

Fact Sheet

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a state/federal/local partnership that combines the existing federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) with the existing Minnesota Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Program to retire environmentally sensitive land in the Minnesota River Valley. Under CREP, landowners can voluntarily enroll eligible land in a 15-year CRP contract followed by a RIM Reserve perpetual easement. Landowners who enroll land will need to develop a conservation plan to manage the land for maximum water quality and wildlife benefits.

Eligible types of land

Enrollment will be targeted to:

- Marginal frequently flooded cropland in the floodplain of the mainstream river and principal tributaries of the Minnesota River
- Riparian buffers along cropland identified as a pollutant contributor
- Wetland restoration with a high potential for providing water quality and wildlife benefits to the Minnesota River or its tributaries
- Cropland that was planted or considered planted to an agricultural commodity 4 of the 6 most recent crop years (including field margins), which is also physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner to an agricultural commodity OR marginal pastureland that is suitable for use as a riparian buffer to be planted to trees.

Landowners can fill out an application to enroll land into CREP at their local USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and Soil and Water Conservation District offices. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will provide technical advice and support. Landowners who enroll land will initially receive a "RIM Reserve bonus" payment followed by 15 years of annual CRP payments. (The "bonus" payment is essentially a lump sum payment for the RIM Reserve easement that begins when the CRP contract expires.) The payment rates for both the CRP and RIM Reserve are based on individual formulas that take a variety of factors into consideration. The CRP

payments are based on currently approved soil rental rates. The RIM Reserve bonus payment is based on 40 percent of the CRP payment. The CREP is authorized by the Food Security Act of 1985 as amended, which gives the Secretary of Agriculture discretion to enter into agreements with states to use the CRP to cost-effectively further specific conservation and environmental objectives of the state and nation. Minnesota submitted the CREP proposal to the USDA in October 1996.

Background information

The Minnesota River stretches 335 miles from the western border of Minnesota to its confluence with the Mississippi River in the Minnesota/St. Paul area. About 92 percent of the basin's 16,770- square-mile area is agricultural; intense land use has made the river one of the country's most polluted and single largest source of phosphorous and sediment to the Mississippi River. Sampling at 22 sites along the river indicates that all sites violate bacterial standards. A statewide 10-year plan to clean up the river began several years ago and is having positive effects.

Benefits of this program

- Reduced sediment, phosphorus and nitrogen loading; reduced flooding; improved wildlife habitat; and improved recreational opportunities
- Effectively leverages state, federal and private dollars to improve water quality
- The program benefits Minnesota, greatly increasing the number of acres enrolled in the RIM Reserve Program easements
- The program benefits the federal government by allowing it to retain the benefits accrued from its investment in the Conservation Reserve Program for many years
- Farmers benefit from receiving compensation for voluntarily placing environmentally sensitive cropland that is only marginally productive into a 15-year CRP contract followed by a conservation easement through the RIM Reserve Program.



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