

Chapter 4

ALTERNATIVES

INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternatives—This section is the heart of the environmental impact statement. Based on information and analysis presented in the sections on the Affected Environment (1502.15) and the Environmental Consequences (1502.16), it should present the environmental impacts of the proposal and the alternatives in comparative form, thus sharply defining issues and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public. (40 CFR 1502.14)

Chapter 4 defines and compares the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of the alternatives. This chapter describes how the alternatives were crafted, as well as any alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed analysis. This chapter also describes the agency and public scoping process, the issues developed in scoping, and how these issues fed into defining the alternatives and impacts analysis.

4.1 DEVELOPMENT OF THE ALTERNATIVES

The purpose of the scoping process, as outlined in the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1501.7) is to determine the scope of issues to be addressed in the EIS and to identify significant issues relating to the action being proposed. The lead agency is required to invite input from Federal, State, and local agencies, affected Indian tribes, project proponents, and other interested parties (Section 1501.7 (a)(1)).

4.1.1 Agency Scoping

The issues identified through internal scoping are considered the original focus of FSA, and helped in determining the methods, procedures, and data that were to be used in the compilation of the draft PEIS.

The following agencies were consulted concerning issues they believed should be addressed in the PEIS: FSA, NRCS, Forest Service, Economic Research Service, Office of Budget and Program Analysis, Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, EPA, FWS, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

Almost all of the issues identified in the internal scoping process were relevant to the program at the time, and since the passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, either directly addressed in the law or will be promulgated as a result of the law. For issues not addressed by the Farm Bill, a majority of them were not major issues, but statements pertaining to the current program and how it is implemented are included in the EIS and address the majority of these issues. Refer to Appendix A for a more detailed discussion of FSA scoping conducted for this project.

4.1.2 Public Scoping

Public scoping meetings were held in Wye Mills, Maryland; Mobile, Alabama; Amarillo, Texas; Gresham, Oregon; Lawrence, Kansas; and Moorhead, Minnesota, to gather public input on the project and issues to be addressed in the EIS. An informal presentation described the purpose of the PEIS, the scoping and comment process, and program alternatives to be addressed in the PEIS. After the presentation, the public was given the opportunity to comment on the CRP PEIS.

Press releases and newspaper advertisements across the U.S. informed the public of the scoping meetings and solicited comments via regular mail, e-mail, and toll-free telephone line. Additional written comments were received in the mail. Letters, transcripts, phone transcriptions, and comments submitted during the scoping process were reviewed and substantive comments identified, categorized, and tabulated.

4.1.3 Scoping Issues

All the comments received during the public and internal scoping process were recorded and then categorized based upon environmental resource area, social value, or economic importance. That breakdown was then evaluated by FSA to determine the scope and significance of each issue, and the depth at which it would be analyzed in this PEIS. A detailed scoping comment report is provided as Appendix A of this PEIS.

A total of 738 individual comments were identified from 193 commenters in three groups. Federal, State or local agencies were classified as Agency. Non-profit organizations and businesses were classified as Organization. Comments from the general public or from unidentified sources were classified Public.

The largest number of comments and the number one most commented upon issue from the public scoping pertained to CRP and its success. The public was extremely satisfied with the general benefits CRP has provided since its inception, and they expressed a sincere interest for the program to continue. A majority of the negative comments concerned issues of CRP management and administration. Commenters voiced their opinions that the contract process needs to be streamlined, that more interagency collaboration is required, and that certain local USDA employees involved demonstrated a lack of program knowledge.

4.1.4 Comments Received on the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS)

All the comments received during the DPEIS comment period were recorded and then categorized based upon environmental resource area, social value, or economic importance. That breakdown was then evaluated by FSA to determine the scope and significance of each comment, and the depth at which it would be addressed in this PEIS. FSA responded to all comments received and either expanded the PEIS to address the comment or explained as to why

the PEIS was not expanded in accordance with the comment. A detailed comment and response report is provided as Appendix H of this PEIS.

Over 1000 individual comments were identified from about 658 commenters from 33 different States and the District of Columbia. The public provided the most comments on the draft followed by national organizations, State agencies, State organizations, and Federal agencies.

4.2 CRP ALTERNATIVES

4.2.1 No Program (Baseline)

This alternative is used as an analytical device to establish a baseline upon which to evaluate the other alternatives. The analysis establishes a baseline by describing what would have happened if the CRP had never been created. Data from the 1982 NRI is used.

4.2.2 No Action (Current Program)

Under this alternative, FSA administration of CRP/CCRP/CREP would continue as if the pre-2002 Farm Bill provisions remained in effect, including the 4.2 million-acre holdback for CCRP and CREP.

Risk

The risk associated with this Alternative would be that CCRP and CREP could possibly not be allocated any additional acreage.

4.2.3 Proposed Action

The Proposed Action is for FSA to implement changes in General CRP/CCRP/CREP administration based on the requirements of the 2002 Farm Bill. Some of the changes include:

- Increasing the enrollment cap for CRP/CREP acreage;
- Changing the eligibility and cropping history requirements;
- Implementing a nationwide FWP; and
- Several additional minor program changes.

The proposed action involves the targeting of certain sensitive environmental resources/geographical areas through the use of CCRP, CRP and FWP. However the Proposed Action still allows full continued use of general CRP. Table 4.2-1 lists the changes in the CRP general provisions, CCRP, and CREP programs that are evaluated in this PEIS under the Proposed Action.

Table 4.2-1 CRP Program Changes in The 2002 Farm Bill

Conservation Reserve Program			
Provision	<u>1996 Farm Bill</u>	<u>2002 Farm Bill</u>	<u>Change/Comment</u>
Acreage Cap	36.4 million acres.	39.2 million acres.	2.8 million acres added.
Cropping History	No specific history required; 2-of-5 years prior to enrollment set by rule.	Requires planted or considered planted status 4 of 6 years prior to enactment.	Prohibits making lands eligible by establishing cropping history after 2001.
Other Cropland Eligibility Criteria	-Highly erodible lands. -Offsite or onsite water quality or salinity problem. -Specified high priority conservation practices. -State and National conservation priority area.	1996 Bill provisions plus lands that: -Provide water conservation benefits. -Buffers of adjoining areas are infeasible to farm. -Are under expiring CRP contracts.	-Infeasible to farm provision applies only to remainders of fields where 50-percent of field is enrolled as buffer and are determined infeasible to farm.
Marginal Pastureland Eligibility	Land devoted to trees in or near riparian areas for water quality purposes.	Land devoted to appropriate vegetation in or near riparian areas for water quality purposes.	-Allows vegetation other than trees. -Includes land converted to wetland or wildlife habitat.
Existing Covers	No provision.	Allows existing covers to be maintained, where practicable.	
Balance of Natural Resource Purposes	No provision.	Requires equal consideration for soil erosion, water quality, and wildlife habitat.	Continues equal consideration policy already established administratively.
Haying and Grazing	Allowed in response to drought or other emergency, with reduction of rental payment commensurate with economic value.	-Allows non-emergency managed use, continues emergency provision. -Rental payment reduction for any use.	Must be consistent with soil, water, and wildlife goals.
Continuous Signup and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program	No specific provisions. Program initiated administratively.	No specific provisions. Program initiated administratively.	Changes that impact continuous and CREP: -Infeasible to farm -Marginal pastureland.

Farmable Wetland Program			
<u>Provision</u>	<u>2001 Appropriation Act Amendment</u>	<u>2002 Farm Bill</u>	<u>Change/Comment</u>
Eligible States	6 pilot States: IA, MN, MT, NE, ND, and SD.	Extends to all States.	
Acreage Cap	150,000 acres per State, 500,000 acres total.	100,000 acres per State, up to 1,000,000 acres total nationwide. 3 rd year, may increase to 150,000 acres per State if program cap has yet to be reached.	Acreage enrolled cannot affect acreage enrolled in continuous or CREP.
Eligibility Criteria	Limited to non-floodplain wetlands and buffers, 5 acres or less, 40 acres per tract.	Expands maximum to 10 acres per wetland, with 5 acres eligible for payment.	3 of 10 year cropping history.
Rental Payments	Requires same payments as continuous CRP.	No changes.	

Risk

The risk associated with this alternative would be similar to that of the No Action Alternative. The acreage allocated under the new programmatic cap (39.2 million acres) could solely be used for general sign-up CRP, if so determined by the Secretary, with no additional acreage being allocated to CCRP or CREP. However, as previously discussed in this Section, FSA plans to continue emphasizing the utilization of CREP, CCRP, and FWP.

4.2.4 Environmental Targeting

Under this alternative, FSA would alter the mix of program goals and change acreage allocations to include CREP and continuous sign-up practices in designated environmentally sensitive areas. The CRP general sign-up would be eliminated. The implicit benefits produced by the EBI would be replaced by the environmental targeting of areas for enrollment. Administration of CRP would then be done using an environmental targeting approach that focuses program resources on addressing national or regional priority conservation goals. Different strategies for allocating the additional acreage under the program cap would be evaluated by FSA.

In the operation of conservation and environmental programs, environmental targeting is a practice that has been increasingly used to improve program performance. Environmental targeting directs program resources to lands where the greatest environmental benefit will be generated for a given expenditure. The objective of environmental targeting is to make the most efficient use of tax dollars allocated to a particular program.
 -ERS, 1998

Under this alternative, FSA would fund three kinds of CRP:

1. The established CREPs;
2. State-defined Environmental Target Areas; and
3. National Environmental Target Areas.

4.2.4.1 State CREPs

Under this alternative, the currently established CREPs and any newly established CREPs would continue to function as they would under the Proposed Action Alternative. The continuation of State CREPs provides additional benefits no longer available through general CRP or CCRP. Under CREP, applicants have the flexibility to extend conservation benefits through a State funded program and thus increase the total sum of their rental payments. An additional benefit of CREP is that enrollment is on a continuous basis and payments tend to be at a higher rate when compared to general CRP or CCRP.

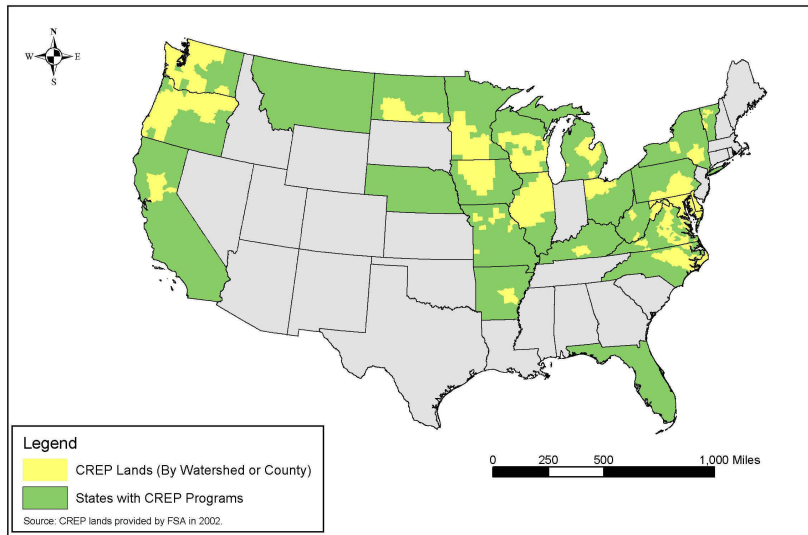


Fig. 4.2-1. Current States with CREP Agreements

4.2.4.2 State Environmental Target Areas

States that do not have CREP programs would be able to establish State-defined Environmental Target Areas (SETAs). The SETAs would not require State funding for rental payments, but would focus enrollment in one or more State-defined ecological regions or impaired watersheds to address a single high-priority environmental issues. This would allow the States that cannot fully fund a CREP program to conduct CREP-like programs, although not as quickly or effectively as would be possible with full State funding participation. Priority goals would be defined by the State and FSA; non-government organizations could participate, and multiple States could combine efforts to target a resource or impaired watershed that overlaps the enrolled States within a defined ecological region.

4.2.4.3 National Environmental Target Areas

The environmental impacts associated with agriculture activity vary widely depending on how production practices affect an area's natural resources with certain geographic areas receiving severe environmental stress from farming and ranching (OTA, 1995). FSA would establish one or more National Environmental Targeting Areas (NETAs) to address environmental conditions that are generally recognized to be broadly regional in extent and would integrate any CREPs,

State-defined priority areas, or CPAs in the NETA context. The overlap of these smaller priority areas could essentially constitute a NETA by addressing the total agroenvironmental ecosystem while at the same time attaining environmental quality objectives. Under this alternative, the focusing on priority targets would likely keep more land in production to serve consumer and trade interests (OTA, 1995).

Agroenvironmental problems begin locally, as agricultural systems affect surrounding environmental resources such as water, air, soil, or wildlife (OTA, 1995). The localized problem may, however, become a transboundary problem encompassing multiple States or large ecological regions such that it must be considered a national issue. However, a downside of large areas like the proposed NETAs is that they inherently diminish targeting efficiency, unless the environmental or conservation program in question applies in equal measure throughout the affected area or region (OTA, 1995).

NETA Selection

When Federal leadership is exercised in identifying potential national agroenvironmental priorities, the eventual program targets must be selected with meaningful State and local involvement (OTA, 1995). To maximize all opportunities in attaining NETA environmental quality goals the following could be a potential way to structure the selection process:

- Local, State, regional, and Federal expertise would help define specific priority areas that overlap, which would allow for consistent and specific programmatic strategies that would best fit local conditions but produce regional or national environmental benefits.
- Identify the specific agricultural related problems within the overlapping SETAs and/or CREPs and isolate the common environmental resource area with the greatest potential to produce national environmental benefits.
- To be eligible for NETA designation, the proposed area must meet at least 4 of the following CREP-based criteria:
 - Project is located in an area where agriculture is an important element of the regional economy, and the long-term viability of agriculture is threatened because of agricultural-related environmental conditions.
 - Project would measurably improve water quality in areas where it currently does not meet designated use standards, such as areas identified according to studies conducted under Section 305 of the Clean Water Act.
 - Project would mitigate nonattainment of air quality standards because of agricultural activities.
 - Project would provide significant restoration of species on or identified as candidates for listing on the Federal Endangered Species List.
 - Project would mitigate adverse agricultural impacts on important segments of the regional economy, such as recreational use, transportation, fisheries, etc.
 - Project would ensure the preservation of a unique geographic region, which represents 1 of the most important examples of a particular resource in the Nation, such as a designated national natural landmark.

Some examples of NETAs could potentially be:

- **Corn Belt/Mississippi River Drainage Basin (Water Quality)**
 - The focus would be on addressing the problem of Gulf of Mexico hypoxia
 - Prevalence of agricultural pesticide and fertilizer residues in ground and surface water throughout the region degrades sources of drinking water
- **Prairie Potholes (Wildlife)**
 - The focus would be on enrolling conservation practices in addition to FWP wetland restoration and protection for the support of these key breeding grounds and migration sites for many animals, grassland birds, and waterfowl
- **High Plains (Soils)**
 - The focus would be on reducing dust from wind erosion thus improving air quality
 - The lack of crop residue and increasing soil degradation from extensive cotton cropping on marginal soils is the primary cause for the degraded air quality and high wind erosion rates in this region

NETA Structure

A collaborative process involving all local, State, tribal, and Federal representatives located in the overlapping SETAs and/or CREPs within the designated NETA could determine the appropriate balance of leadership, programmatic administration, funding, and technical assistance.

Risk

The risk associated with this alternative would be:

- There would be no general sign-up CRP, thus decreasing the potential to enroll the maximum acreage allocated under the 2002 Farm Bill and forgoing the potential benefits to unenrolled lands;
- SETAs and NETAs would encompass so much area that effective targeting would not occur.
- Possible reduction in enrollment due to it being a voluntary program, which will not ensure that all allocated acres are enrolled.
- Cost would be prohibitive.

4.3 ALTERNATIVES ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED EVALUATION

4.3.1 Revert to Permanent Legislation

This alternative would have been the analytical basis had the 2002 Farm Bill not been enacted. When the omnibus Farm Bill legislation is not enacted by Congress and the previous Farm Bill provisions terminate, as they would as of December 31, 2002, for most programs under the 1996 Farm Bill, USDA would fall back on the provisions of the permanent legislation, the Acts of 1938 and 1949. These would address provisions for farm subsidies and quotas and land idling, but would not explicitly define a conservation reserve program. Because no such provision is made in the law, FSA believes it would be outside its decision responsibility to create such a program so this alternative was deemed infeasible.

4.4 COMPARISON OF THE IMPACTS OF THE ALTERNATIVES

The following, Table 4.4-1, compares the potential environmental impacts resulting from each of the alternatives analyzed in this PEIS. Potential environmental impacts can be positive or adverse, and can occur at different magnitudes. The impact definitions that were used to describe potential environmental impacts in this PEIS are defined below.

Positive Impact:

- A beneficial change in the condition or appearance of the resource or a change that moves the resource toward a desired condition.

Adverse Impact:

- A change that moves the resource away from a desired condition or detracts from its appearance or condition.

Minor Impact:

- A change in a resource occurs, but the change is barely perceptible and would not alter the condition or appearance of the resource.

Moderate Impact:

- A noticeable change in a resource occurs, and this change alters the condition or appearance of the resource, but the integrity of the resource remains intact;

Major Impact:

- A substantial change in a resource occurs, and this change is highly noticeable and measurably alters the condition or appearance of the resource.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Soils	Soil erosion rates would most likely be greater than 1.9 billion tons/year. Due to increased soil erosion rates, soil quality and productivity would also be adversely impacted.	Soil erosion has decreased by 450 million tons since CRP's inception and additional soil erosion rate reductions would continue under this alternative. Soil quality has increased due to more topsoil left on the land and would continue as additional acreage is enrolled.	Cumulative positive impacts on soils would continue as CRP contracts are extended for 10-15 more years with additional acreage allocated toward the program. The increased acreage could potentially reduce soil erosion by another 40 million tons. Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help reduce soil erosion and reduce sediment runoff on these land types. An increase in the cropping history requirement has the potential to moderately impact soils by targeting cropland that has been under more intensive production and thus possibly more vulnerable to wind and water erosion than currently required to enroll in CRP. However, positive impacts would continue on those already vegetative areas because the new cropping history provision makes the breaking of new ground to create a cropping history impossible. Infeasible to farm areas smaller than 50% of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to some enhancement of soil quality, but only if enrolling it would contribute to reduced soil erosion rates. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit soils by not removing the established vegetative cover. The potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields would decrease. Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting will increase plant diversity and vigor, while managed grazing has the potential to do the same. These practices should not produce any adverse impacts on soils based on the premise that it must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval. CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to soil quality. Continued positive impacts on long-term soil quality would occur if States place CREP land under easement. Associated soil benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP is opened to all States.	States with CREPs would see additional soil erosion reduction in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of permanent vegetative cover and approved soil conservation practices. Under most targeting scenarios, erosion could increase as other objectives are emphasized. Minor benefits on soil erosion could be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to specifically address soil erosion by utilizing collaborative decision making of all interested parties and an ecosystem driven conservation initiative. Because of location, gross sheet and rill erosion may be less. Associated soil benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP is opened up to all States. Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage would decrease under this alternative. As this enrollment declines, national benefits of soil erosion reduction would be significantly less.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Surface Water	Surface water quality would be substantially worse due to the loss of multiple benefits provided by vegetative cover established under CRP over the last 16 years. Impact on surface water quality would be significant, and more streams would have a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) listing due to the fact that agricultural lands have been cited as the number one pollutant of surface waters.	Surface water quality would continue to improve as producers enroll land under CRP, thus reducing runoff containing sediments, nutrients, and pesticides. TMDL-listed streams would decrease as cropland is enrolled, but this would be based on the conservation practices installed on contract land and whether they directly target the impairments causing the listing.	Continued major positive impacts on surface water quality as CRP contracts are extended for 10-15 more years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring acres. A 40 million ton decrease in sediment would correlate to an increase in water quality and a decrease in nutrient and pesticide loads. Positive impacts in terms of reduced non-point source (NPS) pollutant loadings to achieve TMDLs would occur when producers enroll land that has been more intensively cropped (4 out of 6 years), but the impact would be important only if contract land is located within a watershed having NPS issues. Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help improve water quality and reduce sediment runoff on these land types. Infeasible to farm areas smaller than 50% of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to the enhancement of water quality, but only if conservation practices targeted at improving water quality are adopted. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and decreasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields. Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting should not produce adverse impacts on surface water based on the premise that it must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval. Associated water quality benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP goes nationwide. CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to water quality. CCRP would provide buffer along streams to reduce sediment runoff and subsequent water quality improvements would give direct positive benefits to aquatic species.	States with CREPs would see additional water quality benefits in areas targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of water quality enhancement conservation practices. Moderate positive impacts on water quality could be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to address water quality impairments by using collaborative decision making of all interested parties and an ecosystem driven conservation initiative. This idea would be most beneficial when addressing effects in the Gulf of Mexico and the Chesapeake Bay Region. TMDL-listed streams would decrease based on the specific environmental targeting of those watersheds in the National Environmental Target Area (NETA) that have been identified as contributors to the large-scale water quality impairment problem. Overall enrollment in General CRP sign-up acreage would decrease under this alternative. As this enrollment declines, so would the positive impacts these acres play at maintaining good water quality.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Groundwater	Groundwater quality and drinking water sources would be adversely impacted due to increased contamination by pesticides and fertilizers from land that would have been enrolled in CRP. Conservation practices targeting water quality improvement would therefore not be implemented.	Drinking water sources and groundwater in general would see a continued positive impact on both water quality and quantity, as cropland is taken out of production and enrolled in CRP. This would result in reduced levels of pesticides and fertilizers being used.	Continued cumulative positive impacts on groundwater quality as CRP contracts are authorized for 10-15 more years with additional acreage allocated toward the program and additional acres being enrolled to replace expiring ones. Drinking water sources and groundwater in general would see a continued positive impact on both water quality and quantity, as cropland is taken out of production and enrolled in CRP. This would result in reduced levels of pesticides and fertilizers being used. Marginal pastureland being devoted to vegetative cover would allow these areas to implement practices to help improve groundwater quality and reduce chemical leaching on these land use types. An increase in the cropping history requirement has the potential to produce a positive impact on groundwater by targeting cropland that has been under more intensive production and thus possibly more vulnerable to leaching than currently required to enroll in CRP. Infeasible to farm areas less than 50% of the field size enrolled along with a buffer would contribute to some enhancement of groundwater quality, but only if conservation practices targeted at improving water quality are installed. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP would benefit water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and decreasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed fields. Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting should not produce adverse impacts on surface water based on the premise that it must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval. Associated groundwater quality benefits of wetlands would increase as the FWP goes nationwide. CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to groundwater quality.	States with CREPs would see additional groundwater quality benefits if areas targeted by approved CREP agreements is a known groundwater source area and if approved practices consist of water quality enhancement conservation practices. No real national impacts to groundwater quality can be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to specifically address groundwater quality impairments. This would be due to the fact that groundwater issues tend to be more localized and would therefore be better addressed through the CREPs. TMDL-listed streams could decrease based on the specific environmental targeting of those watersheds in the NETAs that have been identified as having common groundwater quality problems. Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage would decrease under this alternative along with the subsequent positive impacts on groundwater quality and quantity.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Aquatic Species	Aquatic habitat and associated water quality would be severely impacted due to high nutrient, pesticide and sediment runoff from Highly Erodible Land (HEL) on cropland. See Surface and Groundwater impacts for No Program.	Decreased sediment transport rates would produce a positive impact on aquatic species as further cropland is enrolled in CRP. Maintenance of high dissolved oxygen levels and cool water temperatures for aquatic organisms would continue as agricultural land is enrolled as wetland buffers.	The expansion of FWP would allow for an increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide, decreasing the rate of sediment transport to adjacent water bodies and increasing the associated aquatic species benefits described under the No Action Alternative. The limitation of wetland size would also be increased from 5 acres to 10 acres, increasing the potential acreage of aquatic habitat. Continued beneficial impacts on aquatic species as described under no action for an additional 10-15 years. Increase in potential acreage that could benefit aquatic species by 2.8 million acres. Managed haying, grazing, and harvesting should not produce adverse impacts to aquatic species based on the premise that requirements for these practices must be included in the conservation plan or in the land management plan prior to contract approval, so aquatic species associated with the environmentally targeted enrolled land are not adversely affected. CREPs would target areas within States to provide positive benefits to aquatic species. CCRP would provide buffers along streams to reduce sediment runoff, and subsequently improve water quality, which would have direct positive benefits on aquatic species.	States with CREPs would see additional water quality benefits in areas targeted by approved CREP agreements, which would provide aquatic species with the optimal conditions for species success, but only if approved practices consist of water quality enhancement conservation practices that have been proven to directly benefit aquatic species and their associated habitat. Minor national benefits to aquatic species could be accomplished by targeting water quality issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds that are impaired severely. Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to aquatic species would decrease under this alternative.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Floodplains	Decreased floodplain function due to a decrease in permanent vegetative cover and an increase in soil erosion, sediment, and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands. Decrease in associated wetland restoration and riparian areas benefiting floodplain function.	Increased floodplain function due to an increase in permanent vegetative cover and a decrease in soil erosion, sediment, and contaminant runoff from agricultural lands. Increase in associated wetland restoration and riparian areas benefiting floodplain function.	Continued beneficial impacts to floodplains as described under No Action for an additional 10-15 years. Increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to floodplains by 2.8 million acres. Continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with floodplains for an additional year. Beneficial impacts to floodplains in States with CREPs in place would be the same as those described under the No Action Alternative. Also, permanent easements under CREP would provide continued maintenance of floodplains functions and values.	Beneficial impacts to floodplains as described under No Action in States with CREPs. Positive benefits to floodplains could be accomplished by targeting floodplain and related resource issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds. Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to floodplains would be decreased under this alternative.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Riparian Areas	Decreased riparian area function due to a decrease in permanent vegetative cover and an increase in soil erosion, sedimentation, and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands. Decrease in riparian area restoration by 400,000 acres.	Improvement and restoration of natural riparian area functions through increased vegetative cover, and reduced sediment and contaminant runoff from associated agricultural lands. Increase in riparian areas by 400,000 acres.	Continued beneficial impacts to riparian areas as described under No Action for an additional 10-15 years. Increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to riparian areas by 2.8 million acres. Continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with riparian areas for an additional year. Benefits from devotion of marginal pastureland to vegetation, particularly trees in riparian areas. The use of CCRP would target riparian areas by protecting them as buffers with permanent vegetative cover, which would reduce runoff. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP will benefit associated riparian areas. Beneficial impacts to riparian areas in States with CREPs in place would be the same as those described under the No Action Alternative. Also, permanent easements under CREP would provide continued maintenance of these riparian areas functions and values. Permitting haying and grazing in response to drought or other emergency may have minor impacts on riparian areas. Potential increase in eligible acreage for buffer establishment when more than 50% of the field is eligible for enrollment and the other half is infeasible to farm. Increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide through FWP expansion will benefit eligible associated riparian areas.	Beneficial impacts to riparian areas as described under No Action in States with CREPs. Positive benefits to riparian areas can be accomplished by targeting riparian area and related resource issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds. Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and its associated benefits to riparian areas would be decreased under this alternative.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Wetlands	Decreased benefits to wetlands due to increased soil erosion rates, sedimentation, and contaminant runoff from farmlands. Increase in continued use of farmed wetlands and associated uplands by approximately 3 million acres. Potential increase in wetland conversion caused by agricultural producers not participating in USDA programs regulated by Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. Decrease in wetland restoration by 1.6 million acres Decrease in wetland water quality from the loss of 600,000 acres of filter strips and wetland buffers.	Improved water quality from the reduction in sediment and contaminant runoff from agricultural lands. Restored wetland function to 542,278 acres of farmed wetlands and protection of 2.8 million acres of natural and farmed wetlands from agricultural runoff. Additional 1.6 million acres of wetland restoration. Additional 600,000 acres of filter strips and wetland buffers protecting wetland water quality.	Continued beneficial impacts to wetlands as described under No Action for an additional 10-15 years. Increase in potential acreage of beneficial impacts to wetlands by 2.8 million acres. Land eligibility for CRP re-enrollment will extend associated beneficial impacts to wetlands for another 10 to 15 years. Continued benefits from hardwood tree contracts associated with wetlands for an additional year. Increase in potential wetland acres from conversion of marginal pastureland to wetlands. The ability to continue with existing cover where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP will benefit wetland water quality by not removing established vegetative cover and increasing the potential for wind and water erosion on plowed-up fields. Beneficial impacts to wetland water quality from increased conservation of surface and groundwater in agricultural operations. Increased distribution and acreage of wetland restoration and buffers nationwide through FWP expansion. Increased potential wetland function through FWP expansion of allowable wetland restoration acreage from 5 to 10 acres. State CREPs could target sensitive areas with large numbers of wetlands, and permanent easements could provide protection of wetlands and associated buffers.	Beneficial impacts to wetlands as described under No Action in States with CREPs Benefits to wetlands could be accomplished by targeting wetland and related resource issues in multiple regions, States, and watersheds. Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and its associated benefits to wetland areas would be decreased under this alternative.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Grasslands	Without CRP, 25 million actively enrolled acres most likely would not have been planted to conservation cover and it might be assumed that the realized positive impacts of that cover type on cropland would be absent or considerably less.	Native and introduced grass species would continue to be planted on eligible cropland, thus producing residual benefits to water quality and soils.	Grasslands throughout the country would benefit as more acreage is enrolled implementing the establishment of grass cover. However, new EBI scoring is currently being worked on in connection with development of new regulations to implement CRP in accordance with the provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill.	States with CREPs would see additional benefits associated with grasslands in areas targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of native grass species establishment conservation practices. Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to grasslands would be decreased under this alternative.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Forestlands	Incurred benefits of forestlands to water quality, wildlife, and soil stabilization would not have occurred in the absence of CRP. Incentives to enroll land devoted to Longleaf Pine would not exist.	Cropland enrolled and planted to tree practice acreage would continue to cleanse runoff water, silt, and pollutants, thereby protecting and improving streams while simultaneously providing food and shelter for wildlife. The Longleaf Pine Conservation Priority Area (CPA) would continue to see enrollment of additional tree planting acres and thus provide additional positive benefits to water, soils, and wildlife in that region.	Continued ecological benefits associated with tree planting conservation practices would continue for an additional 10-15 years. Additional croplands enrolled and planted with tree practices would continue to cleanse silt and pollutants from runoff water, especially if installed in riparian areas, thereby protecting and improving streams while simultaneously providing food and shelter for wildlife for an additional 10-15 years of CRP contracts. Marginal pastureland in additional tree practice acreage would continue to be enrolled along with other continuous practices that involve tree plantings, such as: shelter belts, field windbreaks, and living snow fences implemented on sensitive cropland enrolled. However, the new provision would allow grasses, forbs, and shrubs to be planted on marginal pastureland along with trees, resulting in a positive impact through the creation of habitat from which multiple species may benefit. State CREPs would target areas where plantings of certain species, such as hardwoods, would improve local ecosystems and provide associated benefits to water quality and wildlife.	States with CREPs would see additional benefits associated with forestlands targeted by approved CREP agreements, if approved practices consist of tree planting conservation practices. The direct positive impact of forestland restoration would benefit local CREP regions in a State by improving and protecting soil quality, water quality, and wildlife habitat, and by creating more opportunities to enjoy nature. Benefits on forestlands if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted to address forestland restoration and protection. Would be most beneficial in the current Longleaf Pine CPA and other National Forestland areas in ecological impairment. Overall, enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits to forestlands would be decreased under this alternative.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Wildlife	There would be significant negative impacts on local wildlife populations along with the availability of localized wildlife-based recreation, like viewing, hiking, hunting, and fishing.	Areas devoted to permanent vegetation, wildlife habitat, and wetlands would continue to provide critical elements for species as more CRP acreage is enrolled. Conservation Practice (CP) enrollment targeted toward wildlife habitat enhancement would continue to provide critical resources and establish corridors between fragmented habitats. Continued benefits from the availability of wildlife-based recreation. Wetland restoration would continue to benefit waterfowl and upland game bird species and provide valuable habitat. Wetland buffer CPs would continue to provide additional habitat and protection from human disturbance.	Land with wildlife habitat benefits could be increased by almost 3 million acres. However, the amount of quality habitat would be dependant on the types of vegetation planted. Managed haying, grazing and harvesting, along with wind turbine placement, if done correctly and in accordance with conservation plans, would have little or no impact on resident wildlife. Permitting existing cover to continue, where practicable and consistent with wildlife benefits of CRP, would continue to have lasting positive impacts on wildlife habitat already established with vegetative cover. This would be true as long as the maintenance schedule documented in the conservation plan is followed. An increase in acreage allocated to CRP could increase the amount of upland game habitat, habitat used by birds and Neotropical migrants, and the amount of protected wetlands, simultaneously and proportionally increasing the recreation chances for those people who like to bird watch, hunt, fish, and to enjoy nature. State CREPs would target specific areas with needs associated with wildlife habitat protection and restoration and achieve additional benefits. Permanent protection of wildlife through the use of easements could also be achieved with the use of State CREPs. CCRP could provide positive benefits to certain wildlife species by establishing buffers, both grassed and forested.	States with CREPs would see additional wildlife benefits in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of wildlife enhancement or wetland restoration conservation practices. Positive benefits to wildlife could be accomplished if multiple regions, States, and watersheds are targeted at specifically addressing wildlife habitat enhancement by utilizing collaborative decision making of all interested parties and an ecosystem-driven conservation initiative. Overall enrollment in General CRP signup acreage and associated benefits would be decreased under this alternative.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Threatened & Endangered (T&E) Species	Continued agricultural practices could have a significant adverse impact on numerous T&E species, but to what extent and to which species is unknown. There are some threatened and endangered species credited with utilizing CRP-created habitat.	Continued enhancement of wildlife habitat could produce positive impacts on T&E species.	Additional acreage allocated to CRP could potentially have a positive impact on almost 3 million additional acres of protected land that could be used, in part, as habitat by many T&E species. If it is found that the land improvements created by CRP conservation practices provide a net conservation benefit for T&E species, then the landowner could enter into a Safe Harbor Agreement with the USF&WS, which benefits T&E species while giving the landowners assurances from additional restrictions. States with CREPs would see additional T&E species and habitat benefits in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of conservation practices targeting the species or species habitat in question.	Benefits on T&E species and their habitat are not as likely at this level unless the species or habitat targeted encompasses large geographic areas, multiple States, or numerous watersheds. States with CREPs would see additional T&E species and habitat benefits in areas targeted by the approved CREP agreement, if approved practices consist of conservation practices targeting the species or species habitat in question.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Economic Impacts	On a national level, without CRP, the change in acreage planted to the major crops is expected to be minimal. However, at the local or regional level, there could be a moderate increase in planted acreage creating economic benefits arising from the additional need for farm labor, as well as demand for the services of agricultural businesses. Possible loss of recreational opportunities. Possible increased uncertainty of producer income, particularly for those non-farming landowners and part-time farmers. Magnitude of uncertainty likely to be greater at the county or community level than nationally.	No adverse impact on farm employment at the regional or State level. Possible adverse impacts at the county or community level. Insufficient research to support a definitive conclusion as to the magnitude. Minimal impact of CRP on cropland supply.	Potential insignificant adverse impact on agricultural employment in areas gaining in CRP enrollment; and potential insignificant adverse impact on agricultural employment in areas losing CRP enrollment No impact on agricultural land rents at the regional and national level. Reallocation of income within the local economy with possible increased agricultural output, income in non-agricultural sectors of the economy, additional spending on agricultural inputs, and decreased recreational spending. Reallocation could affect leakage of value added from the local economy. Potential beneficial, long-term and nominal to moderate increase in agricultural land values from a reduction in the cropland supply and the capitalization of CRP income into land value. Potential increases in recreational opportunities and shifts in recreational opportunities between regions. Provides certainty to the participants of CRP-related income over the long term.	Insignificant effect on agricultural employment at the regional and State level. Possible increased uncertainty of producer income, particularly for those non-farming landowners and part-time farmers. Magnitude of uncertainty likely to be greater at the county or community level than at the regional or national level. Likely change in the regional distribution of enrolled land. Decreased probability of the enrollment of entire fields providing a benefit in the increased supply of rental land. Potential increase in the supply of cropland. Possible reduction in enrollment due to it being a voluntary program, which will not ensure that all allocated acres are enrolled. Cost would be prohibitive.

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Economic Impacts (Continued)	Long term expansion of cropland supply could be beneficial for tenants, lowering rents. In the short term, the increased supply of cropland could raise rents due to temporary increase in productivity. Potentially significant decline in pheasant habitat and recreational benefits nationally and regionally. Potentially significant decline in wildlife viewing benefits in the Northern and Southern Plains States. Potentially modest decline in wildlife viewing benefits in the Northeastern region.	On a national and regional level, the effect of CRP land rent appears to be insignificant. At the state, county or township level, the impact may be adverse and nominal to moderate in magnitude. No change in recreational benefits.		

Table 4.4-1 Comparison of Potential Impacts of the Alternatives

Resource Area	No Program	No Action	Proposed Action	Environmental Targeting
Social Impacts	Land use decisions by producers and owners disconnected from environmental consideration and based on maximizing market income. Social community impacted by erosion from unused excess capacity. Losses in soil quality, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat gains.	Landowners benefit from environmental improvements and stable income stream. Local communities benefit from enhanced recreation and lower costs to residents and industry from air and water improvements. Potentially adverse impacts to tenant farmers and new farm startups. Some potential for access to program benefits for minority and limited resource farmers.	Impacts similar to those identified under no action alternative. Changes improve program performance and increase flexibility but do not substantially alter program effects on social community.	Some currently participating communities may experience reduced benefits. Impacts more concentrated in communities located in or near areas of program