

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

Date: December 13, 2013

Program or Project Title: RIM-WRP Partnership: Phase VI

Funds Recommended: \$ 9,710,000

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Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: No Counties Listed

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Metro / Urban
- Prairie

Activity Type:

- Protect in Easement

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Prairie
- Wetlands

Abstract:

The Reinvest in Minnesota-Wetlands Reserve Program (RIM-WRP) Partnership Phase VI will protect and restore 4,750 acres of previously drained wetlands and adjacent native grasslands on 38 conservation easements. It will leverage \$15.4 million in federal WRP funds.

Design and Scope of Work:

The RIM-WRP Partnership Phase VI will accelerate the restoration and protection of approximately 4,750 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 approximately \$1.60 of federal WRP funding for every state dollar available through RIM Reserve. An appropriation of \$9.71 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will leverage approximately \$15.4 million in WRP funds to Minnesota.

We expect to enroll approximately 38 permanent conservation easements totaling 4,750 acres of wetland

grassland wildlife habitat complexes. This will enable the RIM-WRP partnership to restore approximately 190 previously drained wetland basins totaling 1,570 wetland acres and adjacent native grassland prairies on approximately 3,180 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.

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), 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).

In addition, Ducks Unlimited is included as a full partner in the RIM-WRP Partnership Phase VI. DU will provide engineering services, promote RIM-WRP easements and provide key essential technical assistance and project management services through DU RIM-WRP specialists.

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 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 2014, or select from previously submitted high-scoring applications which were not previously 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.

NOTE: At this time the Federal Farm Bill has still not been passed. Both the US Senate and US House versions include robust easement options and also encourage leveraging of non-USDA funding. The RIM-WRP Partnership will fair well utilizing the new Farm Bill programs, partnerships and concepts. If instead of a new Federal Farm Bill the current one is extended this will also enable this partnership to continue. If federal WRP easements are not available, BWSR will pursue alternative federal or other leverage opportunities along with the potential for stand-alone RIM.

Planning:

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- 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:

- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in MN
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Address Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife, wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions, as well as long-term or permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- 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
- Restore or enhance habitat on permanently protected land
- 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 Forest Prairie Transition Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife
- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie
- Protect, enhance, and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success

LSOHC Metro Urban Section Priorities:

- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)
- Protect, enhance, and restore riparian and littoral habitats on lakes to benefit game and nongame fish species

LSOHC Prairie Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes
- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna
- Protect, restore, and enhance shallow lakes
- Protect expiring CRP lands
- Protect, enhance, and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund
- Clean Water Fund

Beginning in 2009, the BWSR has received FY10-11, FY12-13 and FY14-15 funding for a total of \$31.5 million through the Clean Water Fund (from the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment) to establish and restore permanent RIM Reserve Riparian easements for buffers to keep water on the land in order to decrease sediment, pollutant and nutrient transport, reduce hydrological impacts to surface waters and increase infiltration for groundwater recharge. These funds have been combined with LSOHC funding for buffers to increase the width and add wildlife habitat benefits to clean water buffers.

BWSR has also received funding in FY10-11, FY12-13 and FY14-15 totaling \$8.2 million from CWF for RIM Reserve easements in areas where the vulnerability of the drinking water supply management area is designated high or very high by the Minnesota Department of Health and in certain groundwater recharge areas in SE MN.

BWSR has received \$1.645 million from the ENRTF to secure permanent easements in cooperation with USDA's Mississippi River Basin Initiative and focused on selected watersheds. These easements are a combination of RIM and USDA's WRP.

Rock outcrop and prairie focused RIM easements have also been funded from ENRTF in the amount of \$3.863 million (from 2007, 2009 and 2010 funding) for targeted efforts in SW MN counties.

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

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 regular RIM bond funds in 2008, 2011 and 2012, in 2010 for a special flood disaster in Southern Minnesota and in 2012 First Special Session for certain flood events in Northern and Southern Minnesota.

The RIM-WRP Partnership received Outdoor Heritage Funds in 2009 (\$9.058 million), 2010 (\$6.895 million), 2011 (\$13.0 million), 2012 (\$13.810 million) and 2013 (\$13.390 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 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.

NOTE:

Stewardship costs are part of this project and are calculated at \$5,000/ easement. BWSR is in the process of reassessing stewardship costs based upon perpetual costs. Accomplishment plan amendments will be requested if costs change significantly.

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
Conduct sign-up, ranking and selection of easements	Spring/Summer 2014
Acquire easements	2014 - 2017
Wetland/native grasslands restored	2014 - 2018

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ; *Conservation plans will be developed and implemented to maximize wildlife benefits using technically sound practices.*
- Wetland and upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands, and restored shallow lakes and wetlands ; *Conservation plans will be developed and implemented to maximize environmental benefits using technically sound practices.*
- Water is kept on the land ; *Hydrology is restored to pre-altered state both for the wetlands and the associated uplands.*

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ; *Minnesota Wetland Restoration Evaluation Worksheet is used to prioritize sites to achieve the maximum benefits.*
- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and other species.

Programs in prairie region:

- Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected ; *Expiring CRP contracts are targeted and prioritized for both outreach and funding.*
- Increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects ; *Targeted outreach will be made to increase participation in critical habitat landscapes.*
- Protected, restored, and enhanced shallow lakes and wetlands ; *Conservation plans will be developed and implemented to maximize environmental benefits using technically sound practices.*
- Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered ; *Conservation plans will be developed and implemented to maximize environmental benefits using technically sound practices.*
- Water is kept on the land to reduce flood potential and degradation of aquatic habitat ; *Hydrology is restored to pre-altered state both for the wetlands and the associated uplands.*
- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ; *Conservation plans will be developed and implemented to maximize wildlife benefits using technically sound practices.*

Budget Spreadsheet

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

Total Amount of Request: \$ 9710000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$911,000	\$493,000	Ducks Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, NRCS	\$1,404,000
Contracts	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$7,717,000	\$14,658,000		\$22,375,000
Easement Stewardship	\$190,000	\$0		\$190,000
Travel	\$65,000	\$0		\$65,000
Professional Services	\$780,500	\$232,000	NRCS	\$1,012,500
Direct Support Services	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$15,800	\$0		\$15,800
Supplies/Materials	\$30,700	\$0		\$30,700
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$9,710,000	\$15,383,000		\$25,093,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
DU Manager	0.20	1.00	\$20,000	\$5,000	Ducks Unlimited	\$25,000
DU Engineer	0.25	1.00	\$25,000	\$10,000	Ducks Unlimited	\$35,000
NRCS Technical Positions	0.00	3.00	\$0	\$478,000	NRCS	\$478,000
Engineering and Eco Services	1.90	3.00	\$570,000	\$0		\$570,000
Project Manager	0.15	3.00	\$45,000	\$0		\$45,000
Easement/Database/GIS	1.10	3.00	\$215,000	\$0		\$215,000
Program Management	0.10	3.00	\$36,000	\$0		\$36,000
Total	3.70	17.00	\$911,000	\$493,000		\$1,404,000

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Ducks Unlimited	\$45,000	\$15,000	Ducks Unlimited,Ducks Unlimited	\$60,000
Contracts	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	Ducks Unlimited	\$600,000	\$0		\$600,000
Direct Support Services	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Ducks Unlimited	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$645,000	\$15,000		\$660,000

Personnel - Ducks Unlimited

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
DU Manager	0.20	1.00	\$20,000	\$5,000	Ducks Unlimited	\$25,000
DU Engineer	0.25	1.00	\$25,000	\$10,000	Ducks Unlimited	\$35,000
Total	0.45	2.00	\$45,000	\$15,000		\$60,000

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	BWSR	\$866,000	\$478,000	NRCS	\$1,344,000
Contracts	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	BWSR	\$7,717,000	\$14,658,000		\$22,375,000
Easement Stewardship	BWSR	\$190,000	\$0		\$190,000
Travel	BWSR	\$65,000	\$0		\$65,000
Professional Services	BWSR	\$180,500	\$232,000	NRCS	\$412,500
Direct Support Services	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	BWSR	\$15,800	\$0		\$15,800
Supplies/Materials	BWSR	\$30,700	\$0		\$30,700
DNR IDP	BWSR	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$9,065,000	\$15,368,000		\$24,433,000

Personnel - BWSR

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
NRCS Technical Positions	0.00	3.00	\$0	\$478,000	NRCS	\$478,000
Engineering and Eco Services	1.90	3.00	\$570,000	\$0		\$570,000
Project Manager	0.15	3.00	\$45,000	\$0		\$45,000
Easement/Database/GIS	1.10	3.00	\$215,000	\$0		\$215,000
Program Management	0.10	3.00	\$36,000	\$0		\$36,000
Total	3.25	15.00	\$866,000	\$478,000		\$1,344,000

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	1,570	3,180	0	0	4,750
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1,570	3,180	0	0	4,750

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	\$3,204,300	\$6,505,700	\$0	\$0	\$9,710,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$3,204,300	\$6,505,700	\$0	\$0	\$9,710,000

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	240	710	0	3,800	0	4,750
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	240	710	0	3,800	0	4,750

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	\$485,500	\$1,456,500	\$0	\$7,768,000	\$0	\$9,710,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$485,500	\$1,456,500	\$0	\$7,768,000	\$0	\$9,710,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

0 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

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
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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.