



## Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

### Investing in Colorado - 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 three in Colorado. 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.

### Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2.4 million (State)

Lead Partner: Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust

Number of Partners: 4

Participating State(s): Colorado

The Agate Prairie Conservation Legacy represents a unique opportunity to build upon previous conservation investments in a dynamic landscape located less than 45 minutes from Denver. To date, approximately 60,000 acres of private land has been permanently protected in and around the Town of Agate. A majority of this protected land is comprised of native prairie grasslands, which provides essential habitat for several threatened species and species of special significance including the burrowing owl, swift fox and mountain plover. Prairie grasslands are also critical to the overall health and functionality of watersheds. With this project, partners will permanently protect an additional 30,000 acres of grassland prairie located in northwestern Elbert County through the acquisition of three conservation easements. Partners will work with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies to conduct bird surveys on the property as an indication of rangeland health, which will be used to direct future habitat and rangeland improvement projects.

### Colorado Dairy and Irrigation Efficiency Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1.1 million (State)

Lead Partner: Colorado Energy Office (CEO)

Number of Partners: 8

Participating State(s): Colorado

In 2014, CEO, along with several partners, launched the Colorado Dairy and Irrigation Efficiency Pilot. Overcoming barriers to investment in energy efficiency, CEO's eight pilot dairies are estimated to save nearly 3,000 MMBtu and 742,859 pounds of GHGs annually. Building on the success of the pilot, CEO launched a statewide program in 2015, aimed at reducing energy use. RCPP financial assistance funds will provide an estimated 60% of the cost of improvements up to \$24,000 for 48 of the 160 participating producers. CEO will provide participating producers with on farm energy audits and assist them in selecting and implementing cost effective improvements that reduce energy use, water, environmental impacts and producer operating costs. They will also monitor individual producer and overall program progress and track and report on improvements, energy and cost savings and GHG reductions. CEO will work with its partners to develop SMART goals that will include an annual reduction of 3.5 million kWh and 350 thousand gallons of water.



## Greater Outcomes for Greater Sage-Grouse

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1.9 million (National)

Lead Partner: Partners for Western Conservation

Number of Partners: 6

Participating State(s): Colorado (**lead state**) & Nevada

Western States are gripped by a common need to improve sagebrush habitat and protect against its future loss. This regional partnership brings together Nevada and Colorado, who are actively investing in habitat improvements on private lands with the desire to demonstrate the effectiveness of actions to taxpayers and federal agencies. The project will: 1) Enhance and protect rangeland for greater sage-grouse, and increase conservation outcomes generated by incorporating a habitat quantification approach in project selection and design, and building capacity of project support partners to implement habitat quantification approach; 2) Increase outcomes over time by adaptively managing habitat quantification tools; and 3) Increase transparency and demand for results from public investments by reporting outcomes generated by partner and RCPP funds invested online. State, EQIP and CSP funds will create “credit-ready” projects per the specifications of the Nevada Conservation Credit System and Colorado Habitat Exchange, and private funds will be leveraged to cover long-term stewardship of the improved project sites. This project addresses the issue of stacking credit payments to ensure that EQIP and CSP funds are not be used to offset impacts that require compensatory mitigation and investigates innovative mechanisms for partnering public and private funds to create revolving funds.

