

Guide to OCC's Restoring Natural Ecology in Wetlands (ReNEW) Program

Who should apply?

Landowners interested in creating or restoring a wetland on their property should apply.

Successful applicants must be willing to contribute some labor or financial capital towards the completion of the project and be committed to and interested in improving the wetland to increase environmental benefits.

Which districts are eligible?

This is a statewide program, and all conservation districts are eligible. Ranking criteria prioritizes playa projects, as well as projects located in Unified Watershed Assessment (UWA) Priority Watersheds and the Whooping Crane migration corridor.

Can district directors apply?

Yes, up to 2 directors from each district can apply, depending on district approval.

Who isn't eligible?

Oklahoma Conservation Commission commissioners, employees, conservation district employees and/or the spouse of any of these people mentioned are not eligible for financial assistance.

OCC cannot provide financial assistance to wetland projects where the wetland's hydrology is or would be primarily driven by pumping water.

How long is the program term?

Monies will be obligated to selected applicants by the end of Fiscal Year. The aim is for projects to be completed within one year from signing of the restoration plan. Landowners must demonstrate implementation progress within the first year or funding will move to next highest applicant.

How much financial assistance is available?

OCC will pay 80% of the total project cost or up to \$35,000 per landowner. Landowners willing to pay a higher percentage of the total cost will rank higher.

How does the program work?

1. District boards will formally consider participation in the program. Those districts that choose to participate will:
 - a. Indicate participation by board representative signature and date on the District Declaration of Participation form. Please email form to Maggie Woods.
 - b. Advertise the program and take applications from January 1 to March 1, 2026.
 - i. OCC Wetlands Team will provide advertising materials.
 - c. Forward applications to OCC Wetlands Team via email throughout allocation period to Maggie Woods.
2. Landowner will complete and submit an application through their local district from January 1 to March 1, 2026.
3. Based on the application, the OCC Wetlands Team will run initial scoring criteria to select eligible applications.
4. Each eligible applicant will be contacted by a member of the OCC Wetlands Team to conduct a phone interview and/or site visit.
5. The OCC Wetlands Team will rank and select highest scoring applicants using secondary scoring criteria.
6. Landowners and their districts will be informed of selection outcomes by April 1, 2026.
7. Accepted landowners will work with an OCC Wetlands Team member to create a restoration plan that reaches landowner's goals and improves wetland quality. District staff will be invited to participate in this process.
8. Within one year of official plan signing, landowner will implement practices outlined in restoration plan.
9. Wetlands team member will certify that practices are complete and submit to the District a signed Certificate of Completion & Acceptance along with relevant receipts.
10. Districts will review and endorse the certificate, compile with receipts, and submit a reimbursement claim to the Commission, attention Sarah Gilmer.

How are applicants chosen?

Applications go through a two-part scoring process. In the initial scoring, projects are screened for eligibility. In the secondary scoring, projects are ranked based on functional uplift (environmental benefits) and feasibility. Projects that score high but are not feasible within this program may be retained and considered for alternative assistance.

What are District/Landowner/OCC responsibilities?

District Responsibilities

- Indicate participation in program
- Advertise the program
- Receive and forward applications
- Invoice OCC and reimburse landowner

Landowner Responsibilities

- Work with OCC Wetlands team member to create restoration plan
- Install practices and hire contractors as needed
- Communicate regularly with OCC Wetlands team member and local district

OCC Wetlands Team Responsibilities

- Provide advertising materials for districts
- Review and select applicants
- Work with Landowner to create restoration plan
- Provide technical assistance as needed
- Certify practice completion
- Deliver pay request to District

What will the program payments cover?

Program participants may receive financial assistance for Wetland Restoration, Wetland Enhancement, and Wetland Creation, as defined by NRCS. These activities may be accomplished using a variety of ancillary practices including invasive species removal and buffer creation through range planting. Landowners will work with their assigned OCC Wetlands Team member to develop a restoration plan that outlines supported practices.

Who should I contact with questions?

Maggie Woods (405-431-0958; maggie.woods@conservation.ok.gov)

Sarah Gilmer (sarah.gilmer@conservation.ok.gov)