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NRCS Accepting Applications for Wetlands Reserve Program

TEMPLE, TEXAS, Feb. 17, 2010 – The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is accepting applications from landowners interested in wetlands restoration through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). WRP is a voluntary program that provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners and Tribes to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring eligible land from agriculture.

“While Texas landowners have restored thousands of wetland acres through the program, changes made in the 2008 Farm Bill make WRP an even better investment,” said Don Gohmert, NRCS state conservationist for Texas. “The new program rules make it easier for landowners to enroll acres and provide a better system for assessing the value of the land enrolled.”

The 2008 Farm Bill changes the process for determining the easement value, directing NRCS to pay the lowest of:

- the fair market value of the land according to the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practices or an area-wide market analysis;
- the geographic area rate cap as determined by the Secretary of Agriculture; or
- the landowner’s offer.

WRP offers three enrollment options:

- Restoration Cost-Share Agreement. This is an agreement for a minimum of 10 years in duration to reestablish degraded or lost wetland habitat. NRCS pays 75 percent of the

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cost of the restoration activity. This does not place an easement on the property. The landowner provides the restoration site without reimbursement.

- 30-Year Easement. This is a conservation easement lasting 30 years. Easement payments are 75 percent of what would be paid for a permanent easement. NRCS also pays 75 percent of restoration costs.
- Permanent Easement. This is a conservation easement in perpetuity. NRCS pays for the easement, as well as 100 percent of the costs of restoring the wetland.

Wetlands provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species; improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals; reduce flooding; recharge groundwater; protect biological diversity; and provide opportunities for educational, scientific, and limited recreational activities.

For more information about WRP, contact your local NRCS office to determine if your land is eligible or visit the NRCS Texas Web site at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp.