



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Investing in Nebraska - 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 six in Nebraska. This investment, which builds on the \$370 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.

Cropland Cover for Soil Health and Wildlife

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$700,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Number of Partners: 2

Participating State(s): Nebraska

In Nebraska, the lack of sufficient water, frequent drought and soil erosion cause significant impacts to yields and producers' bottom lines. Similarly, vanishing habitat and increasingly intensive agricultural practices create struggles for wildlife. This project intends to help both producers and wildlife cope with constantly changing conditions. The project partners will implement EQIP practices encouraging producers to leave their cereal grain and sorghum stubble taller and standing in place to provide soil, water and wildlife benefits. The project will also encourage the planting of wildlife friendly cover crops and diverse seedings. Tall standing stubble, cover crops and diverse seedings can help improve water quantity, soil erosion, soil quality and air quality while also providing valuable habitat for grassland birds including at-risk species and pollinators like honey bees and monarchs.

Honey Bee and Monarch Butterfly Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8.3 million (CCA)

Lead Partner: Pheasants Forever, Inc.

Number of Partners: 5

Participating State(s): Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska (**lead state**), North Dakota & South Dakota

Project partners will implement 2,900 EQIP projects on 14,500-acres within the Prairie Grasslands Critical Conservation Areas of Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota and will address inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife natural resource concerns to improve habitat conditions for honey bees and monarch butterflies. Those concerns will be addressed by working to establish high quality habitat projects with landowners on croplands in the area using innovative strategies that directly connect beekeepers, landowners, honey bees, monarch butterflies and high quality habitat.



Innovative Tribal Conservation and GHG Management

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1.8 million (National)

Lead Partner: Intertribal Agriculture Council

Number of Partners: 9

Participating State(s): Alaska, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma & South Dakota (**lead state**)

As the impacts of climate change become more pronounced in Indian country, Native nations and Indian landowners are faced with the challenge of implementing resource conservation land management systems that incorporate greenhouse gas management activities, also known as carbon farming practices. As greenhouse gas management services gain value in environmental markets, it is vital that historically underserved tribal conservation programs and American Indian farmers and ranchers develop conservation projects that demonstrate causal relationships between soil quality and ecosystem production functions such as carbon sequestration. This project will address the need for conservation stewardship projects on American Indian lands that integrate a carbon farming production possibilities frontier component. The project area will be national in scope covering a diversity of tribal rangeland landscape types including Southwest Alaska, prairie grassland and Colorado River Basin regions. The project includes developing and implementing soil amendment, forestry and grazing management Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) and Conservation Stewardship Plans (CSP) on pilot project sites. The CAP/CSPs will establish a framework for inventorying the existing baseline carbon sequestration rate and propose cost-effective conservation practices to achieve multiple environmental quality and economic development goals. One of the anticipated outcomes from this project will be the development of carbon offsets from soil amendment and grazing land and livestock management activities. We will engage private investment in those pilot project sites that both meet investors and credit buyers' interest in charismatic high-quality carbon offsets, and tribes' interest in promoting appropriate conservation practices and economic development on Indian lands.

Lower Elkhorn Water and Soil Conservation Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$400,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD)

Number of Partners: 12

Participating State(s): Nebraska

The Lower Elkhorn Natural Resources District (LENRD), located in northeast Nebraska, will work to conserve water, protect and improve water quality and conserve and improve soils within its boundaries. It will do this through the utilization of Irrigation Water Management practices, the adoption of nutrient management practices and promotion of soil health conservation practices, such as no-till, diversified crop rotations and the integration of cover crops into cropping systems. Other benefits that will be realized include improved air quality, preservation of habitat for at risk species such as the Western Prairie Fringed Orchid and Topeka Shiner, and enhanced resilience and recovery from the detrimental effects of drought. The LENRD will develop on-farm demonstration sites to educate producers about the positive benefits of conservation practices and will prove that such practices allow growers to maintain or increase yields and financial returns.

Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$9.5 million (National)

Lead Partner: Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship

Number of Partners: 40

Participating State(s): Illinois, Iowa (**lead state**) & Nebraska



The Midwest Agriculture Water Quality Partnership has assembled over forty partners and \$38 Million in non-federal funds to build an innovative public-private collaboration aimed at advancing a science-based, non-regulatory approach to reducing nutrient loss and improving water quality, soil health and habitat for at-risk species. The partnership has brought together diverse stakeholders from multiple sectors committed to improving water quality in alignment with the goals of the Iowa Nutrient Reduction Strategy. The geographic focus is Iowa, Illinois and Nebraska, with an emphasis on priority watersheds within Iowa. This proposal seeks to improve water quality through building bridges among the public, private, agriculture and environmental sectors and rural, urban, point source and non-point source communities as well as all segments of the agricultural supply chain to foster greater collaboration, improved coordination, increased alignment and more effective conservation delivery. This proposal merges traditional approaches to deliver conservation through scaling up conservation planning and conservation practices with a non-traditional, highly innovative precision agriculture platform integration component that will lead to greater practice adoption and improved conservation outcomes.

Republican Basin Conservation Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2.1 million (State)

Lead Partner: Lower Republican Natural Resources District

Number of Partners: 4

Participating State(s): Nebraska

This project brings together the Lower Republican, Middle Republican and Upper Republican Natural Resources Districts, which collectively have groundwater regulation and conservation authority in an area of approximately 5.74 million acres—or nearly 9,000 square miles—within the thirteen counties encompassing the entire length of the Republican River in Nebraska from the Colorado to the Kansas borders. These districts also share responsibility for assisting the State of Nebraska in meeting the requirements of the 1943 Colorado-Nebraska-Kansas Republican River Compact. This project will enable, encourage and provide financial incentives toward: conversion of irrigated land to non-irrigated land through a widespread end-gun retirement program; improvement of irrigation system efficiency through implementation of high-tech soil moisture sensor technology and micro-irrigation systems; improvement of wildlife habitat with a focus on pollinator conservation and recovery in collaboration with the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society; and improvement of soil health through increasing cover crop and crop rotation activities.

