



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Buffalo River Watershed Stream Habitat Program – Phase 1

Laws of Minnesota 2018 Final Report

General Information

Date: 09/23/2025

Project Title: Buffalo River Watershed Stream Habitat Program – Phase 1

Funds Recommended: \$1,195,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2018, Ch. 208, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 5(n)

Appropriation Language: \$1,195,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Buffalo-Red River Watershed District to restore and enhance aquatic and upland habitat associated with the south branch of the Buffalo River and Whisky Creek in the Buffalo River watershed. A list of proposed restorations and enhancements must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Kristine Goeden

Title: Administrator

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Location Information

County Location(s): Wilkin.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Prairie

Activity types:

Restore

Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The project is complete, and all project goals have been met. Project construction of the South Branch Buffalo River has restored 4.6 miles of prairie stream by reconnecting the historic alignment of the South Branch of the Buffalo River, rerouting the river away from a straightened ditch section. The project also established 78 acres of enhanced habitat along the stream corridor. In addition, design downstream of this restored reach was completed to assist with future restoration efforts. The future restoration efforts will be completed as part of the ML 2022 and ML 2023 funding received by the BRRWD.

Process & Methods

The project identified the upper reach of the South Branch Buffalo River (also known as Wilkin County Ditch No. 44) as the target area for implementation based on its potential for restoration and enhanced riparian buffers. Through the project reach, buffer widths vary from 140 feet to 150 feet. This area was also marked as desirable given its proximity to three WMAs; Rothsay WMA (2 miles east), Manston WMA (2 miles southwest) and Atherton WMA (1 mile north). In addition, the project area also flows through existing RIM land. Where RIM land was not currently present, the project helped establish an additional WMA; the Rogelstad WMA, providing a corridor of connection for the upstream RIM lands and the existing downstream RIM lands. The project began construction in 2022 and was completed in 2025.

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?

This project restored 4.6 miles of stream and 78 acres of prairie stream riparian habitat for associated fish and wildlife communities. This project benefits mussel and insect populations along and downstream of the South Branch Buffalo River by improving water quality. Pollinator seed mixes were used along the habitat corridor. The project provides a continuous wildlife corridor through existing RIM lands and the newly established Rogelstad WMA. Native mussel beds are located the lowest reach of the South Branch Buffalo River and the Red River which benefits from a reduced sediment loading to the creek as a result of the project. Acquisition and restoration of the stream channel corridor improved habitat for Channel Catfish, Northern Pike, and another 70+ fish species present in Red River Basin. Some species of fish also benefit from the project as a result of a larger quantity of better-quality spawning habitat.

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.

Reference stream reaches were used to set the geometry for the South Branch Buffalo River Channel Restoration based on current and historic aerial photography as well as through discussions with the MN Department of Natural Resources. Geometry used is characteristic of Rosgen E-channels in low gradient streams. Stream channel survey work was leveraged to complete hydraulic modeling. The Minnesota Prairie Plan also lists restoration of channelized prairie river segments and cultivation of lands immediately adjacent to streams and ditches as "critical challenges". In addition, the BRRWD completed GIS-based terrain analysis to identify, prioritize, and target conservation best management practices in the contributing agricultural watershed. Many best management practices have been implemented.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

The project has received significant support from landowners. The landowners have expressed gratitude for the channel restoration work. Other project partners and supporters included the MN Department of Natural Resources, the Wilkin Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). BWSR and the BRRWD partnered on the land acquisition through the establishment of an Memorandum of Understanding that allowed the use of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) lands for restoration. In addition, Pheasants Forever served as a partner to help secure the land which ultimately became the Rogelstad WMA.

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

The major challenge was working with landowners in the middle of the project (land that eventually began the Rogelstad WMA). The land had been going through probate after the death of the matriarch, and it took time for everything to get sorted out from the legal standpoint. Ultimately, through the legal process played out and the land was acquired by Pheasants Forever (with assistance from the BRRWD) and then transferred to the MN Department of Natural Resources as the establishment of the Rogelstad WMA.

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

N/A

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

The BRRWD has set up a Water Management District (local tax levy) that will provide long-term funding for this project. The Water Management District will provide an annual revenue stream for maintenance. The BRRWD has this assessment process up and running at this time. Post-project monitoring will be conducted by the BRRWD as well as the Wilkin SWCD.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Annual	Watershed District - Local Tax Levy	Monitoring and Maintenance of the stream restoration	Make repairs as needed (identify outside funding with help from project partners in addition to locally raised funds)	-
Annual	Watershed District - Local Tax Levy	Monitoring and Maintenance of the habitat corridor	Manage vegetation as needed (identify outside funding with help from project partners in addition to locally raised funds)	-

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contracts	\$1,100,000	\$822,500	\$822,500	-	-	-	\$1,100,000	\$822,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	\$300,000	-	CREP, RIM, Local Tax Levy	\$300,000	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$95,000	\$372,500	\$372,500	\$55,000	\$73,200	Local Tax Levy	\$150,000	\$445,700
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,195,000	\$1,195,000	\$1,195,000	\$355,000	\$73,200	-	\$1,550,000	\$1,268,200

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

Bids received for project construction were considerably under budget, which allowed all planned restoration work to be completed. The under-budget bids also allowed for Contract dollars to be shifted to Professional Services, which allowed additional design work to be completed downstream of the project. This was a major win for the project, as it allowed the BRRWD to set up future phases of restoration for successful implementation.

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	36	36	36	36
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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	42	42	0	0	0	0	42	42
Total	0	0	42	42	0	0	36	36	78	78

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,105,000	\$1,105,000	\$1,105,000	\$1,105,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	\$90,000	\$90,000	-	-	-	-	\$90,000	\$90,000
Total	-	-	\$90,000	\$90,000	-	-	\$1,105,000	\$1,105,000	\$1,195,000	\$1,195,000

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	36	36	0	0	36	36
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	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	42	42	0	0	42	42
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	78	78	0	0	78	78

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,105,000	\$1,105,000	-	-	\$1,105,000	\$1,105,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$90,000	\$90,000	-	-	\$90,000	\$90,000
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,195,000	\$1,195,000	-	-	\$1,195,000	\$1,195,000

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

4.6 miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

Original AP included 4.6 miles of restoration. The project was completed as planned, and all project goals were achieved.

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *The outcome of the South Branch Buffalo River Restoration is a stable prairie stream with an expanded and enhanced permanently protected habitat corridor. This project provides significantly improved terrestrial and aquatic habitat to fish and wildlife using the stream corridor. Improvements in water quality are also expected. Measurement will be through biological assessment by MPCA at sites along the South Branch Buffalo River as part of their Intensive Watershed Monitoring Program which will assess after project biology. In addition, the BRRWD monitors water quality trends on the South Branch Buffalo River through their Regional Assessment Location (RAL) system.*

Parcels

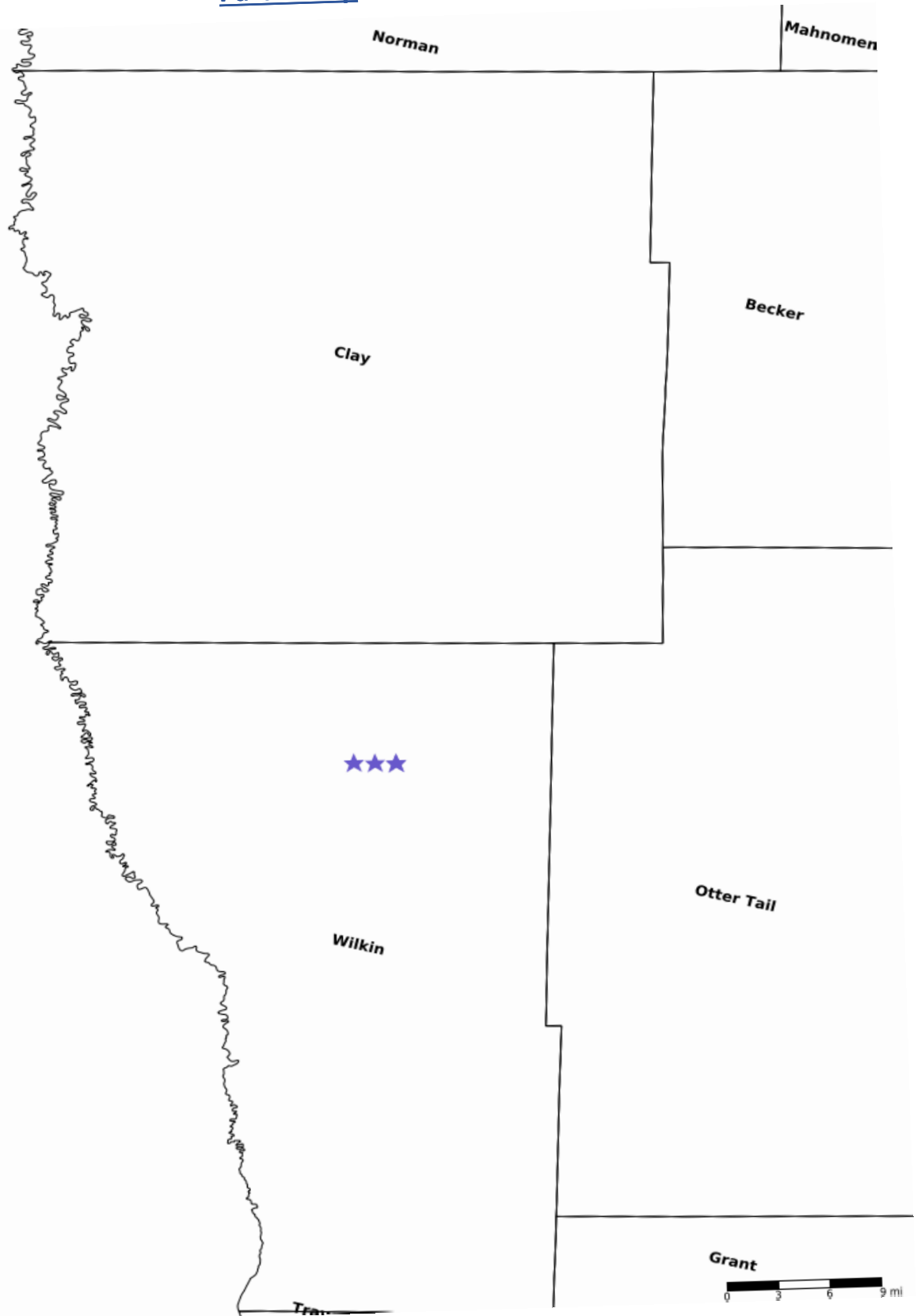
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
12-009-0100	Wilkin	13546209	12	\$183,800	Yes	NE 1/4
12-010-0100	Wilkin	13546210	32	\$490,300	Yes	N 1/2 of N 1/2
12-011-0100	Wilkin	13546211	22	\$337,100	Yes	NE 1/4
12-011-0200	Wilkin	13546211	12	\$183,800	Yes	NW 1/4

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- ✚ Other