

Camp Ripley buffers near 30,000 acres



ACUB goal: Enroll 78,000 acres of compatible-use lands, including public waters, to protect Minnesota National Guard training mission, preserve fish and wildlife habitat

The conservation easements that protect Camp Ripley from development and preserve fish and wildlife habitat within a 5-mile radius approached the 30,000-acre mark in 2019.

[The Army Compatible Use Buffer \(ACUB\) program](#)

has enrolled nearly 30,000 acres through more than 300

Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) easements in Morrison, Crow Wing and Cass counties since 2006. ACUB is meant to ensure operations continue at the Minnesota National Guard's 52,830-acre regional training center, which runs 24 hours a day and trains 30,000 people a year.



ACUB easements funded through the Outdoor Heritage Fund protect existing high-quality natural resources — primarily forests and riparian areas. Federally funded ACUB easements prevent future development but allow farming to continue.

The permanent conservation easements purchase development rights. Landowners receive a per-acre sum.

"As more and more people build up here, there's more and more people complaining about Camp Ripley. I knew Camp Ripley needed the buffer zone," said James Parent, who



“I'd like to leave something behind that's going to be perpetual.”

— James Parent, landowner

has lived within earshot of Camp Ripley since 1970 and recorded his second ACUB easement in 2019. "I love nature, and it's always bothered me every time I drive down the road and I see more and more houses going in."

Parent's most recent easement, 40 acres in Morrison County surrounded by housing within a few miles

of Camp Ripley's main gate, was one of 46 ACUB-related RIM easements recorded in 2019. That year saw the second-highest number of easements recorded. The most ACUB-related RIM easements — 52 — were recorded in 2015.

"This year has been a really big year," Morrison Soil & Water Conservation District Manager Shannon Wettstein

said in December 2019.

Together with public lands and waters, the easements recorded through early January bring ACUB to 64 percent of its 78,000-acre compatible-use lands goal.

Morrison SWCD staff works directly with landowners. (Helen McLennan, the longtime Morrison SWCD manager who retired in December 2018, is among those credited with getting the program started.) Camp Ripley Training Center ranks applicants. Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) staff administers the RIM easements.

“What we’re doing there is unlike anything we’re doing anywhere else in the state,” St. Paul-based BWSR Easement Acquisition Unit Supervisor Luke Anderson said of the state’s first working-lands easements.

BWSR works with about 7,000 easements encompassing about 300,000 acres across the state. The easements in the three-county area surrounding Camp Ripley are among the most highly concentrated in the state.

“Now it’s like a checkerboard, where we’re filling in the gaps. We’ll have easements on two, three — sometimes four sides (of public land). It’s creating a habitat corridor. It’s creating opportunities for clean water up there, and it’s going to protect it into the future. They’re permanent easements,” Anderson said.



A wild rice easement in Crow Wing County was among seven easements BWSR staff visited during an October field training session hosted by Morrison SWCD staff. Photo Credit: BWSR

Permanency appealed to Parent, who enrolled 50 acres in Crow Wing County’s Nokasippi Hills in 2012.

Parent, 80, who retired after a career with the Minnesota Occupational Safety and Health Administration, owns 10 parcels totaling 450 acres in Morrison, Crow Wing and Todd counties.

He rents about 20 acres to farmers. The rest he’s planted into trees — some of it through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) — or managed as existing forest.

“I think about the future. I’m not going to be here, and I hate to see it divided up into 5-acre parcels,” Parent said. “This was my way of protecting it.”



Wettstein



Anderson

Parent said he found the property assessment to be fair. The rate for agricultural land is 75% of the RIM

cropland rate. The rate for high-value, non-cropped riparian land is 60% of the most recent market value determined by county tax assessors.

“I assume that the property has more value as something that could be subdivided than it does now, where it can’t be subdivided. It worked out for my purposes pretty well. If I wasn’t here and my kids owned the property, I don’t know that my kids would have done it,” Parent said.

As of early January, 154 more parcels totaling 14,117 acres within the three-county region were ready to enroll in ACUB.

Boundaries Defined

The Camp Ripley Training Center ranks potential easements. High-quality easements may take place outside these boundaries, which serve as guidelines.

3 MILES: The U.S. Department of Defense’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program funds easements within a 3-mile radius of Camp Ripley. In 2019, those boundaries were defined more specifically based on peak noise model contouring.

5 MILES: Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars can be used here.

The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council has recommended the Legislature make \$3.16 million available to protect fish, game, migratory bird and forest habitat along the Crow Wing, Long Prairie, Gull, Nokasippi, and Mississippi river corridors and lake watersheds within a 5-mile radius of Camp Ripley.

The \$43.6 million (with the LSOHC recommendation) for RIM funding to date includes \$33 million from the U.S. Department of Defense’s Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program and \$10.6 million in Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund investments since 2010.



The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources’ mission is to improve and protect the state’s water and soil resources by working in partnership with local organizations and private landowners.
Website: www.bwsr.state.mn.us