



TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
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Township Landowners Can Earn Profits While Helping to Improve Water Quality

Like many of us, you probably give very little thought to the water that flows from your faucets. It's safe, it's reliable, it tastes good — and that's all that really matters, right?

But the next time you pour yourself a glass, keep in mind that Pennsylvania has been working hard to maintain a clean and plentiful water supply for residents and to protect another important resource that its waterways drain into: the Chesapeake Bay.

To make that happen, state officials have invested millions of dollars and embarked on a number of quality- and quantity-improvement efforts, from updating the commonwealth's water plan to adopting laws and practices that reduce pollution.

However, one of the commonwealth's most important undertakings has been to recruit township supervisors and their residents to voluntarily take steps to stop water problems before they start. The notion behind this is that the state's waterways flow right through our back yards, and it's up to each and every Pennsylvanian to make sure that it is clean and safe as it continues downstream.

As one state official put it: "You can't underestimate the importance of local efforts in protecting water quality. Federal and state



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State and federal initiatives, such as the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, which rewards landowners for planting streamside buffers, drive home an important message: Our water supplies are a precious resource, and we all have a role to play in preserving and protecting them.

government can only do so much.”

For their part, township officials statewide have been proactive in protecting the environment by leading stream clean-up efforts, enacting zoning regulations that lessen the impact of development on water resources, and developing watershed management plans that take a regional approach to identifying and resolving shared problems.

The question is then, what can you, as a township resident, do to preserve and protect local water resources?

Plenty.

And the best part is, through one program in particular, you can earn profits — as much as \$5,000 per acre — while helping your community and your neighbors.

Restoring buffers, restoring water quality

Since 2000, Pennsylvania has been participating in the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), which pays landowners to create riparian buffers, wetlands, wildlife habitats, grass filter strips, native grass stands, and more.

One of the most popular CREP projects is planting streamside buffers. In fact, CREP partners have planted more than 14,000 miles of streamside buffers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

These buffers act as natural filters for runoff and are highly effective in removing excess nitrogen, the main pollutant of concern in the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s renewed focus on water quality in the Chesapeake Bay region. In addition to filtering pollutants, these buffers control stormwater runoff and help to prevent streambank erosion and flood damage.

“CREP offers an arsenal of specific conservation and environmental objectives to farmers and other landowners to restore and protect important natural resources on their properties,” Pennsylvania Game Commission Executive Director Carl Roe says. “In the process, this grassroots approach improves Pennsylvania’s ecological character, improves the environmental quality of the Chesapeake Bay and Ohio River Basin, and ultimately makes the United States a better place to live for Americans and wildlife.”

Today, more than 5,000 farmers and landowners in the commonwealth have installed forested buffers. Bradford County currently leads the state in CREP enrollment with more than 11,000 acres. Other counties with substantial acreage include: Columbia, with more than

9,700 acres; Northumberland, 9,600; Somerset, 7,700; and Tioga, 7,500.

“The important thing to remember about the Pennsylvania effort is we’re not done yet,” says Scott Klinger, director of the Game Commission’s Bureau of Land Management. “Our wildlife habitat biologists and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service staff have completed eligibility determinations for an additional 3,000 applicants.

“When fully implemented,” he adds, “we anticipate more than 10,000 farmers and rural landowners will be enrolled in the program.”

What you need to know about CREP

CREP typically provides enrolled landowners with a 120-percent reimbursement for installation and 100-percent reimbursement for post-planting maintenance. CREP also makes annual payments to landowners, who generally receive between \$2,000 and \$5,000 per acre in profits over a 15-year contract.

While the program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, you do not need to be a farmer and your land does not need to be in agricultural production to be eligible. Other partners include the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the state Departments of Agriculture, Environmental Protection, and Conservation and Natural Resources.

CREP participants receive free help in planning, designing, and implementing buffer projects. Biologists will also help you determine the best native plants to enhance wildlife habitat on your property.

It’s important to note, however, that your responsibilities do not end with the installation of the buffer. You must continue conservation practices throughout the entire CREP contract. Along the way, federal, state, and local partners will help you with CREP’s technical details. You also will receive full reimbursement for post-planting care done by professionals.

To enroll in the program, call toll-free (800) 941-CREP (2737) for the phone number of your county’s Farm Service Agency. When calling your FSA, be sure to ask to enroll in “CP 22” (“*Conservation Practice No. 22*” — CREP’s forested buffer program), a step that gets things started, but is nonbinding.

You can also find out more information about CREP by logging onto www.creppa.org.

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