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Farm Service Agency

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

[USDA and Fort Belknap Indian Community Partner to Support Working Lands Conservation Conservation agreement authorizes enrollment of up to 625,000 acres](#)

News Release | Montana | July 17, 2024

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BOZEMAN, Mont., July 16, 2024— The Fort Belknap Indian Community in Montana is partnering with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help conserve, maintain and improve grassland productivity, reduce soil erosion and enhance wildlife habitat through the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP). The Fort Belknap Indian Community is entering into a CREP agreement with USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) to enroll eligible grassland, pastureland, and other agricultural lands within the boundaries of the reservation, as well as on other eligible land owned by Tribe members.

“This partnership with the Fort Belknap Indian Community represents a significant milestone for both USDA and our efforts to strengthen working land conservation, while also underscoring the vital contribution Native communities make to our country’s agriculture and conservation efforts,” said Maureen Wicks, FSA State Executive Director for Montana. “It’s a clear reflection of our dedication to broaden the scope and reach of our voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs and engage Tribal communities. It’s critical that programs like Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program are not just available but also accessible to all agricultural communities.”

This CREP agreement authorizes the Fort Belknap Indian Community to enroll up to 625,000 acres. Under CREP, high-priority conservation goals are identified by the partner, and then federal funds are supplemented with non-federal funds to achieve those goals. FSA will open enrollment in the coming weeks.

CREP is part of [the Conservation Reserve Program](#) (CRP). The Fort Belknap Indian Community CREP agreement is modeled after grassland CRP, a working lands program, which protects grassland while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. The program emphasizes support for grazing operations, plant and animal biodiversity, and eligible land containing shrubs and forbs under the greatest threat of conversion. CRP participants maintain permanent, resource-conserving plant

species, such as approved grasses or forbs (known as “covers”) to control soil erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat.

The Fort Belknap Indian Community CREP is the fourth such partnership between USDA and a Native American Tribal Nation—the [Cheyenne River, Oglala, and Rosebud Sioux tribes became the first three to do](#) so in late 2022 and early 2023.

How to Participate

Through the Fort Belknap Indian Community CREP, farmers, ranchers, and agricultural producers voluntarily enter into contracts with the federal government for 10-to-15-years, agreeing to maintain an existing vegetative cover of permanent grasses and legumes, while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding. In return, FSA provides participants with rental payments, and cost-share assistance for, among other things, establishing permanent fencing and livestock watering facilities needed to support livestock grazing, along with other conservation measures.

Only Tribal lands, either owned by the Tribe or owned by a member of the Tribe, are eligible for this project. To learn more and determine eligibility, contact FSA at your [local USDA Service Center](#).

More Information

Currently, CREP has 40 projects in 26 states with more than 680,000 acres enrolled nationally.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit [usda.gov](#).

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