The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is offering $1.5 million in cost share assistance to landowners through the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) to control invasive species in fully or over appropriated watersheds.

Landowners have until March 12, to sign up for assistance.

The CCPI, now in its second year, provides financial and technical assistance to owners and operators of agricultural and nonindustrial private forest lands in specific watershed areas (see attached map).

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

Landowners in the North and South Platte River basins, 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 fully or over appropriated basins for surface and/or groundwater.

NRCS State Conservationist Steve Chick said, “We are partnering with the Nebraska Department of Agriculture and Weed Management Areas to enhance weed control. 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.”

Some of the invasive plants being targeted include: phragmites, a grass that can grow 15-feet tall, choking out native plants (phragmites is 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, is estimated to absorb 200 gallons of water per day; and Russian olive, an invasive tree that displaces native species.

For more information about CCPI, contact any NRCS office, County Weed Commissioner or visit the Nebraska Department of Agriculture web site at http://www.agr.ne.gov/riparian/ccpi.htm.

Additional information on Farm Bill programs including EQIP, WHIP, and CSP is available on the Nebraska NRCS web site at www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.