

Landowners Encouraged to Apply for Regional Conservation Projects

Eligible landowners are encouraged to apply for available funding this summer

DAVIS, Calif., May 27, 2015 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Funding is now available for private landowners to conserve and protect their land as part of six new regional conservation projects in California. The six projects are funded by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), newly created in the 2014 Farm Bill.

Each project has its own set of conservation benefits, specific goals and management practices. Four of the selected projects benefit agricultural lands geographically located within California, and two additional projects provide conservation benefits on a multi-state level. The four projects that are totally within California borders will receive approximately \$12 million with partners providing matching resources to implement the work. The work will tap into resources from both the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.

Eligible landowners within the six project areas should submit an application to their nearest USDA Service Center to request financial and technical assistance. Each of the six projects are developing timelines between now and mid-summer to take applications. NRCS funding will be used to implement a variety of conservation practices on private lands.

California-Specific Project Overviews:

- **Enhancement of Tricolored Blackbird Habitat on Agricultural Land.** Partners: Audubon California, Western United Dairyman, Dairy Cares, Farm Bureau and Sustainable Conservation. Project will address factors that challenge dairy farmers and threaten Tricolored Blackbird populations, with the goal of finding a sustainable solution for management of colonies on farms and saving the species from extinction. In addition to using working lands programs and wetland easements to protect and increase habitat, an educational campaign will help increase awareness of farmers' role in saving the species.
- **Expansion of Waterbird Habitat Project in the Central Valley.** Partner: California Rice Commission.

Project will increase technical and financial assistance to California's rice growers to increase wildlife features on approximately 165,000 acres of rice fields. A special component will address the specific needs of upland-nesting bird species on 12,000 acres.

- **The Pajaro Valley Community Water Dialogue.** Partners: Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, Driscoll Farms and Sustainable Conservation. Project will provide assistance to local growers to implement conservation practices that reduce groundwater pumping, increase aquifer recharge, protect surface water by reducing nitrate leaching into the groundwater.
- **Bay Area Climate Change Practices on Agricultural Lands.** Partners: Marin Agricultural Land Trust and local Resource Conservation Districts. Project will help farmers accelerate conservation planning and implement conservation measures that combat climate change. Practices will take place on lands protected by long-term agricultural easements. Partners and landowners will monitor soil quality, water quality, and in-stream habitat on these lands.

Multi-State Project Overviews:

- **The Klamath-Rogue Oak Woodland Conservation Project.** Partner: Lomakatsi Restoration Project. Work will target 3,200 high-priority acres, from California to Oregon, recently identified in a Conservation Implementation Strategy, to preserve, enhance, and restore the structural diversity, ecological function, and overall health and persistence of oak habitats and their watersheds.
- **The Rice Stewardship Partnership.** Partner: Ducks Unlimited. In California, targets approximately 25 landowners on 2,600 acres. Will address water quantity, water quality, and wildlife habitat across 380,000 acres in six states including California. Using remote sensing to estimate bird population carrying capacity in shallow waters and the Field-to-Market Fieldprint Calculator to monitor results over time, the partners offer several innovations to augment conservation implementation and gain broader producer participation.

RCPP is a five-year investment, therefore, applicants not selected for funding for this fiscal year may be eligible for funding in subsequent application periods. Also, each year USDA will award funding for new RCPP projects, so other opportunities for funding may come available in the coming years.

RCPP selected competitive conservation projects, designed by local partners specifically for their state or region. Eligible partners included private companies, universities, non-profit organizations, local and tribal governments and others joining with agricultural and conservation organizations and producers to invest money, manpower and materials to their proposed initiatives.

NRCS has provided leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private landowners and managers conserve their soil, water and other natural resources since 1935. For more information about NRCS's programs and services, please visit www.nrcs.usda.gov (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>).

SOURCE USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service

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