

# NRCS **NEWS RELEASE**

United States Department of Agriculture • Natural Resources Conservation Service  
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## **USDA to Fund New Projects to Reduce Flooding, Enhance Wildlife Habitat** *Improved migratory bird habitat will benefit waterfowl*

WASHINGTON, April 6, 2012 – U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Dave White today announced that \$7 million in financial assistance will be available to help eligible landowners and operators in three states voluntarily enhance wildlife habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife. The selected states—Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota—will begin to accept applications on April 20, 2012.

The newly funded Water Bank Program (WBP) provides landowners and operators with an alternative use for their flooded or frequently flooded lands, such as quality wildlife habitat for priority migratory bird species,” White said. “When landowners and operators choose to conserve wetlands on private lands in this region, they are protecting more than 300 species of migratory birds that rely on the prairie pothole region for breeding, nesting and resting.”

WBP will focus on flood reduction this fiscal year. Severe flooding of agricultural land has been a problem in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, parts of which lie in the prairie pothole region. Eligible land for this year’s WBP included flooded agricultural land, flooded hay, pasture or rangeland, and flooded private forestland.

The intent of WBP is to keep water on the land for the benefit of migratory wildlife such as waterfowl. Landowners and operators can sign new 10-year rental agreements to protect wetlands and provide wildlife habitat. Landowners receive annual payments for conserving and protecting wetlands and adjacent lands from adverse land uses and activities, such as drainage, that would destroy the wetland characteristics of those lands.

WBP funding will not cover the cost of conservation practices to enhance wetlands and contracts will not be renewed after the original contract expires. If conservation practices are required to improve migratory bird habitat, eligible landowners and operators can apply to other NRCS financial assistance programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or available state conservation programs.

For more information about NRCS activities in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, please visit [www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov); [www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nd.nrcs.usda.gov); [www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.sd.nrcs.usda.gov).

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USDA works with state and local governments and private landowners to conserve and protect our nation's natural resources—helping preserve our land and clean our air and water. In 2010, President Obama launched the America's Great Outdoors initiative to foster a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to conservation that is designed by and accomplished in partnership with the American people. During the past two years, USDA's conservation agencies—NRCS, FSA and the U.S. Forest Service—have delivered technical assistance and implemented restoration practices on public and private lands. At the same time, USDA is working to better target conservation investments to embrace locally driven conservation and entering partnerships that focus on large, landscape-scale conservation. In 2011, USDA 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.

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