

CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM – EASEMENTS

This easement program is part of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the United States Department of Agriculture and the State of Maryland. The focus of the MOA is to protect water quality by removing marginal agricultural land from production and replacing it with best management practices including riparian buffers, stabilization of highly erodible soils and restoration of wetlands. There is a two-tier system to accomplish these water quality improvements. First, the landowner enters into a 15 year lease contract (CREP contract) to take land out of production and to install best management practices for water quality. The 15 year lease contract portion of CREP is administered by the federal Farm Services Agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. For some of that land, a second step involves permanently protecting the land taken out of production and the best management practices on it by selling a permanent conservation easement.

The CREP permanent easement program is administered jointly by the Land Acquisition and Planning Unit of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Washington County and is funded from Program Open Space funds. The easements are acquired by land trusts or counties from interested landowners who voluntarily agree to sell conservation easements. The completed recorded easements are held jointly by the land trust of the county and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The easement program uses consistent acquisition processes and forms for easements and titles and survey specifications for all easements. All relevant forms have been approved by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) and are used consistently for all easements throughout the State. The OAG also reviews and approves all specific acquisitions. Each proposed easement acquisition is submitted to the Maryland Board of Public Works for approval.