

Chapter 12. Opportunities to Obtain Financial Assistance for Wildlife Habitat Management Projects

James D. Oehler, New Hampshire Fish & Game Department, 11 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301
joebler@wildlife.state.nh.us

While reading about many of the habitat management techniques described in this guide, you may have asked yourself once or twice, “how do they expect me to pay for this?” There are some options that can be used to reduce or entirely cover the cost of early-successional habitat management on your land:

- Use all or a portion of the proceeds obtained from a timber sale to conduct other habitat management practices. Some loggers will even trade timber for services.
- As Paul Catanzaro mentioned in his landowner cooperative case study in chapter 11, there are economies of scale. Coordinate with your neighbors on habitat management projects across parcel boundaries. Larger projects may reduce your cost/acre to implement a practice.
- Inquire about financial assistance from federal and state government agencies. A number of agencies administer conservation programs that provide technical and financial assistance to landowners to implement wildlife habitat management projects on their land. Following is a description of a number of these programs.

2002 Farm Bill

The U.S. Farm Bill is a collection of policies related to agriculture production and distribution that is enacted and renewed by law every four to six years. First enacted during the Depression in 1933, the Farm Bill was passed to protect farmers and stabilize rural economies by establishing minimum prices for commodities such as wheat, corn, milk, cotton, tobacco, etc. Through the years, additional policies were added to further assist in stabilizing and enhancing rural farming economies. These included credit programs to help farmers cover the cost of commodity production and programs to limit supply, thereby aiding to stabilize commodity prices.

Commodity production expansion in the 1970s and 1980s took an increasing toll on land, water, and wildlife habitat resources. As such, Congress installed a number of conservation programs in the 1985 Farm Bill. Many of these programs were renewed and expanded in the 2002 Farm Bill and may be an option for those landowners interested in restoring and maintaining wildlife habitat on their land. Farm Bill conservation programs are either administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), or the U.S. Forest Service, all of which are housed within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Following is an overview of Farm Bill conservation programs that are pertinent to wildlife habitat management.

Farm Service Agency Programs

Conservation Reserve Program: The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a voluntary program that encourages cropland owners to take highly erodible farm fields out of production by providing annual rental payments based on the agriculture rental value of the land. The program also provides up to 50% cost-share assistance to establish approved conservation practices, such as warm-season grass and tree plantings, on retired fields. Participants enroll in CRP contracts for 10 to 15 years.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program: An offspring of CRP, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary program for cropland owners. Like CRP, it is an agriculture

land retirement conservation program. Unlike CRP, CREP is a joint state-federal effort in which conservation goals and rental payments are set for a specific geographic area. The framework of a local CREP can be adapted to meet local conditions. For an example of what CREP may be able to do for you, read Colleen Delong and Jeffery Finn's case studies of two farms that enrolled in the Pennsylvania CREP in chapter 11.

For more information on these programs, contact your state FSA office (Appendix A) or visit the FSA Conservation programs website:<http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/default.htm>.

Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs

Conservation of Private Grazing Land Program: The Conservation of Private Grazing Land Program (CPGL) is a voluntary program that provides technical assistance to owners and managers of private grazing land. Among other things, NRCS can provide advice on maintaining and improving private grazing land, implementing grazing technologies, protecting and improving water quality, and maintaining and improving habitat while enhancing the economic stability of the grazing land.

Grassland Reserve Program: The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program that helps landowners and operators restore and protect grassland, including rangeland, and pastureland, while maintaining the areas as active grazing lands. A landowner can opt for a permanent conservation easement where they will receive fair market value for their land minus the grazing value, a 30-year easement where the landowner will receive 30% of fair market value minus the grazing value, or a 10- to 30-year rental agreement where a landowner will receive up to 75% of the grazing value. Participants voluntarily limit future use of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices; hay production, mowing, or harvesting for seed production (subject to certain restrictions during the nesting season of bird species that are in significant decline or protected under federal or state law); conduct prescribed fires; and construct firebreaks and fences. If restoration is needed NRCS will provide up to 90% of the cost to implement restoration practices.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program: The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that seeks to reduce non-point source pollution, reduce emissions of organic compounds that contribute to decreased air quality, reduce soil erosion, and improve habitat for at-risk wildlife species on active farmland. Farmland producers can be paid up to 75% of the cost to implement recommended conservation practices such as adding grassed waterways, filter strips, manure management facilities, and other practices. State Technical Committees establish eligible practices, criteria for project selection, and cost-share levels.

Wetlands Reserve Program: The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to landowners to restore and protect wetlands that aid in providing wildlife habitat, improved water quality, and recreational opportunities. Eligible landowners can opt to sell a conservation easement to the USDA or enter into a ten-year contract to re-establish degraded or lost wetland habitat. In both cases the landowner still owns the land but use is restricted. With the easement option, the USDA pays 100% of the cost to restore wetlands, whereas the USDA pays up to 75% of the cost to restore wetlands with the ten-year contract option.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program: The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program that provides funding to landowners who enter into five-year, ten-year, or longer contracts to create and maintain high quality wildlife habitats that support wildlife populations of national, state, tribal, and local significance. State Technical Committees establish eligible practices, criteria for project selection, and cost-share levels. NRCS provides greater cost-share assistance to landowners who enter into 15- year and longer contracts.

For more information on these programs contact your state NRCS office (Appendix A), or visit the NRCS Conservation Programs website: www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/farbill/2002.

U.S. Forest Service Programs

Forestland Enhancement Program: The Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) is a cost-share program that encourages the long-term sustainability of non-industrial private forestlands. It is administered by the U.S. Forest Service through the state foresters in coordination with State Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committees. The state foresters and Coordinating Committees establish program priorities, cost-share practices, and cost-share rates. Typically, a management plan is required for any property wishing to participate in FLEP, but cost-sharing is often provided for the development of a management plan. Depending on state priorities, FLEP funds may also be used to assist with the creation and maintenance of grasslands, shrublands, and young forest habitats among other things. States do not have to participate in FLEP. To find out if your state has a Forestland Enhancement Program and to find out how you can enroll, contact your state forest agency (Appendix A) or visit the FLEP website: www.fs.fed.us/spf/coop/programs/loa/flep.shtml.

Partners for Fish & Wildlife

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program provides up to 50% cost-share to landowners for on-the-ground projects to restore habitat for federal trust species (e.g., migratory birds, anadromous and catadromous (migratory) fish, and species federally-listed as threatened or endangered). Funding cannot be used for project planning. Types of early-successional habitat projects that have funded by this program include:

- Planting native trees and shrubs to restore riparian buffers.
- Planting native grasslands.
- Removal of exotic plants and animals that compete with native fish and wildlife and alter their natural habitats.
- Prescribed burning as a method of removing exotic species and to restore natural disturbance regimes necessary for some species survival.

For more information about this program contact your state coordinator. A listing of all Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program coordinators is available at <http://partners.fws.gov/pdfs/pfwcoord-1-04.pdf>.

Landowner Incentive Program

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is a federal grant program administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. State wildlife agencies compete for funds to be used to implement a program to provide technical and financial assistance for habitat projects on private lands that may support federally or state-listed species, or other species of concern. Currently, nine states in the Northeast have LIP programs, many of which allow for the management of early-successional habitats. To find out more about LIP in your state, contact your state wildlife agency (Appendix A).

Other state wildlife agency programs

Your state wildlife agency may administer other programs that provide technical or financial assistance to private landowners to enhance and restore wildlife habitat. For instance, the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department administers a Small Grants Program that provides up to \$2,000 per year (not to exceed \$6,000 in a ten-year period) to help cover the cost of releasing apple and other fruiting trees and shrubs, clearing brush and trees to maintain shrubland habitats, establishing cool- and warm-season grasses, and other habitat

management activities. Contact your state wildlife agency to see if a similar program exists in your state (Appendix A).

It is no secret that early-successional habitat management can be costly. Using the funding mechanisms described in this chapter, it is possible to at least greatly reduce or even entirely cover the costs of projects on your land.

Biography

Jim Oehler has a B.S. in Wildlife Management from the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point, and an M.S. in Wildlife Ecology from the University of New Hampshire. Prior to joining the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department in January 2003, Jim spent five years with the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife reclaiming and maintaining early-successional habitats and both public and private land.