



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

3381 Skyway Drive
Auburn, Alabama 36830
Voice: 334-887-4581
Email: Amelia.hines@ga.usda.gov
Web: <http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov>

News Release

Release No.: 000001.15

Contact:
Amelia.Hines, (334) 887-4581
Amelia.Hines@ga.usda.gov

USDA selects first projects of new, innovative program to conserve key natural resources

AUBURN, AL, Jan. 15, 2015 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced Wednesday that 100 high-impact projects across all 50 states, including Alabama will receive more than \$370 million as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

RCPP’s historic focus on public-private partnership enables private companies, local communities and other non-government partners a way to invest in efforts to keep our land resilient and water clean, and promote tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism and outdoor recreation, and other industries.

This year’s projects in Alabama will accomplish a wide diversity of agricultural and natural resource goals from helping to protect important drinking water supplies in targeted watersheds statewide and providing essential habitat for many at-risk species along the Gulf Coast.

“Partners are seeing the value of conservation and investing in their future,” Vilsack said. “These partnerships are forging a new path for getting conservation on the ground and are providing opportunities for communities to have a voice and ownership in protecting and improving our natural resources. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program ushers in a new era of conservation, and we’re excited about the down-the-road benefits from this new Farm Bill program.”

This year’s projects will engage hundreds of partners with wide-ranging interests, including communities, conservation districts, agribusiness, non-government organizations, for- and non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies and Tribal governments. In addition to USDA funds, partners’ will contribute an estimated \$400 million, more than doubling USDA’s investment.

-More-

“RCPP puts our partners in the driver’s seat,” said Dr. William E. Puckett, USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist in Alabama. “Projects are led locally, and demonstrate the value of strong public-private partnerships that deliver solutions to tough natural resource challenges. The projects involving Alabama are phenomenal examples of this partnership approach for conservation that will leave an impact on the entire Gulf ecosystem.”

A total of three RCPP projects will have impact in Alabama’s conservation efforts. The Alabama Farmers Federation will lead an effort to partner with NRCS and other organizations to implement a statewide strategy that will allow partners to more effectively manage the growth of irrigation in productive cropland.

According to the 2012 Census of Agriculture, Alabama has more than 2.7 million acres of cropland but only 112,000 acres of irrigated land. NRCS has awarded \$1.7 million to help the project fund construction of on-farm reservoirs along with other irrigation techniques with an emphasis on efficiency. These reservoirs will store surface runoff water to be available to farmers when other water resources are unavailable.

“The ability to harness and better utilize Alabama’s abundant water resources will be pivotal in the agricultural and economic development of our state,” said Alabama Farmers Federation President Jimmy Parnell. “Doing so in a sustainable manner will ensure this resource for future generations. This program will help farmers overcome financial barriers to invest in the most efficient irrigation technologies available.”

The Conservation Fund will lead the Coastal Headwaters project that launched a historic partnership to create a 205,000-acre sustainable working forest comprised of native longleaf pine in the lower Alabama and Florida panhandle region. As part of [America’s Longleaf Restoration Initiative](#)—a collaborative, public-private effort to restore the threatened longleaf ecosystems across 8 million acres by 2020 —partners plan to establish the first large landscape-level model for reestablishing and conserving longleaf habitat on privately-owned land, which will have the dual benefit of providing environmental and economic benefits. NRCS will contribute \$5 million to the effort.

“The Coastal Headwaters Forest is truly a flagship endeavor not only for us but also for the entire longleaf coalition that is diligently working to reverse the trend of longleaf pine loss across the Coastal Plain region,” said Andrew Schock, Alabama & Georgia State Director for The Conservation Fund.

-More-

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin partnership will aim to use appropriate conservation tools to change the course of persistent drought and long-term landscape changes that have reduced the ACFR Basin's capacity to balance human use with ecological demand.

The ACFR Basin covers 13 million acres in western Georgia, eastern Alabama and the Florida panhandle. This partnership will assist producers and landowners in implementing NRCS conservation practices. The ACFR Basin project will utilize \$4 million in NRCS funds to meet its conservation goals.

"The Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District will lead an innovative RCPP project with USDA-NRCS and over 30 partners that will significantly enhance conservation on-the-ground in the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin," District Chairman Marty McLendon said. "This landscape-scale conservation partnership is an investment for the future of all three states of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia and the critical watershed and natural resources we share. Through USDA-NRCS, producers and landowners throughout the watershed will have the opportunity to implement conservation practices that enhance natural resource management."

More than [600 pre-proposals](#) were submitted for RCPP in 2014. Of those, more than 200 were invited to submit full proposals.

"With so many strong project proposals, the project selection process was extremely competitive. RCPP is a 5-year \$1.2 billion USDA commitment; projects not selected in this first year may be eligible in subsequent years," Puckett said.

For more information on RCPP projects, visit www.al.nrcs.usda.gov or [click here](#). The next announcement of program funding for fiscal year 2016 is expected to be announced later this year.

To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or local USDA service center.

#

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).