

Background & Purpose

The Red River Basin, located in parts of Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota, has lost a significant amount of its native prairie wetlands from severe flooding. That flooding has also meant a loss of wildlife habitat and increased water quality concerns. In addition, complex topographies ranging from extremely flat, glacial lake plains and valleys to hilly beach ridges provide conservation challenges and the need for a variety of conservation practices to resolve the natural resource issues.

The 25 million-acre, three-state, Red River Basin Initiative (RRBI) area is located in the mid-continent Prairie Pothole Region which is a critical migratory wildlife pathway. Over the last twenty years, major flooding has been a significant problem. Rapid snow melt has resulted in serious erosion which has affected water quality in the area. The out-of-bank, rapidly moving water has also destroyed wildlife habitat and impacted existing conservation practices and systems.

In an effort to resolve these issues, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is working with landowners to implement conservation practices on private, working, agricultural lands. Through the RRBI, conservation efforts by farmers and ranchers will restore and improve wetlands, restore native vegetative communities, reduce floodwater flows, improve and protect water quality, and improve rare and declining wildlife and wetland habitat in the area.



Wetlands provide resting and nesting habitat for migratory birds.

Partners & Partnerships

Several local, state, and basin-wide agencies and organizations have been working together to develop plans to restore the wetlands in this area. Their initial efforts encouraged NRCS to become more involved and focus funding to support the restoration and improvement of wetlands and wildlife habitat in the RRBI area. Discussions have taken place to monitor and evaluate resource conditions at project sites. Environmental conditions will be benchmarked and documented, then modeling will be utilized to estimate the potential impacts of the restoration efforts.

Working through the Red River Basin Initiative, NRCS and other local, state, and federal agencies and organizations will develop strategies to focus conservation

efforts in locally-identified and selected priority landscapes. Those strategies will work together to treat environmental concerns within the initiative area. Agricultural and other landusers have been actively participating in the planning discussions to ensure that the initiative covers local needs. Their work and analysis of conditions and need is critical to the success of this effort.

Canada is also part of the Red River partnership. Many multinational government and private organization units have been working together to develop activities and projects that will benefit both sides of the border. The Red River of the North, the only north flowing river in the United States, is causing even more resource concerns for our northern neighbors due to melting snow cover and ice flow.

Goals/Objectives

The five-year Red River Basin Initiative is expected to reach at least 200 U.S. landowners in the area with objectives of improving wildlife habitat and water quality improvements, as well as flood water retention.

Direct benefits from initiative activities will mostly result from reduced flooding. Landowners and managers will install conservation practices to improve and protect wetlands and increase the volume of water they can hold. Establishing native vegetation will provide food sources for migratory birds and also hold the soil in place. Decreased water quantity into the Red River and its tributaries will reduce the potential of flooding impacts on agriculture and within the communities. It will also improve water quality by reducing erosion from high water and flooding as well as restore the wildlife habitat that has been continually impacted by flooding.

Conservation Funding and Practices

NRCS conservation professionals are working with landowners providing technical assistance to develop conservation plans for their land. Once landowners have determined the conservation practices they want to implement, they can apply through the Red River Basin Initiative for financial assistance to implement the conservation practices that will restore wetlands and provide habitat for migrating birds and local wildlife.

Some of the applicable conservation practices within the initiative area include: upland wildlife habitat management, nutrient management, conservation cover, Integrated Pest Management, access control, crop rotation, residue and tillage management, wetland restoration, and early successional

habitat development and management. Wetland easement payments can help farmers and ranchers protect the land in perpetuity; 30-year contracts are also available. Residue and tillage management on non-easement fields and water control structures where necessary will help hold the soil in place during hard rains. Crop rotations will not only strengthen soil quality, but also provide food or nesting material for migrating waterfowl. Buffer areas along crop fields can provide nesting and movement zones for wildlife. When strategically located, wetland restoration easements have a high potential to increase water storage while reducing environmental concerns related to soil, water, plants, and wildlife.

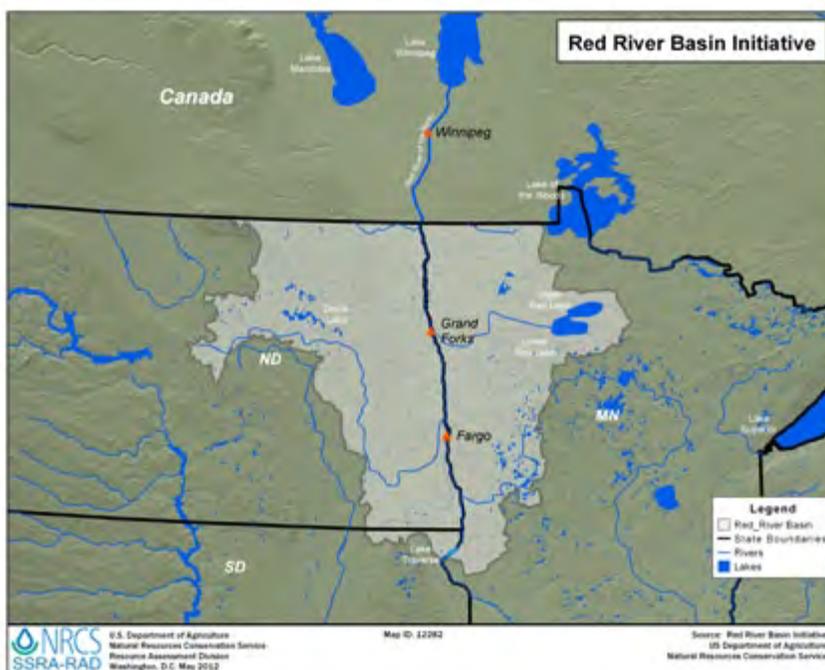
Benefits

Restoring declining wetland habitat will reduce flooding and the financial stress on RRBI communities

and landowners. Thousands of acres of land restored to its pre-altered condition and protected with wetland easements will decrease water quantity flows into the Red River and its tributaries and reduce flooding impacts. The reduced flooding will improve the water quality within the waterways, and help restore wildlife habitat focused on migratory species. Improved water quality may reduce the cost of providing clean drinking water to communities while reduced flooding will negate the cost of restoring communities damaged from flooding.

For More Information

For more information and updates about the Red River Basin Initiative and other NRCS conservation efforts, please visit the website at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov>, or contact your local NRCS office.



While this map identifies all areas accepted into the Initiative, States have determined priority areas where they will focus Initiative activities. Those areas can change on an annual basis.