

Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

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Pecatonica River Pilot Project Tests Conservation Model for Cleaner Water

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative grant will help fund the Pleasant Valley Pilot Project to reduce Phosphorus loading to the Pecatonica River for five years

The Pecatonica Pilot Project is testing the ideas proclaimed by The Wisconsin Buffer Initiative: that water quality will be measurably improved by targeting just the farms contributing the very highest amounts of phosphorus to the stream; and that implementing the “soft” low-cost management type practices, first will be more effective than the high-cost structural practices.

“18% of the land base contributes 63% of the phosphorus load” – Pat Sutter, Dane County Land Conservation Dept.

After inventorying the 62 farms in the watershed, it was clear that majority of the phosphorus flowing into the stream came from only eight farms.

The CCPI money, just over \$600,000, was critical to target these few high-phosphorus

farms to see if management changes would have significant impact, as predicted by WBI. For these eight, a whole farm conservation plan will be done, with the management practices scheduled first to see the impact of the lower-cost practices. Throughout the project, USGS will monitor water quality changes in the pilot watershed as well as a control watershed.

Economics The University of Wisconsin is assessing the economics impacts to see if conservation practices cost the operation money, or if in fact they increase profitability.

“CCPI is the critical component, giving farmers the ability and the confidence to make the changes that we want to evaluate.” – Steve Richter, The Nature Conservancy

CCPI focuses funds from existing programs into a selected area, in tandem with the focused efforts of partners, such as non-profits or local government organizations. In CCPI, partners enter into five-year agreements with NRCS to combine efforts to focus conservation practices on agricultural lands in a selected area. The intent is to leverage investment for greater impact.



Pat Sutter, Dane County Conservationist, talks to Tim Keller about adding grass to their alfalfa seeding mix. Grass added with alfalfa helps reduce erosion and can be just as nutritious compared to direct seeding of alfalfa.



Sutter visits with Keller family. Photo shows rolling Driftless Area type topography, already in contour strips with hay in rotation. Improved manure management, including a spreading plan to better distribute manure to upland fields is key to reducing phosphorus load.