

EXHIBIT CQ – To National Instruction 440-310

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) – Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Nearshore Ranking Guidance

- 1) A single national ranking template has been developed for ACEP-WRE-GLRI enrollments. States must create at least one ranking pool in CART based on the available national ranking template for ACEP-WRE-GLRI enrollments. Note: For non-GLRI enrollments, there are separate national ranking templates for ACEP-WRE General and ACEP-WRE Reserved Grazing Rights enrollments.
- 2) Applicability Question
 - (i) States must use the following question to determine applicability for GLRI:
 - Does at least one PLU intersect the GLRI priority watersheds layer by 50% or greater?
 - (ii) States will use the national approved GLRI priority watersheds layer, Initiative_GLRI_HUC8_Priority, and choose “ANY” for the land unit qualification:
- 3) States have the option to use the category question to create categories within a single ranking pool instead of or in addition to creating separate ranking pools (see NI 440-310.1D).
- 4) Points for ranking questions in the Program Priority and Resource Priority sections cannot exceed a total of 400 points and a total of 200 points for each section.
- 5) For each ACEP-WRE-GLRI ranking pool, a combination of nationally required ranking questions and State-developed ranking questions will be used to address the required ranking criteria. State-developed ranking questions must be included in the Program Priority and Resource Priority sections as identified below.
 - (i) Nationally required program priority ranking questions are as follows (100 points):
 - Is 100% of the proposed easement area within a GLRI phosphorus priority watershed (Initiative_GLRI_HUC12_Phosphorus_Priority)? (Yes/No) (50 points)
 - Is the program application located within an existing State agency or other non-USDA water quality project area (Example: State or county watershed plan, NGO focus watershed) that addresses excess nutrients or sediment? (Yes/No) (50 points)
 - (ii) The following ranking criteria must be addressed in the State-developed program priority ranking questions:
 - Cost effectiveness of enrolling the land to maximize the environmental benefits per dollar expended, applications that have a lower cost per environmental benefit ratio will receive higher rankings.
 - Whether the landowner or another person or entity is offering to contribute financially to the cost of the easement or other interest in the land to leverage Federal funds.
 - Extent to which ACEP-WRE purposes would be achieved on the offered land.
 - The productivity of the offered land.
 - The on-farm and off-farm environmental threats if the land is used for the production of agricultural commodities.
 - (iii) Nationally required resource priority ranking questions are as follows (70 points):
 - What percent of the proposed easement area is cropland? (Select only one response)
 - i. 75% or greater (25 points)
 - ii. 50% or greater (15 points)
 - iii. Less than 50% (0 points)

- Is there potential for areas within the easement to be annually hayed for the water quality purpose of removing phosphorus? (Yes/No) (20 points)
Note: This is limited to planned, open grass areas where the management action is consistent with the easement purpose and not for the purpose of forage production.
 - What percent of the proposed easement area is within the floodplain? (Select only one response)
 - i. 75% or greater (25 points)
 - ii. 50% or greater (15 points)
 - iii. Less than 50% (0 points)
- (iv) The following ranking criteria must be addressed in State-developed resource priority ranking questions (130 points):
- The conservation and environmental benefits of obtaining an easement or other interest in the land, including but not limited to (30 points)—
 - Habitat that will be restored for the benefit of migratory birds and wetland-dependent wildlife, including diversity of wildlife that will be benefitted or life-cycle needs that will be addressed;
 - Extent and use of habitat that will be restored for threatened, endangered, or other at-risk species or number of different at-risk species benefitted;
 - Protection or restoration of native vegetative communities;
 - Habitat diversity and complexity to be restored;
 - Proximity and connectivity to other protected habitats;
 - Extent of beneficial adjacent land uses;
 - Extent of wetland losses within a geographic area, including wetlands generally or specific wetland types;
 - Water quantity benefits through increased water storage in the soil profile or through groundwater recharge;
 - Attenuation of floodwater flows;
 - Proximity to impaired water bodies;
 - Carbon sequestration;
 - Improving climate change resiliency.
 - Hydrology restoration potential, which must comprise at least 100 points for conservation benefits, should take into consideration—
 - The extent to which the original hydrology can be restored;
 - The extent to which the potential hydrology restoration or enhancement practices will successfully provide hydrologic conditions that are suitable for the needs of the native wetland-dependent wildlife species that occurred in the area and are appropriate to support the wetland functions and values being restored or enhanced on the site;
 - Physical site characteristics that affect hydrology restoration potential, including but not limited to—
 - Soil properties, such as soil texture, soil structure, and soil drainage classes;
 - Landscape features, such as geomorphic position, slope, and water table depths;
 - Flooding characteristics, including frequency, timing, duration, depth, and sources;
 - Source of the hydrology, degree and type of hydrologic manipulation, existing connectivity, and barriers to connectivity with hydrology sources;
 - As applicable, reliability and availability of the water delivered through water rights, and the degree of reliance on such water rights to successfully restore hydrology.

- (v) States may also include ranking questions that prioritize in the Program Priority section:
- Certain land types or geographic regions of the State where restoration of wetlands may better achieve State and regional goals and objectives.
 - Land that is currently enrolled in CRP in a contract that is set to expire within one year from the date of application or land under a CRP contract that is in transition to a covered farmer or rancher pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 3835(f) and such land is farmed wetland and adjoining land that has the highest wetland functions and values and is likely to return to production after the land leaves CRP (range of 5 to 20 points).
- (vi) For ACEP-WRE-GLRI, the requirement to provide higher ranking consideration to longer-term enrollments has been automatically included in the planned practice points calculated in the assessment portion of CART, based upon the selection of the easement program practice identifying the enrollment length (perpetual or 30 years).
- (vii) See 440-CPM-528-L-528.111 for additional information on ACEP-WRE ranking procedures.