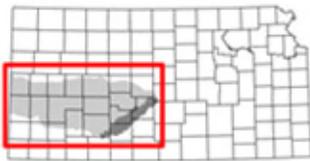


# UPPER ARKANSAS RIVER CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE REPORT

BY THE  
**STATE OF KANSAS**  
**October 1, 2019 – September 30, 2020**

## Kansas CREP: Proposed Expansion Area



- Proposed Expansion Area (245k Ac)**
- Rattlesnake Creek Proposed Expansion Area
  - Rattlesnake Creek Basin
- Current Approved Project Area (1.57 mil Ac)**
- Upper Arkansas River CREP Area
  - Upper Arkansas River Basin



0 10 20 40 Miles



Kansas Department of Agriculture  
Division of Water Resources  
July 2, 2020

2020 activities included a great deal of emphasis on incorporating the Rattlesnake Creek expansion area into the UAR CREP



## Executive Summary

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in Kansas is a federal and state partnership created for enhancing water conservation efforts along the Upper Arkansas River (UAR) corridor from Hamilton County to Rice County. **The UAR CREP has been officially approved and operating for 13 years;** this annual report provides a synopsis of the implementation activities and progress to date.

CREP is an “enhanced” version of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in which the Farm Service Agency (FSA) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the State of Kansas have mutually agreed to address specialized natural resource concerns. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is USDA’s provider of field technical services to producers who are implementing CREP contracts. The Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) Division of Conservation (DOC) is the primary coordinator of the program in concert with numerous other state, local and private partners including KDA’s Division of Water Resources; Kansas Water Office, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism; Kansas Department of Health and Environment; Kansas Geological Survey; Kansas State University; Groundwater Management District Nos. 3 and 5; Ducks Unlimited; Pheasants Forever; and the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams.

The UAR CREP is a voluntary, incentive-based program allowing producers to enroll eligible irrigated acres in targeted areas for 14–15 year contracts with FSA, permanently retire the associated state water rights on the enrolled acres, and establish an approved land cover (typically a native grass) on the same acreage. The producer receives an annual rental payment, and additional cost share opportunities for specific conservation practices from FSA, plus an upfront incentive payment from DOC.

Groundwater is the dominant source of water for all uses in the basin, and aquifer declines are a serious concern. **Therefore, water conservation is the main management objective in the UAR CREP.** The program also provides other resource benefits including soil conservation, water quality protection, wildlife habitat enhancement, and energy savings. The majority of irrigated acres enrolled have been on highly erodible, sandhills soils that are unsuitable for dryland farming.

**One of the most significant merits of the program to date has been establishing cover on these highly erodible lands.** The extremely fragile, windblown soils of the sandhills will be very difficult to re-vegetate after irrigation is no longer possible and crop production ceases due to groundwater declines. The CREP program has provided these producers a viable option, incentive and financial opportunity for starting prairie grass stands and other conservation covers while limited irrigation water is still available.

As of Sept. 30, 2020, a total of 136 state CREP contracts on 23,146 acres have been approved by the State of Kansas. **These contracts have resulted in the permanent retirement of 47,500 acre-feet of annual water appropriation on 166 water rights from 209 wells.** The contracts represent a total of \$1,644,513 in one-time state sign-up payments to producers over the past 13 years.

The State of Kansas has again met its financial commitment to provide at least 20% of the federal costs of the program through a combination of direct payments, technical assistance and in-kind contributions with at least 10% coming from direct cash match as approved in the USDA Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Since 2007, a total of \$14,540,674 of direct and indirect expenditures and in-kind costs from state, local and private partners have been made in support of the project to match an estimated total of \$47,514,801 in federal program costs.

**Annual Progress:** In contrast to the FY2018 total of 4,141 new acres entered into the program, FY2019 and FY2020 were unusually slow ones for enrollment with only 355 new acres being added. And although actual landowner offers were subdued, many inquiries from landowners about water right eligibilities and potential payment scenarios continued to be received. The project is still evolving and interest in expansion to address new water conservation areas is still high. **A great deal of effort has been concentrated on incorporating the Rattlesnake Creek sub-basin into the CREP project.** With the help of K-State, Kansas officials are working to appeal the current irrigated rental rates and re-establish attractive financial incentives for producers. **With only 5,804 acres left to fill the available project allowance of 28,950 acres, the project is now 80% complete.**