

National Bulletin: 300-24-34

Date: 5/22/2024

LTP–Solicitation for Wetland Reserve Enhancement  
**Subject:** Partnership Project Proposals for Fiscal Year 2024  
Funding

**Purpose:** This national bulletin provides information regarding the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) funding opportunity and proposal submission process for fiscal year (FY) 2024.

**Expiration Date:** September 30, 2025.

**Background:** WREP is a component of Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) that focuses on wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement activities. Through WREP, NRCS enters into agreements with eligible partners to target and leverage resources for carrying out high priority wetland activities on eligible lands. Only state and local units of government, Indian tribes, and nongovernmental organizations are eligible to submit WREP proposals. WREP partners must contribute a financial or technical assistance match and maintain an active System for Award Management (SAM) status. All individual agreements or contracts funded under a WREP agreement must meet all ACEP-WRE eligibility and program requirements. All transactions will be processed through required agreement and contract procedures.

**Explanation:** In addition to the national WREP signup announcement that is issued by national headquarters, state conservationists and area directors must announce within their respective states the opportunity to submit WREP proposals. Potential partners may submit WREP proposals for an individual landowner project, a group of landowner projects, or specific wetland and habitat types within a watershed or geographic area. State conservationists and area directors may provide feedback as partners develop their proposals. Individual landowners may not submit WREP proposals through this submission process.

There will be an applicant WREP proposal workshop on June 20, 2024, from 2 pm to 4 pm EDT to discuss program participation and FY 2025 enrollment options. The session will be recorded and made available to NRCS staff and partners on the [NRCS ACEP webpage](#).

The WREP signup will prioritize enrolling [historically underserved landowners](#), projects that further the [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\) priority areas](#), and habitat enhancement of existing wetland program easements.

Partners must submit proposals to the state contact identified in the WREP announcement and courtesy copy to [NRCS.ProgramAgreements@usda.gov](mailto:NRCS.ProgramAgreements@usda.gov) by August 16, 2024. The state conservationist and area directors must review the proposals and conduct an initial evaluation based on the criteria provided in this bulletin and Attachment C, “Announcement of Funding, Proposal Requirements, and Review Criteria.” Following state review, state conservationists and area directors will submit proposals recommended for funding to the Easement Programs Division (EPD) SharePoint **by August 23, 2024**. The Chief will make final proposal selections

and funding determinations. The state conservationist and area directors will collaborate with the partner to execute the WREP agreement as described in this bulletin.

**New for 2024:**

- \$50 million available in ACEP-WRE, including \$25 million in Farm Bill and \$25 million in IRA (if funding is available).
- Proposals are capped at \$10 million.
- If a proposal receives points for any ranking criteria that requires action by the partner, each of the criteria must be met and documented in the annual report.
- Partners should explain outreach and support plans in detail to ensure maximum points.
- To qualify for IRA funding, the proposal must meet statutory priorities, particularly that enrolling and restoring the land will reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions in priority areas.
- All performance-related items must be clearly defined in the WREP agreement and agreed to by both parties.
- Partners must submit an annual report to the lead NRCS state contact and EPD defining all accomplishments; failure to submit an annual report by October 31 each year for the duration of the project could impact future funding.

**FY 2024 WREP Funding Options and Match Requirements.** In FY 2024, NRCS will make up to \$50 million available for WREP projects that will enhance habitats on existing easements or will result in new enrollments under a permanent easement, 30-year easement, or 30-year contract on acreage owned by Indian tribes.

Proposals that provide outreach to new customers, support acquisition activities, and assist with planning and implementing restoration practices on new enrollments or existing easements associated with funded WREP proposals will be prioritized. In addition, proposals with significant and detailed outreach and support plans to encourage enrollment of historically underserved landowners will be prioritized.

**Budgets.** Proposal budgets must include a breakdown of project activities, the estimated costs, and the type of costs (i.e., financial assistance (FA) or technical assistance (TA)). The proposal should indicate the specific partner contributions, which may be cash, in-kind services, or a combination of both, for the following items:

- FA costs for easement or 30-year contract acquisition, which will be provided directly to the eligible landowner through appropriate agreements. FA funds for acquisition may only be provided by NRCS.
- FA costs for easement acquisition-related cost items, which include but are not limited to appraisals, legal boundary surveys, due diligence costs for environmental record and title searches, and title work. FA funds for easement acquisition-related cost items may be provided by NRCS.
- Restoration and enhancement costs may be funded by FA provided by NRCS or cash contributions from the partner.
- TA costs for enrollment, acquisition support, planning, and restoration activities. Technical assistance activities may include, but are not limited to, reviewing and

summarizing title or environmental records search products; evaluating and documenting land eligibility; and planning or designing the ACEP-WRE project restoration according to NRCS planning procedures and practice standards and specifications.

Partner contributions must equal at least 15 percent of the total estimated FA costs for easement acquisition, restoration implementation, and habitat enhancement.

WREP proposals must include a schedule showing how all the requested NRCS funds will be obligated before the end of FY 2027. As NRCS FA funds are not obligated to the WREP agreement itself, the agreement must identify the funding NRCS intends to make available over the life of the agreement for easement acquisition and restoration. The agreement terms will state that NRCS reserves the right and authority to reduce or discontinue project benefits based on funds availability, changes in agency priorities, or inability of partner to deliver resources or provisions of this agreement.

Only agreements or contracts to which NRCS funds are directly obligated (including agreements for the purchase of conservation easement, easement restoration agreements, WREP agreements, cooperative agreements, or federal contracts) are ensured funding for their duration. The agreements and contracts must be properly executed and valid. All funding beyond those obligated to such agreements or contract in FY 2025 is subject to change based on availability of funds and the ability of the partner to meet agreement deliverables.

**Soliciting Proposals.** State conservationists and area directors must announce the availability of this WREP opportunity on the state NRCS website and through state technical committee meetings or other appropriate avenues for advertisement. The Farm Production and Conservation Business Center External Affairs Division will provide a toolkit to state public affairs specialists to help states with advertising and soliciting proposals.

Questions regarding WREP communications may be directed to Justin Fritscher at [justin.fritscher@usda.gov](mailto:justin.fritscher@usda.gov). A national announcement will be made through a press release by NRCS national headquarters. Before posting the announcement or providing information to partners, state conservationist and area directors must insert appropriate contact information for proposals and other relevant state information in the announcement. Additionally, the national ACEP website is updating links to the FY 2024 WREP announcement, applicant webinar, proposal requirements information, and state contact information.

**Proposal Development.** States with partners interested in participating in WREP may determine how best to coordinate with those partners in proposal development. Partners are encouraged to include plans for outreach to historically underserved landowners to ensure awareness of enrollment opportunities under approved WREP projects.

**Proposal Requirements.** Proposals must adhere to the format and address all criteria outlined in this bulletin and attached announcement. Specifics on proposal format and content are outlined in the proposal requirements section of the announcement. State conservationist and area directors must review submitted proposals to ensure that all requirements are met before submitting recommended proposals to EPD. Only complete proposals submitted by the

announced deadline will be considered received by the agency and eligible for consideration. States may recommend more than one proposal for funding consideration.

**Proposal Submission and Notification.** Partners must submit complete proposals to the appropriate state contact by **August 16, 2024**. State conservationists and area directors will review proposals based on the state and national review criteria outlined in this bulletin and the attachments. Depending upon available funding and agency priorities, NRCS may offer less financial or technical assistance funds than requested and may require adjustments to the proposal as a condition of recommendation or approval to meet program or other requirements.

EPD will notify states of selections made by the Chief and the state conservationist or area director will provide an official letter of notification to selected partners following selection.

Incomplete proposals and proposals that do not meet the requirements will not be considered and states must notify the partner if this occurs. State conservationist or area directors must provide written notification to partners whose proposals are not selected and copies uploaded to the [EPD SharePoint](#). Partner proposals may be withdrawn by written notice to the appropriate state conservationist or area director at any time before selection.

**State Review.** Submitted proposals must be evaluated to address each of the following:

- Potential duplication of efforts with other projects (including currently funded WREP agreements), or existing programs.
- Adherence to and consistency with program regulation, including requirements related to land and landowner eligibility and other requirements (e.g., IRA).
- Expected benefits of project implementation in the state, specifically for historically underserved landowners.
- Other issues or concerns that should be considered.
- General recommendation for approval of the project.

If a project is multistate in scope, the state that most of the project area is in will be the lead state responsible for reviewing the proposal and submitting recommendations to EPD. The lead state will ensure that the other affected states are informed of the proposals and provided an opportunity for input.

**National Review and Selection of Proposals.** After states have conducted their reviews, all recommended proposals with any updates must be electronically submitted to the [EPD SharePoint](#). EPD will evaluate submitted proposals using a competitive process, Attachment A, “WREP FY 2024 Proposal Template,” and input from a multidisciplinary team. Proposals are evaluated based on partnership contributions, the objectives of NRCS landscape conservation initiatives or IRA it addresses, planned outreach efforts to underserved groups, and resource outcomes.

The deputy chief for Programs will submit state recommendations and national ranking results and recommendations to the Chief for review and final selection.

**WREP Agreement.** Once proposals are selected, NRCS will enter into a WREP agreement with the partners receiving funding or providing deliverables. States with selected proposals

will be given more guidance on executing WREP agreements with partners. At a minimum, WREP agreements must include the following:

- Role of the partner.
- Role of NRCS.
- Format and frequency of reports required.
- Plan of work and budget to identify other funding sources (if applicable) for financial or technical assistance.
- Specified project schedule and timeframe.
- Types of agreements or contracts that will be used to obligate NRCS funds. TA funds may be obligated directly to the partner through the WREP agreement. FA funds must be obligated by NRCS through the standard obligation mechanisms for enrolling, acquiring, and restoring easements.
- Other requirements deemed necessary by NRCS to achieve purposes of the ACEP-WRE or IRA.

**Eligibility Requirements.** All applications for enrollment selected for funding through WREP must meet all ACEP-WRE program and eligibility requirements and IRA priorities. Interested landowners in an approved WREP agreement area must submit Form NRCS-CPA-1200, “Conservation Program Application,” to NRCS for enrollment consideration. All eligible landowner applications submitted by the announced batching period must be assessed and ranked. All transactions will be processed through standard acquisition, contracting, and agreement procedures set forth in Title 440 Conservation Program Manual, Parts 528 and 527. State conservationists and area directors must ensure that wetland restoration and enhancement activities are designed to maximize wildlife habitat benefits and wetland values and functions in accordance with the ACEP-WRE regulation (7 CFR Part 1468), policy, and NRCS standards and specifications. Additionally, the successful restoration of land and the resulting wetland values must take into consideration the cost of such restoration, as required by 7 CFR Part 1468. Proposals must conform to the ACEP-WRE guidelines for restoration and management of lands subject to an ACEP-WRE easement.

**Contact:** For more information, email Ken Kriese, National ACEP-WRE program manager, at [kenneth.kriese@usda.gov](mailto:kenneth.kriese@usda.gov).

**Attachments:** Attachment A – WREP FY 2024 Proposal Template  
Attachment B – WREP FY 2024 Timeline Targets  
Attachment C – WREP FY 2024 Ranking Criteria