

# BUFFERNOTES



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### BUFFER NOTES

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## LOUISIANA CREP: ZERO TO 50,000 IN A YEAR

When the Louisiana Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program was announced last April, officials said they expected strong interest.

They were sure right. The 50,000-acre CREP is all but fully subscribed. "We have close to 33,000 acres in contract, and we're sitting at around 48,000 to 49,000 acres committed," says Louisiana Farm Service Agency State Executive Director Willie Cooper.

Known as the Lower Ouachita River Basin CREP, the federal-state partnership was announced in April 2005, but sign-up didn't begin until the second week of May. It included all or parts of nine parishes in northeast Louisiana. It is aimed at decreasing sediment loads from highly erosive lands to streams, bayous and lakes and reducing nonpoint runoff on watersheds that drain into the Gulf of Mexico. The CREP also focuses on enhancing wildlife habitat for fish, neotropical migrant birds, shorebirds, waterfowl and other wetland-dependent species.

Enrollees receive 1.5 times the soil rental rate for every practice enrolled and additional incentives for certain practices. Practices in the CREP are establishment of introduced grasses and lagoons, establishment of permanent



An application of liquid fertilizer with a mixture of native grasses goes on a Louisiana CREP field. It is a new approach for establishing native grass mixes. (Michael Schooler photo)

native grasses, tree planting, permanent wildlife habitat, grass waterways, shallow water areas for wildlife, wildlife food plots, filter strips, riparian buffers, wetland restoration and bottom-land hardwood establishment.

State soil and water conservation districts have helped to provide outreach and the technical assistance on the ground.

### Full cooperation led to success

Partners in the Louisiana CREP agree that cooperation was one key to success.

"We involved all the major players that have interest in this -- wildlife groups, environmental groups, farm groups, soil and water groups," says Cooper. "It's a biased opinion, but I think we've got the best

working relationships in the country among our state and federal agencies. We kicked this off as a group, and we went to work as a group, and I think that had a lot to do with the success."

Many of the contracts are for partial-farm fields, taking marginal lands out of production. The incentives have provided a boost for some producers who have struggled economically in recent years. "It gave them some options to look at," Cooper says.

Bradley Spicer, the assistant commissioner for the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry's Office of Soil and Water Conservation, was among those who were optimistic that producers and landowners would choose the CREP. "We have people on the ground who were really inter-

**"We involved all the major players that have interest in this -- wildlife groups, environmental groups, farm groups, soil and water groups."**

ested in getting that project implemented, and there was good interest from farms. It's in an area where some of our ag resources aren't doing that well, and it was an opportunity for farmers to participate," Spicer says.

## Now for No. 2

Louisiana conservationists are busy preparing a proposal for a second CREP, says David Carnline, FSA agricultural programs specialist for conservation in Louisiana. It will be submitted to FSA in Washington, D.C., this year.

Coastal prairie restoration in southwest Louisiana will be among goals of the second proposal, and that has drawn interest from The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited and other wildlife groups. "They've been very supportive," Cooper says.

**For more on the Louisiana CREP, contact David Carnline at [david.carnline@la.usda.gov](mailto:david.carnline@la.usda.gov).**

## 2006 CREP FORUM SET IN NEBRASKA

The 2006 National CREP Forum will be Aug. 14-17 in Lincoln, Nebraska. The theme is "CREP: Creative Solutions, Multiple Resources, Many Partners." The forum will be held at The Cornhusker hotel.

A working agenda, registration forms and other information are posted at <http://www.agr.state.ne.us/crep/crep.htm>.

CREP forums bring together conservationists from around the nation to review progress and address opportunities and challenges for the nation's CREPs. The most recent forum was held in 2004 in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

The Forum registration fee of \$200 covers some meals, all breaks, field tour and conference materials. A day registration rate is also available.

The Historic Haymarket District, state Capitol and University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus are among

featured attractions within walking distance of the conference hotel.

BufferNotes will provide more details on the forum in coming months.

**Conference registration questions can be directed, to Bobbie Kriz-Wickham at the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, 800-831-0550 or (402) 471-2341.**

## WISCONSIN CELEBRATES YEAR OF SOIL

Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle has declared 2006 as the "Year of Soil" in Wisconsin, but the story is bigger than that.

"The crown jewel of the Year of Soil is the completion of the soil survey for the entire state of Wisconsin," said Wisconsin State

Conservationist Pat Leavenworth, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). "This effort, which began over 100 years ago, will result in a complete digital database of soil information and maps for all 72 counties, 35 million acres, with easy public access, called Web Soil Survey."

"Soil is the foundation of all our land use decisions, from food production, to road building, to waste disposal," said Rod Nilsestuen, secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. His agency is a partner with NRCS in the Year of Soil. A public celebration was held May 16 at the State Capitol building in Madison. NRCS Chief Bruce Knight was a special guest.

"Wisconsin is one of only a handful of states to have accomplished this colossal goal," said Leavenworth, "thanks to a wonderful partnership with the state of Wisconsin."

NRCS is the federal agency responsible for conducting the national soil survey. The process is an enormous undertaking, sending soil scientists out to sample and map every acre, determine soil type and characteristics.

## State, NRCS agreed to accelerate work

In 2000, the state of Wisconsin signed an agreement with NRCS to accelerate the work with state funds to bring more soil mappers on board. The Wisconsin agreement also called for digitizing all soil surveys so they would be easily available for use in Geographic Information Systems and through the internet. With the boost from state funds, NRCS was able to finish mapping the northwest 10 counties and digitize all remaining surveys years ahead of schedule.

"The soil survey is one of the best investments we could make," said Nilsestuen. "A complete soil survey puts us in position to make better land use decisions, protect prime farmland, and protect our natural resource base. It's all part of our effort to keep Wisconsin green and growing."

The soil survey provides the foundation layer for geographic information systems used for land use planning and good land management. It describes the characteristics, limitations and best potential uses for the 800 different soil types found in Wisconsin. The Web Soil Survey provides secure public access to the national soils information system, with maps and information usable for individual farms or parcels of land. The Web Soil Survey is available on-line at [www.soils.usda.gov](http://www.soils.usda.gov)

**For more information on the Year of Soil or web soil survey, visit [www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov).**

## RESEARCHERS LINK BUFFER WIDTH, STREAM HEALTH

Wisconsin researchers have found that both width and continuity of undisturbed buffer strips are related positively to stream health. "Even streams within highly agricultural landscapes retained healthy ecosystem function if they had a wide buffer maintained for most of their length," report

## LOUISIANA SED IS THE DEAN

"Hopefully, we made a few contributions that will be lasting."

That's how Louisiana FSA State Executive Director Willie Cooper feels about the state's successful CREP. (See page one story.) But it might also describe how he approaches his job in general.

"He's known around the country as the dean of SEDs," says David Carnline, FSA agricultural programs specialist for conservation in Louisiana. Cooper has been SED since

1972 and has 49 years of service to agriculture. Louisiana conservationists frequently cite the strong interagency cooperation enjoyed in the state, and when they do that, Cooper's name is invariably mentioned as one who provides the glue.

The Louisiana CREP, which went from zero to 50,000 acres in a year, is an example of the careful work of the partners in that state. Acknowledging that the partners were deliberate in putting together the CREP, Cooper says, "We wanted to make sure we had it right before we put it out there."

Cooper's career in agriculture began in 1957 in the cotton fields of southeast Louisiana, where he began measuring cotton for FSA in the 10th grade. "A lot of those were very long, hot days. Ever since then, I've been with FSA because I get a chance to help farmers on a grassroots level," Cooper said a few years ago, after receiving the Louisiana Farm Bureau's Distinguished Service Award. He was one of only six people to ever receive the award. He also received the "Man of the Year in Service to Louisiana Agriculture" award from Progressive Farmer magazine in 2000.



**Willie Cooper**

researchers Brian M. Weigel and Edward E. Emmons of the state Bureau of Integrated Science Services, Jana S. Stewart of the United States Geological Survey and Roger Bannerman of the state's Bureau of Watershed Management.

In 2002, the Wisconsin Legislature considered requiring buffers on most streams when it rewrote the state's nonpoint source pollution control standards. Debate, however, arose regarding the minimum width and continuity of a buffer necessary to protect stream health. Lawmakers delayed a buffer mandate, asking for research by December 2005 to characterize effective buffers.

That set the team of researchers to work. They used fish and aquatic insects as indicators of stream health to determine the minimum buffer width and continuity for stream protection in agricultural landscapes.

The researchers selected streams that represented buffers of various sizes, and watershed areas with different levels of agricultural land cover. Sites were scattered statewide to capture the effects of natural environmental factors known to influence streams, including geology, temperature, and size.

Measures of buffer width and continuity included average buffer width, number of buffer fragments/ km, and percent of stream length having greater than a 100-meter-wide buffer. Standard error of the average buffer width (SE width) represented variability of the buffer width. The buffer measurements were made on the entire stream network (main stem and tributary streams) upstream from where the researchers sampled fish and aquatic insects.

Standard Wisconsin DNR monitoring methods were used to sample fish at 91 sites and aquatic insects at 77 sites.

In addition to identifying findings on width and continuity, the researchers added: "In addition, our analyses suggested that stream health and buffer characteristics were linearly related, meaning that narrow buffers having some

fragmentation had modest effects on curbing agricultural stress, whereas wide buffers without fragmentation had substantial effects."

The report may be reviewed at [http://dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/publications/PUB\\_SS\\_756\\_2005.pdf](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/es/science/publications/PUB_SS_756_2005.pdf).

## **MORE THAN HALF OF US STREAMS ARE POLLUTED**

More than half of U.S. streams are polluted, with the worst conditions found in the eastern third of the country, according to a study by the Environmental Protection Agency.

In its first-ever study of shallow or "wadeable" streams, the agency found 42 percent to be in poor condition, and another 25 percent were considered fair. Twenty-eight percent were in good condition, EPA said. Another 5 percent were not analyzed because of sampling problems in New England. Streams running in the East, from the Atlantic coast through the Appalachian Mountains, fared the worst, with 52 percent listed as poor.

In contrast, 45 percent of streams running west of the Rocky Mountains were the least polluted, the report found.

Streams in 48 states were sampled from 2000 to 2004. The EPA plans to extend the study to Alaska and Hawaii. The survey found activities such as farming and logging raised the levels of nitrogen and phosphorous in the water, said Mike Shapiro, an EPA administrator who worked on the report.

## **EPA RELEASES AG STRATEGY**

EPA recently released its National Strategy for Agriculture to initiate a closer partnership with agriculture in fulfilling the agency's mission of protecting human health and the environment.

EPA said it intends to use communication, collaboration

and innovation to strengthen its relationship with the agricultural community. The new plan builds upon farmers' interest in protecting natural resources and the environment and seeks to address complex issues through locally-based, collaborative efforts.

The goals of the National Strategy for Agriculture include:

- Increasing EPA employee awareness of how their actions affect agriculture and how farming benefits human health and the environment;

- Working with the agricultural industry - including production, processing and distribution - in developing and demonstrating environmental protection solutions that express to the public the value of farmland environmental stewardship activities;

- Coordinating research and technology development and real world application so the needs of agriculture and EPA can be more efficiently met; and,

- Identifying existing environmental improvement measures for agriculture and developing new ones, where needed.

Go to <http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/agstrategy.html> for more information.

## **NAC UNVEILS UPDATED WEB SITE**

The USDA National Agroforestry Center has released an updated Web site ([www.unl.edu/nac](http://www.unl.edu/nac)). Besides an easy-to-navigate new look, there are two new features: an agroforestry image gallery and an NAC blog that covers agroforestry-related news and issues. The updated site brings NAC research papers and those supported by NAC into one location for easy access and review. The site also meets accessibility standards for users with disabilities.

NAC's agroforestry image gallery is the first that is dedicated to agroforestry in the



## **ENROLLMENT ACTIVITY AND NEWS**

The following information is excerpted from FSA's April 2006 CRP Monthly Summary. "Enrollment and Activity and News" is a regular feature in BufferNotes.

- Since Earth Day, April 22, 2004, contracts on 132,420 acres of wetland practices (including adjacent upland buffers) have been approved. As of April 2006, wetland practice contracts (including general and continuous sign-up) total 2 million acres.

- FY 2005's continuous sign-up 30 ended with 391,000 acres, about 52 percent higher than FY 2004 continuous sign-up 28 (257,000 acres). FY 2006's continuous sign-up 31 is proceeding at about 7 percent above sign-up 30.

- On September 28, 2005 USDA announced policy for contracts expiring in 2007 through 2010. For details see FSA's website: <http://www.fsa.usda.gov/pas>. Holders of contracts set to expire September 30, 2007 had until April 28, 2006 to accept the offer to re-enroll or extend contracts (sign-up 32). Holders of 2008, 2009, and 2010 contracts have until June 30, 2006.

- General sign-up 33 ran March 27 through April 28, 2006. Accepted contracts will begin October 1, 2006.

**The full April 2006 CRP Monthly Summary can be viewed at [www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp\\_statistics.htm](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp_statistics.htm).**

United States. Image files are available in various resolutions for Powerpoint presentations, Web sites and high resolution for printing.

NAC's blog will be updated frequently with Web links of newsworthy and interesting agroforestry-related research, education, and information from around the country. Web users can also subscribe to a newsfeed, which uses RSS 2.0, to receive automatic updates on NAC's Blog.

**For more information, contact Agroforester Richard Straight at [rstraight@fs.fed.us](mailto:rstraight@fs.fed.us).**

## **PHEASANT BOOM REPORTED BY PF**

Last year saw a boom in pheasant populations across much of the nation's pheasant range, Pheasants Forever reports.

The group cited in a news release the positive impact of CRP lands, PF habitat projects, and favorable weather.

In fact, South Dakota's pre-season forecast showed bird numbers at a four decade high and Minnesota saw a 75 percent increase in bird numbers from 2004. Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and North Dakota also enjoyed markedly better bird numbers than 2004.

During the year, PF's 600

chapters spent \$25 million dollars to complete 24,500 habitat projects. Those projects are now benefiting wildlife and natural resources on over 500,000 acres. Since the organization's inception in 1982, PF has spent over \$195 million to complete more than 300,000 habitat projects, affecting nearly 4 million acres for wildlife.

PF was formed in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1982 as a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the protection and enhancement of pheasant, quail and other wildlife populations in North America through habitat improvement, land management, public awareness and education. There are more than 113,000 PF members in over 600 chapters across the continent, while Quail Forever accounts for another 39 chapters in 17 states.

## **FSA ISSUES CRP ANNUAL REPORT**

FSA's annual report of CRP activities in Fiscal Year 2005 provides details about a busy year that included establishing procedures for re-enrollments and extensions.

The report is available for review at [http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp\\_statistics.htm](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/dafp/cepd/crp_statistics.htm).

Highlights include:

- Continuous sign-up, including farmable wetland program, increased 297,000 acres, reaching 3.17 million acres.
- New and expanded CREP agreements included Nebraska (100,000 acres), Minnesota (increases to 120,000 acres), Louisiana (50,000 acres) and Indiana (7,000 acres). Total acres under CREP agreements increased 288,000 acres to 2,087,000 acres.
- CREP enrollment increased 80,000 acres to a cumulative total 676,000 acres. Total Signing Incentive Payment and Practice Incentive Payment outlays through 2005: \$460 million.
- One-year CRP extensions were offered for contracts expiring September 30, 2005.
- More than 28 million acres are under contracts scheduled to expire between 2007 and 2010. USDA Secretary Mike Johanns announced early CRP contract re-enrollment and extension procedures. Expiring contracts are divided into 5 categories based on environmental benefits as indicated by environmental benefits index (EBI) scores. The quintile with the highest EBI scores will be offered new 10- or 15-year

contracts, then next highest offered 5-year contract extensions, and so forth.

For more information about this summary, contact Alex Barbarika at 202-720-7093 or at [Alexander.Barbarika@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:Alexander.Barbarika@wdc.usda.gov). Hard copies are also available on request.

## **BUFFER BRIEFS**

### **Kansas CRP Tour celebrates anniversary**

Kansas conservation partners plan a field tour June 7 to help celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Conservation Reserve Program. For more information on the tour, call 785-539-3531 or e-mail [betty.unterberger@ks.usda.gov](mailto:betty.unterberger@ks.usda.gov).

### **Committee seeks Farm Bill input**

The House Agriculture Committee has developed a new Web-based feedback form to allow producers across the nation to provide their thoughts and insight on farm policy. The outreach coincides with a series of field hearings the committee has held to directly gather testimony from producers regarding reauthorization of the 2002 farm bill. Access the form at [www.agriculture.house.gov/inside/feedbackform.html](http://www.agriculture.house.gov/inside/feedbackform.html).

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