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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **NRCS announces National Water Quality Initiative in Massachusetts**

*Farmers located in the Palmer River watershed in southeastern Mass. should apply by June 15.*

AMHERST, Mass., May 10, 2012 — State Conservationist Christine Clarke announced the launch of a new National Water Quality Initiative committed to improving the Palmer River, an impaired waterway in southeastern Massachusetts, one of 157 targeted watersheds nationwide. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will manage the initiative by making funds available to farmers and forest landowners in the selected watersheds.

"The Water Quality Initiative will further NRCS' partnership efforts to improve water quality using voluntary actions on private lands," Christine Clarke, NRCS Massachusetts State Conservationist said. "This initiative is a focused approach in areas facing significant natural resource challenges. It bolsters the positive results of landscape conservation initiatives NRCS and its partners already have underway."

Through this effort, eligible producers in the Palmer River subwatershed will invest in voluntary conservation actions to help provide cleaner water for their neighbors and communities. The selected watersheds were identified with help from state agencies, partners, and the NRCS State Technical Committee.

Using funds from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, NRCS will provide funding and advise to producers to install conservation practices such as nutrient management, animal waste systems and riparian buffers to address agricultural sources of nitrogen and bacteria runoff that contribute to the water quality concerns identified in the Draft Watershed Based Plan for Barrington-Palmer-Warren Rivers Watershed.

Farmers would like to see if they are located in the Palmer River subwatershed, may contact the NRCS West Wareham field office at 508-295-5151, x2. NRCS accepts applications for financial assistance on a continuous basis throughout the year, but applications for funding consideration during this fiscal year must be received by **June 15, 2012**.

General program information is available on the NRCS Massachusetts website at [www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov).

"American farmers are good stewards of the environment, especially when they have the tools they need to protect or improve fish and wildlife habitat and water quality," said NRCS Chief Dave White. "We look forward to collaborating with producers in key watersheds to help them have a positive impact on streams with impaired water quality."

The Palmer River flows through the towns of Rehoboth and Swansea in southeastern Massachusetts, then into eastern Rhode Island. The Environmental Protection Agency includes the river on its list of impaired waters for nutrients and bacteria. The Palmer River subwatershed, which is within the Narragansett Bay watershed, is approximately 33,193 acres or 51 square miles in area, 96 percent of which is in Massachusetts.

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Land in the subwatershed is 62 percent forested. Developed land accounts for 19 percent of the total land area and impervious surfaces such as rooftops, roads and parking lots, cover eight percent. About 10 percent of the watershed is agricultural land.

The type of land use in a watershed has a direct effect on water quality. Pollutants, such as nutrients and bacteria from leaking septic systems, oil from automobiles, and sediment from construction, run off impervious surfaces, negatively affecting nearby water bodies. Agricultural materials, such as fertilizer and manure, can also contribute pollutants.

The Palmer River supports one of the few small stream American shad fisheries in the Commonwealth, as well as an increasingly important river herring fishery, and rainbow smelt and white perch populations. Water piped from the Shad Factory Pond Dam into the Kickemuit Reservoir supplies drinking water for the residents of Barrington, Bristol, and Warren, RI.

Since 1935, NRCS's nationwide conservation delivery system works with private landowners to put conservation on the ground based on specific, local conservation needs, while accommodating state and national interests.

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