



## Long Island Sound Watershed RCPP

### General Summary

The Long Island Sound Watershed Regional Conservation Partnership Program (LISW-RCPP) is a landscape scale initiative that covers the geographic area of Long Island Sound (the Sound) and its watershed. It will coordinate the development and implementation of a comprehensive working lands program with a key focus on: 1) nutrient management and soil health, 2) protection of non-industrial forest land, and 3) working lands adaptation/ resiliency. The LISW-RCPP will better leverage all resources by connecting with existing state and federal programs and catalyzing innovative watershed-scale public/private partnerships.

The primary resource concern to be addressed by the LISW-RCPP is hypoxia in Long Island Sound caused by excess nutrients, primarily nitrogen, in storm water runoff. Additionally, excess nutrients are also impacting drinking water supplies within the watershed. Including source water protection as a priority will be used to get buy in from the upper watershed. Secondary concerns include loss of farmland, loss of forest habitat, wetland and riparian buffer degradation from severe storms, changing precipitation cycles resulting in periods of drought followed by intense rain, and regulatory uncertainty for local food producers.

With over 600 miles of coastline, the Sound is an estuary that forms the northern border of Long Island, NY and the southern boundary of Connecticut. At 1,320 sq. miles, it is the 2nd largest estuary in the United States. The LIS watershed begins at the headwaters of the Connecticut River on the Quebec border and encompasses 17,814 square miles (11,400,923 acres) in six states (CT, MA, NH, NY, RI, and VT) and Quebec. Over ninety percent of the fresh water that drains into the Sound comes from three major rivers: the Connecticut, Housatonic, and Thames Rivers.

The LISW-RCPP will reduce excessive runoff and nutrient loading to Long Island Sound from working lands within the watershed. A technical committee will be established to coordinate implementation of technical and financial assistance in 3 key areas:

1. Soil Health/Nutrient Management (EQIP) – provide technical assistance to producers on best management practices to improve soil health, reduce nutrient runoff, and protect source water. Partners will work with agricultural producers within the watershed to expand the program beyond first adopters resulting in more practices on the land. Agriculture within the

watershed is very diverse and assistance will be provided to all types of producers including, but not limited to dairy, vegetable/berry crops, nursery crops, tobacco, and orchards.

2. Land Protection (HFRP) –The LISW-RCPP will work with the Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP) Network and with up to 18 existing RCPs comprised of land trusts, state and local government agencies, and other groups to identify private lands owners. Priority will be given to lands within the watershed that are non-industrial forest on agricultural working lands, lands that also protect source water, and lands rich in biodiversity.

3. Working Lands Adaptation/Resiliency – focus will be on agricultural lands within the watershed that are located within floodplain areas where proper land management will reduce impact of flood events and increase resiliency.

### **Project Implementation**

The LISW-RCPP will coordinate a multi-state effort designed to bring together all of the resources in the region. The Connecticut Council on Soil and Water Conservation will be the lead agency working with NRCS and will assign a dedicated staff person for the project. A LISW-RCPP Technical Committee will be established that includes representatives across programs and throughout the 6 state watershed. It will include but not be limited to: state conservation agencies (NASCA), local soil and water conservation districts, State departments of environmental protection and natural resource conservation, state departments of agriculture, Cooperative Extension, USDA FSA, EPA Region I, USFWS, USGS, NOAA, local governments/regional planning agencies, Long Island Sound Citizens Advisory Committee, CT River Watershed Council, The Nature Conservancy, Highstead Foundation, National Audubon, and the American Farmland Trust. The award amount will be matched at a minimum of 50-50, with funds and in-kind services.

**Amount awarded: \$10 million in January 2015    Match: \$10 million minimum  
Five Year Contract Period**

### **About the RCPP**

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a new program created by the 2014 Farm Bill and is administered by USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS).

RCPP utilizes Farm Bill programs but allows for great flexibility for program participation.

### **For more information contact:**

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