

George Johnson (386) 985-4037 ex 3 or (352) 538-3909 cell  
101 Heavensgate Rd. Suite F DeLand, FL 32725

## **FLOOD-PRONE LANDS IN FLORIDA MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR RESTORATION AND PROTECTION WITH ECONOMIC RECOVERY FUNDS**

Gainesville, FL, March 10, 2009—U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will provide up to \$145 million to eligible landowners nationwide through the floodplain easement component of its Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced today. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the EWP program. The funds will be used to restore an estimated 60,000 acres, nationwide, of frequently flooded land to its natural state and create jobs. USDA has limited spending to no more than \$30 million per state.

Carlos Suarez, NRCS state conservationist in Florida, announced that eligible landowners can sign up for these easements from March 9 – 27, 2009.

“We will be working with landowners who voluntarily agree to restore the floodplains to their natural condition by placing their land into easements,” Suarez said. “These easements will convert environmentally sensitive lands into riparian corridors and wooded bottomlands that are so vital for fish and wildlife habitat, and to mitigate downstream flooding.”

Secretary Vilsack said green jobs can be created in rural communities nationwide when landowners establish conservation practices on the land entered into easement. Jobs will be created mostly in the engineering, biology and construction fields when trees and native grasses are planted and the hydrology of the floodplain is restored.

The funding, obtained from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, includes both technical and financial assistance to restore the easements. All funds will be spent on targeted projects that can be completed with economic stimulus monies. The goal is to have all floodplain easements acquired and restored within 12-18 months.

The EWP Program's floodplain easement component allows USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) to purchase easements on lands damaged by flooding. The restored floodplain will generate many public benefits, such as increased flood protection, enhanced fish and wildlife habitat, improved water quality, and a reduced need for future public disaster assistance. Other benefits include reduced energy consumption when certain agricultural activities and practices are eliminated and increased carbon sequestration as permanent vegetative cover is re-established.

Interested landowners in Flagler and Volusia Counties can contact George Johnson, District Conservationist, during the signup. For information about EWP Program floodplain easements, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/ewp/Floodplain/index.html>.

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