

# Delivering Conservation in Rhode Island

Fiscal Year 2023



Fiscal year 2023 was truly groundbreaking. The dedicated team at USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) along with our conservation partners successfully implemented conservation practices on America's working lands while rolling out the largest conservation funding opportunity the agency has ever received through the Inflation Reduction Act, part of President Biden's Investing in America agenda.

NRCS made \$850 million available from the Inflation Reduction Act for climate-smart agriculture and forestry mitigation activities through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP), and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). The agency obligated 99.8 percent of all available FY 2023 Inflation Reduction Act financial assistance funds to farmers, ranchers, and forest landowners across America. In addition to conservation program enrollments, NRCS provided Conservation Technical Assistance to producers interested in better understanding the implementation of conservation practices.

In addition, NRCS obligated nearly \$2.5 billion in Farm Bill funds for all types of conservation practices in over 40,000 contracts covering over 20 million acres of land through those same conservation programs.

Demand for NRCS conservation assistance is strong. Despite the additional Inflation Reduction Act funding, NRCS had significant unmet producer demand for EQIP, CSP, and ACEP applications. NRCS received \$2.2 billion in Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP) proposals but was only able to fund half of the projects. The total demand for climate-smart agriculture and forestry practices and projects was millions of dollars higher than available funding.

NRCS also invested in communities to help them prepare for or recover from natural disasters. In Rhode Island, NRCS invested \$739,800 in the Emergency Watershed Protection Program and \$201,952 in the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Program. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provided \$918 million for NRCS watershed programs; and we invested \$846 million of those funds, including \$32,967,947 for the Ocean State.

## NRCS Rhode Island Closes on Largest Wetland Reserve Easement in the State

In fiscal year 2023, NRCS closed on the largest Wetlands Reserve Easement (WRE) ever secured in the Ocean State! NRCS staff worked diligently with a North Kingstown family to place a perpetual easement on their 330-acre property in Dec. 2022. Through WRE, NRCS will work with the Rhode Island Audubon Society over the next year to develop a restoration plan to improve and protect existing habitat and fund the restoration.



Previously, NRCS had built a geographic information system database that staff used to locate parcels that could be eligible for Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE). When the family was considering selling the land for solar development, NRCS conservationists reached out to provide them with information on WRE and its benefits. The family decided to apply for WRE instead, so NRCS worked with the owners to complete an application package, and the project was ranked and selected for funding.

The 330-acre property is a jewel in our easement portfolio. It consists of a combination of upland hardwood forest and wetland and riparian habitats, including perennial streams and vernal pools and provides habitat for declining species of turtles, rabbits, birds, and bats, as well as a variety of other wildlife species. Conserving this land in perpetuity was a labor of love for Rhode Island NRCS staff.

**Rhode Island Contact:**

R. Phou Vongkhamdy, State Conservationist — 401-828-1300 / Pooh.Vongkhamdy@usda.gov – “Our staff’s commitment to protecting natural resources and helping Rhode Island communities resulted in our highest obligation rate ever and clearing out of our application backlog. We are thankful for the funding increases and look forward to expanding our efforts next year.”

**TOP 5 EQIP CONSERVATION PRACTICES IN RHODE ISLAND FY 2023**

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT	FARM BILL
1. Forest Stand Improvement	1. Restoration of Rare or Declining Natural Habitat (Oyster Restoration)
2. Forest Trails and Landings	2. High Tunnel System
3. Brush Management	3. Sprinkler System
4. Pasture and Hayland Planting	4. Water Well
5. Tree/ Shrub Establishment	5. Brush Management

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE, USDA — FINANCIAL AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, RHODE ISLAND FY 2023**

PROGRAM	FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE							TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
	Allocation (\$)	Obligations				Funded Applications (#)	Unfunded Applications (#)	Expenditures (\$)
		\$	%	Underserved (%)	Acres (#)			
ACEP Inflation Reduction Act	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	\$74,514
CSP Inflation Reduction Act	\$90,555	\$90,555	100%	68%	2,251.3	5	0	\$25,919
EQIP Inflation Reduction Act	\$390,920	\$390,920	100%	32%	1,379.9	40	2	\$105,620
Inflation Reduction Act Total	\$481,475	\$481,475	100%	--	3,631.2	45	2	\$206,054
ACEP Farm Bill	\$1,083,120	\$1,080,655	99.8%	--	12	1	5	Data not available
CSP Farm Bill	\$274,250	\$263,523	96%	30%	2,297.3	19	--	
EQIP Farm Bill	\$3,404,179	\$3,065,066	90%	51%	3,530.6	135	59	
Farm Bill Total	\$4,761,549	\$4,409,244	93%	--	5,839.9	155	64	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$5,243,024</b>	<b>\$4,890,719</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>9,471.1</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>\$</b>

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE, USDA — RHODE ISLAND OBLIGATIONS BY CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT FY 2023**

	INFLATION REDUCTION ACT			FARM BILL		
	ACEP	CSP	EQIP	ACEP	CSP	EQIP
District 1	--	--	\$94,815	Data not available	\$135,234	\$876,570
District 2	--	\$90,555	\$296,102		\$128,256	\$2,177,435
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>\$90,555</b>	<b>\$390,917</b>		<b>\$263,490</b>	<b>\$3,054,005</b>