



Protection of Minnesota River Valley Granite Rock Outcrop Ecosystem

Featured Project

The Minnesota River Valley contains exposed ancient granite rock outcrops that provide unique landscape features, as well as habitat for specialized plant and animal communities rarely found elsewhere in Minnesota. These rock outcrops are threatened by mining, overgrazing and other development interests. Past development activities and mining operations have already fragmented large areas of this fragile landscape. Interest in mining these exposed granite rock outcrops is high, because of the relatively low cost of removal. The rock is readily accessible, which encourages the practice of horizontal mining -- removing the easiest and most profitable rock, and moving on to the next site. Unlike a gravel mining operation, there is no reclamation plan possible for replacing the unique landscape feature once it has been removed.



A rock outcrop near the Minnesota River where brittle prickly pear cactus is beginning to bear fruit. This is one of few places in Minnesota where these plants can be found.

The Renville Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was hearing from landowners in the Minnesota River Valley that were not interested in receiving financial compensation from mining companies for the aggregate on their land, however, there were few other options for use of the land. After discussions with neighboring Redwood SWCD, Renville SWCD submitted a proposal to the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) for a conservation easement program to preserve and enhance rock outcrops. The LCCMR made its recommendations to the Legislature for projects to be funded through the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and the project received funding in 2007. Landowners have submitted applications to protect 788 acres of rock outcrops through this program.

Continuing landowner interest led to another successful project funding request in 2009 for Renville, Redwood, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine and Lac qui Parle SWCDs. A 2010 funding request is pending legislative action.



Location: The narrow riparian zone of the Minnesota River in Lac Qui Parle, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, Redwood, and Renville counties.

Partners: SWCDs in Lac Qui Parle, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, Redwood, and Renville counties; Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR); USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Minnesota DNR.

Project Timeline: July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2009

BWSR Featured Project

2007 Project Costs / Funding Sources: \$563,000 from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund:

- \$517,411 for acquisition including perpetual easement
- \$33,000 for Renville and Redwood SWCD staff for promotion, applications, easements, conservation plans, practice implementation supervision, etc.
- \$6,049 for site prep/species removal
- \$5,140 for title searches, title opinions, title insurance
- \$1,400 for BWSR for easement processing
- \$31,441 from other sources to assist with practice implementation
- \$21,537 from the USDA EQIP
- \$2,500 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- \$1,513 from the MN DNR Wildlife Heritage Enhancement
- \$2,100 from the MN DNR ECO-non-game Heritage Enhancement
- \$3,791 from MN Native Buffer Cost Share Program

(2009 project received \$1.5 million and 2010 project received \$1.8 million, both from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. Other costs and funding sources are not finalized.)

Keys to Success: Acting on the requests from local landowners in the Minnesota River Valley, Renville SWCD successfully obtained an LCCMR grant to offer landowners an economically viable option for preserving granite rock outcrop parcels. The SWCD partnered with BWSR to acquire perpetual conservation easements on these parcels via the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program. Landowners receive financial compensation for granting a perpetual easement, while still retaining ownership and limited use rights on their property.

BWSR role: BWSR conservation easement staff acquires these conservation easements via the RIM Reserve program which provides for a legally recorded easement that permanently protects this highly vulnerable natural resource.

Measurable Outcomes:

- 2007 project -- 4 perpetual easements recorded protecting 212.4 acres.
- 2009 project -- 14 applications (currently in the agreement phase) that will result in perpetual easements protecting 540.8 acres.
- 2010 project -- 12 applications on hand, easement processing will begin after funding is approved in 2010. When funded, project will begin on July 1, 2010 and result in perpetual easements protecting 702.8 acres.

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The view of a rock outcrop after the aggregate has been removed. This easement program offers financial incentives to landowners to protect the rare outcrops and plant communities (below).

