

# Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program

Montana



## New Opportunity

The **Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program** is a new funding opportunity available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). When enrolled, producers are eligible for payment on cropped wetlands, two acres or less in size as identified on the National Wetland Inventory, and with intact hydrology. The payment rate will differ by region.

## Background

The Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program emerged from a North Dakota concept called the Working Wetlands program. Farmers and conservation leaders worked together to find a new approach to conserve small wetlands in working cropland. The North Dakota project was instrumental in guiding the development of the new NRCS program and represents a true “win-win” for farmers, water quality, and wetland dependent wildlife.

## How It Works

Producers within the Prairie Pothole Region of Montana, that have unmanipulated wetlands of 2 acres or less within working cropland, will be able to sign up for this new opportunity. NRCS will work with applicants to determine which wetlands are eligible based off the National Wetlands Inventory. Once the wetlands are deemed eligible, producers will then need to decide which level of management is appropriate for their operation.

Payment rates for Montana are identified under each of the 3 levels below. Historically Underserved rates will be 25% higher than the general rate listed. Contracts can be up to 5 years in length.

## Level 1 Practices

### Practice 327 Conservation Cover

Under level one, a producer will seed the wetland acreage back to conservation cover. Conservation cover is permanent vegetation, including a mix of introduced cool season grasses and legumes, and native grasses and forbs established on cropped wetland areas that need permanent vegetative cover to help improve water quality and provide wetland wildlife habitat.

The wetlands must be wholly or partially in cropland, typically two acres in size.

Level 1, Year 1: \$245.66 per acre

### Practice 644 - Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management

Level 1 644 management can be added to the wetland that was seeded back to conservation cover that will no longer be cropped, for up to 4 years. The planning unit is adequately covered with permanent and/or annual (non-persistent) vegetation. The cessation of cropping and maintenance of hydrology provides adequate forage and cover in areas where normal cropland production restricts the growth of cover and forage sources. Monitoring assures hydrology is intact and provides wildlife water and habitat. Acres will be assessed and score 0.5 or greater as both Wetlands and Cropland on the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide. Monitoring will be used to determine if the hydrology remains intact and cover is adequate and free of invasive weed species.

Level 1, Years 2-5: \$230.30 per acre

## Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for the Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program, wetlands must be

- Cropped Wetlands
- 2 acres in size or less as identified on the National Wetlands Inventory
- Intact Hydrology

## Monitoring

Examples of monitoring include but are not limited to: photo points with comparisons to surrounding wetlands, documentation by regeneration or breeding success, completing an annual management records log, documenting wildlife sightings, documenting location and species of invasive plants and condition of vegetative and structural treatments.

## Level 2 Practice Option

### Practice 644 - Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management



Under normal cropland production, the native vegetation is restricted on these sites through mechanical and/or chemical control.

A current crop rotation provides little to no wildlife habitat with habitat limiting factors such as quality, quantity and continuity of forage, cover, shelter, and space being identified. A producer will agree to the cession of cropping and maintenance of hydrology that will provide adequate forage and cover in areas where normal cropland production restricts the growth of cover and forage sources.

Producer will monitor to determine if the hydrology remains intact and cover is adequate and free of invasive weed species. Monitoring will be completed by one or more of the following: photo points with comparisons to surrounding wetlands, documentation regeneration or breeding success, completing an annual management records log, documenting wildlife sightings, documenting location, and species of invasive plants and condition of vegetative and structural treatments.

**Level 2, Years 1-5: \$234.18 per acre**

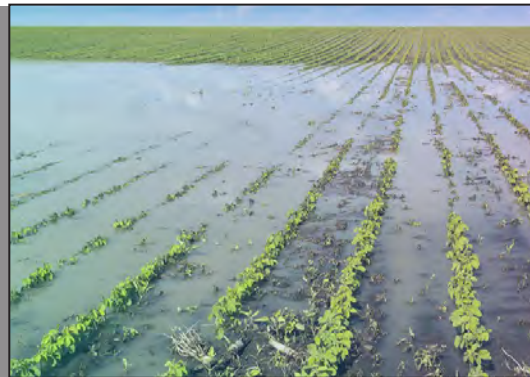
## Level 3 Practice Option

### Practice 644 - Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management

Excess wetness during the early planting season often cause ag producers to seed these small areas after the initial seeding date resulting in soil compaction, reduced hydrology, and limited crop success. If a producer chooses Level 3 an agricultural crop or annual vegetation will be allowed to persist providing food and cover essential for migratory birds on wetland where hydrology will be maintained. A producer may crop a wetland if it is sufficiently dry at the time of planting. If the contracted wetland area is too wet to be seeded at the time of planting, the wetland must remain uncropped for the remainder of that crop year.

Crops seeded during initial planting and annual vegetation will not be harvested during the primary nesting season (April 15 to August 1) as identified by the habitat evaluation guide. This allows for successful nesting and brood rearing. Producers will be required to monitor the wetland to (with supporting photo documentation) demonstrate that wildlife habitat has been improved to levels consistent with management goals/objectives, as well as observed use of the wetland habitat by wildlife.

**Level 3, Years 1-5: \$169.41 per acre**



## For More Information

Please contact your local USDA Service Center for more information regarding the Prairie Pothole Water Quality and Wildlife Program.

**Montana**

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

