Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Shell Rock River Watershed Habitat Restoration Program - Phase IV

Laws of Minnesota 2015 Final Report

General Information

Date: 08/15/2025

Project Title: Shell Rock River Watershed Habitat Restoration Program - Phase IV

Funds Recommended: $2,414,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2015, First Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 5(f)

Appropriation Language: $2,414,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with the Shell Rock River Watershed District to protect, restore, and enhance aquatic habitat in the Shell Rock River watershed. A list of proposed acquisitions, restorations, and enhancements must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Freeborn.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Restore

Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Wetlands

Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The Shell Rock River Watershed District's Habitat Restoration Program restored, enhanced, and protected critical shallow lake, wetland and stream bank habitat benefiting fish, waterfowl and wildlife populations, preserving an outdoor legacy for future generations. Projects included creating an adjustable outlet on Pickerel Lake, an Upper Twin Lake Pumping Station, Lower Twin Lake Fish Barrier and Stream Enhancements, a Wedge Creek Wetland acquisition and restoring a meandering portion of Wedge Creek.

Process & Methods

The Phase IV Habitat Restoration Projects were competed and all objectives and outcomes were met. Specifically the projects, and the processes and methods to completed them are listed below. The projects in this phase were successful due to partnering resources with USFWS and MN DNR staff, as well as having supporting landowners willing to make a difference in Minnesota's natural resources.

For the Wedge Creek Wetland acquisition, the District worked with a willing seller to enter into an option to purchase agreement. Once signed, the District hired consultants to complete a survey and then an appraisal of the property. The District then made an offer to the landowner that was accepted and the option to purchase was executed. This property closed in April of 2019 and protects approximately 20 acres. There is funding in Phase 6 of the Habitat Restoration Program to complete the wetland restoration work of the property before it is turned over to the DNR for ownership.

The Wedge Creek Reach 6 River Restoration completed approximately 3,000 linear feet of streambank restoration work that included boulder retards, rock weirs, vortex weirs, sloped and seeded banks which created retention areas and scouring pools for habitat in public waters. The District worked with an engineering firm to design the project and sourced a contractor following state procurement procedures.

For the Upper Twin Lake pumping station the District worked with the USFWS and MN DNR via a Memorandum of Understanding to complete the project. The work included installing a pumping feature to dewater the 550 acre Upper Twin Lake into Lower Twin Lake to allow for lake management following the lake management plan. Dewatering of the lake allows for carp and vegetation management to improve game fish populations and waterfowl habitat. The District followed procurement procedures for construction of the project and it was completed in 2020.

The Upper and Lower Twin Lake project again worked with the MN DNR to compete projects on public lands and public waters. Both Upper and Lower Twin lakes are shallow lakes infested with Common Carp. The District worked to install a rock fish barrier to prevent carp from entering the 895 acres of the Twin Lakes system. As part of this project, the District also worked on a streambank downstream and completed approximately 7,500 linear feet of restoration. Work included installing rootwads, cross channel logs, toe rock installation and connecting historic floodplains.

The last project in the Phase 4 Habitat Restoration Program was the Pickerel Lake Adjustable Outlet. This project

partnered with MN DNR to incorporate a fish passage and variable crest structure to allow for management of 570 acres of Pickerel Lake and allow Northern Pike to reenter the lake for spawning.

How did the program address habitats of significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, threatened or endangered species, and/or list targeted species?

Historically the Shell Rock River Watershed is a shallow lake system with diverse populations of fish, waterfowl and wildlife. An ongoing effort of modeling and monitoring has defined current impairments and invasive species populations. Implementing site specific habitat restoration projects are progressively improving populations of native fish species, waterfowl and wildlife habitat. The Program included projects that are prioritized based on the significance of benefit to aquatic habitat, urgency of the work, availability of leverage funding, location of projects and agreement with relevant planning documents. This program uses a programmatic approach to achieve prioritized aquatic habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement of lakes, streams, and wetlands across the Watershed, to once again create the historic natural resources we once had. A number of internal and external conservation planning documents support this strategic priority resource planned approach. Targeted species include the endangered Blanding's Turtle and the special species of concern including the Marsh Wren and the Sheepnose and Round Pigtoe Mussels.

How did the program use science-based targeting that leveraged or expanded corridors and complexes, reduced fragmentation, or protected areas in the MN County Biological Survey.

SRRWD utilizes precision conservation modeling with monitoring to identify priority management zones (PMZs) on a sub-watershed basis. The PMZs are prioritized, evaluated conservation measures and project locations chosen to mitigate specific areas contributing to degradation of habitat which reduce populations of aquatic vegetation, fish, waterfowl and wildlife within the lake-shed. The PMZ is a watershed side parcel review where habitat areas were ranked on a 1 to 3 scale. This scale incorporates a variety of measures including size of the habitat complex to be protected, proximity to existing protection, location to MN County Biological Survey areas and distance to a wetland or lake water source. The Districts goal is to implement projects that receive the highest rating where there are willing landowners.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

Partners in this phase of funding include the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and numerous landowners. The SRRWD has an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding with the DNR and USFWS for future maintenance on projects. All projects completed in Phase 4 had the support of the Albert Lea Lakes Foundation, Sportsman's Club, City and County officials along with neighboring landowners.

Exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects of program

As with many projects, challenges occur in getting permitting done in a timely fashion. Projects were sometimes delayed in waiting on State and Federal permits. Also, for the last remaining project, COVID did slow the work down when to came to contracting the project out. With the extension, all projects were able to be completed.

The reduction in acres was approved via an amendment in June of 2020. There were projects listed in the parcels tab that were appropriated to different phases of funding based on that Phase 4 was not fully funded. The projects will still be completed, they are just identified in a different appropriation year.

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this program?

N/A

What is the plan to sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

The SRRWD relies on multiple funding sources including a citizen driven local option sales tax, local levy, and multiple public funding sources to assist the District in restoration efforts. These funding sources will allow the District to maintain existing and future natural resource management projects.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2022 - Ongoing	Local Option Sales Tax	Maintenance Inspections by SRRWD Staff	Maintenance Implementations by SRRWD Staff	Some of the property is owned by Mn DNR and USFWS. They conduct burns/maintenance on property using their funding dollars.
-	-	-	-	-

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	$45,000	$45,000	$45,000	-	-	-	$45,000	$45,000
Contracts	$1,605,200	$1,809,200	$1,802,800	-	-	-	$1,605,200	$1,802,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	$175,000	$82,000	$81,900	-	-	-	$175,000	$81,900
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	$427,800	$477,800	$475,500	$60,000	$65,900	Local Option Sales Tax	$487,800	$541,400
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	$161,000	-	-	-	-	-	$161,000	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$2,414,000**	**$2,414,000**	**$2,405,200**	**$60,000**	**$65,900**	**-**	**$2,474,000**	**$2,471,100**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Manager	0.43	1.0	$25,000	-	-	$25,000
Program Assistant	0.3	1.0	$20,000	-	-	$20,000

Explain any budget challenges or successes:
The budget did change slightly as projects moved forward, this is due to contractors budgets coming in slightly higher or lower than expected or permitting issues leading to increased engineering. All projects were completed and the SRRWD has a slight amount of funds to return back to OHF. The District was able to supply more match than what was originally allocated.

Total Revenue: $0

Revenue Spent: $0

Revenue Balance: $0

Of the money disclosed above, what are the appropriate uses of the money:

E. This is not applicable as there was no revenue generated.

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	518	620	0	0	0	0	0	0	518	620
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	22	19	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	19
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	429	677	0	0	0	0	2,266	4	2,695	681
Total	**969**	**1,316**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**2,266**	**4**	**3,235**	**1,320**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	$1,446,900	$654,900	-	-	-	-	-	-	$1,446,900	$654,900
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	$175,000	$119,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	$175,000	$119,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	$544,600	$1,261,700	-	-	-	-	$247,500	$369,600	$792,100	$1,631,300
Total	**$2,166,500**	**$2,035,600**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$247,500**	**$369,600**	**$2,414,000**	**$2,405,200**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	518	620	0	0	518	620
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	19	0	0	22	19
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,695	681	0	0	2,695	681
Total	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**3,235**	**1,320**	**0**	**0**	**3,235**	**1,320**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	$1,446,900	$654,900	-	-	$1,446,900	$654,900
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	$175,000	$119,000	-	-	$175,000	$119,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	$792,100	$1,631,300	-	-	$792,100	$1,631,300
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$2,414,000**	**$2,405,200**	**-**	**-**	**$2,414,000**	**$2,405,200**

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

236 Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

There was an approved amendment which reduced the lake/river miles from 893 down to 236 due to projects being moved to a different phase of funding. The targeted acres where successfully met after the amendment change and the miles will be reported in a later phase of funding.

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced shallow lakes and wetlands ~ *Outcomes will be measured and evaluated by the increase of use days for migrating waterfowl and increased angler success as a result of improved habitat in shallow lakes. The protected, restored and enhanced shallow lakes, wetlands and streambanks will provide habitat to wildlife and support healthy natural resource conditions for long term benefits.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?
No

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Pickerel Lake Outlet	Freeborn	10222213	620	$651,300	No	Northwest corner Pickerel Lake- outlet
Upper Twin Lake	Freeborn	10122202	213	$397,500	No	2 Shallow lakes Northwest of Twin Lakes
Upper and Lower Twin Lake	Freeborn	10122212	464	$743,800	No	2 Shallow lakes Northwest of Twin Lakes
Wedge Creek Reach 6	Freeborn	10322236	4	$450,800	No	3.7 acre parcel on Wedge Creek South of I-90

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Wedge Creek Reach 6 Wetland	Freeborn	10322236	19	$243,600	No

Parcel Map


Blue Earth
Waseca
Steele
Dodge
Faribault
Freeborn
Mower
0
3
6
9 mi
Protect in Easement
Protect in Fee with PILT
Protect in Fee W/O PILT
Restore
Enhance
Other