

# Union County Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

1. FAQ
  2. CREP Process for Landowners
  3. CREP Payments
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## FAQ

### What is CREP?

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary program that contracts with agricultural producers to restore riparian areas. The purpose of CREP is to help producers protect environmentally sensitive land, decrease erosion, improve water quality, and create wildlife and fish habitat. CREP participants commit to keeping land out of agricultural production for the life of a 10 to 15-year contract. In exchange, producers receive cost-share assistance funding for restoration and annual rental payments. Additionally, Oregon's program is unique in having a cumulative impact incentive payment for a landowner or neighboring landowners who enroll more than 50% of 5-mile stream segment.

The Union Soil and Water Conservation District, Farm Service Agency (FSA), and Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) collaborate to provide CREP technical support in Union County. To learn more, contact the Union SWCD CREP Coordinator, Anna Lindquist: [alindquist@unionswcd.org](mailto:alindquist@unionswcd.org)

### What is a riparian buffer?

A riparian buffer is the established vegetation next to a river or stream. A healthy riparian area filters nutrients and sediments from agricultural runoff, cools the water by providing shade, and stabilizes the stream bank. For CREP, a minimum 35-foot buffer from the bank's edge is required. The Union SWCD and NRCS will help you determine which restoration practices will best help restore the riparian buffer. Practices may include:

- tree and shrub planting
- removing invasive species
- fencing to exclude livestock

- installing off-stream watering facilities
- mulching and browse protection tubes or cages for plants

### **How do I know if my land is eligible for CREP?**

The Union SWCD CREP Coordinator and the FSA County Executive Director can help you determine whether your land is eligible. In general, eligible land must be:

- Cropland or marginal pastureland as defined by the USDA.
- Located along a stream with fish listed as threatened or endangered, located along streams in an approved Agricultural Water Quality Management Plan area, or is reservation or tribal trust land.

### **What is expected of me as a landowner or producer?**

- Work with USDA-approved conservationist to develop a conservation and planting plan.
- Landowners pay the upfront cost of the projects, and are reimbursed when all the projects are complete.
- No grazing, haying, or harvesting on the land for the life of the contract.
- No in-stream work except livestock crossings and watering facilities.
- No management activities during the primary nesting season (March 1 to July 15). The County Committee may provide a waiver.

**If my neighbor enrolls in CREP a few years after I do and together we have over 50% of a 5-mile stream segment enrolled, do we still get the bonus payment?**

Yes

### **How wide does the riparian buffer have to be?**

The width can be a minimum of 35 feet to a maximum average of 180 feet.

**Can I do conservation projects on other areas of my property beyond the riparian areas?**

Yes, there are several other programs available to address natural resource concerns on your property beyond the riparian area. Talk to your local FSA, NRCS, SWCD, or local Watershed Council for more information.

### **What happens when my CREP contract expires?**

You have several options. You can:

- Work with FSA to re-enroll your land in CREP for another 10 to 15-years
- Enroll your land into a permanent easement
- Maintain your buffer and continue stewarding your land
- Convert portions of the area back to agricultural use (following proper regulations such as the Endangered Species Act and Senate Bill 1010)

Acronyms:

**Union SWCD:** Union County Soil and Water Conservation District

**FSA:** U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency

**NRCS:** U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service

**OWEB:** Oregon Water Enhancement Board

# **Union County CREP Process for Landowners**

## **1. Outreach**

- a. Who: Union SWCD
- b. What: Outreach is done through meetings, mailings, and farm visits to discuss your conservation goals and whether CREP is right for you.

## **2. Eligibility**

- a. Who: FSA
- b. What: Once you express interest in CREP, either directly to FSA or through Union SWCD, FSA confirms your land's eligibility based on farm records and initiates an offer.

## **3. Site Visit**

- a. Who: Union SWCD and NRCS
- b. What: An initial site visit is done to gather data and determine which Conservation Practices (CPs) are appropriate.

## **4. Offer Letter and Signing**

- a. Who: FSA and Landowner
- b. FSA sends you a notice of an accepted, rejected, or a modified offer for you to accept and sign.

## **5. Conservation Planning and Review**

- a. Who: NRCS
- b. NRCS creates a Conservation Plan for the acreage, including a cost estimate.

## **6. Conservation Plan Signing**

- a. Who: NRCS, FSA, and Landowner
- b. What: You sign off on the Conservation Plan.

## **7. Contract Approval and First Payment**

- a. Who: FSA and OWEB
- b. What: FSA and OWEB approve the final contract and issue the one-time Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) and any enrollment or re-enrollment bonuses.

## **8. Conservation Plan Implementation**

- a. Who: Landowner, with support as needed

- b. What: You are ready to start work! Submit your receipts to FSA for cost-share reimbursements and certify that you have completed the necessary CPs within the specified amount of time (maximum 24 months).

**9. Re-enrollment or Contract Completion**

- a. Who: Union SWCD and FSA
- b. What: Towards the end of your contract, Union SWCD will contact you for a final site visit. After certifying that all necessary work has been done and the acreage is in good condition, you have the option to either close out your contract or re-enroll for another 10 to 15 years.

## CREP Payments

**1. Cost-Share Payment:** Completed and eligible restoration practices are reimbursed up to 75% (50% from USDA and 25% from the state of Oregon). Costs must not exceed cost estimates.

**2. Annual Payments:** Landowners receive 10 to 15 years of annual rental payments.

- Total Payment = Rental Rate (base) + Incentive\* (50% of base) + Maintenance Rate\*\*
- Rental Rate is based on soil type:
  - Marginal Pastureland Seasonal Stream: \$64
  - Marginal Pastureland Permanent Stream: \$73
  - Dryland/Cropland: \$53-\$159
  - Irrigated: \$230
- \*Incentive rates are 50% for every CP except CP21
- \*\*Maintenance rate varies by practice, \$0-\$5/acre
- Example: Permanent stream (\$73 base) with fencing installed (maintenance).
  - \$73 (base) + \$36.50 (incentive) + \$5 (maintenance) = \$114.50/acre

**3. One-Time Incentive Payments:**

- Landowners receive a one-time Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) when the contract is signed and a one-time Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) when the project is complete.
  - SIP: \$10 for each acre enrolled in the program, for 10 years. Excludes acres enrolled in CP23, wetland restoration.
    - Example: \$10 x 40 acres enrolled x 10 years = \$4,000 one-time payment
  - PIP: When all practices are complete, the PIP is paid based on the final eligible installation cost, up to 40%.
    - Example: \$15,000 paid for installation x 40% = \$6,000 one-time payment

**4. Cumulative Impact Bonus (CIB):** A one-time incentive payment to a landowner or landowners for enrolling more than 50% of a 5-mile stream segment. The payment will be equal to four times the applicable base year rental rate per acre for each participant. Payments are made whenever a segment qualifies.