

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

Overview

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) is a competitive grants program authorized under Section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, and is only available to states and tribal governments. Up to \$50 million is available through fiscal year 2012.

The primary objective of the VPA-HIP is to encourage owners and operators of privately-held farm, ranch and forest land to voluntarily make that land available for access by the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, including hunting or fishing, under programs implemented by state or tribal governments.

Grantees that are states will have the grant amount reduced by 25 percent if opening dates for migratory bird hunting in the state are not consistent for residents and non-residents. This requirement does not apply to grantees that are tribal governments.

Regulations at 7 CFR part 1455 govern the VPA-HIP.

Background

Twenty-six states currently have public access programs in place for hunting, fishing and other related activities. These programs provide rental payments and other incentives, such as technical or conservation services to landowners who allow the public to hunt, fish or perform other types of wildlife recreation on their land. An unknown number of tribal governments have similar public access programs.

The majority of the existing programs have limited scope and budgets; most existing programs have an annual budget of under a million dollars per year. The goals of these existing

programs include providing access for wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting, fishing and other compatible activities that include enhancing wildlife habitat, facilitating sound wildlife management, helping local economies that depend on revenue from hunters, and preserving our nation's conservation and hunting traditions.

The funding provided by the VPA-HIP will help states and tribal governments greatly increase access and recreational experiences. Grant recipients may use the funding to provide higher rental payments, provide technical and conservation services to landowners and increase acreage enrolled for public access.

Nothing in the VPA-HIP preempts liability laws that may apply to activities on any property related to grants made in this program.

How the Program Works

Periodically, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) acting on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) will publish a Request for Applications (RFA) on the federal government's grants portal — www.grants.gov.

The RFA will provide the objectives for projects, the eligibility criteria for projects and applicants, and the application forms and associated instructions needed to apply for a VPA-HIP competitive grant.

Who Can Participate

Only states and tribal governments are eligible for VPA-HIP. Grants will be awarded through a competitive RFA process. States and tribal governments may propose to use VPA-HIP grant funding to expand existing public access programs, create new public access programs and/or provide incentives to improve habitat on land enrolled in public access programs.

Funding Priorities

Funding priority will be given to proposals that will use the grant money in a public access program to address these objectives:

- Maximize participation by landowners;
- Ensure that land enrolled in the program has appropriate wildlife habitat;
- Provide incentives to strengthen wildlife habitat improvement efforts on Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) land;
- Supplement funding and services from other federal, state, tribal government or private resources that is provided in the form of cash or in-kind services and;
- Provide information to the public about the location of public access land.

For More Information

For more information on VPA-HIP, contact a local FSA office or visit FSA's website at: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/vpa>.

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