



## Green Forests Work

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### **RCPP Project: Cerulean Warbler Appalachian Forestland Enhancement**

The [Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture](#) (AMJV) was awarded EQIP funds through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) to enhance forestland in Appalachia for Cerulean Warbler habitat over the next five years (Award Identification Number 68-3047-15-6). This RCPP has a forestland component and a mined land component. AMJV hopes to improve 12,500 acres of forest habitat on private lands in PA, WV, and MD. [Green Forests Work](#) (GFW) and The American Chestnut Foundation are responsible for restoring 1,000 acres on formerly mined lands (450 acres in KY, 300 in OH, 150 in PA, 75 in WV, and 25 in MD).

#### **Green Forests Work**

GFW is a non-profit organization whose mission is to re-establish healthy and productive forests on formerly mined lands in Appalachia with the aim of creating future, sustainable economic opportunities and restoring ecosystem services. Surface mines are typically covered in non-native, invasive grasses and shrubs because heavy soil compaction during reclamation hinders native vegetation establishment. Reforesting these lands requires manual, mechanical, and/or chemical control of unwanted vegetation, cross-ripping to mitigate compaction, and hand planting of tree seedlings. Ideal surface mines for this RCPP project are within or near the Cerulean Warbler Focal Area and consist of large open areas (>25 acres) that were mined during or after 1980 and are not completely covered (<50%) in exotic shrubs or steep slopes.

#### **Project Implementation – Mined Land Component**

- 1) Site Visit:** District Conservationists or other natural resources professionals who know of potential landowners or interested landowners themselves contact Kylie or Michael to arrange a site visit. A site visit is conducted first to evaluate whether it would be within the project intentions and feasible before the potential applicant is screened and ranked for the RCPP; this is to avoid a scenario where an applicant would rank high and be obligated funding, but the site is actually undesirable for reforestation. GFW can then better inform the landowner on which funding mechanism to pursue (RCPP EQIP, EQIP, Abandoned Mined Land funds, or others) and help avoid committing to projects that are beyond the project scope.
- 2) Establish Farm Records:** If the land is determined suitable for this RCPP project after the GFW site visit and if the landowner is EQIP eligible, the landowner will establish farm records at their local FSA Service Center and obtain a Farm Serial Number if they have not done so previously. If the land is not determined suitable for this RCPP, then the landowner will be encouraged to apply through a general EQIP contract or GFW may be able to suggest other potential funding mechanisms to help the landowner achieve their conservation goals.
- 3) Apply for RCPP:** Landowner completes Application for Program Assistance for this RCPP (Mined Land Component). Note that separate funding has been allocated for the mined land component of this RCPP grant in EQIP, and these applicants do not compete with general EQIP applicants.
- 4) Screening & Ranking:** After the cut-off period for application (GFW would prefer year-round application with quarterly cut-off dates), the RCPP applicants are screened and ranked by the NRCS, and the highest ranking applicants are obligated funding. Again, RCPP applicants do not compete with general EQIP applicants.
- 5) Conservation Plans:** GFW will develop an overall reforestation plan for applicants receiving funding. This plan will then be “translated” by NRCS staff into the format they require for each Conservation Practice.

6) **Conservation Plan Implementation:** Conservation Practices are implemented.

Below is an advertisement for landowners that can be used in newsletters, local papers, etc.:

**REFOREST YOUR COAL MINED LAND**

If you own land that was surface mined for coal during or after 1980 that is primarily flat and covered with exotic grasses and shrubs and would like to return it to the native forest, then contact Kylie Schmidt with Green Forests Work (GFW). Funding may be available to cover a substantial portion of the cost.

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