

(d) Where circumstances beyond the participant's control or when it is in the public interest, such as matters of health or safety, the State Conservationist may independently or by mutual agreement with the parties modify or terminate the cost-share agreement as provided for in § 636.12.

§ 636.11 Transfer of interest in a cost-share agreement.

(a) A participant is responsible for notifying NRCS when he or she anticipates the voluntary or involuntary loss of control of the land covered by a WHIP cost-share agreement during the term of the agreement.

(b) The participant and NRCS may agree to transfer a cost-share agreement to another potential participant. The transferee must be determined by NRCS to be eligible to participate in WHIP and must assume full responsibility under the cost-share agreement.

(c) With respect to any and all payments owed to participants who wish to transfer ownership or control of land subject to a cost-share agreement, the division of payment will be determined by the original party and that party's successor. In the event of a dispute or claim on the distribution of cost-share payments, NRCS may withhold payments without the accrual of interest pending a settlement or adjudication on the rights to the funds.

(d) If new participants are not willing or not eligible to assume the responsibilities of an existing WHIP cost-share agreement, including the O&M agreement, and the participant fails to implement the cost-share agreement, then NRCS will terminate the agreement and may require that all cost-share payments be forfeited, refunded, or both, with applicable interest in accordance with § 636.12. Participants may be subject to liquidated damages in accordance with § 636.12.

§ 636.12 Termination of cost-share agreements.

(a) The State Conservationist may, independently or by mutual agreement with the parties to the cost-share agreement, terminate the cost-share agreement where:

(1) The parties to the cost-share agreement are unable to comply with

the terms of the cost-share agreement as the result of conditions beyond their control;

(2) Termination of the cost-share agreement would, as determined by the State Conservationist, be in the public interest; or

(3) A participant fails to correct a violation of a cost-share agreement within the period provided by NRCS in accordance with § 636.13.

(b) If NRCS terminates a cost-share agreement, in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs (a)(1) and (a)(2) of this section the State Conservationist may allow the participant to retain a portion of any payments received appropriate to the effort the participant has made to comply with the contract.

(1) NRCS may require a participant to provide only a partial refund of the payments received if a previously implemented conservation activity can function independently, and is not adversely affected by the violation or the absence of other conservation activities that would have been implemented under the cost-share agreement; and

(2) The State Conservationist will have the option to waive all or part of the liquidated damages assessed, depending upon the circumstances of the case.

(c) When making termination decisions, NRCS may reduce the amount of money owed by the participant by a proportion that reflects:

(1) The good faith effort of the participant to comply with the cost-share agreement; or

(2) The existence of hardships beyond the participant's control that have prevented compliance. If a participant claims hardship, that claim must be documented and cannot have existed when the applicant applied for participation in the program.

§ 636.13 Violations and remedies.

(a) If NRCS determines that a participant is in violation of a cost-share agreement, NRCS will give the parties to the cost-share agreement notice of the violation and a minimum of 60 days to correct the violation and comply with the terms of the cost-share agreement and attachments thereto.

(b) If the participant fails to correct the violation of a cost-share agreement

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within the period provided by NRCS under paragraph (a) of this section, NRCS may terminate the agreement and require the participant to refund all or part of any of the funds issued under that cost-share agreement, plus interest, and may assess liquidated damages as indicated in the cost-share agreement appendix, as well as require the participant to forfeit all rights to any future payment under the agreement.

(c) If NRCS terminates a cost-share agreement due to breach of contract, the participant will forfeit all rights to future payments under the agreement, may be required to pay liquidated damages in an amount determined by the State Conservationist in accordance with the terms of the agreement, and will refund all or part of the payments received, plus interest. Participants violating WHIP cost-share agreements may be determined ineligible for future NRCS-administered conservation program funding.

§ 636.14 Misrepresentation and scheme or device.

(a) A participant who is determined to have erroneously represented any fact affecting a program determination made in accordance with this part, will not be entitled to cost-share agreement payments and must refund to NRCS all payments and pay liquidated damages, plus interest, as determined by NRCS.

(b) A participant will refund to NRCS all payments, plus interest, as determined by NRCS, with respect to all NRCS cost-share agreements to which they are a party if they are determined to have knowingly:

(1) Adopted any scheme or device that tends to defeat the purpose of the program;

(2) Made any fraudulent representation; or

(3) Misrepresented any fact affecting a program determination.

(c) Other NRCS cost-share agreements where this person is a participant may be terminated.

§ 636.15 Offsets and assignments.

(a) Except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section, any payment or portion thereof to any person or legal entity will be made without regard to

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questions of title under State law and without regard to any claim or lien against the land, or proceeds thereof, in favor of the owner or any other creditor except agencies of the United States Government. The regulations governing offsets and withholdings found at 7 CFR part 1403 of this title will be applicable to cost-share agreement payments.

(b) WHIP participants may assign any payments in accordance with 7 CFR part 1404.

§ 636.16 Appeals.

(a) Any participant may obtain reconsideration and review of determinations affecting participation in this program in accordance with 7 CFR parts 11 and 614, except as provided in paragraph (b) of this section.

(b) In accordance with the provisions of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, Public Law 103-354 (7 U.S.C. 6901), the following decisions are not appealable:

(1) Payment rates, payment limits, and cost-share percentages;

(2) The designation of approved fish and wildlife priority areas, habitats, or activities;

(3) NRCS program funding decisions;

(4) Eligible conservation activities; and

(5) Other matters of general applicability.

(c) Before a participant may seek judicial review of any action taken under this part, the participant must exhaust all administrative appeal procedures set forth in paragraph (a) of this section.

§ 636.17 Compliance with regulatory measures.

(a) Participants who implement the WHIP plan of operations will be responsible for obtaining the authorities, rights, easements, permits, or other approvals necessary for the implementation, operation, and maintenance of the conservation activities in keeping with applicable laws and regulations. The requirement for the participant to obtain necessary permits is included in the terms and conditions of the contract appendix.

(b) Participants will be responsible for compliance with all laws and for all