



# The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Wetlands Reserve Easements in the Rainwater Basin

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The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, is a voluntary program created in 2014 to help landowners conserve agricultural lands and wetlands, along with their many benefits.

The Wetlands Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE) component of ACEP offers financial and technical assistance to landowners who want to restore and protect wetlands on their land. Financial assistance generally includes an easement payment, plus cost-share to help pay for wetland restoration. Technical assistance helps accomplish the actual restoration. ACEP-WRE replaces the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) which, with over 100 projects in south-central Nebraska, has been the keystone of many wetland restoration and protection projects on private land.

In general, the ACEP-WRE participant receives a payment for an easement that will provide long-term protection to a wetland that is restored or enhanced with NRCS assistance. The easement purchase price is determined by USDA's Nebraska Geographical Area Rate Cap. Wetlands Reserve easements permit hunting, fishing, and other undeveloped recreational activities. In addition, the landowner may request that NRCS evaluate other potentially compatible uses, such as grazing, haying, or harvest of wood products. On all Wetlands Reserve easements, the landowner controls access to the land.

- For a **Permanent Easement**, NRCS pays 75-100% of the costs of restoring the wetland, plus the purchase price of the easement.
- **Thirty-year Easement** payments are 50-75% of what would be paid for a permanent easement. In addition, NRCS pays 50-75% of the wetland restoration costs.
- Under the **Reserved Grazing Rights** enrollment option, the participant retains the right to graze enrolled land according to an approved grazing plan. The easement price is reduced to 75% of a standard permanent or thirty-year easement payment. As with standard enrollment options, NRCS pays 50-75% or 75-100% of restoration costs, depending on whether a permanent or thirty-year easement is used.

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