

## Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program – Minnesota II

### Overview

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) – Minnesota II is a federal-state natural resource conservation program that works to meet state environmental objectives and to protect environmentally sensitive land on 120,000 acres in parts of Northwest, Southeast, and Southwestern Minnesota. Under CREP, program participants voluntarily enroll certain practices in the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Minnesota Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program.

Under the CREP, participants receive financial incentives for both the CRP and RIM contracts for removing cropland from agricultural production and converting the land to native grasses, trees, and other native vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

CRP contracts are for 14-15 years and RIM easements are for 45 years or permanent (an exception is contour grass strips in Southeast Minnesota, which is restricted to 14- to 15-year CRP contracts only). The total cost over a 14 to 15-year period is about \$250 million, with FSA contributing \$200 million and the state funding \$50 million. The \$250 million does not include any costs that may be assumed by producers.

Minnesota CREP II targets enrollment in environmentally sensitive acreage in the Red River Watershed in northwestern Minnesota, the Lower Mississippi Watershed in southeastern Minnesota and the Missouri/Des Moines River Watershed in southwestern Minnesota.

The program is a results-oriented community-centered cooperative project among landowners, FSA, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Watershed Districts, and other partners.

### Benefits

The program will convert environmentally sensitive cropland to native vegetation in order to improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, increase floodwater storage, and provide for fish and wildlife habitat. Establishment of certain practices in native vegetation will greatly reduce runoff of sediments, nutrients, pesticides, and pathogens from agricultural sources. CREP will also increase the water storage capacity of the watersheds through wetland restoration. Restoring native vegetation will increase wildlife habitat, which will benefit flora and fauna including

threatened and endangered species. Other agricultural impacts mitigated by a CREP include fragmentation of riparian corridors, grasslands, and forestlands.

### Goals

The goals of the CREP – Minnesota II include:

- Reducing sediment loading in the three targeted watersheds by 420,000 tons per year;
- Reducing phosphorus loading in streams and rivers by 530,000 pounds per year;
- Helping to protect the drinking water supplies of 250,000 people by enrolling up to 8,195 acres of land in sensitive groundwater areas through the use of 14 to 15-year CREP contracts and 45-year RIM easements;
- Enhancing long-term fish and wildlife habitat in the targeted watersheds for the preservation of natural diversity of Minnesota's biological resources, including threatened and endangered species;
- Helping to protect 2,500 linear miles of streams, rivers and ditches by enrolling up to 61,897 acres of riparian buffers through the use of 14 to 15-year CREP contracts and 45-year RIM easements;
- Restoring up to 24,000 acres of wetlands and adjacent upland acres through the use of 14 to 15-year CREP contracts and permanent RIM easements. These wetland restoration measures will also help reduce future flood damage by increasing water storage capacity by 10,000 to 20,000 acre feet per year;
- Restoring up to 5,000 acres of flood-damaged land through the use of 14 to 15-year CREP contracts and permanent RIM easements;
- Enrolling up to 18,058 acres of highly erodible cropland with an Erodibility Index (EI) of 15 or greater to reduce soil erosion and achieve related high-priority natural resource benefits; and
- Enrolling up to 2,850 acres of highly erodible cropland with an EI of 8 or greater to help reduce soil erosion through the use of contour

buffer strips.

Up to 120,000 new acres of environmentally sensitive land within the three designated watersheds will be targeted with the following enrollment goals:

- 51,000 acres in the Red River Watershed in northwestern Minnesota;
- 51,000 acres in the Upper Mississippi Watershed in southeastern Minnesota; and
- 18,000 acres in the Missouri and Des Moines River Watershed in southwestern Minnesota.

### Sign-up and Contract Duration

Sign-up for the CREP begins June 6, 2005, and continues until enrollment goals are attained, or through December 31, 2007, whichever comes first. Land enrolled in CREP remains under CRP contract for a period of 14 to 15 years, and a 45-year or perpetual RIM easement, as specified in the contract.

### Approved Conservation Practices

To better serve the program goals the following CRP conservation practices are approved for each of the three CREP areas:

#### Lower Mississippi Watershed in Southeastern Minnesota:

- CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP3A - Hardwood Tree Planting
- CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP12 - Wildlife Food Plot
- CP15A - Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips)
- CP21 - Filter Strips
- CP22 - Riparian Buffer
- CP23 - Wetland Restoration 100-Yr Flood Plain
- CP23A - Wetland Restoration Non-Flood Plain

#### Missouri and Des Moines River Watersheds in Southwestern Minnesota:

- CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses

CP4D - Permanent Wildlife Habitat

CP12 - Wildlife Food Plot

CP21 - Filter Strips

CP22 - Riparian Buffer

CP23 - Wetland Restoration, 100-Yr Flood Plain

CP23A - Wetland Restoration, Non-Flood Plain

#### Red River Watershed in Northwestern Minnesota:

##### Northwestern Minnesota:

- CP2 - Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP12 - Wildlife Food Plots
- CP21 - Filter Strips
- CP22 - Riparian Buffer
- CP23 - Wetland Restoration, 100-Yr Flood Plain
- CP23A - Wetland Restoration, Non-Floodplain
- CP34 - Structure for Flood Control

### Payments

Subject to contract terms and certain limitations, CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of FSA payments:

- 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable costs (cost-share) to establish CREP conservation practices. Cost-share reimbursement to CREP participants from all sources may not exceed 100 percent of the cost to install CREP conservation practices;
- A one-time Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) for all CRP practices currently eligible to receive a PIP payment according to FSA's published national CRP directives;
- A one-time Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) for all CRP practices currently eligible to receive a PIP payment according to FSA's published national CRP directives;
- A one-time Incentive to Restore Wetlands payment for practices CP23 and CP23A according to FSA's published national CRP directives.

### For More Information

For more information about FSA and its programs, visit your local USDA Service Center or online at [www.fsa.usda.gov](http://www.fsa.usda.gov).

*(This article was reprinted courtesy of the United States Department of Agriculture.)*

## Watershed District Project Team Reports

• The Roseau River WD project team has been meeting to discuss the Hay Creek / Norland project. An appraisal was received and the Board of Managers ordered abstracts for the August meeting. Discussions have occurred relative to developing the purpose and needs statement required for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit. The preliminary engineer's report is anticipated by August or September.

The Project Team has also been discussing Roseau River Wildlife Management Area. Correspondence has been forwarded to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources regional wildlife office requesting alternatives to the project.

• The Sand Hill River WD project team has been meeting on a semi-regular basis. As soon as the modeling is complete, analysis will resume in the Garden Slough area. The main purpose of this project is to reduce peak flood flows on the Red River.

# Status Report: Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources

The discovery of certain eligibility limitations contained in the original CREP II Agreement has prompted the need to revise the Agreement since enrollment began. The Agreement has also been amended to allow the use of additional conservation practices for the purpose of enhancing water quality in flood-prone areas.

CP 2 (Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses) is added to the list of practices allowed in the CREP II. The presence of existing vegetation adequately addressing the water quality resource concern according to FSA Handbook 2-CRP practices CP21/CP22, rendered otherwise eligible cropland unable to be enrolled. This water quality enhancement or CP2 acreage in eligible flood-prone areas must lie within the 100-year floodplain and shall be within 600 feet from the edge of watercourse. The FSA State Committee can approve a width greater than 600 feet on a case-by-case basis. The RIM easement duration shall be limited to 45 years when using the CP2 practice.

CP34, Flood Control System, is to create a manmade structural barrier capable of temporarily impounding or managing run-off water for potential flood damage reduction and water quality benefits. These water control structures can now be constructed in an existing stream or channel IF the design and construction are in compliance with all federal, state and local regulations. The time-period to install the structures has been increase to 5 years from 3 years due to the complexity of this practice.

Land in its last year of its CRP contract can also now be enrolled in CREP II.

Not part of the Amendment, but of interest: CRP's Soil Rental Rates used by FSA to make the annual payments to the landowners are also scheduled to be updated (i.e. increased) to more accurately reflect land values and current rental rates. Those new soil rental rates are scheduled to be used starting August 1st.

This note is especially important to all the CREP 2 SWCDs.

October 15, 2007 has been set as the deadline for SWCDs to have all their complete CREP 2 RIM Reserve applications in to their Board Conservationist (BC). This is necessary to allow the RIM Agreements for CREP 2 to be complete (signed by landowner and State) so that they will be available for FSA County Committees to be able to approve CREP 2 CRP contracts prior to the expiration of the CREP 2 Memorandum of

Agreement on December 31, 2007.

Just as a reminder, a complete RIM application package for CREP 2 includes the following items:

1. Conservation easement application form.
2. RIM Easement Area Assessment Form (complete parts I and V only)
3. Aerial photo with easement area clearly outlined.

4. Agreement Information Form
5. CREP Payment Calculation form - easement payments
6. Conservation Easement Practice Plan Worksheet (CEPPW)
7. Landowners deed to the property
8. Copy of the CREP NRCS CRP land and practice eligibility worksheets.
9. Wetland Restoration Informa-

tion form (for wetland restorations only).

Other items such as government lot maps, trust agreements, partnership agreements, etc. may also be required depending on ownership and deeds.

If you have any questions with applications please contact your BWSR BC, or BWSR Easement staff in St. Paul.

## RED RIVER BASIN FLOOD DAMAGE REDUCTION WORK GROUP

### Summary of Decisions • June 14, 2007

This is a summary of actions taken by the Flood Damage Reduction Work Group at its June 14, 2007 meeting at the Northland Inn in Crookston. This is not a complete set of minutes of all items addressed by the Work Group. All decisions recorded as agreed were by consensus of the members in attendance. Attendance: J. Deal (co-chair), P. Swenson (co-chair), D. Wilkens, B. Wright, B. Nelson (alt.), R. Osowski, P. Aasen, R. Huelskamp (alt.), G. Van Amburg, B. Dwight (alt.). Absent: S. Miranowski, K. Mykleseth, B. Patton, J. Leach, C. Evans, P. Borgen, J. Ziegler, Red Lake Nation. Facilitator: D. Buckhout.

#### I. FDRWG Membership

Paul Aasen was introduced as the MCEA-selected representative on the FDRWG. Randy Huelskamp was presented as the new alternate to Glen Kajewski to represent NRCS. The Work Group ratified this membership change by consensus. Don Buckhout announced that this would be his last FDRWG meeting as he is taking a position in the DNR St. Paul office at the beginning of July. Until the position is filled, Paul Swenson will serve as the FDRWG facilitator.

#### II. Project Team Handbook

Don Buckhout presented a draft copy of the Project Team Handbook that contains all the TSAC Technical Papers. He and Brian Dwight will be meeting in the next two weeks to make further progress on this document.

#### IV. TSAC: NRE Benefits

Henry Van Offelen presented a summary of the results to-date of the NRE Benefits technical paper. The timeline for completing this technical paper is to have a review draft for the Work Group prior to the August 29 meeting. At that meeting, both the phase I Culvert Sizing and the NRE Benefits technical papers would be submitted for Work Group "approval."

#### V. FDR/NRE Project Compatibility and Readiness Review

- 1) Hay Creek - Norland (Roseau River WD):  
TSAC Finding: FDR information corrected.  
Work Group Findings:  
Compatible with Mediation Agreement: **YES**  
Readiness for Bonding: **IMMEDIATE** (Land Acquisition/Construction)
- 2) Malung Impoundment (Roseau River WD)  
TSAC Finding: FDR information is correct  
Work Group Findings:  
Compatible with Mediation Agreement: **NOT DETERMINED** (no project team

recommendation)

Readiness for Bonding: **READY IN SECOND YEAR OF CYCLE** (Land Acquisition)

- 3) Nereson 8 (Two Rivers WD)

TSAC Finding: FDR information is correct  
Work Group Findings:

Compatible with Mediation Agreement: **NOT DETERMINED** (no project team recommendation)

Readiness for Bonding: **IMMEDIATE** (Land Acquisition); **READY IN NEXT BONDING CYCLE** (Construction)

- 4) Agassiz Valley WRMP (Middle Snake Tamarac Rivers WD)

TSAC Finding: FDR information corrected  
Work Group Findings:

Compatible with Mediation Agreement: **YES**

Readiness for Bonding: **IMMEDIATE** (Construction)

- 5) Brandt Angus Project (Middle Snake Tamarac Rivers WD)

TSAC Finding: FDR information is correct  
Work Group Findings:

Compatible with Mediation Agreement: **NOT DETERMINED** (no project team recommendation)

Readiness for Bonding: **IMMEDIATE** (Land Acquisition); **READY IN NEXT BONDING CYCLE** (Construction)

- 6) Grand Marais Outlet Restoration (Red Lake WD)

TSAC Finding: FDR Information corrected  
Work Group Findings:

Compatible with Mediation Agreement: **NOT DETERMINED** (no project team recommendation)

Readiness for Bonding: **MAY BE READY IN NEXT BONDING CYCLE**

#### VI. Next Meetings

The next meetings of the Work Group will be on Wednesday, August 29, in Detroit Lakes; and Tuesday, October 30. The August meeting agenda will include approval of the FY 2008 FDRWG Spending Plan, review of the TSAC Phase I Culvert Sizing and the NRE Benefits Technical Papers, and a presentation by SWCD representatives to talk about marketing incentives for federal farm programs. The October meeting location and date may be adjusted to coincide with the Senate Capital Bonding Committee tour of northwest Minnesota.