

Conservation Security Program:

The Watershed Approach — 2004

The Conservation Security Program (CSP) is a voluntary conservation program that supports ongoing stewardship of private, working agricultural lands by providing payments for maintaining and enhancing natural resources. CSP identifies and rewards those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations.

In addition, CSP creates powerful incentives for other producers to meet those same standards of conservation performance. In short, CSP rewards the best and motivates the rest. Through these rewards and incentives, CSP builds a foundation of natural resource conservation that will provide benefits to the public for generations to come.

Watershed Approach

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is using watersheds as a basis to determine CSP participation. This makes sense economically, practically, and administratively.

Watersheds are nature's boundaries and are the best science-based way to group together producers working on similar environmental issues. As CSP grows, more watersheds will be added to the areas eligible for sign up each year until the whole country is covered. This gives NRCS the flexibility needed to expand the program as more funds become available.

The \$41 million budget for CSP in fiscal year 2004 allows for 3,000 to 5,000 program participants in the first year. Focusing on selected watersheds reduces the administrative burden on applicants and reduces the costs of processing a large number of applications that cannot be funded. The law requires that NRCS not incur more than 15 percent technical assistance costs associated with CSP.

2004 Watersheds

In fiscal year 2004, CSP will touch 18 watersheds that cover parts of 22 States, 127 counties, and 119 local conservation districts. About 1.5 million people call these watersheds home. Combined, the watersheds cover an area nearly the size of Maine. About 27,300 farms and ranches are within these watershed boundaries covering more than 14 million acres, an area nearly the size of West Virginia. About 60 percent of this working agricultural land is cropland and 40 percent is grazing land.

Selected watersheds for fiscal year 2004 are in Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. A map is online at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp/watersheds04.html>

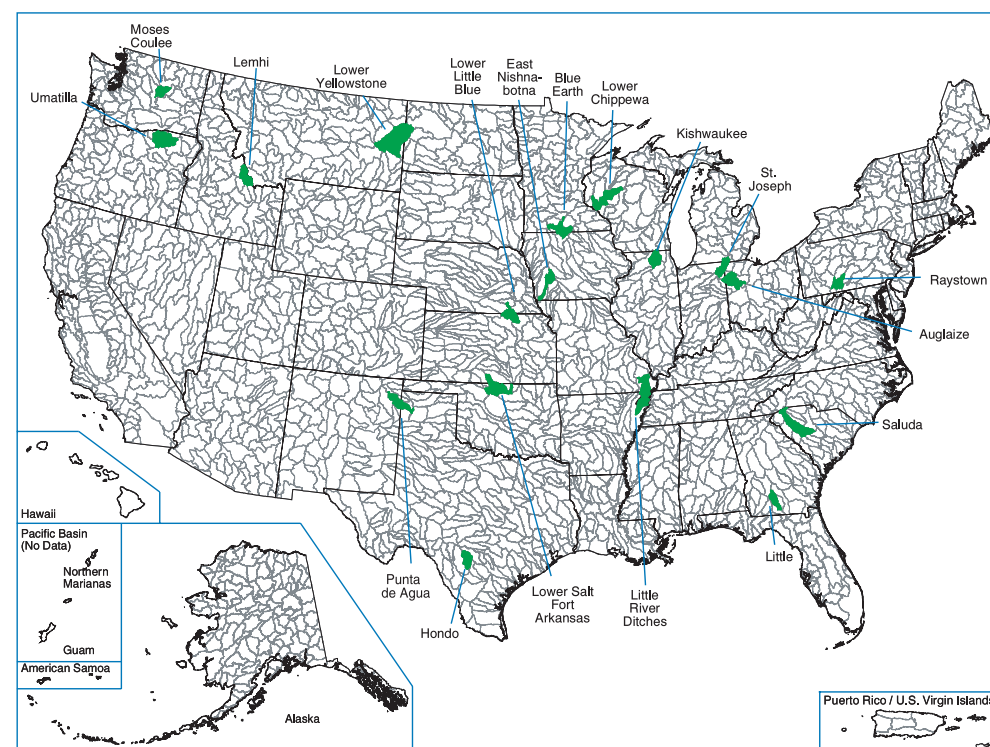
Watershed Selection

NRCS used several criteria for selecting the watersheds to participate this year. The selected watersheds:

- Contain a variety of land uses (crops, rangeland, pasture, vineyards/orchards) and input intensities.
- Have high-priority resource issues to be addressed, including issues that meet State priorities.
- Have a history of good land stewardship on the part of landowners.
- Have the technical tools necessary such as digitized soils information to streamline program implementation.

Watersheds also were evaluated from a national perspective regarding regional resource issues that would enhance CSP's overall environmental goals. Preference was given where improving resources

Figure 1. CSP Watershed Selections for 2004



would assist the recovery of threatened and endangered species or add measurably to critical resource recovery efforts and extensive watershed-wide measures were in place.

Other watersheds will be selected each year until landowners in every watershed have had a chance to participate. Every agricultural operation is in a watershed.

How To Participate

1. Access the CSP self-assessment workbook either online or by getting a hard copy or CD from the local USDA Service Center or NRCS office.
2. Using the workbook, producers (1) determine whether they meet basic eligibility requirements, (2) document their stewardship work to date, and (3) prepare a benchmark inventory documenting conservation they have undertaken so far.
3. Submit the completed self-assessment workbook to the local NRCS office during the sign-up period.
4. Meet with NRCS personnel to go over any additional needed documentation.
5. NRCS determines the enrollment category for which the producer qualifies.
6. Finally, NRCS will select the categories to be funded for CSP contracts.

All CSP applications that meet the sign-up criteria will be placed in an enrollment category regardless of available funding. In addition to legal contract requirements, the categories will consider the applicants' current stewardship (soil condition, tillage intensity, existing practices, and activities) and will sort producers based on these factors. Categories also will examine producers' willingness to perform additional conservation activities during their CSP contract.

For More Information

For additional information about CSP, contact your local USDA Service Center, listed in the telephone book under U.S. Department of Agriculture, or your local conservation district. Information also is available on the Internet at:

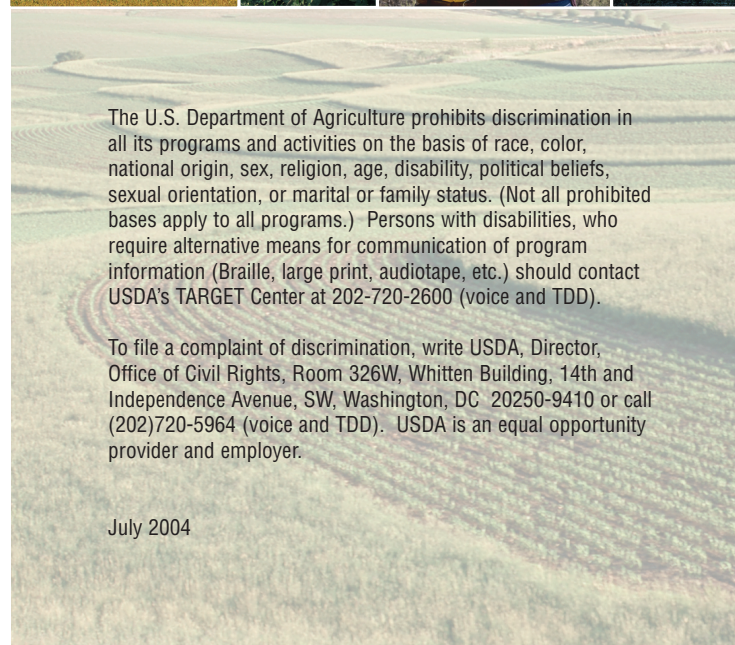
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