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Federal Funding Opportunities for Land Trusts through NRCS

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Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Today's Agenda



What is USDA- NRCS?

What are the Conservation Districts?

How can we work with Land Trusts?

- **Technical Assistance**
- **Funding Programs**
- **Easements**
- **Other**

How do you apply?

Questions?





USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

- **Federal agency under US Department of Agriculture**
- **Formed during the dust bowl of the 1930's**
- **Current mission: voluntary conservation of our nation's natural resources**
- **Financial and Technical Assistance**



Rhode Island's Conservation Districts

- Created nation-wide during the dustbowl
- Quasi-public, funded through grants and agreements
- Local Boards of Directors
- Partner with many organizations to help landowners with natural resources issues, including NRCS



What We Do *Together*

- Address *natural resource concerns* on privately held land*

Erosion

Invasive Plants

Soil Health

Forest Health

Pollinators

Nutrient Management

- Farm Bill funded programs

What can NRCS do for Land Trusts?

- **Funding and technical assistance**

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- **Land protection through Easements**

Agricultural Conservation Easement Program

Wetland Reserve Easements (ACEP-WRE)

Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE)

- **Other programs for Land Trusts**

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

Southern New England Heritage Forest (SNEHF- RCPP)

Forestry for Rhode Island Birds (RI RC&D)





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EQIP 🌿 Opportunities for Land Trusts



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Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- Rhode Island's most popular NRCS program
- Financial and Technical Assistance for the implementation of conservation practices
- Assistance with Conservation Planning (CAPs)

Eligibility Requirements:

Municipal and Non-Municipal Land Trusts

RIFCO & West Greenwich Land Trust

What natural resources issues/stewardship concerns are you having on your Land Trust property?





Common Conservation Practices for Land Trusts

Common EQIP Projects for Land Trusts

Forest Management:

Planning Assistance

Forest Trails and Landings

Thinning for Wildlife and Forest Health

Forest Stand Improvement

Wildlife:

Planning Assistance

Structures for Wildlife

Early Successional Habitat Development

Upland Wildlife Habitat Management

Conservation Cover (Pollinator Habitat)

Delayed Mowing

Restoration of Declining Habitats

Tree and Shrub Establishment



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Common EQIP Projects for Land Trusts (continued)

Invasive Species Management :
Herbaceous Weed Control
Brush Management

Other:

Planning Assistance for Grazing & Nutrient Mgt.
Integrated Pest Management
Forage and Biomass Planting
Cover Crop
Irrigation Planning and Practices
Fencing and Watering Facilities for Grazing

**Land Trusts who've
worked with NRCS:**

Aquidneck LT
Conanicut Island LT
Glocester LT
Tiverton LT
Burrillville LT
Southside Community LT
Mount Tom LT
Narrow River LT
South Kingstown LT
Westerly LT



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Land Protection Through Easements for Land Trusts



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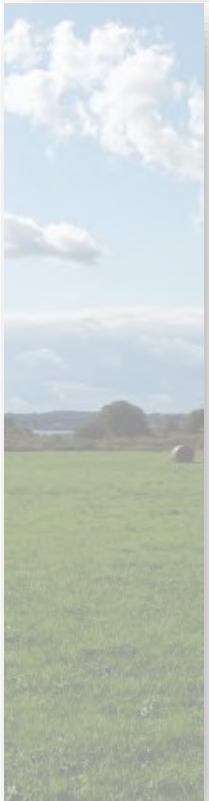
Programs Available under Agricultural Conservation Easement Programs (ACEP)

Wetland Reserve Easements(ACEP-WRE):

- NRCS provides technical and financial assistance directly to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands through the purchase of a wetland reserve easement.

Agricultural Land Easements (ACEP-ALE):

- Financial assistance for eligible partners
 - 50 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement.
 - Where NRCS determines that grasslands of special environmental significance will be protected, NRCS may contribute up to 75 percent of the fair market value of the agricultural land easement



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ACEP Wetland Reserve Easement Program

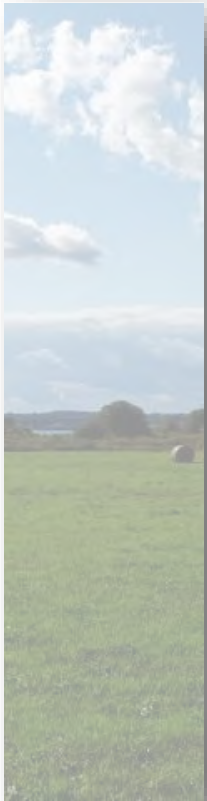


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ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement Program Purpose

The purpose of the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE) is to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands on eligible private or Tribal lands while maximizing wildlife habitat benefits.



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WRE – Reserved Interest Deeds



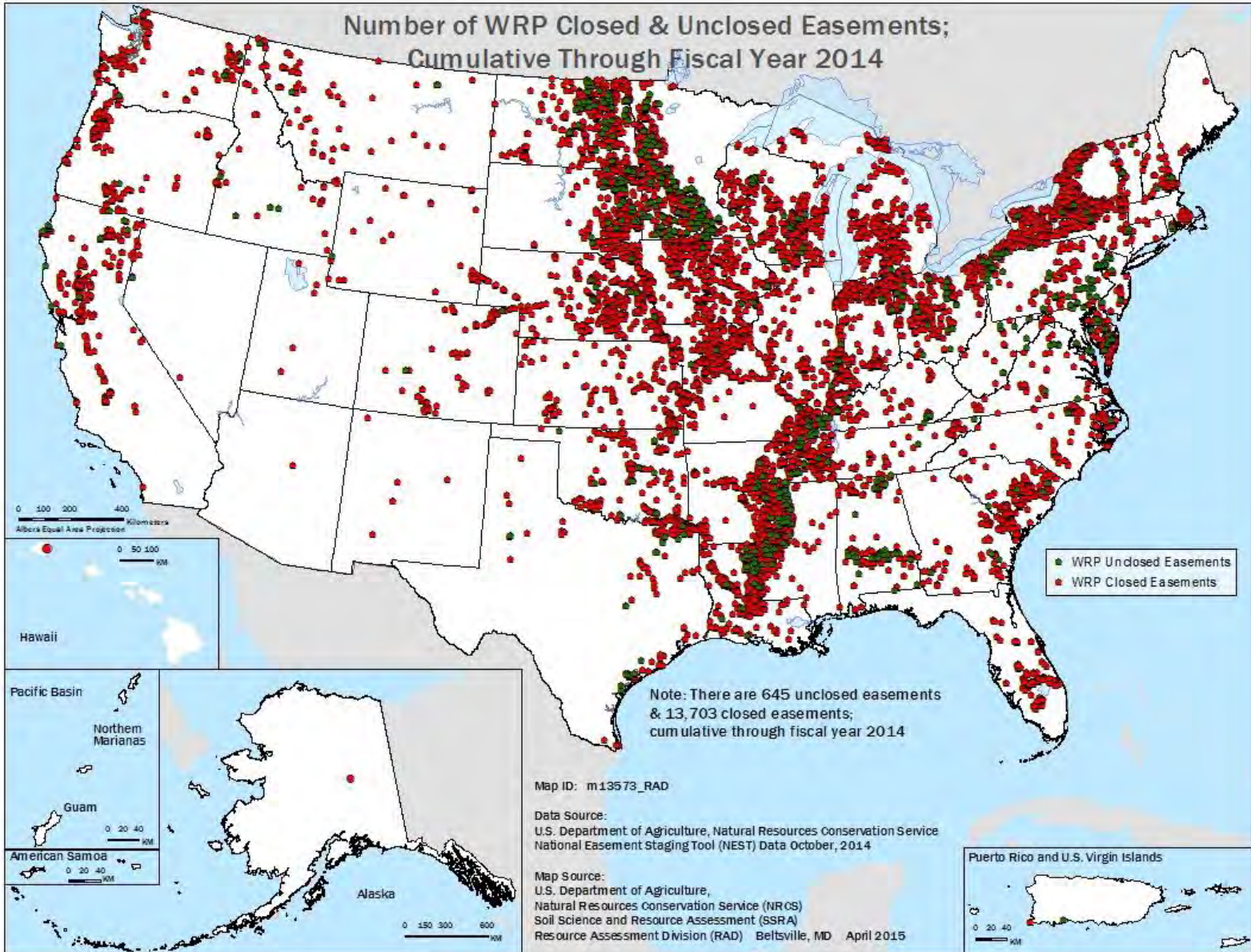
What is the US buying?

- The USDA is purchasing ALL of the development and surface rights of the enrolled property except those specifically reserved to the landowner.
- A warranty easement deed is recorded which defines the US rights and the landowners rights.

What does the landowner reserve?

- Convey, Transfer, or Alienate Title
- Quiet Enjoyment
- Control of Access
- Undeveloped Recreational Use
- Extract Subsurface Resources subject to the WED
- Certain Water Rights



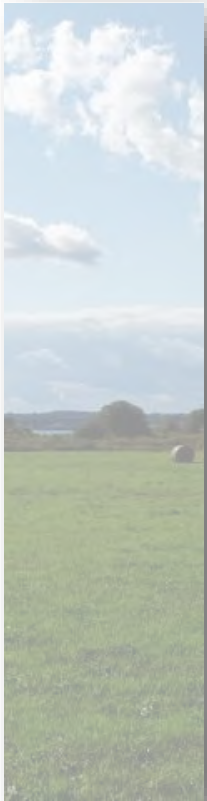


ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement Eligible Landowners

- Private Landowners
- Land Trusts
- Indian Tribes

The applicant works directly with the NRCS for application, entering into an Agreement to Purchase a Conservation Easement, closing on the easement, payments and restoration of the wetland.

NOTE: Closed easements are held and stewarded by USDA-NRCS



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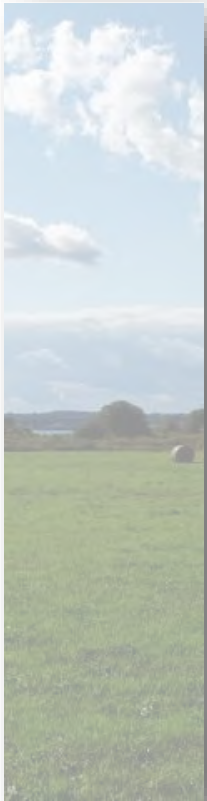
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ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement

Eligible Land Types Typical to Rhode Island

Farmed or Converted Wetlands

- **Farmed or Converted Wetlands.**—Wetlands farmed under natural conditions, farmed wetlands, prior converted cropland, commenced conversion wetlands, or farmed wetland pasture.
- **Former or Degraded Wetlands.**—Former or degraded wetlands that occur on lands that have been or are being used for the production of food and fiber, including rangeland, pastureland, hayland, and forest production lands, where the hydrology has been significantly degraded or modified and will be substantially restored through the implementation of the Wetland Reserve Plan of Operations (WRPO).



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ACEP-Farmed/Degraded Wetland Examples



Damage by Cattle/Horses, livestock or cropping



Damage or alterations on the Forest



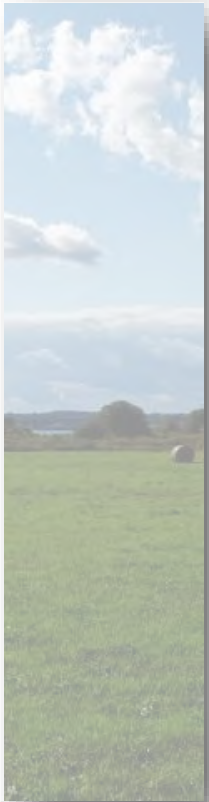
Salt Marshes Can be degraded wetlands

Riparian Areas Definition



Riparian Areas

- “Riparian areas” means areas of land that occur along streams, channels, rivers, and other water bodies. These areas are normally distinctly different from the surrounding lands because of unique soil and vegetation characteristics, may be identified by distinctive vegetative communities that are reflective of soil conditions normally wetter than adjacent soils, and generally provide a corridor for the movement of wildlife.



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ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement

Eligible Land Types Typical to Rhode Island



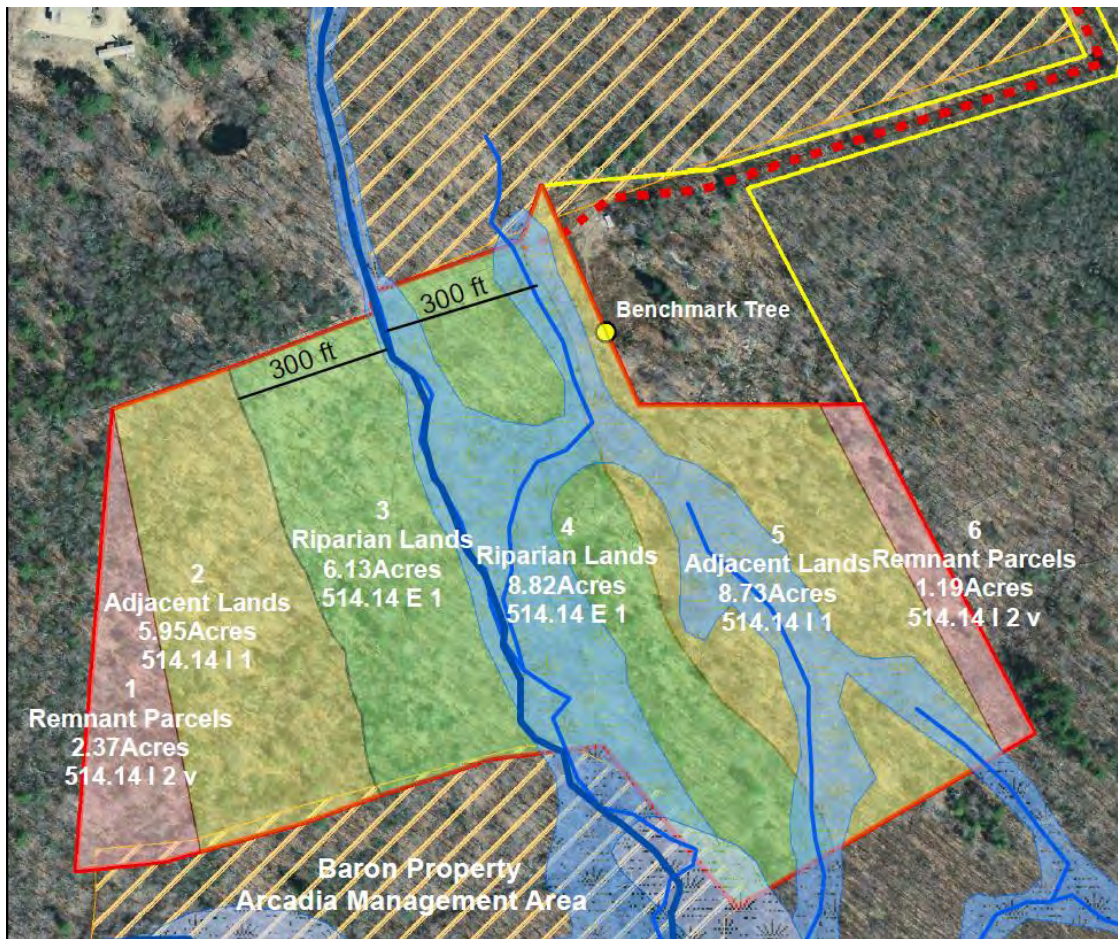
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ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easement

Typical Riparian Area in Rhode Island



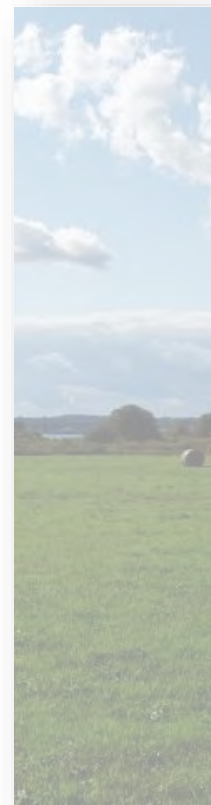
E. Riparian Areas

(1) Riparian areas along streams or other waterways are eligible, provided that the offered riparian area links wetlands that are currently protected, such as a State or Federal wildlife management area.

I. Adjacent Lands

(1) (i) The adjacent lands will contribute significantly to the wetland functions and values or practical administration of the enrolled area. (ii) Acres must not exceed otherwise eligible land to be enrolled.

(2) State Conservationist may wave one-to-one limitation if -
 (v) Strict application of the ratio would leave areas of land remaining outside enrolled area creating uneconomic or unmanageable remnant parcels for the landowner.



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ACEP Agricultural Land Easements

Who Can Apply?



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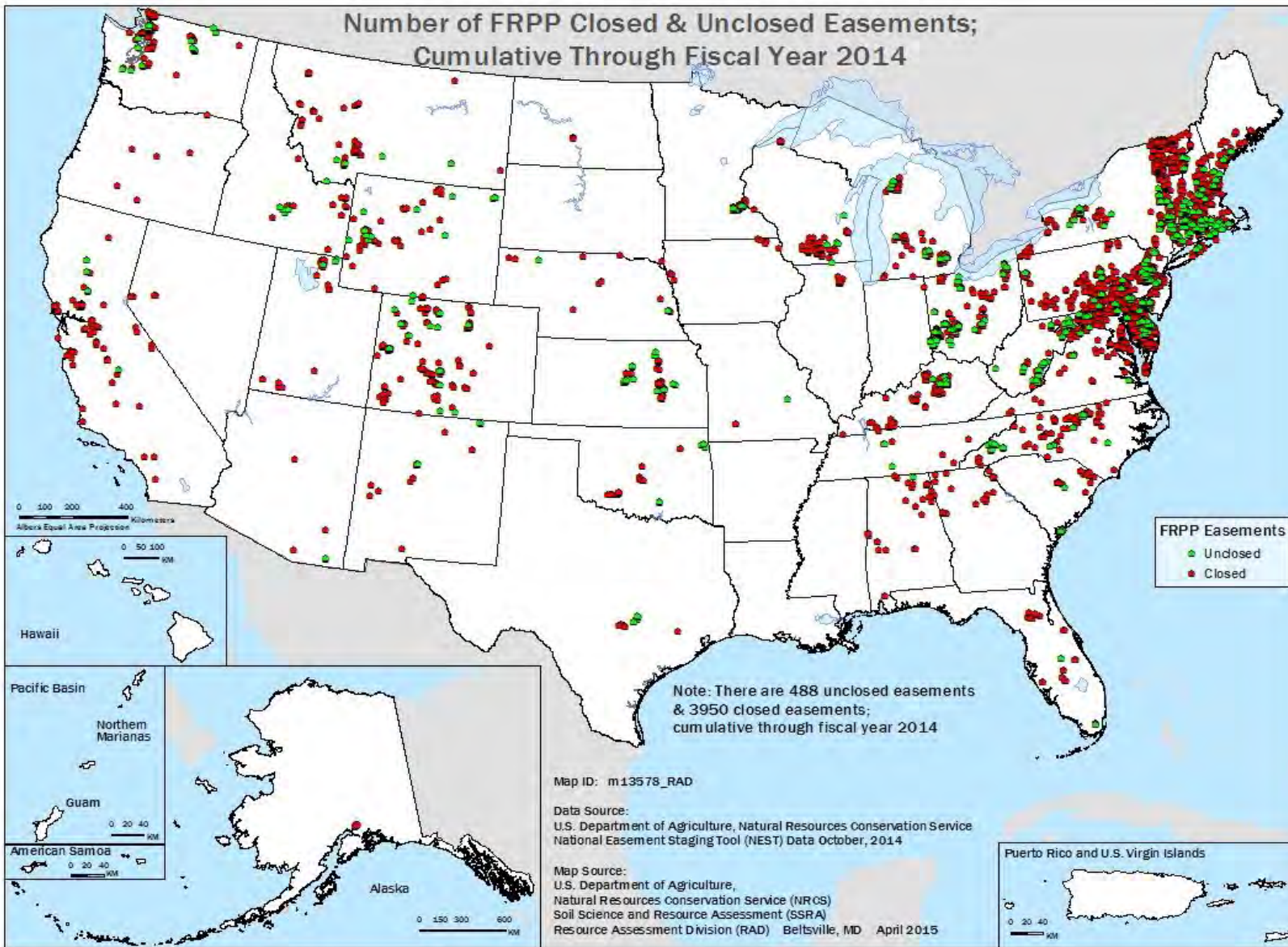
ACEP-ALE: Overview



ACEP-ALE Purposes and Objectives

- Protect agricultural use and future viability, and related conservation values, of eligible land by limiting nonagricultural uses of that land
- OR**
- Protecting grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring and conserving eligible land
- BY**
- Facilitating the purchase of agricultural land easements by entities that protect natural resources and agricultural nature of the land

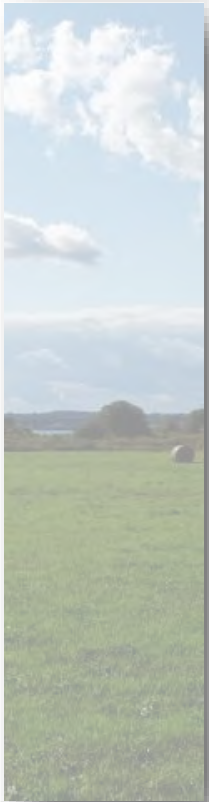




Who can Apply for ACEP-ALE?

ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

- State and Local Governments
- Indian Tribes
- Certain non-governmental organizations
 - Especially Land Trusts!



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Entity Eligibility Requirements

Provide documentation:

- Ability to meet program requirements
- Authority to purchase and hold ag easements
- Have an established farmland protection program
- Demonstrated commitment to long term conservation
- Capability to acquire, manage, and enforce
- Dedicated staff for monitoring and stewardship
- Funds to meet match requirements



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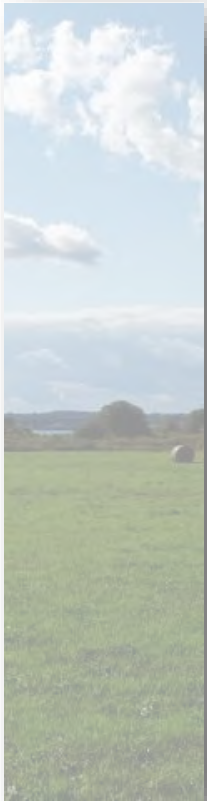


ALE: Land Eligibility Criteria



Private Land that:

- Has prime, unique or other productive soils (Soils)
- Contains historical or archaeological resources
- Enrollment would protect grazing uses and related conservation values by restoring and conserving land (Grassland)
- Further a State or local policy consistent with the purposes of ACEP-ALE



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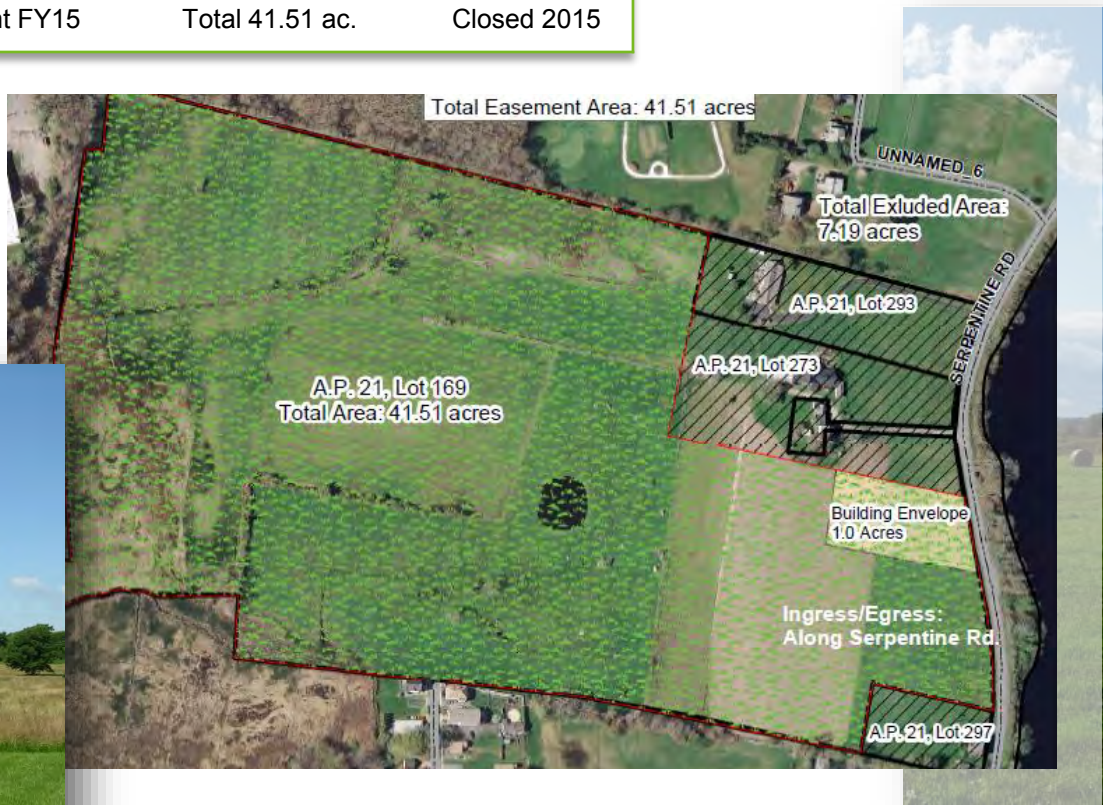
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Success Stories



FRPP (Entity) ALPC Bristol Co. Agreement FY15 Total 41.51 ac. Closed 2015



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Success Stories



Entities

FRPP	The Town of North Kingston (Primary) RI Agriculture Land Preservation Commission (ALPAC) Land Conservancy of North Kingston	Washington Co.	Agreement FY11	Total 38.60 ac.	Closed April, 2016
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Other Programs



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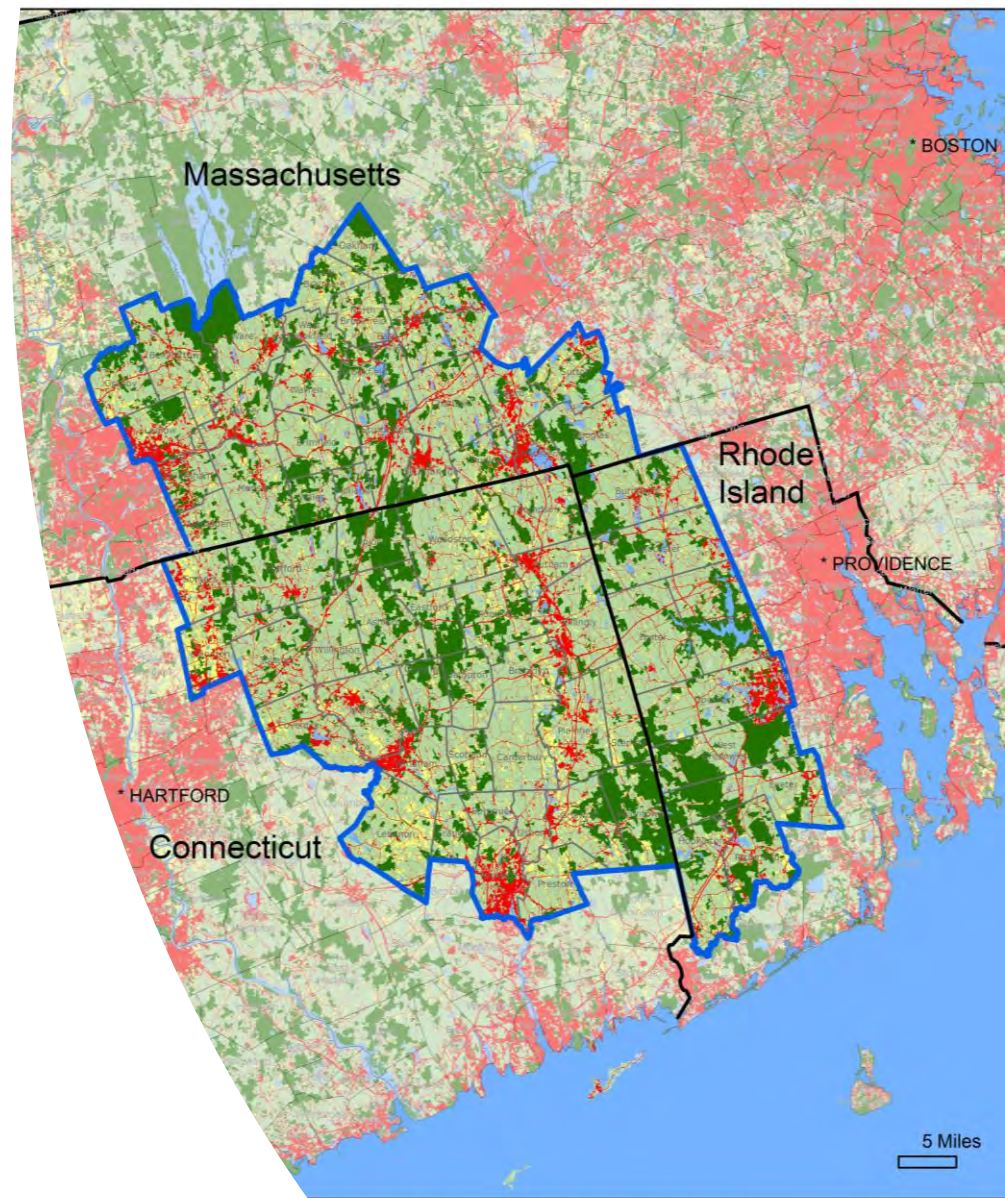
A photograph of three people standing in a vast field of green plants with small white flowers. The field stretches to the horizon under a clear blue sky. One person is on the left, one in the center, and one on the right, all looking towards the plants.

NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

- **Rewards Landowners who are being good stewards to their property's natural resources and provides financial incentives for further stewardship**
- **Accepted landowners receive a minimum annual payment of \$1500, regardless of acreage.**

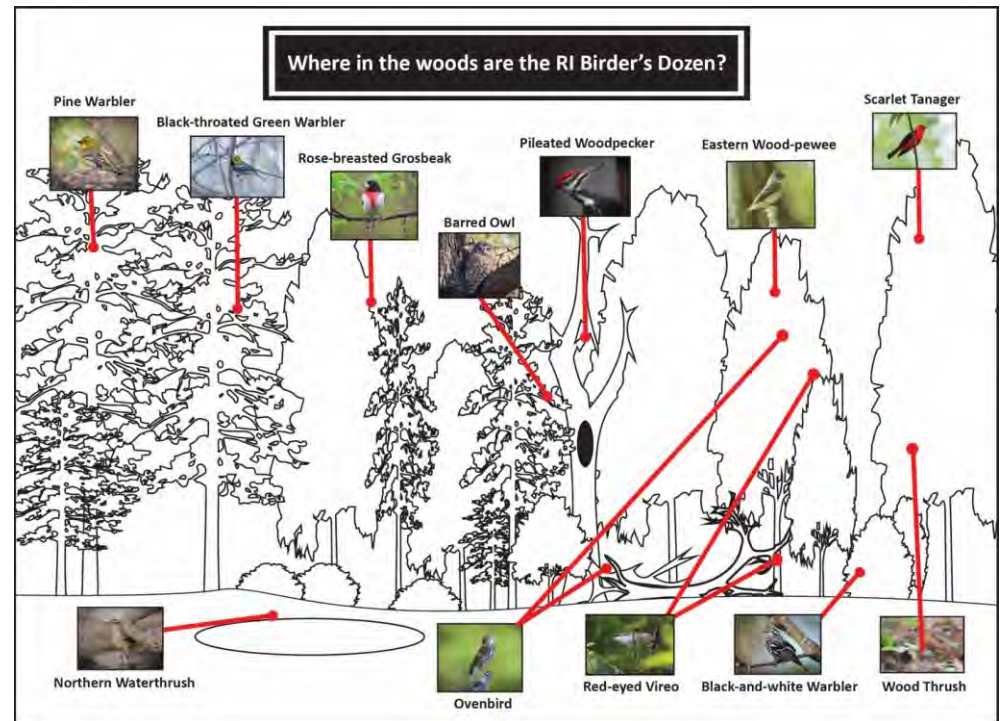
Southern New England Heritage Forest RCPP Project

- Forest Management with Bird Habitat in Mind
- Funding for Implementation of Habitat Recommendations
- Healthy Forest Reserve Easements



Forestry for RI Birds

- RI Woodland Partnership & Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development
- 12 Priority Birds for Rhode Island
- Forest Management while keeping these birds in mind- habitat recommendations
- Training opportunities for Land Trusts and Landowners, Natural Resources Professionals



My Land Trust is Interested! Now What?

Conservation Districts can come to you to take a walk and:

- **Discuss the programs and services that your Land Trust may qualify for**
- **Assess natural resources issues on Land Trust properties**
- **Provide Technical Assistance**

Conservation Districts can help you through the application and eligibility paperwork

Conservation Districts work in concert with NRCS on planning and programs – Give us a call to set up your free site visit





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Discussion and Questions

Thank You!

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender



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