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Mississippi Ag Producers Will Help Improve Health of Gulf of Mexico through USDA Initiative

Jackson, Miss., Dec. 7, 2011 – Ag producers in Hancock and Harrison counties are helping improve the ecological health of the Gulf of Mexico through a new U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiative.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) officially launched the Gulf of Mexico Initiative (GoMI) this month. This initiative focuses on helping agricultural producers in targeted watersheds draining into the Gulf of Mexico implement sustainable agricultural systems that will reduce the amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment traveling from the farm to the Gulf of Mexico. It teams NRCS with partners in five gulf states – Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas – to help agricultural producers improve water quality, increase water conservation, and enhance wildlife habitat.

“This initiative will encourage the use of conservation practices in 16 watersheds across the country, including two bayous in the Jourdan River system,” Acting State Conservationist Al Garner said. “The Gulf of Mexico is an important environmental and economic resource of this state, and it is important we help our farmers do their part in improving water quality.”

The Gulf of Mexico Initiative will deliver up to \$50 million in financial assistance to agricultural producers in targeted watersheds over the next three years through a combination of NRCS easement and financial assistance programs. These programs include the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP).

In the Final Strategy report released earlier this month, the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Task Force identified reducing the flow of nutrients as one of the most pressing environmental concerns in the Gulf. This initiative is an important collaborative effort to implement the strategy and improve the Gulf ecosystem.

In Mississippi, the GoMI project area includes Rotten Bayou and Bayou La-Terre, two tributaries of the Jourdan River. These two bayous comprise a 47,671 acre watershed in which the NRCS will work with landowners to implement conservation practices. For more information on GoMI in Mississippi, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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