

Minnesota Fact Sheet

Alternative Use of Restored Wetlands on Expired CRP



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For over 25 years the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has successfully established diverse wildlife habitat on marginal cropland. Many acres in CRP land retirement contracts have expired or will expire in the near future.

On many of these contracts, landowners chose to restore previously converted wetlands through activities such as breaking existing tile lines, installing water control structures, or replacing drainage tile with non-perforated tile. These restored wetlands not only provide wildlife habitat, but also improve water quality by trapping sediment from farmland runoff, and reduce flooding by minimizing peak flow events in water courses.

In other situations, CRP lands that are situated on wet soil types have, over the course of the contract, naturally reverted to wetlands. These lands may contain historic drainage improvements which no longer function properly or may now have standing water or tree and brush cover.

Landowners with expired CRP contracts can choose to return these acres to pre-contract cropland conditions; however, in some cases this may require considerable out of pocket expenses by the landowner. USDA does not provide funding to “undo” conservation measures established through CRP. Likewise, USDA does not provide funding to maintain non-functioning drainage systems or remove woody brush from expired acres.

One option available to landowners with expired CRP that contains restored wetlands is to utilize these sites to “mitigate” for current or future impacts when other wetlands are converted for agricultural uses. The mitigation process allows a landowner to make drainage improvements and crop wetlands on more productive land, or land in more desirable locations, while replacing and offsetting the lost wetland values.

Landowners with expired CRP that pursue this alternative could use the site as wetland mitigation for their own projects, or deposit “credits” in the Agricultural Wetland Bank. The Ag Wetland Bank can provide a monetary return to the landowner while helping other farmers better

utilize lands more suited to crop production *and* preserving the original conservation investment that was made by CRP. Additionally, where applicable, wetlands with expired CRP contracts could potentially be used to quickly resolve existing Swampbuster violations.

Landowners who choose to establish an Ag Wetland Bank site and sell their restored wetland credits are responsible for setting the selling price of their banked credits. The actual price received can vary due to market demand, but generally speaking, restored wetland credits in the Ag Wetland Bank are expected to sell for at least the value of land in that area. For example, if cropland in your area sells for \$5000 an acre, an acre of wetland mitigation credit could be worth \$5,000 or more. This is a private transaction where the landowner maintains ownership of the property but sells wetland credits through the bank to another landowner who needs those credits for mitigation. In such instances, the wetland bank is a benefit to both landowners.

Landowners interested in using restored CRP wetland acres for wetland mitigation should contact the local NRCS office. NRCS and the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) have developed procedures for the Ag Wetland Bank. Wetland mitigation bank sites must be approved locally and certified by BWSR.



Example Map of Expired CRP Land with Restored Wetlands