



# MASWCD

# NEWS RELEASE

**Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts**

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## **Reinvest in Minnesota-Wetlands Reserve Program Partnership Receives The Minnesota Environmental Initiative Partnership of the Year Award**

St. Paul, MN - The Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) - Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Partnership was recently recognized as the 2009 Partnership of the Year at the Minnesota Environmental Initiative's annual awards ceremony, held May 21st. After hearing presentations about each of the 15 finalists in the state, the RIM-WRP Partnership was chosen for the award by the nearly 300 attendees at the event.

Being lauded as the nation's premier private wetland restoration program, for 2008, the RIM-WRP Partnership resulted in easements and the restoration of 9,775 acres of wetlands and associated uplands. Once restoration is completed these lands will protect and improve water quality, reduce soil erosion, sequester carbon, and provide enhanced fish and wildlife habitat.

RIM, administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), was allocated \$14.2 million in bonding dollars from the state legislature. This state funding was then able to leverage \$19.1 million of federal WRP funding. WRP is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and is a program in the Federal Farm Bill. The federal WRP funds in combination with state RIM funds are being used to secure conservation easements with willing private landowners.

What makes this partnership work is the wide scope of federal, state and local partners assisting in this effort. BWSR, NRCS and local SWCD's and their employees, work with private landowners to implement the program. Their work has been complemented by the work of contractors hired by Ducks Unlimited (DU), using funding recommended by the Legislative Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) Habitat Conservation Partnership project. In addition, the Minnesota Waterfowl Association (MWA), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and NRCS partnered to place an MWA employee in a local service center office to work on the RIM-WRP with landowners. Farm Bill Specialists hired in partnership with local SWCD's, Pheasants Forever, MN DNR and BWSR also provide outreach efforts to publicize and process applications for this partnership effort.

The RIM-WRP Partnership has continued into 2009 with RIM funding once again matching Federal Farm Bill funds through the WRP. These funds will be used to leverage resources and work to restore thousands of additional acres back to their pre-settlement condition.



*Photo, left to right: Steve Sunderlund, MASWCD President; Ryan Heiniger, Ducks Unlimited; LeAnn buck, MASWCD; Kevin Lines, BWSR; and Tim Koehler, USDA-NRCS.*