



Reinvest In Minnesota Reserve

Helping Minnesota's local governments manage and conserve our water and soil resources.

www.bwsr.state.mn.us/easements

Background

In 1986, the Reinvest in Minnesota Resources Act was enacted to restore certain marginal and environmental sensitive agricultural land to protect soil and water quality and support fish and wildlife habitat. To-date over \$200 million state dollars has resulted in approximately 5,500 easements over 218,000 acres (fig. 1). The program currently focuses on permanent wetland restoration (fig. 2), adjacent native grassland wildlife habitat complexes and permanent riparian buffers (fig. 3).

Program information

BWSR's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program is a critical component of the state's efforts to improve water quality by reducing soil erosion, and phosphorus and nitrogen loading, and improving wildlife habitat and flood attenuation on private lands. RIM Reserve is implemented in cooperation with county SWCDs. The RIM Reserve program compensates landowners for granting conservation easements and establishing native vegetation habitat on economically marginal, flood-prone, environmentally sensitive or highly erodible lands. The program protects the state's water and soil resources by permanently restoring wetlands, adjacent native grassland wildlife habitat complexes and permanent riparian buffers.

How it works

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) acquires, on behalf of the state, conservation easements to permanently protect, restore and manage critical natural resources without owning the land outright. The land remains in private ownership and the landowner retains responsibility for maintenance and paying applicable real estate taxes and assessments. BWSR provides statewide program coordination and administration and implementation at the local level is done by county Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs).

Who is involved

The RIM Reserve program is the primary land acquisition program for state-held conservation easements and restoration of wetlands and native grasslands on privately owned land in Minnesota. This program partners with public and private landowners, state, federal and local government entities, non-profit organization and the citizens of Minnesota. Since 2000, the RIM Reserve program has successfully partnered with the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) programs that are compatible with the RIM Reserve program. Partnerships with the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has resulted in over \$260 million federal dollars leveraged into the State of Minnesota via the RIM Reserve program.

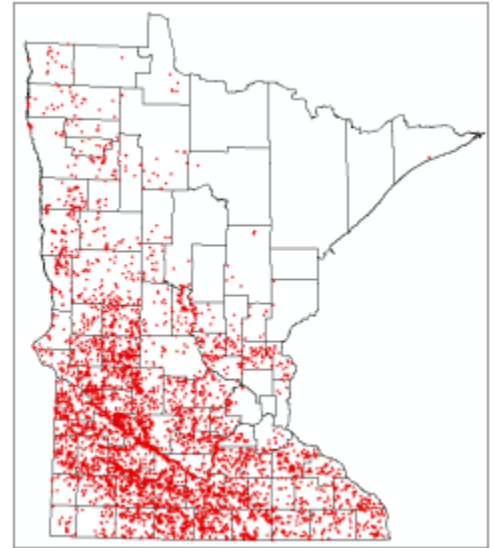


Fig. 1: Statewide conservation easements



Fig. 2: Wetland restoration



Fig. 3: Riparian buffer



RIM Reserve Conservation Easements

Improving water quality, reducing soil erosion and establishing wildlife habitat on privately owned lands

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What are conservation easements, and how do they work?

Conservation easements involve the acquisition of limited rights in land for conservation purposes. Landowners who offer the state a conservation easement receive a payment to stop cropping and/or grazing the land, and in turn the landowners establish conservation practices such as native grass and forbs, trees or wetland restorations. The easement is recorded on the land title with the county recorder and transfers with the land when the parcel is sold.

Who is eligible?

Any individual(s) who have owned the land for at least one year and can provide evidence of a good and marketable land title can apply to enroll eligible land. Landowners must update their property abstract at their own expense. All liens and mortgages must be paid off, or releases or consents to the easement must be obtained from the mortgage or lien holder before the easement can be completed. Partnerships and corporations must be certified as a farm corporation with the Minnesota Department of Agriculture to be eligible for the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Reserve program.

What are the financial incentives?

Payments vary by township and land use history (cropped or non-cropped). They are based on the assessor's township average market value for tillable land.

How long do conservation easements last?

Most easements purchased by the state are perpetual (forever). Some eligible lands may be enrolled under limited duration easements (not less than 20 years), depending on programs available.

What rights do landowners convey to the state?

Landowners retain ownership and control of the property they enroll into the easement but the easement prohibits the following: 1) Cropping and grazing unless specifically approved by the BWSR for habitat management purposes. 2) Timber harvest, unless approved by the BWSR for forest management purposes. 3) Building or placing structures on the easement. 4) Mining activities. 5) Placement of wells and sewage disposal systems. 6) Grading and excavating or any activity that would alter the cover that has been established on the easement.

Who controls access to the easement acres?

All access to the land is controlled by the landowner. No public access is allowed unless granted by the landowner.

How are easement areas managed?

Landowners receive financial assistance for the costs of establishing the conservation practices (vegetation or wetlands), as outlined in a conservation plan developed by the SWCD in cooperation with the landowner. The landowner is responsible for maintaining the practices as well as controlling noxious weeds. Easements are inspected annually by the SWCD for the first five years and every third year thereafter. A copy of the inspection is provided to the landowner and to BWSR. If necessary, the SWCD provides direction to the landowner to assure compliance.

Who pays the property taxes on the easement area?

The landowner is responsible for paying all taxes and any other levies and assessments that may be assessed on the enrolled land. Assessed values vary from county to county.



For more information about RIM Reserve conservation easements, please contact your local Soil and Water Conservation District or visit BWSR's web site: www.bwsr.state.mn.us/easements