Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

NRCS Technical Guidance: Conservation Plan and Practice Criteria

Ecological Sciences Section
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Like every other program, technical assistance (plan and practices) must:

- address a resource concern
- be feasible for the site
- meet NRCS technical standards (FOTG)
- meet CRP and CREP program requirements
  > FSA - program policy, size, CS policy
  > NRCS – purpose, size?, CS?

NRCS makes the final practice eligibility decision...
CREP Technical Assistance

What are CREP objectives and resource concerns? What are the purposes for CREP practices?

From NC CREP Agreement...
• Enhance WQ, reduce sediment & nutrients
• Riparian wildlife (migratory birds, mammals, and amphibians)
• Aquatic species (specific T&E, juvenile fish, fin and shellfish)
• Reduce fresh water pulses into nursery areas
• Wetland & Hydrology Restoration
CREP Technical Assistance

**Bottom Line**

• CREP plans must address CREP objectives/resource concerns (2-CRP).

• Planned practices must be feasible and needed.

• Practice designs MUST meet minimum criteria in NRCS FOTG standard, and MAY be designed up to the program-allowed maximum (2-CRP)
Conservation Plan Development

NRCS Responsibilities – (same as normal planning)

• ULTIMATELY responsible for developing a Conservation Plan that meets all technical and programmatic requirements (participant must be involved).

• Determine effects and generate CR or T&E survey where appropriate.

• Prepare new or updated NC-CPA-52...make available to FSA so they can sign off and handle unresolved CR, NEPA, etc. issues.
Conservation Plan Development

Coordinating with NCFS & Other Agencies

• NRCS ensures that specific practice requirements are communicated to other agencies (use the Tech Request/other written documentation)

• NRCS checks other agency’s plan to insure that prescription meets NRCS practice standards and CRP requirements. Your plan must be specific!

• All elements of the other agency plan must be incorporated in overall conservation plan and contract support document (ex. release treatments, etc.)

• NRCS is the technically responsible entity for what is in the plan and contract support documents.
PLAN and CPO REQUIREMENTS

• Prepare using in Toolkit (plan and contract).
• Have a good Conservation Plan Map...use ArcGIS and FSA CLU layer.
• Conservation Plan Map shows CREP field boundaries, qualifying water, practice location (structural practices, planned riparian buffer zones, wildlife openings, natural regeneration, etc.)
• Include all eligible acres...use field numbers and acres from CRP-1. Do not merge fields. (Ineligible acres may be required in plan.)
• Include a soils map and legend
PLAN and CPO REQUIREMENTS - more

• Contains practices and narratives needed for successful establishment and O&M. Refer to Job Sheets (which should have incorporated all requirements of other agency plan), designs/specifications.

• **Use CREP Plan Matrix** (Nov. 2014).

• Contains required management practices (Also in CREP Plan Matrix)

• CREP with forestry practices under **easement** MUST have a Forest Management Plan prepared by a registered forester. Management must concur with CREP Approved Forest Management Checklist.
PLAN and CPO REQUIREMENTS - more

Plans cover the standard CRP stuff:

• Prohibits harvesting or grazing
• Contains control of weeds, insects, pests
• Ensures that cover is not disturbed in nesting or brood season
• Is reviewed (signed) by SWCD
• Incorporates requirements for permits (if needed)
• **Is signed by all parties to the CRP-1**
• Schedule to establish cover in 1st 12 months (1st 24 months if approved by COC, NRCS, up to 3 years for certain hardwood situations)
Aids, helps, enhancements to improve plan/contract quality and consistency

- **FSA’s Manual “2-CRP”**
- NRCS Planning Matrix for CREP
- Forestry Tech. Request Worksheet
- CREP Hydrology Assessment Form
- CREP Approved Forest Management Checklist
- Updated Cost List
- NRCS Job Sheets
Other CREP Program Issues

• FSA is the contact for cost share questions.
• Be consistent – plan, CREP requirements, other agency plan, job sheets, narratives, etc., etc., etc.
• Mowing and chemical spraying can be done at any time, including primary nesting season if required for establishment.
• Plan 666 for mowing if required for establishment release in years after planting.
• Only 2 CS chemical sprayings are allowed by FSA policy, 1 pre-plant and 1 post plant
• Provide a full copy of plan to FSA (including AD1155, job sheets, Other Agency Plan)
• Provide designs with specific rates, amount, timing to participant (and FSA if requested)
CREP Minimums & Maximums

NRCS Practice Standards & CREP Program policy influence practice design

• *Minimum Criteria* is a *technical* issue (will the practice function properly to accomplish CREP purposes?)

• *Maximum Criteria* is a *program* issue (CREP allows wider width and will often pay for more than the minimum needed to meet NRCS standard?)
CREP Practices

- CP3 Tree Planting
- CP3A Hardwood Tree Planting
- CP21 Filter Strip
- CP22 Riparian Buffer
- CP23 Wetland Restoration
- CP23A Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain
- CP31 Bottomland Timber Establishment on Wetland
CP21 and CP22 are CREP practices intended to trap and remove pollutants from surface waters and riparian areas.

- There must be an up-slope pollutant source.
- Enrolled practice area cannot exceed the agricultural pollutant source area (1:1 ratio...pollutant source buffered must exceed or equal the practice extent).
- Agricultural pollutant source can include unbuffered crop, hay, pasture or other non-forest area that could contribute sediment, nutrients, chemicals to receiving waters.
- Ag. land flowing through these CREP practices does NOT have to be owned by the CREP participant; or be in same field.
Determining Buffer: Agricultural Land Ratio

Example 1: Up to 50% of the cropland/pastureland area draining thru the buffer practice can be enrolled as a buffer.

Example 2: The area draining thru the buffer may extend beyond the field boundary. In such cases, more than 50% of Field 1 may be enrolled.
Determining Buffer: Agricultural Land Ratio

Example 3: If Field 2 does not drain to the stream due to a structure or topography, then the buffer enrollment is limited to 50% of field 1.

Example 4: If Field 2 is already buffered, then the buffer enrollment is limited to 50% of field 1.
CREP Criteria    CP3 Tree Planting

• Enrolled area must be **cropland** and form a continuous buffer to a riparian area.
• Maximum limit of 300 feet from qualifying water.
• CP3 is a cropland conversion practice; therefore, whole fields can be enrolled, up to 300 ft. limitation.
• Cover requirements
  ➢ Must be short leaf pine species (**Pinus echinata**)
  ➢ Site/soils in enrollment area must be appropriate shortleaf pine
  ➢ LOBLOLLY and other SYP NOT ALLOWED!!!!!!
• Management activities defined in Exhibit 9 (refresh firebreak)
• 10 **to** 15 year CRP contract
• 30 year or PERMANENT CREP easement
CREP Criteria  CP3A Hardwood Tree Planting

• Enrolled area must be **cropland** and form a continuous buffer to a riparian area.
• Maximum limit of 300 feet from qualifying water.
• CP3A is a cropland conversion practice; therefore, whole fields can be enrolled, up to 300 ft. limitation.
• Cover requirements
  - Must be appropriate for soils in the enrollment area
  - Hardwood or mixture of hardwoods (Bald Cypress and/or Atlantic White Cedar may be substituted for hardwood species)
  - Longleaf (limited to approved soils list available through FSA)
• Management activities defined in Exhibit 9 (firebreak, burn longleaf; or alternative disk)
• 10 to 15 year CRP contract
• 30 year or PERMANENT CREP easement
CREP Criteria  CP-21 Filter Strip

Enrolled area must form continuous buffer

Widths

- Min. width is 20 feet
- Maximum limit for any purpose other than water quality is 120 feet (average) from qualifying water (If needed to accomplish purpose)

CP21 is a pollutant trapping practice; therefore, pollutant source buffered must exceed or equal the practice extent (at least 1:1 ratio). Generally whole fields will not be enrolled.

Sheet flow water is required.
CP21 Cover requirements

- Cover must be appropriate for soils in the enrollment area
- Cover for water quality portion must meet FOTG’s (Code 393) requirements for filtering runoff
- Additional width for wildlife, if applicable, plant to native grasses/forbs best suited
- Management activities in Exhibit 9 (light disk, burn wildlife portion)
- 10 to 15 year CRP contract
- 30 year CREP easement
CREP Criteria  CP-22 Riparian Forest Buffer

• Enrolled area must form continuous buffer to stream, riparian area
• Minimum width is controlled by 391-Riparian Forest Buffer but will not be less than 35 feet
• Maximum limit for any purpose other than water quality is 300 feet (average) from qualifying water (If needed to accomplish purpose)
• CP22 Is a pollutant trapping practice; therefore, pollutant source buffered must exceed or equal the practice extent (at least 1:1 ratio). Generally whole fields will not be enrolled. Sheet flow is required.
• CP21 Filter Strip required along ditches that bisect enrolled buffer
CP-22 Cover Requirements

✓ Zone 1 *(required)*— min. 15 ft. closest to water, but can be wider, 2 spp. deciduous trees/shrubs *(planted)*

✓ Zone 2 *(required)*

- min. criteria 20 ft. beyond Zone 1 w/ at least 2 spp. tree or shrub is required by FOTG (Code 391)
- when Zone 2 wider than 20 ft. must provide *fish and wildlife habitat* – spec. for deciduous tree/shrub at least 50% of stand is required by FOTG (Code 391)

✓ Zone 3 *(optional)* – filter strip (just like CP21) to disperse concentrated flow
Other CP22 Requirements

✓ Hydrology restoration must be addressed (solid tile lines...) Use Form.

✓ Management activities in Exhibit 9 (light disk, burn native grass in zone 3)

✓ 10 to 15 year CRP contract

✓ 30 year or PERMANENT CREP easement
Filter Strips Needed on Ditches that Bisect Riparian Forest Buffers

Drainage ditches that bisect a buffer and carry unfiltered overland flow must be treated with filter strips (min. 20ft. by NRCS Filter Strip Standard). Ditches that bisect a buffer (at least 2 ft. deep, 1 ft. bottom) are eligible for CP21 even though not a qualified seasonal or perennial water body.
“Restoration” of Hydrology in Riparian Buffers

• Include a ‘CREP Hydrologic Restoration Assessment’ form completed by the planner in case file
• Hydrologic ‘restoration’ applies to enrolled areas (or parts) that are poorly or somewhat poorly drained soils.
• ‘Restoration’ practices CANNOT negatively impact agricultural use of un-enrolled areas…however water table under adjacent areas MAY be raised during parts of the year
• ‘Restoration’ involves both surface and subsurface water
  ➢ Surface Water – Ensure sheet flow through the buffer to increase infiltration and pollutant trapping. Filter Strip or Shaping Upslope?
  ➢ Subsurface – Replace perforated tile with SOLID tile where subsurface drains pass through buffer. Water Table Control on CP-22 should be considered. Technical issues are being evaluated and training guidance will be provided. There could be some extensive on-site analysis required in some cases.
CREP Criteria   CP-23 Wetland Restoration

- Enrolled area must form continuous buffer
- Must be in 100yr floodplain and meet 51% hydric
- CP23 may extend to the edge of hydric soils where enrollment area is substantially hydric
- 750 ft. from qualifying water if enrollment area includes predominantly hydric soils
- Non Riparian wetlands may be enrolled but must limit pulses of freshwater into primary nursery areas; OR, filter water associated with agricultural drainage ditches
- Hydrologic restoration to the greatest extent practical.
- Up to 3:1 uplands may be enrolled if necessary for full ecological functioning
- Cover must be trees
- Management Activities (water table control)
- 10 to 15 year CRP contract
- PERMANENT CREP easement REQUIRED
CREP Criteria  CP-23A Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain

- Enrolled area must form continuous buffer
- CP23A may extend to the edge of hydric soils where enrollment area is substantially hydric
- 750 ft. from qualifying water if enrollment area includes predominantly hydric soils
- Non Riparian wetlands may be enrolled but must limit pulses of freshwater into primary nursery areas; OR, filter water associated with agricultural drainage ditches
- Up to 4:1 acres of uplands may be enrolled if necessary for full ecological functioning
- Cover must be trees
- Management Activities (water table control)
- 10 to 15 year CRP contract
- PERMANENT CREP easement REQUIRED
**CREP Criteria  CP31 Bottomland Timber Est. on Wetland**

- Enrolled area must be **cropland**, form a continuous buffer to a riparian area, and “**be within the recognized 100-year flood plain for a river or stream with permanent flow**”
- Maximum limit of 300 feet from qualifying water.
- CP31 is a cropland conversion practice; therefore, whole fields can be enrolled, up to 300 ft. limitation.
- Cover requirements
  - Must be appropriate for soils in the enrollment area
  - 3 hardwood species required, natural regeneration by nuts/seed not allowed
  - SYP, Softwoods NOT ALLOWED!!!!!
- Management activities - none
- 10 **to** 15 year CRP contract
- 30 year or PERMANENT CREP easement
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

*Spirited discussion and questions...*