



## **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program**

**fy 2007 §319(h)  
EPA Grant #C9-996100-14  
Project 2  
Output 2.4.5.e**

Submitted By:

Oklahoma Conservation Commission  
Water Quality Division  
2800 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 160  
Oklahoma City, OK 73105-4210

December 2007

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## **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)**

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a partnership between a State (including local and state government, nonprofit groups and industry) and Federal Partners (USDA, FSA and NRCS) to protect and improve water quality by retiring environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production for up to fifteen years.

The land immediately adjacent to waterbodies such as streams, wetlands, and lakes can play a critical role in the amount of pollution entering those waterbodies. Research has shown that maintenance of a natural buffer or riparian zone between agricultural or otherwise developed land and a stream can reduce pollution to that stream by up to 90%.

In Oklahoma the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, City of Tulsa, Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, FSA and NRCS are utilizing the CREP program to restore approximately 24,000 acres of this buffer or riparian zone in the Oklahoma portion of the Illinois River, Eucha/Spavinaw, Fort Cobb, and Sugar Creek (Caddo County) Watersheds. These watersheds were selected because they are high priorities for the State, but also because:

- previous, smaller programs had shown that landowners were receptive to protection of riparian areas,
- water quality problems in these watersheds could be significantly reduced by protection of these riparian areas.

Implementation of this program could reduce loading of sediment, nutrients, and fecal bacteria, the three most frequent causes of water quality impairments in Oklahoma, by at least 30% in these watersheds. Along with other efforts already ongoing in these watersheds, CREP could restore water quality in at least some of these watersheds to the point where they are no longer impaired.

The CREP program requires a 20% non-federal match from the State in order to receive the federal dollars. The City of Tulsa and the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission (OSRC) have committed funding to match the program in those watersheds. In addition, the Oklahoma Conservation Commission is providing funding and staff to complete water quality monitoring associated with the implementation to document success over time. Initial commitments are sufficient to implement a \$15 million dollar program in the Eucha/Spavinaw and Illinois River Watersheds.

The OCC has requested additional match from the State legislature as a portion of a \$28 million bond program where \$10 million would match the CREP Program, \$10 million would provide State match for the Federal Flood Control Structure Rehabilitation Program, and \$8 million would be devoted to control of invasive cedar across the State. The \$10 million in State monies would secure an additional \$40 million in Federal dollars and allow the program expansion into Fort Cobb and Sugar Creek Watersheds. This match will elevate the program to a \$65 million dollar investment in environmental protection.

In return for retiring the land from pastureland or cropland, landowners will receive up to 90% of the cost of installing best management practices to protect it (such as fencing, alternative water supply, stream crossings, etc.), as well as an annual rental payment, and an annual maintenance payment for upkeep of the BMPs. The City of Tulsa will invest their match dollars into turning some of these 15 year easements into permanent easements in the Eucha/Spavinaw Watershed.

This initial Oklahoma CREP Annual Report covers the period from the date of signing the program into action through the end of the 2007 federal fiscal year, September 30, 2007.

### **Progress in Meeting Program Goals:**

Oklahoma's first Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) was kicked-off on April 23, 2007 when Governor Brad Henry and Agriculture Deputy Secretary Chuck Conner signed a \$20.6 million cooperative partnership agreement. Gina Crowder Levesque was hired by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission to coordinate CREP. She began work on May 1 and sign-ups for the program began June 1.

On May 30, a training session on the new CREP was held in Jay, Oklahoma for employees of agencies involved with the program including the Farm Service Agency, Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission, Land Legacy, and Tulsa Municipal Utility Authority. Subsequent to this, public outreach meetings highlighting CREP were held in each participating county:

Cherokee County (Tahlequah) – 24 July – 30 attendees  
Adair County (Proctor) – 31 July – 39 attendees  
Mayes County (Pryor) – 1 August – 3 attendees  
Delaware County (Jay) – 7 August – 12 attendees  
Sequoyah County (Black Gum) – 9 August – 7 attendees

Newspaper articles alerting landowners to the new program were published in The Daily Time in Pryor (7 June), Tahlequah Daily Press (10 June), and Delaware County Journal (20 June).

Between June 1 and September 30, 2007, thirty-one producers applied for CREP within the five county area:

Adair County – 11  
Cherokee County - 12  
Delaware County – 8  
Mayes County – 0  
Sequoyah County – 0

Current status of these applications is as follows:

- Six applicants did not qualify for the program for various reasons
- Five applicants withdrew due to either restrictions associated with CREP or too little eligible acreage to make it economically feasible
- Two applications have been put on hold until health of landowner improves
- Eight properties have been mapped using GPS and are pending contracts
- Ten are scheduled for farm visits with a CREP representative

At the end of federal fiscal year 2007, September 30, no CREP contracts had been signed, and therefore, no practices were implemented or federal dollars spent.

Match monies spent by the Oklahoma Scenic Rivers Commission (OSRC) included:

- \$499,545 to protect 202.9 acres in the Illinois River Watershed with 30 year lease agreements
- \$33,832.50 to protect 174 acres in the Illinois River Watershed with one year lease agreements
- Grand Total for Match by OSRC = **\$533,377.50**

In September, interviews were held to hire two conservation plan writers and one conservation plan writer/water quality specialist for the CREP program. Individuals were selected, hired, and began work on October 1, 2007.

Water quality monitoring did not commence prior to the end of this reporting period.

**FY2007:**

**Cumulative Performance:**

<b>Acres Enrolled by Practice</b>	0
<b>Acres of Easement or long-term contract</b>	0
<b>Acres Enrolled by County:</b>	
Adair	0
Cherokee	0
Delaware	0
Mayes	0
Sequoyah	0

**Financial Report for FY2007:**

	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Private</b>
Annual Rent	\$0	\$0	\$0
C/S	\$0	\$0	\$0
Lump-sum Incentive Payment	\$0	\$0	\$0
In-Kind Technical Assistance	N/A	\$25,692.14*	\$0
Monitoring and Evaluation Costs	N/A	\$0	\$0

\* match provided by Oklahoma Conservation Commission