

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

Glenn Sandifer, Programs Specialist

glenn.sandifer@sc.usda.gov

(803) 253-3894

Wetlands Reserve Program Sign Up Announced

SC Landowners with Eligible Wetlands Encouraged to Apply by February 1, 2010

Columbia, SC. – (December 15, 2009)--Landowners in South Carolina with eligible acreage are encouraged to apply for Fiscal Year 2010 technical and funding assistance available through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). WRP is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to create, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The deadline to apply for prioritized funding is February 1, 2010.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides technical and financial assistance to help landowners with wetland restoration efforts. SC NRCS State Conservationist Niles Glasgow said, "Our goal with this program is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, along with optimum wildlife habitat, on every acre enrolled." WRP offers landowners an opportunity to establish long-term conservation, wildlife habitat and wetland protection.

Landowners who choose to participate in WRP may sell a conservation easement or enter into a cost-share restoration agreement with USDA to restore and protect wetlands. The landowner voluntarily limits future use of the land, yet retains private ownership. With landowner input, NRCS develops a plan for the restoration and maintenance of the wetland. "WRP offers landowners three options including permanent easements, 30-year easements, and restoration cost-share agreements of a minimum 10-year duration," explained Glasgow.

Landowners interested in participating in WRP should contact their local NRCS conservationist to begin the application process. Eligibility for the easement option requires seven years of ownership (some exceptions apply) prior to submitting an application, and the landowner must be able to provide evidence of control of the land, including recorded access rights. In addition, participants must also be in compliance with High Erodible Land and Wetland Conservation Provisions of the Farm Bill and also meet the Adjusted Gross Income limitations.

WRP targets land which was formerly wetland and where planned restoration has the potential to maximize wildlife habitat, improve water quality, and aid in the recovery of special status species. NRCS ranks eligible projects according to both environmental benefits and cost-analysis. Environmental factors include assessments of future habitat diversity, benefits to special status animals, restoration of hydrology, the ability of the project to reduce habitat fragmentation, size of the offering, percent of eligible land, and improved water quality.

For more information, visit your local USDA-NRCS office, or call Glenn Sandifer, SC NRCS Program Specialist, at 803-253-3894, or email glenn.sandifer@sc.usda.gov.

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