



Florida NRCS

STAC Meeting - January 10, 2024

Amber Till, Assistant State Conservationist for Financial Assistance Programs

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Conservation
Service

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FY 2023 FA Program Contract-Obligation Summary

TOTAL CONTRACTS

1,031

TREATED ACRES

336,809

TOTAL OBLIGATIONS

\$44.6M

 20.5% PAID

\$9.1M PAID

CONTRACT STATUS

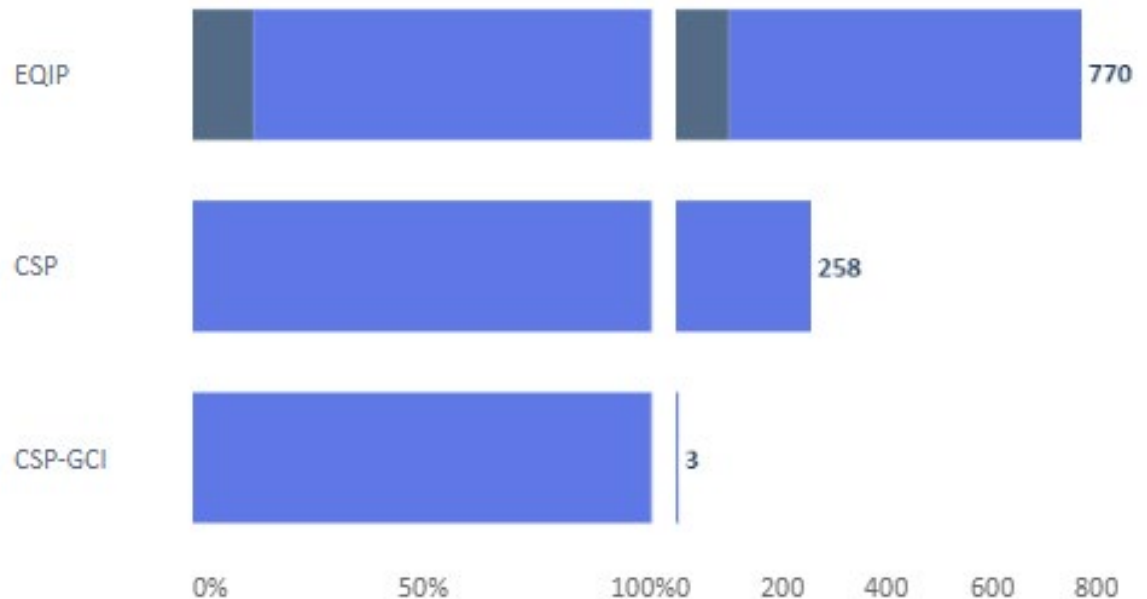
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Active	928	\$40,500,840
Completed	103	\$4,088,070

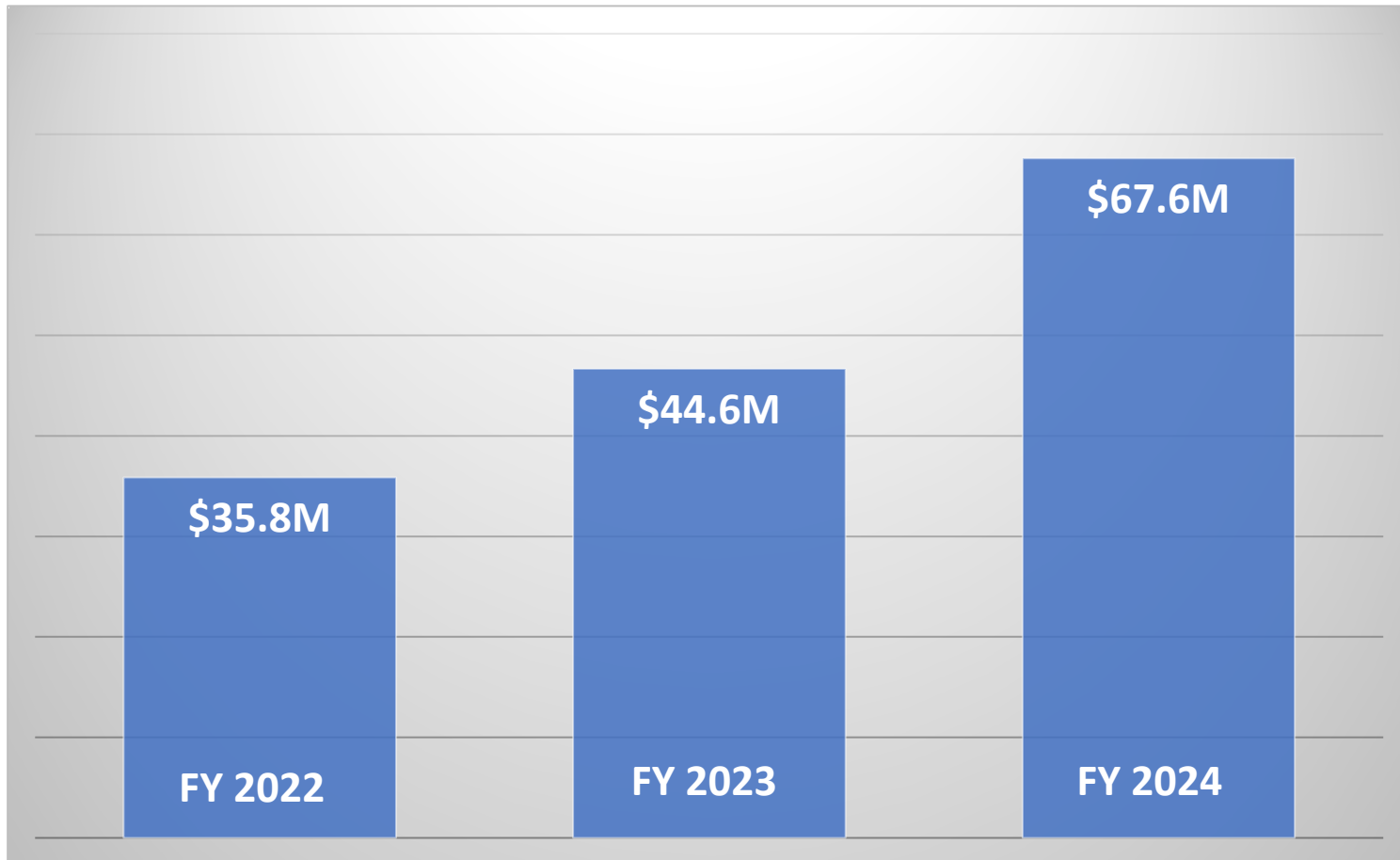
PROGRAM BREAKOUT | Select Type:

Contract Count by Status ▼

Click on a row to filter by program fiscal year, click a bar to also filter by status



Financial Assistance (FA) Programs 3-Year Trend



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FY 2023 CSP Summary

TOTAL CONTRACTS

261

TREATED ACRES

122,796

TOTAL OBLIGATIONS

\$11.8M

7.0% PAID

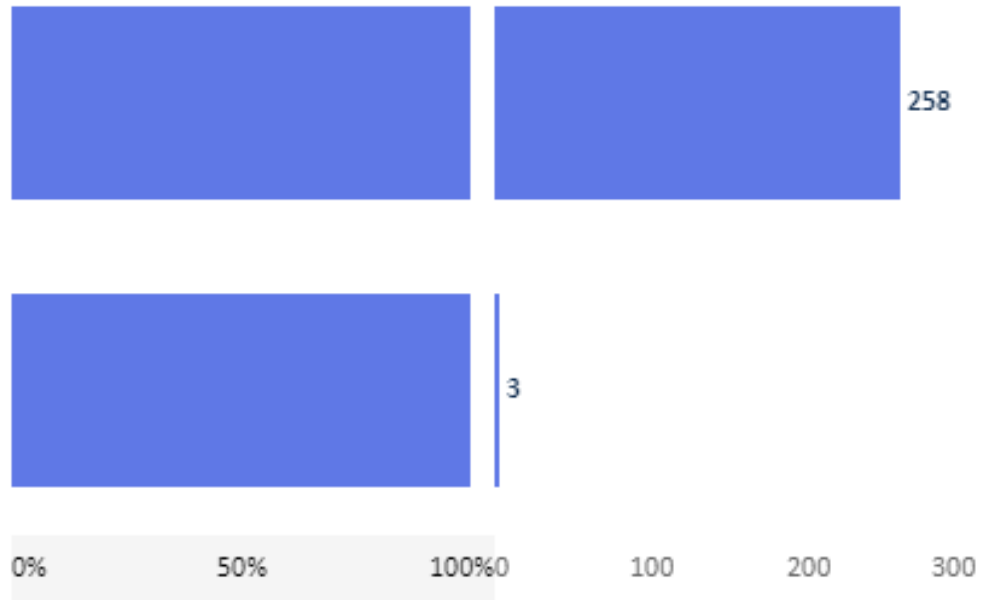
\$0.8M PAID

PROGRAM BREAKOUT | Select Type:

Contract Count by Status

Click on a row to filter by program fiscal year, click a bar to also filter by status

CSP



FY 2023 CSP HU Summary

HU CONTRACTS*

113

43.0% of 263 total

HU OBLIGATIONS

\$4.0M

33.3% of \$12.0M total

HU PAYMENTS

\$0.3M

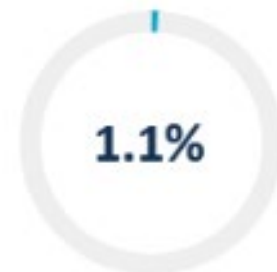
34.0% of \$0.8M total

HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED FUNDING BY TYPE

Beginning Farmers
\$3.23M on 88 Contracts



Veterans
\$126.9K on 7 Contracts



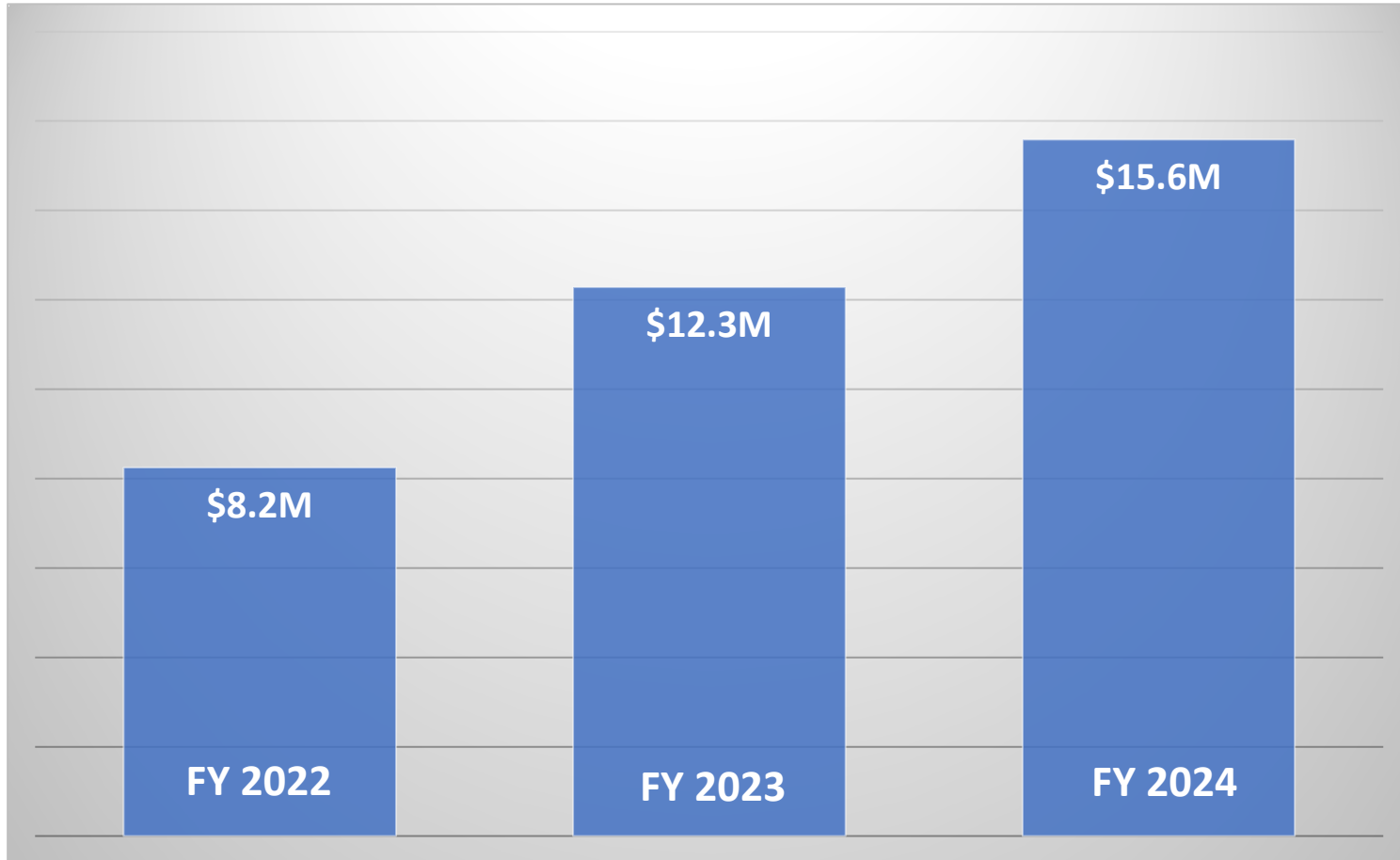
Socially Disadvantaged
\$1.28M on 41 contracts



Limited Resource Producers
\$395.1K on 8 Contracts



CSP 3-Year Trend



CSP Updates

- **Minimum Annual Payment for CSP increased to \$4,000 and is applicable to all Renewal and Classic CSP contracts obligated in FY 2024**
- **Historically Underserved Annual Payments rates for an Applicant that self-certifies on the NRCS-CPA-1200 as a historically underserved producer available starting in FY 2024**
- **Additional Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Activities (CSAF) made available for CSP funding through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)**

CSP Renewals

- **FY 2025 Signup Deadline – May 3, 2024**
- **FY 2024 Final Obligations - \$872,808**
 - CSP Renewals (Farm Bill) - \$724,569
 - CSP Renewals (IRA) - \$148,239

CSP Classic

- **FY 2024 Signup Deadline – November 17, 2023**
- **FY 2024 CSP Initial Allocation – \$7.8 Million**
 - CSP Classic (Farm Bill) - \$724,569
 - CSP Classic (IRA) - \$148,239

FY 2023 EQIP Summary

TOTAL CONTRACTS

770

TREATED ACRES

214,013

TOTAL OBLIGATIONS

\$32.8M

25.4% PAID

\$8.3M PAID

CONTRACT STATUS

Click to filter page by status

Active	667 \$28,692,364
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Completed	103 \$4,088,070
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FY 2023 EQIP HU Summary

HU CONTRACTS*

391

50.5% of 775 total

HU OBLIGATIONS

\$13.0M

39.8% of \$32.8M total

HU PAYMENTS

\$3.0M

36.6% of \$8.3M total

HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED FUNDING BY TYPE

Beginning Farmers
\$9.28M on 295 Contracts



Veterans
\$657.3K on 34 Contracts



Socially Disadvantaged
\$5.22M on 140 contracts



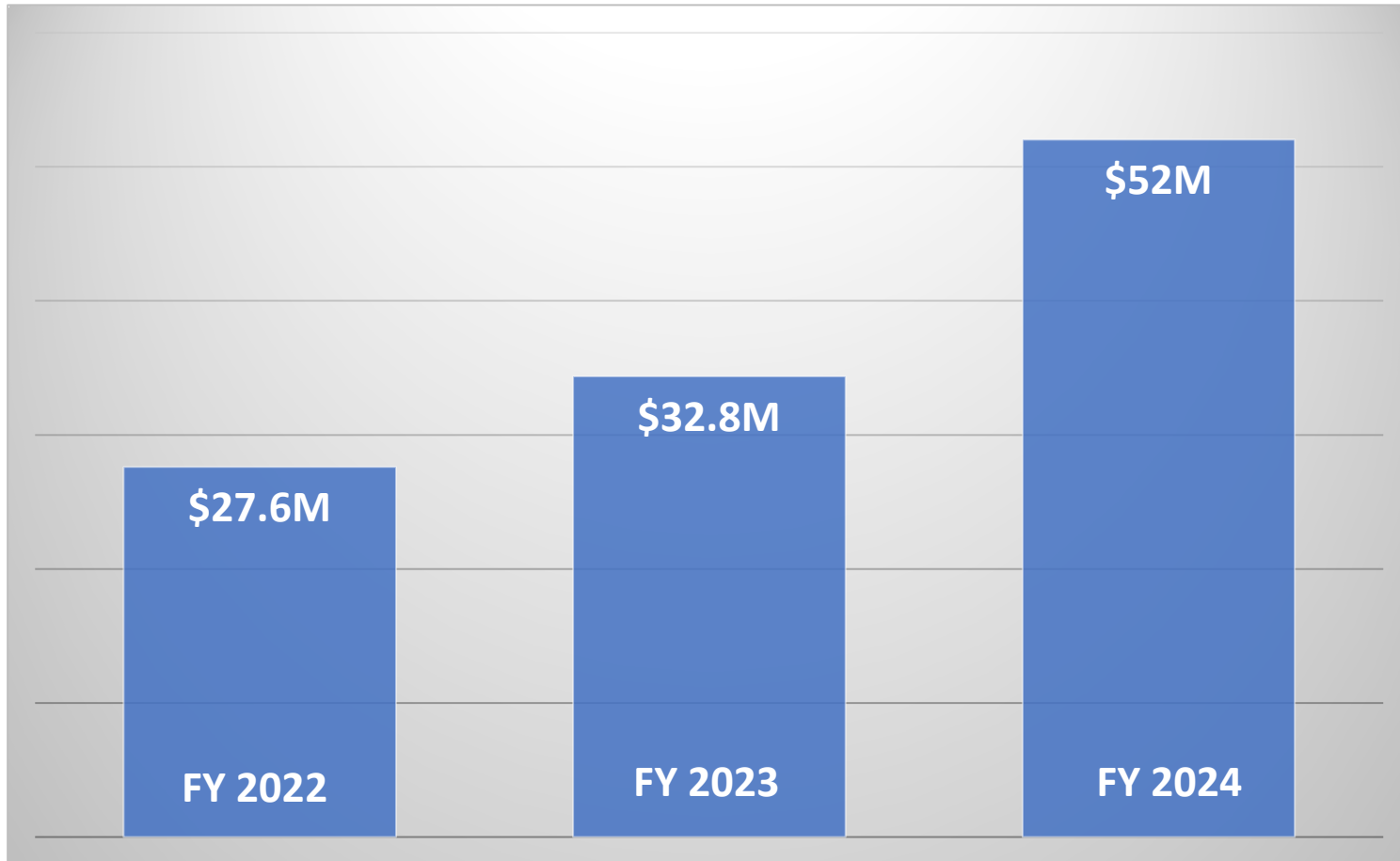
Limited Resource Producers
\$1,124.2K on 34 Contracts



Hurricane Ian EQIP Disaster Recovery

Contracts:	199
Obligations:	\$11,049,928.67
Payments:	\$6,501,598.38
Contract Acres:	111,582.5

EQIP 3-Year Trend



EQIP Classic-Initiatives

- **FY 2024 Signup Deadline – November 17, 2023**
- **EQIP Classic (Farm Bill) – \$18.4 Million**
- **EQIP Classic (IRA) – \$29.1 Million**
- **EQIP Initiatives (Farm Bill) - \$4.5 Million**

FY 2024 EQIP Classic (Farm Bill) Allocations

Funding Category	FY24 Allocations
General EQIP - Field Offices	\$ 7,425,000
General EQIP - Livestock	\$ 2,075,000
General EQIP - Wildlife	\$ 500,000
General EQIP - Water Conservation	\$ 500,000
General EQIP - Conservation Planning Activities	\$ 100,000
General EQIP - High Tunnel System	\$ 2,000,000
General EQIP - Disaster Recovery	\$ 2,500,000
General EQIP - HU	\$ 1,350,000
General EQIP - Tribal	\$ 300,000
General EQIP - Urban	\$ 500,000
General EQIP - Organic	\$ 5,000
General EQIP - State CIG	\$ 1,000,000
General EQIP - Reserve	\$ 134,660

FY 2024 EQIP Classic (IRA) Allocation

Funding Category	FY24 Allocations
IRA EQIP - General	\$ 14,600,000
IRA EQIP - CIC	\$ 2,000,000
IRA EQIP - ACT NOW	\$ 10,000,000
IRA EQIP - Disaster Recovery	\$ 2,500,000

FY 2024 EQIP Initiatives (Farm Bill) Allocation

Funding Category	FY24 Allocations
Long Leaf Pine Initiative	\$ 1,697,433
WLFW Gopher Tortoise	\$ 1,941,422
WLFW Northern Bobwhite	\$ 879,085

EQIP Updates

- **Utilizing the ACT NOW process to immediately approve a ranked application when the application meets or exceeds threshold/minimum ranking score.**
 - This means an applicant no longer has to wait for all applications to be reviewed and preapproved in a ranking pool.
 - Targeted funding for Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry (CSAF) mitigation conservation practice 314, 315, 340, 372, 484, 612, and 666 using the ACT NOW process
- **Early funding selections for the following ranking pools: Hurricane Idalia Disaster Relief, High Tunnel Systems, Conservation Planning Activities, and ACT NOW IRA.**
- **Additional Climate-Smart Agriculture and Forestry Activities (CSAF) made available for CSP funding through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)**

FY 2024 FA Allocation Summary

Financial Assistance	Allocations
CSP Renewals (Farm Bill)	\$ 724,569
CSP Renewals (IRA)	\$ 148,239
CSP Classic (Farm Bill)	\$ 7,869,192
CSP Classic (IRA)	\$ 5,844,000
CSP Long Leaf Pine Initiative	\$ 1,000,000
Total CSP	\$ 15,586,000
EQIP Classic (Farm Bill)	\$ 17,389,660
EQIP Classic (IRA)	\$ 29,100,000
EQIP Initiatives	\$ 4,517,940
EQIP CIG	\$ 1,000,000
Total EQIP	\$ 52,007,600
Total Initial Allocation	\$ 67,593,600

Ranking Changes

In fiscal year 2024, changes were made to the ranking process in response to partner feedback to:

- 1. Utilize ranking questions based on resource concern categories identified by local working groups**
- 2. Increase the weight of local resource concerns ranking questions**



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Questions?





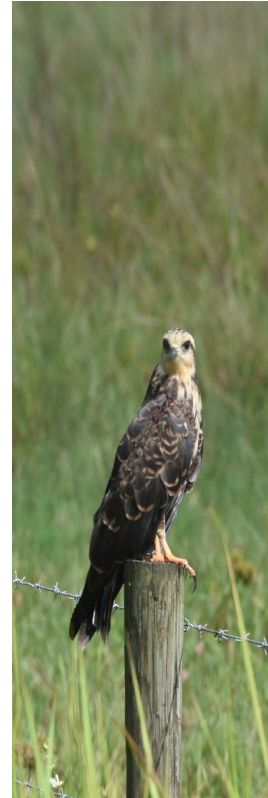
Marcus Shorter, ASTC- Easements

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FY2024 Applications

- **Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) 8**
- **Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) 12**



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Budget

- **Current FA Remaining: \$8,301,457.90**
- **Current TA Remaining: \$2,669,750.40**
- **Additional Stewardship Funds Requested (January) : \$3.08 Million**
- **Upcoming Request For Additional ALE Funds (April) : \$24 Million**



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Staffing Updates

Positions To Be Announced:

- **Realty Specialist**
- **Biologist**
- **Rangeland Management Specialist**
- **Secretary of Easements**
- **ALE Program Specialist**

Preliminary Compensation Package

**We will continue to request funding at
80% of the appraisal value.**



Ranking Updates

**Please cast your vote to keep 2024
ranking procedures and use of prior
year's applications in an effort to fund
projects quickly!**

Questions?



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Local Working Groups



Hilary Barnhart, ASTC Partnerships & Initiatives

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What is a Local Working Group?

- Local Working Groups are composed of agricultural producers, owners/operators of nonindustrial private forest land, professionals representing agricultural and natural resource interests, and individuals representing a variety of disciplines in the soil, water, wetland, plant, forestry, and wildlife sciences who are familiar with agricultural and natural resource issues in the local community.

Why?

-
- In accordance with 7 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Part 610, Subpart C, local working groups are subcommittees of the State Technical Committee and provide recommendations to USDA on local and state natural resource priorities and criteria for conservation activities and programs.



Who should be a Participant?

- Staff & Supervisors of your Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)-Mandatory
- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist-Mandatory
- Suggested participants to include but not limited to:
 - State Natural Resources Agencies
 - Federal Natural Resources Agencies
 - FDACS/OAWP
 - Florida Forest Service
 - Local Cattleman's Association Members
 - UF/IFAS Extension County Agents
 - Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
 - Local Landowners/Farmers/Ranchers/Producers
 - Professionals representing agricultural and natural resource interests

Changes for FY 2025

- Meetings must be held prior to May 24, 2025. Districts will work with their District Conservationist to schedule the meeting.
- All Local Workgroup Meeting information will be posted publicly on the Florida NRCS Website 30 days prior to meeting to meet policy requirements.
- Meetings will be held in person; District Conservationists will offer a Microsoft Teams meeting virtual option (call in number is available).
- **1 Response per NRCS Field Office**



Priority Resource Concerns

NRCS CONSERVATION PROGRAMS FY25 RESOURCE CONCERNS FLORIDA - LOCAL RANKING
County:

SWAPA +E Category	NRCS - Resource Concern	Score
1 Soil	1. Sheet and rill erosion	
	2. Wind erosion	
	3. Ephemeral gully erosion	
	4. Classic gully erosion	
	5. Bank erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyance channels	
	6. Subsidence	
	7. Compaction	
	8. Organic matter depletion	
	9. Concentration of salts or other chemicals	
	10. Soil organism habitat loss or degradation	
	11. Aggregate instability	
2 Water	12. Ponding and flooding	
	13. Seasonal high water table	
	14. Seeps	
	15. Drifted snow	
	16. Surface water depletion	
	17. Groundwater depletion	
	18. Naturally available moisture use	
	19. Inefficient irrigation water use	
	20. Nutrients transported to surface water	
	21. Nutrients transported to groundwater	
	22. Pesticides transported to surface water	
	23. Pesticides transported to groundwater	
	24. Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to surface water	
	25. Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids, or compost applications transported to groundwater	
	26. Salts transported to surface water	
	27. Salts transported to groundwater	
	28. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to surface water	
	29. Petroleum, heavy metals, and other pollutants transported to groundwater	
	30. Sediment transported to surface water	
	31. Elevated water temperature	
3 Air	32. Emissions of particulate matter (PM) and PM precursors	
	33. Emissions of greenhouse gasses (GHGs)	
	34. Emissions of ozone precursors	
	35. Objectionable odors	
	36. Emissions of airborne reactive nitrogen	
4 Plants	37. Plant productivity and health	
	38. Plant structure and composition	
	39. Plant pest pressure	
	40. Wildfire hazard from biomass accumulation	
5 Animals	41. Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates	
	42. Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms	
	43. Feed and forage imbalance	
	44. Inadequate livestock shelter	
	45. Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality and distribution	
6 Energy	46. Energy efficiency of equipment and facilities	
	47. Energy efficiency of farming/ranching practices and field operations	

- The LWG will decide the top 10 priority resource concerns in the LWG area (NRCS Field Office Service Area).
- These will be submitted by the District Conservationist via Microsoft Forms.
- Results will be posted to the State Website.

Questions



Hilary Barnhart, ASTC Partnerships
Hilary.Barnhart@usda.gov

[Florida | Natural Resources Conservation
Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

Next STAC Meeting: June 12, 2024

**NRCS
FLORIDA**



**ANNUAL
REPORT
FY 2023**



FLORIDA CONSERVATION ACCOMPLISHMENTS
Helping People Help the Land

**NRCS
FLORIDA**



MISSION:

We deliver conservation solutions so agricultural producers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world.

VISION:

A world of clean and abundant water, healthy soils, resilient landscapes, and thriving agricultural communities through voluntary conservation.



Contents

1	Farm Bill	14	Engineering
3	Easements	15	EWP
5	RCCP	17	Emergency Assistance
9	CIG	19	Soil
11	Partnerships	21	PMC
13	Ecological Sciences	23	Outreach

Florida has experienced great challenges the past few years with hard-hitting hurricanes. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has seen historic increases in funding levels and demand for our conservation services. We have increased hiring efforts to meet these needs, and we continue to strive for excellence in customer service to our farmers and ranchers. It is humbling to see the resilience of our producers, employees and partners who have such dedication to our mission and vision.

It makes me proud to see the work we do in the field and the strong implementation of conservation measures. We are grateful for partners and contract employees that help our producers apply conservation practices that improve their economic bottom line.

Thank you to each and every one of our Florida staff and partners who has gone above and beyond to connect with our farmers and ranchers, helping their operations be more successful through conservation solutions. This annual report showcases our work across all programs and state initiatives. We are thankful for the opportunity to continue to serve and work with each of you.



Juan C. Hernandez
State Conservationist

“Out of the long list of nature’s gifts to man, none is perhaps so utterly essential to human life as soil.”

Hugh Hammond Bennett

*Soil Conservation (1939).
New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc.*



Much of the work completed through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service on private lands is done with financial assistance through the Farm Bill. The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), the various initiatives, plus the easement programs are all funded through the Farm Bill. Additional funds received for EQIP in FY 2023 were through Emergency Recovery Funds and through Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funds.

Florida had an overall increase in conservation program contracts signed, acres enrolled and dollars obligated in FY 2023 as compared to FY2022 in the tables below.

Florida NRCS, serves diverse agricultural needs through four area offices, 34 field offices, and a Plant Materials Center. We provide voluntary, cost-effective program and technical assistance to landowners to conserve, protect and improve soil, water, air, plants and animals. In doing so, we enable farmers and landowners to better steward and manage their property and remain economically viable.

FY 2022 PROGRAMS	CSP Classic	CSP-GCI	EQIP Classic	RCPP
CONTRACTS SIGNED	134	4	571	21
ACRES ENROLLED	130,348	70	172,939	4740
\$ OBLIGATED	\$8,257,394	\$6,358	\$27,697,079	\$550,327

FARM BILL PROGRAMS



FY 2023 PROGRAMS	CSP Classic	CSP-GCI	CSP IRA	EQIP Classic	EQIP EMERGENCY (HURRICANE IAN)	RCPP	EQIP IRA
CONTRACTS SIGNED	181	3	63	617	199	30	105
ACRES ENROLLED	84,202	258	33,824	188,870	111,582	8,416	14,973
\$ OBLIGATED	\$8,668,090	\$23,263	\$2,943,768	\$28,879,402	\$11,098,416	\$907,185	\$3,102,466

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NRCS conservation easements protect 288,131 acres in Florida. Natural Resources Conservation Service easements provide habitat for wetland dependent species, including threatened and endangered species, and improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals. They also reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity and provide opportunities for educational, scientific and recreational activities.



EASEMENTS

Florida NRCS manages 175 easements.

In FY 2023, total restoration, repair, and stewardship of Florida easements completed was **28,899 acres**. The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) closed on six new Florida easements in FY 2023 adding nearly 1,690 acres. The table to the right reflects the number of Florida easement acres by NRCS program.

Total conservation easement acres include Other Stewardship Lands enrolled in easements as a result of additional factors that are not listed here. View more online at: <https://www.farmers.gov/data/easements-overview>

EASEMENTS & ACRES CLOSED

PROGRAM	NUMBER	ACRES
ACEP-ALE	24	19,853
ACEP-WRE	36	22,806
RCPP-ALE	4	4,734
RCPP-HFRP	3	18,270
RCPP-WRE	1	1,482
WRP	107	220,986
TOTAL	175	288,131

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REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

FARM BILL	PROJECTS	NRCS AWARD
2014	12	\$44,713,000
2018	6	\$71,702,343

REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

FLORIDA RCPP PROJECTS

Through Partnerships, Florida NRCS coordinates the delivery of assistance where it can have the most impact. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural land. RCPP demonstrates the power of public-private partnerships in delivering results for agriculture and conservation.

In Florida, two new RCPP projects were awarded in FY 2023: Lake to Lagoon, located in East Central Florida, and Corridor to Coast, which covers nine Florida counties extending to the East Coast.

Lead Partner: North Florida Land Trust

- **Corridor to Coast:** Covering portions of nine counties in central to Florida and extending to the East Coast, the project focuses on improving wildlife habitat and water quality on forestland, pastureland, and adjacent natural areas through the acquisition of conservation easements and implementation of conservation practices.
- **Ocala to Osceola Wildlife Corridor:** Seeks to link conservation and protect working timberlands, high quality river and streams, and promote a style of forestry that is better for wildlife and increases regional water supplies.

Lead Partner: Alachua Conservation Trust

- **Forest to Gulf:** Addresses degraded plant conditions, terrestrial and aquatic habitat, weather resilient landscapes, and protection of water resources, including groundwater that supplies the majority of Florida's fresh water.
- **Lake to Lagoon:** Addresses resource concerns related to climate resiliency, long-term protection, degraded plant condition, terrestrial habitat, and fire management. Located in a nearly 1.2 million-acre, low-lying region of East Central Florida.
- **Surface To Springs:** Covers approximately 25% of Florida's springs and targets a critical geography threatened by high producer land conversion. Two major impacts for Florida's springs and ground water: 1) catalyze existing partner groundwork to set a regional precedent for protecting rural producer lands in this sensitive area with entity held conservation easements; and 2) reduce nutrient inputs and water use through management activities on producer lands.

Lead Partner: Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy

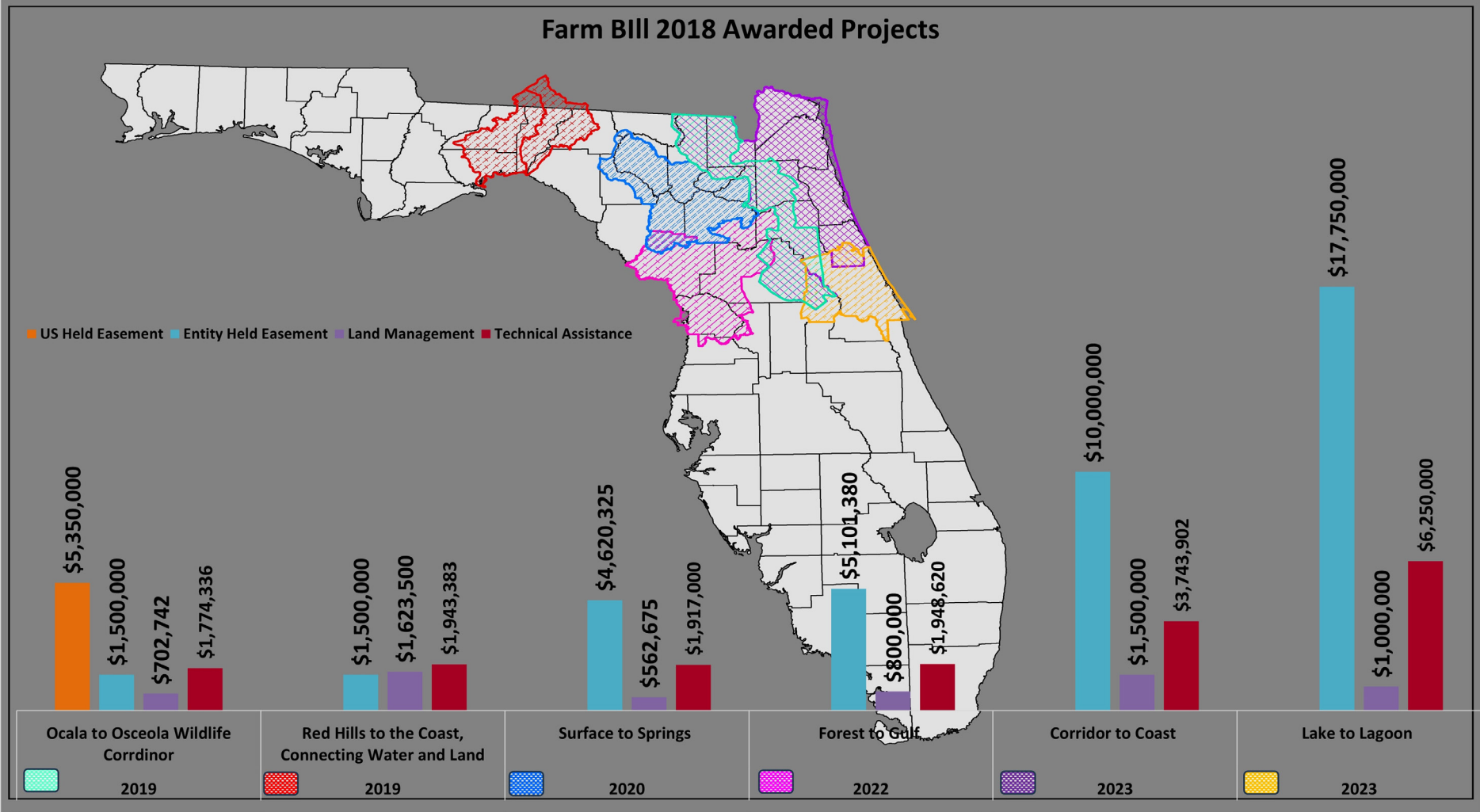
- **Red Hills to the Coast, Connecting Land and Water:** The vision for St. Marks River and Aucilla River watersheds is a pair of adjoining watersheds that will contain conserved, well-managed natural habitats that allow for an increase in listed species populations, improved water quality for residents, and economic benefits to surrounding communities.

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REGIONAL CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Farm Bill 2018 Awarded Projects



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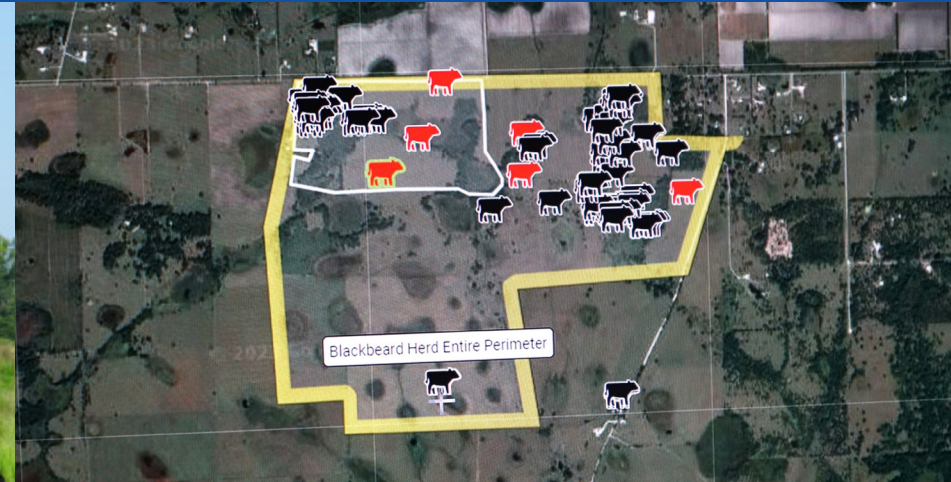
Florida NRCS has 11 Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) projects totaling \$1,979,618.

CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies into NRCS standards and practices. Florida NRCS offers CIG state program funding opportunities to stimulate the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies in conjunction with agricultural production.



Archbold Expeditions, Inc.

CONSERVATION INNOVATION GRANTS



Blackbeard Ranch, NRCS Florida.

In FY 2023, Florida awarded four new CIG projects totaling \$784,214.

Archbold Expeditions, Inc: \$241,036 – To develop innovative unmanned aerial vehicle technology (commonly known as drone) to better identify and quantify brush and improve data collection and management of Florida's grazing lands.

Florida State University: \$250,000 – Evaluate the efficiency of rain gardens as a selected conservation practice to mitigate microplastic pollution in urban farms, and provide guidance on proposing effective plans to prevent and lessen this pollution using green infrastructure.

Blackbeard's Ranch: \$43,000 – To show virtual fence is a helpful tool that works towards long-term, agro-ecosystem goals on grazing and ranchlands.

IMG Citrus Inc: \$249,991 – An implementation and on-farm research and demonstration project that integrates rhizome perennial peanut cover crop in citrus groves as a soil best management practice.



The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing funding through Agreements for partnerships that improve outreach to underserved producers and communities to expand access to conservation assistance.

In FY 2023, a total of \$6,669,938 was funded for new agreements and amendments to include:

- Outreach Agreements - \$274,742.44
- Technical Assistance (TA) Agreements - \$6,395,196
TA includes both providing to NRCS and hiring technical assistance support positions to provide TA for NRCS.
- There are eight National Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative agreements that include work in Florida.

Top Partners with contribution agreements:

- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- The Trust for Tomorrow



Florida NRCS has 24 Active Agreements totaling \$35,161,846.

PARTNERSHIPS





NRCS offers numerous practices for landowners to solve conservation related problems and to adopt new conservation activities on their operations. Through various conservation programs, NRCS provides agricultural producers with financial resources and one-on-one help to plan and implement improvements, or what NRCS calls conservation practices. Using these practices leads to cleaner water and air, healthier soil and better wildlife habitat, all while improving agricultural operations.



**Florida's Top 5
conservation practices
for EQIP in FY 2023, by
order of most used:**

Ecological Sciences

1. Fencing
2. Herbaceous Weed Treatment
3. Prescribed Burning
4. Firebreak
5. Brush Management

Top Engineering Accomplishments

- Completion of the \$2 million Brock Gully Stabilization (RESTORE) project through a federal construction contract, which included working with the design consultant to verify work was completed according to the plans and specifications. NRCS also coordinated with the Grants and Agreements Division and Santa Rosa County to develop a reimbursable agreement with the county to provide funding assistance on the construction of this project.
- Coordinated with national headquarters on a variance and developed guidance to allow for above ground/shallow burial of dead animal carcasses under conservation practice standard Emergency Animal Mortality Management, Code 368, to address the large number of dairy cows lost as a result of Hurricane Ian. This was needed because the site conditions did not allow for traditional burial methods at these locations due to a high water table. NRCS also investigated other methods of disposal for this large number of dead cows.

Florida's Top 5
conservation practices
for EQIP in FY 2023, by
order of most used:

Engineering

1. Watering Facility
2. Livestock Pipeline
3. Heavy Use Area Protection
4. Pumping Plant
5. Water Well

NRCS engineers assist conservation planners, working side-by-side with landowners, to plan, design and implement conservation practices and systems.



The Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program responds to emergencies created by natural disasters. This NRCS emergency recovery program is designed to help people and conserve natural resources by relieving imminent hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, windstorms, and other natural occurrences.

All EWP projects undertaken, with the exception of the purchase of floodplain easements, must be sponsored by a legal subdivision of the State, such as a city, county, general improvement district, conservation district, or any Native American tribe or tribal organization as defined in Section 4 of the Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act.

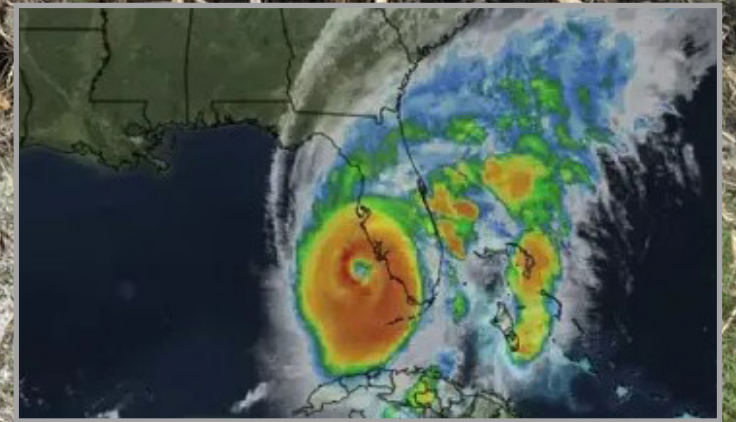
EWP work can include: removing debris from stream channels, road culverts, and bridges; reshaping and protecting eroded banks; correcting damaged drainage facilities; repairing levees and structures; reseeding damaged areas; and purchasing floodplain easements to restore or enhance the functions of wetlands and riparian areas; conserve natural values including fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention, ground water recharge, and open space; and safeguard lives and property from floods, drought, and the products of erosion.

The background image shows a stone-lined channel, likely a stream or drainage ditch, with a concrete structure and a wire fence. The channel is filled with reddish-brown soil, and the stone lining is partially eroded. The concrete structure is a low wall, and the wire fence is made of wooden posts and wire. The background is a lush green forest.

Emergency Watershed Protection

NRCS funded **19 EWP projects** during FY 2023 in Florida, with 18 sponsors, totaling **\$87,949,740** for debris removal and channel bank stabilization in **12 counties** as a result of Hurricane Ian.

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Hurricane Ian made landfall early Wednesday afternoon on September 28, 2022, near the Charlotte Harbor area in southwest Florida as a Category 4 storm – nearly a Category 5, with winds of 155 mph. Most of the southwest coast of Florida experienced life-threatening risk from catastrophic storm surges, wind and flooding. The storm moved slowly over the peninsula and lingered over central Florida into the early morning hours of Thursday, September 29, 2022, dumping heavy rains with wind gusts up to 50mph. Hurricane winds extended out 45 miles from the center as it made landfall. The northeast area of the state, near St. John's River, was also impacted heavily as the storm continued its northeast trajectory across the state.

Requests for NRCS Assistance: NRCS received 178 requests for disaster assistance through its state Disaster Hotline and email (through December 13, 2022). Florida NRCS utilized the ACT Now threshold funding process which allows NRCS to approve and obligate a ranked application when it meets or exceeds a threshold ranking score without waiting until a designated batching date. Contracts were obligated as soon as possible with a target date of March 30, 2023.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

Emergency Assistance: NRCS received 424 applications and over 433 site visits were conducted for EQIP Hurricane Ian emergency assistance, with 199 contracts funded for over \$11 million.

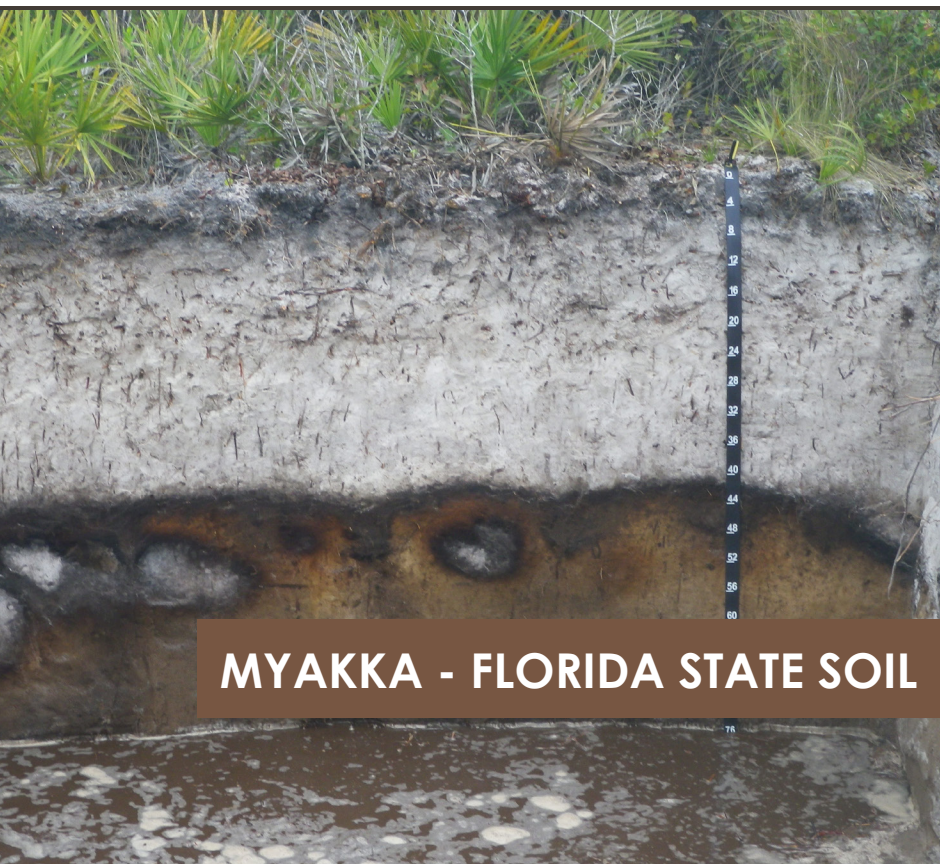
Emergency Watershed Protection: NRCS funded 19 EWP projects in Florida, with 18 different sponsors, totaling \$87,949,740 for debris removal and channel bank stabilization in 12 counties as a result of Hurricane Ian.





NRCS delivers science based soil information to help farmers, ranchers, foresters, and other land managers effectively manage, conserve and appraise their most valuable investment – the soil. Florida field staff perform excellent work, collecting valuable data to assess soil change at several study sites, and demonstration plots across the state. This data helps us to better evaluate resource concerns while providing critical information to update our technical guidance and standards.





MYAKKA - FLORIDA STATE SOIL

Technical Soil Services and Wetland Compliance Natural Resource Inventory (NRI)

- In FY 2023, the Florida NRI program processed 520 segments for Local Data (cropping history) and 40 segments for the Grazing Lands Onsite Data Collection statistical studies.

Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) Requests

- 123 sites evaluated

National Food Security Act – Wetland Compliance

- Completed 66 wetland requests
- National template updates for the State Offsite Methods
- One Mitigation Plan agreement
- Three Good Faith Waivers

Soil Survey

- Big Cypress National Preserve 708,597 acres completed and available on WSS
- 10 new soil series (available in WSS FY24)
- Gadsden County Update (in progress)
- Kandic Soils Study Projects (in progress)

Ecological Sites Descriptions

- 126 ESDs are being edited in various stages of development for eventual publication

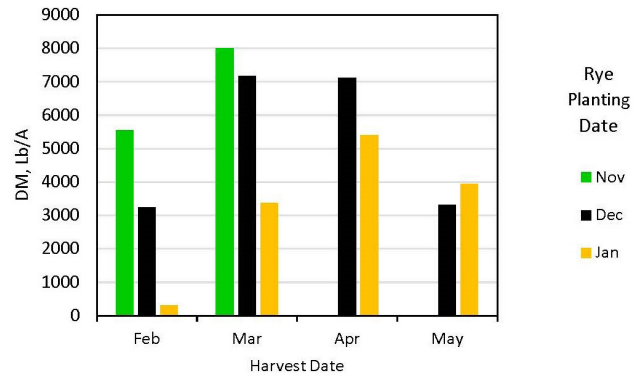
Technical Soil Services / Collaborations

- Longleaf Pine project
- Florida Department of Transportation (FPPA pre-evaluations)
- University of Florida Dynamic Soil Property Projects (initial stage)
- Technical Soil Services: DOH mediations, Envirothons, Land Judgings, and Web Soil Survey Data public calls

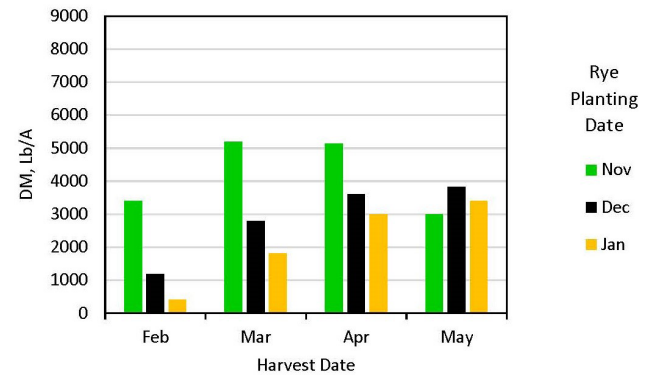


Rye Cover Crop

Date of Planting 3-Year Average FL 401-PMC
FL401



Date of Planting 3-Year Average Wrens Abruzzi
Wrens Abruzzi



NEW COVER CROP STUDY

Planting Date Effect on Biomass Production of Cereal Rye Managed as a Cover Crop

The current planting window for cereal rye, one of the best cover crop species available, runs from October through December, and is based on its use as either forage or grain. NRCS field office staff were concerned that many cotton and peanut producers in the panhandle could not participate in some Farm Bill programs because these commodity crops often are still being harvested in late-December.

To see if a later planting date could be used when grown specifically as a cover crop, early season FL 401 and mid-season Wrens Abruzzi cereal rye cultivars were evaluated in a three-year study at the NRCS Brooksville Plant Materials Center. Both were planted in November, December and January and harvested in February, March, April, and May of each year. Although the average biomass yield for both cultivars was higher with earlier planting dates (see graphs on previous page), on average, the January planted Wrens Abruzzi produced 3,000 lb/acre and FL 401 produced 5000 lb/acre of biomass by April. In the Florida panhandle, the planting season for cotton and peanuts begins in April. This means that either cultivar can be planted as late as mid-January and still meet the requirements of most Cover Crop (CPS 340) purposes.

Current Cover Crop (CPS 340) planting specifications for Florida NRCS are being updated to reflect this new information.





OUTREACH



QUARTER	EVENTS	PARTICIPANTS
1 & 2	30	4,175
3	27	3,886
4	23	2,720
TOTAL	80	10,781

Florida NRCS participated in approximately 80 outreach events across the state in FY 2023. About 10,781 participants were reached through active engagement during producer meetings, agricultural tradeshow events, field days, and other partner, local, state, and community outreach events designed to inform farmers, ranchers and the public about NRCS conservation programs, disaster assistance, and employment opportunities.

Scan the QR Code to visit NRCS Florida online:



NRCS State Office - Florida

Juan C. Hernandez, State Conservationist

4500 NW 27th Ave, Bldg. A, Gainesville, FL 32606

State Office/Main: 352.338.9500

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/conservation-by-state/florida>

YouTube: @NRCSFlorida ■ TWITTER / X: @NRCS_FL

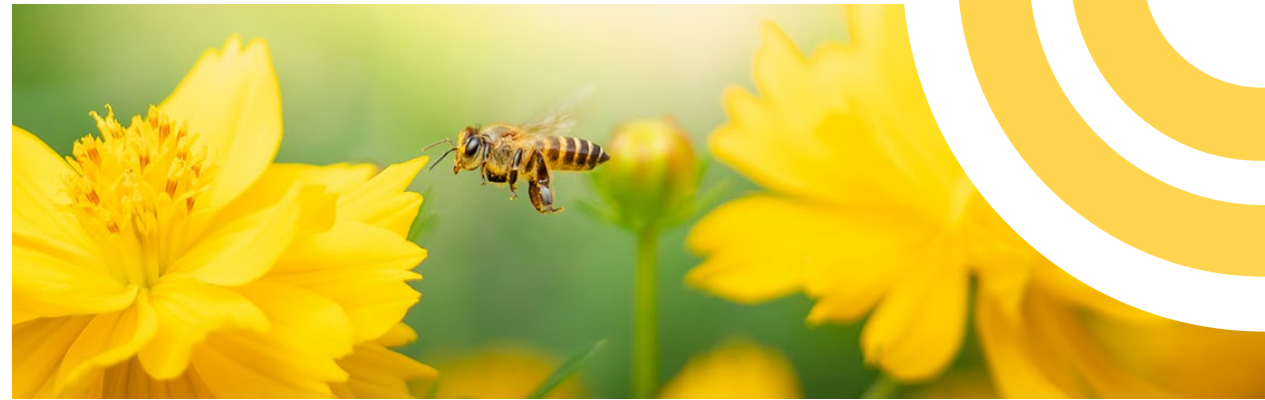


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December 2023



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



State Technical Committee Meeting

NRCS RCPP Coordinator: Denise Liggett

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

What is the RCPP?

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) was created within the 2014 Farm Bill and leverages partnerships to multiply investments to reach common conservation goals. It became a stand-alone program in the 2018 Farm Bill.

RCPP is a partner-driven approach to conservation that funds solutions to natural resource challenges on agricultural land.

How Does RCPP Work?

How

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NFO) published, to solicit proposals. Selected lead partners are offered an opportunity to enter into negotiated partnership agreements (PPA). PPAs used to document each projects' eligible activities, and targeted conservation benefits.

Duration

RCPP project agreements are **typically five years**. Partner led activity (all contributions, TA and most if not all FA) must be completed during this project term (e.g. easements closed!).

How Does RCPP Work?

What

Carry out eligible activities to further the conservation, protection, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife, agricultural land, and related natural resources on Farm Bill eligible land.

Where

On Farm Bill **eligible land**, which is private or tribal agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or associated land where NRCS planning processes indicate an **eligible activity** would help achieve negotiated **conservation benefits** for an approved project.

Eligible Partners

Eligible partnering organizations include:

- An agricultural or silvicultural producer association or other group of producers;
- A state or unit of local government;
- An Indian Tribe;
- A farmer cooperative;
- A water district, irrigation district, rural water district or association or other organization with specific water delivery authority to producers on agricultural land;
- A municipal water or wastewater treatment entity;
- An institution of higher education;
- An organization or entity with an established history of working cooperatively with producers on agricultural land, as determined by NRCS, to address –
 - Local conservation priorities related to agricultural production, wildlife habitat development, or nonindustrial private forest land management, or
 - Critical watershed-scale soil erosion, water quality, sediment reduction, or other natural resource issues

Why Apply for RCPP Funding?

Target

NRCS funding on conservation benefits / resource concerns in a specific project area

Support

Broader private-lands conservation efforts with Farm Bill funding

Amplify

Impact of NRCS funding with partner contributions



RCPP Project Types

RCPP Classic

- NRCS enters into financial assistance (FA) awards directly with Farm Bill eligible producers and entities to benefit eligible lands.
- NRCS can utilize RCPP authorities to "hire" eligible partners to facilitate NRCS delivery of FA, or support partner delivery of pledged contributions.

RCPP Renewals*

- Streamlined application process available for "renewal" of successful RCPP projects
- Projects selected for renewal have opportunity to enter into a new project agreements under current FB rules (i.e. not typically a continuation, rather a new agreement)

RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA)

- NRCS enters into PPA with eligible lead partner.
- **Lead partner implements to NRCS requirements.**
- PPA and/or SA document NRCS technical requirements and partner delivery mechanisms.

RCPP Eligible Activities

Eligible Activity	Associated Covered Programs
Land Management	EQIP/CSP ACEP-WRE & HFRP (<i>restoration component</i>) PL-566 Land Treatment Activities
Rental	CRP
US-Held Easement	ACEP-WRE & HFRP (<i>easement acquisition component</i>) * <i>Classic Only</i>
Entity-Held Easement	ACEP-ALE (<i>easement acquisition component</i>)
Public Works & Watersheds	PL-566

RCPP Funding Sources

2018 Farm Bill

- \$300 M per fiscal year (FY)

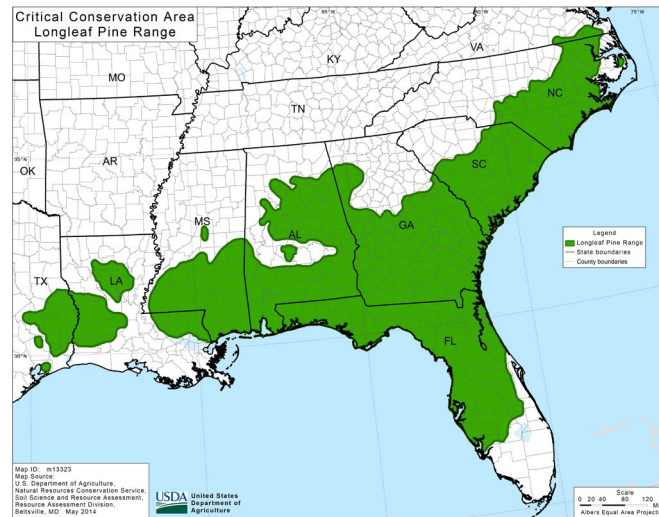
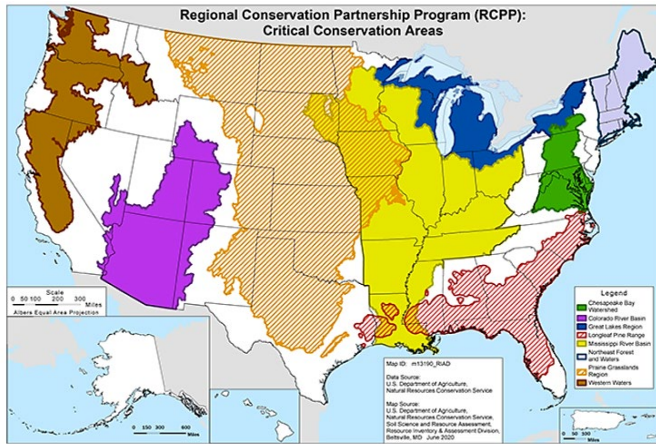
Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

Authorized an additional:

- FY 23 \$250M
- FY 24 \$800M
- FY 25 \$1.5B
- FY 26 \$2.4B

To be expended by September 2031

Funding Pools



STATE / Multistate

Generally, used for projects in a single state – couple of states.

CRITICAL CONSERVATION AREAS

For projects in geographic areas chosen by the Secretary of Agriculture.

RCPP Project Funding

Project Funding is divided into two categories:

Financial Assistance (FA): Funds paid to an eligible program participant to support implementation of a conservation practice or activities.

Technical Assistance (TA): Technical expertise, information, training, education, and tools necessary for the conservation of natural resources on land active in agricultural, forestry, or related uses.

Applicants may request NRCS funding up to 25% of TA Activities. The remainder of the proposed budget will be used for FA to implement eligible conservation activities.

Good Fit for Entities with:

- Similar conservation-focused mission, “Helping People, Help the Land”
- Qualified staff in place
- Existing relationship with farmers/landowners
- Viable source of non-federal share of the easement acquisition cost
- Viable Contribution Method to provide due diligence cost

Early Coordination is Key

Meet with **NRCS State Conservationist, State RCPP Coordinator** and **State RCPP Easement Specialist** early and often.

Key discussion topics:

- Goals/Conservation Values
- Scale
- Funding
- Outcomes
- Project Readiness
- Timeline
- Capacity
- Technical Skills

**Notice of Funding
Opportunity to be
posted in January 2024.**

Early Coordination is Key

- ✓ Defining the scope of the project.
- ✓ Determining what conservation benefits can NRCS anticipate from this Project.
- ✓ What activity types is planned to accomplish the objectives (e.g., land management, easements)?
- ✓ Where is the work planned (have a map available)?
- ✓ Know how much funding is needed.

Early Coordination is Key

- ✓ What top five practices/enhancements are needed in the project area or is there a focused conservation interest?
- ✓ How much funding you are requesting?
- ✓ What skillsets would you be able to provide (e.g., outreach, planners, realty specialist, etc.)
- ✓ What is your project timeline?
- ✓ How do you plan to monitor or evaluate results?

Additional Information

Visit the NRCS RCPP Website for additional information and resources.

How to Apply to RCPP

- Recordings of 2023 RCPP applicant webinar and easement webinar
- RCPP Partner Proposal Guide
- Resources for submitting a Proposal
- Several documents and templates
 - Partner Proposal Guide; Project Outcomes Guide; Proposal Template; Sample Letter of Commitment

What can a partner do now?

- Obtain Level 2 eAuthentication Permissions
 - This process can be lengthy
 - Partners responsibility
 - Find instructions in the [RCPP Partner Proposal Guide](#)
- Request access to the RCPP Portal.
 - Takes a few business days
- Register for a [System for Award Management](#) (SAM) Account
 - Takes a few weeks to obtain
- Schedule a meeting with RCPP Coordinator; denise.liggett@usda.gov



Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) - Easements



RCPP Easement Specialist: Michael Ruiz

FARM PRODUCTION AND CONSERVATION
FSA | NRCS | RMA | Business Center

RCPP Easement Opportunities

Entity-held Easements

Purchased and held
by an **Eligible Entity**.

- **RCPP Classic**
- **RCPP AFA**

US-held Easements

Purchased and held
by the **United States**,
by and through **NRCS**.

- **RCPP Classic**
Only Opportunity

Entity Eligibility

- Eligibility mirrors ACEP-ALE entity eligibility types
 - State or local government
 - NGO organized for one or more conservation purposes specified in Section 170(h)(4)(A) of the Internal Revenue Code.
- Entity Requirements
 - **Authority** to purchase conservation easement
 - **Established land protection program** that purchases conservation easements that protect the types of natural resource(s) in the PPA
 - **Demonstrated commitment** to the long-term conservation of the types of land
 - **Capability and staff capacity** to acquire, manage, monitor, and enforce easements

Lead Partner Input into RCPP Easements

- Geographical Area
- Resource concerns, conservation benefits
- Conservation values and easement purpose
- Land uses
- Ranking and Prioritization Factors
- Application Bundling



Key Differences between ACEP-ALE and RCPP Entity-Held Easements

- Conservation Values and Resource Concerns
- Land Eligibility
- Minimum Deed Terms and Deed Reviews
- Federal Share for easements that do not include a US Right of Enforcement
- Valuation timing and estimates
- Ranking preselected parcels

2018 RCPP Easement Deed Terms

Highly Restrictive

- Restoration/ Protection of native habitats in natural/ historic condition
- Minimal disturbance, no agricultural use.

Moderately Restrictive

- Management of specific habitats to provide conservation benefits
- Conservation activities to manage/maintain conservation values.

Minimally Restrictive

- Protection of agricultural uses, including grazing uses.
- Rights related to agricultural use remains.

Deed Requirements – Entity-held

Must attach or incorporate one of the RCPP minimum deed terms to eligible entity's conservation easement deed.



RCPP Minimum Deed Terms for Protection of Conservation Values
(Highly Restrictive)



RCPP Minimum Deed Term for Conservation Use with Compatible
Agricultural Use (Moderately Restrictive)



RCPP Minimum Deed Terms for Agricultural Use
(Minimally Restrictive)

- ▶ **Two versions of the terms are available**, one with and without terms related to a right-of-enforcement by the United States.
- ▶ **Partner may propose to use an easement template approved under ACEP-ALE** with appropriate adjustments made for RCPP authorities, funding, and project purposes.

Deed Requirements – US-held

Must use one of the RCPP easement deeds:

1 RCPP Warranty Easement Deed for Protection of Conservation Values
(Highly Restrictive)

2 RCPP Warranty Easement Deed for Conservation Uses
(Moderately Restrictive)

3 RCPP Warranty Easement Deed for Working Lands
(Minimally Restrictive)

A partner may request in their proposal that NRCS use a US-held easement deed available under another NRCS easement program:

- Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
- Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP)
- Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements (EWPP-FPE)
- Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)

NRCS will incorporate RCPP authorities into the selected program deed

Valuation, Federal Share, Contribution

- Easement Value
 - Before/After appraisals obtained by the eligible entity following NRCS appraisal specifications

Federal Share = NRCS maximum contribution

- 50% of easement value – with US Right of Enforcement
- 25% of easement value – without US Right of Enforcement
- Where easement will directly facilitate purchase of lands by historically underserved landowners, Federal Share may be:
 - Up to 75% for easements with US Right of Enforcement
 - Up to 50% for easements without US Right of Enforcement

Non-Federal Share = Remainder of Easement Value

- May be comprised of:
 1. Eligible Entity case for easement payment to landowner
 2. Landowner donation or qualified contribution that reduces easement purchase price

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities	Responsible Party	
	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
Easement Holder	Eligible Entity	United States <i>By and through NRCS</i>
Co-holders	Other Entities <i>If identified by Eligible Entity</i>	None
Third-party right holders	Other entities <i>If identified by Eligible Entity</i> United States Right of Enforcement <i>If selected, RCPP Classic only</i>	None

Note
For **entity-held easements** that include co-holders or third-party right holders, be ready to identify those parties at the time the PPA is executed.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility	Responsible Party	
	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
RCPPEasements Funds for Easement Purchase are Provided	To Eligible Entity for their purchase of a conservation easement from an eligible landowner.	To Landowner by NRCS for the sale of a conservation easement to the United States.
Easement Purchase Agreement	Between Landowner and Eligible Entity <i>aka. Written Pending Offer</i>	Between Landowner and NRCS <i>aka. Agreement to Purchase Conservation Easement</i>
Obtain and Pay for Easement Acquisition-Related Items <i>(e.g., appraisal, survey, title, recording, etc.)</i>	Eligible Entity	NRCS

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities	<i>Responsible Party</i>	<i>Responsible Party</i>
	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
Funds for Required Easement Restoration	None	Restoration costs must be included in project budget.
		Highly and Moderately Restrictive Easements only.
Monitoring, Stewardship, and Enforcement of Closed Easement	Easement Holder <i>Eligible Entity</i>	NRCS

Concerns/Benefits/Values

- **Resource Concerns**

A specific natural resource problem that is likely to be addressed successfully through the implementation of eligible activities.

- **Conservation Benefits**

Improvements in the status of resource concerns, and other similar goals in the RCPP project area.

- **Conservation Values**

Establish specific purpose of the RCPP easement. Stated in the RCPP conservation easement deed.

Conservation Values

Project-level Conservation Benefits/
Resource Concerns in PPA

Conservation Values Statement / Purpose in
Entity Application and Program Agreement

Easement-specific Conservation Values Statement /
Purpose in Parcel Application, Parcel Contract, and Deed

Note

For CCA projects – the priority resource concern for the CCA must be the basis for a conservation value in the program agreement and ultimately the easement deed.

Conservation Values Explained

- **What are Conservation Values ?**
 - The natural resources being protected and the resource concerns being addressed consistent with the conservation benefits identified at the RCPP project level and as agreed-to in the individual RCPP programmatic partnership agreement (PPA).
 - RCPP easements further the restoration, protection, management, maintenance, enhancement, and monitoring of those conservation values on eligible lands.
 - Specifically identified in Individual Conservation Easement Deed
 - Derived from RCPP PPA Conservation Benefits/Resource Concerns

Best Practices

Tips to help ensure an efficient process!

- ✓ Meet with NRCS State Conservationist, State RCPP Coordinator and State Easement Programs Staff early and often.
- ✓ Easement holder is responsible for its own due diligence.
 - For entity-held easements, the eligible entity is responsible to conduct and pay for its due diligence.
 - For US-held easements, NRCS is responsible to conduct and pay for its due diligence.
- ✓ Submit your proposed RCPP Easement Deed as early in the process as possible (preferably at time of proposal).
- ✓ For Entity-held easement: Be ready to identify all the eligible entities, co-holding entities and third-party entities that may be identified in the easement deeds.

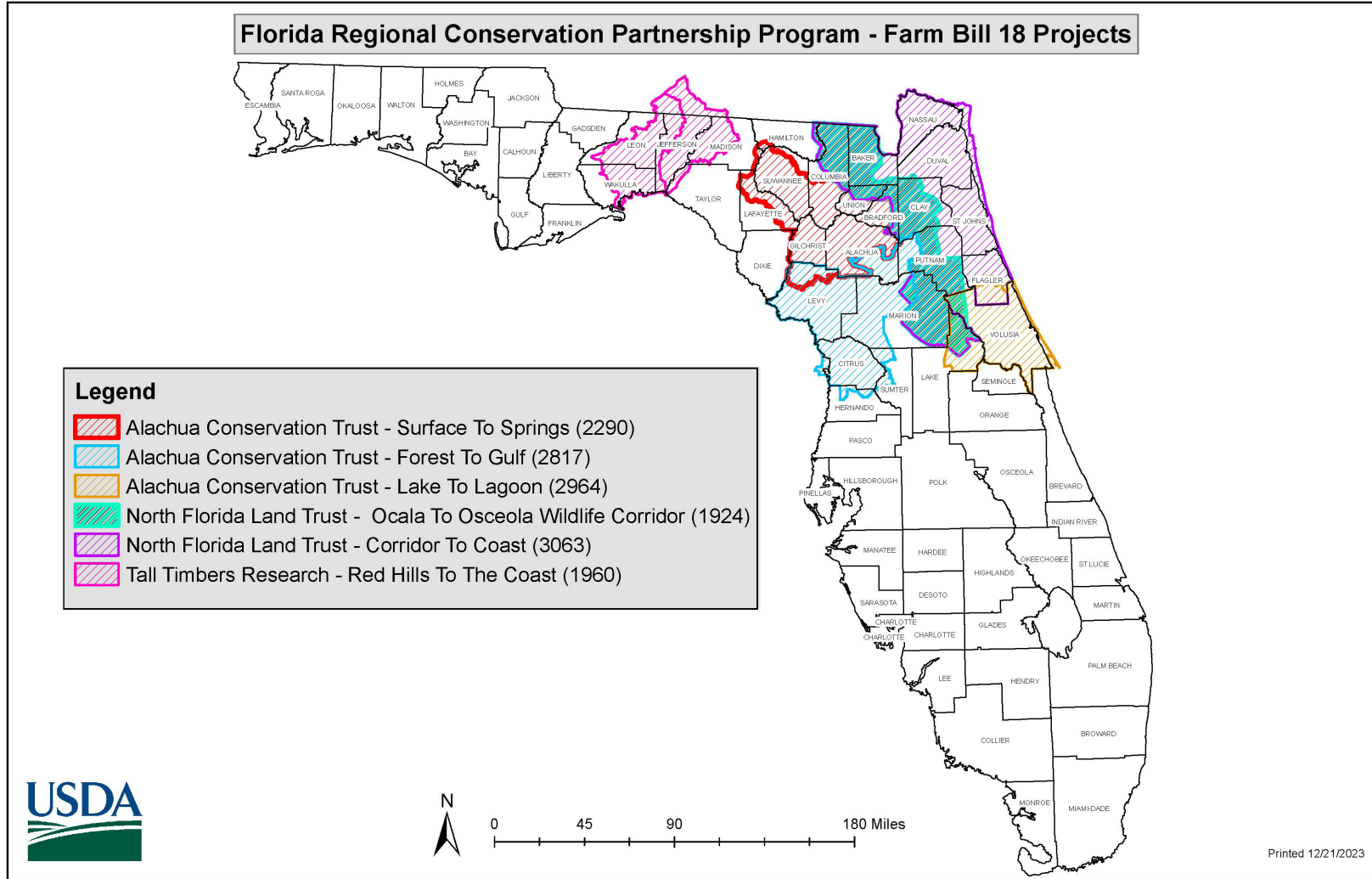
Best Practices

Tips to help ensure an efficient process!

- ✓ Identify the RCPP Easement type and Deed selection.
 - ✓ Entity-held Minimum Deed Terms
 - ✓ US-held Warranty Easement Deed
- ✓ Clearly identify the Conservation Values and explain how the selected easement option will successfully address the resource concerns.
 - ✓ Draft the Conservation Values Statement(s).
 - ✓ For CCA funding, identify the priority natural resource concern(s) the easement activity address.
- ✓ Identify clearly with name and location any known targeted parcels (does not guarantee eligibility).

Questions?

Current FL RCPP Projects



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- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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