

Restored Jackson County wetland benefits wildlife, water quality



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MN CREP is funded by \$175 million in state dollars, including more than \$68.8 million from the Clean Water Fund. These state funds make \$350 million in federal matching funds available for direct payments to landowners.

Two landowners worked with the Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) this summer to complete a large wetland restoration that will enhance habitat and improve water quality.

Approximately 62 acres — including a 28-acre wetland — were restored via the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP). The work involved constructing an outlet structure to manage flow rates, and a rock spillway that outlets into a downstream ditch. A private diversion ditch was closed, which allows surface runoff to enter the restored wetland. Private drainage tile was rerouted to accommodate the restoration design, and a second private tile now outlets into the restored wetland. The site was seeded with a native vegetation mix including Western wheatgrass, big bluestem, Canada wild rye and Indiangrass.

Construction began in July. The contractor, Dodge Center-based Hodgman Drainage Co., completed the work in late August.

"There are several benefits to a project like this: Wildlife habitat

is improved by implementing additional cover and biodiversity through native seedings, water quality is improved by allowing nutrients to settle out before leaving the basin, and increasing surface water storage decreases peak flows of neighboring drainage systems and reduces erosion concerns," said Daniel Bartosh, Jackson SWCD manager.



Bartosh

MN CREP is a voluntary program that leverages state and federal funds to permanently protect environmentally sensitive land within targeted counties. Participants enroll in the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA)-administered Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for 14 to 15 years, and in the BWSR-administered Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program, which taps state funds to establish perpetual conservation easements.

MN CREP compensates participating landowners for enrolling land into conservation easements and establishing native vegetation on economically marginal, flood-prone, environmentally sensitive or highly

Left: A rock spillway was constructed to direct water out of the wetland during major storm events.

Center: An inspection pipe was installed to monitor drainage flow underground.

Right: Employees from Hodgman Drainage Co. constructed an earthen embankment as part of the wetland restoration. The Jackson County project restored a total of 62 acres, including a 28-acre wetland. **Photo Credits:** BWSR



Workers from Dodge Center-based Hodgman Drainage Co. constructed the primary outlet structure for the wetland restoration in August. Structures like this one help control water flow, regulating the quantity and speed of water as it is released from a wetland.

erodible lands. SWCDs implement the program with oversight and guidance from BWSR.

“MN CREP provides options for landowners to earn income off marginal cropland while simultaneously enhancing water quality and habitat,” said BWSR Executive Director John Jaschke. “Conservation lands protected via MN CREP offer multiple benefits including improved habitat, better water quality and increased floodwater storage.”

A signed agreement

“Wetland restorations (like this one) create additional surface water storage, which allows nutrients to settle out before entering the downstream watershed. This is especially true in (predominantly agricultural) areas such as southwest Minnesota.”

— Daniel Bartosh, Jackson SWCD manager

between BWSR and the FSA launched the program in 2017. Initially, MN CREP was available in 54 western and southern Minnesota counties. In January, the agreement was amended to add 12 more.

Since the program started, 25 MN CREP easements have been recorded in Jackson County, protecting a total of 1,545 acres. While MN CREP enrollments were more common in Jackson County between 2019 and

2021, Bartosh said this recently restored wetland marks the first MN CREP project in several years.

“It’s a significant enrollment,” Bartosh said. “Wetland restorations (like this one) create additional surface water storage, which allows nutrients to settle out before entering the downstream watershed. This is especially true in (predominantly agricultural) areas such as southwest Minnesota.”

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.