

**Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
FY 2011 Recommendation
Accomplishment Plan**

Date: January 20, 2010

Project or Program Title: The RIM-WRP Partnership

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	Council Recommendation Funding	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
		FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Funds Recommended (\$000s)				
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$6,895,000	\$18M	\$18M	\$18M

Appropriation Language

Abstract

The Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve–Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Partnership will accelerate the restoration and protection of approximately 4,620 acres of previously drained wetlands and associated upland native grassland wildlife habitat complexes via perpetual conservation easements. The goal of the RIM-WRP Partnership is to achieve the greatest wetland functions and values, while optimizing wildlife habitat on every acre enrolled in the partnership. The RIM-WRP partnership enables Minnesota to leverage \$1.4 of federal WRP funding for every state dollar available through RIM Reserve. This appropriation request of \$6.895 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will leverage \$9.653 million in WRP funds to Minnesota. We expect to enroll approximately 46 permanent conservation easements totaling 4,620 acres of wetland grassland

wildlife habitat complexes. This will enable the RIM-WRP partnership to restore approximately 230 previously drained wetland basins totaling 1,525 wetland acres, and the restoration of native grassland prairies on approximately 3,095 acres. Since WRP is an annual funded program through the 2008 Federal Farm Bill, this leveraging opportunity is available to Minnesota for at least the next four years.

Narrative

Minnesota's original wetland and prairie landscapes have been lost at an alarming rate over the last century and a half of European settlement. Minnesota's prairies once comprised nearly 20 million acres, extending from the borders of Iowa and Wisconsin in the southeast to North Dakota and Manitoba in the northwest. Less than 1% of this native prairie remains. Minnesota has lost an estimated 42 percent of its original 16 million acres of wetlands to drainage or fill activities. The loss of wetlands is most severe in the prairie regions of the state. Approximately 90% of prairie wetlands have disappeared and in the southwestern area of the state losses are as high as 99%.

Prairie wetlands are particularly important for migratory waterfowl. Although the North American pothole region contains only about 10% of the waterfowl nesting habitat on the continent (including a significant portion of Minnesota), it produces 70% of all North American waterfowl. This extensive loss of Minnesota's prairie and wetland habitat has led to the decline of many wildlife and plant species originally abundant in the state. Of the nearly 1,200 known wildlife species in Minnesota, 292 species, or approximately one-fourth, are at risk because they are rare; their populations are declining or they face serious risks of decline due to loss of habitat.

The RIM-WRP Partnership, the premier private lands wetland restoration program in the nation, is a local-state-federal partnership delivered locally by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) to ensure the RIM-WRP Partnership is a longstanding and successful program in Minnesota. In addition, this partnership is possible through collaboration among many local, state and federal partners including NRCS, BWSR, local SWCDs, Ducks Unlimited (DU), the Minnesota Waterfowl Association (MWA) and the United States Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS).

The RIM-WRP Partnership will protect and restore an estimated 230 wetland basins totaling 1,525 wetland acres and associated restored native grassland prairie on 3,095 acres in 46 permanent conservation easements totaling 4,620 acres. These restored wetlands and native grassland complexes will provide critical habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife species in Minnesota. Wetlands provide habitat for fish and wildlife, including threatened and endangered species. They improve water quality by filtering sediments and chemicals, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, protect biological diversity, sequester carbon and increase recreational opportunities.

Relationship to *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* and other published resource management plans.

Several recent statewide Minnesota planning efforts have called attention to the dramatic loss of wetlands and native prairie grasslands over the last century and a half. Minnesota has lost over 99% of its original native prairie and over 90% of its prairie wetlands. The following is a list of strategic plans considered in development of RIM-WRP leveraging proposal that will permanently restore and protect wetland and native grassland complexes in strategically targeted areas of Minnesota.

The Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan calls for protecting priority land (habitat recommendation #1) and this proposal is working to protect and restore priority grassland and wetland habitats important to waterfowl, grassland and wetland birds as well as the myriad species that call grasslands and wetlands home. This proposal will also implement the following habitat recommendations within the plan:

- Protect priority land habitats – the RIM-WRP partnership contains priority grassland and wetland habitats important to waterfowl, grassland and wetland birds as well as the myriad species that call grasslands and wetlands home.
- Protect critical shore lands of rivers and lakes – there are RIM-WRP easements being acquired that will protect shoreline of shallow lakes contained within this proposal.
- Restore and protect shallow lakes – there are RIM-WRP easements being acquired that will include protection of shallow lakes contained within this proposal.
- Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds – the RIM-WRP partnership protects and restores wetlands and grasslands. A majority of the lands acquired will be prior-converted.
- Keep water on the landscape – by protecting and restoring wetlands and grasslands, the RIM-WRP partnership will return water to the landscape (permanent wetland restoration) and help keep water on the landscape (permanent native vegetation restoration).

Minnesota DNR Long-range Duck Recovery Plan has priority goals for long-term protection and restoration for wetland and grassland habitat for duck production. The RIM-WRP partnership will contribute 4,620 acres to the 2,000,000 acre goal set under the plan. Specifically, it will permanently protect and/or restore 1,525 acres of wetlands towards the 600,000 acre wetland goal and permanently protect and/or restore 3,095 acres of native grasslands towards the 1,400,000 acre grassland goal.

Minnesota DNR Long-range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in Minnesota has priority goals to protect and restore nesting and winter habitat for pheasants. The RIM-WRP partnership contributes approximately 2,000 acres to the plan goal of restoring 1,560,000 acres of habitat within the pheasant range of Minnesota.

The RIM-WRP partnership contributes to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan by contributing 4,620 acres of breeding habitat (wetlands and grasslands) to the 11.8 million acre goal to restore continental waterfowl populations. Most of the work will occur within the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, which is recognized as a national priority for wetland and grassland habitat and breeding waterfowl and grassland bird species.

Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare – An Action Plan for Minnesota's Wildlife, is Minnesota's comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. It identifies the species-habitat relationships that show wetlands and grasslands are two of the habitats used by the most species in greatest conservation need. These are the habitats that have experienced some of the greatest loss and degradation in Minnesota.

Project Design and Evaluation

Project Scope	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife (Include Description in Footnote)
Restore	230 basins; 1,525 acres	46 easements; 3,095 acres		46 easements totaling 4,620 acres of protected and restored wetland and native grassland wildlife habitat complexes.
Protect	230 basins; 1,525 acres	46 easements; 3,095 acres		46 easements totaling 4,620 acres of protected and restored wetland and native grassland wildlife habitat complexes.
Enhance				

Counties in which activities will take place	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore	<i>See below</i>			
Protect				
Enhance				

In the winter of 2010, the RIM-WRP Partnership will conduct a statewide landowner application sign-up. All private landowner applications will be scored and ranked using the Minnesota Wetlands Restoration Evaluation Worksheet. The worksheet determines which projects will provide the greatest wetland functions and values and optimizes wildlife habitat on the selected and enrolled acres.

Although the RIM-WRP Partnership is a statewide program, it gives priority to that portion of Minnesota that has had the greatest loss of wetlands and prairies and subsequently significant declines in many species of wildlife that are wetland complex dependent. Specifically, the RIM-WRP Partnership will protect and restore wetland and native grassland complexes by converting agricultural lands to wetland upland complexes in the Forest/Prairie Transition, Prairie and Metro Urbanizing L-SOHC Sections.

Acres Within Each Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area (5%)	Forest-Prairie Transition (15%)	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region (80%)	Northern Forest
Restore	231	693		3,696	
Protect	231	693		3,696	
Enhance					

Estimate based on 2009 RIM-WRP applications.

Funding Per Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore	\$69,117	\$207,352		\$1,105,509	
Protect	\$275,651	\$826,953		\$4,410,418	
Enhance					

Funding Resource Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore	\$ 718,821	\$ 663,156		\$ 1,381,977
Protect	\$ 1,929,558	\$ 3,583,465		\$ 5,513,023
Enhance				

Acquisition and Tax Data	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability				
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability				
Permanent Easement	<i>46 easements for 1,525 acres; 230 basins restored</i>	<i>46 easements for 3,095 acres of native grassland</i>		<i>46 easement totaling 4,620 acres of protected and restored wetland and native grassland wildlife habitat complexes.</i>

Budget

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	\$ 107,400	\$ 110,600	\$ 114,600
Contracts	76,000	76,000	76,000
Travel	28,000	29,000	30,000
Equipment/Tools	14,000	14,000	14,000
Easement Acquisition	1,653,907	3,307,814	551,302
Conservation Practices	103,928	242,498	346,323
TOTAL	\$1,983,235	\$3,779,912	\$1,132,327

Personnel

Position	Name	Amount
<i>Civil Engineer Tech (1.0)</i>		\$71,350
<i>Realty Specialist (0.5)</i>		\$36,050

Leverage

SOURCE	FY 11		FY 12		FY 13	
	In hand	Anticipated	In hand	Anticipated	In hand	Anticipated
State						
Non state	\$8,688,223	\$25-50M		\$25-50M		\$25-50M
USDA WRP						
Easements and conservation practices						
USDA-Technical Assistance	965,358					
In-kind/Volunteer						
TOTAL *	\$9,653,381	\$25-50M		\$25-50M		\$25-50M

*for every \$1 state we leverage \$1.4 federal WRP funds

Leverage	State				Non-State (USDA WRP Funds)			
	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore					\$ 686,070	\$1,392,930		\$2,079,000
Protect					2,499,612	5,074,969		7,574,581
Enhance								

Accomplishment Timeline

Milestones	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Budgetary Expenditure
Conduct sign-up, ranking and selection of easements	Winter 2010			200 easement applications
Easement Acquisition Stage	2010-2013			46 easements acquired; \$5,513,023
Wetland restoration and conservation plan implementation	2011-2013			4,620 acres restored; \$692,850

Maintenance and Sustainability

Once a RIM-WRP easement is acquired, NRCS is responsible for maintenance, inspection and monitoring during the life of their 30-year WRP easement, including all associated costs for this activity. The State of Minnesota assumes sole responsibility via its perpetual RIM Reserve easement once the 30-year WRP easement has expired. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, inspections are performed every three years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection

conducted. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Program Title: Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve - Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)
Leveraging Project

2009 RIM-WRP Outdoor Heritage Applications and Funded Easements

