

2026 legislative session emphasizes easement funding, yields habitat wins



BWSR received appropriations this year from the Clean Water Fund and the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Both funds are supported by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

Bills passed during the 2026 legislative session will support the Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources' (BWSR) mission to work with partners to improve and protect Minnesota's land and water resources. Legislation passed this year strongly prioritizes wildlife habitat expansion and funding for initiatives that yield multiple conservation benefits, such as improved water quality, increased biodiversity and erosion mitigation.

The 2026 Legislature adjourned in late May, concluding its work for the biennium. In even-numbered years, the Legislature typically focuses on policy changes, supplemental budgeting and distributing capital investment funds for infrastructure projects (also referred to as bonding bills). State agency budgets are

typically passed during the biennial budgeting process that occurs during odd-numbered years.

The following are among this session's conservation highlights. A [complete session summary](#) is available online.

Passed: Capital Investment Bill (Bonding Bill)

BWSR received a total of \$6.5 million in capital investment funds to support two projects:

Local Government Roads Wetland Replacement Program (LGRWRP) (\$4.5 million): The LGRWRP develops wetland mitigation banking credits by restoring previously drained or filled wetlands and adjacent uplands. Those credits are used to offset impacts to wetlands that occur when local road

"The Progress of the State," a gilded quadriga statue, is perched atop the Minnesota State Capitol.

Photo Credit:
Andrew VonBank,
Minnesota House
of Representatives

authorities — such as counties, cities or townships — repair, restore or replace public roads.

Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP) (\$2 million):

MN CREP is a voluntary conservation easement program that permanently protects environmentally sensitive land in targeted Minnesota counties by leveraging state and federal funds.

Passed: Environment and Natural Resources Supplemental Budget Bill

BWSR will receive funding for three projects via the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). The bill also provides an extension for an existing BWSR program: Conservation Reserve Program State Incentives have been extended by one year, to June 30, 2027. Funding from the ENRTF comes from Minnesota State Lottery proceeds and is overseen

by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR).

Oak Savanna Restoration for Living Landscapes (\$1.94 million):

This pilot program will help restore and enhance oak savannas and support tallgrass prairies and woodlands on public and protected conservation lands in Minnesota's Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province.

Resilient and Biodiverse Community Spaces (\$612,000):

This initiative will help local communities plan and create climate-resilient and biodiverse community spaces.

Partnership for Resilient Landscapes (\$150,000):

Pheasants Forever will lead this partnership to accelerate adoption of voluntary conservation practices on working lands in Minnesota by increasing technical assistance to farmers and landowners while also pursuing federal matching funds.

Passed: Lands and Legacy Bill (Outdoor Heritage Fund)

Eight BWSR projects will receive funding through the Lands and Legacy Bill, funded by the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF). The OHF is funded by proceeds

from the state's Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment.

Oak Savanna Restoration for Living Landscapes (\$1.7 million):

The Lands and Legacy Bill includes additional support for this developing pilot program administered by BWSR.

Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Grasslands, Phase 7 (\$2.1 million):

This program helps private landowners enroll grasslands into permanent conservation easements.

RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water, Phase 12 (\$3.7 million):

This program will expand conservation easement opportunities for riparian buffer establishment and protection.

RIM Wetlands Restoring Most Productive Habitat in Minnesota, Phase 15 (\$3.5 million):

This program focuses on acquiring permanent conservation easements and restoring wetlands via BWSR's RIM conservation easement program.

Integrating Habitat and Clean Water, Phase 4 (\$1.8 million):

This program helps private landowners enroll permanent conservation easements and restore and enhance wildlife

habitat identified under the One Watershed, One Plan program for stacked benefits to wildlife and clean water.

Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project, Phase 10 (\$1.4 million):

Funding passed this year will support this ongoing, partner-led easement and habitat project spearheaded by the Mississippi Headwaters Board and the Trust for Public Lands.

Red River Basin Riparian Habitat Program, Phase 2 (\$3.8 million):

This [partner-led easement project](#) will support the Red River Basin Watershed Management Board's work to pursue easements to protect, restore, and enhance stream and riparian habitat throughout the Red River watershed.

Riparian Habitat Protection in Kettle and Snake River Watersheds, Phase 3 (\$1.1 million):

Funding will support ongoing work to acquire permanent conservation easements and restore high-quality forests, wetlands and shoreline in the Kettle and Snake river watersheds.

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

