

# NRCS Conservation Programs in Nebraska

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# EQIP Fund Allocations in 2014



# EQIP Fund Allocations in 2014

- EQIP General \$ 25.9 million
- State Initiatives
  - Livestock Mortality \$ 1.1 million
    - 4 counties: Sioux, Dawes, Sheridan, Cherry
  - Forestry \$ 500,000
  - Tribal \$ 100,000
  - AFO \$ 1.0 million

# EQIP Fund Allocations in 2014

## – National Initiatives

•NWQI	\$ 1.1 million
–2 watersheds: Bazile Creek, Wahoo Creek	
•Organic	\$ 150,000
•Energy	\$ 25,000
•High Tunnel	\$ 100,000
•Ogallala SI	\$ 8.1 million
•CAP-CNMP	\$ 200,000

# EQIP 2014 Practices

- Waste Storage Facilities
- Grazing Management
  - Ponds
  - Pipelines
  - Fence



# EQIP 2014 Practices

Brush Management

Prescribed Burn



# EQIP 2014 Practices

- SDI Systems
- Sprinkler Systems
- IWM



# EQIP 2014 Practices

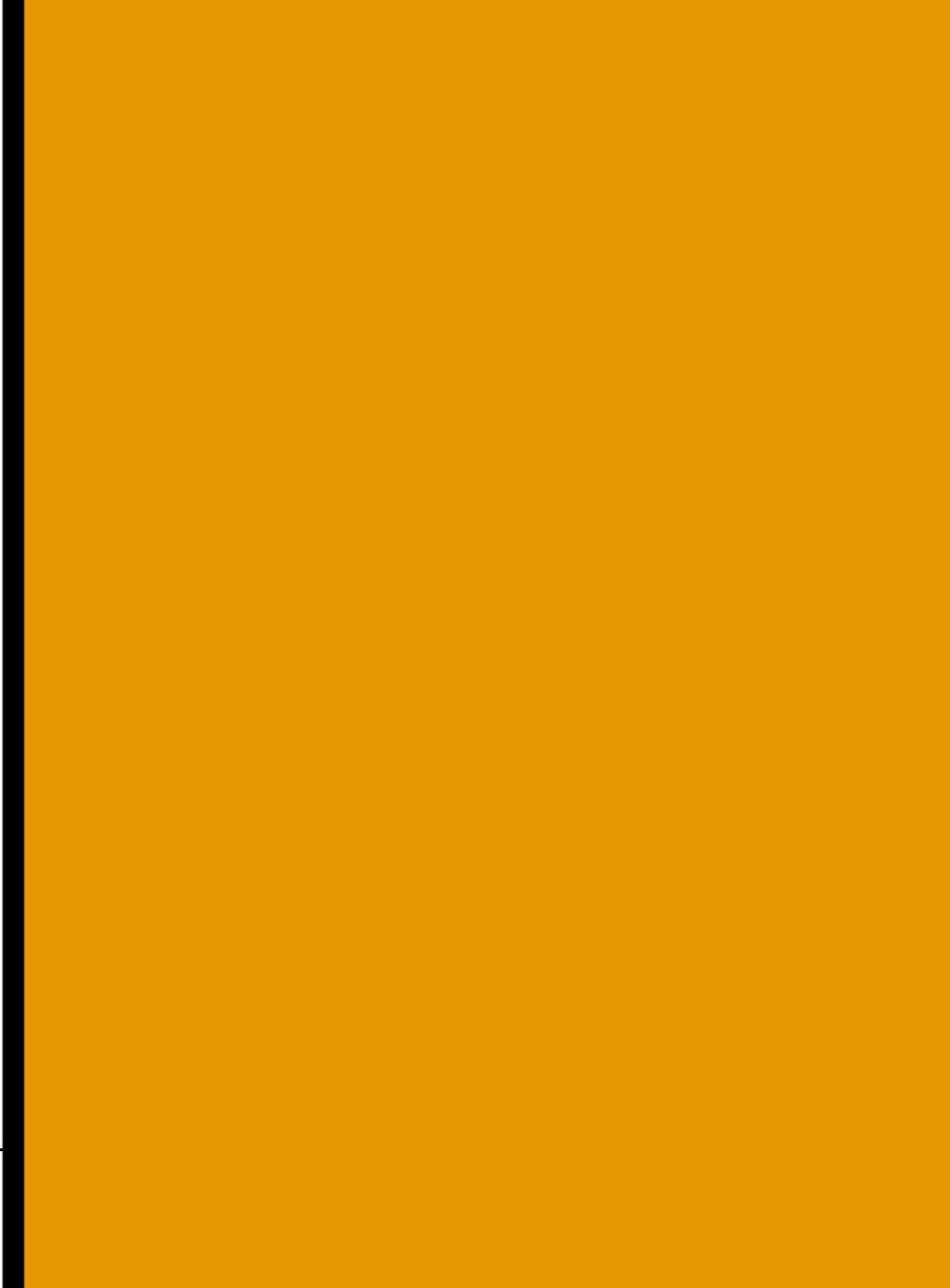
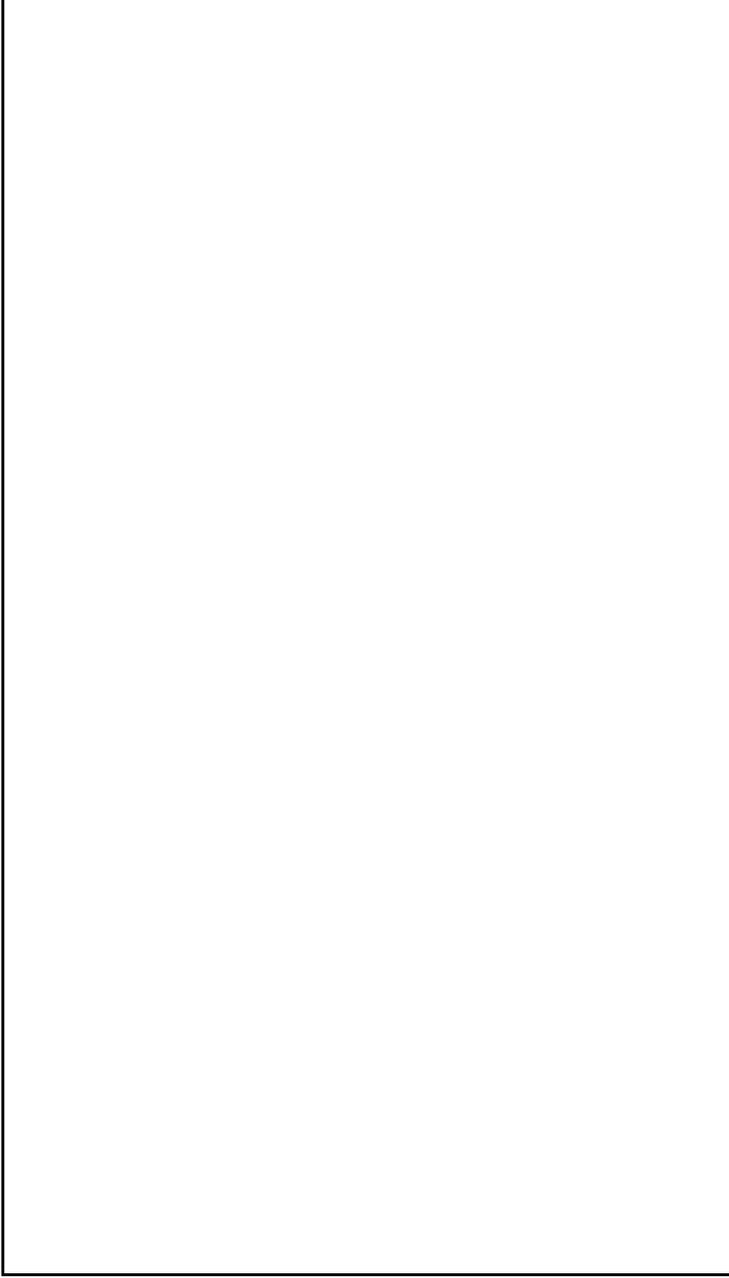
- Terraces
- Diversions
- Grade Stabs
- Waterways
- Underground Outlet
- No till
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt



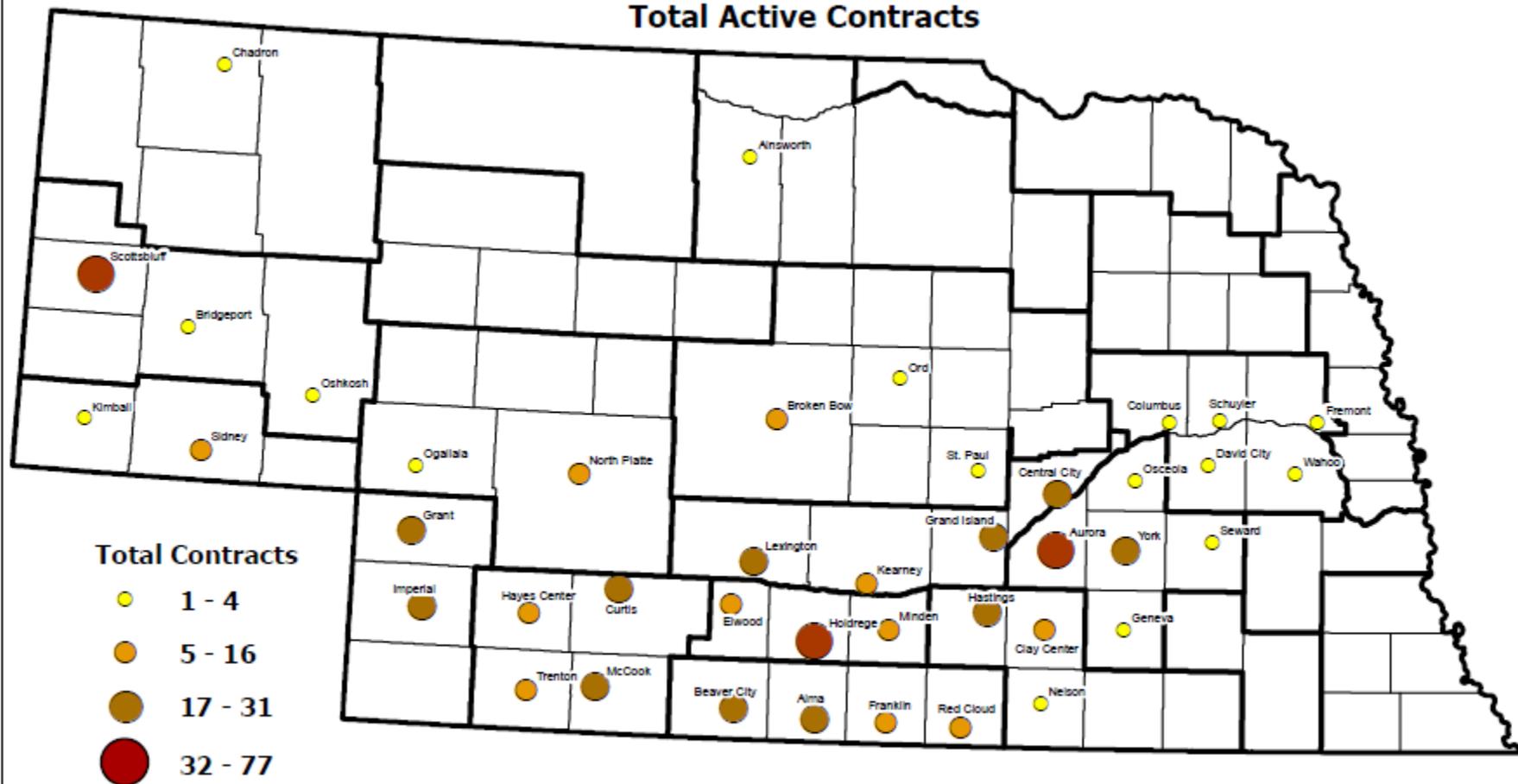
# EQIP 2014 Practices

- Seasonal High Tunnels
- Nutrient Mgmt
- Pest Mgmt
- Cover Crops
- Organic



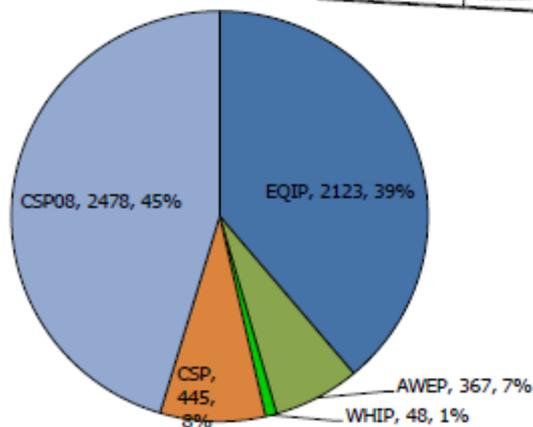
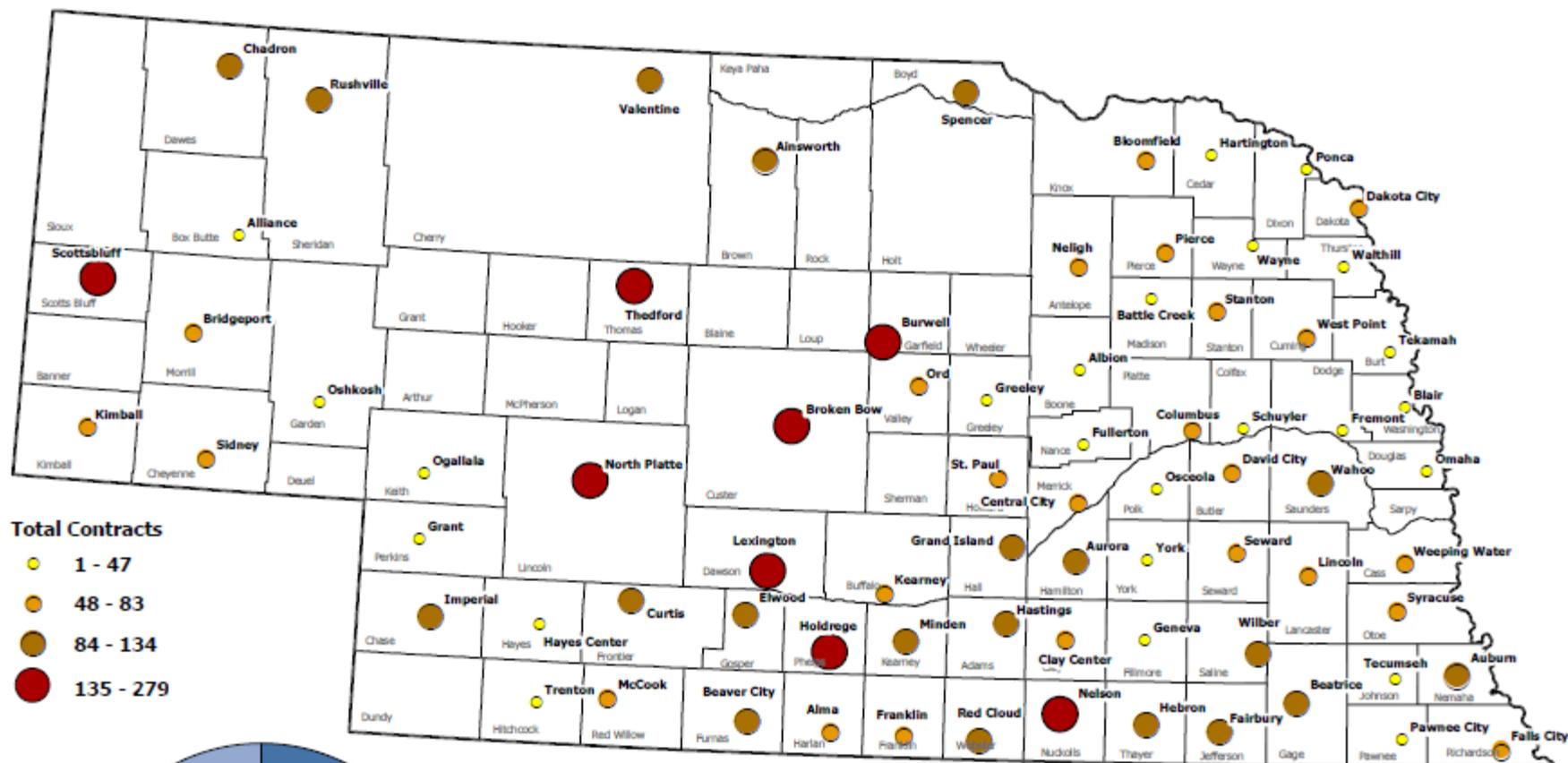


## Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) & Ogallala Aquifer (EQIP) Total Active Contracts



**Total Contracts = 581**

## Total Farm Bill Active Contracts



This map displays the total active contracts by field office for the following Farm Bill programs: EQIP, AWEP, WHIP, CSP, CStP.

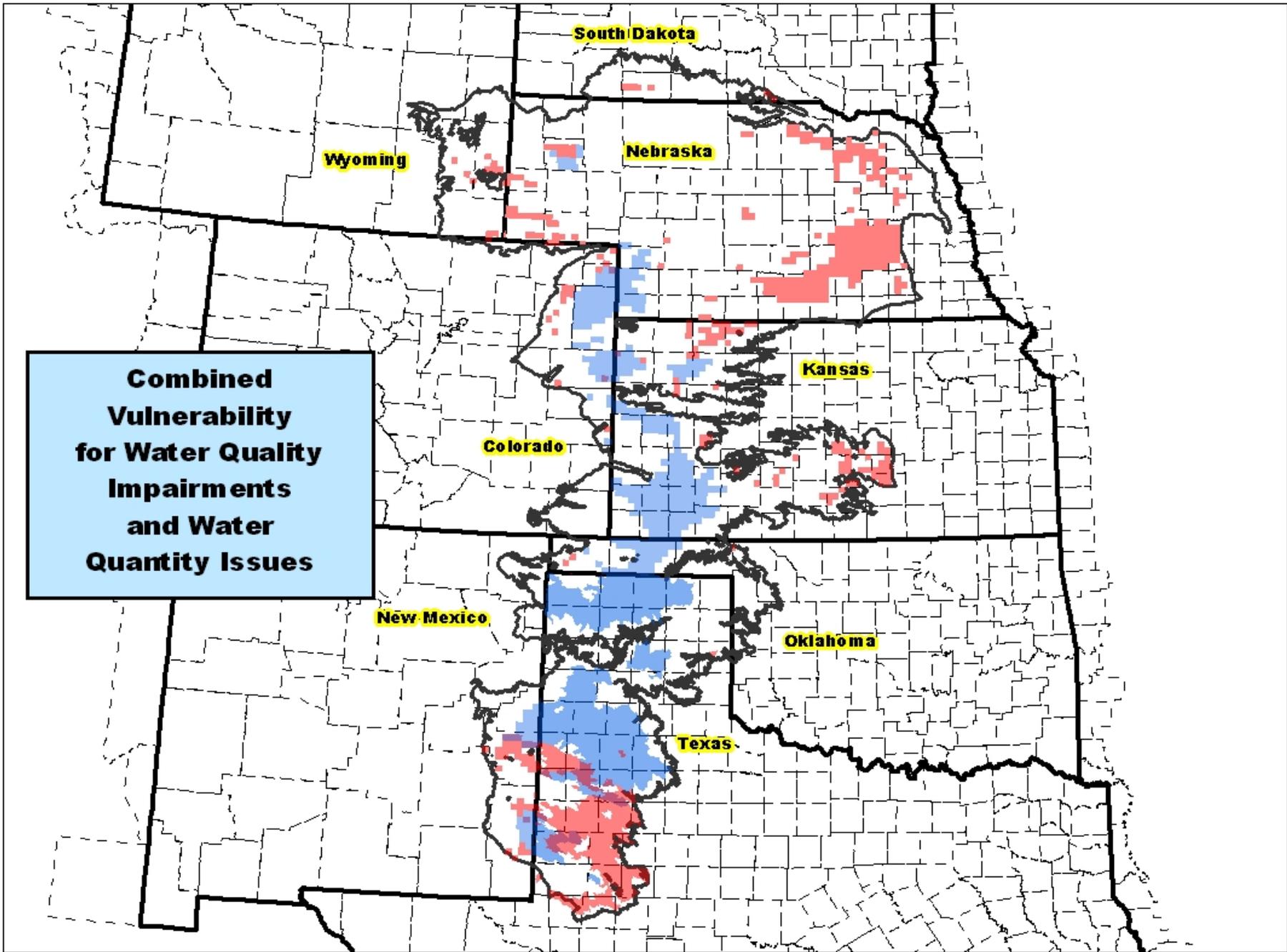
CRP & Easement data is not reflected on this map, but can be found on the attached maps.

All of the data is from NRCS Protracts database as of 2/11/2014.

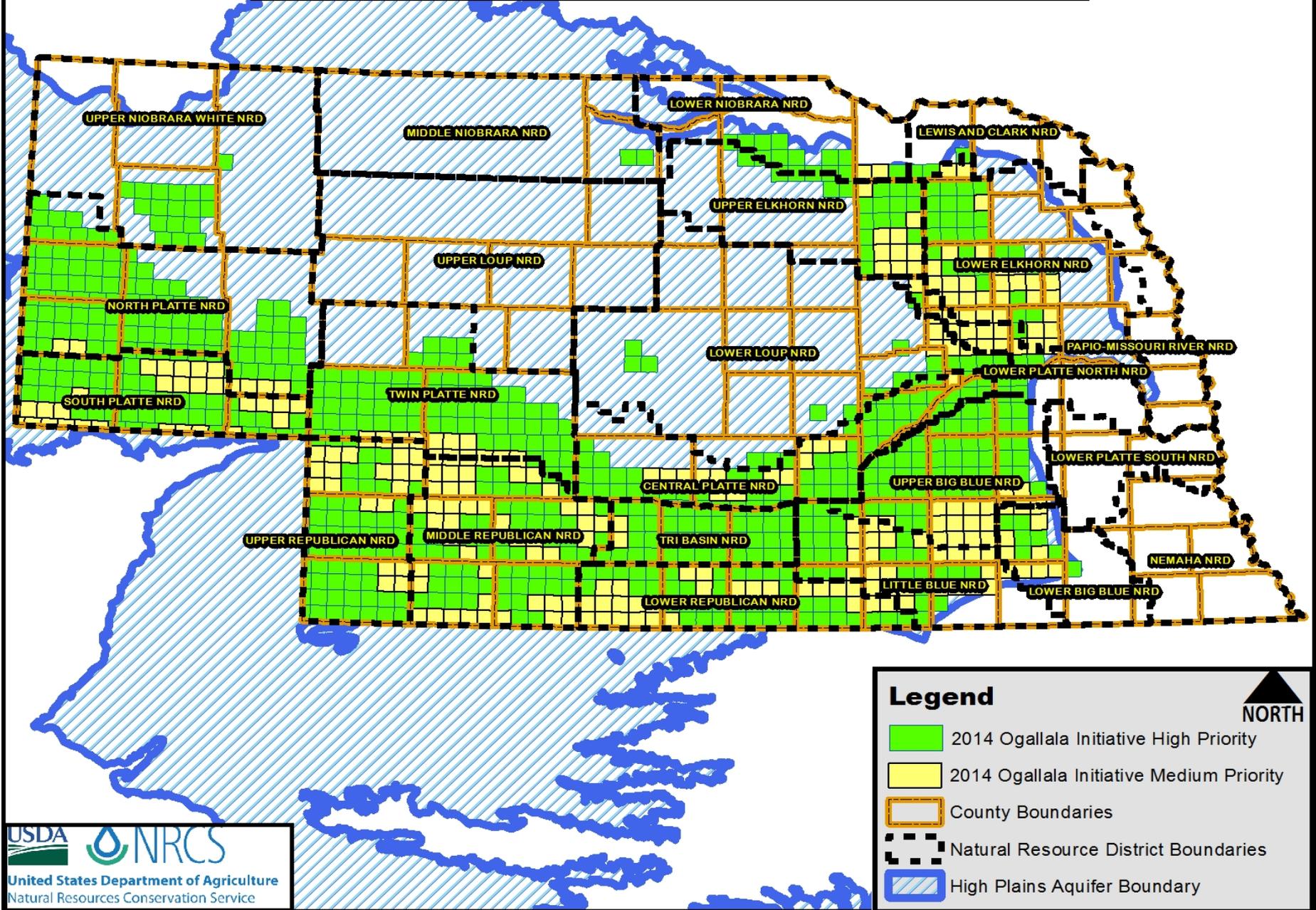
# Ogallala Aquifer Initiative



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# 2014 Ogallala Aquifer Initiative Area for Nebraska



## Legend

- 2014 Ogallala Initiative High Priority
- 2014 Ogallala Initiative Medium Priority
- County Boundaries
- Natural Resource District Boundaries
- High Plains Aquifer Boundary



# AWEP FY2014

- **Authority repealed - combined with RCPP**
- **Existing FY2014 AWEP applications**
  - **“Possibly” considered in EQIP**
- **Existing contracts are valid**
  - **359 active contracts**
  - **32,309 acres**

# PRACTICE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

The 2008 Farm Bill eliminated the authority to make program payments using “cost-share”

**Cost-Share**

A large, semi-transparent graphic of a prohibited sign (a red circle with a diagonal slash) is centered behind the text "Cost-Share".

# Practice Payment Schedule

- Prior to the 2008 Farm Bill - cost-share payments as a percentage of the actual costs
- Incentive payments for EQIP management practices were also made.
- Actual costs had to be documented by producer receipts and invoices.
- Collecting invoices and receipts necessary to administer cost-share payments

# The OLD Authority & Methodology

## Cost Share Cost List:

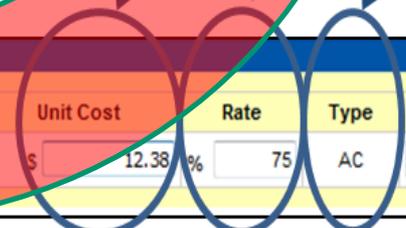
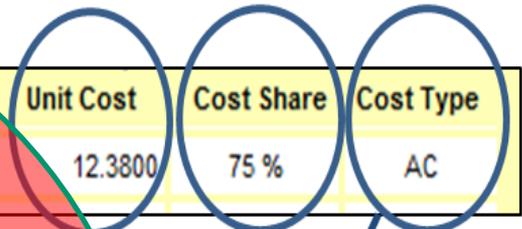
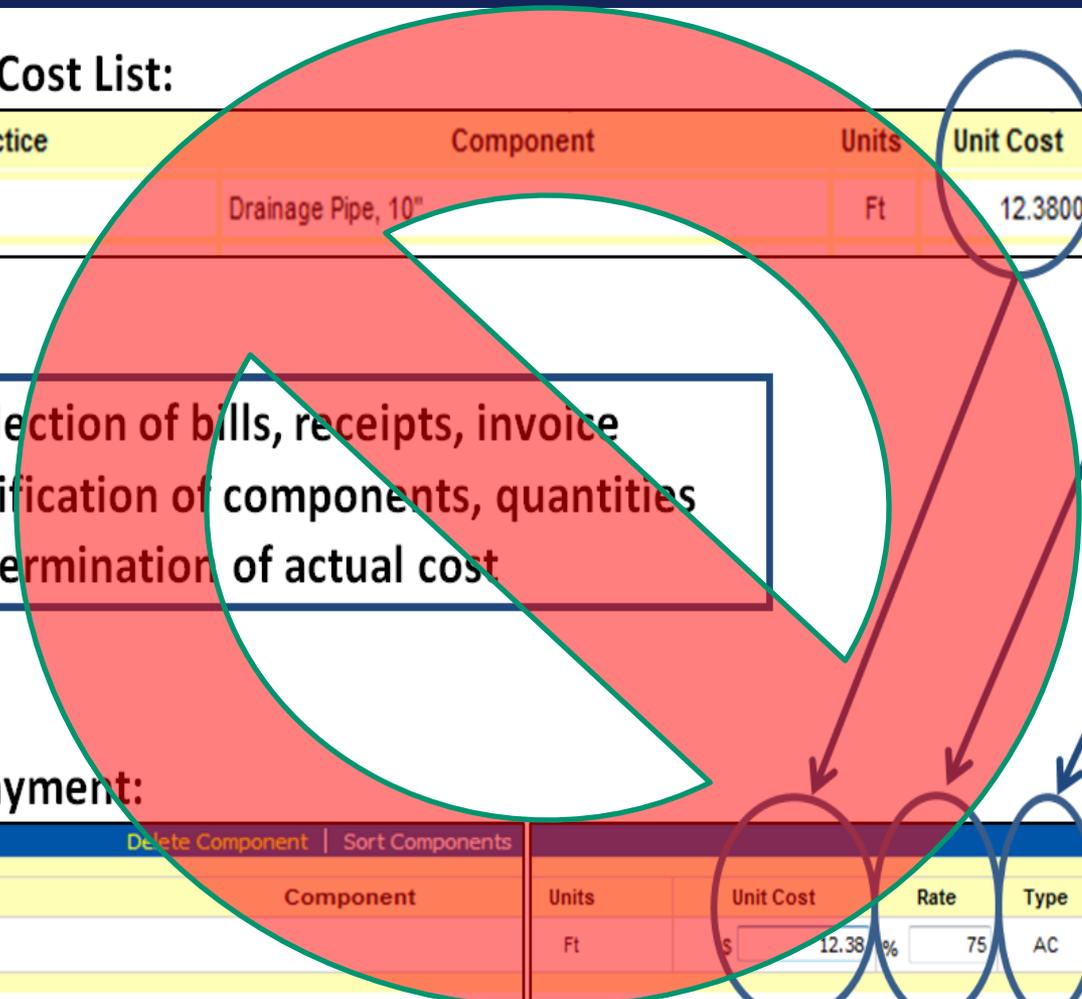
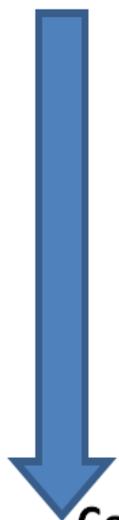
Code	Practice	Component	Units	Unit Cost	Cost Share	Cost Type
606	Subsurface Drain	Drainage Pipe, 10"	Ft	12.3800	75 %	AC

- Collection of bills, receipts, invoice
- Verification of components, quantities
- Determination of actual cost

Average  
Cost Type  
Payment

## Contract Payment:

CIN	Component	Units	Unit Cost	Rate	Type	Amount	Cost-Share
1a	Drainage Pipe, 10"	Ft	\$ 12.38	% 75	AC	618	\$ 5739



# Practice Payment Schedule

- Ensure all conservation payments are WTO/NAFTA green box compliant
- Ensure that the cost basis is adequately documented, to substantiate exclusion for AGI
- Reduce customer uncertainty about program payments
- Change from “Paying to implement a practice” to “Paying to obtain an environmental/social benefit”

# Pay Rate Specifics

- Payments are based on the costs of applying a typical conservation practice.
- Practice payments no longer based on contract holder's actual costs and receipts.
- Traditional cost share process is replaced with concept of program participant compensation
  - Incentive Payments Not Allowed
  - Based On “Actual Cost Incurred”

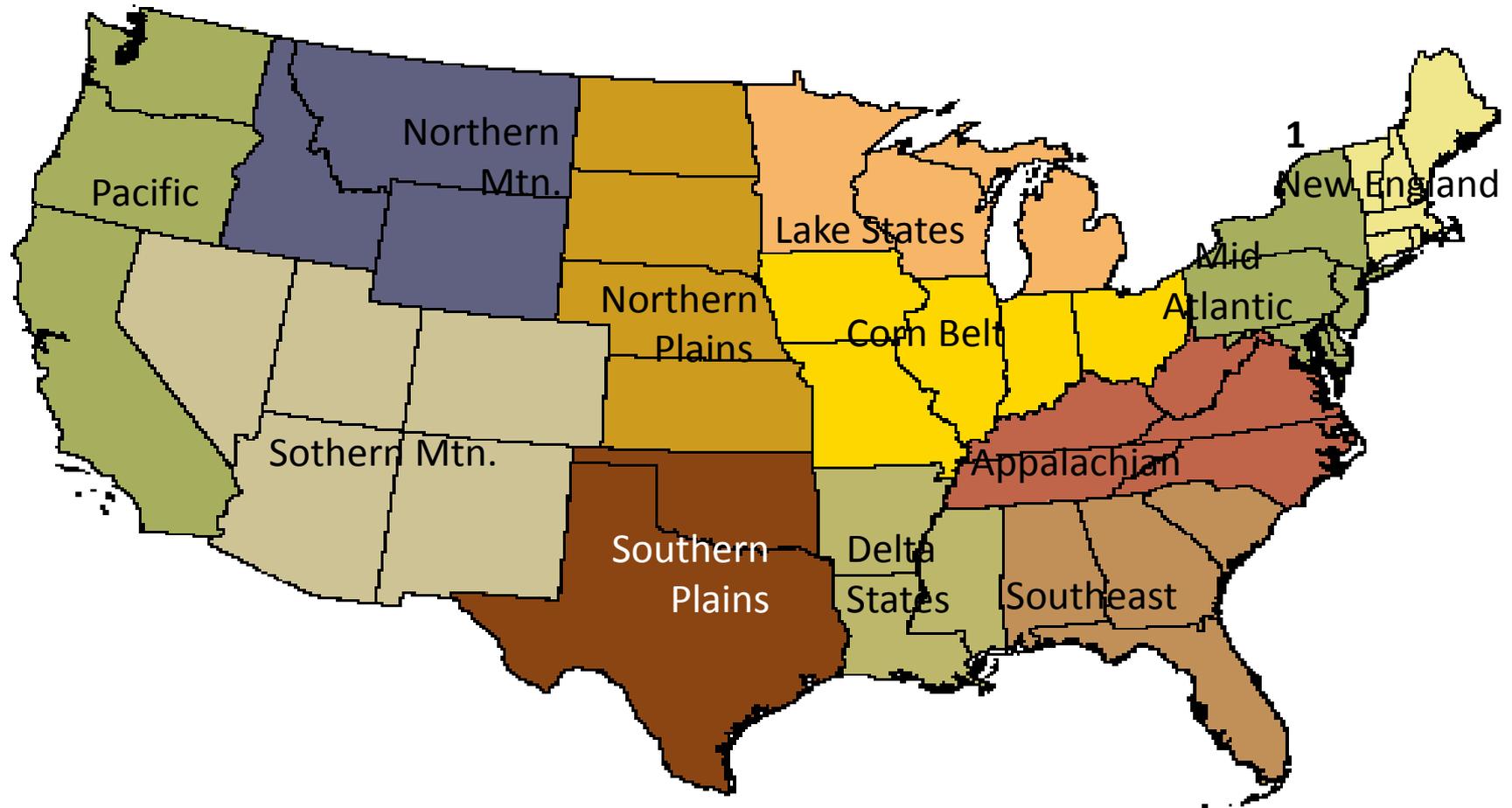
# Practice Payment Schedule

## Advantages;

- More consistent payment rates.
- Consistent, reliable, and defensible method of creating estimated incurred costs.
- Flexibility to account for cost variation.
- Use established economic region alignment of states based on farm employment data and crop cost and returns.
- Consistency with definition, purpose, and technical requirements of conservation practice standards.

# Economic Regions

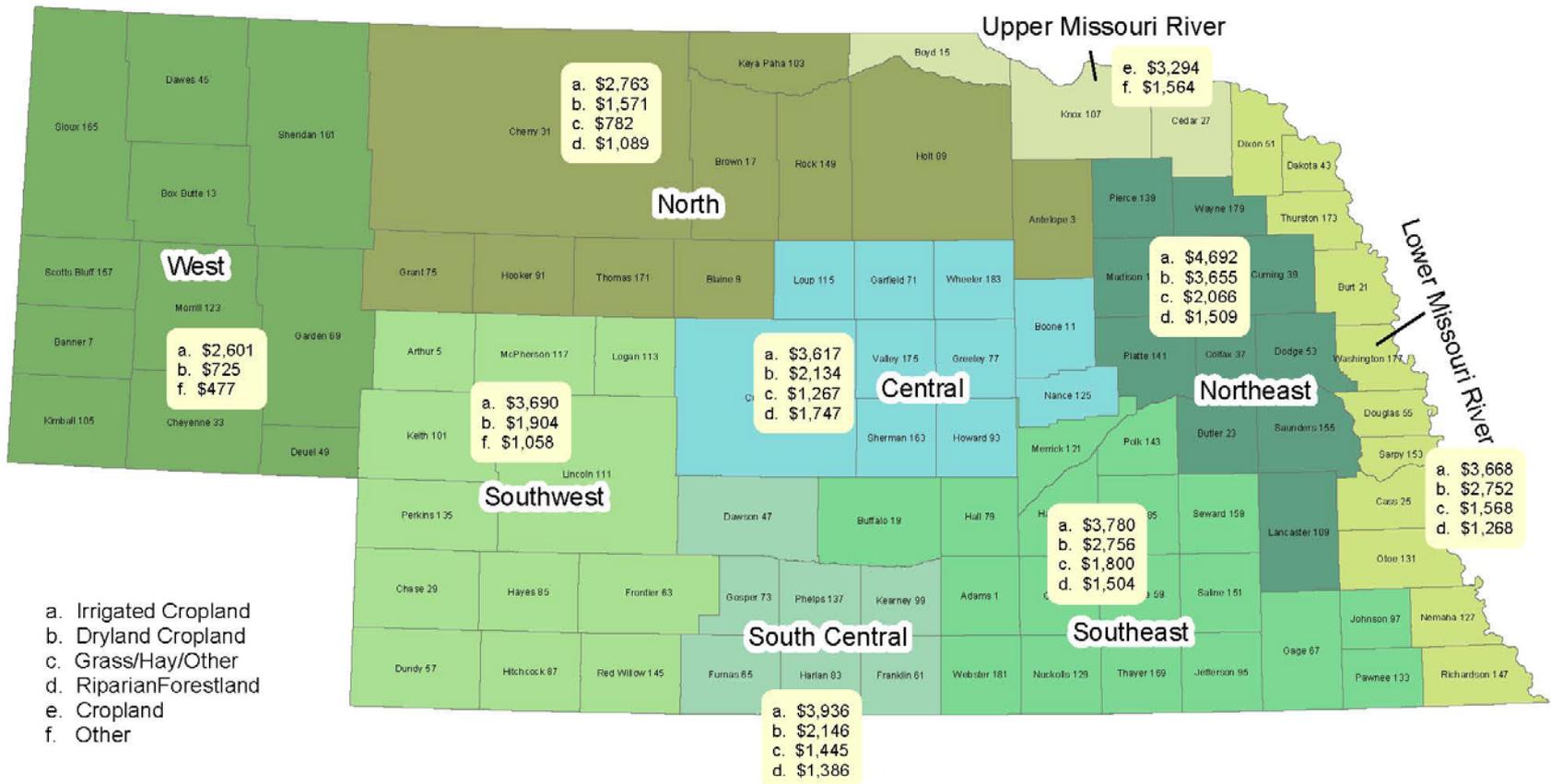
## Farm Production Regions



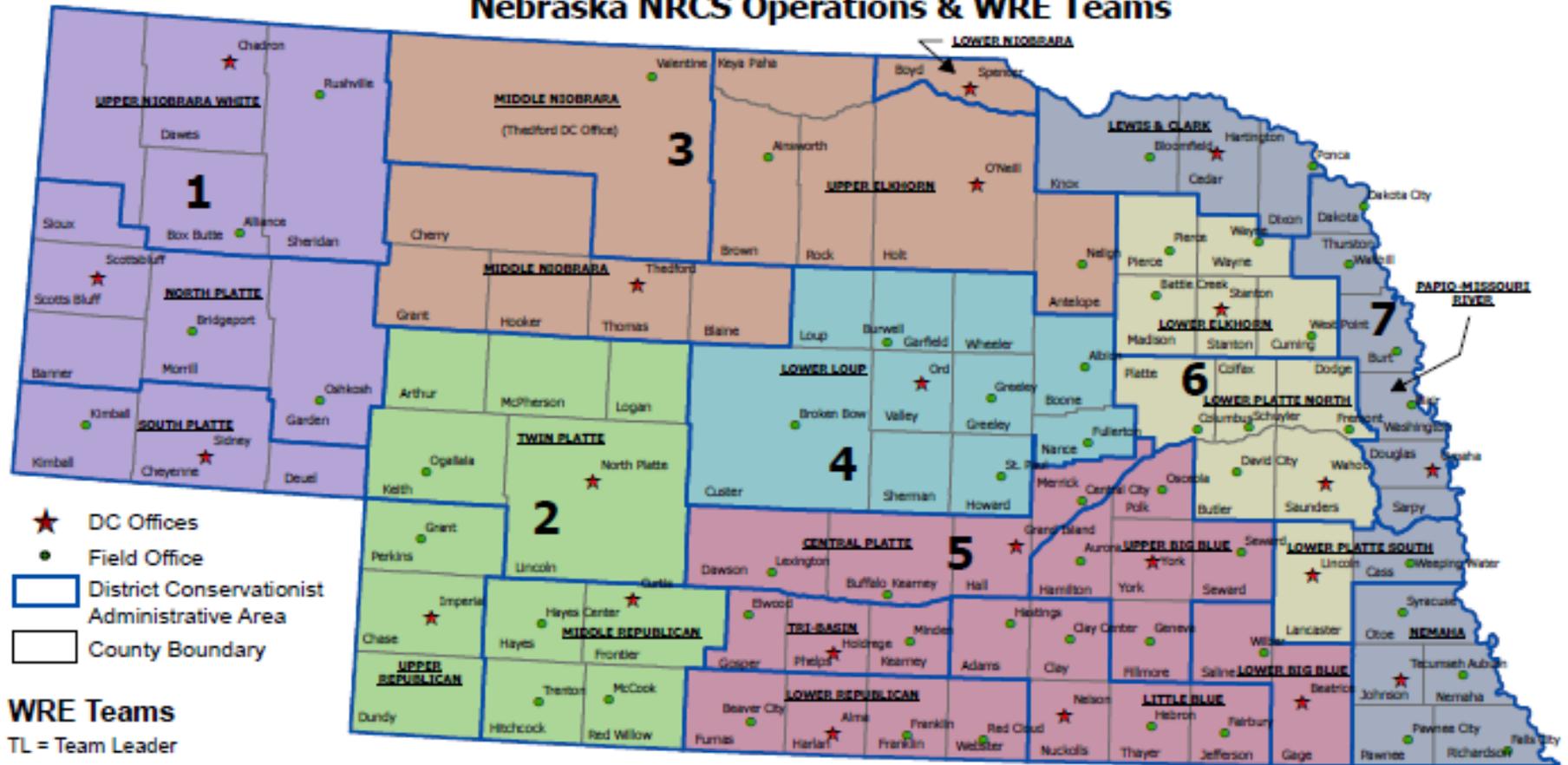
# Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)



# Nebraska Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Geographic Area Rate Caps (GARC) by land use for FY 2014



# Nebraska NRCS Operations & WRE Teams



- ★ DC Offices
- Field Office
- ▭ District Conservationist Administrative Area
- ▭ County Boundary

## WRE Teams

TL = Team Leader

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <p><b>Team #1:</b> Upper Niobrara White, North Platte, &amp; South Platte<br/>         Angie Elg - TL, Oshkosh 308-772-3953<br/>         Dave Cook - RC, Oshkosh 308-772-3743<br/>         Mike Brown - CET, Scottsbluff 308-632-2195</p> | <p><b>Team #4:</b> Lower Loup<br/>         Jim Lott - TL, St. Paul 308-754-4424<br/>         Joe Dush - CET, St. Paul 308-754-4424</p>  | <p><b>Team #7:</b> Lewis &amp; Clark, Papio Missouri, Nemaha &amp; Cass County<br/>         Don Doty - TL, Blair 402-426-2625<br/>         Tim Weltmer - RC, Blair<br/>         James Kennedy - CET, Blair<br/>         Mitchell Keebler - CET, Blair<br/>         Sylvia Thomas, Blair<br/>         Tyler Janke - Biologist, Syracuse<br/>         Eric Hopps - Biologist, Syracuse<br/>         Syracuse Phone #: 402-269-2361<br/>         Theresa Smydra, RC - Bloomfield 402-373-4914</p> |
| <p><b>Team #2:</b> Upper Republican, Twin Platte, &amp; Middle Republican<br/>         Claudia Stevenson - TL, Grant 308-352-4776<br/>         Gene Heathers - CET, Imperial 308-882-4263</p>   | <p><b>Team #5:</b> Central Platte, Tri-Basin, Lower Republican, Little Blue, Upper Big Blue, Lower Big Blue<br/>         Jeremy Jirak - TL, Grand Island 308-395-8586<br/>         Jon Myers - CET, Nelson 402-225-2311</p> |  |
| <p><b>Team #3:</b> Middle Niobrara, Upper Loup, Upper Elkhorn &amp; Lower Niobrara<br/>         Joel Klammer - TL, Ainsworth 402-387-2242<br/>         Don Earl - CET, Thedford 308-645-2621</p>  | <p><b>Team #6:</b> Lower Platte North, Lower Elkhorn, &amp; Lancaster County<br/>         Dave Bichmeier - TL, Columbus 402-564-0506<br/>         Ken Kotera - CET, Wahoo 402-443-4106</p>                                  |  |

## Nebraska Easements - Total

- FRPP = 13 on 34,452 acres
- GRP = 13 on 2,190 acres
- EWPP-FPE = 11 on 2,365 acres
- EWRP = 4 on 56 acres
- WRP 30 year = 62 on 6,414 acres
- WRP cost share = 42 on 9,270 acres
- WRP permanent = 527 on 69,285 acres



# Conservation Security Program

CSP from 2004 -  
2008



# Conservation Security Program

- 4 signups in 24 NE counties
- Total Contracts = 2021
- Current Active contracts = 765
- 5 – 10 year contracts
- Acres in Active Contracts = 549,066
- FY14 Payments = \$4,748,110

# Conservation Stewardship Program



# Conservation Stewardship Program

- 5 Year contracts
- Total Contracts = 2480
- Total Acres = 4,780,136
- Annual Payments = \$49,379,905







# Questions?





United States Department of Agriculture

**2014**

# **Farm Bill**

**Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service**



# Adjusted Gross Income (AGI)

- \$900,000 for both conservation and commodity program payments and benefits.
- Removes authority to waive AGI limitations for projects of special environmental significance
- RCPP is only program with AGI waiver authority
- AGI requirements do not commence until FY 2015 for most of NRCS conservation programs,
- EQIP, CStP, etc. signed and obligated between October 1, 2013 and September 30, 2014 have no AGI requirements.

# Conservation Compliance

- “Recoupling” federal crop insurance premium support benefits to HEL and wetland conservation compliance requirements
- Provides an opportunity to expand HEL and wetland conservation benefits
- Legislated flexibility for these “crop insurance only” participants to transition to conservation compliance requirements

# Conservation Compliance

- These new provisions apply solely to “crop insurance only” participants
- New Highly Erodible Land planning and compliance timelines
  - 5 years to develop and comply with conservation plan
  - 2 years for existing operations with violations
- Wetland Compliance
  - New conversion “trigger date” is date of enactment (2/7/14)
  - “Payment in lieu” option for mitigation of conversions <5 ac.
  - New mitigation timelines

# Environmental Quality Incentives Program

## Program Changes:

- Merging EQIP and WHIP
- Minimum 5% of funds for wildlife habitat
- Advanced payments up to 50%
- Re-establishes 60% of funds for livestock practices
- Single EQIP payment limitation \$450,000 FY2014 – FY2018
  - Eliminates waiver provision
  - Eliminates 6 year rolling limit
- Veteran farmers and ranchers eligible for increased payment rates

# Environmental Quality Incentive Program

- Baseline funding for EQIP
  - FY2014 - \$1.35 Billion
  - FY2015 - \$1.6 Billion
  - FY2016 - \$1.65 Billion
  - FY2017 – \$1.65 Billion
  - FY2018 - \$1.75 Billion

# Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)



# RCPP – Regional Conservation Partnership Program

RCPP is a new regional program that:

- Furthers the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife on a regional scale
- Encourages partners to cooperate with producers
- Provides assistance through:
  - Partnership agreements
  - Program contracts or easement agreements
- Combines and replaces the purposes and functions of:
  - Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)
  - Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program (CBWP)
  - Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI)
  - Great Lakes Basin Program for Erosion and Sediment Control

# RCPP

RCPP program contracts and easement agreements with producers are implemented through covered programs:

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CStP)
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

# RCPP Funding

## Available Funding

- \$100 Million of Direct RCPP funding each year
- 7% of funds from the four covered programs (ACEP, CStP, EQIP, HFRP) reserved annually through April 1st

# RCPP

## Funding Allocation

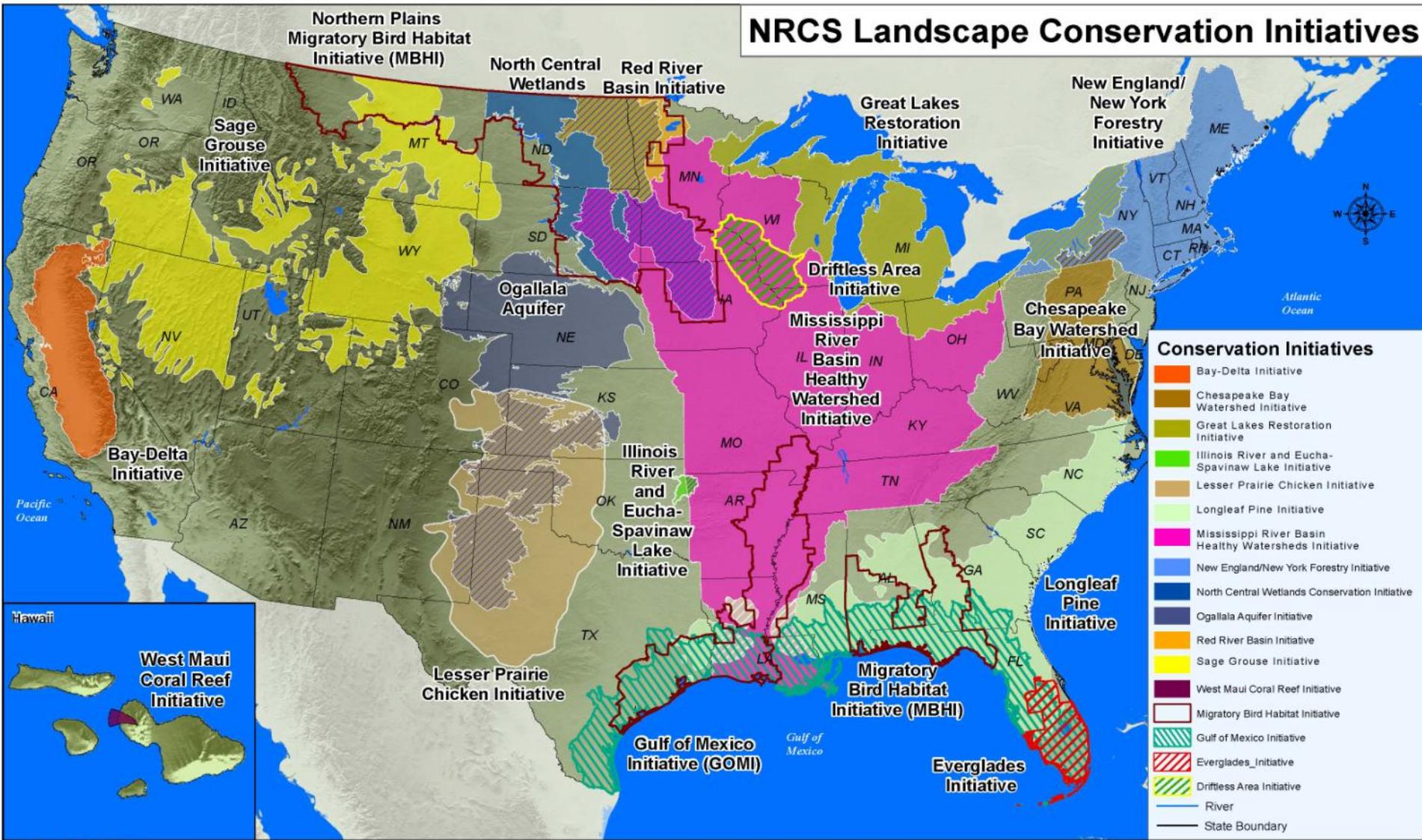
- 25% for State Projects
- 40% for National Projects
- 35% for Projects in Critical Conservation Areas

# RCPP

## Critical Conservation Areas

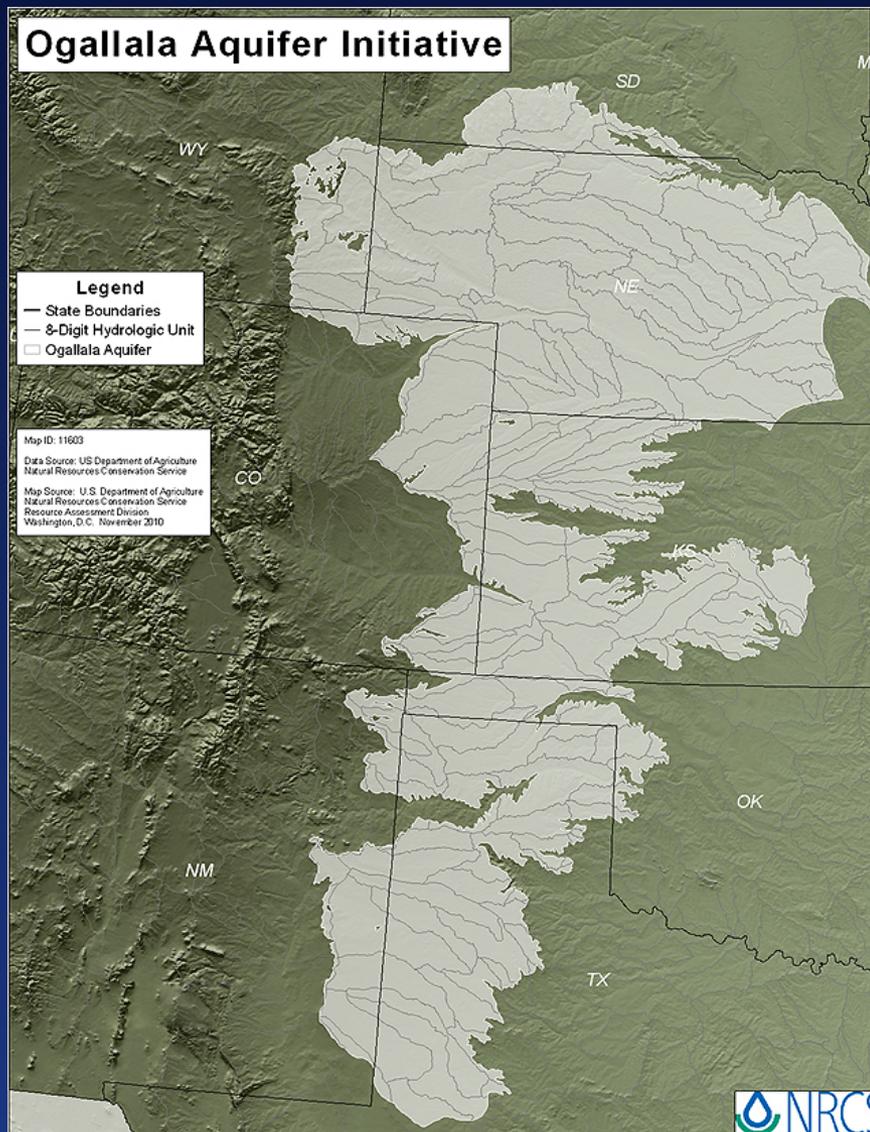
- Secretary will select up to 8 critical conservation areas
- Priority consideration given to geographical areas which:
  - Include multiple States with significant ag production
  - Have an existing agreement or work plans
  - Benefit water quality improvement
  - Benefit water quantity improvement
  - Assist producers to meet natural resource regulatory requirements
- Allows for both Partnership Agreements and for assistance to producers and landowner outside selected partner project areas

# NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives



## Conservation Initiatives

- Bay-Delta Initiative
- Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
- Illinois River and Eucha-Spavinaw Lake Initiative
- Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative
- Longleaf Pine Initiative
- Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative
- New England/New York Forestry Initiative
- North Central Wetlands Conservation Initiative
- Ogallala Aquifer Initiative
- Red River Basin Initiative
- Sage Grouse Initiative
- West Maui Coral Reef Initiative
- Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative
- Gulf of Mexico Initiative
- Everglades Initiative
- Driftless Area Initiative
- River
- State Boundary



# RCPP

## Partnership Agreements:

- NRCS will conduct a competitive process to select applications for partnership agreements
- NRCS will make public the criteria used in evaluating

# RCPP

## Partners are responsible for:

- Contributing a significant portion of the overall costs
- Conducting outreach and education to eligible producers for potential participation in the project
- Acting on a landowner's or producer's behalf, if requested by the landowners or producer in applying for assistance
- Leveraging financial or technical assistance provided by NRCS with additional funds to help achieve the project objectives.
- Conducting and providing an assessment of the project costs and conservation effects

# RCPP

## Additional Program Provisions

- Allows the Secretary to waive AGI if needed to fulfill purposes of the program
- Allows adjustments to discretionary rules of covered program with Secretary's approval, if requested by partner
- No funding may be used to cover partner administrative costs

# Conservation Stewardship Program



# Conservation Stewardship Program Enrollment

- Annual Enrollment Cap (10 million acres)
  - NIPF Acreage Cap lifted
- ACEP Land (with the exception of wetlands reserve easements)
  - Exemption for CRP Transitioning Acres

# CStP - Resource Concern

- CMT Reference removed
- Resource Concern terms changed

FB2008	FB2014
Resource concern	Priority resource concern
Priority resource concern	Applicable priority resource concern
Other resource concern	Other priority resource concern

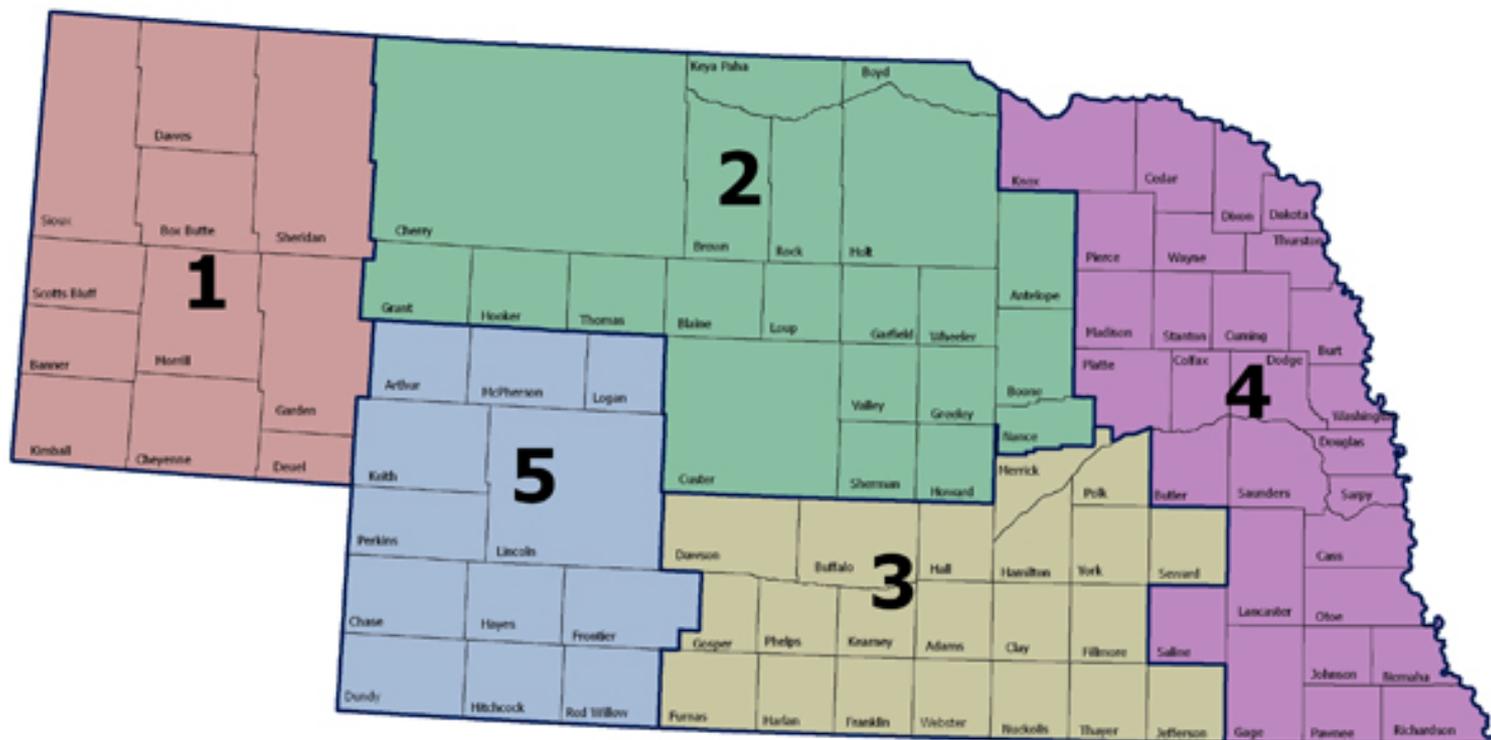
# CStP - Eligibility Criteria

- Eligibility: 2 priority resource concerns at time of application, plus 1 at the end of contract
- Renewal Criteria: Be in compliance with current contract and by end of renewal period be able to meet 2 additional priority resource concerns or exceed 2 existing priority resource concerns

# Conservation Stewardship Program

Nebraska Ranking Pools  
Priority Resource Concerns

# Ranking Pools

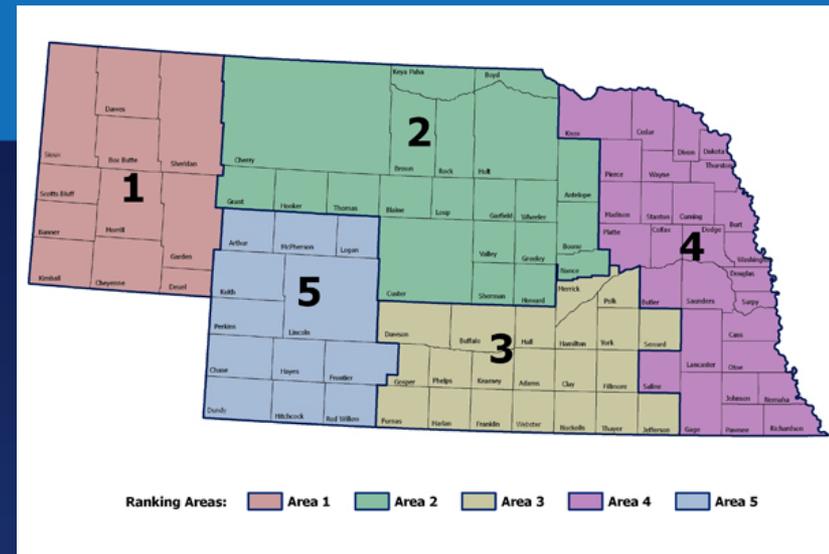


Ranking Areas: ■ Area 1 ■ Area 2 ■ Area 3 ■ Area 4 ■ Area 5

# Priority Resource Concerns

- For the 2014-1 signup each ranking pool must have 5 priority resource concerns from the following:
  - Air
  - Animals
  - Energy
  - Plants
  - Soil Erosion
  - Soil Quality
  - Water Quality
  - Water Quantity

# Priority Resource Concerns



- The existing and *proposed* priority resource concerns
  - Pool 1 – Animals, plants, soil erosion, soil quality, water quantity
  - Pool 2 – Animals, plants, soil quality, *water quality, water quantity*
  - Pool 3 – Animals, *soil erosion*, soil quality, water quality, water quantity
  - Pool 4 – Animals, *plants*, soil erosion, soil quality, water quality
  - Pool 5 – Animals, plants, soil quality, *water quality*, water quantity

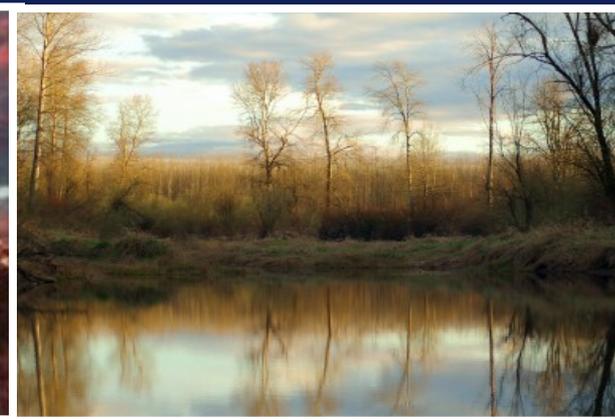
# Agricultural Conservation Easement Program



**FRPP**



**GRP**



**WRP**

# Easement Programs - ACEP

- Farm & Ranch Land Protection Program (FRPP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) have been repealed
  - Consolidated into Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Easement deeds remain valid and enforceable.
- Repeal does not effect existing contracts, agreements and easements
  - Funds obligated to valid contracts can still be expended
- NRCS will continue to monitor, manage and enforce easements on FRPP, GRP, & WRP

# ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- ACEP has 2 components
- Agricultural Land Easement Component (ALE)
  - Combines purposes of FRPP and GRP
  - Functions like FRPP
- Wetland Reserve Easement Component (WRE)
  - Retains purpose and function of WRP

# ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- The purposes of ACEP include:
  - Combine the purposes and coordinate the functions of the WRP, GRP, and FRPP.
  - Restore, protect, and enhance wetland on eligible land.
  - Protect the agricultural use, future viability, and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting non-agricultural uses.
  - Protect grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring and conserving eligible land.

# ACEP – Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

- Baseline funding for ACEP
  - FY2014 - \$400 million
  - FY2015 - \$425 million
  - FY2016 - \$450 million
  - FY2017 – \$500 million
  - FY2018 - \$250 million
- ACEP will require a new regulation
  - Relatively few new statutory provisions for WRE when compared to WRP.

# A CEP – Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)

# ACEP-ALE - Implementation

- **NRCS will continue to administer FRPP and GRP agreements and easements enrolled prior to enactment of the 2014 Act.**
- **Accept new ACEP-ALE applications during FY 2014.**

# ACEP - Agricultural Land Easements

- During FY 2014 NRCS will use existing FRPP and GRP regulations to enroll ACEP-ALE agreements.
  - To the extent existing regulations are consistent with new statute
  - Differences will be addressed in interim guidance

# Statutory Differences Between FRPP and ACEP-ALE

- 4<sup>th</sup> land eligibility category: “protects grazing uses.”
- New Statutorily Ineligible Lands:
  - Lands owned by the United States, State government, or local government.
  - Land subject to an easement or deed restriction that provides protection similar to ACEP-ALE.
  - Lands where the purposes of the program would be undermined by on-site or off-site conditions.

# Statutory Differences Between FRPP and ACEP-ALE

- ALEs **MUST** permit a landowner to continue agricultural use.
- **ALL** ALEs must require the land be subject to an “Agricultural Land Easement Plan.”
- Secretary is allowed to contribute 75% of the FMV of an ALE in the case of “grassland of special environmental significance.”

# Statutory Differences Between FRPP and ACEP-ALE

- The non-Federal contribution from the eligible entity for the purchase of an agricultural land easement varies slightly from the FRPP non-Federal contribution.
- The non-Federal contribution from the eligible entity must now be 50% of the Secretary's contribution, instead of 25% of the purchase price.
  - This will decrease the amount of landowner donation that can be attributed to the entity match

# Statutory Differences Between GRP and ACEP-ALE

- The purposes of GRP are now contained within the ACEP – ALE component
  - Grasslands included as a land use in ALE land eligibility criteria
  - Grasslands must be managed in accordance with a Grassland Management Plan
- ALE easements can only be held by the eligible entity not by the United States
  - No more ‘GRP-type’ easements held by the US
- No longer a GRP Rental Agreement option
  - Provisions added to CRP to accommodate potential new rental agreement enrollment under GRP

# ACEP - Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)



## **Statutory Differences Between WRP and ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)**

- Reduces ownership requirement from 7 years to 24 months.
- Authorizes waiver process to allow enrollment of CRP land established to trees.
- No option to enroll stand-alone 10-year restoration cost-share agreements.

# Statutory Similarities Between WRP and ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

## No Change from WRP:

- NRCS continues to hold easements
- Keeps WRP compensation and eligibility framework from the 2008 Farm Bill.
- Priority for enrollment continues to be based on value of the easement for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife

# Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

- Enrollment Options
    - Permanent Easement
    - 30-year Easement
    - 30 year contract with Indian Tribes
- ✓ Note: WRE eliminates 10-year restoration cost-share only agreements.*

# Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE)

- The enactment of the 2014 Act does not impact or change authority to provide support for easements and agreements obligated under previous legislation.

# Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program – VPA-HIP











