

RLWD Program Description/Outline of the Silver Creek/Clearwater River Buffer Strip Initiative

(As Part of USDA's Buffer Strip Program and RLWD Project Number 82E)

The following description/outline provides information for RLWD's assistance in developing USDA's Conservation Buffer Strip Programs. This is to be used as a guideline for implementing RLWD's assistance.

I. Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to provide buffer strips along an entire small watershed, Silver Creek located entirely within Clearwater County near Clearbrook, MN. The purpose for establishing buffer strips in the "hot zones" (100 meters) adjacent to rivers, tributaries and wetlands is to improve water quality within the Clearwater Watershed. This program will be used to assist in any programs from the USDA/FSA that will establish buffer strips and will be used as a demonstration for similar programs in the future.

II. Project Scope

II A. Project Background

Since land use practices are the major contributor to nonpoint source pollution, a major effort of the Clearwater River Water Quality Implementation Project is dedicated to working with farmers in the watershed. Priority subwatersheds were ranked and identified in Phase I for their contribution of total solids, total suspended solids, total phosphorus, total nitrogen, and chemical oxygen demand. The study also indicated the presence of "hot zones" within 100 meters of the Clearwater River. These "hot zones" required additional statistical analysis (which has been completed).

The Clearwater River Phase I project found that land within 100 meters of waterways has the greatest impact on water quality. Therefore filter strips in that zone may prove to be the most effective and agriculturally appropriate best management practice to promote. Originally the Clearwater River Water Quality Implementation Project focused on installing 100 meter filter strips throughout the entire Clearwater River watershed, particularly in the priority subwatersheds. Although the end goal of this project is to provide filter strips in all areas of the Clearwater River watershed, the size of the watershed prevents proper implementation due to limited staff and funds.

Recently, the Natural Resource Conservation Service has received funding for implementation of buffer strips in association with the Conservation Reserve Program

(CRP) and other programs. This program offers many benefits to the landowner while providing the necessary benefits to water quality and riparian habitat. The Clearwater County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has been implementing several projects along Silver Creek, a tributary to the Lost River. The Silver Creek subwatershed is located wholly within Clearwater County near the cities of Gonvick and Clearbrook, MN, with a size of approximately 36 square miles. The SWCD has implemented projects such as streambank, roadside and shoreland protection and waterway improvements. The Clearwater River Buffer Strip Program has implemented two filter strips along Silver Creek tied into a third stream bank project from a prior year.

One goal of the Silver Creek (Clearwater River) Watershed Demonstration Project will be to establish filter strips, where needed, along the entire stretch of Silver Creek as a priority area. If possible, the project will extend to other areas in the Clearwater River Watershed, where over 500 square miles lie within Clearwater County. The project will utilize existing USDA/FSA programs in combination with RLWD resources to accomplish this goal. Another goal of this project will be to demonstrate an effective filter strip program, which can be applied in a similar manner across the Red Lake Watershed District and other areas within the Red River Basin.

Beside the work already performed, another reason for choosing Silver Creek for this project is the availability of past long-term water quality and quantity data. A monitoring site is located near the Creek's confluence with the Lost River. The data at this site and others in the Clearwater River Watershed will be developed through the Red River Watershed Protocol Project and may be utilized for a comparison of before and after project implementation. Other projects undertaken by the RLWD that will benefit this effort by providing useful data and information are the Clearwater Lake Water Quality Model Project and the Clearwater River Habitat/Bioassessment Project.

II B. RLWD Project/USDA Program Assistance

The RLWD will provide funding for contracting a qualified person(s) to assist in evaluating applications and developing contracts for USDA's Buffer Strip Programs. The contractor will be selected by the Clearwater County NRCS district conservationist and the Clearwater County SWCD district technician, and subject to approval by the RLWD project manager.

III. Assistance Description

III A. Responsibilities of Contractor

The contractor will be responsible for the following items:

- 1) Determining eligibility of individual landowners for USDA's program, using USDA's methods. These methods are described in ???.
- 2) Developing contracts for USDA's program, using USDA's methods, described in ???.

- 3) Assisting landowners with establishing their buffer strips.
- 4) Report progress to the Clearwater County SWCD, NRCS and RLWD staff.
- 5) Provide information to landowners about the buffer strip program and informing the landowners about progress of their applications.
- 6) Providing the RLWD with information and data regarding established buffer strips, including ArcView layers with established buffer strips, a buffer strip description (such as landowner names, contract info).

III B. Qualifications of Contractor

The contractor will be qualified in the following areas:

- 1) Knowledge of USDA's Conservation Programs.
- 2) Ability to use USDA's evaluation methods.
- 3) Ability to learn quickly.
- 4) Good communications skills, both oral and written.
- 5) Computer skills are necessary including word processing and spreadsheet programs using programs such as Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel. Skills in using GIS programs, particularly ESRI's ArcView, is desired.

III C. RLWD and NRCS District Conservationist Project Management

The RLWD Project Manager will provide the following:

- 1) Project assistance and guidance where applicable and possible;
- 2) Project funding/reimbursement for work performed by the contractor;
- 3) Feedback on progress and reports.

The Clearwater County NRCS District Conservationist will provide the following:

- 1) Training in USDA's buffer strip methods for evaluations and contract development;
- 2) Project assistance and guidance;
- 3) Feedback on progress and reports.

III D. RLWD Funding

The RLWD will provide funding through a separate contract with the Clearwater County SWCD. Funding shall be provided up to \$25,000 for up to 1000 hours at a rate dependent upon the worker, which is not to exceed \$25.00 per hour, over a one-year period. The SWCD will bill the RLWD quarter annually which will be submitted with progress reports. The SWCD will also provide updates to the RLWD periodically, as needed.

IV. Project Timeline (Estimated)

Program Task	March – June 2002	July – October 2002	October 2002 – June 2003	Future Dates
Develop Project Proposal and Contracts	X			
Evaluate Potential Buffer Strip Sites	X	X		
Develop Contracts for Landowners	X	X	X	
Implement Buffer Strips		X	X	
Reports of Progress		X	X	
Demonstration of Project and Future Plans (Education and Information)		X	X	X
Monitoring for Watershed Success	X	X	X	X