



REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM



Putting Partners in the 'Driver's Seat'

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

Partner-Led Projects Address Local Resource Challenges

With RCPP, partners are in the "driver's seat" with technical and financial help from NRCS. Partners develop projects that deliver solutions to natural resource challenges. RCPP empowers local organizations and communities to pitch their own projects. This year, NRCS received 265 pre-proposals, and of those, NRCS selected the best of the best to send a full proposal for funding consideration. NRCS is funding 84 of those projects this year.

NRCS works side-by-side with conservation partners and agricultural producers to conserve natural resources, leading to cleaner and more abundant water, healthier soil, enhanced wildlife habitat and many other benefits.

RCPP's TOTAL IMPACT since 2014



2,000+ partners working with NRCS.



199 high-impact projects that covers all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

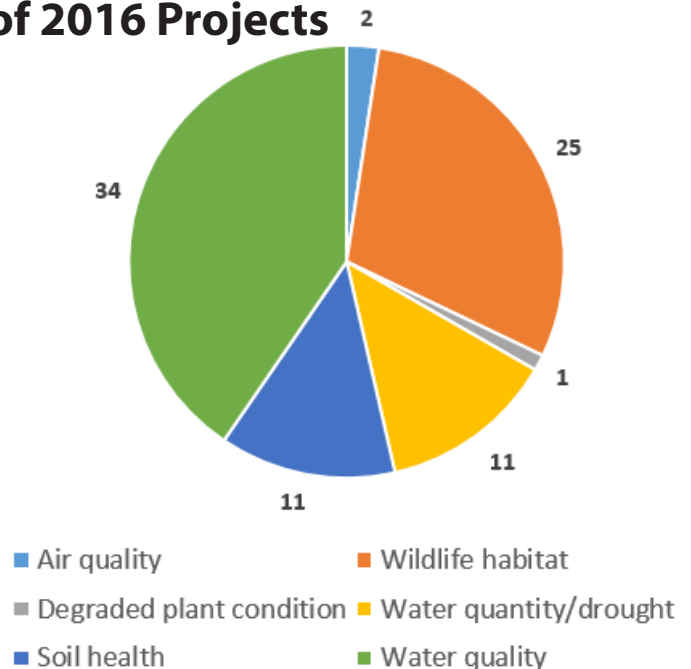
More than **\$500 MILLION** invested by NRCS.

Around **\$900 MILLION** matched by partners.

All told, NRCS plans to invest up to **\$1.2 BILLION** in RCPP through 2018.

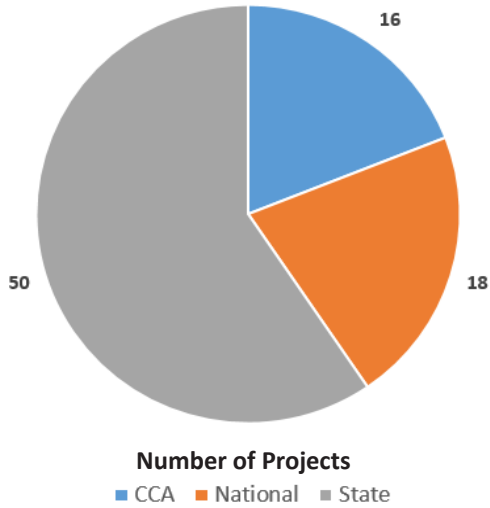
With partner match, that's at least **\$2.4 BILLION** for conservation.

Focus of 2016 Projects



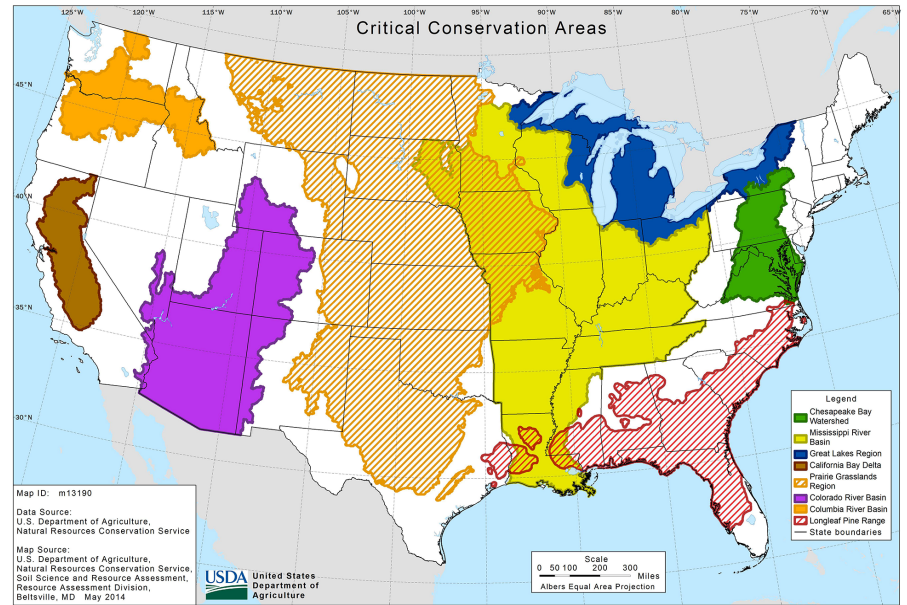
Types of Projects

Funding for RCPP is allocated to projects in three different categories – state-level projects, national-level projects, and projects in Critical Conservation Areas.



Targeting Priority Landscapes

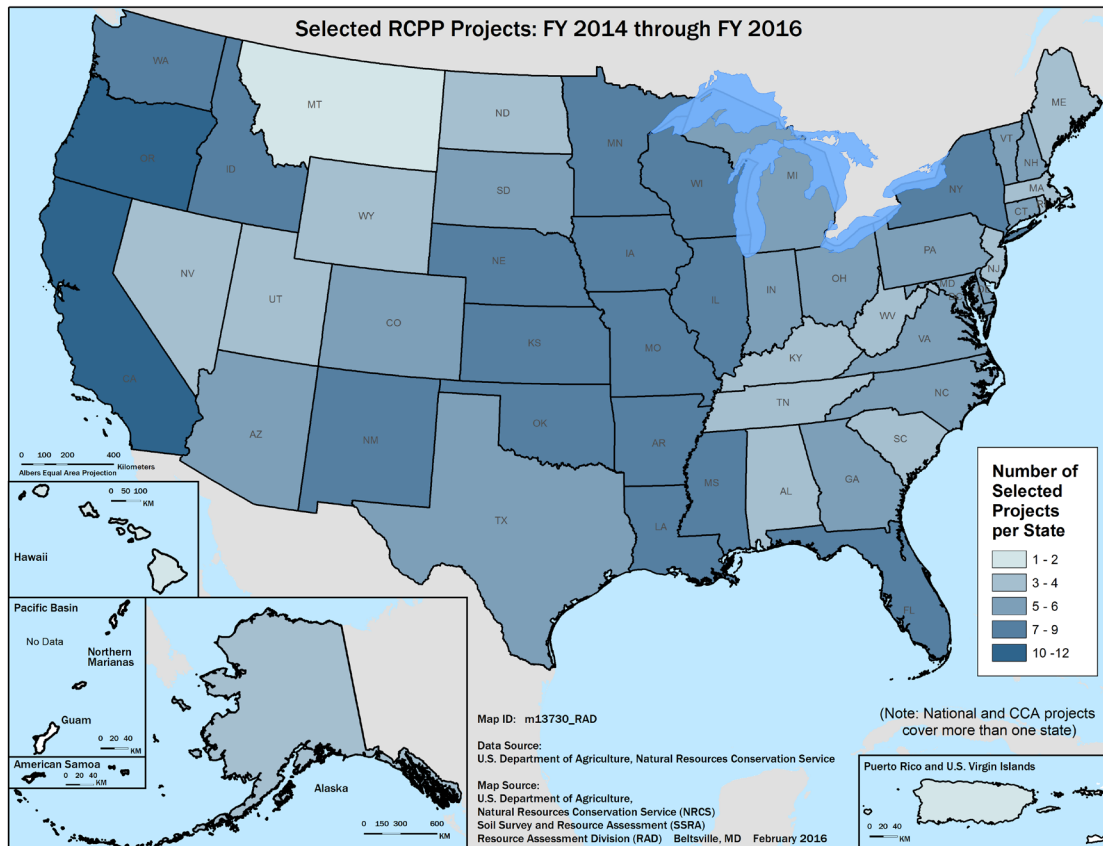
Critical Conservation Areas are landscapes of national importance, and RCPP enables stakeholders to address common natural resource goals at the regional level.



Projects Near You

RCPP gives local organizations opportunities to design and deliver solutions that benefit natural resources where they live and work. See how many projects are in your area.

2014-2016 Projects:





Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Investing in Mississippi - 2016

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2016, NRCS is investing up to \$220 million in 84 high-impact projects that impact every state in the nation, including four in Mississippi. This investment, which builds on the \$370 million invested for 2014 and 2015, will help conservation partners and agricultural producers conserve natural resources, leading to cleaner and more abundant water, healthier soil, enhanced wildlife habitat and many other benefits.

Mississippi Grazing Land Management

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$275,000 (State)

Lead Partner: National Center for Appropriate Technology

Number of Partners: 2

Participating State(s): Mississippi

This five-year project will focus on increasing the number of Mississippi livestock producers who use grazing techniques that improve the overall health of Mississippi grazing lands. Partners will assist producers in developing new grazing techniques, including season-long continuous grazing, rest-rotation grazing, deferred-rotation grazing, intensively managed grazing and familiarizing producers with the advantages of raising pastures rich with local forage varieties. Planting locally adapted perennial forages will increase the likelihood that producers can maintain forage-based management practices year round and have been shown to optimize animal and plant performance, as well as improve or maintain pasture and range health. The target population for the grazing land management project is small livestock producers of large and small ruminants and experienced grazers who are looking for alternative measures to keep their farm viable. This project will also nurture new Mississippi-based "pasture innovators," who will be trained to use innovative grazing practices tailored for specific breeds of livestock. Project partners will also assist Mississippi producers in developing peer connections, fostering creative use of natural resources and grazing methods, and using long-term planning approaches.

North Mississippi Kudzu Control Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$200,000 (State)

Lead Partner: North Central Mississippi Resource Conservation & Development

Number of Partners: 18

Participating State(s): Mississippi

The goal of this project is to provide cost-share assistance to private-owned forestlands in North Mississippi to help eradicate the invasive weed kudzu. Kudzu has invaded more than 546,000 acres of private-owned forestlands in Mississippi and has cost forest landowners \$54 million dollars annually from loss of timber sales. Kudzu makes it impossible to grow timber or re-establish timber where kudzu exists.



Since there has been very limited funding through the federal and state programs for kudzu control, this project hopes to provide a 75% cost-share program to at least 150 forest landowners in a 12-county area to address sustainable forestry and improve wildlife habitat. Partners will hold at least three meetings to inform historically underserved producers about the kudzu control program to ensure that 15% of the landowners receiving cost-share assistance are historically underserved producers.

RCPP-Skuna River Watershed Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$339,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Mississippi Soil and Water Conservation Commission (MSWCC)

Number of Partners: 3

Participating State(s): Mississippi

The RCPP-Skuna River Watershed Project proposes funding the installation of eligible conservation Best Management Practices (BMPs) on about 1,650 acres of cropland and pastureland for landowners located within a targeted area of the watershed located in Chickasaw County, Mississippi. MSWCC will pay for the replacement of two large in-channel grade control structures that have failed, causing serious degradation to the stream banks of the Skuna River Canal in the project area. Erosion of the soil resource base in the project area removes nutrients, reduces water holding capacity, undermines plant rooting systems, reduces soil organic matter content, reduces soil tilth and degrades water quality within the project area. With the installation of NRCS approved BMPs, both sedimentation and animal waste issues will be addressed in this project.

Southern Sentinel Landscapes Conservation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7.5 million (National)

Lead Partner: U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities

Number of Partners: 20

Participating State(s): Georgia (**lead state**), Mississippi & North Carolina

This project will protect and restore 17,500 – 21,500 acres of longleaf and other working forest habitats on private lands important for at-risk species. The goal of this multistate effort – Mississippi, Georgia and North Carolina - is to reduce the likelihood that target species will be listed under the Endangered Species Act and to demonstrate the compatibility of working lands management with at-risk species conservation. These sites and species address shared conservation interests of the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, and Interior on proposed or potential Sentinel Landscapes. The proposed project advances goals of the Range-wide Conservation Plan for Longleaf Pine, the NRCS Longleaf Pine Initiative, and each state's Forest and Wildlife Action Plans, while also contributing to military installation compatible-use buffers. By focusing on the overlapping interests of three federal Departments, this proposal delivers more measurable benefits to At-Risk Species than if the agencies followed separate paths. This proposal builds on the RCPP award the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities received in 2014.





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MEDIA RELEASE

February 12, 2016

USDA, Partners to Invest \$720 Million in Large-Scale, Targeted Conservation Projects Across the Nation

Regional Conservation Partnership Program Pools Together \$220 Million Investment from USDA, up to \$500 Million from Local Partners to Improve Water Quality, Soil Health, Habitat and More

Jackson, Feb. 12, 2016 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and partners across the nation together will direct up to \$720 million towards 84 conservation projects that will help communities improve water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability. These projects make up the second round of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) created by the 2014 Farm Bill.

Through the 2015 and 2016 rounds, USDA and partners are investing up to \$1.5 billion in 199 strategic conservation projects. Projects are selected on a competitive basis, and local private partners must be able to at least match the USDA commitment. For this round, USDA received 265 applications requesting nearly \$900 million, or four times the amount of available federal funding. The 84 projects selected for 2016 include proposed partner matches totaling over \$500 million, more than tripling the federal investment alone.

“The Regional Conservation Partnership Program puts local partners in the driver’s seat to accomplish environmental goals that are most meaningful to that community. Joining together public and private resources also harnesses innovation that neither sector could implement alone,” Vilsack said. “We have seen record enrollment of privately owned lands in USDA’s conservation programs under this Administration, and the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program will be instrumental in building on those numbers and demonstrating that government and private entities can work together for greater impacts on America’s communities.”

RCPP 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 and Tribal governments makes it possible to deliver innovative, landscape- and watershed-scale projects that improve water quality and quantity, wildlife habitat, soil health and other natural resource concerns on working farms, ranches and forests.

-More-

Four of these projects will bring conservation to Mississippi.

- Mississippi Grazing Land Management
- North Mississippi Kudzu Project
- RCPP Skuna River Watershed Project
- Southern Sentinel Landscapes Conservation

A complete descriptions of each project is attached.

“We put out a call for innovative and results-focused projects that will deliver the most conservation impact,” said Kurt Readus, NRCS state conservationist in Mississippi. “Our partners answered with creative, locally-led approaches to help producers support their ongoing business operations and address natural resource challenges in their communities, here in Mississippi, and across the nation.”

Water quality and drought are dominant themes in this year’s RCPP project list with 45 of the 84 projects focusing on water resource concerns.

USDA is committed to invest \$1.2 billion in RCPP partnerships over the life of the 2014 Farm Bill. Today’s announcement brings the current USDA commitment to almost \$600 million invested in 199 partner-led projects, leveraging an additional \$900 million for conservation activities in all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

USDA invested \$370 million in [115 high impact RCPP projects](#) during 2015. In New Mexico, a RCPP project with the Interstate Stream Commission and an acequia—a local communal irrigation system—has addressed long-standing infrastructure failures to significantly reduce water needs by improving irrigation efficiency. In Oregon, removal of encroaching juniper was part of the West-wide private lands conservation effort that helped obviate the need to list the Greater sage-grouse on the endangered species list.

See the [full list of 2016 projects](#).

Since 2009, USDA has invested more than \$29 billion to help producers make conservation improvements, working with as many as 500,000 farmers, ranchers and landowners to protect over 400 million acres nationwide, boosting soil and air quality, cleaning and conserving water and enhancing wildlife habitat. For an interactive look at USDA’s work in conservation and forestry over the course of this Administration, visit <http://medium.com/usda-results>

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