

## PROGRAM HELPS REDUCE GREAT RIVER SEDIMENT BY 40 PERCENT IN JUST TWO YEARS

### *State Reaches Important Milestone in Effort to Preserve the Great River*

CAPITOL CITY (July 19, 2002) – The Governor announced today that the state is halfway to reaching its goal reducing the sediment in the Great River by 80% in five years. In less than two years, the state has reduced the entering sediment by 40 percent, thanks in part to the success of the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

Launched in the fall of 2000, CREP is a \$10-million state-federal-private partnership that provides financial incentives for farmers to take stream-side land out of production and plant buffer strips of native trees and grasses. These swaths of vegetation along waterways help keep nutrients, pesticides and fertilizer on the land where they belong, and out of the waterways.

CREP was designed with the purpose of reducing sediment and nutrients entering the Great River. This run-off has been associated with fish kills in recent years, and some believe it has led to a decline in native fish species. There has also been discussion over the years of the possibility of closing Great River to recreational uses due to the poor water quality. Although there is agreement that business and residential development pressures must be watched closely over the next few years, the reduction in sediment will have significant benefits for wildlife and river users.

“The Great River is one of our state’s finest treasures – a place where hunters, fisherman, conservationists, outdoor enthusiasts and weekend family picknickers have used and enjoyed for generations,” the Governor said. “We are thankful to the farmers in this state who have stepped up to the plate and taken the lead in restoring the Great River. And as the filter strips they planted mature, the benefits to the Great River Watershed will multiply and be there for years to come. And finally, we are thankful to the many partners who have come together to make this program work for our farmers and for our state.

CREP was launched in the state in July of 2000 after a lengthy process of gathering input from all corners and building partnerships. Farmers, commodity groups, state and federal agencies, and nonprofit groups worked together for months to determine which state environmental needs were most pressing, which could best be addressed through farmland conservation, and the most effective way to use funds.

The program offers financial incentives for farmers in the Great River Watershed plant stream-side acres in “filter strips” of native trees and grasses. These buffers protect the river from runoff such as nutrients and sediments. The program is completely voluntary, and farmers maintain ownership of their land.

Costs for the \$10 million program were shared between federal, state and non-government partners, with \$7 million being provided by USDA, \$2 million by the state, and \$1 million from the state chapter of Conservationists for Conservation, a longtime advocate of cleaning up the Great River Watershed.

“We knew this program would be successful, but we’re very pleased to see just how successful it has been,” said Bill Stevens, executive director of Conservationists for Conservation. “Everyone has benefited by farmers taking advantage of the opportunities to protect our natural resources that CREP presents. Just as important, because of the partnership nature of the CREP program, many groups that have in the past had adversarial relationships are now working together to achieve a common goal. As much as the environmental benefits, this spirit of cooperation will probably be a significant legacy of the CREP program.”

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Programs in 20 states are conserving land, protecting water supplies, and improving natural habitat. Each program is targeted to the state’s particular conservation needs.

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