

2007 Project Abstract

For the Period Ending June 30, 2009

PROJECT TITLE: Protection of Rare and Unique Rock Outcrop Wetlands

PROJECT MANAGER: Thomas J. Kalahar

AFFILIATION: Renville Soil & Water Conservation District

MAILING ADDRESS: 1008 West Lincoln

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WEBSITE: www.renvilleswcd.com

FUNDING SOURCE: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

LEGAL CITATION: ML 2007, Chap. 30, Sec 2, Subd. 5(b)

APPROPRIATION AMOUNT: \$563,000

Overall Project Outcome and Results

The Minnesota River Valley contains ancient bedrock outcrops with associated wetlands that provide unique habitats for specialized plant and animal communities rarely found elsewhere in Minnesota. These resources are threatened by mining and other development interests, as removal of the rock results in the severe degradation or permanent loss of the wetlands located among the rock complexes. Although the wetlands vary greatly in size and duration, some of the smallest and most temporary basins harbor the rarest and most specialized plants. Many of these wetlands may not be protected due to de minimis (i.e. minimum size) exceptions to the Wetland Conservation Act. Rock outcrops are also a component of the Minnesota River's riparian zone and destruction of this unique habitat will continue to degrade the water quality and aquatic habitat of the Minnesota River and its tributaries. Unlike other mining operations, there is no reclamation plan possible for replacing this very unique landscape feature once it is removed. This project consisted of efforts to protect these unique habitats through conservation easements and habitat restoration activities.

For the conservation easements portion of the project, applications from 9 landowners totaling 788 acres were scored by a team of natural resource professionals to determine the highest quality sites under grant guidelines. The goal of this project was to protect 200 acres with Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) perpetual conservation easements in Renville and Redwood Counties. That goal was exceeded and 212.4 acres were protected. Four landowners received \$517,411 in easement payments from grant funds. In accordance with the RIM program, landowners retain ownership.

For the habitat restoration portion of the project, \$16,049 in grant funds were used for invasive species control, along with \$31,441 leveraged from other sources to assist in meeting the goals of the conservation plans developed on each easement as part of the RIM process.

Project partners were USDA NRCS, MN DNR Wildlife (Heritage Enhancement), DNR ECO-Non Game (Heritage Enhancement), State of Minnesota Native Buffer Cost Share Program, and US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Project Results Use and Dissemination

Initially staff from the Renville & Redwood Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) had face-to-face contact with landowners. This proved to be a very successful way of generating applications, as 788 acres were offered. The applications that were not funded were kept for future reference and landowners have all been contacted and given an opportunity to apply for dollars from the ML 2009 Environment and

Natural Resources Trust Fund appropriation for \$1.5 million, for which we have a goal of enrolling an additional 530 acres in perpetual easements.

Several newspaper articles have been published since the inception of the 2007 grant. The regional West Central Tribune in Willmar, MN has done articles about the program. In addition local newspapers have included articles about the program. Tom Kalahar, Project Manager, was interviewed by Fred Harris for an article published in the March-April 2009 issue of the Minnesota Conservation Volunteer. The early articles caused landowners in other counties to request information on how they could enroll their land into the program. This landowner interest resulted in Chippewa, Yellow Medicine and Lac qui Parle SWCD offices joining Renville & Redwood in making application for the 2009 funds.

The Renville SWCD continues to update the public on the status of the grants on their website www.renvillewcd.com. Tom Kalahar has done informational/educational talks on the Minnesota River Basin and the unique features of the Granite Rock Outcrops. Audiences included the general public in both Redwood Falls and New Ulm, a presentation for landowners in the Renville/Chippewa DNR Working Lands Initiative area, as well as a presentation to the Upper Sioux Community. DNR Private Lands Program staff have used their one-on-one contacts with landowners to promote the program in addition to sponsoring the Landowner Workshop which included Tom's presentation on the Rock Outcrop program.

In August 2008, Renville SWCD hosted the Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) meeting. A one day tour for about 60 people included stopping at a rock outcrop site. SWCD staff used this opportunity to inform the BWSR and guests about the uniqueness of the natural resource and to give them an update on progress toward meeting the goals for the grant.

Local SWCD staff and supervisors continue to keep their local County Boards informed about progress of not only the 2007 grant but also about landowner interest for future funding.

Trust Fund 2007 Work Program Final Report

Date of Report: 6-30-2009

Trust Fund 2007 Work Program Final Report

I. PROJECT TITLE: Protection of Rare and Unique Rock Outcrop Wetlands

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Affiliation: Renville SWCD

Mailing Address: 1008 W. Lincoln

City / State / Zip : Olivia MN 56277

Telephone Number: 320-523-1559

E-mail Address: kalahar@yahoo.com

FAX Number: 320-523-2389

Web Page address: n/a

Location: Redwood and Renville Counties, Minnesota

Total Trust Fund Project Budget:	Trust Fund Appropriation:	\$563,000.00
	Minus Amount Spent:	\$563,000.00
	Equal Balance:	\$ 0

Legal Citation: ML 2007, Chap. 30, Sec.2, Subd. 5(b).

Appropriation Language: \$563,000 is from the trust fund to the Board of Water and Soil Resources in cooperation with Renville and Redwood Soil and Water Conservation Districts for perpetual easements of unique wetland and riparian habitats associated with rock outcrops in the Minnesota River Valley.

II & III. FINAL Project Summary:

The Minnesota River Valley contains ancient bedrock outcrops with associated wetlands that provide unique habitats for specialized plant and animal communities rarely found elsewhere in Minnesota. These resources are threatened by mining and other development interests, as removal of the rock results in the severe degradation or permanent loss of the wetlands located among the rock complexes. Although the wetlands vary greatly in size and duration, some of the smallest and most temporary basins harbor the rarest and most specialized plants. Many of these wetlands may not be protected due to de minimis (i.e. minimum size) exceptions to the Wetland Conservation Act. Rock outcrops are also a component of the Minnesota River's riparian zone and destruction of this unique habitat will continue to degrade the water quality and aquatic habitat of the Minnesota River and its tributaries. Unlike other mining operations, there is no reclamation plan possible for replacing this very unique landscape feature once it is removed. This project consisted of efforts to protect these unique habitats through conservation easements and habitat restoration activities.

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Project partners were USDA NRCS, MN DNR Wildlife (Heritage Enhancement), DNR ECO-Non Game (Heritage Enhancement), State of Minnesota Native Buffer Cost Share Program, and US Fish & Wildlife Service.

IV. OUTLINE OF PROJECT RESULTS:

Result 1: Habitat Protection via Perpetual Easements:

Description: This project will protect 200 acres of rock outcrop complexes within riparian corridors and/or with associated wetlands. Compensation for easements to willing landowners will be secured using local cropland rates of the Reinvest In Minnesota easement program administered through the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources (BWSR) and the Renville and Redwood Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs). Easement applications will be prioritized by a local work group comprised of technical experts from local, state and federal agencies. A total of twenty easements will be recorded. The goal of the local SWCD offices is to have applications taken for the entire 200 acres within the first year of the grant. Due to the sometimes lengthy easement process, this would ensure signed agreements with landowners before the end of the grant period.

Summary

Budget Info for Result 1:	Trust Fund Budget:	<u>\$546,951</u>
	Amount Spent:	\$546,951
	Balance:	\$ 0

Amendment Approved: January 28, 2009

Deliverable	Completion Date	Budget	Status
1. 20 easements Totaling 200 acres	6-30-2008	\$546,951	Complete

Final Report Summary: 6-30-2009

Four easements totaling 212.4 acres were recorded and landowners paid by the fall of 2008. Total acres exceeded the original goal while the number of easements was less than originally anticipated. In hindsight, we did not anticipate the amount of landowner interest in this program and did not anticipate interest from landowners outside the two original partner counties. Having just made application for our third and final grant, we realize we would have been wise to request more funds initially instead of having to come back with supplemental applications which included additional partners. A larger original application would have avoided scoring some applications more than once which also would have saved staff time and saved some landowners from making multiple applications for the same piece of property. We did not anticipate landowners offering larger tracts of land with multiple granite rock outcrops on those tracts. Therefore, we originally expected smaller easements. A positive outcome of less easements was that staff were able to spend more time with each landowner and vendor as restoration work progressed.

Result 2: Habitat Restoration:

Description: To provide appropriate habitat management practices including but not limited to invasive species management and livestock management facilities (e.g. fencing and watering sites) on the acres protected by easements. We will continue to seek additional funding from federal and private agencies to augment this budget item.

Summary Budget Info for Result 2: Trust Fund Budget: \$16,049

Amount Spent: \$16,049

Balance: \$ 0

Amendment Approved: January 28, 2009

Deliverable	Completion Date	Budget	Status
1. Practice implementation	6-30-2009	\$16,049	Complete

Completion Date: Practice completion within six months after recorded conservation easement. This could be delayed due to weather and season of the year.

Final Report Summary: 6-30-2009

A total of \$6,049 was paid for invasive species removal which completed this portion of the grant. In addition, \$31, 441 was obtained from other sources to assist in practice implementation as outlined in the easement conservation plans. Other funding sources included USDA EQIP program (\$21,537), US Fish & Wildlife Service (\$2,500), DNR Wildlife Heritage Enhancement (\$1,513), DNR ECO-non game Heritage Enhancement (\$2,100) and State of Minnesota Native Buffer Cost Share Program (\$3,791). SWCD Staff in both counties sought out funding sources from these partners. Staff from the partner agencies worked with each other and the landowners to accomplish the goals laid out in the conservation plans. When the original grant was written, we hoped to get funding for practice implementation from some of these sources but with annual budget cycles and budget uncertainty, it was

never a guarantee. Both Renville & Redwood SWCD offices enjoy a good working relationship with all the partner agencies and again found them to be willing to assist SWCD staff and the landowners by using their programs to help implement the goals laid out in the easement conservation plans.

V. TOTAL TRUST FUND PROJECT BUDGET:

Staff or Contract Services : \$23,000 for Renville & Redwood SWCD Staff to promote project, process applications and easements, design conservation plans and supervise construction of practices. \$1,400 to BWSR to process easements. \$5,140 for attorney fees for title searches, title opinions and to purchase title insurance.

Equipment: \$0

Development: \$ 0

Restoration: \$ \$10,000 for staff time to the Renville & Redwood SWCD offices for staff time for technical assistance, conservation plan development, supervision of practice implementation. \$6,049 in grant funds for native species removal. \$31, 441 from other sources including MN DNR both Wildlife & Eco, US Fish & Wildlife Service, USDA NRCS, &State of Minnesota Native Buffer Cost-Share program.

Acquisition, including easements: \$517,411 for 4 easements totaling 212.4 acres using September 2007 RIM cropland rates.

TOTAL TRUST FUND PROJECT BUDGET: \$563,000

Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500: n/a

VI. OTHER FUNDS & PARTNERS:

A. Project Partners: BWSR Easement Team Staff, DNR Private Lands Specialist, US FWS staff and NRCS staff in addition to Redwood & Renville SWCD staff.

B. Other Funds Proposed to be Spent during the Project Period:

At the time the proposal was written the only funds pledged were in-kind from the SWCD offices for office space, vehicles, etc. As the project progressed, funds were secured from several sources to assist in practice implementation. Those sources were the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service EQIP program, both the Wildlife and Eco sections of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the US Fish & Wildlife Service and funds were obtained through the State of Minnesota Native Buffer Cost-Share Program which is administered by the BWSR and the local SWCD offices. A total of \$31,441 in payments to vendors and landowners came from these sources. Staff time was not tracked for the purposes of this reporting and therefore we do not have a dollar amount to assign to that.

Staff time was also used as in-kind match when the initial site visits were done to score applications. A team of natural resource professionals including staff from DNR, US FWS and the local SWCD offices visited each individual site to determine which applications would be funded.

C. Past Spending: none

D. Time: The project was completed within the timelines laid out in the original proposal. Due to weather conditions, some invasive species removal was done on one site in Spring 2009 but that was completed well before the end of the grant period. Staff in both Renville & Redwood SWCD offices are very experienced with the RIM easement process and have a good working relationship with the easement staff at BWSR. There were no unexpected delays with applications and easement processing.

VII. DISSEMINATION:

Initially staff from the Renville & Redwood Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) had face-to-face contact with landowners. This proved to be a very successful way of generating applications as 788 acres were offered. The applications that were not funded were kept for future reference and landowners have all been contacted and given an opportunity to apply for the 2009 grant which was funded for \$1.5 million with a goal of enrolling an additional 530 acres in perpetual easements.

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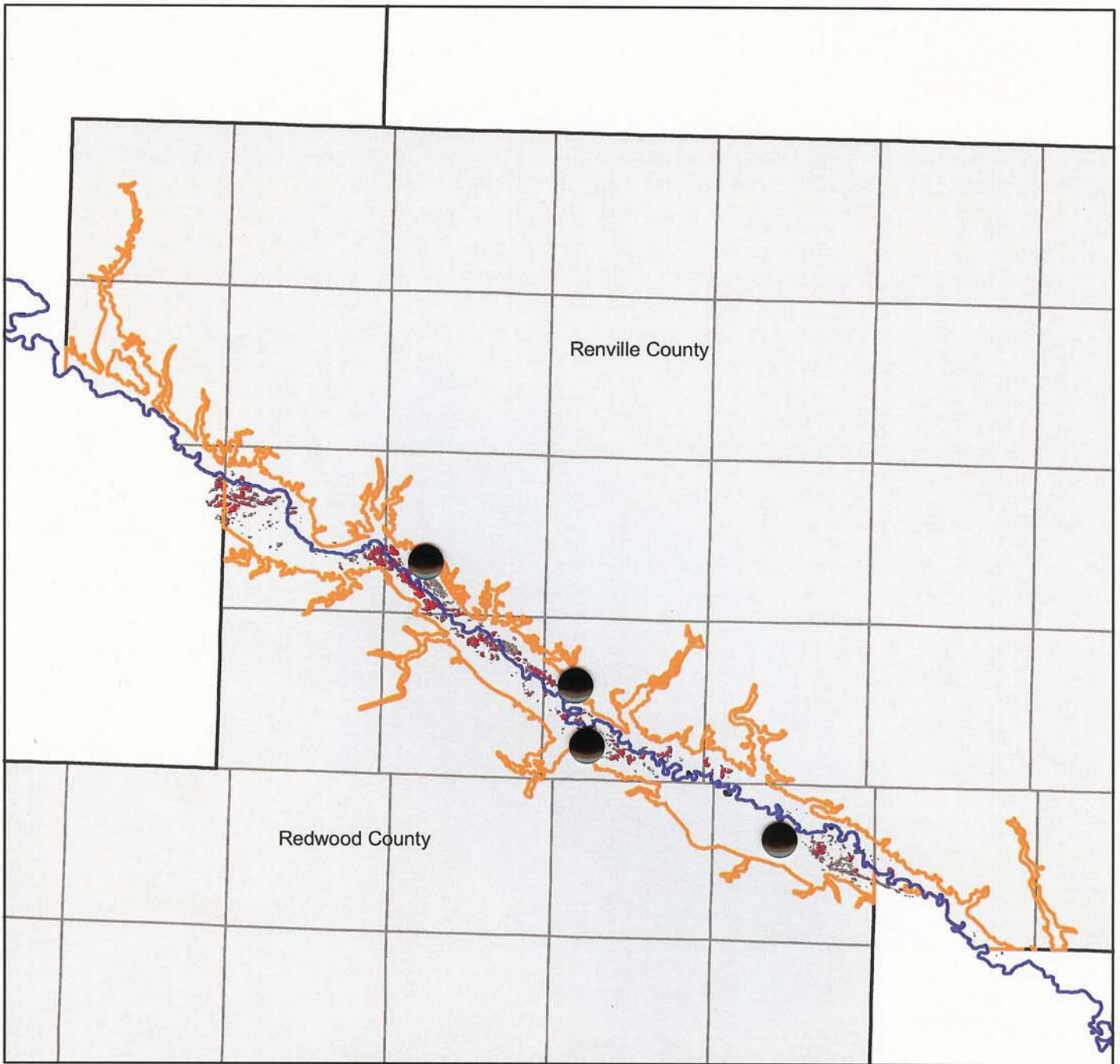
Renville & Redwood SWCD staff and supervisors continue to keep their respective County Boards informed about progress of not only the 2007 grant but also about landowner interest for future funding.

VIII. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Periodic work program progress reports will be submitted not later than December 31, 2007, June 30, 2008, December 31, 2008 and June 30, 2009

IX. RESEARCH PROJECTS: N/A

Protection of Rock Outcrop Riparian and Wetland Habitats Map



Legend

- MN River
- Grant Eligible Area
- County Boundaries
- Known Rock Outcrops

0 2 4 8 12 16 20 Miles

Renville and Redwood Counties



Maps are for graphical purposes only. They do not represent a legal survey. While every effort has been made to ensure that these data are accurate and reliable within the limits of the current state of the art, NRCS cannot assume liability for any damages caused by any errors or omissions in the data, nor as a result of the failure of the data to function on a particular system. NRCS makes no warranty, expressed or implied, nor does the fact of distribution constitute such a warranty.

