



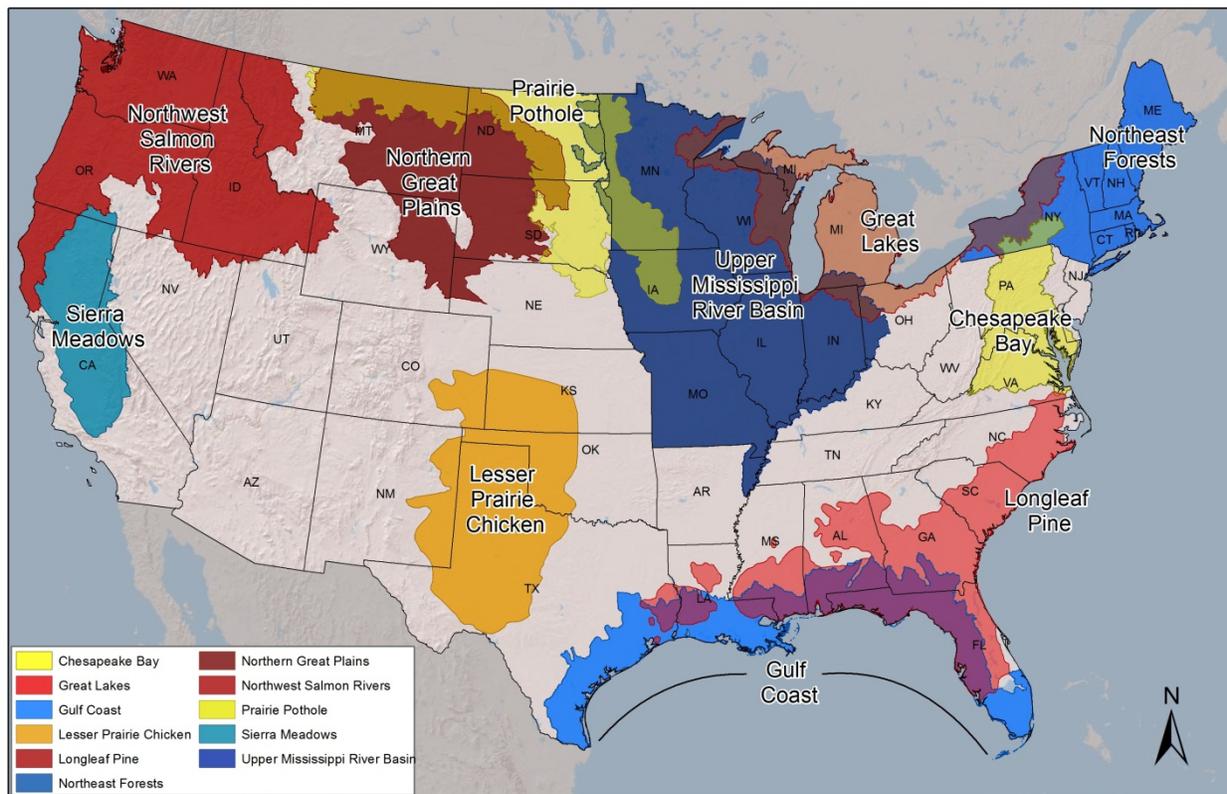
# NFWF

## NRCS Conservation Partners Program

*Conservation Partners* is a partnership between the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and other regional/initiative specific partners such as the Walton Family Foundation. The purpose of this program is to provide grants on a competitive basis to support field biologists and other habitat conservation professionals (ecologists, foresters, range cons, etc.) working with NRCS field offices in providing technical assistance to farmers, ranchers, foresters and other private landowners to optimize wildlife habitat conservation on private lands.

*Conservation Partners* aims to better focus and increase the effectiveness of Farm Bill assistance funded through programs such as Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and others through technical assistance to private landowners in targeted Program Priority Areas (PPAs). In addition, Conservation Partners will consider funding capacity and outreach for organizations whose mission matches the goals of this program.

Consistent with NRCS's Landscape Initiatives and NFWF's Keystone Initiatives, a subset of Program Priority Areas (PPAs) are identified in the map below. These areas will be the focus of the Grants Program. Additional priority areas may be identified and mutually agreed upon by NRCS and NFWF project coordinators.



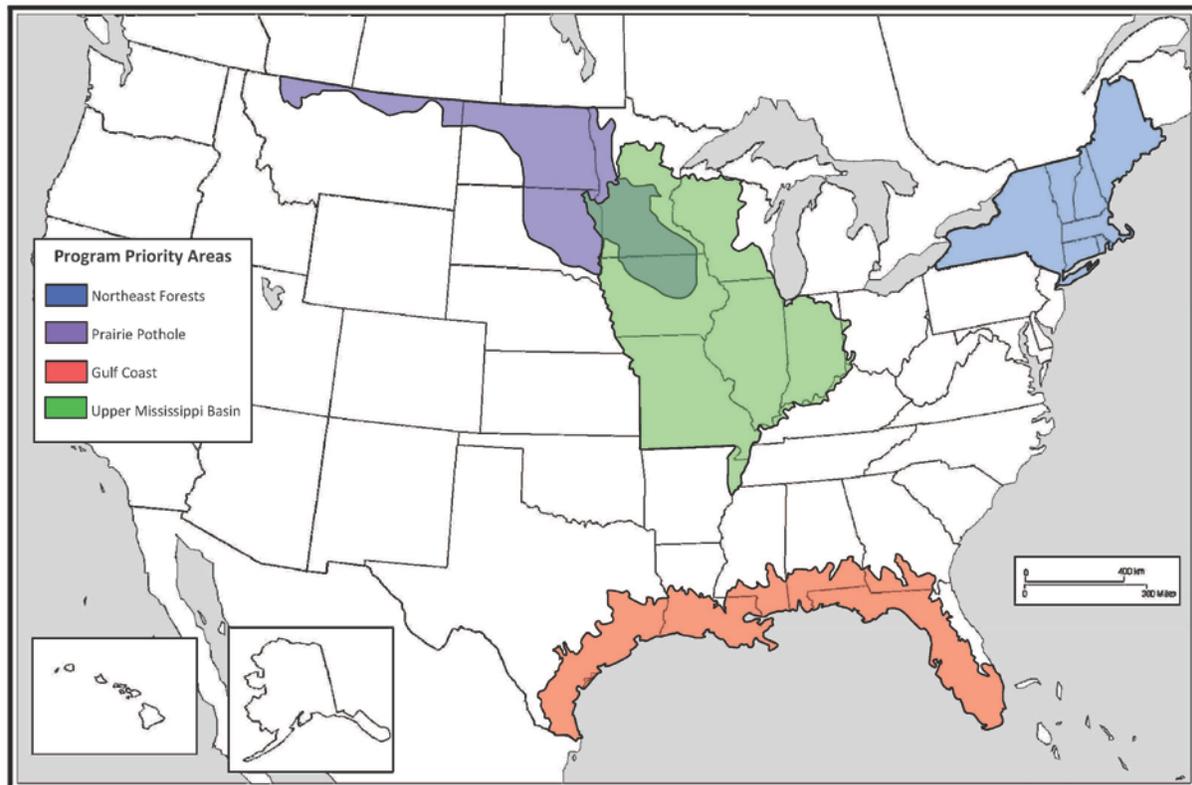
Conservation Partners Program  
Program Priority Areas



# Spring 2012 Funding Cycle

During the spring 2012 funding cycle priority funding will be directed to projects that target species and ecosystems of shared interest between NFWF and NRCS, including but not limited to the following: Northeast Forests; Prairie Pothole; Gulf Coast; Upper Mississippi Basin. The following is an overview of the specific focus of each of the program priority areas highlighted in this funding cycle.

## Conservation Partners: Program Priority Areas (PPAs)



### Northeast Forests

The goal is to work with land owners to enhance the long-term economic, recreational, social, and environmental benefits provided by forested ecosystems in Northeastern U.S., such as clean water, job creation, and habitat for both declining and recreationally important wildlife. The New England/New York region contains over 52 million acres of forest land, including the largest intact block of temperate broadleaf forest in the Nation. Eighty percent are privately owned. The forests are diverse, ranging from the extensive broadleaf deciduous and mixed forests to montane and lowland spruce-fir and low elevation forests of oak, pine, and hickory. They stretch from the Atlantic coast to the highest mountain peaks in the region. The forests also provide habitat for a variety of wildlife such as moose, black bear, lynx, other game species, and bird species of special consideration that breed here, but winter in Central and South America.

*Objectives:*

- Improve forest health and productivity
- Improve water quality primarily through reductions in sediment and phosphorous losses
- Improve fish and wildlife habitat
- Enhance long-term economic, recreational, social and environmental benefits of forest system

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) forest stand improvement, prescribed burning, tree and shrub plantings and restoration of rare and declining habitats.

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* New England cottontail; Bog turtle; Golden-winged warbler; American woodcock

### **Prairie Pothole**

The goal is to restore, enhance, and protect wetland and associated upland grassland habitat for waterfowl, marsh birds, shorebirds and other wildlife. This region is covered with rolling hills, prairie grasses, agriculture and thousands of depressional wetlands ranging in size from shallow temporary wetlands to deeper semi-permanent wetlands. The prairie pothole region provides feeding, nesting, breeding and resting areas to many species of migratory waterfowl. The initiative will integrate wildlife conservation with compatible agricultural practices to ensure the long-term viability of both types of land uses and the species that depend upon these working landscapes.

*Objectives:*

- Restore, enhance and protect wetland and associated upland grassland habitats
- Improve agricultural water drainage management practices to benefit water quality
- Restore wetland functions on working lands
- Enhance long-term economic, recreational, social and environmental benefits of prairie pothole region

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) upland and wetland wildlife habitat restoration as well as management through provision of conservation cover, cover crop, range seeding, prescribed grazing and forage harvest management.

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* Waterfowl, marsh birds, and shorebirds; Grassland birds; Threatened and endangered species such as the piping plover and the whooping crane

### **Gulf Coast**

The goal is to assist agricultural producers in improving water quality, increasing water conservation, and enhancing wildlife habitat. The proposed initiative is designed to implement sustainable agricultural and wildlife habitat management systems that maintain agricultural productivity; avoid, control, and trap nutrient runoff; and reduce sediment transport in priority watersheds.

*Objectives:*

- Enhance wildlife habitat within watersheds draining into the Gulf of Mexico
- Implement agricultural and wildlife habitat management systems that maintain or enhance agricultural productivity while also benefiting natural resources

- Improve water quality by avoiding, controlling and trapping nutrient runoff and reducing sediment transport
- Increasing water conservation
- Enhance long-term economic, recreational, social and environmental benefits of the Gulf Coast region

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) upland and wetland wildlife habitat management, nutrient management, drainage water management, integrated pest management and prescribed grazing.

Priority will be given to efforts in the following river basins: Weeks Bay in Alabama, the Escambia River in Alabama and Florida, the middle Suwannee River area in Florida, the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary and the Mermentau River in Louisiana, the Jourdan River in Mississippi, and the Lower San Antonio River in Texas.

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* Imperiled shorebirds, marsh birds, and waterfowl; Sea turtles; Gopher tortoise; Threatened and endangered coastal species

### **Upper Mississippi Basin**

The goal is to help landowners voluntarily implement conservation practices that avoid, control, and trap nutrient runoff; improve wildlife habitat; restore wetlands; improve water quality; and maintain agricultural productivity. Producers will be provided assistance in implementing a suite of practices that will reduce the impacts of nutrients and sediment leaving agricultural fields. Conservation Partners will be prioritizing projects that will be conducted in NRCS's priority watershed and subwatersheds as identified by the Mississippi River Basin Initiative's 8- and 12-digit Hydrological Unit Codes (HUCs). A reference map is included here, though only HUC's in the states referenced above will be eligible for funding. The Upper Mississippi River is a national treasure, known as a valuable natural, historic, cultural, and economic resource. It is critical to the vitality and abundance of wildlife, birds, aquatic species, people and their communities. Chief among Conservation Partners priorities for the basin are improvements to water quality and a focus on riverside habitat.

#### *Objectives:*

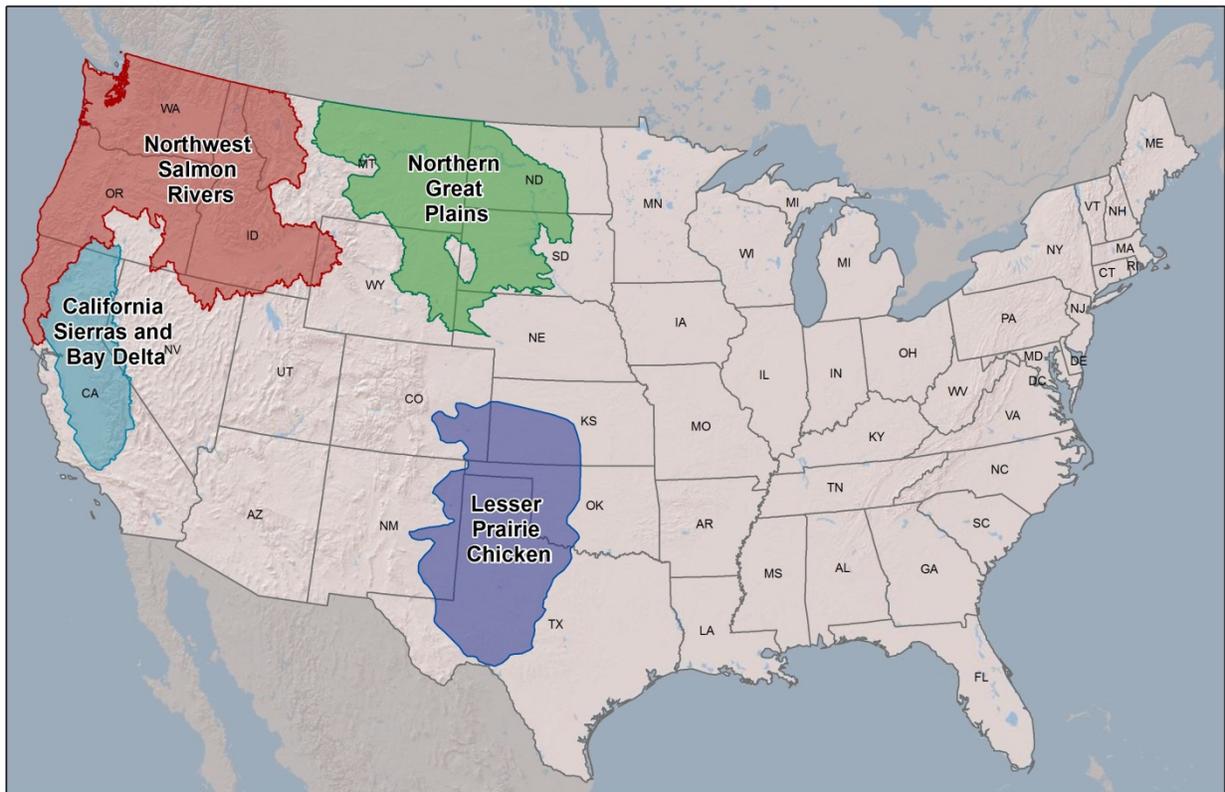
- Achieve long-term reductions in edge-of-field nutrient losses from agricultural lands in the key watersheds in the Mississippi River Basin.
- Engage farmers, farm-related organizations and the agricultural sector in best practices, innovation and stewardship practices that benefit fish and wildlife.
- Improve nutrient management and bring new tools to farmers to more efficiently manage inputs.
- Promote wetlands, active floodplains and other practices that can trap and treat excess nutrient runoff.
- Integrate Farm Bill funding into whole farm planning efforts aimed at producing better water quality.

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) upland, grassland and wetland wildlife habitat restoration, easement programs and management practices such as provision of conservation cover, cover crop, range seeding, buffering, conservation drainage, prescribed grazing and forage harvest management.

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* Mussels, fish and other aquatic biota; Waterfowl, marsh birds, and shorebirds; Grassland birds; Threatened and endangered prairie, grassland, wetland and aquatic species

# Summer 2012 Funding Cycle

During the summer 2012 funding cycle priority funding will be directed to proposals that target species and ecosystems of shared interest between NFWF and NRCS, including but not limited to the following: Northwest Salmon Rivers; Northern Great Plains; California Sierras and Bay Delta; Lesser Prairie-Chicken. The following is an overview of the specific focus of each of the program priority areas highlighted in this funding cycle.



## Conservation Partners Program Program Priority Areas for Summer 2012 RFP



### Pacific Salmon Rivers

Conservation Partners will focus on the most vulnerable populations of salmonids in Pacific coast watersheds and strengthen those populations that are still robust. In order to improve water quality and habitat at the scale needed to reach these goals, Conservation Partners will encourage private landowners to sign-up and implement Farm Bill programs on their lands that can have measureable conservation outcomes for salmonids. Farm Bill technical assistance to help landowners identify potential and implement projects will receive high priority if they include the following:

#### *Objectives:*

- Improve estuarine habitat, including shorelines and critical watersheds
- Improve forest health and productivity for the benefit of salmon
- Improve fish passage

- Improve cold-water flows

Activities that will be implemented to meet these objectives include (but are not limited to) optimizing water use, exercising low-input integrated pest management practices and reducing nutrient runoff, using long-term soil conservation techniques, maintaining healthy riparian and in-stream habitat conditions, and contributing to overall habitat quality and productivity on the farm.

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* Coho Salmon; Chinook Salmon; Summer chum; Steelhead

### **Northern Great Plains**

Conservation Partners will help landowners create and fund systems that maintain or improve soil health, keep water clean, reduce flooding, and provide essential wildlife habitat for abundant as well as threatened species. Land stewardship by tribes, ranchers and public agencies has ensured that there are still significant large intact native grasslands remaining in the Northern Great Plains. The opportunity for conservation of large tracts of native grasslands has highlighted the region on global prioritization maps for grassland conservation. The relatively intact nature of the region also brings opportunity for conservation to partner for working landscapes and to realize economic benefits from wildlife stewardship activities. Conservation Partners seeks to help interested partners integrate ranching practices, soil health, water quality and prairie/grassland restoration across the landscape ensuring that keystone species and ecological processes thrive and private landowners reap economic benefits from managing for wildlife.

*Objectives:*

- Build local capacity to expand habitat protection and restoration;
- Deliver conservation outcomes and benefit from ecological stewardship through private landowner cooperation;
- Identify and direct incentive programs toward priority landscapes that will support species of conservation interest;
- Maximize financial incentives for ecosystem-scale grassland conservation and restoration

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) fencing removal and modification, native grassland enhancement and restoration, grazing management systems, conservation easements, signing up landowners for wildlife incentive programs, designing sustainable landscape plans and monitoring programs, monitoring wildlife response to restoration activities, conservation tillage practices, cover crops, abating conifer encroachment, and systems that support sustainable ranching.

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* Pronghorn, black-tailed prairie dog, black-footed ferret, swift fox, sage grouse, Sprague's pipit and other grassland birds

### **California Sierra Meadows and Bay Delta**

The goal of this initiative is to address the critical water quantity, water quality, and mountain meadow restoration needs of the Sacramento — San Joaquin Bay-Delta and Sierra Nevadas in California. Three primary resource concerns for this initiative are: 1) water quantity (focused on water conservation on irrigated croplands, orchards, vineyards, and small grains); 2) water quality (focused on reduction of nutrients, salts, and sediments on irrigated croplands, orchards, vineyards, small grains and dairies); 3) habitat restoration needs (wetlands, fisheries and riparian dependent species). Expected outcomes of this initiative include: on-farm water savings; improved water quality; and restoration and protection of wetland, riparian and wet meadow habitat throughout the watershed.

*Objectives:*

- Build organizational capacity in watersheds where restoration planning and implementation is limited by insufficient personnel
- Work with ranching community, improve information and provide technical assistance for beneficial agricultural and conservation practices
- Monitor and document ecological and biological responses to meadow restoration
- Work with local and state agricultural organizations to promote grazing and agricultural practices as a part of the farm operations and conservation effort

Activities that will be implemented to meet the objectives include (but are not limited to) improving forest stands, designing and implementing grazing management plans, reducing nutrient runoff, using long-term soil conservation techniques, and maintaining healthy riparian, wetland and in-stream habitat conditions.

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* Yosemite Toad, Mountain yellow-legged frog, Willow flycatcher, Sandhill Crane, Yellow warbler, Great Grey Owl, Eagle lake rainbow trout, Lahontan cutthroat trout, McCloud River redband trout, California and Little Kern golden trout.

### **Lesser Prairie-Chicken**

The goal of this initiative is to help farmers and ranchers enhance, restore and protect habitat for this sensitive and reclusive bird. Many of the conservation practices that promote healthy grazing lands are also productive for the Lesser prairie-chicken's short grass prairie habitat: prescribed grazing, upland wildlife habitat management, brush management, prescribed burning, range plantings, and restoration and management of rare or declining habitats. By restoring and "connecting" large blocks of core grassland habitat, as well as the playa lakes and subsurface water that sustains those grasslands, high priority species such as prairie-chickens, waterbirds, shorebirds, waterfowl, raptors and land birds can again become a visible component of this arid ecosystem.

*Objectives:*

- Restore and enhance core habitat areas for Lesser prairie-chickens and develop corridor connections between those areas to ensure viable, sustainable populations
- Better leverage federal and state agricultural incentive funds for use in conservation of grasslands in priority areas
- Provide technical assistance to private landowners to help ensure sustainable short grass prairie resources, including playa lakes and subsurface water supplies
- Establish a means of assessing and monitoring grassland bird populations and relating population changes to causal factors

*Fish and Wildlife Species of Interest:* Lesser prairie-chicken

### **Working Lands for Wildlife**

In addition to the 4 PPAs listed above, Conservation Partners will consider funding projects working with and on the Working Lands for Wildlife partnership program between NRCS and FWS. The Working Lands for Wildlife program is \$33 million in financial assistance from NRCS's Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program to combat the decline of seven specific wildlife species whose needs can be addressed through private landowner conservation that will also benefit other species with similar habitat needs. A map of Working Lands for Wildlife's priorities is shown below.

Through Working Lands for Wildlife, landowners can voluntarily participate in an incentive-based efforts to:  
Restore populations of declining wildlife species; Provide farmers, ranchers, and forest managers with regulatory certainty that conservation investments they make today will help sustain their operations over the long term;  
Strengthen and sustain rural economies by restoring and protecting the productive capacity of working lands.