



2017 RCPP Projects Led by Conservation Districts

(Project descriptions courtesy of USDA-NRCS)

Climate Resiliency in Florida, Alabama, and Georgia

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 32

Participating States: Alabama, Florida, and Georgia (Lead State)

The Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin stretches from the base of the Appalachian Mountains in North Georgia to the Gulf of Mexico in the Florida Panhandle. The vibrant ecological Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River Basin and adjacent Ochlockonee River Basin provide habitat for a rich biodiversity of aquatic and terrestrial species, including many designated as endangered or threatened. Growers in this region provide food, fuel, forest products and fiber to global markets, and they depend upon the areas natural resources to sustain their livelihoods. Over the last few decades, fluctuations in climate patterns have presented challenges to sustainable management of the region's natural resources. The Flint River Soil and Water Conservation District and over 30 multi-state partners will develop and implement practical solutions for climate change adaptation in the river basins.

Alabama Soil Health

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,897,430 (State)

Lead Partner: Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee (State Association)

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: Alabama (Lead State)

Through the Alabama Soil Health project, the Alabama Soil and Water Conservation Committee and partners will work with Alabama farmers to improve the timeliness of cover crop planting, explore innovative planting methods to get seeds in the ground earlier, and increase access to equipment as needed. The project partners will conduct outreach to farmers through newsletters and social media, workshops and field days along site visits.

Among the many benefits of cover crops, the reduction of soil erosion, the improvement of water infiltration and storage, and the enhancement of water quality are among the most important.

San Diego County Partners Agricultural Sustainability

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$472,590 (State)

Lead Partner: Mission Resource Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 16
Participating States: California (Lead State)

The Mission Resource Conservation District and 15 local partners will improve irrigation system efficiency on 120 agricultural properties in San Diego County, Calif., through the San Diego County Partners Agricultural Sustainability project. Partners will encourage property owners to implement irrigation systems and conservation practices through enrollment in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program or EQIP. Irrigation system evaluations and conservation plans will be utilized to ascertain the baseline conditions of each participating property and to determine the necessary conservation practices needed to ensure sustainability.

Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$3,250,000 (National)
Lead Partner: East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District
Number of Initial Partners: 21
Participating States: Colorado and New Mexico (Lead State)

Completed by the Bureau of Reclamation in 1976, the San Juan-Rio Chama Diversion is a series of diversion structures and tunnels that together carry runoff 26 miles across the Continental Divide from the Colorado River watershed to the Rio Chama, in the Rio Grande watershed. This diversion, along with the Rio Chama, provides approximately one third of New Mexico's water supply for irrigators, agriculture, industry, communities and fish and wildlife. The Building Resiliency in the San Juan-Rio Chama Region project, managed by East Rio Arriba Soil and Water Conservation District and twenty partners, will complement recent diversion structures with additional forest health and watershed treatments to increase the resiliency of the landscape to withstand stressors such as drought, wildfire and climate change in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. Between 2017 and 2021, partners in the San Juan-Rio Chama region of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico will complete 1,000 – 1,500 acres of watershed resiliency treatments per year utilizing \$6.4 million of Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program and the Agricultural Easement Program.

Colorado Rio Grande Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$345,000 (State)
Lead Partner: Subdistrict #1 Rio Grande Water Conservation District
Number of Initial Partners: 3
Participating States: Colorado (Lead State)

The Colorado Rio Grande project will encourage landowners to participate in voluntary conservation practices for water and soil health. To address issues of drought, the partnership project will share irrigated water management practices, such as weather stations and soil moisture monitoring systems, with the public. Soil health practices will be applied on irrigated cropland to reduce water consumption, reduce soil erosion, enhance soil health and improve soil moisture retention qualities. The application of these practices will reduce energy consumption and contribute to increased stream flows and improved riparian habitat.

Cost-share Opportunities for Beginning Farmers

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$475,300 (State)

Lead Partner: Kent Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 4

Participating States: Delaware (Lead State)

The Kent Conservation District in Delaware along with public and private partners will assist new and beginning farmers in Kent County with initial costs associated with poultry operations, particularly with waste and manure disposal. The improper composting and manure storage can increase the possibility of nutrients contaminating surface and ground water. The project will provide cost-share funding to the ever-growing pool of new and beginning farmers in Kent County for composters, freezers and manure storage facilities. The ready access to these resources will provide new farmers with the opportunity to establish safe and effective management practices from the initiation of their operation.

Fox River Water Quality Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$900,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Davis County Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 8

Participating States: Iowa (Lead State)

The Fox River Water Quality Project, in its 18th year, is one of the longest running watershed projects in Iowa. The conservation project will continue to improve the health of the Fox River by addressing water quality, conservation, protection and development of natural resources using voluntary programs that provide economic opportunity. The eight partners, led by the Davis County Soil and Water Conservation District, will help producers improve water quality through conservation practices like installing grade stabilization structures, water and sediment control basins, tile outlet terraces and cover crops.

Innovative Conservation Agriculture

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Proposed NRCS Investment: \$646,670 (State)
Lead Partner: Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation District
Number of Initial Partners: 4
Participating States: Iowa (Lead State)

Through the Innovative Conservation Agriculture Project, the Allamakee County Soil and Water Conservation will address water quality and soil quality/health concerns in Allamakee County. Specifically, the project will support implementation of cover crops and no-till in conjunction with manure application, the conversion of marginal cropland to pasture, and the addition of a small grain crop to a corn-soybean system, preferably with the inclusion of cover crops in the rotation. These practices will help to minimize soil erosion and nutrient runoff. Through the project, eligible farmers will receive financial assistance to implement conservation practices, and the project will address the need to educate producers and landowners about how different practices affect soil health and long-term productivity.

Lake Cumberland Regional Conservation Partnership Program

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$210,000 (State)
Lead Partner: Wayne County Conservation District
Number of Initial Partners: 8
Participating States: Kentucky (Lead State)

The Wayne County Conservation District and eight local partners will provide leverage local and federal funds for four years to implement soil and water conservation practices in Kentucky.

Ground Based Water Quality Implementation

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$969,650 (State)
Lead Partner: Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts
Number of Initial Partners: 13
Participating States: Massachusetts (Lead State)

The Massachusetts Association of Conservation Districts will create a Human Portal - boots on the ground - within each conservation district to serve as a “general contractor” to help producers implement conservation practices. Producers are concerned about the complexity and administrative burdens of the federal conservation programs. The required paperwork and follow-through can impede implementation. MACD proposes to establish one staff member in every Conservation District who can serve as the “general contractor” for producers to assist them in completing the paperwork needed to not only apply for conservation funds but also manage those contracts after awarded. The overall goal is to increase the follow-through and

quality of implementation on the ground. When a farmer documents the conservation practices he has applied, he would be allowed “safe harbor” from certain regulatory requirements.

Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,873,880 (State)

Lead Partner: Morrison Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: Minnesota (Lead State)

The Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape includes high quality water features, including 40 miles of the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River and four tributaries; two ecological zones; and thousands of acres of public and private lands. This landscape is one of Minnesota’s most important source drinking water protection area; 1.2 million people between Camp Ripley and the Twin Cities rely on the Mississippi for drinking water. The 34 minor watersheds within the CRSL are not confined to political boundaries, hence, efforts across this landscape are critical to protect, maintain, and restore lands resulting in cleaner water, less erosion, high quality habitat and recreational opportunities. The Camp Ripley Sentinel Landscape project, a partnership among 11 organizations, will combine the current use of easements and fee title acquisition with management practices on the landscape to protect and enhance our military mission and natural resources.

Northwest Missouri Partnership for Water Quality

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,135,500 (State)

Lead Partner: Holt County Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 13

Participating States: Missouri (Lead State)

The Northwest Missouri Partnership for Water Quality will target counties that are adjacent to and drain directly into the Missouri River. As a baseline, the project partners will complete soil microbial analysis, soil carbon and nitrogen analysis and other soil processes. The project will focus outreach efforts to treat 50 to 80% of the contributing cropland with project practices and then show results of the treatment through monitoring. This partnership seeks to become a working model of how federal and state government along with not for profit entities, small business and institution of higher learning can come together with resources to achieve significant improvement to water quality and quantity.

Wahoo Creek Water Quality Sites 26 and 27

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,500,000 (Critical Conservation Area – Prairie Grasslands Region)

Lead Partner: Lower Platte North Natural Resources District

Number of Initial Partners: 1

Participating States: Nebraska (Lead State)

The Lower Platte North Natural Resources District in Nebraska, with the assistance of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, completed the Wahoo Creek Watershed Plan and Environmental Impact Statement under the authority of Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566). The watershed plan identified seventeen projects within the basin that will reduce rural and urban flooding, reduce sedimentation and scour, stabilize stream channels, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, enhance water quality, improve economic conditions and provide recreational opportunities. Seven of these structures were completed as an environmental enhancement project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Through this project, partners will construct two (Sites 26 and 27) of the remaining ten uncompleted structures as identified in the Wahoo Creek Watershed Plan to address identified flooding and water quality concerns.

Divots in the Pivots

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,863,750 (State)

Lead Partner: Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District

Number of Initial Partners: 15

Participating States: Nebraska (Lead State)

The Divots in the Pivots Project will restore habitat for wetland-dependent birds in Nebraska's Rainwater Basin through Natural Resource Conservation Service easements and enhanced irrigation efficiency through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program. Led by Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District and 14 partners, the project builds upon three decades of conservation projects, including easements, in the area. The integration of precision field mapping, monitoring soil moisture, evaluating crop water needs, and use of precision irrigation prescriptions will ensure irrigation is only completed when the crops need water, maximize inputs on the cropland and minimizing inputs within the restored wetland. The multi-programmatic approach of the current project will provide ideal wildlife habitat while maximizing net-farm income.

New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$7,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: New Mexico Association of Conservation Districts

Number of Initial Partners: 17

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

The New Mexico Range and Forest Soil Health Initiative will bring Environmental Quality Incentives Program and partner funds together for New Mexico ranchers whose operations include federal lands. Each rancher, state and federal agency with lands included in the ranch operation will develop a coordinator resource management plan or CRMP. The CRMP will include range and forest soil health restoration strategies, such as forest thinning, to combat the increase in wildland fires. New Mexico experienced over 1.5 million acres in wildfires from 2009 to 2014. Restoration efforts through this initiative are critical to fund treatments on over 20 million acres of brush-invaded rangeland and 10 million acres of overstocked forest lands.

New Mexico Acequia Revitalization on Historic Lands

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2,907,670 (State)

Lead Partner: NM Association of Conservation Districts, NM Interstate Stream Commission, NM Acequia Association

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

New Mexico has a rich history of community acequias supporting agriculture. Approximately 800 acequias and community ditch associations serve many farmers or “parciantes” who make all, or part of their livelihood from farming and ranching. Farms served by acequias range in size from less than 1 acre to over 500 acres. The majority of farmers depending on acequias are minorities in underserved communities. Acequias are located in 12 of the most impoverished counties in the state. In New Mexico we say “agua es la vida” (water is life). This project will help sustain this critical social and spiritual connection as a matter of social and environmental justice. The objective of the proposal is to facilitate and promote surface water conservation, increase irrigation system efficiencies/effectiveness and improve water quality on agricultural lands and for downstream purposes. Critical riparian habitats for dependent wildlife and plant species will be conserved. Water quantity and quality will be improved by restoring historic acequias on agricultural lands supporting local families and communities.

Traditional acequias in irrigated valleys of northern New Mexico provide multiple hydrological benefits including, aquifer recharge, temporary reservoir storage, and delayed return flow. Recent studies indicate that hydrologic functions of traditional acequia systems prolong the river runoff hydrograph, save water through reduced transpiration loss from ground water storage in comparison to above ground storage, while ameliorating climatic variation on local and regional water users. Some aspects of the traditional acequia system resemble natural hydrologic processes and mitigate altered hydrologic characteristics. These altered characteristics include stream channelization and flood control structures. Irrigation via acequias provides functions similar to overbank flooding and meandering streams. A coordinated/collaborative effort with the Interstate Stream Commission and the New Mexico

Acequia Association throughout the entire planning and implementation process will serve as the basis for program implementation.

North Central NM Watershed Restoration Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: 969,220 (State)

Lead Partner: Claunch-Pinto Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: New Mexico (Lead State)

This is a regional watershed project aimed at reducing wildfire risk while at the same time improving soils, hydrology, vegetation, and enhancing social/economic needs. The watershed approach provides a framework for coordinating project needs among private landowners, state and Federal agencies, tribes, communities, and other interested stakeholders. The project extends from Taos (North) to Bernardo (South) and Gallup (West) to Santa Rosa (East), including all major tributaries and sub-watersheds of the Rio Grande and Pecos River in that region. This project will expand on previous work with established partners to improve the natural resources of this critically important region.

Forest restoration practices have been shown to reduce high-severity wildfire and to improve watershed health, water quality, and water quantity. Poor historic management of forest watersheds and riparian zones along with current and forecast climate change are creating a dire situation for the condition and availability of New Mexico's forest, rangeland and water resources. This situation must be alleviated with natural resource restoration efforts. Montane coniferous forest watersheds and riparian areas that experience extensive mid- and high-severity wildfires have greatly diminished water storage capacity because the soils do not absorb or hold water after fire. Rainwater runoff generated during storms has the potential to cause extreme flooding, sedimentation, and debris flows into the main tributaries of the burned watersheds. The large amounts of post-fire sediment that move into rivers, streams and reservoirs during these flood events diminish water quality and disrupt water delivery and storage.

Wildlife, acequias, rural economies, tourism and outdoor recreation are all at risk from the associated impacts of watershed wildfires. Without a large-scale watershed solution addressing wildfire, more acres will continue to be severely impacted, which will place critical water and other natural resources in jeopardy, and threaten more communities within the Wildland Urban Environment (WUI).

Bowman-Slope SCD Tree & Shrub Establishment

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$57,500 (State)

Lead Partner: Bowman -Slope Soil Conservation District
Number of Initial Partners: 1
Participating States: North Dakota (Lead State)

The Bowman-Slope Soil Conservation District Tree and Shrub Establishment project will establish tree and shrub plantings in Bowman and Slope Counties in southwestern North Dakota to replace lost or older trees across the landscape. The new plantings will address resource concerns identified by working group of local producers and agencies, including inadequate wildlife habitat and livestock shelter, inefficient use of equipment and facilities, and excess flooding, drifting snow, and high water table.

Blue Mountains Vegetative Health Initiative

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,195,890 (Oregon)
Lead Partner: Grant Soil and Water Conservation District
Number of Initial Partners: 5
Participating States: Oregon (Lead State)

The Blue Mountains Vegetative Health Initiative will improve forest conditions, increase streamflows and improve instream listed fish habitat on private lands near the Malheur National Forest in Oregon. The project will be modeled after the Blue Mountains Forest Partners, a key partner in this effort, after their treatment of Malheur National Forest timber areas for fire resiliency. The project partners expect to complete two thousand acres of pre-commercial thinning in conifer stands and one thousand acres of juniper removal over a five-year period. The partners will prioritize treatment area using a GIS-based selection process similar to the one successfully developed by the U.S. Forest Service. Finally participating landowners and partners will develop prescribed grazing to ensure long-term management of the treatments.

Wallsburg Watershed Improvement Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$500,000 (State)
Lead Partner: Wasatch Conservation District
Number of Initial Partners: 8
Participating States: Utah (Lead State)

Main Creek in Wallsburg, has been 303(d) listed for phosphorous, E. coli and temperature. Main Creek flows into Deer Creek Reservoir which has also been listed as impaired because of high phosphorous levels. Deer Creek reservoir is a drinking water source for millions of Utahans along the Wasatch Front. In an attempt to improve water quality and aquatic habitat, stream restoration efforts have been ongoing in the Wallsburg Watershed for the past 3 years.

Currently, there is a stretch of river approximately 1.2 miles in length, where no project work has been completed. This section is characterized by steep eroded banks. River sinuosity is nonexistent, which adds to erosion, bank loss and down cutting. The soils in the Wallsburg Watershed are naturally high in phosphorous. Stream restoration efforts would include putting meanders back into the system and would nearly double the length of the stream. The added meanders would help slow the river, add aquatic habitat, and significantly reduce erosion and dissolved phosphorous issues. The landowner would no longer lose valuable pasture and crop lands to stream erosion. Banks would be sloped, and native riparian vegetation would be planted. J-hooks and rock barbs would be used to add roughness and bank protection. Cross vanes would be used to increase habitat and reduce the potential for down-cutting. The riparian area will be fenced off, however, water gaps and stream crossings will be installed to allow for improved grazing management. These combined practices will decrease in-stream temperature, erosion and phosphorous. The health and vitality of the watershed would improve. The landowner is willing to move forward with stream restoration efforts on the property, however, they have previously been ineligible due to AGI limitations. With RCPP allowing for an AGI waiver, the benefits of this project can be realized.

Puyallup Watershed Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$8,000,000 (National)

Lead Partner: Pierce Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 11

Participating States: Washington (Lead State)

Through the Puyallup Watershed Partnership, the Pierce Conservation District and ten diverse partners will assist landowners with permanent conservation easements and implement restoration activities through Environmental Quality Incentives Program funding assistance. The Puyallup in Washington contains the only remaining prime soils in Pierce County, is home to one of the most urban tribal reservations, and provides essential habitat for Endangered Species Act listed species of Coho and Chinook salmon, Stealhead, and Bull Trout. Since 2002, Pierce County has lost almost 10,000 acres of farmland, nearly five times the state average, due to rapidly encroaching development from the Seattle/Tacoma metropolitan area. That loss not only impacts farmers and food security but also diminishes the ecosystem benefits that farmland provides to water and soil quality.

Northeastern Wyoming Sage-Grouse Habitat Enhancement

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$200,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Converse County Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 3

Participating States: Wyoming (Lead State)

The Northeast Wyoming Sage-Grouse Habitat Enhancement Project will help expand conservation efforts of the Thunder Basin Grasslands Prairie Ecosystem Association, the Douglas Core Area Restoration Team, and other partners operating in northeast Wyoming. The Association has been actively engaged in local and regional conservation efforts since 1999 while the Douglas Core Area Restoration Team was formed in 2013 to focus on restoration of sage-grouse habitat within the Douglas Core Area. The primary focus of this regional project is on developing and maintaining wildlife habitat for sage-grouse and other species of interest while maintaining viable agricultural operations. Conservation projects that will be planned and implemented include sagebrush restoration, grazing management, rangeland improvement, invasive species treatment (specifically cheatgrass), ephemeral and intermittent streambank restoration, restoration of wildfire and energy-related disturbances to minimize excessive erosion, protection and enhancement of upland ephemeral wetlands, and projects focused on enhancing soil quality. The initiative will build on existing collaborative efforts among landowners, state and federal agencies, academia, and other conservation non-governmental organizations working in northeast Wyoming.

Northeast Wyoming Forest Resiliency Project

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1,285,540 (State)

Lead Partner: Wyoming Conservation Districts

Number of Initial Partners: 10

Participating States: Wyoming (Lead State)

Since 2012, local conservation districts and Natural Resources Conservation Service field offices have actively been working on forest health projects throughout Northeast Wyoming. The goal of this project will be to continue the efforts in this area to create a more resilient ecosystem for the future by partnering with local, state, and federal partners. In total eleven partners will be participating on this project to coordinate, promote and administer the proposed project. They stand ready with the knowledge and technical expertise to ensure that this project is a success. This project will encompass three counties in the Northeast portion of Wyoming, with a priority area encompassing 785,000 acres. This project will have the potential to address forest resource concerns on approximately 2,200, acres which will result in improved forest stand conditions, increased forage production for livestock producers and wildlife, decrease wildfire risk, enhance wildlife habitat, and increase overall forest health. The project will be further extended on adjacent property managed federal agencies, as they are currently implementing forest management on their lands. The objectives of this project are to improve forest health and resiliency, and improved rangeland health by reducing encroachment of juniper and pine. These objectives will be achieved with the use of the EQIP conservation program and practices.

Adaptation Measures in Southwestern Puerto Rico

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$918,460 (State)

Lead Partner: Southwest Soil and Water Conservation District

Number of Initial Partners: 7

Participating States: Puerto Rico (Lead State)

The Lajas irrigation system located in southwestern Puerto Rico was built in the mid-1950 to supply four acre-foot of supplemental irrigation water to nearly 20,000 acres of fertile agriculture land. Through the Adaptation Measure in Southwestern Puerto Rico project, the Southwest Soil and Conservation District and six partners will build a new water conveying system and feed several water storage lagoons to supply water by gravity to participating farms in the area to a semiarid region with fertile soils. The partners will develop application tools to assist farmers on when and how much water to apply for optimal soil moisture and water resources in the region. The partners will make applications available to all farmers in the region so they can decide when and how much to irrigate based on simple data entry quests that uses information on crops and date of planting. The rest of the information will be retrieved from existing SSURGO databases, a new USGS climatological network for the area.
