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CONTACT: Tim Ruzek, Mower SWCD
507-434-2603; cell: 507-993-2518
Email: tim.ruzek@mowerswcd.org

Conservation Corps nears end of burns in western Mower *Professional crew works with Mower SWCD on free service to improve conserved land*

May 6, 2016, AUSTIN, Minn. – Controlled burns this spring of conservation land sites in western Mower County are nearing an end under a successful, first-time initiative.

Conservation Corps Minnesota has conducted successful burns – at no cost to the landowner thanks to state Clean Water Legacy funds – since March on 17 different properties covering more than 615 acres, with possibly more acres burned in the coming weeks if conditions remain suitable. All of the sites are under permanent or perpetual easements in which the land cannot be farmed or developed in other ways.

Mower Soil & Water Conservation District worked with the Conservation Corps Minnesota to set up the first-time arrangement. Mower SWCD staff worked in advance to communicate with and get approval from landowners and Conservation Corps planned and conducted the burns.

“This has been an excellent opportunity for Mower County landowners to get maintenance done on their native prairies at no expense, and Conservation Corps has done a great job,” said James Fett, Mower SWCD’s watershed technician who oversaw the prescribed burns.

Some of this year’s sites had never received a prescribed burn, including properties that have been under an easement for 15 years or more, Fett said. Ideally, permanent easement sites should get a prescribed burn every five years, he said, but the process can be costly to the landowner.

All of this year’s sites are located in the Cedar River Watershed but Mower SWCD and Conservation Corps Minnesota expect to do a similar partnership on prescribed burns in 2017 for permanent easement sites in eastern Mower County in the Root River and Upper Iowa River watersheds.

Prescribed burns are highly beneficial to native prairies for various reasons, including that they:

- Remove thatch layer resulting in better native seed germination and a more diverse stand of native species. This results in more water infiltration and better water quality in local streams.
- Help with noxious weeds and control undesirable plant species.
- Create new habitat for native mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles and insects.

Conservation Corps provides meaningful work for young people in managing natural resources, responding to disasters, conserving energy and leading volunteers. The organization also provides training in resource management, safety, job-readiness and technical skills, as well as helps young people develop personal responsibility, a strong work ethic and greater awareness of environmental stewardship.

Mower Soil & Water Conservation District

Since 1953, Mower SWCD has provided land and conservation services to Mower County landowners to help manage lands in a way that promotes a sound economy as well as sustains and enhances natural resources that are key to the state’s environmental health. Mower SWCD is one of Minnesota’s 91 SWCDs each are governed by an elected board.

Mower County prescribed burns

615 acres-plus burned this spring to date

17 permanent easements received burns