Voluntary Public Access/Habitat Incentive Program: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Announces Funding for an Additional 10 Projects - Arkansas Game and Fish Selected for Continued Funding



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The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing $21 million in an additional 10 projects to increase public access to private lands for wildlife-dependent recreation while benefiting farmers, ranchers and private landowners through the Natural Resources Conservation Service ("NRCS") Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program ("VPA-HIP").

The USDA NRCS VPA-HIP's stated intent is to assist state and Tribal governments in encouraging private landowners to allow public access to their land for hunting, fishing and other wildlife-dependent recreation.

The Working Families Tax Cuts Act is stated to have restored funding for VPA-HIP, enabling NRCS to offer the competitive grant program for state and tribal governments.

The Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is one of the organizations selected for continued funding and has been awarded $2.1 million to continue an existing VPA-HIP project titled:

Waterfowl Rice Incentive Conservation Enhancement Program ("Program").

The Program is described as providing financial incentives to rice producers near select wildlife management areas and national wildlife refuges to increase public waterfowl hunting access on private rice fields and wetland reserve easements while improving wildlife habitat over a total area of 15,000 acres.

The Program is further described as helping:

… retain, recruit, and reactivate hunters and wildlife-related recreationists by expanding the land base available for wildlife dependent recreation while also improving waterfowl habitat quality that has been declining due to changing agricultural practices.

A copy of the NRCS news release can be found here.