

MN CREP protects more than 12,000 acres at 15-month mark



The first Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) easements were recorded in February 2018 on the VanderLinden family's property in Redwood County. Buffers protect 1 mile of judicial ditch 32 (JD32), improving water quality and pollinator habitat.

Photo Credits: BWSR

A state-federal program to permanently protect environmentally sensitive land in 54 Minnesota counties prompted robust participation and landowner interest during the first 15 months of continuous sign-up.

To date, private landowners have enrolled 12,200 acres in southern and western Minnesota in the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP). MN CREP has accepted nearly 300 applications for permanent conservation easements since enrollment began in May 2017.

MN CREP is a joint effort. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) oversee the program.



Here's how it works: Landowners simultaneously enroll land in a 15-year federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contract and a permanent Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program conservation easement. Landowners receive payments to restore native vegetation in enrolled

acres, which maximizes water quality and habitat benefits.

"It's a good opportunity to get a fair payment on ground that would be idle and to do your part for resource protection," said a Rock County landowner who recently enrolled 12.75 acres of his property in MN CREP.

The program aims to restore up to 60,000 acres of marginal cropland using buffer strips, wetland restorations and wellhead protection for drinking water supplies. Native plantings on those acres filter water, prevent erosion and provide critical habitat for grassland species including the sedge wren, meadowlark, and monarch butterfly.

Local soil and water conservation

district staff play an essential role in the program. These conservation professionals help guide landowners through the application process and explore the best restoration options for each unique application. So far, the majority of SWCDs in the MN CREP area have submitted applications and provided outreach and resources to numerous landowners.

“This voluntary program is successful because of local staff’s dedication to marketing the benefits, explaining the program, preparing applications, and serving as the bridge between landowners and the state,” said BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke.

While CREP was active in Minnesota in 1998 and 2005, those programs focused primarily on creating wildlife habitat. The current MN CREP program aims to improve water quality by focusing on filter strips, wetland restoration, and wellhead protection. The thousands of acres enrolled in the program continue to create and enhance key wildlife habitat. Sign-up is currently on hold; it’s expected to resume once a federal farm bill passes.

MN CREP is a \$525 million program that includes \$350 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and



BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke (left) talks with Rep. Paul Torkelson and Sen. Gary Dahms at a June 18 event in Redwood County celebrating the first two recorded MN CREP easements. Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) partnered with BWSR to host the celebration event; a similar event was held July 12 in Dalton to commemorate the first recorded wetland easement.

\$175 million in state dollars. The Clean Water Fund, Outdoor Heritage Fund, Environment and Natural Resources and Trust Fund plus capital investment dollars all contribute to state funding for MN CREP. Although BWSR and the FSA administer the program, its numerous partners include the Minnesota Department of Agriculture, Minnesota Department of Natural

Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and the Minnesota Department of Health.

A coalition of more than 70 state and national organizations supports MN CREP.



The first MN CREP easement was recorded on the VanderLinden farm in Redwood County in February 2018. Since enrollment began in May 2017, the program has accepted more than 300 applications that will protect 12,000-plus acres of environmentally sensitive land in southern and western Minnesota.