

**May 2005**

## **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP II) (Southeast Area)**

### **Overview**

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP II) a federal-state natural resource conservation program that works to meet state environmental objectives and to protect environmentally sensitive land on 120,000 acres in parts of Northwest, Southeast, and Southwestern Minnesota. Under CREP II, program participants voluntarily enroll certain practices in the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Minnesota Re-invest in Minnesota (RIM) program.

Under CREP II, participants receive financial incentives for both the CRP and RIM contracts for removing cropland from agricultural production and converting the land to native grasses, trees, and other native vegetation. CRP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended.

CRP contracts are for 14-15 years and RIM easements are for 45 years or permanent (an exception is contour grass strips in Southeast Minnesota, which is restricted to 14 to 15-year CRP contracts only). The total cost over a 14- 15-year period is about \$250 million, with FSA contributing \$200 million and the state funding \$53 million. The \$250 million does not include any costs that may be assumed by producers.

Minnesota CREP II targets enrollment to environmentally sensitive acreage in the Red River Watershed in northwestern Minnesota, the Lower Mississippi Watershed in southeastern Minnesota and the Missouri/Des Moines River Watershed in southwestern Minnesota.

The program is a results-oriented community-centered cooperative project among landowners, FSA, Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Watershed Districts, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and other partners.

### **Benefits**

The program will convert environmentally sensitive cropland to native vegetation in order to improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, increase flood water storage, and provide for fish and wildlife habitat. Establishment of certain practices in native vegetation will greatly reduce runoff of sediments, nutrients, pesticides, and pathogens from agricultural sources. CREP will also increase the water storage capacity of the watersheds through wetland restoration. Restoring native vegetation will increase wildlife habitat, which will benefit flora and fauna including threatened and endangered species. Other agricultural impacts mitigated by a CREP include fragmentation of riparian corridors, grasslands, and forestlands.

## Goals

The goals of the CREP II include:

- Reducing sediment loading in the three targeted watersheds by 420,000 tons per year;
- Reducing phosphorus loading in streams and rivers by 530,000 pounds per year;
- Helping to protect the drinking water supplies of 250,000 people by enrolling up to 8,195 acres of land in sensitive groundwater areas through the use of 14- to 15-year CREP contracts and 45-year RIM easements.
- Enhancing long-term fish and wildlife habitat in the targeted watersheds for the preservation of natural diversity of Minnesota's biological resources, including threatened and endangered species.
- Helping to protect 2,500 linear miles of streams, rivers and ditches by enrolling up to 61,897 acres of riparian buffers through the use of 14- to 15-year CREP contracts and 45-year RIM easements.
- Restoring up to 24,000 acres of wetlands and adjacent upland acres through the use of 14 to 15-year CREP contracts and permanent RIM easements. These wetland restoration measures will also help reduce future flood damage by increasing water storage capacity by 10,000 to 20,000 acre feet per year.
- Restoring up to 5,000 acres of flood-damaged land through the use of 14-to 15-year CREP contracts and permanent RIM easements.
- Enrolling up to 18,058 acres of highly erodible cropland with an Erodibility Index (EI) of 15 or greater to reduce soil erosion and achieve related high-priority natural resource benefits.
- Enrolling up to 2,850 acres of highly erodible cropland with an EI of 8 or greater to help reduce soil erosion through the use of contour buffer strips.

Up to 120,000 new acres of environmentally sensitive land within the three designated watersheds will be targeted with the following enrollment goals:

- 51,000 acres in the Red River Watershed in northwestern Minnesota;
- 51,000 acres in the Upper Mississippi Watershed in southeastern Minnesota;
- 18,000 acres in the Missouri and Des Moines River Watershed in southwestern Minnesota.

## Basic Land Eligibility

- Land must be cropland that is physically and legally capable of being cropped ;
- Has been cropped four of the last six years (1996 – 2001);
- Excessively Eroded Cropland -Erodibility Index (EI) of 15 or greater;
- Erodible cropland (contour buffer strips) - EI of 8 or greater;
- Riparian Areas: perennial stream, seasonal stream, wetland determined to be Cowardin classification, permanent water body always containing water;
- Wetland restoration – acres must be farmed wetlands, wetlands, prior converted wetlands within or outside the 100-year floodplain for either CP23 CP23A;
- Ground water protection – includes sinkholes and Karst areas; well head protection areas;
- Decorah shale outcrops – field determination is required based on county soil survey or County Geological Atlas;

- Flood damage reduction areas – offered acres must have 51% of the soils mapped as occasionally and frequently flooded

### **Producer Eligibility**

- The cropland must have been owned or operated for 12 months prior to being offered.

### **Sign-up and Contract Duration**

Sign-up for the CREP begins June 6, 2005, and continues until enrollment goals are attained, or through December 31, 2007, whichever comes first. Land enrolled in CREP remains under CRP contract for a period of 14 to 15 years, and a 45-year or perpetual RIM easement, as specified in the contract.

### **Approved Conservation Practices For The Lower Mississippi Watershed in Southeastern Minnesota:**

- CP2 Establishment of Permanent Native Grasses
- CP3A Hardwood Tree Planting
- CP4D Permanent Wildlife Habitat
- CP12 Wildlife Food Plot
- CP15A Establishment of Permanent Vegetative Cover (Contour Grass Strips )  
\* CP15A is CRP 14 to 15 year contract with no easement
- CP21 Filter Strips
- CP22 Riparian Buffer
- CP23 Wetland Restoration 100- Yr Flood Plain
- CP23A Wetland Restoration Non-Flood Plain

**Whole counties Southeast CREP area:** Goodhue, Wabasha, Dodge, Olmsted, Winona, Mower, Fillmore, Houston

**Partial counties Southeast CREP area:** Blue Earth, Dakota, Scott, Rice, Le Sueur, Waseca, Steele, Faribault, Freeborn

### **Payments**

Subject to contract terms and certain limitations, CREP participants will be eligible for the following types of FSA payments:

- A per acre annual rental payment based on the most current CRP soil rental rate.
- An additional 30 percent soil rental rate incentive
- An additional CRP maintenance rate.
- 50 percent of the eligible reimbursable costs (cost-share) to establish CREP conservation practices. Cost-share reimbursement to CREP participants from all sources may not exceed 100 percent of the cost to install CREP conservation practices.
- A one-time Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) for CRP practices CP21 and 22 equal to 40 percent of the total cost of practice installation.
- A one-time Signing Incentive Payment (SIP) for CRP practices CP21 and CP22 of \$10/acre for each full year of the contract.
- A one-time incentive payment equal to 25 percent of the cost of restoring the hydrology of the site to encourage the restoration of cropped wetlands for practices CP23 and CP23A according to FSA's published national CRP directives.

**Payment Example:**

10 acres of CP21 offered for 15 years of CRP enrollment and 45 years of RIM easement:

Annual Rental	10 x \$100 acre x 30% incentive + \$5 maintenance = \$1,350
Total of CRP annual Rental payment	\$1,350 x 15 years = \$20,250
SIP	10 acres x \$10 x 15 years = \$1,500
CRP cost share (c/s)	10 acres x \$10/acre practice installation cost = \$1,110 x 50% = \$550
PIP	\$550 x 80% = \$440
RIM c/s	\$1,110 practice installation cost less CRP c/s of \$550 and CRP PIP of \$440 = \$210 RIM c/s
RIM Bonus Payment	Based on a percentage of the county assessor's estimated township market value for tillable farmland in the township of enrollment and 45-year easement length.

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