

### **Regional Conservation Partnership Program**

The purpose of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is to promote coordination between Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and its partners to deliver conservation assistance to producers and landowners through partnership agreements. Funded partnership agreements are implemented through conservation program contracts and easement agreements under programs such as Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

### **About the Waterbird Habitat Enhancement RCPP**

The purpose of the Waterbird Habitat Enhancement RCPP is for the restoration and enhancement of waterbird habitat on rice-growing lands. The geographic focus of the Waterbird Habitat Enhancement RCPP is the rice production region of the Sacramento Valley and includes Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba counties. The conservation objectives for the Water Habitat Enhancement RCPP include the following –

1. Post-harvest crop residue management with boards-in.  
Post-harvest rice fields will be prepared with a method that leaves at least 60 percent of crop residues on the ground as forage for wintering and migrating birds. Replacing boards post-harvest will allow fields to collect seasonal rainwater and to provide flooded waterbird habitat conditions. Boards will remain in place until at least February 1.
2. Winter flooding with variable drawdown through the month of February.  
Flooding fields after harvest, holding water during the winter, then implementing a variable drawdown in February to create matrix of shallow water and mudflat habitat for wintering and migrating bird habitat. Post-harvested rice fields will be prepared with a method that leaves at least 60 percent of crop residues on the ground as forage for resident and migrating waterbirds.
3. Seasonal Inundation with gradual drawdown.  
Water will be applied to post-harvested, or fallowed, fields with at least 60 percent of crop residues to create shallow water habitat for migrating waterbirds. Fields are flooded for two weeks between July 1 and September 15, then followed by two weeks of gradual draining.
4. Nesting/loafing Islands  
Install nesting/loafing islands to create nesting habitat for waterbirds during the months of March through July, while providing loafing areas for the duration of the year.
5. Cover crops for seasonal nesting habitat.  
Cover crops are planted in the fall on idle rice fields to create nesting habitat for waterbirds. The cover crop will remain in place until at least July 15<sup>th</sup> to provide the nesting habitat through the entire migratory bird nesting season.
6. Seasonal habitat ponds  
Creates shallow aquatic habitat in areas that used to be irrigated cropland and provides habitat for waterbirds, amphibians, and aquatic reptiles. Habitat ponds may be anywhere in a system of irrigated fields but are typically placed in rice fields where there are cold water inputs.
7. Wetland restoration. Deleveling areas for wetland restoration to create long-term habitat, at least 15 years, on land that used to be irrigated rice to provide aquatic habitat for waterbirds, breeding waterfowl, waders, amphibians and aquatic reptiles.

Agricultural operations within the Waterbird Habitat Enhancement RCPP project area may be eligible for technical and financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to implement conservation practices to address primary and/or secondary resource concerns identified in the Bay Area RCPP partnership agreement.

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

The purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is to promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals; to optimize environmental benefits; and to help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

### **EQIP Application Sign-up and Cut-off Dates**

NRCS accepts EQIP applications year-round. EQIP is a voluntary, conservation program administered by NRCS that can provide financial and technical assistance to install conservation practices scheduled in a current conservation plan. NRCS establishes cutoff dates to batch and make funding decisions for eligible, screen and ranked applications.

To be ready for EQIP funding consideration, interested applicants will need to: (1) Develop a conservation plan, (2) Submit an application, (3) Meet program eligibility requirements, and (4) Approve their 'EQIP schedule of operations'. The time needed to complete a conservation plan and process eligibility can vary, from a few weeks to more than a month, depending on the complexity of the farming operation.

### **Develop a Conservation Plan**

A conservation plan includes all practices, regardless of the program's financial assistance, that a producer or landowner has agreed to adopt for the agricultural operation and/or associated agricultural lands. Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS or resource conservation district (RCD) field office to help with the development of a conservation plan.

### **Submitting an Application**

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing and submitting the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation or non-industrial private forest land.

### **Program Eligibility Requirements**

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

### **'EQIP schedule of operations'**

The basis for an application is the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and is derived from the applicant's conservation plan. The EQIP 'schedule of operations' identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, timing of the implementation, practice location, and payment rates.

### **EQIP Screening, Ranking and Funding**

EQIP funding decisions are based on an application evaluation process that includes screening tools and ranking criteria. Screening tools are worksheets used to prioritize an application based on factors such as:

a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'. Ranking criteria considers the anticipated benefit of a conservation system, or practice, in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' to a natural resource concern.

### **NRCS Field Office Contact Information**

For more information about EQIP, how to apply and program eligibility, interested applicants should contact the NRCS field office in the county which you own land or where you have an agricultural operation.

#### **USDA-NRCS, Butte County**

Oroville Service Center  
(530) 534-0112

#### **USDA-NRCS, Colusa County**

Colusa Service Center  
(530) 458-2931

#### **USDA-NRCS, Glenn County**

Willows Service Center  
(530) 934-4601

#### **USDA-NRCS, Placer County**

Auburn Service Center  
(530) 885-6505

#### **USDA-NRCS, Sacramento County**

Elk Grove Service Center  
(916) 714-1104

#### **USDA-NRCS, Sutter County**

Yuba City Service Center  
(530) 674-1480

#### **USDA-NRCS, Yolo County**

Woodland Service Center  
(530) 662-2037

#### **USDA-NRCS, Yuba County**

Yuba City Service Center  
(530) 674-1480

### **Approved NRCS Land Uses**

Only applications for agricultural operations that address resource concerns on at least one land use type listed below will be considered for financial assistance from this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- **Crop:** Land used primarily for the production and harvest of annual or perennial field, forage, food, fiber, horticultural, orchard, vineyard, or energy crops.
- **Associated Agricultural Lands:** Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as idle center pivot corners, odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.
- **Irrigated:** Where an operational irrigation system is present and managed to supply irrigation water.
- **Wildlife:** Where the applicant is actively managing for wildlife.

### **Resource Concerns for the EQIP Fund Pool**

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are general NRCS natural resource definitions, applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- ❖ **INADEQUATE HABITAT FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE** – Quantity, quality or connectivity of food, water, cover/shelter, habitat continuity and/or space is inadequate to meet requirements of identified fish, wildlife or invertebrate species.
  - **Habitat Degradation:** Conserving existing habitat and restoring habitat improves the odds that fish and wildlife communities will thrive. The availability and arrangement of food, water, cover, shelter, habitat continuity and space determine the number of organisms that a region can support, also known as carrying capacity. Increasing carrying capacity is critical to attaining long-term population stability.

### Eligible NRCS Conservation Practices

All conservation practices planned for financial assistance must be included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and address a resource concern identified in this EQIP Fund Pool. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

Practices that will not be financially supported in an EQIP contract will not be evaluated in the screening and ranking process. Only conservation practices included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' will be used to determine the screening priority and ranking score of the application considered for funding.

For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link for NRCS conservation practice standards:

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11\\_001020](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020)

**Table 1.** Eligible Conservation Practices

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (years)
340	Cover Crop (Winter Nesting Habitat through July)	ac	1
587	Structure For Water Control – Flashboard Riser, Metal	no	20
587	Structure For Water Control – Commercial Inline Flashboard Riser	no	20
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management – Water Level Drawdown Low Intensity	ac	1
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management – Water Level Drawdown High Intensity	ac	1
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management – Seasonal Inundation with Gradual Drawdown	ac	1
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management – Forage Management for Waterbirds with Boards-in	ac	1
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management – Habitat Ponds	ac	1
644	Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management – Nesting/Loafing Islands	ac	1
657	Wetland Restoration – Deleveling	ac	15

