



Natural Resources Conservation Service
6013 Lakeside Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46278

January 22, 2007

INDIANA BULLETIN NO. IN300-7-13 * REVISED*

SUBJECT: LTP – Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) Ranking for 2007

Purpose: To establish the process and actions necessary to implement the FY07 WHIP program in Indiana, rollout the FY07 WHIP program, and release the 2007 WHIP Guidance document

Expiration Date: September 30, 2007

Action Required By: January 26, 2007

Nationally the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool (AERT) in ProTracts will be used to rank all applications. AERT includes National and State priorities. The tool is located within ProTracts.

The basic information on **all** applicants will be entered in ProTracts first and the NRCS-CPA-1200 will be generated for the applicants' signature as an application. All interested persons have the right to sign an NRCS-CPA-1200 application. Review the 1202 appendix with the producer and provide them with a copy. Producers must provide the following to meet basic WHIP eligibility requirements: 1. Evidence of signatory authority when an entity is involved, 2. Evidence of control of the land for the contract period, and 3. Farm and Tract number.

Once the application is entered in ProTracts select the applicant information menu item to check eligibility. Run the "Update eligibility" feature to see if updates to AGI, HEL/WC, and payment limitations are applied to this application. Determine if the applicant and land meet the basic WHIP program eligibility requirements.

For eligible applicants, proceed with scheduling a field visit with the producer and prepare the conservation plan if not already done. A field visit and conservation plan is **required** to be completed before ranking the application. There is no benefit in waiting until the end of the sign up cutoff to begin the conservation planning process. If the applicant is ineligible, **STOP ANY FURTHER WORK** on the application until all eligibility issues are resolved. Determine what the eligibility issue is. If eligibility appears to be affected by FSA resetting the eligibility flags, then work with FSA to get current information entered. If the applicant is ineligible because necessary paperwork has not been filed with FSA, then determine specifically what the eligibility issue is and generate the "Program Eligibility Certification Letter" from ProTracts.

DIST: 0

Provide the “Program Eligibility Certification Letter” from ProTracts in person to the producer or mail it Certified-Return Receipt. This letter explains what eligibility element(s) the producer does not meet and what needs to be done. It is the applicants’ responsibility to provide the required information within 30 days of the letter. If the information is not provided within the 30 days NRCS has no obligation to follow-up and will service other applications.

Upload the conservation plan to ProTracts and rank eligible applications using the Application Evaluation and Ranking Tool in ProTracts. Ensure that all practices used in the ranking are included in the conservation plan and contract, and that all practices in the plan and contract treat the resource concerns identified in the ranking. There should be no practices in the contract that were not in the ranking.

When the plan and ranking are complete, advise the Area Conservationist, or designee, that the application is ready for Quality Review. When the Quality Review is completed the reviewer will change the application status to “Preapproved” in ProTracts. The Programs staff will change the status of applications selected for funding to “Approved” and notify District Conservationists. Once they are “Approved”, applications, rankings, plans and contracts cannot be edited. If edits are necessary the application will have to be moved to pending and will be eligible for consideration in the next round of funding, if one is available. Contact the Programs staff to reset an application to pending.

District Conservationists will print out the “Approved” NRCS-CPA-1202 with the Programs staff electronic signature and have the applicant(s) sign it and the NRCS-CPA-1202 appendix. The applicant and DC will also need to sign the NRCS-CPA-1155 and the Ranking Report from AERT. When all of the above documents are signed, check the Applicant signature “signed” box in ProTracts.

Scan the signed 1202 signature page and include it in an e-mail notifying the Area Conservationist, or designee, that the contract is ready for NRCS obligating signature. Once NRCS signs the contract it is officially a contract and subject to cancellation/termination and cost recovery policy.

Several changes have been made in the WHIP program for 2007. The 2007 Indiana WHIP Guidance Document is attached. Some of the changes include:

- The **minimum** total cost-share requirement for an application to be considered will remain at \$1,000. The **maximum** amount remains the same at \$25,000 per applicant.
- Financial assistance funds will be divided into three groups. Seventy five percent of the total state allocation will go to private landowners and government and Not for Profit (NFP) groups. These funds will be further divided with seventy five percent set aside for private landowners and the remaining twenty five percent for government and NFP. The remaining 25 percent will be set aside for treatment of invasive species.
- WHIP will no longer use the actual cost (AM) cost type. The cost list will be based on an average cost (AC). The cost-share rate will be based on 75 percent of the average cost determined from historical data collected over the past year.

- Strip mowing has been removed from Early Successional Habitat Development.
- Additional invasive species will be eligible for cost-share in addition to kudzu under the Pest Management (595) standard of the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

All 2006 WHIP applications that are currently in ProTracts need to be cancelled or deferred. If the applicant wishes to apply in 2007, the application should be deferred in ProTracts and promoted to 2007. If the applicant does not wish to reapply for the WHIP program, the application should be cancelled.

The cut-off for the first round of funding will be January 26, 2007. All applications entered into ProTracts by that date will be considered for funding in the first round. Additional rounds will be each month until all funds are obligated. Cut-off dates will be announced as needed.

Any questions regarding the ranking process or guidance document should be directed to John Poenisch, Program Analyst, at extension 357.

/s/

JANE E. HARDISTY
State Conservationist

Enclosure