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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## USDA initiative offers assistance with forest land planning

### Applications for the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program will be accepted through June 15, 2010 for current funding

AMHERST, MA (May 25, 2010) – Are you looking for technical and financial assistance with improving wildlife habitat, forest health and productivity, and water quality on your private forest lands? If so, the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) may be able to help. The agency has targeted \$720,000 of federal Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) funds to assist Massachusetts forest land owners with forest land planning and management.

Massachusetts is one of seven states offering this forestry initiative; the other New England states and New York are also participating. **The application deadline in Massachusetts is June 15, 2010.**

"Forests not only provide clean water and wildlife habitat, but are also the backbone of the Bay State's rural economies, offering a sustainable source of renewable energy, forest products, outdoor-related recreational opportunities and tourism," said Christine Clarke, NRCS State Conservationist for Massachusetts. "Forests are home to diverse communities of fish and wildlife, many of which depend on large contiguous forest blocks. Through sound planning and management, NRCS is helping private landowners to keep forests as forests."

Landowners should call or visit their local USDA Service Center to submit an application and complete the necessary paperwork to establish their eligibility. USDA Service Centers are listed online at [offices.usda.gov](http://offices.usda.gov), or in the telephone book under United States Government, Agriculture Department. More information is available on the Massachusetts NRCS website at [www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov).

The forestry initiative will assist private landowners in conservation planning and management of their private forests to ensure sustainability. Core conservation practices include pest management, early successional habitat development, tree and shrub establishment, upland wildlife habitat management, stream crossings, riparian forested buffer, fish passage, stream habitat improvement and management, forest trails and landings, conservation cover, access roads, wetland restoration, tree and shrub site preparation, and wetland wildlife habitat management.

This initiative is a result of the combined efforts of the New England Governors' Conference, the North East State Foresters Association, the US Forest Service and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop a plan, known as Keep Forests as Forests, to protect and ensure the sustainability of the region's forest land-base.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> year of helping people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. NRCS has seven Massachusetts field offices – in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham – that work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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**NOTE TO EDITORS:** If you would like to include local contact information, please use the office below that serves your area.

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