



The Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

A Partnership between the United States Department of Agriculture
and the State of Illinois

Commonly Asked Questions

What is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)?

CREP is an enhanced version of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The CREP Program is a Federal, State and Local partnership designed to retire frequently flooded and environmentally sensitive cropland in order to achieve restoration and long-term protection of those areas. In Illinois, landowners implement conservation practices in the eligible CREP watersheds to reduce sedimentation and nutrients, improve water quality, and to create and enhance critical habitat for fish and wildlife populations.

Who is Eligible?

Producers and private landowners, if they owned or have had an interest in land for a minimum of one year in the Illinois or Kaskaskia River Watershed, are eligible if the land meets at least one of the following criteria:

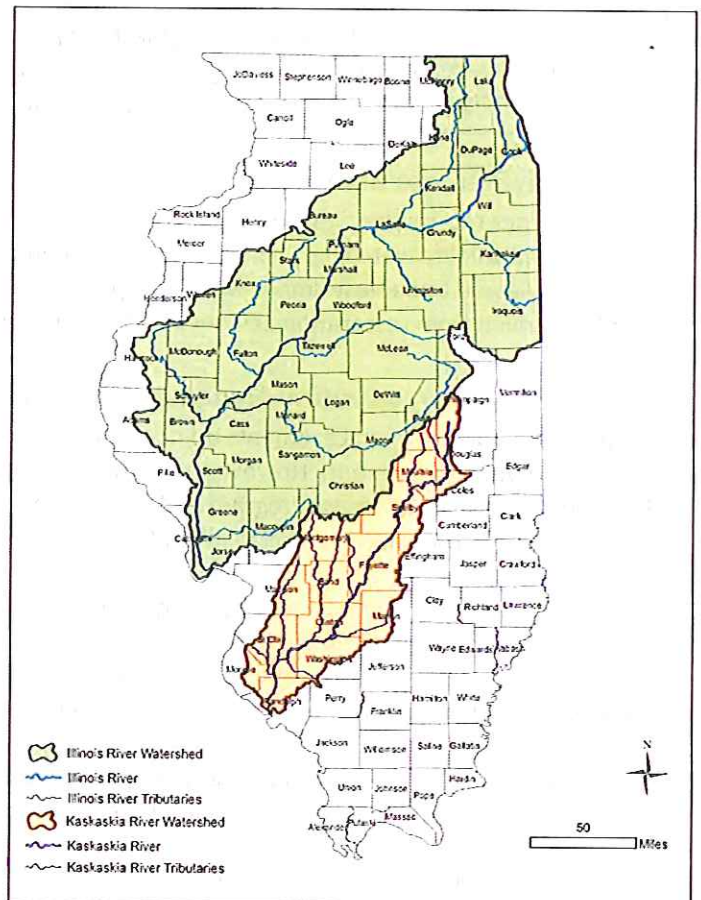
- Is in the 100-year floodplain;
- Qualifies as wetlands, wetlands farmed under natural conditions, or prior converted wetlands.
- Is highly erodible land (HEL) with an erodibility index of 8 or greater adjacent to the 100-year floodplain.

The cropping history requirement is 4 out of 6 years from 2002 to 2007. The eligible area includes all or a part of these 68 counties:

Adams, Bond, Brown, Bureau, Calhoun, Cass, Champaign, Christian, Clinton, Coles, Cook, DeKalb, DeWitt, Douglas, DuPage, Effingham, Fayette, Ford, Fulton, Greene, Grundy, Hancock, Henderson, Henry, Iroquois, Jefferson, Jersey, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Knox, Lake, LaSalle, Lee, Livingston, Logan, McDonough, McHenry, McLean, Macon, Macoupin, Madison, Marion, Marshall, Mason, Menard, Monroe, Montgomery, Morgan, Moultrie, Peoria, Perry, Piatt, Pike, Putnam, Randolph, St. Clair, Sangamon, Schuyler, Scott, Shelby, Stark, Tazewell, Vermilion, Warren, Washington, Will, and Woodford.

What are the enrollment options?

- 14-15 year Federal CREP contract
- Federal CREP contract + 15-year State Conservation Easement
- Federal CREP contract + 35-year State Conservation Easement
- Federal CREP contract + Permanent State Conservation Easement



CREP is restoring large, contiguous land corridors to native vegetation and providing permanent protection along Illinois' rivers and streams.

Federal:

- 30% bonus rate above the weighted average Soil Rental Rate on lands enrolled in riparian practices or wetland restorations
- 20% bonus rate above the weighted average Soil Rental Rate on lands enrolled in HEL practices
- Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) and Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) on eligible practices
- 50% cost share reimbursement on approved conservation practices
- Landowner receives annual rental payments for life of Federal CREP contract

State:

- 50% cost share reimbursement on lands enrolled in State Permanent Easement option
- 40% cost share reimbursement on lands enrolled in 15-year and 35-year State Conservation Easements
- One-time lump sum payment determined by a formula based on the weighted average Soil Rental Rate (without bonus rate) and the State option selected by landowner
- Landowner receives lump sum payment once State Conservation Easement has been executed

CREP is a voluntary, incentive-based approach to conservation. Implementation at the local level has made the Illinois CREP program one of the most successful in the Nation.

More than 90% of land in Illinois is privately owned. Programs, like CREP, are essential to addressing environmental issues of both local and national significance.

What restrictions are there on land enrolled in a State Conservation Easement?

The land may not go back into row crop production or agricultural uses unless specifically allowed in the Conservation Plan of Operation (CPO). The land may not be developed; no permanent structures or roads may be built on enrolled property. Existing roads can remain if approved by IDNR.

What activities are allowed on land enrolled in a State Conservation Easement?

The landowner retains the right to use enrolled property for recreational purposes, including hunting, fishing, primitive camping, and wildlife watching. Landowners also retain ownership of land, become eligible for reduced property taxes, are allowed to harvest timber with an approved Forest Management Plan, and are allowed to receive any future benefits derived from restoration activities such as carbon sequestration.

Does a State Conservation Easement grant access to the public?

No, the State Conservation Easements do not grant public access. This is guaranteed in the CREP Conservation Easement. However, the landowner may grant access or participate in the Illinois Recreational Access Program and State agency personnel and SWCD staff has the authority to access lands enrolled in CREP to perform normal duties.

By implementing conservation practices, landowners reduce nitrogen loading to the Mississippi River, helping to reduce hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

The CREP Program is administered by many partners. The local USDA Service Centers house the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). These agencies work together to administer the Federal and State sides of the program. They determine eligibility for enrollment and provide technical assistance for approved conservation practices. FSA administers the Federal side of CREP as they do for regular CRP. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) administers the State side and also provides technical assistance. Many other agencies, including the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), provide support with marketing, monitoring, and program policy.

For more information or to sign up, visit your local USDA Service Center, or go online at

<http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/conservation/CREP>

Illinois CREP Partners

