

# Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

Washington's CREP restores and protects streamside habitat for salmon. It provides financial incentives to private landowners who voluntarily enroll. Most (80 percent) of the cost is paid by the federal government.



**Background** Salmon and shellfish are vital resources for economic, recreational, and ecological reasons. Unfortunately, in Washington State these species are threatened by water pollution and loss of riparian (streamside) habitat.

One successful approach for protecting salmon and shellfish has been to restore native trees and shrubs in vegetated areas bordering streams, termed riparian buffers. This improves water quality and habitat in several ways:

1. Shade provided by tree and shrub canopy cools water temperatures, which is important for salmon.
2. Leaf litter and plants provide nutrients and promote insect production, which provides food for fish and wildlife.
3. Plants filter pollutants from nearby managed agricultural lands. This cleans water before it reaches streams and shellfish beds.
4. Trees that fall into streams provide habitat for fish and help shape streams to a more natural condition.

Bottom left: CREP project at year 1. The blue tree shelters (plastic tubing) mark new CREP tree plantings.

Top right: Tree growth at same CREP project three years later.

Bottom right: Same CREP project at year 7.

**The Solution** The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) offers incentives to landowners who are willing to remove riparian areas from production and implement conservation practices.

There are more than 1,100 CREP projects in Washington. These projects cover nearly 14,000 acres along 800 miles of stream, making it the largest riparian restoration program in the state. Buffer widths can range from a minimum of 35' to 180' from the stream edge. However, the program's average buffer width is 142'.

Animals must be excluded from CREP buffers, so the program also has installed more than 1.5 million feet of fencing.



CREP is voluntary. It is the strongest tool Washington has to advance riparian projects on private lands that benefit salmon and shellfish.

Right: CREP buffer along Kamm Creek in Whatcom County. The creek is nestled in the newly established forest and is shaded completely. In the foreground is the Nooksack River, which is not buffered with CREP. In the background is the City of Lynden.



**How it Works** CREP is a federal program administered by the Farm Service Agency with state-level management at the Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC). CREP is funded under the Farm Bill—the Farm Service Agency pays 80 percent of program costs, and state dollars cover the remaining 20 percent.

The WSCC provides program oversight and funding for conservation districts to secure CREP contracts with willing landowners. All of the costs for installation of conservation practices are paid for by the program. In addition, CREP provides maintenance for about five years after planting to assure success, with continued oversight throughout the duration of the contracts. Landowners are paid rent for allowing their land to be used for fish and wildlife improvements and receive a monetary bonus for signing up. Interested landowners should contact their local conservation district.

**Success on the Ground** Many Washington conservation districts and landowners use CREP as a tool to protect and restore salmon and shellfish habitat.

The following is just a sample of results accomplished by Washington landowners who have enrolled in CREP:

- Columbia Conservation District — restored 79 percent of the Tucannon River riparian area. In response, summer water temperatures have dropped about 10 degrees and young salmon are using areas of the river that were previously too warm for them.
- Whatcom Conservation District — water temperatures have significantly improved in the Nooksack's Ten-Mile Creek after installation of many CREP and other riparian projects.



**Washington State  
Conservation  
Commission**

### Contact Information

Carol Smith, Ph.D.

CREP Manager

Washington State Conservation Commission

Email: [csmith@scc.wa.gov](mailto:csmith@scc.wa.gov)

Phone: (360) 407-7103