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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM TO EXPAND IN ILLINOIS**

**SPRINGFIELD, IL, October 25, 2010** – – United States Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Scherrie Giamanco and Illinois Governor Pat Quinn today announced a significant expansion of Illinois' Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), a federal, state, and local conservation program that addresses targeted agriculture-related environmental concerns. CREP is part of the Conservation Reserve Program, a private land conservation program with more than 31 million acres enrolled nationwide.

Through Illinois' CREP, producers voluntarily restore riparian buffers, native grasses and wetland areas through financial aid and technical assistance. This restoration reduces sediment and nutrient run-off and enhances wildlife habitat. Producers also have the opportunity to provide for longer term habitat protection through state conservation easements.

"Since 1998, the USDA, through the Illinois Farm Service Agency, has partnered with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Department of Agriculture and many other Federal, State, local and non-governmental agencies and groups to promote water quality and wildlife habitat enhancements in the Illinois River Watershed," said Illinois State FSA Director Scherrie Giamanco. "Most importantly, we have achieved great success in the Illinois CREP by working at the county level one on one with agricultural producers in this voluntary program. Through their efforts, the public as a whole has seen great benefits." Giamanco continued, "I am ecstatic to be the SED at a time where we can expand this program to agricultural producers in the Kaskaskia River Watershed. I look forward to continued success for the Illinois CREP by working in the combined watershed".

"The CREP program in Illinois has a proud and successful history and the expansion of the program to the Kaskaskia watershed will pay big dividends for the environment in Illinois. This expansion would not be possible without the dedication and leadership provided by Illinois Governor Pat Quinn who has worked for years to enhance conservation efforts in our state," said IDNR Director Marc Miller.

The original goal of Illinois' CREP was to enroll 232,000 acres in the Illinois River watershed. Since 1998, landowners have voluntarily enrolled 126,500 acres. This expansion announced today will allow enrollment of the remaining 105,500 acres in both the Illinois River and Kaskaskia River watersheds. The Kaskaskia River watershed is the second largest river system in Illinois, flowing for 292 miles in a southwesterly direction where it flows into the Mississippi River. The diverse habitats in the Kaskaskia River watershed, including the largest contiguous hardwood bottomland forest in Illinois and two of the most significant grasslands in the state, play a major role in the Mississippi River flyway.

CREP will now be available to landowners in 68 counties within the two watersheds. Illinois' CREP is administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), and 66 Soil and Water Conservation Districts. In addition, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) plays a key technical assistance role and has established a CREP Advisory Committee under the State Technical Committee comprised of government agencies, agricultural, environmental and conservation organizations that provide policy guidance for the program.

The Illinois CREP now includes all or portions of 68 counties in the Illinois and Kaskaskia River watersheds:



Adams	DeWitt	Iroquois	McDonough	Morgan	Shelby
Bond	Douglas	Jefferson	McHenry	Moultrie	Stark
Brown	DuPage	Jersey	McLean	Peoria	Tazewell
Bureau	Effingham	Kane	Macon	Perry	Vermilion
Calhoun	Fayette	Kankakee	Macoupin	Piatt	Warren
Cass	Ford	Kendall	Madison	Pike	Washington
Champaign	Fulton	Knox	Marion	Putnam	Will
Christian	Greene	Lake	Marshall	Randolph	Woodford
Clinton	Grundy	LaSalle	Mason	St. Clair	
Coles	Hancock	Lee	Menard	Sangamon	
Cook	Henderson	Livingston	Monroe	Schuyler	
DeKalb	Henry	Logan	Montgomery	Scott	

Conservation practices that are available under CREP include:

- Permanent Native Grasses
- Tree Planting
- Hardwood Tree Planting
- Permanent Wildlife Habitat, Non-Easement
- Filter Strips
- Riparian Buffer
- Wetland Restoration
- Rare and Declining Habitat
- Wildlife Food Plot

CREP participants receive incentive payments, annual rental payments and cost-share assistance from FSA, and participants who choose one of the State Conservation easement options receive additional cost-share assistance and a one-time lump sum payment based on soil rental rates and the duration of the easement. The CREP expansion does not increase the total CREP cost estimated at \$700 Million, with USDA contributing \$580 Million (\$161/acre SSR + incentive and \$121/acre cost-share) and Illinois contributing \$120 Million.

Sign-up for enrollment under the expanded CREP agreement will begin later this year, and is scheduled to continue until the goal of 232,000 acres is complete. Enrolled lands remain under a CREP contract for up to 15 years, stated FSA State Executive Director Giamanco.