



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Investing in Wisconsin - 2016

Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2016, NRCS is investing up to \$220 million in 84 high-impact projects that impact every state in the nation, including three in Wisconsin. This investment, which builds on the \$370 million invested for 2014 and 2015, will help conservation partners and agricultural producers conserve natural resources, leading to cleaner and more abundant water, healthier soil, enhanced wildlife habitat and many other benefits.

Driftless Area - Habitat for the Wild and Rare

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$2.9 million (National)

Lead Partner: Trout Unlimited

Number of Partners: 30

Participating State(s): Minnesota & Wisconsin (**lead state**)

The Driftless Area (DA) was bypassed by the last continental glacier and features steep valleys, sandstone bluffs and more than 600 unique spring-fed creeks and ridges once covered in prairie and scattered oaks. This ancient landscape supports a variety of plants and animals, including dozens of uncommon species of birds of woodland and grassland habitats, reptiles and amphibians, and abundant populations of native fish found in the high concentration of cold-water streams. The DA's diversity of habitat provides critical habitat for dozens of species of concern in the State Wildlife Action Plans, and has been cited as one of North America's most important resources. Early European settlement and agricultural practices took a heavy toll on the DA, resulting in devastating erosion and serious damage to rivers. Land use practices and conservation efforts have helped heal the land, but the legacy of the past damage is still visible in the sediment-filled valleys and steep, eroding stream banks. For the past nine years Trout Unlimited's Driftless Area Restoration Effort has been working with partners to restore structural diversity, ecological function and overall health. This project will provide a new comprehensive, targeted regional approach to restoring prairie, oak woodlands and streams for the benefit of the many at-risk species and abundant concentrations of native species found in the DA landscape.

Improving Working Lands for Monarch Butterflies

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$6 million (National)

Lead Partner: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Number of Partners: 12

Participating State(s): Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas (**lead state**) & Wisconsin

Our partnership will restore, manage and conserve wildlife habitat for monarch butterflies on agricultural and tribal lands using four main strategies: conservation planning and assessment; habitat improvement and best management practices; building an adequate seed supply for milkweed and nectar plants; and, enhancing organizational coordination and capacity. To provide the greatest conservation outcomes, the project will focus work within two NRCS Critical Conservation Areas: Prairie Grasslands Region and Mississippi River Basin. Targeted areas will be identified through a US Geological Survey-led initiative examining fine-scale opportunities for the restoration of milkweed and other pollinator plants. This project will



contribute to national goals in terms of habitat and increase the number of monarch butterflies. This in turn will represent the best opportunity to avoid future regulations related to monarch butterflies from being imposed on farmers and ranchers in the future.

Milwaukee River Watershed Conservation Partnership

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$1.5 million (State)

Lead Partner: Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District

Number of Partners: 18

Participating State(s): Wisconsin

This diverse partnership will implement cost effective conservation solutions that will improve water quality and soil quality along the impaired Milwaukee River corridor. A major tributary to Lake Michigan, the Milwaukee River is plagued with water quality degradation caused in part by high levels of phosphorous and sediment-laden runoff. Project objectives include: 1) recruit landowner participation in EQIP and CSP by promoting EQIP practices through demonstration workshops, agriculture innovation field days and incentives; 2) protect eight properties across 765 acres on priority agricultural lands using ACEP-ALE; and 3) coordinate and facilitate diverse groups - a farmer-led watershed group, working lands group and citizen advisory committee - to educate and promote conservation to farmers.

