

Integrating

Wildlife Habitat



2014 Farm Bill Conservation Programs

OVERVIEW

For anyone who's ever watched a Great Blue Heron hunt or a herd of deer bound across an open field, it's easy to understand how the presence of wildlife enriches our lives. California farmers and ranchers play an important role in providing the important habitat upon which our state's diverse and magnificent wildlife depend.

Farmers and ranchers can easily integrate and enhance wildlife habitat in their operations. Grasslands, wetlands, riparian areas, hedgerows, and a variety of tree, shrub, forb and grass plantings can provide wildlife much-needed food and shelter. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers landowners both technical and financial assistance to improve wildlife habitat on their land.

CONSERVATION PLANNING

For more than 75 years, NRCS has placed a high priority on helping agricultural producers meet their environmental and economic goals through conservation planning. NRCS financial and technical assistance from voluntary 2014 Farm Bill conservation programs can help agricultural producers integrate wildlife habitat into their operations in a cost-effective manner.

NRCS conservationists work one-on-one with farmers and ranchers to design a conservation plan that provides scientifically sound alternatives for accomplishing their goals and a timeline for implementing conservation practices, including those for wildlife habitat. All information provided to NRCS for conservation planning purposes is strictly confidential.

A VARIETY OF CONSERVATION PRACTICES

There are a wide variety of conservation practices landowners can implement to enhance wildlife habitat on agricultural lands. Practices can be as simple as planting native grasses, forbs, shrubs or trees; fencing livestock out of a sensitive riparian area; planting a hedgerow to attract native pollinators; or enhancing a livestock pond to attract wetland-dependent species. (See back for other specific examples of conservation practices.)

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The EQIP Declining Species Habitat Initiative provides financial and technical assistance to eligible participants who want to create, improve or enhance fish and wildlife habitat on properties that they own or manage. This funding is intended to help participants develop habitat for upland, wetland, aquatic, riparian and threatened and endangered species.

Also through EQIP, the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) program, a national wildlife habitat initiative, concentrates on enhanced financial and technical assistance to improve habitat for seven select species across the United States, including the Greater Sage-grouse and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. WLFW is a partnership between USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that helps producers make voluntary improvements to their lands that benefit wildlife and their agricultural operations.

Landowners who voluntarily sign up for WLFW receive Endangered Species Act predictability that they will be exempted from any incidental take of federally listed species caused by the implementation of WLFW conservation practices.



PROTECTING CALIFORNIA SPECIES

NRCS California has enhanced financial and technical assistance available to farmers and ranchers to help protect and improve habitat for many wildlife species, including but not limited to:

GREATER SAGE-GROUSE AND BISTATE POPULATIONS

NRCS California has been working since 2010 to expand conservation efforts to boost Greater Sage-grouse recovery by strategically focusing resources to promote healthy grazing lands management. Anticipated long-term outcomes of this initiative are: improved rangeland health; greater connectivity of core sage-grouse habitat; and stabilization and recovery of sage-grouse populations.

SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER

Landowners in select Southern California counties are encouraged to enhance, restore and protect habitat for the Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. NRCS assistance encourages adoption of management practices that are consistent with the bird's recovery plan and should increase landowner confidence that they will be able to continue their farming or ranching operation without additional regulatory constraints.

TRI-COLORED BLACKBIRDS

Dairy farmers in California's San Joaquin Valley are encouraged to delay silage harvest, in select fields, in an effort to allow nesting Tri-colored Blackbirds to fully fledge. More than 50 percent of this species nests in California's silage fields and typical harvest schedules put young birds at risk.

CALIFORNIA RED-LEGGED FROG AND CALIFORNIA TIGER SALAMANDER

Ranchers in select San Francisco Bay counties are working to rehabilitate livestock ponds in an effort to protect and improve habitat for native amphibians. Projects include desiltation to improve breeding habitat and spillway repair, which extends ponding long enough to allow these species to grow to the juvenile stage and exit the ponds.

Conservation Practices Available

NRCS offers technical and financial assistance on a number of conservation practices that promote wildlife habitat on agricultural lands. Here are eight examples:



Upland Wildlife Habitat Management

Simple changes in land use management can often help provide the needed habitat elements of food, cover, shelter and water. Where a change of management alone cannot provide these habitat factors in sufficient quantity, other practices may be needed.



Hedgerow Plantings

Establishing shrubs, trees and flowering plants provides food, cover and corridors for wildlife. With the appropriate mix of flowering plants, pollinators have access to needed pollen and nectar.



Conservation Cover

Planting of trees, shrubs, flowering plants and grasses provides a diversity of food resources, cover and shelter that allows wildlife species to flourish across all land uses, such as cropland, rangeland and forestlands.



Prescribed Grazing

Through planned grazing, vegetation is managed to provide ample food, cover and shelter for wildlife species dependent on grassland, shrub land, woodland or riparian habitats.



Fish and Wildlife Structures

Structures can provide sites for loafing, escape, nesting, rearing, roosting, perching or basking by terrestrial or aquatic species. Brush, stumps, rocks or artificial materials constructed in an appropriate design and location can meet a variety of habitat needs.



Riparian Forest Buffer

Planting trees and shrubs creates shade to lower or maintain water temperature and provides a source of large woody debris and leaf litter that improves habitat for fish, aquatic organisms and riparian-dependent species.



Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment

Restoring land to native vegetation reduces habitat fragmentation by reconnecting wildlife habitat and migration routes, including streams and riparian areas. Restoration also helps to control noxious weeds and invasive species.

For more information on NRCS Farm Bill conservation programs, visit:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/ca/programs/