

Request for Funding

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

Program or Project Title: Elk River Mississippi Natural Area

Funds Requested: \$3,128,000

Manager's Name: Steve Hobbs

Title: Minnesota State Director

Organization: The Conservation Fund

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Organization Web Site: conservationfund.org

County Locations: Sherburne

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Metro / Urban

Activity Type:

- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Wetlands
- Forest

Abstract:

Purchase 335 acres at the confluence of the Elk and the Mississippi Rivers. This project will protect one of the largest undeveloped privately held tracts on the Mississippi between Elk River and Hastings.

Design and Scope of Work:

The Elk River Natural Area embodies all the components of the Minnesota Legacy Funds. It is rich in cultural heritage. Its lands have hosted every activity that is emblematic of our Minnesota history. If protected, its seven miles of shore line and wetlands provide an important buffer for water quality. Recreational opportunities abound from some of the best smallmouth fishing in the United States to hiking along the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi. Two Bald Eagle nests on site attest to its quality old growth floodplain forest and the excellent habitat that is there and can be created. Its location within 40 miles of the heart of the Twin Cities and its more than 3.3 million residents make it easily accessible to most Minnesotans. There is no natural area of comparable size along the Mississippi anywhere in the area. This site is the largest undeveloped privately held site on the Mississippi between Elk River and Hastings.

The Houlton Tract is situated at the confluence of the Elk and Mississippi Rivers. This location not only provides a unique amenity with more than seven miles of shoreline, but the location has also made the site one of the most historically significant in the region. Archeologists have found arrow points dating back more than 200 years. Two major battles between the Dakota and Ojibwe took place on this site in 1772 and 1773 earning the site the Ojibwe name Me-gaud-e-win-ing, or "Battle Ground". Zebulon Pike was one of the early explorers to the area and named the Elk River in 1805. In the mid-1850s, a dam was built on the site creating Orono Lake along with a sawmill to exploit the hydropower the dam provided. The Houlton Family constructed and operating the mill and the land has been in their continuous ownership ever since. Elk River fully intends to interpret for visitors the vibrant history of the Houlton Tract that in so many ways is a microcosm of the rich history of the entire state of Minnesota.

The purchase of this site affords an opportunity to protect and connect accessible public land near major population centers that simply doesn't occur very often. This 335-acre purchase would connect the adjacent 80-acre Bailey Point Park, protected with LSOHC funds, with three SNAs lying within the Mississippi River. This purchase will secure the needed access and provide the land necessary to create a true regional amenity. The City has an excellent track record of land stewardship and in conjunction with the many partners involved with the project, will continue to obtain the resources necessary for its successful management. The 335 acres to be acquired contain a mix of 130 acres of floodplain forest, wetlands and approximately 180 acres of farmland. The Friends of the Mississippi has \$160,000 in existing funds from an LSOHC grant to begin the restoration of the site. The farmland will be restored to native prairie and oak savanna making it one of the largest riparian prairie/oak savanna restorations in the region. The floodplain forest will be managed to restore the integrity of the native mix of hardwoods to the exclusion of non-native and invasive species.

The natural restored natural amenities of the site, along with its unique location, will serve as the cornerstone of the recreational opportunities provided. The natural area will offer many opportunities for interpretation of our natural and cultural heritage. Viewing platforms will be constructed along the river and overlooking the restored prairie. There will also be a launch point for canoes near the confluence of the Elk and Mississippi Rivers and a larger boat launch on the Mississippi itself. Both launches will give access that is not afforded anywhere else in the vicinity. The site will be open to hunting and fishing in accordance with the same rules approved by LSHOC for use in Anoka County.

The Conservation Fund will acquire the 335 acres and donate it to the City of Elk River. The City will manage the site for habitat, fishing and hunting access and passive recreation.

The Houlton Tract is for sale and is being actively marketed. The site has not been for sale in more than 100 years. If we don't act now, the opportunity will be lost.

How the request addresses MN habitats:

The Elk River Mississippi Natural Area is located in the stretch of the Mississippi River known as one of the best smallmouth bass fisheries in the region. The extensive old growth floodplain forests are exceptional in size and unparalleled in quality, especially in the Metro. Two Bald Eagle nests have successfully reared young for decades. The area that is currently farmed (approximately 180 acres) provides one of the best opportunities to restore a riparian oak savanna in the region, if not the state. Friends of the Mississippi has \$160,000 in hand to begin this restoration. Restoring the oak savanna, combined with the site's adjacency to three SNAs, would create a complex of exceptional habitat unmatched along this part of the Mississippi.

Please explain the nature of urgency:

The land is for sale and being actively marketed. The land has not been for sale in over 100 years and would offer an excellent site for development perched above the Mississippi River. TCF has negotiated the terms of a purchase agreement with the landowners.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H2 Protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes
- LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land

Plans Addressed:

- Minnesota DNR AMA Acquisition Plan
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

Please describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

Numerous scientific studies demonstrate the need for protecting and restoring riparian habitat for wildlife and water quality benefits. This site sits adjacent to three SNAs that offer excellent examples of old growth floodplain forest. The champion cottonwood of Sherburne County is on the proposed site.

LSOHC Metro Urban Section Priorities:

- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

The Conservation Fund (TCF) exists solely to assist government and nonprofit organizations achieve their conservation goals. As such, we have no agenda of our own beyond the desires of our partners. To that end, we are thrilled to have the opportunity to work with such a forward-thinking community as Elk River. Their passion to protect this critical component of their natural and cultural history is exemplary and transcends political boundaries. They see the creation of the Elk River Mississippi Natural Area as an essential part of their economic future that will give their community a competitive advantage embodying their current city motto "Powered by Nature". This project certainly advances TCF's mission to enable conservation that also provides economic benefits.

Non-OHF Money Spent in the Past:

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
FY 2014	Private-TCF	30000

Sustainability and Maintenance:

The site will be owned and managed by the City of Elk River. Elk River has sought this property for decades as it defines their connection to the Mississippi River and their rich cultural history. The City has the staff, along with a dedicated volunteer organization, to maintain the property as a natural area.

Maintain Project Outcomes:

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2015	LSOHC	Secure Protection of Site		
2015	LSOHC & City		Begin Restoration of Site	

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**

Land will be hunted in accordance with the hunting guidelines established by LSOHC for sites owned and managed by Anoka County. Site will be enhanced for increased fishing access with placement of new boat launch in area with few launch sites and will be fully open for public fishing.

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Purchase 335 acres	8/30/2015

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 *This project protects more than 7 miles of shoreline at the confluence of the Elk River with the Mississippi. This project also protects mature floodplain forest while providing the opportunity to restore more than 160 acres of riparian oak savanna.*

Relationship to Other Funds:

- Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund
- Clean Water Fund
- Parks and Trails Fund

While this project is not receiving any funds from these other sources, it is difficult to imagine a project that better captures the purpose of the Legacy Amendment. From its culture importance, to its importance in reducing agriculture runoff, to providing hiking opportunities and access to one of the nation's great smallmouth fisheries, this project truly has it all.

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$3,128,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$10,000	\$10,000	TCF	\$20,000
Contracts	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$3,100,000	\$150,000	Landowner Contribution	\$3,250,000
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$0	\$500	TCF	\$500
Professional Services	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Direct Support Services	\$2,000	\$0		\$2,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	\$0		\$1,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$3,128,000	\$160,500	-	\$3,288,500

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
State Director	1.00	0.10	\$10,000	\$10,000	TCF	\$20,000
Total	1.00	0.10	\$10,000	\$10,000	-	\$20,000

Amount of Request: \$3,128,000

Amount of Leverage: \$160,500

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 5.13%

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	130	0	205	0	335
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	130	0	205	0	335

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	\$65,000	\$0	\$3,063,000	\$0	\$3,128,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$65,000	\$0	\$3,063,000	\$0	\$3,128,000

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	335	0	0	0	0	335
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	335	0	0	0	0	335

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	\$3,128,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,128,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$3,128,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,128,000

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	\$500	\$0	\$14,941	\$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	\$9,337	\$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

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type protect.

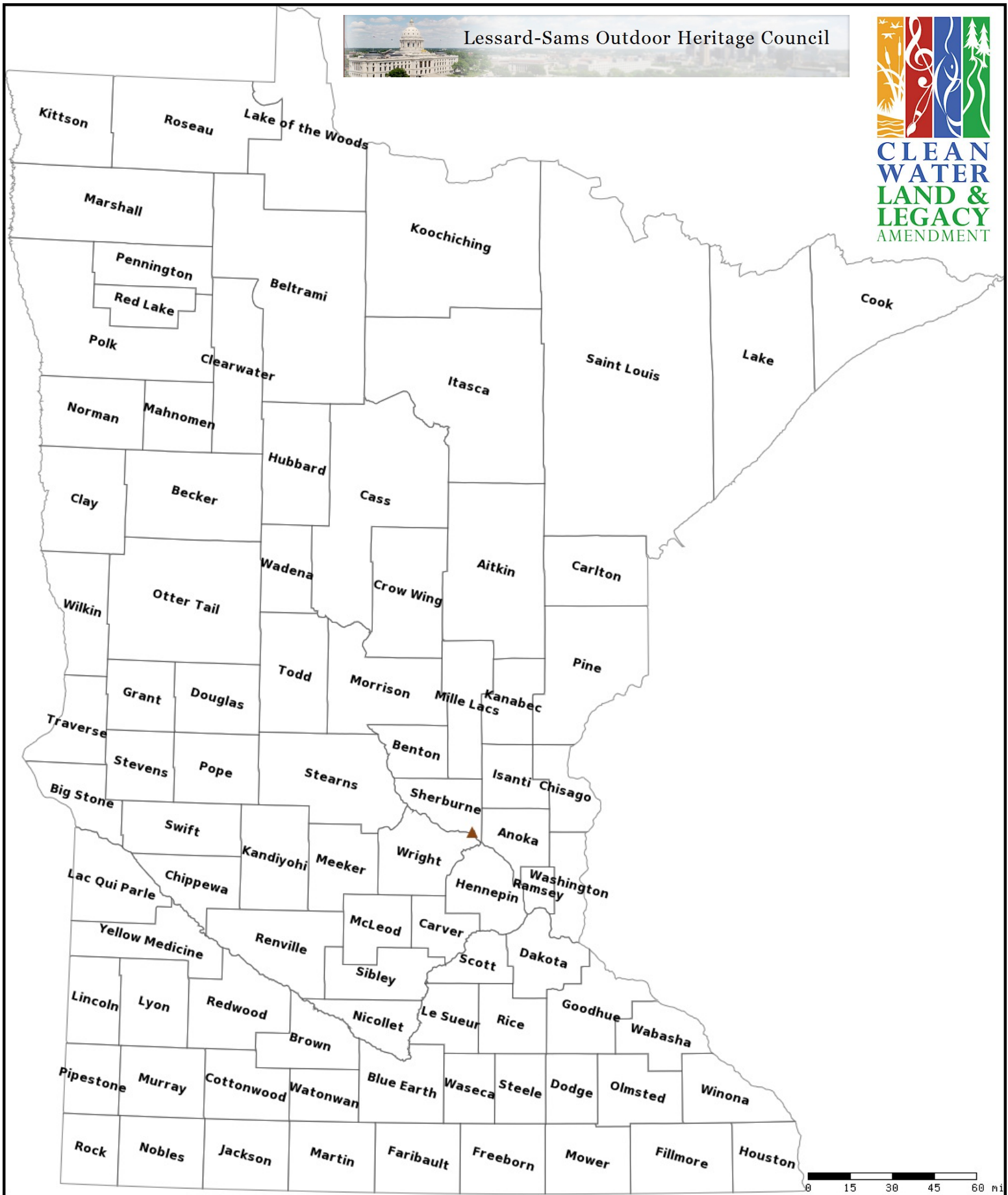
Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

Sherburne

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Houlton	03226204	335	\$3,100,000	2	Barn and old farmhouse that do not have an impact on value per TCF appraisal	\$0	

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

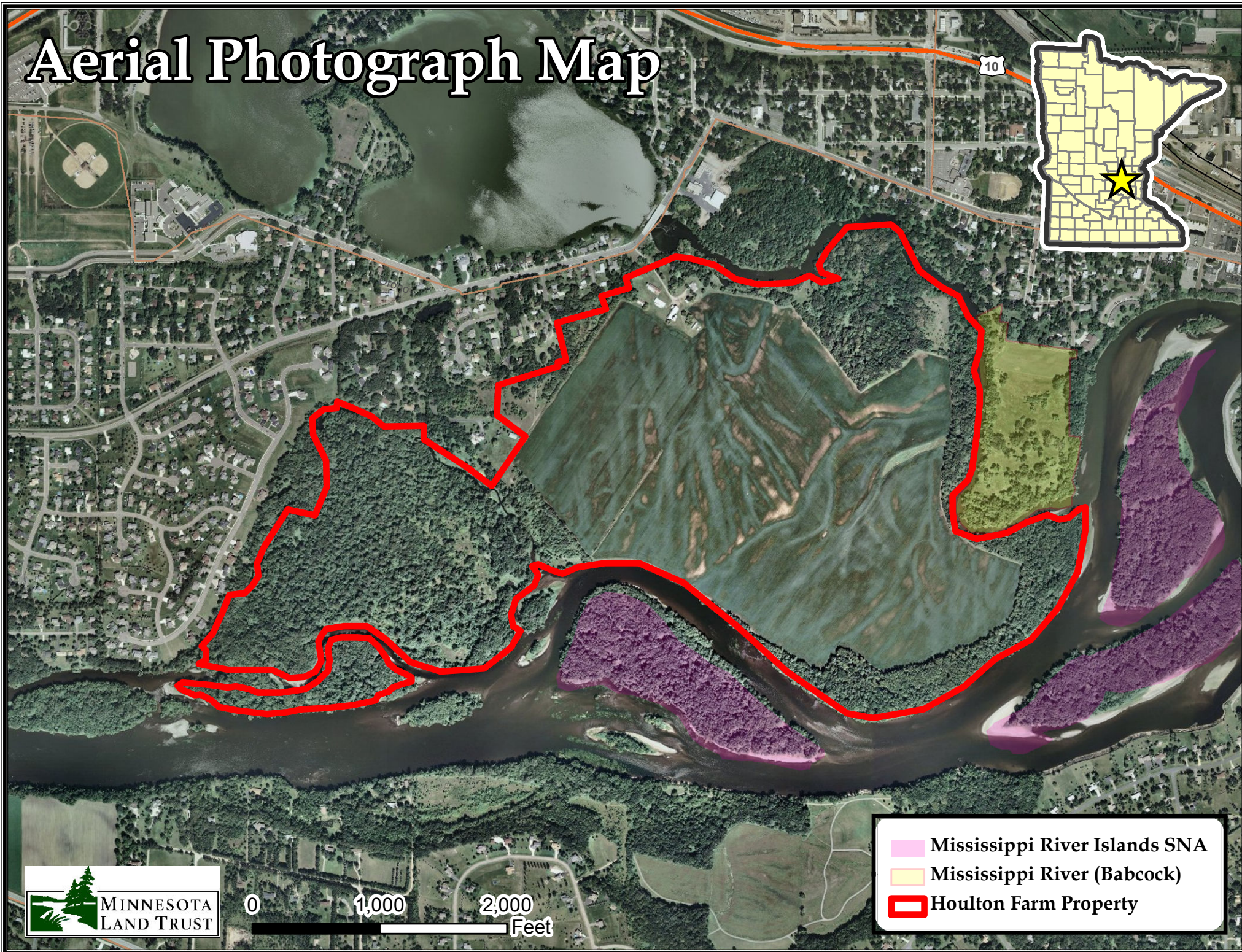
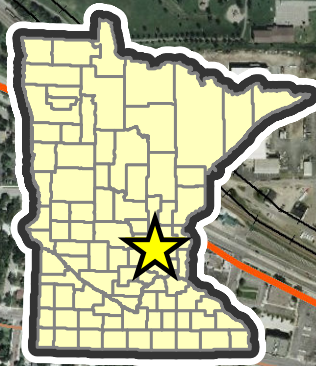


Elk River Mississippi Natural Area

Legend

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

Aerial Photograph Map



0 1,000 2,000 Feet

- Mississippi River Islands SNA
- Mississippi River (Babcock)
- Houlton Farm Property