

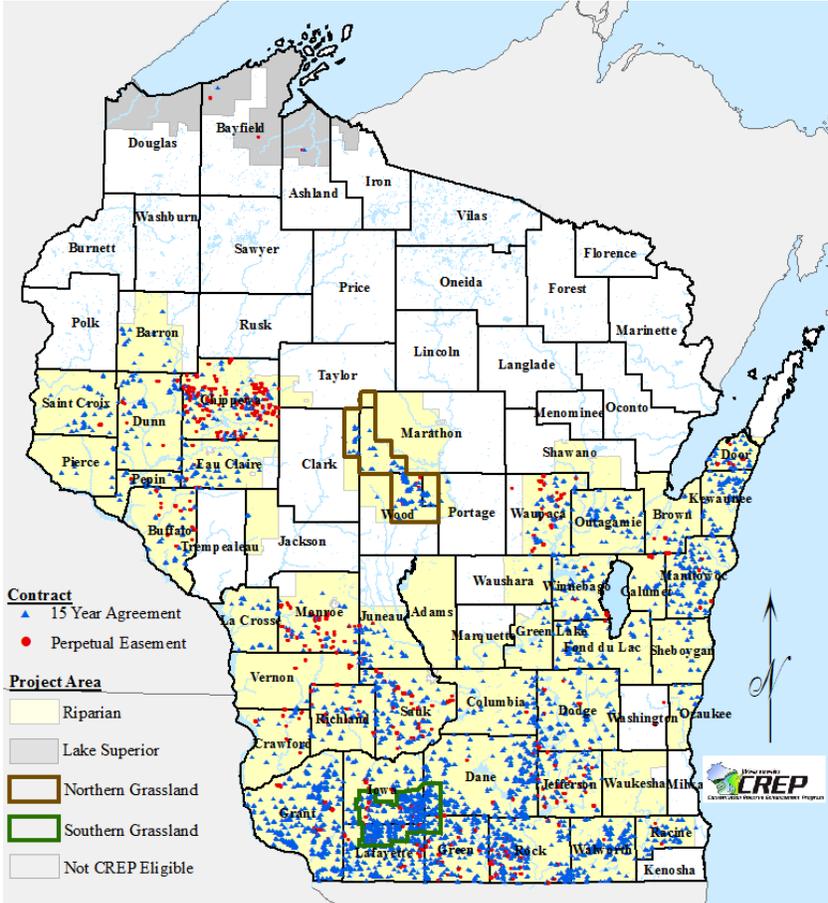
WISCONSIN

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

2020 DATCP Annual Report

Wisconsin's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) was established in 2001 and continues new enrollments and reenrollments. Wisconsin CREP is a cooperative effort with the USDA, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP); county land conservation committees (LCC); and private landowners.

The goal of CREP is to work with landowners to install conservation practices aimed at improving water quality on existing agricultural land. These practices reduce sediment and nutrient loading from agricultural lands to waterbodies on the state's impaired waters (303d list).



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Contract Options
 15 Year Agreement
 Perpetual Easement

Project Areas:
 Riparian
 Southern grassland
 Northern grassland
 Lake Superior

Eligible Land (acres):
 Estimated potential - 362,000
 Total available to enroll - 100,000

- Riparian practices - 80,000
- Grassland practices - 15,000
- Lake Superior practices - 5,000

Conservation Practices Options:
 Grass Filter Strip (CP21)
 Riparian Buffer (CP22)
 Wetland Restoration (CP23)
 Grass Waterway (CP8a)
 Permanent Grasses (CP1, 2, 10)
 Oak Savanna Restoration (CP25)
 Marginal Pasture Buffer (CP29, 30)



ENROLLMENT

FSA National office authorized CREP for enrollment under sign-up 53 (SU53) in January, 2020 and closed enrollment in August 2020, allowing 8 months for enrollment. During the 3 month interim, local FSA offices worked with interested landowners to check crop history and determine eligibility. Meanwhile, county land conservation departments assisted landowners by starting the state CREP application process and continuing to promote CREP to landowners.

Even with the late start to enrollment, Wisconsin CREP again experienced substantial activity in 2020. New enrollment was high and the majority of landowners with expiring contracts chose to reenroll. CREP had a net gain of acres enrolled in FFY 2020 as new and reenrolled acres were greater than acres under contracts that expired. State and Federal CREP enrollment totals as of October 1, 2020 are slightly different as FSA processes contracts prior to the end of the fiscal year with the state following soon after. Also, state active CREP contracts include both 15-year agreements and all perpetual easements including those with expired FSA contracts. Below are the enrollment totals on the federal and state side of CREP reported as of October 1, 2020.

FSA CREP Enrollment - FFY2020:

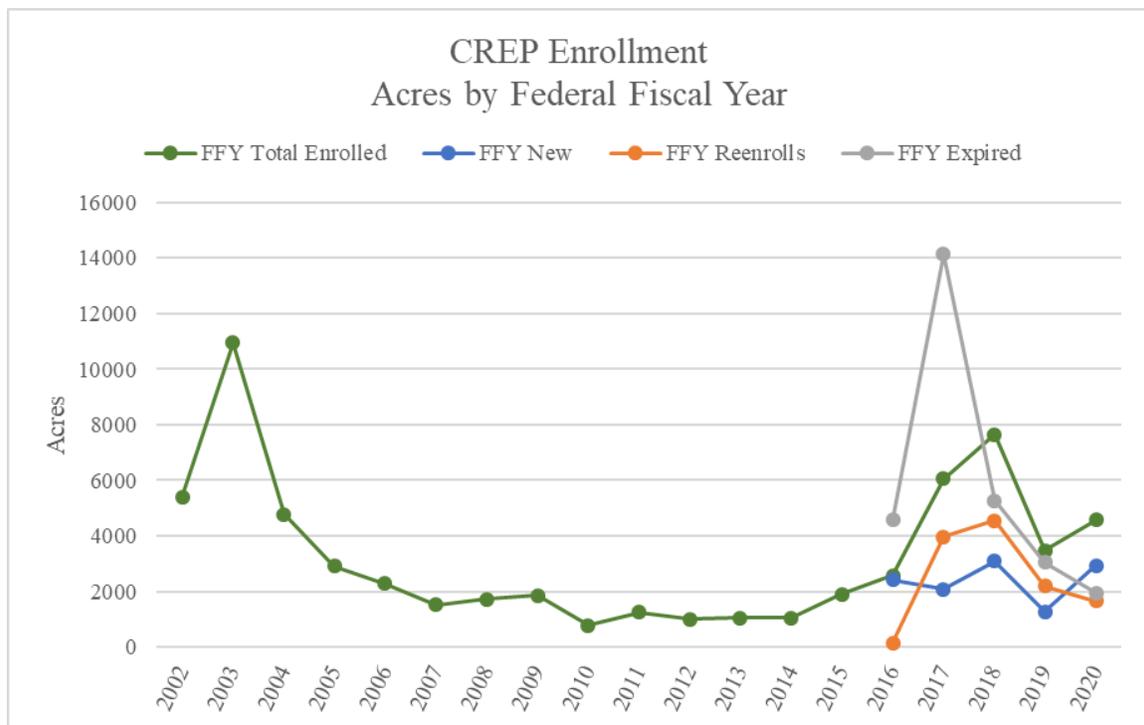
Acres Reenrolled: 1,216
Acres New: 1,802

Acres Total FFY Enrollment: 3,018
Acres Total Enrollment: 36,154

State CREP Enrollment - FFY2020:

Acres Reenrolled: 1,720
Acres New: 2,621
Acres Total FFY: 4,341
Acres Total: 40,475
Acres Easement: 6,788

Contracts FFY: 349
Contracts Total: 3,527
Agreements Total: 3,015
Easements Total: 512





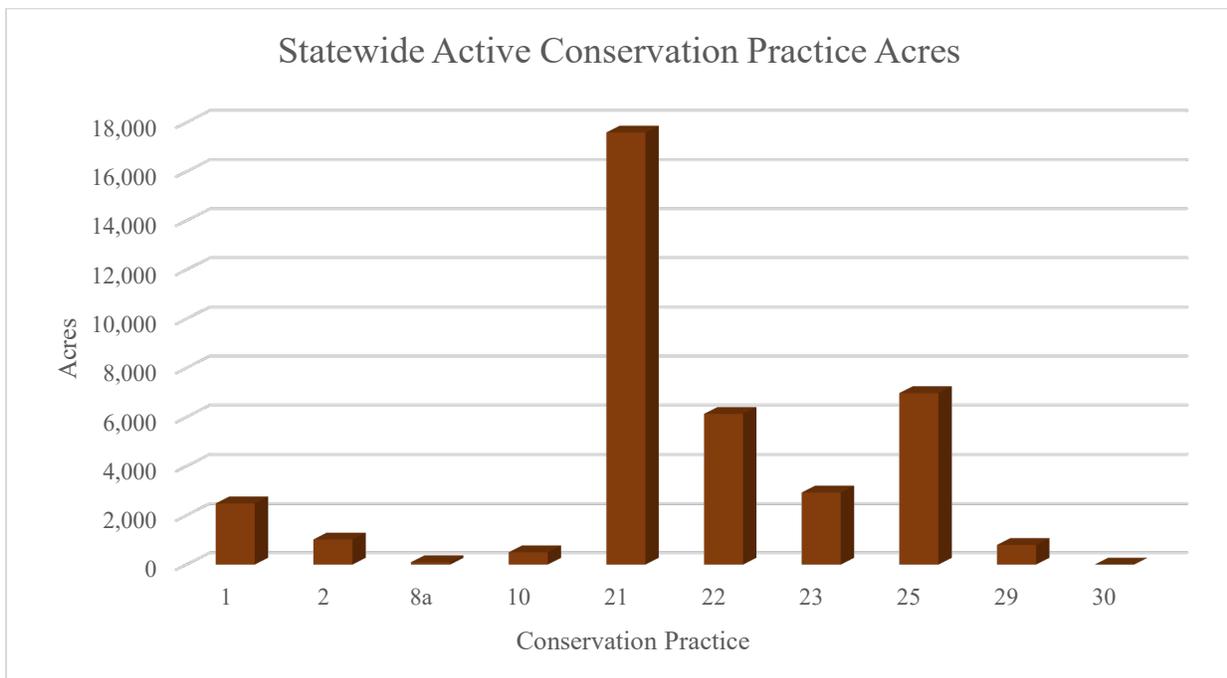
Vernon County, CP21

Three quarters of the active acres enrolled in Wisconsin CREP are in riparian practices. Filter strips (CP21) comprise the majority of the riparian practices with 64% (17,500 acres), while riparian buffers (CP22) make up another 22% (6,100 acres). There are also just under 3,000 acres of wetland restorations (CP23).

About 11,000 acres of grassland conservation practices are under an active CREP contract in the CREP grassland project areas. The

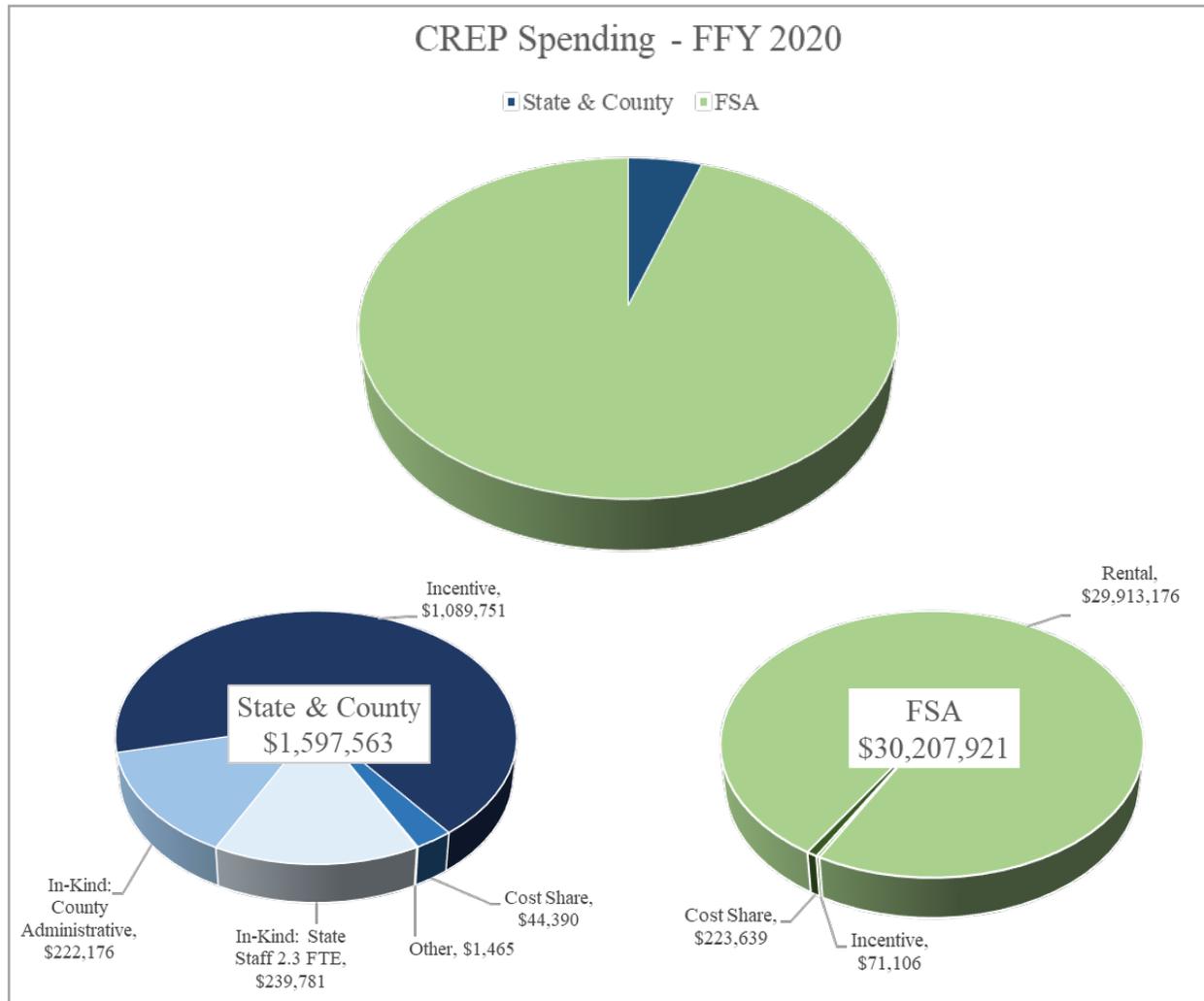
conservation practices unique to the grassland project areas include CP1 (permanent introduced grasses), CP2 (permanent native grasses), and CP25 (rare and declining habitat: prairie and oak savanna restoration). The CREP southern grassland project area reached its maximum allowable acres (10,000 acres) of grassland practices in 2016. Each year since then, acres that have come available for grassland practice from expirations have been filled with new enrollment. The CP25 practice makes up just under 70% of the grassland practices established in the southern grassland project area. The northern grassland project area enrolled about a fifth of its allowable grassland practices with CP1 the primary practice established through CREP.

According to the USDA-FSA CRP monthly summary report for October 2020, out of 32 states that offer CREP, Wisconsin ranks 4th in the number of farms the program has practices on, 5th in the number of CREP contracts, and 10th in the total acres of conservation practices installed.



PAYMENTS AND COSTS

Wisconsin authorized \$28 million in funding for CREP. As of October 1, 2020, the state has made over 12,000 CREP incentive and cost share payments to landowners totaling almost \$20.1 million. In addition, counties reported they spent \$3.8 million in non-federal staff and other costs to administer CREP. Since inception, state and local costs for CREP total \$23.9 million. These funds leverage over \$200 million in federal funds to be paid over the life of the CREP contracts. Spending reported by FSA and the state for FFY 2020 are shown in the charts below.



State Payments and Contracts 2001 – Oct 1, 2020	
Payment Type	Total (Contracts)
Perpetual Easement Incentive	\$6,706,580 (524)
15-year Agreement Incentive	\$11,585,103 (5,263)
Total State Incentive	\$18,291,683 (5,787)
Total State Cost Share	\$2,442,373
Total Materials	\$43,514
Buyouts Received	-\$663,060
TOTAL	\$20,114,510 (5,787)

ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

The state calculates installing CREP conservation practices will result in annual environmental benefits to water quality and wildlife habitat. The table below lists the 2020 estimates of the amount of stream or shoreline adequately buffered, the annual reduction in phosphorus, nitrogen and sediment runoff, and the grassland habitat established.

	Program Goal	Annual Benefit 10/1/2020
Shoreline Buffered (Miles)	3,700	793
Phosphorus (Pounds)	610,000	87,980
Nitrogen (Pounds)	305,000	47,339
Sediment (Tons)	335,000	43,771
Grassland Habitat (Acres)	15,000	11,000

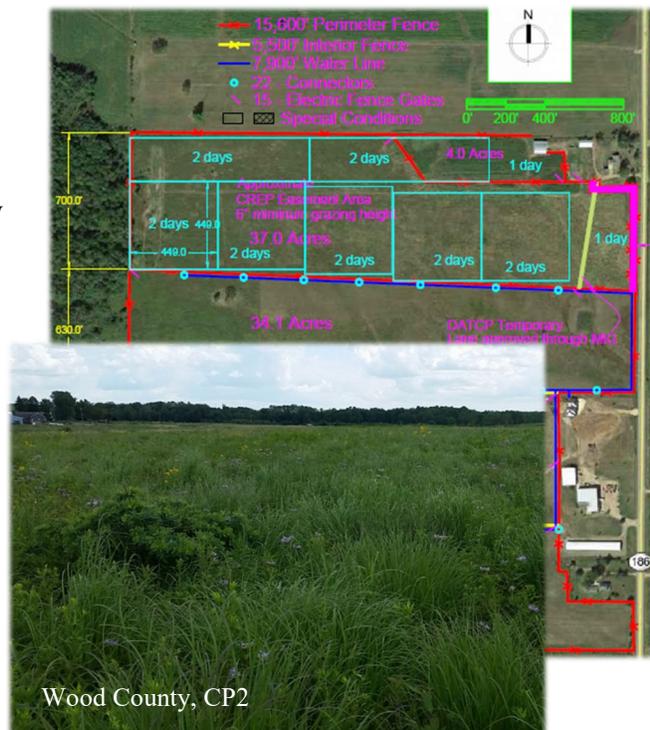
TRAINING AND OUTREACH

The state offers training for staff of all agencies at local offices working on CREP. Trainings include a CREP overview, agreement processing and logistics, and discussion of local CREP issues. In 2020, due to restrictions related to the COVID pandemic, the state transitioned to virtual trainings. Two in person trainings and two virtual CREP trainings were held in 2020.

DATCP staff worked with the Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association to develop a new CREP promotional video. The seven minute video gives an overview of the program and focuses on eligibility, conservation practice options, and environmental and financial benefits. The video was published on the DATCP CREP website. See url: https://youtu.be/vfdK_jYhbq0

EASEMENT MANAGEMENT

Perpetual easements in Juneau and Wood Counties had amendments to their conservation plans reviewed and approved by DATCP to allow for managed grazing during FFY 2020. At the expiration of the federal contract, easement provisions allow DATCP to authorize compatible economic uses on CREP easement sites. Compatible uses may include managed timber harvest, periodic grazing, and haying. The Juneau County CREP easement is a 10 acre grass filter strip (CP21) that runs along the Baraboo River. Managed grazing on the Wood County easement is within the Northern Grassland project area on 34 acres of permanent native grass habitat (CP2).





MONITORING

The state and county Land Conservation Departments take over administration of CREP perpetual easements when the federal contracts expire after 15 years. The goal of monitoring site visits are to reestablish easement boundaries and to work with landowners to maintain compliance with the conservation plan. Four CREP easements were visited in FFY 2020 and included follow up visits with the landowners to resolve compliance issues. Restrictions related to the COVID pandemic limited additional travel and site visits.

CHALLENGES

FSA National office ended authorization for new CREP enrollment under sign-up 52 in August, 2019 and delayed authorization for CREP enrollment under sign-up 53 until January, 2020. For some landowners the uncertainty with program availability and provisions can be a deterrent, particularly during a period of the year that many producers are field planning for the following growing season.

In federal fiscal year 2020, many local county offices were notified about CREP CRP-1s completed under SU53 on the federal side of CREP either very close to or weeks after the end of the fiscal year. This surge of CREP agreements took many county office staff by surprise as they had not accounted for them in their work planning for the last months of the calendar year. When possible, county offices aim to complete the state/county CREP agreements with landowners before December 31 of each year so that the landowner can claim the state incentive payment on that year's taxes. Mid November is typically the cut off for the state to receive CREP agreements and ensure payment to landowners within the year. Notification of enrollment between all local CREP partner offices should occur early on in the offer process, as indicated in the Wisconsin CREP Handbook, to help avoid scenarios such as those experienced in 2020.

FUTURE CREP ACTIVITIES

- Potential amendment to expand CREP Riparian Project Area in northwest Wisconsin along with changes to conservation practice guidelines.
- Continue to review perpetual easements with expiring CRP-1s for status and compliance.
- Finalize cost share policy for maintaining perpetual easements after the FSA CRP-1 expires.
- Work with WI USDA-FSA to update FSA CREP fact sheet.