



**Natural Resources
Conservation Service**

1606 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 209
Richmond, VA 23229
Voice: 804.287.1691
Email: barbara.bowen@va.usda.gov
Web: <http://www.va.nrcs.usda.gov>

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Contacts:

Brad Kreps, (276) 676-2209, bkreps@tnc.org
Blaine Delaney, (804) 287-1663, blaine.delaney@va.usda.gov

New Partnership Project to Support Rural Economies in the Clinch and Powell Valleys of Virginia and Tennessee

Richmond, VA, February 12, 2016 – A bi-state proposal to improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat in the Upper Clinch-Powell River watersheds is among 84 high-impact projects nationwide slated to receive more than \$220 million through USDA’s Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

The Nature Conservancy’s Clinch Valley Program will spearhead this \$4.5 million public-private initiative to help accelerate the planning and implementation of Best Management Practices in Lee, Scott and Russell counties in Virginia and Hancock and Claiborne counties in Tennessee. This five-county area includes more than 4,000 farms and 350 miles of impaired streams polluted from mining, agriculture, and urban runoff.

“Agriculture is a main source of income for many residents in these economically depressed areas of both states,” said Jack Bricker, Virginia State Conservationist. “These counties are already focal areas for USDA’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity, which works across agency lines to get program dollars into the hands of those who need them most. This project will concentrate on meeting landowner needs while providing environmental benefits and supporting local businesses.”

While the project area is popular with locals, weekend visitors, canoeing enthusiasts, fishermen, and hunters, excess sediments and nutrients, dissolved solids, metals, and pesticides are negatively impacting one of the last great strongholds for freshwater mussels. The rural landscape also contains sensitive caves that harbor unique animals and critical groundwater. NRCS will offer technical and financial assistance for installing water quality practices that will address these resource concerns.

“The Clinch and Powell are two of our nation's greatest rivers in terms of rare species and biodiversity,” said Brad Kreps, Clinch Valley Program Director. “The Nature Conservancy is thrilled to be working with NRCS and other partners to provide assistance to landowners. Together, we will implement projects that improve water quality and help rural economies in the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia and Tennessee.”

NRCS received 265 pre-proposals in 2015 and invited 165 to submit full proposals. The announcement of program funding for fiscal year 2017 will be made later in the year. For more information on Virginia RCPP projects, visit www.va.nrcs.usda.gov. View the [full list of projects](#) on the national NRCS site. To learn about technical and financial assistance available through conservation programs, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/GetStarted or your local USDA service center.

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