

2007 Accomplishments Report



**A report by the Minnesota USDA
Natural Resources Conservation Service**



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On the cover:

Morning breaks over a field in northwest Minnesota as this striking sharptail grouse displays his vibrant colors of the mating dance.

**U.S. Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service**

Mission: Helping People Help the Land

Vision: Productive Land, Healthy Environment

State Conservationist's Messages



On behalf of the entire Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff and partners, I proudly present the 2007 Accomplishment's Report. This report covers one fiscal year, from October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007. This year was another productive year for the planning and

applying of conservation to our Minnesota landscape.

Our Minnesota NRCS programs continue to help agricultural operators to address their resource concerns. To this end we see more customers coming in the door at our USDA Service Centers.

Much of the success MN NRCS was able to achieve were due in part to the strong grass roots support that exists throughout Minnesota for soil and water conservation. Our conservation results was possible because of the sheer dedication of our employees.

As I look to the new year of 2008, I have renewed enthusiasm for accomplishing even more on the conservation front. I know that we can and will continue to make a difference in Minnesota's natural resources because of people such as yourself that have a passion for the land.

The mission of the NRCS is:
"Helping People Help the Land."

WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist

William Hunt gave opening remarks at the 2007 Earth day celebration held at Whitewater State Park. An announcement was made for the 2007 USDA EQIP program for the Driftless Area of the Upper Mississippi River Basin. The Basin includes, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin.



L-R Dustin Jasken, MN NRCS Tribal Liaison, William Hunt, MN NRCS State Conservationist, Dawn Kier, Agriculture/Wetlands Manager, White Earth and Mark Rey, USDA Under Secretary for Natural Resources. The White Earth tribe became Minnesota's first tribal conservation district on May 8, 2007 in White Earth, Minnesota.



William Hunt MN State Conservationist stakes out the corners of an agricultural waste facility using the Robotic Total Station under direction of Michael Hemmann (CET, Waite Park) as landowner Dan Atkinson of Atkinson Acres looks on.

Conservation Security Program

At the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2006, CSP participants with FY2004 and FY2005 contracts were allowed to request contract improvement modifications. This included contract holders in the Blue Earth, Root, Sauk, Redwood, Redeye, and Red Lake Watersheds. Participants were allowed to transition between Tiers, bringing in the remainder of their agricultural operation if they were transitioning from Tier I to Tier II or Tier III. The option to add newly acquired land and new enhancements was limited to participants who were already at Tier III and those who were transitioning to Tier III.

In FY2007, the contract improvement modifications were approved for funding. Due to the contract improvement modifications, the number of Tier II FY2005 contracts increased from 91 in 2005 to 144 during the modification period. Tier III FY2005 contracts increased from 17 in 2005 to 134 during the modification period, an increase of 117 contracts. Based on the number of producers who transitioned to Tier II and Tier III during the modification period, additional conservation was applied by CSP participants in Minnesota.

In FY2007 USDA did not conduct a new CSP sign-up or allow additional contract improvement modifications. It is anticipated that a new CSP sign-up will be conducted in the Thief Watershed during the early part of calendar year 2008.

In FY2007, CSP participants received approximately \$8,800,000 in payments as part of their CSP contracts. The following table summarizes the Conservation Security Program Active Contracts by Tier and by Fiscal Year. The table also includes the total obligations between FY2004 and FY2007.

	Tier I	Tier II	Tier III	Total	Obligations (FY2004- FY2007)
2004	89	36	9	134	\$4,689,599
2005	284	144	134	562	\$16,485,082
2006	0	15	0	15	\$332,157
Total	373	195	143	711	\$21,506,835

Emergency Watershed Program-Help after the Storm

EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROGRAM

Southeast Minnesota residents may have lived through some of the worst flash flooding in state history during the August storms of 2007. The director of emergency management in Houston County reported nearly 20 inches of rain fell over a two day period. In some areas of Houston and Winona County over 17 inches of rain fell in one 24 hour period. The previous record was about 10.5 inches in 24 hours.

NRCS is providing assistance in flood recovery through the Emergency Watershed Program (EWP). Funding was allocated for sites in Minnesota City and Hokah that were believed to be in immediate danger if not treated. Additional funding is anticipated for sites with less urgent needs.



The banks of Garvin Brook in Minnesota City are being stabilized through EWP Program assistance after damaging floodwaters moved the Brook up to 80 feet toward these home sites.



Several homes and businesses in the Hokah, MN area suffered damage from landslides combined with gully erosion. EWP assistance was provided to prevent further soil movement and loss of these properties.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program

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 FY2007 Minnesota allocated \$26,289,610 in general EQIP financial assistance. These funds provided financial assistance to 1,528 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 Anoka and Ramsey Counties where we did not have any eligible applicants. A portion of the FY2007 EQIP funding was designated to assisting Limited Resource Producers and American Indians. Forty-four Limited Resource Producers were allocated a total of \$1.35 million and \$11,498 was distributed through two American Indian EQIP contracts.

When extreme drought conditions occurred in Northern Minnesota NRCS partnered with the State of Minnesota – Board of Water and Soil Resources and private landowners to install grazing systems including alternative water systems for livestock. The State put in \$500,000, NRCS contributed \$1.5 million and landowners themselves contributed over \$2 million.

In Minnesota NRCS took the lead on a multi-state effort focused on conservation practices in the Driftless Area of MN, WI, IA and IL. NRCS earmarked nearly \$9.2 million of EQIP funds to this area. Once again MN took the lead, with nearly one half of the total.

In 2007 allocations were made to assist producers implement conservation practices that are identified in Public Law 566 (PL-566) Watershed Plans. This was necessary appropriations from Washington were not received for the PL-566 program. However, two watersheds received funding, the Kanarazie Little Rock (KLR) Watershed in Nobles County received \$183,808 and the Whitewater River Watershed in Winona, Wabasha and Olmsted Counties received \$257,193.

Through the Ground and Surface Water Conservation portion of EQIP, an additional \$360,993 was allocated to 30 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 to save water and energy resources and reduce groundwater contamination potential.

In FY2007 \$9.81 million was paid to



Through EQIP, this water control sediment basin was cost-shared in Scott county, MN

Continued

landowners to apply conservation practices. The majority of these funds came from previously contracted practices that were planned to be applied in 2007. This expenditure from previous contract years represents the bulk of the conservation accomplishments in FY2007. Most of the practices that were planned using 2007 funds will actually be applied in subsequent years.

Highlights of the practices applied and obligated listed by primary natural resource concern:

Livestock Related Practices *applied* - \$5,319,331

Livestock Related Practices *obligated* - \$12,552,314

Examples of livestock related practices:

- Fencing
- Pipeline
- Pasture and hay planting
- Animal mortality facility
- Wastewater and feedlot runoff control systems

Erosion Control Practices *applied* - \$2,903,439

Erosion Control Practices *obligated* - \$10,377,323

Examples of erosion control practices:

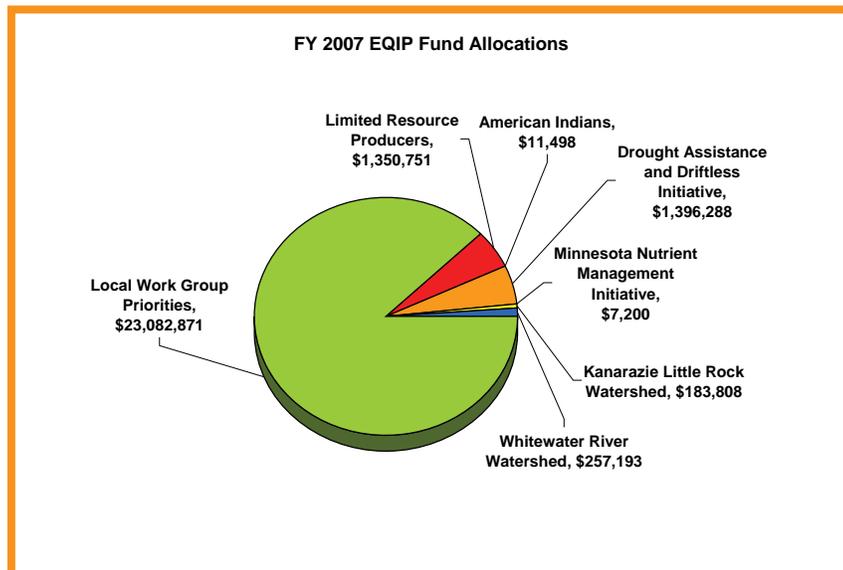
- Residue management
- Grassed waterway
- Diversion
- Terrace

Water Quality Practices *applied* - \$406,804

Water Quality Practices *obligated* - \$1,958,382

Examples of water quality practices:

- Nutrient management
- Stream crossing
- Riparian forest buffer



Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

2007 was another successful year for the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) in Minnesota. In Dakota County, the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District and NRCS continue to partner on this effort working with private landowners to protect farmland.

In 2007, \$669,391 of USDA – NRCS FRPP funding was received. 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 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 as well as other associated costs to secure the easement and administer the program.

This is the fifth year that Dakota County was awarded FRPP funds. This includes over \$540,000 in 2006, \$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 \$5.1 million to Dakota County over the past five years.

One landowner had a Dakota County FRPP easement perfected in 2007. This included a total of 149 acres all of which is prime farmland. The easement utilizes FRPP funding and lists USDA as having a legal interest in the easement, and protects these lands from being converted to non-agricultural land uses.

Additional easements are currently being processed and another Dakota County signup has occurred. Interest remains strong and a number of easements will close in fiscal year 2008.



The National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employee's 14th Annual Training Conference was held in Bloomington, MN. One of the conservation tour sites that the conference participants visited was for a FRPP easement site in Dakota county.



Brian Watson, Dakota Soil and Water Conservation District Manager shared information regarding the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Area Program with the tour participants who attended the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees conference.

Grassland Reserve Program

The Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) continues to be a successful program in Minnesota. Once again, the number of applications far exceeded the state's allocation of \$300,000. A new scoring criterion was enacted this year earning bonus points for limited resource farmers, beginning farmers or tribal lands or producers. Only one applicant was approved under this criterion which was a beginning farmer. The scoring worksheet still emphasizes plant biodiversity, conversion potential and supporting of existing grazing operations. This was the first time since 2004 that new applications were accepted.

Out of a total of 35 applications from 15 counties; 14 contracts from 8 counties were approved for a total of \$276,331 on 1200 acres. Since 2003, 24 counties have a total of 112 contracts placing 15,978 grassland acres under restoration or protection.

Three counties had their first GRP contract approvals: Wabasha, Jackson and Big Stone. Murray County leads the state with the most contracts adding 3 new ones, the most approvals in any county this year; it has a total of 23 active contracts on 1,737 acres. Wilkin County has the most acres enrolled in GRP with 2,550 acres in 18 contracts.

The purpose of GRP is to protect and restore privately owned grassland to 1) preserve high quality grasslands; 2) conserve and protect eligible lands that are subject to risk of conversion to another landuse; 3) support grazing operations and 4) maintain and improve plant and animal biodiversity. This voluntary program provides financial and technical assistance resulting in improved grasslands containing a diversity of forbs and shrubs, increasing water quality and wildlife habitats while reducing soil erosion, sedimentation and flooding.



Lance Smith, NRCS grazing specialist provided numerous grazing training at grazing workshops during FY2007. Lance was observing the clipping of the grass.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

In 2007, the Grazing Specialist staff decreased to a total of three individuals upon the retirement of the State Specialist. His workload was divided among the three remaining specialists.

Group and individual training sessions for both new and experienced staff were conducted that served a total of 287 individuals. Additionally, day long sessions were held for 384 grazing land owners and managers and a majority of these sessions were held during the winter season. An additional 87 cooperating agency and employees of other agricultural sector employees attended the sessions.

NRCS staff, Minnesota Department of Agriculture and SWCD staff conducted 26 demonstration projects with 24 producers.

A total of thirty-four grazing lands presentations, that included workshops, seminars, tours and field days were attended by 709 individuals. The Grazing Specialists and the MDA employee under contract produced 144 Grazing Plans, 98 Grazing plan reviews, and 178 follow-up visits.

Although grazing staff numbers decreased, output of educational and planning products continued at a high level as a result of cooperative efforts by NRCS Grazing Specialists, Minnesota Department of Agriculture, and SWCD Staff. NRCS regional grazing specialists took on additional planning, training and administrative responsibilities to ensure a high level of service to both our external and internal customers.



Mark Hayek, Grazing Specialist shares his expertise at a Grazing Workshop sponsored by Pembina Trail RC&D



Grazing Workshops held in FY 2007 were very successful and brought more people together to learn about the arts and science of grazing in Minnesota!

Plant Materials Program

The plant materials program has provided many benefits to Minnesota residents through the years and was made possible because of the strong support from both our field office employees and partners.

In Minnesota, we have three Off Center Evaluation Planting (OCEP) sites in Morris, Becker and Grand Rapids. These sites are currently evaluating (1) Silverscape hybrid olive, a cross between Russian olive and silver berry. (2) European Cranberry, does well at all OCEPs. (3) American black Currant – fruit is desirable and has nice fall color.

Additional plantings were completed at each of these sites in the spring of 2007 with assistance from NRCS state and field office staff. All of the new and existing plantings were evaluated in August. Measurements and notes were taken on crown spread and plant height, disease and insect damage, drought and cold tolerance, fruit production, survival, vigor and animal damage. A field planting review for black chokeberry was also conducted and this specie is scheduled for a formal release in 2008.

During FY2007, nine employees attended three full days of training at the Plant Materials Center in Bismark, North Dakota. A total of 34 field plantings across the state were evaluated by field office staff in the Fall of 2007. Some of the findings were that Amur Chokecherry did not generally do well in Mn, low survival; Black Chokeberry is a good fruit producer and has good survival. Manifest Intermediate Wheatgrass is doing well and was scheduled for release in 2007.

During FY2007, the following plant materials were requested for field plantings: Sweet Grass, White Sage, American Black Current, Fireberry Hawthorn.

The Fond du Lac Tribal College continues to perform a variety of projects with plant materials. They are collecting ash seeds, conducting prescribed burns on blueberries, and performing site evaluations at Cloquet.

Two new brochures were produced to promote plant materials:
Native Pollinator Plants for Conservation Practices in Minnesota
Living Landscapes in Minnesota: A guide to Native Plantscaping

The Terrestrial Plant Invasive Species Conference was held in March to provide information on the identification and control of some of these problem plants. During FY2007, an incentive was offered in EQIP for terrestrial invasive plant species control, an interim practice standard was written and numerous job sheets on controlling specific plants were produced.

David Wise received the National Plant Materials Special Service Award for 2006, and was presented to Dave in 2007.



L-R Dave Wise , Tribal Liaison for Fond du Lac Tribal College receives the National Plant Materials Special Service Award from William Hunt, MN NRCS State Conservationist

Resource Conservation and Development

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 34 new projects and completed 81 during the past year. There are 106 projects currently being implemented. Federal contributions to these completed projects total \$1.9 million. Contributions from other government and non-government sources toward these projects exceeded \$9.4 million. Fifty-three businesses were established and 26 businesses were expanded or retained. Over 75 workshops, tours, training events or seminars were held. A total of over 49,000 citizens received service, with almost 2,600 of those individuals being economically or socially disadvantaged people. RC&D's in Minnesota took on two significant statewide projects during the past year. First, the dry hydrant program provided water sources for rural fire departments. And second, offered the Productive Conservation on Working Lands program to farmers wanting to establish income producing conservation crops rather than entering an easement program.



Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty served as the Keynote speaker at the Summer Meeting of the Minnesota Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils. Pawlenty enthusiastically supported Laurentian Resource Conservation and Development's (LRC&D) Renewable Energy Clean Air Project (RECAP) as an outstanding example of what local community leaders need to do the reinvigorate and energize their communities.



Colleen Oestreich, RC&D Coordinator for Giziibii RC&D was named recipient of the Outstanding Staff Member Award by the Minnesota Association of Resource Conservation and Development Councils, Inc. (MARC&D). Jim Hall, MARC&D President presented Colleen with a plaque and a token of appreciation.



L-R William Hunt, State Conservationist and Delores Adkins, Pembina Trail RC&D Board member. Mr. Hunt reminded the attendees of the Summer RC&D meeting that RC&D in Minnesota makes things happen! The RC&D Summer event made the front page of the International Falls paper!

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 soil mapping 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 so 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, and as time progressed, soil mapping technology followed suit. 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 field office and archived at the National Cartography and Geospatial Center.

During FY2007, Minnesota soil scientists mapped 1,355,858 acres or 102.3% 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 77 counties in Minnesota that meet SSURGO standards, and work is underway on many others. During FY2007, 9 more counties 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 on the Minnesota NRCS website at: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov.



L-R Al Gienke, Earth Team volunteer, Tom Jackson, MLRA Soil Survey Coordinator and Douglas Miller, Area Soil Scientist view a soil sample in south-central Minnesota.



Russell Plumb, Soil Scientist from the Baxter Soil Survey Office makes it a point to check out those soil mapping details. 13

Technical Assistance

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) encompasses the majority of the work that 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.

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



L-R Some new NRCS employees, Justin Lindner, Sangeetha Gummadi, Manila Khouchaleun, and Lakelle Pritchett, learn about soil properties and suitabilities during a field trip to some soil pits.



Employees learned about surveying during the Conservation Application workshop. These foundational skills are important for NRCS employees.



Joni Franklin, Soil Conservationist, Waite Park answers student questions at the 2007 Area IV Senior Envirothon.



Noel Frank NRCS District Conservationist in Steele County and Irvin Barth former Conservation Technician with the Root River SWCD in Caledonia released Bob White quail on Noel's farm in Fillmore County in an effort to restore quail population in that area.

Technical Service Provider

The 2002 Farm Bill authorized USDA to use Technical Service Providers (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, Minnesota NRCS is able to increase the technical assistance and services available to landowners. Approximately 175 individuals are currently certified as TSPs in Minnesota – by far the most of any state in the nation.

In FY2007 over \$1.7 million was allocated to agreements and contracts with TSPs; \$619,000 went to the private sector and \$1,088,000 went to the public sector. A small portion (\$3,900) of the private sector funds went to WRP engineering services, the remaining money went to support the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Producers contract with TSPs to primarily:

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

Additionally, fiscal year 2007 and earlier EQIP contracts, have scheduled the development and implementation of over 2,600 nutrient management, and over 1,400 pest management plans through the next 3 years. Private sector TSPs will provide or have to provide technical assistance on many of those contracts in addition to nutrient and pest management scheduled by fiscal year 2008 EQIP contracts.

Public sector funds were allocated to a number of public agencies and non-profit organizations including; Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), 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 the EQIP, Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP), Conservation Technical Assistance, Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP).

Activities included:

- designing and installing conservation practices
- developing forestry plans
- developing habitat improvement plans
- developing grazing plans
- topographical surveying
- designing wetland restorations
- monitoring existing wetland restorations
- developing CRP plans

The \$1,088,000 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 are provided. The actual value of the technical assistance provided in 2007 through TSPs in Minnesota is close to \$2.8 million.

NRCS TSP training efforts were expanded through the State of Minnesota Clean Water Legacy Program funds. The Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) and Minnesota Extension Service are spearheading this new training initiative. See the following web site for upcoming TSP training sponsored by this initiative: <http://tsp.umn.edu> (Continue on page 16)

Technical Service Provider (continued)

During the past year TSP training sponsored by this new initiative included; Nutrient Management and Comprehensive Nutrient Management Planning. NRCS state and regional water quality specialists and Thief River Falls Area Office personnel provided additional nutrient and pest management training to TSPs.

Watershed Program

WATERSHED PLANNING AND OPERATIONS

The Pelican River Watershed Plan is complete. The purpose of this plan is to reduce phosphorous levels entering Big Detroit Lake. The Watershed District is now working to implement the plan. Spring Brook Watershed Planning process continues on schedule. This plan is to provide ecological restoration of streams in the area, and flood protection of adjacent cropland. The Spring Brook Plan will be completed early in 2008. The Whitewater and Kanaranzi-Little Rock Land Treatment watersheds continue to provide watershed protection assistance through long-term contracting with local farmers. No new watershed funds were available for these projects over the past year, but a priority was given to these areas for EQIP funding. Sixteen long term contracts were completed during the past year. The Snake River Watershed is providing anticipated flood protection benefits to the City of Warren. Planning and work on environmental mitigation will continue into 2008.



Aerial view of the Snake River Project area.



The design and successful implementation of a flood-control structure at Snake River has made a tremendous impact on reducing the flooding in northern Minnesota.

Wetlands Reserve Program

Minnesota received over \$17 million in Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funding in Fiscal Year 2007. Seventy-four applicants were chosen for funding and NRCS completed appraisals on their land. Due to low appraised values, booming agricultural land values and high rental rates, nearly all landowners rejected the WRP offer. Only four offers were accepted for a total obligation of \$1.2 million on nearly 1,100 acres. This included a 972 acre easement with The Nature Conservancy. The easement is an addition to the extensive Glacial Ridge Project in Polk County. Since the majority of the offers were declined, nearly \$13 million of the original allocation was pulled back to Washington to be used by other states.

Minnesota NRCS received a \$3.75 million allocation for a special Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Special WRP Project. In this partnership effort, a WRP easement is taken for 30 years and then the land remains protected in perpetuity with a RIM easement. This funding was not going to be used due to a lack of RIM funding from the State of Minnesota. When RIM funds became available, during a short 2 week period in mid-September, the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and NRCS staff put together offers and presented them to the applicants who rejected the WRP only offers. Sixteen applicants accepted the new offers on nearly 1,600 acres for a total RIM allocation of \$1.6 million and a WRP total of over \$2 million. In addition, after the restoration plans are completed NRCS will allocate, in a future fiscal year, another \$1 million for restoration costs for these projects.

In FY2007 Minnesota recorded 23 easements on nearly 4,800 acres in 8 counties. The easements were funded with prior year WRP allocations.

Field offices assisted landowners to complete 6,578 acres of upland restoration and 4,087 acres of wetland restoration. The total spent on these restorations was \$3,749,058.

NRCS continued to be a partner in the Habitat Conservation Partnership (HCP), a multi-year project funded by the Minnesota State Legislature as recommended by the Legislative Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). Through a cooperative effort between NRCS and Ducks Unlimited (DU), 7 WRP contract technicians provided assistance to landowners who are located in HCP priority corridors. The HCP funding along with DU assistance has focused WRP funding into identified high priority areas within the state.



Native flowers oasis established on WRP

Wetlands Reserve Program

In late September the HCP celebrated our 100,000th acre of land protected for wildlife habitat in just a short five year period. These acres represent a significant increase in wildlife habitat throughout the state and through the WRP, NRCS is a major contributor to this partnership effort.

Beginning in FY2006 and continuing through the field season of FY2007, Minnesota launched a monitoring program to evaluate established WRP easements. In a cooperative effort between NRCS, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), DU, Freeborn and Steele Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the Pembina RC&D, nearly 500 established easements were field visited and evaluated.

Each site was photographed and detailed notes were recorded on the success of planting and hydrology, presence of invasive or noxious weeds, wildlife habitat, and potential violations of the terms of the easement. In a follow-up program, local NRCS District Conservationists are working with WRP easement landowners to correct and repair identified problems.



The Wetlands Reserve Program made a difference in Minnesota's landscape.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program



The WHIP program has yielded some outstanding habitat results in Goodhue county at the Trelstad farm.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for people who want to develop or improve wildlife habitat on tribal and private lands. It provides both technical assistance and cost sharing to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Minnesota's WHIP plan focuses on the establishment and management of native habitats, including at risk species. WHIP contracts are coordinated with other local, state, tribal and federal initiative, which allows the program to reach many more customers.

2007 Accomplishments

Minnesota received a total of 142 eligible applications in FY2007, and the dollar value of applications received exceeded \$500,000. Minnesota was able to fund 77 contracts establishing and enhancing over 2100 acres at a cost share of over \$365,000.

Practices include:

- establishment of **777 acres** of native shrubs, grasses and forbs,
- **360 acres** of brush land management,
- **1110 acres** of prescribed burning,
- **116 acres** of timber stand improvement,
- **16 acres** of wetlands were restored,
- **8 acres** of tree planting,
- **4770 feet** of stream habitat enhancement and bank protection,
- **73 acres** of declining species habitat enhanced, and
- **260 acres** of invasive species management.

Program Benefits

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

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



Wildflowers flourish in Isanti county, MN following a prescribed burn.

***The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of
The United States Department of Agriculture.***

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