG emissions. Implementation of the established BMPs in the Conservation Plan (i.e., stocking rates and dispersion of livestock) limits the potential for grazing activities to remove the ground cover through hoof action where livestock concentrate; therefore, the ability of the conservation cover to sequester carbon would not be significantly impacted. Any ground cover impacts would be temporary and localized.

Given the increasing threat of long-term drought as a product of climate change, the consistent haying or grazing of the same acreage could lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. However, it should be noted that producers are required to re-establish CRP cover if the cover fails as a result of emergency haying or grazing. Continued monitoring of extensive emergency haying and grazing would be necessary to ensure that lasting damage to vegetation and conservation covers from emergency haying and grazing activities did not occur.

4.10.3 Proposed Action

4.10.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Enrolling land in CRP would benefit air quality regardless of how lands are identified or enrolled in the program. Such benefits would result from reduced emissions from equipment, greater soil stability resulting from permanent covers, and increased potential for long-term carbon sequestration as compared to land in agricultural production. Additionally, Targeted Enrollment would provide a means for targeting lands or CPs for carbon sequestration potential. As such, though CRP enrollment cap will be reduced over the next 3 years, the carbon sequestration potential may not be reduced proportionally if lands or practices with higher than average carbon sequestration rates are targeted. Quantification of these potential benefits is not currently possible because the initiatives and the specific practices to be involved would vary annually, depending on the specific conservation goals and enrollment availability. Therefore, the overall impact of incorporating the Targeted Enrollment approach would be to potentially improve the sequestration capabilities of the acreage through CPs that target or incidentally result in carbon sequestration.

4.10.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Under the Proposed Action, four states (Arizona, California, Nevada and Colorado) would be required to have more frequent harvesting (haying) activities, where those activities are requested, than what is

currently authorized. More frequent harvesting would result in increased GHG emissions from harvesting equipment operations. However, this increase is not expected to be significant since managed harvesting currently occurs only in Colorado (72,000 total acres during 2009 through 2013). In addition, managed harvesting would occur during a short period of time dispersed over a large geographic area. It would not occur on all CRP acres in any given year, so the emissions that result would be localized and temporary and would not contribute measurably to regional emissions. Grassland conservation covers increase soil carbon by decreasing oxidation and increasing the amount of roots and standing biomass. Managed harvesting does not remove roots and a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of stubble must remain after the harvest; therefore, adjusting the frequencies would not affect the ability of the conservation cover to sequester carbon.

Grazing activities on CRP land increase the presence of ruminators that generate CH_4 (a GHG) as a result of consumption of biomass. However, livestock used for grazing are likely already within the general vicinity of CRP field (if not on the exact farm), and grazing of CRP field would not represent an increase in the CH_4 produced in the area. Changing the allowable frequency of grazing activities would not cause any change to GHG emissions. Implementation of the established BMPs in the Conservation Plan (i.e., stocking rates and dispersion of livestock) limits the potential for grazing activities to remove the ground cover through hoof action where livestock concentrate; therefore, the ability of the conservation cover to sequester carbon would not be significantly impacted. Any ground cover impacts would be temporary and localized.

4.10.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing- Additional CPs

The expansion of emergency haying and grazing activities to CPs not previously authorized for any haying or grazing activity would have temporary, negative impacts to carbon sequestration due to the loss of some of the living biomass. Emergency haying and grazing must be included in the Conservation Plan, and these activities (like all haying and grazing activities) must leave a minimum of 2 to 10 inches of cover, reducing the potential for negative impacts. The sequestering of carbon varies, depending on many factors including the geographic location of the acreage. In areas such as the humid, temperate southeast, generally higher levels of carbon are sequestered in soils. The impact of losses would vary by location as specific regions of the U.S. are more susceptible to drought conditions (Southwest, Great Plains). Wetland and riparian areas are some of the richest sources of sequestered carbon. Given the increasing threat of long-term drought as a product of climate change, the consistent haying or grazing of riparian and wetland areas could lead to long-term detrimental impacts to these conservation covers. Continued monitoring of these practices would be necessary to ensure that lasting damage to vegetation and conservation covers from emergency haying and grazing activities did not occur.

4.11 RECREATION

4.11.1 Significance Criteria

Recent trends in outdoor recreation participation in the U.S. have been positive in both the number of participants and the number of participant days. Based on these on-going trends, as well as parallel data that can be derived from CRP outdoor recreation effects, impacts to recreational resources would be considered significant if there were long-term reductions in participation or expenditures for outdoor recreation after implementation of an alternative. Positive recreation impacts would be indicated by increased participation and expenditures; detrimental impacts would be indicated by decreases. The

amount, type, size, and location of lands enrolled in CRP, as well as established trends in recreation participation, are considered to determine the effect of the alternatives on recreation.

4.11.2 No Action Alternative

4.11.2.1 Grassland Eligibility and Authorized Activities

The enrollment of newly eligible grasslands into CRP and the activities authorized on those lands would not be expected to impact recreation. As with all CRP land, participants enrolling grasslands would reserve the right to recreational uses of the land. About two-thirds of current CRP acres are in grassland practices. Allowing for the enrollment of up to 2 million acres of grasslands would not result in changes in recreational participation or expenditures. The benefits to recreation that result from enrollment in CRP would continue.

4.11.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would not change recreation participation patterns, and would provide long-term benefits to recreation by providing a means to keep land in conservation. Maintaining CRP land in conservation would also allow the land to continue to be used for recreational activities. Improving the conservation cover would have benefits to wildlife habitat and water quality in the area, which in turn would improve wildlife related recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, bird watching, and hiking.

4.11.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

Removing the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing would have a negligible impact on recreation. There would be minor, short-term detrimental impacts to recreation associated with reduced access to, or availability of, particular locations during haying or grazing activities.

4.11.3 Proposed Action

4.11.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Though recreation benefits from CRP vary widely by region, Targeted Enrollment is not expected to result in significant impacts to recreation. Positive impacts to outdoor recreation would be directly related to shifts in the quality of CRP lands. Since the goal of Targeted Enrollment is to increase the environmental benefit of CRP lands, lands enrolled using this method would likely result in greater benefit to vegetation, wildlife habitat, and water quality than lands enrolled by other means. This would result in better quality recreational opportunities and higher recreation participation and expenditures.

4.11.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Adjusting the allowable frequencies for managed harvesting or routine grazing would have a net negligible impact on recreation. Managed harvesting can be an effective tool for maintaining CRP cover, which in turn has long-term beneficial impacts to vegetation and wildlife habitat. Quality CRP cover maintained through appropriate harvesting and grazing activities would have long-term benefits to wildlife-related recreation. There would also be minor, short-term detrimental impacts to recreation associated with reduced access to, or availability of, particular locations during harvesting or grazing activities.

4.11.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

The expansion of emergency haying and grazing activities to CPs not previously authorized for any haying or grazing activity would have a negligible impact on recreation. As described in **Sections 4.11.2.3 and 4.11.3.2**, short-term impacts on recreation associated with reduced access to, or availability of, particular locations during haying or grazing activities may occur.

4.12 SOCIOECONOMICS

4.12.1 Significance Criteria

A significant impact on socioeconomic conditions would be a change that is outside the normal or anticipated range of those conditions that would flow through the remainder of the economy and community creating substantial adverse effects in housing, employment, demographic trends, or business sectors. Anticipated changes to the statewide or national economy that are greater than agriculture's normal contribution could be considered significant, as this could affect the general economic climate of other industries on a much greater scale.

4.12.2 No Action Alternative

4.12.2.1 Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

GRP is a working lands program that is currently in existence and has been fully analyzed as part of the 2009 GRP PEA (USDA 2009). It is anticipated that there would not be any significant socioeconomic changes to the economy or community from enrolling grasslands that were formerly eligible for GRP into CRP. The 2009 PEA found that GRP was a beneficial program in whole and could have the potential to delay the conversion of grassland areas to other higher input agricultural uses (e.g., croplands) or for non-agricultural development. Though grassland eligibility would reduce the availability of non-grasslands for enrollment, the loss associated with that potential acreage would be minor compared to the overall CRP acreage. Maintaining working grasslands over the contract period would continue to use agricultural sector merchants and labor, as currently being utilized by those producers.

4.12.2.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would generally have long-term benefits to socioeconomics of the local area. Transitioning expiring CRP land to one of these programs allows the continuation of government payments to the contract holder in a seamless transition from one program to the next. The inclusion during the final year of CRP contract reduces the risk to the contract holder. The risk would be associated with the uncertainty of returning the acreage to agricultural production, selling the acreage for development or continued agricultural production, or rebidding the acreage into a new CRP contract.

CRP enrollment and expiration data from 2006 to 2013 indicate that over 44 percent of expiring acres re-enrolled in CRP, or about two-thirds of total enrollment. Given the new reduced maximum enrollment authority (24 million by 2017), the likelihood of re-enrollment may be reduced. Enrolling in one of these programs would provide an alternative for those acres not eligible for re-enrollment in CRP, as well as free up capacity under CRP acreage cap. Therefore, this non-discretionary change would not have a socioeconomic effect.

4.12.2.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing - Payment Reduction

From a socioeconomic perspective, the impacts from emergency haying and grazing would be similar to those from other types of haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing would be undertaken only on an as-needed basis during periods of severe climatic conditions, which could produce economic hardships to farm households on a regional basis and trickle into the broader regional and larger economy. Allowing emergency haying and grazing assists producers in staging herd culls, rather than being forced to large-scale culls. Such large-scale or unplanned culls could negatively affect the price of livestock, and reduce the short-term ability to rebuild herds once climatic conditions improve. As such, removing the payment reduction would result in regional and local benefits to producers and suppliers to maintain herds during long, severe drought conditions. As addressed in previous NEPA documents, the decision to implement emergency haying and grazing hinges on the value of the activity and whether or not it would exceed the rental payment reduction. Removing this payment reduction may potentially increase emergency haying and grazing activities and create a slightly more beneficial socioeconomic effect (USDA 2010, 2012).

4.12.3 Proposed Action

4.12.3.1 Targeted Enrollment

Using Targeted Enrollment would not result in effects to the economy or communities. Funding of CRP would continue to be provided by the CCC, and would not be affected by how lands are identified or enrolled in the program. Because CRP is a voluntary program, locations of lands that would be enrolled are unknown. Temporary impacts to local economies that result from retirement of active agricultural land (lower demand for agricultural labor, inputs, and services) would be the same under this enrollment method as other existing methods. Targeted Enrollment would be used to enroll a subset of CRP acreage and could vary as to timing, location, CPs, and environmental benefit metrics. Therefore, it is unlikely a Targeted Enrollment would have a widespread effect on CRP enrollment or farming practices and income. Because Targeted Enrollment would focus on lands with the greatest environmental benefit, general societal benefits from conservation could be realized at a lower cost than could be realized using other enrollment methodologies.

4.12.3.2 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Managed harvesting and routine grazing provides minor, beneficial socioeconomic effects to the local and regional communities where these activities occur. Managed harvesting and routine grazing typically produce minor benefits due to their small size on CRP acreage, as compared to overall acreage being used for harvesting and grazing within the region. Adjusting the allowable frequency of managed harvesting or routine grazing would not fundamentally alter the socioeconomic analysis associated with implementation of managed harvesting and routine grazing that has been provided in previous NEPA documentation (USDA 2010, USDA 2003, and state specific EAs). As such, implementing the Proposed Action would not result in changes to farming income or participation, and would not have socioeconomic effects on the economy or community.

4.12.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing – Additional CPs

Under the Proposed Action, the CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing would be expanded during times of severe drought (D2 or greater) on a case by case basis with the approval from the STC

and certain Federal and state agencies. From a socioeconomic perspective, the impacts from emergency haying and grazing would be similar to those from other types of haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing would be undertaken only on an as-needed basis during periods of severe climatic conditions, which could produce economic hardships to farm households on a regional basis and trickle into the broader regional and larger economy. The overall amount of acreage would be relatively minor when compared to regional available acreage for these activities, and would assist producers in staging herd culls, rather than being forced to large-scale culls. Such large-scale or unplanned culls could negatively affect the price of livestock, and reduce the short-term ability to rebuild herds once climatic conditions improve. As such, implementing the Proposed Action would result in regional and local benefits to producers and suppliers to maintain herds during long, severe drought conditions. Therefore, there would be positive changes to farming income during drought, resulting in a socioeconomic benefit.

5.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

5.1 DEFINITION

CEQ regulations stipulate that cumulative impacts analysis consider the potential environmental impacts resulting from the incremental impacts of a Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts most likely arise when a relationship exists between a Proposed Action and other actions expected to occur in a similar location or during a similar time period. Actions overlapping with or in proximity to the Proposed Action would be expected to have more potential for a relationship than those more geographically separated. Similarly, actions that coincide in time, even partially, tend to have the potential for cumulative impacts.

CRP is designed to support implementation of long-term conservation measures to improve the quality of groundwater and surface water, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. The geographic scale of the voluntary program is national and includes U.S. territories. While the scope of the program is potentially nationwide, the land that is eligible for enrollment in CRP is cropland that has been planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity for 4 of the previous 6 crop years or privately owned grasslands as defined in the 2014 Farm Bill. As such, the scope of the cumulative impacts analysis, like the analysis of direct and indirect effects, includes such lands nationwide.

5.2 PAST, PRESENT, AND REASONABLY FORESEEABLE ACTIONS

The affected environment for this cumulative impact analysis includes the lands within the U.S. and its territories eligible for enrollment and currently enrolled in CRP, and those lands potentially affected by changes to CRP in the 2014 Farm Bill (see the beginning of **Section 3.0** for additional detail on the affected environment for this SPEIS). For the purposes of this analysis, other Federal voluntary conservation programs that could affect agricultural lands are the primary sources of information used in identifying past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions. In addition to CRP, there are numerous other conservation programs administered by USDA in which privately owned agricultural lands may be qualified. A brief overview of these USDA and other Federal conservation programs is provided in **Table 5.2-1**.

The primary goal of many of these programs is to protect specific, privately owned lands due to their unique or potential ecological, conservation, or recreational value. In addition to Federal programs, states, regions, or local governments may also have similar programs (given the exhaustive list of those programs, they will not be included in this SPEIS). Other Federal conservation programs in concert with CRP have positive impacts on natural and socioeconomic resources, but it follows that reductions in these programs would also have negative impacts. The majority of these programs are funded through Congressional authorization at specified funding levels per year, while others are discretionarily funded through annual appropriations. Mandatory spending may be lowered through appropriations or legislative acts (including limits on acreage accepted into programs). Conservation measures undertaken on working farmlands in order to qualify for certain other USDA benefits (such as crop insurance) include practices to conserve highly erodible soils and minimization of impacts to wetlands, which also benefit soil, water

quality, wetlands, and air quality. Many of these programs have similar or complementary benefits as CRP.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Agriculture Conservation Easement Program/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)	The 2014 Farm Bill establishes the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The program consolidates the goals of the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) but does not affect the validity or terms of any FRPP, GRP, or WRP contract, agreement, or easement entered into prior to the date of enactment on February 7, 2014 or any associated payments required to be made in connection with an existing FRPP, GRP, or WRP contract agreement or easement. The program provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits. Under the Agricultural Land Easements component, NRCS helps Indian tribes, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land. Under the Wetlands Reserve Easements component, NRCS helps to restore, protect and enhance enrolled wetlands.
Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program/NRCS	Provides cost share to agricultural producers who voluntarily incorporate conservation practices (CPs) onto their land. This program is available in Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, non-industrial forestland, and other private land that produces crops or supports livestock. Contracts range from 3 to 10 years. Landowners must agree to maintain cost-share practices for the life of the contract; eligible structural and/or vegetative CPs are determined by the NRCS State Conservationist and State Technical Committee (STC). Federal cost-share rate is 75 percent of the cost of the eligible practice, not to exceed $50,000 per participant per fiscal year (FY).
Biomass Crop Assistance Program (BCAP)/Farm Service Agency (FSA)	BCAP assists agricultural and forest land owners and operators with matching payments for the cost of collection, harvest, storage, and transportation of eligible material for use by a qualified biomass conversion facility. The program also supports the establishment and production of eligible crops to be converted to bioenergy.
Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program/National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	The purpose of this program is to protect coastal and estuarine lands that are deemed important for their ecological, conservation, recreational, historical, or aesthetic values. The program provides Federal matching funds to states for the purchase of significant coastal or estuarine lands, or conservation easements on such lands from willing private land owners within a state's coastal zone or coastal watershed boundary.
Conservation Operations – Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)/NRCS	Under the Conservation Operations – CTA program, assistance is provided to producers and land owners who voluntarily apply natural resource conservation systems, consisting of one or more practices, on private and other non-Federal lands. Eighty percent of the spending in the Conservation Operations program funds technical support to provide conservation planning and implementation assistance by field staff.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)/NRCS	This voluntary program provides financial and technical assistance to promote the conservation and improvement of soil, water, air, energy, plant and animal life, and other conservation purposes on cropland, grazing land, and (within limits) forest land located on farms. To participate in the program, farmers and ranchers must, at minimum: (1) have already addressed at least one resource concern throughout their farm and (2) agree to address at least one additional priority resource concern (priorities set by USDA) during the 5-year contract term. The 2014 Farm Bill increased the program's focus on generating additional conservation benefits, removed the limitation on the number of non-industrial private forestland acres that can be enrolled in the CSP, and increased flexibility to enroll expiring CRP land. A person or legal entity may not receive more than $200,000 during FYs 2014 through 2018.
Cooperative, Conservation, Partnership Initiative, (CCPI)/NRCS	A voluntary conservation initiative that combines CPs with specific partner programs to provide assistance to private land owners. Eligible programs include: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forests, and are eligible for EQIP, WHIP, or CSP may apply for financial assistance. The land must be within an approved CCPI project area. The 2014 Farm Bill repealed this program.
Emergency Conservation Program/FSA	Provides emergency funding and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters and for carrying out emergency water conservation measures in periods of severe drought.
Emergency Watershed Protection Program/NRCS	The objective of this program is to assist sponsors and individuals in implementing emergency measures to mitigate potential hazards caused by natural disasters. Activities include providing both financial and technical assistance for runoff retardation and erosion prevention. This program is divided into two categories: the Traditional Program and the Floodplain Easement Program. The Traditional Program provides funding for activities such as cleaning debris from clogged waterways, restoring vegetation, and stabilizing river banks. The Floodplain Easement Program provides for the purchase of easements as an emergency measure for the restoration, protection, and enhancement of the functions of floodplains. The easement gives NRCS the authority to restore and enhance floodplain functions and values; NRCS may pay up to 100 percent of restoration costs. Landowners retain several property rights and may include managed timber harvest and periodic haying or grazing, as determined by NRCS.
EQIP/NRCS	Provides producers with financial and technical assistance for implementing and managing a wide range of CPs consistent with crop and livestock production. Sixty percent of overall program funding is targeted to natural resource concerns related to poultry and livestock production. The remainder is directed toward practices that address conservation priorities on working cropland.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Farmable Wetland Program (FWP)/FSA	FWP is a voluntary program designed to restore previously farmed wetlands and wetland buffers to improve both vegetation and water flow. Participants must agree to restore the wetland, establish plant cover, and not use enrolled land for commercial purposes. Plant cover may include plants that are partially submerged or specific types of trees. Contracts are for 10 to 15 years. The 2014 Farm Bill reduces the FWP acreage to 750,000 acres nationally.
Forest Legacy Program/U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and State Governments	This program, in partnership with states, is designed to encourage the protection of privately owned forests. The program encourages and supports acquisition of conservation easements that restricts development, requires sustainable forestry practices, and protects other values. Landowners prepare a multiple resource management plan; the Federal government may fund up to 75 percent of project costs, with the remaining 25 percent coming from state, local or private sources. Goals of the Forest Legacy Program include protection of wildlife, habitat, biodiversity, threatened and endangered species, water quality, wetlands, riparian buffers, and recreational areas.
GRP/NRCS, FSA, and USFS	A voluntary program designed to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on private property. The program objective is to conserve vulnerable grasslands from conversion to cropland or other uses and maintain viable ranching operations. This program emphasizes support for working grazing operations; enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity; and protection of grassland and land containing shrubs and forbs under threat of conversion to cropping, urban development, and other activities that threaten grassland resources. The 2014 Farm Bill repealed GRP as a stand-alone program.
Healthy Forests Reserve Program/NRCS	A voluntary program for the purpose of restoring and enhancing forest ecosystems to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species, improve biodiversity, and enhance carbon sequestration. In order to be eligible, the land restored would enhance or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery of a threatened or endangered species, improve biological diversity, or increase carbon sequestration. Landowners who enroll in the program and restore or improve their land for threatened or endangered species habitat avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land protected under the Endangered Species Act. The owner may elect one of the following: • 10-year cost-share agreement and receive 50 percent CP cost; • 30-year easement and receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land and 75 percent of the average cost for CP installment; or • 99-year easement and receive 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land and 100 percent of the CP installation cost.
Highlands Conservation Act/U.S. Department of the Interior (USDOI) and USFS	The purpose of this Act is to recognize the significance of water, forest, agricultural, wildlife, recreational, and cultural resources of the Highlands region. The Act assists the states of Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania with the protection of land and natural resources of high conservation value within the Highlands region. The state acquires land or an interest in land from willing sellers for permanent protection. Potential lands are identified by USFS; USDOI provides matching funds, not to exceed 50 percent of the total cost for acquisition.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)/USFWS	Provides Federal grant funds to protect and restore habitats on private lands in order to benefit Federally listed, proposed, or candidate species and other species the states determine to be at risk. Grant funds may be used to provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners for habitat protection and restoration.
Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative/NRCS	NRCS and its partners assisted producers in selected watersheds within the Mississippi River Basin to voluntarily apply CPs to avoid, control, and trap nutrients in runoff; improve habitat for wildlife; and maintain agricultural productivity. The 12 participating states are Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. This initiative was offered in FYs 2010 through 2013. Watersheds were selected based on the largest impact on reducing downstream nutrient loads. Payments were based on the estimated cost of implementing or performing CPs and the estimated cost of income forgone by the producer (income lost from a change in land use or land taken out of production and accepting less farm income in exchange for improved resource conditions).
Renewable Energy Production Tax Credit (PTC)/USDOE and Internal Revenue Service (IRS)	PTC is applied to taxpayers that sell electricity to an unrelated person that is produced from qualified energy resources at a qualified facility during a 10-year period beginning on the date the facility was placed in operation, provided it occurred before the tax credit's expiration date. This PTC is available to businesses that pay Federal corporate taxes. Qualified resources include wind, closed-loop biomass, open-loop biomass, geothermal energy, solar energy, small irrigation power, municipal solid waste, and qualified hydropower production.
Renewable Energy Production Incentive/USDOE and IRS	This program was designed to complement the Renewable Energy PTC and is available to non-profit electrical cooperatives, public utilities, state governments, commonwealths, territories, and possessions of the U.S., as well as Indian Tribal governments and Native Corporations. It provides incentive payments for energy produced and sold by new, qualified renewable-energy facilities for the first 10 years of their operation, provided it occurs before the end of FY 2015. Qualified systems include solar, wind, geothermal (with restrictions), biomass (excluding municipal solid waste), landfill gas, methane from livestock, and ocean resources (e.g., tidal, wave, current, and thermal).
Source Water Protection Program/FSA and National Rural Water Association (NRWA)	A joint project between FSA and NRWA to help prevent source water pollution in 43 states through voluntary practices installed at the local level by producers. Rural Source Water technicians work with FSA and NRCS to create operating plans that identify priority areas. Technicians facilitate the creation of local teams to collaborate on the development of local plans to promote clean groundwater. The plans outline the voluntary measures that local producers can install on their lands to prevent source water pollution.
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program	This program provides grants to states and Tribal governments to be used to encourage producers to voluntarily make privately held farm, ranch, and forest lands available for public access for wildlife-dependent recreation. Programs are administered by state and Tribal governments. Programs would strengthen habitat improvement programs on land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) by providing incentives to increase hunting and other recreational access. This grant money can be used in conjunction with other Federal, state, or Tribal resources to achieve program goals.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Watershed Program/NRCS	The Watershed Program is implemented through Watershed Surveys and Planning, Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations, and Watershed Rehabilitation. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to plan and install projects on private lands for the purpose of watershed protection; flood mitigation; water quality improvements; soil erosion reduction; rural, municipal and industrial water supply; irrigation; water management; sediment control; fish and wildlife enhancement; wetlands and wetland function creation and restoration; groundwater recharge; easements; wetland and floodplain conservation easements; hydropower; and watershed dam rehabilitation. Under the Watershed Program, NRCS cooperates with state and local agencies to carry out works of improvement for soil conservation and for other purposes including flood prevention; conservation, development, utilization and disposal of water; and conservation and proper utilization of land.
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program/NRCS	A voluntary program that provides matching funds to state, Tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations to purchase conservation easements from farmers and ranchers to keep their lands in agriculture. State, Tribal, or local governments and non-governmental organizations purchase conservation easements from landowners, who in turn (1) agree not to convert their land to non-agricultural uses and (2) develop and implement a Conservation Plan for any highly erodible land. Landowners are paid fair market value based on standard real property appraisal methods. The 2014 Farm Bill repeals this program.
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)/NRCS	A voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property and provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts. The goal is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This program offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation and wildlife practices and protection. The 2014 Farm Bill repeals this program.
WHIP/NRCS	Provides both technical assistance and up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat on agricultural land. The 2014 Farm Bill repeals this program.
Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW)/USFWS	A voluntary partnership program administered by USFWS that provides financial and technical assistance to private landowners and Tribes that wish to protect or restore wetlands, uplands, and riparian and instream habitats located on privately owned land. The main goals of the program are conservation and management of the Federal Trust Species; inter-jurisdictional fish; certain marine mammals; and species of international concern. The PFW Program can assist with projects in all habitat types which conserve or restore native vegetation, hydrology, and soils associated with imperiled ecosystems. The program provides locally-based biologists to work with private landowners and other partners to develop, implement, and monitor projects.

Table 5.2-1. Other Related USDA and Federal Conservation Programs	
Coastal Program/USFWS	A voluntary, citizen and community based fish and wildlife habitat conservation and restoration program administered by USFWS. This program is similar to the PFW Program in that it provides some financial and technical assistance to private landowners and Tribes for conservation and habitat improvement efforts. The Coastal Program differs by providing locally based staff in 24 primary coastal areas, including the Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, Great Lakes, and the Pacific. The Coastal Program specializes in conservation and habitat restoration within these coastal areas. The Coastal Program's goal is to develop long-term, diverse, and effective partnerships that deliver landscape-scale conservation.

Note:
AMA = Agricultural Management Assistance; BCAP = Biomass Crop Assistance Program; CCPI = Cooperative, Conservation Partnership Initiative; CP = conservation practice; CREP = Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program; CSP = Conservation Stewardship Program; CTA = Conservation Technical Assistance; EQIP = Environmental Quality Incentives Program; FRPP = Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program; FSA = Farm Service Agency; FWP = Farmable Wetland Program; FY = fiscal year; GRP = Grassland Reserve Program; IRS = Internal Revenue Service; LIP = Landowner Incentive Program; NRCS = Natural Resources Conservation Service; NRWA = National Rural Water Association; PFW = Partners for Fish and Wildlife; PTC = Production Tax Credit; STC = State Technical Committee; USDA = U.S. Department of Agriculture; USDOI = U.S. Department of the Interior; USFS = U.S. Forest Service; USFWS = U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; WHIP = Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program; WRP = Wetlands Reserve Program

5.3 Cumulative Impacts Analysis

Several of the proposed changes to the 2014 Farm Bill were not analyzed in this SPEIS because those aspects of the program have been covered in other recent NEPA analyses. Both the discretionary and non-discretionary changes to CRP are considered in this cumulative impacts analysis. The following sections provide a summary of the cumulative impacts anticipated to result from all changes to CRP resulting from the 2014 Farm Bill and additional discretionary measures.

5.3.1 Grassland Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Allowing grasslands formerly eligible for enrollment in GRP to be enrolled into CRP would result in retaining or restoring up to 2 million acres of grasslands in areas where such communities were historically dominant. Because GRP would be repealed, the incorporation of these program elements into CRP represents no net change to program effects. No direct or indirect significant negative impacts and no contribution to negative cumulative impacts are anticipated. Positive impacts would be realized through the creation and restoration of grassland habitat, preservation of soils, and improvements to water quality. Enrolling grasslands in CRP along with other conservation programs such as the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA), EQIP, and Conservation Stewardship Program, would continue to provide positive long-term environmental impacts for grasslands. While GRP was repealed as a stand along program in the 2014 Farm Bill, the goals of that program have been consolidated under the new comprehensive Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Producers interested in establishing long-term contracts for grasslands would be able to enroll in CRP, while producers interested in establishing an easement could now enroll in the new program.

5.3.1.1 Biological Resources

Making grasslands that were formerly eligible for GRP, eligible for enrollment in CRP would be expected to contribute positively to long-term cumulative benefits to grassland vegetation and ecosystems as well as the wildlife and protected species that inhabit grasslands and adjacent aquatic habitats where water quality improvements could occur. Such benefits would be particularly realized in the Great Plains Ecoregion. In the short-term, maintenance activities could contribute to the spread of noxious weeds but this would be controlled by adherence to Grazing Management Plans.

5.3.1.2 Soils

Restoring or maintaining native grasslands would be expected to contribute to cumulative benefits to soils in the long-term. CRP and other programs that limit development and agricultural uses of the land, would preserve soils, increase soil stability and reduce wind and water erosion. In the short-term, installation of CPs and maintenance activities could cause soil compaction and loss through exposure of soils to erosion.

5.3.1.3 Water Resources

Restoring or maintaining grasslands would contribute to long-term cumulative benefits to surface water, groundwater, floodplains and wetlands for the duration of CRP contracts. Maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land through CRP and other conservation programs would: stabilize soils; reduce transport of sediments, bacteria, nutrients, pesticides and metals into adjacent surface waters, wetlands and floodplains; and allow for greater permeability increasing the quantity and quality of groundwater. In the short-term surface waters, wetlands, and floodplains could be negatively affected by runoff of soils during installation of CPs and maintenance activities.

5.3.1.4 Air Quality

Given that more than two-thirds of CRP is grassland vegetation, allowing up to 2 million acres of grassland that would have formerly been eligible for GRP to enroll in CRP is not expected to contribute cumulatively in any change to carbon sequestration rates or rates of reduction in GHGs.

5.3.1.5 Social Resources

The enrollment of newly eligible grasslands into CRP is not expected to contribute to any change in recreation land uses or expenditure, as owners of all CRP lands retain the right to control access, including to recreation, on their lands and off-site benefits would not be expected to change. Given that GRP was in existence since 2003, making grasslands that were formerly eligible for enrollment in GRP available to CRP would not contribute to any change to the economy or community.

5.3.2 Final Year of Contract

Allowing lands to enroll into either the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program during the final year of CRP contract is not anticipated to contribute to any negative cumulative impacts. Allowing producers to make necessary land improvements during the final year of CRP contracts would promote enrollment into these programs and increase the quality of the existing conservation cover. This would be expected to contribute to long-term positive cumulative impacts to all resources. Streamlining the enrollment process to these long-term easement programs may encourage producers to keep their land in conservation instead of returning to agricultural production or

development. Land expiring from CRP could remain in conservation through these other programs allowing for new land to be enrolled in CRP ultimately reducing agricultural inputs.

5.3.2.1 Biological Resources

Allowing preparation for and enrollment in conservation programs during the final year of CRP contract would be expected to result in land remaining in conservation rather than returning to agricultural production or being developed. This would contribute to long-term cumulative benefits to vegetation, wildlife, and protected species. As with grasslands above, short-term impacts to vegetation and disturbance to wildlife could occur during activities designed to improve conservation cover.

5.3.2.2 Soils

Streamlining conversion of CRP to other conservation programs would be expected to result in maintaining conservation covers in the long-term, contributing to positive cumulative impacts including the stability of soils, improvement in soil quality, and reduced soil loss to wind and water erosion. In the short-term, disturbance of soils resulting from land preparation could contribute to soil loss.

5.3.2.3 Water Resources

Measures that encourage land to remain in conservation would be expected to contribute positively to cumulative impacts to water resources including surface water, groundwater, wetlands and floodplains in the long-term. Maintaining vegetative cover and limiting development of the land through easement programs would reduce the transport of pollutants into adjacent surface waters, wetlands, and floodplains, and allow for greater permeability increasing the quantity and quality of groundwater. In the short-term, land preparation activities could contribute to negative impacts to surface water quality and floodplains as a result of erosion of soils.

5.3.2.4 Air Quality

Allowing for the enrollment of expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program would contribute to positive cumulative impacts to air quality through continued carbon sequestration and reduced GHG emissions.

5.3.2.5 Social Resources

Providing a means for former agricultural lands to remain in conservation would not appreciably contribute to cumulative impacts to recreation. Cumulative benefits to vegetation and wildlife would result in improved wildlife and water related recreational opportunities. Since a large percentage of expiring CRP land is reenrolled in CRP or another conservation program, allowing land preparation and enrollment in these easement programs is not expected to contribute to any change in the economy or community.

5.3.3 Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction

No significant cumulative impacts would be expected from removing the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing. Emergency haying and grazing is only authorized under severe drought conditions. Several restrictions and stipulations for emergency haying and grazing are in place to provide protection and long-term viability of the cover to include requiring the producer to replace CRP cover that

is lost due to emergency haying and grazing activities. This provision combined with other emergency programs provides assistance to producers during times of severe need, lessoning economic hardships.

5.3.3.1 Biological Resources

Removing the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing activities would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to biological resources because these activities are minor compared with overall CRP enrollment and the development of Conservation Plans, Grazing Management Plans, and site specific EEs prior to enrollment would prescribe sustainable grazing rates and prevent impacts to protected species. While the cumulative impact on the national scale is considered negligible, it is imperative that the STC consider specific local conditions of the counties being considered for emergency haying or grazing. The potential for cumulative impacts would be greater in those locations with extensive and recurring emergency use of CRP.

5.3.3.2 Soils

As with biological resources, removing the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to soils. Participation in these practices is minor compared with CRP enrollment and Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to soils. As described above, the potential for cumulative impacts would be greater in those locations with extensive and recurring emergency use of CRP.

5.3.3.3 Water Resources

As with biological resources and soils, removing the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to water resources. Participation in these practices is minor compared with CRP enrollment. Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to surface water, groundwater, wetlands and floodplains. Additionally the exclusion of haying and grazing within 120 feet of a body of water would reduce impacts. As described above, the potential for cumulative impacts would be greater in those locations with extensive and recurring emergency use of CRP.

5.3.3.4 Air Quality

Though more extensive haying and grazing would result in increased GHG emissions from harvesting equipment operations and ruminators, these activities are not expected to contribute to GHG emissions or reduce carbon sequestration because participation in these activities is low and is geographically dispersed.

5.3.3.5 Social Resources

More extensive emergency haying and grazing would not contribute substantially to impacts to recreation or socioeconomics. Though individual producers may economically benefit from these activities, participation is low and geographically widespread.

5.3.4 Targeted Enrollment

Targeted Enrollment would allow FSA to meet environmental goals by focusing on specified practices, groups of practices or specific types of land. This method would supplement General and Continuous

Sign-up enrollment methods and would allow FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap of 24 million acres nationally while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit. The Targeted Enrollment of particularly environmentally sensitive agricultural lands to meet conservation goals would be expected to contribute positively to beneficial impacts when considered with other conservation programs, particularly those initiatives that target specific land. Combining Targeted Enrollment with other specific initiatives or programs could be used to generate even greater beneficial impacts than one program alone.

5.3.4.1 Biological Resources

Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, contributing to long-term positive cumulative effects to biological resources. If lands or practices were targeted to provide greatest benefit to vegetation or wildlife habitats, a greater contribution to positive impacts to these resources could result.

5.3.4.2 Soils

Targeted Enrollment would increase the quality of lands enrolled in CRP, contributing to long-term positive cumulative effects to soils. If CPs or goals were targeted to provide greatest benefit to soils, a greater contribution to positive impacts could result.

5.3.4.3 Water Resources

Enrolling land in CRP using any enrollment method would contribute to positive cumulative impacts to surface waters quality and quantity, and the function of floodplains and wetlands adjacent to and downstream from enrolled lands as well as groundwater quality and quantity. Targeting enrollment of lands to achieve greater benefit to water resources would result in even greater contribution to positive cumulative effects.

5.3.4.4 Air Quality

As with biological and water resources, enrolling lands in CRP using Targeted Enrollment or any enrollment methodology would contribute positively to cumulative impacts to air quality by increasing carbon sequestration in conservation covers and reducing the use of machinery that could produce GHGs. Targeting enrollment of lands with greater carbon sequestration potential could result in an even greater contribution to positive effects.

5.3.4.5 Social Resources

Because it would focus on lands with the greatest environmental benefit, Targeted Enrollment would contribute to positive cumulative effects to recreation by preserving, improving, and restoring wildlife habitat and water quality. Targeted Enrollment is not expected to contribute to cumulative effects to socioeconomic measures since it would not affect funding or practices on CRP lands.

5.3.5 Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

The proposed changes to allowable frequencies of managed harvesting and routine grazing would not result in widespread effects. More frequent managed harvesting would occur in only four states, only one of which currently has contracts where managed harvesting is allowed. More frequent routine grazing could be allowed in all states, only 16 of which currently have contracts where routine grazing is allowed.

Actual frequencies of managed harvesting and routine grazing would still be determined by the STC based on local conditions and would be conducted in compliance with Conservation Plans and BMPs. This proposed change is not expected to contribute to any cumulative impacts. Managed harvesting, haying, or grazing activities allowed on other conservation lands typically also requires a Conservation Plan or similar that considers the appropriate methods and timing for the local conditions where the activity would occur.

5.3.5.1 Biological Resources

Proposed changes to managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to biological resources because the participation in these practices is minor compared with overall CRP enrollment and the development of Conservation Plans, Grazing Management Plans, and site specific EEs prior to enrollment would prescribe sustainable grazing rates and prevent impacts to protected species.

5.3.5.2 Soils

As with biological resources, the proposed changes to managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to soils. Participation in these practices is minor compared with CRP enrollment and Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to soils.

5.3.5.3 Water Resources

As with biological resources and soils, the proposed changes to managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to water resources. Participation in these practices is minor compared with CRP enrollment. Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to surface water, groundwater, wetlands and floodplains. Additionally the exclusion of harvesting and grazing within 120 feet of a body of water would reduce impacts.

5.3.5.4 Air Quality

Though more frequent harvesting and grazing would result in increased GHG emissions from harvesting equipment operations and ruminators, these activities are not expected to contribute to GHG emissions or reduce carbon sequestration because participation in these activities is low and is geographically dispersed.

5.3.5.5 Social Resources

More frequent harvesting and grazing would not contribute to impacts to recreation or socioeconomics. Though individual producers may economically benefit from these activities, participation is low and geographically widespread.

5.3.6 Emergency Haying and Grazing Additional CPs

No significant cumulative impacts would be expected from expansion of emergency haying and grazing in CPs that have not previously allowed the activity. Allowing emergency haying and grazing on these CPs would only be authorized under severe drought conditions on a case by case basis with full concurrence from the Secretary, National FSA office, the STC, and appropriate Federal and state

agencies. Several restrictions and stipulations for haying and grazing on these sensitive lands are in place to provide protection and long-term viability of the cover, to include requiring producers to re-establish any CRP cover lost due to emergency haying or grazing activities. This provision combined with other emergency programs provides assistance to producers during times of severe need, lessoning economic hardships. With the removal of the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing (see **Section 5.3.3**) as well as expanding the CPs that could be authorized for emergency haying and grazing, it is anticipated that emergency use of CRP would cumulatively increase. While the cumulative impact at the national level is expected to be negligible, the increased use of emergency haying and grazing would need to be monitored at the local level, especially in those areas with extensive and recurring emergency haying and grazing, to ensure long-term viability of the particular CP being authorized is not affected.

5.3.6.1 Biological Resources

Similar to emergency haying and grazing without a payment reduction, allowing additional CPs to be grazed and hayed under emergency conditions would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to biological resources on a national scale because of the infrequent use and wide geographic distribution of such activities. It is imperative that the STC consider specific local conditions of the particular CP being considered for emergency haying or grazing. The potential for cumulative impacts would be greater in those locations with extensive and recurring emergency use of CRP.

5.3.6.2 Soils

Allowing additional CPs to be grazed and hayed under emergency conditions would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to soils because of the infrequent use and wide geographic distribution of such activities. Additionally, modified Conservation Plans would serve to minimize impacts to soils. STCs would ensure that local conditions of the particular CP being considered for emergency haying or grazing are considered. The potential for cumulative impacts would be greater in those locations with extensive and recurring emergency use of CRP.

5.3.6.3 Water Resources

As with biological resources and soils, expanding emergency haying and grazing to additional CPS would not be expected to contribute to cumulative impacts to water resources. The need for emergency haying and grazing has been historically low compared with CRP enrollment. Conservation Plans, including Grazing Management Plans would prescribe sustainable grazing rates to prevent impacts to surface water, groundwater, wetlands and floodplains. Additionally the exclusion of harvesting and grazing within 120 feet of a body of water would reduce impacts. STCs would ensure that local conditions of the particular CP being considered for emergency haying or grazing are considered. The potential for cumulative impacts would be greater in those locations with extensive and recurring emergency use of CRP.

5.3.6.4 Air Quality

Though expanding emergency haying and grazing could result in localized increases in GHG emissions from harvesting equipment operations and ruminators, these activities are not expected to contribute cumulatively to GHG emissions or reduce carbon sequestration because participation in these activities is low, drought is relatively infrequent and the lands that would be affected are geographically dispersed.

5.3.6.5 Social Resources

Expanding emergency haying and grazing to additional CPs would not contribute to cumulative impacts to recreation or socioeconomics. Though individual producers may economically benefit from these activities, participation is low, infrequent, and geographically widespread.

5.4 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

NEPA requires that environmental analysis include identification of any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved should an action be implemented. Irreversible and irretrievable resource commitments are related to the use of nonrenewable resources and the effects that the use of these resources has on future generations. Irreversible effects primarily result from the use or destruction of a specific resource that cannot be replaced within a reasonable time frame. Irretrievable resource commitments involve the loss in value of an affected resource that cannot be restored as a result of the action. For the Proposed Action, each of the 2014 Farm Bill changes analyzed would result in no irreversible or irretrievable resource commitments.

6.0 MITIGATION MEASURES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of mitigation is to eliminate potential negative impacts of an action on affected resources or to reduce an impact to less than significant. CEQ regulations (40 CFR 1508.20) state that mitigation includes:

- Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action.
- Minimizing impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation.
- Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment.
- Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action.
- Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.

6.2 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Regulations established by CEQ state that all relevant reasonable mitigation measures that could alleviate the significant environmental effects of an action must be identified, even if they are outside the jurisdiction of the lead agency or the cooperating agencies. This serves to alert agencies or officials who can implement these extra measures, and will encourage them to do so. The lead agency for the alternatives analyzed is FSA.

6.3 MITIGATION RECOMMENDATIONS

There are no anticipated significant impacts associated with the Proposed Action addressed in this SPEIS therefore, no specific mitigation measures are required. The negative impacts are expected to be temporary and localized in nature, and they would occur primarily during preparation of the land for installation of conservation covers and maintenance activities as described in previous NEPA documentation concerning CRP. The temporary, localized impacts to biological, soils, and water resources during preparation of the land for installing a CP or maintenance activities may be minimized through the implementation of BMPs such as the installation of silt fencing, temporary covers, vegetative filter strips, or retention basins, as prescribed in site specific Conservation Plans.

Prior to execution of CRP contract, NRCS would complete a site specific EE that would reveal any protected resources on or adjacent to the proposed program lands. When sensitive resources, such as nesting birds or cultural resources are present or in the vicinity of the proposed lands for enrollment, consultation with the appropriate regulatory agency would occur as outlined in FSA Handbook *Environmental Quality Programs for State and County Offices, 1-EQ (Revision 1).* Specific mitigation measures necessary to reduce or eliminate the potential localized negative impacts to those sensitive resources would be identified prior to enrollment. If the EE concludes that species or critical habitat protected under the ESA or cultural resources are potentially present, and the proposed conservation activity on the land is determined to have negative impacts, it is not likely the land would be eligible for that activity.

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APPENDIX A
DESCRIPTION OF THE CPS AND CURRENT ENROLLMENT

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Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP1	Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes	To establish new or maintain existing vegetative cover of introduced grasses and legumes on eligible cropland that will enhance environmental benefits.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	3,363,246
CP2	Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses	To establish new or maintain existing vegetative cover of native grasses on eligible cropland that will enhance environmental benefits.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	6,748,655
CP3	Tree Planting	To establish new or maintain existing stand of trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	537,271
CP3A	Hardwood Tree Planting	To establish and maintain a new stand of or an existing stand of predominantly hardwood trees in a timber planting that will enhance environmental benefits. For CRP purposes, Longleaf Pine and Atlantic White Cedar shall be treated as hardwood trees, if planted at rates appropriate for the site index.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	627,627
CP4B	Permanent Wildlife Habitat (Corridors), Noneasement	To establish a permanent wildlife corridor between 2 existing wildlife habitat areas that are not connected by a suitable corridor for environmental benefits, and to enhance the wildlife in the designated or surrounding area.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	4,500
CP4D	Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Noneasement	To establish new or maintain existing permanent wildlife habitat cover to enhance environmental benefits for the wildlife habitat of the designated or surrounding areas.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	2,119,025
CP5A	Field Windbreak Establishment, Noneasement	To establish windbreaks to improve the environmental benefits on a farm or ranch to reduce cropland erosion below soil loss tolerance and enhance the wildlife habitat on the designated area.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	92,742
CP6	Diversions	Structures designed to divert water away from farmland and farm buildings, and from agricultural waste systems, in order to reduce runoff damage, control erosion, and protect terrace systems from degrading.	General	19
CP7	Erosion Control Structures	Structures such as dikes on river and stream banks to prevent loss or damage to land uses and protect adjacent facilities.	General	23
CP8A	Grass Waterways, Noneasement	To convey runoff from terraces, diversions, or other water concentrations without causing erosion or flooding and to improve water quality.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	127,721

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP9	Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife	To develop or restore shallow water areas to an average depth of 6 to 18 inches for wildlife. The shallow water area must provide a source of water for wildlife for the majority of the year, with the exception that for areas west of the 100th meridian that receive less than 25 inches of annual precipitation, the shallow water area must provide a source of water for wildlife for a minimum of 4 months of the year. This is not a pond development or wetland restoration practice; however, this practice may be constructed on suitable hydric and nonhydric soils.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	30,605
CP10	Vegetative Cover – Grass – Already Established	Beginning March 14, 2011, CP10 is no longer available for new offers. For offers submitted before March 14, 2011, this practice code is to used to identify land under CRP-1, if a grass cover approved for the applicable signup is already established or not under CRP-1, with a grass cover approved for the applicable signup already established.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	4,285,106
CP11	Vegetative Cover – Trees – Already Established	Beginning March 14, 2011, CP11 is no longer available. For offers submitted before March 14, 2011, this practice code is used to identify land established to trees that is under CRP-1 at the time the acreage is offered and the producer elects to reoffer the acreage to be devoted to trees. Thinning and/or creating open areas in eligible existing tree stands are not a separate practice. The open areas shall be considered CP11.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	390,285
CP12	Wildlife Food Plot	To establish annual or perennial wildlife food plots that will enhance wildlife and wildlife habitat.	General, Continuous CREP	56,523
CP15A	Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips), Noneasement	To establish strips of permanent vegetative cover generally following the contour on eligible cropland alternated with wider cultivated strips farmed on the contour that will reduce erosion and control runoff. This practice is not to develop or establish wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	62937
CP15B	Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips) on Terraces	To establish vegetative cover on terraces to enhance water quality and reduce soil erosion. This practice is only applicable on terraces that are no longer under practice lifespan to ensure that the long-term functions of the terrace are maintained. This practice is not to develop or establish wildlife habitat. Wildlife concerns may be considered when making determinations about seed varieties.	b	b
CP16A	Shelterbelt Establishment, Noneasement	To establish shelterbelts on a farm or ranch to enhance the wildlife habitat on the designated area, save energy, or protect farmsteads or livestock areas.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	35,105
CP17A	Living Snow Fences, Noneasement	To establish living snow fences on a farm or ranch to manage snow, provide living screen, or enhance the wildlife habitat on the designated area.	Continuous Non-CREP	6,576

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP18B	Establishment of Permanent Vegetation to Reduce Salinity, Noneasement	To either establish permanent salt tolerant vegetative cover within saline seep areas or establish permanent vegetative cover in areas causing seeps, including trees or shrubs, on eligible cropland that will improve the environmental benefits of a farm or ranch. The cover must address the resource problem with the minimum acreage needed to control the saline seep.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	218,381
CP18C	Establishment of Permanent Salt Tolerant Vegetative Cover, Noneasement	To establish permanent salt tolerant vegetative cover on eligible cropland with existing high water tables that will improve the environmental benefits of a farm or ranch. The cover must address the resource problem with the minimum acreage needed to control the saline seep.	[c]	[c]
CP21	Filter Strips	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	865,343
CP22	Riparian Buffer	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body; to create shade to lower water temperature to improve habitat for aquatic organisms; and to provide a source of detritus and large woody debris for aquatic organisms and habitat for wildlife.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	833,707
CP23	Wetland Restoration	To restore the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to agricultural use. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with NRCS or TSP.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	889,794
CP23A	Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain	To restore the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to agricultural use. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with NRCS or TSP.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	306,485
CP24	Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover as Cross Wind Trap Strips	To establish 1 or more strips, varying in size, of permanent vegetative cover resistant to wind erosion perpendicular to the prevailing wind direction on eligible cropland with a wind erosion EI greater than or equal to 4 that will reduce on-farm wind erosion, trap wind-borne sediments and sediment borne contaminants, and help protect public health and safety.	Continuous Non-CREP	112

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP25	Rare and Declining Habitat	To restore the functions and values of critically endangered, endangered, and threatened habitats. The extent of the restoration is determined by the specifications developed at the state level.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	1,704,537
CP 26	Sediment Retention Control Structure	Structures such as earth embankments or a combination ridge and channel designed to form a sediment trap and temporary water retention basin.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	67
CP27	Farmable Wetlands Pilot Wetland	To restore the functions and values of wetlands that have been devoted to agricultural use. Hydrology and vegetation must be restored to the maximum extent possible, as determined by USDA.	Farmable Wetland	86,181
CP28	Farmable Wetlands Pilot Buffer	To provide a vegetative buffer around wetlands (CP27) to remove sediment, nutrients, and pollutants from impacting the wetland and to provide wildlife habitat for the associated wetland.	Farmable Wetland	195,698
CP29	Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffer	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body. By restoring native plant communities, characteristics for the site will assist in stabilizing stream banks, reducing flood damage impacts, and restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	120,503
CP30	Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer	To remove nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants from surface runoff and subsurface flow by deposition, absorption, plant uptake, denitrification, and other processes, and thereby reduce pollution and protect surface water and subsurface water quality while enhancing the ecosystem of the water body. The practice will enhance and/or restore hydrology and plant communities associated with existing or degraded wetland complexes. The goal is to enhance water quality, reduce nutrient and pollutant levels, and improve wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	42,987
CP31	Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands	To establish and provide for the long-term viability of a bottomland hardwood stand of trees that will control sheet, rill, scour, and other erosion; reduce water, air, or land pollution; restore and enhance the natural and beneficial functions of wetlands; promote carbon sequestration; and restore and connect wildlife habitat.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	112,863
CP32	Expired CRP Hardwood Tree Planting on Marginal Pastureland	To identify land established to trees that was under CRP-1 that expired September 30, 2001, or before, at the time the acreage is offered and the producer elects to reoffer the acreage to be devoted to hardwood trees.	General	8,329

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP33	Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds	To provide food and cover for quail and upland birds in cropland areas. Secondary benefits may include reducing soil erosion from wind and water, increasing soil and water quality, and protecting and enhancing the on-farm ecosystem. Apply this practice around field edges of eligible cropland that is suitably located and adaptable to the establishment of wildlife habitat for primarily quail and upland bird species. Upland habitat buffers will be allowed to re-vegetate by natural herbaceous succession, and/or will be established to adapted species of native, warm-season grass, legumes, wildflowers, forbs, and limited shrub and tree plantings, as specified according to an approved conservation plan.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	248,642
CP34	Flood Control Structure	To create a man-made structural barrier capable of temporarily impounding or managing run-off water for potential flood damage reduction and water quality benefits.	Continuous CREP	69
CP36	Longleaf Pine – Establishment	To re-establish longleaf pine stands at densities that benefit wildlife species and protect water quality.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	119,909
CP37	Duck Nesting Habitat	To enhance duck nesting habitat on the most duck-productive areas of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota to restore the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to agricultural use. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with FSA and NRCS or TSP.	Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	269,350
CP38A	SAFE Buffers	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	555
CP38B	SAFE Wetlands	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	5,568
CP38C	SAFE Trees	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	17,993
CP38D	SAFE Longleaf Pine	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	292
CP38E	SAFE Grass	Apply practices to eligible lands where a specified habitat can be restored and maintained, as determined by the applicable state-developed practice standard.	Continuous Non-CREP	884,965
CP39	FWP Constructed Wetland	To develop a constructed wetland to treat effluent from row crop agricultural drainage systems. The constructed wetland system is designed to reduce nutrient and sediment loading and provide other water quality benefits while providing wildlife habitat.	Farmable Wetland	353

Appendix A CRP Practices and Enrollment				
Code	**Title**	**Description/Purpose**	**Sign-Up Type**	**Current Enrollment (acres)[a]**
CP40	FWP Aquaculture Wetland Restoration	To restore habitat or the functions and values of wetland ecosystems that have been devoted to commercial pond-raised aquaculture. The level of restoration of the wetland ecosystem shall be determined by the producer in consultation with NRCS or TSP.	Farmable Wetland	16,533
CP41	FWP Flooded Prairie Wetland	To restore the functions and values of wetlands that have been subject to natural overflow of a prairie wetland. Hydrology and vegetation must be restored to the maximum extent possible, as determined by USDA.	Farmable Wetland	40,430
CP42	Pollinator Habitat	To establish habitat to support a diversity of pollinator species.	General, Continuous CREP, Continuous Non-CREP	66,472

***Notes*:**

[a] Enrollment as of September 2014.

[b] September 2014 summary report does not distinguish between acreage for CP15A and CP15B.

[c] September 2014 summary report does not distinguish between acreage for CP18B and CP18C.

APPENDIX B
CRP PRACTICES, SIGN-UP TYPES AND INCENTIVES

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Par. 66

66 National Practices (Continued)

D CRP Practices, Signup Types, Contract Lengths, and Incentives

The following provides CRP practices, signup types, contract lengths, and incentives.

Practice Number And Name	Continuous	General	Contract Length	SIP	PIP	Rental Rate Incentive	Maximum Maintenance Incentive Rate
CP1, Establishment of Permanent Introduced Grasses and Legumes	Wellhead	X	10	N	N 1/	Y (10 percent) for wellhead only	
CP2, Establishment of Permanent Native Grass	Wellhead	X	10	N	N 1/	Y (10 percent) for wellhead only	
CP3, Tree Planting	Wellhead	X	10	N	N 1/	Y (10 percent) for wellhead only	
CP3A, Hardwood Tree Planting	Wellhead	X	10-15	N	N 1/	Y (10 percent) for wellhead only	
CP4B, Permanent Wildlife Habitat Corridors - Noneasement	Wellhead	X	10-15	N	N 1/	Y (10 percent) for wellhead only	
CP4D, Permanent Wildlife Habitat - Noneasement	Wellhead	X	10	N	N 1/	Y (10 percent) for wellhead only	
CP5A, Field Windbreak Establishment - Noneasement	X		10-15	Y *--($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	$2
CP8A, Grass Waterway - Noneasement	X		10	Y ($10)--*	Y	Y (20 percent)	

1/ PIP is authorized for practices enrolled under wellhead protection criteria.

Note: For CREP, the * * * incentive rates are established according to the terms of each CREP agreement.

Par. 66

66 National Practices (Continued)

D CRP Practices, Signup Types, Contract Lengths, and Incentives (Continued)

Practice Number And Name	Continuous	General	Contract Length	SIP	PIP	Rental Rate Incentive	Maximum Maintenance Incentive Rate
CP9, Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife	X		10	N	Y	N	
CP10, 3/ Vegetative Cover, Grass Already Established	Wellhead	X	10	N	N 1/	Y (10 percent) for wellhead only	
CP11, 3/ Vegetative Cover, Trees Already Established		X	10	N	N	N	
CP12, Wildlife Food Plot		X	10-15	N	N	N	
CP15A, Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover - Contour Grass Strip	X		10	N	Y	N	
CP15B, Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover - Contour Grass Strip on Terraces	X		10	N	N	N	
CP16A, Shelterbelt Establishment	X		10-15	Y *--($10)--*	Y	N	$2

1/ PIP is authorized for practices enrolled under wellhead protection criteria.

3/ Only eligible for enrollment before March 14, 2011.--*

Par. 66

66 National Practices (Continued)

D CRP Practices, Signup Types, Contract Lengths, and Incentives (Continued)

Practice Number And Name	Continuous	General	Contract Length	SIP	PIP	Rental Rate Incentive	Maximum Maintenance Incentive Rate
CP17A, Living Snow Fences - Noneasement	X		10-15	Y *--($10)--*	Y	N	$2
CP18B, Establishment of Permanent Vegetation to Reduce Salinity - Noneasement	X		10	N	Y	N	
CP18C, Establishment of Permanent Salt Tolerant Vegetative Cover - Noneasement	X		10	N	Y	N	
CP21, Filter Strip	X		10-15	Y *--($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	$0, $4, $5
CP22, Riparian Buffer	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	$2, $4, $5
CP23, 2/ Wetland Restoration	X		10-15	Y ($15)	Y	Y (20 percent)	
CP23A, 2/ Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain	X		10-15	Y ($15)--*	Y	Y (20 percent)	

2/ Incentives apply for contracts approved after November 3, 2008.

*--**Note:** Payments for CREP CRP-1 participants must adhere to the written CREP agreements. Changes made in PIP/SIP/WRI for CRP's general and continuous signup do not automatically apply to CREP's unless those agreements indicate that these payments shall be made "according to 2-CRP" or "consistent with National CRP directives" or similarly worded reference. CREP agreements which include specific payment provisions such as "25% WRI hydrology restoration payments shall be paid for practices CP23 and CP23A" must be adhered to as written.--*

Par. 66

66 National Practices (Continued)

D CRP Practices, Signup Types, Contract Lengths, and Incentives (Continued)

Practice Number And Name	Continuous	General	Contract Length	SIP	PIP	Rental Rate Incentive	Maximum Maintenance Incentive Rate
CP24, Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover as Cross Wind Trap Strips	X		10	N	Y	N	
CP25, Rare and Declining Habitat		X	10-15	N	N	N	
CP27, Farmable Wetlands Pilot Wetland	X		10-15	Y *--($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	
CP28, Farmable Wetlands Pilot Buffer	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	
CP29, Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Buffer	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	$0, $4, $5
CP30, Marginal Pastureland Wetland Buffer	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	$0, $4, $5
CP31, 2/ Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetlands	X		10-15	Y ($10)--*	Y	Y (20 percent)	

2/ Incentives apply for contracts approved after November 3, 2008.

Par. 66

66 National Practices (Continued)

D CRP Practices, Signup Types, Contract Lengths, and Incentives (Continued)

Practice Number And Name	Continuous	General	Contract Length	SIP	PIP	Rental Rate Incentive	Maximum Maintenance Incentive Rate
CP33, Habitat Buffers for Upland Birds	X		10 * * *	Y *--($15)--*	Y	N	
CP35A, Emergency Forestry - Longleaf Pine- New	X		10	N	N	N	
CP35B, Emergency Forestry - Longleaf Pine- Existing	X		10	N	N	N	
CP35C, Emergency Forestry - Bottomland Hardwood - New	X		10	N	N	N	
CP35D, Emergency Forestry - Bottomland Hardwood - Existing	X		10	N	N	N	
CP35E, Emergency Forestry - Softwood - New	X		10	N	N	N	
CP35F, Emergency Forestry - Softwood - Existing	X		10	N	N	N	
35G, Emergency Forestry - Upland Hardwood - New	X		10	N	N	N	
35H, Emergency Forestry - Upland Hardwood - Existing	X		10	N	N	N	

Par. 66

66 National Practices (Continued)

D CRP Practices, Signup Types, Contract Lengths, and Incentives (Continued)

*--

Practice Number And Name	Continuous	General	Contract Length	SIP	PIP	Rental Rate Incentive	Maximum Maintenance Incentive Rate
35I, Emergency Forestry - Mixed Trees - Existing	X		10	N	N	N	
CP36, Longleaf Pine - Establishment	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	N	
CP37, 2/ Duck Nesting Habitat	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	
CP38A, SAFE - Buffers	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	N	
CP38B, SAFE - Wetlands	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	N	
CP38C, SAFE - Trees	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	N	
CP38D, SAFE - Longleaf Pine	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	N	
CP38E, SAFE - Grass	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	N	
CP39, FWP Constructed Wetland	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	
CP40, FWP Aquaculture Wetland Restoration	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y (20 percent)	
CP41, FWP Flooded Prairie Wetlands	X		10-15	Y ($10)	Y	Y	
CP42, Pollinator Habitat		X	10	N	N	N	
CP42, Pollinator Habitat	X		10	Y ($15)	N	N	

--*

2/ Incentives apply for contracts approved after November 3, 2008.

67-80 (Reserved)

APPENDIX C
NOTICE OF INTENT

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Notices

Federal Register

Vol. 78, No. 230

Friday, November 29, 2013

This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Farm Service Agency

Notice of Intent To Prepare a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program

AGENCY: Commodity Credit Corporation and Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Intent (NOI); request for comments.

SUMMARY: This notice announces that the Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), intends to complete a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) assessing the environmental impacts of potential changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). The intent of this notice is to provide an initial summary introduction to the alternatives being considered for potential changes to CRP, and to request comments on these proposed alternatives. The input we receive as a result of this notice will enable us to refine the alternatives, begin to evaluate their impacts, and document results in the scoping report as required by NEPA.

DATES: We will consider comments that we receive by January 13, 2014. Comments received after this date will be considered to the extent possible.

ADDRESSES: We invite you to submit comments on this NOI. In your comments, include the volume, date, and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- *Federal eRulemaking Portal:* Go to *http://www.regulations.gov.* Follow the online instructions for submitting comments;
- *Online:* Go to *www.CRPSPEIS.com.* Follow the online instructions for submitting comments;
- *Email: CRPcomments@cardnotec.com.*
- *Fax:* (757) 594–1469.
- *Mail, Hand Delivery, or Courier:* CRP SPEIS, c/o Cardno TEC, Inc., 11817 Canon Blvd., Suite 300, Newport News, VA 23606.

All written comments will be available for inspection online at www.regulations.gov and in the Office of the Director, Conservation and Environmental Programs Division, FSA, USDA, 1400 Independence Ave. SW., Room 4709 South Building, Washington, DC 20250, during business hours between 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. A copy of this notice is available through the FSA home page at *http://www.fsa.usda.gov/.*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For questions, contact Nell Fuller, National Environmental Compliance Manager, telephone: (202) 720–6303. For the documents discussed in this notice, go to *www.CRPSPEIS.com.*Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the USDA Target Center at (202) 720–2600 (voice and TDD).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: As required by NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), FSA is assessing potential changes to CRP in 2014 by preparing a SPEIS (2014 CRP SPEIS), to provide FSA decisionmakers, other agencies, Tribes, and the public with an analysis that evaluates program effects in appropriate contexts, describes the intensity of adverse as well as beneficial impacts, and addresses cumulative environmental impacts associated with proposed programmatic changes to CRP. CRP was first authorized in the Food Security Act of 1985, Public Law 99–198, 99 Stat. 1509–1514 (16 U.S.C. 3831–3836), and is governed by regulations in 7 CFR part 1410. CRP is a voluntary program that supports the implementation of long-term conservation measures designed to improve the quality of ground and surface waters, control soil erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat on environmentally sensitive agricultural land. In return, CCC provides participants with rental payments and cost share assistance under contracts that extend from 10 to 15 years. CRP is a CCC program administered by FSA with the support of other Federal, State, and local agencies and organizations. More information on CRP is available at *http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSAwebapp?area=home&/subject=copr&/topic=crp.*

Over the last decade, FSA has completed extensive NEPA analysis pertaining to CRP and components of the program. The 2014 CRP SPEIS will tier to (that is, it will focus on analyzing the new changes and incorporate and augment the prior analyses) and incorporate by reference other applicable NEPA documentation, as appropriate, and supplement the 2010 CRP SEIS. As such, only those proposed changes to CRP that have not been adequately addressed in other NEPA documentation will be addressed in the 2014 CRP SPEIS. Other applicable NEPA documentation can be found at *www.CRPSPEIS.com* and includes:

- The 2003 CRP Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and resulting Record of Decision (ROD), which evaluated the environmental consequences of changes to CRP under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, Public Law 107–171 (which is commonly known as the 2002 Farm Bill).
- The 2008 13 state-level CRP Environmental Assessments (EAs) and resulting Findings of No Significant Impacts (FONSI), which analyzed the environmental impacts of managed haying and grazing variations on CRP contracts.
- The 2008 CRP Programmatic EA (PEA) and FONSI, which evaluated mandatory changes to CRP reauthorized by the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Public Law 10–246 (2008 Farm Bill).
- The 2010 CRP SEIS and ROD, which evaluated changes to CRP enacted by the 2008 Farm Bill and supplemented the 2003 CRP EIS.
- The 2012 CRP PEA and FONSI, which evaluated the environmental consequences associated with authorizing emergency haying and grazing of CRP conservation practices (CPs) that had previously been ineligible, and helped alleviate local impacts to farmers and ranchers as a result of extreme drought and high temperatures during 2012.

Building on that NEPA documentation, the 2014 CRP SPEIS

will help FSA review potential alternatives to, and environmental impacts expected to result from, proposed changes to CRP. The results of the 2014 CRP SPEIS and subsequent ROD will be used in implementing and modifying CRP administration and will also serve as guidance to FSA decision-makers when considering proposed CRP changes.

The SPEIS process provides a means for the public, other agencies, and Tribes to provide input on program implementation alternatives and their impacts, and other environmental concerns. We encourage you to participate in helping to define the scope of the draft 2014 CRP SPEIS.

Summary Description of Preliminary Alternatives

To initiate the process, FSA has developed a set of preliminary alternatives to be studied and impacts to be analyzed in the draft 2014 CRP SPEIS. At this time, FSA is proposing three alternatives (the No Action alternative and two action alternatives). The No Action alternative (continuation of CRP as it is currently administered and analyzed in the 2010 CRP SEIS) will be evaluated as required by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR parts 1500–1508).

FSA expects legislative changes to CRP in the next Farm Bill (or other relevant legislation). Although the timing of the next legislative change to CRP is uncertain, to be able to implement the changes expeditiously, FSA is getting a start on the analysis of potential changes by including potential legislative changes in the alternatives. As a starting point for the required NEPA analysis that will be required before FSA can implement regulatory changes when the Farm Bill is enacted, FSA determined that using the proposals most recently passed by the House and the Senate, respectively, was reasonable. Because those proposals may change, it did not seem prudent to detail those proposed changes in this notice; the alternatives will be revised as needed in response to legislation and public and other input. To see the details that FSA is working from, refer to *www.CRPSPEIS.com* for the text of the House and Senate proposals used as our starting point. At this point, the two separate CRP proposals, however they are eventually modified, will be the foundation for our proposed federal actions, and are therefore included as separate alternatives. They are similar, but have some differences, and as discussed below, are not the sole components of the action alternatives.

When the next Farm Bill is enacted (or any other legislative change to CRP), the resulting legislative changes to CRP will be used along with the public and other input to this NOI to fully articulate the alternatives and their impacts, which will be fully described in the resulting scoping report.

FSA has developed the two action alternatives that include the provisions from each of the respective proposed legislative changes to CRP, as well as the following discretionary considerations, to ensure that the 2014 CRP SPEIS captures the full range of potential alternatives, impacts, and issues anticipated: Administrative, staffing, and budgetary considerations; efficiency and jurisdiction concerns; and other factors. The alternatives and impacts will be amended, as appropriate, based on input from the public, other agencies, and Tribes during the scoping process, as well as by any legislative changes to CRP.

Both of the two action alternatives include a gradual reduction of the CRP enrollment cap by 20 to 25 percent over the next 5 years. In the 2014 CRP SPEIS, FSA will analyze discretionary measures to meet the proposed mandatory reduction in enrollment while maintaining the maximum environmental benefit realized from the program.

Other discretionary provisions, which FSA identified separately from any pending legislative changes, to be addressed in the 2014 CRP SPEIS include:

- Changing the enrollment cap on the Farmable Wetlands Program;
- Reducing incentive and cost-share payments for tree thinning activities;
- Evaluating other forms or processes for enrollment under continuous sign-up;
- Adding flexibility for haying and grazing, including emergency haying and grazing on otherwise ineligible CRP CPs (as addressed in the 2012 CRP PEA and FONSI); and
- Providing transition options for expiring contracts to enroll in other conservation programs.

Signed on November 21, 2013.

Candace Thompson,

Acting Executive Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation, and Acting Administrator, Farm Service Agency.

[FR Doc. 2013–28520 Filed 11–27–13; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–05–P

CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

Agenda and Notice of Public Meeting of the New York Advisory Committee

Notice is hereby given, pursuant to the provisions of the rules and regulations of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission), and the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), that a planning meeting of the New York Advisory Committee to the Commission will convene at 12 p.m. (EST) on December 12, 2013. The purpose of the meeting is project planning to discuss the scope of the Advisory Committee's project on disparate treatment of youth in the New York correctional system.

These meetings will be conducted via conference call. Members of the public, including persons with hearing impairments, who wish to listen to the conference call should contact the Eastern Regional Office (ERO), ten days in advance of the scheduled meeting, so that a sufficient number of lines may be reserved. You may contact the Eastern Regional Office by phone at 202–376–7533—persons with hearing impairments would first call the Federal Relay Service at 1–800–977–8339 and give them the ERO number 202–376–7533—or by email at *ero@usccr.gov.* Those contacting ERO will be given instructions on how to listen to the conference call.

Members of the public who call-in can expect to incur charges for calls they initiate over wireless lines, and the Commission will not refund any incurred charges. Callers will incur no charge for calls they initiate over land-line connections to the toll-free telephone number.

Members of the public are entitled to submit written comments. The comments must be received in the regional office by January 14, 2014. Comments may be mailed to the Eastern Regional Office, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1331 Pennsylvania Avenue, Suite 1150, Washington, DC 20425, faxed to (202) 376–7548, or emailed to *ero@usccr.gov.* Persons who desire additional information may contact the Eastern Regional Office at 202–376–7533.

Records generated from this meeting may be inspected and reproduced at the Eastern Regional Office, as they become available, both before and after the meeting. Persons interested in the work of this advisory committee are advised to go to the Commission's Web site, *www.usccr.gov,* or to contact the Eastern Regional Office at the above phone number, email or street address.

APPENDIX D
COMMENT SUMMARY REPORT FOR DRAFT SPEIS

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Comment Summary Report

SUPPLEMENTAL PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT FOR CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

NOVEMBER 2014

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Public involvement is an integral part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. This completed, the agency that produced the document must invite comments on the draft document. This includes comments from federal and state agencies, federal, state, and, local governments, concerned parties, and the general public that may be affected by the proposed action. This allows interested parties to review the document and potentially identify any issues with the analysis that may have been overlooked by the action proponent.

This comment summary report is an analysis of the issues and concerns expressed by interested parties with regard to the Draft Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS) for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This report will:

- Provide an outline of the public comment process;
- Describe the public meeting format and schedule;
- Summarize comments received during the public comment period; and
- Provide responses to substantive comments and identify where the comment is addressed in the Final SPEIS.

2.0 PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS

Under NEPA, after the draft SPEIS is prepared there must be a Notice of Availability (NOA) published in the Federal Register. This begins the requisite 45-day public comment period. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) published a NOA in the Federal Register on July 15, 2014 (79 FR41247-41249) (**Appendix A**). This NOA provided a summary of the changes to the CRP, the proposed action, and the no action alternative. Also included in the NOA was a description of how to provide comments, as well as a list of the dates, times, and locations of the five public meetings that were held as a part of the public involvement process.

Once the public comment period began, any concerned or interested party could submit a comment with regard to the draft SPEIS through any number of formats, including: email, traditional mail, via the comment link on the project website, via the regulations.gov website, and/or attending a public meeting and submitting a written comment. All of these methods for providing a comment were outlined in the NOA.

For this action, the comment period began on July 15, 2014 and ended on September 8, 2014. All substantive comments received before (or postmarked before) September 8, 2014 were considered in the Final SPEIS.

3.0 PUBLIC MEETING FORMAT

Public meetings were held in areas that were determined to have the highest potential impact from the proposed action. In this case, the meeting locations were chosen from the density of currently enrolled

CRP lands within each state. Though the changes to CRP have the potential to affect all eligible land in all 50 states, it was not feasible to hold meetings in all 50 states. Every effort was made to ensure that meeting locations were located in relatively well known areas, in agricultural areas, and that the locations were reasonably accessible and easy to find.

The public meeting was conducted in an open house style. This consisted of a welcome station, where participants were asked to sign in, a series of poster stations, and a comment station. There were a total of five poster stations, each that described a different aspect of the draft SPEIS. These were manned by national FSA representatives, local FSA staff, or private contractors hired to support preparation of the draft SPEIS. These persons were available to all meeting participants to answer specific questions about the document, the posters, the proposed action, or how to provide comments.

There were also handouts available: (1) an overview of the meeting format and a description of all the methods available to provide a comment, and (2) a comparison table of the relevant provision of the 2008 Farm Bill and the 2014 Farm Bill. Comment sheets were also available for participants to provide a written comment. The comment sheets could have been handed in at the meeting or mailed within the comment period.

All of the public meeting materials are provided in **Appendix B.**

4.0 PUBLIC MEETING SCHEDULE AND PARTICIPATION

A total of five public meetings were held to inform the public and to solicit comments on the draft SPEIS. The meeting locations, dates, and times are shown below in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Public Meeting Dates, Times, and Locations

Date	Time	Location
July 21, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Hilton Garden Inn, Spokane Airport 9015 West SR Highway 2 Spokane, WA 99224
July 22, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Holiday Inn, Great Falls 1100 5th Street, South Great Falls, MT 59405
August 4, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Plains Cotton Cooperative Association 3301 East 50th Street Lubbock, TX 79404
August 5, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Stillwater Library 1107 S Duck Street, Stillwater, OK 74074
August 6, 2014	6 pm to 8 pm	Moorhead Area Conference Center 1080 28th Avenue, South Moorhead, MN 56560

A summary of the public meeting participation is provided in **Table 2**. In addition to the participation numbers provided in this table, each meeting was also attended by the FSA Director of Conservation and Environmental Programs from out of the national office, and two private contractors to facilitate the meeting and provide support as necessary. Attendees at the meetings included representatives from the

state and county FSA offices, concerned CRP participants, and representatives from private interest groups/organizations. While all participants were asked to sign-in at the meeting and provide the organization they represented (if applicable), this was not a requirement for participation.

Table 2. Public Meeting Participation

Location	Number of Participants
Spokane, Washington	7
Great Falls, Montana	2
Lubbock, Texas	9
Stillwater, Oklahoma	3
Moorhead, Minnesota	4
Total	**25**

5.0 SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

Eighteen official comments were received during the Public Draft SPEIS Comment Period. These comments were received primarily via email (**Table 3**). Some comments were submitted through more than one method, but only counted once (the first submittal method received). **Table 4** breaks down the eleven comments by type of commenter. These eighteen official comments could be broken down into 75 individual substantive comments or issues to be considered during in the Final SPEIS. Comment Category or nature of the comment was assigned to each substantive comment and is summarized in **Table 5**.

Table 3. Public Draft Comments By Submittal Method

Submittal Method	Number of Comments
Fax	0
Email	9
Regulations.gov	7
Mail	2
Hand Deliver at Public Meeting	0
Total	**18**

Table 4. Comments by Type of Commenter

Type of Commenter	Number of Comments
Federal Agency	2
State, Local Agency	4
Non-Governmental Organization	7
Individuals	5
Total	**18**

Table 5. Comments by Comment Category	
Comment Category	**Number of Comments**
Alternatives	1
Cumulative Impacts	3
Early Termination of Contracts	2
Emergency Haying and Grazing	22
Farmable Wetlands Program	1
Final Year Contract	1
Grassland Enrollment	14
Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction	1
Intermittent and Seasonal Use of Buffers	1
Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	11
Maximum Enrollment Cap	1
Protected Species	1
Target Enrollment	12
Wind Turbines	4
Total	**75**

As illustrated by the number of individual comments (**Table 5**), many of the comments received concerned the additional Conservation Practices (CPs) being proposed for Emergency Haying and Grazing, grassland enrollment, the proposed Targeted Enrollment method, and the managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies. Each of these categories is discussed below. **Appendix C** contains all individual comments and FSA's response.

Emergency Haying and Grazing

The majority of the 22 comments received on emergency haying and grazing requested that the Secretary obtain concurrence of haying and grazing of the additional CPs by federal and state fish and wildlife agencies before they are authorized during a drought event or that the SPEIS clarify the proposed approval process. Another major issue concerned the lack of detailed analysis on the potential impacts to lands that may receive consecutive years of haying and grazing under emergency conditions. Several comments also requested that CP25 be authorized for grazing only versus haying only as provided in the Draft SPEIS.

Grassland Enrollment

The majority of the comments on grassland enrollment concern how this program will be administered under CRP and how FSA will prioritize enrollment to maximize the environmental benefit. Many of the comments provide recommendations on how FSA should maximize grassland enrollment.

Targeted Enrollment

Many of the comments on targeted enrollment requested that the SPEIS provide additional detail on targeted enrollment through a reverse auction concept as well as requesting that each state agency be involved in determining the year to year initiatives. Many comments also requested that geographic areas or specific targeted initiatives be detailed in the SPEIS analysis.

Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

Similar to emergency haying and grazing, many comments requested that concurrence from federal and state fish and wildlife agencies be received on harvesting and grazing frequency changes. In addition to the series of maps provided in the SPEIS showing average harvesting and grazing over the last Farm Bill period, comments requested that tables be developed to show the percent of CRP acreage by state that was harvested or grazed during the same time frame.

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APPENDIX A
FEDERAL REGISTER NOA

averaging, the total annual burden hours may not equal the product of the annual number of responses multiplied by the reporting burden per response.)

All responses to this notice will be summarized and included in the request for OMB approval. All comments will also become a matter of public record.

Done in Washington, DC, this 9th day of July 2014.

Kevin Shea,

Administrator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

[FR Doc. 2014–16531 Filed 7–14–14; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–34–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Commodity Credit Corporation

Farm Service Agency

Notice of Availability of Draft Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for the Conservation Reserve Program

AGENCY: Commodity Credit Corporation and Farm Service Agency, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of availability; request for comments.

SUMMARY: This notice announces that the Farm Service Agency (FSA), on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), completed a Draft Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Draft SPEIS) to examine the potential environmental consequences associated with implementing changes to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) specified in the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill), and assist in developing new regulations. FSA is requesting comments on the Draft SPEIS.

DATES: We will consider comments that we receive by September 8, 2014.

ADDRESSES: We invite you to submit comments on the Draft SPEIS. In your comments, include the volume, date, and page number of this issue of the **Federal Register**. You may submit comments by any of the following methods:

- Federal eRulemaking Portal: Go to *http://www.regulations.gov*. Follow online instructions for submitting comments.
- Email: *CRPComments@cardnotec.com.*
- Online: Go to the Web site at *http://crpspeis.com.* Follow online instructions for submitting comments.
- Fax: (757) 594–1469.
- Mail, hand delivery, or courier: CRP SPEIS, C/O CardnoTEC, Inc., 11817 Canon Blvd., Suite 300, Newport News, VA 23606.

A copy of the Draft SPEIS is available through the FSA homepage at *http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd* or at *http://crpspeis.com.*

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Nell Fuller, (202) 720–6303. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the USDA Target Center at (202) 720–2600 (voice).

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides a means for the public to comment on alternatives and environmental concerns for Federal programs or actions. The CRP Draft SPEIS was completed as required by NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321–4347), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), and FSA's NEPA regulations (7 CFR part 799). FSA provided notice of its intent (NOI) to prepare the CRP SPEIS in the **Federal Register** on November 29, 2013 (78 FR 71561–71562), and solicited public comment on the preliminary alternatives for analyzing changes to CRP from the 2014 Farm Bill. FSA considered input from those comments to develop the alternatives analyzed in the Draft SPEIS. We received a total of 8 comments from private organizations, members of the concerned public, and Federal, State, and local government agencies. The comments involved 55 individual issues covering a range of topics including proposed 2014 Farm Bill changes, CRP maximum enrollment and acreages, regional differences in haying and grazing impacts, claims of a lack of thorough environmental and socioeconomic impact analysis in previous NEPA documentation, and CRP funding policy. All substantive comments received that were within the defined scope of the SPEIS were incorporated.

As specified in the 2014 Farm Bill, FSA plans to consolidate a number of conservation programs to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Many of the changes to CRP from the 2014 Farm Bill are administrative in nature, would not result in major changes to the current administration of CRP, or have been addressed in previous NEPA documentation concerning CRP. Such changes do not require further analysis in the SPEIS.

Those changes, and the justification for eliminating them from analysis, include the following, each of which is discussed below:

- Maximum enrollment authority;
- Farmable Wetland Program enrollment changes;
- Tree thinning payments;
- Early termination of contracts;
- Managed harvesting and routine grazing payment reduction;
- Transition option funding;
- Emergency haying and grazing payment reduction; and
- Prescribed grazing frequency.

Maximum Enrollment Authority

The maximum enrollment authority will be gradually reduced to no more than 24 million acres by 2018, as required by the 2014 Farm Bill. The ''2010 Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement'' (referred to as the 2010 CRP SEIS) analyzed an alternative to reduce the enrollment authority to no more than 24 million acres; therefore, that analysis is incorporated by reference.

Farmable Wetland Program Enrollment Changes

The change in the 2014 Farm Bill to reduce the maximum enrollment authority to 750,000 acres nationally (from 1 million) would still allow for approximately 410,000 acres of farmable wetlands to be enrolled in the Farmable Wetland Program. The mandated reduction in enrollment is not required to be analyzed since there is no discretion for any other level. Additionally, the mandatory reduction is not expected to affect actual enrollment, as historically enrollment has been well below the cap.

Tree Thinning Payments

The payment authority for tree thinning activities was reduced to $10 million and incentive payments are allowed. The 2014 Farm Bill change allows FSA to incentivize owners and operators to conduct practices and use management tools that would promote forest management, enhance the overall health of tree stands, improve the condition of resources, or provide valuable habitat for wildlife. Less than $50,000 in payments have been provided for tree thinning activities since the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Pub. L. 110–246, commonly referred to as the 2008 Farm Bill). The reduction in funding available for tree thinning activities would not represent a real change in current use of the funds and does not require further analysis.

Early Termination of Contracts

As provided in the 2014 Farm Bill, the early termination provision of CRP

that previously applied only to contracts entered into before January 1, 1995, will be modified to apply, only during fiscal year 2015, to allow CRP participants to elect early termination of certain CRP contracts, provided the contract has been in place for at least 5 years. The 2014 Farm Bill mandates providing an opportunity for the early termination of CRP contracts, if certain criteria are met; FSA does not have any discretion whether to implement that change. Therefore, this change does not require further NEPA analysis. FSA estimates that approximately 3 million acres would be eligible for early termination under this provision.

Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Payment Reduction

As required by the 2014 Farm Bill, there will be a reduction in the annual rental payment of at least 25 percent for managed harvesting or routine grazing. This change clarifies the existing administrative procedure related to these practices. A reduction of 25 percent in the annual rental payment was analyzed in the 2010 CRP SEIS; that analysis is incorporated by reference. Therefore, these changes do not require further analysis in the SPEIS.

Transition Option Funding

As specified in the 2014 Farm Bill, the funding authority to encourage the transfer of land from a retiring farmer or rancher to a beginning farmer or rancher, or a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, would be increased to $33 million and would expand the eligibility to include certain farmers or ranchers who are military veterans. This is a non-discretionary, administrative change and does not require further analysis in the SPEIS.

Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction

As specified in the 2014 Farm Bill, harvesting, grazing, or other commercial use of the forage in response to a drought, flooding, or other emergency is authorized without any reduction in the rental rate. The socioeconomic effects of emergency haying and grazing on the local and regional communities where these activities could occur has been previously analyzed in the 2010 CRP SEIS and the ''2012 Environmental Assessment for Emergency Drought Response on Conservation Reserve Program Lands''; those analyses are incorporated by reference. Accordingly, this non-discretionary change does not require further analysis.

Prescribed Grazing Frequency

FSA allows annual prescribed grazing for control of invasive plants. The 2010 CRP SEIS analyzed the impacts of prescribed grazing in compliance with a grazing plan, which is part of the Conservation Plan that includes frequency, timing, stocking rates, and type of grazing animal; that analysis is incorporated by reference. The 2014 Farm Bill provides clarification that such grazing can occur as determined in consultation with the State Technical Committee; this change does not require further analysis.

Alternatives

Many elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are mandatory and therefore, non-discretionary or specifically required to be implemented. As FSA has no decision-making authority over those non-discretionary provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are specified and assessed in the Draft SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative.

Other provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance for CRP, but FSA has some discretion in how to implement those provisions. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action. In addition, FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought-designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

The Draft SPEIS assesses the following two alternatives: The No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative includes the following, each of which is discussed below:

- Grasslands eligibility and authorized activities; and
- Final year of contract.

Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

The 2014 Farm Bill makes grasslands, which would have been previously eligible for the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), eligible for enrollment in CRP. The eligibility of grasslands and authorized activities are the same as those previously defined for GRP. Grasslands enrollment would be limited to no more than 2 million acres at any given time and would count against the total CRP maximum enrollment authority. Enrollment would occur through Continuous Sign-up. Grasslands would be enrolled in 10- or 15-year contracts like other CRP acreage. Authorized activities on grasslands would differ from other CRP lands and include:

- Common grazing practices;
- Haying, mowing, or harvesting for seed production;
- Fire suppression, fire-related rehabilitation, and construction of fire breaks; and
- Grazing-related activities, such as fencing and livestock watering.

Final Year of Contract and Enrollment in New Program

FSA allows a CRP participant to enroll expiring CRP land into the Conservation Stewardship Program during the year prior to the expiration of the CRP contract. FSA encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving and maintaining existing conservation systems. FSA pays participants for conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment. Land is enrolled in 5-year contracts through Continuous Sign-up. Furthermore, a stipulation in the 2014 Farm Bill would allow CRP land to be enrolled in a new program, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, without violation of the CRP contract. In general, the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program combines the purposes of the Wetlands Reserve Program, the GRP, and the Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program by enrolling land in long-term or permanent easements.

Proposed Action Alternative

Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance but details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the Proposed Action alternative. In addition to the 2014 Farm Bill mandatory provisions, FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought designated areas. The components of the Proposed Action alterative include the following, each of which is discussed below:

- Targeted enrollment;
- Managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies; and
- Emergency haying and grazing on additional conservation practices.

Targeted Enrollment

Under the Proposed Action, in addition to the long-standing General

and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods, FSA proposes to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land through a reverse auction approach for select conservation practices. Targeted enrollment could enable FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit. This approach would be similar to Continuous Sign-up, but with an annual enrollment period, sign-up, and offer selection.

Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

As specified in the 2014 Farm Bill, FSA continues to allow for managed harvesting (hay or biomass) and routine grazing of CRP acres provided these activities are included in the Conservation Plan and are consistent with the conservation of soil, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Harvesting and grazing activities must still avoid the Primary Nesting Season. The State Technical Committee must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is:

- At least once every 5 years, but no more frequent than once every 3 years for managed harvesting; and
- Not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing.

Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional Conservation Practices

- The Proposed Action includes making additional conservation practices that are currently ineligible for any type of haying or grazing eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during widespread drought conditions. Allowing haying and grazing on the proposed conservation practices in drought-designated areas would require concurrence and approval by certain State or federal agencies.

Public Involvement

The Draft SPEIS provides a means for the public and any interested parties to provide comments about the CRP changes analyzed in the Draft SPEIS. The Draft SPEIS can be reviewed online at: *http://www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA/webapp?area=home&subject=ecrc&topic=nep-cd* or at *http://crpspeis.com.*

FSA is having five public meetings to provide information and opportunities for discussing the changes to CRP specified by the 2014 Farm Bill and analyzed in the Draft SPEIS. The public meetings will feature an Open House format and interested parties are invited to attend the meeting at any time during the allotted timeframe. Posters and informational handouts as well as FSA representatives will be available for the duration of the meeting to answer questions concerning the Draft CRP SPEIS. The meetings are also an opportunity for interested parties to officially provide comments on the Draft CRP SPEIS. The meetings will be held at the following locations:

Date	Time	Location information
July 21, 2014	6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.	Hilton Garden Inn, Spokane Airport, 9015 West SR Highway 2, Spokane, Washington, 99224.
July 22, 2014	6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m.	Holiday Inn, Great Falls, 1100 5th Street, South Falls, Montana, 59405.
August 4, 2014	6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m	Plains Cotton Cooperative Association, 3301 East 50th Street, Lubbock, Texas, 79404.
August 5, 2014	6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m	Stillwater Library, 1107 S Duck Street, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 74074.
August 6, 2014	6:00 p.m.–8:00 p.m	Courtyard By Marriott and Moorhead Area, Conference Center, 1080 28th Avenue, South, Moorhead, Minnesota, 56560.

Signed on July 11, 2014.

Juan M. Garcia,

Administrator, Farm Service Agency, and Executive Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation.

[FR Doc. 2014–16711 Filed 7–14–14; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3410–05–P

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Food and Nutrition Service

Agency Information Collection Activities: Proposed Collection; Comment Request—Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Study

AGENCY: Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), USDA.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, this notice invites the general public and other public agencies to comment on the proposed information collection. This is a new collection for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) Study.

ADDRESSES: Comments are invited on: (a) Whether the proposed collection of information is necessary for the proper performance of Agency functions, including whether the information shall have practical utility; (b) the accuracy of the Agency's estimated burden of the proposed information collection, including the validity of the methodology and assumptions that were used; (c) ways to enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected; and (d) ways to minimize the burden of the information collection on respondents, including use of appropriate automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological methods of data collection.

Written comments may be sent to: Richard Lucas, Office of Policy Support, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1014, Alexandria, VA 22302. Comments may also be submitted via fax to the attention of Richard Lucas at 703–305–2576 or via email to *Richard.Lucas@fns.usda.gov*.

Comments will also be accepted through the Federal eRulemaking Portal. Go to *http://www.regulations.gov*, and follow the online instructions for submitting comments electronically.

DATES: Written comments must be received on or before September 15, 2014.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: To request more information on the proposed project or to obtain a copy of the data collection plans, contact Richard Lucas, Office of Policy Support, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 1014, Alexandria, VA 22302. Comments may also be submitted via fax to the attention of Richard Lucas at 703–305–2576 or via email to *Richard.Lucas@fns.usda.gov*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Title: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training Study

Form Number: N/A.

OMB Number: 0584–NEW.

Expiration Date: Not yet determined.

Type of Request: New collection.

APPENDIX B
MEETING HANDOUTS AND POSTERS

WELCOME

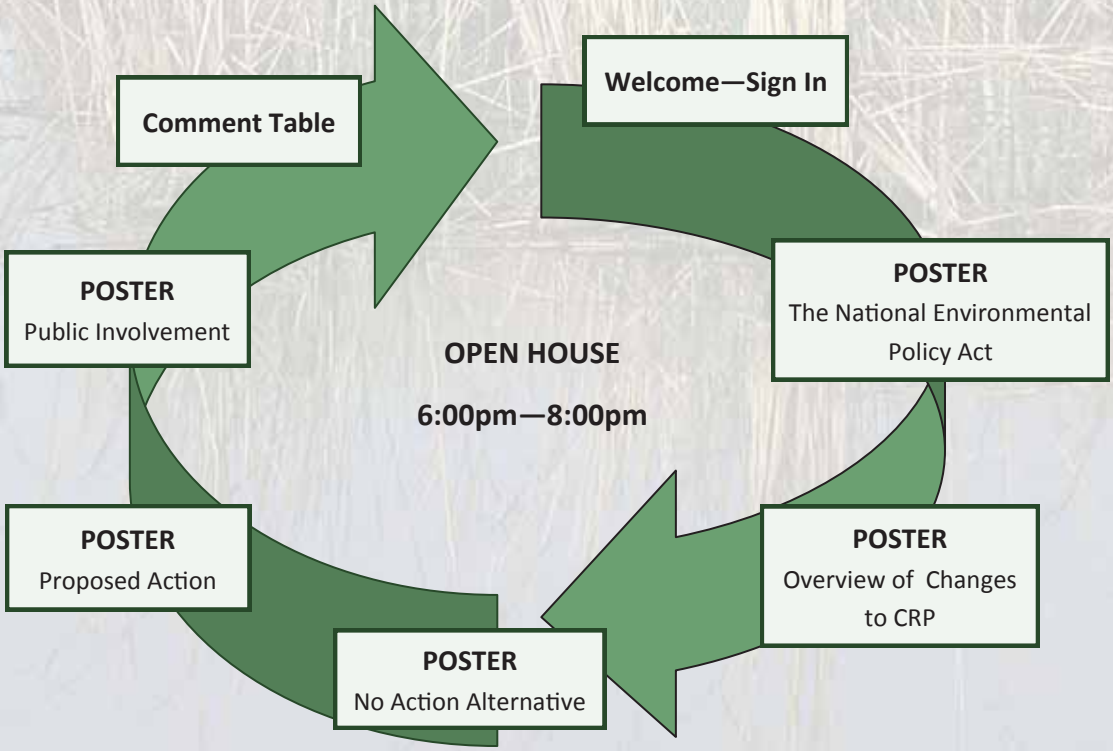
Public Meeting for Conservation Reserve Program

Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS)

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has prepared a SPEIS for changes to CRP identified in the 2014 Farm Bill. The 2014 Farm Bill aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Many elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning that implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in the SPEIS as part of the **No Action Alternative**. Other elements of the 2014 Farm Bill provide overall guidance but details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion. These discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill form the **Proposed Action**. In addition, FSA proposes to implement additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment of environmentally sensitive lands and to expand the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing in drought designated areas to provide necessary support to producers and ranchers during difficult times.

Please review the posters displayed at this meeting for additional details on the National Environmental Policy Act, changes to CRP, descriptions of the Proposed Action and No Action Alternative, and to learn how you can be involved in the decision-making process (public involvement). FSA representatives will be available throughout the Open House to answer questions.

Your involvement is important!



Please visit our website: www.crpspeis.com

Public Involvement Process

Notice of Intent
(November 29, 2013)

↓

Scoping Comment Period
(November 29, 2013 – January 13, 2014)

↓

Preparation of Draft SPEIS

↓

Notice of Availability of Draft SPEIS
(July 15, 2014)

↓

Public Comment Period
(July 15, 2014 – September 8, 2014)

↓

Preparation of Final SPEIS

↓

Notice of Availability of Final SPEIS

↓

Public Waiting Period
(30 days)

↓

Record of Decision
(Estimated February 2015)

☐ Completed to Date

FSA is hosting a series of Public Meetings throughout the U.S. Each meeting will feature an Open House format that provides opportunities for you to speak directly with FSA representatives. We look forward to seeing you at one of our meetings and receiving your input!

Spokane, WA – July 21, 2014

Great Falls, MT – July 22, 2014

Lubbock, TX – August 4, 2014

Stillwater, OK – August 5, 2014

Moorhead, MN – August 6, 2014

Your involvement is important! Please submit your comments by:

1. Filling in a comment sheet here
2. Going to the website at www.crpspeis.com
3. Going to www.regulations.gov
4. Mailing them to:

CRP Comments
c/o Cardno TEC
11817 Canon Blvd, Suite 300
Newport News, VA 23606

Please provide comments by September 8, 2014 to ensure their consideration in the Final SPEIS analysis

For further information, please contact :

Nell Fuller
National Environmental Compliance Manager
Farm Service Agency, USDA
Mail Stop 0513, Office 4715
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250
nell.fuller@wdc.usda.gov

Please visit our website: www.crpspeis.com

Provision	2008 Farm Bill	2014 Farm Bill
Enrollment Authority	Maximum enrollment capped at 32 million acres.	Maximum enrollment gradually reduced from 32 to 24 million acres by fiscal year 2017. Current enrollment is approximately 26 million acres.
Farmable Wetlands Program	Enrollment limited to 1 million acres nationally.	Reduces enrollment authority to 750,000 acres nationally. Current enrollment is approximately 340,000 acres.
Tree Thinning Payments	Authorized $100 million in cost-share payments.	Authorizes $10 million in incentive payments. Less than $50,000 provided for tree thinning cost-share payments since 2008 Farm Bill.
Early Termination of Contracts	Authorized for contracts signed prior to January 1, 1995 as long as contract has been in place for 5 years. Some lands not eligible.	Provides opportunity during Fiscal Year 2015 for contracts that have been in place at least five years. Expands list of ineligible lands. Approximately 3 million acres eligible for this provision.
Managed Harvesting, Prescribed and Routine Grazing Payment Reduction	Required payment reduction of annual payment to be commensurate with the economic value of the activity.	Requires payment reduction of at least 25 percent, consistent with current program administration. Eliminated payment reduction for prescribed grazing for new and beginning farmer or rancher.
Transition Option	Authorized up to $25 million to facilitate transfer of land from retiring farmer or rancher to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher.	Authorizes up to $33 million to facilitate transfer of land from retiring farmer or rancher to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, or a farmer or rancher who is a military veteran.
Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction	Required payment reduction of annual payment to be commensurate with the economic value of the activity.	Removes requirement for a payment reduction.
Prescribed Grazing Frequency	Authorized prescribed grazing at a frequency determined by State Technical Committee.	Authorizes prescribed grazing annually for the control of invasive plant species if approved by State Technical Committee.
Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities	Eligible grasslands could be enrolled in long-term contracts (10-, 15-, or 20-years) or permanent easements in Grassland Reserve Program (GRP).	Grasslands that would have been eligible for GRP can enroll in CRP contracts (10- or 15-years). Enrollment limited to up to 2 million acres. Authorized activities same as those previously defined for GRP.
Final Year of Contract	No such provision.	CRP participant allowed to enroll in Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program during final year of CRP without contract violation.
Managed Harvesting Frequency	Authorized managed harvesting at a frequency determined by State Technical Committee. Varies by state, but currently no more frequent than once every 3 years.	Maintains State Technical Committee authority, but sets minimum frequency of once in 5 years, and maximum frequency of once in 3 years.
Routine Grazing Frequency	Authorized routine grazing at a frequency determined by State Technical Committee. Varies by state, but currently no more frequent than once every 3 years.	Maintains State Technical Committee authority, but sets maximum frequency to no more than once every 2 years.

WELCOME

PUBLIC MEETING

for

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

Photos courtesy of USDA NRCS

USDA

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill are non-discretionary, meaning implementation is mandatory and specifically required by the statute. As the FSA has no decision-making authority over these non-discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, they are assessed in this SPEIS as part of the No Action Alternative.

Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

Prior to the 2014 Farm Bill, the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) was jointly administered by the FSA and NRCS to provide assistance to landowners and operators to protect grazing uses and related conservation values on eligible private range and pasture lands.

The 2014 Farm Bill makes grasslands, which would have been previously eligible for the GRP, eligible for enrollment in the CRP. The eligibility requirements and authorized activities are the same as those previously defined for the GRP.

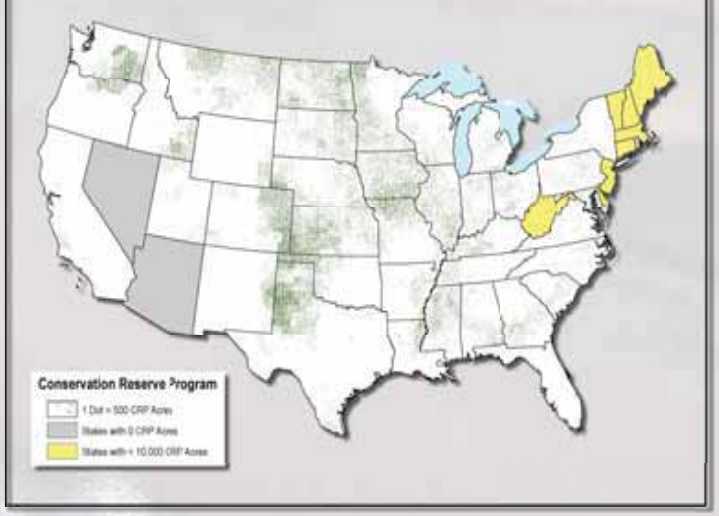
Eligible land includes privately owned grasslands, including Tribal lands, that:

- Contain forbs or shrubs (including rangeland and improved pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use.
- Are located in an area that has been historically dominated by grasslands.
- Could provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value if the land is retained in the current use or restored to its natural condition.

Environmental Consequences

- Retain or restore up to 2 million acres of grasslands
- Grazing and other authorized activities performed in accordance with Grazing Management Plan
- Long-term benefits to grassland vegetation and grassland-dependent wildlife
- Short-term impacts from construction and authorized activities such as fencing, livestock watering, and fire suppression

Current CRP Enrollment



Final Year of Contract

A provision in the 2014 Farm Bill allows a CRP participant to enroll expiring land into the Conservation Stewardship Program or the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program during the last year of the contract without violation of the contract. Authorized land improvement activities must be consistent with the installed conservation practices.

The **Conservation Stewardship Program** is a voluntary program that encourages agricultural and forestry producers to address resource concerns by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving and maintaining existing conservation systems.

- Land enrolled in 5-year contracts.
- Program pays participants for conservation performance – the higher the performance, the higher the payment.
- Program addresses seven resource concerns (soil quality, soil erosion, water quality, water quantity, air quality, plant resources, and animal resources) as well as energy.

The **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program** is a new program authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill. In general, the program combines the purposes of the Wetlands Reserve Program, GRP, and Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program. The goals of the program are to:

- Restore, protect, and enhance wetlands on eligible land.
- Protect the agricultural use and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses of that land.
- Protect grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring and conserving eligible land.

Environmental Consequences

- Streamlining enrollment into long-term easement programs would prevent development of conservation land
- Long-term benefits to biological resources, soils, and water resources from continued conservation
- Short-term impacts from activities to improve conservation system

Please visit the project website at www.crpspeis.com

PROPOSED ACTION

For some CRP changes details of implementation are left to FSA's **discretion**. The discretionary aspects of the 2014 Farm Bill, as well as additional discretionary measures for targeting enrollment and expanding the flexibility of emergency haying and grazing are evaluated in the SPEIS as the **Proposed Action**.

Targeted Enrollment

In addition to the long-standing General and Continuous Sign-up enrollment methods, the FSA proposes to target enrollment of environmentally sensitive land through a reverse auction approach for select conservation practices. A targeted enrollment option could enable the FSA to meet the reduced CRP enrollment cap, while preserving the ability to enroll land that would provide the greatest environmental benefit.

Environmental Consequences

- Short-term impacts from installation of CPs and contract maintenance, same as other enrollment methods
- Long-term benefits to all resources from enrollment of higher quality land in CRP
  - ◊ Improved wildlife habitat
  - ◊ Stabilization of soils and reduced erosion potential
  - ◊ Improved water quality and quantity
  - ◊ Improved land for wildlife related recreation
- No socioeconomic impact, funding of CRP would continue to be allocated year to year based on enrollment cap
- Combining targeted enrollment with other conservation programs or initiatives could generate greater environmental benefits than one program alone

Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies

The State Technical Committee must develop appropriate vegetation management requirements and identify periods during which the activities could occur such that the frequency is: at least once every 5 years, but no more frequently than once every 3 years for managed harvesting, and not more frequent than once every 2 years for routine grazing. Harvesting and grazing activities still must avoid the Primary Nesting Season. Managed harvesting and routine grazing would continue to be performed in accordance with modified Conservation Plans.

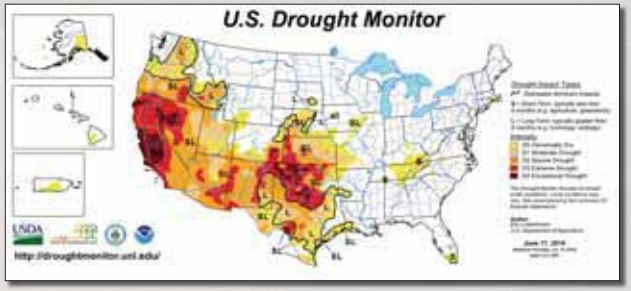
Environmental Consequences

- Activities could have beneficial or negative impacts depending on timing and site-specific conditions such as forage species composition, climate, and wildlife associated with the field
  - ◊ Beneficial impacts could include improved plant diversity, composition, and function
  - ◊ Negative impacts could include disturbance to ground nesting birds, reduced growth periods for vegetation with more frequent harvesting or grazing, and direct competition for resources between livestock and grazing wildlife
- Little to no impacts to water resources with appropriate best management practices and stipulations in Conservation Plan

Emergency Haying and Grazing on Additional Conservation Practices

In 2013 alone, nearly 700,000 acres of CRP (3% of total acreage) were hayed or grazed under emergency provisions. Under the Proposed Action, the Secretary would be afforded the discretionary authority to make additional CPs, that currently are ineligible for any type of haying or grazing, eligible for emergency haying and grazing to provide support to livestock producers during wide-spread drought conditions (D2 or greater). Additional CPs include:

- CP8: Grass waterways
- CP21: Filter strips
- CP22: Riparian buffers
- CP23: Wetland restoration
- CP23A: Wetland restoration, non-floodplain
- CP25: Rare and declining habitats (haying only)
- CP27: Farmable wetland
- CP28: Farmable wetland buffer
- CP37: Duck nesting habitat
- CP39: Constructed wetland
- CP41: Flooded prairie farmable wetland



Environmental Consequences

- Allowing haying and grazing on these CPs would require concurrence and approval by certain state and/or federal agencies
- Consecutive years of emergency haying and grazing of same acreage in these CPs could result in long-term negative impacts to some vegetation types
- Long-term monitoring of these activities is recommended at the local level

Please visit the project website at www.crpspeis.com

OVERVIEW OF CHANGES TO CRP

The 2014 Farm Bill aims to consolidate a number of conservation programs in an effort to simplify the programs, reduce overlapping goals, and reduce overall budgets. Some of the changes in the 2014 Farm Bill are administrative in nature, would not result in major changes to the current administration of the program, and have been addressed in other NEPA documents. These changes to CRP are described below.

Maximum Enrollment Authority

- Gradually reduces authority from 32 to 24 million acres by 2017
- Current enrollment is approximately 26 million acres
- Covered in other NEPA documents

Farmable Wetlands Program

- Reduces enrollment to 750,000 acres nationally
- Current enrollment approximately 340,000 acres
- Covered in other NEPA documents

Tree Thinning Payments

- Authorizes $10 million in incentive payments
- Less than $50,000 paid in cost-share payments since 2008 Farm Bill
- Covered in other NEPA documents

Early Termination of Contracts

- Provides opportunity during Fiscal Year 2015 for termination of contracts that have been in place at least five years
- Expands list of ineligible lands
- Approximately 3 million acres eligible for this provision
- Administrative change, NEPA not required

Managed Harvesting, Prescribed and Routine Grazing Payment Reduction

- Requires payment reduction of at least 25 percent
- Consistent with current program administration
- Covered in other NEPA documents

Transition Option

- Authorizes up to $33 million to facilitate transfer of land from retiring farmer or rancher to a beginning or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher
- Expands transition option to include military veterans
- Administrative change, NEPA not required

Emergency Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction

- Removes requirement for a payment reduction
- Current payment reduction varies depending on situation
- Administrative change, NEPA not required

Prescribed Grazing Frequency

- Authorizes prescribed grazing annually for the control of invasive plant species
- Must be approved by State Technical Committee
- Covered in other NEPA documents

Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities

- Grasslands that would have been eligible for Grassland Reserve Program can enroll in CRP contracts (10- or 15-years)
- Enrollment limited to up to 2 million acres
- Authorized activities same as those previously defined for Grassland Reserve Program
- Analyzed as part of No Action Alternative in SPEIS

Final Year of Contract

- Allows for enrollment in Conservation Stewardship Program or Agricultural Conservation Easement Program during final year of CRP contract
- Land must remain in conservation
- Analyzed as part of No Action Alternative in SPEIS

Managed Harvesting Frequency

- Maintains State Technical Committee authority
- Sets minimum frequency of once in 5 years, and maximum frequency of once in 3 years
- Analyzed as part of Proposed Action in SPEIS

Routine Grazing Frequency

- Maintains State Technical Committee authority
- Sets maximum frequency to no more than once every 2 years
- Analyzed as part of Proposed Action in SPEIS

Please visit the project website at www.crpspeis.com

THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

USDA

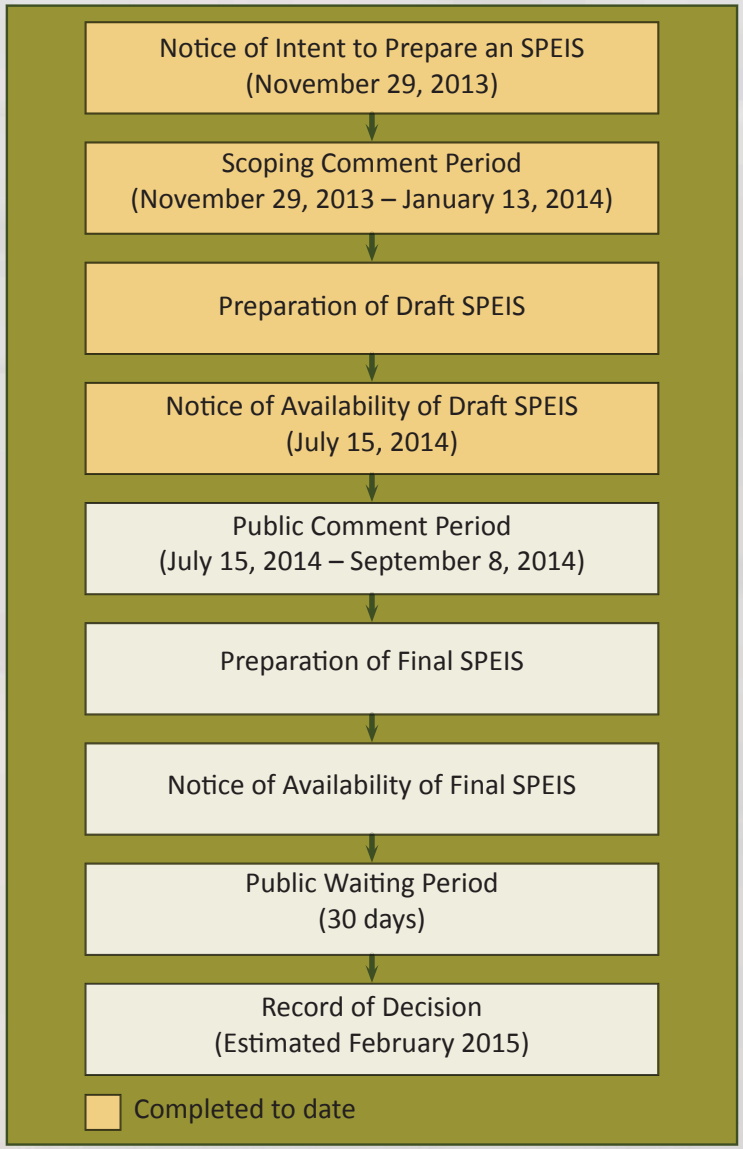
The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

- Requires federal agencies to evaluate the potential impacts of their activities, including changes to their programs
- Aids agencies in making sound decisions
- Guides the Farm Service Agency's environmental analysis process
- Requires input from the public

NEPA and the Conservation Reserve Program

- 2014 Farm Bill changes to CRP require NEPA analysis
- FSA has prepared a Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS)
- Some elements of the 2014 Farm Bill have been covered in other NEPA documents and are not included in the SPEIS
- Some CRP changes are non-discretionary:
  - ◊ Changes are mandatory and specifically required by the 2014 Farm Bill
  - ◊ FSA has no decision-making authority regarding these changes
  - ◊ Non-discretionary changes are evaluated in the SPEIS as the No Action Alternative
- For other CRP changes, details of implementation are left to FSA's discretion
  - ◊ Discretionary changes are evaluated in the SPEIS as the Proposed Action

The NEPA Process



Please visit the project website at www.crpspeis.com

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE NEPA PROCESS

USDA

Your Participation is Important

Your involvement and feedback are essential to helping the Farm Service Agency make an informed decision on the proposed changes to CRP.

Participate in the Process and Stay Informed

- Read and comment on the Draft SPEIS
- Attend a Public Meeting
  - ◊ Spokane, WA – July 21, 2014
  - ◊ Great Falls, MT – July 22, 2014
  - ◊ Lubbock, TX – August 4, 2014
  - ◊ Stillwater, OK – August 5, 2014
  - ◊ Moorhead, MN - August 6, 2014
- Review the Final SPEIS and Record of Decision

For Additional Information

- Visit the project website: www.crpspeis.com
- Visit the FSA website: www.fsa.usda.gov/FSAwebapp?area=home&subject=copr&topic=crp
- Contact the FSA National Environmental Compliance Manager:

Nell Fuller
USDA/FSA/CEPD, Mail Stop 0513
1400 Independence Ave., SW.
Washington, DC 20250

(202) 720-6303

nell.fuller@wdc.usda.gov

How To Submit Comments

- Fill in a comment sheet here; or
- Go to the website at www.crpspeis.com, click the public involvement tab; or
- Go to www.regulations.gov, follow online instructions; or
- Mail them to:

CRP Comments
c/o Cardno TEC
11817 Canon Blvd, Suite 300
Newport News, VA 23606

Please provide comments by September 8, 2014 to ensure they are considered in the Final SPEIS

Please visit the project website at www.crpspeis.com

COMMENT SHEET

Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

Thank you for providing your comments on the Conservation Reserve Program Supplemental Programmatic EIS. Please provide us with your comments no later than **September 8, 2014**. Comments may be submitted at the meeting, by visiting the project website at http://crpspeis.com, or via U.S. Postal Service to the address below.

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Please Print

Name: _____

Zip Code: _____

Affiliation: _____

Please give this form to one of the representatives here at the meeting or mail to:

CRP SPEIS
c/o CardnoTEC, Inc.
11817 Canon Blvd, Suite 300
Newport News, VA 23606

USDA

APPENDIX C
DRAFT SPEIS COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
1	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Farmable Wetlands Program	The FWS recommends an evaluation of how the FWP enrollment reduction could be used for other high-demand continuous signup practices most in need of additional acreage allocations (e.g., State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement or SAFE, Duck Nesting Habitat Initiative).	*Comment Noted* . Enrollment opportunities for continuous programs or other initiatives are determined annually based on acreage available for enrollment into CRP within the mandated maximum enrollment cap. Reducing the set aside for FWP could possibly allow for increased enrollment in other high-demand programs or initiatives within the cap. The program is already administered this way and does not require further analysis.	n/a
2	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Early Termination	Early termination of contracts - The potential early termination of up to 3 million acres from the CRP has not been analyzed in previous NEPA documents. The Department believes the environmental impacts of early termination, although non-discretionary, should be evaluated in the SPEIS. By providing additional detailed information and analysis regarding the landscapes and conservation cover of acres eligible for early termination, the potential effects of this provision on resources of concern, including ongoing conservation efforts for species of concern (e.g., lesser prairie-chicken) will be better understood and targeting of future CRP enrollment more effective.	*Document Change.* Section has been revised to include additional information on the CRP acreage eligible for this opportunity. Added a table detailing the acreage of the various CPs installed and this provides a better description of the type of habitat that could leave the program. This option is only applicable in fiscal year 2015.	Section 2.2.4
3	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Haying and Grazing Payment Reduction	Emergency haying and grazing payment reduction - The 2014 Farm Bill removes the 25 percent payment reduction for emergency grazing and haying. The Department believes that this change, which was not addressed in any previous NEPA document, is likely to increase emergency haying and grazing activities during times of drought when rangeland conditions are already poor. The Department disagrees with the justification provided in the DSPEIS that the change would not fundamentally alter the analysis provided in previous NEPA documents	*Document Change* . This provision has been added to the No Action Alternative and is thoroughly analyzed in Chapter 5.	Section 2.3.3 Section 4.2.2.3 Section 4.3.2.3 Section 4.4.2.3 Section 4.5.2.3 Section 4.6.2.3 Section 4.7.2.3 Section 4.8.2.3 Section 4.9.2.3 Section 4.10.2.3 Section 4.11.2.3 Section 4.12.2.3 Section 5.3.3
4	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Grassland Enrollment	It was recommended in FWS NOI comments that the SPEIS establish a priority ranking system for enrolling eligible grasslands. The Department believes FSA retains the discretionary authority to establish a system that would recognize not only the priority given to expiring CRP contracts under the 2014 Farm Bill, but also expired CRP and expired or expiring Grassland Reserve Program lands, and other eligible grasslands	*Document Change.* The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known. As stated in the 2014 Farm Bill, priority would be granted to expiring CRP land for enrollment under this provision.	Section 2.3.1

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
5	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Grassland Enrollment	This component of CRP should also promote voluntary management by providing cost-share on enrollments to ensure productive fish and wildlife habitat throughout the contract term. This could include providing 75 percent cost-share for prescribed burning (rather than the standard 50 percent cost-share rate) due to the overriding and geographically broad importance of prescribed fire in CRP.	*Document Change.* The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include additional enrollment details that were not available at the time of preparation of the Draft SPEIS. However, anticipated cost-share for authorized activities are not known at this time and would be addressed in the CRP Handbook. FSA will consider comments received during the SPEIS process in developing CRP policy.	Section 2.3.1
6	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Grassland Enrollment	Regarding Authorized Activities on Grasslands, particularly haying, mowing, and harvesting for seed production, the DSPEIS should clarify how "birds in the local area that are economically significant, in significant decline, or conserved in accordance with Federal or state laws" will be determined in consultation with the State Technical Committee (STC).	*Document Change.* A new section has been added that discusses STC policy, membership, authority, etc. The STC includes members from state wildlife agencies and other stakeholders considered knowledgeable of local wildlife. Wildlife agencies are involved in the process at the state level and have opportunities to make recommendations on program implementation.	Section 1.1.2.3
7	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Final Year of Contract	The SPEIS should clarify whether the transition to the CSP or ACEP allows for activities that would have adverse effects on the wildlife conservation values of the existing CRP cover either during the final year of the contract or during the life of the subsequent CSP contract or ACEP easement.	*Document Change* . Transitioning expiring CRP to CSP or ACEP under the 2014 Farm Bill provisions would require that the acreage remain in conservation cover. This point is clarified in the Final SPEIS. Activities to improve the existing cover are authorized and would be similar to maintenance activities as described in the SPEIS.	Section 2.3.2
8	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Targeted Enrollment	In addition to targeting enrollment, the Proposed Action should include maintaining enrollment at authorized levels consistent with Congressional intent as expressed in the 2014 Farm Bill Managers Statement. Approaches should include: • Providing annual general signup opportunities to minimize the impacts of expirations. • Targeting CRP enrollment and re-enrollment of expiring acres on the landscape where they will have the greatest benefit to priority wildlife species through updates in the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) and wildlife priority zones under the general signup, and by providing additional incentives for enrollment of continuous CRP practices, all of which could be based on the CRP purpose of addressing issues raised by State, regional, and national conservation initiatives. • Providing flexibility in shifting acreage allocations between and within continuous signup allotments, including project areas within states, to fully utilize acres held in reserve and to avoid interrupted delivery of targeted conservation practices when acreage caps are reached.	*Document Change.* It is FSA's intent to maintain maximum enrollment in CRP. This is accomplished through a number of ways, such as, General and Continuous Sign-ups, establishing initiatives to meet specific environmental goals, incentivizing enrollment in certain practices. In addition, FSA is considering another targeted enrollment program as a means to meet the reduced enrollment cap while still maintaining the maximum environmental benefit from the program.	Section 2.4.1

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
9	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Targeted Enrollment	It is recommended that the procedure used be more thoroughly described and involve local input to ensure an equitable and flexible process of implementation throughout the country. Any process FSA uses for selecting geographic areas for targeted enrollment should include coordination with the FWS, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), State fish and wildlife agencies, and other stakeholders.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used - to the extent possible at this time. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives.	Section 2.4.1
10	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Targeted Enrollment	The Department recommends that DSPEIS Proposed Action include a variety of targeting tools, including additional incentives available under existing mechanisms for CRP practices and management activities that address state, regional and national conservation initiatives.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used - to the extent possible at this time. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives.	Section 2.4.1
11	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	Maintain the current primary nesting season (PNS) dates established among the various states for birds in the area.	*Document Change.* The SPEIS does not propose any change to the current PNS dates for any state. This has been clarified in the section addressing managed harvesting and routine grazing frequencies.	Section 2.4.2.1 Section 2.4.2.2
12	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	Clarify how “birds in the local area that are economically significant, in significant decline, or conserved in accordance with Federal or state laws” will be determined in consultation with the STC for routine and prescribed grazing and grazing by a beginning farmer or rancher without a payment reduction.	*Document Change.* New section added to SPEIS describing STC role and membership. STC includes representatives from state fish and wildlife agencies and other conservation partners knowledgeable of local wildlife.	Section 1.1.2.3
13	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	Consider providing additional flexibility (with appropriate stocking restrictions timing, residual vegetation height, and other provisions subject to concurrence from the State fish and wildlife agency, the FWS and NRCS) for routine and prescribed grazing on CRP (including on practices such as CP25 and within the PNS), where the primary objective is to improve the quality of grassland habitat for wildlife. PNS flexibility would be limited to grazing only.	*Comment Noted.* FSA only proposes to allow additional flexibility in determining the allowable harvesting and grazing frequencies as specified in the 2014 Farm Bill. All other haying and grazing provisions would remain as they are currently. FSA relies on STC recommendations for program implementation at the state and local level. Full concurrence from STC, state fish and wildlife agencies, NRCS, and FWS would be needed to allow these activities during the PNS.	n/a
14	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	Identify restrictions on the frequency of haying and grazing, including emergency haying and grazing, applicable under the provisions of the Biological Opinion for implementation of CRP in the lesser prairie chicken range of Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Texas, and Colorado.	*Document Change.* Specific restrictions on haying and grazing activities identified in this BO have been added to the SPEIS.	Section 4.4.2.3 Section 4.4.3.2 Section 4.4.3.3
15	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	The DSPEIS does not address impacts specific to the four states (Arizona, California, Colorado and Nevada) where the frequency of managed harvest would “require” a change from once in 10 years to once every five years.	*Document Change.* Vegetation and Wildlife analyses has been revised to provide additional analysis for these specific states with respect to more frequent harvesting. The potential impacts to other resource areas would be the same as what's described.	Section 4.2.3.2 Section 4.3.3.2

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
16	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The SPEIS should clarify that concurrence is required from State fish and wildlife agencies and the FWS.	*Document Change.* New section added to SPEIS describing STC role and membership. STC includes representatives from state fish and wildlife agencies and other conservation partners knowledgeable of local wildlife. Section for Emergency Haying and Grazing of additional CPs revised.	Section 1.1.2.3 Section 2.4.3
17	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	Also, States should be allowed to approve emergency use on a subset of the additional practices, rather than all or none of them.	*Document Change* . Clarified language in SPEIS to note that CPs to be authorized would be site specific or determined on a case by case basis.	section 2.4.3
18	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	Define the term “widespread” at both the state and county levels, and evaluate the potential for DO level conditions to trigger emergency haying and grazing, as happened previously in 2012.	*Document change* . The term "widespread" has been removed. In general, eligibility is based on evidence submitted by County Committees that the county is suffering from a 40 percent or greater loss of normal hay and pasture production due to drought, or because excessive moisture conditions and/or precipitation levels indicate an average of 140 percent or greater increase in normal precipitation during the 4 most recent consecutive months, plus the days in the current month before the date of request. This SPEIS provides NEPA coverage for the Secretary to use his discretionary authority to allow any of these additional CPs to be authorized for emergency haying and grazing under D2 or greater conditions. The situation in 2012 (allowing these activities for D0 level conditions) was a special circumstance. Authorizing emergency haying and grazing under drought conditions less than D2 would require separate NEPA analysis.	Section 2.4.3
19	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The SPEIS should evaluate the cumulative impacts of eliminating payment reductions and allowing consecutive years of haying and grazing on wetlands, riparian areas, and grassland wildlife under such a scenario	*Document Change.* Removing the payment reduction for emergency haying and grazing has been added to the SPEIS under the No Action Alternative and fully analyzed in chapter 4. Consecutive years of emergency haying and grazing is addressed in the new analyses as well as the analysis for making additional CPs eligible for emergency haying and grazing.	Section 2.3.3 Section 4.2.2.3 and 4.2.3.3 Section 4.3.2.3 and 4.3.3.3 Section 4.4.2.3 and 4.4.3.3 Section 4.5.2.3 and 4.5.3.3 Section 4.6.2.3 and 4.6.3.3 Section 4.7.2.3 and 4.7.3.3 Section 4.8.2.3 and 4.8.3.3 Section 4.9.2.3 and 4.9.3.3 Section 4.10.2.3 and 4.10.3.3 Section 4.11.2.3 and 4.11.3.3 Section 4.12.2.3 and 4.12.3.3 Section 5.3.3

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
20	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	It is unclear why CP25 - Rare and declining habitats, is proposed as being eligible for haying only. Since grazing has fewer direct impacts than haying, the Department recommend CP25 be eligible for emergency grazing subject to the concurrence and monitoring process identified in these comments.	*Document Change* . CP25 to be authorized for Grazing only.	Section 2.4.3
21	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The PEA conducted in 2012 evaluated the potential impact of expanding eligibility of emergency haying and grazing to additional conservation practices, but this PEA did not include CP21 (Filter strips), CP22 (Riparian buffers), and CP39 (Constructed wetland). The Department recommend that these CP's be evaluated to determine potential impacts of expanding emergency haying and grazing to these practices, particularly given the environmentally sensitive nature of the practices, as well as the requirements that the majority of the CP22 practice (Zones 1 and 2) would be dominated by woody vegetation, and therefore would not be compatible with haying and possibly grazing.	*Document Change* . Additional analysis added to vegetation section addressing emergency haying and grazing of additional CPs.	Section 4.2.3.3
22	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	Clarify whether the expansion of emergency haying and grazing to filter strip and buffer practices (e.g. CP21 and CP22) would be subject to the 120-foot restriction under current guidance adjacent to streams and other permanent water bodies.	*Comment Noted* . As noted in Section 2.4.3 the 120-ft restriction would be applied to all CPs authorized for emergency haying and grazing.	n/a
23	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	It is essential that the SPEIS identify how the monitoring of emergency haying and grazing activities will occur to ensure adherence to required restrictions, as well as to evaluate the habitat and wildlife response.	*Comment Noted* . Permitted activities on CRP land are currently monitored for compliance by NRCS. This SPEIS does not address any changes to the existing procedures. FSA strongly recommends that STCs monitor emergency haying and grazing that they authorize. Given the need to address local conditions, flexibility in determining how and what to monitor is left to the STCs.	n/a
24	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Wind Turbines	Consistent with comments on the NOI, the Department recommends that the SPEIS include a thorough analysis of the resource impacts of allowing wind facilities to be installed on CRP lands (both the footprint of the facility and related infrastructure), with particular attention to grassland birds, such as prairie grouse, and bats. This analysis was not included in the DSPEIS or the previous 2010 CRP SEIS.	*Comment Noted* . The installation of wind turbines was previously authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill and was not changed in the 2014 Farm Bill; therefore it is not addressed this SPEIS. The installation of wind turbine(s) on CRP land must be included in the Conservation Plan. The Conservation Plan is developed by NRCS and includes any best management practices or measures to be employed to benefit and/or avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to those resources specific to those lands being proposed for enrollment to include grassland birds.	n/a

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
25	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Intermittent and Seasonal Use of Buffers	This issue was not included in the DSPEIS, but given the statutory requirement of CRP to provide wildlife habitat, it is recommended that the SPEIS evaluate how the intermittent or seasonal uses of buffers can occur, not only without destroying the vegetative cover, but also without compromising the statutory purpose of CRP.	*Document change* . The intermittent and seasonal use of vegetative buffer practices is already an authorized activity but referred to as "incidental grazing". The 2014 Farm Bill does not result in any changes to the current authorized activity which has been addressed in previous NEPA documents. This provision is now noted in the "Summary of Changes to the Farm Bill" table and a justification for elimination has been added.	Section 2.1 Section 2.2.9
26	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The section states that "Emergency haying and grazing may not occur during the PNS." Emergency grazing has been authorized during the PNS, so this statement needs to be corrected throughout the SPEIS.	*Document Change* . SPEIS revised to note that emergency haying or grazing may be authorized under extreme circumstances as determined by the Secretary.	Section 2.3.3
27	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Grassland Enrollment	Under the grazing section, the grazing related activities permitted under the grassland component of CRP include fencing, livestock watering, brush management, and the use of prescribed fire. The Department recommends that language be included describing how fencing will be constructed using the latest standards designed to reduce impacts on wildlife species of concern in the area.	*Document Change.* Authorized activities on grasslands would adhere to existing or amended policies and follow NRCS standard practices. Statement added to document to clarify this point.	Section 2.3.1
28	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	In addition to the maps providing a range of acres hayed and grazed by state, the Department recommends that the information be presented as a percentage of CRP hayed or grazed by state for the same time period.	*Document Change* . Tables added with percentages of CRP hayed or grazed in each state for 2009-2013.	Section 2.3.3 Section 2.4.2 Appendix D
29	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The last sentence on the page makes the inaccurate statement that "Emergency haying and grazing would continue to be prohibited during the PNS..."	*Document Change* . SPEIS revised to note that emergency grazing may be authorized under extreme circumstances as determined by the Secretary.	Section 2.3.3
30	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Grassland Enrollment	In the Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities section, the Department recommends adding prescribed fire to the list of authorized activities.	*Document Change* . Prescribed fire added to this sentence.	Section 4.3.2.1
31	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Grassland Enrollment	In the Grasslands Eligibility and Authorized Activities section, the Department recommends adding prescribed fire to the list of authorized activities.	*Document Change* . Prescribed fire added to this sentence.	Section 4.4.2.1
32	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Protected Species	The Department recommends that the SPEIS identify how modifications to the activities on lands already enrolled in CRP would be reviewed for impacts to protected species. This could involve a reassessment of the EE to address the effects of changes to the conservation plan or the protected species in the area since enrollment.	Comment Noted. Changes from the 2014 Farm Bill apply to new contracts only. Producers wishing to implement changes on existing CRP contract land would be required to modify their Conservation Plan through NRCS which would include consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if necessary.	n/a
33	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Cumulative Impacts	Include the FWS's Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program and the Coastal Program.	*Document Change* . Programs added to cumulative analysis.	Section 5.2

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
34	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Cumulative Impacts	The SPEIS should recognize that although participation [in managed harvesting and routine grazing] may be minor at the national scale, participation at the local, State or regional scale may represent a much greater percentage of CRP acres and a greater cumulative impact.	*Document Change* . Cumulative impacts section revised accordingly.	Section 5.3.5
35	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Cumulative Impacts	The DSPEIS states that the "...exclusion of harvesting and grazing within 120 feet of a body of water would prevent impacts." The Department expects that impacts to water resources from haying and grazing activities beyond the 120 foot exclusion zone would be reduced, but not completely prevented.	*Document Change* . Cumulative impacts section revised accordingly.	Section 5.3.4.3 Section 5.3.5.3
36	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Grassland Enrollment	Contrary to FSA's finding, we believe FSA does have important discretionary authority over CRP grassland enrollments, which should be included as alternatives.	*Document Change.* The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known.	Section 2.3.1
37	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Grassland Enrollment	Specifically, FSA does not analyze whether or how to use the discretionary authority to prioritize expiring CRP contracts or whether or how to geographically focus grassland enrollments.	*Document Change* . The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known.	Section 2.3.1
38	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Grassland Enrollment	We believe the best scenario for this new option would be for FSA to prioritize landowners with expiring CRP who will transition, with additional financial support, to a grazing system that would keep resource conserving grass cover in the long term. • FSA's SEIS should consider geographically targeting for enrollment current CRP grass cover on highly erodible land, within areas that benefit candidate or listed grassland species, and/or areas that are currently experiencing high rates of conversion from grassland to other uses. • We recommend FSA evaluate the concept of a CRP grasslands project focused on regions in the country that have the highest likelihood of success.	*Document Change* . The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known.	Section 2.3.1
39	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Targeted Enrollment	We request increased opportunities for input and dialogue as soon as possible to ensure any revisions to CRP do not have unintended environmental consequences and can enjoy the full support of the conservation community.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives.	Section 2.4.1

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
40	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Targeted Enrollment	FSA must be transparent in its implementation plans, solicit and incorporate partner and producer feedback, and consider ways to improve the conservation outcomes of CRP within existing CRP enrollment mechanisms. FSA should do polling or focus groups to learn about producer receptivity to a reverse auction approach. Additionally, geographic areas selected for targeted enrollment should be chosen through a collaborative process with FSA, NRCS, state fish and wildlife agencies, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and other stakeholders. We believe the local and regional approach to continuous CRP enrollment has been most effective and successful model (e.g., CREP and SAFE), and this model should be expanded.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives.	Section 2.4.1
41	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	The SPEIS should explicitly state, similar to recent FSA haying and grazing polices, State Technical Committee decisions must receive concurrence from state fish and wildlife agencies. The SPEIS should also clearly state whether these newly revised frequencies apply to states with frequencies previously set through a court settlement.	*Document Change* . Section added to SPEIS describing STC members, authority, and processes. This SPEIS does not affect any frequencies or PNS dates established through state specific EAs.	Section 1.1.2.3 Section 2.4.2.2
42	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The current draft SPEIS fails to adequately explore the negative environmental consequences of allowing emergency haying and grazing in consecutive years, or emergency haying and grazing immediately following managed harvest and routine grazing.	*Document Change.* Additional analyses added to address consecutive years of emergency haying and grazing.	Section 4.2.2.3 and 4.2.3.3 Section 4.3.2.3 and 4.3.3.3 Section 4.4.2.3 and 4.4.3.3 Section 4.5.2.3 and 4.5.3.3 Section 4.6.2.3 and 4.6.3.3 Section 4.7.2.3 and 4.7.3.3 Section 4.8.2.3 and 4.8.3.3 Section 4.9.2.3 and 4.9.3.3 Section 4.10.2.3 and 4.10.3.3 Section 4.11.2.3 and 4.11.3.3 Section 4.12.2.3 and 4.12.3.3
43	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The final SPEIS should explore the potential negative environmental consequences of allowing consecutive years of emergency use on the same acreage and provide biologically sound guidelines for the limited times when such use may be justified. The current reliance on NRCS to determine plant health through site visits and forage assessments as mentioned in this and previous PEISs often does not actually occur. FSA, not NRCS, is ultimately responsible for environmental compliance on CRP.	*Document Change.* Additional analyses added to address consecutive years of emergency haying and grazing.	Section 4.2.2.3 and 4.2.3.3 Section 4.3.2.3 and 4.3.3.3 Section 4.4.2.3 and 4.4.3.3 Section 4.5.2.3 and 4.5.3.3 Section 4.6.2.3 and 4.6.3.3 Section 4.7.2.3 and 4.7.3.3 Section 4.8.2.3 and 4.8.3.3 Section 4.9.2.3 and 4.9.3.3 Section 4.10.2.3 and 4.10.3.3 Section 4.11.2.3 and 4.11.3.3 Section 4.12.2.3 and 4.12.3.3

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
44	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Emergency Haying and Grazing	FSA should explicitly state that concurrence is required from state fish and wildlife agencies and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for each emergency declaration. Concurrence should not be a onetime approval as conditions and species impacted vary annually.	*Document Change* . New section added to SPEIS describing STC role and membership. STC includes representatives from state fish and wildlife agencies and other conservation partners knowledgeable of local wildlife. Approval for allowing emergency haying and grazing is not a onetime approval.	Section 1.1.2.3 Section 2.4.3
45	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Emergency Haying and Grazing	Also, states should be allowed to approve emergency use on a subset of the additional practices, rather than all or none of them.	*Document Change* . Clarified this language in the SPEIS, authorizing emergency haying or grazing on additional CPs would be specific to the local conditions, appropriate CPs, etc. States would be able to pick which CP to authorize.	Section 2.4.3
46	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The Association is concerned that the SPEIS would only authorize haying on CP25 during drought designations. The Association strongly recommends allowing only grazing on CP25 during drought designations as grazing has fewer impacts on wildlife than haying.	*Document Change* . CP25 to be authorized for Grazing only.	Section 2.4.3
47	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Emergency Haying and Grazing	In the 2-CRP handbook, CP21 Filter strip size requirements are "up to a maximum average width of 120 feet" and the maximum width of a CP22 Riparian buffer is "the lessor of 100 feet or 30 percent of the geomorphic floodplain." Given these policies, emergency use should not be allowed on CP21 Filter strips, and the SPEIS should clarify that emergency use on CP22 Riparian buffers is only allowable in cases where the filter strip is wider than 120 feet.	*Comment Noted.* As noted in the SPEIS, emergency haying and grazing is not authorized within 120 feet of a stream or permanent water body. This restriction would remain in place for these additional CPs.	n/a
48	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Wind Turbines	The Association requests FSA include in the SPEIS an analysis of the practice of allowing the installation of wind turbines onto lands within CRP. …… We believe current FSA policy on the installation of wind turbines – broad approval for footprints up to 5 acres and refunds for access roads – is overly simplistic and does not sufficiently consider the spatial context of an enrollment, the impacts on priority species, or the purposes of the practice the contract is enrolled in. We believe there are some conservation practices and circumstances where wind turbines should not be permitted on CRP lands.	*Comment Noted* . The installation of wind turbines was previously authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill and was not changed in the 2014 Farm Bill; therefore it is not addressed this SPEIS. The installation of wind turbine(s) on CRP land must be included in the Conservation Plan. The Conservation Plan is developed by NRCS and includes any best management practices or measures to be employed to benefit and/or avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to those resources specific to those lands being proposed for enrollment.	n/a

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
49	Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	Wind Turbines	The Association would especially like to see evaluation of the following alternatives related to the installation of wind turbines with the possibility that wind turbines be prohibited on certain wildlife practices and priority zones where wind turbines are incompatible with the species, the practice, or zone was designed to benefit. • Evaluate to ensure there are no negative or cumulative impacts or conflicts to priority wildlife species, by approval of wind turbines and other large structures on lands receiving extra points for being within a general CRP wildlife priority zone. • Evaluate to ensure there are no negative impacts or conflicts to priority wildlife species by approval of wind turbines and other large structures on lands enrolled in SAFE acres focused on grassland/prairie grouse species that may be impacted by vertical structures. • Evaluate to ensure there are no negative impacts or conflicts to priority wildlife species by approval of wind towers and other large structures on other wildlife beneficial practices like CP23, CP37, or CP38.	*Comment Noted* . The installation of wind turbines was previously authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill and was not changed in the 2014 Farm Bill; therefore it is not addressed this SPEIS. The installation of wind turbine(s) on CRP land must be included in the Conservation Plan. The Conservation Plan is developed by NRCS and includes any best management practices or measures to be employed to benefit and/or avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to those resources specific to those lands being proposed for enrollment.	n/a
50	North American Grouse Partnership	Targeted Enrollment	Without clear definitions regarding which conservation practices (CP's) would be targeted for enrollments through a reverse auction process, it is difficult to determine the potential for success at enrolling new acreages. ..... Targeting of the most sensitive lands can more easily and successfully be done through the use of decision support tools—such as the Lesser Prairie Chicken Critical Habitat Assessment Tool—used to help rank applications for various programs offered by the USDA-NRCS.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives.	Section 2.4.1
51	North American Grouse Partnership	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	TGP is most concerned about mandated frequencies for managed harvesting. Allowing haying frequencies of once every three years has the potential to annually leave many acres without year-round habitat. …… Because of the "50% rule" though, it is possible that during the life of a tract's 10-year contract, less than half of the contracted acres will be allowed to provide year-round cover in a manner that generally is beneficial to wildlife.	*Comment Noted* . Managed harvesting is currently authorized once every three years. This was not changed with the 2014 Farm Bill, however, the Farm Bill does stipulate that managed harvesting must occur at least once every five years.	n/a

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
52	North American Grouse Partnership	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	The draft SPEIS also indicates that, on a national basis, managed haying occurs on a relatively low proportion of contracted acres each year. However, we would point out that program contract signups are usually cyclical in nature at the local scale. That often means that county field offices have many contracts that start and end at the same time. It also means that producers who hold those contracts are likely to conduct their mid-contract management practices in the same year. Thus, in years when a county has a particularly high percentage of contracts in a "management year," it can result in a significant portion of the would be high quality cover being destroyed simultaneously and thus unavailable for wildlife throughout that year. ..... We realize that the one-in-three-year haying frequency is already allowed in a number of states; we fear the potential for expanded detrimental effects from that policy. Mandating that states, like Colorado, increase their allowed frequency only exacerbates that potential.	*Comment Noted* . The potential local impact from simultaneous haying/grazing and mid-contract management activities on multiple contracts would be highly site specific, speculative, and unpredictable. This issue would need to be considered at the state or county level through consultation with the STC.	n/a
53	North American Grouse Partnership	Emergency Haying and Grazing	Related to our comments on Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing, we oppose allowing the authorization of emergency haying/grazing on additional conservation practices. ..... We take exception because it potentially would those encourage those activities on nearly every grassland conservation practice—including some specifically directed toward wildlife.	*Comment Noted* . FSA is proposing these additional CPs to allow better balance between flexibility during natural disasters and other emergencies and conservation. Authorizing emergency haying and grazing would still require STC approval with concurrence from state fish and wildlife agencies and other conservation partners.	n/a
54	North American Grouse Partnership	Emergency Haying and Grazing	To allow additional CP's and acreage to be impacted during drought years could limit or eliminate the program's benefits to wildlife. As described above, while that impact may be of limited-scale nationally, it can be significant locally, and those local impacts can be detrimental to local economies as well as local wildlife.	*Comment Noted* . FSA is proposing these additional CPs to allow better balance between flexibility during natural disasters and other emergencies and conservation. Authorizing emergency haying and grazing would still require STC approval with concurrence from state fish and wildlife agencies and other conservation partners.	n/a
55	North American Grouse Partnership	Emergency Haying and Grazing	We also suggest that the FSA reconsider their proposed policy on the emergency use of CP 25. The impact of haying grasslands in late summer is likely to be more pronounced than livestock grazing prescriptions developed by technical assistance from USDA-NRCS personnel. Upland birds thrive in landscapes that are structurally and compositionally diverse. "Patchiness" in grazing use can often enhance the quality of the cover for bird populations. .....emergency grazing of CP 25 acres likely will be less detrimental to bird populations than haying would be.	*Document Change.* CP25 to be authorized for Grazing only.	Section 2.4.3
56	South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks	Targeted Enrollment	The Department supports the idea of targeted enrollment of environmentally sensitive land through a reverse auction. This proposed action has potential to fill a niche demand that may not be currently covered by general CRP and continuous CRP.	*Comment Noted* .	n/a

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
57	South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	South Dakota's State Tech Committee has already established frequencies for managed harvesting and routine grazing of not more than once in five years and completed an Environmental Assessment on it in 2010. The existing frequency is within the range identified by the proposed action and Depa(meant supports it remaining unchanged.	*Comment Noted.*	n/a
58	South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks	Emergency Haying and Grazing	The Department supports the Secretary having the authority to make CP3, CP21, CP22, CP23, CP23A, CP25, CP27, CP28, CP37, CP39, and CP41 eligible for emergency haying and grazing with approval from the State Technical Committee and concurrence with Federal and State wildlife agencies during widespread drought conditions. The listed practices do not currently receive any disturbance during the length of the CRP contract. Allowing emergency haying and grazing during drought years will benefit the long-term health of the cover and increase its wildlife habitat value. Requiring approval from the State Tech Committee with concurrence from Federal and State wildlife agencies will ensure that in cases of multiple drought years the best possible management requirements are implemented to minimize unintentional consequences to wildlife populations.	*Comment Noted.*	n/a
59	National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	Grassland Enrollment	NSAC recommends that the SPEIS examine alternative scenarios for implementation of the 2 million-acre grassland reservation, which Congress created in Section 2001(d) of the 2014 Farm Bill.	*Document Change* . The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known.	Section 2.3.1
60	National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	Grassland Enrollment	The draft SPEIS leaves out any discussion of geographic scope. What would the environmental impacts of a geographically targeted grassland enrollment be versus a nationwide grassland enrollment?	*Document Change* . The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known.	Section 2.3.1
61	National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	Grassland Enrollment	The draft SPEIS does not assess the environmental impact of targeting at-risk species vs. not targeting at-risk species through the new grassland acreage reservation.	*Document Change* . The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known.	Section 2.3.1
62	National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	Grassland Enrollment	The draft SPEIS does not address how the environmental impact of the grassland reservation would change depending on whether the acres are the same as or different than acres targeted for grassland easements under the Agriculture Conservation Easement Program.	*Comment Noted* . Enrollment in either program - grassland in CRP or ACEP - is voluntary. Specific eligibility requirements are set for both programs. In both programs grasslands would be conserved. The SPEIS does not provide NEPA coverage for the newly proposed ACEP. This program will be administered by NRCS and not FSA.	n/a

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
63	National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition	Targeted Enrollment	In addition and relative to examining a reverse auction, the SPEIS should look at the alternative option of substantially increasing the weighting given to the existing cost factor within the EBI. .... A reverse auction would target CRP funds and enrollments based on cost; however, it would also exclude the other critical EBI factors, such as wildlife habitat benefits resulting from increased cover, water quality benefits resulting from reduced erosion, runoff, and leaching, etc. An alternative scenario under which there is no reverse auction—but instead the EBI cost factor is weighted close to one half of total points—would have the same general effect as a reverse auction (getting more bang for the buck) without completely discounting all of the other factors in the EBI.	*Comment Noted* . Changes to Continuous or General Sign-Up enrollment methods and land eligibility criteria are not being proposed in this SPEIS.	n/a
64	National Wildlife Federation	Grassland Enrollment	NWF believes that the SPEIS does not effectively evaluate potential ways to maximize the environmental benefits of the two million acre grassland program. We strongly recommend that FSA examine more alternative actions related to implementation of the grassland reserve. We recommend that the agency evaluate the following alternatives in the SPEIS: • Prioritizing expiring CRP acres • Considering geographic alternatives and the environmental impact of geographic targeting of CRP acres • Targeting areas that benefit candidate, threatened, or endangered species • Targeting areas that are experiencing high rates of conversion or are expected to lose large amounts of CRP over the next few years • Requiring that the land be planted to diverse native grasses and forbs to benefit wildlife and pollinators	*Document Change* . The section describing grassland enrollment and authorized activities has been revised to include draft ranking criteria. Rulemaking for this new provision is not yet complete and not all details are known.	Section 2.3.1
65	National Wildlife Federation	Targeted Enrollment	As laid out in the SPEIS, the reverse auction targets enrollment by grouping bids by conservation practice and choosing primarily based on cost, not on the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). We urge you fully take into account the environmental impacts of this kind of process, and to consider alternatives that better prioritize the environmental benefits of lands to be enrolled.	*Document Change.* Additional information provided on targeted enrollment. Land submitted for bid under the targeted enrollment method would need to meet defined eligibility criteria to meet the conservation initiative being addressed. With all other environmental factors being equal on the land offered for enrollment, the selection of bids would then come down to cost.	Section 2.4.1
66	National Wildlife Federation	Managed Harvesting and Routine Grazing Frequencies	The final SPEIS must clearly state that STC decisions on haying and grazing policies must receive concurrence from state fish and wildlife agencies, and that the Primary Nesting Season must be set according to US Fish and Wildlife Service recommendations.	*Document Change* . Section added that discusses STC policy, membership, authority, etc. STC membership includes wildlife agencies which are involved in the process at the state level and have opportunities to make recommendations on program implementation.	Section 1.1.2.3

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
67	National Wildlife Federation	Emergency Haying and Grazing	We believe that the current draft SPEIS does not adequately assess the environmental impacts of various emergency haying and grazing scenarios. For instance, we are concerned about allowing emergency haying and grazing in consecutive years on the same acres, as this does not allow grasses adequate time to recover.	*Document Change.* Additional analysis added to SPEIS to address potential impacts from consecutive years of haying or grazing. It is also important to note that STC must take local conditions into consideration when requesting emergency haying and grazing authorization.	Section 4.2.2.3 and 4.2.3.3 Section 4.3.2.3 and 4.3.3.3 Section 4.4.2.3 and 4.4.3.3 Section 4.5.2.3 and 4.5.3.3 Section 4.6.2.3 and 4.6.3.3 Section 4.7.2.3 and 4.7.3.3 Section 4.8.2.3 and 4.8.3.3 Section 4.9.2.3 and 4.9.3.3 Section 4.10.2.3 and 4.10.3.3 Section 4.11.2.3 and 4.11.3.3 Section 4.12.2.3 and 4.12.3.3
68	National Wildlife Federation	Wind Turbines	We urge FSA to include an analysis of the wildlife impacts of allowing wind turbines on CRP land in the final SPEIS.	*Comment Noted* . The installation of wind turbines was previously authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill and was not changed in the 2014 Farm Bill; therefore it is not addressed this SPEIS. The installation of wind turbine(s) on CRP land must be included in the Conservation Plan. The Conservation Plan is developed by NRCS and includes any best management practices or measures to be employed to benefit and/or avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts to those resources specific to those lands being proposed for enrollment.	n/a
69	National Wildlife Federation	Early Termination	The final SEIS should assess environmental impacts of this early out policy, and assess alternative scenarios, such as further limiting land eligible for early contract termination. Additionally, we urge FSA to monitor the impacts of early contract termination to better understand the ecological implications over time.	*Document Change.* Section has been revised to include additional information on the CRP acreage eligible for this opportunity. Added a table detailing the acreage of the various CPs installed and this provides a better description of the type of habitat that could leave the program. This option is only applicable in fiscal year 2015.	Section 2.2.4
70	National Wildlife Federation	Maximum Enrollment Cap	With so many acres being lost from the program over the next few years, we urge FSA to work to find ways to maximize the wildlife benefits of CRP. We recommend, for instance, focusing on outreach to high priority wildlife areas to ensure strong enrollment and re-enrollment. We also strongly support FSA's continued commitment to the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program, and State Acres for Wildlife, as well as holding general signups with enough frequency to allow expiring acres of high priority wildlife habitat to re-enroll. We also urge the agency to consider making revisions to the EBI that maximize wildlife and other environmental benefits.	*Comment Noted* . The reduced maximum enrollment cap was a primary driver for proposing a new targeted enrollment method to help ensure maximum wildlife, water, and soil benefits could be realized by the program despite the reduced acreage.	n/a

No.	Agency	Category	Comment	Response	Final SPEIS Section where comment is addressed
71	Environmental Working Group	Targeted Enrollment	USDA has proposed "Targeted Enrollment," the SPEIS failed to identify specific areas and practices to be targeted as preferred alternatives and to consider other areas and practices. In addition, USDA failed to assess the performance of continuous enrollment and CREP and to consider alternatives that would enhance the environmental benefits of these programs.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives. No changes to CREP or other continuous enrollment programs are being proposed by FSA, therefore those issues are considered outside the scope of the SPEIS.	Section 2.4.1
72	Environmental Working Group	Alternatives	This SPEIS failed to consider reasonable alternatives within the agency's discretion, including designating specific areas for Targeted Enrollment, identifying effective alternative practices and other reforms that would enhance Targeted Enrollment and improve the performance and effectiveness of continuous enrollment.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives.	Section 2.4.1
73	Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation	Targeted Enrollment	If FSA decides to use this targeted approach, we request the opportunity for each state to provide input on areas of interest to target CRP acres.	*Document Change* . Additional information provided on how the program may be used. FSA proposes to target land each year based on local, regional, or national resource concerns, much like they currently do with other conservation initiatives.	Section 2.4.1
74	Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation	Emergency Haying and Grazing	If CP-25 is left on the list of practices which allow emergency haying and grazing, we would like to see the "haying only" requirement for CP-25 taken out of the SPEIS, allowing for grazing or haying during emergency situations. We think FSA could leave it up to the State Technical Committees to determine if only haying would be allowed on each CP, making it a regional decision instead of program wide.	*Document Change.* CP25 to be authorized for Grazing only.	Section 2.4.3
75	National Grain and Feed Association	Targeted Enrollment	NGFA sincerely hopes it is not the intention of FSA to enroll highly productive land in CRP.	*Comment Noted* . The intent of CRP has never been to enroll highly productive agricultural land. Land eligible for enrollment in CRP must meet several environmental criteria.	n/a

APPENDIX E
ELIGIBLE ACREAGE FOR EARLY CONTRACT TERMINATION IN FISCAL YEAR 2015

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ACREAGE ELIGIBLE FOR EARLY OUT

STATE	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP10	CP11	Total Eligible	Total CRP	Percent Eligible
ALABAMA	111	179	13,616	1,561	4,682	20,150	307,772	6.5%
ARKANSAS	103	997	1,263	918	4,381	7,662	236,058	3.2%
CALIFORNIA	-	-	-	10,098	277	10,376	83,114	12.5%
COLORADO	719	65,077	16	20,034	15	85,861	1,988,096	4.3%
CONNECTICUT	23	31	-	3	-	57	58	98.3%
DELAWARE	-	-	-	23	-	23	6,175	0.4%
FLORIDA	-	-	1,431	256	4,906	6,593	43,004	15.3%
GEORGIA	-	-	4,285	121	7,343	11,749	305,053	3.9%
IDAHO	3,009	4,990	596	44,190	244	53,028	604,029	8.8%
ILLINOIS	13,371	9,054	193	5,001	3,782	31,401	920,342	3.4%
INDIANA	4,359	5,142	116	6,810	3,151	19,579	239,502	8.2%
IOWA	1,913	10,385	55	10,539	1,911	24,802	1,457,518	1.7%
KANSAS	783	138,562	3	56,951	67	196,366	2,271,468	8.6%
KENTUCKY	1,026	2,618	2	165	250	4,060	276,899	1.5%
LOUISIANA	10	823	5,035	210	4,427	10,504	308,391	3.4%
MAINE	157	-	12	1,391	90	1,650	8,605	19.2%
MARYLAND	277	528	49	618	160	1,631	70,136	2.3%
MICHIGAN	7,090	9,209	1,283	15,073	1,790	34,444	175,185	19.7%
MINNESOTA	34,784	36,871	3,587	38,822	6,935	120,998	1,299,533	9.3%
MISSISSIPPI	58	134	9,848	1,322	30,712	42,073	759,117	5.5%
MISSOURI	6,343	13,533	76	7,679	2,683	30,314	1,039,657	2.9%
MONTANA	58,830	262,553	38	191,102	332	512,856	1,754,964	29.2%
NEBRASKA	1,438	53,056	61	13,542	296	68,392	843,701	8.1%
NEW JERSEY	98	21	46	-	-	165	2,086	7.9%
NEW MEXICO	399	1,820	-	1,840	-	4,058	434,735	0.9%
NEW YORK	2,118	364	159	6,789	266	9,695	44,607	21.7%
NORTH CAROLINA	16	237	1,835	70	815	2,973	101,473	2.9%
NORTH DAKOTA	40,924	22,390	19	199,059	341	262,734	1,619,317	16.2%
OHIO	5,409	9,164	194	12,975	1,293	29,034	278,409	10.4%

STATE	CP1	CP2	CP3	CP10	CP11	Total Eligible	Total CRP	Percent Eligible
OKLAHOMA	173	53,099	25	21,635	78	75,011	756,939	9.9%
OREGON	19,343	42,389	548	25,231	4	87,516	551,111	15.9%
PENNSYLVANIA	260	42	7	468	65	841	174,667	0.5%
PUERTO RICO	-	-	-	-	19	19	1,243	1.5%
SOUTH CAROLINA	44	-	6,911	88	4,002	11,044	112,260	9.8%
SOUTH DAKOTA	7,053	36,820	18	25,854	185	69,929	932,566	7.5%
TENNESSEE	288	2,910	1,160	604	250	5,211	148,230	3.5%
TEXAS	479	303,992	63	126,308	916	431,758	3,176,613	13.6%
UTAH	4,641	1,641	-	1,639	-	7,921	176,919	4.5%
VIRGINIA	300	560	2,245	323	686	4,115	56,142	7.3%
WASHINGTON	27,819	277,303	241	37,709	-	343,073	1,395,724	24.6%
WEST VIRGINIA	88	-	5	-	-	93	6,372	1.5%
WISCONSIN	1,762	7,138	965	7,023	5,086	21,975	262,368	8.4%
WYOMING	736	542	5	308	1	1,591	196,848	0.8%
TOTALS[1]	246,349	1,374,172	56,011	894,350	92,441	2,663,325	25,427,006	10.5%

Note: [1] Total CRP shown in this table does not match total CRP enrollment since not all States have acreage eligible for early termination.

APPENDIX F
REVERSE AUCTION SIMULATION FOR CRP

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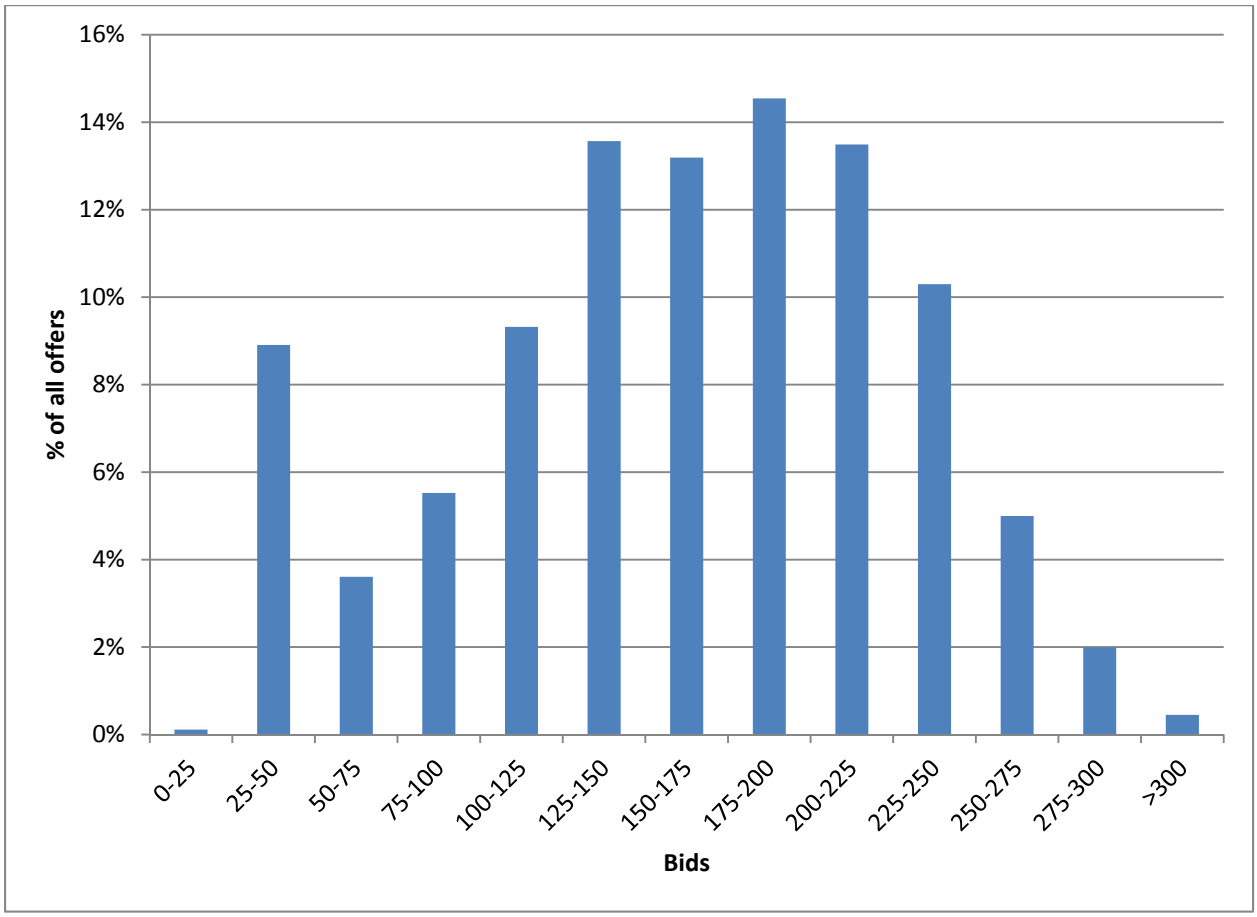
To illustrate the impact of a reverse auction vis-à-vis a more conventional continuous CRP signup, we consider the offers signed up under the Highly Erodible Land (HEL) Initiative in 2014 and compare them to those in an alternate scenario that involves a reverse auction.

The HEL initiative focused on enrolling lands on which the potential rate of soil loss was at least 20 times the maximum rate at which crop productivity can be sustained indefinitely. The 2,661 offers resulted in 97,143 acres enrolled under continuous signup with annual payments totaling $13.1 million. Figure 1 presents the distribution of the bid amounts associated with these offers, which we assume to be equal to the annual payment rates set by FSA. We refer to this as the baseline scenario.

Figure 1: Histogram of bids for enrolled HEL initiative offers, 2014 signup



For this baseline scenario, we make two assumptions:

- The annual payment rates that FSA sets are unbiased, imprecise estimates of what landowners' are willing to accept (WTA) to enroll land in the program (i.e., they are right on average).
- If an offer is submitted, WTA must be less than the annual payment rate. If a landowner does not submit an offer, WTA is greater than the annual payment rate.

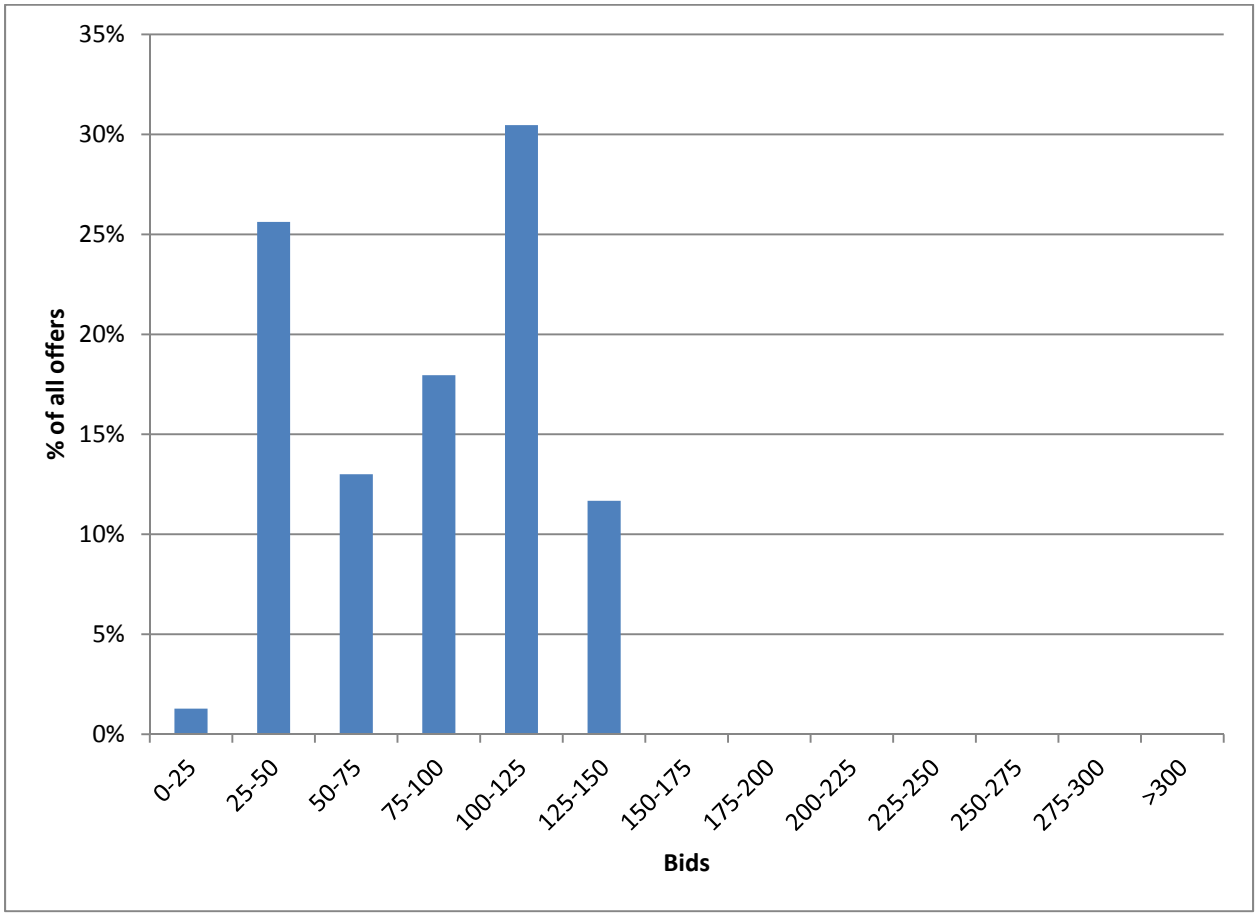
We then ask the questions, "Who would have submitted an offer and what would have the bid been were a reverse auction used in 2014 for the HEL initiative?" To address them, we assume that a landowner's

bid equals their willingness to accept (WTA) in a competitive reverse auction and then develop a simple alternate scenario according to the following rules:

- Those who submitted offers in the baseline would still do so in the alternate scenario. Their WTA and, thus, bid is 0-25% less than their annual payment rate (the specific difference for each offer being drawn from a uniform distribution).
- Since the annual payment rate under the baseline scenario is as likely to be too low as too high, the pool of offers is doubled to reflect those that had not been submitted because the annual payment rate was less than WTA. For each enrolled offer in the baseline, we create an otherwise identical offer with a WTA and, thus, bid that is 0-25% greater than the annual payment rate they would have gotten.

In the alternate scenario, the 5,322 bids from the expanded pool of offers are ranked and the lowest ones accepted until the number of acres enrolled in the baseline scenario (i.e., the 97, 122 actually enrolled) is matched. The reverse auction results in 1,799 offers signed up with annual payments totaling $6.3 million. See Figure 2 for a histogram of payment rates.

Figure 2: Histogram of bids for enrolled HEL initiative offers, reverse auction scenario



In this simple illustrative example, a reverse auction stimulates demand for the program and competition among bidders to the degree that a 52% savings is realized by the Federal government.

APPENDIX G
CRP ACREAGE HARVESTED OR GRAZED BY STATE, 2009-2013

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State	Year	Total CRP Acres	Managed Harvesting		Managed Grazing		Routine Grazing	
			Acres	*%*	*Acres*	*%*	*Acres*	*%*
Alabama	2009	417,539	74	0.02%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2010	398,425	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	361,233	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2012	328,617	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	312,045	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Alaska	2009	25,823	128	0.49%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2010	18,686	368	1.97%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	19,010	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2012	17,992	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	17,992	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
California	2009	126,000	0	0.00%	553	0.44%	-	-
	2010	124,504	0	0.00%	6,570	5.28%	-	-
	2011	102,390	0	0.00%	5,354	5.23%	0	0.00%
	2012	93,604	0	0.00%	3,434	3.67%	0	0.00%
	2013	83,014	0	0.00%	12,817	15.44%	0	0.00%
Colorado	2009	2,017,677	20,576	1.02%	8,577	0.43%	-	-
	2010	2,100,643	6,923	0.33%	4,297	0.20%	-	-
	2011	2,182,756	33,334	1.53%	8,839	0.40%	694	0.03%
	2012	2,081,521	8,164	0.39%	1,751	0.08%	49	0.00%
	2013	2,002,168	3,000	0.15%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Idaho	2009	714,442	501	0.07%	2,745	0.38%	-	-
	2010	664,431	323	0.05%	676	0.10%	-	-
	2011	647,250	7,507	1.16%	0	0.00%	498	0.08%
	2012	623,191	1,284	0.21%	701	0.11%	0	0.00%
	2013	606,374	990	0.16%	2,396	0.40%	0	0.00%
Illinois	2009	1,013,376	2,017	0.20%	136	0.01%	-	-
	2010	1,031,117	3,546	0.34%	286	0.03%	-	-
	2011	1,029,108	7,447	0.72%	310	0.03%	0	0.00%
	2012	996,551	19,150	1.92%	122	0.01%	0	0.00%
	2013	925,480	4,303	0.46%	95	0.01%	0	0.00%
Indiana	2009	285,040	338	0.12%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2010	286,451	274	0.10%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	279,965	448	0.16%	27	0.01%	0	0.00%
	2012	265,106	1,930	0.73%	44	0.02%	0	0.00%
	2013	240,788	343	0.14%	32	0.01%	0	0.00%
Iowa	2009	1,623,242	30,475	1.88%	3,126	0.19%	-	-
	2010	1,680,740	26,210	1.56%	1,963	0.12%	-	-
	2011	1,658,024	52,346	3.16%	3,163	0.19%	0	0.00%
	2012	1,531,057	43,066	2.81%	2,790	0.18%	21	0.00%
	2013	1,465,696	35,854	2.45%	1,251	0.09%	35	0.00%
Kansas	2009	2,781,732	46,383	1.67%	15,266	0.55%	-	-
	2010	2,768,509	42,527	1.54%	13,163	0.48%	-	-
	2011	2,536,566	87,225	3.44%	4,419	0.17%	858	0.03%
	2012	2,374,083	10,931	0.46%	881	0.04%	0	0.00%
	2013	2,288,739	13,640	0.60%	3,766	0.16%	1	0.00%
Kentucky	2009	381,597	136	0.04%	0	0.00%	-	-

State	Year	Total CRP Acres	Managed Harvesting		Managed Grazing		Routine Grazing	
			Acres	*%*	*Acres*	*%*	*Acres*	*%*
	2010	363,760	479	0.13%	142	0.04%	-	-
	2011	334,988	675	0.20%	99	0.03%	0	0.00%
	2012	303,594	2,061	0.68%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	279,976	19	0.01%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Michigan	2009	231,348	127	0.05%	8	0.00%	-	-
	2010	228,482	238	0.10%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	222,490	35	0.02%	8	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2012	209,105	1,695	0.81%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	177,826	366	0.21%	12	0.01%	0	0.00%
Minnesota	2009	1,641,877	36,058	2.20%	1,189	0.07%	-	-
	2010	1,645,626	16,050	0.98%	647	0.04%	-	-
	2011	1,566,657	20,663	1.32%	1,011	0.06%	0	0.00%
	2012	1,404,008	23,567	1.68%	1,098	0.08%	11	0.00%
	2013	1,310,196	37,648	2.87%	832	0.06%	0	0.00%
Mississippi	2009	859,125	58	0.01%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2010	847,191	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	829,425	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2012	781,883	55	0.01%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	762,160	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Missouri	2009	1,390,304	29,419	2.12%	2,422	0.17%	-	-
	2010	1,366,327	32,221	2.36%	2,241	0.16%	-	-
	2011	1,293,768	68,776	5.32%	3,951	0.31%	1,950	0.15%
	2012	1,136,489	135,020	11.88%	4,702	0.41%	292	0.03%
	2013	1,045,070	46,747	4.47%	1,314	0.13%	159	0.02%
Montana	2009	3,084,319	488,103	15.83%	82,788	2.68%	-	-
	2010	2,894,154	96,551	3.34%	33,970	1.17%	-	-
	2011	2,507,415	153,793	6.13%	31,056	1.24%	0	0.00%
	2012	2,009,474	42,630	2.12%	25,040	1.25%	0	0.00%
	2013	1,768,007	234,324	13.25%	42,816	2.42%	0	0.00%
Nebraska	2009	1,091,238	37,773	3.46%	8,186	0.75%	-	-
	2010	1,094,328	33,759	3.08%	3,395	0.31%	-	-
	2011	1,005,973	65,450	6.51%	11,945	1.19%	2,869	0.29%
	2012	898,967	102,196	11.37%	10,093	1.12%	1,128	0.13%
	2013	848,043	23,431	2.76%	5,536	0.65%	12	0.00%
New Mexico	2009	537,930	243	0.05%	3,750	0.70%	-	-
	2010	453,822	653	0.14%	3,026	0.67%	-	-
	2011	420,560	8,816	2.10%	174	0.04%	0	0.00%
	2012	415,671	222	0.05%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	437,890	254	0.06%	5,041	1.15%	0	0.00%
New York	2009	53,163	67	0.13%	16	0.03%	-	-
	2010	52,960	34	0.06%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	51,580	398	0.77%	19	0.04%	0	0.00%
	2012	47,802	412	0.86%	22	0.05%	0	0.00%
	2013	44,773	16	0.03%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
North Dakota	2009	2,697,441	300,820	11.15%	5,567	0.21%	-	-
	2010	2,657,716	176,178	6.63%	4,523	0.17%	-	-

State	Year	Total CRP Acres	Managed Harvesting		Managed Grazing		Routine Grazing	
			Acres	*%*	*Acres*	*%*	*Acres*	*%*
	2011	2,392,723	217,012	9.07%	4,419	0.18%	0	0.00%
	2012	1,803,938	191,881	10.64%	3,778	0.21%	287	0.02%
	2013	1,637,692	140,250	8.56%	2,721	0.17%	42	0.00%
Ohio	2009	341,475	541	0.16%	637	0.19%	-	-
	2010	341,927	545	0.16%	52	0.02%	-	-
	2011	337,689	585	0.17%	55	0.02%	0	0.00%
	2012	320,564	1,657	0.52%	78	0.02%	0	0.00%
	2013	281,946	1,035	0.37%	24	0.01%	0	0.00%
Oklahoma	2009	861,671	53,114	6.16%	32,484	3.77%	-	-
	2010	869,230	7,362	0.85%	5,651	0.65%	-	-
	2011	828,738	61,367	7.40%	13,397	1.62%	5,454	0.66%
	2012	792,918	6,069	0.77%	2,794	0.35%	0	0.00%
	2013	761,944	9,799	1.29%	1,982	0.26%	1,025	0.13%
Oregon	2009	547,366	325	0.06%	1,306	0.24%	-	-
	2010	551,392	215	0.04%	834	0.15%	-	-
	2011	547,088	996	0.18%	1,716	0.31%	0	0.00%
	2012	546,054	606	0.11%	437	0.08%	443	0.08%
	2013	550,476	1,032	0.19%	1,581	0.29%	0	0.00%
Pennsylvania	2009	219,237	35	0.02%	35	0.02%	-	-
	2010	221,226	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	204,415	0	0.00%	1	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2012	184,825	66	0.04%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	176,752	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	22	0.01%
South Dakota	2009	1,079,870	113,098	10.47%	4,284	0.40%	-	-
	2010	1,153,762	65,856	5.71%	4,211	0.36%	-	-
	2011	1,103,113	60,889	5.52%	3,466	0.31%	0	0.00%
	2012	979,988	55,472	5.66%	1,085	0.11%	8	0.00%
	2013	937,606	46,919	5.00%	1,637	0.17%	0	0.00%
Tennessee	2009	217,577	81	0.04%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2010	206,110	559	0.27%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	191,655	642	0.34%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2012	177,421	4,430	2.50%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	149,776	317	0.21%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Texas	2009	3,296,447	15,558	0.47%	68,560	2.08%	-	-
	2010	3,462,620	9,525	0.28%	43,747	1.26%	-	-
	2011	3,367,692	51,181	1.52%	29,638	0.88%	0	0.00%
	2012	3,284,702	54	0.00%	4,744	0.14%	864	0.03%
	2013	3,187,582	6,233	0.20%	13,976	0.44%	5,581	0.18%
Utah	2009	145,423	0	0.00%	3,146	2.16%	-	-
	2010	174,955	0	0.00%	2,834	1.62%	-	-
	2011	178,944	249	0.14%	4,235	2.37%	0	0.00%
	2012	177,335	0	0.00%	28	0.02%	282	0.16%
	2013	177,823	0	0.00%	1,761	0.99%	4,568	2.57%
Virginia	2009	62,509	12	0.02%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2010	63,291	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	61,747	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

State	Year	Total CRP Acres	Managed Harvesting		Managed Grazing		Routine Grazing	
			Acres	*%*	*Acres*	*%*	*Acres*	*%*
	2012	59,323	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	57,120	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Washington	2009	1,439,780	2,041	0.14%	2,121	0.15%	-	-
	2010	1,432,578	2,825	0.20%	194	0.01%	-	-
	2011	1,488,526	2,048	0.14%	1,694	0.11%	0	0.00%
	2012	1,461,546	5,269	0.36%	680	0.05%	0	0.00%
	2013	1,375,513	5,740	0.42%	2,256	0.16%	256	0.02%
West Virginia	2009	5,176	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2010	5,715	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	-	-
	2011	6,090	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2012	6,290	40	0.63%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	6,376	40	0.62%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Wisconsin	2009	429,096	8,131	1.89%	256	0.06%	-	-
	2010	403,508	5,042	1.25%	100	0.02%	-	-
	2011	372,377	9,327	2.50%	146	0.04%	0	0.00%
	2012	321,103	33,154	10.33%	432	0.13%	0	0.00%
	2013	265,265	12,255	4.62%	166	0.06%	0	0.00%
Wyoming	2009	208,053	2,246	1.08%	478	0.23%	-	-
	2010	226,079	937	0.41%	2,042	0.90%	-	-
	2011	215,729	4,791	2.22%	2,031	0.94%	1,352	0.63%
	2012	196,749	77	0.04%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
	2013	196,937	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

APPENDIX H
ALLOWABLE FREQUENCIES FOR HAYING AND GRAZING AND PRIMARY NESTING SEASON BY STATE

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State	Primary Nesting Season	Managed Harvesting Allowable Frequency	Managed Grazing Allowable Frequency[1]
Alabama	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Alaska	May 15 – Jun 25	1/3	1/3
Arizona	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/10	1/10
Arkansas	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
California	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/10	1/3
Colorado	Mar 15 – Jul 15	1/10	1/5
Connecticut	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Delaware	Apr 15 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Florida	Mar 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Georgia	Apr 1 – Aug 31	1/3	1/3
Hawaii		1/3	1/3
Idaho*	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/5	1/5
Illinois	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Indiana	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Iowa	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Kansas*	Apr 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Kentucky	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Louisiana	Apr 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Maine	May 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Maryland	Apr 15 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Massachusetts	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Michigan	Apr 1 – Jul 31	1/3	1/3
Minnesota (north)	Jun 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Minnesota (south)	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Mississippi	Apr 1 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Missouri	May 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Montana*	May 15 – Jul 15	1/5	1/5
Nebraska*	May 1 – Jul 15	1/5	1/3
Nevada	May 1 – Jul 15	1/10	1/10
New Hampshire	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
New Jersey	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
New Mexico*	Mar 1 – Jul 1	1/5	1/3
New York	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
North Carolina	Apr 15 – Sep 15	1/3	1/3
North Dakota*	Apr 15 – Aug 1	1/5	1/5
Ohio	Mar 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Oklahoma*	May 1 – Jul 1	1/3	1/3
Oregon (east)*	Mar 1 – Jul 15	1/5	1/5
Oregon (west)*	Mar 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Pennsylvania	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Rhode Island	Apr 1 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
South Carolina	Apr 1 – Sep 1	1/3	1/3
South Dakota*	May 1 – Aug 1	1/5	1/5
Tennessee	Apr 15 – Jul 1	1/3	1/3
Texas*	Mar 1 – Jul 1 (haying) March 1 – Jun 1 (grazing)	1/3	1/3
Utah*	Apr 1 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Vermont	Apr 15 – Jul 31	1/3	1/3
Virginia	Apr 15 – Aug 15	1/3	1/3
Washington (east) *	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/5	1/5
Washington (west)*	Apr 1 – Jul 1	1/3	1/3
West Virginia	Mar 15 – Jul 15	1/3	1/3
Wisconsin	May 15 – Aug 1	1/3	1/3
Wyoming*	May 15 – Jul 15	1/5	1/5

Notes:

* These states have a state specific EA that determined Managed Haying and Grazing Frequency and/or Primary Nesting Season dates.

[1] Routine Grazing frequencies are the same as managed grazing frequencies.

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