



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

M.L. 2015 Work Plan

Date of Report: May 22, 2015

Date of Next Status Update Report: January 31, 2016

Date of Work Plan Approval: June 11, 2015

Project Completion Date: June 30, 2018

Does this submission include an amendment request?

PROJECT TITLE: Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project

Project Manager: Tabor Hoek

Organization: MN Board of Water and Soil Resources

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Location: Statewide

Total ENRTF Project Budget:

ENRTF Appropriation: \$1,000,000

Amount Spent: \$0

Balance: \$1,000,000

Legal Citation: M.L. 2015, Chp. 76, Sec. 2, Subd. 08d

Appropriation Language:

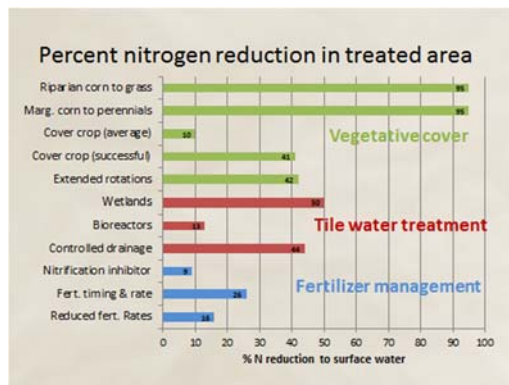
\$1,000,000 the first year is from the trust fund to the Board of Water and Soil Resources for the final phase of a pilot program to provide grants to soil and water conservation districts and other units of local and state government for employment of staff to provide technical assistance to secure enrollment and retention of private lands in federal and state conservation programs. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2018, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

I. PROJECT TITLE: Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project

II. PROJECT STATEMENT:

The Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project is an enhancement to the Conservation Program Technical Assistance project currently funded by LCCMR that will position the program to better address water quality issues and help it transition to other long-term funding sources. A smooth transition is essential due to the urgent need to address nitrogen water quality concerns and capitalize on Farm Bill opportunities. The Conservation Assistance Acceleration Project plans to build upon the success of the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP) program while placing a greater emphasis on vegetative water quality practices as detailed in MPCA’s Nitrogen in Surface Waters Report (MPCA 2013). According to MPCA’s monitoring and research, 72% of the nitrogen in our surface waters is a result of agricultural field runoff and artificial drainage. We currently have a FBAP presence in priority locations that MPCA highlighted as major nitrogen contributing watersheds. MPCA has established a goal of a 20% reduction of nitrogen in surface waters by 2015, and riparian buffers can be a significant and permanent strategy in reaching that goal (see chart below). FBAP staff are trained and knowledgeable on vegetative water quality practices and will provide the necessary targeted landowner education and solicitation.

The passage of the 2014 Federal Farm Bill brings new opportunities and possibilities to Minnesota. As part of the new Farm Bill, USDA will provide \$100 million dollars of dedicated funding annually to the newly created regional conservation partnership program. Additionally a new initiative in the 2014 Farm Bill is the dedication of \$35 million dollars over the next three years to conservation practices in the Prairie Pothole Region, which includes overlaps with the majority of the priority watersheds identified in the MPCA study. Competition for these new Farm Bill dollars will be strong and will require greater participation by states in implementation efforts. Continuing to provide the technical assistance staff to leverage these funds will place Minnesota at a competitive advantage and allow us to capture a significant portion of available Federal funding, thereby extending the conservation work that can be done. Additionally there are 710,623 acres of expiring CRP over the next 5 years in Minnesota making it important that we reenroll the most environmentally sensitive of these lands back into CRP or permanently protect these areas through an easement in order to reach our nitrogen reduction and other conservation goals. It is important that Minnesota continues to support the increase of technical assistance funding in order to maximize the effectiveness of federal and state conservation program offerings.



CRP Expiration Year	Total CRP Acres
9/30/2014	206,426
9/30/2015	100,483
9/30/2016	89,918
9/30/2017	102,800
9/30/2018	210,996

III. OVERALL PROJECT STATUS UPDATES:

Project Status as of January 31, 2016:

Project Status as of July 31, 2016:

Project Status as of January 31, 2017:

Project Status as of July 31, 2017:

Project Status as of January 31, 2018:

Overall Project Outcomes and Results:

IV. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES:

ACTIVITY 1:

Description: Facilitation of 40,000 acres of vegetative water quality practices Budget: \$1,000,000.00

Technicians provide the direct link between available conservation programs offered by state and federal agencies and the private landowner. Technicians will be employed to connect available programs with eligible landowners in priority locations. A yearly request for proposals will solicit all 90 SWCD’s interest in hiring field staff to concentrate on direct marketing and enrollment assistance. The Farm Bill Assistance Committee reviews, scores and ranks these requests based upon identified workload, goals, past performance and available funding. As this project is part of a larger staffing effort, we anticipate exceeding the 20 FTE’s expected to be funded out of this grant as other funds are available. As indicated on the attached map, there currently exists over 34 FTE’s covering 49 counties. Some staff have multi-county responsibility. The added capacity beyond the LCCMR funding is expected to vary from year to year as funding from additional sources is secured and implemented in conjunction with this project. It is anticipated that during the 2 year grant period that a minimum of 40,000 acres of vegetative and other water quality practices will be implemented to help meet the nitrogen reduction goals. Funding for projects will come from Federal Farm Bill programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) and state programs including RIM, Clean Water Fund, Outdoor Heritage Fund, and others.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 1:

ENRTF Budget: \$ 1,000,000
Amount Spent: \$ 0
Balance: \$ 1,000,000

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Staffing: employ 20 Full-Time Equivalents (FTE’s) for 2 full years within a 3 year period from this grant. Staff will be making direct landowner contacts to explain relevant programs, such as CRP, RIM, EQIP, Clean Water Fund, and walk them through the enrollment process. We anticipate total staff coverage of more than 30 FTE’s in up to 50 agricultural based counties (depending on other funding available). Some staff will have multi county responsibility. Staff are typically employed by the local SWCD or delegated through a contractual arrangement with a 3 rd party such as Pheasants Forever.	July 1, 2018
2. 40,000 ac. vegetative and other water quality practices implemented	July 1, 2018

3. BWSR publishes program impacts and associated acres in the MN Conservation Lands Summary. Example of one measurement will be CRP acres set to expire vs. those retained for another 15 year contract.	August 31, 2018

Activity Status as of January 31, 2016:

Activity Status as of July 31, 2016:

Activity Status as of January 31, 2017:

Activity Status as of July 31, 2017:

Activity Status as of January 31, 2018:

Final Report Summary:

V. DISSEMINATION:

Description:

Data is collected on staff time spent, acres impacted and landowners contacted on a quarterly basis and is available to the project partners and participants. Tracking of MN conservation estate can be found at http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/easements/COENROL_2014.pdf. This document is updated each year in August and reflects the acres of MN land enrolled in conservation programs.

Status as of January 31, 2016:

Status as of July 31, 2016:

Status as of January 31, 2017:

Status as of July 31, 2017:

Status as of January 31, 2018:

Status as of July 31, 2018:

Final Report Summary:

VI. PROJECT BUDGET SUMMARY:

A. ENRTF Budget Overview:

Budget Category	\$ Amount	Overview Explanation
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts:	\$1,000,000	SWCD or SWCD-contracted staff employment
TOTAL ENRTF BUDGET:	\$1,000,000	

Explanation of Use of Classified Staff: N/A

Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$5,000: N/A

Number of Full-time Equivalents (FTE) Directly Funded with this ENRTF Appropriation: 0

Number of Full-time Equivalents (FTE) Estimated to Be Funded through Contracts with this ENRTF Appropriation: 40

B. Other Funds:

Source of Funds	\$ Amount Proposed	\$ Amount Spent	Use of Other Funds
Non-state			
SWCD Local Match-Cash	\$300,000	\$	*Match to LCCMR and to enhance FTE opportunities.
State			
DNR, BWSR-Cash	\$750,000	\$	*Match to LCCMR Funding and to enhance FTE opportunities.
TOTAL OTHER FUNDS:	\$1,050,000	\$	

*Match funding is projected to come from state and local sources in the amount shown. The exact breakdown between state and federal may need to be adjusted during this project period due to legislative appropriations.

VII. PROJECT STRATEGY:

A. Project Partners:

The Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (FBAP) program Steering Committee will provide direction to this project and consists of the following: MN DNR-Prairie Habitat Team Supervisor, Pheasants Forever-North Region Manager, MN BWSR-Private Lands Coordinator, USDA-NRCS-State Resource Conservationist, and MN Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

B. Project Impact and Long-Term Strategy

- Provide a means to implement the many plans in MN to address water quality and wildlife habitat. Plans such as the MN Nutrient Reduction Strategy, MN Sediment Strategy, MN Prairie Plan, and Watershed Restoration Action Plans (WRAPS), all which are solid in their recommendations but typically lack a strong delivery mechanism. Implementation of these plans will result in improved water quality, soil health and wildlife habitat.
- Priority is placed upon those counties experiencing the greatest potential loss of CRP acres in critical watersheds.
- The greatest emphasis is on permanent enrollment, but we also recognize that once funding for permanent programs is exhausted, we must utilize shorter term federal programs to their fullest extent.
- At a time when the Minnesota landscape is rapidly changing due to a reduction in CRP acres and the desire to farm all available acres, this project will have an immediate impact on grassland and wetland retention for clean water and wildlife habitat. Key parcels will be identified for permanent protection as funding is available.

As this program is an extension of previous efforts, there is a tremendous opportunity for success based on a proven track record. The partners know how to implement the programs and there will essentially be no start up time required. This request is for the start of a transition period as we move the funding for the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership away from a LCCMR funded project to an agency funded project. We are currently asking LCCMR to fund 50% of total project costs with the remaining 50% coming from agency and LGU partners during this 2 year transition.

C. Funding History:

Funding Source and Use of Funds	Funding Timeframe	\$ Amount
M.L. 2009, Chp. 143, Sec. 2, Subd. 4i.	July 1, 2009-June 30, 2011	\$1,000,000
M.L. 2011, 1 st Special Session, Chp. 2, Art 3, Sec. 2, Subd. 04l	July 1, 2011-June 30, 2013	\$625,000
M.L. 2013, Chp. 52, Sec. 2, Subd. 04f	July 1, 2013-June 30, 2016	\$3,000,000

VIII. FEE TITLE ACQUISITION/CONSERVATION EASEMENT/RESTORATION REQUIREMENTS: N/A

IX. VISUAL COMPONENT or MAP(S): See Attached Map

X. RESEARCH ADDENDUM: N/A

XI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Periodic work plan status update reports will be submitted no later than January 31, 2016, July 31, 2017, January 31, 2017, July 31, 2017, and January 31, 2018. A final report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 15, 2018.

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
M.L. 2015 Project Budget**

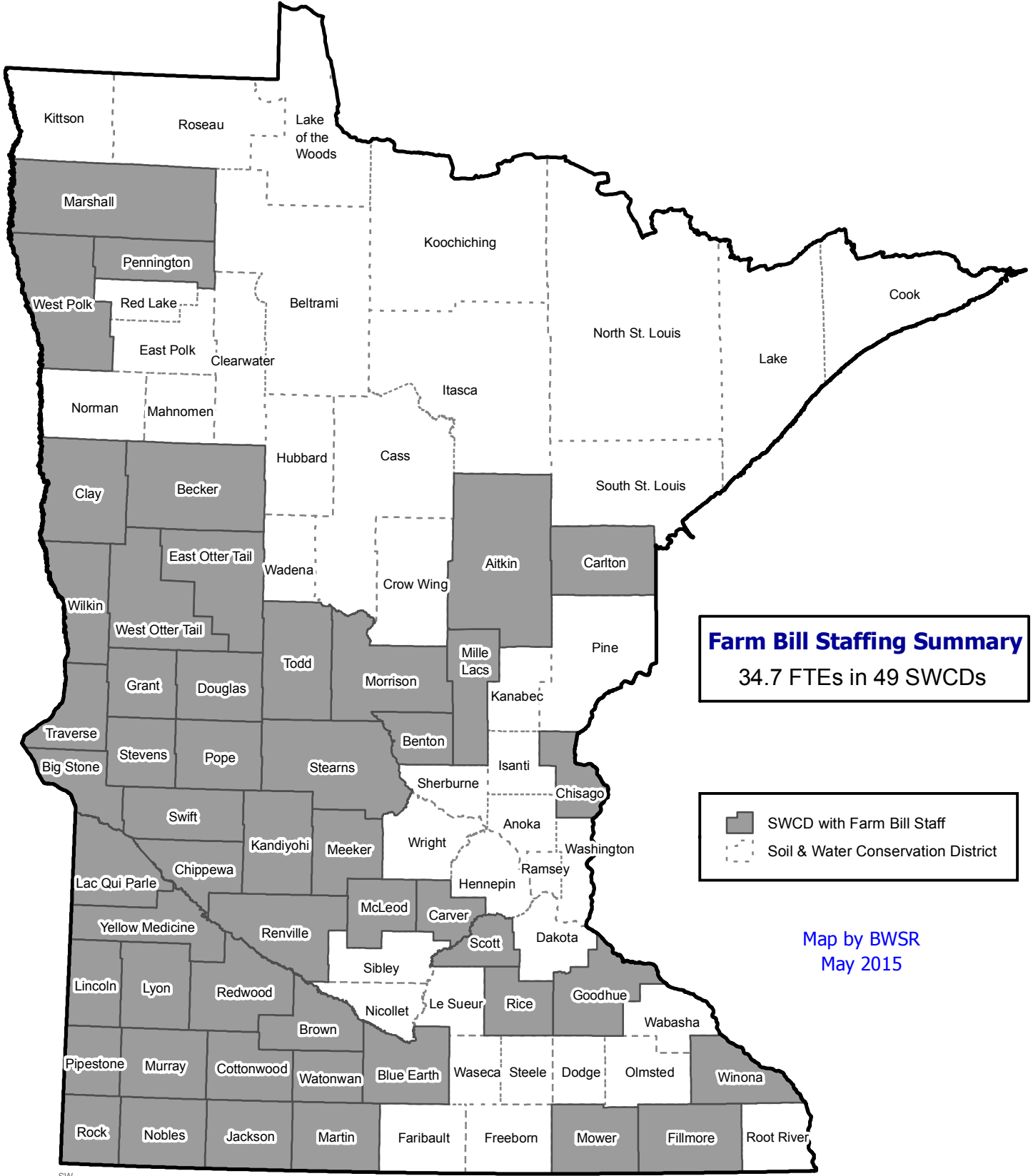


Project Title: Acceleration of Minnesota Conservation Assistance – Final Phase
Legal Citation: M.L. 2015, Chp. 76, Sec. 2, Subd. 08d
Project Manager: Tabor Hoek
Organization: MN Board of Water and Soil Resources
M.L. 2015 ENRTF Appropriation: \$1,000,000
3 years, June 30, 2018
Date of Report: October 15, 2014

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET	Activity 1 Budget	Amount Spent	Activity 1 Balance	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL BALANCE
BUDGET ITEM	<i>Technical Assistance Grants</i>				
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts					
Contracts with SWCD's or other partner's to employ up to 20 FTE's (Farm Bill Assistance Technicians) for 2 full years within a 3 year period from July 1, 2015-June 30, 2018. Staff are typically employed by the local SWCD or delegated through a contractual arrangement with a 3rd party such as Pheasants Forever.	\$1,000,000	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
COLUMN TOTAL	\$1,000,000	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000

Farm Bill Assistance Positions

Phase XIV – July 1, 2014-June 30, 2015



SW

