

# Regional Conservation Partnership Program

## National, Critical Conservation Area, and State Project Summaries

### National

#### **ABC: Improving Forest Health for Wildlife Resources in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan**

Lead partner: American Bird Conservancy

Building on a strong existing partnership with NRCS, American Bird Conservancy (ABC) seeks to improve forest management on nearly 12,000 acres of nonindustrial forest land in order to provide essential habitat for the golden-winged warbler and other potential threatened and endangered (T&E) species. Partners will implement additional forest management on at least 52,000 acres on public and private lands. Goals of the project include achieving a better distribution of forest habitat to benefit potential T&E species, increasing the population of golden-winged warblers on private lands, and, ultimately, avoiding its listing under the Endangered Species Act. The listing decision is scheduled for 2017.

#### **Accelerated Implementation of Agricultural and Forestry Conservation Practices in the Lake Champlain Watershed of Vermont and New York**

Lead partner: State of Vermont Agencies of Agriculture, Food and Markets, & Natural Resources

This renewed effort among long-standing partnerships to accelerate the impact of private lands conservation on water quality concerns in Lake Champlain uses several innovative tools, including the use of modeling to target conservation practices for optimal environmental benefits, an extensive monitoring network to assess conservation effectiveness, sliding scale cost-share to gain the support of producers, and an incentive-based Environmental Stewardship Program to provide some certainty to producers that they will get credit for the conservation practices they apply.

#### **Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers (ACFR) Conservation Partnership for Alabama, Florida, and Georgia**

Lead partner: Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District

Persistent drought and long-term landscape change have reduced the capacity of the ACFR Basin to balance human use with ecological demand. Led by the Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District—whose successful partnership with NRCS has led to innovations in cost-effective irrigation improvements through several Conservation Innovation Grants—this project to improve water quality and quantity in the ACFR includes more than 20 partners, ranging from private industry and large nonprofit organizations to universities and local soil and water conservation districts.

### **Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement**

Lead partner: American Bird Conservancy (ABC)

States: Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and West Virginia

To address habitat loss, soil health, and water quality, the project will focus on suites of conservation practices intended to enhance 25,000 acres of forest habitat on private lands for cerulean warblers, an at-risk species, and associated species. The Nature Conservancy has committed to enrolling an additional 2,000 acres into easements, and the American Chestnut Foundation, the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, and Green Forests Work will reforest up to 1,000 acres of reclaimed mine lands to biodiverse forest.

### **Delaware River Watershed Working Lands Conservation and Protection Partnership**

Lead partner: American Farmland Trust

This project originated from a rigorous watershed-wide assessment and prioritization process initiated by key stakeholders in the Delaware River Basin (DRB) in 2012 by the William Penn Foundation to define and address water quality and quantity concerns. To augment the implementation of conservation systems through NRCS assistance, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Open Space Institute will administer competitive grant and capital programs to award funds to important, well vetted restoration and land protection projects. Private funding will provide streamlined access to some practices and encourage participation by some who prefer not to use government funding. Through these mechanisms, the partners anticipate working with more than 600 farmers and 600 forest landowners on 35,000 acres in this important region.

### **Duck Valley Reservation Irrigation Improvement Project**

Lead partner: The Shoshone-Paiute Tribe of the Duck Valley Indian Reservation

Through close collaboration with the local community, the Duck Valley project in Nevada and Idaho offers specific and achievable activities to upgrade irrigation systems, remove livestock from riparian areas, and restore stream banks. This shovel-ready project will not only improve water quality and the efficiency of irrigation use but also provide economic benefits to an underserved community.

### **Implementing Education, Outreach, and Conservation Practices on Tribal Land for Socially Disadvantaged Producers and Alaska Tribal Conservation Districts**

Lead partner: Tyonek Tribal Conservation District

This project, which includes all eleven Alaska Tribal Conservation Districts (ATCDs), will extend the capacity of NRCS to provide service to ATCDs and connects partners for the benefit of enhancing, preserving, and restoring habitat used for subsistence resources in the effort to preserve customs and traditions of Alaska Native people. The project has a strong monitoring component, and partners will collect data on subsistence resources and their habitat to establish baseline information and measure change overtime.

## **Improving Water Quality Through the Implementation of Forestry Practices and the Assessment of Riparian Systems in Kansas Priority Watersheds**

Lead partner: Kansas State University

Surface water reservoirs in Kansas and Oklahoma have lost 40 percent of their storage capacity and are experiencing frequent algal blooms, owing mainly to stream bank erosion. By implementing forestry best management practices on 25,000 acres and creating a protection framework for remaining riparian forests in ten high-priority watersheds, this project will help sustain reservoir storage and wildlife habitat, improve the drinking water supply, and increase recreation opportunities. The contributing partners have a strong track record in making water quality improvements and working with producers.

## **Klamath-Rogue Oak Woodland Health and Habitat Conservation Project**

Lead partner: Lomakatsi Restoration Project

Many at-risk and listed species depend on quality oak woodlands that are threatened by conifer encroachment, densification, and severe wildfires in this project area, covering portions of Oregon and California. Working with landowners, including historically underserved producers, and using a sound, science-based approach, the partners will target 3,200 high-priority acres recently identified in a Conservation Implementation Strategy to preserve, enhance, and restore the structural diversity, ecological function, and overall health and persistence of oak habitats and their watersheds.

## **Long Island Sound Watershed RCPP**

Lead partner: Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation

Excess nutrients have been identified as the primary driver of hypoxic conditions in Long Island Sound and are also impacting upland water resources within the watershed, which encompasses areas of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. This project will develop a comprehensive, whole-farm management certainty program for farmers in the area and use both working lands and easement programs to improve soil health and nutrient management, establish community resiliency areas with a focus on enhancing riparian areas, and institute a land protection program to protect agricultural and forestry areas.

## **Michigan/Indiana St. Joseph River Watershed Conservation Partnership**

Lead partner: Michigan Department of Ag and Rural Development

The partnership strives to find solutions to increasing groundwater withdrawals and sediment and nutrient loading that are economically good for the farmer but also have multiple conservation benefits, including optimizing groundwater use, improving infiltration, and reducing nutrients and sediment while also improving wildlife and fisheries habitat. Innovative methods to target high-priority areas and appropriate conservation practices will take an already developed watershed management plan to the next level. Monitoring will be used to adaptively manage this project at various levels, from the field-scale to the entire watershed. Partners have a strong history of working with both NRCS and producers.

### **Middle and Lower Neosho River Basin Conservation Program**

Lead partner: Oklahoma Conservation Commission, Water Quality Division

This project will pool Kansas and Oklahoma state and federal resources to address water quality concerns in the middle and lower Neosho River Basin, which affects water quality in downstream Grand Lake. Ten small watersheds, which water quality modeling have indicated are among the highest contributors to nutrient, sediment, and bacteria loading in Grand Lake, have been targeted for the program. The states will use in-stream water quality monitoring to evaluate program performance, along with watershed modeling, soil sampling, and soil carbon sequestration verification.

### **Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program National Demonstration Project**

Lead partner: Minnesota Department of Agriculture

In 2013, the Minnesota certification program kicked off in four small watershed pilot project areas, offering producers that demonstrate superior water quality conservation management a 10-year certification by the State of Minnesota and regulatory certainty that will be in compliance with any new state water quality laws and rules that take effect during the certification period. This project will establish and administer a state-level agricultural water quality certification program for export and adoption by states throughout the country. Success will be gauged both by the establishment of the state-wide program and also on a farm-by-farm basis, ensuring successful mitigation and prevention of water quality risks within each operation in the program.

### **New Mexico Restoration Initiative for Rangeland, Forestland, and Wildlife on Ranches with Federal Lands**

Lead partner: New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

In response to drought conditions and extreme wildfires impacting more than 1.5 million acres from 2009 to 2013, New Mexico has developed a Restore New Mexico plan that includes treating brush-invaded range lands and dense forest land, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat degradation. As part of this effort, more than 150 ranchers in 15 conservation districts collaborated on Coordinated Resource Management Plans, which will be the basis for NRCS, the Bureau of Land Management, and private industry to continue to restore affected areas on both private and Federal land.

### **The Oregon Model to Protect Sage-Grouse**

Lead partner: Oregon Association of Conservation Districts

A thirty-year programmatic Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA) for greater sage-grouse—which is a mechanism to maintain or improve habitat and assist producers in meeting or avoiding the need for regulatory requirements under the Endangered Species Act—has been developed for private lands in Harney County, Oregon, and similar agreements are currently being developed for the remaining six counties in Oregon within the range of sage-grouse. NRCS conservation practices are a critical piece to ensuring producers have the tools and financial assistance they need to successfully meet the terms of the CCA. The project has a goal to reach 40 percent of producers, and partners will provide additional technical and financial assistance, as well as monitoring support.

## **Palouse River Watershed (WRIA 34) Implementation Partnership**

Lead partner: Palouse Conservation District

Through implementation of the Palouse River Watershed Management Plan, more than 15 partners will work with producers to address TMDL concerns and reduce water quality regulatory action on producers in this area of Washington and Idaho. Innovative project components include promotion of the Farmed SMART Certification program (which provides an opportunity for environmental markets), enhanced incentives for riparian buffer establishment including five years of buffer maintenance, and the establishment of a watershed-wide monitoring effort that encourages landowner involvement in monitoring of natural resource conservation improvements. In addition to improved water quality, the project is expected to benefit fish and wildlife habitat, including four fish species of concern.

## **Precision Conservation for Salmon and Water Quality in the Puget Sound**

Lead Partner: Washington State Conservation Commission

Partners will use an ecosystem-wide system for targeting high priority areas to improve water quality and habitat for at-risk species, including Chinook salmon, bull trout, and steelhead. Within focus areas, a farmer-to-farmer approach will be used to increase participation and ensure buy-in from the local community. Opportunities to provide additional outreach to Hispanic and Asian producers and a strong consideration of Tribal needs are included in the project plan.

## **Regional Grassland Bird and Grazing Lands Enhancement Initiative**

Lead partner: Missouri Department of Conservation

The goal of this project, which includes portions of Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, and Nebraska, is to create and implement management strategies that provide for the adoption of scientifically proven and culturally acceptable pasture and grassland management practices. Conservation implementation will maintain the tall grass prairie ecosystem without the need for government regulation and enroll high-quality grasslands into conservation easements and contracts. The highly targeted approach identified in the proposal will strengthen existing partnerships and implementation plans.

## **Rice Stewardship Partnership—Sustaining the Future of Rice**

Lead partner: Ducks Unlimited, Inc. (DU)

The Rice Stewardship Partnership, composed of DU, the USA Rice Federation, and 44 collaborating partners, will assist up to 800 rice producers to address water quantity, water quality, and wildlife habitat across 380,000 acres in Mississippi, Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Missouri, and Texas. Using remote sensing to estimate bird population carrying capacity in shallow waters and the Field-to-Market Fieldprint Calculator to monitor results over time, the partners offer several innovations to augment conservation implementation and gain broader producer participation.

## **Unlocking Carbon Markets for NIPF Landowners in the Pacific Northwest**

Lead partner: Pinchot Institute

By aggregating landowners into groups, the American Carbon Registry (ACR) reduces transaction costs for carbon credit trading and allows small producers to participate. This project will target

approximately 250 non-industrial private forest landowners in Oregon and Washington who wish to participate in a regional carbon crediting program and who possess lands in NRCS and state priority areas as defined in regional conservation strategies. Targeted parcels will be between 75 and 4,000 acres in size, with the majority being less than 250 acres. NRCS and partner assistance will cover much of the initial expense of participating in carbon projects, specifically the development of a forest management plan and subsequent implementation of pre-commercial thinning to enhance carbon stocks.

### **Upper Bear River Stream Restoration and Irrigation Efficiency**

Lead partner: Trout Unlimited

This project in Utah and Wyoming will improve fish passage and stream flows to benefit habitat for native cutthroat trout and other aquatic and riparian dependent species, as well as improve irrigation efficiency and water management. Monitoring will assess project performance using a Conservation Success Index that includes decreasing fish loss to irrigation canals, improving fish habitat, increasing in stream flows, decreasing river water temperatures, improving operation and maintenance of irrigation infrastructure, and decreasing irrigation water loss from canal conveyance. The partners' keen understanding of NRCS programs and alignment with existing conservation plans mean this project is shovel ready.

## **Critical Conservation Areas**

### **California Bay-Delta**

#### **Expansion of Waterbird Habitat Enhancement Programs on Central Valley Agricultural Lands**

Lead partner: California Rice Commission

The current sequence of events for rice production creates a situation where birds are frequently left with abrupt changes in habitat availability. The proposal extends the "watering" season of flooded rice fields beyond just the production phase and adds shallow water habitat in the winter/spring and fall months. This proposal will expand the Waterbird Habitat Enhancement Program (WHEP) by 50 percent, thus enhancing the wildlife value of 165,000 acres of rice and the long term sustainability of rice agriculture. A new WHEP component will address the needs of upland-nesting bird species on a target 12,000 acres. Ultimately, the partners have a goal for past participants to transition to CSP, with 165,000 acres enrolled in the rice field management portion and 19,000 enrolled in the upland portion by 2019.

#### **Protection, Restoration, and Enhancement of Tricolored Blackbird Habitat on Agricultural Lands**

Lead partner: Audubon California

The Tricolored Blackbird, once was abundant in California with a population in the millions, now has an estimated 145,000 birds remaining statewide, and many predict that it is heading toward extinction. This proposal is a partnership between the dairy industry and conservation groups to address the factors that challenge California dairy farmers and threaten Tricolored Blackbirds, with

the goal of finding a sustainable solution for management of colonies on farms and saving the Tricolored Blackbird from extinction. In addition to using working lands and easement programs to protect and increase habitat, the proposal includes an industry-led promotional campaign highlighting farmers' role in saving the species and the formation of a working group with industry partners to develop, vet, and pilot potential long-term solutions that could substitute for federally funded harvest management practices.

## **Chesapeake Bay**

### **Accelerating Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plans**

Lead partner: Maryland Department of Agriculture

To meet a large unmet demand for conservation programs that will contribute to meeting the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, this project will utilize state implementation plans to accelerate targeted, cost-effective conservation in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Implementation will be adapted to each state's high priorities and opportunities for innovation. For example, in Maryland, high-resolution imagery will help prioritize locations for riparian buffers as part of the Chesapeake Bay Riparian Forest Buffer Initiative, while Delaware will offer vouchers to offset the cost of buffers through the Buffer Bonus Program.

### **Comprehensive Watershed Conservation in Dairy and Livestock Landscapes of the Chesapeake Bay**

Lead Partner: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

A large, diverse group of partners will use a "raise the bar" approach that rewards agricultural producers in Virginia, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania for implementing higher impact, priority conservation practices in targeted subwatersheds and counties of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The approach will address both water quality degradation and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife in the CBW through a combination of comprehensive conservation planning, conservation practice implementation, and strategic habitat restoration. A new concept of conservation delivery is proposed: the conservation brokerage, where agency-neutral funding is used to best address resource concern. The partners will also use cost-benefit targeting to focus financial assistance dollars.

### **Delmarva Whole System Conservation Partnership—From Field to Stream**

Lead Partners: The Nature Conservancy and the Delaware Maryland Agribusiness Association

This public-private partnership in Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia will use a science-based approach to achieve significant environmental objectives: 1) improve water quality through the implementation of advanced nutrient management practices on 95,000 acres and restoring, enhancing, and protecting 3,000 acres of natural filters (wetlands and buffers); and 2) expand wildlife habitat by enhancing, restoring, and protecting 3,000 acres of high quality wetlands and buffers. The partners estimate that these conservation systems in priority locations will reduce 836,000 pounds of total nitrogen, 33,300 pounds of total phosphorus, and 58,000 pounds of total suspended solids currently delivered to local waterways each year, which will support achieving the goals of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL.

## **Mason-Dixon Working Lands Partnership**

Lead Partner: Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Partners will bring significant financial resources to areas of Pennsylvania and Maryland within the Chesapeake Bay to overcome common barriers to landowner adoption of conservation systems, including limited outreach, lack of technical assistance and funding, and limited coordination among programs and private markets. A focus on soil health and resilience—as well as harnessing natural systems including riparian forest buffers, restored wetlands, and healthy forests—will not only reduce nutrient loading to the Chesapeake Bay but also improve water quality in high-value streams and water bodies in the area for the benefit of fisheries, drinking water supply, and recreation.

## **Colorado River Basin**

### **Modernizing Agricultural Water Management in the Lower Gunnison River Basin: A Cooperative Approach to Increased Water Use Efficiency and Water Quality Improvement**

Lead Partner: The Colorado River Water Conservation District

This project harnesses local innovation occurring within the agricultural and water communities and integrates activities to accelerate a common mission of utilizing water resources wisely while ensuring agricultural and endangered species sustainability. Although similar activities (improvement in conveyance, delivery, on-farm irrigation) have been occurring in the Lower Gunnison sub-basin, they have been primarily limited, disparate efforts without a unifying ‘grand design’ and without leadership from local producers. This proposal integrates activities and brings together a diversity of partners under a coordinated leadership team to achieve greater water efficiency results and multiply environmental benefits. In addition to water quantity benefits, the partners will use information from a recent Conservation Innovation Grant and national Selenium Soil Interpretation Model to target areas with high selenium. The project also supports a USFWS Programmatic Biological Opinion.

### **Verde River Flow and Habitat Restoration Initiative**

Lead partner: The Nature Conservancy

Project partners in the Verde River Valley of Arizona will aim to improve irrigation water management and irrigation water delivery on 1,000 acres, enhance 6,000 acres of riparian habitat, and protect 400 acres of agricultural lands through conservation easements over five years. Easements will be focused on lands that have significant investment in on-farm conservation practices and are critical to ensure long-term investments are protected. The lead partner has been working in the Verde Valley for three years with a \$200,000 investment in improving conveyance infrastructure, which will now enable this effort with greater on-farm focus.

## **Columbia River Basin**

### **North Slope Ochoco Holistic Restoration Project**

Lead partner: Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District

The Wheeler Soil and Water Conservation District in Oregon has a long-standing, collaborative program that focuses on the improvement and protection of natural resources for the betterment of agricultural producers, the local community, and fish and wildlife. Using an innovative GIS approach

to target treatment areas, the partners will implement a coordinated and directed effort to expand upon the current work being done to address key natural resource concerns in a ridge-top to ridge-top manner. EQIP, ACEP, and CSP will be used to accomplish objectives including pre-commercial thinning, irrigation efficiency projects, conservation easements, juniper removal, range restoration, spring developments, riparian restoration, and critical habitat restoration. Success will be gauged by the evaluation of measurable objectives and the expansion of established monitoring programs.

### **Upper Columbia Irrigation Enhancement Project**

Lead partner: Trout Unlimited, Inc.

This project in Washington State will help fund irrigation efficiency improvements with large irrigators and irrigation districts to modernize water delivery infrastructure. Enhanced instream flows will benefit critical spawning and rearing areas for Endangered Species Act (ESA) fish and provide passage during migration during seasonal low flows. Complementing multiple existing conservation plans in the region, the project's goal is to implement irrigation efficiencies on more than 7,200 irrigated acres, with more than 500 individual landowners. These enhancements will increase instream flows in critical Upper Columbia Tributaries by more than 50 cubic feet per second, as well as improve water quality by increasing instream flow, decreasing stream temperature, and mitigate delivery of fertilizers and pesticides to ESA salmon-bearing tributaries. The Washington Water Project of Trout Unlimited (TU-WWP) will place the water savings from the efficiency improvements into the Washington State Trust Water Right Program.

### **White River Irrigation Efficiency and Stream Flow Restoration Project**

Lead partner: Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation

Partners for this project in Oregon have identified specific goals, already planned through a collaborative approach in the county, including the installation of six unscreened fish passage barriers, saving 7,300 acre feet of water annually, and restoring flows to 21.9 miles of stream, of which 15 miles of stream were over-allocated and seasonally dewatered. Identified activities will increase water quality, improve irrigation efficiency, and improve fish habitat in this critical area.

### **Yakama Nation On-Reservation Lower Yakima Basin Restoration Project**

Lead Partner: Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation

This project addresses critical needs for the integrated conservation and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat, water quantity, and water quality on the Yakama Reservation in the lower Yakima River basin. The actions in this proposal will accelerate the recovery of threatened middle Columbia steelhead on the lower tributaries of the Yakima River, which currently produce more than 50 percent of the wild steelhead population in the Yakima basin. These actions will also benefit multiple other aquatic and riparian species, including chinook and sockeye salmon, Pacific lamprey, and important cultural plant species.

### **Great Lakes Region**

#### **Saginaw Bay Watershed Conservation Partnership**

Lead partner: The Nature Conservancy

Saginaw Bay, an embayment of Lake Huron, hosts the largest coastal wetland in Lake Huron and faces numerous water quality challenges, including loss of habitat, excessive nutrients and sediment, and algal blooms. This project will set ecologically relevant implementation goals, track progress using new online tools, and harness the influence of agribusiness as a complementary delivery mechanism in order to reach goals of treating 55,000 acres with conservation practices through EQIP and restoring 400 acres of wetlands through ACEP by 2019. The partners will track effectiveness using the Great Lakes Watershed Management System to quantify acres implemented and total sediment and nutrients reduced annually while also working with project partners to monitor long-term trends in fish community health.

### **Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin Phosphorus Reduction Initiative**

Lead partner: Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

A diverse team of partners will use a targeted approach to identify high-priority sub-watersheds for phosphorus reduction and increase farmer access to public and private technical assistance—including innovative demonstrations of practices that NRCS does not yet cover—in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. Identified actions are coordinated with the Ohio Phosphorus Task Force Report and will move Lake Erie toward goals developed in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement Annex 4 Nutrient Strategies. The partners will gauge success and monitor results using project-wide water quality monitoring and watershed modeling conducted by national experts from multiple scientific entities and institutions.

### **Longleaf Pine Range**

#### **Coastal Headwaters Forest – Longleaf Conservation and Restoration**

Lead Partner: The Conservation Fund

The 205,000-acre Coastal Headwaters project, located in Florida and Alabama, will utilize key partnerships and resources to acquire conservation easements and restore the off-site loblolly pine to the native longleaf pine. In doing so, more than 44 at-risk species' habitat will be enhanced and more than 150,000 acres of longleaf pine restored. Water quality and quantity to the Gulf of Mexico will be protected and at least 80 jobs retained.

#### **Securing Private Working Forests to Benefit Longleaf Pine, Threatened and Endangered Species, and Military Readiness**

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

The partners will target 20,000 acres of working longleaf in South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Florida, and Louisiana, with a greater than one-to-one match from the Department of Defense and other partners. Protecting longleaf forest and maintaining lands in and surrounding up to ten military installations—each with individual goals—will support existing longleaf and gopher tortoise efforts while also maintaining critical land areas around military bases.

### **Mississippi River Basin**

#### **Bayou Meto Lower Arkansas Region Conservation Partnership Proposal**

Lead Partner: Bayou Meto Water Management District

This project builds on strong momentum among landowners and existing partnerships that have been developed over the past through five years through the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative. It will use the full suite of NRCS programs—EQIP, CSP, ACEP-WRE, and PL-566—to address water quality degradation, groundwater declines, and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife on 300,000 acres of irrigated cropland. Local partners, including irrigation districts, conservation districts, state game and fish and resource agencies, farmer co-op, higher education institutions, and for-profit entities, have well-defined roles and supported contributions to the project.

### **Our Missouri Waters Targeted Conservation**

Lead partner: Missouri Department of Natural Resources (MDNR)

This project will use a collaborative statewide partnership approach called Our Missouri Waters (OMW) to implement geographic targeting of cost-effective farm conservation practices in identified high priority 12-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) watersheds and catchment basins. A high partner match, clearly identified goals, and a nutrient trading program, currently under development, will ensure that activities will maximize improvements in water quality and wildlife habitat. Water quality monitoring and modeling will be used to evaluate the success of the project. The partners have a robust history of targeted working with producers, conservation implementation, and monitoring results.

### **Reducing Total Phosphorus and Sediment Loads in the Yahara Watershed Through Wisconsin's Adaptive Management Option**

Lead partner: Dane County Land and Water Resources Department

Wisconsin is the first and currently only state in the country to formally include an innovative, regulatory compliance option for addressing phosphorus, called Watershed Adaptive Management. The primary goal in this proposal is to engage the Yahara watershed agricultural community in this collaborative, watershed-based approach to meet water quality standards and test four alternative conservation innovations, paid for by partner funds. This project will enable a diverse coalition of partners, including agricultural producers, to expand the geographic scope of adaptive management efforts, test innovative delivery approaches, and serve as a model for collaboration between the water, wastewater, and agricultural sectors.

### **Shorebird Conservation Acreage via Drainage Water Runoff Control**

Lead partner: Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Science, University of Illinois

This region in Illinois and Indiana is a globally important stopover location for many species of conservation concern, especially the American Golden-Plover, and is used by millions of other migratory shorebirds and waterfowl. Creating temporary wetlands in strategic locations through NRCS's drainage water management (DWM) program will provide valuable conservation acreage for many migratory bird species. DWM provide numerous other benefits, including reductions in nitrogen and phosphorous runoff, improved water quality, and potential increases in crop production for the producer. The partnership aims to double the annual implementation of DWM in this region.

### **Iowa Targeted Demonstration Watersheds Partnership Project**

Lead partner: Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil Conservation

Directly tied to the implementation of Iowa's Nutrient Reduction Strategy, developed in response to the Gulf Hypoxia Task Force goal of 45 percent reduction in nutrients to the Gulf, this project will assist a strong, diverse partnership in standing up demonstration watersheds in nine focus watersheds, identified by a coordinating council. Conservation in these watersheds will focus on broad adoption of practices that are most beneficial in reducing nutrients and will serve as models for future work, with a focus on farmer-to-farmer outreach and education. Nearly 70 partners have signed off on this project.

## **Prairie Grasslands Region**

### **Canadian River Watershed Restoration Project (CRWRP)**

Lead Partner: Canadian River Riparian Restoration Project

Working across private, federal, and state lands, the partners in this area of New Mexico will focus on treating invasive plant species while maintaining energy production, maintaining cultural traditions, and supporting operation sustainability. A coordinated resource management plan (CRMP) will be developed collaboratively by the rancher, Federal, and state land management agencies to ensure that all areas of the watershed will be able to benefit from treatment of brush invasion, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat degradation. Support from the Jornada Rangeland Research Programs will ensure that the most up-to-date and scientifically sound conservation methods will be used.

### **Little Otter Creek Watershed Project**

Lead Partner: Caldwell County Commission Development and Green Hills Regional Planning Commission

Previously authorized under PL-566, this project in Caldwell County, Missouri, will include installation of an earth embankment dam and 345-acre multipurpose reservoir, implementation of wildlife and habitat management and enhancement practices around the fringe of the new reservoir, full mitigation for stream and wetland impacts, and development of basic facilities for recreational use. The partner has committed a large cash contribution and has already secured the majority of land rights. At completion, the residents and businesses in the county will have a dependable, long-term raw water supply, increased outdoor recreational opportunities and facilities, and reduced flood damages to crops and infrastructure along Little Otter Creek.

### **Red River Basin of the North Flood Prevention Plan**

Lead partner: Red River Retention Authority

This project uses all of NRCS's authorities—EQIP, ACEP, CSP, and PL-566—to reduce flooding, ponding, and excess water on farm lands, thereby increasing the resiliency of agriculture, as well as to reduce nutrient loads in this region of Minnesota and North Dakota. Once completed, six to eight discreet projects will store approximately 50,000 acre-feet of flood water. The long-standing partnership across state boundaries includes the Red River Retention Authority, which has the power to raise revenue.

## **State Project Summaries**

### **Alabama**

#### **Alabama Farmers Federation**

Lead partner: Alabama Farmers Federation

The Alabama Farmers Federation will work to address a growing demand for water in several of the state's watersheds. Recent data shows that in some cases, irrigation increased up to 80 percent in the past few years. The goal of the Alabama Farmers Federation is to work with partners to provide direct technical support and outreach to program participants to ensure future irrigation practices will be efficient, sustainable and environmentally friendly. The RCPP Alabama Partnership's ultimate goal is to protect, improve and enhance water quantity and water quality in the state's watersheds.

### **Alaska**

#### **Hoonah Native Forest Lands Partnership**

Lead partner: Sealaska Corporation (ANSCA Regional Corporation)

Regional-scale land management and conservation planning in Sealaska's Huna Totem area will improve habitat for Salmon and Sitka Black-tailed Deer, timber production and enhance products such as blueberries and firewood. The work will benefit subsistence use by Native Alaskans and rural Alaskans as well as measure subsistence food gathering and reliance within the project lands. The success of this project will not only improve the ecological and economic sustainability of natural resources in the Hoonah community, but will provide a valuable conservation planning model for other communities.

### **Arizona**

#### **Restoring Native Grassland Habitats to Benefit Wildlife, Ranching and Open Space**

Lead partner: Arizona Game and Fish Department

The projects accomplished through this proposal will be directed at improving grassland habitat for grassland dependent wildlife species. These are species of concern for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, which include pronghorn antelope, Gunnison's prairie dogs, black tailed prairie dogs, western burrowing owls, and Ferruginous hawks to name a few. Projects will restore native grasses and forbs to historic grasslands, which will improve food availability, cover and reduce fragmentation for wildlife.

#### **Central Arizona Grassland Restoration and Watershed Partnership Program**

Lead partner: Arizona Game and Fish Department

The goal of the projects from this proposal is to improve habitat for wildlife species dependent on grasslands and are of concern for the Arizona Game and Fish Department. In addition to grassland habitat improvement, projects from this proposal will address resource concerns such as inadequate water and forage, soil erosion and water quality degradation. Other resource concerns to be addressed include continued degradation of the watershed due to catastrophic wildfire.

## **Arkansas**

### **Growing Conservation in the Illinois River Watershed**

Lead partner: Illinois River Watershed Partnership

The primary goal of this project is to improve water quality in the Illinois River Watershed so that all waters meet their designated uses. The Illinois River and its tributaries have many designated uses set forth by the Arkansas Pollution Control and Ecology Commission including fisheries, primary and secondary contact recreation, drinking water supply and agricultural and industrial water supply. However, portions of the Illinois River and its tributaries have been cited as not meeting these designated uses due to impairment from bacteria, sediment and/or excess nutrients. Financial and technical assistance is vital to achieving that goal now and in the future. Water quality degradation to be addressed includes excessive sediment in surface waters, elevated water temperature, excess nutrients in surface and ground waters, excess pathogens and chemicals from manure, bio-solids or compost applications. Water quality degradation and degradation of plant condition caused by undesirable plant productivity and health must be balanced and addressed as special environmental concerns. Soil erosion is a resource concern due to concentrated flow erosion and excessive bank erosion from streams creating excessive sediment in surface waters. Inefficient use of energy in the farm operation increases dependence on non-renewable energy sources that can be addressed through improved energy efficiency and the use of on-farm renewable energy sources.

### **Red River Project**

Lead partner: Southwest Arkansas Resource Conservation and Development Council

The Arkansas Red River Project area is a multi-county project that includes the counties of Hempstead, Lafayette, Little River and Miller that border the Red River. This project has been developed to address the primary resource concern of water quality in the Red River Watershed in Arkansas. Secondary resource concerns include soil erosion, irrigation water quality and quantity and wildlife habitat benefits. Project success will be measured by the acres of agricultural land under contract and the number of producers adopting conservation practices that will reduce nutrient and sediment load entering the Red River.

## **California**

### **Pajaro Valley Community Water Dialogue**

Lead partner: Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County

The proposed project will leverage and support the locally driven community water dialogue to address pressing water quantity and water quality issues in the Pajaro Valley on California's Central Coast. The region currently has an aquifer overdraft estimated at 12,000 acre-feet per year with resulting seawater intrusion compromising groundwater quality. The primary resource concern to be addressed is water supply (affected by inefficient use of irrigation water and declining groundwater quality due to salts). Additionally, the project will address secondary resource concerns of surface and ground water quality impairments due to sediments and high concentrations of nutrients stemming in large part from agricultural sources. Taken as a whole, these resource concerns threaten the long-term viability of agriculture in the Pajaro Valley. A three year targeted program in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for the Pajaro Valley Community Water Dialogue

Regional Conservation Partnership will implement an innovative water supply and water quality management approach applicable to other regions where both surface and groundwater quality are of concern, including several other coastal California agricultural communities. Project activities include technical and financial assistance to growers in the Pajaro Valley to: implement proven and innovative conservation practices to reduce groundwater pumping by up to 440 acre feet per year; increase aquifer recharge by 200 acre feet per year; and protect surface and groundwater quality by reducing nitrate runoff or leaching below the root zone as well as reducing erosion and sedimentation. The project will leverage significant partner contributions, including a comprehensive permit coordination program to implement projects efficiently and effectively. Project success will be monitored at the field and basin levels through a combination of on-farm environmental performance monitoring, project effectiveness monitoring, basin-wide water use and groundwater quality data and participant surveys.

### **Bay Area Partnership Promoting Climate Beneficial Practices for Environmental Enhancement and Resiliency of Working Lands**

Lead partner: Marin Agricultural Land Trust

We have created an innovative partnership of Bay Area resource conservation districts, land trusts and special districts that have proven track records of protecting agricultural land and developing and implementing locally-derived, innovative climate beneficial practices that increase the productivity and resiliency of agricultural operations while enhancing natural resource values. By working together as a partnership, individual partners will build capacity and strengthen relationships, educate landowners and coordinate conservation actions, benefitting agriculture and natural resources in the region well after implementation is completed. The partnership proposes a three-pronged approach to addressing the primary and secondary resource concerns which includes providing technical assistance to landowners for on-farm planning, using the EQIP program to implement on-the-ground climate beneficial conservation measures, and acquiring agricultural conservation easements to protect high priority agricultural land that provides important ecological functions. We will monitor the results of on-the-ground projects according to established protocols relating to soil quality, water quality and in stream habitat. We will gauge the success of the overall project using a set of criteria that the partnership will develop at the beginning of the project. Criteria will include goals relating to the primary and secondary resource concerns as well as goals relating to engaging landowners in climate-beneficial projects and strengthening the effectiveness of each partner.

### **Colorado**

#### **Colorado Pressurized Irrigation Small Hydropower Partnership Project**

Lead partner: Colorado Department of Agriculture

The proposed project will leverage and support the locally driven community water dialogue to address pressing water quantity and water quality issues in the Pajaro Valley on California's Central Coast. The region currently has an aquifer overdraft estimated at 12,000 acre-feet per year with resulting seawater intrusion compromising groundwater quality. The primary resource concern to be addressed is water supply (affected by inefficient use of irrigation water and declining groundwater quality due to salts). Additionally, the project will address secondary resource concerns of surface and ground water quality impairments due to sediments and high concentrations of nutrients stemming

in large part from agricultural sources. Taken as a whole, these resource concerns threaten the long-term viability of agriculture in the Pajaro Valley. A three year targeted program in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for the Pajaro Valley Community Water Dialogue Regional Conservation Partnership will implement an innovative water supply and water quality management approach applicable to other regions where both surface and groundwater quality are of concern, including several other coastal California agricultural communities. Project activities include technical and financial assistance to growers in the Pajaro Valley to: implement proven and innovative conservation practices to reduce groundwater pumping by up to 440 acre feet per year; increase aquifer recharge by 200 acre feet per year; and protect surface and groundwater quality by reducing nitrate runoff or leaching below the root zone as well as reducing erosion and sedimentation. The project will leverage significant partner contributions, including a comprehensive permit coordination program to implement projects efficiently and effectively. Project success will be monitored at the field and basin levels through a combination of on-farm environmental performance monitoring, project effectiveness monitoring, basin-wide water use and groundwater quality data and participant surveys.

## **Connecticut**

### **Achieving Agricultural Water Security in Connecticut through RCPP**

Lead partner: University of Connecticut

Focusing on the national priority of water quantity, the long-term goal of this project is achieving agricultural water security for existing and new agricultural producers. Utilizing RCPP funding, partners will work with statewide producers to develop science-based plans for drought preparedness to ensure optimal crop per drop in private forestry, crop production, ornamental horticulture/nursery operations, and turf production. Adaptation plans will be created to help producers become economically resilient in the face of greater climate variability. Improving water management across the agricultural sector will improve water quality across the state.

### **Improving Soil Health & Water Quality in the Thames River Watershed**

Lead partner: The Last Green River Valley, Inc.

This project addresses two national priorities (soil health and water quality), and all five Connecticut state priorities (water quality degradation, soil erosion, soil quality degradation, degraded plant conditions and livestock production limitations). Utilizing the RCPP Program, four collaborating partners will implement soil health conservation practices through EQIP on 1,000 acres of cropland in eastern Connecticut's Thames River Watershed. The long-term objective of this project is to show a measurable improvement of edge-of-field and in-stream water quality, including a decrease in nutrient and turbidity levels; thereby, improving soil health and water quality in the area.

## **Delaware**

### **Watershed Channel Restoration Projects in Sussex County, Delaware**

Lead partner: Sussex Conservation District

The Sussex Conservation District (SCD) and its partners plan to improve water quality through watershed channel restoration projects that stabilize tax ditch banks in Sussex County, Delaware.

The SCD and partners will work with landowners in signing up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (RCPP) to remedy identified natural resource concerns. Staff will design, engineer, permit and construct the restoration projects to NRCS standards and specifications. Success will be measured by the amount of sediment and nutrient losses reduced based on the specifications of each project. When possible, bioengineered or green technology practices will be utilized to assist in stabilization, which will further reduce nutrient loads into the waterways.

## **Florida**

### **Regional Partnership for Conservation of Gopher Tortoise and At-Risk Species Habitat in Florida**

Lead partner: Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

This partnership will endeavor to save and protect Florida's threatened and endangered species through restoration and conservation of dwindling habitat. It will provide support for conservation planning, outreach and technical assistance for NRCS conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. Partners with forestry and wildlife expertise will apply conservation practices to improve forest stands, apply prescribed burning, plant field borders, develop early successional habitat and restore rare or declining habitats. This effort will target the gopher tortoise, Florida panther, Florida grasshopper sparrow and other threatened and endangered species. Outreach and program support will be accomplished by the Florida Conservation Group, Wildlands Conservation, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Landowner Assistance Program and the Florida Forest Service staff in partnership with Florida NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service and others.

## **Georgia**

### **Enhancing Conservation in the Lower Flint River Basin of Georgia**

Lead partner: Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District

Enhancing Conservation in the Lower Flint River Basin of Georgia project focuses on agricultural water conservation, implementing technology-driven conservation practices that apply water only where and when it is needed. Irrigation is a critical component of agricultural production in the Lower Flint, but intensive water withdrawals coupled with periods of sustained drought threaten water availability for at-risk species and farmers in the watershed. The principal goals of this project are to increase agricultural water use efficiency on irrigated cropland in the Lower Flint by implementing conservation practices, incorporate innovative precision irrigation methods into the project and sustain natural resources for future generations of producers in southwest Georgia.

### **Protection of Soil and Water Quality in the Savannah, Oconee, Ogeechee, Ocmulgee, Satilla and Altamaha Watersheds**

Lead partner: Athens Land Trust

Protection of Soil and Water Quality in the Savannah, Oconee, Ogeechee, Ocmulgee, Satilla and Altamaha Watersheds project will address the natural resource concerns of water quantity and quality, livestock production limitation, diminishing wildlife habitat by assisting farmers in the

implementation of conservation practices for livestock production, conserving land and water, preserving farmland, improving soil health and supporting the viability of farming. The work will be completed by providing technical assistance to farmers and landowners regarding sustainable livestock production, conservation practices, USDA programs and resources and permanent conservation easements on their properties and financial assistance for farmers through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

## **Hawaii**

### **The Rain Follows the Forest Watershed Initiative**

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

The goal of this project, led by the Hawaii State Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), is to improve water quantity and quality by increasing groundwater recharge, reducing erosion and decreasing the transport of excess sediment and nutrients to streams and coral reefs. It is part of a larger effort to protect our forests under Hawaii DLNR's Watershed Initiative. In partnership with numerous conservation organizations and private landowners, the project will implement practices to control invasive species, exclude non-native hooved animals (ungulates), and plant native tree species on forestlands over the next several years in order to provide long-lasting conservation benefits.

## **Idaho**

### **Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Stabilization**

Lead partner: State of Idaho

The Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer Stabilization project overall goal is to stabilize and recover ground water levels in the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer (ESPA). The aquifer covers nearly 10,800 square miles of Idaho and is the sole water source for many producers in central and eastern Idaho. The region produces goods and services with an estimated value of \$10 billion annually and water is the critical element for this productivity. Declining ground water levels in parts of the ESPA led to decreased aquifer storage, decreased spring flows and changing Snake River flows that resulted in insufficient water supplies for existing uses. Project objectives are to reduce ground water withdrawals from the aquifer and increase delivery efficiencies.

### **Blackfoot River Conservation Partnership**

Lead partner: Trout Unlimited, Inc.

The Blackfoot River Conservation Partnership is a watershed-scale restoration project to restore fish passage, rebuild riparian and aquatic habitats, augment in stream flows and improve water quality throughout the Blackfoot River drainage. The river is the southernmost stronghold for the Yellowstone cutthroat trout; this project will improve habitat for this sensitive species and help landowners divert and deliver irrigation water more efficiently. Major project work will replace two irrigation water diversions with "fish-friendly" diversion structures to enable trout passage and reconnect the river to several tributaries.

## **Illinois**

### **Conservation Cropping Systems for Improving Soil Health: Soil Health Assessment, Comprehensive, Conservation Planning and Implementation on Targeted Farms throughout Illinois**

Lead partner: Illinois Department of Agriculture-Bureau of Land and Water Resources

This project will primarily address Illinois NRCS' resource concern of soil health and will have secondary water quality and erosion control benefits. The project proposes to work with at least 100 farms/farmers distributed across 102 Illinois counties, creating a network of "Soil Health Model Farms." Select EQIP participants will work with a soil health expert to identify a combination of farm specific management practices including cover crops, no-till and nutrient management strategies.

### **BMP Implementation for Nutrient and Sediment Loss Reduction in Macon County, Illinois**

Lead partner: Macon County SWCD

This project will look at Illinois' top resource concerns, which are soil erosion and water quality. With this project, a new partnership is being forged between the Macon County SWCD and the Sanitary District of Decatur. Using the SWCD's proven history with producers and the Sanitary District's modern water analysis lab, in-depth testing can be conducted to prove that new edge-of-field best management practices (drainage water management, bio-reactors and saturated buffer strips) are ecologically and economically worthwhile practices to reduce nutrient loss through subsurface tile drainage.

## **Indiana**

### **Preventing nutrient loss from Indiana farms: watershed-scale pairing of cover crops and the two-stage ditch**

Lead partner: Notre Dame Environmental Change Initiative

The project will assist with adoption of cover crops on 85 percent of cropland, and two-stage ditches along the majority of channelized ditches, in two targeted 12-ditch watersheds. Through water quality monitoring, the project will quantify the soil and water quality/quantity benefits from the implementation of these practices in the watersheds. Based on preliminary research, 40 to 45 percent reductions in nutrient loss are achievable with this approach, which will be monitored at the watershed scale. A key component of the project is to accurately document the effect of these practices on environmental conditions (water and soil quality) and estimate the full costs and benefits for both public and private interests. In addition, the data will support modeling efforts that will allow for broader conclusions regarding the effectiveness of these conservation practices, regionally and beyond.

## **Iowa**

### **Middle Cedar Partnership Project**

Lead partner: City of Cedar Rapids

Led by the City of Cedar Rapids, the Middle Cedar Partnership Project will focus on working with local

conservation partners, farmers and landowners to install best management practices such as cover crops, nutrient management, wetlands and saturated buffers to help improve water quality, water quantity and soil health in the Cedar River Watershed. There is an urgent need to address increasing concentrations of nitrates and extreme flood events in the Cedar River. This project will lay the foundation for needed improvements and bring together a diverse group of conservation partners.

## **Kansas**

### **Kansas Pheasant Initiative**

Lead partner: Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT)

Pheasants are a socially and economically important resource to Kansas; however populations are experiencing challenges across their range. With recent extreme drought, loss of conservation acres such as Conservation Reserve Program, and intensifying farming practices, pheasant populations in Kansas are under decimating pressures resulting in the lowest harvest levels ever recorded. To address the resource concern of inadequate wildlife habitat, KDWPT and its partners have proposed a focus area approach to intensify habitat management at a scale to promote connectivity of habitat and provide opportunity to realize landscape level population impacts.

### **Advanced Irrigation Water Management on the High Plains Aquifer in Kansas**

Lead partner: Southwest Groundwater Management District No. 3

This project will provide producers and crop consultants with telemetry-enabled soil moisture probes, water metering, and evapotranspiration (ET) measurement for near real-time monitoring. Advanced Irrigation Water Management is an underutilized technology in Kansas that typically increases yields and reduces water use. Implementation of this practice through RCPP will bring conservation and economic gains to producers in southwest Kansas.

## **Kentucky**

### **Managing Poo: Adoption of Nutrient Management and Conservation Practices**

Lead partner: Kentucky Division of Conservation

Reducing nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment loads entering waterways on private lands is the overall goal of this project. Partners invested in improving water quality, especially concerning nutrient loading, include the NRCS in Kentucky, local Kentucky Conservation Districts, the University of Kentucky, Kentucky Division of Conservation, Kentucky Division of Water, Kentucky Dairy Development Council and Kentucky Cattlemen's Association. This project will be available to producers throughout Kentucky, but priority will be given to producers nearing regulatory action for water quality violations and/or producers operating in Mississippi River Basin Initiative and National Water Quality Initiative - designated focused watersheds.

## **Louisiana**

### **Rice Stewardship Program in Southwest Louisiana**

Lead partner: Ducks Unlimited

Ducks Unlimited is working with rice producers in southwest Louisiana to improve and sustain their operations through conservation of natural resources through the Rice Stewardship Program (RSP). DU and their collaborating partners are expanding the Rice Stewardship Program in southwest Louisiana and will support Louisiana NRCS and at least 150 rice producers in planning, design and installation of conservation practices on working lands across 28,000 acres. These conservation practices will address the primary resource concerns of southwest Louisiana by improving water quality, as well as improving wetland habitat for wintering waterfowl and other wildlife species.

### **Targeted Conservation Delivery to Improve Soil Health, Water Quantity and Quality**

Lead partner: Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's Office of Soil and Water Conservation

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's Office of Soil and Water Conservation and its partners will conduct site specific assessments within five targeted watersheds across Louisiana. This detailed assessment will identify soil and water management concerns that have a significant potential to contribute to the degradation of soil health and water quality and quantity within the watershed. The primary focus will be to identify, inform and develop resource management plans for landowners and managers to conserve and sustain soil health, water quality and water quantity on working lands.

## **Maine**

### **Improving Connectivity for Coldwater Salmonids in Maine Headwater Streams**

Lead partner: Atlantic Salmon Federation

This project will increase access to spawning and rearing habitat for fish including endangered Atlantic Salmon, sea-run alewives, Eastern brook trout and other fish species. The project goals will be accomplished by replacing road crossing that have been identified as fish barriers.

### **Protecting Potato Fields: Public-Private Partnerships to Improve Soil Health and Water Quality, Aroostook County**

Lead partner: Maine Potato Board

The project will create a public-private partnership between government and potato industry to address soil erosion, soil health, and water quality within Aroostook County, Maine. This project will reduce soil loss from potato fields, prevent sedimentation of public roads, ditches and rights-of-way and improve ambient water quality in rivers and tributary streams and protect sources of public drinking supplies.

## **Maryland**

### **Targeted Conservation Easement Acquisitions**

Lead partner: Maryland Department of Natural Resources

NRCS Maryland has an RCPP project with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to acquire targeted conservation easements in Western Maryland (Washington and Frederick Counties). Funded at \$1.75 million, the project will purchase at least 450 acres of Agricultural Land Easements which

will preserve established conservation practices. These practices were originally established through USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and are located within the state's targeted Rural Legacy Areas. Acquiring perpetual conservation easements help to achieve NRCS and partner resource conservation goals and protect water quality in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

## **Massachusetts**

### **Integrating sustainable forestry and energy to support sustainable communities in Massachusetts' most forested, rural and low-income region**

Lead partner: Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation

This project will create a model, holistic approach to support sustainable rural communities and economies through engaging landowners to conserve working woodlands in the landscape known as the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership region. This area is mapped by The Nature Conservancy as containing one of only four focus landscapes in the northeast for the Open Space Institute's Landscape Resiliency Program. The 28 communities in this region are among the lowest income towns in MA, and this model will promote the building of strong communities based on exemplary forest management that enhances habitat for at-risk species, builds climate resiliency, strengthens renewable and independent energy and supports local forestry and farming economies. Ten additional partners will collaborate on this project leveraging other programs to improve forest health and community health in northeast Massachusetts.

## **Michigan**

### **Training Foresters to Enhance the Sustainable Management of Private Forest Land**

Lead partner: Michigan Department of Natural Resources – Forest Resources Division

NRCS and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) - Forest Resources Division (FRD) will train both public sector and private sector professional land managers to enhance private forest land management in Michigan. Through the partnership, NRCS will provide financial assistance to landowners and the DNR will increase the capacity of land managers to offer technical assistance to the 400,000 forest landowners in Michigan and train staff to educate the general public about the NRCS programs that offer financial assistance for forest landowners. Resource concerns to be addressed include soil erosion, soil quality, and water quality degradation on the 12 million acres of private forestland in Michigan. The results will be demonstrated by monitoring the implementation of Best Management Practices when harvesting timber, implementing NRCS conservation practices or conducting other forest management activities. This project will build upon the organizational strengths of the DNR to train foresters and wildlife biologists while also increasing the collaboration with the Michigan NRCS. This partnership will multiply the Michigan NRCS forestry capacity tenfold as there are currently only a few NRCS staff foresters and 45 Technical Service Providers for forestry conservation planning and practices in Michigan.

## **Mississippi**

### **Migratory Bird Habitat Creation in the Lower Mississippi River Valley**

Lead partner: Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation

The Migratory Bird Habitat Creation project in the Lower Mississippi River Valley will focus on the natural resource concerns of Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife and Insufficient Water. This project will create wetland habitats in conjunction with outreach and education efforts to increase landowner awareness of the benefits of wetlands and winter water, primarily on working agricultural lands and Wetland Reserve Easements. High-quality feeding and resting habitats will be provided to migratory birds headed south towards the Gulf of Mexico through the utilization of various conservation practices through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

### **Wetland Habitat Restoration for Wildlife and Water Resources**

Lead partner: Delta Wildlife, Inc.

The Wetland Habitat Restoration for Wildlife and Water Resources project improves wetland habitats, while protecting and enhancing water resources in the Mississippi Delta. Due to many land conversions for agricultural expansion in the area, valuable habitats were lost causing population declines of wildlife, degraded water quality and decreased enhancement of ground water using the Mississippi River Alluvial Aquifer. To address resource concerns of Inadequate Fish and Wildlife Habitat and Insufficient Water and Degraded Water Quality, the Agricultural Conservation Enhancement Program is proposed for this project.

## **Missouri**

### **Northwest Missouri Urban and Rural Farmers United For Conservation**

Lead partner: Jackson County Soil and Water Conservation District

This project will focus on addressing water quality and quantity, soil health and At-Risk/Declining Species issues experienced by both rural and smaller underserved urban farmers. While vegetable production is the primary crop in the urban setting and corn/soybeans are the common crops for rural farms, the resource concerns are common across both grower groups. This project brings together experienced partners who have worked on these issues independent of one another for years. Success of the project will be monitored by: implementation of NRCS conservation practices; participants' adoption of new management practices; outreach activities completed; development of plans and standards for small farmer vegetation composters; completion of on-farm water audits and outcome summaries; and development of standards for urban runoff catchments for irrigation.

### **Restoring Glade and Woodland Communities for Threatened Species in the Ozarks of Southeast Missouri**

Lead partner: Missouri Department of Conservation

The goal is to manage and restore glades, woodland, and forest habitats and treat cropland with Environmental Quality Incentives Program conservation practices, targeted to benefit threatened and declining species. This area includes several features that have been designated as areas of greatest conservation need, and contains numerous listed species and imperiled habitats. The primary resource concern to be addressed is Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife-Habitat Degradation. At-Risk species include the Federally Endangered Grotto Sculpin, Indiana Bat, Ozark Hellbender, Hine's Emerald Dragonfly and several species of mussels and plants. Secondary resource concerns include Water Quality Degradation and Degraded Plant Condition. The Missouri Department of Conservation

will gauge success of the project by the acres of habitat treated. The agency and its partners will continue to measure direct impacts on water quality in the Grotto Sculpin recharge zone and conduct population monitoring and studies on several of the listed species.

## **Montana**

### **Missouri Headwaters and Lower Gallatin Basin Conservation & Restoration**

Lead partner: The Gallatin Valley Land Trust

The Gallatin Valley Land Trust and other local and regional partners will implement an integrative and enduring RCPP project that will improve water quality, as well as conserve soil health and water quantity in the Missouri Headwaters and Lower Gallatin Basin of southwestern Montana. By utilizing three key NRCS conservation programs, the project will be extremely cost-effective in implementing high-priority, “shovel-ready” conservation projects that have been recently identified through an extensive, community-based watershed planning effort. The project will leverage strong relationships with agricultural producers and other private landowners to create perpetual conservation easements, as well as innovative on-the-ground restoration projects to improve stream health, water quality and water conservation.

## **Nebraska**

### **Ogallala Aquifer & Platte River Recovery**

Lead partner: Central Platte Natural Resources District

The Ogallala Aquifer and Platte River are two of Nebraska’s most precious natural resources. NRCS will partner with the Central Platte Natural Resources District to help protect these critical resources. This project’s goal is to work with producers in central Nebraska to reduce surface water and groundwater consumption by converting irrigated land to non-irrigated land uses. This project will also address surface water and groundwater quantity and quality concerns by applying more efficient irrigation methods to increase irrigation efficiency, thus reducing impacts on the Platte River and local groundwater supply.

## **New Hampshire**

### **Ecological Priorities Project Carroll County & S.E. Coos County, NH**

Lead partner: Tin Mountain Conservation Center

The Ecological Priorities Project provides a coordinated framework to inventory a suite of natural resource concerns on private forestlands in Carroll and southern Coos Counties, NH and take steps to restore and/or protect them. For each ecological resource, proposed work will assess ecological condition and function, rank the severity of impairments, implement conservation practices in order of priority and monitor the efficacy of practices. Forest management plans will be the vehicle under which inventory, assessment and implementation will be achieved. A coordinated approach that develops forest management plans and prescribes multiple practices for each landowner will provide the greatest return on investment. Education/outreach to private forest landowners is vitally important to make the project successful, and with 35 years of experience, Tin Mountain is uniquely suited for that task.

## **A Regional Conservation Partnership for New Hampshire's Coastal Watershed**

Lead partner: The Nature Conservancy

The RCPP proposal for New Hampshire's Coastal Watershed is intended to address two fundamental and closely related natural resource concerns in coastal New Hampshire: the loss/conversion of undeveloped farm and forestland and degradation of water quality in coastal rivers and estuaries. The New Hampshire Coastal Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program will coordinate the development and implementation of a comprehensive program with a key focus on: protection of significant farmland; promotion and implementation of farm management conservation practices to address water quality, soil health and wildlife habitat resource needs; and in-water restoration to improve water quality and estuary habitat.

### **New Jersey**

#### **Delaware Bay Soil and Water Quality Protection Initiative**

Lead partner: New Jersey Conservation Foundation

This partnership effort focuses on protecting farmland in the Delaware Bay area of New Jersey. In addition to easement acquisitions, New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF) will promote participation in NRCS conservation programs to protect soil and water quality and wildlife habitat on preserved farms and forestland. NJCF has established productive partnerships with the agricultural community that will facilitate this outreach. As more farmers in the area implement practices like filter strips, buffers and cover crop, the soil health of their land will be maintained and improved. Practices like tree planting, invasive plant species control and forest stand improvement on forested land will keep it productive and improve wildlife habitat. Conservation activities like these will protect the investment made to preserve these properties and help keep farm and forest land in the Delaware Bay area viable for future generations.

### **New Mexico**

#### **New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Irrigated Lands (NMAR)**

Lead partner: New Mexico Acequia Association, Interstate Stream Commission, New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

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 in primarily highly minority/underserved communities. The New Mexico Acequia Revitalization Initiative will use Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program contracts with farmers and ranchers operating irrigated lands served by an acequia system. The Interstate Stream Commission and the New Mexico Acequia Association are the principal project partners. Water quantity and quality will be improved by restoring historic acequias on agricultural lands supporting local families and communities.

## **North Central New Mexico Watershed Restoration Project**

Lead partner: Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

Poor historic management of forest and riparian watersheds and climate change are creating a dire situation. Wildlife, fish, acequias, rural economies, tourism and outdoor recreation are all at risk from the associated impacts of watershed wildfires. Without a large scale watershed solution wildfire will threaten more communities within the Wildland Urban Interface. Claunch-Pinto SWCD and its partners have identified over 35,000 acres for forest restoration treatments on private, public, state and tribal lands that are located within the upland ponderosa pine, pinon, and juniper watersheds and in the lower elevation riparian ones.

## **New York**

### **Greater Adirondack Agricultural Environmental Enhancement Program**

Lead partner: Greater Adirondack Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.

Encompassing the entire northern portion of New York State, this program will address water quality, soil health and inadequate habitat issues utilizing Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding throughout the Upper Hudson River, St. Lawrence River, Black River and Lake Champlain Watershed. Five objectives are to be achieved; use NRCS funding to provide services directly to producers (farmers and non-industrial forest land owners) for conservation planning; use NRCS funding to create a ranking matrix for project prioritization; use NRCS funding to invest in innovative BMPs on agricultural and forestry lands throughout the region; monitor progress by creating and utilizing a monitoring database; and educate local producers. The overarching goal of this project is to reduce nutrient, sediment and bacterial loading into surface waters and improve habitat within these watersheds utilizing strong regional partnerships.

## **North Carolina**

### **Western North Carolina Stream, Wetland, and Water Quality Initiative**

Lead partner: Resource Institute, Inc.

The project will involve the restoration, enhancement and stabilization of streams and wetlands that have been degraded by agricultural land use throughout the geographic region of 31 North Carolina counties that make up the existing Western North Carolina Stream Initiative. RCPP funding will be leveraged with funding through the partner to continue extensive stream restoration, and address water quality, quantity, soil erosion and at-risk species habitat. For this project, NRCS and Resource Institute, Inc., has assembled a diverse and proven team of project partners who will collaboratively work together to provide financial and technical assistance, promote stakeholder involvement and utilize innovation to develop cost effective solutions to improve at-risk ecosystems and promote conservation.

## **North Dakota**

### **Medora Grazing Association North Billings Prairie Grasslands Conservation Project**

Lead partner: Medora Grazing Association

This project will provide a proactive approach for ranchers to augment their conservation stewardship on the National Grasslands under U.S. Forest Service (USFS) management. Conservation practices and grazing strategies will be implemented in a collaborative approach to meet the resource and sustainability goals of the agricultural producer, USFS and NRCS.

### **How Far Can We Grow?**

Lead partner: Northern Plains Resource Conservation and Development

This Project will demonstrate innovative approaches for the adoption of cover crops to improve soil health practices in a relatively cool, wet, and short-season climate in northern North Dakota. New techniques will be evaluated by agricultural producers under partnership of the Soil Conservation Districts, NRCS and North Dakota State University personnel.

## **Ohio**

### **Promoting BMPs for Phosphorus**

Lead partner: Delaware Soil & Water Conservation District

The Delaware, Knox, Licking and Morrow Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the Upper Big Walnut Creek Water Quality Partnership will assist agricultural producers install phosphorus reducing best management practices on land in the Upper Big Walnut Creek watershed. This watershed, located in Delaware County, drains into the Hoover and O'Shaughnessy Reservoirs, the drinking water supply for the City of Columbus, Ohio. In addition to the phosphorus reducing conservation practices, the proposal also provides for the installation of two enriched bioreactors, water quality monitoring and data analysis.

### **East Fork Watershed Nutrient Reduction Initiative**

Lead partner: Clermont Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Nutrients and sediment, including phosphorus and nitrogen, transported in water leaving agricultural fields within the East Fork of the Little Miami River watershed ultimately contribute to hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico and exacerbate locally occurring harmful algal blooms in East Fork Lake. The project sponsors will assist agricultural producers with installing nutrient and sediment reducing best management practices to improve water quality and reduce algal growth and create a smart phone app to assist producers make fertilizer and management decisions. Edge-of-field and in-stream water quality monitoring in conjunction with algae sampling will demonstrate the impact of this project on water quality.

## **Oklahoma**

### **Elk City Lake Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Project**

Lead partner: Oklahoma Conservation Commission

This project will pool state and NRCS resources to address water quality concerns in the Elk City Lake Watershed. The City of Elk City for recreation now operates Elk City Lake, built in 1970 for flood control. It is impaired by excess turbidity, and recent blue green algae blooms and fish kills in the

Lake have increased its priority for rehabilitation. Oklahoma will use a combination of state and EPA 319 funds to provide project staff for education and outreach and provide technical support to landowners. In stream water quality monitoring will be used to evaluate program performance, along with watershed modeling and soil carbon sequestration verification. Cost-share assistance from Oklahoma, 319 and NRCS, will be used to install conservation practices focused on reducing pollutant loading from grazing lands and cropland in the watershed.

### **Oklahoma Healthy Soils**

Lead partner: The Oklahoma Association of Conservation Districts

Agriculture producers and partners voluntarily drive the Oklahoma Healthy Soils project. The project will focus on the implementation of soil health practices on cropland with an emphasis on establishing cover crop on-farm trials on a minimum of five to a maximum of 10 farms across the state of Oklahoma. Historically underserved producers will be targeted for up to 20 percent of the on-farm trials. Demonstrating cover crop plantings on a field scale has the potential to deliver practical benefits to producers by evaluating field level data over a variety of soil types. Many producers already engaged in no-till or those interested in converting to no-till, have the potential to incorporate cover crops into their rotation. The Southern Plains Regional Climate Hub will assist in loaning scientific equipment to the project for testing and monitoring. The project will build upon ongoing research into practical concerns facing producers who may be contemplating incorporating cover crops into their agronomic production systems.

### **Oregon**

#### **North Willamette Valley Upland Oak Restoration Partnership**

Lead partner: Yamhill SWCD

This project will provide investments to restore oak and prairie habitats in Yamhill and Polk counties to improve conditions for critical wildlife. Historic oak, prairie and savanna habitats have declined in the Willamette Valley and efforts to restore this land will aid in the recovery of several endangered species, including the Fender's blue butterfly. This project will strengthen existing partnerships and facilitate the implementation of numerous regional conservation plans and priorities.

### **Pennsylvania**

#### **Productive Farms and Clean Streams for Berks and Chester Counties**

Lead partner: Stroud Water Research Center

Using significant contributions from local partners, this project will focus on improving water quality in Berks and Chester Counties. The project's purpose is to reduce nutrients and sediments in surface and groundwater and improve in-stream fish and wildlife habitat. A comprehensive approach will use various methods to provide cost-effective conservation practices to farmers to help address resource concerns such as water quality, soil erosion, fish and wildlife habitat and air quality.

## **Puerto Rico**

### **Conservation Partnership Program for the Yabucoa Agricultural Reserve**

Lead partner: Soil Conservation District of Eastern Puerto Rico

The Conservation District of Eastern Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rico Land Authority and the University of Puerto Rico Cooperative Extension Service are partnering with NRCS in the Caribbean Area on a five-year RCPP project to control excess water and improve water quality in the fertile, level lowlands of the Yabucoa Agriculture Reserve (YAR). The 10,490-acre YAR in eastern Puerto Rico is specially zoned to promote protection of prime agricultural land. A large area of the YAR is located in the Río Guayanés floodplain, where producers suffer damages from severe and prolonged flooding to plantain, banana and other starchy crops. Project partners aim to improve drainage and water flow in the YAR to reduce flooding duration, allow flood waters to return to the main channel of Río Guayanés and eliminate ponding of stagnant water. The project will manage runoff, flooding and ponding, while controlling the seasonal high water table, by planting critical areas, removing channel obstructions, protecting heavy use areas, and installing grassed waterways, lined waterways and outlets, water control structures and water and sediment control basins.

## **Rhode Island**

### **Partners Protecting Source Waters of Rhode Island**

Lead partner: University of Rhode Island

The long-term goal of the project is to improve water quality and wildlife habitat in Rhode Island through the expanded adoption of NRCS riparian area management practices, with special attention focused on the underutilized Riparian Forest Buffer practice. The project will make use of prior assessments of impaired stream crossings to create extensive, continuous stream reaches with quality habitat and connectivity. A new tool will be developed for designing functional riparian buffers with varying widths depending on the slope, soils and existing land use. The project will increase the number of conservation practices on agricultural and forest land resulting in benefits to soil health, water quantity and wildlife habitat in Rhode Island.

## **South Carolina**

### **Improving Energy Efficiency in South Carolina Animal Facilities and Greenhouses: A Partnership for Education, Outreach, and Technology Adoption**

Lead partner: Clemson University

A partnership between Clemson University and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources will be developed through this project, and a team of professionals will be assembled that will provide the outreach and the technical assistance needed to help South Carolina farmers with animal and plant production buildings, access assistance funds to adopt energy efficient technologies and improve profitability. Rising energy costs, particularly the cost of electricity and LP gas, have more than doubled since 2000, resulting in sharp increases in energy costs for farms that produce poultry, swine, dairy and plants in greenhouses. However, increases in farm income on the order of \$10,000 to \$25,000 per year are not uncommon following upgrades in energy efficient ventilation, lighting, heating equipment and building insulation. Through this project, qualified individuals will

be available to help South Carolina landowners with the technical information, design, cost-benefit analyses and reports needed to apply for cost-share and assistance funds for energy incentive programs.

## **South Dakota**

### **Central Big Sioux River Water Quality Project**

Lead partner: Minnehaha Conservation District

The primary resource concern of the Central Big Sioux River Water Quality Project is the degradation of surface water quality from bacteria, nutrients and sediment. The project will assist land owners and producers with improving water quality by avoiding, controlling, and trapping nutrient and sediment runoff, and reducing agricultural non-point source pollution within the watershed. Thirteen Animal Waste Management Systems will be installed, 13 Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans written, 43 acres of land will be enrolled in Riparian Area Management and 1,700 acres in the Seasonal Riparian Area Management, Cropland Best Management Practices will be also be installed to maintain a sustainable level of agricultural productivity.

## **Tennessee**

### **Providing financial and technical assistance services to address soil & water resource concerns in 303(D) Listed Watersheds of TN**

Lead partner: State of Tennessee, Department of Agriculture

This project seeks to use RCPP funds to expand financial and technical assistance services provided across TN to address resource concerns & improve quality of Tennessee waters. The RCPP funds awarded will finance cost-share on conservation projects identified as contributing to the watershed being listed on the state 303(d) list. Outside technical assistance will primarily come from Technical Service Providers listed in NRCS's "TechReg", but contracts with other qualified professionals such as professional engineering firms may be used. Pre-established pay rates for services will be developed for applicable NRCS conservation practice planning, design and construction inspection. The plan is to focus the additional financial and technical assistance resources on projects located within watersheds that are listed as impaired on the 2012 303(d) list. This listing identifies more than 10,000 stream miles across Tennessee that are impaired from some agricultural concern; such as, crop production, livestock impacts, pasture grazing, etc. Treatment of primary resource concerns will address and minimize impacts from siltation/sedimentation, nutrients and pathogens. Success will be measured in the number of projects implemented, and the whole or partial de-listing of streams from subsequent 303(d) lists issued by the state environmental regulatory agency.

### **Increasing Row Crop Sustainability in the Obion River Watershed**

Lead partner: University of Tennessee Extension

This project is to promote adoption of agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the North Fork Obion River Watershed that will ultimately reduce nutrients and sediment from degrading the quality of our state's surface waters and ultimately the Mississippi River Basin. Secondary resource concerns to be addressed include: degraded plant condition, soil erosion and soil quality degradation. We are proposing: to implement establishment of cover crops; site-specific soil

sampling and University fertilizer recommendations on a variable-rate basis; and application of USGS SPARROW model for West Tennessee in order to estimate total nitrogen and total phosphorus loads in West Tennessee watersheds, including North Fork Obion River Watershed. These sites will promote the benefits of cover crops on improving soil and water quality, as well show that chemical fertilizers applied at the right rate and right place can limit the amount of nutrients entering our waterways while maintaining the agricultural productivity of the land. The increase in acreage of cover crops and/or receiving a variable rate application of fertilizer in this watershed will serve as one method of gauging success. The Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation 2 (RUSLE2), along with the Tennessee Phosphorus Index, will be used to quantify sediment and nutrient savings resulting from these installed BMPs as a measurement of the primary resource concern, water quality degradation. The SPARROW model for West Tennessee will be applied to estimate total nitrogen loads in Mississippi River Basin watersheds in Tennessee, including the North Fork Obion River Watershed; and a statewide SPARROW model for total phosphorus will be developed to estimate total phosphorus loads in the watersheds. The loading analyses will support the future prioritization of watershed sites, the development of plans, and the implementation of appropriate site-specific BMPs.

## **Texas**

### **Texas Gulf Coast Stream and Wetland Initiative**

Lead partner: Resource Institute Inc.

The Texas Gulf Coast region is experiencing rapid growth and development that is putting pressure on the aquatic resources of the region, and is contributing to the degradation of the Gulf of Mexico. The project will focus on the restoration and protection of headwater stream and wetland systems on agriculture land to improve function and provide protection against future developmental impacts. It will also work to improve water quality and quantity, reduce soil erosion and enhance/create habitat for at risk species through education, outreach and engagement of landowners and land managers for installing conservation practices on their land in the region.

### **Lower Rio Grande Valley Water Improvement Initiative**

Lead partner: Texas Water Resources Institute

The Lower Rio Grande Valley is experiencing significant population growth which has contributed to degraded water quality and limited water supplies, which has increased the need for improved irrigation efficiency. Through partners, funds and educational efforts will be leveraged to work with landowners to reduce nutrient and sediment loading in local water bodies as well as improve agricultural water use efficiency. This project will also enhance agricultural production in the Valley.

## **Utah**

### **Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy**

Lead partner: Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands

This is a statewide, locally lead initiative aimed at significantly reducing the size, intensity and frequency of catastrophic wildfires in Utah in partnership with the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. Through the efforts of regional work groups, a statewide steering committee and a project coordinator, priority project areas will be identified based on a detailed risk assessment.

Implementation project activities will then be developed to reduce fire risk. Farm Bill Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds will be used to assist local landowners to implement practices such as fuels reduction (brush management and forest thinning) as well as fuel breaks, riparian restoration and prescribed grazing. The project supports the goals of the National Cohesive Wildfire Management Strategy and Governor Gary Herbert's Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy Initiative.

## **Vermont**

### **Planning for Accelerated Conservation Planning Implementation in the Lake Champlain Watershed of Vermont and Beyond**

Lead partner: Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

The core objective of Vermont Association of Conservation District's RCPP program is to reduce phosphorus loading into the Lake Champlain Basin by approximately 5080 lbs. per year. Taking into account the multiplier effect over the four years of the program, this benefit will compound to an estimated 12,700 lb. reduction of phosphorus loading over the life of the project. Furthermore, we estimate that farmers will use 144 tons less phosphorus fertilizer per year at the end of this program as a result of their adoption of the NMPs, which is a 50 percent decrease. The secondary objectives of the program, which are essential to the core objective, are to increase participating agricultural producers' understanding of the benefits of nutrient management, conservation and land treatment planning, leading to increased conservation implementation on small farms operations, especially the operations of Historically Underserved producers.

## **Virginia**

### **Forests – Fundamental for Conservation in Virginia**

Lead partner: Virginia Department of Forestry

Well-managed, productive forests offer numerous conservation benefits, but the long growth cycle of trees can present a financial challenge for landowners seeking to retain and manage working forestlands. The Virginia Department of Forestry is leveraging its strong partnership with NRCS to help increase adoption of forest management planning and practices among Virginia's more than 350,000 forest land owners through coordinated outreach, education and funding assistance. Installed practices will offer statewide conservation benefits from cleaner water in the Chesapeake Bay to restoration of declining tree species like the Loblolly Pine and re-establishment of habitat for bobwhite quail and pollinators. Landowner engagement through participation in the Conservation Stewardship Program will help ensure that forest stands are retained and enhanced for ongoing natural resource protection.

## **Washington**

### **Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation Water Quality and Habitat Improvement Project**

Lead partner: Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation

The project focuses on reducing soil erosion and stream sediment by repairing or removing stream

crossings, decommissioning forest roads, installing road drainage and protecting wetland/riparian areas. In addition, this project will improve range conditions through feral horse management and improve wildlife habitat for the sharp-tailed grouse and Columbia River redband trout.

## **West Virginia**

### **West Virginia's Chesapeake Headwaters Conservation Partnership**

Lead partner: West Virginia Agricultural Land Protection Authority

The project will target the placement of perpetual conservation easements on lands that are the most critical for the protection of water quality in the Chesapeake headwaters of West Virginia. This region is an important source of drinking water for over 4 million people in the Washington DC metro area. By incentivizing permanent buffers around sinkholes in karst areas, as well as buffers in riparian corridors and protecting high-quality forests this project will ensure better protection for these sensitive areas. 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**

### **Baraboo River Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program**

Lead partner: Sauk County Conservation Planning and Zoning Department

The Baraboo River Watershed RCPP will focus on improving water quality within the Baraboo River Watershed through the promotion and installation of soil and water conservation practices using USDA-NRCS standards and specifications. These activities will be carried out through collaborating partner agencies utilizing partner provided financial and technical assistance. The Baraboo River has been identified as the second greatest contributor of total phosphorus loading to the Wisconsin River. The primary resource concern that will be addressed through the Baraboo River Watershed RCPP is Water Quality Degradation, or specifically high phosphorus and sediment levels being contributed to surface waters within the watershed.

### **Oconomowoc River Watershed Water Quality and Soil Loss Improvements**

Lead partner: City of Oconomowoc

The main goal of the project is to improve water quality within and downstream of the Oconomowoc River Watershed. The City of Oconomowoc will be leading this project by working with producers and many other partners to improve water quality. A secondary objective is reduction of soil loss within the watershed. The activity to support these objectives will be working with producers to reduce the amount of soil loss and nutrients in the watershed. Benefits will be improved water quality, and reduced soil and nutrient loss from agricultural lands.

## **Wyoming**

### **Water Quality and Habitat Improvements: Tongue River Watershed- Sheridan County, WY**

Lead partner: The Nature Conservancy-Wyoming Chapter

This project will further efforts of the NRCS, Sheridan County Conservation District, Sheridan Community Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy and other partners to accelerate project planning, completion and evaluation. Projects to be planned and implemented include, grazing management, range improvement, irrigation diversion restoration (with fish passage), irrigation infrastructure, stream bank and/or channel stabilization, riparian fencing/stock water developments, septic system replacements, invasive species treatment and easements to prevent fragmentation from residential development within the watersheds. Water quality monitoring has been underway for several years, and will continue along stream stretches where impairments have been noted. New remote sensing analysis will be conducted to allow mapping of existing and future Russian olive densities, with a model developed that will be transferable to other Russian olive infestation areas and range monitoring will assess effects of riparian fencing and other restoration projects and fish passage will be monitored by fish surveys conducted within the watershed.

### **Upper North Platte Watershed Restoration**

Lead partner: Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District

The primary resource concern for the Upper North Platte River Watershed Restoration is surface water quality while balancing agricultural production, maintaining stable river channels, encouraging healthy riparian communities and promoting sustainable fish and wildlife habitat. Collaboration between landowners, state and federal agencies, and non-governmental conservation organizations in the Upper North Platte Watershed has enjoyed numerous successes. With regards to agricultural production, this watershed-wide restoration will minimize land loss from river bank erosion, assure irrigation water delivery, provide off-channel watering as applicable, establish riparian fencing and seek deferred riparian grazing agreements with producers while native riparian plants re-establish.

[nrcs.usda.gov](https://nrcs.usda.gov)

**Natural Resources Conservation Service**

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.