**Habitat Happenings**

**Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership Now Available in Nebraska**

The Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP) is a voluntary program through which the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) enters into agreements with eligible partners to leverage resources to carry out high priority wetland protection, restoration, and enhancement. Some of the purposes of WREP are to improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, recharge groundwater, reduce impacts from flooding and to provide educational and recreational benefits.

WREP is part of the Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) component of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), a Farm Bill conservation program. The voluntary nature of WREP enables effective integration of wetland restoration on working agricultural landscapes providing meaningful benefits to farmers and ranchers who enroll in the program and to the communities where the wetlands exist.

Through WREP, under the WRE component of ACEP, partners work with NRCS to help restore, protect, and enhance enrolled wetlands directly with private landowners and Indian tribes through the purchase of an NRCS Wetland Reserve Easement. Eligible lands, which include farmed or converted wetland habitat that can be successfully and cost-effectively restored, may be enrolled under permanent easements, 30-year easements, or 30-year contracts (for acreage owned by Indian Tribes). For lands enrolled through wetland easements, NRCS will also develop and implement a WRE restoration plan that will restore, protect, and enhance the wetland’s functions and values.

Partner contributions must equal at least 10 percent of the total estimated costs for easement acquisition related costs and restoration implementation costs. Proposals that provide partner contributions greater than 10 percent will be given higher consideration in the selection process.

NRCS will prioritize applications for projects that: provide maximum partner resources as match, support the goals and objectives of an NRCS Landscape Conservation Initiatives, protect habitat that benefits migratory birds and wetland dependent wildlife, provide direct benefits to federal and state threatened and endangered species, and include targeted outreach to underserved groups in the agricultural community.

Individual landowners interested in enrolling their land in a Wetland Reserve Easement may apply at any time at their local USDA Service Center.

*The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture is a public/private partnership that works with federal and state agencies, local Natural Resources Districts, non-governmental organizations, and private landowners to develop “win-win” opportunities to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands in the Rainwater Basin. For more information, visit www.rwbjv.org and follow us on Facebook and Instagram.*