

# Wetlands reserve program receives Federal funding

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On May 13 the President signed the new farm bill. Under the Conservation Title of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill), the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) was reauthorized. The 2002 Farm Bill has expanded funding available to Wetlands Reserve Program. Congress authorized the budget at \$17 million for the program over the next six years. Since 1995, Kansas landowners and Tribes have enrolled over 10,500 acres. Currently, over one million acres are enrolled nationally. The final rules for the program are now being written.

The following questions and answers are offered to help explain and changes made by the 2002 Farm Bill.

• What is the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)?

It is a voluntary program offering landowners financial and technical assistance to restore and protect wetlands and associated uplands through permanent easements, 30-year easements, and long-term restoration agreements. The program is designed to achieve maximum wetland functions and values while obtaining optimum wildlife habitat.

• How did the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill) change the program?

The primary changes are: Raised the total acreage enrollment cap to 2,275,000 acres; directed the Secretary of Agriculture to enroll, to the maximum extent practicable, 250,000 acres per calendar year; and added an exemption to the 12-month ownership requirement for landowners who exercised, their right to redemption after foreclosure.

• What land is eligible for the program?

Eligible land must be restorable and be suitable for providing wildlife benefits. This includes: wetlands cleared or drained for farming, pasture, or timber production; certain adjacent lands that contribute significantly to wetland functions and values; previously restored wetlands that need long-term protection; upland areas needed to provide an adequate buffer or that contribute to creating a manageable boundary; drained wooded wetlands; existing or restorable riparian habitat corridors that connect protected wetlands; and certain lands substantially altered by

flooding.

• What enrollment options are available in Wetlands Reserve Program?

The program offers three enrollment options:

**Permanent Easement.** Easement payments for this option equal the lowest of three amounts: The agricultural value of the land, an established payment cap, or an amount offered by the landowner. In addition to paying for the easement, United States Department of Agriculture pays 100 percent of the costs of restoring the wetland.

**30-Year Easement.** Easement payments through this option are 75 percent of what would be paid for a permanent easement. The department of agriculture also pays 75 percent of restoration costs.

**Restoration Cost-Share Agreement.** This is an agreement (generally for a minimum of 10 years) to reestablish degraded or lost wetland habitat. The department pays 75 percent of the cost of the restoration activity. This enrollment option does not place an easement on the property.

\* Do you have to be a landowner to participate?

Only landowners and Tribes can participate in the Wetlands Reserve Program. For easement projects, eligible landowners are those who can provide clear title to the land and, with some exceptions, those who have owned the property for 12 months prior to filing an application. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office for more information about this provision. To participate in a long-term agreement, landowners must show evidence of ownership since these agreements do not involve the transfer of land rights.

• How does a landowner or Tribe participate?

Applications are accepted continuously. To participate, landowners and Tribes submit an application with their local Natural Resource Conservation Service office or conservation district office.

• How are applications selected?

Applications are ranked and selected at the state level. The ranking and selection criteria are established at the state level within broad national guidelines. Interested persons can obtain ranking and selection criteria through local Natural Resource Conservation Service offices.

• What are a participant's respon-

sibilities, and rights under a Wetlands Reserve Program easement?

When a landowner or Tribe enrolls in one of the easement options, the landowner or Tribe is selling a real property interest to the United States. After an easement is recorded in the local land records office, the landowner or Tribe retains ownership and responsibility for the land, including any property taxes.

The landowner or Tribe: controls access to the land; has the right to hunt and fish and pursue other undeveloped recreational uses; and may sell or lease land enrolled in the program.

Participating landowners and Tribes may request other uses, such as haying, grazing, or harvesting timber under certain conditions. Requests are approved if Natural Resource Conservation Service determines that the activity further enhances or protects the purposes for which the easement was acquired. Requests for compatible uses may be made throughout the life of the easement or agreement.

• How is an easement value determined?

Easement values generally are determined by a professional appraisal of the agricultural value of the land, a geographical area rate cap established by Natural Resource Conservation Service at the state level, or an amount offered by the landowner.

• Is there a limit on the number of acres a landowner may enroll in the program?

There is no national limitation on the amount of land that can be offered for the program. However, a state may establish an acreage enrollment limitation. Contact the local Natural Resource Conservation Service office to find out whether there are acreage limitations in your state.

• Does the applicant need to hire a closing agent, appraiser, surveyor, or lawyer?

No. Natural Resource Conservation Service makes arrangements for these services.

Information can be found at <http://www.ks.usda.nrcs.gov> or [www.ks.usda.nrcs.gov](http://www.ks.usda.nrcs.gov), click on the Farm Bill logo.

Again, the best thing for producers to do is visit their local conservation office. Agriculture in Kansas, north to south and east to west, is diversified. Your local conservation office will be able to assist you in addressing the natural resource concerns in your area.



**DUST COVERS PROTECT** electronic scanners and registers soon to operate in the renovated Bird City grocery store.  
*Times Staff photo by Casey McCormick*

## Bowling News

### Ladies Nite Out 1/23

Team standings: First National Bank 9-2; Wright Carpet 9-3; Great Plains Co-Op 8-3; Cheyenne Bowl 6-6; Jake's 5-7; Troy's Alley Cat 5-7; Jersey Maids 4-8; Dundy Ag 1-11

High game (scratch): Jenny Wright 214; Tammy Zimbelman 202; Jenny Wright 199

High series (scratch): Wright 601, Pat Confer 518, Zimbelman 504

### Ladies Nite Out 1/30

Team standings: First National Bank 12-3; Wright Carpet 12-4; Great Plains Co-Op 9-6; Jake's 9-7; Troy's Alley Cat 9-7; Cheyenne Bowl 7-9; Jersey Maids 4-12; Dundy Ag 1-15.

High game (scratch): Terry Yost 219, Tammy Overlease 198, Alberta Peterson 197

High series (scratch): Yost 531, Marsha Kechter 503, Pat Confer 479

### Monday Mixed League 1/27

Team standings: Captain Hooks Fine Dining 18-10; Z-Tubing 16.5-11.5; Hooks Auction & Realty 14.5-13.5; Bandel Home Center 13-15; Krien Pharmacy 13-15; Cueballs 9-19

High game (handicap): Rell Zimbelman 234, Rick Burton 231, Earl Hankins 221; Dot Hankins 227, Pam Hook 213, Tami Merchant 208

High series (handicap): Kathy Bexley 608, Judy Gienger 584, D. Hankins 578; E. Hankins 633, Zimbelman 607, Burton 606

### Honor Roll

New and renewed Times subscriptions: Sharon Kamla, Nevade, Mo; Frank Serrano, Bird City; David Nelsen, Bird City; Patty Gerver, Bird City; Kent Champman, Emporia; Roy Bacon, Newton Square, Pa.; Charles Coleman, Bird City;

Carl Hilty, Bird City; Lee Amsberry, Bird City; Kent Amsberry, Olathe; Ardis Boesma, Colby; Richard Bursch, Bird City; Royce Bursch, Campo, Colo.

## Filing deadline is Feb. 26 for senior legislature

The Northwest Kansas Area Agency on Aging would like to remind all area senior citizens that the deadline for filing as a candidate for Kansas Silver Haired Legislature is Wednesday, Feb. 26. The election will be held on March 18 at area nutrition centers.

Any Kansan aged 60 and over that is a registered voter may file for candidacy. The term of office is two years and members may be re-elected for three successive terms.

The Kansas Silver Haired Legislature is an unicameral legislature composed of 125 representa-

tives. All are over 60 and are elected from their county residence. The legislature provides an educational experience in the political process and provides an opportunity to identify priority concerns of Kansas senior citizens. The legislature develops bills and resolutions that are presented to the Kansas legislature and the Governor as recommendations for state policy.

Those interested in being a Silver Haired Legislator should contact the Northwest Kansas Area Agency on Aging at 1-800-432-7422 to get candidate registration forms, petitions and filing instructions.

The 800-pound Gorilla

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**The Country Advocate**

For More Information Give Us A Call —

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