

Several organizations are joining forces to continue the battle to reduce invasive plants along many of the river corridors in the western two-thirds of Nebraska.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering \$1.5 million in cost share assistance to landowners who have recently had riparian corridors sprayed for invasive weed control, or soon will have such work completed.

Landowners in five targeted river basins will have until July 24, to apply to be considered in the first awarding of contracts.

Funds are coming through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) or Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP).

Landowners in the North and South Platte River basin, the Platte River basin to the eastern Polk County line all of the Republican River basin and the Niobrara River basin are eligible. These basins have been declared as fully or over appropriated basins for surface and/or groundwater.

“We are partnering with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and seven weed management areas to enhance weed control actions,” said Steve Chick, NRCS state conservationist.

Recently the state agency has been leading actions to control noxious weeds along many river corridors.

“Most of the effort has been in aerial spraying the existing weeds, which has been very successful. These new funds can be used by landowners to undertake additional actions to try and keep the weeds from returning,” explained Chick.

The funds are coming to the state as a new option in the 2008 Farm Bill, called the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI). This initiative allows federal funds for individual landowners to be leveraged with partner agencies, organizations or tribes to address natural resource concerns.

The \$1.5 million is for this year, but similar amounts are projected to be available each of the next two years of the three year project. In future years, there will be a continuous sign-up available to landowners and producers.

Some of the invasive plants being targeted include: phragmites, a grass that can grow 15-feet tall in river channels taking water and choking out native plants (phragmites are highly visible in river channels along I-80 west of Grand Island to the state border); saltcedar a perennial tree or shrub that spreads easily, and when mature and is estimated to absorb 200 gallons of water per day; and Russian olive, an invasive tree that displaces native species.

Other noxious weeds targeted include purple loosestrife, leafy spurge and Canada thistle.

For more information about CCPI, contact any NRCS office or County Weed Commissioner. Information is also available on the Nebraska Department of Agriculture web site at www.agr.ne.gov.