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USDA HIGHLIGHTS IMPACT OF RECOVERY ACT ON RURAL AMERICA ARRA-Funded Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project Is Underway For Delaware

WASHINGTON, Feb. 17, 2010 – Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture highlighted the successes of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). One year after the passage of ARRA, evidence is clear – and growing by the day – that the Recovery Act is working to cushion the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression and lay a new foundation for economic growth.

"President Obama's Recovery Act has helped to create jobs and lay a new foundation for economic growth during the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "USDA has used Recovery Act funding create badly-needed jobs and stimulate local economies, help farmers and rural businesses make it through tough times, ensure that struggling families can put food on the table, and build and revitalize critical infrastructure in rural communities across America."

Delaware Department of Agriculture Forest Service (DFS) ARRA-funded hazardous fuels reduction project is underway, and the state has hired 12 crew members; one consultant to write fire management plans for State Parks; and one consultant to conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects in three at-risk communities.

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), Division of Parks and Recreation is a partner in this project with the DFS.

The program of work provides funding for three, four-member crews (12 crew members total) to conduct hazardous fuel reduction and ecosystem improvement projects on State Forests and State Park lands.

Additionally, funds will be used to develop fire management plans for all State Parks and to fund wildfire mitigation projects in up to five communities to reduce the danger of wildland fires (control of the giant reed grass, phragmites).

DFS and DNREC plan to complete 37 projects on approximately 310 acres throughout the state.

These projects will reduce fire danger through fuel reduction and installing fire breaks, and improve ecosystem health by thinning overstocked stands, eliminating invasive plants, and planting native trees where invasive plants are removed. Twenty at risk communities will benefit from reducing the wildfire hazard near and around the communities.

DFS and DNREC have completed 3 hazard mitigation projects on approximately 50 acres. These projects have benefitted three communities.

Since the Recovery Act was signed into law a year ago, USDA has moved quickly to get dollars out the door. Aside from funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, which is allocated on a mandatory basis each month, USDA has announced the vast majority of its remaining \$7.9 billion to support more than 90,000 grants, loans, and other job-creating projects. In the first year implementing the Recovery Act, USDA has:

- Provided over \$100 billion in tax relief for American businesses and families, including tax cuts for 95 percent of working families through the Making Work Pay tax Credit. And tax relief is expected to nearly double in the coming months.
- Helped over 38 million Americans who need food assistance by providing an average increase in benefits of \$80 per month to low-income households of four. This funding is a fast-acting economic stimulus as every \$1 in food benefits generates up to \$1.84 in total economic activity, supporting jobs at all levels of the food chain.
- Helped 85,420 rural Americans purchase or repair their homes with affordable loans while simultaneously stimulating the economy, and creating jobs in the construction and real estate sectors.
- Helped create private sector jobs protecting rural communities from large wildfires, while improving the health of our forests, water and air resources. We provided \$500 million to treat over 134,000 acres of forest to reduce the risk of wildfire.
- Provided 2,636 loans to farmers and ranchers help them purchase the farm equipment, feed, seed, and fuel they needed to keep their farms operating and support jobs in the rural economy. Approximately half of these loans went to beginning farmers and 25% to socially disadvantaged farmers.
- Created green jobs at plants that use of wood from forest restoration activities to generate renewable energy. Grants worth \$50 million went to projects that will power 223,000 homes.
- Helped more than 5,000 schools purchase equipment to improve the safe and healthy meals they serve to children.

In the coming months, USDA will be implementing additional programs and projects as weather begins to thaw, and construction projects are expected to break ground across the country. In 2010, USDA will continue to invest in projects to help get Americans and the economy back to work:

- By bringing broadband internet to an estimated 1.2 million households, 230,000 businesses, and 7,800 anchor institutions like hospitals and schools across rural America, in one largest job generating efforts to date. This \$3.4 billion investment will give businesses access to global markets and spur rural economic development.
- By helping 300 rural businesses grow, innovate and create jobs, providing \$900 million on top of \$570 million already at work helping 160 businesses across the country.
- With the construction and improvement of hundreds of community facilities, such as police and fire stations, and libraries in rural America. We will improve access to health care for 3 million rural residents, and educational services for 2.5 million residents. We will provide nearly \$750 million on top of \$470 million already announced for more than 850 projects.
- By constructing and rebuilding water and waste water systems in more than 200 communities affecting 1 million rural Americans. We will provide nearly \$1 billion on top of more than \$2 billion already announced for projects in 530 communities.

More information about USDA's Recovery Act efforts is available at www.usda.gov/recovery. Log on to USDA's YouTube channel to view additional ARRA project highlights, videos are available at <http://www.youtube.com/usda#g/c/2A468F5AC6EBCED.7>

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