



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service



Hugh H. Bennett

20  
10

**An Annual report by the  
Minnesota  
USDA  
Natural Resources Conservation Service**



75 Years of Conservation

# 75 Years of "Helping People Help the Land"

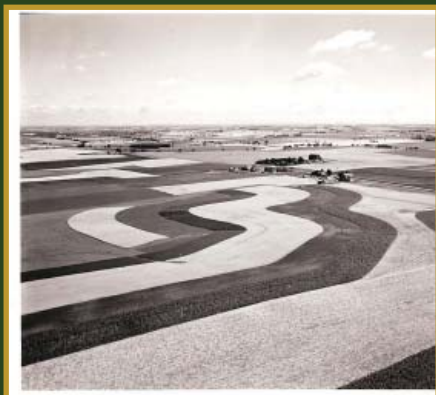
## In this issue:

- State Conservationist's Message
- 75th Anniversary of NRCS
- American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
- Agricultural Water Enhancement Program
- Conservation Stewardship Program
- Environmental Quality Incentives Program
- Emergency Watershed Program
- Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program
- Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative
- Plant Materials Program
- Resource Conservation and Development
- Soil Survey
- Technical Assistance
- Technical Service Provider
- Wetlands Reserve Program
- Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program



"As a nation, we need to renew our acquaintance with the land and reaffirm our faith in its continuity of productiveness—when properly treated. If we are bold in our thinking, courageous in accepting new ideas, and willing to work with instead of against our land, we shall find in conservation farming an avenue to the greatest food production the world has ever known."

Hugh H. Bennett



# State Conservationist's Message

Hello Fellow Conservationist's:



I proudly present the 2010 Accomplishment Report for the Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service. This was a great year for conservation in Minnesota and a great crop year for the producers and private landowners we work so closely with.

Our fiscal year started October 1, 2009 and ended September 30, 2010. Minnesota NRCS had a significant change during this time period. Bill Hunt retired after leading the agency in Minnesota for 15 years and I was blessed with opportunity to take over the leadership on April 26, 2010. I want to thank all of you for the warm welcome and kind words!

Immediately upon arriving to the State, I started a journey to visit all of the 82 USDA Service Centers. To date, I have visited 74 of the 82 offices and have learned a lot about what we do in these offices to get conservation on the ground. I have also learned that we have an outstanding partnership with the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and have a seamless delivery system for local, state and federal conservation programs. A real plus for the private landowners we serve! I also witnessed strong partnerships with Watershed Districts, Joint Powers, BSWR, DNR, MDA, Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, Wheat Growers, Corn Growers, Soybean Growers, GLCA, ....and more that I apologize for not specifically mentioning. WE are in good shape with our partners.....Thank You for this!

As I look to the 2011 year, I am excited to improve upon what we have done in 2010. We will focus on getting more "boots on the ground" by moving as many positions to the field as possible. We will improve our delivery of engineering practices by bringing the best technology to our field offices to make the design and implementation of these practices as efficient as possible. We will continue to look for opportunities to deliver our conservation programs to historically underserved private landowners within the State. So...yes, I am excited for 2011!

I want to thank the NRCS Minnesota staff for a job well done. We had an excellent year and it was a direct result of your dedication to the enhancement and protection of the natural resources of Minnesota.....THANK YOU!

Yours in conservation,

Don

||S|| 

Don A. Baloun

State Conservationist





## American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

As a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 Minnesota developed an Emergency Watershed Protection – Flood Plain Easement (EWP-FPE) Program. MN NRCS received nearly \$5 million of applications and the NRCS National Headquarters tentatively funded 14 projects for \$1.6 million of Financial Assistance. Once the options to purchase were mailed out only 7 applicants accepted our offers and **over \$800,000** was eventually obligated. All 7 of these easements were perfected (closed) in 2010 and are currently in the process of being restored.

## Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP)

Minnesota worked closely with ND and SD, local Watershed Districts, the Red River Basin Commission, local SWCD’s and others to promote the NHQ designated Ring Dike Initiative and the AWEP Project with the Red River Basin Commission. This effort is targeted at flood retention, water quality and soil quality practices that may eventually become the template for a much larger Red River Basin Initiative.

This was very successful and yielded \$1.2 million of EQIP funding obligated with 28 contracts.

## Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

In FY 2010, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) went through some big changes, to make the program accessible to all farmers across the country. Sign-up is no longer limited to specific watersheds, and the sign-up period is now continuous throughout the year with periodic ranking and scoring periods. Applications are assessed and scored using the Conservation Measurement Tool (CMT) which is an online questionnaire that calculates a score by asking producers about farming practices, management techniques and willingness to take on additional conservation activities. These additional activities that can be done by farmers over the life of a contract are recognized as “enhancements”, and they add to the overall amount of conservation that is accomplished on an operation.

All contracts are now five year contracts on an entire farming operation. CSP is available for all working agricultural land including pasture, rangeland and managed woodlots as well as for non-industrial private forestland.

In the first ranking and scoring period of 2010, Minnesota had the following accomplishments:

LAND USE	CONTRACTS	ACRES	FY10 OBLIGATION
AG	1,159.0	817,560.7	\$20,672,792.00
NIPF	419.0	98,323.1	\$704,528.00
<b>2010 TOTAL</b>	<b>1,578.0</b>	<b>915,883.8</b>	<b>\$21,377,320.00</b>



## Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

NRCS continues to spend time and energy reaching out to new USDA participants related to new initiatives in 2010. Minnesota continues to have a premiere EQIP Organic Program in 2010 that yielded over \$1 million obligated with 65 Organic Certified and Transitioning producers.

A significant EQIP Financial Assistance and Technical Assistance effort focused to the State Technical Committee supported outreach efforts including \$6.635 million with 183 Historically Underserved Producers (HUP), this represents 24% of the EQIP allocation for Minnesota, the national goal was 10%. HUP contracts included those with Tribal governments, Socially Disadvantaged Producers, and Beginning Farmers.

Seasonal High Tunnels – Minnesota was one of the leaders on this pilot effort. This yielded 161 contracts for \$666,714 of EQIP FA. Many of these contract holders are non-traditional producers and come from areas that typically do not do a lot of Farm Bill Program work.

68% of the total EQIP allocation was obligated to livestock concerns (the national goal is 60%).

## 2010 EQIP Obligation – Major Practices

### Livestock Related

Practice	# of Contracts	Units	Obligation Amount
<b>Confined Livestock</b>			
Waste Storage	59	70	\$5.4 million
Mortality Composting Facility	32	32	\$722,000
CNMP Plans	20	20	\$18,000
Waste Facility Cover	12	12	\$625,000
Waste Facility Closure	38	38	\$138,000
Manure Transfer	29	29	\$477,000
<b><i>Subtotal</i></b>			<b><i>\$7,380,000</i></b>



## Grazing Systems

Prescribed Grazing	112	16,000 ac	\$1.7 million
Fence	198	1.1 million ft	\$1.5 million
Watering Facility	126	126	\$159,000
Livestock Well	47	47	\$200,000
Pasture Planting	129	19,000 ac	\$616,000
Pipeline	138	544,000 ft	\$889,000
<b><i>Subtotal</i></b>			<b><i>\$5,064,000</i></b>

## Non-Livestock Related

Practice	# of Contracts	Units	Obligation Amount
Management Practices			
Nutrient Management	323	180,000 ac	\$4.2 million
No-Tillage Management	89	29,500 ac	\$1.6 million
Irrigation Water Mgt	29	4,100 ac	\$28,000
<b><i>Subtotal</i></b>			<b><i>\$5,828,000</i></b>

## Structural and Vegetative Practices

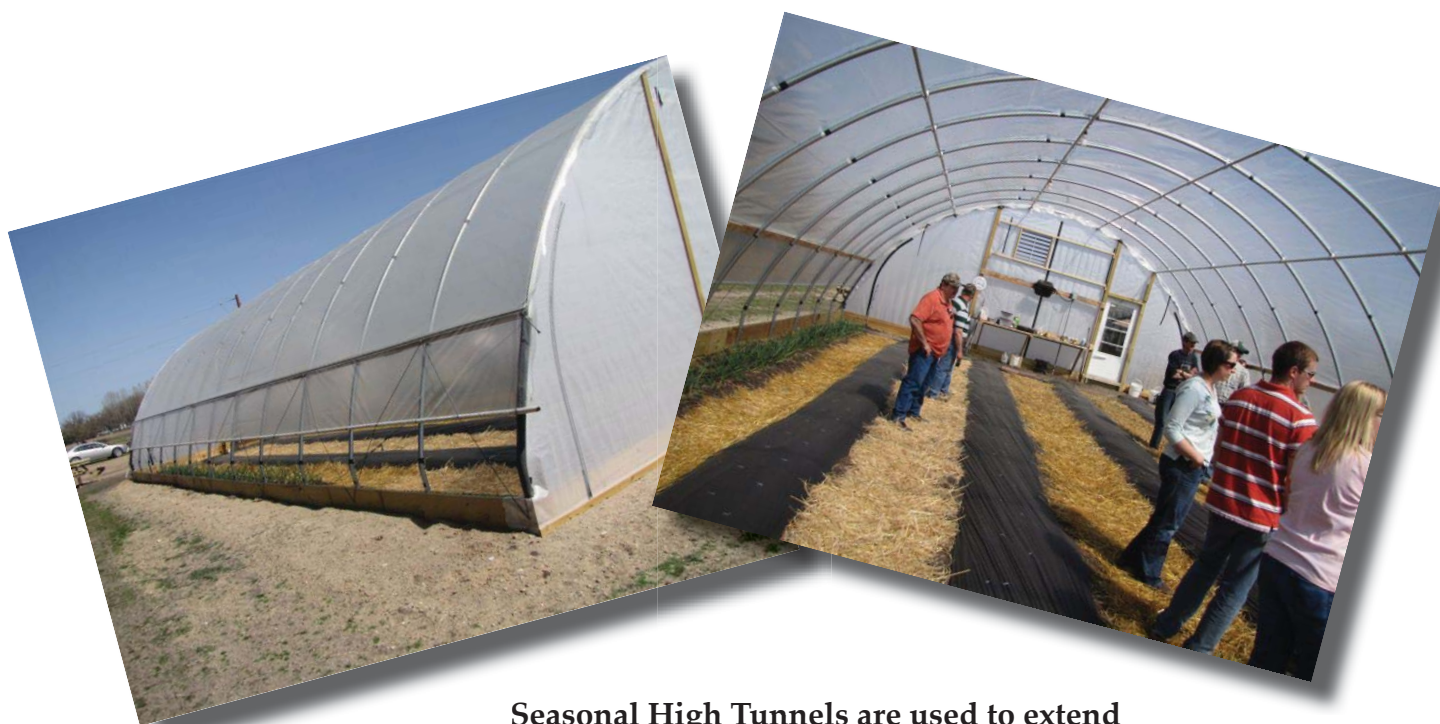
Windbreak	36	105,000 ft	\$40,000
Grade Stabilization	48	56	\$547,000
Irrigation System Conversion	42	4,000 ac	\$203,000
Waterway	83	138 ac	\$193,000
Terrace	15	24,000 ft	\$82,000
Tree Planting	71	1,100 ac	\$151,000
Water and Sediment Control	90	291	\$486,000
Upland Wildlife Habitat	54	177 ac	\$17,000
<b><i>Subtotal</i></b>			<b><i>\$1,719,000</i></b>



## MN 2010 Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Obligations Livestock Summary

Livestock Type	# of Counties	Applications Received	Application Acres	Contracts Obligated	Obligation Amount	Contracted Acres
Alpacas	1	1	16	1	\$17,301	16
Beef	76	435	96,033	261	\$7,893,992	51,182
Bees	1	1	7	1	\$2,359	7
Bison	2	2	437	2	\$230,759	437
Dairy	49	224	60,911	140	\$8,309,155	41,709
Goats	7	7	157	5	\$109,824	104
Horses	12	13	873	6	\$65,996	323
Poultry	10	16	2,297	5	\$43,266	689
Sheep	15	17	1,927	12	\$357,148	1,680
Turkeys	4	13	1,414	12	\$317,201	1,174
Swine	41	157	67,945	77	\$1,703,664	27,205
Other Livestock	3	3	349	2	\$37,249	199
Totals		889	232,366	524	*\$19,087,914	124,725

\* (68% of total EQIP funding)



Seasonal High Tunnels are used to extend  
the growing season for many crops.



## Emergency Watershed program

Performed work through the Buffalo Red River Watershed District to remove log jams from the Buffalo River and to buyout on home that was threatened by the Red River. Those were wait list projects that carried over from a 2009 flood event.

Worked with Blue Earth County to buyout one home on a high bank threatened by erosion from the spring 2010 flood. That home likely would have fallen in the river during the September flood if it had not been removed.

### **PL-566**

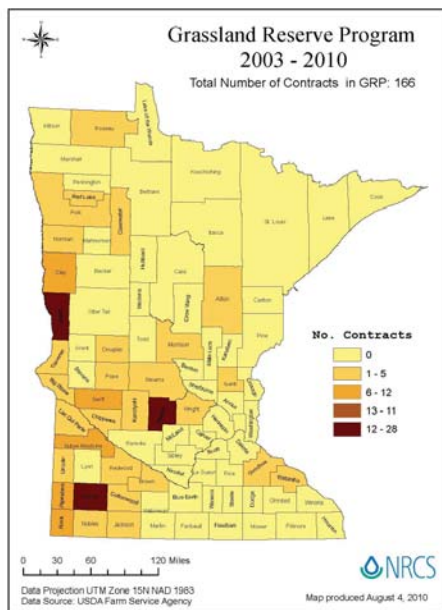
We are continuing to work with the Whitewater and Kanaranzi-Little Rock Watershed JPA's to implement land treatment projects funded through ARRA.

2010 marked the 75th anniversary of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Our Commitment to conserving resources on private lands has a history dating back to 1935. Our legacy is written on the landscape; it flows in the clean waters; it sustains a healthy environment. This is the legacy and the gift we give to future generations.



# Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

In FY 2010 Minnesota's Grassland Reserve Program (GRP) participation remained strong with 41 applications submitted. As in the past, all applications are rental agreements. Although only 18 applications were accepted the obligations totaled almost \$715,000. Minnesota added more than 3,900 acres to its GRP totals. The average allocation for a contract was \$142,998, the highest for any sign-up. Counties with high Soil Rental Rates (SRRs) are submitting more contracts and getting higher scores than those with lower SRRs. Total allocation for the 7 sign-up periods is over \$4.6 million for 166 contracts. Since 2003, Minnesota has put 23,521 acres into the GRP.



GRP has been well distributed in Minnesota. Again more counties had first time approvals and there are now 33 counties with GRP participants. At the first GRP sign-up in fiscal year 2003 only 6 counties had approved GRP contracts. In fiscal year 2010, 9 counties had contracts approved and only one county, Swift, had contracts in both sign-ups. In fact, no county has an approved contract in every year GRP had a sign-up.

In the first sign-up the average size of a contract was 390 acres; in the 2010 sign-up the average acreage was 435 despite the allowance of acreages less than 40. Only fiscal year 2005 had a higher average acreage with 581.

The majority of the contracts occur in the central to western part of the state where grasslands naturally occur. A few contracts can be found in counties outside this boundary such as on the south-eastern border and in north-central MN.

The GRP supports working grazing operations, enhancement of plant and animal biodiversity and protection of grasslands under threat of conversion. Basic provisions include:

- GRP applications are accepted on a continuous sign-up basis.
- Applications with less than 40 contiguous acres are accepted.
- Priority is given to expiring CRP acres, lands that have a high ecological value and lands under significant threat of conversion to uses other than grazing (with a limit of 10% of acreage enrolled in a calendar year).

**"The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture."**

**Thomas Jefferson**



## Plant Materials Program

The plant materials program has provided many benefits to Minnesota residents through the years and continues to enjoy strong support from our field office employees and partners.

In Minnesota, we have two Off Center Evaluation Planting (OCEP) sites: Becker and Grand Rapids. Our agreements are expiring at these sites, but we will most likely continue evaluations of the tree and grass plantings on a year-to-year basis rather than having formal long-term agreements.

Additional plantings were done at each of these sites in the spring of 2010 with assistance from NRCS state and field office staff. All of the new and existing plantings were evaluated in August. Measurements and notes were taken on crown spread and plant height, disease and insect damage, drought and cold tolerance, fruit production, survival, vigor and animal damage.

Seven employees attended three full days of training at the Plant Materials Center in Bismark in August.

In the fall, 52 field plantings across the state were evaluated by field office staff. Some of the findings were:

- Common Chokecherry – looking good on most sites
- Amur chokecherry – not as good, survival is poor, often dies suddenly
- Roundleaf hawthorn – looking good on most sites
- Pin cherry – not as good overall
- Black cherry – good, not bothered by deer, may be an alternative to green ash

Requests for plant materials for field plantings: Sweet Grass - 170 plants (total); White Sage, - 160 plants; Ninebark – 250 plants. All of these requests were filled for planting in the spring of 2010.

American Black Currant was released in 2010. This shrub establishes well, is a native shrub, has sweet fruit (edible), and is colorful in fall. It has been released as a selected class germplasm.



## Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

NRCS has eight approved RC&D Areas, covering 64 counties in Minnesota. We also have two applicant areas, Coteau des Prairies RC&D and Mid Minnesota Mississippi River. Both are seeking USDA authorization as designated RC&D Areas. RC&D Councils in Minnesota adopted 75 new projects and completed 97 during the past year.

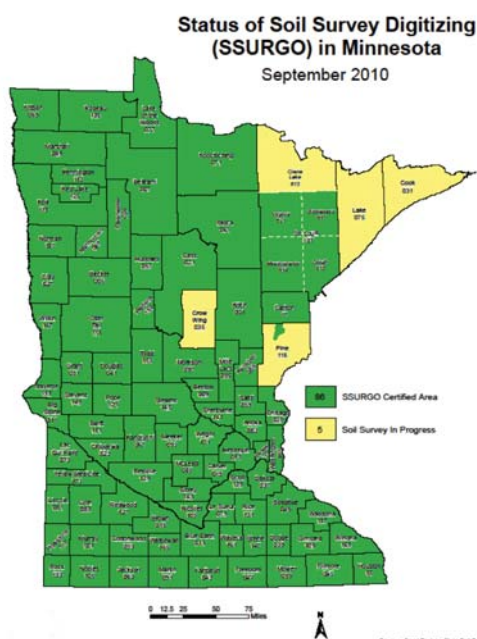
There are 119 projects currently being implemented. Federal contributions, other than USDA RC&D funds, to these completed projects total over 1.8 million dollars. Contributions from other government and non-government sources toward these projects exceeded \$8.3 million. Two businesses were established and 77 businesses were expanded or retained. 154 workshops, tours, training events or seminars were held. A total of over 24,400 citizens received service, with 3,561 of those individuals being economically or socially disadvantaged.

The Productive Conservation on Working Lands program continued to assist farmers statewide wanting to establish income producing conservation crops rather than entering an easement programs. This project, managed by the Three Rivers RC&D has met nearly all of its goals for marketing, field demonstrations, and crop establishment.



## Soil Survey

Soil maps and data are available online for 95 percent of Minnesota counties via the Web Soil Survey (<http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov>) the largest natural resource information system in the world. Field work and data development are underway in the remaining unmapped counties (Lake, Cook, Crow Wing, Pine, and the Crane Lake subset of St. Louis). The initial mapping effort continues to be accelerated with local, state and federal partnerships.



### Status Map showing availability of Online Soil SURvey GeOgraphic (SSURGO) data for Minnesota, September 2010

Minnesota soil scientists also began a Rapid Assessment of US Soil Carbon for Climate Change and Conservation Planning in FY10. This ambitious national sampling project will be completed by September 30, 2011. About 100 sites are scheduled for sampling in Minnesota during the 2 year study period. Results of the study will be used to evaluate differences in soil carbon associated with different ecosystems, agricultural management systems and land uses and apply these to improve existing decision support tools. The results will also be used to develop a scientifically based and statistically valid baseline inventory of soil carbon stocks for the United States.

Minnesota soil scientists began to gear up for accelerating NRCS's Ecological Site Inventory by working with state partners through cross training and data sharing. Ecological Site Descriptions (ESDs) will be developed for Minnesota as part of this inventory and used in conservation planning. This information can be utilized on forest land, rangeland, pastureland, and grazed cropland to understand the ramification of management actions on natural resources such as wildlife, water quality and quantity, carbon sequestration, and plant communities.





## Technical Assistance

The Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) Program provides technical assistance supported by science-based technology and tools to help people conserve, maintain, and improve their natural resources. The CTA program provides the technical capability, including conservation planning, design, and implementation assistance, that helps people plan and apply conservation on the land. This assistance is provided to individuals, groups, and communities who make natural resource management decisions on private, tribal, and other non-federal lands.

NRCS, through the CTA Program, provides conservation technical assistance that addresses natural resource conservation issues at the local level that are of State and national concern.

The CTA Program provides the local delivery system and the foundation technical expertise for other NRCS programs. The CTA Program is unique because it provides a substantive level of technical expertise, background and support for Federal, tribal, State and local conservation programs. The working relationships that landowners and communities have with their local NRCS staff are unique. One-on-one help through flexible, voluntary programs occurs every day in local NRCS offices. It is the way that NRCS does business, and it works.

## Technical Service Provider (TSP)

NRCS has partnered with private and public entities, agencies and private businesses to provide technical assistance funding to accelerate the planning and implementation of conservation practices. In 2010 NRCS obligated over \$1.1 million of TSP technical assistance funds; this amount was 151% of our goal.

Approximately 40% was allocated to private vendors and 60% to public/private agencies and organizations





## Wetlands Reserve Program

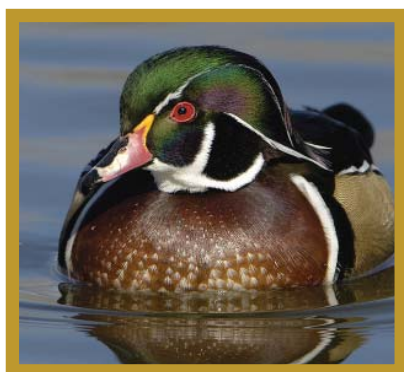
The Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is a voluntary program offering landowners the opportunity to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands on their property. The NRCS provides technical and financial support to help landowners with their wetland restoration efforts.

Since 2008, the NRCS-WRP has teamed up with the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)/Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) reserve program to acquire and restore RIM/WRP conservation easements. This Partnership continued to show great success in 2010.

In 2010, \$9 million in State funds were allocated to RIM; \$2 million from State Bonding and \$7 million as recommended to the State Legislature through the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. A 3rd signup for the RIM-WRP Partnership took in over \$50 million in requests from 230 applications. Of those, 79 were funded with the \$9 million of RIM funds and over \$11 million in WRP funding.

In calendar year 2010, 71 RIM/WRP easements were recorded on 6400 acres

Along with BWSR-RIM, many other partners contributed to the success of the WRP program in 2010. These include Ducks Unlimited, Minnesota Waterfowl Association, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Pheasants Forever and Minnesota's local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.







## Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program

### Program Focus —

The goal of WHIP in Minnesota is to “Maintain a healthy, diverse ecosystem through the improvement, enhancement and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat, in cooperation with private agricultural landowners”.

Promote wildlife habitat restoration and management on private lands through cooperative endeavors between landowners and Federal, state and local conservation partners.

To maximize habitat and species benefits, focus WHIP financial and technical resources towards projects statewide which are a component of a comprehensive plan with the greatest environmental benefits.

Utilize WHIP, to the extent practicable, to benefit State and Federal at risk species.

**WHIP**

### Overview

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) is a voluntary program for people who want to develop or improve wildlife habitat on tribal and private lands. It provides both technical assistance and cost sharing to help establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Minnesota’s WHIP plan focuses on the establishment and management of native habitats, including at risk species. WHIP contracts are coordinated with other local, state, tribal and federal initiative which allows the program to reach many more customers.

### FY 2010 Accomplishments

Minnesota received an allocation of slightly over \$698,000 for FY-10. Minnesota approved 142 agreements establishing and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat on over 3800 acres.

### Practices include:

- establishment of **1130** acres of native shrubs, grasses and forbs,
- **318** acres of early successional habitat management,
- **708** acres of prescribed burning,
- **217** acres of timber stand improvement,
- **7** acres of wetlands to be restored,
- **178** acres of trees planted,
- **425** acres of declining species habitat established/enhanced, and
- **1600** feet of trout stream habitat improvement.

### Program Benefits

NRCS has worked closely with several tribal conservation departments to utilize WHIP in meeting comprehensive wildlife management plans. WHIP has provided NRCS the opportunity to reach non-traditional clients and introduce them to USDA programs and services.

WHIP has been used to demonstrate the value of non-traditional habitat projects. Examples include; declining species habitat restoration, pollinator enhancement and wildlife friendly green spaces.



***The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of  
The United States Department of Agriculture.***

***For more information, please contact:***

***Don Baloun***

***State Conservationist***

***USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service***

***375 Jackson Street***

***St. Paul, MN 55101***

***(651) 602-7900***



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

[www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or a part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.