

Riparian RIM easement builds upon existing wildlife habitat



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The RIM Riparian and Floodplain Restoration Program is funded by the Clean Water Fund and the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Both are supported by Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment dollars.



Program applications are accepted during January, July and October.



Seen here in April 2025, the Mud Creek easement connects a 175.1-acre complex and a 139.7-acre complex, creating 479.4 acres of habitat. Most of the easement had been enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for several years. A small section of the easement that had not been enrolled in CRP and was being farmed will be seeded this year with native grasses and forbs. **Photo Credit:** Yellow Medicine SWCD

A Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve easement in Yellow Medicine County will permanently protect the banks of a 2,720-foot-long reach of Mud Creek and its associated floodplain. The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) recorded the 164.6-acre [RIM Riparian and Floodplain Restoration Program](#) (RRFRP) easement in October 2024.

It is the largest easement recorded under the RRFRP to date.

By joining two existing RIM easements, the Mud Creek easement created a corridor

for wildlife and expands an existing habitat complex to nearly 480 acres.

“If you’re also including CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) and vegetated acres, the corridor connects almost 2,200 acres. So it’s a pretty significant area of habitat that this kind of pieces together,” said Yellow Medicine Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Director Brayden Anderson.

Mud Creek, a Yellow Medicine River tributary, is biologically impaired for aquatic life, meaning it is too polluted or degraded to support a healthy aquatic ecosystem.

BWSR Easement Programs Coordinator Dusty Van Thuyne said BWSR’s RIM easement program is a critical component of the state’s efforts to improve water quality by curbing soil erosion, reducing phosphorus- and nitrogen-loading, and improving wildlife habitat and flood attenuation on private lands.

The BWSR-administered program compensates landowners for granting perpetual conservation easements and establishing native vegetation on economically marginal, flood-prone, environmentally sensitive or highly erodible

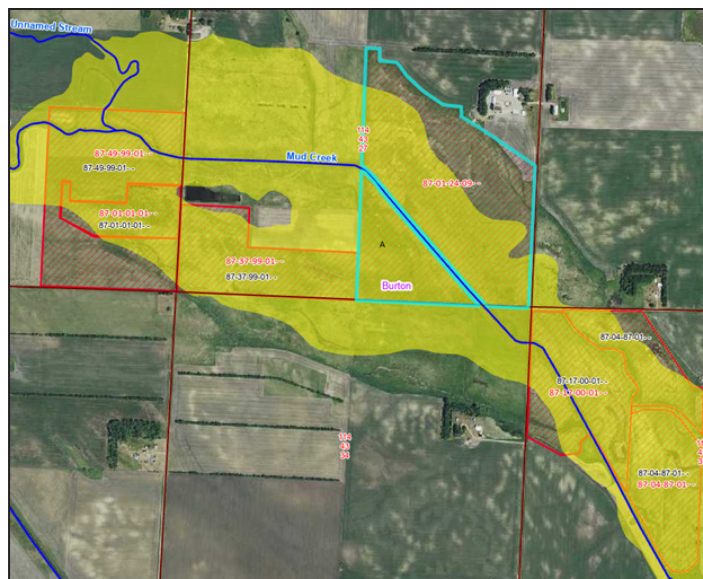
lands. SWCDs implement the voluntary program by working directly with landowners.

Enrolled land remains in private ownership.

The RRFRP focuses on converting land within riparian areas or mapped floodplains from agricultural use to perennial cover.

The program is supported by \$8.56 million in [Outdoor Heritage Funds](#) (OHF) and \$8.87 million in [Clean Water Funds](#) (CWF). Funding was appropriated in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Each funding source has its own parameters. CWF dollars can be used for perpetual or limited-term, 30-year easements that allow working lands activities such as haying, grazing, timber harvesting and planting fruit or nut trees. OHF-funded easements must be perpetual. They do not have the same working lands flexibility, but haying and grazing options are sometimes available.

The 164.6-acre Mud Creek easement, which was secured using OHF dollars, aligns with goals set by the local comprehensive watershed management plan. The Yellow Medicine One Watershed, One Plan (1W1P) includes a



*The RIM Riparian and Floodplain Restoration Program easement, outlined in blue, connects two existing easements, outlined in red. The area highlighted yellow depicts the 100-year floodplain. **Map Credit: BWSR***

watershed-wide goal of converting 450 acres of row crops to perennial cover, with priority given to perpetual protection. The plan also identifies a goal of treating 2% of cropland with wetland restorations, aiming to treat 571 acres.

The Yellow Medicine 1W1P identifies Mud Creek as a priority area for wetland restoration. The plan includes a watershed-wide goal for floodplain retention and reconnection projects.

Anderson said the landowners saw the easement as a way to build the equity needed to buy more land. Most of the RRFRP easement

had been enrolled in the federal CRP for several years and was not being farmed, making it a good fit for the program.

“It is grassland cover, but it always had the opportunity to go back to row crop,” Anderson said. “But now with the easement, we don’t have to worry about that.”

The 2.5-acre section of the 164.6-acre easement that had not been enrolled in CRP and was being farmed will be seeded this year with native grasses and forbs.

Wetland restoration work on the easement slated for this summer includes removing sediment

accumulated during many years of flooding in three scrape areas — shallow ponds that hold water seasonally and provide wildlife habitat. There are plans to reroute drainage tile around the easement and into a wetland.

Anderson said the RRFRP easement has created more interest in the program: A relative of the Mud Creek easement property owner has expressed interest in enrolling 80 acres in the RRFRP.

“They kind of saw how they went through the process, and it worked out in their favor. So they’re interested in doing something,” Anderson said.

The Yellow Medicine County easement is one of five RRFRP easements recorded since sign-up began in October 2023. Together, they protect 400.1 acres. Twenty-three more have been funded and are in the process of being recorded; BWSR easement staff anticipate those easements would protect an additional 939.3 acres.

BWSR staff members write and produce Snapshots, a monthly newsletter highlighting the work of the agency and its partners.