

USDA Offers Hurricane Sandy Victims a New Opportunity to Enroll Land into Easements

WASHINGTON, Jan. 27, 2014 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) will accept applications for easements from landowners who want to enroll floodplains impacted by Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Applications will be accepted until April 18, 2014. This is the second round of applications to be accepted.

“Floodplain easements are a long-term solution to provide relief for landowners while preventing future damage from flooding,” said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. “The Obama Administration is continuing to work with states, local governments and the private sector to help the victims of Sandy recover. This new round will allow eligible landowners to apply to place more critical floodplain acres under easement.”

“During the first sign-up, some landowners and potential project sponsors didn’t have enough time to apply, didn’t know they were eligible, or weren’t aware of the program,” Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Jason Weller said. “This second sign-up period is another opportunity to reach more landowners who need relief and assistance.”

Funds are available for eligible landowners through the NRCS Emergency Watershed Protection Program – Floodplain Easements. In December 2013, NRCS announced the first round of applicants selected for enrollment, which could put about 400 acres in perpetual, floodplain easements to help protect against future floods. Landowners in Connecticut, New Jersey and New York were selected.

NRCS purchases the permanent easements on eligible lands and restores the area to natural conditions. A healthy floodplain enhances fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, flood water retention and ground water recharge while making it more resilient to flooding.

All applications not selected during the first sign-up will be automatically submitted for review this time. “Several applications could not be funded because of their isolated nature. We are hoping that areas surrounding these current applications will apply and fill in these gaps,” Weller said.

Funds are only available in counties affected by Hurricane Sandy and where a major disaster was declared pursuant to the [Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act](#) in

Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia and West Virginia.

Private lands and those owned by local and state governments are eligible if they are located in a floodplain that is not subject to tidal influence or action from storm waves. The land must also meet one of the following requirements:

- Damaged by flooding at least once within the previous calendar year or damaged by flooding at least twice in the past 10 years (in both cases, the land must have been flooded during Sandy);
- Would contribute to the restoration of flood storage and flow, provide for control of erosion, or improve the practical management of the floodplain easement; or
- Could be inundated or adversely impacted as a result of a dam breach.

Easement compensation rates and ranking priorities vary by location and depend on where the land is in the floodplain and how it is used. The program easements are permanent in term. Lands with structures, such as homes, are eligible for enrollment as well as lands that are open or used for agriculture. If a structure is present, NRCS will cost-share the removal or demolition of that structure and enroll the remaining lot in a permanent easement.

Interested landowners should contact their [local USDA Service Center](#) to learn more about the program and submit an application prior to the April 18, 2014 deadline. More information is also available on the [NRCS floodplain easement website](#).

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service helps America's farmers, ranchers and forestland owners conserve the nation's soil, water, air and other natural resources. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment. Follow [NRCS on Twitter](#). Check out other conservation-related stories on [USDA Blog](#). Watch videos on [NRCS' YouTube channel](#).