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## News Release

**USDA Announces \$252 Million Available for Regional Conservation Partnership Program** [Email This Page](#)

Contact:

Kaveh Sadeghzadeh

202-720-2182

*Applications requested for innovative partner-driven projects*

**WASHINGTON, Jan. 12, 2017** - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today invited potential conservation partners, including private industry, non-government organizations, Indian tribes, state and local governments, water districts, and universities to submit project applications for federal funding through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

Through this fourth RCPP Announcement for Program Funding (APF), USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will award up to \$252 million dollars to locally driven, public-private partnerships that improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat, and protect agricultural viability. Applicants must match or exceed the federal award with private or local funds.

"Through unprecedented collaboration, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program has established a new paradigm for working lands conservation that yields unparalleled results," Vilsack said. "Working together, RCPP projects in every state are demonstrating the ways in which locally-led initiatives can meet some of our most pressing natural resource concerns."

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, RCPP connects partners with producers and private landowners to design and implement voluntary conservation solutions that benefit natural resources, agriculture, and the economy. By 2018, NRCS and its more than 2,000 conservation partners will have invested at least \$2.4 billion in high-impact RCPP projects nationwide.

For example, three existing RCPP projects bring together more than 40 partners, including USA Rice, Ducks Unlimited, California Rice Commission, the Walmart Foundation and The Mosaic Company, to accelerate conservation on rice lands in six states facing water quality and quantity challenges. These projects, collectively called the USA Rice-Ducks Unlimited Rice Stewardship Partnership, aim to conserve water and wildlife habitat while sustaining the future of rice farming in the United States. With unique technical expertise and needs, each state is leading a partner-driven, local approach to conservation in rice agriculture.

In its most recent RCPP awards, NRCS last month announced that 88 high-impact projects across the country will receive \$225 million in federal funding, with more than double that investment from partners. The new Gulf of Mexico - Forest to Sea RCPP project will conserve Florida's pristine "Big Bend" area along the northeastern Gulf by implementing innovative conservation solutions with private working forest owners. Using an impact investment approach, The Conservation Fund and 12 partners will implement an easement and restoration plan on large forested tracts to address the natural resource concerns while allowing sustainable timber harvesting and maintaining local jobs. The project will serve as a model for further conservation and impact investing in the region and beyond.

NRCS Chief Jason Weller encourages partners to consider conservation finance and environmental markets as they develop RCPP project applications. "The growing field of conservation finance provides opportunities to inject significant investment capital into projects that protect, restore and maintain our natural ecosystems," says Weller.

USDA is now accepting proposals for Fiscal Year 2018 RCPP funding. Pre-proposals are due April 21. For more information on applying, visit the RCPP website.

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

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