

# Turtle Creek Watershed District



## Geneva Lake News

**June 2005**  
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- Nancy Kay Finley, Secretary

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## Sign-up began June 6 for CREP II enrollment

Producers in three regions of the state, including Freeborn county, whose land meets certain eligibility requirements could begin signing up Monday, June 6, for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP II) at their local USDA Service Center offices.

CREP II, administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), in cooperation with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), and Watershed Districts, combines federal and state resources through the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and state Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program to meet state-specific environmental objectives and to protect environmentally sensitive land.

CREP can be a tremendous tool to address the challenges of flooding and sedimentation in drainage ditches in the Turtle Creek Watershed. The Watershed District Board of Managers considers the program an excellent opportunity to improve water quality in Geneva Lake. They support CREP and hope landowners in the entire watershed consider CREP or Continuous CRP to install buffers along drainage ditches and implement wetland restorations.

The program will have a continuous sign-up, ending Dec. 31, 2007, or when the Southeast 51,000-acre enrollment goal is reached.

Southeast Minnesota (17 counties) CREP goals include the following:

- ◆ Wetland Restorations: 6,960 acres
- ◆ Riparian Areas next to ditches and streams: 14,828 acres
- ◆ Flood Damage Reduction: 2,125 acres
- ◆ Groundwater Protection: 6,179 acres
- ◆ Highly Erodible Lands: 18,058 acres
- ◆ Contour Buffer Strips: 2,850 acres

Under CREP II, producers voluntarily enroll in a 15-year CRP contract and a RIM easement of 45 years or perpetual in duration, depending upon the practice being implemented. Producers wanting to receive the full financial package available through CREP II must enroll in both CRP and RIM.

CREP II is a voluntary federal-state-local program that works with farmers and ranchers to enroll up to 120,000 acres of environmentally sensitive cropland to enhance fish and wildlife habitat, improve water quality, reduce erosion and sedimentation, and reduce the impacts of recurrent flooding. Federal, state, and local agen-

cies, such as FSA, SWCD, NRCS, DNR, and Watershed Districts, will partner in promoting and enrolling participants in CREP II.

CREP II will benefit the Red River watershed in the Northwest, the Lower Mississippi watershed in the Southeast, and the Missouri and Des Moines River watersheds in the Southwest.

To be eligible, cropland must have been planted 4 out of 6 years from 1996-2001 and be physically and legally capable of being cropped in a normal manner. Persons who have land in an existing CRP contract or an approved offer with a contract pending are not eligible for CREP on that acreage until the contract expires, unless the CRP contract is in its final year.

In exchange for converting environmentally sensitive cropland to native vegetation, CREP participants are eligible for several types of federal and state payments, including annual CRP payments, incentive payments for certain CRP practices, and cost-share. In addition, participants are eligible for two types of state payments, including a one-time RIM easement payment and cost-share.

For more information on CREP II, visit the USDA Ag Service Center in Albert Lea or call (507) 373-5607.

-Bev Nordby, Mower SWCD

## CREP: A Landowner's Perspective



Black swallowtail on blue vervain, a native wildflower seeded on many conservation lands (Photo: MN DNR).

Landowners now have an option to enroll farmland in the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP II) or Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP) conservation programs. These programs should be viewed as management tools.

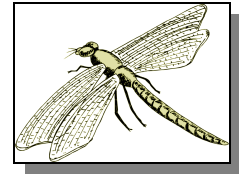
These wetland programs are for portions of farmland that are subject to repeated crop production losses or reduced yields due to drainage problems. In many cases, the area may still be subject to flood-

ing even after investing in improvements. The owner can compare the conservation program revenues for the land before investing in expensive improvements for additional drainage to increase production. New tile expenses can exceed \$500 per acre. Outlet improvement costs would be additional. By enrolling the at-risk lands into CREP II or WREP, the remaining farm unit will have a higher productive average potential.

Freeborn County landowners

should contact their county FSA, NRCS, and/or SWCD at (507) 373-5607 for more information regarding these new conservation programs.

-Tom Butler, farmer and Turtle Creek Watershed District Chair



## Geneva Lake reclamation update

This summer, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will continue efforts to implement the growing season phase of the reclamation plan—a gradual, temporary lowering of water levels to expose bottom soils around lake margins. Lowering water levels during the growing season is critical to a successful reclamation. Geneva Lake has lost many acres of aquatic plants like rushes, cattails, and wild celery that provide important habitat and water quality functions. Some aquatic plants are adapted to the natural cycles of drought and require exposed lake bottom to grow from seed. Once re-established, these plants can persist for several years, helping to protect shorelines from erosion, absorb nutrients, and provide food and shelter for fish and wildlife. If the summer drawdown is successful, active water management will cease so water levels can recover naturally.

In August 2003, the DNR initi-

ated efforts to restore aquatic habitats in Geneva Lake using siphons to temporarily lower water levels. The plan was to lower water levels 18 inches to 2 feet in the lake through the winter and one growing season. So far, management efforts have had mixed results and water clarity improvement and habitat recovery efforts remain below critical thresholds. Geneva Lake was successfully lowered in the winter of 2003 and 2004. However, the second phase of the effort—lowering water levels during the growing season—was cut short by one of the wettest years on record for the Geneva area. Water levels remained at or above dam level from early June 2004 onward.

A large winterkill of carp was observed after ice-out in 2004. Northern pike and yellow perch were stocked in Geneva Lake following the winterkill. However, additional lake monitoring con-



Water lily bed on Geneva Lake in 2003 (Photo: MN DNR).

firmed a substantial number of adult carp had survived. A narrow fringe of new emergent plants developed along the shoreline in some locations and sparse but widely distributed pondweeds were growing in the central lake basin by early summer. Water clarity remained poor and unchanged from 2003. In the winter of 2004 and 2005, dissolved oxygen levels dropped briefly, but winterkill conditions did not develop. In 2005, spring monitoring of water clarity has documented

some improvement from 2003 and 2004. Secchi tube measurements have averaged about 21 centimeters (cm) compared to 9 cm in late May 2004. Water levels remain high. The cool, wet spring has affected growth of aquatic plants as it has affected planting and growth of crops.

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

## Geneva Lake dam study

The outlet structure on Geneva Lake affects water and habitat quality, fish access to the lake, and other water management issues. Dams impact water levels, flows, and the type of fish that can access the lake. The type of dam also influences the management options that may be used to mitigate for long term changes in water quality, fish communities, and flows. The outlet structure emerged as an issue during discussions with area residents and other interested stakeholders about the state of water quality and habitat problems at Geneva Lake.

The Department of Natural Resources in cooperation with

the Turtle Creek Watershed District and Freeborn County agreed to further explore the outlet issues. Toward that end, the DNR has been working on the feasibility of outlet modifications to improve water quality and rough fish control. The breadth of this study includes fish barrier recommendations, examination of the existing structure for soundness, and exploration of outlet modifications that could enhance water management capabilities.

The DNR contracted with Ducks Unlimited, Inc. for portions of the study. Ducks Unlimited has completed the feasibility study for fish barriers

and draft copies of plans are available for review. Topographical surveys of the outlet area were completed in late winter. The engineering and hydrology reports for the existing structure and possible modifications are in progress and should be available for review this summer. These reports will provide information to the Watershed District, Freeborn County, and other interested parties on what can be done at the outlet to help rough fish management, improve water quality, and address other water management concerns. The outlet structure is owned by Freeborn County.

-Jeanine Vorland, MN DNR



## New CREP Technician in Freeborn County

Folks stopping by the NRCS/SWCD office in Albert Lea will see a new face. Lenny Hulbert began his duties on June 6 as a CREP Technician in Freeborn Co. His primary job focus will be on promoting and implementing the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) in the Shellrock and Turtle Creek Watersheds in Freeborn County.

This will facilitate an increase in grasslands and wetlands that will benefit water quality and wildlife habitat. It will also provide a financially attractive alternative to farmers operating marginally productive lands.

Lenny's position is the result of a partnership between Pheasant's Forever and Turtle Creek and Shellrock River Watershed Districts.

Lenny is a native of the Wells area, where he grew up on a farm. He served 4 years in the Air Force before earning his degree at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He worked as an Environmental Specialist/Feedlot Technician for 6 1/2 years in Stearns County.

Lenny can be reached at (507) 373-5607 ext. 3.

-Don Flatness, Freeborn SWCD

## Newsletter editor's notes

"Geneva Lake News" is normally sent to producers and lakeshore owners in the Geneva Lake subwatershed. However, this edition has been sent to all producers in the greater Turtle Creek Watershed in Freeborn Co. to announce the CREP II sign-up. If you currently are not but are interested in becoming a regular

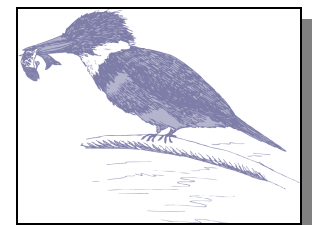
recipient of this newsletter, please contact Emily Hutchins at (507) 455-5841 or [emily.hutchins@dnr.state.mn.us](mailto:emily.hutchins@dnr.state.mn.us)

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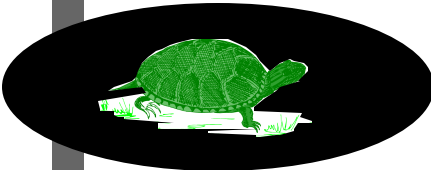
[hutchins@dnr.state.mn.us](mailto:hutchins@dnr.state.mn.us). Please type "Geneva Lake News" into the subject line of your email message.

The next newsletter will feature shoreline topics and lakeshore restoration.

-Emily Hutchins, MN DNR



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