**Indiana NRCS Announces First Projects of New, Innovative Program**

*Indianapolis, IN, January 14, 2014*– Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that 115 high-impact projects across all 50 states, including Indiana, will receive more than $370 million as part of the new Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

RCPP’s historic focus on public-private partnerships enables private companies, local communities and other non-government partners a way to invest in efforts to keep our land productive and water clean, and promote tremendous economic growth in agriculture, construction, tourism and outdoor recreation, and other industries.

The projects in Indiana will accomplish a wide diversity of agricultural and natural resource goals from defining the environmental and economic impacts of conservation practices to helping to protect important waterways like Lake Erie and the St. Joseph river.

“Partners are seeing the value of conservation and investing in their future,” Vilsack said. “These partnerships are forging a new path for getting conservation on the ground and are providing opportunities for communities to have a voice and ownership in protecting and improving our natural resources. The Regional Conservation Partnership Program ushers in a new era of conservation, and we’re excited about the down-the-road benefits from this new Farm Bill program.”

This year’s projects will engage hundreds of partners with wide-ranging interests, including communities, conservation districts, agribusiness, non-government organizations, for- and non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies and Tribal governments. In addition to USDA funds, partners’ will contribute an estimated $400 million, more than doubling USDA’s investment.

“RCPP puts our partners in the driver’s seat,” said Jane Hardisty, USDA’S Natural Resources Conservation Service state conservationist in Indiana. “Projects are led locally, and demonstrate the value of strong public-private partnerships that deliver solutions to tough natural resource challenges.”

Of the 115 projects announced today, the three that impact Indiana include:

* The University of Notre Dame – The project will assist with adoption of cover crops and two-stage ditches in targeted watersheds. Soil and water quality and quantity benefits will be quantified and monitored at the watershed scale. The effect of these practices on water and soil quality and the economic impacts for both public and private interests will be documented. In addition, modeling efforts will make broader conclusions at the regional scale.
* The Tri-State Western Lake Erie Basin Phosphorus Reduction Initiative – A diverse team of partners will identify high-priority sub-watersheds for phosphorus reduction and increase farmer access to public and private technical assistance in Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana. The project will coordinate with the Ohio Phosphorus Task Force Report and move Lake Erie toward goals in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. The partners will gauge success and monitor results using water quality monitoring and watershed modeling.
* The Michigan/Indiana St. Joseph River Conservation Partnership - The partnership optimize groundwater use, improve infiltration, and reduce nutrients and sediment while also improving wildlife and fisheries habitat, using innovative methods to target high-priority areas and appropriate conservation practices. Monitoring will be used to adaptively manage this project from the field-scale to the entire watershed.

More than 600 pre-proposals were submitted for RCPP in 2014. Of those, more than 200 were invited to submit full proposals.

“With so many strong project proposals, the project selection process was extremely competitive. RCPP is a 5-year $1.2 billion USDA commitment; projects not selected in this first year may be eligible in subsequent years,” Hardisty said.

For more information on Indiana RCPP projects, visit NRCS Indiana’s webpage at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/in/programs/?cid=stelprdb1248173> or view the full list of projects on the national site at: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/in/programs/?cid=stelprdb1242732>.

The next announcement of program funding for fiscal year 2016 will be made later in the year. Today's announcement includes funding allocated for the first two years of the program.

To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted) or local USDA service center. You can locate your nearest USDA Service Center at our website <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/in/contact/local/>.

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