

## **Contribute to Clean and Abundant Water by Protecting and Enhancing Water Resources on National Forests and Working Lands**

**ACCOMPLISHMENTS:** The Department has made protecting water resources a priority. USDA is the largest investor in on-the-ground conservation programs affecting the quality and abundance of the Nation's fresh water resources. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) assisted with the application of over 31 million acres of conservation practices to improve water quality. In FY 2015, According to the Conservation Effects Assessment Project (CEAP) conservation practices applied improve water quality over time in the following ways (Chesapeake Bay example): reduced soil erosion by 55 percent, reduce nitrogen surface runoff by 42 percent, reduce nitrogen in subsurface flows by 31 percent, and reduce phosphorus by 41 percent. Conservation practices are generating substantial natural resource benefits for producers and the communities of the Chesapeake Bay region. Additionally AGENCY PERFORMANCE REPORT AND PLAN 45 in FY 2015 USDA increased focus and technical assistance, drainage water management, increased by 12 percent over FY 2014. Drainage water management is a key conservation practice for some farms in managing their impacts on off-site water quality.

For the past four years (FY 2012 through FY 2015), NRCS embarked on the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) pilot program, realigning the agency's budget structure with the goal of increasing efficiency and flexibility to perform integrated watershed protection and landscape-scale restoration. The IRR pilot program demonstrated the importance of collaboration across programs and areas for both priority and target setting across programs, and to bring together people to address shared restoration goals. Collaboration achieved through this pilot led to more landscape-scale restoration and helped to concentrate resources on priority projects. It also fostered a culture of working together towards mutual benefit. The IRR pilot program also showed the value of emphasizing outcome-based performance measurements.

**CHALLENGES:** In FY 2017 the agency will continue to increase opportunities to collaborate across ownership boundaries and within programs, using the lessons learned to gain the benefits realized through the IRR pilot programs.