

February 25, 2013

Colorado NRCS Approves \$9 Million to Assist Landowners with Locally Developed Targeted Conservation Projects

DENVER -- The Colorado Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recently approved \$9 million in targeted conservation proposals to assist Colorado landowners plan and implement locally developed conservation projects that address identified priority resource concerns within the state.

“The targeted conservation effort accomplishes two objectives. First it invigorates the locally led process through our conservation districts and encourages them to actively address local resource concerns,” said Phyllis Ann Philipps, Colorado NRCS State Conservationist. *“Secondly, by focusing our financial and technical assistance dollars, we have a larger cumulative impact on the project area, which is also more efficient and effective. The emphasis for these projects is on obtaining tangible resource benefits.”*

Of the 48 proposals submitted, there were 16 approved projects which will address traditional natural resource issues concerning agriculture such as water quantity, water quality improvement, livestock nutrient management, grazing lands, forest health, and soil resource management. The projects also address emerging natural resource issues including agricultural air emissions, energy conservation, soil health, and market-based approaches to conservation.

A short narrative on each of the 16 approved projects is as follows:

Improving Water Quality in the North Platte River Watershed within Jackson County

Submitted by: Jackson County Conservation District (NPCD)

The project’s goal is to work with producers who have facilities on or adjacent to stream channels where water quality is being affected and to assist them with relocating those facilities to an area away from the stream channel and flood plain in an effort to help eliminate water quality issues that presently exists at those sites.

Elkhead Creek Watershed Improvement Project

Submitted by: Routt County Conservation District

Routt County Conservation District will treat priority areas as identified by the local working group in Northwest Colorado.

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Head-gate and Diversion Firming, Tamarisk and Russian Olive Mitigation

Submitted by: Colorado River Watershed Association/Associated Conservation Districts

This project's goal is improve control and measurement of irrigation diversion projects that will lead to more efficient use of water resources and increase water quantity through more efficient diversion structures, more efficient irrigation systems, and Tamarisk/Russian Olive removal to improve water quality, quantity, and general riparian and wildlife health.

Rio Grande Diversion and Headgate Improvement Project

Submitted by: Rio Grande Watershed Association of Conservation Districts

The project will mitigate degradation in function of the Rio Grande and Conejos River by addressing aging diversion and headgate structures, streambank erosion, water quality, wildlife habitat, and grazing management within the project area.

Reducing Consumptive Use of Water while Improving Soil Health

Submitted by: Rio Grande Watershed Association of Conservation Districts

This project will promote the use of multi-species cover crops and the use of compost to benefit soil health and lower water use through better soil structure and introducing lower consumptive use crops into cropping rotations. This reduction of water use will help ensure sustainable agriculture and assist with the overall economy in the San Luis Valley.

Jefferson Conservation District Focused Forest Restoration Initiative

Submitted by: Jefferson Conservation District

This project will mimic natural disturbances of Lodgepole pine, open ponderosa, and Douglas-fir/ponderosa forests at spatial scales sufficient enough to have meaningful impacts in addressing resource concerns such as decreased landscape diversity, reduced wildlife habitat, and increased risk of wildfires.

Woodland Park Healthy Forest Initiative, Forest Restoration and Conservation Project

Submitted by: Teller-Park Conservation District and Various Partners

This project will address forest health, forest restoration and resiliency, and wildfire risk reduction resource concerns. The project will protect resources and communities by reducing the threat of a forest fire, increasing age and species diversity to reduce insect and disease threats, increasing forest health and tree vigor, emphasizing local accountability, and enhancing wildlife habitat.

Controlling the Invasive Plant Species--Tamarisk

Submitted by: West Otero Timpas Conservation District

This project will provide landowners with technical and cost-share assistance for control methods that will lead to a more ecologically functioning xeric riparian system that will promote native plants. Natural wildlife habitat will be improved, sedimentation reduced and water supply increased in the Arkansas River.

Soil Health Improvement and Soil Erosion Reduction Project

Submitted by: Dolores Conservation District

This project will help producers in the Dolores Conservation District Agricultural Land areas in implementing management practices that will improve soil health and reduce erosion through practices such as conservation crop rotation, residue and tillage management, no-till cover crop, irrigation water management, mulch till, nutrient management, and integrated pest management.

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Reducing Seepage Loss from Irrigation Delivery Ditches in the Lower South Platte

Submitted by: Sedgwick County Conservation District

This project will address water quantity, excessive seepage, inefficient water use on irrigated land, and soil erosion by improving irrigation efficiency, reducing ditch seepage, and improving water management for agricultural producers in Sedgwick County.

Improving Air Quality and Reducing Nitrogen Emissions on Agricultural Land

Submitted by: Haxtun Conservation District

This project will assist agricultural producers in Phillips County to become proactive in reducing nitrogen emissions by implementing management practices such as nutrient management, integrated pest management, nitrogen stabilizers, and establishing an alert system to notify producers of potential easterly upslope wind events in Rocky Mountain National Park.

Southeast Irrigation Energy Efficiency

Submitted by: Northeast Prowers Conservation District

Energy, water quantity/quality, and air quality are top resource concerns for irrigated producers in the district. This project aims at directly addressing these resource concerns with tangible, on-the-ground practices that will reduce energy consumption, increase irrigation system efficiency, improve water quality through enhanced system performance, and reduce air emissions. Such practices may include Variable Frequency Drives, re-bowling, re-nozzling, and metering devices.

Active Restoration in the Upper Arkansas Basin

Submitted by: South Pueblo County and Upper Huerfano Conservation Districts

This project will work with landowners to assist them with treating Tamarisk and Russian Olive and with implementing practices which will restore native vegetation. Practices will include obstruction removal, critical area planting, riparian herbaceous planting, range seeding, use exclusion, and fencing.

Southwest Yuma County Irrigation Water Efficiency Project

Submitted by: Yuma County Conservation District

This project aims to improve water efficiency by adopting the latest technologies in center pivot irrigation through variable rate application and soil moisture monitoring.

Surface Water Quality in the Florida River and Tributaries

Submitted by: La Plata and Pine River Conservation Districts

This proposal addresses treatment of stream banks and riparian areas along the Florida River and Salt Creek via conservation practices designed to reduce stream bank erosion and improve the condition of riparian vegetation.

Stransky Lateral Ditch

Submitted by: Stransky Lateral Ditch Company

This project will assist farmers on the Stransky Lateral convert the earthen ditch system to a buried pipeline, improve irrigation water management, and transition to reduced tillage systems.

Additionally, funding for the Gunnison Sage-grouse was targeted through NRCS's Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program to address Gunnison Sage-grouse priority habitat on approximately 58,000 acres in the upper Gunnison River Basin.

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There will continue to be \$28 million in general Farm Bill Program funding, which will be used to address resource concerns outside of the targeted areas.

For more information about Colorado NRCS programs and initiatives, please visit our website at www.co.nrcs.usda.gov.

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