



## Science-based conservation methods

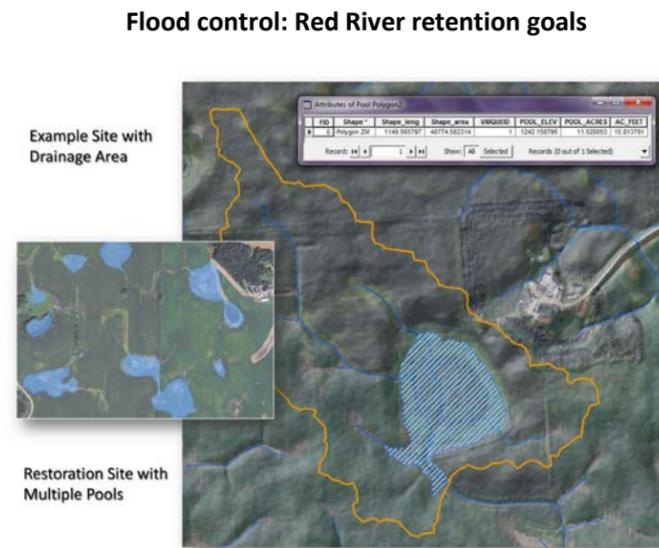
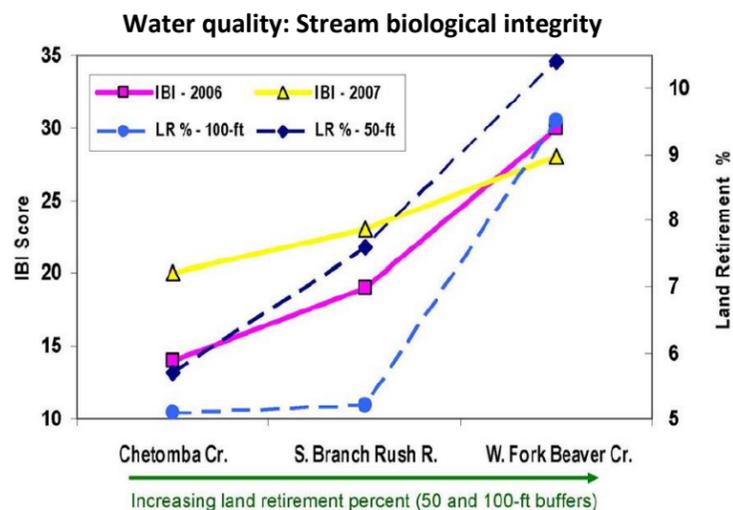
Recent studies by Ducks Unlimited (DU) and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) substantiate the multiple benefits that conservation easements provide. The principles of these studies will be used to determine the areas where dollars will be spent to maximize the return on investment.

In the January/February 2013 issue of *Ducks Unlimited*, Scott C. Yaich, Ph.D., director of conservation operations at DU, said that “the effects of wetland and grassland conservation have far-reaching consequences” including vital habitat for waterfowl and protecting landowners, farms, businesses, and communities from flooding.

According to Yaich, conservation activities in the Chesapeake Bay area beginning in the 1990s, including wetland restorations and streamside buffers, have resulted in a measured improvement in water quality and waterfowl populations in the Bay.

In a 2008 paper titled *Effects of Agricultural Land Retirement in the Minnesota River Basin*, USGS and BWSR scientists concluded that conservation easements provide clear water quality benefits. The study showed:

- Increasing Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) scores with increasing percentage of retired land;
- Decreasing total nitrogen concentrations with increasing percentage of retired land; and
- Lowest nitrogen and phosphorus concentrations in the sub-basin with the highest retired land percentage.
- Better correlation of IBI score with percentage of land retired with decreasing buffer distance from the stream.



**RIM Reserve** restores wetlands and grasslands in agricultural watersheds through permanent conservation easements on privately owned lands. The program uses *science-based conservation methods* that deliver *proven outcomes*.

### Benefits to Minnesotans:

- Creates and connects wildlife habitat
- Increases wildlife populations and improves hunting and fishing
- Protects and improves water quality
- Provides flood retention and reduces soil erosion
- Creates and sustains Minnesota jobs

RIM Reserve bond funding history (\$000)									
	FY01	FY03	FY06	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13
<b>Regular Bonding</b>	\$72,987	\$1,000	\$23,000	\$0	\$25,000	\$500	\$0	\$20,000	\$6,000
<b>Emergency Bonding</b>	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,000	\$0	\$500	\$10,000	\$0	\$1,500

*From FY01-13, a total of 115,799 acres were restored and enrolled with regular bond funding and 5,527 acres in emergency bond funding.*



**John Jaschke, BWSR Executive Director**  
 (651) 296-0878  
[john.jaschke@state.mn.us](mailto:john.jaschke@state.mn.us)

**Sarah Strommen, BWSR Assistant Director**  
 (651) 297-5617  
[sarah.strommen@state.mn.us](mailto:sarah.strommen@state.mn.us)

# Targeting critically-vulnerable expiring CRP acres

Minnesota's expiring CRP:

Year	Acres
2012	292,429
2012	(144,429)*
2013	130,246
2014	207,841
2015	101,634
2016	90,803
<b>Total:</b>	<b>822,953</b>

*\*If 2012 is indicative, more than 400,000 acres will be removed from the CRP by 2016.*

Nearly 823,000 acres (60 percent) of Minnesota conservation lands enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will expire by September 2016 — a land area equivalent to Anoka, Hennepin and Ramsey counties combined. Unless action is taken to continue protection of these lands using a combination of conservation programs, they will likely be converted back into cropland, eliminating the associated water quality benefits that address critical priorities such as reducing sediment and nutrients, as well as providing a multitude of wildlife benefits.

Over the last 25 years, the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) CRP has been the largest and most significant private lands conservation program in Minnesota's history. An entire generation of Minnesotans have benefitted from improved water quality and enhanced wildlife habitat. These benefits are now in jeopardy.

Critical CRP contracts have already been identified using the Ecological Ranking Tool (ERT). This tool identifies areas on the landscape that are (1) at risk for soil erosion, (2) at risk for contributing sediment to surface waters, and (3) are of high habitat quality. Local SWCD, NRCS and partner staff are providing directed outreach to landowners with expiring CRP acres on these targeted lands.

# Creating or sustaining Minnesota jobs

Conservation easement programs that restore wetlands require a broad range of skilled workers in the public and private sectors throughout Minnesota. According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) report, *Assessing the Economic Impact of WRP and RIM on the Minnesota Economy* (Jan. 2010), funding at a \$30 million level would generate the following projected economic benefits:

- Leveraging of up to 1.6 federal conservation dollars for each state dollar invested
- More than \$37.5 million in total economic output
- 300 jobs created or maintained

### What these dollars are buying for Minnesotans:

Thousands of acres of restored wetlands and native grassland buffers are restored on privately owned lands that remain on local tax rolls. The dollars are mainly used for:

- Easement payments to landowners
- Project construction costs of restoring wetland basins and establishing native vegetation
- Program implementation (surveying, engineering designs, and realty transactions) in cooperation with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) who work with the landowner to select local contractors



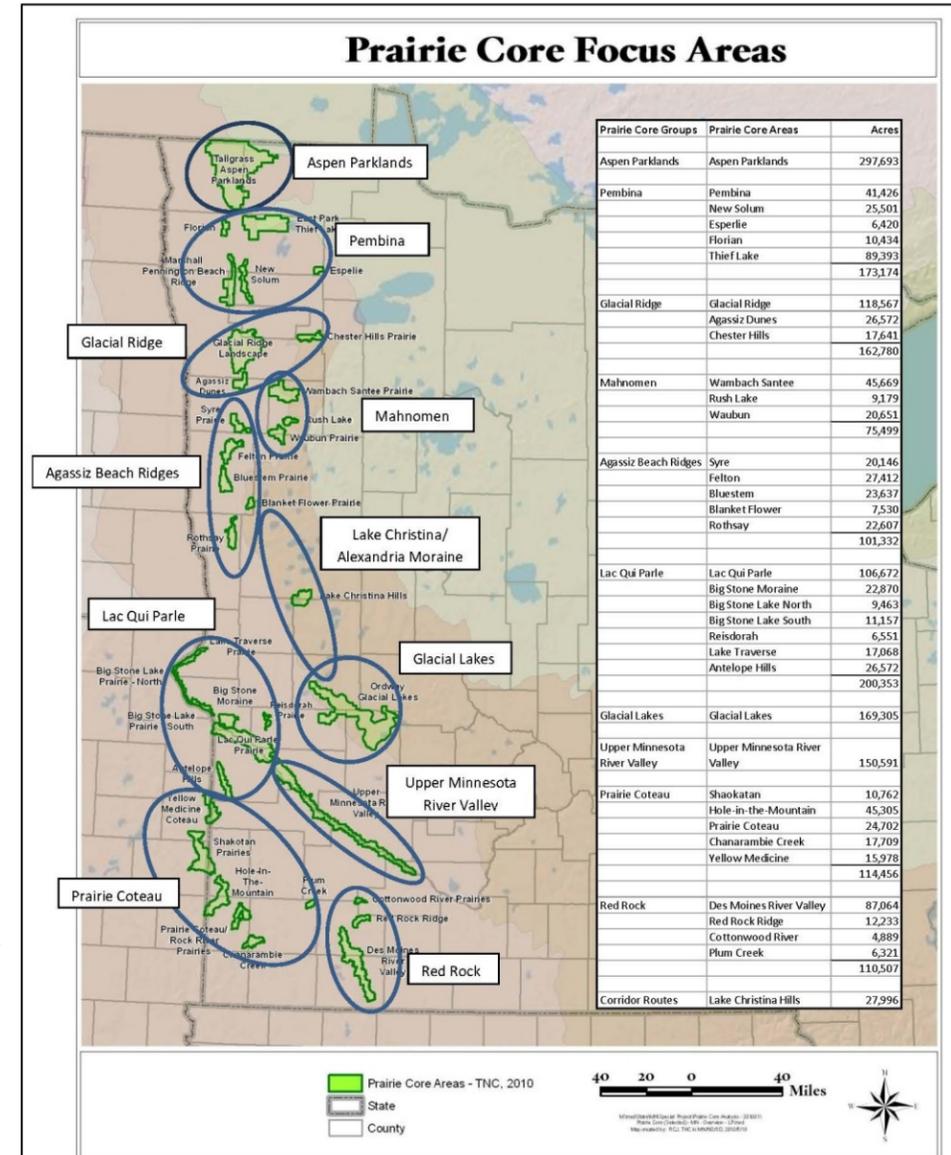
# Implementing the Prairie Conservation Plan

Minnesota's conservation partners in the Prairie Region of the state collaborated to develop a twenty-five year strategy for accelerating conservation. This strategy developed due to the continuing loss and degradation of prairies, grasslands, wetlands and associated habitats along with the fish and wildlife dependent upon them.

The Plan proposes:

1. Permanent protection through fee title or easements of native prairies, wetlands and other habitats of more than 850,000 acres, and
2. Restoration activities on grasslands, wetlands and other habitats on more than 500,000 acres.

As outlined in the plan, BWSR will enroll 10,000-20,000 acres/year in conservation easements using RIM, RIM-WRP, and other appropriations.



RIM projects are selected through a competitive process, so that state and federal dollars accomplish the best possible environmental benefits. The projects that receive funding are the highest ranking projects statewide. Projects within habitat corridors as defined in the Prairie Plan and expiring CRP contracts will be given greater weight during the ranking process.

