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May 24, 2004

RAYSTOWN WATERSHED SELECTED FOR 2004 CSP SIGN-UP

Harrisburg, PA— The Raystown Watershed in parts of Bedford, Huntingdon, Fulton, Blair, Somerset, and Cambria Counties in southeastern Pennsylvania has been selected as one of the nation's 18 priority watersheds that will be used in the fiscal year 2004 Conservation Security Program (CSP) sign-up to be held this summer according to USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

“The selection of the Raytown Watershed in this first sign-up represents a balance of resource needs, historic stewardship, potential producer eligibility, and the technology and adequate staff needed to successfully implement the program,” said NRCS State Conservationist Robin Heard. “Nationally, the selected watersheds reflect a cross-section of land uses, crop regions and landscapes that will test the basic concepts in NRCS’ newest conservation program,” added Heard.

In order to implement CSP this fiscal year, the Natural Resources Conservation Service will begin to train employees within the priority watersheds immediately on the basics of the program. More detailed training will occur once the interim final rule is published in early summer.

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Raystown Lake

“A sign-up announcement will be published along with the interim final rule as soon as we receive the specific program requirements for within the priority watersheds,” said Bill Parrish, Farm Bill Specialist and CSP Program Manager.

Nationally, the fiscal year 2004 CSP budget of \$41.4 million will allow NRCS to write approximately 3,000 to 5,000 contracts. The contracts will be determined in a national selection process that will be described in the sign-up notice.

According to Parrish, all CSP applications that meet the sign-up criteria will be placed in an enrollment category and considered regardless of available funding.

“Agricultural producers in Raystown Watershed have been protecting our soil and water resources for years,” stated Robin Heard. “Now they will be rewarded for that stewardship, and become the models for future CSP participants. It’s a great day for conservation and I’m delighted we’re a part of this exciting first sign-up,” she added.

CSP is a voluntary program that supports ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural working lands and enhances the condition of America’s natural resources. Additional information on CSP, including the *Federal Register* notices, public comments and frequently asked questions, is at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>.

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