

2006 Minnesota

Conservation Accomplishment's Report



 NRCS

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Dear Friends in Conservation:

On behalf of the entire Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff and partners I proudly present this 2006 Accomplishment's Report. This report covers one fiscal year, from October 1, 2005 to September 30, 2006.

Minnesota NRCS had another banner year in 2006. The extra effort by NRCS employees and Conservation Partners in Minnesota produced more conservation on the land.

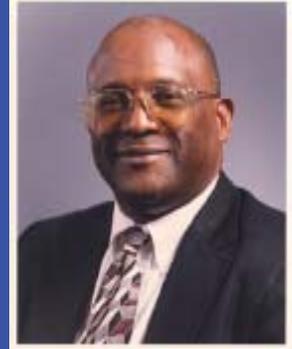
Over the last 4 years, NRCS has been led by Chief Bruce Knight in Washington, DC. During Chief Knight's tenure, several positive changes occurred. Chief Knight demonstrated remarkable leadership abilities throughout his tenure at NRCS. Chief Knight shined as a visionary leader for NRCS and made it a point for NRCS to become more visible and our programs more transparent to the public. During Knight's 4 years as Chief, he made it to Minnesota a total of seven times for major conservation events. His leadership and passion for conservation will be remembered for years to come. We wish him well in his new assignment.

In August, 2006 Chief Knight announced his confirmation as Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs. On August 23, 2006, Arlen Lancaster was appointed to replace Knight as the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the primary agency for voluntary conservation on working agricultural lands. As the 13th Chief for the agency, Chief Lancaster will direct the work of some 12,000 employees and will manage a conservation programs budget totaling nearly \$3.2 billion.

Minnesota NRCS and partners welcomes Chief Lancaster to NRCS. Mr. Lancaster is the first Asian American Chief of NRCS. We look forward to working with him on doing what NRCS does best, "Helping People Help the Land."

Sincerely,

WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist



Vision

*A productive
Minnesota in
harmony with
a sustainable environment*

Mission

*The mission of the Natural
Resources Conservation
Service in Minnesota is to
provide USDA technical
leadership, working in part-
nership with local, state and
other federal conservation
agencies and organizations,
to help people conserve,
improve and sustain our
natural resources.;*

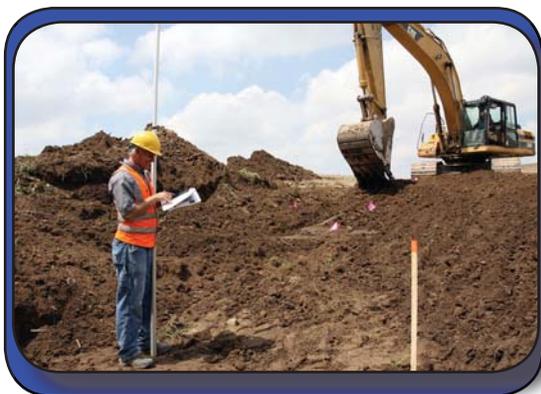
NRCS
**Helping People
Help the Land**

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA)

CTA encompasses the majority of the work NRCS does. Work items such as the agency's infrastructure, training, accountability, technical references, state-specific Field Office Technical Guides and engineering are all part of CTA.

Additionally, conservation compliance activities such as highly erodible land determinations, wetland delineations and determinations are considered ongoing CTA work.

NRCS is working with Hmong farmers in the Twin Cities Metropolitan Region to help them develop conservation plans and successfully implement conservation practices which are suited to their unique small farming operations.



Installation of fabric chute on the Steve Eickoff farm to provide an adequate outlet for CRP grassed waterways. The Preston field office received engineering assistance from Robert Romocki Area 7 Engineer.

The demand for CTA continues to grow in Minnesota. CTA is the foundation for all of NRCS's conservation activities. This is carried out in cooperation with our 91 Soil and Water Conservation Districts throughout the State. This effort has created a seamless delivery of local, State and Federal conservation programs.



Steve Becker, Area 6 Engineer and Kevin Daw, Assistant State Conservationist -Field Operations, Duluth participated in a dairy farm tour in south-central Minnesota.



Dave Wise, Soil Conservationist at the Fond du lac Tribal College serves as a Tribal Liaison for MN NRCS.

Performance Measure Accomplishments for MN NRCS - FY 2006

Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans applied (No.)	100
Comprehensive Nutrient Plans Written (No.)	139
Conservation Plans for Cropland Written (Acres)	806,877
Conservation Plans for Grazing Land (Acres)	65,303
Grazing land with Conservation Applied to Protect the Resource Base (Acres)	44,694
Irrigation Efficiency Improved (Ac-Ft)	4,518
Non-federal land Managed for the Protection and Enhancement of Habitat for Species with Declining Populations (Ac.)	65,290
Non-federal Land Treated for Fish and Wildlife Habitat (Ac.)	163,594
Reduction in the Acreage of Cropland Soils Damaged by Erosion (Ac.)	338,346
Soil Erosion Reduced (Tons)	4,040,891
Watershed or Area-Wide Conservation Plans Developed for Water or Air Quality	12
Watershed or Area-Wide Conservation plans Developed for Water or Air Quality (Ac.)	2,230,943
Watershed or Area-Wide Resource Plans, Studies or Inventories for Flood Prevention or Mitigation (No.)	2
Watershed or Area-Wide Resource Plans, Studies or Inventories for Water Conservation and Water Supply (No.)	1
Wetlands Created, Restored or Enhanced (Ac.)	21,964

Our People

NRCS at Work in Minnesota

NRCS employees are highly skilled in many technical and scientific areas. Our Minnesota NRCS employees offer on-site technical assistance and they understand local site conditions. NRCS's primary mission is to help private landowners plan and use good conservation practices on their land. NRCS has an office in nearly every Minnesota county. Assistance is available in a nearby USDA Ag Service Center location for those desiring some natural resource's assistance in disciplines such as:

Agronomy

Biology

Cartography

Cultural Resources

Economics

Engineering

Forestry

Geographic **I**nformation **S**ystems

Geology

Hydrology

Resource **C**onservation &

Development

Soil **C**onservation

Soil **S**cience

Water **Q**uality

Wetland **S**cience



L-R: 4 Minnesota NRCS employees were named Federal Civil Servant of the Year in 2006. Ann English, Christina Papenfuss, Cutrina Moreland and Robert Joachim. William Hunt, State Conservationist gathered with the award recipients!



L-R: Carol Berg, MASWCD President, William Hunt, MN NRCS State Conservationist and Dana York, NRCS Associate Chief participated in the 2006 Earth Day event at the Glacial Ridge Project near Mentor.

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Conservation Security Program (CSP)

Producers in the Red Lakes Watershed in northwest Minnesota were the only eligible applicants for enrollment into CSP during the FY 2006 Signup. The lack of program funds at the national level restricted most states to a single watershed sign-up. In the Red Lakes watershed fourteen 2006 CSP contracts were approved for funding which translates into more than \$2.4 million in long-term commitment to conservation on these Minnesota farms over the next ten years.

CSP participants are conservation innovators. One example of this was seen in the Sauk Watershed, a 2005 CSP Watershed where a number of producers are using a flushing bar to protect wildlife birds during hay harvest. Several producers have designed and manufactured their own flushing bars to fit their harvesting equipment and to increase efficiency. The use of flushing bars during hay harvest is eligible for a CSP enhancement payment.

During the 2006 program year, producers who initially enrolled in CSP during the 2004 signup had the opportunity to modify their contracts by adding additional land, adding new enhancements, and/or transitioning to a higher tier. Approximately 85 percent of 2004 CSP participants took advantage of this opportunity and modified their contracts during the 2006 modification period.



Roman Schaefer (left) of Evergreen Acres Dairy Partnership near St. Cloud with his flushing bar that was designed and manufactured by his son, Darrin Schaefer (right).

Minnesota 2006 CSP Quick Facts

- Watershed Acreage - 1,307,200 acres, with 77,600 acres of cropland and 36,400 acres of pasture
- Eligible applicants - 54
- Total Contracts Funded in 2006 Signup - 14 Tier II Contracts
- Total Acres Enrolled in CSP in the Red Lakes Watershed – 7,566 acres
- Total 2006 Payments for 2006 Contracts - \$123,553
- Total Contract Dollars obligated for 2006 Contracts - \$2,404,447
- Total CSP Contracts from 2004, 2005, and 2006 Signups – 712 Contracts
- Total Acres Enrolled in CSP – 208,257 acres
- Total 2006 Payments for All Contracts - \$6,250,000

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program that supports agriculture and environmental quality as compatible goals. Through EQIP, landowners may receive financial and technical help with structural and management conservation practices on agricultural land. Local Work Groups (LWGs) are used to prioritize local resource concerns for funding.

In FY 2006 Minnesota allocated **over \$25 million** in general EQIP financial assistance. These funds provided financial assistance to over 1,400 landowners. In addition, NRCS provided technical assistance, either directly or through the use of a Technical Service Provider, to plan or implement these contracts. Funds were distributed state-wide except for Ramsey County. A substantial portion of the FY 2006 EQIP funding was designated to assisting Limited Resource Producers and American Indians. Thirty-three Limited Resource Producers were allocated a total of \$1.3 million and over \$480,000 was distributed through four American Indian EQIP contracts.

Through the Ground and Surface Water Conservation (GSWC) portion of EQIP, an additional **\$189,000** was allocated to **27** landowners. This funding was specifically directed toward conservation of ground and surface water resources in agricultural operations. Funding assistance went to agricultural producers to convert existing center pivot irrigation systems from high pressure to low pressure systems. Low pressure systems save water and energy resources and reduce groundwater contamination potential.

In FY 2006 over **\$10.5 million** was used to apply conservation practices. The majority of these funds came from previously contracted practices that were planned to be applied in 2006. This expenditure from previous contract years represents the bulk of the conservation accomplishments in FY 2006. Most of the practices that have been planned using 2006 funds will actually be applied in subsequent years.

Highlights of the practices that were applied in 2006:

Livestock Related Practices

- 27 Waste Water and Feedlot Runoff Control Systems
- 2,300 acres of Use Exclusion
- 399,100 feet of Fencing
- 1,700 acres of Pasture and Hayland Planting

Erosion Control Practices

- 152,300 acres of Residue Management, Mulch-till
- 116,500 acres of Residue Management, No-till/Strip-till
- 3,300 acres of Conservation Crop Rotation
- 25,000 acres of Seasonal Residue Management
- 75 acres of Grassed Waterways
- 750 acres of Tree and Shrub Establishment
- 3,000 acres of Residue Management, Ridge-till
- 38 Water and Sediment Control Basins
- 8 Grade Stabilization Structures

Water Quality Practices

- 121,600 acres of Nutrient Management (may include manure as a nutrient resource and also may be counted as a livestock concern)
- 3,300 acres of Sprinkler Irrigation Systems
- 42,800 acres of Pest Management
- 175,800 feet of Pipeline

Highlights of the practices that were obligated with FY2006 funding:

Livestock Related Practices

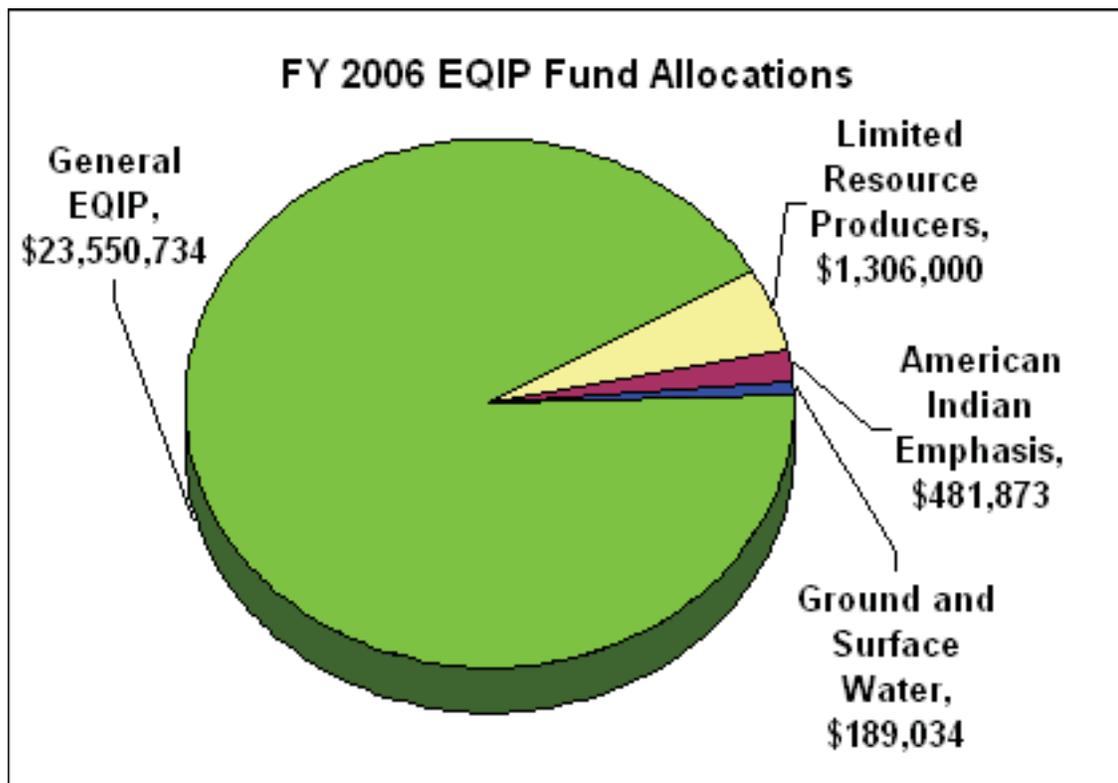
- 84 Waste Water and Feedlot Runoff Control Systems
- 1,643,400 feet of Fencing
- 5,377 acres of Pasture and Hay Planting
- 7 Composting Facilities
- 1,815 acres of Use Exclusion
- 20,778 acres of Prescribed Grazing

Erosion Control Practices

- 462 Water and Sediment Control Basins
- 2,900 acres of Tree and Shrub Establishment
- 41 Grade Stabilization Structures
- 217 acres Grassed Waterways
- 3,801 acres Conservation Crop Rotation
- 58,140 feet of Terraces

Water Quality Practices

- 132,293 acres of Nutrient Management
- 78,589 acres of Pest Management
- 663,660 feet of Pipeline
- 5,275 acres of Sprinkler Irrigation Systems



Farm and Ranchlands Protection Program (FRPP)

2006 was a successful year for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) in Minnesota. Dakota County, the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS continue to partner on this effort working with private landowners to protect prime, unique, and other important farmland.

\$543,731 of USDA – NRCS FRPP funding was received in 2006. A competitive Request for Proposal process was utilized and Dakota County was selected to receive funding. The FRPP funds will continue to support their existing farmland protection efforts through the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Area's Program (FNAP). Through this joint effort, FRPP funds will contribute up to one half of the cost of farmland protection easements and the county will pay for the other half and other associated costs to secure the easement and administer the program.

This is the fourth year that Dakota County has been awarded FRPP funds. This includes over \$1.55 million in 2005, \$1.1 million in 2004, and nearly \$1.3 million in 2003. This brings the grand total of FRPP funding to over \$4.5 million to Dakota County over the past 4 years.

A total of four landowners had Dakota County FNAP easements perfected in 2006. This included a total of 592 acres of prime farmland. The easements utilize FRPP funding and list USDA as having a legal interest in the easement. The easements protect these lands from being converted to non-agricultural land uses.

Additional easements are currently being processed and another Dakota County sign-up has occurred. Interest remains strong and a number of easements are planned to close in fiscal year 2007.



Protecting water quality with a buffer on perpetual FRPP farmland.

Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)

The 2006 Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) funding was part of an emergency drought relief legislative package approved by Congress in late August. Nationally \$11 million was approved in targeted states to help protect drought affected grazing lands. Minnesota's allocation of \$305,745 was used to approve 15 contracts on a total of 1933 acres.

GRP contracts approved in 2006 run from 10 to 15 years in length and require participants to properly manage their grazing lands. The GRP is a voluntary program for grazing land producers to protect, restore and enhance grasslands. Drought conditions on pasture land and grazing lands often lead to reducing or selling off livestock, overgrazing existing pasture, reduced hay production, degraded water quantity and quality



or the conversion of usually productive grassland to developers. GRP assistance will help producers through weather stresses such as drought without degrading the natural resource benefits provided by grasslands.

The 2006 Minnesota GRP funds were only available in the 39 counties that received official USDA designation as being adversely effected by drought conditions. New applications were not taken and funding was offered to the highest ranked applications from the prior year backlog. Swift County received the most approvals with 8 new contracts on 1169 acres totaling \$220,234 which is 73% of the state's allocation. In addition, funding was approved in Aitkin, Roseau, West Polk and Wright counties.



Lance Smith, SW MN NRCS Grazing Specialist provided training to farmers in St. James, Minnesota during a winter workshop sponsored by Three Rivers RC&D.



Elk grazing on a Minnesota pasture

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

NRCS has eight approved RC&D Areas, covering 64 counties in Minnesota. We also have two applicant areas, Coteau des Prairies RC&D and Mid Minnesota Mississippi River. Both are seeking USDA authorization as designated RC&D Areas.

RC&D Councils in Minnesota adopted 88 new projects and completed 61 during the past year. Federal contributions to these completed projects totals \$1.8 million. Contributions from other government and non-government sources toward these projects exceeded \$4.8 million. Nine businesses were established and 23 businesses were expanded. Over 65 workshops, tours, training events or seminars were held with more than 6,203 attendees. A total of over 77,000 citizens received service, with almost 1,900 of those individuals being economically or socially disadvantaged people.



WesMin RC&D played a role in the Eagle Lake Erosion Control project

Soil Survey

Soil surveys provide a field-based scientific inventory of soil resources, including soil maps, data about physical and chemical properties of soils and information on the potentials and limitations of each soil.

The NRCS is the lead Federal agency responsible for the National Cooperative Soil Survey mapping of private lands. Many other state and local agency partners also contribute both staff and money to the mapping effort.

Soil surveys have many uses, but are intended for people to use so their intended use of the land fits the soil. Soils data can be used to determine highly erodible areas, potential wetlands, sites where livestock manure could be distributed with little environmental impact, prime farmland, or other soil interpretations critical to natural resource management. Soils data is also useful to urban planners and other government agencies.

The first soil surveys were conducted a century ago. Just as time has progressed, so has soil mapping technology. The digitizing of soil maps and the development of the soil survey geographic database are an integral part of the soil survey process today. They are completed concurrently with other activities in both initial and maintenance soil survey projects. A soil survey geographic database is one of the products of a completed soil survey. The soil survey geographic database is maintained in the NRCS field office and archived at the National Cartography and Geospatial Center.

Soil Survey

During FY 2006, Minnesota soil scientists mapped 1,698,548 acres, or 106% of their goal.

The Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO) is the most detailed geographic database. It contains digital data developed from detailed soil survey maps that are generally at scales of 1:12,000 or 1:24,000.

Currently, there are 72 counties in Minnesota that meet SSURGO standards, and work is underway on many others. During FY 2006, 14 counties (or 8,744,710 acres) were digitized to SSURGO standards.

All Minnesota county soil surveys that are digitized to SSURGO standards are now available on the web. For more information about soil surveys in Minnesota, click onto the Min-



Peter Weikle , NRCS Area 4 Soil Scientist describes the hydric soil conditions while Kevin Senander observes during an Area 4 Wetland Training Refresher Course

Technical Service Providers (TSP)

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to use TSPs. TSPs are conservation professionals from the private sector, non-profit organizations, or public agencies that can provide direct technical assistance and deliver conservation services to landowners and others on behalf of USDA. By working with TSPs, NRCS is able to increase the technical assistance and services available to landowners.

In FY 2006 over \$2.2 million was allocated to agreements with TSPs; \$763,000 went to the private sector and \$1,450,000 went to the public sector. The majority of the private sector money went to support the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Producers contracted with TSPs to:

- install structures that control waste water and feedlot runoff
- manage nutrients and pests

Public sector funds were allocated to a number of public agencies and non-profit organizations including Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Waterfowl Association and The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). Funds were used in support of EQIP, Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), Conservation Technical Assistance, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).



Krecia Leddy, NRCS District Conservationist Ortonville Field Office meets with local ag producers to discuss EQIP and the opportunities that are available through Technical Service Providers

Activities included:

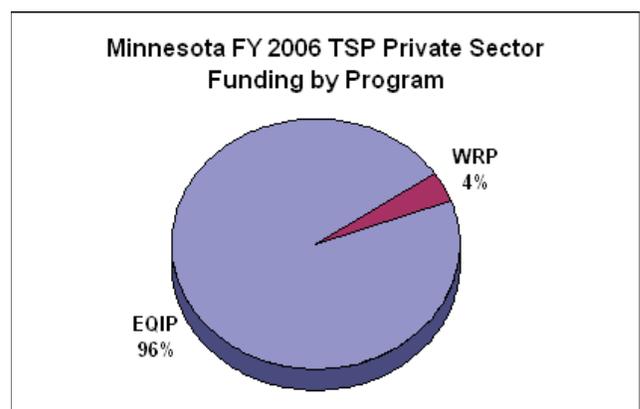
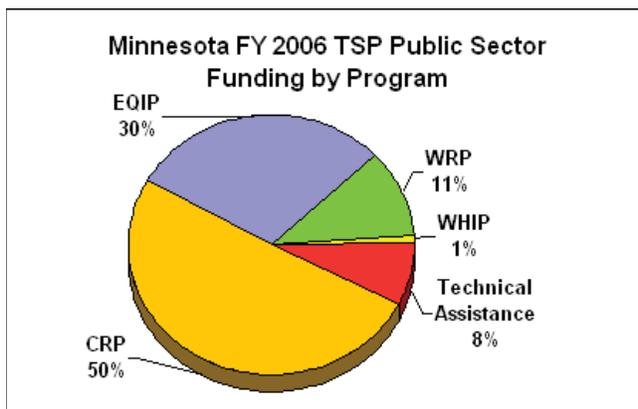
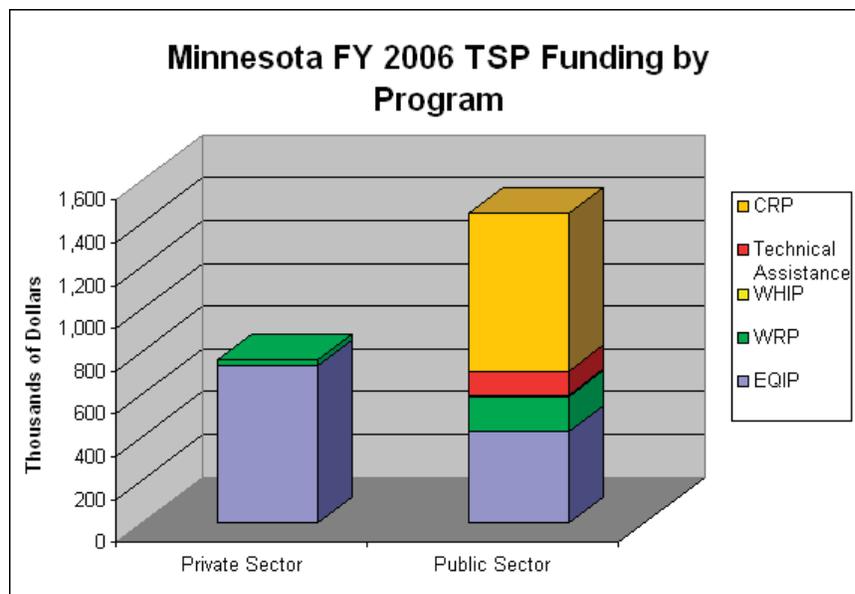
- developing forestry plans
- developing habitat improvement plans
- developing grazing plans
- topographical surveying
- designing wetland restorations
- monitoring existing wetland restorations
- developing CRP plans

The \$1.45 million in funds that were allocated to the public sector were also matched by using the Contribution Agreement process. With Contribution Agreements, each dollar provided by NRCS is matched by the partner agency or organization, effectively doubling the amount of services that can be provided. The actual value of the technical assistance provided through TSPs in Minne-

sota in 2006 is close to \$3.7 million.

A special TSP forum and orientation session was delivered at the Minnesota Crop Production Retailers' annual Short Course and Trade Show. Part of the forum consisted of a TSP panel answering prepared questions and discussing the entire TSP process in Minnesota. Discussion was then open to the audience (60 Certified Crop Advisers, many of whom were TSPs).

National criteria to become TSPs or renew TSP certifications significantly changed in calendar year 2006. Additional training is now required in various categories. The NRCS multi-area water quality/nutrient specialists have been providing this training in numerous small group sessions or on a one-on-one basis since March 2006.



Snake River Project Near Warren

Water Resources

Pelican River Watershed continues to be the highest priority and we anticipate completion of the watershed plan and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) during the first quarter of 2007.

The purpose of this plan is to reduce phosphorous levels entering Big Detroit Lake. The plan is in final draft and out for technical comment at this time. Springbrook Watershed Plan, being developed to provide ecological restoration of streams in the area and flood protection of adjacent cropland, proceeds on or ahead of schedule.

A visual stream assessment report was completed identifying stream segments for restoration. Flooded acres are located and interviews completed for economic analysis.

The Whitewater and Kanaranzi-Little Rock Land Treatment watersheds continue to provide watershed protection assistance through long-term contracting with local farmers. No new funds were available for these projects over the past year. Sixteen long term contracts were completed during the past year.



Snake River Watershed flood control components were finished this year with completion of the diversion structure and the Richard P. Nelson Floodway, named after the late Warren mayor who died from cancer in January 2006. Remaining mitigation features are scheduled for completion in 2007.



Dick Nelson, former Mayor of Warren passed away in January 2006. Dick championed the Snake River Project and this project saved Warren from the spring flood in 2006.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

Practices include:

- Establishment of 1,057 acres of native shrubs, grasses and forbs,
- 169 acres of brush land management,
- 881 acres of prescribed burning,
- 527 acres of timber stand improvement to remove invasive species,
- 50 acres of wetlands were restored,
- 188 acres of tree planting,
- 550 feet of stream bank and shoreline protection, and
- 167 acres of declining species habitat enhanced.

Program Benefits

NRCS has worked closely with several tribal conservation departments to utilize WHIP in meeting comprehensive wildlife management plans. WHIP has provided NRCS the opportunity to reach non-traditional clients and introduce them to USDA programs and services.

WHIP has been used to demonstrate the value of non-traditional habitat projects. Examples include; declining species habitat restoration and wildlife friendly green spaces.



A wetland restoration near Hinckley, Minnesota which was funded through the WHIP program



Native grass and forb planting were planned and successfully implemented near Hinckley, Minnesota



Prairie Chickens booming at Glacial Ridge Project near Mentor, Minnesota

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

Minnesota received **\$13.8 million** in Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funding in Fiscal Year **2006**. These funds were allocated to **35 easements on 13,400 acres in 11 counties**. Of the **13,400 acres** funded in **2006**, **5,400** are owned by the Nature Conservancy (TNC) as part of the Glacial Ridge Project.

In addition, Minnesota received **\$3.2 million** for the Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP). The WREP is a **5-year** partnership between NRCS and the State of Minnesota through the Board of Water and Soil Resources in which The State will contribute **up to \$1.2 million** in money and in-kind services during the life of the project. With this **FY 2006** allocation, **eight easements** were funded in Freeborn, Polk, and Steele counties.

In **FY 2006** Minnesota recorded **27 easements on 4,600 acres in 12 counties**. These easements were funded primarily with prior year WRP allocations.

Field offices completed **3,100 acres** of upland restoration and **1,300 acres** of wetland restoration during the past year. In total **over \$1.4 million** was spent on these restoration efforts.

Minnesota proudly celebrated **50,000 acres** of WRP accomplishments in **2006**. An event was held at the site of a WRP restoration in Freeborn County. NRCS Chief Bruce Knight and US Congressman Gil Gutknecht were among the guests. Highlights of the day included displays by partners, a “nature walk” for local school children and the mounting of wood duck boxes. The finale was the release of a pair of rehabilitated mallards. These

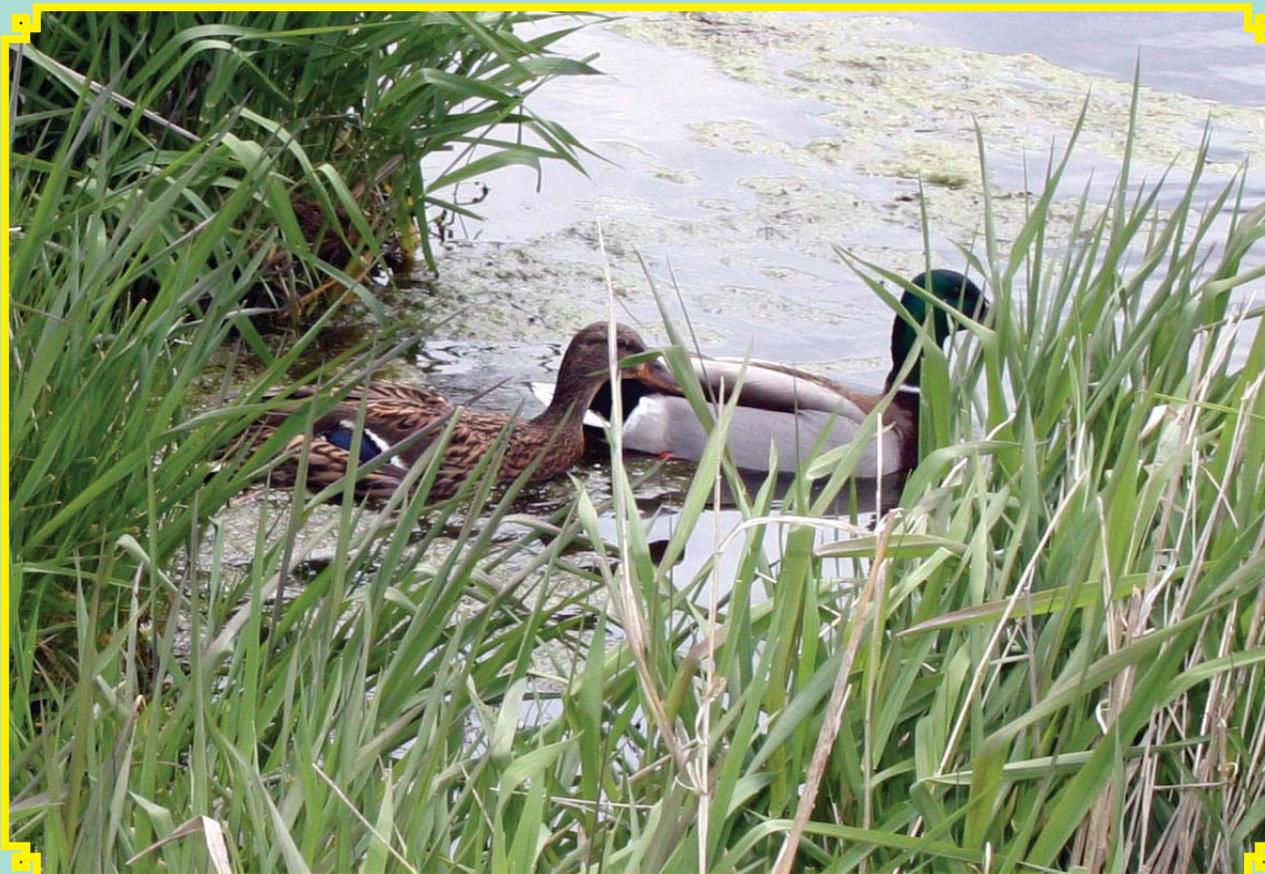
ducks had been found injured and had been treated and rehabilitated by the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center of Minnesota.

NRCS continued to be a partner in the Habitat Corridors Partnership (HCP), a multi-year project funded by the Minnesota State Legislature as recommended by The Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCMR). Through a cooperative effort between NRCS and Ducks Unlimited (DU) seven WRP contract technicians provide assistance to landowners who are located in HCP priority corridors. The majority (**38 of the 43, for \$13 million of the \$17 million** total WRP/WREP funding) of newly funded WRP projects mentioned above are located in HCP areas. In addition, **18 of the 27** recorded easements were in HCP areas. The HCP funding along with DU assistance has focused WRP funding into identified high priority areas within the state.



NRCS Chief Bruce Knight participated in the WRP 50,000 Acres Ceremony on May 15.

NRCS Helping People Help the Land



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