



The Habitat Corner

THE CRP: IT'S NOT JUST FOR CROPLAND ANY LONGER

For decades, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has had a strong following of farmers who produce annually tilled crops such as corn, soybeans, and wheat. For many years, the CRP required that the field be planted to an agriculture commodity for several years before being eligible for CRP enrollment. But in the last few years, new opportunities have become available for non-cropped areas such as marginal pasture lands to be enrolled.

In the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP), degraded or marginal pastureland adjacent to streams, springs, ponds, lakes, or sinkholes may be eligible. "Marginal" means that the vegetative cover is no longer adequately protecting the water body or sinkhole. Once enrolled, a buffer from 30 to 120 feet wide must be established to protect these sensitive areas from contamination by removing nutrients, sediment, organic matter, pesticides, and other pollutants, while also providing good wildlife cover.

In the Conservation Practice 29 (CP29) - Marginal Pasture Wildlife Habitat Buffer, a predominantly grass zone is established to help safeguard these critical areas that contribute to our drinking water. The buffer requires at least three native grass species (6 pounds/acre) plus wildflowers and forbs (2 pounds/acre), and at least 10 percent of the acres to be planted to native shrubs. This will create a diverse planting that filters well and is excellent wildlife habitat. The grasses provide cover for ground nesting birds and small mammals, the wildflowers and forbs supply food for pollinators as well as seeds for birds, and the shrubs offer shade in the summer months and fruit for the fall.

For landowners that desire to plant a buffer of trees and shrubs, the CP22 Riparian Forest Buffer can also be used on marginal pasturelands.

If you have livestock on your property that previously used the protected area for its source of water, then USDA will also assist you in funding an alternative water supply for your livestock. You may be able to drill a well, tie onto city water, or develop a spring to provide livestock with replacement water.

These practices allow for reimbursable payments of up to 90 percent of approved cost for the buffer installation as well as the alternative water supply. A \$100 per acre signing incentive is paid once you sign your contract for the acres you will install. The USDA will also provide an annual rental payment for each acre enrolled for at least 10 years. If you are interested in having someone look at your property to see if you have eligible land for this program contact your local USDA Service Center.

By Robin Mayberry, NRCS Area Wildlife Biologist



Protective grass, tree or shrub buffers along streams contribute to cleaner water.

ASK THE BIOLOGIST

- Q: Are tree tube protectors a good investment when planting trees?
- A: Tree tube protectors can help in survivorship of newly planted trees and shrubs when damage from deer is expected, such as when deer might rub their antlers on the trees. When using protectors, keep several concerns in mind. You want the stem to grow in diameter as the tree height increases. Use tall protectors (36 inches) when planting trees taller than 2 inches or larger in diameter. Use shorter protectors 12- 18 inches when planting shorter trees with smaller diameters, as the prolonged use of tree tubes can cause the trees to grow taller and the crown to become larger than the stem can hold up. Also, tree tubes do not protect against damage from moles and mice who like to chew on the tree right at or below soil surface, and they are not likely to deter beavers either.

HABITAT OPPORTUNITIES

Besides CP22 and CP29, there are several other government programs and organizations that provide technical and financial assistance to landowners desiring to install grass, tree or shrub buffers along water bodies on their property. A summary of these opportunities can be found in the brochure, "Buffer Your Streams And Sinkholes" at <http://www.tn.gov/twra/pdfs/streambuffer.pdf>, or call TWRA at 615-781-6610 to have one mailed to you.

"Helping Landowners and Wildlife Through Habitat Enhancement"

The Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency has Private Lands Biologists that will assist you in developing a management plan for your property and a strategy to implement it. See www.TWRAprivatelands.org for who to contact for technical assistance and other useful information on habitat management and programs.