



Natural Resources Conservation Service

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NEWS RELEASE

Funding Available for Innovative Partner-Driven Projects Aimed at Improving Water Quality, Wildlife Habitat, and Soil Health in Tennessee **Application Batching Deadline is January 15, 2021**

NASHVILLE, December 1, 2020 – The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering funding for innovative partner-driven projects to improve water quality, wildlife habitat and soil health in two Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) areas in Tennessee.

To be considered for program funding, applicants must operate land within the focus area of the respective RCPP project. **The deadline to submit applications for fiscal year (FY) 2021 funding is January 15, 2021.**

“The Regional Conservation Partnership Program draws on local knowledge and networks to fuel conservation projects, bringing together a wide variety of new partners including businesses, universities, non-profits, and local governments,” said Sheldon Hightower, Tennessee NRCS State Conservationist.

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

“While we are taking the necessary precautionary measures to help prevent the spread coronavirus, we will continue to provide one-on-one, customer-specific service to producers to help them meet their conservation and business goals,” said Hightower.

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

Funded FY 2021 RCPP projects include:

Advanced Precision Agriculture for Sustainable Conservation

Tennessee NRCS will invest approximately **\$924,000** to fund a Critical Conservation Area in the Mississippi River Basin. Nutrien will spearhead this project that encompasses the Cumberland River

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basin in Tennessee and Kentucky, which spans nearly 18,000 square miles and is home to nearly 2.5 million people. This project will occur in the Red River and Lower Cumberland watersheds, two of the 14 watersheds that make up the Cumberland River Watershed. [Click here for counties that are eligible to apply.](#)

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

Reversing Declines in Grassland Biodiversity

NRCS will invest nearly **\$2.4 million** in Tennessee to assist the American Bird Conservancy and its partners with a multifaceted conservation program that will complement existing efforts to reverse the decline of grassland habitats in the Southeast U.S., especially near protected landscapes.

The project seeks to recover populations of grassland bird species deemed in need of conservation attention by Partners in Flight, as well as the native biodiversity associated with the historic grassland landscapes of the Interior Low Plateaus ecoregion of Tennessee and Kentucky. Conservation efforts will include removal of woody cover and prescribed fire, reconversion of cropland or fescue pastures to native grasses, increasing forb-to-grass ratios, changing grazing intensities, and altering haying regimes.

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

Online services are available to customers with an eAuth account, which provides access to the [farmers.gov](#) portal where producers can view USDA farm loan information and payments and view and track certain USDA program applications and payments. Customers who do not already have an eAuth account can enroll at [farmers.gov/sign-in](#). Online NRCS services are available to customers through the [Conservation Client Gateway](#) link which can be found at [www.nrcs.usda.gov](#). Customers can track payments, report completed practices, request conservation assistance and electronically sign documents.

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