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NEWS RELEASE

Tennessee NRCS Offers Funding for Innovative Partner-Driven Projects through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Application Batching Deadline is May 1, 2020

NASHVILLE, March 27, 2020 – The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering funding for innovative partner-driven projects to improve water quality, wildlife habitat and soil health in four Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) areas in Tennessee.

To be considered for program funding, applicants must operate land within the focus area of the respective RCPP project. **The deadline to submit applications for fiscal year (FY) 2020 funding is Friday, May 1, 2020.**

“The Regional Conservation Partnership Program draws on local knowledge and networks to fuel conservation projects, bringing together a wide variety of new partners including businesses, universities, non-profits, and local governments,” said Sheldon Hightower, Tennessee NRCS State Conservationist. *“While we are taking the necessary precautionary measures to help prevent the spread coronavirus, we will continue to provide one-on-one, customer-specific service to producers to help them meet their conservation and business goals.”*

At this time, NRCS staff are working with customers through phone, mail and online communications, and field work continues with appropriate social distancing to help producers with conservation planning and financial assistance through Farm Bill programs.

Funding is available through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE), under the RCPP Farm Bill program.

Funded FY 2020 RCPP projects include:

The Upper Clinch-Powell River Watershed Project

The Upper Clinch-Powell River Watershed is in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and Tennessee and is a leading national hotspot for biodiversity and imperiled species sustaining over 40 varieties of rare mussels and supporting at least 129 native types of fish.

Nearly **\$224,000** will be invested in the partnership between NRCS, The Nature Conservancy-Clinch Valley Program, and the states of Tennessee and Virginia—whereby Virginia is the lead state.

Page 2, RCPP Sign up

The project aims to improve water quality and aquatic habitat through a local working group whose task is to identify resources and prioritize best management practices (BMP), design a GIS-based ranking system for project investments, implement agricultural and mining BMPs in biologically critical areas, and assess the positive impacts of BMPs on water quality. **Applicants must be in Claiborne, Hancock, or Hawkins County and meet eligibility requirements** to receive financial assistance for water quality and wildlife habitat improvement.

West Tennessee Floodplain and Wetland Restoration Project

NRCS will invest **\$113,000** to fund a partnership with West Tennessee River Basin Authority. The goal of the project is to measurably improve the water quality and ecological integrity of the identified watersheds through implementation of NRCS soil health initiative practices, grade stabilization structures, riparian forest buffer, sediment basins, wetland enhancement, and wetland restoration. The watershed approach used will result in significant resource improvements and will benefit producers by reducing flooding and improving soil health.

Advanced Precision Agriculture for Sustainable Conservation

Tennessee NRCS will invest approximately **\$924,000** to fund a Critical Conservation Area in the Mississippi River Basin. Security Seed & Chemical, Inc., will spearhead this project that encompasses the Cumberland River basin in Tennessee and Kentucky, which spans nearly 18,000 square miles and is home to nearly 2.5 million people. This project will occur in the Red River and Lower Cumberland watersheds, two of the 14 watersheds that make up the Cumberland River Watershed. [Click here for counties that are eligible to apply.](#)

The partners will work with producers to improve water quality by maximizing fertilizer uptake, preventing sediment and nutrient losses, using science-based precision agricultural practices, and implementing high nutrient reducing structural practices. The goal is to advance the implementation of on-farm precision agriculture practice to help ensure the sustainability, resilience, and continued productivity of the area's working lands while simultaneously improving the producer's bottom line.

Reversing Declines in Grassland Biodiversity

NRCS will invest nearly **\$2.4 million** in Tennessee to assist the American Bird Conservancy and its partners with a multifaceted conservation program that will complement existing efforts to reverse the decline of grassland habitats in the Southeast U.S., especially near protected landscapes. The project seeks to recover populations of grassland bird species deemed in need of conservation attention by Partners in Flight, as well as the native biodiversity associated with the historic grassland landscapes of the Interior Low Plateaus ecoregion of Tennessee and Kentucky. Conservation efforts will include removal of woody cover and prescribed fire, reconversion of cropland or fescue pastures to native grasses, increasing forb-to-grass ratios, changing grazing intensities, and altering haying regimes.

Click on the links for a map of the eligible counties for the [EQIP/CSP](#) and [ACEP-WRE](#) programs.

Page 3, RCPP Sign up

Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the farmers.gov portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments.

Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at farmers.gov/sign-in. Online NRCS services are available to customers through the [Conservation Client Gateway link which can be found at www.nrcs.usda.gov](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov). Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents.

For the most current updates on available services and Service Center contact information, visit farmers.gov/coronavirus.

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