

### **Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council**

RIM Grassland Reserve Phase VI ML 2025 Request for Funding

#### **General Information**

Date: 06/03/2024

Proposal Title: RIM Grassland Reserve Phase VI

Funds Requested: \$8,000,000

**Confirmed Leverage Funds: -**

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

#### **Manager Information**

Manager's Name: John Voz Title: RIM Easement Programs Coordinator Organization: MNBWSR Address: 1723 North Tower Road City: Detroit Lakes, MN 56501 Email: john.voz@state.mn.us Office Number: 218-846-8426 Mobile Number: 218-849-1603 Fax Number: Website: http://www.bwsr.state.mn.us/index.html

#### **Location Information**

County Location(s):

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

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

#### Activity types:

• Protect in Easement

#### Priority resources addressed by activity:

• Prairie

#### **Narrative**

#### Abstract

Using the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program, this project addresses the potential loss of grassland habitats from conversion to cropland and accelerates grassland protection efforts not covered by other programs. Working in coordination with 11 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), and 64 local Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) this proposal will enroll 1260 RIM acres (approximately 18 easements), focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes. This proposal focus's on protecting non-crop moderate to high quality remnant prairies and associated buffer that can be improved through habitat management.

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

Since 2019 approximately 2,890 acres and 43 individual easements have been permanently protected under this program. That's 2,890 acres that would have not been protected under the MNDNR Native Prairie Program. In 2023 throughout Minnesota an additional 65,999 acres of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) has expired. Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of prairie. Today less than two percent remains. The few acres of native remnant prairie that remain were once thought of as too rocky or wet for row crops , but not anymore. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland wildlife populations, including pollinator species.

Past LSOHC funding has allowed BWSR to deliver this program to private landowners and permanently protect remnant prairies which are not covered by other programs. It is vital that we continue this effort as landowners are beginning to learn about this program.

This proposal, working in partnership with 11 Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs) and 64 local SWCD's focuses on protecting current grasslands and buffering native prairie that are within wildlife habitat complexes not covered by other conservation programs. There are programs for native prairie such as MNDNR Native Prairie Bank, Federal Native Tallgrass Prairie (NTP) and programs for cropland, but there are no programs for moderate quality prairies that have the potential for higher quality through protection and management. As Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and LTTs review landowner applications for possible enrollment, they may find additional tracts that are native prairie. With this project, native prairie may include CRP or cropland areas to square up parcels. In cases where larger tracts are identified, they will contact the DNR's Biological Survey and Native Prairie Bank staff for a more formal botanical survey of the site.

The loss of native prairie and grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing northwest, western and southern Minnesota. This proposal aims to protect 980 acres of prairie and grassland habitat by coordinating and accelerating the enrollment in Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) through private land easements. This level of acceleration is needed to address today's rapid loss of grassland habitat and meet the goals set forth in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

A portion of this funding request will be used to contract with the Conservation Corp of Minnesota (CMMI) to encourage young adults from diverse backgrounds to become engaged in conservation, involved in community, and prepare for future employment.

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

Minnesota grasslands provide important habitat for a wide range of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Consistent with guidance in The Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan and Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, strategic site selection will be conducted as well as efforts to minimize landscape stressors and plan for plant diversity and long-term resiliency of project sites. More than 150 SGCN use grasslands for breeding, migration, and/or foraging.

Target Species include: Greater prairie chicken, Eastern meadowlark, Western meadowlark, Grasshopper sparrow, Northern pintail, Northern black duck, Burrowing owl, Chestnut collared longspur, Bobolink, Wilson's phalarope, Sedge wren, Upland Sandpiper, Plains hog-nosed snake, American badger, Prairie vole, Plains pocket mouse, Eastern spotted skunk, Dakota skipper, Monarch butterfly, Poweshiek skipper, Regal fritillary and Rusty Patch bumble bees.

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

Without permanent protection options, these remnant and existing grasslands are under great threat of conversion to row crops. Under the strategic direction provided by the Minnesota Prairie Plan, and recognizing that a new wave of grassland loss is upon us, the RIM program is realigning its targets and priorities. This realignment will ensure that a gap does not exist between programs, and that a private landowner interested in permanent protection of their grassland or prairie has viable options. Funding from this proposal will provide an acceleration of targeted acres enrolled.

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

Native prairies are often part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and wetlands. These complexes will be the top priority for this project using the MN Prairie Plan framework. A preference will be given to protecting expiring CRP with enrollment of adjacent remnant prairie as identified in the MN County Biological Survey. This focus on expiring CRP will fill a niche that cannot otherwise be filled by the Native Prairie Bank program. LTTs will help guide restoration strategies such as prescribed burning, conservation grazing and woody tree removal to be used to restore the conditions of moderate quality prairies. In addition, the LTTs will identify remnant prairie sites that are not listed on the MN County Biological Survey and update the survey accordingly. By utilizing the LTTs, parcels will be targeted for protection and resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.

Recent genetic diversity research was conducted on Greater Prairie Chickens by the MNDNR to understand how birds move through the landscape using a new approach called landscape genetics. It found that prairie chickens in the northern part of the sampled area, near Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, are not very connected to prairie chickens in Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties to the south. Connecting these areas with high quality habitat would allow more genetic mixing, potentially reduce stress and mortality and eliminate the need for birds to travel long distances to find suitable habitat. This "follow the chicken" approach has worked remarkably well in identifying, targeting and protecting areas that have positive impacts on a wide range of species of greatest conservation need.

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

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

# Explain how this proposal will uniquely address habitat resilience to climate change and its anticipated effects on game, fish & wildlife species utilizing the protected or restored/enhanced habitat this proposal targets.

This proposal directly relates to four priority actions in the MN Climate Action Framework: 1) accelerate forest, grassland and wetland restoration, 2) Store more carbon, 3) restore and expand habitat complexes and corridors, and 4). increase water storage and infiltration and manage drainage. Restoring and protecting habitat with RIM easements.

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

#### **Forest / Prairie Transition**

• Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

#### Prairie

• Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

# Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife, and if not permanent outcomes, why it is important to undertake at this time:

This program will focus on key parcels in need of protection and restoration using a ranking process and input from LTTs. Without permanent protection options, these grasslands are under great threat of conversion to row crops. This project focuses on LSOHC priorities by ensuring that key core parcels are protected while increasing participation of private landowners in habitat projects, and by restoring and enhancing grassland habitats.

#### **Outcomes**

#### **Programs in forest-prairie transition region:**

• Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and non game species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.

#### Programs in prairie region:

• Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and non-game species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.

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

• Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund

# 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?

Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement into perpetuity. BWSR partners with local SWCDs carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in 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 report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs are calculated at \$10,000 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship covers costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

#### **Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2023-Ongoing	Landowners	Maintain compliance	-	-
	Responsibility	with easement terms		
2023-Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Inspection every year	Corrective actions on	Easement action taken
	_	for the fist 5 years;	any violations	by MN General Office
		then every 3rd year		

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

A portion of this funding request will be used to contract with the Conservation Corp of Minnesota (CMMI) to encourage young adults from diverse backgrounds to become engaged in conservation, involved in community, and prepare for future employment. See attached CCMI letter of support.

#### **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? Yes

## Explain what will be planted and include the maximum percentage of any acquired parcel that would be planted into foodplots by the proposer or the end owner of the property:

In certain circumstances food plots for wildlife are an allowable use on RIM easements and must be part of an approved Conservation Plan. Under this proposal no food plots would be allowed on remnant prairies which have never been cultivated (only areas that buffer remnant prairies). Food plots on narrow buffers, steep slopes and wet areas are not allowed but may be offered on any potential surrounding grass buffer

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on prior cultivated lands. RIM policy limits food plots to 10% of the total easement area or 5 acres whichever is smaller. There is no cost share for establishment of food plots and upon termination and/or abandonment the landowners must reestablish the vegetation as prescribed in the Conservation Plan at their own expense. Food plots are a rarely selected option by landowners, to date only 2.2% of RIM easements have food plots.

#### 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?

No

#### Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

Yes

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

Existing trails and roads are identified during the easement acquisition process and are often excluded from the easement area if they serve no purpose to easement maintenance, monitoring or enforcement. Some roads and trails, such as agricultural field accesses, are allowed to remain.

#### Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?

Yes

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

The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program which has over 7,450 individual easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first five years and then every third year after that. BWSR, in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

### Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

Yes

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

Though uncommon, there could be a potential for new minimal use trails, if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (e.g. firebreaks, berm maintenance, etc). Unauthorized trails identified during the monitoring process are in violation of the easement.

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

The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program which has over 7,450 individual easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first 5 years and then every 3rd year after that. BWSR, in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A

conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

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

Yes

#### **Other OHF Appropriation Awards**

#### Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC in the past?

Yes

#### Are any of these past appropriations still OPEN?

Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2024	\$2,747,000	-	-	-
2022	\$4,536,000	\$2,479,900	\$2,056,100	54.67%
2021	\$4,354,000	\$4,060,600	\$293,400	93.26%
2020	\$3,233,000	\$3,082,700	\$150,300	95.35%
2019	\$2,276,000	\$2,066,700	\$209,300	90.8%
Totals	\$17,146,000	\$11,689,900	\$5,456,100	68.18%

#### **Timeline**

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Enroll 1260 acres into the RIM private land easement	June 30th, 2029
program	
Final Report Submitted	November 1st, 2030

#### **Budget**

#### **Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$253,700	-	-	\$253,700
Contracts	\$56,300	-	-	\$56,300
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$7,342,800	-	-	\$7,342,800
Easement Stewardship	\$180,000	-	-	\$180,000
Travel	\$14,000	-	-	\$14,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$127,200	-	-	\$127,200
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$20,000	-	-	\$20,000
Supplies/Materials	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$8,000,000	-	-	\$8,000,000

#### Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Easement Staff	0.42	4.0	\$253,700	-	-	\$253,700

Amount of Request: \$8,000,000 Amount of Leverage: -Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0% DSS + Personnel: \$380,900 As a % of the total request: 4.76% Easement Stewardship: \$180,000 As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 2.45%

**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 30% reduction in funding would reduce outputs proportionally. Program management costs are the exception, due to program management & oversight remaining consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

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

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

#### If the project received 30% 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. Program management costs are the exception, due to program management & oversight remaining consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

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

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

#### 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?

This is Phase VI of an ongoing program and these funds will pay for staff time spent on new easements associated with this phase.

#### Contracts

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

The contract line includes costs covered under the SWCD MJPA, \$2000 for staff time per easement acquisition.

#### **Easement Stewardship**

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

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs have been calculated at \$10,000 per easement and 18 easements are anticipated to be completed. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship cover costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

#### 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?

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BWSR calculates and periodically 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.

#### **Other Equipment/Tools**

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

None anticipated at this time but we keep a small amount in this budget line for contingencies.

#### **Federal Funds**

**Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?** No

#### **Output Tables**

#### Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Туре	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	0	1,260	0	0	1,260
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1,260	0	0	1,260

#### How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie? (Table 1b)

Туре	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	1,260
Enhance	0
Total	1,260

#### Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Туре	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	-	\$8,000,000	-	-	\$8,000,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$8,000,000	-	-	\$8,000,000

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

Туре	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	315	0	945	0	1,260
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	315	0	945	0	1,260

#### **Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)**

Туре	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	-	\$2,000,000	-	\$6,000,000	-	\$8,000,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$2,000,000	-	\$6,000,000	-	\$8,000,000

#### Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Туре	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$6,349	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

#### Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Туре	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	-	\$6,349	-	\$6,349	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

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

#### **Parcels**

#### Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

Through a combination of eligibility screening and a scoring and ranking process, each application will be assessed on its potential

to restore functions and values (optimize wildlife habitat benefits) and to provide other landscape benefits. Each site is

considered on its benefits to the surrounding landscape, as well as the site-specific features which highlight the benefits of selection

for permanent protection. During the application process, a review of adjacent permanent habitat and easement size is conducted to indicate a site's usefulness as a corridor or extension to an existing habitat complex.

### BOARD OF WATER AND SOIL RESOURCES



#### May 24, 2024

### **RIM Grassland Reserve Phase VI**

#### **Grasslands at risk**

- In 2023 over 65,999 acres of CRP have expired in Minnesota, including some remnant native habitats.
- Loss of native prairies has significant implications for over 150 Species of Greatest Conservation Need that rely on grasslands such as greater prairie chickens, meadowlarks, northern pintails, and many butterfly species.
- Since 2019 approximately 2,890 acres and 43 individual easements have been permanently protected under this program. That's 2,890 acres that would have <u>not</u> been protected under the MN DNR Native Prairie Program.



#### **Project request**

\$8 million for conservation easements providing permanent protection of 1,260 high-priority grassland acres

#### **Project benefits**

This program is structured to maximize landscape and other benefits including:



- Benefiting a wide range of grassland-dependent wildlife including endangered birds and butterflies
- Helping to protect the genetic diversity of grassland plants and animals
- Using the expertise of 11 Minnesota Prairie Plan Local Technical Teams
- Creating and sustaining Minnesota jobs

#### How this program will work

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) is Minnesota's primary private lands easement program, focused on restoring wetland and upland habitats.

- Protecting and restoring remnant native prairie as part of habitat complexes (focus on Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan identified landscapes)
- Focusing on non-crop moderate quality native prairies including buffering adjacent cropland (expiring CRP) that can be enhanced through restoration activities
- Ranking and project guidance by 11 Local Prairie Plan technical teams
- Achieving restoration through prescribed burning, woody vegetation removal and planting of local ecotype seed in areas buffering native prairie

The Reinvest in Minnesota program has been working with private landowners since 1986. It's a reliable and consistent program.



#### Landowner easement payments



#### For more information:

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