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## **USDA PROVIDES \$3 MILLION FOR CONSERVATION PROJECTS THAT BENEFIT CORAL REEFS**

BIG ISLAND, Hawaii, Feb. 3, 2004—USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight today announced that \$3 million will be provided for innovative conservation projects on private land to improve water quality in watersheds that outlet to coral reef habitats. A special priority will be given to projects involving limited resource farmers that reduce land-based impacts on coral reefs.

The funds will be made available to conservation districts, resource conservation and development areas, state and local governments, educational institutions and other nonprofit organizations through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) 2004 Conservation on Private Lands matching grant program.

"This valuable partnership promotes the conservation and protection of our ocean and coastal resources. At our request, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has agreed to add a new programmatic theme to its 2004 grant program focused on improving land-use practices on agricultural land upstream from coral reef ecosystems," Knight said during remarks at the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting being held here.

This marks the fifth year that NRCS has partnered with NFWF to support agricultural conservation on private lands. This year, the grant program will be expanded to include the Pacific Basin and Caribbean areas. NRCS and NFWF will reach out to limited resource farmers and ranchers to help them reduce sediment and nutrient runoff.

The matching grants are awarded on a competitive basis. All federal funds are matched on a minimum 1:1 basis with one non-federal dollar matching every federal dollar.

Detailed information on this grant program is available at [http://www.nfwf.org/programs/grant\\_apply.htm](http://www.nfwf.org/programs/grant_apply.htm) under "Natural Resources Conservation Service: Conservation on Private Lands." Information on the 2004 program will be available soon or by contacting Howard Hankin, NRCS Ecological Sciences Division, 202-690-0082 or [howard.hankin@usda.gov](mailto:howard.hankin@usda.gov). #