



USDA FUNDS SPECIAL WETLANDS INITIATIVE IN RED RIVER VALLEY

INITIATIVE WILL HELP REDUCE FLOODING, ENHANCE WILDLIFE HABITAT

WASHINGTON, April 20, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that up to \$10 million will be available to help eligible landowners in three states reduce flooding, restore wetlands and enhance wildlife habitat in the Red River Valley Watershed through the USDA's Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The Red River Valley Watershed experiences moderate to severe flooding annually, with record flooding every few years.

"This special initiative funding will expand WRP's ability to mitigate flood damage within the basin by retaining higher levels

of flood waters within the easement acres," Vilsack said. "Projects funded through this initiative will reduce the costs to our rural private landowners who continue to experience severe damages during these flood events."

USDA will provide the funding for this special WRP initiative in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. This additional funding will allow the three states to accept new applications and fund more WRP easements. Restoring wetlands and associated uplands through this initiative will help retain and slow floodwaters in the Red River

Valley Watershed, while providing valuable wildlife habitat and reducing damages from severe flooding.

WRP, administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, is the federal government's largest private lands wetlands restoration program. It provides voluntary technical and financial assistance to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect and enhance wetlands that have been degraded or converted to agricultural uses. More than 80 percent of the restorable wetlands in the Red River Valley are privately owned.

The Red River Reten-

tion Authority identified a critical need for targeted technical and financial assistance for eligible landowners in the watershed. WRP projects funded through this special initiative will result in long-term benefits to taxpayers by reducing funding spent by local and state governments to repair damaged roads, bridges and public areas. Reduced damage to cropland and associated disaster and damage payments also will save taxpayers money in the long term.

For more information about WRP, please visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp.

VALLEY RETENTION PLANS PROGRESS

Area water officials are ready to present a plan for Red River Valley retention projects to the people who would be affected by them.

After nearly a year of study, the meetings mark another step in moving forward with a proposal Minnesota Democratic Rep. Collin Peterson pitched last June.

Peterson aims to use the 2012 farm bill to create a mandatory funding program that would guarantee \$500 million over the next 10 years to pay for regional water projects.

The goal is to create 1 million acre-feet of water

storage in the valley, which should mitigate the impacts of devastating spring flooding, Peterson said.

Water boards on both sides of the Red River signed a joint powers agreement in July to form the Red River Retention Authority. The board will oversee how the federal funding would be spent on regional projects.

Peterson, North Dakota Republican Rep. Rick Berg and members of the retention authority met recently in West Fargo with about 50 area farmers and agricultural stakeholders to discuss retention solu-

tions.

A nearly completed retention project near Tintah, Minn. – about 65 miles southeast of Moorhead – might serve as an example for the potential of Peterson's vision, said Jon Roeschlein, Administrator for the Bois de Sioux Watershed District.

The North Ottawa Impoundment project transformed 3 square miles of farmland into retention ponds, which collect water from about 75 square miles of drainage area.

But during the summer, a portion of the ponds can still be used for farming,

Roeschlein said.

Although the project was initially met with opposition from local residents, the situation changed dramatically after they realized the benefits of the project, Roeschlein said.

During this spring's flood, residents in flood-prone Tintah noticed a drastic difference because of the retention project.

"This year, they had to fire up their pumps for four hours to pump the water that melted from snow, and after that, they were home free," Roeschlein said. "It wasn't stressful at all."

WATERSHED DISTRICT DEVELOPMENTS

RED LAKE WD

The Red Lake WD reported that on April 27, 2011 the District attended a meeting in St. Paul with the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to discuss the petition to amend their Ten-Year Overall Plan to establish a Water Management District for the Thief River Falls Flood Damage Reduction Project. After considerable discussion, the BWSR board approved unanimously to amend the plan. A resolution from the Board was presented to the Board of Managers at the last board meeting conducted on May 12th. To date, the viewers are finalizing their report for the improvement to Pennington County Ditch No. 1 at which time upon filing their report, the Board will set a hearing on both the improvement of the legal drainage system and the initiation of the Water Management District.

WILD RICE WD

The Wild Rice WD reported that construction has begun on the community ring dikes in Hendrum and Perley. Some minor complications occurred by having to put emergency levees on top of the existing dikes to fight this year's flood.

Soil borings and additional surveying is needed in Shelly as the District continues in the project's conceptual phase.

An informational meeting was conducted with the Mayor of Ada and the city engineer with watershed district representatives including Greg Holmvik, Raymond Hanson, Kevin Ruud, and district engineer Jerry Bents to discuss their community levee project.

EVENTS COMING UP

The next meeting of the RRWMB will be on Tuesday, June 21, 2011 at 9:30 a.m. at the Red Lake Watershed District, 1000 Pennington Ave. S., Thief River Falls, MN.

2011 MAWD SUMMER TOUR

THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2011
TO SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 2011

The Red Lake and Middle Snake Tamarac Rivers Watershed Districts are hosting the 2011 Minnesota Association of Watershed Districts Summer Tour.

Tour highlights will include:

- The Agassiz Valley Water Resource Management Project
- The Diversion Structure and the Richard P. Nelson Floodway
- The Red Lake Watershed District Ditch No. 12 drainage project
- Parnell Impoundment - a Flood Damage Reduction Project

RRWMB MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

At its regularly scheduled May meeting, the RRWMB:

- Received a report from Mark Meister, Public Information Officer.
- Discussed the special wetlands initiative recently funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the Red River Valley with Keith Weston, NRCS Red River Coordinator. Mr. Weston also reviewed the draft job description for the proposed U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Regulatory Branch position.
- Received a report from Naomi Erickson, Administrator.
- Received a report from Dan Thul, Red River Coordinator.
- Reaffirmed the board's technical representation on the Red River Basin Flood Damage Reduction Work Group's Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee (TSAC) to include Charlie Anderson - Widseth Smith & Nolting and Nate Dalager - HDR Engineering, Inc.
- Received a report from Ron Harnack, Project Coordinator.
- Toured the Upper Becker Dam Enhancement Project (Option D) of the Wild Rice WD following the board meeting.

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