

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund**

# 2021 Request for Proposal

## **General Information**

**Proposal ID:** 2021-140

**Proposal Title:** Redwood County RIM Easement Evaluation and Public Outreach

## **Project Manager Information**

**Name:** Kristy Zajac

**Organization:** Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District

**Office Telephone:** (507) 637-2427

**Email:** kristy\_z@co.redwood.mn.us

## **Project Basic Information**

**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.

**Funds Requested:** $197,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** 2023-06-30

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Small Projects (H) **Secondary Category:** Foundational Natural Resource Data and Information (A)

## **Project Location**

**What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?** Region(s): SW

**What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?** Region(s): SW

**When will the work impact occur?** During the Project and In the Future

## **Narrative**

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

Redwood County has 540 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? i.e. What are you seeking funding to do? You will be asked to expand on this in Activities and 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 easement-holders. 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

## **Activities and Milestones**

### **Activity 1: 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** | **Completion Date** |
| Evaluate current pollinator use of easements | 2023-05-31 |
| Evaluate soil health and restored wetland condition | 2023-05-31 |
| Complete vegetation surveys on easements | 2023-05-31 |
| Develop Redwood County Easement Stewardship Plan | 2023-06-30 |

### **Activity 2: 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** | **Completion Date** |
| Prepare first volunteer event site (demonstration site #2) through cedar removal contract | 2021-12-31 |
| Choose three demonstration sites based on feasibility and site evaluations | 2022-08-31 |
| First site tour and demonstration | 2022-10-31 |
| MN Wildlife Society - Present preliminary findings and outreach efforts | 2023-03-31 |
| Create educational material including fact sheets and a webpage based on the easement stewardship plan | 2023-06-30 |
| Host two volunteer events at easement demonstration sites | 2023-06-30 |

## **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 |

## **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 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 easement-holders will allow landowners to better evaluate their easements and conduct, or hire out, development and management activities.

## **Project Manager and Organization Qualifications**

**Project Manager Name:** Kristy Zajac

**Job Title:** Conservation Specialist

**Provide description of the project manager’s qualifications to manage the proposed project.**Kristy Zajac is the Conservation Specialist for the Redwood SWCD. She is responsible for enrolling the most CREP III acres of any county in the state. Besides RIM & CREP, Kristy promotes CRP, conducts the MN Buffer Law compliance, and serves as the LGU representative for the MN Wetland Conservation Act (WCA). She has worked for over 20 years on private lands wildlife habitat development and management. She assists in enrolling all the RIM/CREP easements in Redwood County and works directly with landowners and agencies on the development, management, and monitoring of easements. Additionally, Kristy has been the project manager for several Conservation Partners Legacy grants and an Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund grant for invasive species monitoring on MN Wildlife Management Areas. She partnered with the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) on a 2020 LCCMR grant, "Pollinator and Beneficial Insect Strategic Habitat Program", which is currently recommended for funding this legislative session.

Kristy has a BS in Fisheries and Wildlife Management. Prior to working with the Redwood SWCD, she worked for the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Land Department on conservation land development, served as the Assistance Area Wildlife Manager for the MN DNR managing State land in three (3) counties, covered seven (7) counties as the Private Lands Specialist for the MN DNR in Mankato, and worked for several Conservation Districts in Michigan on private lands wildlife and forest management. She has been active with many conservation organizations over the years, elevating the importance of private lands conservation.

**Organization:** Redwood Soil & Water Conservation District

**Organization Description:**The Redwood SWCD is a local unit of government established to address soil and water conservation concerns within the county. They provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and operators to allow them to install, establish, and maintain effective conservation practices on the land they own or farm. Staff includes three technical people and two administrative employees. The Redwood SWCD has an annual operating budget of a half million dollars and manages approximately $1,000,000 in grant funds directly spent on local conservation practices.

## **Budget Summary**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category / Name** | **Subcategory or Type** | **Description** | **Purpose** | **Gen. Ineli gible** | **% Bene fits** | **# FTE** | **Class ified Staff?** | **$ Amount** |
| **Personnel** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Deputy District Administrator |  | Reporting, Budget, and Financial Responsibilities |  |  | 39% | 0.14 |  | $8,500 |
| Conservation Specialist |  | Coordinate with Great River Greening, easement-holder agreements, on-site assistance, and outreach |  |  | 28% | 0.3 |  | $24,500 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **$33,000** |
| **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. |  | X |  | 2.14 |  | $147,500 |
| 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 |
| 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 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **$160,500** |
| **Equipment, Tools, and Supplies** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **-** |
| **Capital Expenditures** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **-** |
| **Acquisitions and Stewardship** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **-** |
| **Travel In Minnesota** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging | MN Wildlife Society & Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference | Explain outcomes of project and how to incorporate these findings into new and existing conservation easement planning | X |  |  |  | $500 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **$500** |
| **Travel Outside Minnesota** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **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 |  |  |  |  | $3,000 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **$3,000** |
| **Other Expenses** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Sub Total** | **-** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | **Grand Total** | **$197,000** |

### **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. | Volunteer events will include supplies and rentals as a standard recruitment tool and safety item: healthy food, beverages, tables, chairs, portable toilets, and tent rentals for 50-75 volunteers. We do not want volunteers hungry or thirsty while working on likely remote easement properties. Standard food items and beverages include selections of fruit, granola bars, juice, water, coffee, and sandwiches (Food and rentals: $3,500/3 events).Supply purchases will be for volunteer gloves and butterfly nets ($500). Other equipment will be included as in-kind match for the project. |
| **Travel In Minnesota** | Conference Registration Miles/Meals/Lodging | MN Wildlife Society & Midwest Fish & Wildlife Conference | The purpose of this project is to evaluate conservation easements and disperse findings to other agencies and conservation groups for use on the land they assist in managing. |

### **Non ENRTF Funds**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Category** | **Specific Source** | **Use** | **Status** | **Amount** |
| **State** |  |  |  |  |
| In-Kind | BWSR - RIM Easements Grant | Fund intern to assist GRG surveys and outreach efforts. | Pending | $1,000 |
| 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 |
| In-Kind | MN DNR - Interagency Technical Assistance | Aid in outreach efforts and assist in developing management recommendations. | Secured | $1,500 |
|  |  |  | **State Sub Total** | **$4,500** |
| **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. | Pending | $5,500 |
| In-Kind | General support funds (foundations, corporations, private donations) | GRG overhead costs covered by General Operating Support | Potential | $30,000 |
| In-Kind | Total of 750 volunteer hours at $24/hr (MN-DNR NCLI posted rate) | Activity 2: seeding, wetland planting, cedar removal | Potential | $18,000 |
| 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 |
| In-Kind | Redwood SWCD - General Operating Budget | SWCD overhead costs | Secured | $5,000 |
|  |  |  | **Non State Sub Total** | **$63,500** |
|  |  |  | **Funds Total** | **$68,000** |

## **Attachments**

### **Required Attachments**

#### ***Visual Component***

File: [348cf062-df4.pdf](https://lccmrprojectmgmt.leg.mn/media/map/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](https://lccmrprojectmgmt.leg.mn/media/attachments/245d972b-1d5.pdf) |
| Redwood SWCD Board Resolution Letter | [4b1e9e45-727.pdf](https://lccmrprojectmgmt.leg.mn/media/attachments/4b1e9e45-727.pdf) |

### **Optional Attachments**

#### ***Support Letter or Other***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Title** | **File** |
| USFWS Letter of Support | [a0f0a6f7-81a.pdf](https://lccmrprojectmgmt.leg.mn/media/attachments/a0f0a6f7-81a.pdf) |
| Redwood Pheasants Forever Letter of Support | [8a18b4dd-712.pdf](https://lccmrprojectmgmt.leg.mn/media/attachments/8a18b4dd-712.pdf) |

## **Administrative Use**

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**
 No

**Does your project have patent, royalties, or revenue potential?**
 No

**Does your project include research?**
 No

**Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?**
 Yes, Redwood County