

**Natural Resources Conservation Service
Report To
Papio-Missouri River NRD Board
September 11, 2014
Neil Jensen, District Conservationist**



USDA Provides \$328 Million to Conserve Wetlands and Farmland, Boost Economy

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced September 8, that \$328 million in conservation funding is being invested to help landowners protect and restore key farmlands, grasslands and wetlands across the nation.

The funding is provided through the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), which was created in the 2014 Farm Bill to protect critical wetlands and encourage producers to keep lands in farming and ranching. Approximately 380 projects nationwide were selected to protect and restore 32,000 acres of prime farmland, 45,000 acres of grasslands and 52,000 acres of wetlands. Nebraska's share of the funding is \$5.4 million.

In addition to protecting cropland and critical habitats, conservation strengthens outdoor recreation and helps boost the economy. According to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, annual United States conservation spending totals \$38.8 billion, but it produces \$93.2 billion of economic output throughout the economy - 2.4 times more than what is put in. This output takes the form of more than 660,500 jobs, \$41.6 billion in income and a \$59.7 billion contribution to national Gross Domestic Product, or GDP.

Through ACEP, private or tribal landowners and eligible conservation partners working with landowners can request assistance from USDA to protect and enhance agricultural land through an agricultural or wetland easement.

These easements deliver many long-term benefits. For example:

- Improve water quality and wetland storage capacity;
- Reduce flooding;
- Provide and protect habitat for threatened, endangered and at-risk species including sage grouse, bog turtles, panthers, black bear, and whooping cranes to recover populations and reduce regulatory burdens; and
- Protect prime agricultural land under high risk of development in urban areas to help secure the nation's food supply and jobs in the agricultural sector.



DEADLINES APPROACHING TO APPLY FOR RESOURCE CONSERVATION FUNDS

Farmers and ranchers interested in soil, water and wildlife conservation are encouraged to sign up now for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EQIP is a voluntary conservation program available to private landowners and operators. Those interested in applying are encouraged to sign up before Oct. 17, 2014.

EQIP is one of NRCS's most versatile programs. It offers cost share and technical assistance to apply conservation measures on cropland and rangeland, as well as for animal feeding operations and establishing or enhancing wildlife habitat. There are many opportunities available, and NRCS staff can help landowners and operators sort out their EQIP options.

Individuals interested in entering into an EQIP agreement may file an application at any time, but the ranking of applications on hand to receive funding will begin Oct. 17, 2014. The first step is to visit your local NRCS field office and complete an application.



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