Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water - Phase VII

Laws of Minnesota 2017 Final Report

General Information

Date: 09/04/2025

Project Title: RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water - Phase VII

Funds Recommended: $5,333,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(g)

Appropriation Language: $5,333,000 in the first year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire permanent conservation easements and restore habitat under Minnesota Statutes, section 103F.515 in order to protect, restore, and enhance habitat by expanding the clean water fund riparian buffer program for at least equal wildlife benefits from buffers on private land. Of this amount, up to $858,000 is for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Mower, Redwood, Nobles, Brown, Nicollet, Lyon, Pope, Faribault, Cottonwood, Jackson, McLeod, Renville, Wilkin, Rock, Murray and Lac qui Parle.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

Metro / Urban

Southeast Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The Clean Water Fund (CWF) and Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) were used together to secure easements on buffer areas. 32 easements have been recorded for a total of 1,151.5 acres and are reported in the output tables for the final report (acre total does not include Clean Water Fund acres). The total acreage from both CWF and OHF sources for recorded easements is 2,358.6 acres. Only the ML 2017 OHF acres are being reported in this final report to be consistent with the approved accomplishment plan.

Process & Methods

The sites enrolled were generally farmed sites adjacent to a sensitive water feature or drained and farmed floodplain wetlands and associated upland habitat. Expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts were also enrolled. These sites originally offered limited ecological benefits. Through a combination of a scoring and ranking process and eligibility screening, each application was evaluated, with the applications that provided the greatest habitat and environmental benefits after restoration and protection being selected for funding. Factors considered during site selection included: linear corridor connectivity, length and width of the filter strip, adjacency to a public water, size of the site offered for enrollment, additional wildlife benefits, highly erodible land or partially highly erodible land, threatened and endangered species, and addressing water quality concerns.

MN Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is a voluntary, federal-state funded natural resource conservation program that uses a science based approach to target environmentally sensitive land in 54 Counties in southern and western Minnesota. This is accomplished through permanent protection by establishing conservation practices via payments to farmers and agricultural landowners. Landowners enrolled in the federally-funded CRP for 14-15 years; CRP is administered by the United States Department of Agriculture-Farm Service Agency (USDA-FSA). It uses agricultural land for conservation benefits, rather than farming or ranching; The same land was also enrolled into a state-funded perpetual conservation easement through the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program, administered by the Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). Private ownership continues and the land is permanently restored and enhanced for conservation benefits.

The RIM payment rates were consistent throughout most (2018 - 2022) of this appropriation. RIM payment rates were updated in 2023 and 2024 and generally increased both years. CRP annual rental rates fluctuated throughout this appropriation, so the state's contribution to the overall easement cost varied in reaction to the CRP annual rental rate.

The largest easement funded in this project was a floodplain easement in Redwood county (64-04-24-01). The total easement was 341.4 acres (153.5 acres funded with this project) and protects portions of the Cottonwood River and the floodplain areas. This easement is adjacent to a 128.2 acre RIM easement which is adjacent to three additional RIM easements (76 acres). 64-14-19-01 (funded with ML2016 RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water -

Phase VI), 64-12-17-01 (funded with ML2016 RIM Wetlands), and 64-92-01-01 are across the Cottonwood River. These easements total 777+ acres of habitat. Several other RIM easements and Two Rivers WMA (724.4 acres) are within 2 miles of this area, building on to the habitat complex and corridor connectivity along the Cottonwood River.

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

Project selection criteria for the buffer program is designed to compliment historic investments to protect wildlife habitat in the degraded prairie region of the state. Providing connections between and adjacent to these previous habitat investments is a key factor in realizing the best return on investment found in wildlife population models. Riparian areas are logical corridors found between these historical habitat areas. Buffers targeting expiring CRP and near existing complexes of greater than 200 acres were given preference.

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

BWSR uses the Ecological Ranking Tool, MN Nutrient Management Strategy, Watershed Restoration and Protection Strategy (WRAPS) for the clean water focus. Wildlife benefits are summarized from numerous models (e.g., Habitat and Population Evaluation Team; HAPET) and incorporated into our wildlife score sheet. Factors considered during site selection included: linear corridor connectivity, length and width of the filter strip, adjacency to a public water, size of the site offered for enrollment, additional wildlife benefits, highly erodible land or partially highly erodible land, threatened and endangered species, and addressing water quality concerns.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

RIM Buffers is a local-state-federal partnership delivered locally by Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and BWSR. The MN CREP partnership is possible through collaboration among many local, state and federal partners including the USDA-FSA, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Pheasants Forever (PF), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), and over 70 supporting organizations and agencies. This phase of the RIM Buffers Program was supported by Minnesota's Farm Bill Assistance Partnership which includes BWSR, NRCS, DNR, SWCDs, PF and local partners. The program was delivered locally through SWCDs and administered by BWSR.

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

The accomplishment plan for this program was drafted and approved prior to the beginning of MN CREP enrollment, which began in May 2017. The approved accomplishment plan had an amendment approved October 2021 for an extension of time due to the program receiving federal funds as well as a legislative extension in ML 2023. The number of anticipated easements, acres, and federal leverage through the USDA-FSA CRP included in the original and amended accomplishment plans were based on early projections that nearly half of the of the acres enrolled in the MN CREP were going to fall within the filter strip conservation practice (buffers). Pauses in the opportunity to enroll into CRP, thus pausing CREP enrollment, coupled with reduced CRP annual rental rates, resulted in all easement and stewardship funds not able to be utilized and anticipated easements and acres not able to be met.

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

Clean Water Fund

Other : USDA Farm Bill Program funding-CRP/MN CREP

How were the funds used to advance the program?

CWF dollars were used to support MN CREP buffer projects within the 54 county CREP area. In addition, federal funds were provided to landowners in the form of annual CRP payments, incentive payments, and cost share for practice installation per the CREP agreement.

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

BWSR is responsible for maintenance, inspection and monitoring of RIM easements. BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its easements. Easements are inspected each of the 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 of each site inspection conducted and report to BWSR. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when problems or potential violations are identified. Perpetual monitoring and stewardship costs were calculated at $6,500 per easement at the time this accomplishment plan was approved and funded. As of July 1, 2024, perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at $10,000 per easement. This value was based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship cover costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight and future enforcement if necessary.

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	$436,300	$271,500	$267,200	$436,300	-	-	$872,600	$267,200
Contracts	$549,400	$144,900	$122,300	$459,400	$40,800	Clean Water Fund	$1,008,800	$163,100
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	$3,468,900	$4,707,700	$4,636,900	$25,892,800	$13,817,400	Clean Water Fund, USDA-FSA-CRP	$29,361,700	$18,454,300
Easement Stewardship	$793,000	$123,500	$111,500	$793,000	$107,000	Clean Water Fund	$1,586,000	$218,500
Travel	$9,400	$9,400	$1,000	$9,400	-	-	$18,800	$1,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	$58,700	$58,700	$2,600	$58,700	-	-	$117,400	$2,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$13,300	$13,300	-	$13,300	-	-	$26,600	-
Supplies/Materials	$4,000	$4,000	$100	$4,000	-	-	$8,000	$100
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$5,333,000**	**$5,333,000**	**$5,141,600**	**$27,666,900**	**$13,965,200**	**-**	**$32,999,900**	**$19,106,800**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.25	5.0	$76,400	-	-	$76,400
Easement Processing	3.13	3.0	$125,700	-	-	$125,700
Engineering/Eco Services	0.26	3.0	$65,100	-	-	$65,100

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

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

The federal match is likely more than reported. The total leverage listed includes CWF, as well as all CRP contract payments but CRP practice payments may not be fully paid yet via FSA. If the acquisition line excluded CWF, title and practice payments, the federal to state match for CRP contract payments vs the RIM Buffers Phase VII portion of the easement payment to the landowner was approximately 2.01:1. The CWF match is also likely more than reported. We were unable to fully quantify the personnel CWF for this program, but know it exists.

Total Revenue: $0

Revenue Spent: $0

Revenue Balance: $0

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

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

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	2,053	1,152	0	0	0	0	2,053	1,152
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**0**	**0**	**2,053**	**1,152**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2,053**	**1,152**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	-	-	$430,100	-	-	-	-	-	$430,100	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	$4,902,900	$5,141,600	-	-	-	-	$4,902,900	$5,141,600
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**$5,333,000**	**$5,141,600**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$5,333,000**	**$5,141,600**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	205	21	205	0	205	0	1,438	1,131	0	0	2,053	1,152
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**205**	**21**	**205**	**0**	**205**	**0**	**1,438**	**1,131**	**0**	**0**	**2,053**	**1,152**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/ Urban (AP)	Metro/ Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	$43,000	-	$43,000	-	$43,000	-	$301,100	-	-	-	$430,100	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	$490,300	$93,700	$490,300	-	$490,300	-	$3,432,000	$5,047,900	-	-	$4,902,900	$5,141,600
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**$533,300**	**$93,700**	**$533,300**	**-**	**$533,300**	**-**	**$3,733,100**	**$5,047,900**	**-**	**-**	**$5,333,000**	**$5,141,600**

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

23 miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

The number of anticipated easements and acres included in the original and amended accomplishment plans were based on early projections that nearly half of the acres enrolled in the MN CREP were going to fall within the filter strip conservation practice (buffers). This projected enrollment of acres into the filter strip practice was not realized. Instead, we experienced a considerably higher interest by landowners in the wetland restoration practices during every batching period. The easements secured were significantly larger than what was assumed in development of the accomplishment plan. This resulted in unspent funds in stewardship and personnel.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced aspen parklands and riparian areas ~ *No easements were obtained in the forest-prairie transition region with this funding.*

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *Scoring and ranking was used to prioritize sites to achieve maximum environmental benefits. Adding buffers provides improved water quality and upland, as well as increased infiltration and decreased runoff. Easements and restoration of perennial native grasslands secured with this funding were focused on lands with expiring CRP contracts and cropland sites adjacent to critical water bodies. We expect healthier populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species with these complexes restored. Onsite inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years to ensure outcomes are maintained.*

Programs in prairie region:

Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected ~ *Scoring and ranking was used to prioritize sites to achieve maximum environmental benefits. Adding buffers provides improved water quality and upland, as well as increased infiltration and decreased runoff. Easements and restoration of perennial native grasslands secured with this funding were focused on lands with expiring CRP contracts and cropland sites adjacent to critical water bodies. We expect healthier populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species with these complexes restored. Onsite inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years to ensure outcomes are maintained.*

Programs in southeast forest region:

Rivers, streams, and surrounding vegetation provide corridors of habitat ~ *No easements were obtained in the southeast forest region with this funding.*

Parcels

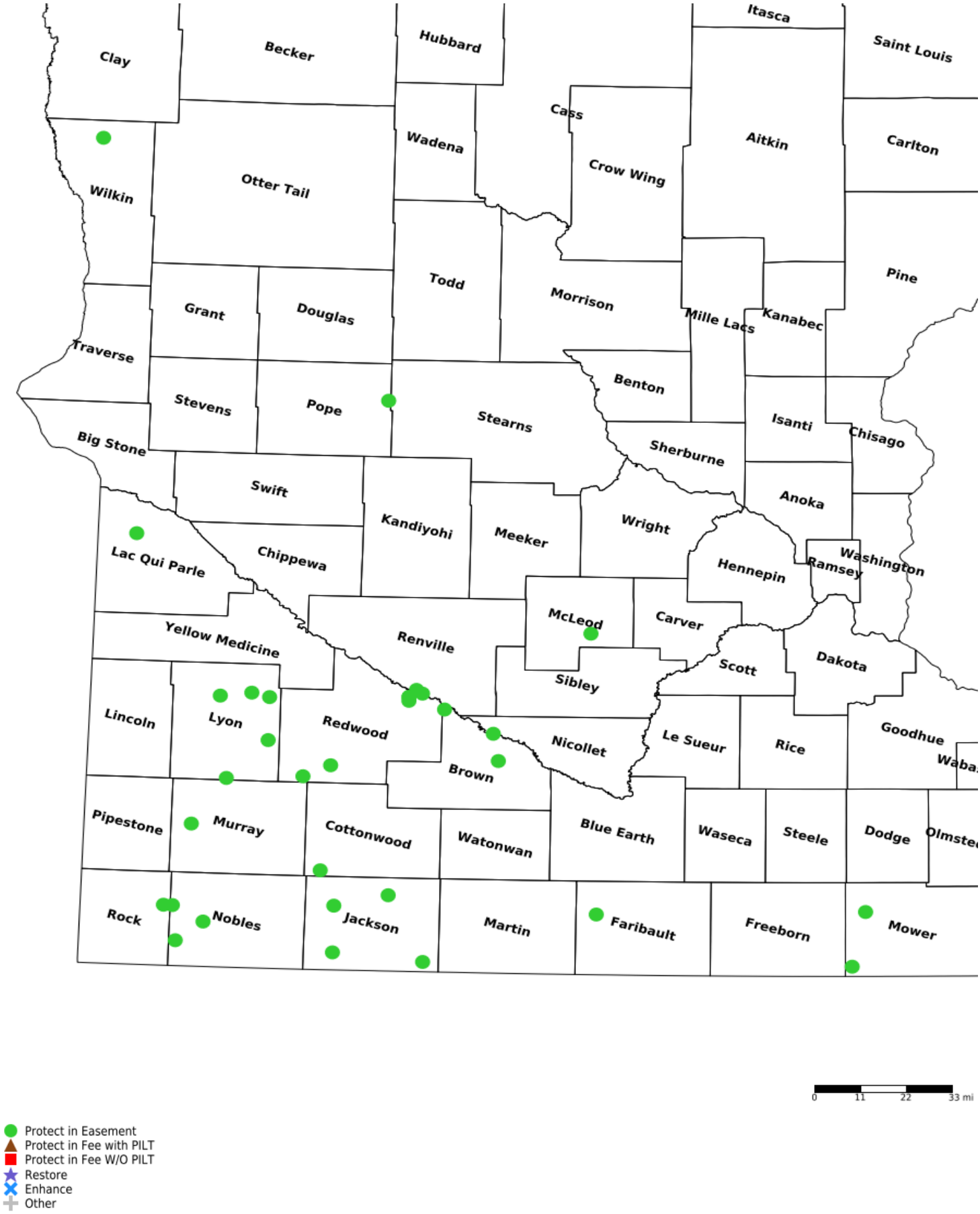
Sign-up Criteria?

Yes - Sign up criteria is attached

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
08-02-20-01- -	Brown	11233230	19	$105,536	No
08-03-21-01- -	Brown	11031231	11	$45,259	No
17-05-20-01- -	Cottonwood	10538227	115	$361,046	No
22-01-21-01- -	Faribault	10328214	2	$4,617	No
32-01-21-01- -	Jackson	10137207	15	$33,762	No
32-02-20-01- -	Jackson	10134221	10	$44,202	No
32-03-20-01- -	Jackson	10337207	20	$93,140	No
32-05-20-01- -	Jackson	10435230	13	$48,123	No
37-01-20-01- -	Lac qui Parle	11945222	69	$132,144	No
42-01-20-01- -	Lyon	10941231	32	$113,027	No
42-01-23-01- -	Lyon	11240215	9	$71,263	No
42-03-20-01- -	Lyon	11242214	14	$65,946	No
42-05-20-01- -	Lyon	11241212	53	$321,978	No
42-06-20-01- -	Lyon	11040210	38	$107,726	No
43-01-20-01- -	McLeod	11528216	21	$59,889	No
50-01-20-01- -	Mower	10318211	23	$61,495	No
50-01-23-01- -	Mower	10118220	28	$182,705	No
51-04-20-01- -	Murray	10743235	52	$85,953	No
52-05-20-01- -	Nicollet	11132225	64	$249,112	No
53-04-20-01- -	Nobles	10242205	52	$233,244	No
53-05-20-01- -	Nobles	10343218	65	$203,948	No
53-06-20-01- -	Nobles	10243232	30	$137,181	No
61-01-23-01- -	Pope	12536224	12	$37,229	No
64-04-24-01- -	Redwood	10938212	153	$996,172	No
64-05-20-01- -	Redwood	11235214	10	$53,326	No
64-09-20-01- -	Redwood	11235211	10	$48,415	No
64-10-20-01- -	Redwood	11235211	28	$107,795	No
64-11-20-01- -	Redwood	10939225	4	$15,753	No
65-11-20-01- -	Renville	11234205	15	$51,810	No
65-12-20-01- -	Renville	11334231	3	$10,249	No
67-02-20-01- -	Rock	10344214	41	$148,959	No
84-02-20-01- -	Wilkin	13646230	121	$144,540	No

Parcel Map


Clay
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Douglas
Mille Lacs
Kanabec
Traverse
Benton
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Pope
Stearns
Isanti
Chisago
Big Stone
Sherburne
Swift
Anoka
Kandiyohi
Meeker
Wright
Lac Qui Parle
Chippewa
Hennepin
Ramsey
Washington
McLeod
Carver
Yellow Medicine
Renville
Scott
Dakota
Sibley
Lincoln
Lyon
Redwood
Nicollet
Le Sueur
Rice
Goodhue
Brown
Pipestone
Murray
Cottonwood
Watonwan
Blue Earth
Waseca
Steele
Dodge
Rock
Nobles
Jackson
Martin
Faribault
Freeborn
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Protect in Easement
Protect in Fee with PILT
Protect in Fee W/O PILT
Restore
Enhance
Other