



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

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News Release

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NRCS to Expand Targeted Conservation Effort for Wildlife on Agricultural Lands

New Project to Provide Opportunities for Producers to Restore, Protect Habitat for Northern Bobwhite

LITTLE ROCK, AR, Dec. 22, 2016 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is adding dozens of new target species, including the northern bobwhite, to its premier wildlife conservation effort that helps agricultural producers make wildlife-friendly improvements on working lands. USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is adding 11 new projects to Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW), the agency’s targeted, science-based effort to help producers restore and protect habitat for declining species on farms, ranches and working forests.

Producers in Arkansas are part of a project that focuses on helping producers enhance early successional habitat to aid in bobwhite quail recovery. The project targets grasslands, where NRCS is working with producers to replace non-native grasses with native grasses, forbs and legumes that benefit bobwhite and other wildlife, while creating alternative healthy grazing options for livestock. Other states included in this project are Virginia, Illinois, Indiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Missouri and Kentucky.

Arkansas producers in 20 counties have until Jan. 30, 2017, to apply for funding consideration to help install conservation practices such as native grass planting, pollinator habitat, forest stand improvement, early successional habitat development and prescribed burning. Approximately \$400,000 is available.

The project area in Arkansas includes Ashley, Baxter, Benton, Carroll, Drew, Faulkner, Fulton, Hempstead, Logan, Marion, Nevada, Newton, Pulaski, Randolph, Searcy, Sebastian, Sharp, St. Francis, Stone and Yell. These counties were selected because they have Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Wildlife Management Areas where quail focused practices are being implemented.

“Agriculture and wildlife both thrive together through landscape conservation,” said Mike Sullivan, NRCS state conservationist in Arkansas. “The northern bobwhite was once a familiar face in rural communities, and we’re working with producers to make bobwhite-friendly improvements on working lands that will help the species and benefit operations.”

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When habitat is restored for the bobwhite, many other species benefit, including turkeys, deer, rabbits, gopher tortoises, bog turtles and many different songbirds, including the Bachmann's sparrow and prairie warbler. NRCS uses the bobwhite and other wildlife as indicators of the health of the ecosystem at-large.

With more than two-thirds of the continental United States under private ownership, wildlife depend heavily on working lands for habitat and food. Projects focus on declining species that have needs compatible with agricultural practices and rural land management and that can benefit from conservation on private lands.

NRCS staff worked with conservation partners to identify new species and landscapes. Considerations included the compatibility of the species and agriculture, the network of available partners and the needs of the species.

Working Lands for Wildlife Conservation Model

So far, WLFW has helped producers restore 6.7 million acres of habitat for seven target species, such as the New England cottontail and greater sage-grouse. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) determined last year that Endangered Species Act protections were not necessary for these species largely because of the voluntary conservation efforts on working lands.

“The future of wildlife, agriculture and rural ways of life depend on our collective ability to transfer our Working Lands for Wildlife model to more species and working landscapes,” Sullivan said.

Through WLFW, NRCS strategically invests where conservation returns are highest and measures how wildlife respond to management activities to refine conservation efforts.

Own or Manage Land? You Can Help.

NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help producers adopt a variety of conservation practices on their land. NRCS staff help producers with a conservation plan and provide funding to cover part of the costs for adopting the practices. These practices are designed to benefit both the species and the agricultural operation.

To learn more about assistance opportunities, landowners should contact their local USDA service center or visit www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov.