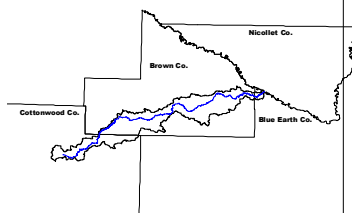


LITTLE COTTONWOOD RIVER WATERSHED PROJECT

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LCR Watershed spans three counties with over 75% in Brown County.

Topics to look for in future newsletters:

- Greater Profits through the Conservation Security Act
- Watershed Meeting Dates
- Constructed Wetlands for Water Quality
- Living Snow Fences
- Strip Tillage Demos
- Cost Share Practice Menu

LITTLE COTTONWOOD PROJECT ENTERS IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

by Kevin Kuehner

This marks the first newsletter of the Little Cottonwood River Phase II Water Quality Project. Since 1997 the Little Cottonwood River and surrounding 108,000 acre watershed has undergone water quality studies through Minnesota's Clean Water Partnership Program. The three-year water quality monitoring phase of the program officially ended in the fall of 2000.

LCR Watershed Project Receives Grant

In the fall of 2000 the Board applied for Clean Water Partnership funding to start a new phase of the water quality project—conservation implementation. The project received \$297,600 for water quality improvement practices and \$150,000 in low interest loan money for septic system improvements. The project will last three years.

County staff see the Little Cottonwood River Clean Water Partnership as a great opportunity to help local



SWCD, NRCS, and watershed residents by accelerating conservation efforts through provision of financial and technical assistance. In addition to cost-share programs, water quality improvement efforts will include on-farm educational demonstrations to showcase conservation technologies relating to agronomy, conservation tillage, nutrient management and maximization of profits. Listed below are some of the programs the LCR Project will be focusing on:

- CREP

- Buffer strips
- Septic system improvements
- Nutrient management, nitrogen rate, tile intake alternative, stream fencing, and conservation tillage demonstrations.
- Wetland restorations
- Feedlot improvements
- Sustainable Profits

If you are interested in learning more about the project or cost share opportunities contact the BNC Water Board at 507-934-4140.

WATERSHED CREP ENROLLMENT

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is proving to be a popular option for watershed residents with marginal crop land—especially those experiencing frequent flooding. Residents are enrolling cropland along ditches, wetlands

and floodplains into permanent easements. In exchange, landowners are receiving \$1,900- \$2,900 an acre. As of July 27, 2001, 23 easements have been recorded for a total of 416 acres in the watershed with an average payment of \$2,300/acre. An-

other 500 acres is likely to be enrolled in the watershed by programs end in late Sept. of 2002.

The 2001 Minnesota Legislature recently approved the final funding package for CREP, with \$51.4 million. That funding paves

Continued on page 4.....

CONSERVATION BUFFERS-MODERN PRACTICES FOR PRODUCTION AGRICULTURE!

ADOPTED FROM JUNE/JULY MDA UPDATE
BY JEFF ST. ORES, USDA

“Payments within the LCR watershed can range from \$84-\$150 an acre through the continuous CRP program.”



Most farm producers and suppliers have probably heard about the USDA buffer initiative and the many environmental benefits that installing conservation buffer practices provide especially improving water quality. What you may not be aware of is that conservation buffers also benefit modern agriculture and can make your farming operation more convenient, more efficient and more profitable! Conservation buffer areas earn annual income payments by enrolling eligible land into the continuous CRP program. In most cases these payments are competitive with cash rent that can more than equal the anticipated return from farming the land.

Buffer areas can meet herbicide label setback require-

ments and save damage to machinery. Some herbicide labels prohibit application within a set distance of streams, wetlands or drainage ditches. Installing grass filter strips or planting trees in riparian buffers immediately adjacent to these sensitive areas helps you meet this requirement and avoid the possibility of applying herbicides off label. Since buffers next to ditches help eliminate bank erosion, you are less likely to damage machinery by dropping an axle into a gully or washout.

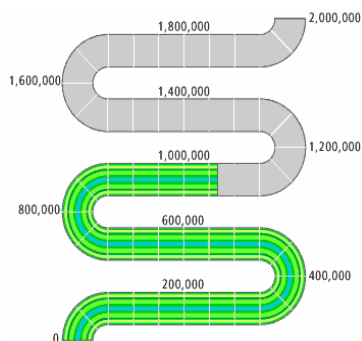
Participation in the CRP or CREP buffer program is voluntary and flexible with several different options and practices to choose from. The continuous CRP program is an extremely popular and easy

way to receive financial assistance to establish buffers. CRP allows you to help determine the width of the buffer strip you install, the types of grass, shrubs or tree cover to be planted, and the length of the contract!

Recently the Continuous CRP program was improved to increase cost share for practice establishment and includes a bonus payment of \$100 to \$150 per acre for establishment of selected practices. Together these NEW incentives increases the overall value of Continuous CRP contracts. Actual payments depend on soil type and program options. Producers and their advisors are encouraged to stop by local USDA Service Centers to find out more about how it improves a farm and farm op-

Properly installed buffers along with other conservation measures can:

- remove up to 50 percent or more of nutrients and pesticides.
- remove up to 60 percent or more of certain pathogens.
- remove up to 75 percent or more of sediment.



National goal of 2 million miles of conservation buffers is over half way there.

Conservation Reserve Program –Continuous Sign Up

The continuous CRP signup allows landowners to enroll environmentally sensitive land into CRP without going through the regular CRP signup. The length of the contracts are 10-15 years, depending on which practice is enrolled.

PRACTICE	CONTRACT LENGTH (yrs)	INCENTIVE
Farmed Wetland Pilot Program	10-15	20%
Filter Strip	10-15	20%
Grass Waterway	10	20%
Forest Riparian Buffer	10-15	20%
CRP within wellhead area	10-15	10%
Shallow Water Areas for Wildlife	10	None
Contour Buffer Strips	10	None
Shelterbelt	10-15	None

NEW FARMED WETLAND PILOT

by Scott MacLean

There is a new option for landowners with wetlands and prior converted cropland. The Farmable Wetland Pilot Project (FWP) is a new CRP practice that allows landowners to enroll small wetlands and prior converted cropland into a conservation program. The FWP falls under the CRP continuous sign-up so there is no competition or bidding process. The voluntary program offers annual rental rate payments and cost share assistance to establish resource cover on eligible land. Payments are very similar to those someone would receive for enrolling a grass filter strip. Eligibility requirements are:

- Row cropping history of at least 3 of the last 10 years
- No land on a flood plain

is eligible

- Maximum wetland size is 5 acres
- Buffers enrolled around the wetland may not exceed three times the size of the wetland or 150 feet in width, whichever option is greater



Farmed wet areas less than 5 acres in size are now eligible through the Continuous CRP Program.

Both producers and the environment stand to benefit from the FWP. First, landowners receive regular competitive payments for the retirement of marginal cropland. Payments are for 10 to 15 years depending on the length of the contract. Second, the FWP provides a good alternative to the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) as small sites do not generally compete well for WRP funding. Finally, enrolling land in the FWP will im-

prove water quality, reduce flooding and enhance wildlife habitat while maintaining or even improving a landowner's bottom line. If you would like to know more about the Farmable Wetland Pilot Program, contact Greg Tenant of the NRCS at 507-794-4491 or the LCR Watershed Project at 507-934-4140.

The Farmable Wetland Pilot Project (FWP) is a new CRP practice that allows landowners to enroll small wetlands and prior converted cropland into a conservation program.

LOW INTEREST LOAN MONEY FOR SEPTIC UPGRADES WILL BE MADE

Are you in need of upgrading your failing septic system? The LCR watershed project can assist you financially by providing a low interest loan. Minnesota's revolving loan program provides loans to individuals for planning, design, and construction of wastewater treatment systems. Through the program residents can obtain a loan to cover the costs of a septic system improvement at a reduced interest rate of 3.5 % and loans may be

repaid over 10 years. The LCR Clean Water Partnership program has \$150,000 available to watershed residents in Brown and Cottonwood counties. This amount should cover the cost of 15-20 systems. Interested residents living in Brown County should contact the Planning and Zoning office at 507-233-6640 and in Cottonwood County contact 507-831-2060.



Through the State Revolving Loan Program, homeowners needing septic system upgrades can receive reduced interest loans (3.5%) within the LCR watershed



BROWN NICOLLET COTTONWOOD
WATER QUALITY BOARD

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Gary Moreau-NRCS
Dave Bucklin-SWCD
Greg Tenant-NRCS
Tom Maher-SWCD
Wayne Schopper-Extension

The BNC Water Quality Board is a multi-county alliance, which collaborates with public and private organizations and institutions that share an interest and commitment toward the long-term protection and improvement of water quality. The board has a long history of supporting and protecting rural watersheds, river corridors, and source water protection through voluntary cost-share assistance programs. The Board educates watershed residents, farmers, and children and improves river and watershed management policy. The joint powers board also cooperates with other federal, state and local agency officials, industry and business representatives, university personnel, scientists, and environmental interests.

ON FARM DEMONSTRATIONS

MIDWESTERN WATER QUALITY PROJECT
CENTER FOR AGRICULTURE PARTNERSHIPS (CAP)

Proper nutrient management is critical to the success of the modern farmer. Applying too little nitrogen can reduce yields while applying more nitrogen than the crops can utilize reduces a producer's net profit. The LCR Project is partnering with the Center for Agriculture Partnerships to help demonstrate economic optimal nitrogen rates. The Midwestern Water Quality Project is looking for 50 producers to enroll nutrient management demonstration plots.

Producers will receive \$500 for participating in the study. The goal of the project is to collect scientific data on nutrient application and resulting yields on a localized watershed scale. The



Pooling data for profit and protection is the theme for the N- Rate Demonstrations

project also looks at soil types, plant population, seed rate, and other variables to determine the most profitable rate of nitrogen application for each participant. The data collected could help farmers in two ways. First, a better understanding of the nutrient needs of a specific plot

could increase a producer's net profits by increasing yields or reducing nitrogen application costs. Second, the data could provide producers with a degree of protection in the event of government regulation of nutrient application rates.

DEADLINE: If interested, contact CAP project representatives listed below as soon as possible! The deadline is September 1 of 2001 with a maximum of 50 farms allowed to participate.

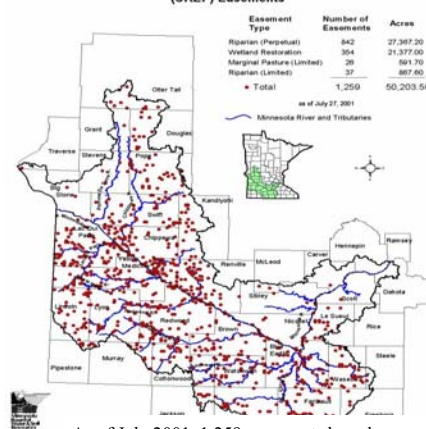
To learn more about nutrient management demonstrations, see the attached brochure or contact the Little Cottonwood Watershed Project at 507- 934-4140 or Blue Earth Agronomics at 507-947-3362.

WATERSHED CREP ENROLLMENT (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

the way for the state to move ahead with the final implementation of the program. CREP enrollment staff are currently in the process of accessing CREP eligible lands within the watershed and estimating payment rates for landowners. If you

are interested in the program or would like additional information contact Scott MacLean-507-934-4140. Hurry! The program ends Sept. 30, 2002!

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
(CREP) Easements



As of July 2001, 1,259 easements have been secured, accounting for over 50,203 acres in the Minnesota River Basin.