

South Dakota Chapter of The Wildlife Society

Position Statement

on

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Conservation Reserve Program

April 1993

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is a program that pays agricultural producers an annual fee for planting Highly Erodible Land (HEL), and some other types of land, to permanent vegetative cover for a period of ten years. The CRP was a part of the Food Security Act of 1985. The program was continued in a modified and downscaled form in the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990. The first CRP contracts that were signed with producers will expire in 1996. Contracts will continue to expire each year until the majority of them will have expired by 2000. As CRP contracts expire, the strides it has made in the conservation of our natural resources will begin to erode concurrently with the land if these tracts are put back under the plow.

The CRP was initiated in order to accomplish several economic and conservation tasks; among them, conserve soil by reducing erosion, reduce grain surpluses by taking land out of production, protect surface water resources by reducing siltation, and to provide habitat for wildlife. All of these objectives are sound, and worthy of pursuit by government. The planting of a permanent land cover on HEL, as required by the CRP, furthers the accomplishment of these objectives. Highly erodible land, by its very nature, is marginal agricultural land. Continued cropping of HEL would, eventually, result in a reduced capacity for it to sustain much of any use at all. The South Dakota Chapter of the Wildlife Society believes that as long as the Federal government is directly involved in the manipulation of the economics of the agricultural sector, then encouragements to conserve our natural resources should be a part of the economic package. It is our position that either the Conservation Reserve Program should be preserved in the 1995 "Farm Bill", or at the very least, incentive programs aimed at retaining the CRP acres in some type of permanent cover should be implemented. We believe that abandoning the CRP acres in the next "Farm Bill" would be environmentally irresponsible.