

In the Long Run

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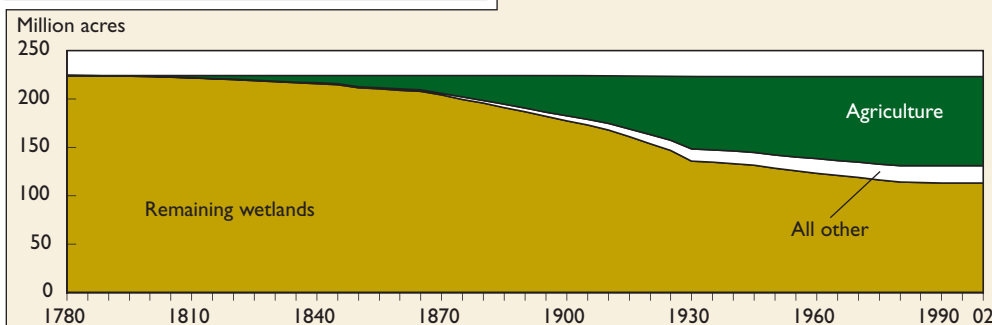
Wetland losses. Until well into the 20th century, conversion of wetlands to agricultural and other uses was encouraged by policy incentives for drainage and westward expansion. Starting in the 1930s, conservation laws began to slow wetland conversion, and this momentum was reinforced by other measures over the last 30 years. Today, about half of the original wetlands area in the 48 contiguous States has been converted to other uses, mostly agriculture, but urbanization and other uses now account for most wetland conversion. Currently, the rate of net wetland loss from agriculture has been reduced to almost zero.

The current inventory of U.S. wetlands has been influenced by key legal and economic milestones:

- The Swamp Land Acts of 1849 and 1850
- The Homestead Act of 1862
- The Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act of 1934
- The Water Bank Program, 1970
- The Clean Water Act of 1972 plus later amendments
- Swampbuster provisions, 1985
- Reduced tax incentives for wetland drainage, 1986
- Wetland Reserve Program, 1990

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Wetland losses, 1780-2002



Source: ERS analysis of data from "Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States: 1986-1997" (U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service) and from 2002 National Resources Inventory (USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service).

On the Map

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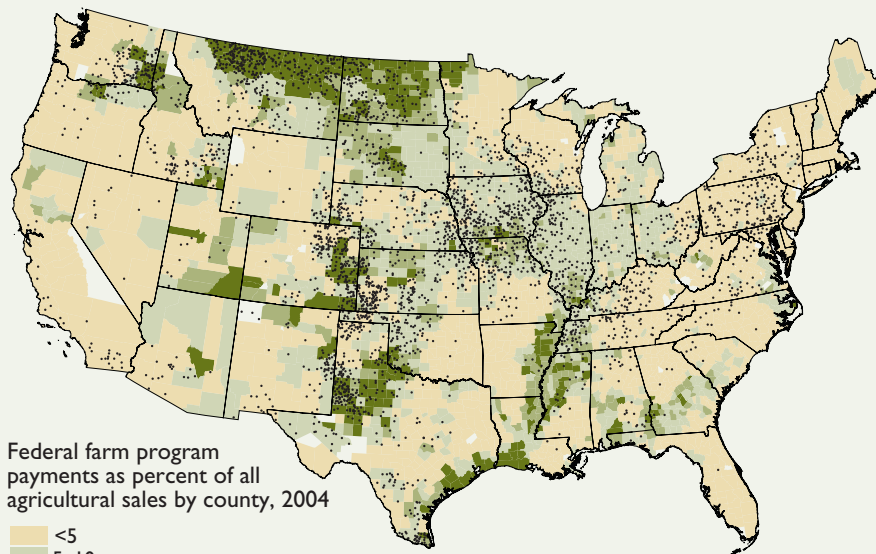
Conservation compliance effectiveness depends on where the money goes

USDA's Conservation Compliance Program was designed to ensure that Federal farm programs did not encourage crop production on highly erodible land (HEL) in the absence of measures to protect against soil erosion. Under this program, farmers who grow crops on HEL must apply an approved soil conservation system or risk losing eligibility for Federal income support, conservation, and other payments.

The effectiveness of conservation compliance in enhancing soil conservation depends, in part, on the extent to which farms that crop HEL also receive Federal farm program payments. Overall, 86 percent of all cropland and about 83 percent of highly erodible cropland is located on farms that receive farm program payments.

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Most farms with highly erodible cropland receive Federal farm program payments



Federal farm program payments as percent of all agricultural sales by county, 2004

- <5
- 5-10
- 11-15
- >15
- No data

Distribution of highly erodible cropland, 1 dot = 25,000 acres of HEL

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service's National Resources Inventory, the Commodity Credit Corporation, and the Census of Agriculture.