



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

2008 Accomplishments Report



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



In this issue:

- State Conservationist's Message
- Conservation Security Program
- Emergency Watershed Program
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
- Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative
- Healthy Forests Reserve Program
- Plant Materials Program
- Resource Conservation and Development
- Soil Survey
- Technical Assistance
- Technical Service Provider
- Watershed Program
- Wetlands Reserve Program
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program



Mission: Helping People Help the Land

Vision: Productive Land, Healthy Environment



On the cover:

Sunshine shows off the beautiful fall colors on the maple trees in Minnesota. Another reminder, how precious our natural resources are.

State Conservationist's Messages



On behalf of the Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff, I proudly present the 2008 Accomplishment's Report. This report covers one fiscal year, from October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2008.

This past fiscal year was another successful year for the planning and application of conservation practices for our Minnesota landscape.

Our NRCS programs continue to help Minnesota's agricultural producers in addressing their resource concerns. Our results on the landscape were made possible because of the continued support and dedication of our employees and conservation partners.

As I look to the new year of 2009, I have a renewed commitment to accomplishing even more on the conservation front. Together, we can and will continue to make a difference with Minnesota's natural resources.

The mission of the NRCS is:

"Helping People Help the Land."

WILLIAM HUNT
State Conservationist



Conservation Security Program

2008 marked a significant turning point in the CSP program. Producers in the Thief Watershed in northwest Minnesota were among 51 watersheds throughout the nation which were eligible to submit applications for enrollment in the Conservation Security Program (CSP) during the 2008 signup. Changes to both the eligibility requirements, through the use of a new nationally developed “Soil and Water Evaluation Tool”, and the restriction which eliminated state-specific enhancements resulted in reduced producer interest in the program.

With the passage of the 2008 Farm Bill the CSP becomes a legacy program which will be replaced in 2009 with the newly authorized Conservation Stewardship Program. This change makes the Thief Watershed, which is approximately 603,600 acres in size, with 122,000 acres of cropland and 16,900 acres of pasture, the last watershed in MN to hold a CSP sign-up.

As a result of the signup, ten 2008 CSP contracts were approved for funding in Minnesota. The total FY 2008 payments for the new contracts totaled \$133,452 dollars. Table 1 shows the breakdown of current CSP contracts by year of signup and by Tier, including the total number of acres enrolled in CSP. Table 2 shows the CSP payments made in FY 2008 and the average dollar about per contract.

Table 1: CSP Contracts by Year of Signup and by Tier

Year	Tier I	Tier II	Tier III	Total New Contracts ⁽¹⁾	Total Acres
2004	83	35	9	127	55,985
2005	282	142	134	558	141,585
2006	0	15	0	15	8,141
2008	1	6	3	10	19,084
Total	366	197	147	710	224,795

⁽¹⁾This does not include contracts that have been cancelled or terminated.

Conservation Security Program

Table 2: CSP Payments made in FY 2008

Fiscal Year	Total CSP Payments By Fiscal Year	Average Payment Per Contract Per Year
2008 Payments	\$8,623,492	Total Payments / 710 = \$12,145.76
Prior Year Contracts	\$8,492,734	Total Payments/700 = \$12,132.50
2008 Contracts	\$133,451	Total Payments/10 = \$13,345



Gwen Kappes, District Conservationist in Marshall County, and Larry Voltz, District Conservationist in Beltrami County, present information to interested producers at the Grygla CSP Outreach Meeting during the FY 2008 CSP signup.

Emergency Watershed Program

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, and were hit again in June of 2008. In areas of Houston and Winona County three record rainfall events have taken place in the past year. Prior to last August, the 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, Hokah, Goodview, Houston County, and Rochester. While work needed to provide immediate protection of life and property was completed, other work continues on sites in less imminent danger.



Floodwaters eroded thousands of cubic yards of soil and destroyed several acres of mature trees to threaten ten homes in Minnesota City.



NRCS provided immediate assistance under the EWP program to rebuild the bank and protect the threatened homes in Minnesota City.

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 FY 2008 Minnesota was allocated \$34,060,364 in general EQIP financial assistance. These funds provided financial assistance to 2028 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 and funds were obligated with landowners in all counties of the state except for Lake and Ramsey Counties, where we did not have any applicants.

A portion of the FY 2008 EQIP funding was designated to assisting Limited Resource Producers and American Indians. Of this amount, 43 contracts with \$1,179,171 of funds were obligated to Limited Resource Producers. These individuals must meet national guidelines and are in need of special financial assistance to complete conservation practices. Once again, NRCS prioritized assistance to American Indian applicants and funded 10 high priority contracts for \$83,269.

In 2008, after much discussion with producers and the State Technical Committee a subcommittee of the State Technical Committee was formed to discuss and formulate alternatives to provide additional assistance to Beginning Farmers. They met a number of times and provided input to NRCS on this effort. It was decided to offer additional financial assistance to Beginning Farmers who met the national definition, up to 90% cost sharing as allowed by law. Statewide, 146 contracts were obligated for \$4,980,466 with eligible Beginning Farmers.

As a continuation of the flood assistance efforts started in 2007, NRCS continued to partner with the State of Minnesota – Board of Water and Soil Resources and private landowners to allocate EQIP funds to the affected counties in SE Minnesota. There were 57 landowners who received a total of \$471,418. When additional flooding occurred in 2008 in the SE, NRCS nationally focused additional EQIP resources to assist affected landowners. A total of 55 contracts were obligated for \$381,173 to repair damaged conservation practices and treat environmental concerns caused by the flooding.



Established native grasses and forbs using EQIP in Pennington County

Continued

Once again NRCS continued to provide assistance to producers affected by a continuing drought in the Northern part of the state. Practices were primarily focused on assisting livestock producers better manage their forage through the use of water developments, fencing and other practices needed to implement a complete grazing system. As a result, 35 producers took advantage of this special funding with \$1,103,454 obligated into contracts.

In 2008 allocations were made to assist producers to implement conservation practices that had been identified in Public Law 566 (PL-566) Watershed Plans. This was needed when no appropriations from Washington were received for the PL-566 program. Two watersheds received funding. The Kanaranzie Little Rock (KLR) Watershed in Nobles County received \$224,675 for 13 producers and the Whitewater River Watershed in Winona, Wabasha and Olmsted Counties received \$161,551 for 10 producers.

Through the Ground and Surface Water Conservation (GSWC) portion of EQIP, an additional \$273,509 was allocated to 31 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 2008 over \$11 million was paid to landowners to apply conservation practices. The majority of these funds came from previously contracted practices that were planned to be applied in 2008. This expenditure from previous contract years represents the bulk of the conservation accomplishments in FY 2008. Most of the practices that have been planned using 2008 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* - \$ 4,515,207

Livestock Related Practices *obligated* - \$ 12,587,836

Examples of livestock related practices:

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

Erosion Control Practices *applied* - \$ 4,121,906

Erosion Control Practices *obligated* - \$ 8,865,985

Examples of erosion control practices:

- Residue management
- Grassed waterway
- Diversion
- Terrace

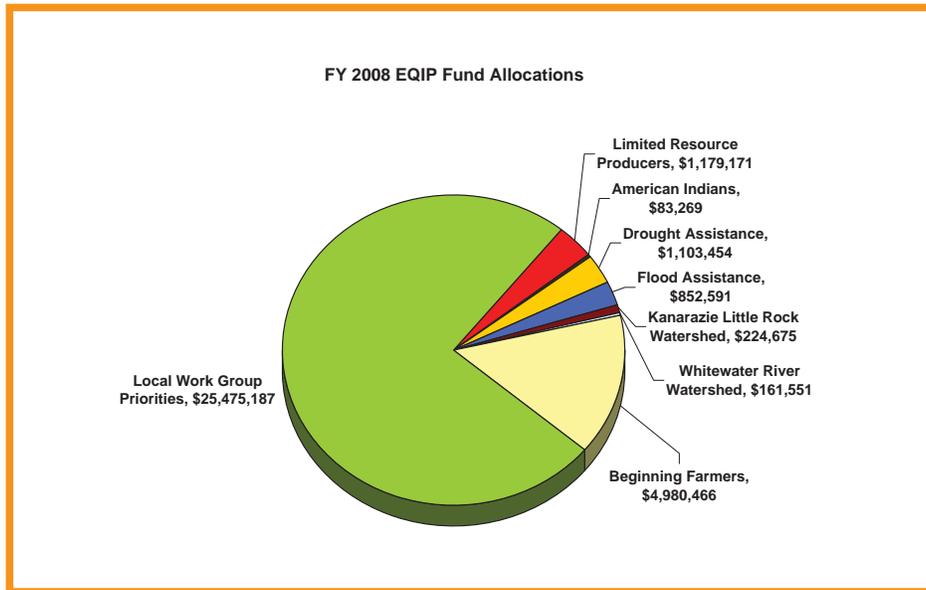
Continued

Water Quality Practices *applied* - \$ 2,421,081

Water Quality Practices *obligated* - \$ 5,209,208

Examples of water quality practices:

- Nutrient management
- Stream crossing
- Riparian forest buffer



EQIP funds spent at Chuck Nilsons Farm. In Faribault County. (Before)



Manure lagoon that was installed in McLeod County this summer using EQIP funds. (before)



(After)



(After)



Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

2008 was another 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 farmland.

\$ 2,576,000 of USDA – NRCS FRPP funding was received in 2008. Due to the new Federal Farm Bill negotiations and then its subsequent passage a competitive Request for Proposal process was not utilized nationwide in 2008. Instead we utilized the 2007 selected entities for 2008 and Dakota County was selected to receive funding since they were the only entity that was funded in 2007.

The FRPP funds will continue to support Dakota Counties 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 sixth year that Dakota County has been awarded FRPP funds. This includes \$670,000 in 2007, 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 \$7.736 million to Dakota County over the past six years.



Preserved agricultural land in Dakota County, Minnesota.

Four landowners had a Dakota County/NRCS FRPP easement perfected in 2008. This included a total of 545 acres all of which were prime farmland, except for 7 acres. The easement utilizes FRPP funding and lists USDA as having a legal interest in the easement. The easement 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 2009.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

The Minnesota GLCI committee met as a group in St. Cloud, Minnesota on April 16, 2008. The group decided to convene a bylaws meeting and to send letters of support for a unified policy for Bovine Tuberculosis management to the Minnesota Board of Animal Health, University of Minnesota Extension and sportsmen's organizations. Part of the discussion at the meeting centered on the possibility of obtaining non-profit status after the bylaws had been adopted. A bylaws meeting was held on July 30 with a draft set produced and sent out for committee review.

The Minnesota GLCI works in conjunction with many partners to promote and foster proper grazing management. One of the main partners is NRCS which maintains three full time grazing staff. In addition to these NRCS employees, technical assistance on grazing was augmented by a contracted Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) employee who planned 3000 acres through a NRCS Technical Service Provider Contribution Agreement. In addition to these designated grazing specialists MN also has many trained NRCS and SWCD staff that provide assistance on grazing and grazing related conservation practices.

Overall training efforts related to grazing, pasture management and livestock production increased in comparison to FY 07 with 259 NRCS employees trained, 1095 producers trained in one-on-one sessions, and 72 cooperating agency employees trained. Training for NRCS and cooperating agency employees focused on grassland data collection and resource evaluation. This training emphasis was aimed at enhancing and increasing the capability of local resource staff to complete the initial portion of the planning process with livestock producers.

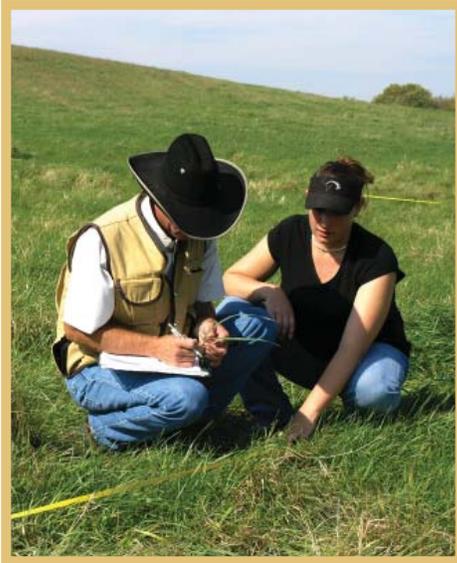
MN GLCI was involved with twenty grazing related demonstration projects. Fifteen of these projects are with producers that have an existing managed grazing system and are used to demonstrate the proper grazing concepts to prospective USDA conservation program participants and others interested in implementing a managed grazing system. These existing grazing systems cover a variety of livestock types and vary in their intensity of management. Another of these demonstration projects involves a grazing system on a MN DNR Wildlife Management Area, and partners with the USFW, MN DNR, and private landowners.

Public education and awareness projects were an important component of the GLCI effort due to



Rotational grazing is a livestock production system where livestock graze in one portion (a paddock) of pasture that has been divided into several paddocks. Livestock are systematically moved from paddock to paddock based on the stage of growth of the forages and on the objectives of the grazing system. While one paddock is being grazed, the rest of the pasture rests. This rest and recovery time maintains forage plants in a healthy and vigorous condition.

Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative



Conducting a pasture evaluation is an important step when planning a grazing system.

Media coverage of grazing events co-sponsored by GLCI increased in FY 2008. There were a total of eight newspaper articles written by or about one of the NRCS Grazing Specialists and grazing related educational events. "Prairie News" and "Agri News" are two publications with a wide readership among producers. These publications wrote a total of three articles that featured grazing specialists providing assistance to livestock producers.

In addition to newspaper coverage, two of the NRCS grazing specialists were interviewed on radio and television. Mark Hayek was featured in a radio interview with Mick Kjar on A.M. 890 out of Lisbon ND, reaching all of NE North Dakota and NW Minnesota. Hayek talked about the Coffee Shop meetings that were held to provide producers information on the Livestock TB issue in the NW portion of the state. John Zinn was interviewed on Lakeland Public Television at a grazing meeting in Crow Wing County and appeared on the 10 P.M. news. The newspaper articles, radio and television coverage reached an estimated 350,000 people.

increased demand by other agencies and producer groups for technical grazing services. Events were co-sponsored by the University of Minnesota Extension Service, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health, the Minnesota Sheep and Wool Producers' Association and the Minnesota Buffalo Association. The three NRCS grazing specialists participated in 51 meetings that were attended by approximately 2300 people. These meetings increased public awareness about grazing technology, grazing related technical assistance and financial assistance available through USDA programs. Information on Prescribed Grazing and USDA conservation programs was also provided at the University of Minnesota sponsored "Cow-Calf Days" which occurred at 14 locations throughout the state. GLCI also assisted with the first Southeast Minnesota Grazing School which was co-sponsored by the local RC&D council and will be continued in FY09.



Minnesota has a diverse animal agriculture industry. In addition to dairy, beef, hogs and poultry there are smaller farm operations with buffalo, elk and even goats that utilize managed grazing systems to protect natural resources while generating farm revenue.

Healthy Forests Reserve Program

The Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP) was piloted in three states in 2006; Maine, Mississippi and Arkansas. The purpose of this voluntary easement program is to restore and enhance forest ecosystems by: 1) promoting the recovery of T&E species; 2) improving biodiversity; and, 3) enhancing carbon sequestration. In 2007, Minnesota NRCS in partnership with MN Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) Forest Legacy Program, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) submitted a proposal for the HFRP. In the spring of 2008, the proposal was accepted; now the real work begins.



Wabasha Blufflands

One of MNDNR's Forest Legacy Program's priority areas is the Wabasha Blufflands located in Wabasha County. The pristine and diverse woodlands are inhabited with two Federally listed threatened species: the timber rattlesnake and Blanding's turtle. State species of concern in this area include James sedge, Goldies fern, cliff goldenrod, wood sedge, American ginseng, Louisiana waterthrush, snow trillium and the moschatel. The Wabasha Blufflands are biologically important forestlands consisting of upland forests of oak, maple, ash, walnut and other valuable native hardwoods. State designated trout streams and the largest roadless forested area in Wabasha County are found here. Fragile dunes with important species and habitats also exist in the Wabasha Blufflands. Despite the uniqueness and ecological value of the area, the project received inadequate funding through the highly competitive Forest Legacy Program.

That uniqueness and ecological value plus the relationships MNDNR already had with the landowners made this project a perfect candidate for the HFRP. In fiscal year 2008, MN was the newest state to receive HFRP funding. Minnesota's program was funded at \$952,000. During the short sign-up period, March 17 through April 4, 2008, 16 landowners submitted applications for a total of 2372 acres. Most applicants requested a 99-year easement that offered 100% easement value plus 100% cost share for approved practices. A few applications requested a 30-year easement that offered 75% of the easement value + 75% of the average cost of approved practices. After a prioritization process, 6 applications, all in the 99-year easement category, were selected for funding and 5 landowners chose to continue with the program.



Blanding's Turtle

At this time the 5 applications are undergoing processing, land appraisals and timber cruises to determine an easement value. It is anticipated that easement offers will be made by late October or early November 2008. Landowners will then decide if they want to accept their offers. In the meantime forest management plans and forestland restoration plans are being drafted. Approved practices include Forest Stand Improvement, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, Forest Site Preparation, and Tree/Shrub Establishment. If all goes well, hundreds of acres of biologically unique and ecologically valuable forestlands will be protected for future generations to enjoy.

Plant Materials Program

The plant materials program has provided many benefits to Minnesota residents through the years and has enjoyed strong support from our field office employees and partners.

In Minnesota, we have three Off Center Evaluation Planting (OCEP) sites: Morris, Becker and Grand Rapids. They are currently evaluating (1) Silverscape hybrid olive, a cross between Russian olive and silver berry; it produces sterile seed and does not spread; (2) European Cranberry, does well at all OCEPs, may offer this one for field plantings in the next year or so. Similar to Highbush Cranberry, but the fruit is not as good; (3) American black Currant – fruit is desirable and has nice fall color – being evaluated.

Additional plantings were done at each of these sites in the spring of 2008 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.

Six employees attended three full days of training at the Plant Materials Center in Bismark in August.

In the fall, 39 field plantings across the state were evaluated by field office staff. Some of the findings were: black cherry seemed to do well and had a high survival rate; roundleaf hawthorn had fair to good overall performance; american black currant also seemed to be doing fairly well the first year. Manifest Intermediate Wheatgrass has been doing well and was released as scheduled in 2007.

Requests for plant materials for field plantings: Sweet Grass, 10 requests for 100 plants (total); White Sage, 6 requests for a total of 60 plants; Black Cherry, 7 requests for a total of 190 plants; Pin Cherry, 5 requests for a total of 125 plants; Black Chokeberry, one request for 15 plants.

Documentation and release brochures were completed by the PMC for 'McKenzie' Black Chokeberry and 'Prairie Red' hybrid plum. These were distributed to field offices and these plants are now available for use in conservation plantings.

Several new brochures and fact sheets were produced and distributed to field offices to promote plant materials:

Tribal Outreach Accomplishments and Activities

Tribal Assistance available Through the Plant Materials Program

Five Reasons to Use Native Grass Varieties/Releases

Big Bluestem Biomass Trials in North Dakota, south Dakota and Minnesota

Terrestrial Plant Invasive Species Conference was held in October to provide information on the identification and control of some of these problem plants. An incentive was offered in EQIP for terrestrial invasive plant species control. As of September, 2008, a total of \$87,532 was paid to 28 contracts on 1,844 acres in Minnesota. There are a total of 185 contracts that plan to control invasive plant species in future years on 7,396 acres for a total obligation of \$349,912. The most common species being controlled are common and glossy buckthorn, garlic mustard and Canada thistle.



The Milaca Field Office laid coconut fiber blankets on the slopes prior to planting the PMC Prairie Cordgrass plugs.

Resource Conservation and Development



Demonstrating the use of the Grazing Stick during the field portion of the Lyon County Grazing Tour on June 11, 2008. The Grazing Tour was attended by approximately 70 individuals interested in prescribed grazing.

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 60 new projects and completed 89 during the past year. There are 126 projects currently being implemented. Federal contributions to these completed projects total over \$1.5 million. Contributions from other government and non-government sources toward these projects exceeded \$5.1 million. Four businesses were established and 67 businesses were expanded or retained. 127 workshops, tours, training events or seminars were held. A total of over 43,000 citizens received service, with almost

3,200 of those individuals being economically or socially disadvantaged people. RC&D's in Minnesota continued work on two significant statewide projects during the past year. First, the dry hydrant program was completed provided 92 water sources for rural fire departments. And second, the Productive Conservation on Working Lands program continues to assist farmers wanting to establish income producing conservation crops rather than entering an easement program. has eight approved RC&D Areas,



Lance Smith, Grazing Specialist, presented information via a powerpoint presentation at the Lyon County Grazing tour on June 11, 2008.



From L-R: Dennis Hanson (Pipestone Performing Arts Center, Managing Director), Pat Beyers (Board Member, Pipestone Performing Arts Center), Ian Cunningham (Board Member, Coteau des Prairies RC&D), Jerry Remund (Pipestone County Commissioner), Luke Johnson (Pipestone County Commissioner).

The Performing Arts Center in Pipestone, received a \$2,500 grant from the Coteau des Prairie RC&D. The project involved placing insulation and an energy efficient fire door in the building.

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 soil 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 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. 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 field office and archived at the National Cartography and Geospatial Center.

During FY 2008, 1,250,384 acres were mapped in Minnesota.

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.



Larissa Schmitt, Soil Scientist, describing soil in a pit in Pine County, MN



Janine Milbradt, Soil Scientist, teaching 6th graders about the importance of soil conservation.

Currently, there are 80 counties in Minnesota that meet SSURGO standards, and work is underway on many others. During FY 2008, 2 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 onto the Minnesota NRCS website at: www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov.

Technical Assistance

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program provides technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools to help people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. The CTA program provides the technical capability, including conservation planning, design, and implementation assistance, that helps people plan and apply conservation on the land. This assistance is provided to individuals, groups, and communities who make natural resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands. NRCS, through the CTA Program, provides conservation technical assistance that addresses natural resource conservation issues at the local level that are of State and national concern.

The CTA Program provides the local delivery system and the foundation technical expertise for other NRCS programs. The CTA Program is unique because it provides a substantive level of technical expertise, background and support for Federal, tribal, State and local conservation programs. The working relationships that landowners and communities have with their local NRCS staff are unique. One-on-one help through flexible, voluntary programs occurs every day in local NRCS offices. It is the way that NRCS does business, and it works.



NRCS provides technical training to employees on an on-going basis.



The Center of Excellence at the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Cloquet, Minnesota provides employment opportunities for students interested in pursuing natural resources as a career.



NRCS engineers perform surveys and design engineering conservation practices using various types of surveying equipment.

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 FY 2008 \$1,353,084 allocated to agreements and contracts with TSPs; \$522,610 to the private sector and \$830,475 to the public sector. 100% of the private sector funding came from the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Producers contracted with TSPs to primarily:

- install structures that control waste water and feedlot runoff
- manage nutrients and pests
- implement other conservation practices

Additionally, fiscal year 2008 and earlier EQIP contracts have scheduled the implementation of approximately 2500 nutrient management plans and 1300 pest management plans over the next 3 years. Private sector TSPs will provide technical assistance on many of those contracts plus nutrient and pest management scheduled by fiscal year 2009 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, Ducks Unlimited, the 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
- installing CRP practices

The \$830,475 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 through TSPs in Minnesota in 2008 is over \$2 million.

Technical Service Provider (continued)

The University of Minnesota TSP Training Initiative sponsored and coordinated the following Fiscal Year 2008 TSP trainings: Introduction to RUSLE2, Advanced RUSLE2, Upland Land Treatment, Nutrient Management, Comprehensive Nutrient Management, and Pest Management. Instructors for these trainings included NRCS state, area and local staff; SWCD staff, MDA staff, UofM Extension staff and existing TSPs.

See the following web site for upcoming TSP training sponsored by this initiative:
<http://tsp.umn.edu>

NRCS state and regional water quality specialists also provided additional pest management training to TSPs at the annual Minnesota Crop Production Retailers Trade Show and UofM Short Course.

Watershed Program

WATERSHED PLANNING AND OPERATIONS

The Spring Brook Watershed Planning process was halted due to budget constraints, but a draft report was provided the sponsors to use in seeking other funds for implementation. This plan is to provide ecological restoration of streams in the area, and flood protection of adjacent cropland. 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. Fourteen long term contracts were completed during the past year. The Snake River Watershed is providing anticipated flood protection benefits to the City of Warren. Environmental mitigation was completed in 2008.



Photo Shows 4-5 ft boulders being placed in one sill of the rock riffle structure.



Completed rock riffle structure.

The purpose of this structure was to take 4 feet of grade out of the Snake River to slow velocities and control bank erosion. The structure was designed in collaboration with DNR to allow fish passage



Aerial photo shows the wetland mitigation area created to compensate for wetland impacts associated with the Snake River Project

Wetlands Reserve Program

Minnesota received \$14,067,284 in Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) funding in Fiscal Year 2008. Additionally, the State of Minnesota's Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Reinvest in Minnesota Reserve (RIM) Program allocated over \$12.1 million towards easements for a newly developed WRP-RIM easement partnership. Together, the partnership funded 94 easement projects in 23 counties on nearly 9400 acres. As with previous WRP-RIM partnerships, the WRP easement will be a 30-year easement and the RIM easement will be perpetual.



Baudler eggs

Local NRCS, Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Ducks Unlimited (DU) contractors, Minnesota Waterfowl Association staff and other partners secured 260 applications for over \$50 million in requests during the summer sign-up period. The applications were scored and funded based on the highest environmental benefits. BWSR and NRCS staff are now working with local staffs to fully secure the easements and restore the sites.

Due to all of these great efforts and landowner interest Minnesota received approximately 20% of the nationwide WRP total in federal fiscal year (FY) 2008!

In FY 2008 20 easements on over 2700 acres in 11 counties had WRP easements perfected. These were from previously funded applications.

Field offices assisted landowners to complete 4,375 acres of upland restoration and 3,739 acres of wetland restoration. The total spent on these restorations was \$2,975,418.

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), 10 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.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program



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.

2008 Accomplishments

Minnesota received an allocation of \$1.355 million for FY-08. Minnesota has approved contracts establishing and enhancing over 4000 acres at a cost share of over \$1,000,000.

Practices include:

- establishment of 815 acres of native shrubs, grasses and forbs,
- 460 acres of brush land management,
- 2000 acres of prescribed burning,
- 282 acres of timber stand improvement,
- 40 acres of wetlands were restored,
- 280 acres of declining species habitat enhanced, and
- 321 acres of woody invasive species management.



The WHIP program has produced some outstanding habitat results. Burn completed by Wildlife Consulting as part of a WHIP contract.

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.



The slopes are very steep and difficult to farm making the WHIP tree planting practice very suitable to fit this type of landscape.

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

For more information, please contact:

William Hunt

State Conservationist

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

375 Jackson Street

St. Paul, MN 55101

(651) 602-7900



United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.