

## **NRCS Funding Available to Restore Maine Wetlands**

The United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Maine has nearly \$1,000,000 available to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands through the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). "Maine has received more funding to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands than it has in previous years," explains NRCS District Conservationist Paul Hersey. "We will be working closely with other partners to ensure that Franklin County's private landowners are aware of this unique opportunity and they understand the benefits from participating in WRP."

Applications are accepted year round. However, applications received by April 30, 2010 will be considered for the first round of funding in 2010. Applications received after this date will be considered in subsequent rounds of funding if funds remain available.

The Wetlands Reserve Program has been around since the mid 1990's. Over the past 15 years it has become a cost-effective and ecologically successful voluntary wetlands restoration program. The WRP is a great opportunity for many landowners, particularly farmers, who may have land that is poorly drained and difficult to cultivate, landowners who are looking to cut back on farming but don't want to sell the land, or those landowners interested in establishing and protecting prime wildlife habitat.

WRP provides financial incentives to help farmers restore farmland, including pastures, which were once wetlands to create fully-functioning wetlands again. The benefits from selling an easement on the wetland may help farmers shift their field configurations, allowing them to put more resources toward increasing productivity in other areas of the farm. To enroll in WRP, lands that are classified as wetland, or were formerly wetland and are kept mowed or cultivated for agricultural purposes, and forest lands where the wetland hydrology has been altered significantly, are eligible. The program offers three enrollment options: (1) A permanent easement in which NRCS pays 100 percent of the easement value and restoration costs; (2) A 30-year easement (for Tribal lands only) in which NRCS pays up to 75 percent of the easement value and restoration costs; and (3) Restoration Cost-Share Agreement to restore or enhance the wetland functions and values without placing an easement on the enrolled acres – NRCS pays up to 75 percent of the restoration costs and annual payments cannot exceed \$50,000 per year. The landowner maintains ownership of the land, access to the land, and responsibility for taxes. Public access IS NOT required on WRP land.

Interested landowners should visit their local NRCS office located at the USDA Service Center, 107 Park Street in Farmington, or call Paul Hersey, District Conservationist, at 207-778-4767 x 105 to determine eligibility.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Additional information on the Wetland Reserve Program is available at [www.me.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.me.nrcs.usda.gov).