



United States Department of Agriculture

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

2015 Chesapeake Bay Program
Conservation District and PA Agency Staff Meeting

March 10, 2015



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2014 Farm Bill – Three purposes of RCPP:

(1) To use “covered programs” to accomplish purposes and functions similar to those of the following former conservation programs:

- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
- Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program
- Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
- Great Lakes Basin Program



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Three purposes of RCPP (cont.):

(2) To further the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources on eligible land on a regional or watershed scale.

(3) To encourage eligible partners to cooperate with producers to:

- Meet or avoid the need for national, State, and local natural resource regulatory requirements related to production on eligible land; and
- Implement projects that will result in the installation and maintenance of eligible activities that affect multiple agricultural or nonindustrial private forest operations on a local, regional, State, or multistate basis.



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RCPP projects utilize conservation program and easement contracts with producers through NRCS “covered programs”

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)



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Annual Funding for RCPP

\$100 Million

plus

7 percent of the funds and
acres made available for a covered program



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RCPP Funding Allocation

Funding is divided among three funding pools:

40% National Pool

35% Critical Conservation Areas Pool

25% State Pool



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Critical Conservation Areas (CCAs)

- Multi-state geographical areas with significant agricultural production
- Existing plan or agreement with established goals and work plans adopted by Federal, State or regional authority
- Would benefit from water quality or quantity improvements
- Designated by the Secretary of Agriculture for up to five years (subject to redesignation)
- No more than eight CCAs at any given time
- Designation can be withdrawn by the Secretary if the area no longer meets statutory conditions



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8 Critical Conservation Areas

Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Great Lakes Region

Colorado River Basin

Longleaf Pine Range

Columbia River Basin

California Bay Delta

Mississippi River Basin

Prairie Grasslands Region



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Eligible partners that may submit RCPP proposals

Agricultural or Silvicultural Producer Associations

Farmer Cooperatives or other groups of producers

State or local governments

American Indian tribes

Farmer Cooperatives

Municipal water or wastewater treatment entities

Water and irrigation districts

Conservation-driven nongovernmental organizations

Institutions of higher education



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Partners will:

- Enter into a partnership agreement with NRCS for up to five years to implement the RCPP project
- Apply through a competitive process
- Provide a significant portion of the overall costs of the project
- Not receive RCPP funds for education, outreach, or administration



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Criteria for the Selection of Projects

Contributions – expand private lands conservation investment by leveraging partner contributions

Solutions – provide measurable results to benefit individual farms, ranches and forests, local economies, and communities in watersheds and targeted geographical areas

Innovations – offer creative projects that integrate multiple conservation approaches

Participation – engage new organizations and increase the diversity and number of stakeholders that participate in the projects



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FY 2014 and 2015 Funding

- First two fiscal years of program funding was combined for the first round of applications – about \$ 395 million
- There was great interest in the program – about 600 pre-proposals were submitted and the top pre-proposals were invited to submit a full proposal
- NRCS received 210 proposals requesting \$1.4 billion – about four times the available funding



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Projects selected for FY 2014 and 2015

- On January 14, 2015 USDA Secretary Vilsack announced the first round of RCPP projects
- 115 projects across all 50 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico were selected
- \$372 million in Federal funding
- Projects will leverage an estimated \$400 million in partner contributions



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PA has the lead in two RCPP projects:

Delaware River Watershed Working Lands Conservation and Protection Partnership

USDA Funds: \$ 13 million (National Pool)

Lead partner: American Farmland Trust

Productive Farms and Clean Streams for Berks and Chester Counties

USDA Funds: \$ 1.5 million (State Pool)

Lead partner: Stroud Water Research Center



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PA will participate in three other RCPP projects:

Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement

USDA Funds: \$ 8 million (National Pool)

Lead partner: American Bird Conservancy

Comprehensive Watershed Conservation in Dairy and Livestock Landscapes of the Chesapeake Bay

USDA Funds: \$ 7 million (Chesapeake Bay CCA Pool)

Lead partner: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Mason-Dixon Working Lands Partnership

USDA Funds: \$ 1.5 million (Chesapeake Bay CCA Pool)

Lead partner: Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay



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Next Round of RCPP Projects

- There will be an Announcement for Program Funding (APF) for FY 2016
- Information on how to apply for RCPP will be posted on the USDA NRCS national website in the RCPP section (Home/Programs/Farm Bill/RCPP)



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