

2024 SWCD Program Guidance - Enrollments

Minnesota Walk In Access Program (Year 14)

Properties open for hunting Sept. 1 to May 31

This document outlines the criteria, conditions, and process for landowner enrollments in the 2024 Minnesota Walk-In Access Program. This guidance should be considered additive to language in the Walk-In Access landowner agreement and the SWCD/DNR Joint Powers Agreement.

Enrollment Conditions and Process:

1. The enrollment period this year will run from February 20th-April 19th. Agreement applications are filled out in the DNR Walk-In Access Enrollment Information System (WIAEIS). If you do not have access to WIAEIS, contact Amber Knutson at amber.knutson@state.mn.us or leave a message at 507-706-6172.
2. Landowners whose contracts are set to expire in 2024 will be mailed re-enrollment packets with instructions to reply directly to their WIA county SWCD. SWCD staff will need to ensure these re-enrollments are reviewed for boundary changes or other significant changes to the WIA habitat. SWCDs will be compensated for re-enrollments.
3. Signed agreement applications should be color scanned and emailed to Amber Knutson at amber.knutson@state.mn.us. A W-9 form is not needed for reenrollments but must accompany all new enrollments. Be sure that address information is the same on both the agreement and W-9.
 - The person signing the WIA Agreement must own the land, be the power of attorney for the owner of the land or be the designated representative for a group of owners. Only one W-9 (with one designated social security number) can be submitted per agreement. ***Be sure that the name/address/signature on the agreement application and the name/address/signature on the W-9 are the same.***
 - Agreement applications will be pending approval when they are entered into the WIAEIS. They will remain as pending in the system until DNR signs the agreement. An email with a scanned and signed fully executed agreement will be sent when signatures are complete.
 - Sites will be approved or denied for enrollment before June 30, 2024. Landowners will receive fully signed and executed Walk-In Access agreements from the DNR on or before August 31, 2024.
4. The DNR will install signs on enrolled parcels during July and August. ***If the landowner terminates the agreement, they are responsible for returning the signs and posts to the SWCD or DNR Area Wildlife office.***
5. SWCDs will submit invoices for accomplishments, by June 30, 2024, and will receive accomplishment payments in August 2024. Per the Joint Powers Agreement, SWCDs will be

paid \$250 for each fully executed landowner agreement signed during this year's enrollment period. This excludes re-enrollments processed directly with the DNR.

6. Landowners enrolling or re-enrolling in 2024, will receive their annual payment by June 30, 2025.

Enrollment Criteria Guidelines: *The criteria below are guidelines compiled based on previous years. They are criteria **guidelines**. Please feel free to call Amber Knutson, WIA Program Coordinator, if you have questions about sites that may deviate from the criteria.*

1. Eligible sites must include a minimum of 40 acres. Acreage below this threshold will be considered for enrollment only if:
 - it is contiguous with a WMA/WPA, another WIA, or public water meeting the criteria in #5, resulting in at least 40 contiguous acres open to public hunting.
 - if two or more smaller parcels within proximity of each other (1/2 mile or less), add up to 40 acres, they may also be considered, even if not contiguous with a WMA/WPA or another WIA.
2. Areas within 500' of an occupied building or active livestock stockade or corral will not be enrolled unless a waiver to do so is signed by the occupant. * DNR sign crews will be installing "No Shooting Zone" signs in buffered areas as needed (if buffer is continuation of habitat), although these areas will not be included under the landowner agreement. Please make landowners aware of this signage need to reduce potential shooting zone violations. Contact Amber Knutson with questions.
3. Land currently enrolled in a conservation program is a priority of WIA. Outreach and enrollment should be targeted to these lands. The WIAEIS now includes a dropdown box for indicating participation in a conservation program, **please use this feature so we can track the type of lands being enrolled**. Other land with high quality natural vegetation may be eligible if SWCD staff certifies it via a field visit and documents the condition of the cover at the time of the visit. Small inclusions of cropland or hayland may be enrolled only to square off boundaries.
4. The Walk-In Access agreement requires that high quality natural habitat remain intact from Sept. 1 through May 31. If a landowner disturbs vegetation on the site during the growing season, they must notify the WIA Program Coordinator, **PRIOR** to disturbing the habitat. *** DNR will be actively enforcing the habitat disturbance guidelines, which are made part of all agreements. Please remind landowners that payment reductions will follow if these terms are violated.**
5. Generally, public water basins are not eligible for enrollment unless they are solely owned by the applicant and there is no existing public access (e.g., a public road ditch, river connection, etc.).
6. For ease of mapping, signage and hunter navigation, boundaries should be as square as possible, while keeping cropland or lower quality habitat inclusions to a minimum. The DNR will not place signs in standing crops or water.
7. Sufficient access to a site must be provided. Reasonable access to land locked parcels should also be considered during enrollment. This may consist of a 10' strip of enrolled land containing no habitat but under the control of the landowner. Landowners must be made aware that hunters will be walking through the area. Use the tools in the enrollment database to indicate the point of access and trail to the WIA parcel. **Also, please keep in**

mind that our sign crews do not have the ability to cross open water or drainage ditches to install boundary signs where these barriers exist. Safety is of utmost importance, please work with landowners to ensure all parcels provide at least one safe access point away from high-traffic paved roads, accommodate at least 1-2 vehicles, and allow for vehicles to pull off roadways and out of the right-of-way wherever possible. DNR sign crews will be posting new signage this year to designate Access Trails and Parking Areas.

The Walk-In Access agreement may be terminated by either party with a 5-day notice. Landowners must email their notice to Amber Knutson at: amber.knutson@state.mn.us or mail it to Amber Knutson at: 2716 290th Street, Marshall MN, 56258.

1. Termination by the State resulting from a violation of the terms of the agreement will result in forfeiture of any compensation (i.e., the landowner will NOT receive pro-rated payments.) Agreements may be for multiple years and the State may have to terminate agreements if funding for the outlying years of an agreement are not secured.
2. No motorized vehicles are allowed except by the landowner performing normal maintenance or farm operations and DNR sign crew.

Payment rates

Payment to landowners for enrolled land will come at the end of the enrollment period, estimated to be in June of the following year. Landowners must provide social security number information and will receive an IRS 1099 for payment received where it is required by law.

Payment for a voluntary early termination will be prorated for lands removed after Jan. 1, 2025. Cancellations prior to Jan. 1, 2025, will not receive payment. Penalties may be assessed to the annual payment without amending the agreement if the landowner participates in DNR-approved activities such as emergency haying or grazing of conservation lands. Termination due to a violation of the terms in the agreement will result in forfeiture of any payment.

Payment rates:

2024: \$18/acre flat rate payment.

Existing agreements will not be prorated.

Contacts

General WIA Program information:

Amber Knutson, Walk-In Access, 2716 290th Street, Marshall MN, 56258; 507-706-6172;
amber.knutson@state.mn.us

Walk-In Access Enrollment Information System:

Julie Hines, DNR Grand Rapids, MN; 218-328-8936; julie.hines@state.mn.us