

2014

Farm Bill

**Regional Conservation Partnership Program
Presentation for Interested VT Partners**

A large, semi-transparent logo for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is overlaid on the right side of the slide. It consists of a large, stylized letter 'A' shape that is open at the bottom, with a smaller 'S' shape nested inside it.

**Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service**

Vicky Drew – State Conservationist
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What is RCPP?



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

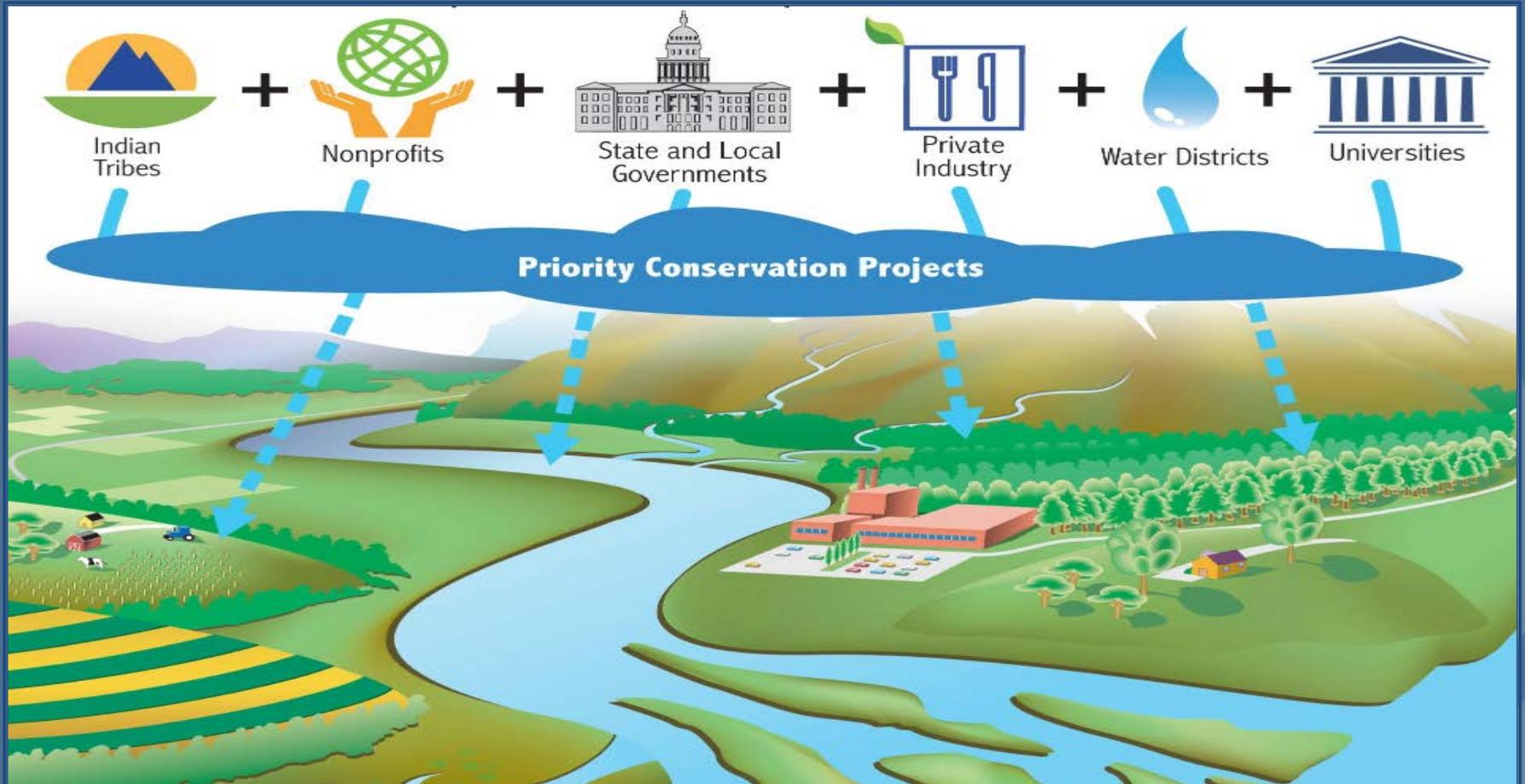
is a new program that mobilizes partnerships to multiply investments and reach common conservation goals.

RCPP is a new 2014 Farm Bill conservation program that:

- Furthers the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil, water, wildlife on a regional scale
- Encourages partners to cooperate with producers
- Provides financial and technical assistance through:
 - Partnership agreements
 - Program contracts and/or easement agreements

What is RCPP?

- RCPP is a way to bring more partners to the table
- More partners = innovation, new ideas, more resources, and local expertise



What is RCPP?

RCPP Offers new opportunities for NRCS to work with partners to encourage:

- locally driven innovation
- create high-performing solutions
- harness innovation
- accelerate the conservation mission
- launch bold ideas
- demonstrate the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation



What is RCPP?

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announces RCPP!



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eK2xya2DKoU&feature=youtu.be>

Measures of Success

For this new flagship program, NRCS will specifically measure environmental successes through the following four criteria:

1. Solutions
2. Contributions
3. Innovation
4. Participation



Measures of Success

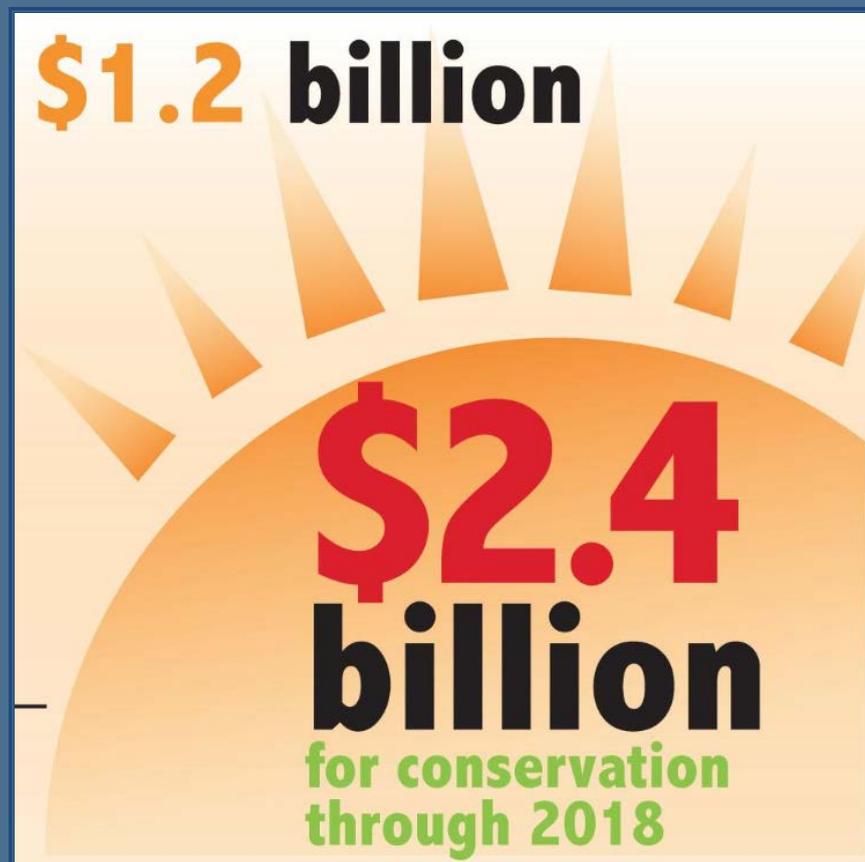
1. **Solutions**. NRCS will invest in projects that generate near-term results that are measurable from environmental, economic, and social perspectives. Both partners and NRCS staff will be involved with documenting the outcomes of these conservation investments.
2. **Contributions**. NRCS specifically will promote leveraging of other Federal and non-federal resources. The agency goal is to **at least double the total investment in conservation**, including cash and in-kind contributions from both Federal and non-Federal sources.

Measures of Success

- 3. Innovation.** NRCS will select innovative projects that integrate multiple conservation approaches to deliver comprehensive and measurable solutions
- 4. Participation.** NRCS will seek to maximize the number of organizations that participate in and contribute to projects as compared with predecessor programs (such as the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative).

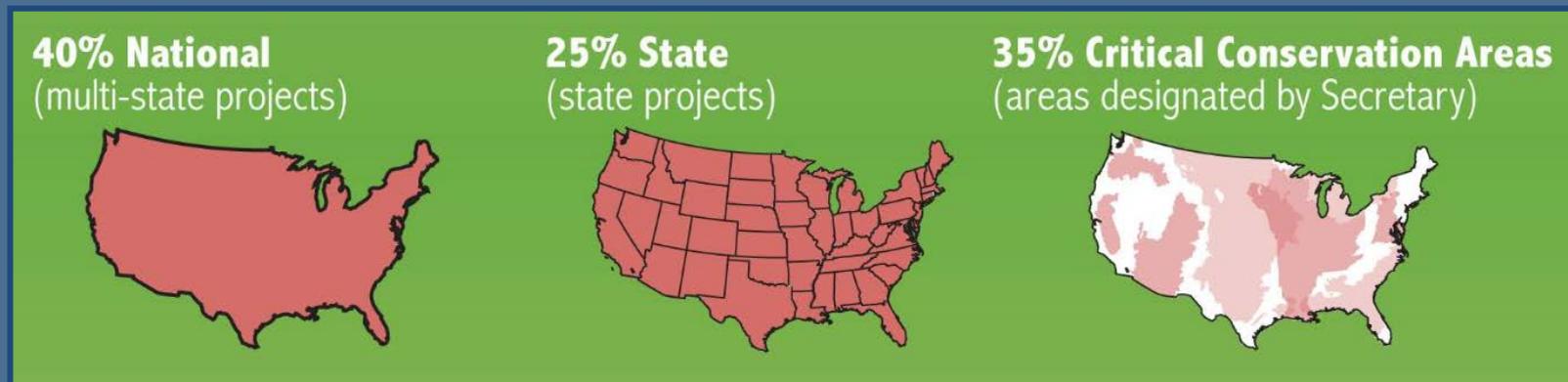
RCPP Funding

- The 2014 Agricultural Act (2014 Farm Bill) has reserved \$100 million dollars each year to contribute directly to the RCPP program
- In addition, USDA has reserved 7% of annual funds from four covered programs to contribute toward RCPP
- USDA plans to invest up to \$1.2 billion dollars with through 2018. Combined with partner matching funds that is \$2.4 billion in conservation investment!



RCPP Funding

RCPP has three different “levels”



- 40% of funds are reserved for projects based on a national competitive process
- 25% of funds are reserved for a state competitive process administered by STC's
- 35% of funds are reserved for projects in critical conservation areas

RCPP Funding

Projected Funding by Covered Program & Pool

Funding Year	2014/2015
EQIP ^{1/}	\$131,155,900
CSP ^{2/3}	\$12,600,000
ACEP	\$55,391,280
HFRP ^{4/5}	\$0
RCPP	\$195,680,000
TOTAL	\$394,827,180

Allocation Between National, State and CCA's	
Funding Year	2014/2015
National (40%)	\$157,930,872
State (25%)	\$98,706,795
CCA (35%)	\$138,189,513
TOTAL	\$394,827,180

1/ excludes \$66,550,777 distributed to states for CCPI in Dec 2013

2/ acres will be secured based on recent sign-up in 2014

3/ 7 percent is projected at 700,000 acres at \$18/acre = \$12,600,000 in 2015

4/ no new funding in 2014

5/ funds not requested in FY15 budget

RCPP Funding

Allocation Between National, State and CCA's					
Funding Year	2014/ ⁶	2015/ ⁷	2016	2017	2018
National (40%)	\$56,190,872	\$101,740,000	\$104,176,000	\$105,576,000	\$101,376,000
State (25%)	\$35,119,295	\$63,587,500	\$65,110,000	\$65,985,000	\$63,360,000
CCA (35%)	\$49,167,013	\$89,022,500	\$91,154,000	\$92,379,000	\$88,704,000
TOTAL	\$140,477,180	\$254,350,000	\$260,440,000	\$263,940,000	\$253,440,000

⁶ Apportioned funding, net of sequester reductions and CHIMPS

⁷ Authorized level; does not include anticipated sequester reductions or CHIMPS

RCPP Delivery

RCPP Partnership Agreements:

- NRCS will enter into RCPP partnerships with partners.
- The partnership agreement defines the scope of the project, including:
 - Eligible activities to be implemented
 - Potential agricultural or nonindustrial private forest operation affected
 - Local, State, multi-State or other geographic area covered
 - Planning, outreach, implementation and assessment to be conducted

Partnership agreements may not exceed 5 years; however, NRCS may extend the agreement 1 time for up to 12 months

RCPD Delivery

Partners are responsible for:

- Defining the scope of the project (accomplished through the project proposal and agreement);
- Conducting outreach and education to eligible producers for potential participation in the project;
- Assisting landowners and producers with NRCS applications, at their request;



RCCP Delivery

Partners are responsible for:

- **Leveraging financial or technical assistance** provided by NRCS with additional funds to help achieve the project objectives;
- Conducting and providing an **assessment of the project costs and conservation effects**;
- **Contributing a significant portion of the overall costs**
- Other duties as specified in the partnership agreement.



RCPP Delivery

RCPP funding will be delivered through the Partnership Agreement using four “core” NRCS Conservation Programs:

- EQIP – Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- CSP – Conservation Stewardship Program
- ACEP – Agricultural Land Easements
- ACEP – Wetland Reserve Easements
- HFRP – Health Forest Reserve Program

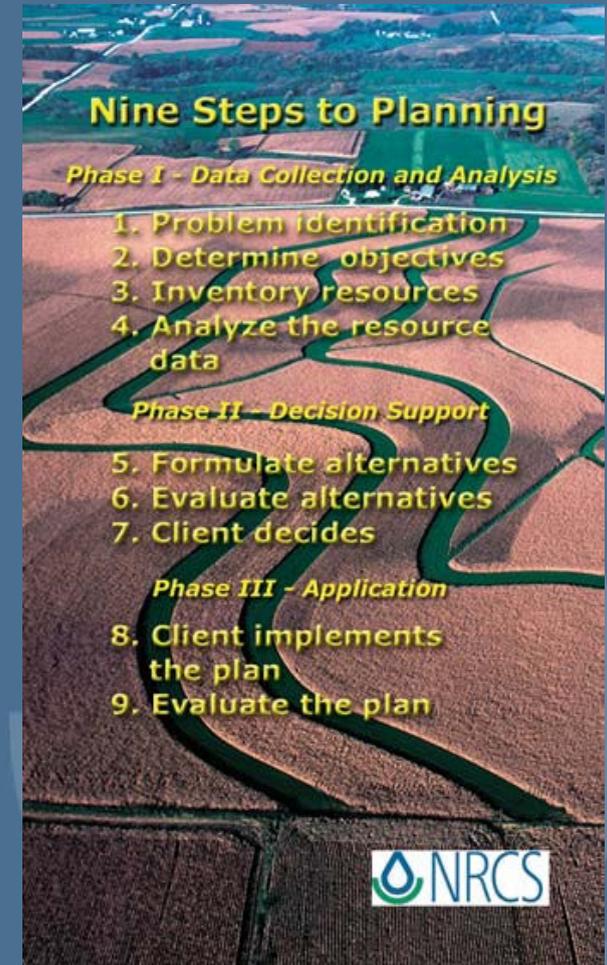
For those of you unfamiliar with these four “core” NRCS Programs, there are certain terms and nuances with which you should be familiar:

NRCS Terminology

Conservation Planning – all potential NRCS projects must go through a Nine-Step Planning Process

Conservation Plan - the record of decisions and supporting information for treatment of a unit of land meeting planning criteria for one or more identified natural resource concerns.

NRCS Practice Standards – Sets the minimum quality criteria that must be met during the application of a practice in order for it to achieve its intended purpose



NRCS Terminology

Eligibility – NRCS is only authorized to provide services on “eligible” land to “eligible” landowners

Conservation Contracts – The most common mechanism through which NRCS projects are administered - Conservation Contracts are agreements between NRCS and the landowner to install practices or perform management activities at specific time periods in accordance with certain NRCS Practice Standards





Unique to RCPP

Adjustments of Terms – RCPP allows for the rules of a covered program to be adjusted under the agreement— this includes non-statutory, regulatory rules or provisions

Direct Technical Assistance Funds to Partners – RCPP allows for alternative funding arrangements to be made in partnership agreements – however, RCPP cannot pay for administrative costs

Unique to RCPP

For Agricultural Land Easements - RCPP offers the option for an eligible entity to submit a proposal to enter into a cooperative agreement for specific parcels to be considered for funding - RCPP allows partners the flexibility to propose non-standard agreement and deed terms. These terms are subject to NRCS approval

For Wetland Easements - the ACEP-WRE includes a Wetland Reserve Enhancement Option that is similar to Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP)

Through RCPP proposals for Healthy Forest Reserve Program projects are not limited to areas previously approved for HFRP.



RCPA Announcement

The announcement for program funding (APF) can be found on grants.gov. More information on the APF and the program can be found at nrca.usda.gov

The screenshot shows the Grants.gov website interface. At the top right, there are links for 'CONTACT US', 'MANAGE SUBSCRIPTIONS', 'REGISTER', and 'LOGIN'. A search bar contains the text 'Grant Opportunities' and a 'GO' button. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with options: 'HOME', 'ABOUT', 'SEARCH GRANTS', 'APPLICANTS', 'GRANTORS', 'SYSTEM-TO-SYSTEM', 'FORMS', 'OUTREACH', and 'SUPPORT'. The main content area is titled 'SEARCH GRANTS' and includes search criteria filters for 'Keyword(s)', 'Funding Opp #', and 'CFDA Number'. A 'SEARCH' button is present. Below the filters, there are options for 'AGENCY: [X] All Department of Agriculture', 'SORT BY: Open Date (Descending)', and 'DATE RANGE: All Available'. A table displays search results, with the first entry being 'USDA-NRCS-NHQ-RCPA-14-01 Regional Conservation Partnership Program' from the 'Natural Resources Conservation Service' agency, with an open date of 05/27/2014 and a close date of 07/14/2014.

Funding Opportunity #	Opportunity Title	Agency	Open Date	Close Date
USDA-NRCS-NHQ-RCPA-14-01	Regional Conservation Partnership Program	Natural Resources Conservation Service	05/27/2014	07/14/2014

Pre-proposals are due July 14, and full proposals are due September 26



RCPP Announcement

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



ANNOUNCEMENT TYPE: Announcement for Program Funding

AGENCY: Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC)

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 10.930

The purpose of this notice is to announce the availability of nearly \$400 million in CCC funding for RCPP and to solicit applications from potential partners who seek to enter into partnership agreements with NRCS under RCPP.

RCPP Announcement

- **July 14** – RCPP Pre-Proposals are due
- Late July – NRCS will review Pre-proposal applications and notify partners if the Pre-proposal is accepted
- **September 26** - Full proposals due
- Mid October: Proposals are selected and announced
- **October 30** - All project agreements are signed
- Once agreements are signed, partnership activities and obligations may begin

RCPA Application Process

- NRCS will conduct a competitive process to select applications for partnership agreements
- Applicants will be ranked against each other in the various RCPA funding pools

Ranking Criteria	Weight
Solutions	25%
Contributions	30%
Innovation	20%
Participation	25%



Applications

- Applicants must identify **one specific funding pool** in which to compete in accordance with the criteria established in this notice
- Project areas may be defined by geo-political boundaries, watershed boundaries, agricultural land uses, or regional natural resource concerns

Applications

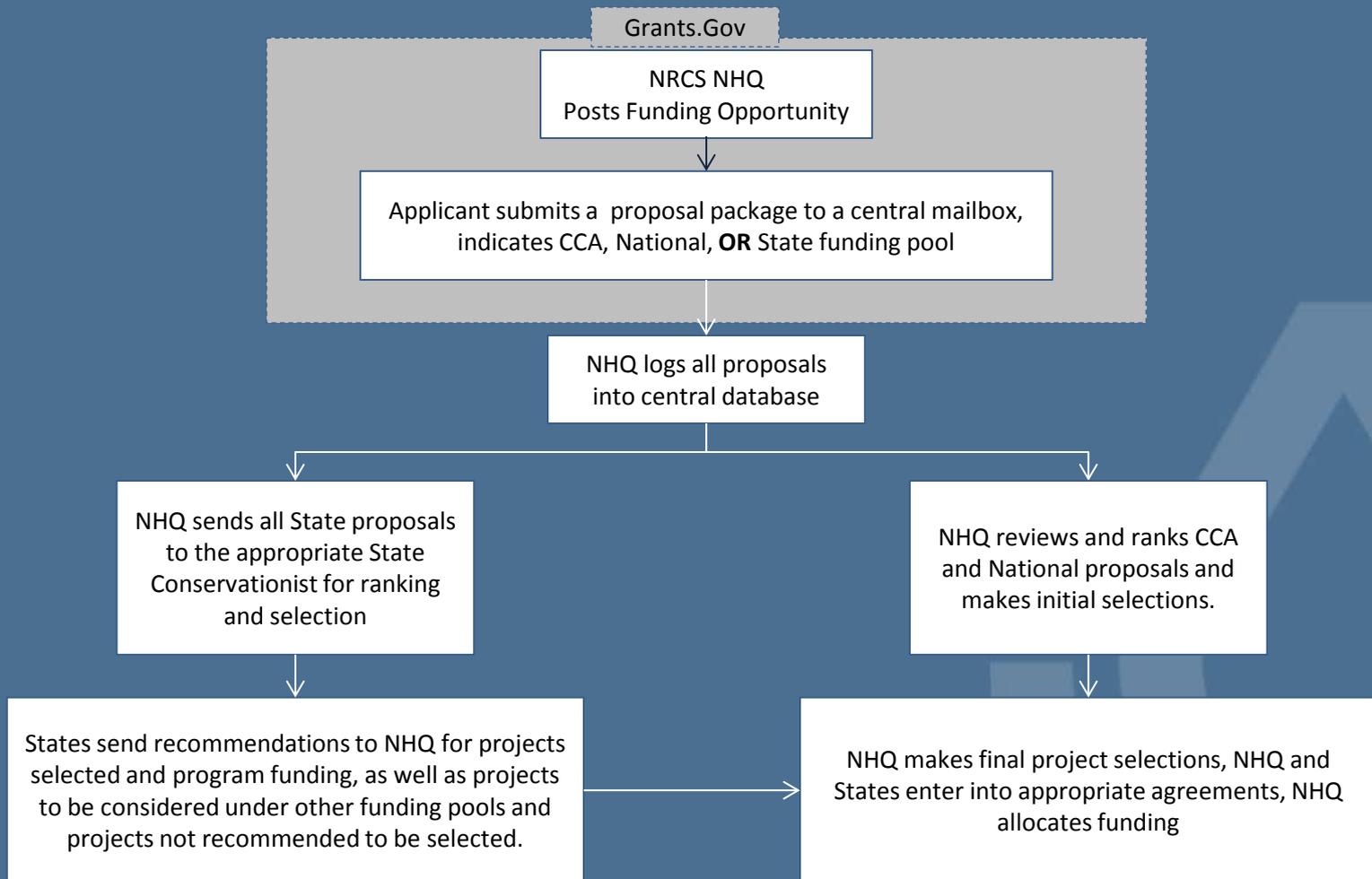
- The project area does not need to be contiguous, but the **geographic boundaries need to be described**
- The project must address at least **one identified priority**





RCPP Application Process

Process for Reviewing Applications



Potential partners in Vermont are encouraged to apply under the National Funding Pool or the State Funding Pool by submitting their Pre-proposal by July 14, 2014

Priority will be given to multistate projects.

National priorities for FY 2014/2015

- 1) Water quantity
- 2) Water quality
- 3) Soil health
- 4) At risk species habitat
- 5) Air quality



RCPP State Funding Pool

Priority will be given to projects that address one or more of the following priority resource concerns in Vermont:

- 1) Water quality
- 2) Soil erosion
- 3) Soil quality and health
- 4) Inadequate habitat for fish and wildlife
- 5) Energy



Questions?



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