



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water Laws of Minnesota 2026 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/05/2026

Project Title: RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water

Funds Recommended: \$3,744,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2026, Ch. 126, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(h)

Appropriation Language: \$3,744,000 the second year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire permanent conservation easements and restore habitat under Minnesota Statutes, section 103F.515, to protect, restore, and enhance habitat by expanding the riparian buffer program under the clean water fund for additional wildlife benefits from buffers on private land. Of this amount, up to \$60,000 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: Dusty Van Thuyne

Title: Easement Programs Coordinator

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Location Information

County Location(s):

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Southeast Forest

Prairie

Metro / Urban

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Narrative

Abstract

The RIM Reserve Buffers program will protect and restore riparian areas, permanently protecting approximately 301 acres on 6 easements. This program will continue utilizing a science-based ranking and selection process and be implemented locally, working with SWCD staff in targeted areas in the state and throughout the 66-county MN CREP area. The focus of this funding will be to include larger areas (floodplain scale) rather than the narrower areas traditionally thought of as riparian buffers.

Design and Scope of Work

Riparian corridors containing healthy buffer and floodplain areas contribute to clean water and provide critical wildlife habitat and travel corridors. The MN Buffer Law requires perennial vegetative buffers of up to 50 feet along lakes, rivers, and streams and buffers of 16.5 feet along ditches but does not necessarily accommodate flooding issues and allows continued disturbance of these areas, which may not be favorable to wildlife. By extending the minimum required buffer area, we can create significantly better wildlife habitat while achieving multiple benefits. This partnership program between Outdoor Heritage Fund, Clean Water Fund, and potentially the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), would establish permanent riparian areas that provide both critical water quality improvements and improved habitat.

Criteria used to evaluate and prioritize parcels funded under this program include existing CRP contracts, proximity to other permanently protected habitat, proximity to lands open to public hunting, prioritization One Watershed, One Plans or other comprehensive water plans, type of water resource being buffered, overall size, proximity to threatened and endangered species, and frequency of inundation or crop loss. A competitive RIM Riparian application process for landowners will be used. The goal for this project will be funding from both LSOHC and Clean Water Funding as well as USDA, when possible, under existing or new CRP enrollment. Wider riparian areas provide long-term water quality treatment and increased habitat. Buffers that are established in proximity to other grasslands also function at a higher level within the landscape for grassland nesting birds and other wildlife.

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve Buffers will utilize funds to the greatest extent possible by leveraging federal funding through the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) when possible. MN CREP is a partnership between the USDA and BWSR that provides voluntary conservation easement opportunities for landowners. MN CREP focuses on protecting environmentally sensitive land across 66 counties in southern and western Minnesota. Landowners enroll in the federally funded CRP for 14-15 years as well as a state-funded perpetual conservation easement through the RIM Reserve program.

RIM Buffers will also secure conservation easements on lands not eligible for MN CREP and/or during periods when MN CREP enrollment is paused.

The RIM Buffers program delivery will be supported by delivery through Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and administered by BWSR.

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

Buffers are commonly viewed as simply a water quality practice, but buffers have positive impacts on wildlife due to their unique habitat. This is especially true for expanded width buffers enrolled through this program. Not only are grasslands protected or restored, detrimental impacts to stream-reliant biota is reduced. Many species of amphibians, such as the Northern Cricket Frog (endangered) rely on aquatic habitat during the breeding season and then spend most of their lives in upland habitat. In southeastern MN, reptiles such as the Blanding's Turtle (threatened) rely on meandering streams, rivers, and adjacent lands.

The Sedge Wren, a Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) most commonly associated with grassland habitat, is encountered in buffer areas. Bird use is influenced by buffer width with greater widths experiencing greater abundance and diversity of birds and grassland species. However, bird use is negatively associated by the amount of edge exposure. In an effort to limit edge exposure, sites that may serve as corridors or expand current complexes receive higher weight using this program's scoring and ranking process.

Diverse vegetation, access to a water resource, and protection from pesticides are important to Minnesota's native pollinator species. BWSR's native vegetation guidelines and pollinator initiative have outlined the RIM Program's commitment to protecting native pollinators. Complexes and corridors targeted through RIM Buffers provide areas that are safe from pesticides and are natural passageways for pollinators. Targeted pollinator species include the Monarch Butterfly and solitary bee species including Leafcutter Bees, Mason Bees, and Yellow-faced Bees.

SGCN in the RIM Buffers area include the common five-lined skink, two-spotted skipper, northern pintail, American black duck, grasshopper sparrow, upland sandpiper, sedge wren, dickcissel, and western grebe. In addition to the SGCN, the threatened or endangered species targeted in this proposal include the Dakota skipper, poweshiek skipperling, and rusty patched bumble bee.

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

CRP contracts continue to expire (301,300 acres with a contract expiring in Minnesota during federal fiscal years 2026 - 2029) and farming pressure leads to more habitat fragmentation and agricultural fields within the floodplain. It is critical to retain as many acres of habitat in the most important locations. A combination of permanent protection with RIM and re-enrollment of CRP, when possible, will reduce this impact from habitat loss.

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

Through a combination of targeted outreach, eligibility screening, and a scoring and ranking process, each site is considered on its benefits to the surrounding landscape, as well as the site-specific features.

During the application process, a review of adjacent permanent habitat and easement size is conducted to evaluate a site's importance as a corridor or extension to an existing habitat complex. Other examples of the science-based

targeting used include drainage to shallow lakes, buffering along lakeshore, planned vegetative diversity, and proximity to land open to public hunting.

As we implement this project, we will utilize similar science-based considerations that have been historically used by the RIM Buffers program.

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

Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in MN

Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

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 wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

Metro / Urban

Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)

Northern Forest

Protect shoreland and restore or enhance critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas

Prairie

Protect expiring CRP lands

Southeast Forest

Protect, enhance, and restore habitat for fish, game, and nongame wildlife in rivers, cold-water streams, and associated upland habitat

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced aspen parklands and riparian areas ~ *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 in the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife. 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 areas are restored.

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in 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 in the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife. 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 areas are restored.

Programs in the northern forest region:

Increased availability and improved condition of riparian forests and other habitat corridors ~ 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 in the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife. 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 areas are restored.

Programs in prairie region:

Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected ~ 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 in the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife. 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 areas are restored.

Programs in southeast forest region:

Rivers, streams, and surrounding vegetation provide corridors of habitat ~ 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 in the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife. 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 areas 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?

BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement of RIM easements. BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry out oversight, monitoring and inspection of conservation easements. Easements are inspected every year for the first five years beginning 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 document findings and report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs are \$10,000 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship includes costs of BWSR and local government unit staff time, travel costs, and other costs for easement monitoring, encouraging voluntary compliance, addressing potential violations, and legal enforcement.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2026-Ongoing	Landowner Responsibility	Maintain compliance with easements.	-	-
2026-Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Inspections every year for the first five years; then every third year.	Corrective actions of any violations.	Enforcement action taken by MN Attorney General's office.

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 State of Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) will be the responsible party for monitoring and enforcing easements with assistance from the appropriate SWCD for monitoring.

Who will be the easement holder?

The State of Minnesota through the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR).

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

6; the actual number will depend on the cost of easements.

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?

Yes

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 or on lands to be acquired in this program?

Yes

Where does the activity take place?

Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

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, wildlife food plots are an allowable use on RIM easements as part of an approved conservation plan. Food plots on narrow riparian buffers, steep slopes or frequently flooded areas are not allowed. RIM policy limits the total acres of food plots planted. There is no cost-share for establishment of food plots and upon termination the landowners must re-establish vegetation as prescribed in the Conservation Plan at their expense. SWCD partners request seed tags for food plots to ensure seed is insecticide free. As part of the SWCDs inspection process they review sites to make sure food plots meet the conservation plan requirements which include prohibiting the use of food plots with insecticides.

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?

Field roads or vegetated access routes are necessary on some easements and may continue after easements are secured to allow for management activities.

Under the terms of the RIM easement, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the

easement. Easements are monitored annually by SWCDs in cooperation with BWSR for the first five years and then every third year after easement acquisition to assure compliance with easement terms.

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, new trails could be developed if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (e.g., fire breaks, berm maintenance). Unauthorized trails are in violation of the easement.

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Under the terms of the RIM Reserve 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

Vegetative restoration is planned to occur and these restoration costs are included in the Easement Acquisition line of the budget table.

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
Activity 1 – easements recorded	June 30, 2030
Activity 2 – restorations completed	June 30, 2034

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2034

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, 2030;
- (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, 2034;
- (3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2031;
- (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	\$102,100	-	-	\$102,100
Contracts	\$22,500	-	-	\$22,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,482,700	-	-	\$3,482,700
Easement Stewardship	\$60,000	-	-	\$60,000
Travel	\$6,600	-	-	\$6,600
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$57,900	-	-	\$57,900
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$9,400	-	-	\$9,400
Supplies/Materials	\$2,800	-	-	\$2,800
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$3,744,000	-	-	\$3,744,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Engineering	0.07	4.0	\$39,200	-	-	\$39,200
Easements	0.1	6.0	\$62,900	-	-	\$62,900

Amount of Request: \$3,744,000

Amount of Leverage: -

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%

DSS + Personnel: \$160,000

As a % of the total request: 4.27%

Easement Stewardship: \$60,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 1.72%

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

A reduction in funding reduced outputs (acres/activities) almost proportionately.

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 50% reduction in funding would reduce outputs proportionally. Program management & oversight remain relatively 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 contracts line amount will be used for payments to SWCD staff for easement acquisition. Estimated restoration costs are included in the easements acquisition line.

Easement Stewardship

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

6 easements at \$10,000 per easement; the actual number will depend on the cost of easements. Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at \$10,000 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship covers costs of the BWSR and local government unit staff time, travel costs, and other costs for easement monitoring, encouraging voluntary compliance, addressing potential violations, and legal 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 annually 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?

Steel posts, hardware, and signs to mark the easement boundaries.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

Is Confirmation Document attached?

Yes, on file

Output Tables**Acres 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	-	301	-	-	301
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	301	-	-	301

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	-	\$3,744,000	-	-	\$3,744,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$3,744,000	-	-	\$3,744,000

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	14	14	29	230	14	301
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	14	14	29	230	14	301

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	\$179,700	\$179,700	\$359,500	\$2,845,400	\$179,700	\$3,744,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$179,700	\$179,700	\$359,500	\$2,845,400	\$179,700	\$3,744,000

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	-	\$12,438	-	-
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	\$12,835	\$12,835	\$12,396	\$12,371	\$12,835
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

1 mile

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 followed by a scoring and ranking process, the RIM Buffers program evaluates each application on the potential to restore ecological functions and values; optimizing wildlife habitat benefits and providing other benefits including water quality. Each site is evaluated on its benefits to the surrounding landscape and any site-specific features that are important for permanent protection of habitat.

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 as an extension of an existing habitat complex.

BWSR will continue to utilize similar science-based considerations as have been historically used by the RIM Buffers Program.