



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Investing in California - 2016

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2016, NRCS is investing up to \$220 million in 84 high-impact projects that impact every state in the nation, including six in California. This investment, which builds on the \$370 million invested for 2014 and 2015, will help conservation partners and agricultural producers conserve natural resources, leading to cleaner and more abundant water, healthier soil, enhanced wildlife habitat and many other benefits.

North Coast Oak Woodland Conservation Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2.6 million (State)

Lead Partner: University of California Cooperative Extension

Number of Partners: 9

Participating State(s): California

Throughout the Pacific Northwest, the loss of deciduous oak woodlands has become a critical conservation concern, resulting in associated losses of wildlife habitat, range values, cultural uses, biodiversity and other ecosystem services. This project would provide much-needed cohesion to efforts at a regional scale, complementing significant contributions by local organizations and landowners and providing a venue for shared development of related skills and expertise, best management practices and strategic vision among the many stakeholders working on this issue. Project objectives include increasing habitat continuity and the quantity and quality of food and shelter for wildlife; restoring structural integrity of oak woodland habitats and reducing wildfire risks; increasing the vigor and productivity of oak stands and associated plant communities; and increasing forage and shelter for livestock.

Salton Sea Agricultural Wetlands Habitat Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7.5 million (National)

Lead Partner: Salton Sea Authority

Number of Partners: 6

Participating State(s): California

This project will help producers and partners improve Salton Sea water quality, improve Imperial and Coachella valley air quality and restore habitat and wetlands. The Salton Sea is a shallow, saline, terminal lake sustained by agricultural discharge principally from the Imperial Valley. The lake provides significant habitat for birds, with an estimated 400 species relying upon the lake, as well as habitat for several state- and federally-listed species. Over the last two decades, Imperial Irrigation District (IID) became a party to agreements, which provide for conservation measures to generate 408,000 AFY (acre feet per year) of water for transfer out of the Imperial

Valley for Southern California urban users. Because the lake is sustained largely by agricultural discharges, absent mitigation and restoration, the parties recognized that these transfers would have unacceptable environmental impacts, particularly to the Salton Sea. IID committed to provide mitigation water for 15 years, while California committed to remaining mitigation and restoration. The first restoration projects are ready for implementation. This project targets conservation assistance to improve the water quality of IID agricultural drains, the New River and the Alamo River, which together will



provide the inflows to sustain these first habitat and air quality restoration projects. By improving the quality of these inflows, this project will fill a pivotal niche in these important Salton Sea restoration projects and will help assure the success of a critical ag-to-urban water transfer.

Sierra Valley CPP

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$9.9 million (CCA)

Lead Partner: Feather River Land Trust

Number of Partners: 3

Participating State(s): California

The Sierra Valley Conservation Partnership Project (SVCPP) is a collaborative initiative to conserve high quality wildlife habitat and address water quality and groundwater management challenges in Sierra Valley, the largest wetland and mountain meadow complex in the Feather River system and an ecologically rich sub-region of the Bay Delta. Sierra Valley supports the greatest diversity and abundance of birds in the Sierra Nevada and provides breeding habitat for more than 17 rare or threatened bird species. Sierra Valley is also a "priority" groundwater basin for California supplying drinking water to over 1.6 million Californians each year. The SVCPP will create a formal working partnership between NRCS and one of the most successful landscape-scale conservation initiatives underway in California today, enabling NRCS to leverage its resources to achieve results completely unimaginable absent the partnership. The SVCPP will bring significant new financial and human resources to the table, more than doubling NRCS's investment and enabling NRCS better serve the resource conservation needs of landowners in this critical upper watershed of the California Bay Delta CCA.

SONEC Working Wet Meadows Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2.6 million (National)

Lead Partner: Intermountain West Joint Venture

Number of Partners: 12

Participating State(s): California & Oregon (**lead state**)

The Southern Oregon-Northeastern California (SONEC) region is one of the most important areas for migratory waterbirds in North America, supporting approximately 70% of the Pacific Flyway's wetland-dependent migratory bird population (>six million birds). These birds are attracted to SONEC because of the food resources provided by privately owned, flood-irrigated wet meadow habitats on working ranchlands within historic floodplains. However, these habitats are increasingly threatened by changing irrigation practices, aging water conveyance infrastructure and fragmentation. To address at risk species habitat, water quantity and drought resource concerns, this project will strategically utilize Farm Bill programs and partner contributions to conserve nearly 25,000 acres of wet meadow habitats and improve the resiliency of working ranchlands to drought. Specifically, the project will improve the sustainability of wet meadows for migratory birds by:

enhancing infrastructure and improving the efficiency of flood-irrigation on critical wet meadows; acquiring conservation easements to remove fragmentation risk; and enhancing important foraging habitat for wetland-dependent migratory birds.

Sonoma County Venture Conservation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8.0 million (National)

Lead Partner: Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

Number of Partners: 15

Participating State(s): California



Due to severe drought in California, protection of agricultural lands and ecosystems for climate and drought resiliency is a high priority for partners in Sonoma County, California. This project is focused on four resource concerns: insufficient water, water quality degradation, soil quality degradation and inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife. The strategy for drought and climate resiliency involves using cutting edge science – such as LIDAR, downscaled climate modeling, atmospheric river modeling, habitat and species mapping and countywide GIS based spatial decision support systems – to inform our conservation vision, conservation plans and effectiveness monitoring. The project will leverage funds for natural resource enhancements utilizing practices, which avoid the need for regulatory requirements and increase regulatory certainty for landowners. Conservation activities will focus: on layering multiple practices in key riparian corridors, groundwater basins and floodplains in Sonoma County; acquiring easements; developing landowner plans; and implementing riparian corridor restoration, water conservation measures and floodplain enhancements to achieve sustainable water quality and quantity, soil health and functional ecosystems. Sonoma County sits at the nexus of the rapidly urbanizing San Francisco Bay Area and the rural North Coast of California. Conserving the rural heritage, agricultural economy and natural ecosystems is increasingly challenging given the pressure to convert natural and working lands to residential development, and conversion of these landscapes will only exacerbate impacts from drought and climate change.

Yurok Traditional Landscape Management Plan

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2.2 million (State)

Lead Partner: Yurok Tribe

Number of Partners: 4

Participating State(s): California

Located in northern coastal California, the Yurok Reservation starts near the confluence of the Trinity and Klamath rivers and follows the Klamath River until it empties into the Pacific Ocean. The Yurok Tribe is proposing a unique land management model that will combine existing management documents into a culturally based, comprehensive, overarching guidance document with the goal of widespread sub-basin restoration. The basis of the model will combine cultural resource priorities, forest management plans, Aquatic Habitat Conservation Plans, carbon sequestration goals and watershed restoration plans into a tool to restore the health of forested lands, increase carbon production, improve long term air quality and create habitat for aquatic and terrestrial populations that rely on habitats within this sub-basin. Plan development, training and the implementation of traditional strategies will result in greater species diversity, improvement to aquatic and terrestrial habitats and lessen the risk to the region of catastrophic fire events.

