

Request for Funding

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2016 / ML 2015

Program or Project Title: Protecting Forest Wildlife Habitat in the Wild Rice River Watershed

Funds Requested: \$2,188,000

Manager's Name: Lorena Vogt
Title: Tribal Land Manager
Organization: White Earth Nation
Street Address: P.O. Box 495
City: White Earth, MN 56591
Telephone: 218-983-4650
E-Mail: lorenav@whiteearth.com
Organization Web Site: www.whiteearth.com

County Locations: Clearwater

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Northern Forest

Activity Type:

- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Wetlands
- Forest
- Prairie

Abstract:

This project will protect forest wildlife habitat and prevent forest fragmentation through the fee acquisition of 1,994 acres of forestland, riparian corridors, and meadows adjacent to public land, encompassing over 6,500 feet of the Wild Rice River and its tributaries.

Design and Scope of Work:

I. Overview

White Earth Nation is pleased to submit this proposal to protect forest wildlife habitat and prevent forest fragmentation through the fee acquisition of the Conservation Project Area, which consists of 1,994 acres of forestland, riparian corridors, and open meadows, encompassing 6,500 feet of the Wild Rice River and its tributaries. The Conservation Project Area is adjacent to thousands of acres of state, county, and tribal lands, creating contiguous forestland and wildlife corridors. There is great urgency to this project. The industrial forest owner that owns this land is actively marketing for sale more than 1,500 acres of the property.

II. The Diverse Landscape of the White Earth Reservation

White Earth Reservation encompasses approximately 829,000 acres in Clearwater, Becker, and Mahnomen Counties, of which approximately 63,000 acres are tribally owned and managed. White Earth Reservation is at the heart of one of the most diverse transition ecological zones in North America, encompassing three LSOHC ecological regions: Prairie, Prairie/Forest Transition, and Northern Forest. White Earth Reservation contains the 160,000-acre White Earth State Forest. Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge, a significant refuge for migratory birds and other wildlife, is situated along the southern boundary of the reservation. Itasca State Park – the source of the headwaters of the Mississippi River -- is along southeastern boundary of the reservation. The diversity of habitat

of White Earth Reservation presents significant conservation opportunities, including the 1,994 acres that would be protected through this project.

III. The Habitat of the Conservation Project Area

The 1,994-acre Conservation Project Area consists forestland, riparian corridors, and open meadows. The Conservation Project Area is adjacent to thousands of acres of forestland owned by the state, county, and tribe. Virtually all of the Conservation Project Area is within White Earth State Forest. Protecting the Conservation Project Area will maintain this intact forestland and the wildlife habitat corridors that are threatened by the potential sale of these properties.

The Conservation Project Area is adjacent to Perch Lake State Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which features an open-water bog. The Conservation Project Area contains similar wetlands, providing additional habitat for migratory waterfowl. The Conservation Project Area includes over 6,500 feet of the Wild Rice River and its tributaries and is less than two miles from Lower Rice Lake, the largest lake on the reservation and the most significant rice-growing lake on the reservation, producing 200,000 pounds of wild rice each year. Lower Rice Lake is one of the finest rice-producing lakes in all of Minnesota. Protecting the Conservation Project Area will expand the buffer that protects Lower Rice Lake.

The Conservation Project Area has excellent habitat for migratory waterfowl, bald eagle, whitetail deer, ruffed grouse, woodcock, black bear, gray wolf, and the golden-winged warbler.

IV. Management of the Conservation Project Area

White Earth Nation has substantial experience in land management and collaboration with other conservation partners. The 829,000-acre White Earth Reservation includes 360,000 acres of forests, 48,000 acres of lakes, and 53,000 acres of wetlands. Of the 63,000 acres that are tribally owned and managed, approximately 55,000 acres are forested.

In 2002, White Earth Nation adopted an Integrated Resource Management Plan (IRMP) to guide its work and establish priorities. Based on the IRMP, in 2013, White Earth Nation adopted a Forest Management Plan. Acquiring the Conservation Project Area is consistent with the priorities of the IRMP and Forest Management Plan. In recent years, White Earth Nation has acquired the land surrounding Lower Wild Rice Lake to protect wildlife habitat. White Earth Nation manages Lower Rice Lake as a WMA. Acquiring the Conservation Project Area is a logical extension of the conservation work along the shores of Lower Wild Rice Lake.

In recent years, White Earth Nation has worked collaboratively with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and staff from Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge to restore habitat on 240 acres of tribal land encompassing the Wild Rice River just north of Lower Wild Rice Lake and very near the Conservation Project Area. The restoration activities in this collaboration include wetland impoundments for waterfowl habitat, prescribed burns for prairie restoration, and diversifying the forest habitat by establishing different age classes of trees. White Earth Nation would seek to establish similar collaborations with NRCS and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service with respect to the Conservation Project Area.

White Earth Nation will manage the Conservation Project Area to maximize the wildlife habitat values. White Earth Nation will create diversity in tree species and age classes to expand the diversity of wildlife and enhance the resiliency of the forest. Openings and young-forest habitat will be established along the edges of older forest stands, providing excellent habitat for the golden-winged warbler and woodcock. Existing meadows will be planted with native forbs to promote pollinators. Upland areas will be replanted predominantly in red and white pine to restore the forest to pre-settlement conditions.

V. There Is Great Urgency for This Project

There is great urgency for this project. Potlach, the industrial forest owner of the land, is actively marketing for sale more than 1,500 acres of the project site, including producing a promotional video to market one of the parcels for sale.

VI. Fee-to-Trust Process

After White Earth Nation acquires the Conservation Project Area, it will seek to transfer the land from “fee land” to “trust land” in which title is held by the United States government, while White Earth Nation retains the beneficial use of and full management responsibilities for the land. It is the overriding policy objective of the federal

government to move tribal land into trust status. White Earth Nation is well aware that, to receive LSOHC funds, restrictions will be placed on the title to the Conservation Project Area to protect permanently the natural resources on the property. These restrictions will continue to remain in place after the land is in trust status.

How the request addresses MN habitats:

The Conservation Project Area has habitat to support the following Minnesota Special Concern Species: acadian flycatcher, cerulean warbler, northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, and trumpeter swan. The trumpeter swan has been sighted in the area.

The Conservation Project Area has habitat to support the following Minnesota Wildlife Species in Greatest Conservation Need: Franklin's ground squirrel, American badger, LeConte's sparrow, northern pintail, lesser scaup, American bittern, Swainson's hawk, whip-poor-will, common nighthawk, veery, northern harrier, mash wren, olive-sided flycatcher, eastern wood pewee, black throated blue warbler, least flycatcher, common loon, wood thrush, red-headed woodpecker, swamp sparrow, black crowned night heron, rose breasted grosbeak, horned grebe, red-necked grebe, American woodcock, ovenbird, brown thrasher, and golden-winged warbler.

Bald eagles nest in the area. There is a healthy gray wolf population around Lower Rice Lake with at least one pack.

White Earth Nation will manage Conservation Project Area to create young forest openings on the edge of older forest stands, providing excellent habitat for the golden-winged warbler, whose population has been in dramatic decline in recent years. White Earth Nation will plant red and white pine in upland areas of the Conservation Project Area to establish pre-settlement forest conditions of the historic coniferous forest.

Please explain the nature of urgency:

There is great urgency to this project. Potlatch, the large industrial forest owner that owns the Conservation Project Area, is actively marketing for sale more than 1,500 acres of the property, including preparing a promotional sales video for one of the parcels.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land

Plans Addressed:

- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- The Nature Conservancy's Superior Mixed Forest Ecoregional Plan

Please describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

This acquisition is a high priority for White Earth Nation because: (1) the property is adjacent to thousands of acres of forestland already owned by the tribe, state, and county; (2) the close proximity of the property to Lower Rice Lake; (3) the opportunity to protect permanently significant wildlife corridors.

LSOHC Northern Forest Section Priorities:

- Provide access to manage habitat on landlocked public properties or protect forest land from parcelization and fragmentation through fee acquisition, conservation or access easement

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

A LSOHC grant will not displace existing White Earth Nation funding for conservation and natural resource

management. Instead, the LSOHC grant will enable White Earth Nation to accelerate and expand its conservation efforts. White Earth Nation has acquired several properties in recent years to protect the shoreline of Wild Rice Lake. Receiving the LSOHC grant will enable White Earth Nation to seize the unique opportunity created when Potlatch put up for sale more than 1,500 acres of forestland in the vicinity of Wild Rice Lake. Acquisition of the Conservation Protection Area will enable White Earth Nation to accelerate its efforts to restore the pre-settlement red and white pine forest cover on the reservation.

Non-OHF Money Spent in the Past:

| Appropriation Year | Source | Amount |
|--------------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| 2009-13 | White Earth Nation general funds and settlement funds | \$283,500 used to purchase 300 acres |

Sustainability and Maintenance:

White Earth Nation is not seeking any Outdoor Heritage Funds to support the personnel time that will be required to implement this project. Instead, White Earth Nation will implement this project using its existing staff funded through established sources. Since sustaining management of the Conservation Project Area is not dependent upon Outdoor Heritage Funds, White Earth Nation will be able to maintain its forest and natural resources management work after Outdoor Heritage Funds are used to purchase the Conservation Project Area.

Maintain Project Outcomes:

| Year | Source of Funds | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 |
|------|----------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 2016 | White Earth Nation general funds | Establish openings along older forest stands` | Plant red and white pines and hardwoods in upland areas | Conduct prescribed burns in fields |
| 2017 | White Earth Nation general funds | Establish openings along older forest stands | Plant red and white pines and hardwoods in upland areas | Plant native prairie grasses and forbs in fields |
| 2018 | White Earth Nation general funds | Establish openings along older forest stand | Plant red and white pines and hardwoods in upland areas | Conduct prescribed burns in fields |

Applicable Criteria:

If funded, this proposal will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056? - Yes

Government Approval:

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

None.

Permanent Protection:

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

Current Hunting and Fishing Plan:

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

The land is not open to public hunting. The current industrial landowner leases out some of its properties for private hunting, but the project area is not open to public hunting.

Future Hunting and Fishing Plan:

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion? - **Yes**

White Earth Nation strongly supports hunting and fishing. The Conservation Project Area will be open to public hunting and fishing to tribal and non-tribal members. Since the Conservation Project Area is within the boundaries of White Earth Reservation and would be tribally-owned, there will be no wolf hunting on the properties in accordance with White Earth Nation hunting regulations.

Accomplishment Timeline

| Activity | Approximate Date Completed |
|--|----------------------------|
| Negotiate with the landowner and enter into a purchase agreement. | August 1, 2015 |
| Conduct due diligence for acquisition of the properties (appraisal, title work, environmental assessment). | November 1, 2015 |
| DNR review of appraisal of the properties. | February 1, 2016 |
| Acquire fee title to the properties. | April 1, 2016 |

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation *White Earth Nation will evaluate the effectiveness in protecting forestlands from fragmentation by measuring the total acreage of contiguous forestland that is transferred from private ownership to tribal ownership. In addition, to measure the added value of protecting land adjacent to existing protected lands or in areas of heightened habitat importance (such as riparian corridors), White Earth Nation will break out and measure subsets of the total acreage of protected forestland that are adjacent to existing protected lands or are in areas of special habitat value (e.g., in riparian corridors).*

Relationship to Other Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$2,188,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

| Budget Name | LSOHC Request | Anticipated Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|----------------------------|---------------|----------------------|--|-------------|
| Personnel | \$0 | \$120,000 | White Earth Nation, White Earth Nation, White Earth Nation | \$120,000 |
| Contracts | \$0 | \$70,000 | | \$70,000 |
| Fee Acquisition w/ PILT | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Fee Acquisition w/o PILT | \$2,180,000 | \$0 | | \$2,180,000 |
| Easement Acquisition | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Easement Stewardship | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Travel | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Professional Services | \$8,000 | \$8,000 | White Earth Nation | \$16,000 |
| Direct Support Services | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| DNR Land Acquisition Costs | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Capital Equipment | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Other Equipment/Tools | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Supplies/Materials | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| DNR IDP | \$0 | \$0 | | \$0 |
| Total | \$2,188,000 | \$198,000 | - | \$2,386,000 |

Personnel

| Position | FTE | Over # of years | LSOHC Request | Anticipated Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|---------------------|------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Forester | 0.10 | 3.00 | \$0 | \$25,000 | White Earth Nation | \$25,000 |
| Wildlife Manager | 0.20 | 3.00 | \$0 | \$50,000 | White Earth Nation | \$50,000 |
| Tribal Land Manager | 0.25 | 2.00 | \$0 | \$45,000 | White Earth Nation | \$45,000 |
| Total | 0.55 | 8.00 | \$0 | \$120,000 | - | \$120,000 |

Amount of Request: \$2,188,000

Amount of Leverage: \$198,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 9.05%

Output Tables

Table 1a. 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 | 0 | 0 |
| Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability | 199 | 40 | 1,755 | 0 | 1,994 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 199 | 40 | 1,755 | 0 | 1,994 |

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

| Type | Native Prairie |
|--|----------------|
| Restore | 0 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | 0 |
| Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability | 0 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 |
| Enhance | 0 |
| Total | 0 |

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 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability | \$221,000 | \$56,000 | \$1,911,000 | \$0 | \$2,188,000 |
| Protect in Easement | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Enhance | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Total | \$221,000 | \$56,000 | \$1,911,000 | \$0 | \$2,188,000 |

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 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,994 | 1,994 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1,994 | 1,994 |

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 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$2,188,000 | \$2,188,000 |
| Protect in Easement | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Enhance | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Total | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$2,188,000 | \$2,188,000 |

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

| Type | Wetlands | Prairies | Forest | Habitats |
|--|----------|----------|---------|----------|
| Restore | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability | \$1,111 | \$1,400 | \$1,089 | \$0 |
| Protect in Easement | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Enhance | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |

Table 6. Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section

| Type | Metro/Urban | Forest/Prairie | SE Forest | Prairie | Northern Forest |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-----------------|
| Restore | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$1,097 |
| Protect in Easement | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| Enhance | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Clearwater

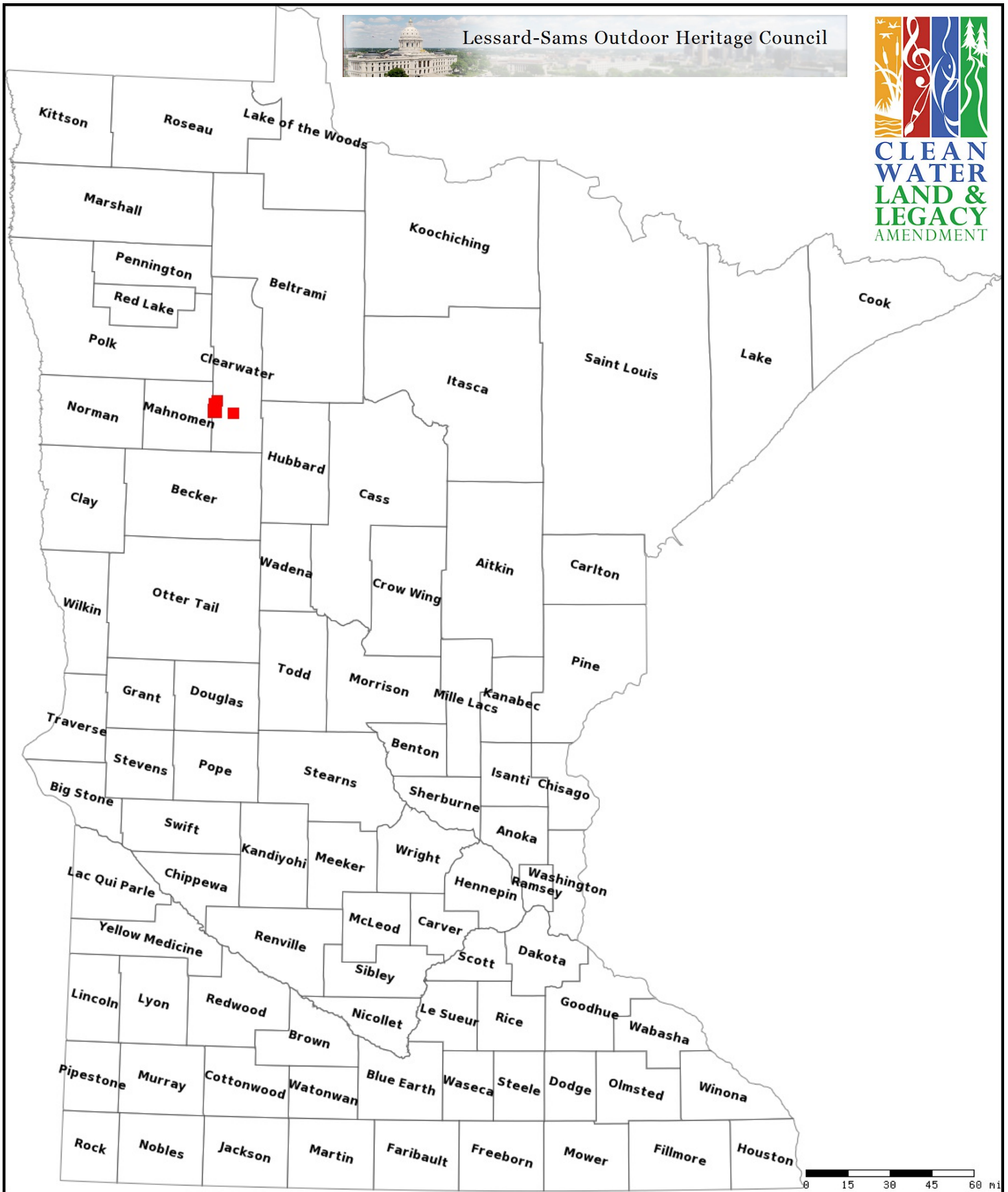
| Name | TRDS | Acres | Est Cost | Existing Protection? | Hunting? | Fishing? |
|------------------|----------|-------|-----------|----------------------|----------|----------|
| Parcel 112050500 | 14538205 | 114 | \$137,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 112070200 | 14538207 | 160 | \$168,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 112170200 | 14538217 | 440 | \$572,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 112170300 | 14538217 | 40 | \$52,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 112190200 | 14538219 | 200 | \$182,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 112200100 | 14538220 | 480 | \$436,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 112290200 | 14538229 | 160 | \$145,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 112300100 | 14538230 | 120 | \$109,000 | No | Limited | Full |
| Parcel 130290500 | 14537229 | 280 | \$379,000 | No | Limited | Full |

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

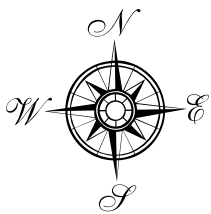
No parcels with an other activity type.



Protecting Forest Wildlife Habitat in the Wild Rice River Watershed

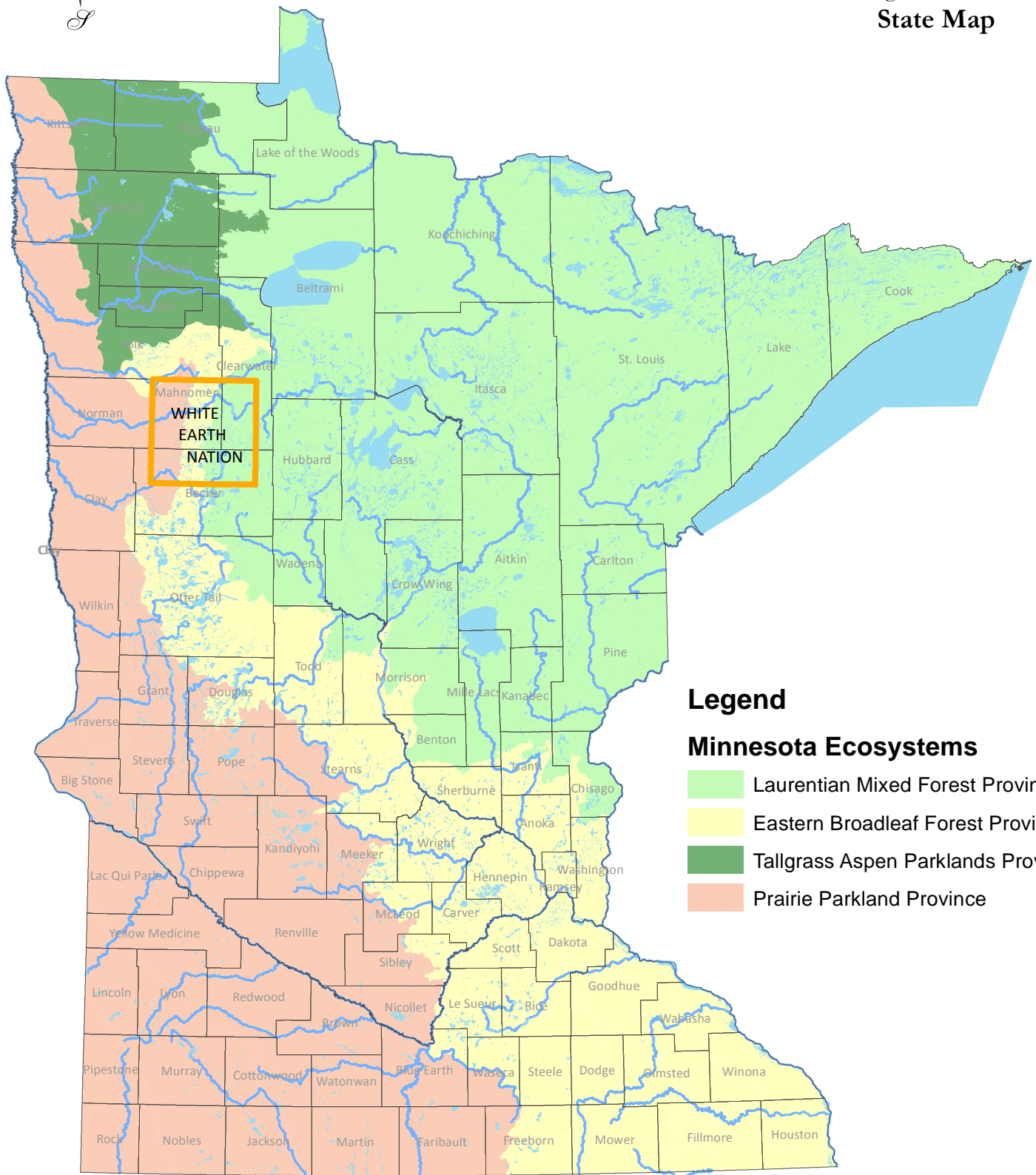
Legend

- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee w/o PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- + Other



White Earth Nation

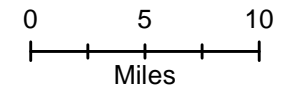
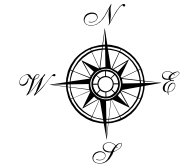
Lessard-Sams Outdoor
Heritage Council Grant
State Map



White Earth Nation

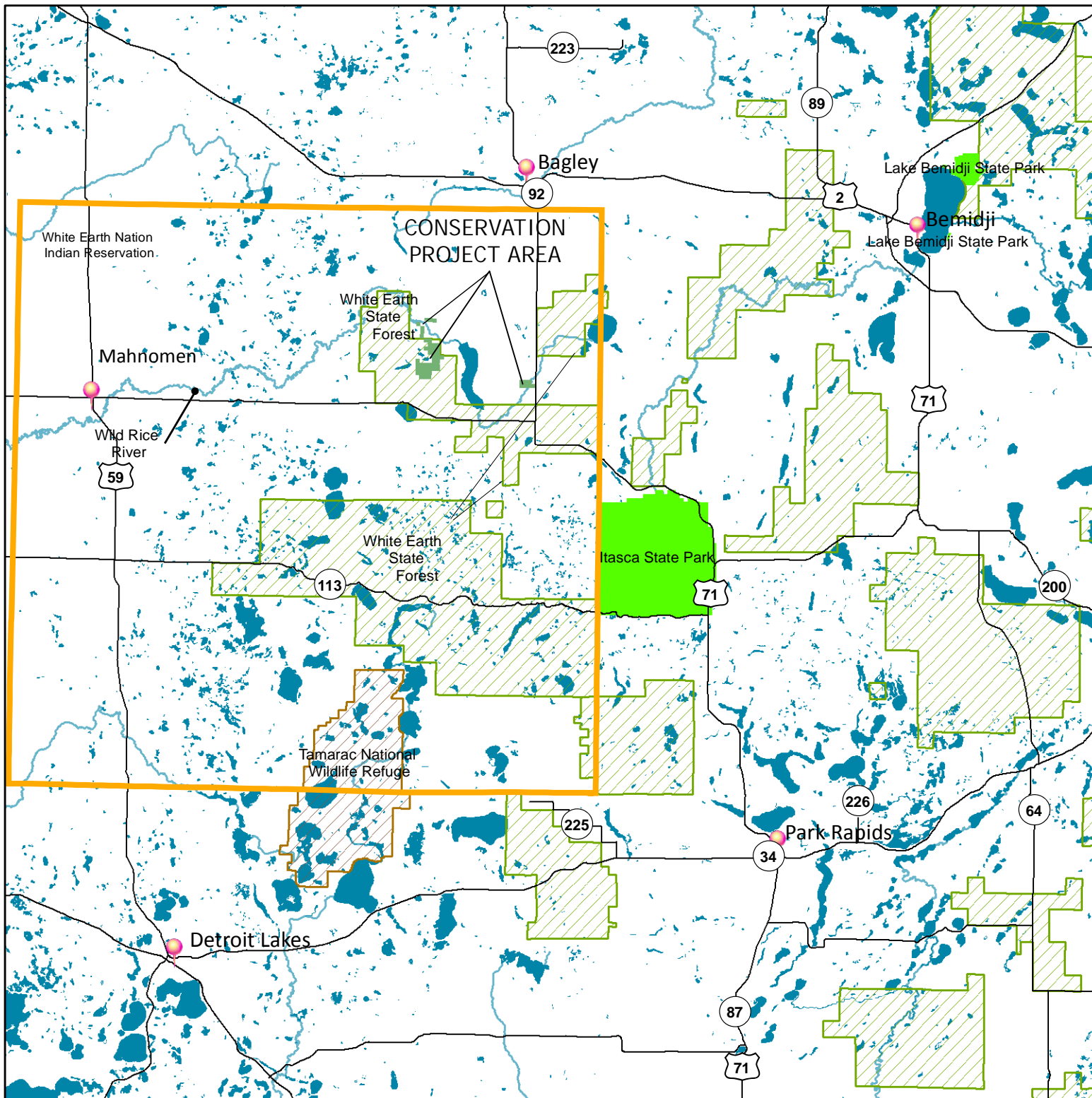
Lessard-Sams Outdoor
Heritage Council Grant

Regional Map



Legend

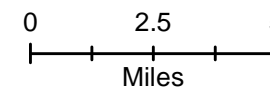
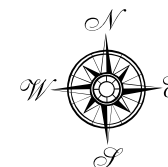
- Reservation Boundary
- Conservation Project Area
- Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge
- State Parks
- State Forests
- Lakes
- Major Rivers
- Major Roads



White Earth Nation

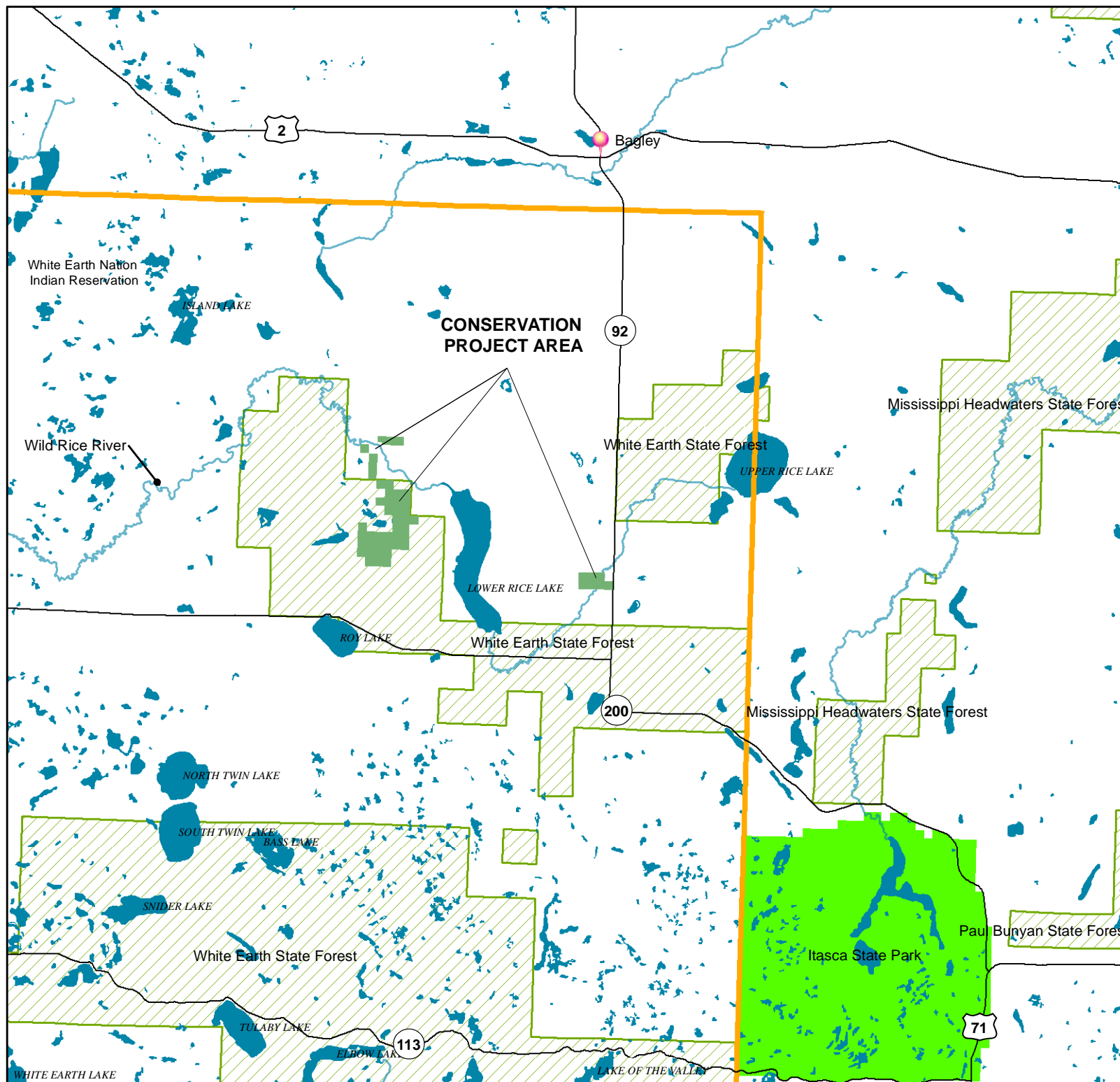
Lessard-Sams Outdoor
Heritage Council Grant

Local Map

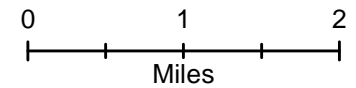
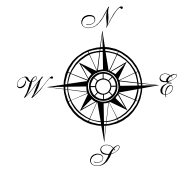


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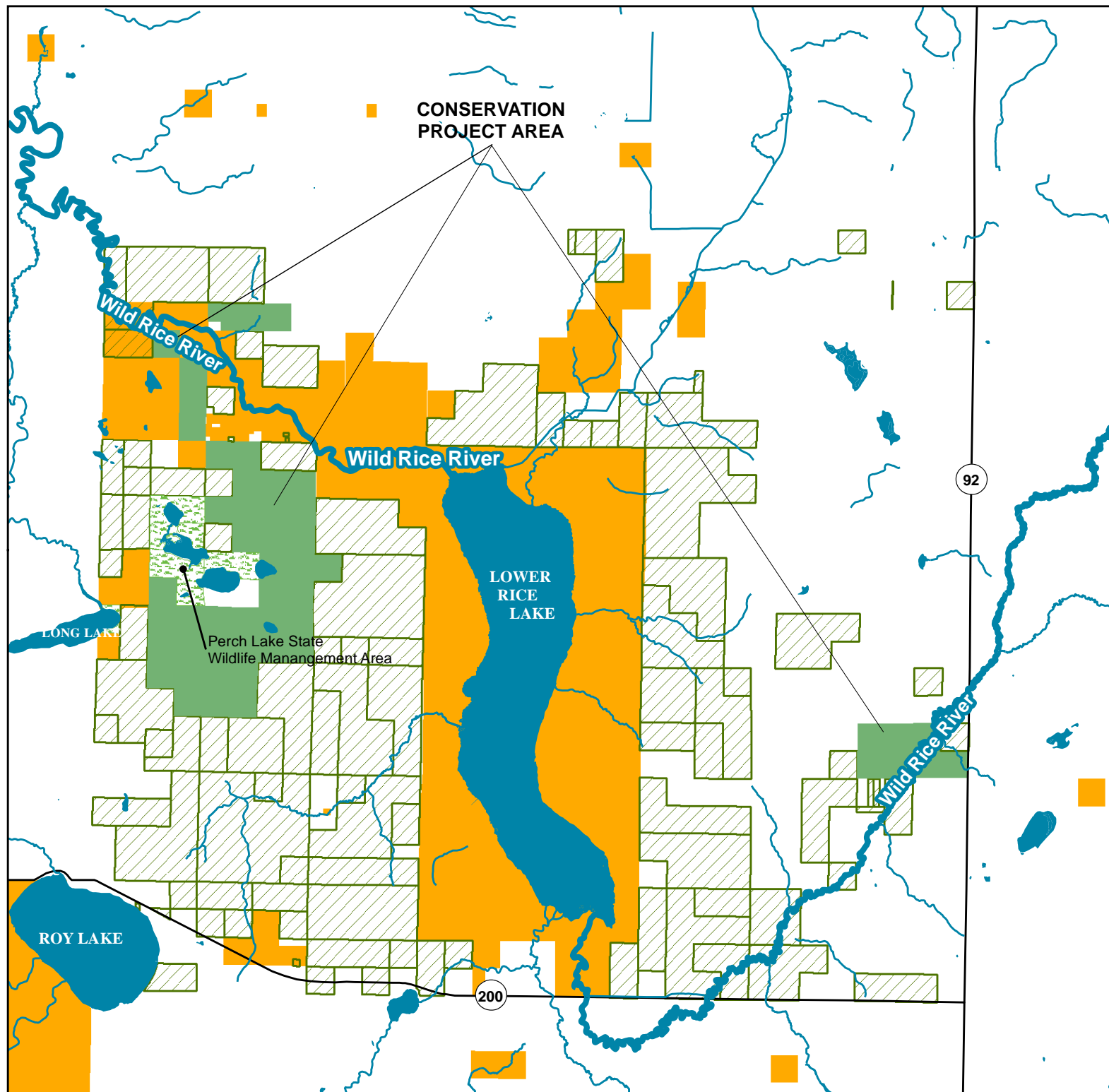
- Reservation Boundary
- Conservation Project Area
- Lakes
- State Parks
- State Forests
- Major Rivers
- Major Roads



White Earth Nation
Lessard-Sams Outdoor
Heritage Council Grant
Parcel Map



- Legend**
- Conservation Project Area
 - Parcels Owned By MNDNR
 - Parcels Owned By Other State and County Agencies
 - Tribal Land
 - Lakes
 - Major Roads
 - Rivers





United States Department of Agriculture

June 6, 2014

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
State Office Building, Room 95
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Grant Application of White Earth Nation

To Members of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council:

I am writing in support of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) grant application being submitted by White Earth Nation.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is a premier leader in providing conservation efforts on Private and Tribal Lands. These efforts have opened the doors to provide an outstanding partnership with the White Earth Nation. This partnership has led to a series of successful conservation initiatives, including:

- Implementing filter strips and wildlife habitat corridors on agricultural land as part of the Conservation Reserve Program.
- Working on prairie restoration, including prescribed burns, with tribal staff.
- Planting "living snow fences" of natural grasses and hedges to reduce snow drifts across roads and provide for wildlife habitat.

My staff has been working with White Earth Nation and specialists from the Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge to implement several restoration activities on approximately 240 acres of tribal land just north of Lower Rice Lake and very near the White Earth Nation's Conservation Project Area. The restoration work includes wetland impoundments for waterfowl habitat, prairie restoration, and forest management to improve habitat for the golden-winged warbler.

The White Earth Nation's project would permanently protect nearly 2,000 acres of wildlife habitat, forestland, and riparian corridors. The White Earth Nation's Conservation Project Area is adjacent to an existing state wildlife management area and is surrounded by other publicly owned and tribally owned lands. Most of the Conservation Project Area is within the boundaries of the White Earth State Forest. The land is good habitat for deer, roughed grouse, and woodcock.

I request that the LSOHC support the grant application of White Earth Nation.

Sincerely,

Don A. Baloun
State Conservationist
USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service

**Protecting Forest Wildlife Habitat in the Wild Rice River Watershed
White Earth Nation
Project Photos**



