

# CONSERVATION COUNTS

*JEFFERSON COUNTY LAND AND WATER  
CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT*



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## 2008 EQIP Signup Ends November 16, 2007

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that the Wisconsin signup for agricultural conservation practices will be from September 4 through November 16 for 2008 funding. Brian Resch, District Conservationist for the NRCS in Jefferson County, said there are a number of changes to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) this year. EQIP is the primary program available to provide financial assistance for agricultural conservation practices.

“This year, a number of new conservation practices will be offered, including waste facility cover, mulching, obstruction removal, and subsurface drains, in addition to the more than 50 other practices that have been eligible in the past,” said Brian Resch. “Also, to help streamline payments, EQIP no longer does “cost-sharing” – instead it offers flat-rate payments based on a schedule for each particular practice. Farmers will know up-front what the payment will be, not a percentage of the costs as in the past.”

All eligible applications received by the end of the ranking period on November 16, 2007 will be evaluated and ranked for 2008 funds. Signup is at the NRCS offices in USDA Service Centers statewide. NRCS anticipates \$17 million in funds for Wisconsin; however that figure could change depending on Congressional action on the Farm Bill. Of the \$17 million, an estimated \$4 million will go toward animal waste concerns.

For more information, see [www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov) under “Programs”, or contact the NRCS office at the USDA Service Center in Jefferson: 920-674-2020; 143 West Rockwell Street.

## Signup Now for CREP



Unless reauthorized in the new farm bill, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) will come to an end on December 31, 2007. The program started in Wisconsin in 2002 as a cooperative effort between the USDA Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the State of Wisconsin, and participating counties. The goal of the program is to establish vegetative buffer strips adjacent to surface water to filter out sediment and other pollutants.

Landowners currently have until the end of 2007 to enroll eligible acres into the program. Generally, eligible land includes land in crop production which is located next to rivers, streams, lakes or other open water areas. Landowners receive 15 years of rental payments from the USDA. Rental rates range from \$86 to \$167 per acre per year. They also receive cost-sharing for establishing vegetative cover and signing bonus payments from the USDA and the State. Landowners can receive additional payments from the State if they choose to enroll the land as a permanent easement.

Please contact NRCS (920-674-2020) or Nancy at the LWCD office (920-674-7115) for more information on CREP.

## Keeping Tabs on Soil Erosion in Jefferson County

The Land and Water Conservation Department has completed its 9th year of conducting the Transect Survey to monitor soil loss in the county. The program was developed by Purdue University to estimate soil loss on a county-wide basis with a predicted accuracy rate of over 95%. The survey is completed by driving a pre-established route throughout the County, stopping every half mile to evaluate present and previous crops, type of tillage, and amount of residue present on the soil surface. The initial survey collected all the static information such as slope, soil type, and watershed. The collected data is sent to the Department of Agriculture for analysis.

The 2007 Transect Survey yielded the following information:

- 80% of all Jefferson County fields are at or below tolerable soil loss.
- The average soil loss for the County is 2.9 tons/acre/year with the maximum acceptable rate being 5 tons/acre/year.
- Corn was planted on 51% of all acres, soybeans on 22%, hay made up 17%, small grains 6%, and 4% was in Conservation Reserve Program, planted to specialty crops such as mint, onion or sod, or left fallow.
- 15% of corn and 54% of soybean were no-till planted.



The complete Transect Survey report can be viewed at the Land and Water Conservation Department.

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## Grant Program Seeks Innovative Ideas for the Farm and Ranch

The North Central Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (NCR-SARE) Program is seeking innovative farmers or ranchers who want to implement a new, sustainable idea to improve their operation. NCR-SARE is currently accepting applications for their 2007 Farmer Rancher grant program.

NCR-SARE awards grants to farmers and ranchers for on-farm research, demonstrations, and education projects. By providing funds ranging from \$6,000 per individual grant to up to \$18,000 for grants awarded to groups of three or more, NCR-SARE helps facilitate essential agricultural research and development.

Jim Stute farms in Walworth County, Wisconsin. He received an NCR-SARE grant fund to compare three different cover crop options following winter wheat. "The SARE farmer grant program is really valuable," Stute commented. "It allows farmers to test things they're curious about but would not be able to do on their own."



Stute's grant is just one example of the wide range of projects that NCR-SARE has funded over the years. Other funded topics include pest and disease management, soil conservation, local marketing, public education, waste management, agri-tourism, crop diversity, aqua-culture, and many others. NCR-SARE grants are awarded based on the applicants ability to describe how their project will be sustainable in terms of having long-term profitability, being good for the environment, producing healthy foods, being socially responsible, and supporting their community.

This year farmers and ranchers throughout the North Central Region will have the opportunity to apply for roughly \$400,000 in grant assistance. Grant proposals are due in the NCR-SARE office by December 3, 2007. Interested applicants may contact Joan Benjamin with NCR-SARE at 402-472-0809 or [ncrsare@umn.edu](mailto:ncrsare@umn.edu). The current Farmer Rancher Grant Call for Proposals application can be found on the NCR-SARE web site at <http://ncr.sare.org/prod.htm>. Previous project reports are made available through the national SARE web site at <http://www.sare.org>.

## Order Your Tree and Shrub Seedlings Now

### Land and Water Conservation Committee

Carlton Zentner, Chair  
Howard Wiedenhoef, Vice Chair  
Karen Christian, FSA Representative

### Land and Water Conservation Department

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County Conservationist  
Patricia Cicero  
Water Resource Management Specialist  
Nancy Lannert  
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Administrative Clerk

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The Jefferson County 2007/2008 Tree Seedling Sale is underway. Varieties include Fraser Fir, Red Oak, White Oak, Red Maple, White Cedar (Eastern Arborvitae), Thechny Arborvitae, White Pine, Colorado Blue Spruce, Norway Spruce, White Spruce, Black Hills Spruce, and American Plum.

Trees come in bundles of 25 trees, with each bundle costing \$22 plus tax. Order forms are available either from our office or on our website (<http://www.co.jefferson.wi.us/landcon>). Orders should be sent to our office with payment as soon as possible because there are a limited number of trees available. Please contact Deb in our office at 920-674-7110 for more information. Pick up dates for the seedlings will be in mid-April at the Jefferson County Fairgrounds. Postcards will be sent out notifying customers of pick up dates and times.



The Department of Natural Resources also offers trees and shrubs for sale. A minimum order must consist of a total of 1,000 tree seedlings, or 500 shrubs, or one packet. There are 4 packets: Energy Packet (300 conifers suitable for a wind-break), Moist Shoreland Packet (50 conifers, 50 hardwoods, 200 wildlife shrubs), Sandy Shoreland Packet (25 conifers, 75 hardwoods, 200 wildlife shrubs), and Wildlife Packet (100 conifers, 200 wildlife shrubs). Trees and shrubs may be purchased in increments of 100 of each species. For information on planting, species availability, and on-line ordering, visit the DNR's website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/forestry/nursery/>. For species availability information call 1-800-875-9050.

## Project on Mud and Hope Lakes

In the spring of 2007, the Land and Water Conservation Department received a grant from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to work on Hope and Mud Lakes, both located in the Town of Lake Mills. The project addresses the lack of scientific knowledge for these 2 lakes by implementing a variety of data collection. Chemical sampling (water clarity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, phosphorus, conductivity, and pH), aquatic plant surveys, fish surveys, and other species identification are all being implemented in 2007. In addition, the percent of different land uses will be determined in each watershed.

Based on the data collected, lake management plans for each lake will be developed. Each plan will include a summary of the data, analysis of the data, and recommendations on managing the resources. Recommendations will cover the topics of water quality objectives, pollutant load reduction, relevant conservation practices, fish and aquatic plant management, sensitive areas within each lake, recreation, public access, and public involvement and education. The management plans will be finalized in the spring of 2008.

Some initial findings include the following:

- Black Terns at Hope Lake (Wisconsin Species of Greatest Conservation Need)
- Blanding's Turtle at Mud Lake (Wisconsin Threatened Species)
- 6 fish species and 20 aquatic plant species at Hope Lake
- 12 fish species and 14 aquatic plant species at Mud Lake

To obtain more information about this project, please contact Patricia in our office (920-674-7121).

## Do You Need a Tax Break? The New Farmland Conservation Easement Program May Be For You!

Since April 2007, the Jefferson County Farmland Preservation Commission has been researching and discussing how to best preserve farmland in the rapidly-developing area of southeast Wisconsin. One of the first ideas being implemented by the Commission is the Farmland Conservation Easement Program.

Those interested in preserving farmland and obtaining tax savings can donate a conservation easement on their rural property as part of the Jefferson County Farmland Conservation Easement Program. The land remains in the hands of the landowner who can reap the rewards of the program if IRS criteria are met. The detailed example below shows how landowners and farmers can benefit from the Taxpayer Relief Act.

The landowner is not the only one who benefits from this new program – the citizens of Jefferson County also will benefit. Preserving farmland retains the rural character and “small town” atmosphere we all enjoy. It also helps boost Jefferson County’s economic base, as agriculture contributes \$442 million to the county’s total income. Did you know that more than 10,000 Jefferson County residents are employed in agriculture?

The natural resources in Jefferson County will also benefit from the Program. When farmland and natural areas are protected from development, the result can be maintaining the quality of water resources. Crops and groundcover absorb rainwater and help keep soil in place. In fact, one acre under construction with no erosion control delivers, on average, as much sediment to local waterways as 75 acres of cropland.

For more information on the County’s Farmland Conservation Easement Program, contact LWCD at 674-7110 or go to <http://www.co.jefferson.wi.us/Farm/index.htm>. If you would like to share your ideas on how to preserve farmland, please contact the Farmland Preservation Commission chair, Jim Mode at 920-563-3153.

### 2007 Conservation Easement Donation Income Tax Example

(Example is for current law, which expires on December 31, 2007 but may be re-approved by Congress for 2008 and beyond.)

#### Farmer Example

Mr. Brown, a farmer (50% or more of income from farming), is allowed to deduct 100% of his taxable income and has 16 years to use up the deduction:

Total value of conservation easement donation = \$700,000

Mr. Brown’s annual tax deduction = \$100,000 (100% of his \$100,000 taxable income)

Eligible time period = 16 years (year of the gift + 15-year carry-forward)

Tax deduction claimed = \$700,000 (\$100,000/year over 7 years)

#### Non-Farmer Landowner Example

Mr. Brown, not a farmer, rancher, or tree farmer (less than 50% of income from farming), is allowed to deduct 50% of his taxable income and has 16 years to use up the deduction:

Total value of conservation easement donation = \$700,000

Mr. Brown’s annual tax deduction = \$50,000 (50% of his \$100,000 taxable income)

Eligible time period = 16 years (year of the gift + 15-year carry-forward)

Tax deduction claimed = \$700,000 (\$50,000/year over 14 years)

**Jefferson County Farmland Preservation Commission members:** Jim Mode, chair, Fort Atkinson, County Board; John Molinaro, Cambridge, County Board; Steve Nass, Lake Mills, County Board; Blane Poulson, Palmyra, County Board; Carlton Zentner, Fort Atkinson, County Board; Margaret Burlingham, Palmyra, farmer; Daphne Holterman, Watertown, farmer; Sharon Schmeling, Jefferson, County Board & ex-officio member

## The Zeloski Marsh Restoration is Complete and Open to the Public

A new gem for public recreation, the Zeloski Marsh, was dedicated on June 14, 2007. The celebration recognized the many efforts that allowed this 1,500 acre wetland to be restored and opened for public recreation and hunting. The Glacial Drumlin Bicycle Trail crosses through the marsh, offering cyclists wildlife viewing.

This collaborative effort of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and Madison Audubon Society began a number of years ago with the dream of turning 1,500 acres of marginal farmland into an area rich in diversity through the development of a complex of wetlands, prairies, an oak opening, tamarack woods, and a remnant bog. Specifically, 286 acres were planted to prairie, 270 acres of sedge meadow were developed along with 112 acres of emergent wetland habitat and 64 acres of shorebird habitat.

This restoration forms the core of the Lake Mills Wildlife Area, now owned and operated by the DNR. Grants from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program allowed Madison Audubon Society to purchase the property and also assisted in the restoration efforts.

The Rock River Coalition (RRC) has been utilizing volunteers to monitor the property starting when it was still being farmed, through the restoration, and will continue into the future to document the return of wildlife and plants. The RRC continues to look for volunteers to monitor birds, dragonflies, damselflies, butterflies, frogs and toads, water quality, plants and mammals. If interested in the monitoring effort, contact Jerry at 920-648-3380 or at [wetlands@rockrivercoalition.org](mailto:wetlands@rockrivercoalition.org).

### Birds at the Marsh

Zeloski Marsh has become a birder's paradise since the restoration was completed. Approximately 159 different species of birds, including 25 species of shore birds, have either made the area their home or have stopped there during migration. Highlights include: 2 whooping cranes (migrating), peregrine falcon (migrating), black tern, sedge wren, dunlin (migrating), spotted sandpiper, black-necked stilt, black bellied plover, Hudsonian godwit, dickcissel, Brewer's blackbird, common moorhen, yellow-headed blackbirds, and black-crowned night herons (migrating). An ongoing list of species is being kept on <http://ebird.org/content/wi>

- click on "View and Explore Data"
- click on "All Birds at a Location"
- click on "Hot Spots in Wisconsin" and click on "Continue"
- check the "Lake Mills WA—Zeloski Marsh Unit" box and click on "Continue"

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## Conservation Happenings

The Land and Water Conservation Committee meets on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of each month at 8:30 a.m. in the Jefferson County Courthouse. The public is welcome to attend. Please call Deb (920-674-7110) to confirm the meeting day and time before attending.

The Heart of the Farm—Women in Agriculture conference will be held at the Grant County UW-Extension in Lancaster on November 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Pre-registrations are due November 8. Visit the Heart of the Farm website <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/heartofthefarm> for a brochure or call Ted Bay at 608-723-2125.

The Wisconsin Land and Water Conservation Association is holding its annual conference on December 5-7 at the Concourse Hotel in Madison. For more information, call the WLWCA office (608-441-2677) or check out their website at <http://wlwca.org/>.

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## LWCD Web Watch

NRCS has developed four energy tools designed to increase awareness of how much energy we use in agriculture and to help farmers find ways to reduce those costs. Go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/energy/> to check out energy estimators for animal housing, nitrogen, tillage, and irrigation.

The Land Trust Alliance website contains information on the Taxpayer Relief Act cited in the Farmland Conservation Easement Program article (page 4): <http://www.lta.org>. The American Farmland Trust also has lots of information on protection agricultural resources: <http://www.farmland.org>.

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**LWCD Web Site:** <http://www.co.jefferson.wi.us/lcon>

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