



Natural Resources Conservation Service

675 U.S. Courthouse

801 Broadway

Nashville, TN 37205

Contact: Katherine K. Burse, 615-277-2533

Web: <http://www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov>

NEWS RELEASE

NRCS to Expand Targeted Conservation Effort for Wildlife on Agricultural Lands

New Project to Provide Opportunities for Producers to Restore and Protect Habitat for Conasauga River Aquatic Species

NASHVILLE, December 1, 2016 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is adding dozens of new target species, including Conasauga River Aquatic Species, to its premier wildlife conservation effort that helps agricultural producers make wildlife-friendly improvements on working lands.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is adding 11 new projects to its [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) (WLFW) program, a targeted, science-based effort to help producers restore and protect habitat for declining species on farms, ranches and working forests.

"Agriculture and wildlife both thrive together through landscape conservation," said Kevin Brown, NRCS State Conservationist in Tennessee. *"Working Lands for Wildlife has delivered many unprecedented successes over the years, and we're proud of our collective past achievements and look forward to continuing our work with Tennessee's producers."*

One of the 11 new projects, the Conasauga River Aquatic Species, focuses on helping landowners reduce nutrient inputs and prevent sediment, nutrients, and pesticides from washing off the land, including cover crops, residue and tillage management, fencing, watering facility, nutrient management, prescribed grazing, and stream habit improvement for the Conasauga River Watershed.

The Conasauga River, in southern Tennessee and northern Georgia, is known for its exceptional mussel, snail, crayfish, and fish biodiversity. This river system supports 10 fish and mussel species that are federally listed as endangered or threatened as well as 20 other aquatic species that are either listed by the states or at-risk of federal listing. The holiday, bridled, and trispot darters are among those fish facing declines and at risk of being listed. Many of these species are in jeopardy because of sediment, nutrient, and pesticide pollution.

When habitat is restored for Conasauga River Aquatic Species, many other species benefit. NRCS uses the Conasauga River Aquatic Species and other wildlife as indicators of the health of the ecosystem at-large.

With more than two-thirds of the continental United States under private ownership, Conasauga River Aquatic Species is one of many wildlife species that depend heavily on working lands for habitat and food. Projects focus on declining species that have needs compatible with agricultural practices and rural land management and that can benefit from conservation on private lands. [See the full list of new projects.](#)

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NRCS staff worked with conservation partners to identify new species and landscapes. Considerations included the compatibility of the species and agriculture, the network of available partners and the needs of the species.

Through WLFW, NRCS strategically invests where conservation returns are highest and measures how wildlife respond to management activities to refine conservation efforts.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers adopt a variety of conservation practices on their land. NRCS staff help producers with a conservation plan and provide funding to cover part of the costs for adopting the practices. These practices are designed to benefit both the species and the agricultural operation.

By participating in WLFW, producers also receive regulatory predictability under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Once enrolled, they may continue to implement their conservation efforts without fear of additional regulations.

To learn more about the Conasauga Aquatic River Species [click here](#), or to learn more about assistance opportunities, landowners should contact their [local USDA service center](#).

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