

EXPIRING CONTRACT OPTIONS FOR CRP

PREPARED IN COOPERATION WITH:

USDA Farm Service
Agency (FSA)

USDA Natural Resources
Conservation Service (NRCS)

Spokane Conservation District (SCD)

Washington Association of
Conservation Districts (WACD)

Washington Office of Farmland
Preservation

Washington Department
of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

Washington State University
Extension - Steve Van Vleet

LANDOWNERS WITH EXPIRING CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP) CONTRACTS FACE A VARIETY OF ALTERNATIVES FOR MANAGING THE LAND.

If you choose not to re-enroll in CRP, or your bid to re-enroll is not accepted, your options will vary from returning the land to crop production to managing it for wildlife. If you wish to return your land to CRP, you may make modifications to improve your chances of getting the land accepted back into the program.

This information sheet reviews some of your options, the considerations related to each and contacts for additional information. The options are not all-inclusive but focus on the most likely alternatives. You may even choose to separate the acreage and adopt more than one alternative.

Your choice will depend on your circumstances, expectations and goals. It is important to consider several factors including soil productivity and limitations, management and past yields, commodity prices, conversion and renovation costs and other required investments.

Whatever you decide, resources are available to help you realize your objectives. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), your local conservation district, and extension office can provide technical assistance.



OPTION #1: CROP PRODUCTION

CONSIDERATIONS

- ❑ **Cropping suitability:** Does slope steepness, low productivity or erosive soils make part or all of the land better suited for a different option?
- ❑ **Crop prices and potential yields:** Crop production may be more profitable than CRP payments.
- ❑ **Input costs:** Labor, equipment, management, and other input costs will increase.
- ❑ **Conversion costs:** Existing CRP vegetation will need to be destroyed by tillage, fire or chemical methods. Residual weed problems can be an issue. Higher than normal nitrogen rates may be required for two years after conversion.
- ❑ **There is NO Federal farm program through NRCS or FSA** to help cover your costs to convert CRP to crop production.
- ❑ **Equipment availability:** Do you still have equipment for crop production, will you need to lease or purchase equipment or hire an operator?
- ❑ **Conservation compliance:** Highly Erodible Land (HEL) will require a new conservation plan. Decisions for the level of residue minimums left on the soil surface during critical wind and water erosion periods of the year will depend on field widths and number of tillage operations and their timing. Being out of compliance could affect any future USDA financial assistance.
- ❑ **Environmental costs:** Perennial vegetation provides the greatest benefits for soil health and wildlife habitat. Soil erosion and compaction may be reduced with use of no-till, direct seed or minimum tillage. Financial assistance to adopt these practices may be available through conservation districts. Threatened and endangered species considerations may apply. Maintaining grass buffers along roads and drainages may increase your eligibility for NRCS conservation programs.
- ❑ **Maintaining base acres:** Base acres are important for some FSA program payments. If your base acres were reduced at the time your CRP contract was signed, they may be restored. Check with your FSA office.



Crop production may be more profitable than CRP payments.

CONTACTS

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Washington State Office
 Phone: (509) 323-2900
 Web: www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov
 County office locator: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=WA>

Spokane Conservation District

Phone: (509) 535-7274
 Web: <http://sccd.org/>

Washington Association of Conservation Districts

Web: <http://www.wadistricts.org/>

PNW STEEP - PNW Direct Seed Association

Web: <http://pnwsteep.wsu.edu/authors/index.htm>

Farm Service Agency

Washington State Office
 Phone: (509) 323-3000
 Web: www.fsa.usda.gov/wa
 County office locator: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=wa&agency=fsa>

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Spokane County Conservation District Direct Seed Loans provide low-interest loans for no-till and direct seed equipment, including tractors and combines. The program is available in 18 counties in eastern Washington and Idaho.

PNW Conservation Tillage Handbook STEEP (Book): STEEP (Solutions To Environmental and Economic Problems) is a cooperative Pacific Northwest research and educational program on conservation tillage systems through the University of Idaho, Oregon State University, Washington State University, and USDA-Agricultural Research Service.



OPTION #2: LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION

CONSIDERATIONS

- ❑ **Livestock prices:** Forage production is influenced by climate, management and market demands.
- ❑ **Input costs:** Labor, equipment, management, animal supplements, and other input costs will depend on grazing economics.
- ❑ **Conversion costs:** Using expiring CRP grass stands for hay or forage may include the cost of adding fencing and water improvements if the land is to be grazed. Cost-share may be available through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), but the grazing plan would require a portion of your existing grazing acres to be deferred or rested.
- ❑ **Environmental benefits:** Leaving expiring CRP in grass and/or shrubs/trees gives continued protection from erosion. Bird nesting season may be an issue for grazing. Good grazing management will be required to maintain productivity and species composition.
- ❑ **Management flexibility:** Land may be used as either hay or forage.

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

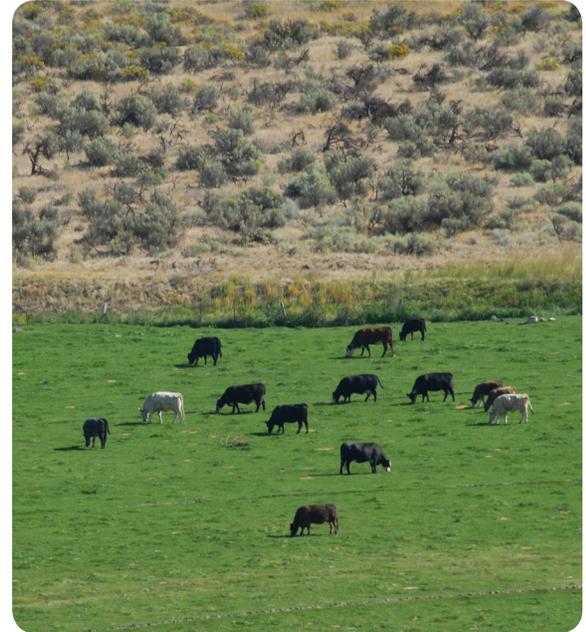
Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to treat resource concerns. Offered through the NRCS.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary conservation program that emphasizes support for working grazing operations, enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity, and protection of grassland under threat of conversion to other uses. Offered through NRCS and FSA.

WSU Extension can provide technical assistance for grazing management.

The NRCS Field Office Technical Guide can provide more information through the [Eastern Washington Range and Pasture Seedings Technical Note 101](#).

Additional materials are offered through the Pullman Plant Materials Center on [Pasture Grazing Management](#).



Converting your CRP land for hay or forage is a viable alternative to crop production.

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Washington Association of Conservation Districts

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Steve Van Vleet, WSU Extension

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Farm Service Agency

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WSU Extension

County office locator: <http://extension.wsu.edu/locations/Pages/default.aspx>



OPTION #3: WILDLIFE HABITAT

CONSIDERATIONS

- ❑ **Management:** Wildlife plantings may improve habitat, and could increase revenue as well as costs. In some cases, grazing may be a compatible component of wildlife management. Depending on how the land is to be used, there may be costs for signs.
- ❑ **Income:** Potential income from hunting leases or recreational fees. A business and marketing plan may be needed.
- ❑ **Environmental benefits:** Leaving expiring CRP in grass and/or shrubs/trees gives continued environmental protection from erosion, maintains air quality, retains wildlife habitat and continues to safeguard ground and surface water quality.
- ❑ **Low conversion costs:** The cost to convert expiring CRP will depend on the needs of wildlife and diversity of existing plant communities.
- ❑ **Wildlife enjoyment:** Maintain habitat for your own satisfaction.

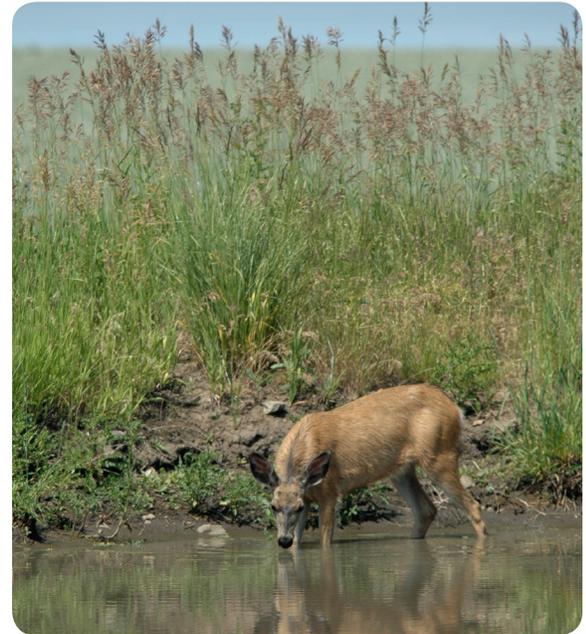
PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP): Through WHIP, Working Lands for Wildlife allows landowners to voluntarily participate in an incentive-based effort to restore populations of declining wildlife species, provide farmers, ranchers, and forest managers with regulatory certainty that conservation investments they make today help sustain their operations over the long-term, strengthen and sustain rural economies by restoring and protecting the productive capacity of working lands. Offered through NRCS.

State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE): The SAFE initiative aims to provide wildlife habitat for high value species on private land. The initiative is a state and federal partnership designed to meet state wildlife priorities. As part of CRP, SAFE is implemented similar to CRP and in cooperation with the WDFW. SAFE is available in specific locations and targets specific wildlife species. Contact your FSA office or WDFW for details.

Partnerships for Pheasants: Annual cash rental payments to landowners who plant and maintain high quality habitat for pheasants and allow public hunting. Property must be within the Pheasant Management Focus Area in southeast Washington (portions of Whitman, Walla Walla, Columbia, and Garfield counties) unless extenuating circumstances exist. Offered through the WDFW.

Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant program administered by WDFW. It provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners for conservation and restoration efforts that produce benefits to at-risk fish and wildlife species and their habitats. Additional resources or programs may be available from local wildlife or conservation organizations. [WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife](#) may be able to help you identify resources in your area.



Converting CRP land to wildlife habitat may have financial benefits as well as recreational.

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Washington Association of Conservation Districts

Web: <http://www.wadistricts.org/>

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Phone: (360) 902-2200
 Web: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>

Farm Service Agency

Washington State Office
 Phone: (509) 323-3000
 Web: www.fsa.usda.gov/wa
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OPTION #4: CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

CONSIDERATIONS

- ❑ **Income:** Depending on the type of easement, this option can provide economic benefits that are minimal or substantial and may be paid out over time or at the time a contract is approved.
- ❑ **Management:** Easements are voluntary long-term contracts between you, the landowner, and an organization, most often a government or a non-profit agency. Many are in perpetuity. The type of easement determines the management activities allowed on the land. Some easements are for the purpose of protecting land for agricultural purposes in perpetuity. Easements remain with the land when land is sold.
- ❑ **Minimal conversion costs:** Converting expiring CRP to an easement will provide income instead of costing you. However, if you choose other land management practices such as cropping, haying, grazing, etc., conversion costs will need to be considered.
- ❑ **Funding:** Funds for easements may be limited.

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP) helps purchase development rights to keep productive farm and rangeland in agricultural uses. Offered through NRCS.

Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program (WRRP), administered by the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office, includes Farmland Preservation grant funding to purchase development rights on farmland. Can be used as match for FRPP.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary conservation program that emphasizes support for working grazing operations, enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity, and protection of grassland under threat of conversion to other uses. Offered through NRCS and FSA.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is to assist landowners, on a voluntary basis, in restoring, enhancing and protecting forestland resources on private lands through easements, 30-year contracts and 10-year cost-share agreements. Offered through NRCS.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. Offered through NRCS.

Cities, counties and local organizations provide additional resources and programs. **Washington Office of Farmland Preservation** provides a clearinghouse for these resources.



Converting your expiring CRP to an easement will have minimal costs and provide you an income.

CONTACTS

Washington Office of Farmland Preservation

Phone: (360) 407-7474

Web: <http://ofp.scc.wa.gov/>

Email at jgiuntoli@scc.wa.gov

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Washington State Office

Phone: (509) 323-2900

Web: www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov

County office locator: <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?state=WA>

Washington Association of Conservation Districts

Web: <http://www.wadistricts.org/>

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Phone: (360) 902-2200

Web: <http://wdfw.wa.gov/>

Washington Recreation and Conservation Office

Phone: (360) 902-3000

Web: <http://www.rco.wa.gov/index.asp>



OPTION #5: CONTINUOUS CRP

CONSIDERATIONS

- ❑ **Income:** Similar to a General CRP contract, Continuous CRP pays annual rental payments, cost-share for establishment and may include a signing bonus depending on the conservation practice. The rental rate for Continuous CRP is similar to General CRP rates.
- ❑ **Contracts** may be for 10-15 years and requires a conservation plan.
- ❑ **Weeds** must be controlled.
- ❑ **Although your entire expiring CRP contract may not be renewed,** you may want to re-enroll portions of the contract as part of your conservation plan for your farm. Continuous CRP may be the solution for highly erodible or portions of a field that are difficult to farm.
- ❑ **Unlike the general CRP signup,** you can offer acres under the Continuous CRP at any time and non-competitively.
- ❑ **Only specific practices are eligible:** These include forested riparian buffers, grass filter strips, grass contour buffer strips, wetland restoration, windbreaks and pollinator habitat.
- ❑ **Land with an Erosion Index (EI):** of 20 or greater is eligible for Continuous CRP.
- ❑ **Requires a diverse mix of vegetation:** You may have to enhance your expiring CRP stand to meet the standards for the specific conservation practice you choose.

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Continuous CRP is part of the [Conservation Reserve Program](#). It is administered by FSA. Your local conservation district or NRCS may provide technical planning assistance.



With continuous CRP, you may be eligible to receive annual rental payments or cost-share dollars.

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Washington Association of Conservation Districts

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Farm Service Agency

Washington State Office
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OPTION #6: GENERAL CRP

CONSIDERATIONS

- ❑ **Income:** CRP pays annual rental payments and cost-share to establish permanent vegetative cover.
- ❑ **Contracts are for 10 years** and requires a CRP conservation plan.
- ❑ **General CRP signups** occur when the Secretary of Agriculture announces a signup. Typically, FSA conducts one signup per year, but a signup is not guaranteed to occur each year.
- ❑ **The General CRP involves a national competitive bid process to get land into the program.** It involves submitting a bid outlining the environmental benefits the landowner will provide and the annual rental payment the landowner would accept in exchange for providing those environmental benefits. The FSA accepts the bids with the highest environmental benefits per dollar spent. The number of accepted bids is determined by the amount of acres and funding set aside for an individual signup.
- ❑ **Competitive scores can be improved by diversifying** and improving habitat, making other enhancements or accepting lower rental payments. A site visit will be made to determine what vegetation is currently growing. Some of the plant species seeded ten or more years ago may no longer be there. You may need to reseed to re-establish the necessary species, or to include other species to improve your bid score. To make an ideal seedbed (weed free and firm) for a new seeding, the existing cover may have to be removed (mowing and chemically treating regrowth 1-2 times, tillage, fire) for good seed-soil contact.
- ❑ **Acreage caps.:** Counties are limited to CRP acreage totaling no more than 25 percent of a county's cropland acres, unless a waiver is granted. This means that in counties where the cap has been reached, landowners may not be able to bid land into CRP during a General signup.
- ❑ **Weeds must be controlled:** If the land is to be reseeded, weeds and existing vegetation must be controlled prior to planting as they compete for soil water and nutrients that are necessary for your new seeding to be successful.
- ❑ **Mid-contract management practices** may be approved but must be built into the contract at the beginning.
- ❑ **FSA considers land in CRP cropland:** Crop base acres on enrolled land will be retired while the land is under contract.
- ❑ **A CRP contract precludes most other economic activity on the land.**
- ❑ **Failure to adhere to contract requirements** can result in paying back CRP payments, plus penalties.

PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)** is administered by FSA. Your local conservation district or NRCS may provide technical planning assistance.



Converting your expiring CRP back to CRP will provide you annual rental payments.

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