



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

### RIM Grassland Reserve Phase VI Laws of Minnesota 2025 Accomplishment Plan

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#### General Information

**Date:** 06/09/2025

**Project Title:** RIM Grassland Reserve Phase VI

**Funds Recommended:** \$3,375,000

**Legislative Citation:** ML 2025, Ch. 36, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(c)

**Appropriation Language:** \$3,375,000 the first year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance grassland habitat under Minnesota Statutes, sections 103F.501 to 103F.531. Of this amount, up to \$70,000 is to establish a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. Subdivision 8, paragraph (b), does not apply to this project. A list of permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

#### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** John Voz

**Title:** RIM Easement Programs Coordinator

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#### Location Information

**County Location(s):**

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

**Activity types:**

Protect in Easement

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Prairie

**Narrative****Abstract**

Using the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program, this project addresses the potential loss of grassland habitats from conversion to cropland and accelerates grassland protection efforts not covered by other programs. Working in coordination with 11 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), and 64 local Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) this proposal will enroll 490 RIM acres (approximately 7 easements), focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes. This proposal focus's on protecting non-crop moderate to high quality remnant prairies and associated buffer that can be improved through habitat management.

**Design and Scope of Work**

Since 2019 approximately 3,823 acres and 52 individual easements have been permanently protected under this program. That's 3,823 acres that would have not been protected under the MNDNR Native Prairie Program. In 2023 throughout Minnesota an additional 65,999 acres of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has expired. Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of prairie. Today less than two percent remains. The few acres of native remnant prairie that remain were once thought of as too rocky or wet for row crops , but not anymore. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland wildlife populations, including pollinator species.

Past LSOHC funding has allowed BWSR to deliver this program to private landowners and permanently protect remnant prairies which are not covered by other programs. It is vital that we continue this effort as landowners are beginning to learn about this program.

This proposal, working in partnership with 11 Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs) and 64 local SWCD's focuses on protecting current grasslands and buffering native prairie that are within wildlife habitat complexes not covered by other conservation programs. There are programs for native prairie such as MNDNR Native Prairie Bank, Federal Native Tallgrass Prairie (NTP) and programs for cropland, but there are no programs for moderate quality prairies that have the potential for higher quality through protection and management. As Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and LTTs review landowner applications for possible enrollment, they may find additional tracts that are native prairie. With this project, native prairie may include CRP or cropland areas to square up parcels. In cases where larger tracts are identified, they will contact the DNR's Biological Survey and Native Prairie Bank staff for a more formal botanical survey of the site.

The loss of native prairie and grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing northwest, western and southern Minnesota. This proposal aims to protect 490 acres of prairie and grassland habitat by coordinating and accelerating the enrollment in Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) through private land easements. This level of acceleration is needed to address today's rapid loss of grassland habitat and meet the goals set forth in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

## **Explain how the plan addresses habitat protection, restoration, and/or enhancement for fish, game & wildlife, including threatened or endangered species conservation**

Minnesota grasslands provide important habitat for a wide range of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Consistent with guidance in The Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan and Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, strategic site selection will be conducted as well as efforts to minimize landscape stressors and plan for plant diversity and long-term resiliency of project sites. More than 150 SGCN use grasslands for breeding, migration, and/or foraging.

Target Species include: Greater prairie chicken, Eastern meadowlark, Western meadowlark, Grasshopper sparrow, Northern pintail, Northern black duck, Burrowing owl, Chestnut collared longspur, Bobolink, Wilson's phalarope, Sedge wren, Upland Sandpiper, Plains hog-nosed snake, American badger, Prairie vole, Plains pocket mouse, Eastern spotted skunk, Dakota skipper, Monarch butterfly, Poweshiek skipper, Regal fritillary and Rusty Patch bumble bees.

## **What are the elements of this plan that are critical from a timing perspective?**

Without permanent protection options, these remnant and existing grasslands are under great threat of conversion to row crops. Under the strategic direction provided by the Minnesota Prairie Plan, and recognizing that a new wave of grassland loss is upon us, the RIM program is realigning its targets and priorities. This realignment will ensure that a gap does not exist between programs, and that a private landowner interested in permanent protection of their grassland or prairie has viable options. Funding from this proposal will provide an acceleration of targeted acres enrolled.

## **Describe how the plan expands habitat corridors or complexes and/or addresses habitat fragmentation:**

Native prairies are often part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and wetlands. These complexes will be the top priority for this project using the MN Prairie Plan framework. A preference will be given to protecting expiring CRP with enrollment of adjacent remnant prairie as identified in the MN County Biological Survey. This focus on expiring CRP will fill a niche that cannot otherwise be filled by the Native Prairie Bank program. LTTs will help guide restoration strategies such as prescribed burning, conservation grazing and woody tree removal to be used to restore the conditions of moderate quality prairies. In addition, the LTTs will identify remnant prairie sites that are not listed on the MN County Biological Survey and update the survey accordingly. By utilizing the LTTs, parcels will be targeted for protection and resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.

Recent genetic diversity research was conducted on Greater Prairie Chickens by the MNDNR to understand how birds move through the landscape using a new approach called landscape genetics. It found that prairie chickens in the northern part of the sampled area, near Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, are not very connected to prairie chickens in Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties to the south. Connecting these areas with high quality habitat would allow more genetic mixing, potentially reduce stress and mortality and eliminate the need for birds to travel long distances to find suitable habitat. This "follow the chicken" approach has worked remarkably well in identifying, targeting and protecting areas that have positive impacts on a wide range of species of greatest conservation need.

## **Which top 2 Conservation Plans referenced in MS97A.056, subd. 3a are most applicable to this project?**

Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

**Explain how this plan will uniquely address habitat resilience to climate change and its anticipated effects on game, fish & wildlife species utilizing the protected or restored/enhanced habitat this proposal targets.**

This proposal will contribute to at least four Priority Actions under Goal 2 (Climate-smart natural and working lands) of the MN Climate Action Framework. The four Priority Actions are: 1) accelerate forest, grassland and wetland restoration; 2) store more carbon; 3) restore and expand habitat complexes and corridors; and 4) increase water storage and infiltration, and manage drainage.

**Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?**

**Forest / Prairie Transition**

Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

**Prairie**

Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

**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 ~ *A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and non game species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

**Programs in prairie region:**

Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and non-game species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

**Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.**

This funding request is not supplanting existing funding or a substitution for any previous funding.

**How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?**

Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement into perpetuity. BWSR partners with local SWCDs 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 document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs are calculated at \$10,000 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship covers costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

### **Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Source of Funds</b>	<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Step 2</b>	<b>Step 3</b>
2023-Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Inspection every year for the first 5 years; then every 3rd year	Corrective actions on any violations	Easement action taken by MN General Office
2023-Ongoing	Landowners Responsibility	Maintain compliance with easement terms	-	-

### **Provide an assessment of how your program celebrates cultural diversity or reaches diverse communities in Minnesota, including reaching low- and moderate-income households:**

For our statewide programs, BWSR will pilot designating a percentage of the easement acquisition budget line for applicants who self-certify as emerging farmers or from underserved populations, including Black, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). If funds remain at the end of a predetermined number of scoring/ranking periods and there are no additional applicants, the remaining funds would be added to the larger easement acquisition pool of funding. Being a statewide program, rural communities and areas of the state with lower annual income thresholds will benefit from this program in several ways, including financial benefits. RIM easements not only offer financial benefits for landowners, but they also require outreach, monitoring and maintenance which help maintain and grow rural jobs and economies.

### **Activity Details**

#### **Requirements**

**If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?**

Yes

**Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection?**

Yes

**Who will manage the easement?**

The landowner and BWSR.

**Who will be the easement holder?**

The State of Minnesota through BWSR.

**What is the anticipated number of easements (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?**

Working in coordination with 11 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), and 64 local Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) this proposal will enroll 490 RIM acres (approximately 7 easements), focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes.

## Land Use

**Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?**

Yes

**Explain what will be planted and include the maximum percentage of any acquired parcel that would be planted into foodplots by the proposer or the end owner of the property:**

In certain circumstances food plots for wildlife are an allowable use on RIM easements and must be part of an approved Conservation Plan. Under this proposal no food plots would be allowed on remnant prairies which have never been cultivated (only areas that buffer remnant prairies). Food plots on narrow buffers, steep slopes and wet areas are not allowed but may be offered on any potential surrounding grass buffer on prior cultivated lands. RIM policy limits food plots to 10% of the total easement area or 5 acres whichever is smaller. There is no cost share for establishment of food plots and upon termination and/or abandonment the landowners must reestablish the vegetation as prescribed in the Conservation Plan at their own expense. Food plots are a rarely selected option by landowners, to date only 2.2% of RIM easements have food plots.

**Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this program either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?**

No

**Will the eased land be open for public use?**

No

**Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?**

Yes

**Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:**

Existing trails and roads are identified during the easement acquisition process and are often excluded from the easement area if they serve no purpose to easement maintenance, monitoring or enforcement. Some roads and trails, such as agricultural field accesses, are allowed to remain.

**Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?**

Yes

**How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?**

The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program which has over 7,450 individual easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first five years and then every third 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. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

**Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?**

Yes

**Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:**

Though uncommon, there could be a potential for new minimal use trails, if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (e.g. firebreaks, berm maintenance, etc). Unauthorized trails identified during the monitoring process are in violation of the easement.

**How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?**

The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program which has over 7,450 individual easements currently in place. 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. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

**Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?**

Yes

The RIM Grassland Reserve program evaluates each application on its potential to restore upland/wetland functions and values to optimize wildlife habitat and provide other benefits, including water quality. Each site is evaluated on its benefits to the surrounding landscape, ability to build upon existing corridors and complexes, and site-specific features that highlight the benefits of selection for permanent protection and habitat and associated environmental benefits.

**Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this program's funding and availability?**

Yes

### Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Final Report Submitted	November 1st, 2030
Enroll 490 acres into the RIM private land easement program	June 30th, 2029

**Date of Final Report Submission:** 11/01/2030

**Availability of Appropriation:** Subd. 7. Availability of Appropriation

(a) Money appropriated in this section may not be spent on activities unless they are directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation and are specified in the accomplishment plan approved by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Money appropriated in this section must not be spent on indirect costs or other institutional overhead charges that are not directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation. Money appropriated for fee title acquisition of land may be used to restore, enhance, and provide for public use of the land acquired with the appropriation. Public-use facilities must have a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

(b) Money appropriated in this section is available as follows:

- (1) money appropriated for acquiring real property is available until June 30, 2029;
- (2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this section is available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2033;
- (3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2030;
- (4) notwithstanding clauses (1) to (3), money appropriated for a project that receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds is available until a date sufficient to match the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if the federal funding was confirmed and included in the original approved draft accomplishment plan; and
- (5) money appropriated for other projects is available until the end of the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.



**Budget**

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

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$127,200	-	-	\$127,200
Contracts	\$21,900	-	-	\$21,900
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,084,400	-	-	\$3,084,400
Easement Stewardship	\$70,000	-	-	\$70,000
Travel	\$5,900	-	-	\$5,900
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$54,700	-	-	\$54,700
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$8,400	-	-	\$8,400
Supplies/Materials	\$2,500	-	-	\$2,500
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$3,375,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,375,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.98	4.0	\$127,200	-	-	\$127,200

**Amount of Request:** \$3,375,000

**Amount of Leverage:** -

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 0.0%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$181,900

**As a % of the total request:** 5.39%

**Easement Stewardship:** \$70,000

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 2.27%

**How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?**

Reduction in funding will reduce outputs proportionally. Program management costs are the exception, due to program management & oversight remaining consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

**Does this project have the ability to be scalable?**

Yes

## If the project received 50% of the requested funding

### **Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

A 30% reduction in funding would reduce outputs proportionally. Program management costs are the exception, due to program management & oversight remaining consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

### **Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

BWSR calculates direct support services costs that are directly related to and necessary for each request based on the type of work being done.

## Personnel

### **Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?**

Yes

## Contracts

### **What is included in the contracts line?**

The contract line includes costs covered under the SWCD MJPA, \$2,500 for staff time per easement acquisition.

## Easement Stewardship

### **What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?**

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at \$10,000 per easement. We anticipate acquiring approximately 7 easements with this money. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship covers costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and enforcement.

## Travel

### **Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?**

No

### **Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging**

The travel line will only be used for traditional travel costs.

### **I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:**

Yes

## Direct Support Services

### **How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?**

BWSR calculates and periodically reviews and updates direct support services costs that are directly related to and necessary for each request based on the type of work being done.

## Other Equipment/Tools

### **Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?**

Posts and signs to mark easement boundaries.

Federal Funds

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?

No

Output TablesAcres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	490	-	-	490
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>490</b>	-	-	<b>490</b>

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,375,000	-	-	\$3,375,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>\$3,375,000</b>	-	-	<b>\$3,375,000</b>

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	70	-	420	-	490
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>70</b>	-	<b>420</b>	-	<b>490</b>

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$482,100	-	\$2,892,900	-	\$3,375,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>\$482,100</b>	-	<b>\$2,892,900</b>	-	<b>\$3,375,000</b>

**Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$6,887	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

**Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$6,887	-	\$6,887	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

## Parcels

### Parcel Information

#### Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

#### **Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:**

Through a combination of eligibility screening and a scoring and ranking process, each application will be assessed on its potential

to restore functions and values (optimize wildlife habitat benefits) and to provide other landscape benefits. Each site is

considered on its benefits to the surrounding landscape, as well as the site-specific features which highlight the benefits of selection

for permanent protection. During the application process, a review of adjacent permanent habitat and easement size is conducted to indicate a site's usefulness as a corridor or extension to an existing habitat complex.