



United States Department of Agriculture

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Fiscal Year 2017 Projects by State

Alabama

Coastal Headwaters Forest Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Longleaf Pine Range)

Lead Partner: The Conservation Fund

Number of Initial Partners: 15

Participating States: Alabama (Lead State)

The Coastal Headwaters Forest Partnership will address the natural resource concerns of the Longleaf Pine Range Critical Conservation Area in Alabama's Gulf Coastal Plain. Longleaf pine forests once dominated the American Southeast, stretching across 90 million acres. Now only four percent of the original forests remain, mostly on public lands. The CHF Partnership, led by The Conservation Fund and over a dozen diverse partners, will educate private land owners about conservation easements and encourage producers to conserve, restore and manage large properties permanently for longleaf habitat in a way that benefits the economy and environment. By restoring longleaf pine, the project will preserve four major coastal river systems in the Gulf Coast Plain and protect habitat for the threatened gopher tortoise and approximate 600 other species related to longleaf pine habitat.

Climate Resiliency in Florida, Alabama and Georgia

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 32

Participating States: Alabama, Florida and Georgia (Lead State)

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin stretches from the base of the Appalachian Mountains in North Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico in the Florida Panhandle. The vibrant ecological Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin and adjacent Ochlockonee River Basin provide habitat for a rich biodiversity of aquatic and terrestrial species, including many designated as endangered or threatened. Growers in this region provide food, fuel, forest products and fiber to global markets, and they depend upon the area's natural resources to sustain their livelihoods. Over the last few decades, fluctuations in climate patterns have presented challenges to sustainable management of the region's natural resources. The Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District and over 30 multi-state partners will develop and implement practical solutions for climate change adaptation in the river basins.

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Alabama Soil Health

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,897,430 (State)

Lead Partner: Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: Alabama (Lead State)

Through the Alabama Soil Health project, the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee and partners will work with Alabama farmers to improve the timeliness of cover crop planting, explore innovative planting methods to get seeds in the ground earlier, and increase access to equipment as needed. The project partners will conduct outreach to farmers through newsletters and social media, workshops and field days along site visits. Among the many benefits of cover crops, the reduction of soil erosion, the improvement of water infiltration and storage, and the enhancement of water quality are among the most important.

Arkansas

Departee Creek Flood Prevention Plan

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$180,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Mississippi River Basin)

Lead Partner: Departee Creek Watershed Improvement District

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Arkansas (Lead State)

Departee Creek Watershed Improvement District and local partners, including beginning farmers and under-served producers, will implement a “shovel ready” flood prevention plan and restore natural flow to Departee Creek in Arkansas. Frequent flooding results in high quantities of sediment buildup, nutrient loss and erosion along the waterway and adjacent lands. The partners will restore critical sections of the river and then develop a low water weir on a lake located mid-stream to maintain desired water levels. The work will improve wildlife habitat, limit loss of nutrients and crops, and reduce damage to personal property and roads. With successful implementation of the flood plan, the waterway also may be removed from the 303 (d) Impaired List.

The Little Red River Water Improvement Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,200,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Little Red River Irrigation District

Number of Initial Partners: 14

Participating States: Arkansas (Lead State)

The Little Red River Regional Irrigation Water District in Arkansas was formed in 1991 with a goal of creating sustainable sources of irrigation water throughout parts of White County. The Little Red River Water Improvement Project, managed by the District and 13 partners, will encourage irrigated cropland producers to implement structural irrigation practices. The project will result in a higher level of irrigation efficiency and water quality throughout the area. Wildlife habitat also will be increased on enrolled land.

Mid-south Graduated Water Stewardship Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: USA Rice Federation

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Number of Initial Partners: 24

Participating States: Arkansas (Lead State)

The economically-distressed Lower Mississippi River Valley region of the United States has long been fighting an uphill battle to retain groundwater levels, improve water quality and provide a suitable habitat for the diverse array of wildlife that inhabit the region. The Mississippi River Alluvial Aquifer serves as a vital and valuable irrigation source for rice growers throughout the region. Decades of annual withdrawals in excess of the aquifer's recharge capabilities have resulted in severely declining water levels that threaten the entire region's viability and could result in regulation for farmers. To address this, USA Rice has partnered with Ducks Unlimited and more than 20 other partners to increase conservation efforts at all levels of producers – from those who are just beginning their conservation efforts to those who are on the cutting edge of conservation innovation. In addition to offering appropriate practices/enhancements for producers, the Mid-south Graduated Stewardship project will include an innovative option for producers to enter the carbon market by adopting advanced Alternate Wetting Drying through Environmental Quality Incentives Program/EQIP 449 Irrigation Water Management practice. The project will include 25 Strike Force counties and parishes and use an innovative outreach plan devised to reach a new and diverse set of farmers that may not often participate in USDA or conservation programs.

Arizona

The Little Colorado River Watershed - Navajo Nation Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$4,826,250 (Critical Conservation Area – Colorado River Basin)

Lead Partner: Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources

Number of Initial Partners: 6

Participating States: Arizona (Lead State)

The Little Colorado River Watershed - Navajo Nation Regional Conservation Partnership Program Project will align Navajo and federal governments, Navajo producer associations, communities, and local organizations with the mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Navajo Nation RCPP will establish a five year PL-566 Watershed Planning Team for three sub-watersheds of the Little Colorado River Basin in Arizona. The project partners – including the Navajo Nation Division of Natural Resources, the Little Colorado River Watershed Chapters Association, Navajo Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Indian Affairs - will participate in and support PL-566 planning activities. The partners will address barriers to Navajo participation in Environmental Quality Incentives Program and other USDA programs, conduct bilingual-bicultural outreach and education to emerging producers' associations, and support youth conservation demonstration projects. The partnership will strengthen relationships among communities, producers and decision-makers and improve resource conditions in the project area, approximately 25% of Navajo Nation.

Northern Arizona Grassland Restoration

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,500,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Arizona Game and Fish Department

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Arizona (Lead State)

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In Arizona, an estimated two-thirds of native grasslands have been adversely impacted by ongoing drought and climate change, invasive woody vegetation and noxious weeds and wildland fire. Through the partnership project, the Northern Arizona Grassland Restoration project - led by the Arizona Game and Fish Department and federal, non-profit and academic partners - will remove encroaching woody vegetation using fire and mechanical treatments, modify or remove potential barriers to wildlife movements, and repair, upgrade, and install watering facilities for wildlife. The complementary project goals are to restore a minimum of 20,000 acres of degraded grassland and savannah habitat and to provide reliable water sources for wildlife on a total of 100,000 acres.

California

Black Rascal Creek Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$10,000,000 (Critical Conservation Area - California Bay Delta)

Lead Partner: Merced County

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating State(s): California (Lead State)

The Black Rascal Creek Project will provide flood protection to the communities of Merced and Franklin/Beachwood in California and surrounding prime agricultural lands, an area that has seen frequent and severe flooding. In addition to flood control, the project will address drought, water quality, soil quality and inadequate wildlife habitat. The project is sponsored by the Merced Streams Group, a partnership of Merced County, Merced Irrigation District, and City of Merced. The partners expect to triple the federal investment in the project.

Livestock in Harmony with Sage-Grouse

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Eastern Sierra Land Trust

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: California and Nevada (Lead State)

In 2012, private landowners, non-profits, and federal, state and local government partners developed the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse to proactively conserve key habitat and significantly reduce long-term threats to the Bi-State greater sage-grouse population in Nevada and California. Through the Livestock in Harmony with Sage-Grouse project, 11 collaborating partners will implement recommended water quality, rangeland and soil health conservation practices and monitoring on grasslands of special significance in Nevada and California; partners will secure conservation easements on at least 11,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat on working ranches. The project intends to protect and measurably enhance sage-grouse habitat on working ranchlands, improve water quality, and to assist producers in meeting or avoiding the need for natural resource regulatory requirements.

San Mateo Coast Farmland, Water and Wildlife

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,465,670 (State)

Lead Partner: Peninsula Open Space Trust

Number of Initial Partners: 2

Participating States: California (Lead State)

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On the San Mateo coast, agricultural lands occupy vital spaces between large islands of protected open space, and contain significant creeks, forests, grasslands, and other fish and wildlife habitats. Farmland also comprises many of the flat, scenic, developable areas in coastal San Mateo County. The proximity to Silicon Valley makes risk of development here extraordinarily high, and farmland sells for ten times the national average. In many places, farmers have been unable to own the land they have farmed for generations. Real estate speculation and other factors have led to an underinvestment in agriculture infrastructure, and in the land itself. Water management is a critical example of this. Challenges with antiquated irrigation equipment and inadequate storage exacerbate conflicts with native species' needs for the same limited water supplies. These challenges are compounded by California's drought, which has severely impacted both fish and farmers. This project will expedite delivery of natural resource conservation on agriculture lands by integrating land protection and stewardship strategies farm-by-farm and across the region to address these priority challenges.

San Diego County Partners Agricultural Sustainability

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$472,590 (State)

Lead Partner: Mission Resource Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 16

Participating States: California (Lead State)

The Mission Resource Conservation District and 15 local partners will improve irrigation system efficiency on 120 agricultural properties in San Diego County, Calif., through the San Diego County Partners Agricultural Sustainability project. Partners will encourage property owners to implement irrigation systems and conservation practices through enrollment in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program or EQIP. Irrigation system evaluations and conservation plans will be utilized to ascertain the baseline conditions of each participating property and to determine the necessary conservation practices needed to ensure sustainability.

Colorado

Colorado River Headwaters Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,758,830 (Critical Conservation Area – Colorado River Basin)

Lead Partner: Trout Unlimited

Number of Initial Partners: 9

Participating States: Colorado (Lead State)

The Colorado River Headwaters Projects will address the consequences of trans-mountain diversions that supply agricultural and municipal water to Northern Colorado and the Denver Metro Area, which have had a significant impact on agriculture and aquatic resources in the headwaters of the Colorado River. Led by an array of partners representing local agriculture, local government, water providers, state agencies, conservation groups and landowners, the project will create a bypass channel to reconnect the Colorado River, make channel and habitat improvement downstream of the bypass to support healthy habitat, and improve irrigation, soil quality and water quality. When fully implemented, the Headwaters Project will directly benefit over 30 miles of the Colorado River and 4,500 acres of irrigated lands that provide sage grouse habitat and make up to 11,000 acre-feet of water available to improve the river during low flow conditions.



Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,250,000 (National)

Lead Partner: East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 21

Participating States: Colorado and New Mexico (Lead State)

Completed by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1976, the San Juan-Rio Chama Diversion is a series of diversion structures and tunnels that together carry runoff 26 miles across the Continental Divide from the Colorado River watershed to the Rio Chama, in the Rio Grande watershed. This diversion, along with the Rio Chama, provides approximately one third of New Mexico's water supply for irrigators, agriculture, industry, communities and fish and wildlife. The Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region project, managed by East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District and twenty partners, will complement recent diversion structures with additional forest health and watershed treatments to increase the resiliency of the landscape to withstand stressors such as drought, wildfire and climate change in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Between 2017 and 2021, partners in the San Juan-Rio Chama region of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico will complete 1,000 – 1,500 acres of watershed resiliency treatments per year utilizing \$6.4 million of Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural Easement Program.

Colorado Rio Grande Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$345,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Subdistrict #1 Rio Grande Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: Colorado (Lead State)

The Colorado Rio Grande project will encourage landowners to participate in voluntary conservation practices for water and soil health. To address issues of drought, the partnership project will share irrigated water management practices, such as weather stations and soil moisture monitoring systems, with the public. Soil health practices will be applied on irrigated cropland to reduce water consumption, reduce soil erosion, enhance soil health and improve soil moisture retention qualities. The application of these practices will reduce energy consumption and contribute to increased stream flows and improved riparian habitat.

Connecticut

Accelerating the Pace of Conservation in the Southern New England Heritage Forest

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$6,144,000 (National)

Lead Partner: The Last Green Valley, Inc.

Number of Initial Partners: 12

Participating States: Connecticut (Lead State)

The Southern New England Heritage Forest is a uniquely-positioned forest corridor stretching north along the Connecticut and Rhode Island border to the Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts. Spanning the shared borders of the 2nd, 3rd and 4th most densely populated states in the country, SNEHF contains 68 towns and covers 1.49 million acres, of which a remarkable 76% still remains in forest and high-priority forested wildlife habitat.

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Between 2011 and 2017, federal and non-profit organizations conducted extensive forest landowner outreach in this region, establishing an informed network of “Woodland Ambassadors” and educated and engaged landowners interested in improving and conserving their forested properties. This SNEHF project will connect these forest landowners, who would not traditionally interact with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, with NRCS programs and services. A remarkable partnership of non-profit organizations and regional, state and municipal agencies will offer private woodland owners a suite of NRCS tools for sound management and forestry conservation practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and permanent protection through easements under the Healthy Forests Reserve Program. This project will serve as a “conservation pipeline” of forest and bird habitat plans, EQIP practices and HFRP easements on private forestlands in order to accelerate the pace of conservation in SNEHF.

Delaware

Cost-share Opportunities for Beginning Farmers

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$475,300 (State)

Lead Partner: Kent Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 4

Participating States: Delaware (Lead State)

The Kent Conservation District in Delaware along with public and private partners will assist new and beginning farmers in Kent County with initial costs associated with poultry operations, particularly with waste and manure disposal. The improper composting and manure storage can increase the possibility of nutrients contaminating surface and ground water. The project will provide cost-share funding to the ever-growing pool of new and beginning farmers in Kent County for composters, freezers and manure storage facilities. The ready access to these resources will provide new farmers with the opportunity to establish safe and effective management practices from the initiation of their operation.

Energize Delaware Farm Energy Efficiency Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$475,300 (State)

Lead Partner: Delaware Sustainable Energy Utility

Number of Initial Partners: 1

Participating States: Delaware (Lead State)

For Delaware farms, the greatest agricultural revenue – approximately 88% - comes from the energy-intensive poultry and irrigation sectors. To address this challenge, the Delaware Sustainable Energy Utility and EnSave sought the feedback and support of Delaware agricultural organizations and farmers, and worked together to develop an SEU-funded program that will offer energy audits, renewable energy assessments, grants, loans and connections with other sources of funding. The Energize Delaware Farm Energy Efficiency Program will match the SEU financial assistance and provide a greater percentage of cost-share to producers than the SEU funds alone. The investment will spur interest in energy conservation and renewable energy and deliver cost savings to Delaware producers.

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Florida

Innovative Financing for Watershed Protection

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,555,000 (National)

Lead Partner: U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities

Number of Initial Partners: 4

Participating States: Florida (Lead State)

By developing two case studies, the Innovative Financing for Watershed Protection project will encourage water utilities to fund land conservation and restoration that simultaneously protects water supplies and benefits at-risk species and other natural resources. An existing, premiere case study focused on a Natural Resources Conservation Service/Endowment partnership led Raleigh, N.C., to establish a watershed protection fee that generates \$2.25 million annually for watershed projects. For this project, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and partners will examine the protection of a large, underserved landowner-owned farm important for water quality and that connects a matrix of other lands protected for wildlife in Savannah River Basin. The partners also will field test a potential break-through, market approach that could help landowners generate income from selling water by restoring more natural forests that benefit at-risk species and longleaf ecosystems.

Gulf of Mexico - Forest to Sea Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: The Conservation Fund

Number of Initial Partners: 13

Participating States: Florida (Lead State)

The Gulf of Mexico – Forest to Sea project will conserve Florida’s pristine “Big Bend” area along the northeastern Gulf by implementing innovative conservation/restoration solutions with private working forest owners. Using an impact investment approach, The Conservation Fund and 12 partners will implement an HFRP easement/restoration plan on large forested tracts to address the natural resource concerns of water quantity, water quality, inadequate habitat, air quality and climate change. The area faces a significant threat due to the conversion of upstream forests to more intensive uses and the resultant reduction in freshwater flows. This project will prevent conversion while allowing sustainable timber harvesting and maintaining local jobs. It will accelerate the pace of conservation and serve as a model for further conservation and impact investing in the region and beyond.

Climate Resiliency in Florida, Alabama and Georgia

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 32

Participating States: Alabama, Florida and Georgia (Lead State)

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin stretches from the base of the Appalachian Mountains in North Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico in the Florida Panhandle. The vibrant ecological Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin and adjacent Ochlockonee River Basin provide habitat for a rich biodiversity of aquatic and terrestrial species, including many designated as endangered or threatened. Growers in this region provide food, fuel, forest products and fiber to global markets, and they depend upon the areas natural resources to sustain their livelihoods. Over the last few decades, fluctuations in climate patterns have presented challenges

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to sustainable management of the region's natural resources. The Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District and over 30 multi-state partners will develop and implement practical solutions for climate change adaptation in the river basins.

Georgia

Climate Resiliency in Florida, Alabama and Georgia

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 32

Participating States: Alabama, Florida and Georgia (Lead State)

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin stretches from the base of the Appalachian Mountains in North Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico in the Florida Panhandle. The vibrant ecological Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin and adjacent Ochlockonee River Basin provide habitat for a rich biodiversity of aquatic and terrestrial species, including many designated as endangered or threatened. Growers in this region provide food, fuel, forest products and fiber to global markets, and they depend upon the area's natural resources to sustain their livelihoods. Over the last few decades, fluctuations in climate patterns have presented challenges to sustainable management of the region's natural resources. The Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District and over 30 multi-state partners will develop and implement practical solutions for climate change adaptation in the river basins.

Sentinel Landscape At-Risk Species Conservation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Georgia (Lead State)

The listing of Candidate Conservation Species and continued demise of Threatened species can have profound impacts on public and corporate producers. Listing of the wide-ranging gopher tortoise in Georgia, for example, would economically impact thousands of producers and millions of acres. The Sentinel Landscape At-Risk Conservation project will protect and restore habitat that might preclude listing of the gopher tortoise in Georgia and accelerate recovery of the black pine snake and gopher tortoise in Mississippi. Building upon existing federal agency efforts, the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and multiple local partners will encourage conservation easements and habitat restoration to protect critical properties that form the core of recovery efforts.

North Georgia Poultry Energy Efficiency and Nutrient Management Planning Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,700,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Limestone Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Georgia (Lead State)

The North Georgia Poultry Energy Efficiency and Nutrient Management Planning Initiative will bring conservation partners together with local poultry farmers to identify on-farm energy efficiency opportunities and improve farm profitability through energy conservation implementation. These improvements will have the added

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benefit of improving air quality by reducing emissions of air pollutants and reducing climate change impacts through reduction of greenhouse gases. The project will also help poultry farmers with an interest in or requirement for nutrient management planning for on-farm implementation. Implementation of nutrient management plans will lead to a reduction in water quality degradation, and indirectly, reduce inadequate habitat for fish and macroinvertebrates.

Hawaii

Hawaii's Watershed Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,063,000 (State)

Lead Partner: State of Hawaii, Department of Land and Natural Resources

Number of Initial Partners: 9

Participating States: Hawaii (Lead State)

The State of Hawaii, Department of Land and Natural Resources has an ambitious commitment to double the acreage of protected watershed forests by 2021 and has already protected over 37,000 new acres in less than four years. The Watershed initiative project sites contain the most intact native forest and receive the highest rainfall, which is critical for recharging Hawaii's fresh water supplies. Protecting forests also improves water quality and reduces erosion and excess nutrients in streams and coral reefs. The project will focus on controlling invasive species, the main threat to forested watersheds, and building fences to exclude non-native hooved animals.

Idaho

Idaho Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer Stabilization Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$5,177,185 (National)

Lead Partner: Idaho Water Resource Board

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Idaho (Lead State)

Through the Idaho Eastern Snake River project, the Idaho Water Resource Board and local partners will implement four actions recommended by the State of Idaho to stabilize and recover ground water levels in the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer: ground to surface water conversions; end gun removal/conversion to dryland; fallowing; and flood irrigation enhancements. The project will support agriculture, industry and municipalities on the Eastern Snake Plain and stabilize and recover spring discharges from the aquifer into the Snake River that maintain the minimum stream flows.

Portneuf River Fish Passage and Water Management

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$719,100 (State)

Lead Partner: Shoshone-Bannock Tribes

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Idaho (Lead State)

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The Portneuf River in southeastern Idaho provides an important habitat for fish, particularly salmonid species, and is a significant source of irrigation water for the Shoshone Bannock Tribes and Fort Hall Irrigation Project. The Portneuf Pump Station supplies irrigation water for approximately 13,300 acres of the Michaud Unit. In order to meet the irrigation deliveries of the Michaud Unit and to prevent pump cavitation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has been annually reconstructing a rock check dam immediately downstream of the pumping station to adjust the water level as necessary. This rock dam is the greatest obstruction to fish movement in the Lower Portneuf River and is a labor-intensive and difficult to manage tool to regulate main channel water flow. Through the fish passage and water management project, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and partners will construct a previously-designed natural-like fish passage channel on the river's right-descending bank and an Obermeyer gate irrigation check structure in the main channel of the river. Fish passage access will normalize feeding patterns and allow access to better habitats, thereby increasing fish survivability rates in the Lower Portneuf River. Also, the ability to better manage river flow will make additional water available for the Tribal Water Bank leasing program, thereby increasing drought resiliency and providing greater regional water security.

Teton Valley Soil, Water and Wildlife

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$825,490 (State)

Lead Partner: Friends of the Teton River

Number of Initial Partners: 4

Participating States: Idaho (Lead State)

A new partnership in the Teton Basin seeks to address growing concerns related to the loss of agriculture in Teton Valley, as well as the related loss of wildlife habitat. The partners will implement market-based solutions to address water quality and quantity issues that are impacting farmers and wildlife populations.

Illinois

Upper Macoupin Creek Watershed Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,000,000 (State)

Lead Partner: American Farmland Trust

Number of Initial Partners: 12

Participating States: Illinois (Lead State)

Illinois contributes 20% of the Nitrogen and 11% of the Phosphorus, yet only 7% of the water to the Gulf of Mexico through the Mississippi River. The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy identifies the Macoupin Creek HUC 8 Watershed as one of the three highest P-yielding watersheds and outlines a voluntary approach to stemming nutrient loss through widespread adoption of agricultural conservation management practices. With little new funding, public-private partnerships will be critical for implementation, and such a partnership was recently formed in the Upper Macoupin Creek sub watershed. Ongoing activities include farmer and non-operator landowner outreach (field days, workshops and producer interviews), soil transect surveys and water quality monitoring, and enrollment of producers in state and federal cost share programs to implement conservation practices on agricultural and forested private lands. Through the new Upper Macoupin Creek Watershed Partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the American Trust and 11 partners will address a major barrier to practice implementation – the need for expensive new equipment – by offering reduced rate

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custom application with a new tillage tool, the “SoilWarrior”, allowing for strip tillage, nutrient placement and cover crop seeding all in one pass. The project will raise awareness of soil lost from un-managed forestlands by establishing a forest management demonstration site in partnership with Blackburn College, and be able to respond to requests from a traditionally underserved community in the watershed to help them with sedimentation issues.

Indiana

Southern Indiana Young Forest Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$960,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry

Number of Initial Partners: 10

Participating States: Indiana (Lead State)

The Southern Indiana Young Forest Initiative, established by 11 partner organizations with a history of conservation leadership in the state, will address a lack of early successional habitat and corresponding declines in at-risk wildlife species. The Initiative will focus on 43 counties in southern Indiana that contain the majority of forested land and provide the best opportunities for incorporating early successional forest regeneration into a predominantly hardwood forest landscape characterized by advanced forest succession. Partners will promote and use Best Management Practices, ranging from species-specific silvicultural guidelines to generalized private landowner management recommendations that benefit young forest indicator species like American Woodcock and Ruffed Grouse. The project intends to work in similar fashion to successful young forest initiatives on the east coast and in Wisconsin and lays the groundwork for the establishment of an Ohio Valley Young Forest Initiative.

Iowa

Fox River Water Quality Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$900,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Davis County Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Iowa (Lead State)

The Fox River Water Quality Project, in its 18th year, is one of the longest running watershed projects in Iowa. The conservation project will continue to improve the health of the Fox River by addressing water quality, conservation, protection and development of natural resources using voluntary programs that provide economic opportunity. The eight partners, led by the Davis County Soil and Water Conservation District, will help producers improve water quality through conservation practices like installing grade stabilization structures, water and sediment control basins, tile outlet terraces and cover crops.

Innovative Conservation Agriculture

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$646,670 (State)

Lead Partner: Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation District

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Number of Initial Partners: 4

Participating States: Iowa (Lead State)

Through the Innovative Conservation Agriculture Project, the Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation will address water quality and soil quality/health concerns in Allamakee County. Specifically, the project will support implementation of cover crops and no-till in conjunction with manure application, the conversion of marginal cropland to pasture, and the addition of a small grain crop to a corn-soybean system, preferably with the inclusion of cover crops in the rotation. These practices will help to minimize soil erosion and nutrient runoff. Through the project, eligible farmers will receive financial assistance to implement conservation practices, and the project will address the need to educate producers and landowners about how different practices affect soil health and long-term productivity.

Kansas

Kansas Wetland Easements

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,607,100 (State)

Lead Partner: Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Number of Initial Partners: 6

Participating States: Kansas (Lead State)

Through the Kansas Wetlands Easements project, Duck Unlimited and partners will assist with the delivery of Agricultural Conservation Easement program on priority Kansas wetlands, with 800 or more additional protected easement acres. The project will provide landowner outreach and education and assist with the application process and site restoration. Conservation priorities will include protecting and restoring sensitive wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge and improving water quality.

Kentucky

Increasing Farm Bill Participation and Benefits

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$350,000 (State)

Lead Partner: University of Kentucky

Number of Initial Partners: 2

Participating States: Kentucky (Lead State)

Forty-eight percent of Kentucky is forestland - that's 12.4 million acres of forests. Productive and well-managed forests enable producers/owners to retain forests for long-term socio-economic benefits and will conserve natural resources and improve forest health, condition and wildlife habitat. Through the project, the University of Kentucky and partners will focus on increasing conservation planning and conservation practice implementation to meet resource concerns and the high demand of technical assistance requests from Kentucky's woodland owners.

Lake Cumberland Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$210,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Wayne County Conservation District

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Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Kentucky (Lead State)

The Wayne County Conservation District and eight local partners will provide leverage local and federal funds for four years to implement soil and water conservation practices in Kentucky.

Season Extension for Eastern Kentucky (S.E.E.K)

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$400,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Grow Appalachia/ Berea College

Number of Initial Partners: 10

Participating States: Kentucky (Lead State)

The Season Extension for Eastern Kentucky or S.E.E.K project includes higher education institutions, non-profit organizations and for profit entities that together will deliver conservation practices to the historically-underserved producers of eastern Kentucky. The S.E.E.K partnership specifically will support producers through cost share contracts for seasonal high tunnels, micro-irrigation in those tunnels, cover crop practices for soil health and mulching practice to reduce tillage and increase plant health. These Conservation practices will increase the length of the growing season, provide a platform for more efficient water management and reduce disease pressures that impact plant health. The S.E.E.K project will be led by Grow Appalachia- a rural food security project of Berea College – which currently has 16 partner sites that serve or border all of the 37 counties specified for the S.E.E.K partnership.

The Fort Campbell Private Lands Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$750,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Compatible Lands Foundation

Number of Initial Partners: 2

Participating States: Kentucky (Lead State)

The Fort Campbell Private Lands Initiative - a partnership between the Compatible Lands Foundation and the U.S. Army - will preserve approximately 20,000 acres of farmland adjacent to Fort Campbell Army Base in Christian County, Kentucky, through the acquisition of permanent conservation easements. Through this effort, prime farmlands, wildlife habitat and water quality/quantity in the Cumberland River Basin and Four Rivers Region will be protected.

Louisiana

Fallow and Derelict Rice Land Enhancement

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$157,480 (State)

Lead Partner: Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Louisiana (Lead State)

The Fallow and Derelict Rice Land Enhancement project will focus on poorly drained, fallow and derelict rice fields in southwestern Louisiana. In this area, historically a tall-grass prairie ecotype, there are approximately 80,000 acres of fallow rice fields that are currently being grazed or are completely neglected and overgrown with

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Chinese tallow and other invasive or undesired tree and brush species. Across the same region, there also are approximately 100,000 un-leveed acres of undeveloped rangeland, some of which may have been periodically cropped in rice, soybeans or sorghum in past decades and which currently are grazed at low stocking rates with little or no form of prescribed grazing, forage management, mowing, prescribed burning or other favorable vegetative enhancements. With slight to moderate vegetative enhancement and hydrologic restoration practices applied to most of these overgrown areas, wetland prairie habitat potential will quickly rebound and may prove as seasonally beneficial and resilient a waterfowl/whooping crane habitat as most rice stubble fields.

Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Reduction

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$157,480 (State)

Lead Partner: Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry - Office of Soil and Water Conservation

Number of Initial Partners: 5

Participating States: Louisiana (Lead State)

The Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Reduction project partners will develop strategies to minimize quick nutrient loss from precision agriculture and mitigate nutrient runoff after irrigation or rain events. By managing the amount of fertilizer spread and proper placement of fertilizer, loss of excess nutrients will be lowered, reducing the amount of fertilizers that reach the Gulf.

Vermilion River Working Lands, Wildlife and Water

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,500,000 (State)

Lead Partner: The Conservation Fund

Number of Initial Partners: 5

Participating States: Louisiana (Lead State)

The Vermillion Parish Working Lands, Wildlife and Water Partnership project aims to permanently conserve large-scale agricultural lands within the coastal zone of Louisiana, with substantial natural resource value, through the purchase of conservation easements under Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The focus lands in Vermilion Parish are under threat of conversion, with real potential for loss of wildlife habitat and further water quality degradation critical to the economy and environment both locally and across the broader geography of the Gulf of Mexico. Big picture success would be completing this first of its kind project, using this success to replicate an innovative agricultural lands protection model across the state.

Maine

Maine Aquatic Connectivity Restoration Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$6,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: The Nature Conservancy - Maine

Number of Initial Partners: 19

Participating States: Maine (Lead State)

The 25,000-square-mile Maine Aquatic Connectivity Restoration Project will restore some of the state's highest-value aquatic networks from habitat fragmentation and degradation caused by road-stream crossings. Led by the Nature Conservancy and 18 other partners, the project will use with Stream Smart design and installation to improve habitat and aquatic organism passage and reduces the impacts of increasingly volatile storm flows.



Massachusetts

Ground Based Water Quality Implementation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$969,650 (State)

Lead Partner: Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts

Number of Initial Partners: 13

Participating States: Massachusetts (Lead State)

The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts will create a Human Portal - boots on the ground - within each conservation district to serve as a “general contractor” to help producers implement conservation practices. Producers are concerned about the complexity and administrative burdens of the federal conservation programs. The required paperwork and follow-through can impede implementation. MACD proposes to establish one staff member in every Conservation District who can serve as the “general contractor” for producers to assist them in completing the paperwork needed to not only apply for conservation funds but also manage those contracts after awarded. The overall goal is to increase the follow-through and quality of implementation on the ground. When a farmer documents the conservation practices he has applied, he would be allowed “safe harbor” from certain regulatory requirements.

Maryland

Promoting Rotational Grazing: Upper Potomac in Maryland

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,100,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Maryland (Lead State)

The Chesapeake Foundation and seven partners will support roughly 20 livestock farmers in Maryland as they convert cropland to pasture or transition existing pasture-based operations to more intensive grazing systems. At the same time, partners will capitalize on opportunities to implement related practices such as stream livestock exclusion and forested buffers. Finally the partnership will expand efforts to provide permanent easements on Conservation Reserve and Enhancement Program forested buffers in Frederick County as a model for future efforts. The project will target Maryland counties within the Upper Potomac watershed because these counties represent the highest number and/or concentration of dairy and livestock operations within Maryland and pollution load modeling high loads of nitrogen and phosphorus to local waters and the Bay.

Michigan

Low Grand River Watershed Habitat Restoration - Farmland Conservation Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Great Lakes Region)

Lead Partner: Grand Valley Metro Council

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Number of Initial Partners: 22

Participating States: Michigan (Lead State)

The Watershed Habitat Restoration - Farmland Conservation Project addresses priority resource concerns in the Lower Grand River Watershed of water quality degradation and inadequate habitat for fish, wildlife and invertebrates. The project will use innovative, creative designs to revitalize 2.5 miles of the river flowing through Grand Rapids. Indian Mill Creek and Rogue River are tributaries of the Grand River upstream from the restoration area, with watersheds that are over 40 percent agricultural. The project also will encourage conservation practices, possibly through financial assistance or cost share funds, using new technology in managing large river systems to address resource concerns. The over twenty project partners have committed significant contributions, almost doubling the federal conservation investment, to deliver a targeted outreach campaign; provide public and private financial and technical assistance to landowners applying for Natural Resources Conservation Service programs; and coordinate monitoring efforts to document project outcomes. A participatory conservation approach of working with property owners through workshops, one-on-one interactions and bilingual materials will reach both experienced and underserved producers in critical areas. The inclusion of many private organizations will increase knowledge of conservation practices and build capacity for developing a local workforce focused on improving water quality and providing adequate habitats for fish and wildlife.

The Huron River Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,825,880 (State)

Lead Partner: Legacy Land Conservancy

Number of Initial Partners: 5

Participating States: Michigan (Lead State)

Through the Huron River Initiative, the Legacy Land Conservancy and partners will work with producers in the upper Huron River watershed to address soil quality degradation and water quality degradation – improving, sustaining and building upon the Emerald Arc of conserved lands in Southeast Michigan. Depression Era state legislators envisioned an arc of conserved lands benefitting the growing population of Detroit, and their efforts in the mid-twentieth century resulted in the state and metro parks systems seen today, stretching from Lake Erie to Waterloo State Recreation Area to Port Huron. The Huron River watershed, the cleanest urban river in Michigan, plays a big and important role in this landscape – as do the agricultural producers within the watershed. The Emerald Arc also consists of prime agricultural soils, expansive farmland, and producers who play critical roles in the health of these lands and adjacent waters. Today, partners can offer new tools and approaches to agricultural land conservation that benefit both individual producers and the broader community, combining permanent land protection with landowner incentives.

Minnesota

Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,873,880 (State)

Lead Partner: Morrison Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: Minnesota (Lead State)

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The Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape includes high quality water features, including 40 miles of the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River and four tributaries; two ecological zones; and thousands of acres of public and private lands. This landscape is one of Minnesota's most important source drinking water protection area; 1.2 million people between Camp Ripley and the Twin Cities rely on the Mississippi for drinking water. The 34 minor watersheds within the CRSL are not confined to political boundaries, hence, efforts across this landscape are critical to protect, maintain, and restore lands resulting in cleaner water, less erosion, high quality habitat and recreational opportunities. The Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape project, a partnership among 11 organizations, will combine the current use of easements and fee title acquisition with management practices on the landscape to protect and enhance our military mission and natural resources.

Missouri

Conservation Ranching Program for Missouri Farmers

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,008,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Missouri Department of Conservation

Number of Initial Partners: 4

Participating States: Missouri (Lead State)

The Conservation Ranching Program for Missouri Farmers program will create and implement market-based management strategies that lead to the adoption of scientifically-proven pasture management practices that provide bird-friendly habitat on actively grazed pasture. The National Audubon Society has launched proof-of-concept pilots of the Conservation Ranching Program in four geographies, including Missouri. The program will link beef producers who voluntarily implement improved pasture and grassland management practices to the retail marketplace. Participating cattle producers will be rewarded with a premium price for pasture-raised beef that is produced on lands managed using applied conservation practices. The Conservation Ranching Program for Missouri Farmers Regional Conservation Partnership Program will provide financial and technical assistance to Missouri livestock producers to assist in the adoption of pasture management practices that align with the Audubon CRP habitat standards. The habitat standards and program protocols are aimed at holistic management practices that support grassland bird-friendly beef production, and provide other environmental benefits, including soil health, water quality and water quantity.

Northwest Missouri Partnership for Water Quality

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,135,500 (State)

Lead Partner: Holt County Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 13

Participating States: Missouri (Lead State)

The Northwest Missouri Partnership for Water Quality will target counties that are adjacent to and drain directly into the Missouri River. As a baseline, the project partners will complete soil microbial analysis, soil carbon and nitrogen analysis and other soil processes. The project will focus outreach efforts to treat 50 to 80% of the contributing cropland with project practices and then show results of the treatment through monitoring. This partnership seeks to become a working model of how federal and state government along with not for profit

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entities, small business and institution of higher learning can come together with resources to achieve significant improvement to water quality and quantity.

Montana

Yellowstone Region Agricultural Sustainability Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,210,000 (State)

Lead Partner: MillerCoors

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: Montana (Lead State)

The Yellowstone Region Agricultural Sustainability Project, led by MillerCoors, will bring together multiple private and public agricultural partners in a three-county project based around defining a path towards agricultural sustainability through progressive conservation practices and sound conservation planning. This project seeks to define best management practices for irrigated agricultural producers in Southern Montana that would lower natural resource consumption and degradation. Over the five year timeline, the project teams will work to lower the consumption of natural resources through the use of added incentives that would allow producers to mitigate financial risks while transitioning to adopt the practices. The project would, therefore, provide a pathway toward a model for agricultural sustainability.

Nebraska

Wahoo Creek Water Quality Sites 26 and 27

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,500,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: Lower Platte North Natural Resources District

Number of Initial Partners: 1

Participating States: Nebraska (Lead State)

The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District in Nebraska, with the assistance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, completed the Wahoo Creek Watershed Plan and Environmental Impact Statement under the authority of Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566). The watershed plan identified seventeen projects within the basin that will reduce rural and urban flooding, reduce sedimentation and scour, stabilize stream channels, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, enhance water quality, improve economic conditions and provide recreational opportunities. Seven of these structures were completed as an environmental enhancement project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Through this project, partners will construct two (Sites 26 and 27) of the remaining ten uncompleted structures as identified in the Wahoo Creek Watershed Plan to address identified flooding and water quality concerns.

Divots in the Pivots

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,863,750 (State)

Lead Partner: Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District

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Number of Initial Partners: 15

Participating States: Nebraska (Lead State)

The Divots in the Pivots Project will restore habitat for wetland-dependent birds in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin through Natural Resource Conservation Service easements and enhanced irrigation efficiency through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program. Led by Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District and 14 partners, the project builds upon three decades of conservation projects, including easements, in the area. The integration of precision field mapping, monitoring soil moisture, evaluating crop water needs, and use of precision irrigation prescriptions will ensure irrigation is only completed when the crops need water, maximize inputs on the cropland and minimizing inputs within the restored wetland. The multi-programmatic approach of the current project will provide ideal wildlife habitat while maximizing net-farm income.

Nevada

Livestock in Harmony with Sage-Grouse

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Eastern Sierra Land Trust

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: California and Nevada (Lead State)

In 2012, private landowners, non-profits, and federal, state and local government partners developed the 2012 Bi-State Action Plan for Greater Sage-Grouse to proactively conserve key habitat and significantly reduce long-term threats to the Bi-State greater sage-grouse population in Nevada and California. Through the Livestock in Harmony with Sage-Grouse project, 11 collaborating partners will implement recommended water quality, rangeland and soil health conservation practices and monitoring on grasslands of special significance in Nevada and California; partners will secure conservation easements on at least 11,000 acres of sage-grouse habitat on working ranches. The project intends to protect and measurably enhance sage-grouse habitat on working ranchlands, improve water quality, and to assist producers in meeting or avoiding the need for natural resource regulatory requirements.

New Hampshire

Protecting Farmland in New Hampshire's Monadnock Region

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$ \$1,218,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Monadnock Conservancy

Number of Initial Partners: 6

Participating States: New Hampshire (Lead State)

The Monadnock Conservancy and its partners will protect nearly 3,000 acres of important farmland in New Hampshire's Monadnock region by 2021. One thousand acres will be conserved through Natural Resources Conservation Service funds; the remaining 1,700 acres will be conserved using a combination of private funds, state grant funding and through donated easements. The project will target riverfront farmland, especially land along the Connecticut, Ashuelot and Contoocook as well as waterways that have been identified as impaired.

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While the main focus of this project is easement acquisition, the Monadnock Conservancy and its partners will also undertake education and outreach to promote conservation easements and good land stewardship practices to landowners.

New Jersey

Whole Farm Systems Conservation Trial

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$644,000 (State)

Lead Partner: New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee

Number of Initial Partners: 5

Participating States: New Jersey (Lead State)

The New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee and its preservation partners have been at the forefront of farmland preservation since 1983. With a full third of the New Jersey agricultural land base in permanent preservation, the average size of farms entering into permanent preservation now is shrinking. Anecdotally, these farms have more environmental constraints and require more staff time to close. Coupled with the new reality of smaller budgets, SADC is exploring options to leverage additional funding to help landowners steward their properties and to conserve additional farmland. As a pilot, this program will create one potential framework for continued farmland preservation in New Jersey. This project will utilize New Jersey farmland preservation funding and wetland restoration funds together to preserve actively farmed areas for agriculture while restoring modified wetlands. The SADC and partners hope to give landowners more choice in the way they preserve their farms while protecting additional farmland for future farmers.

New Mexico

Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,600,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: Canadian River Riparian Restoration Project

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project will encourage ranchers and landowners operating within the Prairie Grasslands Region of New Mexico to utilize the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Each participating rancher, in collaboration with federal and state land managing agencies, will develop a resource management plan. The leveraged EQIP funds will encourage restoration efforts outlined in the plan, like treating invasive plant species. Partners within the CRWRP have been addressing resource concerns on ranches with mixed ownership lands for 11 years. This project was initiated when eight Soil and Water Conservation Districts encompassing the entire Canadian River Watershed began collaboration through a Joint Powers Agreement to restore the watershed of the Canadian River and its tributaries.

New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

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Number of Initial Partners: 17

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

The New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative will bring Environmental Quality Incentives Program and partner funds together for New Mexico ranchers whose operations include federal lands. Each rancher, state and federal agency with lands included in the ranch operation will develop a coordinator resource management plan or CRMP. The CRMP will include range and forest soil health restoration strategies, such as forest thinning, to combat the increase in wildland fires. New Mexico experienced over 1.5 million acres in wildfires from 2009 to 2014. Restoration efforts through this initiative are critical to fund treatments on over 20 million acres of brush-invaded rangeland and 10 million acres of overstocked forest lands.

Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,250,000 (National)

Lead Partner: East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 21

Participating States: Colorado and New Mexico (Lead State)

Completed by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1976, the San Juan-Rio Chama Diversion is a series of diversion structures and tunnels that together carry runoff 26 miles across the Continental Divide from the Colorado River watershed to the Rio Chama, in the Rio Grande watershed. This diversion, along with the Rio Chama, provides approximately one third of New Mexico's water supply for irrigators, agriculture, industry, communities and fish and wildlife. The Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region project, managed by East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District and twenty partners, will complement recent diversion structures with additional forest health and watershed treatments to increase the resiliency of the landscape to withstand stressors such as drought, wildfire and climate change in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Between 2017 and 2021, partners in the San Juan-Rio Chama region of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico will complete 1,000 – 1,500 acres of watershed resiliency treatments per year utilizing \$6.4 million of Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural Easement Program.

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Lands

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,907,670 (State)

Lead Partner: NM Association of Conservation Districts, NM Interstate Stream Commission, NM Acequia Association

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

New Mexico has a rich history of community acequias supporting agriculture. Approximately 800 acequias and community ditch associations serve many farmers or “parciantes” who make all, or part of their livelihood from farming and ranching. Farms served by acequias range in size from less than 1 acre to over 500 acres. The majority of farmers depending on acequias are minorities in underserved communities. Acequias are located in 12 of the most impoverished counties in the state. In New Mexico we say “agua es la vida” (water is life). This project will help sustain this critical social and spiritual connection as a matter of social and environmental justice. The objective of the proposal is to facilitate and promote surface water conservation, increase irrigation system efficiencies/effectiveness and improve water quality on agricultural lands and for downstream purposes. Critical riparian habitats for dependent wildlife and plant species will be conserved. Water quantity and quality will be improved by restoring historic acequias on agricultural lands supporting local families and communities.

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Traditional acequias in irrigated valleys of northern New Mexico provide multiple hydrological benefits including, aquifer recharge, temporary reservoir storage, and delayed return flow. Recent studies indicate that hydrologic functions of traditional acequia systems prolong the river runoff hydrograph, save water through reduced transpiration loss from ground water storage in comparison to above ground storage, while ameliorating climatic variation on local and regional water users. Some aspects of the traditional acequia system resemble natural hydrologic processes and mitigate altered hydrologic characteristics. These altered characteristics include stream channelization and flood control structures. Irrigation via acequias provides functions similar to overbank flooding and meandering streams. A coordinated/collaborative effort with the Interstate Stream Commission and the New Mexico Acequia Association throughout the entire planning and implementation process will serve as the basis for program implementation.

North Central NM Watershed Restoration Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: 969,220 (State)

Lead Partner: Claunh-Pinto SWCD

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

This is a regional watershed project aimed at reducing wildfire risk while at the same time improving soils, hydrology, vegetation, and enhancing social/economic needs. The watershed approach provides a framework for coordinating project needs among private landowners, state and Federal agencies, tribes, communities, and other interested stakeholders. The project extends from Taos (North) to Bernardo (South) and Gallup (West) to Santa Rosa (East), including all major tributaries and sub-watersheds of the Rio Grande and Pecos River in that region. This project will expand on previous work with established partners to improve the natural resources of this critically important region. Forest restoration practices have been shown to reduce high-severity wildfire and to improve watershed health, water quality, and water quantity. Poor historic management of forest watersheds and riparian zones along with current and forecast climate change are creating a dire situation for the condition and availability of New Mexico's forest, rangeland and water resources. This situation must be alleviated with natural resource restoration efforts. Montane coniferous forest watersheds and riparian areas that experience extensive mid- and high-severity wildfires have greatly diminished water storage capacity because the soils do not absorb or hold water after fire. Rainwater runoff generated during storms has the potential to cause extreme flooding, sedimentation, and debris flows into the main tributaries of the burned watersheds. The large amounts of post-fire sediment that move into rivers, streams and reservoirs during these flood events diminish water quality and disrupt water delivery and storage. Wildlife, acequias, rural economies, tourism and outdoor recreation are all at risk from the associated impacts of watershed wildfires. Without a large-scale watershed solution addressing wildfire, more acres will continue to be severely impacted, which will place critical water and other natural resources in jeopardy, and threaten more communities within the Wildland Urban Environment (WUI).

New York

Agricultural Stewardship in the Peconic Estuary

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,212,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Suffolk County - Department of Economic Development & Planning

Number of Initial Partners: 10

Participating States: New York (Lead State)

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Agricultural Stewardship in the Peconic Estuary project - a partnership among government agencies, non-profit organizations, academic institutions and private farmers – will provide technical assistance and financial resources to Suffolk County farmers within the federally-designated Peconic Estuary Watershed in New York. With these resources, farmers can conduct nutrient management plans and integrated pest management plans to adapt best management practices, which will improve water quality, soil vitality and wildlife habitat. The project will support an agricultural specialist at the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District whose primary responsibility will be to assist farmers with their nutrient and pest management plans. The project also will provide farmers with access to trained professionals who can provide information about additional Natural Resources Conservation Service funding needed to enhance agricultural stewardship efforts.

North Carolina

Forever Farms: Easements at the Eminence

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Blue Ridge Forever

Number of Initial Partners: 14

Participating States: North Carolina (Lead State)

The Southern Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina contain the headwater sources of drinking water for millions of people throughout the South Eastern United States, in nine river basins emanating on either side of the Eastern Continental Divide. Large mountain farms are particularly scarce because they are prone to fragmentation and development upon landowner succession, yet they are critically important for clean water and climate resiliency as they typically encompass diverse topography and significant alluvial floodplains. Through the project, Blue Ridge Forever and local partners will assist landowners with voluntary agricultural conservation easements to ensure these farms remain in agriculture.

Western North Carolina Stream and Water Quality Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Resource Institute, Inc.

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: North Carolina (Lead State)

The Western North Carolina Stream and Water Quality Initiative team will identify, implement and monitor projects that will restore, enhance and reestablish streams and wetlands that have been degraded by agricultural land use throughout Western North Carolina. Partners will provide local landowners with financial and technical assistance to develop and implement cost effective solutions to improve at risk ecosystems. By improving function and increasing the amount of protected lands, riparian buffers and wetlands, the project will reduce the overall load of non-point source agricultural pollutants entering waterbodies in the region. This outcome will benefit resource users in the watershed and help producers reduce or avoid the need for regulation of agricultural land use.

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Western North Carolina Stream and Water Quality Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,000,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Resource Institute, Inc.

Number of Initial Partners: 2

Participating States: North Carolina (Lead State)

The Western North Carolina Stream and Water Quality Initiative will implement and monitor projects that will restore, enhance and reestablish streams and wetlands that have been degraded by agricultural land use in six western North Carolina counties. The project will provide measurable improvements in the quality of water resources in this region by reducing erosion, increasing aquatic habitat availability and diversity, restoring stream functions, promoting riparian and wetland areas, and increasing the amount of protected land along stream corridors. By improving function and increasing the amount of protected lands, riparian buffers and wetlands, the project will reduce the overall load of non-point source agricultural pollutants entering water bodies in the region. This outcome will benefit resource users in the watershed and help producers reduce or avoid the need for regulation of agricultural land use. The project will include public outreach and education about of economic development, particularly the co-existence of agriculture and conservation.

North Dakota

Bowman-Slope SCD Tree & Shrub Establishment

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$57,500 (State)

Lead Partner: Bowman -Slope Soil Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 1

Participating States: North Dakota (Lead State)

The Bowman-Slope Soil Conservation District Tree and Shrub Establishment project will establish tree and shrub plantings in Bowman and Slope Counties in southwestern North Dakota to replace lost or older trees across the landscape. The new plantings will address resource concerns identified by working group of local producers and agencies, including inadequate wildlife habitat and livestock shelter, inefficient use of equipment and facilities, and excess flooding, drifting snow, and high water table.

The Grand Forks Prairie Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$375,880 (State)

Lead Partner: University of North Dakota

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: North Dakota (Lead State)

The Grand Forks Prairie area in North Dakota provides forage production, wildlife habitat and water management services for the region. This grassland is interspersed with row-crop fields that, unlike other regions of the state, are most commonly managed with single crop, clean-field practices. A Memorandum of Understanding among state, federal, non-profit and citizen partners established a working group to focus on grassland retention, improved grazing practices and invasive species management in the area. Through the Grand Forks Prairie Project, the working group will promote restoration and sustainable use of the natural resources in this region though an integrated effort to implement and monitor Environmental Quality Incentive Program cover and

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grazing practices. The group will engage producers and landowners through regional workshops and by potential financial assistance for adopting these practices.

Spiritwood Lake Water Quality Improvement Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$375,000 (State)

Lead Partner: City of Spiritwood Lake

Number of Initial Partners: 5

Participating States: North Dakota (Lead State)

Spiritwood Lake in North Dakota provides economic and recreation benefits to the local community and an aquatic wildlife habitat that supports those activities. The Spiritwood Lake Water Quality Improvement Project, led by the City of Spiritwood Lake and local partners, will restore and protect Spiritwood Lake and its tributaries by engaging landowners in a variety of conservation practices, including riparian improvements, nutrient and grazing management, no-till farming and use of cover crops and more diverse crop rotation.

Oregon

Three Sisters Irrigation District Innovation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$990,604 (Critical Conservation Area – Columbia River Basin)

Lead Partner: Three Sisters Irrigation District

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: Oregon (Lead State)

The Three Sisters Irrigation District in Oregon with government, private industry and nonprofit partners will implement multiple innovative projects to mitigate drought, improve water quality/quantity and improve fish habitat. The project includes the completion of piping Three Sisters Irrigation District Watson McKenzie Main Canal with two HDPE side-by-side buried, resulting in the conservation of 800 acre feet of annual canal seepage loss. The on farm component of this project will encompass 61 projects, over 1500 acres, in the Upper District. The program will allow farmers in the Upper District to pipe private laterals, thereby providing access to pressurized water from the District's pipeline. Pressurized water will eliminate electrical pumps that use over 2.5 million kWh of electricity annually. A feasibility study will be conducted to determine the potential for 60 on farm hydro net metering projects. This project will allow TSID to mitigate drought by piping the District.

Conservation of Soil Health in Wallowa County, Oregon

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,194,400 (National)

Lead Partner: The Nature Conservancy

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: Oregon (Lead State)

Through the conservation project, the Nature Conservancy and partners will maintain and improve soil health in targeted areas of Wallowa County, Ore., through innovative on-farm practices and permanent easements. The project capitalizes on the strengths of three well-respected organizations who have a history of working with local producers, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and each other. The project will target the use of NRCS financial assistance to address multiple resource concerns, including soil health, habitat, water quantity/quality and climate change resilience.

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Blue Mountains Vegetative Health Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,195,890 (Oregon)

Lead Partner: Grant Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 5

Participating States: Oregon (Lead State)

The Blue Mountains Vegetative Health Initiative will improve forest conditions, increase streamflows and improve instream listed fish habitat on private lands near the Malheur National Forest in Oregon. The project will be modeled after the Blue Mountains Forest Partners, a key partner in this effort, after their treatment of Malheur National Forest timber areas for fire resiliency. The project partners expect to complete two thousand acres of pre-commercial thinning in conifer stands and one thousand acres of juniper removal over a five year period. The partners will prioritize treatment area using a GIS-based selection process similar to the one successfully developed by the U.S. Forest Service. Finally participating landowners and partners will develop prescribed grazing to ensure long-term management of the treatments.

Pennsylvania

Soil Health: Improving Land, Water and Profitability

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$396,800 (State)

Lead Partner: Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Pennsylvania (Lead State)

Through the Improving Land, Water and Profitability project, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and public-private partners will build farmer management capacity to implement strategic farm conservation practices that promote soil health (i.e. maximize in soil organic matter, soil organisms, and nutrients) and improving “whole-farm” conservation performance. While addressing other resource concerns of the participating farms, the partners will focus on implementing high-level, innovative conservation stewardship practices on 1,000 acres annually for three years, with emphasis on watersheds in Clinton and Centre Counties in Central Pennsylvania. Project objectives include better soil health management practices to improve farm economic viability through reduced input costs and productivity gains associated with advanced management of soil as a living ecosystem, while also reducing soil erosion and nutrient loss. Partners will encourage farmers to consider implementing soil management practices through outreach and educational activities such as on-farm demonstrations, field days, educational materials, and on-farm research/monitoring outcomes. Additionally, in an effort to provide individualized solutions and reduce barriers to implementation, partners will construct specific mentor teams to provide practical advice for farmers throughout the planning and operational phases of implementing conservation practices.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island Farm Conservation Plans

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Proposed NRCS Investment: \$600,000 (State)

Lead Partner: RI State Conservation Committee

Number of Initial Partners: 5

Participating States: Rhode Island (Lead State)

Through the Rhode Island Farm Conservation Plans project, the Rhode Island State Conservation Committee, local conservation districts and partners will assist local farmers with farm conservation plans that address natural resource concerns. The conservation plans will entitle the landowners to qualify as a farm under the FFOS current use tax program and increase landowner participation in Natural Resources Conservation Service technical and financial assistance programs.

South Dakota

Prairie Pothole Working Lands Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$4,188,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Number of Initial Partners: 22

Participating States: South Dakota (Lead State)

Through the Prairie Pothole Working Lands Partnerships, Ducks Unlimited and over twenty conservation partners will improve water quality, soil health and wildlife habitat within the Mississippi River watershed through working lands solutions for agricultural producers at local scales. The project will provide additive acres to federal EQIP, ACEP, and CSP financial assistance programs while utilizing additional partner contributions and programs to leverage federal funds and promote program opportunities. Through EQIP, cost-sharing practices to promote the retention of expired CRP contracts into “working grasslands” projects will be prioritized. Under CSP, partners will provide incentive payments to producers who experiment with fall seeded cover crops, small grain crops in problem soils and protect croppeds wetlands from drainage. By leveraging additional funds, the ACEP program will provide easement payments and cost share for practice implementation on enrolled properties. The project will also utilize existing local partnership programs to provide incentive payments to landowners who voluntarily conserve wetlands.

James River Watershed

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,738,270 (State)

Lead Partner: Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Number of Initial Partners: 10

Participating States: South Dakota (Lead State)

Ducks Unlimited and ten diverse partners will offer innovative cost-share assistance and incentives to increase the quantity and quality of certain conservation practices being applied within the James River Watershed. The partners will promote sustainable conservation practices with landowners through targeted application of National Resources Conservation Service financial. On a broader scale, the partners will establish a series of "long-term demonstration farms" in key landscapes that will be instrumental in changing attitudes towards various

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conservation farming strategies being promoted. The project partners expect the work to improve water quality, soil health, wildlife habitat and long-term sustainability of the James River Watershed.

Texas

Oaks and Prairie Joint Venture Grassland Restoration Incentive Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,925,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: National Wild Turkey Federation

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Oklahoma and Texas (Lead State)

The Oaks and Prairie Joint Venture partners, with the National Wild Turkey Federation serving as the lead partner, will address the significant decline in grassland wildlife populations and loss of natural hydrologic conditions through the improvement and restoration of native grassland ecosystems in the southern great plains. The project will include dedicated staff to work side by side with staff from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, Texas and Oklahoma NRCS, and other OPJV partner organizations to strategically deliver grassland ecosystem improvement projects on private lands. Through this collaborative effort, the OPJV will continue to offer their highly successful Grassland Restoration Incentive Program. The program has already delivered over \$1.1 million in funding to producers who have restored wildlife habitat on over 57,000 acres of grasslands in its first 3 years of existence. Additional financial assistance will be provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program on qualifying projects in Texas and Oklahoma. The deliverable for this combined effort is 95,000 acres of improved native grasslands over the life of the project.

Lower Colorado River Authority Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: Lower Colorado River Authority

Number of Initial Partners: 21

Participating States: Texas (Lead State)

The Lower Colorado River Authority and partners will construct an off-channel reservoir in Colorado County to increase the region's water supply and help preserve regional economies susceptible to frequent and prolonged droughts. The reservoir will provide critically needed irrigation water to farmers and Lakeside rice fields, which also provide habitat for waterfowl and water birds. The project will implement complementary Conservation Stewardship Program or CSP enhancements in Colorado, Wharton and Matagorda counties near the Texas Gulf Coast, including outreach and funding for CSP enhancements on rice lands that provide habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife and aid in water conservation.

Elm Creek Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$4,912,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

Number of Initial Partners: 4

Participating States: Texas (Lead State)

The Elm Creek (1250) Watershed Plan and Environmental Impact Statement were developed and authorized by the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 1981. The watershed plan, to be updated with a supplement,

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consists of seven floodwater retarding structures, two floodwater dikes, accelerated technical assistance for cropland erosion control and development of upland wildlife habitat. Due to funding limitations, only three floodwater retarding structures have been built in the Elm Creek Watershed (3R, 6R, and 7R). This Elm Creek Watershed project will include construction of one floodwater retarding structure, Site 1A, and assistance to agricultural producers for erosion control, water quality improvement, brush management and upland wildlife habitat improvement.

Utah

Uintah County Efficiency Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,387,500 (Critical Conservation Area – Colorado River Basin)

Lead Partner: Uintah Water Conservancy District

Number of Initial Partners: 9

Participating States: Utah (Lead State)

The Uintah Water Conservancy District in Utah is leading a county-wide effort to increase the quantity and improve the quality of water in the area through better management of existing and future water facilities and resources. Partners in this county-wide effort include two federal agencies, three state government entities, Uinta County, Utah State University and several canal companies. These partners will implement nine separate project “components” in this coordinated effort and organize feasible salinity projects on a large scale, eliminating the piecemeal approach of the past.

Ute Indian Tribe Water Conservation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,196,250 (Critical Conservation Area – Colorado River Basin)

Lead Partner: Ute Indian Tribe

Number of Initial Partners: 2

Participating States: Utah (Lead State)

The Ute Indian Tribe in Utah currently is developing a Water Code for tribally-owned water and a Water Plan to inventory and prioritize tribal water resource needs. The Ute Indian Tribe Water Conservation project will assist the tribe and partners with resource need projects. For instance, the project will redirect cold water through Bottle Hollow to restore and stabilize the fishery while providing a delivery point for future improved irrigation projects. These projects are deemed vital and top priority for the Tribe in its efforts to more fully develop its water resources while maintaining healthy river systems and proper environmental conditions in cooperation with public and private water users in the Uintah Basin.

Wallsburg Watershed Improvement Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$500,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Wasatch Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Utah (Lead State)

Main Creek in Wallsburg, has been 303(d) listed for phosphorous, E. coli and temperature. Main Creek flows into Deer Creek Reservoir which has also been listed as impaired because of high phosphorous levels. Deer Creek reservoir is a drinking water source for millions of Utahans along the Wasatch Front. In an attempt to improve

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water quality and aquatic habitat, stream restoration efforts have been ongoing in the Wallsburg Watershed for the past 3 years. Currently, there is a stretch of river approximately 1.2 miles in length, where no project work has been completed. This section is characterized by steep eroded banks. River sinuosity is nonexistent, which adds to erosion, bank loss and down cutting. The soils in the Wallsburg Watershed are naturally high in phosphorous. Stream restoration efforts would include putting meanders back into the system and would nearly double the length of the stream. The added meanders would help slow the river, add aquatic habitat, and significantly reduce erosion and dissolved phosphorous issues. The landowner would no longer lose valuable pasture and crop lands to stream erosion. Banks would be sloped, and native riparian vegetation would be planted. J-hooks and rock barbs would be used to add roughness and bank protection. Cross vanes would be used to increase habitat and reduce the potential for down-cutting. The riparian area will be fenced off, however, water gaps and stream crossings will be installed to allow for improved grazing management. These combined practices will decrease in-stream temperature, erosion and phosphorous. The health and vitality of the watershed would improve. The landowner is willing to move forward with stream restoration efforts on the property, however, they have previously been ineligible due to AGI limitations. With RCPP allowing for an AGI waiver, the benefits of this project can be realized.

Vermont

Cold Hollow Woodlots Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$640,580 (State)

Lead Partner: Cold Hollow to Canada

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Vermont (Lead State)

Cold Hollow to Canada (CHC), a regional conservation partnership operating in seven towns along the western spine of the Green Mountains, is proposing to expand an existing cross boundary management initiative - the Cold Hollow Woodlots Program. A pilot project engaged 12 landowners spanning over 2,000 acres in the town of Enosburg. We intend to increase the scope of work to 3 towns, close to 50 landowners and 8,000 acres. With more than two-thirds of Vermont's forests privately owned, managers must reach out to individual forest owners to manage wildlife habitat, to find solutions for the effects of climate change, and to develop ways to help forests adapt to changing conditions. Innovative methods such as the landscape-based social network formed through the CHWP, will provide a solution to this challenge. As the pilot project has shown, by coming together around a shared passion for their land and working with informed professionals around common interests, private landowners are galvanized to participation. Woodlots ownerships also become demonstration sites which can be leveraged to share the vision to the broader community and with other conservation organizations. CHC's approach to peer-to-peer woodlands management is unique because it engages landowners with contiguous properties in prioritized forest blocks. CHC then provides resources, technical assistance and educational support to guide the discussion among the group. The Woodlots group works together to develop a blueprint for a collaborative approach to future management actions. By securing resources for practice implementation for the pilot group in Enosburg and two new groups in the towns of Richford and Montgomery, CHC seeks to expand the base of engaged landowners in our region, furthering peer-to-peer engagement on these issues to increase the pace of conservation and to foster the stewardship of our forests' health, integrity and resiliency into the future.



Virginia

Engaging Small Producers in the Nutrient Management Planning Process

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$4,575,000 (Critical Conservation Area - Chesapeake Bay Watershed)

Lead Partner: Sustainable Chesapeake

Number of Initial Partners: 16

Participating States: Virginia (Lead State)

Partners will engage up to 100 Maryland and Virginia small dairy producers in the development and implementation of comprehensive nutrient management plans. This effort will support producer and state efforts to meet Chesapeake Bay and local pollution reduction goals.

Oyster Bottom Restoration through Aquaculture

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$852,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Virginia Marine Resources Commission

Number of Initial Partners: 2

Participating States: Virginia (Lead State)

Wild oyster populations have declined dramatically over the past sixty years due to habitat degradation from human population growth within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, sedimentation from land-based activities, and from harvesting. Historically, oyster producers added shells to their privately leased oyster ground in order to catch wild oysters. As oyster diseases became more entrenched in Chesapeake Bay investment and oyster farming on these leases declined, leaving them fallow and leading to further habitat degradation. Modern aquaculture is hatchery-based and provides producers improved genetic stocks of oysters which grow faster and survive disease. Over the past decade, these selected stocks of native oysters have performed well and have resulted in the investment in oyster hatcheries and nurseries by private firms which provide seed oysters and larvae to a rapidly growing, modern oyster aquaculture industry. Virginia's oyster harvest from private leases has increased from less than 20,000 bushels in 2005 to over 356,000 bushels in 2015. This project will restore the degraded oyster habitat in Virginia's tidal tributaries of Chesapeake Bay by implementing a cost-share partnership between NRCS, Virginia Marine Resources Commission, Virginia Institute of Marine Science and Virginia oyster producers. The program would provide oyster shell substrate needed to rebuild a suitable habitat for oyster survival and growth on privately leased oyster bottom. In return, the producer would privately invest in planting the restored area with an adequate volume of spat-on-shell oysters. These oysters will address two priority natural resource concerns by improving water quality by removing excess nitrogen through filtration (feeding), and providing a needed habitat for a variety of fish, juvenile crabs and other wildlife. Increasing the amount of oysters planted on restored bottom would also help local governments meet the nutrient goals established in the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load.

Washington

Puyallup Watershed Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Pierce Conservation District

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Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: Washington (Lead State)

Through the Puyallup Watershed Partnership, the Pierce Conservation District and ten diverse partners will assist landowners with permanent conservation easements and implement restoration activities through Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding assistance. The Puyallup in Washington contains the only remaining prime soils in Pierce County, is home to one of the most urban tribal reservations, and provides essential habitat for Endangered Species Act listed species of Coho and Chinook salmon, Steelhead, and Bull Trout. Since 2002, Pierce County has lost almost 10,000 acres of farmland, nearly five times the state average, due to rapidly encroaching development from the Seattle/Tacoma metropolitan area. That loss not only impacts farmers and food security but also diminishes the ecosystem benefits that farmland provides to water and soil quality.

Yakima Integrated Plan - Toppenish to Teanaway

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,540,740 (National)

Lead Partner: Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation

Number of Initial Partners: 12

Participating States: Washington (Lead State)

The Yakima Integrated Plan will accelerate the recovery of threatened Middle Columbia Steelhead by targeting high priority watersheds which currently produce more than 50% of the wild steelhead run in the Yakima River Basin. These actions will also increase water supply and water quality for environmental, economic and cultural purposes. This project will fund actions supported by diverse partners to enact holistic, innovative solutions to natural resource conservation issues. These actions will restore fish habitat in over 50 miles of channels across 2,500 acres; restore riparian vegetation on over 10 miles of stream banks; enhance fish access to over 480 acres of aquatic habitat; increase water retention in 2,000 acres of ephemeral channels; and improve grazing management across 3,500 floodplain acres and 34,000 upland grazing acres. In addition, the project will target over 30,000 acres for irrigation efficiency enhancements, over 25,000 acres for Conservation Stewardship practices and protect 500 acres of floodplain farmland through easements. Monitoring of these actions will occur through existing programs. The project stems from extensive collaborative efforts in recent years by Yakima Basin Integrated Plan Workgroup, which represents over 20 stakeholders from environmental, agricultural, and tribal interests working to restore habitat and conserve water resources in the Yakima Basin.

Southwest Washington Non-industrial Private Forest Conservation Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,300,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Number of Initial Partners: 6

Participating States: Washington (Lead State)

Non-industrial private forest lands in southwest Washington are important to the regional and state economies. In addition to timber harvest, these working forests provide many functions including: fish and wildlife habitat, protection of water quality, flood reduction, recreational opportunities and carbon sequestration to help combat climate change. The project area includes Grays Harbor, Mason, Thurston, Lewis Pacific, Wahkiakum, Cowlitz and Clark Counties. Washington Department of Natural Resources and conservation districts will conduct outreach and education activities and provide technical assistance to NIPF owners to develop and implement stewardship plans with funding from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program. Washington State Conservation Commission will distribute NRCS technical assistance

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funding to the conservation districts. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will administer the RCPP and assess fish and wildlife habitat and species presence on lands enrolled in the Healthy Forests Reserve Program and other participating lands with willing owners. The HFRP program will be focused in the Chehalis Watershed and includes provisions for conservation easements and habitat restoration to benefit marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl. Program participants could have multiple options for regulatory certainty by implementing conservation practices. Participating landowners will provide at least 25% cost share to match implementation funding from NRCS. Projects funded by the RCPP will improve fish and wildlife habitat, protect water quality, improve forest resiliency in the face climate change, and help meet regulatory requirements while keeping working forests working.

West Virginia

West Virginia's Aquatic Passage: Working Farms

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,021,500 (Critical Conservation Area - Chesapeake Bay Watershed)

Lead Partner: Trout Unlimited

Number of Initial Partners: 6

Participating States: West Virginia (Lead State)

Headwater fragmentation of brook trout habitat is a limiting factor for the range, population numbers and individual size of this well respected species and indicator of healthy watersheds. Habitat becomes fragmented when improperly designed stream and road crossings prevent timely passage of fish and other aquatic species. Brook trout, a Chesapeake Bay Program priority species, is especially susceptible population decline due to habitat fragmentation. Through the Working Farms project, the partners will replace aquatic habitat barriers to fish passage throughout the Potomac Headwaters of West Virginia by concentrating efforts of three coordinated state and federal agencies with the common goal of strategically removing Aquatic Organism Passage barriers on public lands, roadways, and, under the terms of this proposal, on private lands. This area, rich in brook trout heritage, comprises a large, attractive area for visitors and residents to enjoy its natural resources while ensuring water quality standards are met. This program will serve as demonstration restoration project adds to the ecological benefits by producing social, economic and quality of life benefits to residents, visitors, wildlife and downstream water users.

West Virginia Chesapeake Headwaters Conservation Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,004,400 (State)

Lead Partner: West Virginia Agricultural Land Protection Authority

Number of Initial Partners: 13

Participating States: West Virginia (Lead State)

Project partners will use an incentives approach that rewards landowners in the eight-county Chesapeake headwaters area of West Virginia who place perpetual conservation easements on lands that are the most significant for the protection of water quality, and to implement water quality protection practices in these sensitive areas. This region is an important source of drinking water for over four million people in the Washington D.C. metro area. The partnership of eight county farmland protection boards and three land trusts proposes to provide incentives to landowners to protect high priority agricultural land with important ecological functions, to establish permanent buffers around sinkholes in karst areas and in riparian corridors and to protect

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high-quality forests. Success will be gauged first by the willingness of landowners to implement the protection measures as part of their easement; and second by the movement toward future implementation of such measures on all easements containing those attributes identified as vital to the protection of vital resources in the Chesapeake headwaters region.

Wisconsin

Lafayette County Agricultural Enterprise Area Water Quality Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$600,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection

Number of Initial Partners: 10

Participating States: Wisconsin (Lead State)

Within the Pecatonica River watershed, there are many waterways identified on the Federal 303(d) list of impaired waters and sections of the watershed have been identified as priority areas for phosphorous and nitrogen reduction. The Lafayette County Agricultural Enterprise Area Water Quality Project aims to mobilize an existing informal network of landowners to address these water quality concerns through the widespread adoption and installation of conservation practices. The project's goal is to build a self-sustaining network of landowners and producers to take ownership over conservation activities in the watershed. Ten partners have committed to pooling their resources, more than doubling federal investment, to support and advance landowner efforts to reduce runoff of excess nutrients and sediment from agricultural land. This collaborative effort to increase conservation work on agricultural lands will address soil health and water quality while ensuring continued agricultural viability for future generations farmers.

Wyoming

Northeastern Wyoming Sage-Grouse Habitat Enhancement

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$200,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Converse County Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: Wyoming (Lead State)

The Northeast Wyoming Sage-Grouse Habitat Enhancement Project will help expand conservation efforts of the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association, the Douglas Core Area Restoration Team, and other partners operating in northeast Wyoming. The Association has been actively engaged in local and regional conservation efforts since 1999 while the Douglas Core Area Restoration Team was formed in 2013 to focus on restoration of sage-grouse habitat within the Douglas Core Area. The primary focus of this regional project is on developing and maintaining wildlife habitat for sage-grouse and other species of interest while maintaining viable agricultural operations. Conservation projects that will be planned and implemented include sagebrush restoration, grazing management, rangeland improvement, invasive species treatment (specifically cheatgrass), ephemeral and intermittent streambank restoration, restoration of wildfire and energy-related disturbances to minimize excessive erosion, protection and enhancement of upland ephemeral wetlands, and projects focused on enhancing soil quality. The initiative will build on existing collaborative efforts among landowners, state and

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federal agencies, academia, and other conservation non-governmental organizations working in northeast Wyoming.

Northeast Wyoming Forest Resiliency Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,285,540 (State)

Lead Partner: Wyoming Conservation Districts

Number of Initial Partners: 10

Participating States: Wyoming (Lead State)

Since 2012, local conservation districts and Natural Resources Conservation Service field offices have actively been working on forest health projects throughout Northeast Wyoming. The goal of this project will be to continue the efforts in this area to create a more resilient ecosystem for the future by partnering with local, state, and federal partners. In total eleven partners will be participating on this project to coordinate, promote and administer the proposed project. They stand ready with the knowledge and technical expertise to ensure that this project is a success. This project will encompass three counties in the Northeast portion of Wyoming, with a priority area encompassing 785,000 acres. This project will have the potential to address forest resource concerns on approximately 2,200 acres which will result in improved forest stand conditions, increased forage production for livestock producers and wildlife, decrease wildfire risk, enhance wildlife habitat, and increase overall forest health. The project will be further extended on adjacent property managed federal agencies, as they are currently implementing forest management on their lands. The objectives of this project are to improve forest health and resiliency, and improved rangeland health by reducing encroachment of juniper and pine. These objectives will be achieved with the use of the EQIP conservation program and practices.

Puerto Rico

Sugar Cane Industry Restoration Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Serralles Agricultural, LLC

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: Puerto Rico (Lead State)

Through the Sugar Cane Industry Restoration project, Serralles Agricultural LLC, the Government of Puerto Rico and multiple private landowners will promote sugar cane agriculture in the western and southern regions of Puerto Rico through agricultural management and natural resources conservation practices. The partners will restore and expand existing water systems to preserve and enhance local aquifers, particularly in the arid south, while increasing the productivity of agriculture in these economically depressed regions. The Project also will improve soil structure and limit erosion and water runoff, while enhancing air quality, especially in Ponce where sugar cane bagasse will replace oil for boilers at the Serralles Distillery and reduce carbon dioxide levels.

Adaptation Measures in Southwestern Puerto Rico

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$918,460 (State)

Lead Partner: Southwest Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Puerto Rico (Lead State)

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The Lajas irrigation system located in southwestern Puerto Rico was built in the mid-1950 to supply four acre-foot of supplemental irrigation water to nearly 20,000 acres of fertile agriculture land. Through the Adaptation Measure in Southwestern Puerto Rico project, the Southwest Soil and Conservation District and six partners will build a new water conveying system and feed several water storage lagoons to supply water by gravity to participating farms in the area to a semiarid region with fertile soils. The partners will develop application tools to assist farmers on when and how much water to apply for optimal soil moisture and water resources in the region. The partners will make applications available to all farmers in the region so they can decide when and how much to irrigate based on simple data entry quests that uses information on crops and date of planting. The rest of the information will be retrieved from existing SSURGO databases, a new USGS climatological network for the area.