

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
FY 2010
RHODE ISLAND
COOPERATIVE CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE (CPPI)**

Overview of the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

Background

The CCPI is a voluntary conservation initiative that establishes specific parameters for working with eligible partners to provide financial and technical assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands. The assistance provided enables participants to install and maintain conservation practices, including the development and adoption of innovative conservation practices and management approaches.

CCPI uses the funds, policies, and processes of EQIP and WHIP to deliver flexible conservation assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest land. Under CCPI, NRCS enters into partnership agreements with eligible entities that want to enhance conservation outcomes on agricultural and nonindustrial private forest land. The intent of CCPI is for the Federal government to leverage investment in natural resources conservation and enhancement from non-Federal sources and to coordinate Federal efforts with other Federal, State, tribal, and local efforts. The purposes of a CCPI partnership agreement are to: (1) Address conservation priorities involving agriculture and nonindustrial private forest land on a local, State, multi-State, or regional level; (2) to encourage producers to cooperate in meeting applicable Federal, State, and local regulatory requirements related to production; (3) to encourage producers to cooperate in the installation and maintenance of conservation practices that affect multiple agricultural or nonindustrial private forest land; and (4) to promote the development and demonstration of innovative conservation practices and delivery methods, including those for specialty crop and organic production and precision agriculture producers.

Partners who may enter into partnership agreements with NRCS include federally recognized Indian Tribes, State and local units of government, producer associations, farmer cooperatives, institutions of higher education, and non-governmental organizations with a history of working cooperatively with producers to effectively address conservation priorities related to agricultural production and nonindustrial private forest land. Potential partners may submit proposals that request assistance for a specified project area which may be defined by geo-political boundaries, watershed boundaries, or resource concern. The proposal must describe the area to be covered by the project, conservation priorities in the area, conservation objectives to be achieved, the number of producers, including nonindustrial private forest landowners, which are likely to participate; a description of the partner, or partners, collaborating to achieve the objectives of the agreement, and the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of the partners; a description of the resources that are requested from the Rhode Island State Conservationist and the contributions of the partners; a description of the plan for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on progress made towards achieving the objectives of the agreement; and other information that may be required by the Secretary.

Once a partnership proposal is selected, eligible individuals wishing to participate in the project must apply directly to Rhode Island NRCS for funding. Individual applications will be evaluated to ensure that applications selected for funding are most aligned with the project objective. All Federal funds made available through this CCPI request for proposals (RFP) will be provided directly to eligible participants through EQIP contracts and WHIP cost-share agreements. Producers interested in applying must meet the eligibility requirements of the program for which they are applying.

In FY 2010, the aim of Rhode Island CCPI is to deliver EQIP and WHIP assistance to achieve high-priority conservation objectives in geographic areas defined by the partner(s). Examples of high-priority conservation objectives include but are not limited to:

Forest Conservation and Management
New England Cottontail Conservation and Management
Fish Habitat Conservation and Management
Transition to Organic Agriculture and Enhancing Organic Production
Invasive Species
Energy Conservation

Submitting Proposals

Prospective partners submit complete proposals to the Rhode Island State Conservationist. All proposals must be submitted to the State by January 15, 2010. Please send all proposals to:

Poohkham Vongkhamdy
State Conservationist, Rhode Island
60 Quaker Lane, Suite 46
Warwick, Rhode Island 02886

The State Conservationist will review and evaluate the proposals based on the criteria set forth in this notice. Incomplete proposals will not be considered and will be returned to the submitting entity. Positive consideration will be given to proposals that provide for outreach to beginning, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers or ranchers within the area covered by the project. Positive consideration will also be given to proposals that both achieve program purposes and further the Nation's efforts with renewable energy production, energy conservation, mitigating the effects of climate change, facilitating climate change adaptation, or fostering carbon sequestration. An example of this type of activity may be planting trees along riparian corridors, which not only enhances wildlife habitat and controls erosion, but also sequesters carbon. Once a proposal is selected, NRCS will enter into contracts or costshare agreements, depending on the applicable program, with eligible participants to install and perform conservation practices and/or enhancements to meet objectives described in the project proposal.

Producers interested in participating in CCPI may apply for designated CCPI funds at their local United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) service center. The designated conservationist will determine the applicable program (EQIP and WHIP) requirements depending on the practices and/or activities which the applicant seeks to install or perform. For example, a State Conservationist will enter into an EQIP contract with an applicant who seeks to apply an agricultural waste management facility, while an applicant who wishes to apply a conservation practice that enhances habitat for at-risk or declining species enters into a WHIP cost-share agreement.

Producers seeking to participate in a CCPI project must meet all program specific eligibility requirements. The requirements that apply to the contract or cost-share agreement are determined by the program selected, as adjusted by any approved flexibility. For information on the limitations and benefits, including appropriate payment limitations which apply to land and participants enrolled in EQIP and WHIP, please consult the appropriate programs' statutory authority and regulations: Environmental Quality Incentives Program (U.S.C. 3836a, 7 CFR 1466) and Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (16 U.S.C. 3839bb-1, 7 CFR 636). You may also visit the NRCS Web site at www.nrcs.usda.gov for additional information by selecting the "Programs" tab.

Partner and Land Eligibility

Entities eligible to participate as partners include federally recognized Indian Tribes, State and local units of government, producer associations, farmer cooperatives, institutions of higher education, or nongovernmental organizations with a history of working cooperatively with producers to effectively address conservation priorities related to agricultural production and nonindustrial private forest land. The following land is eligible for enrollment in the CCPI:

- Private agricultural and nonindustrial private forest land,
- Land meeting the covered programs (EQIP and WHIP) eligibility rules.

Eligible land is defined for each program in regulation:

- EQIP: 7 CFR 1466.8(c)
- WHIP: 7 CFR 636.4

Proposal Criteria

To be eligible for selection, prospective partners must submit a complete proposal to the Chief or the appropriate State Conservationist. The proposal must contain the information set forth below in order to receive consideration:

- (a) A description of the partner(s) history of working with producers to address the conservation objectives to be achieved;
- (b) A description of the geographic area covered by the proposal, conservation priorities in the area, conservation objectives to be achieved, and the expected level of participation by producers;
- (c) A description of the partner(s) collaborating to achieve the objectives of the agreement and the roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of the partner(s);
- (d) A description of the project duration, not to exceed 5 years in length, and schedule that details when the potential partner anticipates finishing the project and submitting a final report;
- (e) A description of the resources that are requested from the Secretary, and the non-Federal resources that will be leveraged by the Federal contribution;
- (f) A description of the plan for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on progress made towards achieving the objectives of the agreement;

- (g) A list of the criteria to be used to prioritize individual producer applications to ensure that applications most aligned with the proposal's objectives receive priority;
- (h) An estimate of the percentage of producers, including nonindustrial private forest landowners, in the project area that are likely to participate in the project;
- (i) A description of the conservation practices and activities to be applied on the landscape within the project timeframe;
- (j) An estimate of the financial assistance program funds and acres needed to implement the conservation practices and activities within the project area
- (k) A description of any requested program adjustments, by program, with explanation of why the adjustment is needed in order to achieve the objectives of the project. If a partner is requesting specific program flexibilities that depend on detailed participant or project information, the proposal must provide the needed information. Partners should contact their NRCS State office to determine the specific information required;
- (l) A description of how the partner will provide for outreach to beginning, limited resource, and small and disadvantaged farmers and ranchers and Indian Tribes; and
- (m) A description of how the proposal's objectives further the Nation's efforts with renewable energy production, energy conservation, mitigating the effects of climate change, facilitating climate change adaptation, or fostering carbon sequestration, if applicable.

Ranking Considerations

Once the State Conservationist has assessed the merits of each proposal, the State Conservationist will rank the proposals via a competitive process. The Chief or State Conservationist shall give a higher priority to proposals that:

- Have a high percentage of producers actively farming or managing working agricultural or nonindustrial private forest lands included in the area covered by the agreement;
- Complete the application of the conservation practices and/or activities on all of the covered program contracts or cost-share agreements in 5 years or less;
- Assist the participants in meeting local, State, and/or Federal regulatory requirements;
- Significantly leverage non-Federal financial and technical resources and coordinate with other local, State, or Federal efforts;
- Provide for matching technical assistance funds to assist participants with the implementation of their EQIP contracts and WHIP cost-share agreements;
- Deliver high percentages of applied conservation to address water quality, water conservation, or State, regional, or national conservation initiatives;

- Provide innovation in conservation methods and delivery, including outcome-based performance measures and methods;
- Further the Nation's efforts with renewable energy production, energy conservation, mitigating the effects of climate change, facilitating climate change adaptation, or fostering carbon sequestration; or
- Provide for outreach to, and participation of, beginning farmers or ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers or ranchers, limited resource farmers or ranchers, and Indian Tribes within the area covered by the agreement.

Partnership Agreements

NRCS will enter a partnership agreement with a selected partner as the mechanism for participation in CCPI. The partnership agreement will not obligate funds, but will address among other things:

- The role of the partner;
- The role of NRCS;
- The responsibilities of the partner as it relates to the monitoring and evaluation;
- The format and frequency of reports (semi-annual, annual, and final) that are required as a condition of the agreement;
- The frequency and duration of the monitoring and evaluation that will take place within the project area;
- Plan of Work and Budget to identify other funding sources (if applicable) for financial and/or technical assistance;
- The specified project timeframe; and
- Other requirements deemed necessary by NRCS to further the purposes of the CCPI project. Once a proposal is selected and a partnership agreement is signed, and subject to the availability of funding, NRCS begins entering into EQIP contracts and/or WHIP cost-share agreements directly with producers that include nonindustrial private forest landowners who are participating in the project. The program used will depend upon the type of practices or activities anticipated to be applied. Participants may have multiple contracts through CCPI if more than one covered program is needed to accomplish the project objectives.