

Final Abstract

Final Report Approved on November 4, 2024

M.L. 2021 Project Abstract

For the Period Ending June 30, 2024

Project Title: Redwood County Reinvest in Minnesota Easement Evaluation and Public Outreach

Project Manager: Nick Brozek

Affiliation: Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District

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Website: <https://www.redwoodswcd.org/>

Funding Source:

Fiscal Year:

Legal Citation: M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 03h

Appropriation Amount: \$197,000

Amount Spent: \$194,100

Amount Remaining: \$2,900

Sound bite of Project Outcomes and Results

We surveyed vegetation and pollinators across 21 RIM/CREP easements and 3 Prairie Bank Easements and analyzed change in canopy cover across 125 easements in Redwood County. Results afford state agencies, SWCDs, and landowners new insight to improve existing and new easements to provide high-quality habitat for wildlife and pollinators.

Overall Project Outcome and Results

In Minnesota, conservation easements are widely used to achieve natural resource protection benefitting the general public, while still keeping land in private ownership. In the 40 years since the Reinvest in Minnesota easement program began, we have become substantially more knowledgeable about developing and managing conservation lands. However, we are now facing increased pressure from invasive species. Coupled with challenges associated with the transfer of easement ownership, lack of funding, knowledge, and/or abilities to do the work, easement management by the landowner is difficult.

This project evaluated the vegetative communities on easements across Redwood County and provided solutions which

could be applicable for easement design, enhancement, and management across the state. The easement evaluation project was coupled with outreach and education components to landowners with conservation easements. These were our primary findings: 1) Easements that were planted to higher diversity seed mixes had lower non-native species encroachment; 2) Most easements, with the exception of buffer/filter strips, had moderate species diversity when compared to native, remnant prairies in the area; 3) Tree encroachment was increasing by 20% each year from 2010-2021; 4) Incorrect, ineffective, poorly-timed, or general lack of management yielded decreased plant diversity, increased non-native species, and higher tree encroachment; 5) Easements that were not originally cropland had the highest woody cover encroachment; 6) No correlation between easement age and plant diversity; 7) Easement type was not indicative of plant diversity; 8) Native bees showed notable preference for native flowers and non-native insects (primarily the European Honeybee) had a high preference for flowers from Europe; and 9) All easement types have low floral diversity in the spring, and many have low diversity in the fall – both of which times pollinators are active and desperately needing resources as they emerge from or prepare for hibernation.

Project Results Use and Dissemination

Preliminary results and restoration techniques were shared at 3 demonstration events in Redwood County. Great River Greening presented results at the regional Society for Ecological Restoration conference in May 2024. A final analysis of the data was compiled into a final report, shared with partners and agencies, and posted on the organization website along with a devoted webpage highlighting the project (greatrivergreening.org/redwood). Landowner letters were created and mailed summarizing their respective easements. The final report included recommendations for improving habitat quality across easements and methods for landowner education and engagement to encourage land stewardship across private lands.



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2021 Approved Final Report

General Information

Date: November 18, 2024

ID Number: 2021-140

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Project Title: Redwood County Reinvest in Minnesota Easement Evaluation and Public Outreach

Project Budget: \$197,000

Project Manager Information

Name: Nick Brozek

Organization: Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District

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Project Reporting

Final Report Approved: November 4, 2024

Reporting Status: Project Completed

Date of Last Action: November 4, 2024

Project Completion: June 30, 2024

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 03h

Appropriation Language: \$197,000 the first year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Redwood County for the Redwood Soil and Water Conservation District to inventory vegetation, evaluate wetland conditions, and create a countywide stewardship plan for lands protected with permanent conservation easements. This appropriation may also be spent to conduct outreach to volunteers and landowners on effective prairie and wetland habitat management.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2024

Narrative

Project Summary: To inventory vegetation and evaluate wetland condition on permanent conservation easements, and conduct education and outreach regarding prairie and wetland habitats and their management.

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Redwood County has 560 RIM easements on 18,661 acres (average date of enrollment - 2004). More than \$1.26 billion in RIM/CREP payments have been paid to landowners, not including associated cost-share. These easements improve water quality, reduce flooding, provide valuable wildlife and pollinator habitat, create biodiversity, and add intrinsic recreational and aesthetic value.

The southern Wet Prairie, Crystalline Bedrock Outcrop (Prairie), and Prairie Wetland complexes are listed by the DNR as imperiled or critically imperiled. Some of these complexes are prioritized in Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan for species such as the Poweshiek skipperling, regal fritillary, and grasshopper sparrow. While the vast majority of the easements were restored, they have not always matched the correct community type and many are lacking proper management. These need to be surveyed to determine reconstruction and management needs. There are regular, scheduled inspections to evaluate compliance with boundaries, noxious weed control, and minimum vegetative requirements, along with evaluating water control structures. Local office staff are not equipped to conduct in-depth evaluations on easement condition or develop long-term management strategies on each easement, certainly not countywide. Perpetual easements need frequent evaluation, proper management, landowner contact, and up-to date maps and conservation plans.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

We are seeking funding for two activities to better develop and manage prairie and wetland easements. First, we are looking to conduct detailed on-site evaluations on select Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) easements across the various habitats within Redwood County. Evaluating the plant communities, pollinators, and soil health in these easements will provide baseline information about the condition and quality of the habitat. Results from the surveys will be used to create an easement stewardship plan for each site surveyed and will serve as a template for management plans on other easements within the county.

Secondly, we plan to conduct outreach and training through workshops, site tours, and volunteer activities. We will establish three management demonstration sites within the easements to provide educational opportunities to local residents and general public on the value of restoring and maintaining prairie and wetland habitats. The events will also provide training on specific reconstruction and management techniques for landowners with conservation easements. Engaging the public through hands-on activities and published material will raise awareness of the need for restoration and management of prairies and wetlands to improve biodiversity, habitat, water storage, water quality, and recreation.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

The outcomes of easement evaluation will give us a baseline in which to direct future management efforts. Results from the surveys will be included in a Redwood County Easement Stewardship Plan. Additionally, this information will allow us to:

- obtain necessary staff and landowner training to address easement concerns
- identify key sites to enhance the native vegetation and add pollinator plots
- plan large scale tree removal and invasive species control projects across property boundaries
- identify focus areas for future protection
- develop a base of trained local land management contractors
- request additional funds to conduct further management and reconstruction activities

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

County(s): Redwood

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Easement management demonstrations, outreach, and volunteer engagement

Activity Budget: \$103,750

Activity Description:

Three management demonstration sites will be established to engage volunteers and educate attendees about the importance of restoring and managing prairie and wetland communities for habitat, biodiversity, water quality, and water retention. These events will include hands-on educational opportunities. Each site will be selected based on feasibility, results from the field surveys, and landowner agreements.

The first event will focus on demonstrating the surveys taking place in the county. SWCD staff, Great River Greening ecologists, and other partners will lead a site tour on the selected easement to describe the surveys performed and management needed. The second and third events will be volunteer-based demonstration opportunities for attendees to learn management and restoration techniques. The activities will depend on site needs but may include prairie seeding, wetland planting, and cedar removal. There will also be soil borings to compare soil profiles and health across multiple sites.

Finally, Great River Greening will create educational materials based on the easement stewardship plans and the benefits that these habitats provide. The outreach material and research results will also be used to create a webpage about the importance of managing conservation easements and restoring prairie and wetland habitat in southern Minnesota.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Prepare first volunteer event site (demonstration site #2) through cedar removal contract	December 31, 2021
Choose three demonstration sites based on feasibility and site evaluations	August 31, 2022
First site tour and demonstration	October 31, 2022
MN Wildlife Society - Present preliminary findings and outreach efforts	March 31, 2023
Create educational material including fact sheets and a webpage based on the easement stewardship plan	June 30, 2023
Host two volunteer events at easement demonstration sites	June 30, 2023

Activity 2: Redwood County easement habitat surveys and stewardship plan development

Activity Budget: \$93,250

Activity Description:

Great River Greening will conduct a baseline evaluation of vegetative quality, pollinator habitat, and soil health. Over 1,000 acres of permanently-protected easements will be surveyed across Redwood County within the Redwood River and Cottonwood River watersheds. The majority of these easements are restored prairie and wetland plant communities have received little to no management, some within floodplains. Vegetation surveys will include timed meanders using the methods from the University of Minnesota Restoration Evaluation Project Vegetation Monitoring Tool and floral areal cover estimates. Pollinator surveys will follow the same meanders while recording butterfly species and bee morphological groups observed. The U of M Bee Lab will train Great River Greening staff in bee morphological group identification and review the survey results. Soil evaluations will include shallow borings to determine soil type and health within the wetland sites.

The results of the surveys will be used to write a Redwood County Easement Stewardship Plan. The plan will include site descriptions, survey results, and management recommendations for each site and other easements throughout the county. The results will also be used to develop outreach and educational material for the second activity in this project.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Evaluate current pollinator use of easements	May 31, 2023
Evaluate soil health and restored wetland condition	May 31, 2023
Complete vegetation surveys on easements	May 31, 2023
Develop Redwood County Easement Stewardship Plan	June 30, 2023

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Dr. Brad Gordon	Great River Greening	Sub-Award Project Manager - lead vegetation, bee, butterfly, and soil surveys; coordinate volunteer events; develop easement stewardship plan; set up demonstration sites and events	Yes
Dr. Dan Cariveau	University of Minnesota Bee Laboratory	Contract project manager - bee survey consulting; bee identification training; stewardship plan review; demonstration event attendance, assistance, and presentation	Yes
Ben Bauer	Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District	Conservation Specialist	No
Melissa Greenwood	Great River Greening	Grant Specialist	Yes

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

We are partnering with Great River Greening on this project from start to finish, thus the organization and dissemination efforts will be a joint effort. There will be a series of demonstrations, site tours, workshops, and volunteer events. These events will take place within Redwood County on conservation easements with participation between SWCD staff, Great River Greening ecologists, DNR Wildlife, and other local, state, and federal partners. We will be demonstrating the surveys taking place on these easements and explain the value of conservation easements (water quality, wildlife and ecological sustainability), along with why and how we manage these habitats. Volunteer-based events will focus on teaching reconstruction and hands-on management techniques on these sites. Volunteers activities may include prairie seeding, wetland plug planting, cedar removal, and assist with soil borings to compare soil profiles and soil health across multiple sites.

Outreach efforts will introduce the general public to the value of the varied habitats in this part of the state and support future easements. Workshops, on-site demonstrations and volunteer days will provide the public an opportunity to learn techniques to properly develop and maintain conservation land. Technical training for easement-holders will allow landowners to better evaluate their easements and conduct, or hire out, development and management activities to increase the quality of their easement.

Finally, Great River Greening will create educational materials based on the easement stewardship plans and the benefits that these habitats provide. These materials will include a separate page on the SWCD website to outline about the history and value of these ecosystems across our landscape, value of conservation easements, and what techniques we use to manage these habitats. The information will include periodic project updates. The page will also include current maps of easements within the county, a summary of this project, and information on management. Handouts will be developed specific to this habitats in this part of the state. This information will be made available to other agencies. We will be announcing trainings and volunteer events in the local media and directly to easement-holders via e-mail and/or mail.

The disseminated materials will acknowledge ENRTF in the following ways:

Press releases and written articles will include a link to ENRTF (<https://www.legacy.mn.gov/environment-natural-resources-trust-fund>) and provide a brief explanation of the source of funding

Interviews will acknowledge ENRTF verbally

The projects' separate page on the Redwood SWCD webpage will explain our source of funding for this project, include a logo, and have a link to ENRTF webpage

Print and digital summary will include both the logo and language

Digital presentations will acknowledge ENRTF and have a logo on the corner of each page

During events, ENRTF will be acknowledged for providing funding

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

This comprehensive evaluation of select easements will guide future direction for habitat establishment and management. It will allow Redwood County to prioritize areas for future State and Federal funding aid for enhanced development, management, easement acquisition, and fee-title land acquisitions. Outreach efforts will introduce the general public to the value of prairie-wetland habitats and support future easements. Workshops, on-site demonstrations and volunteer days will provide the public an opportunity to learn techniques to properly develop and maintain conservation land. Technical training for landowners will allow them better evaluate their easements and conduct, or hire out, development and management

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount	\$ Amount Spent	\$ Amount Remaining
Personnel										
Conservation Specialist		Coordinate with Great River Greening, easement-holder agreements, on-site assistance, and outreach			28%	0.3		\$24,500	-	-
Deputy District Administrator		Reporting, Budget, and Financial Responsibilities			39%	0.14		\$8,500	-	-
							Sub Total	\$33,000	\$33,000	-
Contracts and Services										
Tree Clearing sub-contract following state competitive RFP requirements	Professional or Technical Service Contract	We plan to conduct tree removal on one easement to demonstrate the benefits of woody vegetation control as a critical component of prairie management. This will be conducted in 2021. This site will be host for the woody vegetation control field day in 2022.				0.05		\$10,000	\$10,000	-
University of Minnesota Bee Lab	Professional or Technical Service Contract	The Bee Lab will provide consultation through training other members of this project on bee morpho-group identification and reviewing results for the county easement management report. They have a unique expertise in pollinator identification and have research plots adjacent to some of the easements.				0.06		\$3,000	\$3,000	-
Great River Greening	Sub award	Survey vegetation, pollinators, and soil on easements; develop Redwood County Easement Stewardship Plan; setup demonstration sites and volunteer events; lead outreach and material development. Funds for personnel, travel, mileage, supplies, and other: volunteer event expenses		X		2.12		\$148,100	\$148,100	-

		include handouts, displays, healthy food/beverages, and toilet/tent rental.								
							Sub Total	\$161,100	\$161,100	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Capital Expenditures										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Travel In Minnesota										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Travel Outside Minnesota										
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	MN Wildlife Society & Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference - 1 person, 1 trip each, registration fees, food, est. 1,500 mi (2023 - MN TWS location TBA, MFWC in Kansas; 1 night for TWS and 3 nights for MFWC)	Professional Presentation on Project Summary and Recommendations	X				-	-	-
							Sub Total	-	-	-
Printing and Publication										
	Printing	Report of Findings	Send report and explanation of outcomes to landowners, conservation groups, other regional land management agencies, and funding partners					\$2,900	-	\$2,900
							Sub Total	\$2,900	-	\$2,900

Other Expenses										
							Sub Total	-	-	-
							Grand Total	\$197,000	\$194,100	\$2,900

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Contracts and Services - Great River Greening	Sub award	Survey vegetation, pollinators, and soil on easements; develop Redwood County Easement Stewardship Plan; setup demonstration sites and volunteer events; lead outreach and material development. Funds for personnel, travel, mileage, supplies, and other: volunteer event expenses include handouts, displays, healthy food/beverages, and toilet/tent rental.	GRG will present our project by explaining the evaluation of baseline easement condition and provide recommendation for development and management recommendations. In addition, GRG will discuss the landowner training efforts and how it has led, or will lead, to landowners taking ownership in their own management and will make funds and effort spent on these easements a better long-term investment and benefit for our landscape. GRG will describe how these efforts can be implemented across various landscapes on both private and public lands. This will be presented in 2023 at the Society for Ecological Restoration-Midwest Great Lakes annual conference in Baraboo, WI.
Travel Outside Minnesota	Conference Registration Miles/Meals/Lodging	MN Wildlife Society & Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference - 1 person, 1 trip each, registration fees, food, est. 1,500 mi (2023 - MN TWS location TBA, MFWC in Kansas; 1 night for TWS and 3 nights for MFWC)	I will present our project by explaining the evaluation of baseline easement condition and provide recommendation for development and management recommendations. I will also discuss the landowner training efforts and how it has led, or will lead, to landowners taking ownership in their own management and will make funds and effort spent on these easements a better long-term investment and benefit for our landscape. I will describe how these efforts can be implemented across various landscapes on both private and public lands. This will be presented in 2023 at the Annual Minnesota Wildlife Society meeting and Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference in Kansas.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount	\$ Amount Spent	\$ Amount Remaining
State						
In-Kind	BWSR - RIM Easements Grant	Fund intern to assist GRG surveys and outreach efforts.	Pending	-	-	-
In-Kind	CREP Implementation and Outreach Funds - Bonding	Conservation Specialist will utilize this information to implement conservation practices with new and existing easement-holders.	Secured	\$2,000	\$2,000	-
In-Kind	MN DNR - Interagency Technical Assistance	Aid in outreach efforts and assist in developing management recommendations.	Secured	\$1,500	\$1,500	-
			State Sub Total	\$3,500	\$3,500	-
Non-State						
In-Kind	USFWS	Seed will be purchased for one of the volunteer events. USFWS will develop USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Agreements.	Secured	\$1,500	\$1,500	-
In-Kind	General support funds (foundations, corporations, private donations)	GRG overhead costs covered by General Operating Support	Secured	\$53,000	\$53,000	-
In-Kind	Total of 150 volunteer hours at \$24/hr (MN-DNR NCLI posted rate)	Activity 2: seeding, wetland planting, cedar removal	Secured	\$5,000	\$5,000	-
In-Kind	Equipment, tools, and supplies usage and degradation	Activity 1 & 2: tablets, augers, shovels, spades, loppers, and other equipment for conducting vegetation and soil surveys and seeding, planting, and tree cutting at demonstration and volunteer events.	Secured	\$5,000	\$5,000	-
In-Kind	Redwood SWCD - General Operating Budget	SWCD overhead costs	Secured	\$5,000	\$5,000	-
			Non State Sub Total	\$69,500	\$69,500	-
			Funds Total	\$73,000	\$73,000	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [348cf062-df4.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Attached is a map of the RIM easements in Redwood County and the associated list of potential evaluation and outreach sites. The map shows all the easements and denotes which ones will be drawn upon for site evaluation and on-site outreach activities. The selected sites are larger easements from across the county with varying habitat types (e.g., grasslands, wetland restorations, floodplains, rock outcrops). The enrollment date range for these easements is 1988 - 2018....

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
GRG Board Resolution	245d972b-1d5.pdf
Redwood SWCD Board Resolution Letter	4b1e9e45-727.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
USFWS Letter of Support	a0f0a6f7-81a.pdf
Redwood Pheasants Forever Letter of Support	8a18b4dd-712.pdf
Background Check Certification	98db97da-d4b.pdf
Restoration Demonstration/Volunteer Event Handout	b6e568ca-4ae.pdf
Restoration Demonstration/Volunteer Event Handout #2	b4c26828-a7a.pdf
Event Announcement Flyer	c8926ed0-dc0.pdf
Redwood County RIM Easement Evaluation and Public Outreach Report 2024	86c30ac7-29d.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

Being that we were funded at 100% of our request, we don't intend to make any changes from the initial proposal.

Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?

N/A

Do you agree travel expenses must follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

Yes, Redwood County

Work Plan Amendments

Amendment ID	Request Type	Changes made on the following pages	Explanation & justification for Amendment Request (word limit 75)	Date Submitted	Approved	Date of LCCMR Action
1	Amendment Request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Collaborators - Project Manager Info • Project Collaborators - Organization Info • Project Collaborators - Project Partner Info • Budget - Professional / Technical Contracts • Budget - Travel and Conferences 	Due to GRG's familiarity with the surveys and staffing changes at the SWCD, partners agreed to have GRG staff present project results at a regional conference instead of SWCD staff. The Society for Ecological Restoration-Midwest Great Lakes chapter conference is comparable to the Wildlife Society and Fish and Wildlife conferences in the original work plan with Minnesotan attendees and local applications of findings to landowners and land managers.	March 29, 2023	Yes	May 9, 2023
2	Project Manager	Previous Manager: Scott Wold (scott_w@co.redwood.mn.us) New Manager: Nick Brozek (nick_b@co.redwood.mn.us)	New Staff, previous PM no longer with organization.	March 29, 2023	Yes	March 29, 2023
3	Amendment Request	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget • Other • Budget - Non-ENRTF Funds Contributed 	Match adjustments to reflect deliverables: No intern was hired due to SWCD staffing changes at the start of the grant; 175 volunteer hours instead of 750 (recruitment remained difficult post-COVID), but GRG provided more in-kind match through staff hours and overhead (\$53,000 instead of \$30,000); and \$1,500 of USFWS seed instead of \$5,000 for the smaller event. Total match was \$70,000 instead of \$68,000.	August 12, 2024	Yes	October 15, 2024

Status Update Reporting

Final Status Update August 14, 2024

Date Submitted: August 12, 2024

Date Approved: October 15, 2024

Overall Update

Final data analysis was concluded, and the final report completed. Webpage was created and launched on GRG's website, and landowner letters were completed by GRG and mailed by the SWCD. The completed report was presented and shared with the Redwood SWCD and BWSR. Next steps and recommendations for easement quality and proper landowner education were included in the final report. Dissemination will continue beyond the grant.

Activity 1

Great River Greening completed the engagement and outreach during the previous reporting periods. In total, volunteer hours were well under the goal with 150 hours completed instead of the proposed 750. Recruitment was difficult for the events in 2022 and 2023, possibly due to a continued decline in volunteers after the pandemic. Changes in staff also likely impacted volunteer recruitment.

(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Activity 2

Great River Greening completed all vegetation surveys and data collection during previous reporting periods. Data analysis and a final report were completed and shared with the SWCD and BWSR. Recommendations for future easement stewardship were included in the report and shared with partners.

(This activity marked as complete as of this status update)

Dissemination

GRG presented at the Society of Ecological Restoration - Midwest-Great Lakes Chapter annual conference in Hammond, IN, in May 2024. The presentation was a preliminary look at the 3 years of data that was collected with a heavy focus on floristic quality in relation to pollinator species. A final analysis of the data was concluded, and a final report was shared with Redwood SWCD and BWSR. A webpage highlighting the project was launched on GRG's website (greatrivergreening.org/redwood) and landowner letters were created and mailed. The final report included recommendations for improving habitat quality across easements and methods for landowner education and engagement to encourage land stewardship throughout private lands.

Additional Status Update Reporting

Additional Status Update August 14, 2024

Date Submitted: June 6, 2024

Date Approved: June 28, 2024

Overall Update

Per LCCMR staff guidance, due to system logic this is place holder text to allow the submission of required reporting.

Activity 1

Per LCCMR staff guidance, due to system logic this is place holder text to allow the submission of required reporting.

Activity 2

Per LCCMR staff guidance, due to system logic this is place holder text to allow the submission of required reporting.

Dissemination

Per LCCMR staff guidance, due to system logic this is place holder text to allow the submission of required reporting.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update June 1, 2024

Date Submitted: June 6, 2024

Date Approved: June 28, 2024

Overall Update

Data analysis occurred during this period on vegetation, pollinator use, and tree cover. The final report to the landowners and the county is being developed for final dissemination in June. The Redwood SWCD and BWSR have been notified of various preliminary results. Webpage and presentations for dissemination are being developed as well.

Activity 1

Great River Greening completed the engagement and outreach during the previous reporting periods.

Activity 2

To date, all the data collection has taken place (21 RIM/CREP easements and 3 Prairie Bank easements for vegetation, 16 for pollinator use, and 125 for tree cover). This data is being worked into a report highlighting opportunities for stewardship on easements across the county.

Dissemination

During this period, dissemination had been limited to preliminary results to Redwood SWCD and BWSR. Once the report is finalized in June, it will be released to SWCD and BWSR, along with letters to the individual landowners where vegetation surveys were conducted. Preliminary results are also being shared at partner meetings and conferences where GRG staff are attending through matching funds.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update December 1, 2023

Date Submitted: January 11, 2024

Date Approved: January 30, 2024

Overall Update

This period concluded the in-field surveys. The number of easements available to survey was lower than anticipated, but the results will still be helpful for describing the status of easements in the county. With the final phase of surveys including aerial imagery analysis, results will be ready by Spring 2024. The demonstrations and volunteer engagement also concluded during this period after hosting two volunteer and demonstration events in May 2023. The demonstration/volunteer events are complete, but web page and more fact sheets are underway. Feedback was positive from attendees and the impact of the events will lead to better easement management practices among those who attended and people with whom they share this new-found knowledge.

Activity 1

During this reporting period, Great River Greening identified demonstration locations and hosted two demonstration/volunteer events in Redwood County in May demonstrating easement enhancement methods and discussing resources for improving habitat. The first was at an easement near Walnut Grove, MN. The second event was on the Phyllis Voosen Wildlife Management Area near Vesta, MN. The latter was intended to be on an easement as well, but there was a limited response from landowners interested in hosting. The University of Minnesota Bee Lab and DNR partnered with GRG in these demonstrations and discussions. Between the two events, 30 attendees helped plant 700 native prairie plugs in prairies while also learning numerous methods for managing their own lands. Many attendees were local landowners who were eager to learn restoration and management practices for their own lands. Educational materials were developed for each event - in the form of a prairie restoration 2-pager specific to the two easement sites and a volunteer supervisor packet for the final event. DNR and the Bee Lab also provided pre-made educational materials. Feedback was highly positive and numerous neighbors of the site were highly interested in the activities and practices implemented on each site.

Activity 2

The original goal of surveying over 1,000 acres was met in 2022, but the acres were from only 16 large easements. The sites were also selected from higher-quality easements than anticipated due to landowners of high-quality sites being more willing to allow surveys on their lands, so more efforts were made to survey from a more randomized pool of another 10 easements after 2022. New site numbers decreased by August 2023 due to landowners changing their minds and one passing away, so 6 more were surveyed in 2023 (25 sites and 1,776 acres total from 2021 to 2023). Surveys included timed meander surveys following the University of Minnesota Restoration Evaluation Project Vegetation Monitoring Tool and floral areal cover estimates. Pollinator surveys were conducted across 19 sites and 1,453 acres. Data will be analyzed over Winter 2023/2024. Aerial imagery will be analyzed for cedar encroachment over Winter 2023/2024 as well. The easement stewardship plan has been delayed until June 2024 due to the extension of surveys into 2023 and extended data analysis.

Dissemination

Dissemination during this period consisted of numerous social media posts, emails, flyers, and direct communication promoting the May volunteer and demonstration events as well as summaries following the events. GRG staff are also communicating their initial findings with partners from DNR, SWCDs, and various organizations in the Redwood County area. Dissemination will continue in Winter 2023/2024 as results are shared from data analysis and webpage material is constructed.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update June 1, 2023

Date Submitted: August 7, 2023

Date Approved: September 5, 2023

Overall Update

Work in this period included a focus on establishing connections necessary to carryout habitat surveys and stewardship plans, planning outreach events for May, hosting those events, and presenting at a regional conference. Identification of survey participants is a major step toward achieving the outcome of this project as it is necessary to create stewardship plans and the basis of a template for management plans on other easements within the county. Outreach and dissemination help to progress toward the outcome of this project by increasing awareness of the need and methods to improve restoration and management of prairies and wetlands, increase biodiversity, habitat, water storage, water quality, and recreation. The events occurred in May 2023, but surveys will continue in Summer/Fall 2023, data evaluation in Fall/Winter 2023/2024, and final outreach and dissemination material development into 2024.

Activity 1

During the reporting period, Great River Greening worked on planning for two outreach events that took place in May 2023. Activities included scheduling, communication, mailings, social media posts, reaching out to partners, and purchasing supplies. One event was in Lucan, MN and the second was in Vesta, MN. These events engaged the public to learn more about prairies and pollinators through prairie plug plantings, lectures from the University of Minnesota Bee Lab, and DNR. There were 16 and 12 volunteers at each event who planted 300 and 400 plugs, respectively, across 10 acres at each site. They planted for the first 2 hours and then learned about private land restoration resources, funding opportunities, wildlife and pollinator habitat benefits from land management, and how to do various enhancement activities. The final dissemination materials and webpage for this activity will be developed in Winter 2023/2024 and Spring 2024 based on the final survey results from Activity 2.

Activity 2

Activity 2 related work included organizing surveys for summer 2023 in addition to the sites that were surveyed in 2021 and 2022 - determining size, year of easement, owner contact information. Great River Greening contacted 56 landowners regarding conducting vegetation surveys on their RIM/CREP conservation easement. The final sites were selected to accurately represent the size, type and year of easement enrollment that are present within the county. Currently, 10 surveys are planned for August 2023 which aligns with the goal for this project. Survey data and results will be organized and shared following the final surveys.

Dissemination

GRG presented at the Society for Ecological Restoration-Midwest Great Lakes annual conference in Baraboo, WI April 15, 2023. The presentation was a preliminary look at the first two years of data collected from the surveys. It explained the baseline easement condition and provided recommendations for development and management - mostly focusing on adding food sources for pollinators in the spring when flowers are limited. In addition, GRG discussed the landowner training efforts and how it has led, or will lead, to landowners taking ownership in their own management. The hope is that the results of this survey and associated outreach will make easement development more sustainable and open opportunities to apply for additional funds for development and enhancement. This information can be used to yield better long-term investments and benefit the sustainability of our agricultural landscape in southwest Minnesota. GRG described how these efforts can be implemented across various landscapes on both private and public lands.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update December 1, 2022

Date Submitted: December 2, 2022

Date Approved: December 16, 2022

Overall Update

The outcomes in this project depend on the surveys and their results. Field surveys are complete. Data are being analyzed and a report produced to summarize the results. Great River Greening surveyed vegetation, bees, and butterflies across 52 meander lines on 15 easements and 3 reference sites in 2021 and 2022.

Activity 1

Great River Greening hosted the first of three events through coordination with the SWCD and the private landowner and easement holder. The event took place on the cedar removal demonstration site. Approximately 2 to 3 acres of dense cedar were removed in the winter of 2021-2022. There were 19 volunteers who attended the event on October 29th, 2022, to seed native prairie species into the new opening, learn about cedar removal techniques, discuss prairie restoration strategies, and hear about the benefits of easement management. The final two events will occur Spring 2023 at sites presently under discussion.

Activity 2

Great River Greening completed vegetation, bee, and butterfly surveys across 52 meander lines by the end of Summer 2022. The UMN Bee Lab helped the GRG field crew prepare for surveys in Spring 2022. The 2022 survey data are presently being analyzed and quality metrics will be calculated. Results will be used to develop an easement stewardship plan.

Dissemination

Dissemination to date has included a field day and volunteer event, mailers, radio interviews, newsletters, social media posts, website updates, phone calls to local businesses, and communications with partnering organizations and agencies. More events in the spring will provide more thorough dissemination opportunities where Great River Greening will share the results of their surveys and the easement stewardship plan. Partners including the UMN Bee Lab will describe the benefits of site management to pollinators. GRG will continue to disseminate information about the project leading up to the spring events and work on developing educational materials and a webpage.

Status Update Reporting

Status Update June 1, 2022

Date Submitted: May 31, 2022

Date Approved: July 6, 2022

Overall Update

The inventory and evaluation of permanent conservation easements is coming along nicely. Data collection should be completed by fall of 2022.

Activity 1

Great River Greening has been coordinating with the SWCD and UMN Bee Lab to prepare for the first of three events. The first event will occur this fall in a recent cedar removal easement. Work under this activity will accelerate this summer as partners prepare for the first event and analyze results from the field surveys. The final two events will occur Spring 2023 at sites yet to be determined.

Activity 2

Great River Greening completed vegetation surveys across 22 of the 44 meander lines (spanning half of the easement sites) in late summer of 2021. Ecologists spent Winter 2021-2022 coordinating with the UMN Bee Lab to prepare for pollinator surveys that will begin June 2022. The remaining vegetation surveys will be completed in late summer of 2022. The 2021 survey data have been analyzed and quality metrics calculated based on the Galatowitsch and Bohnen (2016) protocols. The remaining sites will be analyzed similarly in Fall 2022 and results will be used to develop an easement stewardship plan. Soil sampling was coordinated with the SWCD for the same sites as the vegetation and pollinator surveys.

Dissemination

Information to be disseminated still being collected.