

July 15, 2016

USDA Announces \$49 Million Public-Private Investment to Improve Critical Wetlands in 12 States

Tennessee plans to invest more than \$15 million in two projects

NASHVILLE – The U. S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Kevin Brown recently announced that NRCS is awarding \$44.6 million through its Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) to support 10 wetland enhancement projects on private and tribal agricultural lands in 12 States, including Tennessee. In total, the projects will help to protect, restore or enhance 15,000 wetland acres in critical watersheds across the nation.

"NRCS in Tennessee is committed to protecting and enhancing our state's wetlands, which are critical to the quality of our nation's waters, wildlife and landscapes," said Brown. "By collaborating with private partners at the local and regional level, we are able to support innovative conservation solutions and expand the amount of dedicated resources. These are high impact projects that will ensure our land and water resources are healthy now and for the next generation."

The recent announcement will bring together partners leveraging technical and financial resources to address local concerns, such as water quality and flooding.

In Tennessee, NRCS will partner with five other states to enroll an additional 5,000 acres in conservation easements to improve water quality, expand habitat for federally protected species, reduce soil erosion, and provide additional outdoor recreation opportunities. This is the third phase of work that begun in 2012 and is on track to enroll more than 20,000 acres by 2019. The project area includes portions of 35 counties/parishes bordering the Mississippi River in Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. NRCS plans to invest nearly \$12.2 million in this project.

Tennessee NRCS will also partner with the West Tennessee River Basin Authority by investing \$3 million to enroll between 350-500 acres of floodplain in WRE easements to restore lost floodplain habitats, improve water quality in the Forked Deer River and Gulf of Mexico, and improve fish and wildlife habitat. The project will begin in FY17 and extend to FY2020.

A full list of all funded projects is available on the [WREP website](#).

Wetland reserve easements enable landowners to successfully reduce impacts from flooding, recharge groundwater, enhance and protect wildlife habitat and provide outdoor recreational and

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educational opportunities. The voluntary nature of NRCS easement programs allows effective integration of wetland restoration on agricultural land, providing benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program, as well as benefits to the local and rural communities where the wetlands exist.

The Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) was authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill and is administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). WREP helps States, local governments, Tribes and other organizations collaborate with NRCS to work with private and Tribal landowners to voluntarily enroll eligible land into conservation easements that protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. WREP is a special enrollment option under the [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#).

For more information about WREP, please contact Chris Moyers, Program Specialist, at 731-668-0700, or email him at chris.moyers@tn.usda.gov. Visit our website at www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov for information about NRCS programs and services.

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