

News Release

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USDA Launches New Bobwhite Conservation Pilot and Announces General Conservation Reserve Program Signup

SIoux FALLS, S.D., March 2, 2024 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the launch of a new conservation initiative – Working Lands for Wildlife’s Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project, as well as the signup dates for USDA’s General Enrollment signup in the Conservation Reserve Program (General CRP), which opens March 4. Both conservation opportunities give producers tools to conserve wildlife habitat while achieving other conservation benefits, including sequestering carbon and improving water quality and soil health.

Robert Bonnie, USDA Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation, announced these opportunities today at Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic in Sioux Falls, S.D. The General Conservation Reserve Program signup will run from **March 4 to 29, 2024**. The Working Lands for Wildlife Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project is a new effort supporting voluntary conservation of private working lands to benefit northern bobwhite quail and East-Central grasslands conservation.

“The USDA has a long track record of fostering and supporting the vital relationship between agriculture and conservation, and the Conservation Reserve Program and new Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project help our producers be good stewards of their lands and boost wildlife populations at the same time,” Bonnie said. “These efforts demonstrate the power of USDA’s Farm Bill conservation programs to conserve wildlife habitat, protect clean water and address climate change in partnership with farmers, ranchers, forest owners and conservation organizations, like Pheasants Forever, across the country.”

General CRP

As one of the largest private lands conservation programs in the United States, CRP offers a range of conservation options to farmers, ranchers and landowners. It has been an especially strong opportunity for farmers with less productive or marginal cropland, helping them re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion and support wildlife habitat.

General CRP, offered through USDA’s [Farm Service Agency](#) (FSA), helps producers and landowners establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses or trees. Additionally, General CRP includes a Climate-Smart Practice Incentive to help increase carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by helping producers and landowners establish trees and permanent grasses, enhance wildlife habitat and restore wetlands.

Landowners and producers interested in CRP should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#) to learn more or to apply for the program before their deadlines.

Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project

The Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project, offered by the [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) through Working Lands for Wildlife, provided dedicated funding of \$13 million -- for fiscal year 2024 - in new assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. This is for producers to help the bobwhite and other game and non-game species by managing their working lands for early successional habitat while meeting their lands natural resource and production goals.

This new pilot also includes funding to support producers in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

NRCS accepts applications year-round for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Interested producers from eligible states should contact the NRCS at their local [USDA Service Center](#).

The Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project supports the 5-year, 7-million-acre goal of the Working Lands for Wildlife Northern Bobwhite, Grasslands and Savannas Framework for Conservation Action unveiled in 2022 by USDA. Recently, NRCS expanded the [Climate- Smart Agriculture and Forestry Mitigation Activities](#) that qualify for funding through the Inflation Reduction Act. Those funds will also be critical to Working Lands for Wildlife's success in reaching its long-term goals.

The Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project advances USDA's efforts in climate-smart agriculture with almost 20 climate-smart practices being deployed voluntarily on private lands, including field borders, brush management, tillage management, prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, forest stand improvement and herbaceous weed treatment. More than 17 conservation practices that support climate smart mitigation are included in the Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project.

More Information

Producers and landowners interested in either opportunity should contact the FSA and NRCS at their local Service Center. Those interested in General CRP should apply by March 29, 2024. Those interested in Northern Bobwhite Pilot Project should contact NRCS to sign up now.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit usda.gov.

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