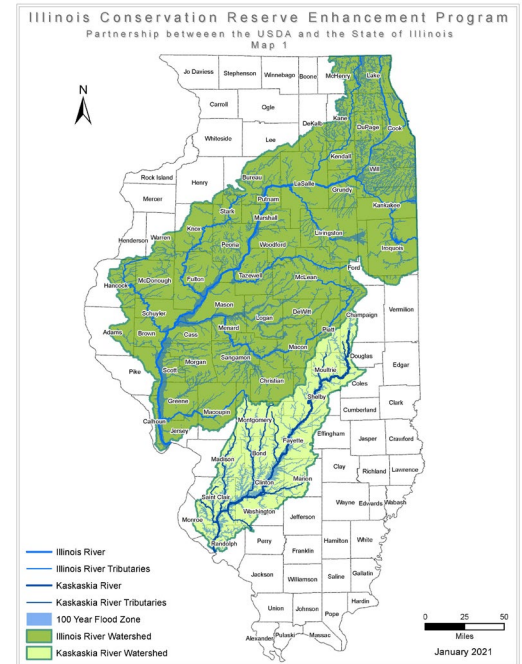




What is CREP?

For over 20 years, Illinois' Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) has been a successful partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA), Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), and private landowners. The goals of CREP are to reduce sediment and nutrient runoff, improve water quality, and create and enhance critical habitat for fish and wildlife populations on private lands within the Illinois and Kaskaskia River Watersheds. As one of the oldest and most popular CREP programs in the nation, the CREP partnership has achieved restoration and long-term protection of over 90,000 acres in Illinois.

In CREP, landowners enroll frequently flooded and environmentally sensitive cropland in a Federal CREP contract, with FSA. IDNR extends the terms of that Federal contract by enrolling the land into an Illinois CREP Grant of Conservation Right and Easement Agreement (Easement) for 15 years or in perpetuity beyond the expiration of the Federal contract. In exchange for voluntarily removing land from production, landowners received compensation to implement conservation practices that contribute to the goals of CREP. With over 90% of land in Illinois privately owned, programs like CREP are essential to effectively address important environmental issues.



How does CREP differ from CRP?

- CREP is an enhanced version of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). The Federal CREP component of the program differs very little from CRP. Many of the same rules and policies apply. However, there are higher incentive payments associated with Federal CREP and contracts are for 15 years versus the 10-year contracts typical for CRP. CREP also has a state component of the program, which CRP does not. Once the Federal contract has ended, the State component of CREP extends the benefits of the established conservation practices for 15 years or in perpetuity with an Easement.

How do landowners enroll in CREP?

Federal CREP

- If a landowner is interested in CREP, they should contact their local FSA (USDA) office first.
 - FSA will determine if the land is eligible for Federal CREP.
 - Some of the FSA's eligibility requirements are: is the land in the CREP watershed, is it in the 100-year floodplain or a previous wetland, does the land have cropping history for 4 of the last 6 years, etc.
 - If the land is eligible, then FSA will execute a 15-year Federal CREP contract on the acreage. Landowners are paid an annual rental payment for the acreage in the Federal CREP contract.
 - NRCS creates a management plan (called the CPO) for the conservation practice that will be established on the acreage.
 - A conservation practice is the type of vegetative cover that is appropriate to be placed on the land (grasses, trees, wetland, etc.).
 - Once the conservation practice is established, FSA will reimburse the landowner 50% cost-share. Cost-share is the cost incurred by the landowner to establish the conservation practice on the acreage.

State CREP (Illinois CREP)

- After the Federal CREP contract is executed, then the landowner will need to contact their local SWCD to start the enrollment process for the Stateside of CREP (Illinois CREP).
- The SWCD will work with the landowner and IDNR to execute an Easement for 15-years or in perpetuity beyond the expiration (or termination) of the Federal CREP contract.
- The landowner may be eligible to enroll Additional Acres into the easement. Additional Acres are acres contiguous to the Federal CREP contract acreage, that contribute to the goals of CREP.
- Upon execution of the Easement, the landowner will receive a lump sum payment for the Easement. The payment will be based on the Easement length chosen by the landowner and the site-specific soil rental rate.
- IDNR will reimburse the remaining 50% of the cost-share to establish the conservation practice on the Federal CREP acreage. Cost-share is not available for Additional Acres.

How does the landowner make changes to the acreage during the Federal CREP contract?

- During the Federal CREP contract, the landowner must work with FSA to make any changes to the management of the acreage. IDNR and the SWCDs have no authority to approve changes to the acreage during the Federal CREP contract.
- The acreage automatically switches from the Federal CREP contract to an Illinois CREP Easement.
- IDNR will send a “Welcome to Illinois CREP” letter soon after the expiration of the Federal CREP contract. This letter will remind the landowner of the Easement and what can/cannot be done on the acreage while it is in an Easement.

How is the land managed during an Illinois CREP Easement?

- The landowner may continue to use their land for hunting, fishing, hiking, etc. as they have during their Federal CREP contract.
- The landowner should continue to manage the acreage to maintain the environmental benefits of the conservation practices (i.e. control invasive species, mow or burn as prescribed, etc.).
- Any changes to the acreage under Easement must have pre-approval by the SWCD and IDNR (i.e. change or create new food plots, change or adjust the conservation cover, etc.).
- IDNR can write new or amended conservation management plans for landowners to help them accomplish their management goals. Conservation plans can be written by outside agencies/groups, but they must be approved by IDNR and the SWCD before implementation.

What can/cannot be done on a CREP Easement?

- Please visit the “[Allowable Activities on CREP](#)” document on the Illinois CREP webpage to learn more about what can/cannot be done on a CREP Easement.
- The Illinois CREP Easement is tied to the land, so if a landowner sells the land, the Easement is still in place, and the new landowner must abide by the terms in the Easement document.
- The Easement is recorded with the local county recorder’s office. When a landowner is looking to buy a property, the Easement will show up on title work.
- There is no buyback or buy-out option for CREP Easements.

How do the SWCDs and IDNR ensure compliance on CREP Easements?

- Each CREP Easement should be monitored for compliance on a 3-year rotation.
- Easements should be monitored after each landowner change as well.
- These site visits primarily serve to identify Easement violations, but also provide an opportunity to build relationships with CREP landowners and ensure landowners understand the terms of the CREP Easement.

For more information about CREP, please visit: <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/conservation/CREP>