



TOHONO O'ODHAM NATION

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The Cooperative Conservation Partnerships Initiative within the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 or 2008 Farm Bill provides grants and payments for conservation projects on Tribal lands, including the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). This program is voluntary and provides financial and technical assistance.

The WHIP provides for the development and improvement of quality wildlife habitat. WHIP agreements are between USDA-NRCS and individual Tribal members that can last up to 15 years for projects that involve essential plant and animal habitats. The Farm Bill does not adequately discuss a mechanism for cooperative partnerships with individual Tribal members and Tribal Departments and Programs.

Without input from the Departments and Programs that manage plant and animals, Tribal Nations may not be able to fully incorporate WHIP projects in their management plans unless a MOA or MOU is developed between the USDA-NRCS. Refusal of an individual Tribal member under contract to participate with a Tribal management plan or provide proper documentation for control of land may be problematic to a Tribal Nation.

The 2008 Farm Bill includes the Endangered Species Recovery Act, which provides tax deductions for Tribal members who voluntarily conserve habitat on their lands for threatened and endangered species. Under the WHIP, essential plant and animal habitat may include critical habitat designation under federal law. Currently, critical habitat designation on several Tribal Nations has not been applied by the US Fish and Wildlife Service pursuant to Statement of Relationships developed between the Tribes and the Service.

Respectfully

Selso Villegas, Director
Natural Resources Department
Tohono O'odham Nation