

**2014**

# Farm Bill

Regional Conservation Partnership Program  
FY 2016 of Announcement of Program Funding (APF)

A large, semi-transparent logo for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is positioned on the right side of the slide. It features a stylized, light blue drop shape with a circular element at the bottom, resembling a water drop or a conservation symbol.

Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

RCPP offers new opportunities for Partners and NRCS to :

- Create high-performing on-the-ground conservation **solutions**
- Leverage partner **contributions** using federal resources
- Harness locally-driven **innovation**
- Maximize partner, producer, and landowner **participation**

RCPP is an innovative approach to investing in natural resource conservation that empowers partnerships to design solutions and deliver specific, measurable results.

- Draws on local knowledge and resources to accelerate progress on critical conservation projects.
- Partners are in the driver's seat with technical and financial assistance from NRCS

# LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

RCPA assistance is delivered through the authorities and rules of the following programs, referred to throughout the APF as “covered programs:”

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP);
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP);
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP); and
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

For Critical Conservation Areas only:

Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566; hereafter Watershed Authorities). Please note that Watershed Authorities are not covered programs as defined in statute.

For this new flagship program, NRCS will measure environmental successes through the following four criteria:

1. Solutions
2. Contributions
3. Innovation
4. Participation

# MEASURES OF SUCCESS

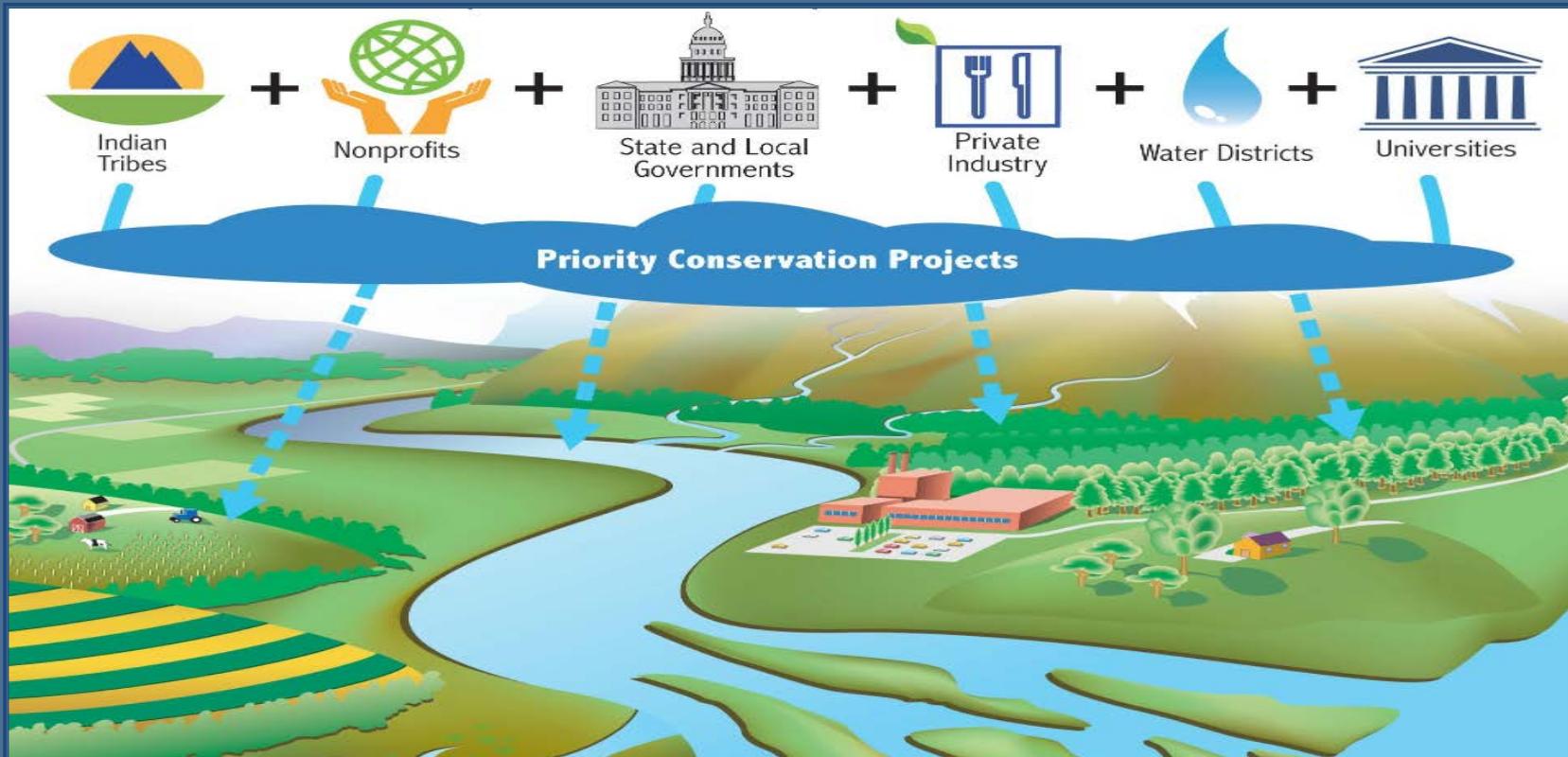
1. **Solutions**. Investing in projects that generate near-term results that are measurable from environmental, economic and social perspectives. Both partners and NRCS will be involved with documenting the outcomes of conservation investments.

2. Contributions. Leveraging the Federal resources to *at least double the total investment in conservation.*

3. Innovation. Promoting innovative projects that integrate multiple conservation approaches to deliver comprehensive and measurable solutions

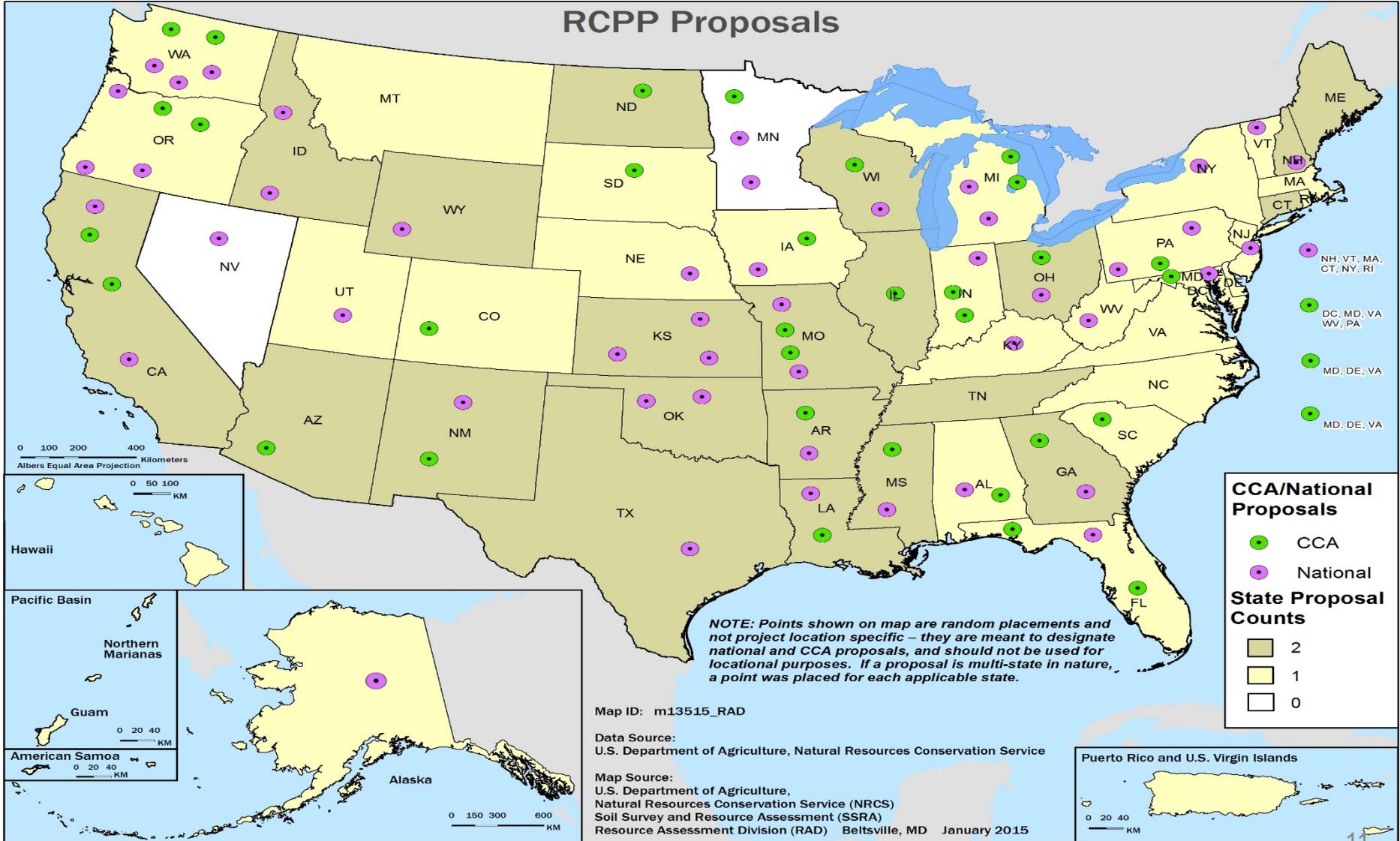
4. **Participation**. Maximizing the number of partners and participants, including those with a proven track record and those new to NRCS to administered conservation programs, to participate in and contribute to projects.

# More Partners bring innovation, new ideas, resources and local expertise to solve problems



# RCCP Proposals FY 14/15

## RCCP Proposals



# HOW RCPP WORKS

- **Address priority natural resource concerns in a regional or watershed scale project area**
- **NRCS program authorities and rules to promote conservation through the contributing programs:**
  - **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**
  - **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)**
  - **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)**
  - **Health Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)**

# FA & TA in RCPP Funding

- **NRCS Funds in RCPP projects can cover:**
  - Financial Assistance (FA) for producers under covered programs
  - Technical Assistance (TA) for NRCS to plan, design, contract, implement
  - Partner TA for fulfilling NRCS role in implementing FA
    - Partner TA cannot be for administrative expenses (which include indirect costs, outreach expenses)
    - Partner administrative expenses can be contributions
- **Proposals should include FA/TA for NRCS to complete program assistance and can include Partner FA/TA**
  - Some roles in programs (particularly easements) are inherently governmental and a partner cannot legally complete them

## **Adjustments of Terms**

- Non-statutory program rules and policies may be adjusted

## **Direct Technical Assistance Funds to Partners**

- Through partnership agreements or in alternative funding arrangements

## **Alternative Funding Arrangements**

- Eligible multistate water resource agencies or authorities to deliver both technical and financial assistance



# Adjustment of Terms

## Adjustment of Terms include:

- Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) Waivers
- Payment schedule updates
- Interim practices
- Alternative ranking processes
- Changing payment method (e.g. return to cost-share)
- Other changes to covered programs for RCPP projects



# Alternative Funding Arrangement

## **NRCS can enter into a total of 20 Alternative Funding Arrangements with an eligible multistate water resource agencies or authority to deliver RCPP**

- Partner has all responsibility for delivering Technical and Financial Assistance for implementation of the RCPP project
- Develop a plan and the associated contractual agreement to install and maintain the conservation practices to address the identified natural resource concerns and objectives.
- Provide technical assistance and assist producers to design and install conservation practices to meet NRCS standards and specifications.

# WATERSHED PROGRAM

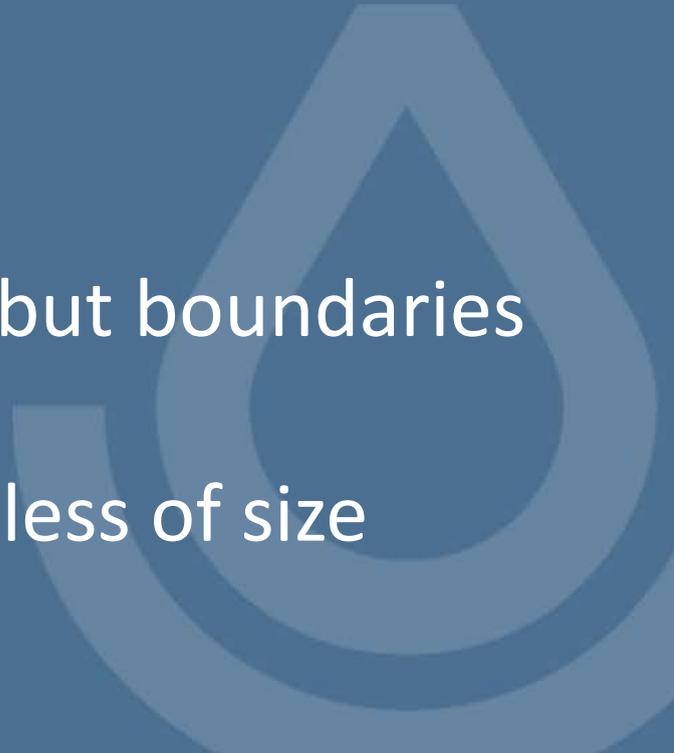
- In Critical Conservation Areas, RCPP projects can apply Watershed Authorities (PL 83-566)
  - Except for watershed rehabilitation
- Requires watershed project plan with implementation actions
  - Physically, environmentally, socially, economically sound plan
  - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and economic documentation
- Requires a partner who meets the Sponsoring Local Organization requirements

- **Two-phase application process**
  - 1. Pre-proposal application**
    - Partners submit projects with pre-proposal application - July 8, 2015
    - NRCS reviews and selects pre-proposals - September 4, 2015
  - 2. Full proposal application**
    - NRCS invites partners to submit a full proposal for selected pre-proposals - November 10, 2015
    - NRCS reviews and selects full proposals for development of an agreement and award - January 2016

# Applications - Funding

- Must identify one funding pool per project
- Must address at least one national resource concern priority for the funding pool
- Funding provided per proposal will not exceed \$10 million
- Law prohibits partners using RCPP funds for administrative costs
  - Partner administrative costs can be a contribution
- Individual producers or landowners are not eligible for RCPP
  - Individual producers may apply for assistance under an RCPP project after NRCS & partner establish an agreement

# Applications – Project Area

- Project areas may be defined by:
    - geo-political boundaries,
    - watershed boundaries,
    - agricultural land uses, or
    - regional natural resource concerns.
  - Does not need to be contiguous, but boundaries must be described.
  - Projects equally evaluated regardless of size
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## Available Funding

- \$100 million of direct RCPP funding each year
- 7 percent of funds from the four covered programs
  - ACEP
  - CSP-allocated in acres
  - EQIP
  - HFRP

## Funding Pools

- 35 percent for projects in Critical Conservation Areas (CCA)
- 40 percent for National Projects
- 25 percent for State Projects

# FUNDING BY

# PROGRAM & POOL

Funding Year	2016
EQIP	\$94,500,000
CSP	\$8,220,240
ACEP	\$29,358,000
HFRP	\$0
RCPP	\$93,200,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$225,278,240*</b>
<b>Allocation Between National, State and CCA's</b>	
Funding Year	2016
CCA (35%)	\$78,847,384
National (40%)	\$90,111,296
State (25%)	\$56,319,560
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$225,278,240*</b>

\* Reflects reduction due to Sequestration

- Priority will be given to multistate projects.
- National resource concern priorities for FY 2016:
  1. Excess/ insufficient water (drought)
  2. Water quality degradation
  3. Soil quality degradation (soil health)
  4. Inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife (and invertebrates)
  5. Air quality impacts

Awarded to single states.

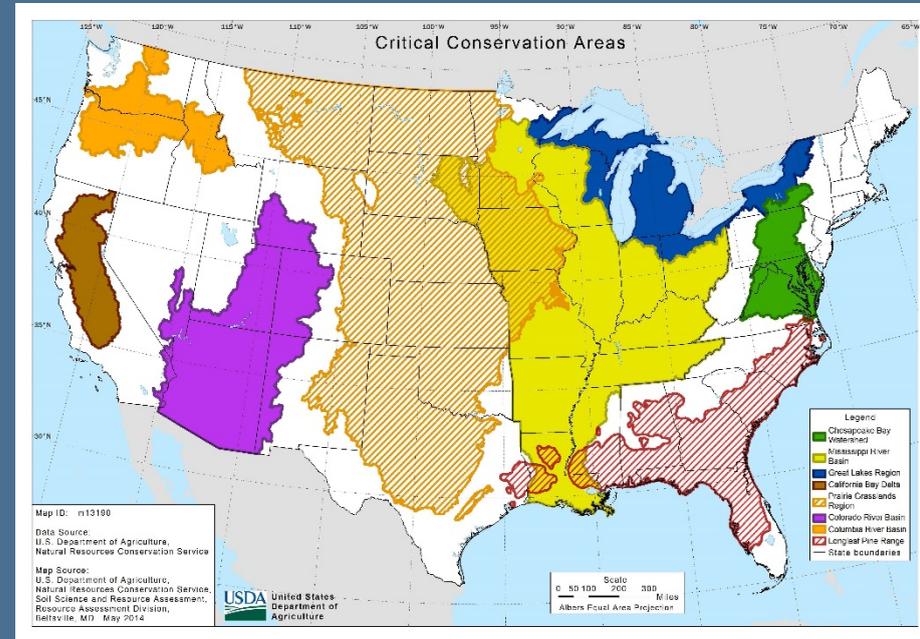
Designated State resource concerns in addition to one National resource concern.

State Conservationists collaborate with State Technical Committees in developing priorities and a process for reviewing and selecting state funded proposals.

State Conservationists may choose to set state priorities and communicate those priorities to partners; however, all proposals must be reviewed and considered based on established criteria.

# CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREAS FUNDING POOL

- Eight Critical Conservation Areas:
  - Chesapeake Bay Watershed
  - Mississippi River Basin
  - Great Lakes Region
  - California Bay Delta
  - Prairie Grasslands Region
  - Colorado River Basin
  - Longleaf Pine Range
  - Columbia River Basin



Note: APF details priority resource concern for each CCA.

# Partnership Agreements

- NRCS will conduct a competitive process to select proposals for partnership agreements.
- The criteria used in evaluating project proposals is listed in the APF
- Multistate projects will have a lead state selected for each proposal to develop and enter into partnership agreements
- Partnership agreements will be between NRCS and the lead partner
  - If no direct funds to the partner, then Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)
  - If direct funds to the partner, then Partnership Agreement

# Partner Responsibilities

Partners are responsible for:

- **Defining the scope of the project** (accomplished through the project proposal and agreement);
- Conducting **outreach and education** to eligible producers for potential participation in the project;
- **Assisting landowners and producers with NRCS applications**, at producer's request;
- **Leveraging financial or technical assistance** provided by NRCS with additional funds to help achieve the project objectives;
- Conducting and providing an **assessment of the project costs and conservation effects**;
- Other duties as specified in the partnership agreement.

- **May 4, 2015:** Announcement of Program Funding (APF)
- **July 8, 2015:** Pre-proposal applications are due
- **September 4, 2015:** Pre-proposals invited for full proposal submission
- **November 10, 2015:** Full proposals due
- **January 2016:** Proposals selected and announced
- **March 2016:** All project agreements are signed

Once agreements are signed, partnership activities and obligations may begin.

- Tools for 2016 Pre-proposals
  - Pre-proposal Fillable Form
  - Pre-proposal Data Entry Tool Instructions
  - RCPP Pre Application Data Entry Tool
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Information on 2014-2015 Projects
- Information on Critical Conservation Areas
  - Maps, background, priority resource concerns, selection process
- Information on State priorities and processes and links to State websites
- Ask questions to RCPP team at: [RCPP@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:RCPP@wdc.usda.gov)

A wide-angle photograph of a vast, open landscape under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the foreground, there are green, scrubby bushes and a person wearing a light-colored cowboy hat, seen from behind, looking out over the terrain. The middle ground shows rolling hills and a valley, while the background features distant mountain ranges.

**Thank you!**

**Email questions to:**

[rcpp@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:rcpp@wdc.usda.gov)