2015 Explanatory Notes
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Purpose Statement

The mission of NRCS is "Helping People Help the Land." The Agency accomplishes its mission by providing products and services that enable people to be good stewards of the Nation's soil, water, and related natural resources on non-Federal lands. The formation of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) marked the beginning of the Federal government's enduring commitment to conserving natural resources on private lands. Originally established by Congress in 1935, the agency was later renamed NRCS pursuant to Public Law 103-354, the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6962). From the beginning, the agency brought a national focus to the emerging resource issues of the Dust Bowl era: prevention of wind and water erosion. Desperate to retain its productive Midwest soils, the Nation turned to SCS for technical guidance and advice on minimizing the impacts of erosion. Although the Dust Bowl has passed, the relationship between landowners and the agency remains.

Over the last 75 years, the agency expanded its services to become a conservation leader for all natural resources: soil, water, air, plants, and animals. Now, as NRCS, its primary focus is to ensure that private lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to environmental challenges, like climate change. NRCS is a primary contributor to achieving the USDA Strategic Goal that ensures our national forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing water resources. This is accomplished through a variety of programs aimed at preserving and restoring our private lands, mitigating the effects of climate change, and making the landscape more resilient. NRCS partners with private landowners to provide technical and financial assistance to help protect farm and ranch lands and private forestland.

Seventy percent of the land in the United States is privately owned, making stewardship by private landowners and land managers absolutely critical to the health of our Nation's environment. These are the people, who make day-to-day decisions about natural resource use and management on non-Federal lands, and NRCS offers them the technology, technical and financial assistance needed to benefit the resources, sustain productive lands, and maintain healthy ecosystems.

Science and technology are the critical foundation to effective conservation. NRCS experts from many disciplines come together to help landowners conserve natural resources in efficient, smart and sustainable ways. Whether developed in a laboratory or on the land, NRCS science and technology helps landowners make the right decisions for every natural resource concern.

NRCS's Conservation Delivery System provides services directly to the landowner or land manager in cooperation with conservation districts. Conservation districts are units of local government created by State law and exist in every county and territory of the United States. Conservation districts are responsible for providing guidance to the agency on local resource concerns and serving as the voice of the local community on resource issues.

NRCS's also works in partnership with State and local agencies, locally elected or appointed farmer committees, Federal agencies, tribal governments, and private sector organizations to encourage cooperation and facilitate leveraging of the financial and technical resources these groups can offer. By bringing together groups that have a common and vested interest in the local landscape, community, or watershed, NRCS facilitates collaboration among groups that collectively support sustainable agriculture and maintain natural resource quality.

Under this umbrella of agency mission and local cooperation, NRCS employees help landowners and land managers understand the natural processes that shape their environment, how conservation measures can improve the quality of that environment, and what conservation measures will work best on their land. NRCS employees provide these services directly to the customer. Field offices at USDA Service Centers are in nearly every county and territory of the United States. NRCS employees' technical expertise and understanding of local resource concerns and challenges result in conservation solutions that last. ***In the words of the first NRCS Chief, Hugh Hammond Bennett – "If we take care of the land, it will take care of us."***

Conservation Operations. Conservation Operations is authorized by the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935, P.L. 74-46 (16 U.S.C. 590a-590f) and the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977, (16 U.S.C. 2001-2009). The purpose of Conservation Operations is to provide technical assistance supported

by science-based technology and tools that help people conserve, maintain, and improve the Nation's natural resources. Conservation Operations has four major program components: Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA); Soil Survey; Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SSWSF); and Plant Materials Centers (PMCs).

Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA). The CTA Program has a long history as NRCS'S conservation planning program, helping to develop and deliver conservation technologies and practices to private landowners, conservation districts, tribal, and other organizations.

Through the CTA Program, NRCS helps land managers develop comprehensive conservation plans that include activities which: reduce soil loss from erosion; address soil, water quality, water conservation, air quality, and agricultural waste management concerns; reduce potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or drought; enhance the quality of fish and wildlife habitat; improve the long-term sustainability of all lands, including cropland, forestland, grazing lands, coastal lands, and developed or developing lands; and facilitate changes in land use as needed for natural resource protection and sustainability.

Since its inception, CTA funding has provided the agency with the infrastructure and technology needed to proactively address national conservation priorities that have significant impacts on our resources while maintaining a sustainable and productive agriculture sector. At the same time, CTA provides the flexibility required to be responsive to national priorities and ever-evolving conservation technology. The need to maintain technical capacity at the field level is imperative in developing and delivering the needed conservation assistance to landowners on privately owned land.

CTA funding is used to:

- Provide conservation technical assistance to individuals or groups of decision makers, and to communities, conservation districts, units of State, tribal and local government, and others to voluntarily conserve, maintain, and improve natural resources;
- Provide collaborative community, watershed, and area-wide technical assistance with units of government so they can develop and implement resource management plans that conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources at appropriate scales;
- Provide conservation technical assistance to help agricultural producers comply with the Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and Wetland (Swampbuster) Conservation Compliance Provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended by past and future Farm Bills;
- Provide conservation technical assistance to aid private landowners in complying with other Federal, State, tribal, and local environmental regulations and related requirements, and prepare them to become eligible to participate in other Federal, State, and local conservation programs;
- Collect, analyze, interpret, display, and disseminate information about the status, condition, and trends of soil, water, and related natural resources so people can make informed decisions for natural resource use and management;
- Assess the effects of conservation practices and systems on the condition of natural resources; and
- Develop, adapt, and transfer effective science-based technologies and tools for assessment, management, and conservation of natural resources.

Soil Survey. NRCS's Soil Surveys provide the public with information on the properties, capabilities, and conservation treatment needs of their soils through the use of soil maps and interpretive analyses. Soil Surveys help people make informed land use and management decisions that take into consideration various soil characteristics and capabilities, ensuring their soil is kept healthy and productive. In addition, it provides soils information and interpretation to individuals or groups of decision-makers, and to communities, States, and others to aid sound decision-making in the wise use and management of soil resources;

NRCS conducts Soil Surveys cooperatively with other Federal agencies, Land Grant Universities, State agencies, tribes, and local governments. NRCS's major Soil Survey objectives are to:

- Inventory and map the soil resource on all lands of the United States;
- Keep soil surveys relevant to meet emerging and ever-changing needs;
- Interpret the data and make soil survey information available to meet public needs;
- Promote and provide technical assistance in the use of soil survey information; and
- Lead the National Cooperative Soil Survey Program.

A major challenge is integrating soils data for 3,000 counties across the Nation into a single dataset that eliminates discrepancies in older Soil Surveys, which do not have the same level of detail as newer Soil Surveys and which often use outdated mapping and classification concepts. Until recently, Soil Survey information reflected the "average" condition of soil properties without providing information on differences induced by different management systems and land uses. Soil Surveys are now being updated to create a seamless soil survey across all counties and States and to provide information on soil properties that change depending on land use and management.

Soil Survey information is the foundation of resource planning conducted by land-users and policy makers. Soil Surveys provide vital information needed to support sustainable and productive soils in the United States. Emerging environmental issues (e.g., soil carbon stocks, nutrient management, and healthy soils) require that the soil survey collect and interpret new data to best inform decision makers.

In addition to providing Soil Survey data to the public, NRCS also maintains a National Soil Survey Center (NSSC) that integrates and adds to the current soil science and provides information for the effective application of the Soil Survey to help make good land management possible. NSSC develops national soil policy, technical guidance, procedures, and standards. It conducts soil research investigations, operates a soil survey laboratory, develops handbooks and manuals, provides training, develops and maintains soil survey data systems; and plans regional work conferences.

Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasts (SSWSF). The SSWSF Program collects high elevation snow data in the Western United States and provides managers and users with snowpack data and water supply forecasts. NRCS field staff collects and analyzes data on snow depth, snow water equivalent, and other climate parameters at over 2,022 remote, high elevation sites. The program is actively transitioning to a fully automated system that provides near-real time data available on the internet. At the present time, 862 of these remote data collection sites (SNOTEL) are currently automated. The data are used to provide estimates of annual water availability, spring runoff, and summer stream flows. Climate change researchers have increasingly accessed the data for evaluating trends in the Western U.S. The water supply forecasts are used by individuals, Tribes, organizations, and units of government for decisions relating to agricultural production, hydroelectric power generation, fish and wildlife management, municipal and industrial water supply, reservoir management, urban development, flood control, recreation, and water quality management. Western Federal water management agencies include these forecasts in their water management functions. Reports on the snowpack characteristics are used by the ski industry, transportation departments and others to plan their seasonal work in remote mountainous areas.

The objectives of the program are to:
- Provide reliable, accurate and timely forecasts of surface water supply to water managers and water users in the west;
- Efficiently obtain, manage, and disseminate high quality data and information on snow, water, climate, and hydrologic conditions; and
- Provide climate data to support NRCS conservation planning tools.

In addition, the Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN) provides similar climate information as well as soil moisture and temperature data at lower elevations. SCAN consists of 191 sites in the 48 contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico/Virgin Islands.

Plant Material Centers (PMCs). The PMCs identify, test, evaluate, and demonstrate the performance of plants and plant technologies to solve natural resource problems and improve the utilization of natural resources. Thus, PMCs contribute to reducing soil erosion; increasing cropland soil health and productivity; restoring wetlands, improving water quality, and improving wildlife habitat (including pollinators); protecting streambank and riparian areas; stabilizing coastal dunes; producing biomass; improving air quality; and addressing other conservation treatment needs. PMCs have a long and successful history of selecting and testing plant materials for resource conservation which has, in large part, accomplished the purpose of increasing the availability of conservation plant material to the public.

PMCs are realigning their activities to better focus on: 1) the utilization of plants for specific objectives and purposes, such as soil health, soil stabilization, and pollinator/wildlife habitat; 2) the collection of data to improve

conservation planning efforts; and 3) the validation of plant materials for use in NRCS vegetative conservation practices. The shift in focus aligns PMCs with current NRCS needs to ensure that conservation practices are scientifically-based, to improve the knowledge of NRCS field staff through PMC-led training sessions and demonstrations, and to develop recommendations to meet new and emerging natural resource issues. This new focus expands existing efforts to improve technology transfer. For example, 2,500 documents are now available online describing how to select and use plants for conserving or improving natural resources. The work at PMCs is carried out cooperatively with State and Federal agencies, universities, tribes, commercial businesses, and seed and nursery associations. PMC activities directly benefit private landowners as well as Federal and State land managing agencies.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Programs (WFPO). Through the WFPO programs, NRCS cooperates with State and local agencies, tribal governments, and other Federal agencies to prevent damage caused by erosion, floodwater, and sediment, to further the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water, and advance the conservation and utilization of the land. Authorization includes the Watershed Operations Program authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1944 (P.L. 78-534) and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program authorized by P.L. 83-566 (16 U.S.C. 1001-1008), as amended.

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program is available nationwide to protect and improve watersheds up to 250,000 acres in size (small watersheds). Currently, there are approximately 315 active small watershed projects throughout the country. The Watershed Operations Program is available only in areas authorized by statute; these areas cover about 38 million acres in 11 States. Objectives of the program are to provide technical and financial assistance to install watershed improvement measures to reduce flood, sedimentation, and erosion damage; improve the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water; and advance the conservation and proper utilization of land in authorized watersheds.

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP). EWP reduces hazards to life and property in watersheds damaged by severe natural events. An emergency exists when a watershed is suddenly impaired by flood, fire, drought, wind borne, or other natural causes that results in threats to life and property. The emergency area need not be declared a national disaster area to be eligible for assistance; however, a Presidential disaster declaration is one method for establishing eligibility. The program is authorized by Section 216 of the Flood Control Act of 1950 (33 U.S.C. 701b-1), as amended, and Sections 403-405 of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1978 (16 U.S.C. 2203-2205), as amended.

Objectives of the program are to provide technical and financial assistance for disaster cleanup, restoration of watershed conveyance, and subsequent stabilizing of streambanks and levees. The program also allows for relocation of properties outside floodplains in lieu of restoration in cases where it is more cost effective. Local people are generally employed on a short-term basis to assist with disaster recovery. Activities include: 1) establishing quick vegetative cover on denuded land, sloping steep land, and eroding banks; 2) opening dangerously restricted channels; 3) repairing diversions and levees; 4) purchasing floodplain easements; and 5) other emergency work.

Watershed Rehabilitation Program. This dam rehabilitation program provides both financial and technical assistance to communities for addressing public health, safety concerns, and environmental impacts of aging dams. The program is authorized under Section 14 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1012), as amended.

Local communities have constructed more than 11,700 watershed dams with assistance from NRCS. These dams protect America's communities and natural resources with flood control, but many also provide the primary source of drinking water for the area or offer recreation and wildlife benefits. Funding is used for rehabilitation projects to bring the dam up to current safety standards through planning, design, and construction of the rehabilitation project, but may also be used for dam removal. The program may provide up to 65 percent of the total cost of the rehabilitation projects; Federal funds cannot be used for operation and maintenance.

Water Bank Program. WBP focuses technical and financial assistance on flooded cropland, flooded hay and pasture land, and flooded forestland. NRCS received WBP funding in 2012 and held a sign-up in Minnesota, North

Dakota, and South Dakota, which have experienced significant flooding of agricultural land. Landowners and operators have non-renewable 10-year rental agreements to receive annual payments to protect wetlands and provide wildlife habitat by preventing adverse land uses and activities, such as drainage, that would destroy the wetland characteristics of those lands. WBP participants who wish to establish or maintain conservation practices may apply for financial assistance through other NRCS or State financial assistance programs where available.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP advances the voluntary application of conservation practices to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible uses. Conservation practices funded through EQIP help producers improve the condition of soil, water, air, and other natural resources. The program assists owners and operators of agricultural and forest land with the identification of natural resource problems and opportunities in their operation and provides assistance to solve identified problems in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program, which is authorized by Sections 1240 through 1240G and Section 1241(a) of the Food Security Act of 1985, was amended and re-authorized through 2018 by Sections 2201 through 2208 and Section 2601 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

Although EQIP specifically addresses resource concerns on working farms and ranches, implementation of the program creates benefits that extend well beyond the farm. Conservation practices funded through EQIP contracts accrue significant environmental benefits, including improved grazing lands, improved air quality, enhanced fish and wildlife habitat, sustainable plant and soil conditions, improved water quality and quantity, reduced soil erosion, and energy conservation that provide important ancillary economic and social benefits.

In 2015, of the total EQIP funding, at least $4 million will be used to support an initiative to increase the availability and access to nutritious forage for pollinators in a targeted multi-state area (North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan) that is home to nearly 75 percent of the Nation's managed honeybee population during the prime summer forage months.

Conservation Security Program. The Conservation Security Program was a voluntary program that provided financial and technical assistance for the conservation, protection, and improvement of natural resources on tribal and private working lands. It provided payments for producers who practice good stewardship on their agricultural lands and provided incentives for those who wanted to do more. Under the 2008 Farm Bill, NRCS is not authorized to enter into new Conservation Security Program contracts but continues to make payments to producers with five- to ten-year contracts from prior years.

The program was authorized by Section 2002 of the 2002 Farm Bill, which amended the Food Security Act of 1985 by adding Chapter 2, Subchapter A, the Conservation Security Program. Section 2301(b) of the 2008 Farm Bill stipulated that a Conservation Security Program contract may not be entered into or renewed after September 30, 2008. Pursuant to Section 1241(a)(3) of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by Section 2601(a) of the Agricultural Act of 2014, the Secretary shall make payments on contracts entered into before September 30, 2008, using such sums as are necessary.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The purpose of CSP is to encourage producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities. The program, which is authorized by Sections 1238E through 1238G and Section 1241(a) of the Food Security Act of 1985, was amended and re-authorized through 2018 by Sections 2101 and Section 2601 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and to adopt additional ones on their operations. CSP provides opportunities to both recognize excellent stewards and deliver valuable new conservation. The program helps producers identify natural resource problems in their operation and provides technical and financial assistance to solve those problems in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. CSP addresses seven natural resource concerns (soil quality, soil erosion, water quantity, water quality, air quality, plant resources, and animal resources) as well as energy.

CSP is a voluntary program available through a continuous sign-up process, with announced cut-off dates for ranking and funding applications. This allows producers to submit their applications at any time. Applications are

evaluated relative to other applications addressing similar priority resource concerns to facilitate a competitive ranking process among applications that face similar resource challenges. The 2008 Farm Bill prescribed the following factors for evaluating and ranking applications:

- Level of conservation treatment on all applicable priority resource concerns at the time of application;
- Degree to which the proposed conservation treatment on applicable priority resource concerns effectively increases conservation performance;
- Number of applicable priority resource concerns proposed to be treated to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the contract; and
- Extent to which other resource concerns, in addition to priority resource concerns, will be addressed to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the contract period.

During the period beginning on the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014 and ending on September 30, 2022, the Secretary of Agriculture shall, to the maximum extent practicable, "(1) enroll in the program an additional 10,000,000 acres for each year" and "(2) manage the program to achieve a national average rate of $18 per acre, which shall include the costs of all financial assistance, technical assistance, and any other expenses associated with enrollment or participation in the program."

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) consists of two components: 1) an agricultural land easement component under which NRCS assists eligible entities to protect agricultural land by limiting non-agricultural uses of that land through the purchase of agricultural land easements and 2) a wetland reserve easement component under which NRCS provides financial and technical assistance directly to landowners to restore, protect and enhance wetlands through the purchase of wetlands reserve easements. ACEP consolidates the purposes of three easement programs that were repealed by the Agricultural Act of 2014: the Wetlands Reserve Program, the Grassland Reserve Program, and the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program. ACEP is authorized through 2018 by Sections 1265 through 1265D and Section 1241(a) of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by Sections 2301 and 2601 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

Through the agricultural land easement component, ACEP helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including rangeland, pastureland and shrubland. Eligible entities include an Indian Tribe, State government, local government, or a nongovernmental organization which has a farmland or grassland protection program that purchases agricultural land easements for the purpose of protecting agriculture use and related conservation values, including grazing uses and related conservation values, by limiting conversion to non-agricultural uses of the land.

Through the wetland reserve easement component, ACEP provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian Tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a wetlands reserve easement or 30-year contract. Wetlands provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity, and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities.

To enroll land through agricultural land easements, NRCS enters into cooperative agreements with eligible entities that include the terms and conditions under which the eligible entity is permitted to use ACEP cost-share assistance, including the development of an agricultural land easement plan. This plan will promote the long-term viability of the land.

To enroll land through wetland reserve easements, NRCS enters into purchase agreement with eligible private landowners or Indian tribes that includes the right for NRCS to develop and implement a wetland reserve restoration easement plan. This plan restores, protects, and enhances the wetlands functions and values of the land. NRCS may authorize enrolled land to be used for compatible economic uses, including activities such as hunting and fishing, managed timber harvest, or periodic haying or grazing if such uses are consistent with the long-term protection and enhancement of the wetland resources for which the easement was established.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes the implementation of conservation activities through agreements between partners and producers. RCPP combines the purposes of four former Title XII conservation programs – the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program, the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, and the Great Lakes Basin Program. Through agreements between partners and conservation program contracts directly with producers, RCPP helps implement conservation projects that may focus on water quality and quantity, soil erosion, wildlife habitat, drought mitigation and flood control or other regional priorities. RCPP is authorized through 2018 by Sections 1271 through 1271F of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by Section 2401 of the Agricultural Act of 2014.

RCPP partners include agricultural or silvicultural producer associations or other groups of producers, state or local governments, Indian tribes, farmer cooperatives, municipal water treatment entities, irrigation districts, conservation driven nongovernmental organizations, and institutions of higher education are eligible. Agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands may enter into RCPP contracts to receive financial and technical assistance as part of an RCPP partner agreement. Producers may receive assistance without a partner if the land is located in a partner project area or a critical conservation area designated by NRCS. RCPP contracts with producers are implemented through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Conservation Stewardship Program, or the Healthy Forests Reserve Program.

RCPP increases the restoration and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on regional or watershed scales by encouraging partners to cooperate with producers. Producers receive technical and financial assistance through RCPP while NRCS and its partners help producers install and maintain conservation activities. Partners contribute and leverage funding for partnership projects and assess the results.

Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA). AMA provides technical and financial assistance in 16 States: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. AMA is funded through the CCC. The program is authorized by Section 524(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C 1524(b)), as amended. Section 524(b)(4)(B) provides $10,000,000 each year for the program, of which 50 percent is allocated to NRCS ($15,000,000 was provided for the years 2008 through 2014).

NRCS provides AMA technical and financial assistance to producers to construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks; and take actions to improve water quality. In addition, the Risk Management Agency provides AMA financial assistance to producers purchasing crop insurance to reduce revenue risk. The Agricultural Marketing Service also provides AMA financial assistance to program participants receiving certification or continuation of certification as an organic producer.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP). The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentives Program (VPA-HIP) encourages private landowners to voluntarily make their land available to the public for wildlife-dependent recreation. States and tribes approved for funding in program use the funds as incentives to encourage private landowners of farms, ranches, and forests to make that land available to the public for wildlife-dependent recreation. This may include hunting or fishing. The overall goal of VPA-HIP is to enhance wildlife habitat and management and to boost local economies through activities that attract wildlife enthusiasts.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP). HFRP assists landowners in restoring, enhancing, and protecting forest ecosystems to: promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species; improve biodiversity; and enhance carbon sequestration. The program is authorized by Sections 501 through 508 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-148) as amended by Section 8203 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79).

Programmatic and Landscape Conservation Initiatives. To address critical, regionally important conservation needs, NRCS and its partners have established programmatic and landscape-scale initiatives to provide additional support to voluntary conservation on private lands. NRCS has targeted funding to support the initiatives through a variety of Farm Bill conservation programs. NRCS technical assistance is also provided through its CTA Program. Technical and financial support may also come from partners.

Each initiative is intended to raise awareness of a specific resource concern or opportunity, to stimulate interest and commitment for voluntary action, to help focus funding, and to optimize conservation results. By coordinating NRCS'S efforts with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other groups, efficiency and effectiveness are optimized; additional resources are generated from partners to expand capacity and accelerate action; and mutual support is established for core conservation practices/systems that benefit the watershed, ecosystem, or species of concern.

Following are some of the initiatives of national significance.

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). NRCS works with farmers and ranchers in small watersheds throughout the Nation to improve water quality where this is a critical concern. NRCS worked collaboratively with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at the national level to develop a framework for selecting high-priority watersheds where State water quality agencies and NRCS could target outreach and assistance to demonstrate improvements in water quality. NRCS identified priority watersheds through the help of local partnerships and state water quality agencies. Partners sometimes offer financial assistance in addition to NRCS programs. NRCS will continue to coordinate with local and state agencies, conservation districts, nongovernmental organizations and others to implement this initiative. This strategic approach will leverage funds and provide streamlined assistance to help individual agricultural producers take needed actions to reduce the runoff of sediment, nutrients and pathogens into waterways where water quality is a critical concern. Water quality-related conservation practices benefit agricultural producers by lowering input costs and enhancing the productivity of working lands. Eligible producers will receive assistance under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program for installing conservation systems that may include practices such as nutrient management, cover crops, conservation cropping systems, filter strips, terraces, and in some cases, edge-of-field water quality monitoring.

Sage-Grouse Initiative (SGI). This initiative focuses on protecting and conserving Sage-Grouse habitat in California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. The objective is to alleviate or reduce threats to Sage-Grouse habitat and facilitate the sustainability of working ranches. SGI targets conservation delivery within high Sage-Grouse abundance centers or 'core areas' rather than provide palliative care to small and declining populations. NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service completed a range-wide conference report under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in which NRCS identified a suite of 40 conservation practices that are beneficial to Sage-Grouse. Landowners benefit from the conference report because it provides predictability regarding identified conservation activities if Sage-Grouse are listed under the Endangered Species Act.

Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI). Longleaf Pine forests once covered more than 90 million acres in the Southeastern United States, serving as one of the most diverse ecosystems outside of the tropics. Today only 3.4 million acres remain and provide critical habitat for 29 threatened or endangered species. The Longleaf Pine ecosystem range includes portions of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. The objective of this initiative is to protect and restore Longleaf Pine forest ecosystems in these States.

Bay-Delta Initiative. The Bay-Delta Initiative covers important estuary ecosystems within California's Sacramento/San Joaquin River Delta and the San Francisco Bay Estuary (Bay-Delta). The Bay-Delta supplies water for 22 million people, and supports a $28 billion a year agriculture industry in California. In response to the Administration's Interim Federal Action Plan, NRCS has made the Bay-Delta a nationally recognized conservation initiative based on a Federal and State partnership in support of balancing water quality concerns, water supply, and ecosystem restoration in the Central Valley.

Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI). NRCS and its conservation partners developed GoMI in response to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and it incorporates what the public and communities requested through their input into the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force Strategy to restore the Gulf Coast. Through this initiative, NRCS assists farmers and ranchers to address water quality and wildlife resource concerns with voluntary conservation in priority areas along seven major rivers that drain to the Gulf.

Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative (LPCI). NRCS developed the LPCI to provide landowners assistance in priority areas of the Lesser Prairie Chicken's current and historic range for the protection, enhancement, and expansion of

suitable habitat, while also helping agricultural producers sustain their agricultural operations. Lesser Prairie Chicken populations can be found in parts of Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Because of habitat loss and population decline, the Lesser Prairie Chicken is a candidate for Federal listing as a threatened or endangered species. NRCS hopes to reduce the need for listing and aid in the sustainability and population increase of the Lesser Prairie Chicken and has cooperated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to develop a conference opinion for the Lesser Prairie Chicken, through which farmers and ranchers can receive predictability under the Endangered Species Act.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI). The MRBI was established in 2010 and covers Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. It was established to improve the health of watersheds within the Mississippi River Basin through the reduction of nutrient runoff, restoration and enhancement of wildlife habitat, wetland restoration, and maintenance of agricultural productivity. Through 2012, NRCS had 123 partnership agreements in place to implement projects in 640 small watersheds under MRBI.

Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). GLRI was authorized as an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) program in October 2009, and is implemented through a taskforce of 16 Federal departments and agencies who developed the Great Lakes Restoration Action Plan (2010 – 2014) to guide restoration efforts. GLRI aggressively addresses five priorities: 1) clean up the most polluted areas of the Great Lakes; 2) combat invasive species; 3) protect watersheds and shorelines from run-off; 4) restore wetlands; and 5) work with strategic partners on education, evaluation, and outreach. With GLRI funding, NRCS is able to accelerate assistance to farmers working to address phosphorous loading and other critical resource concerns in priority watersheds of the Great Lakes basin.

Ogallala Aquifer Initiative (OAI). The OAI is designed to reduce the quantity of water removed from the aquifer and to improve water quality using conservation practices on cropland and rangeland. Nebraska, Texas, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wyoming are all part of the OAI. Groundwater withdrawal from the aquifer exceeds the natural recharge rate and intensive agricultural practices have increased the potential for long-term water quality degradation. The goals of the OAI are to re-establish the equilibrium of water recharge and water removal from the aquifer over time, and to maintain water quality.

North Central Wetlands Conservation Initiative (NCWCI). The Prairie Pothole Region of North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa, is critical to North American waterfowl. Under the terms and conditions of 7 CFR 12.6, NRCS is required to make certified wetland determinations in this region, and to identify the sites that meet applicable wetland criteria.

Technical Service Provider Assistance (TSP). Under the TSP, individuals or entities are certified by NRCS to assist landowners and agricultural producers in applying conservation practices on the land. TSPs expand and accelerate NRCS'S ability to plan and apply conservation practices that enhance, restore or conserve the Nation's soil, water, and related natural resources on non-Federal land. Use of third parties to conduct conservation work is authorized under Section 1242 of the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended.

Section 1242 requires the Secretary of Agriculture to provide technical assistance under the Food Security Act Title XII conservation programs to a producer eligible for that assistance 1) directly; 2) through an agreement with a third-party provider; or 3) at the option of the producer, through a payment to the producer for an approved third-party provider, if available. Section 1242 also requires that USDA establish a system for approving individuals and entities to provide technical assistance to carry out conservation programs, and establish the amounts and methods for payments for that assistance. Technical assistance includes conservation planning and conservation practice design and implementation.

Repealed Programs. The Agricultural Act of 2014 repealed several Title XII Conservation Programs as of the date of enactment, including the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP), Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP), Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program (CBWP), and Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI). The purposes for many of these programs have been transferred to other programs, including new programs authorized by the current act. For example, the purposes of the easement programs – WRP, GRP, and FRPP – are now served by the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), while the purposes

of AWEP, CBWP and CCPI are now served by the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). The purposes of WHIP are now included in EQIP.

The Agricultural Act of 2014 includes language for the repealed programs that preserves the validity of existing contracts, agreements, and easements (i.e., those entered into before the date of enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014). There is also language that makes funding that was made available for the repealed programs between 2009 and 2013 available to carry out those existing contracts, agreements, and easements. When the prior year funding is exhausted, the Agricultural Act of 2014 allows the Secretary to use funding from the successor programs (ACEP, RCPP, and EQIP, as appropriate), to continue to carry out those existing contracts, agreements, and easements.

Workforce Status and Locations. As of September 30, 2013, NRCS had 10,363 full time employees with permanent appointments. Of this total, 383 employees were located in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, and 9,980 employees were located outside of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Organizational Structure. NRCS is a line and staff organization. The line of authority begins with the Chief of NRCS and extends through the Associate Chiefs (Conservation and Operations), Regional Conservationists (four regions), State Conservationists and Directors, Area Conservationists, and the District Conservationists. Line officers are responsible for direct assistance to the public. Staff positions furnish specialized technical or administrative assistance to line officers.

During FY 2013, NRCS had 2,733 offices located across the Nation. This represents the number of locations where NRCS operates or conducts mission-related activities (i.e., offices, warehouses, plant materials centers, etc.) and reports at least one full time FTE at the location. In addition, this number includes locations used for conservation testing, research and storage.

National Headquarters (NHQ). NRCS assumes Departmental leadership for programs and other activities assigned by the Secretary of Agriculture, through the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment. The Chief, Associate Chiefs, Regional Conservationists, and Deputy Chiefs carry out NHQ functions. The functions include: 1) planning, formulating, and directing NRCS programs, budgets, and activities; 2) developing program policy, procedures, guidelines, and standards; 3) leading and coordinating with other agencies, constituent groups, and organizations; and 4) strategic planning and development of strategic initiatives.

Primarily located in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, NHQ is responsible for the framework for national technology development and delivery within the agency. Natural resource technology is developed and delivered through Headquarters and Management Offices including: Office of the Chief; Office of the Associate Chief for Conservation; Office of the Associate Chief for Operations; Office of the Deputy Chief Areas; Regional Conservationists, and other management or leadership components.

Centers. Technological guidance and direction is also provided through the NRCS Centers, including the National Design, Construction and Soil Mechanics Center; National Soil Survey Center; National Water and Climate Center; Information Technology Center; National Water Management Center; National Employee Development Center; National Geospatial Center of Excellence; National Agroforestry Center; and three National Technology Support Centers (NTSCs) located in the eastern, central, and western areas of the Nation. NTSCs acquire and/or develop new science and technology in order to provide cutting-edge technological support and direct assistance, and to transfer technologies to States, the Pacific Islands Area, and the Caribbean Area. NTSCs also develop and maintain national technical standards and other technological procedures and references. Centers are co-located with other NRCS field offices whenever possible.

State Offices. State Offices provide program planning and direction, consistency and accountability, and administration of a comprehensive soil, water, and related resource conservation program for each State, the Pacific Islands Area (including Hawaii), and the Caribbean Area. State Offices also have the responsibility for the technical integrity of NRCS activities, technology transfer and training, marketing of agency programs and initiatives, and administrative operations and processing. State Offices partner with other Federal and State agencies to provide solutions to State resource issues. A State Conservationist heads each State Office. In the Pacific Islands Area and the Caribbean Area offices, a Director serves in a leadership role similar to that of a State Conservationist.

Service Center Offices. Personalized, one-on-one service is provided by NRCS employees located in Service Centers or specialized offices, which is the majority of NRCS employees. Service Centers and specialized offices support customers to prevent or solve natural resource problems on their land and in their communities. Service Center staff work side-by-side with employees of local conservation districts and State conservation agencies. The Service Centers function as clearinghouses for natural resource information and help people gain access to knowledge and assistance available from local, State, regional, and national sources. They are located in all States, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Micronesia, Palau, and the Marshall Islands. The specialized offices are located across the Nation and deliver technical or financial assistance for specific resource concerns such as water quality improvement.

Support Offices. Support offices provide critical technical and administrative support to Service Centers and other NRCS offices. Support offices include: 1) area offices that provide administrative and technical support to a group of Service Centers; 2) project offices that are headquarters for watershed or river basin planning and construction activities; 3) soil survey offices and Major Land Resource Areas offices that inventory and map the soil resource on private lands, resulting in current and consistent interpretations and data sets; and 4) plant material centers that test, select, and release plants for conservation purposes in selected plant growth regions throughout the United States.

Accountability NRCS regularly collects program performance data through a set of data collection tools, processes, and related software that provide information on a routine basis to support agency strategic and performance planning, budget formulation, workforce planning, and accountability activities. This Accountability Information Management System (AIMS) tracks and evaluates field and state level conservation planning efforts and practice implementation through the Performance Results System (PRS). In addition to AIMS, NRCS implements a suite of actions to improve accountability:

Compliance Activities

- Conducted three functional reviews, fourteen state program reviews, eight program delivery reviews and ten civil rights reviews to ensure compliance is monitored throughout the agency on a consistent basis. NRCS's priority is to improve agency quality assurance and quality controls by reforming financial processes, streamlining business processes, enhancing the workforce, and increasing information quality.
- Conducted HEL Conservation and Swampbuster Compliance reviews on 24,309 tracts.
- Closed 14 of the 39 open audits from the active audit list as of the beginning of 2013. Of the 14 audits closed, 13 had no recommendations for NRCS follow-up. There were 22 audit recommendations closed in 2013, while 60 recommendations remain open.

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

- Security of Data - Continued to upgrade agency accountability software applications and hardware security to correctly safeguard all private and sensitive information, including Personally Identifiable Information (PII), in order to remain in compliance with the Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) and National Institute of Standards and Technology Special Publication 800-53.
- Completeness of Data – The reported performance measures are based on data reported through September 30, 2013. Numerous data quality mechanisms within PRS ensure the completeness of each performance record entry. Each performance record must adhere to a set of quality assurance requirements during the upload process. Business rules, definitions, and internal controls enforce accountability policies or business requirements and diagnose potential entry errors. Error reports are generated for managers at multiple levels to review for completeness or rejected entries, including the Strategic Planning and Accountability Deputy Area staff. On an annual basis the State Conservationists certify that the data is complete.
- Reliability of Data – The data reported for performance measures was determined within PRS based on information validated and received from the National Conservation Planning (NCP) database and the Program Contracts System (ProTracts). ProTracts is a web-enabled application used to manage NRCS conservation program applications, cost- share contracts, and program fund management. Conservation plans are developed in consultation with the customer, created with the Customer Service Toolkit (Toolkit), and warehoused in the NCP. Applied conservation practices are date- stamped, geo-referenced, and linked to employee ID, enabling detailed quality-assurance reviews. Periodic reviews are conducted by state office and headquarters personnel to assess the accuracy of reported data.

- Linking Performance to Programs – To ensure program accountability and evaluate program efficiency, data on performance measures for conservation applied must be linked to the program that funded the staff time needed to carry out each activity. Where more than one program is used to apply practices on the same land unit, each program is credited under the performance measure. The chief sources of data for these performance measures are NCP, ProTracts, and PRS.

Completed and On-going Audits.

2013 Government Accounting Office (GAO) and Office of Inspector General (OIG) closed audits:

- GAO 310974, Implementing Provisions of the E-Government Act of 2002 (GAO-12-782) (January 2012). Final report issued September 12, 1012. No USDA recommendations. NRCS was notified to remove from active list on July 17, 2013.
- GAO 320886, Feed the Future Initiative, terminated without a product. New code GAO 320969 (January 2012), no NRCS notification. (GAO-13-809), final report issued September 17, 2013. No USDA recommendations.
- GAO 361318, Federal Farm Program Direct Payment (GAO-12-640) (July 2011). Final report issued July 3, 2012. Open recommendations directed to Farm Service Agency. No NRCS action needed. NRCS was notified to remove from active list on July 17, 2013.
- GAO 361351, USDA Civil Rights Progress (GAO-12-976R) (November 2011). Final report issued August 29, 2012. No NRCS recommendations. NRCS was notified to remove from list on November 7, 2012.
- GAO 361356, Duplication in Federal Invasive Species Programs (December 2011). After completing preliminary work, GAO terminated the engagement, effective April 3, 2012.
- GAO 361361, Climate Change Adaptation in Natural Resources (GAO-13-253) (December 2011). Final report issued May 31, 2013. No report recommendations. NRCS was notified to remove from active list on July 17, 2013.
- GAO 450909, Protection of Federal Workforce in a Pandemic Influenza (GAO-12-748) (August 2011). Final report issued July 25, 2012. No NRCS recommendations. NRCS was notified to remove from list on November 7, 2012.
- GAO 541085, Trends Federal Vehicle Fleets (GAO-12-780) (February 2012). Final report issued August 2, 2012. GAO made no report recommendations. NRCS was notified to remove from active list on July 17, 2013.
- GAO 541098, Federal Vehicle Fleet Management (GAO-13-659) (August 2012), final report issued July 31, 2013. No NRCS recommendations. NRCS was notified to remove from active list on July 31, 2013.
- GAO 544182, Remanufactured Vehicle Parts (GAO-13-316R) (August 2012). Final report issued March 7, 2013. No NRCS recommendations. Audit closed March 7, 2013.
- GAO 830842, Cost Savings in Federal Government Satellite Programs, (May 2012). Review closed November 7, 2012. GAO determined no issue to pursue. Engagement closed without a product.
- OIG 10024-0001-11, Fiscal Year 2011, NRCS Improper Payment Review (June 2011). Final report issued May, 2012. OCFO accepted final action on June 3, 2013.
- OIG 50024-0002-11, Calendar Year 2011, Executive Order 13520, Reducing Improper Payments, High-Dollar Report Review (November 2011). Final report issued September 28, 2012. OCFO has two recommendations to address. NRCS has completed all requirements to identify high-dollar overpayments and calculating the overpayment percentage.
- OIG 50024-1-11, Improper Payment Elimination and Recovery Act, Compliance Review (November 2011). Final report issued May 18, 2012. No recommendations were assigned to NRCS. All recommendations are for OCFO. Closed May 18, 2012.

2013 Government Accounting Office (GAO) and Office of Inspector General (OIG) active audits:

- GAO 360644, USDA Funding for EQIP – USDA Conservation Programs Stakeholders Views on Participation and Coordination to Benefit Threatened and Endangered Species and Their Habits (October 2005). EQIP Allocation Process to States (GAO-06-969). Final report issued September, 2006. Recommendation 1 is closed. Recommendation 2 is pending receipt and/or processing of final action documentation.

- GAO 361251, Nonpoint Source Water Pollution: Greater Oversight and Additional Data Needed for Key Environment Protection Agency Water Program (GAO-12-335) (November 2010). Final report issued July, 2012. NRCS is actively addressing the September 20, 2012, USDA Statement of Action (SOA), as provided to Congress, OMB, and GAO.
- GAO 361379, Federal Wind Energy Initiatives (GAO-13-136) (February 2011). Final report issued March 11, 2013. Signed SOA dated September 23, 2013, provided to members of Congress, OMB, and GAO. No recommendations for NRCS. Open at this time until notified by GAO.
- GAO 361397, USDA Payments to the Deceased (GAO-13-503) (April 2012). Final report issued June 28, 2013. Statement of Action has one NRCS recommendation, and is pending clearance for Secretary's review and signature.
- GAO 361404, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GAO-13-797), (July 2012), USDA-NRE signed comments to draft report were sent to GAO on September 20, 2013. Environment Protection Agency is the lead for this audit.
- GAO 361418, USDA Implementation of Adjusted Gross Income Limitations for Farm Programs (GAO-13-741) (June 2012). Final report issued August 29, 2013. Statement of Action was provided to GAO and pending departmental clearance. Farm Service Agency is the lead for this audit.
- GAO 361435, Missouri River Flood of 2011 (November 2012). Field work still in process.
- GAO 361444, Human Capital Management and Restructuring Efforts at USDA (October 2012). NRCS fulfilled three information requests. Review is ongoing. Department of Human Resources Management is the lead for this audit.
- GAO 361452, Review of Non-Medical Radiological Sources (November 2012), Occupational Health and Safety European Commission is the lead on this audit. Field work still in progress.
- GAO 361454, Freshwater Supply Update (November, 2012). Field work still in process. NRCS has addressed all follow-up questions and submitted to Forest Service, the lead for this audit.
- GAO 361465, Potential Overlap and Duplication among Federal Farm Safety Net Programs (February 2013). Farm Service Agency is the lead on this audit. Field work still in progress.
- GAO 542215, Federal Facilities Space Use (February 2013). Departmental Management/Office of Procurement and Property Management is lead on this audit. Field work is still in progress.
- OIG 10099-0001-31, NRCS's Administration of Easement Programs in Wyoming (March, 2013). Final report issued September 27, 2013. Management Decision reached on all seven recommendations are pending receipt and/or processing of final action documentation.
- OIG 10401-0002-FM, FY NRCS Financial Statements for Fiscal Year 2008 (January 2008). Final report issued November 13, 2008. Recommendations 1 through 3 and 6 through 9 are closed. Recommendations 4 and 5 are pending receipt and/or processing of final action documentation.
- OIG 10401-0003-FM, NRCS Financial Statements for Fiscal Year 2009 (October 2009). Final report issued November 10, 2009. Recommendations 1, 6, 7 and 8 are closed. Recommendations 2 through 5 are pending receipt and/or processing of final action documentation. A-123 testing had to be retested due to controls that did not work as planned.
- OIG 10401-0004-FM, Natural Resources Conservation Service's Financial Statements for Fiscal Year 2010 (January 2010). Final report issued November 2010. All management decisions reached. Recommendations 1through 6 are open. Recommendation 7 is closed.
- OIG 10401-0001-11, NRCS Financial Statement Audit Fiscal Year 2011 (February 2011). Final report issued November 2011. All management decisions reached. Recommendations 3 through 6 are open. Recommendations 1, 2 and 7 are closed.
- OIG 10401-0002-11, NRCS Financial Statement Audit Fiscal Year 2012 (March 2012). Final report issued November 9, 2012. All management decisions reached. Recommendations 1 through 7 are open.
- OIG 10601-0001-22, Oversight and Compliance Activities (August 2011). Final report issued February 7, 2013. Management decisions complete. Field work completed. Recommendation 3 is closed. Recommendations 1, 2, 4 and 5 are open.
- OIG 10601-0001-23, Controls over Land Valuations for Conservation Easements (September 2013), Entrance conference held on October 29, 2013. Field work is still in progress.
- OIG 10601-0002-31, NRCS Conservation Easement Compliance (May 2013). Field work is still in progress.

- OIG 10601-0004-KC, NRCS Conservation Security Program (CSP) (November 2006). Final report issued June 2009. Management decision achieved for all 23 recommendations. Recommendations 8 and 9 remain open until litigation has been resolved. Recommendations 1 through 7, and 10 through 23 are closed.
- OIG 10601-0006-KC, Emergency Disaster Assistance for the 2008 Floods-EWP (January 2009). Final report issued April 5, 2011. Management decision reached for both recommendations. Recommendation 1 is closed. Recommendation 2 remains open.
- OIG-10703-0001-AT, ARRA-Rehabilitation of Flood Control Dams (September 2010). Final report issued March 25, 2013. Management decision has been achieved on all five recommendations. Recommendations 1, 2, 4 and 5 are open. Recommendation 3 closed on June 11, 2013.
- OIG 10703-0001-31, ARRA, Emergency - Floodplain Easements and Watershed Operations Programs Audit - Phase III (February 2012). Final report issued March 25, 2013. Management Decisions reached. Recommendation 2 is closed. Recommendation 1 remains open.
- OIG 10703-0001-KC, (Phase I) Emergency Watershed Protection Program Floodplain Easements (April 2009). Final report issued September, 2010. Report includes Fast Reports dated August 19, 2009, and November 19, 2009. Recommendations 1 through 3 and 5 through 7 are closed. Recommendation 4 lacks 8 of 30 easement cures for closure.
- OIG-10703-0003-KC (Phase 2), Emergency Watershed Protection Program, Easement Applications on Non-Agricultural Lands (January 2010). Final report issued March 4, 2012. Management decision achieved promptly on all recommendations. The three recommendations are open pending policy development.
- OIG 10703-0004-KC (Phase 2), Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Operations Program, Field Confirmations (July 2010). Final report issued July 24, 2012. Management decisions complete. Recommendations 1, 2, 4 and 5 are closed. Recommendation 3 remains open.
- OIG 10703-0005-KC (Phase 2), ARRA Emergency Watershed Protection Program Floodplain Easements (July 2010), final report issued March 14, 2013. Management decision has been achieved on all recommendations. Recommendations 1 through 6 are open. Recommendation 7 closed September 27, 2013.
- OIG 10704-0001-32, Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative: NRCS response to issues caused by the Deepwater Horizon/British Petroleum Oil Spill (BP) (December 2010). Final report issued August 9, 2012. Management decisions in place. Recommendations 3 and 5 are closed. Recommendations 1, 2, and 4 remains open.
- OIG 50024-0003-11, Calendar Year 2012 Executive Order 13520, Eliminating Improper Payments, High-Dollar Overpayments Report Review (December 2012). Final report issued August 22, 2013. One OCFO recommendation. NRCS to document and certify its process for identifying and reporting high-dollar overpayments and provide the documented process to OCFO for review and approval.
- OIG 50024-0004-11, Improper Payment Elimination and Recovery Act of 2010 (IPERA) Compliance Review for Fiscal Year 2012 (December 2012), OCFO is lead. Final report issued March 14, 2013. Eight recommendations are in the report. Only Recommendation 8 pertains to NRCS, and it remains open.
- OIG 50501-0004-12, Fiscal Year 2013 Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) (April 2013). Entrance conference held May 7, 2013. Field work is in progress.
- OIG 50703-0002-13, Revised case number 50703-02-DA, ARRA Recipient Reporting (January 2012). Field work in progress.

Available Funds and Staff Years (SY)
(Dollars in thousands)

Item	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Detailed information for each account can be found in the Project Statements.								
Discretionary Programs:								
Private Lands Conservation Operations……	$828,159	5,808	$830,998	5,345	$812,939	5,345	$814,772	5,253
Watershed & Flood Prevention Operation……	215,900	105	245,454	81	-	81	-	-
Watershed Rehabilitation Program……	15,000	59	14,700	29	12,000	23	-	-
Water Bank……..……	7,500	2	-	-	4,000	2	-	-
Total, Discretionary Appropriation……	1,066,559	5,974	1,091,152	5,455	828,939	5,451	814,772	5,253
Recission……..….	-	-	-23,620	-	-	-	-	-
Sequestration…….……	-	-	-52,434	-	-	-	-	-
Transfers In……..……	156	-	144	-	-	-	-	-
Transfers Out……..……	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Adjusted Appropriation……..……	1,066,715	5,974	1,015,242	5,455	828,939	5,451	814,772	5,253
Balance Available, SOY……..……	209,424	-	231,936	-	419,080	-	90,560	-
Unobligated Balance of Approp, Reduced ……	-	-	-	-	-2,017	-	-	-
Other Adjustments (Net)……..……	31,347	-	85,584	-	-90,487	-	-90,486	-
Total Available……..……	1,307,486	5,974	1,332,762	5,455	1,155,515	5,451	814,846	5,253
Lapsing Balances……..……	-12,017	-	-146	-	-	-	-	-
Balance Available, EOY……..……	-396,274	-	-419,574	-	-74	-	-74	-
Obligations……..…..……	899,195	5,974	913,042	5,455	1,155,441	5,451	814,772	5,253
Obligations under other USDA appropriations:								
Farm Security & Rural Investment Program ……	3,269,545	4,283	3,173,507	4,408	3,404,598	5,088	3,413,818	5,263
Transfers Out…….……	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Reimbursements for technical services to Federal and Non-Federal:								
USDA Planning & Application (FSA-CRP)……..	101,521	792	64,920	611	-	-	-	-
Other Federal and Non-Federal Reimbursements	470,323	228	72,066	197	80,602	132	59,200	117
Total Reimbursements……..……	571,844	1,020	136,986	808	80,602	132	59,200	117
Total, NRCS……	4,740,584	11,277	4,223,536	10,671	4,640,641	10,671	4,287,790	10,633

Permanent Positions by Grade and Staff Year Summary

Item	2012 Actual			2013 Actual			2014 Estimate			2015 Estimate		
	Wash. D.C.	Field	Total	Wash. D.C.	Field	Total	Wash. D.C.	Field	Total	Wash. D.C.	Field	Total
SES.....	27	3	30	22	2	24	22	2	24	22	2	24
GS-15.....	88	91	179	95	73	168	87	67	154	87	67	154
GS-14.....	132	250	382	206	177	383	189	163	352	188	161	349
GS-13.....	70	652	722	120	553	673	110	508	618	109	504	613
GS-12.....	33	3,005	3,038	60	2,886	2,946	55	2,653	2,708	55	2,632	2,687
GS-11.....	26	2,507	2,533	66	2,412	2,478	61	2,217	2,278	60	2,199	2,259
GS-10.....	-	36	36	1	38	39	1	35	36	1	35	36
GS-9.....	22	1,832	1,854	62	1,639	1,701	57	1,507	1,564	57	1,495	1,552
GS-8.....	18	872	890	18	449	467	17	413	430	16	409	425
GS-7.....	14	1,729	1,743	35	1,466	1,501	32	1,348	1,380	32	1,337	1,369
GS-6.....	1	420	421	2	347	349	2	319	321	2	316	318
GS-5.....	2	454	456	8	237	245	7	218	225	7	216	223
GS-4.....	2	222	224	4	205	209	4	188	192	4	187	191
GS-3.....	2	157	159	1	39	40	1	36	37	1	36	37
GS-2.....	1	40	41	3	34	37	3	31	34	3	31	34
GS-1.....	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	1
Total Perm. Positions.....	438	12,271	12,709	703	10,558	11,261	648	9,706	10,354	644	9,628	10,272
Unfilled, EOY..	52	1,912	1,964	320	576	896	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Perm. Full-Time Employment, EOY.....	386	10,359	10,745	383	9,982	10,365	648	9,706	10,354	644	9,628	10,272
Staff Year Est...	724	10,553	11,277	724	9,947	10,671	666	10,005	10,671	661	9,972	10,633

Size, Composition and Cost of Motor Vehicle Fleet

As a field-based agency, NRCS has a significant number of employees who require vehicles to visit field offices, job sites (farms and ranches), and other areas where public transportation is non-existent, uneconomical, or inadequate. Because they drive on agricultural land to provide technical assistance to farmers and ranchers, and often transport large engineering and other field equipment, employees need access to pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles (SUVs). NRCS maintains a fleet of vehicles distributed among service centers and field, area, and State offices in the 50 States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Basin areas. The majority of the vehicles are owned by the agency, others are leased through the General Services Administration (GSA). The vehicles are assigned to an office location, and several employees use a single vehicle. Efforts are made to share vehicles with other co-located USDA agencies when feasible to minimize the number of vehicles at a location and maximize their use in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

To ensure that vehicles are safe and reliable, NRCS requires annual vehicle inspections per States' motor vehicle regulations. The Federal Management Regulation (FMR) 102-34.280 sets forth the minimum number of years or number of miles an agency must keep its vehicles before replacement. NRCS policy is to replace motor vehicles based on economy, environmental, and safety requirements.

Changes to the motor vehicle fleet. Since 2011, NRCS has been aggressively assessing its fleet inventory to dispose of older, high maintenance vehicles and high-emission vehicles and optimize vehicle utilization. A review was done in each State to justify each vehicle and dispose of under-utilized vehicles. Also included in these measures is increased coordination of trips among NRCS staff members and with other USDA agencies to maximize vehicle sharing and downsize fleet inventory. At the end of 2013, NRCS had a fleet of 8,916 vehicles, of which 792 were sedans and station wagons. Included in the fleet were 285 GSA leased vehicles, of which 57 were sedans and station wagons. The total vehicles decreased by 529 from 2012 to 2013, and annual operating costs were reduced by $2.64 million. NRCS adjusted its fleet inventory in FY13, based on its economic and environmental analysis of the vehicles needed to deliver the agency's conservation mission. The agency has also chartered a Vehicle Management Strategy Workgroup to develop a three-year plan that provides a proactive approach to optimize the use of NRCS vehicles, reduces costs, addresses vehicle replacements to aid in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and ensures that NRCS vehicle allocation methodology meets Federal fleet guidelines and policies, while also meeting mission needs. In 2014, NRCS anticipates an additional net reduction in its fleet of 125 vehicles, resulting in a total vehicle inventory of 8,791. NRCS is also planning to replace a large number of older vehicles from inventory that did not meet DOE and EPA guidelines in FY14 and FY15.

Managing the motor vehicle fleet to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In order to meet Federally-mandated requirements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, NRCS purchases alternative fuel vehicles, where such fuels are available, and hybrid vehicles where they are not. In remote rural areas, there may be few or no alternative fuel options. In the coming year, the agency will continue to focus on purchasing alternative fuel vehicles where there is adequate access to such fuels, and hybrid vehicles in other locations in order to meet greenhouse gas emission targets.

Size, Composition, and Annual Operating Costs of Vehicle Fleet

Fiscal Year	Number of Vehicles by Type[1]								Annual Operating Costs ($ in 000)
	Sedans and Station Wagons	Light Trucks, SUVs, and Vans		Medium Duty Vehicles	Ambu-lances	Buses	Heavy Duty Vehicles	Total Number of Vehicles	
		4x2	4x4						
2012	888	3,138	5,019	348	-	1	51	9,445	18,222[2]
Change	-96	-344	-91	+31	-	-	-29	-529	-2,638
2013	792	2,794	4,928	379	-	1	22	8,916	15,584
Change	-22	-96	+9	-13	-	-	-3	-125	-218
2014	770	2,698	4,937	366	-	1	19	8,791	15,366
Change	-6	-70	+79	-1	-	-	-	+2	+3
2015	764	2,628	5,016	365	-	1	19	8,793	15,369

[1] Vehicles reported are both agency-owned and GSA-leased.

[2] The 2012 annual operating cost reported in the 2014 President's Budget ($17,063) was incorrect; the amount has been corrected.

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

The estimates include appropriation language for this item as follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

Private Lands Conservation Operations

For necessary expenses for carrying out the provisions of the Act of April 27, 1935 (16 U.S.C. 590a-f), including preparation of conservation plans and establishment of measures to conserve soil and water (including farm irrigation and land drainage and such special measures for soil and water management as may be necessary to prevent floods and the siltation of reservoirs and to control agricultural related pollutants); operation of conservation plant materials centers; classification and mapping of soil; dissemination of information; acquisition of lands, water, and interests therein for use in the plant materials program by donation, exchange, or purchase at a nominal cost not to exceed $100 pursuant to the Act of August 3, 1956 (7 U.S.C. 428a); purchase and erection or alteration or improvement of permanent and temporary buildings; and operation and maintenance of aircraft, [$812,939,000]$814,772,000 to remain available until

1 September 30, [2015]2016: *Provided*, That appropriations hereunder shall be available pursuant to 7 U.S.C. 2250 for construction and improvement of buildings and public improvements at plant materials centers, except that the cost of alterations and improvements to other buildings and other public improvements shall not exceed $250,000: *Provided further*, That when buildings or other structures are erected on non-Federal land, that the right to use such land is obtained as provided in 7 U.S.C. 2250a.

2 In addition, $732,819,000, to be available for the same time period and for the same purposes as the appropriation from which transferred, shall be derived by transfer from the Farm Security and Rural Investment Program for technical assistance in support of conservation programs authorized by Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended (16 U.S.C. 3801–3862); Section 524(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act, as amended (7 U.S.C. 1524(b)); and Section 502 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, as amended (16 U.S.C. 6572): Provided, That, of such amount, at least $35,000,000 shall be competitively awarded to non-Federal conservation partners pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 3842: Provided further, That, upon a determination that additional funding is necessary for technical assistance for the purposes provided herein, additional such amounts may be derived by transfer from the Farm Security and Rural Investment Program: Provided further, That any portion of the funding derived by transfer deemed not necessary for the purposes provided herein may be transferred to the Farm Security and Rural Investment Program: Provided further, That the transfer authority provided under this heading is in addition to any other transfer authority provided elsewhere in this Act.

The first change in language proposes deletion of “2015” and insertion of “2016” to provide two year funds availability.

The second change proposes insertion of language to allow the transfer of funds from the Farm Security and Rural Investment Program for technical assistance in support of conservation programs. See page 27-34 for or more details.

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

Lead-Off Tabular Statement

Budget Estimate, 2015	$814,772,000
2014 Enacted	812,939,000
Change in Appropriation	+1,833,000

Adjusted Appropriations

Budget Request, Current Law 2015	$814,772,000
Change Due to Proposed Appropriations Language Changes	+732,819,000
Net Request, 2015 Request	+1,547,591,000

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

Summary of Increases and Decreases
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual	2013 Change	2014 Change	2015 Change	2015 Estimate
Discretionary Appropriations:					
Private Lands Conservation Operations:					
Conservation Technical Assistance	$729,459	-$53,688	+$38,468	+$2,332	$716,571
Soil Survey	80,000	-6,191	+6,191	+94	80,094
Snow Survey & Water Supply Forecasting	9,300	-720	+720	-363	8,937
Plant Materials Centers	9,400	-727	+727	-230	9,170
	828,159	-61,326	+46,106	+1,833	814,772
Transfer from Mandatory Programs	-	-	-	+732,819	732,819
Total Private Lands Conservation Operations	828,159	-61,326	46,106	+734,652	1,547,591

Note: "Proposed Legislation" is reserved for authority changes submitted through the authorizing process outside appropriations. The Private Lands Conservation Operations is not expected to be submitted that way but only through appropriations language changes.

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

Project Statement

Appropriations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)

(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Appropriations:										
Private Lands Conservation Operations:										
1. Technical Assistance.....	$729,459	5,102	$675,771	4,691	$714,239	4,691	+$2,332 (1)	-95	$716,571	4,596
2. Soil Survey.....	80,000	563	73,809	517	80,000	517	+94 (2)	+3	80,094	520
3. Snow Survey.....	9,300	55	8,580	52	9,300	52	-363 (3)	-	8,937	52
4. Plant Materials.....	9,400	88	8,673	85	9,400	85	-230 (4)	-	9,170	85
Total Adjusted Approp.....	828,159	5,808	766,833	5,345	812,939	5,345	+1,833	-92	814,772	5,253
Rescissions, transfers, ... and Seq. (Net).....	-	-	64,165	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Appropriation.....	828,159	5,808	830,998	5,345	812,939	5,345	+1,833	-92	814,772	5,253
Transfers In:										
Congressional Relations.....	156	-	144	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rescission.....	-	-	-22,503	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sequestration.....	-	-	-41,662	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/.....	33,936	-	57,135	-	44,361	-	-28,620	-	15,741	-
Recoveries, Other (Net).....	16,477	-	9,816	-	-15,741	-	-	-	-15,741	-
Total Available.....	878,728	5,808	833,928	5,345	841,559	5,345	-26,787	-92	814,772	5,253
Lapsing Balances.....	-12,017	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/.....	-57,135	-	-44,361	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations.....	809,576	5,808	789,567	5,345	841,559	5,345	-26,787	-92	814,772	5,253
Total Appropriation.....	828,159	5,808	830,998	5,345	812,939	5,345	+1,833	-92	814,772	5,253
Proposed Language Changes:										
Transfer from Farm Bill TA..	-	-	-	-	-	-	+732,819	+5,263	732,819	5,263
Adjusted Appropriation.....	828,159	5,808	830,998	5,345	812,939	5,345	+734,652	+5,171	1,547,591	10,516

1/ Includes Reimbursable carryover.

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

Project Statement
Obligations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Obligations:										
Private Lands Conservation Operations:										
1. Technical Assistance	$711,457	5,102	$698,655	4,691	$736,114	4,691	-$19,543	-95	$716,571	4,596
3. Soil Survey	78,629	563	73,925	517	85,416	517	-5,322	+3	80,094	520
4. Snow Survey	9,973	55	8,007	52	10,498	52	-1,561	-	8,937	52
5. Plant Materials	9,517	88	8,980	85	9,531	85	-361	-	9,170	85
Total Obligations	809,576	5,808	789,567	5,345	841,559	5,345	-26,787	-92	814,772	5,253
Lapsing Balances	12,017	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/	57,135	-	44,361	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available	878,728	5,808	833,928	5,345	841,559	5,345	-26,787	-92	814,772	5,253
Transfers In	-156	-	-144	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rescission	-	-	22,503	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sequestration	-	-	41,662	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/	-33,936	-	-57,135	-	-44,361	-	+28,620	-	-15,741	-
Recoveries, Other (Net)	-16,477	-	-9,816	-	15,741	-	-	-	15,741	-
Total Appropriation	828,159	5,808	830,998	5,345	812,939	5,345	1,833	-92	814,772	5,253
1/ Includes Reimbursable carryover.										
Total Appropriation	828,159	5,808	830,998	5,345	812,939	5,345	+1,833	-92	814,772	5,253
Proposed Language Changes:										
Transfer from Farm Bill TA	-	-	-	-	-	-	+732,819	+5,263	732,819	5,263
Adjusted Appropriation	828,159	5,808	830,998	5,345	812,939	5,345	+734,652	+5,171	1,547,591	10,516

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

Justification of Increases and Decreases

The Private Lands Conservation Operations (PLCO) account has a net increase of $1,833,000 and a decrease of 92 staff years from the 2014 levels for the account ($812,939,000 and 5,345 staff years available in 2014). Increases include $5,142,000 for the proposed pay increase, funding for the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) ($3,679,000), and $28,614,000 for the decentralization of General Services Administration (GSA) Rental Payments and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) payments, and are offset by a $35,602,000 decrease in the funding provided for program activities that are expected to be realized through administrative savings and efficiencies. When adjusted for appropriations language changes, the PLCO account has a total increase of $734,652,000. The changes in the programs funded in this account are as follows:

(1) A net increase of $2,332,000 and a decrease of 95 staff years for Conservation Technical Assistance ($714,239,000 and 4,691 staff years available in 2014):

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) is the foundation for NRCS's ability to deliver effective conservation. CTA provides the flexibility to work with agricultural producers to prepare foundational conservation plans so that they can wisely invest in conservation actions on their operations, as well as with partner organizations to develop innovative responses to conservation challenges and opportunities. Base funding for CTA will continue to provide important technical assistance helping land managers to reduce soil loss from erosion; address soil, water quality, water conservation, air quality, and agricultural waste management concerns; reduce potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or drought; enhance the quality of fish and wildlife habitat; improve the long-term sustainability of all lands, including cropland, forestland, grazing lands, coastal lands, and developed or developing lands; and facilitate changes in land use as needed for natural resource protection and sustainability.

NRCS is pioneering a conservation paradigm that is generating results at broader scales and changing the national dialogue about agriculture and the environment. These landscape conservation innovations are delivering benefits for the environment, for agriculture, and for rural communities. The approach encompasses:

- Targeted conservation initiatives;
- Innovative regulatory predictability and certainty programs;
- New markets for ecosystem services; and
- Traditional and non-traditional public-private partnerships.

As part of this approach, NRCS will:

- Transition, in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), from species-level regulatory predictability efforts (delivered through Working Lands for Wildlife) to ecosystem-level approaches that will help broaden the benefits for at risk species, including species facing threatened and endangered status. In 2015, NRCS proposes to begin to deliver predictability opportunities to land managers and operators in two pilot ecosystems, which may include the long leaf pine and sagebrush habitats.
- Support State-led certainty programs in priority watersheds, building on the successes in the Upper Mississippi River Basin (Minnesota), Michigan, Louisiana, and the Chesapeake Bay (Maryland). This effort will expand to include additional States that are expressing interests in certainty (e.g., Virginia, Vermont, and Arkansas).
- Integrate Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) results and edge-of-field water quality monitoring data to refine targeting of conservation locations and practices, improve the efficiency of agricultural operations, and generate measurable increases in conservation results.
- Expand the use of conservation product labels and other market-based mechanisms to create additional incentives for conservation-based production on private lands. Consumer demand for environmentally-friendly products is increasing exponentially. NRCS will work with the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), agricultural and conservation stakeholders, and large for-profit entities to develop market-based conservation labeling to formally recognize sustainably managed operations and provide producers with a new marketing tool while encouraging greater conservation.

- Deliver, in partnership with other USDA offices, an Environmental Markets and Ecosystem Services Toolbox, a website designed to house user-friendly ecosystem services quantification tools that provide easy access to enterprising producers, States and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) seeking to capitalize on this new source of revenue. NRCS will collaborate with the Economic Research Service (ERS) and the Office of the Chief Economist, Office of Environmental Markets in the analysis of economic costs and environmental benefits of specific practices to inform Environmental Market protocols.
- Enhance business development support for producers, innovative local food enterprises including food hubs, natural resource management in on-farm processing facilities supported through value added producer grants, and resource-based economic opportunities. Key partners in creating and delivering support include Rural Development (RD), AMS, and local Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils and Soil and Water Conservation Districts.
- Leverage new partnerships among NRCS, RD, and RC&D Councils to encourage expansion of resource-based rural economic opportunities. Developing farm-scale alternative fuel sources can provide energy as well as address resource concerns. For example, in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, thermochemical technology is being used to convert poultry litter to energy to supply electricity to the poultry houses.

Agriculture and forestry are challenged to sustain productivity and natural resource quality in the face of a changing climate. NRCS is meeting the growing demand for sustainable agricultural practices by giving producers access to state-of-the-art conservation technologies, tools, and information that will help them cope with pressure from land conversion, scarce water supplies and climate change. Cutting edge science, delivered by technically qualified conservationists, help these land managers adapt and keep working lands working.

As part of this approach, NRCS will:

- Provide state-of-the-art technical assistance to producers at the farm and ranch scale, which complements the investment in CTA at the landscape scale and empowers producers to adapt to changing environmental challenges, to increase their productivity, and to help create resilient landscapes through their conservation efforts.
- Transform NRCS's "boots on the ground" conservation efforts with implementation of the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI), which encompasses a state-of-the-art, integrated planning and assessment tool and a client portal for producers to access their conservation business plan. Full implementation of CDSI will result in faster service for customers and streamlined business processes for planners, and allow reinvestment of savings to meet growing demand for conservation services.
- Make nationwide gains in soil health. Collectively, healthy soils address the major conservation challenges of the day, including water quality, water supply, and carbon sequestration. In so doing, healthy soils also position producers to remain productive and build resilience to extreme weather.
- Collaborate with ERS and departmental counterparts in identifying economic and non-economic incentives that influence the adoption of management practices (e.g., tillage, crop rotations) that improve the environmental performance of agriculture. Explore these linkages and their potential to accelerate desired outcomes from conservation programs and opportunities to accelerate environmental market developments.
- Accelerate the Strike Force initiative by bundling tools and resources in collaboration with the Farm Service Agency (FSA), United States Forest Service (USFS), RD, and the Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) mission area to provide comprehensive assistance that increases profitability and improves natural resources.
- Refresh and expand the 2008 CEAP data and micro-simulation modeling infrastructure to provide an up-to-date scientific basis for program, planning, and policy decisions.
- Accelerate certified wetlands determinations so that producers can make timely operational and wetland resource management decisions. In 2015, NRCS will implement a streamlined and consistent process with a goal of addressing the backlog for certified wetland determinations.

NRCS is transforming the nature of its partnerships to emphasize expanding partnerships and increasing coordination in service delivery to expand one-on-one service to producers and forestland owners and

managers. This includes a focus on key customer groups – Tribes, historically underserved producers, and beginning farmers and ranchers – many of whom operate on acreage most vulnerable to the pressures of climate change, water scarcity and land conversion.

As part of this approach, NRCS will:

- Provide additional state-of-the-art one-on-one conservation assistance, primarily through partnerships, to ensure that the next generation of working farms and ranches are productive, diverse, and resilient to climate change.
- Significantly increase partnership agreements with external entities, including Tribes, State and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses, to leverage financial resources for conservation and increase the array of technical expertise available to design and deliver conservation solutions. NRCS proposes to increase partnerships by $36 million, which is expected to leverage an additional $21 million or more. For example, in the Agency's partnership with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), our investment of $9 million leveraged nearly $40 million in partnership contributions.
- Seek new partners who bring the skills and experience to reach historically underserved producers and Tribes. Since 2010, NRCS has reached historically underserved producers and communities in 400 counties in 16 states through USDA's StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity initiative. In 2015 we will reach additional states and counties with this effort.
- Increase collaboration with Departmental counterparts to coordinate service delivery to address priority assistance needs. For example, coordinate with FSA, USFS, Rural Development, and MRP to develop bundled approaches to help beginning farmers, ranchers and foresters increase profitability through loans, value added grants, operation diversification and reduced input costs through conservation planning.
- Increase awareness among the historically underserved, beginning farmers, and Tribes of conservation tools, such as Soil Survey, Ecological Site Descriptions, and Water Supply Forecasting that are available to aid in decision-making. Improve access to this information through one-on-one technical assistance, as well as evaluating alternative formats (e.g., print, translations) to meet identified needs.
- Accelerate efforts to consolidate agency-specific land classification systems of NRCS, BLM, and USFS into single, consistent Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs). This will vastly improve the agency's ability to provide land managers the information needed to evaluate the suitability of the land for various land use activities, the capability to recognize impending change, and the ability to respond by implementing management strategies to meet their economic and environmental objectives.

a. An increase of $4,466,000 for pay costs, which includes $1,078,000 for annualization of the 2014 pay raise and $3,388,000 for the anticipated 2015 pay raise.

The increase for pay will enable NRCS to maintain a staffing level critical to the Agency's mission. The pay cost funds are needed to avoid any disruption or delays in the CTA program activities and will be used to pay the increased salaries and benefits cost for the 4,630 staff years funded in the 2015 Budget.

b. An increase of $28,614,000 for the decentralization of GSA Rental Payments and DHS payments.

USDA proposes in 2015 the decentralization of GSA Rental Payments and DHS payments. The amount shown is the equivalent share of the current GSA Rent and DHS central appropriations based upon current space occupancy across the continental United States. The appropriations request for the central GSA rent account and the DHS payment account has been reduced accordingly.

c. An increase of $3,679,000 to invest in the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) to improve the cost effectiveness, timeliness, and accountability of NRCS's program delivery.

The Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI) is a multi-year effort to integrate information technology and business process improvements that will eliminate duplicative program administrative

tasks, reduce overhead costs, and free NRCS technical field staff to refocus on conservation planning and customer service. CDSI's specific goals are to:

- Reduce the administrative burden on field staff to allow them to spend the vast majority of their time with customers planning and implementing conservation in the field;
- Minimize the time that field staff currently devotes to clerical tasks instead of customer service;
- Develop cutting-edge tools to guide NRCS staff and customers through conservation assistance steps and improve cost effectiveness; and
- Shorten the time between when customers apply for a program and when they are awarded contracts to less than two weeks.

Ultimately, implementation of CDSI should reduce the time agency staff in state and field offices must devote to administering duplicative and burdensome administrative processes. Thus, NRCS estimates that when fully implemented CDSI will allow the agency to refocus over 1,500 staff years on customer service and better planning and delivery of conservation assistance.

NRCS is proposing a reallocation of base funding for CDSI, $15,679,000 available in 2015 for overall program support; for salaries and travel for the CDSI Enterprise Business Initiative (EBI) Team and the Information Technology (IT) Team; and for the design, development, testing and deployment of the Conservation Desktop (CD), Mobile Planning Tool (MPT), and Client Gateway (CG) applications. Included in the total request are the following costs:

- Conservation Desktop (CD) – $8,821,900 for the development and deployment of CD version 2.0, along with the planning, design and development of CD version 3.0. CD v2.0 is scheduled for modular development and testing in FY 2015, with the initial deployment in late 2015 and full feature deployment in 2016.
- Mobile Planning Tool (MPT) – $3,780,800 for the MPT, development of which will be initiated in 2015, including the prototype, which will lead to the selection and acquisition of NRCS's mobile device. The funding requested is for the application development and testing and includes the acquisition of NRCS's mobile devices.
- Client Gateway (CG) – $3,076,300 for the development and deployment of CG version 2.0. CG version 1.0 is on schedule for deployment in 2014 and will be the initial release of CG. In 2015, integration of CG with CD and MPT will be accomplished.

d. A decrease of $34,427,000 and a reduction of 95 staff years in Conservation Technical Assistance in support of conservation plans written and delivery of conservation programs.

Conservation planning is a continuous, iterative process whereby resource assessment and evaluation of alternatives are funded through the CTA account while final plan implementation and evaluation are provided with mandatory Farm Bill funding. It is anticipated that this reduction will have minimal effect on the number of plans written and the assistance provided to producers because of efficiencies realized by the agency in the delivery of conservation technical assistance through process improvements and automation efforts, and because of cost savings realized for administrative support services.

(2) A net increase of $94,000 and an increase of three staff years for the Soil Survey Program ($80,000,000 and 517 staff years available in 2014).

The major NRCS objectives of the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS) Program are to:

- Inventory and map the soil resource on all lands of the United States;
- Keep soil surveys relevant to meet emerging and ever-changing needs;
- Interpret the data and make soil survey information available to meet public needs;
- Promote and provide technical assistance in the use of soil survey information; and
- Lead the National Cooperative Soil Survey Program.

The agency conducts soil surveys cooperatively with other Federal agencies, Land Grant Universities, State agencies, tribes, and local governments. Base funding for Soil Survey will continue to fund mapping and

interpretative analyses that provide the public with information on the properties, capabilities and conservation treatment needs of their soils through soil surveys. The vital work of the NRCS soil survey program will continue in improved ways to address user needs. The program provides soil maps, databases, and soil interpretative data for all lands of the U.S. as well as direct technical support to the American public.

a. An increase of $533,000 for pay costs, which includes $129,000 for annualization of the 2014 pay raise and $404,394 for the anticipated 2015 pay raise.

The increase for pay will enable NRCS to maintain current staffing levels, which are critical to the Agency's mission. The pay cost funds are needed to avoid any disruption or delays in the Soil Survey program activities and will be used to pay the increased salaries and benefits cost for the 553 staff years funded in the 2015 budget.

b. A decrease of $439,000 and an increase of three staff years in support of program activities.

Data integrity enhancements and field studies would be affected, reducing availability of up-to-date and accurate soil data base needed for climate change modeling and adaptation planning.

The Soil Survey Program within NRCS provides dynamic information to meet current and future needs, interpret soil and ecosystem services for various uses, and makes this data and information available for public use. In keeping with its essential business functions and charges, NRCS proposes to enhance the program through the following activities:

- Harmonize soils data across county and state lines, including multiple land uses, new and archived information to develop new digital soil mapping efforts to meet geospatial modeling requirements for multiple needs. Develop data models and collect validation data for dynamic soil properties to allow the prediction of management and natural disturbance effects on ecosystem services at various spatial and temporal scales;
- Standardize and maintain policy and protocols for the taxonomic, soil property and ecological site information and to make data collection, storage, and delivery more efficient and effective;
- Develop integrated technical tools and information to assist planners and land managers predict and assess soil health, ecosystem and landscape sustainability and implement sustainable management systems;
- Develop innovative data sharing and information delivery tools and products to reach multiple stakeholders from underserved audiences to the most technically advanced.

(3) A net decrease of $363,000 and no change in staff years for Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting ($9,300,000 and 52 staff years available in 2014):

The Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SSWSF) Program's mission is to measure snow and other climatic data in order to provide water supply forecasts and products that interpret the effect of current and future weather conditions on conservation practices. Base funding for SSWSF will continue to fund snowpack data and water supply forecasts. Continuing base funding is crucial to ensuring the continued success of the program for NRCS to provide land managers and users with snow pack data and water supply forecast for the Western United States, including water managers, other agencies, municipalities and private individuals who access the National Water and Climate Center (NWCC) annually.

a. An increase of $61,000 for pay costs, which includes $16,000 for annualization of the 2014 pay raise and $45,000 for the anticipated 2015 pay raise.

The increase for pay will enable NRCS to support staffing levels that are critical to the Agency's mission. The pay cost funds are needed to avoid any disruption or delays in the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting program activities and will be used to pay the increased salaries and benefits cost for the 63 staff years funded in the 2015 budget.

b. A decrease of $424,000 and no change in staff years for program activities.

This reduction may impact NRCS's ability to make available critical snow/water forecasting data to Western States and water managers, other agencies, municipalities and private individuals who access the NWCC annually.

The SSWSF program has been a cooperative program since funding began in 1935. Traditionally, the program has partnered with individuals; federal, state, and local governments; tribal councils; and Canadian and Mexican agencies to administer the snow survey activities and collect valuable climate data. Federal partners include the National Weather Service, U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Reclamation, Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Geological Survey, Bonneville Power Administration, and NRCS field offices. Representatives from twelve western states have traditionally participated in the data collection and funding. Tribal entities collect climate data for use in water supply forecasts that directly benefit them. Snow and climate data collection activities are very important for managing water resources and complying with long established treaties between Canada and Mexico.

The SSWSF operates, maintains, and controls the only operational, quality-controlled, high elevation climate network in the world. The SNOTEL network is designed to collect snowpack and related climatic and soils data at 858 (currently) remote sites in the western U.S. and Alaska. This network, which has been operating continuously since 1978, uses meteor-burst communications technology to collect data in near real-time at two receiving master stations.

The major function of the SNOTEL network is to provide data that are used to provide water supply forecasts at over 700 locations in the West in support of irrigated agriculture. Many of these locations are major reservoirs that are managed for multiple uses. Besides river and reservoir management, the network also provides data for emergency decisions for floods and droughts, administration of recreational resources, power generation, climate variability studies, air and water quality investigations, climate change, and endangered species habitat. It is used to make adjustments for satellite modeling of spatial snow cover extent, water content, snow depth, and soil moisture worldwide. SNOTEL data will become increasingly more valuable to estimate water availability in the West as the demand increases.

Programs have been developed and guidelines are being written to discontinue manual snow courses that are not deemed essential to water supply forecasting. All essential snow courses will be converted to SNOTEL sites. This will result in field labor cost savings, provide for more daily climate stations for model use, and provide a safer work environment for program and partnered personnel by decreasing time spent in a harsh winter environment.

(4) A net decrease of $230,000 and no change in staff years for the Plant Materials Centers ($9,400,000 and 85 staff years available in 2014):

Our Nation continues to be challenged by environmental stresses, both natural, such as extreme drought challenging the productivity of cropland, pastures, and rangeland, and human-induced, such as heavy nutrient loads which impair the quality of our water and productivity of our streams, lakes, and oceans. Plants, and specifically the right plants for a location or purpose, are tools to help correct these challenges and build resilient landscapes to mitigate future stresses.

Plant Materials Centers (PMCs) evaluate plants and plant technologies to meet the specific conservation requirements of diverse environments. PMCs will continue to increase diversity in plant communities; build resiliency in rangeland and pasture plants to mitigate the effects of drought; support certainty efforts for at-risk wildlife, water and air quality; and improve recommendations for cover crops to increase cropland soil health. PMCs will continue their tradition of delivering high quality, timely, science-based products to support NRCS conservation activities, initiative and emphasis areas, and delivery of Farm Bill programs.

Base funding for PMCs will continue to fund testing, evaluation, and demonstration of plant technologies used to solve natural resource problems and improve the utilization of natural resources such as:

- reducing soil erosion;
- increasing cropland soil health and productivity;
- restoring wetlands;
- improving water quality;
- improving wildlife habitat (including pollinators);
- protecting streambank and riparian areas;
- stabilizing coastal dunes;
- producing biomass;
- improving air quality; and
- addressing other conservation treatment needs.

a. An increase of $82,000 for pay costs which includes $23,000 for annualization of the 2014 pay raise and $59,000 for the anticipated 2015 pay raise.

The increase for pay will enable NRCS to maintain current staffing levels, which are critical to the Agency's mission. The pay cost funds are needed to avoid any disruption or delays in the PMC's activities and will be used to pay the increased salaries and benefits cost for the 85 staff years funded in the 2015 budget.

b. A decrease of $312,000 and no change in staff years for program activities.

The program is vital to creating effective vegetation for soil erosion and other extreme weather conditions. This reduction would limit PMCs' flexibility to address critical vegetative questions related to changes in climate, such as appropriate plant species or varieties for different areas of the country to support cropland soil health or range planting recommendations. PMCs will continue their tradition of delivering high quality, timely, science-based products to support NRCS conservation activities, initiative and emphasis areas, and delivery of Farm Bill programs.

PMCs have a long and successful history of selecting and releasing plants and plant technologies that serve a variety of natural resource needs. Much of that success is due to their unique nationwide network and ability to test vegetative solutions in a variety of environments. PMCs provide vegetative tools and information to increase the efficiency of conservation planning and effectiveness of conservation treatments. These vegetative tools increase the reliability of efforts to improve soil health; establish high quality livestock forage; create buffers of all kinds; stabilize soil in crop fields, along stream banks and shorelines, and after disturbances; improve water and air quality; and improve wildlife habitat, including habitat for managed and native pollinators. The work of PMCs increases the resiliency of our agricultural systems and ecosystems by providing appropriate plants for unique geographic locations and environmental conditions.

Emerging environmental stresses continue to challenge our ability to maintain healthy and productive cropland, rangeland, forestland, and natural areas. In 2012, the PMC program initiated a three-year national project to study the effects of cover crops on soil health and the productivity of commodity crops in different parts of the country. Outcomes of this study will help NRCS demonstrate to producers the benefits of using cover crops to maintain productivity and increase agricultural system resilience in extreme weather. Preliminary results in 2013 are providing data to refine the seeding rates of cover crops and the potential of cover crops to provide nitrogen for growing commodity crops, both which will ultimately save producers money. Over the next two seasons, data about the impacts of cover crops on soil water holding capacity and soil health will provide critical information to identify the benefits of cover crops on cropland sustainability. Another area of concern is the effect of drought on grazing systems. PMCs have tested and released to the public over 200 plant selections for pastures and rangelands. The next challenge will be to identify the adaptation of these plants in light of climate change. Producers will then be able to plan accordingly so their grazing lands are more resilient to future drought occurrence.

As a result of these efforts, NRCS field staff, Federal and State partners, and land owners and land managers, will have vegetative guidance to meet specific conservation challenges. The availability of these products will improve the efficiency of NRCS conservation planning as well as the consistency and success of vegetative conservation treatments.

NRCS continues to improve the structure and function of the PMC program. Recent activities include facility assessments and an examination of PMC structure and function. The facility assessments examined facility condition, energy use, and sustainability to gain a better understanding of our owned real property assets and opportunities to more effectively manage them. As NRCS begins to use this information, it will help the agency implement OMB's Freeze the Footprint guidance, address deferred maintenance issues, and improve energy efficiency.

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and Staff Years
(Dollars in thousands)

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Alabama	$10,622	99	$7,966	71	$8,491	71	$10,829	91
Alaska	5,019	33	3,882	34	4,137	34	5,117	30
Arizona	7,702	72	5,977	52	6,371	52	7,852	66
Arkansas	10,886	102	10,399	73	11,083	73	11,098	93
California	19,016	158	17,573	127	18,730	127	19,387	144
Colorado	14,468	142	10,948	97	11,669	97	14,750	130
Connecticut	3,095	26	3,000	21	3,197	21	3,155	24
Delaware	1,742	13	1,584	12	1,688	12	1,776	12
Florida	9,705	89	8,341	65	8,891	65	9,894	81
Georgia	12,752	115	6,802	85	7,250	85	13,001	105
Hawaii	6,910	61	6,468	46	6,894	46	7,045	56
Idaho	10,464	101	8,297	70	8,843	70	10,668	92
Illinois	14,639	141	15,848	98	16,892	98	14,925	129
Indiana	11,579	105	10,433	77	11,120	77	11,805	96
Iowa	21,632	222	22,787	145	24,288	145	22,054	203
Kansas	19,221	204	17,565	129	18,722	129	19,596	187
Kentucky	12,378	115	11,160	83	11,895	83	12,620	105
Louisiana	8,903	107	9,982	60	10,640	60	9,077	98
Maine	5,282	43	3,899	35	4,155	35	5,385	39
Maryland	5,234	47	4,044	35	4,311	35	5,336	43
Massachusetts	3,724	29	3,001	25	3,199	25	3,797	27
Michigan	10,669	105	10,998	71	11,723	71	10,877	96
Minnesota	13,767	131	11,343	92	12,090	92	14,036	120
Mississippi	13,903	139	13,874	93	14,788	93	14,174	127
Missouri	20,603	207	17,501	138	18,654	138	21,005	189
Montana	16,534	168	12,699	111	13,536	111	16,857	154
Nebraska	17,086	143	15,739	114	16,775	114	17,419	131
Nevada	4,005	35	3,179	27	3,389	27	4,083	32
New Hampshire	2,411	24	2,783	16	2,966	16	2,458	22
New Jersey	4,298	40	3,875	29	4,131	29	4,382	37
New Mexico	8,939	83	7,350	60	7,834	60	9,113	76
New York	9,464	97	8,485	63	9,044	63	9,649	89
North Carolina	10,097	91	7,884	68	8,403	68	10,294	83
North Dakota	14,202	147	12,255	95	13,062	95	14,479	134
Ohio	11,928	113	10,395	80	11,079	80	12,161	103
Oklahoma	15,116	148	14,695	101	15,663	101	15,411	135
Oregon	11,707	105	9,219	78	9,826	78	11,935	96
Pennsylvania	9,657	92	9,483	65	10,108	65	9,845	84

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and Staff Years
(Dollars in thousands)

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Puerto Rico.....	3,258	32	3,174	22	3,383	22	3,322	29
Rhode Island.....	1,728	13	1,985	12	2,116	12	1,762	12
South Carolina.....	7,645	76	6,267	51	6,679	51	7,794	69
South Dakota.....	13,318	129	10,564	89	11,260	89	13,578	118
Tennessee.....	12,065	114	11,936	81	12,722	81	12,300	104
Texas.....	38,970	340	32,762	261	34,920	261	39,730	311
Utah.....	6,726	58	5,377	45	5,731	45	6,857	53
Vermont.....	3,639	34	3,008	24	3,206	24	3,710	31
Virginia.....	8,729	86	6,297	58	6,712	58	8,899	79
Washington.....	10,959	99	10,028	73	10,688	73	11,173	91
West Virginia.....	7,322	72	6,390	49	6,811	49	7,465	66
Wisconsin.....	12,700	120	11,274	85	12,016	85	12,948	110
Wyoming.....	7,978	66	6,569	53	7,002	53	8,134	60
National Hdqtr.....	211,545	314	307,945	1,415	328,223	1,415	215,673	287
National Centers.....	43,238	300	4,274	289	4,556	289	44,082	274
Nat. Tech. Sup. Cent.....	10,397	63	-	-	-	-	-	-
Undistributed FB TA*.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	732,819	5,263
Obligations.....	809,576	5,808	789,567	5,345	841,559	5,345	1,547,591	10,516
Lapsing Balances.....	12,017	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY.....	57,135	-	44,361	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Available.....	878,728	5,808	833,928	5,345	841,559	5,345	1,547,591	10,516

*Transfer in mandatory authority from the Farm Security and Rural Investment Programs (Farm Bill) account to the Private Lands Conservation Operations Account to consolidate technical assistance funding in the Private Lands Conservation Operations Account.

PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS
Classification by Objects
(Dollars in thousands)

	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Personnel Compensation:				
Washington, D.C.	$26,870	$26,609	$26,819	$52,290
Field	371,672	351,891	356,310	694,714
11 Total personnel compensation	398,542	378,500	383,129	747,004
12 Personal benefits	132,176	121,032	132,000	256,148
13.0 Benefits for former personnel	1,726	468	475	667
Total, personnel comp. and benefits	532,444	500,000	515,604	1,003,819
Other Objects:				
21.0 Travel and transportation of persons	16,030	37,738	28,649	36,028
22.0 Transportation of things	2,834	1,443	1,467	1,759
23.1 Rental payments to GSA	-	-	-	26,276
23.2 Rental payments to others	16,180	33,041	33,570	70,531
23.3 Communications, utilities, and misc. charges	15,222	3,069	3,117	4,838
24.0 Printing and reproduction	1,862	1,426	1,448	1,971
25.2 Other services	192,362	183,500	227,809	347,564
25.2 Construction contracts	265	-	-	-
26.0 Supplies and materials	15,868	13,169	13,380	23,731
31.0 Equipment	16,074	15,163	15,405	29,699
32.0 Land and structures	39	182	186	438
41.0 Grants	-	-43	-	-
42.0 Insurance Claims and Indemnities	396	879	924	937
Total, Other Objects	277,132	289,567	325,955	543,772
99.9 Total, new obligations	809,576	789,567	841,559	1,547,591
Position Data:				
Average Salary (dollars), ES Position	$158,490	$165,337	$166,990	$168,677
Average Salary (dollars), GS Position	$65,399	$66,606	$67,272	$67,951
Average Grade, GS Position	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0

Private Lands Conservation Operations – Appropriations Language Changes

Explanation of Changes:

This proposal would rename the Conservation Operations account as the Private Lands Conservation Operations (PLCO) account and would consolidate the discretionary and mandatory technical assistance funding in a single account for display purposes.

NRCS uses this funding to provide technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools that help people conserve, maintain, and improve the Nation's natural resources. Technical assistance provides agricultural producers and others with the knowledge and conservation tools they need to conserve, maintain, and improve the natural resources on the lands they manage. Technical assistance funding also supports mandatory conservation programs managed by NRCS in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (FSRI) account, which is funded by transfers from CCC.

The new account would consolidate the technical assistance funding currently provided in two accounts – the discretionary Conservations Operations account and the mandatory FSRI – in the new Private Lands Conservations Operations account by transferring from FSRI to PLCO $733 million that is estimated for technical assistance in FSRI for 2015. The proposal also provides for additional transfers, if needed, and requires that at least $35 million will be awarded to non-Federal conservation partners pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 3842 through a consistent and transparent process that leverages Federal funding to achieve conservation objectives.

This consolidation would not increase or decrease the amount available for technical assistance; it simply consolidates all technical assistance funding in a single account for display purposes. This proposal also would not change the authorities or the period of availability of the mandatory funding.

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION OPERATIONS ACCOUNT

STATUS OF PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. Conservation Operations is authorized by the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935 (P.L. 74-46; 16 U.S.C. 590a-590f) and the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 (RCA) (16 U.S.C. 2001-2009). The purpose of Conservation Operations is to provide technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools that help people conserve, maintain, and improve the Nation's natural resources. Conservation Operations has four major program components: Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA); Soil Survey; Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SSWSF); and Plant Materials Centers (PMCs).

Funding in the Conservation Operations account provides for the development and delivery of a major portion of the products and services associated with four of the agency's five business lines: 1) Conservation Planning and Technical Consultation; 2) Conservation Implementation; 3) Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment; and 4) Natural Resource Technology Transfer. The fifth business line (Financial Assistance) is funded primarily through other conservation programs.

Agency Strategic Plan. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Strategic Plan (2011-2015) sets the vision, direction and priorities for NRCS in helping people use science-based technology and tools to conserve, maintain, and improve the Nation's natural resources. This plan is used to develop tactics to deliver on this core mission. The plan is focused on three overarching priorities:

1) **Get more conservation on the ground** – This is the agency's mission. NRCS is committed to developing, implementing, and evaluating strategic conservation solutions; delivering the highest quality technical expertise; and proactively addressing emerging natural resource issues.

2) **Increase organizational effectiveness and efficiency** – NRCS will change as needed to ensure that the right people with the right skills are in the right places to get conservation on the ground and produce the results that our customers and stakeholders expect.

3) **Create a climate where private lands conservation will thrive** – Voluntary, incentive-based conservation is the best way to achieve positive environmental results, and that requires strong partnerships and coalitions to promote an ethic of conservation stewardship among America's private landowners.

In 2013, the agency further developed key outcome-based performance measures that were supported by available conservation science and agency business tools. The selected measures reflect the effect of NRCS's efforts while working with private landowners and managers. These measures are also compliant with the Government Performance and Results Modernization Act of 2010, and provide a transparent link between budgetary investment, outputs, and outcomes.

CONSERVATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Current Activities.

Program Objectives. The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program provides agricultural producers and others with the knowledge and conservation tools they need to conserve, maintain, and improve the natural resources on the lands they manage. Through the program, NRCS conservation professionals and partners translate science, professional judgment, and sensitivity to land managers so they can take appropriate actions on their farms, ranches, and watersheds to conserve resources, enhance the environment, and ensure the commercial viability of agriculture.

Program Operations. Technical assistance starts with a science-based assessment of the resource concerns and opportunities on farms and ranches and in watersheds. NRCS professionals then provide farmers and ranchers with the best options for addressing resource concerns and taking advantage of opportunities. Trained NRCS conservationists understand the synergies of various conservation practices and activities and can recommend the best strategies to get desired results on the land. Through the development of a conservation plan, resource-related problems are addressed as producers and NRCS work together to use the information gleaned from the planning process to make decisions, implement plans, and put conservation practices in place.

Technical assistance does not stop with implementation; annual follow up or reassessment helps determine the effectiveness of the plan for the land manager. Technical assistance is an ongoing process of science-based assessment, action, reassessment, and adjusted action. Science-based technical assistance helps producers understand how their operations affect the environment, and how they can manage their operations to make a profit while improving the natural resources. It connects what happens on one farm with what happens on neighboring farms so that measurable natural resource improvements can be made on the broader landscape. Finally, technical assistance is about innovation - developing, testing, and transferring new conservation practices and systems that better meet the needs of producers and the environment.

NRCS is USDA's principal agency for providing conservation technical assistance to private landowners, conservation districts, Indian Tribes, and other organizations. Through the CTA Program, NRCS helps land managers reduce soil loss from erosion; address soil, water quality, water conservation, air quality, and agricultural waste management concerns; reduce potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or drought; enhance the quality of fish and wildlife habitat; improve the long-term sustainability of all lands, including cropland, forestland, grazing lands, coastal lands, and developed or developing lands; and facilitate changes in land use as needed for natural resource protection and sustainability.

NRCS conservation technical assistance addresses at the local level, where public policy truly supports private action, those natural resource conservation issues that are of State and national concerns. The NRCS Chief establishes CTA Program national priorities and initiatives on a yearly or multi-year basis in order to focus agency resources on specific program objectives. States may establish additional priorities and initiatives for the CTA Program. The agency utilizes various approaches to focus CTA Program resources on national and State priorities and initiatives. These approaches include, but are not limited to:

- Strategically positioning staff to address natural resource needs;
- Locating program funds to address natural resource needs based upon priorities and initiatives;
- Establishing short-term and long-term performance measures and goals;
- Formulating, enhancing, and expanding partnerships through memoranda of understanding and cooperative agreements;
- Developing and transferring new and innovative technologies;
- Delivering conservation planning and other technical assistance to help producers meet eligibility requirements for USDA programs and other Federal, State, and local conservation programs;
- Conducting technical and program evaluations and assessments on the effectiveness of conservation practice implementation;
- Conducting resource inventories and assessments;
- Developing and delivering training;
- Expanding technical capacity, including the use of Technical Service Providers (TSPs); and
- Developing public information and outreach strategies.

2013 Activities.
In 2013, CTA Program activities included:

- Provided new technologies and conservation practices that addressed emerging challenges and opportunities, such as organic production systems, on farm energy management, air quality improvement, and enhancement of pollinator populations;
- Provided assistance to improve soil health and productivity in States impacted by the historic drought;
- Continued implementation of the Working Lands for Wildlife, a partnership between NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to use agency technical assistance combined with financial assistance to combat the decline of seven specific wildlife species;
- Addressed a growing number of niche enterprises that include aquaculture, specialty crops, and sustainable and organic farming;
- Engaged producers who were new to production agriculture and had higher demands for technical assistance or had not previously participated in NRCS programs but who are critical in solving the identified resource concerns in special initiative areas;
- Entered into agreements with conservation partnerships in order to leverage local funds and provide additional focused technical assistance through landscape-scale conservation initiatives such as the Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, Sage Grouse, Gulf of Mexico, and the Mississippi River Basin;
- Addressed continued growing demand for pre-program conservation planning support for Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program;
- Designed natural resource conservation systems to reduce the risk of loss from climatic events such as drought, fire and flood, and to mitigate their effects;
- Initiated changes to business processes that will support implementation of the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI). This effort is referred to as Foundational Maintenance Improvement and will streamline agency business processes by implementing a corporate document management system, implement core CDSI ideas like the Single Plan concept, improve conservation planning with new land uses and resource concerns, and improve Agency performance reporting by geospatially locating all land units and practices; and
- Issued a major revision of the National Planning Procedures Handbook, which provides guidance on the conservation planning process used by NRCS, its partners, technical service providers, and others for developing, implementing, and evaluating individual and area-wide conservation plans. The revision makes NRCS planning procedures clearer and makes the handbook easier to use.

Get Conservation on the Ground. Through the CTA Program, NRCS's field staff provides technical assistance to customers in the planning and application of science-based conservation practices and systems on non-Federal land. This technical assistance provides public benefits through soil and water quality improvements, water conservation, healthier grazing and forest land ecosystems, and wildlife habitat improvement. The 2013 examples of CTA Program results are:

Maintain productive working farms and ranches. NRCS helps ensure soil health, which is the foundation for productive working farms and ranches. Soil health leads to sustained production of a safe, healthy, and abundant food supply.

- In 2013, NRCS assisted in developing conservation plans on 41.7 million acres. In accordance with those plans, conservation practices and systems designed to improve soil quality were applied to 8.4 million acres of cropland.
- NRCS helped the owners and managers of grazing and forest land apply conservation to improve the resource base on 16.6 million acres.

Eliminate and reduce impairments to water bodies. NRCS works with agricultural producers to help them conserve water and reduce the potential for pollutants to move off site into water bodies, streams, and rivers. This reduces input costs to the producer and protects water quality.

- Over 22 million acres of agricultural land had conservation practices applied as designed by NRCS to improve off-site water quality.
- Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs) were developed and implemented with livestock producers to ensure significant reductions in released nutrients. In 2013, 689 CNMPs were written and 430 were applied.

- Nearly 1 million acres of conservation practices were applied to improve irrigation water use efficiency, which reduces costs to the producer and reduces groundwater withdrawals and surface runoff.

Decrease threats to "candidate" and threatened and endangered species. Nearly 70 percent of the fish and wildlife habitat in the United States is on privately owned lands. The creation and restoration of wildlife habitat on private lands is vital to decreasing the threats to species already listed as threatened or endangered or have potential to be listed ("candidate" species). NRCS works with landowners and managers to assist them with wildlife habitat improvement and wetland restoration, providing increased recreational opportunities and vital ecosystem services.

- Nearly 8 million acres had conservation practices and systems applied to improve wildlife habitat.
- Creation, restoration, and enhancement of wetlands which provide critical wildlife habitat, was accomplished on over 43,000 acres.

Grazing Lands Conservation. Grazing lands comprise an economic resource base in all 50 States and provide food, fiber, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and open space. According to the NRCS National Resource Inventory (NRI), privately owned range and pasture lands make up over 27 percent (528 million acres) of the total acreage of the contiguous 48 States. These lands constitute the largest private land use category, exceeding both forestland (21 percent) and cropland (18 percent). Properly managed grazing land has multiple benefits, including reduced storm water runoff, improved carbon storage in the soil, wildlife habitat, and beautiful open space. In 2013, NRCS conservationists helped ranchers and farmers understand the basic principles of rangeland and pastureland soil health; install facilitating practices (such as pipelines, tanks, ponds, fences, erosions control structures) as needed; and begin the management regimen necessary to conserve, protect, and properly utilize these resources.

NRCS partners with the Grazing Lands Conservation Coalition, a non-governmental nationwide consortium of individuals, organizations, and agencies working together to maintain and improve the management and the health of the Nation's grazing lands. This coalition has spurred major increases in the knowledge and skills of NRCS conservationists and the planning and application of conservation of grazing land management, which facilitates adoption of grazing conservation practices. In 2013, over 36 million acres of grazing land had conservation practices applied. NRCS also partners with the National Cattlemen's Foundation to recognize outstanding ranch and farm managers/conservationists through the Environmental Stewardship Awards. This program encourages all producers in America to strive for better land management on their farm or ranch for the future generations.

The additional focus on grazing lands conservation conveyed by the Coalition also had additional benefits. For example, grazing lands conservation partners worked with NRCS helped to expand the NRI of non-forested Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands in order to provide a statistically-based sample design that is common to both agencies. This new partnership is expanding both agencies' understanding of the ecology of the "greater landscape" encompassing the intertwined public and privately managed lands. Understanding of management needs for the Sage Grouse now aids the efforts of private ranchers, agencies, and non-government organizations that dedicate their time and knowledge to habitat restoration for this species. BLM is providing NRCS $12.5 million over five years for the service, and data collection is planned through 2015. This inventory is critical for both agencies since these Federal lands are intertwined with non-Federal rangelands where land management units typically span both ownership types.

NRCS's Ecological Site Information System (ESIS) continues to provide the capability to produce automated ecological site descriptions from the data stored in its database. Joint policy between BLM, NRCS, and the USDA Forest Service efficiently pools the agencies' technical resources behind the development and use of Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) to describe site characteristics, plant communities, and use interpretations for grazing land and forestland. ESD development training is ongoing and all three agencies provide staff support and participation. NRCS partners with the Society for Range Management (SRM) to provide multi-agency training in ESD development. This technology improves land management planning capabilities for agencies and the public by providing consistency among the agencies' classification, technology development, planning, and blueprints for ecological improvement of grazing lands across the Nation, and will have implications and applications in other countries.

Clean Water Activities. NRCS addresses key water quality issues to help safeguard the Nation's streams, lakes, rivers, and coastal and ocean resources through the implementation of conservation practices on America's working lands. These conservation practices help mitigate the potential environmental risks posed by animal feeding

operations and the impairment of water resources by nutrients, sediment, and pesticides. NRCS works with the agricultural community and implements conservation actions to address water quality resource concerns at the farm and field scales. The agency also provides the leadership needed to enhance coordination with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other Federal agencies in areas of mutual interest. Specific areas in which NRCS provides technical leadership include: Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) Rule implementation; nutrient management; pesticide drift under the Clean Water Act; Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, and Mississippi River Basin restoration efforts; Gulf of Mexico Initiative; National Ocean Policy; U.S. Coral Reef Task Force; and conservation assistance to reduce hypoxia and improve water quality across the landscape.

NRCS has embarked upon a series of national and regional conservation initiatives that protect and conserve water quality and quantity. For example, the National Water Quality Initiative, which began in 2012, involved each State identifying one to three watersheds in which to concentrate efforts and coordinate with State water quality agencies. In 2013, NRCS provided nearly $35 million in financial assistance to help farmers and ranchers implement conservation systems that reduce nitrogen, phosphorous, sediment and pathogen contributions from agricultural land in 165 small watersheds where water quality is a critical concern. The goal of this initiative is to improve water quality and eventually delist stream segments from the EPA's 303(d) list of impaired streams. The National Water Quality Initiative is also piloting use of the Water Quality Index for Agricultural Runoff for prescribing conservation practices that will improve overall quality of the water leaving the farm fields. This tool is useful for easily communicating conservation practice benefits on water quality to the public.

Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs). The release of nutrients from agricultural operations (e.g., over-fertilization, animal waste disposal, and dairy runoff) is a recognized source of contamination for the Nation's waterways. Voluntary CNMPs are an effective tool for addressing these water quality problems associated with agriculture. An average CNMPs takes approximately 100 hours of staff time to develop. Since 2011, NRCS, conservation partners, and TSPs assisted over 6,000 livestock and poultry producers in developing new CNMPs. Considering that these plans are voluntary in nature and may at times involve large financial investments on the part of the landowner or manager, this is viewed as a relatively high level of success.

Pathogens. In 2009, NRCS, in partnership with the University of California, began to address the issue of conservation and pathogens in food safety and disease control through revising its waterborne pathogen publication to reflect current science and the development of a web-based training course for NRCS personnel. In 2012, the updated publication Introduction to Waterborne Pathogens in Agricultural Watersheds was made available on the NRCS website. In 2013, an on-line training tool with the same name was released for usage at the USDA AgLearn website.

Hypoxia. USDA participated on the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force in 2013. NRCS served as the USDA point of contact on the Task Force Coordinating Committee. NRCS also participated in four Task Force sub-committees with assigned responsibility to provide technical assistance and guidance to the Deputy Under Secretary and the Task Force in implementing the Hypoxia Action Plan. The Hypoxia Action Plan is designed to reduce the size of the hypoxic zone in the Gulf, thus restoring and protecting the waters within the Mississippi/Atchafalaya River Basin and improving community and economic conditions across the Basin. In 2013, the mid-summer northern Gulf of Mexico hypoxic zone was 5,800 square miles, which is a decrease from record high years but still three times larger than the size goal set by the task force.

Water Quality Leadership. During 2013, NRCS led the development, advancement, and demonstration of new and innovative approaches to improving water quality. The following activities highlight some of these advances:

- In 2013, NRCS released two new conservation activities for Edge-of-Field Water Quality Monitoring—one for system installation and one for data collection and evaluation. Edge of field monitoring is an effort to help farmers improve and, or verify the effectiveness of agricultural conservation practices and systems on their farm and fields to provide defensible information on the efficacy of conservation practices. Using these new conservation activities, NRCS provided financial assistance to producers through EQIP for twenty-two edge-of-field monitoring projects.
- NRCS has developed a web-based tool to help producers easily calculate the quality of water flowing off their fields. The web-based tool is called Water Quality Index for Agricultural Runoff (WQIag). The tool allows a producer to input variables for a field, such as slope, soil characteristics, nutrient and pest management, tillage and conservation practices. The WQIag takes the complex scientific information of the variables and synthesizes

them into a single number. NRCS scientists chose a solution inspired by the Dow Jones Industrial Average and worked to develop a tool that could clearly communicate to farmers and ranchers with a single, easy-to-understand number.

- NRCS continues to complete regional reports from the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP). In 2013, the agency completed Assessment of the Effects of Conservation Practices on Cultivated Cropland reports for the Arkansas-White-Red Basin and for the Lower Mississippi River Basin. The Lower Mississippi River Basin study showed that 6.3 million acres—33 percent of the cultivated cropland in the region—has a high level of need for additional conservation treatment. In the Arkansas-White-Red Basin, 1.3 million acres—4 percent of the cultivated cropland in the region—has a high level of need for additional conservation treatment.
- NRCS continues to collaborate with agricultural groups and States to gather agricultural data for use in meeting the EPA requirements for watershed implementation plans as a result of the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). NRCS participates in a poultry litter working group that has gathered "real world" numbers on litter production and nutrients of the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia area that suggests previous estimates may have been excessive. The working group has also enlisted the cooperation of the poultry integrators to provide real numbers of producers and birds produced that will assist Chesapeake Bay modelers in increasing the accuracy of the next model run.
- NRCS, through the Watershed Partnership program of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, is working with producers in watersheds to voluntarily implement conservation practices to avoid, control, and trap sediment and nutrient runoff and improve wildlife habitat while maintaining agricultural productivity. NRCS provides outreach and technical assistance to landowners enrolled in the EQIP program who propagate native trees to plant in critical areas and help ensure wildlife conservation practices are properly implemented with certified conservation practices. NRCS is also working to engage local landowners in adopting conservation practices by offering cost-share incentives through several volunteer land conservation programs.
- In 2011, The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force announced the start of an innovative water and wildlife conservation effort along the Gulf Coast, called the Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI). NRCS developed GoMI in close collaboration with local, State, and Federal partners. It is a new approach to better target conservation activities in the Gulf Coast region to help improve the health of the Gulf Coast's rivers, wetlands, and estuaries that are integral to jobs and the economy in the Gulf. NRCS dedicated up to $50 million over three years to this effort, which leverages additional investments from Federal and State agencies, private landowners, and local organizations to enhance outcomes. This continuing initiative is expected to apply $30 million per year to treat agricultural lands in greatest need of conservation for 2014 through 2018.

National Resources Inventory (NRI) and Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP). Through the NRI and CEAP, NRCS acquires, analyzes, interprets, and delivers data and information on natural resources. Several pieces of legislation authorize the NRI, in particular the Rural Development Act of 1972. CEAP was authorized under the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 2646 (4a, b) and the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 (RCA) (as amended by the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, P.L. 110-246, 122 Stat. 1651) [16 U.S.C. 2001-2009].

The NRI compiles natural resources data and information, conservation program data, and data from other Federal and non-Federal sources. These data provide the basic scientific information necessary for sound natural resource planning and decision-making at many landscape levels. NRI assesses natural resource conditions and trends on non-Federal lands, including privately-owned land, Tribal and trust lands, and lands controlled by State and local governments. In all, the NRI covers over 75 percent of the Nation's land area. Data and analyses from the NRI lay the foundation for appropriate and effective conservation programs, sound agricultural policy, realistic strategic and performance plans, and national farm policy discussion through the Farm Bill process. NRI data are designed to help assess outcomes of existing legislative mandates, such as the appraisals required by the RCA and the periodic Farm Bills. The 2007 NRI and CEAP assessments provided the analytical foundation for the 2011 RCA Appraisal that USDA delivered to Congress. NRI data facilitate the development of practical programs and sensible policies that support and promote agricultural development, expand the economy, restore and preserve the quality of the environment, and advance social values.

The NRI is a statistical survey that inventories scientifically selected sample sites located in every county across the United States as well as in the Caribbean Area and Pacific Basin. NRI data are collected every year for a scientifically selected subset of the 800,000 NRI sample sites nationwide. From 1977 to 1997, NRI was conducted on five-year

cycles. By collecting NRI data on an annual basis, NRCS has the flexibility and capability to gather scientific information on emerging natural resource issues. The ability of the NRI to capture long-term trends, one of its most valuable aspects, is useful in evaluating the impacts of conservation programs and policies. Major releases of NRI data are scheduled every five years; data from the 2012 Annual NRI are being processed for release early in 2015. An interim release of 2010 data is scheduled for the end of 2013. The NRI is performed in cooperation with the Iowa State University Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology. 2013 NRI activities included:

- 2007 Alaska NRI Release. The first NRI release for Alaska was posted on the Agency NRI website in February 2013. Alaska has presented many data collection challenges; procurement of suitable imagery is complicated and many resource issues are unique to the State. The new data provide stakeholders and partners, including native Alaskan groups, with credible and useful natural resources information.
- NRI Conservation Tillage and Nutrient Management Survey. NRCS is partnering with the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to obtain updated NRI CEAP survey data in order to develop a revised assessment of the environmental effects of conservation programs and practices implemented within the Chesapeake Bay, Des Moines River, and Western Lake Erie Basins. This work updates previous CEAP results (which were based on data collected from 2003 to 2006). Data review, database construction, and modeling activities for Chesapeake Bay were completed in the fourth quarter of 2013. The updated draft report is being peer-reviewed; planned release is early 2014. Data collection activities to support additional high priority surveys of the Western Lake Erie Basin and Des Moines River Watershed were completed in February 2013. Data review, database construction, and modeling activities were performed in late 2013 and continue into the first half of 2014 for these two areas; draft reports will be prepared, reviewed, and released in late 2014 or early 2015. NASS completed 1,699 farmer surveys to obtain farm-field level land management and conservation practice data for cropland fields associated with selected NRI sample sites throughout the region. NASS enumerators (data collectors) also worked with NRCS State and field staffs to obtain supplemental information regarding conservation plans and practices from Field Office records. Planning for data collection activities to support an additional high priority survey of the California Bay-Delta area occurred in late 2013. Training of NASS enumerators and supporting NRCS field staff for this survey occurred in September 2013; data collection is scheduled for completion in February 2014. Planning for another special study/survey in the South Atlantic-Gulf region is underway. Data collection for this area is scheduled to occur in late 2014.
- On-site Data Collection on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands. NRCS is continuing an interagency agreement with the BLM on a landscape monitoring project. BLM is partnering with NRCS to implement a national approach for monitoring rangeland resources by expanding NRI data collection on BLM lands and intensifying sampling in core Sage Grouse habitat. The agreement is from 2011 to 2015 and may be renewed, if necessary. A survey system, developed with BLM funding, is used to regularly provide scientifically credible information on the status of non-forested BLM lands in 13 Western and Midwestern States. Data collected as part of this agreement are being reviewed by an interagency team and will be used in reports for the Sage Grouse and Great Basin initiatives and contribute to BLM's ongoing monitoring program. Adoption of NRI protocols on BLM-managed landscapes enhances NRCS's leadership on grazing lands. By combining information derived from NRI data collected on BLM-managed lands with that obtained from NRI data collected on non-Federal lands, a thorough area-wide representation of all western grazing lands will result.
- Implementation of Remote Sensing to Monitor Stewardship Lands (Easements). In 2012, NRCS Resource Inventory Division's Remote Sensing Laboratories, the NRCS Easement Programs Division, and the National Geospatial Center for Excellence completed a research pilot to evaluate a web-based Geographic Information system tool modified for the purpose of conducting remote sensing of stewardship lands. The Web-based tool, called GeoObserver, displays multiple years of high-resolution imagery along stewardship land boundaries. Users of GeoObserver can readily detect changes on the landscape in easement program areas. In 2013, a remote monitoring program was implemented to provide baseline landscape information on easements. The use of remote sensing promotes efficiency and standardization of easement monitoring.
- Prairie Pothole Wetland Determinations. The Central Remote Sensing Lab is cooperating with the NRCS State Offices in the Prairie Pothole region on wetland determinations. This project provides State specialists with information compiled from imagery, soils maps, and other sources in a format so they can determine the location and extent of wetlands. This effort supports NRCS's North Central Wetlands Conservation Initiative.

CEAP is a multi-agency effort designed to quantify the environmental benefits of applying conservation practices on agricultural land, and provide a scientific basis for managing the agricultural landscape for environmental quality.

Findings from projects completed under CEAP are used to guide USDA conservation policy and program development and to help conservationists, farmers, and ranchers make more informed conservation decisions.

CEAP assessments are carried out at national, regional, and watershed scales. The national assessments for cropland, grazing lands, wetlands, and wildlife are designed to provide summary estimates of conservation practice benefits. Additional "what-if" scenarios are run in various models to assess the potential of USDA conservation programs to meet the Nation's environmental and conservation goals. Watershed assessment studies provide more detailed, in-depth assessments of smaller areas. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, as part of the Agriculture, Food, Nutrition, and Natural Resources R&D Round Table, honored CEAP in 2011 as an "Exemplary Collaborative Case Study" for CEAP's ability to estimate ecosystem outcomes utilizing available sound science.

The 2013 CEAP activities included:

Cropland Assessment. The sixth and seventh reports in the nationwide series of CEAP-Cropland assessment reports on the Arkansas-White-Red River Basin and the Lower Mississippi River Basin were released to the public in 2013. An updated version of the Chesapeake Bay report will be released in late 2013 or early 2014. A comparison of findings from the first seven studies found that the use of conservation practices reduced:

- Edge-of-field sediment losses by 27 to 73 percent;
- Nitrogen losses with surface runoff by 26 to 58 percent;
- Nitrogen losses through subsurface pathways by 5 to 57 percent; and
- Total phosphorus losses by 33 to 59 percent.

Reports for the Pacific Northwest and South Atlantic-Gulf regions are being finalized and prepared for official release in early 2014.

In addition, analyses of the environmental effects to make optimal economic costs of applying conservation practices have provided Agency leadership with vital information for decision making optimizing use of available conservation resources while increasing ecosystem benefits and minimizing the risk of agricultural yield losses. These types of analyses have been used for decision support for the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill restoration efforts and project selection criteria.

Wetlands Assessment. Four project reports were completed in 2013: "Integrating CEAP-Wetlands Integrated Landscape Model (ILM) Outputs into the National Resources Inventory Framework: A Pilot Effort in the Great Plains," "ILM Sub-Model Algorithm report – Models for predicting amphibian presence in High Plains Playas," "CEAP-Wetlands Conceptual Model for Wetland Plant Diversity (Vegetation Quality)," and "U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Scientific Investigations Report 2012-5266: A Regional Classification of the Effectiveness of Depressional Wetlands at Mitigating Nitrogen Transport to Surface Waters in the Northern Atlantic Coastal Plain."

Summary for the Northern Atlantic Coastal Plain report:

- A geographical and statistical model describing the spatial variability in the likely effectiveness of depressional wetlands in watershed uplands at mitigating nitrogen transport from nonpoint sources to surface waters was constructed for the Northern Atlantic Coastal Plain, from North Carolina through New Jersey;
- Results were used to interpret the relative likelihood of depressional wetlands and their likely effectiveness at mitigating nitrogen transport from upland source areas to surface waters;
- The potential effectiveness of depressional wetlands at mitigating nitrogen transport varies substantially over different parts of the Coastal Plain;
- Depressional wetlands are common, covering 32 percent of the area, with a relatively high potential to mitigate nitrogen transport. Approximately 37 percent of the area includes rolling hills with low potential for nitrogen transport mitigation; 31 percent of the Coastal Plain area includes relatively flat watersheds with moderate to low potential; and
- This model, with adequate consideration for assumptions and limitations, should be useful for targeting wetland conservation or restoration efforts, and for estimating the effects of depressional wetlands on the regional nitrogen budget.

Student work on CEAP's Mid-Atlantic Regional Assessment included a Doctoral Dissertation at the University of Maryland, "The Impact of Agricultural Wetland Restoration on Adjacent Temporary and Perennial Streams," and a Master's Thesis, "Water Quality Benefits of Wetlands under Historic and Potential Future Climate in the Sprague River Watershed, Oregon," at Colorado State University.

Wildlife Assessment**.** CEAP-Wildlife regional assessments completed in 2013 include:

- An assessment of the effects of conservation practices on priority sagebrush birds throughout the Intermountain West;
- An evaluation of Farm Bill program benefits to lesser prairie-chickens;
- An assessment of water bird response to the NRCS Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative using weather surveillance radar;
- An assessment of the benefits of WRP and other Farm Bill Programs to spring-migrating waterfowl in the Southern Oregon-Northeastern California (SONEC) region;
- Great Lakes Phase 2 - Final Report: Assessing the Costs and Benefits of Conservation Practices to Restoring Biological Integrity in Agricultural Watersheds. This assessment develops the scientific foundation for integrating biological (stream fish community condition) endpoints in CEAP down scaled water quality modeling now being piloted in the Western Lake Erie Basin; and
- CEAP Conservation Insight – USDA conservation program contributions to lesser prairie-chicken conservation in the context of projected climate change.

Assessments initiated in prior years were continued in 2013, including assessments of the effects of conservation practices associated with the Working Lands for Wildlife effort involving Golden-Winged Warblers and New England Cottontails. Work also continued on producing science-based outcome reporting and technical tolls for effective delivery of the Lesser Prairie-Chicken and Sage Grouse Initiatives. The multi-partner effort to develop biological endpoints, particularly aquatic biota metrics, for CEAP water quality modeling efforts in the Western Lake Erie Basin continued in 2013. This is a major effort to link CEAP wildlife and cropland components. The CEAP wildlife component also expanded efforts to integrate biodiversity metrics with CEAP grazing lands modeling, beginning in the desert Southwest.

Grazing Lands Assessment. Version 1 of the Rangeland Hydrology and Erosion Model (RHEM) is available for use by NRCS and other land management entities. RHEM is an online tool designed to predict the risk of soil erosion, calculate peak flow rates, and delineate total quantity of runoff from a series of design storms for each plant community under evaluation. The model has both a Web interface and a personal computer interface and is available for integration into NRCS Field Office conservation planning systems. Concentrated flow equations, which will provide capabilities to assess disturbed conditions such as sites affected by fire, and snowmelt flow equations are currently being evaluated. They will be incorporated into RHEM and will be available to transfer to NRCS Science and Technology Deputy Area in 2014. Procedures also are being developed to: 1) specifically execute model predictions for NRI data, such that a user may estimate runoff and erosion rates for single storms at NRI sites, and 2) calculate the risk of various-sized erosion events and return frequency storm values at a site of interest in its current or assumed condition. The Wind Erosion Model (WEMO) for rangeland is being adapted to take advantage of NRI rangeland data. Both RHEM and WEMO are being used to assess rangeland at the national, regional, and vegetation type scales. Finally, the Automated Geospatial Watershed Assessment (AGWA) tool is available for review by NRCS. AGWA model documentation, relevant peer-reviewed publications, and the software are available at: http://www.tucson.ars.ag.gov/agwa. AGWA is available for integration into NRCS Field and State Office use through the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative (CDSI). Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) documentation, publications, and software are available at: http://www.brc.tamus.edu/swat/. The CEAP team is making enhancements to the core hydrology and erosion engines used within AGWA. Updates to the Agricultural Policy Extender (APEX) model to simulate grazing preferences, animal intake thresholds, forage quality related to preference and intake, and other key grazing and plant growth features are underway.

A synthesis of the scientific literature on rangeland conservation practices, "Conservation Benefits of Rangeland Practices: Assessment, Recommendations, and Knowledge Gaps," was released in October 2011. A companion synthesis for pasture and hayland, "Conservation Outcomes from Pastureland and Hayland Practices: Assessment, Recommendations, and Knowledge Gaps," was released in December 2012. Both publications have Executive Summaries that were released slightly ahead of the full syntheses. Each synthesis advances the science of grazing

land conservation management through analysis of previously unrelated studies based on the "purpose" statements of selected NRCS conservation practice standards. They improve the foundation for evaluation of current conservation practice use, and provide insight to new approaches NRCS can use for management of pastureland and hayland.

Two CEAP grazing land science notes that address the effects of brush management and fire have been completed and posted to the CEAP Grazing Land and CEAP Publications Websites. Two additional science notes and two conservation insights have been fully reviewed and are pending release. Additional reports will be developed from published scientific papers by the CEAP team.

Several field studies coordinated with specific NRCS State Offices and CEAP partners (e.g., San Carlos Apache Tribe and U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in Eastern Arizona) are obtaining data on western rangeland plant growth parameters. Data are being provided to the Agriculture Research Service in Temple, Texas to augment plant data and modeling in the Agriculture Policy and Environmental Extender model.

CEAP Watershed Assessment Studies. During 2013, a major activity involved planning and delivering several outreach sessions to follow up on the release of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture CEAP Watershed Synthesis Study findings. The findings were published in a book released in late 2012 by the Soil and Water Conservation Society, entitled "How to Build Better Agricultural Conservation Programs to Protect Water Quality," and was summarized in several fact sheets. Fact sheets and other products are available at: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/technical/nra/ceap/?&cid=stelprdb1047821. Outreach products included:

- A video teleconference (VTC) to share and discuss findings with NRCS staff;
- Development of a new PowerPoint outreach tool (Steps to Citizen-based Watershed Planning: A Presentation for Watershed Planners) released in November 2012, for producers and conservationists on how to improve local water quality conservation and protection efforts. Key tips are shared in this downloadable, editable file developed specifically for local communities involved in water quality conservation;
- Several presentations on the findings of this synthesis study, delivered to various audiences throughout 2013, including producers, farm groups, conservation groups, Agency employees and leaders, and policy-makers; and
- These presentations highlighted key insights and provided suggestions towards implementing the findings.

The Agricultural Research Service (ARS), a key partner, continues work on their long-term conservation effects assessments. This year, a set of peer-reviewed papers submitted to the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation (JSWC) described accomplishments toward several CEAP-related objectives. A special section of the JSWC will be published in 2014 to present findings of these long-term studies to assess conservation in locations across the Nation. Topics such as climate change, nutrient management, and sedimentation and erosion will be examined to highlight the latest science on how to most effectively address these challenges.

Getting Conservation on the Ground

CEAP continues to provide assessments of the conservation efforts in various NRCS Initiative areas: the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watershed Initiative, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative and related Executive Order, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI), the Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative (LPCI), the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI), and Working Lands for Wildlife. Assessments conducted by CEAP at regional and watershed scales inform the prioritization of conservation needs enabling NRCS to focus resources in more effective ways for the American public.

NRCS continues to work with the cross-agency CEAP Implementation Team. In 2013, the efforts focused on NRCS's Financial Assistance Programs and Easements Programs Divisions. CEAP Implementation Plans have been completed for both divisions, and work will continue with the Conservation Technical Assistance Division. Plans have been devised and approved to integrate CEAP findings into NRCS program enhancements and assessments of program accomplishments. Findings from the NIFA CEAP Watershed Synthesis and other CEAP Watershed Assessments (including ARS, NIFA, and NRCS) have been used to revise and improve guidance for conservation activity for water quality monitoring and to develop training on watershed considerations related to implementing the new activities.

CEAP supports the USDA Agency Priority Goal (APG) for Water, in particular, the pilot projects aspect of this goal. Two CEAP studies were selected as APG pilot watershed projects and the findings from those efforts were written up in a 30-page report. This activity represented a strong collaboration between the Resource Assessment Division and the Strategic Planning and Performance Division to support Agency and Department-wide performance reporting efforts directly related to the USDA Strategic Plan. This was a major accomplishment for CEAP integration and application of Agency business lines.

In 2012, the Resource Assessment Division of NRCS initiated a VTCs series on CEAP for the States to describe ways in which CEAP can support conservation planning and delivery. In 2013, two VTC were presented with good participation and included presentations and discussions on key findings from the NIFA CEAP Watershed Synthesis Study and on the significant conclusions of the Rangeland and Pastureland Literature Syntheses. Planning is underway for another VTC on CEAP Wetlands assessments and considerations.

Natural Resource Technology Transfer. NRCS ensures field staffs have the appropriate resources and necessary training to utilize the latest scientific research and technology for natural resources assessment, conservation planning, conservation system installation, and program delivery. In 2013, training was available as needed via webinars, video teleconferences, and individual computer-to-computer support to a greater extent than in previous years while reducing travel costs.

Key activities in 2013 included:

- As part of NRCS's goal of making the latest technology available to our field offices, 10 updated national conservation practice standards were released in April 2013. These practices will help producers do a better job of managing irrigation water, treating animal waste, and improving energy efficiency. In addition, 14 national conservation practice standards were revised and updated in 2013 and will be released after final review and approval;
- NRCS, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Forest Service jointly released an Interagency Ecological Site Handbook for Rangelands, since private and public lands under these agencies' jurisdictions are intermingled throughout the United States. This handbook provides a standardized system to define and describe rangeland ecological sites that is more efficient and defensible;
- Provided training to NRCS staff, partner biologists, farmers, educators, and other community members on the importance of pollinators, soil health, Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans, rehabilitating disturbed forests, and improving wildlife habitat. Training included full-day short courses, one- to two-hour seminars, webinars, videos, field training and field site visits. Direct assistance in using seed calculators and developing appropriate plant mixes beneficial to pollinators was also provided to participants; and
- Wrote a technical note that provides information for conservation planning of bioenergy plants: "Conservation Planning Considerations for Bioenergy Crops."

ProTracts is a Web-based application that helps NRCS efficiently manage applications, contracts, obligations, payments, and performance reporting. This is the primary electronic tool used by NRCS and partners to develop and manage contracts associated with NRCS's financial assistance programs.

ProTracts 2013 activities included:

- Processed over $2.1 billion in obligations on 127,467 contracts, and over $1.7 billion in payments on 32,355 contracts;
- Continued improvements and successfully implemented the migration of ProTracts and Fund Manager Interfaces to the Financial Management Modernization Initiative;
- Provided direct support to the CDSI integration efforts for ProTracts and Fund Manager Applications; and
- Provided periodic data extracts to National Headquarters and assisted in the data analysis and reporting.

Web Soil Survey (WSS) provides free public access online to geospatial and tabular soil data produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey. Launched in 2005 by NRCS, WSS provides electronic access to relevant soil and related information needed to make land-use and management decisions. The WSS application provides an alternative to traditional hard-copy publications; quicker delivery of information; electronic access to full soil survey report content; and access to the most current data. WSS allows customers to get just the information they want when they want it. Use of WSS in 2013 included:

- Area of Interests created within WSS – 2,373,530;
- Printable Versions Requested from WSS – 852,469;
- Custom Soil Resource Reports Requested – 214,007;
- Total WSS Visits – 2,242,319 (average per day = 6,160); and
- Unique Visitors – 1,285,302.

Highly Erodible Land and Conservation Compliance (HEL). Highly Erodible Land is made up of soils that have a high vulnerability to increased erosion due to wind and water. This vulnerability is higher when the land is cropped than when the land is in permanent vegetative cover.

Participants in USDA programs are required to protect their HEL cropland from excessive soil erosion, and comply with the HEL regulations and provisions of 16 U.S.C. §§ 3801; 3811-3814 Chapter 58, Subchapter II – Highly Erodible Land Conservation. USDA program participants must implement a conservation system on HEL cropped land that provides for a substantial reduction in soil erosion. In addition, when breaking out native vegetation, a program participant must implement a system that results in no substantial increase in soil erosion. NRCS classifies as HEL about 101.1 million acres of America's cropland, or approximately 27 percent of the Nation's cropland.

Wetlands Conservation Compliance (WC). NRCS's responsibilities for wetlands conservation compliance are provided in Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, 16 U.S.C. §§ 3801; 3821-3824. NRCS's responsibilities include: making wetland determinations; processing and resolving determination appeals; developing mitigation and restoration plans; determining minimal effect exemptions; and implementing scope and effect evaluations for the installation of new drainage systems and maintenance of existing systems.

A compliance status review is an inspection of a cropland tract to determine whether the USDA participant is in compliance with the HEL/WC provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985. Compliance status reviews are conducted annually in every State. Compliance status reviews are conducted on farm and ranch lands that have received USDA benefits and which are subject to the HEL or WC provisions, or both. The NRCS compliance status review process requires employees to make an on-site determination when a violation of the HEL/WC provisions is suspected, and ensures that only qualified NRCS employees report violations. The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, also requires that NRCS conduct reviews of approximately one percent of HEL and/or WC cropland on farms that have received some government payment in the prior year. In addition, NRCS must review five percent of all farm loan recipients from the prior year, and review HEL or WC tracts of cropland owned by any government employee every three years.

Penalties for non-compliance range from a Good Faith Exemption issued by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), which allows the producer one year to correct the violation, to a determination by FSA that the producer is ineligible for any government payment and must pay back any current and/or prior year funding. The compliance review year runs from January 1 to December 1. Therefore, 2013 final review data will be available in February 2014. The results of 2012 reviews (see table below) show that a high percentage of program participants are following NRCS-approved conservation plans and are in compliance with HEL requirements. In 2012, compliance reviews were conducted on 24,309 tracts, which include approximately 3.6 million acres of cropland. A total of 744 tracts, or 3.1 percent of the total reviewed, were found to be in non-compliance: 401 tracts had both HEL and WC violations, and 343 tracts had only WC violations. Of the 23,565 tracts that were in compliance, approximately 4.6 percent (1,081 tracts) had been issued variances or exemptions as provided by statute. This indicates a relatively low rate of non-compliance, with exemptions provided due to extenuating circumstances. Data from the past four years suggest that conservation measures prescribed by NRCS are being effectively implemented on our most vulnerable land.

Four Year Summary of Tract Reviews and Tracts Out of Compliance	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total Tracts Reviewed	20,474	18,704	22,210	24,309
Tracts Out of Compliance	277	344	530	744
Percent out of Compliance	1.4	1.8	2.4	3.1
Number of States Recording Non-Compliance	30	28	32	30

CTA Program Funds Customer Assistance. NRCS provided technical assistance to over 640,000 customers, and comprehensive planning assistance to over 113,000 customers in 2013. Primary customers are land owners and managers who make the day-to-day decisions about natural resources use and management on private lands. The Agency provides conservation technical assistance to four main customer groups:

- Farmers and ranchers who own, operate, or live on farms and ranches;
- Other members of the private sector who support agriculture production and conservation;
- Governments, including Tribes, with responsibility for natural resource use and management; and
- Non-profit organizations whose mission aligns with NRCS regarding natural resource management.

The CTA Program is the backbone of the Agency's conservation delivery system. Many customers begin their relationship with NRCS through requests for assistance that later evolve into a conservation plan that may include cost-share assistance through Farm Bill programs.

In 2013, the CTA program resulted in:

- 42 million acres of conservation plans written;
- 22 million acres of conservation applied to improve water quality;
- 17 million acres of grazing and forest land conservation;
- 8 million acres of wildlife habitat improvement; and
- 8 million acres of conservation applied on the ground to improve soil quality.

CTA Program Leverages Technical Assistance. NRCS field staff work with over 8,100 State agencies and local partners to deliver conservation technical and financial assistance. During 2013, these non-Federal partners contributed an estimated $95 million of in-kind goods and services and over $150 million in financial assistance toward addressing local resource concerns that coincide with the Strategic Goal to "Get Conservation on the Ground." These leverage agreements have allowed NRCS to enhance existing funds by finding other partners, on a project-specific basis, in order to accomplish a task that could not be accomplished solely by NRCS.

NRCS understands the need for conservation to be a results-driven decision and therefore seeks opportunities to leverage funds with conservation partners whenever possible in order to drive natural resource solutions. NRCS continues to support innovation and non-traditional approaches to forge sustainable partnerships between private landowners, corporations, foundations, local natural resource agencies, and conservation organizations. With collaborative conservation, NRCS helps conservation partners identify and implement solutions through partnership agreements that deliver mutual benefit.

Technical Service Providers (TSP). TSPs are individuals or businesses that have technical expertise in conservation planning and design for a variety of conservation activities. TSPs expand and accelerate NRCS's ability to plan and apply conservation practices that enhance, restore, or conserve the Nation's soil, water, and related natural resources on non-Federal land. TSPs assist landowners and agricultural producers in applying conservation practices on the land. They may be individuals or entities such as private businesses, nonprofit organizations, Indian Tribes, State and local governments, or Federal agencies outside USDA. TSPs provide participants in USDA conservation programs with convenient access to technical services, quality work, and professional one-on-one technical assistance. TSPs develop conservation plans; perform selected compliance studies; plan, design, and implement conservation practices; and evaluate completed conservation practices.

The TSP program provides eligible participants with consistent, science-based, site-specific practices designed to achieve conservation objectives on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses. The program is national in scope and is offered throughout the United States and territories.

To become a certified TSP, individuals or entities must enter into a certification agreement with NRCS. TSPs must meet education, experience, and credential requirements that are established for each conservation practice, which ensures that technical assistance is provided in accordance with the NRCS statement of work associated with each conservation practice. All conservation practices and criteria are reviewed and updated annually. A Web site maintains certification criteria and a registry of TSPs. The NRCS TSP Web site, http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/technical/tsp, contains other information for TSPs and customers.

In 2013, NRCS worked with 11 professional recommending organizations that provide TSP certification. NRCS signed agreements or contracts with individuals and other organizations resulting in nearly $47 million in obligations for service. NRCS conservation programs accounted for the majority of TSP obligations, with 68 percent of funds distributed through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and 22 percent distributed through Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The remaining 10 percent of TSP obligations were distributed through other conservation programs such as Conservation Operations, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative. Over 2,200 certified TSPs are available to help program participants apply conservation.

In 2013, TSPs played a key role in the implementation of Conservation Activity Plans (CAP). A CAP is a plan that can be developed for producers to identify conservation practices needed to address a specific natural resource need. NRCS offered 16 approved CAPs, and to adopt a CAP a producer was required to work with a certified TSP. For EQIP, a total of 4,750 CAPs were written in 2013 covering 14 resource areas: nutrient management; forest management; grazing management; comprehensive nutrient management plan; agriculture energy management plan; landscape agriculture energy management plan; integrated pest management; irrigation water management; transition to organic; fish and wildlife management; pollinator habitat enhancement; integrated pest management; herbicide-resistance weed control, and spill prevention, control and countermeasure plan; and drainage water management.

In Iowa, NRCS entered into an agreement with the Technical Service Provider Network (TSPN), which will help NRCS more efficiently develop and implement conservation plans for Iowa farmers. The memorandum of understanding (MOU) will increase the availability of technical service to Iowa farmers and landowners. TSPN and NRCS share a common interest in the wise use and management of natural resources, and in improving educational and work opportunities for TSPs.

International Assistance. NRCS's international assistance program provides short and long-term technical assistance for the development of natural resource conservation programs and projects abroad. The program ensures that NRCS employees continue to broaden their knowledge of relevant international conservation issues, and participate in the mutual exchange of conservation technology with countries that face soil and water conservation issues similar to those in the United States. This program furthers an enhanced understanding of various international resource conservation issues, improved international relations, and access to technology developed in other countries.

NRCS cooperates with other Federal agencies in providing technical assistance in natural resource conservation to countries affected by disasters, conflicts, or mismanagement of natural resources. The Agency assists other Federal agencies by arranging meetings between Agency specialists and foreign visitors who are interested in how NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners. NRCS also works with other countries on scientific and exchange projects that benefit both countries. In 2013, NRCS hosted 13 Haitian ministry officials, university representatives, and scientists to build capacity for the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources, Rural Development and Faculty of Veterinarian College in Haiti to lead and support soil survey activities. This activity was sponsored by the Cochran Fellowship Program coordinated by USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). The soil survey pilot initiative that started in 2012 will begin field work in 2014.

NRCS coordinated with FAS and delivered a software package that FAS developed to the NRCS staff in Nebraska. The software package, titled "*Satellite Imagery for Agricultural Advisors deployed to Afghanistan in an easy to use format*", was presented as part of the training and as a possible planning resource for a Nebraska National Guard unit

that was scheduled to be mobilized for service in Afghanistan as an Agribusiness Development Team. The FAS software package was also delivered to a NRCS soil scientist prior to his deployment to Afghanistan as a Provincial Reconstruction Team Agriculture Advisor. The agency has been engaged with FAS, identifying NRCS technical specialists who can work with FAS-sponsored foreign delegations, initiating discussions to support the USDA Cochran Fellowship Program and provide US-based short-term training for foreign nationals, and identifying other areas for possible collaboration, including support to the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). NRCS provided soil testing kits to the NRCS soil scientist in Afghanistan. The materials were used to train local high school students and agriculture technicians on how to use the kits for assessing agricultural fields.

NRCS worked with FAS on the exchange of agriculture and natural resources management training materials between the Peace Corps's Office of Programming and Training Support and NRCS staff in Fort Worth, Texas, Pohnpei and the Federated States of Micronesia. The exchange has assisted in the reviewing of new draft training materials for use in other countries. An International Program Division staff member participated in a three-person EPA and USDA delegation that traveled to Nanjing, China for discussions with staff at the Nanjing Institute of Environmental Science (NIES) and the Ministry of Environmental Protection of China. The discussions centered on areas of possible research collaboration, and the development of a new MOU between USDA, EPA, and NIES.

NRCS Scholarship Programs. In 2013, NRCS participated solely in the USDA/1890 National Scholars Program, a partnership between USDA and 1890 Land-Grant Universities. This programs is intended to increase the number of students enrolling in agriculture, food, natural resource sciences, and other related programs in pursuit of a bachelor's degree at any of the nation's 1890 Land Grant Universities, all of which are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). In 2013, NRCS obligated approximately $300,000 for scholarships and career training for students enrolled in this program, referred to as "Scholars". Applicants include inbound freshmen and college students entering their sophomore and junior years. Students must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 and are required to work during the summers as interns, completing a minimum of 640 hours. Once a scholar graduates, they are hired noncompetitively as provided by their scholarship agreement, and they are required to work one year for each year of their scholarship. This commitment from the scholars along with increasing the diversity of NRCS is the Agency return on the investment. Currently there are 26 scholars in NRCS, 16 was selected in 2013. Over the last two years, there have been 3 graduates, two are soil conservationists one is an engineer.

The USDA/1994 Tribal Scholars Program is a partnership between USDA and 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities. The program awards scholarships to students who are attending one of the 1994 Tribal Colleges and Universities. In addition, because many of the Tribal Colleges only have a two-year program, students may transfer from the Tribal College to any Land Grant College or University to complete their education. The program is intended to strengthen the partnership of the USDA with 1994 Tribal Colleges. Currently there are no Tribal Scholars.

NRCS Outreach Partnerships. The 1890 Centers of Excellence Initiative provides NRCS the opportunity to collaborate with selected 1890 Land Grant Colleges and Universities to broaden the transfer of technologies. The Centers of Excellence, supported by NRCS, focus on Air and Water Quality (Florida A&M University), Grasslands (Langston University), Geographic Information System and Remote Sensing (Lincoln University), Savannah River Environmental Sciences (South Carolina State University), and Plant and Water Quality (Virginia State University). The Agency continues to achieve results as the initiatives meet unique conservation needs and challenges while implementing new site-specific technology and developing comprehensive resource plans. In 2013, NRCS provided $250,000 to support the Centers of Excellence. In addition, NRCS's Outreach and Advocacy Division has partnered with North Carolina A&T University and Florida A&M University to address Biological Agricultural and System Engineering (BASE) that will support NRCS goals of a diverse workforce. NRCS has provided $100,000 to support the BASE program between the two institutions.

NRCS has partnered with the National Association For Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) to enhance the visibility of NRCS disciplines to attract, recruit, and train highly-skilled graduates in Agricultural Programs to address the needs and retention efforts of NRCS. NAFEO is conducting five seminars for students in the identified academia areas relevant to NRCS work (soil science/conservation, biology, engineering, and agriculture). NAFEO is also conducting four webinars on how to apply for Federal jobs that are NRCS focused.
NRCS partnered with the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities and helped identify two multicounty pilots in North and South Carolina to preserve working forests. These pilots are designed to stabilize African American land

ownership and enhance family wealth by increasing income and land asset value through sustainable forestry practices. NRCS invested $100,000 in this partnership venture. NRCS has also targeted EQIP funding for these pilots.

NRCS is partnering with 10 community-based organizations through cooperative partnership agreements to assist new immigrant farmers, specialty crop farmers, and limited resource and socially-disadvantaged farmers and ranchers with technical assistance, on-site demonstrations, program awareness, inner-city urban agriculture, land loss prevention, and training opportunities. These efforts will increase the adoption of natural resource management on their operations, and assist and inform underserved farmers and landowners on how to access NRCS conservation assistance. NRCS also hopes that these efforts will contribute to a reduction in civil rights complaints. NRCS provided over $1 million to support outreach efforts on the ground by working with community-based organizations to set up workshops designed to increase program participation in the Conservation Easement and Stewardship Programs.

The Outreach and Advocacy Division continued its efforts to support women in agriculture by partnering with the National Women in Agriculture Association to help sustain existing women farmers and ranchers, and to encourage and assist women to become farmers and ranchers. The partnership involves providing innovative education and community outreach workshops to demonstrate the opportunities available to them through NRCS conservation programs. The Agency provided $200,000 to support this effort.

The NRCS Outreach and Advocacy Division also partnered with Economic Analysis, Inc. to develop a syllabus that will provide information and contextual guidance to landowners on land loss retention and how to protect inherited land. Phase 2 of the syllabus is completed and Phase 3 is underway. NRCS provided $280,000 to support this effort.

Small, Limited Resource, and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers. NRCS assists small, limited resource, beginning, and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers by creating opportunities for transparent dialogue, promoting open partnerships, coordinating economic viability through innovative conservation programs, increasing program access and services in persistent poverty communities, and expanding program participation avenues by improving internal guidelines.

In 2011, the USDA StrikeForce Initiative began in Arkansas, Georgia, and Mississippi. The initiative is now active in 16 States: Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Alabama, Alaska, North Carolina, South Carolina, North Dakota, South Dakota, Virginia and with concurrent regional activities in the Tribal Communities in Arizona, Texas, and Utah. The increase in outreach to these areas has resulted in increased interest in participation in NRCS conservation programs. As a result, 9,947 participants entered into contracts totaling $205,720,334 in the StrikeForce States.

In 2013, NRCS programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Security Program (CSP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), and Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) provided assistance to Historically Underserved customers. Historically underserved may include beginning, limited resource, and/or socially disadvantaged producers. Following are contracts and financial assistance provided to those customers:

- $104.4 million in financial assistance on 4,371 contracts with socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers to treat about 3 million acres.
- $210.6 million in financial assistance on 9,716 contracts with beginning farmers and ranchers to treat about 2 million acres.
- $26.5 million in financial assistance on 1,483 contracts with limited resource farmers and ranchers to treat about 300,000 acres.

Assistance to American Indians and Alaskan Natives. In 2013, NRCS continued to increase Tribal participation among 563 Federally-recognized Tribal governments to strengthen conservation activities on Tribal lands. The Agency's objectives are: to operate within a government-to-government relationship with Federally recognized Indian Tribes; to consult to the greatest extent practicable, and as permitted by law, with Indian Tribal governments before taking actions that affect Federally recognized Indian Tribes; to assess the impact of Agency activities on Tribal trust resources and assure that Tribal interests are considered before the activities are undertaken; to remove procedural

impediments to working directly with Tribal governments on conservation activities that affect trust property or government rights of the Tribes.

The Federally-recognized Tribes can work with NRCS to receive financial assistance and/or technical assistance. NRCS offers Tribal governments assistance with conservation planning, partnerships, grants, cost-share programs, and training through the agency outreach efforts. Within NRCS, employees are trained in Tribal culture and protocol. NRCS has 50 offices, including 42 full-time and eight part-time offices, located on or near Tribal lands. There are approximately 195 NRCS Tribal liaisons assisting the 563 Federally-recognized Tribes.

USDA programs and services are available to American Indian and Alaska Native farmers and ranchers. NRCS programs strive to meet Tribal demands for improved agriculture, and environmental and conservation agricultural quality, such as conservation of crop, pasture, and rangelands; rural landscape services; wildlife habitat; wetlands; and improved water and air quality, along with food, fiber and timber production.

- Program Activities/Participation. In 2013, NRCS awarded the following to American Indian and Alaska Natives:
  - 759 EQIP contracts totaling $23.7 million;
  - 28 WHIP contracts totaling $3.4 million;
  - 6 AWEP contracts totaling $94,000; and
  - 197 CSP contracts totaling $4.0 million.
- Regional Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils. To strengthen working relationships with Tribes, NRCS established three advisory councils in 2012. The Agency will use these councils to assist in establishing regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with Tribal representatives and officials in the development of Federal policy that has Tribal implications. The councils will meet twice a year and assist the Chief, Regional Conservationists and State Conservationist in strengthening government-to-government relationships and clarifying lines of communication and consultation with American Indian Tribes. All three councils held two meetings in 2013.
- Tribal Technical Service Providers (TSP) Pilot. A cooperative agreement was established between NRCS and the College of the Menominee Nation to certify Tribal Technical Service Providers who can provide assistance in implementing Farm Bill programs to Tribal producers. This pilot project established a process that can be adapted by other Tribes throughout the Nation. The intent of this project is to build capacity of Tribal colleges in professional, continuing education training, and certification and to strengthen the capacity of Tribes in conservation and resource management.
- National Outreach Share Point. A Website has been designed to increase communication and collaboration within the agency. The site has a separate section for tribal outreach and offers important linkages to key policies and training tools to better understand how to work more effectively with Tribes and their members.
- USDA Action Plan. NRCS continues to implement the USDA Office of Tribal Relations Action Plan on Tribal consultation. The plan requires all Federal agencies to provide effective Tribal consultation and collaboration in carrying out their roles and responsibilities.
- Tribal Conservation Districts (TCD). There are 39 TCDs established under Tribal laws, and they are essential to delivering conservation planning and conservation programs assistance in Indian Country. These TCDs are recognized by the Secretary of Agriculture. Presently, there are four TCDs pending.

Accountability and Management Improvements. Maximizing agency success requires adaptive management strategies – systematically and accurately assessing work and processes and making improvements. Adaptive management requires a feedback system to improve conservation solutions and monitor success in order to achieve efficient investments in conservation. The feedback system NRCS uses includes performance measures and program evaluation methods and connecting scientific evidence to conservation outcomes such as the CEAP efforts. Program evaluations help the agency learn about the successes, share information with key audiences, and make rapid adjustments to improve services under changing conditions. The key components of the adaptive management strategy for measuring and evaluating programs include:

- Developing a variety of performance measures and performance metrics that align with the purpose and success factors of the program;
- Monitoring evidence of efficient program design and results (outputs and outcomes) on a regular basis;
- Developing, maintaining, and auditing internal controls for program compliance; and
- Making evidence-based and targeted program improvements on an on-going basis.

The agency has continued to work on transparency and accountability by taking the following steps in 2013:

- Developed business requirements during 2013 for a comprehensive agency data system that will connect a variety of data sources for program measurement and analysis. The system will improve access for internal and external customers to agency official data on NRCS programs, planning, and application of conservation and field activities at any spatial scale;
- Conducted three functional reviews, fourteen State program reviews, eight program delivery reviews, and ten civil rights reviews to ensure compliance is monitored throughout the agency on a consistent basis. As with all programs, there are potential risks in data and information collection, fiscal reporting, program implementation, and operation. By conducting these reviews, the agency has the opportunity to mitigate risks in a timely manner. NRCS's priority is to improve the Agency's quality assurance and quality controls by reforming financial processes, streamlining business processes, enhancing the workforce, and increasing information quality;
- Completed review year 2012 Highly Erodible Land and Wetlands Conservation Compliance reviews on 24,309 tracts of cropland;
- Closed 14 of the 39 open audits from the active audit list at the beginning of 2013. Of those 14 audits closed, 13 had no recommendations for NRCS follow-up. There were 22 audit recommendations closed in 2013, while 60 recommendations remain open;
- Drafted a comprehensive Compliance Strategic Plan (2014 - 2017) that presents an integrated framework to manage compliance and control activities. The Plan will serve as a blueprint to guide the achievement of NRCS mission critical goals and objectives to meet the Agency's mission; and
- Designated the Associate Chief of Operations as the Chief Compliance Officer to ensure that compliance oversight activities are effective throughout the Agency.

SOIL SURVEY

Current Activities.

Program Objectives. Understanding and managing soil as a strategic natural resource helps sustain the health and economy of the Nation. Soil survey is an essential tool for regional and local conservation planning that allows people to manage natural resources. Scientists and policy makers use soil survey information in studying climate change and evaluating the sustainability and environmental impacts of land use and management practices. Soil surveys provide input data that computer simulation models use to predict the dynamics of carbon, nutrients, and water in soils. Soil surveys are used by planners, engineers, farmers, ranchers, developers, and home owners to evaluate soil suitability and make management decisions for farms, home sites, subdivisions, commercial and industrial sites, and wildlife and recreational areas.

National Cooperative Soil Survey. NRCS is the lead Federal agency for the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS), a partnership of Federal land management agencies, State agricultural experiment stations, private consultants, and State and local governments. The NCSS promotes the use of soil information, and develops policies and procedures for conducting soil surveys and producing soil information. NRCS provides the scientific expertise to enable the NCSS to develop and maintain a uniform system for mapping and assessing soil resources that allows soil information from different locations to be shared regardless of which agency collects it. NRCS provides most of the training in soil surveys to Federal agencies and assists with their soil inventories on a reimbursable basis.

Standards and Mechanisms for Soil Information. NRCS is responsible for developing the standards and mechanisms for soil information on national tabular and spatial data infrastructure required by Executive Order 12906. NRCS is continually enhancing the National Soil Survey Information System, and producing publications that are accessible to the public through the Internet at *http://soils.usda.gov*. The Soil Data Warehouse houses archived soil survey data. Web Soil Survey distributes published soil surveys, making it easier to keep soil information current for daily public access. NRCS refreshes the official national soil survey data annually to better meet the needs of modelers and researchers in addition to meeting Agency and Departmental compliance program requirements. The SoilWeb mobile application is becoming a popular tool for individuals to derive soil information at Global Positioning System located points. Web-based delivery mechanisms that simplify the interpretation and delivery of soils data are evolving at a rapid pace. The first generation of smartphone applications were native applications limited to the iPhone and

Android-based smartphones. A revised version of SoilWeb was developed to work across all types of devices (desktops, smartphones, and tablets), making it accessible to users anywhere an internet connection is available.

Program Operations. The primary focus of the Soil Survey Program is to provide current and consistent map interpretations and data sets of the soil resources of the United States. This includes providing useful information to the public in a variety of formats (e.g., electronic and Web-based). The program will continue to focus on maintaining quality soil information and helping people understand and use the soil resource in a sustainable manner. Key program elements include:

- Mapping. Mapping procedures are managed based on physiographic rather than administrative boundaries. Soil surveys based on natural landscape boundaries rather than political boundaries are more efficient to produce, and provide consistent, quality data for assessing and planning the use and protection of landscape units (watersheds or ecosystems). Physiographic surveys provide consistent data that can be used easily by landowners with holdings in multiple jurisdictions, or by community, State, or regional planners. A primary challenge is to complete the initial soil survey for the entire country. This challenge also includes completing surveys on American Indian land holdings as well as public lands controlled by the United States Military, FWS, Bureau of Land Management, and the National Park Service. Public lands are important to include with private lands when planning land use and conservation for watersheds, landscapes, or ecological sites. NRCS is working cooperatively within the NCSS to accomplish these goals.
- Ecological Site Information System (ESIS). Ecological site descriptions (ESDs) used as assessment tools in conservation planning and modeling projects such as Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) have potential to radically change conservation on working lands. NRCS's ESIS is linked with the National Cooperative Soil Survey data to provide the capability to produce automated ecological site descriptions from the data stored in the ESIS database. NRCS led the National Resource Inventory of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) non-forested lands with ESIS data in order to provide a statistically based sample design that is common to both agencies. BLM is providing $12.5 million to NRCS over five years for the service and data collection through 2015. This inventory is critical for the agencies because the Federal lands are intertwined with non-Federal rangelands and land management units typically span both ownership types. Joint policy between BLM, NRCS, and the Forest Service efficiently pools the agencies' technical resources for the development and use of ESDs to describe site characteristics, plant communities, and use interpretations for grazing land and forestland. ESD development training is ongoing and all three agencies provide staff support and participation. This technology improves land management planning capabilities for agencies and the public by providing consistency among the agencies' classification, technology development, planning and accomplishment reporting.
- Rapid Assessment of Soil Carbon for Conservation Planning (RaCA). Visible and near infrared spectra for prediction of organic and inorganic carbon contents and bulk density data were collected for 145,000 soil samples. These samples were from 6,500 locations statistically selected to represent specific soil properties and land covers. Data summary and analysis was initiated and will continue in 2014. Soil sampling for carbon analysis was implemented for soils in Alaska, the Pacific Islands Area, and Puerto Rico in 2012, with completion of sample and data analysis expected in 2014. The goal of this project is to provide data on carbon stocks for the United States by soil groupings, land use, and management for conservation planning and model calibration.
- Kellogg Soil Survey Laboratory (KSSL). The KSSL produced consistent and precise data for more than 6,000 samples in 2013. In addition to analysis to support NCSS, a portion of these samples were associated with EPA National Wetland Condition Assessment; Plant Materials Centers Soil Quality Study; Soil Monitoring Network; and a pilot study cooperative with National Ecological Observatory Network. An additional 8,000 samples from the Rapid Carbon Assessment were received at the KSSL and archived for future analysis.
- Technical Analysis and Tool Development. The Kellogg Soil Survey Laboratory (KSSL) of the National Soil Survey Center (NSSC) provides analytical support, which includes research and methods development and testing, and analyses to support on-going soil survey activities around the Nation. KSSL completed 280,000 analyses on 6,000 soil samples in 2013, which is about 50 percent more than in 2012 (186,000). Although production increased, data quality was maintained or improved. KSSL refined visible, near-infrared and mid-infrared diffuse reflective spectroscopy (VNIR) methods and implemented measuring the reflectance spectra for incoming laboratory samples. Use of mid-infrared and VNIR techniques will increase field and laboratory analytical efficiency for selected soil properties including organic carbon. The NSSC awarded six competitive research grants to NCSS cooperators to investigate problems pertinent to soil survey update and enhancement.
- Information Management. The National Soil Survey Information System, a part of the NCSS information system, is where soil scientists develop, manage, and deliver soil information for the public. Digital soil surveys enable

customers to use electronic soil data in geographic information systems for generating maps tailored to their needs and performing complex resource analyses. NRCS delivers these data via the Internet;

- Technical Soil Services (TSS). TSS provides five basic types of service: technical policy and program services; planning services; site-specific soil investigations, testing, interpretation, and evaluation; expert services for judicial requests; and information services. These services are primarily provided through the USDA Service Centers. TSS also supports new and innovative models of conservation delivery like Conservation Streamlining Initiative (CDSI).
- Web Soil Survey. The Web Soil Survey website, *http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/*, provides soil data and information produced by NCSS to the public. Operated by NRCS, the Web site provides access to the largest natural resource information system in the world. NRCS has soil maps and data available online for more than 95 percent of the Nation's counties, and anticipates having 100 percent in the near future. The site is updated and maintained as the single authoritative source of soil survey information. The Web Soil Survey will be used directly for conservation planning under the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative protocols.
- Digital Soil Surveys. The NCSS develops and maintains two scales of soil surveys:
    - Soil Survey Geographic Data Base (SSURGO) is used primarily by landowners, townships, counties or parishes, and watershed hydrologic units for planning and resource management. SSURGO contains the most detailed level of soil information; or
    - United States General Soil Map is used primarily for multi-county, State, river basin planning and resource management and monitoring.

2013Activities.

- Acres Mapped. Soil surveys have been prepared on over 2.1 billion acres. During 2013, NRCS soil scientists mapped or updated 34.7 million acres, and another 230,000 acres were mapped or updated by other Federal, State, and local agencies in cooperation with NRCS. Soil mapping priorities are directed toward completion of all previously unmapped private lands and updating mapping and interpretations to meet current user needs and requirements. As a pilot to test standards and tracking, ESD were developed and linked to 24 million acres of soil survey information.
- Soil Surveys used interactively online. In 2013, the Web Soil Survey website logged over 2.2 million user visits (a 5 percent increase over 2012) and over 107,000 visitors per month. Over 214,000 customized soil reports for individual small portions of the country were developed through Web Soil Survey in 2013 (a 13 percent increase over 2012). At the end of 2013, the total number of visits to the Website since its initial release in 2005 topped 12 million. Working in conjunction with Google Maps, the revised application now displays soil map unit delineations overlain on Google's imagery. Users can view summaries of soil types for any geographic location where NRCS soil data exists. Detailed information on the named soils is now seamlessly linked and formatted within the application. SoilWeb was developed in collaboration between the University of California Davis Soil Resource Lab and NRCS. The website is available at *http://casoilresource.lawr.ucdavis.edu/soilweb*. The SoilWeb Smartphone application is currently averaging between 500 and 1,000 viewers per day by people searching for soils information using Smartphones GPS coordinates throughout the country. The new SoilWeb Google Earth application is currently averaging about 15,000 viewers per day.
- Research in Soil Geography. The National Soil Survey Center (NSSC) and the National Geospatial Research Unit have collaborated since 2005 to support research and development into the science of hydropedology and digital soil mapping as defined by the International Union of Soil Science. This research is generally conducted collaboratively with NSSC, university partners, and related institutions.
- Soil Health. National Soil Survey Center staff is playing an important role in the creation and roll out of the Soil Health Management System effort by providing scientific underpinnings for conservation practices recommended, collection of dynamic soil property data and lab analyses for demonstration projects.

Get Conservation on the Ground.

Rapid Carbon Assessment (RaCA) Project in Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Field work is underway in Hawaii, Alaska, and Puerto Rico to document sites and collect samples for soil organic carbon stocks under the RaCA Project. Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Units agreements have been developed with appropriate universities to provide field and laboratory assistance including employment of students in part-time positions. Data collected from these tropical and arctic regions will augment findings from the U.S. mainland and enhance the understanding of current U.S. carbon stocks. The fieldwork in Alaska is planned to take about two years to complete. The National Soil Survey Center is working with a University of Alaska professor to initiate RaCA sample collection and analysis in easily

accessible areas of the State. Seventy-five RaCA sites were selected for sampling in Hawaii during 2013. Training was provided to the University of Hawaii and NRCS staff. A State Soil Scientist and a University of Hawaii professor teamed up to conduct fieldwork on sites that are primarily located on the island of Hawaii, in addition to sites distributed among the islands of Oahu, Molokai, Maui, and Kauai. The University of Hawaii will be providing laboratory processing of samples and student assistance for fieldwork. Sampling RaCA sites in Puerto Rico is underway. A State Soil Scientist and a Carbon Researcher at the University of Wisconsin began sampling 25 sites in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

National Park Service Soil Surveys. Soil resource inventories are now available for over 80 percent of the National Park Service (NPS) properties nationwide, including Carlsbad Caverns National Park. A National Soil Survey Center soil scientist and the NPS reported that as of September 2013, 224 out of 270 natural resource park properties (over 80 percent) have completed soil resource inventories that use NRCS soil mapping. One of the most recently completed SSURGO-certified National Parks is Carlsbad Caverns National Park, New Mexico. While most visitors think of caves in this park, the park is situated in the northern portion of the Chihuahuan Desert region. This region is influenced by ecosystem components of the Sierra Madre, Rocky Mountains, and Great Plains. The park's lower elevations tend to share the traits of the Chihuahuan Desert and Great Plains, while the higher elevations tend to have similarities with the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Madre of Mexico. The Chihuahuan Desert is the most biologically diverse desert in the Western Hemisphere, and one of the most diverse in the world. Most of this desert is located in Mexico, with only the northern third in the United States. Detailed update mapping in the park and the development of new Ecological Site Descriptions will help park managers in the U.S. and Mexican resource managers understand this shared delicate ecosystem.

Geophysical Training and Assistance Completed with NRCS Field Soils Staff on Native American Tribal Lands in Washington State. A NRCS Geophysical Soil Scientist and the National Soil Survey Center assisted Washington State with training and technical assistance using geophysical techniques Electromagnetic Induction technology for use in soils investigations. Technical assistance included investigations conducted on land holdings of the Nisqually and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Communities in Olympia and La Conner, Washington - Puget Sound region. Field investigations conducted on the local reservations concentrated mainly on changes in soil properties and salinity concentrations across the sites as these changes relate to re-establishment of vegetative communities across WRP restoration sites. The Native American communities in the Puget Sound region have established an excellent working partnership with NRCS while conserving and protecting our natural resources. Multiple collaborative projects have resulted from this partnership with beneficial and encouraging results.

Erosion Prediction Models Updated for Sustainable Cropping Systems. NRCS Crop Management Zone leaders, State Agronomists and Regional Agronomists completed and released a 100 percent update of the national crop and soil management database. This database is used in the official NRCS Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE2) and the Wind Erosion Prediction System (WEPS) assessment tools. Over 35,000 crop management templates in 78 crop management zones in the Continental U.S., Caribbean, Hawaii, and the Pacific Basin have been updated for representative cropping and management systems including energy use. New crops, vegetation and operations have been created in RUSLE2 and WEPS to better reflect current sustainable management systems including cover crops and specialty crops. These extensive updates will enhance the utility and applicability of RUSLE2 and WEPS for NRCS employees and other professionals who regularly use the models to make land management decisions. The updated templates will be used for cropland and hayland conservation planning for the Integrated Erosion Tool and the Land Management Operations Database components of the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative.

SNOW SURVEY AND WATER SUPPLY FORECASTING

Current Activities.

Program Objectives. The Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SSWSF) Program collects high elevation snow data in the Western United States and provides managers and users with snowpack information, other climatic data, and water supply forecasts. NRCS field staff and cooperators collect and analyze data on snow depth, snow water equivalent, and other climate parameters at over 2,065 remote, high elevation data collection sites. These data are used to provide estimates of annual water availability, spring snowmelt runoff, and summer streamflows. Climate change researchers are increasingly accessing the data to evaluate trends in the Western U.S. climate. The water

supply forecasts are used by individual farmers and ranchers; water resource managers; Federal, State, and local government agencies; municipal and industrial water providers; hydroelectric power generation utilities; irrigation districts; fish and wildlife management agencies; reservoir project managers; recreationists; Tribal Nations; and the countries of Canada and Mexico.

Program Operations. The SSWSF Program provides water and climate information, and technology support for natural resource management in 13 States (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming). The National Water and Climate Center (NWCC), located in Portland, Oregon, provides leadership and technology support to the States, and directly provides water supply forecasts.

Snowmelt provides a majority of the water supply in the West, so the SSWSF Program provides critical information for water managers. The demographic, physical, and political landscape of the Western United States is changing rapidly, and there is increasing competition over water for irrigation, municipal and industrial customers, and in-stream uses, such as river-based recreation, esthetic enjoyment, fish and wildlife habitat, and hydroelectric power generation. Increasing water demands will require more precise management of this valuable resource.

Climate change projections and climate variability increase the uncertainty of the yearly water supply. A study by the Rocky Mountain Climate Change Organization[1] finds that "no other effect of climate disruption is as significant as how it affects snowpacks and water supply." As exhibited by the extremes of temperature and precipitation over the last few years in the West, the potential effects of climate variability can be significant. Extremes in the snowpack could result in less reservoir storage in warm, dry years (as in 2012), complicate reservoir regulation in cold, wet years (as in 2011), and cause massive flooding (as in 2011 and 2013). Earlier snowmelt, caused by warming conditions, increases the length of time between peak flows and summer water user needs, while a delayed snowmelt, caused by cool weather, shortens the melting season and produces potentially disastrous flooding.

The SSWSF Program has been operated by the Agency continuously since 1935. The program is designated as a cooperative effort because it operates with the assistance from, and in cooperation with, both public and private entities that rely on consistent and accurate water supply and hydrograph timing forecasts. Although most funding and field efforts are through NRCS, the partners and cooperators provide a share of the financial burden and contribute to data-collection activities. During the 2013 water year (October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013), partners and cooperators contributed a significant amount of money and in-kind services towards the collection of snow and related climate data. The SSWSF Program consists of a network of 1,180 manually measured snow courses and 885 automated SNOTEL sites. The economic and societal value of the program is provided in the NRCS released report "A Measure of Snow," which is available on the NWCC webpage at:
http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/downloads/factpub/MeasureofSnowFullReport.pdf for the full report, or
http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/ftpref/downloads/factpub/MeasureofSnowSummary.pdf for the summary report. The report provides numerous examples of the applications and economic benefits of the SSWSF Program to users throughout the Western United States.

2013 Activities.
SNOTEL Conversions. The effort to convert manual snow course and aerial marker measurement sites to automated SNOTEL or Snolite sites continues to be a program priority. Snolite sites are remote, automated sites that report snow depth and temperature; they replace aerial markers that were formally measured during fixed wing flights. In water year 2013, 16 sites were added to the network, increasing the total to 878 sites. These additions have lessened the risk of physical injury, costs for obtaining measurements, providing maintenance, and require less costly visits to these remote sites. The SNOTEL network collects the vast majority of the critical, high-elevation snowpack and climate data used to estimate water yields in the mountainous west, and plays a key role in flood forecasting and other life/property threatening snow related events by providing hourly precipitation, temperature, snowpack depletion, and soil moisture information. Snowpack and related climate information enables emergency management agencies to effectively anticipate and mitigate flood damage and the effects of drought months in advance of the spring snowmelt.

[1] Saunders, Stephen, and Maxwell, Maureen, 2005, Less Snow, Less Water: Climate Disruption in the West: The Rocky Mountain Climate Organization, September 2005, 30 p.

Three of the recently installed automated sites were on lands of the Summit Lake Tribe in Nevada, Yakima Nation in Montana, and the Goshute Tribe in Utah to help support their water management and endangered species activities.

SNOTEL Sites Affected by Natural Disasters. The 2013 wildfire season has been rough for the SNOTEL network. Several sites were completely destroyed by fire, including sites at Younts Peak, Montana; Burroughs Creek, Wyoming; Rainbow Canyon, Nevada; and Dollarhide Summit, Idaho. Several other sites experienced near misses, as fires raged around them. Even though many sites were spared by the wildfires, nearby watersheds have been drastically changed and the snowpack accumulation and melt characteristics will not relate to basin streamflow runoff as they have in the past. It will take many years of forest regeneration to recover the snowpack/runoff equilibrium that was lost. Fires are not the only natural disasters that disturb SNOTEL sites. For example, in 2013, a wind event downed a tree onto the snow pillow at the Two Ocean Plateau site in Yellowstone National Park.

Electronics Maintenance Facility Activities. Maiden Rock Communications, an independent contractor, has been designing and implementing the next generation components for the NWCC master stations. Working with NWCC Electronics Maintenance Facility (EMF) staff, Maiden Rock Communications has progressed through a series of factory and field tests, culminating in the deployment of the components at the Boise master station. After replacing the old components, the overall operation of the Boise meteor burst master station has greatly improved.

The EMF is responsible for testing and qualifying all pressure transducers used for snow pillows and storage precipitation gages and SNOTEL sites. The EMF technicians use an environmental chamber to test and qualify every pressure transducer before it is deployed to the field for SNOTEL site installation. Use of the environmental chamber has reduced the field failure rate of the transducers from almost 23 percent to about 1 percent. Without a way of qualifying the transducers, the EMF was faced with a large backlog of units needing to be tested. NWCC was recently able to procure and install two new environmental chambers at the EMF location. This will allow the EMF team to calibrate 600 field units each year to keep the SNOTEL network running.

Missouri River Basin Climate Change Impact Evaluation. Representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey, South Dakota Water Science Center, the National Weather Service, and NRCS participated in a research study to assess the impact of climate change on mountain snowpack accumulation and runoff in the upper Missouri River Basin. NRCS SNOTEL data were an essential part of the research. The original intent of the research study was to ascertain the sensitivity of mountain snow water equivalent and seasonal reservoir inflow to climate variability and projected change, based on Global Climate Model projections.

Water Supply Forecasts. Water supply forecasts are produced from December through June in collaboration with the National Weather Service and other Federal and State agencies. During the 2013 forecast season, the SSWSF program issued 6,789 water supply forecasts at 632 streamflow forecast points. In addition, SSWSF hydrologists have developed 198 daily water supply forecast models that run automatically, using daily SNOTEL data to track climatic trends throughout the forecast season. From December 1 through July 1 these forecast models augment the official forecasts producing almost 42,174 additional trend forecasts to aid water resource users and managers. Water supply forecasts are used by:

- Irrigators to make effective use of limited water supplies for agricultural production needs;
- Federal government in administering international water treaties with Canada and Mexico;
- State governments in managing intrastate streams and interstate water compacts;
- Municipalities in managing anticipated water supplies and drought mitigation;
- Reservoir operators to satisfy multiple use demands;
- Federal and State governments to mitigate flood damages in levied areas and downstream from reservoirs; and
- Federal and State governments to support fish and wildlife management activities associated with species protection legislation.

Water Supply Forecasting Technology Development. Work is continuing on the NWCC effort to implement the Precipitation Runoff Modeling System hydrologic simulation model into forecasting operations. The main activity areas in 2013 included:

- Working with Portland State University Geography Department to complete the development of a GIS-based system for delineation of Hydrologic Response Units (HRUs), the basic spatial computational units for the model is based on various watershed characteristics such as topography, vegetation, and soils;

- Working with Portland State University Geography Department to develop a GIS-based system for calculating spatial model parameters, based on the HRUs delineated and quantities derived from spatial layers of various watershed characteristics;
- Working with Portland State University Civil Engineering Department to develop model output post-processing techniques for removal of bias and for adjusting the error bounds of ensemble forecasts;
- Working with Colorado State University to continue developing the Object Modeling System as a model development and operational environment for using PRMS; and
- Working at the NWCCs to test and experiment with the tools developed by the two universities. Conducted investigations to get a clear understanding of the model parameters, developing model calibration procedures, testing model performance (skill, bias, etc.), and envisioning forecast products to be created from ensemble forecasts. Work has also involved adapting spatial interpolation routines for calculating spatially distributed meteorological forcing data (precipitation and temperature) and investigations into the model's ability to adequately simulate solar radiation forcing.

Technology Transfer and Collaboration. NWCC uses the Visually Interactive Prediction and Estimation Routines (VIPER) as its main statistical forecasting tool. VIPER, which contains NRCS's forecasting and statistical algorithms, is a visual dashboard interface that forecast hydrologists use to build forecasting models, analyze current data, and produce water-based reports and products. NWCC staff has been working with the Seattle District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to transfer VIPER to their computer system to use for forecasting snowmelt runoff into reservoirs that they manage. The technology transfer team conducted two successful hands-on training workshops that build on an earlier collaboration with water managers at the Denver Water Board, Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, and the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency in California.

Near Real-Time Quality Control System for SNOTEL. NWCC has contracted with Oregon State University to develop a simplified, robust quality control system for SNOTEL data that runs operationally and can produce quality-controlled data and condition flags within a timeframe sufficient for running hydrologic models. This is the second year of the two-year contract. The project deliverables are due to be completed in September 2014 and will provide a serially complete daily dataset for every SNOTEL network site that includes minimum, maximum, mean temperature, snow water equivalent, and precipitation. A map-based web portal will be developed to allow NRCS's data editors to access the final quality control values and condition flags on a daily basis.

Information Systems. The database and forecast system maintained by the NWCC Water and Climate Information System supports a wide variety of software used for water supply forecasting, water and climate data analyses, and other products used in water resource management and related natural resource conservation activities at NRCS. NWCC websites containing snow survey data, water supply forecasts, soil moisture data, and other products recorded 25.9 million visits during the year. The views and downloads of the information from NRCS websites are similar to the information from sites such as the National Weather Service website that utilize SSWSF data. The NWCC is implementing a failover plan which includes migration to USDA for hosting of all data collection and product production activities. Half of the NRCS applications have been submitted for deployment in USDA hosting. NWCC is currently developing a Product Data Portal that will provide Climate, Water Supply and Data interpretations information through data retrieval and data interpretations. Delivery will be available to the general public and service centers through the Field Office Technical Guide and Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative web pages.

PLANT MATERIALS CENTERS

Current Activities.

Program Objectives. NRCS operates or supports a network of 25 Plant Materials Centers (PMCs) based in ecologically distinct service areas. Through its PMCs and plant materials specialists, the Plant Materials Program addresses natural resource concerns identified locally and nationally. PMC activities focus on "core" resource concerns such as soil stabilization, soil health and productivity, and water quality. PMCs also focus on emerging national priorities such as biofeedstocks for energy production, enhancement of pollinator habitat to support agricultural production, and development of information and alternate procedures to assist organic producers.

PMCs: 1) develop technology and information for the effective establishment, use, and maintenance of plants for a wide variety of natural resource conservation uses; 2) study and characterize plant attributes to provide data and information important in the operation of predictive models and effective management of climate impacted plant resources; 3) provide appropriate training and education to NRCS staff, partners, and the public; and 4) assemble, test, select, and release seed and plants to provide for the commercial production of plant materials that protect and conserve our natural resources.

Program Operations. NRCS Field Office Technical Guides (FOTGs) deliver Plant Materials Program information directly to NRCS field staff and partners in conservation planning efforts. PMC staff tailor vegetative information in the FOTGs to the unique conditions found in their service areas, and provide extensive training to field staff and partners on the selection and establishment of vegetation to address specific resource concerns. Program information is available to the public through the Web at *http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov*. Plant Materials Program information improves the condition of natural resources on private and public lands. On private lands, program information supports the successful implementation of Farm Bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Conservation Reserve Program, and the Biomass Crop Assistance Program, which is administered by the Farm Service Agency.

The Plant Materials Program uses a multi-disciplinary approach to solving natural resource problems, drawing on staff expertise in biology, agronomy, forestry, soils, and horticulture. Plant Materials Program activities are coordinated with NRCS technical specialists, other governmental agencies, nongovernment organizations, and industry. The program often cooperates with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management, and State and local agencies, such as departments of transportation, wildlife, and conservation. Nongovernmental organizations include universities, native plant societies, wildlife organizations, and industry partners such as commercial seed and plant growers. These partnerships enhance the development of plant materials information, accomplishing work that would not be possible for PMCs or their partners acting alone. These partnerships also provide a conduit for sharing technical information developed by PMCs.

NRCS's network of PMCs is the only national organization that develops and tests vegetation to address our Nation's natural resource challenges. NRCS operates 25 PMCs, and provides limited funding to groups in Alaska and Colorado for the development of plant materials products needed by NRCS. PMC service areas are defined by ecological boundaries. Each PMC addresses the high-priority conservation concerns within their service areas. When needed, PMCs coordinate across service areas to evaluate vegetative technology and solutions that impact large regions of the United States.

2013 Activities.
In 2013, NRCS continued its efforts to improve the operations and missions of PMCs. The following are highlights PMC activities.

Technology Development and Transfer. PMCs ensure that NRCS staff, conservation partners, and the public have information available to successfully get natural resource conservation on the ground. Plant Materials studies resulted in the addition of 327 new technical documents to the Plant Materials Website. In 2013, the 2,570 documents available on the Web site had more than 346,000 visitors and were downloaded more than 1.5 million times. Plant Materials staff conducted 185 technical training sessions for 1,990 NRCS field staff and conservation partners. Training consisted of topics such as seed and plant identification; selection and establishment of conservation plants; planning a conservation planting; using cover crops and improving soil health; improving the productivity of range and pasture land; restoring riparian areas; windbreak establishment; and enhancing pollinator habitat.

New Conservation Plants. PMCs released five new native conservation plants to the public and commercial growers. New conservation plants included:

- Balli Germplasm prostrate bundleflower and Venado Germplasm awnless bushsunflower (Kingsville, Texas PMC in cooperation with the South Texas Natives program) for range plantings and restoration efforts in southern Texas;
- Kingston Germplasm prairie cordgrass (Big Flats, New York PMC) for erosion control and wildlife habitat uses along freshwater shorelines in the Northeast States;

- Southampton Germplasm prairie cordgrass (Cape May, New Jersey PMC) for streambank and shoreline erosion control and wetland restoration and enhancement in the Mid-Atlantic States; and
- 'Centennial' sand bluestem (USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in cooperation with the Manhattan, Kansas and Knox City, Texas PMCs) for pasture, hay, and rangeland forage in the Central and Southern Great Plains States.

Improving Cropland Soil Health and Productivity. Cover crops provide ecological services such as improving soil health, reducing soil erosion, retaining nutrients on-site, and suppressing weeds. They are also an important part of NRCS's Soil Health Campaign. PMCs have actively worked with cover crops for several decades, and that work continues. In 2013, PMCs located in California, Florida, Maryland, Missouri, North Dakota, Oregon, and Washington continued a three-year national effort to study the effects of different cover crop mixes on dynamic soil properties. This effort is coordinated with NRCS agronomists and soils staff. PMCs presented the preliminary results of the effects of cover crop seeding rates on ground cover, biomass production, soil moisture, and temperature in a September 2013 webinar to 125 NRCS participants. The results of this study will support future NRCS recommendations on cover crop mixes and may help the producers save money by reducing cover crop seeding rates while maintaining the soil health benefits. PMCs are also engaged in studies and demonstrations of cover crops in rotation with commodity crops in Knox City, Texas, Corvallis, Oregon, and Bridger, Montana; evaluation of cover crop species and varieties in East Lansing, Michigan, and Elsberry, Missouri. In addition, the PMCs provided cover crop training sessions for NRCS field staff and farmers on the use and benefits of cover crops in Big Flats, New York, Cape May, New Jersey, and Bridger, Montana.

Recovering from Natural Disasters. In October 2012, Hurricane Sandy came ashore on the upper Mid-Atlantic coastline, causing extensive damage to property in New Jersey and New York, among other States. PMCs in New Jersey, Florida, and Louisiana lead efforts to select plants and develop technology for the successful re-establishment of vegetation on dunes and coastal marsh ecosystems along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. In response to Hurricane Sandy, the Cape May, New Jersey, PMC drew upon its 45 years of experience to increase the production and distribution of the premier dune stabilization plant, 'Cape' American beach grass, to commercial growers, assisted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to refine dune planting specifications, accelerated development of a northern ecotype of sea oats, and worked with coastal communities and non-profits on public awareness and information transfer.

Improving Wildlife Habitat and Biodiversity. Biodiversity (having a wide range of species in an area) is an important indicator of ecosystem health. NRCS conservation activities promote plant species that improve biodiversity and support a range of wildlife. Improving habitat for managed and native bees and other pollinators is a major focus of NRCS conservation planning. These habitats affect cultivated crops and support larger wildlife. PMCs, often in collaboration with others, play an important role in supporting conservation planning for pollinator habitat. PMCs throughout the U.S. hosted pollinator workshops for NRCS staff and farmers on ways to improve pollinator habitat. PMCs continue to work closely with partners such as The Xerces Society and the Pollinator Partnership to evaluate plants and techniques to establish, manage, and expand pollinator habitat. In 2013, NRCS developed a list of recommended plant species to improve honeybee health and enrich NRCS conservation plantings for managed honeybees in the Northern Great Plains.

Partnerships with Federal Agencies. In addition to selecting and promoting plants for conservation on private lands, PMCs work cooperatively with other Federal agencies, on a cost reimbursable basis, to develop plant technology and grow plants for restoration work on public lands. PMCs in Arizona, California, Idaho, Kansas, Maryland, Michigan, Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, and West Virginia worked with over 30 National Parks producing native seed and plants indigenous to the parks for soil stabilization and restoration projects. The Corvallis, Oregon, PMC, in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, NRCS field staff, and the Institute for Applied Ecology, met recovery goals for two recovery zones of the endangered Nelson's checkermallow butterfly after three years of seed and plant production at the PMC. This large-scale restoration project has become a national model for threatened and endangered species recovery. The Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Oregon PMCs are working with the Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to develop production methods of grasses, legumes, and wildflowers that have potential for commercialization, and to produce limited quantities of important species to increase the biological diversity of restoration projects on BLM land.

Getting Conservation on the Ground.
Riparian areas, ecosystems that are a transition between the aquatic and terrestrial environments, have critical functions, such as trapping sediment, filtering nutrients and chemicals, and providing connectivity for wildlife. Healthy riparian areas directly influence our water quality, habitat for wildlife, and the recreation and scenic value of our waters. PMCs have developed solutions to support the delivery of NRCS conservation practices to stabilize shorelines and enhance riparian areas adjacent to agricultural production. In 2013, NRCS established 23,000 acres of new herbaceous or forested riparian areas and established over 50 miles of streambank and shoreline protection. Much of this was successful because of the conservation plants and technology developed by PMCs. A few of the important PMC efforts and the impacts realized from them include:

- Fine tuning and demonstrating the technology needed to successfully restore riparian areas expanding throughout much of the west where invasive shrubs, such as salt cedar (*Tamarisk*) and Russian olive (*Elaeagnus*), have been removed. The Los Lunas, New Mexico, PMC pioneered the use of deep-planted "longstem" trees and shrubs to improve the success of riparian plantings. The results of this work are shared through technical papers, workshops, and training sessions to promote these novel methods. The Bridger, Montana, PMC is participating in a collaborative project with the Agriculture Research Service Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Laboratory to determine the best revegetation techniques to establish native species vegetation after Russian olive removal along the Yellowstone River;
- PMCs in New York, New Jersey, Michigan, and Oregon have been very active in the selection of shrubs used for streambank bioengineering (the practice of using plant materials to stabilize the soil along streams). The success of these plants has been largely due to the accompanying technologies also developed by these PMCs. Some of the most successful conservation plants released by PMCs—'Ruby' red-osier dogwood, 'Streamco' purpleosier willow, and 'Bankers' dwarf willow—continue to be used in streambank stabilization projects;
- In 2013, the New York and New Jersey PMCs released two new selections of prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*). This native grass is an important addition to the plants used in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic States for stabilizing the banks of streams, rivers, and lakes; and
- The New York PMC held a Riparian Forest Buffer Workshop in September 2013 which trained over 150 participants on riparian area ecology, benefits of buffers, tree and shrub selection and establishment, and weed control methods.

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WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATONS

Summary of Increases and Decreases
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual	2013 Change	2014 Change	2015 Change	2015 Estimate
Discretionary Appropriations:					
Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations:					
Emergency Watershed Protection Programs.....	$215,900	+$18,782	-$234,682	-	-
Total Discretionary Appropriations.....	215,900	+18,782	-234,682	-	-

WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATIONS

Project Statement
Appropriations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Appropriations:										
Watershed and Flood Prevention - Regular Appropriation:										
Watershed Operations										
Authorized by P.L. 78-534:										
(a) Technical Assistance.....	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
(b) Financial Assistance.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal, P.L. 78-534.....	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Small Watersheds										
Authorized by P.L. 83-566:										
(a) Technical Assistance.....	-	12	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
(b) Financial Assistance.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal, P.L. 83-566.....	-	12	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Appropriation.....	-	13	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/	$66,110	-	$92,255	-	$242,004	-	-$21,784	-	$220,220	-
Recoveries, Other (Net).....	32,683	-	157,065	-	-220,220	-	-	-	-220,220	-
Total Available.....	98,793	13	249,320	5	21,784	-	-21,784	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/.....	-92,255	-	-242,004	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations.....	6,538	13	7,316	5	21,784	-	-21,784	-	-	-

1/ Includes Reimbursable carryover.

EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

Project Statement
Appropriations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Appropriations:										
Watershed and Flood Prevention - Supplemental Appropriations:										
Emergency Watershed										
Protection Program:										
(a) Technical Assistance.....	$43,180	92	$49,621	76	-	81	-	-81	-	-
(b) Financial Assistance.....	172,720	-	185,061	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Adjusted Approp.....	215,900	92	234,682	76	-	81	-	-81	-	-
Rescissions, transfers,										
and Seq. (Net).....	-	-	10,772	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Appropriation.....	215,900	92	245,454	76	-	81	-	-81	-	-
Rescission.....	-	-	-1,772	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sequestration.....	-	-	-9,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/.....	88,596	-	73,795	-	$124,458	-	-$269,933	-	-$145,475	-
Recoveries, Other (Net).....	-18,062	-	-83,795	-	145,475	-	-	-	145,475	-
Total Available.....	286,434	92	224,682	76	269,933	81	-269,933	-81	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/.....	-73,795	-	-124,458	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations.....	212,639	92	100,224	76	269,933	81	-269,933	-81	-	-

1/ Includes Reimbursable carryover.

WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATIONS

Project Statement
Obligations Details and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Obligations:										
Watershed & Flood Prevention - Regular Appropriation:										
1. Watershed Operations										
Authorized by P.L. 78-534:										
(a) Technical Assistance.....	$97	1	$1	-	$3,037	-	-$3,037	-	-	-
(b) Financial Assistance.....	-50	-	1,502	-	6,022	-	-6,022	-	-	-
Subtotal, P.L. 78-534.....	47	1	1,503	-	9,059	-	-9,059	-	-	-
2. Small Watersheds										
Authorized by P.L. 83-566:										
(a) Technical Assistance.....	1,917	12	708	5	1,380	-	-1,380	-	-	-
(b) Financial Assistance.....	4,574	-	5,105	-	11,345	-	-11,345	-	-	-
Subtotal, P.L. 83-566.....	6,491	12	5,813	5	12,725	-	-12,725	-	-	-
Total Obligations…….....	6,538	13	7,316	5	21,784	-	-21,784	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/.....	92,255	-	242,004	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available.....	98,793	13	249,320	5	21,784	-	-21,784	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/.....	-66,110	-	-92,255	-	-242,004	-	+21,784	-	-$220,220	-
Recoveries, Other (Net).....	-32,683	-	-157,065	-	220,220	-	-	-	220,220	-
Total Appropriation……...	-	13	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-

[1/] Includes Reimbursable carryover.

EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

Project Statement
Obligations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Obligations:										
Watershed & Flood Prevention - Supplemental Appropriations:										
1. Emergency Watershed										
Protection Operations:										
(a) Technical Assistance.....	$25,503	92	$8,195	76	$72,345	81	-$72,345	-81	-	-
(b) Financial Assistance.....	187,136	-	92,029	-	197,588	-	-197,588	-	-	-
Total Obligations…….....	212,639	92	100,224	76	269,933	81	-269,933	-81	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/.....	73,795	-	124,458	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available.....	286,434	92	224,682	76	269,933	81	-269,933	-81	-	-
Rescission.....	-	-	1,772	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sequestration.....	-	-	9,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/.....	-88,596	-	-73,795	-	-124,458	-	+269,933	-	$145,475	-
Recoveries, Other (Net).....	18,062	-	83,795	-	-145,475	-	-	-	-145,475	-
Total Appropriation……...	215,900	92	245,454	76	-	81	-	-81	-	-

[1/] Includes Reimbursable carryover.

WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATIONS

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and Staff Years

(Dollars in thousands)

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Alabama	$5,973	2	$188	1	$43	-	-	-
Alaska	3,565	3	-3	-	1,355	-	-	-
Arizona	1,069	1	555	1	4,860	1	-	-
Arkansas	1,870	2	-	-	473	-	-	-
California	1,367	3	700	2	1,563	1	-	-
Colorado	1,931	1	2	-	14,789	-	-	-
Connecticut	801	1	196	-	372	-	-	-
Delaware	-	-	-6	-	-	-	-	-
Florida	8,035	1	342	-	909	-	-	-
Georgia	379	-	142	-	249	-	-	-
Hawaii	585	1	1,169	-	464	-	-	-
Idaho	740	-	35	-	66	-	-	-
Illinois	-	-	21	-	361	-	-	-
Indiana	1,504	1	250	-	292	-	-	-
Iowa	-66	4	70	-	542	-	-	-
Kansas	140	1	279	-	9	-	-	-
Kentucky	7,901	10	2,417	5	1,097	5	-	-
Louisiana	28	-	541	1	4,031	1	-	-
Maine	69	-	146	1	12	1	-	-
Maryland	-	-	5	-	295	-	-	-
Massachusetts	4,102	1	673	-	268	-	-	-
Michigan	-	-	-42	-	-	-	-	-
Minnesota	1,211	1	354	1	1,349	-	-	-
Mississippi	4,049	6	12	-	7,320	-	-	-
Missouri	31,720	11	20,501	5	1,133	5	-	-
Montana	2,452	4	9	-	27	-	-	-
Nebraska	1,008	-	963	1	60	1	-	-
Nevada	859	-	1,492	2	78	2	-	-
New Hampshire	1,930	2	112	1	406	1	-	-
New Jersey	1,739	1	133	2	1,190	2	-	-
New Mexico	519	-	178	1	8	1	-	-
New York	34,278	3	268	1	11,341	1	-	-
North Carolina	3	-	-	-	5	-	-	-
North Dakota	467	-	1,674	-	1,229	-	-	-
Ohio	1,208	1	1,209	1	214	1	-	-
Oklahoma	2,915	4	4,616	1	634	1	-	-
Oregon	-	-	365	2	1	2	-	-

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Pennsylvania	6,659	6	1,057	3	4,409	3	-	-
Puerto Rico	1,688	-	18,044	2	67	2	-	-
Rhode Island	4,521	2	7,425	1	592	1	-	-
South Carolina	-	-	91	-	87	-	-	-
South Dakota	170	-	874	-	121	-	-	-
Tennessee	5,583	7	9,002	10	1,749	11	-	-
Texas	3,261	7	6,551	7	2,194	7	-	-
Utah	62,349	9	15,628	23	2,750	25	-	-
Vermont	6,034	5	1,562	-	227	-	-	-
Virginia	-	-	137	-	-	-	-	-
Washington	98	-	6	-	401	-	-	-
West Virginia	3,720	1	-	-	12,413	-	-	-
Wisconsin	6	-	-117	-	8	-	-	-
Wyoming	180	-	-	-	26	-	-	-
American Samoa	-	-	-	-	60	-	-	-
Virgin Islands	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-
National Hdqtr	441	3	7,385	6	199,206	4	-	-
National Centers	-	-	-	-	802	-	-	-
Undistributed	116	-	329	-	9,559	-	-	-
Obligations	219,177	105	107,540	81	291,717	81	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	166,050	-	366,462	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Available	385,227	105	474,002	81	291,717	81	-	-

WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATIONS

Classification by Objects
(Dollars in thousands)

		2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Personnel Compensation:					
Washington, D.C.		$441	$439	$459	-
Field		8,060	6,217	6,498	-
11	Total personnel compensation	8,501	6,656	6,957	-
12	Personal benefits	2,545	1,961	2,036	-
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	11,046	8,617	8,993	-
Other Objects:					
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons	587	345	626	-
22.0	Transportation of things	65	2	2	-
23.2	Rental payments to others	-3	130	132	-
23.3	Communications, utilities, and misc. charges	8	22	22	-
24	Printing and reproduction	-	2	2	-
25	Other contractual services	6,971	413	-	-
25.1	Advisory and assistance services	116,619	39,378	66,726	-
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources	6,232	6,609	75,398	-
26.0	Supplies and materials	225	15	14	-
31.0	Equipment	1,323	250	245	-
32.0	Land and structures	2,794	213	-	-
41.0	Grants	73,307	51,543	139,557	-
43.0	Interest and dividends	3	1	-	-
	Total, Other Objects	208,131	98,923	282,724	-
99.9	Total, new obligations	219,177	107,540	291,717	-

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATIONS

STATUS OF PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Watershed Operations) includes the Flood Prevention Operations Program authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1944 (P.L. 78-534) and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program authorized by (P.L. 83-566; 16 U.S.C 1001-1008). Through Watershed Operations, the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to provide technical and financial assistance to entities of State and local governments and Tribes (project sponsors) for planning and installing watershed projects.

Program Objectives. The Flood Control Act authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to install watershed improvement measures in 11 watersheds to reduce flood, sedimentation, and erosion damage; improve the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water; and advance the conservation and proper utilization of land. Working in cooperation with soil conservation districts and other local sponsoring organizations, NRCS prepares detailed sub-watershed plans that outline soil and water management problems and proposals to alleviate the problems. Proposals can include estimated benefits and costs, cost-sharing arrangements, and operation and maintenance arrangements.

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act provides for cooperation between the Federal government and the States and their political subdivisions in a program to prevent erosion, floodwater, and sediment damage; to further the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water; and to further the conservation and proper utilization of land in authorized watersheds.

2013 Activities.

No 2013 funds were appropriated for Watershed Protection (P.L. 83-566) or Flood Prevention (P.L. 78-534) programs. Carryover funding was used to complete construction on existing projects and to continue planning and design work. Congressionally-designated project funding accounts for a significant portion of this continuing work.

Flood prevention and other activities of the Flood Control Act and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act provided the following estimated cumulative benefits in 2013. Benefits reported below are from projects currently entered into the NRCS Programs Operations Information Tracking System.

Monetary Benefits.

- Agricultural flood prevention benefits: $347 million. This value includes all crop and pasture damage reduction benefits as well as all other agricultural damage reduction benefits;
- Non-agricultural flood prevention benefits: $455 million. Non-agricultural flood damage prevention measures protected roads, bridges, homes, and other structures that exist in the floodplain;
- Agricultural benefits not related to flood prevention: $435 million. Benefits are associated with erosion control, animal waste management, water conservation, water quality improvement, irrigation efficiency, change in land use, etc; and
- Non-agricultural benefits not related to flood prevention: $943 million. Benefits are associated with recreation, fish and wildlife, rural water supply, water quality, municipal and industrial water supply, and incidental recreation uses, etc.

Environmental Benefits.

- Acres with nutrient management applied: 674,283
- Tons of animal waste properly disposed: 4,801,640
- Tons of soil saved from erosion: 90,198,341
- Miles of streams and corridors enhanced or protected: 47,513
- Acres of lakes and reservoirs enhanced or protected: 2,518,613
- Acre-feet of water conserved: 1,846,147
- Acres of wetlands created, enhanced, or restored: 279,375

- Acres of upland wildlife habitat created, enhanced, or restored: 9,150,271

Social and Community Benefits.
- Number of people impacted: 48,319,180
- Number of farms and ranches: 181,551
- Number of bridges: 61,702
- Number of public facilities: 3,663
- Number of businesses: 46,586
- Number of homes: 611,093
- Number of domestic water supplies: 27,874

Status of Flood Prevention Projects Authorized by the Flood Control Act. The 11 authorized flood prevention projects include relatively large areas so work plans were developed on a sub-watershed basis as shown below. As of September 30, 2013, the total planning is about 99 percent completed, with work in 439 plans covering approximately 30 million acres. The following table summarizes the status of sub-watershed planning by authorized project:

Flood Prevention Project	Total Authorized Area	Potential Sub-watersheds		Project Plans Completed through September 30, 2013	
	Acres	No. of Plans	Acres	No. of Plans	Acres
Buffalo Creek, NY [a/]	279,680	3	279,680	3	279,680
Middle Colorado, TX	4,613,120	17	3,703,520	17	3,703,520
Coosa, GA,TN [a/]	1,339,400	16	1,174,650	16	1,174,650
Little Sioux, IA	1,740,800	124	1,050,093	122	1,033,578
Little Tallahatchie, MS	963,977	18	625,274 [b/]	18	625,274
Los Angeles, CA [a/]	536,960	10	127,627 [c/]	10	127,627
Potomac, MD,PA,VA,WV	4,205,400	31	4,205,400	30	3,094,543
Santa Ynez, CA	576,000	5	50,743 [d/]	5	50,743
Trinity, TX	10,769,266	36	10,769,266	36	10,769,266
Washita, OK, TX	5,184,362	57	5,184,362	57	5,184,362
Yazoo, MS	7,661,278	125	3,955,124	125	4,061,424
Total	37,870,243	442	31,125,739	439	30,104,667

[a/] The Buffalo Creek Watershed was completed and closed in 1964 and reopened in 1992 for repairs. The Coosa Watershed was completed and closed in 1981. The Los Angeles Watershed is completed.
[b/]/ Does not include 96,501 acres of Sardis Reservoir area or 304,000 acres in minor watersheds needing only land treatment measures.
[c/] Includes National forest and other lands for which the Forest Service has been assigned program responsibility.
[d/] Does not include 195,818 acres of reservoir area.

The estimated Federal cost for each watershed and total Federal obligations through 2013 are listed in the table below:

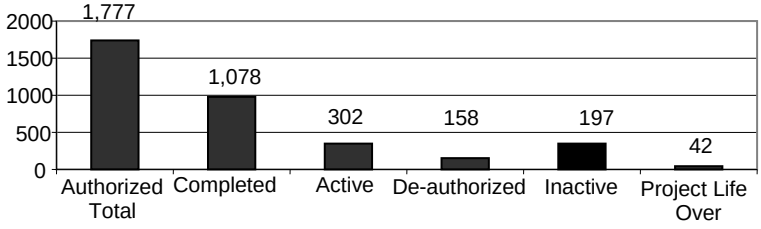
Flood Prevention Project	Estimated Total Federal Cost	Obligations (cumulative $)
Buffalo Creek Watershed, NY (Complete)[a/]	$ 7,827,746	$ 6,287,347
Middle Colorado River Watershed, TX	71,111,062	63,062,722
Coosa River Watershed, GA and TN (Complete)[a/]	18,999,247	18,264,485
Little Sioux River Watershed, IA	98,581,921	94,543,443
Little Tallahatchie River Watershed, MS	69,501,448	76,321,851
Los Angeles River Watershed, CA(Complete)[a/]	60,597,017	60,297,017
Potomac River Watershed, MD, PA, VA, and WV	201,227,958	149,368,394
Santa Ynez River Watershed, CA	41,386,536	40,786,536
Trinity River Watershed, TX	331,241,632	211,172,331
Washita River Watershed, OK and TX	202,491,055	194,288,752
Yazoo River Watershed, MS	252,957,352	251,468,563
Total	1,355,922,974	1,165,861,441

[a/] The Buffalo Creek Watershed was completed and closed in 1964 and reopened in 1992 for repairs. The Coosa Watershed was completed and closed in 1981. The Los Angeles Watershed is completed.

Status of Watershed Projects Authorized by the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act. Watershed project plans are prepared by local sponsoring organizations with assistance from NRCS and submitted to NRCS with requests for Federal funding authorization. Watershed projects involving an estimated Federal contribution in excess of $5 million for construction, or construction of any single structure having a capacity in excess of 2,500 acre-feet of water storage, require authorization by Congressional committee. The Chief of NRCS authorizes the use of Watershed Operations funds for all other projects. Watershed projects are limited to 250,000 acres and cannot include any single structure that provides more than 12,500 acre-feet of floodwater detention capacity, or more than 25,000 acre-feet of total capacity.

After authorization, technical and financial assistance may be provided to local sponsoring organizations for installation of work specified in the plans. At the end of 2013, of the 1,777 projects authorized by the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, 1,078 have been completed, 302 remain active, with the others de-authorized or inactive, as shown in the table below.

2013 P.L. 83-566 Watersheds Project Status



Watershed Projects Authorized for Funding. No new projects were authorized in 2013 for funding under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act within available funds, as no funds were appropriated for this program.

Unfunded Authorized Projects. Several projects are authorized but unfunded; $921 million is needed to install the remaining measures in the 302 active watershed projects. When installed, these floodwater dams, reservoirs, and other conservation practices will reduce potential flood damages in 300 communities, provide agricultural water supply in 78 communities, improve water quality in 148 stream segments, install water conservation measures in 22 projects, and enhance, restore or create wildlife habitat in 65 projects.

Unfunded Authorized Watershed Projects as of September 30, 2013

State	P.L. 83-566 Watershed Protection And Flood Prevention	P.L. 78-534 Flood Control Act	Total
Alabama	$ 3,620,000	-	$ 3,620,000
Alaska	15,000,000	-	15,000,000
Arkansas	49,356,129	-	49,356,129
California	21,373,000	-	21,373,000
Colorado	6,170,000	-	6,170,000
Hawaii	33,325,000	-	33,325,000
Indiana	4,500,000	-	4,500,000
Iowa	36,515,000	$7,300,000	43,815,000
Kansas	36,732,700	-	36,732,700
Louisiana	3,750,000	-	3,750,000
Massachusetts	23,960,000	-	23,960,000
Minnesota	1,327,400	-	1,327,400
Mississippi	7,000,000	38,094,100	45,094,100
Missouri	111,230,000	-	111,230,000
Montana	3,664,500	-	3,664,500
Nebraska	2,000,000	-	2,000,000
New Mexico	7,189,500	-	7,189,500
New York	10,537,557	-	10,537,557
North Carolina	22,303,280	-	22,303,280
North Dakota	7,870,000	-	7,870,000
Ohio	13,555,000	-	13,555,000
Oklahoma	122,910,000	3,357,100	126,267,100
Oregon	430,000	-	430,000
Pennsylvania	8,135,000	-	8,135,000
Tennessee	19,152,326	-	19,152,326
Texas	105,854,000	139,200,000	245,054,000
Virginia	9,552,146	-	9,552,146
West Virginia	17,025,000	26,089,541	43,114,541
Wyoming	850,800	-	850,800
Pacific Basin	2,150,000	-	2,150,000
Total	707,038,338	214,040,741	921,079,079

Loan Programs under the Flood Control Act and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act. Both programs provide for loans and loan services to finance the local share of the costs of installing, repairing, or enhancing works of improvement and water storage facilities; purchasing sites or rights-of-way; and other costs in approved watershed and flood prevention projects.

As of the end of 2013, 35 borrowers held loans with an unpaid principal amount of $6.9 million. Over the life of the program, 495 loans have been made at a value of approximately $176 million.

Get Conservation on the Ground.
Tennessee: Cane Creek Watershed. Erosion along Cane Creek, located in southwestern Memphis, led to the loss of tons of healthy soil and farmland and the crippling of bridges due to unstable stream banks. This stream watershed stabilization project has helped fortify Cane Creek's banks, protect valuable farmland. and protect the residents of Ripley. The Cane Creek Watershed District recently completed the three-year, nine-month project. More than 1,000 acres of prime farmland soils have been protected from erosion. Six public bridges were preserved and NRCS prevented hundreds of thousands of tons of eroded soil and sediment being deposited downstream each year. Partnerships between the landowners, local, State and Federal agencies, environmental agencies and conservation-focused organizations paved the way to success.

Missouri: East Locust Creek Watershed. The original East Locust Creek Watershed Project was signed in 1987. Since then, 72 small, floodwater-retarding structures have been installed within the watershed. The original project is being replaced with a revised watershed plan that NRCS helped develop on behalf of the project sponsors. The sponsors revised the project primarily to add a multiple-purpose reservoir that will provide seven million gallons of water per day for public consumption. The reservoir will provide water for 54,000 residents in 10 north central Missouri counties: Adair, Chariton, Grundy, Linn, Livingston, Macon, Mercer, Putnam, Schuyler, and Sullivan. The multiple-purpose reservoir and 22 small, floodwater-retarding structures will reduce flood damages to cropland, pasture, roads, and bridges by an additional 22 percent. Project costs include: Construction of Multiple-Purpose Reservoir $28 million; Construction of 22 Small FWR Structures $1.4 million; Real Property (Acquisition, Easements, Infrastructure) $16 million; Engineering Services $6.4 million; and Project Administration $2.8 million for a total Estimated Project Cost of $55 million.

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

STATUS OF PROGRAM

Current Activities.
Background. The Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) is authorized by Section 216 of the Flood EWPP Control Act of 1950 P.L. 81-516 (33 U.S.C. 701b-1) and Sections 403-405 of the Agricultural Credit Act of 1978 P.L. 95-334 (16 U.S.C. 2203-2205). The Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 amended Section 403 by including the purchase of floodplain easements as an emergency measure authorized under EWPP.

Program Objectives. EWPP was established to respond to emergencies created by natural disasters, including floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences. EWPP work includes removing debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges; reshaping and protecting eroded banks; correcting damaged drainage facilities; repairing levees and structures; reseeding damaged areas; and purchasing floodplain easements.

Program Operations. EWPP projects (except for the purchase of floodplain easements) must be sponsored by a legal subdivision of the State, including any city, county, general improvement district, or conservation district, or by a Native American Tribe or Tribal organization, as defined in Section 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Public and private landowners are eligible for assistance, but must be represented by a project sponsor. Sponsors are responsible for securing land rights to do repair work, the necessary permits, and the local share of the funding, and for getting the work installed. NRCS may provide up to 75 percent of the construction cost of emergency measures (or up to 90 percent within limited resource areas as identified by Department of Commerce Census data). The remaining funding must come from local sources as cash or in-kind services. Work can

be done through either Federal or local contracts. EWPP work is not limited to a particular set of prescribed measures, but is determined by NRCS on a case-by-case basis. It is not necessary for a national emergency to be declared for an area to be eligible for assistance.

EWPP Floodplain Easements. NRCS may purchase EWPP easements on any floodplain lands that have been impaired within the last 12 months or that have a history of repeated flooding (i.e., flooded at least twice during the past ten years). Under the floodplain easement option, a landowner voluntarily offers to sell a permanent conservation easement that provides NRCS full authority to restore and enhance the floodplain. Most easement transactions are on agricultural lands, but a small component of the program involves rural land with residences or other structures. These types of easement transactions are only offered where the easement acquisition is part of a broader watershed effort to minimize future flood damage and a local sponsor will acquire fee title to the land encumbered by the easement.

NRCS may pay up to 100 percent of the restoration costs of the easement. Restoration efforts include the removal of buildings or other structures in the floodplain, and the restoration of floodplain function through both structural and non-structural conservation practices. To the extent practicable, NRCS actively restores the natural features and characteristics of the floodplain by re-creating the topographic diversity and re-establishing native vegetation.

The landowner has the opportunity to participate in the restoration efforts. Landowners retain several rights to the property, including quiet enjoyment, the right to control public access, and the right to undeveloped recreational use such as hunting and fishing. At any time, a landowner may obtain authorization from NRCS to engage in other activities, provided the agency determines the activities will further the protection and enhancement of the floodplain easements.

Cumulative Program Activity (Through End of 2013)	
Enrolled Easements (Permanent)	**Cumulative**
Number of Easements	1,420
Number of Acres	184,235
Closed Easements (Permanent)	**Cumulative**
Number of Easements	1,414
Number of Acres	184,230

2013 Activities.

In 2013, using prior year funds, NRCS closed 20 enrolled easements, which encompass approximately 89 acres. Additionally, the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-2) made up to $136.8 million available for the purchase and restoration of floodplain easements through the EWPP-Floodplain Easement Program (EWPP-FPE) in States affected by Hurricane Sandy. The President declared disaster areas under the Stafford Act in twelve northeastern States, making them eligible for EWPP-FPE funding, including: Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and West Virginia.

In spring 2013, NRCS began efforts to identify and enroll eligible lands in permanent FPE easements. Since that time, participating States have completed multi-agency outreach efforts that informed affected landowners of the programs availability and the creation of State-specific programmatic ranking criteria that guide NRCS selection of applications for funding. States initiated and conducted an eight week sign-up period ending on September 2, 2013. At the conclusion of the sign-up period, States immediately began working with applicants to compile any additional information required for the applications to be ranked and considered for funding, including verification of application eligibility, development of preliminary restoration plans and associated preliminary costs estimates, and the assignment of ranking scores.

In 2013, the EWPP was provided $234.7 million, after sequester, for EWPP recovery efforts occurring from natural disasters; 44 projects were funded stemming from 26 natural disasters. The table below reports the number of projects funded, unfunded and completed. The economic benefit (National Emergency Watershed Protection Program Manual, Section 513.1 Final Report, Part A) identify completed projects at $1.6 billion providing a benefit to cost ratio of 12.3/1.0.

EWPP Costs and Benefits (Through September 30, 2013)	
General	
No. of disaster projects funded	44
No. of disaster projects unfunded	40
No. of projects completed	30
Costs	
Technical assistance	$ 11,864,370
Financial assistance	114,704,981
Local contribution	6,333,582
Total costs	132,902,933
Benefits	
Public buildings protected (no.)	924
Private buildings protected (no.)	47,705
Roads protected (miles)	457
Utilities protected (no.)	1,301
Value of property protected	$40,931,931,115
Debris removed (feet)	386,193
Streambank stabilized (feet)	1,182,382
Land protected (acres)	52,623
No. of 8(a) contracts	19
Value of 8(a) contracts	$1,849,699
Total economic benefit	$1,639,813,809
Costs / Benefit Ratio	12.3/1.0
No. of Persons Benefited	
Minority	3,585,851
Other	5,697,843
Total	9,283,694

Get Conservation on the Ground.

Kentucky. The City of Owensboro is making steady progress on a $1.3 million project to stabilize the eroding and damaged banks of Persimmon Ditch. This is a joint effort between the Department of Agriculture, City of Owensboro, and Daviess County Fiscal Court. This ditch is along the city-county boundary and runs through the area of Ewing Road, Industrial Drive, and Audubon Acres subdivision which is an important waterway that drains into the northwestern portion of the city.

In 2012, heavy spring floods triggered vast sections of the creek's banks to breakdown and slide into the creek, uncovering gas and sewer lines and drain in the backyards of homes along the creek. In March 2013, State Conservationist Karen A. Woodrich, on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, and Owensboro City Commissioner, Pam Smithwright signed an Emergency Watershed Protection Agreement that authorized the Federal government to provide 75 percent of the funds ($975,000) needed to repair nine specific areas of the Persimmon Ditch.

Allegany County, Maryland rebuilds one year after Hurricane Sandy. Hurricane Sandy's effect on the Atlantic coastline is well-known, but the superstorm also caused damage to inland streams, rivers and surrounding areas. In Western Maryland's Allegany County, Sandy's heavy rain and increased river flows caused major erosion to riverbanks. Several streams flooded and damaged the only road into a number of communities, leaving residents stranded.

In the aftermath of Sandy, EWPP funding was used at seven different sites to help Allegany County stabilize streambanks to protect roadways and underground utilities. Allegany County used imbricated riprap, a stability technique that involves stacking two to four ton rocks into the side of the bank. The riprap will help prevent future

damage from erosion to the streambanks, and reduce the downstream effects of sediment. The riprap also provides habitat for many aquatic species. Through the assistance provided by EWPP, residents of Allegany County now have peace of mind that their roads and property will be protected in future storm events.

WATERSHED REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The estimates include appropriation language for this item as follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

Watershed Rehabilitation Program

[Under the authorities of section 14 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, $12,000,000 is provided.]

The change in the 2015 Budget includes no funding for this program.

WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Lead-Off Tabular Statement

Budget Estimate, 2015	-
2014 Enacted	$12,000,000
Change in Appropriation	-12,000,000

WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Summary of Increases and Decreases
(On basis of appropriation)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual	2013 Change	2014 Change	2015 Change	2015 Estimate
Discretionary Appropriations:					
Watershed Rehabilitation:					
1. Technical Assistance	$7,500	-$2,996	+$296	-$4,800	-
2. Financial Assistance	7,500	+1,579	-1,879	-7,200	-
Total Discretionary Appropriations	15,000	-1,417	-1,583	-12,000	-

Note: The Agricultural Act of 2014 provided $250 million of mandatory Small Watershed Rehabilitation funding, which is presented with other Farm Bill programs in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Programs. The $153 million in mandatory funding currently available is proposed to be unavailable for obligation in the 2015 Budget (see General Provisions Sec. 714 for the Department of Agriculture).

WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Project Statement
Appropriations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Appropriations:										
Watershed Rehabilitation Appropriations:										
Technical Assistance	$7,500	59	$4,504	29	$4,800	23	-$4,800	-23	-	-
Financial Assistance	7,500	-	9,079	-	7,200	-	-7,200	-	-	-
Total, Available or Est.	15,000	59	13,583	29	12,000	23	-12,000	-23	-	-
Rescissions, transfers, and Seq. (Net)	-	-	1,117	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Appropriation	15,000	59	14,700	29	12,000	23	-12,000 (1)	-23	-	-
Rescission	-	-	-398	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sequestration	-	-	-719	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/	12,377	-	6,231	-	5,944	-	-5,944	-	-	-
Recoveries, Other (Net)	250	-	2,205	-	-1	-	1	-	-	-
Total Available	27,627	59	22,019	29	17,943	23	-17,943	-23	-	-
Lapsing Balance	-	-	-146	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/	-6,327	-	-5,944	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations	21,300	59	15,929	29	17,943	23	-17,943	-23	-	-

1/ Includes Reimbursable carryover.

Project Statement
Obligations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Obligations:										
Watershed Rehabilitation Obligations:										
Technical Assistance	$10,234	59	$11,005	29	$7,544	23	-$7,544	-23	-	-
Financial Assistance	11,066	-	4,924	-	10,399	-	-10,399	-	-	-
Total Obligations	21,300	59	15,929	29	17,943	23	-17,943	-23	-	-
Lapsing Balance 2/	-	-	146	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY 1/	6,327	-	5,944	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available	27,627	59	22,019	29	17,943	23	-17,943	-23	-	-
Rescission	-	-	398	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sequestration	-	-	719	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY 1/	-12,377	-	-6,231	-	-5,944	-	+5,944	-	-	-
Recoveries, Other (Net)	-250	-	-2,205	-	1	-	-1	-	-	-
Total, Appropriation	15,000	59	14,700	29	12,000	23	-12,000	-23	-	-

1/ Includes Reimbursable carryover.

Justification of Increases and Decreases

(1) A decrease of $12,000,000 and 23 staff years for Watershed Rehabilitation ($12,000,000 and 23 staff years available in 2014):

Since 1948, local communities have constructed more than 11,788 watershed dams with assistance from NRCS. These dams provide flood control protection for America's communities and natural resources, but many also serve as primary sources of drinking water, recreation areas, and wildlife habitat. These projects have become an integral part of the communities they were designed to protect. Like highways, utilities, and other public infrastructure, these dams need to be maintained to protect public health and safety and to meet changing resource needs. No funding is requested in the 2015 Budget, reflecting the Administration's position that the maintenance, repair and operation of these dams are the responsibility of local project sponsors.

WATERSHED REHABILITATION

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and Staff Years

(Dollars in thousands)

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Alabama	-	-	$9	-	$10	-	-	-
Arizona	$264	3	7,415	3	8,359	3	-	-
Arkansas	-	-	30	-	34	-	-	-
California	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Colorado	-1	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Connecticut	-	-	42	-	47	-	-	-
Georgia	57	-	4	-	4	-	-	-
Hawaii	-	-	6	-	7	-	-	-
Idaho	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Illinois	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Indiana	-	-	10	-	11	-	-	-
Iowa	-	-	15	-	17	-	-	-
Kansas	-232	2	477	2	538	1	-	-
Kentucky	-	-	498	-	561	-	-	-
Louisiana	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-
Maine	-	-	2	-	3	-	-	-
Maryland	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Massachusetts	1,612	2	508	1	572	1	-	-
Michigan	-	-	2	-	2	-	-	-
Mississippi	76	1	23	-	26	-	-	-
Missouri	6	-	15	-	17	-	-	-
Montana	-5	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Nebraska	1,018	5	225	2	253	2	-	-
Nevada	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
New Hampshire	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
New Jersey	1	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
New Mexico	170	1	20	-	23	-	-	-
New York	200	1	220	2	248	2	-	-
North Carolina	-	-	9	-	10	-	-	-
North Dakota	7,933	3	14	1	16	-	-	-
Ohio	15	-	14	-	15	-	-	-
Oklahoma	3,649	11	748	6	844	4	-	-
Pennsylvania	152	1	558	1	629	1	-	-
South Carolina	-	-	7	-	8	-	-	-
South Dakota	-	-	4	-	5	-	-	-
Tennessee	62	1	432	-	487	1	-	-
Texas	752	7	13	1	15	-	-	-
Utah	547	1	1,129	-	1,273	-	-	-

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Washington.....	49	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vermont.....	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Virginia.....	1,849	5	2,636	5	2,969	3	-	-
West Virginia.....	1,014	5	375	1	423	1	-	-
Wisconsin.....	-	-	5	-	6	-	-	-
Wyoming.....	133	-	8	-	10	-	-	-
National Hdqtr.....	1,980	10	407	4	440	4	-	-
Obligations.....	21,300	59	15,929	29	17,943	23	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY.....	6,327	-	5,944	-	-	-	-	-
Lapsing Balance.....	-	-	146	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Available.....	27,627	59	22,019	29	17,943	23	-	-

WATERSHED REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Classification by Objects
(Dollars in thousands)

		2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Personnel Compensation:					
Washington D.C.		$1,094	$320	$245	-
Field		3,766	1,998	1,527	-
11	Total personnel compensation	4,860	2,318	1,772	-
12	Personal benefits	1,302	671	513	-
13.0	Benefits for former personnel	-1	-	-	-
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	6,161	2,989	2,285	-
Other Objects:					
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons	137	45	84	-
22.0	Transportation of things	17	-	-	-
23.2	Rental payments to others	-13	21	34	-
	Communications, utilities, and misc. charges	50	-3	-	-
24.0	Printing and reproduction	7	-	-	-
25	Other contractual services	1,725	6,365	8,221	-
25.1	Advisory and assistance services	4,173	134	173	-
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources	1,542	1,436	1,855	-
26.0	Supplies and materials	16	99	186	-
31.0	Equipment	466	53	100	-
41.0	Grants	7,018	4,790	5,005	-
42.0	Insurance and loans	-	-	-	-
43.0	Interest and dividends	1	-	-	-
	Total, Other Objects	15,139	12,940	15,658	-
99.9	Total, new obligations	21,300	15,929	17,943	-

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
WATERSHED REHABILITATION PROGRAM

STATUS OF PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. In November 2000, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (P.L. 83-566) was amended by the Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments of 2000 (Section 313 of P.L. 106-472), which authorized NRCS to assist communities to address public health and safety concerns and environmental impacts of aging dams. The amendment allowed NRCS to provide technical and financial assistance for the planning, design, and implementation of rehabilitation projects that may include upgrading or removing dams past their useful life.

Program Objectives. The purpose of the Watershed Rehabilitation Program is to extend the service life of dams and bring them into compliance with applicable safety and performance standards, or to decommission the dams so they no longer pose a threat to life and property.

Since 1948, local communities have constructed more than 11,800 watershed dams with assistance from NRCS. Local sponsors provided leadership in the program and secured land rights and easements needed for construction. NRCS provided technical assistance and cost sharing for construction. Local sponsors assumed responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the structures once they were completed. These dams protect America's communities and natural resources with flood control, and many provide the primary source of drinking water in the area or offer recreation and wildlife benefits.

Some communities that have been protected by these watershed dams are now vulnerable to devastation caused by flooding because the dams have reached or will soon reach the end of their 50-year design life. By the end of 2013 a total of 3,224 watershed dams had reached the end of their designed life-span, and another 1,525 dams will be added to that total by the end of 2016, for a total of 4,749. Time has taken its toll on many dams: spillway pipes have deteriorated and reservoirs have filled with sediment. More significantly, the area around many dams has changed over time as subdivisions and businesses have been built on what was once agricultural land. Thus, a dam failure could pose a serious threat to the health and safety of those living downstream and to the communities that depend on the reservoir for drinking water, and could have serious adverse environmental effects.

Program Operations. The Watershed Rehabilitation Program's highest priority is to rehabilitate dams that pose the greatest risk to public safety. These dams are classified as high hazard in the national dam safety classification system. Dams classified in the three-tier system as low or significant hazard to public safety will not be planned for rehabilitation until all high-hazard dam project requests from public sponsors have been rehabilitated. In 2013, NRCS completed assessments on 17 high-hazard dams where local communities have requested assistance to evaluate the condition and safety of their dams.

Dams installed through the following programs administered by NRCS are eligible for rehabilitation assistance: the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (the Watershed Operations Program (specifically Public Law 83-566)), Pilot Watershed Projects authorized by the Agriculture Appropriation Act of 1953, and the Resource Conservation and Development Program.

NRCS may provide up to 65 percent of the total cost of dam rehabilitation projects, which includes the acquisition of land, easements, rights-of-way, project administration, non-Federal technical assistance, and construction. NRCS provides technical assistance to conduct technical studies; develop rehabilitation plans; develop environmental impact statements or environmental assessments; prepare the engineering designs; and provide construction management services; including construction inspection. Local sponsors are required to provide 35 percent of the total project cost.

The implementation strategy for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program has three phases, all of which require requests from a local public sponsor: 1) conduct dam assessments to evaluate the condition of dams, including safety hazards, and to provide preliminary alternatives for rehabilitation; 2) prepare project plans for implementation; and 3) implement dam rehabilitation.

Partnerships among local communities, State governments, and NRCS leverage services and funds to allow many projects to move quickly through the planning and implementation stages.

- Technical capacity. NRCS does not have technical staff capacity to respond to all requests for watershed rehabilitation assistance from project sponsors. In 2013, NRCS renewed and will continue its national contract with Architectural and Engineering (A&E) Service consulting companies to perform dam assessments, rehabilitation planning, engineering designs, and construction inspection services under NRCS guidance. Also, some sponsors have used either their own professional staff or acquired technical services as part of their "in-kind" contribution to meet their 35 percent cost-share requirement; and
- Financial assistance. Sponsors have used many innovative means to obtain the funds necessary to address the rehabilitation of the aging dams that were threatening their local communities. They have used the sale of bonds dedicated to dam safety and rehabilitation, levied taxes on beneficiaries, obtained grants, used State appropriations, sought voluntary land rights from private landowners, and provided in-kind services using existing staff.

Annually, NRCS ranks all dam rehabilitation funding applications for planning, design, and construction, based on a numerical Risk Index and Failure Index that relates to the overall condition of a dam and the population at risk downstream of the dam.

2013 Activities.

In 2013, project sponsors submitted requests for Federal assistance totaling $42.8 million for the assessment, planning, design, and implementation of rehabilitation for 92 high priority dams in 21 States, which is a part of the total NRCS portfolio.

NRCS contracted with USEngineering Solutions Corporation (USES) to improve the web-based software tool called *DamWatch*, for use in monitoring potential dam safety concerns nationwide. This tool monitors, in real-time, the status of dams negatively affected by storms and other events. In 2013, funding was provided to 48 States and Puerto Rico to continue implementation of the *DamWatch* software Tool. Funding provided varied between $5,000 and $15,000, based on the number of dams in each state. This initiative allowed States to provide training to staff and sponsors in the use of the *DamWatch*.

In 2013, NRCS continued to provide funding and promoted assessments of high-hazard dams, monitored costs, and examined the rehabilitation program to ensure equitable delivery in economically-disadvantaged areas. NRCS entered into four Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with State dam safety agencies (bringing the total to 33), which helps State and National agencies ensure uniformity of standards for high hazard dams.

Summary of Watershed Rehabilitation Projects and Allocations as of September 30, 2013

State	Total Number of Funded Dam Rehabilitation Projects 2000 –2013	Number of Dams Rehabilitated	2013 Federal Allocations of WF-07 (No Year Funds)[a/]	2013 Federal Allocations of WF-84 (Annual Funds)
Alabama	1	1	-	-
Arizona	12	2	-	$7,373,000
Arkansas	6	1	-	-
California	1	-	-	-
Colorado	3	-	-	-
Connecticut	2	-		40,000
Georgia	24	7	-	-
Indiana	1	1	-	-
Iowa	4	4	-	-
Kansas	5	2	$125,000	-
Kentucky	5	1	-	488,000
Massachusetts	6	1	-	-
Mississippi	24	17	-	-
Missouri	5	2	-	-
Montana	2	-	-	-
Nebraska	14	8	415,640	-
New Jersey	2	-	-	-
New Mexico	11	3	-	20,000
New York	6	-	-	217,375
North Dakota	3	-	209,100	-
Ohio	9	8	-	9,000
Oklahoma	50	32	265,000	480,000
Pennsylvania	4	1	220,000	385,000
Tennessee	4	2	-	404,000
Texas	20	14	17,735	286,000
Utah	11	-	120,000	998,500
Virginia	12	8	354,783	2,295,000
West Virginia	5	1	26,700	360,253
Wisconsin	15	11	-	-
Wyoming	1	-	-	-
Dam Watch Initiative	-	-	401,250	-
NHQ	-	-	-	206,492
Total	268	127	2,155,208	13,562,620

[a/] Allocations include assessments, project planning, design, and implementation. Carryover funds, prior year recoveries, and annual funds are also included in the allocation. The dams funded in 2013, as shown in the table above, represent a partial list of the 141 projects that have been previously funded. Additionally, NRCS funded and completed 17 assessments of high hazard dams that provided communities with technical information about the condition of their dams and alternatives for rehabilitation of dams that do not currently meet Federal dam safety standards.

Project Status and Benefits. From 2000 through 2013, rehabilitation of 268 dams in 30 States was authorized, and rehabilitation of 127 dams was completed. The remaining 141 rehabilitation projects are being implemented, subject to funding priorities. The following table summarizes the benefits for both agricultural and non-agricultural lands provided by the completed projects:

Average annual floodwater damage reduction benefits :	$6,907,294
Average annual non-floodwater damage reduction benefits :	$7,046,468
Number of people with reduced risk downstream from the dams :	13,399
Number of people who benefit from project action:	285,155
Number of homes and businesses benefiting from project action:	9,953
Number of farms and ranches benefiting from project action:	872
Number of bridges benefiting from project action:	342

Getting Conservation on the Ground.

Oklahoma: Web-based Dam Monitoring Pilot Project. From 2011 thru 2013, NRCS and the Oklahoma Conservation Commission worked with USEngineering Solutions Corporation to implement *DamWatch*, a system to monitor and store data for 2,100 watershed dams in Oklahoma. *DamWatch* is a patented web-based monitoring software system that allows watershed sponsors and NRCS personnel to monitor, in real-time, and respond to potentially destructive flood events. *DamWatch* gathers and archives real-time rainfall and stream flow data from sources such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Weather Service (NWS), and the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The system compares rainfall data against established site-specific thresholds of dam capacity and then alerts predetermined staff of potential spillway flows at specific dams.

The *DamWatch* system employs an automatic messaging system that alerts users through various means such as cellular phones, pagers, fax transmissions, or e-mails. Users can monitor messages during critical flood events and appropriate staff can be dispatched as needed to those dams for which alerts were issued during a storm event. The *DamWatch* system also stores site-specific data such as as-built drawings, inspection reports, operation and maintenance agreements, emergency action plans, photos, videos, and watershed benefits data. This data can be accessed via remote means to allow interaction between on-site personnel and specialists in various offices. The pilot project has been very successful in its first year of operation. After a competitive solicitation, NRCS is partnering with USES through a nationwide contract for monitoring over 11,800 watershed dams in 48 States. The nationwide system was operational in late 2013.

Arkansas: Poteau River No. 5. Located northeast of Waldron, Arkansas, this dam was constructed in 1964 as a multi-purpose dam providing flood control and a municipal water supply for Waldron (population of 3,500) and surrounding areas. The dam was constructed by local watershed project sponsors with the assistance of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program. It is one of 16 dams in the Poteau River Watershed Project. Rehabilitation included raising the height of the dam and the elevation of the principal spillway inlet. The dam was originally designed as a low hazard dam with a 50-year design life. It was reclassified as a high-hazard dam because of development downstream. Federal funds for the project came from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), with local matching funds being provided. This dam provides protection for the lives and property of 80 residents downstream. Twenty homes, several commercial properties, farm and poultry operations, and a highway will be protected from flooding. The dam also provides 2,100 acre feet of water supply storage for 4,000 people in the City of Waldron and other areas of Scott County. Rehabilitation of the dam brought it up to current State dam safety criteria and extended its life and its benefits for another 100 years. Local partners included the City of Waldron, Arkansas, the Poteau River Watershed Improvement District, and the Poteau River Conservation District.

Oklahoma: Caney Coon 2M. Known locally as Coalgate Reservoir, the dam is located north of Coalgate, Oklahoma. The dam was constructed in 1965 by the City of Coalgate and Coal County Conservation District with the assistance of the Oklahoma Conservation Commission and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program. The dam provides flood control, municipal water for the City of Coalgate, and recreational areas. When the Caney Coon Creek Watershed Project was developed in 1958 the population of Coalgate was 2,300. Thirteen water wells were drilled between 1910 and 1953, but only five wells were still producing and they were only providing 160,000 gallons of water per day. Because wells were not going to be an option in the future, Caney Coon Watershed Dam No. 2M was planned as a multipurpose structure. The City funded an additional 3,000 acre feet of water storage beyond what was

needed for flood control to serve as a water supply. The dam is one of three dams in the Caney Coon Watershed project, located in Coal County. These dams provide over $357,000 in average annual benefits in flood protection for 53 farms and ranches and numerous county roads and bridges. The dam was originally designed as a low-hazard dam with a 50-year design life. It was reclassified as a high-hazard dam because of development downstream. Because of its age and because it no longer met current high hazard dam safety criteria, the dam was rehabilitated in 2012-2013. Rehabilitation included removing and disposing of the existing concrete principal spillway, constructing a new concrete principal spillway to meet current NRCS requirements, and constructing a 300-foot- wide roller compacted concrete auxiliary spillway. Construction on the project began in October 2012 and was completed in July 2013. Rehabilitation of the dam extends the life of the dam for another 100 years. The lake will continue to provide a quality water supply for over 80 percent of Coal County's population, and it will continue to provide flood protection for the City of Coalgate, agricultural land, roads and bridges.

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RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Project Statement
Obligations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual Amount	SYs	2013 Actual Amount	SYs	2014 Estimate Amount	SYs	Inc. or Dec. Amount	SYs	2015 Estimate Amount	SYs
Discretionary Obligations:										
Resource Conservation and Development										
Technical Assistance	$90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Financial Assistance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations	90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lapsing Balances	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	1,927	-	$2,040	-	$23	-	-	-	$23	-
Total Available	2,017	-	2,040	-	23	-	-	-	23	-
Rescission	-	-	-	-	2,017	-	-$2,017 (1)	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-1,104	-	-1,927	-	-2,040	-	+2,017	-	-23	-
Recoveries, Other (Net)	-913	-	-113	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Appropriation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Justification of Increases and Decreases

(1) A decrease of $2,017,000 in unobligated balances.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 includes a general provision (Section 727) that rescinds $2.017 million of the unobligated balances.

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and Staff Years (SY)

(Dollars in thousands)

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Florida	-$15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kansas	-1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kentucky	-1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Maryland	-9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pennsylvania	-2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rhode Island	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
West Virginia	-4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wisconsin	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
National Hdqtr	112	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Obligations	90	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	1,927	-	$2,040	-	$23	-	-	-	$23	-
Total, Available	2,017	-	2,040	-	23	-	-	-	23	-

RESOURCES CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Classification by Objects
(Dollars in thousands)

		2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Personnel Compensation:					
Washington, D.C.		-$10	-	-	-
Field		-68	-	-	-
11	Total personnel compensation	-78	-	-	-
12	Personal benefits	-29	-	-	-
13	Benefits for former personnel	75	-	-	-
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	-32	-	-	-
Other Objects:					
23.2	Rental payments to others	-8	-	-	-
23.3	Communications, utilities, and misc. charges	52	-	-	-
25.2	Printing and reproduction	-	-	-	-
25	Other contractual services	78	-	-	-
	Total, Other Objects	122	-	-	-
99.9	Total, new obligations	90	-	-	-

HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM

Project Statement
Obligations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Obligations:										
Healthy Forests Reserve Program:										
Technical Assistance	-$15	-	$2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Financial Assistance	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	47	-	51	-	$51	-	-	-	$51	-
Total Available	47	-	53	-	51	-	-	-	51	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-4	-	-47	-	-51	-	-	-	-51	-
Recoveries, Other (Net)	-43	-	-6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Appropriation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and Staff Years (SYs)
(On basis of obligations)
(Dollars in thousands)

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Michigan	$4	-	-$4	-	-	-	-	-
Oregon	-15	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
Pennsylvania	-2	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
National Headquarters	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Obligations	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	47	-	51	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Available	47	-	53	-	-	-	-	-

Classification by Objects
(Dollars in thousands)

	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Personnel Compensation:				
Field	-$1	-	-	-
11 Total personnel compensation	-1	-	-	-
Total, personnel comp. and benefits	-1	-	-	-
Other Objects:				
25.0 Other contractual services	16	$2	-	-
32.0 Land and structures	-15	-	-	-
Total, Other Objects	-	2	-	-
99.9 Total, new obligations	-	2	-	-

WATER BANK

Lead-Off Tabular Statement

Budget Estimate, 2015	-
2014 Enacted	$4,000,000
Change in Appropriation	-4,000,000

Note: 2014 funds were provided through General Provision 739 of the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2014. Not funded in 2013.

WATER BANK PROGRAM

Summary of Increases and Decreases

(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual	2013 Change	2014 Change	2015 Change	2015 Estimate
Discretionary Appropriations:					
Water Bank					
1. Technical Assistance	$525	-$525	+$250	-$250	-
2. Financial Assistance	6,975	-6,975	3,750	-3,750	-
Total Discretionary Appropriations	7,500	-7,500	+4,000	-4,000	-

WATER BANK PROGRAM

Project Statement
Appropriations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.			2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs		Amount	SYs
Discretionary Appropriations:											
Water Bank Program:											
Technical Assistance.....	$525	2	-	-	$250	2	-$250	-2		-	-
Financial Assistance.....	6,975	-	-	-	3,750	-	-3,750	-		-	-
Total, Available or Est.....	7,500	2	-	-	4,000	2	-4,000	-2		-	-
Rescission.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-
Total, Appropriation.....	7,500	2	-	-	4,000	2	-4,000	-2	(1)	-	-
Rescission.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-	-	$51	-	222	-	-222	-		-	-
Recoveries, Other (Net).....	-	-	174	-	-	-	-	-		-	-
Total Available.....	7,500	2	225	-	4,222	2	-4,222	-2		-	-
Lapsing Balance 1/.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-
Bal. Available, EOY.....	-51	-	-222	-	-	-	-	-		-	-
Total, Obligations	7,449	2	3	-	4,222	2	-4,222	-2		-	-

Project Statement
Obligations Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs
Discretionary Obligations:										
Water Bank Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	$119	2	$3	-	$299	2	-$299	-2	-	-
Financial Assistance.....	7,330	-	-	-	3,923	-	-3,923	-	-	-
Total Obligations	7,449	2	3	-	4,222	2	-4,222	-2	-	-
Lapsing Balance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	51	-	222	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available.....	7,500	2	225	-	4,222	2	-4,222	-2	-	-
Rescission.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-	-	-51	-	-222	-	+222	-	-	-
Recoveries, Other (Net).....	-	-	-174	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Appropriation.....	7,500	2	-	-	4,000	2	-4,000	-2	-	-

Justification of Increases and Decreases

(1) A decrease of $4,000,000 and 2 staff years for the Water Bank Program ($4,000,000 and 2 staff years available in 2014):

Due to budget priorities, the FY 2015 Budget proposes to terminate funding for this program.

WATER BANK PROGRAM

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and Staff Years (SY)
(Dollars in thousands)

State/Territory	2012 Actual		2013 Actual		2014 Estimate		2015 Estimate	
	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY	Amount	SY
Minnesota	$45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
North Dakota	6,410	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
South Dakota	994	1	$3	-	-	-	-	-
Undistributed	-	-	-	-	$4,222	2	-	-
Obligations	7,449	2	3	-	4,222	2	-	-
Lapsing Balances	-	-	-	-		-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	51	-	222	-		-	-	-
Total, Available	7,500	2	225	-	4,222	2	-	-

WATER BANK PROGRAM

Classification by Objects
(Dollars in thousands)

		2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Personnel Compensation:					
Washington, D.C.		-	-	-	-
Field		$87	$2	$90	-
11	Total personnel compensation	87	2	90	-
12	Personal benefits	32	-	35	-
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	119	2	125	-
Other Objects:					
23.2	Rental payments to others	135	-	-	-
25.4	Other services from non-Federal sources	195	-	174	-
26.2	Supplies and materials	-	1	-	-
41.0	Grants	7,000	-	3,923	-
	Total, Other Objects	7,330	1	4,097	-
99.9	Total, new obligations	7,449	3	4,222	-

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
WATER BANK PROGRAM

STATUS OF PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. Section 748 of the Water Bank Act (16 U.S.C. 1301-1311) authorized the Water Bank Program (WBP). No funding was provided in 2013.

Program Objectives. The purposes of WBP include: 1) preserving and improving major wetlands as habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wildlife; 2) conserving surface waters; 3) reducing soil and wind erosion; 4) contributing to flood control; 5) improving water quality; 6) improving subsurface moisture; and 7) enhancing the natural beauty of the landscape. The intent of the program is to keep water for the benefit of migratory wildlife.

Program Operations. WBP contracts are non-renewable, 10-year rental agreements to compensate landowners for maintaining lands as wetlands in lieu of draining the lands for agricultural production. Rental payments are made annually. WBP agreements for each participating farm or ranch become effective on January 1 of the calendar year in which the agreement is approved. Financial assistance is not available for conservation practices through WBP; participants who wish to establish or maintain conservation practices may apply for financial assistance through other NRCS or State financial assistance programs where available. NRCS will assist participants with developing a Conservation Plan of Operations (CPO) for the enrolled land and associated adjacent land when applicable. WBP participants are not subject to the Farm Bill payment eligibility requirements including the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions or the adjusted gross income limitations.

Eligibility. NRCS determines whether land is eligible for enrollment and whether, once found eligible, the lands may be included in the program based on the likelihood of successful protection of wetland functions and values when considering the cost of the agreement and protection costs. Land placed under an agreement shall be specifically identified and designated for the period of the agreement. A person must:

- Be the landowner of eligible land for which enrollment is sought for at least two years preceding the date of the agreement unless new ownership was acquired by will or succession as a result of death of the previous owner; or
- Have possession of the land by written lease over all designated acreage in the agreement for at least two years preceding the date of the agreement unless new ownership was acquired by will or succession as a result of death of the previous owner and will have possession over all the designated acreage for the agreement period.

Program Participation Requirements. An agreement shall be executed for each participating farm. The agreement shall be signed by the owner or operator of the designated acreage and any other person who, as landlord, tenant, or share cropper, will share in the payment or has an interest in the designated acreage. There may be more than one agreement for a farm.

The designated acreage in the agreement must:

- Be maintained for the agreement period in a manner which will preserve, restore, or improve the wetland character of the land;
- Not be drained, burned, filled, or otherwise used in a manner which would destroy the wetland character of the acreage;
- Not be used as a dumping area for draining other wetlands, except where the State Conservationist determines that such use is consistent with the sound management of wetlands and is specified in the conservation plan;
- Not be used for agricultural purposes including cropping, haying, or grazing for the life of the agreement;
- No haying except if authorized under limited circumstances, such as severe drought; and
- No grazing unless necessary to enhance the wetland functions and values of the land under agreement.

NRCS will perform an annual status review to note the progress in maintaining designated wetland acreage and need for technical assistance. The failure to maintain the designated wetland acreage may result in noncompliance or a reduction in rental payments.

2013 Activities.

No funding was provided.

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FARM SECURITY AND RURAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS

Budget Estimate, 2015	$3,413,818,000
2014 Enacted	3,404,598,000
Change in Appropriation	+9,220,000

Conservation programs included in this account are listed in the project statement below. Program funding authorized by the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) will continue from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

FARM SECURITY AND RURAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS

Project Statement - Current Law
Authorized Level Detail and Staff Years (SYs)
(Dollars in thousands)

Program	2012 Actual		2013 Actual [d/]		2014 Estimate [d/]		Inc. or Dec.		2015 Estimate [e/]			
	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	Amount	SYs	FA	TA	Total	SYs
Environmental Quality Incentives Program a/	1,374,004	2,972	1,373,859	2,958	1,350,000	2,892	-	-30	981,714	368,286	1,350,000	2,862
Conservation Stewardship Program	741,620	472	882,552	595	1,078,942	737	369,876	272	1,288,675	160,143	1,448,818	1,009
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	-	-	-	-	377,977	662	47,023	98	296,494	128,506	425,000	760
Regional Conservation Partnership Program	-	-	-	-	95,680	133	4,320	-1	78,955	21,045	100,000	132
Conservation Reserve Program	101,521	792	64,920	611	35,625	331	14,375	129	-	50,000	50,000	460
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program	-	-	-	-	40,000	48	-40,000	-48	-	-	-	-
Conservation Security Program	188,045	119	158,856	105	124,780	62	-89,780	-32	31,195	3,805	35,000	30
Agricultural Management Assistance b/	2,380	5	2,450	5	6,460	14	-1,460	-4	3,966	1,034	5,000	10
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	46,949	87	63,513	112	2,737	15	-2,737	-15	-	-	-	-
Grasslands Reserve Program	65,264	33	62,857	36	826	3	-826	-3	-	-	-	-
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program	49,832	65	49,399	56	12,663	47	-12,663	-47	-	-	-	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program	9,858	7	6,441	8	6,448	6	-6,448	-6	-	-	-	-
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program	144,903	38	118,129	43	1,817	8	-1,817	-8	-	-	-	-
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program	58,758	76	55,258	69	1,567	10	-1,567	-10	-	-	-	-
Wetlands Reserve Program	587,932	409	400,192	421	19,076	97	-19,076	-97	-	-	-	-
Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program	-	-	-	-	250,000	23	-250,000	-23	-	-	-	-
Subtotal, Farm Security and Rural Investment Programs	3,371,066	5,075	3,238,427	5,019	3,404,598	5,088	+9,220	+175	2,680,999	732,819	3,413,818	5,263
Reimbursable	9,158	42	17,495	40	19,000	39	-	-	-	19,000	19,000	39
Technical Assistance Transfer to PLCO Account c/	-	-	-	-	-	-	-732,819	-5,263	-	-732,819	-732,819	-5,263
Total, Farm Security and Rural Investment Programs	3,380,224	5,117	3,255,923	5,059	3,423,598	5,127	-723,599	-5,088	2,680,999	19,000	2,699,999	39

[a/] Of the total EQIP funding, at least $4 million will be used to support an initiative to increase the availability and access to nutritious forage for pollinators in a targeted multi-state area (North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan) that is home to nearly 75 percent of the Nation's managed honeybee population during the prime summer forage months.

[b/] The Agricultural Management Assistance Program is authorized by Section 524(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1524(b)), as amended. It authorizes $10 million annually for the program ($15 million annually for 2008 through 2012), of which NRCS is to receive one-half. This program is implemented by NRCS, the Agricultural Marketing Service, and the Risk Management Agency. The Budget proposes providing the overall AMA program $10 million in 2015, of which NRCS is to receive $5 million.

[c/] Transfer mandatory authority from the Farm Security and Rural Investment Programs (Farm Bill) account to the Conservation Operations account to consolidate technical assistance funding in the Private Lands Conservation Operations (PLCO) account. The transfer does not change the authorities or the period of availability of the mandatory funding.

[d/] Amounts shown in 2013 and 2014 columns are net of sequester reductions.

[e/] In the 2015 column the authorized funding is shown separately for financial assistance (FA), for technical assistance (TA), and for the total.

FARM SECURITY AND RURAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS

Statement of Program

	Performance Targets			
Output Metrics	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Target	2015 Target
Environmental Quality Incentives Program				
Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality, acres (millions)	4.6	4.2	3.4	3.4
Wetlands Reserve Program				
Wetlands created, restored or enhanced, acres (thousand)	188.7	164.0	N/A	N/A
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program				
Non-Federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality, acres (thousand)	0.9	0.4	N/A	N/A
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program				
Prime, unique, and important farmland protected from conversion to non-agricultural uses by conservation easements, acres (thousand)	45.2	27.8	N/A	N/A

FARM SECURITY AND RURAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations
2013 Actual
(Dollars in thousands)

	WRP	CRP	EQIP	CSP	WHIP	FRPP	Cons. Sec. Program	AWEP	GRP	CBWP	HFRP	AMA a/
ALABAMA	$3,302	$1,315	$19,960	$7,319	$5,735	$240	$1,165	$1,245	$50	-	-	-
ALASKA	44	19	4,844	1,632	4,707	90	47	-	33	-	-	-
ARIZONA	78	-	14,317	7,222	97	29	159	-	19	-	-	-
ARKANSAS	27,393	567	72,128	62,633	2,990	-	3,818	1,190	62	-	-	-
CALIFORNIA	18,229	72	96,880	8,620	1,549	4,506	2,501	12,847	95	-	$152	-
COLORADO	833	1,523	42,221	26,467	291	16,282	2,137	643	85	-	-	-
CONNECTICUT	34	8	6,124	286	828	1,390	22	-	45	-	-	$103
DELAWARE	753	44	7,083	1,142	60	4,401	248	5	18	$1,252	-	71
FLORIDA	66,160	119	16,298	3,096	846	2,977	-	115	110	-	-	-
GEORGIA	9,536	722	34,899	33,977	6,414	2	2,066	2,027	4	-	21	-
HAWAII	154	38	9,789	327	118	117	163	-	113	-	-	81
IDAHO	1,248	831	22,801	7,015	1,346	1,597	9,513	5,388	364	-	-	-
ILLINOIS	5,574	5,539	17,387	22,490	156	269	6,741	102	125	-	-	-
INDIANA	5,929	5,102	32,719	8,289	203	-	5,479	973	42	-	628	-
IOWA	23,275	5,718	35,466	44,008	571	-	16,191	140	51	-	-	-
KANSAS	2,020	2,592	42,924	48,963	1,743	1,873	5,651	3,052	206	-	-	-
KENTUCKY	11,430	2,004	17,812	3,707	159	2,154	130	-	29	-	1,209	-
LOUISIANA	39,703	150	25,165	23,353	917	-	141	23	1	-	-	-
MAINE	75	83	14,262	828	597	1,175	99	-	1	-	36	500
MARYLAND	4,484	712	9,039	1,222	377	103	1,229	-	5	12,183	-	100
MASSACHUSETTS	2,658	-	3,884	186	358	9,165	10	-	43	-	-	75
MICHIGAN	5,501	647	18,921	9,355	268	2,717	3,750	1,832	27	-	495	-
MINNESOTA	11,174	5,871	32,930	70,893	839	1,398	4,402	3,441	64	-	-	-
MISSISSIPPI	14,871	1,644	42,674	22,527	1,904	6	228	2,558	53	-	705	-
MISSOURI	9,454	6,205	42,456	31,443	791	55	20,825	-	54	-	-	-
MONTANA	1,041	1,093	21,083	36,387	560	5,050	7,591	990	174	-	-	-
NEBRASKA	8,074	1,940	37,737	53,128	259	1,007	5,655	3,941	22	-	-	-
NEVADA	8,431	1	9,635	1,083	217	85	143	18	281	-	-	66
NEW HAMPSHIRE	4,449	-	5,641	275	371	2,723	1	-	5	-	-	106
NEW JERSEY	1,693	102	5,781	320	412	6,506	97	257	15	-	-	197
NEW MEXICO	113	302	30,319	22,310	745	632	896	181	77	-	-	-
NEW YORK	4,346	169	13,510	5,852	506	4,572	458	77	24	5,822	-	213
N CAROLINA	8,639	582	26,677	3,406	139	2,074	629	9	21	-	-	-
N DAKOTA	10,334	2,398	23,224	61,109	235	-	4,593	2,446	9	-	-	-
OHIO	5,657	3,494	18,608	5,886	82	7,066	11,024	-	12	-	85	-
OKLAHOMA	5,836	1,202	25,573	47,799	265	745	2,136	686	115	-	273	-
OREGON	4,968	632	17,882	15,780	1,248	23	19,290	2,001	74	-	1,808	-
PENNSYLVANIA	6,978	1,185	28,744	7,134	2,733	3,654	506	-	84	10,965	647	335

NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

	WRP	CRP	EQIP	CSP	WHIP	FRPP	Cons. Sec. Program	AWEP	GRP	CBWP	HFRP	AMA a/
PUERTO RICO.....	44	-	6,154	93	22	-	4	-	-	-	-	-
RHODE ISLAND.....	49	-	3,624	169	337	2,933	7	-	45	-	-	48
S CAROLINA.....	2,512	541	19,937	5,655	635	2,150	1,242	-	346	-	319	-
S DAKOTA.....	14,779	2,216	18,449	50,303	4,743	-	664	127	170	-	-	-
TENNESSEE.....	14,462	622	30,072	4,817	1,612	1,248	246	-	79	-	-	-
TEXAS.....	9,482	2,397	118,848	35,522	8,170	4,093	1,032	5,397	799	-	-	-
UTAH.....	609	108	24,367	4,210	172	457	1,980	-	268	-	-	13
VERMONT.....	355	60	10,492	124	294	4,431	15	-	16	-	-	114
VIRGINIA.....	928	848	22,222	6,942	364	1,879	217	-	68	10,776	-	-
WASHINGTON.....	3,012	943	17,837	17,026	589	3,250	4,832	144	68	-	-	-
WEST VIRGINIA.....	338	41	14,659	2,308	1,066	3,231	186	-	53	8,454	-	219
WISCONSIN.....	5,650	2,053	34,585	16,870	137	1,114	3,497	-	105	-	-	-
WYOMING.....	325	282	17,381	8,989	319	6,090	1,314	473	425	-	-	209
NATIONAL HDQTR.....	13,144	185	87,247	21,991	3,405	2,569	3,886	2,918	57,801	-58	63	-
CENTERS.....	32	-	591	66	12	5	-	10	-	5	-	-
FY 2013 Total Obligations.....	400,192	64,920	1,373,859	882,552	63,513	118,129	158,856	55,258	62,857	49,399	6,441	2,450

a/ AMA actuals include only those AMA obligations made by NRCS.

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COMMMODITY CREDIT CORPORATION
FOOD, CONSERVATION, AND ENERGY ACT OF 2008

WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM
STATUS OF PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), which was authorized by Section 1237 of the Food Security Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-198), as amended by the Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-624), the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-127), the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171), the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-246), and the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-240), is designed to assist owners in restoring and protecting wetlands. WRP is funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and administered by NRCS.

Program Objectives. WRP is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to enable eligible landowners to protect and restore valuable wetland ecosystems, including associated habitats such as uplands, riparian areas, and forest lands. WRP addresses wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water and related natural resource concerns on private lands and acreage owned by Indian Tribes in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program achieves solutions to local community issues related to farms, ranches, rural lands, and other areas by establishing easements and long-term agreements on eligible farmlands and by establishing 30-year contracts on acreage owned by Indian Tribes. This unique program offers landowners an opportunity to establish, at minimal cost, long-term conservation and wildlife habitat enhancement practices and protection.

The goal of WRP is to achieve the greatest wetlands functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. This is accomplished by restoring former wetland and associated habitats on lands that were converted for agricultural use and have a high likelihood of successful restoration. Wetlands provide a variety of important environmental services that are increasingly valued, including filtering nutrients, trapping sediments and associated pollutants, improving water quality, providing fish and wildlife habitat, damping floodwater runoff peaks, recharging aquifers, and buffering shorelines from storm impacts.

Over 50 percent of the Nation's wetlands in the lower 48 States have been lost since colonial times and the greatest potential for restoration exists on private lands. Over 80 percent of lands on which restoration is economically feasible are in private ownership. To achieve successful restoration that maximizes benefits to both the landowners and the public, WRP focuses on: 1) enrolling marginal lands that have a history of crop failures or low production yields; 2) restoring and protecting wetland values on degraded wetlands; 3) maximizing wildlife benefits; 4) achieving cost-effective restoration with a priority on benefits to migratory birds; 5) protecting and improving water quality; 6) reducing the impact of flood events; 7) increasing ecosystem resilience; and 8) promoting scientific and educational uses of WRP projects.

Program Operations. Under WRP, at least 70 percent of the wetlands and associated habitats are restored to their original condition to the extent practicable; the remaining 30 percent of the project area may be restored or enhanced to alternative habitat conditions. For example, instead of restoring a bottomland hardwood site to all trees, a portion of the site could be restored to an emergent marsh condition if the landowner or NRCS wanted to create habitat for targeted wildlife species. This flexibility allows NRCS to implement projects that meet landowner objectives, address specific species or habitat needs, and maximize wildlife and environmental benefits.

Eligibility. WRP is available in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Island, and the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands on all lands meeting any of the following eligibility criteria:

- Altered, cropped, and grazed wetlands along with upland buffer areas;
- Rangeland and wooded areas where hydrology is significantly degraded but substantially restorable;
- Croplands or grasslands subject to flooding from overflow of a closed basin, lake, or pothole;
- Riparian areas linking protected wetlands;
- Natural wetlands that contribute to the value of other eligible land;
- Eligible priority wetland acres already enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program; or

- Wetlands restored under a Federal or State cost-share program with an easement or deed restriction with duration of less than 30 years.

Financial Assistance. WRP provides landowners four methods to enroll acreage:

- Permanent easement: Easement duration is in perpetuity. Participants are provided an easement payment after the easement is filed. The payment is for 100 percent of the value of the land, with compensation determined as the lowest of: 1) the value determined through an appraisal or area-wide market survey; 2) a geographic cap; or 3) landowner offer. In addition, NRCS pays up to 100 percent of the eligible restoration costs;
- 30-year easement: Easement duration is 30 years. Landowners receive an easement payment after the easement is filed that is equivalent to 75 percent of the value for a permanent easement; and NRCS pays up to 75 percent of the eligible restoration costs;
- Restoration cost-share agreement: Restoration cost-share agreements are made available to participating landowners as an alternative mechanism to restore wetlands without requiring the landowner to enroll the land as an easement. Agreements are generally for a 10-year period, although longer agreement periods may be required for unique projects that are funded at a higher level. There is no easement payment; however, NRCS pays up to 75 percent of the eligible restoration costs; and
- 30-year contract: Acreage owned by Indian Tribes can also be enrolled through the use of a 30-year contract that is equivalent in value to a 30-year easement.

Technical Assistance. NRCS conducts ecological and cost ranking and develops a preliminary site plan for the offered acres, with input from State wildlife agencies and the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service. Once the landowner accepts an offer, NRCS completes restoration designs and implements the conservation practices necessary to restore the identified habitats on the easement, contract, or agreement area.

NRCS continues to provide assistance to the landowner throughout the life of the project, after the initial completion of the restoration activities. NRCS works cooperatively with the private landowners to develop management and maintenance plans, conduct monitoring and enforcement, identify enhancement or repair needs, and provide biological and engineering advice on how to achieve optimum results for wetland-dependent wildlife or other desired ecosystem services.

WRP Partnership Activities. NRCS emphasizes partnerships with conservation entities and agencies as a mechanism to leverage WRP funds and maximize conservation benefits. NRCS can enter into cooperative and interagency agreements with a focus on completing the acquisition, restoration, and monitoring of existing WRP easements. Through these agreements, Federal funds are being leveraged with conservation partners providing an average of over 25 percent matching funds. The partners include an array of conservation organizations, including non-governmental organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited, California Waterfowl Association, The Nature Conservancy, Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Mississippi River Trust, and the Audubon Society, numerous resource conservation and development councils, local and State wildlife agencies, and the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service. Others contributing technical expertise to the delivery of WRP include the National Association of Conservation Districts, State associations of conservation districts, U.S. Forest Service, the Department of the Army Corps of Engineers, local conservation districts, and Technical Service Providers. These agreements will supplement NRCS's capacity to expedite easement acquisition and restoration implementation, and to ensure annual monitoring is conducted. These activities help guarantee the public and natural resource benefits of WRP are fully realized and maintained.

2013 Activities.

WRP Acreage. Enrolled acres are the specific controlling factor for WRP. Enrollment is defined as the point at which the landowner and NRCS enter into the agreement authorizing NRCS to proceed with the purchase of the easement or 30-year contract. In the case of restoration cost-share agreements, enrollment occurs when both the landowner and NRCS execute the restoration contract documents. NRCS estimates the funding needed for enrollment of new acres in a given year by projecting the number of acres by enrollment option (i.e. permanent easements, 30-year easements, 30-year contracts, cost share agreements) and the geographic rate cap for the location of the acres to be enrolled.

In 2013, NRCS enrolled a total of 96,086 acres in 575 new WRP enrollments (table below). The majority were in easements (79,878 acres in 436 permanent easements and 16,179 acres in 135 30-year easements). The average project size was 167 acres, compared with 181 acres in 2012. Also in 2013, NRCS created, restored, and enhanced 229,675 acres of wetlands.

Agreement Type	2013 Agreements	2013 Acres Enrolled
Restoration cost-share agreement	4	29
30-year easement	135	16,179
Permanent easement	436	79,878
Total	575	96,086

Once enrollment has occurred, NRCS proceeds with the requisite acquisition activities, such as obtaining title review and surveys, and closes on the easement, including executing and recording the easement. Following closing, NRCS completes restoration on the easement. Proceeding from enrollment, through easement closing, and to completed restoration generally takes three to five years, and annual monitoring takes place for the life of the easement. Funding needs for the activities that occur in years after the projects' original enrollment are based on the number of acres in each phase of the process in a given year and the costs related to those various activities.

The table below shows the total cumulative acres and number of enrollments in WRP and the cumulative acres and number of easements closed, which is a subset of the total acres enrolled. The cumulative number of acres enrolled in WRP throughout the life of the program is about 2.7 million acres; this excludes cancelled, terminated or expired enrollment transactions. In 2013, NRCS closed easements on 139,000 acres through 786 easement transactions, including 187 30-year easements on 27,000 acres and 599 permanent easements on 112,000 acres. This data is part of the cumulative totals below.

WRP Cumulative Enrolled Easements, Restoration Cost-Share Agreements and Contracts with Tribes and Closed Easements		
Agreement Type	**Cumulative Agreements**	**Cumulative Acres**
Enrolled Permanent Easements	10,993	2,125,846
Enrolled 30-year Easements	2,823	455,695
Restoration Cost-Share Agreement	832	123,111
30-Year Contract with Tribes	14	2,771
Total	14,662	2,707,423
Agreement Type	**Cumulative Easements**	**Cumulative Acres**
Closed Permanent Easements	10,106	1,970,517
Closed 30-Year Easements	2,402	399,700
Total	12,508	2,370,217

Emergency Wetlands Reserve Program (EWRP) Cumulative Closed Permanent Easements		
Agreement Type	**Cumulative Agreements**	**Cumulative Acres**
Closed Easements	732	84,152

The wetlands restored through WRP includes a variety of types, including vernal pools in the West and Northeast, bottomland hardwood forests in the Southeast, prairie potholes in the upper Midwest, coastal marshes, and mountain meadows, but consists primarily of floodplain forests and emergent marsh wetlands. Restoration and protection of these varied and valuable wetland type accounts for 85 percent of the acreage enrolled in WRP, while the remaining 15 percent of WRP acres includes adjacent upland habitats that provide nesting habitat and buffer area to the wetland areas. Most acres offered into WRP occur in areas that, despite having been drained or cleared for agricultural production, are still subject to frequent flooding or prolonged saturation, making them marginal for agricultural production but ideally suited for restoration.

Initiatives and Partnership Projects. NRCS has a number of initiatives and program options that provide targeted delivery of conservation assistance to address specific resource concerns on a geographic, species, habitat, natural

disaster, or other basis that benefits from a tailored or rapid response. In 2013, WRP was a key tool in delivering conservation benefits to these initiative efforts:

- Georgia: NRCS helps protect a large portion of the Lower Altamaha River Corridor in Georgia through WRP. In 2013, NRCS and a landowner signed an agreement filling in another piece of protection to the Lower Altamaha River Corridor, which is identified as a high priority area in the State Wildlife Action Plan. Commonly referred to as "Whaley Lake," the 1,098-acre easement will add to the 35 miles of existing contiguous protection of the Lower Altamaha River Corridor, from the Intracoastal Waterway near Wolf and Egg Island National Wildlife Refuges up to Griffin Ridge Wildlife Management Area. The Lower Altamaha River Corridor is also part of the Fort Stewart/Altamaha Longleaf Partnership priority area, which includes partnerships with Land Trusts and The Nature Conservancy; timber companies, such as International Paper; State Governments, including Wildlife Resources and Coastal Resource Divisions of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the Georgia Forestry Commission; and Federal agencies, such as United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of the Army and the United States Marine Corps. This easement has noteworthy historical value, and will significantly benefit the at-risk wildlife species that depend on the Altamaha River Corridor, such as the Wood Storks and Bald Eagles, and it will also ensure that these habitats are fully restored and protected for the long-term. Landscape-level protection achieved on the Lower Altamaha River Corridor is a model for other high priority areas in the State.

- New Hampshire: On June 17, 2013, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), Strafford Rivers Conservancy (SRC), the New Hampshire Fish and Game, and the Town of Barrington celebrated the permanent protection of over 240 acres of land, including Stonehouse Pond. TPL purchased the property from the Carolyn S. Bedford Trust, and transferred ownership to the SRC, which will manage the property. It will be available to the public for low-impact recreational use such as hiking, bird-watching, fishing, trapping, hunting, cross country skiing, and canoeing. In Barrington, New Hampshire, Stonehouse Pond is a wilderness gem to the community. It has been a conservation priority for several years now, especially with the Town of Barrington.

  WRP not only helped protect the property, but it will provide funding for restoration of compromised wetland habitats. Other partners include Barrington's Conservation Fund, the New Hampshire Conservation Committee, the New Hampshire Fish and Game's Fish Habitat Fund, Piscataqua Region Estuaries Partnership grants, foundation grants and individual donations.

Get Conservation on the Ground.

Florida: Protecting the Everglades–An ecosystem of vital important to Florida and the Nation. Since 2009, USDA has invested $432 million in WRP funds to restore and protect more than 108,000 acres of wetland habitat in Florida's Northern Everglades, demonstrating a strong commitment to partnerships with Florida's ranchers and farmers to improve water quality and wildlife and fish habitat within the greater Everglades ecosystem.

In 2013, NRCS demonstrated its continued commitment to restoring and protecting wetlands in the critically important Northern Everglades Watershed by providing $60 million in WRP funds and enrolling an additional 12,500 acres in the watershed. These funds supported the restoration and enhancement of habitat for a variety of listed species, including the federally listed Wood Stork, Northern Crested Caracara, and Eastern Indigo Snake. In addition, many of these wetland acres are located within a well-documented wildlife corridor for the Florida Panther.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. Section 2503 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Act, P.L. 110-246) re-authorized and revised the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa). EQIP was first authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (P. L. 104-127) and the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171). The Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012 extended EQIP authority until 2014. The Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds EQIP.

Program Objectives. America faces serious environmental challenges that financial and technical assistance delivered through EQIP can help address. Federal, Tribal, State and private lands face pressing environmental concerns that pose risks to the long-term sustainability of our natural resources. For example, regulation of on-farm air pollution poses challenges to agriculture, while changing growing and marketing conditions for producers, high costs for energy, and the desire on the part of many producers to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are some of the new challenges faced by today's agriculture industry. To meet these and other challenges to agricultural sustainability, EQIP promotes the voluntary application of land-based conservation practices and activities that maintain or improve the condition of the soil, water, plants, and air, conserve energy, and address other natural resource concerns.

EQIP promotes implementation of conservation practices and activities to meet a variety of environmental and natural resource challenges. For example, in the Mississippi River Basin and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, EQIP practices reduce nutrients and sediment to improve water quality and habitat for fish and wildlife. The program has-promoted practices to address water quantity and quality concerns in the Ogallala Aquifer, combating declining water tables affecting eight States, including Colorado, South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas. Through EQIP, practices were implemented to reduce the threat to the habitat of Endangered Species Act Candidates, such as Sage Grouse and Lesser Prairie Chicken, and provide critical habitat for migratory birds. Such actions have helped reduce the need for regulatory requirements and environmental permits while allowing continued agricultural production in a sustainable fashion.

In accordance with statute and published regulation, the agency carries out EQIP in a manner that optimizes environmental benefits. EQIP provides:

- Technical and financial assistance to farmers and ranchers that face the most serious threats to soil, water, plants, and air, to help them conserve energy and address related natural resources concerns;
- Assistance to farmers and ranchers in complying with Federal, State, and local environmental regulatory requirements;
- Assistance to farmers and ranchers in making beneficial, cost-effective changes to cropping systems; grazing systems; manure, nutrient, pest, or irrigation management systems; or land uses to conserve and improve soil, water, air, and related natural resources; and
- Consolidated and simplified conservation planning and implementation to reduce the administrative burden on producers.

National Priorities. EQIP statutory provisions require that at least 60 percent of the financial assistance funds for EQIP be targeted to livestock-related operations, including both confined livestock operations and grazed lands. The Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 also added energy conservation as a national priority. With input from the public, agricultural and environmental organizations, Conservation Districts, agencies, and other partners, NRCS established the following national priorities for EQIP:

- Reduction of nonpoint source pollution, such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or excess salinity in impaired watersheds consistent with Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), where available;
- Reduction of contamination from agricultural point sources, such as concentrated animal feeding operations;
- Reduction of surface and groundwater contamination and conservation of surface and groundwater resources;
- Reduction of emissions, such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and ozone precursors and depleters, that contribute to air quality impairment violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards;
- Reduction in soil erosion and sedimentation;
- Promotion of at-risk species habitat conservation; and
- Promotion of energy conservation.

Eligibility. To participate in EQIP, both the land and the applicant must be eligible. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, pastureland, private nonindustrial forestland, Tribal land, and other farm or ranch lands. The land must have an identified natural resource concern that poses a serious threat to soil, water, air, or related resources by reason of land use practices, soil type, terrain, climatic conditions, topography, flooding, saline characteristics, or other natural resource factors. Publicly-owned land is eligible when the land is under the control of an eligible producer for the contract period, is included in the participant's operating unit, and the participant has written authorization from

the government Agency to apply conservation practices. For irrigation-related practices, the land must have a history of being actively irrigated for two out of the last five years.

Applicants must be an agricultural producer, have control of the land for the life of the contract, develop an EQIP plan of operations, and be in compliance with statutory payment eligibility provisions and limitations including highly erodible land compliance, wetland conservation compliance, adjusted gross income limitations, and protection of tenants and sharecroppers. Eligible applications are accepted year-round at local USDA Service Centers, but ranking cut-off dates that vary by State are established to allow ranking and approval.

Technical Assistance. NRCS works with the participant to develop the EQIP plan of operations, which forms the basis of the EQIP contract. The plan may be developed with NRCS technical assistance, or EQIP may provide financial assistance to the participant to obtain the services of an agency-certified Technical Service Provider (TSP) who develops a conservation plan or EQIP plan of operations for the offered acres initially determined eligible. The plan identifies the conservation practices and activities that will be implemented through EQIP.

Implementation of conservation practices must contribute to an improvement in the identified natural resource concern as determined through the application evaluation and ranking process. Conservation practices include structural practices, land management practices, vegetative practices, forest management practices, conservation activities, and other improvements that achieve the program purposes. Conservation activities supported through EQIP may include the development of specialized plans such as comprehensive nutrient management plans, agricultural energy management plans, dryland transition plans, forest management plans, integrated pest management, and other similar plans. To earn program payment, these plans, activities, and practices must meet NRCS technical standards adapted for local conditions.

Financial Assistance. EQIP payment rates may be up to 75 percent of the estimated incurred costs and up to 100 percent of income foregone related to certain conservation practices. Historically underserved producers, including socially disadvantaged, limited resource, or beginning farmers and ranchers, and tribal members, may be eligible for payment rates up to 90 percent for estimated incurred costs. Payment rates and estimated incurred costs are documented in agency developed and approved payment schedules. Contracts are for a minimum term that ends one year after the implementation of the last scheduled practices and for a maximum term of ten years.

Total EQIP conservation payments are limited to $300,000 in financial assistance per person or legal entity during any six-year period, regardless of the number of contracts. A waiver of the $300,000 payment limit may be granted by the NRCS Chief for projects of special environmental significance that will result in significant environmental improvements as determined by NRCS policy. The payment limitation for these contracts of special environmental significance may be extended up to $450,000.

Partnerships. NRCS cooperates with Federal, State, and local partners to address local and national conservation issues and to complement their conservation programs. Partners include the National Association of Conservation Districts, State Associations of Conservation Districts, and local conservation districts in efforts to deliver a program beneficial to program participants and the environment. Through interactive communication between the local community, local interest groups, and State and Federal agencies, EQIP provides the partners with information and resources needed to address local priorities and implement State and national programs, such as EQIP.

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) is a voluntary conservation initiative that enables the use of EQIP and other conservation programs, combined with resources of eligible partners, to provide financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers. Under CCPI, NRCS enters into partnership agreements with eligible entities that want to enhance conservation outcomes on these lands in an effort to leverage funds to get more conservation benefit. Eligible partners include federally-recognized Indian Tribes, State and local units of government, producer associations, farmer cooperatives, institutions of higher education, and nongovernmental organizations with a history of working cooperatively with producers. NRCS does not provide funds to the partners; instead, NRCS provides funding directly to producers to implement the agreed-upon conservation practices. Partners provide additional technical or administrative resources to assist with planning, implementation, and/or monitoring of project effectiveness.

2013 Activities.
In 2013, EQIP financial assistance obligations were over $989 million in 44,823 active or completed contracts covering an estimated 13.8 million acres. In addition to regular EQIP projects, these funds also supported projects in resource-based initiatives, such as air quality, on-farm energy audits and energy conservation, migratory bird habitat, and the Mississippi River Basin, and projects in initiatives, such as organic production, seasonal high tunnels, and America's Great Outdoors, focused on environmental benefit and agricultural production as compatible goals.

Air Quality – In 2013, NRCS provided over $33.5 million in financial and technical assistance to nine States through the national Air Quality Initiative to help producers meet requirements of the Clean Air Act. Through this initiative, NRCS provides assistance to farmers and ranchers to reduce air pollution generated from agricultural operations in areas designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as non-attainment areas for ozone and particulate matter. During 2013, 1,126 active and completed contracts supported some 4,400 practices on more than 164,400 acres.

Energy – NRCS obligated more than $17.2 million in financial assistance to address inefficient use of energy on agricultural lands. Funding helped producers develop more than 1,097 Agricultural Energy Management Plans in 43 States and Puerto Rico to analyze the return on investment and environmental benefits of potential energy efficiency upgrades. Financial assistance provided through 1,510 EQIP contracts will help farmers install more than 2,296 energy conservation practices that will reduce energy consumption.

Organics – The Organic Initiative is a nationwide special initiative that provides assistance to organic producers as well as producers in the process of transitioning to organic production. In 2013, NRCS obligated over $10.2 million in EQIP funds to 718 active and completed contracts, treating 39,400 acres in organic production or in transition to organic production. The most-often prescribed practices by occurrence were cover crop, nutrient management, pest management, conservation crop rotation, and seasonal high tunnel system for crops. Each of these conservation practices has specific environmental benefits, especially when applied as a complete system of practices. One critical benefit is sustaining the natural physical, biological, and chemical properties of the soil, which is vital to organic production.

Drought Assistance – In 2013, NRCS obligated over $22 million in 1,856 EQIP active and completed contracts with producers in eight States that were severely affected by drought. These producers were able to use EQIP financial assistance for practices on their farm or ranch operation such as watering facilities, prescribed grazing, pasture and hayland planting, and cover crops. NRCS is developing strategies to assist producers address potential effects of future droughts by implementing conservation practices that will maintain and improve soil health.

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) - Established in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency in 2012, the NWQI targets 165 small watersheds across the country to address agricultural sources of water pollution, including nutrients, sediments, and pesticides. These watersheds, chosen by State NRCS offices in conjunction with State water quality agencies and other partners, are either on the EPA 303(d) list of threatened, or upstream impaired water bodies. NRCS obligated more than $28 million in financial assistance toward specific systems of practices that improve water quality coming off of farms and ranches in these small watersheds. Through this targeted approach, NRCS seeks to gain broad implementation of conservation systems that will result in significant reduction of water quality impairments.

EQIP is highly popular among producers, and demand for the program is high across the country. Nationally, slightly over 45.7 percent of qualifying projects (valid applications) were funded in 2013, as the table below shows.

2013 Total EQIP Program Demands[1]

State	Total Applications Received	Number of Active and Completed Contracts	Unfunded Valid Applications	Valid Applications Funded (Percent)	Average Contract Amount	Estimated Unfunded Application Amount
Alabama	3,482	1,312	1,146	53.4	$10,678	$12,237,045
Alaska	426	132	213	38.3	18,201	3,876,867
Arizona	377	118	210	36.0	74,212	15,584,497
Arkansas	12,244	2,786	5,960	31.9	22,957	136,824,450
California	6,932	2,059	2,503	45.1	39,301	98,370,157
Colorado	2,266	804	811	49.8	38,294	31,056,314
Connecticut	355	193	96	66.8	19,076	1,831,304
Delaware	337	252	4	98.4	21,531	86,125
Florida	1,026	336	279	54.6	29,957	8,358,085
Georgia	5,855	1,940	2,516	43.5	14,682	36,938,879
Hawaii	286	99	100	49.7	42,139	4,213,895
Idaho	1,293	349	582	37.5	50,157	29,191,414
Illinois	3,366	622	2,468	20.1	20,385	50,309,392
Indiana	2,512	972	1,170	45.4	28,840	33,742,264
Iowa	4,801	1,454	2,217	39.6	18,759	41,588,914
Kansas	3,218	1,582	467	77.2	21,998	10,273,057
Kentucky	2,318	931	648	59.0	13,247	8,584,067
Louisiana	2,961	952	1,283	42.6	19,699	25,273,617
Maine	2,032	759	1,046	42.0	13,027	13,626,231
Maryland	747	278	116	70.6	23,553	2,732,129
Massachusetts	267	127	106	54.5	14,372	1,523,397
Michigan	2,461	1,021	1,248	45.0	17,666	22,046,637
Minnesota	2,666	1,493	672	69.0	15,564	10,459,305
Mississippi	7,680	2,269	1,100	67.3	16,182	17,800,476
Missouri	5,218	1,248	2,532	33.0	25,398	64,307,409
Montana	1,657	244	606	28.7	51,832	31,410,119
Nebraska	5,476	1,309	2,405	35.2	22,556	54,247,704
Nevada	338	121	88	57.9	58,334	5,133,415
New Hampshire	656	297	234	55.9	12,311	2,880,741
New Jersey	423	195	69	73.9	18,999	1,310,941
New Mexico	1,343	555	509	52.2	42,104	21,431,069
New York	1,422	391	625	38.5	23,887	14,929,214
North Carolina	2,677	1,038	1,121	48.1	20,113	22,546,440
North Dakota	3,442	844	1,967	30.0	21,451	42,194,151
Ohio	3,654	780	1,954	28.5	22,229	43,435,828
Oklahoma	7,136	1,058	3,486	23.3	16,878	58,837,222
Oregon	1,019	503	359	58.4	27,291	9,797,473
Pennsylvania	2,977	797	1,554	33.9	26,208	40,726,776
Rhode Island	231	122	85	58.9	19,035	1,617,935
South Carolina	1,429	964	4	99.6	17,230	68,921
South Dakota	2,163	307	1,364	18.4	42,529	58,009,390
Tennessee	3,292	1,679	639	72.4	14,517	9,276,071
Texas	8,215	4,536	2,339	66.0	20,064	46,929,570
Utah	1,576	339	496	40.6	47,802	23,709,623

State	Total Applications Received	Number of Active and Completed Contracts	Unfunded Valid Applications	Valid Applications Funded (Percent)	Average Contract Amount	Estimated Unfunded Application Amount
Vermont	983	463	322	59.0	16,096	5,182,971
Virginia	1,373	870	141	86.1	18,332	2,584,836
Washington	2,098	531	1,056	33.5	24,595	25,971,941
West Virginia	2,150	488	1,257	28.0	19,444	24,440,829
Wisconsin	2,742	1,556	340	82.1	20,853	7,090,162
Wyoming	1,038	290	531	35.3	41,113	21,831,113
Pacific Basin	149	85	55	60.7	21,969	1,208,269
Caribbean Area	692	375	220	63.0	10,233	2,251,159
Total	135,477	44,825	53,319	45.7	22,078	1,177,181,333

[1]Source: Protracts as of October 25, 2013. Unfunded applications include pre-approved, deferred, eligible, pending, and disapproved. Estimated Value of Unfunded Applications ($) determined from number of unfunded valid applications multiplied by average contract amount. Data are preliminary and are expected to change subject to final budget reconciliation.

Significant EQIP Accomplishments.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG). CIG provides a competitive grants program that stimulates innovative science-based approaches to environmental enhancement and protection in conjunction with agricultural production. Through CIG, NRCS works with public and private entities to accelerate the transfer and adoption of promising conservation technologies, management systems and innovative approaches to address some of the Nation's most pressing natural resource concerns. CIG projects lead to the transfer of these cutting-edge technologies, systems, and approaches into NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides, and references or to the private sector.

In 2013, NRCS awarded $18.7 million in CIG for 46 projects nationwide. Grant recipients provide matching funds, bringing the total value of the approved projects to more than $37.4 million. In the 2013 CIG application process, projects targeting nutrient management, economics, energy, soil health, wildlife, and adaptation to drought were funded as priorities for CIG. The funded projects included seven projects in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed (approximately $3 million) and 19 projects in the Mississippi River Basin (approximately $7.9 million) to address specific natural resource concerns within those areas, including managing and optimizing nutrient management, reducing downstream nutrient loads, maintaining agricultural productivity, and enhancing wildlife and other ecosystem services. In addition, another 20 projects were selected nationally (approximately $7.8 million).

CIG Adaptation to Drought Efforts. In 2013, NRCS offered a separate funding opportunity through CIG to support adaptation to drought nationally. The Secretary of Agriculture approved $5.4 million that will help develop approaches and technology to increase resilience to extreme weather such as drought. Examples of projects include:

- South Dakota State University received $713,000 to demonstrate on South Dakota and Nebraska ranches the effects of innovative grazing management practices on rangeland's ability to recover from drought;
- Texas AgriLife Research received $233,000 to develop guidelines for managing irrigation under drought conditions, and to develop computer programs for linking weather stations with irrigation scheduling;
- University of Florida Board of Trustees: received $442,000 to address adaptation to drought by demonstrating and evaluating innovative approaches to improve irrigation water use efficiency by agricultural crops under drought conditions;
- Colorado State University received $883,000 to demonstrate synergistic soil, crop and water management practices that adapt irrigated cropping systems in the central Great Plains to drought and lead to efficient use of water. An existing model will be modified to allow farmers to calculate water savings from different conservation practices; and
- Intertribal Buffalo Council received $640,000 to evaluate how traditional/cultural practices aided Tribes in dealing with drought, develop a best practices database, and use that information for training and demonstration projects covering 57 Tribes in 19 States (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa,

Kansas, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.)

Get Conservation on the Ground

Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) Missouri River, North Dakota. CIG the Green House Gas Project is an EQIP funded venture providing financial and technical assistance to improve grazing land opportunities on expired Conservation Reserve Program acres and other grasslands to the north and east of the Missouri River in North Dakota. Participating producers also enrolled in a separate program for grassland conservation carbon credits administered by Ducks Unlimited, NRCS's partner in this project. Highlights for 2013 include a total of 46 contracts delivered throughout 11 North Dakota counties, and approximately $2.9 million in financial assistance that will bring conservation benefits to approximately 25,000 acres.

Colorado Salinity Project. The NRCS Grand Valley Project Area, the first salinity control project in Colorado, was established with the goal of reducing salt loading to the Colorado River by 132,000 tons per year. After 33 years of removing salt from the Colorado River, the project has been successful and will finally come to a close. Funding from EQIP and several other NRCS programs have been used for this project, along with a State-managed program using Basin States salinity reimbursement funding. The NRCS portion of the Grand Valley Salinity Project treated 41,989 acres (of 47,600 total acres in the project area), 94 percent of which were in irrigated agricultural production, and reduced salt loading to the river by 141,344 tons per year, or 107 percent of the goal.

Wisconsin: Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) is designed to improve water quality and wildlife habitat in the region, and help protect and restore priority watersheds. NRCS is working with its conservation partners in an eight-State area to combat invasive species, protect watersheds and shorelines from non-point source pollution, and restore wetlands and other habitat areas. In Wisconsin, NRCS focused conservation program funds in the Lower Fox, Manitowoc-Sheboygan, and the Milwaukee River watersheds that border the shores of Lake Michigan. Through this initiative, NRCS has been very successful in deploying technical and financial assistance to assist a large number of private landowners with the installation of conservation practices, such as cover crops, conservation crop rotations, filter strips, prescribed grazing and wetlands restoration.

Morgan County, Indiana. EQIP funding allowed a beginning farmer in Morgan County, who now operates the family farm, to install needed conservation improvements. The farmer raises beef and poultry for local markets. With the help of EQIP funding, he was able the install more than 4,000 feet of interior fence to create paddocks, an estimated 2,960 feet of pipeline, eight watering facilities, and a water pumping plant, all to serve 28.8 acres of prescribed rotational grazing. The paddocks and water facilities now allow cattle to be moved from one grazing unit to another to protect the land from over grazing and soil erosion. Conversion of a 17-acre crop field to a permanent pasture has also resulted in significant soil loss savings and has reduced chemical and pesticide use to help protect nearby Stotts Creek.

AGRICULTURAL WATER ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. Section 2510 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Act) (P.L. 110-246) established the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) by amending section 1240I of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa).

Program Objectives. The purpose of AWEP is to promote improved ground and surface water conservation and water quality by leveraging the Federal government's investment in natural resources conservation with services and resources of other eligible partners. Eligible partners include Federal, State, and local entities and local conservation districts whose conservation goals complement and are compatible with NRCS's mission.

AWEP was specifically created to address serious surface and ground water shortages and water quality concerns in many agricultural areas. AWEP follows the established national priorities for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP):

- Conservation of ground and surface water resources;

- Reduction of nonpoint source pollution, such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or excess salinity, in impaired watersheds consistent with Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) where available;
- Reduction of surface and groundwater contamination;
- Reduction of contamination from agricultural point sources, such as concentrated animal feeding operations; and
- Reduction in soil erosion and sedimentation from unacceptable levels on agricultural land.

Program Operations. Through AWEP, eligible partners submit proposals for funding to NRCS. The proposals are evaluated and successful applicants enter into multi-year agreements with NRCS to promote ground and surface water conservation and improve water quality on eligible agricultural lands in a specific geographic area. In evaluating partnership proposals, NRCS gives priority to those that:

- Include a high percentage of agricultural land and producers in the region or other appropriate area;
- Result in high levels of applied agricultural water quality and water conservation activities;
- Significantly enhance agricultural activity;
- Allow for monitoring and evaluation;
- Assist agricultural producers in meeting a regulatory requirement that might otherwise reduce the economic scope of the producer's operation;
- Are able to achieve the project's land and water treatment objectives within no more than five years;
- Include conservation practices supporting conversion of agricultural land from irrigated to dryland farming;
- Leverage AWEP funds with funds provided by partners; and
- Assist producers in areas with high-priority water quantity concerns in the following regions: Eastern Snake Plains Aquifer, Puget Sound, Ogallala Aquifer, Sacramento River Basin, Upper Mississippi River Basin, Red River, or Everglades.

As part of EQIP, AWEP contracts provide technical and financial assistance directly to eligible producers to do the following:

- Construct or improve irrigation systems and increased irrigation efficiency; and
- Implement conservation practices to improve water quality, and mitigate the effects of drought by conversion to less water-intense agricultural commodities or to dryland farming.

Eligible program participants may receive a payment amount that includes up to 75 percent of the incurred costs to implement one or more structural, vegetative, or land management practices, and up to 100 percent of estimated foregone income. Limited resource farmers, beginning farmers, and landowners or operators that are socially disadvantaged are eligible to receive up to 90 percent of the incurred costs and up to 100 percent of foregone income.

Total conservation payments are limited to $300,000 per person or legal entity during any six-year period, regardless of the number of farms or contracts. No person or legal entity may receive AWEP payments in any crop year if their average adjusted gross income for the preceding three years exceeds $1 million, unless two-thirds of that income is from farming, ranching, or forestry interests.

2013 Activities.

This is the fifth year in which AWEP has been implemented. NRCS has provided support for 91 project areas approved between 2009 and 2013. In 2013, NRCS obligated $45.5 million in over 1,212 new contracts in existing project areas to implement conservation practices on nearly 224,000 acres of agricultural land. The ability to leverage funding through partnership agreements has also remained strong. Partners provide matching technical and financial assistance throughout 2009-2013 has been nearly equivalent to NRCS's AWEP investment.

2013 Applications Backlog.

State	Total Applications	Number of Active and Completed Contracts	Valid Applications Unfunded	Percentage Valid Applications Funded	Average Contract Amount	Estimated Unfunded Contracts
Alabama	79	23	40	37	$44,493	$1,779,725
Arkansas	42	14	25	36	60,737	1,518,421
California	798	234	338	41	47,852	16,173,898
Colorado	11	4	5	44	140,056	700,278
Georgia	334	171	105	62	7,459	783,166
Idaho	108	50	33	60	97,462	3,216,261
Illinois	31	5	20	20	8,062	161,236
Indiana	43	28	7	80	29,793	208,550
Iowa	11	6	2	75	14,033	28,065
Kansas	49	25	3	89	105,494	316,481
Michigan	69	34	32	52	48,506	1,552,191
Minnesota	260	107	98	52	30,765	3,014,974
Mississippi	340	43	194	18	49,819	9,664,907
Missouri	1	-	1	-	-	-
Montana	16	14	1	93	59,469	59,469
Nebraska	317	126	77	62	28,009	2,156,672
New Jersey	10	5	-	100	38,759	-
New Mexico	4	4	-	100	15,290	-
New York	2	-	2	-	-	-
North Carolina	171	114	23	83	19,271	443,242
North Dakota	50	9	27	25	50,644	1,367,395
Oklahoma	49	15	25	38	112,157	2,803,930
Oregon	5	5	-	100	11,221	-
South Dakota	305	173	51	77	26,508	1,351,924
Texas	1	-	-	-	-	-
Washington	6	1	1	50	64,598	64,598
Wyoming	2	2	-	100	170,615	-
Total	3,114	1,212	1,110	52	36,682	40,717,020

2013 Funding.
AWEP funding has been invaluable in helping NRCS address areas in which water demand outstrips water supply. Approximately 60 percent of the contracts approved in 2013 are located in the designated high-priority water quantity concern areas. Socially disadvantaged producers received 5.0 percent of all contracts under the program.

Get Conservation on the Ground.
Idaho: Producers in south central Idaho are improving their surface water delivery along the Oakley Canal. An AWEP-funded project is working with 27 property owners to enclose an open irrigation canal. They are replacing over 52,000 feet of open ditch with Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) pipe. In the past, the average water loss from the open canal was around 36 percent or 13,747 acre feet per year. Conserving surface water will reduce the need to pump ground water from the area's deep wells by as much as 16,800 acre feet per year, helping recharge the Snake River Plains aquifer. AWEP is providing about $1.3 million for the approximately $2 million project.

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVE PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. Section 2602 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 reauthorized the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) by amending Section 1240N of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-1). The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers WHIP with funds made available through the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Program Objectives. WHIP provides assistance to agricultural landowners for the protection, restoration or enhancement of upland wildlife habitat, wetland wildlife habit, threatened and endangered species, fisheries, and other types of habitat. Focused efforts on habitat for fish and wildlife also contribute to more sustainable use of resources and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. WHIP can be implemented in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. By prioritizing specific geographic areas, WHIP is able to target financial and technical assistance funds to improve habitats needed for specific declining fish and wildlife species.

WHIP practices are often compatible with, and beneficial to, farming and ranching enterprises. Some practices enhance farm profitability by improving grazing conditions, reducing management expenses, and producing non-crop income from the lease of rights to harvest and observe wild game and fish. WHIP has been used to control invasive plant species; re-establish native vegetation; manage non-industrial private forestland; stabilize stream banks; protect, restore, develop or enhance unique habitats; and remove barriers that impede migration of certain wildlife species.

Program Operations. The national priorities in implementing WHIP are to:

- Promote the restoration of declining or important native fish and wildlife habitats;
- Protect, restore, develop or enhance fish and wildlife habitat to benefit at-risk species;
- Reduce the effects of invasive species on fish and wildlife habitats;
- Protect, restore, develop, or enhance declining or important aquatic wildlife species' habitats; and
- Protect, restore, develop, or enhance important migration and other movement corridors for wildlife.

The State Conservationist, with recommendations from the State Technical Committee and other partners, may identify priorities for enrollment in WHIP that complement the goals and objectives of relevant fish and wildlife conservation initiatives at the national, regional, and State level. The priorities serve as a guide for the development of WHIP ranking criteria in each State. States generally select two to six priority habitat types.

Eligibility. To be eligible for WHIP, the land must be private agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or Tribal land. Applicants must own or control the land for the duration of the WHIP contract.

Financial Assistance. WHIP provides up to 75 percent cost-share assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat through contracts that last from one to ten years. Higher payments may be made to eligible socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, to beginning and limited resource farmers or ranchers, and Indian Tribes. WHIP provides additional financial assistance to landowners who enter into 15-year or longer contracts to protect and restore high value, essential plant and animal habitat. Aggregate WHIP payments to any person or legal entity may not exceed $50,000 per year.

Technical Assistance. NRCS and its partners provide program participants with an assessment of wildlife habitat conditions, recommendations for practices to improve these habitat conditions, and a wildlife habitat development plan that incorporates practices and strategies for maximizing habitat for target species.

Partnerships. Partners play a significant role in WHIP implementation. In addition to assisting with the delivery of technical assistance to WHIP participants, they contribute cost-share support, supply equipment, and install practices. Partners include public agencies, non-profit organization partners, and technical service providers. Their participation in WHIP has improved communication and coordination among various interests addressing wildlife concerns.

2013 Activities.
In 2013, NRCS obligated almost $44.5 million in more than 2,225 contracts to enroll over 840,000 acres in WHIP. Of these 28 contracts valued at over $3.3 million on over 73,000 acres are with American Indian and Alaskan Natives. At the end of 2013, additional applications valued at over $14.7 million remain unfunded, demonstrating the strong producer interest in the program. In 2013, WHIP contracts addressed the following five major habitat types and declining species:

- Upland wildlife habitat (including grasslands, shrub/scrub, and forests);
- Wetland wildlife habitat;
- Riparian habitat (including areas along streams, rivers, lakes, and sloughs and coastal areas);
- Shallow water habitat (including lands where water can be impounded or regulated by diking, excavating, ditching, and/ or flooding). The goal is to provide habitat for wildlife such as shorebirds, waterfowl, wading birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, and other species that require shallow water for at least a part of their life cycle; and
- Rare and declining habitat (areas that once supported or currently support a unique, dwindling, or imperiled native plant and animal community).

Initiatives. WHIP plays an important role in implementing Working Lands for Wildlife, a new partnership with this overall goal of maintaining profitable food and fiber production on private and public lands while also benefitting wildlife populations. NRCS works with partners and private landowners to benefit habitat for a range of wildlife species while also offering innovative approaches for providing producers and landowners with regulatory predictability in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. NRCS and FWS initially selected seven at-risk wildlife species whose decline can be reversed given sufficient resources and landowner participation. Primary objectives are to:

1) Provide landowners with financial and technical assistance to help them improve their lands through wildlife habitat management and protection;
2) Implement conservation practices that will help restore populations of declining wildlife species (candidate, federally listed endangered and threatened or other at-risk wildlife species); and
3) Provide landowners with Endangered Species Act predictability and confidence that conservation investments they make on their lands today can help sustain their operations over the long term.

Following are WHIP-WLFW accomplishments for the seven wildlife species selected for 2013:
Bog Turtle. The Bog Turtle is a federally listed threatened wildlife species. A Biological Opinion and Addendum for implementation of Working Lands for Wildlife have been completed. In 2013, NRCS enrolled over 61 acres of habitat in six contracts valued at over $55,000. Through practices applied with WHIP funding, the landowners improved the habitat for the turtle while maintaining agricultural operations in Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Golden-Winged Warbler. The Golden-Winged Warbler is an at-risk wildlife species. It is also being considered a declining wildlife species. In 2013, NRCS enrolled over 5,629 acres of habitat in 127 contracts valued at over $2.9 million in the States of Maryland, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Gopher Tortoise. The Gopher Tortoise is a federally listed threatened wildlife species in some ranges, and a candidate wildlife species in other ranges. In 2013, NRCS enrolled over 91,000 acres of habitat in over 621 contracts valued at over $9.9 million. The States for the western population where the gopher tortoise is listed as a threatened species include Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama (three counties), and the States for the eastern population where the gopher tortoise is considered a candidate species include Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina.

Lesser Prairie Chicken. The Lesser Prairie Chicken is a candidate species. In 2013, NRCS enrolled almost 58,000 acres in Kansas and New Mexico in42 WHIP contracts that are valued at more than $1.9 million. This will help prevent the need to list the Lesser Prairie Chicken as an endangered or threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, while also improving grazing and wildlife habitat.

New England Cottontail. The New England Cottontail is a candidate species. In 2013, NRCS enrolled over 1,716 acres of habitat in 36 contracts valued at almost $1.2 million in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Rhode Island. Providing habitat for this cottontail will assist in preventing the cottontail from being listed and ultimately prevent its extinction while maintaining agricultural operations.

Sage Grouse. The Sage Grouse is a candidate species. In 2013, NRCS enrolled over 53,000 acres in 40 WHIP contracts valued at more than $2.1 million. WHIP planned conservation practices in 11 States, including California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Providing habitat needed for the Sage Grouse will prevent it from being federally listed as an endangered or threatened species.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher. The Southwestern Willow Flycatcher is a federally-listed threatened wildlife species. In 2013, NRCS enrolled over 685 acres of habitat in 13 contracts valued at almost $770,000 in California, Colorado, and Utah. Providing needed habitat for the Flycatcher will move towards delisting it under the Endangered Species Act, while allowing private property owners to maintain their ranching operations. These efforts support recovery and eventual delisting of this species under the Endangered Species Act while also allowing the ranching operations of private property owners to remain economically viable.

Getting Conservation on the Ground.
New Jersey – Bog Turtle. This tiny turtle is a federally-listed Threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and one of the seven wildlife species under the Working Lands for Wildlife partnership. On a farm in New Jersey, the cows graze on red maple saplings, sedges, ferns and tangled weeds, which keeps the vegetation in check and provides sunshine needed for the Bog Turtles to warm their bodies. Keeping the vegetation in check also allows the turtle eggs to get the sun they need to incubate. WHIP funds were used to install fences and gates to manage the cows' grazing habits while providing for the turtle's needs. For six months each year the cows roam freely in the wetlands portion of the pasture, and in the remaining months they are funneled to another field. In addition to sun, the Bog Turtle needs vegetation for their nests and for foraging during the nesting and breeding season in the spring. The fence strategy also allows the turtles to move about during the season without the risk of being trampled. This is a recovery plan with the ultimate goal of removing the Bog Turtle from the list of endangered species.

Florida – Gopher Tortoise. Through the Working Lands for Wildlife partnership, NRCS is providing WHIP assistance to restore the Florida Gopher Tortoise on an 80-acre parcel within the longleaf pine ecosystem. This property is located on Florida's "Nature Coast," which is home to a variety of ecosystems, from dense hardwood forests and marsh lands to sand hills and Gulf Coast waters. The subject property is a mixture of slash pine planted on former pasture and upland longleaf pine forest. Habitat is being restored by thinning and reducing the number of slash pines in the forest, establishing native groundcover vegetation and implementing prescribed burning in this fire-dependent ecosystem. These activities greatly enhance the habitat for the gopher tortoise and other wildlife such as the fox squirrel and the northern bobwhite quail. In the near term, restoration includes establishing ground cover plants such as wiregrass, silk grass and partridge pea to increase plant diversity and enhance wildlife habitat. These plants will also serve as filters for the groundwater that eventually finds its way into the local rivers and the Gulf of Mexico, helping to improve water quality in the coastal waters and estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico.

FARM AND RANCH LANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM

Current Activities.
Background. Title III of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 established the Farmland Protection Program (FPP) as a new farmland protection program. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (the 2002 Act) authorized FPP as a Title XII program under the Food Security Act of 1985 (the 1985 Act), and authorized the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to purchase conservation easements for the purpose of protecting topsoil by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land. NRCS identified the program as the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) in the 2003 Final Rule to distinguish it from the 1996 authorization and to more accurately reflect the types of land the program protects. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Act) amended FRPP by changing the purpose of the program to protecting the agricultural use and related conservation values of eligible land by limiting non-agricultural uses of that land. Additionally, the 2008 Act changed

FRPP from a Federal land acquisition program to a program through which NRCS provides financial assistance for the purchase of conservation easements by eligible entities.

Program Objectives. FRPP protects the Nation's most valuable lands for the production of food, feed, and fiber by providing matching funds to keep productive farm and ranch lands in agricultural use. According to NRCS National Resources Inventory (NRI) data, over 7.5 million acres of prime farmland, an area equivalent to the States of Maryland and Delaware, were converted to non-agricultural uses between 2002 and 2007. The same study tells us that more than one-third of all land that has ever been developed in the lower 48 States during our Nation's history was developed in the last quarter century. Such conversion decreases the availability of local food markets and increases the travel distance and cost of delivery of food to the consumer market. By enrolling in FRPP, farm and ranch lands that are threatened by development pressures can remain productive and sustainable. Keeping land in agricultural use avoids the creation of urban pollution (nitrogen, phosphorus and sedimentation) from land that would otherwise be converted to lawns and impervious surfaces such as paving and buildings. Ultimately, this assists with efforts in managing the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) of nutrients to public waters such as the Chesapeake Bay and Mississippi River. Additionally, FRPP supports the President's America's Great Outdoors Initiative by preserving the natural landscape features of non-urbanized areas and encouraging the continued agricultural uses of the lands.

Program Operations. NRCS works with State and local governments, soil and water conservation districts, Indian Tribes, and eligible non-governmental organizations to purchase conservation easements to protect the agricultural use of eligible land. Potential partners must provide written evidence of their:

- Commitment to long-term conservation of agricultural lands;
- Staff dedicated to monitoring and easement stewardship;
- Capability to acquire, manage, and enforce easement rights or other interests in land; and
- Capability to provide, in cash, a minimum of 25 percent of the purchase price (appraised fair-market value minus the landowner donation) for the conservation easement.

Eligibility. Individual landowners must apply to and be accepted by an eligible State, Indian Tribe, or local governments or non-governmental programs to participate in FRPP. As a Title XII program, these individual landowners must meet payment eligibility requirements for adjusted gross income, wetland conservation compliance, and highly erodible land conservation compliance. The land to be enrolled in FRPP must meet one of three criteria to qualify for consideration: 1) have at least 50 percent prime, unique, or important farmland soils; 2) have historic or archeological resources; or 3) further a State or local government policy that is consistent with the purposes of the FRPP.

Application and Selection Process. NRCS uses a continuous signup under which cooperating entities may propose and submit parcels for funding. Upon receipt of the applications for parcels from an eligible cooperating entity, each NRCS State office evaluates the entities, land, and landowners for eligibility, and ranks and prioritizes parcels based on established criteria. NRCS awards funds to the eligible cooperating entities that submit the highest-ranked parcels for which the NRCS State office has FRPP funding. NRCS priorities include farms that face the greatest pressure to convert to non-agricultural uses, are accessible to appropriate markets, contain prime soils or other farmland of significance, have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services, and have surrounding parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production.

NRCS and the cooperating entities sign a cooperative agreement to obligate FRPP funds. The cooperating entities acquire the conservation easements, and then hold, monitor, manage, and enforce the acquired easements. The Federal share for any easement acquisition cannot exceed 50 percent of the appraised fair market value of the conservation easement. Each conservation easement deed must include a provision granting the United States the right of enforcement to protect the Federal investment. To ensure responsible land stewardship, the landowner must implement a conservation plan protecting highly erodible land on each parcel acquired in part with Federal funds. NRCS provides technical assistance to develop conservation easements deeds with enforceable provisions and conservation plans for the highly erodible cropland accepted into FRPP.

NRCS Technical Assistance. In addition to helping landowners and entities develop conservation easement deeds and conservation plans, NRCS provides technical assistance through verification of the eligibility of the entity,

landowner, and land; assessment of the risk of hazardous materials; evaluation and ranking applications; development of cooperative agreements; review of deeds, title, and appraisals; and payment processing.

2013 Activities.
In 2013, approximately 344 new FRPP cooperative agreements were entered into with partners. NRCS and its partners enrolled an associated 116,011 acres through these cooperative agreements. Additionally, 256 FRPP permanent easements from previous years were closed in 2013, encompassing approximately 63,552 acres.

Cumulative Program Activity Through 2013	
Closed Easements (Permanent)	**Cumulative**
Number of Easements	3,696
Number of Acres	838,333
Enrolled Easements (Permanent)	**Cumulative**
Number of Easements	4,535
Number of Acres	1,137,767

FRPP contributed to the agency's strategy to reduce threats to Sage Grouse habitat and improve rangeland health and sustainability by working with partners to enroll three new parcels with 29,828 associated acres in 2013.

Get Conservation on the Ground.
American Farmland Trust study. In addition to keeping land available for agricultural use, FRPP improves agricultural viability, encourages on farm conservation, and helps farmers gain access to land according to a study recently published by the American Farmland Trust. The study reports that of FRPP landowners who took part in the study:

- 84 percent spent a portion of the proceeds from the sale of their easement on improving their agricultural operation;
- 75 percent applied at least one conservation practice, in addition to conserving their land through FRPP. Of these, the majority applied practices intended to protect soil from erosion; and
- 55 percent spent a portion of their easement proceeds on repaying loans on agricultural land or buying additional land.

New Hampshire. The 39-acre Amber Acres Farm, next to the Oyster River Forest in New Hampshire, has been protected by a FRPP conservation easement. In addition to preserving the agricultural use of the property, the environmental benefits and unique qualities of the property include the habitat for the New England Cottontail Rabbit, a candidate species for the endangered species list, and the abutting Spruce Hole Bog, a National Natural Landmark.

This easement was successful because of the strong community action and financial support of 115 donations from private landowners and foundations. The Trust for Public Land (TPL) spearheaded a fundraising campaign that came to be known as the Oyster River Initiative, which consisted of several organizations that collaborated and pooled their resources. In addition to NRCS, the organizations involved were the TPL, Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire, New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services, New Hampshire Land and Community Investment Program, New Hampshire Mooseplate Program, Lamprey River Advisory Committee, and the Town of Durham's Conservation Commission. FRPP contributed $765,000, which is 50 percent of the appraised value of the Amber Acres Farm conservation easement.

The FRPP conservation easement on the 39-acre Amber Acres Farm, when combined with the 171-acre Oyster River Forest, which is protected by another NRCS easement program, connects nearly 2,200 acres of protected land and helps maintain water quality with approximately 4,600 feet of frontage along the Oyster River. The river serves as the drinking water source for Durham residents and the University of New Hampshire, including nearly 16,000 people using the municipal water system.

CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. The Conservation Security Program is not currently authorized for new enrollments. It was originally authorized by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (the 2002 Act). Section 2001 of the 2002 Act amended the Food Security Act of 1985 by adding Chapter 2, Subchapter A, the Conservation Security Program. Section 1202(a) of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 extended the program into 2011, but the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Act) (P.L. 110-246), prohibits any Conservation Security Program to be entered into or renewed after September 30, 2008. Pursuant to Section 2301 of the 2008 Act, the Secretary must make payments on contracts entered into before September 30, 2008, using such sums as are necessary.

Program Objectives. The Conservation Security Program was a voluntary program that provided financial and technical assistance for the conservation, protection, and improvement of natural resources on tribal and private working lands. It provided payments for producers who practice good stewardship on their agricultural lands and provided incentives for those who wanted to do more. The program purpose was to:

- Identify and reward those farmers and ranchers meeting the very highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations;
- Create powerful incentives for other producers to meet those same standards of conservation performance on their operations; and
- Provide public benefits for generations to come.

Under the 2008 Act, NRCS is not authorized to enter into new Conservation Security Program contracts, but continues to make payments to producers with five- to ten-year contracts from prior years.

2013 Activities.

In 2013, NRCS provided nearly $144 million in financial assistance payments on slightly more than 12,000 contracts from signups held in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2008. Among the many benefits of this program, the Conservation Security Program has been a significant contributor within the emerging areas of carbon and energy management. NRCS provides payments for enhancement activities to promote carbon sequestration, energy conservation, and the production and use of renewable fuels and electricity. Funded activities include:

- Sequestration of greenhouse gases as measured by improvements to the soil conditioning index, which reflects soil organic matter levels;
- Generation of renewable energy;
- Use of renewable energy fuels such as biodiesel and ethanol;
- Recycling of on-farm lubricants; and
- Reductions in soil tillage intensity ratings.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. Section 2301 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Act) amended the Food Security Act of 1985 to establish the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The 2012 Agricultural Appropriations Act extended CSP enrollment authority through 2014.

Program Objective. CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and to adopt additional ones on their operations. CSP provides opportunities to recognize excellent stewards and deliver valuable new conservation. The program helps producers identify natural resource problems in their operation and provides technical and financial assistance to solve those problems in an environmentally-beneficial and cost-effective manner.

CSP addresses eight resource concerns: soil erosion, soil quality, water quantity, water quality, air quality, plant resources, animal resources, and energy. Below are examples of how the program addresses these concerns:

- Soil erosion - reducing the amount of soil lost through wind, sheet, and rill erosion from cropland, stream banks, and farm roads;

- Soil quality - increasing soil organic matter, reducing compaction, reducing organic matter oxidation, removing soil contaminants, and utilizing nutrient cycling;
- Water quantity - mitigating the impact of excess water, improving water usage through irrigation efficiency, and selecting crops based on available moisture;
- Water quality - reducing the negative impact of transported sediments, nutrients, pesticides, salinity, and pathogens on surface and subsurface water sources;
- Air quality - reducing the contribution of agricultural operations to airborne soil particles and greenhouse gas emissions, controlling chemical spray drift, and reducing odors from livestock operations;
- Plant resources - improving the quantity, diversity, health, and vigor of plants while creating conditions for recognized threatened and endangered species to reestablish;
- Animal resources - improving the cover, food, and water available for domestic and wildlife species and improving habitat for aquatic and recognized threatened and endangered species; and
- Energy - promoting energy efficiencies for on-farm activities.

Program Operations. CSP is a voluntary program available through a continuous sign-up process, with announced cut-off dates for ranking and funding applications. This allows producers to submit their applications at any time. Applications are evaluated relative to other applications addressing similar priority resource concerns to facilitate a competitive ranking process among applications that face similar resource challenges. The 2008 Act prescribed the following factors for evaluating and ranking applications:

- Level of conservation treatment on all applicable priority resource concerns at the time of application;
- Degree to which the proposed conservation treatment on applicable priority resource concerns effectively increases conservation performance;
- Number of applicable priority resource concerns proposed to be treated to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the contract; and
- Extent to which other resource concerns, in addition to priority resource concerns, will be addressed to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold by the end of the contract period.

Congress authorized the enrollment of an additional 12,769,000 acres each fiscal year beginning October 1, 2008. Continuous sign-up for CSP started on August 10, 2009.

The program is national in scope, but NRCS did not establish national priority resource concerns. Instead, States determine the three to five priority resource concerns that are of specific concern for their State or for geographic areas within the State.

Eligibility. Eligibility to participate in CSP has three components - applicant, land, and stewardship threshold eligibility. CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or crops produced, in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas. Individuals, legal entities, joint operations, or Indian Tribes may apply. To be accepted, the applicant must have effective control of the land and be the operator of record with the Farm Service Agency records system. Eligible lands include cropland, pastureland, rangeland and non-industrial private forestland, agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian Tribe, and other private agricultural land (including cropped woodland, marshes, and agricultural land used for the production of livestock) on which resource concerns related to agricultural production could be addressed.

Once applicant and land eligibility are determined, NRCS uses the conservation measurement tool (CMT) to assess an applicant's conservation activities. These activities must meet or exceed the stewardship threshold, as determined by CMT, for at least one resource concern at the time of the application, and one priority resource concern by the end of the CSP contract.

Financial Assistance. CSP provides participants with two possible types of payments. An annual payment is available for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing activities. A supplemental payment may be earned by participants receiving an annual payment who also adopt a resource-conserving crop rotation. CSP contracts are for a five-year period, and payments are made as soon as practicable after October 1 of each year for contract activities installed and maintained in the previous fiscal year. For all contracts, CSP payments to a person or legal entity may not exceed $40,000 in any year and $200,000 during any five-year period. However, joint operations may qualify for up to $400,000 over the term of the initial contract period.

Technical Assistance and Partnership. CSP offers technical assistance to producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner. Through the planning process, NRCS helps producers and forestry land owners identify natural resource problems in their operation, and provide technical and financial assistance to solve those problems in an environmentally-beneficial and cost-effective manner.

Partnerships have been created with Federal, State, and local entities, including the National Association of Conservation Districts, State Associations of Conservation Districts, and local conservation districts in order to deliver a program beneficial to program participants and the environment. NRCS cooperates with Federal, State, and local partners to address local and national conservation issues. Through interactive communication between the local community, local interest groups, and State and Federal agencies, the partnership provides the entities with information and resources needed to address local priorities and implement State and national programs, such as CSP.

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) enables the use of certain conservation programs, including CSP, along with the resources of eligible partners to provide financial and technical assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands. Under CCPI, the NRCS enters into partnership agreements with eligible entities that want to enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands in an effort to leverage funds to get more conservation benefit. The partners do not receive any funds from NRCS. All financial assistance is provided directly to producers for implementation of activities in CSP contracts. Partners agree to provide additional technical or administrative resources to assist with planning, implementation, and/or monitoring of project effectiveness. Eligible partners include federally-recognized Indian Tribes, State and local units of government, producer associations, farmer cooperatives, institutions of higher education, and nongovernmental organizations (NGO) with a history of working cooperatively with producers.

2013 Activities.
In 2013, CSP provided $124 million in financial assistance funding, as shown in the State distribution table below. These funds will be used to treat 9,519,373 acres**.**

2013 Enrollment[1]

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance ($ obligated)
Alabama	23,142	$333,217
Alaska	1,138	32,706
Arizona	15,127	60,713
Arkansas	547,705	17,806,745
California	76,421	547,113
Colorado	167,051	1,407,013
Connecticut	26	1,000
Delaware	12,031	236,132
Florida	43,960	359,618
Georgia	115,820	3,537,363
Idaho	63,876	417,847
Illinois	188,731	3,729,403
Indiana	40,725	834,842
Iowa	175,346	3,842,775
Kansas	413,666	5,263,546
Kentucky	28,775	717,172
Louisiana	132,204	3,154,219
Maine	3,246	79,883

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance ($ obligated)
Maryland	1,844	48,562
Michigan	29,523	519,675
Minnesota	387,331	10,047,837
Mississippi	137,599	3,654,847
Missouri	161,442	2,656,476
Montana	505,233	4,131,206
Nebraska	887,066	8,044,484
Nevada	19,728	142,380
New Hampshire	26,994	47,023
New Jersey	1,514	35,388
New Mexico	995,483	4,655,159
New York	34,571	669,622
North Carolina	18,367	248,287
North Dakota	604,829	10,665,604
Ohio	51,952	1,175,512
Oklahoma	762,443	9,267,910
Oregon	138,120	1,286,515
Pennsylvania	43,709	708,947
South Carolina	31,125	357,796
South Dakota	984,966	11,083,631
Tennessee	39,851	687,819
Texas	899,768	4,710,598
Utah	226,792	1,165,839
Vermont	747	9,809
Virginia	23,363	496,349
Washington	218,428	2,673,900
West Virginia	17,817	215,402
Wisconsin	94,425	1,665,770
Wyoming	125,353	672,983
Total	9,519,373	124,106,637

[1] Source: NRCS Protracts October 25, 2013

The program started in 2009, and more than 59.5 million acres of agricultural land have been enrolled into the program. CSP helps farmers and ranchers who are already taking action to conserve natural resources do even more to benefit the soil, water, air and other resources on their operations. CSP has grown into a major force for conservation, and it continues to strongly inspire others with the desire to go the extra mile to conserve and protect America's natural resources. With the 2013 sign up enrollment of 9.5 million acres, the total acreage of lands now enrolled in CSP exceeds 92,000 square miles, an area larger than Iowa and Indiana, combined.

Getting Conservation on the Ground.

Minnesota: Minnesota farmers have consistently been the biggest users of one of America's most significant farm conservation programs, according to a new analysis released by the Land Stewardship Project (LSP). "This report

further shows what we've known for a while—Minnesota farmers are using CSP to do more conservation on the land," said Don Baloun, State Conservationist. LSP's examination of CSP contract data shows that Minnesota farmers have been the biggest users of the program every year that it's been offered, both in terms of number of contracts—3,200—and dollars obligated to farmers who hold those contracts—$180 million to date. In terms of number of active CSP contracts, the next closest State is Missouri, with 3,084. Interviews with Minnesota farmers show that they are using their CSP contracts to protect water, soil and wildlife habitat using everything from diverse crop rotations and rotational grazing to wildlife-friendly implements and more targeted use of chemicals. "CSP has emerged as a critical program for putting real conservation and real dollars on Minnesota's working farms," said Adam Warthesen, an LSP Policy organizer and author of the report.

Wisconsin: A major participant of CSP in Wisconsin is a dairy near Neillsville. The farm is run by sons who are co-owners and the family works together to manage the operation and participate in the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The farm is a sizable operation, milking 700 cows every day, and the family has implemented a long list of conservation and water quality practices. Starting in 2003, they adopted Nutrient and Feed Management along with a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan. "NRCS gives us quite a few ideas and guidance that is helping us make good decisions on the use of our land," says the operator. "We have constructed and maintained many acres of grassed waterways on our 3000 plus acres. We constructed lot runoff and filter strips along with abandoning several wells and an old manure storage structure." The operator wants to protect the water quality and is active in making sure that the water supply is not impaired for the surrounding farms and the wells they depend on every day to sustain their operation. Talking about the program, the operator says "CSP has allowed me to tailor conservation improvements to my farm that meet my resource concerns."

GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM

Current Activities.

Background. The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) was authorized by Sections 1238 N through Q of the Food Security Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-198), as amended by Section 2401 of the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171). Section 2403 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110–246) (the 2008 Act) reauthorized GRP and made several amendments, including authorizing the enrollment of an additional 1.22 million acres of eligible land from 2009 through 2012. The American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-240) extended authorization for enrollment through 2013.

Program Objectives. GRP helps landowners and operators restore and protect rangeland, pastureland, and other grassland while maintaining the land's suitability for grazing. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding. GRP, by limiting development and providing habitat needed by threatened and endangered species, preserves agricultural heritage and green space, provides for recreational activities, and ensures the Nation's ability to produce its own food.

Program Operations. NRCS and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) jointly administer GRP. NRCS has lead responsibility for conservation planning, technical assistance to owners and operators, and easement administration. FSA has lead responsibility for rental contract administration and financial activities. National ranking criteria guide the development of State ranking criteria to ensure GRP funds are focused on projects that support grazing operations, protect grassland from conversion to other uses, enhance plant and animal biodiversity, leverage non-Federal funds, and address that State's program priorities. Priority is given to expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) grasslands. Applications, ranking criteria, and program forms are publicly available through agency Web sites.

GRP participants are required to follow a grazing management plan developed with NRCS to ensure that the grassland is sustained and that livestock grazing on the enrolled land are healthy and well-managed. All enrollment options permit grazing on the land in a manner that maintains the viability of natural grasses, shrubs, and forbs. Haying, mowing, or harvesting seed is permitted, except during the nesting seasons for local bird species that are in significant decline or are protected under Federal or State law.

Eligibility. Land is eligible if it is private or tribal land and is: 1) grassland that contains forbs or shrubs (including rangeland and pastureland) for which grazing is the predominant use; or 2) located in an area that has been historically dominated by grassland, forbs, or shrubs. The land also must have potential to provide habitat for animal or plant populations of significant ecological value if it is either retained in its current use or restored to a natural condition.

Financial Assistance. The program operates under a continuous signup process with the following enrollment options:

- Rental contract. Participants may choose a 10-year, 15-year, or 20-year rental contract, during which USDA provides annual payments in an amount not more than 75 percent of the grazing value established by FSA. County-based grazing values (based on soil productivity) are posted in USDA field offices. Payment rates are evaluated to assure that the rates reflect local prevailing rental rates. Payment is limited to $50,000 per person or legal entity per year;

- Permanent easement. Easement duration is in perpetuity or to the maximum extent allowed by State law. Participants are provided an easement payment at the time of easement purchase. Easement payment amounts may not exceed the current market value of the land less the grazing value of the land encumbered by the easement. Easement compensation is determined as the lowest of: 1) an appraisal or area-wide market survey, 2) a geographic cap, or 3) landowner offer. Easements are recorded in the local land records;

- Restoration agreement. If NRCS and the landowner determine that restoration is necessary to return the vegetation to a desired condition, cost-share assistance is available through a restoration agreement that pays up to 50 percent of the restoration cost, up to $50,000 per person or legal entity per year. Participants may pay part of their share through in-kind contributions. If funds are limited, USDA gives higher priority to applications with high-quality grassland that does not need restoration than to poorer-quality grassland that also needs restoration; or

- Cooperative agreement. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 amended GRP to authorize USDA to enter into cooperative agreements with a unit of State or local government, Indian Tribe, or non-governmental organization that demonstrates it has the relevant mission, experience, and resources to administer a GRP easement. USDA will pay up to 50 percent of the purchase price of the easement. The cooperating entity has the responsibility to enforce the easement, but the United States maintains a contingent right of enforcement.

Technical Assistance. The participant develops a grazing management plan or conservation plan with NRCS, which includes grazing practices for the acres, determined eligible for GRP and specifies the manner in which the grasslands should be managed to maintain their viability. NRCS technical assistance includes reviews of restoration measures, guidance on management activities, and biological advice to achieve optimum results considering all grassland resources.

2013 Activities.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 authorized GRP to enroll an additional 1,220,000 acres of eligible land in 2009 through 2013. In 2013, the program obligated and committed $52.6 million of the financial assistance funding allocated to the States and enrolled 148,574 acres. Enrollments include current active and completed agreements.

2013 GRP Enrollment Summary			
	Active Easements	**Rental Contracts Signed**	**Total**
No. of Agreements	42	222	264
No. of Acres Enrolled	59,184	89,390	148,574
FA Funding	$ 40,812,855	$ 11,843,591	$ 52,656,446

GRP Cumulative Program Activity						
GRP Accomplishments	**2003 to 2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**
Number of Enrolled Easements	252	56	141	110	66	42
Enrolled Easement Acres	117,618	27,611	67,789	78,323	47,049	59,184
Rental Acres Enrolled	618,103	89,580	273,519	124,039	227,715	89,390
Total Acres Enrolled	735,721	117,191	341,308	202,362	274,764	148,574
Cumulative Acres enrolled under 2008 Farm Bill		117,191	458,499	660,861	934,304	1,082,878

GRP Cumulative Closed Easements (Through 2013)	
Number of Easements	660
Acres of Easements	396,261

Get Conservation on the Ground.
Missouri: Protecting Declining Habitat. Missouri landowners have enrolled 37 easements into GRP, protecting approximately 4,300 acres of grassland. Approximately half of those protected acres are native prairie lands, which have declined from a pre-settlement total of 15 million acres to a current total of 90,000 acres. Missouri Department of Conservation wildlife service biologists have documented 94 species of plants on one GRP site, and there is a record of a greater prairie chicken nesting on a Missouri GRP easement after traveling over 50 miles from Kansas. The protection of this once flourishing habitat has provided habitat necessary to maintain animal and plant biodiversity in Missouri.

AGRICULTURAL MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Current Activities.
Background. Section 524(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1524(b), Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA), authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to use $15 million of Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) funds for financial assistance in selected States where participation in the Federal Crop Insurance Program is historically low. Section 524(b) was added by Title I, Section 133, of the Agricultural Risk Protection Act of 2000 (PL 106-224). Section 133 was amended by the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-171). This amendment identified the following States as eligible for AMA: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Section 133 was further amended by the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Act) (P.L. 110–246) to add Hawaii as the 16th State eligible for participation in AMA. The 2008 Act amendment also specifies the amount of funds to be apportioned to NRCS, the Risk Management Agency (RMA), and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

Program Objectives. NRCS administers the conservation provisions of the AMA program, which provides financial assistance to agricultural producers to address water management, water quality, and erosion control issues by incorporating conservation into their farming operations. With AMA funds, producers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or to improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices, including soil erosion control, integrated pest management, or transition to organic farming.

Program Operations. The AMA program addresses the following NRCS national priorities:
- Reducing non-point source pollution, such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or excess salinity in impaired watersheds consistent with Total Daily Maximum Loads, where available;
- Reducing surface and groundwater contamination;
- Promoting conservation of ground and surface water resources;
- Reducing emissions, such as particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, and ozone precursors and depleters that contribute to air quality impairment violations of National Ambient Air Quality Standards;

- Reducing soil erosion and sedimentation from unacceptably high levels on agricultural land; and
- Promoting at-risk species habitat conservation.

Like other financial assistance programs, AMA implementation is based on a conservation plan, from which a contract is developed containing highly effective conservation practices that help mitigate the negative effects of resource concerns on the landscape and to the environment. The practices most frequently included in conservation plans and contracts include:

- Irrigation pipelines used to convey irrigation water in an efficient and effective manner;
- Micro-irrigation systems which have the highest irrigation efficiency and which can reduce water usage significantly;
- Sprinkler irrigation systems, which are the most widely used type of irrigation water delivery system that is both effective and efficient;
- Irrigation storage reservoirs used to store irrigation water for reuse;
- Pumping plants installed in conjunction with other irrigation system components to assist in water use or reuse;
- Water wells as a means by which to effectively utilize groundwater, often in conjunction with sprinkler and micro-irrigation systems;
- Fencing installed to assist in the management of livestock grazing, which is a vital component of any grazing management system;
- Brush management used to control invasive species and increase land productivity; and
- Seasonal high tunnel systems for crops, which are temporary structures that control the growing environment and improve the efficiency of water use.

NRCS developed the conservation provisions to make program implementation flexible enough to allow States the opportunity to use it to meet their resource needs. States individually determine the resource concerns to be addressed, eligible practices, applicant ranking criteria, the ranking process, and cutoff dates for ranking applications. States are responsible for fund allocations within the State, payment methods, and public outreach and information activities. Participants may use AMA in conjunction with other USDA conservation programs.

Eligibility. Applicants must own or control the land, which must be within one of the States in which the program is authorized, and comply with adjusted gross income limitation provisions. Eligible land includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, nonindustrial forestland, and other private land that produces crops or livestock where risk may be mitigated through operation diversification or change in resource conservation practices.

Financial Assistance. AMA provides financial assistance to eligible participants. Participation is voluntary, but requires a conservation plan. NRCS works with the applicant to develop the plan. A contract must be for a minimum duration of one year after completion of the last practice, but not more than ten years. Participants must agree to maintain cost-shared practices for the life of the practice. They may contribute to the cost of a practice through in-kind contributions, which may include personal labor, use of personal equipment, donated labor or materials, and on-hand or approved used materials.

2013 Activities.

In 2013, NRCS allocated $2.5 million of CCC funds for financial and technical assistance for approval of new AMA contracts. Of this amount, over $1.9 million was obligated into 119 contracts covering 3,422 acres. Cumulatively, AMA has 465 contracts in implementation, and a continuing backlog of applications that indicates strong interest among producers in the program. At the end of 2013, AMA had a backlog of 281 applications, with an estimated contract value of $4.6 million on 8,100 acres. Backlog estimates are based on 2013 average contract value and contract acreage.

AMA provides many producers a first-time opportunity to address natural resource concerns on their lands. For example, many producers have not been able to participate in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) because they do not meet the eligibility requirement that land must have been irrigated for two of the previous five years to receive EQIP funding. A number of these EQIP-ineligible producers are small-acreage or specialty-crop farming operations that provide high dollar value products to the general public. By helping to mitigate the risks associated with these kinds of agricultural enterprises, AMA helps agriculture remain a valuable segment of local economies.

AMA funding helps address issues of concern to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative (CBWI) in New York, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Delaware, and Maryland, and implement water quality practices in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed drainage area.

Get Conservation on the Ground.
Walpole, New Hampshire. Sheldon Sawyer and his son, Tom Sawyer, own and operate a large dairy farm with 250 Jersey cows in the Connecticut River Valley. They entered into an AMA contract that included the following conservation practices: critical area planting, a new milking center waste water treatment system, and decommissioning of the old waste water lagoon. The old waste water lagoon was located in a floodplain adjacent to a stream on gravelly soils. Decommissioning the old waste water lagoon and installation of a new conventional stone leach field has mitigated possible future discharges into the nearby stream.

Tompkins County, New York. Doug and Mary Newman moved to the Groton Area as beginning organic farmers. In 2010, a few years after establishing their vegetable farm and starting a community supported agriculture operation; Doug contacted the Ithaca NRCS field office to inquire about the new NRCS pilot under AMA providing financial assistance to install seasonal high tunnels. The high tunnel pilot seemed to be a great opportunity to further the farm's goal of providing food for the local market over a longer season. The high tunnel has allowed the farm to grow a second crop - mainly spinach - after the tomatoes, peppers and eggplants. It has also allowed the harvest of fresh tomatoes for sale at local markets earlier in the year. The use of the high tunnel also has reduced incidence on their farm of common plant diseases such as blight, particularly during wetter growing seasons.

The Newmans found an ancillary benefit in the high tunnels. They are assisting the less fortunate in their community by providing healthy, fresh vegetables to the local food pantry once a week. With a record number of people on assistance, it is at these times that the Newmans' generosity is most needed.

CHESAPEAKE BAY WATERSHED PROGRAM

Current Activities.
Background. Section 2605 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-246) authorized the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program (CBWP) by adding Section 1240Q to the Food Security Act of 1985 (1985 Act).

Program Objectives. The Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure, constituting the largest estuary in the United States and one of the largest and most biologically productive estuaries in the world. However, water pollution in the Chesapeake Bay is preventing the attainment of existing State water-quality standards and the "fishable and swimmable" goals of the Clean Water Act.

The CBWP helps agricultural producers improve water quality and quantity, and restore, enhance, and preserve soil, air, and related resources in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed through the implementation of conservation practices. These conservation practices reduce soil erosion and nutrient levels in ground and surface water; improve, restore, and enhance wildlife habitat; and help address air quality and related natural resource concerns. CBWP encompasses all tributaries, backwaters, and side channels, including their watersheds, that drain into the Chesapeake Bay. This area includes portions of the States of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

Program Operations. NRCS implements CBWP through the various natural resources conservation programs authorized by subtitle D, Title XII of the 1985 Act. In 2013, NRCS implemented CBWP through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). NRCS announces the availability of CBWP financial assistance through a request for contract solicitations.

CBWP funding supports the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Program, a regional initiative that helps Federal and State agencies, local governments, nonprofit groups, and citizens address resource concerns and reach mutually established goals for clean and sustainable ecosystems. CBWP funding also supports Executive Order 13508, Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration, issued by President Obama in May 2009. This Executive Order declared the Chesapeake

Bay a national treasure and ushered in a new era of shared Federal leadership, action, and accountability. Thus, CBWP priorities are also national priorities and include focusing on high priority watersheds, focusing and integrating Federal and State programs, accelerating conservation adoption, and accelerating development of new conservation technologies.

Eligibility. Only agricultural producers owning or operating within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed are eligible to participate in CBWP. In addition, NRCS applies the eligibility requirements of the particular natural resource program used to implement CBWP.

Conservation Plan. With assistance from NRCS or approved technical service providers (TSPs), an agricultural producer develops a conservation plan for some or all of the land owned or operated. The plan specifies the method in which the planned conservation treatment practices and systems on the enrolled acres will be implemented, operated, and maintained. A conservation plan is the basis for the program contract.

Financial Assistance. NRCS targets financial assistance under CBWP in several ways. Eligible applications for CBWP funding receive additional ranking points if they are: located in high nutrient and sediment yielding priority watersheds; include core and supporting practices that address State water quality milestones; and treat soils that are vulnerable to leaching or runoff.

NRCS uses CBWP financial assistance to enter into contracts with eligible producers to share the costs of the applicable conservation treatment on agricultural lands in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. NRCS provides payments for approved conservation practices and systems and land-use adjustments within a time schedule specified by the conservation plan. The CBWP contracts may be modified to increase funds provided the increased cost is the result of a valid contract modification within the original contract scope and intent. The modification must follow the rules of the conservation program used to apply the conservation treatment.

Technical Assistance. NRCS provides technical assistance through CBWP to help agricultural producers and others address opportunities, concerns, and problems related to the use of natural resources, and to help them make sound natural resource management decisions on lands within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Examples of technical assistance include assisting producers with identifying conservation problems through resource inventories and proposing conservation practices to solve the problems.

Partnerships. The agency consults with appropriate Federal and State agencies to ensure CBWP conservation activities complement other Federal and State programs in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Across the watershed, NRCS works with State agriculture departments, State association of conservation districts and local conservation districts to align program delivery with each State's needs for watershed implementation plans, and conservation planning. The agency also works with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Chesapeake Bay Program Office on implementation of Executive Order 13508.

2013 Activities.

In 2013, approximately 2,175 agricultural producers submitted applications to NRCS to participate in CBWP. NRCS approved more than 900 contracts for more than $40.6 million of financial assistance to treat an estimated 104,470 acres of high priority agricultural land. Examples of conservation treatment practices include conservation crop rotation, conservation tillage, cover crop, stream exclusion, waste storage facility, riparian buffers, heavy use area protection, nutrient management, upland wildlife habitat management, and streambank and shoreline protection.

CBWP technical and financial assistance played an important role in 2013 in the improvement of water quality by addressing numerous natural resource concerns:

- Nitrogen, phosphorous, sediment and chemical contaminants make achieving water quality goals throughout the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed a challenge;
- Low or fluctuating populations of fish and shellfish, including American and hickory shad, river herring, striped bass, eel, weakfish, bluefish, flounder, oysters, and blue crabs, continue to be a concern. These various populations hold tremendous ecological, commercial, and cultural value; and
- Development leads to continued loss of habitats and agricultural land.

To help producers apply conservation treatment, CBWP made extensive use of technical service providers (TSPs) in 2013. Approximately $780,000 was obligated for TSPs to enable them to provide technical assistance to producers in working lands programs. Approximately 80 TSPs are registered in the Chesapeake Bay States.

Get Conservation on the Ground.
Virginia: Improving Water Quality. A producer enrolled into CBWP a cow-calf business and grass-finished beef operation on 120 acres located in Virginia. The cattle had unrestricted access to a wetland area and stream on the property, which is located in the Middle River watershed (a tributary of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River). CBWP funding helped to improve herd health and water quality with wetland and exclusion fencing, a freeze-proof livestock watering system, and an interior fence to subdivide the pasture for rotational grazing. Health of the cattle has been improved by preventing access to the streams and wetland areas (they no longer have pink eye or foot problems), and water quality has also been improved.

Maryland: Water Quality/Air Quality. A family-owned poultry farm located in Maryland faced numerous Federal, State, and local environmental regulations, and they requested assistance from NRCS. The first step in addressing resource concerns was to prepare a comprehensive nutrient management plan (CNMP). Implementation of the CNMP included the installation of a waste storage structure to hold manure cleaned out of chicken houses until the manure can be land applied by local farmers. Composting areas were also installed to allow for safe and environmentally-friendly disposal of dead chickens. Amendments are used to treat chicken waste to decrease ammonia emissions, a major air quality concern. Also, heavy use area protection pads were installed at the ends of the chicken houses on the operation, assisting in reducing nutrient and sediment runoff into the Chesapeake Bay. This family had incurred millions of dollars of debt in order to construct the chicken houses and could not afford to install the needed conservation practices without the assistance of the Maryland Department of Agriculture and NRCS.

HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM

Current Activities.
Background. Title V of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-148) authorized the establishment of the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP). The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-246) amended the program to provide mandatory funding through the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC).

Program Objectives. HFRP assists landowners in restoring, enhancing, and protecting forest ecosystems in order to: 1) promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species; 2) improve biodiversity; and 3) enhance carbon sequestration.

Program Operations. HFRP provides financial assistance for specific conservation actions completed by the landowner. The NRCS Chief solicits project proposals that State Conservationists have developed in cooperation with partnering organizations. States with approved projects provide public notice of the availability of funding within the selected geographic area(s). HFRP offers four enrollment options:

- 10-year restoration agreement. The landowner may receive 50 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices;
- 30-year contract (equivalent to the value of a 30-year easement). The landowner may receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 75 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation restoration practices. This option is only available on acreage owned by Indian Tribes;
- 30-year easement. The landowner may receive 75 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 75 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices; or
- Permanent easement. The landowners may receive 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 100 percent of the average cost of the approved conservation practices.

Eligibility and Restoration Plans. Only privately held land, including acreage owned by Native American Indian Tribes, is eligible for enrollment in HFRP. In addition, to be eligible, the landowner must commit to restoring, enhancing, or measurably increasing the likelihood of recovery of an at-risk species. At-risk species include threatened or endangered species or candidates for the Federal or State threatened or endangered species list. Landowners must also improve biological diversity or increase carbon sequestration on enrolled land. For all

enrollment options, landowners develop a restoration plan that includes practices necessary to restore and enhance habitat for at-risk species. NRCS provides technical assistance to help owners develop and comply with the terms of their HFRP restoration plans.

Landowners may receive "safe harbor" assurances for land enrolled in HFRP if they agree, for a specified period, to protect, restore, or enhance their land for threatened or endangered species habitat. In exchange, landowners avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land under the Endangered Species Act.

Financial Assistance. NRCS provides payments consistent with the enrollment option in either a single payment or in no more than ten annual payments, as agreed to between NRCS and the landowner. NRCS also provides cost-share payments upon a determination that an eligible conservation practice or an identifiable component of the conservation practice has been established in compliance with appropriate standards and specifications.

Technical Assistance. In coordination with the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service, NRCS works with landowners to develop healthy forests management conservation plans for land eligible for enrollment in HFRP. The conservation plan integrates compatible silvicultural practices and habitat considerations to protect, restore, and enhance forest ecosystems for the recovery of threatened and endangered species and candidate species. NRCS continues to provide assistance to the landowner after the project is enrolled by reviewing restoration measures and providing guidance on management activities and biological advice to achieve optimum results.

2013 Activities.
In 2013, NRCS received 38 applications to participate in HFRP. Of these applications, 21 were enrolled into the program; this includes 18 permanent easements, one 30-year easement and two 10-year restoration cost-share agreements. These 2013 active agreements encompass approximately 8,486 acres. Cumulatively, through HFRP, NRCS has enrolled 112 landowners, encompassing approximately 677,169 acres, as the table below shows.

Cumulative Program Activity (Through 2013)	
Closed Easements (Permanent and 30-Year)	**Cumulative**
Number of Easements	96
Number of Acres	22,659
Active Restoration Cost-Share Agreements	**Cumulative**
Number of Agreements	16
Number of Acres	654,509
Active 30 Year Contract with Tribes	**Cumulative**
Number of Contracts	-
Number of Acres	-
Summary	**Cumulative Summary**
Total Agreements Enrolled	112
Total Acres	677,169

Getting Conservation on the Ground.
Upper Cumberland River Basin, Kentucky. HFRP in Kentucky has been focused on protecting and enhancing habitat in Eastern Kentucky for the federally-endangered Indiana Bat (Myotis sodalis) through permanent easements on forested lands. In 2013, working in partnership with the Kentucky Field Office of the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service and the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, NRCS has continued efforts to enroll HFRP easements containing critical habitat in Kentucky. NRCS continued to enroll additional easements to acquire critical habitat for the Indiana Bat in the Horse Lick Creek watershed in Jackson County. The Horse Lick Creek watershed contains forested habitat and caves that have documented nesting and roosting habitat for the Indiana Bat. Through HFRP, Kentucky has enrolled approximately 1,300 acres in this 62 square mile watershed. The protection of the forested area will also help protect the water quality of Horse Lick Creek, which supports three species of endangered mussels. The HFRP acreage is in addition to land that is under conservation easements by The Nature Conservancy and the publically-protected Daniel Boone National Forest in the watershed. These acquisitions of large areas of biological importance will help to further protect the Indiana Bat in Kentucky.

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Shared Funding Projects
(Dollars in thousands)

	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Working Capital Fund:				
Administration:				
Beltsville Service Center	$102	$90	$135	$138
Mail and Reproduction Management	1,581	1,648	1,600	1,738
Integrated Procurement System	1,736	1,858	1,744	1,842
Subtotal	3,418	3,596	3,479	3,717
Communications:				
Creative Media & Broadcast Center	71	45	246	164
Finance and Management:				
NFC/USDA	3,307	2,714	3,126	3,072
NFC/Non-USDA	-	-	-	-
Controller Operations	2,824	2,719	4,432	4,448
Financial Systems	11,266	9,680	5,317	5,261
Internal Control Support Services	120	163	140	141
Subtotal	17,517	15,276	13,016	12,922
Information Technology:				
NITC/USDA	3,764	5,330	2,789	2,839
NITC/Non-USDA	-	-	-	-
International Technology Services	114,356	120,262	105,860	107,143
Telecommunications Services	438	443	473	435
Subtotal	118,558	126,035	109,122	110,418
Correspondence Management	174	179	157	186
Total, Working Capital Fund	139,737	145,131	126,020	127,406
Department-Wide Reimbursable Programs:				
1890's USDA Initiatives	375	305	310	310
Advisory Committee Liaison Services	10	8	9	9
Continuity of Operations Planning	213	215	221	221
E-GOV Initiates HSPD-12	770	688	712	712
Emergency Operations Center	291	241	245	245
Facility and Infrastructure Review and Assessment	36	44	47	47
Faith-Based Initiatives and Neighborhood Partnerships	50	40	41	41
Federal Biobased Products Preferred Procurement Program	43	36	37	37
Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program	247	206	210	210
Honor Awards	7	5	8	8
Human Resources Transformation (Inc. Diversity Council)	205	167	172	172
Intertribal Technical Assistance Network	243	322	322	322
Medical Services	15	24	27	27
Personnel and Document Security	36	88	90	90
Pre-authorizing Funding	427	354	393	393
Retirement Processor/Web Application	65	59	60	60
Sign Language Interpreter Services	65	87	97	97
TARGET Center	109	94	97	97
USDA 1994 Program	98	80	83	83
Virtual University	259	215	218	218
Visitor Information Center	98	89	103	103
Total, Department-Wide Reimbursable Programs	3,662	3,366	3,504	3,504
Agency Total	143,399	148,497	129,524	130,911

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Summary of Budget and Performance
Statement of Department Goals and Objectives

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was established pursuant to the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994, (P.L. 103-354, 7 U.S.C. 6962). The mission of NRCS is "Helping People Help the Land." The Agency accomplishes its mission by providing products and services that enable people to be good stewards of the Nation's soil, water, and related natural resources on non-Federal lands. NRCS administers the following discretionary programs: Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA), Soil Survey (SOIL), Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SNOW), Plant Materials Centers (PMCs), Watershed Rehabilitation Program (REHAB), Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO, P.L. 78-534), Small Watersheds (P.L. 83-566), Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), and Water Bank. NRCS also administers the following mandatory programs, authorized through the 2014 Farm Bill: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). Finally, the agency provides technical assistance to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) administered by Farm Services Agency.

All agency programs and performance support USDA's Strategic Goal 2 as outlined in the following table.

USDA Strategic Goal: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources

Agency Strategic Goal	Agency Objectives	Programs that Contribute	Key Outcomes
Get More Conservation on the Ground	Improve the Health of the Nation's Forests, Grasslands, and Working Lands by Managing our Natural Resources	CTA, EQIP, SOIL, CSP, ACEP, RCPP, HFRP	1. Maintain Productive working farms and ranches.
		CTA, EQIP, ACEP, RCPP, HFRP	2. Decrease threats to "candidate" and threatened/endangered species.
	Contribute to Clean and Abundant Water by Protecting and Enhancing Water Resources on National Forests and Working Lands	CTA, EQIP, CSP, ACEP, RCPP, CRP, SNOW, Water Bank	3. Eliminate and reduce impairments to water bodies and help prevent the listing of additional water bodies as "impaired".

Key Outcome 1: Maintain productive working farms and ranches.

Key Performance Measures and Targets:

USDA provides assistance to private landowners and managers to improve soil health since it is the foundation for maintaining working productive farms and ranches. The two primary focuses for improving soil health on cropland are reducing erosion and increasing organic matter. Reducing soil erosion preserves the "topsoil", the rich upper layer that supports the majority of a plant's life cycle. Intensive agricultural practices often reduce the amount of organic matter (carbon) in the soil over time. This reduces the soil's ability to efficiently hold nutrients and water.

Maintaining and increasing the percentage of organic matter in our soils is vital to retaining the ability to feed ourselves as a nation.

In addition, USDA is committed to reducing agriculture's carbon footprint and assisting America's farmers, ranchers and forest owner's adapting to new challenges caused by a changing climate – ranging from more intense weather events, to increased risk of wildfire, to a greater prevalence of invasive species. While assessments on the future of agriculture and forestry show that climate change holds these and other challenges in the years ahead, American producers are longtime leaders in innovation, risk management and adaptation. USDA has supported these efforts for more than a century.

Agency Priority Goal (APG) for Soil Health – Soil has tremendous potential to store carbon, which reduces the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, one of the leading greenhouse gases contributing to climate change. Storage potential varies among soils, land covers, land uses and management, but it is known that increasing soil carbon is the single most important component of soil health. The 2014-2015 APG will focus on improving the health of our Nation's soil, with the goal to develop, demonstrate, and implement science-based practices to improve soil health and sustainability nationwide.

NRCS assists agricultural producers to apply science-based conservation practices that deliver environmental benefits such as improved soil health and carbon retained on cropland. The benefits of implementing these standardized practices can be measured and modeled nationally, especially when combined with land, soil, climate, and other data. The combination of practices used to improve soil health is called a Soil Health Management System.

Programs administered by NRCS will be used to demonstrate soil health management systems (e.g. through Conservation Innovation Grants and Plant Materials Centers) and provide financial/technical assistance to enhance adoption of soil health promoting practices (e.g. through EQIP). Through this APG, NRCS will increase the adoption of soil health management systems nationwide to reduce annual soil carbon loss.

Measures	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Actual	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Target[2/]	2015 Target[2/]
Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality, million acres[1/]							
CTA	7.6	8.2	8.2	8.7	8.4	6.8	6.8
EQIP	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.6	4.2	3.4	3.4

[1/] All practices reported under this measure must comply with NRCS General Manual (GM) _180_409 and NRCS GM_450_407, which require agency staff with appropriate technical approval authority certify that each practice meets agency-approved technical specifications, in addition to a sampling protocol for quality assurance of conservation practices certified as applied.

[2/] As part of the Foundational Maintenance Improvements (FMI), the agency is updating its business rules and transitioning to a geospatial data entry system for conservation activities. This will ultimately, deliver higher quality, geospatially-integrated data for improved performance management. However, because of the retraining required to implement this change, reduced performance per FTE is expected during 2014 and 2015.

Selected Past Accomplishments toward Achievement of the Key Outcome:

Several NRCS conservation practices directly impact soil carbon storage. For example, conservation crop rotations (5.8 million acres applied in 2013) or planting cover crops (with 1.1 million acres applied in 2013) help increase carbon storage in soil. These crops take carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere and deposit it into the soil as organic matter. They also help reduce erosion and increase water-holding capacity and water infiltration, which increases the resiliency to drought, heavy precipitation and extreme temperatures. In 2013, across all NRCS programs, over 13 million acres of cropland had conservation applied to improve soil quality. This measure is used as the USDA indicator for maintaining or enhancing sustained production of a safe, healthy, and abundant food supply. These annual outputs contribute significantly to long-term outcome measurements. According to the science-based USDA National Resources Inventory (NRI), between 1982 and 2007 soil erosion on U.S. cropland decreased 43 percent.

Water (sheet & rill) erosion on cropland in 2007 declined from 1.68 billion to 960 million tons per year, and erosion due to wind declined from 1.38 billion to 765 million tons per year.

Selected Accomplishments Expected at the 2015 Proposed Resource Level:
Soil health will be improved on over 12 million acres of the Nation's cropland, by preventing soil erosion and carbon loss. Through the conservation planning and delivery system, NRCS personnel will provide technical assistance to landowners and managers in addressing soil health concerns. Financial assistance programs will facilitate conservation activities, especially the more costly structural practices that are difficult for landowners to afford.

Key Performance Measures and Targets:

Range and pasture lands are located in all 50 states. According to the NRI, privately-owned range and pasture lands makes up over 27 percent (528 million acres) of the total acreage of the contiguous 48 states. These lands constitute the largest private lands use category, exceeding both forest land (21 percent) and crop land (18 percent). Properly managed grazing land has multiple benefits, including reduced storm water runoff, improved carbon storage in the soil, wildlife habitat, and beautiful open space.

Measure	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Actual	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Target[3/]	2015 Target[3/]
Grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect the resource base, million acres [1,2/]							
CTA	16.0	17.6	17.1	17.1	16.6	12.8	12.8
EQIP	17.2	17.5	16.3	17.2	17.9	13.7	13.7

[1/] In 2011, Grazing lands and forestlands were combined into one measure. In the previous year's report the measures for grazing and forest land were reported separately. This table includes combined numbers for all years.
[2/] All practices reported under this measure must comply with NRCS General Manual (GM) _180_409 and NRCS GM_450_407, which require agency staff with appropriate technical approval authority certify that each practice meets agency-approved technical specifications, in addition to a sampling protocol for quality assurance of conservation practices certified as applied.
[3/] As part of the Foundational Maintenance Improvements (FMI), the agency is updating its business rules and transitioning to a geospatial data entry system for conservation activities. This will ultimately, deliver higher quality, geospatially-integrated data for improved performance management. However, because of the retraining required to implement this change, reduced performance per FTE is expected during 2014 and 2015.

Selected Past Accomplishments toward Achievement of the Key Outcome: Range and pasture management methods enhance sustainable livestock production, but they can also improve soil and water resources by preventing erosion, increasing infiltration, facilitating soil building grasses in rotation systems, and sequestering carbon from the atmosphere. They are production systems that can be used as tools to conserve and restore our natural resources as well as provide a direct and short-term economic return to farmers and ranchers.

For example, rising energy costs increase the costs of producing and transporting hay and grain. Livestock producers are working with NRCS and looking for ways to save on these inputs as well as improve the nutrition of their herds. Stockpiling forage to extend the grazing season and strip grazing to improve forage utilization offers economic and environmental benefits. Although the savings on diesel fuel, improvements in animal health, and higher-quality pastures are unique to each operation, economic returns are realized quickly by using a variety of grasses and properly rotating the animals with fencing and water systems.

In 2013, NRCS worked with private-land managers to apply grazing and forest management systems. As a result, all NRCS programs contributed to the application of over 33 million acres of conservation to improve grazing and forest land health. In addition to directly applied conservation, NRCS also provided technical assistance on the application of effective grazing and forest land management practices.

Selected Accomplishments Expected at the 2015 Proposed Resource Level: The NRI findings show that 20 percent of the rangeland is in need of conservation treatment for soil stability, hydrologic function, and/or biotic integrity. USDA has prioritized grazing land conservation through initiatives to assist America's ranchers with improving the health of their lands and animals. With these funds, NRCS can assist landowners and managers in installing prescribed grazing and forestry systems that improve ecosystem health on almost 30 million acres.

Key Performance Measures and Targets:

The 2014 Farm Bill combined the purposes of several agricultural easement programs. The purposes of the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), and Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) were combined into the newly-authorized Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), which will conserve agricultural land utilizing easements. Performance measures and targets are in development for 2015 and not yet available.

Selected Past Accomplishments toward Achievement of the Key Outcome: This is a new program authorized in January of 2014.

Selected Accomplishments Expected at the 2015 Proposed Resource Level: The accomplishments under this program for 2015 will be determined during the development of the program.

Key Outcome 2: Decrease threats to "candidate" and threatened/endangered species.

Key Performance Measures and Targets:

Nearly 70 percent of the fish and wildlife habitat in the U.S. is on privately-owned lands. USDA provides private landowners financial and on-site technical assistance to assess the quality of wildlife habitat, to install practices necessary to restore or enhance that habitat, and to create a management plan to sustain the habitat. NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to maintain and enhance fish and wildlife habitat on non-Federal lands.

Measure	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Actual	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Target[3/]	2015 Target[3/]
Non-Federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality, million acres[1,2/]							
EQIP	1.2	1.9	1.8	2.6	2.0	1.7	1.7

[1]/ The method for calculating performance for this measure (verification and validation methodology) was improved for 2013, resulting in a smaller acreage target that is more directly focused on wildlife habitat benefits. 2011 and 2012 actuals were calculated retroactively to reflect past performance using the revised computation. 2008-2010 actuals were from existing PRS database and reflect performance reported for those years.

[2/] All practices reported under this measure must comply with NRCS General Manual (GM)_180_409 and NRCS GM_450_407, which require agency staff with appropriate technical approval authority certify that each practice meets agency-approved technical specifications, in addition to a sampling protocol for quality assurance of conservation practices certified as applied.

[3/] Performance was lower in 2013 as a direct result of program changes and funding in 2012 when contracts were established that would have been implemented in 2013. In addition, the agency's focus on the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Partnership targets priority wildlife species of concern, which will deliver fewer, higher-value acres and a relationship to regulatory predictability for landowners with identified priority species habitat. The delay in implementing conservation reflects the program adjustments to meeting regulatory predictability for landowners before the conservation practices are applied.

Selected Past Accomplishments toward Achievement of the Key Outcome: In 2013, over 11 million acres of habitat were improved for wildlife over all NRCS programs. These acres included habitat for wildlife species on Federal and State Threatened and Endangered Species Lists and for other species of concern through focused initiatives including: Sage Grouse, Migratory Birds, Longleaf Pine, and the Lesser Prairie-Chicken. NRCS standard conservation practices applied for wildlife habitat improvement include riparian herbaceous cover, stream bank and shoreline protection, hedgerow plantings, upland wildlife habitat management, and wetland creation and restoration.

Through Working Lands for Wildlife, an NRCS partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, landowners in 35 States enrolled approximately 3.5 million acres in conservation practices to improve habitat for these species. More than 2.5 million acres of those were enrolled in the Sage Grouse Initiative. Known for its mating dance, the sage grouse is a Western icon.

Ranchers across the West are actively reducing the threats to the sage grouse habitat, including a fence-marking initiative that decreased sage grouse deaths from running into barbed wire fences by 83 percent. They are also helping the grouse and other sagebrush wildlife species by improving rangeland health.

Removing invasive conifers that fragment the landscape and severely affect sage grouse populations, productivity of the land, and health of the range is making a positive mark on the landscape. In total, more than 200,000 acres of invasive conifer trees have been removed under SGI, tripling the probability of maintaining sage grouse populations.

Landowners in the Southeast are helping restore the habitat for the gopher tortoise, the keystone species of the longleaf pine ecosystem. About 360 other wildlife species depend on tortoises and their burrows. Conservation activities for at-risk species also directly benefit other wildlife. For example, one Florida landowner used NRCS conservation practices to restore the land into a vibrant longleaf pine forest, which, under proper management, will develop a robust understory that provides food and cover for a variety of wildlife, including the fox squirrel and northern bobwhite quail.

In addition to the wildlife benefits, these conservation activities also help the environment as a whole. By establishing native groundcover plants such as wiregrass, silk grass and partridge pea to increase plant diversity, this landowner is creating a landscape that will serve as a filter for water that eventually flows to the Gulf of Mexico, removing excess nutrients.

Selected Accomplishments Expected at the 2015 Proposed Resource Level: For 2014, over 12 million acres of wildlife habitat will be improved through all NRCS programs. Wildlife habitat such as riparian areas and in wetlands and upland areas will be improved through the application of NRCS conservation practices, especially in priority areas that have Threatened and Endangered Species. Through the focusing of the program dollars only in the highest priority areas, the direct impacts of the funding will be improved.

Key Outcome 3: Eliminate and reduce impairments to water bodies and help prevent the listing of additional water bodies as “impaired.”

Key Performance Measures and Targets:

Within USDA, NRCS is the lead Agency on Objective 2.3 – Contribute to clean and abundant water by protecting and enhancing water resources on National Forests and Working Lands. Water running off or infiltrating the ground from agricultural operations can carry a number of pollutants into streams, lakes, groundwater, and estuaries. States and tribal governments have identified sediment and nutrients as the greatest agricultural contaminants affecting surface water quality. Nutrients and agrichemicals are the major concerns for groundwater.

USDA has made great strides in improving water quality through landowner participation in voluntary conservation programs. However, “nonpoint” source pollution remains a significant economic, environmental, and public health challenge that requires policy attention and thoughtful new approaches. NRCS, along with other key Federal partners such as the United States Geological Survey, and the Environmental Protection Agency, will work collaboratively with stakeholders, including agriculture producer organizations, conservation districts, States and tribal governments, NGOs, and other local leaders, to identify areas where a more targeted and coordinated approach can achieve substantial improvements in water quality.

Measure	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Actual	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Target[2/]	2015 Target[2/]
Land with conservation applied to improve water quality, million acres[1/]							
CTA	20.5	22.3	24.0	23.8	22.4	17.2	17.2
EQIP	14.5	14.2	14.5	13.6	13.0	10.5	10.5

[1/] All practices reported under this measure must comply with NRCS General Manual (GM)_180_409 and NRCS GM_450_407, which require agency staff with appropriate technical approval authority certify that each practice meets agency-approved technical specifications, in addition to a sampling protocol for quality assurance of conservation practices certified as applied.

[2/] Reduced performance per FTE is expected during 2014 and 2015 while the agency updates business rules to transition to a geospatial data entry system for conservation activities. This transition, as part of the Foundational Maintenance Improvements (FMI), will deliver higher quality, geospatially-integrated data for improved performance management.

Selected Past Accomplishments toward Achievement of the Key Outcome: In 2013, USDA assisted landowners and managers in application of nearly 37 million acres of conservation designed to improve water quality across all NRCS programs. USDA conservation practices are science-based and have a demonstrated effect. A scientific study was done by the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) with the following results: Adoption of conservation practices in agriculture in the Chesapeake Bay watershed has reduced edge-of-field sediment loss by 55 percent, losses of nitrogen with surface runoff by 42 percent, losses of nitrogen in subsurface flows by 31 percent, and losses of phosphorus (sediment attached and soluble) by 41 percent.

Farmers have also significantly reduced the loss of sediment and nutrients from farm fields through voluntary conservation work in the lower Mississippi River basin. In the Mississippi River basin, conservation work, like controlling erosion and managing nutrients, has reduced the edge-of-field losses of sediment by 35 percent, nitrogen by 21 percent and phosphorous by 52 percent.

These losses are derived from comparing losses of sediment and nutrients from cultivated cropland to losses that would be expected if conservation practices weren't used. The results show that an increase in cover crops will have a significant impact on reducing edge-of-field losses of sediment and nutrients and improve water quality. In 2013, NRCS assisted with the application of 1.1 million acres of cover crop nationwide.

Over the past few years, similar assessments were completed in the upper Mississippi River, Tennessee-Ohio, Missouri and Arkansas-Red-White basins. As a whole, assessments in this project have shown:

> Conservation on cropland prevents an estimated 243 million tons of sediment, 2.1 billion pounds of nitrogen and 375 million pounds of phosphorus from leaving fields each year. These figures translate to a 55 percent, 34 percent and 46 percent reduction in sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus edge-of-field losses, respectively, compared to what would have been lost if no conservation practices were in place.
>
> Similarly, conservation has resulted in an estimated 17 percent reduction in nitrogen and 22 percent reduction in phosphorus entering the Gulf of Mexico annually. An additional reduction of 15 percent of nitrogen and 12 percent of phosphorus can be achieved by implementing comprehensive conservation plans on all cropland in the basin in areas that have not adequately addressed nutrient loss.
>
> The scientific-based modeling also pointed out that higher rainfall and more intense storms lead to higher edge-of-field losses of sediment and nutrients in the lower Mississippi River basin than the other four basins in the Mississippi River watershed. Because of this, more soil erosion control and better management of nutrients are important in the basin.

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill, and realigned to the Agricultural Conservation Easements Program (ACEP), also helped private landowners voluntarily restore, protect and enhance wetlands and wildlife habitat on their lands since 1992. The cumulative benefits of the wetlands restored through WRP reach well beyond their boundaries to improve watershed health, the vitality of agricultural lands, and aesthetics and economies of local communities. Wetlands are among the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to tropical rainforests and coral reefs in the diversity of species they support. Wetlands occupy only about five percent of the continental U.S. land surface, but up to one-half of all North American bird species feed or nest in wetlands, more than one-third of Endangered and Threatened species rely on them, and wetlands are home to nearly one-third of our plant species. (Source: EPA)

For example, wood storks are currently listed as an Endangered species by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. These storks nest in colonies or rookeries in cypress swamps. During the 1970s, when the population was at its lowest, the storks primarily nested near the Florida Everglades. In 2010, a colony of over 125 wood stork nests, 580 cattle egrets, and various other water birds were discovered on a WRP project in southwest Georgia. Since these southern restored wetlands are so valuable to these birds, WRP is considered essential to the federal Wood Stork Recovery Action Plan.

Wetlands are also considered the “kidneys” of our landscape. Wetlands decrease soil erosion and filter out sediments, chemicals and nutrients by capturing and slowing water. Research shows that many wetlands can trap at least 50 percent of dissolved phosphate and 70 percent of dissolved nitrates running off nearby lands before they enter our Nation’s waterways and ground and surface water supplies. Studies from the Prairie Pothole Region in North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota show that WRP projects in these states have the potential to reduce soil loss by as much as 124,000 tons per year, enough soil to fill over 3,600 dump trucks. The amount of soil could prevent over 400 tons of nitrogen and 5.5 tons of phosphorus from washing downstream in the area alone.

Agency Priority Goal for Water - In 2012 and 2013, USDA tested an interagency water quality metric in two pilot watersheds to measure the effectiveness of conservation investments made by the Department. A measurement framework was developed for the new integrated approach for reporting on the performance of conservation programs, with pilot efforts continuing with the expansion as resources allow. Using pilot watersheds, USDA could build on years of advances in agency conservation and science, and provide results-based, landscape-scale conservation investments that will protect water resources more efficiently and effectively, and encourage innovations that attract private capital and create non-regulatory incentives for a variety of stakeholders to invest in sustainable water resource management practices.

In the St. Joseph River Watershed, models estimated USDA conservation investments contributed to a 51 percent decrease in sediment load, 30 percent decrease in phosphorus, and 42 percent decrease in nitrogen load modeled at the field scale. In the Cienega Creek Watershed, modeling scenarios indicate that sediment yields for a subwatershed, Gardner Canyon, have decreased by between 4 and 33 percent from pre-conservation to current conditions. To expand beyond the pilot approach, key lessons learned during the pilot will shape future similar undertakings. Three primary findings are:

- Common water quality measures for pollutants such as nitrogen, phosphorus, or sediment are a challenge to find, but are required to support the analysis of watershed condition and water quality changes;
- Water quality outcome measurement needs to be done in such a way as to distinguish among various influences on water quality parameters, such as pollutant behavior, hydrologic regime, watershed and land treatment, significant land use changes, and climate effects among others; and
- Spatial and Temporal Considerations are challenging as there is a significant lag time between conservation implementation on the land and observing water quality benefits, which is more difficult as factors affect watershed condition and water quality between the point where conservation is applied in a landscape and the point where downstream water quality is measured.

These three considerations have been evaluated through the APG and the conclusion is that combined water quality and watershed condition monitoring and modeling approach is needed to document water resource outcomes. The application of these approaches can prioritize locations and increase the effectiveness of conservation and management actions to protect or restore clean water.

Selected Accomplishments Expected at the 2015 Proposed Resource Level: In 2015, there will continue to be an increased focus of programs and conservation investments in water quality and quantity, especially in priority watersheds. Through all NRCS programs, nearly 40 million acres of conservation will be applied using science-based conservation practices, such as vegetation planted on slopes to reduce soil erosion, drainage water management, conservation buffers, water conservation, and nutrient management.

Key Performance Measures and Targets:

Agriculture is one of the largest users of the Nation's surface water and groundwater, with irrigation being the greatest use. Agriculture is a major user of ground and surface water in the United States. In arid and semi-arid areas, crop production depends almost entirely on irrigation.

Farm-level Irrigation Water Management (IWM) involves the managing water and related inputs in irrigated crop production to financial returns, often in energy savings, and minimize environmental impacts. Improvements and expansion in IWM is essential to the agricultural sector that depends on ground and surface water, especially in times of drought. Within the conservation systems approach, water conservation has always been considered as a major factor in reducing soil erosion, runoff, and leaching of nutrients from cropland. However, as the focus has shifted to consumptive use of water, NRCS has accelerated water conservation efforts on agricultural operations.

Measure	2009 Actual	2010 Actual	2011 Actual	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Target[2/]	2015 Target[2/]
Land with conservation applied to improve irrigation efficiency, million acres[1/]							
CTA	N/A	0.8	0.7	0.7	1.0	0.7	0.7
EQIP	N/A	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.0

[1/] All practices reported under this measure must comply with NRCS General Manual (GM) _180_409 and NRCS GM_450_407, which require agency staff with appropriate technical approval authority certify that each practice meets agency-approved technical specifications, in addition to a sampling protocol for quality assurance of conservation practices certified as applied.

[2/] Reduced performance per FTE is expected during 2014 and 2015 while the agency updates business rules to transition to a geospatial data entry system for conservation activities. This transition, as part of the Foundational Maintenance Improvements (FMI), will deliver higher quality, geospatially-integrated data for improved performance management.

Selected Past Accomplishments toward Achievement of the Key Outcome: In 2013, USDA assisted landowners and managers in application of over 2 million acres of conservation for irrigation efficiencies. In response to the drought, energy savings from reduced pumping, and pressure on some of the Nation's aquifers, NRCS is increasing focus on water conservation activities and practices in the next several years.

USDA assisted with conservation of Ogallala Aquifer water resources in 2013. The aquifer is a 225,000-square-mile underground basin vital to agriculture and to municipal and industrial development. The aquifer stretches from western Texas to South Dakota and supports nearly one-fifth of the wheat, corn, cotton, and cattle produced in the United States. During drought times, the aquifer becomes an even more critical water resource for America's heartland as many rely on the aquifer in lieu of rainwater. By reducing an individual operation's water use, conservation helps relieve some of the pressure put on the aquifer.

Many farmers are switching their irrigation systems from gravity to sprinkler center pivots and subsurface drip irrigation systems, which can increase pumping efficiencies by at least 40 percent. Technology is also playing a large role in water conservation. Some new pivots use variable rate irrigation, meaning as the pivot travels over areas, it adjusts water rates to match the need.

Conservation practices such as no-till and cover crops can help improve soil health and water quality. Healthy soils increase water capacity and infiltration making lands more resilient to drought. During 2013, cover crops were applied on 1.1 million acres and no-till and management of crop residue was applied on over 5 million acres. One example from a farm in Nebraska showed a direct return to the grower. He converted a gravity irrigation system to center pivots and installed a subsurface drip irrigation system with NRCS assistance and reduced water usage by at least 50 percent and increased corn yield by 9 bushels per acre due to improved uniformity of irrigation. Efforts like this taken by farmers and ranchers have helped decrease the water withdrawn from the Ogallala Aquifer by more than 280 billion gallons over the past four years.

Selected Accomplishments Expected at the 2015 Proposed Resource Level: In 2015, there will continue to be an increased focus of programs and conservation investments in water conservation, with over 2 million acres of water conservation practices applied each year. One example is the Ogallala Aquifer Initiative, which is designed to reduce the quantity of water removed from the aquifer, improve water quality using conservation practices, and enhance the economic viability of the affected farms and ranches. Over the course of the initiative, irrigation efficiency will be improved by a minimum of 20 percent on 3.7 million acres.

Strategic Goal Funding Matrix
(Dollars in thousands)

Program / Program Items	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	Increase or Decrease	2015 Estimate
Department Strategic Goal: Ensure our national forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources					
Discretionary:					
Conservation Technical Assistance	$729,459	$675,771	$714,239	$2,332	$716,571
Staff Years	5,102	4,773	4,725	-95	4,630
Soil Survey	80,000	73,809	80,000	94	80,094
Staff Years	563	550	550	3	553
Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting	9,300	8,580	9,300	-363	8,937
Staff Years	55	52	63	-	63
Plant Materials Program	9,400	8,673	9,400	-230	9,170
Staff Years	88	96	85	-	85
Watershed Operations					
P.L. 78-534					
1. Technical Assistance	-	-	-	-	-
2. Financial Assistance	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal, P.L. 78-534	-	-	-	-	-
Staff Years	1	-	-	-	-
Emergency Watershed Protection Program					
1. Technical Assistance	43,180	49,621	-	-	-
2. Financial Assistance	172,720	185,061	-	-	-
Subtotal, EWP	215,900	234,682	-	-	-
Staff Years	92	76	81	-81	-
Small Watershed Operations					
P.L. 83-566					
1. Technical Assistance	-	-	-	-	-
2. Financial Assistance	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal, P.L. 83-566	-	-	-	-	-
Staff Years	12	36	15	-15	-
Watershed Rehabilitation					
1. Technical Assistance	7,500	4,504	4,800	-4,800	-
2. Financial Assistance	7,500	9,079	7,200	-7,200	-
Subtotal, Rehabilitation	15,000	13,583	12,000	-12,000	-
Staff Years	59	29	23	-23	-
Water Bank Program					
1. Technical Assistance	525	-	250	-250	-
2. Financial Assistance	6,975	-	3,750	-3,750	-
Subtotal, Water Bank	7,500	-	4,000	-4,000	-
Staff Years	2	-	2	-2	-
Total Cost, Strategic Goal	1,066,559	1,015,098	828,939	-14,167	814,772
Total FTEs, Strategic Goal	5,974	5,612	5,544	-213	5,331

Program / Program Items	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	Increase or Decrease	2015 Estimate
Mandatory:					
Wetlands Reserve Program					
1. Technical Assistance	72,051	69,396	16,244	-16,244	-
2. Financial Assistance	515,881	330,796	2,832	-2,832	-
Subtotal, WRP	587,932	400,192	19,076	-19,076	-
Staff Years	409	421	97	-97	-
Environmental Quality Incentives Program					
1. Technical Assistance	373,432	376,373	368,285	1	368,286
2. Financial Assistance	1,000,572	997,486	981,715	-1	981,714
Subtotal, EQIP	1,374,004	1,373,859	1,350,000	-	1,350,000
Staff Years	2,972	2,958	2,892	-30	2,862
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program					
1. Technical Assistance	11,005	10,740	1,567	-1,567	-
2. Financial Assistance	47,753	44,518	-	-	-
Subtotal, AWEP	58,758	55,258	1,567	-1,567	-
Staff Years	76	69	10	-10	-
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program					
1. Technical Assistance	13,267	19,116	2,543	-2,543	-
2. Financial Assistance	33,682	44,397	194	-194	-
Subtotal, WHIP	46,949	63,513	2,737	-2,737	-
Staff Years	87	112	15	-15	-
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program					
1. Technical Assistance	6,539	8,827	1,672	-1,672	-
2. Financial Assistance	138,364	109,302	145	-145	-
Subtotal, FRPP	144,903	118,129	1,817	-1,817	-
Staff Years	38	43	8	-8	-
Conservation Security Program					
1. Technical Assistance	18,554	13,181	7,865	-4,060	3,805
2. Financial Assistance	169,491	145,675	116,915	-85,720	31,195
Subtotal, CSP	188,045	158,856	124,780	-89,780	35,000
Staff Years	119	105	62	-32	30
Conservation Stewardship Program					
1. Technical Assistance	70,074	92,364	116,071	44,072	160,143
2. Financial Assistance	671,546	790,188	962,871	325,804	1,288,675
Subtotal, CStP	741,620	882,552	1,078,942	369,876	1,448,818
Staff Years	472	595	737	272	1,009
Grasslands Reserve Program					
1. Technical Assistance	5,960	6,202	553	-553	-
2. Financial Assistance	59,304	56,655	273	-273	-
Subtotal, GRP	65,264	62,857	826	-826	-
Staff Years	33	36	3	-3	-

Program / Program Items	2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	Increase or Decrease	2015 Estimate
Agricultural Management Assistance					
1. Technical Assistance	455	492	1,439	-405	1,034
2. Financial Assistance	1,925	1,958	5,021	-1,055	3,966
Subtotal, AMA	2,380	2,450	6,460	-1,460	5,000
Staff Years	5	5	14	-4	10
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program					
1. Technical Assistance	8,458	6,581	5,556	-5,556	-
2. Financial Assistance	41,374	42,818	7,107	-7,107	-
Subtotal, CBWP	49,832	49,399	12,663	-12,663	-
Staff Years	65	56	47	-47	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program					
1. Technical Assistance	1,373	1,183	957	-957	-
2. Financial Assistance	8,485	5,258	5,491	-5,491	-
Subtotal, HFRP	9,858	6,441	6,448	-6,448	-
Staff Years	7	8	6	-6	-
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program					
1. Technical Assistance	-	-	115,046	13,460	128,506
2. Financial Assistance	-	-	262,931	33,563	296,494
Subtotal, ACEP	-	-	377,977	47,023	425,000
Staff Years	-	-	662	98	760
Regional Conservation Partnership Program					
1. Technical Assistance	-	-	21,142	-97	21,045
2. Financial Assistance	-	-	74,538	4,417	78,955
Subtotal, RCPP	-	-	95,680	4,320	100,000
Staff Years	-	-	133	-1	132
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program					
1. Technical Assistance	-	-	7,220	-7,220	-
2. Financial Assistance	-	-	32,780	-32,780	-
Subtotal, VPA	-	-	40,000	-40,000	-
Staff Years	-	-	48	-48	-
Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program					
1. Technical Assistance	-	-	100,000	-100,000	-
2. Financial Assistance	-	-	150,000	-150,000	-
Subtotal, SWRP	-	-	250,000	-250,000	-
Staff Years	-	-	23	-23	-
Conservation Reserve Program					
1. Technical Assistance	101,521	64,920	35,625	14,375	50,000
2. Financial Assistance	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal, CRP	101,521	64,920	35,625	14,375	50,000
Staff Years	792	611	331	129	460
Total Costs, Mandatory	3,371,066	3,238,427	3,404,598	9,220	3,413,818
Total Staff Years, Mandatory	5,075	5,019	5,088	175	5,263
Total Costs, All Strategic Goals	4,437,625	4,253,525	4,233,537	-4,947	4,228,590
Total Staff Years, All Strategic Goals	11,049	10,631	10,632	-38	10,594

Full Cost by Department Strategic Goal
(Dollars in thousands)

Program / Program Items		2012 Actual	2013 Actual	2014 Estimate	2015 Estimate
Department Strategic Goal: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources					
Conservation Technical Assistance					
Technical Assistance		$729,459	$675,771	$714,239	$716,571
	Total Costs	729,459	675,771	714,239	716,571
	Staff Years	5,102	4,773	4,725	4,630
Performance measure: Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality					
Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	6.8	6.8
Performance measure: Grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect the resource base					
Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	12.8	12.8
Performance measure: Land with conservation applied to improve water quality					
Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	17.2	17.2
Performance measure: Land with conservation applied to improve irrigation efficiency					
Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	0.7	0.7
Soil Survey					
Technical Assistance		80,000	73,809	80,000	80,094
	Total Costs	80,000	73,809	80,000	80,094
	Staff Years	563	550	550	553
Performance measure: Soil surveys mapped or updated					
Performance: million acres		30.4	45.7	38.0	40.0
Performance measure: Ecological Site Descriptions developed					
Performance: million acres		10.1	24.4	26.0	28.0
Snow Survey & Water Supply Forecasting					
Technical Assistance		9,300	8,580	9,300	8,937
	Total Costs	9,300	8,580	9,300	8,937
	Staff Years	55	52	63	63
Performance measure: Water supply forecasts issued					
Performance, number		11,445	5,993	6,789	6,789
Plant Materials Centers					
Technical Assistance		9,400	8,673	9,400	9,170
	Total Costs	9,400	8,673	9,400	9,170
	Staff Years	88	96	85	85
Performance measure: New plant materials released to commercial growers					
Performance, number		12	5	3	3
Performance measure: Technical documents prepared and transferred to customers					
Performance, number		388	327	250	240
Performance measure: Plant materials technical training delivered to conservation delivery staff					
Performance, number of participants		N/A	2,015	1,200	1,500

Full Cost by Department Strategic Goal
(Dollars in thousands)

Department Strategic Goal: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources		2012	2013	2014	2015
Flood Prevention Operations P.L. 78-534					
Technical Assistance		-	-	-	-
Financial Assistance		-	-	-	-
	Total Costs	-	-	-	-
	Staff Years	1	-	-	-
Watershed Operations P.L. 83-566					
Technical Assistance		-	-	-	-
Financial Assistance		-	-	-	-
	Total Costs	-	-	-	-
	Staff Years	12	36	15	-
Emergency Watershed Protection Program					
Technical Assistance		43,180	49,621	-	-
Financial Assistance		172,720	185,061	-	-
	Total Costs	215,900	234,682	-	-
	Staff Years	92	76	81	-
Watershed Rehabilitation Program					
Technical Assistance		7,500	4,504	4,800	-
Financial Assistance		7,500	9,079	7,200	-
	Total Costs	15,000	13,583	12,000	-
	Staff Years	59	29	23	-
Performance measure: Dams with watershed rehabilitation plans authorized					
Performance, number		10	3	11	-
Water Bank					
Technical Assistance		525	-	250	-
Financial Assistance		6,975	-	3,750	-
	Total Costs	7,500	-	4,000	-
	Staff Years	2	-	2	-
Discretionary Total					
	Total Costs	1,066,559	1,015,098	828,939	814,772
	Staff Years	5,974	5,612	5,544	5,331
Wetlands Reserve Program					
Technical Assistance		72,051	69,396	16,244	-
Financial Assistance		515,881	330,796	2,832	-
	Total Costs	587,932	400,192	19,076	-
	Staff Years	409	421	97	-

Full Cost by Department Strategic Goal
(Dollars in thousands)

Department Strategic Goal: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources		**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Environmental Quality Incentives Program					
Technical Assistance		373,432	376,373	368,285	368,286
Financial Assistance		1,000,572	997,486	981,715	981,714
	Total Costs	1,374,004	1,373,859	1,350,000	1,350,000
	Staff Years	2,972	2,958	2,892	2,862
Performance measure: Land with conservation applied to improve water quality Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	10.5	10.5
Performance measure: Cropland with conservation applied to improve soil quality Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	3.4	3.4
Performance measure: Non-Federal land with conservation applied to improve fish and wildlife habitat quality Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	1.7	1.7
Performance measure: Grazing and forest land with conservation applied to protect the resource base Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	13.7	13.7
Performance measure: Land with conservation applied to improve irrigation efficiency Performance, million acres		N/A	N/A	1.0	1.0
Grasslands Reserve Program					
Technical Assistance		5,960	6,202	553	-
Financial Assistance		59,304	56,655	273	-
	Total Costs	65,264	62,857	826	-
	Staff Years	33	36	3	-
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program					
Technical Assistance		11,005	10,740	1,567	-
Financial Assistance		47,753	44,518	-	-
	Total Costs	58,758	55,258	1,567	-
	Staff Years	76	69	10	-
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program					
Technical Assistance		13,267	19,116	2,543	-
Financial Assistance		33,682	44,397	194	-
	Total Costs	46,949	63,513	2,737	-
	Staff Years	87	112	15	-

Full Cost by Department Strategic Goal
(Dollars in thousands)

Department Strategic Goal: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources		**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program					
Technical Assistance		6,539	8,827	1,672	-
Financial Assistance		138,364	109,302	145	-
	Total Costs	144,903	118,129	1,817	-
	Staff Years	38	43	8	-
Conservation Security Program					
Technical Assistance		18,554	13,181	7,865	3,805
Financial Assistance		169,491	145,675	116,915	31,195
	Total Costs	188,045	158,856	124,780	35,000
	Staff Years	119	105	62	30
Conservation Stewardship Program					
Technical Assistance		70,074	92,364	116,071	160,143
Financial Assistance		671,546	790,188	962,871	1,288,675
	Total Costs	741,620	882,552	1,078,942	1,448,818
	Staff Years	472	595	737	1,009
Performance measure: Stewardshipplans written					
Performance, acres		N/A	N/A	TBD	TBD
Performance measure: Stewardship activities applied that improve environmental quality					
Performance, acres		N/A	N/A	TBD	TBD
Agricultural Management Assistance					
Technical Assistance		455	492	1,439	1,034
Financial Assistance		1,925	1,958	5,021	3,966
	Total Costs	2,380	2,450	6,460	5,000
	Staff Years	5	5	14	10
Healthy Forests Reserve Program					
Technical Assistance		1,373	1,183	957	-
Financial Assistance		8,485	5,258	5,491	-
	Total Costs	9,858	6,441	6,448	-
	Staff Years	7	8	6	-

Full Cost by Department Strategic Goal
(Dollars in thousands)

Department Strategic Goal: Ensure Our National Forests and Private Working Lands Are Conserved, Restored, and Made More Resilient to Climate Change, While Enhancing Our Water Resources		2012	2013	2014	2015
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program					
Technical Assistance		8,458	6,581	5,556	-
Financial Assistance		41,374	42,818	7,107	-
	Total Costs	49,832	49,399	12,663	-
	Staff Years	65	56	47	-
Conservation Reserve Program					
Technical Assistance		101,521	64,920	35,625	50,000
	Total Costs	101,521	64,920	35,625	50,000
	Staff Years	792	611	331	460
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program					
Technical Assistance		-	-	115,046	128,506
Financial Assistance		-	-	262,931	296,494
	Total Costs	-	-	377,977	425,000
	Staff Years	-	-	662	760
Performance measure: Agricultural land protected in conservation easements					
Performance, acres		N/A	N/A	TBD	TBD
Regional Conservation Partnership Program					
Technical Assistance		-	-	21,142	21,045
Financial Assistance		-	-	74,538	78,955
	Total Costs	-	-	95,680	100,000
	Staff Years	-	-	133	132
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program					
Technical Assistance		-	-	7,220	-
Financial Assistance		-	-	32,780	-
	Total Costs	-	-	40,000	-
	Staff Years	-	-	48	-
Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program					
Technical Assistance		-	-	100,000	-
Financial Assistance		-	-	150,000	-
	Total Costs	-	-	250,000	-
	Staff Years	-	-	23	-
Mandatory Total					
	Total Costs	3,371,066	3,238,427	3,404,598	3,413,818
	Staff Years	5,075	5,019	5,088	5,263
Agency Total					
	Total Costs	4,437,625	4,253,525	4,233,537	4,228,590
	Staff Years	11,049	10,631	10,632	10,594