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For Immediate Release

## **PRESS RELEASE - CREP**

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### **NEW PROGRAM FUNDING TO HELP IMPROVE WATER QUALITY AND WILDLIFE HABITAT IN WINNEBAGO COUNTY**

The USDA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, better known as CREP, will provide up to \$240 million in federal and state funding statewide to help landowners reduce soil erosion, improve water quality and, at the same time, provide for improved wildlife habitat. In Winnebago County, this could mean roughly \$3.5 million available to landowners to enroll an estimated 1,600 acres of cropland into the program. Up to 100,000 acres may be enrolled across the state.

Earlier this year, the USDA authorized \$200 million in federal funds for Wisconsin in a negotiated contract that commits the state to an additional \$40 million in bonded funds to assist in getting CREP implemented at the county level. There are 51 counties in Wisconsin that are declared eligible for the program.

Eligible landowners in Winnebago County will be able to enroll their land into either 15-year contracts or permanent easements. In doing so, they agree to install conservation 'best management practices' such as streamside vegetated buffers, grassed waterways, and wetland restorations. These practices will keep soil in place, protect water quality, and provide habitat for many wildlife species. In return, those landowners will receive federal and state funds for practice installation and long-term rental payments for the acreage enrolled in the program. The permanent easement option involves a conservation easement that would be held by the State of Wisconsin in perpetuity.

The goal is to begin CREP sign-ups in Winnebago County within the next week, according to Pete Van Airsdale, Director of the Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department. Crop lands and marginal pasturelands that are located within 150 feet of surface waters, including streams, ponds, wetlands, rivers and lakes, may be eligible to be enrolled in the program.

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program involves federal, state, and local agencies working together, with landowners, toward a common goal of natural resource improvement and protection. The USDA Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service handle the federal portion of the program. DATCP and DNR coordinate implementation efforts at the state level. The Winnebago County Board, by formal agreement with DATCP, has authorized the Land & Water Conservation Department to assist in delivery of the program at the local level.

For more information about this program, contact any of the following: USDA Farm Services Agency or USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, both at (920) 424-0329; or Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation Department at (920) 232-1950 or 727-8642.