

## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

### Laws of Minnesota 2012 Accomplishment Plan

**Date:** October 24, 2011

**Program Title:** Columbus Lake Conservation Area

Manager's Name: John VonDeLinde  
Title: Director of Parks and Recreation  
Organization: Anoka County  
Telephone: 763-767-2860  
Email: john.vondelinde@co.anoka.mn.us  
Fax: 763-755-0230

**Funds Recommended:** \$ 940,000

**Legislative Citation:** ML 2012, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. 4 (c): *(to be completed when signed by Governor)*

#### **Abstract:**

*(Provide a clear, concise summary of the program's activities and outcomes. Limit response to 30 words or fewer.)*

Acquisition of Columbus Lake Conservation Area will protect 263 acres of quality habitat for game and waterfowl hunters, creating a wildlife corridor connecting Lamprey Pass WMA to other protected habitat.

### **Program Narrative**

#### **Design and Scope of Work**

This project proposes to acquire 263 acres of wetland and creek corridor just south of the Lamprey Pass Wildlife Management Area (WMA). It will protect nearly all of the shoreline of Columbus Lake, a 20-acre shallow lake, and nearly complete public ownership of a 20+ mile conservation corridor, extending from the WMA and along Rice Creek to the Mississippi River. Currently there is no connection between the WMA and these other tracts of publicly owned habitat.

The acquisition area has a rich mixture of habitat types, including emergent marsh, cattail marsh, mixed hardwood swamp, shrub swamp, maple/basswood islands, poor fen and rich fen. Most of the area is identified within the state's County Biological Survey as some of the last remaining high quality natural communities in the metro area. The property further provides important habitat for many species in the

greatest conservation need, including Blanding's Turtles, Snapping Turtles, Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets, Black Crowned Night Herons, American Bitterns, and Water Willow.

The land provides excellent habitat with hunting opportunities for not only waterfowl, but also for pheasant, turkey and deer. Rice Creek also offers opportunities for bow-fishing and angling for northern pike. This is a rare opportunity to obtain high quality habitat that is available to present and future generations of metropolitan area sportsmen and women. The property is within one half hour from downtown Minneapolis and St. Paul. The conservation of Columbus Lake and Rice Creek would provide many water quality benefits, including sustaining drinking water quality by preserving an important headwaters area and source of water into the Mississippi River.

This acquisition is a priority for Anoka County because of the habitat, biological, and recreational attributes discussed above; it is also a priority in the County's Natural Resources Management Plan discussed below. The project has broad local support and is a priority for many local sportsmen's groups. Letters of support for this project have been submitted from the Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Minnesota Waterfowl Association and Pheasants Forever. The City of Columbus and local citizens further support this acquisition.

The parcels were selected based on their native habitat quality and the need for protection. The current landowners have had development plans drawn for this land and intend to develop it if this conservation effort is not successful. Such development would eliminate the connection between the WMA and the large tract of public habitat to the south.

The County asked The Trust for Public Land (TPL) for assistance in completing this conservation transaction. TPL has an option to purchase the property from the landowners for its current appraised fair market value of \$1,207,000; this is approximately half the amount the landowners had recently asked for the property. Current market conditions have created a rare opportunity to acquire this quality habitat and hunting land in the metro area at a historically low price.

The County will contribute \$250,000 towards this project; \$200,000 in capital towards the acquisition itself and an additional \$50,000 for initial site development costs including signing, parking and restoration of a field area to native prairie. The purchase price of the property is \$1,207,000. With the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council funding recommendation of \$940,000, there is a funding gap of \$67,000, which TPL intends to fill with previously awarded ENRTF funds.

The land will be open to public hunting and fishing. The County will work with the Commissioner of Natural Resources to set the appropriate regulations for the resource in the same manner as was done for the Cedar Creek Conservation Area previously funded by the LSOHC. The County will also coordinate with the DNR on management of this land so that it is consistent with that of the neighboring WMA. The County and the DNR have already been working together to permanently protect this land for a number of years.

## Planning

The Columbus Lake property is of such high quality that it meets numerous goals and priorities in statewide resource management plans, including the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan (SCPP) and LSOHC's Metro Urbanizing Section Vision.

The SCPP states, "habitat issues are arguably the most important issues facing the conservation and preservation of natural resources throughout Minnesota" (p. 31). Columbus Lake meets habitat recommendations from the SCPP, including protection of priority land habitats (p. 63), protection of critical shorelands of streams and lakes – particularly 'protection of aquatic habitats at a large scale' and 'providing shoreline buffers' (p. 67), improving connectivity and access to outdoor recreation (p. 74), protection of in-water habitats of lakes and streams (p. 81) and protection of shallow lakes (p. 78).

The Columbus Lake property is located in the Metro Urbanizing Section of the LSOHC Ecological Sections and addresses that sections goals of protecting highly biologically diverse wetland and plant communities, protecting habitats that connect, making corridors for wildlife, holding wetlands and shallow lakes open to public recreation and hunting and protecting riparian habitats that benefit fish and waterfowl (RFP pp.7-8).

This project also furthers many of the goals contained in Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition Plan. That plan acknowledges that DNR "can't do it alone" and needs help from counties, like Anoka. The plan further recognizes that efforts should focus on waterfowl and pheasant habitat (p. 3), especially larger wetland/grassland complexes like Columbus Lake (p. 11). It specifically states, "acquisition efforts should complement existing state and other public lands to protect critical corridors and larger blocks of habitat" (p. 11), as this project does. Waterfowl, shallow lakes and seasonally flooded wetlands, like Columbus Lake, are a priority for acquisition (p. 11).

Protection of such habitat is also a primary goal/strategy of the Long Range Duck Recovery Plan. For pheasant, core wintering areas with adjacent nesting site habitat is key (p.11). This is also recognized by the Long Range Plan For The Ring-necked Pheasant In Minnesota (pp. 6-7). Columbus Lake has such pheasant habitat, with undisturbed grasses for nesting and brooding; emergent and shrub-scrub wetlands and dense woods for winter cover; and neighboring cultivated grains for food. Perhaps most importantly, the WMA Plan acknowledges the importance of providing additional hunting land in close proximity to the major population centers to increase hunter access and opportunities (p. 11). It then goes on to name this area of northern Anoka County as a significant focus area (p. 11).

As noted above, the Columbus Lake acquisition has also been identified in the County's Natural Resources Management Plan, which establishes a comprehensive and prioritized approach to resource conservation across the County. Participants in the development of this plan included the DNR, the University of Minnesota, the Anoka Conservation District, Rice Creek Watershed District and the City of Columbus. The City has further incorporated the Rice Creek corridor into its comprehensive land use plan for permanent protection.

### **Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds**

Other constitutional funds will not be sought for acquisition of this land. However, \$67,000 in ENRTF funds previously awarded to TPL will be used to acquire this land.

### **Relationship to Current Organizational Budget**

Anoka County Parks and Recreation Department is a governmental agency that currently manages a large natural resource based parks and open space system throughout the County. The Outdoor Heritage funding would supplement the County's budget by allowing the County to acquire and protect these wetlands sooner than normal budget appropriations would allow.

### **Sustainability and Maintenance**

On-going operations and maintenance of the land and restoration will be sustained following the Anoka County Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Natural Resource Management Plan and will be supported through the annual Operations and Maintenance Budget for the Parks and Recreation Department.

Anoka County's management goals for the Columbus Lake Conservation Area are based upon the ideals that will achieve the outcomes of existing natural resource plans, including, but not limited to, the Minnesota Statewide Conservation Plan, that directly relate to the restoration, protection, and enhancement of wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife. In addition, the conservation area will remain open to hunting and fishing, consistent with the capacity of the land, during the open season, as determined by the State Commissioner of Natural Resources. As a result, the following management goals for Columbus Lake Conservation Area have been identified:

Goal 1: Maintain and enhance the natural character of Columbus Lake, Rice Creek, and the surrounding wetlands and their function as a connective wildlife habitat corridor to Lamprey Pass WMA.

- The water quality and habitat quality of the creek and lake will be maintained or enhanced. A natural flow regime should be maintained. An emphasis will be placed on stream, lake, and wetland habitat that supports fish and wildlife production.
- The creek, lake, and wetlands will be monitored on regular basis to identify trends or changes in water quality.
- Best management practices will be used to control erosion and pollution. This includes establishing native vegetation buffers along the riparian zones and educating and encouraging adjacent landowners to employ best management practices.

Goal 2: Restore and maintain the quality and function of the natural plant and wildlife habitat and production.

- Efforts will be made to reconstruct, restore and manage prairies, wetlands, and forests utilizing locally native ecotype sources of seeds and plants. This includes maximizing habitat structure and composition that will support wildlife production.
- Necessary disturbance regimes, at prescribed intervals, will be introduced to sustain healthy populations of plants and wildlife.
- Roads, parking lots, and other infrastructure will be designed to minimize impacts to the creek, natural communities, and wildlife.
- Invasive species will be monitored, controlled and suppressed. Biological control methods will be used when applicable.

Goal 3: Hunting and fishing opportunities will be maintained, consistent with the capacity of the land.

- One vehicle access point will be developed and maintained off of County Road 23.
- Rustic trails will be provided to allow for reasonable access to hunting and fishing areas. In addition, the trails will be used outside of the hunting season for general hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities.
- The primary game species that will be hunted, in addition to deer, will be pheasants, waterfowl, ruffed grouse, turkey, rabbit, and squirrel.

The annual cost of working towards obtaining the above conservation goals will approximately be as follows:

Labor - \$7,000 per year

Equipment - \$7,000 per year

Supplies / Materials - \$2,500 per year

The above annual costs will be funded through Anoka County's operations and maintenance budget. In addition, various grant programs will be pursued for special larger scale habitat restoration projects.

### Outcomes

The anticipated outcome of this project will permanently protect 263 acres of high quality habitat. It will connect and provide a wildlife corridor between the 1,300-acre Lamprey Pass WMA and over 600 acres of public land to the south. These tracts further connect to a conservation corridor that extends over 20 miles to the Mississippi River.

This complex will provide quality hunting opportunities for Twin Cities residents in close proximity to where they live.

As noted in the Results Management Framework of the Metropolitan/Urbanizing Section (Outdoor Heritage Fund Framework p. 60), the following outcomes from the Columbus Lake project can be expected:

#### Short-term and Intermediate Results:

263 acres with highly biologically diverse wetlands and plant communities is protected;  
A network of natural land habitats is created, making corridors for wildlife; and  
Access development to the protected habitats will hold wetlands and shallow lakes open to public recreation and hunting.

#### Long-term and End Results:

Increased large complexes and corridors of biologically diverse habitat provide multiple enduring conservation benefits in the face of climate change, invasive species and other major stressors;  
Improved health of terrestrial and aquatic habitat for fish, game and other wildlife species;  
Increased access for outdoor recreation,  
Improved health of watersheds, and  
Increased number of fish, game and other wildlife populations in the Metro/Urbanizing Area.

**Accomplishment Timeline**

Activity	Milestone	Date completed
Acquisition of 263 acres in fee title	TPL completes landowner negotiations and obtains option to purchase agreement.	July 15, 2011
	Complete due diligence	Winter 2012
	Anoka County acquires 263 acres	January 2013
Initial site development	Sign, post, parking, restoration of small field area	Summer-Fall 2014

**Table B-2. Other Outcome Table**

*(This table should be used instead of attachment B for activities that are not counted in acres, miles etc. If you use attachment B you can delete this table from the accomplishment plan.)*

Goal 1	Activity – P/R/E	Measure	Impact	Ecological Type
Goal 2				

Attachments *(on spreadsheet workbook – 3 separate tabs)*:

- A. Budget
- B. Proposed Outcome Tables
- C. Parcel List

*No Map is needed for the accomplishment plan*

**Attachment A. Budget Spreadsheet**

<b>Name of Proposal:</b>	Columbus Lake Conservation Area
<b>Legislative Citation:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	10/24/2011

[Link HERE to definitions of the budget items below.](#)

**Total Amount of Request**      \$ 940,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

**Personnel**

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash		Total
				Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	
<i>Manager of Programs</i>					\$	-
<i>Admin Asst</i>					\$	-
<i>position 3</i>					\$	-
<i>position 4</i>					\$	-
<i>position 5</i>					\$	-
<i>position 6</i>					\$	-
<i>position 7</i>					\$	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

**Budget and Cash Leverage** *(All your LSOHC Request Funds must be direct to and necessary for program outcomes.)*

*Please describe how you intend to spend the requested funds.*

Budget Item	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash		Total
		Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	
<b>Personnel - auto entered from above</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Contracts</b>		\$ 50,000	<i>Anoka County</i>	\$ 50,000
<b>Fee Acquisition w/ PILT (breakout in table 7)</b>				\$ -
<b>Fee Acquisition w/o PILT (breakout in table 7)</b>	\$ 940,000	\$ 267,000	<i>Anoka County/Trust fo</i>	\$ 1,207,000
<b>Easement Acquisition</b>				\$ -
<b>Easement Stewardship</b>				\$ -
<b>Travel (in-state)</b>				\$ -
<b>Professional Services</b>				\$ -
<b>Direct Support Services</b>				\$ -
<b>DNR Land Acquisition Costs</b>				\$ -
<b>Other</b>				\$ -
<i>Capital Equipment (auto entered from below)</i>				\$ -
<i>Other Equipment/Tools</i>				\$ -
<i>Supplies/Materials</i>				\$ -
	\$ 940,000	\$ 317,000	\$ -	\$ 1,257,000

**Capital Equipment** *(single items over \$10,000 - auto entered into table above)*

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Leverage
<i>Truck</i>		
<i>Item 2 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 3 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 4 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 5 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 6 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 7 enter here</i>		
<i>Item 8 enter here</i>		
<b>Total</b>	-	-

**Attachment B. Output Tables**

<b>Name of Proposal:</b>	Columbus Lake Conservation Area
<b>Legislative Citation:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	10/24/2011

*Table 1 and Table 3 column totals should be the same AND Table 2 and Table 4 column totals should be the same*

*If your project has lakes or shoreline miles instead of land acres, convert miles to acres for Tables 1 and 3 using the following conversion:*

*Lakeshore = 6 acres per lakeshore mile / Stream & River Shore = 12 acres per linear mile, if both sides*

**Table 1. Acres by Resource Type**

Describe the scope of the project in acres (use conversion above if needed)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					0
Protect Fee	243	3	17		263
Protect Easement					0
Protect Other					0
Enhance					0
<b>Total</b>	243	3	17	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)	263	<i>These two cells should be the same figure.</i>
Total Acres (sum of Total row)	263	

**Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type**

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					\$ -
Protect Fee	\$ 874,200	\$ 9,400	\$ 56,400		\$ 940,000
Protect Easement					\$ -
Protect Other					\$ -
Enhance					\$ -
<b>Total</b>	\$ 874,200	\$ 9,400	\$ 56,400	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)	\$ 940,000	<i>These two cells should be the same figure.</i>
Total Dollars (sum of Total row)	\$ 940,000	

Check to make sure this amount is the same as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

**Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section**

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						0
Protect Fee	263					263
Protect Easement						0
Protect Other						0
Enhance						0
<b>Total</b>	263	0	0	0	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)	263	<i>These three cells should be the same figure.</i>
Total Acres (sum of Total row)	263	
Total Acres from Table 1.	263	



**Attachment B. Output Tables**

**Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section**

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						\$ -
Protect Fee	\$ 940,000					\$ 940,000
Protect Easement						\$ -
Protect Other						\$ -
Enhance						\$ -
<b>Total</b>	\$ 940,000	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column) \$ 940,000  
 Total Dollars (sum of Total row) \$ 940,000  
 Check to make sure these amounts are the same as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

*These two cells should be the same figure.*

**Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles**

# miles of Lakes / Streams / Rivers Shoreline

**Table 6. Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in acres)**

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					0
Acquired in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	243	3	17		263
Permanent Easement PILT Liability					0
	243	3	17	0	

**Table 7. Estimated Value of Land Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in dollars)**

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total	
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					\$ -	
Acquired in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$ 874,200	\$ 9,400	\$ 56,400		\$ 940,000	\$ 940,000
Permanent Easement PILT Liability					\$ -	
	\$ 874,200	\$ 9,400	\$ 56,400	\$ -		

*FYI: should match total in budget table that is auto entered below*

### Attachment C. Parcel List

**Name of Proposal:** Columbus Lake Conservation Area  
**Legislative Citation:**  
**Date:** 10/24/2011

County	Township (25-258)	Range (01-51)	Direction most parcels are 2 with the exception of some areas of Cook County which is 1	Section (01 thru 36)	TRDS	# of acres	Budgetary Estimate (includes administrative, restoration or other related costs and do not include matching money contributed or earned by the transaction)	Description	Activity PF=Protect Fee PE=Protect Easement PO=Protect Other R=Restore E=Enhance	If Easement, what is the easement cost as a % of the fee acquisition?	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)	
<b>Parcel Name</b>													
Columbus Lake Conservation Area	Anoka	32	22	2	23	3222223	40	\$131,600	Wetland, Forest	PF	N/A	N	Y
Columbus Lake Conservation Area	Anoka	32	22	2	22, 23	3222222	223	\$808,400	Wetland, Prairie, Forest	PF, R	N/A	N	Y
							<b>263</b>	<b>\$940,000</b>					

*Information provided will be used to map project locations. Incomplete or inaccurate information will result in that parcel or program not being mapped.*