USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)

Overview and 2026 Notice of Funding Announcement

This presentation will be recorded and made available on the [How to Apply to RCPP] website

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Agenda

1. NRCS Chief's priorities
2. RCPP Overview
3. FY2026 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)
4. Wrap-up, proposal tips, and resources

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NRCS Priorities and RCPP Overview

Ken Kriese, US-Held Easement Program Manager, NRCS

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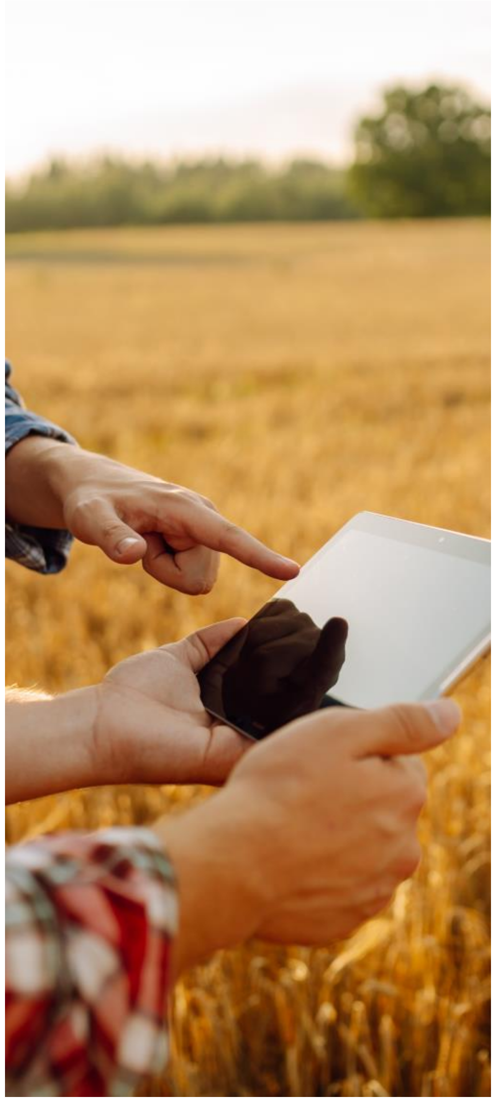
NRCS Chief's Priorities

1. **Preserve and Protect Agricultural Land**
2. **Shift to Outcome-Based Conservation and Farmer Empowerment**
3. **Recenter Field Engagement and Technical Assistance**
4. **Expand Wildlife Conservation and Outdoor Access**
5. **Strengthen Partnerships by Streamlining Processes and Accountability**
6. **Optimize Mission Delivery by Strengthening Workforce Culture**
7. **Modernize NRCS Infrastructure and Technology**



RCPP Program Overview

What

Carry out **eligible activities** to further the conservation, protection, restoration, and sustainable use of **soil, water, wildlife, agricultural land, and related natural resources** on eligible land on a regional or watershed scale.

Where

On **eligible land**, which is Private or Tribal agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or associated land on which an eligible activity would help achieve the **conservation benefits** defined for an approved project.

RCPP Program Overview

How

NRCS and partners co-invest in conservation activities to achieve conservation benefits and address natural resource concerns.

For More Information

Grants.gov for webinar recording on RCPP overview

NRCS Webpage: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/regional-conservation-partnership-program

RCPP Authorities = Covered Programs

RCPP Activity Type	Covered Program Authorities	Purpose/Notes
Land Management	EQIP Practices & CSP Activities ACEP-WRE/HFRP – restoration PL-566 – land treatment	Treatments to restore or improve the land
Rental	CRP	Temporary & based on foregone income
US-Held Easement	ACEP-ALE/WRE & HFRP – easement acquisition	Permanent protection of the land
Entity-Held Easement	ACEP-ALE/WRE & HFRP – easement acquisition	Permanent protection of the land
Watershed Project	PL-566	Infrastructure project requiring an approved watershed plan & design

RCPP Opportunities

Classic

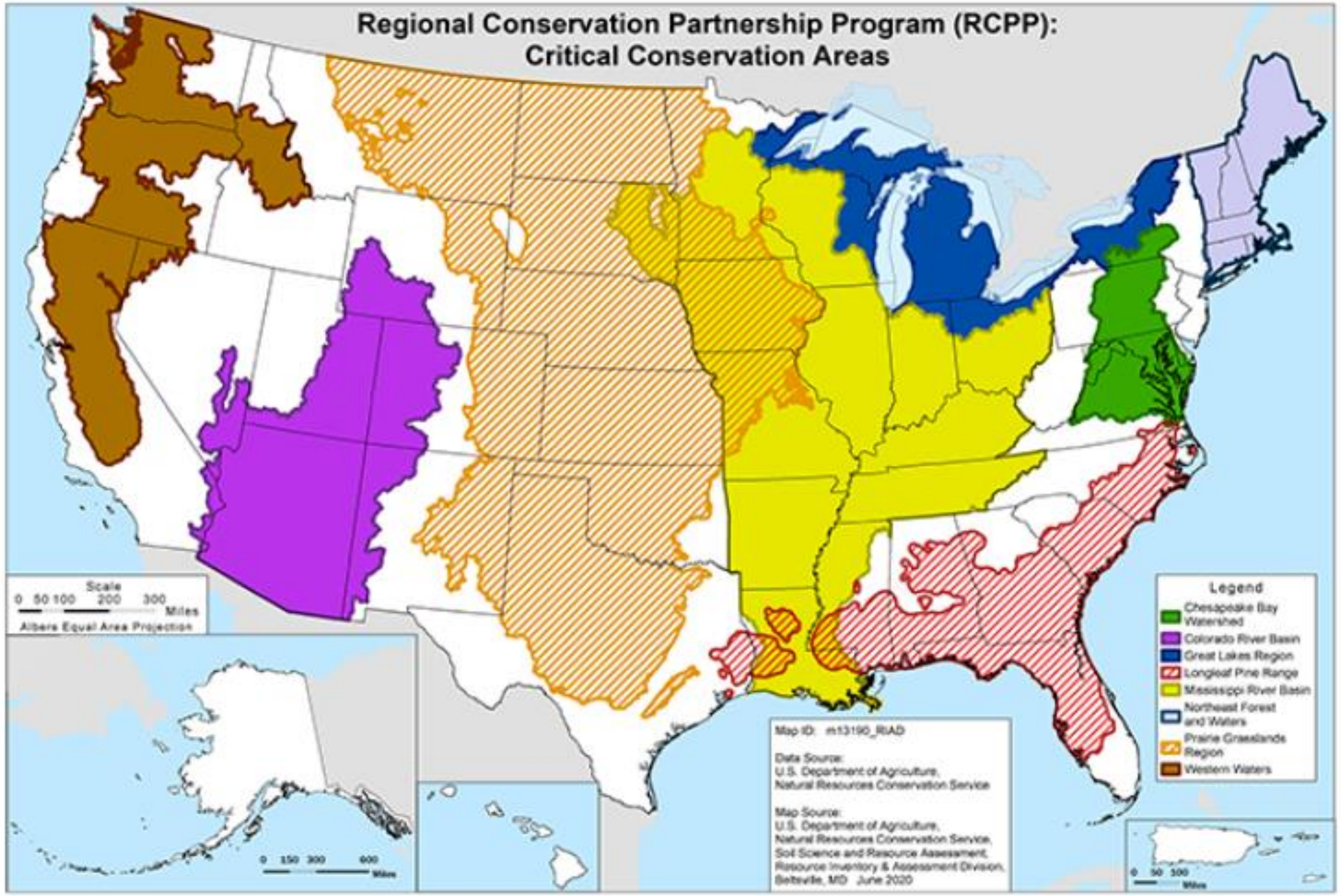
- NRCS reimburses participants directly for financial assistance (FA) activities.
- NRCS and partner negotiate roles in delivering technical assistance (TA) in support of producer contracts and easements.
- Partner's primary role is to provide outreach, measure impact, and deliver partner contributions to amplify NRCS funding.

Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA)

- Partner installs practices for producers or reimburses producers for FA activities.
- Partner delivers all project TA in support of producer contracts.
- NRCS support limited to non-delegable tasks such as confirming the eligibility of producers and land and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance decisions.

RCPP Funding Pools

- State/Multi-State
  - Can include any RCPP resource concern or conservation benefit.
- Critical Conservation Areas
  - Project *and producer contracts or easements* under this project must address at least one CCA-specific priority resource concern.
  - A single proposal cannot include multiple CCAs.
  - See the RCPP website for more information.



RCPP Easement Opportunities

Entity-held Easements

Provide cost-share for the purchase of and held by an Eligible Entity.

- RCPP Classic
- RCPP Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA)

US-held Easements

Purchased and held by the United States, by and through NRCS.

- RCPP Classic

RCPP Roles

Activity	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
RCPP Funds for Easement Purchase	**Provided To Eligible Entity** As cost-share for their purchase of a conservation easement from an eligible landowner.	**Provided To Landowner** by NRCS for the purchase of a conservation easement.
Easement Purchase Agreement **(Document)**	**Between Landowner and Eligible Entity** *(Parcel Contract)*	**Between Landowner and NRCS** *(Agreement for the Purchase of Conservation Easement)*
Obtain and Pay for Easement Acquisition-Related Items *(e.g., appraisal, survey, title, recording, etc.)*	**Eligible Entity**	**NRCS**

RCPP Roles

Activity	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
Easement Holder	Eligible Entity	United States *By and through NRCS*
Co-holders	Other Entities *If identified by Eligible Entity*	None
Third-party right holders	Other entities *If identified by Eligible Entity*	None

RCPP Roles

Activity	Entity-held Easements	US-held Easements
Funds for Required Easement Restoration	**None**	Restoration costs must be included in project budget. Not applicable to Easements for Working Lands
Monitoring, Stewardship, and Enforcement of Closed Easement	**Easement Holder** *Eligible Entity*	**NRCS**

RCPP Use of Funds

Partner Contributions:

The non-Federal share (easement match) for entity held easements closed prior to PPA expiration	Can count as a contribution to RCPP project.
Eligible entity's cost for acquisition-related items	May count toward RCPP project contribution but not toward easement match (non-Federal share for easement purchase).

RCPP Funds:

May not be used for entity-held easement acquisition-related costs/due diligence expenses

e.g., appraisal, survey, title, etc.

Entity-Held Easements

- Who conducts and pays for due diligence?
  - **NRCS Responsibilities** – Limited to environmental database records search, as part of a limited phase I Environmental Site Assessment and appraisal technical reviews.
  - **Partner Responsibilities** – All other due diligence are a partner responsibility to purchase and provide <u>and not reimbursed by NRCS.</u>

US-Held Easements

NRCS is responsible for the acquisition of the easement, including obtaining and paying for easement acquisition-related items.

- NRCS will pay up to 100% of the easement-acquisition related costs on all US-held easement types.

- NRCS may also pay up to 100% for the cost of restoration on the easement area as determined by NRCS for highly and moderately restrictive easements.

US-Held Easements

All technical assistance (TA) and FA costs for the RCPP US-held easement must be accounted for in the PPA budget.

FA costs include but are not limited to:

- Cost of the easement itself.
- All acquisition-related costs.
- For highly or moderately restrictive easements, the costs of required restoration activities as determined by NRCS.
- For procurement of the baseline documentation report when not prepared by NRCS.

Note

Must be sufficient funds available in the PPA budget for entirety of easement transaction for a US-held easement to be eligible for funding selection.

US-Held Easements

Third Party Contributions

A partner or other third-party may contribute toward a RCPP US-Held easement in the following ways:

Provide funds or in-kind services for:

- **Design or implementation of restoration activities** on the easement area.
- **Management activities** on the easement area through an agreement with the landowner.

Provide in-kind services for:

- **Outreach** to private and tribal landowners.

Provide funds for:

- Payment of **easement compensation** to the landowner into escrow (this is uncommon).

Note

In no circumstances will the RCPP Warranty Easement Deed include any rights-of-enforcement or other interests to another party.

Third Party Contributions - Continued

Partner Funds or Qualified In-kind Services

- Provided by the partner or third-party **may be counted** as a contribution under the PPA subject to its terms.

Limitation on Landowner Contributions

- Funds contributed by the landowner **may not be included** as a contribution under the PPA, including but not limited to:
  - The difference between the fair market value of the easement and the easement compensation amount paid to the landowner for the easement itself.
  - Any actual costs or in-kind services provided by the landowner for restoration or other activities on the easement.

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FY 2026 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – RCPP Classic

Matt Oliver, Entity-Held Easement Program Manager, NRCS

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Notice of Funding Opportunities (NOFO)

FY2026 Classic and Alternative Funding Arrangement (AFA) NOFOs running concurrently and were posted June 23, 2026

- Proposal submission deadline: **August 24, 2026, by 4:59 PM Eastern.**

- $310M Classic and AFA RCPP Funds Available
  - Split 50/50 between Critical Conservation Area funding and state or multistate funding pool
  - 30M set aside for tribal proposals

2026 NOFO Agency Priorities

1. Projects based on land management activities encompassing various areas like soil health, water quality, healthy range and pasturelands, and wildlife habitat with an aim to improve land health, enhance resource management, and promote sustainable agriculture and long-term protection of agricultural, grassland and forestland viability.
2. Farmer focused projects with contributions that will provide financial assistance and/or technical expertise for planning and practice designs to support producer contracts.
3. Soil health projects using practices that focus on minimizing soil disturbance, maximizing soil cover, increasing natural vitality, and maintaining living roots throughout the year. Such NRCS practices often include cover cropping, crop rotation, reduced tillage, surface residue management, grazing management and long-term protection of grasslands through entity held easement activities.

2026 NOFO Agency Priorities

4. Precision agricultural (PA) projects that use PA technologies to target conservation efforts based on specific field conditions, potentially reducing costs and improving resource efficiency. Such may include using PA technologies in conjunction with conservation practices to ensure optimal land preparation with reduced erosion, enhanced nutrient and pesticide application rates and timing.
5. Projects led by Indian Tribes. NRCS is reserving $30 million for PPAs with Indian Tribes. Any unused funds will return to the general funding pool.

RCPP Classic NOFO

- **Easement Holder:** US-Held or Entity-Held Easements that meet the requirements in 7 CFR Part 1468.3

Deed Requirements

Entity-Held Easements must attach or incorporate 1 of 3 sets of minimum deed terms (MDT) into their own conservation easement with two versions existing for each set (with US Right of Enforcement (ROE) and without). Eligible entities may request in their proposal to use a previously approved NRCS easement template for "ACEP-ALE-like" transactions.

- RCPP MDT for Protection of Conservation Values (Highly Restrictive)
- RCPP MDT for Conservation Use with Compatible Agricultural Use (Moderately Restrictive)
- RCPP MDT for Agricultural Use (Minimally Restrictive)

US-Held Easements include 3 Warranty Easement Deeds (WEDs) tailored to easement specific purposes or alternatively, request to use an NRCS preapproved, prepopulated, warranty easement deed, or request NRCS approval of a custom deed, using the posted materials as a guide, and submitted with the proposal.

- RCPP WED for Protection of Conservation Values (Highly Restrictive)
- RCPP WED for Protection of Conservation Uses (Moderately Restrictive)
- RCPP WED for Working Lands (Minimally Restrictive)

RCPP Classic NOFO

- **Duration:** Easement are perpetual or maximum duration allowed by state law.
- **Eligible Land Types:** Private agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or associated lands (e.g., riparian areas, floodplains, seasonal or flooded wetlands).
- **Valuation Methodology:** Determined through an appraisal, but alternative valuation methods may be considered if included in the proposal prior to the deadline (note: the latter could delay PPA negotiation and implementation). Prior to proposal submission, applicants seeking an alternative valuation methodology, must consult the applicable RCPP coordinator and the Easement Programs Division (EPD) valuation team at NRCS.NationalAppraisers@usda.gov. Approvals will be documented in the PPA and SA Type IV.

RCPP Compensation

Entity-Held Easement

- provide a federal share to eligible entities as a percentage of a before- and after appraisal, or an approved alternative valuation methodology, for up to 50% of the easement value with a US ROE, and up to 25% of the easement value without a US ROE.

US-Held Easements

- pays up to 100% of the easement value as determined by NRCS valuation methods.

RCPP Classic NOFO

Partner Match

Entity-Held Easements must consist of any combination of landowner donation toward easement value or partner cash contribution toward easement compensation to the landowner.

US-Held Easements do not have matching requirements from the partner.

Partner Contribution

Entity-Held Easements require a non-federal match as well as due diligence activities to be performed or procured by the partner.

US-Held Easements contributions that contribute substantially to overall costs are highly encouraged. In-kind, or cash, contributions from sources other than the landowner may count. Landowner cost-share (i.e., landowner donation or charitable contribution) cannot be counted as partner contribution.

RCPP Classic NOFO

RCPP Award Type

Entity-Held Easements are implemented through agreements entered into by NRCS with an eligible entity that will hold the easement on eligible land.

US-Held Easements are implemented though producer contracts entered into directly with eligible landowners.

Allowed Uses of RCPP Financial Assistance (FA)

Entity-Held Easements provide for the cost of the easement itself, cost for NRCS procured appraisal technical reviews, and environmental database record searches. RCPP FA for entity-held easements may not be used for entity procured due diligence or any other purpose.

US-Held Easements provide for the cost of the easement itself, acquisition related costs (e.g., appraisal, survey, due diligence, title, and closing services), and restoration implementation costs.

FY 2026 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) – RCPP AFA

Tim Aaron, National Realty Specialist, NRCS

RCPP AFA NOFO

- **Easement Holder:** Acquired and held by an eligible entity in accordance with 7 CFR Part 1468.3.
- **Deed Requirements:**
  - Eligible entity must incorporate the RCPP AFA Minimum Deed Requirements into their own conservation easement. Entities may submit with their proposal a modified ACEP-ALE template deed or other proposed custom deed terms using the RCPP AFA minimum deed requirements as a guide. Approval of the same will be documented in the PPA and SA Type IV.
    - Note: any version of the applicable MDT would satisfy the AFA minimum deed requirements.
- **Duration:** Easements are perpetual or maximum duration allowed by state law.
- **Eligible Land Types:** Private agricultural land, nonindustrial private forest land, or associated lands (e.g., riparian areas, floodplains, seasonal or flooded wetlands).
- **Basis for RCPP Compensation:** provide a federal share to eligible entities as a percentage of a before- and after appraisal, or an approved alternative valuation methodology, for up to 50% of the easement value with a US ROE and an ALE Certified Entity, or up to 25% of the easement value without a US ROE.

RCPP AFA NOFO

- **Valuation Methodology:** Generally determined through an appraisal, but alternative valuation methods may be considered if included in the proposal prior to the deadline (note: the latter could delay PPA negotiation and implementation). Prior to proposal submission, applicants seeking an alternative valuation methodology, must consult the applicable RCPP coordinator and the Easement Programs Division (EPD) valuation team at NRCS.NationalAppraisers@usda.gov. Approvals will be documented in the PPA and SA Type IV.
- **Partner Match:**
  - **Entity-Held Easements** must consist of any combination of landowner donation toward easement value or partner cash contribution toward easement payment of easement compensation to the landowner.
- **Partner Contribution:**
  - **Entity-Held Easements** require a non-federal match as well as due diligence activities to be performed or procured by the partner.
- **RCPP Award Type:**
  - **Entity-Held Easements** are implemented through agreements entered into by NRCS with an eligible entity that will hold the easement on eligible land.

RCPP AFA NOFO

- **Allowed Uses of RCPP Financial Assistance (FA):**
  - **Entity-Held Easements** provide for the cost of the easement itself, cost for NRCS procured appraisal technical reviews, and environmental database record searches. RCPP FA for entity-held easements may not be used for entity procured due diligence or any other purpose.
- **Entity Certification:** Eligible entities certified through ACEP-ALE may elect to use their certification on "ALE-like" easements. The eligible entity must be certified at the time the proposal is submitted and include the processes they will utilize for easement acquisition. These processes will be documented in the PPA and SA Type IV.
  - For RCPP AFA entity-held easements, NRCS may provide a federal share up to 50% of the easement value with a US ROE for "ALE-like" easements with a certified entity. Otherwise, NRCS may provide a federal share up to 25% of the easement value.
- **Buy-Protect-Sell Transactions:** BPS transactions are not an eligible transaction type.

Classic vs AFA Comparison

2026 NOFO	Classic (US-Held)	Classic (Entity-Held)	AFA (Entity-Held)
Easement Holder	USDA NRCS	Eligible Entity (7 CFR § 1468.3)	Eligible Entity (7 CFR § 1468.3)
Deed Requirements	NRCS Warranty Easement Deed (WED) (highly, moderately, or minimally restrictive) or NRCS approved, prepopulated WED	NRCS Minimum Deed Terms with or without US ROE (highly, moderately, or minimally restrictive) or NRCS approved template for ALE-like transactions	RCPP AFA Minimum deed requirements or a modified ALE template or other proposed custom deed
Duration	Perpetual or Maximum Duration allowed by state law		
Eligible Land Types	Private agricultural land, Non-Industrial Private Forestland, or associated lands (e.g., riparian, floodplain, or wetland)		

Classic vs AFA Comparison

2026 NOFO	Classic (US-Held)	Classic (Entity-Held)	AFA (Entity-Held)
RCPP Compensation	NRCS pays up to 100% of the easement value.	Cost-share up to 50% of the easement value with US ROE. Cost-share up to 25% of the easement value with no US ROE.	Cost-share up to 50% of the easement value with US ROE on 'ALE-Like' through a certified entity. Cost-share up to 25% of the easement value with no US ROE.
Valuation Method	Before and after appraisal or approved alternative valuation methodology.		
Match Requirement	None	Must consist of any combination of landowner donation toward easement value or partner cash contribution toward easement payment to landowner.	

Classic vs AFA Comparison

2026 NOFO	Classic (US-Held)	Classic (Entity-Held)	AFA (Entity-Held)
Partner Contribution	Highly encouraged. In-kind or cash contribution may count. Landowner donation or charitable contribution does not.	Requires non-federal share match as well as due diligence activities to be performed or procured by the partner.	
RCPP Award Type	Producer Contract with landowners.	Agreements entered into by NRCS with an eligible entity for the purchase of a conservation easement from the landowners.	
Buy-Protect-Sell	Not Applicable.	Not an eligible transaction type.	

Classic vs AFA Comparison

2026 NOFO	Classic (US-Held)	Classic (Entity-Held)	AFA (Entity-Held)
Allowed uses of FA	Provides for the costs of the easement itself, acquisition-related costs, and the restoration implementation costs.	Provides the cost-share of the purchase of easement, NRCS procured appraisal technical reviews, and environmental database records search. RCPP FA may not be used for the entity procured due diligence or other purposes.	
ALE Certified Entity Role	Not Applicable.	No certification flexibilities available.	ALE certified entities are able to utilize acquisition flexibilities and have up to 50% cost-share with a US ROE. Must be certified prior to proposal submission.

Maximum Federal Cost Share – Entity Held Easements

Notice of Funding Opportunity	Classic RCPP			AFA RCPP		
	Includes US ROE	No US ROE	Historically Underserved (HU) Landowner	Includes US ROE	No US ROE	HU Landowner
FY 19 and FY26	50%	25%	N/A	50%*	25%	N/A
FY 20-22	50%	25%	N/A	N/A	25%	N/A
FY 23	50%	25%	If the RCPP entity-held easement transaction will directly facilitate the purchase of land by a HU producer than an additional 25% Federal share is available.	N/A	25%	N/A
FY 24	50%	25%	If the RCPP entity-held easement is being purchased on land owned or being purchased by HU landowners, then an additional 25% Federal share is available.	N/A	40%	If the RCPP entity-held easement is being purchased on land owned or being purchased by HU landowners, then an additional 25% Federal share is available.

* Certified entity for ALE-Like Transactions

Primary Changes in FY 2026 NOFO for Easements

- **RCPP Classic**
  - Prioritization of protection of agricultural lands and grasslands through entity-held and US-held easements
    - May use previously approved modified ACEP-ALE template deed if submitted and requested with proposal
    - NRCS developing US-Held deed templates for the protection of agricultural and grasslands
  - No Buy-Protect-Sell transactions
  - Entity-Held Easements without a US Right of Enforcement (ROE)

Primary Changes in FY 2026 NOFO for Easements

- **RCPP AFA**
  - Easements with a US ROE only an option for ALE-like easements where the eligible entity is an ALE certified entity.
    - The eligible entity must be certified at the time the proposal is submitted.
  - Cost-Share rates up to 50% for ALE-like with US ROE for ALE certified entities only.
  - May use previously approved modified ACEP-ALE template deed or other proposed custom deed terms, using the RCPP minimum deed requirements, and alternative acquisition processes, if submitted and requested with proposal. This approval will be documented in the PPA and Supplemental Agreement Type IV.

RCPP Easement Resources

- RCPP Easement Resources are available on the RCPP Easement Webpage located here: https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/regional-conservation-partnership-program/rcpp-easements.
  - Information includes how to apply, US-held and entity-held easement deed terms, process aids, including the State Conservationist Questionnaire, and RCPP appraisal specifications and scope of work.
  - Project or parcel specific questions should be directed to your RCPP Coordinator and State Conservationist.

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Questions?

For more information visit NRCS-USDA.Gov and navigate to page How to Apply to RCPP

For a list of State RCPP Coordinators scroll down to the section called “Resources for Submitting a Proposal”.

National RCPP Team: RCPP@usda.gov

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