

The Conservation Partnership in Michigan

March 2006

NRCS – Natural Resources Conservation Service

Federal Agency under the
United States Department
of Agriculture





Founded during the Dust Bowl era of the 1930's

Partners with the local Conservation District and
MI Department of Agriculture

Partnership Agreements

- § Mutual Agreement is between the Secretary of Agriculture, Governor and/or Tribal Chair and the Conservation District or Tribe
 - Umbrella agreement – basic framework
- § Cooperative Working Agreement is between the Conservation District or Tribe, MI Department of Ag and NRCS
 - General guidelines of operation, reviewed annually at CD meeting, no expiration date

What does NRCS Do?

- § Provides technical assistance to landowners and farmers with natural resource concerns and/or problems
- § Administers various Farm Bill Programs
- § Provides technical information to the public obtained through research and development
- § Partners with Conservation District and others on various projects

Technical Assistance

- § On site identification of potential resource concerns
- § Discuss ideas that could solve resource concerns
- § Landowners make decisions which are documented in a Conservation Plan
- § Assist with installation of conservation practices
- § Follow up



Conservation Plan

- § A Conservation Plan outlines the planned practices and installation schedule.
- § Updated as changes to operation, land base, and finances occur.
- § Private document-not subject to the Freedom of Information Act
- § All Conservation Plans are reviewed by Conservation District Directors

NRCS Programs

- § CTA – Conservation Technical Assistance
- § EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- § WHIP – Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program
- § WRP – Wetland Reserve Program
- § CSP – Conservation Security Program
- § GRP – Grassland Reserve Program
- § TA – Technical Assistance Funds for TSPs
- § RC&D - Resource Conservation & Development Program

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

- § Work with landowner to evaluate existing Agricultural Operation and/or Property
- § Free of Charge.
- § First step towards participation in NRCS Programs that provide financial assistance.
- § Technical advice for solving a resource problem.
- § Partner with Districts and others on special projects



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- § Provides incentive payments and cost-share to offset the costs of correcting an existing resource problem.
- § A competitive program – acceptance based on available funding and an environmental benefit score.
- § Most popular NRCS financial incentive program.
- § 15.2 million dollars in funding available for Michigan in Fiscal Year 2006.



Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

- § Provides financial incentives to develop and enhance areas for wildlife. (50 to 75 percent cost-share)
- § Limited funding - \$400,000 available for Fiscal Year 2006 contracts in Michigan. (\$20,000 max per contract)



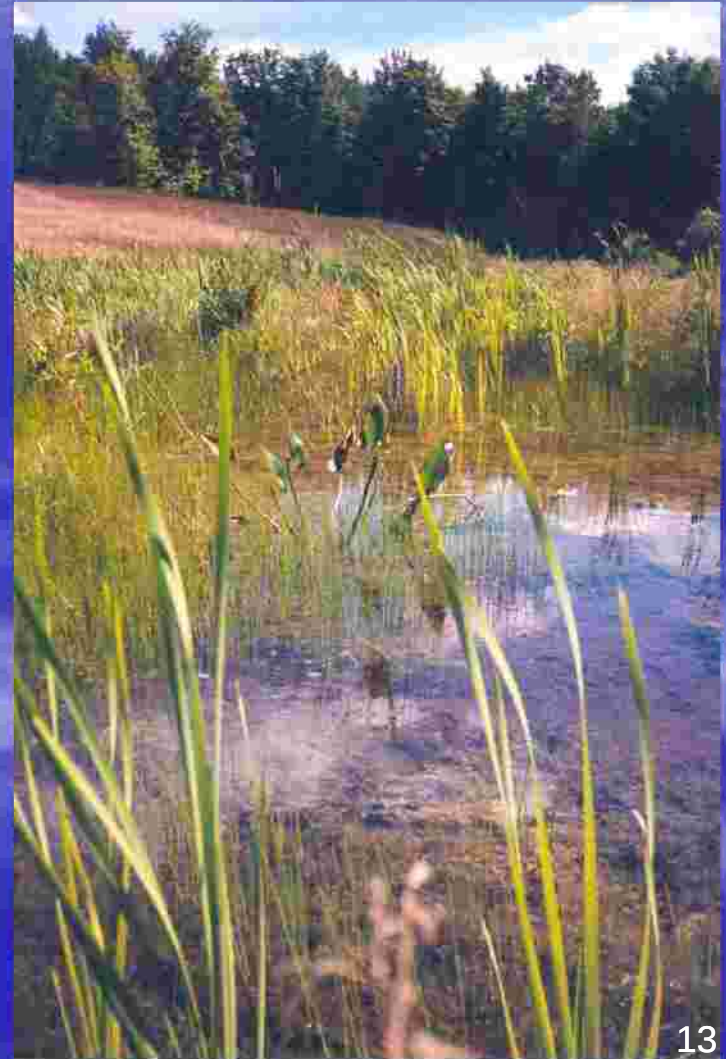
Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

There are three types of contracts

- Restoration only
- 30 year Easement
- Permanent Easement

§ \$7,750,000 in funding for fiscal year 2006

- 85% of funding goes towards permanent easements
- 15% of funding goes towards 30 year easements
- 1% or less of funding goes towards restoration only



Conservation Security Program (CSP)

- § Very young program – Fiscal Year 2004 was the first year of implementation
- § Provides base payments and enhancement payments to producers who have been actively applying conservation on their land.
- § “Reward the best, motivate the rest”
- § Funded by watershed



Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

- § Developed to protect privately owned grasslands.
- § 40 ac. Minimum
- § If grassland is grazed, a prescribed grazing plan is required
- § Mowing of GRP fields is regulated or prohibited during the primary nesting season (April 15th to July 15th) to protect nesting habitat.
- § Easements and Rental Agreements

Technical Assistance Funds (TA)

- § NRCS's workload has dramatically increased over last two Farm Bills
- § Limited number of employees to implement Farm Bill Programs
- § TA Funds provide dollars to landowners to hire certified Technical Service Providers (TSPs) to implement contracted conservation practices
 - Landowner is paid a Not To Exceed (NTE) rate developed nationally to hire a TSP to design, implement and certify the contracted conservation practice

TA Funds Continued

- § TA Funds also provide opportunity to enter into Contribution Agreements (CAs) with sponsors
 - CA with MDA reimburses MDA 50% of NTE rate for practices implemented because they do not compete with private sector TSPs for funding
- § Services paid for with TA \$ will meet NRCS Standards and Specifications
- § TA Funds can reimburse Conservation Districts or other sponsors for assisting NRCS with the administration of Farm Bill contracts
- § Each year the State Conservationist is given a TA “earmark”
- § It grows each year as the \$ for NRCS staff shrinks

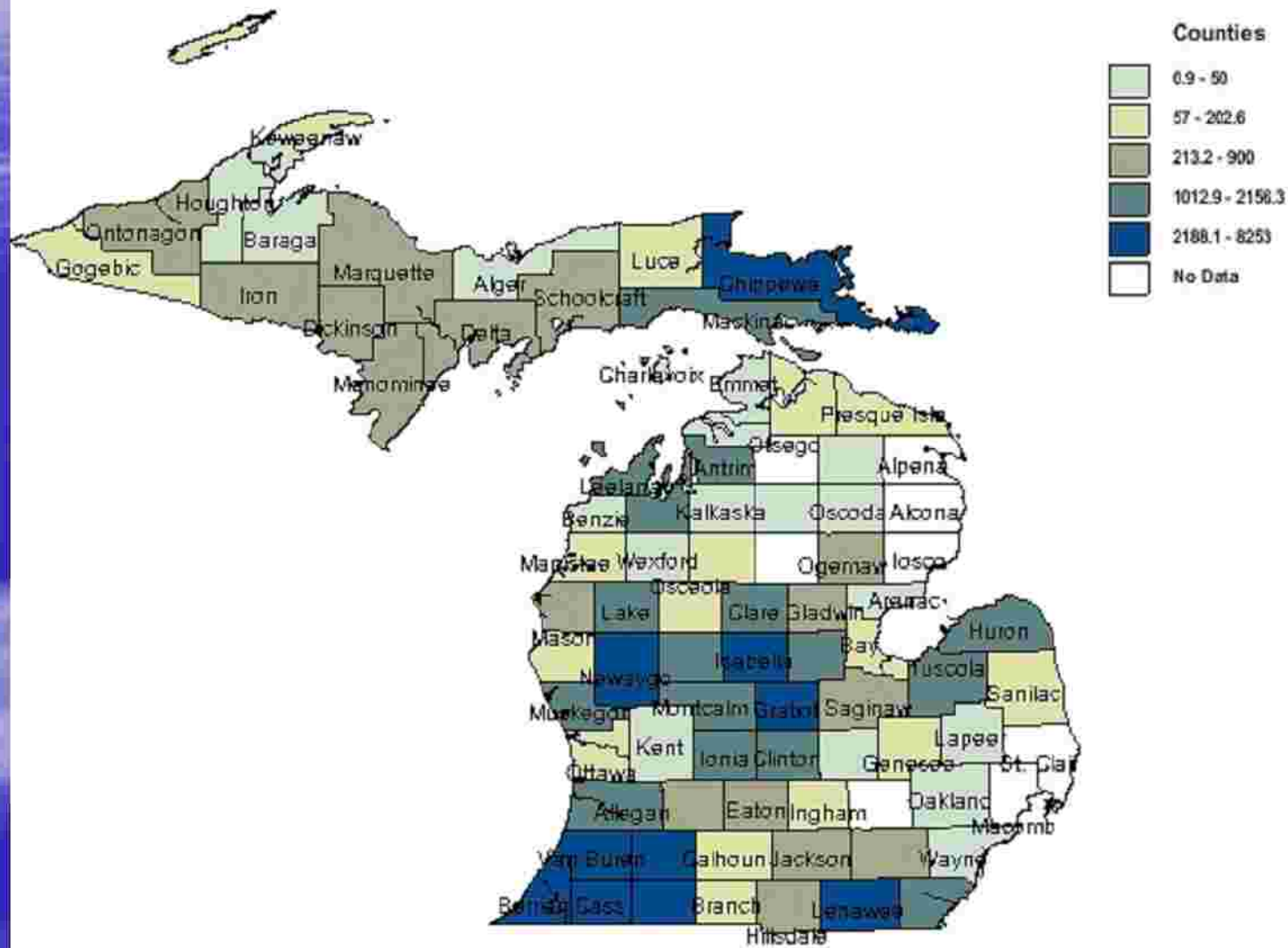
The Federal Budget Process

- § NRCS is part of the USDA and must follow the Government Performance Results Act of 1994
 - Federal agencies MUST BE accountable for dollars spent
 - Local field offices are responsible for attaining set goals
 - National Performance Plan is negotiated annually with Congress

Budget Continued

- § All activities are documented locally to prove accountability for funds
 - Web based Performance Results System (PRS) is used to track conservation activities at a district, state, and national level
 - Conservation Districts have access to and are encouraged to participate in the PRS process
 - § Provides reports of your activities that you can use in fundraising

Conservation Plan Acres Applied as of 2/21/06



MI NRCS Training Courses

- § Conservation District Staff welcome as room allows
- § Practice modules for Critical Area Treatment, Grassed Waterways & Diversions, Pasture & Hayland Mgt, Grade Stabilization Structures, Wildlife Management, Agrichemical Containment Facilities, Tree Planting/Windbreaks, Fence, Warm Season Grass Mgt, Aquatic Habitat Mgt, Evaluating Wildlife, Forest Stand Improvement, Grassland Wildlife Habitat Mgt, Wetland Wildlife Habitat Mgt, Watering Systems
- § Manure Application Risk Index, Crops 101, Concrete Inspection, Using Soil Surveys in Urban Areas, Basic Engineering Surveys, GIS, Customer Service Toolkit, RUSLE2
- § Plant Identification – Grasses/Forbs, Wetlands, Trees

QUESTIONS?

