

HOOSIER FARMLAND WILDLIFE NOTES

Fostering Wildlife in Agriculture



The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Can Help to Improve Wildlife Habitat

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Conservation programs of the 1996 Farm Bill make it economically feasible to implement conservation practices on your land and enhance wildlife habitat at the same time! One program, the **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)**, makes technical assistance and cost-share dollars available to landowners who wish to improve fish and wildlife habitat on their lands. This program is not limited to agricultural producers. Copping history or minimum acreage is not required. **Anyone** who wants to implement practices benefiting wildlife may apply.

Landowners who desire to participate in this program may receive up to 75% of the costs to implement habitat improvements on their property. A maximum cost-share payment of \$10,000 is available for each habitat improvement project. Additional cost-share dollars to cover the 25% of costs not available from NRCS, as well as technical assistance, may be obtained from other conservation organizations, such as Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Quail Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, and the National Wild Turkey Federation. Your District Wildlife Biologist and county extension educator can put you in touch with these resources.

Participation in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program begins by contacting your county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) representative. Your NRCS representative, in conjunction with your District Wildlife Biologist, will help you develop a **Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP)**. The plan includes your goals for improving wildlife habitat and a schedule for establishing and maintaining a list of practices to meet your goals for the duration of the agreement.

Most agreements range five years in length. Your NRCS representative and District Wildlife Biologist will help you decide on conservation practices appropriate for your land. Landowners who participate in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program maintain control of access to their lands, just as they do with other Farm Bill conservation programs.

Eligibility

All Indiana landowners are eligible to participate in WHIP. **Any land** can be enrolled, regardless of the acreage and cropping history. However, lands that are currently enrolled in other Farm Bill conservation programs are not eligible for enrollment in the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

Your NRCS representative may consult with District Wildlife or Fisheries Biologists from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources in your area. Together, these professionals can help you select and design the practices that best fit your property. They can also assist you in identifying other sources of cost-share assistance.

Ranking Criteria

Indiana receives a fixed allocation of WHIP funding annually. Each application is ranked by the following criteria: 1) the improvement of upland grassland or riparian (stream and river) habitats, 2) the location of the proposed Wildlife Priority Areas, and 3) the likely success of the Wildlife Habitat Development Plan. You can improve your chance for funding by including grassland and riparian habitat improvements in your WHDP.

Examples of Cost-share Practices

Crop

- Field windbreaks
- Field borders
- Conservation cover
- Buffer strips (strips of land planted in permanent vegetation)
- Fencing to exclude livestock from riparian areas (areas along streams and rivers)
- Grass filter strips

Non-crop

- Wildlife upland habitat management
- Tree planting
- Planting of native warm season grasses
- Riparian forest buffers (forest filter strips)
- Stream bank stabilization practices
- Prescribed burning of habitats

Riparian and grassland habitat improvement plans are specifically encouraged. Additional points are awarded to plans that are more likely to succeed, located within one of the four Wildlife Priority Areas (Figure 1), and those installing priority practices. Additional criteria that may increase the likelihood of acceptance include the acreage of the enrolled habitat, additional contributions to your plan, and the connectivity of your land with existing habitat blocks.

Wildlife Priority Areas

Figure 1. **ALL** lands in the state are eligible for WHIP. However, lands within the Wildlife Priority Areas (shaded) receive 5 or 10 points more out of a maximum of 200 in the Indiana ranking system.



Summary

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program provides an excellent opportunity for anyone to improve their land for wildlife at 75% cost-share. In some cases, your costs can be lowered further with help from local chapters of conservation organizations like Pheasants Forever, Quail Unlimited, and the National Wild Turkey Federation. This is your chance to manage for wildlife at minimal or no cost to you.

Additional Information

For additional information on assistance with conservation planning, cost-share opportunities, and wildlife incentive programs, contact your county Extension Office, the Indiana Dept. Natural Resources Div. of Fish and Wildlife [(317)232-4080], the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service [(812)334-4261], and online at <http://www.fnr.purdue.edu> or <http://www.ai.org/dnr/public/publicat/fis.html>. You may also order publications by contacting the Agriculture Communication Service Media Distribution Center, 301 South 2nd Street, Lafayette, IN 47901-1232, Toll Free: 1-888-EXT-INFO, Fax: 765-496-1540.

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