

RIM Reserve – One Watershed, One Plan

Integrating Habitat and Clean Water: New opportunities for RIM easements



Background

In 2021, BWSR was awarded \$2.358 M from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) for Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) easements that contribute toward goals in comprehensive watershed management plans (CWMPs) developed through the One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) program. The *Integrating Habitat and Clean Water* project proposal states:

Funds for RIM conservation easements build on Clean Water Fund (CWF) investments for restoration and protection projects that “stack” habitat and clean water benefits. Projects will be identified in watershed plans developed through BWSR’s One Watershed, One Plan program, in which local governments strategically set priorities for clean water and habitat, target implementation, and set measurable goals. BWSR currently distributes CWF dollars to partnerships with approved plans for water quality projects. By offering a more comprehensive funding package, BWSR aims to incentivize local partnerships to focus on more multi-benefit solutions that use the Legacy funds at their full potential.

This program provides opportunities for funding RIM projects that may not have otherwise been eligible under current RIM programs or in areas of the state where particular RIM programs are not available. It’s different than traditional resource-specific RIM programs in that it will receive projects of multiple types that can’t be compared in an “apples to apples” way. Therefore, BWSR will use the following methodology to vet, score, and rank proposals.

Eligibility, Scoring, and Ranking

Eligibility: In addition to OHF and statutory RIM eligibility criteria, **to be eligible for this funding**, projects must be able to answer “yes” to the following three questions:

- 1) Is the project identified in or does it make contributions to a goal in a BWSR approved and locally adopted plan? {“plan” means comprehensive watershed management plan developed through the One Watershed, One Plan Program; for the Twin Cities Metro Area: a locally adopted watershed management plan as required under §103B.231, a county groundwater plan authorized under §103B.255, or a soil and water conservation district comprehensive plan under Minnesota statutes §103C.331, Subd. 11.}
- 2) Does the project leverage funds that benefit a priority water resource or contribute to water related goal in a plan?

Leveraging Clean Water Funds could range from OHF and Clean Water Fund (CWF) dollars being used on the same project to both funds being used for different projects but in the same subwatershed or priority area as identified in the plan. (Being in the same planning boundary but

not contributing to the same goal or priority does not constitute leverage.) Note: CWF may be used for a variety of activities in the same priority area or subwatershed as the OHF funded easement.

Leveraging other funds could include a variety of sources that benefit a priority water resource or contribute to water-related goals in comprehensive watershed management plans.

- 3) Does the project protect, restore, or enhance habitat for fish, game, and other wildlife? The project must demonstrate multiple benefits to both habitat and water. Since these are Outdoor Heritage Funds, projects must include a habitat element.

Scoring: Projects will be scored using existing scoring sheets (all are normalized to a possible 100 points) for the following easement types. If a project type that's a RIM eligible project but for which a score sheet does not currently exist, BWSR easement staff will create a new score sheet. (e.g., white cedar, bluff land protection, karst)

- grassland protection/restoration
- working grasslands (grazing)
- floodplains
- buffers
- wild rice protection (could be forests)
- wetland restoration
- wellhead
- forest restoration
- riparian protection
- {restoration on designated trout streams will need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis}

Ranking: Projects of like types will be ranked according to their score, with the highest scoring projects ranked highest.

Project Selection: If decisions need to be made between projects of different types, scoring and ranking will be used in addition to additional considerations such as immediate threat and the strength of the connections in the eligibility criteria. For example, a strong project would be explicitly identified in a plan and use both CWF and OHF on the same project. A weaker project may not be explicitly identified in a plan but reasonably contribute to plan goals and it may fund a project in the same subwatershed (e.g., HUC 12) as another water project.

If there are multiple applications from a One Watershed One Plan boundary, local governments are encouraged to communicate their priorities for funding within that boundary to the appropriate board conservationist.

BWSR will review applications on a quarterly basis (see the RIM website for project review timelines) and notify applicants as soon as a decision is made.

Payment Rates: Payment rates are based on project type, consistent with existing BWSR programs.

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