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MN CREP sign-up kicks off May 15, 2017 ***A Milestone for Conservation in Minnesota***

St. Paul, Minn. - Landowners have a new option to protect their environmentally sensitive cropland with the introduction of the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP). The kick-off for the MN CREP continuous sign-up begins May 15, 2017.

MN CREP is a voluntary state-federal program designed to improve water quality and habitat conservation. It will protect and restore up to 60,000 acres of marginal cropland across 54 southern and western Minnesota counties, using buffer strips, wetland restoration and drinking water wellhead protection.

Native plantings on those acres will filter water, prevent erosion and provide critical habitat for countless grassland species including badgers, meadowlarks and monarch butterflies.

"This is a milestone in conservation for Minnesota," according to John Jaschke, executive director of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). "It targets the most critical acres and will provide water quality and habitat benefits for generations."

The program is funded with approximately \$350 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and \$150 million needed from state sources including: Clean Water Fund, Outdoor Heritage Fund, Capital Investment (bonding), and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. MN CREP is administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and BWSR, but involves numerous partners including Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources, Department of Health and Pollution Control Agency as well as local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff. MN CREP is also supported by a coalition of more than 70 state and national organizations and groups.

"Minnesota is at a crossroads in conservation," said Jaschke. "The state is facing serious water quality challenges and we're losing hundreds of thousands of acres of grassland through expiring CRP. MN CREP isn't the whole answer, but it plays an important role in addressing both of these issues."

Landowners who are accepted in MN CREP will enroll in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for 14-15 years. At the same time, the land will be put into a permanent conservation easement through the state's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement program. Private ownership continues and the land is permanently restored and enhanced for water quality and habitat benefits.

"This program helps producers with the land that needs protecting so they can farm their best, most productive acres," explained Michelle Page, Minnesota Acting State Executive Director for the USDA Farm Service Agency. "We encourage people to take advantage of this opportunity."

Landowners wanting to learn more about MN CREP can contact their local FSA/Natural Resources Conservation Service/SWCD office. They can also visit www.bwsr.state.mn.us/crep.

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