

Improve the Health of the Nation's Forest, Grasslands and Working Lands by Managing Our Natural Resources

ACHIEVEMENTS: The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) helped farmers and ranchers apply conservation practices to over 9 million acres of cropland to improve soil health and over 26 million acres of grazing land and forest land to protect and improve the resource base. In addition, the Farm Service Agency's (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program's (CRP) which helps to reduce nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution by more than 85 percent annually on all lands enrolled achieved over 1.93 million acres in wetland practice enrollment in FY 2015. As of November 30, 2015, 23.5 million acres were enrolled in CRP. The USDA Forest Service restored or enhanced 3.1 million acres of public and private forest lands in FY 2015 by using the best science available and focusing on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program and the Integrated Resource Restoration pilot program.

Almost 9 million acres of habitat were improved for wildlife over all programs. These acres included habitat for wildlife species on Federal and State Threatened and Endangered Species AGENCY PERFORMANCE REPORT AND PLAN 41 Lists and for other species of concern through focused initiatives including: Sage Grouse, Migratory Birds, Longleaf Pine, and the Lesser Prairie-Chicken; Through Working Lands for Wildlife, a partnership between NRCS, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, landowners in 35 States enrolled approximately 6.7 million acres in conservation practices to improve habitat for these species. More than 4.6 million acres were enrolled in the Sage Grouse Initiative, with conservation practices reducing sage grouse death from fence strikes by 83 percent; and Over 275,000 acres of invasive conifers were removed thus reducing landscape fragmentation and improving Sage Grouse populations.

Providing timber and woody biomass from national forests is important not only in support of restoration efforts, but is also critical to rural communities and economies. A combination of Integrated Resource Restoration funding, forest products appropriations, and permanent and trust funds were used to accomplish this work. Each year, forest products from USDA Forest Service lands contribute approximately 42,000 jobs and \$2.7 billion to the national economy.

CHALLENGES: Producers' willingness and ability to implement conservation measures on private forest land, range, and grasslands is affected by economic conditions, climate variability, drought, and invasive species.

With forests at risk from drought, invasive species, severe wildfires, and outbreaks of insects and disease, USDA faces a sustained forest restoration challenge. As USDA works to increase restoration accomplishments, timber harvest will remain an important tool used to achieve multiple resource objectives. Challenges to achieving increased timber targets are numerous, but the most prominent are litigation and the viability of local markets to accept and process the product.