



City of Blaine Anoka County, Minnesota

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Legislation Details (With Text)

File #: WS 19-49 **Version:** 1 **Name:** Southern Blaine Wetland Sanctuary Restoration
Type: Workshop Item **Status:** Filed
File created: 8/12/2019 **In control:** City Council Workshop
On agenda: 8/12/2019 **Final action:** 8/12/2019
Title: SOUTHERN BLAINE WETLAND SANCTUARY RESTORATION
Sponsors: Dan Schluender
Indexes:
Code sections:
Attachments: 1. BWS, 2. BWS Southern Portion

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
8/12/2019	1	City Council Workshop	Discussed	

WORKSHOP ITEM - *Rebecca Haug, Water Resources Manager*

SOUTHERN BLAINE WETLAND SANCTUARY RESTORATION

The Blaine Wetland Sanctuary (BWS) has been receiving a lot of positive recognition since it opened in August 2017. Some of the big accomplishments of the site are the number of successful programs held along the boardwalk with the help of Growing Green Hearts and the Wargo Nature Center. This has brought over 400 people out to the site to experience hands on learning. The city has also hosted several field trips with the Minnesota Institute for Talented Youth, Summer Fun, Woodcrest Spanish Immersion 3rd graders, Avail Academy, and the National Mitigation and Ecosystem Banking Conference. On Wednesday of this week, approximately 60 metro watershed partners will be touring the site.

In addition to the field trips, ongoing partnerships are being formed. Anoka Ramsey Community College has created interpretive signs that are close to being ready for installation at the site. The college has also had research students out the past two summers documenting the various wildlife species that have made the BWS their home. Spring Lake Park High School Advanced Placement science classes have incorporated the site into their class curriculum bringing students out to the site. Both Aveda and Christ Lutheran Church have volunteered at the site by painting animal tracks and removing invasive species.

There is an additional 220 acres of the site that are in need of restoration. A BWS subcommittee

made up of members from the Natural Resource Conservation Board (NRCB) has been created to work on the next steps for the southern site restoration as well as future planning for the BWS. The subcommittee was created because of the November 8, 2018 City Council Workshop meeting, where the council recommended staff moving forward with putting a plan together for the restoration of the southern half of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary utilizing the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund grants received by Great River Greening (GRG).

With assistance from the subcommittee, staff and GRG have been working on the details for developing the future plan for the southern portion of the BWS and are at a point where an agreement needs to be entered into with GRG to continue the work.

GRG leads community based restoration of prairies, forests and waters. Their restoration efforts help preserve natural areas, protect clean air and water, and increase urban residents' access to healthy natural areas and sustainable open space. A lot of their work is through community stewardship by holding community events. They provide trainings to volunteers, educate landowners and expose at risk teens to natural areas and environmental science careers. GRG has a team of ecologists that would run the RFP process and subcontract with the winter woody removal subcontractor.

GRG has received two Anoka Sand Plain grants in the amount of $\$1,130,000 + \$2,573,000 = \$3,703,000$ to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance wildlife habitat on public lands in Anoka, Benton, Isanti, Morrison, Sherburne and Stearns Counties.

GRG wishes to enter into an agreement with the city and contribute $\$224,000 + \$140,000 = \$364,000$ of their Anoka Sand Plain grant to restore the southern portion of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary. The city would be required to contribute \$19,900 for Great River Greening's labor costs. Utilizing the grant dollars is a unique opportunity to finish restoring the remaining 220 acres of the 500 acre Blaine Wetland Sanctuary.

The scope of the agreement will be the enhancement of 184 acres of shallow basin wetland as shown on the attached map. GRG would provide the following services to the city:

- Review management plans and revise as mutually agreed upon.
- Project and grant management including reporting to the State of MN.
- Develop and oversee project implementation, including subcontractors, volunteers, and GRG crew, to ensure the work meets the needs of the site.

- Complete removal of non-native invasive and overabundant native woody species.
- Complete non-native invasive herbaceous species.
- Complete prescribed burns.
- Promote understory diversity with post burn inter-seeding.

The city would be agreeing to the following services:

- Provide a management plan. City has received a bid from Jason Husveth, Critical Connections Ecological Services in an amount not to exceed \$45,500 to develop and oversee implementation of an initial vegetation restoration plan for the full 220 acres of the 220 acre of Blaine Wetland Sanctuary southern project area. Map is attached.
- Directly compensate city subcontractor for ecological planning, and plant monitoring.
- Provide timely site access to GRG and associates.
- Coordination between GRG and city staff and associates regarding project work.
- Provide outreach and communication to park users and the local community to build awareness of the project and address concerns if they arise with assistance from GRG.

The restoration will include the removal of non-native invasive and overabundant native woody species similar to the work that was completed in the northern half of the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary. A difference between this area compared to branch 3 and site 7 is this will not be a wetland bank so there is more flexibility in the restoration efforts and can be developed through the plan. The center of the site would be the main focus and then have the restoration feather out to the exterior. The properties in this area are primarily large lots but the restoration will be sensitive to aesthetics for neighboring properties.

Staff and the NRCB recommend the city council enter into an agreement with Great River Greening for the purposes of enhancing the Blaine Wetland Sanctuary. Great River Greening will contribute \$364,000 towards the project and the city will contribute up to \$19,900 to cover labor costs.