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Contact: Holly L. Martien, (318) 473-7917
holly.martien@la.usda.gov

USDA CELEBRATES EARTH DAY IN LAKE ARTHUR Sign-Up Period for New Wildlife Program Announced Over \$5.5 Million in Funding Announced

LAKE ARTHUR, April 22, 2008 – Earth Day is celebrated around the world as a day to promote awareness of environmental issues. In Louisiana, USDA officials recognized Earth Day by announcing key environmental projects that will impact area residents.

Willie F. Cooper, State Executive Director for USDA Farm Service Agency, announced a sign-up period for a new wildlife enhancement program – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE). The sign-up is scheduled to begin May 5, 2008.

“SAFE is designed to restore native grassland and shallow water habitats in selected regions around the United States,” said Cooper. “In Louisiana, agricultural owners and operators in eight southwestern Louisiana parishes may be eligible to sign-up for this program.”

Clyde C. Holloway, State Director for USDA Rural Development, announced funding for three environmentally-important projects:

- Jefferson Davis Parish Waterworks District 4 (Jefferson Davis Parish) – Over \$1.1 million in USDA Rural Development direct loan funds will be used to renovate and expand the water system.
- Magnolia Plantation Water System, Inc. (Vermilion Parish) – Over \$3 million in USDA Rural Development direct loan funds will be used to upgrade the water treatment facility and water distribution system.
- Town of Melville (St. Landry Parish) – Over \$1.1 million in USDA Rural Development direct loan funds and \$172,985 in USDA Rural Development grant funds will be used to renovate Melville’s waste water system and extend sewer service to an additional 35 homes.

“Very few things are more important to a community than clean, safe drinking water or a safe waste water disposal system,” said Holloway. “Rural Development works with rural communities to make sure residents have access to these basic necessities.”

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Kevin Norton, State Conservationist for USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), joined Cooper and Holloway to celebrate Earth Day.

“NRCS’s mission is to help people help the land,” said Norton. “We help people every day care for the Earth; so, I guess you could say that every day is Earth Day for us.”

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private land owners and managers conserve soil, water, and other natural resources. NRCS provides technical assistance based on sound science and suited to each customer's specific needs. NRCS also provides financial assistance for many conservation activities.

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