

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Laws of Minnesota 2014 Accomplishment Plan

Date: October 08, 2013

Program or Project Title: Minnesota Buffers for Wildlife and Water-IV

Funds Recommended: \$ 2,200,000

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Title:

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Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: No Counties Listed

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Prairie

Activity Type:

- Protect in Easement

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Prairie

Abstract:

This is the fourth request of LSOHC to target riparian buffers for wildlife and clean water using the Reinvest In Minnesota easement program. The Clean Water Fund and OHF will be used together to secure easements and protect buffers.

Design and Scope of Work:

435,000 acres of CRP are set to expire in Minnesota in the next three years. This exodus is being driven by high land and commodity prices, and increased pressure for alternative uses and federal budgets for conservation programs. Minnesota's primary strategy to mitigate the loss of CRP is to target expiring contracts for enrollment into continuous CRP practices (like buffers) and permanent easements for the most beneficial practices (e.g. wetland restoration, grasslands, and buffers). This program is one proven strategy to provide landowners with a sound option to keep targeted conservation on the land when economic incentives are tilted towards row crop production.

This partnership program establishes permanent buffers that provide both critical water quality improvements and improved wildlife habitat. For example, a buffer of 100' generally serves to protect water quality, while the addition of an additional 100' for wildlife greatly enhances nesting opportunities for wildlife. Establishing a minimum of 200' on each side of a stream for a total of 400', plus the natural corridor that already exists creates a

block of habitat for nesting birds and a critical link between other permanently protect habitats.

Criteria used to evaluate and prioritize buffers funded under this program include: does buffer build upon a Clean Water Fund Buffer, proximity to other permanently protected habitat, buffers within a designated shallow lake watershed, proximity to lands open to public hunting, plant diversity, overall size, and type of water resource being buffered. An open RIM Buffers application process for landowners will commence upon grant approval. This effort builds upon the momentum established for RIM Buffer enrollments supported by the Outdoor Heritage Fund and Clean Water Fund in the previous three funding cycles that have utilized the full extent of funding awarded. In future years, it is hoped that demand for this program increases and that funders consider a broader buffer initiative for our impaired waters and fragmented habitat. Simply put, wider buffers mean better habitat. Further, buffers that are put in proximity to other grasslands also function at a higher level within the landscape for grassland nesting birds and other wildlife.

RIM Buffers Program delivery will be supported by Minnesota's Farm Bill Assistance Partnership which includes Minnesota BWSR, USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service, Minnesota DNR, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, Pheasants Forever, and numerous local partners. Additionally, the RIM program will be delivered through SWCD's and administered by Minnesota BWSR.

We propose that the LSOHC fund \$2.2 million in perpetual state RIM buffer easements that will build upon the RIM buffers funded through the Clean Water Fund allocation of \$2.2 million. This creates an equal partnership of both programs to accomplish a single project with enhanced outcomes that could not otherwise be obtained with a single funding source.

Planning:

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H2 Protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes
- H4 Restore and protect shallow lakes
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds
- H7 Keep water on the landscape
- LU6 Reduce Upland and gully erosion through soil conservation practices

Plans Addressed:

- A Vision for Wildlife and Its Use -- Goals and Outcomes 2006-2012
- Ducks Unlimited Living Lakes Initiative
- Grassland Bird Conservation Area
- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Long Range Plan for Fisheries Management
- Managing Minnesota's Shallow Lakes for Waterfowl and Wildlife
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Strategic Habitat Conservation Model
- U.S. Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Plan

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Ensures activities for "protecting, restoring and enhancing" are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work; provides the most cost-effective use of financial resources; and where possible takes into consideration the value of local outreach, education, and community engagement to sustain project outcomes
- Leverage effort and/or other funds to supplement any OHF appropriation
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model

LSOHC Prairie Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes
- Protect, restore, and enhance shallow lakes
- Protect expiring CRP lands

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- Clean Water Fund

This project brings two of the major components of the Legacy Amendment together by matching an equal amount of Clean Water Fund for the RIM buffers program. This project will also build upon expiring CRP contracts that have funding associated with them from the USDA CRP contract that is in place. Where possible, partners would leverage the Outdoor Heritage Funds within a larger buffer initiative within Minnesota using other programs like CRP, NAWCA and other non-state funding sources to permanently protect buffers within landscapes that add value for grassland wildlife.

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

Expiring CRP is a major concern in the prairie landscape of Minnesota. We are targeting wetlands and riparian areas for permanent protection that provide water quality benefits and wildlife benefits. The plan is to retain the most critical buffers in perpetuity that provide significant benefits for water and wildlife. Our focus is on protecting expiring CRP, yet collectively, we are working to retain as many acres as possible within new CCRP contracts where sufficient funding is not available to make them permanent. This proposal provides a real mechanism for the Clean Water Fund and Outdoor Heritage Fund to work in concert to provide Minnesota landowners an opportunity to permanently protect and filter our water in a way that also provides habitat for ground nesting birds (e.g. ring-necked pheasants), native pollinators, and other associated grassland wildlife.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

All easements secured under this project will be permanent. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) easement program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement and manage the conservation cover. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Initial costs to establish conservation cover are to be covered under this project with additional assistance from Clean Water Fund and the USDA CRP program. The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve program. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first 5 years and then every 3rd year after that. BWSR in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms.

NOTE:

Stewardship costs are part of this project and are calculated at \$5000/easement. It is estimated that this project will result in 45 easements for a total cost of \$225,000. This cost would be split equally between Clean Water Fund and Outdoor Heritage Fund. BWSR is in the process of reassessing stewardship costs. Accomplishment plan amendments will be requested if needed.

Public Use:

Will the eased land be open for public use? - **No**

Permanent Protection:

Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - **Yes**

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Obtain applications from eligible landowners	June 30, 2015
Provide easement parcel list to LSOHC	December 31, 2015
Easement Development	July 1, 2015

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

- Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected *Over 90% of easements secured with this funding are placed on expiring CRP contracts.*
- Increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects *Each easement is privately owned and managed under a plan.*
- Protected, restored, and enhanced shallow lakes and wetlands *Adding buffers to these water bodies provides enhanced water quality of the water and provides upland nesting.*
- Agriculture lands are converted to grasslands to sustain functioning prairie systems *Focus of RIM buffers on cropland sites adjacent to critical water bodies and their conversion to perennial native grasslands.*
- Increased wildlife productivity *Every acre of undisturbed nesting habitat is important and becomes more effective as corridors secured with this funding are widened for wildlife purposes. Creating lineal habitat's that exceed 200' in width start to function as block habitat.*
- Enhanced shallow lake productivity *Emphasis placed on buffers protecting shallow lakes using wildlife scoring system.*
- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife *Riparian corridors are a key link in connecting existing core habitat parcels. Corridors will be scored using the the eligibility scoresheet for wildlife benefits of each parcel.*
- Water is kept on the land to reduce flood potential and degradation of aquatic habitat *Conversion of cropland to vegetation in these critical riparian areas increases infiltration and slows run off by a factor of 10 over bare ground.*
- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species *Shallow lake protection as a result of ripaian buffers benefits migratory birds.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan

Total Amount of Request: \$ 2200000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$102,800	\$102,800	Clean Water Fund,CleanWater Fund,Clean Water Fund,Clean Water Fund	\$205,600
Contracts	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$1,922,200	\$1,922,200	Clean Water Fund	\$3,844,400
Easement Stewardship	\$112,500	\$112,500	Clean Water Fund	\$225,000
Travel	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	\$62,500	\$62,500	Clean Water Fund	\$125,000
Direct Support Services	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$2,200,000	\$2,200,000		\$4,400,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.05	3.00	\$9,000	\$9,000	Clean Water Fund	\$18,000
Easement Processing/Data Base/GIS	0.50	3.00	\$48,800	\$48,800	CleanWater Fund	\$97,600
Eco Services	0.05	3.00	\$7,500	\$7,500	Clean Water Fund	\$15,000
Project Manager	0.25	3.00	\$37,500	\$37,500	Clean Water Fund	\$75,000
Total	0.85	12.00	\$102,800	\$102,800		\$205,600

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	375	0	0	375
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	375	0	0	375

Table 1b. How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie?

Type	Native Prairie
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	0
Total	0

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$2,200,000	\$0	\$0	\$2,200,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$2,200,000	\$0	\$0	\$2,200,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	375	0	375
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	375	0	375

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,200,000	\$0	\$2,200,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,200,000	\$0	\$2,200,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

19 miles

Parcel List

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type protect.

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.