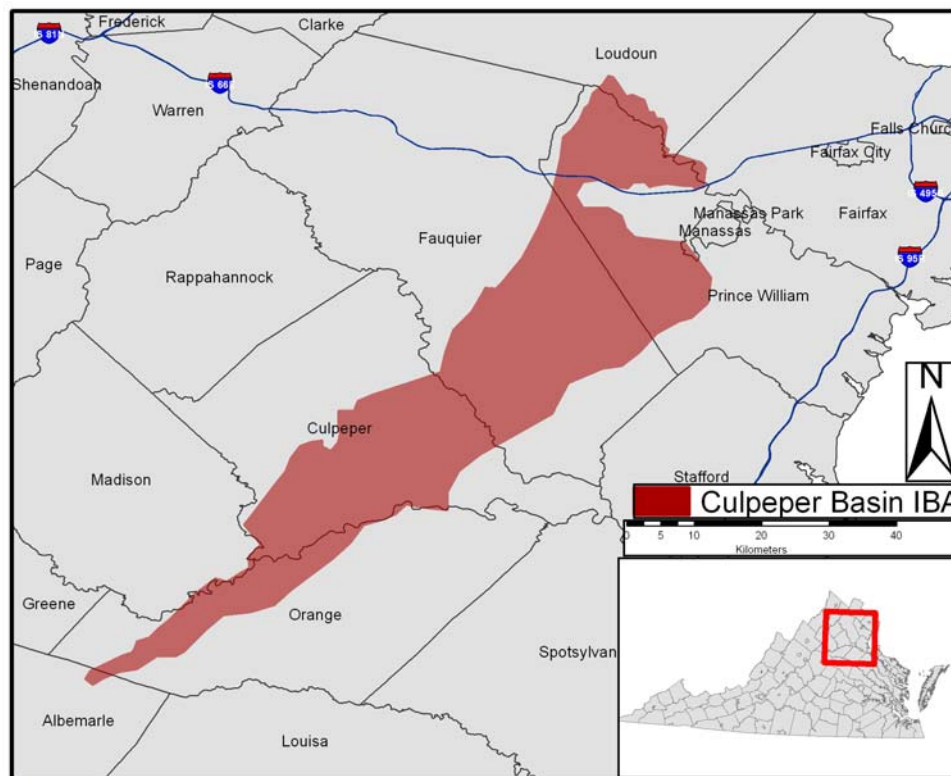


Culpeper Basin Important Bird Area Habitat Restoration Project State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)

Detailed Frequently Asked Questions

What is an Important Bird Area and where is the Culpeper Basin IBA located?

Important Bird Areas (IBA) are sites that provide essential habitat for one or more species of birds. IBAs include sites for breeding, wintering, and/or migrating birds. They may be a few acres or thousands of acres in size and are defined primarily by habitat boundaries. Consequently, IBAs may include public or private lands, or both, and they may be protected or unprotected. There are no regulatory restrictions on lands that fall within IBAs.



The Culpeper Basin IBA covers several counties, but the SAFE Program covers parts of Orange, Culpeper and Fauquier Counties. The hydrologic unit codes (HUC) that the basin covers are RA16, RA17, RA18, RA19, RA20, RA21, RA22, RA28, RA30, RA37, RA38, RA39, RA40, and RA42.

What is this project's mission?

The Culpeper Basin's IBA mission seeks to restore 1,000 acres of land to grass, shrub land and riparian habitat for sensitive bird species along the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers. The IBA will use native trees, shrubs and grasses to restore riparian buffers and uplands that will collectively create a corridor of diverse wildlife habitats. The mix of proposed habitats will provide nesting sites, food, and cover needs for a number of different birds and other wildlife species. In addition riparian restoration will improve water quality benefiting not only aquatic species, but also the communities within the watershed.

What is SAFE and how does it Work?

State Acres For wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) is a practice within the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), a voluntary program that encourages agricultural landowners to restore highly erodible land to vegetative cover. Through SAFE, eligible landowners will receive all the benefits of CRP, including annual rental payments and cost-share assistance for restoring land. SAFE participants will also receive additional incentive payments and cost share assistance that, along with the regular CRP benefits, can total more than 100% of the cost of restoration.

What are the benefits of enrolling in SAFE?

There are many benefits to enrolling in SAFE. Not only will you be helping to create wildlife habitat for numerous species of concern in Virginia, but you will also be improving the quality of your land for agriculture by reducing erosion, controlling invasive species and weeds, and creating habitat for native pollinators. SAFE is good for your pocketbook too. Participating landowners will receive significant financial compensation for restoring their land and removing it from production (See 'What are the Financial Incentives of SAFE?'). SAFE can also improve your land for hunting and increase water quality in your local area and beyond.

Who administers the SAFE Program?

The Farm Service Agency administers the Conservation Reserve Program and SAFE while technical support functions are provided by:

- USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Services (NCRCS);
- USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service;
- State forestry agencies;
- Local soil and water conservation districts;
- Private sector providers of technical assistance.

Am I eligible for SAFE?

To be eligible for SAFE, landowners must be within the Culpeper Basin IBA and meet all eligibility requirements for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Landowners must have owned or operated the land for at least 12 months prior to close of the CRP sign-up period, unless:

- The new owner acquired the land due to the previous owner's death;
- The ownership change occurred due to foreclosure where the owner exercised a timely right of redemption in accordance with state law; or

- The circumstances of the acquisition present adequate assurance to the Farm Service Agency that the new owner did not acquire the land for the purpose of placing it in CRP.

To be eligible for placement in CRP, land must be either:

- Cropland (including field margins) that is planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 4 of the previous 6 crop years from 1996 to 2001, and which is physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity; or
- Certain marginal pastureland that is suitable for use as a riparian buffer or for similar water quality purposes.

In addition to the eligible land requirements, cropland must meet one of the following criteria:

- Have a weighted average erosion index of 8 or higher;
- Be expiring CRP acreage; or
- Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area.

Will flash grazing be allowed in the SAFE program lands?

No, flash grazing is not allowed.

Is hunting and fishing allowed on SAFE enrolled land?

Yes, fishing and hunting are allowed on SAFE/CRP-enrolled land. As with other conservation practices, certain restrictions apply. Please contact your Farm Service Agency representative for more information.

What are the financial incentives of SAFE?

Producers enrolling in SAFE enter into contracts with USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The CCC bases rental rates on the average value of dryland cash rent or the cash rent equivalent for the past three years and adjusts rates to reflect the relative productivity of soils within each county. CCC calculates the maximum CRP rental rate in advance of enrollment. The individual soil rentals are available at the local FSA service center. While acceptance is not determined by a competitive offer process, producers may elect to receive an amount less than the maximum payment rate.

In addition to the payments described above, CCC will pay up to 50% of the eligible cost of establishing a permanent cover.

SAFE participants may receive the following benefits:

- An up-front, one-time CRP Signing Incentive Payment (CRP-SIP) of \$100 per acre which is made after the contract is approved.
- Rental Payments – The Farm Service Agency provides annual rental payments as compensation for taking land out of production. Rental rates are based on the relative productivity of the soils within each county and the average dry land cash rent or cash-rent equivalent.

- Maintenance Incentive Payments – CRP annual rental payments may include an additional amount up to \$4 per acre per year as incentive to perform certain maintenance obligations.
- Cost-share Assistance – SAFE participants will receive 90% cost share to restore their land – 50% offered through regular CRP incentives plus an additional 40% offered through the SAFE practice. The remaining 10% of costs can be covered through in-kind donations of labor or equipment.
- Other Incentives – A sign-up Incentive Payment (SIP) and an additional Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) are available.

Offers for CRP contracts are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). FSA collects data for each of the EBI factors based on the relative environmental benefits for the land offered. Each eligible offer is ranked in comparison to all other offers and selections made from that ranking. FSA uses the following EBI factors to assess the environmental benefits for the land offered:

- Wildlife habitat benefits resulting from covers on contract acreage;
- Water quality benefits from reduced erosion, runoff, and leaching;
- On-farm benefits from reduced erosion;
- Benefits that will likely endure beyond the contract period;
- Air quality benefits from reduced wind erosion; and
- Cost.

How do I Sign Up?

The USDA’s Farm Service Agency (FSA) will conduct sign-up for SAFE on a continuous, ongoing, basis. Landowners within the priority areas will be accepted until the cap of 1000 acres has been met. Although all landowners in the priority region are eligible to apply, priority will be given to those landowners with larger parcels and who have properties that adjoin the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers or their tributaries. For information on upcoming sign-ups, contact your local FSA office.

Where can I get more information about the Culpeper Basin IBA SAFE project?

Mary Elfner
 National Audubon
 Virginia Important Bird Area Program
 (804) 788-7660
melfner@audubon.org
www.audubon.org

Maggi MacQuilliam
 Piedmont Environmental Council
 Land Conservation
 (540) 347-2334 x29
mmacquilliam@pecva.org
www.pecva.org

How can I contact my local Farm Service Agency or Soil and Water Conservation District?

Fauquier County

John Marshall Soil & Water Conservation District

Conservation Specialists: Tom Turner, Larry Dunn, Melissa Allen & Brent Barriteau
(540) 347-3120 x3

Farm Service Agency – Service Center Office

Farm Loan Manager – Kimberly Depasquale, (540) 899-9492 x105

County Executive Director – Robert Williamson, (540) 347-4402

Culpeper & Orange Counties

Culpeper & Orange County Soil & Water Conservation District

Conservation Specialists: Richard Jacobs III, W. Spencer Yager, David Massie & Evan Blumenstein
(540) 825-8591

Farm Service Agency – Service Center Office

Farm Loan Manager – Kimberly Depasquale, (540) 899-9492 x105

County Executive Director – Cynthia Bowman, (540) 672-1639



Audubon IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS

