

The Natural Resources Conservation Service is testing landowner interest in a new Wetlands Reserve Program option to reserve grazing rights on their contracted wetland acres.

Applications are being accepted statewide from Aug. 10 through Aug. 21 at local NRCS offices.

NRCS State Conservationist Steve Chick said, "This is a new option applies only to Wetlands Reserve Program applications received during this signup period. It will apply to permanent or 30-year easement contracts."

Under this "reserved grazing rights pilot option" landowners would retain the rights to grazing of land entered into a Wetlands Reserve Program contract.

Compensation normally paid through WRP for permanent or 30-year easements would be reduced by the value of the grazing.

Participants would develop a grazing plan with NRCS that includes the location, timing, intensity, frequency and duration of grazing.

Pasture land will be converted from non-native to native grasses. Some shallow water habitat enhancements for waterfowl and wading birds will be created on some sites.

This pilot option was authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill.

The Wetlands Reserve Program is a voluntary program to assist landowners of private and tribal lands in restoring, protecting, and enhancing land with wetland soils.

Landowners who are interested in pursuing this pilot program should contact their local Natural Resources Conservation Service office.