



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

2027 Riparian Habitat Protection In the kettle and Snake River Watersheds  
ML 2027 Request for Funding

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### General Information

**Date:** 06/24/2026

**Proposal Title:** 2027 Riparian Habitat Protection In the kettle and Snake River Watersheds

**Funds Requested:** \$4,000,000

**Confirmed Leverage Funds:** -

**Is this proposal Scalable?:** Yes

### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Paul Swanson

**Title:** District Manager

**Organization:** Pine County Soil and Water Conservation District

**Address:** 1610 Highway 23 North

**City:** Sandstone, MN 55072

**Email:** paul.swanson@pinecountymn.gov

**Office Number:** 320-216-4241

**Mobile Number:**

**Fax Number:**

**Website:** <https://www.pineswcd.com/>

### Location Information

**County Location(s):**

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

Northern Forest

**Activity types:**

Protect in Easement

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Wetlands

Forest

## Narrative

### **Abstract**

We will utilize BWSR RIM conservation easements to protect approximately 1020 acres of high-quality private forests, wetlands, and shoreline in the Northern Forest Ecological Section. Sites will be selected utilizing minor watershed/RAQ scoring and an integrative ranking process developed through a collaborative process. By using this methodology, not only will we be stacking public benefits but also maximizing conservation benefits per dollar (return on investment). Development trends pose a serious threat to Lake Sturgeon, four-toed and spotted salamanders, Gilt Darter, Northern Long-eared Bat, Blanding's Turtles, and over 128 unique, rare, endangered, and threaten species that live in these watersheds.

### **Design and Scope of Work**

Watersheds in northern Minnesota benefit from public lands since they are mostly forested. The primary risk to habitat and water quality is on private lands. Private forestlands are key because they are more likely to be developed resulting in habitat fragmentation, loss of connectivity, increased pollution and stormwater runoff, and siltation or sedimentation of water bodies. Conversion of private forestlands to more intense land uses place negative impacts on both wildlife habitat and water quality. Both the Kettle and Snake river watersheds have experienced an increase in development and land use conversion in recent years. Since most of the prime lakeshore in the counties is developed, present and future development of river shoreland is expected.

The DNR Hinckley Area Fisheries Office has been tagging and monitoring Lake Sturgeon in the Kettle, St. Croix, and Snake rivers since the early 1990's. Populations appear to be stable and small sturgeon are recruiting into the fishery. While Lake Sturgeon populations appear to be healthy in the Kettle and Snake Rivers, their future relies on clean water. Healthy forests, wetlands, and shorelines in watersheds are vital to the water quality downstream. Thus, protecting private riparian forestland is critical to fish and wildlife habitat.

In 2016, the MN DNR and BWSR, working with SWCDs and partners developed a protection framework based on research developed by MN DNR Fisheries. The MN DNR identified a strong correlation between water quality and habitat that sustains fish populations and maintaining 75 percent forest cover in the watershed. The process works as follows: 1) Prioritize minor watersheds that have less than 75% protected watersheds, 2) Target specific parcels using RAQ scores and 3) over time, measure progress toward 75% forestland protection goal on watershed basis. We periodically measure the percent of the watersheds with permanent forest protection to illustrate this transformation on graphic dial like a speedometer. As of early 2026, the Kettle Watershed is 57.06% protected, and the Snake Watershed is 48.84% protected.

To move the needle in Kettle and Snake watersheds, this program will utilize BWSR's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) conservation easements. To maximize conservation return on investment the SWCDs will select parcels with the greatest conservation value. To accomplish this, we will use the RAQ methodology scoring system (Riparian, Adjacent, Quality). Each private forested parcel is scored on a 0-10 scale based on the parcel proximity to water ("Riparian") or protected lands ("Adjacency") and various local defined features ("Quality"), such as wild rice, trout, and biodiversity. In short, the RAQ tool prioritizes parcels with benefits overlapping – habitat, biodiversity, cost, water quality, and resiliency to create and protect extensive habitat complexes. Therefore, using the minor watershed/RAQ methodology we are stacking public benefits and maximizing the conservation benefits per dollar. We will protect approximately 1020 acres of high-quality private forests, wetlands, and shoreline habitat important for Lake Sturgeon and another 128 Species in Greatest Conservation Need that are known to occur within these watersheds.

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

Most of the project area falls within the Mille Lacs Uplands Subsections. 128 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are known or predicted to occur within the Mille Lacs Uplands, the third most of all subsections in Minnesota. According to the species problem analysis in the Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife, habitat loss and degradation is the most significant challenge facing SGCN populations in this subsection. This project seeks to address this challenge by protecting the healthy riparian lands from the threat of development, habitat loss or degradation through the use of RIM conservation easements.

The project area has a mixed representation of extensive forest lands and riparian habitats that are home to many Species of Greatest Conservation Need including: Lake Sturgeon, Blanding's turtle, wood turtles, gray wolves, bald eagles, ospreys, sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, and yellow rails. The St. Croix River Basin is also globally-recognized for its mussel diversity, over 40 known mussels occur within the St. Croix River Basin, including 5 federally endangered, and 20 state-listed species such as rare mussels like the winged mapleleaf, spike, and round pigtoe.

The Kettle and Snake Rivers are also home to populations of Lake Sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*). These bony-plated, ancient-looking fish prefer moderately clear, large rivers and lakes, where they can migrate long distances to spawning areas and foraging for the invertebrates and small fish that make up their diet. Their large sizes and fighting qualities make them a favorite among catch and release anglers. Sturgeon are long-lived, slow growing, and can take many years to mature and be able to reproduce. They are vulnerable to degraded water quality and over exploitation, as well as to dams which block fish passage. Therefore, protecting high-quality private forests, wetlands, and shoreline is critical to maintain fish and wildlife habitat.

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

Because of its proximity to the Twin Cities and its vast network of roads, this area is under increasing pressure from human activities, including the expansion of residential development, some of it affecting river shoreline. While Lake Sturgeon populations appear to be healthy in the Kettle and Snake Rivers, their future relies on clean water. Healthy forests, wetlands, and shorelines in watersheds are vital to the water quality. If we do nothing this type of development along the rivers will continue. Increases in housing density and associated development on rural forest lands can be linked to numerous changes to private forest services across watersheds, including decreases in native wildlife; changes in forest health; and reduced water quality, forest carbon storage, timber production, and recreational benefits. Protecting healthy watersheds with conservation easements now is a cost-effective strategy to ensure that the ecosystem and economic services provided by healthy watersheds remain intact.

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

This project will utilize the Landscape Stewardship Plans minor watershed science-based targeting to expand important habitat corridors and complexes on private lands. The RAQ tool scores each private forested parcel on a 0-3 scale for each of common characteristics; "Riparian"--the parcels proximity to water, "Adjacency"--the parcels location in relation to contiguous tracts of existing state, county, or federal land in preference to parcels scattered across the landscape, knowing that a forest community is healthier and more diverse with less fragmentation, and "Quality"-- is the locally determined value of the land (1-3 Points), which can include a number of criteria, such as biodiversity from the MN County Biological Survey, trout/cisco, wild rice, old growth forests, rare species, and groundwater recharge and sensitive areas.

The RAQ tool has been developed for the entire Kettle River Watershed and includes a series of RAQ maps for each major HUC-10 subwatershed. The RAQ tool will be a helpful tool to target areas where public investments will have the most benefit. This scoring was updated in 2022 with a new Landscape Stewardship Plan for the Kettle and Upper St. Croix watersheds. RAQ was developed for the Snake River Watershed with the first round of funding for this program. This data targets RIM easements to the parcel level and this allows us to hand select the best parcels for habitat value and prevent future fragmentation in the entire watershed. The following additional factors are considered to ensure site selection reflects current science-based measures for riparian habitat protection: feet of shoreline protected, development potential of site, depth from shore, watershed considerations, and easement size relative to the parcel. This played an integral part in outreach, interested and successful enrollment the first and second round of funding. This 2-step methodology is proven through Environmental Natural Resource Trust Fund and Clean Water Fund RIM easement programs. The BWSR RIM is one of the most efficient and effective easement programs in Minnesota.

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

Minnesota Forest Resource Council Landscape Plans

Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

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

**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

**Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife:**

This project will directly implement priority actions for the Northern Forest Section which include:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation
- Increased availability and improved condition of riparian forest and other habitat corridors
- Lakes and wetlands support healthy fish populations
- Lakes and streams with protected shoreland and forestland will produce quality warm and cold-water aquatic systems.

By implementing these priority actions, this project will produce a significant and permanent conservation legacy as forestlands provide multiple enduring conservation benefits in the face of climate change and other major stressors. These enduring benefits include healthy terrestrial and aquatic habitat for fish, game, and other wildlife species, healthy watersheds and clean water, and enhanced recreational opportunities for all Minnesotans. Within the next 10 years, it is this partnerships goal to bring the Kettle River watershed up to 58% protection and the Snake River Watershed up to 50% protection. That is an additional 15,640 acres, and 7,450 acres, respectively, of protection acres. These protection acres will be achieved through this program, as well as other land protection programs available to landowners in both watersheds.

**If this project/program does not have permanent outcomes, describe why it is important to undertake at this time:**

## Outcomes

### Programs in the northern forest region:

Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation This project will measure the number acres of forestland and wetland habitat enrolled into RIM easements. We also will measure the number of miles of shoreline protected and the individual minor watershed percent protection goal.*

### 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 are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs are \$10,000 per easement. This value is based on using SWCD staff for monitoring and preliminary enforcement. The amount includes costs of BWSR and local government unit staff time as well as costs for encouraging voluntary compliance, addressing potential violations and legal enforcement.

### Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2027-Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Inspections every year for the first five years; then every third year.	Corrective actions to address violations.	Enforcement action taken by MN Attorney General's office.
2027-Ongoing	Landowner responsibility	Maintain compliance with easement terms.	-	-

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

Lake sturgeon have long held importance in Native American cultures, including the bands of Ojibwe who call this area of Minnesota, home. Lake sturgeon are also a favored catch-and-release fish species in some circles of anglers. By protecting habitat that protects sturgeon populations, we are able to provide opportunities for many Minnesota communities to continue practice of their culture and recreational opportunities.

## Activity Details

### Requirements

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

Yes

## 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?**

No

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

No

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

Yes

### **Describe the expected public use:**

RIM easements do not require that private land is open to the public; however, this question is also evaluated on public benefit and RIM easements do provide a significant public benefit; often expand wildlife habitat near public lands; and do not limit the potential for the land to be open to the public through other programs.

RIM's statutory language requires restriction of building and agricultural activities on an easement. If RIM also required public access, the landowner would be retaining almost no private rights to the land and still paying property taxes. RIM easement land is still in private ownership and the landowner still pays property taxes and is still consistent with the statutory goals of the Outdoor Heritage Fund of protection and restoration of habitat. Minnesota Statute 97A.056 states ". . .the fund must be expended to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife." and "The council shall make recommendations . . . that directly relate to the restoration, protection, and enhancement of wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife, and that prevent forest fragmentation, encourage forest consolidation, and expand restored native prairie."

Criteria in RIM program scoresheets used to evaluate and prioritize parcels funded include proximity of the easement land to lands that are in public ownership and/or open to public hunting. Parcels immediately adjacent to public land or that would connect or expand larger existing habitat areas receive additional points in the scoring and ranking process than a parcel that does not provide that benefit. Wildlife do not follow property lines; therefore protected private lands adjacent to and near public lands create complexes of public and private land that provide high quality habitat supporting wildlife, including recreationally hunted species, allowing them to thrive on and off public lands. Protected private lands also add visual and noise buffers that allow users of public land to better enjoy their experiences.

**Will new trails or roads be developed or improved, beyond those used for maintenance and management, as a result of the proposed acquisition?**

Yes

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

Though uncommon, new trails may be developed if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (fire breaks, berm maintenance, forest stewardship) and are noted on the conservation plan. Narrow mowed trails for personal use are allowed for landowner access on RIM easements. Unauthorized trails are a violation of the easement.

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

Under the terms of the easement, a conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement and the conservation plan. BWSR, in cooperation with SWCDs, implements a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms and the conservation plan.

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

Yes

**Previous OHF Appropriations**

**Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC for this program or project in the past?**

Yes

**Are there any of these past appropriations still OPEN?**

Yes

**If needed, please include any explanation of unspent funds.**

Because the easement acquisition process through BWSR's RIM program can take up to 18 months, some funds from previous funding cycles look unused. However, these funds have been committed to eligible properties under the RIM program. Once the properties go through the RIM application process, those funds can then be considered spent.

ML 2024 - \$30,000 available to contribute to 1 new application; \$1.15 million in easement payment funding expended, encumbered, or committed to approved applications.

ML 2026 - Funding not yet appropriated.

**Open OHF Appropriations - Data from Most Recent Status Update**

Project	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
ML 2026 - 2026 Riparian Habitat Protection in the Kettle and Snake River Watersheds	\$1,122,000	-	\$1,122,000	0.0%
ML 2024 - Riparian Habitat Protection in the Kettle and Snake River Watersheds	\$1,569,000	\$333,200	\$1,235,800	21.24%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$2,691,000</b>	<b>\$333,200</b>	<b>\$2,357,800</b>	<b>12.38%</b>

**Timeline**

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Final Report Submitted	November 1, 2030
RIM easements secured on 1020 acres	June 30, 2030

**Budget**

**Grand Totals Across All Partnerships**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Funding Request</b>	<b>Total Leverage</b>	<b>Leverage Source</b>	<b>Total</b>
Personnel	\$327,500	-	-	\$327,500
Contracts	\$42,500	-	-	\$42,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,370,100	-	-	\$3,370,100
Easement Stewardship	\$170,000	-	-	\$170,000
Travel	\$6,900	-	-	\$6,900
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$70,100	-	-	\$70,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$9,900	-	-	\$9,900
Supplies/Materials	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$4,000,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$4,000,000</b>

**Partner: BWSR**

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$277,500	-	-	\$277,500
Contracts	\$42,500	-	-	\$42,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,370,100	-	-	\$3,370,100
Easement Stewardship	\$170,000	-	-	\$170,000
Travel	\$6,900	-	-	\$6,900
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$70,100	-	-	\$70,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$9,900	-	-	\$9,900
Supplies/Materials	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$3,950,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,950,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.5	4.0	\$277,500	-	-	\$277,500

**Partner: Pine SWCD**

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$50,000	-	-	\$50,000
Contracts	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Administration	0.1	4.0	\$50,000	-	-	\$50,000

**Amount of Request:** \$4,000,000

**Amount of Leverage:** -

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

**DSS + Personnel:** \$397,600

**As a % of the total request:** 9.94%

**Easement Stewardship:** \$170,000

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 5.04%

N/A

**Does this proposal 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.

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

A small portion of easement staff time specifically for appropriation and program management and reporting remains relatively consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

### **If the project received 30% 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.

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

A small portion of easement staff time specifically for appropriation and program management and reporting remains relatively consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

### **What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this proposal?**

#### **Personnel**

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

Yes

**Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?**

The district manager at Pine SWCD has taken on the administrative and coordination efforts to manage the program at a local level. This effort is needed to continue the progress of easement acquisition and local partner coordination. These funds will pay for staff time spent on new easements associated with this project.

#### **Contracts**

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

The contracts line is used for payments to SWCD staff for easement acquisition and technical assistance, as appropriate. Estimated restoration costs are included in the easement acquisition line.

#### **Easement Stewardship**

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

17 easements at \$10,000 per easement. The total stewardship amount will ultimately be dependent on the cost of easements and if the proposed easement number is reached. Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs are \$10,000 per easement. This value is based on using SWCD staff for monitoring and preliminary enforcement. The amount includes costs of BWSR and local government unit staff time as well as costs for 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 and the program staff time involved.

## **Other Equipment/Tools**

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

Steel posts and signs to mark easement boundaries.

## **Federal Funds**

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

No

## Output Tables

### Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
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	162	0	858	0	1,020
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,020</b>

### Restoration/Enhancement Acres of OHF Acquired Lands (Table 1a.1)

	RESTORE: Lands acquired in this proposal	RESTORE: Lands acquired with previous OHF appropriations (<5yrs old)	RESTORE Total	ENHANCE: Lands acquired in this proposal	ENHANCE: Lands acquired with previous OHF appropriations (<5yrs old)	ENHANCE Total
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	1,020	0	1,020	-	-	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

### Restoration/Enhancement Acres Breakdown of Existing Protected Lands (Table 1a.2)

	RESTORE: Lands acquired with OHF	RESTORE: Lands NOT acquired with OHF	ENHANCE: Lands acquired with OHF	ENHANCE: Lands NOT acquired with OHF
DNR Lands (WMA, State Forests, etc.)	-	-	-	-
Non-DNR Lands (city, state, federal, etc.)	-	-	-	-
Easements	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</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	\$640,000	-	\$3,360,000	-	\$4,000,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$640,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,360,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$4,000,000</b>

### Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	1,020	1,020
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>1,020</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	-	-	-	-	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	-	<b>\$4,000,000</b>	<b>\$4,000,000</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	\$3,950	-	\$3,916	-
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	-	-	-	-	\$3,921
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

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

9.6 Miles

**Parcels**

**Sign-up Criteria?**

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

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

The SWCDs will mail letters to eligible landowners utilizing RAQ scoring. Once the SWCD has an interested landowner the easement will be ranked using the integrative ranking process. The Kettle and Snake RIM Easement ranking sheet is attached as an example of the scoring sheet that will be used to rank RIM Easements. The SWCD then brings the parcel to the project technical committee for comments and recommendations. This committee reviews easement proposals and sorts through them for the parcels that provide the greatest public benefit possible. We always look for areas with high quality habitat, where a limited public investment can leverage a larger area of public benefit. The result is an increase in resiliency to the habitat base. The parcels that rank the highest tend to be adjacent to public lands, in a river corridor, or both.

# Riparian Habitat Protection in the Kettle and Snake River Watersheds

Phase 4- **\$4,000,000 request** May 2026



## Program Goals and Request

- This project is a partnership between BWSR and the Aitkin, Carlton, Kanabec, and Pine SWCDs, with the Pine SWCD acting as the project administrator.
- These watersheds need protection as most of the prime lakeshore is developed and continued as well as future development of river shoreland is expected.
- In phase 4, we will protect approximately 1,020 acres of high-quality private forests, wetlands, and shoreline habitat.
- Protection will be accomplished by utilizing habitat-focused RIM Easements that restrict development and land use conversion.
- RIM easement will permanently protect resources while private ownership is maintained.
  - Outcomes – this project will produce a significant and permanent conservation legacy for all Minnesotans.
  - Healthy terrestrial and aquatic habitat for fish, game, and other wildlife species.
  - Healthy watersheds and clean water that support healthy fish populations
  - Enhanced recreational opportunities for all Minnesotans.
- Between 2021 and 2026, there has been an increase in land protection in both the Kettle and Snake Watersheds.
  - The Kettle River Watershed increased from 56.27% protected in 2021 to 57.06% protected in 2026
  - The Snake River Watershed increased from 48.2% protected in 2021 to 48.84% protected in 2026
  - With the RIM program up and running efficiently, and contributing to protection acres, our goal is to reach 58% protection and 50% protection in the Kettle and Snake Watersheds, respectively, in the next 10 years.



**1** Example of Kettle River where biological communities are excellent. The fish scored far above the exceptional use threshold and the macroinvertebrates also scored beyond their exceptional use threshold here.



**2.** Lake Sturgeon, like those pictured here, are an ancient species, a living dinosaur that is slow to grow and reproduce. The Kettle is one of only 3 rivers where Lake Sturgeon survived ~100 years ago after intense overharvesting, damming of rivers, and pollution.

## Prioritizing

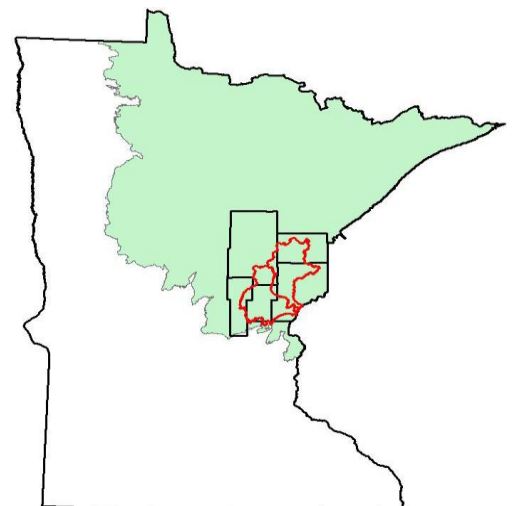
- Use RAQ methodology to prioritize parcels with multiple benefits overlapping – habitat, biodiversity, cost, water quality, and resiliency to create and protect extensive habitat complexes.
- This methodology achieves maximum wildlife habitat benefits and conservation benefits per dollar.
- Prioritizes parcels with the following characteristics:
  - Proximity to water
    - Adjacent to other protected lands
    - Currently intact and forested
- Additional screening Committee of State and local partners



**3** *The Solitary Sandpiper is a long-distance migrant, that winters in Central and South America and breeds in remote wetlands throughout the boreal forest region. It has been recorded breeding in the northern counties of Koochiching, Lake, Lake of the Woods, and St. Louis. Protected shoreline stopover sites that RIM easements create are critical areas for birds like these and more to use in the spring/fall during migration.*



**4** *A lake sturgeon caught while fishing on the Kettle River. They make a quality catch and release species for anglers. The Kettle and Snake Rivers are one of the few rivers in Minnesota with lake sturgeon.*



Targeted LSOHC section, watersheds, and counties

For more information, please contact Paul Swanson, District Manager at 320-216-4241 Pine County Soil and Water Conservation District • <https://www.pineswcd.com>