

### **Environmental Quality Incentives Program**

The purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals; optimize environmental benefits; and help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

EQIP is a continuous sign-up, voluntary, conservation program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides financial and technical assistance for approved conservation practices based on a current conservation plan.

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

### **About the Fire Recovery Initiative**

The purpose of the Fire Recovery Initiative is to provide immediate resource protection in those areas burned during the 2012 fires. Priority applications will include practices that will be initiated by January 2013 and provide immediate erosion protection, adequate livestock water, reduce pest proliferation and protect habitat values.

### **Submitting an EQIP Application**

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, and submitting the application to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or have an agricultural operation.

Interested owners and/or operators of land managed for agricultural production in:

Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, Glenn, Lake, Lassen, Marin, Modoc, Mendocino, Placer, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Tehama, Trinity, Yolo, and Yuba counties may be eligible for the Fire Recovery Initiative.

The application cut-off date for ranking applications submitted for the fiscal year 2013 Fire Recovery Initiative is October 6, 2012.

### **Requesting Conservation Planning Assistance**

Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan; the basis for any EQIP application is a conservation plan. Some of the benefits of developing a customized conservation plan include: helping you to comply with environmental regulations; preparing you for various conservation programs opportunities and identifying immediate or potential resource problems that could hurt your production.

### **How EQIP Works**

EQIP initiatives are funding opportunities created to assure funds are available to resource priorities across various land use types, for special emphasis resource needs and to assure that underserved groups have access to assistance.

An EQIP initiative is a ranking and funding pool where similar applications are evaluated. Applications for an EQIP initiative will be evaluated based on screening and ranking criteria that consider the benefits of planned conservation practices as identified by local, state and national priorities. The basis for an EQIP application is a conservation plan.

Please contact your local NRCS field office about EQIP eligibility and the application process or visit [http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/eqip\\_program\\_eligibility.html](http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/eqip_program_eligibility.html) and [http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/how\\_to\\_apply\\_for\\_eqip.html](http://www.ca.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/how_to_apply_for_eqip.html) for more information.

Program payments are limited to \$300,000 a person or entity for all contracts entered into during any six-year period. This limitation includes unpaid prior year contract obligations as of October 1, 2008, as well as new contract obligations. For the purpose of applying this requirement, the six-year period will include those payments made in fiscal years 2009-2014.

### **Priority Resource Concerns**

The priority resource concerns for the Fire Recovery Initiative include soil erosion, noxious and invasive plants, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat and livestock water on forestland and rangeland.

The most immediate consequence of fire is the potential for soil erosion. Intense heat from fire can make the soil repel water, a condition called hydrophobicity. The potential for severe soil erosion is a consequence of wildfire because as a fire burns it destroys plant material and the litter layer. Shrubs, forbs, grasses, trees, and the litter layer break up the intensity of severe rainstorms. Plant roots stabilize the soil, and stems and leaves slow the water to give it time to percolate into the soil profile. Fire can destroy this soil protection.

Immediate action to control soil erosion at burned forest and range sites include treatments such as using damaged trees or woody residues to slow runoff water, create check dams in drainages and spreading straw to protect the soil and reseeding efforts.

Historically, fire was a natural occurrence in California forests and typically forest soils would have tree seed source for natural regeneration; but, many of California forests have gone years without fire and much of the tree seed source is gone and noxious and invasive plants will proliferate on post-burn sites. Forests that are not immediately planted with tree seedlings within one year of the fire will result in regeneration of shrub and brush that will out-compete the few naturally germinated tree seedlings; the returning brush is very aggressive and within one season will dominate the forest site and reforestation will require treatments such as herbicides, mastication or brush raking and other negative treatments prior to tree planting.

Most post-burn range sites are also susceptible to invasion by noxious weeds. Rangeland noxious weeds and soil erosion can be controlled through management and distribution of livestock to facilitate recovery of burned sites most at risk for erosion and weed proliferation. In some cases, range planting may be necessary if range seed source is absent.

Many existing forestland and rangeland access roads and culvert systems were severely damaged during fire suppression activities, in addition, emergency roads were created during the fire event

and now need to be removed - both are potential sources of sediment and turbidity in surface water bodies. The after-fire rehabilitation of roads is usually rushed and poorly designed and, with little vegetation on slopes, sediment off roads and destroyed culvert systems has a direct path to a surface water body. In addition, riparian zones are often heavy fire areas where temporary access trails were built for fire suppression and these trails can be direct sediment sources to riparian streams.

Where catastrophic fire eliminates all vegetation in an area wildlife habitat potential can be significantly reduced and sometime eliminated. Response of herbaceous and sprouting grasses, forbs and woody vegetation is highly unpredictable. Some plants require fire for regeneration. Often, after destructive fires invasive plants can become the dominant vegetation and inhibit growth of the native plant communities. Aerial seeding, direct planting and mulching can improve the return of the native or naturalized plant communities. Temporary structures can be installed that provide suitable shelter, cover and nesting habitat until the plant community matures enough to provide adequate structure. Particular emphasis should be given to riparian areas associated with these shrublands, forests and grasslands with revegetation efforts to minimize erosion improve water quality and provide habitat.

Use of the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation guides for Woodlands & Forestland, Shrublands, or Savannah & Grassland should be used to assess the existing conditions and then predict the expected outcome post implementation of contracted practices.

### **Approved NRCS Land Uses**

Only approved NRCS land uses are eligible for the Fire Recovery Initiative. Approved land uses are:

- Forestland
- Grazed Range

### **Approved NRCS Resource Concerns**

Only approved NRCS resource concerns are eligible for the Fire Recovery Initiative. Approved resource concerns are:

#### Soil Erosion

- Sheet and Rill
- Classic Gully

#### Plant Condition

- Noxious and Invasive Plants

#### Water Quality

- Excessive Suspended Sediment and Turbidity in Surface Water

#### Domestic Animals

- Inadequate Stock Water

#### Fish and Wildlife

- Inadequate Food
- Inadequate Cover/Shelter
- Habitat Fragmentation

**Approved NRCS Conservation Practices**

Only approved NRCS conservation practices are eligible for financial assistance through the Fire Recovery Initiative. For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11\\_001020](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020) the website link for all NRCS conservation practice standards. Table 1 lists the practices approved for the Fire Recovery Initiative.

Table 1. Approved Conservation Practices for the Fire Recovery Initiative

Practice Name	Practice Code
Access Control	472
Access Road	560
Brush Management	314
Conservation Cover	327
Critical Area Planting	342
Fence	382
Fish and Wildlife Structure	734
Forest Stand Improvement	666
Forest Trails and Landings	655
Fuel Break	383
Grade Stabilization Structure	410
Herbaceous Weed Control	315
Livestock Pipeline	516
Mulching	484
Obstruction Removal	500
Prescribed Grazing	528
Range Planting	550
Riparian Forest Buffer	391
Riparian Herbaceous Cover	390
Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	654
Stream Crossing	578
Structure for Water Control	587
Tree/Shrub Establishment	612
Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	490
Watering Facility	614
Woody Residue Treatment	384

**Application Screening Criteria for the Fire Recovery Initiative**

The purpose of screening criteria is to prioritize applications into ‘High’, ‘Medium’ or ‘Low’ categories prior to application ranking. All eligible applications for the Fire Recovery Initiative will be screened and applications in the ‘High’ priority category will be ranked. ‘Medium’ priority applications will be ranked only if funding is available. An application screening worksheet is included at the end of this document and will be used by NRCS to screen applications submitted for the Fire Recovery Initiative. The following is for reference only.

High Priority Category:

- 1) Conservation treatments are planned on land predominately, at least 75 percent, designated as “Severely” burned by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) or the US Forest Service and all conservation treatments in the EQIP conservation plan and schedule of operations are scheduled for implementation by December 31, 2012.

Medium Priority Category:

- 2) Conservation treatments are planned on land predominately, at least 75 percent, designated as “Moderately” burned by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) or the US Forest Service and all conservation treatments in the EQIP conservation plan and schedule of operations are scheduled for implementation by June 30, 2013.

Low Priority Category:

- 1) All other applications, or
- 2) Applicant has had a contract terminated within the last fiscal year.

**Application Ranking Criteria for the Fire Recovery Initiative**

The purpose of the Fire Recovery Initiative ranking criteria is to evaluate the environmental benefits of conservation treatments included in an EQIP application, i.e. the EQIP schedule of operations and conservation plan. An application ranking score is based on national, state and local ranking criteria and the cost-efficiency of conservation practices in the EQIP application. The cost-efficiency score is based upon broad averages of the cost and environmental benefits of each practice in the EQIP application.

The following sections list the national, state and local ranking criteria for the Fire Recovery Initiative and are provided for reference only. Applications will be evaluated electronically by NRCS using the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool (AERT).

**National Ranking Criteria**

Only questions 2, 6, 7, and 9 are applicable to the Fire Recovery Initiative; all other questions will be answered “No” in the AERT.

- 1) If the application is for development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP), the agency will assign significant ranking priority and conservation benefit by answering “Yes” to the following question. Answering “Yes” to question 1a will result in the application being awarded the maximum amount of points that can be earned for the national priority category.
  - a. Is the program application to support the development of a Conservation Activity Plan (CAP)? If answer is “Yes”, do not answer any other national level questions. If answer is “No”, proceed with evaluation to address the remaining questions in this section.
- 2) Clean and Abundant Water: Water Quality - Will the proposed project assist the producer to:
  - a. Meet regulatory requirements relating to animal feeding operations, or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?
  - b. Reduce sediment, nutrients or pesticides from agricultural operations located within a field that adjoins a designated "impaired water body" (TMDL, 303d, etc.)?

- c. Reduce sediment, nutrients or pesticides from agricultural operations located within a field that adjoins a "non-impaired water body"?
- 3) Clean and Abundant Water: Water Conservation - Will the proposed project assist the producer implement conservation practices which:
  - a. Decrease aquifer overdraft?
  - b. Conserve water from irrigation system improvements and saved water will be available for other beneficial uses?
  - c. Conserve water in an area where the applicant participates in a geographically established or watershed-wide project?
- 4) Clean Air: Treatment of air quality from agricultural sources - Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practice(s) which:
  - a. Meet on-farm regulatory requirements relating to air quality or proactively avoid the need for regulatory measures?
  - b. Reduce on-farm generated green house gases such as CO<sub>2</sub> (Carbon Dioxide), CH<sub>4</sub> (Methane), and N<sub>2</sub>O (Nitrous Oxide)?
  - c. Increase on-farm carbon sequestration?
- 5) Soil Health: Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practice(s) which:
  - a. Reduce erosion to tolerable limits (Soil "T")?
  - b. Improve soil tilth, organic matter, structure, health, etc.?
- 6) Healthy Plant and Animal Communities Wildlife Habitat Conservation - Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practice(s) which:
  - a. Benefit on-farm habitat associated with threatened and endangered, at-risk, candidate, or species of concern as identified in a State wildlife plan?
  - b. Help retain wildlife and plant habitat on land exiting the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)?
- 7) High Quality, Productive Soils, Healthy Plant and Animal Communities: Will the proposed project assist the producer implement practices which:
  - a. Help manage or control noxious or invasive plant species on non-cropland?
  - b. Increase, or improve habitat to benefit pollinator or other targeted wildlife species?
  - c. Properly dispose of livestock carcasses?
  - d. Are identified in an Integrated Pest Management plan?
  - e. Are identified in a Nutrient Management plan?
  - f. Apply principles of adaptive nutrient management?
- 8) Energy Conservation - Will the proposed project assist the producer to implement practices which:
  - a. Reduce energy consumption on the agricultural operation?
  - b. Increase on-farm energy efficiency with practices and improvements identified in an approved energy audit equivalent to criteria required in Ag EMP (122,124)?
  - c. Assist in implementing energy conservation measures that also reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants?

- 9) Business Lines - Conservation Implementation Additional Ranking Considerations - Will the proposed project result in:
- Implementation of all conservation practices scheduled in the contract on the CPA-1155 within three years of date of obligation?
  - Improvement of existing conservation practices or conservation systems already in place at the time the application is accepted?
  - Implementation of practice(s) which will complete an existing conservation system or suite of practices?

### State Ranking Criteria

All questions are applicable to the Fire Recovery Initiative.

- Conservation treatment will mitigate, minimize and/or control soil erosion on land predominately, at least 75 percent, designated as “Severely” burned by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) or US Forest Service.
- Conservation treatment will mitigate, minimize and/or control soil erosion on land predominately, at least 75 percent, designated as “Moderately” burned by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) or US Forest Service.

### Local Ranking Criteria

All questions are applicable to the Fire Recovery Initiative.

- SOIL EROSION - Sheet and Rill and Classic Gully
  - Conservation treatment will provide immediate ground cover on sites to reduce erosion from rainfall. Treatment area is located in burned areas with a soil erosion hazard rating of “Very Severe” or “Severe” and greater than 20 percent slopes.
  - Conservation treatment will maintain soil stability through installation of practices that reduces concentrated overland flow. Treatment sites include roads, trails, and/or culvert systems located in burned areas with a soil erosion hazard rating of “Very Severe” or “Severe” and greater than 4 percent surface grade.
  - Conservation treatment will maintain soil stability through installation of practices that reduces concentrated overland flow. Treatment sites include roads, trails, and/or culvert systems located in burned areas with a soil erosion hazard rating or “Moderate” and greater than 10 percent surface grade.
  - Conservation treatment includes access control and/or prescribed grazing to manage and redistribute livestock and to facilitate recovery of burned sites with a soil erosion hazard rating of “Very Severe” or “Severe” and greater than 20 percent slopes.
  - Conservation treatment provides immediate erosion control using downed damaged trees or woody residue to slow runoff water on slopes 20 percent or greater and in drainages to control sheet and rill and gully erosion.
- WATER QUALITY – Excessive Suspended Sediment and Turbidity in Surface Water
  - Conservation treatment will reduce direct delivery of sediment to a surface water body that supports Federal or State listed endangered, threatened, or candidate species.

- b) Conservation treatment will reduce direct delivery of sediment to a tributary of a surface water body that supports Federal or State listed threatened or endangered species.
  - c) Conservation treatment will reduce direct delivery of sediment to a surface water body designated as impaired for sediment and turbidity. The Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List is found at the State Water Resources Control Board website:  
[http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/tmdl/integrated2010.shtml](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/tmdl/integrated2010.shtml)
  - d) Conservation treatment will reduce direct delivery of sediment to a Class I or II watercourse as defined in the California Forest Practice Rules. A Class I watercourse is defined as: 1) Domestic supplies, including springs, on site and/or within 100 feet downstream of the operations area and/or 2) Fish always or seasonally present onsite, includes habitat to sustain fish migration and spawning. A Class II watercourse is defined as: 1) Fish always or seasonally present offsite within 1000 feet downstream and/or 2) Aquatic habitat for nonfish aquatic species. 3) Excludes Class III waters that are tributary to Class I waters.
- 3) DOMESTIC ANIMALS - Inadequate Stock Water
- a) Conservation treatment will provide immediate source of livestock water to ensure sufficient water supply to facilitate prescribed grazing. Prescribed grazing will assist with vegetation recovery across the landscape and improve rangeland health.
- 4) PLANT CONDITION – Noxious and Invasive Plants
- a) Conservation treatment will control and manage critical state-listed (A, B, or C) weeds or other identified noxious weed found on the burned site.
  - b) Conservation treatment will restore species composition to the burned site according to the site ecological site description (ESD) for rare or declining habitats or to pre-fire species balance.
- 5) FISH AND WILDLIFE – Inadequate Food; Inadequate Cover/Shelter; Inadequate Water; Habitat Fragmentation
- a) Conservation treatment will improve the riparian zone within 100 feet from a perennial, intermittent, or ephemeral stream and the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Guide (WHEG) score is equal to or greater than 0.5 ( $\geq 0.5$ ) on the WHEG Riparian worksheet.
  - b) Conservation treatment will improve multiple habitat types, improving habitat elements for both upland/riparian (based on the appropriate WHEG) and instream conditions (based on SVAP) that benefit both terrestrial and aquatic habitats and species. This requires score of equal to or greater than 0.5 ( $\geq 0.5$ ) on the WHEG worksheet for that Land Use/Cover type, if instream practices are planned then the SVAP score must be equal to or greater than 7 ( $\geq 7$ ).



<b>Fiscal Year 2013 Fire Recovery Initiative Screening Worksheet</b> <u><b>A Screening Worksheet must be completed for each eligible EOIP application.</b></u>			
<b>Applicant Name:</b>		<b>Application No:</b>	
<b>Evaluator Name:</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<p>This screening worksheet must be completed for each eligible producer applying for Fire Recovery Initiative assistance. Applications will be accepted on a continuous basis; however, application periods are established for purposes of evaluation, ranking, and funding decisions.</p> <p>Completion of this worksheet and documentation does not constitute agreement to provide EQIP program benefits nor approval of a program contract. The original screening worksheet should be filed with the applicant case file or EQIP program file and unless the application is determined to be ineligible, the screening priority (high, medium, and low) must be recorded in ProTracts. Upon request, a copy of any completed screening worksheet may be provided to the applicant.</p>			
<b><u>High Priority Category:</u></b>  Conservation treatments are planned on land predominately, at least 75 percent, designated as “Severely” burned by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) or US Forest Service and all conservation treatments in the EQIP conservation plan and schedule of operations are scheduled for implementation by December 31, 2012.			<b>High Priority Status in ProTracts</b>
<b><u>Medium Priority Category:</u></b>  Conservation treatments are planned on land predominately, at least 75 percent, designated as “Moderately” burned by California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFIRE) or US Forest Service and all conservation treatments in the EQIP conservation plan and schedule of operations are scheduled for implementation by June 30, 2013.			<b>Medium Priority Status in ProTracts</b>
<b><u>Low Priority Category:</u></b>  All other applications for the Fire Recovery Initiative. Applicant has had a contract terminated within the last fiscal year.  Low Priority applications will not be ranked.			<b>Low Priority Status in ProTracts</b>
District Conservationist Approval Signature:			Date Approved: