ASSISTANCE NOW AVAILABLE TO RESTORE AND PROTECT OHIO’s PRIVATELY-OWNED LAND FOR WETLAND HABITAT

Sign-up Deadline is March 27, 2020

COLUMBUS, OH, Feb. 14, 2020 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) encourages people and groups wanting to restore and protect critical wetlands to consider enrolling their property into conservation easements.

This year, NRCS will invest in technical and financial assistance to help private landowners, tribes and other groups protect these valuable lands. Efforts will be focused on restoring previously drained agricultural lands and protecting the restored wetlands with easements. Landowners are financially compensated for enrolling their land in easements.

“Protecting these lands preserves Ohio’s heritage, natural resources and open space,” said Barbara Baker, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist in Ohio. “Easements are an important tool for people who are trying to preserve the land for future generations.”

The Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) utilizes the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) component of the program. Applications for ACEP-WRE are accepted on a continuous basis. Applications signed and submitted to NRCS by the ranking and funding deadline will be evaluated for fiscal year 2020 funding. The application deadline for this year is March 27, 2020.

Through ACEP wetland reserve easements, NRCS helps landowners restore and protect wetland ecosystems. Wetlands are one of nature’s most productive ecosystems providing many ecological, societal and economic benefits.

In the 1700s, wetlands covered 5 million acres of Ohio, primarily in the northwestern part of the State, referred to as the “Great Black Swamp.” Competing land uses resulted in a 90 percent loss of wetlands by the late 1900s. Since 2005, NRCS has assisted landowners in restoring more than 25,000 acres of Ohio’s wetlands.

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“Wetlands provide many benefits, including critical habitat for a wide array of wildlife species. They also store floodwaters, clean and recharge groundwater, sequester carbon, trap sediment, and filter pollutants for clean water,” said Baker.

“Seventy-five percent of the nation's wetlands are situated on private and tribal lands,” Baker added. Last year, Ohio landowners restored 600 acres of wetlands through ACEP. Landowners can choose either a permanent or 30-year wetland conservation easement.

Eligible lands include farmed or converted wetlands that can successfully be restored, croplands or grasslands subject to flooding, previously restored wetlands, and riparian areas that link protected wetland areas. As part of the easement, NRCS and the landowner work together to develop a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the wetland.

Ohio landowners interested in wetland reserve easements and partners interested in agricultural easements should contact their local USDA Service Center.

To learn more about ACEP and other technical and financial assistance available through NRCS conservation programs, visit Get Started with NRCS.

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