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USDA Seeks Partner Proposals to Protect and Restore Critical Wetlands in Alabama

AUBURN, April 14, 2016 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced the availability of \$15 million to help eligible conservation partners leverage local investments to provide technical and financial resources for wetland protection and improvements on private and Tribal agricultural lands nationwide.

The Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) is one way state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and Tribal governments collaborate with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to increase the number of voluntary conservation projects for targeted, high priority wetland protection, restoration and enhancement. Local and regional WREP partners match federal funding and technical assistance to increase the assistance they can provide to eligible private landowners interested in enrolling their agricultural land into conservation wetland easements. WREP is a special enrollment option under USDA's [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program \(ACEP\)](#).

Applicants must submit electronic proposals to Jason.Gardner@al.usda.gov and two hard copies to the NRCS state office at 3381 Skyway Drive, Auburn, Alabama 36831 in c/o Jason Gardner by May 16, 2016. More information is available on the NRCS [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) webpage.

"USDA is committed to protecting and enhancing our nation's wetlands, which are critical to the quality of our nation's waters, wildlife and landscapes," said State Conservationist Ben Malone.

"We are looking to our partners for innovative project proposals that will leverage our Farm Bill conservation funding. This will allow us to expand our work on critical wetlands and gain results that will make project participants proud."

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Wetland reserve easements allow landowners to enhance and protect habitat for wildlife on their lands, reduce impacts from flooding, recharge groundwater and provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities. The voluntary nature of NRCS' easement programs allows effective integration of wetland restoration on working landscapes, providing benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program, as well as benefits to their communities.

Collectively nationwide, NRCS easement programs help productive farm, ranch and grasslands continue in agricultural production and protect the nation's critical farmland, wetlands and grasslands that are important to water supplies and home to diverse wildlife and plant species. In 2014 and 2015, NRCS invested more than \$600 million through ACEP to help landowners engage in voluntary conservation. Their collective efforts provide long-term protection of an estimated 250,000 acres of farmland, grassland and wetlands through more than 750 new easements.

Under the former Wetlands Reserve Program nationally, private landowners, tribes and conservation organizations enrolled 2.7 million acres through 14,500 agreements for a total NRCS and partner investment of \$4.3 billion in assistance on private and tribal agricultural lands.

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