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USDA Announces \$260 Million Available for Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Applications sought with a focus on environmental markets, conservation finance

AUBURN, March 14, 2016—USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) today announced the availability of up to \$260 million for partner proposals to improve the nation's water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat and protect agricultural viability. The funding is being made available through NRCS’ innovative [Regional Conservation Partnership Program](#) (RCPP) and applicants must be able to match the federal award with private or local funds.

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, RCPP investments of nearly \$600 million have already driven 199 partner-led projects, including four projects in Alabama. The program leverages local leadership to establish partnerships that can include private companies, local and tribal governments, universities, non-profits and other non-government partners to work with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners on landscape-and watershed-scale conservation solutions that work best for their region. This will be the third round of funding through RCPP, helping USDA build on record enrollment in all voluntary conservation programs, with more than 500,000 producers participating to protect land and water on over 400 million acres nationwide.

“Across the country, locally-driven efforts are having a positive effect on conservation and production,” said Ben Malone, NRCS state conservationist in Alabama. “RCPP serves as a valuable vehicle for matching federal investment and private capital to advance natural resource conservation and support agricultural production. Partners in the 84 new high-impact projects we announced in February are matching USDA funding more than two-to-one for a combined investment of over \$720 million.”

“We recognize the growing interest in leveraging private capital markets to foster impact investments in conservation, sustainable agriculture and forestry,” said Malone. “For this new round, we hope to see even more applications that support the development of environmental markets and conservation finance projects.”

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One of the 2016 high-impact Alabama projects [announced](#) in February will be led by The Conservation Fund. The \$5.1 million Coastal Headwaters Forests (CHF) Partnership will address the natural resource concerns of the Longleaf Pine Range in Alabama's Gulf Coastal Plain. By restoring longleaf pine, this project will preserve four major coastal river systems in the Gulf Coast Plain and protect habitat for the threatened gopher tortoise and approximately 600 other species related to longleaf pine habitat.

USDA is now accepting proposals for Fiscal Year 2017 RCPP funding. Pre-proposals are due May 10. 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 at USDA's work in conservation and forestry over the course of this Administration, visit <https://medium.com/usda-results>.

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