

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Laws of Minnesota 2014 Accomplishment Plan

Date: December 20, 2013

Program or Project Title: Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase II

Funds Recommended: \$ 5,770,000

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

Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Olmsted, Wabasha, and Winona.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Southeast Forest

Activity Type:

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

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Forest
- Habitat
- Prairie

Abstract:

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

Design and Scope of Work:

Importance of the Project Area:

The Southeast Blufflands region 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 region and the greater Mississippi River Blufflands have been largely untouched by glaciers for 500,000 years. As a result of this unique geology, no other region in the state

demonstrates this diversity and uniqueness of habitats of the Blufflands.

While much of the region has been converted to cropland, pasture and rural development, many of its bluffs and valleys are still home to high quality cliffs, forests, oak savannas, and prairies, including 86 different native plant community types mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) covering nearly 149,670 acres. This diversity is critical to the State's enduring legacy of high quality forests, rivers and prairies. The region is home to 183 species of state-listed rare plants and animals in the region, many of them concentrated in the 749 sites of biodiversity significance mapped in the region by MBS.

Thanks to this diversity, the area is highly regarded for turkey and deer hunting along with other recreational pursuits such as 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, unlike Northern Minnesota or other regions, less than 3% of the region's watersheds are open to the public and relatively very little is in any kind of protected status. Rapid growth of nearby cities like Rochester and LaCrosse are increasing rural development with bluff top and remote country homes. More roads, buildings and associated infrastructure further fragment an already fragmented landscape, disturbing forest habitat and increasing already high erosion rates. In addition, due to the high price of agricultural commodities in recent years, farming practices have increasingly encroached on these unique habitats including tracts in this proposal and have had significant impacts to water quality. Finally, while the overall scale of impact is yet to be determined, silica sand mining poses potential risks to the region's unparalleled biodiversity.

To maintain this legacy of the Blufflands' 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 an area of the state with relatively little public lands.

Investment in habitat protection and restoration in the Southeast Blufflands 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 1,087 acres of forest and 170 acres of prairie along 2 miles of coldwater trout streams adjacent to state forest land, scientific and natural areas and a state park; 2) Enhancement of 127 acres of prairie and 40 acres of forest habitat along with 70 acres of forest restoration including 100 acres of native prairie enhancement within these protected habitat complexes; and 3) Strategic protection of approximately 480 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 region.

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, Wildlife Management Area or Scientific and Natural Areas, which will be open for public hunting and fishing.

Restoration and Enhancement:

Restoration plans and activities will be coordinated with DNR Forestry, Wildlife 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 127 acres of bluff prairie and oak savanna restorations, 70 acres of forest planting and prescribed fire on 40 acres of forest enhancements on new acquisitions.

Conservation Easement Acquisitions:

To complement the fee title acquisitions described above, the Minnesota Land Trust will acquire permanent conservation easements on 480 acres of high quality prairie, forest and riparian habitat in the Blufflands. 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
- LU6 Reduce Upland and gully erosion through soil conservation practices
- 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
- TNC's Root River Conservation Action Plan, TNC's Weaver Dunes Zumbro Delta Conservation Action Plan, Root River Landscape Stewardship Plan

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Address Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife, 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 long-term or permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Attempts to ensure conservation benefits are broadly distributed across the LSOHC sections
- Ensures activities for "protecting, restoring and enhancing" are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work; provides the most cost-effective use of financial resources; and

where possible takes into consideration the value of local outreach, education, and community engagement to sustain project outcomes

- Leverage effort and/or other funds to supplement any OHF appropriation
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- Restore or enhance habitat on permanently protected land
- 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

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

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

This proposal accelerates the efforts of several local partnerships working in Southeast Minnesota and the Root River Protection and Restoration Phase I approved for FY14. A broad cross section of state, federal and local agencies along with nongovernment organizations participate in a conservation collaborative and Landscape Stewardship Plans for Southeast Minnesota. Regional 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 on private and public lands that also protect the watersheds of the region.

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 will 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 through economies of scale. 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.

Government Approval:

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

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

Permanent Protection:

*Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - **Yes***

Hunting and Fishing Plan:

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

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

Public Use:

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

Permanent Protection:

*Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - **Yes***

Permanent Protection:

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

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Finish brush and tree clearing and Rx fire on 27 acres	April 2016
Finish brush and tree clearing and Rx fire on 100 acres	April 2017
Rx fire on 167 acres	May 2017
Forest Restoration 70	May 2017
Forest Enhancement 40	May 2017
Protection 1,257 acres	June 2017
Conservation Easements on 480 acres	June 2017

Outcomes

Programs in southeast forest region:

- Healthier populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species *Species population and distribution will be measured in future biological surveys taking place in the project area.*
- High priority riparian lands, forestlands, and savannas are protected from parcelization and fragmentation *Riparian lands will be measured in miles protected, fragmentation will be evaluated by increase in interior to edge ratio, reduction of public property boundary.*
- Landlocked public properties have increased access for land managers *Increase in acres accessible for management.*
- Forestlands and savannas are protected from parcelization and fragmentation and accessible for resource management purposes *Increase in acres accessible for management.*
- Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat typical of the unglaciated region are restored and protected *Acres protected and overall increase in connected tracts.*
- Remnant goat prairies are perpetually protected *Acres of goat prairies protected.*
- Rivers, streams, and surrounding vegetation provide corridors of habitat *Increase length (miles) and aerial extent (acres) of corridors.*
- Stream to bluff habitat restoration and enhancement will keep water on the land to slow runoff and degradation of aquatic habitat *Acres of perennial vegetation established and enhanced.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan

Total Amount of Request: \$ 5770000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$417,900	\$0		\$417,900
Contracts	\$240,000	\$0		\$240,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$4,124,700	\$0		\$4,124,700
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$540,000	\$0		\$540,000
Easement Stewardship	\$160,000	\$0		\$160,000
Travel	\$11,600	\$0		\$11,600
Professional Services	\$187,000	\$0		\$187,000
Direct Support Services	\$53,300	\$53,300		\$106,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$500	\$0		\$500
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$5,770,000	\$53,300		\$5,823,300

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Staff	1.60	3.00	\$150,000	\$0		\$150,000
Negotiator	0.30	3.00	\$83,100	\$0		\$83,100
Project Manager	0.46	3.00	\$109,500	\$0		\$109,500
Data Manager	0.12	3.00	\$21,700	\$0		\$21,700
Grant Administrator	0.27	3.00	\$53,600	\$0		\$53,600
Total	2.75	15.00	\$417,900	\$0		\$417,900

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$150,000	\$0		\$150,000
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	\$540,000	\$0		\$540,000
Easement Stewardship	Minnesota Land Trust	\$160,000	\$0		\$160,000
Travel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$7,000	\$0		\$7,000
Professional Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$113,000	\$0		\$113,000
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		\$970,000	\$0		\$970,000

Personnel - Minnesota Land Trust

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Staff	1.60	3.00	\$150,000	\$0		\$150,000
Total	1.60	3.00	\$150,000	\$0		\$150,000

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	The Nature Conservancy	\$267,900	\$0		\$267,900
Contracts	The Nature Conservancy	\$240,000	\$0		\$240,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	The Nature Conservancy	\$4,124,700	\$0		\$4,124,700
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	The Nature Conservancy	\$4,600	\$0		\$4,600
Professional Services	The Nature Conservancy	\$74,000	\$0		\$74,000
Direct Support Services	The Nature Conservancy	\$53,300	\$53,300		\$106,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	The Nature Conservancy	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Capital Equipment	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	The Nature Conservancy	\$500	\$0		\$500
Supplies/Materials	The Nature Conservancy	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
DNR IDP	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$4,800,000	\$53,300		\$4,853,300

Personnel - The Nature Conservancy

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Negotiator	0.30	3.00	\$83,100	\$0		\$83,100
Project Manager	0.46	3.00	\$109,500	\$0		\$109,500
Data Manager	0.12	3.00	\$21,700	\$0		\$21,700
Grant Administrator	0.27	3.00	\$53,600	\$0		\$53,600
Total	1.15	12.00	\$267,900	\$0		\$267,900

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	70	0	70
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	170	1,087	0	1,257
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	50	340	90	480
Enhance	0	127	40	0	167
Total	0	347	1,537	90	1,974

Table 1b. How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie?

Type	Native Prairie
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	65
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	40
Enhance	100
Total	205

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$63,300	\$0	\$63,300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$876,000	\$3,504,000	\$0	\$4,380,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$120,000	\$600,000	\$250,000	\$970,000
Enhance	\$0	\$330,700	\$26,000	\$0	\$356,700
Total	\$0	\$1,326,700	\$4,193,300	\$250,000	\$5,770,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	70	0	0	70
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	1,257	0	0	1,257
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	480	0	0	480
Enhance	0	0	167	0	0	167
Total	0	0	1,974	0	0	1,974

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$63,200	\$0	\$0	\$63,200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$4,380,000	\$0	\$0	\$4,380,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$970,000	\$0	\$0	\$970,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$356,800	\$0	\$0	\$356,800
Total	\$0	\$0	\$5,770,000	\$0	\$0	\$5,770,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

2 miles

Parcel List

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Fillmore 1	10212221	130	\$116,000	Yes

Houston

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Houston 1	10204221	50	\$38,000	Yes
Houston 2	10306230	50	\$38,600	Yes

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Fillmore 2	10408222	282	\$1,018,700	No	Full	Full
Fillmore 3	10410221	78	\$325,000	No	Full	Full
Fillmore 4	10408230	63	\$284,100	No	Full	Full
Watson Creek	10310220	36	\$63,000	no	no	no

Goodhue

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Bullard Creek	11214210	94	\$0	no	no	no
Hay Creek	11214218	90	\$0	no	no	no

Houston

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Houston 1	10204221	274	\$958,500	No	Full	Full
Houston 3	10306230	240	\$800,000	No	Full	Full

Olmsted

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lake Zumbro	10814214	34	\$59,500	No	No	No

Wabasha

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Beaver Creek	10811224	120	\$0	no	no	no
Long Creek	10912227	300	\$525,000	no	No	no
Middle Creek	10912213	29	\$0	no	no	no
Zumbro River	10914208	39	\$68,300	No	No	No
Zumbro River Bottoms	11010218	37	\$64,800	No	No	No

Winona

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Apple Blossom Drive	10504219	117	\$0	no	No	no
Apple Blossom Drive	10504220	178	\$0	No	No	no
Burns Valley Creek	10607230	95	\$332,500	No	No	No

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Rush Creek 1	10408204	20	\$70,300	yes	no	no
Rush Creek 3	10408214	10	\$46,300	yes	Full	Full

Houston

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Sheldon 1	10307224	25	\$82,200	yes	Full	Full

Wabasha

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Whitewater 1	10910235	17	\$67,200	yes	Full	Full
Zumbro Bottoms	11011214	25	\$82,200	yes	Full	Full

Winona

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Rush Creek 2	10508233	50	\$96,700	yes	Full	Full