



**Regional
Conservation
Partnership**

N E T W O R K



Partnering with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) on their RCP Program: Focus on the Healthy Forest Reserve Program

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Workshop Agenda

- Overview of Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) – Q&A
- Overview of Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) – Q&A
- How did the LI Sound Watershed RCPP use HFRP?
- Questions and Answers on RCPP and HFRP
- And then if there's time: Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Questions and Answers on ACEP



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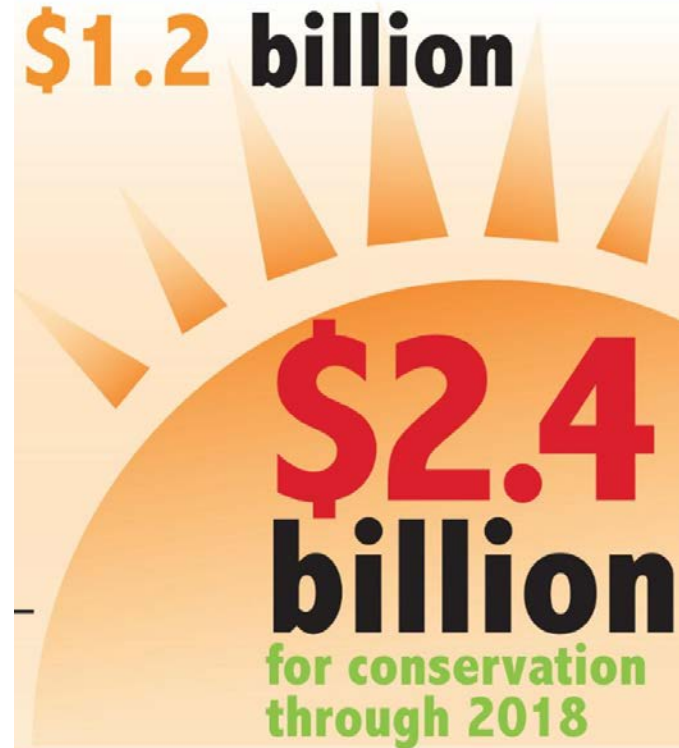


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USDA plans to invest up to \$1.2 billion through 2018.

Combined with partner matching funds, that's \$2.4 billion in conservation investment!

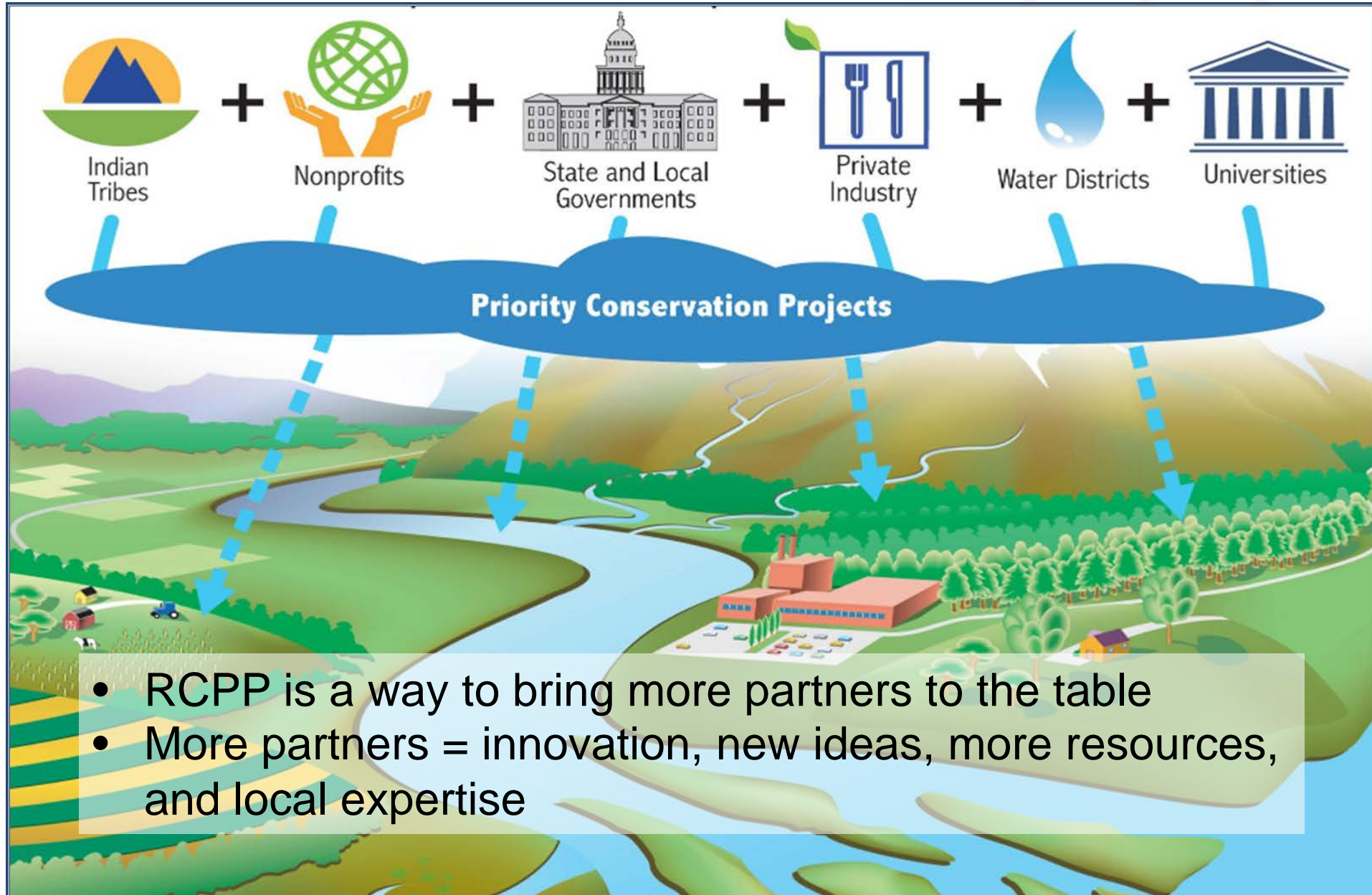
An infographic with a sunburst background. At the top, there is a row of seven water drop icons. Below them, the text "\$1.2 billion" is written in orange and black. In the center, a large sunburst graphic contains the text "\$2.4 billion" in red and black. Below that, the text "for conservation through 2018" is written in green.

\$1.2 billion

\$2.4 billion

for conservation through 2018





- RCPP is a way to bring more partners to the table
- More partners = innovation, new ideas, more resources, and local expertise



RCPP



- **New Program with the 2014 Farm Bill**
- **Utilizes *covered programs***
 - EQIP
 - CSP
 - ACEP
 - HFRP
 - (PL83-566 is an authorized authority)
- **Covered program and authority rules are same as outside RCPP**
 - Few exceptions



RCPP ...



- **Furthers the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife on a regional scale**
- **Encourages partners to cooperate with producers**
- **Provides financial and technical assistance through:**
 - Partnership agreements
 - Program contracts and/or easement agreements

RCPP mobilizes partnerships to multiply investments and reach common conservation goals



RCPP ...

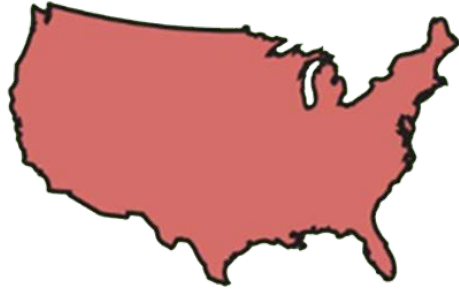


Offers new opportunities for NRCS to work with partners to encourage:

- locally driven innovation
- create high-performing solutions
- harness innovation
- accelerate the conservation mission
- launch bold ideas
- demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation



RCPP Has Three *Levels*



NATIONAL *(multi-state)*

40% of funds are reserved for projects based on a national competitive process



STATE

25% of funds are reserved for a state competitive process administered by STC's



CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREAS

(designated by the Secretary of Agriculture)

35% of funds are reserved for projects in critical conservation areas



Eligible Partners



- **Agricultural or silvicultural producer associations**
- **Farmer cooperatives or other groups of producers**
- **State or local governments**
- **American Indian tribes**
- **Municipal water treatment entities**
- **Water and irrigation districts**
- **Conservation-driven nongovernmental organizations**
- **Institutions of higher education**



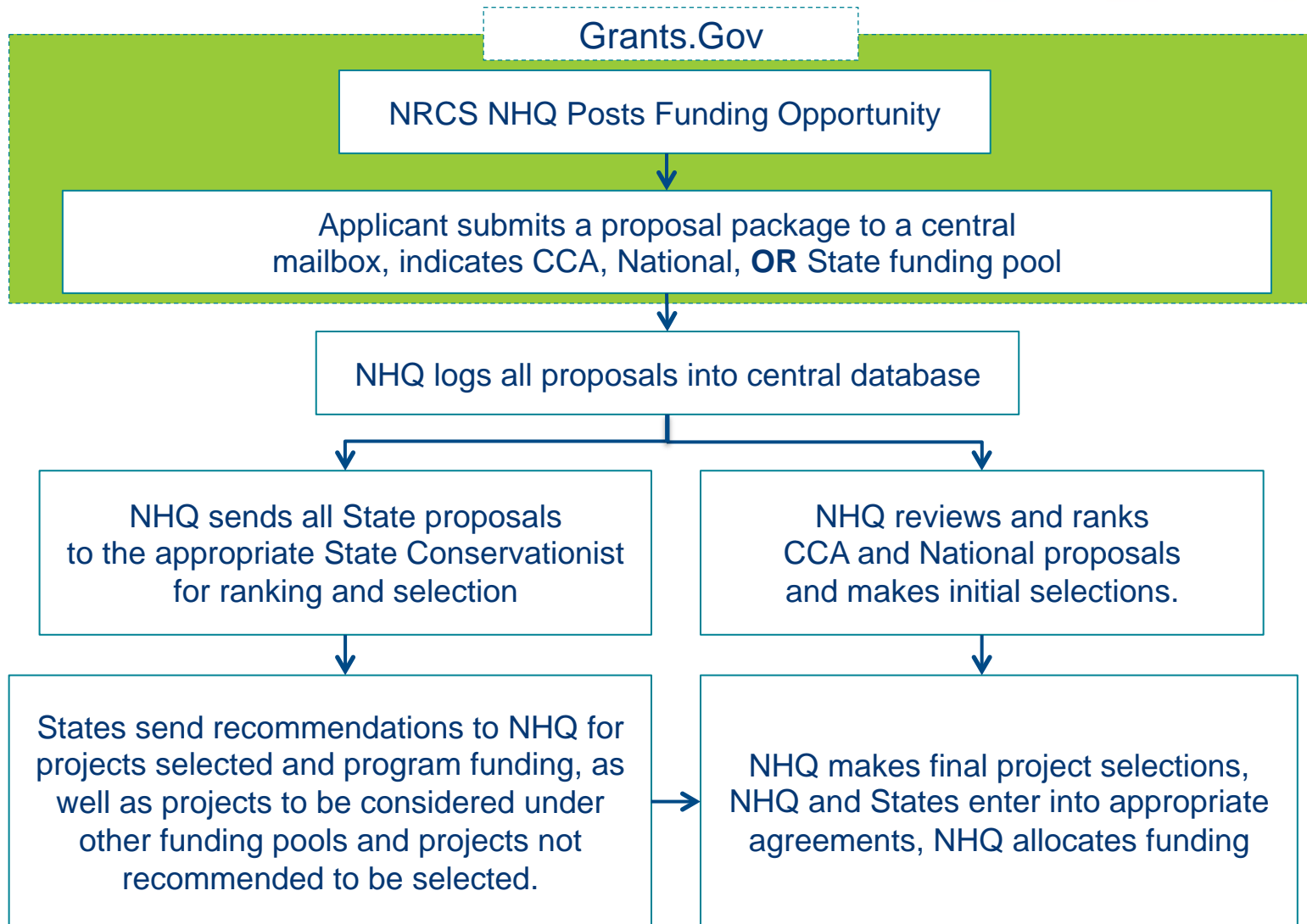
Eligible Participants



Under RCPP, eligible producers and landowners of agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland may enter into conservation program contracts or easement agreements under the framework of a partnership agreement.



RCPP Application Process



State RCPP Projects: Connecticut



Path to Reduce Pathogens in Connecticut Agricultural Runoff

\$669,000

Lead Partner: University of Connecticut No. of Partners: 4

Achieving Agricultural Water Security in Connecticut

\$400,000

Lead Partner: University of Connecticut No. of Partners: 7

Improving Soil Health & Water Quality in Thames River Watershed

\$400,000

Lead Partner: The Last Green Valley, Inc. No. of Partners: 4



State RCPP Projects: Maine



Improving Connectivity for Coldwater Salmonids in Maine Headwater Streams

\$200,000

Lead Partner: Atlantic Salmon Federation No. of Partners: 6

Protecting Potato Fields: Public-Private Partnerships to Improve Soil Health and Water Quality, Aroostook County

\$600,000

Lead Partner: Maine Potato Board No. of Partners: 9



State RCPP Projects: Massachusetts

Integrating Sustainable Forestry and Energy to Support a Regional Rural Economy and Sustainable Communities in Massachusetts' Most Forested, Rural, and Low Income Region

\$700,000

Lead Partner: Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation & Recreation

No. of Partners: 1



State RCPP Projects: New Hampshire



Beebe River Aquatic Connectivity & Habitat Project

\$524,000

Lead Partner: Trout Unlimited

No. of Partners: 5

Ecological Priorities Project Carroll County & S.E. Coos County

\$300,000

Lead Partner: Tin Mountain Conservation Ctr. No. of Partners: 9

Regional Conservation Partnership for New Hampshire's Coastal Watershed

\$500,000

Lead Partner: The Nature Conservancy

No. of Partners: 9



State RCPP Projects: Rhode Island



Enhancing Soil Health in the Ocean State

\$600,000

Lead Partner: RI State Conservation Committee No. of Partners: 6

Partners Protecting Source Waters of Rhode Island

\$600,000

Lead Partner: University of Rhode Island

No. of Partners: 6



State RCPP Projects: Vermont



Memphremagog Long-Term Water Quality Partnership

\$674,000

Lead Partner: Orleans County Natural Resources Conservation District

Number of Partners: 10

Planning for Accelerated Conservation Planning Implementation in the Lake Champlain Watershed of Vermont and Beyond

\$800,000

Lead Partner: Vermont Association of Conservation Districts

No. of Partners: 3



National RCPP Projects



Young Forest Initiative for At-Risk Species

\$5.2 million

12 Partners

Wildlife Management Institute (lead)

Participating:
CT, MA, ME, NH (lead), NY, RI, VT

Long Island Sound Watershed RCPP

\$10 million

19 Partners

CT Council on Soil & Water Conservation (lead)

Participating:
CT (lead), MA, NH, NY, RI, VT

Accelerated Implementation of Ag & Forestry Conservation Practices, Lake Champlain Watershed (VT/NY)

\$16 million

19 Partners

State of Vermont Agencies of Agriculture, Food & Markets, and Natural Resources (lead)

Participating:
VT, NY

Maine Mountain Collaboration for Fish & Wildlife

\$4.6 million

7 Partners

Trust for Public (lead)
Participating:
ME





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An Overview of the

Healthy Forests Reserve Program



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The Healthy Forests Reserve Program was signed into law as part of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. It was amended in the 2008 Farm Bill.



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Healthy Forests Reserve Program

This voluntary program assists landowners to restore, enhance, and protect forestland resources on private lands or tribal owned land through easements, 30-year contracts, and 10-year cost-share agreements.



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HFRP ...



- **Promotes the recovery of endangered and threatened species under the Endangered Species Act**
- **Improves plant and animal biodiversity**
- **Enhances carbon sequestration**



HFRP Benefits ...



- **Restoring and protecting forests contribute to the economy, provides biodiversity of plants and animal populations, and improves environmental quality.**



HFRP Benefits ...



- **Protections will be made available to landowners enrolled in HFRP who agree, for a specified period, to restore or improve their land for threatened or endangered species habitat. In exchange, they avoid certain regulatory restrictions under the Endangered Species Act on the use of that land.**



HFRP Benefits ...



- **HFRP provides financial assistance in the form of easement payments and costs-share for specific conservation action completed by the landowner.**



HFRP Eligibility



To be eligible for enrollment, land must be private or Tribal land which will restore, enhance, or measurably increase the likelihood of recovery of a threatened or endangered species; must improve biological diversity, or increase carbon sequestration.



HFRP Enrollment Options



The Program offers three enrollment options:

- 1. A 10-year restoration cost-share agreement, for which the landowner may receive no more than 50% of the average cost of the approved conservation practices**



HFRP Enrollment Options



2. 30 Year Options

- A 30-year easement, for which the land-owner may receive no more than 75% of the easement value of the enrolled land, plus no more than 75% of the average cost of the approved conservation practices
- A 30-year contract for restoration, enhancement and management on acreage owned by Indian Tribes



HFRP Enrollment Options



3. Permanent easements for which landowners receive between 75-100% percent of the easement value of the enrolled land plus between 75-100 % the average cost of the approved conservation practices



Working Through Obstacles

NRCS is committed to working with partners to make RCPP successful. When obstacles are encountered, NRCS will work with the partner to explore all the options available.





- **RCPP is flexible**
 - ✓ Adjustments of terms
 - ✓ Partners determine application period, ranking dates, and have input into ranking questions
 - ✓ Adjusted Gross Income waivers
- **HFRP has ...**
 - ✓ No requirement to be Highly Erodible Land Compliant or Wetland Compliant



Tips for a Successful RCPP Project

- **Consult with the State Conservationist on your RCPP idea**
- **Understand the NRCS program rules for the ones you plan to use**
- **Understand the capacity of your partners to deliver**
- **COMMUNICATE!**





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NETWORK

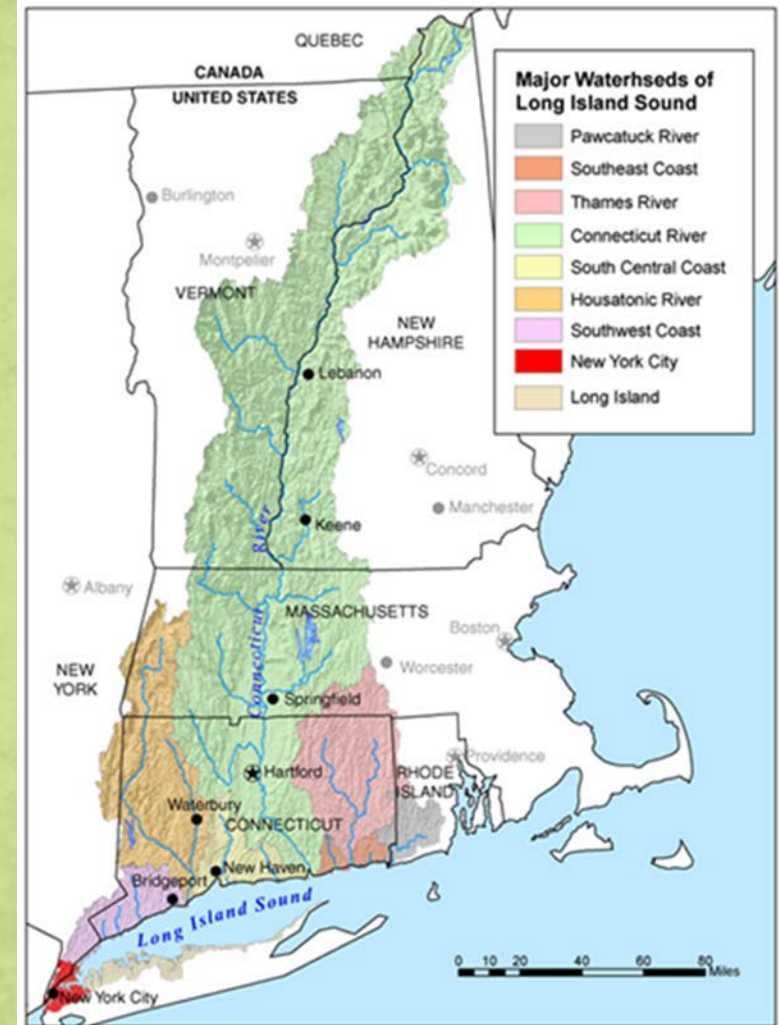


Long Island Sound Watershed (LISW) Regional Conservation Partnership Program - Healthy Forest Reserve Program

Bill Labich
Highstead Foundation
2016 RCP Network Gathering

LI Sound Watershed (LISW) RCPP - Overview

- **Challenge: Long Island Sound has significantly impaired water quality**
- 19 Partners (including RCP Network)
- Collaborate to reduce runoff and nutrient loading from private, working lands
- \$10 million, five-year project:
 - Forest Land Protection
 - Soil Health and Nutrient Management
 - Working Lands Adaptation and Resiliency



LISW-RCPP - Forest Land Protection

- **Healthy Forest Reserve Program**
- **Purpose:** Conserve and restore/maintain habitat for rare species and source water on private forested lands
- **Adjustment of Terms**
 - Only use permanent easements
 - Protect “drinking water source protection areas”
 - Use a Pre-Screening Application Process > **High Quality** Applications to NRCS
 - Land Trusts are Key Partners – Can Manage Some Due Diligence & Raise at least 25% of the FMV



Bill Labich, Highstead Foundation
working with Harvard Forest



Forest Land Protection Technical Committee

Bill Labich, Highstead Foundation
Robert O'Connor, Massachusetts Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
Bruce Payton, Rhode Island Division of Forest Environment
Dan Peracchio, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection
Keith Thompson, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation
Karen Bennett, Extension Forestry Professor & Specialist with UNH Cooperative Ext.
John Wernet, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Kira Jacobs, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Suzanne Paton, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Karl Honkonen, U.S. Forest Service



The purpose of the LISW-RCPP - Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) is to assist landowners, on a voluntary basis, in helping to restore enhance and protect forestland resources on private lands through permanent conservation easements.

Key Attributes of the LISW-RCPP's Healthy Forest Reserve Program

- \$3.25 million: \$2.55 M FA, \$250,000 in TA, \$450,000 in FA for NRCS
- Landowner gets at least 75% of HFRP Easement FMV as cash – up to 50% from LISW-HFRP
- Regional Equity
- Max HFRP Grant \$200,000 unless top-ranked in state

Key Attributes of the LISW-RCPP's Healthy Forest Reserve Program

- Our Pre-screening Application Process
 - Land trusts helped landowners use online GIS map and fill out application
 - Online GIS map shows parcel's relationship to eligibility and ranking criteria – help's people score parcels out of 1000 points
 - GIS scores determine ranking
- Partner with US Fish and Wildlife Service and North Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative to ID Surrogate Species

LISW-RCPP's HFRP – Design and Implementation

- **Step 1: Form a Forest Land Protection Technical Committee** – USFS, EPA, USFWS, NRCS, Six States' State Forestry Agencies
- **Step 2: Develop a Pre-Screening Application Process**
 - Eligibility Criteria – What Statute Requires + LISW
 - Ranking Criteria – What We Wanted + What NRCS Would Likely Appreciate and Support

Table 1: State Listed Species by Surrogate Species' Habitat

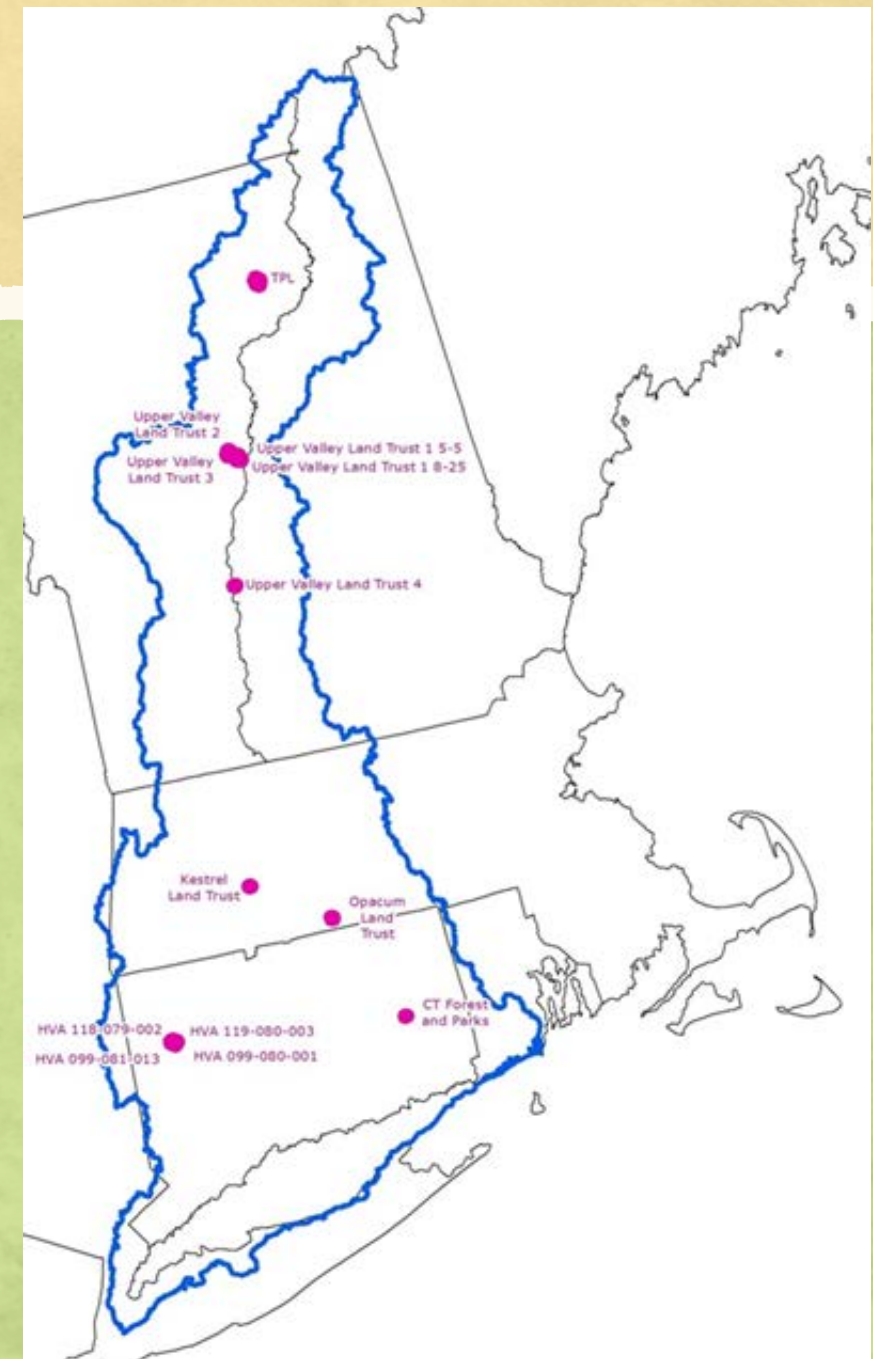
Forest Type	Surrogate wildlife species	States where surrogate species listed	Species that share habitats with the surrogate species	States Where These Species are of Greatest Conservation Need					
Mature upland and riparian hardwood forest	Louisiana Waterthrush	CT, MA, NY		NY	CT	RI	MA	VT	NH
	Wood Thrush	CT, MA, NY, RI, VT, NH	Birds						
			Acadian Flycatcher			YES*			
			Black-and-white Warbler		YES	YES	YES		
			Black-throated Blue Warbler	YES	YES	YES			
			Broad-winged Hawk		YES		YES		
			Brown Creeper		YES	YES			
			Cerulean Warbler	YES	YES		YES	YES	YES
			Eastern Wood-pewee		YES				
			Great Crested Flycatcher			YES			
			Hairy Woodpecker			YES			
			Least Flycatcher		YES	YES			
			Northern Goshawk	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
			Ovenbird		YES				
			Pileated Woodpecker			YES			
			Red-shouldered Hawk	YES				YES	
			Rose-breasted Grosbeak		YES	YES			
			Scarlet Tanager	YES	YES	YES	YES		YES
			Sharp-shinned Hawk		YES				
			Veery		YES	YES			YES
			Worm-eating Warbler	YES	YES				
			Mammals						
			Big Brown Bat		YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
			Black Bear			YES	YES	YES	
			Bobcat			YES	YES	YES	
			Deer Mouse		YES				
			Eastern Red Bat	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

LISW-RCPP's HFRP – Design and Implementation

- **Step 1: Form a Forest Land Protection Technical Committee** – USFS, EPA, USFWS, NRCS, Six States' State Forestry Agencies
- **Step 2: Develop a Pre-Screening Application Process**
- **Step 3. Demonstrate Process Using Webinar and Online Map Tool**
www.lisw-rcpp.com/forests.html
- **Step 4. Advertise RFP, Support, Receive, Score, and Rank Pre-Screening Applications**

2016 LISW-RCPP HFRP Grant Round

- 2016 RFP - ranked nine pre-screening applications, 13 parcels of land (40 ac to 1100 ac)
- 3500 acres in all
- All Nine Applications have RCP members as partners:
 - Staying Connected Initiative
 - Quabbin to Cardigan
 - Berkshire Wildlife Habitat Linkage Partnership
 - MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership
 - Litchfield Hills Greenprint Collaborative



LISW-RCPP's HFRP – Design and Implementation

- **Step 1: Form a Forest Land Protection Technical Committee** – USFS, EPA, USFWS, NRCS, Six States' State Forestry Agencies
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www.lisw-rcpp.com/forests.html
- **Step 4. Advertise RFP, Support, Receive, Score, and Rank Pre-Screening Applications**
- **Step 5: Hand over Pre-Screening Applications to NRCS**
- **Step 6: Assist and Prepare Next RFP**

LISW-RCPP's HFRP – Design and Implementation

- Forest Land Protection Technical Committee Meeting - Adjust Application Process and Materials
- Next RFP – January – March 2017

- **Questions on RCPP and HFRP?**



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An Overview of the

 **Agricultural
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Easement Program**

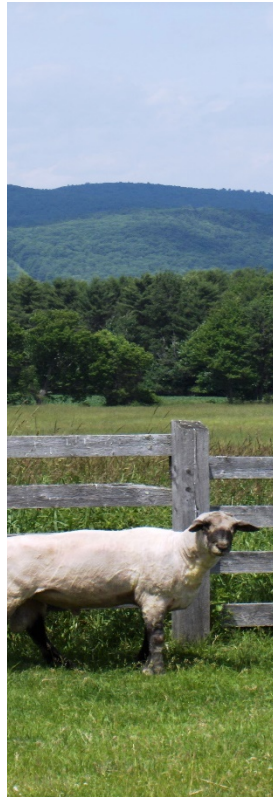


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The Agricultural Act of 2014 consolidated the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP), and the Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) into the single Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP).



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Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

The program has two components:

1. **Agricultural Land Easement (ALE)**
(patterned after the former FRPP, merged with GRP's land eligibility components)
2. **Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)**
(patterned after WRP – land previously enrolled in the three contributing programs is considered enrolled in ACEP)



ACEP

Provides financial and technical assistance to help conserve agricultural lands and wetlands and their related benefits.

ALE

NRCS helps American Indian tribes, state and local governments and non-governmental organizations protect working agricultural lands and limit non-agricultural uses of the land.

WRE

NRCS helps to restore, protect, and enhance enrolled wetlands.



ALE ...



Protects the long-term viability of the nation's food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. Land protected by agricultural land easements provides additional public benefits, including environmental quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat, and protection of open space.



WRE ...



Provides habitat for fish and wildlife including threatened and endangered species, improves water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduces flooding, recharges groundwater, protects biological diversity, and provides opportunities for educational, scientific, and limited recreational activities.



Eligibility



- Land eligible for ALE easements includes cropland, rangeland, grassland, pastureland, and non-industrial private forest land. NRCS will prioritize applications that protect agricultural uses and related conservation values of the land and those that maximize the protection of contiguous acres devoted to agricultural use.
- Land eligible for WRE easements includes farmed or converted wetland that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored. NRCS will prioritize applications based the easement's potential for protecting and enhancing habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife.



How To Enroll ...



- **To enroll land through ALE, eligible partners may submit proposals to NRCS to acquire conservation easements on eligible land.**
- **To enroll land through WRE, landowners may apply at any time at their local USDA Service Center.**



Questions?



USDA IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PROVIDER, EMPLOYER, AND LENDER.



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