

## The NRCS and Conservation Professional Training Program Present: The CRP Readiness Initiative

On April 18-19, conservation professionals have the opportunity to join 200 other colleagues across the country who have already signed up to help farmers and landowners preserve soil, improve water quality, and increase wildlife habitat through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) Readiness Initiative. A free two-day CRP training workshop will be held at the Hampton Inn, 27800 U.S. Hwy. 50, La Junta. The registration deadline is April 10<sup>th</sup>. The workshop is presented by the Conservation Professional Training Program and sponsored by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It is part of a national initiative to train a group of conservation professionals and independent consultants to provide the planning, implementation, and management services associated with the Conservation Reserve Program.

“We are thrilled to have so much interest in our national training program so far. These conservation professionals emerging from our trainings now have detailed knowledge of national and state CRP conservation practices. They are ready to create, implement and maintain CRP conservation plans and ultimately help preserve our most fragile rural lands,” said Kevin Erb, Project Co-Director.

A team led by the University of Wisconsin-Extension and comprised of national university extension staff, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency (FSA) staff, and representatives from NRCS partner agencies and organizations has collaborated to streamline the trainings and make them accessible, convenient, and consistent across all states.

"With more people trained to help landowners, we expect more landowners to take advantage of the Conservation Reserve Program to protect our natural resources," said Erb. The Conservation Reserve Program gives farmers and landowners technical assistance and a financial incentive to reduce soil erosion and runoff, leading to improved water quality and wildlife habitat. Upon acceptance under a general or continuous program signup, a conservation professional trained in CRP planning helps a landowner assess his or her unique parcel of land, covering topics like land slope, cropping history, soil type, cultivation methods, and water quality. Upon completion of an assessment, the landowner and the conservation professional work together to create a CRP-conservation plan.

Natural Resources Conservation Service employees and conservation partners usually provide the technical services associated with CRP planning, but a wave of upcoming renewals has prompted a new effort to recruit and train a broader range of professionals to help meet planning demands. Independent conservation professionals, registered technical service providers, members of conservation associations, and employees of organizations with formal connections to NRCS in Colorado, western Oklahoma, northern Texas and western Kansas are encouraged to participate.

“Assisting landowners in getting conservation on the ground is the end goal of the CRPRI. By training and mentoring technical service providers and current partners for CRP conservation planning, we increase the capacity and availability of conservation professionals qualified and ready to prepare high-quality conservation plans that protect soil, water quality and wildlife habitats,” said Tony Kramer, NRCS Deputy Chief of Programs.

Following the initial two-day training, participants in the CRP Readiness Initiative will have the opportunity to work directly with a project mentor, participate in online forums and webinars, and

sign up for supplemental training courses as needed. During the summer of 2012, the training curriculum will be transitioned to an online format, which will be available for a course fee. Some of the topics to be covered during the free core workshops include: understanding the landowner's objectives, developing a CRP plan according to national and state guidelines, and CRP best practices for conservation. Continuing education units are available across multiple certification disciplines.

For more information, contact Merrita Fraker-Marble, CRP Readiness Initiative Western Media Contact, at 406-388-2055 or [mmarble@montana.edu](mailto:mmarble@montana.edu). To register for the Colorado workshop, visit <http://conservation-training.uwex.edu/crpworkshops>.