



SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI • AUGUST 29-31, 2005

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CONFERENCE

### Remarks from Secretary Mike Johanns...

*Conservation today is no longer about conflict. Instead, it's about partnerships, about collaborative solutions that rise from the bottom up.*

#### Key points for Cooperative Forestry

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- ▀ Real opportunities for conservation and stewardship lie with those who depend on the land to make a living and those with a vested interest in stewardship. “Those who look for government-imposed solutions are missing the bigger picture... The USDA has embraced an alternative vision...” Rather than serve as a top-down regulator, the government “has a responsibility to be a facilitator of community-based collaborative approaches from the bottom up.”
- ▀ Johanns acknowledged Forest Service S&PF programs that provide landowners incentives to remain on the land, naming the successes of the Forest Legacy program as an example. Johanns recognized NRCS and FSA programs, together which provide technical and financial assistance to 1.2 billion acres of working farm lands, and distinguished the Ranch Land Protection Program, the Wetland's Reserve Program, and the Grassland Reserve Program.
- ▀ The Conservation Reserve Program is reaching its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary – Johanns noted that CRP is one of the nation's most successful conservation programs in history. He announced that USDA is close to detailing commitments to renew CRP contracts that will expire between 2007 and 2010 (400,000 CRP contracts, covering over 28 million acres); contracts that are not re-enrolled will receive extensions.
- ▀ Johanns announced a new USDA policy that will seek to broaden the use of markets for ecosystem services through voluntary market mechanisms. “I see a future where credits for clean water, greenhouse gases, or wetlands can be traded as easily as corn. We will collaborate with partners to establish a role for agriculture and forestry in providing voluntary environmental credits.” USDA will create a Market-Based Environmental Stewardship Coordination Council to ensure that a sound market-based approach to ecosystem services is produced. “After a generation of conflict in the name of conservation, I believe it [cooperative conservation] represents an innovation in land and resource stewardship,” Johanns said. “It's a journey well worth making...if we're ever going to restore our forests to health, recover our lost wetlands, and protect our green spaces for generations to come.”

## Other policy announcements...

Secretary of the Interior Gail Norton announced that DOI is working on new “cooperative conservation” legislation as an outcome of the White House conference. Part of this new legislation will authorize existing DOI partnership programs and landowner incentive programs. Lynn Scarlett later stated that DOI will elicit ideas for the new cooperative conservation legislative package.

EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson announced a new EPA initiative that will remove legal barriers to cleaning up watersheds threatened by abandoned mine runoff. “Abandoned mines are mostly on private lands, where the responsible parties are long gone.” Combined with targeted assistance and grants, the Good Samaritan Initiative will remove fear of liability and provide volunteer non-profit organizations with protection and certainty to restore watersheds. EPA’s first “Good Samaritan partner” is Trout Unlimited; EPA is helping the non-profit restore a watershed to reclaim a rare resident trout population.

CEQ Chairman James L. Connaughton announced that a Secretary-level task force will be formed to carry forth the outcomes of the White House conference.

## Key statements and themes from the panels ...

- ▀ “Urgency for action” – there is a need for action at the federal level, embraced across the landscape; we all need to change our behaviors to make cooperative conservation work.
- ▀ We need government leadership – reward systems for government employees need to be changed; risk-taking should be valued.
- ▀ How can government provide flexibility *and* predictability – a natural tension exists.
- ▀ In collaborative processes, we need to keep economic objectives up front. Environmental and economic objectives need to be aligned.
- ▀ “It’s when government gets into the ‘how to’ that people at the watershed and local levels get nervous.” -- William D. Ruckelshaus
- ▀ States are our laboratories; they often have legislative authorities and financial resources that aren’t present at the federal level.
- ▀ We need to address global warming, connect kids back to nature, and restore America’s great places for human health and safety...This is the first day of the fourth chapter of conservation in America.” – Larry J. Schweiger, National Wildlife Federation

## Statements from Mark Rey

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For the 2007 Farm Bill USDA will have to address how to develop programs or modify programs to reach a new, growing constituency: landowners with 10-30 acres (and less) of forest land.

Rey is working to complete an MOU between USDA and other departments that involves adding “cooperation” into department standards. Coming out of the Conference, he will ask NRCS and the FS to reflect on conflicting themes identified by participants: *regulation v. collaboration; flexibility v. predictability.*

There is also a need to better define the objectives of USDA programs and to distinguish them from our work of 10-15 years ago. We need to pursue the dichotomy that exists between *environmental protection* and *environmental restoration*, for example.