

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Statement of Dave White, Chief

**Before the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug
Administration, and Related Agencies**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our fiscal year (FY) 2012 budget request for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Last year NRCS celebrated its 75th anniversary, recognizing the Agency's many contributions to Americans' quality of life and our Nation's prosperity. We looked back at the landmark achievements of our predecessors in the Soil Conservation Service and NRCS, but we also continued to make some history of our own. Before providing the Subcommittee details of our FY 2012 budget, I would like to share a few of our accomplishments in FY 2010 as well as some of the work we have underway in FY 2011.

NRCS staff and partners had a record year in conservation program delivery in FY 2010. Of special note is the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). A nationwide emphasis on wetlands conservation resulted in a record-setting WRP enrollment of 272,762 acres, exceeding the next-highest yearly total by more than 58,000 acres and nearly doubling our average annual enrollment. In addition, more than 129,000 acres of wetlands were created, restored or enhanced.

NRCS finalized the Conservation Stewardship Program rule and conducted two sign-ups resulting in the enrollment of 25.2 million acres. Almost 21,000 farmers, ranchers and forest owners were awarded contracts related to enhanced conservation efforts.

NRCS successfully entered into 1,400 contracts, grants and agreements, awarding \$340 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding to rebuild American infrastructure and improve natural resources. This represents 100 percent of the funding the agency received. The agency's ARRA projects are being implemented through its Floodplain Easements, Watershed Operations, and Watershed Rehabilitation programs.

These programs, along with all of our Farm Bill programs and activities funded through Conservation Operations provide benefits to producers and the public through installation of additional conservation practices and adoption of activities that improve water, soil, and air quality, and enhance wildlife habitat. They also provide flood prevention, groundwater recharge, erosion and sediment reduction, and opportunities for education and recreation.

NRCS issued two key reports, providing further evidence that voluntary conservation on private lands works. The 2007 release for the National Resources Inventory underscored the need to focus on working lands. The results showed that we have reduced soil erosion by 43 percent between 1982 and 2007. However, the nation increased development of its rural land base by 56 percent over the same period. Both findings underscore the benefits of voluntary, private lands conservation and the continued need for further conservation investments.

The second report, prepared through the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP), presented the first results of the first nationwide assessment of the effects of conservation practices on cropland. One of 14 regional reports, the Upper Mississippi River Basin CEAP Cropland Report quantified the great progress farmers have made in reducing sediment and

nutrient losses from cropland and the need for focusing conservation efforts on nutrient management. A few key highlights from the basin assessment include:

- Voluntary, incentive-based conservation works. Reduced tillage is used on 95 percent of the cropland - sediment losses are reduced 69 percent.
- Nutrient management is the greatest need. Much can be done through expanded adoption of existing practices. About 60 percent of the cropland needs nutrient management; Timing, rate and method of application are important factors in managing nutrient application.
- Targeting can greatly enhance program effectiveness. Treating the most critical acres can have 3 to 5 times the benefit of treating acres with less serious problems.
- Comprehensive conservation planning is essential. Suites of practices that address multiple resource concerns are more effective than single practices.

In FY 2010, NRCS used landscape-scale initiatives to address priority resource concerns in working landscapes and watersheds nationwide. Two of these initiatives were begun prior to FY 2010 - the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, supported by the statutory Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program in the Farm Bill and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, supported by financial assistance transferred from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Great Lakes Restoration Action Plan. The other initiatives are the Sage Grouse (which Under Secretary Sherman previously mentioned), the Longleaf Pine, California Bay-Delta, Lesser Prairie Chicken, Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds, New England Forestry, and the Migratory Bird Habitat. These initiatives were formed based on recommendations from state conservationists to address natural resources concerns that are broader than just a single state and from the knowledge gained from the NRI and CEAP reports.

Under Secretary Sherman focused on the Sage Grouse Initiative and our landmark agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and I will focus on another compelling initiative that suggests why the landscape-scale approach can be a powerful tool --- the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative (MBHI).

In the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill disaster, NRCS and its partners in a matter of weeks designed and delivered the MBHI to provide critical habitat resources for wetland-dependant wildlife potentially impacted by the Gulf Oil Spill during Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 bird migrations. This initiative enhanced habitat on privately-owned land along the migratory bird flyways in the region and was developed in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the region U.S. Joint Ventures, state departments of wildlife and private conservation organizations. Scientists estimate that upwards of 50 million birds migrate through the Gulf of Mexico region annually, and this initiative helped to mitigate the impacts of the oil spill in the sensitive wetland habitats.

The response from both landowners and wildlife has been immense. NRCS obligated approximately \$40 million in financial assistance and made habitat improvements on over 400,000 acres through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the Wetland Reserve Program. This was a strategic and coordinated habitat restoration effort that prioritized the ecologically most valuable areas of migratory bird flyways in the Gulf region. The initiative included parts of eight states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri and Texas. Perhaps most importantly, this initiative demonstrated on a massive geographic scale the concept of “working wetlands;” that having productive agricultural lands and wildlife habitat are not mutually exclusive.

Last year, NRCS continued to make investments to transform our field operations, harness information age technologies, and make ourselves more efficient through the Conservation Delivery Streamlining Initiative. This initiative has three overarching objectives: *Simplify Conservation Delivery* – The new business model will be easier for customers and employees; *Streamline Business Processes* – New business processes will increase operating efficiency and deliver technical and financial assistance in a fully integrated manner; and *Ensure Science-based Assistance* – The new business model will reinforce the delivery of technically sound products and services.

These efforts provide a snapshot of just a few of NRCS' activities in FY 2010. While we made great achievements last year, there remain areas that need improvement. Since 2008, NRCS has undergone an annual financial audit. In each of those years, the external auditors have identified critical weaknesses related to our financial management processes and data. NRCS currently has seven material weaknesses that we are actively working to address. NRCS takes these findings very seriously, and we have launched an in-depth campaign to overhaul our financial management operations. NRCS is streamlining financial processes and technology and improving management and oversight controls.

We expect to see positive results from these investments in the coming year, but it will take time to fully transform our financial processes. Since 2002, the scope of NRCS's conservation programs has grown by almost 400 percent. Under our current effort we will make significant improvements, putting in place robust accounting and documentation procedures. I am committed to having transparent financial records that accurately represent the important work that is being conducted by NRCS and our many conservation partners and demonstrate that the public investment is being managed responsibly and for the benefit of all Americans.

Current Activities

In FY 2011, we expect to release additional CEAP reports, starting with the Cropland report for the Chesapeake Bay. The Department is also finalizing the Soil and Waters Resource Conservation Act Appraisal which will describe important changes in the structure of U.S. agriculture, the changes in conditions of the land base, and the allocation of public resources for natural resource conservation.

NRCS will continue many of our ongoing conservation activities, working with our federal, state and local partners. One area NRCS is pursuing is the intersection between food safety requirements and the important conservation work accomplished by farmers and ranchers across the country. To ensure that food safety efforts recognize the benefits of conservation, NRCS is collaborating with the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on co-management of environmental stewardship and on-farm produce safety guidelines and regulations. In the past, conflicts between these two objectives have resulted in the removal of conservation measures and concern exists about resulting environmental consequences. Current areas of collaboration include:

- Produce Safety Alliance – A partnership effort among USDA, FDA, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, and Cornell University. NRCS is serving on the steering team guiding this project which will provide produce growers and packagers with fundamental, on-farm food safety and co-management knowledge.
- Produce Safety Rule Development and Implementation – NRCS is providing technical input regarding effective co-management to FDA to assist in its ongoing development of a regulation on food safety.

- Educational Outreach – NRCS will be developing a short-term educational outreach strategy on co-management, and a long-term educational outreach strategy to support the FDA Rule implementation.

NRCS is actively delivering Farm Bill conservation programs and we have sign-ups underway across the country. We are on track to have another successful year of conservation program delivery.

The President's FY 2012 Budget

Discretionary Funding

The President's FY 2012 budget was developed after closely examining all NRCS programs and our operations in the coming years. The budget prioritizes limited resources to ensure NRCS is positioned to meet the needs of America's farmers and ranchers while doing its share to help reduce the budget deficit. It also makes a number of difficult decisions that were necessary to support the President's goals of reducing the budget deficit and improving program delivery through streamlining operations and administrative efficiencies.

Conservation Operations

The purpose of Conservation Operations (CO) is to provide technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools that help people conserve, maintain, and improve the Nation's natural resources. The major program components of CO are: Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA); Soil Survey, Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting (SSWSF); and Plant Materials Centers (PMCs).

Funding in the Conservation Operations account provides for the development and delivery of a major portion of the products and services associated with four of the Agency's five business lines: 1) Conservation Planning and Technical Consultation; 2) Conservation Implementation; 3) Natural Resource Inventory and Assessment; and 4) Natural Resource Technology Transfer. The fifth business line (Financial Assistance) is funded primarily through other conservation programs.

The President's FY 2012 budget request for Conservation Operations (CO) proposes a funding level of \$898.6 million, which includes \$782.6 million for Conservation Technical Assistance, \$93.94 million for the Soil Survey, \$10.97 million for Snow Surveys and \$11.1 million for Plant Material Centers.

Within this level of Conservation Operations funding, the budget eliminates funding for Congressional earmarks and re-prioritizes funding through the following increases:

- \$15 million to implement Strategic Watershed Action Teams (SWATs). NRCS will deploy teams consisting of five to seven conservation professionals for periods of three to five years to address specific needs in high-priority landscapes. These teams of additional field personnel will bolster our existing field personnel in order to provide more timely and comprehensive service.
- \$11.3 million to enhance conservation delivery and support the conservation streamlining initiative I described earlier.
- \$7 million for the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) to collect better data and more effectively estimate the environmental outcomes from our conservation efforts.
- \$25 million for IT hardware investments under the USDA Common Computing Environment effort.

The CO budget does not include funding for the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative. NRCS will continue to maintain and improve the management, productivity and health of the Nation's privately owned grazing land through ongoing activities within other NRCS programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and the Grassland Reserve Program.

The budget proposes legislation for a user fee to cover the costs of providing technical assistance for completing a conservation plan. This fee would be applied based on the complexity of the natural resource issues addressed in the conservation plan. Total collections from this proposal are estimated to be \$22 million, which will reduce appropriation needs in future years.

Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program

The Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations program authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to provide technical and financial assistance to entities of State and local governments and Tribes (project sponsors) for planning and installing watershed projects. The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program 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. The Flood Control Act of 1944 is available only in areas authorized by Congress; and these areas cover about 38 million acres in 11 States.

The FY 2012 budget does not include funding for the Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations Program, including the Watershed Operations (PL 534) and Small Watersheds (PL 566). This reduction is in keeping with the Administration's efforts to curb spending. In addition,

recent funding for this program has not been fully prioritized based on anticipated project outcomes or measurable impacts.

Watershed Rehabilitation Program

The purpose of the Watershed Rehabilitation Program is to extend the service life of dams and bring them into compliance with applicable safety and performance standards or to decommission the dams so that they do not pose a threat to life and property. NRCS may provide technical and financial assistance for the planning, design, and implementation of rehabilitation projects that may include upgrading or removing the dams.

Eleven dam rehabilitations were completed in FY 2010, and there are 23 dam rehabilitation projects currently under construction. Additionally, there were 650 ongoing assessments of high hazard dams that provided communities with technical information about the condition of their dams and alternatives for rehabilitation for dams that do not meet Federal dam safety standards.

The FY 2012 budget does not include funding for the Watershed Rehabilitation Program reflecting the many difficult choices that were made in order to ensure fiscal responsibility within the current economic climate. Further, the continuing operations and maintenance of Federally-built dams under the program has long been understood to be the responsibility of local project sponsors.

Resource Conservation and Development

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program encourages and improves the capability of State and local units of government and non-profit organizations in rural areas to plan, develop, and implement programs for resource conservation and development. NRCS provides program administration and assistance to RC&D areas through volunteer non-profit RC&D Councils.

The FY2012 budget does not include funding for the Resource Conservation and Development program, as other USDA agencies provide technical and limited financial assistance to RC&D Councils, which also obtain assistance from State, local, and other Federal agencies, private organizations, and foundations to carry out specific projects.

Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008

The President's FY 2012 budget includes \$3.6 billion in Farm Bill program spending and an additional \$124 million is included for Conservation Reserve Program technical assistance. The following discussion summarizes NRCS administration of the Farm Bill conservation programs.

Wetlands Reserve Program

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) provides technical and financial assistance to enable eligible landowners to restore, protect and enhance valuable wetland ecosystems, including associated habitats such as uplands, riparian areas, and forest lands. The goal of WRP is to achieve the greatest wetlands functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled in the program. WRP addresses wetland, wildlife habitat, soil, water and

related natural resource concerns on private lands in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program achieves solutions to local community issues related to farms, ranches, rural lands, and other areas by establishing easements and long-term agreements on eligible farmlands and by establishing 30-year contracts on Tribal lands. This unique program offers landowners an opportunity to establish, at minimal cost, long-term conservation and wildlife habitat enhancement practices and protection.

During FY 2010, NRCS enrolled a total of 272,762 acres in WRP in 1,414 projects. Of these, the majority were in easements (206,094 acres in 951 permanent easements and 61,935 acres in 30-year easements). Also during FY 2010, NRCS created, restored, and enhanced 129,082 acres of wetlands that are part of WRP easements and contracts in prior years.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$785 million in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Wetlands Reserve Program and NRCS expects to enroll 271,158 acres.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers to help them address environmental challenges. To meet these challenges, EQIP provides incentives for the application of farming and other land use practices that maintain or improve the condition of soil, water, air, and other natural resources. The program assists agricultural and forest land users in identifying natural resource issues and opportunities to improve their agricultural operations and provides technical and financial assistance to address them in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner. EQIP-promoted practices meet a variety of environmental and natural resource challenges.

In FY 2010, EQIP financial assistance obligations by States reached almost \$840 million in 36,500 contracts covering an estimated 13 million acres. In addition to regular EQIP projects, these funds also supported projects in resource based initiatives such as air quality, on-farm energy audits, migratory bird habitat, and the Mississippi River Basin Initiative, and projects that emphasize environmental protection and agricultural production as compatible goals such as organic production and seasonal high tunnels.

In FY 2010, NRCS provided \$37.5 million in financial and technical assistance to 12 States through the national Air Quality Initiative to help producers meet requirements of the Clean Air Act. Through this initiative, NRCS provides assistance to farmers and ranchers to reduce air pollution generated from agricultural operations in areas designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as non-attainment areas for ozone and particulate matter. During FY 2010, over 950 contracts supported some 3,800 practices on more than 220,000 acres. In the Central Valley of California alone, we estimate that these air quality projects over the past two years have had the equivalent impact of removing the NO_x emissions from 400,000 vehicles from the area's roads each year.

In FY 2010, NRCS worked to provide financial assistance to more than 240 producers for on-farm energy audits by offering the Agricultural Energy Management Plan through EQIP. In partnership with the private sector and other organizations, NRCS is developing technical tools and training to evaluate and reduce agricultural energy consumption through implementation of on-farm energy audit recommendations and to help producers adapt plans and practices for better energy efficiency and on-farm energy production.

The Organic Initiative is a nationwide special initiative within EQIP to provide assistance to organic producers as well as producers in the process of transitioning to organic production. In FY 2010, NRCS obligated nearly \$24 million in financial assistance to treat 148,000 acres in organic production or in transition to organic production. The most often recommended practices include nutrient management, cover crop, pest management, conservation crop rotation, and prescribed grazing.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$1.408 billion in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

The purpose of the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) is to promote improved ground and surface water conservation and water quality by leveraging the Federal government's investment in natural resources conservation with services and resources of other eligible partners. The AWEP program was specifically created to address serious surface and ground water shortages as well as water quality concerns in many agricultural areas. The security of the nation's food supply is dependent upon the continued delivery of clean, reliable irrigation water to farms and ranches.

This is the second year in which AWEP has been implemented and interest from the agricultural sector has remained steady. In FY 2010, NRCS obligated \$60.8 million in 1,489 new contracts to implement conservation practices on nearly 271,000 acres of agricultural land. The ability to leverage funding through partnership agreements has also remained strong. Partners provided approximately \$50.5 million in technical and financial assistance in FY 2010, nearly matching NRCS' AWEP investment. Through AWEP, the agency approved 28 new partner project areas

during FY 2010, and continued to provide support for 63 existing project areas approved during FY 2009.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$60 million in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) provides wildlife habitat, wetland wildlife habitats, to benefit threatened, endangered and other at-risk species. This effort is accomplished while educating and changing public attitudes toward wildlife habitat management and land stewardship on private agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, and Tribal land, but the benefits extend far beyond wildlife. Focused efforts on habitat for fish and wildlife also contribute to more sustainable use of resources. By prioritizing specific geographic areas, WHIP is able to target financial and technical assistance funds to benefit habitats for specific declining wildlife species such as the sage grouse.

In FY 2010, NRCS obligated almost \$63 million in financial assistance in more than 4,700 agreements to enroll over one million acres in WHIP. Sixty-eight of these contracts valued at over \$3.7 million are with American Indian and Alaskan Natives participants to benefit habitat for culturally important species. Since the program began in 1998, national enrollment has included almost 37,000 agreements on over 6.5 million acres.

The FY2012 budget includes \$73 million in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

The Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) protects the Nation's highly productive agricultural lands by providing matching funds to keep productive farm and ranch lands in agricultural uses. Farm and ranch lands enrolled in FRPP are protected from threats of conversion to non-agricultural uses, and remain productive and sustainable sources of food, fiber, and feed for the Nation. Keeping land in agricultural use reduces the amount of urban pollution (nitrogen, phosphorus and sedimentation) from land that would otherwise be converted to lawns and impervious surfaces. Additionally, FRPP supports the President's *America's Great Outdoors* initiative by preserving the natural landscape features of non-urbanized areas and encouraging the continued agricultural uses of the lands.

In FY 2010, over 170,000 acres were enrolled in FRPP in 35 States. The average size easement enrolled in FY 2010 was 423 acres.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$200 million in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program.

Conservation Security Program

The Conservation Security Program was a voluntary program that provided financial and technical assistance for the conservation, protection, and improvement of natural resources on tribal and private working lands. It provided payments for producers who practice good stewardship on their agricultural lands and provided incentives for those who wanted to do more. Under the 2008 Farm Bill, NRCS is not authorized to enter into new Conservation

Security Program contracts but continues to make payments to producers with five- to ten-year contracts from prior years.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$197 million in mandatory funding for the Conservation Security Program.

Conservation Stewardship Program

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) encourages agricultural and forestry producers to maintain existing conservation activities and to adopt additional ones on their operations. CSP provides opportunities to both recognize excellent stewards and deliver valuable new conservation. The program helps producers identify natural resource problems in their operation and provides technical and financial assistance to go beyond existing conservation and deliver new environmental benefits in an environmentally beneficial and cost-effective manner.

CSP is a voluntary program available through a continuous sign-up process, with announced cut-off dates for ranking and funding applications. Applications are evaluated relative to other applications addressing similar priority resource concerns to facilitate a competitive ranking process among applications that face similar resource challenges.

In FY 2010, CSP supported conservation by obligating more than \$320 million in financial assistance funding. These funds will be used to treat 25,164,328 acres leading to more productive working lands, improved water quality and energy efficiency. These are among the many benefits of addressing the natural resource concerns of agricultural and forestry producers.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$788 million in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Conservation Stewardship Program to enroll 12 million acres.

Grasslands Reserve Program

The Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP) helps landowners and operators restore and protect rangeland, pastureland, and other grassland while maintaining the land's suitability for grazing. Participants voluntarily limit future development and cropping uses of the land while retaining the right to conduct common grazing practices and operations related to the production of forage and seeding. Limiting development and providing habitat desperately needed by threatened and endangered species preserves agricultural heritage and green space, provides for recreational activities and ensures the Nation's ability to produce its own food.

During FY 2010, the program obligated and committed \$90.3 million of the financial assistance funding allocated to the States and enrolled 335,332 acres in the program. Of the funding provided, approximately 60 percent enrolled GRP easements and 40 percent enrolled rental contracts.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$67 million in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Grasslands Reserve Program to enroll an estimated 203,515 acres.

Agricultural Management Assistance

NRCS administers the conservation provisions of the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, which provides financial assistance to agricultural producers to address water management, water quality, and erosion control issues by incorporating conservation into their farming operations. With AMA funds, producers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or to improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices, including soil erosion control, integrated pest management, or transition to organic farming.

In FY 2010, \$6 million was obligated into 429 contracts covering 11,102 acres.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$2.5 million in mandatory funding for the Agricultural Management Assistance program.

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program

The Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program (CBWP) helps agricultural producers improve water quality and quantity, and restore, enhance, and preserve soil, air, and related resources in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed through the implementation of conservation practices. These conservation practices reduce soil erosion and nutrient levels in ground and surface water; improve, restore, and enhance wildlife habitat; and help address air quality and related natural resource concerns. CBWP encompasses all tributaries, backwaters, and side channels, including their watersheds, draining into the Chesapeake Bay. This area includes portions of the states of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia.

NRCS implements CBWP through the various natural resources conservation programs authorized by subtitle D, Title XII of the Food Security Act of 1985. In FY 2010, NRCS implemented CBWP through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP). NRCS announced the availability of CBWP funding through a request for proposals.

In FY 2010, nearly 2,900 agricultural producers submitted applications to NRCS to participate in CBWP. NRCS approved more than 950 contracts for more than \$33.5 million of financial assistance to treat an estimated 156,700 acres of high priority agricultural land.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$50 million in mandatory funding for financial and technical assistance for the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Program.

Healthy Forest Reserve Program

Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) assists landowners in restoring, enhancing, and protecting forest ecosystems to: 1) promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species; 2) improve biodiversity; and 3) enhance carbon sequestration.

HFRP provides financial assistance for specific conservation actions completed by the landowner. As funds are made available, NRCS solicits project proposals State Conservationists have developed in cooperation with partnering organizations. States selected for funding provide public notice of the availability of funding within the selected area.

During FY 2010, NRCS received 164 applications in the 13 States with approved projects. Fourteen landowners were enrolled, encompassing 5,583 acres, with financial assistance obligations valued over \$6 million.

The FY 2012 budget includes \$9.75 million in mandatory funding for the Healthy Forest Reserve Program.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the work of NRCS. I am happy to answer any questions from the Subcommittee members.