

USDA Selects First Projects of New, Innovative Program

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that 100 high-impact projects across all 50 states, including Kansas, will receive more than \$370 million as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). RCPP focuses on public-private partnership and enables private companies, local communities, and other non-government partners a way to invest in efforts to keep our land resilient and water clean, and promote tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism, and outdoor recreation.

This year's projects in Kansas will accomplish a wide diversity of agricultural goals to improve soil health, water quality and water use efficiency, wildlife habitat, and other related natural resources on private lands.

"Partners are seeing the value of conservation and investing in their future," Vilsack said. "These partnerships are forging a new path for getting conservation on the ground and are providing opportunities for communities to have a voice and ownership in protecting and improving our natural resources. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program ushers in a new era of conservation, and we're excited about the down-the-road benefits from this new Farm Bill program."

This year's projects will engage hundreds of partners with wide-ranging interests, including communities, conservation districts, agribusiness, non-government organizations, for- and non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies, and Tribal governments. In addition to U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) funds, partners will contribute an estimated \$400 million, more than doubling USDA's investment.

"RCPP puts our partners in the driver's seat," said Eric B. Banks, USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist in Kansas. "Projects are locally led, and demonstrate the value of strong public-private partnerships that deliver solutions to tough natural resource challenges."

In Kansas, there is one multi-state project approved through a national ranking pool.

Improving Water Quality Through the Implementation of Forestry Practices and the Assessment of Riparian Systems in Kansas' Priority Watersheds (Lead Partner: Kansas State University—Kansas Forest Service)

Surface water reservoirs in Kansas have lost 40 percent of their storage capacity and waterways are experiencing stream bank erosion. By implementing forestry best management practices on 25,000 acres and creating a protection framework for remaining riparian forests in ten high-priority watersheds, this project will help sustain reservoir storage and wildlife habitat, improve the drinking water supply, and increase recreational opportunities. This project also supports the outcomes outlined in the Governor's Vision for the Future of Water in Kansas by sustaining and creating forest riparian conservation near Kansas streams.