

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Updates

Soil and Water Commission Meeting
March 26-27, 2024



Presentation Outline

- Review of CREP program
- History & Current Status of CREP
- Division of SWC Responsibilities
- Previous Commission Activities
- CREP Conservation Easement Committee

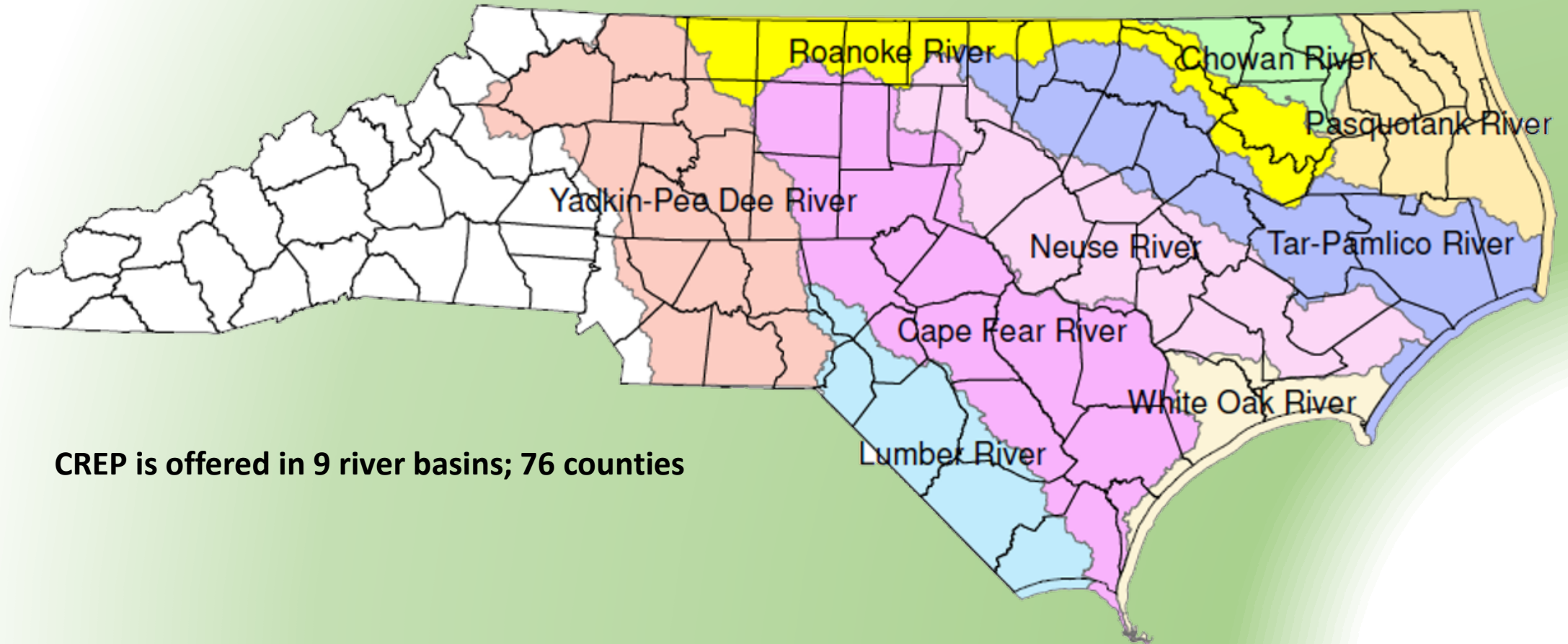


Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Review

- CREP is a partnership program between USDA Farm Service Agency and the State of NC.
- It is an “extension” of the FSA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).
- The purpose of the program is to improve water quality by reducing non-point source pollution from agriculture operations by **establishing riparian buffer zones** along streams and agricultural ditches and restoring wetlands. (02 NCAC 59F .0101)
- Voluntary program where landowners can choose the areas of the farm (within 300 feet of a watercourse) to enroll in the program.



Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Review



CREP is offered in 9 river basins; 76 counties



CREP Summary of Landowner Options

Term	FSA Provides Cost Share to Establish Buffer	Potential NC ACSP Cost Share to Establish Buffer	FSA Pays an Annual Rental Payment	State of NC Pays Conservation Easement Incentive Payment	Enroll Adjacent Forestland or Existing Forested Buffer
10-Yr.	Yes (50%)	Yes (25%)	10 Yrs.	-	-
15-Yr.	Yes (50%)	Yes (30%)	15 Yrs.	-	-
30-Yr.	Yes (50%)	Yes (40%)	15 Yrs.	Yes (\$250/ac)	-
Permanent	Yes (50%)	Yes (50%)	15 Yrs.	Yes (\$1,000/ac)	Yes

* When 10 acres or more are enrolled in CREP, a conservation easement must be conveyed.

** Cost share percentages are based on established cost lists and cost share % may vary.

*** Annual rental payments are based on **DOUBLE** the soil rental rate up to **\$150 per acre**.

**** Existing Forested Buffer can be enrolled into a CREP conservation easement at a ratio of 1:10.

CREP Landowner Responsibilities

- Establish and Maintain Conservation Practices**
 - Landowner is responsible for site prep, tree planting, and maintenance of conservation practice.

- Follow the Conservation & Forest Management Plans**

- Follow Deed of Conservation Easement Restrictions**
 - No farming, developing, mining, dumping trash, or unapproved timber harvesting within the easement.

- Allow CREP Staff access for monitoring inspections**
 - Onsite monitoring every 2-3 years



CREP History and Current Status

CREP started in NC on March 1, 1999, with the goal of enrolling 100,000 acres of environmentally sensitive cropland and marginal pastureland.

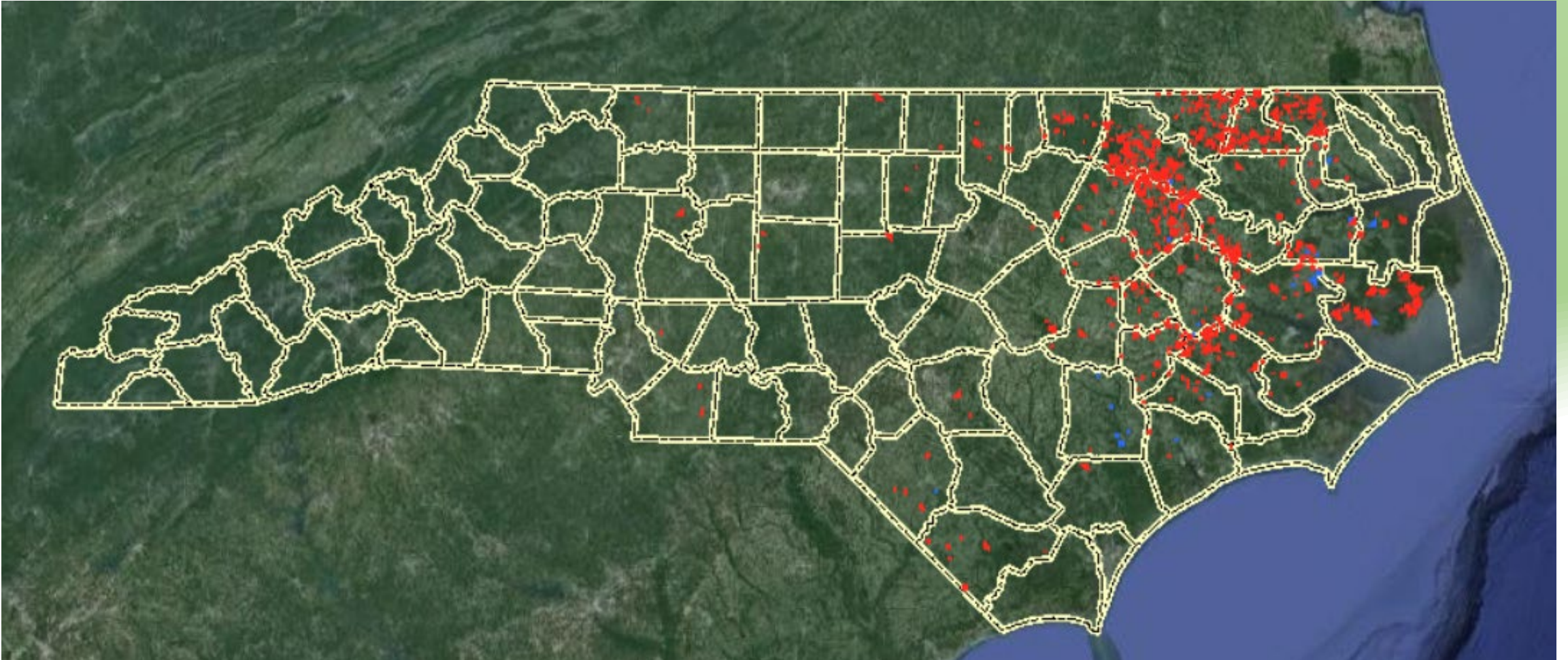
To date, we have:

1,250 conservation easements for a total of 32,079 acres

- Roughly 70% are 30-Year term conservation easements
- 30% are permanent conservation easements.



CREP Conservation Easements



○ **Red** polygons indicate easement location

CREP Conservation Easement Examples



Average easements are 25 acres.
The CREP program has forested easements as
big as 200 acres and as small as 1 acre.

Division of Soil and Water Conservation Responsibilities

Work with private landowners, federal and state partners, and local soil and water districts to find opportunities where the CREP program could be beneficial.



- Act as liaison to improve understanding of the CREP program partnership and cost share incentives.
- Handle the professional survey and the real estate closing of the conservation easement. (These costs are absorbed by the Division and not the landowner or FSA).
- Perform on the ground monitoring of easements every 2-3 years to ensure that the deed of conservation easement is being upheld. Where violations occur, work with easement holders to determine corrective actions.
- Work with easement holders on allowable uses of the easement to ensure compliance and partnership.
- Hold annual meeting of Conservation Easement Committee



Previous Commission Activities

In 2013, the Commission approved the establishment of a CREP Conservation Easement Committee.

(from the June 7, 2013 Commission meeting minutes).

Since 2013, the Commission approved the use of small workgroups and their recommendations.

- Existing Buffer Ratio. In 2018, increased ratio of standing trees to 1:10 that can be taken in with permanent conservation easements. For every 1 acre of cropland, 10 acres of forestland could be included.
- Clear-cut Policy. In 2019, the Commission approved the use of clear-cut harvesting in permanent CREP easements.



Purpose of CREP Conservation Easement Committee

In addition to discussing acquisition concerns, compliance issues, and utilization of State monies appropriately while maintaining a working lands easement, there is a need to:

- Better define terminology used in the deed of conservation easement and guiding documents.
 - Example: What is a “Qualifying Waterbody” that must maintain a 50-foot Minimum Impact Zone

- Improve guidance provided to easement holders and natural resource professionals on allowable forest management uses.
 - Example: When the landowner is unhappy with the current forest stand and desires to change species composition in the Forest Management Zone

- Improve collaboration and support of the program that could help improve landowner options and financial incentives.



CREP Conservation Easement Committee

- Commission representation
- 3 S&W District representatives (1 from each region of the state)
- NCDA & CS Legal representation
- Farm Service Agency
- NRCS
- NC Forest Service
- NC Wildlife Commission
- Division of Soil and Water CREP Manager as Chair

***Changes recommended by the committee to the Division of Soil & Water CREP Policy and Procedures would be brought before the Commission for Approval.





Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

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