ILLINOIS CONSERVATION RESERVE ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM 2007 ANNUAL REPORT

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE USDA
AND
THE STATE OF ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2007

Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
(CREP)
Reporting Period: October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007

The Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a federal-state program that was created by a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Commodity Credit Corporation, and the State of Illinois in March 1998. Enrollments into this program began on May 1, 1998.

Since the beginning, the program has been extremely well received by the landowners in the targeted area. The MOA was re-authorized by all the parties on December 18, 2002 increasing the eligible acreage for enrollment to 232,000 acres.

CREP is being implemented through a federal-state-local partnership in the eligible area. The Agencies that are implementing the program are USDA - Farm Service Agency (FSA), USDA - Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), the Illinois Department of Agriculture (IDOA), the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), and the County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) along with the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD) in the eligible area. Other agencies and organizations provide guidance and assistance for the program through the CREP Advisory committee, which is a subcommittee of the State Technical Committee.

ENROLLMENT SUMMARY:

For the reporting period of October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007, the Federal CREP Program enrolled 675 new contracts. Total Federal enrollment figures from the inception of the program May 1, 1998 through September 30, 2007 are as follows:

Number of contracts	-	6,483
Average acres/contract	-	19
Total acres contracted	-	126,016.1
Average rental rate/acre	-	$160.00

Total State enrollments for the same period are as follows:

Number of Contracts	-	1168
Average acres/contract	-	67.25
Total acres enrolled	-	78,545.82
Average cost/acre	-	$688.28

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND PROGRAM STAFF:

Technical assistance in this program is made up of three types:
1. Assistance to the landowners during the enrollment process in determining eligibility, options, and selecting approved practices;
2. Assistance to landowners in implementing the approved CREP practice once the property is enrolled in the program; and
3. Assistance to the SWCD and landowners in the state requirements for execution of the state easement documents.

The Farm Service Agency, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Department of Natural Resources, and the County Soil and Water Conservation Districts provide primary technical assistance.

NON-FEDERAL CREP PROGRAM EXPENDITURES:

For this reporting period, the State obligated $5,201,777.05 for CREP expenditures, State cost-share expenses, monitoring costs, SWCD administrative fees and other associated enrollment and easement costs. In addition, the IDNR has provided another $344,147.30 from its operational dollars to provide for CREP Administrative Expenses, bringing the total State dollars directly expended for CREP enrollments to $5,545,924.35.

State CREP Expenses
October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007

State Bonus Payment for State Option	$3,401,646.95
State Cost-Share Payments	$ 581,019.80
Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Administrative Fees	$ 349,141.25
DNR Administrative Expenses - Contract and Data Management, Technical Assistance, Reports, Training	$ 344,147.30
Add. Admin. Fees – Legal, Survey, filing costs	$ 79,673.17
Monitoring	$ 790,295.88
TOTAL	**$ 5,545,924.35**

The Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for the Illinois CREP, as amended on December 18, 2002, details the formula to determine the overall costs of the program and to determine if the State has fulfilled its obligation to provide 20% of the total program costs. A summary of these enrollments follows: The total federal annual rent payment for the 675 CREP contracts (9,606.4 acres) is $1,553,403. The total annual incentive payment is $339,543. The total federal annual rent plus incentive and maintenance over the life of the 15-year contracts is $23,202,767. The estimated total federal cost-share is $1,541,729.

To determine the overall costs of CREP, the following costs are to be used: the total land retirement costs, which will include the CRP payments made by the Commodity Credit Corporation and the easement payments or the bonus payments made by Illinois; the total reimbursement for conservation practices paid by the CCC and Illinois; the total costs of the monitoring program; and the aggregate costs of technical assistance incurred by Illinois for implementing contracts and easements, and a reasonable estimate of the cost incurred by the State to develop conservation plans. Since the CRP contract payments will be annual payments, an 8 percent per annum discount rate (per the MOA) is normally used to compare the CRP Payments with the State Bonus payment.

Annual CRP Payments
Discounted at 8% for 15 Years

Payment Year	Annual Payment	Payment Year	Annual Payment
Year 1	$1,553,403	Year 9	$797,236
Year 2	$1,429,131	Year 10	$733,457
Year 3	$1,314,800	Year 11	$674,780
Year 4	$1,209,616	Year 12	$620,798
Year 5	$1,112,847	Year 13	$571,134
Year 6	$1,023,819	Year 14	$525,443
Year 7	$941,914	Year 15	$483,408
Year 8	$866,561	TOTAL 15 Years	$13,858,347

Total Federal and State Expenditures
October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007

CRP Payments (Before Discount)	$ 23,202,767	CRP Payment (Discounted 8%)	$ 13,858,347
Federal Cost-Share	$ 1,541,729	Federal Cost-Share	$ 1,541,729
State Payments for CREP Enrollments	$ 3,046,857.42	State Payments for CREP Enrollments	$ 3,046,857.42
Total Program Costs	$ 27,791,353.42	Total Program Costs	$ 18,446,933.42

The total Federal and State cost of CREP from October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007 was $ 27,791,353.42. The State's share of costs for the reporting period was $3,046,857.42. Using the 8% per annum discount rate per the MOA, the Federal costs to be used for comparison to the state expenditures is $ 13,858,347.

Per the December 18, 2002 Agreement, the State must contribute 20% from the Program inception in May 1998. Total Program discounted costs for this period are $247,367,792. The State contributed $54,060,952.38, or 22% of the total program costs after using the discount rate. The State has met the requirement for incurring 20% of the total Program costs.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

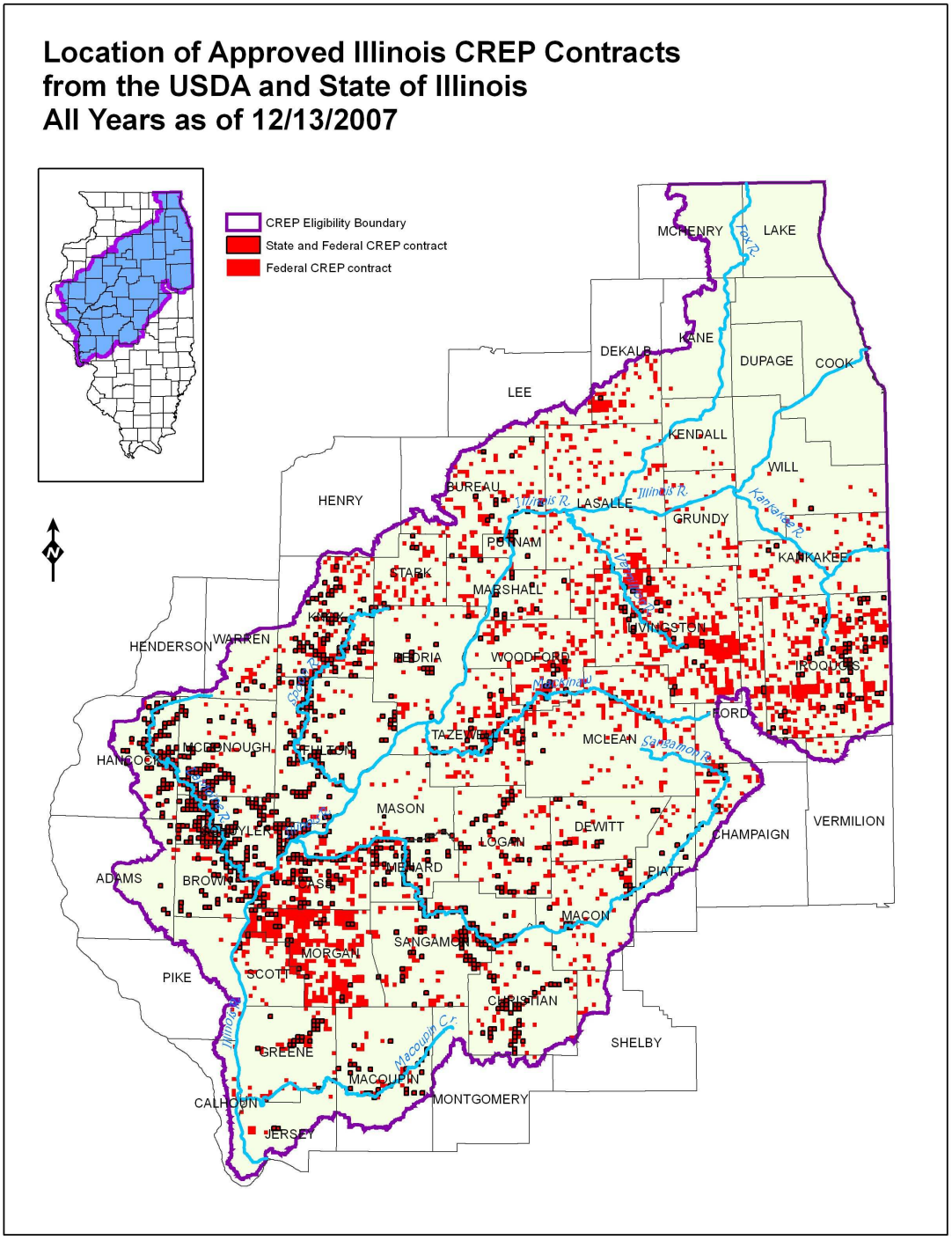
Since the beginning of the CREP program on May 1, 1998 through the end of the current reporting period (September 30, 2007), CREP has restored and/or protected 126,016.7 acres of land either in existing native vegetation or in a previous CRP sign-up (See Map 1).

Of the 47,592.98 Federal acres enrolled in the State option, 9% selected the 15-year extension, 5% selected the 35-year extension, and 86% selected the permanent easement option. In Illinois, 37.8% of the 126,016.7 acres enrolling in the Federal CREP Program also enrolled in the State enhanced option.

The CREP program is restoring and protecting large stretches of floodplain corridors both on the main stem of the Illinois River and along the major tributaries. It is helping landowners, who have only been able to produce crops in the area once or twice in the last decade, to retire these lands from agricultural production.

Additionally, CREP activities are directly contributing to, or complimenting, the objectives of the Illinois Fish and Wildlife Action Plan and the Landowners Incentive Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency. The ability of CREP to achieve or contribute to other program objectives make it an attractive program for continuation.

MAP 1


Location of Approved Illinois CREP Contracts
from the USDA and State of Illinois
All Years as of 12/13/2007
CREP Eligibility Boundary
State and Federal CREP contract
Federal CREP contract
MCHENRY
LAKE
KANE
DEKALB
DUPAGE
COOK
LEE
KENDALL
WILL
HENRY
BUREAU
LASALLE
GRUNDY
KANKAKEE
PUTNAM
STARK
MARSHALL
KNOX
IROQUOIS
HENDERSON
WARREN
PEORIA
WOODFORD
FORD
TAZEWELL
MCLEAN
HANCOCK
MCDONOUGH
FULTON
MASON
DEWITT
CHAMPAIGN
VERMILION
SCHUYLER
LOGAN
ADAMS
BROWN
CASS
MENARD
PIATT
MACON
SANGAMON
MORGAN
PIKE
SCOTT
CHRISTIAN
SHELBY
GREENE
MACOUPIN
CALHOUN
MONTGOMERY
JERSEY
Illinois R.
Fox R.
Kankakee R.
Mackinaw R.
Sangamon R.
Macoupin Cr.

OTHER PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

There are other state, federal and organizational programs that are contributing to the accomplishment of the goals of the Illinois CREP. The following highlights a few of the programs that contributed to achieving the goals the State has set for the Illinois River Basin. Any state or non-federal dollars that have been expended in these programs have not been included in the previous section that describe and list the direct state expenditures for CREP match.

STATE SUPPORTING AGENCIES

CREP and C2000: Another Great Partnership

Conservation 2000 (C2000) is a 14 year, multi-agency, $276 million comprehensive program designed to take a holistic, long-term approach to protecting and managing Illinois' natural resources. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources administers the Ecosystems Program and the Critical Trends Assessment Program (CTAP), a statewide ecosystem assessment and monitoring program.

The Ecosystems Program**,** a landmark program, is based upon an extensive network of local volunteers working to leverage technical and financial resources to promote ecosystem based management primarily on private lands. With 95% of the state in private ownership (non-state owned), the main objective of the program is to assist in the formation of public/private partnerships, *Ecosystem Partnerships*, to develop plans and projects on a watershed scale with an ecosystem-based approach. There are two key criteria established for the Ecosystems Program. One, that they must be voluntary, and based on incentives rather than government regulation; and, two, they must be broad-based, locally organized efforts, incorporating the interests and participation of local communities, and of private, public and corporate landowners.

Currently there are 41 Ecosystem Partnerships covering 86% of Illinois. Half of those partnerships are located in counties that comprise the Illinois River watershed; 21 to be exact. They are Big Rivers, Chicago Wilderness, DuPage River Coalition, Fox River, Headwaters, Heart of the Sangamon, Illinois River Bluffs, Kankakee River, Lake Calumet, LaMoine River, Lake Michigan Watershed, Lower Des Plaines, Lower Sangamon Valley, Mackinaw River, North Branch of the Chicago River, Prairie Parklands, Spoon River, Thorn Creek, Upper Des Plaines, Upper Salt Creek, and Vermillion Watershed Task Force.

Since 1996, the C2000 Program has awarded more than $14,755,000 million in C2000 grants to Ecosystem Partnerships in the Illinois River watershed basin for projects providing a variety of conservation practices. Another $14,727.000 has been leveraged as match for these projects for a total of nearly $30 million for 442 projects. Accomplishments from these projects include: 14,522 acres of habitat restoration, 160,302 feet of stream bank restoration, 1,426 sites have been or are being monitored, and more than 636,000 people

have been educated on watershed protection and restoration.

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Illinois Department of Agriculture administers numerous soil and water conservation programs that produce environmental benefits in the Illinois River Watershed. During FY 06 and FY07, the Conservation 2000 Program (C-2000), administered by IDOA, has allocated $1.7 million dollars to the 46 counties that have significant acreage in the Illinois River Watershed for cost-sharing the installation of upland soil and water conservation practices. Administered by the Department, with assistance from County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), this program provides up to 70% of the cost of constructing conservation practices that reduce soil erosion and protect water quality.

Eligible conservation practices include terraces, grassed waterways, water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures and nutrient management plans. Although not all of the FY07 results are available, 675 projects have been completed by the SWCD's with significant benefits in the Illinois River Basin during the last 2 fiscal years. Individual conservation projects were completed with funding of $1.45 million dollars. These projects are responsible for bringing soil loss to tolerable levels on hundreds of acres of land. This translates into over 41,924 fewer tons of soil loss each year, or the equivalent of more than 1,700 semi truckloads of soil saved.

In FY 07, the Department of Agriculture provided over $4.1 million to 54 county SWCD offices in the Illinois River Watershed for operational expenses. Specifically, these funds were used to provide financial support for SWCD offices, programs, and employees' salaries. Employees, in turn, provided technical and educational assistance to both urban and rural residents of the Illinois River Watershed. Their efforts are instrumental in delivering programs that reduce soil erosion and sedimentation and protect water quality.

In an effort to stabilize and restore severely eroding streambanks that would otherwise contribute sediment to the Illinois River and its tributaries, the Department of Agriculture, with assistance from SWCDs, is administering the Streambank Stabilization and Restoration Program (SSRP). The SSRP, funded under C-2000, provides funds to construct low-cost techniques to stabilize eroding streambanks. In FY 06 and FY 07, 30 individual streambank stabilization projects totaling $221,714 were constructed in 16 counties within the Illinois River Watershed. In all, over 2.5 miles of streambank have been stabilized to protect adjacent water bodies during the past 2 fiscal years.

Another environmentally oriented C-2000 Program administered by the Department of Agriculture is the Sustainable Agriculture Grant Program. Grants are made available to agencies, institutions, and individuals for conducting research, demonstration, or education programs or projects related to profitable and environmentally safe agriculture. In FY 07, over $172,380 in funds were awarded to 12 grant recipients with programs or projects in the Illinois River Watershed in such areas as alternative crops, nutrient management, grassland management, integrated pest management, and organic production.

In the spring of 2006, the Department, in cooperation with SWCDs, conducted the eleventh Transect Survey to assess the status of the adoption of conservation practices on a county and watershed basis. The survey, which is conducted biennially, provides data that can be used by SWCDs, the Department and other agencies/organizations to identify trends and develop plans for targeting financial and technical resources to further

reduce soil loss and to enhance water quality.

The 2006 Survey showed that SWCD staff assessed more than 24,000 fields while driving county routes to conduct the survey within the Illinois River Basin. The data shows sheet and rill erosion has been reduced to an average of about 2.3 tons per acre and about 90 percent of the fields surveyed are at or below the Tolerable Soil Loss Level to maintain productivity. The gains realized in reducing soil loss from sheet erosion in the basin are largely due to the increase in farmers' use of conservation tillage. Tillage systems like mulch-till or no-till are considered forms of conservation tillage because they leave more than 30 percent of the previous crop's residue on the soils surface after planting, which protects the soil from erosion. The survey shows nearly half (48%) of the fields surveyed in the Illinois River Basin were farmed using conservation tillage methods. The data also documents the continuation of a trend which shows about 71 percent of soybean fields are farmed using conservation tillage.

Although significant gains have been made in the reduction of sheet and rill erosion, the survey shows an increase in erosion caused by water leaving fields in a concentrated flow, which is known as ephemeral erosion. The 2006 survey indicated that 24 percent of the fields surveyed were in need of a conservation practice to control this type of erosion that can cause gullies in fields.

The agricultural community has and will continue to employ environmental-friendly practices that will conserve and protect natural resources in the Illinois River Watershed for the long term.

ILLINOIS ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

One of the key missions of Illinois EPA is to monitor and protect the water resources of Illinois; these resources are relied upon for drinking water, fishing, transportation and recreational use and other environmental and economic benefits. One of the most dramatic improvements in water quality that Illinois EPA has documented has taken place on the Illinois River.

Illinois EPA has eight Ambient Water Quality Monitoring Sites on the main channel of the Illinois River. Water chemistry is collected at these sites nine times per year. There are also approximately 250 Intensive Basin Survey Sites in the Illinois River watershed. These sites are monitored "intensively" once every five years. The monitoring includes water chemistry, macroinvertebrates, fish, habitat, sediment and at some sites fish tissue contaminants are collected. This information is cooperatively collected with the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources, a partnership that began many years ago and continues annually.

The monitoring shows that the Illinois River mainstream water quality has improved significantly since the passage of the Federal Clean Water Act in 1972. Early improvements were due primarily to point source controls, such as additional treatment requirements and limits on discharges from wastewater treatment plants. The majority of water quality improvements over the last fifteen years have been from the implementation of nonpoint source management programs that reduce urban and agricultural runoff, programs such as CREP.

Illinois EPA believes that CREP has played a significant role in the improvement of the water quality in the Illinois River through the reduction of nonpoint source pollution. Seventy-three percent of the stream miles in the Illinois River Basin are currently rated as "good," compared with 62 percent statewide and 98 percent of the lakes in the Illinois River Basin are rated "good" or "fair" compared with 97 percent statewide.

In 2006, Illinois EPA continued to participate on the State CREP Advisory Committee and continued to provide financial assistance to local soil and water conservation district staff, so that they could assist landowners enroll in CREP. To date, more than $1,491,355 of 319 grant funds have been put towards implementation of the CREP program.

The benefits derived through this financial support is not only efficiency in the sign-up process to increase CREP enrollment, but it also allows the existing SWCD and NRCS staff to continue to implement the other conservation programs so desperately needed to improve water quality in the Illinois River watershed. Some of those Illinois EPA programs include:

Section 319: Since 1990, the IEPA has implemented over 200 Clean Water Act Section 319 projects within the Illinois River Watershed. The Agency receives these federal funds from USEPA to identify and administer projects to prevent nonpoint source pollution. These projects include watershed management planning; best management practices implementation and outreach efforts. Illinois EPA has dedicated over $40 million towards these projects to help improve the health of the Illinois River, its tributaries and ultimately the Mississippi River and Gulf of Mexico. Hundreds of conservation practices have been installed in the Illinois River watershed by dozens of our partners through the Section 319 program. Traditional practices such as terraces and waterways are dotting the landscape along with porous pavement parking lots, green roofs and miles of rural and urban stabilized streambank.

Since 1990, the 319 NPS program, through on the ground implementation can show load reduction decreases of: 199,928 lbs of nitrogen, 1,486,064 pounds of phosphorus, 1,111,231 pounds of total suspended solids, and 65,896 TONS of sediment per year, each and every year since the Best Management Practices were implemented as a result of 319 grant projects between IEPA and our local partners, in both the private and government sectors.

Pilot Construction Site Erosion Control Program: Illinois EPA has continued a program subcontracting with several soil and water conservation districts, the majority of them in the Illinois River Basin. Those partners include the DeWitt, Macon, McHenry and Winnebago County Soil and Water Conservation District Offices. District staff complete on-site NPDES Construction Stormwater Permit inspections and provide technical assistance in implementing best management practices to minimize runoff to nearby water bodies. This program is a natural fit for properly developing acreage that does not qualify for CREP.

Other Illinois EPA programs that complement CREP include:

Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL): USEPA has approved 105 completed TMDL evaluations and Illinois EPA is currently developing another 245 TMDLs. TMDLs are a tool that we use to restore impaired watersheds so that their waters will meet Water Quality Standards and Full Use Support for those uses that the water bodies are designated. A TMDL looks at the identified pollutants and develops, through water quality sampling and modeling, the amount or load reductions needed for the water body to meet its designated uses.

Conservation 2000: A total of 25 lakes in the Illinois River watershed have been improved by intensive monitoring and/or implementation projects, and more than $5 million dollars of local, state and some federal monies have been used.

In conclusion, the Illinois River is a valuable resource that we are working hard to protect and restore. Illinois EPA will continue long-term monitoring of the river and its

watershed and will continue to pursue funds to help implement CREP and other water quality restoration and protection projects and to work with citizen groups and local government and industry to continue the progress we have made.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-EXTENSION

The University of Illinois Extension provides educational programs and research-based information that helps adults and youth to learn about land and water quality issues in the Illinois River Watershed. In the summer of 2007 Illinois Department of Natural Resource and the University of Illinois Extension forged a one year relationship to update the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) website, development and maintain a Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) website, and maintain the Illinois Watershed Management Clearinghouse (IWMC) website. The CREP website is the most comprehensive source of information for this conservation program available to the public. The goal of the website is to provide the most current information available for both the Federal and State side of the program. Individuals from around the world can access the site and learn the primary goals of the program, eligibility requirements for enrollment, financial incentives offered by the Federal and State contracts, whom to contact to enroll and which conservation practices qualify. The "Contact Us" section provides visitors to the site with instant access to professionals who will answer their questions and concerns. The joint venture will assist with the coordination and integration of CREP and LIP program elements in the Illinois River Basin, and information and education materials available to natural resource agencies and organizations. The University of Illinois Extension serves on the CREP Advisory Committee.

FEDERAL PARTNERS

NRCS CONTRIBUTIONS TO ILLINOIS RIVER WATERSHED

EQIP

One of NRCS' primary conservation programs is the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), which is designed to provide cost-share funds to farmers who qualify for practices designed to improve or create conservation-minded operations or solutions. EQIP addresses practices for livestock operations, grazing operations or non-livestock operations, which covers most of Illinois' private landowners in need of conservation solutions.

Streambank Solutions

In 2007, special EQIP funds were targeted to stream bank erosion in the Spoon River Watershed. Funds targeted private landowner within the Spoon River for stream bank stabilization solutions.

EQIP's Newest Forestry Efforts

For 2007 NRCS added an EQIP Incentive for Forestry. The primary focus of the Forest Management Plans special project incentive is to help applicants develop management plans and protect their forested acres. Eligible applicants will receive $400 to help hire a professional forester who will visit the property, inventory the site, and write out a complete woodland management plan. This Special Projects opportunity through Illinois' EQIP can help landowners manage their woodland resources better and obtain a quality management plan that is also approved by the State of Illinois. With more acres of Illinois forest resources well planned for and managed, the health and

value of our forest resources will be greatly improved.

Wetland Reserve Program

NRCS' Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) continues to create and restore quality wetland habitats in the Illinois River Watershed and across the state. A particular success includes Illinois NRCS' largest WRP easement, the Emiquon wetland, a 6,400 acre area located in Fulton County. The property, owned by The Nature Conservancy, will ultimately become a naturalized haven and habitat for wetland flora and fauna and enjoyed by nature and naturalists for years to come. At present, the TNC is developing a management plan for the area. The environmental benefits this large wetland area will offer the watershed and the state—improvements in wetland habitats, species biodiversity, water quality, and erosion reduction—will be significant.

For more information on NRCS conservation programs, please visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE/PARTNERS FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) supports the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). Since inception, the Illinois CREP has provided opportunities on a landscape scale for restoration, enhancement, and preservation of natural habitats on private land. The Service recognizes that CREP has produced significant benefits for Federal Trust Resources through restoration and preservation of habitats important to migratory birds as well as federally listed threatened and endangered species. Equally significant are direct and indirect benefits to National Wildlife Refuge lands located on the Illinois River that result from implementing approved conservation practices.

The Service's primary contribution to the Illinois CREP is through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (Partners). Partners staff participated on the CREP Advisory Committee, providing technical and policy assistance input to the program. At the local level, Partners personnel coordinate with local NRCS, SWCD, and Illinois DNR staff as necessary on individual or groups of projects. CREP has opened a host of opportunities for habitat restoration, enhancement, and preservation on private land that fulfills the objectives of a broad coalition of Federal, State, local, and non-government conservation organizations.

Within the Illinois River Watershed, Partners projects compliment CREP and other habitat programs. The Partners program provides a tool for restoration and enhancement of habitats on private lands that may not be eligible for other landowner assistance programs. Partners coordinators also review the full range of landowner assistance programs with each potential cooperator and refer landowners to CREP and other programs that best meet their habitat development and economic goals.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL PARTICIPANTS

ASSOCIATION OF ILLINOIS SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

The AISWCD, in partnership with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the Illinois Department of Natural

Resources, helps with administration of the CREP program, by providing funding to SWCDs through a 319 grant. The grant is given to certain SWCDs who express the need of additional support in their District office to complete CREP related duties. Currently there are 8 CREP Assistants in 16 Soil and water conservation districts enrolled in the CREP Assistant Funding program.

The AISWCD serves on the CREP Advisory Committee.

ILLINOIS FARM BUREAU

Illinois Farm Bureau (IFB) continues to publicize and promote the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP). In 2007, articles in FarmWeek provided information about aspects of the program. IFB also used our statewide radio network to highlight details of the program. Information on CREP was sent directly to county Farm Bureaus (CFB) via e-mail and through our county Farm Bureau mail system. An Illinois Farm Bureau statewide workshop in 2007 on voluntary programs for farmers included information about CREP and other conservation programs through various agencies. Illinois Farm Bureau continues to provide input about CREP through various groups and committees and also continues to voice support for the program. CREP is another tool producers can use that provides cost share incentives and technical assistance for establishing long-term, resource-conserving practices and is a positive program in Illinois.

SUCCESS STORIES

Stories and Photo by Thad Eshleman, Iroquois County SWCD

The River Farm

The Iroquois SWCD/NRCS office was approached in 2000 by a local landowner interested in the possibility of enrolling bottomland acreage in CREP. Neena Pratt worked with Mike Kiefer, NRCS District Conservationist, to determine the best CRP practice for “the river farm” northwest of Watseka along the Iroquois River. As Mike and Neena looked at the floodplain map it was determined that over 200 acres of the river farm were in the 100-year floodplain. Since the original vegetation at the time of settlement was trees, Neena and Mike decided to re-plant native bottomland hardwoods.

Thad Eshleman, Resource Conservationist for Iroquois County SWCD worked with both Mike and Neena to enroll the farm in a permanent easement, thereby keeping the area from being cropped again. After reviewing other farms, Neena eventually enrolled 320 cropland acres in CREP and 305 acres in CREP permanent easements.

In 2001, 169 acres of native hardwoods, including sycamore, swamp white oak, bur oak, walnut (on the higher areas), green ash, Kentucky Coffeetree and mixed bottomland hickory were planted on the river farm by Ken Hoene of Timber Services.

By 2007, many of the sycamore trees are 10’ tall, with volunteer silver maple filling in some of the wetter areas; the oaks and other species are all coming along very well and Neena is rightfully proud of not only the river farm tree planting, but all of her CREP land.

The River Farm

Jerry Drilling Farm

Shortly after CREP opened, Jerry Drilling came to the office with the hope of turning a poorly drained, occasionally flooded 100 acre farm along Spring Creek near Loda, Illinois into a wildlife and hunting area. Farming some of the best land in the world, Jerry wanted a rougher, less productive piece of ground as a respite from the rest of his flat, fertile farmland.

Working with Thad Eshleman, SWCD Resource Conservationist, and Mike Kiefer, NRCS District Conservationist, Jerry eventually enrolled 60 acres in CREP to a riparian buffer and 24 acres to a wetland restoration with native grasses. Jerry was looking to keep most of this land out of crop production long-term; eventually Jerry put the 60 acres of trees and another 35 acres of non-cropland into a permanent easement.

Despite the eroded, clay soils, the native bottomland trees have done very well, finally topping the annual broadleaf grasses and grass seeding in 2006. Situated along US highway 45 at the south end of 4 successive CREP enrollments, this site receives much attention from neighboring landowners and has resulted in many inquiries about CREP eligibility on their farm.

In 2005 Jerry enhanced the area further with a Shallow Water Area for Wildlife attached to a pond on the opposite side of the CREP easement acreage. Jerry Drilling has made his former farm into a refuge for both upland and wetland wildlife.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE PLANS OF THE CREP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Setbacks from past reductions in CREP appropriations have had a significant impact on not only enrollment, but the loss of momentum that had been achieved with the State's successful achievement of its' original goal, and the USDA approval of expanded acreage to 232,000 acres. This has resulted in the development of new fiscal strategies.

CONTINUED STRATEGIES ON PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

1. Taking into consideration the source of Illinois CREP Funding, maintain the current long-term staffing and monitoring strategy to assure adequate staff and support for the proper administration of the program.

2. Continue training and workshops, for all field staff and SWCD's as a means of updating new and existing staff on issues, and refinement of the enrollment process. Update and keep the training manual up-to-date for field use.

3. Continue to expand on SWCD staff to assist all in the administration of the CREP program at the County level. Efforts to work with IEPA and other supporters will continue and expand.

4. Efforts will be continue to provide mid-management habitat assistance to achieve Wildlife Action Plan objectives while complying with CREP objectives.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THE ILLINOIS RIVER

- **Impact of Conservation Practices on Sediment and Nutrient Delivery to the Illinois River**

- **CREP and Watershed Management Education in Illinois**