

News Release

Land Management Field School Held at U of M, Crookston in June

By Itollefs on Monday, July 11, 2011

The University of Minnesota, Crookston and the Northwest Research and Outreach Center (NWROC) recently co-hosted a land management field school for new employees of resource management agencies, particularly the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Agriculture and land use was a primary focus of the 4-day field school which was held from June 21- 24 on the Crookston campus with field excursions to various sites within the county.

Dan Svedarsky, Director of the Center for Sustainability at the U of M, Crookston and research biologist with the NWROC and Glen Kajewski, Assistant State Conservationist with NRCS organized the session along with U of M, Crookston Associate Professor David Demuth, who served as field camp coordinator.



"Fewer graduates have farm backgrounds these days," according to Svedarsky, "and as they go to work for natural resource agencies and interact with agriculture, it is imperative that they have a familiarity with the process and the culture of folks who make their living on the land."

Eighteen participants from the NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts learned from technical personnel through lecture and lab sessions; most speakers were from the U of M, NWROC, Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, and Extension. Equally important, field school participants learned from practitioners on trips to working farms. These ranged from the highly specialized operation of the Wagner Farms located in the heart of the Red River Valley where precision agriculture has been pioneered, to a 5-generation, conventional dairy farm, to a fruit and vegetable farm, to a diverse Amish farm in the eastern part of Polk County. Emphasis was placed on the natural resource base of soil and water and how farmers use these resources in agriculture, management considerations, and relationships with various agencies.



The intensive session provided an exposure to practical land use in Northwest Minnesota and was structured for participants to learn from each other as well as from more formal instruction. Participants came from all over the state and represented a broad spectrum of experiences and cultural diversity. According to one participant, "The skills and information I attained by participating in the school were absolutely invaluable and very applicable to my job and will make me a better employee for my agency."

Polk County and the Crookston campus were ideally suited for the field school due to the diversity of agricultural land uses within walking or commuting distance of the modern instructional and residential facilities on campus. The Red River Valley in the western part of the county has large intensive farms located on deep, rich prairie soils which transition to lighter soils developed under deciduous forests to the east with smaller, more diversified farms.



Participants were able to tour the Glacial Ridge Project, located 10 miles east of campus, where the NRCS has played in key role in investing Wetland Reserve Program resources to create the largest wetland and prairie restoration project in North America. This project is transitioning to the Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A system of prescribed burning to increase forage quality for livestock is being implemented on Glacial Ridge, and is being evaluated as a wildlife management technique as well. Water table effects also are being evaluated in concert with shallow wetland restoration

Additional sponsors of the session included; U of M Extension; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Wagner Farms; Truax Company, and the Minnesota Corn Growers. This was essentially the first field school of this sort to be hosted in Minnesota and plans are underway to make it an annual occurrence.

"There is an incredible transition of personnel within all agencies due to retirement of baby boomers," says Svedarsky, "That, plus the need for new hires to know more about the practical considerations of land use and the need to collaborate with other agencies really puts a high priority on these kind of sessions."

Today the University of Minnesota, Crookston delivers 29 bachelor's degree programs, 18 minors, and more than 40 concentrations, including several online degrees, in the areas of agriculture and natural resources; business; liberal arts and education; and math, science and technology. With an enrollment of about 1,400 undergraduates from more than 25 countries and 40 states, the Crookston campus offers a supportive, close-knit atmosphere that leads to a prestigious University of Minnesota degree. "Small Campus. Big Degree." To learn more, visit www.umcrookston.edu.

In the photos:

Top, right: Albert Sims, Ph.D., director of Operations at the Northwest Research and Outreach Center explaining the nature of agricultural research as applied to soils and agronomy at the University of Minnesota.

Center, left: Alumnus Gary Wagner '75 an area farmer explains the fundamentals of precision agriculture. Glen Kajewski, NRCS Assistant State Conservationist is to the right of Wagner.

Bottom, left: Mary Lien from Gonvick, Minn., describing a local food meal catered to field school participants at the headquarters of the Rydell National Wildlife Refuge.

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2900 University Ave., Crookston, MN 56716
800-862-6466 | 218-281-6510 | umcinfo@umn.edu

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