CULTIVATING RESTORATION

How Farm Bill Conservation Programs Help Heal Our Great Lakes

FEBRUARY 2007

HEALING OUR WATERS®—GREAT LAKES COALITION

More than 90 organizations representing millions in the Great Lakes have joined a new coalition, whose goal is to restore and protect the Great Lakes.

Formed in 2005, the Healing Our Waters®-Great Lakes Coalition reflects a growing public awareness nationwide about the urgent need to protect and restore the Great Lakes.

The Coalition seeks to secure a sustainable restoration plan and the billions of dollars of state and federal funding needed to implement it.

Led by the National Wildlife Federation and the National Parks Conservation Association, the coalition seeks resources to clean up sewage and toxic sediments, to restore damaged habitat, to protect high quality habitat, and to control and prevent the introduction of invasive species, each of which is an essential component of restoring the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem.

WHAT MAKES THE GREAT LAKES SPECIAL

The Great Lakes are a national and international treasure. The Lakes and their connecting channels contain nearly 20 percent of the world's surface freshwater, second only to the polar ice caps. In addition to the Great Lakes themselves, the ample water in this region is the critical component of blue ribbon trout streams, vibrant wetlands, and majestic inland lakes. The Great Lakes and their surrounding lands and waterways are home to more than 37 million people as well as a rich and unique diversity of plants and animals.

The Great Lakes' natural bounty also play a defining role in the region's history and still support its primary economic activities, including agriculture, industrial manufacturing, steel production, shipping, commercial and sport fisheries, and recreation and tourism. Recreation and tourism from the Great Lakes is a $6-billion industry.

For more information about the coalition and Great Lakes issues, contact Chad Lord at 202-454-3385 (clord@npca.org), Jeff Skelding at 202-797-6893 (jskelding@nwf.org) or visit:

WWW.HEALTHYLAKES.ORG

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thousands of farmers are restoring imperiled wildlife habitat and wetlands around our Great Lakes with the assistance of conservation programs authorized by the 2002 Farm Security and Rural Investment Act, more commonly known as the Farm Bill. The hard work of these local stewards is critical to protecting the Great Lakes, but their success is at risk unless programs are expanded and fully funded under the next Farm Bill.

Our Great Lakes are a gift of the glacial age. Spread across eight states, the Great Lakes are the catch basin for a region nearly the size of Texas. They are the world's single-largest source of fresh water, quenching the thirst of many U.S. cities and fueling everything from transportation to recreation.

Yet, science shows that the lakes are near a tipping point of ecological collapse. Toxic levels of phosphorus, a pollutant that is killing Lake Erie, are increasing again. Valuable topsoil is being washed into the lakes, clouding shallow shoreline water. Smelly algae and high bacteria levels contaminate the water between the shoreline and up to two miles out—closing beaches and harming fish and wildlife.

Thankfully, farmers are taking an active role in restoring the Great Lakes. As illustrated in this report, Farm Bill conservation programs help farmers return land to nature, farm their land wisely and protect the health and quality of the Great Lakes, while maintaining their family's way of life.

Farm Bill conservation programs have ensured that once-marginal farmland now provides millions of acres of high-quality wildlife habitat, which supports the local $18-billion hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching industry. These farmland conservation programs also serve to filter pesticides, fertilizers and sediment out of water that millions of Great Lakes residents depend upon for drinking, bathing, fishing and swimming. Conservation easements slow urban sprawl and ensure supplies of productive farmland.

Many more families want to participate in the Farm Bill conservation programs than can be accommodated because of insufficient federal funding. Congress must expand and fully fund the Farm Bill conservation programs. The health of our Great Lakes, the local farming families that live around the lakes and our communities cannot afford to have these programs shortchanged.

photos.com

Farm Bill conservation programs help heal the Great Lakes.

WETLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (WRP)

The Wetland Reserve Program provides Great Lakes farmers financial and technical assistance in restoring and protecting wetlands on their property. The program enables landowners to take frequently flooded areas out of production and restore them as wetlands. Most WRP wetlands are protected long-term through enrollment in 30-year or permanent conservation easements.

State	Cumulative Acres Enrolled Since Program's Inception	Cumulative Funding Since Program's Inception	2003 Funding	2004 Funding	2005 Funding
IL	59,692	$100,059,046	$22,729,263	$20,102,899	$12,621,754
IN	45,730	78,771,140	11,653,700	12,946,374	12,799,166
MI	33,275	61,943,398	8,834,002	8,058,744	8,540,700
MN	61,839	94,541,149	18,481,865	18,579,034	15,228,260
NY	46,068	46,868,130	6,303,232	7,500,207	5,421,116
OH	19,350	33,434,025	4,341,050	3,814,000	3,339,952
PA	2,201	2,983,761	123,812	430,709	400,140
WI	45,451	59,809,659	7,199,435	5,801,002	7,448,996
TOTALS	**313,606**	**$478,410,308**	**$79,666,359**	**$77,232,969**	**$65,800,084**

State	Number of Unfunded Easment Applications	Total Unfunded Easement Application Dollars	Acres
IL	195	$38,659,153	23,475
IN	154	16,820,020	6,282
MI	160	22,337,240	17,697
MN	371	60,597,405	59,276
NY	87	3,929,124	3,993
OH	71	6,230,861	2,833
PA	7	39,753	26
WI	66	6,325,355	3,646
TOTALS	**1,111**	**$154,938,911**	**117,228**

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

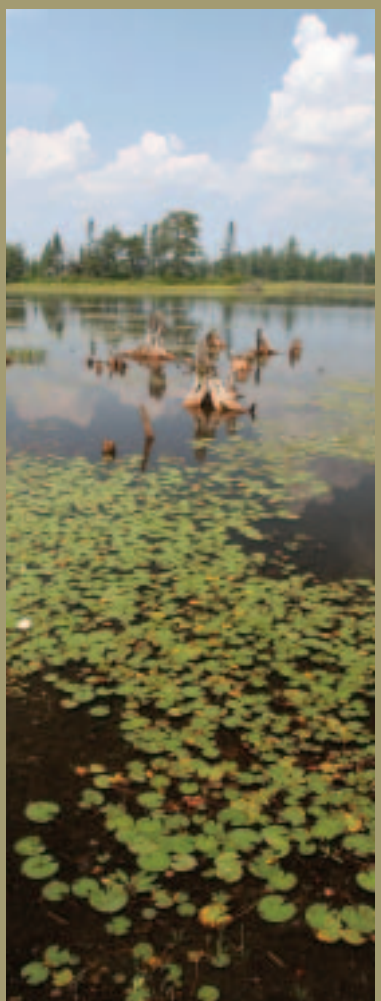


Photo by Steve Geer, istockphoto.com

Great Lakes wetlands filter toxic sediments from water, provide habitat and control flooding.

How Farm Bill Conservation Programs Help Heal Our Great Lakes

When Paul Becker's family immigrated to Wisconsin in 1876, they settled on wetland-pocked acreage along Molarsh Creek, 40 miles south of Green Bay. Over the next century, they dug ditches and laid drain tile in acre after acre of hard red clay, transforming an expansive wetland into orderly rows of peas, corn, oats, alfalfa and wheat.

When one type of drain tile wore out, they installed another. When ditches plugged, they were dutifully redug. The water retreated, along with bobolink and other birds, otter and other creatures. And while the Beckers grew hearty crops, no matter how hard they labored, they never matched the production of farms just 10 miles away.

"We're not that far from Lake Michigan – and Lake Michigan is an ice box," Paul Becker says. "Our growing season is two to three weeks shorter than other farms. They have oats coming out of the ground before we can plant them."

As farm yields exploded elsewhere, it made less and less sense for the Beckers to compete. Seven generations after their first kinfolk arrived, they were able to return a large portion of their fields to wetlands, thanks to a key conservation measure funded by the federal Farm Bill.

"I thought it would help the rest of the people," says Paul's father, Richard, who has spent his career working this ground. "Take this land out of production and help bring prices up for the rest of the farmers."

"It's kind of like game day for football," Paul Becker adds. "You put your best people out on the field."

Like the Beckers, thousands of Great Lakes area farmers are restoring wetlands, planting streamside buffers and returning highly erodible fields to native vegetation with the help of Farm Bill conservation programs. These efforts are critical to restoring and protecting the Great Lakes and its tributaries. What was once marginal farmland now not only provides millions of acres of wildlife habitat, it filters pesticides, fertilizers and sediment out of water that millions of Great Lakes residents depend upon for drinking, bathing, fishing and swimming.

"These programs not only have direct benefits to farmers, but because they are restoring critical ecological functions to the landscape, everyone benefits from this investment of our tax dollars," says David

Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS.

Great Lakes farmers protect the environment with the help of Farm Bill conservation programs.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM (CRP) *(Includes Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program as of FY 1999)*

The Conservation Reserve Program encourages farmers and ranchers to return highly erodible cropland to wildlife habitat and take other steps to reestablish native vegetation on marginal fields in the Great Lakes Basin, as well as pays farmers to create buffers along waterways. The federal government reimburses landowners for the income they lose by not raising crops in CRP fields. The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program has been included in the CRP program since fiscal year 1999. The program offers financial incentives to encourage farmers and ranchers to convert agricultural land into environmentally beneficial uses such as streamside vegetative buffers that keep sediment, fertilizer and pesticides out of surface water. It receives both federal and state funding.

State	Cumulative Acres Enrolled as of 2005	Cumulative Funding Since Program's Inception (1987)	2003 Funding	2004 Funding	2005 Funding
IL	1,027,842	$1,258,956,000	$113,240,000	$115,526,000	$116,817,000
IN	293,164	584,958,000	43,427,000	42,417,000	43,756,000
MI	263,206	1,843,914,000	24,586,000	24,453,000	20,327,000
MN	1,762,957	1,835,298,000	105,000,000	111,708,000	109,324,000
NY	61,350	63,237,000	5,024,000	4,024,000	4,249,000
OH	287,941	1,898,535,000	32,953,000	35,151,000	35,320,000
PA	201,332	130,071,000	13,437,000	15,571,000	18,899,000
WI	619,999	762,848,000	46,020,000	47,118,000	44,882,000
TOTALS	**4,517,791**	**$5,390,231,000**	**$383,687,000**	**$395,967,000**	**$393,573,000**

Source: USDA Farm Service Agency.
Please note that Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program figures are included as part of CRP figures beginning in FY 1999.

CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM (CSP)

Unlike programs that pay farmers to set aside certain lands, the Conservation Security Program rewards farmers and ranchers for the environmentally-friendly measures they are willing to undertake on the lands that they keep in production—measures such as establishing buffers, going organic, buffering all water resources, etc. The program is currently only available in a few watersheds per state.

State	Cumulative Acres Enrolled Since Program's Inception	Cumulative Funding Since Program's Inception	2003 Funding	2004 Funding	2005 Funding
IL	357,399	$13,152,929	$0	$4,877,427	$8,275,502
IN	405,681	9,732,935	0	2,153,238	7,579,697
MI	383,878	8,252,337	0	1,455,909	6,796,428
MN	301,017	7,913,030	0	1,614,729	6,298,301
NY	149,776	1,237,344	0	29,245	1,208,099
OH	436,734	12,681,769	0	3,992,460	8,689,309
PA	76,599	1,930,431	0	320,722	1,609,709
WI	121,103	6,767,278	0	2,522,400	4,244,878
TOTALS	**2,232,187**	**$61,668,053**	**$0**	**$16,966,130**	**$44,701,923**

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Please note that NRCS says it cannot supply any funding backlog data for the Conservation Security Program.

Brakhage, Director of Conservation Programs in the Great Lakes with Ducks Unlimited.

In Wisconsin alone, the Wetlands Reserve Program prevents at least 46,000 tons of soil from washing off farm fields each year, says biologist Greg Kidd of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. That's enough dirt to fill a line of 25-ton dump trucks seven miles long.

Considering agriculture's reach, Farm Bill conservation programs are vital to the future of the Great Lakes. "Modern, large-scale agriculture, with its reliance on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides is one of the main nonpoint sources of pollution to the Great Lakes," according to the Environmental Protection Agency's environmental atlas and resource book on the Great Lakes.

"We are in a generation of making or breaking the Great Lakes," says Dave Dempsey, former member of the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission and author of *On the Brink: The Great Lakes in the 21st Century*. "They are a national treasure like the Grand Canyon."

GIFT OF THE GLACIAL AGE

The Great Lakes transcend almost any superlative. Dempsey calls them a "gift of the glacial age." Indeed, these magnificent inland seas were carved by the repeated advance and retreat of massive ice sheets and filled by melt water as the last glaciers withdrew some 10,000 years ago.

Spread across eight states and two Canadian provinces, the Great Lakes are the catch basin for a region roughly the size of Texas. They hold one-fifth of the world's fresh water.

The Great Lakes are key to the well-being of two nations, slaking the thirst of many cities and fueling everything from transportation to recreation. Consider that fishermen spend an estimated $4.5 billion a year plying these waters. When their economic contribution is combined with hunters and wildlife watchers, the annual tally tops $18 billion. Agriculture drew the most settlers to the area, however, and continues to be one of the most important elements in the Great Lakes economy.

It hasn't been a free ride.

The Great Lakes' vast forests and ample fisheries were once considered inexhaustible. The Great Black Swamp that covered more than 1,500 square miles of northern Ohio and eastern Indiana was once considered uninhabitable. The Lakes' ability to absorb whatever Chicago or Detroit or anyone else wanted to dump in them was considered infinite.

By 1900, the forests were razed, commercial fishing stocks nearly exhausted and much of the Black Swamp was drained, plowed and planted. And full-throttle development continued unabated.

The bill for such freewheeling abuse inevitably came due. Pollution captured the headlines after Ohio's Cuyahoga River caught fire in the 1960s. Lake Erie became so foul that some called it the "American Dead Sea." Citizens stepped forward and pressured politicians to take action, resulting in the passage of the Clean Water Act and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency. Phosphorus was eliminated from laundry detergent. Cities and industries were forced to treat their wastewater before dumping it into the lakes. DDT was pulled from the pesticide arsenal. Water quality steadily improved.

Today the Great Lakes once again need help.

"Although many people continue to believe that the lakes have recovered, this is far from the truth," says National Wildlife Federation's Jeff Skelding, director of the Healing Our Waters® – Great Lakes Coalition's National Great Lakes Restoration Campaign. "In fact, recent scientific evidence suggests that the combination of environmental insults

Photo by Dan Cooper, istockphoto.com

The Great Lakes provide drinking water, recreational opportunities and a way of life for millions in two nations.

ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (EQIP)

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program provides financial incentives and cost share agreements that help reduce air and water pollution from agricultural sources, reducing soil erosion and improving habitat for wildlife in the Great Lakes region.

State	Cumulative Acres Enrolled Since Program's Inception	Cumulative Funding Since Program's Inception	2003 Funding	2004 Funding	2005 Funding	Number of Unfunded Applications	Total Unfunded Application Dollars
IL	786,479	$58,517,074	$12,346,854	$15,497,430	$16,036,872	378	$4,415,460
IN	558,304	44,530,312	9,333,362	11,951,361	13,057,748	319	6,893,217
MI	464,783	65,345,887	12,719,072	17,604,280	19,321,438	151	6,172,421
MN	3,257,841	107,473,203	20,692,721	30,991,379	33,718,954	708	12,676,173
NY	644,745	50,934,759	11,544,013	12,455,248	13,558,472	405	15,562,099
OH	690,833	55,704,847	12,232,044	14,952,652	16,403,269	865	6,855,304
PA	263,962	45,990,805	10,539,792	12,586,528	13,322,885	565	18,937,171
WI	1,991,318	73,655,073	15,433,692	19,635,710	21,436,149	304	3,504,050
TOTALS	**8,658,265**	**$502,151,960**	**$104,841,550**	**$138,674,588**	**$146,855,787**	**3,695**	**$75,015,895**

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

WILDLIFE HABITAT INCENTIVES PROGRAM (WHIP)

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program is designed to help landowners in the Great Lakes region establish or improve wildlife habitat on their property. The program funds up to 75 percent of the habitat restoration work and also provides technical assistance.

State	Cumulative Acres Enrolled Since Program's Inception	Cumulative Funding Since Program's Inception	2003 Funding	2004 Funding	2005 Funding	Number of Unfunded Applications	Total Unfunded Application Dollars
IL	18,228	$3,395,884	$496,293	$592,687	$418,014	44	$281,843
IN	13,585	2,265,650	455,613	524,844	556,588	0	$0
MI	11,533	3,998,774	492,896	667,817	556,210	8	59,782
MN	25,004	4,376,637	493,727	750,521	794,736	17	79,004
NY	19,321	3,226,838	362,760	741,400	552,293	40	243,630
OH	8,236	2,625,235	422,800	525,000	614,225	3	20,940
PA	8,244	2,689,187	308,495	297,556	319,833	41	208,756
WI	16,428	3,734,252	460,358	781,423	685,506	20	124,564
TOTALS	**120,579**	**$26,312,457**	**$3,492,942**	**$4,881,248**	**$4,497,405**	**173**	**$1,018,519**

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

to the lakes has pushed them to a point of such fragility that we may be facing an irreversible breakdown of the ecosystem."

The assaults include widely dispersed "nonpoint source" pollution produced by agricultural and urban runoff. Reversing the Great Lakes catastrophic decline will require immediate action, including robust funding for key Farm Bill conservation programs.

GAINS ACHIEVED, PROGRESS LOST

Water quality trends are particularly disturbing in the Lake Erie basin. Dissolved phosphorus concentrations declined between 65 and 90 percent in five major tributaries – the Maumee, Sandusky, Cuyahoga, Grand and River Raisin – from about the mid-1970s through 1995.

Much of that progress is rapidly being lost.

"Dissolved phosphorus concentrations have been increasing in all of these watersheds since about 1995," says Pete Richards, senior research scientist at the National Center for Water Quality Research at Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio. "Now they are getting close to where they were in the mid-70s."

Lake Erie is considered the "mine canary" because it is the most vulnerable and most stressed of the Great Lakes, Richards says. Phosphorus is the nutrient by which the health of Lake Erie is managed. When dissolved phosphorus is too plentiful, it sparks algal blooms that ultimately deplete oxygen from the cooler water trapped at the bottom of Lake Erie in early summer. As a result, part of the lake becomes a clam-and-crayfish-suffocating dead zone by late summer.

"These are the things that were causing problems in the 1970s, when Lake Erie was a disaster," Richards says. That disaster could be repeated.

Scientists have not pinpointed the reason for the recent rise in phosphorus. But agriculture has been a key source of such pollution in the past and there is little doubt that reversing the trend will include redoubling efforts to control farm runoff as well as improving sewage treatment and reducing the use of phosphorus in lawn fertilizer.

Take the Maumee River, which is the largest tributary to any of the Great Lakes. The Maumee primarily drains farmland as it flows from Fort Wayne, Indiana, to join Lake Erie at Toledo, Ohio. Phosphorus is one of the primary nutrients farmers add to crops, says John Hageman, manager of Ohio State University's F.T. Stone Laboratory, based at Lake Erie.

"We're seeing losses of millions of cubic yards of topsoil" from farms in the Maumee watershed, Hageman says. "With that topsoil is the phosphorus that adheres to the clay particles in the topsoil."

In addition to depleting the lake's oxygen, phosphorus-induced algal blooms can produce toxins that taint drinking water, make people and pets sick and close swimming beaches.

Some of these same problems cloud the near-shore waters of Lake Ontario because of the sediment and fertilizer runoff from agricultural operations.

"From the shoreline to between one and two miles out, the water can be very dark and turbid with algal blooms and high coliform (bacteria) levels," says Joseph Makarewicz, distinguished professor of environmental science and biology at the State University of New York at Brockport. This combination frequently prompts public health officials to close popular recreation sites such as Chalotte Beach as a precaution.

Planting streamside filter strips, returning highly

GREAT LAKES STATES FARMLAND ACREAGE (by state)

ILLINOIS	27.3 million acres
INDIANA	15 million acres
MICHIGAN	10.1 million acres
MINNESOTA	27.5 million acres
NEW YORK	7.55 million acres
OHIO	14.3 million acres
PENNSYLVANIA	7.7 million acres
WISCONSIN	15.4 million acres

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service

GRASSLAND RESERVE PROGRAM (GRP)

The Grassland Reserve Program provides financial assistance to Great Lakes area landowners for restoring and protecting rangeland, pastureland and shrub land. The program protects these lands through short term rental agreements or long term conservation easements that prevent vulnerable grasslands from being developed or converted to cropland.

State	Cumulative Acres Enrolled Since Program's Inception	Cumulative Funding Since Program's Inception	2003 Funding	2004 Funding	2005 Funding
IL	2,680	$1,225,008	$846,335	$338,347	$40,326
IN	641	2,997,992	909,414	537,033	1,551,545
MI	11,791	1,583,258	780,301	569,057	233,900
MN	12,794	3,409,038	973,239	1,205,322	1,230,478
NY	8,203	2,987,064	918,497	470,776	1,597,791
OH	18,854	2,715,411	1,012,469	1,131,574	571,369
PA	13,805	1,819,674	1,003,069	636,624	179,981
WI	16,833	3,288,155	1,447,352	1,342,925	497,878
TOTALS	**85,601**	**$20,025,600**	**$7,890,676**	**$6,231,658**	**$5,903,268**

State	Number of Unfunded Applications	Total Unfunded Application Dollars	Acres
IL	13	$634,129	784
IN	268	10,668,472	17,091
MI	43	5,437,026	4,241
MN	102	2,324,849	11,948
NY	98	2,556,612	10,368
OH	242	3,875,168	21,405
PA	256	7,349,544	10,980
WI	133	3,880,392	15,396
TOTALS	**1,155**	**$36,726,192**	**92,213**

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Photo by Lynn Betts, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Local farmers work everyday to find ways to restore and protect the Great Lakes throughout the Basin.

Photo by Lynn Betts, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Lack of funding for Farm Bill conservation programs prevents farmers from applying more commonsense stewardship on their farms.

erosive lands to native vegetation and restoring wetlands help prevent such problems, researchers say.

"They keep the soil on the land in measurable quantities," Hageman says. That lowers phosphorus pollution and reduces the amount of sediment that has to be cleared from farm ditches and dredged from Great Lakes harbors.

In short, these programs "are worth the investment in terms of economic savings," Hageman says. "And you can see the difference in terms of the diversity of life – insect life, fish and birds."

That's common sense to farmer James Graham.

COMMON SENSE STEWARDSHIP BENEFITS FARMERS

For decades, Graham has raised wheat, corn, soybeans, oats and hay virtually without plowing his central Michigan fields. He maintains 120-foot-wide switch grass buffers to keep soil, pesticides and fertilizers from washing into the drainage ditches on his family's 1,000-acre farming operation. Now he is constructing a chemical and fertilizer storage building to prevent a potential spill from becoming a contamination problem.

For him it's all about the water.

"Water is going to be a big issue in the years to come – especially keeping it clean," says Graham, who farms in the Maple River watershed, a tributary of Lake Michigan. "The Maple River watershed is probably one of the most polluted in the state from agriculture runoff. (Farm Bill conservation programs) keep the dirt where it ought to be."

Graham receives a small payment under the Farm Bill's Conservation Reserve Program to help offset the income he forfeits by planting buffer strips instead of row crops. His careful stewardship is also now being rewarded under the new Conservation Security Program, which provides financial incentives to farmers with a track record of maintaining wildlife habitat and keeping animal waste, fertilizer, chemicals and sediment out of key watersheds.

"These kinds of programs reward farmers who are doing the right conservation thing – and there's something to be said for that," says George Meyer, former secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Most farmers cannot afford to take such steps without the assistance of Farm Bill programs.

"It's always a financial decision in the farmer's mind," says Dale Allen, Michigan conservation chief for the federal Farm Service Agency. "They want to be good stewards. But they have to make every acre count financially."

FARM AND RANCH LAND PROTECTION PROGRAM (FRPP)

The Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program provides matching funds to purchase development rights to keep productive farm and ranchland in agricultural uses. The U.S. Department of Agriculture works with state, tribal or local governments and non-governmental organizations to acquire conservation easements or other interests in land from landowners.

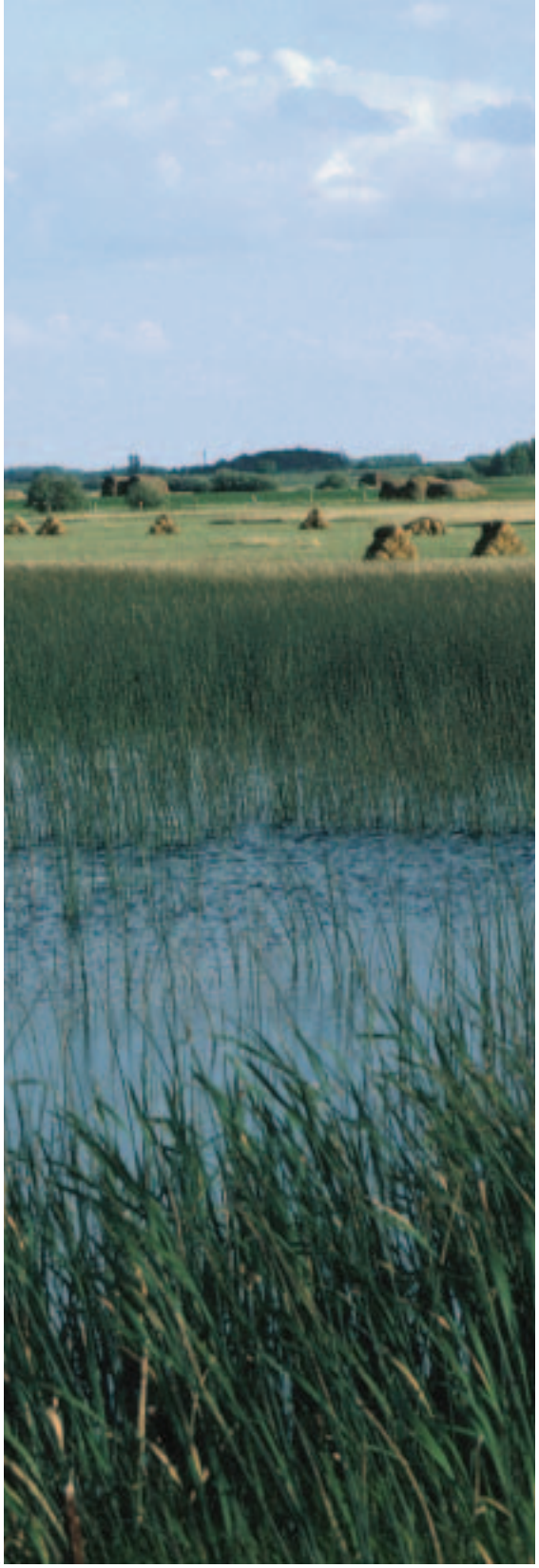
State	Cumulative Acres Enrolled Since Program's Inception	Cumulative Funding Since Program's Inception	2003 Funding	2004 Funding	2005 Funding
IL	2167	$6,823,321	$1,439,627	$1,764,393	$1,779,871
IN	0	1,010,435	101,402	7,075	759
MI	4810	15,248,089	3,101,945	2,683,935	4,163,108
MN	637	4,031,596	1,302,625	1,135,953	1,593,018
NY	6793	15,828,282	2,847,562	3,301,635	5,713,403
OH	7199	11,362,235	2,428,786	3,346,079	3,974,570
PA	22,807	23,110,906	5,027,443	4,244,627	6,899,419
WI	5005	12,007,149	1,803,866	2,083,216	3,583,567
TOTALS	**49,418**	**$89,422,013**	**$18,053,256**	**$18,566,913**	**$27,707,715**

State	Number of Unfunded Easment Applications	Total Unfunded Easement Application Dollars	Acres
IL	0	$0.00	0
IN	0	0.00	0
MI	26	22,188,000	10,000
MN	20	13,500,000	2,700
N Y	13	1,655,658	320
OH	22	12,500,000	5,000
PA	65	20,000,000	6,200
WI	0	0.00	0
TOTALS	**146**	**$69,843,658**	**24,220**

Source: USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Photo by Fred Gasper, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Farm Bill conservation programs help Great Lakes farmers respond to developmental pressures.



photos.com

Farm Bill conservation programs provide thousands of acres of high-quality wildlife habitat in the Great Lakes region.

"Without the payment," says Richard Gumz, an Endeavor, Wisconsin, vegetable farmer with 1,000 acres enrolled in the Wetlands Reserve Program, "you wouldn't be able to set the land aside and pay the taxes and the restoration costs."

HELPING GREAT LAKES FARMERS HELP THE GREAT LAKES

The benefits extend far beyond the farm field. Wetlands disperse floodwaters. They trap sediment – one of the biggest pollutants coming off of agricultural lands – as well as catching and breaking down pesticides, says Ken Krieger, senior research scientist at the National Center For Water Quality Research. Wetlands also absorb phosphorus and other fertilizer residues, serve as nursery grounds for a number of fish species and are important habitat for amphibians, waterfowl and songbirds.

Conservation easements provided under the Farm Bill can also slow urban sprawl.

"Voluntary perpetual conservation easements and short term conservation programs provided under the Farm Bill help landowners and producers afford to stay on the land," says Jim Inglis, regional biologist with Pheasants Forever. "These programs offer sound conservation and business planning, an option to keeping farms from development pressure, reduce taxes and give other options to just selling and moving someplace else."

"In Ohio, we are losing farm land to development faster than just about any state in the country," Inglis adds. "This results in more pavement, roofs and other impervious surfaces that cause water to leave the landscape too quickly, rather than absorbing slowly into soil and wetlands. Such rapid runoff causes an increase in storm water and sewage discharge in urban areas. In an agriculture landscape, it causes soil erosion and carries fertilizers and herbicides from agriculture fields."

"It's disheartening to see good farmland taken up by housing development," adds Gumz, the Wisconsin vegetable farmer, who also enrolled a hillside field in the Conservation Reserve Program rather than sell it to subdividers. "Once you have land in houses, it can't be taken out."

Farm Bill conservation programs also provide thousands of acres of high-quality wildlife habitat in regions dominated by private land. "Our easements play a critical role in the long-term survival of whooping cranes and other species that cannot count on refuges or public land for survival," says Greg Kidd, wetlands and grasslands reserve biologist for Natural Resources Conservation Service. "That heightens the importance of keeping land

and enrolling additional land in these conservation programs."

And the programs are a bargain. Measures such as the Conservation Reserve Program cost the taxpayer an average of $49 a year, Farm Service Agency's Allen says. "When you equate that to the water quality and wildlife benefits, that's pretty cheap."

FULLY FUNDED FARM BILL HEALS GREAT LAKES

The federal farm agencies meanwhile, have a long backlog of producers wanting to enroll in the Farm Bill conservation programs because of insufficient funding. Nationally, there are more than 460,000 acres on the Wetlands Reserve Program waiting list – including 59,000 acres in Minnesota.

Since passage of the 2002 Farm Bill, Congress has greatly shortchanged funding for conservation programs through the annual appropriations process. For example, each year Congress has cut funding levels for the Wetlands Reserve Program by about 40 percent from what the 2002 Farm Bill set aside for the program, resulting in about 100,000 fewer acres a year of wetlands restoration opportunities for farmers than was intended when the bill was passed. Congressional appropriators have limited funding for the Conservation Security Program so severely, that although the program was supposed to be available to every interested farmer, it has only been made available in a few watersheds per state, despite offering enormous potential to help farmers and ranchers reduce their impacts on waters resources, such as the Great Lakes.

Some of the conservation programs also need adjustment. For example, a majority of the money allocated to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program – one of the better-funded measures – is sometimes used to intensify agriculture production, instead of easing its affects on land, water and wildlife.

The Great Lakes region cannot afford to have these programs shortchanged.

"We have a multi-billion dollar industry based on fish, wildlife and tourism," warns Meyer, now director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. "These Farm Bill programs are critically important."

"Farm bill programs are a very important tool and one of the very few in the current political climate we're going to see any action on in Congress," adds Dave Dempsey, author of *On the Brink*. "We can either stand by … or take the initiative and bring home the money to secure the future health of the ecosystem and the farm economy."

Photo by Ashok Rodrigues, istockphoto.com

Funding the Farm Bill conservation programs protects a way of life in the Great Lakes.

This report was written by Ken Olsen Cover photo from istockphoto.com

The HOW-GL Coalition wants to thank Chad Lord, Andrea Keller, Jeff Skelding, Julie Sibbing, Jordan Lubetkin, Gildo Tori and Chris Grubb for their special contributions to this report

For copies of this report, or to learn more about the Healing Our Waters®-Great Lakes Coalition, please contact Chad Lord at 202-454-3385 or visit www.healthylakes.org

The National Parks Conservation Association and the National Wildlife Federation jointly manage the Healing Our Waters®-Great Lakes Coalition

HEALING OUR WATERS® - GREAT LAKES COALITION