NRCS
Natural Resources Conservation Service

**PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**
**BETWEEN THE**
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**
**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE**
**AND THE**
**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**
**OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (Civil Works)**

**Purpose:** To promote a long-term working relationship between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)(OASA(CW)) on collaborative efforts to improve the management of water and related natural resources under the missions and authorities of NRCS and the Department of the Army (DA) Civil Works mission through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

**Goals:** NRCS and OASA(CW) have established the following partnership goals:

- To express mutual commitment to comprehensive water and related natural resources management and conservation in support of Executive Order 13352, Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation.

- To create and support three national teams to review existing authorities and programs, identify areas of concern and need for increased collaboration, and support implementation of actions identified for:

  (1) Watershed Planning and Implementation,
  (2) Wetland Creation, Restoration, and Enhancement, and
  (3) Natural Disaster Recovery.

- To coordinate other programs and activities including Wetland Conservation Compliance (Swampbuster) and Regulatory (Section 404 of the Clean Water Act).

- To support and encourage the establishment of six to ten Field Implementation Teams to serve as pilot activities for implementing innovations, removing impediments to the NRCS/USACE partnership, and engaging and supporting local leadership in solving water and related natural resources problems.

**Implementation:** We commit to achieve our goals by fostering a spirit of teamwork between our organizations at all levels. We will meet in partnering sessions as needed, but at least annually, to ensure that we are achieving our goals. This partnership agreement does not commit either the NRCS or USACE to fund particular initiatives, as funding commitments must be addressed pursuant to a more formal document.

**Effective Date:** This agreement is effective when signed by both parties and should be reviewed annually to renew our commitment and consider needed changes.

United States Department of Agriculture

**BRUCE I. KNIGHT**
Chief
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Date: July 7, 2005

United States Office of the
Assistant Secretary of the Army
(Civil Works)

**GEORGE S. DUNLOP**
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
of the Army

Date: July 7, 2005

PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES
to accompany
PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT
between the
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
and the
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (Civil Works)

## I. Background

A. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners, State and local units of government, Tribes, other Federal agencies, and international governments through a partnership effort to conserve, maintain, and enhance natural resources and the environment.

B. The Department of the Army (DA) Civil Works mission through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) provides planning, design, and construction services to civil and military customers, and other agencies, worldwide. The USACE also develops, manages, and protects water and related land resources.

C. The NRCS and USACE (subsequently referred to as the Agencies) both have responsibilities for carrying out policies and programs that address water and related natural resources issues. Both Agencies recognize that the policies, programs, plans, and activities that are used to carry out their respective responsibilities may significantly affect the other agency.

D. There are often opportunities for Federal agencies, such as the Agencies, to cooperate under their respective jurisdictions. Opportunities also exist for the Agencies to provide each other with needed technical expertise. Cooperative management and technical assistance efforts can help: improve resources management and protection; improve public services; provide a better understanding of the Agencies' goals, objectives, and programs; and help minimize conflicts.

E. Each Agency retains full responsibility and authority to execute and accomplish their programs. All duties and commitments described herein are contingent on the availability and administrative allocation of funding. Nothing in this document shall be construed as authorizing either agency to provide any goods or services to the other agency.

## II. Purpose

The purpose of the Partnership Agreement between the Agencies and the associated Partnership Principles is to:

A. Improve public services, management of water, and related natural resources through harmonious and effective cooperative agency efforts.

B. Establish a framework for coordination and communication between officials and staff at every level of the Agencies.

C. Encourage the use of NRCS expertise in application of upstream conservation practices to enhance the effectiveness of appropriate USACE water resources projects.

D. Foster the early identification of overlapping interests in the Agencies' plans, programs, and activities in order to minimize conflicts and maximize synergy whenever possible, and to facilitate collaborative efforts to address water resources needs.

## III. Areas of Cooperation and Mutual Interest

Listed below are areas of cooperation that may initially be pursued between the Agencies. The items listed are by no means all inclusive since as this partnership develops, it is likely that other areas of cooperation and mutual interest will be identified at all levels of the Agencies.

A. Wetlands Conservation Compliance (Swampbuster) and Regulatory (Section 404 Clean Water Act). The Agencies should review existing policies and agreements related to wetland conservation compliance and regulation, update them as needed, and identify additional opportunities for cooperation.

B. Wetland Creation, Restoration, and Enhancement. The Agencies should create a National Wetland Creation, Restoration, and Enhancement Team to review existing authorities and ongoing programs, identify areas of concern and need for increased collaboration. Topics to be addressed may include:

1. Identification and importance of wetlands and aquatic resources functions;
2. Develop processes to coordinate wetlands projects and programs;
3. Coordinate interagency wetlands training and technology exchanges; and
4. Develop an action register to implement the President's Wetland Initiative.

C. Natural Disaster Recovery. The Agencies should create a National Natural Disaster Recovery Team that should review and update, as needed, existing emergency management agreements for Presidentially Declared Disasters, working closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and major flood response and recovery actions requiring coordinated response for Flood Control and Coastal Emergencies (FCCE) and Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) activities. Items to be addressed may include:

1. Review areas of responsibility; and
2. Coordinate disaster recovery activities.

D. Watershed Planning and Implementation. The Agencies should create a National Watershed Planning and Implementation Team to seek ways to integrate water resources programs and initiatives in order to develop more complete and efficient water resources projects for project sponsors, and improved watershed resources management for the broader range of watershed stakeholders. Topics to be addressed may include:

1. Increase the Agencies' coordination and collaboration in water resources activities;
2. Establish a sediment work group to collaboratively identify system approaches to managing sediment and potential pilot projects;
3. Establish a workgroup to coordinate models, tools, and technologies related to water and natural resources planning;
4. Establish pilot water resources projects and/or interagency planning teams to identify innovations and impediments to collaborative watershed approaches to resource development and management;
5. Establish watershed planning, training, and technology exchange;
6. Develop an integrated process to assist watershed project sponsors in obtaining 404 permits; and
7. Increase technology, services, and data exchange to assure safety of new and existing dams.

## IV. Communications and Coordination

A. The Agencies should provide each other with a list of points of contact responsible for program areas and other areas of mutual interest. Early communication should improve public services and resources management consistent with the above mission statements for both Agencies, through increased efficiency and avoidance of potential conflict. Coordination should occur for planning, programs, and other management actions of mutual interest. Each Agency should offer the other opportunities for early coordination regarding the modification of significant policies and procedures that may affect subject areas of this agreement and have impacts on the programs and mission of the other Agency.

B. Frequent informal consultation on matters of mutual interest should be encouraged at all levels. The NRCS State Conservationists and USACE District Engineers should be the primary conduit through which field coordination should take place. Each Agency should be responsible for ensuring that personnel are informed and involved. To encourage District/State communications, the Agencies, with staff support from the Liaisons, should:

1. Issue communication from headquarters to NRCS State Conservationists and USACE District Engineers encouraging communication and providing examples of success stories;

2. Publicize through newsletters, websites, etc. examples of NRCS/USACE collaboration resulting from planned District/State communications; and
3. Provide points of contact by subject matter for each State NRCS Office and each USACE District.

## V. Implementation

A. Responsibility. Lead responsibility for overall coordination and implementation of the Partnership Agreement should be assigned as follows: NRCS – Mississippi River Basin Coordinator, USACE – Northwestern Division Regional Integration Team Leader, or their designees.

B. National Teams. The Agencies should establish three National Teams to coordinate activities, identify needs, present findings, and document agency leadership decisions in support of this agreement.

C. Field Implementation Teams. The Agencies should support and encourage the establishment of six to ten Field Implementation Teams to serve as pilot activities for implementing innovations, removing impediments to the NRCS/USACE partnership efforts, and engaging and supporting local leadership in solving water and related natural resources problems.

D. Liaison Exchange. The Agencies should continue their existing liaison exchange, at mutually agreed to locations and duration. Liaisons should provide staff support to help carry out actions identified through this Partnership Agreement.

E. Goods and Services. The Agencies should explore mechanisms that provide for the effective and efficient exchange of goods and services necessary to accomplish the intent of each Agency's legislative responsibilities and mandates, as appropriate.

F. National Points of Contact. National points of contact should be established by each Agency by subject matter for coordination on program and technology issues. Points of Contact should be reviewed annually and kept current.