



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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FEDERAL CONSERVATION AGENCY CONDUCTING STATEWIDE SIGN-UP FOR THE WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM

ATHENS, GA, November 8, 2010—James E. Tillman, Sr., State Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Georgia today announced that the NRCS has opened the application period for applications for financial assistance through the USDA Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The application period to receive consideration for 2011 WRP funds runs until December 10, 2010.

“Farmers and landowners interested in protecting, restoring or enhancing wetland habitat should contact their local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service”, said Tillman.

Applications received in NRCS offices will be evaluated and ranked according to levels of environmental benefits pending available funds. Although NRCS offers a continuous application period for WRP, applications must be received by December 3, 2010 for FY 2011 funding. Applications received after December 3, 2010 will be deferred to the next funding cycle.

"WRP is an important conservation program because it protects and restores wetland habitat that was lost due to intensive farming and urbanization. Georgia has enjoyed tremendous success during our previous enrollment periods by assisting landowners in installing wetland conservation practices. In 2010, we provided over \$5,000,000 in funds to farmers that allowed us to secure conservation easements on over 3,394 wetland acres in Georgia," Tillman said. Since 1999, NRCS Georgia has enrolled over 21,000 acres into WRP.

Participants in WRP voluntarily limit future use of the land, but retain private ownership. Landowners benefit by receiving financial and technical assistance in return for protecting wetlands, reducing problems associated with farming potentially wet and difficult areas, and developing wildlife and recreational opportunities on their land.

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Wetlands benefit the Nation by providing fish and wildlife habitat; improving water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals; reducing flooding; recharging groundwater; protecting biological diversity; as well as providing opportunities for educational, scientific, and recreational activities.

The program offers three enrollment options:

1. Permanent Easements: a conservation easement in perpetuity. USDA pays 100 percent of the easement value and 100 percent of the restoration costs.
2. 30-Year Easement: an easement that expires after 30 years. USDA pays up to 75 percent of the easement value and up to 75 percent of the restoration costs.
**For both permanent and 30-year easements, USDA pays all costs associated with recording the easement.*
3. Restoration Cost-Share Agreement: an agreement to restore or enhance the wetland functions and values without placing an easement on the enrolled acres. USDA pays up to 75 percent of the restoration costs.

No easement shall be created on land that has changed ownership during the preceding 7 years. Eligible acres are limited to private and Tribal lands.

“NRCS and its partners continue to provide assistance to landowners after completion of restoration activities,” said Tillman. “This assistance may be in the form of reviewing restoration measures, clarifying technical and administrative aspects of the easement and project management needs, and providing basic biological and engineering advice on how to achieve optimum results for wetland dependent species,” he added.

NRCS is USDA’s lead conservation agency and has worked hand-in-hand with farmers and landowners for 75 years to conserve natural resources on private lands. Georgia landowners can learn more about conserving natural resources by contacting NRCS Georgia through USDA Service Centers or by visiting the NRCS Georgia homepage at www.ga.nrcs.usda.gov.