

## MN CREP 1<sup>st</sup> Year Review and Proposed Adjustments June 2018

MN CREP is a voluntary, federal-state funded natural resource conservation program that uses a science-based approach to target environmentally sensitive land. Landowners' enrollment within the 54 county Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) project area began in May of 2017. MN CREP has a goal of 60,000 acres of filter strips, wetlands, and groundwater protection areas. Enrolled land includes a Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract of 14 to 15 years in length and a perpetual conservation easement through the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) program. Administration of CRP is handled by USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and RIM by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

**1<sup>st</sup> Year Accomplishments:** Thirty-nine Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) have assisted landowners with submitting 201 filter strip, floodplain wetlands, and non-floodplain wetland applications on over 7,000 acres during the past 12 months. Applications have been selected for funding with 154 landowners on 5,720 acres that have a total estimated state and federal cost of \$49,210,000.

Background: BWSR staff have undertaken a review of the program to determine its effectiveness and to identify any desirable and needed adjustments to achieve the program goals. As part of this process, in April 2018, BWSR staff held four MN CREP Engagement meetings to seek input from SWCDs throughout the project area. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an opportunity for district staff to share the feedback they've been hearing from landowners on what aspects of the MN CREP program are working well, and where adjustments are needed.

On May 23, 2018, the BWSR Board RIM Committee reviewed draft adjustments for MN CREP. These adjustments, summarized below, seek to maximize landowner and resource benefits. The proposed adjustments will be further considered in June by the RIM Committee and the BWSR Board.

### **Proposed Payment Changes** being evaluated are:

- Adding an incentive to the existing rate, resulting in an increased RIM payment to landowners.
- Applications that have been approved for funding but have not had an easement recorded would also have their payment increased.

**Administrative Changes** being considered include:

- **CRP Payment Restriction - \$50,000 maximum** – In limited circumstances, when a CREP application shows a CRP payment in excess of \$50,000, the amount above \$50,000 may be paid using RIM funds. This incentive will only be valid for MN CREP wetland applications.
- **Allow RIM-only enrollment for existing CRP** – RIM-only enrollment may be offered for existing CRP that is part of the total MN CREP offered acres. The exact proportion is still being evaluated.
- **Non-floodplain wetland, 4:1 upland to wetland ratios increased** – The allowable upland to wetland ratio for non-floodplain wetland enrollments may be increased. The upland acres above the 4:1 ratio would be paid based on the cropland or non-cropland rate as RIM-only.
- **Increase non-cropland %** – The amount of non-cropland for all CP's would be increased.
- **100-year floodplain not mapped causing eligibility challenges** – NRCS will be asked to provide guidance and practical alternatives to local offices on how to handle outdated or not available maps and tools to determine the 100-year floodplain for CP23's that avoids review of soils on the site.

An additional update is planned after the June BWSR Board Meeting.