



Natural Resources Conservation Service
6013 Lakeside Boulevard
Indianapolis, In 46278

July 9, 2004

INDIANA BULLETIN NO. IN440-4-1

SUBJECT: PGM- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) Fiscal Year 2004.

Purpose: To establish the first round sign up period for FY 04 GRP.

Expiration Date: September 30, 2004

Action Required By: July 28, 2004

The GRP Interim Final Rule was published in the Federal Register Vol. 69, No. 99, Friday, May 21, 2004 and is available @ <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP/> .

The Interim Final Rule had an impact on GRP ranking criteria for FY04. We revised the Indiana ranking criteria to meet the requirements of the rule. The new electronic ranking worksheet with instructions is attached.

GRP is a continuous sign up program and Field Offices should continue to accept and rank all new GRP applications (AD-1153) through July 19, 2004 for the first round sign up.

All unfunded FY03 applications were deferred to FY04 and are on the attached FY03 GRP backlog list. The backlog list only includes applications that were received by the FY03 cutoff date of August 8, 2003. The applicants on the backlog list do not need to reapply. District Conservationists should contact all applicants on the backlog list to determine if they are still interested in the GRP program. Those applicants still interested in the GRP program will need to be re-ranked using the new electronic ranking worksheet.

A screening process will be used to determine which applicants on the FY03 backlog list will need to be re-ranked. The backlog list contains 463 applicants requesting \$7,004,768 for rental agreements and 50 applicants requesting \$5,025,015 for easements. Applications for *rental agreements that scored 160 or higher*, and applications for *easements that scored 170 or higher* on the FY03 backlog list are the **only ones that need to be re-ranked** if the applicant is still interested. The exception to this would be where the applicant scored below these point ranges and is willing to significantly upgrade their FY03 application.

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The timeline for GRP implementation is as follows:

- New applicants that signed up after August 8, 2003 and those that sign up by the close of business Monday July 19, 2004 will be considered in the first round of funding.
- Applicants on the FY03 backlog list that wish to continue with the program will automatically be considered in the first round of funding.
- All eligible applications need to be ranked using the electronic ranking sheet by the close of business Wednesday July 28, 2004.
- All completed ranking sheets and electronic conservation plan maps of the offered acres and planned practices need to be e-mailed to Jim Dunaway by the close of business Wednesday July 28, 2004.

The following changes are effective for the FY04 GRP program.

- Incidental land is limited to 10% on rental agreements, and 20% on easements.
- Cropland is eligible for GRP *only* if the historic native vegetation was grassland/herbaceous.
- Cost effectiveness considerations are built into the ranking process.
- Rental applications will be in one pool and easement applications in another so that offers are competing only within that pool.
- The Grassland Specialists, or other qualified person, will complete a site review of potentially funded sites prior to final funding decisions.
- Access from a public road must be granted for all easements.
- The intent of GRP has been restated to prioritize enrollment of working, non-urban agricultural lands, to avoid competition with lands that are more suited to enrollment in the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Additional information on GRP and necessary forms can be found on the Indiana NRCS web site by clicking on the Programs tab.

If you have any questions concerning the Grassland Reserve Program, the ranking sheet, or the instructions please contact Dwayne Howard at ext. 386, or Jim Dunaway at ext. 334.

/s/ Elana T. Cass Acting for

JANE E. HARDISTY

State Conservationist

cc: Dwayne Howard, ASTC-Programs

Attachments