

Wildlife Stewardship in Hard Times

In trying times when drought and blizzards strike hard at the farmer's and rancher's bottom line, it is difficult to think beyond this year's crop and the health of the herd. Nevertheless, we at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) are charged with providing producers with the technical know-how and assistance to continue

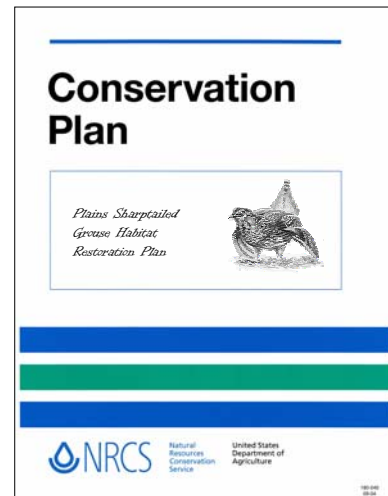


resource stewardship even in the toughest years. This applies to soil, water, and rangeland conservation; and it also applies to wildlife conservation. After all, wildlife and their habitats suffer from nature's extremes as well.

Wildlife conservation through Farm Bill programs is a national priority for NRCS. By 2010, an additional 9 million acres of essential habitat will be improved and managed to benefit at-risk and declining species. Indeed, promotion of at-risk species habitat conservation is one of four national priorities for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), NRCS' premiere working-lands conservation program. Recent developments in EQIP have been directed to improve the quality of at-risk wildlife habitats on working lands in Colorado. It is our hope that through careful planning, cost-share assistance on conservation practices, and wildlife management incentive payments, producers may look again at wildlife stewardship on their lands even in hard times.

EQIP is a program directed at conserving the natural resources on working lands, including farms and ranches. Wildlife conservation is a natural resource concern addressed through EQIP. Producers can work with NRCS to develop a wildlife conservation plan, obtain cost-share assistance in implementing that plan, and receive incentive payments for managing their lands for wildlife. A conservation plan for wildlife simply states which species are going to be targeted by what practices. NRCS biologists and conservationists are available to apply the latest knowledge of wildlife habitat management techniques to wildlife resource concerns. Cost-share rates for wildlife conservation practices are (most of the time) 50%. However, many conservation partners are willing to chip in additional cost-share dollars for good projects to lower the overall cost to a producer of implementing a wildlife conservation plan.

New in 2007, is an increased Wildlife Habitat Management Special Incentive Payment for wildlife species of concern. Incentive payments of \$10/ac. are available to eligible producers who implement a certified Wildlife Habitat Management Plan for select wildlife species and their habitats.



Under EQIP, priority wildlife projects are those that address the habitat needs of Threatened and Endangered species and other State Species of Special Concern. Contact



your local NRCS or Colorado Division of Wildlife biologist to ascertain which wildlife species fall into these categories. A general rule of thumb in eastern Colorado is that habitat work focusing on the habitat needs of native wildlife species utilizing shortgrass prairie, seasonal wetlands, including playas and shallow-water wetlands, and riparian areas will likely address the needs of priority wildlife species. These

habitats have seen the greatest decline in associated wildlife species and provide critical food and shelter for more than 80% of Colorado's wildlife species. EQIP may also be used to address habitat needs of economically important species including pheasants, quail, turkey and deer.

As with any natural resource concern addressed by EQIP, wildlife conservation planning utilizes many different conservation practices as tools to improve wildlife habitat on working lands. Principal among these practices are prescribed grazing plans focusing on wildlife needs, fencing and fence removal arrangements, conservation buffers, and wetland restoration and enhancements. Consultation with your local NRCS wildlife biologist, range conservationist, or soil conservationist will allow you to explore how these practices may apply on your working lands.



To determine your eligibility for EQIP wildlife programs and the wildlife conservation planning process visit your local NRCS office. EQIP has a continuous sign-up process so applications are always accepted. Colorado's agricultural producers are our most important wildlife stewards. It is our hope, that the wildlife programs now available through EQIP will allow farmers and ranchers to continue wildlife stewardship on their lands even in the toughest of times.

For more information on the EQIP program in Colorado you may visit:
<http://www.co.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/eqip.html>.

For more information on wildlife conservation utilizing EQIP you may contact:

Matthew A. Reddy
Area 2 Private Lands Wildlife Biologist
Natural Resources Conservation Service
(970) 867-8568 x110
matt.reddy@co.usda.gov