Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals; to optimize environmental benefits; and to help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

Continuous Sign-Up: EQIP is a continuous sign-up, voluntary, conservation program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides financial and technical assistance for approved conservation practices based on a current conservation plan.

Conservation Plan: A conservation plan includes all practices, regardless of the program's financial assistance, that a producer or landowner has agreed to adopt for the agricultural operation and/or associated agricultural lands. Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan.

'EQIP schedule of operations': The basis for an application is the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and is derived from the applicant's conservation plan. The EQIP 'schedule of operations' identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, timing of the implementation, practice location, and payment rates.

Ranking and Funding Pools: EQIP ranking and funding pools are developed to assure that program funds are available to resource priorities across various land use types, for special emphasis resource needs and to assure that underserved groups have access to assistance.

Screening and Ranking: Eligible applications will be evaluated for financial assistance based on a screening and ranking process.

- The purpose of screening criteria is to prioritize an application based on factors such as: a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and, fund pool resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'.
- The objective of ranking criteria is to evaluate the environmental benefits of conservation treatments included in the applicant's 'EQIP schedule of operations'.

Applications will be screened and prioritized into 'High', 'Medium' or 'Low' categories. 'High' priority eligible applications will be ranked and considered for funding. 'Medium' priority eligible applications will be ranked only if funding is available. 'Low' priority applications are typically not ranked or considered for funding.

Practices that will not be financially supported in an EQIP contract will not be evaluated in the screening and ranking process. Only conservation practices included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' will be used to determine the screening priority and ranking score of the application considered for funding.

Continuous Funding: Continuous funding is a process to distribute EQIP funds year-round, as funds are available. This process provides a fluid transition between conservation planning and financial assistance throughout the year. Applications will be batched monthly, or quarterly, for ranking and those that meet a minimum threshold ranking score for the funding period will be approved for financial assistance.

About the EQIP Fund Pool

The purpose of the Eastern Sierra and Great Basin Rangeland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote sustainable operations, rangeland health and ecological function while enhancing wildlife habitat values.

Range operations is the Eastern Sierra and Great Basin region primarily occur on private, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Forest Service (USFS), and Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) perennial rangelands.

Both cattle and sheep operations occur with in the Eastern Sierra Great Basin boundary, however cattle operations, primarily cow-calf, are the dominate rangeland livestock enterprise. Livestock are present year round and are rotated between, and within, the different land ownerships. Wildlife habitat, including Sage grouse, Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Big Horn sheep, and yellow legged frog, is an important consideration for range operations.

Livestock primarily graze lower elevations in fall, winter, and spring, and move to higher elevations during the summer. Most sheep operators are predominately summer grazers with sheep from the San Joaquin Valley being trucked to the upper elevation summer grazing ranges in the Eastern Sierra. Many livestock operations include irrigated pasture along with the grazed rangelands. During good precipitation years sheep and cattle may also graze desert allotments in the southern part of the fund pool boundary.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Alpine, Inyo, eastern Kern, Mono, north-eastern Los Angeles, and northern San Bernardino* counties may be eligible for the Eastern Sierra and Great Basin Rangeland EQIP Fund Pool; please refer to the map at the end of this document for the boundaries of this EQIP Fund Pool.

Land Uses for the EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address a resource concern on at least one land use type listed below will be considered for financial assistance from this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- Range: Land used primarily for the production of grazing animals. Includes native plant communities and those seeded to native or introduced species, or naturalized by introduced species that are ecologically managed using range management principles.
- Farmstead: Land used for facilities and supporting infrastructure where farming, forestry, animal husbandry, and ranching activities are often initiated. This may include dwellings, equipment storage, plus farm input and output storage and handling facilities.
- Associated Agricultural Lands: Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as idle center pivot corners, odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.
- Grazed: Where grazing animals impact how land is managed.
- Wildlife: Where the applicant is actively managing for wildlife.

Resource Concerns for the EQIP Fund Pool

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are general NRCS natural resource definitions, applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- SOIL EROSION – Erosion removes topsoil, reduces levels of soil organic matter, and contributes to the breakdown of soil structure.
  - Sheet and Rill: Sheet and rill erosion is the detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by rainfall runoff/splash and/or irrigation events. Symptoms of soil erosion by water include: small rills and channels on the soil surface, soil deposited at the base of slopes, sediment in streams, lakes, and reservoirs, and pedestals of soil supporting pebbles and plant material.
  - Classic Gullies: Classic gullies are forms of erosion created by the concentrated flow of water. Classic gully erosion generally occurs in well-defined drainage ways and generally is not obliterated by tillage. Untreated classic gullies may enlarge progressively by head cutting and/or lateral widening.
  - Excessive Bank Erosion from Streams, Shorelines or Water Conveyance Channels: Stream stability is an active process, and while streambank erosion is a natural part of this process, it is often accelerated when land use management alters the stream system. When a stream's sediment load increases, the shape and function of the stream change, and the normal transport of sediment to downstream bottomlands is affected and the quality of wildlife habitat, both on land and in-stream, can be impacted.

- WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.
  - Excess Nutrients in Surface Water: Nutrients, organic and inorganic, are transported to receiving surface waters through runoff in quantities that degrade water quality. Increased nitrogen and phosphorus levels in water can produce excessive aquatic vegetation and algal blooms resulting in reduced dissolved oxygen, harmful toxins, and increased water temperature.
  - Excessive Sediment in Surface Water: Off-site transport of sediment to surface water can impact water quality and aquatic habitat. Not only does sediment carry nutrients and pesticides that can negatively impact water quality, but the physical characteristics of sediment can clog stream channels, silt in reservoirs, cover fish spawning grounds, and reduce downstream water quality.
  - Elevated Water Temperature: Water temperature has important ecological consequences and potential negative impacts for human use. As water temperature rises, there is a corresponding decrease in the availability of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases important to aquatic life. Warm water also has the potential to increase the presence of dissolved toxic substances that may restrict the suitability of water for human use.

- DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION – Plant condition degradation can result in stress, disease, insect damage and result in changes to the structure and composition of plant communities.
  - Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health: Plants must be adapted to the site and provided with appropriate amounts of nutrients, water, and sunshine, and protected from unchecked animal, weed,

insect, and disease pests. Plants established in the wrong climate or soil may be under stress and may never thrive, no matter how much fertilizer or water supplied. Natural events, such as drought, or mismanagement can cause plant stress. Plants under stress are more susceptible to disease and insect damage.

- Inadequate Structure and Composition: Plant communities, such as - wetland habitat, unique ecosystems or targeted plant communities, have insufficient diversity, density, distribution patterns, and three-dimensional structure necessary to achieve ecological functions and/or management objectives.
- Excessive Plant Pest Pressure: The term "pest" can be any animal, plant, insect, bacteria, or virus that results in plant damage or competes for space, nutrients, or water (e.g., weeds). Heat, drought, wind, sun, and cold create stress on plants that make them more susceptible to pests.
- Wildfire Hazard, Excess Biomass Accumulation: Accumulated plant residue (biomass) creates wildfire hazards that pose risks to human safety, structures, plants, animals, and air resources. While fire is an important and often beneficial part of the natural ecosystem, uncontrolled or "wild" fire poses a threat to life, health, and property.

❖ INADEQUATE HABITAT FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE – Quantity, quality or connectivity of food, water, cover/shelter, habitat continuity and/or space is inadequate to meet requirements of identified fish, wildlife or invertebrate species.

- Habitat Degradation: Conserving existing habitat and restoring habitat improves the odds that fish and wildlife communities will thrive. The availability and arrangement of food, water, cover, shelter, habitat continuity and space determine the number of organisms that a region can support, also known as carrying capacity. Increasing carrying capacity is critical to attaining long-term population stability.

❖ LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION LIMITATION – Livestock require five major classes of nutrients: energy, protein, minerals, vitamins, and water. All five are essential for normal health and production.

- Inadequate Livestock Water: Water quantity and distribution of suitable water sources can affect livestock based on the basic need to meet daily intake requirements and issues related to grazing patterns. Livestock travel distance to water can result in surplus/deficient forage availability and excessive/insufficient plant utilization.

❖ INEFFICIENT ENERGY USE – The inefficient use of energy increases costs and dependence on non-renewable energy sources.

- Farming/Ranching Practices and Field Operations: Inefficient energy use occurs whenever equipment or machinery operates more hours than needed to meet management goals. It may also occur when equipment or machinery becomes worn out, outdated, or poorly controlled.

Eligible NRCS Conservation Practices

All conservation practices planned for financial assistance must be included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and address a resource concern identified in this EQIP Fund Pool. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link for NRCS conservation practice standards:
http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020

Table 1. Eligible Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
338	Prescribed Burning	ac	1
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
348	Dam, Diversion	no	15
350	Sediment Basin	no	20
351	Water Well Decommissioning	no	20
355	Groundwater Testing	no	1
356	Dike	ft	20
362	Diversion	ft	10
378	Pond	no	20
380	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment	ft	15
381	Silvopasture Establishment	ac	15
382	Fence	ft	20
383	Fuel Break	ac	10
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
394	Firebreak	ft	5
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	ac	5
396	Aquatic Organism Passage	mi	5
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
460	Land Clearing	ac	10
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ft	15
472	Access Control	ac	10
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
500	Obstruction Removal	ac	10
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
521C	Pond Sealing or Lining, Bentonite Sealant	no	15
521D	Pond Sealing or Lining, Compacted Clay Treatment	no	15
521A	Pond Sealing or Lining, Flexible Membrane	no	20
521B	Pond Sealing or Lining, Soil Dispersant	no	20

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
548	Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment	ac	1
550	Range Planting	ac	5
558	Roof Runoff Structure	no	15
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	ac	10
570	Stormwater Runoff Control	no	15
572	Spoil Spreading	ac	1
574	Spring Development	no	20
575	Animal Trails and Walkways	ft	10
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
582	Open Channel	ft	15
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
601	Vegetative Barrier	ft	5
603	Herbaceous Wind Barriers	ft	5
606	Subsurface Drain	ft	20
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
630	Vertical Drain	no	10
636	Water Harvesting Catchment	no	20
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin	no	10
642	Water Well	no	20
647	Early Successional Habitat Development/Management	ac	1
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
650	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation	ft	15
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	ft	10
656	Constructed Wetland	ac	15
657	Wetland Restoration	ac	15
658	Wetland Creation	ac	15
659	Wetland Enhancement	ac	15
660	Tree/Shrub Pruning	ac	10
666	Forest Stand Improvement	ac	10
740	Pond Sealing and Lining, Soil Cement	no	20

Submitting an EQIP Application

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production may apply for EQIP by completing and submitting the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

USDA-NRCS, Alpine County
Minden Service Center
(775) 782-3661
Jim Gifford, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Inyo County
Bishop Service Center
(760) 872-6111
Rob Pearce, District Conservationist

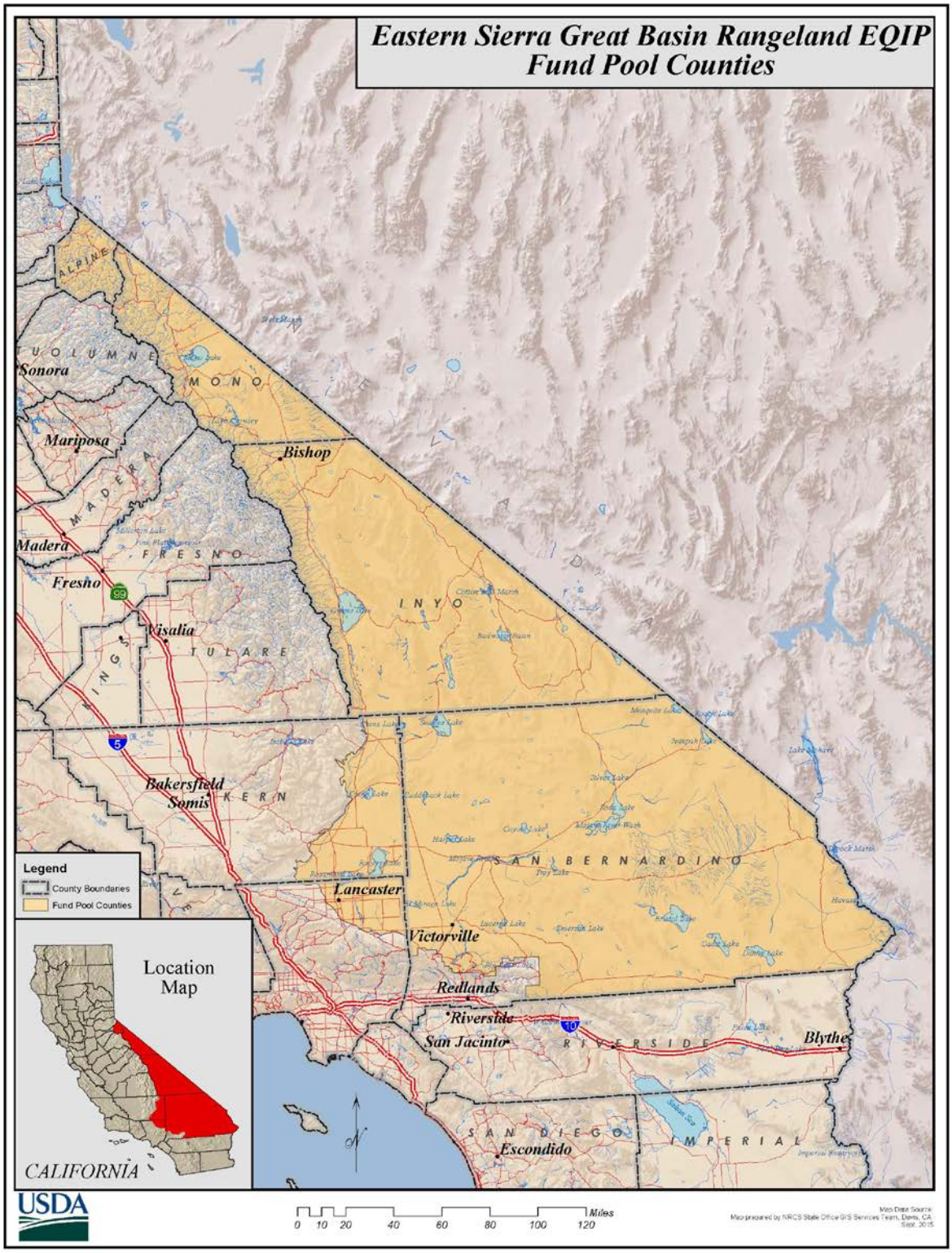
USDA-NRCS, eastern Kern County
Lancaster Service Center
(661) 945-2604
Hudson Minshew, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Los Angeles County
Lancaster Service Center
(661) 945-2604
Hudson Minshew, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Northern Mono County
Minden Service Center
(775) 782-3661
Jim Gifford, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Southern Mono County
Bishop Field Center
(760) 872-6111
Rob Pearce, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Northern San Bernardino County
Victorville Service Center
(760) 843-6882
Holly Shiralipour, District Conservationist


Eastern Sierra Great Basin Rangeland EQIP
Fund Pool Counties
ALPINE
TUOLUMNE
MONO
Sonora
Mariposa
Bishop
MADERA
Madera
FRESNO
Fresno
99
INYO
Visalia
TULARE
KING
5
Bakersfield
Somis
KERN
SAN BERNARDINO
Lancaster
Victorville
Redlands
Riverside
San Jacinto
10
RIVERSIDE
Blythe
SAN DIEGO
IMPERIAL
Escondido
Legend
County Boundaries
Fund Pool Counties
Location Map
CALIFORNIA
N
USDA
0 10 20 40 60 80 100 120
Miles