

Sources of Technical & Financial Assistance

Federal Sources

U.S. Department of Agriculture-Farm Service Agency

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

The CRP offers a yearly rental payment to farmers and ranchers in exchange the removal of environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production. Once lands are removed from production, CRP participants plant grasses and other cover crops to control erosion, improve water quality and develop wildlife habitat.

U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

NRCS is a federal agency that works hand-in-hand with Texans to improve and protect their soil, water and other natural resources. For decades, private landowners have voluntarily worked with NRCS specialists to prevent erosion, improve water quality and promote sustainable agriculture. NRCS provides conservation planning and technical assistance to landowners, groups and units of government to develop and implement conservation plans that protect, conserve and enhance their natural resources. When providing assistance, NRCS focuses on the sound use and management of soil, water, air, plant and animal resources. NRCS ensures sustainability, allows for productivity and respects the customers' needs. Conservation planning can make improvements to livestock operations, crop production, soil quality, water quality, and pastureland, forestland, and wildlife habitats. NRCS also integrates ecological and economic considerations in order to address private and public concerns.⁹²

NRCS administers numerous Farm Bill Programs authorized by the U.S. Congress that provide financial assistance for many conservation activities:

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) administered by USDA Farm Service Agency

EQIP and other programs were reauthorized in the federal Agricultural Act of 2018 (Farm Bill) to provide a voluntary conservation program for farmers and ranchers that promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible national goals. People who are engaged in livestock or agricultural production on eligible land may participate in EQIP. EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to eligible participants for installation or implementation of structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land.

NRCS also provides incentive and payments to implement conservation practices. NRCS activities are carried out according to a plan of operations developed in conjunction with the producer that identifies the appropriate conservation practice(s) to address resource concerns. All practices are subject to NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions. The local SWCD approves the plan.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Section 319(h) Clean Water Act

Clean Water Act Section 319(h) funds are provided only to designated states to implement their approved NPS management programs. State NPS programs include a variety of components, including technical assistance, financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer, demonstration projects and regulatory programs. In Texas, both TSSWCB and TCEQ receive 319(h) funds to support NPS projects, with TSSWCB funds going to agricultural and silvicultural issues and TCEQ funds going to urban and other non-agricultural issues.

Targeted Watersheds Grant Program

The goal of this program is to encourage successful community-based approaches to protect and restore the nation's watersheds.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Through voluntary agreements, the Partners program provides expert technical assistance and cost-share incentives directly to private landowners to restore fish and wildlife habitats. There is no formal application process; a phone call or letter initiates the process.

State Sources

Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB)

Water Supply Enhancement Program (WSEP)

Administered through TSSWCB, this program is designed to increase available surface water and groundwater through the targeted control of brush species that are detrimental to water conservation. Through this voluntary program, landowners may contract with TSSWCB for cost-share assistance to implement brush control activities for water supply enhancement on eligible acres. A 10-year resource management plan is developed for each property enrolled in the WSEP, which describes the brush control activities to be implemented, follow-up treatment requirements, and supporting practices to be implemented, including livestock grazing management, wildlife habitat management, and erosion control measures (e.g., buffers, filter strips, reseeding).

Water Quality Management Plan Program (WQMP)

The TSSWCB administers the WQMP Program as a voluntary mechanism by which site-specific plans are developed and implemented on agricultural and silvicultural lands to prevent or

reduce Non-point Source pollution. Plans include appropriate treatment practices, production practices, management measures, technologies, or combinations thereof. Plans are developed in cooperation with local SWCDs, cover an entire operating unit, and allow financial incentives to augment participation. Funding from the WQMP program will be sought to support implementation of agricultural management measures in the watershed.

Texas Nonpoint Source Management Program – 319(h) Grant Program

Established under Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency provides funding through TSSWCB to abate agricultural NPS water pollution.

Texas Commission for Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

Texas Nonpoint Source Management Program – 319(h) Grant Program

Established under Section 319(h) of the Clean Water Act, the Environmental Protection Agency provides funding through TCEQ to abate urban NPS water pollution through OSSF repair and replacement and educational workshops.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)

Landowner Incentive Program

TPWD along with other partners provide support to private landowners and non-governmental agencies for conservation practices on private land that benefit the health of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Support is provided as a cost-sharing program. The funding series includes a statewide program as well as watershed programs. Currently, the 90 watershed series targets the James and Llano rivers watersheds with the goal of improving water quality, increasing water quantity, restoring riparian areas, removing invasive species, and reducing stream system fragmentation.

Technical Guidance Program

Through the TPWD Private Lands Program, landowners are offered this advisory program without charge to develop sound wildlife management programs consistent with the landowner's goals and objectives.

Texas Department of Agriculture

Agricultural Loan Guarantee Program

This program provides a loan guarantee to a lender on behalf of a creditworthy agriculture producer or agriculture-related business. The loan may be used for any agriculture-related operating expense, the purchase or lease of land or a fixed-asset acquisition or improvement, or for any enterprise based on agriculture as identified in the application.

County Hog Abatement Matching Program

Under the Feral Hog Abatement Grant Program, the County Hog Abatement Matching Program is focused on implementing a long-term statewide feral hog abatement strategy. The program is designed to encourage counties across the state to create partnerships with other counties, local governments, businesses, landowners and associations to reduce the feral hog population and the damage caused by these animals in Texas. Only Texas counties with at least one

partner may apply. Partners include other local governments, private or non-profit businesses, landowners, ranchers or entities that have an interest in feral hog abatement.

Texas Water Development Board (TWDB)

Agricultural Water Conservation Grants Program

This grant program offers state agencies and political subdivisions funds for technical assistance, demonstration, technology transfer, education and metering projects that conserve water. Grant topics must address current issues and topics in agricultural water conservation with the goal of implementing agricultural irrigation projects designated in the State Water Plan and demonstrate BMPs that conserve water or improve water use efficiency. Grants are available for up to \$600,000.

Clean Water State Revolving Fund

Authorized by the Clean Water Act, this loan program funds a variety of practices including wastewater treatment, nonpoint pollution control and watershed management. Examples of projects include upgrading WWTFs, collection systems, wastewater recycling and reuse improvements, stormwater pollution control, NPS pollution control, and eligible green project reserve components. Loans are offered to individual landowners, to business, and to non-profit organizations at interest rates lower than the market. This program also includes Federal (Tier III) and Disadvantaged Communities to provide even lower interest rates for those meeting the respective criteria.

Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program

This loan program, authorized by the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), provides low-interest loans for planning, design, and construction of water infrastructure to both public and private water systems. Examples of projects include water treatment facilities, distribution systems, upgrade/replacement of water infrastructure, address standards from the SDWA, consolidation of systems, purchasing additional capacity, source water protection projects and eligible green project reserve components.

Rural Water Assistance Fund Program

This program provides low-cost financing for water and wastewater projects by small rural utilities (serving a population of 10,000 or less, and counties in which no urban area has a population exceeding 50,000). Those eligible may also partner with a federal agency, state agency or another rural political subdivision to apply for funding. Financial assistance may include planning, design and construction for water and water quality enhancements. Examples of water-related projects include acquisition of groundwater and surface water rights, water projects included in the State or a Regional Water Plan, and improvements of wells, among other projects. Examples of water quality enhancement projects include NPS pollution abatement, among others.

Local and Private Sources

Dixon Water Foundation

The mission of The Dixon Water Foundation is education, outreach and research on water issues, with a particular focus on ecologically and financially sustainable land management that will enhance water retention and minimize erosion in watersheds. Grants are available for projects addressing the foundation's mission to nonprofit organizations.

Pedernales Electric Cooperative (PEC) Community Grant

Grants of up to \$1,000 are available to non-profit organizations within the PEC territory. Emphasis is placed on awards that support lifesaving, conservation and educational projects or equipment. Grants can be used for capital improvement projects, equipment needs, program implementation and other special projects.

Wells Fargo Environmental Solutions for Communities

In 2012, Wells Fargo and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation launched a five-year Environmental Solutions for Communities initiative to support projects that link economic development and community well-being to the stewardship and health of the environment. Funding from this program can be used to study BMPs related to urban-stormwater runoff.

Information taken from Upper Llano River Watershed Protection Plan (August 2016) with permission from the author.