

NRCS and FWS Reach Historic Agreement to Extend Wildlife Conservation Efforts on Working Agricultural Lands

WASHINGTON, Sept. 17, 2012 –Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Dave White and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Director Dan Ashe today announced an agreement that will provide long-term regulatory predictability for up to 30 years to farmers, ranchers and forest landowners participating in NRCS’s Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Initiative. Participants voluntarily implement proven conservation practices designed to protect wildlife habitat, including several at risk species and vulnerable game species on private lands.

“This agreement will change the way we manage at-risk species on private lands,” White said. “It will provide landowners with a mechanism to keep working lands in production while complying with the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and will facilitate restoration of habitat for at-risk species. It also will help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners rest a little easier knowing their operations are protected for the long term and that they are contributing to conserving vital natural resources.”

The agreement builds on a \$33 million investment NRCS announced last spring dedicated toward producers who develop and implement conservation plans to manage and restore high-priority habitats for seven specific wildlife species across the country. The species are greater sage-grouse, New England cottontail, bog turtle, golden-winged warbler, gopher tortoise, lesser prairie-chicken and the Southwestern willow flycatcher. NRCS, FWS and numerous state and local entities are partnering to implement WLFW.

“This important partnership underscores the outstanding conservation stewardship provided by America’s farmers and ranchers across the country,” Ashe said. “It is a clear example of the compatibility of working landscapes and species conservation. We are pleased to be able to support this creative partnership that provides predictability to landowners who volunteer to implement conservation practices that benefit wildlife.”

With today’s agreement, farmers, ranchers and forest landowners who implement and voluntarily agree to maintain the proven conservation practices in WLFW will have addressed the related ESA regulatory responsibilities for up to 30 years. These landowners will be able to operate their farms and ranches as agreed upon, providing economic benefits and species conservation simultaneously.

Under the WLFW partnership, federal, state and wildlife experts jointly identified at-risk or listed species that would benefit from targeted habitat restoration investments on private lands. Using the best available science, these wildlife experts prioritized restoration actions on a large regional scale to focus assistance most cost effectively. The federal government will grant farmers, ranchers and forest landowners regulatory predictability in return for voluntarily making wildlife habitat improvements on their private agricultural and forest lands. Participating producers must adhere to the requirements of each conservation practice during the term of their contract, which can last from one to 15 years. If landowners would like to receive regulatory predictability for up to 30 years, they must maintain the conservation practices as outlined in the NRCS and FWS agreement.

For more information about Working Lands for Wildlife, please visit <http://go.usa.gov/rsUj>.

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