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Minnesota Inter-Tribal Conservation Workshop A Consultation with NRCS

SAINT PAUL, MN, November 10, 2005-Shannon Bengtson, District Conservationist from the Mille Lacs Field Office has been working hard since October, 2004 to improve her technical assistance to the local Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. Shannon worked with Kevin Daw, Assistant State Conservationist-Field Operations, Duluth, MN and David Wise, Tribal Liaison for NRCS to pull off a Minnesota first, "Minnesota Inter-Tribal Conservation Workshop- A Consultation with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

On November 2, 2005 close to 60 employees and tribal members from the State of Minnesota attended this session. Participants learned more about USDA-NRCS farm programs such as the Conservation Security Program (CSP), The Farm Bill, Plant Materials Program, Rain Gardens and Technical Service Providers (TSP). This government to government session set the stage for future dialogue between NRCS and tribes.

William Hunt, State Conservationist for Minnesota NRCS said, "NRCS is here to reach out to the tribes in Minnesota and is open to receiving feedback as to how we are doing. Government to government relations is important." Curt Kalk, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Commissioner of Natural Resources welcomed the participants to the Grand Casino and was honored to be part of this session. The Mille Lacs Band has about 4,000 acres of trust lands.

A highlight of the event was the signing of a Cultural Resources Tribal Protocol. The Agreement outlines the process by which the NRCS will consult with the Band regarding cultural resources when NRCS plans to install practices within Mille Lacs Band reservation boundaries. The agreement also recognizes the sovereignty of the Mille Lacs Band and respects the government to government relationship between NRCS and the Band.

Patrick McLoughlin, NRCS Cultural Resources specialist said "Building relationships through successful consultation is important." McLoughlin reminded the participants that effective partnerships can't be established through laws, rather by building trust and relationships."

For additional information on the Minnesota Inter-Tribal Conservation Workshop, please contact Shannon Bengtson, District Conservationist, Milaca Field Office at (320)983-2154 or via e-mail at: Shannon.bengtson@mn.usda.gov