



U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Commodity Credit Corporation
Financial Assistance Programs Division
Programs Deputy Area

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is authorized by Subtitle I of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (the 1985 Act), as amended by Section 2401 of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (the 2014 Act). The Secretary of Agriculture has delegated the authority to administer RCPP to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). NRCS is an agency of the Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Announcement No. USDA-NRCS-NHQ-RCPP

For Fiscal Year 2016

Date Issued: May 4, 2015

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ANNOUNCEMENT TYPE: Announcement for Program Funding

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC)

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.932

DATES: Applications must be received by NRCS before 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Daylight Time).

Preproposal applications due:	July 8, 2015
Announcement of selected preproposals:	September 4, 2015
Full proposal applications due:	November 10, 2016
Announcement of selected full proposals:	January 2016

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

NRCS is the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) conservation agency working with farmers, ranchers, and private forest landowners nationwide to identify and address natural resource objectives in balance with operational goals in order to benefit soil, water, wildlife, and related natural resources locally, regionally, and nationally. NRCS works in partnership with other entities to accelerate getting conservation on the ground.

Through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners in innovative, workable and cost-effective approaches to benefit farming, ranching, and forest operations, local economies, and the communities and resources in a watershed or other geographic area.

RCPP partners develop project applications, as described in this notice, to address specific natural resource objectives in a proposed area or region. Partnering organizations design, promote, implement, and evaluate the project outcomes.

NRCS will select final RCPP projects following a two-phase application process that includes: (1) a pre-proposal application; and (2) a full proposal application. NRCS will assess and evaluate RCPP project applications against four criteria—solutions, contributions, innovation, and participation. The full proposal process is only open to applicants whose pre-proposal applications are selected by the agency to go forward from the pre-proposal stage. All RCPP applications become the property of NRCS for use in the administration of the program and will not be returned to the applicant.

RCPP federal assistance is delivered in accordance with the authorities of the Environmental

Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), and in certain geographic areas, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention program. NRCS and partners implement RCPP projects by working with agricultural producers and owners of agricultural and forestland.

The purpose of this notice is to announce the availability of CCC funding for RCPP and to solicit applications from potential partners. Subject to fiscal year (FY) 2016 appropriations, NRCS anticipates the availability of about \$225 million in funding for RCPP. If the Sequester were not in effect in FY 2016, as proposed in the President's FY 2016 Budget, available funding would be about \$235 million. The FY 2015 proposal process offered up to \$394 million in funding, reflecting two years of funding (FY2014 and FY2015), not a higher level of annual funding. Applications will be accepted from all 50 States, the Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands), and U.S. territories in the Pacific Island Areas (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

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ADDRESSES:

Applicants may submit applications through any one of the following three methods:

1. *Email:* RCPP@wdc.usda.gov (Preferred submission method).

Applicants may submit preproposal and full proposal applications as described in section IV or V to the RCPP email address shown above. A Dun & Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and current registration in the System for Award Management (SAM) is not required at the preproposal stage, but must be obtained if the applicant is invited to submit a full proposal. The standard forms **must be completed in accordance with:**

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/programs/financial/?cid=>

2. *Mail* (Registered or Certified Mail will not be accepted):

Mark A. Rose, Director
Financial Assistance Programs Division
Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP Application
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890

3. *Grants.gov:*

Applicants may submit preproposal and full proposal applications as described in section IV or V via Grants.gov. Please note that the Grants.gov electronic submission system is relatively complex for first-time users and involves several preliminary registration steps before the applicant can submit the application. To register, go to www.grants.gov, click on “Applicants”, and then click on “Get Registered.”

If you have completed a prior application, you may already have completed the registration process. Please allow sufficient time to submit the application electronically in grants.gov and for possible computer delays.

For registered applicants to submit an application:

1. Go to www.grants.gov. Information about submitting an application using Grants.gov is located on the Grants.gov Web site with supplementary materials.
2. Select the Applicants tab.
3. Select the Apply for Grants heading, click on Apply for Grants.
4. Follow all steps. Select “Download a Grant Application Package” and enter the CFDA number 10.932.

5. Submitting an RCPP application through Grants.gov requires completing a variety of standard forms including requiring applicants to include a DUNS number and current registration in SAM in order to submit either a preproposal or a full proposal.

NRCS **will not** consider applications that do not meet the application requirements, are incomplete, are submitted after the deadline date listed in this notice, or are submitted via Registered or Certified Mail, submitted by facsimile, or delivered by courier.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact the USDA TARGET Center at: (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

For additional information contact:

Mark A. Rose, Director
Financial Assistance Programs Division
Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP Application
P.O. Box 2890
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890
Telephone: (202) 720-1844; email: mark.rose@wdc.usda.gov

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Legislative Authority

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is authorized by Subtitle I of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985 (the 1985 Act), as amended by Section 2401 of the Agricultural Act of 2014. The Secretary of Agriculture has delegated the authority to administer RCPP to the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), who is Vice President of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). NRCS is an agency of USDA.

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

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), 16 U.S.C. 3839aa-3839-8; 7 CFR part 1466;
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), 16 U.S.C. 3838d-3838g; 7 CFR part 1470;
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), 16 U.S.C. 6571-6578; 7 CFR part 625;

- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), 16 U.S.C. 3865–3865d; 7 CFR part 1468; and
- For Critical Conservation Areas only: Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566; hereafter Watershed Authorities), 16 U.S.C. 1001, *et seq.*; 7 CFR part 622. Please note that Watershed Authorities are not covered programs as defined in statute and the adjustment of terms discussed below does not apply. We include the authority here to simplify terminology.

Delivering Assistance through Covered Programs

RCPP assistance is provided to project participants in accordance with the authorities and rules of the covered programs. Applicants identify the specific conservation activity and the appropriate covered program for delivery. For example, a watershed-scale drought mitigation project may be delivered through EQIP and CSP, allowing for implementation of on-farm irrigation improvements and enhancements. In this case the applicant would estimate the financial and technical assistance funds (EQIP) and acres to be treated (CSP) in needed for each program to accomplish the project objective. In other cases, for example to achieve wildlife habitat and agricultural viability objectives, easements through ACEP may be the appropriate program authority, or in a combination with EQIP and CSP.

Adjustment of Program Terms

RCPP allows some flexibility to adjust the rules of ACEP, CSP, EQIP, HFRP in order to provide a simplified application and evaluation process, or to better reflect unique local circumstances that will help to achieve the purposes of the RCPP program. This flexibility applies only to the non-statutory regulatory rules or provisions of a covered program and does not extend to Watershed Authorities. For example, rules that may be adjusted include:

- a. Operational guidance and requirements for a covered program.
- b. Use of a threshold score to approve applications without further evaluation prior to the end of an application or ranking period.
- c. Modifying program application ranking criteria for applications within the RCPP project area.

Applicants seeking to adjust rules should contact NRCS for additional information while developing their preproposals to confirm whether the particular rule adjustment is non-statutory. Statutory requirements are not subject to this flexibility; for example NRCS cannot adjust:

- a. Payment rates to exceed the maximum payment limitation of the estimated incurred cost for practice implementation to all EQIP participants.
- b. Eligibility requirements such as compliance with Highly Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Provisions, program land eligibility, or participant eligibility.

- c. Compliance with other applicable federal laws (e.g., National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Clean Water Act (Section 404 and other permits), Endangered Species Act, etc.)

Adjusted Gross Income Limitation Waiver

RCPP allows waiver of the Adjusted Gross Income (AGI) limitations for participating producers if the Chief determines that the waiver is necessary to fulfill the objectives of the program. Applicants should indicate in their preproposals and full proposals if they anticipate that AGI waivers will be requested. Waiver requests will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

B. Vision and Goals of the Program

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is an innovative approach to investing in natural resource conservation that empowers partnerships to design solutions and deliver specific, measurable results. RCPP draws on local knowledge and networks to accelerate progress on critical conservation projects. Partners are in the driver's seat with technical and financial help from NRCS. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to achieve:

1. Solutions. Investing in projects that generate near-term results that are measurable from environmental, economic, and social perspectives.
2. Contributions. Leveraging the Federal resources to at least double the total investment in conservation projects.
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-administered conservation programs, to participate in and contribute to projects.

Successful RCPP proposals will bring an array of financial and technical capabilities to projects, will demonstrate experience with working effectively and collaboratively with agricultural producers and private forest landowners across the landscape, and will present innovative, sustainable and measurable approaches to achieving important conservation goals.

C. Overview of the RCPP Application and Selection Process

NRCS is soliciting applications for fiscal year 2016 funding in this current announcement. RCPP project selection follows a two-phase application and evaluation process that includes:

- (1) A preproposal application; and
- (2) A full proposal application.

Applicants submit preproposals and full proposals in accordance with Part IV and Part V of this notice. NRCS will conduct thorough evaluations of preproposals and full proposals in accordance with Part VI of this notice. The full proposal process is only open to applicants

whose preproposal applications are selected by NRCS for further consideration. The agency decision for development and submission of a full proposal is final and there is no appeal process or opportunity for reconsideration.

Upon selection of final proposals for funding, NRCS will work with lead partners to develop and finalize partnership agreements for the project. A negotiation phase is part of the partnership agreement development process to ensure that each project is fully scoped and resourced to achieve identified objectives. RCPP is not a grant program. All RCPP funds are provided in accordance with the final partnership agreement.

II. ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Partner Eligibility

Eligible partners include:

- An agricultural or silvicultural producer association or other group of producers;
- A State or unit of local government;
- An Indian Tribe;
- A farmer cooperative;
- A water district, irrigation district, rural water district or association, or other organization with specific water delivery authority to agricultural producers;
- A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity;
- An institution of higher education; and
- An organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers on agricultural land, as determined by NRCS, to address—
 - Local conservation priorities related to agricultural production, wildlife habitat development, or nonindustrial private forest land management, or
 - Critical watershed-scale soil erosion, water quality, sediment reduction, or other natural resource issues.

Individual producers and landowners are not eligible to submit project applications under this notice. However, once NRCS selects a project and establishes a partnership agreement, individual producers and landowners may apply directly to NRCS for program assistance as part of the eligible project or they may work with the partner to participate in the project.

B. Land Eligibility

Applicants must describe the type of land(s) that will benefit from the conservation activities in their proposals.

1. Covered programs.—The following private and Tribal lands are eligible for enrollment:

- Cropland;
- Grassland;
- Rangeland;
- Pastureland;
- Nonindustrial private forest land; and
- Other land incidental to agricultural production (including wetlands and riparian buffers) on which significant natural resource issues could be addressed under the program.

Public lands are eligible in EQIP under limited circumstances where an eligible producer has authority to operate on the public land (e.g., a grazing permit) for the length of the program contract.

2. Watershed Authorities.— Lands within an eligible watershed area. The size of the watershed cannot to exceed 250,000 acres, and the size of any single structure proposed for funding cannot exceed 12,500 acre-feet of floodwater detention capacity, and no more than 25,000 acre feet of total capacity.

Additional information about various aspects of the covered programs are summarized in Appendix C. Contact NRCS with any questions regarding covered program requirements.

III. FUNDING AVAILABILITY

The maximum NRCS funding available for any project (combined financial assistance and technical assistance) selected under this announcement will not exceed \$10 million.

A. Fiscal Year 2016 Estimated Total RCPP Funding

The RCPP statute authorizes annually \$100 million in CCC funding and reserves 7 percent of the funds and acres made available under “covered programs” (i.e., EQIP, CSP, ACEP, and HFRP) to implement the program:

Estimated Total RCPP Funding for Fiscal Year 2016

<u>Program</u>	<u>Estimated Funding</u>
EQIP	\$ 94,500,000
CSP *	\$ 8,220,240
ACEP	\$ 29,358,000
HFRP	\$ 0
RCPP	\$ 93,200,000
Total	\$225,278,240

* CSP is allocated in acres. The FY 2016 funding estimate in the table is derived by calculating 7 percent of the available program acreage (456,680 acres) multiplied by \$18/acre, which is the average rate established in statute (16 USC 3838g) for CSP.

Funding availability is subject to final congressional appropriations and apportionment from the Office of Management and Budget. The Federal fiscal year is October 1 to September 30. Funding will be available for project implementation activities once final project selections are made in FY 2016 and partnership agreements are executed. Funds will be committed for the duration of the project, or through FY 2020.

B. Fund Pools and Funding Priorities

RCPP funding is allocated across three competitive funding pools as follows:

FY 2016 Funding Allocation Across Funding Pools

<u>Fund Pool</u>	<u>Funding Allocation</u>	<u>FY 2016 Estimated Funding</u>
Critical Conservation Areas	35 percent	\$ 78,847,384
National	40 percent	\$ 90,111,296
State	25 percent	\$ 56,319,560
Total	100 percent	\$225,278,240

Applicants must identify one specific fund pool in which to compete in accordance with the criteria established in this notice. Applicants cannot change fund pools once they have formally entered the process. For additional information on fund pools, go to:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>.

Critical Conservation Areas Fund Pool

USDA has designated eight Critical Conservation Areas (CCAs) that represent an opportunity for partners at a regional level to address common natural resource goals while maintaining or improving agricultural productivity. Project applications submitted for consideration through the CCA fund pool must address the resource concern priority listed for the CCA. In designating CCAs, priority was given to geographical areas with:

- Significant agricultural production;
- An existing plan adopted by a Federal, State, or regional authority;
- Substantial need for water quality or water quantity improvements; and
- Producers that may have a need for assistance in meeting or avoiding a natural resource regulation.

Authorities under the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (P.L. 83-566) except the Watershed Rehabilitation Program, hereafter referred to as “Watershed Authorities,” are available to applicants in the CCA fund pool. Applicants requesting use of Watershed Authorities must follow all statutory and programmatic rules as outlined in 7 CFR Part 622 and the National Watershed Program Manual (Title 390, Parts 500-506). Applicants are strongly encouraged to thoroughly review the specific requirements of the program before they begin the application process. NRCS is available to discuss and review the benefits and requirements of the Watershed Authorities; questions regarding proposed requests for use of Watershed Authorities in CCAs may be directed to: RCPP@wdc.usda.gov.

Projects in CCAs that include activities that are outside the CCA boundary are permitted, to a limited extent, so long as the project also includes a significant portion of conservation activities and resulting benefits that occur within the established CCA boundaries and the project clearly addresses the resource concerns identified for the CCA. An example is where a county is partially within the CCA but some of the project activity occurs in the part of the county that is outside of the CCA boundary; that part of the project must be integral to the overall success of the project. This relationship must be clearly identified in the proposal.

Table of Critical Conservation Areas

Critical Conservation Area	Resource Concern Priorities
Great Lakes Region (IL, IN, MI, MN, NY, PA, OH, WI)	Water Quality Degradation: Excess nutrients and pesticides in surface and ground waters; excessive sediment in surface water Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation
Chesapeake Bay Watershed (DE, MD, NY, PA, VA, WV)	Water Quality Degradation: Excessive sediment in surface water; excess nutrients and pesticides in surface and ground waters Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation
Mississippi River Basin (13-state area: AR, KY, IA, IL, IN, LA, MN, MO, MS, OH, SD, TN, WI)	Water Quality Degradation: Excess nutrients and pesticides in surface and ground waters; excessive sediment in surface waters Insufficient Water: Inefficient use of irrigation water (associated with Water Quality Degradation); Inefficient moisture management (Drought) Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation
Longleaf Pine Range (AL, FL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC, TX, VA)	Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation Degraded Plant Condition: Undesirable plant productivity and health; excessive plant pest pressure Water Quality Degradation: Excess nutrients and pesticides in surface and ground waters; excessive sediment in surface waters
Columbia River Basin (ID, OR, WA)	Insufficient Water: Inefficient use of irrigation water; Inefficient moisture management (Drought) Water Quality Degradation: Excessive sediment in surface waters; excess nutrients and pesticides in surface and ground waters Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation
California Bay Delta (CA)	Water Quality Degradation: Excess nutrients and pesticides in surface and ground waters; excessive sediment in surface waters Insufficient Water: Inefficient use of irrigation water, Inefficient moisture management (Drought) Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation
Prairie Grasslands Region (CO, KS, IA, MO, MN, MT, ND, NE, NM, OK, SD, TX, WY)	Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation Insufficient Water: Inefficient use of irrigation water;

	Inefficient moisture management (Drought) Excess Water: Runoff, Flooding or Ponding Degraded Plant Condition: Excessive Plant Pest Pressure
Colorado River Basin (AZ, CA, CO, NM, NV, UT, WY)	Water Quality Degradation: Excessive salts in surface waters and ground waters Insufficient Water: Inefficient use of irrigation water; Inefficient moisture management (Drought) Soil Quality Degradation: Concentration of salts and other chemicals Inadequate Habitat for Fish and Wildlife: Habitat degradation

National Fund Pool

Project applications submitted for consideration through the national fund pool should emphasize priorities to address conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, and other related resources. NRCS will give priority to applications that address multistate resource concerns, and those that provide detail on how specific resource objectives will be monitored to assess outcomes. National priorities established under this notice include:

- Excess/Insufficient Water/Drought
- Water quality degradation
- Soil quality degradation
- Inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife (and invertebrates)
- Air quality impacts

State Fund Pool

Project applications submitted for consideration through the State fund pool should address at least one of the national priorities stated above or a State-identified priority. NRCS State Conservationists, with advice from the State Technical Committees and Tribal Conservation Advisory Councils, may also define more specific resource concerns. State priorities are available from the NRCS website at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/?cid=stelprdb1254189> and State offices identified in Appendix B.

Applications competing under the State funding pool should be located entirely within one State. State applications will compete within each state. A funding level for State-level RCPP projects has been provided to each State Conservationist to fund successful projects in their state.

C. Alternative Funding Arrangements

Alternative funding arrangements provide additional flexibility for certain partners to manage the

RCPP funds associated with the project. NRCS may enter into up to 20 alternative funding arrangements with multistate water resource agencies or authorities to deliver RCPP technical and financial assistance funding. The application must describe how the alternative funding arrangement will meet the goals and objectives of RCPP. During the partnership agreement negotiations NRCS will work closely with the multistate water resource agency or authority to develop criteria to implement the RCPP project under the Alternative Funding Arrangement.

Under an Alternative Funding Arrangement, partners have all responsibility for delivering the technical and financial assistance for implementation of the RCPP project, including assisting participants to:

- Identify NRCS conservation practices or activities to achieve outcomes of the RCPP proposal;
- Develop a plan and the associated contractual agreement to install and maintain the conservation practices to address the identified natural resource concerns and objectives. This agreement will have a beginning and ending date, the practices to be installed with NRCS FA, a timeline to install these practices, operation and maintenance for the practice, and additional information needed to ensure the producer (or landowner) and partner achieve the outcomes identified in the project agreement; and
- Provide technical assistance and assist producers to design and install conservation practices to meet NRCS standards and specifications.

Alternative Funding Arrangements will be implemented using a Cooperative Agreement between NRCS and the multistate water resource agency or authority. Terms and conditions of the agreement will address, but not necessarily be limited to:

Multistate Water Resource Agency or Authority:

- Ensure that participating producers and landowners have farm records established with the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and assist in the establishment of farm records with FSA as needed. NRCS may provide limited assistance to the lead partner to establish these records with FSA.
- Submit to NRCS the names, business information, and tax identification numbers of producers and landowners participating in the project.
- Provide AGI waiver requests to NRCS for review and a decision by the Chief. AGI waivers will be reviewed on an individual case-by-case basis.
- Provide to NRCS upon completion of planning activities, a report by producer, location, a list of the NRCS practices or activities to be installed, and the payment amount made or attributed to the eligible producer.
- Agree to:
 - Submit an annual independent audit to NRCS that describes the use of funds;
 - Provide any data necessary for NRCS to issue a report on the use of funds;
 - Not use any funds provided for administration or to provide for administrative costs through contracts with another entity;
 - Enter into a Cooperator Agreement to ensure the confidentiality of producer and landowner information in accordance with Section 1619 of the Food, Conservation,

- and Energy Act of 2008; and
- Meet any requirements determined necessary by NRCS.

NRCS:

- Conduct program and payment eligibility determinations (e.g., Adjusted Gross Income limitations at 7 CFR part 1400, conservation compliance requirements at 7 CFR part 12, and applicable program payment limitations) for each participating producer and landowner whose information is provided by the multistate water resource agency or authority.
- Provide confirmation of producer and landowner eligibility to the multistate water resource agency or authority, including identifying if AGI waiver requests are needed for any potential participant.
- Perform quality assurance reviews for a minimum of 10 percent of the installed practices and activities based on the report provided by the multistate water resource agency or authority.
- Provide RCPP funding as outlined in the Cooperative Agreement.

IV. PREPROPOSAL APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTNERSHIP

PROJECTS

A. Format and Instructions

Applicants must submit a preproposal application by the application deadline, July 8 2015, and in accordance with the instructions found in Appendix D of this announcement. NRCS will evaluate preproposals according to the criteria in Part VI of this notice, and applicants should limit the content of their submittal to the information required in this Part. Preproposal applications consist of data worksheet and a PDF fillable form for the narratives, and maps. Applicants are encouraged to submit applications via email to RCPP@wdc.usda.gov.

In addition to fulfilling the requirements of this Part for the preproposal application, applicants are encouraged to read all of Part V in order to understand the additional information they will be required to submit if they are selected to advance to the full proposal step in the process. This additional information should NOT be submitted at the preproposal step in the process and will not be considered in the evaluation of preproposal applications.

Instructions can also be found on the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

B. Content

All applicants must contact the appropriate State Conservationist to ensure coordination at the

start of this process. National and CCA applicants should contact the State Conservationist that is most central to the proposed project area. A lead State Conservationist will be determined based on the proposed project area. Applications for all Fund Pools must also provide a copy of the preproposal application to the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist by email (preferred) or U.S. Postal mail. (See list of NRCS State Conservationists and their addresses in Appendix B).

1. Data (Preproposal sections only):

Applicants must provide the following data items for preproposal applications using the FY2016 Data Entry Tool. The tool is organized by section and will guide users to input required information, see link below. The tool is required in order to gather the information needed to evaluate proposals.

- a) Basic Project Information, Project Details, Executive Summary, Project Partners
- b) Project Financials: Preproposal budget figures are considered preliminary; it is understood that there may be changes to the budget in the full proposal process. Applicants should identify whether the proposed project is scalable and can be funded at lower levels, depending on the availability of funds. Applications must reflect the total estimated cost of the project, showing separately the federal share requested and partner leverage in the following categories:
 - i. Financial assistance (FA)—Show FA funds (1) being requested from NRCS by program and (2) being contributed by the partners, by program if appropriate.
 - ii. Technical assistance (TA)—Show TA funds (1) being requested from NRCS by program for all NRCS technical assistance and partner technical assistance to implement contracts and agreements with producers, landowners, and (for agricultural easements under ACEP-ALE) eligible entities to carry out the purposes of the program. NRCS TA may not be used for partners' administrative costs or for outreach. (See definitions in Appendix A.) and (2) being contributed by the partners (in-kind or cash, this may include partner funding for administrative costs) to implement the project.
- c) Maps: Upload clear project maps to the data tool. A one-page map is sufficient unless the project area is complex. Include an overall location map showing where the project is located within the state or CCA. Submit using the JPEG format. Illustrate pertinent project boundaries, such as areas targeted for conservation. Provide a shapefile if available (Shapefile coordinate system, request decimal degrees in WGS 84). If you cannot provide shapefiles provide a list of the 12-digit hydrologic unit code (HUC) along with the latitude and longitude of a central point (centroid) within the project area. Note that maps will also be required for the full proposal application.

A listing of the data elements required by the tool is found in Appendix D. Applicants can access the FY 2016 Data Entry Tool on the RCPP web page under "How to Apply".

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

2. Descriptive Narratives (Preproposal sections only).

Narratives will be entered into the provided PDF file and uploaded to the data tool when completed. Applicants must provide narratives that describe the partners; project geographic focus; project objectives and goals; monitoring and evaluation plans; types and sequence of project activities; expectation of requests for adjustment of program rules, AGI waivers, or alternative funding arrangements. All narratives will be restricted to certain character lengths to ensure uniformity of applications.

A detailed list of the required information for descriptive narratives can be found in Appendix E. Applicants can access PDF Fillable Form for Narratives on the RCPP web page under “How to Apply”.

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

V. FULL PROPOSAL APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTNERSHIP

PROJECTS

A. Overview of the Requirements

Full proposals will be accepted only from applicants who are notified at the end of the preproposal review process that NRCS has selected their application for the full proposal phase. During the full proposal phase, applicants expand and finalize the information provided to NRCS during the preproposal phase, such as providing: a shapefile map if one was not submitted earlier, a DUNS number, and certification of current registration in SAM. NRCS may request additional information from individual applicants as part of the review process.

Instructions can also be found on the website:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

B. Detailed Application Requirements

The full proposal application must include the following:

1. **Data worksheet (Appendix D).** Include any needed updates within the preproposal section and complete the full proposal sections. Preproposal budget figures are preliminary; if the application is approved for full submission, it is understood that there may be differences when the budget is finalized. Final budgets of selected projects will be negotiated during the partnership agreement development phase.
2. **Updated Maps:** Submit clear detailed project map(s) graphic file as an attachment, accompanied by a narrative description of the geographic area covered by the application. Format: PNG or JPEG, 400-500 DPI resolution. A one-page map is sufficient unless the project area is complex. Include an overall location map showing where the project is located within the state or CCA. Illustrate pertinent project boundaries, such as hydrologic

unit code (HUC) boundaries, species ranges, and areas targeted for conservation. Outline on the map or describe in the application the areas that need conservation treatment, and identify the number of acres involved. Provide applicable shape files (Shapefile coordinate system, request decimal degrees in WGS 84). If you cannot provide shape files provide a list of the 12-digit hydrologic unit code (HUC) along with the latitude and longitude of a central (centroid) point within the project area.

3. **PDF Fillable Form for Descriptive Narratives.** Include updates within preproposal section and complete the full proposal sections. All narratives will be restricted to certain character lengths to ensure uniformity of applications.
4. **Additional Items.** Additional items identified below must be obtained prior to submitting a full proposal. NRCS cannot enter into an agreement without a Lead Partner DUNS number and confirmation that they are registered in SAM. Applicants are therefore encouraged to apply early for their DUNS number and SAM registration.
 - a. **DUNS Number.** A Dun and Bradstreet DUNS number is a unique nine-digit sequence recognized as the universal standard for identifying and keeping track of over 70 million businesses worldwide. Applicants must obtain a DUNS number. Information on how to obtain a DUNS number can be found at: <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by calling 1-866-705-5711. Please note that the registration may take up to 14 business days to complete.
 - b. **SAM.** System for Award Management is the official U.S. Government system that consolidated the capabilities of the Central Contractor Registration, Federal Register, Online Representations and Certification Application, and Excluded Parties List System. To register, go to: <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. Please allow a minimum of 5 days to complete the SAM registration.
5. **Letters of Commitment.** Provide letters from all partners identifying all contributions, including cash and in-kind services. Amounts must match figures provided in the data worksheet. Do not submit letters of support that do not provide a contribution.
6. **Letter from the State Conservationist.**

State fund pool: The Lead Partner must obtain a letter from the applicable State Conservationist demonstrating that the proposal meets the intent of RCPP.

National or CCA fund pools: The Lead Partner must consult all applicable NRCS State Conservationists, however only one letter is required to demonstrate the proposal meets the intent of RCPP. The State Conservationist providing the letter will indicate collaboration with the other States.

7. **Submittal of Copy to State Conservationist.**

Applications for all fund pools must also provide a copy of the full proposal application to

the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist by email (preferred) or U.S. Postal mail. (See list of NRCS State Conservationists and their addresses in Appendix B).

VI. APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND REVIEW

A. Definition of Success and Ranking Criteria

Preproposals and full proposal applications will be evaluated against the following four criteria (also listed is the weight of each criterion and example questions that may be used to assess to what degree the criterion is met):

Table of Ranking Criteria and Weight for Preproposals and Full Proposal Applications

Weight	Ranking Criteria	Guidance and example questions
25%	Solutions	<p>Successful partnerships will engage local organizations and communities, including historically underserved and tribal communities, to identify project objectives and design solutions that are enduring and locally supported so that benefits will extend beyond the Federal investment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the project plan at the watershed or regional scale target critical, high-priority areas in order to maximize conservation effectiveness? • Does the project identify specific resource concern(s) and measurable, achievable, and results-oriented goals to address the resource concern(s) in a comprehensive and cost-effective manner? • Will the project deliver high percentages of applied conservation practices to address water quality, water conservation, wildlife, or State, regional, or national conservation initiatives or objectives? • Will the project make a demonstrable improvement in an existing project, initiative, or agreement? • Is there a strong relationship with the agricultural community, such that a high number of producers in the area are likely to participate in the project? • Are the solutions identified in the application supported by potential participants and likely to persist beyond the initial implementation phase? • Will the project partnership effectively engage historically underserved producers? • Are the methods and approaches or results transferrable to other locations within the CCA, National or State? • Does the proposed project assessment link to relevant research and outline a process likely to detect change as a result of conservation implementation for the primary resource concern and specific conservation need?

25%	Contributions	<p>Successful partnerships will bring an array of financial and technical interests and capabilities to projects such as cash contributions, technical professionals to work one-on-one with farmers and ranchers to provide planning and engineering activities, or experts to conduct field assessments of agronomic and environmental performance. NRCS' goal is to double the conservation investment with partner contributions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What percentage of financial assistance will the partner(s) commit or leverage to achieve project objectives? • What percentage of technical assistance will the partner(s) commit or leverage to accomplish project objectives? • What percentage of the overall project cost will come from partner resources, either their own or leveraged from other external sources? • What unique skillsets will partner(s) bring to the project to accelerate progress or enhance the potential for project success? • Does the partnership contribute activities and services that supplement or accelerate the technical and financial assistance offered by NRCS? For example: outreach and education, monitoring project outcomes; and tracking the installation and maintenance of conservation systems. • Are the intended uses of partner cash and in-kind resources clearly stated and tied to overall project objectives? (All contributions commitments must be clearly documented in support letters.) • Will the project leverage funding and capabilities from partners new to or only recently engaged in agricultural conservation activities?
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25%	Innovation	<p>Successful partnerships will draw all of the program authorities into an integrated project so that resource management solutions are achieved most cost effectively to realize the full potential of RCPP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the project establish or demonstrate feasibility of new or emerging environmental markets or conservation investment strategies with potential benefits for agriculture and natural resources? • Does the project propose innovative methods or promising new technologies and approaches that are documented as feasible and supported by partners and participants? • Does the project propose innovative methods of conservation delivery and adoption to accelerate conservation adoption or deliver conservation outcomes more effectively? • Will the project provide potential benefits for improving or expanding existing conservation practice standards or contribute to the development of new conservation practice standards? • Does the project use suites of conservation practices or activities that collectively address the primary resource concern and are based on recent scientific findings and lessons learned? • Does the project identify comprehensive strategies for encouraging participation of Historically Underserved producers such as: tribes, beginning farmers and ranchers, limited resource farmer or rancher, and socially disadvantaged producers? • Does the project provide scalable innovation and multi-pronged implementation approaches to fit diverse participant needs from limited resource producers to large, high-tech operations? • Does the project partnership include partners with capabilities to drive innovation, reduce risk potential, and expand conservation participation?
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25%	Participation	<p>Successful partnerships will bring a diverse array of stakeholders into a project and integrate their unique capabilities to engage wide participation and help make a project successful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the collaborating partners appropriate, necessary, and sufficient to achieve the stated project goals and objectives? • Does the project reflect a commitment from partners, to perform specific activities as part of the project that are not typically performed by NRCS but are necessary for success? • Does the project contribute to, accelerate, or complement a regional plan or activities by other local, State, or Federal efforts? • Does the partnership demonstrate a strong ability to collaborate successfully with agricultural producers and forest landowners, including historically underserved producers? • Does the project reflect a well thought out approach to engaging potential participants from diverse backgrounds, including historically underserved producers and communities, interests, and capabilities to ensure broad participation in the project? • Does participation in the project help to address pressing natural resource and social issues, such as environmental justice or persistent poverty? • Does the project effectively integrate diverse interests in developing and delivering on project goals and objectives? • Does the project propose a workable, multi-sectoral approach to engage participants throughout the geographic scope of the project area in achieving project objectives? • Does the project propose or explore alternative institutional arrangements for communities to integrate natural resource issues and objectives into routine decision-making?
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B. Review Process

All preproposal and full proposal applications will be reviewed for conformance with the requirements as established in this notice to determine qualified applications. Technical review boards of subject matter and program experts will review qualified applications based on the criteria outlined in VI.A of this notice. Once preproposals are selected, NRCS will notify applicants who then may submit final proposals in accordance with the requirements outlined in this announcement.

An Agency leadership review board will evaluate the results from the technical review boards and make recommendations to the Chief for preproposals and final proposals for the national and CCA fund pools. For applications to the State fund pool, NRCS State Conservationists will establish a review process for preproposals and final proposals.

NRCS **will not** consider incomplete applications, or those that do not meet the requirements set forth in this notice, and applicants will be notified when NRCS is not considering their application.

C. Environmental Review Requirements

All applicable national, state and local permits must be acquired for project activities. Applicants should consider permit related activities when outlining the timeline for a project. NRCS requires applicants to provide appropriate documentation as part of the application packet. NRCS cannot approve funding until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met. NRCS may choose not to approve funding for projects that may result in unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.

VII. AWARD INFORMATION AND ADMINISTRATION

A. Partnership Agreements

Upon selection and approval of final full proposal applications, NRCS will enter into negotiations with the Lead Partner to develop a Partnership Agreement for the project. Potential partners should be aware that, depending upon available funding and agency priorities, NRCS may offer a reduced amount of program assistance from that requested in the application.

1. The Lead State Conservationist will initiate negotiation with the Lead Partner to define the final scope and responsibilities to be reflected in the Partnership Agreement. This process will include detailed discussion and agreement on the roles of the partner and NRCS in implementing the project, including the provision of technical assistance.
2. The Partnership Agreement will address, at a minimum, the following responsibilities:
 - a. The eligible Lead Partner shall—
 - i. Define the scope of a project, including the—
 - Eligible activities to be implemented;
 - Potential agricultural or nonindustrial private forest land operations affected;
 - Local, State, multistate, or other geographic area covered; and
 - Planning, outreach, implementation, and assessment to be conducted
 - ii. Conduct outreach and education to producers for potential participation in the project; include specifics on outreach to historically underserved populations.
 - iii. Act on behalf of a producer, at their request, to apply for assistance in order to participate in the project;
 - iv. Describe all TA activities (e.g., design, layout and oversee implementation of

conservation practices by the partner(s)).

- v. Leverage financial or technical assistance provided by the Secretary with additional funds to help achieve the project objectives;
 - vi. Conduct an assessment of the project's effects; and
 - vii. At the conclusion of the project, report to the Secretary on its results and funds leveraged.
- b. The partner shall be aware of and assist producers and landowners to comply with applicable program requirements as follow (see also Appendix C):
- EQIP – 7 CFR Part 1466
 - CSP – 7 CFR Part 1470
 - ACEP – 7 CFR Part 1468
 - HFRP – 7 CFR Part 625
 - WFPO – 7 CFR Part 622 (in CCAs)
- c. An eligible partner shall provide a significant portion of the overall costs of the scope of the project, which will be reflected in the partnership agreement. The overall cost includes all direct and indirect costs associated with implementation, from NRCS and partner(s). Partners may include funds they have received from other Federal sources as part of their contribution to the project, provided they submit a written commitment from the Federal agency confirming such funds can be used in conjunction with NRCS funds. Examples of significant contributions may include, but are not limited to, the following:
- Direct financial support to producers/landowners for implementing conservation activities or purchase of conservation easements,
 - Technical services for conservation planning and implementation activities that benefit participants,
 - Other services, such as:
 - Outreach and education to potential participants, especially historically underserved producers, regarding conservation activities,
 - Monitoring and data analysis related to the outcomes of conservation activities and effects on the targeted resource concerns,
 - Administrative costs that are directly associated with the project, such as:
 - Equipment
 - Office supplies
 - Travel
 - Indirect or direct costs relating to submitting or implementing the project application.
- d. Additional requirements:
- The role(s) of the partner(s), including the Lead Partner's responsibilities to ensure the cooperation of other identified partners;

- The role(s) of NRCS; TA requested for partner, NRCS or both;
- The responsibilities of the Lead Partner as they relate to conservation activities and evaluation;
- The frequency and duration of conservation activities and evaluation to be completed by the Lead Partner;
- The tracking and reporting of performance deliverables;
- The format and frequency of reports (annual and final) required as a condition of the partnership agreement;
- The overall budget, including non-NRCS funding sources for FA and TA;
- NRCS funding amount being requested by program and activity;
- How NRCS will conduct spot-checking of conservation activities;
- The specified project schedule; and
- Other requirements deemed necessary by NRCS to further the purposes of the selected RCPP project.

B. Reporting Requirements

NRCS is required to report to the Secretary and Congress the items identified in the chart below for each project. Lead Partners will be required to provide input on these items and submit reports to NRCS, as established in the partnership agreement, no later than November 30, 2016, and every year thereafter. Reporting items and responsible entities are outlined in the table below.

REPORTING ITEMS TABLE

Reporting Item	Responsible Entity	
	NRCS	Lead Partner
The number and types of eligible partners, landowners, and producers participating in the selected project(s).	X	*
The number of producers and landowners receiving assistance.	X	*
The number of new producers and landowners reached (i.e., those who have not previously participated in NRCS programs) and if any beginning farmers or ranchers, limited resource farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, eligible veteran farmers or ranchers, or Indian Tribes received assistance.		X

Total funding committed to projects, including from Federal and non-Federal resources.		X
A description of how the funds are being administered under an alternative funding arrangement.		X
Means for tracking adherence to any applicable provisions for payment eligibility.	X	*
Any oversight mechanisms implemented.	X	*
The process through which program appeals by program participants are resolved.	X	

* In the case of alternative funding arrangements, the Lead Partner must provide this information.

In addition, on an annual basis, Lead Partners will be required to provide updates on the activities conducted to date; a status of the accomplishment of goals established in the project application, including whether and why goals have been adjusted; any proposed adjustments to funding requested from NRCS; and other items as required in the partnership agreement. Requirements for the final report will be established in the partnership agreement and will include a description of the goals and outcomes accomplished.

Failure to meet goals and reporting requirements may result in termination of a partnership agreement.

C. Notifications

All applicants will receive notification on selection or non-selection of projects. For selected CCA and national applications, Lead Partner should contact the lead State Conservationist to develop the required partnership agreement and other implementation requirements. Lead State Conservationists will be identified as projects are received and can be requested through an applicant's home State Conservationist. Upon notification of selection for a State application, the Lead Partner must contact the NRCS State Conservationist, listed in the letter, to develop the required partnership agreement and other project implementation requirements.

D. Withdrawal of Applications

Lead Partner applications may be withdrawn by written notice to the Director, Financial Assistance Programs Division, at any time prior to selection.

VIII. AGENCY CONTACTS

RCPP Program Contact:

Mark A. Rose, Director
Financial Assistance Programs Division
Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
RCPP Application


P.O. Box 2890
Washington, DC 20013-2890
Telephone: (202) 720-1844
Email: mark.rose@wdc.usda.gov

Administrative Contact:

Frankie Comfort
Grants Specialist
Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service
P.O. Box 2690
Washington, D.C. 20013-2890
Telephone: (202) 690-0164
Email: frankie.comfort@wdc.usda.gov

Additional information about RCPP, including fact sheets, is available at:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>.

Signed this 4 day of May, 2015, in Washington, D.C.



Jason A. Weller
Vice President, Commodity Credit Corporation and
Chief, Natural Resources Conservation Service

APPENDIX A.—DEFINITIONS

Terms used for the RCPP are defined in either Subtitle I of the Food Security Act of 1985, the covered program authorities, or as set forth below. To the extent any definition set forth below is inconsistent with a statutory or regulatory definition, the statutory or regulatory definition will control.

Administrative costs.—Costs beyond the costs of direct services (direct costs). These are also known as “indirect costs/overhead.” Examples: rent/utilities, space used by staff, copies, phones, IT support, etc., that are used by all staff and not directly related to the project. The term “indirect costs” is defined below.

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program.— The program administered by NRCS in accordance with 7 CFR part 1468 (16 U.S.C. 3865–3865d).

Beginning farmer or rancher.— Unless otherwise defined in covered program regulation, the term means a participant or applicant who:

- Has not operated a farm or ranch, or who has operated a farm or ranch for not more than 10 consecutive years. This requirement applies to all members of a legal entity; and
- Will materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch.

In the case of a contract with an individual, individually or with the immediate family, material and substantial participation requires that the individual provide substantial day-to-day labor and management of the farm or ranch consistent with the practices in the county or State where the farm is located.

In the case of a contract made with a legal entity, all members must materially and substantially participate in the operation of the farm or ranch. Material and substantial participation requires that the members provide some amount of the management, or labor and management necessary for day-to-day activities, such that if the members did not provide these inputs, operation of the farm or ranch would be seriously impaired.

Chief.—The Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or designee.

Commodity Credit Corporation.—A Government-owned and operated organization created to stabilize, support, and protect farm income and prices to help maintain balanced and adequate supplies of agricultural commodities, including food products, feeds, and fibers; and to help in their orderly distribution of these commodities (440-CPM-Part 503).

Conservation Activity —as defined in 400 CPM Part 502:

- As applies to EQIP: Conservation Activity: The actions necessary, using acceptable tools and protocols, to identify, inventory, assess, evaluate, or otherwise measure the presence and extent of a natural resource concern and how to address the natural resource concern

through one or more conservation practices. Information gathered as a result of these actions must be essential to the development of a plan that furthers the purposes of the program, including a plan that addresses the adoption or adaptation of conservation practices in order to achieve a conservation benefit.

- As applies to CSP: Conservation Activity: Conservation systems, practices, or management measures needed to address a resource concern or improve environmental quality through the treatment of natural resources, and includes structural, vegetative, and management activities, as determined by NRCS.

Conservation practice— means one or more conservation improvements and activities, including structural practices, land management practices, vegetative practices, forest management practices, and other improvements that achieve the program purposes, including such items as Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (CNMPs), agricultural energy management plans, dryland transition plans, forest management plans, integrated pest management, and other plans or activities determined acceptable by NRCS. Approved conservation practices are listed in the NRCS FOTG.

Conservation benefit —means the improved condition of a natural resource concern resulting from the implementation of a conservation practice.

Conservation planning.—Using the NRCS planning process outlined in the NRCS National Planning Procedures Handbook (NPPH)(Title 180, Part 600). The NPPH is available at: <http://directives.sc.egov.usda.gov/>.

Conservation Stewardship Program.— The program administered by NRCS in accordance with 7 CFR part 1470 (16 U.S.C. 3838d-3838g).

Covered programs.—ACEP, EQIP, CSP, HFRP, and in CCAs only, the Watershed Authorities defined below.

Critical Conservation Area.—A geographic area designated by USDA based on the degree to which an area addresses RCPP priorities.

Eligible activity.— Any of the following conservation activities:

- Water quality restoration or enhancement projects, including nutrient management and sediment reduction;
- Water quantity conservation, restoration, or enhancement projects relating to surface water and ground water resources including—
 - The conversion of irrigated cropland to the production of less water-intensive agricultural commodities or dryland farming, and
 - Irrigation system improvement and irrigation efficiency enhancement;
- Drought mitigation;
- Flood prevention;
- Water retention;
- Air quality improvement;

- Habitat conservation, restoration, and enhancement;
- Erosion control and sediment reduction;
- Forest restoration; and
- Other related activities that NRCS determines will help achieve conservation benefits.

Eligible partner.—An entity that enters into a partnership agreement with NRCS to carry out the approved RCPP project including any of the following:

- An agricultural or silvicultural producer association or other group of producers;
- A State or unit of local government;
- An Indian Tribe;
- A farmer cooperative;
- A water district, irrigation district, rural water district or association, or other organization with specific water delivery authority to producers on agricultural land;
- A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity;
- An institution of higher education; and
- An organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers on agricultural land, as determined by the Secretary, to address—
 - Local conservation priorities related to agricultural production, wildlife habitat development, or nonindustrial private forest land management, or
 - Critical watershed-scale soil erosion, water quality, sediment reduction, or other natural resource issues.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program.—The program administered by NRCS in accordance with 7 CFR part 1466 (16 U.S.C. 3839aa-3839aa-8).

Field office technical guide (FOTG).—The official local NRCS source of resource information and interpretations of guidelines, criteria, and requirements for planning and implementation of conservation practices. It contains detailed information on the quality standards to achieve conservation of soil, water, air, plant, energy, and animal resources applicable to the local area for which it is prepared. The FOTG can be accessed online at:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>.

Fiscal year.—The Federal Government year beginning October 1 of each calendar year and ending September 30 of the following calendar year.

Financial assistance.—A payment made to a program participant to implement an NRCS approved conservation practice. Does not include activities outside approved standards such as road spraying, salaries, etc.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP).—The program administered by NRCS in accordance with 7 CFR part 625 (16 U.S.C. 6571-6578).

High priority outcomes.—Project results that meet the purposes identified in Section 1271B(d)(4) of the 1985 Act and can include: assisting producers in meeting or avoiding the need for a natural resource regulatory requirement; covering a high percentage of producers in

the area by the agreement; significantly leveraging non-Federal financial and technical resources and coordinate with other local, State, or national efforts; delivering high percentages of applied conservation to address conservation priorities or regional, State, or national conservation initiatives; providing innovation in conservation methods and delivery, including outcome-based performance measures and methods; or meeting other factors that are important for achieving the purposes of the program, as determined by NRCS.

Historically Underserved Producer.—An eligible person, legal entity, joint operation, or Indian Tribe who is a beginning farmer or rancher, socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher, or limited resource farmer or rancher.

Indirect costs.—Indirect costs, as defined by 2 CFR Part 200, mean those costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved.

Indian Tribe.—Any Indian Tribe, band, nation, or other organized group or community, including any Alaska Native village or regional or village corporation as defined in or established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.), which is recognized as eligible for the special programs and services provided by the United States to Indians because of their status as Indians.

Lead Partner. – The partner who will serve as the primary contact with NRCS for all discussions regarding the RCPP project, final authority for negotiations and signing of the partnership agreement, and lead for coordinating all partner(s) activities for the overall project.

Legal entity.— An entity, as defined in 7 CFR Part 1400, created under Federal or State law and that—

- 1) Owns land or an agricultural commodity, product, or livestock.
- 2) Produces an agricultural commodity, product, or livestock.

Limited resource farmer or rancher.—Defined in 7 C.F.R § 1469.3 (CSP) and 7 C.F.R. § 1466.3 (EQIP), is a participant:

- With direct or indirect gross farm sales not more than the current indexed value in each of the previous 2 years; and
- Has a total household income at or below the national poverty level for a family of four, or less than 50 percent of county median household income in each of the previous 2 years.

A legal entity or joint operation can be a limited resource farmer or rancher only if all individual members independently qualify. A Self-Determination Tool is available to the public and may be completed online or printed hardcopy at: <http://www.lrftool.sc.egov.usda.gov/>.

Multistate Water Resource agency or authority. - A governmental agency or quasi-governmental entity granted certain powers and authorities by statute to conduct activities related to a water or waters that are multi-state or regionally shared resources and which management by more than one State or on a regional basis is needed to achieve shared objectives for the resource.

Natural Resources Conservation Service.—An agency of USDA which has responsibility for administering the covered programs either directly, or on behalf of the CCC and the Watershed Authorities, which are made available through RCPP.

Outreach and Education.— Informing existing and potential customers about NRCS programs and services to better serve a diverse clientele with an emphasis on historically underserved producers. Examples include conducting webinars targeted to producers describing the Conservation Stewardship Program and application process; organizing field tours to demonstrate the effectiveness of practices implemented using EQIP funds; and providing staff at a farm show to talk about ACEP.

Participant.—A person, legal entity, joint operation, or Indian Tribe who has been determined eligible, has been accepted into a covered program, and is receiving payment or is responsible for implementing the terms and conditions of a conservation program contract or easement agreement under a program covered by RCPP.

Partnership agreement.—An agreement between NRCS and the Lead partner that outlines the scope of the RCPP project and roles and responsibilities of NRCS and partners for planning, implementing, evaluating, and reporting.

Payment.—Financial assistance provided to a program participant under the terms of the conservation program contract, long-term contract, cooperative agreement, or easement agreement. Payments and payment rates are established by program rule.

Person.—A natural person and does not include a legal entity.

Private land.—Land that is not owned by a governmental entity. Private land includes acreage owned by Indian Tribes.

Producer.—A person, legal entity, Indian Tribe, Tribal corporation, or joint operation who either NRCS determines is engaged in agricultural production or forestry management on the agricultural operation.

Program.—The RCPP authorized by Subtitle I of Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended by section 2401 of the Agriculture Act of 2014.

Socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher.—Defined under section 355(e) of the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act (7 U.S.C 2003(e)), as added in 1990, is a producer is member of a group whose members have been subjected to racial or ethnic prejudices without regard to its members' individual qualities. For an entity, at least 50 percent ownership in the farm business must be held by socially disadvantaged individuals. These groups consist of the following:

- American Indians or Alaskan Natives
- Asians

- Blacks or African Americans
- Native Hawaiians or other Pacific Islanders
- Hispanics

Notes: (1) Gender alone is not a covered group under NRCS conservation programs, and (2) the term “entities” reflects a broad interpretation to include partnerships, couples, legal entities, etc.

Sponsoring Local Organizations.—Associated with the use of Watershed Authorities; Sponsoring local organizations have the legal authority and resources to carry out, operate, and maintain works of improvement. Responsibilities of the sponsoring local organizations include:

- Power of eminent domain;
- Ability to obtain permits and licenses;
- Have and exercise the authority to levy taxes;
- Ability to obtain agreements from landowners to implement conservation plans on not less than 50% of the lands situated in the drainage area above each retention reservoir to be installed;
- Coordinate or leading public participation;
- Evidence of commitment of funding, installing, operating and maintaining the project for the design lifespan;
- Ability to implement needed watershed management features such as permitting, zoning, land use regulation, easements, or upstream watershed protection;
- Evidence that any proposed municipal and industrial water supply use will be acceptable in quantity and quality to meet the anticipated needs; and
- Ensure operation and maintenance of the project.

State Conservationist.— The NRCS employee who is authorized to implement conservation programs administered by NRCS and who directs and supervises NRCS activities in a State, the Caribbean Area, or the Pacific Island Areas.

State Technical Committee.—A committee established pursuant to 16 U.S.C. 3861 and described in 7 CFR part 610. Information regarding these committees can be found at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/technical/stc/>.

Technical assistance.—Technical expertise, information, training, education, and tools necessary for a producer to be able to successfully implement, operate, and maintain the conservation of natural resources on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses. The term includes: (1) technical services provided directly to farmers, ranchers, and other eligible entities, such as conservation planning, technical consultation, and assistance with design and implementation of conservation practices; and (2) technical infrastructure including activities, processes, tools, and agency functions needed to support delivery of technical services, such as technical standards, resource inventories, training, data, technology, monitoring, and effects analyses. Information regarding TA can be found at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cta/>. Does NOT include administrative (food, travel, clothing), research, outreach and education.

Technical Service Provider (TSP).—Means an individual, private-sector entity, Indian Tribe, or

public agency either:

- 1) Certified by NRCS pursuant to 7 CFR part 652 and placed on the approved list to provide technical services to participants; or
- 2) Selected by the Department to assist the Department in the implementation of conservation programs covered by this part through a procurement contract, contributions agreement, or cooperative agreement with the Department.

Tribal Conservation Advisory Council.—In lieu of forming a Tribal Conservation District, an Indian Tribe may elect to designate an advisory council to provide input on NRCS programs and the conservation needs of the Tribe and Tribal producers. The advisory council may be an existing tribal committee or department and may also constitute an association of member Tribes organized to provide direct consultation to NRCS at the State, regional, and national levels to provide input on NRCS rules, policies, and programs and their impacts on Tribes.

Watershed Authorities.—The provisions of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 83-566) administered by NRCS in accordance with 7 CFR part 622, except such authorities do not include the Watershed Rehabilitation Program authorized by Section 14 of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (16 U.S.C. 1012).

Veteran farmer or rancher means a producer who meets the definition in section 2501(e) of the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990, as amended (7 U.S.C. 2279(e)).

APPENDIX B.—NRCS STATE CONSERVATIONISTS (STC)

Lead Partners must contact STC's as early in the process as possible. If a particular STC position becomes vacant, an Acting STC will be assigned and can be contacted through the address and phone number provided below.

AL – Bill Puckett
3381 Skyway Drive
P.O. Box 311
Auburn, Alabama 36830
Phone: 334/887-4500
Fax: 334/887-4552
(E) william.puckett@al.usda.gov

AK – Robert Jones
800 West Evergreen
Atrium Building, Suite 100
Palmer, Alaska 99645-6539
Phone: 907/761-7760
Fax: 907/761-7790
(E) robert.jones@ak.usda.gov

AR – Michael E. Sullivan
Federal Building, Room 3416
700 West Capitol Avenue
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201-3228
Phone: 501/301-3100
Fax: 501/301-3194
(V) 9((E) michael.sullivan@ar.usda.gov

AZ – Keisha Tatem
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APPENDIX C.—SUMMARY OF PROGRAM OBJECTIVES AND TERMS

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
Purpose or Goal	Provides funds for the purchase of conservation easements to provide long-term protection of agricultural and wetland resources. ACEP has two components, an Agricultural Land Easement component (ACEP-ALE) and a Wetland Reserve Easement component (ACEP-WRE).	Encourages producers to address resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by improving, maintaining, and managing existing conservation activities; and undertaking additional conservation activities.	Provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to help plan and implement conservation practices that address natural resource concerns and for opportunities to improve soil, water, plant, animal, air and related resources on Tribal land, agricultural land, and non-industrial private forestland.	Assists landowners, on a voluntary basis, in restoring, enhancing and protecting forestland resources on private lands to increase the likelihood of recovery of threatened or endangered species, improve biological diversity, and increase carbon sequestration.	Provides technical and financial assistance to entities of State and local governments and Tribes (project sponsors) for planning and installing watershed projects. The Watershed Operations is available nationwide to protect and improve watersheds up to 250,000 acres in size. Currently there are approximately 300 active small watershed projects throughout the country. Eligible purposes include preventing damage from erosion, floodwater, and sediment; furthering the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water; and furthering the conservation and proper utilization of land.

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
Length of contract	<p>ACEP-ALE: Permanent easements and easements of maximum duration allowed by State Law.</p> <p>ACEP-WRE: Permanent easements, 30-Year easements, 30-Year Contracts with Indian Tribes, and easements of maximum duration allowed by State Law.</p>	5 years with an opportunity to renew for one additional 5-year period.	Up to 10 years.	Permanent easements, 30-year easements, 30-year contracts, and 10-year cost-share agreements. Easements are also available for the maximum duration authorized under State law.	Agreements are multi-year, depending upon the nature and scope of the watershed project plan.
Eligible land	<p>ACEP-ALE: Land eligible for agricultural land easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and nonindustrial private forest land which contributes to the economic viability of an offered parcel or serves as a buffer to protect such land from development.</p> <p>ACEP-WRE: Land eligible for wetland reserve easements includes farmed or converted wetland that can be successfully and</p>	<p>All private or Tribal agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland is eligible, unless it is enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), ACEP-WRE, or the Conservation Security Program. Land enrolled in CRP may be eligible if--</p> <p>(i) the CRP contract will expire at the end of the fiscal year in which the land is to be enrolled in CSP; and</p> <p>(ii) CRP payments for land enrolled in CSP cease before the first CSP payment is made to the applicant.</p>	<p>Private and Tribal agricultural land, including cropland, grassland, and non-industrial private forestland but does not include land enrolled in CRP or ACEP-WRE.</p> <p>Public lands are eligible in EQIP under limited circumstances where an eligible producer has authority to operate on the public land for the length of the program contract.</p>	All private or Tribal forestland.	<p>Projects are limited by the size of the watershed (not to exceed 250,000 acres) and the size of any single structure (12,500 acre-feet of floodwater detention capacity, and no more than 25,000 acre feet of total capacity.</p> <p>Each project must contain benefits directly related to agriculture, including rural communities, which account for at least 20 percent of the total benefits of the project.</p>

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
	cost-effectively restored.				
Eligible program applicants	<p>ACEP-ALE: (1) To be eligible to receive ALE funding, an eligible entity must be an Indian Tribe, State government, local government, or a nongovernmental organization which has a farmland or grassland protection program that purchases agricultural land easements for the purpose of protecting agriculture use and related conservation values, including grazing uses and related conservation values, by limiting conversion to nonagricultural uses of the land. In addition, eligible entities Interested in receiving ALE funds must provide NRCS sufficient evidence of:</p> <p>(i) A commitment to long-term conservation of agricultural lands,</p> <p>(ii) A capability to acquire, manage, and enforce easements,</p>	<p>To be eligible to participate in CSP, an applicant must:</p> <p>(1) Be the operator of an agricultural operation in the Farm Service Agency (FSA) farm records management system, unless an exception applies as determined by NRCS;</p> <p>(2) Have effective control of the land unless an exception is made by the Chief in the case of land administered by the BIA, Indian lands, or other instances in which the Chief determines that there is sufficient assurance of control;</p> <p>(3) Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions found at 7 CFR part 12;</p> <p>(4) Be in compliance with Adjusted Gross Income provisions found at 7 CFR part 1400;</p> <p>(5) Supply information, as required by NRCS, to determine eligibility for the program;</p> <p>(6) Comply with applicable registration and reporting</p>	<p>To be eligible to participate in EQIP, an applicant must:</p> <p>(1) Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions found at 7 CFR part 12;</p> <p>(2) Must be a producer as determined by NRCS;</p> <p>(3) Have control of the land for the term of the proposed contract unless an exception is made by the Chief in the case of land administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Indian lands, or other instances in which the Chief determines that there is sufficient assurance of control;</p> <p>(4) Agree to implement the EQIP plan of operations according to the provisions and conditions established in the EQIP contract, including the EQIP contract appendix;</p> <p>(5) Submit an EQIP plan of operations or plan developed for the purposes of acquiring an air or water quality permit;</p> <p>(6) Supply information, as required by NRCS, to</p>	<p>To be eligible to enroll an easement in the HFRP, an individual or entity must:</p> <p>(1) Be the landowner of eligible land for which enrollment is sought; and</p> <p>(2) Agree to provide such information to NRCS, as the agency deems necessary or desirable, to assist in its determination of eligibility for program benefits and for other program implementation purposes.</p>	<p>To be eligible to receive PL-566 funds, a qualifying sponsor(s) must have the authority to carry out, operate and maintain works of improvement, including organizations that, individually or collectively, have:</p> <p>(1) The power of eminent domain,</p> <p>(2) The authority to levy taxes or use other adequate funding sources, including state, regional, or local appropriations, to finance their share of the project cost and all operation and maintenance costs.</p> <p>Sponsors must commit themselves to use their powers and authority to carry out and maintain the project as planned.</p>

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
	<p>(iii) Sufficient number of staff dedicated to monitoring and easement stewardship, and</p> <p>(iv) The availability of funds at the time of application sufficient to meet the eligible entity's contribution requirements for each parcel proposed for funding.</p> <p>ACEP-WRE: To be eligible to enroll in WRE, all landowners must:</p> <p>(1) be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation provisions in 7 CFR part 12;</p> <p>(2) be in compliance with the Adjusted Gross Income Limitation provisions at 7 CFR part 1400;</p> <p>(3) Be the owner of the eligible land for which enrollment is sought;</p> <p>(4) Provide any documentation required by NRCS as</p>	<p>requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 (7) Provide a list of all members of the legal entity or joint operation, as applicable, and associated information.</p>	<p>determine eligibility for the program, including but not limited to, information to verify the applicant's status as a limited resource, beginning farmer or rancher, and payment eligibility as established by 7 CFR part 1400;</p> <p>(7) Comply with applicable registration and reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006; and</p> <p>(8) Provide a list of all members of the legal entity and associated information.</p>		

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
	<p>necessary to determine eligibility;</p> <p>(5) Comply with applicable registration and reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006; and</p> <p>(6) For easement applications, have been the landowner of such land for the 24-month period prior to the time of application unless an exception applies.</p>				
Program activities	<p>Under the ACEP-ALE component, NRCS enters into agreements with eligible entities to provide cost-share assistance to the eligible entities to purchase agricultural land easements from eligible landowners. The agricultural land easement, including implementation of the agricultural land easement plan, protects agricultural lands from conversion to non-agricultural uses. Grasslands are protected</p>	<p>CSP provides financial and technical assistance to producers adopt and maintain conservation activities to address priority resource concerns, including air, animals, energy, plants, soil erosion, soil health, water quality, and water quantity. Conservation activities include conservation enhancements and conservation practices.</p> <p>Conservation enhancements treat natural resources and improve</p>	<p>EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to producers to obtain conservation planning; implement vegetative practices like conservation buffers, conservation cover, windbreaks, shelterbelts, grass waterways, wildlife habitat development; install structural practices like terraces, waste management structures, anaerobic digesters; and adopt management practices like nutrient management, grazing land management, residue and tillage management, forest stand</p>	<p>HFRP provides financial and technical assistance to restore, protect, and enhance forest resources by providing funds directly to eligible landowners for the purchase of HFRP easements. Additionally, NRCS pays for the implementation of forestry restoration, enhancement, and habitat management practices. The practices adopted under the HFRP restoration plan may be the basis for the landowner to obtain safe harbor assurances under</p>	<p>Watershed Operations provides financial and technical assistance is provided for activities associated with planning and implementing authorized watershed project plans for the purpose of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. watershed protection 2. flood mitigation 3. water quality improvements 4. soil erosion reduction 5. rural, municipal and industrial water supply 6. irrigation

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
	<p>from conversion to non-grassland uses management</p> <p>Under the ACEP-WRE component, NRCS restores, protects, and enhances wetlands by providing funds directly to eligible landowners for the purchase of wetland reserve easements. Additionally, NRCS pays for the implementation of wetland restoration, enhancement, and habitat management practices.</p>	<p>conservation performance through adding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cover crop mixes, using deep rooted cover crops to breakup compaction, • testing and analyzing tissue to improve farm nitrogen management, • maintaining residue through continuous no-till, • adopting or improving resource conserving crop rotations to reduce soil erosion and fertility, • rotating feeding and supplement areas to reduced localized disturbance and impacts on water bodies, • designing water facilities to promote wildlife scape and access for birds and bats, • monitoring key grazing areas to improve management, • utilizing prescribed burning, forest stand improvement for habitat and soils quality, pollinator 	<p>improvement, wildlife habitat management.</p>	<p>the Endangered Species Act.</p>	<p>water management</p> <p>7. sediment control</p> <p>8. fish and wildlife enhancement</p> <p>9. hydropower</p>

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
		<p>and/or beneficial insect habitat.</p> <p>Enhancement bundles are available to implement enhancements to addresses resource concerns synergistically.</p> <p>Conservation practices are available to meet additional stewardship thresholds and include land management practices, vegetative practices, and forest management.</p>			
Payments	<p>ACEP-ALE: Up to 50 percent of fair market value (FMV) of the ALE easement or up to 75 percent of the FMV of the ALE for Grasslands of Special Environmental Significance.</p> <p>ACEP-WRE: 100 percent of the easement value and restoration costs for permanent easements. 75% of the easement value and restoration costs for 30-year easements and 30-year contracts (30-year contracts are only</p>	<p>Annual payment based on level of conservation stewardship; supplemental payment for participants that adopt a resource conserving crop rotation. National average cost not to exceed \$18/ac.</p>	<p>Financial assistance payments to participants for the estimated costs incurred for implementing conservation practices. Up to 75% and up to 90% for historically underserved participants.</p> <p>Advance payments are available to historically underserved producers for up to 50% of the program payment.</p>	<p>For permanent easements and easements for the maximum duration available under State law, easement compensation provides up to 100 percent of the fair market value of the enrolled land less the fair market value of the land encumbered by the easement. Restoration payments provide up to 100 percent of the restoration costs.</p> <p>For 30-year easements and 30-year contracts, easement (contract) payments provide up to</p>	<p>Payments provide 50-100 percent of the cost associated with works of improvement for a watershed project.</p>

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
	available for acreage owned by Indian tribes).			<p>75 percent of the value that would be paid for a permanent easement. Restoration payments provide up to 75 percent of the restoration costs.</p> <p>10-year cost-share agreements – there is no easement payment. Restoration payments provide up to 50 percent of the restoration costs.</p>	
Payment Limits	Not Applicable.	<p>A person or legal entity may not receive, directly or indirectly, payments that, in the aggregate, exceed \$200,000 for all contracts entered into between FY 2014 and FY 2018. The regulation include an annual payment limit of \$40,000 during any fiscal year to a person or legal entity.</p> <p>Contract limitations also apply.</p>	<p>A person or legal entity may not receive, directly or indirectly, payments that, in aggregate, exceed \$450,000 for all contracts entered into between FY2014 and FY 2018.</p> <p>Payments made under the Organic Initiative to a person or legal entity, directly or indirectly, may not exceed in aggregate \$20,000 per fiscal year or \$80,000 during any 6-year period.</p> <p>Contract limitations also apply.</p>	Not Applicable.	Not Applicable.
Producer/Landowner Responsibilities	Under ACEP-ALE, the landowner must convey to an eligible entity an agricultural land	Enter into a CSP contract that requires the implementation of a conservation stewardship	Enter into an EQIP contract that requires the implementation of a plan of operations. The plan of	The landowner must convey an HFRP easement to the United States and comply with	Sponsors must have a legal interest in or responsibility for project areas, be

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
	<p>easement and comply with the terms of the easement. Among the terms of the easements is the requirement for the land to be subject to an agricultural land easement plan.</p> <p>Under ACEP-WRE, the landowner must convey a wetland reserve easement to the United States and comply with the terms of the easement. The landowner must also agree to the NRCS implementation of a wetland reserve easement plan.</p>	<p>plan. The conservation stewardship plan addresses resource concerns in a comprehensive manner by installing and adopting additional conservation activities and improving, maintaining, and managing existing activities.</p>	<p>operations describes the conservation and environmental objectives to be achieved. The producer contributes to installation costs and performs operation and maintenance during the lifetime of the installed practices.</p>	<p>the terms of the easement. The landowner must also implement a healthy forests restoration plan.</p>	<p>capable of obtaining land rights and required permits, and carry out operation and maintenance activities. Sponsors must also pay a percent of the cost of the project which varies dependent on project purpose.</p>
Participants are subject to	<p>Adjusted Gross Income limitations</p> <p>Registration and reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006</p> <p>Highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance</p>	<p>Adjusted Gross Income limitations</p> <p>Registration and reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006</p> <p>Highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance</p>	<p>Adjusted Gross Income limitations</p> <p>Registration and reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006</p> <p>Highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance</p>	<p>Registration and reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006</p> <p>RCPP-funded Projects are also subject to--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusted Gross Income limitations • Highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance 	<p>Registration and reporting requirements of the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006</p> <p>RCPP-funded Projects are also subject to--</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusted Gross Income limitations • Highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance

Program	Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)	Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)	Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)	Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)
Appeals Process	Title XII	Title XII	Title XII	Non-Title XII	Non-Title XII
Program website	http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/easements/acep/	http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmbill/?cid=stelprdb1242683	http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/farmbill/?cid=stelprdb1242633	http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/easements/forests/	http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/landscape/wfpo/?cid=nrcs143_008271

APPENDIX D.—DATA ENTRY TOOL ELEMENTS FOR PRE AND FULL PROPOSALS

Applicants can access the FY 2016 Data Entry Tool on the RCPP web page under “How to Apply”.
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

The tool consists of the following sections (* indicates required data):

1. Overview: Provides a summary of the tool, and important steps to complete before submitting the application.
2. Basic Project Information:
 - Project name*
 - Funding pool*
 - Lead State*
 - Lead Partner *
 - Lead Partner Contact
 - Address 1* and 2 – street, city, state, zip
 - Email – primary* and secondary
 - Phone number*
 - Lead Partner DUNS
3. Project Details:
 - Start Year*
 - End Year*
 - Request for Adjustment of Terms*
 - Alternative Funding Request*
 - Total Producers in Project Area*
 - Estimated percentage of eligible producers who may participate*
 - Primary Resource Concern*
 - Secondary and Tertiary Resource Concerns available
 - Partner State List
 - Box to “add Partner States”
 - Additional Resource Concern List
 - Box to “add Additional Resource Concerns”
4. Executive Summary:

Enter the executive summary of the project. There is a 300-word limit.
5. Project Partners:
 - Partner Name*
 - Partner Type*
 - Project Coordination*
 - Producer Technical Assistance*

- Lead for Outreach & Education*
- Conduct Monitoring*
- Funding for Conservation*
- Funding for Administrative Costs*
- Other*
- Partner Contact:
 - A. First & Last Name*
 - B. Email*
 - C. Phone*
 - D. Address, City*, State*, Zip*
- FA Contributed
- TA Contributed
- Total Contributed
- Administration Cost

6. Project Financials – table form that asks for data entry by row and:

- State*
- Program*
- Fiscal Year*
- FA requested*
- TA requested*
- Total Requested*
- FA Contributed*
- TA Contributed*
- Total Contributed*
- Acres (required for CSP)

Users add data row by row. As they “add line” of info, totals for each program are summed in the bottom portion of the window

7. Map - The next step is to upload the project map.
8. Narrative – The final step is to upload the narrative pdf form.
9. Save information for official submission to RCPP FY 2016
10. If selected for submitting a Full Proposal, this information may be updated to provide additional information based on further development of partnership proposal.

APPENDIX E.—NARRATIVE ELEMENTS FOR PRE AND FULL PROPOSALS

Preproposal Section All narratives will be restricted to certain character lengths to ensure uniformity of applications.

Applicants can access PDF Fillable Form for Narratives on the RCPP web page under “How to Apply”.
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>

Below is a listing of the questions that will be found in the fillable form for reference.

Preproposal Section:

1. Describe how each partner meets the eligibility criteria in Section II.A. of this announcement.
2. Specify the geographic focus of the project area. This can be based on habitat type, land uses, political jurisdiction of State or local government, or any other appropriate method to identify the project area. Note that the project area does not need to be contiguous, but all areas should have a common primary resource concern that the project addresses.
3. Identify the project objectives and the natural resource concerns that the project will address and how the partners identified those concerns, see listings of priority resource concerns in Section II.B. A complete list of NRCS approved natural resource concerns may be found on the RCPP Web site at:
<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/rcpp/>.
4. A general description of the plans for evaluating outcomes, including plans for monitoring and modeling, and for reporting on progress to achieve the objectives of the application.
5. A brief description of the types and sequence of implementation of conservation practices that the project will implement, for example:
 - Conservation activity plans (EQIP only),
 - Enhancements (CSP only),
 - Wetland restoration activities, (ACEP, HFRP, sponsor-held floodplain easements),
 - Easement acquisition activities (ACEP, HFRP, sponsor-held floodplain easements),
 - Other partner activities to be implemented during the project timeframe.
6. If applicable, indicate how the project will “assist producers in meeting or avoiding the need for natural resource regulatory requirements.” Section 1271B(d)(4)(A) of the 1985 Act.
7. A description of any requested program adjustments of terms (adjustments to regulations or policy), including AGI waivers, by covered program, with an explanation of why the adjustment of terms is needed in order to achieve the objectives of the project.
8. Whether and how the project requests alternative funding arrangements.
9. Any additional information that has not specifically been requested but will help reviewers understand your proposal.
10. Save document and upload to the data tool.

Full Proposal Section:

If selected for submission for the Full Proposal consideration, applicants will need to update any information that has changed since the proposal was submitted and provide additional information into the fillable form. A listing of the questions is provided below for reference.

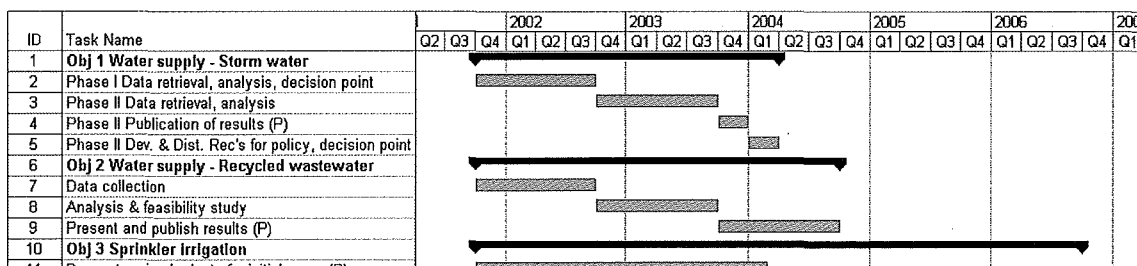
11. A budget table, by fiscal year, that describes the activities and resource contributions. This table must include the amount of FA funds needed annually for producer contracts or agreements that will be used to implement the conservation practices and enhancements identified in the previous Part, by activity. If the Lead Partner is also requesting TA, include the funding requested by activity. For multistate projects, provide the funds or acres by State, as appropriate. CSP requests must be in acres.
12. A description of how the partner(s) will collaborate to achieve the objectives of the partnership agreement and the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of the partner(s). Applications that include resources from other sources than the lead applicant must include a letter or other documentation from the other partners confirming this commitment of resources. Potential partners should also describe whether and how the project will coordinate with other local, State, or national activities, including regional plans adopted by government entities that address resource concerns identified in the project area.
13. Applicants must clearly state, by project objective, how they intend to leverage Federal funds along with partner resources (identify in-kind and cash contributions).
14. Describe the categories of intended producer and landowner participants. (See definition of producer in Appendix A.)
15. Natural Resource Objectives and Actions
 - A. Identify the specific primary natural resource concern and any secondary resource concerns to be addressed through the project. Provide details about the natural resource concern(s) to be addressed and how the concern(s) were identified.
 - B. List the proposed objectives and how the objectives will address the identified resource concerns. Objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, and results-oriented. Include a timeline for completion and demonstrate cost effective use of agency, partner, and producer resources. Describe how objectives will lead to environmental outcomes and how the applicant will measure these outcomes. Environmental outcomes should consider either local or regional resource concerns and priorities, or both, as appropriate for the fund pool (CCA, National, or State).

Four examples of objectives addressing resource concerns follow:

- If the objective is to improve water quality, measurement could include edge-of-field or in-stream flow monitoring of critical water quality constituents.
- For a wildlife objective aimed at increasing a bird species population, an annual bird count could be used as an indicator of project success.
- Installation of flow metering may be required to accurately determine progress toward an irrigation water reduction goal in a water-deficient watershed.
- The environmental outcome of nitrate reduction would be monitored at the watershed outlet (by federal partner X) using real-time flow and nitrate level measurement equipment and throughout the watershed using grab samples taken monthly and during storm flow runoff at

specific locations (see project map) by the community watershed group partner.

16. For each objective, identify the actions to be completed to achieve the objective and to address the identified natural resource concern. Note which actions are to be addressed through this project using NRCS program assistance and which actions are being addressed through non-Federal funding sources or other resources provided.
17. Briefly describe the major land uses of the area with special emphasis on the lands that will be included in the project.
18. Briefly describe why the particular area was chosen, including the scientific basis for choosing the area (e.g., high levels of nutrient yields in a locally, regionally, or nationally significant water body; the area contains known habitat for an endangered or listed species; the area has experienced significant land-use change from agriculture to other uses; the area has a history of flooding or drought; etc.), and why targeted conservation in this area will contribute to CCA, national, or State priorities.
19. Describe the cost-effectiveness of the proposed approach in terms of achieving the stated goals of the project. Briefly describe whether and how the application contributes to the efficient use of funding compared to at least one alternative approach, which may include an “as is” scenario describing the cost-effectiveness of current program delivery in the project area. The Lead Partner is encouraged to consider other alternative approaches to achieving the stated goals of the project and the relative cost-effectiveness of these approaches, and why the applicants chose the approach described in the application. Describe how you will target lands most critical to achieving the primary resource concern objectives within the project area. Consider how this might affect the cost effectiveness of your approach.
20. A description of the project timeline, not to exceed 5 years in length, and a project implementation schedule which details when the potential Lead Partner anticipates finishing the project and submitting annual reports and final report. To simplify description of the project’s timeline, consider using a Gantt or similar bar chart to illustrate the timing for implementing project conservation actions, complying with NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), reporting dates, monitoring schedule, outreach meetings, and other pertinent project activities.



21. Description and extent of the conservation activity plans, conservation practices, enhancements, wetland restoration activities, easement acquisition activities, and other partner activities, by program, to be implemented during the project timeframe and the general sequence of implementation of the project. Include partner contributed TA efforts and those that the partner requests NRCS provide using eligible approved conservation practices and enhancements. List easement acquisition activities to be implemented by the partners and how they will be submitted by the partners/applicants to NRCS for review and approval. Describe any activities that are innovative or include outcome-based performance measures implemented by the partner.

Information about approved NRCS practices can be found in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/>;

Descriptions of approved NRCS practices at:

http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/national/technical/references/?cid=nrcs143_026849; and

Information on eligible enhancements on the CSP Web site at:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/programs/financial/csp/?cid=stelpdb1242683>.

22. A description of the plans for assessing and evaluating the results of the project along with plans for reporting on progress to achieve the objectives of the application. Priority will be given to projects where the Lead Partner can provide resources or services or conduct activities to evaluate effects of conservation practices and activities implemented through the project.
23. Lead Partners should consider different approaches for evaluating project outcomes and propose the best approach given partner resources and capacity. Approaches may include, but are not limited to, the following: identification of issues of concern and related priority source areas within a watershed, followed by an assessment of relevant conservation implemented in the critical areas to address the identified resource concern(s); monitoring at field or applicable broader scale (e.g., watershed designated critical habitat) to document the effects of conservation practices installed; or simulation modeling to estimate practice effects.
24. Identify potential criteria to be used by NRCS to evaluate and rank agricultural producers' or landowners' RCPP program applications in the project area that are linked to NRCS' overarching metrics for judging the success of the RCPP program: solutions, contributions, innovation, and participation. Those criteria should reflect local priorities in addressing the primary resource concern as well as local considerations for conservation implementation. For all applications (CCA, national, and State), potential Lead Partners should collaborate with the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist(s) or his or her designee to develop these criteria. For approved projects, this joint effort will help NRCS select covered program applications that will best accomplish the project's intended conservation goals and address priority resource concerns identified by the Lead Partner in the application. Additional information regarding the process NRCS uses to evaluate and rank individual applications is found in each of the covered programs regulations. (See list of NRCS State Conservationists and their addresses in Appendix B).
25. An estimate of the percentage of eligible producers and landowners in the project area who may participate in the project, along with an estimate of the total number of participants located in the project area. Include a description of how the Lead Partner will provide for outreach to producers with special emphasis on beginning farmers or ranchers, limited resource farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, eligible veteran farmers or ranchers, and Tribal producers and how many are expected to participate in the project.
26. Describe the partner's or partners' history of working with agricultural producers or landowners to address the conservation objectives to be achieved.
27. Describe any barriers expected in working with landowners to adopt conservation, and how those barriers will be addressed. Explain how the Lead Partner will encourage participation to guarantee success of the project. Identify any groups of producers who may submit joint applications to address resource issues of common interest and need. Describe how the Lead Partner will assist producers in applying for NRCS programs, including acting on the behalf of a producer at the producer's request.

Demonstrate the applicants' ability to conduct outreach and to gain the cooperation of producers in the targeted area.

28. If applicable, indicate how the project will help producers in the area in "assisting producers in meeting or avoiding the need for natural resource regulatory requirements." Section 1271B(d)(4)(A) of the 1985 Act. Briefly describe the regulation or potential regulation; the impact or potential impact of the regulation on producers, including any economic impact or impact on production; what mechanism (e.g., State-level or "safe-harbor" agreement or Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances) will allow project activities to be considered under the regulation.
29. A description of any requested adjustments of terms, including AGI waiver requests, by covered program, with an explanation of why the adjustment of terms is needed in order to achieve the objectives of the project. If a Lead Partner is requesting specific covered program flexibilities that depend on detailed participant or project information, the application must provide the needed information. Lead Partners should contact the appropriate NRCS State Conservationist, or his or her designee, to determine the specific information that may be required. (See list of NRCS State Conservationists and their addresses in Appendix B.) **Please read Part I-A of the Announcement thoroughly if requesting covered program adjustments. Lead Partners should contact the appropriate NRCS STC, or his or her designee, regarding potential adjustments being sought to determine if they are allowable. The National Office will review requests for adjustment of terms; and base approval of those requests on how the proposed adjustments meet statutory requirements, intent, and priorities of the program.**
30. If the project will request an alternative funding arrangement, include a detailed description of the proposed arrangement. Include how the proposed arrangement will meet all requirements for: RCPP; applicable covered programs; and participating individuals and entities, specifically eligibility conditions, payment limitations, Adjusted Gross Income requirements, conservation compliance requirements, and contract implementation requirements. Note any proposed NRCS roles as outlined in section III.C. Detailed information on proposed alternative funding arrangements may be provided as an attachment to the project proposal and may be in addition to the required documents. More details on specific requirements of alternative funding arrangement proposals will be provided to selected preproposals.
31. If the proposal includes any activities that are not covered by one of the NRCS conservation practice standards, briefly identify the beneficial and adverse effects of those activities on affected natural resources (soil, water, air, plants, and animals) and specially statutorily protected resources (e.g., cultural and historic resources, wetlands, threatened and endangered species, etc.). National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations at 40 CFR parts 1500-1508 and the NRCS regulations implementing NEPA at 7 CFR part 650, require that an environmental review and appropriate documentation be prepared for all Federal actions. As part of the application packet, applicants conducting activities other than NRCS conservation practices are required to provide environmental information pertaining to their project to help NRCS determine the appropriate NEPA documentation. If project actions are covered by an existing NEPA document, provide the name of the document, a link, or indicate how a copy can be obtained. NRCS may require applicants to provide additional information or otherwise assist the agency, if it requires such information or assistance, to ensure that the Federal funding meets environmental requirements. Applicants need to work with State Conservationists to ensure NEPA requirements are met. NRCS cannot approve funding until the environmental review requirements demonstrating compliance with NEPA are met. The NEPA process and associated permitting can be a lengthy process and should be accounted for in the project budget, schedule of activities, and project timeline.
Note: Applications for projects with potentially adverse impacts may need to be modified in order to

achieve acceptable and beneficial levels of environmental impacts. NRCS may choose not to approve funding for projects that may result in unacceptable adverse environmental impacts.

32. For projects requesting use of Watershed Authorities, identify the Project Sponsor, any existing watershed plans and NEPA documents pertaining to the proposed watershed activity and provide the name of the documents, a link, or indicate how copies can be obtained.

33. Save document and upload to the Data tool.

