

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Table of Contents

Preface	1
Agency-Wide.....	1
Purpose Statement	1
OIG and GAO Reports	12
Lead-off Tabular Statement	14
Available Funds and FTEs.....	14
Permanent Positions by Grade and FTEs	14
Vehicle Fleet.....	15
Vehicle Fleet.....	16
Shared Funding Projects	17
Advertising Expenditures	18
Account 1: Private Lands Conservation Operations.....	19
Appropriations Language	19
Lead-Off Tabular Statement	19
Project Statements	19
Justification of Changes.....	20
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs.....	22
Classification by Objects	23
NRCS Technical Assistance	25
Status of Programs	29
Account 2: Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program.....	63
Appropriations Language	63
Lead-Off Tabular Statement	63
Project Statements	63
Justification of Changes.....	67
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs.....	67
Classification by Objects	69
Status of Programs	71
Account 3: Emergency Watershed Protection Program	73
Project Statements	73
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs.....	73
Classification by Objects	74
Status of Programs	75
Account 4: Watershed Rehabilitation Program	77
Appropriations Language	77
Lead-Off Tabular Statement	77
Project Statements	78
Justification of Changes.....	79

Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs.....	80
Classification by Objects	81
Status of Programs	83
Account 5: Water Bank Program	87
Appropriations Language	87
Lead-Off Tabular Statement	87
Project Statements	87
Justification of Changes.....	87
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs.....	88
Classification by Objects	88
Status of Programs	89
Account 6: Healthy Forests Reserve Program.....	91
Appropriations Language	91
Lead-Off Tabular Statement	91
Project Statements	91
Justification of Changes.....	92
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs.....	92
Classification by Objects	92
Status of Programs	93
Account 7: Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program.....	95
Appropriations Language	95
Lead-Off Tabular Statement	95
Project Statements	95
Justification of Changes.....	95
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs.....	96
Classification by Objects	96
Status of Programs	97
Account 8: Farm Security and Rural Investment Programs	105
Project Statements	105
Geographic Breakdown of Obligations	108
Classification by Objects	110
Status of Programs	113
Agency-Wide Performance	143
Summary of Performance	143

PREFACE

This publication summarizes the fiscal year (FY) 2025 Budget for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Throughout this publication any reference to the “Budget” is in regard to the 2025 Budget, unless otherwise noted. All references to years refer to fiscal year, except where specifically noted. The budgetary tables throughout this document show actual amounts for 2022 and 2023, annualized Continuing Resolution levels for 2024, and the President’s Budget request for 2025. Amounts for 2024 estimated levels include: non-enacted amounts such as Full-Time Equivalent levels, fleet levels, information technology investment levels, recovery levels, transfers in and out, balances available end of year, and obligation levels.

Throughout this publication, the “2018 Farm Bill” is used to refer to the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. Most programs funded by the 2018 Farm Bill through 2023 were extended through 2024 via the one-year Farm Bill extension within the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-22). Amounts shown in 2025 for most Farm Bill programs reflect those confirmed in the baseline.

Pursuant to the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, sequestration is included in the numbers for mandatory programs in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025.

In tables throughout this document, amounts equal to zero (0) are displayed as dashes (-). Amounts less than 0.5 and greater than zero are rounded and shown as a zero (0). This display treatment is used to prevent the masking of non-zero amounts that do not round up to one (1).

AGENCY-WIDE**PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The mission of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is “Helping People Help the Land.” The agency accomplishes this 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 establishment of the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) marked the beginning of the Federal Government’s enduring commitment to assisting in the conservation of natural resources on private lands. Originally authorized by Congress in 1935, the agency was later renamed the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-354, 7 U.S.C. 6901 et seq.) to better reflect the broad scope of the agency’s mission. 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 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 time, the agency’s suite of programs expanded and NRCS provides leadership to address all resource concerns across all natural resources: soil, water, air, plants, and animals. NRCS supports the Nation’s communities by helping urban and rural agricultural landowners and producers, including Indian tribes, protect the natural resource base on their lands. Technical assistance provided to farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners supplies the knowledge and tools they need to conserve, maintain, and restore the natural resources on the lands they manage. Financial assistance partially offsets the cost to install conservation practices necessary to safeguard natural resources and improve wildlife habitat.

According to the National Resources Inventory (NRI), about 71 percent of the land in the United States is privately owned, making stewardship by private landowners and land managers critical to the health of our Nation’s agricultural economy. These are the people who make day-to-day decisions about natural resource use and management on non-Federal lands, and NRCS offers them technology, technical and financial assistance needed to benefit the resources, sustain productive lands, and maintain healthy ecosystems.

Science and technology are the critical foundation for 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 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."

Private Lands Conservation Operations

The programs funded in the Private Lands Conservation Operations account are authorized by the 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), as amended. The purpose of Private Lands 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. Private Lands Conservation Operations has four major program components: Conservation Technical Assistance Program; Soil Survey Program; Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program; and Plant Materials Centers.

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, Indian tribes, and other organizations.

Through the CTA Program, NRCS helps land managers develop comprehensive conservation plans that include activities that reduce soil loss from erosion; address soil quality, 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 private 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.

CTA Program 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 conservation (HELCS) and wetland conservation (WC) compliance provisions required by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.
- 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 dynamic properties of soil, water, and related natural resources so people can make informed decisions for natural resource use and management.
- Assess the level of carbon sequestered in terrestrial soils through voluntary conservation practices.
- Assess the effects of conservation practices and systems on the condition of natural resources.
- Develop, adapt, and transfer effective science-based technologies and tools for assessment, management, and conservation of natural resources.

Soil Survey Program

NRCS's soil survey program provides the public with information on the properties, capabilities, and conservation treatment needs of their soils through collection of data, creation of soil maps and interpretive analyses. The program's science-driven products help people make informed land use and management decisions that take into consideration various soil characteristics, such as soil carbon, and capabilities to ensure soil is healthy and productive. In addition, the soil survey program provides soil and ecological site information and tailored interpretations to public stakeholders, policy decision-makers, communities, States, and others to facilitate 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 program objectives are to:

- Inventory and map the soil and ecological resource on all lands of the United States;
- Keep soil surveys relevant to meet emerging and ever-changing National needs such as mitigation of the impacts of climate change and greater resiliency of working agricultural lands;
- Interpret the data and make soil survey information available to meet public needs;
- Lead the dynamic soil properties for soil health project (formerly known as the science of soil health) and other related collaborative efforts to advance the science of the soil survey;
- Contribute to all aspects USDA soil carbon and soil health monitoring and assessment efforts including the soil health monitoring network;
- Provide technical assistance in the use of soil survey information to maximize conservation outcomes; and
- Lead the National Cooperative Soil Survey Program.

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

In addition to providing soil survey and ecological site data to the public, NRCS also maintains a National Soil Survey Center that provides information for the effective application of the soil survey to help make good land management possible. The National Soil Survey Center develops national soil policy, technical guidance, procedures, and standards for soil survey, ecological site descriptions, and laboratory activities. The Center staff conduct soil research investigations, operate a soil survey laboratory, develop handbooks and manuals, provide training, develop, and maintain soil survey data systems, and plan regional work conferences.

Dynamic soil survey (DSS) is an evolving and iterative approach to soil survey that seamlessly integrates ecology, hydrology, and temporal soil properties with improvements in digital technology. DSS uses the practice of complementary soil survey project administration within the same geographical footprint or overlap. All current and future soil survey projects contribute to the DSS. Dynamic soil survey is leveraged when a soil survey inventory, ecological site, or a DSS project is conducted alongside a research and/or monitoring project. The full potential for DSS is realized when the products of these coincident projects are paired with a raster soil survey (high resolution pixel format) and used to deliver enhanced interpretation of all soil survey data and information. Past soil survey work provides data on static soil properties in a vector (line/polygon format). Digital technology allows better capture and visualization of the variability and diversity of static soil properties at multiple scales, as well as the modeling of temporal soil properties and soil moisture. Collection of temporal soil properties affected by soil biology and land use management allows DSS to illustrate the interaction of the ecosystem and leverage the development of ecological state and transition models and linkage of climate data. The combination of these data allows the improvement of soil interpretation and support of conservation practices. Partnerships with USDA-US Forest Service on DSS case studies have been underway throughout 2022 and 2023 in the Hubbard Brook and Fernow Experimental Forests, and the Coweeta Hydrologic Laboratory, and are aligned with the measurement of soil moisture. A partnership with a private landowner near Clay Center, KS provides a case study for soil moisture and runoff modeling, as well as soil microbial communities. Another partnership with the National Park Service in Acadia National Park, Cuyahoga National Park and Minuteman National Historic Park is emergent and will provide case studies on the dynamics of the soil and ecological sites. Dynamic soil properties in rural and urban or near urban areas offer unique ways to reach the public with soil and ecological information.

Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SSWSF) Program

The SSWSF Program and partners collect high elevation snow and climate data in the western United States, apply these data to produce water supply forecasts, and disseminate the snowpack information and forecasts to

the public. Snowmelt accounts for approximately 70 percent of the West's water supply meeting agricultural, municipal, and other needs. NRCS staff and cooperators collect and review snowpack and precipitation data at nearly 2,000 mountain sites across the West. Presently, 940 of these remote sites, referred to as SNOTEL or SnoLite, are automated, providing near real-time publicly available information on snow depth, snow water equivalent (SWE), and other parameters such as precipitation, air temperature, and soil moisture. Snow courses and aerial markers supply snowpack information on a monthly basis primarily between January and June (i.e., snow accumulation and melt season). Data are analyzed to assess annual water availability, drought conditions, and flooding potential.

The SSWSF Program has operated under USDA since 1935, with 12 western States, including Alaska, providing seasonal water supply forecasts essential for the national economy and resource management. Program importance exponentially increases as water management in the West adapts to stresses such as population increase, rapid urbanization, flooding, droughts, fires, avalanche risk, and competing needs over limited water resources.

Snow and climate data and water supply forecasts are used by farmers, ranchers, and irrigation districts; municipal and industrial water providers; hydroelectric power utilities; fish and wildlife management; reservoir managers; recreationists; Tribal Nations; Federal, State, and local government agencies including transportation departments; and contribute to international treaties.

Program objectives:

- Provide reliable, accurate, and timely seasonal surface water supply forecasts for agricultural producers, water managers, and water users in the West.
- Obtain, manage, and disseminate high quality data and related information on snow, water, climate, and hydrologic conditions.
- Provide climate data supporting NRCS conservation planning tools.

Additionally, the Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN) provides climate information as well as soil moisture and temperature data at relatively lower elevations across the country. SCAN consists of 212 sites in the 48 contiguous United States, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands, including 25 sites on tribal lands.

Plant Materials Centers (PMCs)

NRCS's network of 25 PMCs identify, evaluate, and demonstrate the performance of plants and plant technologies to solve natural resource problems and improve the utilization of our nation's natural resources. PMCs continue to build on their long and successful history of releasing plants for resource conservation that have been instrumental at increasing the commercial availability of appropriate plant materials to the public. PMC activities contribute to reducing soil erosion; adapting to climate change; 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 forage; improving air quality; and addressing other conservation treatment needs.

The results of studies conducted by PMCs provide much of the basis for NRCS vegetative recommendations and conservation practices. This PMC work ensures that NRCS vegetative recommendations and conservation practices are science based, that NRCS field staff are well-trained, and that recommended conservation practices meet new and emerging natural resource issues. PMCs carry out their work 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 management agencies.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO)

Through the programs funded in the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations account, NRCS cooperates with State and local agencies, tribal governments, and other Federal agencies to prevent damage caused by erosion, floodwater, and sediment; further the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water; and advance the conservation and utilization of the land.

Congress established the Watershed Program by enacting the Flood Control Act of 1944 (Public Law 78-534) and the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act of 1954 (Public Law 83-566). Under these authorizations, the NRCS has assisted watershed project sponsors in the construction of more than 11,850 flood control dams in 1,271 watersheds in 47 States since 1948 with a maximum individual watershed size of 250,000 acres. These projects provide an estimated \$2.2 billion in annual benefits in reduced flooding and erosion damages, recreation, water supplies and wildlife habitat.

Emergency Watershed 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, or other natural causes that result 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.

The program provides 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 to provide protection from flooding and soil erosion such as streambank stabilization using stone to protect private property. Over the past six years ending in 2023, the program has provided \$1.2 billion in relief assistance for 224 disaster events across the country.

Watershed Rehabilitation Program

Through both financial and technical assistance, this program helps local communities address critical public health, or safety concerns, of aging dams that are reaching the end of their design life and/or no longer meet Federal or State standards. The program is authorized under Section 14 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1012), as amended.

Since 1948, NRCS has assisted local communities in the construction of 11,850 watershed project dams. These dams protect America's communities and natural resources with flood control, offer recreation, wildlife benefits, water quality, and some may also provide the primary source of drinking water for the area. Funding supports rehabilitation to bring a dam up to current safety standards through planning, design, and construction of a rehabilitation project, but may also be used for a dam removal. The program may provide up to 65 percent of the total project cost of rehabilitation not to exceed 100 percent of the construction cost; Federal funds cannot be used for operation and maintenance.

Water Bank Program

The Water Bank Program (WBP) is authorized under Section 748 of the Water Bank Act (16 U.S.C. 1301-1311). The program focuses on technical and financial assistance on flooded cropland, flooded hay and pastureland, and flooded forestland. Under the program, landowners and operators have non-renewable ten-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. Program participants who wish to establish or maintain conservation practices may also apply for financial assistance through other NRCS or State financial assistance programs where available.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program assists private and tribal landowners in restoring, enhancing, and protecting forest ecosystems to promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species; improve biodiversity; conserve forest land that provides habitat for at-risk species, 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 the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill). The 2018 Farm Bill made changes to HFRP to expand enrollment and eligibility options including providing permanent easements as an enrollment option for acreage owned by an Indian tribe and adding that eligibility of land may include considerations for a species of greatest conservation need as identified by a state wildlife action plan.

HFRP offers to forestry landowners four enrollment options including 10-year restoration agreements, 30-year, or permanent easements, or 30-year contracts on acreage owned by an Indian tribe. Land enrolled in HFRP must restore, enhance, or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery of an at-risk species, improve biological diversity, or increase carbon sequestration. For all enrollment options, a restoration plan is developed that includes practices necessary to restore and enhance habitat for at-risk species. Technical assistance is provided to help landowners develop and comply with the terms of their HFRP restoration plans.

Landowners may receive "safe harbor" assurances from the regulatory agencies 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.

HFRP applicants must provide proof of ownership, or an operator (tenant) must provide written concurrence from the landowner of tenancy for the period of the HFRP restoration agreement in order to be eligible. Land enrolled in HFRP easements must be privately owned or be acreage owned by Indian tribes.

Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program

The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) is authorized by Section 12302 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 amending Section 222 of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6911 et seq.). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated the Natural Resources Conservation Service to lead the USDA-wide office, and work in partnership with other USDA agencies that support urban and innovative agriculture. OUAIP encourages and promotes urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices. OUAIP invests in grants supporting urban agriculture and innovation production; awards cooperative agreements that support composting and reduce food waste; administers a Federal Advisory Committee, which provides recommendations to the USDA Secretary, and provides support to Farm Service Agency county committees that focus on urban and suburban areas.

Mandatory-Farm Bill Programs:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP advances the voluntary application of conservation practices to promote agricultural production, forest management, and environmental quality as compatible land 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 conservation opportunities in their operation and provides financial assistance to solve such identified problems in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program is authorized by Sections 1240 through 1240G and Section 1241(a) of the Food Security Act of 1985. The program was further enhanced by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill). These enhancements include soil testing and remediation as EQIP practices, further supporting advance payments for qualified producers, lowering the livestock set-aside to 50 percent, raising the organic EQIP payment limit, introduction of conservation incentive contracts, and allowing identified water management entities to participate in certain EQIP projects. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) amended the 2018 Farm Bill to extend funding for all EQIP activities through 2031.

Although EQIP specifically addresses resource concerns on working farms and ranches, implementation of the program can create 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.

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

The purpose of CSP is to encourage producers to improve, maintain and manage existing conservation activities and address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by undertaking additional conservation activities. The program provides opportunities to both recognize excellent stewards and deliver valuable new conservation that increases or extends the conservation practices of the producer's operation. The program is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill) and implemented through the CSP regulation at 7 CFR Part 1470. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) amended the Farm Bill to extend CSP funding for all CSP activities through 2031.

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 within similar geographic areas to facilitate a competitive ranking process among applications that face similar resource challenges. The 2018 Farm Bill prescribed the following factors for evaluating and ranking CSP applications:

- Requires that at least two resource concern categories meet or exceed a science-based stewardship threshold at the time of contract offer and meet or exceed one additional resource concern category by the end of the contract.
- Level of conservation treatment on all applicable natural resource concern categories at the time of application.
- Degree to which the proposed conservation activities increase natural resource

conservation and environmental benefit.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) is authorized by subtitle H of title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by Section 2301 of the 2014 Farm Bill (P. L. 113-79) and sections 2601-2605 of the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill). ACEP consolidates the purposes and functions of three former easement programs that are no longer authorized: Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Lands enrolled under these former easement programs are enrolled in ACEP. ACEP is funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and administered by NRCS. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) amended the Farm Bill to extend ACEP funding for all ACEP activities through 2031.

ACEP is a voluntary program through which NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands, and their related benefits by directly acquiring or funding the acquisition of conservation easements on private or tribal lands. ACEP has two components - ACEP-Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) and ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP- WRE).

ACEP-ALE helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture. The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving or restoring grassland, including rangeland, pastureland and shrubland. Eligible entities include Indian tribes, State governments, local governments, or nongovernmental organizations, which have farmland or grassland protection programs that purchase agricultural land easements for the purpose of protecting agricultural use, grazing uses, and related conservation values, by limiting conversion to non-agricultural uses of the land. To enroll land through ACEP-ALE, NRCS enters into agreements with eligible entities that include the terms and conditions under which the eligible entity is permitted to use ACEP cost-share assistance.

Through ACEP-WRE, NRCS 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 restored and protected on wetland reserve easements 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 recreational activities.

To enroll land through ACEP-WRE, NRCS enters into a purchase agreement with eligible private landowners or Indian tribes that includes the right for NRCS to develop and implement a wetland reserve restoration 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 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.

Between 2014, when ACEP was established by the Farm Bill, and 2022, ACEP has been used to enroll 3,559 unique easements. Through these projects, ACEP-ALE has protected the agricultural productivity of 1,479 properties and almost 1,042,000 acres while ACEP-WRE has restored the wetland functions and values of approximately 2,080 easements and 404,000 acres.

In 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) passed and provided \$1.4 billion in ACEP funding beginning in 2023, with additional funding appropriated each year through 2026. This IRA funding is for easements or interests in land that will mostly reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions associated with land eligible for the program.

ACEP is administered locally through NRCS field and state offices, where applicants apply directly for 2018 Farm Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). States will rank all eligible application received in an announced application batching period based on programmatic and resource criteria.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination of NRCS conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) amended the Farm Bill to extend RCPP funding for all RCPP activities through 2031.

Through agreements with 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 by Sections 1271 through 1271F of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill). The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized RCPP as a stand-alone program and expanded authority for the use of Grants or Alternative Funding Arrangements, with lead partners accepting nearly all project implementation responsibilities. It also directs the Secretary to allocate 50 percent of funds to a State/Multistate pool, and 50 percent to projects in Critical Conservation Areas.

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. RCPP projects must be carried out on agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands, or associated lands. RCPP projects may consist of any combination of five eligible conservation activities; land management, land rental, entity-held easements, U.S.-held easements, and public works activities.

RCPP is administered through funding announcements that include funding from the 2018 Farm Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Lead partners submit proposals that are evaluated based on three criteria – impact, partner contributions, and partnership and management. NRCS prioritizes the use of IRA funds for projects that will implement climate-smart agriculture conservation activities. All lead partners must report on the environmental outcomes of their projects.

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 Commodity Credit Corporation. The program is permanently authorized by Section 524(b) of the Federal Crop Insurance Act (7 U.S.C. 1524(b)), as amended. Under the program, NRCS provides 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 has collaborated with NRCS to provide financial assistance for producers to implement high-tunnel conservation practices. 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 Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) was authorized by Section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-198), as amended (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-5). The program was reauthorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. The Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-22) extended authorization through 2024. The program encourages private landowners to voluntarily make their land available to the public for wildlife-dependent recreation, such as hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. States and tribes are eligible for VPA-HIP and compete for funding by submitting proposals to NRCS. VPA-HIP funding can be used both to expand public access to private lands and to improve or enhance wildlife habitat on lands enrolled in the program. The overall goal of VPA-HIP is to enhance wildlife habitat and management and to boost local economies through activities that attract wildlife enthusiasts.

Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program

The program is authorized by Sections 2408 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334). The Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-22) extended authorization through 2024. The program is implemented by NRCS and the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service to address the threat that feral swine pose to agriculture, native ecosystems, human health, and animal health.

Programmatic and Landscape Conservation Activities

NRCS and its partners have established programmatic and landscape-scale activities to address regionally important conservation needs by providing additional support for voluntary conservation on private lands. NRCS has targeted funding to support activities through a variety of Farm Bill conservation programs. NRCS provides technical assistance through its CTA Program; partners may also provide technical and financial support.

Each activity is intended to raise awareness of a specific resource concern or opportunity, stimulate interest and commitment for voluntary action, help focus funding, and optimize conservation outcomes. NRCS's coordination efforts with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and other stakeholder groups optimizes efficiency and effectiveness; generates additional partner resources to expand capacity and accelerate action; and establishes

mutual support for core conservation practices and systems that benefit the watershed, ecosystem, or species of concern. Examples of NRCS landscape conservation initiatives include:

National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI)

NRCS works with farmers and ranchers in small watersheds throughout the Nation to improve and protect water quality where this is a critical concern. NRCS works collaboratively with the Environmental Protection Agency at the national level to facilitate selection of high-priority watersheds and source water protection areas where NRCS and partners target outreach and assistance and demonstrate improvements in water quality. NRCS identifies priority watersheds through the help of local partnerships and state agencies. This strategic approach leverages funds and helps agricultural producers take needed actions to protect drinking water and reduce the runoff of sediment, nutrients, and pathogens into waterways. Water quality-related conservation practices can benefit agricultural producers by lowering input costs and enhancing the productivity of working lands. Eligible producers receive assistance under EQIP to install conservation systems that may include practices such as nutrient management, cover crops, and filter strips. Water quality monitoring data provided to EPA shows improvements in 36 percent of monitored watershed. This is significant as there is often lag time between the application of conservation practices and water quality improvements. As of 2022, NRCS recorded 19 Clean Water Act impairments removed or proposed for removal in NWQI watersheds. In 2023, NRCS continued to build on partnerships with drinking water partners and conservation delivery in watersheds across the nation. Through these partnerships, NRCS is now implementing 22 projects directly benefiting source water and is in the planning phase of 30 more. Since the inception of NWQI in 2012 through 2022, NRCS has provided targeted EQIP assistance through about 6,100 contracts treating approximately 1.25 million acres and obligating over \$299 million. The agency is working with EPA and state agencies to identify additional impairments that will be removed from the impaired list after implementation of the 2021 and 2022 projects.

Longleaf Pine Initiative

Longleaf pine forests once covered more than 90 million acres in the Southeastern United States. Stretching along Eastern Texas, through Central Florida, and north to Southern Virginia, these forests represent one of the world's most unique and biologically diverse ecosystems. However, 97 percent of the historic forests have been lost. According to Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) data, only 3.4 million acres of longleaf pine and mixed longleaf pine/oak forest types remained in 2008. These remaining forests provide critical habitat for 29 threatened and endangered species. In 2009, America's Longleaf Restoration Initiative (ALRI) released the Range-Wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine. The plan calls for restoring, improving, and maintaining eight million acres of longleaf pine by 2024. This ambitious goal will not be reached by 2024, FIA data shows that as of 2022 there are 5.2 million acres of longleaf pine forest. These accomplishments and favorable trajectory are bolstered by a strong collaborative partnership supporting the conservation work across the range. This includes working with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, leveraging their non-Federal funding with Federal funding to achieve more work on the ground, across public and private boundaries. In 2023, NRCS and ALRI partners published a revised Range-wide Conservation Plan updating the collaboration's goals, objectives, strategies, and key recommendations to achieve the eight-million-acre goal by 2040. This revised plan incorporated lessons learned over the past 15 years and builds on the collaboration's successes across the range. Also in 2023, USDA, Department of Defense, and Department of the Interior signed a new MOU reaffirming their shared commitment to restoring the longleaf pine ecosystems in the southeast. Since the plan's creation, more than 1.8 million acres of longleaf pine forest has been restored through establishment and over 200,000 acres of land has been protected. Over the past thirteen years, NRCS has enrolled more than 4.4 million acres of private lands in longleaf conservation practices. These enrolled acres can include multiple conservation practices contracted on the same acre. For example, site prep and tree planting on a 20-acre parcel, which is followed two years later by firebreak installation and prescribed burning. Alternatively, a degraded mature stand of longleaf pine may only require the forest stand improvement conservation practice.

Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI)

The MRBI activity was established in 2010 and covers Arkansas, Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, 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. In 2015, the activity was refined to support the Nutrient Reduction Strategies developed by each State to address nutrient losses to the Mississippi River and the Gulf of Mexico. In 2019, the initiative strengthened its emphasis on and support of watershed assessment and planning to further target conservation efforts for water quality benefit. From 2010 through 2022 over \$436 million of EQIP financial assistance supported voluntary conservation on over 1.82 million

acres in the Mississippi River watershed. The initiative is exceeding milestones for nutrient and sediment reduction and has been associated with the clean-up and delisting of a number of waterbodies.

Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW)

The WLFW activity is designed to provide targeted financial and technical assistance to improve habitat for identified wildlife species. Two-thirds of the land in the lower 48 States is privately owned, and these working farms, ranches, and forests produce much of the country's food and fiber. These working lands also provide much of our Nation's open space and the habitats that wildlife need. NRCS assists agricultural producers who want to voluntarily make wildlife-friendly improvements on their land. These conservation activities or practices benefit fish and wildlife while boosting the land's resilience and production. Producers have conserved millions of acres of wildlife habitat from the sagebrush and grasslands of the West to forests in the East. This work has led to the rebound and recovery of many species, including the Oregon chub, Louisiana black bear, New England cottontail, and greater sage-grouse. In October 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife published a proposed finding that listing another WLFW species, the gopher tortoise, was not warranted. This was due in part to the nearly one million acres of voluntary conservation measures put in place with NRCS assistance.

Technical Service Provider Assistance (TSP)

Under the TSP Program, 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 Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, which 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.

Workforce Status and Locations

As of September 30, 2023, NRCS had 10,577 full time employees with permanent appointments. Of this total, 172 employees were in the National Capital Region, and 10,405 employees were located outside of the National Capital Region.

Organizational Structure

NRCS is a line and staff organization. The line of authority begins with the Chief and extends down through the Associate Chief, Regional Conservationists (Northeast, Southeast, Central, and West), Deputy Chiefs, Division Directors, and State Conservationists. Line Officers are responsible for direct assistance to the public. Staff positions provide specialized technical or administrative expertise to line officers.

During 2023, NRCS had 2,593 duty locations located across the Nation, where NRCS performs mission-related activities (e.g., field offices, State offices, Plant Materials Centers, etc.) and reports at least one full time equivalent (FTE) at the location. In addition, this number includes locations used for conservation testing, research, and storage.

National Headquarters (NHQ)

Located in the Washington, DC National Capital Region (NCR), NHQ assumes leadership for all programs which are national in scale and other activities assigned by the Secretary of Agriculture through the Under Secretary for Farm Production and Conservation. The Chief, Associate Chiefs, Regional Conservationists, and Deputy Chiefs carry out national headquarters functions such as: 1) planning, formulating, and directing programs, 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.

NRCS Centers

Technological guidance and direction are also provided through the NRCS centers, including National Design Construction and Soil Mechanics Center, National Soil Survey Center; National Water and Climate Center; National Water Management Center; National Agroforestry Center; and East, Central and West National Technology Support Centers (NTSCs). NTSCs acquire and/or develop new science and technology to provide cutting-edge technological

support and direct assistance, and to transfer technologies to field offices for service delivery. NTSCs also develop and maintain national technical standards and other technological procedures and references. Centers are co-located with other NRCS offices where possible.

State Offices

State offices provide program planning and direction, delivery, and accountability for comprehensive soil, water, air, plant, and animal conservation programs. State offices also have responsibility for the technical integrity of NRCS activities, technology transfer and training, marketing of programs and initiatives, and program operations and processing. Where possible, State offices partner with other Federal and State agencies to provide solutions to resource concerns. The State Conservationist position leads all activities in each State. The Director position is similar to that of a State Conservationist for the Pacific Islands Area (Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of Marshall Islands) and the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands).

Service Center Offices

Personalized, one-on-one service is provided by NRCS employees located in Service Centers or specialized offices. This service delivery constitutes a majority of NRCS employees who are largely technical in nature. Service Centers and specialized offices support customers to prevent, or solve, natural resource concerns on private lands and in their communities. Service Center staff work side-by-side with employees of local conservation districts and other State conservation agencies to address resource concerns. Service Centers function as a clearinghouse for natural resource information and help customers gain access to knowledge and assistance available from local, State, regional, and/or national sources. These offices are located across the nation in every area where NRCS works and support the delivery of technical or financial assistance to address resource concerns.

Support Offices

Support offices provide critical technical and administrative support for Service Centers and other NRCS offices. Support offices include offices that provide administrative and technical support to a group of Service Centers; headquarter offices for watershed or river basin planning and construction activities; soil survey and Major Land Resource Areas offices that inventory and map soil resources on private lands; and Plant Materials 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 that provides information to support agency strategic planning, budget formulation and execution, workforce planning, and performance accountability. The Conservation Desktop web application tracks and evaluates field- and State- level conservation planning efforts, and practice implementation through the Conservation Desktop Performance Reports. Further, practices implementation is verified and documented by NRCS through the practice certification process prior to issuing any payments. In addition, Conservation Desktop tracks HELC/WC compliance and is building functionality to track all compliance and quality assurance needed to achieve program accountability.

Compliance Activities

There were ten audits, and 28 recommendations open at the start of fiscal year 2023, and one audit and six recommendations added during the same year, leaving a total of 11 audits and 34 recommendations in 2023. NRCS closed six of 11 active Office of Inspector General (OIG) and Government Accountability Office (GAO) audits for a year-end closure rate of 54 percent and closure of 28 recommendations for a closure rate of 82 percent.

OIG AND GAO REPORTS**Table NRCS-1. Closed, Implemented OIG Reports**

ID	Date	Title	Result
10099-0001-23	9/20/2023	Controls Over Conservation Innovation Grants	Recommendation 6 – OIG recommended that NRCS verify and reconcile insufficiently supported matching funds and take appropriate action, as applicable. To implement the recommendation, NRCS completed its review and requested a change in management decision regarding projects beyond the 3-year requirement for awardees to maintain auditable documentation of matching funds.
10403-0003-11	8/11/2023	Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Financial Statements for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2019	Recommendation 9 – OIG recommended that NRCS implement recurring analysis of open obligations. To implement the recommendation, NRCS, among other actions, worked to strengthen procedures to improve the accuracy and consistency of period end accruals.
10601-0004-31	5/17/2023	NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) Controls	Recommendation 3 – OIG recommended that NRCS review supporting documentation for questioned program costs and recover payments determined ineligible. To implement the recommendation, NRCS provided written determinations, supporting documentation, and received Departmental approval of submitted monetary actions. Recommendation 4 – OIG recommended that NRCS request the return of program payments used for ineligible expenses. To implement the recommendation, NRCS requested repayment and collected ineligible program payments.
10601-0004-31(2)	3/30/2023	NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program Controls (Interim Report)	Recommendation 2 – OIG recommended that NRCS request additional supporting documentation for previous payments. To implement the recommendation, NRCS requested and obtained the documentation to support the previous payments.

Table NRCS-2. Closed, Implemented GAO Reports

ID	Date	Title	Result
GAO-22-104326	7/25/2023	Emergency Watershed Protection: Assistance Program Helps Meet Post-Disaster Needs and Could Be Improved with Additional Guidance	<p>Recommendation 1 – GAO recommended that NRCS assess the time limits for program projects and revise regulations, as needed. To implement the recommendation, NRCS analyzed project timeframes and outlined actions to improve timely completion of projects.</p> <p>Recommendation 2 – GAO recommended that USDA determine whether another funding approach was needed for the program. To implement the recommendation, USDA determined that no change to the funding approach was needed due to new funding included in the 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act.</p> <p>Recommendation 3 – GAO recommended that USDA develop additional guidance for program projects on National Forest System lands. To implement the recommendation, USDA updated its guidance for how and when projects can be done on National Forest System lands.</p> <p>Recommendation 4 – GAO recommended that NRCS continue work developing the sponsor guide for the program. To implement the recommendation, NRCS updated and added to the guide to clarify areas where previous guidance was limited.</p>

LEAD-OFF TABULAR STATEMENT

Table NRCS-3. Lead-off Tabular Statement (In dollars)

Item	Amount
Estimate, 2024	\$1,042,624,000
Change in Appropriation	+31,635,000
Budget Estimate, 2025	<u>1,074,259,000</u>

AVAILABLE FUNDS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-4. Available Funds and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTE)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
Account 1: Private Lands Conservation Operations:								
Discretionary Appropriations	\$904,396	3,612	\$941,124	3,300	\$941,124	3,879	\$985,203	3,894
Mandatory Appropriations.....	4,800,000	-	-	531	-	1,094	-	1,094
Account 2: Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations:								
Discretionary Appropriations	100,000	65	75,000	46	75,000	61	70,000	58
Mandatory Appropriations.....	50,000	1	50,000	-	50,000	2	50,000	2
Supplemental Appropriations.....	775,000	118	925,000	118	-	78	-	78
Account 3: Emergency Watershed Protection Program:								
Supplemental Appropriations.....	300,000	4	-	7	-	10	-	2
Account 4: Watershed Rehabilitation:								
Discretionary Appropriations	1,000	6	2,000	4	2,000	2	2,003	2
Mandatory Appropriations.....	-	17	-	14	-	3	-	3
Supplemental Appropriations.....	118,000	-	-	6	-	3	-	3
Account 5: Water Bank Program:								
Discretionary Appropriations	4,000	3	4,000	3	4,000	3	2,011	3
Account 6: Healthy Forests Reserve:								
Discretionary Appropriations	-	-	7,000	-	7,000	7	-	-
Account 7: Urban Agriculture Innovative Production:								
Discretionary Appropriations	-	-	8,500	1	8,500	7	15,042	7
Account 8: Farm Security and Rural Investments Programs:								
Discretionary Appropriations	5,000	-	5,000	-	5,000	-	-	-
Mandatory Appropriations.....	3,639,115	6,394	4,864,115	6,143	7,281,615	8,913	10,014,115	8,913
Total Discretionary Appropriations.....	1,014,396	3,686	1,042,624	3,354	1,042,624	3,959	1,074,259	3,964
Total Mandatory Appropriations	8,489,115	6,412	4,914,115	6,688	7,331,615	10,012	10,064,115	10,012
Total Supplemental Appropriations.....	1,193,000	122	925,000	131	-	91	-	83
Total Appropriation	10,696,511	10,220	6,881,739	10,173	8,374,239	14,062	11,138,374	14,059
Transfers Out	-60,228	-	-60,228	-	-60,228	-	-70,740	-
Balance Available, SOY	3,512,518	-	8,496,657	-	6,174,270	-	3,675,694	-
Sequestration.....	-352,780	-	-231,655	-	-416,905	-	-573,655	-
Recoveries, Other	400,119	-	633,917	-	-190,735	-	-311,999	-
Total Available	14,196,140	10,220	15,720,430	10,173	13,880,641	14,062	13,857,674	14,059
Lapsing Balances	-8,953	-	-10,537	-	-	-	-	-
Balance Available, EOY.....	-8,496,657	-	-6,174,270	-	-3,675,694	-	-4,045,645	-
Total Obligations	5,690,530	10,220	9,535,623	10,173	10,204,947	14,062	9,812,029	14,059
Other Funding:								
Gulf Coast Restoration Revolving Fund.....	4,085	5	1,633	3	7,195	5	3,778	5
Other Federal and Non-Federal Reimbursements	57,255	85	93,309	83	58,000	83	58,000	83
Total, Other Funding	61,340	90	94,942	86	65,195	88	61,778	88
Total Available, NRCS	14,257,480	10,310	15,815,372	10,259	13,945,836	14,150	13,919,452	14,147

PERMANENT POSITIONS BY GRADE AND FTEs

Table NRCS-5. Permanent Positions by Grade and FTEs

Item	2022			2023			2024			2025		
	D.C.	Field	Actual Total	D.C.	Field	Actual Total	D.C.	Field	Estimated Total	D.C.	Field	Estimated Total
SES.....	11	2	13	14	2	16	17	3	20	17	3	20
GS-15	44	74	118	43	67	110	45	74	119	45	74	119
GS-14	28	212	240	40	273	313	56	285	341	56	285	341
GS-13	7	573	580	7	587	594	34	591	625	34	591	625
GS-12	10	2,654	2,664	11	2,766	2,777	28	2,825	2,853	28	2,835	2,863
GS-11	9	1,890	1,899	11	2,095	2,106	20	2,346	2,366	20	2,336	2,356
GS-10	-	27	27	-	43	43	-	42	42	-	40	40
GS-9	8	2,100	2,108	9	2,224	2,233	11	3,366	3,377	11	3,365	3,376
GS-8	3	318	321	2	301	303	3	350	353	3	350	353
GS-7	1	1,646	1,647	2	1,513	1,515	4	2,535	2,539	4	2,555	2,559
GS-6	-	254	254	-	197	197	-	356	356	-	356	356

Item	2022			2023			2024			2025		
	D.C.	Field	Actual Total	D.C.	Field	Actual Total	D.C.	Field	Estimated Total	D.C.	Field	Estimated Total
GS-5	-	262	262	-	221	221	-	579	579	-	559	559
GS-4	-	133	133	-	141	141	1	247	248	1	247	248
GS-3	1	231	232	-	172	172	1	282	283	1	282	283
GS-2	1	45	46	-	32	32	1	45	46	1	45	46
GS-1	-	2	2	-	2	2	-	2	2	-	2	2
Other Graded.....	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	1
Total Permanent ...	123	10,424	10,547	139	10,637	10,776	221	13,929	14,150	221	13,926	14,147
Total Perm. FT EOY ..	123	10,424	10,547	139	10,637	10,776	221	13,929	14,150	221	13,926	14,147
FTE	200	10,110	10,310	256	10,003	10,259	165	13,985	14,150	165	13,982	14,147

Note: In addition to the numbers above, and of the end of 2024 NRCS maintained about 118 non-permanent positions throughout the agency that provides support across the agency programs in their national or field locations.

VEHICLE FLEET

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. Driving takes place on agricultural land and in an assortment of operating conditions for the purpose of providing technical assistance to farmers and ranchers, which often involves transporting large engineering and other field equipment, thereby requiring employees to have access to pickup trucks and sport-utility vehicles.

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, while others are leased through the General Services Administration (GSA). Office locations are assigned vehicles, where multiple employees share vehicles to carry out mission requirements.

Replacement Criteria

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

Fleet Optimization

The optimal fleet inventory for NRCS has been identified. The agency will attain and maintain this optimal fleet inventory through one-for-one vehicle replacements, additions and eliminating non-essential vehicles through excess and transfer.

Looking ahead, NRCS will continue to optimize its fleet by:

- Maximizing its participation in an existing and successful vehicle-sharing program that continues to expand.
- Continuing to implement and utilize telematics to simplify vehicle usage recording for field staff.
- Vehicle right-typing, ensuring that the fleet inventory reflects a blend of vehicles that are a proper match to the mission and offer best value back to the Government.
- Reducing the number of fossil fuel-based vehicles by identifying opportunities to increase electrification within the agency’s inventory. All electric and hybrid (to include plug-in) -electric vehicles will be prioritized within the replacement strategy where they are a best match to mission requirements and charging infrastructure.
- Implement changes to fleet based on the Vehicle Allocation Methodology (VAM) survey conducted in 2023.

VEHICLE FLEET

Table NRCS-6. Size, Composition, and Annual Costs of Motor Vehicle Fleet

Item	Sedans and Station Wagons	Vans	SUVs	Light Trucks 4X2	Light Trucks 4X4	Medium Duty Vehicles	Buses	Heavy Duty Vehicles	Total Vehicles	Annual Operating Costs
2018 End of Year Operating Inventory	406	-	-	1,558	5,184	570	-	17	7,735	\$21,109,000
2022 End of Year Operating Inventory	318	95	136	953	6,488	575	-	14	8,579	19,916,363
2023 Actual Acquisitions	30	12	258	17	876	14	-	-	1,207	-
2023 Actual Disposals	30	12	258	17	876	14	-	-	1,207	-
2023 End of Year Operating Inventory	318	95	136	953	6,488	575	-	14	8,579	20,513,854
2024 Planned Acquisitions	34	11	129	128	407	9	-	1	719	-
2024 Planned Disposals	34	11	129	128	407	9	-	1	719	-
2024 End of Year Operating Inventory	318	95	136	953	6,488	575	-	14	8,579	21,129,269
2025 Planned Acquisitions	32	12	194	73	642	12	-	7	972	-
2025 Planned Disposals	32	12	194	73	642	12	-	7	972	-
2025 End of Year Operating Inventory	318	95	136	953	6,488	575	-	14	8,579	21,763,147

Note: Number of vehicles by type include vehicles owned by the agency and leased from commercial sources or GSA.
Annual Operating Costs excludes acquisition costs and gains from sale of vehicles as shown in FAST.

Table NRCS-7. Statement of Proposed Purchase of Passenger Motor Vehicles

Fiscal Year	Net Active Fleet, SOY	Disposals	Replacements	Additions	Total Acquisitions	Net Active Fleet, EOY
2022 ..	318	30	30	-	-	318
2023 ..	318	30	30	-	-	318
2024 ..	318	34	34	-	-	318
2025 ..	318	32	32	-	-	318

SHARED FUNDING PROJECTS

Table NRCS-8. Shared Funding Projects (thousands of dollars)

Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
Working Capital Fund:				
Administrative Services:				
AskUSDA Contact Center	-	\$307	\$636	\$667
Material Management Service	\$52	44	54	50
Mail and Reproduction Services	391	725	507	511
Integrated Procurement Systems.....	1,068	1,110	943	-
Procurement Operations Services.....	1,262	1,571	1,893	2,550
Fleet Charge Card Services.....	-	-	-	188
Human Resources Enterprise Management Systems.....	170	208	144	148
Subtotal	2,943	3,965	4,177	4,114
Communications:				
Creative Media & Broadcast Center	356	278	543	394
Finance and Management Services:				
National Finance Center	2,442	2,832	3,044	2,787
Personnel Document Security	-	513	591	596
Financial Shared Services	15,492	16,639	17,618	16,817
Internal Control Support Services.....	79	83	162	155
Subtotal	18,013	20,067	21,415	20,355
Information Technology:				
Client Experience Center	119,327	111,684	97,718	95,188
Enterprise Cybersecurity Services	-	4,255	7,659	8,514
Enterprise Data and Analytics Services	-	5,246	545	521
Department Administration Information Technology Office	300	445	406	409
Digital Infrastructure Services Center	16,489	22,542	15,358	14,506
Enterprise Network Services.....	15,232	14,403	29,462	22,412
Subtotal	151,348	158,575	151,148	141,550
Correspondence Management Services:				
Office of the Executive Secretariat	142	151	158	163
Total, Working Capital Fund	172,802	183,036	177,441	166,576
Department-Wide Shared Cost Programs:				
Advisory Committee Liaison Services	4	5	6	6
Agency Partnership Outreach	682	778	861	861
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility	-	211	308	308
Intertribal Technical Assistance Network.....	375	378	411	411
Medical Services	38	55	41	41
National Capital Region Interpreting Services	8	18	16	16
Office of Customer Experience	941	339	371	371
Personnel and Document Security Program	162	-	-	-
Physical Security.....	460	479	541	541
Security Detail	487	532	619	619
Security Operations Program.....	670	736	877	877
Talent Group	-	382	381	381
TARGET Center	138	175	205	205
Employee Experience	-	363	431	431
USDA Enterprise Data Analytics Services.....	475	-	-	-
Total, Department-Wide Reimbursable Programs.....	4,440	4,451	5,068	5,068
E-Gov:				
Budget Formulation and Execution Line of Business	10	10	11	12
Hiring Assessment Tool.....	25	-	-	-
E-Rulemaking	11	7	16	21
Financial Management Line of Business	21	22	23	23
Geospatial Line of Business.....	13	13	13	13
Benefits.gov	71	66	72	-
Grants.gov	60	51	115	138
Human Resources Line of Business	31	31	34	34
Integrated Acquisition Environment.....	3	16	19	18
Total, E-Gov	245	216	303	259
Agency Total.....	177,487	187,703	182,812	171,903

ADVERTISING EXPENDITURES

Table NRCS-9. Advertising Expenditures (thousands of dollars)

Item	2023	2023	2024	2024	2025	2025
	Actual Number of Contracts	Actual Dollars Obligated	Estimated Number of Contracts	Estimated Dollars Obligated	Estimated Number of Contracts	Estimated Dollars Obligated
Total Contracts for Advertising Services.....	4	\$57,900	-	-	-	-
Contracts for Advertising Services to Women- Owned and Minority-Owned Small Businesses	1	3,900	-	-	-	-

ACCOUNT I: PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS

APPROPRIATIONS LANGUAGE

The appropriations language follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

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. 2268a); purchase and erection or alteration or improvement of permanent and temporary buildings; and operation and maintenance of aircraft, [~~\$1,022,566,000~~]\$985,203,000, to remain available until September 30, [2025]2026: *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.

LEAD-OFF TABULAR STATEMENT

Table NRCS-10. Lead-Off Tabular Statement (In dollars)

Item	Amount
Estimate, 2024	\$941,124,000
Change in Appropriation	+44,079,000
Budget Estimate, 2025	<u>985,203,000</u>

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-113. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.	Chg Key
Discretionary Appropriations:											
Private Lands Conservation Operations											
Conservation Technical Assistance	\$779,424	3,086	\$826,865	2,753	\$826,865	3,328	\$868,945	3,343	+\$42,080	+15	(1)
Soil Survey	89,444	400	86,757	423	86,757	419	88,277	419	+1,520	-	(2)
Snow Survey	9,488	51	16,751	45	16,751	52	16,940	52	+189	-	(3)
Plant Materials	10,540	68	10,751	73	10,751	80	11,041	80	+290	-	(4)
Watershed Projects Program	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Urban Agriculture & Innovative Prod. Prg.	8,500	6	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program	7,000	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	904,396	3,612	941,124	3,300	941,124	3,879	985,203	3,894	+44,079	+15	-
Mandatory Appropriations:											
Partnerships for Climate-Smart											
Commodities	3,357,500	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Conservation Technical Assistance (IRA)	1,000,000	-	-	531	-	1,069	-	1,069	-	-	-
Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment (IRA)	300,000	-	-	-	-	25	-	25	-	-	-
Subtotal	4,657,500	-	-	531	-	1,094	-	1,094	-	-	-
Total Adjusted Approp	5,561,896	3,612	941,124	3,831	941,124	4,973	985,203	4,988	+44,079	+15	-
Add back:											
Sequestration	142,500	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Appropriation	5,704,396	3,612	941,124	3,831	941,124	4,973	985,203	4,988	+44,079	+15	-
Sequestration	-142,500	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Recoveries, Other	-39,639	-	23,441	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	138,202	-	4,777,530	-	1,849,170	-	621,159	-	-1,228,011	-	-
Total Available	5,660,459	3,612	5,742,095	3,831	2,790,294	4,973	1,606,362	4,988	-1,183,932	+15	-
Lapsing Balances	-8,140	-	-9,768	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	-4,777,530	-	-1,849,170	-	-621,159	-	-388,025	-	+233,134	-	-
Total Obligations	874,789	3,612	3,883,157	3,831	2,169,135	4,973	1,218,337	4,988	-950,798	+15	-

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

Note: The details associated with Supplemental appropriations provided to the Office of the Secretary, but implemented in this account, is found in the USDA Budget Summary and is not reflected above.

Table NRCS-12. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Discretionary Obligations:										
Private Lands Conservation Operations										
Conservation Technical Assistance	\$766,977	3,086	\$762,725	2,753	\$994,053	3,328	\$868,945	3,343	-\$125,108	+15
Soil Survey	85,059	400	84,216	423	99,813	419	88,277	419	-11,536	-
Snow Survey	9,174	51	10,318	45	24,053	52	16,940	52	-7,113	-
Plant Materials	11,681	68	11,228	73	13,582	80	11,041	80	-2,541	-
Watershed Projects Program	89	1	4	-	308	-	-	-	-308	-
Watershed Protection Program	1,809	6	1,955	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Urban Agriculture and Innovative Prod. Prg.	-	-	6,695	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program	-	-	2,963	2	3,012	-	1,026	-	-1,986	-
Subtotal Disc Obligations.....	874,789	3,612	880,104	3,300	1,134,821	3,879	986,229	3,894	-148,592	+15
Mandatory Obligations:										
Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities.....	-	-	2,797,034	-	560,466	-	-	-	-560,466	-
Conservation Technical Assistance (IRA).....	-	-	200,761	531	349,239	1,069	200,000	1,069	-149,239	-
Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment (IRA) ..	-	-	5,258	-	124,609	25	32,108	25	-92,501	-
Total Obligations.....	874,789	3,612	3,883,157	3,831	2,169,135	4,973	1,218,337	4,988	-950,798	+15
Add back:										
Lapsing Balances	8,140	-	9,768	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Balances Available, EOY:										
Conservation Technical Assistance	1,387,755	-	167,188	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Soil Survey	12,423	-	13,056	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Snow Survey	910	-	7,302	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Plant Materials	3,292	-	2,832	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Watershed Projects Program	4	-	308	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Watershed Protection Program	1,955	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Prg. ..	6,691	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program	7,000	-	4,037	-	1,026	-	-	-	-1,026	-
Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities.....	3,357,500	-	560,466	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Conservation Technical Assistance (IRA).....	-	-	799,239	-	450,000	-	250,000	-	-200,000	-
Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment (IRA) ..	-	-	294,742	-	170,133	-	138,025	-	-32,108	-
Total Bal. Available, EOY	4,777,530	-	1,849,170	-	621,159	-	388,025	-	-233,134	-
Total Available	5,660,459	3,612	5,742,095	3,831	2,790,294	4,973	1,606,362	4,988	-1,183,932	+15
Less:										
Sequestration	142,500	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Recoveries, Other	39,639	-	-23,441	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-138,202	-	-4,777,530	-	-1,849,170	-	-621,159	-	+1,228,011	-
Total Appropriation.....	5,704,396	3,612	941,124	3,831	941,124	4,973	985,203	4,988	+44,079	+15

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

Note: The details associated with Supplemental appropriations provided to the Office of the Secretary, but implemented in this account, is found in the USDA Budget Summary and is not reflected above.

JUSTIFICATION OF CHANGES

A net increase of \$44,079,000 in funding and an increase of 15 staff years in the Private Lands Conservation Operations (\$941,124,000 and 3,879 staff years available in 2024).

1. A net increase of \$42,080,000 in funding and an increase of 15 staff years for the Conservation Technical Assistance Program (\$826,865,000 and 3,328 staff years available in 2024).

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program remains the agency’s primary program to work with private landowners across the country through USDA’s unique delivery system of local field offices. Working one-on-one, NRCS can help producers use new technologies and conservation practices that address emerging challenges and opportunities, such as organic production systems, on farm energy management, air quality improvement, and enhancement of pollinator populations.

Through the CTA Program, NRCS helps land managers develop comprehensive conservation plans that include activities that: 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.

- a) An increase of \$30,000,000 for Conservation Technical Assistance to invest in equity conservation cooperative agreements.

In 2025, NRCS proposes to continue investment in cooperative agreements to support historically underserved farmers and ranchers with climate-smart agriculture and forestry. The increase of \$30,000,000 will provide additional funding opportunities based on the demand demonstrated in 2022

and 2023. In 2022, we were able to fund 46.8 percent of applicants, or 24.4 percent of requested dollars. In 2023 we were able to fund 46.3 percent of applicants, or 32.9 percent of requested dollars. The Equity Conservation Cooperative Agreements are two-year projects that expand the delivery of conservation assistance to farmers and ranchers who are beginning, limited resource, historically underserved and/or veterans. Authorized by the Soil Conservation Act and Domestic Allotment Act (16 U.S.C. 590a-590f, 590q), these cooperative agreements will remove barriers to access for conservation planning and technical assistance to historically underserved groups through targeted outreach to these producers and allow NRCS to address key priority areas. These agreements will increase new customers at NRCS.

Key priority areas include addressing local natural resource issues; encouraging use of climate-smart practices; encouraging existing and new partnerships; developing state and community-led conservation leadership for historically underserved agricultural producers, including training students for careers in natural resource management.

- b) An increase of \$15,000,000 for Conservation Planning to support implementation of equity conservation cooperative agreements.

This increase will ensure NRCS staff are available to provide assistance to new customers anticipated from the equity agreements. New customers require more technical assistance time than existing customers for conservation planning, conservation compliance, and eligibility determinations.

- c) An increase of \$8,000,000 for Climate Hubs.

The Climate Hubs are a framework for connecting a wide range of NRCS partners on climate variability issues including drought, excess rainfall, soil and streams management, and carbon issues. Requested funds will continue to support NRCS cooperation of the USDA Climate Hubs and will result in a greater understanding and delivery of the NRCS mission and programs on a truly national level. The Hubs highlight the technical, financial, and economic benefits of NRCS's voluntary conservation programs so that proven science-based information is reaching stakeholders such as agricultural producers and natural resource managers. The amount requested will support Climate Hub projects that are consistent with the NRCS mission and goals related to regional and sectoral based vulnerability assessments that assist NRCS in addressing the needs of working lands and vulnerable natural resources through voluntary conservation programs. Funds will also be used to establish regional and state-based projects to understand how natural resource conditions on working lands are affected by the changing climate. This is essential to improve the performance of programs that conserve the land and sustain agricultural production. The increase in funds will enable the Climate Hubs to expand NRCS outreach to the public through effective and efficient delivery of research to end users. This includes Hub adaptation demonstration projects that serve as concrete responses to real-world agricultural climate management issues.

- d) An increase of \$12,053,000 for pay and employee costs in the Conservation Technical Assistance Program.

This increase will support an annualization of the 2024 5.2 percent Cost of Living pay increase and the 2025 2.0 percent Cost of Living pay increase. If this funding is not provided, NRCS will not have adequate resources available to avoid any disruption or delays in the Conservation Technical Assistance Program activities.

- e) A decrease of \$22,973,000 for Congressionally Directed Projects.

This item was funded in 2023 Enacted. Funding is not included in the 2025 Budget Request.

2. An increase of \$1,520,000 and no change in staff years for the Soil Survey Program (\$86,757,000 and 419 staff years available in 2024).

This increase will support an annualization of the 2024 5.2 percent Cost of Living pay increase and the 2025 2.0 percent Cost of Living pay increase. If this funding is not provided, NRCS will not have adequate resources available to avoid any disruption or delays in the Soil Survey Program activities.

3. An increase of \$189,000 and no change in staff years for the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program (\$16,751,000 and 52 staff years available in 2024).

This increase will support an annualization of the 2024 5.2 percent Cost of Living pay increase and the 2025 2.0 percent Cost of Living pay increase. If this funding is not provided, NRCS will not have adequate resources available to avoid any disruption or delays in the Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program activities.

4. An increase of \$290,000 and no change in staff years for the Plant Material Centers Program (\$10,751,000 and 80 staff years available in 2024).

This increase will support an annualization of the 2024 5.2 percent Cost of Living pay increase and the 2025 2.0 percent Cost of Living pay increase. If this funding is not provided, NRCS will not have adequate resources available to avoid any disruption or delays in the Plant Material Centers Program activities.

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-13. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTE	Actual	FTE	Estimated	FTE	Estimated	FTE
Alabama	\$6,529	36	\$8,235	44	\$11,990	59	\$9,267	59
Alaska	5,506	35	7,111	30	10,354	40	8,002	40
Arizona.....	7,012	59	8,977	52	13,071	69	10,102	69
Arkansas.....	12,158	74	18,827	107	27,413	140	21,186	140
California.....	21,418	162	31,443	170	49,282	221	35,383	222
Colorado.....	10,608	84	17,675	81	25,735	106	19,890	106
Connecticut.....	5,129	30	7,734	36	11,261	48	8,703	48
Delaware.....	2,692	19	5,642	22	8,715	30	6,349	30
District of Columbia.....	406,399	342	3,193,091	325	1,151,136	360	445,680	361
Florida.....	6,818	51	10,099	49	14,704	65	11,364	65
Georgia.....	7,840	66	18,524	104	26,972	136	20,845	137
Hawaii.....	6,358	42	10,005	46	14,568	61	11,259	61
Idaho.....	8,527	67	12,457	73	19,138	96	14,018	96
Illinois.....	10,109	64	15,058	63	21,925	83	16,945	83
Indiana.....	10,443	76	23,311	86	33,942	113	26,232	113
Iowa.....	17,949	128	23,065	107	33,583	140	25,955	140
Kansas.....	11,750	100	14,639	100	21,315	131	16,473	131
Kentucky.....	8,094	67	10,321	67	15,028	88	11,614	89
Louisiana.....	9,866	69	11,170	68	17,264	89	12,570	89
Maine.....	4,894	39	8,959	41	13,045	54	10,082	55
Maryland.....	5,684	46	8,427	45	12,270	60	9,483	60
Massachusetts.....	3,060	22	5,704	25	8,305	34	6,419	34
Michigan.....	10,248	75	12,995	75	21,921	98	14,623	99
Minnesota.....	9,451	52	20,737	69	31,194	91	23,335	91
Mississippi.....	12,380	74	21,786	78	31,721	102	24,516	102
Missouri.....	16,148	105	23,740	138	34,566	180	26,714	181
Montana.....	11,516	91	18,096	88	26,348	115	20,363	116
Nebraska.....	16,285	121	20,607	122	30,004	159	23,189	160
Nevada.....	4,397	34	6,043	29	8,799	39	6,800	39
New Hampshire.....	3,600	33	5,123	33	7,459	44	5,765	44
New Jersey.....	4,002	29	5,684	30	8,776	40	6,396	40
New Mexico.....	9,071	52	10,726	45	15,617	60	12,070	60
New York.....	8,019	63	13,941	58	20,299	77	15,688	77
North Carolina.....	6,607	54	9,600	67	13,978	88	10,803	89
North Dakota.....	11,094	79	15,482	100	22,542	131	17,422	131
Ohio.....	9,678	61	10,911	59	15,887	78	12,278	78
Oklahoma.....	10,534	78	13,967	85	20,336	111	15,717	111
Oregon.....	9,416	61	15,779	62	22,975	82	17,756	82
Pennsylvania.....	9,156	82	13,672	84	19,907	110	15,385	110
Puerto Rico.....	2,992	22	4,490	26	6,538	35	5,053	35
Rhode Island.....	2,548	15	4,249	14	6,187	20	4,781	20
South Carolina.....	6,980	36	8,997	36	13,100	48	10,124	48
South Dakota.....	11,577	94	18,474	102	26,899	134	20,789	134
Tennessee.....	12,447	82	14,897	86	21,690	113	16,764	113
Texas.....	31,966	200	45,051	251	71,844	326	50,696	327
Utah.....	7,056	45	10,172	33	14,811	44	11,446	44
Vermont.....	9,381	30	5,966	32	8,687	43	6,714	43
Virginia.....	6,933	64	10,450	64	15,216	85	11,759	85
Washington.....	8,310	60	10,888	58	16,353	77	12,252	77
West Virginia.....	6,335	52	8,530	48	12,420	64	9,599	64

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025		
	Actual	FTE	Actual	FTE	Estimated	FTE	Estimated	FTE	
Wisconsin.....	11,653	35	20,749		60	31,211	79	23,349	80
Wyoming.....	6,166	55	7,442		58	10,836	77	8,374	77
Distribution Unknown	-	-	3,439		-	-	-	-	-
Obligations.....	874,789	3,612	3,883,157		3,831	2,169,135	4,973	1,218,337	4,988
Lapsing Balances.....	8,140	-	9,768		-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY.....	4,777,530	-	1,849,170		-	621,159	-	388,025	-
Total, Available.....	5,660,459	3,612	5,742,095		3,831	2,790,294	4,973	1,606,362	4,988

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS

Table NRCS-14. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
	Personnel Compensation:				
	Washington D.C.	\$7,612	\$9,413	\$12,685	\$12,977
	Personnel Compensation, Field.....	278,717	306,898	413,582	423,101
11	Total personnel compensation.....	286,329	316,311	426,267	436,078
12	Personal benefits.....	143,317	144,935	199,149	203,760
13.0	Benefits for former personnel.....	34	34	37	38
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits.....	429,680	461,280	625,453	639,876
	Other Objects:				
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons.....	1,709	19,296	28,446	20,086
22.0	Transportation of things	2,854	3,681	5,108	4,889
23.1	Rental payments to GSA.....	8,444	10,002	5,208	6,217
23.2	Rental payments to others	25,769	23,228	15,487	16,324
23.3	Communications, utilities, and misc. charges	128	1,476	1,992	1,241
24.0	Printing and reproduction.....	136	526	771	209
25.1	Advisory and assistance services	-128	-1	-	-
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources.....	238,825	302,298	528,128	226,528
25.3	Other goods and services from Federal sources.....	1,921	13,160	25,060	3,666
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities.....	127,461	198,460	285,544	221,188
25.5	Research and development contracts	-	-2,354	9,037	8,700
25.7	Operation and maintenance of equipment.....	1,144	1,559	2,135	2,240
26.0	Supplies and materials.....	8,434	10,706	16,228	14,491
31.0	Equipment	26,002	30,451	43,963	38,045
32.0	Land and structures	2,379	12,090	15,753	14,260
41.0	Grants, subsidies, and contributions.....	-	2,797,035	560,466	-
42.0	Insurance Claims and Indemnities	23	261	351	372
43.0	Interest and Dividends.....	9	4	5	5
44.0	Refunds.....	-1	-1	-	-
	Total, Other Objects	445,109	3,421,877	1,543,682	578,461
99.9	Total, new obligations	874,789	3,883,157	2,169,135	1,218,337
	DHS Building Security Payments (included in 25.3).....	\$1,921	\$1,405	\$660	\$666
	Information Technology Investments:				
	FBC-1001 Cust Engagement & Mgmt Svcs				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors).....	\$6,747	\$6,764	\$7,654	\$7,820
	Total FBC-1001 Cust Engagement & Mgmt Svcs.....	6,747	6,764	7,654	7,820
	FPAC-1002 Geospatial Services				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors).....	3,416	10,947	26,447	27,974
25.2	Outside Services (Consulting).....	7,909	272	134	287
31.0	Hardware	-	-	156	65
	Total FPAC-1002 Geospatial Services.....	11,325	11,219	26,737	28,326
	FPAC-1003 Information Management				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors).....	-	-	4,506	4,493
	Total FBC-1003 Information Management	-	-	4,506	4,493
	FSA-129 Program Financial Services				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors).....	34	35	85	86
	Total FSA-129 Program Financial Services.....	34	35	85	86
	NRCS-1401 Natural Resources & Mgmt Info				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors).....	-	-	32,060	40,808
31.0	Software.....	-	-	644	676
	Total NRCS-1401 Natural Resources & Mgmt Info ...	-	-	32,704	41,484
	NRCS-1402 Conservation Field Delivery Programs				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors).....	-	-	39,089	45,085

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
	Total NRCS-1402 Conservation Field Delivery Prg. ..	-	-	39,089	45,085
	NRCS-CDSI Conservation Delivery Streamline Initiative				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors).....	3,120	2,525	1,588	1,276
	Total NRCS-CDSI Conservation Delivery Streamline Initiative	3,120	2,525	1,588	1,276
	Total Major Investments	21,226	20,543	112,363	128,570
	Mission Area Non-Major Investment Totals	99,067	57,891	11,959	12,198
	Mission Area Standard Investment Totals	33,745	23,280	56,285	49,965
25.2	Mission Area WCF Transfers	97,787	100,655	228,848	227,625
	Total IT Investments	251,825	202,369	409,455	418,358
	Cybersecurity				
	Identify	n/a	\$454	\$231	\$231
	Protect.....	n/a	4,430	2,191	2,191
	Detect.....	n/a	183	93	93
	Respond.....	n/a	758	385	385
	Recover.....	n/a	467	238	238
	Total Cybersecurity.....	-	6,292	3,138	3,138
	Position Data:				
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position.....	\$186,454	\$191,976	\$201,959	\$205,998
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position	\$73,727	\$77,835	\$81,882	\$83,520
	Average Grade, GS Position	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0

Note: The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

NRCS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Table NRCS-15. NRCS Technical Assistance (millions of dollars)

NRCS Technical Assistance ¹	2022 Enacted	2022 % of Total	2023 Enacted	2023 % of Total	2024 Estimate (Assumes CR) ²	2024 % of Total	2025 Agency Request	2025 % of Total
Discretionary Programs (Source: 2025 USDA Budget Estimates)								
Conservation Operations: ³								
Conservation Technical Assistance	\$779	18.42%	\$827	18.29%	\$827	16.83%	\$869	16.37%
Soil Surveys	89	2.10%	87	1.92%	87	1.77%	88	1.66%
Snow Surveys.....	9	0.21%	17	0.37%	17	0.34%	17	0.32%
Plant Materials	11	0.26%	11	0.24%	11	0.22%	11	0.21%
Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program.....	9	0.21%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program.....	2	0.05%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Discretionary Program (Source: General Provisions and Carryover Funding)								
Wetland Mitigation Banking Program.....	-	-	1	0.02%	1	0.02%	1	0.02%
Total, Discretionary Programs	\$899	21.25%	\$942	20.84%	\$942	19.17%	\$986	18.57%
Mandatory Programs (Source: FY 2025 USDA Budget Estimates and NRCS Actual and Preliminary Carryover Balances)								
Farm Bill Programs (Technical Assistance): ⁴								
Environmental Quality Incentives Program.....	625	14.78%	635	14.04%	702	14.28%	740	13.94%
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	219	5.18%	235	5.20%	221	4.50%	194	3.65%
Regional Conservation Partnership Program.....	347	8.20%	393	8.69%	424	8.63%	220	4.14%
Conservation Stewardship Program.....	427	10.09%	474	10.48%	359	7.31%	435	8.18%
Agricultural Management Assistance ⁵	1	0.02%	1	0.02%	1	0.02%	1	0.02%
Conservation Reserve Program Tech. Assist	328	7.75%	269	5.95%	256	5.21%	233	4.39%
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program..	2	0.05%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot	1	0.02%	1	0.02%	-	-	-	-
Agriculture Water Enhancement Program.....	5	0.12%	5	0.11%	-	-	-	-
Farm and Ranchland Protection Program	40	0.95%	32	0.71%	81	1.65%	60	1.13%
Grassland Reserve Program	15	0.35%	12	0.27%	12	0.24%	7	0.13%
Wetland Reserve Program	11	0.26%	5	0.11%	6	0.12%	-	-
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	5	0.12%	5	0.11%	1	0.02%	1	0.02%
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program	4	0.09%	4	0.09%	-	0.00%	-	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program.....	1	0.02%	1	0.02%	1	0.02%	-	-
Total, Mandatory Programs	\$2,031	48.01%	\$2,072	45.82%	\$2,064	42.00%	\$1,891	35.61%
Supplemental Program (Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Funds) (Source: IRA Spend Plan, 2024 Authorized Levels, and NRCS Estimated Carryover) ⁶								
Conservation Technical Assistance (\$1B)	1,000	23.64%	1,000	22.11%	799	16.26%	450	8.47%
Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment (\$300M).....	300	7.09%	300	6.63%	295	6.00%	170	3.20%
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (\$8.45B).....	-	-	77	1.70%	331	6.74%	608	11.45%
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (\$1.4B).....	-	-	27	0.60%	48	0.98%	116	2.18%
Regional Conservation Partnership Program (\$4.95B)	-	-	25	0.55%	338	6.88%	891	16.78%
Conservation Stewardship Program (\$3.25B)	-	-	79	1.75%	97	1.97%	198	3.73%
Total, IRA Program Funds	\$1,300	30.73%	\$1,508	33.35%	\$1,908	38.83%	\$2,433	45.82%
Total, Technical Assistance	\$4,230	100.00%	\$4,522	100.00%	\$4,914	100.00%	\$5,310	100.00%

Full-time Equivalents (FTEs) - Direct FTEs Only (Source: 2025 USDA Budget Estimates)								
Discretionary FTEs:								
Conservation Operations.....	3,612	36.10%	3,300	33.09%	3,879	27.93%	3,894	28.01%
Mandatory FTEs:								
Farm Bill Programs.....	6,394	63.90%	5,834	58.49%	7,353	52.95%	7,353	52.90%
Supplemental FTEs:								
Inflation Reduction Act.....	-	-	840	8.42%	2,654	19.11%	2,654	19.09%
Total FTEs.....	10,006	100.00%	9,974	100.00%	13,886	100.00%	13,901	100.00%

¹ This table reflects the total staff resources necessary to implement private lands conservation programs administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. This table includes the total for discretionary technical assistance and associated science and technology programs provided through the Private Lands Conservation Operations account in addition to the total technical assistance necessary to implement Farm Bill and the Inflation Reduction Act programs.

² The discretionary funding is based on a Full Year Continuing Resolution. Mandatory and Supplemental funding are based on Authorized levels and Actual carryover.

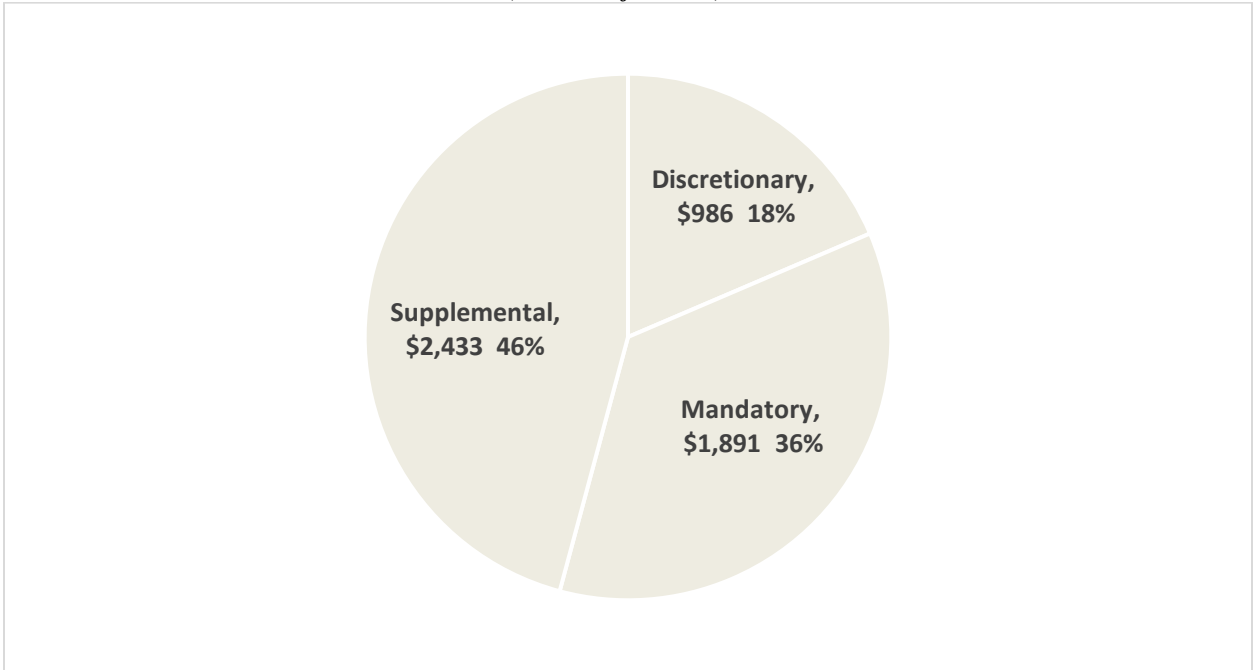
³ The Conservation Operations Account includes the Congressionally Directed Projects funding for 2022 Enacted (\$19.611 million [\$14.611 million in Conservation Technical Assistance and \$5 million in Soil Surveys Program]), 2023 Enacted (\$22.973 million in Conservation Technical Assistance), and 2024 Continuing Resolution (\$22.973 million in Conservation Technical Assistance).

⁴ The 2025 Budget assumes estimated carryover of \$364 million in mandatory programs.

⁵ NRCS is authorized to receive 50 percent of total AMA funding. The balance of the funds is allocated to the Risk Management Agency and the Agricultural Marketing Service.

⁶ The 2025 Budget assumes estimated carryover of \$977 million in supplemental Funding. The 2024 Estimates and 2025 Agency Request are based on the IRA Spend Plan as of January 2024.

***NRCS Technical Assistance Funding
(millions of dollars)***



This page was intentionally left blank.

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**PRIVATE LANDS CONSERVATION OPERATIONS**

Private Lands 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 Private Lands 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. Private Lands 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).

Discretionary funding in the Private Lands 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:

- Conservation Planning and Technical Consultation
- Conservation Implementation
- Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment
- Natural Resource Technology Transfer

The fifth business line, Financial Assistance, is funded primarily through mandatory conservation programs that are authorized and funded through the Farm Bill with resources from the Commodity Credit Corporation.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program

NRCS is the principal agency within USDA for providing conservation technical assistance to private landowners, conservation districts, Indian tribes, and other organizations. Through the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program, NRCS helps land managers reduce soil loss from erosion; address soil and water quality, water conservation, air quality, and agricultural waste management concerns; reduce potential damage caused by excess water and sedimentation or by 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.

The 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 CTA Program, 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.

Technical assistance starts with a science-based assessment of the resource concerns and opportunities on farms, ranches, and within watersheds. Conservation professionals then provide farmers and ranchers with the best options for addressing resource concerns and taking advantage of opportunities. Trained 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 information gleaned from the planning process to make decisions, implement plans, and put conservation practices in place.

Technical assistance does not stop with implementation; it includes annual follow-up or reassessment to determine the effectiveness of the actions implemented by the land manager in response to the conservation plan. 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 both make a profit and improve 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.

Conservation technical assistance addresses at the local level natural resource conservation issues that are of State and national concern. NRCS leadership establishes CTA Program national priorities and initiatives on an annual or multi-year basis to focus resources on specific program objectives. States may establish additional priorities and initiatives for the CTA Program. NRCS has a full array of processes to focus CTA Program resources on national and State priorities and initiatives. These processes include, but are not limited to:

- Strategically positioning staff to address natural resource needs through conservation planning;
- Allocating program funds to address natural resource needs;

- Establishing short-term and long-term performance measures and goals;
- Formulating, enhancing, and expanding partnerships;
- 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;
- Conducting resource inventories and assessments;
- Developing and delivering training to support conservation planners and conservation planning activities;
- Providing tailored conservation planning and assistance to meet unique need of a diverse customer base;
- Expanding technical capacity, including the use of technical service providers; and
- Developing public information and outreach strategies, including targeted outreach to underserved communities.

Current Activities

In 2023, CTA Program continuing activities included:

- Using new technologies and conservation practices to address emerging challenges and opportunities, such as organic production systems, on-farm energy management, air quality improvement, and enhancement of pollinator populations;
- Helping to improve soil health and productivity in States impacted by the historic drought;
- Protecting wildlife through the Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), a partnership between NRCS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to use technical assistance with financial assistance to combat the decline of wildlife species;
- Addressing a growing number of niche enterprises that include aquaculture, specialty crops, sustainable, and organic farming;
- Engaging producers who are new to production agriculture and have higher requirements for technical assistance or have not previously participated in NRCS programs, but who are critical in solving the identified resource concerns in special initiative areas;
- Entering into agreements with conservation partnerships in order to leverage local funds and provide additional technical assistance;
- Accelerating focused technical assistance through landscape conservation initiatives such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Sage Grouse Initiative, and the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative;
- Addressing threats to drinking water, especially community water systems, targeting technical and financial assistance for source water protection;
- Addressing growing demand for conservation planning support for Farm Bill and Inflation Reduction Act programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP);
- Designing natural resource conservation systems to reduce the risk of loss and mitigate the effects of climatic events such as drought, fire, and flood;
- Leveraging the innovative technology and agribusiness applications of the private sector in a collaborative effort to improve the tailored products and assistance provided to customers;
- Bolstering the credibility and technical acumen of staff and partners by strengthening the conservation planner certification program; and
- Attending to the unique needs of urban agricultural customers through the delivery of customized conservation planning and technical assistance.
- Assessing conservation on approximately 75.5 million acres. In accordance with those assessments and utilizing CTA Program support, conservation practices and systems designed to improve soil quality were applied to over five million acres of cropland.
- Providing CTA support to the owners and managers applying conservation to protect and improve vegetative condition on over 560,000 acres of forest land.
- Providing CTA support for the application of conservation practices on approximately 162,000 acres to improve irrigation water use efficiency, reducing costs to the producer, groundwater withdrawals, and surface runoff.
- Providing CTA support to actively manage 1.67 million acres for wildlife habitat that had conservation applied.
- Providing CTA support to implement projects to create, restore, and enhance wetlands to provide critical wildlife habitat on approximately 13,600 acres.

There continues to be a growing demand for technical assistance, and the agency has continued to manage and invest in human capital to ensure the right skills are in the right location to deliver high quality products and services. In addition, the agency continues work to improve and streamline internal business processes to accelerate service delivery; expand conservation partnership and build new alliances for cooperative approaches that conserve and protect natural resources; develop and use electronically-based technology to provide a more customer-focused service; and strengthen the ability to develop innovative technology while addressing new and emerging conservation challenges.

CTA Program Success Story

Where the corn and soybeans once grew at Fix-Stoelting Nature Preserve in Monroe County, Indiana, native plants have quickly taken over. They have been joined by nearly 3,000 trees in a variety of species planted along one side of the property. Multiple wetland pools have been added to the property to provide habitat for a variety of species.

This transformation is exactly what was planned by the staff at Sycamore Land Trust, which owns the property as part of its mission to protect and restore natural properties. The entire Fix-Stoelting Nature Preserve property encompasses about 30 acres, including forestland and the roughly 10-acre field.

Sycamore Land Trust purchased the land that would become Fix-Stoelting Nature Preserve in 2016 but began the restoration work in earnest in 2022 including multiple tree plantings, the construction of macro and micro topography and a pollinator planting.

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, Sycamore Land Trust enrolled in five Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts to address natural resource concerns on six different properties in Monroe County, including Fix-Stoelting Nature Preserve. The EQIP assistance has been used for tree plantings, brush management to remove invasive species, wetland restorations, habitat management, conservation plantings, forest stand improvement and more.

In addition to the financial assistance, the Sycamore Land Trust's land stewardship director said the major benefit of working with NRCS is the access to free technical assistance. Through the conservation planning process landowners such as Sycamore Land Trust are able to take advantage of the free technical assistance offered by NRCS' team of experts including engineers, soil scientists, biologists, foresters and more. These experts work directly with the landowner to plan conservation practices, ensure they are being implemented correctly and the resources being invested are maximized.

For the Fix-Stoelting Nature Preserve, NRCS experts helped Sycamore Land Trust plan the location of the wetlands and design them. This included work by soil scientists to ensure the soils were correct for what they were trying to accomplish and engineers to develop plans for the wetland that contractors were able to implement. Sycamore Land Trust also worked with NRCS to select the seeds for the conservation cover planting and develop a management plan for the plot to ensure it develops correctly.

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 National Resource Inventory (NRI, 2021), the 525 million acres of privately-owned range and pasture lands make up 27 percent of the total acreage of the contiguous 48 States. These lands constitute the largest private land use category, exceeding both forestlands (21 percent) and cropland (19 percent). Properly managed grazing land has multiple benefits, including reduced storm water runoff, improved carbon storage in the soil, and continued availability of habitat for wildlife species.

In 2023, conservationists helped ranchers and farmers understand the basic principles of rangeland and pastureland soil health. Grazing land conservation practices including their associated enhancements (such as range planting (550), Pasture and Hay Planting (512), Brush Management (315), Herbaceous Weed Treatment (314), Grazing Land Mechanical Treatment (548), Prescribed Burning (338), Prescribed Grazing (528) and Forage Harvest Management (511) were applied on approximately 24.1 million acres of grazing land in 2023 in order to conserve, protect, and properly utilize soil, water, plant and air resources. The revision of Prescribed Grazing (528) conservation practice standard was completed in 2023.

The grazing program provided updates to the Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry list and included practice standards 314, 315 and 338, and associated enhancements, to the list for conservation planning and implementation of practices. These practices, when applied appropriately, can maintain and enhance carbon sequestration and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a quantifiable manner.

NRCS works with the Society for Range Management (SRM), American Forage and Grassland Council, and other range and grazing entities to assist in technology development and transfer, and infusion of science into NRCS technical assistance. The agency partners with the National Grazing Lands Coalition (NatGLC), a nongovernmental 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 spurred major increases in the knowledge and skills of conservationists with the planning, training, and application of conservation in grazing land management to facilitate adoption of grazing conservation practices.

In 2023, NRCS successfully awarded 49 agreements totaling \$12 million dollars through the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). The goal of this funding opportunity is for NRCS, in collaboration with a diverse set of partners, including historically underserved farmers and ranchers and their organizations, to expand the delivery of conservation technical assistance to support grazing planning and conservation practice implementation and monitoring, conferences and other education, demonstrations, producer networks, workforce training, research and outreach projects to improve resilience on grazing lands.

NRCS uses the NRI Grazing Land On-Site Data Survey to evaluate and document the environmental conditions of rangelands and pastureland across private lands in America. Our interagency agreement with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) expands grazing lands NRI onto non-forested BLM lands to provide a statistically based sample design that is common to both agencies. NRI field training was offered in 2023.

Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) provide a framework to support conservation planning, implementation, and assessment. An ecological site is a subdivision of the landscape that can be mapped via online tools such as Web Soil Survey. Each ESD contains information that allows a user to determine current conditions (including resource concerns), alternatives for future management (including climate change drivers), and necessary actions (conservation practices) to achieve those objectives. This technology improves land management planning capabilities for private landowners, agencies, and the public by providing blueprints for ecological improvement of grazing lands across the Nation and will have implications and applications in other countries.

Joint policy between NRCS, BLM, and the USDA Forest Service pools the agencies' technical resources to support the development and use of ESDs to describe site characteristics, plant communities, and use interpretations for grazing land and forestland. Through this approach, agencies achieve consistency in classification, technology development, and conservation planning. ESD development is on-going, and all three agencies provide staff support and participation. All of the relevant information is contained in the Ecosystem Dynamics Interpretative Tool which allows users to directly view information or via other connected platforms.

NRCS continues to deliver training and works closely with partners and universities in developing and delivering the grazing land conservation training curriculum. In 2023, the following courses were taught: Range Ecology I, Pastureland Ecology I and II, Prescribed Grazing, Grazing Management Basics, Prescribed Burning, Plant Herbivore Interaction, Ecohydrology, and Interpreting Indicators of Rangeland Health. NatGLC taught several training courses in 2023 including: Introduction to Grazing Ecology and Management, Working Effectively with Livestock Producers, Pasture Condition Scoring, and Rangeland Health. SRM taught Grazing Land Economics and Vegetation Monitoring and Data Interpretation.

Clean Water Activities

NRCS promotes the implementation of conservation practices on America's working lands to address water quality issues and help safeguard the Nation's streams, lakes, rivers, aquifers, and coastal resources. These conservation practices help mitigate the potential environmental risks posed by agricultural operations and the impairment of water resources by nutrients, sediment, pathogens, and pesticides. NRCS works with the agricultural community to implement conservation practices to address water quality resource concerns at the field, farm, and watershed scales.

The agency also provides leadership to enhance coordination in areas of mutual interest with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Geological Survey, Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and other Federal agencies. Specific areas in which the agency provides technical leadership include erosion control and sediment management; nutrient management; conservation practices, activities, and enhancements; tools for assessing and addressing agricultural water pollution; and technical knowledge transfer to producers, partners, and the public.

NRCS targets agency efforts to protect water quality, including several national and regional conservation initiatives. The National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI) began in 2012 to implement conservation practices in priority watersheds to reduce agricultural contribution to water quality impairment. Each State has identified

watersheds in which to concentrate NRCS efforts and coordinate with State water quality agencies. In 2023, the agency made financial assistance available to help farmers and ranchers implement conservation systems in 341 priority watersheds and provided technical assistance for development of watershed assessments in 196 watersheds.

Also, in 2023, NRCS continued to address threats to public water supplies through source water protection in 15 States (22 projects). The initiative continued to emphasize watershed assessment and planning to further target conservation efforts by requiring all watersheds receiving financial assistance to have a watershed assessment that identifies critical treatment areas. Landowners and producers participating in the initiative receive conservation payments to work on the land in a sustainable way that provides cleaner water while keeping the land productive into the future. Since its inception, NWQI watersheds have accelerated improvements in waterbodies listed as impaired under the Clean Water Act; with at least 19 waterbodies in NWQI watersheds have been delisted as of 2021.

The Mississippi River Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI) is a similar initiative with a primary goal of assisting Hypoxia Task Force States in implementing their nutrient loss reduction strategies. In 2023, there were 285 watersheds receiving financial assistance for practice implementation and an additional 44 watersheds developing watershed assessments. MRBI watersheds have watershed assessments and specific metrics designed to target and measure impacts of conservation practice implementation. Communities benefit by having clean waterways, safer drinking water, and healthy habitat for fish and wildlife.

NRCS initiated efforts in 2019 to address source water protection based on the 2018 Farm Bill provisions. NRCS State Conservationists worked with community water systems and other drinking water partners to develop local priority areas to address water quantity and quality threats to drinking water. NRCS has the authority to provide higher rates of financial assistance for selected practices within these priority areas; these selected practices relate to water quality and quantity and protect drinking water sources while also benefitting producers.

During 2023, the agency continued to provide leadership through the development, advancement, and demonstration of new and innovative approaches for water quality conservation. Below are some of these:

- NRCS serves as the lead USDA agency for providing conservation technical assistance for water quality improvement. A major component of this assistance is provided through the establishment of national conservation practice standards (CPSs). In 2023, NRCS updated 11 CPSs, including those that protect, maintain, or improve water quality such as: Riparian Herbaceous Cover (Code 390); Aquatic Organism Passage (Code 396); Wetland Wildlife Habitat Management (Code 644); and Wetland Enhancement (Code 659). Associated resources, including technical notes, are being updated to coordinate with new standards. Practice use is being analyzed and investigated to determine barriers to broader implementation. Training was provided throughout the year and new payment scenarios have been developed.
- Voluntary edge-of-field water quality monitoring enables agricultural producers and scientists to quantify the benefits of conservation practices to water quality. Through edge-of-field monitoring, NRCS works with producers and conservation partners to measure the amount of nutrients and sediment in water runoff from a field and compare improvements under different conservation systems. During the first nine years of edge-of-field water quality monitoring, the agency obligated nearly \$6.8 million for more than 43 monitoring projects in 12 States.
- NRCS has a goal of putting conservation systems on four million unique acres in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed by 2025. Between 2010 to 2023, NRCS has worked with farmers and ranchers to put conservation practices on over 2.8 million of these unique acres.
- Collaborations with agricultural groups, States, Universities, and other Federal agencies continued to provide aggregated data about voluntary conservation practice implementation by NRCS customers which is helping States meet Chesapeake Bay total maximum daily load goals. Through collaboration and implementation of conservation practices, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed has met 51 percent of Nitrogen reduction goals, 60 percent of Phosphorus reduction goals, and over 100 percent of the sediment reduction goals.
- During 2023, NRCS continued to raise awareness about the issue of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the agricultural environment. PFAS originates from multiple sources and can enter farms through contaminated water, soil, and air (for example, from biosolids spread on the land for fertilizer or groundwater used for irrigation or livestock water). Once PFAS is in the water, soil, or air of a farming operation, these chemicals can migrate to crops and livestock that graze on that land, or feed on grain from contaminated fields.
- Federal support provided by USDA programs in response to PFAS contamination is limited. Resources currently in place were not designed to respond comprehensively to the scope of the crisis. Recognizing our limitations, we are exploring ways to better support the range of agricultural producers grappling with PFAS contamination. In 2023, NRCS began offering financial assistance for PFAS testing in water or soil

(Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities 209) to help farmers determine if PFAS may be present on their operation. This pre-screening testing is intended to complement, not replace, PFAS testing offered by State agencies or the EPA.

NRCS started a collaboration with the Iowa Water Center at Iowa State University to support delivery of water quality related assistance by establishing a National Hub for the Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework (ACPF). This builds on a collaboration with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) to support, deploy, and expand the geographic range for the ACPF for conservation and watershed planning activities. The ACPF is based on a holistic planning concept, using geographic information system tools and high-resolution geospatial data to determine suitable locations for conservation practices to improve water quality and other ecosystem services, in addition to supporting stakeholder engagement efforts. ACPF results provide a planning resource that enables conservationists and landowners to identify preferred practices and locations suited to their landscape and farms.

In support of the EPA's priority to promote and finance water reuse and recycling projects through the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, USDA has committed to the collaborative efforts of the National Water Reuse Action Plan (WRAP), which was released in 2020. The WRAP features 11 strategic themes, 37 developed actions, 28 unique action leaders, 80 collaborating partners, and 200 implementation milestones geared towards better coordination and focus of taxpayer resources on national water resource concerns. Recognizing that data and information on the quality and quantity of available water can improve opportunities for water reuse, NRCS committed to the action item of increasing water information availability.

NRCS continues to fulfill this action by prioritizing water-reuse projects through the NRCS Conservation Innovation Grants Program (CIG); NRCS funded two water reuse-focused projects in 2021 investigating tailwater recovery and optimizing irrigation scheduling and storage. In 2022 NRCS funded a project about on-farm water capture and reuse in North Carolina, and in 2023, funded a project on tailwater recovery in rice production in Mississippi. The current investment in active projects through the CIG program totals \$6.6 million. NRCS provides increased incentives for conservation practices that relate to water quality and quantity and protect drinking water sources while also benefiting producers. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized these enhanced incentive rates.

National Resources Inventory (NRI) Program

NRCS collects, analyzes, interprets, and delivers data and information on natural resources through the National Resources Inventory (NRI) program and the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP). Several pieces of legislation authorize the NRI, but the Rural Development Act of 1972 (7 U.S.C. 1010a) is recognized as the statute that specifically articulates the NRI program. CEAP is authorized under the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act of 1977 (RCA) as amended.

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 to inform sound natural resource planning and decision-making at many landscape levels. The NRI is a national assessment of 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 provides information on over 80 percent of the Nation's land area. Data and analyses from the NRI are indispensable for developing appropriate and effective conservation programs, sound agricultural policy, and informing national farm policy discussion through the Farm Bill process. In addition, the data from the Grazing Land NRI Onsite Data Study are used in the CEAP-Grazing Lands conservation effects modeling efforts to further enhance optimization of conservation practice application on the Nation's grazing lands.

The NRI is a statistical survey that inventories scientifically selected sample sites in every county across the United States and locations in the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas. From 1977 to 1997, NRI was conducted on five-year cycles. Since 2001, a statistically sound subset of the 800,000 NRI sample sites nationwide has been selected every year for data collection. Collecting NRI data on an annual basis allows the agency the flexibility and capability to gather scientific information on emerging natural resource issues, with its most valuable aspect being its ability to capture long-term trends. This trending information is instrumental in evaluating the effects of conservation programs and policies over time. Major releases of NRI data are mandated by law and scheduled for every five years. The NRI is performed in cooperation with the Iowa State University Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology. The 2023 NRI activities included:

- NRI Production Work – The Remote Sensing Laboratories (RSLs) staff completed data collection for the 2021 NRI from images of 71,852 sample sites and approximately 216,000 points. The RSLs staff also processed and collected data on 95 percent of the 71,762 images for the 2022 contiguous U.S. (CONUS), Hawaii, and Puerto

Rico NRI. The contracts for acquiring aerial photography for over 71,500 segments for the 2023 NRI were awarded.

- Alaska NRI – Work began on Alaska NRI in 2023. Survey design and sample selection has been completed. Imagery has been acquired through satellite vendors and processed.
- On-site Data Collection on Non-Federal Grazing Lands. The partnership with the National Employee Development Section (EDS) of USDA’s Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Business Center returned to in-person training in 2023 after a pause of in person training due to COVID-19 restrictions. In 2023, data collection was conducted on 2,350 non-Federal range and pasture sites.
- On-site Data Collection on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Lands – In 2023, NRCS and BLM continued their interagency agreement to monitor rangeland resources by planning to expand NRI data collection on BLM lands with intensified sampling in core sage-grouse habitat beginning in 2024. The five-year agreement that began in September 2019, continues the collaborative work that started in 2011. A survey system, developed with BLM funding, provides scientifically credible information on the status of non-forested BLM lands in 13 Western and Midwestern States. In 2023, NRCS collected data on over 1,000 sites on BLM lands. Adoption of standardized NRI protocols on BLM-managed landscapes enhances NRCS’s leadership on grazing lands, benefits BLM surveys by providing a well-proven sampling framework, and enables compilation of a consistent and comprehensive database. Combining information derived from NRI data collected on BLM-managed lands with data obtained from NRI points on non-Federal lands provides a statistically sound, virtually seamless, area-wide representation of all grazing lands in the western U.S.

Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP)

The CEAP is a multi-agency effort designed to quantify the effects of conservation practices on agricultural land and to provide a scientific basis for managing the agricultural landscape for environmental quality. Findings from assessments 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.

To build the science base necessary for effective conservation planning, CEAP collaborates with partners from across the spectrum of the conservation research and planning community, including academic partners, NGOs, and government collaborators at the local, State, and Federal levels. CEAP projects are managed by CEAP component leaders, with portfolios centered on cropland, grazing lands, wildlife, wetlands, and watershed assessments. Assessments of the effects of conservation practices and current agricultural management are carried out at national, regional, and watershed scales.

National assessments are conducted for cropland, grazing lands, wetlands, and wildlife. These assessments use a variety of methodologies to evaluate the impacts of conservation practices and to assess the potential of USDA conservation programs to meet the Nation’s conservation goals, including modeling, monitoring and data collection, and geospatial analysis. The watershed assessment component focuses on studies that provide more detailed, in-depth assessments of smaller areas, developing science at the regional and watershed level to inform local decision-making and improve modeling capacities at multiple scales. CEAP-funded assessments inform conservation planning strategies by evaluating the conservation impacts of current conservation implemented, scenarios for additional conservation treatment, and environmental change in response to practices.

Assessments conducted by all components of CEAP at various scales, from field to regional and watershed, inform the prioritization of conservation needs to enable the agency to focus resources more effectively to benefit the American public. CEAP-Watersheds and CEAP-Wildlife are working to support Conservation Initiatives within the agency to help identify and document measurable outcomes of on-the-ground conservation efforts. CEAP continues to provide assessments of the conservation efforts in various NRCS Initiative areas: the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative and related Executive Order, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the National Water Quality Initiative, the Lake Champlain Basin Initiative, the Sage-Grouse Initiative, the Lesser-Prairie Chicken Initiative, the Longleaf Pine Initiative, the Joint Chiefs Landscape Initiative, and Working Lands for Wildlife efforts. CEAP also has assessment efforts to support USDA focal areas such as climate-smart agriculture and America the Beautiful (30x30), as well as providing timely assessments for wildfire damage surveys and conservation needs following emergency declarations via the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP). The Resource Analytics Lab in the NRCS Resource Assessment Branch is contributing critical geospatial information and analysis to these assessment efforts.

The 2023 CEAP activities included:

Cropland Assessments

CEAP-Cropland provides science-based estimates of the environmental benefits and effects of conservation

practices applied to cropland and the need for additional practices. In 2023 the Cropland Modeling team concentrated on analyzing the effects of practices collected during the second CEAP-Cropland farmer survey (for CEAP-2) as well as analysis of alternative conservation scenarios to assist with optimization of conservation practice implementation for use in the Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) analysis. This survey, conducted by National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) enumerators, involved face-to-face surveys with producers across the country to collect detailed data on farm management and conservation practice adoption on 18,765 farms. Practice adoption and management practices used on cropland in CEAP-2 were compared to those reported in the CEAP-1 farmer survey (conducted 2003-2006) to show trends that have emerged on cultivated cropland between the two survey periods.

Eleven crop production regional summaries of CEAP-2 findings are in the review process in preparation for release 2024. These reports document the changes in practice levels, differences in edge-of-field losses (reductions in sediment and nutrient losses), and the impacts on water quality metrics between survey periods. Topics covered in the reports included structural practices and conservation tillage, crop rotations and cover crops, nutrient management, irrigation, pest management, and more. Full-length reports will be accompanied by summaries and outreach to states on findings that may inform decision-making for program outreach and delivery.

Additionally, several internal-facing topical documentation reports were completed in 2023. Topical reports include:

- Changes in Crop Acres Between CEAP I and CEAP II
- Conservation Crop Rotations and Cover Crop Use
- Assessment of the Effects of Conservation Practices on Cultivated Cropland, CEAP II
- Socio-Economic Drivers of Conservation Adoption on Cropland
- Technical Documentation Report of Model Simulation Results Part 1: Erosion and Edge-of-Field Sediment Loss

The Technical Documentation Report of Model Simulation Results Part 2: Edge-of-Field Nitrogen and Phosphorus Loss will be completed in 2024.

Two external-facing topical reports are in review and expected to be released in 2024, including:

- Integrated Pest Management Practices and Pesticide Applications on Cultivated Cropland
- Adoption of Cover Crops on Cultivated Cropland

In 2024, CEAP-2 estimates of sediment and nutrient loss reductions from conservation and management practices will also be used in State Landscape Planning Packages, in agency outcomes reports, and the Water Quality Benefits Estimator Tool. In 2023, the Cropland Modeling team worked with contractors to develop a CEAP-2 Data Dashboard which will be publicly available in late 2023 or early 2024 and will allow users to view conservation benefits data at the production region, State, hydrologic unit code (HUC)-2, and HUC-4 levels. A machine learning project also utilized CEAP survey input data and Agricultural Policy Environmental eXtender (APEX) model output data from both time periods to develop algorithms for predicting sediment and nutrient losses based on field-level management and conservation practice implementation. These algorithms are intended to be incorporated into the CarbOn Management & Emissions Tool-Water Quality (COMET-WQ) tool and the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) for estimating the benefits of conservation practices.

Data collected from the CEAP-1 and CEAP-2 Farmer Surveys made it possible to evaluate changes in cropland conservation and tillage practices over time within eleven crop production regions.

Several notable changes were realized between survey periods within various CEAP crop production regions:

- Adoption of soil health-promoting practices increased across most production regions, including:
 - Increased adoption of conservation tillage (ranging from 6 to 34 percent relative to CEAP I), with the Southern and Central Plains region seeing the largest increase (up 34 percent relative to CEAP I) in use of the practice. Only the Lower Mississippi and Texas Gulf Coast and California Coastal production regions saw small decreases in adoption of this practice.
 - Increased structural practice adoption (ranging from 2 to 21 percent relative to CEAP I), with the Northwest Production region seeing the largest increase (up 21 percent relative to CEAP I) in use of the practice. Only the East Central and Southwest production regions saw small decreases in adoption of this practice.
 - Increased adoption of cover crops resulted in between 2 and 21 percent of acres per region using the practice by CEAP II. The Northeast production region had the greatest percent of acres using the practice in CEAP II (at 21 percent), and the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plains was close behind with 19 percent of acres reporting use in CEAP II. While many regions still had too few data points to draw conclusions in CEAP II, all were trending positively for adoption of this practice.

- Stable or increasing levels of soil testing to inform nutrient applications were seen in most production regions. The Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plains production region saw the highest percent of acres adopting this practice in CEAP II, at 78 percent. The Southern and Central Plains production region was the only region that did not show an increase in adoption and had too few points reporting the practice to report a reliable estimate of adoption.
- While many production regions saw increased application rates for nitrogen and phosphorus, the California Coastal, East Central, Northeast, and Northwest production regions saw declines in most or all application rates (e.g., for nitrogen and phosphorus, in both manure and commercial fertilizer applications).

As a result:

- Soil carbon gains were seen in nearly every region, with the exception of the California Coastal and South Central production regions. Gains ranged from 22,000 to 2.6 million tons per year, with the North Central and Midwest and Southern and Central Plains regions having the highest gains at 2.4 and 2.6 million tons per year, respectively.
- Many production regions (with the exception of the Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plains, California Coastal, Northwest, and Southwest) experienced increased losses of soluble phosphorus and/or subsurface nitrogen, due in part to the fact that these can be two of the most difficult losses to control given the limited edge-of-field options for trapping subsurface flow. While conservation tillage systems reduce surface nitrogen loss, they also increase infiltration promoting greater subsurface flow and subsurface losses.
- All production regions had approximately one third or fewer of their acres exceeding loss thresholds for the sediment, erosion, surface nitrogen, total phosphorus, and soil carbon resource concerns, indicating that a small subset of regional acres may be driving losses in many cases.

Findings from the CEAP-2 regional reports continue to emphasize the ongoing need in many parts of the country to balance nutrient management and soil health objectives and overcome challenging environmental conditions. Efforts such as a SMART Nutrient Management plan, which includes the right Source, right Method, right Rate, and right Timing—and emphasizes smart activities to reduce nutrient loss by Assessment of comprehensive, site-specific conditions, continue to be important to meet these difficult resource concern objectives.

In 2022-2023, the process-based, field-scale Agricultural Policy/Environmental eXtender (APEX) model continued to be improved using CEAP-1, CEAP-2, and Special Studies findings. These ongoing improvements will enable more realistic comparisons between CEAP-1 and CEAP-2 outputs and will better ground evidence-based agency decision-making. Subroutines from three versions of the APEX model are being incorporated into one master version which will provide enhanced soil carbon, preferential grazing, water table dynamics, and nitrogen and phosphorus cycle modeling.

CEAP-Cropland component scientists participated in several collaborative efforts with interagency and university groups related to potential improvements in conservation efforts in the context of numerous initiatives in 2023 and expect many of these collaborations to continue in 2024. Collaborative efforts include the CEAP Conservation Benefits Indicator (CCBI), the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART), Chesapeake Bay Ag Modeling Team (AMT), and the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI). Both the Cropland and Watershed components also continue to inform interagency Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act (HABHRCA) efforts.

The Cropland team is also working cooperatively with the Economic Research Service (ERS) to provide CEAP producer management data to inform agricultural economic shock scenarios. Members of the CEAP-Cropland component are also collaborating with other scientists from across USDA in the Inflation Reduction Act Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Quantification efforts to improve and advance models and decision-support tools for assessing GHG emissions and carbon sequestration outcomes on agricultural and forestry lands at various temporal and spatial resolutions.

The CEAP Cropland team continued to collaborate with NASS to design and develop the CEAP-3 survey. In 2023 the Cropland Modeling team—along with the NRI Technical team, NASS, and Iowa State University—determined the sampling dataset, populated the NASS CEAP frame, and finalized the survey instrument questions. The Cropland Modeling team submitted the proposed questionnaire for review and input from other NRCS Deputy Areas, NASS, ERS, the Office of Environmental Policy, and the Office of Pest Management Policy. Emphasis in the review was placed on collection of data to increase greenhouse gas modeling capacity and capture adoption of soil health-related practices.

The CEAP interviewer's manual along with other survey-related documentation will also be updated in 2024 to reflect any changes to the survey instrument. In 2024, the CEAP Cropland team will develop training materials for

enumerators, including training videos and documentation to be shared at the NASS regional supervisor trainings to take place in the summer of 2024 as well as the enumerator trainings to take place in late summer/early fall of 2024. The survey will be deployed in the fall of 2024, 2025, and 2026. Twenty percent of the survey sample points will be collected in 2024, 40 percent in 2025, and the remaining 40 percent in 2026. CEAP-3 will continue providing estimates of the benefits of voluntary conservation adoption from both direct and indirect influence of conservation programs and outreach. CEAP-3 data will also support Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Performance and Results Act needs to produce outcomes from agency investments in conservation.

Grazing Land Assessments

As with other CEAP components, the Grazing Lands component relies on key partners in completing assessments and providing quick access to uniform modeling datasets on rangeland, pastureland, and in some cases forestland. In 2023, these partners included 15 different Federal agency locations (Agricultural Research Service (ARS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), seven universities, seven non-profit organizations, and one for-profit organization. Additionally, various NRCS Deputy Areas and State Offices are providing needed technical input and collaboration.

Primary CEAP-Grazing Lands component activities and accomplishments in 2023 include:

Finalized development and release of the ArcGIS Online tool, RaBET, for use by conservation planners, ranchers, and others. The Rangeland Brush Estimation Tool (RaBET), developed with ARS-Tucson, provides MLRA-based remote sensing woody plant maps and canopy cover estimation using no-cost imagery. The CEAP-Grazing Land team released the online tool for review in mid-2023. The tool covers 15 MLRAs in seven States for an area of roughly 145,000 sq. km.

Two peer-reviewed papers were published on the cutting-edge research to remotely identify specific woody species which has been a continual request from NRCS field offices. The RaBET team previously joined forces with the CEAP-Grazing Lands VGS team and two USFWS Joint Ventures, resulting in more effective training sessions, data exchange, and ground-truthing of the canopy cover values generated via remotely sensed data. RaBET is useful for efficient and effective conservation planning, evaluation of conservation effects, documentation of Farm Bill funds to treat woody plant concerns and helping States to develop statewide resource assessments. RaBET is planned for release for agency use in late 2023.

The nationwide ArcGIS Online soil characteristics filter (SSURGO-Query Tool; Soil Survey Geographic Query Tool) was updated in 2023 with annual soil survey information. This tool was created to aid in CEAP modeling efforts, soil survey updates and ecological site concepts, correlation, and conservation planning. The tool continues to see the number and range of users increase, and more soil properties will be added in late 2023 to meet the needs of soil health specialists.

Final development of the Climate-Enhanced Topographic Wetness Index (CETWI)--a new index for conservation planning, soil data quality reviews, and model input parameterization, particularly in very complex, heterogenous landscapes. CETWI is a geospatial mapping representation of landscape, terrain, and climate properties that affect the movement of water across the soil surface and landscape. The flow paths of precipitation as well as areas of accumulation of moisture influence vegetation potentials (kinds and amounts of plants). When CETWI is used in conjunction with soil mapping products, the combination is a powerful tool for conservation planning, modeling, and ecological site development. The new index is designed to better capture variability in critical site condition factors such as aspect, terrain, hydrography, depressions, temperature, and effective precipitation than existing topographic wetness indices. The CEAP-Grazing Lands team has developed the tool in collaboration with Teren Inc. The tool was used successfully in the post-fire rehabilitation analysis conducted in New Mexico on the 2022 Hermits Peak Fire.

Released the water erosion matrix and online tool for the rangeland Soil Vulnerability Index (rSVI-water), and continued work on the final matrix for rangeland soil vulnerability to wind (rSVI-wind). These indices are designed to offer a quick analysis of soils and soil map units that are at High, Moderately High, Moderate, or Low risk of erosion by wind and/or water. These background layers will aid conservation planners in developing options with producers for the treatment of at-risk areas to improve soil stability and resilience.

Continued development of the Conservation Outcomes Research Explorer (CORE). CORE will provide the agency with an extensive database that presents peer-reviewed literature findings, as well as the measured conservation outcomes of research. This online geospatial database will contain research papers, measured values, links from research to conservation practices and resource concern components. The database will be available to all NRCS Deputy Areas to enhance outcome-based assessments, serve as a science-based reference

in developing improved conservation practice standards, and help inform conservation planning to achieve programmatic outcomes. Additional information provided by CORE will include assessments and science produced from Conservation Innovation Grants, Conservation Stewardship Program, Regional Conservation Partnership Program, along with other field-based studies.

Expanded current work on a Longleaf Pine study which models water savings and stream baseflows under different forest species, forest structure, and forest management scenarios. The main goals of the existing and expanded portions of the study are to explore the economics of different scenarios – to the rancher/farmer – and offer NRCS clear longleaf pine forest management guidelines, provide data to help target lands for ACEP wetland easements, and quantify the water conservation outcomes of the NRCS Longleaf Pine Initiative (LLPI). The project should be fully published and documented in early 2024. Early findings identified that long leaf pine forest restoration promotes stream flow suggesting that two pressing environmental issues, water scarcity and forest degradation, may both be eased by the same solution. The team investigated 21 watersheds in rural parts of the southeastern U.S. and found that areas with abundant longleaf pine woodlands had 17 percent more streamflow on average and 92 percent higher streamflow during droughts.

Finalized “Accounting for Nature’s Value with Rangeland Conservation Practices in the Western Range and Irrigated Region”, a study identifying the impacts of applied conservation on ecosystem service valuation in the southwestern and western states that are part of NRCS Land Resource Region D. Rangeland is a dominant land use in the area, with approximately 40 percent being non-Federal, and 60 percent in Federal ownership/management (Bureau of Land Management (BLM), predominantly). In line with the goals of the America the Beautiful USDA initiative, CEAP-Grazing Lands is collaborating with the BLM to evaluate and estimate ecosystem service values on the non-Federal and the BLM lands. NRCS expends approximately \$13.1 million annually in financial assistance (2011-2020 average) in conservation applied to non-federal western range lands. Cooperation with the BLM allows CEAP-Grazing Lands to use grazing land data collected within the nationwide NRI statistical framework on federally managed BLM lands also. BLM data are added to the non-Federal NRI grazing land data, improving the estimates of ecosystem service values resulting from application of conservation practices and treatments and expanding to scope of the estimates to include investments on Federal lands. Final report was released January 2024.

Multi-agency and partner collaborations since 2017 have greatly expanded the CEAP-GL supported “Landscape Data Commons”(LDC), which is led by ARS. This project brings many field-collected data sets from several agencies and partners under one umbrella. All data are then processed into individual attribute files which are then available to users, researchers, and agencies, with proper clearances, to access as parameterization input data for environmental modeling. This is a huge leap forward in data-sharing and use of common datasets for modeling conservation outcomes. We are connecting several other CEAP-GL projects with the LDC, which will continue to grow in value over time.

Wetland Assessments

The CEAP-Wetlands component supports on-going outcome-based assessment and modeling projects aimed at quantifying and interpreting effects and effectiveness of conservation practices and programs on ecosystem services provided by wetlands. Assessments are conducted in partnership with the US Geological Survey (USGS), USDA’s Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and various universities and non-profit partners. Results are used to document measurable outcomes of wetland restoration and conservation practices on water quality and storage, carbon sequestration and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, habitat values, and other ecosystem services in agricultural and silvicultural landscapes.

Current regional assessments emphasize outcomes of wetland restoration and conservation practices on water quality in priority watersheds including the Chesapeake Bay, Upper Mississippi River Basin, California Central Valley, Lake Champlain, and Lake Okeechobee/Kissimmee River basins. Modeling of water quality outcomes at sub-watershed scale in the Kissimmee River watershed in Florida will contribute to understanding of Harmful Algal Bloom dynamics in Lake Okeechobee. An additional five new cooperative agreements with university or NGO partners were initiated in 2023: three focus on carbon dynamics and GHG production in wetland systems, one on habitat management for listed species, and one that establishes a framework for a national assessment of nitrogen mitigation by wetlands.

In addition to water quality outcomes, other projects evaluate effects of conservation practices on ecosystem services such as flood water storage, groundwater recharge, carbon cycling, and pollinator and other habitat values. Evaluation of pollinator habitat associated with wetland conservation practices in the Delmarva Peninsula by ARS researchers indicates the potential for significant additional yields in soybean and economic benefits resulting from

the presence of native pollinators; this evaluation is currently being expanded to the mid-west and other regions. An on-going partnership with USGS will incorporate wetlands in the Prairie Pothole Region into the cropland APEX models to evaluate effects of conservation practices on wetlands and how they contribute to water quality outcomes. In the southeastern coastal plain, hydrologic modeling has been used to assess the effect of forest management practices on water yield and wetland inundation. Evaluation of ecosystem services of playa lake wetlands in the high plains will be accomplished using remote sensing, simulation models, and artificial intelligence.

Two projects are aimed at developing GIS based tools that will advance the ability of conservation planners to target restoration and assess wetland contributions to ecosystem resiliency, nutrient cycling, and water quality. These include tools that will allow planners: 1) to identify potentially restorable riparian areas in the Sage Grouse Initiative area by accurately mapping valley bottoms over large areas; and 2) to target easement acquisition and forest management practices to maximize water yield and improve management of isolated wetlands in southeastern pine flatwoods. In addition, hydrologic modeling in the Lake Okeechobee basin is aimed at identifying nutrient loading from “hotspots” at the HUC-12 level. These projects will advance NRCS’s ability to target restoration and assess wetland contributions to ecosystem resiliency, nutrient cycling, and water quality.

In 2023, the CEAP-Wetlands National Assessment focused on:

- Developing remote sensing-based protocols that document spatial and temporal changes and effects of wetland conservation practices and programs on ecosystem services in the Delmarva Peninsula, including wildlife and pollinator habitat, water storage, and nutrient cycling.
- Integration of algorithms representing depressional wetlands (prairie potholes, playas) and associated NRI data into the CEAP Cropland model (APEX) to inform watershed-scale SWAT modeling and broaden its conservation application.
- Improved mapping of headwater ditch networks and hydrologic changes resulting from wetland restorations.
- Development of process-based hydrological and biogeochemical modeling capabilities to quantify downstream water quality and quantity benefits of wetland restoration and conservation practices in the Upper Mississippi River Basin.
- Quantifying the effects of upland pine forest management and restoration on hydrologic function of isolated wetlands in southeastern pine flatwoods and Longleaf Pine Initiative area.
- Determining the efficacy of restored riparian wetland systems for capturing and storing sediment and sediment-bound phosphorus in the Lake Champlain Basin.
- Evaluating carbon storage and development of hydric soil properties in WRP/E restored wetlands at various times post-restoration.
- Developing GIS-based conservation planning tools, including:
 - Valley Bottom Extraction Tool (VBET) to identify restorable riparian wetlands in the Sage Grouse Initiative area.
 - A GIS-based tool to quantify the effects of upland pine forest management and restoration on hydrologic function of isolated wetlands in southeastern pine flatwoods and Longleaf Pine Initiative area.
 - Documenting the effectiveness of conservation practices and working lands treatments within the broader regional study framework to improve modeling results and translate those results to improve on-the-ground conservation.

CEAP-Wetlands regional project reports and publications completed in 2023 include:

- Backhaus, P.J., (2022). A Hydrogeomorphic Remote Assessment of Wetland Function (HGM-RAWF) for the Mid-Atlantic Region, USA. Doctoral dissertation Pennsylvania State University
- Lee, S., J. Qi, G.W. McCarty, M. Anderson, Y. Yang, X. Zhang, G.E. Moglen, D. Kwak, H. Kim, V. Lakshmi, S. Kim. 2022. Combined use of crop yield statistics and remotely sensed products for enhanced simulations of evapotranspiration within an agricultural watershed. *Agricultural Water Management* 264: 107503 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agwat.2022.107503>.
- Kahara, S.N.; Madurapperuma, B.D.; Hernandez, B.K.; Scaroni, L.; Hopson, E. Hydrology and Nutrient Dynamics in Managed Restored Wetlands of California’s Central Valley, USA. *Water* 2022, 14, 3574. <https://doi.org/10.3390/w14213574>
- Lee, J., Abbas, A., McCarty, G.W., Zhang, X., Lee, S., Cho, K. 2022. Estimation of base and surface flow using deep neural networks and a hydrologic model in two watersheds of the Chesapeake Bay. *Journal of Hydrology*. 617. Article 128916. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhydrol.2022.128916>.

- Lee, E., Epstein, J. M., and Cohen, M. J., (2023), Patterns of wetland hydrologic connectivity across coastal-plain wetlandscapes. *Water Resources Research*, 59, e2023WR034553. doi: 10.1029/2023WR034553
- Ross, C.R. and O.P. McKenna 2023. The Potential of Prairie Pothole Wetlands as an Agricultural Conservation Practice - A Synthesis of Empirical Data. *Wetlands* 43, 5 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13157-022-01638-3>
- Maximizing the Water Quality Benefits of Wetlands in Croplands. CEAP Conservation Insight, January 2023. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2023-01/CEAP-Wetlands-2023-ConservationInsight-WetlandsWaterQuality.pdf>

Wildlife Assessments

The CEAP-Wildlife Component is an on-going effort to quantify the effects of USDA conservation practices and programs on fish and wildlife in landscapes influenced by agriculture in the United States. Assessments rely on cooperative partnerships with the fish and wildlife science and management communities to conduct priority regional assessments in support of Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) species and other priority fish and wildlife resource concerns to document outcomes and support the science base for more effective delivery. Some assessments initiated in prior years were continued in 2023, including assessments of the effects of conservation practices associated with the WLFW effort involving golden-winged warblers, sage-grouse, lesser prairie-chickens, and bog turtles.

Assessment studies were continued for WLFW 2.0-associated species, including saltmarsh sparrows, black rails, whip-poor-wills, northern bobwhite, and Monarch butterflies, as well as an assessment of the effects of various tillage practices on native ground-nesting bees. Assessment also included studying the implications of landscape-scale transitions from grasslands to woodlands in the Great Plains, and grassland bird response to prescribed grazing and brush management in the Great Plains. In addition, assessments documented Farm Bill conservation program support for at-risk wildlife associated with working lands in central Washington, assessed the value of cover crops as migrating and breeding bird habitat in Iowa and Tennessee, and documented the response of the endangered New Mexico meadow jumping mouse to southwestern riparian conservation practices. A multi-party assessment studied the effects of cropland conservation treatment on in-stream fish community health throughout the Upper Mississippi Basin.

Other assessments begun in 2022 and continued in 2023. Auburn University assessed pollinator response to various management practices applied to pollinator plantings in the Southeast. Ground-nesting native pollinator response to NRCS wetland easement management practices was assessed in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley (Mississippi State University). The role of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) in contributing to or preventing conifer encroachment on the Great Plains (University of Nebraska-Lincoln) was assessed. Pollinator response to practices applied was studied through the New England Pollinator Partnership in Rhode Island and Connecticut (University of Rhode Island); in addition, modeling support of pollination ecosystem services provided by conservation practices applied throughout the conterminous U.S. (Virginia Tech) was studied. Assessments also included: native bee response to conservation practices in Missouri (University of Missouri), assessing the utility of managed and unmanaged log landings as pollinator habitat in eastern forests (University of Massachusetts), and extending modeling of bird response to forest management in the Colorado Front Range (Bird Conservancy of the Rockies).

In 2023, CEAP Wildlife initiated eight new cooperative agreements with university partners. These agreements consisted of work:

- with the University of Wyoming to assess efficacy of various migratory big game friendly fence design for allowing wildlife passage while containing livestock,
- a University of Maine assessment of pollinator response to the New England Pollinator Partnership in northern New England,
- University of Kentucky assessment of pollinator response to practices applied to enhance northern bobwhite habitat throughout the Southeast,
- a University of Tennessee assessment of the benefits of native grass pastures to wildlife and small ruminant production,
- a Mississippi State University assessment of wildlife benefits associated with regenerative agricultural practices,
- a Kansas State University assessment of USDA program effects associated with landscape-scale movement and sustainability of lesser prairie-chicken populations,
- and a Texas A&M University assessment of invasive species management programs on private and public lands throughout the Great Plains.

CEAP-Watershed Assessment Studies

Long-term watershed assessment projects, conducted in partnership with USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and universities, continue to be a significant element of CEAP as they document measurable outcomes of conservation on water and soil resources in small watersheds. The scale and detail of these small watershed assessments (hydrologic unit code 10-12) are directly applicable to conservation planning and a watershed-based approach of targeted NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives and programs. A major effort continues to be summarizing and extending lessons learned across the projects, adding value to the individual watershed case studies, and applying insights directly to NRCS core business elements. Emphasis continues to be on working collaboratively within NRCS on water quality conservation initiatives and the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to provide support and translate key findings into program guidance and design.

Significant CEAP-Watershed Assessment impacts and accomplishments in 2023 include:

Publication of a USDA report on the CEAP Watersheds Assessments national network (jointly with the USDA Agricultural Research Service) that profiles each of the CEAP watersheds, synthesizes lessons learned from work on that project, and describes future direction of work. These findings, the improved simulation models, and the newly developed conservation practices and assessment tools contribute towards more effective conservation strategies to address goals and document outcomes for the USDA Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, the Lake Champlain Basin Initiative, and local source water protection efforts. [A copy is accessible online here.](#)

A CEAP Watersheds Showcase to highlight accomplishments and conservation insights from 20 years of assessment under CEAP Watersheds. The event was held at the [Soil and Water Conservation Society Annual Conference](#) in Des Moines, Iowa, on August 7-8th, 2023, and featured over 30 CEAP-WAS oral and poster presentations. Presentations ranged in topics from quantifying the impacts of individual conservation practices to approaches, techniques, and processes for assessing conservation practices at watershed scales and the development and assessment of conservation tools and modeling. A CEAP Field Tour was hosted following the conference to highlight findings from several CEAP field sites in Iowa, including results of effectiveness of the saturated riparian buffer conservation practice standard (CPS 604).

Journal of Soil and Water Conservation Highlights 20 Years of Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) Assessment and Findings in Indiana's St. Joseph River Watershed: A [paper published in the *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation \(JSWC\)*](#) in January 2023, and highlighting the major findings, accomplishments, and impacts of 20 years of research and assessment in the St. Joseph River watershed through a CEAP partnership led by NRCS, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), and other federal agencies. The project started in 2003 when Indiana's St. Joseph River watershed was selected as one of 14 original ARS benchmark watersheds for in-depth analysis of soil and water quality, and to quantify the effects of watershed-scale conservation.

In October 2023 a [conservation outcomes webinar](#), "Addressing Water Quality Outcomes Through Nutrient and Water Management," was delivered synthesizing the current science supporting effective nutrient management for water quality benefit, including the 4Rs of nutrient management and SMART nutrient management. The agenda included highlighting the conservation outcomes of nutrient management and supporting NRCS efforts to refine nutrient management planning and reduce nutrient losses to water resources.

In 2023, NRCS provided additional funding for an expanded partnership with USDA Agricultural Research Service and universities to establish a national network of scientists working under the CEAP Watershed Assessments component to assess and evaluate legacy sources of phosphorus. The multi-year project continues working to assess priority water resource regions including Lake Champlain Basin, Chesapeake Bay Watershed, Lake Erie Basin, Mississippi River Basin, and Snake River Basin. New equipment will innovate ways to measure soil and sediment phosphorus to advance our knowledge of this key constituent, which presently can only be measured with extraction procedures. Applying this new method to measure soil and sediment phosphorus across our project network sites with consistent methods will help us unlock information about legacy phosphorus properties and processes that will be used to inform effective conservation strategies for various sources.

The January/February 2023 issue of the *Journal of Environmental Quality* includes a paper – "[Resolving new and old phosphorus source contributions to subsurface tile drainage with weighted regressions on discharge and season \(WRDS\)](#)" – with results from research supported by the USDA-NRCS CEAP project "Assessing Legacy Phosphorus Losses from Fields and Watershed in the Western Lake Erie Basin." Analysis in the paper also documents the significance of various P sources to edge-of-field water quality losses, (a major goal of this

assessment study) with newer P sources contributing 0-17 percent of overall dissolved reactive phosphorus (DRP) losses and older legacy P in soil contributing 83-100 percent. These findings reinforce the need to consider more than just in-season nutrient management (e.g., CPS 590 or 4Rs) when pursuing reduced edge-of-field losses as a conservation goal, and to include edge-of-field controlling and trapping conservation practices where appropriate to reduce losses from the legacy sources. This work contributes to the CEAP Watersheds assessments of legacy sources of nutrients as part of the NRCS Nutrient Loss Action Plan.

Two new legacy source assessments received additional funding for assessing legacy nitrate and sediment to collaborate with and supplement the legacy phosphorus assessment. These two projects, and the new national partnership to evaluate legacy sources of phosphorus, will conduct field sampling over the next five years and model enhancement and analysis to evaluate sources and effective conservation practices to reduce risks.

Continuing the application of watershed assessment tools and lessons learned from CEAP-Watershed Assessments to the approach for the Mississippi River Basin Initiative, the National Water Quality Initiative (NWQI), and the Lake Champlain Basin Initiative. A watershed-based assessment tool, the Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework, based on insights and assessment techniques from CEAP Watersheds, has been used in a number of watersheds in these Initiatives and others to support more focused conservation delivery. (See more on ACPF below).

Continuing efforts to develop and evaluate innovative or existing conservation practice standards for water quality improvement through multiple watershed assessment projects. These include practices such as saturated riparian buffers, phosphorous removal structures, blind inlets, riparian buffers, bioreactors, drainage water management, cover crops, conservation crop rotation, irrigation water management, and specific nutrient management approaches within the 4Rs that are effective for no-till, tile drained, or cover cropped areas. Two projects are evaluating the impacts of stacked conservation practices as part of a conservation treatment system in the Western Lake Erie Basin and Ohio River Basin, and another in the Lake Champlain Basin. This will provide new data on outcomes when multiple practices are necessary and used together to achieve further reductions and how best to couple practices in the landscape. NRCS uses this information to support conservation planning with landowners to promote adoption of effective conservation systems.

Continuing support for innovative phosphorous-reducing practices in harmful algal blooms (HABs) affected watersheds. These projects include stacking conservation practices in systems to achieve greater reductions and address tradeoffs among practices; evaluating innovative practices for legacy sources of phosphorus; assessing legacy sources of phosphorous across fields and small watersheds in the Western Lake Erie Basin; and developing and evaluating innovative technologies to reduce phosphorus in manure.

Two new enhanced tools were published online as part of the Agricultural Conservation Planning Framework (ACPF). The two new tools improve abilities to identify critical source areas within watersheds through enhanced Soil Vulnerability Index (SVI) at pixel-based scales for both surface runoff and leaching risks. An enhanced tool for identifying potential for drainage is also included, which is valuable information in determining soil leaching loss risks in soils that may be managed under agricultural drainage. Also, a second tool released can support siting evaluation for two-stage ditch conservation planning at watershed scale, to identify potentially effective placement for that practice.

The Soil Vulnerability Index Enhancement Project under CEAP Watersheds Assessments completed analysis of the effects of precipitation parameters (rainfall amount, intensity, and rainfall erosivity) on characterization of risk for surface runoff by that index presently. It was determined that additional work is needed to accurately characterize risk to support conservation planning under current, sometimes extreme, precipitation conditions. (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2489/jswc.2023.0006>). A second peer reviewed analysis and paper is in review. NRCS has continued funding for this project to help us determine the most reliable and credible method to account for precipitation influence on field scale soil erosion and surface runoff risk and conservation treatment need under changing climatic and precipitation conditions.

Natural Resource Technology Transfer

NRCS ensures field employees 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. Science and Technology staff developed and provided training on a wide range of topics as part of NRCS's goal of making the latest technology available to our field offices.

In particular, NRCS has three National Technology Support (NTSCs) staff that include specialized teams and staff with core technical disciplines: agricultural engineer, agronomist, biologist, economist, energy specialist,

environmental compliance specialist, environmental engineer, forester, national technology specialist, natural resource specialist, plant materials specialist, pasture/rangeland management specialist, soil scientist, and water management specialist. The NTSC locations and specialized functions are listed below.

1. Greensboro, North Carolina – East NTSC
 - a. National Animal Manure and Nutrient Management Team (NAMNMT)
2. Fort Worth, Texas – Central NTSC
 - a. National Grazing Lands Technology Acquisition and Development Team (NGLTADT)
3. Portland, Oregon – West NTSC
 - a. Air Quality/Atmospheric Change Team (AQAQT)
 - b. Energy and Environmental Markets Team (EEMT)
 - c. Water Quality/Quantity Team (WQQT)

Key activities in 2023 included:

NTSC staff supported the development and annual update of the following tools: Conservation Practice Document-Document Management System (CPD-DMS), Conservation Practice Data Entry System (CPDES), Conservation Desktop (CD), NRCS Engineering Tool Suite (NETS), WinTR 20 & WinTR 55, Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG), Dynamic Soils Hub Site Risk for Water Quality, Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) Rating Tool, SSURGO Portal Support, Soil Data Access Queries, Web Soil Survey Interpretations, ROSETTA, Prairie Pothole Region Web Soil Survey Hydrogeomorphic (HGM) Wetland Classification Soils report, National HEL Determination Tool, National Wetland Determination Tool, Water Erosion Prediction Project (WEPP), Wind Erosion Prediction System (WEPS), Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE2), WinPST, VegSpec, Vegetation GIS System (VGS), Irrigation Water Requirement, Manure Management Planner (MMP) and Agricultural Waste Management (AWM), Conservation Practice Data and Innovation (CPDI), Conservation Cost Database (CCD), expanding (COMET) to cover the Caribbean area.

An NTSC Environmental Engineer led the Dam Consortium, which serves as an interdisciplinary community of engineers and geologists focused on dam safety issues. The Dam Consortium provides technology transfer, informal mentoring, and on the job training on dam safety topics related to geology; hydrology; and hydraulic, geotechnical, structural, and construction engineering. This consortium works to increase engineering technical capacity and efficiency across regions and implement efficient methods to enable specialists to sustain high quality technical assistance to our customers on dam safety issues. Twelve sessions were delivered resulting in 25 Professional Development Hours offered to the participants; on average 160 employees attended each session. Sessions Topics included a mix of case studies from the States, updates from the NTSCs and CED, external speakers, and technical presentations from the NTSCs.

Thirty-one live webinars and well over 38,000 on-demand webinars were viewed with over 16,000 professional continuing education units (CEU) earned. This year's webinars included a first ever pollinator series in Spanish. Additionally, website traffic over the year included over 700 thousand unique page views. S&T staff including NDLs and NTSC specialists serve as innovation reviewers for ready-to-go innovations submitted to the Employee Innovation Portal (EIP).

NRCS staff across multiple areas were instrumental in the implementation of activities identified in the NRCS Adaptation Plan as part of the USDA Climate Change Adaptation Plan. NTSC Staff were also key in supporting States and the National Office, functioning as Climate Hub Co-leads on several regions and ensuring that NRCS priorities and goals are incorporated into the cross agency workplan for these groups.

Renewal of the charter for the USDA Agricultural Air Quality Task Force, with Secretary Vilsack approving the charter in February 2023. Upon charter approval, nominations/applications for membership on the Task Force were solicited, review boards established, and a multi-agency effort to review applications received in support of the Secretary's selection of members was initiated.

NTSC staff contributed to the development of a standard process for evaluating conservation activities for inclusion on the Agency's Climate Mitigation (CSAF) list. NTSC staff served on review teams that evaluated conservation activities for inclusion on the CSA list.

NTSC staff provided technical assistance to 17 States on delivery of Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) in the West and Central Regions, helping them implement the Frameworks for Conservation Action spanning the Sagebrush and Great Plains Grassland Biomes. WLFW Technical Team calls for State technical leads were held to share latest science and technology and identify upcoming issues and needs. NTSC staff also helped

organize and present at the Western Working Lands for Wildlife Workshop in Manhattan, KS, for over 300 staff, producers, and partners.

For more than five years the NRCS, Central National Technology Support Center has been engaged with Texas A&M Kingsville, providing internships and professional development opportunities to their students, with a focus on geospatial applications in natural resources. This internship has resulted in several products including maps, peer-reviewed publications, recruitment opportunities to USDA agencies, conference presentations, UAV imagery of NRCS's Plant Materials Centers and other areas of interest, and many other benefits. This year, two new interns from the following programs: Range and Wildlife; Agriculture Business with a concentration in Ranch Management and minor in Range and Wildlife. They worked closely with FPAC-GEO, APHIS, and U.S. Navy/Naval Air Station – Kingsville, on the Land Change Analysis Technique (LCAT) and BASH projects.

Providing training and supporting State soil health efforts were a main focus of the Soil Health Division (SHD), particularly a Train the Trainer certification for our keystone course, Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff. We delivered four trainings to all States and now have 224 certified instructors for the course, versus the 13 instructors we previously had. We also delivered a new pilot course, Cover Crops for Soil Health, and will offer that as a regular course to Eastern and Western States. Additional soil health presentations were delivered on topics ranging from urban agriculture, soil health economics, and grazing management for soil health and were delivered to over 2,500 attendees.

An international effort supported by the SHD, "Training in the Efficient use of Fertilizers, Biofertilizers and Nutrient Management", was delivered in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia from March 27-31, 2023, in response to a request from CARICOM under the U.S.-Caribbean Food Security Initiative. The purpose was to help farmers mitigate impacts from the increased cost of fertilizer due to supply chain disruptions and the war in Ukraine. Saint Lucia Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security, and Rural Development (MOA) hosted the workshop for 32 extension agents. At the closing ceremony NRCS and FAS, along with the Director of Agricultural Services and the Chief Extension Officer presented certificates to the trainees who completed the workshop.

The Soil Health Division (SHD) rolled out a significantly updated Conservation Enhancement and Management Activity (CEMA) 221 for Soil Carbon Stock Monitoring. The updates have aligned the CEMA with the National Soil Carbon Monitoring & Research Network, to ensure no crossover in responsibilities, and a uniform data collection and reporting strategy from the CEMA 221 that is a citizen science approach. Part of this rollout included the obligation of four awards to entities to assist the SHD in development of training, outreach, strategies and coordination for data collection, and recruitment of qualified individuals to ensure success.

Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELC) Compliance

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 (including those receiving Federal crop insurance subsidies) are required to protect their HEL cropland from excessive soil erosion in order to comply with the HELC regulations at 7 CFR Part 12 and statutory provisions of 16 U.S.C. Sections 3801, 3811, 3812, 3812a, and 3814. USDA program participants must implement a conservation plan or system on highly erodible cropped land, that provides for a substantial reduction in soil erosion. In addition, when breaking out native vegetation after 1985, a program participant must implement a plan or system that results in no substantial increase in soil erosion. According to the 2017 National Resources Inventory, about 109.3 million acres, or approximately 30 percent of America's cropland, is land that is classified as HEL.

As part of the technical responsibilities of implementing the HELC provisions, NRCS conducts HEL determinations to identify cropland fields that are highly erodible and subject to the provisions. In 2023, over 45,000 HEL determinations were conducted nationwide. The agency also provides conservation planning assistance on HEL.

Wetlands Conservation (WC) Compliance

NRCS's responsibilities for wetlands conservation compliance are detailed in Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. Sections 3801 and 3821 to 3824). The agency responsibilities include making wetland determinations, 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.

One of the NRCS's significant responsibilities for WC involves conducting wetland determinations, to identify wetlands subject to the provisions, in violation of the provisions, or that are eligible for a specific exemption to the provisions. In 2023, over 20,600 wetland determinations were conducted nationwide.

A compliance status review is an inspection of a cropland tract to determine whether the USDA participant complies with the HELC or WC provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985. Compliance status reviews are conducted annually in every State on farm and ranch lands that are associated with a person who has received USDA benefits and are subject to the HELC or WC provisions, or both. The compliance status review process requires employees to make an onsite determination when a violation of the HELC/WC provisions is suspected and ensures that only qualified employees report violations. In addition, the agency reviews HELC or WC tracts owned or operated by any NRCS or Farm Service Agency (FSA) employee who receives benefits at least once every three years.

Penalties for noncompliance with the HELC or WC provisions range from a Good Faith Exemption issued by the FSA 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 31. The results of the 2022 reviews, which are displayed in the table below, show that a high percentage of program participants are following approved conservation plans or systems on HEL and complying with the WC requirements.

In 2022, compliance reviews were conducted on 19,271 tracts, which included approximately 3.1 million acres of cropland. A total of 241 tracts, or 1.3 percent of the total reviewed, were found not to be compliance: 156 tracts had HELC violations, and 101 tracts had WC violations. Of the 19,071 tracts that were in full compliance, approximately 592 tracts or 3.1 percent were deemed to be compliant, because they had been issued variances or exemptions as provided by statute or regulation. This indicates a low rate of noncompliance, with exemptions provided due to extenuating circumstances.

Data from the past four years suggest that conservation measures prescribed are being effectively implemented on our most vulnerable land (Note: the number of tract reviews in 2019 is lower due to NRCS forgoing reviews in most Federally declared disaster counties due to extreme weather events).

Table NRCS-16. Summary of Tract Reviews and Tracts Out of Compliance (HELC and WC):

Item	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Tracts Reviewed.....	18,206	22,113	21,846	19,271
Tracts out of Compliance	261	334	365	241
Percent out of Compliance	1.4	1.5	1.7	1.3
Number of States Recording Noncompliance	34	36	37	36

CTA Customer Assistance

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 financial assistance through mandatory (Farm Bill) programs.

In 2023, 104,000 clients had conservation assessments completed with 23,000 being first time participants. Results from this conservation planning assistance are:

- Approximately 75.5 million acres were in conservation assessments to treat soil, water, air, plant, and animal resource concerns;
- 560 thousand acres of forest land with conservation applied to protect and improve vegetative condition (3.4 million acres across all NRCS programs);
- 1.67 million acres where conservation was applied on land being actively managed for wildlife habitat (12 million acres across all NRCS programs); and
- 5 million acres of conservation applied on cropland to improve soil quality (14.7 million acres across all NRCS programs).

NRCS implements Conservation Desktop (CD) to streamline conservation delivery to customers. CD is an internally facing, map-based tool for field conservationists to efficiently develop science-based conservation plans and practice schedules to support implementation. CD also helps field staff with the management of conservation program contracts.

The first release of CD to NRCS field conservationists was in July 2017. In early October 2019, a completed CD release replaced and exceeded the current functionality of the Customer Service Toolkit. In 2020, NRCS integrated CD with the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART). Together, CD and CART modernize and streamline NRCS's conservation planning and program delivery, and improve the customer experience by creating an efficient application process. NRCS planners can use CD and CART to help address 47 resource concerns, across seven land uses, for over 350 conservation practices, enhancements, and bundles, and clients can submit one application for simultaneous consideration of many programs. CD and CART also enable planners to take advantage of over 1,000 geospatial layers of data to automate processing calculations during conservation planning to move the client from program application to program contract much quicker than in past years.

In 2023, NRCS enhancements to CD and CART including adding an optional Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) button in CART that automatically pre-selects pertinent Resource Concern Components to be assessed when a client is pursuing a CSP contract. Additional enhancements that improved the user experience, efficiency, and data visibility included adding a Clients Report which reduced the agency's need for Midas licenses, adding Worklists to more efficiently manage workload, and enabling Farm Service Agency users the ability to log Highly Erodible Land Conservation (HELCS) and Wetland Conservation (WC) requests in CD. As of the end of 2023, NRCS worked on approximately 153,000 CART assessments (98,800 of them which were ranked), evaluating over 16 million resource concerns on 970,000 land units.

Technical Service Providers (TSP)

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. TSPs may be individuals or entities such as private businesses, nonprofit organizations, Indian tribes, or State and local governments. 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 assessments; 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 its 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 and conservation activity. This ensures that technical assistance is provided in accordance with the agency's requirements and criteria for each conservation practice and conservation activity.

All technical service certification criteria are reviewed and updated annually. The TSP website hosts a link to view and access certification criteria and hosts a publicly accessible list of certified TSPs and contains other important information about the TSP Program for TSPs and customers: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getting-assistance/technical-assistance/technical-service-providers>.

Currently, there are 1,023 individuals and 103 businesses serving as certified TSPs that are available to help program participants apply conservation efforts through programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, Conservation Technical Assistance Program, and Watershed Programs.

Certified TSPs continue to play the primary role in the planning and implementation of conservation activities in EQIP. There are three types of conservation activity categories: Conservation Planning Activities (CPAs), Design and Implementation Activities (DIAs), and Conservation Evaluation and Monitoring Activities (CEMAs). Certified TSPs completed 6,634 conservation activities in 2023, representing \$18 million in technical services. In 2023, NRCS established a national TSP Program Branch dedicated to expanding the availability and utilization of certified TSPs.

International Conservation

Through International Conservation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides leadership to promote, enhance, and strengthen the conservation of natural resources globally. NRCS shares scientific and technological information about conserving natural resources with other countries to help foreign governments develop, use, and protect their natural resources.

The agency cooperates with other Federal agencies in providing technical assistance in natural resource conservation to countries affected by disasters, conflicts, or mismanagement of natural resources. NRCS assists other Federal agencies by arranging meetings between agency specialists and foreign visitors, who are interested in how the agency provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners and works with other countries on scientific and exchange projects that benefit both countries.

Current Activities

In 2023, the International Programs Division (IPD) arranged thirty-seven international travel assignments for NRCS employees taking them to 28 different countries. Programs included the Embassy Science Program, the Ambassador's Water Expert Program, the European Union Collaboration Platform on Agriculture, the Caribbean Soil and Health Program, the Foreign Agricultural Service Fertilize Right and Food for Progress Programs, and the Cacao for Peace Project. IPD assisted seven NRCS employees to attend virtual meetings, webinars, or conferences in four countries on topics supporting soil health, and environmental health practices. IPD supported requests for thirty-one staff members to meet with foreign visitors from four countries two regional delegations and three International Organizations. These engagements were primarily for presentations and sharing of scientific and technical information as part of speaker requests or in support of specific programs. The agency maintains an outstanding international reputation and is continually sought out by foreign officials for guidance and information.

In response to a formal request of support to President Biden from several Caribbean country leaders, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) worked in partnership with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Dominican Republic as part of a joint food security action committee to improve worsening food security in the region. Eighteen NRCS employees traveled to six Caribbean countries to provide a combination of lectures and field exercises to cover the 4Rs in nutrient management. The training reduced the poor use of fertilizer and prevents nutrient loss to the environment affecting soil, water, air, plants, animal, and energy resources.

The Embassy Science Fellowship Program provides U.S. embassies access to NRCS experts in science and technology. IPD manages NRCS's participation in this program and supports NRCS employees that are selected. There were eight employees that provided technical assistance in five countries.

Secretary Vilsack and European Union (EU) Commissioner for Agriculture Wojciechowski signed a multi-year Memorandum of Understanding establishing the Collaboration Platform on Agriculture (CPA). The CPA created an open dialogue between USDA and EU Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development incorporating U.S. and EU stakeholders. IPD assisted three NRCS employees to participate in a series of discussions regarding dynamic soil properties, future challenges in agriculture, and mechanisms that support farmers amidst challenges surrounding sustainability, greenhouse gas mitigation, and agri-food exchanges.

NRCS Soil and Plant Science Division (SPSD) has taken digital soil mapping from an academic exercise to production soil survey. IPD is assisting SPSD employees to engage with the international digital soil mapping community to continue to collaborate and innovate as this field of science continues to evolve.

Throughout 2023, IPD provided ongoing coordination to synchronize operations with the Foreign Agricultural Service, other sister agencies in USDA, and interagency partners. IPD provided agency staff with new or updated guidance to increase awareness about international activities. IPD's International Travel Program provides support functions that enable agency employees to conduct official U.S. Government business in foreign countries. This support includes obtaining official passports and visas to undertake travel, requesting country clearances from U.S. embassies, and providing guidance on additional topics, such as traveling with electronic devices, medical evacuation policy, mandatory security training, and inoculations.

Scholarship/Internship Programs

In 2023, the NRCS participated in the USDA 1890 National Scholars Program, a partnership between USDA and the 1890 Land-Grant Universities. This program is intended to increase the number of minority 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. In 2023, the agency obligated \$2.06 million for these scholarships and career training for students enrolled in this program, referred to as "Scholars". Applicants include inbound freshmen and rising college sophomores and juniors. Students must maintain a minimum Grade Point Average of 3.0 and are required to work during the summers as conservation interns. In return for Scholarship funding, Scholars commit through a service agreement to fulfill one year of permanent employment upon graduating for every year of tuition received. There were 42 new Scholars sponsored in 2023 by NRCS, which led all USDA Agencies. Currently, there are 130 NRCS sponsored Scholars.

In past years, NRCS participated in the USDA 1994 Tribal Scholars Program designed to strengthen the long-term partnership, between USDA and the 1994 Land-Grant Institutions. The objective is to promote USDA's Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) Mission Area as an employer of choice for diverse populations, with an emphasis on American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) tribal students. In 2023, the agency obligated \$20 thousand for initial expenses associated with existing Scholarships. The program offers a unique strategy for sharing information and ideas focused on best practices in outreach to American Indian/Alaska Natives interested in careers in Agriculture and Natural Resource management. In 2023, FPAC converted the first 1994 Tribal Scholar to a career conditional position after graduation in over three years. Recruitment applications were very low in 2023 resulting in only one applicant that accepted a Scholarship with another USDA Agency. The 2023 funds did continue to support the two existing 1994 Tribal Scholarships.

Outreach Partnerships

The Outreach and Partnerships Division (OPD) within NRCS provides leadership and funding to ensure NRCS programs and services are made accessible to all NRCS customers, fairly and equitably, with emphasis on reaching historically underserved farmers, ranchers, and landowners.

In 2023, NRCS announced a new funding opportunity, Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements, making available up to \$70 million for projects that provide outreach to underserved groups. Through this and other opportunities, NRCS continues to develop new and enhanced existing partnerships to expand the delivery of conservation assistance to underserved producers across rural, suburban, and urban landscapes. The 139 projects selected for funding through the 2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity will have the following impacts:

- 48 agreements with Minority Owned entities;
- 13 agreements with Minority Serving Institutions;
- 6 agreements with Native American Tribal Governments (Federally Recognized);
- 70 agreements with new partners;
- Projects will be completed in 45 States, Puerto Rico, US Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the District of Columbia; and
- 12 projects will have nationwide reach.

Success stories from 2022 Equity Cooperative Agreements:

In 2022, the KKAC Organization was awarded an Equity in Conservation Outreach Agreement to work across multiple states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, and North Carolina) to increase the awareness and utilization of NRCS programs, specifically emphasizing the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative, by socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers. As of August 2023, KKAC had hosted 26 meetings reaching an estimated 399 individuals. As a result, 24 ACEP applications and 34 EQIP (High Tunnel) applications were submitted.

Limestone Valley Resource Conservation and Development Council (RC&D) was awarded \$123,100 to provide Outreach in Market Gardening for Northwest Georgia. Limestone Valley RC&D is collaborating with a network of partners including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, GA Botanical Garden, Coosa River Basin Initiative, Tennessee Aquarium, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, United Way, and Dalton State College to provide educational programming at two local elementary schools with majority Hispanic student bodies, engaging more than 500 students in growing nutritious food and learning about local ecosystems.

The Central Arkansas Sphinx Foundation was awarded \$649,998 for their "Building Food Security Through Support for Community Gardening." They have created an educational booklet, "Basics for Community Gardens", which provides guidance for small-scale vegetable producers and step-by-step instructions for starting new community gardens.

Beginning, Limited Resource, Underserved, and Veteran Farmers and Ranchers

NRCS assists underserved producers 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 2023, NRCS programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Agricultural Management Assistance Program aided underserved producers, which include beginning, limited resource, and veteran farmers and ranchers.

The following financial assistance contracts were provided to customers in fiscal year 2023:

- \$317.8 million in financial assistance on 6,219 contracts with *underserved farmers and ranchers* to treat about 2,692,188 acres.
- \$484 million in financial assistance on 14,265 contracts with *beginning farmers and ranchers* to treat about 2,758,010 acres.
- \$49.5 million in financial assistance on 1,423 contracts with *limited resource farmers and ranchers* to treat about 308,611 acres.
- \$28.8 million in financial assistance on 1,023 contracts with *veteran farmers and ranchers* to treat approximately 118,903 acres.

Success Stories:

Sand County Foundation (WI) was awarded a \$342,700, 2022 Equity in Outreach Cooperative Agreement for its project “Amplifying the Reach and Impact of the Land Ethic Mentorship for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers”, expanding on the work of a 2020 Conservation Collaboration agreement. The Land Ethic Mentorship program had 68 enrolled members as of March 2023, supporting new and beginning farmers through conferences, one-to-one coaching and mentorship, and webinars.

Urban Transformation Network was awarded \$760,000 to develop six urban farms in the Chicagoland area and introduce gardening, farming, and climate resiliency to underserved populations. As of April 2023, 30 youth farmers at Chicago Ag High School participated in the urban farms, demonstrating soil conservation planting. Two workshops and an Urban Expo were held for community members.

Pocasset Pokanoket Land Trust (PPLT--MA/RI) was awarded \$173,593 to provide outreach to veteran and limited resource farmers. In their first two quarters of work, the project visited 50 farms and ranches, created five trainings, provided training to 76 limited resource and/or veteran farmers, and provided NRCS program trainings to 33 farmers and ranchers. PPLT staff assisted 16 farmers and ranchers in signing up for NRCS programs.

Assistance to American Indians and Alaska Natives

In 2023, NRCS continued to increase American Indians and Alaska Natives tribal participation in financial assistance programs among the 574 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 Tribal Nations;
- consult to the greatest extent practicable with Tribal Nation Governments before taking actions that affect Federally-recognized Indian Tribes;
- work with Tribal Nations and tribal organizations to incorporate tribal knowledge and perspectives into NRCS conservation programs to improve our approach with tribal producers and address more issues on tribal lands.
- assess the impact of agency activities on tribal trust resources, and assure that interests are considered before the activities are undertaken; and
- remove procedural impediments to working directly with tribal governments on conservation activities that affect trust property or government rights of the Tribes.

Federally-Recognized Tribal Nations and tribal producers receive financial and technical assistance through NRCS programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and initiatives such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), as well as the Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) program. NRCS also works with Tribal Nations and their natural resources staffs, through grants, agreements, and cross training. NRCS employees are trained in tribal culture and protocol. The agency has 46 offices, including 42 full-time and eight part-time offices, located on or near tribal lands. There are approximately 169 agency tribal liaisons assisting the 574 Federally-recognized Tribes.

NRCS continues to work with tribal leadership and tribal resources staffs to improve NRCS technical and financial assistance programs to increase Tribal Nation and tribal producer program participation, and to meet the agency’s tribal trust responsibilities. NRCS strives to assist Tribal Nations and tribal producers in achieving their goals for improving agriculture and environmental quality, such as conservation of cropland, pastureland, and rangelands; improved wildlife habitat; restoration of wetlands; improved water and air quality; and food, fiber, and timber production.

NRCS Tribal Working Group Membership

The membership includes: four Regional Conservationists, one representative from each Deputy area, and State level Tribal Liaisons from each of the four regions. Others that inform work of the NRCS Working Group include: State level decision making on the part of the State Conservationists, Deputy area subject matter experts including National Technology Support Centers, and representatives of Tribal Nations and staff from tribal organizations.

Tribal Conservation Districts (TCD)

There are 63 TCDs established under tribal laws and are essential to delivering conservation planning and conservation programs assistance in Indian Country. These TCDs are recognized by the Secretary of Agriculture.

Current Activities

In the past year, the NRCS Tribal Working Group made progress on a number of existing initiatives to address and ultimately resolve issues raised at consultation, including:

- The 2022 Equity Agreements are helping NRCS expand assistance to tribal producers and strengthen tribal community agriculture.
- Resources related to the Inflation Reduction Act present opportunities to work more closely with Tribal Nations on climate change mitigation issues.

Additionally, in 2023, American Indian and Alaska Natives were awarded the following:

- 604 EQIP contracts totaling \$34,610,948.
- 3 Tribal-led RCPP projects totaling \$58,576,200.
- 199 CSP contracts totaling \$17,068,397.
- 4 Agricultural Management Assistance program contracts totaling \$24,536.

Success Stories:

- Intertribal Agriculture Council was awarded a \$710,000 Equity in Conservation Outreach Agreement to provide “Culturally Relevant Outreach and Assistance.” The Council hired two natural resources specialists to support work in regenerative agriculture and held field days for tribal producers in North and South Dakota on ecosystem function, traditional practices, regenerative ranching, soil health, and diversifying agriculture.
- Indian Nations Conservation Alliance (INCA) was awarded \$710,000 to Build Capacity for Indigenous Leaders. At the Reservation Economic Summit in April 2023, INCA shared the INCA Exchange App, a virtual trading and exchange platform for small-scale producers, and onboarded 20 new users. At three outreach events conducted with the Rodale institute, underserved tribal producers were educated about organic farming and organic beef production.

Soil Survey Program

The soil survey program provides essential soil survey and ecological site data for national, regional, and local conservation planning. Scientists, conservationists, land managers, and policy makers use soil survey and ecological site information to study climate changes impacts, to assess, select, and implement conservation practices, to recognize thresholds of irreversible change in managed ecosystems, and to evaluate the sustainability and environmental effects of land use and management practices. The soil survey program provides data for computer simulation models to predict the dynamics of carbon, nutrients, and water in soils. Planners, engineers, farmers, ranchers, forest managers, developers, and homeowners use soil survey program information to evaluate soil and land suitability for various land uses and covers; to respond to disasters, to provide climate change adaptation and resilience strategies; and to 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, Tribes, State agricultural experiment stations, private consultants, and State and local governments. The NCSS promotes the use of soil and ecological site information and develops policies and procedures for conducting soil surveys, ecological site inventories, and producing soil and ecological site information. The Agency provides the scientific expertise to enable the NCSS to develop and maintain a uniform system for mapping and assessing soil resources and ecological site descriptions that allows soil survey program information from different locations to be shared regardless of which agency collects it. The Agency provides most of the training in soil surveys to Federal agencies and assists with their soil inventories on a reimbursable basis.

Four regions comprise the NCSS and correspond to the agricultural experiment station regions: North Central, Northeast, Southern, and Western. The conference steering committee publishes the conference proceedings and distributes copies to regional NCSS cooperators and others. Each region convenes a soil survey conference in even-numbered years, while national conferences occur in odd-numbered years. National Cooperative Soil Survey business is generally generated at the regional conferences and acted on at the national conference level.

Standards and Mechanisms for Soil Survey Program Information

The NRCS Soil and Plant Science Division (SPSD) is responsible for developing the standards, guidelines, definitions, policy, responsibilities, and procedures for conducting the NCSS in the United States. The Agency establishes required standards by defining technical criteria, methods, processes, or practices that must be accomplished or adhered to in order to ensure mission objectives are being met. National Cooperative Soil Survey standards ensure consistency and repeatability of field, analytical, and office procedures so user needs and processes are repeatable in all locations. Standards also apply to the results, performance, and output of soil survey program information and data.

The SPSP provides the leadership to produce and deliver scientifically based soil and ecological site information to help society understand, value, and wisely manage global resources. Soil survey data is gathered and delivered using a national tabular and spatial data infrastructure, which is required by Executive Order 12906. The NRCS is continually enhancing the National Soil Survey Information System (NASIS) database and producing soil survey publications that are accessible to the public through the [NRCS webpages](#). The NRCS houses some archived soil survey data on the Soil Data Warehouse and distributes all of the official published soil surveys using Web Soil Survey, for free daily public access. The NRCS refreshes the official NCSS data annually for modelers and researchers in addition to meeting NRCS and Departmental conservation compliance program requirements and Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) needs. The Agency continues to support the SoilWeb mobile application which is a popular tool used by individuals to derive soil information at Global Positioning System (GPS) located points and web-based delivery mechanisms that simplify the interpretation and increase the delivery of soil and ecological site data.

Current Activities

The primary focus of the soil survey program is to provide current and consistent interpretations and data sets of the soil and ecological site 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 and ecological information and helping people understand and use resources in a sustainable manner. The NCSS is integral to maintaining quality soil and ecological site information. Key program elements include the following.

Soils Inventory

Mapping procedures are based on physiographic rather than administrative boundaries. Soil surveys based on natural landscape 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 easily used by users with interest 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 Tribal land holdings and on public lands controlled by the Forest Service (FS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Park Service (NPS), Department of Energy (DOE), and Department of Defense (DOD). 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.

In 2022, SPSP published a National Instruction institutionalizing the collection of Dynamic Soil Properties (DSP) data as part of SPSP operations. Digital Soil Properties are those properties that change with land use and management and are used to measure and predict the response of soils to disturbances caused by human and non-human factors. Dynamic soil properties link traditional soil inventories to advancing areas of soil health, conservation, and management practices. There is an increasing demand for dynamic soil property data to inform management activities, to better assess the effect of ecosystem services, and to provide more detailed and site-specific information for model development and applications.

Ecological Inventory

Ecological sites (ES) are subdivisions of working landscapes defined and mapped by their associations with soil properties. These management-scale units are defined by inherent site properties, (soils, hydrology, geomorphology, climate, and organisms) which determine the likelihood of a site to respond predictably to natural and management changes. Each ES is documented in an Ecological Site Description (ESD) containing information resource managers can use to: 1) verify the ES for their area of interest; 2) conduct inventories of soil properties, vegetation dynamics

and land use/management interpretations for conservation planning; 3) identify management objectives; and 4) evaluate outcomes. All ES information is stored and managed in a common platform, the Ecological Dynamics Interpretive Tool (EDIT). The Ecological Dynamics Interpretive Tool is connected to other NRCS databases and platforms.

By policy, ES are used as a technical resource for inventories, assessments, and to make and document management decisions by NRCS, Bureau of Land Management, and Forest Service on rangelands. These agencies have a long history of collaboration at national and local projects including training, database development, on-the-ground implementation, national inventory, and research.

To get ESDs to end users quickly, the Provisional Ecological Site (PES) initiative was established to organize all the existing soil survey map units across the continental United States into provisional ecological sites suitable to guide conservation planning decisions. In 2023, a new national instruction was developed in collaboration with the Science and Technology Deputy Area to build upon the PES initiative, and to systematically verify provisional ES concepts, engage diverse partners in ESD development, and ensure the ESD products meet the needs of conservation planners and other end users. An ES Focus Team was initiated to provide the structure necessary to implement the new national instruction.

Kellogg Soil Survey Laboratory (KSSL)

In 2023, the KSSL conducted analysis and validation on 10,000 soil samples collected from individual soil horizons that represent 1,216 soil profiles (pedons). The soil samples analyzed come from NRCS and other Agency clientele that include Soil Survey Field Offices, State Soil Scientists, Resource Soil Scientists, University Cooperators, non-governmental organizations, Plant Materials Centers, the National Resource Inventory Soil Monitoring Network, the National Ecological Observatory Network, and outreach activities such as collegiate soil judging and the United Nations-Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO). During 2023, the KSSL recorded 100,500 analytical results on chemical, physical, mineralogical, and biological soil properties by more than 50 different analytical methods. This quantitative data is essential for the NCSS and NRCS programs such as Conservation Technical Assistance and Farm Bill Programs. National programs and research projects depend on KSSL data for soil classification, soil screening and assessment, soil health, and dynamic soil properties.

KSSL is the primary laboratory providing quantitative analyses to support NCSS and NRCS activities around the Nation. In addition, the KSSL develops and maintains standard soil laboratory procedures specifically applicable to soil assessment programs and provides technical consultation and reference samples to other soil laboratories as participants in lab testing comparison studies.

The quantitative soil data produced by the KSSL serves as input for models and interpretations for land use and management, baseline data to assess soil health, and measures values to determine effectiveness of conservation practices and programs (e.g., CEAP, Environmental Policy Integrated Climate model, Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation).

The NCSS Characterization Database is maintained and delivered by the Kellogg Soil Survey Laboratory of the SPSD. It delivers a comprehensive soil laboratory dataset of chemical, physical, and mineralogical properties from over 64,000 sample sites, which are the result of 120 years of inventorying soils of the United States and Territories. The database is used by a wide range of customers, including farmers, ranchers, forest managers, internal USDA staff, other Federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, state and local governments, and university partners.

The KSSL participates in the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Global Soil Partnership (GSP), Global Soil Laboratory Network (GLOSOLAN) (<http://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/glosolan/en/>), that facilitates harmonization of methods of analysis and standards for laboratory quality control, and improves the capacity of laboratories worldwide to perform soil analysis. The KSSL also participated in the 5th annual GLOSOLAN meeting, ([Fifth GLOSOLAN meeting | Global Soil Partnership | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(fao.org\)](http://www.fao.org/glosolan/5th-annual-meeting)).

Over the last 13 years, the KSSL has been assembling a mid-infrared (MIR) spectral library to use soil infrared spectrometry as a low-cost tool for the rapid prediction of soil carbon and other properties. The growing KSSL MIR spectral library represents over 90,000 legacy samples from the KSSL soil archive, the largest public collection in the United States with over 400,000 specimens. Local calibration models are being developed for use by NRCS soil survey field offices for rapid prediction of organic carbon for soil health and soil resource assessment. MIR spectrometry allows rapid data collection while assuring data quality and consistency with a tool that any NRCS field soil scientist can use for soil survey and soil health investigations.

Based on its demonstrated capacity to produce quality measured and spectral data as well its open data policy, the KSSL plays a key role in the GLOSOLAN soil spectrometry initiative (<https://www.fao.org/global-soil-partnership/glosolan-old/soil-analysis/dry-chemistry-spectroscopy/en/>). Work continues toward the establishment of a global spectral calibration library, a soil property estimation service, and on capacity building in soil spectrometry, on national and global levels. Standard operating procedures are in place for sample preparation and MIR spectral data collection, that will also help GLOSOLAN regional champion laboratories support capacity building activities in soil spectrometry. For example, in 2023, under a special license from the Office of Foreign Asset Control, the country of Iran submitted 41 diverse samples to the KSSL on the GLOSOLAN platform for both conventional and spectral analysis. This effort offers science diplomacy and organized science, and the joint Iran-KSSL data set will provide an important methods comparison concerning carbonate-bearing soil samples that will inform best practices.

National Soil Survey Center

In 2023, the Soil Survey Program entered into agreements with multiple NCSS partners to use their expertise in innovative research and new technology development to achieve efficiencies in assessing and delivering soil and ecological site information. These investments are the foundation for information delivery in the future.

Technical Soil Services

Technical Soil Services (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. Technical Soil Services also support new and innovative models of conservation delivery such as the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) and Conservation Desktop. In 2023, over 103,000 hours of TSS were delivered to internal and external customers. Wetland and highly erodible land compliance, onsite investigations, technical consultations, and delivering maps, presentations, and training were dominant services delivered.

Web Soil Survey

The Web Soil Survey website, <https://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>, provides soil data and information produced by the NCSS to the public. The Agency operates the website that provides access to the largest natural resource information system in the world. The NRCS's soil maps and data are available online for 96 percent of the continental United States. The site is updated and maintained as the single authoritative source of soil survey information. The Web Soil Survey is used directly for conservation planning via Conservation Desktop.

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; with vector and raster formation available for SSURGO; and
- United States General Soil Map, which is used primarily for State, multi-county river basin planning, resource management and monitoring.

Acres Mapped

During 2023, soil scientists mapped or updated 56 million acres bringing the total of soil survey acres mapped to 2.08 billion acres in the United States. About 95 percent of private lands are completed and 72 percent of Federal lands have a soil survey inventory.

Soil mapping priorities are directed toward completion of all previously unmapped private, Federal, and Tribal lands and updating mapping and interpretations to meet current user needs and requirements.

Soils Information and Soil Surveys used interactively online.

In 2023, soils and plant information on the NRCS web site had 1 million page views. The total number of visits was over 3.4 million. The top information requests, by number of visits are: Soil Surveys by State (101,862), Soil Texture Calculator (81,044), Soil Survey (71,128), soils homepage (67,744), and Soil Classification (39,233).

Soil surveys used interactively online are accessed via Web Soil Survey, SoilWeb, and Soil Data Access. Users can view summaries of soil types for any geographic location where NRCS soil data exists. In 2023, the Web Soil Survey (<https://websoilsurvey.sc.egov.usda.gov/App/HomePage.htm>) logged over 3.5 million user visits and accessed data for over 3.4 million areas of interest. Customers generated about 1.0 million printed documents. Customers downloaded data over 476,000 soil datasets. Users can view summaries of soil types for any geographic location where NRCS soil data exists. SoilWeb was developed in collaboration with the University of California-Davis Soil Resource Lab and NRCS. The website is available at <http://casoilresource.lawr.ucdavis.edu/soilweb>. The SoilWeb interface received about 678,228 visits. Soil Data Access (SDA) is the name of a suite of web services and

applications whose purpose is to meet requirements for requesting and delivering soil survey spatial and tabular data that are not met by the Web Soil Survey and Geospatial Data Gateway websites. Customers queried soil data using SDA over 120 million times.

Soil Resource Assessment for Conservation Planning

NRCS soils information is foundational for the Agency to continue to provide technical assistance and support to landowners efficiently and effectively. The increasing availability of geospatially referenced natural resource data (e.g., soil, climate, land cover) and the expansion of computing resources and web-based services provide field staff with an unprecedented amount of information to help support and inform their discussions with landowners. The CART business software modernizes and streamlines NRCS's conservation planning and program delivery, and improves the customer experience by creating an efficient assessment and application process. The tool combines and analyzes geospatially referenced data and site-specific information provided by the landowner within a decision support system framework.

In 2023, soils information was accessed over 5 million times in the resource assessment part of CART. Documentation for soils data inputs into CART are at <https://jneme910.github.io/CART/>.

Dynamic Soil Properties

Dynamic Soil Properties (DSP) are soil properties that change in response to land use, management, and natural disturbance. DSPs include soil organic carbon, infiltration, and structure and are drivers of soil functions. DSPs can indicate past management as well as predict responses and guide decisions made by land managers.

Since 2020, NRCS is mandated to collect DSP data across all U.S. states and territories focusing on "benchmark" soils – soils of great extent and importance for their contribution to local economies, livelihoods, and recreation. Over 330 DSP projects have been initiated or completed. Our projects leverage partnerships with NRCS field staff, conservation partners, universities, Federal partners (USFS, BLM, NPS, etc.) and many private landowners.

Already the data from individual projects are answering local conservation questions and enabling our field staff to "sell" conservation at the local level. The data aggregated from DSP projects provides the scientific basis for our future dynamic soil survey that will integrate soil function and change into soil survey products and decision support tools.

Dynamic Soil Survey

Dynamic soil survey (DSS) is the foundation of land-use planning and management and is an evolving and iterative approach to soil survey that seamlessly integrates ecology, hydrology, and temporal soil properties with improvements in digital technology. The DSS uses the practice of complementary soil survey project administration within the same geographical footprint or overlap. All current and future soil survey projects contribute to the DSS. The DSS is leveraged when a soil survey inventory, ecological site, or a dynamic soil property project is conducted coincident with a research and/or a monitoring project. The full potential for DSS is realized when the products of these coincident projects are paired with a raster soil survey (high resolution pixel format) and used to deliver enhanced interpretation of all soil survey data and information. Past soil survey work provides data on static soil properties in a vector (line/polygon format). Digital technology allows better capture and visualization of the variability and diversity of static soil properties at multiple scales, as well as the modeling of temporal soil properties and soil moisture. Collection of temporal soil properties affected by soil biology and land use management allow DSS to illustrate the interaction of the ecosystem and leverage the development of ecological state and transition models and linkage of climate data. The combination of these data allows the improvement of soil interpretation and support of conservation practices.

Dynamic Soils Hub

The Dynamic Soils Hub (DS Hub) was initiated in 2021 and started alpha testing in 2023. The DS Hub is an innovative, high-end, geospatial data user interface that builds new data products from a wide variety of existing data sets. It will support the Conservation Innovation Grants, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and Soil Health programs. It is focused on rapidly responding to customer requests for science-based soil property data at the Deputy Chief, Chief, and Under Secretary levels. The DS Hub expands USDA capacity to model and report on soil properties that change with conservation management. It will empower the collection, storage, and delivery of data related to dynamic soil properties and conservation management. The DS Hub will link soil and conservation databases, providing the ability to assess outcomes in conservation programs by accessing otherwise siloed data and models across Agency divisions. The DS Hub is a flagship innovation that expands USDA capacity to model and report on soil properties that change with conservation management on a human time scale.

Nutrient Sensitive Areas Analysis - Soil Sensitivity Model (Nutrient Runoff) for CART/CD

To support the NRCS SMART Nutrient Management initiative, a soil sensitivity index (interpretation) was developed to rate soils based on their sensitivity for nutrient runoff. SMART refers to the right Source, right Method, right Rate, and right Timing. The index can be used in conservation planning to assist in identifying soils and areas that are most vulnerable, or highly susceptible to nutrient runoff.

Nutrient Sensitive Areas Analysis – The Soil Sensitivity (Nutrient Runoff) model provides a science-based methodology, a tool and visualization for conservationists to use with clients in Conservation Desktop. Conservationists can use this pre-planning tool and map to assist clients with a plan to reduce nutrient runoff from their operations. Conservation planners will be able to select practices and fields to run the sensitivity analysis to help with planning alternatives. Results of the sensitivity analysis will be stored for future use within the CART assessment and ranking process. The Conservation Products module will retrieve the results and develop a map and report to provide to the client with information for planning conservation practices in their operations.

Water Quality Models

NRCS has rapidly responded to partnership needs for a public version of the nutrient management soil threshold results used in CART for Technical Service Providers (TSPs). This is partly to support the [Nutrient Loss Action Plan](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/nrcs-refines-nutrient-management-strategies-to-improve-conservation-outcomes) (<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/news/nrcs-refines-nutrient-management-strategies-to-improve-conservation-outcomes>), but also to support TSP Nutrient Management Planning and expansion of the TSP program prioritized by the Chief and Congress. This NRCS partnership effort included:

- The Water Quality and Quantity Technology Development Team (West National Technology Support Center, Science and Technology Deputy Area)
- The Conservation Information Delivery Section (Soil Services and Information Branch, Soil and Plant Science Division, Soil Science and Resource Assessment Deputy Area)
- The Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division (Programs Deputy Area)

This partnership also helped the DS Hub with a soft launch during alpha testing. The DS Hub enables high-performance geospatial modeling and terrain analysis, expanding USDA capacity for rapid response to soil and climate data information requests. As a result:

- TSPs and conservation planners can visualize CART algorithms for the first time and use a map to identify vulnerable areas and address resource concerns.
- Lightning-fast data and information delivery is possible–
 - DS Hub will set new expectations for delivery timelines, from years down to months.
 - The goal for the DS Hub is to reach soil information turn-around times of days to weeks.
- Geospatial Data Act of 2018-compliant metadata will be developed for scientific models to enable transparency in the methods and engage users and scientists in continuous improvement.

Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SSWSF) Program

The SSWSF Program collects high elevation snow data in the Western U.S. and produces snowpack information, water supply forecasts, and other climatic data for a myriad of water managers and users. Snowmelt in the West delivers approximately 70 percent of the regional water supply, vital to the continued success of Western agriculture. NRCS field staff and cooperators measure snow depth, snow water equivalent (SWE), and other parameters such as precipitation, air temperature, and soil conditions at thousands of remote mountain sites. Further analysis provides estimates for water supply and usefulness related to planning, drought, flooding, wildfire, and avalanche risk.

During the snow season, Google Analytics reports indicate use of SSWSF data and associated products comprise up to 80 percent of all NRCS web traffic. The SSWSF information systems are designated as a High Value Asset according to the Department of Homeland Security because of the critical data provided in support of mission essential functions at twelve Federal agencies. Customers and partners include farmers; ranchers; irrigation and conservation districts; municipal and industrial water providers; individual providers; hydroelectric power companies; fish and wildlife management; water masters; reservoir management entities; recreationists; Tribal Nations; Federal, State, and local government; and Canada and Mexico. Users and use cases continue to grow. Federal partners and users include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Weather Service (NWS) River Forecasting Centers and other National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) departments, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Department of Energy (DOE), and Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The SSWSF Program furnishes water and climate information and direct assistance 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 backing for NRCS State Offices supporting field equipment, data collection, database management, and water supply forecast delivery.

Because snowmelt is the greatest source of water supply in the semi-arid West, information provided by SSWSF is critical. Demographic, physical, and political landscapes in the Western U.S. are rapidly changing due in large part to population growth, increased urbanization, and land use change. Recent high temperatures, prolonged droughts, and more damaging wildland fires further stress this valuable resource. Competition continues to intensify over water for irrigation, municipal uses, and industrial uses. Competition also includes in-stream requirements such as river-based recreation, aesthetic enjoyment, fish and wildlife habitat, and hydroelectric power generation. Increasing water demands require more precise management starting with snowpack evaluation.

NRCS Snow Survey data are routinely used in matters of commerce and public safety in addition to Western water supply management. Road closure determinations, flooding or drought potential, avalanche risk mitigation, wildfire prediction and risk mitigation, NOAA weather modeling, and streamflow forecasting all rely on SSWSF data. With much of the West often in drought, SSWSF data, products, and forecasts are extensively used. Drought impacts or flood damages are mitigated with early preparation based on snowpack information and streamflow forecasts.

Established in 1935, the cooperative SSWSF Program is widely recognized for its historical record of high-elevation snow data. SSWSF provides consistent and accurate water supply forecasts. The Program accomplishes this by operating and maintaining a world-renowned snowpack monitoring system with over 1,100 manually measured snow courses, aerial markers, and cooperator sites in the U.S. and in watersheds draining into the U.S. SSWSF also maintains 940 automated SNOTEL (Snow Telemetry) and SnoLite sites. Additionally, the NWCC, in cooperation with the NRCS Soil and Plant Science Division, operates 212 automated Soil Climate Analysis Network (SCAN) stations across the U.S., including 25 sites on tribal lands. Although most of the funding and field efforts occur through the agency, partners and cooperators provide a share of financial burden and contribute to data-collection activities.

Snow courses are locations where snow is manually measured, typically on a monthly schedule during winter months. SNOTEL sites automatically collect a suite of hydrometeorological data in high-elevation settings reporting real-time information on hourly intervals via telemetry. Sensor measurements typically include SWE, snow depth, precipitation, and air temperature. Soil moisture sensors are being added at many SNOTEL sites, along with wind speed and wind direction, relative humidity, snowpack temperature profiles, and net solar radiation. SnoLite sites have fewer sensors on a smaller site footprint. Automated telemetered sites provide continuous up-to-date information and reduce costs and safety concerns versus use of field personnel for manual measurements in remote locations. SCAN stations focus on gathering soil and climate information. A limited number of SCAN stations collect snow depth in addition to the typical suite of sensors. Valuable data play a key role in flood and drought forecasting, water supply determination, understanding wildfire and avalanche risks and behaviors, and for evaluating climate change.

Snow Survey information and water supply forecasts are also used extensively in hydroelectric power operations, in reservoir management, to project water quantity available for crops, to project probability of flooding, to determine available water for aquifer recharge, to predict flows for wildlife and recreation, and to inform the public about mountain conditions including avalanche likelihood. No other products in the Western U.S. fulfill these informational needs. Past assessment of SSWSF Program economic and societal values are outlined in an agency-released report “A Measure of Snow.”

https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/MeasureofSnowSummary_0.pdf

Current Activities

Water Supply Forecasts

Water supply forecasts predict snowmelt runoff volume and are issued from January - June in collaboration with the NWS and other Federal and State agencies. Seasonal forecasts for 600+ streamflow locations were delivered during 2023. SSWSF also distributed peak flow, recession, and threshold forecasts with surface water availability index values. The program published 6,269 water supply forecasts during the 2023 water year. Additional forecasts were added this year for Utah because of the record snow year.

Site Upgrades and Installations

In 2023, two new SNOTEL sites were installed, one of which was a conversion from a snow course. Four sites were re-built including one that had to be moved. A site in Alaska was decommissioned at the landowner's request. The Montana snow survey office is working with the Northern Arapaho Tribe to install two SNOTEL sites on tribal lands in the Wind River range. Other offices performed investigations for future SNOTEL sites at various locations and are pursuing the lengthy permitting process for new site installations.

To ensure accurate data are available, summer maintenance for SNOTEL sites was prioritized to reset, repair, or replace sensors, precipitation gages, data loggers, transmitters, transducers, antennas, plumbing, electrical wiring, solar panels, batteries, snow course point markers, and snow pillows. Hazardous trees that could potentially damage stations were removed.

A major milestone was achieved this year, completing the conversion of all sites from use of Meteor Burst telemetry, relied upon for 46 years, to mainstream cellular and satellite telemetry, to reduce equipment costs and increase reliability. A large number of SCAN sites were updated and maintained across the country this past year and plans are to expand the network.

SNOTEL Sites Affected by Disasters and Vandalism

Western U.S. wildfires remain a concern, and the SSWSF works to protect sites ahead of approaching fire, if possible. Sites were spared this year. After a fire moves through, the altered landscape affects snow accumulation, snowmelt, and resulting streamflow runoff. The historical relationship between snow and streamflow forms the foundation for water supply forecasts.

Bear activity and winter conditions created the most damage this year. Seven snow pillows, approximately 10 feet wide, were replaced due to bear activity. This year a bear destroyed a sensor cable, but typically, rodents often are attributed to damaged plumbing and wiring. The record snowpack in Utah caused trees to fall on sites and sensor shields, arms, and fences to bend. In performing complex transducer maintenance in Alaska, unintentional calamitous damage occurred at one site, resulting in loss of this winter's precipitation data.

Outreach, Partnerships, and Investigative Climate Research

SSWSF entered a \$1 million agreement with the University of New Hampshire to evaluate the potential of an automated weather and snowpack monitoring network in the northeastern United States. This study will examine partnerships, number of sites, sensors, site location criteria, warehouses, vehicles, and staff needed to install and maintain a network, potentially similar to the current western SNOTEL system.

Multiple SSWSF state offices are strengthening partnerships with tribes to coordinate on installing sites, providing operational support, or participating in educational outreach. The Alaska office contributed to the Native Village of Chickaloon Climate Fair. Idaho is a member of The Confluence Project coordinating outreach to local high schools as part of a collaboration with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and other agencies and non-profits. New Mexico has a long-standing partnership with the Navajo Nation providing in-person field support, training, and assessment of priorities for installing new SNOTEL and SCAN sites. As noted previously, Montana is working with the Northern Arapaho which will pay for the large equipment for two new sites and the SSWSF Montana office will commit to installation and maintenance.

SSWSF offices in each State perform extensive outreach around snow and water conditions. A broad illustration of SSWSF work and data availability is shown in this video developed by the Nevada office:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWm5TeASLY8>

Multiple collaborations continue to be established with private and public partners. More examples include: The Nevada snow program collaborates with the USFS, National Park Service, California Department of Water Resources, and the US District Court Water Master for the Truckee and Carson Rivers to collect snowpack measurements. The Oregon office established the Oregon Soil Monitoring Initiative to enhance drought monitoring and streamflow forecasts. Utah contributes to the multi-agency Drought Monitor evaluation group. Idaho participates in multiple committees, from local to regional, focused on drought response and partners with the USACE to install enhanced sensors for climate monitoring at seven SNOTEL sites.

A "supersite" concept was developed by SSWSF which involves placing additional sensors at sites to evaluate best available technology to support the SSWSF Program, partner, and researcher needs ultimately leading to improved water resource management. This work also is supported through collaboration with the USBR on network design, enhancement, and sensor evaluation. In addition, the SSWSF and USBR partner on identifying emerging snow

monitoring technologies to advance water supply forecast performance, and NRCS SNOTEL and snow course data play a critical role in ground truthing private airborne lidar data and providing accurate snow density measurements.

In addition, SSWSF studies continue at sites to improve climate monitoring. Snow temperature profile arrays are in place to monitor temperatures at various snowpack depths for determination of timing of snowmelt onset and prediction of streamflow peaks. New snow depth, SWE, and precipitation sensors are installed and being evaluated for accuracy, efficiency, and cost savings. Improved telemetry equipment is being tested to refine communication.

Plant Materials Centers (PMC)

The NRCS network of PMCs is the only national organization that develops and tests vegetation to address our Nation's natural resource challenges. The agency operates 25 PMCs and works closely with other entities for the development of plant materials products needed by the agency. Each PMC addresses the high-priority conservation concerns within unique ecological areas. When appropriate, PMCs coordinate among locations to evaluate vegetative technology and solutions that influence large regions of the United States.

PMCs develop vegetative solutions to critical natural resource concerns. PMCs focus on priorities such as soil stabilization, soil health and productivity, water and air quality, enhancement of pollinator habitat to support agricultural production, habitat for at-risk species such as sage grouse, and restoring productivity to degraded landscapes. PMCs directly support the agency mission by providing scientifically sound plant information and tools used by conservation planners, partners, producers, and private landowners. PMCs develop technology and information for the use, establishment, and maintenance of plants for a wide variety of natural resource conservation practices; provide training and education to staff, partners, and the public; assess and characterize plant attributes to provide data and information important in the operation of predictive models and effective management of climate impacted plant resources; and assemble, evaluate, and release seed and plants to provide for the commercial production of plant materials that protect and conserve our natural resources.

The Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) delivers Plant Materials Program information directly to field staff and partners in conservation planning. PMC staff tailor vegetative information to the unique conditions of the areas they serve and provide extensive training to field staff and partners on the selection and establishment of vegetation adapted to specific resource concerns. Program information is available to the public at <https://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 programs such as the EQIP and CSP administered by NRCS and CRP administered by the Farm Service Agency.

The Plant Materials Program uses a multidisciplinary approach to solving natural resource problems, drawing from staff expertise in agronomy, biology, soils, forestry, and horticulture. Plant Materials Program activities are coordinated with NRCS technical specialists, other governmental agencies, nongovernment organizations, and the private sector. The program regularly cooperates with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Forest Service, the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management, and State and local departments of transportation, wildlife, and natural resources. 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 to audiences well beyond NRCS conservation planners and customers.

Current Activities

In 2023, NRCS continued its efforts to improve the operations and mission of PMCs to produce products needed by field staff and conservation partners. The following are highlights of PMC activities:

Technology Development and Transfer. PMCs provide agency staff, conservation partners, and the public with information needed to successfully get natural resource conservation on the ground. Plant Materials Program studies resulted in over 107 new technical documents to the plant materials website. PMCs continue to increase efforts to tailor plant materials information for specific conservation purposes and to support the agency initiatives. PMCs transferred the results of studies through seven new study reports, the application of PMC vegetative information in ten new technical notes or conservation practice implementation requirements, and information on the use, establishment, and management of conservation plants in six new or revised plant guides. The program continues its efforts to provide relevant, high quality vegetative information for NRCS conservation planners and customers to assist with implementing conservation practices.

At the end of 2023, there were over 2,500 documents and detailed information on over 440 conservation plants available on the PMCs' website. The website enhancement continues, with special features, improved linkages to technical topics, national and regional program documents, and connections with other NRCS websites. Plant Materials updates, released as GovDelivery emails to over 100,000 subscribers, continue to disseminate new information monthly. These actions are improving the accessibility and usefulness of the plant materials website for all users.

Plant Materials Program staff conducted 63 technical training sessions for 2,582 field staff and conservation partners. Training included: 1) selecting, planting, and managing cover crops; 2) selecting and establishing conservation plants; 3) plant identification; 4) planning a conservation planting; 5) enhancing wildlife and pollinator habitat; 6) improving the productivity of range and pastureland; 7) managing weeds in conservation plantings; and 8) importance of vegetative covers for preventing erosion. Technical knowledge of the NRCS field staff is improved by holding many of these PMC trainings in conjunction with Conservation Planner Certification training sessions. The training is provided in multiple ways, through in-person training at the PMCs, through virtual platforms, and with PMC staff traveling to participants. For example, in 2023 the Bismarck, North Dakota PMC staff delivered a multi-day training at the PMC, a webinar to 79 participants in South Dakota, and "on the road" training to 82 participants at three locations in North Dakota. PMCs provided field days, tours, and presentations to 6,400 participants including NRCS employees, Federal and State government employees, farmers, ranchers, and the public. The NRCS Soil Health Division and Plant Materials Program launched a cooperative effort to deliver a hugely successful pilot course "Cover Crops for Soil Health" hosted at the Elsberry, Missouri PMC. The training is planned at three PMC sites in 2024.

PMC Climate Smart Activities. The PMC program's Climate Smart Action Plan, established in 2021, provides the foundation for PMC support for USDA and NRCS goals to address the impacts of changes in climate. In 2023, PMCs addressed the five goals of the action plan through targeted activities, such as the following examples from throughout the program:

- Goal 1: Characteristics and adaptation of conservation plants – PMCs in Georgia, Texas (Nacogdoches), and Arizona completed a growth study for black oats, a popular cover crop, to generate data for NRCS erosion prediction models for use nationwide by conservation planners.
- Goal 2: New plant selection to increase adaptability and climate resilience – The New Jersey PMC continues to evaluate plants to provide primary stabilization for living shorelines, including species such as seaside goldenrod, amberique-bean, and Virginia saltmarsh mallow; PMCs continue to work cooperatively with the Cover Crop Breeding Network, consisting of USDA-ARS scientists and Land Grant Universities, to develop new regionally-adapted cover crops with improved traits for productivity and cold hardiness.
- Goal 3: Evaluate establishment technologies and management strategies – PMCs are conducting cover crop time-of-seeding and seeding density studies to determine if changes are needed in recommended planting dates and seeding rates to optimize performance; other PMCs are evaluating alternative methods for establishing pollinator habitat or to find the best adapted selections of forage grasses to improve the success of conservation practices.
- Goal 4: Increase outreach, training, and the development of documents and tools – Many of the technical documents, training sessions, and presentations developed and delivered by PMCs support climate smart literacy by delivering the latest findings and most appropriate recommendations on the selection, use, establishment, and management of conservation plants in different parts of the Nation.
- Goal 5: Improve the sustainability of PMCs – NRCS invested in facility improvements to boost the energy efficiency of PMC facilities and water use efficiency of irrigation systems. Additionally, PMCs continue to improve the sustainability of field operations by increasing soil health of PMC fields and reduce inputs when possible.

Conservation Plants

PMCs have selected and released 753 conservation plants over the past 80 years, of which 563 are active and commercially available today. These plants are tools used to support conservation practices that stabilize soil, improve pollinator and wildlife habitat, provide livestock forage, and increase the diversity in conservation plantings. All PMC plant releases support NRCS conservation activities on private lands as well as the National Seed Strategy, a Federal interagency effort to select appropriate plants for restoration and conservation on both public and private lands. The PMC program and the ARS Forage and Range Research Laboratory in Logan, Utah, are working together to develop information which will support decisions to maintain the genetic diversity of new conservation plant development, so they are better adapted to changing environments.

PMCs did not release any new conservation plants in 2023 but are actively working on several new conservation plants to release to the public in 2024.

PMC continue to expand the testing and utility of many of the conservation plants that have been released in past years:

- PMCs in Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Missouri, Texas (Nacogdoches), and West Virginia are testing the adaptation and performance of new plant selections and commercially available conservation plant releases in different soil and climatic conditions to prepare for potential changes in conservation plant recommendations due to projected climate change.
- PMCs in Georgia, New Mexico, and Washington have begun cooperating with ARS to use genetic analysis to ensure that past conservation plants are being maintained to retain the genetic integrity of the original release and to adjust in our maintenance strategies if needed.
- PMCs in New Jersey and Maryland are collaborating with others to evaluate the utility of several conservation plants for use on marginal farmland areas in the Mid-Atlantic to mitigate the impacts of saltwater intrusion due to climate change.

Mandatory (Inflation Reduction Act) - Conservation Technical Assistance

Conservation Technical Assistance – Inflation Reduction Act

In August 2022, President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and it represents the single largest investment in climate and clean energy solutions in American history. IRA provides an additional \$19.5 billion over five years to support USDA’s existing conservation programs that yield climate change mitigation benefits. This includes \$1 billion for Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA).

Current Activities

In 2023, over \$98 million IRA CTA funds were obligated to support conservation planning efforts to provide the technical assistance needed to implement complex on-the-ground systems. In addition, over \$73 million dollars of IRA CTA funding (that will span multiple years) were obligated this year towards partnership agreements. Some of the ways these partnership agreements will increase capacity and help implement IRA activities is through the funding of additional administrative and technical positions at the local level, providing technical assistance to plan and implement conservation practices, and conducting outreach events and workshops for producers.

Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment – Inflation Reduction Act

The Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Quantification work is authorized through Section 21002(a)(2) of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Data and outcomes from the IRA GHG Quantification program are used to track trends through the GHG Inventory and Assessment program.

In particular, Section 21002(a)(2) of the IRA provides as follows:

(2) \$300,000,000 to carry out a program to quantify carbon sequestration and carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide emissions, through which the Natural Resources Conservation Service shall collect field-based data to assess the carbon sequestration and reduction in carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide emissions outcomes associated with activities carried out pursuant to this section and use the data to monitor and track those carbon sequestration and emissions trends through the Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment Program of the Department of Agriculture.

Program Objectives

The IRA GHG Quantification program objectives are to collect field-based data to assess mitigation outcomes associated with NRCS activities, and then use the data to monitor and track trends through the GHG Inventory and Assessment Program.

To support these objectives the IRA GHG Quantification program aims to:

- 1) Improve estimates and reduce uncertainties of GHG mitigation outcomes associated with conservation activities supported through USDA conservation programs; and
- 2) Improve the timeliness and reduce uncertainties in the US National GHG Inventory.

Program Operation

The IRA GHG Quantification work is organized through seven action areas that are led by the NRCS, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Economic Research Service (ERS), the National Agricultural and Statistics Service (NASS), and the Office of the Chief Economist’s (OCE) Office of Energy and Environmental

Policy (OEEP). These seven action areas bring in expertise from additional agencies including the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and the Forest Service (FS). The seven action areas include:

- (1) Establish and advance a Soil Carbon Monitoring and Research Network with a perennial biomass component;
- (2) Establish and advance a Greenhouse Gas Research Network;
- (3) Expand data management, infrastructure, and capacity;
- (4) Improve models and tools for assessing outcomes at operational, State, regional, and national scales;
- (5) Improve NRCS conservation practice standards and implementation data to reflect GHG mitigation opportunities;
- (6) Improve temporal and spatial coverage of national conservation activity data; and
- (7) Advance Greenhouse Gas Inventory and Assessment Program of USDA.

The GHG Quantification work addresses national priorities of improving estimates of mitigation outcomes to increase understanding and confidence in mitigation efforts and advances the U.S. Inventory of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks and reporting to the United Nations. The program components are scientific activities, including field data collection and modeling, and program and policy tools and reports. The funding supports internal work by USDA agencies and lead agencies will also be making external awards for specific scopes of work that are necessary for the IRA GHG Quantification goals.

Current Activities

In 2023 key activities of the IRA GHG Quantification program included:

- Reviewed and synthesized comments from the IRA Request for Information (RFI) to guide the development of the IRA GHG Quantification work;
- Approval of Action Area topics, selection of leads, and initiation of work groups;
- Completed review of initial workplans and approval of initial allocations by leadership. Leadership includes a representative from the Farm Production and Conservation Office of the Under Secretary, NRCS Office of the Chief, and OCE/OEEP;
- Processed initial allocations to lead agencies;
- Conducted a workshop - USDA Agricultural GHG Quantification Expert Workshop. The workshop included experts from academia, industry, and government;
- Supported an announcement that included the IRA GHG Quantification funding - [Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Investments to Improve Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification of Greenhouse Gas Emissions through President Biden's Investing in America Agenda](#)
- Held a public webinar - [USDA Investment in Improved GHG Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification for Agriculture and Forestry](#)
- Produced a public factsheet - [USDA Investment in Improved GHG Measurement, Monitoring, Reporting and Verification for Agriculture and Forestry through the Inflation Reduction Act](#)

ACCOUNT 2: WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATIONS PROGRAM

APPROPRIATIONS LANGUAGE

The appropriations language follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

For necessary expenses to carry out preventive measures, including but not limited to surveys and investigations, engineering operations, works of improvement, and changes in use of land, in accordance with the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1001–1005 and 1007–1009) and in accordance with the provisions of laws relating to the activities of the Department, [~~\$175,000,000~~]\$70,000,000, to remain available until expended: *Provided*, That for funds provided by this Act or any other prior Act, the limitation regarding the size of the watershed or subwatershed exceeding two hundred and fifty thousand acres in which such activities can be undertaken shall only apply for activities undertaken for the primary purpose of flood prevention (including structural and land treatment measures): *Provided further*, That of the amounts made available under this heading, [~~\$65,000,000~~]\$10,000,000 shall be allocated to projects and activities that can commence promptly following enactment; that address multiple resource concerns and provide ecosystem benefits, or regional priorities for flood prevention, agricultural water management, inefficient irrigation systems, fish and wildlife habitat, or watershed protection; or that address authorized ongoing projects under the authorities of section 13 of the Flood Control Act of December 22, 1944 (Public Law 78–534) with a primary purpose of watershed protection by preventing floodwater damage and stabilizing stream channels, tributaries, and banks to reduce erosion and sediment transport.

LEAD-OFF TABULAR STATEMENT

Table NRCS-17. Lead-Off Tabular Statement (In dollars)

Item	Amount
Estimate, 2024	\$75,000,000
Change in Appropriation	<u>-5,000,000</u>
Budget Estimate, 2025	<u><u>70,000,000</u></u>

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-18. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Chg Dec. Key
Discretionary Appropriations:										
Small Watershed P.L. 83-566:										
Technical Assistance.....	\$16,000	46	\$19,250	39	\$19,250	46	\$21,000	44	+\$1,750	-2
Financial Assistance.....	64,000	-	35,750	-	35,750	-	39,000	-	+3,250	-
Subtotal	80,000	46	55,000	39	55,000	46	60,000	44	+5,000	-2 (1)
Flood Prevention Operations P.L. 78-534:										
Technical Assistance.....	2,000	18	3,500	5	3,500	14	3,500	14	-	-
Financial Assistance.....	8,000	-	6,500	-	6,500	-	6,500	-	-	-
Subtotal	10,000	18	10,000	5	10,000	14	10,000	14	-	-(2)
Rural Water Operations Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	1,500	1	3,500	2	3,500	1	-	-	-3,500	-1
Financial Assistance.....	8,500	-	6,500	-	6,500	-	-	-	-6,500	-
Subtotal	10,000	1	10,000	2	10,000	1	-	-	-10,000	-1 (3)
Total Discretionary Appropriations	100,000	65	75,000	46	75,000	61	70,000	58	-5,000	-3
Mandatory Appropriations:										
Watershed Flood and Prevention Operations:										
Technical Assistance.....	4,715	1	9,394	-	9,394	2	9,394	2	-	-
Financial Assistance.....	42,435	-	37,756	-	37,756	-	37,756	-	-	-
Subtotal	47,150	1	47,150	-	47,150	2	47,150	2	-	-
Supplemental Appropriations:										
Small Watershed P.L. 83-566 (IIJA)										
Technical Assistance.....	125,000	13	-	14	-	15	-	15	-	-
Financial Assistance.....	375,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	500,000	13	-	14	-	15	-	15	-	-
Emergency Watershed Protection Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	55,000	105	185,000	104	-	63	-	63	-	-
Financial Assistance.....	220,000	-	740,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	275,000	105	925,000	104	-	63	-	63	-	-
Total Supplemental Appropriations.....	775,000	118	925,000	118	-	78	-	78	-	-
Total Adjusted Appropriations	922,150	184	1,047,150	164	122,150	141	117,150	138	-5,000	-3

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Chg Dec. Key
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Sequestration.....	2,850	-	2,850	-	2,850	-	2,850	-	-	-
Total Appropriation	925,000	184	1,050,000	164	125,000	141	120,000	138	-5,000	-3
Sequestration.....	-2,850	-	-2,850	-	-2,850	-	-2,850	-	-	-
Recoveries, Other	-11,460	-	130,520	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	815,258	-	1,057,470	-	-1,409,041	-	566,437	-	-842,604	-
Total Available.....	1,725,948	184	2,235,140	164	1,531,191	141	683,587	138	-847,604	-3
Lapsing Balances	-18	-	-139	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	-1,057,470	-	-1,409,041	-	-566,437	-	-167,333	-	+399,104	-
Total Obligations	668,460	184	825,960	164	964,754	141	516,254	138	-448,500	-3

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

Table NRCS-19. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
Discretionary Obligations:										
Small Watershed P.L. 83-566:										
Technical Assistance.....	\$35,255	46	\$59,870	39	\$53,641	46	\$41,498	44	-\$12,143	-2
Financial Assistance	35,569	-	109,493	-	83,040	-	71,901	-	-11,139	-
Subtotal	70,824	46	169,363	39	136,681	46	113,399	44	-23,282	-2
Flood Prevention Operations P.L. 78-534:										
Technical Assistance.....	1,983	18	5,413	5	6,832	14	4,467	14	-2,365	-
Financial Assistance	9,980	-	31,883	-	22,929	-	18,984	-	-3,945	-
Subtotal	11,963	18	37,296	5	29,761	14	23,451	14	-6,310	-
Rural Water Operations Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	163	1	2,333	2	1,447	1	-	-	-1,447	-1
Financial Assistance	2,900	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal	3,063	1	2,333	2	1,447	1	-	-	-1,447	-1
Subtotal Disc Obligations	85,850	65	208,992	46	167,889	61	136,850	58	-31,039	-3
Mandatory Obligations:										
Watershed Flood and Prevention Operations:										
Technical Assistance.....	9,415	1	2,706	-	9,394	2	9,394	2	-	-
Financial Assistance	37,732	-	44,316	-	37,756	-	37,756	-	-	-
Subtotal Mand Obligations	47,147	1	47,022	-	47,150	2	47,150	2	-	-
Supplemental Appropriations:										
Small Watershed P.L. 83-566 (IIJA)										
Technical Assistance.....	90,496	13	33,528	14	37,160	15	35,071	15	-2,089	-
Financial Assistance	185,615	-	84,478	-	16,826	-	16,826	-	-	-
Subtotal Supp Obligations	276,111	13	118,006	14	53,986	15	51,897	15	-2,089	-
Emergency Watershed Protection Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	42,028	105	70,235	104	114,997	63	97,523	63	-17,474	-
Financial Assistance	217,324	-	381,705	-	580,732	-	182,834	-	-397,898	-
Subtotal Supp Obligations	259,352	105	451,940	104	695,729	63	280,357	63	-415,372	-
Total Supp Obligations	535,463	118	569,946	118	749,715	78	332,254	78	-417,461	-
Total Obligations	668,460	184	825,960	164	964,754	141	516,254	138	-448,500	-3
Add back:										
Lapsing Balances	18	-	139	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Balances Available, EOY:										
Small Watershed P.L. 83-566	243,521	-	187,242	-	135,632	-	126,625	-	-9,007	-
Flood Prevention Operations P.L. 78-534	120,508	-	93,226	-	67,118	-	35,692	-	-31,426	-
Rural Water Operations Program	16,937	-	24,604	-	9,433	-	5,016	-	-4,417	-
Emergency Watershed Protection Program.....	452,615	-	998,086	-	302,357	-	-	-	-302,357	-

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Small Watershed P.L. 83-566 (IIJA)	223,889	-	105,883	-	51,897	-	-	-	-51,897	-
Total Bal. Available, EOY.....	1,057,470	-	1,409,041	-	566,437	-	167,333	-	-399,104	-
Total Available	1,725,948	184	2,235,140	164	1,509,191	141	683,587	138	-847,604	-3
Less:										
Sequestration.....	2,850	-	2,850	-	2,850	-	2,850	-	-	-
Recoveries, Other.....	11,460	-	-130,520	-	-	-	-	-	-294,572	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-815,258	-	-1,057,470	-	-1,409,041	-	-566,437	-	+842,604	-
Total Appropriation	925,000	184	1,050,000	164	125,000	141	120,000	138	-5,000	-3

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

JUSTIFICATION OF CHANGES

A net decrease of \$5,000,000 and a decrease of 3 staff year for the Watershed and Flood Preventions Operations Program (\$75,000,000 and 61 staff years available in 2024).

Through the programs funded in the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations account, 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.

1. An increase of \$5,000,000 and a decrease of 2 staff years for the Small Watershed Operations Program (\$55,000,000 and 46 staff years available in 2024).

Program funding for Small Watershed Operations ensures staff are dedicated to planning activities and completing ongoing projects, design work, or construction oversight for existing projects. The increase will allow NRCS to address the increased cost of projects in the implementation phases (design and construction).

2. No change in funding and no change in staff years for the Flood Prevention Operations Program (\$10,000,000 and 14 staff years available in 2024).

This funding enables NRCS to continue with the implementation phases (design and construction) of projects.

3. A decrease of \$10,000,000 and a decrease of 1 staff year for the Rural Water Operations Program (\$10,000,000 and 1 staff year available in 2024).

No funds are requested in the 2025 Budget for this program and a decrease of 1 staff year.

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-20. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
Alabama.....	\$1,286	-	\$24,944	-	\$15,123	1	\$8,093	1
Alaska.....	812	1	1,203	1	4,068	1	2,177	1
Arizona.....	23,780	2	40,432	1	27,392	1	14,658	1
Arkansas.....	91,419	28	21,096	10	8,233	2	4,405	2
California.....	1,383	3	5,734	1	6,434	2	3,443	1
Colorado.....	10,658	3	16,254	1	9,220	2	4,934	2
Connecticut.....	648	1	417	-	515	1	275	1
Delaware.....	48	-	89	-	305	1	163	1
District of Columbia.....	27,947	35	18,551	28	12,062	10	6,454	10
Florida.....	4,073	-	88,974	1	45,019	1	24,090	1
Georgia.....	46,343	1	1,389	1	12,691	1	6,791	1
Hawaii.....	18,742	-	393	1	224	1	120	1
Idaho.....	487	-	189	-	6,682	2	3,575	2
Illinois.....	1,247	-	1,164	1	604	1	323	1
Indiana.....	2,694	-	1,032	-	15,206	1	8,137	1
Iowa.....	9,035	7	2,330	7	1,211	2	648	1
Kansas.....	517	-	588	1	1,867	1	999	1
Kentucky.....	6,332	5	55,590	12	20,450	5	10,943	5
Louisiana.....	61,453	2	15,664	2	7,867	2	4,210	2
Maine.....	61	-	33	-	194	1	104	1
Maryland.....	88	-	47	-	32	-	17	-
Massachusetts.....	42,697	2	20,859	3	8,936	2	4,782	2
Michigan.....	3,404	2	579	1	283	1	151	1
Minnesota.....	123	-	109	-	76	1	40	1
Mississippi.....	40,249	6	169,418	6	70,599	5	37,779	5
Missouri.....	24,501	8	8,726	6	10,127	5	5,419	5
Montana.....	5,858	-	4,453	1	2,343	1	1,254	1
Nebraska.....	7,610	7	3,794	6	7,684	5	4,112	5
Nevada.....	297	-	47	-	4,102	1	2,195	1
New Hampshire.....	56	-	31	-	29	-	16	-
New Jersey.....	3,935	1	456	1	892	1	477	1

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
New Mexico	1,833	2	142,092	10	91,575	2	49,003	2
New York	59,933	7	39,654	18	21,662	7	11,592	7
North Carolina	10,319	6	20,486	4	9,255	3	4,952	3
North Dakota	225	1	1,563	1	1,519	1	813	1
Ohio	1,462	1	708	-	548	-	293	-
Oklahoma	8,338	3	1,271	4	870	3	466	3
Oregon	15,143	6	31,727	7	19,809	6	10,600	6
Pennsylvania	2,173	1	488	1	468	-	250	-
Puerto Rico	261	1	2,919	2	1,096	1	587	1
Rhode Island	11,714	1	33,102	2	15,019	1	8,037	1
South Carolina	9,357	-	16,177	1	6,601	1	3,532	1
South Dakota	139	-	127	-	82	-	44	-
Tennessee	3,988	4	9,229	3	4,078	1	2,182	1
Texas	12,888	18	2,077	5	2,933	6	1,569	6
Utah	80,439	8	12,712	7	40,323	6	21,578	6
Vermont	1,024	1	533	-	375	1	201	1
Virginia	887	-	49	-	163	-	87	-
Washington	865	-	343	-	342	-	183	-
West Virginia	6,025	7	5,555	6	2,555	1	1,369	1
Wisconsin	3,377	2	248	1	635	1	340	1
Wyoming	287	1	315	-	589	1	315	1
Distribution Unknown	-	-	-	-	443,787	38	237,477	37
Obligations	668,460	184	825,960	164	964,754	141	516,254	138
Lapsing Balances	18	-	139	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	1,057,470	-	1,714,113	-	544,437	-	112,833	-
Total, Available	1,725,948	184	2,540,212	164	1,509,191	141	629,087	138

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS

Table NRCS-21. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
	Personnel Compensation:				
	Washington D.C.	\$843	\$575	\$997	\$998
	Personnel Compensation, Field	17,352	15,972	18,934	18,961
11	Total personnel compensation	18,195	16,547	19,931	19,959
12	Personal benefits	7,306	6,601	8,149	8,161
13.0	Benefits for former personnel	3	2	7	7
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	25,504	23,150	28,087	28,127
	Other Objects:				
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons	443	979	2,126	1,769
22.0	Transportation of things.....	7	-1	3	3
23.1	Rental payments to GSA	1,062	498	-	-
23.2	Rental payments to others.....	2,586	1,447	-	-
23.3	Communications, utilities, and misc. charges	1,136	1,529	5,590	5,066
24.0	Printing and reproduction	1	8	11	9
25.1	Advisory and assistance services.....	76,354	52,094	41,824	10,920
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources	128,275	128,736	162,940	130,882
25.3	Other goods and services from Federal sources...	154	200	-	-
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities	18,815	16,616	23,582	20,718
26.0	Supplies and materials	94	153	186	156
31.0	Equipment.....	1,239	710	836	576
32.0	Land and structures.....	17,074	5,107	59,495	59,481
41.0	Grants, subsidies, and contributions	395,716	594,734	640,074	258,547
	Total, Other Objects.....	642,956	802,810	936,667	488,127
99.9	Total, new obligations	668,460	825,960	964,754	516,254
	DHS Building Security Payments (included in 25.3)	\$154	\$55	-	-
	Position Data:				
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position	\$186,454	\$191,976	\$201,959	\$205,998
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position.....	\$73,727	\$77,835	\$81,882	\$83,520
	Average Grade, GS Position.....	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0

Note: The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

This page was intentionally left blank.

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**WATERSHED AND FLOOD PREVENTION OPERATIONS**

The Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Watershed Operations) account 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.

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, the agency 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.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations

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.

Current Activities

In 2023, the Agency received \$75 million in discretionary funding and \$50 million in mandatory funding. NRCS provided funding to 155 projects in 34 States, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In selecting projects for funding, the Agency prioritized addressing drought in the western States, projects that would have a positive impact on historically underserved and tribal communities, and projects that involved sponsors who had not previously worked with the P.L. 83-566 program.

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 agency staff and submitted for approval with requests for Federal funding authorization. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 included provisions that increased the threshold for requiring authorization by Congressional committee from \$5 million to \$25 million. 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. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 also included provisions that the limitation of 250,000 acres only applies for activities undertaken for the primary purpose of flood prevention.

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. Over the life of the program, 495 loans have been made at a value of almost \$176 million.

This page was intentionally left blank.

ACCOUNT 3: EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-22. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.	Chg Key
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs			
Supplemental Appropriations:											
Emergency Watershed Protection Program:											
Technical Assistance.....	\$60,000	4	-	7	-	10	-	2	-	-8	
Financial Assistance.....	240,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total Appropriation	300,000	4	-	7	-	10	-	2	-	-8	
Recoveries, Other	-	-	\$3,245	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Bal. Available, SOY	-	-	97,951	-	\$95,305	-	\$51,398	-	-\$43,907	-	
Total Available.....	300,000	4	101,196	7	95,305	10	51,398	2	-43,907	-8	
Bal. Available, EOY	-97,951	-	-95,305	-	-51,398	-	-30,499	-	+20,899	-	
Total Obligations	202,049	4	5,891	7	43,907	10	20,899	2	-23,008	-8	

Table NRCS-23. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Supplemental Obligations:										
Emergency Watershed Protection Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	\$6,083	4	\$1,527	7	\$11,647	10	\$10,457	2	-\$1,190	-8
Financial Assistance.....	195,967	-	4,364	-	32,260	-	10,442	-	-21,818	-
Total Obligations	202,049	4	5,891	7	43,907	10	20,899	2	-23,008	-8
Balances Available, EOY:										
EWPP.....	97,951	-	95,305	-	51,398	-	30,499	-	-20,899	-
Total Bal. Available, EOY.....	97,951	-	95,305	-	51,398	-	30,499	-	-20,899	-
Total Available.....	300,000	4	101,196	7	95,305	10	51,398	2	-43,907	-8
Less:										
Recoveries, Other	-	-	-3,245	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-	-	-97,951	-	-95,305	-	-51,398	-	+43,907	-
Total Appropriation	300,000	4	-	7	-	10	-	2	-	-8

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-24. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
Alabama	-	-	\$68	-	\$13	-	-	-
Arizona.....	\$2,231	-	7	-	-	-	-	-
California	3,045	1	266	2	525	2	\$250	1
Colorado.....	6,051	-	343	2	191	2	90	1
Kentucky.....	927	1	1,322	1	-	-	-	-
Louisiana.....	43,159	-	331	-	10	-	200	-
Mississippi	2,751	-	1,747	-	638	1	250	-
Montana	1,816	1	-	-	13	-	-	-
New Jersey	33	-	405	1	75	-	50	-
New Mexico.....	136,545	1	1,348	1	-	-	-	-
New York.....	886	-	48	-	-	-	-	-
North Dakota.....	2,871	-	-	-	10	-	-	-
Pennsylvania	1,480	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tennessee.....	17	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
Vermont	120	-	4	-	-	-	-	-
Washington	117	-	-1	-	-	-	-	-
Distribution Unknown	-	-	-	-	42,432	5	20,059	-
Obligations	202,049	4	5,891	7	43,907	10	20,899	2
Bal. Available, EOY	97,951	-	95,305	-	51,398	-	30,499	-
Total, Available.....	300,000	4	101,196	7	95,305	10	51,398	2

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS

Table NRCS-25. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
	Personnel Compensation:				
	Personnel Compensation, Field	\$432	\$696	\$1,047	\$214
11	Total personnel compensation	432	696	1,047	214
12	Personal benefits	171	273	410	84
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	603	969	1,457	298
	Other Objects:				
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons	19	15	30	24
25.1	Advisory and assistance services	40,644	-	4,000	1,000
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources	5,370	192	10,000	10,000
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities	24	5	40	40
26.0	Supplies and materials	24	15	20	20
31.0	Equipment	42	331	100	75
32.0	Land and structures	-	41	60	98
41.0	Grants, subsidies, and contributions	155,323	4,323	28,200	9,344
	Total, Other Objects	201,446	4,922	42,450	20,601
99.9	Total, new obligations	202,049	5,891	43,907	20,899
	Position Data:				
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position	\$186,454	\$191,976	\$201,959	\$205,998
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position	\$73,727	\$77,835	\$81,882	\$83,520
	Average Grade, GS Position	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0

Note: The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROGRAM (EWP)**

The Emergency Watershed Program (EWP) is authorized by Section 216 of the Flood 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). EWP implements recovery measures for watershed emergencies created by floods, wildfires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences that threaten life and property. EWP assistance is provided for both major disaster declarations and local watershed emergencies recognized by NRCS.

EWP work is not limited to a set of prescribed practices but is planned and designed on a case-by-case basis. EWP emergency measures include 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; buying out property; and purchasing floodplain easements.

EWP projects (except for the purchase of floodplain easements) must be sponsored by a State or local unit of government, or a Native American tribe or tribal organization. Sponsors are responsible for contributing their share of the project costs, obtaining land rights and regulatory permits, and providing operation and maintenance of the completed emergency measures.

NRCS provides the necessary technical assistance for planning and design and may provide up to 75 percent of the construction cost of eligible emergency measures (or up to 90 percent within limited resource areas).

Current Activities

Of the \$300 million authorized in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, \$227 million has been allocated to existing disaster needs, and the remaining \$73 million is being used for recent disasters that currently have cost estimates being developed. In 2023, NRCS entered into 167 agreements with local sponsors to implement cooperatively emergency recovery measures, and \$276 million of EWP funds were obligated. Responses to 61 watershed emergencies have been initiated in 2023, including: Hurricane Ida; western wildfires in Arizona, California, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico; major storm and flooding events across the nation; and major tornado events across the southeast.

In addition to responding to major disaster declarations, EWP also provides assistance for local flooding, tornados, and significant weather events. For example, in 2023, NRCS addressed an immediate need to protect remote Alaskan native villages from severe erosion as well as to complete projects that protected homes and business from localized erosion caused by spring runoff and ice jams. Also, NRCS provided funding to Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Washington to address post wildfire fire recovery efforts in the west to address the need for protecting life and property downstream of burned areas.

EWP Floodplain Easements

NRCS may purchase Emergency Watershed Program Floodplain Easements (EWP-FPE) on floodplain lands that have been impaired or impacted within the last 12 months, have a history of repeated flooding (i.e., flooded at least twice during the past ten years), would be inundated or adversely impacted by a dam breach, or have been damaged by a specific natural disaster, for which Congress allocated funding. Under the floodplain easement option, a landowner voluntarily sells a permanent conservation easement to NRCS that provides NRCS the full authority to restore and enhance the floodplain's natural functions and values. Since the program's inception in 1996, most of the purchased floodplain easements involved undeveloped agricultural lands, but a small portion of the purchased easements involved rural land with residences or other structures present. In recent years, the number of easement transactions involving urban and suburban lands with homes present has dramatically increased. Floodplain easements are only available as part of a larger strategy intended to minimize future flood damage, by removing valuable infrastructure from flood prone areas while prohibiting their future development and restoring the floodplain function.

This type of easement purchase requires a local sponsor that will purchase the underlying land, in fee title, once the floodplain easement is acquired by NRCS.

NRCS may pay up to 100 percent of the costs associated with the restoration of EWP-FPEs. The goal of EWP-FPE restoration is to restore and return the floodplain to its natural condition. Restoration measures used to accomplish this goal include the removal of buildings or other structures from the floodplain and the reestablishment of the floodplain's functions and values through the installation of structural and non-structural conservation practices. To the extent practicable, NRCS restores the natural features and characteristics of the floodplain by recreating topographic diversity, improving flood storage or detention, and reestablishing native vegetation. EWP-FPE landowners can assist with implementation of the easement restoration plan.

Upon enrollment in EWP-FPE, landowners retain certain rights to the property, including quiet enjoyment, controlled public access, and undeveloped recreational use such as hunting and fishing. A landowner may obtain authorization from the agency to engage in other activities, through the Compatible Use Authorization Process, provided the agency determines the activities will further the protection and enhancement of the floodplain easements.

Current Activities

The table below reports the number of easements enrolled in EWP-FPE from 1997 through the end of 2023.

Table NRCS-26. Cumulative Program Activity (1997 Through End of 2023)

Enrolled Easements (Permanent)	Cumulative
Number of Easements	1,774
Number of Acres	201,262
Closed Easements (Permanent)	Cumulative
Number of Easements	1,709
Number of Acres	190,662
Restored Easements	Cumulative
Number of Easements	1,614
Number of Acres	185,286

Illinois Dogtooth Bend

Dogtooth Bend is located in Illinois at the northern reach of the Mississippi River Alluvial Valley, near the confluence of the Ohio River. NRCS has acquired 10 EWP-FPEs comprising 2,327 acres at a cost of approximately \$8.2 million. Additionally, 23 agreements through EWP-FPE and ACEP-WRE Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) cover an additional 3,362 acres in Dog Tooth Bend. Restoration planning efforts consist of diversifying the floodplain that has significant sand deposition and scouring from 2019 and previous flood events to mimic a bottomland hardwood riverine habitat. The acquisition and restoration of the easements will also link conservation efforts implemented by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Horseshoe Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge and the USFWS Mid-Miss National Wildlife Refuge.

ACCOUNT 4: WATERSHED REHABILITATION PROGRAM

APPROPRIATIONS LANGUAGE

The appropriations language follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

Under the authorities of section 14 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, [~~\$10,009,000~~]\$2,003,000 is provided.

LEAD-OFF TABULAR STATEMENT

Table NRCS-27. Lead-Off Tabular Statement (In dollars)

Item	Amount
Estimate, 2024	\$2,000,000
Change in Appropriation	<u>+3,000</u>
Budget Estimate, 2025	<u><u>2,003,000</u></u>

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-28. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.	Chg Key
Discretionary Appropriations:											
Watershed Rehabilitation Program:											
Technical Assistance	\$1,000	6	\$2,000	4	\$2,000	2	\$2,003	2	+\$3	-	
Financial Assistance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Subtotal	1,000	6	2,000	4	2,000	2	2,003	2	+3	-	
Total Discretionary Appropriations ..	1,000	6	2,000	4	2,000	2	2,003	2	+3	-	(1)
Mandatory Appropriations:											
Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program:											
Technical Assistance.....	-	17	-	14	-	3	-	3	-	-	
Financial Assistance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Subtotal	-	17	-	14	-	3	-	3	-	-	
Supplemental Appropriations:											
Watershed Rehabilitation Program (IIJA):											
Technical Assistance.....	30,000	-	-	6	-	3	-	3	-	-	
Financial Assistance	88,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total Supplemental Appropriations.....	118,000	-	-	6	-	3	-	3	-	-	
Subtotal	119,000	23	2,000	24	2,000	8	2,003	8	+3	-	
Total Appropriation	119,000	23	2,000	24	2,000	8	2,003	8	+3	-	
Sequestration.....	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Recoveries, Other	-6,473	-	11,828	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Rescinded Balances	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Bal. Available, SOY	45,349	-	92,255	-	50,345	-	18,472	-	-31,873	-	
Total Available	157,876	23	106,083	24	52,345	8	20,475	8	-31,870	-	
Lapsing Balances	-	-	-32	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Bal. Available, EOY	-92,255	-	-50,345	-	-18,472	-	-6,665	-	+11,807	-	
Total Obligations	65,621	23	55,706	24	33,873	8	13,810	8	-20,063	-	

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

Table NRCS-29. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Discretionary Obligations:										
Watershed Rehabilitation Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	\$2,123	6	\$2,809	4	\$2,960	2	\$2,678	2	-\$282	-
Financial Assistance.....	26	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal Disc Obligations	2,149	6	2,809	4	2,960	2	2,678	2	-282	-
Mandatory Obligations:										
Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program:										
Technical Assistance.....	12,312	17	8,852	14	5,881	3	3,765	3	-2,116	-
Financial Assistance.....	2,204	-	-	-	4,025	-	3,375	-	-650	-
Subtotal Mand Obligations	14,516	17	8,852	14	9,906	3	7,140	3	-2,766	-
Supplemental Obligations:										
Watershed Rehabilitation Program (IIJA)										
Technical Assistance.....	25,416	-	25,553	6	8,062	3	3,992	3	-4,070	-
Financial Assistance.....	23,540	-	18,492	-	12,945	-	-	-	-12,945	-
Subtotal Supp Obligations	48,956	-	44,045	6	21,007	3	3,992	3	-17,015	-
Total Obligations	65,621	23	55,706	24	33,873	8	13,810	8	-20,063	-
Lapsing Balances	-	-	32	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Balances Available, EOY:										
Watershed Rehabilitation Program	1,910	-	1,945	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Small Watershed Rehabilitation Program.....	21,301	-	23,401	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Watershed Rehabilitation Program (IIJA)	69,044	-	24,999	-	18,472	-	6,665	-	-11,807	-
Total Bal. Available, EOY.....	92,255	-	50,345	-	18,472	-	6,665	-	-11,807	-
Total Available.....	157,876	23	106,083	24	52,345	8	20,475	8	-31,870	-
Less:										
Recoveries, Other	6,473	-	-11,828	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-45,349	-	-92,255	-	-50,345	-	-18,472	-	+31,873	-
Total Appropriation	119,000	23	2,000	24	2,000	8	2,003	8	+3	-

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

JUSTIFICATION OF CHANGES

- An increase of \$3,000 and no change in staff years in the Watershed Rehabilitation Program (\$2,000,000 and 2 staff year available in 2024).

The Watershed Rehabilitation Program works with local project sponsors to rehabilitate aging dams that are reaching the end of their design lives and/or build or augment existing water supplies based on current and future water supply demands. Program 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.

- An increase of \$3,000 for pay and employee costs in the Watershed Rehabilitation Program.

This increase will support an annualization of the 2024 5.2 percent Cost of Living pay increase and the 2025 2.0 percent Cost of Living pay increase. If this funding is not provided, NRCS will not have adequate resources available to avoid any disruption or delays in the Watershed Rehabilitation Program activities.

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-30. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
Arizona.....	\$196	1	\$106	-	\$64	-	\$26	-
California.....	74	-	68	-	41	-	17	-
Colorado.....	25	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Connecticut.....	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
District of Columbia.....	336	2	471	3	286	1	117	1
Georgia.....	21,973	1	158	1	96	-	39	-
Illinois.....	315	1	123	-	75	-	30	-
Indiana.....	120	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kansas.....	157	-	18	-	11	-	4	-
Kentucky.....	56	-	1,946	-	1,183	-	482	-
Maine.....	-	-	1,109	-	674	-	275	-
Maryland.....	-	-	448	-	272	-	111	-
Massachusetts.....	1,169	1	286	1	174	-	71	-
Mississippi.....	6,268	-	1,373	-	835	-	340	-
Montana.....	-	-	223	-	136	-	55	-
Nebraska.....	538	1	1,620	-	985	-	402	-
Nevada.....	46	-	10	-	6	-	2	-
New Hampshire.....	43	-	22	-	13	-	5	-
New Jersey.....	913	-	63	-	38	-	16	-
New Mexico.....	1,727	-	4	-	2	-	1	-
New York.....	87	-	795	-	483	-	197	-
North Carolina.....	45	-	471	-	286	-	117	-
North Dakota.....	60	-	899	-	547	-	223	-
Ohio.....	23	-	180	-	109	-	45	-
Oklahoma.....	3,790	2	2,649	4	1,611	1	657	1
Oregon.....	14	-	26	-	16	-	6	-
Pennsylvania.....	4,775	1	188	-	114	-	47	-
Puerto Rico.....	1,109	-	82	-	50	-	20	-
South Carolina.....	-	-	100	-	61	-	25	-
Tennessee.....	2	-	60	-	36	-	15	-
Texas.....	12,419	10	19,025	12	11,572	5	4,719	5
Utah.....	1,609	-	6	-	4	-	1	-
Vermont.....	58	-	2	-	1	-	-	-
Virginia.....	1,873	-	2,453	1	1,492	-	608	-
West Virginia.....	5,787	3	20,722	2	12,600	1	5,137	1
Obligations.....	65,621	23	55,706	24	33,873	8	13,810	8
Lapsing Balances.....	-	-	32	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY.....	92,255	-	50,345	-	18,472	-	6,665	-
Total, Available.....	157,876	23	106,083	24	52,345	8	20,475	8

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS

Table NRCS-31. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
Personnel Compensation:					
	Personnel Compensation, Field	\$2,874	\$3,206	\$1,107	\$1,130
11	Total personnel compensation	2,874	3,206	1,107	1,130
12	Personal benefits	1,101	1,213	421	429
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	3,975	4,419	1,528	1,559
Other Objects:					
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons.....	177	344	254	148
25.1	Advisory and assistance services	2,501	4,806	8,775	3,831
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources	32,999	28,510	12,967	7,104
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities	2,736	3,679	694	361
26.0	Supplies and materials	1	3	2	1
31.0	Equipment	2	259	53	29
41.0	Grants, subsidies, and contributions	23,231	13,686	9,600	777
	Total, Other Objects.....	61,646	51,287	32,345	12,251
99.9	Total, new obligations.....	65,621	55,706	33,873	13,810
Information Technology Investments:					
FPAC-1002 Geospatial Services					
25.2	External Labor (Contractors)	-	-	\$342	\$376
	Total FPAC-1002 Geospatial Services	-	-	342	376
NRCS-1402 Conservation Field Delivery Programs					
25.2	External Labor (Contractors)	-	-	3,504	4,112
	Total NRCS-1402 Conservation Field Delivery Prg.	-	-	3,504	4,112
	Total Major Investments	-	-	3,846	4,488
	Total IT Investments.....	-	-	3,846	4,488
Position Data:					
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position.....	\$186,454	\$191,976	\$201,959	\$205,998
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position	\$73,727	\$77,835	\$81,882	\$83,520
	Average Grade, GS Position	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0

Note: The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

This page intentionally left blank.

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**WATERSHED REHABILITATION PROGRAM**

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (P.L. 83-566), as amended by the Watershed Rehabilitation Amendments of 2000 (Section 313 of P.L. 106-472), authorizes NRCS to assist communities to address public health and safety concerns, and environmental impacts of aging dams. The amendment allows the agency to provide technical and financial assistance for the planning, design, and implementation of rehabilitation projects that may include upgrading dams to bring them into compliance with applicable safety and performance standards, or to decommission and remove dams past their original design life so they no longer pose a threat to life and property.

Dams installed through 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 are eligible for rehabilitation assistance.

Since 1948, local communities have constructed 11,850 watershed dams with assistance from NRCS. Local sponsors provide leadership in the program and secure 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 after construction is complete. These dams protect America's communities, infrastructure, 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 protected by these watershed dams are now vulnerable to flooding since many dams have reached, or will soon reach, the end of their design life. There are currently 6,392 watershed dams that have reached the end of their originally designed lifespan. That total is estimated to increase to 6,609 by December 2024 and 6,782 by December 2025. Thus, more than half of the 11,850 watershed dams in the Nation are beyond their design life. In many cases, the area around and below these dams have substantially changed, primarily due to the construction of homes and businesses on what was once agricultural or forest land. Consequently, 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, recreation, and water supply. Dam failure could also cause serious adverse environmental effects like lost wildlife habitat and poor water quality.

The highest priority of the Watershed Rehabilitation Program is to rehabilitate dams that pose the greatest risk to public safety. The agency classifies these dams as high hazard potential in the national dam safety classification system. Dams classified in the three-tier system as low or significant hazard potential to public safety will not be planned for rehabilitation until all high-hazard potential dam project requests from public sponsors have been rehabilitated.

The Watershed Rehabilitation Program provides up to 65 percent of the total project cost for dam rehabilitation projects, which includes the acquisition of land, easements, rights-of-way, project administration, non-Federal technical assistance, and construction. The agency provides technical assistance to conduct 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 four phases, all of which require a request from a local public sponsor: 1) conduct a dam assessment to evaluate the condition of the dam, including safety hazards, and provide preliminary alternatives for rehabilitation; 2) prepare project plans; 3) prepare designs for implementation; and 4) implement the rehabilitation or decommission plan. 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.

Annually, the 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.

The Architectural and Engineering (A&E) Service contracts were advertised in 2023 and are set to be awarded in 2024 for private A&E firms to perform dam assessments, rehabilitation planning, engineering designs, and construction inspection services under the agency's guidance. Also, some sponsors have used their own professional technical staff or acquired technical services as part of their "in-kind" contribution to meet their 35 percent cost-share requirement.

Sponsors have used many innovative means to obtain the funds necessary to address the rehabilitation of 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, sought construction materials from private landowners or local governments, and provided in-kind services using existing staff.

Current Activities

In 2023, the Watershed Rehabilitation Program received \$2 million in discretionary funding and \$3.2 million in mandatory funding. \$116 million of the \$118 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) has been allocated to existing rehabilitation projects. This investment in watershed rehabilitation recognizes the critical role of these watershed structures in flood management, water supply, erosion control, agricultural productivity, recreation, and wildlife habitat. This funding helps to repair aging infrastructure, creates jobs and commerce, and protects homes and families.

The agency continued funding and promoted assessments of high-hazard potential dams, monitored costs, and examined the rehabilitation program to ensure equitable delivery in economically disadvantaged areas. Projects funded for assessments, planning, design, and construction are included in the chart below.

Table NRCS-32. Summary of Watershed Rehabilitation Projects and Allocations as of September 30, 2023

State	Total Number of Funded Dam Rehabilitation Projects 2000-2023	Number of Dams Rehabilitated	2023 Federal Allocations of Mandatory Funds ^{b/}	2023 Federal Allocations of Discretionary Funds ^{a/}	2023 Federal Allocations of BIL funding
Alabama.....	1	-	-	-	-
Arizona.....	11	3	-	\$91,234	-
Arkansas.....	7	1	-	-	-
California.....	1	-	-	-	-
Colorado.....	5	1	-	-	-
Connecticut.....	4	-	-	-	-
Georgia.....	39	9	-	-	-
Illinois.....	1	-	-	80,376	-
Iowa.....	4	4	-	-	-
Kansas.....	8	3	-	-	-
Kentucky.....	4	-	-	321,970	\$1,656,809
Louisiana.....	3	-	-	-	-
Maine.....	1	-	-	-	308,900
Massachusetts.....	9	2	-	-	153,837
Maryland.....	1	-	-	298,000	-
Mississippi.....	36	18	-	-	220,000
Missouri.....	2	2	-	-	-
Montana.....	-	-	-	106,000	-
Nebraska.....	19	13	-	3,378,387	-
Nevada.....	2	-	-	-	-
New Hampshire.....	5	-	-	-	-
New Jersey.....	7	-	-	-	-
New Mexico.....	9	3	\$139,760	151,000	-
New York.....	9	-	308,847	217,516	-
North Carolina.....	7	-	-	467,124	-
North Dakota.....	8	1	-	918,553	-
Ohio.....	16	8	-	74,863	117,564
Oklahoma.....	67	39	-	2,315,000	78,700
Oregon.....	3	-	-	-	-

State	Total Number of Funded Dam Rehabilitation Projects 2000-2023	Number of Dams Rehabilitated	2023 Federal Allocations of Mandatory Funds ^{b/}	2023 Federal Allocations of Discretionary Funds ^{a/}	2023 Federal Allocations of BIL funding
Pennsylvania.....	21	3	-	91,500	-
Puerto Rico	2	-	-	41,776	-
South Carolina.....	-	-	-	779,000	-
Tennessee	7	3	-	59,718	-
Texas	57	26	-	1,065,409	8,060,527
Utah	25	11	-	-	-
Vermont.....	4	-	-	1,700	-
Virginia.....	17	13	-	176,000	2,135,250
West Virginia.....	23	2	2,782,714	215,395	14,936,766
Wisconsin	11	11	-	-	-
Wyoming	1	1	-	-	-
Total.....	457	177	\$3,231,321	\$10,850,521	\$27,668,353

^{a/} Discretionary funds include carryover funds, prior year recoveries, and annual funds for project planning, design, and implementation.

^{b/} Mandatory funds include carryover funds and prior year recoveries.

In 2023, 67 assessments of high hazard dams were funded. These assessments 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 2023, 446 dams have been funded for rehabilitation. Of these 446 dams, 276 dams in 28 States were authorized for rehabilitation. There are 153 dams in the planning phase that are subject to funding priorities. Of the 276 dams that were authorized for rehabilitation, 178 have been rehabilitated and 42 are in the design and 19 are in the construction phase and 37 are on hold due to land rights, funding, or other sponsor related issues.

Success Story

The Millsite Dam rehabilitation project was completed in June of 2023 at a cost of \$25.5 million. The NRCS share of costs were \$16.6 million and the local share of the costs were \$8.9 million for the construction of the dam. The dam protects 285 residents in the town of Ferron, Utah 10 businesses, one school, and 95 homes and provides water supply to the town of Ferron as well as irrigation water to over 4,000 acres of cropland and cooling water for a power plant. The dam also provides significant recreation at Millsite State Park where thousands enjoy fishing, boating and other water-based recreation. The spillway was upgraded to meet current standards, a stability berm was added downstream to prevent failure during an earthquake, and many other items were addressed in the rehabilitation to bring the dam up to current federal and state standards.

The following table summarizes the benefits for both agricultural and non-agricultural lands provided by the completed projects:

Table NRCS-33. Benefits for lands provided by the completed projects.

Average annual floodwater damage reduction benefits.....	\$9,383,748
Average annual non-floodwater damage reduction benefits	\$7,754,549
Number of people with reduced risk downstream from the dams	45,302
Number of people who benefit from project action.....	519,652
Number of homes and businesses benefiting from project action	18,755
Number of farms and ranches benefiting from project action	1,037
Number of bridges downstream which benefit from project action	401

ACCOUNT 5: WATER BANK PROGRAM

APPROPRIATIONS LANGUAGE

The appropriations language follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

In addition to amounts otherwise made available by this Act and notwithstanding the last sentence of 16 U.S.C. 1310, there is appropriated [~~\$4,000,000~~]\$2,011,000, to remain available until expended, to implement non-renewable agreements on eligible lands, including flooded agricultural lands, as determined by the Secretary, under the Water Bank Act (16 U.S.C. 1301–1311).

LEAD-OFF TABULAR STATEMENT

Table NRCS-34. Lead-Off Tabular Statement (In dollars)

Item	Amount
Estimate, 2024	\$4,000,000
Change in Appropriation	-1,989,000
Budget Estimate, 2025	<u>2,011,000</u>

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-35. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.	Chg Key
Discretionary Appropriations:											
Water Bank Program											
Technical Assistance	\$400	3	\$400	3	\$400	3	\$402	3	+\$2	-	-
Financial Assistance	3,600	-	3,600	-	3,600	-	1,609	-	-1,991	-	-
Total Appropriation	4,000	3	4,000	3	4,000	3	2,011	3	-1,989	-	(1)
Recoveries, Other	485	-	43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	649	-	1,305	-	460	-	-	-	-460	-	-
Total Available	5,134	3	5,348	3	4,460	3	2,011	3	-2,449	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	-1,305	-	-460	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations	3,829	3	4,888	3	4,460	3	2,011	3	-2,449	-	-

Note: Funding was provided in the 2023 Enacted Budget through General Provision Section 762.

Table NRCS-36. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
Discretionary Obligations:										
Water Bank Program										
Technical Assistance	\$353	3	\$324	3	\$446	3	\$402	3	-\$44	-
Financial Assistance	3,476	-	4,564	-	4,014	-	1,609	-	-2,405	-
Total Obligations	3,829	3	4,888	3	4,460	3	2,011	3	-2,449	-
Balances Available, EOY:										
Water Bank Program	1,305	-	460	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Bal. Available, EOY	1,305	-	460	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available	5,134	3	5,348	3	4,460	3	2,011	3	-2,449	-
Recoveries, Other	-485	-	-43	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-649	-	-1,305	-	-460	-	-	-	+460	-
Total Appropriation	4,000	3	4,000	3	4,000	3	2,011	3	-1,989	-

Note: Funding was provided in the 2023 Enacted Budget through General Provision Section 762.

JUSTIFICATION OF CHANGES

1. A decrease of \$1,989,000 and no change in staff years in the Water Bank Program (\$4,000,000 and 3 staff years available in 2024).

The Water Bank Program focuses on technical and financial assistance on flooded cropland, flooded hay and pastureland, and flooded forestland. Under the program, landowners and operators have non-renewable ten-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.

- a) A decrease of \$2,000,000 and no change in staff years in the Water Bank Program.
The decrease in funding will reduce the number of contracts and acres enrolled by up to 50 percent from the previous years. Funding supports staff that administer the program in applicable states.
- b) An increase of \$11,000 for pay and employee costs in the Water Bank Program.
This increase will support an annualization of the 2024 5.2 percent Cost of Living pay increase and the 2025 2.0 percent Cost of Living pay increase. If this funding is not provided, NRCS will have to further reduce Water Bank Program contract activities.

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-37. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
North Dakota	\$3,388	2	\$4,329	3	\$3,950	3	\$1,781	3
South Dakota	441	1	559	-	510	-	230	-
Obligations	3,829	3	4,888	3	4,460	3	2,011	3
Bal. Available, EOY	1,305	-	460	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Available	5,134	3	5,348	3	4,460	3	2,011	3

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS

Table NRCS-38. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)

Item No.	Item	2022	2023	2024	2025
		Actual	Actual	Estimated	Estimated
	Personnel Compensation:				
	Personnel Compensation, Field	\$260	\$227	\$264	\$269
11	Total personnel compensation	260	227	264	269
12	Personal benefits	93	97	118	120
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	353	324	382	389
	Other Objects:				
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities	-	-	64	13
41.0	Grants, subsidies, and contributions	3,476	4,564	4,014	1,609
	Total, Other Objects	3,476	4,564	4,078	1,622
99.9	Total, new obligations	3,829	4,888	4,460	2,011
	Position Data:				
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position	\$186,454	\$191,976	\$201,959	\$205,998
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position	\$73,727	\$77,835	\$81,882	\$83,520
	Average Grade, GS Position	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0

Note: Funding was provided in the 2023 Enacted Budget through General Provision Section 762.

The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**WATER BANK PROGRAM**

Section 748 of the Water Bank Act (16 U.S.C. 1301-1311) authorized the Water Bank Program (WBP). The purposes of the 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.

WBP contracts are non-renewable, ten-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. WBP only provides these rental payments, and payments are not available for conservation practices. Participants who wish to establish or maintain conservation practices may apply for financial assistance through other NRCS or State financial assistance programs.

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. The rental rates, for the 2022 program, were as follows:

- \$50 per acre per year for cropland;
- \$35 per acre per year for pasture and rangeland (grazing lands); and
- \$20 per acre per year for forestland.

NRCS determines whether land is eligible for enrollment and whether, once found eligible, 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. Land placed under an agreement shall be specifically identified and designated for the period of the agreement. A person must:

- Be the owner 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 because 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 because of death of the previous owner and will have possession over all the designated acreage for the agreement period.

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 sharecropper, 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;
- Not be hayed unless authorized under limited circumstances, such as severe drought; and
- Not be grazed unless necessary to enhance the wetland functions and values of the land under agreement.

An annual status review is performed to note the progress in maintaining designated wetland acreage, and the need for technical assistance. Failure to maintain the designated wetland acreage may result in noncompliance or a reduction in rental payments.

Current Activities

In 2023, \$4 million in financial and technical assistance was available for approval of new WBP ten-year rental agreements. Over \$3.4 million was obligated to 71 agreements covering 10,198 acres.

This page was intentionally left blank.

ACCOUNT 6: HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM

APPROPRIATIONS LANGUAGE

The appropriations language follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

[For necessary expenses to carry out the Healthy Forests Reserve Program under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (16 U.S.C. 6571-6578), \$20,011,000, to remain available until expended.]

Change Description

No funding is requested in 2025.

LEAD-OFF TABULAR STATEMENT

Table NRCS-39. Lead-Off Tabular Statement (In dollars)

Item	Amount
Estimate, 2024	\$7,000,000
Change in Appropriation	-7,000,000
Budget Estimate, 2025	-

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-40. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or		Chg Key
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Dec.	Inc. or Dec.	
Discretionary Appropriations:											
Healthy Forests Reserve Program:											
Technical Assistance.....	-	-	\$2,313	-	\$2,313	7	-	-	-\$2,313	-	-7
Financial Assistance.....	-	-	4,687	-	4,687	-	-	-	-4,687	-	-
Total Appropriation	-	-	7,000	-	7,000	7	-	-	-7,000	-	-7 (1)
Bal. Available, SOY	-	-	-	-	7,000	-	-	-	-7,000	-	-
Total Available.....	-	-	7,000	-	14,000	7	-	-	-14,000	-	-7
Bal. Available, EOY	-	-	-7,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Obligations	-	-	-	-	14,000	7	-	-	-14,000	-	-7

Table NRCS-41. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or		FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Dec.		
Discretionary Obligations:											
Healthy Forests Reserve Program:											
Technical Assistance.....	-	-	-	-	\$4,626	7	-	-	-\$4,626	-	-7
Financial Assistance.....	-	-	-	-	9,374	-	-	-	-9,374	-	-
Subtotal Disc Obligations	-	-	-	-	14,000	7	-	-	-14,000	-	-7
Total Obligations	-	-	-	-	14,000	7	-	-	-14,000	-	-7
Add back:											
Balances Available, EOY:											
Healthy Forests Reserve Program....	-	-	\$7,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Bal. Available, EOY	-	-	7,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available.....	-	-	7,000	-	14,000	7	-	-	-14,000	-	-7
Less:											
Bal. Available, SOY	-	-	-	-	-7,000	-	-	-	+7,000	-	-
Total Appropriation	-	-	7,000	-	7,000	7	-	-	-7,000	-	-7

JUSTIFICATION OF CHANGES

1. A decrease of \$7,000,000 and a decrease of 7 staff years for the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (\$7,000,000 and 7 staff years available in 2024).

No new funding requested in 2025.

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) helps landowners restore, enhance & protect forestland resources on private lands through easements and financial assistance. HFRP easements are a valuable tool for restoring and protecting all types of forests lands to further biodiversity, critical wildlife habitat, and carbon sequestration goals. Without additional funding, the program will need to forgo additional enrollment of easements, including those with historically underserved landowners.

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-42. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
Distribution Unknown.....	-	-	-	-	\$14,000	7	-	-
Obligations.....	-	-	-	-	14,000	7	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY.....	-	-	\$7,000	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Available.....	-	-	7,000	-	14,000	7	-	-

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS

Table NRCS-43. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
	Personnel Compensation:				
	Personnel Compensation, Field	-	-	\$765	-
11	Total personnel compensation	-	-	765	-
12	Personal benefits	-	-	315	-
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	-	-	1,080	-
	Other Objects:				
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources	-	-	3,333	-
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities	-	-	213	-
32.0	Land and structures	-	-	5,812	-
41.0	Grants, subsidies, and contributions	-	-	3,562	-
	Total, Other Objects.....	-	-	12,920	-
99.9	Total, new obligations.....	-	-	14,000	-
	Position Data:				
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position	-	-	\$201,959	-
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position	-	-	\$81,882	-
	Average Grade, GS Position	-	-	10.0	-

Note: The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**HEALTHY FORESTS RESERVE PROGRAM**

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. The 2014 Farm Bill made minor changes to HFRP by adding a definition of the term “acreage owned by Indian tribes”, identifying HFRP as a contributing program or (“covered program”) authorized to accomplish the purposes of RCPP, replacing mandatory funding with authorization of appropriations, and authorizing the use of conservation operation funds for HFRP stewardship responsibilities. The 2018 Farm Bill amended the provisions. Most programs funded by the 2018 Farm Bill through 2023 were extended through 2024 via the one-year Farm Bill extension within the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-22). Amounts shown in 2025 for most Farm Bill programs reflect those confirmed in the baseline.

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. HFRP provides financial assistance for specific conservation actions completed by the landowner. NRCS 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 actual or 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 actual or 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 actual or average cost of the approved conservation practices.
- Permanent easement. The landowners may receive 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 100 percent of the actual or average cost of the approved conservation practices.

Only privately held land, including acreage owned by Indian tribes, is eligible for HFRP enrollment. The definition of land owned by Indian tribes was expanded in the 2014 Farm Bill to include land that is held in trust by the United States for Indian tribes or individual Indians. 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. Technical assistance is provided to help landowners develop and comply with the terms of their HFRP restoration plans.

Landowners may receive “safe harbor” assurances from the regulatory agencies 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.

The agency provides financial assistance payments consistent with enrollment in either a single payment or in ten or fewer annual payments, as agreed to between the agency and the landowner. Cost-share payments are also provided 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.

In coordination with the Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Commerce’s National Marine Fisheries Service, the agency provides technical assistance to landowners through the development of 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. Technical assistance continues to be provided 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.

Current Activities

Cumulatively, 108 agreements have been enrolled between 2006 and 2023, encompassing approximately 683,201 acres.

Table NRCS-44. Cumulative Program Activity (2006 Through 2023)

Enrolled Easements (Permanent and 30-Year)	Cumulative
Number of Easements.....	89
Number of Acres.....	28,177
Active and Completed Restoration Cost-Share Agreements	Cumulative
Number of Agreements.....	18
Number of Acres.....	654,852
Enrolled 30-year Contract (Indian Land)	Cumulative
Number of Contracts.....	1
Number of Acres.....	172
Summary	Cumulative Summary
Total Agreements Enrolled.....	108
Total Acres.....	683,201
Closed Easements (Permanent and 30-Year)	Cumulative
Number of Easements.....	88
Number of Acres.....	23,538

First Tribal HFRP Enrollment in the Country

The Coeur d'Alene Tribe has enrolled 172 acres of forestland in the HFRP being the first Tribal HFRP enrollment in the country. The property is located on Hangman Creek in Benewah County, Idaho, and includes valuable habitat for Redband Trout, a culturally important species. The Coeur d'Alene Tribe has a robust restoration program in the Hangman Creek watershed, and the HFRP enrollment will complement this work and provide an opportunity to address additional conservation needs. The Tribe is interested in protecting and restoring Redband Trout habitat in the drainage, and they felt HFRP would help them achieve this goal. The Tribe's enrollment is a significant achievement for all involved parties, and an example of how the program can be used to protect important fish and wildlife habitat on Tribal lands. This enrollment will provide numerous benefits to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and the Hangman Creek watershed, including: the protection of critical habitat for Redband Trout and other fish and wildlife species, improved water quality, reduced soil erosion, increased carbon sequestration, and enhanced cultural and recreational opportunities for the Tribe and the public.

HFRP Easement Closed in Georgia Protecting Gopher Tortoise Habitat

The 856.5-acre Wesley R. Odom Family Partnership, LP Tract is a permanent HFRP easement closed in 2023 comprised of forested land in northwest Turner County, Georgia and eastern Crisp County, Georgia. This HFRP easement has a past use of agricultural crop production and as commercial timberland, including row-cropped agricultural land, planted pine forest (slash, loblolly, and longleaf pine), and natural forest of diverse age and character. Most, if not all, of the natural habitats found on the property are in various conditions of recovery from agricultural management, and display evidence of prolonged fire suppression. Still, the potential for longleaf pine and pine flatwoods restoration is significant. Many of the sandy uplands on the Property provide habitat for gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) and restoration efforts, including the introduction of fire, will be beneficial to the natural habitats and associated species. A significant gopher tortoise population is already present on the property, and with restoration, will be able to support an increased population. In addition to gopher tortoise, other rare species such as Hooded Pitcher plant, Eastern Diamond-backed Rattlesnake, and many other rare plants are located on the property.

The property provides important habitat for conservation of the gopher tortoise and high priority habitats including Longleaf Pine–Scrub Oak Woodlands, Pine Flatwoods, Bottomland Hardwood Forest, Depression Forested Wetlands, and blackwater streams. The easement is located within the region of Georgia where fire-dependent ecosystems once thrived, still linger, and can be substantially restored. The conservation values protected on the property include these high priority habitats and other land cover types identified with the potential for suitable gopher tortoise habitat, the wildlife that depend on these habitats, and public views provided. The property is part of a larger project with Georgia Dept of Natural Resources and The Conservation Fund, including an adjacent 1,049.5-acre conservation easement held by the Athens Land Trust. This entire contiguous project, including the Athens Land Trust conservation easement, totals approximately 1,906 acres.

ACCOUNT 7: URBAN AGRICULTURE AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION PROGRAM

APPROPRIATIONS LANGUAGE

The appropriations language follows (new language underscored; deleted matter enclosed in brackets):

For necessary expenses to carry out the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program under section 222 of subtitle A of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6923), as added by section 12302 of Public Law 115–334, [~~\$13,534,000~~]\$15,042,000.

LEAD-OFF TABULAR STATEMENT

Table NRCS-45. Lead-Off Tabular Statement (In dollars)

Item	Amount
Estimate, 2024	\$8,500,000
Change in Appropriation	+ 6,542,000
Budget Estimate, 2025	<u>15,042,000</u>

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-46. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.	Chg Key
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs			
Discretionary Appropriations:											
Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program											
Technical Assistance.....	-	-	\$8,500	1	\$8,500	7	\$15,042	7	+\$6,542	-	
Total Appropriation	-	-	8,500	1	8,500	7	15,042	7	+6,542	-	(1)
Total Available.....	-	-	8,500	1	8,500	7	15,042	7	+6,542	-	
Lapsing Balances	-	-	-48	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total Obligations	-	-	8,452	1	8,500	7	15,042	7	+6,542	-	

Note: The 2022 Enacted Appropriation was funded under the Private Lands Conservation Operations Account.

Table NRCS-47. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Discretionary Obligations:										
Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program										
Technical Assistance.....	-	-	\$8,452	1	\$8,500	7	\$15,042	7	+\$6,542	-
Total Obligations	-	-	8,452	1	8,500	7	15,042	7	+6,542	-
Lapsing Balances	-	-	48	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Available.....	-	-	8,500	1	8,500	7	15,042	7	+6,542	-
Total Appropriation	-	-	8,500	1	8,500	7	15,042	7	+6,542	-

Note: The 2022 Enacted Appropriation was funded under the Private Lands Conservation Operations Account.

JUSTIFICATION OF CHANGES

1. An increase of \$6,542,000 and no change in staff years in the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program (\$8,500,000 and 7 staff years available in 2024).
 - a) An increase of \$6,500,000 and no change in staff years in the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program.

This increase in funding will provide additional grant opportunities to historically underserved communities, complementing the outreach progress achieved over the past few years. The Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production grant program remains a highly popular program. In fiscal year 2023, total applications nearly doubled those received over previous years, yet the office only had funds for approximately 10 percent of eligible applications. The expanded grant program will assist a larger number of communities to become more economically resilient through greater access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food, while also building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers. Additionally, this increase will expand opportunities to address food loss and waste to include encouraging composting through cooperative agreements with county and local governments and other eligible

recipients. The increase in funding will help expand the Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Productions’ efforts to leverage existing authorities within USDA agencies, and other federal agencies to amplify ongoing programs that support both urban and innovative producers, while still allowing the office to manage the needs of the Federal Advisory Committee.

- b) An increase of \$42,000 for pay and employee costs in the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program.

This increase will support an annualization of the 2024 5.2 percent Cost of Living pay increase and the 2025 2.0 percent Cost of Living pay increase. If this funding is not provided, NRCS will not have adequate resources available to avoid any disruption or delays in the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program activities.

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS AND FTEs

Table NRCS-48. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory/Country	2022		2023		2024		2025	
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs
District of Columbia.....	-	-	\$8,452	1	\$8,500	7	\$15,042	7
Obligations	-	-	8,452	1	8,500	7	15,042	7
Lapsing Balances	-	-	48	-	-	-	-	-
Total, Available.....	-	-	8,500	1	8,500	7	15,042	7

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS

Table NRCS-49. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
Personnel Compensation:					
	Washington D.C.	-	\$186	\$1,369	\$1,397
11	Total personnel compensation.....	-	186	1,369	1,397
12	Personal benefits.....	-	68	502	512
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits.....	-	254	1,871	1,909
Other Objects:					
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons	-	18	77	102
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources..	-	8,159	6,543	13,020
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities....	-	21	-	-
26.0	Supplies and materials.....	-	-	9	11
	Total, Other Objects	-	8,198	6,629	13,133
99.9	Total, new obligations	-	8,452	8,500	15,042
Position Data:					
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position	-	\$191,976	\$201,959	\$205,998
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position.....	-	\$77,835	\$81,882	\$83,520
	Average Grade, GS Position.....	-	10.0	10.0	10.0

Note: The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

The 2022 Enacted Appropriation was funded under the Private Lands Conservation Operations Account.

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**URBAN AGRICULTURE AND INNOVATIVE PRODUCTION PROGRAM**

The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) was authorized by Section 12302 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill) amending Section 222 of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6911 et seq.). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated NRCS to lead the USDA-wide office, and work in partnership with numerous USDA agencies that support urban agriculture.

The mission of the OUAIP is to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices, including:

- community gardens and farms located in urban areas, suburbs, and urban clusters;
- rooftop farms, outdoor vertical production, and green walls;
- indoor farms, greenhouses, and high-tech vertical technology farms;
- hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic farm facilities; and
- other innovations in agricultural production, as determined by the Secretary.

OUAIP is directed to administer grants, cooperative agreement pilot projects in at least ten States, establish ten new Urban/Suburban County Committees for Urban Agriculture, and establish a Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture. OUAIP is also responsible for engaging in activities to carry out the mission, including managing programs for community gardens, urban farms, rooftop agriculture, and indoor vertical production; advising the Secretary; coordinating with the agencies and officials of the Department to update relevant programs; engaging in stakeholder relations and developing external partnerships; identifying common State and municipal best practices for navigating local policies; coordinating networks of community gardens and facilitating connections to local food banks, in partnership with the Food and Nutrition Service; and collaborating with other Federal agencies.

Current Activities**UAIP Competitive Grants**

UAIP Competitive Grants Program supports a wide range of activities through two grant types, which are Planning Projects and Implementation Projects. Activities include operating community gardens and nonprofit farms, increasing food production and access in economically distressed communities, providing job training and education, and developing business plans and zoning. Priority was given to projects with positive impact where limited access to healthy affordable food is an issue as listed in the USDA Food Access Research Atlas. In 2023, the fourth year of operation of this program, USDA received 302 applications in response to the Notification of Funding Opportunity. This is a significant increase in applications over the past couple of years. In comparison, last year, OUAIP received 172 applications.

Of the applications received in 2023, USDA awarded just over \$9.1 million for 31 Projects. USDA selected the top scoring 10 percent of total applications reviewed.

Since launching this program in 2020, USDA has awarded 186 projects in 45 States and territories, totally over \$46.83 million. For 2021 and 2022 only, USDA received a plus-up in funding for this program under the American Rescue Plan.

Examples of projects include:

Technical Assistance Partnership of Arizona, Phoenix, AZ

With their 2021 UAIP grant funding, the Technical Assistance Partnership of Arizona created an “Urban Food Oasis Opportunity Zone,” a unique agricultural landscape project that functions not only as a resource for fresh food but as a one-stop center for financial, health, and wellness education as well as an economic development incubator. Serving the greater area of South Phoenix, the Opportunity Zone has already become a potent fixture in transforming the economy of the area and the food security of its residents.

As a result of the project:

- 92 individuals completed a personalized economic plan for their household.
- 5 gardens have been made available to assist participating families in food production and distribution at local farmers markets and restaurants.
- 572 families reported that they now include fresh fruits and vegetables in at least one meal a day.
- 64 participants were able to find jobs or pursue further education and trade skills within the 2-year project cycle.

- 34 urban forest and edible landscaping gardens were created that provided 23,725 pounds of produce grown for distribution through the food hub.

Arkansas Interfaith Power and Light, Little Rock, AR

Engaging an impressive number of stakeholders, Arkansas University for Medical Sciences, AmeriCorps, Farm-2-School, University of Arkansas, and the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality, Arkansas Interfaith Power and Light used their 2020 UAIP funding to build upon eight years of work to improve access to local, nutritious food. The project has surpassed its goals to foster a network of connected urban gardens who share material and informational resources to produce food while assisting local growers with infrastructure to increase their food production. In addition to direct assistance, the project engaged Pulaski County residents on local food systems education: inculcating the value of fresh, healthy food while demonstrating the connection our food systems have on the environment and the local economy.

As a result of the project:

- 70 College of Public Health students were equipped with knowledge and skills to establish networks of urban growers.
- 1,722 Pulaski County Residents reported increased knowledge about the nutritional benefits of local, fresh food.
- 13 new chicken coops were established, 76 new garden beds were established, 23 new beehives, and 100 shiitake mushroom logs.
- 8 food pantries received food donations from the established network of producers.
- 4 new green houses were built and 3 were revitalized.
- 27 new garden partnerships were established with community centers, schools, and places of worship.
- 114 “garden days” were hosted at neighboring community centers, schools, and places of worship.

Common Ground Producers and Growers, Inc, Wichita, KS

An urban non-profit producer in Wichita serving Sedgwick, Harvey, Butler, and Saline Counties, Common Ground was able to increase significantly their capacity as a result of their 2020 UAIP grant funding. With their UAIP augmented mobile food market, Common Ground was able to travel across their region of impact providing fresh food at the height of the pandemic when it was needed most in their food insecure locality. To improve and expand their operation, Common Ground also engaged K-State Extensions Growing Growers program to train growers and extension students in urban agriculture while partnering with community faith-based organizations to increase the reach of their mobile market to elderly and vulnerable communities.

As a result of the project:

- 4 new contracts with local producers were entered to distribute 761 lbs. of produce per farmer to be distributed through the mobile market.
- Direct yields from Common Ground farms exceeded 13,000 lbs. for distribution.
- Cold storage facilities were established to prevent excess spoilage.
- 2 Kansas Wesleyan University were given hands on experience in market management and urban extension.

Compost and Food Waste Reduction Cooperative Agreement (CFWR) Pilot Program

Since its inception in 2020, USDA has invested over \$12.1 million through 81 awards in 33 States and territories under this pilot program. USDA received 97 applications for the CFWR Pilot Program in 2023, an increase of approximately 70 percent, up from 57 percent in 2022. Through the competitive process, USDA will award approximately \$11.8 million in approximately 38 pilot projects that develop and test strategies for planning and implementing municipal compost plans, and food waste reduction. Priority will be given to projects that anticipate or demonstrate economic benefits, incorporate plans to make compost easily accessible to farmers, including community gardeners, integrate other food waste strategies, including food recovery efforts, and collaborate with multiple partners. For 2022 through 2024 only, USDA received a plus-up in funding for this program under the American Rescue Plan.

Example results from CFWR projects are being recorded and show positive results:

Anchorage, AK

The Municipality of Anchorage has long been a pioneer when it comes to community compost programs and curbside collection. With their 2020 CFWR funding, the municipality's efforts gained a huge boost. Under their agreement, Anchorage's Department of Solid Waste Services conducted a feasibility study to engage more private businesses in food recovery efforts, connecting grocery stores and restaurants to food distribution networks. The study is being shared with local and regional partners to determine which strategies are best adapted to the unique needs of the area. Additionally, because of the project:

- The municipality's curbside collection program went from 292 residents participating to over 1,100.
- 321 tons of organic material was diverted from the Anchorage Regional Landfill (up from 56 tons in the previous year)
- The municipality engaged in a broad-based education campaign, partnering with Alaska Waste and the Alaska Food Policy Council to sensitize Anchorage residents to the procedures and benefits of composting.

Boulder County, CO

Boulder County, CO had a bold vision for a locally based, resilient, and sustainable food system and utilized their 2020 CFWR funding to help achieve it. Under their "Restore Colorado" project, participating businesses provide a small fee to a fund that helps producers engage in regenerative agricultural practices – businesses can then market local products that are low carbon or even negative carbon while area producers can transform their agricultural operations to be climate solutions. The fund has developed a composting facility that provides compost to area farmers: the 2022 CFWR project scaled this facility up to increase its capacity. As a result of the project:

- 4,262 cubic yards of compost were applied to farms in Boulder County.
- 40 tons of restaurant food waste were diverted from landfills.
- 5,343 businesses were provided guidance on food waste reduction.
- Over 1,000 businesses became directly engaged in composting their food waste.

New York, NY

The folks at New York City's Department of Sanitation are no strangers to food waste and, under their 2020 CFWR agreement, they sought to put it to use. Partnering with the non-profit Big Reuse, the city established composting stations at community gardens, urban farms, public libraries, and other strategic sites. Big Reuse transformed the collected waste into high-quality compost for use in urban farms throughout NYC. Data from the project informed New York City's broader strategic plan for residential composting for all five boroughs and demonstrated the viability of using food waste to restore urban soils. As a result of the project:

- 20 food waste drop off stations were established.
- 694,000 pounds of food scraps were collected.
- 432.1 cubic yards of finished compost were distributed to urban farms and gardens.

Urban and Suburban County Committees

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized the Secretary to establish ten new Urban and Suburban Farm Service Agency (FSA) County Committees as part of a five-year pilot project. Prior to 2023, FSA announced 17 locations, including Albuquerque, New Mexico; Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago, Illinois; Cleveland, Ohio; Dallas, Texas; Detroit, Michigan; Grand Rapids, Michigan; Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minnesota; Los Angeles / Compton, California; New York City, New York; New Orleans, Louisiana; Oakland, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Phoenix, Arizona; Portland, Oregon; Richmond, Virginia; and St. Louis, Missouri. These committees will make important decisions about how Federal farm programs are administered locally. Their input is vital to how FSA carries out disaster programs, as well as conservation, commodity and price support programs, county office employment, and other agricultural issues. The committees also help FSA develop outreach, business, and operation plans and associated policies; and conduct national trainings and outreach sessions. In each of these cities, OUAIP is coordinating with FSA and NRCS on the opening of Urban Service Centers (USC) to bolster the work done by the Urban County Committees. Staff from both FSA and NRCS will be collocated within these 17 new USCs. OUAIP will assist with staff training and cross-USC communication and collaboration.

FSA is the lead agency for establishing these committees but worked closely with OUAIP to announce six new urban county committees in 2023, these will be in Boston, Massachusetts; Columbia, South Carolina; Denver, Colorado; Houston, Texas; Jackson, Mississippi; Kansas City, Missouri; Los Vegas, Nevada; Little Rock, Arkansas; Memphis, Tennessee; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Elections will be held for these locations during the next County Committee election cycle.

Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Federal Advisory Committee

In February 2022, the OUAIP announced the 12 members appointed to the USDA Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Advisory Committee (Committee) pursuant to 7 U.S.C. 6923(b)(1). The Committee is to advise the Director of OUIAP and the Secretary on the development of policies and outreach relating to the notice of funding opportunity for urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural production practices. The Committee will operate in accordance with the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), as amended, 5 U.S.C. App. 2, and 41 CFR 102-3.

In January 2023, the Committee renewed the Charter for an additional two-years, along with reappointing four of the initially appointed members who were selected for a 1-year term. In the summer of 2023, the OUAIP announced open nominations in anticipation of the four vacancies expected for the initially appointed members who were selected for a 2-year term. Over 80 nominations were received for these four vacancies. In January 2024, the Secretary of Agriculture appointed four new members.

To date, the Committee has held eight public meetings with over 5,500 registered attendees and received over 1,200 written and/or oral comments for the record.

As a result of the first seven meetings, the Committee was able to deliberate and vote on 14 recommendations that are consistent with the 2018 Farm Bill for USDA's consideration. The recommendations, if enacted would affect change in at least nine different USDA agencies and offices. The Committee's first 14 recommendations have been compiled in a final report in accordance with provisions in the 2018 Farm Bill requiring the Committee to submit this report recommendations to the Secretary, the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives, and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate.

Managing Programs to Encourage and Promote Urban, Indoor, and Other Emerging Agricultural Practices

One of the initiatives the OUAIP is using to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices is through the restart of the People's Garden Initiative. USDA originally launched the People's Garden Initiative in 2009, and the initiative was renewed by Secretary Tom Vilsack in May 2022. It's named for the "People's Department," former President Abraham Lincoln's nickname for USDA, which was established during his presidency in 1862. The USDA Headquarters People's Garden is located on the corner of Jefferson Drive and 12th Street, S.W. in Washington, D.C. It educates the public about sustainable gardening practices and local food access. The garden showcases food grown in containers for small urban spaces, raised beds for community plots, and fruit trees. There are also active beehives on the rooftop of the USDA Whitten Building.

In 2023, the People's Garden Initiative continues to expand. There are flagship gardens located in urban communities nationwide. In addition, USDA has launched a registered program for gardens across the country to sign-up to be a People's Garden by filling out the registration form on the [People's Garden website](#). To date over 1500 gardens have registered representing all 50 States, Puerto Rico, and Guam. To participate, gardens must register as part of the People's Garden network, grow using sustainable practices that benefit people and wildlife, and teach about local, resilient food systems.

Key activities and partnerships developed in 2023 include:

- Partnered with the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and Extension Foundation to establish a People's Garden subgroup on the Extension Foundation Connect site. On this platform, gardens can learn about upcoming USDA activities and share information across the network.
- Launched the People's Garden monthly webinar series with over 2,000 registered participants attending the first six webinars of the series. Topics have ranged from composting, brownfields, pollinators, culture and community to climate-smart agriculture, and Food and Nutrition Service resources. Guest presenters have included USDA staff from NRCS, FNS, Forest Service, Office of the Chief Economist, USDA Climate Hubs, and USDA Invasive Species Information Center, as well as subject matter experts from other federal agencies such as EPA and US Peace Corps and external partners including Xerces Society and NFWF.
- Partnered with the USDA Office of Tribal Relations to amplify the USDA Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative.
- Collaborated with the Embassy of Canada on the first foreign embassy People's Garden.
- Established collaboration with DC Central Kitchen and Food Rescue to ensure all food produced at the Headquarters People's Garden is donated.

- Partnered with University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Seed to Kitchen Collective for People's Garden website content focused on the unique varieties of produce grown at the HQ People's Garden and the value of independent and public sector seed breeders.

Identifying Common State and Municipal Best Practices for Navigating Local Policies.

OUAIP is partnering with USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), National Agricultural Library (NAL), and external partners to develop a Local and Regional Food Systems Policy Collaborative and Database. Through this project, the partnership will establish an advisory committee comprised of external organizations and producers working in this space to glean lessons learned and stakeholder needs, identify opportunities to partner and collaborate, and pool and amplify resources. The group will collaborate on a Local and Regional Food Systems database (LRFS database) that builds on existing efforts by institutions and organizations to create a LRFS policy clearinghouse(s). The LRFS database will include state and local policies and best practices on topics including but not limited to agritourism, cottage food, farm to institution/government procurement, farmers' markets and other local food retail, and innovative production policies. Complimentary resources, such as fact sheets, case studies, and webinars, will be produced to help stakeholders easily digest best practices, policy gaps and opportunities, and lessons learned.

For its pilot phase, OUAIP in collaboration with AMS and NAL has entered an agreement with Vermont Law and Graduate School to establish the advisory committee and collect and build out resources that support urban agriculture and innovative production. The goals for this first phase are to showcase:

- 1) How policies from states down to local governments impact urban agriculture and innovative producers.
- 2) Best practices for urban agriculture and innovative producers to navigate state and local policies, and for government at all levels to support this group of producers.

Coordinating with the Agencies and Officials of the Department to update relevant programs.

OUAIP has coordinated with several agencies within the Department to update and market relevant programs. The Office has coordinated with the Farm Production and Conservation-Business Center (FPAC-BC) to create the Urban Agriculture at-a-Glance document which replaces the Urban Agriculture Toolkit and is available in multiple languages. The document highlights 45 technical and financial assistance programs that can be used for urban and innovative agriculture.

OUAIP holds quarterly meetings with its grant and agreement recipients to provide program updates and new program opportunities, including resources available within USDA and other federal agencies. For example, the Risk Management Agency was invited to speak about updates to its Whole Farm Revenue Protection and Micro Farm Policies and its new Controlled Environment Insurance Program. In addition, these meetings serve as a platform for recipients to showcase project highlights and share their successes and challenges.

Internal USDA Advisory Committee

USDA established an internal advisory committee with membership from agencies that have a mission which services urban agriculture and innovation. Tasks of the committee initially included developing an outreach plan and providing specifics on resources and commitments to be attained through individual agencies to carry out collaborative efforts supporting urban agriculture. In addition, members developed recommendations on priorities and mechanisms for achieving statutory requirements. The committee also ensures dedicated agency staff with relevant urban agriculture and innovative production responsibilities to develop guidance and policy recommendations for USDA leadership.

The committee has funded, coordinated, or partnered with multiple agencies to meet its mission to encourage and promote urban and innovative agriculture. Highlights include:

- Coordinated with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to create several new payment scenarios under the EQIP and CIG programs to support urban, small-scale and innovative producers and to remove unnecessary engineering requirements.
- Partnered with Forest Service (FS) to identify local planners and ambassadors for the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and participated in the selection process for a \$1 billion Urban and Community Forestry program investment in nearly 400 projects to expand access to trees and green spaces in communities and neighborhoods nationwide which included urban agroforestry and food forest projects.
- Partnered with the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) to select the 12 new USDA Regional Food Business Centers that will provide national coverage coordination, technical assistance, and capacity

building to help farmers, ranchers, and other food businesses access new markets and navigate federal, state, and local resources. This new capacity is critical to bridge the current gaps to successful expansion of urban and innovative agriculture and for promoting these programs in tribal communities.

- Coordinated with the Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) to choose urban agriculture as a priority for the Cochran Fellowship program for the first time in the program’s history. At the time of this publication the Cochran Fellowship is finalizing agreements with four US minority serving universities to design training courses and host fellows in the coming year.
- Partnered with Risk Management Agency (RMA) to select the Risk Management Education Partnership Program recipients for 2023, which included \$6.5 million to 22 organizations to educate underserved, small-scale, and organic producers on farm risk management and climate-smart farm practices including several urban agriculture organizations.
- Partnered with the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Department of Energy (DOE), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on the Advancing Controlled Environment Agriculture on Land and in Space in the next 20 years conference. The conference promoted USDA programs to over 100 innovative production organizations.
- Partnered with National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) Extension Foundation to create a subgroup on their “Connect” site for promotion of the People’s Garden and to market training webinars.
- Partnered with the Office of Partnership and Public Engagement (OPPE) on virtual Earth Day event to promote urban agriculture to environmental groups and faith-based organizations. Also partnered with OPPE to promote urban agriculture to the next generation of farmers and agricultural industry workers through the 1890 Center for Excellence Student Success & Workforce Development Symposium and the 2023 USDA E. Kika De La Garza Fellows participants.
- Partnered with the Food Nutrition Service (FNS) to promote urban agriculture with the Center of Law and Social Policy Community Driven Policy and Practice (CDPP) Virtual Convening.
- Collaborated with NIFA, FSA, FBC, AMS, RD, and NRCS in the 2023 Ag Outlook Forum. The booth was the 4th most liked of 40 USDA’s Forum-related booths based on feedback in tweets on social media which garnered over 6,000 impressions.

Engaging in Stakeholder Relations and Developing External Partnerships:

- OUAIP has developed a stakeholder topic and outreach lists to promote stakeholder relations. In 2023, the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production topic experienced an increase of 24 percent in subscribers over last year (+16,572). The Office has sent over 45 bulletins to the stakeholder list.
- OUAIP develops the “Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Newsletter” which highlights technical and financial assistance opportunities from across USDA and other federal agencies, important department highlights and announcements, People’s Garden activities, and other resources and information related to urban agriculture and innovative production.
- The Office partnered with the AMS Local and Regional Food System Workgroup on a national webinar training open to the public on local food systems in Philadelphia which reached over 1,000 people. To date, the office’s public and internal trainings have reached over 3,000 individuals and organizations.
- OUAIP has developed partnerships with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Xerces Society to support the People’s Garden Initiative, including direct assistance to People’s Gardens in the 17 USDA Urban Hubs, the USDA Headquarters People’s Garden, and outreach and technical assistance through the People’s Garden webinar series.
- OUAIP holds quarterly roundtables with all UAIP and CFWR recipients to encourage the sharing of information, best-practices, and building networks.

Coordinating Networks of Community Gardens and Facilitating Connections to Local Food Banks, in Partnership with the Food and Nutrition Service.

- OUAIP provides all grant and agreement recipients with the information to encourage sign up for the USDA Local Food Directory and provides them with a list of Local Food Banks that the Food and Nutrition Service works with in partnership with Feeding America.
- OUAIP is showcasing USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service resources through the People’s Garden Webinar Series, connecting this customer network with financial and technical resources.
- The office supported a Food and Nutrition Service detailee who developed a donation form to capture produce and items donated through the People’s Garden Initiative.

- Organizations that received UAIP awards have reported servicing 58 zip codes known as food deserts and are promoting food and nutrition security.

Collaborating with other Federal Agencies.

OUAIP continues to develop strategic Federal partnerships with other departments and agencies. The following partnerships are established or in development:

- Partnered with the EPA Pollution Prevention (P2) Grant Program to market programs to minority serving institutions that are stakeholders with the office. The partnership directly resulted in the first ever award to a Historically Black College and University (Southern University).
- Partnered with USDA Rural Development and the Department of Labor to create the first Agriculture Industry Registered Apprenticeship Community of Practice. The purpose of the community is to connect stakeholders to existing registered apprenticeship programs and help new stakeholders create or collaborate on new ones. The inaugural work session included over 100 attendees from across the agricultural sector.
- Collaborated at the local level with the EPA Urban Federal Waters Partnership in Anacostia, Washington, DC. This included work plan development and outreach at the Rooting DC Conference.
- Initiated collaboration with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) at a national and regional level. Potential HUD programs for future partnerships include the Choice Neighborhoods and National Coalition of Promise Zones.
- Initiated collaboration with EPA under the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, and further engagement with EPA regarding food loss and waste and to promote Composting and Food Waste Reduction cooperative agreements.
- Presented at Brownfields 2023 on USDA resources available for local, resilient food systems. This has led to further collaboration with the EPA Office of Brownfields and Land Revitalization to promote resources available for communities to grow food safely.
- Continued partnerships with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the USDA Military Veterans Agricultural Liaison that has provided opportunities for OUAIP to present at the Farmer Veteran Coalition's annual meeting and the USDA Beginning Farming and Ranching Webinar for Transitioning Service Members, Veterans, and Military Spouses.
- Shared data and technical contacts with the Department of Energy.
- OUAIP intends to engage Department of Veteran Affairs and Labor to ensure there is continued discussion of workforce development and support of veterans within the space of urban ag and innovative production.
- The office will continue conversations with the United States Botanical Garden and Smithsonian Gardens to identify areas of overlap with their Urban Agriculture Resilience Program.

This page was intentionally left blank.

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

ACCOUNT 8: FARM SECURITY AND RURAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS

PROJECT STATEMENTS

Table NRCS-50. Project Statement on Basis of Appropriations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
Discretionary Appropriations:										
Wetlands Mitigation Banking	\$5,000	-	\$5,000	-	\$5,000	-	-	-	-\$5,000	-
Subtotal	5,000	-	5,000	-	5,000	-	-	-	-5,000	-
Mandatory Appropriations:										
Environmental Quality Incentive Program	1,713,813	2,943	1,878,838	2,643	1,878,838	4,094	\$1,873,473	4,095	-5,365	+1
Conservation Stewardship Program (2018)	733,216	929	921,816	990	921,816	1,079	918,119	1,080	-3,697	+1
Conservation Stewardship Program (2014)	-	420	-	347	-	-	-	-	-	-
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	416,043	411	416,043	365	416,043	585	414,593	586	-1,450	+1
Regional Conservation Partnership Program	282,900	146	282,900	196	282,900	113	282,900	114	-	+1
Conservation Reserve Program (TA Only)	220,770	1,530	220,770	1,283	220,770	1,470	220,770	1,470	-	-
Agricultural Management Assistance	4,715	7	4,715	4	4,715	6	4,715	6	-	-
Environmental Quality Incentive Program – IRA	-	-	250,000	175	1,650,250	1,145	2,829,000	1,145	+1,178,750	-
Conservation Stewardship Program – IRA	-	-	250,000	73	471,500	264	943,000	264	+471,500	-
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – IRA ...	-	-	100,000	35	188,600	122	471,500	122	+282,900	-
Regional Conservation Partnership Program – IRA	-	-	250,000	26	754,400	29	1,414,500	29	+660,100	-
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Prg.	-	1	-	1	10,000	2	-	-	-10,000	-2
Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program	-	4	-	4	7,500	2	-	-	-7,500	-2
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wetlands Reserve Program	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	-
Subtotal	3,371,457	6,394	4,575,082	6,143	6,807,332	8,913	9,372,570	8,913	+2,565,238	-
Total Adjusted Approp	3,376,457	6,394	4,580,082	6,143	6,812,332	8,913	9,372,570	8,913	+2,560,238	-
Add back:										
Transfers In and Out, Rescissions	60,228	-	60,228	-	60,228	-	70,740	-	+10,512	-
Sequestration	207,430	-	228,805	-	414,055	-	570,805	-	+156,750	-
Total Appropriation	3,644,115	6,394	4,869,115	6,143	7,286,615	8,913	10,014,115	8,913	+2,727,500	-
Transfers Out:										
NRCS/ACEP	-8,307	-	-8,307	-	-8,307	-	-9,757	-	-1,450	-
NRCS/CSP	-21,184	-	-21,184	-	-21,184	-	-24,881	-	-3,697	-
NRCS/EQIP	-30,737	-	-30,737	-	-30,737	-	-36,102	-	-5,365	-
Total Transfers Out	-60,228	-	-60,228	-	-60,228	-	-70,740	-	-10,512	-
Sequestration	-207,430	-	-228,805	-	-414,055	-	-570,805	-	-156,750	-
Recoveries, Other	457,206	-	159,768	-	136,337	-	-279,499	-	-415,836	-
Bal. Available, SOY	2,513,060	-	2,470,146	-	2,457,877	-	2,440,228	-	-17,649	-

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Total Available.....	6,346,723	6,394	7,209,996	6,143	9,406,546	8,913	11,533,299	8,913	+2,126,753	-
Lapsing Balances	-795	-	-550	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY	-2,470,146	-	-2,457,877	-	-2,440,228	-	-3,507,623	-	-1,067,395	-
Total Obligations	3,875,782	6,394	4,751,569	6,143	6,966,318	8,913	8,025,676	8,913	+1,059,358	-

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

Table NRCS-51. Project Statement on Basis of Obligations (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

Item	2022		2023		2024		2025		Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
	Actual	FTEs	Actual	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs	Estimated	FTEs		
Discretionary Obligations:										
Wetlands Mitigation Banking	\$4,734	-	\$4,260	-	\$5,975	-	\$5,030	-	-\$945	-
Subtotal Disc Obligations	4,734	-	4,260	-	5,975	-	5,030	-	-945	-
Mandatory Obligations:										
Environmental Quality Incentive Program	1,955,321	2,943	2,175,674	2,643	2,156,339	4,094	1,839,080	4,095	-317,259	+1
Conservation Stewardship Program (2018)	803,445	929	899,696	990	1,027,404	1,079	919,035	1,080	-108,369	+1
Conservation Stewardship Program (2014)	100,379	420	101,932	347	59,243	-	-	-	-59,243	-
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program	515,143	411	483,617	365	595,966	585	429,598	586	-166,368	+1
Regional Conservation Partnership Program	172,978	146	240,225	196	685,647	113	392,435	114	-293,212	+1
Conservation Reserve Program (TA Only)	280,717	1,530	241,327	1,283	243,366	1,470	203,025	1,470	-40,341	-
Agricultural Management Assistance	4,401	7	4,165	4	4,715	6	4,715	6	-	-
Environmental Quality Incentive Program – IRA	-	-	223,309	175	1,351,429	1,145	2,445,710	1,145	+1,094,281	-
Conservation Stewardship Program – IRA	-	-	247,243	73	415,327	264	842,819	264	+427,492	-
Agricultural Conservation Easement Program – IRA ...	-	-	96,397	35	170,636	122	450,463	122	+279,827	-
Regional Conservation Partnership Program – IRA	-	-	22,461	26	200,880	29	471,050	29	+270,170	-
Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Prg.	397	1	137	1	10,000	2	-	-	-10,000	-2
Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program	714	4	858	4	7,500	2	-	-	-7,500	-2
Agricultural Water Enhancement Program	-5	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program	54	1	56	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program	23,518	-	5,913	-	20,143	-	15,107	-	-5,036	-
Grassland Reserve Program	4,337	-	1,230	-	4,393	-	3,295	-	-1,098	-
Wetlands Mitigation Banking Program	329	-	68	-	306	-	-	-	-306	-
Wetlands Reserve Program	9,137	1	2,869	-	6,363	1	407	1	-5,956	-
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program	142	1	123	1	150	1	235	1	+85	-
Healthy Forests Reserve Program	36	-	4	-	536	-	3,672	-	+3,136	-
Conservation Security Program	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subtotal Mand Obligations	3,871,048	6,394	4,747,309	6,143	6,960,343	8,913	8,020,646	8,913	+1,060,303	-
Total Obligations	3,875,782	6,394	4,751,569	6,143	6,966,318	8,913	8,025,676	8,913	+1,059,358	-
Add back:										
Lapsing Balances	795	-	550	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Item	2022 Actual	FTEs	2023 Actual	FTEs	2024 Estimated	FTEs	2025 Estimated	FTEs	Inc. or Dec.	FTE Inc. or Dec.
Balances Available, EOY:										
Discretionary	5,266	-	6,005	-	5,030	-	-	-	-5,030	-
Mandatory	2,464,880	-	2,451,872	-	2,435,198	-	3,507,623	-	+1,072,425	-
Total Bal. Available, EOY	2,470,146	-	2,457,877	-	2,440,228	-	3,507,623	-	+1,067,395	-
Total Available.....	6,346,723	6,394	7,209,996	6,143	9,406,546	8,913	11,533,299	8,913	+2,126,753	-
Less:										
Total Transfers Out	60,228	-	60,228	-	60,228	-	70,740	-	+10,512	-
Sequestration.....	207,430	-	228,805	-	414,055	-	570,805	-	+156,750	-
Recoveries, Other	-457,206	-	-159,768	-	-136,337	-	279,499	-	+415,836	-
Bal. Available, SOY	-2,513,060	-	-2,470,146	-	-2,457,877	-	-2,440,228	-	+17,649	-
Total Appropriation	3,644,115	6,394	4,869,115	6,143	7,286,615	8,913	10,014,115	8,913	+2,727,500	-

Note: The project statement and Budget Appendix discrepancy is due to reimbursable funding and FTEs, which are not included in the project statement.

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF OBLIGATIONS

Table NRCS-52. Geographic Breakdown of Obligations and FTEs (thousands of dollars, FTEs)

State/Territory /Country	ACEP	AMAP	AWEP	CBWP	CSPG	CRPG	CSTP	EQIP	FRPP	FSCP	GRPG	HFRP	RCP	VPAP	WHIP	WMBP	WRPG	IRA- ACEP	IRA- EQIP	IRA- CSTP	IRA- RCP
Alabama	\$2,176	-	-	-	-	\$1,691	\$20,776	\$42,995	-	-	-	-	\$464	-	-	-	-	\$120	\$3,312	\$5,850	-
Alaska	268	-	-	-	-	286	568	12,909	-	-	-	-	345	-	-	-	-	132	2,203	-	\$101
Arizona.....	5,762	-	-	-	-	385	6,040	24,834	-	-	-	-	7,918	\$1	-	-	-	-	2,044	3,534	-
Arkansas.....	7,855	-	-	-	-	1,858	54,000	91,337	-	\$131	-	-	11,741	-11	-	-	-	-	6,144	11,096	117
California.....	18,271	-	-	-	-	977	12,376	120,489	-	-	-	-	9,743	-	\$9	-	\$50	153	8,574	1,590	572
Colorado.....	11,261	-	-	-	-	4,611	17,994	46,231	-	-	-	-	1,480	-	-	-	76	48	3,347	2,950	89
Connecticut.....	2,105	\$116	-	-	-	214	890	8,421	-	-	-	-	2,032	-	-	-	-	151	1,265	28	71
Delaware.....	3,482	95	-	-	-	152	496	8,542	-	-	-	-	58	-	-	-	-	67	818	181	-
District of Columbia .	108,686	-	-	-	-	48,380	138,176	222,409	\$5,913	42	\$1,142	-	26,236	70	-	\$15	2,277	16,811	45,982	63,246	16,360
Florida.....	24,431	-	-	-	-	472	11,755	39,669	-	-	-	-	3,206	-	-	-	-	2,787	3,545	3,079	256
Georgia.....	11,563	-	-	-	-	2,037	30,970	64,207	-	-	-	-\$1	2,869	22	-	-	-	9	6,272	5,805	-
Hawaii.....	349	205	-	-	-	401	2,456	16,077	-	39	-	-	4,165	-	-	-	-	53	1,629	638	91
Idaho.....	5,657	-	-	-	-	1,390	8,637	44,353	-	-	-	-	721	3	5	-	-	68	3,233	1,915	-
Illinois.....	5,677	-	-	-	-	19,913	34,647	39,711	-	-	-	-	14,986	-	-	3	2	1,027	3,691	5,357	-
Indiana.....	10,269	-	-	-	-	7,709	19,561	40,166	-	-	-	-	2,744	9	-	696	-	4,360	4,762	4,247	-
Iowa.....	8,193	-	-	-	-	27,990	23,176	46,007	-	-	-	-	32,706	-	-	698	-	9,786	4,958	5,524	142
Kansas.....	3,524	-	-	-	-	9,802	35,087	53,436	-	-	-	-	1,713	-	-	-	-	2,031	3,879	7,089	26
Kentucky.....	8,477	-	-	-	-	3,182	12,736	34,162	-	-	-	-	533	32	3	-	-	58	4,052	2,820	-
Louisiana.....	39,700	-	-	-	-	1,695	29,679	30,567	-	80	-	-	3,093	-	61	-	-	-	2,787	5,376	78
Maine.....	311	679	-	-	-	302	1,586	15,468	-	-	-	-	1,797	-	4	-	-	112	1,291	655	145
Maryland.....	2,630	290	-	-	-	1,948	3,040	20,684	-	-	-	-	1,727	-	-	-	-	8,165	1,679	23	261
Massachusetts.....	3,338	188	-	-	-	220	1,661	7,712	-	-	-	-	1,366	-	32	-	-	124	1,351	205	164
Michigan.....	4,238	-	-	-	-	3,744	14,962	27,978	-	-	-	6	2,297	-5	-	1,012	-	201	4,027	4,293	197
Minnesota.....	2,110	-	\$5	-	-	14,695	40,914	47,922	-	-	-	-	5,511	-	-	-16	-	1,129	3,869	6,489	177
Mississippi.....	18,341	-	-	-	-	4,352	35,752	83,832	-	-	-	-	2,430	-	-	8	-	12	6,490	10,370	-
Missouri.....	9,674	-	-	-	-	8,073	30,434	53,779	-	344	-	-	2,687	-	5	15	-	1,550	5,826	5,576	326
Montana.....	27,658	-	-	-	-	2,962	27,280	50,247	-	-	-	-	4,984	4	-	-	64	7,224	3,483	5,370	386
Nebraska.....	3,953	-	-	-	-	7,177	35,224	39,851	-	-	-	-	5,522	7	-	26	-	426	2,984	5,729	214
Nevada.....	191	329	-	-	-	184	1,716	10,867	-	-	-	-	135	-	-	-	44	161	775	464	-
New Hampshire.....	4,039	128	-	-	-	229	1,981	7,082	-	-	-	-	2,602	-	-	-	-	161	824	514	70
New Jersey.....	1,130	266	-	-	-	494	785	11,180	-	-	-	-	607	-	1	-	-	109	1,698	140	68
New Mexico.....	1,829	-	-	-	-	1,154	27,455	33,692	-	-	-	-	5,923	-	-	-	-	8	4,940	5,700	-
New York.....	4,183	323	-	\$56	-	867	6,725	24,450	-	-	-	-	1,634	-	-	-	36	142	2,411	439	-
North Carolina.....	10,110	-	-	-	-	1,017	12,740	44,876	-	-	-	-	4,945	-	-	-	-	3,569	3,686	5,549	209
North Dakota.....	1,693	-	-	-	-	6,288	40,300	27,312	-	-	-	-	3,603	-	-	15	-	77	3,419	7,667	144
Ohio.....	7,089	-	-	-	-	10,548	9,140	38,688	-	-	-	-	5,142	-	-	-	-	1,396	4,835	2,051	-
Oklahoma.....	1,340	-	-	-	-	2,431	23,503	39,287	-	76	-	-1	187	-	-	-	-	1,292	4,134	5,327	-
Oregon.....	8,019	-	-	-	-	1,835	24,926	40,194	-	-	-	-	11,862	10	-	-	-	78	2,320	5,520	742
Pennsylvania.....	2,758	287	-	-	-	2,994	12,064	37,708	-	-	88	-	5,794	-	1	-	-	64	3,820	2,773	-
Puerto Rico.....	158	-	-	-	-	156	1,433	21,436	-	-	-	-	233	-	-	-	-	-	2,919	458	-
Rhode Island.....	1,352	150	-	-	-	174	680	4,975	-	-	-	-	467	-	-	-	-	71	492	125	98
South Carolina.....	2,865	-	-	-	-	547	14,605	41,063	-	63	-	-	173	-20	-	-	-	60	2,302	2,584	10
South Dakota.....	4,264	-	-	-	-	12,509	38,333	36,712	-	-	-	-	13,514	4	-	1,014	-	2,221	3,734	8,559	406
Tennessee.....	8,768	-	-	-	-	1,910	17,699	55,440	-	-	-	-	774	-	-	-	-	50	4,068	5,712	93
Texas.....	21,438	-	-	-	-	9,582	24,519	159,334	-	83	-	-	5,679	-3	1	-	-	27,381	14,831	4,830	259

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

State/Territory /Country	ACEP	AMAP	AWEP	CBWP	CSPG	CRPG	CSTP	EQIP	FRPP	FSCP	GRPG	HFRP	RCP	VPAP	WHIP	WMBP	WRPG	IRA-ACEP	IRA-EQIP	IRA-CSTP	IRA-RCP
Utah.....	8,778	131	-	-	-	397	12,567	42,016	-	-	-	-	5,452	-	-	-	-	5	1,958	560	-
Vermont.....	5,049	176	-	-	-	503	2,253	19,546	-	-	-	-	3,218	-	1	-	-	65	1,241	504	231
Virginia.....	3,958	-	-	-	-	1,506	22,555	35,239	-	-	-	-	2,005	-	-	-	-	4	3,134	5,118	2
Washington.....	2,787	-	-	-	-	3,656	16,955	28,216	-	-	-	-	5,047	14	-	-	-	138	4,523	5,189	-
West Virginia.....	952	688	-	-	-	655	6,412	20,558	-	-	-	-	720	-	-	-	-	32	1,497	1,500	-
Wisconsin.....	21,017	-	-	-	-	4,562	26,325	31,883	-	-	-	-	4,163	-	-	842	310	2,692	3,666	5,224	338
Wyoming.....	9,891	114	-	-	-	511	5,084	29,925	-	-	-	-	1,272	-	-	-	10	17	2,585	1,701	18
Obligations.....	483,617	4,165	5	56	-	241,327	1,001,628	2,175,674	5,913	858	1,230	4	240,225	137	123	4,328	2,869	96,397	223,309	247,243	22,461
Lapsing Balances.....	-	550	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bal. Available, EOY ..	306,341	-	6,293	8,255	\$7,148	34,866	431,831	425,180	80,571	-	17,573	5,357	1,110,691	4,020	6,543	6,365	6,842	3,603	26,691	2,757	227,539
Total, Available*....	789,958	4,715	6,298	8,311	7,148	276,193	1,433,459	2,600,854	86,484	858	18,803	5,361	1,350,916	4,157	6,666	10,693	9,711	100,000	250,000	250,000	250,000

*Total Available balance does not include reimbursable unobligated balances.

CLASSIFICATION BY OBJECTS**Table NRCS-53. Classification by Objects (thousands of dollars)**

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
	Personnel Compensation:				
	Washington D.C.....	\$16,105	\$23,368	\$36,446	\$37,173
	Personnel Compensation, Field.....	450,461	452,102	705,126	719,195
11	Total personnel compensation.....	466,566	475,470	741,572	756,368
12	Personal benefits	191,749	206,922	322,132	328,570
13.0	Benefits for former personnel	57	87	116	116
	Total, personnel comp. and benefits	658,372	682,479	1,063,820	1,085,054
	Other Objects:				
21.0	Travel and transportation of persons.....	7,515	14,881	18,686	14,233
22.0	Transportation of things	2,204	1,521	1,788	1,237
23.1	Rental payments to GSA.....	18,632	21,274	32,874	39,269
23.2	Rental payments to others	49,992	56,163	78,276	82,733
23.3	Communications, utilities, and misc. charges.....	7,301	13,847	16,812	24,864
24.0	Printing and reproduction.....	28	63	74	51
25.1	Advisory and assistance services	-138	-918	-	-
25.2	Other services from non-Federal sources.....	326,795	334,635	421,519	651,355
25.3	Other goods and services from Federal sources.....	2,960	45,826	4,186	4,228
25.4	Operation and maintenance of facilities.....	280,162	353,893	420,724	317,266
25.54	Project services.....	-	-197	-	-
25.7	Operation and maintenance of equipment.....	53	277	325	225
26.0	Supplies and materials.....	7,312	7,950	9,438	7,759
26.1	Project materials.....	2	-	-	-
31.0	Equipment	25,014	60,159	87,042	110,405
32.0	Land and structures	213,887	231,185	282,205	326,333
41.0	Grants, subsidies, and contributions.....	2,275,653	2,928,530	4,528,548	5,360,663
42.0	Insurance Claims and Indemnities	36	-	-	-
43.0	Interest and Dividends.....	2	1	1	1
	Total, Other Objects	3,217,410	4,069,090	5,902,498	6,940,622
99.9	Total, new obligations	3,875,782	4,751,569	6,966,318	8,025,676
	DHS Building Security Payments (included in 25.3)	\$2,960	\$3,396	\$4,186	\$4,228
	Information Technology Investments:				
	FBC-1001 Cust Engagement & Mgmt Svcs				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors)	\$9,139	\$9,163	-	-
	Total FBC-1001 Cust Engagement & Mgmt Svcs.....	9,139	9,163	-	-
	FPAC-1002 Geospatial Services				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors)	4,625	14,828	\$1,037	-
25.2	Outside Services (Consulting).....	10,715	368	216	\$463
	Total FPAC-1002 Geospatial Services	15,340	15,196	1,253	463
	FSA-129 Program Financial Services				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors)	46	48	-	-
	Total FSA-129 Program Financial Services	46	48	-	-
	NRCS-1401 Natural Resources & Mgmt Info.				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors)	-	-	5,207	6,701
	Total NRCS-1401 Natural Resources & Mgmt Info...	-	-	5,207	6,701
	NRCS-1402 Conservation Field Delivery Programs				
25.2	External Labor (Contractors)	-	-	54,136	67,999
	Total NRCS-1402 Conservation Field Delivery Prg. ..	-	-	54,136	67,999
	Total Major Investments	24,525	24,407	60,596	75,163
	Mission Area Non-Major Investment Totals	134,195	78,418	-	-
	Mission Area Standard Investment Totals	45,714	31,536	12,958	12,958
	Mission Area WCF Transfers	132,459	136,346	8,639	17,278
	Total IT Investments.....	336,893	270,707	82,193	105,399

2025 USDA EXPLANATORY NOTES - NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

Item No.	Item	2022 Actual	2023 Actual	2024 Estimated	2025 Estimated
Cybersecurity					
	Identify	n/a	\$223	\$113	\$113
	Protect	n/a	198	102	102
	Detect	n/a	158	80	80
	Respond.....	n/a	34	18	18
	Recover	n/a	106	54	54
	Total Cybersecurity	-	719	367	367
Position Data:					
	Average Salary (dollars), ES Position.....	\$186,454	\$191,976	\$201,959	\$205,998
	Average Salary (dollars), GS Position	\$73,727	\$77,835	\$81,882	\$83,520
	Average Grade, GS Position	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0

Note: The position data reported above is representative of data collected across all funding sources provided to NRCS, including, but not limited to, Private Lands Conservation Operations, Watershed Rehabilitation (Technical Assistance), Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (Technical Assistance), Water Bank Program (Technical Assistance), and Farm Security and Rural Investment Program (Technical Assistance).

This page was intentionally left blank.

STATUS OF PROGRAMS**FARM SECURITY AND RURAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMS**

Throughout this publication, the “2018 Farm Bill” is used to refer to the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018. Most programs funded by the 2018 Farm Bill through 2023 were extended through 2024 via the one-year Farm Bill extension within the Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extensions Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-22). Amounts shown in 2025 for most Farm Bill programs reflect those confirmed in the baseline.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) is authorized by subtitle H of title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by Section 2301 of the 2014 Farm Bill (P. L. 113-79) and sections 2601-2605 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (2018 Farm Bill). ACEP consolidates the purposes and functions of three former easement programs that are no longer authorized: Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). Lands previously enrolled under these former easement programs are now considered enrolled in ACEP and are eligible to receive financial and technical assistance services authorized under ACEP.

ACEP is funded by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC) and is a voluntary program through which NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands, and their related benefits, by directly acquiring or funding the acquisition of conservation easements on private or tribal lands. ACEP has two components - ACEP-Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) and ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE).

ACEP-ALE helps farmers and ranchers keep their land in agriculture and continue as working lands. The program also protects grazing uses and related conservation values by conserving grassland, including rangeland, pastureland, and shrubland. ACEP-ALE easements require partnership with cooperating entities, which include Indian Tribes, State and local governments, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that are committed to the long-term conservation of agricultural lands.

ACEP-ALE protects the Nation’s most valuable lands for production of food, feed, and fiber by providing matching funds to ensure productive farmlands and ranchlands remain in agricultural use. By enrolling in ACEP-ALE, farmlands and ranchlands under commercial development pressures can remain productive and sustainable. Keeping land in agricultural use also reduces the amount of urban pollution (nitrogen, phosphorus, and sedimentation) from land that would otherwise be converted to lawns and impervious surfaces such as pavement and buildings. Ultimately, this assists with efforts in managing the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) of nutrients flowing into public waters such as the Chesapeake Bay and the Mississippi River.

Through ACEP-WRE, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian Tribes who voluntarily agree to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the sale of a permanent or 30-year wetland reserve easement to NRCS, or through a 30-year contract (tribes only). These wetland easements/contracts provide numerous benefits to the public that extend well beyond the footprint of the protected area. 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 outdoor education, scientific research, and recreational activities.

The goal of ACEP-WRE is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program, which is accomplished by restoring wetlands and associated habitats that were converted for agricultural use and have a high likelihood of successful restoration. Over 50 percent of the Nation’s wetlands in the lower 48 States have been lost since the 17th century, and the greatest potential for restoration exists on private lands, which make up 70 percent of the land ownership in the country.

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, ACEP-WRE 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 on wetland easement of ACEP-WRE projects.

To enroll land through ACEP-ALE, NRCS enters into agreements with cooperating eligible entities. NRCS requires certain terms and conditions under which the cooperating entity is eligible to receive NRCS ACEP cost-share assistance.

For example, each agricultural land easement must be subject to easement deed terms that promotes the long-term agricultural viability of the land.

To enroll land through ACEP-WRE, NRCS enters into purchase agreements with eligible private landowners or Indian tribes that include the right for NRCS to develop and implement a wetland restoration plan. The plans are designed to restore, protect, and enhance the wetland functions and values. NRCS may authorize wetland reserve easement lands to be used for compatible economic uses, including activities such as hunting and fishing, managed timber harvesting, 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 acquired.

ACEP is available on all lands in any of the 50 States, the District of Columbia, Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the United States Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands given the following eligibility criteria:

- ACEP-ALE - cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and nonindustrial private forest land. NRCS prioritizes applications that protect agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize the protection of contiguous acres devoted to agricultural use; and
- ACEP-WRE - farmed or converted wetlands that can be restored successfully and cost-effectively. NRCS prioritizes applications based on the land's potential for protecting and enhancing wetland habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.

ACEP-ALE: NRCS uses a continuous signup under which eligible entities may submit applications for funding. Upon receipt of the applications from an eligible entity, each NRCS State office evaluates the entities, land, and landowners for eligibility and ranks and prioritizes the applications based on established criteria. NRCS then awards funds to the eligible entities that submit the applications for the highest-ranking parcels of land for which the State office has ACEP funding. NRCS priorities include farms and ranches that face the greatest pressure to convert productive agricultural land to non-agricultural uses or grasslands to non-grazing uses, have access to appropriate agricultural markets, contain prime soils or other soils of significance, have adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services, are located near other parcels of land that can support long-term agricultural production, or contain grasslands of special environmental significance.

ACEP-WRE: To apply for ACEP-WRE, landowners may submit applications at any time to their local USDA Service Center. NRCS determines landowner and land eligibility, ranks each application using ranking criteria developed with input from the State Technical Committee, and makes tentative funding selections. NRCS priorities for ACEP-WRE include the extent to which ACEP-WRE purposes would be achieved on the land, the significance of the wetland functions, and values that would be restored and protected. Such functions and values include protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, conservation benefits achievable through an easement, cost-effectiveness of enrolling the land to maximize environmental benefit per dollar expended, and whether Federal funds are being leveraged.

ACEP-ALE: NRCS and eligible entities sign a parcel cost-share agreement to obligate ACEP funds. The cooperating, eligible entities acquire the conservation easements and then hold, monitor, manage, and enforce the acquired easements. Generally, the Federal share for any easement acquisition cannot exceed 50 percent of the appraised market value of the conservation easement. Where NRCS determines that grasslands of special environmental significance will be protected, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the appraised 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.

ACEP-WRE: NRCS and an eligible landowner sign an Agreement to Purchase a Conservation Easement to enroll land and obligate ACEP funds. NRCS acquires and holds the easement and is responsible for the restoration, monitoring, and enforcement of that easement. NRCS may enroll eligible land through various ACEP-WRE enrollment options:

- Permanent Easements, which are conservation easements in perpetuity. NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement and between 75 to 100 percent of the restoration costs.
- 30-Year Easements, which expire after 30 years. Under these easements, NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the easement and between 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.
- Term Easements, which are easements that are for the maximum duration allowed under applicable State laws. NRCS pays 50 to 75 percent of the easement value for the purchase of the term easement and between 50 to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

- 30-year Contracts, which are only available to enroll acreage owned by Indian tribes. Program payment rates are commensurate with 30-year easements.

For ACEP-WRE, all costs associated with recording the easement in the local land records office, including recording fees, charges for abstract, survey and appraisal fees, and title insurance, are paid by NRCS, as part of its acquisition of the wetland reserve easement.

ACEP-ALE: In addition to helping landowners and eligible entities develop conservation easement deeds 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 agreements; review of deeds, title, and appraisals; and payment processing.

ACEP-WRE: NRCS conducts ecological benefit and cost ranking and develops a preliminary site-specific restoration plan for the offered acres, using input from State wildlife agencies, and the Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service. Once the landowner accepts an offer, NRCS acquires the easement or executes the contract, completes restoration designs, and implements the conservation practices necessary to restore the identified habitats on the easement, contract, or easement area.

NRCS helps landowners throughout the life of the project under ACEP-WRE. 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.

Current Activities

In 2023, \$279.8 million in ACEP financial assistance funding was used to enroll an estimated 120,236 acres of farmland, grasslands, and wetlands through 315 new ACEP enrollments, including 152 for ACEP-ALE and 163 for ACEP-WRE.

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. The agency also closed 250 ACEP easements which protected 183,450 acres during 2023.

ACEP-ALE Enrollment. NRCS processed ACEP-ALE 355 parcel applications on over 145,246 acres, including applications for ACEP-ALE on acres of grasslands of special environmental significance. Available funding allowed for the enrollment of applications for ACEP-ALE. Enrollment is defined as the point at which the eligible entity, and NRCS enter into the agreements and parcel contracts authorizing the eligible entity to proceed with the purchase of the easement.

In 2023, NRCS enrolled a total of 89,551 acres in 152 new ACEP-ALE parcel contract enrollments through 72 program agreements (see table below). This includes 132 general agricultural land easements and 20 agricultural land easements on grasslands of special environmental significance. The average project size was 439 acres in general ALE, and 1,583 acres in ALE on grasslands of special environmental significance.

Table NRCS-54. Agreement Types

Agreement Type	2023 Parcel Contracts	2023 Acres Enrolled
Total ALE (2023 Parcel Contracts).....	152	89,551

Since the inception of ACEP in 2014, NRCS has cumulatively enrolled 1,598 parcels in the ALE component of ACEP on 1,089,527 acres and has closed 1,103 easements on 748,781 acres. The table below shows ACEP-ALE cumulative enrollments and closings.

Table NRCS-55. Agreement Types

2014-2022	Parcels Enrolled – Cumulative Number	Parcels Enrolled - Cumulative Acres	Easements Closed – Cumulative Number	Easements Closed – Cumulative Acres
ACEP-ALE.....	1,598	1,089,527	1,103	748,781

ACEP-WRE Enrollment. In 2023, NRCS processed 2,955 ACEP-WRE applications for over 505,316 acres. 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, or 30-year contracts with Indian Tribes), and the geographic rate cap for the location of the acres to be enrolled.

In 2023, the agency enrolled a total of 30,685 acres in 163 new ACEP-WRE enrollments, or approximately seven percent of the demand for ACEP-WRE enrollment (see table below). The average project size was 188 acres.

Table NRCS-56. Contracts

2023	2023 Agreements	2023 Acres Enrolled
Contracts		
30-year contracts with Tribes	1	322
Total (Contracts Only)	1	322
Easements		
30-year easement	5	527
Permanent easement	157	29,836
Total	163	30,685

Since the inception of ACEP in 2014, NRCS has cumulatively enrolled 2,205 applications in the WRE component of ACEP on 422,757 acres and closed 1,754 easements on 321,939 acres. The below table shows ACEP-WRE cumulative enrollments and closings.

Table NRCS-57. 2014-2023 ACEP-WRE Cumulative Enrollments and Closings

2014 – 2023	Applications Enrolled Cumulative Number	Applications Enrolled Cumulative Acres	Easements Closed Cumulative Number	Easements Closed Cumulative Acres
Contracts				
30-year contracts with Tribes	4	1,090	N/A	N/A
Total (Contracts Only)	4	1,090	N/A	N/A
Easements				
30-year easement	175	35,373	157	32,705
Permanent easement	2,026	386,294	1,597	289,234
Total	2,201	421,667	1,754	321,939

ACEP-ALE

Nebraska Protects Native Prairie in the Sandhills

In 2021 Nebraska NRCS enrolled nearly 20,000 square miles of sand dunes stabilized by native prairie, in the sandhills of Northcentral Nebraska. One of the largest intact grasslands in North America containing nearly 700 plant species, 300 bird species and more than 55 species of mammals that call the sandhills home. In this area there is an increasing trend for buyers to purchase parcels of ranches and turn them into “ranchettes” or golf courses. These subdivisions carve up the land into small pieces that are no longer viable for ranching, and once divided, the land can never be a working ranch again. This easement closed in 2023, with 4 miles of frontage on the Dismal River containing over 6,000 acres of protected native prairie.

Alaska Protects Palmer Farmland

In 2021, Alaska NRCS enrolled over 450 acres of farmland. In the past 20 years, the threat of development in Palmer has exponentially increased as more and more people are discovering the quality-of-life benefits offered by Palmer’s picturesque mountains, abundant rivers, and fertile farmlands. The farm started as a dairy in 1945 on 40 acres and has grown to 452 acres with leases for an additional 400 acres. The farm produces hay and black and red angus, which is grass-fed and sold directly to local customers and local restaurants. The easement closed in 2023 protecting the farmland from development.

ACEP-WRE

Protecting another critical piece of historic wetland habitat in the Sonoma Creek Baylands

Working with the Sonoma Land Trust, the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, California NRCS completed the acquisition of an ACEP-WRE easement on the Camp 4 property in the heart of the Sonoma Creek Baylands in 2023. After more than a century of agricultural use, land subsidence, rising tides,

levee maintenance and pumping costs, and a changing agricultural market made farming this property increasingly difficult. ACEP-WRE allowed the landowners to voluntarily retire this marginal agricultural land and restore it to native habitat. As a result, this 1,150-acre easement, situated between the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge and the Napa-Sonoma Marshes Wildlife Area and surrounded by seven miles of tidal slough channels, will be restored to tidal marsh wetlands, an ecosystem that has been mostly converted or destroyed around San Francisco Bay. The acquisition and restoration of the Camp 4 property protects delicate wetlands along San Pablo Bay, contributes to habitat resilience against the impacts of sea level rise, provide home to a diverse range of plants, fish, birds, and other wildlife, and conserves vital habitat for special-status species, including the endangered Ridgeway's rail and salt marsh harvest mouse.

Sowam Meadow Preserve Restores Salt Marshes in Rhode Island

Impacts to Sowam's salt marshes from sea level rise and past human activities have resulted in vegetation die-back and a shift from high marsh species to low marsh species, causing peat subsidence and conversion of the marsh to shallow impounded water bodies that do not support healthy habitat for fish or other critical wetland-dependent species. To protect and restore this critical salt marsh habitat on the eastern side of the Palmer River, Rhode Island NRCS partnered with the Warren Land Conservation Trust, Save the Bay, and the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management. More than 23 acres of salt marsh were permanently protected by an ACEP-WRE easement and restored by draining impounded water from the marsh and excavating runnels through the marsh to restore healthy flows of salt and fresh water between the marsh, wetlands, and uplands.

Impacting Participation in ACEP-WRE by Historical Underserved Landowners in Mississippi

For the past several years, Mississippi NRCS, in collaboration with the Tri-State Partnership, have focused outreach efforts to non-traditional partners and Historically Underserved landowners to increase their awareness, interest, and participation in, NRCS programs like ACEP-WRE. As a result of these efforts, Mississippi NRCS has seen an increase in historically underserved landowner applications to ACEP-WRE by almost 400 percent. In 2023, 35 of more than 200 applications for ACEP-WRE came from historically underserved landowners resulting in three new enrollments. In addition, in 2023, Mississippi NRCS closed its first ACEP-WRE easement with an historically underserved landowner under an active Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) project with the Tri-State Partnership, protecting 135.3 acres of important wildlife habitat in the Mississippi Alluvial Valley. The success of the Tri-State partnership and its collaboration with Mississippi NRCS will continue to expand on this recent effort. For example, at three recent landowner workshops in Mississippi, historically underserved landowners represented more than 50 percent of all landowners in attendance.

Inflation Reduction Act - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) authorized NRCS to carry out, using the facilities and authorities of the Commodity Credit Corporation, the *agricultural conservation easement program* under subtitle H of title XII of that Act (16 U.S.C. 3865 through 3865d) for easements or interests in land that will most reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions associated with land eligible for the program. The IRA provides \$100 million in ACEP funding beginning in 2023, with additional funding appropriated each year through 2026.

ACEP is a voluntary program through which NRCS provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands, and their related benefits, by directly acquiring or funding the acquisition of conservation easements on private or tribal lands. ACEP has two components - ACEP-Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE) and ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE).

In 2023, IRA ACEP was implemented through a national sign-up and ranking process that prioritized the acquisition of easements for ACEP eligible lands which met the following criteria and located within the IRA target areas and meet the 2023 IRA technical eligibility requirements:

- Have the highest soil carbon sequestration potential (based on soils data)
- Restore or protect permanent and persistent vegetative cover types (wetlands and grasslands)
- Subject to highest risk of conversion to uses that would result in a net contribution of greenhouse gases.

IRA ACEP-ALE enrollments prioritized grasslands located in the NRCS Working Lands for Wildlife Great Plains Grassland Biome under threat of conversion for the grasslands to higher intensive agricultural uses and non-agricultural uses. Those lands under the highest risk of conversion would be highest target areas for enrollment.

IRA ACEP-WRE enrollments prioritized soils high in organic carbon, including organic soils mapped as histosols, and mineral soils with high organic carbon including, soils with histic epipedons, aquolls (wet Mollisols), and soils with

umbric epipedons. NRCS recognizes that there are eligible land types under ACEP that are not included in this prioritization, but these areas were identified as having significant GHG mitigation potential.

Current Activities

In 2023, over 72.9 million in IRA ACEP financial assistance funding was used to enroll an estimated 56,488 acres of grasslands and wetlands through 69 new ACEP enrollments.

IRA ACEP-WRE Enrollment. In 2023, NRCS processed 215 IRA ACEP-WRE applications for over 42,414 acres. Available funding allowed for the enrollment of 3,221 acres in 42 new ACEP-WRE enrollments (see table below). The average project size was 77 acres. 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.

IRA ACEP-ALE Enrollment. In 2023, NRCS processed IRA ACEP-ALE 45 parcel applications on over 80,156 acres. Available funding allowed for the enrollment of 53,267 acres in 27 new ACEP-ALE parcel contracts (see table below). Enrollment is defined as the point at which the eligible entity, and NRCS enter into the agreements and parcel contracts authorizing the eligible entity to proceed with the purchase of the easement.

Table NRCS-58. Agreement Types

2023	2023 Applications	2023 Application Acres	2023 Applications Enrolled	2023 Acres Enrolled
Easements				
WRE easements.....	215	42,414	42	3,221
Parcels				
ALE Parcels.....	45	80,156	27	53,267

In 2023 Montana NRCS enrolled an IRA-ACEP ALE project with a historically underserved landowner located on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. This property provides protection to a wide range of wildlife travel corridors and specifically provides additional Grizzly Bear habitat protection within the United States Fish and Wildlife Service defined Northern Continental Divide recovery zone.

In 2023, Texas NRCS enrolled an IRA ACEP-ALE with Twin Oaks Pantermuehl Ranch. The ranch is located in central Texas, a region having natural beauty and rich ecological diversity, and has been an active goat ranch for over 50 years. The owner of the ranch wanted to preserve the unique blend of forest, grassland, and karst features for the environment and future generations. The Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust partnered with NRCS to enroll the land in an IRA ACEP-ALE easement. During the conservation planning process, two significant archaeological sites that are remnants of a prehistoric Native American tribe were discovered on the ranch. The property contains 338 acres, used for hay production, winter grazing, and native grass pastures.

Agricultural Management Assistance

Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to use \$10 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) identifies the following States as eligible for AMA: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. AMA is administered jointly by NRCS, the Risk Management Agency (RMA), and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

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. By statute, the agency receives 50 percent of the funds apportioned to AMA each year. 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.

AMA addresses the following national priorities:

- Reducing non-point source pollution, such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or excess salinity in impaired watersheds consistent with total maximum daily 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 unacceptably high levels of soil erosion and sedimentation on agricultural land; and
- Promoting at-risk species habitat conservation.

Like other financial assistance programs, AMA implementation is derived from a contract based on a conservation plan containing highly effective conservation practices to help mitigate the negative effects of resource concerns on the landscape and to the environment.

The practices most frequently utilized in conservation plans and AMA contracts include:

- Seasonal high tunnels to control the growing environment and improve plant health;
- Irrigation pipelines to convey irrigation water in an efficient and effective manner;
- Irrigation water management to assist clients in more effective and efficient management of water;
- Micro irrigation systems to deliver water more consistently;
- Cover crops to help improve soil health, reduce erosion, and improve air quality;
- Fencing installation to assist in the management of livestock grazing; and
- Brush management to control invasive species and increase land productivity.

The conservation provisions developed by the agency 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, ranking processes, and cutoff dates for ranking applications. States are responsible for within-State fund allocations, payment methods, and public outreach and information activities. Participants may use AMA in conjunction with other USDA conservation programs.

Applicants must own or control the land, which must be within a State in which the program is authorized and comply with the adjusted gross income limitation provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985. 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.

Participation in AMA is voluntary, and the agency works with the applicant to develop the required conservation plan. A contract may be for a period not to exceed ten years, and participants must agree to maintain cost-shared practices for the life of the practice. In addition, 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.

Current Activities

In 2023, over \$6.6 million in CCC funds for financial assistance was obligated for 310 AMA contracts covering 2,255 acres. 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) due to 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 public. By helping to mitigate the risks associated with these kinds of agricultural enterprises, AMA helps sustain a valuable segment of local economies.

Table NRCS-59. 2023 Total AMA Program Data

State	2023 Obligation	2023 Acres	2023 # Contracts
Connecticut	\$280,534	70.7	6
Delaware	152,778	64.8	8
Maine	1,192,973	82.6	57
Maryland	449,354	321.7	17
Massachusetts	337,968	83.9	12
Nevada	500,945	452.7	32
New Hampshire	119,248	30.1	9
New Jersey	520,100	124.6	14
New York	325,104	30.8	12
Pacific Island Area	308,774	48.7	2
Pennsylvania	385,081	140.4	27
Rhode Island	189,875	57.8	11
Utah	265,377	164.8	18
Vermont	174,091	118.5	6
West Virginia	1,219,396	155.9	62
Wyoming	210,992	307.9	17
Total	\$6,632,590	2,255.9	310

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

Section 2510 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (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-9). Section 2706 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Farm Bill) (P.L. 113-79) repealed AWEP. However, Section 2706 also provided transitional language that ensured prior enrollments will continue to provide technical and financial assistance by NRCS. The 2014 Farm Bill consolidated AWEP into the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

The purpose of AWEP was to promote 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 included Federal, State, and local entities, as well as local conservation districts, whose conservation goals complement the agency's mission.

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

Through AWEP, eligible partners submitted proposals for funding. The proposals were evaluated, and successful applicants entered 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, priority was given to those that:

- Included a high percentage of agricultural land and producers in the region or other appropriate area;
- Resulted in high levels of applied agricultural water quality and water conservation activities;
- Significantly enhanced agricultural activity;
- Allowed for monitoring and evaluation;
- Assisted agricultural producers in meeting a regulatory requirement that might otherwise reduce the economic scope of the producer's operation;
- Projected achievement of the project's land and water treatment objectives within no more than five years;
- Included conservation practices supporting conversion of agricultural land from irrigated to dryland farming;
- Leveraged AWEP funds with funds provided by partners; and
- Assisted 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.

AWEP contracts provided technical and financial assistance directly to eligible producers to do the following:

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

Eligible program participants 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 historically underserved 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. Applicants must be an agricultural producer, have control of the land for the life of the contract, develop an AWEP plan of operations, and be compliant 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.

Current Activities

In fiscal year 2023, the last AWEP contract remaining was completed. There are no active contracts remaining moving forward into the next fiscal year.

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program (CBWP) was authorized by Section 1240Q of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by Section 2605 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-246). Authority for new funding for CBWP expired at the end of 2013. Section 2709(a) of the 2014 Farm Bill (P.L. 113-79) repealed the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program. However, Section 2709 also provided transitional language that ensured prior enrollees will continue to be provided technical and financial assistance by NRCS. The purposes and activities of CBWP were consolidated into the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill.

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 helped agricultural producers to 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 encompassed all tributaries, backwaters, and side channels, including their watersheds, which drain into the Chesapeake Bay. This area includes portions of the States of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

CBWP funding supported the Chesapeake Bay Program, a regional initiative that helped 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 supported Executive Order 13508, Chesapeake Bay Protection and Restoration. 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 were also national priorities and included focusing on high priority watersheds, integrating Federal and State programs, accelerating conservation adoption, and accelerating development of new conservation technologies.

Section 2709 of the 2014 Farm Bill authorizes NRCS to use any funds made available for CBWP prior to October 1, 2013, to carry out contracts, agreements, and easements entered into prior to February 7, 2014, the date of enactment of the 2014 Farm Bill. Therefore, financial assistance under CBWP is used to support existing contracts.

All remaining technical assistance through CBWP is used to help agricultural producers implement their existing contracts.

Current Activities

All activities focused on implementing the remaining CBWP contracts were completed in 2022. There were no active contracts in 2023.

Conservation Stewardship Program

The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized CSP through 2023 and changed the program from acre-based to a cash-based program. In addition, the Grassland Conservation Initiative (GCI) was added to CSP. The Commodity Credit Corporation funds CSP.

CSP provides opportunities to recognize excellent stewards and deliver valuable new conservation. CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional activities on their operations. 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 priority resource concerns as identified at the national, State, or local level. Below are examples of how the program addresses some priority 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.

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. NRCS evaluates applications that face similar natural resource problems using a competitive ranking process.

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. Even though the program is national in scope, the agency did not establish national targeted resource concerns. Instead, States determine five targeted resource concerns that are of specific concern or for geographic areas within the State.

To be eligible for CSP, an applicant must meet each of the following three components - applicant, land, and stewardship threshold eligibility. 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 within the FSA records system. An operator of record waiver can be approved by NRCS where sufficient evidence of control exists. Eligible lands include cropland, pastureland, rangeland, non-industrial private forestland, associated agricultural land, farmstead land, agricultural land under the jurisdiction of an Indian tribe, and other private agricultural land on which resource concerns related to agricultural production could be addressed.

Once applicant and land eligibility are determined, NRCS uses a science-based stewardship threshold for each resource concern to assess an applicant's existing and planned conservation activities. These activities must meet or exceed the stewardship threshold for at least two resource concerns at the time of the application, as well as one additional resource concern by the end of the CSP contract. In 2019, NRCS began using new tools to evaluate applications, including the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART) to assist customers and planners with the specific land use evaluations of the overall land use management systems that are part of agricultural operations. NRCS uses CART to determine eligibility for the program, and to document customer decisions to adopt conservation activities. The evaluations provide estimates of the applicant's current and future conservation levels. The tool also increases awareness of which conservation activities can be adopted to meet additional resource concerns of the operation. Eligible applications are then ranked using CART.

CSP provides participants with two possible types of payments. An annual payment is available for installing new conservation activities and maintaining existing conservation activities. A supplemental payment may be earned by participants already receiving an annual payment who also adopt or improve a resource-conserving crop rotation. CSP pays participants for conservation performance of existing activities in place at the time of supplemental payment enrollment based on resource concerns met at the time of enrollment, the higher the performance, the higher the payment. Payment rates and estimated costs incurred for new conservation activities are documented in the developed and approved NRCS payment schedules. New conservation activities adopted through CSP must meet NRCS technical standards and nationally developed enhancement job sheets to earn program payment. States develop supplements to the job sheets to address additional local conditions and resource concerns. 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 year. Contract terms for CSP establish that payments to a person or legal entity may not exceed \$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.

CSP offers technical assistance to producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner. Through the planning process, the agency helps producers, including forestry landowners, 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 to deliver a program beneficial to participants and the environment.

Cooperation is formed 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.

Current Activities

In 2023, CSP provided more than \$669.2 million in financial assistance funding for new enrollments, as shown in the three State distribution tables below. These funds will be used to treat over 11.49 million acres. CSP funds also support conservation initiatives focused on targeted areas through the following land conservation initiatives: Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiative, Longleaf Pine Initiative, Sage Grouse Initiative, and Mississippi River Basin Initiative.

Table NRCS-60. 2022 CSP - Classic Enrollment

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Alabama.....	88,305	\$13,482,001
Alaska.....	98	17,297
Arizona.....	585,292	4,245,255
Arkansas.....	226,729	36,058,223
California.....	225,004	7,069,539
Caribbean Area.....	1,968	436,980
Colorado.....	192,267	10,329,188
Connecticut.....	2,557	402,199
Delaware.....	1,795	168,455
Florida.....	81,866	8,419,392
Georgia.....	78,340	17,039,067
Idaho.....	306,666	4,156,593
Illinois.....	165,418	18,007,077
Indiana.....	85,182	11,929,152
Iowa.....	149,782	12,449,164
Kansas.....	369,146	22,636,350
Kentucky.....	61,481	6,403,350
Louisiana.....	106,312	13,206,156
Maine.....	8,530	700,453
Maryland.....	9,153	1,567,140

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Massachusetts	7,119	1,003,881
Michigan	93,920	8,212,366
Minnesota	173,414	22,913,756
Mississippi	81,997	18,635,792
Missouri	121,499	12,075,218
Montana	400,528	10,651,280
Nebraska	312,199	14,952,844
Nevada	21,004	1,174,588
New Hampshire	63,174	1,170,079
New Jersey	1,303	122,710
New Mexico	1,008,102	18,305,803
New York	54,988	3,939,163
North Carolina	43,910	8,028,770
North Dakota	357,077	22,018,442
Ohio	52,070	4,131,051
Oklahoma	183,495	11,948,994
Oregon	300,613	12,698,660
Pacific Island Area	819	998,609
Pennsylvania	68,411	6,200,000
Rhode Island	778	181,981
South Carolina	81,714	9,060,033
South Dakota	320,578	16,697,301
Tennessee	141,165	12,455,522
Texas	315,494	10,400,968
Utah	437,531	6,101,729
Vermont	14,303	1,261,878
Virginia	71,025	11,686,014
Washington	172,054	9,864,407
West Virginia	12,643	2,280,652
Wisconsin	195,027	10,465,460
Wyoming	148,036	2,767,429
Grand Total.....	8,001,881	\$461,128,411

Source: NRCS Protracts October 2023, unofficial end-of-year data set.

Table NRCS-61. 2023 CSP - Renewal Enrollment

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Alabama	31,734	\$3,481,357
Arizona	4,827	286,603
Arkansas	75,706	10,403,801
California	56,960	1,424,302
Caribbean Area	750	265,302
Colorado	59,701	3,168,088
Connecticut	1,638	36,447
Delaware	93	17,484
Florida	9,541	895,595
Georgia	44,420	8,855,504
Idaho	38,080	2,025,250
Illinois	83,571	10,048,992
Indiana	47,741	3,915,427
Iowa	62,223	4,653,103
Kansas	96,212	5,438,497
Kentucky	28,556	3,363,027
Louisiana	104,716	9,878,730
Maine	3,569	286,884

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Maryland	3,000	307,609
Massachusetts	710	73,020
Michigan	41,600	3,223,239
Minnesota	83,146	10,477,018
Mississippi	73,595	10,762,204
Missouri	116,848	10,428,487
Montana	287,725	10,077,164
Nebraska	305,199	10,809,384
Nevada	10	16,766
New Hampshire	344	75,490
New Mexico	340,192	3,988,696
New York	10,833	844,296
North Carolina	13,181	1,936,720
North Dakota	167,703	10,512,656
Ohio	27,277	2,305,840
Oklahoma	59,924	3,217,131
Oregon	165,185	7,177,985
Pacific Island Area	477	279,387
Pennsylvania	19,335	2,713,647
Rhode Island	1,520	81,542
South Carolina	29,191	3,512,518
South Dakota	234,330	10,808,043
Tennessee	7,306	1,465,709
Texas	206,410	4,186,838
Utah	207,195	2,590,630
Vermont	1,198	66,363
Virginia	46,617	7,656,903
Washington	51,005	3,588,443
West Virginia	15,645	2,296,300
Wisconsin	99,778	8,448,145
Wyoming	66,507	582,299
Grand Total.....	3,433,024	\$202,954,865

Source: NRCS Protracts October 2023

Table NRCS-62. 2023 CSP – Grassland Conservation Initiative

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Alabama	629	\$55,190
Arkansas	251	22,595
California	434	39,065
Colorado	1,128	101,560
Florida	258	23,265
Georgia	618	53,080
Idaho	312	24,678
Illinois	85	7,630
Iowa	405	36,460
Kansas	4,607	415,319
Kentucky	347	31,290
Louisiana	3,991	326,552
Michigan	37	3,290
Minnesota	55	4,555
Mississippi	265	23,858
Missouri	1,935	172,910
Montana	929	83,605

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Nebraska.....	1,453	130,835
New Jersey.....	21	1,890
New Mexico.....	597	53,780
New York.....	461	41,510
North Carolina.....	174	14,787
North Dakota.....	1475	132,785
Ohio.....	104	9,350
Oklahoma.....	15,830	1,398,642
Oregon.....	24	2,135
South Carolina.....	159	14,315
South Dakota.....	2,332	209,865
Tennessee.....	753	67,820
Texas.....	18,458	1,531,108
Utah.....	98	8,815
Virginia.....	436	39,280
Washington.....	24	2,170
West Virginia.....	133	12,005
Wisconsin.....	56	5,010
Wyoming.....	413	37,195
Grand Total.....	59,287	\$5,138,199

Source: NRCS Protracts October 2023

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) - Conservation Stewardship Program

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) made additional funding available for the implementation of the Conservation Stewardship Program under Subtitle B “Conservation” of Title II of the IRA.

The IRA provided \$250 million for CSP in 2023, with additional annual funding through 2026. This funding will be used to support IRA funded CSP contract participants that directly improve soil carbon, reduce nitrogen losses, or that reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions, associated with agricultural production.

IRA-CSP provides opportunities to recognize excellent stewards and deliver valuable new conservation targeting climate mitigation and clean energy. IRA-CSP encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and adopt additional climate smart activities on their operations. 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.

IRA-CSP addresses priority resource concerns as identified at the national, State, or local level. Below are examples of how the IRA program funding addresses some priority concerns:

- Soil quality - increasing soil organic matter, reducing compaction, reducing organic matter oxidation, removing soil contaminants, and utilizing nutrient cycling;
- 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 re-establish;
- 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.

IRA-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. NRCS evaluates applications that face similar natural resource problems using a competitive ranking process.

IRA-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. The program is national in scope and the agency establish

nationally targeted resource concerns that address the IRA funding priorities. States prioritized five targeted resource concerns that are of respective specific concern or for geographic areas within the State that would meet the IRA criteria.

Cooperation is formed 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 through IRA funding.

Current Activities

In 2023, IRA-CSP provided more than \$170.96 million in financial assistance funding for new enrollments, as shown in the State distribution tables below. These funds will be used to treat over 3.3 million acres.

Table NRCS-63. 2023 IRA-CSP - Classic Enrollment

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Alabama	29,959	\$5,408,620
Arizona.....	700,687	3,299,710
Arkansas.....	97,869	10,635,455
California	34,900	1,439,989
Caribbean Area	1,820	424,909
Colorado.....	68,434	2,596,028
Connecticut	116	16,534
Delaware	3,886	173,196
Florida	33,864	2,981,243
Georgia.....	17,840	5,249,389
Idaho.....	35,363	1,720,181
Illinois	63,083	4,905,076
Indiana.....	46,926	4,081,318
Iowa.....	54,625	5,114,170
Kansas	120,949	6,364,741
Kentucky	17,537	2,534,917
Louisiana.....	32,327	4,946,807
Maine	89,416	607,158
Maryland	49	11,245
Massachusetts.....	422	157,293
Michigan	48,208	3,952,194
Minnesota.....	54,331	5,955,721
Mississippi	52,299	10,264,849
Missouri	45,568	5,113,355
Montana	139,646	4,898,512
Nebraska.....	149,969	5,250,373
Nevada	31,586	407,500
New Hampshire.....	3,576	458,281
New Jersey	55	78,672
New Mexico.....	226,600	5,673,440
New York.....	4,899	384,919
North Carolina.....	32,579	5,102,795
North Dakota.....	103,626	7,145,154
Ohio.....	19,566	1,855,070
Oklahoma	64,066	4,805,481
Oregon.....	121,310	5,084,463
Pacific Island Area	787	568,733
Pennsylvania	20,937	2,558,790
Rhode Island	2,251	90,555
South Carolina.....	14,231	2,436,975
South Dakota.....	202,063	7,880,588
Tennessee.....	71,776	5,311,553

State	Acres Treated	Financial Assistance (\$ Obligated)
Texas	150,606	4,376,981
Utah	35,130	468,962
Vermont	6,419	460,561
Virginia	29,593	5,117,705
Washington	93,979	4,969,081
West Virginia	10,541	1,357,347
Wisconsin.....	61,793	4,781,473
Wyoming.....	64,466	1,485,853
Grand Total	3,312,528	170,963,915

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

Sections 2301-2309 of the 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized and revised the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa – 3839aa-8).

America faces serious environmental challenges that can be addressed through financial and technical assistance delivered through EQIP. Federal, State, tribal, 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 growth 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 is carried out in a manner that optimizes conservation benefits. EQIP provides:

- Technical and financial assistance to help farmers and ranchers address natural resource concerns and carry out on-farm conservation practices and activities that lead to improved water and air quality, conserved ground and surface water, increased soil health and reduced soil erosion and sedimentation, improved or created wildlife habitat, and mitigation against drought and increasing weather volatility;
- 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 50 percent of the financial assistance funds for EQIP be targeted to livestock-related operations, including both confined livestock operations and grazed lands. With input from the public, agricultural and environmental organizations, local conservation districts, agencies, and other partners, NRCS has the following national priorities for EQIP:

- Reduction of nonpoint source pollution, such as nutrients, sediment, pesticides, or excess salinity in impaired watersheds consistent with TMDLs, where available;
- Reduction of contamination from agricultural point sources, such as concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs);
- 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;
- Conservation of at-risk species habitat; and
- Promotion of energy conservation.

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 agricultural production activities with respect to 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 relevant government agency to apply conservation practices. Publicly-owned land may also be eligible for certain water conservation or irrigation efficiency projects that help a private agricultural producer with managing water distribution or conservation systems. For irrigation-related practices, the land must have been irrigated for two out of the last five years. However, a limited waiver to this irrigation history requirement is available for limited resource and historically underserved farmers and ranchers (including Tribal entities) when the land has not been irrigated for reasons that are beyond the producer's control.

An eligible applicant 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, protection of tenants and sharecroppers. Eligible applications are accepted year-round at local USDA Service Centers, but cut-off dates are established by States to allow time for ranking and approval of applications.

The agency 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 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. The plan identifies the conservation practices and activities that will be implemented through co-investment of EQIP financial assistance.

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 as adapted for local conditions.

EQIP payment rates may be up to 75 percent of the estimated incurred costs and up to 100 percent of foregone income related to implementing certain conservation practices. Historically underserved producers, including limited resource, veteran, or beginning farmers and ranchers, and tribal members, may be eligible for payment rates up to 90 percent for the estimated incurred costs and up to 100 percent of forgone income. Payment rates and estimated costs are documented in payment schedules developed and approved by NRCS. Contracts have a maximum term of ten years.

Total EQIP conservation payments are limited to \$450,000 in financial assistance per person or legal entity for contracts entered into between 2019 through 2023, regardless of the number of contracts. Tribal entities themselves are not subject to payment limitations provided they certify that no individual tribal member exceeds their individual payment limitation.

The agency 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.

Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership – Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (LRP), NRCS and Forest Service are combining resources and coordinating activities to restore landscapes across ownership boundaries. The aim of the partnership is to reduce wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protect water quality and supply, and improve habitat for at-risk species seamlessly across public and private land boundaries. By working across adjacent public and private lands, conservation work in the project areas will be more efficient and effective. Projects selected for the Joint Chiefs' LRP demonstrate strong collaborations with local partners and readiness to implement the restoration work. These cross-boundary projects address priority conservation needs in that landscape while delivering benefits to local communities. Sixteen new three-years-long projects in fourteen States were selected in 2020. Currently, 36 projects across 23 States and United States territories are being implemented.

Current Activities

In 2023, EQIP financial assistance obligations totaled over \$1.49 billion in 31,114 active or completed contracts covering an estimated 9.0 million acres. In addition to regular EQIP projects, these funds also supported projects in initiatives focused on environmental benefit and agricultural production as compatible goals, such as air quality, on-farm energy conservation, migratory bird habitat in the Mississippi River Basin, organic production, and high tunnel systems.

Air Quality – Through this initiative, NRCS assists farmers and ranchers in reducing air pollution generated from agricultural operations in areas designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as non-attainment areas for ozone and particulate matter.

Organic Production – 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. One critical benefit of the Organic Initiative is sustaining the natural physical, biological, and chemical properties of the soil, which is vital to organic production.

EQIP is popular among producers, and demand for the program is high across the country. Nationally, 30.9 percent of qualifying projects (valid applications which met all program requirements) were funded in 2023, as the table below shows.

Table NRCS-64. 2023 Total EQIP Program Demand

State	Total Applications Received	Number of Active and Completed Contracts	Unfunded Valid Applications	Valid Applications Funded (Percent)	2023 Average Contract Amount (Dollars)	Estimated Unfunded Application Amount (Dollars)
Alabama	3,190	1,424	1,766	44.6%	\$23,770	\$41,978,303
Alaska.....	54	41	13	75.9%	261,510	3,399,625
Arizona.....	317	166	151	52.4%	119,890	18,103,330
Arkansas.....	6,926	1,508	5,418	21.8%	47,830	259,145,070
California	4,294	1,024	3,270	23.8%	93,068	304,330,976
Colorado.....	1,209	417	792	34.5%	81,675	64,686,429
Connecticut	190	107	83	56.3%	56,095	4,655,914
Delaware	275	90	185	32.7%	71,259	13,182,860
Florida	2,316	667	1,649	28.8%	46,757	77,103,102
Georgia.....	5,451	1,372	4,079	25.2%	38,791	158,227,446
Hawaii	236	117	119	49.6%	110,482	13,147,395
Idaho.....	824	577	247	70.0%	62,722	15,492,234
Illinois	2,421	522	1,899	21.6%	59,606	113,191,081
Indiana.....	1,690	761	929	45.0%	40,265	37,406,593
Iowa.....	2,902	781	2,121	26.9%	45,065	95,582,954
Kansas	2,186	786	1,400	36.0%	51,324	71,853,691
Kentucky	2,568	778	1,790	30.3%	31,777	56,881,721
Louisiana.....	1,891	506	1,385	26.8%	44,349	61,422,783
Maine	1,185	415	770	35.0%	28,062	21,608,038
Maryland	596	261	335	43.8%	59,853	20,050,782
Massachusetts.....	248	147	101	59.3%	37,168	3,754,001
Michigan	1,568	679	889	43.3%	29,753	26,449,974
Minnesota.....	3,300	822	2,478	24.9%	47,109	116,736,554
Mississippi	8,954	1,869	7,085	20.9%	37,261	263,992,782
Missouri	4,449	1,317	3,132	29.6%	31,515	98,705,874
Montana	1,089	472	617	43.3%	81,176	50,085,526
Nebraska.....	2,616	936	1,680	35.8%	31,225	52,458,307
Nevada	137	86	51	62.8%	97,852	4,990,438
New Hampshire....	425	182	243	42.8%	27,870	6,772,411
New Jersey	616	241	375	39.1%	31,668	11,875,420
New Mexico.....	817	291	526	35.6%	93,842	49,360,767
New York.....	849	459	390	54.1%	39,225	15,297,908

State	Total Applications Received	Number of Active and Completed Contracts	Unfunded Valid Applications	Valid Applications Funded (Percent)	2023 Average Contract Amount (Dollars)	Estimated Unfunded Application Amount (Dollars)
North Carolina.....	2,643	563	2,080	21.3%	64,190	133,515,020
North Dakota.....	808	388	420	48.0%	53,544	22,488,414
Ohio.....	2,067	723	1,344	35.0%	37,432	50,308,531
Oklahoma.....	3,021	813	2,208	26.9%	35,493	78,368,263
Oregon.....	1,138	536	602	47.1%	55,715	33,540,239
Pennsylvania.....	1,744	393	1,351	22.5%	65,646	88,688,133
Rhode Island.....	194	135	59	69.6%	22,704	1,339,547
South Carolina.....	2,262	580	1,682	25.6%	54,909	92,356,670
South Dakota.....	1,169	322	847	27.5%	86,910	73,612,565
Tennessee.....	3,075	994	2,081	32.3%	38,578	80,279,792
Texas.....	7,415	2,484	4,931	33.5%	50,049	246,792,782
Utah.....	1,531	414	1,117	27.0%	80,378	89,782,103
Vermont.....	719	301	418	41.9%	47,873	20,010,982
Virginia.....	858	345	513	40.2%	68,751	35,269,280
Washington.....	934	286	648	30.6%	75,665	49,030,946
West Virginia.....	1,058	427	631	40.4%	29,757	18,776,364
Wisconsin.....	2,190	901	1,289	41.1%	27,603	35,579,717
Wyoming.....	653	223	430	34.2%	108,716	46,748,076
Pacific Basin.....	1,365	465	900	34.1%	32,784	29,505,819
Puerto Rico.....	54	29	25	53.7%	47,707	1,192,686
Grand Total.....	100,687	31,143	69,544	30.9%	\$48,065	\$3,379,116,218

Source: Protracts as of October 2023.

Unfunded valid applications include pre-approved, deferred, and eligible. Estimated value of unfunded valid applications (dollar) is determined from number of unfunded valid applications multiplied by average 2023 contract amount.

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)

Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG) are authorized as part of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-8). CIG stimulates the development, adoption, and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in conjunction with agricultural production. CIG projects transfer conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches (such as market-based systems) to agricultural producers, NRCS staff, and the private sector.

The 2018 Farm Bill authorized a new CIG component On-Farm Conservation Innovation Trials (On-Farm Trials). The traditional CIG component (Classic) and On-Farm Trials complement each other, with CIG Classic funding pilot projects, field demonstrations, and on-farm conservation research of promising technologies or approaches, and On-Farm Trials funding wider-scale adoption and evaluation of innovative conservation approaches such as those proven effective in CIG Classic. On-Farm Trials includes the Soil Health Demonstration Trial as a subcomponent.

NRCS annually publishes notices of funding opportunity for national Classic and On-Farm Trial competition. In addition, NRCS State offices may opt to administer their own CIG competitions using a portion of their EQIP allocations. Between 20 and 30 States generally take advantage of this opportunity each year.

Current Activities

In September 2023, \$50 million in available funding was announced for the national On-Farm Trials competition, which is accepting proposals in four priority areas: Feeding Management and Enteric Methane Reduction, Irrigation Water Management Technologies; Nutrient Management; Grazing Lands and Soil Health Demonstration Trials.

In September 2023, \$15 million in available funding was announced for the national CIG Classic competition, which is accepting proposals in four priority areas: Forestry, Habitat Conservation and Restoration for Wildlife and Invertebrates, Managing Agricultural Lands to Improve Local Water Quality, Energy Conservation, Economics, and Strengthening Conservation through Indigenous Knowledge.

Both national programs expect to review proposals and make final award announcements in 2024. In addition, 26 State offices held State-level competitions in 2023 and awarded just over \$6 million in Federal funding.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program - Inflation Reduction Act

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (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 is carried out in a manner that optimizes conservation benefits. EQIP provides:

- Technical and financial assistance to help farmers and ranchers that face the most serious threats to soil, water, plants, and air 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.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (IRA) authorized additional funding for NRCS to carry out EQIP to support the implementation of practices directly improve soil carbon, reduce nitrogen losses, or that reduce, capture, avoid, or sequester carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions, associated with agricultural production. IRA made available an additional \$250 million for EQIP in 2023, with additional funding made available each year through 2026, to support producers in their implementation of these IRA goals.

Current Activities

In 2023, IRA EQIP financial assistance obligations totaled over \$147.4 million in 2,811 active or completed contracts covering an estimated 762 thousand acres.

Nationally, 37 percent of qualifying projects (valid applications which met all program requirements) were funded in 2023, as the table below shows.

Table NRCS-65. 2023 Total IRA EQIP Program Demand

State	Total Applications Received	Number of Active and Completed Contracts	Unfunded Valid Applications	Valid Applications Funded (Percent)	2023 Average Contract Amount (Dollars)	Estimated Unfunded Application Amount (Dollars)
Alabama.....	197	77	120	39.1%	\$38,188	\$4,582,504
Alaska.....	1	1	-	100.0%	1,857,813	-
Arizona.....	33	17	16	51.5%	105,712	1,691,385
Arkansas.....	283	61	222	21.6%	85,932	19,076,846
California.....	437	113	324	25.9%	69,322	22,460,369
Colorado.....	98	29	69	29.6%	96,325	6,646,397
Connecticut.....	26	18	8	69.2%	62,506	500,048
Delaware.....	36	17	19	47.2%	45,125	857,375
Florida.....	167	108	59	64.7%	30,601	1,805,486
Georgia.....	269	66	203	24.5%	78,274	15,889,625
Hawaii.....	90	20	70	22.2%	112,558	7,879,068
Idaho.....	57	48	9	84.2%	51,794	466,145
Illinois.....	146	50	96	34.2%	56,547	5,428,476
Indiana.....	306	76	230	24.8%	48,967	11,262,513
Iowa.....	227	59	168	26.0%	65,347	10,978,367
Kansas.....	218	117	101	53.7%	28,339	2,862,269
Kentucky.....	149	75	74	50.3%	47,570	3,520,156
Louisiana.....	330	40	290	12.1%	58,552	16,980,164
Maine.....	154	50	104	32.5%	19,729	2,051,864

State	Total Applications Received	Number of Active and Completed Contracts	Unfunded Valid Applications	Valid Applications Funded (Percent)	2023 Average Contract Amount (Dollars)	Estimated Unfunded Application Amount (Dollars)
Maryland	44	34	10	77.3%	41,132	411,323
Massachusetts	47	45	2	95.7%	26,773	53,546
Michigan.....	252	54	198	21.4%	50,452	9,989,446
Minnesota	231	104	127	45.0%	28,590	3,630,974
Mississippi.....	487	146	341	30.0%	36,170	12,334,058
Missouri.....	76	37	39	48.7%	123,639	4,821,905
Montana.....	44	32	12	72.7%	88,071	1,056,853
Nebraska.....	260	111	149	42.7%	22,099	3,292,698
Nevada.....	7	6	1	85.7%	97,655	97,655
New Hampshire...	30	23	7	76.7%	28,281	197,965
New Jersey.....	48	44	4	91.7%	27,898	111,593
New Mexico	69	61	8	88.4%	78,709	629,675
New York	136	9	127	6.6%	228,691	29,043,701
North Carolina	450	111	339	24.7%	27,172	9,211,200
North Dakota	124	25	99	20.2%	121,473	12,025,813
Ohio	84	78	6	92.9%	42,020	252,120
Oklahoma	368	68	300	18.5%	51,460	15,438,070
Oregon.....	66	39	27	59.1%	48,125	1,299,383
Pennsylvania.....	190	72	118	37.9%	43,582	5,142,681
Rhode Island.....	42	40	2	95.2%	9,773	19,546
South Carolina.....	243	108	135	44.4%	18,397	2,483,583
South Dakota	103	63	40	61.2%	51,076	2,043,057
Tennessee	160	86	74	53.8%	39,392	2,915,021
Texas	227	87	140	38.3%	142,926	20,009,644
Utah	83	30	53	36.1%	56,268	2,982,197
Vermont.....	3	2	1	66.7%	420,361	420,361
Virginia.....	125	49	76	39.2%	54,668	4,154,774
Washington.....	161	78	83	48.4%	53,537	4,443,585
West Virginia.....	50	47	3	94.0%	25,346	76,037
Wisconsin	90	41	49	45.6%	69,177	3,389,684
Wyoming	90	18	72	20.0%	119,851	8,629,300
Pacific Basin.....	76	21	55	27.6%	125,190	6,885,471
Puerto Rico.....	11	11	-	100.0%	30,655	-
Grand Total.....	7,701	2,822	4,879	37%	52,469	\$302,431,976

Source: Protracts as of October 2023.

Unfunded valid applications include pre-approved, deferred, and eligible. Estimated value of unfunded valid applications (\$) is determined from number of unfunded valid applications multiplied by average 2023 contract amount.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) was authorized by Subchapter C of Chapter 2 of Subtitle D of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3838h et seq.), as amended. Section 2704 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) (the 2014 Farm Bill) repealed FRPP. However, Section 2704 also provided transitional language that ensures NRCS has authority to provide prior enrollees technical and financial assistance to complete work on prior FRPP enrollments as needed. FRPP protected lands by providing matching funds to keep productive farm and ranch lands in agricultural use. The purposes and functions of FRPP were consolidated into the Agricultural Land Easements component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP-ALE). Lands enrolled under FRPP are considered enrolled in ACEP-ALE and are eligible to receive financial and technical assistance services authorized under ACEP.

Section 2704 of the 2014 Farm Bill authorized the continued validity of FRPP contracts, agreements, and easements, and authorized any unobligated FRPP funds made available between 2009 to 2013 to be used to support FRPP activities entered into prior to February 7, 2014, the date of enactment of the 2014 Farm Bill. Upon exhaustion of these prior year FRPP funds, the 2014 Farm Bill authorizes the use of ACEP funds to carry out these FRPP activities.

In addition to helping landowners and entities develop conservation easement deeds and conservation plans, NRCS may use FRPP prior year funds to provide technical assistance, as needed, for existing FRPP enrollments to complete activities such as final verification of the eligibility of the entity, landowner, and land; completion of hazardous materials assessments; enforcement of the terms of cooperative agreements; final review of deeds, title, and appraisals; and payment processing on lands enrolled into FRPP prior to February 7, 2014.

Current Activities

The 2014 Farm Bill repealed FRPP and combined its purposes with the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Grassland Reserve Program to create ACEP. No new enrollments of FRPP occurred in 2023. The acquisition and closing of all FRPP-funded conservation easements have been completed.

Table NRCS-66. Cumulative Program Activity Through 2023

Closed Easements (Permanent)	Cumulative
Number of Easements	4,322
Number of Acres	1,068,067
Financial Assistance Funding	\$668,794,600

Grassland Reserve Program

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. Section 2705 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) (the 2014 Farm Bill) repealed GRP. However, Section 2705 also provided transitional language that ensured prior enrollments will continue to provide technical and financial assistance by NRCS. The 2014 Farm Bill combined the purposes and functions of GRP into the Agricultural Land Easement component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP-ALE). Lands previously enrolled in GRP are now considered enrolled in ACEP-ALE, and the repeal of GRP does not affect the validity or terms of any contract, agreement, or easement entered into prior to the 2014 Farm Bill enactment.

Section 2705 of the 2014 Farm Bill authorized the continued validity of GRP contracts, agreements, and easements, and authorized any unobligated GRP funds made available between 2009 to 2013 to be used to support GRP activities entered into prior to February 7, 2014, the 2014 Farm Bill enactment date. The 2014 Farm Bill also authorized the use of ACEP funds to carry out these GRP activities.

GRP technical assistance includes development of grazing management plans, reviews of restoration measures, guidance on management activities, and biological advice to achieve optimum results considering all grassland resources. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized GRP prior year funds to be used by NRCS to provide ongoing technical assistance to existing GRP enrollments.

Current Activities

The 2014 Farm Bill repealed GRP and combined its purposes with the Wetlands Reserve Program and the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program to create ACEP. No new additional enrollment of GRP lands has occurred since 2013; however, contracts and easements signed prior to February 7, 2014, continue to be serviced by the agency. All GRP agreements for easements have completed the acquisition of the conservation easement. Enrollments include current active and completed agreements, but do not include cancelled or expired agreements.

Table NRCS-67. 2009 to 2013 GRP Enrollment Summary

Item	Amount
No. of Agreements	391
No. of Acres Enrolled	266,132
Financial Assistance Funding	\$320,641,800

Information regarding GRP rental contracts is available from the Farm Service Agency.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program

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. The 2014 Farm Bill made minor changes to HFRP by adding a definition of the term “acreage owned by Indian tribes”, identifying HFRP as a contributing program or (“covered program”) authorized to accomplish the purposes of RCPP, replacing mandatory funding with authorization of appropriations, and authorizing the use of conservation operation funds for HFRP stewardship responsibilities. The 2018 Farm Bill amended the provisions.

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. HFRP provides financial assistance for specific conservation actions completed by the landowner. State Conservationists collaborate with partnering organizations to develop project proposals. 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 actual or 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 actual or 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 actual or average cost of the approved conservation practices.
- Permanent easement. The landowners may receive 100 percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus 100 percent of the actual or average cost of the approved conservation practices.

Only privately held land, including acreage owned by Indian tribes, is eligible for HFRP enrollment. The definition of land owned by Indian tribes was expanded in the 2014 Farm Bill to include land that is held in trust by the United States for Indian tribes or individual Indians. 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. Technical assistance is provided to help landowners develop and comply with the terms of their HFRP restoration plans.

Landowners may receive “safe harbor” assurances from the regulatory agencies 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.

The agency provides financial assistance payments consistent with enrollment in either a single payment or in ten or fewer annual payments, as agreed to between the agency and the landowner. Cost-share payments are also provided 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.

In coordination with the Department of the Interior’s Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Commerce’s National Marine Fisheries Service, the agency provides technical assistance to landowners through the development of 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. Technical assistance continues to be provided 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.

Current Activities

The 2023 Enacted Appropriation was funded under the Healthy Forests Reserve Program stand-alone account.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) was reauthorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill). Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges on a regional or watershed scale.

The purpose of RCPP is to further the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources on eligible land. It encourages eligible partners to cooperate with producers in meeting or avoiding the need for regulatory requirements related to agricultural production. Through RCPP, NRCS and State, local, and regional partners coordinate resources to help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas. Partners leverage RCPP funding in project areas and report on the benefits achieved. The goal is to implement projects that will result in the installation and maintenance of eligible activities that affect multiple agricultural or non-industrial private forest operations on a local, regional, State, or multistate basis. RCPP offers new opportunities for the agency to work with partners to encourage locally driven innovation and create high-performing solutions, harness innovation, accelerate the conservation mission, launch bold ideas, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, RCPP is administered through three components:

- **Classic**—Under this traditional RCPP component, partners apply to target RCPP conservation assistance to a particular place to address an identified resource concern(s). Assistance to producers and landowners flows through NRCS producer contracts and easements.
- **Renewals**—Renewals are available to partners with existing RCPP projects and intended to reward the most successful projects with additional funding.
- **Alternative Funding Arrangement/Grants (AFA)**—AFAs & Grants fund projects that are almost entirely partner-led. AFA or Grant projects use innovative approaches such as pay-for-performance or have other characteristics that innovate the conservation delivery system.

RCPP projects can include any combination of conservation activities authorized for the program—land management, land rental, easements, and watershed projects.

NRCS funds approved partner proposals by entering into agreements with an eligible partner to implement a project that will assist producers with installing and maintaining qualified activities on eligible land. Partners contribute a significant portion of the overall costs toward meeting the project scope. RCPP-eligible partners include agricultural or silvicultural producer associations, farmer cooperatives or other groups of producers, State or local governments, Indian tribes, municipal water treatment entities, water and irrigation districts, conservation-driven non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher education. Partner contributions are used to leverage the financial benefits of the project to increase the natural resources being protected utilizing RCPP funds. The partnership agreement details the arrangement between the agency and the partner, including the programs being offered and any alternative funding arrangements.

The RCPP project selection process is outlined through notices of funding opportunities (NOFOs) posted on www.grants.gov and the NRCS website. Project selections occur after applicants submit proposals using the web-based application for RCPP. Proposals are then evaluated by NRCS staff using criteria published in the NOFO. In making final award decisions, NRCS staff may also consider available funding, geographic diversity, applicant diversity, and other factors.

The Inflation Reduction Act provides \$800 million for RCPP in 2024, with additional annual funding through 2026. This funding will be used to prioritize conservation project proposals that target delivery of project assistance to directly improve soil carbon sequestration; reduce nitrogen losses; or reduce, capture, or avoid, carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions associated with agriculture production.

Current Activities

In 2023, NRCS awarded 14 renewals with a total funding of \$41 million and awarded 81 new projects with a total funding of \$1 billion. To date, under the 2018 Farm Bill, NRCS has made 261 awards under the Classic, AFA, and Renewals program components. As of October 1, 2023, there were 322 active RCPP projects combined under the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bill programs.

In 2023, 1,449 RCPP Land Management & Rental producer contracts (for 2018 Farm Bill projects) were obligated for over \$91 million. Thirty-two entity-held easements (for 2018 Farm Bill projects) were obligated for over \$7 million and four entity-held easements were closed on 442 acres. A total of seven entity-held easements have closed on a total of 12,925 acres. One U.S.-held easement was obligated for over \$2 million.

NRCS States and partners executed 114 supplemental agreements in 2023, when combined with agreement modifications and prior year obligations this equates to \$129 million in financial and technical assistance funding to partners.

The next RCPP Classic and AFA/Grant competitions are scheduled to be announced early in calendar year 2024.

Success Story

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/rcpp-regional-conservation-partnership-program/news/restoring-michigans>

NRCS worked with Michigan's Grand Traverse Band (GTB) of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians to remove blockages to natural water flow in streams and rivers through the RCPP. USDA invested over \$18 million in Federal grants and \$30 million were raised in local matching funds to replace undersized culverts with timber bridges, the removal of old and failing dams, and the purchase of conservation easements to prevent urban development on farmland – particularly fruit farms.

The GTB of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians leads the Tribal Stream and Michigan Fruitbelt Collaborative, which includes over a dozen nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies.

This was one of the most important sections of Miller Creek to restore because fish and insect migration was blocked upstream from the Boardman River, and downstream flow was also blocked. Fish and wildlife navigate waterways much like people navigate highways. When a stream is blocked, complete ecosystems can suffer.

So far, over 50 stream crossing improvements are complete in Northwest Lower Michigan, with many more planned.

Regional Conservation Partnership Program – Inflation Reduction Act

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) was reauthorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill). Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges on a regional or watershed scale. The purpose of RCPP is to further the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources on eligible land. It encourages eligible partners to cooperate with producers in meeting or avoiding the need for regulatory requirements related to agricultural production. Through RCPP, NRCS and State, local, and regional partners coordinate resources to help producers install and maintain conservation activities in selected project areas.

The Inflation Reduction Act provided \$250 million for RCPP in 2023, with additional annual funding through 2026. This funding will be used to prioritize conservation project proposals that target delivery of project assistance to directly improve soil carbon sequestration; reduce nitrogen losses; or reduce, capture, or avoid, carbon dioxide, methane, or nitrous oxide emissions associated with agriculture production.

Current Activities

NRCS is working on the 2024 funding opportunity, which will make both 2018 Farm Bill and IRA funding available for new awards. NRCS anticipates opening this opportunity in the second quarter of 2024.

Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP) was authorized by Section 1240R of the Food Security Act of 1985 (P.L. 99-198), as amended (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-5). The program was reauthorized by the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 with an authorized funding level of \$50 million for the period covering fiscal years 2019 through 2023. Section 102 of H.R. 6363 – Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extension Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-22) provided \$15 million in mandatory funding for 2024. VPA-HIP is implemented with Commodity Credit Corporation funds.

VPA-HIP is a competitive grant program that provides opportunities to State and tribal governments to promote programs encouraging owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch, and forestlands to voluntarily make land accessible to the public for hunting, fishing, nature watching, hiking, and other wildlife-dependent recreation.

Only State and tribal governments are eligible to apply for program funding through a competitive grants process. Owners of private forests, farms, or ranchlands are eligible to receive funds from the State or tribal government awardees in a manner consistent with the proposals submitted to the agency and in compliance with the conditions of the established formal agreements between NRCS and the awardees.

VPA-HIP awardees use the Federal funds to lease land from participating landowners for public use and to enhance wildlife habitat. VPA-HIP awards include funds for technical assistance to identify and/or improve existing quality wildlife habitat on private lands and provide outreach to historically underserved landowners. VPA-HIP awardees use technical assistance funds to update maps and other information to ensure the public is aware of locations providing opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation. NRCS State offices collaborate with VPA-HIP awardees to provide needed technical assistance.

Current Activities

In September 2019, NRCS published a notice of funding opportunity that made up to \$50 million available for three-year projects. On March 11, 2020, NRCS announced the selection of 27 award recipients in 27 States. NRCS State offices managing the awards finalized award agreements for all 27 award recipients. These awards all expire by the end of 2024.

Wetlands Reserve Program

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) was authorized by Section 1237 of the Food Security Act of 1985 (P.L. 99- 198), as amended. WRP was a voluntary program that provided technical and financial assistance to eligible landowners, to permanently protect and restore valuable wetland ecosystems, including associated habitats such as uplands, riparian areas, and forest lands. WRP was repealed by Section 2703 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) on February 7, 2014. However, Section 2703 also provided transitional language that ensured prior enrollments will continue to provide technical and financial assistance. WRP purposes were rolled into the Wetland Reserve Easements component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP-WRE). Lands previously enrolled in WRP are now considered enrolled in ACEP-WRE and are eligible to receive financial and technical assistance services authorized under ACEP. The repeal of WRP does not affect the validity or terms of any contract, agreement, or easement entered into prior to the enactment of the Agricultural Act of 2014. Prior to its repeal, WRP provided landowners four options to enroll acreage: permanent easements, 30-year easements, restoration cost-share agreements, or a 30-year contract (only on acreage owned by an Indian tribe or tribe member).

The 2014 Farm Bill also authorized the agency to use prior year unobligated WRP funds from 2009 - 2013 to continue to implement certain restoration and closing activities on WRP projects enrolled prior to February 7, 2014, the date of enactment of the 2014 Farm Bill. Authorized activities included restoration of the easement site, and acquisition-related costs such as title reports, hazardous substance evaluations, due diligence, boundary surveys, and easement closings.

Prior year WRP funding continues to be used to provide ongoing technical assistance to existing WRP easements and contracts entered into prior to the 2014 Farm Bill enactment date. Authorized expenditures include restoration planning and implementation for any unrestored easements, boundary surveys, and management and maintenance activities to support agency easement stewardship responsibilities.

Current Activities

The 2014 Farm Bill repealed WRP and combined its purposes with the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program and the Grassland Reserve Program to create ACEP. No new enrollments of WRP have occurred since the 2014 Farm Bill was signed into law; all closings to date related to WRP enrollments have been completed. Changes in total enrollment relates to conversion of 30-year easements to permanent easements and other easement administrative activities.

Table NRCS-68. WRP Cumulative Enrolled Easements, Restoration Cost-Share Agreements and Contracts with Tribes and Closed Easements

Agreement Type	Cumulative Agreements	Cumulative Acres
Enrolled Permanent Easements.....	10,861	2,097,693
Enrolled 30-year Easements	2,707	422,446
Restoration Cost-Share Agreements.....	300	75,742
30-Year Contracts (with Tribes).....	15	2,920
Total.....	13,883	2,598,802
Agreement Type	Cumulative Easements	Cumulative Acres
Closed Permanent Easements	10,861	2,097,693
Closed 30-Year Easements	2,707	422,446
Total.....	13,568	2,520,139

Wetlands Mitigation Banking Program

The Wetland Mitigation Banking Program (WMBP) is a first-of-its-kind program funded through the 2014 Farm Bill and revised in the 2018 Farm Bill. WMBP provides a legal mechanism for agricultural producers to maintain their eligibility for USDA program benefits if they convert agricultural wetlands. In particular, a producer may offset the loss of wetland functions and values resulting from a conversion activity by restoring, enhancing, or creating wetland functions and values on a different site. Through a mitigation bank, producers can purchase offsetting wetland “credits” which come from previously drained (prior to 1985) wetlands that have been restored and approved for wetland mitigation.

NRCS accepts grant proposals to establish mitigation banks for agricultural producers. The intent of the program is for qualified third parties to operate and manage all aspects of a wetland mitigation bank with oversight by NRCS. Eligible entities include Federally recognized Indian tribes, State, and local units of government; for-profit entities; and nongovernmental organizations.

Program funds may be used to pay for:

- Development of a mitigation banking instrument.
- Identification of suitable mitigation sites and performance of functional assessments to determine the available credits and a credit release schedule.
- Market research and contracting for mitigation activities.
- Land surveys, permitting, and title searches.
- Design and formulation of mitigation plans.
- Restoration, enhancement, or creation of wetland mitigation bank sites in accordance with NRCS conservation practice standards.
- Tracking and management of wetland mitigation data.
- Direct administrative costs associated with implementing the project.
- Indirect costs of the awardee.

NRCS uses a grant agreement to provide program funds to each selected applicant. The project budget period, amount of Federal assistance, terms and conditions of the award, and reporting requirements are described and provided to the selected applicants as part of this process.

Subsequently, awardees work with NRCS to develop a mitigation banking instrument that provides full details for development, establishment, and operation of a mitigation banking program. Mitigation banking instruments are developed in conjunction with national and State NRCS staff oversight and are subject to NRCS approval.

Eligible entities receiving funds will ensure the following wetlands receive priority for mitigation under WMBP (note that wetland designation labels are those used by NRCS for implementation of the wetland compliance provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985):

- Farmed Wetland;
- Farmed Wetland Pasture;
- Wetland less than five acres in size that is predominantly bordered by land that has been cropped eight of the past ten years when the wetland is designated as degraded according to a functional assessment tool; and
- Converted Wetland that, prior to conversion, qualified under one of the items of above, as determined by NRCS staff.

Activities funded by this program are for the sole purpose of assisting agricultural producers with wetland conservation compliance.

Current Activities

Producers have purchased all the credits made available from the 2018 inaugural bank site in Illinois, with the last credits being sold earlier this year. This forested wetland bank was funded in part by the first round of Natural Resources Conservation Service' Agricultural Wetland Mitigation Banking grant dollars. An additional grant was awarded in 2021 in Illinois at another forested wetland bank site to help address the growing need for producers. This restored bank site is home to over 65 native woody and herbaceous species. The final stages of work are being done to permit Illinois' largest agricultural mitigation bank site to date at the Forked Creek site. This site will contain a 65-acre wetland nestled within a larger 140-acre native prairie restoration.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) was authorized by Section 1240N of the Food Security Act of 1985 (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-1), as amended. NRCS administered WHIP with funds made available through the Commodity Credit Corporation. Section 2707 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (P.L. 113-79) repealed WHIP. However, Section 2707 also provided transitional language that ensured prior enrollees will continue to be provided technical and financial assistance by NRCS. WHIP provided 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 habitats. Efforts focused on fish and wildlife habitats also contributed to more sustainable use of resources and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The purposes of WHIP were consolidated into EQIP by the 2014 Farm Bill.

Financial Assistance. Section 2707 of the 2014 Farm Bill authorized the use of unobligated WHIP funds from 2009 through 2013 to be used to support contracts entered into WHIP prior to the date of enactment of the 2014 Farm Bill. A WHIP contract 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.

Technical Assistance. The agency and its partners provided 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. All remaining technical assistance through WHIP will be used to help agricultural producers implement their existing contracts.

Current Activities

The 2014 Farm Bill repealed the authority to enter into new WHIP contracts. As a result, priority was shifted to assist producers to implement existing contracts. In 2023, the agency worked with producers to implement 20 practices and made nearly \$50,279 in payments for the completed practices. Currently, 56 WHIP contracts remain active.

Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program

The Feral Swine Eradication and Control Pilot Program (FSCP) was authorized by Section 2408 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (P.L. 115-334). The Farm Bill provided \$75 million in mandatory funding for 2019 through 2023, and this funding is equally divided between NRCS and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to carry out the pilot program. Section 102 of H.R. 6363 – Further Continuing Appropriations and Other Extension Act, 2024 (P.L. 118-22) provided \$15 million in mandatory funding for 2024, and this funding is also equally divided between NRCS and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) to continue the pilot program.

The objective of FSCP is to pilot collaborative efforts to address the threat that feral swine pose to agriculture, native ecosystems, human health, and animal health. Feral swine are an invasive species that damage agricultural crops, degrade natural systems, and can carry diseases that can be passed on to livestock and humans. Estimates of the damage caused by this invasive species, as well as associated control costs, exceed \$2 billion annually in the United States. Feral swine are found across the continental United States and Hawaii, but the heaviest concentrations are found in the Southeastern portion of the country, and stretch as far west Texas and Oklahoma, with high populations also found in California.

Pilot areas for FSCP are identified collaboratively, by NRCS and APHIS personnel in consultation with State technical committees. FSCP is delivered within pilot areas through three coordinated components. First, APHIS works directly to control feral swine populations. Second, NRCS provides funding to partner organizations to provide technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers for on-farm trapping, and other means of feral swine control. Partner organizations also provide other services, including pre- and post-project damage assessments, and other means to assess progress in control efforts. Finally, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance for restoration of damage caused by feral swine after those populations have been controlled.

Delivery of FSCP is prioritized to those States that have the highest and most damaging feral swine populations. The existing APHIS National Feral Swine Damage Management Program has proved effective in addressing emerging populations in conjunction with States. The pilot program builds upon and expands work already underway by APHIS' National Feral Swine Damage Management Program, to reduce damages inflicted by feral swine, in areas with high population densities and in partnership with local government, the private sector, industry, and academia.

Current Activities

NRCS obligated over \$34 million dollars through two rounds of grant awards with partners in 12 States to deliver assistance to producers in pilot projects. Through 34 pilot projects, more than 4,300 landowners received assistance to help reduced feral swine damage on almost 3 million acres. Assistance provided through NRCS funded grants may include outreach and educational events, trapping cost-share, damage assessments, and individual project studies. All projects are participating in the landowner damage assessment survey and are working with Auburn University and Texas A&M University to collect, report, and analyze damage information. Landowners in all pilot project areas noted the positive economic impact of feral swine control. Following feral swine reductions, landowners are able to expand the use of their agricultural lands, harvesting crops from areas that were previously devastated by feral swine. Likewise, landowners have reported being able to plant crops with higher economic returns.

Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production

The Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production (OUAIP) was authorized by Section 12302 of the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (the 2018 Farm Bill) amending Section 222 of the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6911 et seq.). The Secretary of Agriculture delegated NRCS to lead the USDA-wide office, and work in partnership with other USDA agencies that support urban agriculture.

The mission of the OUAIP is to encourage and promote urban, indoor, and other emerging agricultural practices, including:

- community gardens and farms located in urban areas, suburbs, and urban clusters;
- rooftop farms, outdoor vertical production, and green walls;
- indoor farms, greenhouses, and high-tech vertical technology farms;
- hydroponic, aeroponic, and aquaponic farm facilities; and
- other innovations in agricultural production, as determined by the Secretary.

OUAIP is directed to administer grants, cooperative agreement pilot projects in at least ten States, establish ten new Urban/Suburban County Committees for Urban Agriculture, and establish a Federal Advisory Committee for Urban Agriculture. OUAIP is also responsible for engaging in activities to carry out the mission, including managing programs for community gardens, urban farms, rooftop agriculture, and indoor vertical production; advising the Secretary; coordinating with the agencies and officials of the Department to update relevant programs; engaging in stakeholder relations and developing external partnerships; identifying common State and municipal best practices for navigating local policies; coordinating networks of community gardens and facilitating connections to local food banks, in partnership with the Food and Nutrition Service; and collaborating with other Federal agencies.

Current Activities

The 2023 Enacted Appropriation was funded under the Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production Program stand-alone account.

This page was intentionally left blank.

AGENCY-WIDE PERFORMANCE

Introduction

The Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) mission area is USDA’s focal point for the nation’s farmers and ranchers and other stewards of private agricultural lands and non-industrial private forest lands. FPAC agencies implement programs designed to mitigate the significant risks of farming through crop insurance services, conservation programs and technical assistance, and commodity, lending, and disaster programs. These agencies include the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Risk Management Agency, and the FPAC Business Center (FPAC BC).

FPAC BC’s Performance, Accountability, and Risk (PAR) division leads the mission area in Strategic Planning, Performance Management, Evidence and Evaluation, and Enterprise Risk Management (ERM). PAR works closely with each of the FPAC agencies to develop performance related practices and products. This office frequently works directly with USDA leadership and represents FPAC on the Department’s Performance, Evaluation, Evidence and Risk committee and the ERM Committee, which are facilitated by the USDA Office of Budget and Program Analysis. FPAC’s Enterprise Risk and Strategy Committee, comprised of executives from each of the FPAC agencies, oversees and provides accountability for performance functions across the mission area.

Alignment to USDA 2022 – 2026 Strategic Plan

NRCS contributes to Goal 1 of the Department’s Strategic Goals in the current 2022 – 2026 USDA Strategic Plan. Departmental KPIs are performance indicators that are aligned to the Strategic Objectives laid out in the USDA’s Strategic Plan.

Strategic Goal 1: Combat Climate Change to Support America’s Working Lands, Natural Resources and Communities

- Objective 1.1: Use Climate-Smart Management and Sound Science to Enhance the Health and Productivity of Agricultural Lands
- Objective 1.3: Restore, Protect, and Conserve Watersheds to Ensure Clean, Abundant, and Continuous Provision of Water Resources
- Objective 1.4: Increase Carbon Sequestration, Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Ce Economic Opportunities (and Develop Low-Carbon Energy Solutions)

SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE

A more detailed report of the performance plan can be found at <https://www.usda.gov/our-agency/about-usda/performance>. The following table summarizes the results for the Departmental KPIs for which Natural Resources Conservation Service is responsible.

Table NRCS-69. KPIs

Strategic Objective 1.1¹	Item	2024	2025
Conservation Needs	Results	-	-
Land Evaluated for Conservation Needs (Million Acres)	Target	N/A	52.1
Conservation Plans	Results	-	-
Conservation Plans Developed	Target	N/A	115,000
Reduce Soil Erosion or Improve Soil Health	Results	-	-
Conservation Practice Applied to Reduce Soil Erosion or Improve Soil Health (Million Acres)	Target	N/A	15.9
Conservation Easements	Results	-	-
Land Under Protection by Conservation Easements (Million Acres) ...	Target	N/A	5.7

Expected Performance Progress Towards the Achievement of Strategic Objectives:

¹ NRCS underwent a KPI revamp for 2025 and replaced previous KPIs with the following KPIs to better reflect NRCS work.

Objective 1.1: Use Climate-Smart Management and Sound Science to Enhance the Health and Productivity of Agricultural Lands.

Conservation Needs: While this is a new KPI that will be reported starting in 2025, the information represented is not new to NRCS. The target for this KPI, which represents the acres of land that NRCS had performed conservation planning for, was informed by historic accomplishments. NRCS continues to prioritize conservation planning activities and does not anticipate any changes to this priority that would impact achieving the 2025 target.

Conservation Plans: While this is a new KPI that will be reported starting in 2025, the information represented is not new to NRCS. The target for this KPI, which represents the quantity of conservation plans NRCS has developed, was informed by historic accomplishments. NRCS continues to prioritize conservation planning activities and does not anticipate any changes to this priority that would impact achieving the 2025 target.

Reduce Soil Erosion or Improve Soil Health: This KPI was designed to be a more exhaustive measure of the outcomes NRCS produces with relation to reducing erosion and improving soil health. The target for this KPI was informed by historic accomplishments in these conservation areas. Reducing soil erosion and improving soil health are anticipated to continue being priority resource concerns on a national scale, and NRCS does not anticipate any changes to this priority that would impact reaching the 2025 target.

Conservation Easements: Starting in 2025, NRCS will represent easement outcomes in terms of the total acres of land under protection from easement programs, rather than focusing exclusively on new land acres. This representation better reflects the long-term commitment to land protection and stewardship that conservation easements provide. 2025 targets for this calculation reflect the existing inventory as of the end of 2022, plus anticipated new acres to be closed in the coming fiscal years.

Table NRCS-70. KPIs

Strategic Objective 1.3	Item	2024	2025
Cropland Sediment	Results	-	-
Tons of Sediment Prevented from Leaving Cropland and Entering Water Bodies (Million Tons).....	Target	6	6
Conserve Water²	Results	-	-
Conservation Practices Applied to Conserve Water (Million Acres).	Target	N/A	15.9

Expected Performance Progress Towards the Achievement of Strategic Objectives:

Objective 1.3: Restore, Protect, and Conserve Watersheds to Ensure Clean, Abundant, and Continuous Provision of Water Resources.

Cropland Sediment: NRCS has had a sustained and successful soil health campaign and will continue to utilize the effective methodology under this KPI. However, new Farm Bill requirements may pose risks to progress.

Conserve Water: This KPI was designed to be a more exhaustive measure of the outcomes NRCS produces with relation to conserving water. The target for this KPI was informed from historic accomplishments in this conservation area. Water conservation is anticipated to continue being a priority resource concern on a national scale, and NRCS does not anticipate any changes to this priority that would impact reaching the 2025 target.

² This KPI will initiate in 2025.

Table NRCS-71. KPIs

Strategic Objective 1.4³		2024	2025
Climate Change	Results	-	-
Climate Change Mitigation (Million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent [MMT CO ₂ e]).....	Target	N/A	30
Conservation Practices	Results	-	-
Conservation Practices Applied to Mitigate Climate Change (Million Acres)	Target	N/A	23

Expected Performance Progress Towards the Achievement of Strategic Objectives:

Objective 1.4: Increase Carbon Sequestration, Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions, and Ce Economic Opportunities (and Develop Low-Carbon Energy Solutions).

Climate Change: The 2025 target will be updated to incorporate expectations from IRA funding as USDA is in the early stages of implementation for this transformational work and data is still needed for the necessary establishment of the initial trends.

NRCS is also working to advance the methodology for the KPI. This longer-term work is supported as part of IRA and will continue through 2031. For 2025, initial improvements will be driven by improved documentation and expanding input from Subject Matter Experts to identify and advance opportunities, such as refining assumptions and implementation data.

NRCS is also considering options for updating the source of program data to better capture applied practice units, which are key inputs to the estimates and are converted to the estimated benefit using coefficients (e.g. from COMET-Planner). NRCS is also working to advance automation of the estimates.

Conservation Practices: The 2025 target will be updated to incorporate expectations from IRA funding as USDA is in the early stages of implementation for this transformational work and data is still needed for the necessary establishment of the initial trends.

NRCS is also making improvements to the process and data for estimating this KPI. These improvements include advancing the automation of the calculations, expanding input from Subject Matter Experts, and considering options for the source of program data to better capture applied practice units.

³ NRCS underwent a KPI revamp for 2025 and replaced previous KPIs with the following KPIs to better reflect NRCS work.