

Conservation Reserve Program...

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) focuses on land treatment/conservation practices applied to marginally productive and environmentally sensitive land. More recently, additional emphasis has been given to establishing vegetative cover of native warm season grasses (NWSGs) well suited for wildlife habitat.

NRCS provides technical assistance to plan and install conservation practices eligible for CRP and the Farm Service Agency administers the program including taking applications and making cost share and annual rental payments.

NRCS assisted Tennessee landowners in developing conservation plans for Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) applicants with 1,267 offers accepted on 53,231 acres—more than any other southeastern state! Eighty-four percent of the acres and 81 percent of offers were accepted, making this one of the highest percentages of accepted offers ever in CRP.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program...

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) received \$150,000 in funding in 2003. An additional sixteen (16) new WHIP contracts covering 1,950 acres were approved.

Currently, Tennessee has over 200 active WHIP contracts, and Tennessee has received approximately \$1.2 million cost share funds since WHIP was authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill. Cost share is available to landowners to install conservation practices beneficial to aquatic, upland wildlife, migratory waterfowl, and other birds.

Grassland Reserve Program...

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance grasslands on their property. Over \$1 million in GRP funding was provided to approximately 70 landowners in the state in FY 2003.

The NRCS, Farm Service Agency, and Forest Service are coordinating implementation of GRP, which helps landowners restore and protect grassland, rangeland, pastureland, shrubland and certain other lands and provides assistance for rehabilitating grasslands.

Farm and Ranchland Protection Program...

Numerous organizations and individuals have indicated an interest in participating in the Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP), a program designed to protect prime agricultural land from urban sprawl. According to the National Resources Inventory, Tennessee is losing prime agricultural land to urban development at a much higher rate than most other states (7th in the U.S.). Through FRPP, USDA cooperates with local entities to place a conservation easement on farmland that will protect the land from future conversion to non-agricultural uses. The landowner receives an easement payment for the encumbrance placed on the land.

The State Technical Committee assisted NRCS in developing a state plan and ranking criteria to implement the Farmland Protection Program (FRPP); however, no applications/proposals were submitted to the State Conservationist for consideration and funding in FY 2002 or FY 2003.



Wetland Reserve Program...

The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program to restore and protect wetlands on non-federal lands. It was initiated in 1994 in Tennessee. As of September 30, 2003, ninety (90) easements on more than 14,450 acres have been filed. An additional eleven (11) easements on approximately 2,300 acres are currently pending. Restoration may include establishment of bottomland hardwood trees, natural regeneration, waterfowl management areas, and reversal of previously installed drainage or flood control measures to enhance wetland functions and values.

WRP offers for FY 2003 were extended to five landowners, all for permanent easements. NRCS anticipates filing easements on an estimated 1,500 acres for FY 2003 applicants.

In FY 2004, a total of 32 applications remain unfunded for the WRP. Tennessee currently has applications totaling about 4,800 acres with a funding need of approximately \$6 million.

For More Information...

For more information on these and other NRCS programs, log onto the Tennessee NRCS website at: www.tn.nrcs.usda.gov

Outreach...

Outreach is an integral part of the NRCS conservation effort in Tennessee. Extra effort is put forth to assure all landowners are made aware of programs and services available to them. Minority landowners are contacted by letter, personal contacts, newspaper, and radio broadcasts. In addition, listening sessions have been held to gather input on new programs, and meetings have been held across the state in partnership with other agencies to allow small farmers an opportunity to learn about 2002 Farm Bill programs.

Budget and Staffing...

Ten percent of the NRCS workforce is eligible to retire at the present time and twenty-five percent will be eligible to retire in five years or less. NRCS received a budget allocation in FY 2003 that supported 251 full-time employees.

NRCS staff works closely with 101 soil conservation district employees to provide the maximum technical assistance to private landowners. Additionally, other conservation partners with a common interest in conservation include: Resource Conservation and Development Councils, State Government Agencies, other Federal Agencies, NRCS Earth Team Volunteers, Agricultural and Environmental Groups and Conservation Organizations, and many others.



Tennessee

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Annual Report

FY 2003



The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment.

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Dear Tennesseans,

I am pleased to present this 2003 USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Annual Report. Tennessee's private landowners continue to respond to soil and water resource challenges. Each year, gains in natural resources conservation bring us closer to our goal of achieving a productive land in harmony with a quality environment.

These strides are made because of the stewardship and commitment of our private landowners along with assistance from a broadbased conservation partnership consisting of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Tennessee Association of Conservation Districts, Department of Agriculture, Resource Conservation & Development councils, and others. This partnership has reaffirmed its commitment to locally led conservation as one of the most effective ways to help individual landowners and communities achieve their conservation goals through a voluntary, incentive-based approach to land stewardship.

This has been a very successful year in that we exceeded all of our resource conservation goals. I would like to thank Tennessee's NRCS employees, conservation partnership members, and private landowners for the contributions you have made and I encourage your continued participation as we work together for all Tennesseans.

James W. Ford
State Conservationist

NRCS
Vision
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Natural Resources Conservation in Tennessee...

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) worked closely with the local soil conservation districts and Tennessee Department of Agriculture (TDA) in assisting landowners to participate in programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) in 2003. Ongoing programs, such as EQIP, have been very effective in reducing erosion rates and improving water quality through the installation of best management practices, such as, grassed waterways, sediment control basins, grade control structures, and pasture management systems. All of the soil conservation districts in Tennessee participate in the TDA cost-share program, which also helps to fund installation of planned best management practices.



Program Summary Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program (PL-566)...

NRCS uses the Small Watershed Program to improve water quality and to enhance, protect, and restore natural resources while improving the overall well being of the affected communities.

Current watershed project activity and purpose are as follows:

- Bear Creek Watershed, Scott County (treat 207 acres of abandoned mine land and water quality improvement),
- Hurricane Creek Watershed, Humphreys County (flood prevention)
- Hickory Creek Watershed, Warren, Coffee and Grundy Counties (water quality protection and improvement),
- Lick Creek Watershed, Greene County (water quality improvement).

Grazing Lands Program...

NRCS grazing land specialists and other employees held numerous field days and grazing workshops this year. A State Grazing Council was established in 2003 in cooperation with other state organizations to meet the growing need for information on grazing lands.

Tennessee hosted the Second National Grazing Lands Conference in Nashville on December 7-10, 2003. More than 1,100 ranchers and other conservation leaders from all over the Nation met to focus on conserving natural resources on the nation's grazing lands. The event provided information ranging from conservation easements and intensive grazing rotations to tracking livestock patterns through the use of GPS. Attendees gained invaluable knowledge to help them conserve and protect natural resources on range and grasslands throughout the country while keeping those lands productive for cattle, and other grazing livestock.



Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)...

The Tennessee Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program provides a community-based venue for assisting in the regional management and development of the state's natural, social, and economic resources. Two new RC&D areas, one in the southcentral and one in the northwest portions of the state, are almost ready to begin the application process. When the two new areas are approved, this will bring RC&D coverage to 92 of the 95 counties in Tennessee.

The projects of RC&D in Tennessee have expanded to include areas of the state that are currently not in RC&D authorized areas through the operation of state-wide programs. These programs include "First Wheels" a transportation program for welfare recipients to improve their capabilities for employment, and Envirothon, an environmental education program for Tennessee high schools.



Status of Soil Surveys...

Requests for soil survey reports and information from city/county officials, land developers, private land owners and others are increasing. Soil Survey mapping (initial first time mapping and updates) is completed at a rate close to 350,000 acres per year.

Six soil surveys were published in fiscal year 2003—Polk, Bedford, Sequatchie, Dickson, Cheatham, and Campbell. In fiscal year 2003, soil survey mapping was completed on 410,000 acres in the state.

Watershed Rehabilitation...

There are several aging watershed dams in Tennessee that have been identified as needing repair. The plan and engineering design for Mary's Creek Watershed Project (Structure Site #8) in Shelby County was finalized in 2003. Project funds have been authorized in the amount of \$350,000 with \$187,000 local cost share. Construction is scheduled to begin soon.

Several other watershed dams in Tennessee are in need of repair.

Farm Bill Programs

Environmental Quality Incentives Program...

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary USDA conservation program which offers producers a tool to address their natural resource concerns on eligible land while achieving the maximum environmental benefits. Through EQIP, Tennessee landowners received approximately \$7.3 million in funding in FY 2003. There were 525 contracts with four contracts exceeding \$100,000.

EQIP program funds help Tennessee farmers install conservation practices to address serious environmental problems that threaten their land. Numerous conservation practices are available for cost share to Tennessee landowners and operators including Waste Storage Facility, Filter Strip, Riparian Forest Buffer, Prescribed Grazing, Grade Stabilization Structure, Water and Sediment Control Basins, Stream bank and Shoreline Protection, Pasture and Hayland Planting, Stream Crossing, Livestock Watering Facility, and others.

Tennessee has very active Local Working Groups. In addition, the State Technical Committee advises the State Conservationist with management and administration of EQIP.