

Request for Funding

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

Program or Project Title: Protecting Pinelands Sands Forest and Aquatic Habitat Phase 2

Funds Requested: \$4,260,000

Manager's Name: Richard F. Peterson

Title: Forest Legacy Coordinator

Organization: MN DNR Forestry

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Organization Web Site: www.mndnr.gov

County Locations: Cass, and Wadena.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Northern Forest

Activity Type:

- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Forest

Abstract:

Protect up to to 2,000 acres of at risk, priority forest habitat adjacent and near the Crow Wing River that will consolidate and link public forestland parcels, provide management and recreational access and protect surface and ground water quality.

Design and Scope of Work:

This Phase 2 project continues the efforts of the initial phase of the Pinelands Sands Project to identify and protect with fee acquisition up to 2,000 acres of priority forestland and associated habitats in west-central Minnesota in an area that is experiencing significant deforestation as a result of conversion of forests to irrigated agriculture. The sandy soils which underlie much of the forestland in this area support extensive pine and mixed pine/hardwood forests and are also very suitable for the growing of potatoes and other row crops which rely on groundwater for irrigation. The resulting sales and forestland conversions have many resource impacts including the outright loss of forest habitat, parcelization and fragmentation of large blocks of forest habitat, impacts to surface and ground water quality and quantity, and reduced access to public lands for management and recreational purposes. This threat has resulted in the formation of a DNR interdisciplinary team to work with the landowner and other partners including counties to protect the most critical parcels for their fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, watershed, access and timber benefits.

Funding from Phase 2 would focus on habitat protection within a core area along and nearby the Crow Wing River in west-central Minnesota that includes the Huntersville State Forest, Crow Wing Chain Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Huntersville WMA, Burgen Lake Prairie WMA, Menahga WMA and Yaeger WMA. Habitats protected include pine, oak, and aspen forests, brushlands, and wetlands. Over 1 1/4 mile of river frontage along the Crow Wing is included in the potential acquisition parcels. The Crow Wing River is one of the state's best river routes for canoeists, with many rustic campsites and miles of undeveloped, wooded shorelines. Parcels acquired will be managed by the appropriate DNR Division as either State Forests or State Wildlife Management Areas. This is an important public use area that provides a wide range of public recreational opportunities including hunting, hiking,

fishing, canoeing, trail riding and camping.

The properties are currently managed for timber production by the current owner and are annually leased to private individuals and are off limits to the general public for hunting or other uses. Following DNR acquisition, the private leases would terminate and the properties would be managed for public access according to State Forest and Wildlife Management Area policies.

The project will protect properties containing high conservation and natural resource values as determined by a team of area staff who used a science based assessment to evaluate resource values on the various tracts. Values considered in the assessment included shoreline habitat, wildlife habitat, terrestrial ecological importance, groundwater protection, watershed protection, access, trails, forest consolidation and forest productivity. The parcels were further evaluated based on their threat of conversion to agriculture using the following criteria: topography; soil drainage; proximity to other irrigated agricultural land; size of parcel; and soil survey data.

This area is an important focus of DNR management and protection and includes several State Wildlife Management Areas and a State Forest covering over 20,000 acres of state ownership in the vicinity of the Crow Wing River within the general project area. The entire area provides abundant and diverse habitat for a wide range of forest and non-forest species including many popular game species such as white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, woodcock, black bear, timber wolves, small game, and waterfowl. The deep sandy soils that are typical of the watershed along with the low gradient and numerous tributaries feeding into it allow the river to maintain a fairly constant water level throughout the year. The consistent flow and good water quality of the river contribute to a stable fish population. The sandy bottom and relatively shallow depth of the river favors white suckers and northern redhorse which are the predominant fish species. Northern pike, largemouth bass and walleye are also present.

This project is consistent with the Minnesota State-Wide Conservation and Preservation Plan priorities to "Protect large blocks of forestland" and to "Improve connectivity and access to recreation". In addition, it supports other priorities including the "Protection of priority land habitats", "Protection of critical shoreland of streams and lakes" and "Supports and expands sustainable practices on working forest lands". The project also addresses two of the priority actions listed in the Outdoor Heritage Fund: A Twenty Five Year Framework for the Northern Forest Section: 1) By protecting shorelands along the Crow Wing River which is one of the DNR's Designated Water Trails; and 2) By protecting lands from conversion to agriculture, the project prevents parcelization and fragmentation of large forest blocks.

This project is also strongly consistent with the Minnesota Forests for the Future Program goals of conserving Minnesota's working forest lands to meet the state's future ecological, recreation and economic goals. This project is also consistent and supports several other plans including Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare, the Minnesota Forest Resource Council's West Central Landscape Plan, and the Wadena County Comprehensive Plan.

The project assessment has been completed with the involvement and support of County land departments and County Boards. The landowner has been actively involved in the assessment process and has a long history of successful natural resource transactions with the DNR and has indicated a willingness to pursue additional land sales with the Department. Now is an opportune time to work with this landowner to acquire a significant number of key parcels within the management units and along the Crow Wing River.

How the request addresses MN habitats:

This area has been the focus of DNR management and protection for many decades and includes a state forest and several wildlife management areas that have provided public hunting and fishing opportunities for decades. The habitat is generally forested with aspen, jack pine, red pines, white pines, and oaks. There are many acres of emergent wetlands and lowland brush. The properties provide habitat for several game species including white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, woodcock, waterfowl, black bears, bobcats, timber wolves and small game. Additionally, the Shell and Crow Wing Rivers that occur here provide habitat diversity, with many miles of bottomland forests interspersed with bogs, swamps and grassy openings. Other featured bird species of the property and surrounding areas include bald eagles, sandhill cranes, sharp-tailed grouse, and the greater prairie chicken. In addition, 89 species of greatest conservation need are known or predicted to occur within this region and 2 state listed bird species, 1 state listed fish, and 1 state listed mussel have been documented from the property or in rivers adjacent to the property. These properties are currently leased to private individuals and not open to the public. Acquisition and management by DNR will open this property to public.

Please explain the nature of urgency:

The current owner of this property, a real estate investment trust (REIT), has sold over 120,000 acres of their holdings in Minnesota since 2006 including over 7,500 acres within this region. Many of the region's parcels have been sold to agricultural interests for conversion to irrigated agriculture.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation
- LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land

Plans Addressed:

- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Minnesota Forests for the Future Program Strategic Report

Please describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

Parcels were evaluated for resource values and public benefits including wildlife habitat, shoreline habitat, trails, access, forest consolidation, groundwater and watershed protection, forest productivity and terrestrial ecological values by a team of resource professionals to determine overall resource values and priorities. The parcels were further evaluated for conversion risk.

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:

This proposal continues and accelerates the efforts of the Department to identify and protect high priority forest lands across the state through a multidisciplinary assessment effort undertaken by a team of resource professionals. This effort supplements the work of the Minnesota Forests for the Future program, the State Forest Program, and the Wildlife Management Area Program.

Non-OHF Money Spent in the Past:

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
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Sustainability and Maintenance:

Once acquired, the land will be managed long-term as State Forest or State Wildlife Management Area according to State Forest and State Wildlife Management Area guidelines.

Maintain Project Outcomes:

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2020	Forest Management Investment Account	Manage Forests to optimize forest health and habitat benefits consistent with guidance documents.	Maintain boundaries.	Monitor and manage public use.

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? - **Yes**

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? - **No**

Future Hunting and Fishing Plan:

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

Hunting and Fishing Regulations Not Listed

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Acquisition of Fee Title Parcels	June 30, 2017

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation *Forestlands will be permanently protected from conversion to non-forest uses by fee acquisition which will reduce potential development and fragmentation and consolidate public ownership in larger blocks that will be sustainably managed by the Department of Natural Resources.*

Relationship to Other Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$4,260,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$30,000	\$5,000	U.S. Forest Service	\$35,000
Contracts	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$4,115,000	\$0		\$4,115,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$4,000	\$0		\$4,000
Professional Services	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Direct Support Services	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	\$0		\$1,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$4,260,000	\$5,000	-	\$4,265,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Acquisition Coordinator	0.20	2.00	\$30,000	\$5,000	U.S. Forest Service	\$35,000
Total	0.20	2.00	\$30,000	\$5,000	-	\$35,000

Amount of Request: \$4,260,000

Amount of Leverage: \$5,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.12%

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	2,000	0	2,000
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	2,000	0	2,000

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	\$4,260,000	\$0	\$4,260,000
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	\$4,260,000	\$0	\$4,260,000

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	2,000	2,000
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	0	0	0	0	2,000	2,000

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	\$4,260,000	\$4,260,000
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	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,260,000	\$4,260,000

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	\$2,130	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$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	\$2,130
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

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Cass

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13532206	84	\$168,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13632231	40	\$80,000	No	Full	Full

Wadena

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13734207	178	\$316,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13533201	40	\$80,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833219	226	\$452,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13834211	400	\$800,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13734209	190	\$380,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13834226	180	\$360,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13834225	78	\$156,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833209	136	\$272,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833227	80	\$160,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13734204	80	\$160,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833217	120	\$240,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833226	100	\$200,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833230	119	\$238,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833220	250	\$500,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833204	200	\$400,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833228	39	\$78,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13834224	128	\$256,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833231	155	\$310,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833218	146	\$292,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13734210	60	\$120,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13734217	160	\$320,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13733202	168	\$336,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13733203	120	\$240,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13734209	190	\$380,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13734216	49	\$80,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833208	108	\$216,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833203	214	\$428,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833214	40	\$80,000	No	Full	Full

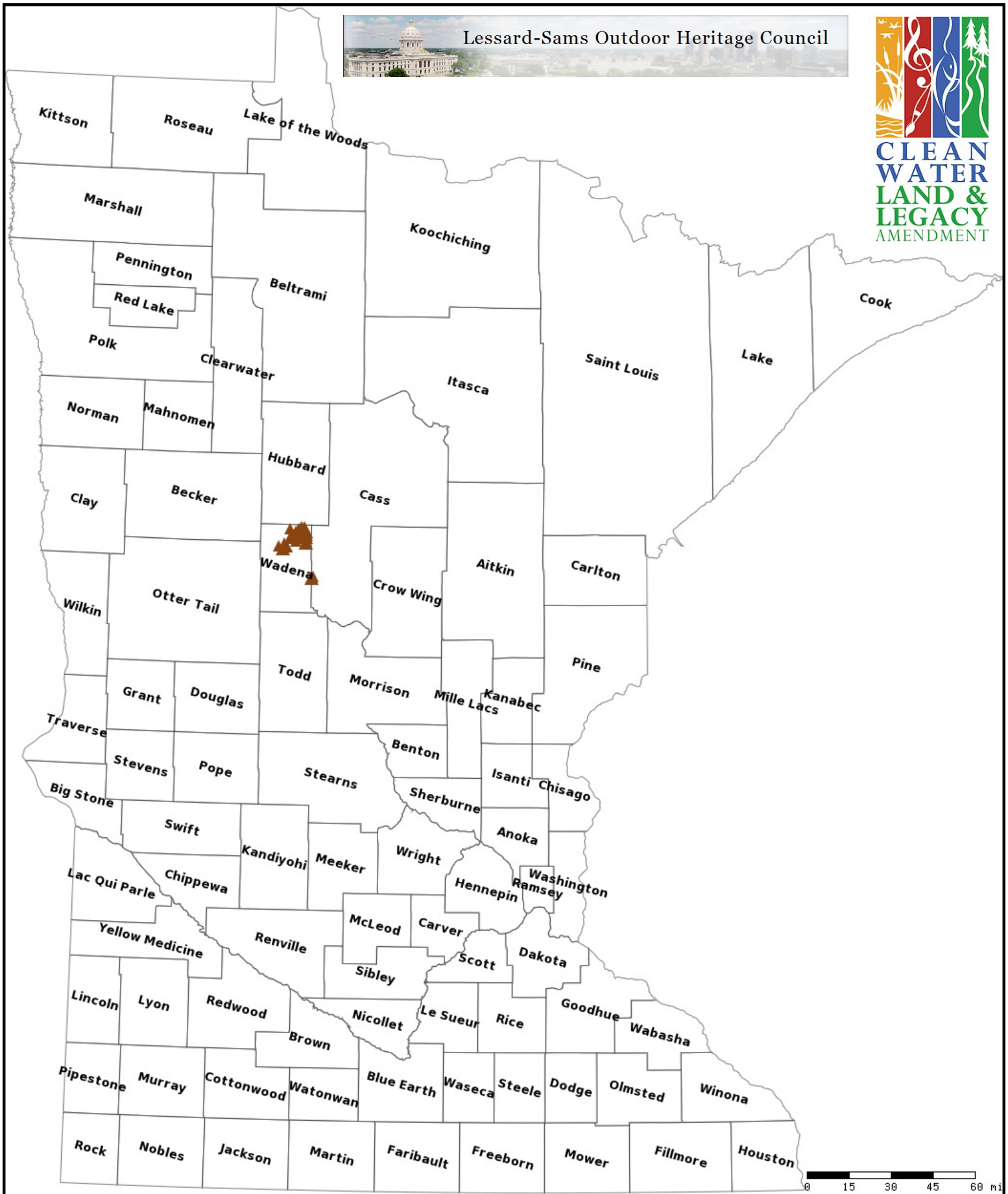
Ph2	13833214	40	\$80,000	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands Ph2	13833223	160	\$320,000	No	Full	Full

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.



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