

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Overview of Program



RCPP Purpose and Objectives

First Objective:

- To use four USDA conservation programs (covered programs)
 - [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#) (EQIP)
 - [Conservation Stewardship Program](#) (CSP)
 - [Agricultural Conservation Easement Program](#) (ACEP)
 - [Healthy Forests Reserve Program](#) (HFRP)
- To achieve objectives of four previous conservation programs
 - Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
 - Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program
 - Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative
 - Great Lakes Basin Program

RCPP Purpose and Objectives

Second Objective

- To further conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife and related natural resources on eligible land on regional or watershed scale

RCPP Purpose and Objectives

Third Objective

- To encourage eligible partners to cooperate with producers through Partnership Agreements in
 - Meeting or avoiding the need for natural resource regulatory requirements related to agricultural production; and
 - Implementing projects that will result in the installation and maintenance of eligible activities that affect multiple agricultural or non industrial private forest operations

RCPP Eligible Activities

Among a long list of eligible activities relevant to the municipal water sector are:

- Water quality restoration and enhancement projects (including nutrient management and sediment reduction)
- Drought mitigation
- Flood prevention
- Water retention
- Erosion control and sediment reduction
- Other related activities at discretion of USDA Secretary

Eligible Partners

Among list of eligible partners who can enter into Partnership Agreements with USDA are:

- A State or unit of local government
- A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity

Partnership Agreements

- Between Eligible Partners and USDA to undertake RCPP-related activities
- Length – not more than five years, 12 months extension, if necessary

Duties of Partners

- Define Scope of project including implementation activities, potential lands affected, geographic area covered
- Conduct outreach and education for potential producers
- If requested, act on behalf of producer in applying for funding assistance
- Leverage financial and technical assistance with additional funds to achieve project objectives
- Conduct assessment of project's effects
- At conclusion of project, report on project results and funds leveraged

Partner Contribution

- Eligible partner shall provide a “significant portion” of overall costs of scope of project
- At this point, “significant portion” undefined
- At this point, “significant portion” means both in-kind and financial
- Examples of in-kind: technical assistance, data collection and monitoring

Competitive Application Process

Application content shall include description of –

- Scope of project
- Plan for monitoring evaluating and reporting progress toward project objectives
- Program resources requested, including covered programs to be used
- Eligible partners collaborating on project, including roles and responsibilities (*But not specific producers)
- Any other elements Secretary deems necessary

Priority to Certain Applications

- Assist producers in meeting or avoiding regulatory requirements
- High percentage of producers in the area covered
- Significantly leverage non-Federal financial and technical resources and coordinate with other state, local or national efforts
- Deliver high percentages of applied conservation practices
- Provide innovation in conservation methods and delivery, including outcome-based performance measures
- Other factors deemed important by Secretary

Assistance to Producers

In general, USDA contracts directly with producers to provide technical and financial assistance to producers participating in project with eligible partner

- According to rules of covered program used (EQIP, CSP, ACEP, HFRP)
- Secretary can adjust non-statutory operational guidance and requirements of covered programs
 - To simplify application and evaluation process and
 - Better reflect unique local circumstances

Payments to Producers

Secretary may provide **five year** payments to

- Producers participating in a project that addresses water quantity concerns to encourage conversion from irrigated to dryland farming
- Producers participating in project that addresses water quality concerns in an amount sufficient to encourage adoption of conservation practices and systems that improve nutrient management

Available Funding

- RCPP - \$100 million annually (\$500m)
- 7% set-aside of dollars and acres from covered programs (EQIP/CSP/ACEP/HFRP)
 - \$196 m (FY14), \$231m (FY15), \$347m (FY16), \$263m (FY17), \$265m (FY18) (*HFRP excluded)
- Allocation of funding:
 - 25% State administered
 - 40% Nationally administered
 - 35% Critical Conservation Areas

Critical Conservation Areas

(Up to eight designated by Secretary)

Priority given to geographical areas that

- Include multiple States with significant agricultural production;
- Are covered by an existing multi-state/national/regional workplan;
- Would benefit from water quality improvement affecting large regional waterbodies;
- Would benefit from water quantity improvement; OR
- Contain producers in need of assistance in meeting or avoiding regulatory requirements

CCA Funded Projects

- The Secretary shall, to the extent practicable, ensure that eligible activities carried out in CCAs complement and are consistent with other Federal and State programs and water quality and quantity strategies

Current Status?

- Announcement for Program Funding to be released ?
- Application deadline TBD
- CCA designation at time of APF release

Questions?

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[USDA State Conservation Offices](#)

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