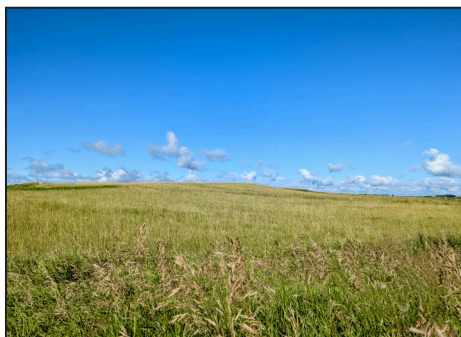


Revised RIM boosts payment, land-use options, term length



YOUR Clean Water
Fund AT WORK

The Clean Water Fund, created through the state's Legacy Amendment, supports projects that aim to protect, enhance and restore Minnesota's waters.

The Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) updated one of its Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Reserve programs to more effectively protect drinking water sources across the state. The revamped [RIM Drinking Water Program](#) expands eligibility, increases land-use flexibility, offers improved financial incentives and introduces a new 25-year easement option — all aimed at boosting landowner participation in conservation.

BWSR made \$11 million from the state's Clean Water Fund available to support private landowners' and local governments' conservation efforts aimed at safeguarding drinking water sources across Minnesota. The funding, [announced in July](#), is part of the RIM Drinking Water Program. The program, which replaces the former RIM Wellhead Program, is now accepting applications.

The revamped program introduces two key opportunities for participation: RIM Drinking Water easements for private landowners and Drinking Water Protection Partner Agreements for public entities.

The RIM Drinking Water easements component allows private landowners to enroll their land in conservation easements held by BWSR. Interested

landowners can begin the application process by contacting their county soil and water conservation district (SWCD).

The Drinking Water Protection Partner Agreements provide funding to local governments and related entities to acquire land that protects drinking water sources. Eligible applicants include cities, townships, counties, public water suppliers, SWCDs, watershed districts, Tribal Governments and joint powers authorities.

Since 2011, the RIM Wellhead Program has protected groundwater supplying public drinking water sources by restoring 5,000 acres of cropland within highly vulnerable Wellhead Protection Areas (WHPAs) to native perennial vegetation. However, enrollment had lagged due to limited land-use options and the complex geography of WHPA boundaries.

The Minnesota Department of Health defines WHPAs as surface and subsurface areas surrounding a public water supply well or well field that supplies a public water system, through which source water can become contaminated.

"This RIM Drinking Water Program is in response to a human health

From left: A hay field and a restored prairie in Yellow Medicine County, along with managed grazing in Rock County, are examples of conservation options or practices supported by the RIM Drinking Water Program.

Photo Credits: Sara Reagan, BWSR

concern, not necessarily a wildlife concern. So we're trying to reflect that in the opportunities within the program," said Sara Reagan, BWSR easement programs coordinator.

The RIM Drinking Water Program addresses several limitations of the original RIM Wellhead Program. By offering the option to convert row crops to perennial crops — defined as a crop rotation that includes at least three consecutive years of maintaining perennial plantings — the program aims to reduce nitrate contamination in public water supplies.

Previously, land had to be located primarily within a WHPA. Eligibility now includes land within highly vulnerable Drinking Water Supply Management Areas (DWSMAs). Also eligible are [DWSMAs with elevated nitrate levels](#) under the Groundwater Protection Rule, and those identified in Tribal Government protection plans.

The shift to include DWSMAs is critical for landowners who need to



The Minnesota Department of Agriculture will monitor nitrate levels in community public water supply wells to track the revamped program's effectiveness. The RIM Drinking Water Program aims to expand protection efforts.

operate large-scale farming equipment. The irregular shapes of WHPAs often hindered adjacent farming operations.

Expanding the eligible practices means landowners are no longer limited solely to habitat restoration. The revamped program also includes perennial crops, and managed grazing with a comprehensive plan.

This added flexibility allows farmers to continue using their land productively while meeting RIM easement goals.

"It's a very unique program within RIM, because it does offer a lot more flexibility for landowners to have continued use," Reagan said. "A perennial cropping system makes sense in these really unique areas... it's all voluntary, so if they don't want to do it, they don't have to."

The RIM Drinking Water Program introduced a new 25-year easement option in addition to traditional perpetual agreements. This change is more likely to appeal to landowners who are hesitant to permanently take high-value cropland out

Application Details

Application materials are available on [BWSR's website](#). Applications are accepted on a rolling basis and reviewed monthly.

of production.

BWSR also revised the payment structure to better reflect land values within DWSMAs, which tended to be higher because the sites were closer to municipalities, and because the land itself tended to be well-drained with fertile soils that support annual crops. Rather than using the standard RIM rate based on average township values, the revamped program uses tax-assessed values, making compensation more competitive.

Perpetual easements will be compensated at 90% of the tax-assessed value, plus a 30% public health benefit payment, while 25-year easements will receive 60% of the tax-assessed value, plus a 15% public health benefit payment.

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