



Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative

2013 Progress Report DALCI

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Photo by Jim Richardson.



Overview

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) established the Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative (DALCI) in Fiscal Year 2013 to help farmers better use and protect their working lands while maintaining their farm's profitability. Through the DALCI, NRCS and its partners help farmers carry out voluntary conservation practices to conserve the Driftless Area's natural resources. These conservation efforts help ensure the economic viability of cropland, pastureland and forestland in the region, while restoring and improving fish and wildlife habitat of the diverse species found there.

This unique ecosystem is located in portions of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The Driftless Area is home to dozens of threatened and endangered animal and plant species. The region features extremely productive but very fragile soils vulnerable to erosion. Sediment and runoff threaten the cold water streams and diverse habitats. Forestland and grassland converted to intensive agriculture further increase risks to the delicate ecosystem.

Results

The DALCI is a one-year old initiative with many strong partnerships. The Driftless Area Initiative, one such partner, implements projects of regional significance that support natural resource conservation, sustainable rural economic development, and strengthened community identity and vitality. The Driftless Area Initiative is intended to enhance and restore this region's ecology, economy, and cultural resources.

In Fiscal Year 2013, NRCS invested nearly \$4 million to fund 372 contracts covering over 23,800 acres.

Well-managed pastures reduce soil erosion, improve soil health, benefit water quality, and provide habitat for wildlife. NRCS has partnered with the Wallace Center, Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D), and several other organizations to promote grazing as an effective strategy for conserving grasslands in the Driftless Area. To aid in this effort, the organizations used a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

grant to fund a grazing broker position to make it easier for agricultural producers and others to promote grass-based agriculture in the Driftless Area. The grazing broker, employed by the RC&D, connects agricultural producers and non-farm landowners to preserve or establish grasslands and produce livestock. The grazing broker also will develop grazing plans, help to establish a lease agreement based on the grazing plan and market rates, and connect the producers and landowners with needed resources such as fencing and watering infrastructure.

NRCS and the conservation partners in the Driftless Area worked with agricultural producers to restore a section of cold water stream in Iowa County, Wisconsin. The project stabilized streambanks, restored native grasses and forbs, and improved wetland and wildlife habitat that will benefit bird species, pollinator populations, amphibians and reptiles. Once the conservation practices are completed, a self-sustaining wild brown trout population will be able to survive in the stream.



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Funding

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program is the only program used to fund DALCI in Fiscal Year 2013.

Fiscal Year 2013 Driftless Area Landscape Conservation Initiative NRCS Financial Assistance (FA) and Active and Completed Contracts*

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)			
State	Number of Contracts	Funding	Contract Acres
Illinois	72	\$205,853	2,330
Iowa	22	\$404,218	1,594
Minnesota	82	\$972,258	9,819
Wisconsin	196	\$2,382,879	10,088
Totals	372	\$3,965,208	23,831

For More Information

For more information and updates about DALCI and other NRCS conservation efforts, please visit <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/home/?cid=stelprdb1117519>

*Data source: Protracts for new enrollment 10/25/13.