

Private Land Wetland Programs

in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin

Income Options for Your Marginal Acres



Progress through Partnership

The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture is a public-private partnership dedicated to improving wetland habitat in south-central Nebraska's agricultural landscape. The Joint Venture offers a variety of programs to help landowners protect or restore wetland habitat on their property, and potentially enhance the income from their marginal acres. Many of our partners offer additional programs for landowners; see our website, www.rwbjv.org, for information.

The following list provides general guidelines for each Joint Venture program; however, every producer, operation, and piece of land is unique, so no two wetland projects are identical. We invite you to contact the Joint Venture to discuss details of these programs, and to consider how we might work together.

Restoration and Management Program (RAMP)

This ten-year agreement focuses on restoring and managing quality wetland habitat. The program provides financial incentives to restore hydrology within a wetland basin through pit filling, ditch plugs, water control structures, tree removal, vegetation management, etc. The native

plant community is restored on non-cropped areas.

The landowner receives a per-acre land-use payment, and may continue to farm previously-cropped ground. Center pivots may be used, provided that wheel crossings do not interfere with wetland hydrology.

In addition, the landowner has the option to be paid for performing prescribed management actions – such as haying, disking, and chemical applications – or contracting the work, with assistance from the Joint Venture. Grazing the wetland is encouraged as a way to supplement farm income.



Hydrology Restoration Program (HRP)

This full restoration program targets temporary and seasonal wetlands under 20 acres, with severely altered hydrology (e.g., drains, pits). Only high-priority wetlands (defined by the RWBJV Wetland Prioritization Model) are eligible.

To participate, the landowner signs a ten-year agreement and agrees to the wetland hydrology restoration, for which Joint Venture partners provide financial and technical assistance. In exchange, the landowner receives annual land use payments, which begin once restoration is complete. Cropping and grazing are permitted in this program.

Seasonal Habitat Improvement Program (SHIP)

This program is designed for drained and cropped wetlands. The landowner maintains cropping during the growing season, but provides migratory bird habitat in the non-growing season by allowing water to pond in a wetland soil area.

A ten-year agreement provides for installation of a water control structure and associated dirt work. The landowner, in consultation with the Joint Venture partners, determines an acceptable pool elevation based on topographic maps, and thus determines the cropland area to be covered in the agreement.

On cropland, the landowner allows natural runoff to pond in the area immediately after harvest, until March 31. Dates for pastureland are November 1 to April 30. Center pivots are permitted in SHIP.

CRP Wetland Restoration Incentive Bonus Program

This is a one-time signing bonus, funded by the Joint Venture partners, to promote enrollment and full restoration of wetlands under the USDA's CRP wetland restoration program, CP-23A. Cropland enrolled in CP-23A (including CREP), is eligible for the incentive if the hydrology is restored (full hydrology restoration on the applicant's property).

The incentive is a one-time payment of up to \$500 per acre, payable on March 31 following completion of restoration. All acres enrolled in the CRP CP-23A contract – uplands and wetlands – are eligible for the payment.

Existing Rainwater Basin wetlands that are currently enrolled in CRP are eligible for a bonus payment if the hydrology is restored. Payment is pro rata, based on the number of years remaining in the contract.

Short-Term Vegetation Management Program

In this program, a landowner signs a negotiated-length agreement that allows Joint Venture partners to treat invasive wetland plants – trees, cattail, reed canary grass, river bulrush, etc. – on his or her property. Unlike other programs, no wetland restoration is required, nor is there an annual land-use payment.

The landowner agrees to allow management activities: haying/shredding, intensive wetland grazing, prescribed burning, silt removal, pit filling, disking, chemical application, and tree removal. Additional grazing incentives may be possible, such as fencing, installation of a water source, or mineral block purchase.



Working Landscape Initiative

Through this program the Joint Venture purchases a conservation easement on property that contains a wetland or hydric soil. After the wetland and grassland are restored, through native seed planting and hydrologic restoration, the easement provides for the land to be used as pasture.

In certain circumstances, the Joint Venture purchases easements for the purpose of protecting existing wetlands. Priority is given to functioning wetlands, without hydrologic modifications, that are not eligible for NRCS Wetlands Reserve Program or other existing programs.

Joint Venture Cost Share Incentives

The Joint Venture partners promote certain practices in combination with programs outlined above, or on their own. Financial incentives are available for these activities if they benefit wildlife habitat, with an emphasis on migratory birds, or if they improve watershed hydrology, directly benefiting a protected wetland. A ten-year agreement is required.

Wetland Improvements

- Sediment control structures
- Fencing to promote wetland grazing
- Prescribed Grazing
- Variable-flow tail water recovery system
- Road closure and removal
- Vegetation management
- Wetland creation
- Wetland seeding
- Water development: wells, pivots, pipe,

livestock
Culvert re-size/addition/replacement
Water control structures
Junk pile removal
Earthwork:
- pit fills
- drain or ditch fills
- silt/sediment removal
- power line or pipeline burial
- dikes/berms
- tile drain removal

Watershed Improvements

Pit fills
Culvert re-size/addition/replacement
Buffers
Grassland restoration
Sediment control structure
Variable-flow tail water recovery system
Removing flow restrictions
Terrace removal
Road closure and removal
Tile drain removal

