



National Association of Conservation Districts

December 16, 2008

NACD Economic Stimulus Proposal

Summary: The economic stimulus package before Congress represents an opportunity to create jobs while also creating assets in critical natural resource infrastructure. The nation's 3000 conservation districts are at the forefront of natural resource conservation, working at the local level to assess local resource needs, to set priorities and to work with landowners in implementing conservation practices. Conservation districts understand the potential for investment in the nation's green infrastructure, providing jobs for such activities as rehabilitating local P.L. 534/566 watershed structures, conducting forestry related activities such as wildfire mitigation, wood based energy development, fuels reductions, and post-wildfire restoration, improving the water quality of impaired streams through 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution grants, reclaiming lands occupied by invasive plants and restoring the native vegetation and restoration of public lands through the Healthy Lands Initiative.

Background: The National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) represents the nation's 3,000 conservation districts and their governing boards. Established under state law, conservation districts are local units of state government charged with carrying out programs for the protection and management of natural resources at the local level. Conservation districts work with federal, state and other local agencies to provide technical assistance to landowners and other partners to address natural resource issues.

While the term "green jobs" may be a new term they have actually been around since the late 1930's. Conservation Districts and the Soil Conservation Service were created to lead the local and national investments in conservation of our natural resources. Many of the original conservation programs that were created under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt such as the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration built the natural resource infrastructure which we still enjoy today. Those programs also put people to work. Since then billions of private, local, state and federal dollars have been invested in conservation of our natural resources.

We believe the following projects can serve the dual purpose of providing jobs and an economic stimulus in local economies while also providing for reinvestment in our nation's green infrastructure assets. It is important to note that in order for any stimulus dollars to effectively reach the ground and impact job creation, a temporary waiver of any related cost-share requirements with state or local government or landowners might be required. State and local budgets are feeling the effects of the economy, and

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implementation of projects could be delayed indefinitely should cost-share be requirements accompany stimulus spending. We recommend a temporary suspension of cost-share with these programs.

Agriculture

NRCS P.L. 534/566 Watershed Structures:

Watershed Rehabilitation - \$260 million over 2 years, 4,200 jobs

Watershed Flood Prevention (PL 534/566, new construction) - \$380 million over 2 years, 6,300 jobs

Watershed Operations and Maintenance - \$100 million over 2 years, 1,090 jobs

Remedial Repairs of Upstream Flood Control Dams - \$100 million over 2 years, 1,090 jobs

Throughout the 1940's and 50's the government made a substantial investment in the nation's infrastructure through conservation. USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has built more than 11,000 flood control structures that still protect America's communities and natural resources. However, like houses and highways, maintenance and improvements must be made over time. More than half the structures are over 30 years old and many are approaching the end of their 50-year life.

Reinvestment in this infrastructure can provide local jobs while also maintaining aging structures to provide continued flood control, public safety, local water supply and recreational benefits. Other watershed structures have been proposed and many are "shovel ready", having already undergone NEPA assessments and needing only adequate funding for activity to begin. Secondary job creation could also occur with local suppliers and businesses to meet increased demands for products and support services.

Grants should be made available to Watershed Project sponsors as defined in PL 534/566 as amended for the purpose of operation and maintenance.

Interior and Environment

EPA 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Grants - \$380 million, 7,600 jobs

In 1987 Congress amended the Clean Water Act and established the 319 Nonpoint Point Source (NPS) Management Program. This was done in an effort to help focus state and local NPS work. To qualify for funding from the 319 program the water body must be on EPA's 303d list of impaired water bodies.

Since 1990 EPA has awarded \$470 million in grants nation wide. In that time, 100 water bodies have been partially or fully restored. However, thousands of water bodies or segments remain on the list of impaired waters. There is still a lot of work to be accomplished.

The 319 grants are an effective means of delivering funding to the local level and getting programs on the ground. Funds are distributed by EPA to States for further distribution to local governments and organizations for management programs. These programs can include increasing the utilization of agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as buffer strips, conservation tillage, and nutrient management, and the implementation of low impact development practices to protect urban water quality.

EPA's most recent Clean Watershed Needs Survey estimates funding needs of \$38 billion over the next 20 years for NPS pollution control. Based on that estimate, we recommend an investment of \$380 million or 1 percent of this need over the next two years.

FS/DOI Forest and Rangeland Health Activities – \$1.4 billion, 22,000 jobs

Programs under the U.S. Forest Service (FS) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) related to forest and rangeland management offer tremendous potential for job creation and forest stewardship, including wildfire mitigation, wood based energy development, fuels reductions, pest prevention and rehabilitation, invasive plant rehabilitation, and post-wildfire restoration. Programs under State and Private Forestry as well as efforts on federal land through the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of Interior are critical to carrying out these efforts.

A 2002 estimate from experts at both agencies determined that an initial short-term investment of \$1.4 billion could result in significant cost-reductions after 15 years for total state and private wildland fire management costs and risks. Based on FS and DOI estimates on overall job creation for it proposed programs under the stimulus, these initiatives could create over 22,000 jobs.

BLM Healthy Lands Initiative - \$55 million, 850 jobs

The Bureau of Land Management's Healthy Lands Initiative was created in 2007 to accelerate land restoration, increase productivity, and improve the health of public lands in the Western United States with a goal of preserving the diversity and productivity of public and private lands across the landscape.

Activities under the Healthy Lands Initiative can provide opportunity to create jobs while accomplishing many restoration activities. Specific areas in which economic stimuli could be applied include restoration of native plant and wildlife habitat, invasive species management, and wildfire fuel loads reduction. According to BLM estimates, projects in these areas could be initiated within six months.