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## Memorandum

**To:** Mark Johnson, Executive Director, Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council  
**Cc:** Joe Pavelko, Assistant Director, Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council  
**From:** Erik Jones, BRRWD District Engineer  
**Subject:** South Branch Buffalo River Restoration work proposed on Outdoor Heritage Fund  
Funded Conservation Easement and Land Acquisition  
**Date:** May 11, 2021

Under ML 2018, Ch. 208, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 5(n), The Buffalo-Red River Watershed District (BRRWD) was appropriated \$1,195,000 for Buffalo River Watershed Stream Habitat Program – Phase 1.

The BRRWD identified a number of potential stream restoration locations in their Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) accomplishment plan but is currently focused on completing the restoration of 4.6 miles of perennial stream with associated riparian corridor habitat along the South Branch of the Buffalo River. The project will route water from Wilkin County Ditch No. 44 (formerly called Judicial Ditch 3) back into the abandoned South Branch channel. The South Branch channel will be restored using natural channel design principles. A sinuous riffle-pool natural channel design is proposed to recreate the aquatic habitat diversity that was lost in the straightened ditch. The portions of Wilkin County Ditch north of the restored river will be abandoned and filled once the restoration has been fully completed and well vegetated. The naturally stable restored channel will not only recreate lost habitat but will reduce the current erosion that is overloading downstream reaches of the South Branch. The project will essentially put the South Branch back into its historic location. The project will have significant habitat and some flood reduction benefits.

The first phase of river restoration is located in Sections 9, 10, and 11, T135N, R45W (Manston Township), Wilkin County. A map of the project reach is enclosed. The BRRWD has been working with a number of partners to get the project moving forward including Pheasants Forever, MN Prairie Chicken Society, the MN Department of Natural Resources, and the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). The river restoration project crosses one OHF-funded easement and one OHF-funded purchase. **We are looking for the Council's approval to move forward with the river restoration work across these tracts of land.**

As shown on the attached map, the plan will require stream restoration construction and maintenance over a Reinvest In Minnesota permanent conservation easement (RIM easement No. 84-03-15-03) which was acquired in 2015 by the MN BWSR located in Section 11, T135N, R45W (Manston Township), Wilkin County. A new meandering river channel with floodplain will be constructed on this easement.

In Section 10 of Manston Township, the old South Branch channel flows across 320 acres of land that

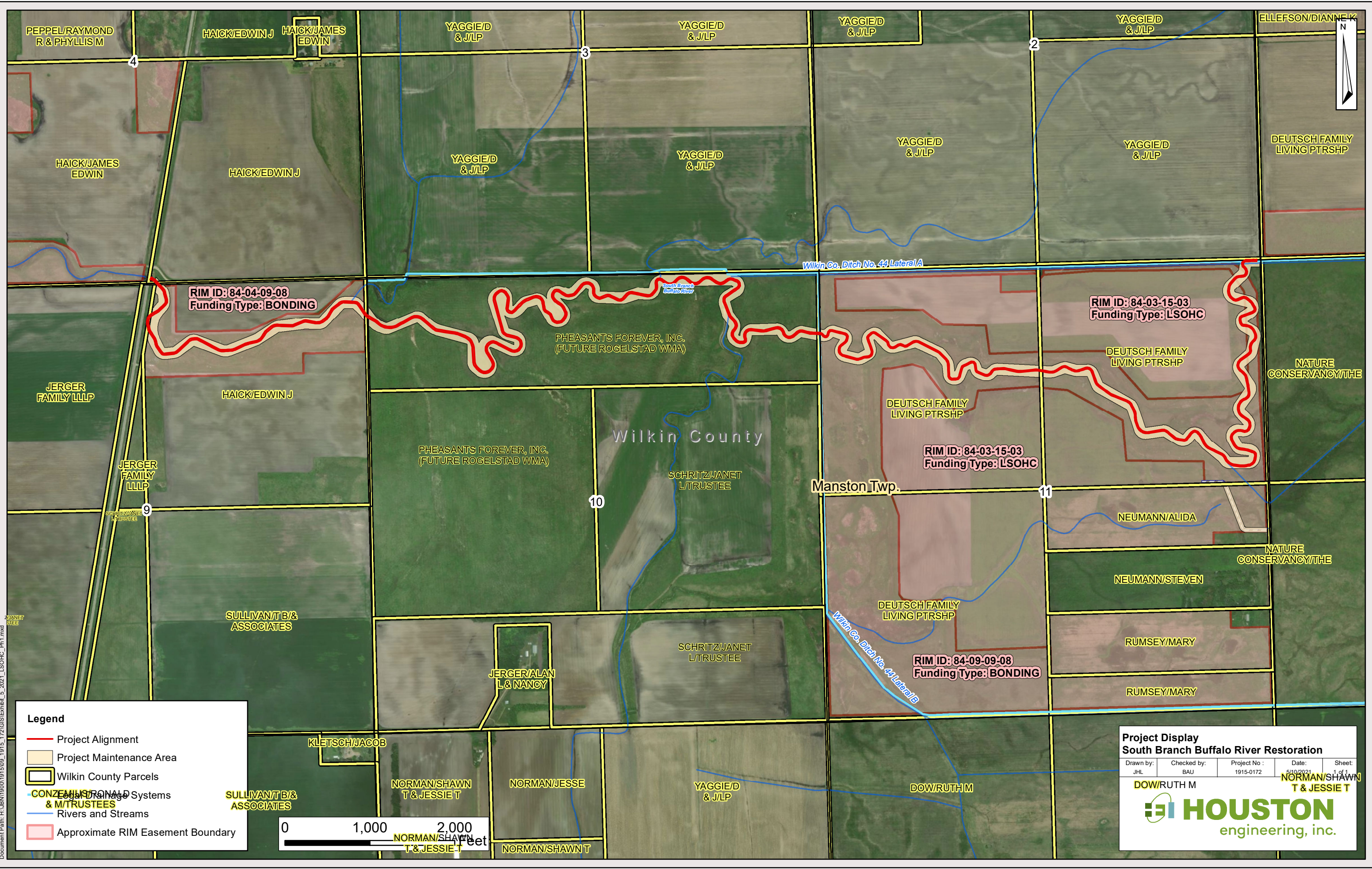
was recently purchased by Pheasants Forever with funding from OHF grant program plus additional funding from the BRRWD. As part of the overall restoration to occur on this tract of land, the BRRWD is working with their partners to restore the river in this location. The MN DNR has been involved in the river restoration for several years and is very supportive of the project. This PF-acquired property will ultimately be transferred to the MN DNR and will become the Rogelstad Wildlife Management Area. The BRRWD worked with the previous owners of this property to encourage the sale to Pheasants Forever.

The BRRWD with partner input has begun the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding between the partners for future access and maintenance of the restored river corridor. Maintenance along the restored river corridor will be completed by the BRRWD and at this time funded locally.

In the process of getting this project to actual restoration, the BRRWD is in the process of checking a number of items off their project development list. The BRRWD has developed construction plans. Permitting is largely complete for the first phase of construction (with the exception of the construction stormwater permit which will be applied for once we determined who will be our contractor). Later this summer, the BRRWD will hold a project hearing in accordance with MN Statutes 103E and 103D. The BRRWD is hoping to bid the river restoration project later this year with construction to begin late Summer or Fall 2021 with completion in 2022. Asking the Council for approval of the river restoration work on the previously acquired conservation easement and land purchase is a step in this process of moving forward implementing the project.

Thank you in advance for consideration of this request.





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**Legend**

Project Alignment

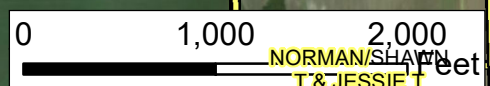
Project Maintenance Area

Wilkin County Parcels

Concealment Systems

Rivers and Streams

Approximate RIM Easement Boundary



**Project Display**  
**South Branch Buffalo River Restoration**

Drawn by: JHL	Checked by: BAU	Project No : 1915-0172	Date: 5/10/2021	Sheet: 1 of 1
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DOW/RUTH M

NORMAN/SHAWN T & JESSIE T

**HOUSTON**  
engineering, inc.

JANET STEE

