

**STATE GUIDELINES
FOR THE
RESTORING NATURAL ECOLOGY IN WETLANDS (ReNEW) PROGRAM**

**Allocation Period
Begins: April 1 – June 30, 2026**

**Oklahoma Conservation Commission
in cooperation with
Oklahoma's 84 Conservation Districts**

Approved by the Conservation Commission on 10/06/2025

I. PURPOSE

Wetlands are locations where water covers or saturates the soil for a portion of the growing season. The presence of this water creates a unique environment, which generates distinctive soil characteristics and supports biological communities that are adapted to those conditions. Oklahoma wetlands provide essential services to Oklahomans including water quality improvement, flood reduction, aquifer recharge, and recreational opportunities. Additionally, they create important habitats for a diverse assortment of animals and plants. Oklahoma has approximately 950,000 acres of wetlands. It is estimated that this represents only about 1/3 of the wetlands that were present in the late 1700s. Many of the remaining wetlands across the state fail to function to their full potential because they have been impacted by altered hydrology and invasive species encroachment. The mission of the Wetlands Program is to improve the quantity, quality and biological diversity of wetlands in Oklahoma.

The Conservation Commission (Commission) hereby establishes the Restoring Natural Ecology in Wetlands (ReNEW) Program. The Restoring Natural Ecology in Wetlands Program will offer technical and financial support for a variety of wetland restoration practices that further the goals of OCC's Water Quality Division. Through this program, the Commission will accomplish the following objectives:

1. Provide technical assistance to landowners to support implementation of wetland restoration practices designed to improve natural conditions and benefit water quality,
2. Make funds available to qualifying landowners that will assist them in implementing the planned restoration practices, and
3. Increase the number of functional wetland acres in Oklahoma.

The more prominent concerns that will be addressed by this program include:

- water quality degradation due to loss of natural wetland filters,
- decreased aquifer recharge,
- loss of floodwater storage that has exacerbated the impact of flood events on human life and property, and
- loss of wetland habitat caused by modified hydrology and invasive species expansion.

The Commission herein establishes the list and description of the ReNEW Program's policies. Any exceptions from these established guidelines shall require approval by the Commission.

ALLOCATION OF FUNDS

The Commission allocates \$115,000 in cost share funds to the ReNEW Program. Each approved applicant may be eligible for up to \$35,000 to implement wetland restoration practices. Of the approved projects, at least one project will be a playa restoration project, and another one project will be in the Central Flyway.

All monies will be obligated by the end of the fiscal year. Landowners must demonstrate implementation progress within the first year or funding will move to next highest applicant.

II. POLICIES

Program Period

The ReNEW Program will begin on January 1, 2026, and continue until funding is exhausted. Current plans are to request funding annually for the ReNEW Program as an integral component of the base Wetlands Program budget. The ReNEW Program, therefore, will maintain indefinite program activity depending upon recurring funding.

Allocation Period

The allocation period is defined as the period the Commission Wetlands Team will obligate program funding. The initial allocation period will be April 1, 2026 – June 30, 2026. Depending upon program engagement from this point, subsequent allocation periods will be opened until remaining funds are obligated.

Eligibility Requirements

The ReNEW Program is for individuals interested in restoring wetlands on their property.

Projects that require pumping of surface water or groundwater to sustain wetland hydrology will not be considered eligible for funding.

Applicants must be a district cooperator with an approved cooperator agreement. Fields or property designated for implementation cannot be enrolled in other programs (e.g., EQIP) accomplishing the same practice implementation.

Applicants must agree to maintain the conservation practice(s) for the expected life specified by the practice standard and/or the recommendation of the Commission Wetlands Team consultant.

Applicants must agree to wetland monitoring conducted by the Commission Wetlands Team over the course of their program involvement.

Conservation Commissioners, Conservation Commission staff, Conservation District employees or the spouses of any of these people shall not be eligible to participate in the ReNEW Program.

Conservation district directors are eligible to participate in the Program under the following conditions:

1. Only two conservation district board members in any one conservation district can apply and participate.
2. Individual conservation district board members applying cannot discuss any element of the ReNEW Program including but not limited to practices, rates,

- average costs, selection criteria, application approval/disapprovals, cost share payments, and extensions.
3. Individual conservation district board members applying for the ReNEW Program must abstain from voting/approving any elements of the program.
 4. Individual conservation district board members cannot use their position as a board member to improve or elevate their individual chances of becoming a successful applicant.

Technical Representative(s)

The Commission Wetlands Team will serve as the ReNEW Program technical representatives. Their responsibilities include:

- conducting the application review and selection process,
- conducting field visits as necessary to determine landowner/operator needs,
- developing implementation plans with design and schedule of practice installations,
- certifying practice implementation,
- preparing necessary payment documentation for conservation districts to process a claim for reimbursement, and
- confirming landowner/operator receives payment(s).

Eligible ReNEW Program Restoration Practices

All conservation practices listed below are eligible to applicants based on the needs identified during Commission Wetlands Team field visit. Restoration practices reflect those as referenced from NRCS national conservation practice standards and shall be implemented according to these standards and specifications unless otherwise authorized by a Commission Wetlands Team member. If it becomes necessary to add practices, the Commission will reference the same NRCS national standards and specs document and include and implement them accordingly.

Priority Practices:

657 – Wetland Restoration

Definition: The return of a wetland and its functions to a close approximation of its original condition as it existed prior to disturbance on a former or degraded wetland site.

Purpose: To restore wetland function, value, habitat, diversity, and capacity to a close approximation of the pre-disturbance conditions by restoring:

- Conditions conducive to hydric soil maintenance.
- Wetland hydrology (dominant water source, hydroperiod, and hydrodynamics).
- Native hydrophytic vegetation (including the removal of undesired species, and/or seeding or planting of desired species).

658 – Wetland Creation

Definition: A wetland created on a site location that was historically not a wetland.

Purpose:

- Create wetland functional capacity for floodwater storage
- Create wetland functional capacity to provide fish and wildlife habitat
- Create a native plant community adapted to growth and regeneration in anaerobic conditions

659 – Wetland Enhancement

Definition: The augmentation of wetland functions beyond the original natural conditions on a former, degraded, or naturally functioning wetland site; sometimes at the expense of other functions.

Purpose: This practice is used to accomplish the following purposes:

- To enhance hydric soil functions (changing soil hydrodynamic and/or biogeochemical properties).
- To enhance wetland hydrology (dominant water source, hydroperiod, and hydrodynamics).
- To enhance vegetation (including the removal of undesired species, and/or seeding or planting of desired species).
- To enhance plant and animal habitats.

Ancillary practices (used only to facilitate priority practices above):

314 – Brush Management

Definition: The management or removal of woody (nonherbaceous or succulent) plants including those that are invasive and noxious.

Purpose:

- Create the desired plant community consistent with the ecological site or a desired state within the site description
- Restore or release desired vegetative cover to protect soils, control erosion, reduce sediment, improve water quality, or enhance hydrology
- Maintain, modify, or enhance fish and wildlife habitat
- Improve forage accessibility, quality, and quantity for livestock and wildlife
- Manage fuel loads to achieve desired conditions
- Pervasive plant species are controlled to a desired level of treatment that will ultimately contribute to creation or maintenance of an ecological site description “steady state” addressing the need for forage, wildlife habitat, and/or water quality

315 – Herbaceous Weed Treatment

Definition: The removal or control of herbaceous weeds including invasive, noxious, prohibited, or undesirable plants.

Purpose:

- Enhance accessibility, quantity, and/or quality of forage and/or browse
- Restore or release native or desired plant communities for wildlife habitat

- Protect soils and control erosion
- Reduce fine fuel loads and wildfire hazard
- Control pervasive plant species to a desired level of treatment

327 – Conservation Cover

Definition: Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover.

- Purpose:
- Reduce sheet, rill, and wind erosion.
 - Reduce sediment transport to surface water.
 - Reduce ground and surface water quality degradation by nutrients.
 - Reduce emissions of particulate matter.
 - Provide wildlife, pollinator, and other beneficial organism habitat.
 - Improve soil health by maintaining or increasing soil organic matter quantity.
 - Improve soil health by increasing soil aggregate stability.
 - Improve soil health by enhancing habitat for soil organisms.
 - Improve soil health by reducing compaction.

338 – Prescribed Burning

Definition: Planned fire applied to a predetermined area.

- Purpose:
- Manage undesirable vegetation to improve plant community structure and composition
 - Manage pests, pathogens, and diseases to reduce plant pressure
 - Reduce wildfire hazards from biomass accumulation
 - Improve terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates
 - Improve plant and seed production, quantity, and/or quality
 - Facilitate distribution of grazing and browsing animals to improve forage-animal balance
 - Improve and maintain habitat for soil organisms and enhance soil health

356 – Dike and Levee

Definition: A barrier used to retain water on the landscape using a wetland dike; or, a barrier used to exclude water from the landscape and protect property and infrastructure from flooding using a flood control levee.

- Purpose:
- Manage water retained on the landscape using a dike
 - Reduce flood risk by excluding water from a landscape using a levee

378 – Pond

Definition: A water impoundment made by constructing an embankment, excavating a dugout, or a combination of both.

- Purpose:
- Store water for:
 - Livestock
 - Fish and wildlife

- Recreational use
- Fire control
- Erosion control
- Flow detention
- Improve water quality

382 - Fence

Definition: A constructed barrier to animals or people.

Purpose: Provide a means to control the movement of animals, people, and vehicles to accomplish specific conservation objectives.

390 – Riparian Herbaceous Cover

Definition: Grasses, sedges, rushes, ferns, legumes, and forbs tolerant of intermittent flooding or saturated soils, established or managed as the dominant vegetation in the transitional zone between upland and aquatic habitats.

Purpose:

- Provide or improve food and cover for fish, wildlife and livestock
- Improve and maintain water quality
- Establish and maintain habitat corridors
- Increase water storage on floodplains
- Reduce erosion and improve stability to stream banks and shorelines
- Increase net carbon storage in the biomass and soil
- Enhance pollen, nectar, and nesting habitat for pollinators
- Restore, improve or maintain the desired plant communities
- Dissipate stream energy and trap sediment
- Enhance stream bank protection as part of stream bank soil bioengineering practices

391 – Riparian Forest Buffer

Definition: An area predominantly covered by trees and/or shrubs located adjacent to and up-gradient from a watercourse or water body.

Purpose:

- Reduce transport of sediment to surface water, and reduce transport of pathogens, chemicals, pesticides, and nutrients to surface and ground
- Improve the quantity and quality of terrestrial and aquatic habitat for wildlife, invertebrate species, fish, and other organisms
- Maintain or increase total carbon stored in soils and/or perennial biomass to reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gasses
- Lower elevated stream water temperatures
- Restore diversity, structure, and composition of riparian plant communities

550 – Range Planting

Definition: The seeding and establishment of herbaceous and woody species for the improvement of vegetation composition and productivity of the plant community to meet management goals.

- Purpose:
- Restore a plant community to a state similar to the ecological site description reference state for the site or another desired plant community
 - Provide or improve forages for livestock
 - Provide or improve forage, browse, or cover for wildlife
 - Reduce erosion by wind and water
 - Improve water quality and quantity
 - Restore hydrologic function
 - Increase and/or stabilize carbon balance and sequestration

587 – Structure for Water Control

Definition: A structure in a water management system that conveys water, controls the direction or rate of flow, maintains a desired water surface elevation, or measures water.

- Purpose:
- Control the stage, discharge, distribution, delivery, or direction of water flow

612 – Tree/Shrub Establishment

Definition: Establishing woody plants by planting, direct seeding, or through natural regeneration.

- Purpose:
- Maintain or improve desirable plant diversity, productivity, and health by establishing woody plants.
 - Improve water quality by reducing excess nutrients and other pollutants in runoff and ground water.
 - Restore or maintain native plant communities.
 - Control erosion.
 - Create or improve habitat for target wildlife species, beneficial organisms, or pollinator species compatible with ecological characteristics of the site.
 - Sequester and store carbon.
 - Conserve energy
 - Provide livestock shelter

644 – Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management

Definition: Retaining, developing or managing wetland habitat for wetland wildlife

- Purpose: To maintain, develop, or improve wetland habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, fur-bearers, or other wetland dependent or associated flora and fauna

Average Cost

The ReNEW Program will use a standard average cost (unit cost) for conservation practices based on Oklahoma NRCS EQIP payment rates. These average costs will be reviewed and updated by the Commission Wetlands Team as necessary based on NRCS cost updates and/or best professional judgement to maintain or improve incentive for adoption.

Maximum Program Payment

The Commission sets the maximum program payment at \$35,000 per participant. OCC will pay a maximum of 80% of the project cost up to the maximum program payment.

Application Process

The Commission and conservation districts will advertise the ReNEW Program and accept applications throughout the open allocation period. Interested individuals should apply at their local conservation district. Each applicant is limited to one application and must be a district cooperator. Conservation districts must submit all applications received in their offices, whether the district is participating in the program or not, to the Commission Wetlands Team for review and approval.

Review and Approval Process

The Commission Wetlands Team will review and rank applications using a preset ranking tool. Applicants with top scores will be chosen for participation. Approved applicants and their conservation district will be notified no later than 45 days from the close of the allocation period. Commission Wetlands Team members will schedule an initial consultation with each approved participant to develop a restoration plan.

Completion Dates

Approved applicants will be required to demonstrate implementation progress within six (6) months from signing a restoration plan. Uncontrollable weather delays will be considered, and extensions may be granted. Any weather extension will be determined by the Commission Wetlands Team. Participants and their assigned Commission Wetlands Team member will mutually decide on a schedule of practice implementation. If implementation does not begin and proceed according to the agreed upon schedule, pending approved weather delays, funds can be pulled from an applicant and moved to another project. The construction deadline for each project will be January 31, 2027.

Payment Process

Districts of program participants will be asked to prepare an OSF3 for reimbursement once a Commission Wetlands Team member has verified the practice(s) was(were) implemented in accordance with the plan through onsite visit(s). A signed Certification of Completion and Acceptance documenting such will be submitted to the district to initiate the claim assembly.

ReNEW Program reimbursements will be made to the conservation district by EFT. The conservation district will issue a district check to the applicant for the approved payment amount.

Conservation districts must provide an IRS Form 1099-MISC to any applicant receiving \$600 or more in payment(s) from the district during a calendar year. In accordance with IRS and Oklahoma Tax Commission regulations, conservation districts must file an IRS 1099-MISC form with the Internal Revenue Service and Oklahoma Tax Commission. Neither the conservation district nor the Commission provides tax advice; the applicant

may wish to consult with an independent tax advisor regarding any potential tax consequences.

Participants are only eligible for reimbursement for practices implemented according to their restoration plans as verified and signed off on by an OCC Wetlands Team member. Those participants who fail to complete the practices as planned or cancel their agreement will forfeit remaining potential for reimbursement but will not have to pay back monies received for practices already implemented and for which reimbursement has been received.

III. ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES

District Reporting and Accounting

1. Conservation Districts will work cooperatively with the Commission Wetlands Team to prepare ReNEW Program claims including back-up documentation.
2. Conservation districts will be responsible for submitting the claim to the Commission for payment.
3. Conservation districts will be responsible for making payments to participants and issuing 1099s.

Commission Reporting and Accounting

The Commission Wetlands Team shall conduct the following reporting and accounting procedures:

1. Receive and review ReNEW Program claims for payment.
2. Maintain the Wetlands Database to track allocation and expenditures.