

Main Request for Funding Form

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2014 / ML 2013 Proposal

Program or Project Title: Root River Protection and Restoration

Funds Requested: \$3,774,600

Manager's Name: Richard Biske

Title: Southeast Minnesota Conservation Coordinator

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

Street Address: PO Box 405

City: Preston, MN 55965

Telephone: 507-765-2450

E-Mail: rbiske@tnc.org

Organization Web Site: nature.org

County Locations: Fillmore, Houston, and Winona.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Southeast Forest

Activity Type:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore
- Enhance
- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Forest
- Prairie
- Habitat

Abstract

This project will protect and restore declining habitats for important wildlife species in strategically targeted areas of outstanding biodiversity in Southeast Minnesota's Root River watershed. It will result in increased public access and expanded habitat complexes critical to the state.

Activity Detail

Design and Scope of Work

Importance of the Project Area:

The Root River Watershed of Southeast Minnesota is as rich in habitat for game and nongame wildlife species as it is in aesthetic beauty. Long valleys rimmed with dry prairies and hardwood hills are bisected by coldwater trout streams. Unlike any other part of the state, much of the watershed and the greater Mississippi River Blufflands have been largely untouched by glaciers for 500,000 years. As a result of this unique geology, the Blufflands—are home to diverse habitats. No other region in the state demonstrates this diversity and uniqueness of habitats.

While much of the region has been converted to cropland, pasture and rural development, many bluffs and valleys of the watershed are still home to high quality cliffs, forests, oak savannas, and prairies, including 40 different native plant community types mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) covering nearly 38,000 acres. The Root River watershed represents an extraordinary priority: there are 111 species of state-listed rare plants and animals in the watershed, many of them concentrated in the 353 sites of biodiversity significance mapped in the watershed by MBS.

Thanks to this diversity, the area is highly regarded for turkey and deer hunting along with trout fishing, hiking and biking. Outdoor recreation is a significant component to the local economy and heritage, drawing visitors from across the upper Midwest. However, less than 3% of the Root River Watershed is open to the public and relatively very little is in any kind of protected status. Moreover, growth of nearby communities like Rochester and LaCrosse are increasing rural development with bluff top and remote country homes. More roads, buildings and associated infrastructure further fragments an already fragmented landscape, disturbing forest habitat and increasing already high erosion rates. In addition, farming practices have increasingly encroached on these unique habitats including tracts in this proposal and have had significant impacts to water quality.

To maintain this legacy of the unique natural habitats, there are three primary needs or opportunities in the region: 1) expand the amount of protected land—both public and private—in strategic locations based on existing protected lands and high-quality habitat; 2) maximize the quality of this protected habitat through well-executed restoration and enhancement projects; and 3) increase public access to these unique habitats in this area of the state with relatively little public lands.

Investment in the Root River watershed by the Outdoor Heritage Fund would expand and connect larger contiguous blocks of protected lands, allowing land managers to restore and maintain native habitats at a scale difficult to accomplish with fragmented ownership. An example of this is the frequent prescribed fire burns necessary to reclaim the unique “goat prairies” and oak savanna from the cedar and buckthorn hillsides, which is most effective at larger scale.

Certain habitat complexes stand out in the watershed, including the different units of the R.J. Dorer Memorial Forest, state parks, and larger blocks of existing conservation easements. These complexes serve as hubs for additional protection through strategic fee title and conservation easement acquisitions. This proposal aims to enhance this prior conservation investment and ensure that the legacy of the Blufflands region is preserved for the future.

Overall Scope of Work:

This project has three primary components: 1) fee title acquisition of approximately 479 acres of forest and 150 acres of prairie along 2.5 miles of coldwater trout streams adjacent to state forest land, scientific and natural areas and a state park; 2) Restoration and enhancement of 241 acres of prairie and forest habitat within these protected habitat complexes; and 3) Strategic protection of 500—700 acres of high-quality habitat on private lands within these complexes through the acquisition of conservation easements. Project partners include The Nature Conservancy, the Minnesota DNR and the Minnesota Land Trust. Priority for

these three activities will be placed on targeted tracts within high biodiversity conservation complexes identified by project partners as representing the highest quality and most diverse habitat types in the watershed.

Fee Acquisitions:

The Nature Conservancy will coordinate with MN DNR on all potential fee-title acquisitions. The Nature Conservancy will assist the participating DNR Divisions by conducting all or some of the following activities: initial site reviews, negotiations, appraisals, environmental reviews and acquisition of fee title. In the event the Conservancy comes into the chain of title, it will transfer the property to the DNR. The property acquired with this funding will be owned and managed by the DNR as State Forest or Scientific and Natural Areas, which will be open for public hunting and fishing.

Note: Three tracts out of 6 included in this proposal for acquisition also appear on a MN DNR Forestry LSOHC proposal. TNC and Forestry are coordinating on the acquisition of these tracts. The inclusion of the tracts on both proposals is an emphasis of their value and synergy between Forestry and TNC. In the event one proposal is funded, and to the extent that these 3 tracts can be acquired with that funding, funds in the other proposal will be directed to other acquisitions on the list.

Restoration and Enhancement

Restoration plans and activities will be coordinated with DNR Forestry and Nongame leads for specific units. TNC will contract with CCM as much as possible and other local vendors for invasive brush removal and prescribed fire on 121 acres of bluff prairie and oak savanna restorations. TNC will coordinate with SNA staff on the reconstruction of 120 acres of prairie, oak savanna and hardwood forest upon completion of an SNA acquisition included in this proposal.

Conservation Easement Acquisitions:

To complement the fee title acquisitions described above, the Minnesota Land Trust will acquire permanent conservation easements on 500-700 acres of high quality prairie, forest and riparian habitat in the watershed. Priority will be given to important private parcels that are near-by or adjacent to existing protected habitat complexes.

The Minnesota Land Trust works only with conservation easements that are perpetual. These easements prohibit land uses or development that negatively affect important habitat and other conservation values.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H2 Protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation
- H7 Keep water on the landscape
- LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land
- LU10 Support and expand sustainable practices on working forested lands

Plans Addressed

- A Vision for Wildlife and Its Use -- Goals and Outcomes 2006-2012
- Driftless Area Restoration Effort
- Long Range Plan for Fisheries Management
- Long Range Plan for the Wild Turkey
- Minnesota DNR AMA Acquisition Plan
- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota DNR Scientific and Natural Area's Long Range Plan
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Forest Resource Council Landscape Plans
- Minnesota Sustainability Framework
- Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years
- National Audubon Society Top 20 Common Birds in Decline
- National Fish Habitat Action Plan
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Strategic Plan for Coldwater Resources Management in Southeastern Minnesota
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- The Nature Conservancy's Root River Watershed Conservation Action Plan and Rapid Protection Plan

LSOHC Statewide Priorities

- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Are able to leverage effort and/or other funds to supplement any OHF appropriation
- Allow public access. This comes into play when all other things about the request are approximately equal
- Address conservation opportunities that will be lost if not immediately acted on
- Restore or enhance habitat on state-owned WMAs, AMAs, SNAs, and state forests
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model
- Address wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions, as well as permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- Ensures activities for "protecting, restoring and enhancing" are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work
- Target unique Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife

LSOHC Southeast Forest Section Priorities

- Protect forest habitat through acquisition in fee or easement to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties
- Protect, enhance, and restore habitat for fish, game, and nongame wildlife in rivers, cold-water streams, and associated upland habitat
- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant goat prairies
- Restore forest-based wildlife habitat that has experienced substantial decline in area in recent decades

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

- Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund

As described in the narrative above, portions of this proposal are included in a DNR Forestry request for funding for State Forest Acquisition. In addition, the DNR SNA Program has a request under review by LCCMR for acquisition of parcels for addition to the SNA Program. One tract included in this proposal is highly ranked in that proposal as well. In the event one proposal is funded, and to the extent that tract can be acquired with that funding, funds in the other proposal will be directed to other acquisitions on the list.

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts

This project accelerates the efforts of several local partnerships working in the Root River Watershed. A broad cross section of state, federal and local agencies along with nongovernment organizations participate in a conservation collaborative and a Landscape Stewardship Plan for the Root River Watershed. Root River watershed partners have identified priority conservation efforts based on the Minnesota Biological Survey, public land assets and natural resource value. Partners have agreed to coordinate ongoing conservation efforts and participate in land protection along with public and private land restoration and management. Acquisition and restoration projects included in this proposal build on 50 years of land conservation in the R.J. Doer Memorial Hardwood Forest. The DNR and local partners have made progress in recent years restoring rare and declining habitats like bluff prairies and oak savannas. However, it is widely recognized that much more needs to be done to revert these declining habitats. Partners are working together to protect and restore habitat mosaics that include forest, prairie, oak savanna and riparian areas.

Sustainability and Maintenance

Acquisition projects will be adjacent to or within close proximity to existing protected lands, including state-owned lands and lands under conservation easement. This would allow for the expansion of maintenance and restoration activities that are currently taking place on those protected lands and adjacent private lands. Habitats cleared of invasive species will be maintained with prescribed fire. Protection and restoration projects will improve future prescribed fire and maintenance activities. The conservation easements will be monitored and enforced through the Minnesota Land Trust's comprehensive conservation easement stewardship program. The Minnesota Land Trust was one of the first land trusts in the country to be accredited by the Land Trust Alliance Accreditation Commission. Accreditation means that this land trust abides by the Land Trust Standards and Practices and operates in an ethical, legal and technically sound manner. The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation. It recognizes organizations for meeting national standards for excellence, upholding the public trust and ensuring that conservation efforts are permanent.

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition? - **No**

Yes, for fee title acquisitions for the SNA program. Local government approval is not required for additions to the Forestry program or for acquisition of conservation easements by the Minnesota Land Trust.

Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - **No**

A portion of some land to be acquired is currently in a trout stream angler access easement. Trout stream easements are typically only 66 feet from the stream and are intended to provide angler access and allow for habitat improvement. Protection of the land beyond the angler easement along the stream will provide greater habitat and stream protection

Is this land open for hunting and fishing? - **Yes**

Lands acquired in fee will be designated as either State Forest or Scientific and Natural Areas. Fee lands will be open to public hunting and fishing as provided in the Constitution.

Will the eased land be open for public use? - **No**

Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - **No**

A portion of some land to be acquired is currently in a trout stream angler access easement. Trout stream easements are typically only 66 feet from the stream and are intended to provide angler access and allow for habitat improvement. Protection of the land beyond the angler easement along the stream will provide greater habitat and stream protection

Is the activity on permanently protected land and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15? - **Yes (SNA, State Forests, permanent easements)**

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Initiate Restorations - Brush and Tree Clearing on 47 acres Isinours and Rushford Sand Barrens	November 2013
Initiate Restorations - Brush and Tree Clearing on 74 acres - Peterson & Rushford State Forest Unit	March 2014
Prescribed Fire on 27 acres	April 2014
Finish Brush and Tree Clearing - 47 acres	December 2014
Finish Brush and Tree Clearing - 74 acres	March 2015
Rx Fire on 94 acres	April 2015
Protection - 268 acres	June 2015
Initiate Prairie, savanna, hardwood reconstruction	June 2015
Finish reconstruction and prairie restoration	December 2015
Protection - 164 acres	April 2016
Protection - 100 Acres	June 2016
Conservation Easements - 500-700 acres	June 2016

Outcomes

Programs in southeast forest region

- Healthier populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species
- High priority riparian lands, forestlands, and savannas are protected from parcelization and fragmentation
- Landlocked public properties have increased access for land managers
- Remnant goat prairies are perpetually protected
- Rivers, streams, and surrounding vegetation provide corridors of habitat
- Stream to bluff habitat restoration and enhancement will keep water on the land to slow runoff and degradation of aquatic habitat
- Springshed protection

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$3,774,600

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$272,900	\$15,300		\$288,200
Contracts	\$411,000	\$41,100	TNC	\$452,100
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$2,059,600	\$0		\$2,059,600
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$525,000	\$175,000	Private Source	\$700,000
Easement Stewardship	\$160,000	\$0		\$160,000
Travel (in-state)	\$14,200	\$0		\$14,200
Professional Services	\$117,500	\$0		\$117,500
Direct Support Services	\$62,400	\$0		\$62,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$60,000	\$6,000	TNC	\$66,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$15,000	\$1,500	TNC	\$16,500
Supplies/Materials	\$77,000	\$7,700	TNC	\$84,700
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$3,774,600	\$246,600	-	\$4,021,200

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
MLT Conservation and Legal Staff	1.50	3.00	\$120,000	\$0	-	\$120,000
TNC Protection Specialist	0.30	3.00	\$60,000	\$6,000	TNC	\$66,000
TNC Project Manager	0.53	3.00	\$60,400	\$6,000	TNC	\$66,400
TNC Grant Administrator	0.26	3.00	\$32,500	\$3,300	TNC	\$35,800
Total	2.59	12.00	\$272,900	\$15,300	-	\$288,200

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	TNC	\$152,900	\$15,300	-	\$168,200
Contracts	TNC	\$411,000	\$41,100	TNC	\$452,100
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	TNC	\$2,059,600	\$0	-	\$2,059,600
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	TNC	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Easement Acquisition	TNC	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Easement Stewardship	TNC	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Travel (in-state)	TNC	\$6,200	\$0	-	\$6,200
Professional Services	TNC	\$57,500	\$0	-	\$57,500
Direct Support Services	TNC	\$62,400	\$0	-	\$62,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	TNC	\$60,000	\$6,000	TNC	\$66,000
Capital Equipment	TNC	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	TNC	\$15,000	\$1,500	TNC	\$16,500
Supplies/Materials	TNC	\$77,000	\$7,700	TNC	\$84,700
DNR IDP	TNC	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Total	-	\$2,901,600	\$71,600	-	\$2,973,200

Personnel - TNC

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
TNC Protection Specialist	0.30	3.00	\$60,000	\$6,000	TNC	\$66,000
TNC Project Manager	0.53	3.00	\$60,400	\$6,000	TNC	\$66,400
TNC Grant Administrator	0.26	3.00	\$32,500	\$3,300	TNC	\$35,800
Total	3.67	9.00	\$152,900	\$15,300	-	\$168,200

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$120,000	\$0	-	\$120,000
Contracts	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Easement Acquisition	Minnesota Land Trust	\$525,000	\$175,000	Private Source	\$700,000
Easement Stewardship	Minnesota Land Trust	\$160,000	\$0	-	\$160,000
Travel (in-state)	Minnesota Land Trust	\$8,000	\$0	-	\$8,000
Professional Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$60,000	\$0	-	\$60,000
Direct Support Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Capital Equipment	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Supplies/Materials	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
DNR IDP	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Total	-	\$873,000	\$175,000	-	\$1,048,000

Personnel - Minnesota Land Trust

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
MLT Conservation and Legal Staff	1.50	3.00	\$120,000	\$0	-	\$120,000
Total	5.17	3.00	\$120,000	\$0	-	\$120,000

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	176	75	0	251
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	63	480	0	543
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	500	0	0	500
Enhance	0	0	329	0	329
Total	0	739	884	0	1,623

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$463,900	\$112,500	\$0	\$576,400
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$447,400	\$1,827,500	\$0	\$2,274,900
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$873,000	\$0	\$0	\$873,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$50,300	\$0	\$50,300
Total	\$0	\$1,784,300	\$1,990,300	\$0	\$3,774,600

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	251	0	0	251
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	543	0	0	543
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	500	0	0	500
Enhance	0	0	329	0	0	329
Total	0	0	1,623	0	0	1,623

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$576,400	\$0	\$0	\$576,400
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$2,274,900	\$0	\$0	\$2,274,900
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$873,000	\$0	\$0	\$873,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$50,300	\$0	\$0	\$50,300
Total	\$0	\$0	\$3,774,600	\$0	\$0	\$3,774,600

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

3 miles

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Isinours	10310220	20	\$70,225	Yes
Peterson	10408219	40	\$120,016	Yes
Rushford	10408225	34	\$99,331	Yes
Rushford Sand Barrens	10408228	27	\$88,639	Yes

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Estby	10410236	35	\$183,720	No	Full	Full
Forestville 1	10212221	213	\$1,106,963	No	Full	Full
Forestville 2	10212221	65	\$293,586	No	Full	Full
Root River 8 Easement	10408219	655	\$300,000	No	No	No
Root River 9 Easement	10408217	200	\$100,000	No	No	No

Houston

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Ask	10307224	91	\$399,490	No	Full	Full
Root River 1 Easement	10404230	87	\$50,000	No	No	No
Root River 2 Easement	10406221	17	\$10,000	No	No	No
Root River 3 Easement	10406221	142	\$85,000	No	No	No
Root River 4 Easement	10407221	100	\$105,000	No	No	No
Root River 5 Easement	10405220	80	\$50,000	No	No	No

Winona

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
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Root River 6 Easement	10506234	251	\$100,000	No	No	No
Root River 7 Easement	10707229	106	\$60,000	No	No	No
Smith	10509235	38	\$194,704	No	Full	Full

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Forestville 1 Fee Acquisition



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Forestville 2 Fee Acquisition

