

**FY 2025 USDA and Trout Unlimited: Driftless Area Habitat for the Wild and Rare Phase III LMR Signup**

**The United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Trout Unlimited Driftless Area Habitat for the Wild & Rare Phase 3 (TU- DA -HFTWAR III) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) Land Management Rental (LMR) Signup**

### Background

The Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partnership that leverages capabilities and resources, targets assistance where it is most needed, cooperatively engages project partners, and works collaboratively with agriculture producers, forest land managers, and Tribes. This project will address aquatic and riparian habitat impairment and water quality impairment within the Driftless Area. The project is particularly focused on restoration of cold-water streams and seeks to pair instream habitat or aquatic organism passage with broader farm-scale conservation activities.

In a setting where cropland is adjacent to the stream, the highest-ranking projects will have an existing riparian easement (with DNR or a local entity) and will set-aside a 50' area from the top of bank to provide a stream buffer. Supporting practices could include the addition of a grassed waterway, field border, filter strip, contour buffer strips, water & sediment control basin, or riparian forest buffer to protect the integrity of the in-stream habitat and water quality.

This project also addresses broader-scale concentrated erosion, livestock production limitation, or degraded plant condition concerns for producers that use riparian floodplain areas for pasture. In order to be eligible for these practices, the producer must have a current grazing plan. Practices such as fencing, access control, pasture planting, or silvopasture that will improve water quality, in-stream baseflow, in-stream habitat and riparian habitat conditions may also be considered.

### Application Period

Applications may be taken at any time. Producers must submit an RCPP Application on or before **December 16, 2024** to be considered for funding.

### Application Processing

RCPP is a stand-alone program and requires its own NRCS-1200 application separate from other NRCS FA programs. All 2018 Farm Bill RCPP applications will be continuously accepted, and signup cut off dates will be publicly announced each year. For Land Management and Rental producer contracts, question 2 of the NRCS-CPA-1200 Conservation Program Application (version October 2024) should be marked "Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP)". **Write "2881 Trout Unlimited RCPP LMR" in box 2a.** 2018 Farm Bill RCPP applications will be managed through

Conservation Desktop. USDA Financial Assistance Eligibility will need to be determined manually with the Farm Service Agency's Subsidiary Report.

**2. Interested in participating in the following (select all that apply):**

- |                                                                                                         |                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural Conservation Easement Program-Wetland Reserve Easement (ACEP-WRE) | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA)                                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)                                         |                                                                                      |

a) Program enrollment type, activity type, and/or project name, as applicable:

2881 Trout Unlimited RCPP LMR

### Eligible Project Area

Applications with >50% of the project located within the Driftless Area Habitat for the Wild and Rare Phase III project area are eligible to participate in the project's sign-up.

The conservation activity(s) identified in the application must be located within **Dakota, Rice, Goodhue, Steele, Dodge, Olmsted, Wabasha, Winona, Mower, Fillmore and Houston** counties. See map at the end of this document.

### Eligible Land uses

- Crop
- Pasture
- Forest
- Associated Ag Land

### Eligible Resource Concern Categories and Resource Concerns

**Aquatic Habitat:**

- Aquatic habitat for fish and other organisms
- Elevated water temperature

**Concentrated Erosion:**

- Bank erosion from streams, shorelines, or water conveyance channels
- Classic gully erosion
- Ephemeral gully erosion

**Degraded Plant Condition:**

- Plant productivity and health
- Plant structure and composition

**Field Pesticide Loss:**

- Pesticides transported to groundwater
- Pesticides transported to surface water

**Field Sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss:**

- Nutrients transported to groundwater
- Nutrients transported to surface water
- Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to groundwater
- Pathogens and chemicals from manure, biosolids or compost applications transported to surface water
- Sediment transported to surface water

**Livestock Production Limitation:**

- Feed and forage balance
- Inadequate livestock shelter
- Inadequate livestock water quantity, quality and distribution

**Soil Quality Limitations:**

- Aggregate instability
- Compaction
- Concentration of salts or other chemicals
- Organic matter depletion
- Soil Organism Habitat Loss or Degradation

**Terrestrial Habitat:**

- Terrestrial habitat for wildlife and invertebrates

**Weather Resilience:**

- Drift Snow
- Naturally available moisture use
- Ponding and flooding
- Seasonal high-water table
- Seeps

**Wind and Water Erosion:**

- Sheet and Rill Erosion
- Wind Erosion

### Eligible Activities and Payment Rates

LMR activities include NRCS – approved conservation practices and rental activities. **FY25\_2881 RCPP LM Payment Schedule and Eligible Activities** provides the activities eligible for **RCPP LMR - #2881 TU-DA- HFTWAR III)**

Project specific cost list in CD: **Minnesota RCPP18 FY2025 2881**

### Assessments

Planners must assess all RCPP applications using CART. **A maximum of 2 Resource Concerns/Primary Practice will be assessed.** Only eligible Resource Concerns will be assessed.

## Prioritization Worksheet

For FY2025 the workload prioritization tool will be completed outside of conservation desktop. The document is the official workload Prioritization Tool for Planners to utilize. **All High Priority Applications will be ranked.**

Applicant Name:	County:
Application Number:	Field Office:
Evaluator Name:	Date:

1. This project is located on MNDNR Class 1 or 2 Trout stream.

☐ **Yes**, continue to question 2.  
☐ **No (Low)** <end review>

2. The application includes 395 Stream Habitat Improvement and Management or 396 Aquatic Organism Passage or it includes both 395 and 396.

☐ **Yes**, continue to question 2A.  
☐ **No (Low)** <end review>

2A. Does this application include 580 Streambank and Shoreline protection?

☐ **Yes**, continue to question 2B.  
☐ **No** continue to question 3.

2B. This application includes a minimum of 5 instances of 395 Stream Habitat Improvement and Management per 1000ft of stream. Or a lesser amount of 395 is planned with Trout Unlimited Staff written concurrence.

☐ **Yes**, continue to question 3.  
☐ **No, (LOW)** <end review>

3. Will the riparian area be grazed and has an active grazing plan that meets NRCS requirements?

☐ **Yes**, Grazing practices may be included in the application (**remains** High Priority)  
☐ **No**, Grazing practices *cannot* be included the application (**remains** High Priority)

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>HIGH</b>		<input type="checkbox"/> <b>LOW</b>
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D.C. Approval:		Date Approved:	
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## Eligible Land Management and Rental Practices

The Schedule of Operations must include at least one of the core practices or must be completing a conservation system that supports core practices that are documented as already implemented on the land and identified in the CART assessment as historical or observed practices. Eligibility for Stream Habitat Improvement and Management (395) will be determined using the Stream Visual Assessment Protocol (SVAP2).

Code	Practice Name	Core
395	Stream Habitat Improvement and Management	Core
396	Aquatic Organism Passage	Core
326	Clearing and Snagging	
327	Conservation Cover	
332	Contour Buffer Strips	
342	Critical Area Planting	
362	Diversion	
381	Silvopasture	
382	Fence	
386	Field Border	
390	Riparian Herbaceous Cover	
391	Riparian Forest Buffer	
393	Filter Strip	
410	Grade Stabilization Structure	
412	Grassed Waterway	
420	Wildlife Habitat Planting	
422	Hedgerow Planting	
468	Lined Waterway or Outlet	
472	Access Control	
484	Mulching	
490	Tree/Shrub Site Preparation	
500	Obstruction Removal	
512	Pasture and Hay Planting	
516	Livestock Pipeline	
528	Prescribed Grazing	
533	Pumping Plant	
560	Access Road	
561	Heavy Use Area Protection	
572	Spoil Disposal	
574	Spring Development	
575	Trails and Walkways	
578	Stream Crossing	
580	Stream bank and Shoreline Protection	
582	Open Channel	

584	Channel Bed Stabilization
587	Structure for Water Control
606	Subsurface Drain
612	Tree/Shrub Establishment
614	Watering Facility
620	Underground Outlet
638	Water and Sediment Control Basin
642	Water Well
643	Restoration of Rate or Declining Natural Communities
649	Structures for Wildlife
656	Constructed Wetland
657	Wetland Restoration
658	Wetland Creation
659	Wetland Enhancement
Code	Rental Payment Scenario
RFRN	Rental Payment – Irrigated Cropland Contracted Activity
RFRN	Rental Payment – Non-Irrigated Cropland Contracted Activity
RFRN	Rental Payment – Pastureland for Contracted Rental Activity

### Rental Activities

The Project has \$15,000 total available for Rental Activity Payments.

Rental Activities have a 1-year Lifespan and may be planned up to 3 years (starting the year after vegetative practice has been installed) on the same land in RCPP Land management/rental producer contract.

#### Rental Activities must –

- 1) Address a project resource concern;
- 2) Meet all applicable program and project requirements, as outlined in the 530.520A RCPP Rental Activity Worksheet
- 3) NOT result in a duplicative payment (i.e., if a producer is earning a Conservation Reserve Program rental payment, or forgone income under another USDA-funded practice, a rental payment cannot be earned)

#### RFRN – Irrigated Cropland, Dry Cropland and Pasture landuses

- 1) Areas of annual crop produced will be converted to perennial grass or tree vegetation to reduce filed sediment, nutrient and pathogen loss, and/or improve terrestrial habitat for grassland birds and pollinators. Rental may be used to transition land converting from CRP to prescribed grazing system or agroforestry  
Practices used to convert the land use will include: 327 Conservation Cover, 332 Contour Buffer Strips, 342 Critical Area Planting, 362 Diversion, 381 Silvopasture, 386 Field Boarder, 391 Riparian Forest Buffer, 393 Filter Strip, 412 Grassed Waterway, 420 Wildlife Habitat Planting, 512 Pasture and Hayland Planting (in conjunction with 528 Prescribed Grazing according to 159

Grazing Management Design or equivalent) , 612 Tree and Shrub Establishment, 656 Constructed Wetland, 657 Wetland Restoration, 658 Wetland Creation.

- 2) The first land rental Payment will occur the year **AFTER** the installation and certification of the core practice under Land Management. NRCS will have access to verify the practices supported by the rental are maintained. **Rental payments are offered up to 3 years.**
- 3) Individual practice Implementation Requirements (IR) will be followed regardless of the use of USDA financial assistance to install the practice that took the land from a more intense land use to a less intense land use.
- 4) An annual site visit will occur with photo documentation of the required cover, to take place and verification of RFRN requirements prior to certifying the land rental payment.
- 5) Field Offices will place a copy of the FY25 RCPP 2881 TU 530.520.A RCPP Rental Activity Worksheet in the producer case files if RFRN practices are scheduled.
- 6) Field Offices will complete page 5, of the FY25 RCPP 2881 TU 530.520 RCPP Rental Activity worksheet and send in with supporting documentation when a payment is being requested.

### Ranking

Scoring of all applications will be done according to the ranking established in the Conservation Assessment and Ranking Tool (CART).

Ranking of the applications will be done according to the ranking system posted on the MN NRCS web site for the **2881 TU-DA- HFTWAR III**. All rankings will be conducted in CART. The efficiency score calculated in the CART ranking must be used when a tie breaker is needed between one or more RCPP-LM applications. When using the tie breaker, NRCS will select the application with the highest efficiency score first. **CART Ranking Pool: 2881 LMR Producer FY25**

### Funding

Available RCPP-LMR #2881 TU-DA-HFTWAR III funds will be allocated based on the numerical ranking system set forth on the web site. All ranking will be conducted in CART. If insufficient funds are available to fund all eligible applicants, applications will be held and may be funded with extra RCPP -LMR 2881 TU-DA-HFTWAR III funds if available or deferred to the next ranking period.

### Payment Limitations

Each RCPP- LMR contract with a person or legal entity is limited to \$450,000 over the term of the contract, and each RCPP-LM contract with a joint operation (Farm Service Agency business type 2 or 3) or group projects may have a contract limit of up to \$900,000.

### Program Ranking Questions (200 Points Max)

1. The applicant has worked with a Conservation Planner AND Trout Unlimited Staff through the conservation process to the extent that: **(Select One Choice)**
  - a. All designs and job sheets for all practices included in the application are complete and final. **70 pts**
  - b. At least 1 practice in the application has a design or job sheet that is complete and final. **10 pts**
  - c. No Designs or job sheets are complete and final. **0 pts**
2. The applicant marked on the NRCS-CPA-1200 that they are a historically Underserved participant.
  - a. YES **40 pts**
  - b. NO **0 pts**
3. Where is the participant's progress in obtaining permits to complete the project? **(Select One Choice)**
  - a. The project does not require permits. **50 pts**
  - b. The project requires permits, and the participants has all final permits in hand. **50 pts**
  - c. The project requires permits, and the participant has applied for all required permits. **40pts**
  - d. The project requires permits, and the participant has not applied for all required permits. **0 pts**
4. Application addresses the following resource concerns **(May choose more than 1)**
  - a. Aquatic Habitat **15 pts**
  - b. Field Sediment Nutrient and Pathogen Loss **15 pts**
  - c. Terrestrial Habitat **10 pts**
  - d. None of the above **0 pts**

### Resource Ranking Questions (200 points Max)

1. The project site is located on stream identified by the MN Department of Natural Resources as one of the following: **(Select One Choice)**
  - a. Class 1 - Trout Stream **50 pts**
  - b. Class 2 - Tributary to Trout Stream **20 pts**
2. A *Fishing Access Easement* is already established on the project site
  - a. YES **50 pts**
  - b. NO **0 pts**

3. Riparian area adjacent to stream is in perennial vegetation that is a minimum of 50 feet wide from the top of bank and has sufficient cover and management to address the project's eligible resource concerns, **OR**, equivalent vegetation will be established through implementation of this application or associated conservation plan.
  - a. YES **58 pts**
  - b. NO **0 pts**
4. The application includes the following instream or riparian habitat practices to benefit non-game species (**Select all that apply**)
  - a. (CP 395) Stream Habitat Improvement and Management – for instream wood placement (Root wad, log deflector, or basking log) **17 pts**
  - b. (CP 657) Wetland Restoration **12 pts**
  - c. Pollinator planting/native seed mix (riparian) **13 pts**
  - d. Not applicable **0 pts**

#### Partner Responsibilities and Point of Contact

Technical assistance may be delivered as a project contribution from Trout Unlimited. Trout Unlimited staff must complete a site visit to identify eligibility with 395 and 396 requirements and collect landowner priorities and resource concerns. Trout Unlimited or collaborating technical partners, may complete pre-application, planning, design, installation, or checkout. All designs completed by Trout Unlimited (or their contractors) will meet the Field Office Technical Guide standards and specifications. All required documents listed in Statement of Work (SOW) for each listed practice will be provided to NRCS. Designs will be approved and signed off by NRCS staff with appropriate Job Approval Authority. Trout Unlimited will communicate with NRCS any further need for JAA-type oversight.

The NEPA will be completed by the NRCS with inputs coming from the partner planner.

To discuss planning & design assistance with Trout Unlimited, please contact:

Paul Krahn, 608-606-0565, [paul.krahn@tu.org](mailto:paul.krahn@tu.org)

Sara Strassman, 608-668-1632, [Sara.strassman@tu.org](mailto:Sara.strassman@tu.org)

#### NRCS Point of Contact

Michelle Legatt – RCPP Coordinator

Keith Kloubec - ASTC -Programs

Aaron Janz – ARC – SE Area

\*Please route all questions through Area Office staff