

Request for Funding

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2015 / ML 2014

Program or Project Title: Vermillion River WMA Acquisition

Funds Requested: \$6,452,800

Manager's Name: Patrick Rivers

Title: NR Program Consultant

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Organization Web Site: mndnr.gov

County Locations: No Counties Listed

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Metro / Urban

Activity Type:

- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Habitat

Abstract:

This project will protect one mile of Vermillion River (Dakota County), associated riparian corridor and connect the Vermillion Highlands to the Vermillion River, protecting lands from development in an integral portion of the future WMA.

Design and Scope of Work:

This project is a rare opportunity to add significant acres and river frontage to a major Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in the metro area. The parcels of interest are contiguous with the Vermillion Highlands Research, Recreation and WMA and soon to be contiguous with the existing Vermillion River AMA/WMA. The parcels have long been identified as key parcels to protect and enhance the overall Vermillion River Complex. The parcels will help link to future acquisition to the east along the Vermillion River corridor. These units receive some of the heaviest hunting pressure within the State of Minnesota WMA system and the addition of 425 acres to the existing 1028 acres of the Vermillion River AMA/WMA plus the 2840 acres of the Vermillion Highlands would greatly enhance the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' (DNR) ability to provide quality hunting opportunities within one of the fastest growing counties in the state. The Vermillion River, a designated trout stream, runs through the property for approximately one mile. This portion of the river is very high quality and would benefit anglers and hunters alike. There is approximately 10 acres of restored native prairie on site. The added habitat would offer excellent deer, turkey, pheasant, waterfowl and dove hunting. The agricultural fields offer future prairie restoration sites. Acres that are currently being mined for sand and gravel will be restored to site conditions suitable for prairie restoration prior to purchase by the State. Purchase of this property would eliminate private property trespass issues on the existing WMA/AMA. Dakota County and Empire Township have interest in a trail corridor that may run within this proposals' parcels of interest and are supportive of the State's

purchase of this parcel. Any trail corridor plans through this parcel will be presented to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Outdoor Heritage Funds will not be used to pay for any portion of a trail corridor.

The opportunity to acquire these parcels arose last summer when the landowner expressed his desire to sell. The DNR is working with The Conservation Fund and Dakota County to acquire the property. The Conservation Fund is in negotiations to acquire the land in the near future and will own the property until DNR obtains funding to acquire the land.

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

Plans Addressed:

- Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in MN
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological 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

LSOHC Metro Urban Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity
- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

It is a rare opportunity to add such a large and significant parcel to an existing WMA, especially in a growing metro county. Acquiring the entire ownership at this time will not only provide for public access and management in the near term, but also prevent the need to approach multiple landowners and successfully complete each transaction in the future if the land were sold.

Efforts are underway to acquire parcels adjacent to the Vermillion River AMA/WMA and Vermillion Highlands especially along the Vermillion River. The new Dakota County White-tail Woods Regional Park is also contiguous with the State owned lands in this area. Opportunities along the river corridor just to the east have recently come to our attention and this parcel will be key to maintain the corridor.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

The DNR Section of Wildlife manages 1,433 WMA encompassing 1.3 million acres of land in 86 of the state's 87 counties. Lands acquired with Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars will add to this system. Management of WMAs is guided by Management Guidance Documents and is funded primarily through the Game and Fish Fund. For SNAs, field staff will monitor project sites and take any necessary actions to sustain the habitat improvements as part of their public land management responsibilities.

Government Approval:

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition? - **Yes**

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? - **No**

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Fee title acquisition of 265 acres	12/31/2014
Feet title acquisition of 160 acres	6/30/2017

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need *Acres of habitat and miles of stream acquired and managed as WMA.*
- Improved aquatic habitat indicators *Number of trout per mile of stream.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$6,452,800

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$0	\$0		\$0
Contracts	\$322,000	\$0		\$322,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$6,000,000	\$0		\$6,000,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	\$0	\$0		\$0
Direct Support Services	\$10,800	\$0		\$10,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$20,000	\$0		\$20,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Total	\$6,452,800	\$0	-	\$6,452,800

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	425	425
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	425	425

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$6,452,800	\$6,452,800
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$6,452,800	\$6,452,800

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	425	0	0	0	0	425
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	425	0	0	0	0	425

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$6,452,800	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$6,452,800
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$6,452,800	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$6,452,800

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

1 miles

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Dakota

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Vermillion River WMA	11419224	265	\$3,740,000	No	Full	Full

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

Dakota

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Vermillion River WMA	11419224	160	\$2,260,000	10	House and farm buildings	\$268,100	Remove

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.