



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CREP signups officially open in Mower County, state

Mower SWCD seeks landowners to discuss permanent conservation

AUSTIN, Minn. – Tuesday, May 16, 2017 – Gathered just uphill from the meandering Cedar River, local and state officials on Monday celebrated the first signup day for the new round of a state-federal program that permanently enrolls farmland into conservation.

Mower Soil & Water Conservation District and agency partners joined together in northwest Mower County on Udolpho Township land owned by farmer Roger Peterson, who enrolled the parcel in a previous round of the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP). Peterson, who has participated in numerous conservation programs, joined Mower SWCD district manager Justin Hanson in talking about the importance of CREP and encouraging landowners to consider it.

Peterson said CREP gave him the chance to take eroding cropland and get paid to put it permanently into prairie grass.

"I just jumped at that idea and never looked back, and I've been happy with it ever since," Peterson said. "The wildlife here is phenomenal."

MN CREP officially opened Monday as a voluntary state-federal program for landowners seeking to protect their environmentally sensitive cropland. It is designed to improve water quality and habitat conservation.

Locally, Mower SWCD will serve as the lead agency for MN CREP in Mower County, one of 54 counties in southern and western Minnesota selected for this round of the program. Overall, this round of MN CREP will protect and restore up to 60,000 acres of marginal cropland in the state through buffer strips, wetland restoration and drinking water wellhead protection.

Many opportunities are provided through MN CREP for landowners to restore their land into a private wildlife area for their own enjoyment or enroll farm land that often is frequently flooded or in the 100-year floodplain, said James Fett, Mower SWCD's watershed technician leading the CREP effort in Mower County. Compensation through MN CREP is offered at a fair market value.

"MN CREP is a way to make a positive change on the landscape that lasts forever," Fett said. "We're also really excited to have CREP back because, unlike other conservation programs, it's not always available to us."

David Copeland, a board conservationist with the Minnesota Board of Water & Resources (BWSR) – the state lead for MN CREP – also attended Monday's kickoff with Michelle Janssen of Farm Service Agency (USDA) for Mower County; and Brian DeVetter, of the Natural Resources Conservation Services (USDA).

BWSR's Executive Director John Jaschke, has called the new round of MN CREP "a milestone in conservation for Minnesota."

MN CREP is funded with about \$350 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and \$150 million from the State of Minnesota.

Landowners accepted into MN CREP will enroll in the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for 14 to 15 years. At the same time, the land will be put into a permanent conservation easement through the state's Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) easement program. Private ownership continues and the land is permanently restored and enhanced for water quality and habitat benefits.

Mower County landowners interested in MN CREP should contact James Fett, Mower SWCD, at 507-434-2603 or by email at james.fett@mowerswcd.org. More information, visit the websites for Mower SWCD – www.mowerswcd.org – or Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources – www.bwsr.state.mn.us/crep.

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.

MN CREP signups begin in Mower County

Who: Mower Soil & Water Conservation District; Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources; Farm Service Agency (USDA); and Natural Resource Conservation Service (USDA).

What: First day of signups statewide for the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP).

Where: Mower County and 53 other counties in southern and western Minnesota.

When: Monday, May 15.

Why: New round of MN CREP will permanently protect and enhance up to 60,000 acres of marginal cropland in Minnesota.

Contact: Mower County landowners should contact James Fett at Mower SWCD at 507-434-2603 or james.fett@mowerswcd.org.



Justin Hanson, Mower SWCD, speaks Monday about the start of MN CREP signups at a previous CREP site in Mower County's Udolpho Township along the Cedar River. He was joined by (left to right) James Fett, Mower SWCD; landowner Roger Peterson; David Copeland, Minnesota BWSR; Michelle Janssen, USDA's Farm Service Agency; and Brian DeVetter, NRCS-USDA.