



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

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NEWS RELEASE

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Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project Launched at Sholan Farms

LEOMINSTER, Mass. (June 1, 2007) – Members of the Friends of Sholan Farms joined federal, state and local officials today to cut a “ribbon” of invasive plants, kicking-off a long-term federally-funded project to restore habitat for grassland nesting and migratory birds on Sholan Farms in Leominster.

The program for the event included an overview of the project, remarks by project partners and invited dignitaries, the ceremonial invasive plant cutting and a demonstration of land clearing equipment.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is providing some \$65,000 in cost-share assistance through the agency’s Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) to clear invasive oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose and honeysuckle on 40 acres adjacent to the orchard. NRCS will also provide technical assistance.

Sholan Farms is owned by the City of Leominster and operated by the Friends of Sholan Farms, a community supported, non-profit organization. The Friends of Sholan Farms will provide volunteer labor for the project, which will begin this summer and will be on-going for the next decade.

“Mechanical clearing of invasive plants and diseased apple trees will start this year,” said NRCS Soil Conservationist, Michael Whited of the agency’s Worcester County office in Holden. “Next year there will be follow-up mowing, seeding and soil improvements for grass and wildflowers.”

As early as the end of 2008, however, the land will be restored to a natural meadow habitat, according to Whited. Maintenance mowing will be done each year through 2015.

“The WHIP funding is a perfect fit with the Friends of Sholan Farms’ long term goal of reclaiming this portion of the orchard. We would not have been able to realize this dream without the help of NRCS,” said Steven Smith, Friends of Sholan Farms vice-president.

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“Sholan Farms is a precious resource to the City of Leominster that we must protect and preserve,” said Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzeola. “This Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program assistance will enhance the natural beauty and ecology of this treasured orchard and surrounding farmland. Programs such as this are vital to the longevity of Sholan Farms, which dates back to the year 1642.”

“NRCS is pleased to partner with the Friends of Sholan Farms and the City of Leominster to restore this important habitat and protect a natural resource that’s part of the heritage of the birthplace of ‘Johnny Appleseed’,” said Christine Clarke, Massachusetts State Conservationist for NRCS. “This project is one great example of the \$1.1 million in WHIP projects that will be implemented cooperatively with state and local partners across Massachusetts this year.”

Through WHIP, NRCS provides technical and cost-share assistance to landowners to protect or restore valuable ecosystems and wildlife habitat on their property. Landowners may receive up to 75 percent of installation costs for conservation practices. For more information on the WHIP program, visit www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip.html.

In 2006, NRCS funded 51 WHIP projects on 1700 acres of land in Massachusetts, for a total of \$1.4 million. Worcester County projects represented 13 percent of the funding.

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