



# MN CREP Update

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**Date:** February 1, 2017

**To:** SWCD, Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP) and Local Pheasants Forever (PF) Staff in the 54 County CREP area

**From:** John Jaschke, Executive Director  
Board of Water and Soil Resources

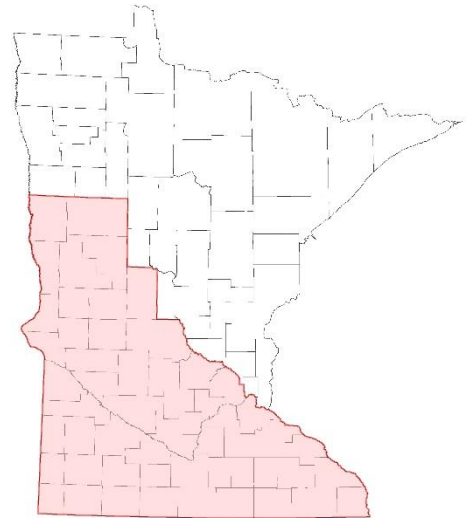
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Jaschke", is written over a thin horizontal line.

As you have probably already heard, Governor Mark Dayton recently signed a \$500 million Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture. Over two years in the making, this agreement is now in place because of strong Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Watershed District (WD), landowner, and conservation groups' support. BWSR, along with our state agency partners - Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Department of Natural Resources and the MN Pollution Control Agency worked to ensure that the proposal would use existing data and be targeted to the most environmentally sensitive lands. This is significant for conservation in Minnesota and we are thrilled for the opportunity to work together on this new CREP!

## Scope:

This federal, state, and local partnership will work with farmers and other landowners across 54 counties in southern and western Minnesota who choose to voluntarily implement perpetual conservation easements on up to 60,000 acres of land to restore and protect water quality and enhance habitat. The MN CREP targets four conservation practices (CPs):

- CP2 Wellhead Protection
- CP21 Filter Strips
- CP23 100 year Floodplain Wetlands
- CP23a non-100 year Floodplain Wetlands



## Funding:

The \$500 million investment for the MN CREP consists of approximately \$350 million from USDA and \$150 million of state funding needed from sources including: Clean Water Fund, Outdoor Heritage Fund, Capital Investment (bonding) and Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. The legislature has already appropriated to BWSR nearly \$55 million. This means we can start the CREP sign-up this spring.

\$96 million of state funds are still needed in order to meet the 60,000 acre MN CREP goal.

## **Board Action and Next Steps:**

On January 25<sup>th</sup> the BWSR Board adopted a CREP Implementation resolution authorizing BWSR staff to:

- Utilize existing and future RIM appropriations to implement the MN CREP;
- Work with USDA to plan and implement the MN CREP;
- Conduct a continuous sign-up, score and rank applications and make funding decisions;
- Provide perpetual easement and restoration funding to landowners; and
- Plan and conduct a CREP Communications and Information Plan.

MN CREP processes and procedures must be incorporated into USDA – Farm Service Agency (FSA) CRP manual amendments and directives as well as BWSR RIM guidance. BWSR, FSA and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) staff are working to complete these documents which must be formulated, approved and posted before a MN CREP sign-up can begin.

Training for local field staff (FSA, NRCS, SWCD, FBAP, PF, BWSR, etc.) is being planned for:

- Mid-February – general MN CREP overview; and
- Late March – detailed MN CREP sign-up processes and procedures

Once the training is completed, a MN CREP continuous sign-up will begin, which is anticipated to start this spring. While the sign-up continues, periodic “batching periods” will be conducted to make funding decisions. These “batching periods” will consider:

- Available state funds;
- Acres allocated to each of the four MN CREP practices;
- The environmental benefits score of each application.

Continuous sign-up and “batching periods” will be used throughout the duration of the MN CREP until the total 60,000 acre goal is met.

The initial roll-out of the MN CREP will prioritize the CP21 – Filter Strip practice in order to provide another option to implement practices associated with the Buffer Law (MS 103F.48). The MN CREP combines a CRP contract with a RIM perpetual easement.

This will be a tremendous conservation effort that will require increased local capacity to assist the landowners of your county. BWSR is also working with FSA and NRCS to provide additional technical assistance in local SWCD offices. As these discussions progress you will be informed as to the details.

Thank you in advance for assistance with making the MN CREP available to your landowners and helping to implement water quality and habitat practices. Together we will make the MN CREP a success.

If you have questions related to the MN CREP feel free to check out the BWSR web page or contact Bill Penning, Easement Section Manager or Tim Koehler, Senior Programs Advisor.