



## **Emergency Watershed Protection**

The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program, a federal emergency recovery program, helps local communities recover after a natural disaster strikes.

### **Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program**

#### **OVERVIEW**

The **EWP Program** offers technical and financial assistance to help local communities relieve imminent threats to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms and other natural disasters that impair a watershed. EWP does not require a disaster declaration by federal or state government officials for program assistance to begin. The NRCS State Conservationist can declare a local watershed emergency and initiate EWP program assistance in cooperation with an eligible sponsor (see the Eligibility section below). NRCS will not provide funding for activities undertaken by a sponsor prior to the signing of a cooperative agreement between NRCS and the sponsor.

NRCS offers financial and technical assistance for various activities under the EWP Program, including:

- Remove debris from stream channels, road culverts and bridges;
- reshape and protect eroded streambanks;
- correct damaged or destroyed drainage facilities;
- establish vegetative cover on critically eroding lands;
- repair levees and structures;
- repair certain conservation practices, and
- purchase of [EWP Buyouts](#).

#### **EWP Project Criteria**

- provide protection from flooding or soil erosion;
- reduce threats to life and property;
- restore the hydraulic capacity to the natural environment;
- economically and environmentally defensible.

## Eligibility

### Recovery Projects

Recovery projects begin with a local sponsor or legal subdivision of state or tribal government. Eligible sponsors include cities, counties, towns, conservation districts, or any federally-recognized Native American tribe or tribal organization. Interested public and private landowners must work through a sponsor.

### EWP BUYOUT Option

In some situations, landowners can directly apply for assistance through a floodplain easement at the local NRCS office when project funding for floodplain easements becomes available. States will hold a signup period for the impacted communities and the local NRCS offices will publicize that information in the affected communities.

### **The EWP Program cannot be used:**

- to address the same structural issue or practice 3 times within 10 years;
- for existing operation and maintenance;
- to repair, rebuild, or maintain any transportation facilities, utilities, or similar facilities;
- to restore projects installed by another federal agency;
- to repair nonstructural management practices;
- to repair coastal erosions to beaches, dunes, and shorelines, including those along the Great Lakes;
- if the recovery measures are eligible for the Emergency Conservation Program offered thru the Farm Service Agency (FSA).

### Locally-Led Solutions

All EWP projects must have a sponsor and demonstrate that they reduce threats to life and property; be economically, environmentally and socially sound; and must be designed to acceptable engineering standards.

NRCS partners with diverse sponsors to complete EWP Program projects. Sponsors include *cities, counties, towns, conservation districts, or any federally-recognized Native American tribe or tribal organization.*

Sponsors can apply for EWP Program assistance directly to NRCS while public and private landowners can apply for this assistance through a local sponsor.

Check out the [EWP Sponsor Resource page](#) for more information.

## **Watershed Programs - EWP Resources**

### **Watersheds**

Watersheds impact everyone; every community, farm, ranch, and forest. They provide a vital resource for all living things to survive and thrive. All watersheds are interconnected, creating a land-water system that conveys wat...

### **EWP in the News**

Current Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program national news and announcements.

### **Emergency Watershed Program State Contacts**

Below, is the list of EWP Program Managers by state; they will guide you thru the process on how best to access assistance thru the EWP program.

### **EWP Success Stories**

The Emergency Watershed Protection Program helps communities recover from natural disasters. The following success stories illustrate the agility of EWP to provide recovery assistance.

### **EWP Sponsor Resources**

Resources for EWP Program assistance.

### **Bipartisan Infrastructure Law**

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – signed by President Biden in November 2021 – is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure. &nbsp;

## **Additional Documents**

[EWP Fact Sheet](#) (1.37 MB)

## **Ready to get started?**

Contact your local service center to start your application.

## **Find Your Local Service Center**

USDA Service Centers are locations where you can connect with Farm Service Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or Rural Development employees for your business needs. Enter your state and county below to find your local service center and agency offices. If this locator does not work in your browser, please visit [offices.usda.gov](https://offices.usda.gov).



## Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program Buyouts

NRCS administers the Emergency Watershed Protection EWP Program, which is designed for emergency recovery work, including the purchase of floodplain property buyouts.

### EWP RECOVERY BUYOUT OPTION

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the [Emergency Watershed Protection Program \(EWP\)](#) to assist project sponsors in protecting lives and property from flooding or soil erosion after a natural disaster. In communities impacted by constant flooding or severe erosion due to a natural disaster, a property buyout might be the best solution..

#### What is an EWP Recovery Buyout?

EWP Recovery Buyouts are used where structural projects to reduce threats from flooding and erosion are not cost-effective and/or beneficial. Once NRCS determines that buying a flood-prone property (for example) would provide the pivotal solution and sustainable course of action for a community, EWP has the authority to provide local sponsors with financial assistance to purchase and preserve the land for the purpose of restoring the natural environment.

NRCS may provide project sponsors up to 75 percent (and up to 90 percent for [limited resource areas](#)) of:

- the fair market value based on an appraisal for the property,
- eligible acquisition and relocation costs, and
- site restoration costs.

#### What lands are eligible?

Properties are potentially eligible if they meet all of the following requirements for a buyout:

- be from willing, voluntary sellers;
- contain a structure threatened by additional flooding/erosion;
- adjacent lands that would contribute to the conservation purposes of the program as open space; and,
- restoration is feasible.

Structures may be relocated to an area NOT threatened by flooding or erosion, if it is determined to be an economic and feasible option.

## **What is the process?**

### **EWP assistance does not require a disaster declaration by FEMA.**

1. After a qualifying disaster event, an eligible sponsor must submit a request in writing to their local NRCS State Conservationist within 60 days.
2. If approved for funding, NRCS will work with the project sponsor to define the terms of a cooperative agreement and clarify roles and responsibilities.
3. Acquisition is handled by the sponsor, who then purchases the property and becomes the owner. A deed restriction is placed on the title limiting land use to open space and natural resource conservation.
4. Structures will either be demolished or relocated outside of the flood zone.
5. Conservation practices will be installed that restore the natural environment and provide flooding and erosion protection.
6. Continued monitoring and maintenance of the property will be performed by the project sponsor.

## **What are the benefits?**

Buyouts are effective in preventing future damage, make residents safer and protect communities. Once purchased, the land is returned to a natural open space where it provides the added benefit of absorbing storm runoff, reducing future flooding, and providing wildlife habitat.

## **Criteria for Assistance**

All EWP work must provide protection from future flooding or soil erosion; reduce threats to life and property; restore the natural function to the watershed; and be economically and environmentally sound.

## **How do I obtain assistance?**

If property has been damaged by flooding or threatened by severe erosion and meets the eligibility requirements, it may qualify for EWP assistance. To request assistance, work with a local project sponsor and contact your [USDA-NRCS EWP Program Manager](#).

## **Sponsorship**

### **Sponsor Eligibility Guide and Resources**

A Project Sponsor must be a State or political subdivision thereof, a federally-recognized Tribe or Tribal organization, or unit of local government with a legal or conservation interest in the land. Cities, Counties, and state conservation districts are the most common sponsors of EWP projects.

Project sponsors must be able to:

- obtain all necessary property rights, water rights, and permits.
- provide their share of the restoration costs and cover any unreimbursed expenses.
- operate and maintain any completed restoration measures.

Contact your local NRCS office to learn more about EWP buyouts.



## Natural Resources Conservation Service

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### **EWP Floodplain Buyout Option for Limited Resource (LRA) Communities**

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) provides a reserve of Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program funds for eligible flood-prone Limited Resource Areas (LRAs).

#### [EWP BIL LRA Buyout Webinar for Sponsors](#)

The above webinar, presented on May 24th, 2023 provides information for communities and potential sponsors to learn about this funding opportunity provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. For more information, reach out to our local NRCS EWP Program Manager.

#### **What is an LRA floodplain buyout?**

Floodplain buyouts are used where structural projects to reduce threats from additional flooding are not cost-effective and/or beneficial. A property owner sells their flood-prone property to an [eligible EWP local sponsor](#). All land rights convey to the sponsor so that the property will be maintained in perpetuity as open space for the conservation of natural floodplain functions. For floodplain buyouts in LRA communities being funded by Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, NRCS will provide sponsors funding for the full fair market value and will fund the relocation and restoration costs of the buyout.

#### **What lands are eligible?**

Any land use is potentially eligible for an LRA floodplain buyout using Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding. Agricultural land, land with/without structures and communities with residential properties, are eligible if the property was damaged by flooding at least once within the previous year or at least twice within the previous 10 years. Lands adjacent to eligible flood damaged land are also eligible if the land will contribute to the floodplain function. Additionally, lands that would be impacted as a result of a dam breach are also eligible.

#### **What is a Limited Resource Area (LRA)?**

A limited resource area is defined where housing values and income are less than a state's average and unemployment is at least twice the U.S. average. NRCS has calculated LRAs at the county level (map below), however other areas may also meet the LRA criteria, as determined by NRCS.

#### [LRA Counties and Tribal Areas 2023 Spreadsheet](#)

#### **Criteria for Assistance**

All EWP work must provide protection from future flooding or soil erosion; reduce threats to life and property; restore the natural function to the watershed; and be economically and environmentally sound.

## **How Do I Obtain Assistance?**

If your land has been damaged by flooding and meets the eligibility requirements, it may qualify for EWP assistance. To request assistance, work with a project sponsor to contact your [USDA-NRCS EWP Program Manager](#).

## **Sponsorship**

Project sponsor must be a State or political subdivision thereof, qualified Indian tribe or tribal organization, or unit of local government. Cities, Counties, and state conservation districts are the most common sponsors of EWP projects.

[EWP LRA Buyout Fact Sheet](#) (2.09 MB)





## EWP Sponsor Resources

Resources for EWP Program assistance.

### The EWP Program Process

NRCS partners with diverse sponsors to complete EWP Program projects. To begin the process, a potential local sponsor submits a *Request for Assistance* that includes information on the nature, location and scope of the problem for which assistance is requested. The letter, considered the application, must be signed by an official of the requesting entity. NRCS staff is available to assist with the letter preparation and offer additional information on EWP Program eligibility. The letter must be sent to your [local NRCS office](#) or to your NRCS State office.

***Sponsors must submit a formal request for assistance within 60 days of the disaster occurrence, or 60 days from the date when access to the sites becomes available.***

NRCS conducts damage survey reports (DSR), or case-by-case investigations of the work requested or damages reported. EWP Program restoration work may include removing debris from stream channels, road culverts and bridges; reshaping and protecting eroded streambanks; repairing damaged drainage facilities, levees and associated structures; reseeding damaged areas; or purchasing floodplain easements.

### STEP-BY-STEP Watershed Programs Process -

[Click here](#) to download the guide.

### Sponsor Responsibilities

- obtaining land rights for repairs;
- securing the necessary permits;
- furnishing the local cost share (Sponsors must come up with 25 percent of the construction costs for recovery measures in the form of cash or in-kind services);
- accomplishing the installation of work. (Work can be done through federal or local contracts); and
- conducting operation and maintenance on completed projects.

### EWP Sponsor Guides and Templates

This twenty-page document covers the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program policy, requests for assistance and outlines the process for sponsors seeking EWP assistance.

[EWP Sponsor Guide](#) (366.38 KB)

[EWP Sponsor Request for Assistance Template](#) (23.79 KB)