

NRCS NEWS RELEASE

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Wetlands Reserve Program Marks 20 Years of Wetlands Conservation

Nation's Largest Wetland Restoration Program Has Protected 2.6 Million Acres

ST PAUL, MN, Dec 12, 2012 – In its two decades of existence, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's federal Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) has restored more than 2.6 million acres of wetlands habitat across the U.S, creating prime wildlife habitat and helping the environment by holding and cleaning water. This includes 102,800 acres here in Minnesota.

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) administers the voluntary program that works with landowners to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on private and tribal lands, a mission that helps rural and urban communities throughout the country by reducing flood damage, contributing to groundwater recharge and carbon sequestration, and providing recreational opportunities. Seventy-five percent of wetlands in the U.S. are located on private lands.

“The Wetlands Reserve Program is a great conservation tool, providing landowners a way to protect and restore wetland areas while making improvements to their properties—it is a win-win for the environment, the landowner and the community,” NRCS Acting Chief Jason Weller said.

Through the program, NRCS provides technical and financial assistance to help landowners voluntarily restore and protect wetland ecosystems. Landowners may select either a permanent or 30-year easement, retaining ownership of the land once the easement is in place.

In the 20-year history of the program, more than 11,000 landowners across the U.S. have participated in this voluntary program. Landowners can receive financial assistance to restore wetlands on the saturated and flooded portions of their property that are difficult to farm, focusing their agricultural efforts on more productive soils.

Wetlands slow and store water, lowering the risk of flooding for nearby communities during hurricanes and other severe weather events.

The program is best suited for frequently flooded agriculture lands, where restoration will maximize habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife, and improve water quality.

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Wetlands are among the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the world. Rare and endangered wildlife, such as the Louisiana black bear, whooping crane, wood stork, bog turtle and other species, are thriving on WRP easement lands.

In Minnesota, the program includes easements on private lands in a variety of landscapes. Projects examples include: small urban fringe restorations, flood prone sites along the Minnesota River, large projects with the Nature Conservancy, prairie pothole restoration in Western Minnesota, and restorations within the Red River Watershed.

“The farmers, ranchers and landowners in Minnesota are not our only citizens who have benefited from the Wetlands Reserve Program,” NRCS State Conservationist Don Baloun said. “The program has led to cleaner water, aesthetic open spaces and abundant habitat for wildlife. Minnesota will continue to benefit from WRP as more land is set aside for wetland areas.”

NRCS attributes WRP’s milestone achievements to landowner interest, strong partnerships and effective science-based technical assistance. NRCS technical specialists work cooperatively with landowners, federal and state wildlife agencies, researchers and universities, conservation districts and non-governmental organizations to develop and implement effective hydrologic and vegetative restoration and management techniques.

WRP success stories from around the nation can be found in the following publication:
<http://go.usa.gov/g5bx>.

For more information about WRP, please visit: <http://go.usa.gov/g5bj>.

Stay up to date on WRP and other Farm Bill programs through GovDelivery:
<http://go.usa.gov/g5b5>.

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USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service helps America’s farmers and ranchers conserve the Nation’s soil, water, air and other natural resources. All programs are voluntary and offer science-based solutions that benefit both the landowner and the environment.

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