

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

2012 Accomplishment Plan

November 4, 2010

Program Title: MN buffers for Wildlife & Water (P-03)

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Funds Recommended: \$2,249,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x): *(to be completed when signed by Governor)*

Abstract

An initiative that bridges the resource benefits of the Outdoor Heritage Fund (LSOHC) and Clean Water Fund (CWF) through enrolling 1156 acres of enhanced wildlife and water quality buffers in partnership with private landowners.

Program Narrative

Loss and fragmentation of grassland habitat is the greatest threat to grassland wildlife in Minnesota. This partnership program permanently adds grassland habitat and reduces fragmentation by combining the efforts of outdoor heritage and clean water. Building upon the 100-foot RIM buffers funded through the Clean Water Fund, we propose to add additional buffer width (up to NRCS 393 standard for CRP buffers) to make clean water buffers more attractive and productive for wildlife. Furthermore, these wildlife buffers will be targeted for landscapes with existing permanently protected habitat to accelerate progress toward achieving minimum thresholds of grass habitat required by waterfowl and other wildlife of conservation need. We propose that LSOHC fund \$2.249 million in perpetual state RIM buffer easements prioritized to build upon the 100' RIM buffers funded through the Clean Water Fund. This program brings together two key components of the dedicated funding amendment that Minnesotans voted on in

2008 – clean water and wildlife. Where buffers for wildlife habitat are a priority and clean water funds not available, stand alone wildlife buffers would be made available to private landowners through this program.

Additionally, this program takes full advantage of USDA conservation programs for riparian corridors like the Conservation Reserve Program and Wetlands Reserve Enhancement Program to deliver a sound option for private landowners to provide much needed grassland nesting habitat along with water quality protection of rivers, ditches, lakes, and streams.

Design and Scope of Work

Minnesota has an estimated 21,500 miles of open drainage ditch and 170,338 miles (each side) of riparian areas within 67 counties that have at least 30% of their land base in cropland (see

[://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/easements/Cultivated Riparian Zone Analysis](http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/easements/Cultivated_Riparian_Zone_Analysis)).

Approximately 57,828 acres or 1/3 of this riparian area already contains a buffer of at least 50 feet. The remaining 112,510 miles are likely in need of buffering. Adding a 100' buffer for water quality (under USDA's Filter Strip Conservation Practice Standard 393) would result in 1.3 million acres. And, extending those buffers out another 100' for wildlife and long term buffer viability would double that amount for a total of 2.6m acres. It would be our long-term goal to enroll 25% (28,127 mi. or 650,000ac.) of these miles in permanent conservation easements for water quality and wildlife habitat. In addition, Minnesota currently has just over 200,000 acres of Conservation Reserve Program in buffer practices at various stages of their 10-15 year contracts, some soon to expire. The buffer initiative would compliment other programs, both existing and yet to be determined over the next 25 years.

Planning

Restoration of grass habitat is cited as a top priority for the *Long Range Plan for the Ring-neck Pheasant in Minnesota*, the *Long Range Duck Recovery Plan*, and *Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy*. Many species of conservation need benefit from large habitat patches and some require a minimum threshold of grassland habitat within a landscape. This program will contribute toward the development of new habitat complexes and enhancement of existing habitats by expanding the size of narrow corridors and connecting them to large, permanently protected grasslands, wetlands, and shallow lakes. For example, placing 200-foot grassland buffers (400 feet wide when buffered on both sides of a ditch or stream) on the landscape will achieve the following recommendations identified in the *Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan – Final Plan, Phase II*. 1. Land protection (1156

acres) 2. Protect critical shore lands of streams and lakes (30-60 miles of shoreline permanently protected in grass) 4. Restore and Protect Shallow Lakes (prioritized for protection) 5. Restore land, wetlands, and wetland-associated watersheds 7. Keep water on the landscape (1156 acres of grass along streams, rivers, and ditches.

Agricultural expansion, biofuel production, and expiration of Conservation Reserve Program contracts have recently accelerated the loss of grass habitat in Minnesota. This program will use RIM and leverage USDA conservation programs (e.g. CRP & WREP) to deliver multiple enduring conservation benefits of clean water and wildlife habitat. In addition, buffers for wildlife under this program will be prioritized based upon their ability to enhance public land habitats (e.g., WPA's or WMA's), protect expiring CRP lands, add key nesting cover to wetland/upland complexes, provide maximum water quality benefits, and enhance shallow lakes. A scoring mechanism will be employed to fund high quality wildlife buffer enhancements and target the funds to deliver the aforementioned priorities.

Delivery of this program will be under a coordinated approach that brings together Minnesota BWSR, Minnesota DNR, local SWCD's, Pheasants Forever and other key conservation partners interested in private land conservation. This program balances the need for quality wildlife habitat, water quality, and what works for farmers and landowners within their operation.

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

There is no direct relationship to other constitutional funds at this time. Indirectly, the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership with BWSR, DNR, PF, and SWCDs pays for SWCDs to hire technicians to promote conservation provisions of the Federal Farm Bill and other conservation programs to private landowners. The Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund provided \$1.0 million in funding via an LCCMR recommendation beginning July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2011.

Relationship to Current Organizational Budget

This program accelerates permanent protection of buffers for wildlife and water quality. This opportunity would not occur without support from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (& builds upon the activities of the Clean Water Fund). This proposal is intended to be additive to any traditional sources of RIM funding. The RIM Reserve program was established in state statute in 1986 to restore and set aside marginal land principally for increasing fish and wildlife populations. Past funding via bonding varies, ranging from \$0 to a one-time maximum of \$52M for Minnesota River CREP. BWSR last received bonding funds in 2008. The RIM Reserve program is not funded by general revenue and is not part of BWSR's agency base budget.

Sustainability and Maintenance

All easements secured under this project will be permanent in nature. Under the terms of the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easement program, landowners are required to

maintain compliance with the easement and manage the conservation cover. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of the easement. Initial costs to establish conservation cover are covered under this project as part of the easement with additional assistance from USDA-CRP program. These additional buffer easements will be managed along with the other 5,000 conservation easements within the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR). Currently BWSR and Soil and Water Conservation Districts have a process for easement tracking, quality assurance, and compliance. Easements are reviewed in the field annually for each of the first 5 years and then every 3rd year after that. Annual costs for compliance are approximately \$100/easement. It is estimated that this project will result in 140 easements with an annual cost of \$14,000.

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Milestone	Date
Design Wildlife Buffer Evaluation Worksheet	Complete worksheet	July 2011
Obtain habitat buffer proposals from willing private landowners	Conduct competitive sign-up for habitat buffers program	Before 12/1/2011
Score proposals and bring project list before LSOHC	Obtain easement project list approval from LSOHC	Winter 2012
Easement development & recording	2,857 Acres of habitat buffers enrolled	Ongoing after approval in 2012

Attachments (*on spreadsheet workbook – 3 separate tabs*):

- A. Budget
- B. Proposed Outcome Tables
- C. Parcel List

No Map is needed for the accomplishment plan

Attachment A. Budget Spreadsheet

[Link Here to definitions of the budget items below.](#)

Total Amount of Request \$ 2,249,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

Personnel

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
<i>Manager of Programs</i>	0.05	3	\$ 19,125			\$ 19,125
<i>Admin/IT/Database</i>	0.05	3	\$ 14,400			\$ 14,400
<i>Easement Processor position 4</i>	x.5	2.5	\$ 80,666			\$ 80,666
<i>position 5</i>						\$ -
<i>position 6</i>						\$ -
<i>position 7</i>						\$ -
Total			\$ 114,191	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 114,191

Budget and Cash Leverage *(All your LSOHC Request Funds must be direct to and necessary for program outcomes.)*

Please describe how you intend to spend the requested funds.

Budget Item	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel - auto entered from above	\$ 114,191	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 114,191
Contracts	\$ 110,709			\$ 110,709
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT (breakout in table 6 & 7)				\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT (breakout in table 6 & 7)				\$ -
Easement Acquisition	\$ 2,024,100	\$ 2,000,000	USDA-CRP	\$ 4,024,100
Easement Stewardship				\$ -
Travel (in-state)				\$ -
Professional Services				\$ -
DNR Land Acquisition Costs				\$ -
Other				\$ -
Capital Equipment				\$ -
Other Equipment/Tools				\$ -
Supplies/Materials				\$ -
	\$ 2,249,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ -	\$ 4,249,000

Only enter data in the outlined cells

Table 1 and Table 3 column totals should be the same AND Table 2 and Table 4 column totals should be the same

If your project has lakes or shoreline miles instead of land acres, convert miles to acres for Tables 1 and 3 using the following conversion:

Lakeshore = 6 acres per lakeshore mile / Stream & River Shore = 12 acres per linear mile, if both sides

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Describe the scope of the project in acres (use conversion above if needed)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					0
Protect		1,156			1156
Enhance					0
Total	0	1156	0	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column) 1156 *These two cells should be the same figure.*
 Total Acres (sum of Total row) 1156

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					\$ -
Protect		\$ 2,249,000			\$ 2,249,000
Enhance					\$ -
Total	\$ -	\$ 2,249,000	\$ -	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column) \$ 2,249,000 *These two cells should be the same figure.*
 Total Dollars (sum of Total row) \$ 2,249,000

Check to make sure this amount is the same as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						0
Protect				1,156		1156
Enhance						0
Total	0	0	0	1156	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column) 1156 *These three cells should be the same figure.*
 Total Acres (sum of Total row) 1156
 Total Acres from Table 1. 1156

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						\$ -
Protect				\$ 2,249,000		\$ 2,249,000
Enhance						\$ -
Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 2,249,000	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

\$ 2,249,000

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

\$ 2,249,000

Check to make sure these amounts are the same as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

miles of Lakes / Streams / Rivers Shoreline

Table 6. Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in acres)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					0
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability					0
Permanent Easement NO State PILT Liability		1156			1156

Table 7. Estimated Value of Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in dollars)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					\$ -
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability					\$ -
Permanent Easement NO State PILT Liability		\$ 2,249,000			\$ 2,249,000

Program Title: Minnesota Buffers for Wildlife and Water

County	Township	Range	Direction	Section	TRDS	# of acres	Budgetary Estimate (includes administrative, restoration or other related costs and do not include matching money contributed or earned by the transaction)	Description	Activity R=Restore P=Protect E=Enhance	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)
Parcel Name											
A project list will be provided to LSOHC for approval after competitive sign-up period						1156	\$2,249,000	Perpetual RIM Easements	P	N	N