

Program Description

September 2009

Resource Conservation and Development Program

Overview

The Resource Conservation and Development Program (RC&D) is a voluntary program that helps people protect and develop their economic, natural, and social resources. Program objectives address improving the quality of life, including social, economic, and environmental concerns; continuing prudent use of natural resources; and strengthening local citizens' ability to use available sources of assistance through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other Federal agency partnerships. The program is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), in cooperation with other USDA agencies.

Authority

The program began in February 1964 under authority of Section 102 of the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962 (P.L. 87-703) and other Departmental authorities. Sections 1528-1538 of the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 have replaced these authorities. This act authorized a program to encourage and improve the capability of State and local units of government and local nonprofit organizations in rural areas to plan, develop, and implement programs for resource conservation and development. Through the establishment of RC&D areas, led by a council, the program establishes or improves coordination systems in rural communities and builds rural community leadership skills to effectively use Federal, State and local programs for the communities' benefit. The RC&D program was given permanent authority in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Farm Bill).

Scope

The RC&D program is available in all 50 states, the Caribbean (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Basin (Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa). Currently, 375 RC&D areas, designated by the Secretary of Agriculture, serve 2,709 counties across the Nation. The 1990 Food, Agriculture, Conservation and Trade Act limited assistance to not more than 450 active designated areas. Designated areas now serve approximately 85 percent of U.S. counties and 80 percent of the U.S. population. To participate, locally formed RC&D councils submit an application for designation through their NRCS State Conservationist to the Secretary of Agriculture.

How RC&D Works

An RC&D area covers several counties. It is locally defined and directed by a council that implements natural resource protection and wise use, accelerated economic development, and/or improvement of social conditions. The council consists of public and private sector sponsors and other local organizations that represent a diverse cross section of community interests. Sponsors include county and city governments, conservation districts, sub-state planning or economic districts, Tribal governments, and interested private organizations in the area. This grassroots involvement is highly valuable in shaping decision making at the local level. RC&D councils provide a way for people to plan and implement projects that will make their communities better places to live.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.