



United States Department of Agriculture

USDA Accomplishments 2009-2012

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 working in partnership with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to deliver results. Work in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, the Mississippi River Basin, and Gulf of Mexico are among 19 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%.

- Over the last four years, USDA has made its largest-ever investment in Florida's northern Everglades to help conserve and restore about 95,000 acres through voluntary conservation easements that improve habitat for wildlife species and maintain working lands.
- We are also bringing a similar landscape-scale approach to the nation's forests across both public and private lands. For example, 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 with conservation groups, forest industry, county commissioners and others to restore ponderosa pine across hundreds of thousands of acres on four national forests.

- Following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, USDA began an initiative to help provide safe habitat 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 wetland habitat for millions of birds.

Encouraging Record Natural Resource Restoration and Conservation on Private Working Lands

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 support – leveraged with historic outside investments – helped support producer incomes and reward them for their good work.

- Provided new opportunities for tens of thousands of farmers, ranchers and landowners to enroll more than 10 million acres of private working lands into the Conservation Reserve Program.
- Enrolled more than 50 million acres into the Conservation Stewardship Program to incentivize the most productive, beneficial conservation practices.
- Accelerated the protection of critical wetlands habitats, enrolling more than 820,000 acres in the Wetlands Reserve Program to improve water quality, reduce soil loss 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 240,000 vehicles off the road.

Caring for Our National Forests

- USDA has made significant efforts toward restoration of forest landscapes to enhance rural economies since 2009.
- USDA adopted and is now implementing 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.
- Created thousands of jobs maintaining and improving more than 170,000 miles of trails and roads on National Forest lands.
- Increased 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 4 million acres of private forestland. Decommissioned nearly 8,000 miles of roads, and restored over 6 thousand miles of stream habitat.
- Reduced the threat of wildfire for tens of thousands of communities by removing flammable vegetation on 13.7 million acres of forest.
- Collaborated with stakeholders to implement a rule that protects 4.2 million acres of Colorado's roadless areas critical for ecological resiliency and recreational opportunities.
- Established the Chimney Rock National Monument in southwestern Colorado.

Promoting Good Health and Economic Vitality Through Outdoor Recreation

- The USDA-managed National Forests and Grasslands provided opportunities for over 165 million visitors each year to recreate, be physically active, and support local economies. These recreational uses support 200,000 full and part time jobs and contribute almost \$13 billion to local communities each year.
- Over the last two years, USDA has helped support more than 25 state public access programs to open an estimated 2.4 million acres for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational opportunities on privately-owned lands. Grants worth almost \$30 million through the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program should help promote a 35% increase in the number of participating landowners and increase outdoor recreation in these states by 21%.

- USDA has enrolled more than one million acres on private working lands specifically to protect habitat for duck, pheasant, quail and other birds through "continuous signup" Conservation Reserve Program initiatives.
- With the Department of Interior, established a Federal Interagency Council on Outdoor Recreation to improve recreational access to federal lands across federal agencies.
- Proposed a special \$5 million set-aside in the Land and Water Conservation Fund to improve hunting and fishing access to federal lands.

Developing Regulatory Certainty and Promoting Ecosystem Services

- Since 2009, USDA has awarded more than 200 conservation innovation grants to support innovation in this field.
- USDA is pursuing a mix of innovative and science-based approaches to accelerate private land conservation and measure the results of our work:
- Launched a Working Lands for Wildlife Initiative to proactively work with farmers and ranchers to conserve the habitat of seven species with declining populations whose ranges are composed primarily of private lands.
- USDA reached a historic agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to provide assurances to landowners that if they implement and maintain certain conservation practices on their lands to protect these species, they can continue to manage their lands even if the species are added to the endangered species list.
- Supported States and other partners in their efforts to establish water quality trading markets. Through three regional initiatives, USDA is demonstrating the potential for farmers and ranchers to receive new revenue streams while delivering cost effective results for industries regulated under the Clean Water Act.
- USDA is preparing new greenhouse gas estimation guidelines for farmers, ranchers, and rural land owners. The tools being developed will assess greenhouse gas reductions and carbon sequestration from conservation, land management activities, and tree planting and are an important step to helping farmers earn revenue for their work to help the environment.
- USDA is supporting large-scale demonstrations of new approaches to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote carbon sequestration on private lands.

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