

USDA CELEBRATES EARTH DAY 2006

U.S. Department of Agriculture actions on Earth Day 2006 include:

- ☑ Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns traveling to Wiggins, Colorado to highlight two Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) partnerships totaling \$91.6 million that will conserve water and improve wildlife habitat, two major Earth Day objectives;
- ☑ Noting record amounts of hazardous fuels restoration work accomplished under the Healthy Forests Initiative;
- ☑ Investing an additional \$115.9 million in water and wastewater infrastructure projects in 28 states throughout rural America;
- ☑ Senior USDA officials participating in Earth Day activities in more than 15 states.



KEY CONSERVATION EFFORTS

➤ Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

CREP uses unique state and federal partnerships that allow participants to receive incentive payments for installing specific conservation practices. Through CREP, producers can receive annual rental payments and cost-share assistance to establish long-term, resource-conserving covers on eligible land. Nationwide, close to 646,000 acres are enrolled in CREP, including about 92,000 wetland and buffer acres.

- Sign-up for both Colorado CREPs announced today begin June 12, 2006, and continues until enrollment goals are met, or through Dec. 31, 2007, whichever comes first. Enrolled land will remain under contract for 14 to 15 years, as specified in the contract.



➤ Conservation Reserve Program (CRP):

The Conservation Reserve Program (including General, Continuous, and farmable Wetlands) enrolls 36 million acres with the goal of reducing soil erosion, improving water and air quality, and improving wildlife habitat.

- CRP annually reduces the erosion of our nation's soil by over 470 million tons and further aids surface water quality by reducing fertilizer applications (700,000 tons of nitrogen, 110,000 tons phosphorous).
- There are over 3.4 million acres of wetlands systems in CRP. These acres provide wildlife habitat. Additionally CRP has 3.5 million acres dedicated for wildlife habitat.
- Current CRP contracts contain more wetlands and buffers than previous decades. Ten years ago there were 400,000 acres of wetlands and buffers each. Today there are two million acres of wetlands and 2.5 million acres of buffers.

➤ **Wetlands Restoration**

- Significant progress has been made toward the President's Wetlands Initiative. Since 2004, over 1.7 million acres of wetlands have been restored, created, protected or improved.
- By the end of Fiscal Year 2006, USDA will have contributed nearly 400,000 acres of restored, created, protected or improved wetlands. USDA funding contributing to this accomplishment totals nearly \$270 million dollars.
- Through voluntary conservation programs such as the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, Conservation Reserve Program and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, USDA has made significant contributions to the habitats of the Ivory Billed Woodpecker, the Black Bear Corridor, Sage Grouse, and Wild Turkey.
- USDA is a major contributor to cooperative conservation on over 1.2 billion acres of privately owned lands.
- The President's proposed budget for 2007 would increase funding for WRP by 60 percent. That's enough to purchase easements for 250,000 acres—the maximum annual acreage authorized under the 2002 farm bill.



Additional information on USDA conservation programs can be found at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs> and <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/default.htm>.

➤ **Healthy Forests Initiative**

On December 3, 2003, President Bush signed into law the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to reduce the threat of destructive wildfires while upholding environmental standards and encouraging early public input during review and planning processes. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act:

- Strengthens public participation in developing high priority forest health projects;
- Reduces the complexity of environmental analysis allowing federal land agencies to use the best science available to actively manage land under their protection;
- Provides a more effective appeals process encouraging early public participation in project planning; and
- Issues clear guidance for court action against forest health projects.

The President's FY 2007 budget is faithful to commitments made to sustain strong wildfire fighting capability, reduce the risk of fire and assist communities. The budget calls for \$2.5 billion in HFI funding, including \$492 million for hazardous fuels reduction.

From 2001-2005, federal land management agencies treated a total of 15 million acres for hazardous fuels. By the end of FY 2006, that total will approach 20 million acres. The wildland-urban interface (WUI) and public and private lands of concern to communities at risk are a top priority for treatment. Approximately 60 percent of forest restoration dollars has been invested in this area. From 2001-2005, Federal agencies increased fuels and other treatments on land in the WUI from 775,000 acres to 2.4 million acres--more than doubling WUI acres treated.

Additional information on the Healthy Forest Initiative is available at <http://www.healthyforests.gov>.

➤ Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Programs

Secretary Johanns recently announced a comprehensive energy strategy to help farmers and ranchers mitigate the impact of high energy costs and develop long-term solutions. At the same time he announced the formation of the USDA Energy Council to examine departmental programs and authorities, ensuring they fit into a comprehensive energy strategy. The Council will also ensure agricultural producers have a place at the table for national energy discussions and play a key role in the President's Advanced Energy Initiative.



The new Energy Council will coordinate implementation of USDA's energy strategy and partner with the U.S. Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency and others in an effort to achieve the Renewable Fuels Standard set by the Energy Policy Act of 2005. The standard requires an annual usage rate of 7.5 billion gallons of renewable fuel by 2012.

The President has called for tax incentives totaling \$4.1 billion through 2009 to spur the use of clean, renewable energy, and energy-efficient technologies, including biomass.

Key USDA Renewable Energy Accomplishments:

- During the Bush Administrations, USDA's Rural Development has invested nearly \$185 million in bioenergy and biomass projects through its business and utility programs.
- In FY 2005, USDA Rural Development, with the support of the Department of Energy, selected 150 applicants from 32 states for the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Improvement grant program (Section 9006 of the 2002 Farm Bill) to receive \$21 million dollars in grant funds. These funds help to reduce energy costs and increase opportunities for rural businesses, farmers and ranchers. Grant awards supported a wide range of wind, solar, biomass, geothermal, and conservation technologies.
- In FY 2006, USDA plans to provide \$60 million for purchases of additional
- commodities to expand bioenergy production under Section 9010 of the 2002 Farm Bill, and, with the Department of Energy, made awards of over \$15.6 million under the Biomass R&D program under Section 9008. In FY 2006, USDA also designated the first bioproducts for preferred procurement by Federal agencies under Section 9002, and USDA continued the national educational program on the use of biodiesel fuel under Section 9004.

More information about USDA's energy strategy is available at www.usda.gov/energy including a USDA Energy Fact Sheet, the Energy Calculator, and details of USDA's energy-related loan and grant programs.

➤ Improving Drinking Water Quality

Since 2001, more than \$7.8 billion was provided in loans or grants to rural communities to assist with community water and wastewater infrastructure. Many of the communities receiving the funding are struggling to address environmental concerns brought on by improper treatment of sewage or unsafe or unreliable water, and many are among our nation's poorest rural communities. In total, in FY 2001-05, more than 4,500 rural water or wastewater systems have been assisted benefiting more than 12 million rural residents.

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