

RED RIVER BASIN BUFFER INITIATIVE

Project Purpose:

The purpose of the Red River Basin Buffer Initiative is to demonstrate the means by which the Red River Basin Commission (RRBC), in coordination with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Watershed Districts and Pheasants Forever, can establish buffers within targeted sub watersheds in the basin in order to achieve surface water quality improvements.



Overall Project Goals:

The goal of this initiative is to demonstrate a process for successfully implementing strategically targeted riparian buffers within a small watershed so the process can be duplicated throughout the Red River Basin. The project will also help demonstrate the water quality benefits to restoring the riparian buffers.

Specific measurable goals include:

- Establish 75 % of the prescribed buffers on those project areas selected for treatment;
- Restore 25% of the prescribed wetland restorations within the watershed;
- Reduce sediment concentrations/loads at stream sites by 40%;
- Reduce total phosphorus concentrations/loads at stream sites by 30%;
- Provide 3 buffer demonstration pilot projects that will be used to inform the public about the benefits of buffers and promote their implementation;
- Promote additional candidate demonstration projects utilizing cost share funds with Pheasants Forever, Inc;
- Demonstrate how to utilize existing state and federal conservation programs to improve water quality, reduce flood damages, restore ecological health/functions to a watershed, and improve farm income;
- Reduce the number of non-swim days during the June through August period on the four pilot project lakes; and
- Develop tours and education programs and opportunities within the basin based on the results of the pilot and candidate projects.

Project Description:

Local staff will work with land owners in the selected watersheds and promote buffers strips and other USDA Farm Bill practices, including the continuous sign-up Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), the US Fish and Wildlife Service private land programs, and the Wetland Reserve Program. Participating Soil and Water Conservation Districts will provide in-kind services for the individual pilot projects.

RRBC Mission:

To develop a Red River Basin integrated natural resources framework plan; to achieve commitment to implement the framework plan; and to work toward a unified voice for the Red River Basin.

Three small sub watersheds have been selected as pilots for this project:

Silver Creek Watershed This sub-watershed lies entirely within the within Clearwater County near Clearbrook, Minnesota. Existing water quality data shows impacts to Silver Creek from land use activity within this predominantly agricultural area. Further analysis of the watershed shows the presence of numerous hot zones within 100 meters of the river and wetlands that have been identified by the SWCD as being high priorities for buffers and filter strips.

Sand Lake Watershed This small watershed straddles the Becker and Clay County Line. Five small lakes within the hilly terrain have been impacted by row crop production and feedlots within extensively drained areas. Extensive water quality data exists for this area. Critical sites to be addressed include areas adjacent to drainage ditches, tile inlets, swales, drained and farmed wetlands, shoreland areas, and steep slopes. Pre and post project monitoring will measure improvements in water quality as buffers and other best management practices are installed.

Whiskey Creek Watershed This watershed within Wilkin County comprises 92, 950 acres, 91% of which is currently under cultivation. There are approximately 28 miles of perennial streams and 62 miles of intermittent streams with approximately 60 miles of drainage ditches within the watershed. The lower portion of the watershed is listed as impaired for turbidity by the MPCA. Wind erosion is a major concern in the area. It is estimated that there are potentially 250 local cooperators for the project in this watershed.



Current local project sponsors are Becker SWCD, Clay SWCD, Clearwater SWCD, Buffalo Red Watershed District, Red Lake Watershed District and American Crystal Sugar. State and Federal contributing sponsors are Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Board of Water and Soil Resources, Department of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Future pilot projects will be funded and identified through a coordinated effort of the MPCA, RRBC and Pheasants Forever. For more information, contact Ruth Lewis, Basin Coordinator, Red River Basin Commission.

RRBC Vision:

A Red River Basin where residents, organizations and governments work together to achieve basinwide commitment to comprehensive integrated watershed stewardship and management.



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