



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

Thinning CREP Easements

The following information is meant to provide guidance to landowners and natural resource professionals in the management of CREP easements. It does not replace or supersede the deed of conservation easement.

Purpose of the CREP Easement

The purpose of the CREP easement is to improve water quality by reducing non-point source pollution and sedimentation along agricultural operations. Riparian buffer zones were established within 300 feet of a qualifying waterbody where cooperators or grantors agreed to plant trees and maintain the forestland for a set length of time.

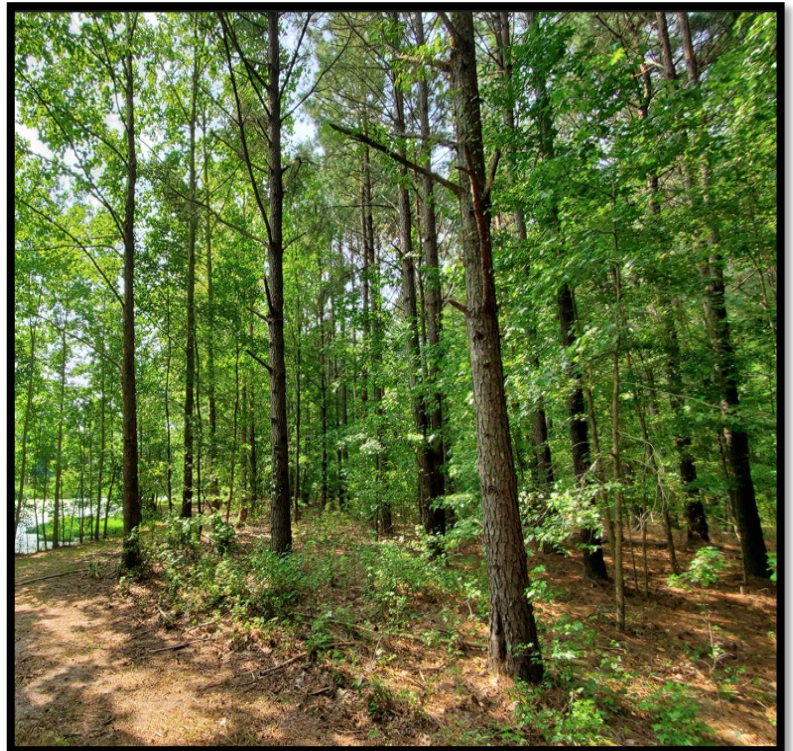
Additionally, the CREP program should also enhance wildlife habitat along these aquatic ecosystems and bottomland forests. Thinning allows sunlight to reach the forest floor creating more opportunities for native grasses and weeds to grow that provide food and cover for an array of wildlife species.

Forest Thinning is an Allowable Activity

Once the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract has expired and the **trees are at least 16 years of age**, additional management activities like thinning that promote tree health and enhance wildlife habitat are allowed. **All management activities must take care to not impact water quality.**

Managing CREP easements must be carried out under the guidance and recommendations of a **professional NC Registered Forester or a Wildlife Biologist.**

Prior to thinning a CREP easement, a forest management plan that recommends the practice of thinning must be **submitted and approved** by CREP program staff. A forest management plan is a written document that describes the property and makes recommendations for management activities, timeframes, and the purpose and desired outcomes. A forest management plan is tailored to meet the needs of a specific property and helps to ensure that the deed of conservation easement is being adhered to.



If you need assistance with acquiring a forest management plan, contact your local NC Forest Service County Ranger, a private Consulting Forester, or a Certified Wildlife Biologist.



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Forest management plans, at a minimum, should include the following information:

- ✓ **Current Stand Conditions.** (*Tree age, Tree diameters (DBH), Tree Height, stand density, tree health, disease or pest concerns, storm damage, etc.*)
- ✓ **Management Recommendations**
 - Why is the thinning needed
 - When should the thinning be performed (timeframes)
 - What type of thinning will be performed
 - What Basal Area (BA) will the stand be thinned down to. (*Target BA is 70 FT²/ acre or within 20% of recommended BA from the Foresters Field Handbook*)
 - Expected stand conditions after the thinning
- ✓ **Thinning requirements** (see below)
- ✓ **Map of the area** to thin with the CREP easement identified

Thinning Requirements

- ✓ A **50- foot NO CUT buffer zone** or minimum impact zone (MIZ) must be maintained along qualifying waterbodies. This is a requirement of the CREP deed of conservation easement.
- ✓ NC Forestry Best Management Practices must be implemented during the harvesting to protect water quality.
- ✓ All state, federal, and/or local laws as they relate to forest management and the harvesting of timber, must be followed. This includes the NC Forest Practice Guidelines and the NC Riparian Buffer Rules as applicable.
- ✓ When possible, logging decks should be located outside of the CREP easement, and at least 50 feet away from any ditch or stream (potential deck sites can be shown on map).

Questions About Managing CREP Easements

Questions regarding qualifying waterbodies, thinning, or other management activities should be directed to the CREP Program with the NC Division of Soil and Water Conservation or your local soil and water district.

When the CRP contract expires, the landowner or cooperator has met their obligation or agreement with the USDA Farm Service Agency. However, on the properties that had CREP plus a CREP easement, some land use restrictions still apply and the deed of conservation easement must be adhered to.

<https://www.ncagr.gov/divisions/soil-water-conservation/programs-initiatives/crep>

