



How's your habitat?

Want More Fish and Wildlife? Try Buffers

by David Long, AGFC Private Lands Supervisor

Farmers can increase fish and wildlife populations on their property by installing tree, shrub and native grass buffers. You can also increase income by enrolling in the Farm Service Agency's Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP).



CCRP tree and grass buffers using CP22 and CP33 along a cropland and drainage system

Landowners in Arkansas are using CCRP to establish buffers... As of May, 2014, over 2,000 farmers and ranchers have placed over 76,000 acres in various CCRP buffer practices across the state and enrollment continues to increase.

Why? First, it pays! Enrolling in conservation practices including CP21 Filter Strips, CP22 Riparian Forest Buffers, CP29 Marginal Pastureland Wildlife Habitat Buffers and CP33 Habitat Upland Buffers pays yearly per acre rental payments for up to 15 years – a 50 percent cost-share payment covering establishment cost, an additional 40 percent Practice Incentive Payment and one-time Signing Incentive Payment of \$100 per acre up-front usually with 30 days of contract approval. Most of these practices also offer an additional 20 percent payment added to the standard per acre cropland and/or pastureland rental rate. Landowners establish native tree, shrub or grass buffers ranging from 30 feet and up to 180 feet or wider.



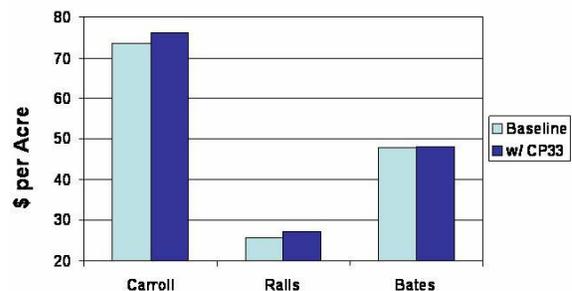
Show me the money... Yearly cropland CRP soil rental rates are paid based on the specific soil type present on the farm being considered for enrollment plus a 20 percent incentive added. Payment rates per acre per year range from a low of \$25 up to over \$100 per acre on some cropland soils. Croplands require a cropping history of four years cropped out of the past six years. Pastureland rental rates are set at a flat rate by county.

Farm Less, Earn More... One study conducted by the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute in three Missouri cropland counties found net farm income per acre rose when comparing farms with conservation buffers versus those without buffers. With fewer acres to farm from enrolling field or stream edges in CRP buffers, the annual cash operating expenses declined with the net effect being an increase in overall farm income. Based on the results of the study, farmers have an economic incentive to idle unproductive cropland acres through participation in the CCRP buffer practices. The study concluded additional returns over 10 years ranged from \$4,090 to \$28,340. Each farm will have a unique set of variables but overall, installing buffers stands to improve the financial bottom line.

Weight the yields and profits?



Average Annual Returns - \$/Acre



MFAPRI study on crop fields using CCRP buffers

Where to put them... These buffers are established around river, stream and drainage ditch edges along row-crop field edges. In many cases these areas can be the lowest yielding and subject to greater soil erosion.

Many pastures next to riparian areas may also qualify. Buffers filter pasture run-off and help prevent soil erosion next to the stream bank, protecting the rancher's investment. Many landowners lose up to an acre of pasture each year because they did not maintain a good vegetative buffer next to the stream.

Get Wildlife... Native grass, forb, shrub and tree buffers offer outstanding benefits to farm wildlife such as deer, turkey, rabbits quail and a host of non-game wildlife species. Migratory wildlife along with many other resident species also benefits- farmers installing buffers have proven this over and over. When they connect existing forested tracts using grass or tree buffers, wildlife populations improve dramatically. The buffers serve as travel lanes along with fawning and nesting areas for deer and turkey moving between forested tracts. Managing for bigger deer in the Delta can be achieved using buffers to increase their habitat base. With our rich Delta soils capable of producing premium forage and cover, deer quality can be increased measurably when additional fawning, bedding and thermal cover is provided on the farm. Installing buffers that are 60 to 180-feet wide in quality wildlife friendly native grasses, shrubs and hardwood trees, which take a relatively small acreage, can result in significant increases in usable habitat across the farm landscape.



CP21, Native grass filter strip (120 feet wide) on intensive cotton & soybean farm in Crittenden County, AR

Yes, I mentioned wanting more fish. Not only are these farmers able to see significant increase in wildlife populations, but improved water quality in streams and creeks on the farm as well as the water leaving their farms. The result can be increased fishing opportunities in the communities where landowners install buffers.



CP33 native grass buffer (60 feet wide) next to woodland edge and cropland edge.

The program is not competitive, so if the land qualifies and is eligible, it can be enrolled, unlike the General CRP, in which the land has to rank competitively to be approved.

Try Buffers if you want more wildlife on your farm & \$...

If farming 'less and earning more' sounds good, while at the same time improving wildlife populations and water quality, farmers can start by contacting an AGFC private lands biologist for CCRP program details first. Then, biologists can direct you to the appropriate FSA office to enroll and if you ask, they can even go with you to sign up.

Contact a AGFC Private Lands Biologist at: Beaver Lake, 866-253-2506; Harrison, 870-741-8600 ext. 114; Hope, 877-777-5580; Calico Rock, 877-297-4331; Little Rock, 877-470-3650; Brinkley, 877-734-4581; Jonesboro, 877-972-5438 and Monticello, 877-367-3559. To locate the private lands biologist that covers your county, go the www.agfc.com/habitat and review the map for contact information.