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Conservation Agency Charts Its Future

INDIANAPOLIS, June 26, 2006 – Everyone wants to know what their future holds. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has developed a road map to chart its future.

“We see conservation work on private lands as one of the most important considerations that will affect water quality, soil health, wildlife habitat and other natural resources that make up a quality environment,” says Jane Hardisty, state conservationist for NRCS in Indiana. “This plan sets the stage not only for NRCS activities on a national scale, but also for our direction here in Indiana. It is impressive, setting the clearest direction for the agency that I have seen in my career.”

Three broad, unifying strategies will guide NRCS’ work over the next five years and beyond: Cooperative Conservation, The Watershed Approach, and Market-Based Approach.

Cooperative Conservation – NRCS will pursue partnerships that encourage the private sector to invest in conservation and will promote cooperative efforts to achieve conservation goals. Examples of this approach are the Conservation Innovation and Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative grant programs.

Watershed Approach – NRCS will provide information and assistance to encourage and enable locally led, watershed-scale conservation. NRCS is currently looking at conducting 8-digit watershed assessments to help focus farm bill conservation funding on identified natural resources concerns.

Market-Based Approach – NRCS will encourage market-based pilot projects that test innovative conservation technology. These mechanisms might include environmental credit trading, mitigation banking, eco-labeling—and more.

“Our *foundation* goals of high-quality productive soils, clean and abundant water, and healthy plant and animal communities will sound familiar to people who know us,” says Hardisty. “We have decades of experience helping farmers and ranchers apply conservation practices to achieve these goals. As we look to the future, it makes sense that we look at emerging resource concerns. To do that, NRCS identified three *venture* goals in the plan: air quality; an adequate energy supply; and, preserving working farm and ranch lands.”

“With the 2007 Farm Bill just around the corner, we expect this strategic plan to help guide the conservation work we do under that farm bill. Here in Indiana, we at NRCS are ready to work with farmers to get conservation and good management systems on the ground,” said Hardisty. “Indiana’s course parallels the strategic plan because of our new field technical assistance delivery system and cooperative efforts with our key conservation partners—the Indiana State Department of Agriculture and the Soil and Water Conservation Districts.”

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