

EXPIRED CRP—AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ADDITIONAL GRAZING ACRES??



The USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has given producers a stable income on marginally productive cropland, while providing numerous other benefits such as reduced soil erosion, improved water quality, and wildlife habitat. South Dakota enrollment in CRP has declined from about 1.6 million acres in 2007 to about 1.0 million acres in 2010. With another ¼ million acres set to expire across the state in 2010 and 2011, many South Dakota producers have had to make some important land management decisions.

Grazing the established grass cover of expired CRP is an option for producers to earn income off the land while maintaining many of the benefits to soil, water, and wildlife. For example, CRP seedings of tame cool season grasses can be grazed early in the spring, allowing native rangeland to reach grazing-readiness. Warm-season native grass seedings could be grazed in late summer after forage quality has declined in cool season grasses.

However, lack of fences and water sources may prevent some producers from utilizing expired CRP as grazing land. Recognizing the wildlife benefits of well-managed grassland, the South Dakota Department of

Game, Fish & Parks (SD GFP) has a strong interest in assisting landowners who wish to maintain expired CRP grass cover for grazing purposes.

SD GFP's Wetland/Grassland Habitat Program offers up to 100% cost share for permanent fencing materials (interior and exterior fences) necessary to prepare expired CRP for grazing. Up to 2/3 cost share is available for small pond water developments and cost share may also be available for pipeline and tanks.

Because program funding is tied to migratory birds, namely waterfowl and other wetland/grassland dependent species, SD GFP will prioritize projects that are in close proximity to other well-managed grassland habitat, natural wetland complexes and for those producers interested in a managed grazing system.

Producers interested in learning more about this opportunity, should contact a SD GFP Biologist in Huron (353-6699 or 353-7185), Pierre (773-3658), or Rapid City (394-5232).

