

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary, conservation program administered by NRCS that can provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices that address natural resource concerns. The purpose of 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.

EQIP Application Sign-up and Cut-off Dates

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round, but establishes cutoff dates to make funding selections for eligible, screened, and ranked applications.

To be ready for EQIP funding consideration, interested applicants will need to: (1) Develop a conservation plan, (2) Submit an application, (3) Meet program eligibility requirements, and (4) Approve their 'EQIP schedule of operations'.

The time needed to complete a conservation plan and process eligibility can vary, from a few weeks to more than a month, depending on the complexity of the farming operation.

Develop a 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.

Submitting an Application

Interested applicants 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 non-industrial private forest land.

Program Eligibility Requirements

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.

'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.

EQIP Screening, Ranking and Funding

EQIP funding decisions are based on an application evaluation process that includes screening tools and ranking criteria. Screening tools are worksheets used to prioritize an application based on factors such as: a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'. Ranking criteria considers the anticipated benefit of a conservation system, or practice, in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' to a natural resource concern.

About the EQIP Fund Pool

The purpose of the Sierra Nevada Forestland EQIP Fund Pool is to promote healthy and productive forestlands, reduce soil erosion, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, minimize the impacts to water quality and reduce wildfire risks on non-industrial private forestlands in the Sierra Nevada.

The resource setting is the west slope of the Sierra Nevada in Major Land Resource Area (MLRA) 18 and 22A. Common habitat types as described by the California Wildlife Habitat Relationship System include Montane Hardwood Conifer, Ponderosa Pine, Sierra Mixed Conifer, White Fir, Red Fir, Jeffrey Pine, and East Side Pine.

Elevation ranges from 1,200 feet in the northern area of the boundary to over 3,500 feet in the southern. Soils are generally of granite, volcanic or metamorphic parent material. Major rivers generally drain westward to the San Joaquin and Sacramento Rivers that flow into the Sacramento–San Joaquin River Delta, also called the California Delta.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in *Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Fresno, Kern, Madera, Mariposa, Nevada, Placer, western Sierra, Tuolumne and Tulare* counties may be eligible for the Sierra Nevada Forestland 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 that address resource concerns 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.

- **Forest:** Land on which the primary vegetation is tree cover (climax, natural or introduced plant community) and use is primarily for production of wood products or non-timber forest products.
- **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 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 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.
- ❖ **INSUFFICIENT WATER** – Water resources are not optimally managed to support ecological processes, land use objectives and/or water conservation goals.
 - **Inefficient Moisture Management:** In dryland conditions, inefficient moisture management can result in increased runoff, reduced soil moisture and diminished groundwater recharge. In some grassland and forestland systems, brush management can help restore a natural water regime.
- ❖ **WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.
 - **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.
 - **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.

Eligible NRCS Conservation Activity Plans

Only applications for NRCS conservation activity plans listed in the table below are eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. A Conservation Activity Plan (CAP) can be developed for an applicant to identify conservation practices needed to address a specific natural resource need.

Information about CAP services from Technical Service Providers (TSP), including how to find a certified TSP in your State, can be found on the NRCS national TSP website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/technical/tsp/?cid=stelprdb1042981>

Table 1. Eligible Conservation Activity Plans

Practice Code	Conservation Activity Plan Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
106	Forest Management Plan - Written	no	1

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 2. 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

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
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
484	Mulching	ac	1
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
500	Obstruction Removal	ac	10
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1
533	Pumping Plant	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	Trails and Walkways	ft	10
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
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
647	Early Successional Habitat Development/Management	ac	1
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
650	Windbreak/Shelterbelt Renovation	ft	15

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	ft	10
655	Forest Trails and Landings	ft	5
657	Wetland Restoration	ac	15
659	Wetland Enhancement	ac	15
660	Tree/Shrub Pruning	ac	10
666	Forest Stand Improvement	ac	10

Practice Payment Rate Caps

For certain conservation practices a limit to the amount of financial assistance has been established. Practice payment caps are established in consultation with local partners and to allow limited financial assistance support to reach more participants. Please contact your local field office if you have questions. A maximum payment amount per contract or practice is not allowable. Payment rate caps are applicable per contract item number.

Table 3. Practice Payment Rate Caps

Conservation Practice	Regular Payment Rate Cap	Historically Underserved Payment Rate Cap
490 – Tree and Shrub Site Preparation		
• Mechanical	\$70,000	\$126,000
• Chemical/ Biological	\$13,000	\$23,400
612 – Tree and Shrub Establishment	\$35,000	\$63,000
384 – Woody Residue Treatment	\$30,000	\$54,000
660 – Tree and Shrub Pruning	\$17,000	\$30,600
666 – Forest Stand Improvement	\$90,000	\$162,000

NRCS Field Office Contact Information

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants should contact a NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have non-industrial private forest land.

USDA-NRCS, Alpine County

Minden Service Center
(775) 782-3661
Jim Gifford, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Mariposa County

Mariposa Local Partnership Office
(209) 966-3431
Robyn Smith, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Amador County

Jackson Local Partnership Office
(209) 223-6535
Vacant, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Nevada County

Grass Valley Service Center
(530) 272-3417
Pam Hertzler, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Calaveras County

Jackson Local Partnership Office
(209) 223-6535
Vacant, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Placer County

Auburn Service Center
(530) 885-6505
Jennifer Johnson, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, El Dorado County

Placerville Service Center
(530) 295-5630
Danny Marquis, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Sierra County

Grass Valley Service Center
(530) 272-3417
Pam Hertzler, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Fresno County

Fresno Service Center
(559) 276-7494
David Durham, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Tulare County

Visalia Service Center
(559) 734-8732
Joe Williams, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Kern County

Bakersfield Service Center
(661) 336-0967
Jemaine Jenkins, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Tuolumne County

Jackson Local Partnership Office
(209) 223-6535
Vacant, District Conservationist

USDA-NRCS, Madera County

Madera Service Center
(559) 674-2108
Johnnie Siliznoff, District Conservationist

