

2011 Project Abstract

For the Period Ending June 30, 2014

PROJECT TITLE: HCP VII - Wetlands Reserve Program (3d)
PROJECT MANAGER: Jon Schneider
AFFILIATION: Ducks Unlimited
MAILING ADDRESS: 311 East Lake Geneva Road NE
CITY/STATE/ZIP: Alexandria, MN 56308
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WEBSITE: www.ducks.org
FUNDING SOURCE: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
LEGAL CITATION: ML 2011, First Special Session, Chp. 2, Art.3, Sec. 2, Subd. 04j3d

APPROPRIATION AMOUNT: \$775,000

Overall Project Outcome and Results

Most of Minnesota's prairie wetlands and nearly all of our native prairie grasslands have been converted to agriculture or other uses. Restoring and protecting native prairie and prairie wetland complexes is a priority for the state as outlined in Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan. The federal Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an important voluntary conservation easement program available to landowners, with an objective to restore and protect wetlands and adjacent upland habitats to benefit migratory birds and other wildlife, and improve water quality.

To accelerate the WRP in Minnesota, Ducks Unlimited (DU) partnered with the USDA's NRCS to provide technical assistance through eight grant-funded wetland consultants contracted to help NRCS promote and secure new WRP applications and plan and implement restorations on WRP easements secured in previous years. In addition, DU provided engineering services to assist NRCS with survey and preliminary design of two larger wetland restorations requiring complex water control structures to restore wetland hydrology.

Through this grant, DU consultants promoted WRP to 955 private landowners, secured/completed/submitted 83 WRP applications, developed or modified 110 conservation plans to facilitate restoration of WRP easements, provided engineering assistance to design or manage construction of wetland restorations on 19 WRP easement involving 206 wetland basins affecting 462 wetland acres, and provided biological assistance to help restore an additional 235 wetland basins affecting 1,546 wetland acres on WRP easements. In addition, Ducks Unlimited engineers completed a preliminary engineering report for 4,000-acre Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County to guide future landowner outreach efforts, and completed engineering design plans for restoration of 100-acre Rasmus Lake wetland project in Kandiyohi County. This technical assistance helped NRCS close 36 new WRP easements at a federal cost of \$4,222,827 to protect 3,133 acres in Minnesota during this grant period.

Project Results Use and Dissemination

Ducks Unlimited consultants promoted the WRP through SWCD newsletters, articles in local newspapers, and in an article written by DU volunteers in the spring 2013 DU state newsletter Cattails. Two DU consultants also gave a PowerPoint slide presentation on the WRP partnership with NRCS at the February 2012 DU state convention.



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) M.L. 2011 Work Plan Final Report

Date of Report: 10/6/2014
Final Report
Date of Work Plan Approval: 6/23/2011
Project Completion Date: 6/30/2014

Project Title: HCP VII - Wetlands Reserve Program (3d)

Project Manager: Jon Schneider
Affiliation: Ducks Unlimited Inc.
Address: 311 East Lake Geneva Road NE
City: Alexandria **State:** MN **Zip Code:** 56308
Telephone Number: (320) 762-9916
Email Address: jschneider@ducks.org
Web Address: <http://www.ducks.org>

Location:

Counties Impacted: Statewide

Ecological Section Impacted: Lake Agassiz Aspen Parklands (223N), Minnesota and Northeast Iowa Morainal (222M), North Central Glaciated Plains (251B), Northern Minnesota and Ontario Peatlands (212M), Northern Minnesota Drift and Lake Plains (212N), Northern Superior Uplands (212L), Paleozoic Plateau (222L), Red River Valley (251A), Southern Superior Uplands (212J), Western Superior Uplands (212K)

Total ENRTF Project Budget:	ENRTF Appropriation \$:	775,000
	Amount Spent \$:	<u>775,000</u>
	Balance \$:	0

Legal Citation: M.L. 2011, First Special Session, Chp. 2, Art.3, Sec. 2, Subd. 04j3d

Appropriation Language:

\$1,737,000 the first year and \$1,738,000 the second year are from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for the acceleration of agency programs and cooperative agreements. Of this appropriation, \$125,000 the first year and \$125,000 the second year are to the commissioner of natural resources for agency programs and \$3,225,000 is for agreements as follows: \$637,000 the first year and \$638,000 the second year with Ducks Unlimited, Inc.; \$38,000 the first year and \$37,000 the second year with Friends of Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District; \$25,000 the first year and \$25,000 the second year with Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe; \$225,000 the first year and \$225,000 the second year with Minnesota Land Trust; \$200,000 the first year and \$200,000 the second year with Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.; \$242,000 the first year and \$243,000 the second year with Pheasants Forever, Inc.; and \$245,000 the first year and \$245,000 the second year with The Trust for Public Land 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 habitable 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. An entity who acquires a conservation easement with appropriations from the trust fund must have a long-term stewardship plan for the easement and a fund established for monitoring and enforcing the agreement. Money appropriated from the trust fund for easement acquisition may be used to establish a monitoring, management, and enforcement fund as approved in the work program. An annual financial report is required for any monitoring, management, and enforcement fund established, including expenditures from the fund. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2014, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

I. PROJECT TITLE: Wetlands Reserve Program Technical Assistance

II. PROJECT STATEMENT:

Most of Minnesota's prairie wetlands and nearly all of our native prairie grasslands have been converted to agriculture or other uses. Restoring and protecting native prairie and prairie wetland complexes is a priority for the state as outlined in Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan. The federal Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) administered by the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is an important voluntary conservation easement program available to landowners, with an objective to restore and protect wetlands and adjacent upland habitats to benefit migratory birds and other wildlife, and improve water quality.

To accelerate the WRP in Minnesota, Ducks Unlimited (DU) partnered with the USDA's NRCS to provide technical assistance through eight grant-funded wetland consultants contracted to help NRCS promote and secure new WRP applications and plan and implement restorations on WRP easements secured in previous years. In addition, DU provided engineering services to assist NRCS with survey and preliminary design of two larger wetland restorations requiring complex water control structures to restore wetland hydrology.

Through this grant, DU consultants promoted WRP to 955 private landowners, secured/completed/submitted 83 WRP applications, developed or modified 110 conservation plans to facilitate restoration of WRP easements, provided engineering assistance to design or manage construction of wetland restorations on 19 WRP easement involving 206 wetland basins affecting 462 wetland acres, and provided biological assistance to help restore an additional 235 wetland basins affecting 1,546 wetland acres on WRP easements. In addition, Ducks Unlimited engineers completed a preliminary engineering report for 4,000-acre Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County to guide future landowner outreach efforts, and completed engineering design plans for restoration of 100-acre Rasmus Lake wetland project in Kandiyohi County. This technical assistance helped NRCS close 36 new WRP easements at a federal cost of \$4,222,827 to protect 3,133 acres in Minnesota during this grant period.

III. PROJECT STATUS UPDATES:

Project Status as of January 2012: DU and NRCS began work on this grant in November 2011. Seven wetland specialist consultants hired under contract through our 2010 appropriation continued working under contract for DU through this 2011 appropriation to help NRCS submit WRP applications, complete easements, develop restoration plans, and implement restorations. Through the end of December 2011, contract specialists promoted WRP to 28 private landowners, developed and modified 25 WRP easement conservation plans to guide restoration of WRP easements, and oversaw the construction and installation of 56 wetland restoration water control structures on WRP easements. No DU engineering has been started during the first six months of this grant period.

Project Status as of July 2012: From the period November 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012, Ducks Unlimited's contract specialists promoted WRP to 420 private landowners; secured/completed/submitted 66 WRP applications; developed and modified 55 WRP conservation plans to assist with restoration of WRP easements, designed 6 water control structures for wetland restorations and oversaw the construction of 98 water control structures on WRP easements. All of this work was done within HCP Project Areas. DU engineers also reviewed the large Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County and Rasmus Lake restoration project in Kandiyohi County, and began survey and engineering work to design the restoration of the basin in FY13 through this grant. Meanwhile, NRCS closed 16 new WRP easements at a cost of \$2,319,122 that protects 1,773 acres within HCP Project Areas in Minnesota.

Project Status as of January 2013: From the period November 1, 2011 through January 31, 2013, Ducks Unlimited's contract specialists promoted WRP to 613 private landowners;

secured/completed/submitted 76 WRP applications; developed and modified 139 WRP conservation plans to assist with restoration of WRP easements, designed 9 water control structures for wetland restorations and oversaw the construction of 155 water control structures on WRP easements. All of this work was done within HCP Project Areas. DU engineers also surveyed the large Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County and began restoration engineering design work on both Crooked Lake and the Rasmus Lake restoration project in Kandiyohi County. Meanwhile, NRCS closed 17 new WRP easements since July 1, 2012 at a federal cost of \$1,393,899 that protects 404 upland acres and 794 wetland acres within HCP Project Areas in Minnesota. Since beginning this grant, NRCS has spent \$3,713,021 to permanently protect 2,971 acres in HCP project areas.

Project Status as of July 2013: From the period November 1, 2011 through June 30, 2013, Ducks Unlimited's contract specialists have promoted WRP to 955 private landowners; secured/completed/submitted 83 WRP applications; developed and modified 174 WRP conservation plans to assist with restoration of WRP easements, designed 15 water control structures for wetland restorations and oversaw the construction of 192 water control structures on WRP easements. All of this work was done within HCP Project Areas. DU engineers also surveyed the large Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County and continued restoration engineering design work on Crooked Lake and completed engineering design work on the Rasmus Lake restoration project in Kandiyohi County. Meanwhile, NRCS has closed 36 new WRP easements at a federal cost of \$3,985,375 that protects 3,130 in Minnesota since beginning this grant.

Project Status as of January 2014: From the period November 1, 2011 through June 30, 2013, Ducks Unlimited contract specialists have promoted WRP to 955 private landowners; secured/completed/submitted 83 WRP applications; developed and modified 174 WRP conservation plans to assist with restoration of WRP easements, designed 15 water control structures for wetland restorations and oversaw the construction of 192 water control structures on WRP easements. All of this work was done within HCP Project Areas. DU engineers also surveyed the large Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County and continue their engineering design work for a water control structure to restore Crooked Lake while also completed engineering design plans for restoration of the Rasmus Lake project in Kandiyohi County. NRCS has closed 36 new WRP easements at a federal cost of \$3,985,375 that protects 3,130 in Minnesota since beginning this grant. DU will complete the engineering work on both Crooked Lake and Rasmus Lake in winter and spring 2014, and will complete the administration of this grant by June 30, 2014 with the small amount of grant funds remaining. DU requests a budget amendment to move \$4,000 from Travel to Personnel. Approved by the LCCMR – 3-12-14.

IV. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES:

ACTIVITY 1: Provide Technical Assistance to NRCS to help Implement the WRP in Minnesota.

Description: DU will use grant funds to contract with approximately six (6) FTE wetland restoration specialist consultants to provide technical assistance to the USDA-NRCS and private landowners to help enroll 2,500 acres of private land in new Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) easements. DU staff may also provide engineering services to assist NRCS with survey, design, and construction management on one or more larger restorations that require complex water control structures. DU will administer this grant and coordinate WRP partnership activities. The USDA-NRCS will fund the associated easement and restoration costs. The contracted wetland restoration specialist consultants will implement all aspects of the WRP program that will result in lands being enrolled and wetlands and uplands restored under the WRP. This project will be delivered throughout the prairie Minnesota.

Securing a WRP easement with a willing seller typically takes a year or more from the time a landowner expresses interest, and the application and easement process involves many steps. Once an easement is closed, NRCS begins and funds the restoration of wetland and upland habitats within the easement, a process that takes 2-3 years to fully complete. Often, WRP easements are combined with RIM easements to leverage state and federal resources. All restoration details are documented in an

NRCS restoration plan for each easement. This complicated federal WRP easement application and restoration process relies heavily on the assistance and expertise of specialists contracted by DU, which have been supported by Trust Fund grants since 2005.

The contracted DU wetland specialists funded through this grant will make it possible for USDA-NRCS to secure WRP easements on approximately 2,500 acres in prairie areas of Minnesota at an estimated cost of approximately \$4 million to NRCS. Once secured under a WRP easement, NRCS will restore wetlands and grasslands in future years. Restoring these wetlands and native prairie grasslands is critical to maintaining continued federal funding for the WRP in Minnesota into the future, and will significantly improve and expand existing blocks of habitat and help improve downstream water quality.

Grant funds will be used by DU for approximately six (6) FTE contracted wetland restoration specialist consultants (\$695,000), for DU staff engineering services to USDA-NRCS (\$70,000), and for DU grant administration and partnership coordination that includes managing contractors and coordinating with USDA-NRCS field, area, and state office personnel (\$30,000). NRCS alone does not have enough technical assistance to implement the WRP at the accelerated levels described in this proposal without the technical assistance help provided by DU contracted wetland restoration specialist consultants.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 1:	ENRTF Budget:	\$ 775,000
	Amount Spent:	<u>\$775,000</u>
	Balance:	\$0

Activity Completion Date: June 30, 2014

Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. Technical and engineering assistance provided by six (6) FTE contracted specialists and DU engineering to help USDA-NRCS secure WRP easements. Ongoing technical assistance will include landowner contacts, WRP applications submitted, easement restoration plans submitted, wetland restoration designs, and restoration project oversight/management.	June 30, 2014	\$ 775,000
2. Secure 2,500 acres of new WRP Easements by USDA-NRCS	June 30, 2014	\$ 0

Activity Status as of January 2012: DU and NRCS began work on this grant in November 2011. Seven wetland specialist consultants hired under contract through our 2010 appropriation continued working under contract for DU through this 2011 appropriation to help NRC S submit WRP applications, complete easements, develop restoration plans, and implement restorations. Through the end of December 2011, contract specialists promoted WRP to 28 private landowners, developed and modified 25 WRP easement conservation plans to guide restoration of WRP easements, and oversaw the construction and installation of 56 wetland restoration water control structures on WRP easements. No DU engineering has occurred yet this grant period, nor has NRCS closed any new WRP easements.

Activity Status as of July 2012: From the period November 1, 2011 through June 30, 2012, Ducks Unlimited's contract specialists promoted WRP to 420 private landowners; secured/completed/submitted 66 WRP applications; developed and modified 55 WRP conservation plans to assist with restoration of WRP easements, designed 6 water control structures for wetland restorations and oversaw the construction of 98 water control structures on WRP easements. All of this work was done within HCP Project Areas. DU engineers also reviewed the large Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County and Rasmus Lake restoration project in Kandiyohi County, and began survey and engineering work to design the restoration of the basin in FY13 through this grant. Meanwhile, NRCS closed 16 new WRP easements at a cost of \$2,319,122 that protects 1,773 acres within HCP Project Areas in Minnesota.

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Final Report Summary: Through this grant, DU consultants promoted WRP to 955 private landowners, secured/completed/submitted 83 WRP applications, developed or modified 110 conservation plans to facilitate restoration of WRP easements, provided engineering assistance to design or manage construction of wetland restorations on 19 WRP easement involving 206 wetland basins affecting 462 wetland acres, and provided biological assistance to help restore an additional 235 wetland basins affecting 1,546 wetland acres on WRP easements. In addition, Ducks Unlimited engineers completed a preliminary engineering report for 4,000-acre Crooked Lake restoration project in Douglas County to guide future landowner outreach efforts, and completed engineering design plans for restoration of 100-acre Rasmus Lake wetland project in Kandiyohi County. This technical assistance helped NRCS close 36 new WRP easements at a federal cost of \$4,222,827 to protect 3,133 acres in Minnesota during this grant period.

V. DISSEMINATION:

Description: DU consultants, the USDA's NRCS, and SWCD's will periodically issue news releases about WRP sign-ups and the success of the program. Consultants may speak at DU's Minnesota state convention, and DU volunteers may feature information about the WRP in the electronic DU state newsletter "Cattails".

Status as of January 2012: None

Status as of July 2012: DU consultants, the USDA's NRCS, and SWCD's periodically issued news releases about WRP sign-ups and the success of the program. Two consultants also presented at DU's Minnesota state convention in February 2012.

Status as of January 2013: DU consultants continue to help promote WRP through SWCD newsletters and other articles in local newspapers.

Status as of July 2013: DU consultants continue to help promote WRP through SWCD newsletters and other articles in local newspapers, and an article on the WRP was featured in the spring 2013 DU newsletter Cattails.

Status as of January 2014: DU consultants continue to help promote WRP through SWCD newsletters and other articles in local newspapers.

Final Report Summary: DU consultants promoted the WRP through SWCD newsletters, articles in local newspapers, and an article written by DU volunteers in the spring 2013 DU state newsletter Cattails. Two DU consultants also gave a PowerPoint slide presentation on the WRP partnership with NRCS at the February 2012 DU state convention.

VI. PROJECT BUDGET SUMMARY:

A. ENRTF Budget:

Budget Category	\$ Amount	Explanation
Personnel:	\$ 94,000	DU staff to administer grant and engineer projects.
Professional/Technical Contracts:	\$ 675,000	Approximately six (6) FTE wetland restoration specialist contract consultants to provide technical assistance to NRCS over two years to process WRP applications and plan restorations.
Service Contracts	\$	
Equipment/Tools/Supplies:	\$ 2,000	GPS survey equipment rental.
Capital Equipment over \$3,500:	\$	
Fee Title Acquisition:	\$	
Easement Acquisition:	\$	
Professional Services for Acq:	\$	
Printing:	\$	
Travel Expenses in MN:	\$ 4,000	In-state mileage for grant admin and engineering.
Other:	\$	
TOTAL ENRTF BUDGET:	\$ 775,000	

Explanation of Use of Classified Staff: n/a

Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500: n/a

Number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) funded with this ENRTF appropriation: Approx. 12 FTE

B. Other Funds:

Source of Funds	\$ Amount Proposed	\$ Amount Spent	Use of Other Funds
Non-state			
USDA NRCS federal funds	\$4,000,000	\$4,222,827	USDA NRCS easement payments and contribution agreement w/DU
Ducks Unlimited private funds	\$ 0	\$ 15,000	DU staff personnel and travel cost
State	\$ 0	\$ 0	
TOTAL OTHER FUNDS:	\$4,000,000	\$4,237,827	

VII. PROJECT STRATEGY:

A. Project Partners: Ducks Unlimited is a member of the Habitat Conservation Partnership. Jon Schneider from Ducks Unlimited and a representative from USDA NRCS will be the Co-Managers of this project. 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 other conservation partners also may assist the implementation of the WRP.

B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy: The USDA' NRCS estimates that \$4,000,000 will be spent to acquire WRP easements on approximately 2,500 acres as a result of the technical assistance provided by the wetland restoration consultants contracted through this grant. Jon Schneider from Ducks Unlimited and a representative from USDA NRCS will be the Co-Project Managers. 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 other partners assist the implementation of the WRP

C. Spending History:

Funding Source	M.L. 2005 or FY 2006-07	M.L. 2007 or FY 2008	M.L. 2008 or FY 2009	M.L. 2009 or FY 2010	M.L. 2010 or FY 2011
ENRTF	\$450,000, ML 2005, Chapter 1, Article 2, Sec. 11, Subd. 5a.	\$350,000, ML 2007, Chapter 30, Sec. 2, Subd. 4b.	\$267,500, ML 2008, Chapt. 367, Sec. 2, Subd. 3c3d.	\$420,000, ML 2009, Chapt. 143, Sec. 2, Subd. 4e3d.	\$350,000, M.L. 2010, Chap. 362, Sec. 2, Subd. 4f3d.

VIII. ACQUISITION/RESTORATION LIST: This grant funds technical assistance only. No actual acquisitions or restorations are being directly funded with ENRTF grant funds, and all USDA NRCS WRP easement locations are confidential due to federal privacy act regulations.

IX. MAP(S): This grant funds technical assistance only. No actual acquisitions or restorations are being directly funded with ENRTF grant funds, and all USDA NRCS WRP easement locations are confidential due to federal privacy act regulations.

X. RESEARCH ADDENDUM: n/a

XI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Periodic work plan status update reports will be submitted not later than February 1, 2012, August 1, 2012, February 1, 2013, August 1, 2013, and February 1, 2014. A final report and associated products will be submitted by August 15, 2014.

Final Attachment A: Budget Detail for M.L. 2011 (FY 2012-13) Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Projects						
Project Title: Wetlands Reserve Program Technical Assistance						
Legal Citation: M.L. 2011, First Special Session, Chp. 2, Art.3, Sec. 2, Subd. 04j3d						
Project Manager: Jon Schneider (Ducks Unlimited)						
M.L. 2011 (FY 2012-13) ENRTF Appropriation: \$775,000						
Project Length and Completion Date: 3 years ending June 30, 2014						
Date of Report: October 6, 2014						
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET	Activity 1 Budget revised 3-12-14	Amount Spent	Balance	TOTAL BUDGET	Amount Spent	TOTAL BALANCE
BUDGET ITEM	Provide Technical Assistance to NRCS					
Personnel (Wages and Benefits)						
DU professional bio-engineering staff to survey and design one or more complex water control structures for NRCS. 0.3 FTE/year over two years, 60% salary 40% benefits.	60,000	60,000	0	60,000	60,000	0
DU conservation program manager to administer grant and manage grant activities. 0.2 FTE/year over two years, 60% salary 40% benefits.	34,000	34,000	0	34,000	34,000	0
Professional/Technical Contracts Approximately six (6) FTE wetland restoration specialist contract consultants to provide technical assistance to NRCS over two years to process WRP applications and plan restorations.	675,000	675,000	0	675,000	675,000	0
Service contracts						
Equipment/Tools/Supplies GPS survey equip rental, etc.	2,000	2,000	0	2,000	2,000	0
Capital equipment over \$3,500						
Fee Title Acquisition						
Easement Acquisition						
Professional Services for Acquisition						
Printing						
Travel expenses in Minnesota In-state mileage and lodging for DU engineering survey and design staff, and grant management/coordination.	4,000	4,000	0	4,000	4,000	0
Other						
COLUMN TOTAL	\$775,000	\$775,000	\$0	\$775,000	\$775,000	\$0