



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Lower Wild Rice River Corridor Habitat Restoration - Phase III

Laws of Minnesota 2020 Final Report

General Information

Date: 08/23/2024

Project Title: Lower Wild Rice River Corridor Habitat Restoration - Phase III

Funds Recommended: \$1,888,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2020, Ch. 104, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 2(e)

Appropriation Language: \$1,888,000 the second year is to acquire land in permanent conservation easement and to restore river and related habitat in the Wild Rice River corridor. Of this amount, \$148,000 is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Wild Rice Watershed District and \$1,740,000 is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources. The Board of Water and Soil Resources may use up to \$78,000 for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of proposed acquisitions must be included as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Tara Jensen

Title: District Administrator

Organization: Wild Rice Watershed District

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Location Information

County Location(s): Norman.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

This Corridor Habitat Restoration Project is a cooperative effort between the District (WRWD), MN Board of Soil and Water Resources (MNBWSR), MN DNR, and Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB). This is a voluntary program with the long-term goal to restore a natural corridor area along the Lower Reach of the Wild Rice River. When completed, the project will restore 23 channelized river miles to 50 miles of natural stream channel. The funding from this allocation was used to protect and restore approximately 151 acres of floodplain forest, wetland, and grassland habitat along the Wild Rice River.

Process & Methods

The long-term goal of the Wild Rice River Corridor Habitat Restoration Project is to restore a natural corridor area along the Lower Reach of the Wild Rice River. When completed, the project will restore 23 channelized river miles to 50 miles of natural stream channel.

Due to the overall size of the initiative, it is planned that the project will be conducted in multiple phases over the next decades. The phases were established to allow both for orderly implementation of the project and to ensure that wildlife and habitat benefits would be gained from the onset of implementation.

The following describes the anticipated phases and major work items anticipated under each phase.

Phase 1 – Land Acquisition/Restoration – This phase will involve acquisition of a Conservation Easements to provide the Wild Rice Watershed District land rights to install and maintain future phases of implementation. As part of this phase, the production of agricultural crops within the parcel would cease and the area would be restored to a permanent vegetative cover by the landowner as set forth in the Conservation Easement conservation plan.

Phase 2 – Detailed Design and Setback Levee Construction – Once a significant reach of property has been enrolled as part of Phase 1 and detailed design for the corridor restoration has been completed, the existing river-side levees would be decommissioned and replaced with new levees setback further from the river. The alignment of these levees would be established to maximize the use of the available Phase 1 corridor and to allow for future implementation of Channel Rehabilitation under Phase 3.

Phase 3 – Channel Rehabilitation – Phase 3 will involve restoration of the channel along an approximately 23-mile segment of river. This restoration will reconnect many segments of the natural river that were cutoff by the channelized, leveed river channel. Reconnecting the floodplain will also benefit adjacent prairie and wetlands. During this phase, it is anticipated that a combination of modifications to historic oxbows that were cut off during the earlier straightening project and new meandering river channel segments would be constructed to create a long-term stable river channel. In addition, wetlands will be restored where determined practicable and compatible with setback levee and channel rehabilitation locations.

Funding from this allocation was utilized specifically for Phase 1.

How did the program address habitats of significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, threatened or endangered species, and/or list targeted species?

Funding from this allocation was utilized for the land acquisition phase of the long term project that will restore 50 miles of river and over 6,500 acres of habitat for associated fish and wildlife communities. The Wild Rice River and

associated prairie and forest lowland habitats were identified as key habitats for species of greatest conservation need in the Red River Prairie ecoregion. Key among aquatic species is the Lake Sturgeon, a species of special concern. The Wild Rice River provides sturgeon habitat and restoration of the river will help ensure successful reestablishment of sturgeon populations in the Red River basin. This project will also likely benefit mussel and insect populations in the Wild Rice River. Two species of mussels, black sandshell and fluted-shell are listed as species of special concern are known to be present in the upstream reaches of the Wild Rice River. Two species of caddisfly present in the Wild Rice River are also listed as species of special concern. Acquisition and restoration of the stream and associated riparian wetlands will also improve habitat for Channel Catfish, Northern Pike, Smallmouth Bass, Walleye, and more than 50 other fish species present in other reaches of the Wild Rice River.

How did the program use science-based targeting that leveraged or expanded corridors and complexes, reduced fragmentation, or protected areas in the MN County Biological Survey.

The restoration of the Lower Wild Rice River corridor is a high priority project on the state river restoration priority list. The Minnesota Prairie Plan also lists restoration of channelized prairie river segments and cultivation of lands immediately adjacent to streams and ditches as critical challenges.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

This Wild Rice River Corridor Habitat Restoration Project is a cooperative effort between the Wild Rice Watershed District (WRWD), MN Board of Soil and Water Resources (MNBWSR), MN Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), and Red River Watershed Management Board (RRWMB). This is a voluntary program with the long term goal to restore a natural corridor area along the Lower Reach of the Wild Rice River. As a result, only landowners that voluntarily enroll their property are eligible for the program.

Exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects of program

The largest challenge of the project was the extensive coordination and communication of local landowners. Coordination required individual meetings with all interested landowners to explain the project intent and expected outcome.

As a result of the challenge listed above, and the fact that the program is voluntary, many landowners were unwilling to enroll in the program at the established RIM payment rates. The rates were not updated in a timely manner to increase as fast as the open market land values increased. This resulted in a number of applications not being closed within the grant time window. Since that time, the RIM rates have increased approximately 40% and the interest/willingness for landowners to voluntarily participate has returned.

The most unique aspect of the project involved the successful partnerships between the District (WRWD), MN Board of Soil and Water Resources (MNBWSR), MN DNR, and RRWMB.

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this program?

- N/A

What is the plan to sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

The Wild Rice River Watershed District will be responsible for all maintenance of the final project when completed. Sustainability and maintenance of this channel restoration is required within watershed district law (Minnesota Statutes 103D). Long term project maintenance is authorized and funded through established watershed district construction and maintenance funds. This project will be designed to mimic natural, stable stream channels and should require less maintenance than the current channelized stream segment.

In the interim, the Conservation Easements that were acquired using funding from this allocation were enrolled in MnBWSR Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program. As part of the RIM program, management/maintenance activities identified within the easement area will be the responsibility of the landowner as identified in the conservation plan. As part of the program, the landowner grants the right to enforce the terms of the Conservation Easement to the State of Minnesota, by and through the Board of Water and Soil Resources.

Budget

Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$107,200	\$107,200	\$57,300	-	-	-	\$107,200	\$57,300
Contracts	\$25,200	\$25,200	\$6,000	-	-	-	\$25,200	\$6,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$1,544,100	\$1,544,100	\$594,100	\$270,800	\$118,800	-, Wild Rice Watershed District	\$1,814,900	\$712,900
Easement Stewardship	\$78,000	\$78,000	\$19,500	-	-	-	\$78,000	\$19,500
Travel	\$3,000	\$3,000	-	-	-	-	\$3,000	-
Professional Services	\$111,700	\$111,700	\$49,800	-	-	-	\$111,700	\$49,800
Direct Support Services	\$13,100	\$13,100	-	-	-	-	\$13,100	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$4,400	\$4,400	-	-	-	-	\$4,400	-
Supplies/Materials	\$1,300	\$1,300	-	-	-	-	\$1,300	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,888,000	\$1,888,000	\$726,700	\$270,800	\$118,800	-	\$2,158,800	\$845,500

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$70,900	\$70,900	\$32,000	-	-	-	\$70,900	\$32,000
Contracts	\$25,200	\$25,200	\$6,000	-	-	-	\$25,200	\$6,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$1,544,100	\$1,544,100	\$594,100	-	-	-	\$1,544,100	\$594,100
Easement Stewardship	\$78,000	\$78,000	\$19,500	-	-	-	\$78,000	\$19,500
Travel	\$3,000	\$3,000	-	-	-	-	\$3,000	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$13,100	\$13,100	-	-	-	-	\$13,100	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$4,400	\$4,400	-	-	-	-	\$4,400	-
Supplies/Materials	\$1,300	\$1,300	-	-	-	-	\$1,300	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,740,000	\$1,740,000	\$651,600	-	-	-	\$1,740,000	\$651,600

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.05	5.0	\$13,500	-	-	\$13,500
Easement Processing	0.15	3.0	\$18,500	-	-	\$18,500
Eco/Engineering	0.03	3.0	-	-	-	-

Partner: Wild Rice Watershed District

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$36,300	\$36,300	\$25,300	-	-	-	\$36,300	\$25,300
Contracts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	\$270,800	\$118,800	Wild Rice Watershed District	\$270,800	\$118,800
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$111,700	\$111,700	\$49,800	-	-	-	\$111,700	\$49,800
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$148,000	\$148,000	\$75,100	\$270,800	\$118,800	-	\$418,800	\$193,900

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Administrator	0.12	5.0	\$25,300	-	-	\$25,300

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

The primary budgetary challenges under this allocation revolved around the fact that land prices increased significantly between the time that grant application was submitted and the easements were acquired.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

Of the money disclosed above, what are the appropriate uses of the money:

- E. This is not applicable as there was no revenue generated.

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	430	150	0	0	0	0	430	150
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	430	150	0	0	0	0	430	150

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700	-	-	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700	-	-	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	430	150	0	0	430	150
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	430	150	0	0	430	150

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/ Urban (AP)	Metro/ Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700	-	-	\$1,888,000	\$726,700

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

As a result of the challenge listed above, and the fact that the program is voluntary, many landowners were unwilling to enroll in the program at the established RIM payment rates. The rates were not updated in a timely manner to increase as fast as the open market land values increased. This resulted in a number of applications not being closed within the grant time window. Since that time, the RIM rates have increased approximately 40% and the interest/willingness for landowners to voluntarily participate has returned.

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~

Parcels

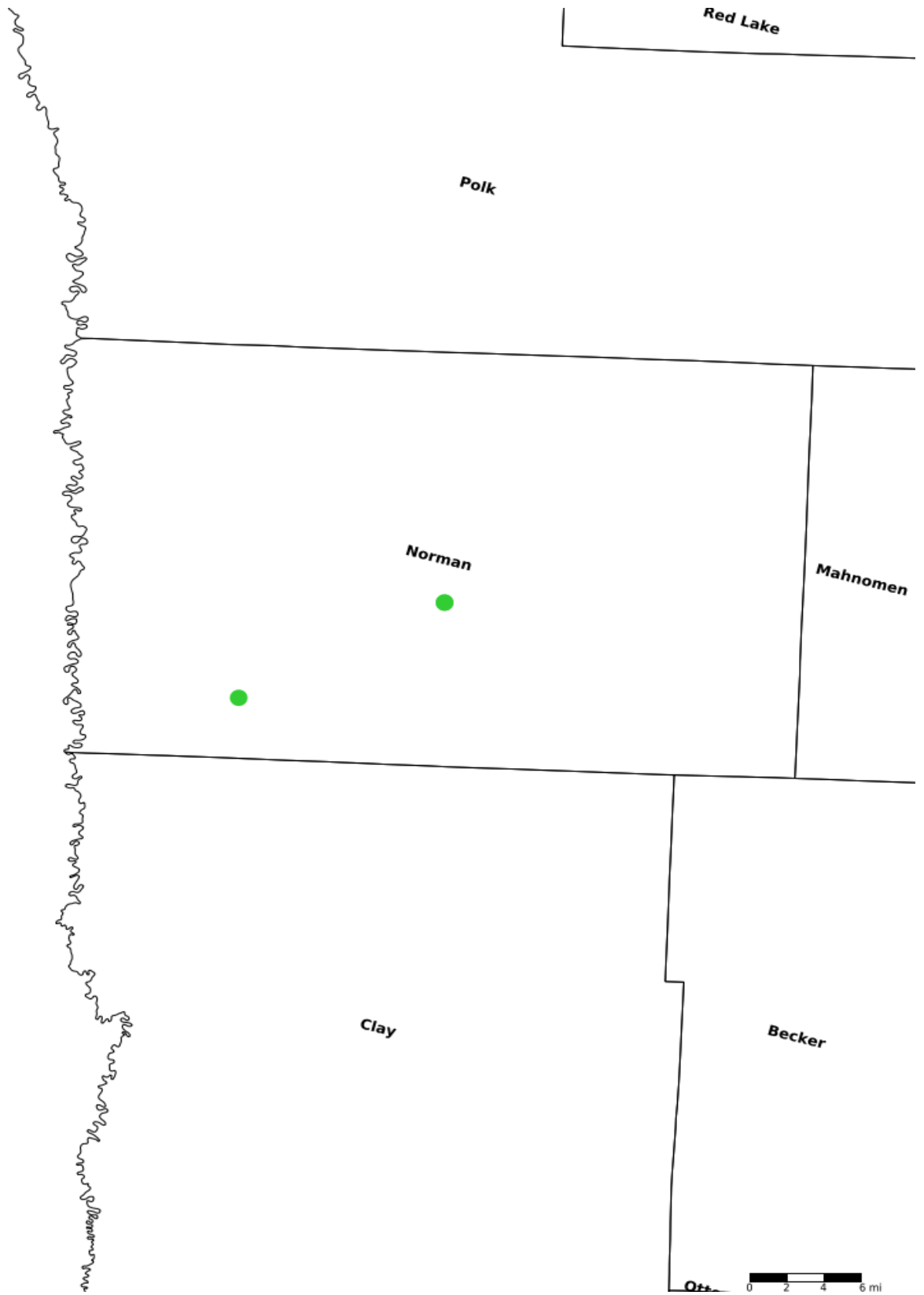
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
STRAND/KIRK T & VICKI J	Norman	14446213	40	\$118,832	No
RUEBKE/DEBRA A	Norman	14446213	20	\$60,581	No
KROSHUS/CHARLES & AMY	Norman	14347217	91	\$398,085	No

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- ✚ Other