

## Resource Conservation and Development Councils Strategic Proposal

Strong, sustainable rural communities are essential to winning the future and ensuring American competitiveness in the years ahead. These communities supply our food, fiber, and energy, safeguard our natural resources, and are essential in the development of science and innovation. Though rural communities face numerous challenges, they also present enormous economic potential. The Federal Government has an important role to play in order to expand access to the capital necessary for economic growth, promote innovation, improve access to health care and education, ensure adequate emergency services, and expand outdoor recreational activities on public lands.

Sixteen percent of the American population lives in rural counties. There is a need to better coordinate Federal programs and maximize the impact of Federal investment to promote economic prosperity and quality of life in our rural communities. Resource Conservation and Development Councils currently exist throughout the United States as a 501 ( c ) 3 non-profit organization for providing assistance to rural communities. The 501 ( c ) 3 designation is a very important part in helping rural communities receive grants and enhance economic opportunities.

An analysis prepared in 2009 by the University of Arkansas- division of Agriculture “Rural Profile of Arkansas – Social & Economic Trends Affecting Rural Arkansas” shows that 63 of Arkansas’ 75 counties are classified as non-metropolitan in 2000. Fifty-one percent of Arkansans live in a non-metropolitan county. This compares with 20 percent of people living in non-metropolitan counties in the nation as a whole. With a current statewide population approaching 3,000,000 this calculates to 1,500,000 rural residents.

Manufacturing firms tend to most often locate within the metropolitan area which leads Arkansas to focus on Agricultural Resources such as farming and forestry. These employment sectors enhance the need for Resource Conservation and Development Councils due to the great success shown in conservation, energy efficiency, and other initiatives.

There is a funding mechanism in place ..... and no funding has been provided in the FY2012 budget.

The Department of Agriculture shall provide funding and administrative support for the Council to the extent permitted by law and within existing appropriations.

### Mission and Function

The Council shall work across agencies, and offices to coordinate development of policy recommendations to promote economic prosperity and quality of life in rural America, and shall coordinate engagement with rural communities.

Make recommendations on streamlining and leveraging Federal investments in rural areas to increase the impact of Federal dollars and create economic opportunities to improve the quality of life in rural America;

Coordinate and increase the effectiveness of Federal engagement with rural stakeholders, including agricultural organizations, small businesses, education and training institutions, health-care providers, research and land grant institutions, rural emergency services, State, local, and tribal governments, and nongovernmental organizations regarding the needs of rural America;

Coordinate Federal efforts directed toward the growth and development of geographic regions that encompass both urban and rural areas

Identify and facilitate rural economic opportunities associated with energy development, outdoor recreation, and other conservation related activities.

Disseminates information on programs to Community-base Organizations and Conservation partners on Federal programs through an effective outreach program. Maintains an awareness of a positive attitude toward equal opportunity and civil rights. Cooperates in carrying out affirmative action efforts within range of responsibility. Civil Rights responsibilities include the obligation to cooperate with and assist the public/individuals without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, age disability, marital or family status, or political beliefs.

#### Arkansas Association of RC&D Councils Proposal

An Outreach Liaison / Coordinator / etc. will be placed within each of the three USDA-NRCS areas within the state of Arkansas. Each individual will be primarily responsible for their area while also being available on an as-needed basis to assist within the other areas. Each area will also staff a person in a Secretarial position to assist with the day-to day operations.

Cost is calculated at approximately \$640,000 per year

This cost represents \$0.45 per year for each rural resident in Arkansas.

This format would be used nationwide which would result in a significant reduction in the overall budget but allow RC&D Councils to continue their important work.

Respectfully submitted by the Arkansas Association of Conservation Districts