

**Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
FY 2011 Recommendation
Accomplishment Plan**

Date: December 22, 2009

Project or Program Title: Valley Creek Protection Partnership

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Funds Recommended (\$000s)	Council Recommendation Funding	Out-Year Projections of Needs*		
	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$1,218	0	0	0

* The Valley Creek Protection Partnership is an ongoing program with ongoing funding needs, but at this point in time we do not know if we will request additional funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Appropriation Language

To be inserted

Abstract

The Valley Creek Protection Partnership seeks to permanently protect, restore and enhance priority lands within the watershed of Valley Creek, a coldwater fishery that flows directly into the St. Croix River. We propose to accomplish this protection by acquiring land and conservation easements and restoring the riparian woodlands, prairies, oak savannas, and in-stream areas that provide significant habitat for fish and other wildlife. The Partnership seeks to build upon the collective experience of each of the organizations, working collaboratively and strategically, to permanently protect the most important parcels on this trout stream and restore the oak savannas that were once present.

Specifically, we will:

- Acquire two perpetual conservation easements to protect approximately 80 acres.
- Acquire the underlying fee on one parcel to secure public angling access to Valley Creek.
- Restore and enhance in-stream habitat, surrounding upland habitat, and key upstream habitat on 30 acres and ¾ mile of trout stream.

Narrative

This project is a continuation of previous success by the Valley Creek Protection Partnership. The organizations participating in this partnership include the Minnesota Land Trust, Belwin Conservancy, Valley Branch Watershed District, the Washington County Land & Water Legacy Program, and Trout Unlimited.

The Valley Creek watershed is located on the eastern edge of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and covers approximately 14 square miles. The watershed originally was characterized by savanna, tallgrass prairie and maple-basswood forest, but is now rapidly becoming more urban. The watershed includes portions of several growing communities such as Woodbury, West Lakeland Township, and Afton. Valley Creek itself flows approximately 10 miles through Washington County from its source near Woodbury to Afton, where it empties into the St. Croix River.

The exceptional habitat value of Valley Creek has been identified in Minnesota's State Wildlife Action Plan, which identifies Valley Creek as a "Key River Reach." Valley Creek is one of 13 trout streams within the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area and is one of only a few that has a naturally reproducing population of brook trout, the only trout species native to Minnesota. In addition to brook trout, Valley Creek sustains large populations of brown and rainbow trout. While many of the trout streams in Minnesota depend on stocking to maintain their trout populations, Valley Creek's habitat remains of high enough quality that the trout populations maintain themselves through natural reproduction. Valley Creek is one of the best trout-producing streams in the state of Minnesota, and is believed to be in the top 10% of trout streams in the world in terms of trout production (based on personal communication with Tom Waters and Ray Newman).

The Valley Creek watershed is home to more than 20 endangered, threatened, and special concern species, including the American brook lamprey, the hooded warbler, and Blanding's turtle. The creek also appears to be home to a species of crane fly (genus *Phantolabis*) previously undescribed by science. Scientists from the University of Minnesota are in the process of publishing their findings.

Valley Creek flows into the Wild and Scenic St. Croix River, which provides one of the premier mussel habitats in the world; approximately 38 mussel species live in the St. Croix watershed. The uncommon richness of mussel species in the St. Croix parallels the uncommon richness of the flora and fauna of the watershed as a whole. The watershed is home to many Midwestern species such as the wolf, bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and Karner blue butterfly, all of which are on the Federal list of threatened and endangered species.

Development and siltation are major concerns to the health and quality of the Valley Creek and its watershed. Development can destroy the upland habitat, while siltation destroys trout spawning habitat. A partnership of several organizations has formed to take the needed actions to maintain and improve in-stream habitat that is threatened by degradation. This partnership maximizes the relative strengths of each organization with each serving a vital role in ensuring that the lands can be acquired, protected, restored and maintained for future generations. This cooperative project will protect the Valley Creek watershed to ensure its high water quality and habitat by protecting 80 acres of land, restoring 30 acres of upland habitat, and enhancing the trout habitat in approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile of the stream.

In addition to protecting and improving Valley Creek and its watershed, this project will help improve the water quality of lower St. Croix River, which was recently listed as impaired. Finally, this project aims to provide angling access to a top trout stream that is close to the State's major population center.

Relationship to *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* and other published resource management plans.

The conservation of Valley Creek, with its rich assemblage of rare species and its unparalleled quality of aquatic habitat, is important to achieving the goals of the Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan and the Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan as well as the goals of other conservation plans.

The Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan, 'Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife,' classifies the Valley Creek project area as part of the St. Paul Baldwin Plains and Moraines subsection. The Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers traverse this subsection, which originally was characterized by savanna, tallgrass prairie and maple-basswood forest, but is now rapidly becoming more urban. This subsection contains 149 Species of Greatest Conservation Need, the second highest total number in all 25 subsections in Minnesota. Of the 149 Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Baldwin Plains and Moraines, 74 are species that are federal or state endangered, threatened, or of special concern. Examples of Species of Greatest Conservation Need in this subsection include the northern cricket frog, eastern wood pewee, paddlefish, St. Croix snaketail, and American badger.

Specifically, this proposal furthers the following recommendations of the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan:

- Protect priority land habitats
- Protect critical shorelands of streams and lakes
- Restore land, wetlands, and wetland-associated watersheds
- Improve connectivity and access to outdoor recreation

In addition, these plans recognize the use of conservation easements as one of the most established and effective means of permanently protecting the targeted habitats, as many of these areas are located on private lands.

Project Design and Evaluation

Describe the scope of the project in appropriate measures (i.e., .acreage numbers of lakes, miles of shoreline)

Project Scope	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife (Include Description in Footnote)
Restore		23 acres of oak savanna		7 acres
Protect		23 acres of oak savanna		57 acres* and 1 mile of trout stream
Enhance				0.75 miles of trout stream

* The 57 acres will include a mix of wetlands, forest, and habitat for fish, game and wildlife, but we have chosen to allocate it to this latter category due to the emphasis on protection of the trout stream.

Counties in which activities will take place	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore		Washington		Washington
Protect		Washington		Washington
Enhance				Washington

Acres Within Each Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore	30 acres				
Protect	80 acres				
Enhance	0.75 miles of trout stream				

Funding Per Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore	\$ 100,000				
Protect	\$1,056,000				
Enhance	\$62,000				

Indicate what is being funded

Funding Resource Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore		\$80,000		\$20,000
Protect				\$1,056,000*
Enhance				\$62,000

* This will include a mix of wetlands, forest, and habitat for fish, game and wildlife, but we have chosen to allocate it to this latter category due to the emphasis on protection of the trout stream.

Acquisition and Tax Data	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability				
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability				
Permanent Easement				80 acres

Budget

Please describe how you intend to spend the recommended funds

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11*	Fiscal Year 12*	Fiscal Year 13*
Personnel	\$5,000 (BC)	\$5,000 (TU)	
Equipment/Tools/Supplies Restoration: seed, trees, chemical, erosion control		\$95,000 (BC) \$44,000 (TU)	

materials, etc.			
Easement Acquisition Including easement purchase price of easements, appraisals, title work, title insurance, maps, GIS, etc.	\$826,000 (MLT) \$218,000 (WC)		
Easement Stewardship	\$12,000 (MLT)		
Professional Services Restoration: install seed, prepare soil for seeding, remove exotic species, mapping, create designs, etc.	\$4,000 (VBWD)	\$4,000 (VBWD) \$1,000 (TU)	\$4,000 (VBWD)
TOTAL	\$1,065,000	\$149,000	\$4,000

*Budget amounts for each partner organization are provided to facilitate separate appropriations.

Relationship to Current Budget

Although the Valley Creek Protection Partnership has established its success, none of the participating organizations have dedicated or sufficient operating budget or capital to continue to meet the conservation needs at Valley Creek. The majority of financial support to the Minnesota Land Trust, Belwin Conservancy, and Trout Unlimited must be raised on an annual basis. Capital funds are expended only when a priority opportunity becomes available and project-specific funds are obtained to complete the acquisition and/or restoration.

Washington County's approved budget includes \$10 million for Phase I of their Land and Water Legacy Program to complete projects throughout Washington County. The County Board has expressed a desire to supplement the County's available funding with other state or public dollars to maximize the conservation work that can be completed.

Valley Branch Watershed District has \$165,000 budgeted in 2010 for watershed restoration and stabilization projects. The money requested through this proposal would supplement these funds in order to ensure that work occurs on the most strategic Valley Creek parcels.

Personnel

List the positions, name (if known) and anticipated program funds to be paid by this recommendation

Position	Name	Amount
Belwin Conservancy Restoration Staff		\$5,000
Twin Cities Trout Unlimited Staff		\$5,000

Leverage

List the sources and amounts of leverage you have in hand or anticipate by fiscal year.

SOURCE	FY 11		FY 12		FY 13	
	In hand	Anticipated	In hand	Anticipated	In hand	Anticipated
State						
CPL Grants	\$217,533					
Non state						

Valley Branch WD		\$50,000		\$50,000		
Belwin Conservancy	\$300,000					
Washington County	\$500,000					
In-kind/Volunteer						
TOTAL	\$1,017,533	\$50,000		\$50,000		

Indicate how the leverage will be used

Leverage	State				Non-State			
	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore								
Protect								\$1,017,533
Enhance								\$100,000

Accomplishment Timeline

Milestones	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Budgetary Expenditure
Acquire conservation easement	50 acres protected			\$218,000
Acquire conservation easement	30 acres protected			\$838,000
Monitor and defend conservation easements	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	\$12,000
Purchase underlying fee for public access	30 acres purchased and public access created			
Complete restoration/ Enhancement of in-stream habitat and key upland parcels		¾ mile of stream enhanced		\$62,000
Complete restoration of adjacent uplands		30 acres of restoration complete		\$100,000

Maintenance and Sustainability

The land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through the best standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. Again, funding for easement stewardship for the Minnesota Land Trust is included in the budget outlined above. Both the Minnesota Land Trust and Washington County have stewardship programs that include annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation.

The Belwin Conservancy has the resources and 40 years of land management and restoration experience to ensure that the integrity of the habitat is maintained through its ongoing monitoring of indicator species. Additionally, Valley Branch Watershed District will continue to annually monitor the benthic invertebrates living in the creek, continuously monitor the water quality of the creek, and routinely monitor the fisheries in Valley Creek.



