



Introduction

The South Dakota Farm Bureau (Farm Bureau) and Dakota Wetland Partners (DWP) are seeking landowner participation in a wetland conservation initiative throughout South Dakota. Select landowners with existing, low quality farmed, grazed or fallow wetland areas (as mapped by the NRCS) may qualify for “license” payments or other benefits in exchange for: (1) allowing restoration of the wetlands, and (2) long-term protection of those wetlands along with an upland buffer zone. Long-term management will also be provided in accordance with a landowner-endorsed management plan.



How it works

Working in concert with prospective landowners and other conservation partners, DWP will identify appropriate wetland areas that exhibit some moderate to serious need for habitat improvements.

Such improvements may include exotic plant control, weed spraying, removal of debris, livestock exclusion fencing, and wetland planting to restore the natural vegetation community.



Ecological Benefits

Wetland and upland buffer zone protection provides many benefits to landowners beyond simple financial benefits, including:

- Improved wildlife habitat (= better deer hunting);
- Improved breeding, brood rearing, cover and food sources for waterfowl (= better duck hunting); and
- Natural filtering of field runoff (= much improved water quality in local lakes and streams).

Producers may make inquiry to DWP, the Farm Bureau, or through the SD Corn Growers or Soybean Associations.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are “wetlands and upland buffers”?

Wetlands are low-lying areas that are temporarily, seasonally or permanently flooded and which may have a vegetation component, such as cattails. Upland buffers are a 50- to 100-foot zone around wetlands, and typically do not flood but may provide a protective zone around the wetland habitat.

What is a “license”?

A license is a signed contract granting permission by the landowner to DWP to conduct the restoration and management work agreed to by the parties.

How much are license payments?

License payments vary depending on the creditability of the resources, but are typically higher than comparable USDA conservation payments.

How are payments made?

Payments are sometimes made as a lump sum upon execution of the license and recording of the voluntary deed restriction. This will bring a smaller payment. An alternative is to take payments over a 2-3 year period of time. This alternative can bring a larger payment, and has the added benefit of reducing the effects of taxes on the payment.

What form of long-term protection is required?

A USDA warranty easement deed or similar instrument is required to provide long-term protection for the restored wetlands.

Are there any long-term obligations for the landowner / host?

There are absolutely no long-term costs or obligations for the landowner. All restoration costs are paid by the Exchange, and long-term management costs are covered by an endowment managed by the Farm Bureau. The only “cost” to the landowner is accepting the limitations on use of the restored wetland acres, which ultimately have other benefits accruing to the landowner (e.g. recreation).

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

1. **Identification of Parcel.** At the invitation of a landowner, DWP will visit a subject property and review areas that may be appropriate for inclusion in the initiative. DWP and the landowner then collaboratively map out possible conservation areas which range in size from 20 acres and larger.
2. **Execution of a Letter of Intent.** DWP and the landowner each sign a Letter of Intent (LOI) which states the intentions of both parties: (1) DWP’s agreement to compensate the landowner in accordance with agreeable terms, and to restore and manage the wetlands and buffer zones in accordance with a landowner-endorsed management plan; and (2) the landowner’s agreement to protect the parcel.
3. **Execution of a License.** The contractual license is executed at the time and place agreed to by the parties, typically within 12 months of the LOI (following approval of the site).
4. **Recording of the Easement.** The landowner, with assistance from DWP (if requested) records the easement with a third party easement holder. A copy of the recorded document is provided to DWP.
5. **Payment of License Fee.** The license fee is paid to the landowner in the amount and on the schedule agreed to by the parties.

For more information, please contact:

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