

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) 2010 Work Program

Date of Report: May 27, 2010
Date of Next Progress Report: December 1, 2010
Date of Work Program Approval:
Project Completion Date: June 30, 2011

I. PROJECT TITLE: HCP Phase VI Supplemental - Wetlands Reserve Program (3d)

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Location: All Wetlands Reserve Program work will be completed within the nine HCP Project Area boundaries identified in the attached map.

Total ENRTF Project Budget:	ENRTF Appropriation	\$350,000
	Minus Amount Spent:	\$
	Equal Balance:	\$ 350,000

Legal Citation: M.L. 2010, Chap. 362, Sec. 2, Subd. 4f3d

Appropriation Language:

\$1,344,000 is added to Laws 2009, chapter 143, section 2, subdivision 4, paragraph (e), from the trust fund for the acceleration of agency programs and cooperative agreements. Of this appropriation, \$308,000 is to the commissioner of natural resources for agency programs and \$1,036,000 is for agreements as follows: \$425,000 with Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; \$50,000 with National Wild Turkey Federation; \$164,000 with the Nature Conservancy; \$102,000 with Minnesota Land Trust; \$200,000 with the Trust for Public Land; \$45,000 with Friends of Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District; and \$50,000 to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe to plan, restore, and acquire fragmented landscape corridors that connect areas of quality habitat to sustain fish, wildlife, and plants. The

United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service is an authorized cooperating partner in the appropriation. Expenditures are limited to the project corridor areas as defined in the work program. Land acquired with this appropriation must be sufficiently improved to meet at least minimum habitat and facility management standards as determined by the commissioner of natural resources. This appropriation may not be used for the purchase of residential structures, unless expressly approved in the work program. All conservation easements must be perpetual and have a natural resource management plan. Any land acquired in fee title by the commissioner of natural resources with money from this appropriation must be designated as an outdoor recreation unit under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.07. The commissioner may similarly designate any lands acquired in less than fee title. A list of proposed restorations and fee title and easement acquisitions must be provided as part of the required work program. All funding for conservation easements must include a long-term stewardship plan and funding for monitoring and enforcing the agreement.

II. PROJECT SUMMARY AND RESULTS:

DU will provide technical assistance (TA) to the federal Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) through approximately six grant-funded contracted wetland restoration specialists to help NRCS promote and secure new WRP easements and plan and implement restorations on previously secured easements. The objective of WRP is to restore and permanently protect wetland and associated upland habitats to benefit migratory birds and other wildlife, and improve water quality. To meet this objective, NRCS purchases easements that gives NRCS the right to restore and protect wetland and associated upland habitats. Closing a WRP easement with a willing seller may take up to a year and is the first step in this process. Once an easement is closed, NRCS begins and fully funds the restoration of wetland and upland habitats within the easement, a process that takes 2-3 years to complete. Often, WRP easements are combined with RIM easements to make them perpetual.

The state grant-funded TA provided by contracted wetland specialists will make it possible for USDA-NRCS to secure WRP easements on approximately 1,000 acres in prairie Habitat Conservation Partnership (HCP) project areas at an estimated cost of \$1,520,000 to NRCS. Once secured under a WRP easement, NRCS will begin work to restore wetlands and grasslands on these acres in 2011. These restored wetlands and native prairie grasslands will significantly improve existing blocks of habitat and help improve downstream water quality. Grant funds will be used by DU to contract with wetland restoration specialists, provide supplemental contract or DU staff engineering services to USDA-NRCS, and for DU staff costs to administer this grant partnership (hire and manage the work of the contractors, and coordinate with USDA-NRCS).

III. PROGRESS SUMMARY AS OF:

All Habitat Conservation Partnership progress summaries (twice annually) will be generated by the Partnership online reporting system. This system provides an accomplishment, expenditure and narrative update to LCCMR for each individual work plan.

IV. OUTLINE OF PROJECT RESULTS:

This project directly addresses Item C. Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Acquisition, Item 2. Acquisition, of the funding priorities listed in the 2010 LCCMR Request For Proposals. LCCMR resources will be used to provide technical assistance to secure permanent easements and to restore critical wetlands and adjacent uplands. Minnesota has lost over 90% of our prairie wetlands and 99% of our native prairie grasslands as documented in numerous studies and reports. Restoring and protecting restored native prairie and wetland complexes is a priority among conservation agencies and organizations in the state and is often recognized as a primary objective in strategic conservation plans. Habitat recommendation #5 “Restore Land, Wetlands, and Wetland-associated Watersheds” in the “Statewide Conservation & Preservation Plan” contained in Appendix A of LCCMR’s “Six-Year Strategic Plan for the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund” specifically calls for the restoration of native prairie and associated wetlands.

Minnesota’s Long Range Duck Recovery Plan also calls for the restoration and protection of prairie-wetland complexes. The USDA’s NRCS is committed to helping secure and protect 1,000 acres of restored wetlands and native grasslands by offering the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), a voluntary conservation easement option, to private landowners as a stand alone effort and in partnership with the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR), local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) and Ducks Unlimited (DU).

Current Trust Fund support for this WRP effort through the HCP as recommended by the LCCMR (2009 LCCMR HCP grant--Phase VI) began on September 10, 2009. Ducks Unlimited in partnership with USDA NRCS is administering this 2009 grant and the funds are expected to be fully utilized by summer 2010. Therefore, this 2010 supplemental grant is anticipated to be used in late 2010 and early 2011 to support contracted wetland specialists through June 2011. DU may use up to \$20,000 of this \$350,000 grant for staff personnel costs of grant administration and coordination.

Result /Activity 1: Secure WRP Easements (Part 3D)

Description:

DU will use ETF funding to contract with approximately six wetland restoration specialists in HCP Project Areas to provide technical assistance (TA) to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and private landowners to help USDA-NRCS protect or restore 1,000 acres of land in Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easements in HCP habitat conservation project areas. WRP promotion will target large restorable wetlands and drained shallow lakes. The contracted specialists will help landowners apply for the WRP via federal applications, and help guide the planning and restoration of lands accepted into the WRP through the development of federal conservation plan contracts between landowners and USDA-NRCS according to USDA-NRCS guidelines and specifications. TA activities will include landowner contacts, USDA-NRCS WRP applications submitted, USDA-NRCS WRP restoration plan developed, USDA-NRCS

WRP wetland restoration designs developed, and USDA-NRCS WRP restoration project implementation oversight, all of which are performed to meet USDA-NRCS requirements as per the WRP guidelines and are critical to helping USDA-NRCS secure additional easements and maintain continued federal funding for the WRP in Minnesota into the future. The USDA-NRCS will fund the associated easement and restoration costs. The contract specialists will implement all aspects of the WRP program that will result in lands being enrolled and wetlands and uplands restored under the federal WRP in HCP Project Areas.

DU will coordinate the partnership and administer wetland restoration specialist contracts, including payments for time, travel, and field expenses with grant funds and grant administration and coordination. USDA-NRCS will pay for all WRP easements and restoration work with federal funds, and all restoration work will be performed to USDA-NRCS standards, guidelines, and specifications.

Potential projects* are listed below and represent WRP easements that have been selected for funding that will likely close during the grant period:

2010 LCCMR WRP Easements in LCCMR Corridors*

County Name	Acres	WRP Funds	Number of Easements
Becker	719.7	\$510,778.17	14
Big Stone	3.2	\$5,172.00	1
Clay	326.7	\$283,046.82	2
Douglas	199.5	\$193,507.77	3
Freeborn	555.4	\$1,217,176.40	8
Jackson	67.0	\$147,843.54	1
Kandiyohi	589.2	\$987,380.91	8
Murray	44.0	\$65,634.30	1
Nicollet	2.5	\$7,993.13	1
Otter Tail	201.3	\$193,576.64	3
Polk	836.6	\$517,350.98	2
Pope	329.6	\$419,960.90	5
Steele	912.8	\$2,457,858.83	2
Stevens	168.0	\$344,521.30	2
Traverse	57.7	\$90,920.78	1
Wilkin	38.3	\$34,188.45	1
Grand Total	5,051.5	\$7,476,910.92	55

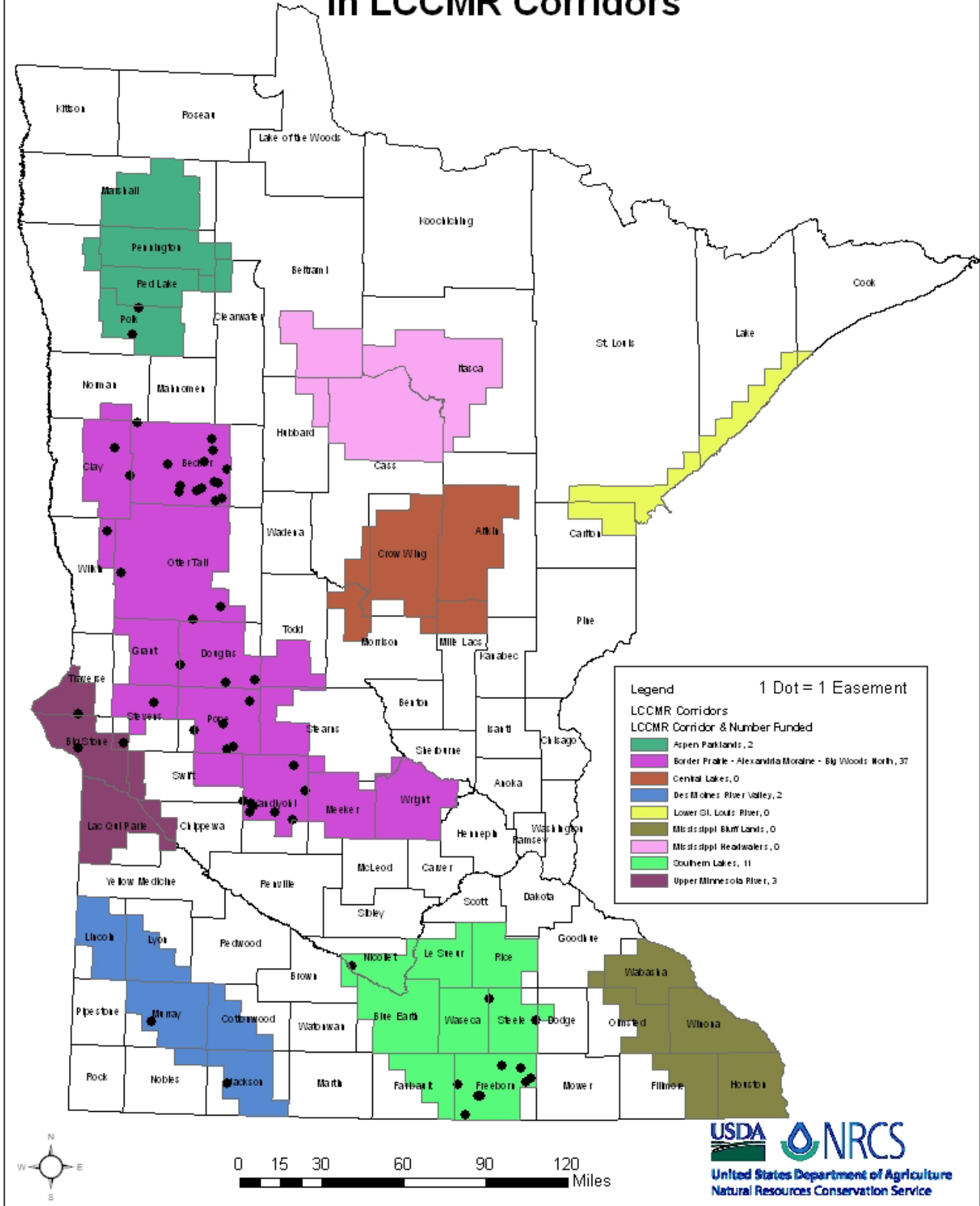
*Please note that these are potential private land projects, all of which may not necessarily be completed. All projects are done on either public lands or in cooperation with willing private landowners. Projects not on this list that meet the strategic objectives of the Partnership may be added at any time via submittal of a project list amendment. The projects listed above are from WRP applications previously received and approved by NRCS, and may be close prior to this grant period. Additional new WRP applications will be secured and added to this list once work begins, and throughout the grant period.

WRP funds were obligated in August and September of 2009 for the projects listed above. These easements are expected to close during the period of this grant. In

addition, if any of these potential projects fall through, future USDA WRP funding will be used to secure additional applications for enrollment in WRP. Minnesota has received between \$20 and \$31 million of WRP funding annually during the past 5 years in part due to the strong level of support for the program by the State of Minnesota and other conservation partners. This level of funding is expected to continue for the length of the current federal Farm Bill.

DU may use up to \$20,000 of this \$350,000 grant for staff personnel costs of grant administration and coordination.

2010 LCCMR WRP Easements in LCCMR Corridors



Summary Budget Information for Result/Activity 1:

ENRTF Budget: \$350,000
Amount Spent: \$
Balance: \$ 350,000

Deliverable/Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
<p><i>1. Technical assistance (TA) to help USDA-NRCS secure WRP easements.</i></p> <p><i>Ongoing TA activities will include landowner contacts, WRP applications submitted, easement restoration plans submitted, wetland restoration designs, and restoration project oversight/management.</i></p>	6/30/2011	\$350,000
<p>2. WRP easements secured on 1,000 acres</p>	6/30/2011	NRCS \$'s

Result Completion Date: Ongoing, June 30, 2011

Result Status as of:

All Habitat Conservation Partnership progress summaries will be generated by the Partnership online reporting system. This system provides an accomplishment, expenditure and narrative update to LCCMR for each individual work plan.

Final Report Summary:

The final report will be generated by the Partnership online reporting system and will include the project abstract, and detailed accounting of expenditures and accomplishments for individual work plans.

V. TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET:

Staff: \$ 20,000 (for DU grant admin & coordination 0.25 FTE)
Contract Services: \$330,000 (for 6 FTE contracted WRP specialists +/-)
Equipment/Tools/Supplies: \$0
Acquisition: \$0 (NRCS buys and holds easements with federal funds)
Travel: \$0
Additional Budget Items: \$0

TOTAL ENRTF PROJECT BUDGET: \$350,000

VI. PROJECT STRATEGY:

A. Project Partners:

This project is part of the Habitat Conservation Partnership Phase VI Supplemental appropriation. Please reference the overall HCP work program. DU will work especially closely with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to provide technical assistance, and to coordinate and deliver the Wetlands Reserve Program in Minnesota.

WRP easements will be secured as stand alone and in conjunction with ReInvest In Minnesota Reserve program easements administered by The Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and funded through State Capital Investment (Bonding) funding. Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts and many partners assist with the implementation of the WRP.

B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy:

The USDA's Wetland Reserve Program is the most effective wetland restoration program in Minnesota and restores more acres of wetlands and associated native prairie uplands than any other effort. The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service routinely monitors and enforces the terms of its easements, and works with landowners to manage these restored wetlands and prairie uplands in perpetuity. Through this grant, DU and NRCS will partner to protect or restore 1,000 acres of prairie wetlands and associated uplands, including the lakesheds of key shallow lakes wherever possible. These restored and protected lands will help improve and protect water quality and wildlife habitat in and around shallow lakes throughout the southern and western portion of Minnesota in HCP project areas, often in relatively close proximity to human communities. Importantly, these restored and protected lands will provide important wetland/upland complexes for multiple wildlife species, especially migratory birds that include both game and non-game species. This work helps address the wetland and associated prairie restoration strategies of the Statewide Conservation Plan, and the goals of the DNR's Duck Recovery Plan.

C. Other Funds Proposed to be Spent during the Project Period:

The USDA-NRCS estimates that it will spend over \$1.5 million to secure WRP easements through this grant as a result of assistance from wetland restoration technicians

D. Spending History:

DU received and is currently spending \$420,000 through HCP#6 (legal citation: ML 2009, Chapter 143, Section 2, Subdivision 4e3d). DU also received and spent \$350,000 in 2007 through HCP#4 (legal citation: ML 2007, Chapter 30, Section 2, Subdivision 4b) and \$267,500 in 2008 through HCP#5 (legal citation: ML 2008, Chapter 367, Section 2, Subdivision 3c) to help NRCS promote and deliver the Wetlands Reserve Program.

VII. DISSEMINATION:

Accomplishment Reports and press releases will be made available at <http://www.mnhabitatcorridors.org>.

VIII. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: Periodic work program progress reports will be submitted not later than December 1, 2010, June 1, 2011 and December 1, 2011. A final work program report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 1, 2011 or sooner as requested by the LCCMR.

All reports will be generated using the HCP online reporting system.

IX. RESEARCH PROJECTS: N/A

Attachment A: Budget Detail for 2010 Projects					
Project Title: Wetlands Reserve Program (HCP Part 3d)					
Minnesota's Habitat Conservation Partnership 2010 Phase 6 Supplemental Grant					
Project Manager Name: Jon Schneider (DU) & Tim Koehler (NRCS)					
Trust Fund Appropriation: \$350,000					
DATE: May 27, 2010					
2010 Trust Fund Budget		Amount Spent	Balance	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL BALANCE
	<i>WRP Easements</i>				
BUDGET ITEM			0	0	0
PERSONNEL: wages and benefits: DU project administration, coordination with NRCS, and contract tech hiring and supervision (0.25 FTE)	20,000		20,000	20,000	20,000
Contracts			0	0	0
Professional/technical: contracted WRP wetland restoration specialists to promote and help NRCS secure WRP easements (6 FTE)	330,000		330,000	330,000	330,000
Other contracts			0	0	0
Other			0	0	0
COLUMN TOTAL	\$350,000	\$0	\$350,000	\$350,000	\$350,000