



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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USDA awards \$6.8 million for Greater Bernheim RCPP Project

Funds support Kentucky landowners to protect forests, wildlife, and benefit climate goals

Clermont, KY – Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest, Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves, and Kentucky Natural Lands Trust now have a new tool to help landowners protect their natural land – a \$6.8 million grant from the United States Department of Agriculture-Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS).

The grant is provided through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and will help Kentucky landowners use conservation easements for protecting forests, wildlife, and connecting natural land corridors. The Greater Bernheim RCPP Project also includes support for outreach and education activities for conservation, water, and land stewardship.

Bernheim Executive Director Mark Wourms said the use of conservation easements will provide climate benefits now and in the future. The award will also leverage considerable funds to Kentucky that support the regional economy via payments to landowners.

“We are thrilled that the Greater Bernheim RCPP Project has been chosen as one of these important projects across the nation,” Dr. Wourms said. “These dollars will go directly to landowners helping them preserve the land that they love, in some cases helping to keep land in families across generations and will be a benefit to the regional economy.”

Andrew Berry, Bernheim Director of Conservation, stated that “the Greater Bernheim RCPP Project will preserve forests, wildlife, and iconic knob landscapes that are an important part of the local heritage in Kentucky,” Berry said. “Studies show natural lands contribute to quality of life and health of communities by providing enrichment through wildlife, recreation, scenic beauty, and ecosystem services such as clean air and water.”

OKNP Executive Director Zeb Weese said the Greater Bernheim area is one of Kentucky’s biodiversity hotspots.

“This project will allow our partnership to work with interested landowners to conserve endangered species populations and other important habitats on private property,” Weese said. “Over 90 percent of Kentucky is privately owned, so it's very exciting to have NRCS give us this opportunity to help private landowners conserve their property.”

Kentucky Natural Lands Trust Executive Director Greg Abernathy added “...large landscape conservation depends on the power of partnership. NRCS is a welcome partner in our efforts, their RCPP funding will help advance the innovative and meaningful conservation work underway in the region.”

Through RCPP, conservation partners collaborate with NRCS to help farmers, ranchers and forest landowners throughout the nation implement systems that conserve water and soil resources, improve the health of wildlife habitats, and increase climate resilience.

Nationally, NRCS is investing a total of \$330 million in 85 locally driven, public-private partnerships to address climate change, improve the nation’s water quality, combat drought, enhance soil health, support wildlife habitat, and protect agricultural viability.

Terry Cosby, Acting Chief for USDA-NRCS, said the 85 new projects will help enact change needed to combat the climate crisis.

“The Regional Conservation Partnership Program is public-private partnership working at its best,” Cosby said. “These new projects will harness the power of partnership to help bring about solutions to natural resource concerns across the country.”

For more information on the RCPP announcement visit,
nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/releases/?cid=nrcseprd1769025

For a map of RCPP projects awarded in 2021 visit,
nrcs.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Shortlist/index.html?appid=ab6aa86f9aea48e2af92ed165450d110

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About Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest

Bernheim’s mission is to connect people with nature. Bernheim is the largest privately held contiguous forest block in the eastern United States dedicated to conservation and education. Bourbon maker Isaac Wolfe Bernheim established the arboretum and forest in 1929 as a gift to the people of Kentucky. Recent land additions brought the total that Bernheim protects to 16,140 acres. Fun, educational programs, diverse tree collections, 40 miles of hiking trails and varied landscapes are available every day except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s Day. \$10 per car donation suggested for non-members.

Bernheim is in Clermont, Ky., about 20 minutes south of the Louisville airport. From I-65 take exit 112 and follow the signs. Bernheim is a non-profit organization that relies on memberships, grants, and donations for support. Come visit and enjoy the beauty of nature. For more information, please visit bernheim.org.

About Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves (OKNP)

The Office of Kentucky Nature Preserves is a state agency that owns and/or manages a system of dedicated state nature preserves, state natural areas, conservation easements, and Wild Rivers. These areas encompass over 140,121 total acres of ecological communities and natural habitat for rare species across Kentucky. The Kentucky Nature Preserves System was created in 1976 to promote understanding and appreciation of the aesthetic, cultural, scientific, and spiritual values of our unpolluted and unspoiled environment. eec.ky.gov/Nature-Preserves

About Kentucky Natural Lands Trust

Kentucky Natural Lands Trust (KNLT) is a nationally accredited nonprofit working to protect, connect and restore wildlands. Their efforts are aimed at protecting biodiversity and climate resilient landscapes in ways that benefit local, regional and global communities. Their primary focus areas are Pine Mountain, a 125-mile forested ridgeline running from Tennessee through Kentucky to Virginia, and the Bernheim-Fort Knox area. Since 1995 they have protected over 50,000 of acres of wildlands. Learn more and get involved by visiting KNLT.org.