

# BUFFERNOTES



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Described as key to program success

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### BUFFER NOTES

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## CREP FORUM PRODUCES NEWS OF NOTE

LINCOLN, Nebraska - More than 200 conservationists from around the country gathered Aug. 14-17 for the 2006 CREP Forum, "Creative Solutions, Multiple Resources, Many Partners."

USDA Secretary Mike Johanns, a Nebraska native, Gov. Dave Heineman and Nebraska U.S. Sen. Chuck Hegel were among featured speakers. They underscored the importance of the Conservation Reserve Program and its offshoots in protecting water and enhancing wildlife habitat in America.

This issue of BufferNotes features news of interest from the forum. Look for stories on:

- The future of CRP, CCRP and CREP
- Water quality and water quantity goals in America's CREPs
- Marketing as an essential tool for conservation programs

Johanns noted that CREP is an example of a voluntary program achieving results. "Cooperative conservation is compelling, and USDA is proud to be a part of it," he said.

## CRP IS HERE TO STAY

LINCOLN, Nebraska -- The 2007 Farm Bill is anything but settled, but the Conservation Reserve Program is here to stay. The same goes for the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and the continuous CRP sign-up.

That's what conservationists gathered here at a national CREP forum heard from several speakers. Conference attendees, many of them involved with implementing the nation's 37 CREPs, were also encouraged to redouble efforts to sign up the maximum number of acres authorized under the current Farm Bill.

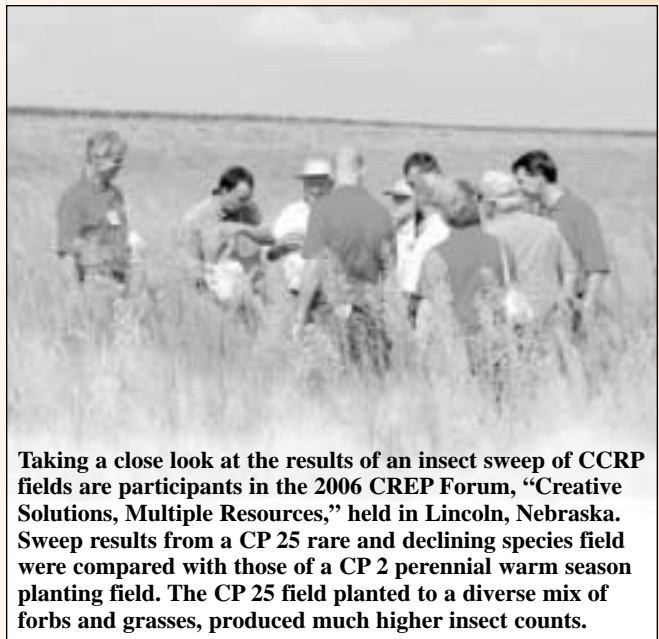
Among the speakers was John Johnson, Farm Service Agency deputy administrator for farm programs. He underscored importance and popularity of the program around

the country.

"No matter what Congress does with the 2007 Farm Bill, CRP will be there, along with the Conservation Reserve

Enhancement Program," Johnson predicted during opening-session remarks.

*Continued on next page*



Taking a close look at the results of an insect sweep of CCRP fields are participants in the 2006 CREP Forum, "Creative Solutions, Multiple Resources," held in Lincoln, Nebraska. Sweep results from a CP 25 rare and declining species field were compared with those of a CP 2 perennial warm season planting field. The CP 25 field planted to a diverse mix of forbs and grasses, produced much higher insect counts.

# "The right thing to do is to keep CRP positioned high on the docket for 2007"

FSA Associate Administrator Glenn Keppy added, "The right thing to do is to keep CRP positions high on the docket for 2007."

Keppy was featured speaker at a ceremony recognizing the 20th anniversary of CRP.

Charles Chadwell, FSA CREP program manager, noted the importance of enrolling maximum eligible acres. "We want to fully enroll through our authorization," he said. Congress will be watching the numbers, he said. Of the 39 million acres currently authorized, 36,072 were enrolled as of July. Chadwell was on hand for a nuts-and-bolts session at the forum.

Enrollment in the current fiscal year has been good, Johnson noted. As of July, enrollment for all continuous signup programs was 213,515 acres, compared to 198,747 in July 2005. CREP enrollment was running more than 20,000 acres ahead of last year as of July. Total enrollment in 2005 was 3.2 million acres, a gain of 297,222 from the previous year.

## MARKETING PROGRAMS A MUST

If one consistent theme emerged from various sessions at the 2006 CREP Forum, it's that outreach is essential if a conservation program is to succeed.

"Marketing really is the battle, the toughest part," said Glenn Schafer, FSA assistant program specialist in Minnesota.

One way to enhance outreach would be to build financial incentives for outreach into programs, said Max Schnepf of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. Schnepf was coordinator of the National Conservation Buffer Initiative, a USDA outreach initiative that promoted CCRP and CREP. "Outreach has been a problem from the day the continuous Conservation Reserve Program was created," he said. He suggested:

- Incentives for peer-to-peer marketing

- A bonus for landowners willing to act collectively on program participation
- Finders' fees for producers and third parties.

Marketing was a key component of Louisiana's successful CREP rollout, said David Carline, FSA conservation program specialist in that state. The 50,000-acre Louisiana CREP was announced on Earth Day 2005. It is almost completely enrolled.

"We bombarded people with publicity - radio spots, news releases and other PR," Carline said. "We held workshops and partner meetings, which are crucial."

Nebraska relies on community-based planning for watershed projects, said Elbert Traylor of the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality. The process identifies key stakeholders in a project area and quickly empowers them to develop project goals and plans, timelines, best management practices and other details.

"We use extensive advertising and outreach to stakeholders," Traylor said. The outreach includes:

- Two personal letters to stakeholders
- Posters placed in prominent spots

- Postcards announcing meetings
- Personal phone calls and follow-up calls to stakeholders. Agency lists are pooled to identify personal contacts

One of the best marketing tools is success. Vermont's CREP pays producers for enrolling unused but environmentally important acres near streams. Dairy farmers receive a significant bonus for enrolling "small but important acres," said Roger Albee, FSA state executive director in Vermont. "It's a 10 percent increase in revenues for some farmers," said Albee. "That's a marketing tool."

## WHAT'S NEW WITH CREP?

News of note from the 2006 CREP Forum:

**<37>** CREPs in America. First signed: Maryland, Oct. 20, 1997. Most recent: Idaho, May

**<5>** new CREP proposals are pending approval: Kansas, Louisiana (2nd in state), New Mexico, Texas, Iowa (2nd in state).

**<4>** CREPs are in development: Arkansas (2nd in state), Hawaii, Montana (2nd in state), Oklahoma.

**<6>** states address water conservation in current CREPs.

**<3>** states are considering addressing water conservation in new CREP proposals - Kansas, New Mexico and Texas.

**<3>** states make water conservation a major goal: Nebraska, Idaho and Colorado.

A new CREP Tracking Report is provided by FSA on-line at <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crep.htm>.

## IN THE FIELD: NEBRASKA CREP

Insects in a sweep net (right) and a ground water cleanup project (below) were among tour stops for CREP Forum participants in Nebraska. John Johnson, FSA deputy administrator for farm programs, is at far left in the lower photo.



Jim Harder of the Lancaster County, Nebraska, NRCS talks about how an underground outlet is used to control water flow across terraces in a land treatment associated with the Wagon Train Lake Watershed Project.

# CREP AIMS AT WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY

CREP and certain other Farm Bill programs these days are focusing on both water quality and quantity. Here's a wrapup of two CREP Forum sessions focusing on these often-complementary goals.

## Protecting Quality

Water quality enhancement has been a central goal of CCRP and CREP since the programs were authorized a decade ago. With more than 3.4 million acres signed up, conservationists have learned a lot.

Understanding has been boosted by growth in the body of research about key CCRP/CREP practices like riparian buffers and filter strips, said Max Schnepf of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. He was among speakers at a water quality session during the 2006 CREP Forum in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Seventy-two research articles about buffers have been published since 2000, he said. Studies focusing on riparian buffer effectiveness indicate that properly designed buffers work. Mean results from research indicate removal of 69 percent of nitrates in runoff, 72 percent of nitrates from subsurface flows, 61 percent of potassium, 84 percent of sediment, 51 percent of atrazine and 67 percent of fecal coliform.

Buffer research is sometimes criticized for being too controlled and without applied practices, Schnepf noted. But the need for careful design is underscored by research and real-world findings.

"It's extremely important to plan buffers to capture sheet flow and nitrate and subsurface flow," he said. Designers must consider flow patterns in watersheds and also the intersection of ground and surface water flows, Schnepf added.

"Daylighting" drainage systems into restored wetlands is a growing practice to improve the effectiveness of conservation systems. Glenn Schafer, FSA assistant program specialist in Minnesota, noted that one project in that state combined that practice with CREP and CRP contracts, leading to a 75 percent reduction in nitrate flows.

More partnering and more effective best management practices are needed, said John Bender of the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality. The state produces 31.8 million kilograms of nitrates per year. The vast majority comes from agriculture.

Clean Water Act funding for nonpoint-source pollution has been declining for five years, he said. "This is really making partnerships critical. You've got to pool resources if you're going to make any progress."

Ground water quality is a concern in states like Nebraska. "We need better best-management practices," he said. "Over-watering continues to be a source of ground water contamination."

## Quantity Counts

CREPs to address water quantity issues are emerging quickly as tools for landowners, state water authorities, conservationists and other stakeholders.

Colorado, Idaho and Nebraska CREPs are among the nation's newest, and all three make water conservation major goals. Three other CREPs have water conservation provisions, and three more CREPs in development would address water conservation.

Nebraska's was the first to make water conservation the major priority. Being first was difficult, noted Greg Reisdorff, FSA conservation program specialist, who spoke at the 2006 CREP Forum in Lincoln. It was like "herding chickens," he said. The list of partners is often expanded with this new breed of CREP. State water authorities have major roles, and states often have more responsibilities.

FSA Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs John Johnson outlined some specifics:

- FSA may support water-saving CREPs where state water authorities have issued water usage stops or moratoriums on new water uses in the project area.
- State partners need to develop and manage plans to reduce water consumption.
- FSA may pay irrigated rental rates for CREPs that meet specific requirements. These include payments for land being retired and planted to cover. State partners also need to enter into contracts with state water authorities.

Developing new CREPs takes longer because of these necessary steps, Johnson said.

In Nebraska, FSA, the state Department of Natural Resources, water districts and natural resource districts (conservation districts) all needed to approve the Republican-Platte River CREP, said Reisdorff. "It is more lengthy," he said of the process.

But once the Republican-Platte CREP was signed, producers moved quickly in the face of seven years of drought. More than 40,000 acres have been enrolled in little more than a year, noted Gov. Dave Heineman. Much of that interest came in the Republican River basin. Producers are eligible for rental rates of \$100 per acre to retire gravity irrigation systems and \$120 for pivot irrigation. They also receive other customary CREP incentives and cost sharing.

Given the level of interest in other states considering water quantity CREPs, including Kansas, New Mexico and Texas, it looks like CREP's flexibility makes it a new tool in states that need water conservation.

## UPPER MISSISSIPPI PARTNERSHIP HAS 198T-MILE AREA

By SAMUEL OSINDE  
Partnership Coordinator

The Upper Mississippi River is a valuable natural, historic, cultural, and economic resource. The river supports a tremendous diversity and abundance of wildlife. Use of

the land and the river over time, has often come at the expense of wildlife, natural function of the river and its watershed, and a clean environment. Steady progress has been made on a number of pollution problems; however, the river is still faced with some difficult and complex management challenges.

Urban and industrial growth, habitat loss, sediment and nutrient pollution, and the effects of river regulation and

modification have all disrupted the ecological health of the watershed and the river system. Downstream, recent studies of hypoxia problems in the Gulf of Mexico have further pointed out the need for extensive efforts in the upper watershed to reduce nutrient pollution from agricultural and urban lands and restore critical habitats, like forests that provide both biological benefits and the ability to protect water quality.

The Upper Mississippi

Forestry Partnership, a joint venture between the state forestry agencies of Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin, along with the USDA Forest Service, aims to increase the use of trees and forests to meet the overall objective of watershed protection in the 198,000 square mile Upper Mississippi River basin. In addition, the project is targeted at heightening awareness of the role and importance of forestry oppor-

tunities being implemented by agencies and organizations working in the basin.

Improving water quality through the establishment of riparian buffers is a major focal activity. The premise for this activity is that runoff from agricultural land is the dominant source of contaminants (per acre) to water bodies in this region.

The goal is to prioritize locations for reforestation for water quality improvement in the Upper Mississippi agricultural landscapes and to work with partners to install riparian buffers.

Impact at this watershed scale can only be achieved through prioritization of activities. The upper Mississippi Forestry partnership has made significant progress in prioritizing areas where it makes the most sense to establish riparian buffers in the upper Mississippi watershed. This was done using GIS, primarily on a regional scale. Some finer analysis has also been done. For example, Watonwan River watershed in Minnesota was chosen based upon having a large percentage of agriculture (row crops and small grains) within the entire eight-digit watershed and also a large percentage of agriculture within a 300-foot corridor surrounding perennial and intermittent water bodies and because of the availability of

high resolution hydrograph and high resolution soils data.

Reforestation and forest conservation models were individually run on land area within the 300-foot corridor. Such information can be used to guide the installation of practices in the field.

**For more information, visit our at [http://na.fs.fed.us/watershed/upper\\_mississippi\\_partnership/](http://na.fs.fed.us/watershed/upper_mississippi_partnership/). You can also contact me at [Samuel.Osinde@dnr.state.wi.us](mailto:Samuel.Osinde@dnr.state.wi.us) or 608-785-9013.**

## **DROUGHT AID TAPS UNUSED, OTHER FUNDS**

HAYES, South Dakota - Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns announced during a visit to South Dakota Aug. 28 that \$780 million in assistance will be made available to help farmers and ranchers manage drought and weather-related production challenges. This funding includes a new \$50 million program for livestock producers impacted by drought, focusing nearly \$30 million in unused conservation funds on drought, and accelerating the delivery of an estimated \$700 million in counter-cyclical payments.

"While some parts of the country are experiencing very

good crop conditions, drought is taking a toll on farming and ranching operations in other areas of the United States this year," said Johanns.

The nearly \$30 million in unused conservation funds applied to the new assistance package includes almost \$19 million in unused Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) funds and \$11 million in unused Grassland Reserve Program (GRP). The ECP funds will go to 27 states. Information on eligibility and a list of the states and funding is also posted online.

The GRP funds will help to protect drought-affected grazing lands. The funds will be distributed to 14 states. These funds will be focused on pending GRP applications for rental agreements in drought-affected areas.

Johanns also directed NRCS state conservationists to work with their producers and state technical committees to focus remaining FY 2006 and a portion of FY 2007 conservation program funds on resource conservation practices related to drought response and mitigation. Programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program, and GRP have built-in flexibility and local decision-making

ability in order to encourage a focus on state-specific concerns, such as those related to drought.

Livestock assistance, counter-cyclical payments and existing USDA disaster assistance are also part of the drought assistance targeted to drought relief.

**More information about the drought assistance package and existing USDA disaster assistance is available at <http://www.usda.gov>.**

## **BUFFER BRIEFS Ohio SWCS hosts buffer conference**

A four-day conference titled "Floodplains, Riparian Zones and Buffer Strips: Key Components to Aquatic Life Use Attainment and Self-Sustaining Stream and Watershed Systems" is scheduled for Sept. 5-8, 2006, at the University Plaza Hotel in Columbus, Ohio. Ohio State University and the All Ohio Chapter Soil and Water Conservation Society are joining forces to host the conference. The event, centered on the theme "Celebrating 50 Years and Beyond," will include technical tours and workshops, presentations and discussions, and a 50th Anniversary banquet. For more information and to register, visit <http://streams.osu.edu/conf.php>.

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