



# Committing to Conservation

October 2014 Snapshots



If you could put land in permanent protection, knowing that by doing so you were providing lasting benefits for Minnesota's natural resources, would you? For participants in the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Riparian Buffer Easement Program, that answer is yes.

The riparian buffer initiative has been one of our largest, most successful easement programs over the last several years. The Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program is the largest non-Federal private lands permanent protection program in the country, and riparian buffers play a key role. The program is one piece of a strategic approach to prevent pollutants from entering our lakes and streams and restore critical wildlife habitat.

How does it work? The program creates vegetated buffers on riparian crop land adjacent to streams and lakes through the purchase of conservation easements. These easements provide permanent protection of natural resources while keeping property in the hands of individual landowners. Using an innovative approach, the RIM Riparian Buffer Easement Program combines both Outdoor Heritage Funds and Clean Water Funds to expand buffers to provide additional wildlife habitat benefits.

Landowners have responded in a big way. In June, our agency conducted a sign-up for the 2014 program. By July, just one month later, the program had reached capacity. Interest in the program far outpaces funding, and we were only able to fund 10% of the applications. That left 189 applications – totaling \$30 million – unfunded. Our hope is that those applicants that didn't receive funds maintain their interest in participating until the next funding cycle comes around.

Since 1986, RIM easements collectively number over 250,000 acres in 7,000 locations around the state. The Reinvest in Minnesota program, implemented locally by Soil and Water Conservation Districts, continues to provide a unique opportunity for private landowners to make a long term commitment to conservation.

## ***Permanent Protection: A 2014 Easement Highlight***

When Dan Keefe, a long-time conservation cooperator and the 2014 Olmsted County Outstanding Conservationist, wanted to turn his short-term conservation commitment with the Conservation Reserve Program into a long-term legacy, the RIM Riparian Buffer program was the right fit. Keefe, who had two RIM easements as part of his active farming operation, was approached by Olmsted Soil and Water Conservation District's Skip Langer about participating again because of the benefits this easement count provide. It protects both sides (over 1.5 miles) of Lynch Creek, a cold-water trout stream that winds its way through his farm before it eventually outlets into the Root River. Water quality and wildlife habitat will both benefit in the area, thanks to his participation.

