



The Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) can be an effective financial tool to manage your land for wildlife while reducing sediments within the Illinois and Kaskaskia watersheds.

What is CREP?

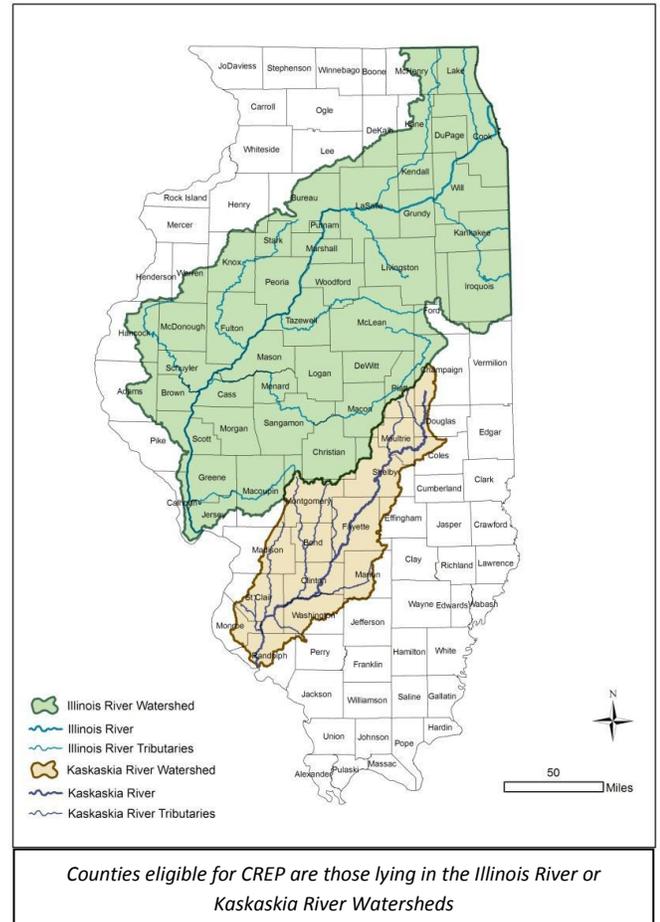
CREP is a conservation program designed to retire frequently flooded cropland which is located in environmentally sensitive areas. The goal of the program is to achieve restoration and long-term protection of those areas. In exchange for voluntarily removing land from production, landowners implement conservation practices to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff, improve water quality, and to create and enhance critical habitat for fish and wildlife populations.

Who administers CREP?

Being a Federal, State, and local partnership, CREP achieves success through the coordination of 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 components of the program. They determine eligibility for enrollment and provide technical assistance for approved conservation practices. FSA administers the Federal component of CREP as they do for CRP. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) along with the local SWCD administers the State component and also provides technical assistance. Many other agencies, including the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), provide support with marketing, monitoring, and program policy.

How does CREP differ from CRP?

CREP is an enhanced version of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the country's largest private-land conservation program. The Federal component of the program differs very little from CRP. Many of the same rules and policy apply. However, there are higher rental rates and incentive payments associated with Federal CREP and they are typically 15-year contracts. CREP also has a State component of the program. Once the Federal contract has expired, the State component of CREP extends the benefits of the established conservation practices through 15 or 35-year extensions, or in perpetuity with a permanent easement. If a landowner chooses to enroll in a permanent easement, they have the option of enrolling and receiving payment on adjacent additional acres, which would not otherwise be eligible for CRP or CREP, due to a lack of cropping history.



The National Great Rivers Research & Education Center

Who is Eligible?

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

- Is located 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.

In addition to the above criteria, to be eligible for CRP and CREP, the land needs to have cropping history as determined by FSA.

What are the enrollment options?

- Federal CREP contract + Permanent State Conservation Easement
- Federal CREP contract + 35-year State Conservation Easement
- Federal CREP contract + 15-year State Conservation Easement
 - State Conservation Easements on cropland acres begin after the expiration of the Fed Contract. Permanent State Conservation Easements for additional acres begin when the easement is recorded.
- 14-15 year Federal CREP contract with no State Conservation Easement

What are the financial incentives?

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
- Signup 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

What are some examples of eligible conservation practices for CREP?

In the 100-year Floodplain:

- Wetland restorations
- Riparian forest buffers
- Hardwood tree plantings
- Wildlife Habitat

On adjacent highly erodible land:

- Native grass plantings
- Tree plantings
- Wildlife habitat

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 for the life of the conservation easement
- Land cannot be re-enrolled in Federal CRP/CREP
- The land may not be developed; no permanent structures or roads may be built on enrolled property
- CREP Easements are recorded documents and stay with the land for the term of the Easement

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

- The right to use enrolled property for recreational purposes, including hunting, fishing, primitive camping, and wildlife watching
- May be eligible for reduced property taxes
- Manage the property for wildlife habitat with an approved Wildlife Management Plan
- Harvest timber with an approved Forest Management Plan
- Receive any future benefits derived from restoration activities such as carbon sequestration

Does a State Conservation Easement grant access to the public?

- Enrolling a property into CREP does **NOT** grant access to the public
- State agency personnel and SWCD staff are granted the authority by the landowner to access lands enrolled in CREP to perform periodic program-related monitoring duties
- Landowners may also want to consider participation in the Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP) to receive financial benefits for granting limited public access for specific purposes such as youth turkey hunting and bird watching

For more information or to sign up, visit your local USDA Service Center, or go online at <http://www.dnr.illinois.gov/conservation/CREP>