

# New RIM program targets riparian areas, floodplains to benefit habitat, water quality



The RIM Riparian and Floodplain Restoration Program is funded by the Clean Water Fund and the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Both funds are supported by Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment dollars.

A new Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve easement program administered by the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) provides flexible options to protect riparian and floodplain areas across the state.

BWSR began accepting applications on Oct. 2 for the RIM Riparian and Floodplain Restoration Program (RRFRP), which offers payments to landowners who enroll land bordering watercourses or in Federal Emergency Management Area (FEMA)-mapped floodplains into conservation easements. The program aims to improve water quality and enhance habitat corridors.

BWSR Conservation Easement Section Manager Sharon Doucette said the new program will focus on converting land from agricultural uses to perennial vegetation.

“If there’s permanent vegetation, that’s going to reduce the sediment load in flooding conditions,” Doucette said. “There’s shoreline protection benefits, habitat benefits, and there’s a water-quality benefit to taking these areas out of row crop agriculture.”

The program is supported by \$8.87 million in Clean Water Funds (CWF) and \$8.56 million in Outdoor Heritage Funds (OHF). The two funding sources have different parameters for easement terms: CWF dollars can be used for limited-term, 30-year easements that allow working lands activities such as haying, grazing, timber harvesting and planting fruit or nut trees; OHF-funded easements must be perpetual and do not allow for working lands activities. The OHF funding sets a 1,500-acre goal for the program, whereas the CWF funding does not stipulate acreage goals.

*A Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve easement was recorded in 2018 on Robert and Cathy VanderLinden’s property near Redwood Falls as part of a Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) enrollment. The easement, which borders Judicial Ditch 32, is an example of the type of land targeted by BWSR’s new RIM Riparian and Floodplain Restoration Program.*

**Photo Credits:**  
Mary Juhl, BWSR



A Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) easement recorded in 2018 on Loreli and Rob Westby's west Ottertail County farm protects 620 acres. Land enrolled in MN CREP is also enrolled in a permanent Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve easement and a federal Conservation Reserve Program easement. This easement protects native vegetation established on former cropland, plus a restored wetland. A new BWSR program seeks to extend RIM easements to riparian and floodplain areas.

“The option to generate income on the easements via working lands activities might be appealing to some,” said BWSR Easement Programs Coordinator Dusty VanThuyne. “I think the options available under this program are more likely to fit what landowners are looking to do to meet their goals for their properties.”

Interested landowners can work with their local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) to prepare an application, which the SWCD then submits to BWSR. BWSR intends to open monthlong application periods every January, July and October until funds are spent.

The new program is the latest in a series of targeted RIM easement programs developed by BWSR in recent years. Some of these emerging programs focus on specific resource

**“ I think the options available under this program are more likely to fit what landowners are looking to do to meet their goals for their properties. ”**

— Dusty VanThuyne,  
BWSR easement programs coordinator

concerns, such as the RIM Working Lands and RIM Grassland Reserve easement programs launched in 2019. RIM Wetlands, a statewide program that aims to restore wetland complexes in areas of the state that may not be eligible for the Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP), was developed in September 2022.

Other targeted RIM easement programs focus on specific watersheds and regions. The Pine River

and Leech Lake Watershed Shoreland Protection Easements Program was developed in 2020 to preserve undeveloped shoreland within the Pine River and Leech Lake watersheds, which have been identified as a state priority for source water protection through the One Watershed, One Plan program planning process. The Critical Shorelands: Rum River Conservation Easements Program developed in 2019 offers RIM easement options for sensitive shorelands in 10 counties within the Rum

River watershed.

“When we pursue a new program that’s really geographically focused, that’s typically because a local partner came to us and asked us to hold RIM easements so they can do their work,” Doucette said. “BWSR also pursues programs from a resource perspective — we look for gaps in resource protection needs that may not be met by broader conservation easement programs like the (federal) Conservation Reserve Program.”

RIM Reserve easements play a critical role in the state’s efforts to improve water quality by reducing soil erosion and phosphorus- and nitrogen-loading, and improving wildlife habitat on private lands. There are currently more than 7,600 active RIM easements protecting more than 332,000 acres of land across Minnesota.