

this title, may be used to pay for the administrative expenses of eligible partners.

(2) Project development and outreach

Under a partnership agreement that is not funded through an alternative funding arrangement or grant agreement under section 3871c(d) of this title, the Secretary may advance reasonable amounts of funding for not longer than 90 days for technical assistance to eligible partners to conduct project development and outreach activities in a project area, including—

(A) providing outreach and education to producers for potential participation in the project;

(B) establishing baseline metrics to support the development of the assessment required under section 3871b(c)(1)(E) of this title; or

(C) providing technical assistance to producers.

(e) Technical assistance

(1) In general

At the time of project selection, the Secretary shall identify and make publicly available the amount that the Secretary shall use to provide technical assistance under the terms of the partnership agreement.

(2) Limitation

The Secretary shall limit costs of the Secretary for technical assistance to costs specific and necessary to carry out the objectives of the program.

(3) Third-party providers

The Secretary shall develop and implement strategies to encourage third-party technical service providers to provide technical assistance to eligible partners pursuant to a partnership agreement.

(Pub. L. 99-198, title XII, §1271D, as added Pub. L. 113-79, title II, §2401, Feb. 7, 2014, 128 Stat. 749; amended Pub. L. 115-334, title II, §2705, Dec. 20, 2018, 132 Stat. 4598.)

AMENDMENTS

2018—Subsec. (a). Pub. L. 115-334, §2705(1), substituted “\$300,000,000” for “\$100,000,000” and “2019 through 2023” for “2014 through 2018”.

Subsec. (c). Pub. L. 115-334, §2705(2)-(4)(A), redesignated subsec. (d) as (c), struck out “and acres” after “funds” and “and reserved for the program under subsection (c)” after “under subsection (a)” in introductory provisions, and struck out former subsec. (c) which related to reservation of additional funding and acres for each of fiscal years 2014 through 2018.

Subsec. (c)(1). Pub. L. 115-334, §2705(4)(B), substituted “50 percent of the funds to projects based on a State or multistate competitive process administered by the Secretary at the local level with the advice of the applicable State technical committees” for “25 percent of the funds and acres to projects based on a State competitive process administered by the State Conservationist, with the advice of the State technical committee” and inserted “and” at end.

Subsec. (c)(2), (3). Pub. L. 115-334, §2705(4)(C)-(E), redesignated par. (3) as (2), substituted “50 percent of the funds” for “35 percent of the funds and acres”, and struck out former par. (2) which read as follows: “40 percent of the funds and acres to projects based on a national competitive process to be established by the Secretary; and”.

Subsec. (d). Pub. L. 115-334, §2705(5), designated existing provisions as par. (1), inserted heading, substituted “Except as provided in paragraph (2), none of the funds made available for the program, including for a partnership agreement funded through an alternative funding arrangement or grant agreement under section 3871c(d) of this title,” for “None of the funds made available or reserved for the program”, and added par. (2).

Pub. L. 115-334, §2705(3), redesignated subsec. (e) as (d). Former subsec. (d) redesignated (c).

Subsec. (e). Pub. L. 115-334, §2705(6), added subsec. (e). Former subsec. (e) redesignated (d).

§ 3871e. Administration

(a) Disclosure

In addition to the criteria used in evaluating applications as described in section 3871b(e)(2) of this title, the Secretary shall make publicly available information on projects selected through the competitive process described in section 3871b(e)(1) of this title.

(b) Reporting

Not later than December 31, 2019, and every two years thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Agriculture of the House of Representatives and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry of the Senate a report on the status of projects funded under the program, including—

(1) a summary of—

(A) the progress made towards achieving the conservation benefits defined for the projects; and

(B) any other related outcomes of the projects;

(2) the number and types of eligible partners and producers participating in the partnership agreements selected;

(3) the number of producers receiving assistance;

(4) total funding committed to projects, including from Federal and non-Federal resources;

(5) a description of how the funds under section 3871c(d) of this title are being administered, including—

(A) any oversight mechanisms that the Secretary has implemented;

(B) the process through which the Secretary is resolving appeals by program participants; and

(C) the means by which the Secretary is tracking adherence to any applicable provisions for payment eligibility; and

(6) in the case of a project within a critical conservation area under section 3871f of this title, the status of each priority resource concern for each designated critical conservation area, including—

(A) the priority resource concerns for which each critical conservation area is designated;

(B) conservation goals and outcomes sufficient to demonstrate that progress is being made to address the priority resource concerns;

(C) the partnership agreements selected to address each conservation goal and outcome; and

(D) the extent to which each conservation goal and outcome is being addressed by the partnership agreements.

(c) Compliance with certain requirements

The Secretary may not provide assistance under the program to a producer unless the producer agrees, during the program year for which the assistance is provided—

- (1) to comply with applicable conservation requirements under subchapter II; and
- (2) to comply with applicable wetland protection requirements under subchapter III.

(d) Historically underserved producers

To the maximum extent practicable, in carrying out the program, the Secretary and eligible partners shall conduct outreach to beginning farmers and ranchers, veteran farmers and ranchers, socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, and limited resource farmers and ranchers to encourage participation by those producers in a project subject to a partnership agreement or funding agreement under 3871c(d)¹ of this title.

(e) Regulations

The Secretary shall issue regulations to carry out the program.

(Pub. L. 99-198, title XII, §1271E, as added Pub. L. 113-79, title II, § 2401, Feb. 7, 2014, 128 Stat. 749; amended Pub. L. 115-334, title II, §2706, Dec. 20, 2018, 132 Stat. 4599.)

AMENDMENTS

2018—Subsec. (a). Pub. L. 115-334, §2706(1), which directed amendment of subsec. (a) by substituting “3871b(e)” for “3871b(d)” wherever appearing, was executed by substituting “3871(e)(2)” for “3871b(d)(2)” and “3871(e)(1)” for “3871b(d)(1)”.

Subsec. (b). Pub. L. 115-334, §2706(2)(A), substituted “December 31, 2019” for “December 31, 2014” in introductory provisions.

Subsec. (b)(1) to (3). Pub. L. 115-334, §2706(2)(B), (C), added par. (1) and redesignated former pars. (1) and (2) as (2) and (3), respectively. Former par. (3) redesignated (4).

Subsec. (b)(4). Pub. L. 115-334, §2706(2)(B), (D), redesignated par. (3) as (4) and struck out “and” at end. Former par. (4) redesignated (5).

Subsec. (b)(5). Pub. L. 115-334, §2706(2)(B), (E), redesignated par. (4) as (5) and substituted “3871c(d)” for “3871c(b)(2)” in introductory provisions and “; and” for period at end.

Subsec. (b)(6). Pub. L. 115-334, §2706(2)(F), added par. (6).

Subsecs. (c) to (e). Pub. L. 115-334, §2706(3), added subsecs. (c) to (e).

§ 3871f. Critical conservation areas

(a) Definitions

In this section:

(1) Critical conservation area

The term “critical conservation area” means a geographical area that contains a critical conservation condition that can be addressed through the program.

(2) Priority resource concern

The term “priority resource concern” means a natural resource concern located in a criti-

cal conservation area that can be addressed through—

(A) water quality improvement, including through reducing erosion, promoting sediment control, and addressing nutrient management activities affecting large bodies of water of regional, national, or international significance;

(B) water quantity improvement, including improvement relating to—

- (i) drought;
- (ii) groundwater, surface water, aquifer, or other water sources; or
- (iii) water retention and flood prevention;

(C) wildlife habitat restoration to address species of concern at a Federal, State, or local level; and

(D) other natural resource improvements, as determined by the Secretary, within the critical conservation area.

(b) Applications

In administering funds under section 3871d(d)(2) of this title, the Secretary shall select applications for partnership agreements and program contracts within critical conservation areas designated under this section that address 1 or more priority resource concerns for which the critical conservation area is designated.

(c) Critical conservation area designations

(1) In general

The Secretary shall identify 1 or more priority resource concerns that apply to each critical conservation area designated under this section after February 7, 2014, including the conservation goals and outcomes sufficient to demonstrate that progress is being made to address the priority resource concern.

(2) Priority

In designating critical conservation areas under this section, the Secretary shall give priority to geographical areas based on the degree to which the geographical area—

(A) includes multiple States with significant agricultural production;

(B) is covered by an existing regional, State, binational, or multistate agreement or plan that has established objectives, goals, and work plans and is adopted by a Federal, State, or regional authority;

(C) contains 1 or more priority resource concerns; or

(D) contains producers that need assistance in meeting or avoiding the need for a natural resource regulatory requirement that could have a negative impact on the economic scope of the agricultural operations within the area.

(3) Review and withdrawal

The Secretary may—

(A) review designations of critical conservation areas under this section not more frequently than once every 5 years; and

(B) withdraw designation of a critical conservation area only if the Secretary determines that the area is no longer a critical conservation area.

¹ So in original. Probably should be preceded by “section”.