

## **COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE**

Fiscal Year 2007 Announcement of Internal Program Funding

**Executive Summary:** The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announces the availability of up to \$2 million through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI), under authorities provided by the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act of 1935. The CCPI offers one component in fiscal year 2007: the Rapid Watershed Assessment (RWA) component. The RWA component provides funding RWAs on an 8-, 11-, and/or 14-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) sized watersheds. CCPI awards will be selected through a nationwide competition. Each State may submit one single State proposal and may also participate in the submission of one multi-State proposal for evaluation and award consideration. This announcement sets forth the funding priorities, project eligibility requirements, application procedures, and evaluation criteria for proposed projects.

### **I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION**

#### **A. Overview**

CCPI RWA applications must advance a locally-led watershed-scale assessment effort to identify and quantify local conservation priorities. RWAs should include two products. The first product is a resource profile for the 8-, 11-, or 14-digit HUC sized watershed of interest which provides a rough picture of resource conditions and conservation efforts in the watershed and can be used as a focal point for discussions during locally-led identification of resource concerns and priorities. The second product is a resource assessment (assessment matrix) that builds on the information in the profile and develops quantitative estimates of the size, scope, and value of natural resource needs in the watershed. NRCS encourages proposals to develop RWAs in watersheds with significant holdings by limited resource or beginning farmers and ranchers, or tribes.

States may submit one single-State proposal. States may also participate in the submission of one multi-State proposal.

#### **B. RWA Objectives**

The majority of NRCS conservation program funding goes directly to producers or small groups of producers. NRCS recognizes the need for multiple approaches to natural resource conservation, and is committed to using various means to assist producers in meeting their natural resource objectives and in complying with local, State, and Federal environmental regulations. NRCS believes that fostering locally-led planning is critical to addressing natural resource concerns that are watershed-based in scope. Implementation of the RWA component of CCPI is a reflection of this belief.

Proposals must describe projects that are consistent with the following seven RWA objectives. The projects must encourage:

1. local stakeholders to come together to identify, assess, and prioritize conservation needs and actions at the 8-, 11-, or 14-digit HUC sized watershed;
2. the use of current and cutting-edge technology to expedite the planning process;
3. outreach to stakeholders and agricultural producers as to the status of resource conditions in the watershed;
4. producers to share information and participate in the conservation need identification and assessment phases;
5. producers to implement and maintain practices identified in the assessment;
6. cumulative and demonstrable conservation benefits in the watershed; and

7. participation by partners in the future implementation as well as the assessment phase.

### **C. Limited Resource and Beginning Farmers and Ranchers, and Tribes**

NRCS intends to select at least one of the CCPI awards for a proposal that addresses the need for RWAs in areas with significant numbers of limited resource or beginning farmers and ranchers, or tribes. NRCS encourages applications that address the natural resource conservation needs of these historically underserved farmers and ranchers.

## **II. FUNDING AVAILABILITY**

NRCS announces the availability of up to \$2 million for RWAs. Funds will be awarded through this internal announcement. RWAs on 8-, 11-, and 14-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) sized watersheds will be developed to assess what scale planning can be accomplished while still adequately addressing resource concerns and regulatory requirements. Funding will be used for technical assistance for either of two types of RWA pilot efforts, as follows:

1. Conducting 5 to 10 RWAs within a State on 8-, 11-, and/or 14-digit HUC sized watersheds to determine the most efficient scale for watershed planning. The size of the watersheds should be determined by the nature of the resource concerns, the cooperative conservation opportunities with other stakeholders, and the ability and willingness of the local community and landowners to undertake the challenge of improving the health of the watershed.
2. Conducting up to 10 RWAs crossing State boundaries. Multi-State RWAs present their own unique challenges in partnering, coordinating personnel, and gathering geospatial and field data across State boundaries. These multi-State proposals may be conducted at the 8-, 11-, and/or 14-digit HUC sized watersheds. The size of the watersheds should be determined by the nature of the resource concerns, the cooperative conservation opportunities with other agencies/entities, and the ability and willingness of the local community and landowners to undertake the challenge of improving the health of the watershed. Multi-State proposals must include the signatures and indications of concurrence from all State Conservationists involved in the project. The distribution of funding between the participating States must also be indicated in the project proposal.

States may submit one single-State proposal, with a maximum request of \$100,000. States may also participate in the submission of one multi-State proposal, with a maximum request of \$150,000. The available funding is anticipated to support approximately 10 to 15 awards assessing at least 50 HUCs.

The anticipated start date for awarded projects is July 1, 2007. States will have up to 12 months to complete the proposed work. States that receive funding will need to obligate their funding by September 30, 2007. States will need to request carryover if the CTA funds are not obligated by September 30, 2007. Requests for carryover will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will need to be directed through the appropriate Regional Assistance Chief.

## **III. PROPOSAL AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION**

### **A. RWA Interim Guidance**

NRCS RWA interim guidance is posted at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/rwa/index.html>.

Applicants submitting proposals should review these documents carefully. **RWAs developed using CCPI funding must be consistent with this guidance.**

## **B. Proposal Content and Format**

Proposals must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration for a grant. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NRCS or others as to the relative merits of the project described in the proposal. Proposals must include all required narrative sections described below; incomplete proposals will not be considered.

Proposals must be submitted in the following format:

- 1. Project abstract:** Each proposal must contain a summary of not more than two pages that provides the following:
  - a. Project title;
  - b. Project objectives and scope;
  - c. List of 8-, 11-, or 14-digit HUC sized watersheds to be assessed and their importance to conservation;
  - d. Summary of the work to be performed during the RWA;
  - e. Name of the State Conservationist/Director(s) cooperating on the project;
  - f. Names and affiliations of project partners and collaborators (if applicable);
  - g. Projected estimates of agricultural producer participation in the conservation efforts;
  - h. Duration of RWA project (beginning and ending dates);
  - i. Total cost of the project, including partner funding;
  - j. Total funds requested from NRCS for the project; multi-State proposals should include distribution to each participating State;
  - k. Name, address, telephone, email, and other contact information for the Project Leader.
  
- 2. Project description:** The RWA scope must be completely and accurately described in no more than 10 typewritten, double-spaced pages, and include the following:
  - a. Project background: Describe the history and need for the proposed project. Describe how this project will provide environmental benefits superior to those of past or current efforts and how the information collected and distributed through the RWA will improve the likelihood for future planning success.
  - b. Project objectives: State how the project objectives are consistent with the RWA objectives described above.
  - c. Project methods: Describe clearly how the RWA will be carried out. Detail the activities, technological tools/products used to streamline the process, and the partners required to complete the profiles and assessments.
  - d. Scope: Describe the location of the project and the relative size and scope (e.g., acres of difference land uses, etc.) of the project area, including a description of the significance of the particular watershed undergoing RWA. Provide a map of the project area;
  - e. Project partnership (if applicable): List all project partners and their roles in the project. Describe how the funds for the RWA will be used to build and strengthen the project partnership and increase the quality of resource information used for planning. Estimate the historic rate of producer participation in conservation efforts in the project area. Describe the outreach efforts that will be used to promote the project to producers and encourage them to participate;
  - f. Project milestones and timeline: Provide a table listing project milestones, timeframes, and significant actions through project completion. The milestones and timeline should reflect the projected completion dates for the resource profile, assessment matrix, publication of final reports, and stakeholder coordination;
  - g. Project management: Give a detailed description of how the project will be organized and managed. Include a list of key project personnel and their anticipated contributions to the project;

- h. **Anticipated results and benefits:** Describe the anticipated social and environmental benefits to be derived from the proposed activities of the project assessment and implementation phases, and explain how the results will be measured. Describe how the assessment results will be communicated to others through outreach activities. Describe anticipated environmental benefits and identify likely project beneficiaries, for example, agricultural producers by type or region or sector; rural communities; municipalities. Explain how these entities will benefit. Be as specific and quantitative as possible.
- i. **Limited resource and beginning farmers and ranchers, and tribes:** To receive special consideration for selection in this category, describe how the project addresses identification, quantification, and prioritization of conservation needs, as it impacts limited resource or beginning farmers and ranchers, or tribes.

**3. Budget:** Proposals must include a distribution of expenses as follows:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Labor</b>	<b>Materials/Equipment/Supplies</b>
Assessment and Coordination		
GIS		
Outreach		
Complete Report		
Publication and Distribution		
Related Travel Costs		
<b>Total</b>		

Include information on additional partnership money leveraged for the proposal.

**4. State Conservationist's statement and signature:** Proposals must provide a signed statement from the State Conservationist/Director in support of the proposed project. Multi-State proposals must include the signatures and indication of concurrence from all State Conservationists involved in the project.

### **C. Proposal Due Date**

Proposals must be received at NRCS Headquarters by 5 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time) on April 27, 2007. Three hard copies of each proposal and one electronic copy on a CD are to be mailed to the attention of Dan D. Lawson, Branch Chief, Conservation and Watershed Planning, Conservation Planning and Technical Assistance Division, PO Box 2890, Washington DC 20013-2890. Electronic files must be in either Microsoft Word or Adobe Acrobat (pdf) format. Proposals submitted via facsimile or e-mail will not be accepted. Proposals received after this date and time will not be accepted. Proposals received by the due date will be ranked.

### **D. Acknowledgement of Submission**

NRCS National Headquarters will acknowledge receipt of all proposals by e-mail. Applicants must provide an accurate email address.

## **IV. PROPOSAL REVIEW**

### **A. Proposal Evaluation Criteria**

The following four criteria will be used to evaluate project proposals:

#### Purpose and goals – 25%

1. The purpose and goals of the project are clearly stated;
2. The project adheres to the RWA objectives described in this notice;

3. The project describes the need for information on resource conditions and priority concerns in that particular watershed; and,
4. There is clear and significant potential for a positive and measurable outcome.

Stakeholder/partner support – 15%

1. A declaration of support for the RWA by key and/or participating organizations, stakeholders, and partners. Proposals that address the need for RWAs of resource conditions in an area with significant numbers of limited resource or beginning farmers and ranches, or tribes will receive special consideration. NRCS intends to fund at least one proposal that addresses the conservation needs of these historically underserved farmers and ranchers.

Soundness of planning phase – 45%

1. RWAs contain two components: a watershed resource profile and an assessment matrix. Proposals should provide an example template for each component and detail a strategy for:
  - a. collection of information from local individuals and communities;
  - b. inventorying and mapping of natural resource and environmental conditions;
  - c. assessing current resource conditions;
  - d. identifying the problems, concerns, and opportunities;
  - e. determining the goals and objectives of the local individuals and communities;
  - f. formulating alternative solutions;
  - g. identifying appropriate conservation systems to address the major land uses and associated resource concerns for the watershed; and
  - h. quantifying the costs of implementing appropriate conservation practices with willing landowners in the watershed;

Project management – 15%

1. The proposal has clear milestones and timelines for completing project in one year, designated staff, and demonstrates collaboration and partnership and the use of available technology to expedite the assessment process.
2. The project staff has the relevant expertise needed to do the work.
3. The budget request is reasonable and adequately justified.

## **B. Proposal Review and Selection Process**

All proposals received at NRCS National Headquarters will be screened for completeness. Incomplete proposals will be eliminated from competition, and notification of elimination will be mailed to the applicant.

Proposals submitted to NRCS National Headquarters will be evaluated by a team of subject matter experts and a CCPI Review Board, according to the criteria for proposal evaluation identified in this notice. The CCPI Review Board will make recommendations for awards to the Chief. Final selections will be made by the Chief. For proposals selected by the Chief, CCPI funds will be allocated to the appropriate State.

## **V. AWARD INFORMATION**

### **A. Anticipated Award Announcement and Notification**

CCPI awards are anticipated to be announced on June 1, 2007. Those proposals that have been selected for funding will be notified by an official letter from NRCS National Headquarters. Applicants whose proposals have not been selected for funding will also be notified by an official letter from NRCS National Headquarters.

## **B. Reporting Requirements**

Throughout the RWA development period, feedback on the pilot RWAs will be solicited from the States that receive awards. The feedback will be used to refine the guidance for conducting RWAs, and to evaluate their usefulness in:

- Facilitating program integration and implementation;
- Providing transparency to our cooperators;
- Improving partner participation in planning;
- Assessing workload and costs;
- Providing a setting and context for adaptive management and monitoring; and
- Providing useful information for all aspects of planning.

States must also submit a copy of their completed profiles and assessment matrices to the attention of the Conservation Technical Assistance Branch Chief, PO Box 2890, Washington DC 20013-2890.

## **VI. AGENCY CONTACTS**

### **CCPI National Program Manager:**

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CCPI National Program Manager  
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### **RWA Contact:**

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