

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2012 Accomplishment Plan

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Program Title: The RIM-WRP Partnership

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Funds Recommended: \$13,810,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x): *(to be completed when signed by Governor)*

Abstract

The RIM-WRP Partnership will protect and restore 9,385 acres of previously drained wetlands and adjacent native grasslands on 75 conservation easements. It will leverage \$22 million in federal WRP funds.

Program Narrative

The Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve–Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) Partnership will accelerate the restoration and protection of approximately 9,385 acres of previously drained wetlands and associated upland native grassland wildlife habitat complexes via permanent 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 \$1.60 of federal WRP funding for every state dollar available through RIM Reserve. An appropriation of \$13.81 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will leverage \$22 million in WRP funds to Minnesota.

We expect to enroll approximately 75 permanent conservation easements totaling 9,385 acres of wetland grassland wildlife habitat complexes. This will enable the RIM-WRP partnership to restore

approximately 375 previously drained wetland basins totaling 3,097 wetland acres, and adjacent native grassland prairies on approximately 6,288 acres. These restored wetlands and native grassland complexes will provide critical habitat for migratory waterfowl and other wetland dependent wildlife species in Minnesota. Wetlands and adjacent grasslands provide habitat for waterfowl, pheasants, deer and non-game species, some that are threatened or endangered.

Design and Scope of Work

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 part 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). In addition, this partnership is possible through collaboration among many local, state and federal partners including Ducks Unlimited (DU), the Minnesota Waterfowl Association (MWA), Pheasants Forever (PF), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) and the United States Department of Interior - Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS).

The RIM-WRP Partnership uses the NRCS State Technical Committee's established subcommittee for WRP to provide statewide guidance for WRP in Minnesota. In addition, the RIM Reserve Management Planning Committee – a subcommittee of the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources – provides oversight and guidance on behalf of the BWSR.

The RIM-WRP Partnership holds one to two joint meetings per year to provide program oversight and guidance and to establish payment rates for upcoming sign-ups. Specifically, the RIM-WRP Partnership has had the USFWS Habitat and Population Evaluation Team (HAPET), located in Fergus Falls, develop a GIS Wildlife Habitat Potential Model for use with the WRP and RIM Reserve programs' environmental evaluation. In addition, the RIM-WRP Partnership has developed the Minnesota Wetland Restoration Evaluation Worksheet (attached) which is used to evaluate each easement application on its potential to restore wetland functions and values along with optimum wildlife habitat benefits.

We will conduct a RIM-WRP partnership statewide sign-up in the spring of 2012, or select from previously submitted high-scoring applications which were not funded. All applications will be scored and ranked using the Minnesota Wetland 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. The highest scoring applications will be selected for funding with Outdoor Heritage funds.

Planning

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 for agricultural purposes.
- 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 9,385 acres to the 2,000,000 acre goal set under the plan. Specifically, it will permanently protect and/or restore 3,097 acres of wetlands towards the 600,000 acre wetland goal and permanently protect and/or restore 6,288 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 4,700 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 9,385 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.

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

The RIM-WRP Partnership integrates with many other L-SOHC requests and previously funded projects such as Buffers for Wildlife which is funded 50% with Clean Water Funds. In addition, the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership with BWSR, DNR, PF and SWCD's pays for SWCD's to have technicians to promote the conservation provisions of the Federal Farm Bill and other conservation program opportunities to private landowners. The Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) provided \$1.0M via an LCCMR recommendation in FY10-11, and is recommending \$625,000 in FY12-13.

Since early 2000 the ENRTF has provided, through the Habitat Conservation Partnership, funding for Ducks Unlimited for contractors to work on the Wetlands Reserve Program in the approved corridor target areas. These DU-contract positions are presently funded through June 30, 2012. It is uncertain at this time if there will be funding made available from the ENRTF after this period.

Because of the acceleration of the RIM-WRP Partnership efforts in Minnesota and the need to retain these highly skilled DU-contractors, we are proposing funding from the OHF beginning in FY13. There are 7 DU-contractor positions presently employed to specifically market WRP and essential technical assistance to ensure the continued success of WRP and RIM-WRP Partnership in Minnesota.

Relationship to Current Organizational Budget

The RIM Reserve program was established in state statute in 1986 to restore and set aside marginal land principally for increasing fish and wildlife populations. Past funding via bonding varies, ranging from \$0 in most "off-year" bonding bills to a one-time maximum of \$52 million for the Minnesota River CREP in 2001. BWSR received \$25 million in bond funds in 2008, \$10 million in 2010 for a special flood disaster in Southern Minnesota, and \$20 million in the 2011 Special Session.

The RIM-WRP Partnership received Outdoor Heritage Funds in 2009 (\$9.058 million), 2010 (\$6.895 million), and 2011 (\$13.0 million). All of these OHF appropriations are being used to protect and restore previously drained wetlands and adjacent native grasslands through permanent conservation easements. The RIM Reserve program is not funded by general revenue and is not part of BWSR's agency base budget. All aspects of the program are funded by project funds the agency requests and receives to accomplish program objectives.

Sustainability and Maintenance

Once a RIM-WRP easement is acquired, NRCS is responsible for maintenance, inspection and monitoring during the life of the 30-year WRP easement. 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, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and NRCS and partners' staff document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Outcomes

The RIM-WRP Partnership will accelerate the protection and restoration of approximately 9,385 acres of previously drained wetlands and associated upland native grassland wildlife habitat complexes via permanent 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 partnership.

The RIM-WRP Partnership enables Minnesota to leverage \$1.6 of Federal WRP funding for every state \$1 available through RIM Reserve. An appropriation of \$13.81 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will leverage \$22 million in WRP Funds to Minnesota’s wetland restoration efforts on private lands. In total, this is a \$36 million project through which we expect to enroll approximately 75 permanent conservation easements totaling 9,385 acres into 60 wetland and native grassland wildlife habitat complexes. This will enable the RIM-WRP partnership to restore approximately 375 previously drained wetland basins totaling 3,097 wetland acres, and adjacent native grassland complexes on approximately 6,288 acres.

Past history indicates that approximately 80% of this protection and restoration of 60 wetland native grassland wildlife habitat complexes will occur in the LSOHC Prairie Landscape Section; 15% or 12 wetland native grassland complexes in the LSOHC Forest-Prairie Landscape Section; 5% or three wetland native grassland complexes in the Metro-Urbanizing L-SOHC Section.

The RIM-WRP Partnership is the premier private land wetland restoration program in the nation. It provides the following long-term outcomes and natural resource legacy:

RIM-WRP Partnership

Priority Actions for the Prairie Section; Forest-Prairie & Metro-Urbanizing	Outcome Measures
1. Protect and restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife. • Increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects. • Restored and enhanced wetland and adjacent upland habitat. • Increased wildlife productivity.
2. Convert agricultural land to permanent wetland/upland wildlife complexes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural lands are converted to grasslands to sustain functioning prairie/native grassland systems. • Water is kept on the land to reduce flood potential and degradation of aquatic habitat.
3. Protect, restore and enhance shallow lakes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protected, restored and enhanced shallow lakes. • Improved aquatic vegetation. • Enhanced shallow lake productivity.
4. Protect critical expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife.
5. Protect and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protected and restored habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species. • Increase wildlife productivity.

The average wetland/native grassland complex size is 125 acres. The average wetland to native grassland ratio is 1:2. The average cost to protect and restore per acre is estimated at \$3,824. The OHF cost to protect and restore an acre of wetland native grassland complex is estimated at \$1,471. The federal WRP cost to protect and restore an acre is \$2,353.

RIM-WRP Partnership – LSOHC Recommended Budget FY13

Activity	RIM \$	Federal WRP \$	RIM-WRP Totals
Protection and restoration on private lands: 75 easements, 60 complexes, 9,385 acres	\$11,324,000	\$22,000,000	\$33,324,000
BWSR Implementation:			
Personnel (16 FTEs)	\$1,420,000		\$1,420,000
Travel, Equip., Supplies	\$245,000		\$245,000
Easement Stewardship	\$180,000		\$180,000
NRCS Implementation:*		\$2,200,000	\$2,200,000
Contracts:			
SWCD	\$338,000		\$338,000
DU-Contractors	\$303,000		\$303,000
NRCS Contribution Agreements		\$420,000	\$420,000
Total L-SOHC Request	\$13,810,000	\$24,620,000	\$38,430,000

* NRCS Implementation includes all phases of technical assistance including application, closing, restoration and monitoring.

Proposed Accomplishments

- \$38,430,000 total dollars including RIM & WRP
- 9,385 acres: 75 permanent easements secured
- 60 wetland-native grassland complexes restored
- \$3,824 total per acre cost
- \$1,471 State (RIM) per acre cost
- \$2,353 Federal (WRP) per acre cost

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Milestone	Date
Conduct sign-up, ranking and selection of easements	200+ easement applications received, reviewed, ranked and approved for funding.	Spring/Summer 2012
Acquire Easements	75 permanent conservation easements recorded.	2012-2015
Wetlands/native grasslands restored	9,385 acres are permanently protected and restored.	2013-2015

Attachments:

- A. Budget
- B. Proposed Outcome Tables
- C. Parcel List

Attachment A. Budget Spreadsheet

Name of Proposal:	BWSR RIM-WRP Partnership
Date:	October, 2011
	W-01

[Link HERE to definitions of the budget items below.](#)

Total Amount of Request \$ 13,810,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

Personnel

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
	<i>Engineering & Eco Services</i>	4	3	\$ 898,000		
<i>Project Manager</i>	0.5	3	\$ 100,000			\$ 100,000
<i>Easement/Database/GIS</i>	2	3	\$ 360,000			\$ 360,000
<i>Program Mgmt</i>	0.25	3	\$ 62,000			\$ 62,000
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
Total	6.75		\$ 1,420,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,420,000

Budget and Cash Leverage *(All your LSOHC Request Funds must be direct to and necessary for program outcomes.)*

Please describe how you intend to spend the requested funds.

Budget Item	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel - auto entered from above	\$ 1,420,000	\$ -		\$ 1,420,000
Contracts	\$ 641,000	\$ 420,000	<i>NRCS</i>	\$ 1,061,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT (breakout in table 7)				\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT (breakout in table 7)				\$ -
Easement Acquisition	\$ 11,324,000	\$ 22,000,000	\$ 2,200,000	\$ 35,524,000
Easement Stewardship	\$ 180,000			\$ 180,000
Travel (in-state)	\$ 144,500			\$ 144,500
Professional Services				\$ -
Direct Support Services				\$ -
DNR Land Acquisition Costs (\$3,500 per acquisition)				\$ -
Other				\$ 100,500
Capital Equipment <i>(auto entered from below)</i>	\$ -	\$ -		\$ -
Other Equipment/Tools	\$ 36,800			\$ 36,800
Supplies/Materials	\$ 63,700			\$ 63,700
	\$ 13,810,000	\$ 22,420,000	\$ 2,200,000	\$ 38,430,000

Capital Equipment *(single items over \$10,000 - auto entered into table above)*

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Leverage
Total	-	-

Attachment B. Output Tables

Name of Proposal:	RIM-WRP Partnership
Date:	October, 2011
	W-01

Table 1 and Table 3 column totals should be the same AND Table 2 and Table 4 column totals should be the same

If your project has lakes or shoreline miles instead of land acres, convert miles to acres for Tables 1 and 3 using the following conversion:

Lakeshore = 6 acres per lakeshore mile / Stream & River Shore = 12 acres per linear mile, if both sides

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Describe the scope of the project in acres (use conversion above if needed)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					0
Protect Fee					0
Protect Easement	3097	6,288			9385
Protect Other					0
Enhance					0
Total	3097	6288	0	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)	9385	<i>These two cells should be the same figure.</i>
Total Acres (sum of Total row)	9385	

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					\$ -
Protect Fee					\$ -
Protect Easement	\$ 5,040,650	\$ 8,769,350			\$ 13,810,000
Protect Other					\$ -
Enhance					\$ -
Total	\$ 5,040,650	\$ 8,769,350	\$ -	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)	\$ 13,810,000	<i>These two cells should be the same figure.</i>
Total Dollars (sum of Total row)	\$ 13,810,000	

Check to make sure this amount is the same as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						0
Protect Fee						0
Protect Easement	469	1408		7,508		9385
Protect Other						0
Enhance						0
Total	469	1408	0	7508	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)	9385	<i>These three cells should be the same figure.</i>
Total Acres (sum of Total row)	9385	
Total Acres from Table 1.	9385	

Attachment B. Output Tables

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						\$ -
Protect Fee						\$ -
Protect Easement	\$ 690,500	\$ 2,071,500		\$ 11,048,000		\$ 13,810,000
Protect Other						\$ -
Enhance						\$ -
Total	\$ 690,500	\$ 2,071,500	\$ -	\$ 11,048,000	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column) \$ 13,810,000
 Total Dollars (sum of Total row) \$ 13,810,000
 Check to make sure these amounts are the same
 as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

*These two cells
should be the same
figure.*

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

miles of Lakes / Streams / Rivers Shoreline

Table 6. Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in acres)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					0
Acquired in Fee w/o State PILT Liability					0
Permanent Easement PILT Liability <i>NO State</i>	3097	6,288			9385
	3097	6288	0	0	

Table 7. Estimated Value of Land Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in dollars)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total	
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					\$ -	\$ -
Acquired in Fee w/o State PILT Liability					\$ -	\$ -
Permanent Easement PILT Liability <i>NO State</i>	\$ 5,040,650	\$ 8,769,350			\$ 13,810,000	\$ 35,524,000
	\$ 5,040,650	\$ 8,769,350	\$ -	\$ -		

*FTI should
match total in
budget table
that is auto
entered below*

Attachment C. Parcel List

Name of Proposal: RIM-WRP Partnership
Legislative Citation: ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x): (to be completed when signed by Governor)
Date: October 24, 2011

County	Township (25-258)	Range (01-51)	Direction most parcels are 2 with the exception of some areas of Cook County which is 1	Section (01 thru 36)	TRDS	# of acres	Budgetary Estimate (includes administrative, restoration or other related costs and do not include matching money contributed or earned by the transaction)	Description	Activity PF=Protect Fee PE=Protect Easement PO=Protect Other R=Restore E=Enhance	If Easement, what is the easement cost as a % of the fee acquisition?	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)
Parcel Name <i>Individual parcel information will not be available until after the sign-up is conducted in Spring 2012.</i>									PE			

Information provided will be used to map project locations. Incomplete or inaccurate information will result in that parcel or program not being mapped.