



## What is the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)?

CREP is the country's largest private national land conservation program. This is a voluntary program that aims to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and establish conservation with the introduction of native vegetation. In return, landowners are paid an annual rental rate along with potential incentives during a contract period of 14-15 years.

## What is the purpose of Harney Valley Groundwater CREP?

Due largely to the increase in permitted groundwater development for irrigated agriculture, the Harney Basin has experienced substantial groundwater declines that negatively affect many groundwater users and natural resources. The Harney Valley Groundwater CREP (HVG CREP) will be administered by Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD) and the U.S. Farm Services Agency (FSA) to provide incentives for eligible groundwater irrigators who choose to enroll and are located within the Greater Harney Valley Groundwater Area of Concern (GHVGAC) to reduce their consumptive water use by voluntarily cancelling their groundwater rights. Harney Valley Groundwater CREP goal is to enroll 20,000 acres of groundwater irrigated croplands to conserve 40,000-50,000 acre feet per year to help the basin approach a more sustainable level of groundwater use.



## Benefits of CREP

- **Income for landowners:** After voluntarily agreements for cancelled groundwater rights are received, CREP will provide a steady income through annual rent. The base rental rate is \$185 per acre/per year (\$23,125 per year for a 125-acre pivot) for 14 to 15 years with additional incentives up to \$10,000 for land impacting groundwater dependent ecosystems such as springs and wetlands. Enrollees can earn a maximum of \$50,000 a year.
- **Environmental benefits:** Reducing groundwater usage will help slow the rate of groundwater level decline in the Harney Basin aquifer, reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides to improve water quality, lower energy use, and restore natural habitat for wildlife.
- **Technical Assistance:** FSA and the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will work with the landowner to develop and provide technical assistance for the implementation of an approved conservation plan. If needed, FSA will assist with part of the acceptable cost of establishing the conservation practice.
- **Cost Share:** A cost share payment of up to \$2,500 can be provided for permanent well abandonment.

## Grazing

Harney County has a long history of grazing which is still a common practice in the basin. CREP can allow the ability to use grazing as a mid-contract management tool. Limited grazing may be possible after the fourth year of the contract if ample vegetation is established. Grazing practices must not reduce the conservation value of established cover and will only occur outside of the ground nesting season (March 1st-July 15th).



## Do I Qualify for CREP?

Your land may be eligible if:

- Your land is located within the Greater Harney Valley Groundwater Area of Concern (an area closed to issuance of new groundwater rights by Oregon Administrative Rule 690-512).
- You have a documented annual consumptive use of groundwater of at least 2-acre feet per acre in 4 of the 5 previous years as identified by either measured use or satellite-based evapotranspiration.
- You have owned the land for at least one year.
- You are using a permit or certificated groundwater right in which the application and water use are in compliance with the terms and conditions on the associated water right issued by OWRD.
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## CREP Monitoring Program

The success of the Harney Valley Groundwater CREP program will be measured by the amount of reduced groundwater use. Accountability for reduced groundwater use will depend on visual observation, periodic measurement of groundwater levels at enrolled lands, reported pumpage data, and satellite-based evapotranspiration. OWRD will conduct a program review every other year with assistance from the Harney Valley Groundwater CREP review committee which will provide recommendations for program improvement.



## What does enrollment in CREP look like?

1. A site visit and confirmation your land is eligible for CREP.
2. A signed affidavit to voluntarily cancel primary and supplemental groundwater rights associated with enrolled land.
3. A consultation with FSA, OWRD and NRCS to determine the appropriate conservation plan for your land and one-time payment for establishing conservation practices.
4. Technical assistance to implement conservation plan and conversion of irrigation well to stock well or abandonment.
5. Temporary limited irrigation for 2-4 years to ensure permanent coverage of native vegetation and legume.
6. Continued technical assistance from FSA and OWRD along with implementation of the monitoring program to verify contract accountability.

## Questions about CREP?

If you have questions or comments about CREP, please contact Graham Thomas at 971-283-5085 or email [graham.k.thomas@water.oregon.gov](mailto:graham.k.thomas@water.oregon.gov).