

# New RIM easement program option exceeds initial goal, offers flexibility



**The RIM-1W1P program taps the Outdoor Heritage Fund and leverages Clean Water Fund dollars. The Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment supports both funds.**

A new option within the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program will help landowners establish conservation easements that address resource concerns identified in local comprehensive watershed management plans (CWMPs) developed through BWSR's One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program while maximizing benefits for both habitat and water quality.

The RIM-1W1P Integrating Clean Water and Habitat Program (RIM-1W1P) set a Phase 1 enrollment goal of 380 acres. Since the application period opened in January 2023, it has enrolled nearly double that.

RIM-1W1P taps the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), which supports habitat projects, and leverages Clean Water Funds (CWF), which support water-quality improvement projects. Sales tax

revenue generated by the Clean Water, Land & Legacy Amendment supports both the OHF and the CWF.

"Each fund has a primary goal: habitat or water quality," said Julie Westerlund, BWSR One Watershed, One Plan coordinator. "While many of these projects have a primary purpose, they can achieve multiple benefits if they are strategically planned and implemented. RIM-1W1P offers an opportunity to do more strategic, multi-benefit work by building on the One Watershed, One Plan Program's prioritize-target-measure approach."

Local governments form planning partnerships to collaboratively write CWMPs through BWSR's 1W1P program or the Metropolitan Surface Water Management Act. These water plans identify the highest-priority resource concerns within a specific watershed or planning area. Once a plan is approved

*A RIM-1W1P easement involving two Meeker County landowners will protect more than 100 acres, including 8,000 feet of shoreline along the North Fork Crow River. Another Meeker County segment of the North Fork Crow River is seen here at the Minnesota Highway 15 crossing in Kingston. Photo Credit: Ann Wessel*

by BWSR, the planning partnership becomes eligible for Watershed-Based Implementation Funding (WBIF) and RIM-1W1P. Planning partnerships can use WBIF to pursue projects based on a watershed's greatest needs and resource concerns.

The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council approved \$2.4 million in OHF dollars for the program in 2022 and \$3.3 million in 2023. CWF grants can also be leveraged to support RIM-1W1P projects. BWSR staff review and announce awards quarterly.

Fourteen easements protecting 738 acres were enrolled during Phase 1 (which concluded in March), far exceeding the original 380-acre Phase 1 goal. Program staff set a 525-acre goal for Phase 2, which began in July. So far, 440 acres have been enrolled during Phase 2. Approximately \$1.33 million remains to fund easements. Phase 2 will run until June 2027 or until funds are spent.

RIM-1W1P offers easement options to landowners whose property may not otherwise qualify for traditional easement programs.

"RIM-1W1P allows SWCDs (soil and water conservation districts) to put an emphasis on local habitat priorities in addition to statewide priorities," said Kevin Roth, BWSR easement programs coordinator. "CWMPs may call out specific areas or identify certain habitat needs within a watershed planning area. This information helps fill in gaps that may not be identified as a statewide



A RIM-1W1P easement will protect 25.7 acres on this Murray County property. **Photo Credit:** Murray SWCD

priority, but are crucial for habitat."

Meeker SWCD conservation technician Jaden Hunter is working with several landowners interested in RIM-1W1P enrollments.

"They want to protect the land, but they didn't have a good option before this program," Hunter said. "That's why there's been so much interest in this program — it's the first of its kind."

Two of the Meeker County landowners Hunter has worked with submitted applications to protect more than 100 acres, including 8,000 feet of shoreline along the North Fork Crow River.

The projects align with priorities identified in the North Fork Crow River CWMP, which Meeker SWCD contributed to. One of the CWMP's priorities is to provide habitat for fish and other aquatic life — and the shoreline easements along the North Fork Crow River would be just upstream from a population of the pugnose shiner, a threatened minnow species. Protecting shoreland and riparian corridors is another CWMP priority

addressed by the project.

"It's good riparian protection for the river," Hunter said. "Converting the land back to native vegetation can help curb the sediment load. It's a lowland, forested and marshy area that helps filter runoff and sediment before it reaches the river."

In west-central Minnesota, the Grant County SWCD's first RIM-1W1P enrollment involves working with a landowner to protect 72 acres of upland and wetland habitat. Upland wildlife habitat is identified as a priority in the Bois de Sioux-Mustinka CWMP. Grant County SWCD Technical Manager Brent Gulbrandson said the site has potential for wetland restorations in addition to upland habitat protection.

Gulbrandson said the flexibility of RIM-1W1P makes it the right fit for this acreage.

"Currently, for the (acres), it doesn't qualify for RIM Wetlands. It doesn't fall into the parameters for MN CREP (the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program). It doesn't abut protected waters or public

ditches. There's no true (public water) riparian areas. This program was pretty much the only option we'd have for putting this property into RIM," Gulbrandson said. "It's a nice complex out here that provides habitat, so protecting these acres will be an enhancement to the area."

In southwestern Minnesota, the Murray SWCD worked with a landowner to enroll 25.7 acres into RIM-1W1P. The land was previously enrolled in the Minnesota Agriculture for Pollinators Project, a University of Minnesota program that analyzes how different easement sizes and seed mixes impact native bee communities. Once enrollment in that program ended, the landowners became interested in permanent protection options.

"The field is split by a stream running through it that made it hard to farm — that was the main reason (the landowners) wanted to enroll it in a permanent program," said Craig Christensen, Murray SWCD program manager. "The added benefit would help protect an adjacent DNR (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources) wetland from getting excessive nutrients and sediment from the cropland during excessive rainfall events, which is a high priority for the Des Moines River comprehensive watershed management plan."

RIM-1W1P applications are accepted continuously and awarded quarterly. The next batching period deadline is Sept. 30. [Learn more about RIM-1W1P.](#)