

# Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

## 2010 New Jersey FACT SHEET



The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) is a voluntary USDA program for improving or developing fish and wildlife habitat on private lands. The program provides both technical and financial assistance to establish and enhance habitat for priority species and habitat types.

Eligible applicants work with their local Natural Resources Conservation Service staff to prepare and implement a wildlife plan of operations. The plan becomes the basis for a contract which, if funded through a competitive ranking process, provides payments for completed practices that create or improve the approved wildlife habitat.

### Who Is Eligible?

To participate in WHIP, applicants must own land capable of being farmed or land suitable for wildlife habitat; or have an interest in an agricultural operation, including forestry, and own or have control of the land under consideration. Land is not eligible for WHIP if it is currently enrolled in another USDA Farm Bill conservation program such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) or the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). Land is also ineligible if it is used for mitigation purposes, or if it is publically owned.

### Wildlife Plan of Operations

The wildlife plan of operations describes the land user's goals for improving habitat and lists the conservation practices as well as a schedule for implementation.

The plan is ranked based on how well it meets national, state and species specific habitat goals, as well as for cost efficiency (providing the greatest benefit for the least cost). If selected for funding, the applicant will enter into a contract agreement with NRCS that will last for one year after the last practice is installed. The wildlife plan of operations becomes an integral part of the contract.

Payments are made after practices are installed. Applicants agree to maintain the installed practices for their normal lifespan, which is set out in the contract. NRCS conducts annual reviews of the contract with the landowner to monitor practice success or failure and determine if plan modifications are needed.

### What is the Contract Period?



Contracts have a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practice and a maximum term of ten years. Contracts provide pre-determined program payments to the producer for the implementation of the planned practices according to a schedule developed with the producer.

The schedule identifies the conservation practice extent (amount), date to be installed, and payment. Practices must meet NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions. Any deviation from the contract schedule is a violation of the contract unless approved in advance.

### What are the Payment Rates and Terms?

Program payment rates in New Jersey are calculated at either 60% or 75% of the typical cost of implementing the practice, determined by the habitat benefit of the practice. If the applicant is a beginning farmer, limited resource or socially disadvantaged producer, the rates are 25% higher, up to a maximum of 90%. Payments are made after conservation practices are implemented to the standards agreed to in advance.

There is an annual payment limitation of \$50,000 per person per year for WHIP contracts. Additional contributions from other partners may also be available.

### For More Information or to Sign Up, Contact Your Local USDA Service Center:

*Burlington, Camden and Ocean counties*

**Columbus Service Center (1971 Jacksonville-Jobstown Rd)**  
Telephone: (609) 267-1639

*Hunterdon, Somerset and Union counties*

**Frenchtown Service Center (687 Pittstown Rd Suite 2)**  
Telephone: (908) 782-4614

*Atlantic, Cape May and Cumberland counties*

**Vineland Service Center (1317 South Main Rd. Bldg 3)**  
Telephone: (856) 205-1225

*Mercer, Middlesex and Monmouth counties*

**Freehold Service Center (4000 Kozloski Road)**  
Telephone: (732) 462-0075

*Bergen, Morris, Passaic, Sussex and Warren counties*

**Hackettstown Service Center (Bldg #1, 101 Bilby Road)**  
Telephone: (908) 852-2576

*Gloucester and Salem counties*

**Woodstown Service Center (51 Cheney Road, Suite 2)**  
Telephone: (856) 769-1126

## Funding and Priority Projects



NRCS and its conservation partners developed a state plan to direct WHIP financial and technical assistance to several areas. Applications are accepted year-round for individual projects that meet one of these priority habitat areas. The priority areas and typical minimum acres are:

Grasslands habitat – 20 acres

Wetland habitat – 5 acres

Pollinator habitat – ¼ acre

Bog Turtle habitat – 0.1 acre

Woodland habitat – 10 acres

Disturbance-Dependent habitat – 10 acres

Delaware Bay geographic area – 5 acres

Typical minimum acres are targets and not requirements. The ratio of the actual project area to the minimum is used in application ranking. At-risk species are determined by the State Conservationist in consultation with wildlife specialists.

### Grassland Habitat

Grasslands are a declining habitat critical to a number of ground-nesting birds, several of which are state threatened or endangered. Funding is provided to create and manage grasslands that provide habitat for these species. An emphasis will be placed on establishing native plant species.

Disturbance during the nesting season, April 1<sup>st</sup> through July 15<sup>th</sup>, is prohibited on these lands, but they may be used for the production of agricultural products such as bio-fuels and mulch hay, both compatible uses.

### Woodland Habitat

Woodlands, including savannahs, can provide excellent wildlife habitat for many threatened and endangered species while still providing productive timber resources. Funding is provided to create and manage niche habitat areas within managed woodlots.

### Bog Turtle Priority Species

Bog turtles depend on actively grazed areas for their habitat. Under this category, the habitat can be enhanced or maintained for this federally threatened species while still providing pastures for livestock.

### Disturbance-dependent Habitat

Habitats that depend upon a natural or human-induced disturbance in order to regenerate, such as Atlantic white cedar forests, fire dependent plant communities and scrub/shrub habitats can be effectively managed through WHIP to sustain the species that depend on them.

As an example: thinning of Pine Barrens forests, normally provided through natural wildfires, will provide critical habitat for native plants and small animals and create a source of income for farmers.



### Pollinator Habitat

Pollinators are vital to the agricultural industry. As honey bee colonies continue to decline, it is even more important for farmers to attract native bees, wasps, flies,

and other pollinators to their crops. Providing nectar, pollen and larval food sources for pollinators and year-round habitat can attract and sustain these species. Field borders, center pivot corners and other odd areas around a farm are suitable for pollinator habitat.

### Wetland Habitat

Small wetlands are vital to sustain many wetland species such as reptiles, amphibians, and birds. These species may help control insect pests on the farm year-round. Creating and managing wetland habitats in forested wetlands, coastal wetlands and riparian habitats can help protect these species from decline. Focus is on land not likely to be funded by the Wetlands Reserve Program.

### Delaware Bay Priority Area

The Delaware Bay counties of Salem, Cape May, and Cumberland are globally important habitat for many migratory wildlife species and have been designated as a priority area for WHIP. Any habitat enhancement project in this priority area that benefits a declining species may be eligible for funding and technical assistance.

