USDA Announces Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Grants

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Funds will Help Improve Access to Private Lands for Recreation in 17 States

WASHINGTON, Oct. 4, 2010 - Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that 17 state public access programs will receive grants totaling \$11.76 million through the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP). The state programs were selected from 28 applications vying for the competitive VPA-HIP grants program that was announced July 8, 2010.

"This administration is committed to preserving and enhancing the great conservation legacy of our nation's hunters and anglers for the benefit of current and future generations," Vilsack said. "VPA-HIP will help achieve conservation goals and increase opportunities for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation by providing greater access to privately held lands and we are excited to assist these 17 states in developing new and enhancing existing public access and habitat incentive programs."

The 17 states and their grant amounts are:

Arizona - \$600,000 Colorado - \$445,318 Idaho - \$400,000 Illinois - \$525,250 Iowa - \$500,000 Kansas - \$1,500,000 Kentucky - \$651,515 Michigan - \$457,449 Minnesota - \$582,367 Nebraska - \$1,091,164 North Dakota - \$300,000 Oregon - \$786,795 Pennsylvania - \$1,500,000 South Dakota - \$558,325 Utah - \$84,837 Washington - \$836,999 Wisconsin - \$936,040.

The Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program incentivizes owners and operators of privately held farm, ranch and forest land to voluntarily give hunters, fishermen, hikers, bird watchers and other recreational outdoor enthusiasts access to land for their enjoyment.

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Program funds were made available to states and tribal governments through a competitive process. Eligible states and tribal governments could request funding for existing public access programs, to create new public access programs, or to provide incentives to improve wildlife habitat on enrolled lands. VPA-HIP funds may be used to provide rental payments and other incentives, such as technical or conservation services to landowners who, in return, provide the public access to their land.

Funding priority was given to proposals that use the grant money to address these objectives:
-000000 Maximize participation by landowners;
1000000 Ensure that land enrolled in the program has appropriate wildlife habitat;
1000000 Provide incentives to strengthen wildlife habitat improvement efforts on Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) land, if available;
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-0000000 Inform the public about the location of public access land
FSA will open the grant application period for fiscal year 2011 funding after publication of a final rule. It is anticipated that the grant application period for states and tribal governments will occur in the late fall of 2010.
For more information on VPA-HIP and other FSA programs, visit http://www.fsa.usda.gov/vpa .

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