

Wildlife Populations and the CRP Program

(Putnam County Missouri)

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The Conservation Reserve Program removed much land from row crop farming in North Missouri. The replacement of crop production with permanent vegetative cover has had an effect on the economy of the area and on wildlife populations. If there is no continuation of the CRP program when the initial 10 year contracts expire, land may be used again for crop production or alternative uses. The direction taken will impact the economic development of the area including the potential for wildlife related recreation.

Much needs to be known about the plans which landowners have for their land after CRP if an accurate appraisal of development opportunities is to be conducted. This paper reports on the wildlife population/wildlife related recreation results of a survey of the CRP landowners in Putnam County, Missouri.¹ Putnam County was selected for case study analysis because (1) its agriculture is typical of much of northern Missouri; (2) it had a high level of CRP enrollment; and (3) it has an active economic development program.

Agricultural Characteristics-Putnam County

Putnam County, Missouri is located in the north central part of the state. The northern border of the county is the

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¹Other survey results are reported in "Post Conservation Reserve Program Alternatives For Putnam County Missouri" Gary Devino, author, University of Missouri, Department of Agricultural Economics, AEWP 1993-8.

Missouri/Iowa line. The county's topography consists mostly of rolling hills. Much of the land is wooded. Row crop production occurs primarily in creek and river bottoms.

Agricultural production is heavily cattle oriented. In 1991 there were about 51,000 head of cattle (99 percent beef).² Hay production was the principal crop with 54,700 acres harvested. Row crop production totaled 24,900 acres. Fifty-five percent of the row crop land was in soybeans.

Characteristics of Putnam County CRP Land Ownership

To date, 28,673 acres of Putnam County cropland have been enrolled in the CRP. Most of the enrollment took place in the first nine sign-ups (26,024). Because there was a two-year gap between the ninth and tenth sign-up, and the program changed slightly, the survey reported in this paper was based on the first nine sign-ups.

Two hundred forty-nine contracts cover the first nine CRP sign-ups in Putnam County. There are 185 farms that have at least a portion of their land in CRP.³ Individual CRP tracts range from two to more than a thousand acres. The average CRP owner has 140 acres in the program.

Post-CRP Survey of Putnam County CRP Landowners

All persons who owned land in Putnam County on which there was a CRP contract received a questionnaire. Sixty-three percent of

²Missouri Agricultural Statistics Service, "1192 Farm Facts," p.43.

³There are multiple contracts on some farms because owners added land to the program during more than one sign-up period.

the landowners responded. All but seven of the questionnaires were used in compiling the results reported in this paper. Their ownership totaled 62 percent of the Putnam County CRP land. Sixty percent of the respondents lived within Putnam County or within 15 miles of the county's borders. Of the remaining 40 percent, half lived in Missouri and half had out of state mailing addresses.

Landowners Perception of Wildlife Population

Changes on Conservation Reserve Program Land.

Landowners were asked: What has happened to the number of wildlife on your land since you entered the CRP program"?. For nine categories of wildlife, owners indicated that wildlife numbers were higher, the same, lower, or don't know. Their responses by category are identified in Table 1.

Table 1. Wildlife Population Changes on Conservation Reserve Program Land - Putnam County Missouri⁽¹⁾

WILDLIFE Species	HIGHER	SAME (Percent)	LOWER	DON'T KNOW
Deer	64	23	4	9
Quail	46	25	18	11
Pheasant	46	22	19	13
Turkey	55	19	9	16
Waterfowl	15	35	4	45
Squirrel	30	38	3	29
Rabbit	45	32	3	20
Dove	29	30	8	34
Furbearer	29	28	4	38

(1) Data based on a survey of landowner's perception.

Wildlife Populations and Farm Size

A high proportion of respondents to the survey indicated that they had wildlife populations which were large enough for hunting. The highest percentages were for wildlife which is resident to the area, Table 2.

Table 2. Conservation Reserve Program Enrolled Farms with Huntable Wildlife Populations - Putnam County, Missouri⁽¹⁾

<u>Wildlife Species</u>	<u>Percent Farms With Huntable Population</u>
Deer	87
Quail	74
Pheasant	74
Turkey	75
Waterfowl	26
Squirrel	76
Rabbit	86
Dove	51
Furbearer	58

(1) Data based on a survey of landowners perception.

It was hypothesized that total farm size and land use would affect the type of wildlife on CRP farms. All of the farms which reported having a huntable species of wildlife were analyzed with respect to the two factors. Little difference was found in these characteristics on Putnam County Farms, Table 3.

Table 3. Total Farm Size and Land Use For Farms with Huntable population of wildlife Putnam county Missouri⁽¹⁾

Wildlife Species	CRP	Cropland Not-CRP	Pasture Acres	Wood	Hay	Other	Total
Deer	147	75	195	51	50	12	531
Quail	172	87	211	54	47	10	583
Pheasant	176	85	211	50	48	14	586
Turkey	167	95	204	61	56	11	600
Squirrel	169	86	235	59	60	13	621
Rabbit	163	85	204	51	51	16	571

(1) Data based on a survey of landowners perception.

Wildlife and Wildlife Related Recreation Interests

CRP landowners in Putnam County expressed a strong interest in increasing wildlife number and/or wildlife related recreation for their own use:

<u>Owners Interested for Own Use</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Increasing wildlife numbers	53
Not Increasing wildlife numbers	37
No Response	<u>10</u>

When asked if they were interested in increasing wildlife numbers and/or wildlife related recreation on their land for the use of others, half said they were not interested:

<u>Owners Interest For The Use Of Others</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Increasing wildlife numbers	37
Not increasing wildlife numbers	50
No response	13

Summary

The perception of landowners is that the number of most species of wildlife has increased during the years that land was in the CRP. More than half of the owners surveyed had an interest in increasing wildlife numbers for their own use. More than a third were interested in increasing wildlife numbers for the benefit of others. Given the level of interest, it appears likely that even in the absence of a CRP program efforts would be made by landowners to retain some of the wildlife/wildlife recreation benefits which