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NRCS and FWS Reach Historic Agreement to Extend Wildlife Conservation Efforts on Working Agricultural Lands

Regulatory Predictability will help Colorado Farmers and Ranchers Improve Greater Sage Grouse, Lesser Prairie Chicken, and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher Habitat

WASHINGTON, Sept. 18, 2012 – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Chief Dave White and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) Director Dan Ashe today announced an agreement that will provide long-term regulatory predictability for up to 30 years to Colorado’s farmers, ranchers and forest landowners participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) initiative. Participants voluntarily implement proven conservation practices designed to protect wildlife habitat, such as the greater sage grouse, lesser prairie chicken, and Southwestern willow flycatcher, on private lands.

“This agreement provides Colorado landowners with a way to keep working lands in production while protecting important wildlife habitat,” Colorado NRCS State Conservationist Phyllis Ann Philipps said. *“It helps our farmers and ranchers rest a little easier knowing their operations can continue to be sustainable while helping conserve the greater sage grouse, lesser prairie chicken, and Southwestern willow flycatcher habitat and essential natural resources.”*

The agreement builds on a \$33 million investment NRCS announced last spring dedicated toward producers who develop and implement conservation plans to manage and restore high-priority habitats for seven specific wildlife species across the country. The species are greater sage-grouse, New England cottontail, bog turtle, golden-winged warbler, gopher tortoise, lesser prairie-chicken and the Southwestern willow flycatcher. NRCS, FWS and numerous state and local entities are partnering to implement WLFW.

With today’s agreement, farmers and ranchers who implement and voluntarily agree to maintain the proven conservation practices in WLFW will have addressed the related ESA regulatory responsibilities for up to 30 years. These landowners will be able to operate their farms and ranches as agreed upon, providing economic benefits and species conservation simultaneously.

Under the WLFW partnership, federal, state and wildlife experts jointly identified at-risk or listed species that would benefit from targeted habitat restoration investments on private lands. Using the best available science, these wildlife experts prioritized restoration actions on a large regional scale to focus assistance most cost effectively.

The federal government will grant farmers and ranchers regulatory predictability in return for voluntarily making wildlife habitat improvements on their private agricultural and forest lands.

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Participating producers must adhere to the requirements of each conservation practice during the term of their contract, which can last from one to 15 years. If landowners would like to receive regulatory predictability for up to 30 years, they must maintain the conservation practices as outlined in the NRCS and FWS agreement.

For more information about Working Lands for Wildlife, please visit www.co.nrcs.usda.gov.

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