



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

NEWS RELEASE

Natural Resources Conservation Service
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USDA Announces \$49 Million Public-Private Investment to Improve Critical Wetlands in 12 States

Indianapolis, IN, July 11, 2016 – Indiana's USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) State Conservationist Jane Hardisty today announced that NRCS is awarding \$44.6 million through its Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) to support 10 wetland enhancement projects on private and tribal agricultural lands in 12 States. In total, the projects will help to protect, restore or enhance 15,000 wetland acres in critical watersheds across the nation, including 500 acres in Indiana.

"Indiana NRCS is committed to protecting and enhancing our state's wetlands, which are critical to the quality of our nation's waters, wildlife and landscapes," said Hardisty. "By collaborating with private partners at the local and regional level, we are able to support innovative conservation solutions and expand the amount of dedicated resources. These are high impact projects that will ensure our land and water resources are healthy now and for the next generation."

Wetland reserve easements enable landowners to successfully reduce impacts from flooding, recharge groundwater, enhance and protect wildlife habitat and provide outdoor recreational and educational opportunities. The voluntary nature of NRCS easement programs allows effective integration of wetland restoration on agricultural land, providing benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program, as well as benefits to the local and rural communities where the wetlands exist.

In Indiana, The Nature Conservancy is building on existing efforts by partnering with NRCS, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Indiana University's Conservation Law Center. This project will address both water quality and at-risk species habitat within the Lower Wabash and Lower White River watersheds by reducing nutrient export from the Wabash River and improving important migratory and wintering bird habitat. The project will restore 400 acres of current cropland in the floodplain to native vegetation and improve habitat on at least 100 acres of wetlands for waterfowl and shorebird habitat.

To learn more about WREP and easements in Indiana, visit:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/programs/easements/>.

For more information about NRCS and other technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or contact your District Conservationist <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.

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