

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM

STATE PLAN

October 2009

Texas is rich in ecological and biological diversity. The purpose of WHIP is to help participants develop fish and wildlife habitat on private agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Indian land. WHIP is a Farm Bill program whose purpose is to develop habitat for fish and wildlife on eligible lands. Participants agree to implement a wildlife habitat development plan and NRCS agrees to provide cost-share assistance for the initial implementation of wildlife habitat development practices. NRCS and program participants enter into a cost-share agreement for wildlife habitat development. Payment for conservation practices is made to assist with the cost of installation or establishment. The contract agreement lasts a minimum of one year and a maximum of 10 years.

The Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP) will be developed jointly with the participant by NRCS or other public or private natural resource professions approved by NRCS. The WHDP shall be approved by NRCS and address at least one of the following:

- 1) Fish and wildlife habitat conditions that are of concern to the participant;
- 2) Fish and wildlife habitat concerns identified in State, regional and national conservation initiatives; or
- 3) Fish and wildlife habitat concerns identified in an approved area-wide plan that addresses the wildlife resource habitat concern.

The WHDP includes a schedule for installation and maintenance of the conservation practices, as determined by NRCS. All conservation practices in the WHDP must be approved by NRCS and developed and carried out in accordance with the applicable [NRCS Field Office Technical Guide](#). The participant is responsible for the implementation of the WHDP.

Program Requirements

To participate in WHIP, an applicant must:

- 1) be in compliance with the highly erodible and wetland conservation provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill
- 2) Be in compliance with the terms of all other USDA-administered conservation program contracts to which the participant is a party
- 3) Develop and agree to comply with a Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP) and Operations and Maintenance Agreement
- 4) Enter into a cost share agreement
- 5) Provide NRCS with written evidence of ownership or legal control for the term of the proposed cost share agreement;
- 6) Agree to provide all information to NRCS determined to be necessary to assess the merits of a proposed project and to monitor cost-share agreement compliance;
- 7) Agree to grant to NRCS or its representatives access to the land for purposes related to application;
- 8) Provide a list of all members of the legal entity and embedded entities along with members' tax identification numbers and percentage interest in the entity;
- 9) Supply information, as required by NRCS to determine eligibility for the program, including but not limited to information to verify the applicant's status as a limited resource farmer or rancher or beginning farmer or rancher and payment eligibility as established Adjusted Gross Income requirements.

National and Texas Priorities

National priorities for WHIP are to promote the restoration of declining or important native fish and wildlife habitats; protect, restore, develop or enhance fish and wildlife habitat to benefit at-risk species; reduce the impacts of invasive species on fish and wildlife habitats, and protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats. NRCS will use the national priorities in conjunction with state and local priorities to assist with prioritization and selection of WHIP applications, and periodically review and update the national priorities utilizing input from the public and affected stakeholders to ensure that the program continues to address priority resource concerns.

A. Support of national priorities:

1. Promote the restoration of declining or important native wildlife habitats.
2. Protect, restore, develop or enhance wildlife habitat of at-risk species (candidate species, state and federally listed threatened and endangered species).
3. Reduce the impacts of invasive species on wildlife habitats.
4. Protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats.

STATE PRIORITIES:

The state habitat priorities for WHIP correspond to the conservation priorities identified in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Texas Wildlife Action Plan known as the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CWCS)[currently under revision]. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department completed this plan in 2005 based on input from many wildlife biologists from various agencies and organizations within the state as well as public input and comments. Following is a link to the entire document: [Texas Wildlife Action Plan](#)

Texas is divided into ten Eco-regions representing different habitat types. These eco-regions correspond closely with the Major Land Resource Areas of Texas utilized by NRCS. Each MLRA (eco-region) has been placed into one of three priority levels with priority one being most critical and priority three the least critical.

Priority 1 – High Priority Regions (MLRAs)

- Blackland Prairie (86A,B)
- Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes (150A,B; 151)
- South Texas Plains (83A,B,C,D,E)

Priority 2 – Secondary Priority Regions (MLRAs)

- Cross Timbers (80A,B; 84B; 85)
- Edwards Plateau (81A,B,C,D; 82)
- High Plains (77A,B,C,D)
- Pineywoods (133B; 152B)

Priority 3 – Tertiary Priority Regions (MLRAs)

- Post Oak Savannah (87A,B)
- Rolling Plains (70E; 77E, 78B,C,D)
- Trans-Pecos (42)

STATE OBJECTIVES:

- B. To restore, and conserve native wildlife habitats in the following priority order
1. Native Grasslands/Prairie/Savannah
 2. Stream/Riparian
 3. Wetland
 4. Forestland/Woodland
 5. Thorn Shrub

Applications and Application Ranking

Applications for WHIP can be obtained at local NRCS offices at anytime. NRCS will evaluate the application and make enrollment decision based on the fish and wildlife habitat needs using some or all of the following criteria:

- 1) contribution to resolving an identified habitat concern of national, regional, or state importance;
- 2) relationship to any established wildlife or conservation priority areas;
- 3) duration of benefits to be obtained from the habitat restoration practices;
- 4) self-sustaining nature of the habitat restoration practices;
- 5) availability of other partnership matching funds or reduced funding request by the person applying for participation;
- 6) estimated costs of fish and wildlife habitat restoration activities;
- 7) other factors determined appropriate by NRCS to meet the objectives of the program; and
- 8) willingness of the applicant to complete all conservation improvements during the first two years of the WHIP cost-share agreement.

Payment Limitations

NRCS shall offer to pay no more than 75 percent of the costs of establishing conservation practices to develop fish and wildlife habitat. Historically underserved producers, and Indian tribes may receive the applicable rate and an additional rate that is not less than 25 percent above the applicable rate, provided the this increase does not exceed 90 percent of the estimated incurred costs associated with the conservation practice. Cost-share payments may be made only upon a determination by the NRCS that a conservation practice or an identifiable component of a conservation practice has been established in compliance with appropriate standards and specifications. Payments made or attributed to a participant, directly or indirectly, may not exceed, in total, \$50,000 per year.

CONSERVATION PRACTICES

The following conservation practices from the NRCS Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) will be emphasized:

- Upland Wildlife Habitat Management (645)
- Brush Management (314)
- Prescribed Grazing (528)
- Prescribed Burning (338)
- Range Planting (550) – **Native species only**
- Riparian Forrest Buffer (391)
- Firebreak (394)
- Restoration of Declining Habitat (643)
- Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (644)
- Wetland Development or Restoration (657)

- Windbreak / Shelterbreak Establishment (380)
- Tree / Shrub Establishment (612)
- Forestland Improvement (490)
- Riparian Herbaceous Cover (390)
- Filter Strip (393)
- Field Border (386)
- Herbaceous Wind Barriers (603)

All conservation practices in Section IV of the Texas Field Office Technical Guide may be eligible for payment under WHIP, provided they are contained in the WHDP and treat a stated resource concern.

PARTNERSHIPS (members of the Wildlife Subcommittee of the Texas State Technical Advisory Committee)

- Audubon Texas
- Ducks Unlimited
- Environmental Defense
- Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Pheasants Forever
- Plateau Land & Wildlife Management
- Quail Unlimited
- Quail Forever
- Texas AgriLifeExtension
- Texas Farm Bureau
- Texas Forest Service
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas Upland Game Bird Advisory Council
- Texas Wildlife Association
- The Nature Conservancy of Texas
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- All Bird Joint Ventures: Playa Lakes, Rio Grande, Central Texas Oaks and Prairies, and Gulf Coast.

CRITERIA FOR MEASURING PROGRAM SUCCESS

- Program success will be determined by completing Habitat Value Assessment Worksheets for each habitat type on an annual basis. The worksheets will be used to evaluate changes in habitat as a result of implementation of the wildlife conservation plan.

STATE APPLICATION RANKING PROCESS AND CRITERIA

- The current ranking evaluation worksheet is posted on the Texas NRCS webpage posted below: [Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program \(WHIP\)](#)