

# 75 Years

# A Legacy of Conservation

## Helping People Help the Land



### 2010 Nebraska Accomplishments

- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** - 1,053 contracts totaling \$24.1 million on 334,314 acres.
- **Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)** - 129 contracts totaling \$5.2 million on 8,856 acres.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** - 69 contracts totaling \$757,779 on 10,137 acres.
- **Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)** - 94 projects had \$23 million to restore 13,000 acres of wetlands.
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** - 1,113 contracts totaling \$17.8 million on 1.8 million acres.
- **Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)** - 25 applications approved on 29,964 acres.
- **Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)** - 3 easements approved this year. Nebraska now has a total of 11 easements on 6,697 acres.
- **Shell Creek Watershed Improvement Area** - no-till now covers 21,000 acres, conserving 63,000 tons of soil per year.

This year marked a significant milestone for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service. NRCS celebrated its 75th anniversary. During the past year, NRCS has taken a look back to recognize the pioneers in conservation that created the only Federal agency that helps private landowners manage natural resources.



Nebraska NRCS is fortunate to have such a rich conservation heritage. Nebraska was one of the first states to form soil and water conservation districts, and then develop its much-envied system of Natural Resources Districts.

Nebraska has greatly benefitted from the hard work and dedication of the conservation partners of the past. The NRCS/NRD partnership of today continues to honor that legacy by working to bring together the best of both worlds - the scope and resources of NRCS coupled with the local control and flexibility of the NRDs - to form one of the Nation's most successful natural resources management partnerships.



This year also marks a significant change for Nebraska NRCS. Steve Chick, the state conservationist in Nebraska for the past 15 years, is moving on to a new position. During this year of reflection, Steve has been looking back on Nebraska's accomplishments.

"The NRCS/NRD partnership has implemented thousands of conservation practices that have helped make Nebraska's farm and ranch lands more sustainable and profitable. We have partnered together to create additional staffing positions in field offices, resulting in more assistance to our customers. We have worked together to identify critical natural resources concerns across the state, and then pooled resources to address these issues head-on. In short, NRCS would not have made the impact it has in Nebraska without the NRDs. Together, we have created an impressive legacy of conservation," Chick said.



The year 2010 will be remembered as a significant milestone for Nebraska natural resources conservation. ●



## Environmental Quality Incentives Program

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is the “umbrella” program that provides funding for many other programs, and is the base soil and water conservation program statewide. The following are examples of the type of projects completed through EQIP in Nebraska during 2010:

- 72 beginning farmer/rancher contracts on 29,763 acres;
- 18 limited resource contracts on 29,768 acres;
- 3 socially disadvantaged contracts on 167 acres;
- 12 Ponds;
- 1,095,163 feet of fence;
- 53 forage & 34 range plantings on 4,316 acres;
- 1,193,387 feet of pipeline;
- 2,838,228 feet of terraces on 339 jobs;
- 8 grade stabilization structures;
- And MUCH more.

## Special Initiatives

Through EQIP, several special initiatives were funded. These initiatives helped focus funding to projects that conserve water in the Ogallala Aquifer, increase organic ag, and improve water quality. Special Initiatives included:

- AFOs - 23 contracts for \$2,444,078;
- NDEQ(319) - 25 contracts, totaling \$978,303;
- NE Legacy - 39 contracts, totaling \$828,763;
- Forestry - 38 contracts, totaling \$416,329;
- Organic - 36 contracts, totaling \$1,008,369;
- High Tunnels - 20 contracts, totaling \$92,220, and;
- Ogallala - 109 contracts, totaling \$3,064,467.

## Agricultural Water Enhancement Program

The Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) is a component of EQIP. The intent of AWEP is to leverage Federal dollars with local dollars to address local concerns.

AWEP supports nationally-approved project areas submitted by states. Project areas are established by local, state, and tribal interests wanting to improve water use.

In Nebraska, five applications were submitted. The following three were approved: The Groundwater Quality and Supply Conservation AWEP project through a partnership agreement with the Upper Big Blue NRD; the Lower Republican AWEP project through a partnership agreement with the Lower Republican NRD; and the Ogallala/Platte River Recovery AWEP project through a partnership agreement with the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources.

## AWEP + EQIP = Significant Water Conservation

Through irrigation water conservation practices applied using EQIP and AWEP - like converting irrigated ground to dryland, furrow irrigation to center pivots or to a micro irrigation system - Nebraska has seen the amount of irrigation water applied to cropland decrease by nearly **12 billion** gallons each year!

## Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative

The Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) allows Federal funds for individual landowners to be leveraged with partner agencies, organizations or tribes to address natural resource concerns. Four initiatives were approved in 2010: Lower Republican NRD Water = \$250,126; Gracie Creek Grazing = \$37,352; Shelterbelt Renovation = \$85,700; and Riparian Forest = \$85,700. These projects have helped control invasive species, conserve water, improve habitat and grazing, and restore windbreaks.

## Watershed Rehabilitation and Planning

Nebraska received funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for four watershed projects: Blackwood 32-A in Hayes County, Gering Valley (Yensen Drain) in Scotts Bluff County, Papio Creek W-3 in Washington County, and Wilber Watershed in Saline County. Through the PL-566 Watershed Rehabilitation Program, Nebraska has requested funds to restore several additional watersheds. All of these projects will provide flood control, reduce erosion and improve water quality.

## Wetland Conservation and Restoration

The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners technical and financial support to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. Landowners have three options to enter eligible land into this program—permanent easement, 30-year easement or a 30-year contract with Indian tribes. Landowners retain ownership and access to the land and may be able to generate income from NRCS-approved grazing or haying or recreation opportunities.

In 2010, the Rainwater Basin Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) was approved. This program’s goal is to restore and protect wetland and upland acres for the benefit of wildlife within the Rainwater Basin wetland complex, while maintaining the right to allow a pivot to cross through a WREP easement. To date, 186 acres on 10 easement sites have been enrolled.

## Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program that provides landowners technical and financial assistance to develop upland, wetland, riparian, and aquatic habitat areas on their property. In 2010, WHIP contracts provided assistance on brush management, prescribed burns, integrated pest management and filling non-functional irrigation reuse pits.

## To Learn More

For information about all of the programs and services provided by the Nebraska NRCS, visit [www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov), or stop by a local field office. ●