

# For Immediate Release

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## USDA and Interior Announce Wildlife Conservation Efforts to Support Local Economies and Preserve Farm Traditions

*Innovative partnership preserves working lands and protects at-risk species*

SOMERSET, March 8, 2012—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Secretary of Interior Ken Salazar today announced a new \$33 million partnership to use innovative approaches with farmers, ranchers and forest landowners to restore and protect the habitats for seven specific wildlife species while also helping other vulnerable and game species.

The announcement of the [Working Lands for Wildlife](#) partnership follows last week's White House Conference on Conservation that spotlighted **community-driven conservation efforts as part of** President Obama's [America's Great Outdoors](#) Initiative.

"America's natural resources play a significant role in building a strong and vibrant economy," said Secretary Vilsack. "Agricultural lands with healthy and abundant wildlife habitat support strong incomes for our farmers and ranchers and provide great opportunities for enhancing hunting and fishing, outdoor recreation and wildlife viewing."

"Our goal is to help America's farmers and ranchers continue to work their land, while ensuring the future of these at-risk species," said Secretary Salazar. "By improving the health and diversity of working landscapes, we can provide better habitat for wildlife and strengthen local economies by protecting the way of life that families in rural America have maintained for decades."

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) will jointly prepare species recovery tools such as informal agreements, safe harbor agreements and habitat conservation plans to provide regulatory certainty to landowners. The goal is to have these tools in place for all priority species within the next seven months, with the intent to continue this targeted species recovery work beyond this year. Two of the species initially selected for this expanded campaign, the bog turtle and golden-winged warbler, are found in New Jersey.

Today's announcement kicks-off the sign-up for [Working Lands for Wildlife](#). New Jersey landowners can sign-up to manage and restore high-priority habitats for bog turtle and golden-winged warbler. New Jersey NRCS State Conservationist Donald Pettit said, "We hope to be able to reach all eligible NJ landowners with this new opportunity." Applications within the priority habitat areas will receive highest consideration.

Interested producers and landowners can check the [New Jersey NRCS website to see target areas](#) for these species. Producers and landowners can enroll in the [Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program](#) (WHIP) on a continuous basis at their local [NRCS field office](#). NRCS funds from WHIP will share the cost of conservation practices with landowners in areas known to support one or both of the selected species.

For 14 years, WHIP has worked to protect, restore or develop fish and wildlife habitat for many species, including those considered at-risk. Since 2003, about \$310 million has been committed to 23,000 farmers, ranchers and landowners to provide wildlife treatments on four million acres of private working lands.

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