

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack recently announced the launch of a new era in American conservation efforts that will focus on public-private partnerships.

“This is an entirely new approach to conservation,” Vilsack said. “We’re giving private companies, local communities and other non-government partners a way to invest in what are essentially clean water start-up operations.”

The new conservation program, called the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), was authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill and will benefit areas across the nation. RCPP streamlines conservation efforts by combining four programs (the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program, Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative, the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Initiative, and the Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil Erosion) into one.

The RCPP will competitively award funds to conservation projects designed by local partners specifically for their region. ***Eligible partners include private companies, universities, non-profit organizations, local and tribal governments and others joining with agricultural and conservation organizations and producers to invest money, manpower and materials to their proposed initiatives.***

“Local decision making is empowered through this program – bringing together conservation groups, cities and townships, sportsmen groups, universities, agricultural associations and others – to design conservation projects that are tailored to our needs here in Missouri,” said J.R. Flores, NRCS state conservationist.

USDA has \$1.2 billion for the five-year program, but with partners investing along with USDA, the program will leverage \$2.4 billion for conservation. Through RCPP, partners propose conservation projects to improve soil health, water quality and water use efficiency, wildlife habitat, and other related natural resources on private lands.

“This is an example of government at its best – streamlining multiple programs into one more effective effort, providing flexible tools, and connecting local citizens and organizations with resources that best address their priorities, protect and improve their quality of life, and propel economic growth,” Vilsack said.

The RCPP has three funding pools: 35 percent of total program funding directed to critical conservation areas chosen by Vilsack; 40 percent directed to regional or multi-state projects through a national competitive process; and 25 percent directed to state-level projects through a competitive process established by NRCS state leaders.

Missouri is included in the critical conservation areas selected by Vilsack. The Mississippi River Basin area includes the whole state, and the Prairie Grasslands area covers about half of the state (a map showing the boundary is included on the NRCS website). Flores said that Missouri NRCS has established five natural-resources priorities that proposals should address: water quality; soil health; at-risk and declining wildlife species; water quantity; and forest health.

“This program is a prime example of how government can serve as a catalyst for private investment in rural America,” Flores said.

The Holt County Soil and Water Conservation District is seeking partners who would be interested in pledging technical and/or financial assistance for participation in an RCPP project for Holt County geared towards drainage water management, cover crops, no-till, and flood prevention.

With pre-proposals for RCPP due July 14, Holt SWCD encourages anyone interested in pledging technical and/or financial assistance to please contact our office no later than July 3, 2014 – 660-442-3173 Ext 3.