

## **NEBRASKA BUFFER STRIP PROGRAM**

### **Description and Guidelines**

#### **Introduction**

- The Nebraska Buffer Strip Program (NBSP) was created by the Nebraska Legislature in 1998. The program encourages landowners to establish buffer strips, specifically filter strips and riparian forest buffers, along vulnerable surface water resources. Buffer strips are an effective means of reducing sediments and other pollutants in runoff. Funding for the program is from a fee assessed on pesticides registered in Nebraska.

#### **Eligible Areas**

- Land eligible for enrollment in this program is cropland (in annual crops or legumes as part of a rotation) adjacent to perennial streams, seasonal streams, wetlands, permanent bodies of water, or existing buffer strips established after January 1, 1996. The area of the streams, wetlands, and permanent bodies of water are not eligible for enrollment except that three-dot blue line seasonal streams on USGS quadrangle maps that are cropped may be eligible for out of channel flow filter strips.
- Fields adjacent and parallel to the area to be buffered must be cropped.
- Perennial streams are any solid blue line on USGS quadrangle maps or other streams with perennial flow that are verified on-site.
- Seasonal streams are any three-dot blue line on USGS quadrangle maps or any areas of concentrated flow with a defined bed and bank that has either a scoured bottom (from normal flow) or hydrophytic vegetation.
- Wetlands are any wetlands that meet permanently flooded, intermittently exposed, semipermanently flooded, or seasonally flooded criteria. The wetlands protected by buffer strips cannot be cropped during the life of the contract.
- Permanent bodies of water are surface water bodies, such as lakes or ponds, that provide water cover throughout the year.

#### **Payment Rates**

- For non-irrigated cropland that is not enrolled in CRP, the NBSP payment rate per acre shall equal 120% of the CRP weighted average soil rental rate plus \$5 minus payments from any other source. (The CRP weighted average soil rental rate is the amount calculated before the incentive and maintenance rate are added.) In no case, may the payment from all sources exceed \$150 per acre.
- For irrigated cropland, whether enrolled in CRP and/or any other program, the NBSP payment rate per acre shall equal \$150 minus payments received from all other sources.

#### **Deadlines**

- Funding availability for new applications is reviewed annually near the start of each calendar year, however, applications may be submitted any time.

#### **Process**

1. The landowner works with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on tentative buffer strip locations.
2. The landowner submits the completed application to the Natural Resources District (NRD).
3. The NRD and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) consider the application.
4. If approved, the landowner enters into a formal agreement with the NRD.
5. The landowner establishes and maintains the buffer strip according to NRCS FOTG practice requirements.

#### **General Terms**

1. The contract length cannot be less than five or more than ten years.
2. Eligible buffer strips are filter strips (NRCS FOTG practice 393) and riparian forest buffers (NRCS FOTG practice 391).
3. The established vegetation must meet NRCS FOTG practice requirements.
4. Limited haying and grazing is allowed provided it meets NRCS FOTG practice requirements.
5. Minimum width is 20 feet for filter strips and 55 feet for riparian forest buffers (35 feet must be trees and 20 feet must be grass) unless NRCS FOTG practice requirements are greater.
6. Maximum width is 100 feet for buffer strips unless NRCS FOTG practice requirements are greater. For streams, the maximums apply to each side of the stream.
7. Minimum size per application is one acre.
8. Failure to maintain the buffer strip according to contract requirements may result in forfeiture of past and future payments.
9. Buffer strips will be subject to compliance checks by NRD and/or NDA staff.

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Rev. 11/04