

## Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The purpose of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible goals; to optimize environmental benefits; and to help farmers and ranchers meet Federal, State, Tribal, and local environmental regulations.

In order to be considered eligible for EQIP the applicant must have a vested interest in production agricultural or non-industrial private forest land and meet other program eligibility requirements.

**Continuous Sign-Up:** EQIP is a continuous sign-up, voluntary, conservation program administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that provides financial and technical assistance for approved conservation practices based on a current conservation plan.

**Conservation Plan:** A conservation plan includes all practices, regardless of the program's financial assistance, that a producer or landowner has agreed to adopt for the agricultural operation and/or associated agricultural lands. Interested applicants are encouraged to request conservation planning and technical assistance from a local NRCS field office to help with the development of a conservation plan.

**'EQIP schedule of operations':** The basis for an application is the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and is derived from the applicant's conservation plan. The EQIP 'schedule of operations' identifies the conservation practices to be implemented, timing of the implementation, practice location, and payment rates.

**Ranking and Funding Pools:** EQIP ranking and funding pools are developed to assure that program funds are available to resource priorities across various land use types, for special emphasis resource needs and to assure that underserved groups have access to assistance.

**Screening and Ranking:** Eligible applications will be evaluated for financial assistance based on a screening and ranking process.

- The purpose of screening criteria is to prioritize an application based on factors such as: a completed conservation plan; readiness to implement practices; history of contract compliance; and, fund pool resource priorities addressed in the 'EQIP schedule of operations'.
- The objective of ranking criteria is to evaluate the environmental benefits of conservation treatments included in the applicant's 'EQIP schedule of operations'.

Applications will be screened and prioritized into 'High', 'Medium' or 'Low' categories. 'High' priority eligible applications will be ranked and considered for funding. 'Medium' priority eligible applications will be ranked only if funding is available. 'Low' priority applications are typically not ranked or considered for funding.

Practices that will not be financially supported in an EQIP contract will not be evaluated in the screening and ranking process. Only conservation practices included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' will be used to determine the screening priority and ranking score of the application considered for funding.

**Continuous Funding:** Continuous funding is a process to distribute EQIP funds year-round, as funds are available. This process provides a fluid transition between conservation planning and financial assistance throughout the year. Applications will be batched monthly, or quarterly, for ranking and those that meet a minimum threshold ranking score for the funding period will be approved for financial assistance.

### **About the Catastrophic Fire Recovery EQIP Fund Pool**

The purpose of the Catastrophic Fire Recovery EQIP Fund Pool is to provide immediate resource protection in areas burned by catastrophic fires in the past eighteen months.

Priority resource concerns for the Catastrophic Fire Recovery EQIP Fund Pool include immediate soil erosion protection, minimize noxious and invasive plant proliferation, protect water quality, and restore livestock infrastructure necessary for grazing management on forestland and rangeland.

The immediate consequence of fire is the potential for soil erosion. Intense heat from fire can cause the soil to repel water, a condition called hydrophobicity. The potential for severe soil erosion is a consequence of catastrophic wildfire because as a fire burns it destroys plant material and the litter layer that protects the soil from eroding during severe rainstorms and moving off-site to surface water bodies, roads and other sites.

Immediate action to control soil erosion at burned forest and range sites include treatments such as using damaged trees or woody residues to slow runoff water, creating check dams in drainages and spreading straw to protect the soil and reseeding efforts. Most post-burn range sites are also susceptible to invasion by noxious weeds.

Rangeland noxious weeds and soil erosion can be controlled through management and distribution of livestock to facilitate recovery of burned sites most at risk for erosion and weed proliferation. In some cases, range planting may be necessary if range seed source is absent.

Many existing forestland and rangeland access roads and culvert systems may be severely damaged during fire suppression activities. In addition, emergency roads created during the fire event now need to be addressed - both are potential sources of sediment and turbidity in surface water bodies. The after-fire rehabilitation of roads is often rushed and due to time constraints are poorly designed and, with little vegetation on slopes, sediment from roads and destroyed culvert systems has a direct path to surface waters. Riparian zones with heavy biomass accumulation are often high intensity fire areas where temporary access trails were built for fire suppression and these trails can be direct sediment sources to riparian streams as well.

Following catastrophic fires, much of the natural fire recovery seed source is gone and noxious and invasive plants often proliferate on sterile post-burn sites. Forests that are not immediately planted with tree seedlings within one year of the fire will result in shrub regeneration that will out-compete the few naturally germinated tree seedlings. These shrub communities can be very aggressive and within one season will dominate the forest site, which increases costs to complete additional treatments prior to reforestation such as herbicide application, mastication or brush raking to ensure the success of tree plantings.

### **Land Uses for the EQIP Fund Pool**

Only applications for agricultural operations that address resource concerns on at least one land use type listed below will be considered for financial assistance from this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are the general NRCS land use definitions - applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- **Forest:** Land on which the primary vegetation is tree cover (climax, natural or introduced plant community) and use is primarily for production of wood products or non-timber forest products.
- **Range:** Land used primarily for the production of grazing animals. Includes native plant communities and those seeded to native or introduced species, or naturalized by introduced species that are ecologically managed using range management principles.
- **Associated Agricultural Lands:** Land associated with farms and ranches that are not purposefully managed for food, forage, or fiber and are typically associated with nearby production or conservation lands. This could include incidental areas, such as odd areas, ditches and watercourses, riparian areas, field edges, seasonal and permanent wetlands, and other similar areas.

### **Resource Concerns for the EQIP Fund Pool**

Only applications for agricultural operations that address at least one resource concern listed below will be considered for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool. The descriptions below are general NRCS natural resource definitions, applications should fit within, but do not need to exactly match, these descriptions.

- ❖ **SOIL EROSION** – Erosion removes topsoil, reduces levels of soil organic matter, and contributes to the breakdown of soil structure.
  - **Sheet and Rill Erosion:** Sheet and rill erosion is the detachment and transportation of soil particles caused by rainfall runoff/splash and/or irrigation events. Symptoms of soil erosion by water include: small rills and channels on the soil surface, soil deposited at the base of slopes, sediment in streams, lakes, and reservoirs, and pedestals of soil supporting pebbles and plant material.
  - **Classic Gullies:** Classic gullies are forms of erosion created by the concentrated flow of water. Classic gully erosion generally occurs in well-defined drainage ways and generally is not obliterated by tillage. Untreated classic gullies may enlarge progressively by head cutting and/or lateral widening.
- ❖ **WATER QUALITY DEGRADATION** – Water quality degradation impacts the beneficial use of the receiving waters.
  - **Excessive Sediment in Surface Water:** Off-site transport of sediment to surface water can impact water quality and aquatic habitat. Not only does sediment carry nutrients and pesticides that can negatively impact water quality, but the physical characteristics of sediment can clog stream channels, silt in reservoirs, cover fish spawning grounds, and reduce downstream water quality.
  - **Elevated Water Temperature:** Water temperature has important ecological consequences and potential negative impacts for human use. As water temperature rises, there is a corresponding decrease in the availability of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases important to aquatic life. Warm water also has the potential to increase the presence of dissolved toxic substances that may restrict the suitability of water for human use.

- ❖ **DEGRADED PLANT CONDITION** – Plant condition degradation can result in stress, disease, insect damage and result in changes to the structure and composition of plant communities.
  - **Inadequate Structure and Composition:** Plant communities, such as - wetland habitat, unique ecosystems or targeted plant communities, have insufficient diversity, density, distribution patterns, and three-dimensional structure necessary to achieve ecological functions and/or management objectives.

### Eligible NRCS Conservation Practices

All conservation practices planned for financial assistance must be included in the 'EQIP schedule of operations' and address a resource concern identified in this EQIP Fund Pool. NRCS conservation practices eligible for financial assistance through this EQIP Fund Pool are listed in the below table.

For more information about NRCS conservation practices visit the following website link for NRCS conservation practice standards:

[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11\\_001020](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/?cid=NRCSDEV11_001020)

**Table 1. Eligible Conservation Practices**

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
314	Brush Management	ac	10
315	Herbaceous Weed Control	ac	5
326	Clearing and Snagging	ft	5
327	Conservation Cover	ac	5
342	Critical Area Planting	ac	10
362	Diversion	ft	10
382	Fence	ft	20
384	Woody Residue Treatment	ac	10
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	ac	5
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	ac	15
393	Filter Strip	ac	10
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	ac	5
396	Aquatic Organism Passage	mi	5
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	no	15
430	Irrigation Pipeline	ft	20
441	Irrigation System, Microirrigation	ac	15
460	Land Clearing	ac	10
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	ft	15
472	Access Control	ac	10
484	Mulching	ac	1
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	ac	1
500	Obstruction Removal	ac	10
516	Livestock Pipeline	ft	20
528	Prescribed Grazing	ac	1

Practice Code	Conservation Practice Name	Practice Units	Lifespan (Years)
533	Pumping Plant	no	15
548	Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment	ac	1
550	Range Planting	ac	5
560	Access Road	ft	10
561	Heavy Use Protection	ac	10
570	Stormwater Runoff Control	no	15
572	Spoil Spreading	ac	1
578	Stream Crossing	no	10
580	Streambank and Shoreline Protection	ft	20
584	Channel Bed Stabilization	ft	10
587	Structure for Water Control	no	20
606	Subsurface Drain	ft	20
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment	ac	15
614	Watering Facility	no	20
620	Underground Outlet	ft	20
630	Vertical Drain	no	10
636	Water Harvesting Catchment	no	20
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin	no	10
649	Structures for Wildlife	no	5
654	Road/Trail/Landing Closure and Treatment	ft	10
655	Forest Trails and Landings	ft	5
666	Forest Stand Improvement	ac	10

### Submitting an EQIP Application

Interested applicants may apply for EQIP by completing the application, Form NRCS-CPA-1200, Conservation Program Application, and submitting the application to the NRCS field office in person, by phone, email, or fax in the county which you own land or have an agricultural operation.

**Table 2. NRCS Field Office Contact Information**

NRCS Office	Phone Number	NRCS Office	Phone Number
Alturas Service Center	(530) 233-4137	Modesto Service Center	(209) 491-9320
Auburn Service Center	(530) 885-6505	Napa Field Office	(707) 252-4189
Bakersfield Service Center	(530) 336-0967	Oroville Service Center	(530) 534-0112
Bishop Field Office	(760) 872-6111	Oxnard Field Office	(805) 984-2358
Blythe Field Office	(760) 922-3446	Petaluma Service Center	(707) 794-1242
Capitola LPO	(831) 475-1967	Placerville Field Office	(530) 295-5630
Colusa Service Center	(530) 458-2931	Quincy LPO	(530) 283-7511
Concord Service Center	(925) 672-4577	Red Bluff Service Center	(530) 527-3013
Del Norte LPO	(707) 487-7630	Redding Service Center	(530) 226-2560
El Centro Service Center	(760) 352-7886	Redlands Field Office	(909) 799-7407
Elk Grove Service Center	(916) 714-1104	Salinas Service Center	(831) 424-1036
Escondido Field Office	(760) 745-2061	San Jacinto LPO	(951) 654-7139
Eureka Service Center	(707) 442-6058	Santa Maria Service Center	(805) 928-9269
Fallbrook LPO	(760) 723-2529	Sonora LPO	(209) 984-0500
Fresno Service Center	(559) 276-7494	So. Lake Tahoe Field Office	(530) 543-1501
Grass Valley Field Office	(530) 272-3417	Stockton Service Center	(209) 472-7127
Half Moon Bay LPO	(650) 726-4660	Susanville Service Center	(530) 257-7272
Hanford Service Center	(559) 584-9209	Templeton Service Center	(805) 434-0396
Hollister Service Center	(831) 637-4360	Tulelake Basin Project Office	(530) 667-4247
Hoopla Local Partnership	(707) 486-7439	Ukiah Service Center	(707) 468-9223
Indio Service Center	(760) 347-3675	Victorville Service Center	(760) 843-6882
Jackson LPO	(209) 223-6535	Vacaville Service Center	(707) 448-0106
Lakeport LPO	(707) 263-4180	Visalia Service Center	(559) 734-8732
Lancaster Service Center	(661) 945-2604	Weaverville Service Center	(530) 623-3991
Livermore LPO	(925) 371-0154	Willows Service Center	(530) 934-4601
Madera Service Center	(559) 674-2108	Woodland Service Center	(530) 662-2037
Mariposa LPO	(209) 966-3431	Yreka Service Center	(530) 842-6123
McArthur LPO	(530) 336-5604	Yuba City Service Center	(530) 674-1461
Merced Service Center	(209) 722-4119		