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## **Influence of Financial Incentive Programs in Sustaining Wildlife Values**

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Conservation incentive programs have substantial impacts on the nation's forests and wildlife habitat. There are eight major conservation incentive programs. The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) provides forest landowner assistance by focusing on resource management plans embodying multi-resource stewardship principles. The Forest Land Enhancement Program (FLEP) is the primary vehicle for cost-sharing. The Crop Reserve Program (CRP) provides for conserving covers on eligible farmland. The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) protects environmentally important private forestlands via conservation easements. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) promotes agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals. The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) provides grants to protect and restore habitat on private lands to benefit federally listed, proposed, candidate, or other at-risk species. The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) provides for development and improvement of upland and wetland wildlife and fish habitat. Finally, the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) offers landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands.

The 1990 Farm Bill showed that conservation incentive programs such as these were expected to address a broad spectrum of multiple-use natural resource activities. The FSP became the focal point of federal forestry assistance and its nine approved practices included wildlife and fisheries habitat enhancement. The 2002 Farm Bill made these incentive programs even more conducive to non-timber values. This findings abstract estimates the effectiveness of various conservation incentive programs in achieving wildlife sustainability and objectives.

Data were obtained from a survey in 2005 of the top level conservation incentive forester at each state forestry commission. The survey was conducted by mail with a telephone survey for the last few respondents. Data are from all 50 states, so the response rate is 100%. Survey questions focused on how each of the major federal incentive programs

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contributed to forest and wildlife sustainability. Responses for most survey questions were measured on four-point scales (1 = lowest, 4 = best). Data were analyzed both at an aggregate level and for regional differences (North, South, Midwest, and West).

In response to a question about what programs were perceived to have the highest landowner awareness, foresters, on average, rated FSP, FLEP, and CRP as highest in overall awareness (Table 1). WHIP, EQIP, and FLP received the second highest ratings, whereas WRP and LIP had the lowest average awareness. Foresters were also asked about overall appeal of each incentive program. On average, programs with the highest overall appeal were FLEP, FSP, FLP, and WHIP (Table 1). CRP, EQIP, WRP, and LIP had the lowest average appeal. FSP and FLEP are foundation programs so it is not surprising that they rated high in appeal and awareness. FLEP does include wildlife habitat cost-sharing and WHIP rated just below the foundation programs. Taken together, this suggests that wildlife values rated fairly high in appeal and awareness for these incentive programs.

In response to a question about what programs were perceived to be most effective in sustaining wildlife values, WHIP and FLP rated highest (Table 1). WHIP would be expected to rate high and FLP protects critical land. FSP and FLEP are foundation programs and emphasize wildlife, which may explain why they were also highly rated.

FSP, FLEP, and LIP rated highest in average perceived effectiveness for assisting landowners to achieve wildlife objectives (Table 1). WHIP and FLP were also rated highly. Because both FSP and FLEP have a strong multiple resource orientation and emphasize wildlife objectives, it is not surprising that they were rated highly. On average, WHIP and the other two land protection programs were both highly rated.

ANOVA ( $F$ ) and Eta ( $\eta$ ) values (Table 1) provide an indication of the degree to which respondents' perceptions of effectiveness attributes differed among the various programs. Mean differences among programs were statistically significant in all cases ( $p \leq .01$ ) and effect sizes ranged from  $\eta = .10$  to  $.44$  suggesting minimal to typical differences. Regional differences in response patterns were insignificant and minimal.

**Table 1**  
Conservation incentive foresters' beliefs regarding incentive programs

	Conservation incentive program <sup>1,2</sup>								$F$	$\eta$
	FSP	FLEP	CRP	FLP	EQIP	LIP	WHIP	WRP		
Landowner awareness	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.0	2.2	1.4	2.2	1.8	3.77**	.10**
Overall appeal	3.2	3.4	2.6	2.9	2.3	1.6	2.7	2.2	8.53**	.44**
Effectiveness in sustaining wildlife	3.5	3.5	3.2	3.6	2.8	3.4	3.6	3.2	4.00**	.10**
Assisting landowners achieve wildlife objectives	3.6	3.6	3.2	3.4	2.6	3.6	3.5	3.2	6.70**	.40**

<sup>1</sup>FSP: Forest Stewardship Program, FLEP: Forest Land Enhancement Program, CRP: Crop Reserve Program, FLP: Forest Legacy Program, EQIP: Environmental Quality Incentives Program, LIP: Landowner Incentive Program, WHIP: Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, WRP: Wetlands Reserve Program.

<sup>2</sup>Cell entries are means on a 4-point scale from 1 = Lowest to 4 = Best.

\*\*  $p \leq .01$ .

The combination of conservation incentive programs is well-regarded by forestry officials in terms of wildlife sustainability and objectives. Wildlife incentives seem to be rated in terms of the overall FSP, a multiple resource and integrated incentive system. This suggests a complete reversal from earlier timber production-oriented programs. Conservation incentive programs now have a major impact on the nation's wildlife habitat.

