

The purpose of the NRCS/USACE partnership is to promote a long term working relationship to improve the management of water and related natural resources under the missions and authorities of both agencies. One aspect of this working relationship is the sharing of data and information where it is mutually beneficial and advances the goals of both agencies.

Aquatic ecosystem restoration is a shared goal of both NRCS and USACE, and each agency has programs and authorities designed to protect and restore these ecosystems, particularly wetlands. Specifically, USACE administers Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and is responsible for regulating the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S, including wetlands. When activities are authorized and involve streams or wetlands impacts, compensatory mitigation is often required. This mitigation may be accomplished on-site or off-site, or through the purchase credits at an approved wetland mitigation bank or in-lieu-fee program. Compensatory mitigation decisions are made in a watershed context and in accordance with the joint Corps/EPA Mitigation Rule published in 2008. NRCS promotes wetland protection and restoration through its easements programs, particularly the Wetland Reserve Program and the Floodplain Easement Program.

Coordination and sharing of NRCS the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) easements and the Watershed Protection Program Floodplain easement information on the locations of existing these existing easement and coordination during recovery on proposed WRP and floodplain easements would enable USACE to locate mitigation sites near other protected wetland areas, thus creating more contiguous habitat for wildlife and better determine the flood protection benefits in and near areas protected by levees . This was a primary recommendation by Interagency Levee Task Force during recovery from the 2008 Midwest floods. Copy of the policy white paper attached. This would have benefits for both agencies because it would increase the functions and services provided by the mitigation and WRP easements sites, as well as inform decisions to repair levees adjacent to these easement areas. Such sharing of information would create a synergy between these two programs and enhance achievements of both.

What benefits specifically?

1. Improve coordination and decision making for USACE repair of damage levee systems or develop non-structural repair alternatives that maximize the floodplain and wetland benefits.
2. Better coordinated watershed resource planning.
3. Development of USACE data base that support watershed and water resource planning and coordination.

Another benefit of data sharing at the field level would be the interactions among USACE and NRCS personnel. Establishment of a working relationship at this level

would help both agencies to take advantage of each other's expertise through sharing of technical information (particularly soils information), collaboration on wetland delineations, and training opportunities.

Information on the locations of WRP and floodplain easements would also enable USACE to increase the effectiveness of its Flood Risk Management program. An example of this is the repair of levees which are damaged by a flood event. USACE is required to make these repairs soon after the flood event occurs. However, if the area behind the damaged levee becomes a WRP easement, then repair of the levee may actually interfere with the wetland restoration plans. If USACE people are aware of the WRP, then they can explore other alternatives, perhaps resiting the levee behind the wetland area.