



January 11, 2010

Dear SWCD Board Members:

As the new year gets underway, there is a new program that SWCDs will play an integral role in implementing - the Rural Preserves Property Tax Program. One of the requirements of the Rural Preserves program is that the landowner must obtain an SWCD approved Conservation Management Plan. Hopefully by now, you have had some exposure to the program and are developing a working knowledge of this program and how it may affect your SWCD in terms of workload and budget.

The Rural Preserves Property Tax Program was created during the 2009 legislative session as a result of changes made to the Green Acres Property Tax Program. In essence, rural vacant land that used to be eligible for the Green Acres program now must either be removed from the tax relief program or be rolled into the Rural Preserves Program. Additionally, the Rural Preserves program is available statewide and landowners that did not participate in the Green Acres program can enroll in the Rural Preserves program.

Although landowners enrolled in the Green Acres program have until May 1, 2013 to complete this transition, they need to decide on program participation by May 1, 2010 to avoid any penalties for withdrawal. The attached map indicates 2007 participation in the Green Acres program. With 13% of the state's agricultural land in Green Acres, it's a safe assumption that a percentage of this land will need to transition into the Rural Preserves program as it becomes ineligible for Green Acres on May 1, 2013. Your assessor's office can help you determine the scope of this program in your county.

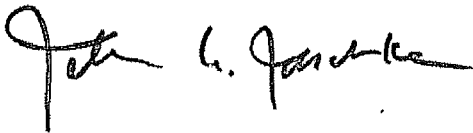
Your local assessor's office is responsible for communicating and coordinating with landowners all eligibility issues and deadlines. Our responsibility is to ensure that SWCDs are informed and ready to provide the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for landowners enrolling in the program (see attached flowchart). To that end BWSR has already provided several training opportunities and a detailed web link at: http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/Rural_Preserves/index.html. We recommend you go through each section with an emphasis on the tutorial presentations for both the SWCD role and the Conservation Management Plan. Additionally, we have scheduled four teleconferences in February as additional opportunities for training. Each teleconference will include an overview of the Rural Preserves program, outline the SWCD role and responsibility, review the Conservation Management Plan, and allow for a questions and answers. Each conference call is scheduled for 10:00 AM, can accommodate 50 lines and has been planned for 2 hours in order to allow for adequate discussion of questions. Call the conference call line at 888-946-3813 and then follow the instructions. When prompted, enter the passcode 63794 to get connected to the conference call.

<i>Benidji</i>	<i>Brainerd</i>	<i>Duluth</i>	<i>Fergus Falls</i>	<i>Marshall</i>	<i>New Ulm</i>	<i>Rochester</i>	<i>Saint Paul</i>
701 Minnesota Avenue Suite 234 Benidji, MN 56601 phone (218) 755-4235 fax (218) 755-4201	1601 Minnesota Drive Brainerd, MN 56401 phone (218) 828-2383 fax (218) 828-6036	394 S. Lake Avenue Room 403 Duluth, MN 55802 phone (218) 723-4752 fax (218) 723-4794	1004 Frontier Trail Fergus Falls, MN 56537 phone (218) 736-5445 fax (218) 736-7215	1400 E. Lyon Street Box 267 Marshall, MN 56258 phone (507) 537-6060 fax (507) 537-6368	261 Highway 15 S. New Ulm, MN 56073 phone (507) 359-6074 fax (507) 359-6018	2300 Silver Creek Road N.E. Rochester, MN 55906 phone (507) 281-7797 fax (507) 285-7144	520 Lafayette Road N. Saint Paul, MN 55155 phone (651) 296-3767 fax (651) 297-5615

The calls will be scheduled for: February 5, February 8, February 19, and February 24. Please review the information provided on the website prior to the conference call to become better acquainted with the program. The BWSR program staff that have developed the training materials and information are Tabor Hoek, Michelle Schaefer, and Julie Blackburn. They will be conducting the conference calls as well.

Although the Rural Preserves program is essentially a tax relief program, the conservation plan approval requirement may open the door for many new conservation partners to come into your SWCD. We know that SWCDs statewide will take advantage of this opportunity and will provide landowners with professional and expert guidance.

Sincerely,



John Jaschke
Executive Director

Email cc: John Hagen, MN Dept of Revenue
Drew Imes, MN Dept. of Revenue
Michael Stalberger, MN Dept. of Revenue
Andrew Arends, DNR Forestry
Bob Tomlinson, DNR Forestry
Gary Michael, DNR Forestry
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Jeanne Henderson, Sherburne County
Kevin Corbid, Washington County
Pat Stotz, Mille Lacs County
Steve Hacken, Winona County
Mel Baughman, University of Minnesota
Jim Lemmerman, BWSR