



Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Program Overview

Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov



The Agency:

NRCS provides many services; however, the foundation of the Agency is the **free** technical assistance offered to develop conservation plans and resource management systems.

Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

A few NRCS definitions:

- **Conservation plans** -
 - A conservation plan identifies the customer's conservation objectives and assesses and analyzes the natural resources issues on that customer's land related to soil, water, animals, plants, air, energy, and human interaction.
- **Resource management systems** -
 - a process of evaluating the resources, their interaction with each other, and the impact of selective treatment(s). The goal of planning a resource management system is to select and evaluate treatment alternatives that solve the identified resource problem(s).
- **Resource concerns** -
 - A resource concern is a resource condition that does not meet minimum acceptable condition levels. Resource concern categories organize resource concerns into functionally similar groups and divided into components to distinguish between causal factors mitigation actions anticipated environmental effects.



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Working together...



We partner with grassroots and national partners to inform and aid Americas producers in conserving the nations natural resources.

In Kansas, our Primary Partners include (but are not limited to):

- Local Conservation Districts
- Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- Kansas Wildlife and Parks
- Kansas Forest Service
- K-State Extension

Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Funding vs. Programs

- **Funding comes to the USDA via an advisory allocation**
 - based on the available funding provided by estimated congressionally enacted appropriations for discretionary programs and the anticipated full-year apportionment for mandatory programs.
- **The NRCS has the ability to allocate funding to the programs. Our programs offer opportunities for the Agency to fund the priorities mentioned previously.**
 - The NRCS does this through incentives.



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Funding vs. Programs examples:

Discretionary Funding:

- **Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA), including Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)**
- **Plant Materials Centers (PMC)**
- **Snow Survey and Water Supply Forecasting Program**
- **Soil Survey Program**
- **Urban Agriculture**

Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Funding vs. Programs examples:

Mandatory Programs:

- **Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)**
- **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), including IRA**
- **Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)**
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), including IRA**
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), including IRA**
- **Conservation Innovation Grants**
- **Healthy Forests Reserve Program**
- **Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), including IRA**

Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Inflation Reduction Act 2023

- First thing to know is that the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) offers a new funding source but is not a Program. IRA funds must be spent using the current programs policy and activities.
- The IRA Funding provides an additional \$19.5 billion nation wide until 2031. IRA is meant to support USDA's conservation programs to mitigate climate change.
- NRCS recently published an updated list of [Climate-Smart Agricultural and Forestry Mitigation Activities](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/climate/climate-smart-mitigation-activities) that must be implemented to qualify for IRA funding.
- These activities are expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or increases carbon sequestration, as well as mitigate soil health, water quality, pollinator and wildlife habitat and air quality.



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Below is the web address for the Climate-Smart Agricultural and Forestry Mitigation Activities
<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/conservation-basics/natural-resource-concerns/climate/climate-smart-mitigation-activities>

NRCS Programs Available in Kansas

2018 Farm Bill:

- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
- Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)
- Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)
- Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP)
- Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)
(administered by FSA)



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

NRCS Program

- Applications are accepted year-round.
- Funding and the incentives are based on conservation benefits provided.
- All programs are open to all eligible agricultural producers and landowners and have multiple funding pools available.
- Pays the contract holder after the activity is installed.
- Payment rates are flat rates, not a percentage.

Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

- EQIP is a voluntary conservation program that helps agricultural producers to promote agricultural production and environmental quality as compatible goals.
- Through EQIP, agricultural producers receive financial and technical assistance to implement structural and management conservation practices that optimize environmental benefits on working agricultural land.
- Contracts can be scheduled over a period of one to ten years.



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

EQIP addresses Resource Concerns

- **Cropland**
 - Water Quality
 - Waterways
 - Nutrient management
 - Filter Strips
 - Soil Health
 - Cover Crops
 - No-till
 - Crop Rotation
- **Rangeland and Pasture**
 - Brush management and noxious/invasive plant management
 - Stream crossings
 - Prescribed grazing
 - Prescribed burning
- **Forestry**
 - Timber stand improvement
 - Riparian buffers
- **Wildlife**
 - Seeding Native Plants
 - Pollinator habitat



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Conservation Stewardship Program

Program Purpose

- The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) is for producers who want to take their conservation efforts to the next level.
- Most CSP applicants have already applied conservation practices to their land.
- Through CSP, producers can further improve their conservation efforts with conservation activities called “enhancements.”



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov



CSP specific requirements

- The Operators entire operation (according to records at the Farm Service Agency (FSA)) must be enrolled in the program.
- Contracts are for five-year periods. Annual payments are made once a year.
 - Includes Incentive payment for enrolled and treated land, as well as the planned practice or enhancement payment.
- Existing Activities -
 - Your current level of conservation equates to a higher land use payment.
- Enhancements and Practices -
 - Conservation activities you agree to add and pays a set dollar amount.



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Land Eligibility

Applications must meet Stewardship Threshold Eligibility.

- Minimum of 2 Resource Concerns at time of application (For all Land Uses, i.e., Crop, Range, Farmstead etc.)



Natural Resources Conservation Service
nrcs.usda.gov

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)

ACEP consolidates three earlier conservation easement programs under two components:

1. ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) former program:
 - Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
2. ACEP-Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) former programs:
 - Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
 - Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE)

- The purpose is to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands and associated lands.
- Lands protected with an easement provide critical habitat for improving water quality and give a home to birds of conservation and recreational importance.
- NRCS purchases rights directly from private and Tribal landowners, through a reserved interest deed in eligible land.
- A WRE easement may either be in perpetuity (with up to 100% cost share) or for 30-years (up to 75% cost share).
- **The United States holds the easement**, meaning that NRCS is responsible for the monitoring, management, and enforcement consistent with conservation values.



ACEP-ALE: Purpose

- Protecting the agricultural use and future viability, and related conservation values, of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses of that land that negatively affect the agricultural uses and conservation values. (§ 1468.1(a)(3)).

Otherwise interpreted as: The ACEP-ALE program is designed to protect the land that your family farm business is built on, from nonagricultural development.



ACEP- Eligible Entities in Kansas:

❖ The Nature Conservancy

- Contact Lindsey Reinarz
- lreinarz@tnc.org
- (314) 501-1505

❖ Kansas Land Trust

- Contact Jerry Jost
- jjost@klt.org
- (785) 749-3297

❖ Ranchland Trust of Kansas

- Contact Lynn Gentine
- lynn@kla.org
- (785) 273-5115



Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service
nrcs.usda.gov



Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

2 types of RCPP Funding available to Partners –

Classic

AFA

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most similar to traditional NRCS programs. • NRCS reimburses producers directly for FA activities via producer contracts in CDAA. • NRCS often delivers all (or most) of the TA in support of producer contracts & easements. • Partner’s primary role is to provide outreach, measure impact, and deliver partner contributions to amplify NRCS funding. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner acts as a “mini NRCS” • Partner installs practices for producers or reimburses producer for FA activities. • Partner delivers all project TA in support of producer contracts and easements. • NRCS support limited to non-delegable tasks such as confirming eligibility of producers and land, AGI verification, HEL & WC compliance, & NEPA evaluation. |
|--|---|

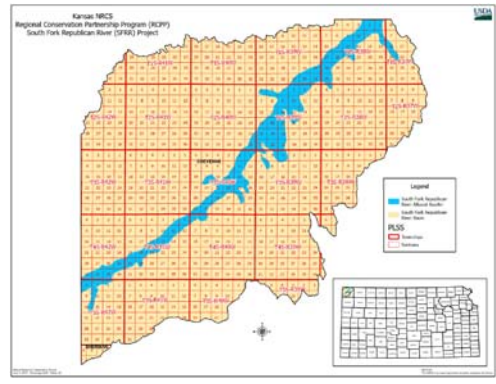
Active *Classic* RCPP Projects in Kansas for FY2025

Groundwater Restoration and Sustainability Project (GRASP)



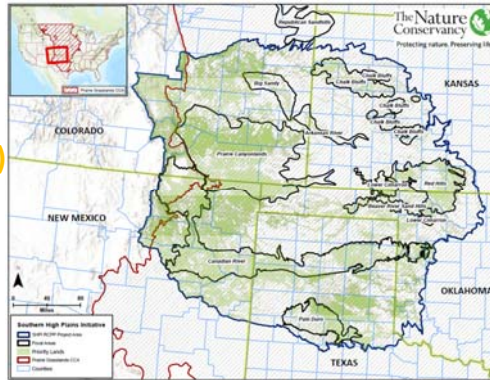
- Lead Partner = Playa Lakes Joint Venture (PLJV)
- Eligible Area = Wichita & Greeley Counties
- Project is targeting funds to playa restoration and practices to help improve infiltration and conserve ground water.
- Resource concerns =
 - *Primary* = Source Water Depletion
 - *Secondary* = Field Pesticide loss; Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss; Terrestrial Habitat; Long Term Protection of Land (associated with rental payments).
- ACT NOW sign-up for FY25 – Bulletin & news release coming soon!

South Fork Republican River Project (SFRR)



- Lead Partner = Cheyenne County Conservation District
- Eligible Area = SFRR watershed within Cheyenne County
- Project is targeting funds to conserve water on the Republican River by removing invasive species (Russian olive, Salt Cedar) and convert to solar pumps (float required).
- Resource Concerns =
 - *Primary* = Source Water Depletion; Pest Pressure
 - *Secondary* = Aquatic Habitat; Terrestrial Habitat; Concentrated Erosion; Degraded Plant Condition; Livestock Production Limitation; Wind & Water Erosion
- ACT NOW sign-up for FY2025 – Bulletin & news release coming soon!

Southern High Plains Initiative (SHPI)

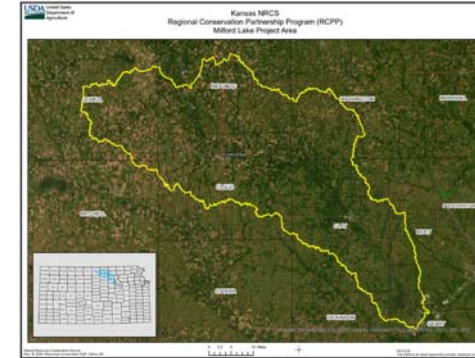


Multi-state project, Colorado is the lead State

- Lead Partner = The Nature Conservancy (TNC).
- Eligible Area = Numerous counties in SW/SC Kansas
- Project is targeting funds to retain and maintain grassland in the Southern High Plains.
 - Primary* = Terrestrial habitat
 - Secondary* = Aquatic habitat; Degraded Plant Condition; Weather resilience; Long term protection of land (this RC is tied to rental payments & easements as well).
- All current funds have been spent for LMR contracts! Only entity-held easement funds remaining (sign-up deadline of October 25th)

Milford Lake Project *RENEWAL*

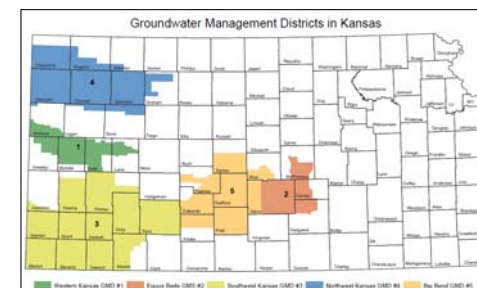
- Lead Partner = Kansas Water Office
- Eligible Area = Milford Lake Watershed in Clay, Cloud, Dickinson, Geary, Jewell, Mitchell, Republic, Riley, Washington Counties.
- Project is targeting funds to reduce nutrients entering Milford Lake.
 - Primary* = Field sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss
 - Secondary* = Concentrated erosion; Degraded plant condition; Pest pressure; Soil quality limitations; Source water depletion; Storage and handling of pollutants; Terrestrial Habitat; Weather resilience; Wind & water erosion
- FY25 sign-up 1 deadline is November 1st



Active AFA RCPP Projects in Kansas for FY2025

High Plains Aquifer Project

- \$18,750,000 in FA to producers
- Kansas Department of Agriculture (KDA) is lead partner
- Resource concerns include insufficient water, source water protection (groundwater), soil quality degradation.
- Practices include conversion to No-Till and dryland farming, IWM, crop rotation, nutrient management...

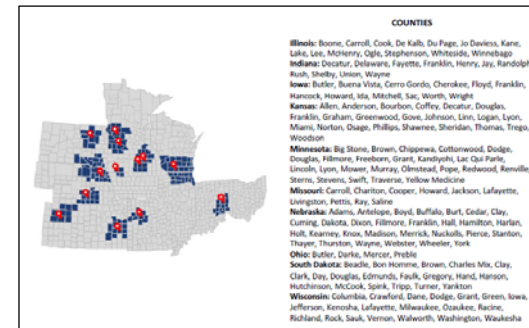


Kansas Nebraska Wetland Initiative

- \$7,500,000 in FA to producers (both states)
- Ducks Unlimited is lead partner
- Resource Concerns include inadequate habitat for wildlife, degraded plant condition, insufficient water
- Practices include wildlife habitat projects (wetland restoration, brush management, prescribed grazing, grass plantings, etc.)

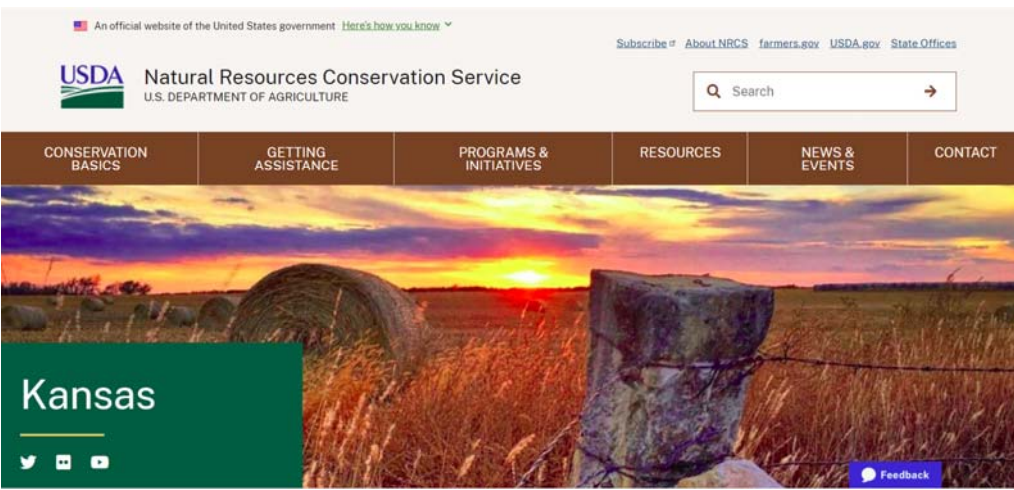


Expanding Soil Health Through Carbon Markets



- Multi-State project, South Dakota is the Lead State
- \$2,884,615 in FA to producers in Kansas
- American Coalition for Ethanol is the lead partner
 - Targeting partner “grain-sheds” for enrollment
- Resource Concern is Soil Quality Degradation
- Practices include No-Till, Nutrient Management, Cover Crops

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



Conservation Compliance

1. **Highly Erodible Land Compliance (HEL)**
2. **Wetland Compliance (WC)**

- Aims to reduce soil loss on erosion-prone lands and to protect wetlands for the multiple benefits they provide.
- HELC and WC provisions apply to all land that is considered HEL or a wetland, and that is owned or farmed by persons voluntarily participating in USDA programs, unless USDA determines an exemption applies.
- Non-compliance may affect the following types of USDA program benefits:
 - FSA loans and disaster assistance payments.
 - NRCS and FSA conservation program benefits.
 - Federal crop insurance premium subsidies.





Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

- Administered by Farm Service Agency (FSA)
- NRCS is the technical service provider.
 - Land Eligibility determinations.
 - Conservation planning.
 - Practice implementation.

Disclaimer

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) at 711. If you are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, please dial 7-1-1 to access telecommunications relay services. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.