



## Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

### Investing in Louisiana - 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 three in Louisiana. 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.

### Restoring Coastal Prairie through Biofuels

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$613,000 (State)

Lead Partner: The Earth Partners LP

Number of Partners: 4

Participating State(s): Louisiana

The conversion of the Gulf coastal prairie ecoregion to rice, sugarcane, pasture and Chinese Tallow infested land has left a mere one percent of this unique, environmentally critical ecosystem fragmented across what was originally 9 million acres in Louisiana and Texas. Restoration of native perennial grasses can simultaneously support increased natural vegetation communities, increase water filtration ecosystem services and also head off further invasion of exotic species. Partners will demonstrate the feasibility of rehabilitating coastal prairie ecosystem services by deploying a production-scale switchgrass production program across as many as 1,500 acres in Southwest Louisiana spanning the Sabine, Calcasieu, Mermentau and Vermilion-Teche watersheds.

### RSP: Improving Water Quality using Practice 590

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$800,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Ducks Unlimited

Number of Partners: 5

Participating State(s): Louisiana

LA Department of Environmental Quality has designated the Mermentau Basin in need of restoration. This basin holds the majority of rice production in southwest Louisiana. Nutrient loss from agriculture and other sources, particularly nitrogen and phosphorous, is contributing to over-enrichment of waterways, not to mention loss of nutrients is a cost to producers. It is estimated that fewer than 25% of southwest Louisiana rice producers apply nutrients following recommendations for an up-to-date soil test and fewer than 5% of those are using precision application of nutrients. Those who attempt grid soil sampling and precision application quickly see the benefits and further adopt the practice. However, getting producers to take the first step can be a hurdle due to perceived cost. This project will use planning and application of NRCS EQIP practice 590 – Nutrient Management on 23,000 acres to advance water quality improvements in the Mermentau Basin. Additional partnerships such as Chevron and Ducks Unlimited's will work to install grade stabilization structures, and research and development of rice varieties and management systems to perfect nutrient budgets for modern rice varieties



will ensure success to this proposal.

## Shifftail Canal Watershed Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$360,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Caddo SWCD

Number of Partners: 8

Participating State(s): Louisiana

The fundamental aim of this project is to holistically address water quality, soil health, wildlife habitat, water quantity and energy conservation concerns within a working farm using highly effective approaches. The core strategy will be to identify several working land tracts within the watershed to implement a comprehensive conservation system that integrates Environmental Quality Incentive Program conservation practices and Conservation Technical Assistance. Conservation plan development for the project will be accomplished through an interdisciplinary planning team that will work to integrate water quality improvement practices, soil health management practices, wildlife enhancement practices and irrigation water management practices. In addition, an economic evaluation will be conducted to provide a cost-benefit analysis of conservation practices implemented to improve water quality, soil health and irrigation efficiency.

