

U.S.D.A.  
NATURAL RESOURCES  
CONSERVATION SERVICE -  
MINNESOTA

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<http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov>

- The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a part of the USDA, is the primary federal agency that works with private landowners to help them protect their natural resources.

- NRCS focuses on private working lands

- NRCS emphasizes:

- Voluntary
- Science based
- Incentive based conservation technical and financial assistance
- Locally led

- Locally Led Conservation

- In conjunction with SWCD's and other partners
- Landowner involvement in all phases
- Decisions at the lowest level possible
- This model has existed for 70 years and has been very successful – it works!!!

- NRCS has 354 employees servicing every county in the state located in USDA Ag. Service Centers with Farm Service Agency, Rural Development and SWCD's
- We work in cooperation with the 91 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts providing one-on-one assistance to landowners with the conservation of natural resources.



- How Does NRCS Provide Assistance –
  - In cooperation with SWCD's and other partners
  - Technical Assistance (TA) – landowner requests assistance at the county field office
  - Financial Assistance (FA) – landowner may also request funding to implement conservation practices
    - Cost sharing
    - Incentive payments
    - Easement payments

Annual Appropriations  
2006 Fiscal Year (Oct 05 – Sept 06)

- Technical Assistance \$33 million
  - For employees, support and Technical Service Providers
  - Most expansive conservation delivery system of trained specialists in the state to assist private landowners and local SWCD's
- Financial Assistance \$50 million
  - Payments to landowners to implement conservation practices

- NRCS Administered Programs –
  - Conservation Operations
    - Technical Assistance (CO-01)
    - Soil Survey (CO-02)
  - Watershed Surveys and Planning (PL-06)
  - Watershed Operations (WF-08)
  - Watershed Rehabilitation (WR-07)
  - Resource Conservation & Development (RCD-11)

- NRCS Administered Programs (cont.)
  - Conservation Security Program (CSP)
  - Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)
  - EQIP – Ground and Surface Water (G&SW)
  - Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
  - Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)
  - Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
  - Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

- Conservation Operations – Technical Assistance (CO-01)
  - FY06 - \$13.6 million
  - Assistance to landowners to identify problems, propose solutions and complete a conservation plan
  - Direct support to local SWCD's

- Conservation Operations – Soil Survey (CO-02)
  - FY06 \$3.2 million
  - 1.7million acres of soil mapping initial and update
  - 72 counties certified digital data

- Farm Bill Programs

- The 2002 Farm Bill has brought a tremendous amount of financial assistance (FA) and technical assistance (TA) to producers in the state
- MN received the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest allocation in the USA!
- Through the vast array of programs and locally led conservation all natural resource concerns and ALL parts of the state have benefited.

- Farm Bill Programs (cont.)

- Cooperate with federal, state and local agencies and groups
- NRCS works with our sister agency - the Farm Service Agency (FSA) - on all aspects of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)
  - NRCS provides technical assistance
  - FSA provides program management and handling of the funds

- Farm Bill Programs (cont.)

- Open to all who are eligible
- Locally led process – local work groups
- State Technical Committee
  - Landowners, agencies, groups, non-profits
  - Provide input and recommendations to NRCS
  - Meet quarterly as needed

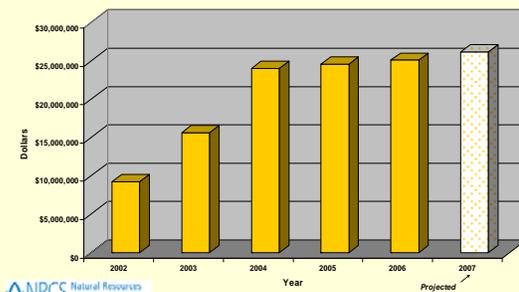
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

- The flagship Farm Bill program of NRCS
  - Provides technical and financial assistance to implement conservation practices
  - Focused on at least one of the four National priorities –
    - Water Quality
    - Air Quality
    - Soil Quality
    - Wildlife Habitat

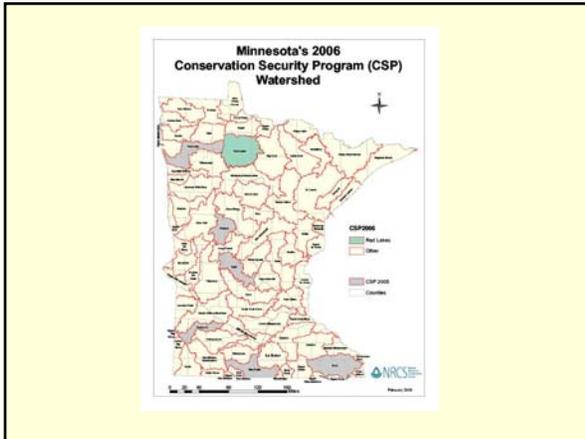
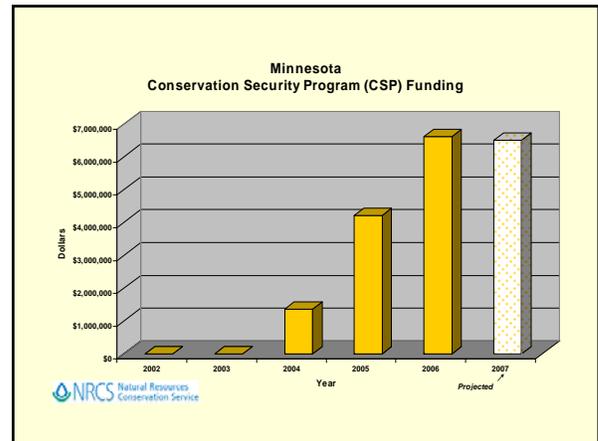
EQIP (cont.)

- Contracts have been approved in every SWCD with high quality applications – for 2006 – 90 of 91 SWCD's received funding for producer contracts. Ramsey SWCD did not have any EQIP applications in 2006.
- 1400 contracts were approved for over \$25 million in 2006.
- \$275,000 was the average allocation per SWCD
- 33 Limited Resource Producers were allocated \$1.3 million and over \$480,000 was distributed through four American Indian EQIP contracts

Minnesota  
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Funding



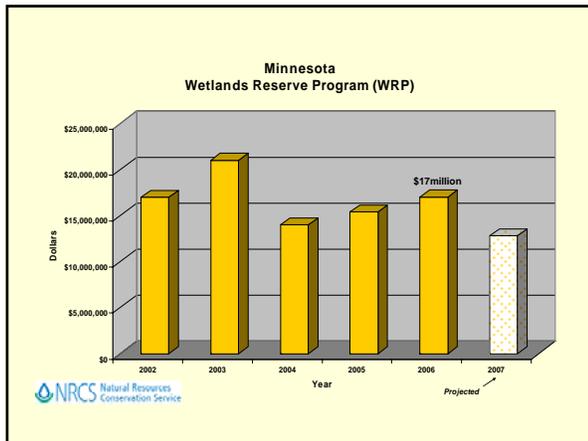
- Conservation Security Program (CSP)
  - New program in 2004
  - Provides payments to producers for maintaining and increasing their conservation practices
  - 2004 – Blue Earth River Watershed
  - 2005 – Red Lake, Redeye, Redwood, Root, and Sauk River Watersheds as well as a continuation of the Blue Earth River Watershed
  - 2006 – Red Lakes Watershed
  - 2004, 2005, 2006 total 712 contracts and over 208,000 acres; average payment \$8,800/year



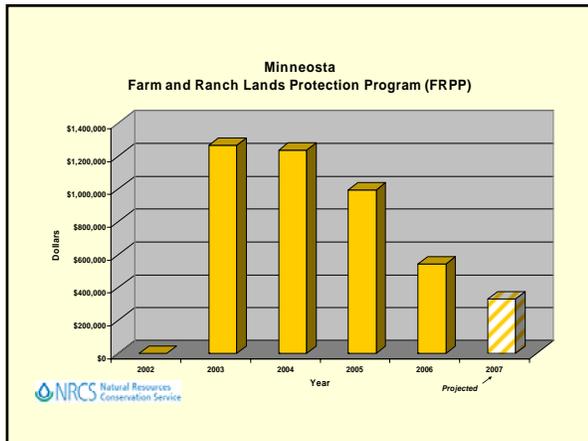
- Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
  - Provides technical and financial assistance to restore previously drained wetlands and associated uplands
  - Easement payments and restoration cost share
  - Perpetual and 30 year easements

- Wetlands Reserve Program (cont.)
  - Almost 60,000 acres of easements total
  - \$17 million was obligated with 43 landowners on over 15,000 acres in 2006
  - FY2006 (WRP and WREP) 28 easements recorded on 5,000 acres in 12 counties, \$17 million
  - Landowners completed 3,100 acres of upland restoration and 1,300 acres of wetland restoration. Over \$1.4 million was spent on these restoration efforts.

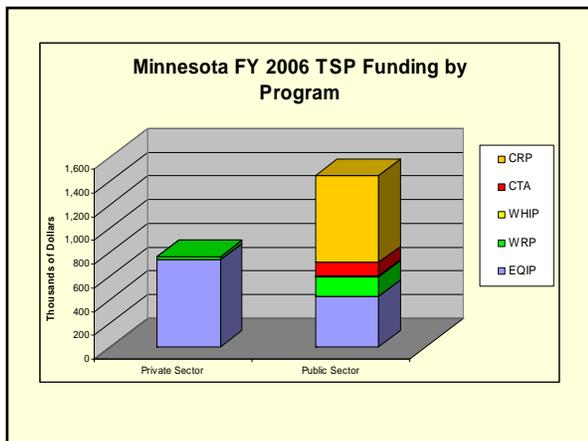
- Wetlands Reserve Program (cont.)
  - Habitat Corridors Partnership (HCP) – over 6 year period \$1.1 million of State funding, as supported by LCMR, will leverage over \$40 million of WRP \$'s
  - RIM/WRP Partnership – utilizes both programs to leverage resources and secure additional wildlife habitat



- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)
  - Provides up to 50% of the cost of an easement to a government or non-profit to secure a farmland protection easement
  - Currently Dakota County only recipient in MN receiving \$540,000 in 2006
  - Local Unit or non-profit holds the easement
  - 2006 - easements were perfected with 4 landowners on 592 acres



NRCS has utilized Technical Service Provider (TSP) funds to provide technical assistance (TA) to implement high priority practices through Farm Bill Programs. These practices are those that we do not have the capability or capacity to provide TA in a timely fashion.



- ## NRCS Guiding Principles
- Service Partnership Technical Excellence*
- ### Overarching Strategies
- ❖ Cooperative Conservation
  - ❖ Watershed Approach
  - ❖ Market-based Approach

NRCS has a long history of cooperating with state, local and other federal agencies and organizations:

Soil Surveys – Funds from LCMR and Counties

Feedlot technical assistance through LCMR – early 1990's

Buffer Initiative – increase technical assistance with help from DNR and Pheasants Forever

Clean Water Legacy – NRCS has been a full partner

- Challenges to NRCS assisting landowners

- Unfunded backlog

- There are always more applicants than funding
- \$59 million backlog in Wetlands Reserve Program
- Unlimited backlog in Environmental Quality Incentives Program – 2 month signup yielded \$35 million in applications - \$100's millions needed
- Conservation Security Program – 8,000 farmers eligible in MN each year based on the National schedule – not enough funding for all quality applicants – 14 only funded in 2006

- Challenges (cont.)

- More than Federal share needed

- Most programs require significant landowner commitment of time and money to implement
  - EQIP, 50% Federal cost share only
  - WRP new nationwide process offers less to landowners for easements

- Challenges (cont.)

- Lack of enough technical assistance

- Shortage of appropriated funds for employees
- Not as timely of service as landowners request
- Handle walk-in traffic primarily not as much outreach and promotion
- Large workload to monitor existing Federal easements
- Extremely large workload to survey, design and install practices funded during the past 5 years

## How could the State help?

- Allocation of funds to implement conservation practices (State cost share, Clean Water Legacy, etc.)
- Continuation of successful RIM/WRP partnership to fund easements focused on critical wildlife habitat
- Additional technical assistance resources for local SWCD's and others to assist with implementation of the Farm Bill

Minnesota NRCS' goal is to continue to receive our fair share of Federal funding to benefit landowners. With the State's help we can increase the funding levels, expand our local capacity and implement conservation practices at an accelerated pace!!

This presentation is posted on the MN NRCS website at:

[http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/  
powerpoint.html](http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/powerpoint.html)

Once at this site click on Programs under the Select Topic heading.

QUESTIONS???