



The “Road Program”: Protecting Wetlands, Helping Local Partners

August 2014 Snapshots

It's road construction season in Minnesota. Orange barrels dot the landscape and travel times to the lake are sometimes longer than anticipated. Orange barrels don't just impact your commute, they can also impact local wetlands. The Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program (LGRWRP), also called the “Road Program”, works to offset wetlands lost through public road improvement projects.

Funded by the State, the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) implements the LGRWRP to assist local road authorities, such as counties, cities, and townships, in using wetland banks to meet the “No Net Loss” wetland policy established in State of Minnesota statutes. BWSR works through the program to restore previously drained wetlands which are used to offset other wetlands lost to local road projects.

A wetland bank works like a checking account. As a state, Minnesota generates and deposits wetland “credits” into a bank account, and periodically “debit” from the account to replace wetland impacts that have occurred throughout the state. The system isn't just theoretical – wetland credits are real acres of wetland and wetland banks are established across the state in the watersheds where the impacts occur.

Prior to the LGRWRP, each local road authority had the responsibility of replacing wetland impacts associated with their road projects. Each project had to go through the full wetland replacement and permitting process, even for projects with very small wetland impacts. The Road Program takes that burden off local road authorities, providing high quality wetland replacement much more efficiently. The program combines multiple small impacts into larger, more diverse, and more sustainable wetland complexes while simplifying the process for local road authorities.

Not all road projects can participate. In order to be eligible, the purpose of a project must be for the repair, rehabilitation, reconstruction, or replacement of currently serviceable roads in order to meet state or federal design or safety standards. Since its inception in 1996, the LGWRP has provided approximately 4,200 acres of wetland credits, compensating for wetlands lost to local road work. Balancing the impact of local road projects with protecting local wetlands can be challenging, but the LGWRP helps make that happen.



The Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program provides for restoration of wetlands like this one, in Wright County.