



N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
N.C. ADFP Trust Fund
Cycle 16 USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program
(RCPP) Information Packet



- **Overview**

- **What is the USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)?**

Via the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): “The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) promotes coordination of USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) conservation activities with partners that offer value-added contributions to expand our collective ability to address on-farm, watershed, and regional natural resource concerns. Through RCPP, NRCS seeks to co-invest with partners to implement projects that demonstrate innovative solutions to conservation challenges and provide measurable improvements and outcomes tied to the resource concerns they seek to address.”

- **How does RCPP fit with the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund Cycle 16 request for proposals?**

A proposal by the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services was awarded \$8.5 million by the USDA NRCS to place conservation easements on farms in the Piedmont and Sandhills of North Carolina.

As of September 2022, Approximately \$3,847,865 in USDA NRCS RCPP funds are still available for conservation easement purchases.

The Preserving Upriver Farms to Reduce Flooding in N.C. proposal is a phased project that aims to reduce the negative impacts of soil erosion and runoff in the river basins in the Piedmont and Sandhills. This project will focus on eligible parcels within the Cape Fear River Basin from the headwaters of the Deep River in Guilford County and the Haw River in Forsyth County to Interstate 95 in Johnston, Harnett and Cumberland counties.

Eligible entities may partner with landowners in this region to create grant applications for conservation easements for funding from both USDA NRCS RCPP and the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund.

- **Eligibility**

- All applicants must be non-profit conservation organizations or county agencies.
- Farmers, landowners, and others interested in applying must partner with a non-profit conservation organization or county agency to participate in an ADFP Trust Fund grant proposal.
- Applicants must file complete applications with both USDA NRCS and the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund.
 - For information on the USDA NRCS application process and required materials, navigate to <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/nc/programs/easements/acep/?cid=nrcseprd339013>
 - For information on the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund application process and required materials, navigate to <https://www.ncadfp.org/Cycle16.htm>. Applicants must opt-in for RCPP funding in the budget section of the application.
- The property must be privately-owned, located within the borders of the State of North Carolina, and in working lands use (agriculture, horticulture, forestry).
 - Review both USDA NRCS and the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund program and application guidelines to ensure land parcel eligibility.

- **Funding Purposes**
 - To secure perpetual agricultural conservation easements on agricultural, horticultural, and forestlands for active production of food, fiber, and other agricultural products.

- **Funding Priorities**
 - Both USDA NRCS and the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund have program requirements and independent grant evaluation processes. In addition to these factors, priority is given to working areas that face the greatest threat to development and the best opportunity for runoff mitigation. The following are additional factors for this RCPP:
 - Farms located outside of the 100-year floodplain;
 - Within five miles to municipalities; and
 - Surface water on the property as identified by the U.S. Geological Survey.

- **Grant Amount Requests**
 - The maximum grant will be based on the potential beneficial impact of the project, the resources available, and the needs of the project or the groups intended to be served by the grant programs.
 - Refer to both USDA NRCS and the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund program and application guidelines for complete budget information.
 - For conservation easement purchase funding requests:
 - USDA NRCS will provide a maximum funding amount of 50 percent of the estimated conservation easement purchase amount.
 - The N.C. ADFP Trust Fund will provide a maximum funding amount of 25 percent of the estimated conservation easement purchase amount. The maximum acceptable N.C. ADFP Trust Fund grant request per application is capped at \$500,000.
 - The remaining amount of the estimated conservation easement purchase amount must come from sources other than USDA NRCS, the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund, or N.C. state government. Landowner donation of conservation easement purchase in-kind value, or other cash match from local government, private, or non-profit sources may constitute the remaining conservation easement value.
 - USDA NRCS funding is limited to the purchase of conservation easement value. Funding for appraisals, travel, or personnel/administrative costs is ineligible through the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund.
 - Applications through the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund may include grant requests for other allowable costs. Below is a listing of allowable cost line items:
 - Survey
 - Baseline Documentation Report
 - Environmental Assessment/Audit
 - Legal Fees
 - Closing Costs
 - Stewardship endowment (Funding is limited to 3% of the appraised easement value being purchased by the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund and must be equally matched.)

- **Match Requirements**
 - Documentation of match will be required in the reporting process.
 - For the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund conservation easement applications:
 - Non-profit conservation organizations must match a minimum of **30%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - A Tier Two or Tier Three Enterprise County (as defined in G.S. 143B-437.08)

- **With** an NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), must match a minimum of **15%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. (G.S. 106-744(c2)) These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - **Without** an NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), must match a minimum of **30%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. (G.S. 106-744(c2)) These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - A Tier One Enterprise County (as defined in G.S. 143B-437.08)
 - **With** an NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), **is not required** to acquire matching funds. (G.S. 106-744(c2))
 - **Without** an NCDA&CS approved County Farmland Protection Plan (G.S. 106-744(e)), must match a minimum of **30%** of ADFP Trust Fund monies received. (G.S. 106-744(c2)) These monies must be from sources other than the ADFP Trust Fund.
 - Note: List of tiers is available on the application website.
- **Number of Proposals Allowed**
 - Each eligible entity may submit an unlimited number of proposals per funding cycle.
 - Contract awards are based on funding availability. If total grant requests exceeds the funding allocation for the grant cycle, the ADFP Trust Fund will fund a maximum of four (4) applications per category (perpetual easements, term easements, agricultural development projects/agricultural plans) per applicant. This includes any other Cycle 16 applications. Applications for donated easement proposals requesting only transaction cost assistance are not considered in this contract limit. If the funding allocation for the grant cycle is greater than the total grant requests, the contract maximum per applicant is waived for the grant cycle.
- **Incomplete Applications**
 - All information requested in both the USDA NRCS and N.C. ADFP Trust Fund applications is required. Incomplete applications may be considered ineligible for funding.
- **Evaluation of Applications**
 - Both USDA NRCS and the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund will evaluate each complete application.
 - For the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund, the evaluation includes a review of the application and all the documents submitted with it. On-site visits and interviews will be conducted for all eligible applications.
- **Selecting Recipients**
 - For the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund, the Commissioner of Agriculture in consultation with the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund Advisory Committee selects the applicants who will receive a N.C. ADFP Trust Fund grant.
- **Application Materials**
 - The N.C. ADFP Trust Fund application is to be completed online. Application form link, materials, and additional information are available at www.ncadfp.org.
 - For USDA NRCS, eligible entities must submit the respective applications listed below to the NRCS North Carolina State Office.

- Easement Programs, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, 4407 Bland Rd., Suite 117, Raleigh, NC 27609, ATTN: Terry Foreman and Brian Loadholt
- E-mail: ra.nrcs.ncral.easementmonitoring@usda.gov

- **Funding Period**

- All RCPP funds must be contracted and encumbered by 2024, or until all available funds are exhausted.
- Contracts will run on a two-year period.

- **Questions about Filling Out the Application**

- If you have questions about filling out the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund application, please contact the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund office by email at sarah.weavil@ncagr.gov or by phone at 919-707-3074.
- If you have questions about filling out the USDA NRCS application, please contact the USDA NRCS State office by email at Brian.Loadholt@nc.usda.gov or by phone at 919-873-2160.

- **Application Deadline**

- **For the N.C. ADFP Trust Fund, applications must be submitted online no later than 5:00 PM on December 16, 2022.**

- **Please review the USDA NRCS website for the latest application deadline information:**

<https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/nc/programs/easements/acep/?cid=nrcseprd339013>