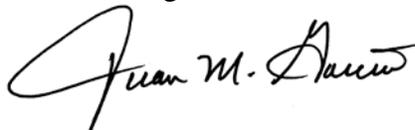


For: State and County Offices

Additional Acres for State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)

Approved by: Deputy Administrator, Farm Programs



1 Overview

A Background

On March 2, 2012, Secretary Vilsack announced 400,000 additional acres for SAFE, to allow State Offices to further address local wildlife conservation needs. SAFE allows producers to install practices that benefit high priority State wildlife conservation objectives through the use of targeted restoration of vital habitat. This cooperative conservation effort is based on locally-developed conservation proposals that address the highest priority wildlife objectives in the State before the practice may be implemented.

New proposals will be considered by STC after a review by the State Technical Committee. CEPD will review all STC recommendations. In addition, FSA will be accepting requests from STC for additional acres for existing SAFE projects. Any previously submitted requests for additional acres or modifications for which a response has not been received must be resubmitted to CEPD for consideration.

B Purpose

This notice provides the following:

- information about submitting new proposals for SAFE
- information about submitting requests for additional acres on existing SAFE projects
- criteria for SAFE
- general practice information.

Disposal Date	Distribution
September 1, 2012	State Offices; State Offices relay to County Offices and NRCS

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1 Overview (Continued)

C General Information

SAFE provides an opportunity to develop grassroots cooperative conservation projects to address high priority wildlife needs through habitat restoration. The practices must be used to address wildlife habitat that can be enhanced through the restoration of eligible cropland through CRP. Enrollment is available under continuous signup criteria.

SAFE practices can be used to restore the following:

- threatened and endangered species habitat
- habitat for species that have suffered a significant population decline

Examples: This could include species, such as Lesser Prairie Chicken, Sharp-Tailed Grouse, or Northern Bobwhite.

- habitat for species that provide significant social or economic value to the community.

Note: This includes restoration of habitat for game species, such as pheasant or quail habitat, salmon or steelhead stream habitat, or for other economically significant species.

SAFE practice proposals must provide measurable and tangible benefits to the desired species.

All proposals must be submitted not later than **COB June 1, 2012**.

2 Policy

A Cropland Eligibility

Eligible cropland is cropland:

- according to 2-CRP, paragraph 151
- located within the State-designated SAFE area.

Notes: Marginal pastureland is **not** eligible.

All or part of a State may be included.

B Continuous Signup

Continuous signup enrollment is authorized.

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2 Policy (Continued)

C Contract Duration and Effective Date

The CRP-1 period for CRP contracts is 10 to 15 years.

For **new** land enrolled in SAFE, the effective date of CRP-1 is the first day of the month following the month COC approves the contract according to 2-CRP, subparagraph 213 B.

For land under an **expiring** CRP contract enrolled in SAFE, the effective date of CRP-1 is October 1 of the year the existing CRP contract expires according to 2-CRP, subparagraphs 181 F and 213 C.

D Incentives

Practice incentive payments (PIP) and \$100 per acre signing incentive payments (SIP) are authorized for **new** land enrolled under SAFE. Land currently enrolled in CRP that is reenrolled in SAFE may be eligible for PIP if additional cost-share is authorized for enhancements but is not eligible to receive SIP. Further, land under an expired CRP contract where the cover is maintained as though enrolled is not eligible for SIP if enrolled in SAFE.

E Management Activity

Approved SAFE proposals will have periodic management activities performed, according to the conservation plan, during the life of CRP-1, as determined by COC. This activity may be based on the management activity approved for the CRP practice used as a basis for the SAFE practices. If new or modified management activities are necessary, these activities must be established according to 2-CRP, paragraph 428.

F Cost Share

CCC will pay up to 50 percent of the eligible cost of establishing a permanent cover. State Offices must develop a cost-share table similar to 2-CRP, Exhibit 11, after practices are selected.

Note: See 2-CRP, Exhibit 11, page 6 for an example.

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3 New SAFE Proposals

A New Proposal Development

A new SAFE proposal may be developed and put forth by a Federal, State, or local agency or by a private organization. Ideally, all partners will develop proposals under a collaborative conservation partnership umbrella. The proposal must be developed consistent with the process set forth in this paragraph and must comply with the format outlined in Exhibit 1.

Proposals must be based on the existing CRP framework and CRP practices. Approved proposals must correlate to existing CRP practices. All proposals must be limited to the following SAFE practices and the applicable CRP practices.

SAFE Practice	Practice Type	Applicable CRP Practices
CP38A	Buffers	CP8A, CP21, CP22
CP38B	Wetlands	CP9, CP23, CP23A, CP27, CP28, CP37
CP38C	Trees	CP3, CP3A, CP16, CP17, CP25, CP31, CP35
CP38D	Longleaf Pine	CP3A, CP36
CP38E	Grass	CP1, CP2, CP4D, CP8, CP15's, CP18's, CP24, CP25, CP33

A SAFE proposal may select 1 or more CRP practices for use as SAFE practices. CRP practices may be used without modification, or 1 or more practices may be modified. See subparagraph B.

Example: SAFE practices intended to restore habitat for the benefit of Sharp-Tailed Grouse in Idaho may incorporate CP2 (Native Grass Restoration) and CP4D (Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Noneasement) as best suited for the project and these practices may be used under CP38E (Grass) without changes.

B Practice Modifications

CRP practices outlined in 2-CRP may be modified by imposing additional requirements within 2-CRP practice standard guidelines. These changes apply only within the approved SAFE practice geographic area.

Note: Practice requirements may not be relaxed.

Example: The Sharp-Tailed Grouse Restoration SAFE practice, CP38E, could require all plantings (based on CP4D) to have 5 native species of grasses plus a requirement that Silver Sage Brush be a part of the planting.

The Sharp-Tailed Grouse Restoration SAFE practice, CP38E, could alter CP2 (Native Grass Restoration) by the seeding rates or frequency of disturbance.

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3 New SAFE Proposals (Continued)

B Practice Modifications (Continued)

Rationale for CRP practice modifications must be:

- part of the SAFE proposal
- supported by scientifically-defensible information or expert judgment.

C New Proposal Review

All new SAFE proposals must be submitted to the FSA State Office. After a review for completeness, the FSA State Office will request the State Technical Committee to review, which must then report its recommendations to STC. STC will review all proposals and, giving consideration to State Technical Committee recommendations, then forward the recommendations for implementation to CEPD. When submitting STC-approved proposals to CEPD, recommendations must be provided as electronic copies to Jim Michaels by e-mail at james.michaels@wdc.usda.gov at the start of the review process.

Note: If there are questions, contact Jim Michaels by telephone at 202-690-0794.

CEPD will review proposals for conformity with this notice, CRP regulations, and the CRP authorizing legislation before issuing proposal approval.

A State may have multiple:

- SAFE practices approved and implemented within a project area
- project areas approved.

D Deadline

SAFE proposals must be submitted electronically to CEPD not later than **COB June 1, 2012**.

Note: STC's must discuss with State Technical Committees to determine any timeframe for accepting SAFE proposals to ensure that proposals are submitted to CEPD not later than **COB June 1, 2012**.

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3 New SAFE Proposals (Continued)

E Performance Reporting

Each SAFE proposal must provide an annual performance report. The annual report must be sent before December 31st of each year and must include the following:

- overview of project accomplishments
- description of each modified practice and list of all practices
- enrollment by practice
- State/private resource commitment
- monitoring/evaluation methods and results
- outreach efforts.

Note: The report must be sent to CEPD electronically as a Microsoft Word document with data in either Excel or Access.

F Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

To determine whether the practices selected create the desired habitat, each proposal submitted to an FSA State Office must collaborate with qualified professionals in the wildlife community to design and implement an appropriate habitat and wildlife population monitoring and evaluation plan. Wildlife population response to the habitat must be conducted in a scientifically defensible manner (Exhibit 1), using generally accepted techniques, and making the resulting data, papers, and reports available to FSA and the scientific community.

4 Existing SAFE Projects

A Requests for Additional Acres

States with existing SAFE projects may request additional acres. Requests for additional acres must include documentation and justification to support the additional acres.

The request for additional acres must include:

- name of the project
- number of acres requested
- justification for additional acres.

Note: Because of the significant demand for limited available SAFE acres, justification based solely on high producer demand is not sufficient to support requests for additional acres. All requests for additional acres within a previously approved SAFE project area must explain how the additional acres would provide significant benefits.

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4 Existing SAFE Projects (Continued)

A Requests for Additional Acres (Continued)

Justifications for additional acres **must** include **all** of the following:

- anticipated wildlife benefits, including the suite of species that would be benefitted and the ecological, social, and economic importance of the target species
- wildlife population response data to the existing SAFE project or prediction of population responses to the additional acres requested
- letters of support from partner organizations and other relevant stakeholders.

Note: Justifications may present that increased enrollment in a SAFE project may be needed to address changes in the surrounding landscape, such as expiring CRP or habitat conversion trends.

B Modifications to Existing Projects

States with existing SAFE projects may request modifications to existing projects. Requests for modifications must include documentation and justification to support the modification.

The request for the modification must include:

- name of the project
- description of the modification
- justification for the modification.

Justifications for modifications to existing projects **must** include **both** of the following:

- documentation on how the requested modification would improve conservation outcomes
- letters of support from partners or other relevant stakeholders.

C Deadline

SAFE requests for additional acres or modifications to existing projects must be submitted to CEPD not later than **COB June 1, 2012**.

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5 Acreage Allocations

A Allocation to States

New acreage allocations will be issued after all requests for new proposals, requests for additional acreage for existing projects, and modifications to existing projects have been reviewed by the National Office.

Allocations of acreage will be based on performance and conservation significance of existing projects; requests for new proposals; capacity to deliver the project; threatened, endangered, or candidate species status; and other related criteria.

Note: Projects that are determined to be underperforming may have existing acreage allocations decreased. States may provide justifications to retain acres in projects that may be underperforming. Justifications must include a description of why the project has been underperforming and why performance is anticipated to improve.

6 Action

A State Office Action

State Offices must:

- distribute this notice to the State Technical Committee
- comply with the provisions of this notice
- accept SAFE proposals that conform to Exhibit 1
- submit SAFE proposals to CEPD according to Exhibit 2
- submit all requests not later than **COB June 1, 2012**
- provide partners with this notice and updated acreage enrollment information.

New SAFE Proposal Format

New SAFE proposals must be prepared according to the following criteria:

- separate required information into sections, as described
- use bulleted lists, tables, or short narratives
- submit an electronic copy in Microsoft Word
- no more than 5 to 10 pages in length.

Provide the following:

- cover sheet with the following:
 - project name
 - contact organization, name, address, telephone number, FAX number, and e-mail address
 - stakeholders
 - State or States
 - county or counties
 - Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) (11- to 14-digit code)
- goal of the project:
 - describing the desired goal of the project
 - providing measurable program outcomes and timeframes for when the outcomes would be achieved
- description of the project with the following:
 - defined project boundaries (State, county, HUC code (12-digit code from TERRA))
 - GIS file of the project boundaries in Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) shapefile format according to Exhibit 3
 - CRP acreage request for SAFE
 - list of SAFE practices and applied CRP practices
 - with each applicable CRP practice, list the proposed additional requirements
 - technical practice requirements (number of species, species selection, planting requirements, etc.) for each SAFE practice

New SAFE Proposal Format (Continued)

- habitat type to be restored
 - map of land use and existing habitat types in project area (proposed CRP land in relationship to existing habitats) as an attachment in ESRI shapefile format
 - brief description of existing conditions (human and environmental within the project area)
 - description of other Federal, State, and private efforts to achieve project goals and objectives
 - description of benefits:
 - describing benefits (including societal, recreational, economic, and environmental) of the proposed project
 - describing relationship to existing Federal and State Wildlife plans or strategies, such as the State Wildlife Action Plans
 - description of the cost to:
 - estimate FSA CRP payments
 - provide any additional State and private resources that will assist in the project
 - provide estimated CCC life of project costs
 - provide estimated State and private partners out-of-pocket costs
 - description of Monitoring/Evaluation Plan
- Note:** A habitat and wildlife population monitoring and evaluation plan is required and must use generally accepted techniques appropriate to the geographic area and habitat type.
- description of the Public Outreach Program:
 - providing a discussion of the public support and outreach efforts to support the program
 - describing any communication plan for the proposed project
 - developing and providing a fact sheet about the SAFE practice for use with producers.

Important: New SAFE proposals submitted that do **not** follow the format in this paragraph will not be considered for approval.

Proposal Package Submission

Each new proposal submitted to CEPD must include, at a minimum, **all** of the following:

- copy of FSA STC minutes
- copy of NRCS State Technical Committee minutes
- shapefiles (about 2)
- proposal (5 to 10 pages)
- 2-CRP amendment, including modifications to Exhibit 11 practice write-up for SAFE
- fact sheets for SAFE practice (State-specific).

SAFE Shapefile Requirement

SAFE Shapefile Reporting Details

Name the shapefile safe_<code>_a_<prj >.shp. Code is an abbreviation for the full SAFE project area name, and prj is the type of projection.

The following illustrates how shapefiles for the Illinois Spoon River (isr) SAFE project area that are in a geographic coordinate system (GCS) would be named:

- safe_isr_a_gcs.dbf
- safe_isr_a_gcs.prj
- safe_isr_a_gcs.sbn
- safe_isr_a_gcs.sbx
- safe_isr_a_gcs.shp
- safe_isr_a_gcs.shp.xml
- safe_isr_a_gcs.shx.

Note: Submit all shapefiles in the GCS projection.

Shapefile creators should retain multiple polygons and identifying attributes if the file created is based on a feature set such as counties or watershed boundaries. Do not merge separate polygon features into 1 large polygon.

The following attributes should be included within the polygon shapefile provided.

Name	Type	Length	Data Example
FID	Object Id	Default	
Shape	Polygon	Default	
Type	Text	25	SAFE
Name	Text	255	Illinois Spoon River
Code	Text	10	isr