

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

**Allocation Period
Begins: August 17, 2026 – June 30, 2027**

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

Approved by the Conservation Commission on 08/03/2026

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) renews for Fiscal Year 2027 the Restoring Natural Ecology in Wetlands (ReNEW) Program. The Restoring Natural Ecology in Wetlands Program offers 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 \$80,000 in cost share funds to the ReNEW Program. Additional funds from private partners may be added to the ReNEW Program to fund additional projects. Each approved applicant may be eligible for up to 80% cost share 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, if eligible applications are received.

All monies will be obligated by the end of the fiscal year. Landowners must demonstrate implementation progress within 6 months of agreement signing or funding will move to next highest applicant.

II. POLICIES

Program Period

The ReNEW Program will begin on August 17, 2026, and continue until funding is exhausted. The OCC Wetlands Team receives 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 August 17, 2026, to June 30, 2027. 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, WRE) accomplishing the same practice implementation.

Applicants must agree to maintain the approved conservation practice(s) for the duration of their ownership or control of the property. For wetland projects, this includes maintaining the wetland in accordance with the applicable conservation practice standard and any management recommendations provided by the Commission's Wetlands Team. Successful wetland management may require ongoing activities, including active water level management, to ensure the long-term success of the project.

If the applicant is a lessee or is not the owner on the deed, the application must include a Landowner Consent Form signed by the landowner. The lessee shall be responsible for maintaining the wetland conservation practice for the duration of the lease or while the lessee retains control of the property. If the lease terminates, expires, is assigned, or the lessee otherwise ceases to control the property, the landowner shall assume responsibility for maintaining the wetland conservation practice, unless the Commission approves another eligible applicant to assume those obligations. By signing the Landowner Consent

Form, the landowner acknowledges and accepts this continuing maintenance responsibility.

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.

342 – Critical Area Planting

Definition: Establishing permanent vegetation on sites that have, or are expected to have, high erosion rates, and on sites that have physical, chemical, or biological conditions that prevent the establishment of vegetation with normal seeding/planting methods.

- Purpose:
- Stabilize areas with existing or expected high rates of soil erosion by wind or water
 - Stabilize stream and channel banks, pond and other shorelines, earthen features of structural conservation practices

- Stabilize areas such as sand dunes and riparian areas

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

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.

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

Average Cost

The ReNEW Program will use a standard average cost (unit cost) for conservation practices based on Oklahoma NRCS fair market value. 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

There is no maximum payment for this program. Wetland restoration costs vary widely by project type. Cost will factor into the ranking criteria, and the Commission will prioritize projects that cost less than \$50,000 total, so more projects may be funded. Some projects may exceed \$50,000 if they have large conservation impacts. OCC will pay a maximum of 80% of the total project cost.

Application Process

Interested individuals may apply using the General Wetlands Programs Application found on the Wetlands Program Website or at their local conservation district. The application is available year-round, but applications must be submitted prior to September 30, 2026, to be eligible for the FY2027 ReNEW Program. The Commission and conservation districts will advertise the ReNEW Program and review applications throughout the open allocation period. Each applicant is limited to one application and must be a district cooperator at the time of agreement signing. 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. Applicants and their conservation district will be notified of their status 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 December 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.