

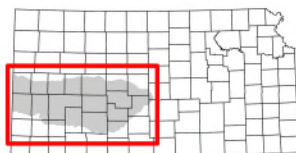
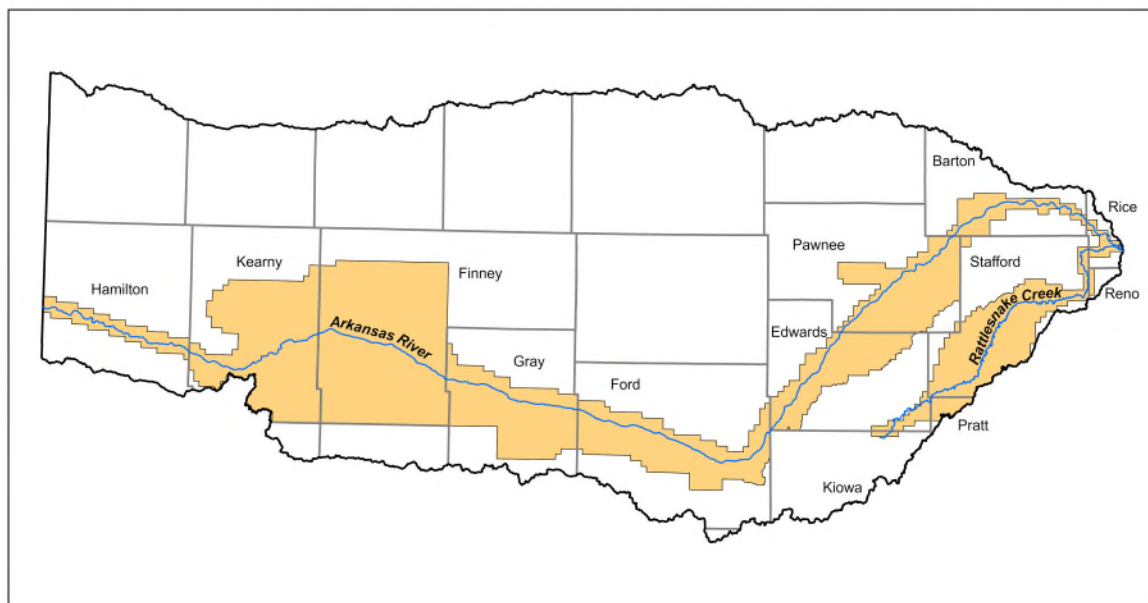
UPPER ARKANSAS RIVER CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE REPORT

BY THE

STATE OF KANSAS

October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

Kansas Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)



KS CREP Project Area
KS CREP Project Area (1.82 mil Ac)
Upper Arkansas River Basin



0 12.5 25 50 Miles



Kansas Department of Agriculture
Division of Water Resources
March 19, 2021

2021 highlights include formal USDA approval for adding the Rattlesnake Creek expansion area.



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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 14 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 and Parks; Kansas Department of Health and Environment; Kansas Geological Survey; Kansas State University; Groundwater Management District Nos. 3 and 5; Ducks Unlimited; Pheasants Forever; and 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 to 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, 2021, a total of 138 state CREP contracts on 23,430 acres have been approved by the State of Kansas. **These contracts have resulted in the permanent retirement of 47,643 acre-feet of annual water appropriation on 169 water rights from 212 wells.** The contracts represent a total of \$1,669,373 in one-time state sign-up payments to producers over the past 14 years.

The State of Kansas has again met its financial commitment to provide at least 20% of the program costs 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 \$16,447,731 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 \$50,780,871 in federal program costs.

Annual Progress: Although 284 new acres were added in Pawnee County, 2021 was again another slow year for enrollments. However, significant progress was made on developing programmatic changes resulting in enhanced potential for 2023. USDA granted formal approval to expand the eligible project zone with the addition of the Rattlesnake Creek area and increased the allowable project cap to 40,000 acres. A new conservation practice, “CP-43 Prairie Strips”, which can incorporate dryland farming in between approved conservation covers on certain soil types, was also approved. As a result of changes in the 2018 Farm Bill, the State of Kansas agreed to provide a much higher sign-up incentive payment to landowners — another significant change that was formalized in a revised and updated MOU between USDA and the State of Kansas to become effective October 1, 2021. Work continues on requesting enhanced irrigated rental rates from FSA to attract and enhance renewed producer interest and participation in the UAR CREP project.