



United States Department of Agriculture

# Regional Conservation Partnership Program



**Dianne Schlenker**  
**Amanda Mathis**  
**RCPP Informational Meeting**  
**August 20, 2020**

Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

[nrcs.usda.gov/](https://nrcs.usda.gov/)

# Agenda



- **Changes in RCPP**
- **RCPP Principles and application process**
- **Agreement Structure**
- **New Technical Assistance approach**
- **Financial Assistance activities**
- **Partner Contributions**
- **Measuring outcomes**



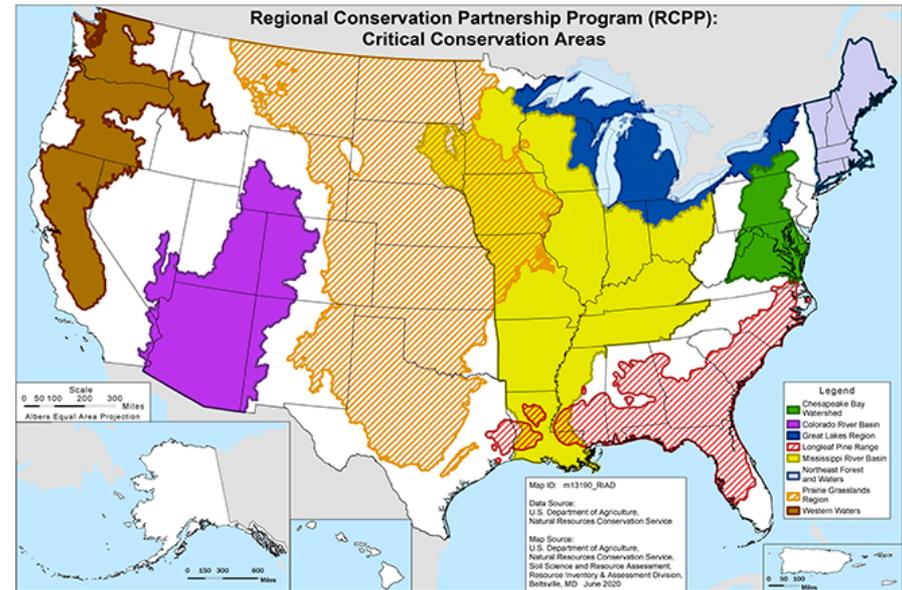
# What are we not going to cover?

- **Interim Final Rule**
- **Alternative Funding Arrangements**
- **Details of programmatic agreements and RCPP contract implementation**
- **Details of proposal review process**
- **Quality assurance and reviews**



# 2018 Farm Bill--Significant Changes

- Standalone program with \$360 million
- RCPP contracts and programmatic agreements
- Enhanced Alternative Funding Arrangement provision
- Three funding pools reduced to two
  - State/Multistate and Critical Conservation Areas



# Significant Changes

- **Noncompetitive project renewals**
- **Emphasis on project outcomes**
- **Customer service provisions**
- **Changes in Current announcement**
  - **Additional CCA designated but Arkansas will still be under Mississippi River CCA**
  - **Project level- applicability waivers for AGI**
  - **More clarity on Easement language**
  - **Bundling applications for project**



# RCPP v2.0 Streamlining

- **Accelerated program timeframes**
  - Elimination of pre-proposal process
  - Faster turnaround from Portal applications to partnership agreements
  - Transition to programmatic agreements vs. traditional Grants and Agreements approach
  - Increased flexibility in making partner TA obligations as project needs are identified
- **Standalone funding reducing administrative complexity**
- **States carry out all RCPP application reviews**
  - Award decisions are at the discretion of the NRCS Chief. The Chief may consider available funding, geographic diversity, applicant diversity, and other factors in making the final project decisions.



# 2020/21 Funding Announcement

- **Makes available \$360 million**
- **Maximum of \$10 million, minimum of \$250k**
- **Agreements are for 5 years**
- **Application period is 90 days (Nov 4th)**
- **Submission is through RCPP Portal**
  - Lead Partner needs eAuthentication to access Portal-how to request is outlined on pages 22 and 23 of the APF.



# RCPP Principles



- Critical feature is a co-investment approach
- Four key principles of RCPP:
  - Impact
  - Partner Contributions
  - Innovation
  - Partnership and Project Management.
- Successful RCPP applicants-
  - Bring an array of financial and technical capabilities,
  - Demonstrate experience working effectively with agricultural producers, and
  - Propose innovative, sustainable, and measurable approaches to achieving compelling conservation goals



# Overview of the RCPP Application Process

- Applicants submit a full project application following the guidance as outlined in the announcement for program funding (APF).
- Proposals will include such things as:
  - Project area
  - Resource Concerns
  - FA Activities
  - TA Activities
  - Goals/Expected Outcomes
  - Partner Contributions
  - Response to narrative questions

Proposals will be submitted through the RCPP portal.

Proposal	
Project Details	
Basic Project Information	
Project Title:	Lead State:
Funding Pool: Please Select	CCA (if applicable): Please Select
DUNS:	SAM:
SCIMS:	
Applicant Contact Information	
Lead Partner:	
Project Director Name:	Alternative Contact Name:
Project Director Email:	Alternative Contact Email:
Project Director Phone Number:	Alternative Contact Phone Number:
Project Details	
Proposed State Year:	Proposed End Year:
Primary Resource Concern: Please Select (If State/Multi-State Pool Selected)	Primary Resource Concern: Please Select (If CCA Selected)
Additional Resource Concerns:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Air Quality	<input type="checkbox"/> Animals – Livestock
<input type="checkbox"/> Plants	<input type="checkbox"/> Soil Erosion
<input type="checkbox"/> Animals – Wildlife	<input type="checkbox"/> Energy
<input type="checkbox"/> Water Quality	<input type="checkbox"/> Water Quantity
Description of Goals and Objectives:	
Description of Expected Environmental, Economic, and Social Outcomes:	
Justification for Projects Longer than Five Years:	



# Producer Contracts Supplemental Agreements



# RCPP Conservation Activities

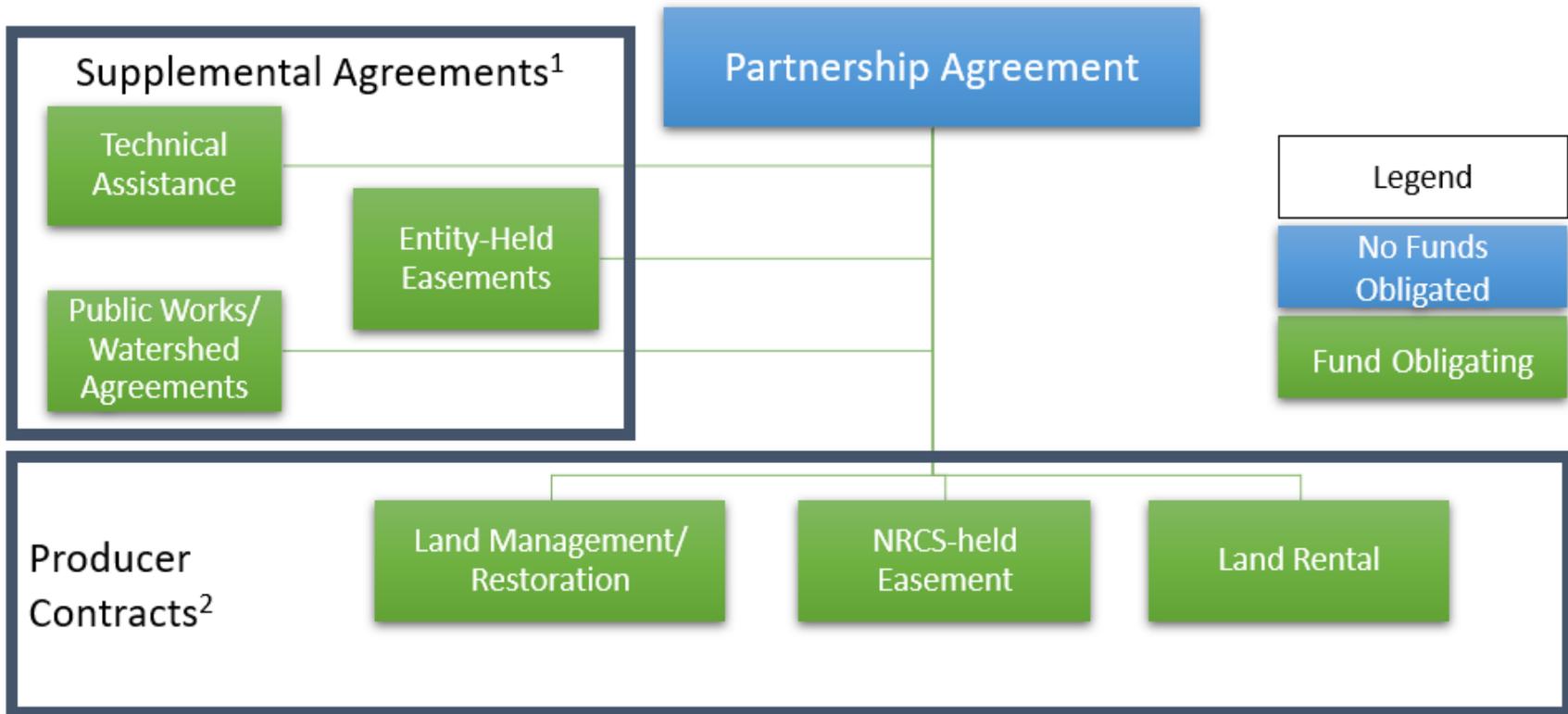


RCPP Activity Type	Associated Covered Program Authorities
Land improvement / management/ restoration	EQIP, CSP, ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements (WRE) (restoration), HFRP (restoration), Public Law 83-566
Land rental	CRP
Easement (U.S.-held)	ACEP-WRE, HFRP (easement), Public Law 83-566 (floodplain easement); expanded to include land uses other than those traditionally eligible under the covered programs (e.g. grasslands, agricultural lands, riparian areas)
Easement (entity-held)	ACEP-ALE (currently); expanded to include easements on land uses other than those traditionally eligible under the covered programs (e.g., wetlands, floodplains, forest lands)
Public works/watersheds	Public Law 83-566

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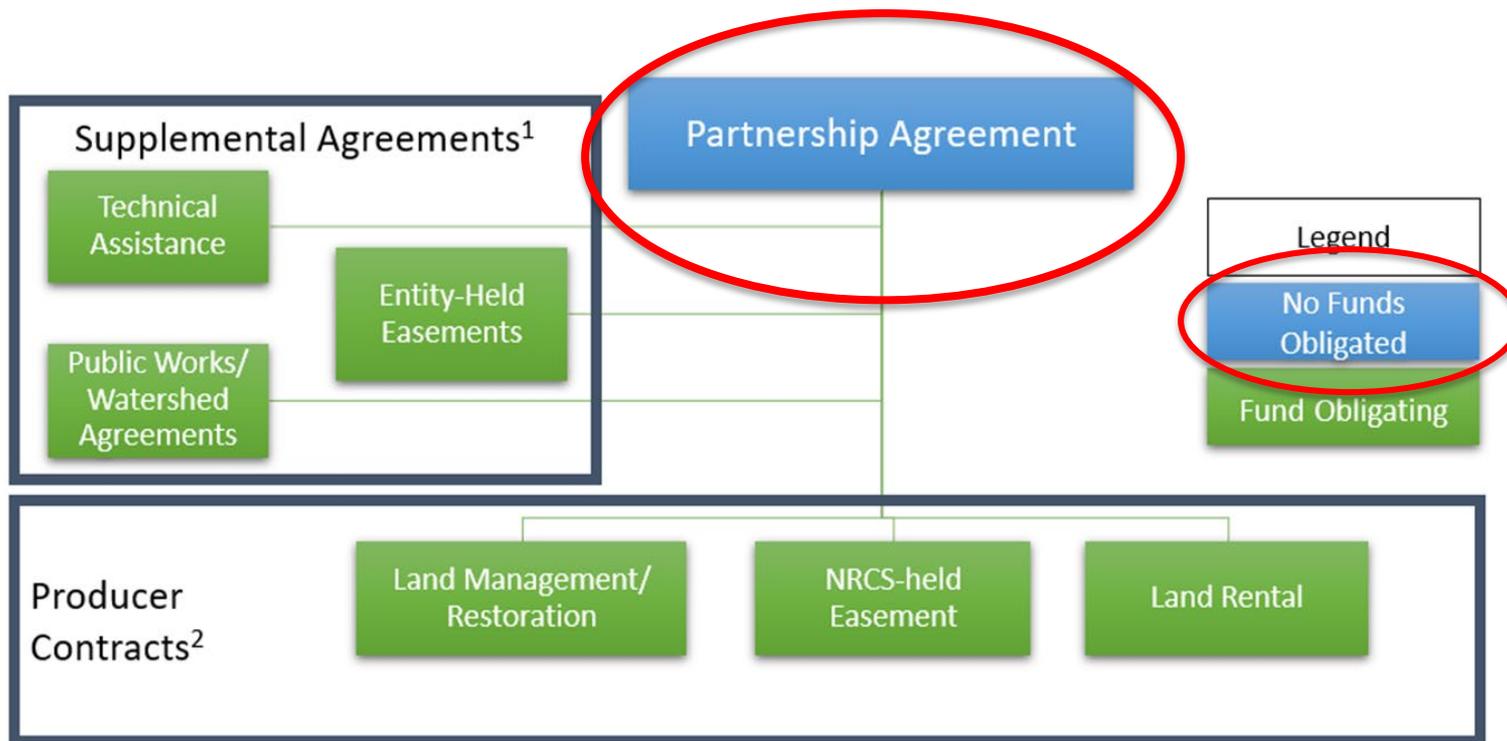
# RCPP Programmatic Agreement Structure



1 – Agreements with partners for public works/watershed activities, technical Assistance, and entity-held easement agreements.

2 – Contracts with a producer may contain one or more of the components listed in this section.

# Partnership Agreement



1 – Agreements with partners for public works/watershed activities, technical Assistance, and entity-held easement agreements.

2 – Contracts with a producer may contain one or more of the components listed in this section.

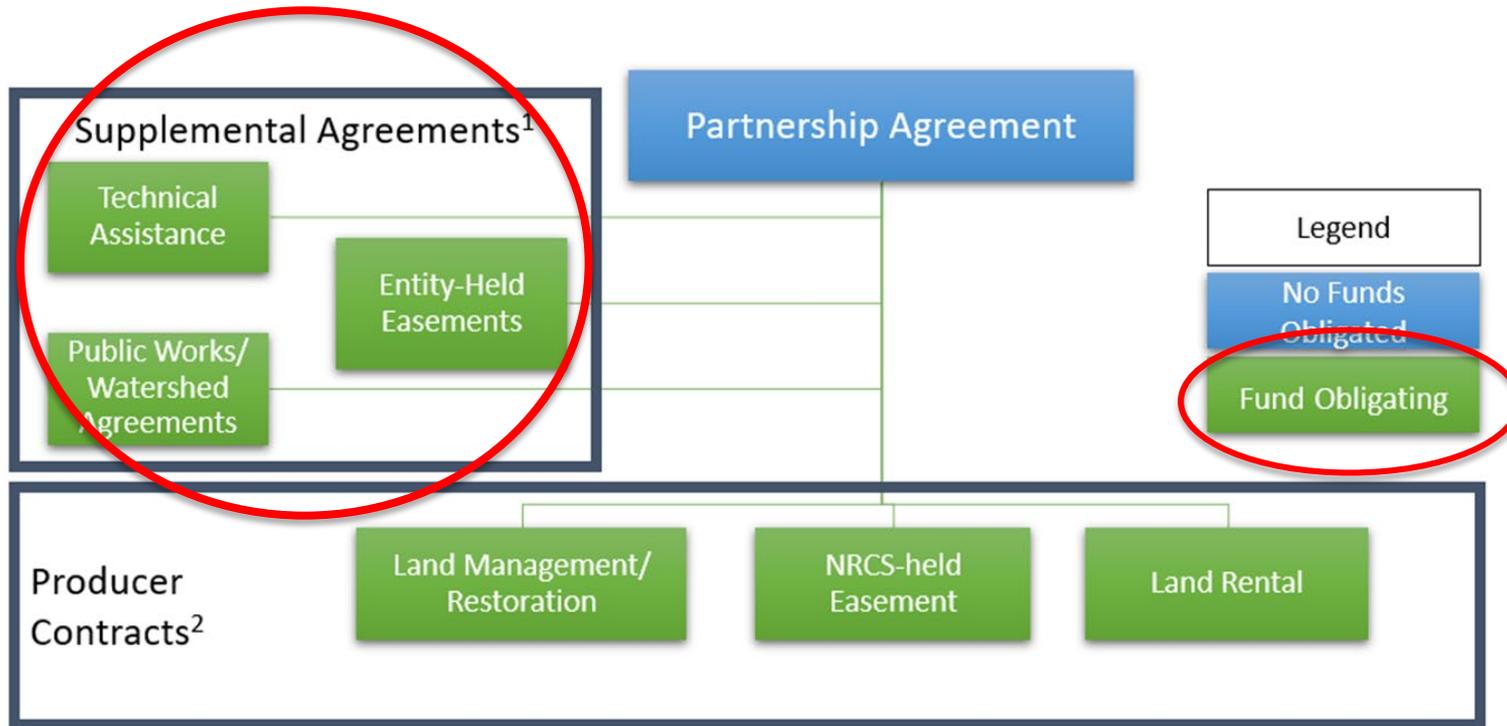


# Partnership Agreement

- **NO FUNDS OBLIGATED**
- **Lays out project scope: geographic area and targeted resource concerns (“conservation benefits”)**
- **Establishes expectations for successful project including deliverables, FA, TA and Partner Contributions**
- **Includes General Terms and Conditions**
- **Developed based on proposal information submitted to the RCPP portal--later attaches to blanket RCPP agreement template**
- **Housed in ProTracts**



# Supplemental Agreements



1 – Agreements with partners for public works/watershed activities, technical Assistance, and entity-held easement agreements.

2 – Contracts with a producer may contain one or more of the components listed in this section.

\*\*\* Land management/restoration contracts may be executed with partners in very limited conditions as determined by NRCS.

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# Supplemental Agreements

- **Can only be with lead partner or other eligible partner**
- **Provides management flexibility**
  - Allows FA or TA award to partners without partnership agreement amendment
  - Supports active collaboration with partners to secure 3<sup>rd</sup> party services
- **Independent management and reporting requirements**
  - Non-compliance related to a supplemental agreement will not necessarily affect overall project viability
  - Progress and financial reporting requirements similar to current cooperative agreement expectations
- **Managed in ProTracts**



# Producer Contracts & U.S.-held Easements



1 – Agreements with partners for public works/watershed activities, technical Assistance, and entity-held easement agreements.

2 – Contracts with a producer may contain one or more of the components listed in this section.

# Producer Contracts & U.S.-held Easements

- **Potential for combination of land management and rental activities in the same contract**
- **Managed in ProTracts**
  - Practice and Activity Standards will apply
  - Payments will be “typical” cost-list, or “modified” cost-list based
  - Participants (or partners) expected to provide portion of “cost-share” though cost-share rates may be negotiated
  - **Participant portion of “cost-share” does NOT count as “contribution”**

# Implementation Contract Types:



## Implementing Awards: RCPP Traditional Projects

### Supplemental Agreements

with eligible **Partners** for benefit of producers

- Technical Assistance
- Entity Held Easements
- Public Works/Watersheds
- (Limited) Land Management/Land Improvement

### Producer Contracts

with eligible **Producers\*\*\*** on **eligible land**

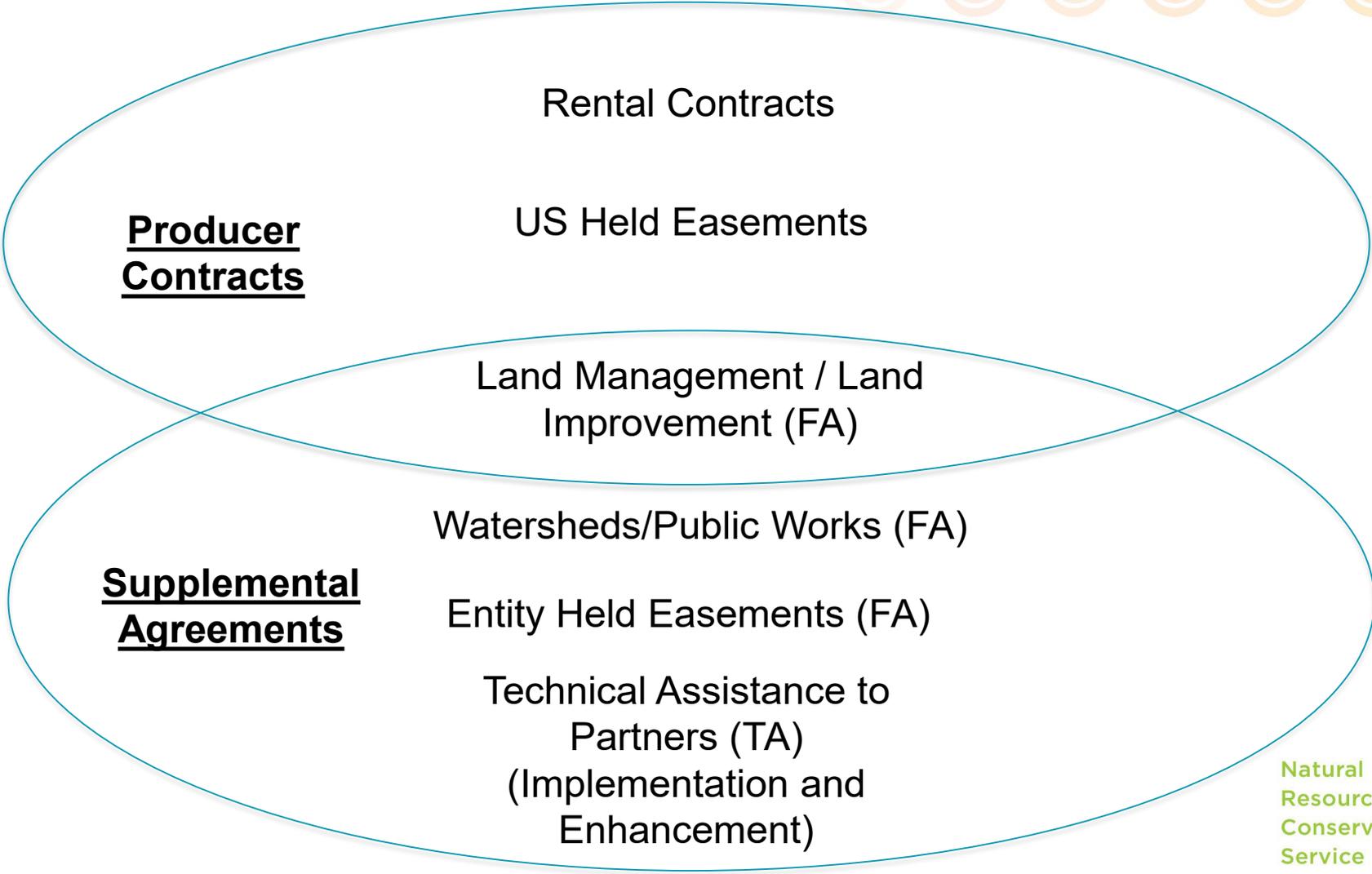
- Land Management/Land Improvement (FA+TA)
- Rental
- US Held Easements (FA)



# Producer Contracts and Partner Supplemental Agreements

Differences:	Producer Contracts	Supplemental Agreements
Contract Between NRCS and	Producer (or Landowner)	Eligible Partner
Typically Managed	Field offices	State office
Relationship to Eligible Land	On eligible land	On or benefits eligible land
Adjusted Gross Income	Applicants and members **Wavier for project can be requested or leave as individual request	Does not apply to partners
Payments (Contract Type Driven)	Generally PR, payment Schedules. Some “actual not to exceed a maximum” (AM)	Negotiated at supplemental agreement level
Relationship to Contributions	Cost-Share model  Producer share not allowed as contributions	Supplemental agreement match allowable as contribution during RCPP project life only



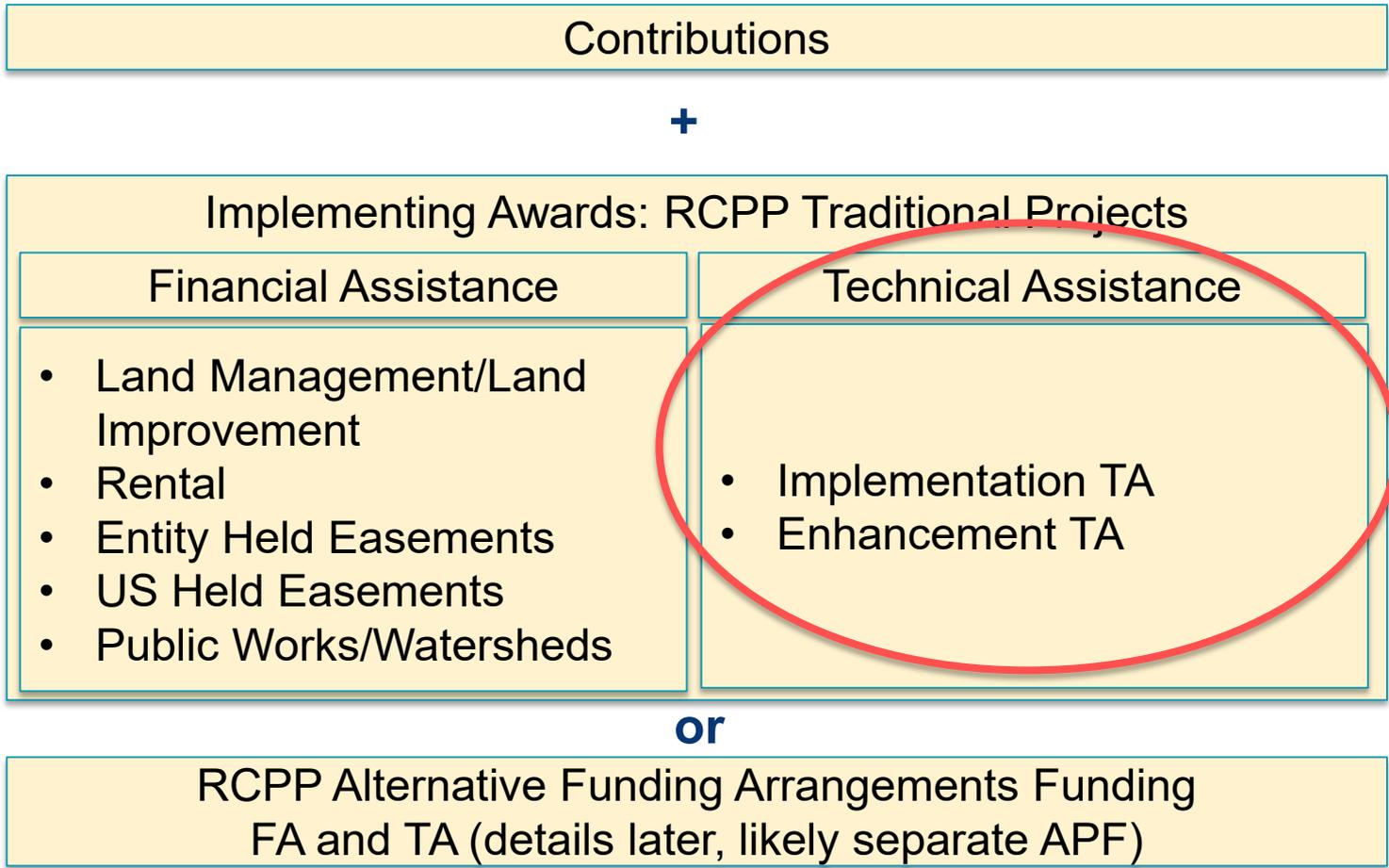




# Financial vs Technical Assistance Approach



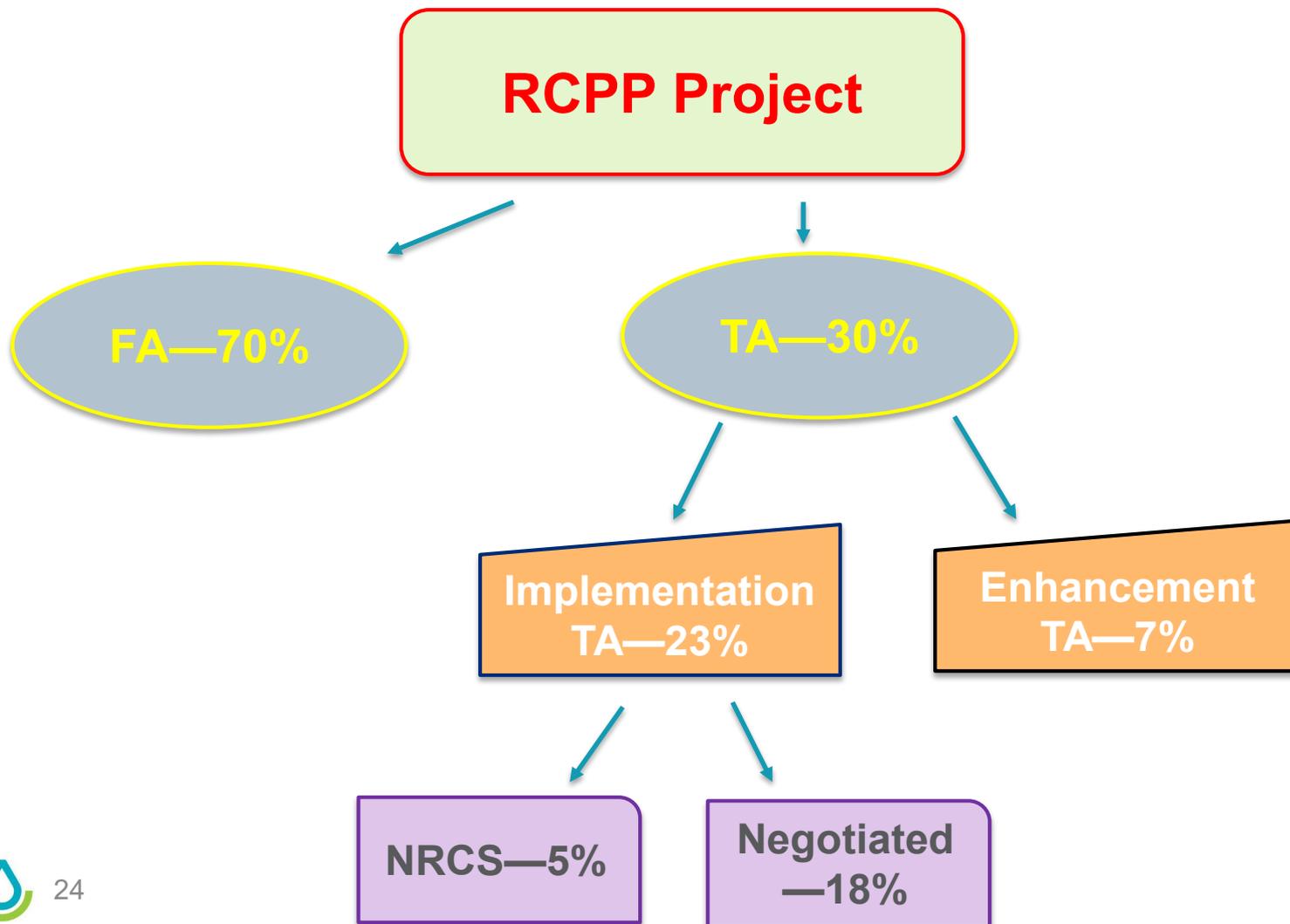
# Financial vs Technical Assistance Approach



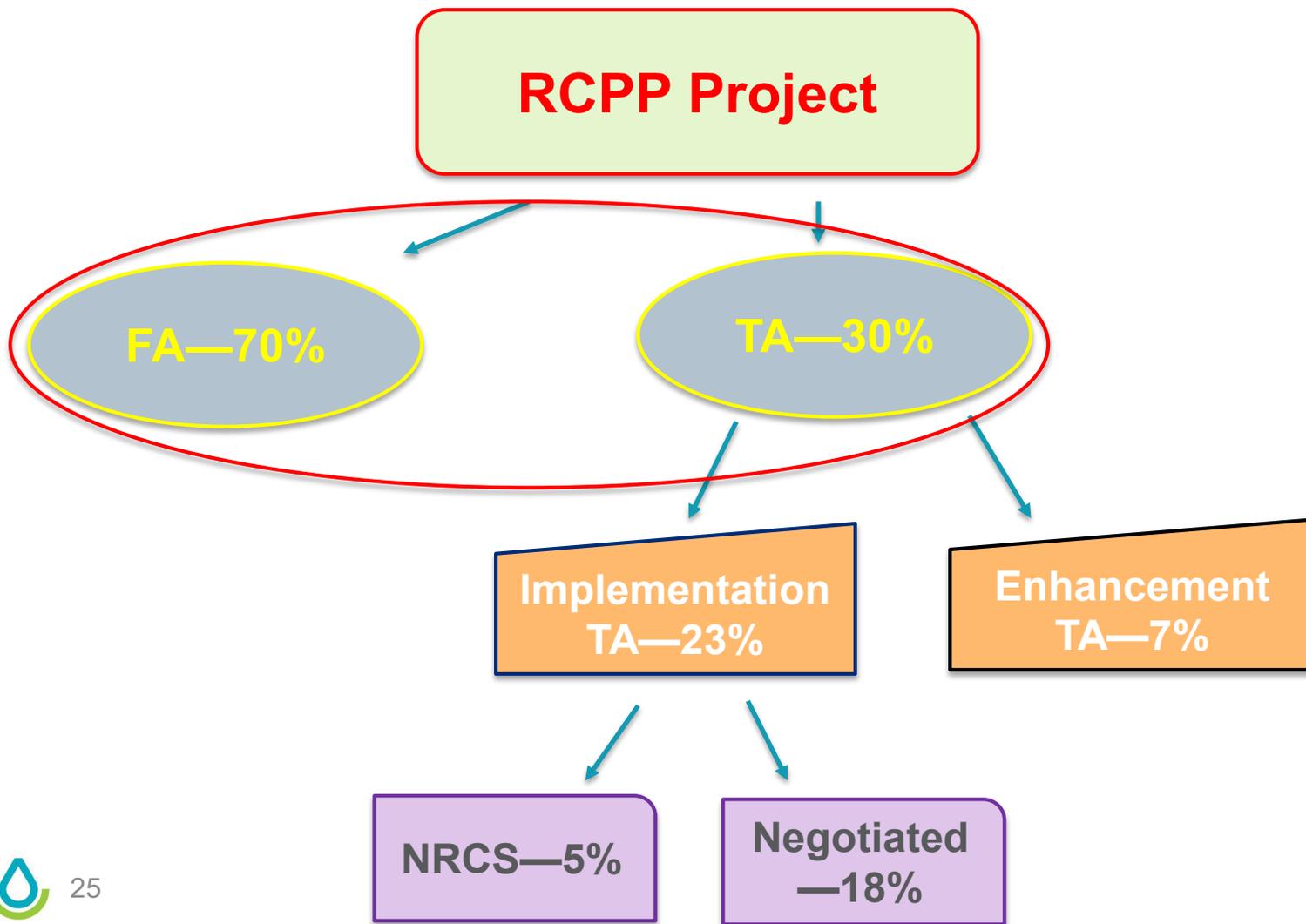
Natural Resources Conservation Service



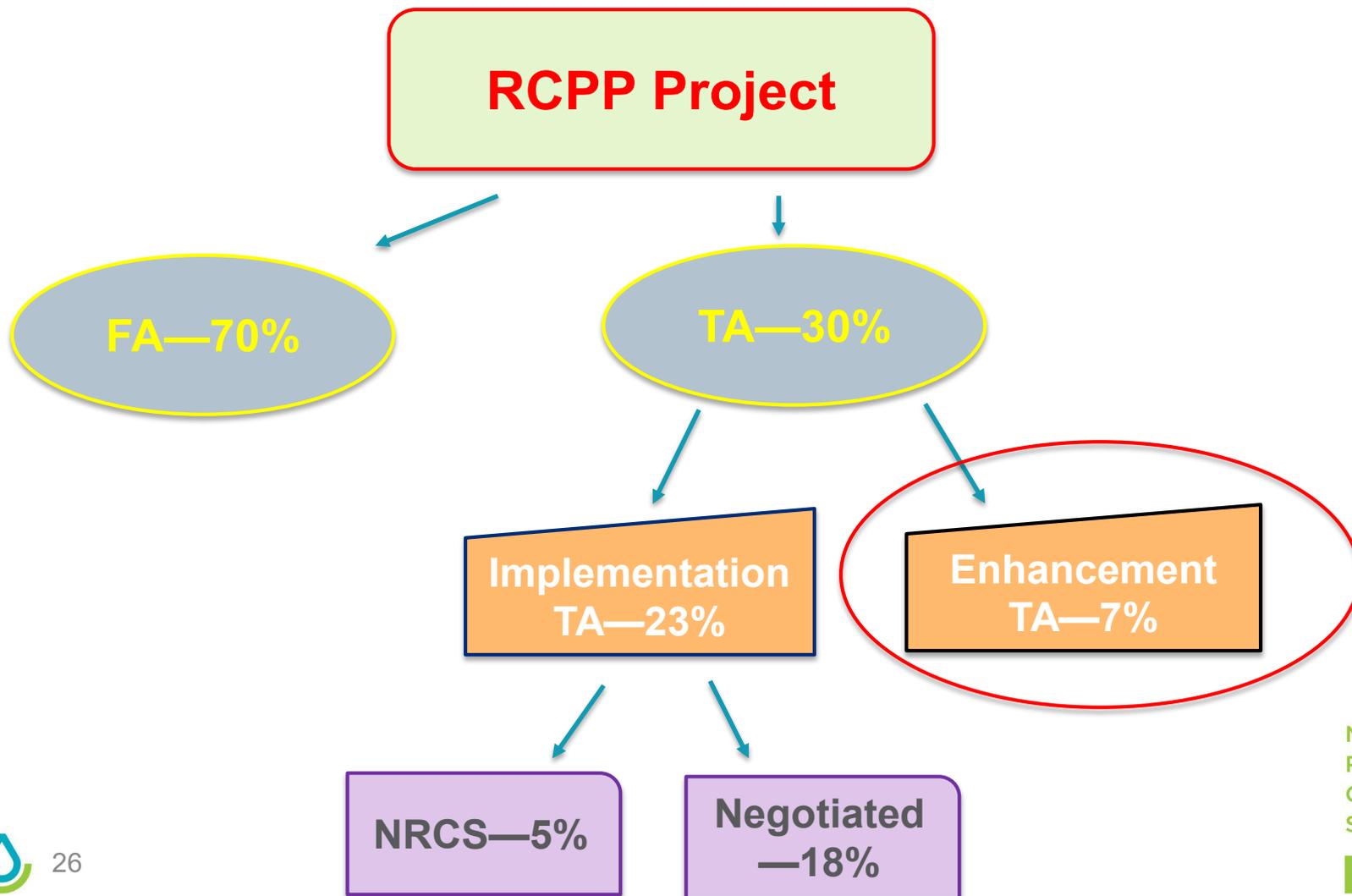
# RCPP FA/TA Approach



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# RCPP FA/TA Approach

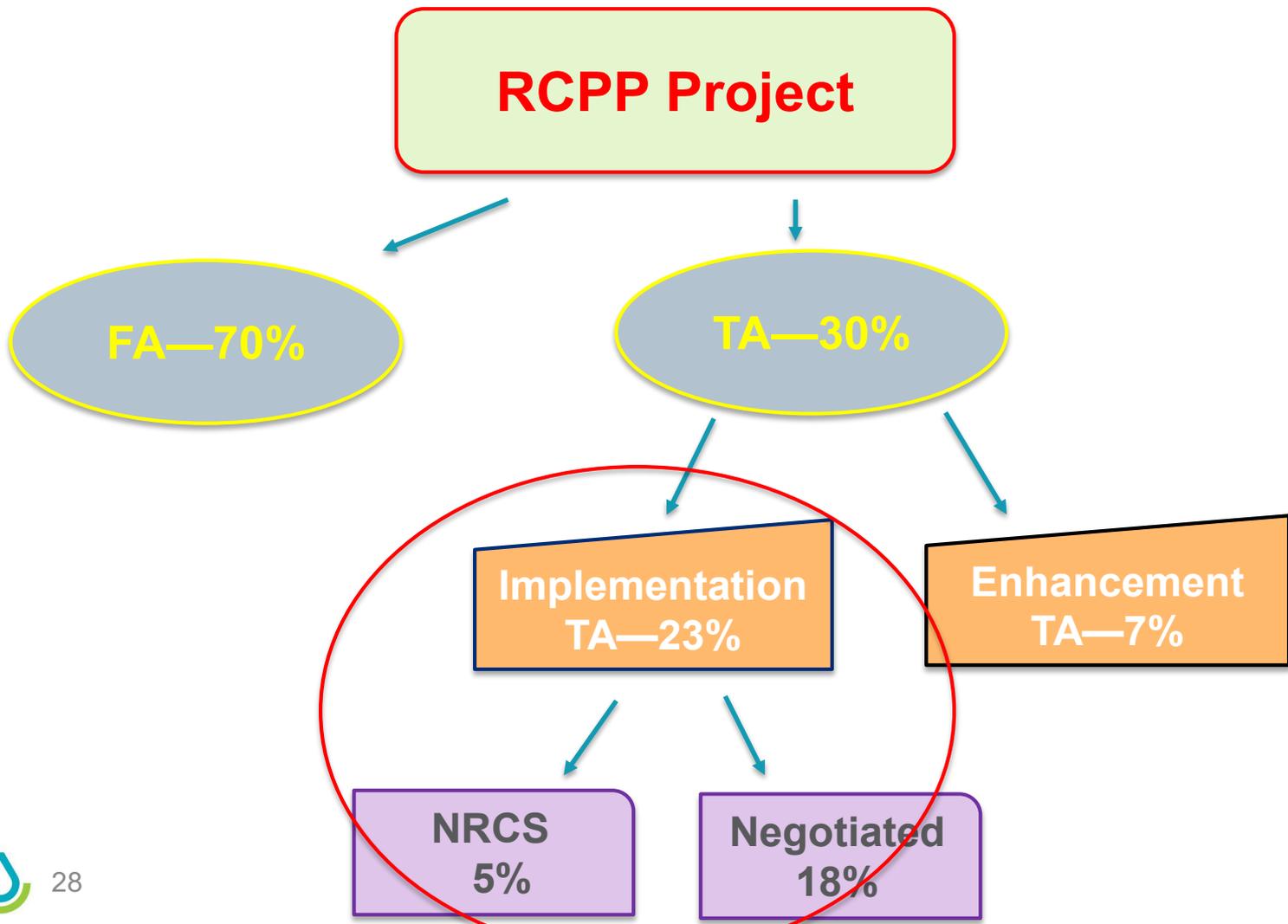


# Enhancement TA—7% maximum of total project cost

- **Partners may request TA funding for project enhancement activities**
- **See APF table for full list of eligible activities (page 13 and 14).**
- **Example requests at 7% level**
  - \$2 million project, \$140k maximum
- **Subject to negotiation during agreement development**
- **Partners must identify means of justifying expenses as a part of their Portal application**
- **If not requested, total project TA maxes out at 23%**



# RCCP FA/TA Approach



# Implementation TA—23% of total project cost

- **5% retained by NRCS, non-negotiable, for required project implementation activities**
- **18% retained by NRCS unless requested and justified by partners and approved by NRCS**
- **See APF table for implementation TA activities**
- **(page 13 and 14).**
- **Requests must be accompanied by partner or 3<sup>rd</sup>-party qualifications in Portal application**
- **TA rates of partners or 3<sup>rd</sup> parties must be competitive with NRCS rates**

# Administrative Costs



- **The 2018 Farm Bill statute prohibits NRCS from paying administrative costs associated with RCPP projects.**
- **Equivalent to “overhead” or “indirect costs”**
- **May be counted as partner contributions**
  - Calculated based on partners non administrative contribution total
- **Organizations with an active NICRA must use that indirect cost rate**
- **Other entities can request a 10% de minimis rate.**

<p><b>NRCS TA Responsibilities</b></p>	<p><b>Potential Partner Contributions (C), Implementation TA (I), Enhancement TA (E)</b></p>
<p><b>Develop and manage RCPP agreements with partners (<i>required</i>)</b></p>	<p>Develop and manage RCPP agreements with NRCS (C, E)</p>
<p><b>Agency RCPP outreach and education (<i>required</i>)</b></p>	<p>Other RCPP project-related outreach and education, including inventories, analyses, and tools needed to inform outreach (C,E)</p>
<p><b>Environmental evaluations (<i>required</i>)</b></p>	<p>Inventories and data to support environmental evaluations (C, I)</p>
<p><b>Eligibility determinations, evaluation, and ranking of RCPP individual applications submitted under an RCPP project (e.g. producer contract applications) (<i>required</i>)</b></p>	<p>Providing information or tools needed by NRCS to support Agency eligibility determinations, evaluation, and ranking (C, I)</p>
<p><b>Execution and management of individual contracts or supplemental agreements under the RCPP project (<i>required</i>)</b></p>	<p>Develop and enter into financial assistance (FA) contracts or agreements to implement RCPP eligible activities with non-NRCS funds (C)</p>

<p><b>TA to producers or landowners for planning directly related to installation (or management) of eligible activities</b></p>	<p>TA to producers or landowners for planning directly related to installation or management of eligible conservation activities (C, I)</p>
<p><b>Other FA contract support services (e.g., securing and managing contracts for third-party services like engineering studies, surveys, appraisals etc.) <i>(some required)</i></b></p>	<p>Other non-inherently governmental FA contract support services (e.g., securing and managing contracts for third-party services like engineering studies, surveys, appraisals to satisfy NRCS requirements) (C, I)</p>
<p><b>Project related communications and coordination activities</b></p>	<p>Project related communications and coordination activities (C, E)</p>
<p><b>HEL/WC compliance, AGI compliance, and RCPP eligibility determinations <i>(required)</i></b></p>	<p>Development and calculation of quantifiable project outcomes (C, E)</p>

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<p><b>Review and analysis of quantified outcomes provided by partners to determine if project goals and objectives are achieved</b></p>	<p>Manage leveraging of other funds related to the RCPP goals and objectives (C)</p>
<p><b>Track and verify expenditures and partner contributions</b></p>	<p>Development of innovative conservation approaches (C,E)</p>
	<p>Project management and partnership development to accomplish project goals (C,E)</p>
	<p>Staff development/training/capacity building (C)</p>
	<p>Developing/maintaining connections to related conservation efforts (C)</p>
	<p>Any other project-related administrative (indirect) costs <b>**</b>(C)</p>
<p><b>** Note that administrative (indirect) costs associated with the implementation of RCPP projects cannot be reimbursed by NRCS, by statue. Unrecovered indirect costs can be counted as partner contributions</b></p>	





# RCPA Financial Assistance Activities



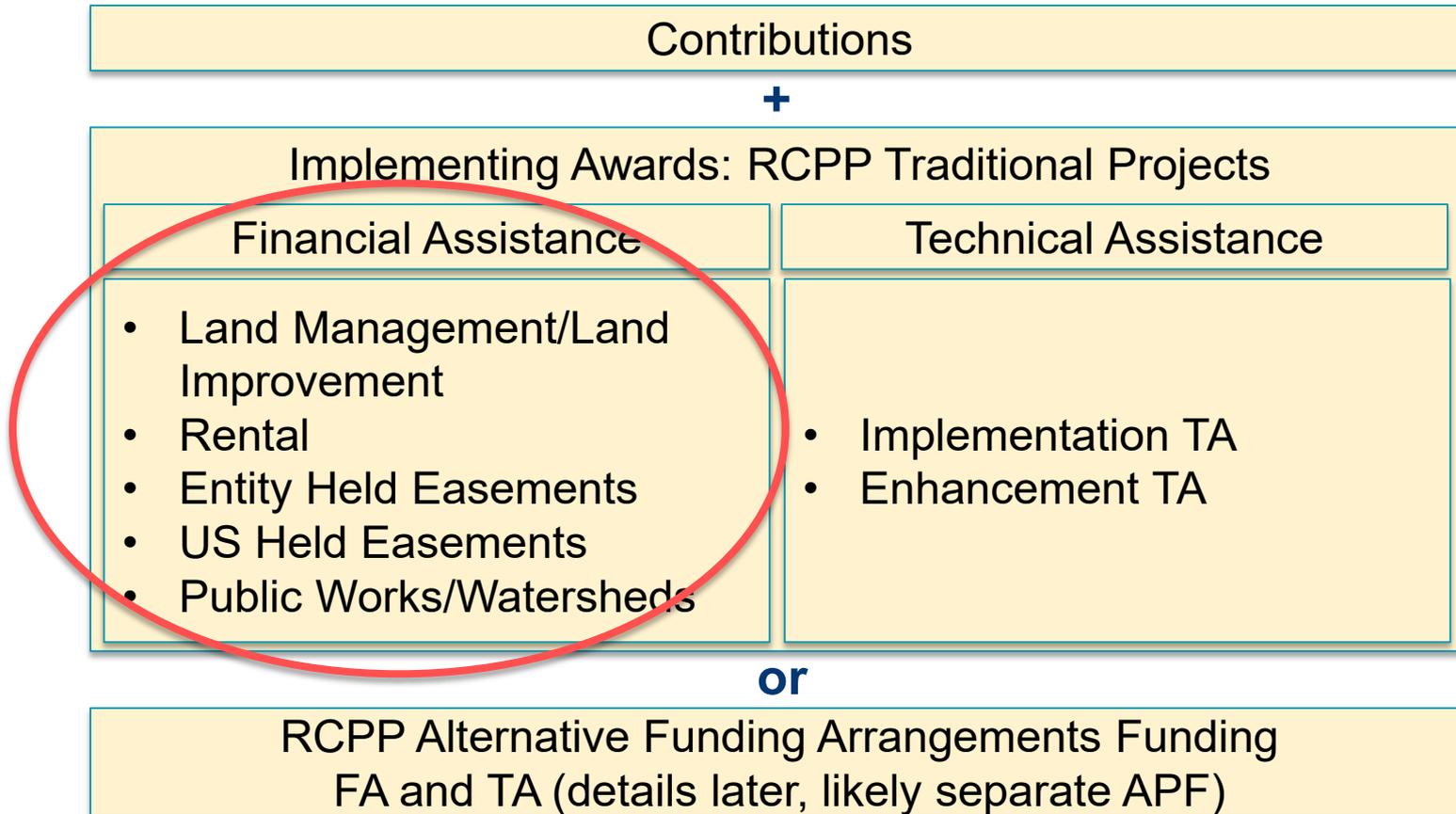


## RCPP FA Activities

**“A majority of RCPP funding is expected to be provided to farmers, ranchers, and landowners of nonindustrial private forest land or agricultural lands through producer contracts, and supplemental agreements to implement entity-held easements and Public Law 83-566-like projects.”**



# Financial vs Technical Assistance Approach



# RCPP FA Activity Types:



RCPP Activity Type	Associated Covered Program Authorities
Land Improvement / Management / Restoration	EQIP, CSP, ACEP-WRE (Restoration), HFRP (Restoration), PL-566
Land Rental	CRP
Easement <u>US-Held</u>	ACEP-WRE, HFRP (Easement); expanded to include land uses other than those traditionally eligible under the covered programs (e.g. grasslands, floodplains, agricultural lands, riparian areas)
Easement <u>Entity-Held</u>	ACEP-ALE, PL-566 (floodplain easement); expanded to include other eligible easements on land uses other than those traditionally eligible under the covered programs (e.g., wetlands, non-industrial private forest lands)
Public Works / Watersheds	PL-566



# RCPP Activity Types:

## Land Management/Land Improvement/Restoration

- Land Management contracts will use an EQIP/CSP-like contracting model.
- Application and planning follow standard agency processes (e.g. CART, NPPH, etc.)
- Project establishes eligible resource concerns, partners have input into ranking
- Cost-share model with partner influence.
- Contracts use existing conservation practices, enhancements and activities.



# RCPP Activity Types:

## Rental



- Land rental activities will look like ProTracts contracts.
- Application, ranking, and contracting will follow standard NRCS ranking processes.
- RCPP land rentals are expected to be used for **short term**, targeted rental needs in the context of a larger RCPP project.
  - Examples include paying 1–3 years of foregone income to incentivize adoption of an innovative cropping system or to transition to an organic production system.
- Rentals will incorporate proven aspects of NRCS planning, implementation, and contracting methodology, and are expected to be based principally on an estimate of foregone income.

# RCPP Activity Types: Conservation Easement

	U.S.-Held Easements	Entity-Held Easements
Easement Holder	Acquired and held by the United States by and through USDA NRCS	Acquired and held by an eligible entity that meets the requirements of 7 CFR Section 1468.3.
Easement Deed Requirements	<p>Must use one of three standard easement deeds provided by NRCS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Highly restrictive;</li> <li>2. Moderately restrictive;</li> <li>3. Minimally restrictive.</li> </ol>	
Duration	Easements are perpetual or maximum duration allowed under State law	Easements are perpetual or maximum duration allowed under State Law.
Potential Eligible Land Types	Private agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land or associated lands (e.g., riparian areas, floodplains, seasonal or flooded wetlands).	



# RCPP Activity Types: Conservation Easement

	U.S.-Held Easements	Entity-Held Easements
Basis for RCPP Compensation Cap	<p>Landowner is paid a percentage of the value of the easement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 100% of easement value for a high level of landowner restriction (similar to current ACEP-WRE)</li> <li>Up to 75% of easement value for a moderate level of landowner restriction (similar to current ACEP-WRE with reservation of grazing rights or HFRP)</li> <li>Up to 50% of easement value for a low level of landowner restriction (similar to current ACEP-ALE)</li> </ul>	<p>Cost-share provided to the entity for their purchase of an easement based on a percentage of the value of the easement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to 50%—with U.S. right of enforcement</li> <li>Up to 25%—without U.S right of enforcement</li> </ul>
Valuation Methodology	Easement value determined via appraisal.	Easement value determined via appraisal of before-and- after fair market value of the offered acres



# RCPP Activity Types: Conservation Easement



	U.S.-Held Easements	Entity-Held Easements
<b>Partner Match</b>	<p>Matching funds provided by partners are not required but contributions are encouraged to further RCPP project objectives.</p> <p>Any landowner donation associated with U.S. held easements cannot count as partners contribution for the project.</p>	<p>Partner match is required and may consist of any combination of landowner donation toward easement value or partner cash contribution toward payment of easement compensation to the landowner.</p>
<b>RCPP award type for easement purchase</b>	<p>Producer contract entered into directly with eligible landowners.</p>	<p>Supplemental agreement entered into with an eligible entity that will hold the easement on eligible land.</p>
<b>Allowed uses of RCPP financial assistance</b>	<p>Cost of easement itself, acquisition-related costs (e.g., appraisal, survey, due diligence, title and closing services), restoration implementation costs.</p>	<p>Cost of easement itself, costs of NRCS technical appraisal review, and NRCS environmental database search. RCPP financial assistance funds awarded for an entity-held easement may not be used for any other purposes.</p>

**NRCS may provide up to 50% of the easement value for entity-held easements that include a right of enforcement and 25% of the easement value for entity-held easements that do not include a U.S. right of enforcement.**



# RCPP Conservation Easements: U.S.-Held

- Contract between NRCS and a producer
- A three-tiered level- or restriction-based template in development.
- Tier availability within a project negotiated (post-selection), NRCS to retain authority.
- Partner will have opportunity to influence planning expectations and some (**but not all**) aspects of deed restrictions at a project level.

# RCPP Conservation Easements: U.S.-Held

- Application, ranking and contracting will emulate applicable aspects of ACEP-WRE, HFRP, and ACEP-ALE
- Partner contributions will be allowed to complement NRCS funding to encourage landowner participation, and there will be the possibility of entity-led contracting for closing services and partner-led long-term easement monitoring.
- Additional flexibilities of RCPP US-held easements may include:
  - partner-driven ranking pools
  - partner led outreach and
  - the potential leveraging of partner contributions (including monitoring and or potential payments to land owners) to increase participation.

# RCPP Conservation Easements: Entity-Held

- Collaboration between NRCS, a qualified entity, and an eligible landowner.
- Land uses negotiated at project level.
- NRCS-derived minimum deed terms to be including entity deeds.
- Partners and landowners will be expected to follow closing processes similar to ACEP-ALE.



# RCPP Conservation Easements: Entity-Held

- Application, ranking and contracting will evolve with ALE.
- Lead partners may influence entity easement supplemental agreement awards, but NRCS remains decision maker.
- Match required.
- Match can “double count” as contributions IF expended during RCPP project life.



# RCCP Activity Types: Public Works/Watersheds

- Principally to support **implementation** of watershed-scale structures, not land treatment.
- Proposal must **detail** responsibilities, timing, and steps of the following (at a high-cut level):
  - Planning/environmental,
  - Design
  - Implementation
- Anticipate watershed plan and design approval authority consistent with Federal infrastructure projects and informed by PL-566 model.

## RCPP Activity Types: Public Works/Watersheds

- NRCS may not award, or may discontinue assistance if schedule not maintained, or if unforeseen issues appear likely to substantially affect cost or schedule.
- Flood control projects may request up to 100% RCPP financial assistance, **others have minimum 35% cash match requirement.**
- Only Public Works/Watershed project contributions count towards match.
- Ranking may favor projects with significant contributions.



# Partner Contributions



# Partner Contributions



- **Stated goal of contributions at least equal to the NRCS investment**
- **Value-added, substantive, elevating, amplifying, etc.**
- **Lead partner assumes full responsibility for delivery of contributions.**
- **2018 statute makes a distinction between cash and in-kind contributions**



# Partner Contributions



- **Non-USDA Federal contributions allowed if directly related to project objectives and resource concerns**
- **Portal application requires justification of contribution value**
- **Table in APF includes potential contribution activities**
- **Partner's support letters with value of contribution and activity listed needed at the time of project submittal.**



# Measuring Outcomes



# Statutory Language



## DUTIES OF PARTNERS:

...(E) conduct an assessment of—

(i) the progress made by the project in achieving each conservation benefits defined in the partnership agreement, including in a quantified form to the extent practicable; and

(ii) as appropriate, other outcomes of the project

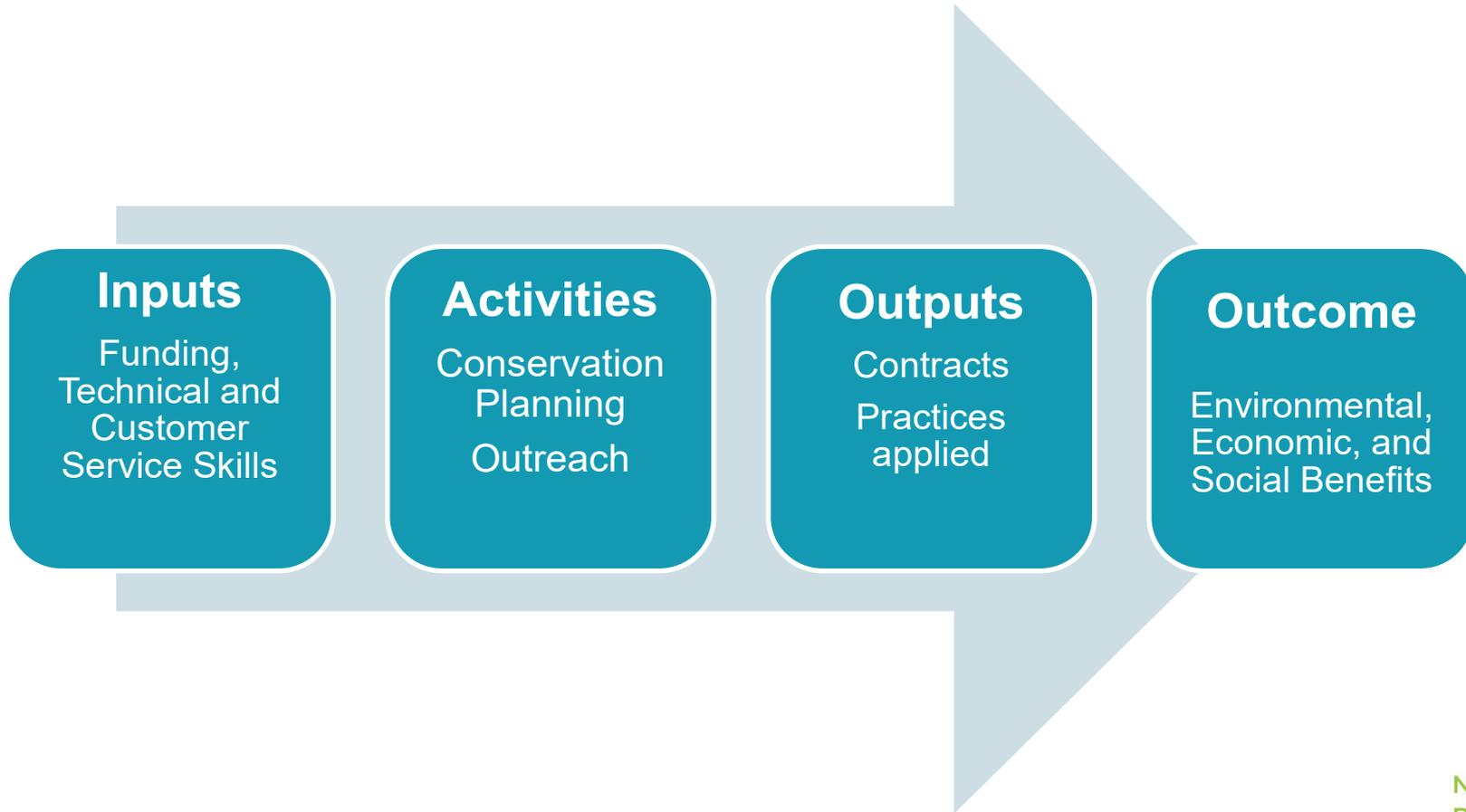


# Manager's Report Language

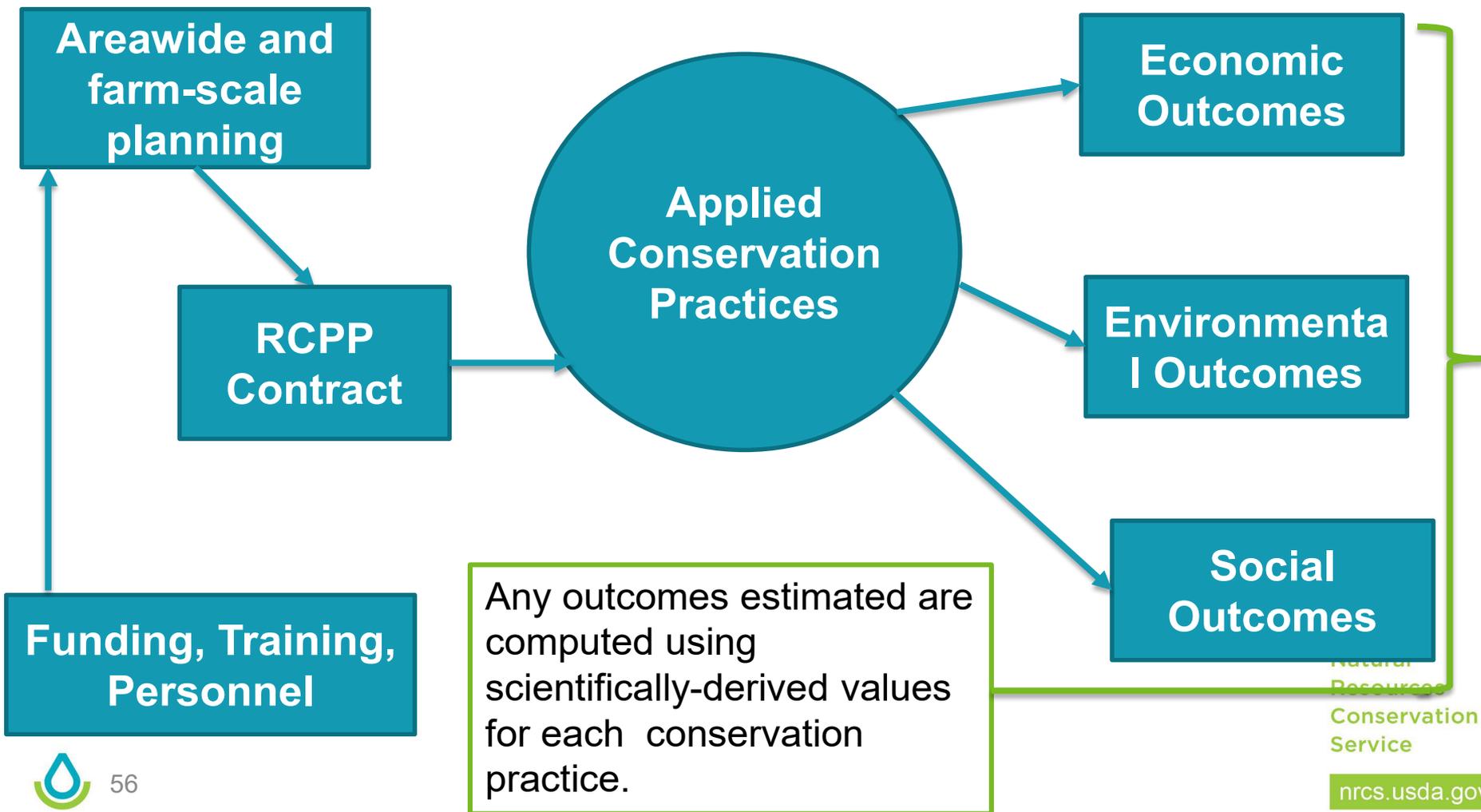
“The Managers emphasize the importance of a partner's duty to quantify the environmental outcomes of their RCPP projects, and partners are encouraged to assess and report on the economic and social outcomes of their projects, as partners may be able to encourage increased adoption of conservation practices. The Managers expect the Secretary to provide guidance to partners on how to quantify and report on the outcomes of their projects. This guidance should include methods and tools that can be used to quantify outcomes at varying scales appropriate to projects (regional, state, county, watershed, field, etc.), and for the various natural resource concerns addressed by projects.



# What is an Outcome?



# Pivot Point = applied conservation practices



# Start with the Success Story Vision



With the RCPP investment of A dollars matched by B partner contributions over C years, we have made a lasting improvement to the biodiversity of the D (geographic region) over initial benchmark E by improving F acres habitat and increasing our {priority species} population by G to a naturally sustainable size that will benefit the region for H years.

A = Total RCPP funds dispersed over C period of time

B = Partner contributions (cash and in-kind)

C = Defined number of years

D = Defined geographic area in the RCPP agreement

E = benchmark conditions developed for the outcome from the partnership agreement

Each outcome should have a benchmark against which to measure E and F

F = Acres of wildlife habitat improvement practices for the RCPP project

G = to be modeled or estimated figures based on the best professional judgement of a scientific expert

H = Connected to reference in F (define assumptions such as regeneration time, lifespan, population dynamics, etc.)





# Local Data Stewardship

## Example of outcome from locally validated data (Dr. John Litvaitis):

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
\$ RCPP Funding \$ partner contributions # of partners	Areawide planning Farm-scale planning Contracting Outreach	# acres of NE Cottontail habitat restored (specific practice codes)	# NE Cottontail*

\*Outcome estimates based range of 0.4-0.5 rabbits per acre as published in peer-reviewed scientific research:

- Fuller, S. and A. Tur. 2012. Conservation Strategy for the New England Cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*).
- Barbour, M.S., and J.A. Litvaitis. 1993. Niche dimensions of New England cottontails in relation to habitat patch size. *Oecologia* 95:321-327.
- Litvaitis, J.A. and R. Villafuerte, 1996. Factors Affecting the Persistence of New England Cottontail Metapopulations: The Role of Habitat Management
- Wildlife Society Bulletin (1973-2006), Vol. 24, No. 4 (Winter, 1996), pp. 686-693



# RCPP FY 20/21 Timeline



RCPP Action	Key Dates to Remember
RCPP FY20/21 funding announcement released	August 6, 2020
Webinar for Partners	August 27, 2020 @ 2:00 p.m. CST
Webinar on how to submit an RCPP proposal through the RCPP portal	September 10, 2020 @ 2:00 p.m. CST
Application due into the RCPP portal	November 4, 2020 @ 10:59 p.m. CST
RCPP website for more information on webinars	

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/rcpp/>



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# Questions?



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