

FEATURE –WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM 2 MILLIONTH ACRE

INTRO: Two million acres have now been enrolled in a USDA program designed to preserve and restore the nation's wetlands. The U-S-D-A's Bob Ellison has more. (1:38)

U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE OFFICIALS SAY REACHING TWO MILLION ACRES IN THE WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM IS A MAJOR STEP IN PROTECTING THE NATION'S ENVIRONMENT AND WILDLIFE.

Arlen Lancaster, NRCS Chief: Wetlands are an incredible part of our natural ecosystem. It's one where nature serves as a filter. It serves as a habitat. And it truly serves as an area where we get cleaner air, cleaner water, more wildlife habitat.

THE WETLANDS RESERVE PROGRAM, OR W-R-P, WAS INTRODUCED IN NINETEEN NINETY TWO AND GIVES TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO ELIGIBLE LANDOWNERS ADDRESSING WETLAND, WILDLIFE, SOIL, WATER, AND NATURAL RESOURCE CONCERNS ON PRIVATE FARM LAND.

Richard Coombe, USDA NRCS: Everybody can have great intentions, but until this land is set aside and conserved for a long period of time then we are just not going to be able to have that protection that we so desperately need.

N-R-C-S PARTNERS WITH OTHER AGENCIES, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND GROUPS TO REACH W-R-P GOALS.

Jay Herrington, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: I work with NRCS, visit all the W-R-P's throughout the state that are potential projects. We rank those projects and then we do the restoration plans for them.

THROUGH THE PROGRAM, N-R-C-S WORKS TO HELP PRODUCERS KEEP W-R-P LAND PART OF THE FARM OR RANCH.

Greg Hendricks, USDA NRCS: When we restore a wetland to its former function, we encourage the use of livestock and cattle specifically in helping us manage that wetland to achieve its ecological function into perpetuity.

THOSE INTERESTED IN THE W-R-P SHOULD CONTACT THE LOCAL U-S-D-A SERVICE CENTER. FOR THE U-S DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, I'M BOB ELLISON.