

Protect (Acquire) Key Industrial Forest Land Tracts in Central Minnesota

Request for Funding Form Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2011

Program or Project Title: #22 Protect (Acquire) Key Industrial Forest Land Tracts in Central Minnesota

Date: October 31, 2009

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Funds Requested (\$000s)	Council Funding Request	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Outdoor Heritage Fund	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000

A. Summary:

Project will protect and restore 500+- acres of forest and wetland wildlife habitats in central Minnesota (Cass County) through fee title acquisition of key industrial forest tracts. Title of lands acquired will be held by Cass County for a majority of the tracts listed. However, land asset (e.g. exchange) and management partnerships (e.g. cooperative lease) will be worked out with the Minnesota DNR for those tracts identified in Table 6 that are best suited for management within the State recreational unit listed.

B. Background Information

1. What is the problem or opportunity being addressed?

Problem: Central Minnesota, especially the area in Cass County from Brainerd/Baxter to Walker, has and will continue to see some of the fastest human population growth in Minnesota. This growth will also lead to increased recreational demands/use of this area, it's natural resources and related public land base that needs to support this growth.

Opportunity: Key industrial forest tracts (i.e. in-holdings in large public land tracts, public access issues, etc.) are being considered or currently being offered for sale by a large industrial forest owner (Potlatch Corporation) in this area. Market conditions

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and a willingness by this industrial forest owner to sell at this time is an opportunity that should be addressed now since it is narrow and may close (properties sold) at any time.

2. What action will be taken?

Fee title acquisition, incorporate tracts into existing Cass County land base. Where appropriate, consider land asset (i.e. exchange) and/or management partnerships (i.e. cooperative lease) with the Minnesota DNR for those tract identified in Table 6 that are best suited for management within the State recreational units listed.

3. Who will take action and when?

Cass County (Land Department), within time frames of the project.

4. How will you coordinate this program with the other Constitutional Funding?

No other Constitutional funding is being considered, project is specific to funds authorized through L-SOHC.

5. What specific habitat changes will occur if this item is funded? Be specific about and list multiple benefits if they exist.

With protection: Tracts are primarily forested, some wetland attributes (Dry Sand WMA impoundment frontage; Pine River and Daggett Brook stream frontage). Current forest habitats are primarily cutover pine types that have been replanted to Norway Pine and/or Jack Pine, some Aspen and other hardwoods exist on transition edge to wetlands. Forest habitats will not change much in the first few years of protection since they are currently young forest. However, they will change in later years due to the fact County management will have a longer rotation age and a more diverse age/structural composition goal. These changes will greatly increase the structural and compositional diversity of these forest habitats and related wildlife that use them.

Without protection: Tracts will end up in private ownership where private desires, intent and zoning regulations will drive how they are developed. This change/development will have collateral impact (i.e. edge effect, noxious weeds/invasive species, etc.) on adjacent public lands that will probably be negative. Private development will also increase short and long-term County management costs for boundary surveys, postings, access roads, etc.

6. When do you expect to see these habitat changes?

As stated above, changes should start in 5-10 years, increase as time progresses after that.

7. Will your Outdoor Heritage Fund dollar request complete the planned accomplishments?

 X YES

 NO

If not, how will you finance completion?

Yes for this project period. Additional projects in futures years may be submitted as other key industrial forest tracts become available within Cass or adjacent counties.

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8. How will you pay for the maintenance of the accomplishments?

Ongoing maintenance of tracts acquired will be the responsibility Cass County and/or the Minnesota DNR recreational unit they are added to (i.e. State WMA or State Forest). Cass County currently manages over 250,000 acres of land. This land will be added to the existing land base.

9. How does this action directly restore, enhance, or protect prairies, wetlands, forests or habitat for fish, game, and wildlife?

Project protects long-term forest and wetlands habitats, and related fish, game and wildlife species by consolidating management of these in-holdings with surrounding public lands. Enhancements will be reflected both on a landscape scale (i.e. integrated forest composition goals, age structure, patch size dynamics, etc.) and a site scale (i.e. efficiency in managing individual timber sales and related wildlife habitat/recreational needs).

10. If you are restoring or enhancing property, is the activity on permanently protected land?

☒ **YES**

☐ **NO**

If yes briefly describe the kind of protection.

Fee title acquisition of these tracts permanently protects and allows for the long-term management of habitats on these tracts.

11. How will you ensure transparency and provide information about your work and use of Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars.

Numerous news releases; outreach efforts with local, regional and statewide stakeholders groups that will benefit by this project; posting on County's web site, etc.

12. Why will this strategy work?

A public information strategy that combines broad (news release) and targeted (stakeholder groups) efforts should reach a wide variety of Minnesota citizens. In house capabilities to produce this effort exist within the County, assistance expected from the Minnesota DNR.

13. Who might make decisions that assist or work against achieving the expected impact program?

Most all of the tracts being considered under this project have been discussed with local government officials and stakeholder groups over the last few years, expect strong support if funded. Objections may come from local neighbors (wanted to buy tracts themselves, concerned about boundary/trespass issues).

14. If this is acquisition of land, has the local government formally approved the acquisition?

☒ **YES**

☐ **NO**

Cass County Board supports the acquisition of this land. This type of Land Asset Management activity is identified in both the County Comprehensive Plan and the Forest Resource Management plan. Formal approval will be sought on each

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parcel acquired. The County's process requires township approval before the County Board takes action. The County expects a positive response and feels our current policy will ensure transparency and provide information about our work and use of Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars.

15. If this is fee simple acquisition of land, is the land free of any other permanent protection such as a conservation easement?

☒ **YES**

☐ **NO**

16. If this is an easement acquisition, will the eased land be open for public use?

Not applicable. All Cass County Administered Land is open to the public.

☐ **YES**

☐ **NO**

If Yes what kind of use?

17. If easement acquisition, will the easement be a permanent conservation easement as described in MS 2009, Chapter 84C.01, specifically protecting the natural resource values of real property forever?

Not applicable.

☐ **YES**

☐ **NO**

18. If you are proposing funding for a new or ongoing program how long into the future do you expect this program to operate?

2-3 **Years**

Note: Depending on the funding level and success of this project, additional annual projects may be submitted in future years to help consolidate other County and/or State lands in this area.

19. Which planning sections will you work in? Check all that apply in the list below.

- ☒ Northern Forest
- ☐ Forest/Prairie Transition
- ☐ Southeast Forest
- ☐ Prairie
- ☐ Metropolitan Urbanizing Area

20. Does the request address an urgent conservation opportunity that will be lost if not immediately funded?

☒ **YES**

☐ **NO**

If yes, please explain.

A large number of these tracts are currently up for sale or been considered for sale by the industrial forest landowner. Several of these tracts have been already

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been listed For Sale, but have been removed from the owners sale list at the request of Cass County and/or the Minnesota DNR so as to allow pursuit of possible funding.

21. Does the request restore and/or enhance habitat on existing state-owned Wildlife or Aquatic Management Areas or Scientific and Natural Areas?

_____ YES _____X_____ NO

If Yes, list the names of the AMAs, WMAs and/or SNAs and the acres to be restored and/or enhanced.

Note: Request does however fill in/round out land parcels within existing Cass County lands and creates the potential for land exchanges and/or cooperative lease agreements that enhance existing State Wildlife Management Areas or State Forests lands (see Table 6).

22. Is this request based on assessment through a science based strategic planning and evaluation model similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model?

_____ YES _____X_____ NO

If yes explain the model briefly.

While not a specific science based assessment process, tracts are all within or adjacent to existing public (Cass County) lands.

23. Explain the scientific foundation for your project, and the benefits it will produce.

Project and tracts are based on long-term management concerns for management costs (i.e. boundary survey, posting, access road development) that will be incurred to state citizens (Cass County) in the event these tracts go private, and related collateral impacts (i.e. trespass, noxious weeds/invasive species, ownership/forest fragmentation, etc.) of private development on adjacent public lands.

24. How do you set priorities? *(Be sure to list the criteria you use and the weight you give each one.)*

Long-term costs to state citizens, protection needs (boundary, recreational trail, and access issues), and, and collateral impacts if these in-holdings go private.

C. Relationship to the *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* and Other Published Resource Management Plans

Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan: This project best fits under the Critical Land Protection strategy and related Action recommendations: *Protect large blocks of forest lands, Protect critical shorelands of streams and lakes, Protect priority habitats, Improve connectivity and access to recreation.*

The Cass County land asset management program retains and consolidates the tax forfeited land base to improve efficiency and effectiveness in achieving management objectives, and, reduce future public costs to service remote and isolated private land.

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This is to be accomplished in a manner that does not reduce the private property tax base or decrease the amount of acres of County Administered Land within the county.

L-SOHC Strategic Planning and Recommendation Development Process – Northern

Forest section summary: This project provides the following forest protection features: *Aquatic components; Protection of riparian forests; Parcels that put together existing lands to create unfragmented landscapes; Open access; Parcels that provide access to landlocked parcels; Eliminate incompatible in-holdings; Complements other public lands to create corridors and protect larger blocks of land; Complete existing WMAs.*

DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda, 2009-2013: This project primarily fits the Landscape Changes from Growth and Development trend and related strategy for Integrated Public and Private Land Management, Forest Ownership Change: *Development and fragmentation of lands adjacent to public lands can impede management, restrict public recreational access, and reduce habitat value of adjacent public lands.*

Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy: This project serves the goal to Stabilize and increase SGCN populations for the Pine Moraines and Outwash Plains Subsection through actions that will permanently protect and manage: Upland coniferous red-white pine forest habitats, Jack pine woodland habitats, nonforested wetlands, and Stream habitats.

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D. Budget

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Contracts	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Equipment/Tools/Supplies	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Fee Acquisition	\$1,000,000.00	\$1,000,000.00	\$1,000,000.00
Easement Acquisition	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Easement Stewardship	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Professional Services	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Travel	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Additional Budget Items	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
TOTAL	\$1,000,000.00	\$1,000,000.00	\$1,000,000.00

E. Personnel Details *In the space below list the names, titles and anticipated program funds to be paid by this recommendation. If you will need to fill a position just list the title and amount.*

Title	Name	Amount.
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No personnel costs are being requested. Funds will be used for acquisition only. Funds acquired will not be used for overhead.

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F. All Leverage In the table below list the sources and amounts of leverage you anticipate by fiscal year you anticipate receiving it. Include state and non-state leverage.

Source of Non-State Leverage	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Cass County	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00
Staff Match			
Cass County			
Professional Services	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00	\$10,000.00
(Title Work)			
Cass County	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
Travel			
TOTAL	\$37,000.00	\$37,000.00	\$37,000.00

G. Outcomes:

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Table 1 Accomplish- ments	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect			<i>500+- acres, primarily forested, 2+ miles of lake or stream frontage</i>	
Enhance				

Table 2 Sections Impacted and Impact Quantifier	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect			<i>Northern Forest</i>	
Enhance				

Table 3 Recommend Fund Allocation	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect	<i>\$300,000</i>		<i>\$700,000</i>	
Enhance				

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Table 4 Leverage \$	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect			\$0	
Enhance				

Table 5 Acquisition Data	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability				
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability			500+- acres	
Permanent Easement				

H. Accomplishment Time Table

Milestone	Date	Measure
Purchase lands	June 30, 2011	500+- acres
Exchange potential WMA or Forest Lands with DNR	June 30, 2012	250+- acres

I. Relationship to Your Current Budget:

This funding will be used to supplement current Cass County acquisitions in the proposed project area. The County currently budgets staff time and fees associated with land acquisition and exchange. We plan to use these funds as match. The funds secured from this program will be used for the fee acquisition exclusively.

J. How Will the Habitat Improvements Be Sustained?

Lands acquired under this project will be designated as Cass County Fee Owned Lands. Lands that stay Cass County Fee owned lands will be sustained through revenue generated from timber management activity. Those lands that are exchanged to the State of MN will be sustained through the following options: State Wildlife Management Areas or State Forestry administered lands under authority of the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1978 and managed in perpetuity with DNR Wildlife (Game and Fish Funds) or DNR Forestry funds. Payment of in-lieu

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of tax payments are made to counties from biennial appropriations by the Legislature from the general fund.

K. Attach a list of your projects listing their county location and edit the map of Minnesota on the next page to show each project as a symbol.

See Table 6 for a list of recreational units and proposed acquisitions.

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Table 6. List of Tracts to be Acquired

The following notes a list (ascending sort by legal description) of tracts being considered for acquisition with this project, actual tracts acquired will depend on final agreements by project partners. Additional/substitute tracts may be considered, but would only be acquired if they fit within the projects budget and are approved as an addendum to this project by L-SOHC.

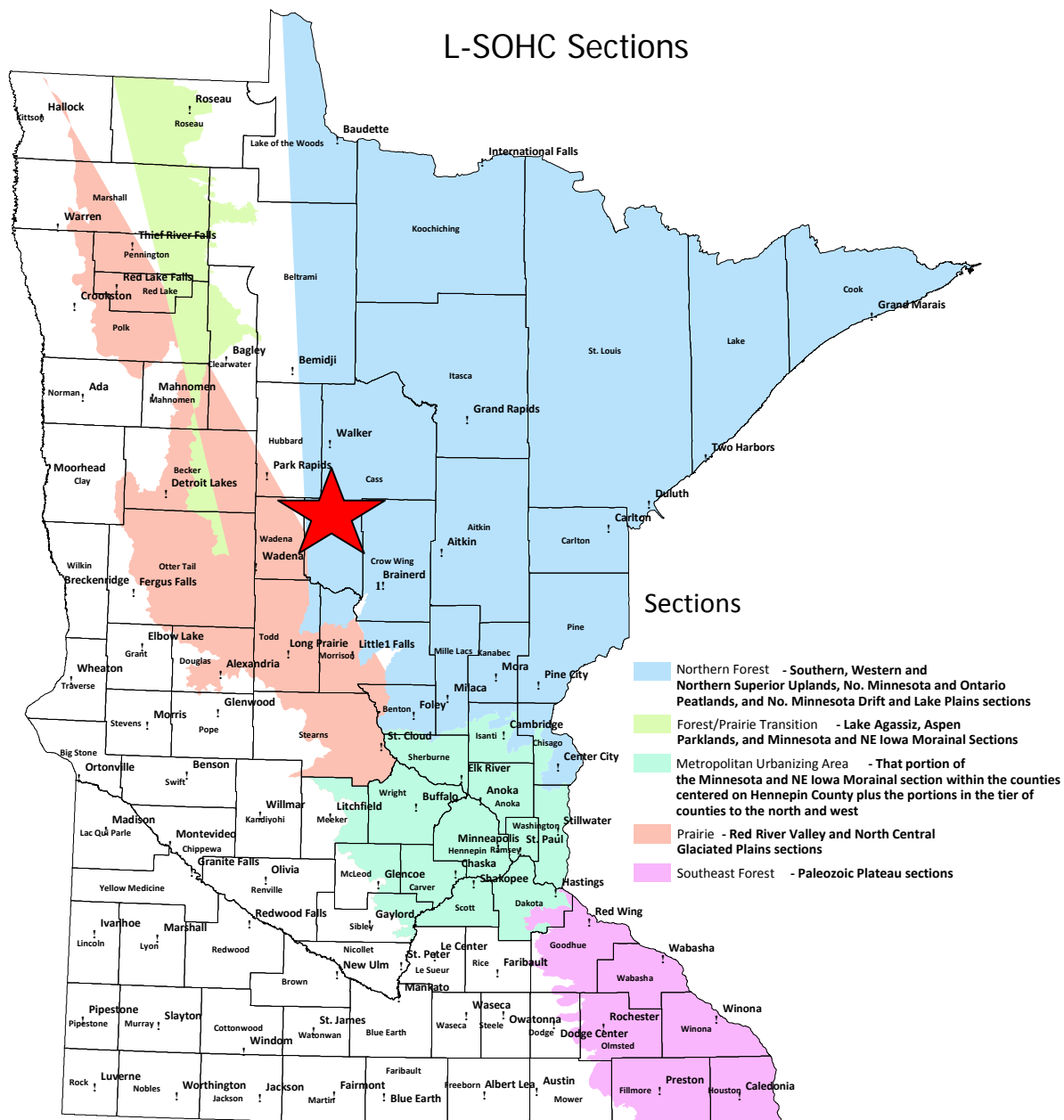
<u>Location (legal description)</u>	<u>Acres</u>
T. 134 N., R. 32 W., S. 21 (S1/2 of the NE quarter) .5 mile of common boundary with Cass County land, .25 common boundary with State Forestry land. Critical public access to several hundred acres of other Cass County and State lands.	80
T. 135 N., R. 32 W., S. 6 (NE of the NE quarter) Totally surrounded by public lands (.75 miles of common boundary with Cass County land, .25 of common boundary with Dry Sand Lake State Wildlife Management Area). Includes connecting access trail to adjacent public lands.	40
T. 135 N. R. 32 W., S. 6 (SW of the NE quarter) Totally surrounded by public lands (.5 miles of common boundary with Cass County land, .5 miles of common boundary with the Dry Sand Lake WMA). Part of tract is under the Turtle Shell impoundment for this WMA, 1,000+ feet of shoreline on impoundment. Cooperative lease will be pursued with the Minnesota DNR for management of this tract as part of the Dry Sand Lake WMA.	40
T. 135 N., R. 32 W., S. 16 (SE of the NW quarter) Totally surrounded by State Forestry lands (i.e.tract sets in the middle of 600 acres of State Trust Fund land. Over .5 miles of road access easement will have to be granted if this tract goes private. Land exchange will be pursued with DNR Forestry to consolidate this State ownership and assist County land asset management needs somewhere else.	40
T. 135 N., R. 32 W., S. 18 (E1/2 of the NW, NE of the SW) .75 miles of common boundary with Cass County land. Tract protects 3,000 feet of shoreline on Farnham Lake within the newly created Farnham Lake State Wildlife Management Area. Cooperative lease will be pursued with the Minnesota DNR for management of this tract as part of the Farnham Lake WMA.	120
T. 136 N., R. 29 W., S. 29 (E12/ of the NE quarter) .25 miles of boundary with Cass County land. Provides a route for a Grant in Aid snowmobile trail and summer access for timber management activity on adjacent public land.	80
T. 140 N., R. 27 W., S. 34 (NE quarter) Totally surrounded by Cass County land, 2.0 miles of common boundary, 1,500 feet of stream frontage on Daggett Brook, ¼ mile downstream of the Daggett Brook State WMA.	160
T. 140 N., R. 31 W., S. 27 (NE of the NW quarter) Totally surrounded by Cass County land, 1.0 miles of common boundary, Provides a route for a Grant in Aid snowmobile trail.	40
T. 140 N., R. 31 W., S. 34 (SW of the NW quarter) Totally surrounded by Cass County land, 1.0 miles of common boundary, allows the County to avoid ¾ miles of private easement for public access.	40
T. 140 N., R. 31 W., S. 35 (S1/2 of the SE quarter) Totally surrounded by public lands (County and State), 1.5 miles of common boundary, Avoid 1.5 miles of private easement on an existing Grant in Aid Snowmobile Trail.	80
T. 140 N., R. 31 W., S. 36 (NW of the SW quarter)	40

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Totally surrounded by public lands (State and County, 1.0 miles of common boundary, 1,300 feet of stream frontage on the Pine River. Avoid 2 miles of private easement on an Existing Grant in Aid Snowmobile trail within the Foothills State Forest Boundary.

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