

# Land sale offers drinking water protection, enhanced habitat in Pipestone County



The Clean Water Fund supports BWSR's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Drinking Water Protection Partner Agreements.

HOLLAND — A creative approach to transitioning 160 acres in Pipestone County's Grange Township from row crops and grasslands to permanent vegetative cover is poised to protect drinking water and enhance wildlife habitat.

A unique public-private partnership among the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Lincoln-Pipestone Rural Water (LPRW) and Pheasants Forever made the project, accomplished via land acquisition, possible.

In fall 2025, 160 acres went up for sale within Pipestone County's Holland Drinking Water Supply Management Area (DWSMA), which is considered highly vulnerable to contaminants reaching the public water supply intake. Raw water from the Holland DWSMA wells exhibits periodically elevated nitrate levels. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's

legal limit for nitrate in drinking water is 10 milligrams per liter. The Holland DWSMA is considered a [Mitigation Level 2 DWSMA](#), meaning nitrate levels are over 8 mg/L, or are projected to exceed 10 mg/L in the next 10 years.

Groundwater sources are particularly vulnerable in Pipestone County and throughout southwestern Minnesota because aquifers tend to be shallow and soils are sandy and porous, allowing nitrates and other applied chemicals to reach groundwater sources with relative ease.

"A common method to limit or eliminate nitrates in some groundwater systems is to transition the land from typical annual corn and soybean rotations to a rotation implementing perennial cover," said Sara Reagan, BWSR easement programs coordinator. "Perennial cover, planted either to harvest as a crop or to leave as habitat, requires

*A tributary that connects to the north branch of Pipestone Creek runs through the 160-acre property targeted for restoration in Pipestone County's Grange Township. Returning the land to permanent vegetative cover will improve habitat and drinking water quality in the highly vulnerable Holland Drinking Water Supply Management Area.*  
**Photo Credit:**  
Pheasants Forever

“Permanent cover protects drinking water by reducing nitrate movement, and at the same time, it creates the kind of habitat pheasants and other grassland wildlife depend on. When those goals align, it’s a win for communities and a win for wildlife.”



— Jacob Granfors, Minnesota public lands manager, Pheasants Forever

far fewer fertilizer inputs, if any. Perennial cover also establishes a continuous living cover to filter out any potential nitrate inputs through more extensive root systems.”

When Pheasants Forever staff became aware of the potential land acquisition opportunity, they notified LPRW, a public water supplier serving Jackson, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood, Rock and Yellow Medicine counties. The 160-acre area is adjacent to 610 acres already owned by LPRW that’s kept in permanent cover via federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts. Putting additional acres into perennial cover will help protect drinking water sources within the well field and extend existing habitat corridors for grassland birds and other wildlife.

“Because of the aquifer and its close proximity to the surface, it’s impacted by surface flows and agricultural uses that create high nitrogen loads,” said Jason Overby, LPRW general manager.

“When Pheasants Forever

came to us, I thought, ‘This is really great. This one is immediately adjacent to our well field with a stream reach running through it. As far as ranking goes, this project is about as high as you can get.’”



**Overby**

LPRW was interested in the land but lacked the \$1.3 million needed to purchase it outright. They contacted Minnesota Rural Water Association staff for advice, and Source Water Protection Specialist Aaron Meyer suggested they connect with BWSR for assistance.

A unique solution emerged from those discussions: Pheasants Forever would initially purchase the land and hold it while LPRW secured funding for the acquisition from BWSR via a Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Drinking Water Protection Partner Agreement. These agreements provide direct funding for local governments and private organizations to purchase land for the purpose of

protecting groundwater and drinking water sources from degradation. Once BWSR funds are received, Overby said LPRW intends to purchase the land from Pheasants Forever before restoring it to permanent native vegetation.

“We’re well-versed in the (land) acquisition world, but this approach of working with private and public partners doesn’t happen too often,” said Jacob Granfors, Minnesota public lands manager for Pheasants Forever. “In this situation, we have a mutual goal of establishing permanent cover. Permanent cover protects drinking water by reducing nitrate movement, and at the same time, it creates the kind of habitat pheasants and other grassland wildlife depend on. When those goals align, it’s a win for communities and a win for wildlife.”

Overby said LPRW has purchased land for groundwater protection in the past, but it’s not their typical approach.

“We don’t want to be land moguls; we’re not in the business of buying up a bunch of land. Our ultimate



goal is protection in key critical areas.” Overby said.

Pheasants Forever closed on the property on March 3. Reagan said she anticipated the land would be transferred from Pheasants Forever to LPRW and recorded as an easement in early April.

After the sale, Pheasants Forever staff plans to assist LPRW with restoration activities such as designing seed mixes and providing technical assistance.

“This is the type of work that delivers our mission at the highest level,” Granfors said. “This project will produce multiple benefits, including protecting clean drinking water, reducing soil erosion, creating and enhancing habitat and providing space for outdoor recreation.”

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