

National Bulletin: 300-24-8

Date: 11/14/2023

Subject: LTP – Submitting Geospatial Boundaries and
Attributes for Closed Conservation Easements to
the National Easements Geodatabase

Action Required By: September 26, 2024

Purpose: This national bulletin provides guidance to state conservationists and directors for submitting accurate and current geospatial boundaries and attributes for all closed stewardship lands, non-stewardship lands, and 30-year contracts to the National Easements Geodatabase (NEG).

Expiration Date: December 31, 2024.

Background: NRCS, on behalf of USDA and the Commodity Credit Corporation, holds and administers more than 24,000 conservation easements covering over 5.4 million acres under its easement program authorities. Pursuant to Title 440, Conservation Programs Manual, Part 527, Subpart P, “Monitoring,” NRCS must complete and record annual monitoring in the easement business tools.

An important component of NRCS’s conservation easement monitoring is the use of remote sensing and aerial photography. The Easement Programs Division (EPD) implements remote sensing capabilities through the annual acquisition of high-resolution aerial photography. The geospatial boundaries in the NEG determines the requirements for the location and extent of aerial photography flight planning and acquisition. The geospatial boundaries and attributes for all conservation easements must be continuously collected to ensure the quality and timeliness of the data.

The following tables list all NRCS easement categories that must be maintained in the NEG.

NRCS Stewardship Lands

PROGRAM	ENROLLMENT TYPE
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)	All easements (including enrollments under RCPP)
Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program (EWRP)	All easements
Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE)	All easements
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)	All easements enrolled in fiscal years (FY) 2006–2008 and any easement with the United States as grantee or coholder
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	All easements held by the United States
Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	All easements (including enrollments under RCPP)

Other Stewardship Lands (OSL)	All easements
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)	All easements held by the United States
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	All easements

NRCS Non-Stewardship Lands

PROGRAM	ENROLLMENT TYPE
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program- Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE)	All easements (including enrollments under RCPP)
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Wetland Reserve Easements (ACRP-WRE)	30-year contracts** (including enrollments under RCPP)
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)*	All easements held by eligible entities where the United States is not a grantee or coholder (except those enrolled in FY 2006–2008, which are considered stewardship lands)***
Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)	All easements held by eligible entities
Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	30-year contracts** (including enrollments under RCPP)
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)	All easements held by eligible entities where the United States is not a grantee or coholder
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	30-year contracts**

***Note:** FRPP also includes the predecessor program Farmland Protection Program (FPP).

****Note:** Non-stewardship lands to be monitored in accordance with the stewardship land requirements.

*****Note:** Regardless of specific deed language, all FRPP easements enrolled in FY 2006–2008 are considered stewardship land and must comply with stewardship land activities.

Explanation:

Accessing imagery - High-resolution aerial imagery strengthens the integrity of conservation easement monitoring. High-resolution imagery and the current easements geodatabase are available through the [Easements Imagery Web Map Viewer](#) or by adding an [ArcGIS server site](#) to an ArcGIS session.

Imagery will also be available in Conservation Desktop (CD) and can be accessed through the NRCS [Mobile Tools for Easements \(sharepoint.com\)](#).

Instructions for adding and updating data in NEG - Until further notice, states must check out the file geodatabase to add new easement boundaries and to upload updated easement boundary geometry or attributes approved through EPD. The file geodatabase contains domains in appropriate fields. This accelerates the data entry process and improves the integrity of NEG.

Instructions for digitizing and transmitting easement boundaries to the Geospatial Enterprise Operations Branch (GEO) are attached to this national bulletin. The instructions also include topology guidance.

Topology rules are set to check for “No Polygon Overlaps.” If overlap errors or other topology errors are found, do not move vertices of a new boundary to fit with an older boundary. These errors must first be investigated to avoid corrupting correct boundary data.

To request corrections or updates to NEG boundaries, submit a Program Activity Management Solution (PAMS) ticket for “Geospatial Boundary Modification Assistance.” Conservation planning in CD can continue even with overlapping easement boundaries in the NEG.

Updates to these instructions will be included with the easement checkout email notifications. Edits will only be accepted through this checkout/check-in system. GEO generates quarterly checkouts for states to add new easement boundaries and to update and correct existing easement boundary geometry or attributes during the fiscal year. Each quarterly state checkout will only include data from National Easement Staging Tool (NEST), ProTracts, and RCPP easements closed in CD, as of the end of the previous quarter.

The checkout/check-in schedule for FY 2024 is as follows:

FY	Quarter	Date Range	Checkouts Available	Check-In Deadline
2024	1	October 1 through Dec. 31	November 1	January 1
2024	2	January 1 through March 31	February 1	April 1
2024	3	April 1 through June 30	May 1	July 1
2024	4 (End of FY)	July 1 through September 26	August 1	September 26

Closing dates in system of record. For easement boundaries to be successfully uploaded to the NEG, easements closed in NEST must have a closing date entered in the NEST. ACEP-ALE easements closed in ProTracts and RCPP easements closed in CD will follow the similar upload process as NEST-recorded easements, except for the NEST point match. ProTracts ACEP-ALE and CD RCPP easements attribution must have a closing date in addition to other attribution listed in the attached instructions. This attribution must be entered manually.

States must have received a quarterly checkout from GEO to upload new or updated easement boundaries. States must submit geospatial easement boundary data for the fiscal year based on the above table. This ensures that the agency has the most current easement boundary data available.

Data should be submitted to the [check-in folder](#) in the GEO shared network drive.

Boundaries for FRPP easements are required for parcels acquired under cooperative agreements in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008. Parcels acquired with funds during these program years were required to have USDA or the United States as a grantee on the easement deed; therefore, they are considered stewardship lands of the United States. Continue to include all OSLs into the NEG, as they are also stewardship lands of the United States. Non-stewardship ACEP-ALE, FRPP, GRP, and RCPP easements that list the entity as the grantee and do not list the United States as the grantee or co holder on the deed are also a mandatory part of this request. States that

have non-stewardship ACEP-ALE, FRPP, GRP, and RCPP boundaries are required to upload them to the NEG.

Restoration cost-share agreements (RCSA) should not be included in the NEG. Ingress and egress easements are not to be included in the NEG at this time. However, these boundaries will be requested in the future to be included in CD.

Do not remove any legacy data in the NEG. For RCSA projects, ingress or egress corridors, and other boundaries previously submitted, mark their status as “Do Not Fly (DNF)” in the non-stewardship dataset provided in the NEG.

Do not mark any stewardship and non-stewardship ACEP-ALE, FRPP, GRP, and RCPP easements as Do Not Fly (DNF). All such easements must be flown.

A list of easement records that have a closing date in the system of record but no NEG boundary is located on the [EPD SharePoint](#). If you need assistance to create geospatial boundaries from legal descriptions or manage shapefiles, please submit a PAMS general request. Use the “Program Assistance” request type and the “GIS Assistance” request sub-type.

Contact: Questions regarding the database download, its contents, or returning data to GEO may be directed to Laura Davenport-Wade, Cartographer, by email at laura.davenport@usda.gov. Questions regarding this national bulletin may be directed to Tate Jenkins, National Realty Specialist, by email at tate.jenkins@usda.gov.

Attachment: Instructions for Digitizing and Transmitting Easement Boundaries to the Geospatial Enterprise Operations Branch (GEO), Fort Worth, TX