

Turtle Creek Watershed District



Geneva Lake News

September 2004
Volume 1, No. 2

Watershed District Board Members

- Tom Butler, Chair
- Norman Johnson
- Ken Muilenburg
- Arlen Schamber
- Peter Van Erkel
- Nancy Kay Finley, Secretary

Contributors

- Jeanine Vorland
MN Dept of Natural Resources
- Ann Byers
Freeborn County NRCS
- Bev Nordby
SE MN CREP Coordinator & Mower County SWCD
- Emily Hutchins
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Updated Watershed Plan & Rules

The Turtle Creek Watershed District has updated its watershed management plan and rules.

In updating the plan, the Managers sought public input through surveys, one-on-one discussions with landowners, informational meetings, and news releases to gather input on concerns and issues the public might have.

The District has developed policy statements and goals as a result of the planning the board has done. These goals are organized within the following Six Major Areas of District Involvement.

Watershed Management - Manage the watershed from an effective Watershed Management Plan that addresses goals and meets the needs of the watershed public.

Water Quality - Encourage and implement practices to

improve and protect the quality of surface water in the District.

Water Quantity Management - Effectively manage the flow of floodwaters within the District.

Education - Provide the residents and landowners with information to assure the protection and improvement of the Turtle Creek Watershed.

The overall goal of the Managers is to make the wisest possible use and conservation of the District's water and related resources. The watershed plan is intended to be the guide for accomplishment of this goal.

The rules were also updated. The Managers intend to use



these rules as a management tool in carrying out their responsibility to provide wise management of the Watershed District's resources.

You can view both of these documents on the web at: <http://hwy.co.freeborn.mn.us/watershed/turtlecreek/forms/>

For more information, contact Turtle Creek Watershed Board, c/o Nancy Kay Finley, 24701 515 Ave., Austin, MN 55912

-Bev Nordby, Mower Co. SWCD

General CRP Sign-up 29 Underway

From **30 August to 24 September 2004**, the USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA) is holding a General Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) sign-up.

CRP is a voluntary program available to farmers to help them protect marginal and highly erodible cropland. Producers enrolled in CRP plant long-term cover to cre-

ate wildlife habitat, improve water quality, and control erosion. FSA provides participants with rental payments, maintenance payments, and cost-share assistance. Rental payments are based on the soils of the area being offered, plus a \$5/ac maintenance payment. Maximum cost-share is 50% for establishing conservation practices. Contracts are 10-

15 years.

To be eligible, producers must have owned or operated the land for at least one year prior to sign-up. Land offered for enrollment must have a crop history—meaning planted to an agricultural commodity 4 of 6 years from 1996-2001.

The General CRP sign-up is a national bidding process, in

(Continued from page 1)
contrast to the Continuous CRP sign-up in which producers can enroll at anytime and be approved locally.

CRP offers are ranked according to the Environmental Benefits Index (EBI). EBI is based

on 5 environmental factors and a cost factor. Each offer is assigned a point score based on its relative environmental benefits.

Only 800,000 acres are available for enrollment nationwide. It will be a very competitive

sign-up, and producers will need to know how to maximize their bid for enrollment. For assistance, producers may call Emily Hutchins at (507) 455-5841 or the Freeborn County FSA office at (507) 373-5607 ext. 2.

-Emily Hutchins, MN DNR



CRP and WRP offer alternative to crop drown-outs

Heavy rains all growing season have caused severe crop drown-outs for area farmers—these losses will be very evident come harvest time.

There is no doubt many area farmers are experiencing severe crop drown-outs due to heavy rains this growing season. These losses will be very evident come harvest time. If you are a farmer looking for an alternative to crop drown-outs, the Farmable Wetland Program (FWP) and Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) are options you should seriously consider.

FWP is a practice under the Continuous Sign-up Conservation Reserve Program (Continuous CRP). Continuous CRP practices are automatically eligible for enrollment—all you need to do is sign up. Under FWP, landowners are allowed to enroll wetland(s) of 5 acres or less and a buffer ranging from a minimum 30-foot band around the wetland to three times the size of the wetland. The maximum enrollment per farm tract is 40 acres. Contracts are 10 to 15 years in exchange for annual

rental payments, which are based on soil type, plus 20% incentive payments, a one-time signing bonus of \$100 to \$150 per acre based on contract length, up to 90% cost-share for seeding, and a \$5 per acre maintenance payment.

WRP is a permanent easement program in which several landowners in Turtle Creek Watershed are participating. WRP offers payment to restore wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal land from agriculture. WRP provides payment for the conservation easement, which is based on the agricultural value of the land, as well as up to 100% cost-share for restoration costs. Landowners retain control of access and ownership of the land—no public access is required, and they have the right to hunt, fish, trap, and pursue other appropriate recreational uses. WRP allows for

land, including any easement, to be sold, and provides additional benefits for the entire community, including improved water quality, enhanced habitat for wildlife, reduced soil erosion, reduced flooding, and improved water supply.

For more information on FWP and WRP eligibility and enrollment options, contact the NRCS/SWCD office today at (507) 373-5607 ext. 3. Office staff would be happy to develop a proposal that meets your needs and creates beneficial wildlife habitat. Don't miss this opportunity to do something good for the environment and be well compensated for it too!

-Emily Hutchins
DNR Wildlife, Owatonna

-Ann Byers
Freeborn County, NRCS



Before: Flooded cropland and lost profit.



After: FWP serving its function: Income from CRP, detaining flood waters, filtering sediment and pollutants from runoff, recharging groundwater, and providing wildlife habitat.

Geneva Lake Status

In August 2003, the Minnesota DNR initiated efforts to restore aquatic habitats in Geneva Lake using siphons to lower water levels. The plan was to lower water levels 18 inches to 2 feet through winter and during the growing season of 2004. Unfortunately, efforts to control rough fish and improve water clarity and aquatic plant distribution fell well short due to unfavorable weather conditions. Water clarity remains very poor.

The DNR plans to lower water levels again this winter to try for a more complete winterkill of carp. Plans are also in place to use a technique known as reverse aeration to help ensure better winterkill. Reverse aeration stirs up water in the frozen lake when dissolved oxygen levels are near zero to attempt to eliminate spots of higher oxygen where carp may be finding refuge. The DNR plans to restock the lake with northern pike and perch if winterkill is successful.

Next spring, the DNR will try again for a drawdown of 18 inches to 2 feet to expose bottom soils around the lake margins. If this level is achieved,

several yards up to a few hundred yards of lake bottom will be exposed in the shallow north bay. It is anticipated water levels will be allowed to recover naturally in late summer.

Despite adverse conditions, the 2003-04 drawdown efforts produced some results. Initially, reclamation proceeded according to plan. By late winter, target water levels were reached and dissolved oxygen levels were dropping rapidly. Evidence of winterkill was widespread. Unfortunately, the period of low oxygen was shortened by a late winter thaw and rainfall. While there was significant carp kill, it was apparent by early summer enough rough fish survived to limit the recovery of desired aquatic plants. Only a narrow fringe of new aquatic plants developed along the shoreline, and sparse submergent aquatic plants were noted by early summer.

Because Geneva Lake has lost many acres of emergent plants that provide important habitat and water quality functions, the DNR planned to lower water levels through the growing season. Emergent aquatic plants

are adapted to natural cycles of drought and most species require exposed lake bottom to germinate. Hence the need for lower water levels in spring and summer. Lower water in summer could also help with rough fish control and growth of submergent plants.

Spring efforts to lower the lake went well for a time. The lake level was nearly a foot below the dam by mid-May, and some new growth of plants was observed. Ducks Unlimited purchased pipe for 3 additional siphons to add capacity. Shortly after these siphons were installed, the weather changed and excessive rainfall thwarted further efforts to lower the lake. Normal water levels returned by mid-June, and the lake level has since remained at or above the level of the dam.

Minnesota's Climatology Office ranks growing season precipitation on a scale of 0 to 100. This



New growth of rushes and other aquatic plants along the shore of Geneva Lake.

year's growing season rainfall (1 April-13 Sept.) ranked in the 90-98 percentiles even though the watershed was in the tail end of drought in early spring. The siphons do not have the capacity to overcome that much excessive rainfall.

For more information, contact Jeanine Vorland, Area Wildlife Manager., at (507) 455-5841.

-Jeanine Vorland, MN DNR

CREP vs. Continuous CRP

There is a wide variety of conservation programs available to landowners today, and landowners need to be informed in order to choose the programs that best meet their needs.

At the present time, Minnesota is waiting for its second round of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Unfortunately, the new CREP, which would have covered 3 areas in Minnesota including the Southeast, was not approved

for funding during the last legislative session. There are hopes it will be funded in the coming year.

CREP combines federal CRP funds with state Re-invest in Minnesota (RIM) funds (4:1). CREP provides for a 15-year CRP contract with either a 30-year or perpetual easement, depending on what practice you are implementing. CREP offers annual rental payments based on soil type; additional incen-

tive payments; practice maintenance payments; 90% cost-share for restoration costs; and a one-time easement payment.

Continuous CRP offers annual rental payments based on soil type; additional incentive payments for eligible practices; practice maintenance payments; and 90% cost-share for restoration costs. Contracts are 10-15 years.

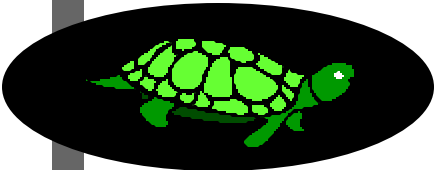
Landowners should be aware if



they decide to enroll in Continuous CRP now and CREP is implemented next year, that particular piece of land is ineligible for CREP, its great incentives, and long-term protection. It's a choice landowners will have to make.

-Emily Hutchins, MN DNR

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