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Contact: Steve Bertjens, 608-732-0847
Brett Hulsey, 608-334-4994, Brett@BetterEnviro.Com

Wisconsin Lost One-Third of Conservation Reserve Lands in the Last 2 Years, More than Iowa, Illinois and Minnesota--

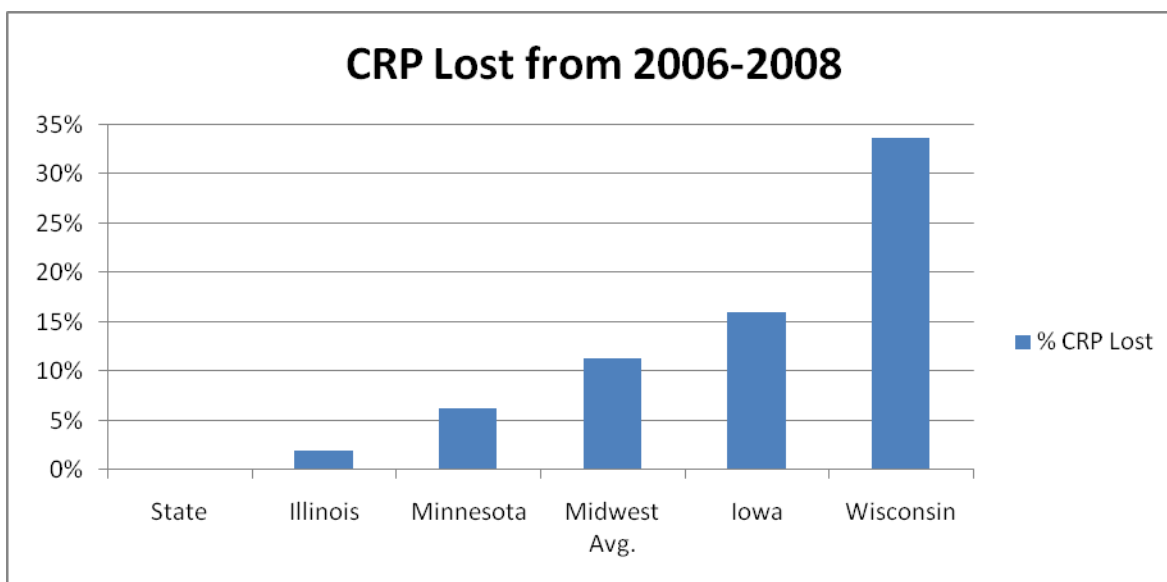
Program Needs Change to Protect Land, Water, Habitat, Flood Control

Madison—With Pheasants Forever meeting in Wisconsin this weekend, Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development Council, Trout Unlimited and Better Environmental Solutions today released an analysis of USDA information showing that Wisconsin has lost one-third of the its Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands in the last two years. That's twice as much as Iowa, 5 times more than Minnesota, and 17 times more than Illinois lost, as a percentage of the 2008 total.

“We need to keep highly erodible lands in the Conservation Reserve Program to protect our streams and lakes, provide habitat for people, fish, and wildlife, and reduce flooding,” said Steve Bertjens, the NRCS coordinator with Southwest Badger RC&D. The USDA data are shown below.

Conservation Reserve Program Acreage Trends, 2006-2008

State	FY 2006 CRP Acres	Dec. 2008 CRP Acres	Loss in Acres	% Loss	Compared to MW Regional Average
Illinois	1,049,992	1,029,498	20,494	2.0%	14%
Minnesota	1,796,620	1,690,417	106,203	6.3%	43%
Iowa	1,958,883	1,688,730	270,153	16.0%	110%
Wisconsin	616,588	461,263	155,325	33.7%	232%
MW Total	5,422,083	4,869,908	552,175	14.5%	100%



One of the most successful conservation programs in history, the Conservation Reserve Program was created in the 1985 Farm Bill to pay farmers for conservation practices. CRP protected 33.6 million acres of highly erodible lands and wetlands in December 2008, an area equal to 15 Yellowstone National Parks.

“The Conservation Reserve Program is the key to protecting habitat for pheasants, upland song birds, and other wildlife and we can’t afford to lose any more,” said Jeff Gaska, Regional Wildlife Biologist for Pheasants Forever.

The analysis also looked at CRP acres expiring in the next two years in western Wisconsin counties and estimated that 165,079 more acres could lose protection. Grant, Iowa, Trempealeau and Dane Counties could lose the most if farmers don’t renew their contracts, as the data below show.

Wisconsin County	CRP Acres Expiring in the Next 2 Year
Grant	25,529
Iowa	17,594
Trempealeau	17,118
Dane	13,380
Pierce	11,966
Crawford	10,242
Lafayette	9,623
Green	9,281
Sauk	8,462
Richland	8,224
Monroe	7,725
Eau Claire	7,156
Vernon	6,626
Buffalo	6,292
La Crosse	3,684
Pepin	2,177
Total	165,079

“We must do more to protect these Conservation Reserve lands that protect our streams and make Wisconsin a national draw for trout and other kinds of fishing and hunting,” said Laura Hewitt, Midwest Director for Trout Unlimited.

To address this concern, Trout Unlimited recommended changes in CRP like focusing on keeping landowners in the program and increasing flexibility to protect these conservation lands in a way that protects the habitat.

“As a landowner formerly in the Conservation Reserve Program, we need to make CRP more-user friendly and cut red tape,” said Larry Larson, head of the Association of State Floodplain Managers based in Madison. “We need CRP to work better to reduce runoff from rainfall and to protect natural lands that act like sponges to reduce floods.”

“The good news is that western Wisconsin is the Saudi Arabia for biomass and switchgrass. We need to work with farmers to give them more flexibility to manage these lands for conservation to produce biomass, and store carbon,” said Brett Hulsey, president of Better Environmental Solutions, the environment and energy consulting firm that did the analysis.

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Conservation Reserve Program benefits include better habitat, cleaner water, reduced floods, carbon storage to reduce extreme climate change, and biomass potential.

The Conservation Reserve Program provides:

- **Better Habitat** for people, fish and wildlife by restoring native prairies, woodlands and promoting more conservation tillage. New CRP can restore our native grassland prairies, the most endangered ecosystem in the nation according to the Nature Conservancy.
- **Cleaner Water**—a recent study, "Estimating Water Quality, Air Quality and Soil Carbon Benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program," showed that enrolling marginal cropland in CRP increases the amount of organic matter on enrolled fields and virtually eliminates soil and nutrient loss. The study found that CRP in the eastern half of the U.S. (adjoining and east of the Mississippi River) reduced soil, nitrogen and phosphorus losses from field-practice enrollments are 6.5 tons, 20.7 pounds and 5.4 pounds, respectively, per acre lower annually compared with acres engaged in current production practices, see www.fsa.usda.gov/Internet/FSA_File/606586_hr.pdf.
- **Reduced Flooding**—USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service studies in Minnesota and Iowa on the Boone and Redwood Rivers showed that CRP and farm conservation practices can reduce 100-year flood peaks by up to 20%, and by almost 40% with other measures such as the restoring wetlands and small flood detention projects.
- **Biomass Energy**--Better Environmental Solution's 2007 report, *Cellulose Prairie: Biomass Fuel Potential in Wisconsin and the Midwest*, showed that Wisconsin has enough excess biomass like switchgrass to replace half our coal burning, significantly reducing greenhouse air pollution, see <http://betterenvironmentalsolutions.com/reports/CellulosePrairie.pdf>
- **Reduced Climate Change**-- A recent USGS study showed that the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) has quantified and documented environmental benefits, such as preventing more than 23 million tons of soil erosion. Nutrient loading in waterways is closely related to rates of erosion in watersheds. The scientists calculated that the programs reduced levels of phosphorous and nitrogen washed into adjacent waters by nearly 6,000 tons per year. CRP and particularly wetland basins of the Prairie Pothole Region sequester nearly a quarter million tons of carbon. Also, those basins have the potential to store nearly a half million acre-feet of water of floodwater if filled to maximum capacity. See <http://pubs.usgs.gov/pp/1745/>.

The research project is sponsored by Southwest Badger RC&D Council, Inc., Trout Unlimited, Alliant Energy, the Driftless Area Initiative, USDA-NRCS, and Better Environmental Solutions. For more, go to www.BetterEnviro.Com.

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