



United States Department of Agriculture

USDA Accomplishments 2009-2011

Secretary Tom Vilsack

Conservation

America's Great Outdoors Initiative

Worked with a host of other federal agencies to launch the America's Great Outdoors initiative to develop a 21st century conservation agenda and reconnect Americans to the outdoors.

Promoting Landscape Scale Conservation

USDA is stepping up conservation with landscape-scale initiatives that are delivering results. Work in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Mississippi River Basin, and Gulf of Mexico are among 10 initiatives that are applying the most effective conservation practices in the best places to increase agricultural and environmental returns. New science is helping to focus work in areas where we will generate 3-to-5 times the benefits of more general approaches – reducing problematic nutrients making it to rivers and streams by as much as 45%.

- We made the largest-ever investment in Florida's northern Everglades to help conserve and restore about 50,000 acres through voluntary conservation easements that improve habitat for sensitive wildlife species.
- Following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, USDA began an initiative to help provide safe habitats for migratory birds away from the danger of the oil-contaminated coastal marshes. In three months, we enrolled more than 470,000 acres in the program to provide habitat for millions of birds.

- To bring the same landscape scale approach to forests, we are working with a variety of partners in the American southeast to restore the longleaf pine ecosystem across public and private lands. In Arizona we are working to restore ponderosa pine across hundreds of thousands of acres on four national forests.

Encouraging Record Natural Resource Restoration and Conservation on Private Working Lands to Create Jobs and Improve our Environment

- Enrolled a record number of acres of private working lands in conservation programs, working with more than 500,000 farmers and ranchers to implement conservation practices that clean the air we breathe, filter the water we drink and prevent soil erosion. USDA payments – leveraged with historic outside investments – helped support producer incomes and reward them for their good work.
- Through a host of voluntary conservation programs, landowners implemented conservation practices to improve water and soil quality and enhance wildlife habitat on land mass larger than the state of California.
- Enrolled more than eight million acres of private working lands on nearly 120,000 farms into the Conservation Reserve Program.
- Accelerated the protection of critical wetland habitats, enrolling more than 650,000 acres in the Wetlands Reserve Program to improve water quality, restore wildlife habitat and help prevent flood damage.

- Implemented projects to improve air quality for the American people. In California alone, USDA partnered with landowners to install nearly 500 projects that are estimated to reduce emissions equivalent to taking more than 400,000 vehicles off the road.

Restoring and Conserving America's Forests

- USDA has made significant efforts toward restoration of forest landscapes which has also enhanced rural economies in the past three years.
- Proposed a new planning rule for the 193 million acres of USDA-managed National Forests that will help us develop land management plans that protect water and wildlife, combat climate change, fire and pests, and promote vibrant, economically thriving communities.
- Forest Service firefighters have responded to more than 6,450 fires on National Forest System lands, successfully suppressing 98% of them through initial attack within the first 24 hours.
- Reduced the risk of wildfire for over 9,600 communities by removing hazardous fuels like underbrush and other flammable vegetation on more than 9.6 million acres.
- Increasing the pace of restoration and forest management on our National Forests to support jobs in the timber industry while also helping private landowners sustainably manage almost four million acres of private forestland. Decommissioned over 3,000 miles of roads, and restored over 6,000 miles of stream habitat.
- Collaborated with stakeholders to publish a draft rule that protects 4.2 million acres of Colorado's roadless areas critical for ecological resiliency and recreational opportunities. Employed over 6,000 young people to assist in summer student conservations corps programs. This supplements other important seasonal and job corps opportunities for young people with the Forest Service.
- Provided important habitat for more than 500 threatened species.

Promoting Good Health and Economic Vitality Through Outdoor Recreation

- The USDA-managed National Forests and Grasslands provided opportunities for over 170 million visitors each year to recreate, and support local economies. This recreation supports 225,000 full and part-time jobs and contributes almost \$15 billion to local communities each year.
- Over the last two years, USDA has helped support 25 state public access programs which will open an estimated 2.4 million acres for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational opportunities on privately-owned lands.
- USDA has enrolled more than 720,000 acres on private working lands specifically to protect habitats for ducks, pheasants, quails and other birds.
- With the Department of Interior, established a Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation to improve recreational access to federal lands.

New Approaches to Conservation: Regulatory Certainty and Ecosystems Markets

USDA is pursuing a mix of innovative and science based approaches to accelerate private land conservation and measure the results of our work:

- Launched Sage Grouse and Lesser Prairie Chicken Initiatives to proactively work with farmers and ranchers to conserve the habitat of these rare birds while providing assurances to landowners that they can continue to manage their lands even if the birds are added to the endangered species list.
- Ranchers implemented a grazing system on over 1.3 million acres to increase hiding cover for nesting birds; an activity expected to increase sage grouse populations on that land by 8 to 10 percent.
- USDA is preparing new greenhouse gas estimation guidelines for farmers, ranchers, and rural land owners. The tools will assess greenhouse gas reductions and carbon sequestration from conservation, land management activities, and tree planting, and help farmers earn revenue for their work to help the environment. We are supporting large-scale demonstration of new approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote carbon sequestration on private lands.

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