

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

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### 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 for 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 reduction does not apply to grantees that are tribal governments.

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

### Background

A number of states and tribal governments have public access programs 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 recreation on their land by the public, including hunting, fishing, or other appropriate activities.

The majority of the existing public access programs have limited scope and budgets; most existing programs have an annual budget of less than one million dollars per year. The goals of these existing programs include providing access for wildlife-associated recreation, wildlife management, helping local economies that depend on revenue from hunters, and encouraging conservation.

The funding provided by the VPA-HIP will help states and tribal governments address many issues that can greatly increase access and recreational experiences. Grant recipients will be able to use the funding to provide additional landowner incentives and conservation assistance and increase acreage available for public access.

Nothing in the VPA-HIP pre-empts liability laws that may apply to activities on any property related to grants made in this program; however, a number of states provide limited liability protection to landowners participating in state public access programs.

### How the Program Works

Periodically, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) acting on behalf of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) will publish a Re-

quest for Applications (RFA) on the federal government's grants portal at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

The RFA highlights considerations that should be adequately described in VPA-HIP applications and identifies evaluation criteria that will be used by FSA to determine VPA-HIP applications that will be approved and awarded funding. State and tribal governments submit applications to FSA through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). A federal inter-agency panel reviews and scores applications against evaluation criteria. FSA considers inter-agency review panel scoring in making a determination of which applications will be approved to receive VPA-HIP funding. Approved applicants must complete additional financial agreements and related assurances, and a programmatic environment assessment, before VPA-HIP funds awarded are released to them.

### Who Can Participate

Only states and tribal governments are eligible for federal VPA-HIP funding. 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 enhance wildlife habitat on lands enrolled in state or tribal government public access programs.

**Funding Priorities**

Funding priority is given to applications that use VPA-HIP grant funding to implement public access programs 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.

**Current Participation**

Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin were approved for VPA-HIP funding and awarded multi-year (based on the availability of out-year funding) grants in 2010.

California, Georgia, Hawaii, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and Wyoming, and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama  
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Nation were approved for VPA-HIP funding and will be awarded new or additional VPA-HIP funding in 2011.

**For More Information**

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

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