



NRCS CELEBRATES 5 MILLION ACRES ENROLLED IN CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

Minnesota
Natural
Resources
Conservation
Service

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St. Paul, Minnesota, April 2, 2021 – NRCS and private landowners have partnered to protect more than 5 million acres of wetlands, grasslands and prime farmlands — an area the size of New Jersey. In Minnesota, NRCS enrolled over 135,000 acres, helping achieve this important conservation milestone.

“The nation’s farmers, ranchers and private landowners are critical to conserving our nation’s natural resources for future generations,” said Troy Daniell, MN NRCS State Conservationist. “We want to celebrate their efforts in helping us protect sensitive lands, support wildlife, and confront challenges like climate change.” NRCS has offered conservation easements through the Farm Bill for 28 years, through programs like **Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP)**, which helps landowners, land trusts and other entities protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, grasslands, and working farms and ranches through conservation easements. These programs benefit participants and the American public by creating cleaner air, water and open spaces.

Wetland Easements

Wetland easements — totaling over 2.8 million acres nationwide and over **122,830** acres in Minnesota— improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reducing flooding, recharging groundwater, protecting biological diversity and providing opportunities for educational, scientific and limited recreational activities.

Wetland easements are also crucial to wildlife, and are credited for the recovery of the Louisiana black bear in 2019 and the Oregon chub in 2015. Whooping cranes rely on wetland easements on their cross-country treks and for raising young. Also, the wet meadows of sagebrush country are an oasis for wildlife like sage grouse.

Agricultural Land Easements

Agricultural land easements protect the long-term viability of the nation’s food supply by preventing conversion of productive working lands to non-agricultural uses. These easements have been crucial to protecting rangelands and farmsteads from urban encroachment, ensuring the most productive lands remain working lands. Easements also can be used to protect floodplains, grasslands and forests, providing public benefits, including carbon sequestration, water quality, historic preservation, wildlife habitat and protection of open space. Easements have contributed to the restoration of the Southeast’s unique, but rare longleaf pine forests, and to the protection of animals like the Greater Sage-Grouse.

Agricultural land easements, including grassland easements, total more than 1.9 million acres nationwide and over **9,700** acres in Minnesota.

Also under ACEP is the Healthy Forest Reserve Program (HFRP) with an additional **544** acres in Minnesota.

Carbon Sequestration and Easements

Working with private landowners to preserve and restore wetlands, grasslands, forests and farmlands is integral to USDA’s efforts to build resiliency and reduce the impacts of climate



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change across the nation. Easements protect sensitive lands from development in perpetuity, and landowners can partner with NRCS to implement voluntary climate-smart management practices that maximize the amount of carbon sequestered from the atmosphere and stored in soils or plant biomass across these landscapes.

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is engaged in a whole-of-government effort to combat the climate crisis and conserve and protect our nation's lands, biodiversity and natural resources including our soil, air and water. Through conservation practices and partnerships, USDA aims to enhance economic growth and create new income streams for farmers, ranchers, producers and private foresters. Successfully meeting these challenges will require USDA to pursue a coordinated approach alongside stakeholders, including State, local and Tribal governments.

Enroll in Easements

Farmers, ranchers and private foresters looking to enroll farmland, grasslands or wetlands in a conservation easement may submit proposals to the **NRCS state office** to acquire conservation easements on eligible land. To enroll land through wetland reserve easements, landowners should contact their local [USDA Service Center](#).

USDA offers a variety of conservation programs that provide help to plan and implement conservation practices on farms, ranches or forests. Learn more about putting conservation to work through our [Conservation at Work](#) video series.

While USDA offices are closed to visitors because of the pandemic, Service Center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email, and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local [USDA Service Center](#). Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus.

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