



Partner Activity Report

November 2024



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Message from the State Conservationist

A banner year, thanks to “we”

By Roylene Comes At Night
NRCS-WA State Conservationist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. - We celebrated Fiscal Year 2024 as a banner year - not just for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, but for the whole of our conservation family here in Washington. Together, we came together and helped producers enhance their stewardship of more than 1.2 million acres and obligated more than \$72 million through EQIP, CSP, and ACEP.

We couldn't have achieved this without understanding where everyone else is at, listening to their needs and ideas, learning what their priorities are, and then working very closely to achieve our shared goals.

I believe the collaboration and cooperation among our agencies we enjoy is a hallmark for all of us to celebrate - and it's also what we will continue to lean on as we work extremely hard to take full advantage of the opportunities the Inflation Reduction Act offers us, which is big.

We're facing a 31% increase in Technical and Financial Assistance funding in FY25. That's a lot of opportunity, which is why we need all of our partners at the table. We need to continue creating new ways of building agreements to support our conservation goals. We need to work together to continue taking advantage of the Regional Conservation Partnership Program. We need to further empower and encourage our Local Working Groups to be bold and courageous in the unique and interesting ways they can use our programs to help their neighbors.

We also need to listen to our producers, who are the experts on what they need and the barriers they face when working with us. Then, we need to take that wisdom back to our organizations and see how we can adjust the way we do business to better support them.

While all of that may seem complicated and maybe even a bit overwhelming, I ask you to take a look back on all of this and take notice of something - every sentence contains a “we” ... because together, we got this.

~ Roylene



West Area

By David Rose

West Area Conservationist

Staff Actions:

- ◆ We are working to fill the following vacancies:
Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP)
Engineer position in the Area Office located in Olympia;
Resource Conservationist in Chehalis and Lake
Stevens; Natural Resource Specialist (NRS) position in
Chehalis and Renton.
- ◆ New staff: Susan Hoey-Lees, CNMP Planner in
Olympia; Josh Himsl, Area Forester in Vancouver; .
- ◆ We have made selections for the following positions:
Area Forester in Vancouver. There are more to come.
- ◆ Lynn Khuat is back as the District Conservationist (DC)
for the Puget Sound Team following the birth of her
first child. Erin Gutierrez, RC in Puyallup, did a great job
as acting DC in Lynn's absence.
- ◆ Jared Hamman, RCPP Coordinator on the Area Staff, is
serving a detail as acting District Conservationist (DC)
for the Northwest Team while Sarah Tanuvasa is on
military duty.

Program Update:

The final FY24 Financial Assistance Programs tally for the West Area shows the following: EQIP - 204 contracts for over \$9.0 million, CSP - 30 contracts for over \$1.2 million, RCPP - 2 contracts for over \$1.1 million.

It's way too early to have any judgments about FY25, however we do currently have 400 applications for EQIP and 54 for CSP.



Central Area

Happy Autumn!

By Chris Clemens

NRCS- WA Central Area Conservationist

The leaves are falling and so is the snow in many areas. Our Central Area Staff have done an amazing job wrapping up our FY24 program campaigns and getting conservation on the ground. Our staff have been very busy working on ACT Now applications and getting ready for the rest of the FY25 Programs roll out. We are working hard to get staff and partners support with new hires and trainings.

Staffing:

We're excited about adding to the Central Area this next year with the following positions.

Area Office in Ephrata:

- ◆ Agronomist
- ◆ Civil Ag Engineer
- ◆ Pheasants Forever Easement Privat Lands Conservationist

Retirements:

Sergio Peredes from Goldendale FO will be retiring in December. We wish Sergio the best!

Programs Update:

The final FY24 Financial Assistance Programs tally for the Central Area shows the following: EQIP - 104 contracts (Up 118% from FY23) for \$16.1 million (Up 81%), CSP - 24 contracts (Up 118% from FY23) for \$3.4 million (Up 143%), RCPP - 27 contracts for \$6 million.

Partnership Activities:

This last month I had the the opportunity to attend the WACD conservation district area meetings, Columbia Basin Development League Conference, Cattlemen's Convention and the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) Strategy Meeting in the central area. It was engaging to hear all the great conservation that is going on across the Central area. Relationships are so important to putting conservation on the ground. Without this alliance, conservation could be limited and face many challenges.

Field:

- ◆ District Conservationist/Tribal Liaison for the Yakima Nation
- ◆ Resource Conservationist (RC) positions in Goldendale and Ephrata
- ◆ Forester in Okanogan
- ◆ Range Management Specialist in Okanogan and Prosser
- ◆ Pheasants Forever Privat Lands Conservationist in Waterville
- ◆ Natural Resource Specialist in Waterville
- ◆ Civil Engineer Technician in Ephrata and Prosser
- ◆ Program Assistant in Ephrata
- ◆ New employees in the area include:
- ◆ Ja'Morris Jenkins as Program Assistant in Yakima
- ◆ Channon Bighorn as Area Civil Engineer Technician
- ◆ Kalycya Hawkins as acting RCPP Coordinator for the Central Area





East Area

By Aubrey Hoxie
East Area Conserationist

General Overview:

This fall was busy finishing up contract obligations and then meeting with all the Conservation Districts at their fall area meetings. It's always so great for me to attend these events, as I love hearing about all the projects and innovative things the Conservation Districts are doing!

This year was one for the books for the East Area setting new obligation records. We obligated 169 EQIP contracts totaling \$21.9 million, 94 CSP contracts totaling \$15.8 million, and 4 RCPP contracts out of the 2128 Palouse watershed project for just under \$1 million. Historic numbers, that's for sure! Using the funding mechanism with IRA money for the Local Work Group specific fund pools, the Snake River team was able to focus nutrient management application, and forestry practices within their team; implementing over \$5.5 million dollars.

I'm extremely proud of all the hard work our field staff did this year, in working with our partners, our producers, and meeting the objectives of getting conservation implemented on the landscape! Great job, East Area Staff!

Now it's time for us to gear up for another season of application processing, and assisting in conservation implementation within Washington State. Here's to a good FY2025!

Staffing:

Recently, we welcomed two new staff members to the East Area office that included Ryan Hoff and Bret Elgersma. Ryan came to us as a range management specialist from Okanogan and received a promotion into our Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP) Specialist position, and Bret comes to us from the Forest Service in Arizona as our new area forester. This forester position is new to the area, and one we're excited to get going with field assistance. With those two positions now filled, that only leaves one more technical specialist to fill, an area agronomist.

We're still working to backfill a few vacancies in the Palouse team and the West Palouse team. Hopefully we can get these filled before the end of the year.



Management & Strategy

Human Resources

By Chas Scriptor

NRCS-WA ASTC for Management & Strategy

The current NRCS-WA staffing level stands at 182 employees, as of federal pay period 20 (October 19, 2024). This is an increase of 5 positions since the last partner report. At the same time last year, we had 154 staff, and 5 years ago (2019) we were at 139. In Fiscal Year (FY)24 we filled 66 permanent positions, providing a net gain of 29 staff during FY24 (the smaller net gain is due to employee separations, promotions within state and backfilling positions due to promotions or separation of internal staff).

Nationwide, NRCS currently has 11,955 staff which is up from 11,815 at the time of the last report. At this time last year that number was 10,932; and 5 years ago, the national staff count was 9,127.

Here's a chart showing the NRCS-WA staffing levels over the past 5 years, and showing our initial FY obligation amounts (initial FY funding):

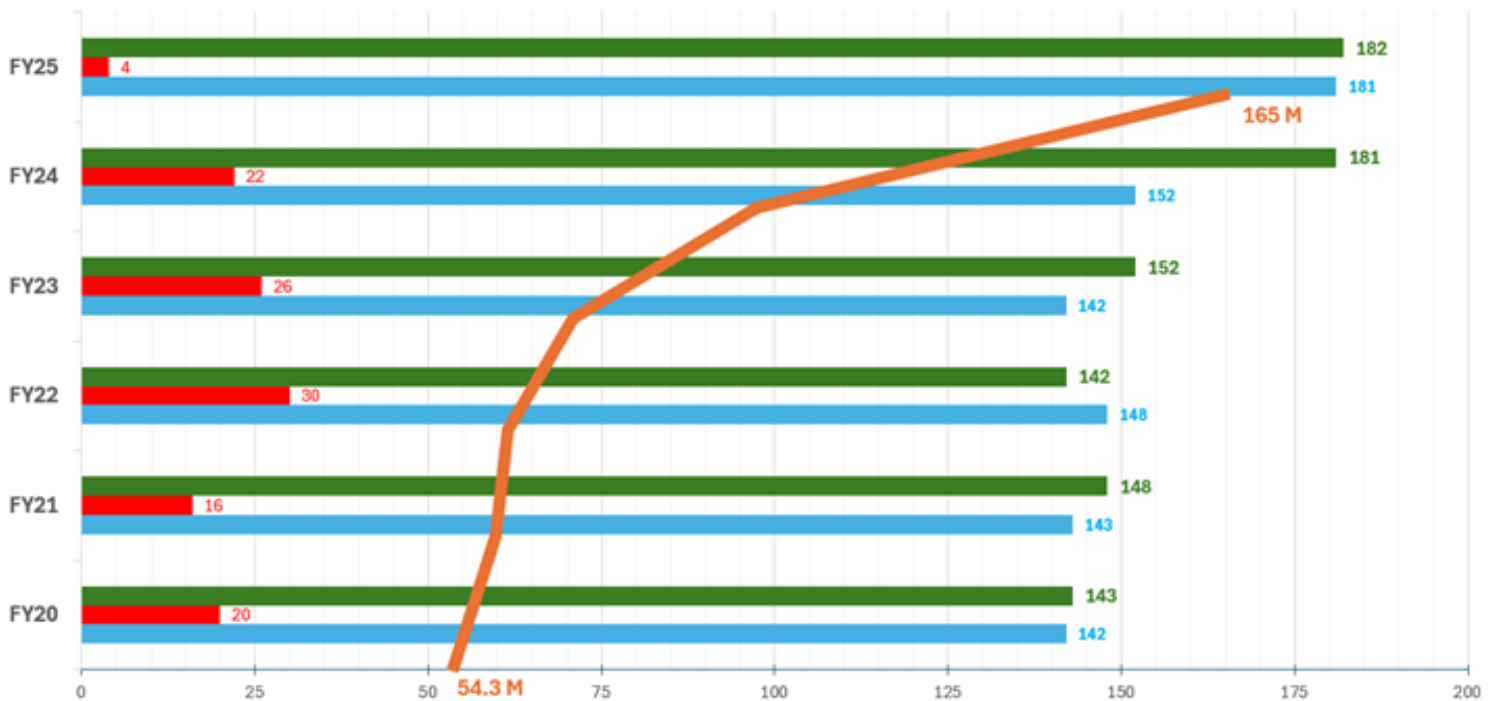
Currently, we have 49 positions in the process of being advertised or that have been advertised and are in the selecting and hiring stage.



Staffing Levels FY20-25

■ FY End Staff Count ■ Separations ■ FY Begin Staff Count

Initial FY Allocation in Millions (adjusted for inflation)



Tribal Liaison

By Merissa Dominguez
NRCS-WA Tribal Liaison

I'm pleased to announce that NRCS held a remote meeting for the Washington Tribal Conservation Advisory Council (WATCAC) on November 7, 2024. This meeting provided an opportunity for tribes and tribal representatives to voice their questions concerning NRCS' programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and Alternative Funding Arrangements (AFA). If you would like to attend future meetings, please contact me at merissa.dominguez@usda.gov.

On 11/7/2024, NRCS staff met with Jonalee Squeoachs, Interim General Manager for Yakama Nation Farms. We toured the 1500-acre, century-old farm where organic and conventional fruit and vegetables are grown. The farm, located on the Yakama Reservation was purchased by the tribe in 2022 with a focus is on tribal food sovereignty and security.

(Jonalee discussing the history of the Yakama Nation Farm)



(Jonalee discussing the distribution process of Yakama Nation Farm)



Conferences

9/29-10/3/2024 Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) Annual Conference – ilani Casino Resort, Ridgefield, WA

10/3-6/2024 American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) National Conference, San Antonio, TX

11/18-20/2024 Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians (ATNI) Natural Resource Summit – Tulalip Casino and Resort

(AISES_Student)



“AISES mission is to increase the representation of Indigenous peoples in STEM fields through education, professional development, and networking. <https://www.aises.org>” Merissa Dominguez with AISES member Tyler Olney, Yakama Nation

Partnerships

Growing CSP in Washington State

By Nick Vira
Partnership Liaison

NRCS's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) helps you build on your existing conservation efforts while strengthening your operation. Whether you are looking to improve grazing conditions, increase crop yields, or develop wildlife habitat, we can custom design a CSP plan to help you meet those goals. We can help you schedule timely planting of cover crops, develop a grazing plan that will improve your forage base, implement no-till to reduce erosion or manage forested areas in a way that benefits wildlife habitat. If you are already taking steps to improve the condition of the land, chances are CSP can help you find new ways to meet your goals.

Beginning in 2024, NRCS increased minimum payments for CSP from \$1,500 to \$4,000 per year per contract, with contracts running for five year periods (\$20,000 minimum payment per contract), regardless of operation size.

In Washington State, we have grown a strong CSP program, yet we still have pockets of the state where knowledge and program participation are limited. As such, we are seeking to expand CSP more uniformly across all corners of the state.



So, if your organization is interested in learning more about how CSP can benefit your community please reach out to Nick Vira (nick.vira@usda.gov) to discuss your interests and needs. We have seasoned staff available to assist with producer workshops and can provide program overviews including participant eligibility, plans of operations, and payment rate information, as well as answer your questions.

NRCS accepts CSP applications on a continual basis, but the next batching cutoff date is in January of 2025. Get your people to get their applications turned into their local NRCS Service Center and let NRCS know how we can assist.



Please see this QR code additional information on CSP: [Washington | Conservation Stewardship Program | Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)



New Full Time Training Officer

By Bobby Evans

State Resource Conservationist

NRCS-WA would like to extend a warm welcome to Joshua (“Josh”) Madison as our new fulltime training officer! Over the last two years, NRCS-WA has made vast improvements to our training program. With a fulltime training officer, I am confident that we can take our successes even higher in FY25 and beyond.

Josh Madison started his Federal Career when he was 15 years old in the Youth Conservation Corps for the National Parks Service (NPS) in Hot Springs, AR; he worked in each division ranging from maintenance, interpretation, and to law enforcement during his time as a seasonal. During his time with NPS, joined the army national guard and remains active. After leaving NPS, Josh joined the Forest Service in Newport, WA as a permanent employee working on the Colville National Forest (NF) for 7 years. Josh also worked in human resources management for the Forest Service and then onto the Deschutes NF in Bend, OR before joining NRCS as the state training officer in Spokane, WA.

In Josh’s free time you can find him running ultra marathons, reading about leadership, and refereeing both D1 men’s and women’s soccer and Professional soccer.



Update for Anaerobic Digesters

By Lynelle M. Knehans

NRCS-WA State Conservation Engineer

Anaerobic digesters have been a hot topic for dairy and other agricultural producers in Washington over the last few years. The Washington State Conservation Commission (WSCC) has been taking the lead on funding provided by the State for agricultural manure management systems including \$22 million for anaerobic digesters. This is not a new funding but started in 2023. The NRCS was asked to join the Climate-Smart Livestock Management Advisory Committee to determine how the NRCS can partner with other agencies to make the most of this opportunity to help producers. Chris Clark the NRCS WA lead for Environmental Engineering and Energy practices has been an active participant on the committee for the last year.

Early in the Committee's tenure it was asked for NRCS to closely look at the current payment scenarios for anaerobic digesters and how they could be adjusted to better suit the large scale of these projects and better meet producer needs. Mark Dose, NRCS WA Design Engineer, took the lead on this task early on and developed some options that better reflect the actual costs of anaerobic digesters and also looked at supporting practices that the NRCS can provide financial assistance for producers. From this work and help from Chris Clark and our National Engineering Team, NRCS WA has two new payment scenarios for FY 2025 based on size of the production.

- ◆ Gas and Flare System, Greater Than or Equal to 2,000 Animal Units for large systems and
- ◆ Gas and Flare System, Less Than 2,000 Animal Units for small systems.

NRCS WA also kept two existing payment scenarios for FY 2025

- ◆ Anaerobic Digester based on a per each system and
- ◆ Covered Lagoon or Holding Pond for the cover to an existing system.

Under the new payment scenarios, producers would see a potential for the higher reimbursement rates for an anaerobic digester. There is still the barrier of the \$450,000 per producer per farm bill in connection with EQIP. The NRCS is still working to find avenues to reimburse producers beyond the EQIP limits. Multiple partners were in discussions for RCPP proposals and working with local Tribes on the potential of Alternative Funding Arrangements. So far these alternatives have been unsuccessful but NRCS WA is committed to continuing to support the Washington State Conservation Commission and the Committee to overcome barriers to this opportunity and help producers achieve their goals of more sustainable productions.



Outreach & Communications

We won!!

By Nate Gallahan

NRCS-WA State Public Affairs Specialist

SPOKANE VALLEY, Wash. – I recently had the distinct honor of accepting the 2024 Chief’s Conservation Stewardship Award for Outreach and Communications!

I accepted the award on the behalf of my team and other teammates that really helped drive our Outreach and Communications to the next level.

Kris Mills, our State Outreach Coordinator coordinated our participation at 191 events between May 1, 2023 and April 31, 2024 – among many other contributions.

Macala Leyden, our Administrative Assistant, coordinated the payments and packaged up the materials to support many of them – among many other contributions.

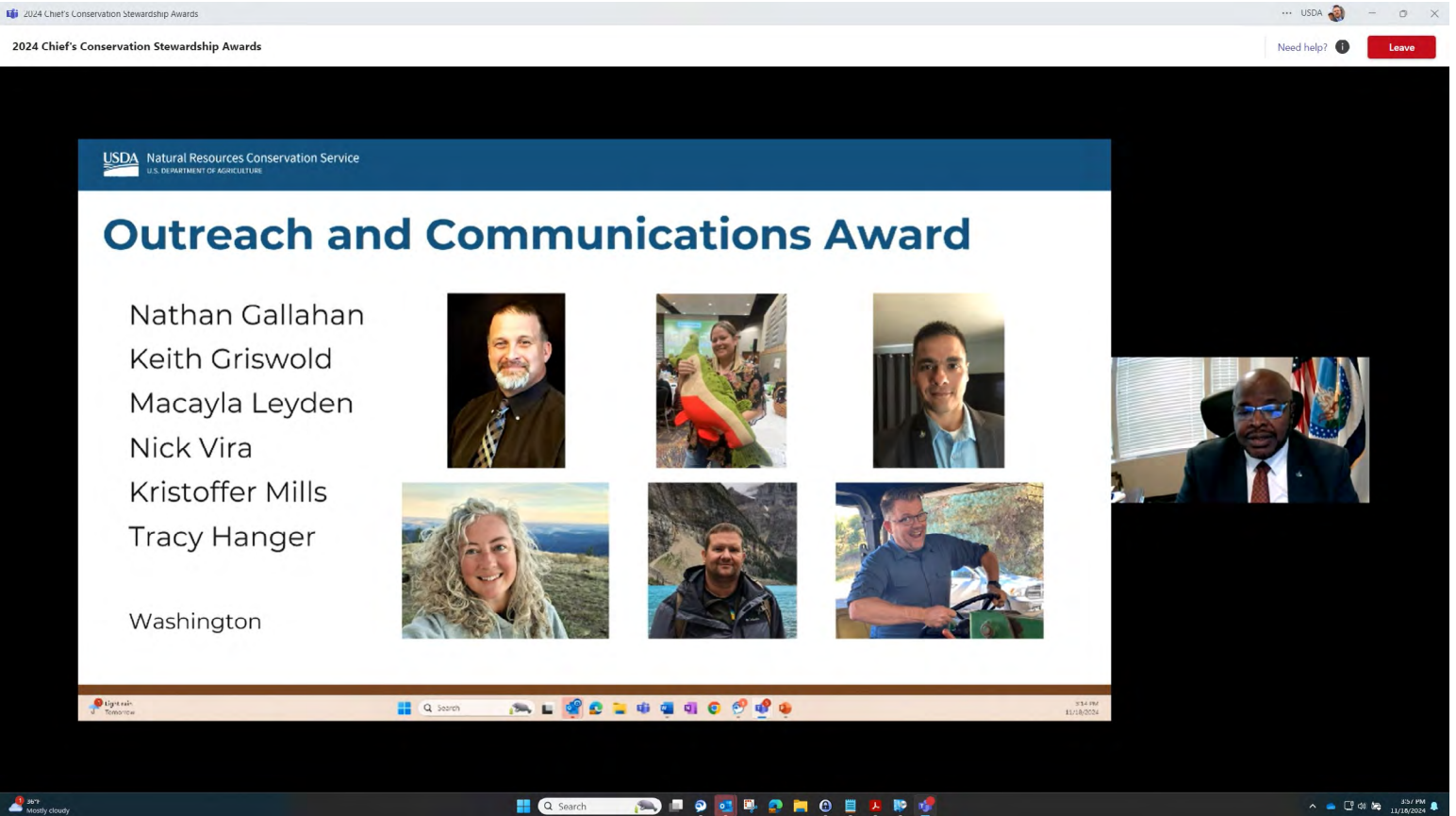
Keith Griswold, our Assistant State Conservationist for Programs, worked tirelessly to ensure our news releases and program details we distribute to producers was both timely and accurate – among many other contributions.

Nick Vira, our Partnership Liaison, has built, sustained, and strengthened, relationships with amazing organizations and conservation leaders across Washington to find unique and creative ways to enhance our ability support locally led conservation – among many other contributions.

And finally, Tracy Hanger, our Snake River Team District Conservationist, has spent countless hours across the table from producers both on their land and at so many outreach events in her area – among oh so many other contributions.

It’s thanks to these incredible professionals, and really all NRCS-Washington staff across the state, that we’ve been able to double the number of application’s we’ve received for our programs – among many many other accomplishments.

We’re just getting started though! There’s so much more work to be done and for such an amazingly good cause. Helping the best people in the world help the land! I couldn’t be prouder of our Outreach and Communications Team (OCT). As always, our ears, and hearts, are always open to new ideas and honest criticisms. Together, we hope to win this award year-over-year as we continue to work our tails off to both help our field office staff, and producers across the state.



Cultural Resources Education Becomes High Speed Aquatic Endeavor for NRCS Field Staff

Published October 8, 2024

CLARKSTON, Wash. – A group of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) – Washington field staff were given a unique opportunity to expand their knowledge of the state’s cultural resources while taking in the beauty of the Snake River.

For this group, learning more about cultural resources was a river roller-coaster adventure aboard a powerful jet boat, rather than a death by PowerPoint education. Letting education and adventure blend into a memorable day on the water. Click [HERE](#) to read more.



Cascadia Conservation District now accepting Fuel Break and Forest Resilience Partnership Program applications

Published October 2, 2024

WENATCHEE, Wash. – Landowners interested in improving forest health, wildfire, and drought resilience, along with helping protect critical infrastructure, are encouraged to apply for the Fuel Break and Forest Resilience Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) before November 1, 2024.



Cascadia Conservation District is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service and other partners, to run the program, which has \$2.1 million available in financial assistance. This is the third sign-up for this five-year program. Click [HERE](#) to read more.

Palouse Conservation District to start accepting RCPP Palouse River Watershed applications

Published October 2, 2024

Pullman, Wash. - Palouse Conservation District and USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service will start accepting applications for their Palouse River Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) funding starting Oct. 1, 2024, until Oct. 31, 2024. This RCPP covers land within the Palouse River Watershed (WRIA 34) and includes land in Whitman, Spokane, Adams, and Lincoln counties.



The Palouse River Watershed RCPP is a partnership program led by Palouse Conservation District that provides technical assistance and funding for land management activities. Funding is available for practices that improve Soil Health, Water Quality, and Habitat. Common practices include: No-Till, Reduced Till, Cover Crop, Nutrient Management, Field Border, Filter Strip, Riparian Forest Buffer, Conservation Cover, and Conservation Crop Rotation. Click [HERE](#) to read more.

Emerging Farmers Conference

Published November 14, 2024

MINNESOTA - NRCS Minnesota attended the 19th annual Emerging Farmers Conference in Minneapolis, an event designed to help new and historically underserved farmers grow their operations and strengthen their communities. This year's theme was "Rooted Resilience: Cultivating Strength Through Diversity". Click [HERE](#) to read more.



\$1 Million in Funding Available for People's Gardens

Published November 14, 2024

WASHINGTON - Approximately \$1 million in funding is available from the People's Garden Initiative through USDA's Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production, in partnership with The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) 2025 Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration program. The program will fund projects that support community-based gardens promoting sustainable agriculture practices that benefit people and wildlife. Applications will be accepted until January 30, 2025. Click [HERE](#) to read more.



Connecting Farmers with Conservation and Community through NRCS Partnership

Published November 8, 2024

American Farmland Trust's Erinn Roberts partners with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to help farmers in Southeastern Massachusetts adopt more environmentally friendly practices and secure federal financial assistance to implement them. Click [HERE](#) to read more.



Our Amazing Grasslands - November 2024 - Wildlife

Published November 6, 2024

WASHINGTON - The South Dakota Grassland Coalition (SDGC) partnered with the organizations listed below to enhance the Grassland Planner with a release of a short video story each month during 2024, promoting healthy soils, grasslands, and ecosystems. Please enjoy the "Our Amazing Grasslands" feature story for September 2024.



The 2024 Grassland Stewardship Communications Project Partners: SDGC, Audubon Dakota, Ducks Unlimited, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, South Dakota Soil Health Coalition, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and South Dakota State University. Click [HERE](#) to read more.

Conservation Innovation Grant Helps Create Healthy Farms and Soils Across Vermont

Published October 30, 2024

VERMONT - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will invest \$400 million with at least 18 irrigation districts to help farmers continue commodity production while also conserving water across the West. This funding - which will support irrigation districts and producers in using innovative water savings technologies and farming practices while producing water-saving commodities in the face of continued drought - is expected to conserve up to 50,000 acre-feet in water use across 250,000 acres of irrigated land in production, while expanding and creating new, sustainable market opportunities. Click [HERE](#) to read more.

