

# **WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM**

## **STATE PLAN**

### **May 2013**

Texas is rich in ecological and biological diversity. The purpose of WHIP is to help participants develop fish and wildlife habitat on private non-industrial land and Tribal land. WHIP is a Farm Bill program whose purpose is to develop habitat for fish and wildlife on eligible lands. Participants agree to implement a wildlife habitat development plan and NRCS agrees to provide financial assistance for the implementation of certain wildlife habitat development practices. NRCS and program participants enter into a contract agreement for wildlife habitat development assistance. Payment for conservation practices is made to assist with the cost of installation or establishment. The contract agreement lasts a minimum of one year and a maximum of 10 years.

The Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP) will be developed jointly with the participant by NRCS or in some cases, other public or private natural resource professions approved by NRCS. The WHDP shall be approved by NRCS and address at least one of the following:

- 1) Fish and wildlife habitat conditions that are of concern to the participant;
- 2) Fish and wildlife habitat concerns identified in State, regional and national conservation initiatives; or
- 3) Fish and wildlife habitat concerns identified in an approved area-wide plan that addresses the wildlife resource habitat concern.

The WHDP includes an agreed to schedule for installation and maintenance of the conservation practices. All conservation practices in the WHDP must be approved by NRCS and developed and carried out in accordance with the applicable [NRCS Field Office Technical Guide](#). The participant is responsible for the implementation of the WHDP.

#### **Program Requirements**

To participate in WHIP, an applicant must:

- 1) Be in compliance with the FSA highly erodible and wetland conservation provisions of the 1985 Farm Bill
- 2) Be in compliance with the terms of all other USDA-administered conservation programs to which the participant is a party
- 3) Develop and agree to comply with a Wildlife Habitat Development Plan (WHDP) and Operations and Maintenance Agreement
- 4) Enter into a contract agreement
- 5) Provide NRCS with written evidence of ownership or legal control for the term of the proposed cost share agreement;
- 6) Agree to provide all information to NRCS determined to be necessary to assess the merits of a proposed project and to monitor contract compliance;
- 7) Agree to grant to NRCS or its representatives access to the land for purposes related to application;

#### **National and Texas Priorities**

National priorities for WHIP are to promote the restoration of declining or important native fish and wildlife habitats; protect, restore, develop or enhance fish and wildlife habitat to benefit at-risk species; reduce the impacts of invasive species on fish and

wildlife habitats, and protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats. NRCS will use the national priorities in conjunction with state and local priorities to assist with prioritization and selection of WHIP applications, and periodically review and update the national priorities utilizing input from the public and affected stakeholders to ensure that the program continues to address priority resource concerns.

A. Support of national priorities:

1. Promote the restoration of declining or important native wildlife habitats.
2. Protect, restore, develop or enhance wildlife habitat of at-risk species (candidate species, state and federally listed threatened and endangered species).
3. Reduce the impacts of invasive species on wildlife habitats.
4. Protect, restore, develop or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats.

**STATE PRIORITIES:**

The state habitat priorities for WHIP correspond to the conservation priorities identified in the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Texas Conservation Action Plan. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department completed this plan in 2012 based on input from many wildlife biologists from various agencies and organizations within the state as well as public input and comments. Following is a link to the entire document: [Texas Conservation Action Plan](#). Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN): [Species of Greatest Conservation Need](#).

Texas is divided into ten Eco-regions representing different habitat types, which can be found in the Texas Conservation Action Plan: [Texas Conservation Action Plan](#). These eco-regions correspond closely with the Major Land Resource Areas of Texas utilized by NRCS. Each MLRA (eco-region) has been placed into one of three priority levels with priority one being most critical and priority three the least critical.

**Priority 1 – High Priority Regions (MLRAs)**

- Blackland Prairie (86A,B)
- Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes (150A,B; 151)
- South Texas Plains (83A,B,C,D,E)

**Priority 2 – Secondary Priority Regions (MLRAs)**

- Cross Timbers (80A,B; 84B; 85)
- Edwards Plateau (81A,B,C,D; 82)
- High Plains (77A,B,C,D)
- Pineywoods (133B; 152B)

**Priority 3 – Tertiary Priority Regions (MLRAs)**

- Post Oak Savannah (87A,B)
- Rolling Plains (70E; 77E, 78B,C,D)
- Trans-Pecos (42)

**STATE OBJECTIVES:**

- B. To restore, and conserve native wildlife habitats in the following priority order
1. Native Grasslands/Prairie/Savannah

2. Stream/Riparian
3. Wetland
4. Forestland/Woodland
5. Thorn Shrub

**PARTNERSHIPS (members of the Wildlife Subcommittee of the Texas State Technical Advisory Committee)**

- Audubon Texas
- Ducks Unlimited
- Environmental Defense
- Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Pheasants Forever
- Plateau Land & Wildlife Management
- Quail Unlimited
- Quail Forever
- Texas AgriLifeExtension
- Texas Farm Bureau
- Texas Forest Service
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas Upland Game Bird Advisory Council
- Texas Wildlife Association
- The Nature Conservancy of Texas
- U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- All Bird Joint Ventures: Playa Lakes, Rio Grande, Central Texas Oaks and Prairies, and Gulf Coast.

**CRITERIA FOR MEASURING PROGRAM SUCCESS**

- Program success will be determined by completing Habitat Value Assessment Worksheets for each habitat type on an annual basis. The worksheets will be used to evaluate changes in habitat as a result of implementation of the wildlife conservation plan.
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