Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
Fiscal Year 2018 / ML 2017 Request for Funding

Date: June 15, 2016

Program or Project Title: Minnesota Forests for the Future - Phase V (FA05)

Funds Requested: $8,000,000

Manager's Name: Richard F. Peterson
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County Locations: Morrison

Regions in which work will take place:

- Northern Forest

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Forest

Abstract:

The Minnesota Forests for the Future Program is requesting $8 million for conservation easement acquisition to protect 4 parcels totaling approximately 11,250 acres of forest and wetland habitat in the northern forest region. Parcels selected featured some of the largest private forest parcels in the region, high biodiversity sites, topographic and habitat diversity, and connectivity with additional protected forest and wetland complexes. These properties provide habitat for a range of game and non-game species including waterfowl, deer, grouse, timber wolves, ovenbirds and golden-winged warblers and contain 6.6 miles of lake shore and 1.3 miles of stream.

Design and scope of work:

The Hardwood Hills and Rum River Project Area is a landscape of forests, riparian habitat, extensive wetlands complexes, and open waters. Over 217 species of greatest conservation need are known to occur within this region, including many disturbance-sensitive species such as red-shouldered hawks. Portions of this landscape have been identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey as sites of statewide biodiversity significance on the basis of the number of rare species, the quality of the native plant communities, size of the site, and context within the landscape. This landscape is extremely vulnerable to development. Specifically, between 2008 and 2013, more than 260,000 acres of forest, wetland, and grassland in the Upper Mississippi River Basin were converted to other uses, with a large proportion of this fragmentation occurring within the project area. If unprotected, the long term integrity of the wetland and forest habitats will be compromised by future development activities that could convert and fragment habitat and threaten water quality. The purpose of this project is to preserve the ecological integrity and habitat values of this region by focusing protection efforts in strategic locations that ensure that forests remain undeveloped, with connections maintained between forests and wetlands across private and public ownerships.

Phase 5 of the Forests for the Future Program will protect 4 parcels ranging in size from nearly 1,500 acres to over 6,200 acres that contain diverse upland and lowland habitats, several small lakes and open water as well as small streams. The northern hardwood

forests, conifer forests, and mixed hardwood-conifer uplands communities of the properties provide important nesting habitat for forest-interior songbirds (such as cerulean warblers and ovenbirds) more general forest songbirds (including brown creeper, veery, and hermit thrush), and ruffed grouse. The uplands also offer specialized habitat for red-shouldered hawks and bald eagles. Adjacent shrub thicket habitat and young forests offer habitat for birds of conservation concern such as golden-winged warblers. Mammal species using this landscape includes timber wolf, black bear, white-tailed deer, bobcat, and beaver. Species using the wetlands and riparian corridors on the project tracts include American black duck, wood duck, mallard, alder flycatcher, swamp sparrow, yellow warbler, blackburnian warbler, and American bittern. Woodcock find foraging and nesting sites in the wetlands and riparian areas and the upland open grasslands offer roosting and singing ground sites.

The Forests for the Future Program uses a Geographic Information System (GIS) to identify priority private forest lands for protection. Prioritization goals include: 1. Protecting forests with high public benefits (i.e. high ecological, habitat, economic and recreational values); 2. Focusing protection on the largest, most intact forest lands; and 3. Protecting private forests that will result in the greatest consolidation, linkage, and contiguity of lands. By protecting intact landscapes, the project will help achieve the goals of several resource plans related to the prevention of forest habitat loss and fragmentation. This project is a partnership effort with the Nature Conservancy who has pledged $1,000,000 towards the successful completion of this project.

Which sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are applicable to this project:

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

Which other plans are addressed in this proposal:

- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare

Describe how your program will advance the indicators identified in the plans selected:

Activities to be carried out under this project coincide with goals and objectives for protecting key critical habitat types and species assemblages in Minnesota. There are several plans with complimentary goals to protect forest habitat, secure connectivity, and make large mosaics of natural lands as resilient as possible including Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare and the Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework. Within the Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare, Goal 1 identifies "Stabilize and increase SGCN populations" by targeting priority conservation actions to maintain and enhance key habitats.

The Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25-Year Framework identifies "protect forestland through acquisition or easement to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties" as a priority action for the northern forest section. This project will protect 11,250 acres thereby preventing forest loss, parcelization and forest fragmentation.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal:

Northern Forest:

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

Describe how your program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife as indicated in the LSOHC priorities:

LSOHC Priorities
• Protecting large, contiguous forests through easements or acquisition of private lands that limit access to public lands (acquisition and easements should be targeted to areas that would consolidate ownerships, address critical habitat needs, and have significant public support in the region).
• Protecting and restoring high ecological value forests, including rare native plant communities, forest habitat for SGCNs, forested riparian areas, old-growth forests, and forest habitat corridors.

As development and conversion pressures have increased over decades, critical wildlife habitat areas have become threatened. In many cases only remnants of once abundant wildlife populations remain. Protecting large, contiguous forests through easement, and protecting high ecological value forests, including rare native plant communities, forest habitat for SGCN's, forested riparian areas, and forest habitat corridors are identified LSOHC priorities for this northern region.

The permanent protection of 11,250 acres on 4 parcels within this project is focused on ensuring that upland forests remain large, connected blocks, thus sustaining and enhancing habitat and other environmental benefits and that riparian forests and wetlands

provide landscape and habitat connectivity to support biodiversity and also provide the additional benefits for people of flood abatement, water purification, and recreation.

By protecting large forest blocks and wetland complexes, and securing the size, scale, composition, and connectivity of diverse forest and wetland systems in this region of Minnesota, we are taking the necessary steps to safeguard forest and wetland habitats in the region.

Describe how the proposal uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:

The Forests for the Future Program uses a GIS based system to guide the strategic protection (protection from parcelization, conversion and fragmentation) of private forest lands. Protection priority is given to protecting the largest, most intact blocks of forest and those forest tracts that result in the greatest amount of consolidation, linkage, and contiguity of protected forest lands. Included in the GIS model were MCBS sites of biodiversity significance, ecological patches, connections between patches, aquatic habitat scores and priority lake watersheds for the protection of water quality. Our prioritization process also helps identify lands that are closest to protected lands.

Permanent protection of these 4 parcels will prevent forest loss and fragmentation of some of the largest blocks of private land in this region, lands that have been identified by MCBS as sites of high/moderate biodiversity significance. In addition, each of these lands connect to other protected parcels in public ownership thereby expanding forest/wetland complexes in the region. Specifically, the Lake Alexander Project adjoins or is close to The Nature Conservancy Preserves, State Forest, State SNA, ACUB easement properties, and the Camp Ripley Military Reserve making it part of the core conservation areas of the region. The two Rum River parcels adjoin the nearly 3,000 acre Four Brooks WMA as well as portions of the Rum River State Forest and tribal properties. The Blackberry Bog site is part of a large forest/wetland complex and adjoins 240 acres of county forest.

How does the proposal address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species:

Forested and wetland habitat protection will occur in priority conservation areas as identified in several statewide planning efforts such as The Nature Conservancy's Superior Mixed Forest Ecoregional Plan.

Specifically, four parcels have been identified that rest within the Pine Moraines and Outwash Plains subsection (1 parcel) and the Mille Lacs Uplands subsection (3 parcels).

Within the Pine Moraines and Outwash Plains, the highest concentrations of species of greatest conservation need occur in the far southern reach of the subsection, where a 1,478 acre parcel has been identified for protection. The entire property has been identified as a site of high or medium biodiversity due to the quantity and quality of native plant communities by the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS). There are several known element occurrences on this property including: Tamarack Swamp, Cerulean Warbler, Red Oak, Sugar Maple, Basswood forest type, Red Shouldered Hawk, and Bald Eagle. In addition to the above known elemental occurrences, this property is adjacent to over a dozen known element occurrences including bog bluegrass, a threatened Minnesota species. In addition, the entire property lies within an Audubon Important Bird Area, which recognizes the importance of this property and the surrounding area to bird conservation efforts in Minnesota.

Within the Mille Lacs Uplands subsection, over 128 species of greatest conservation need are known to occur. The three parcels in this subsection contain over 5,500 acres out of a total of approximately 9,700 acres that have been identified as sites of high or medium biodiversity due to the quantity and quality of native plant communities by MCBS including several forest and wetland communities that include mesic hardwood forest , basswood-black ash forest, mesic oak-aspen forest, basswood-black ash forest, several lowland conifer forest types and several fen, swamp, sedge meadow and shrub types. They also contain several element occurrences including American Bittern and Bald Eagle. Bog bluegrass, a threatened Minnesota species occurs just outside one of the properties within the same wetland matrix as occurs on the property.

Identify indicator species and associated quantities this habitat will typically support:

The forest and wetland habitats associated with this project will support a variety of game and non-game species including ovenbirds, golden-winged warblers, and white-tailed deer. Ovenbirds (Seiurus aurocapilla) are found in upland forests statewide; typically in relatively mature forest but can also be found in younger forests. While territories vary in size and may overlap, an average of 10 pairs for every 10 hectares may be translated to roughly 16 pairs for every 40 acres.Often associated with shrubland habitat and regenerating forests, more current research indicates a variety of forest habitats are required by Golden-winged Warblers (a matrix of shrubby wetlands and uplands, regenerating forests, and mature forests). While territories vary in size, an average of 4 pairs for every 10 hectares , may be translated to roughly 6 pairs for every 40 acres. White-tailed deer (Odocoileus virginianus) use a wide variety of forested habitats, are found throughout Minnesota, and are an important game species in the state. In the 33 forested deer permit areas for which deer densities are estimated, covering most of the LSOHC Northern Forest section, the six-year average (2010-2015) for

pre-fawn deer densities across all deer permit areas is 13 deer per square mile of land (excluding water) . This translates to 0.02 deer (pre-fawning) per acre of forest land habitat or roughly 1 deer (pre-fawning) for every 50 acres of land.

Outcomes:

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation *Forest lands are protected from development and fragmentation This project will permanently protect approximately 11,250 acres of northern forest and associated wetlands and nearly 6.6 miles of undeveloped shoreline on several lakes and 1.3 miles on streams thereby preventing habitat loss, habitat fragmentation and associated degradation of waters and wetlands and helping to conserve several large forest/wetland complexes that link to other protected lands.*

How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended:

All lands protected through permanent conservation easements will be sustained through standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship that have been developed and implemented in the forest easement program over the past 15 years. Our easement stewardship program incorporates annual landowner meetings, annual on-site monitoring of all properties, records management, responding to landowner inquiries, tracking ownership changes and addressing and resolving easement violations.

Funding for the easement stewardship is included in the current proposal. Stewardship funds will be transferred to the designated easement stewardship account and interest earned from the account will fund the annual stewardship and monitoring work for the easement. All easements will have baseline property reports, forest stewardship plans and easement monitoring plans prepared prior to closing of the project. Future forest management will be accomplished through DNR-approved Forest Stewardship Plans. The Forest Stewardship Plans provide direction and guide the sustainable management activities that are consistent with protecting the habitat and other resource values of the properties.

Explain the things you will do in the future to maintain project outcomes:

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
June 30, 2020 or upon completion of the project	OHF	Transfer stewardship funds to dedicated stewardship account per accomplishment plan and OHF appropriation.	Develop easement stewardship plans prior to closings.	Develop baseline property report and easement monitoring plan prior to closing.
Annually/ perpetually	OHF - Permanent Easement Account	Monitor easements annually and enforce easement terms.	Annual landowner contacts and on-site monitoring.	Review forest management activities annually and review and update Forest Stewardship Plans periodically.

What is the degree of timing/opportunistic urgency and why it is necessary to spend public money for this work as soon as possible:

Permanent protection of the unique habitats identified in this proposal is highly significant due to the project sizes, the immediacy of the threats to parcelization and fragmentation, and the proximity of currently protected public lands. There are very few opportunities within this region of the state to protect lands and waters of the size and scope of this project. One of the four parcels we are proposing to protect in perpetuity is the largest privately owned parcel in the entire Rum River watershed (Rum River1). This same parcel currently is subdivided into 66 parcels, wetlands have been delineated for future parcelization and potential cabin development and the property to the west has been recently cleared of trees for pasture expansion. A second parcel (Lake Alexander parcel) proposed for protection is within two miles of two other large blocks of similar property have been converted to housing subdivisions in recent years.

How does this proposal include leverage in funds or other effort to supplement any OHF appropriation:

The Nature Conservancy has committed a non-federal match of privately-sourced funds totaling $1,000,000 toward the successful completion of this project. We will also request funding through the Federal Forest Legacy Program of $1,000,000 or more towards the completion of this project.

Relationship to other funds:

- Not Listed

Describe the relationship of the funds:

Not Listed

Describe the source and amount of non-OHF money spent for this work in the past:

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
2010	The Conservation Fund	$9,750,000
2010	Reinvest in Minnesota	$328,631
2012	The Nature Conservancy	$1,437,900
2012	Reinvest in Minnesota	$229,100
2012	State Capital Bonding	$231,551

Activity Details

Requirements:

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

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

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program - **Yes**

Are the funds confirmed - **No**

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds - **October 2017**

Land Use:

Will there be planting of corn or any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program - **No**

Will the eased land be open for public use - **Yes**

One of the properties will provide a Grant-in-aide snowmobile trail. No other public access will be provided.

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the acquisitions on the parcel list - **Yes**

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

Forest Access Roads: These roads have been developed and are maintained to provide access for timber and wildlife management activities on the properties.
Recreational Trails: One property has a grant-in-aide snowmobile trail that follows a forest access road.

Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition - **Yes**

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished:

Maintenance of the forest access roads will be the responsibility of the landowner.
The grant-in-aide trails are maintained by snowmobile clubs.
Monitoring of roads and trails will be ongoing as part of the annual easement monitoring on the property.

Will new trails or roads be developed as a result of the OHF acquisition - **Yes**

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

Additional and temporary timber access routes will be established as needed. These will be to provide temporary or sometimes permanent access for forest and wildlife management activities.

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished:

These will be the responsibility of the landowner.
Monitoring will be ongoing as part of the annual monitoring of the property.

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Acquire conservation easements	June 30, 2019
Develop conservation easement monitoring plans, forest stewardship plans and dedicate easement stewardship funds	June 30, 2019
Monitor conservation easement annually and enforce easement terms.	Annully, perpetually

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: $8,000,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$50,000	$0		$50,000
Contracts	$20,000	$0		$20,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	$0	$0		$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	$0	$0		$0
Easement Acquisition	$7,643,000	$2,000,000	The Nature Conservancy and Federal Forest Legacy Program	$9,643,000
Easement Stewardship	$125,000	$0		$125,000
Travel	$5,000	$0		$5,000
Professional Services	$150,000	$0		$150,000
Direct Support Services	$6,000	$0		$6,000
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	$8,000,000	$2,000,000	-	$10,000,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Coordinator	0.25	2.00	$50,000	$0		$50,000
Total	0.25	2.00	$50,000	$0	-	$50,000

Amount of Request:	$8,000,000
Amount of Leverage:	$2,000,000
Leverage as a percent of the Request:	25.00%
DSS + Personnel:	$56,000
As a % of the total request:	0.70%
Easement Stewardship:	$125,000
As a % of the Easement Acquisition:	1.64%

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program:

The amount is determined by using a calculator that has been developed by the Department of Natural Resources.

Does the amount in the contract line include R/E work?

no

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental? - No

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging:

NA

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The Nature Conservancy of Minnesota will provide non-federal match of privately-sourced funds for this project up to $1,000,000. We are intending to apply for Federal Fiscal Year 2018 funds through the Federal Forest Legacy Program with funds available on or about October 1 of 2017.

Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable? - Yes

Tell us how this project would be scaled and how administrative costs are affected, describe the "economy of scale" and how

outputs would change with reduced funding, if applicable:

Available funding would be directed to the highest priority parcels. Administrative costs and other acquisition costs would be reduced as the number of parcels are reduced. Per parcel acquisition costs may be lower for multi-parcel projects.
Acres protected will be reduced in proportion to the reduction in funds.

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	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	3,695	0	7,555	0	11,250
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3,695	0	7,555	0	11,250

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	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Protect in Easement	$2,628,000	$0	$5,372,000	$0	$8,000,000
Enhance	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Total	$2,628,000	$0	$5,372,000	$0	$8,000,000

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	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	11,250	11,250
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	11,250	11,250

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	$0	$0
Protect in Easement	$0	$0	$0	$0	$8,000,000	$8,000,000
Enhance	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0
Total	$0	$0	$0	$0	$8,000,000	$8,000,000

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	$0	$0	$0	$0
Protect in Easement	$711	$0	$711	$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	$0
Protect in Easement	$0	$0	$0	$0	$711
Enhance	$0	$0	$0	$0	$0

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

I have read and understand Section 15 of the Constitution of the State of Minnesota, Minnesota Statute 97A.056, and the Call for Funding Request. I certify I am authorized to submit this proposal and to the best of my knowledge the information provided is true and accurate.

Parcel List

Explain the process used to select, rank and prioritize the parcels:

The Forests for the Future Program uses a GIS based system to guide the strategic protection (protection from parcelization, conversion and fragmentation) of private forest lands. Protection priority is given to protecting the largest, most intact blocks of forest and those forest tracts that result in the greatest amount of consolidation, linkage, and contiguity of protected forest lands. Included in the GIS model were MCBS sites of biodiversity significance, ecological patches, connections between patches, aquatic habitat scores and priority lake watersheds for the protection of water quality. Priority is Our prioritization process also helps identify lands that are closest to protected lands.

Individual parcels are scored and ranked according the the Minnesota Forests for the Future Project Scoring Guidance to further document the value and public benefits of individual parcels and assist with parcel selection. Scoring criteria includes: Parcel size, strategic location (consolidation, linkage, and contiguity with other protected lands), ecological and habitat values, timber values, recreation values, and tract readiness.

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Morrison

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Blackberry Bog	04230204	489	$0	No	No	No
Blackberry Bog	04230205	587	$0	No	No	No
Blackberry Bog	04230207	80	$0	No	No	No
Blackberry Bog	04230208	240	$0	No	No	No
Blackberry Bog	04230209	280	$0	No	No	No
Lake Alexander	13131203	148	$0	No	No	No
Lake Alexander	13131204	615	$0	No	No	No
Lake Alexander	13231233	400	$0	No	No	No
Lake Alexander	13231234	320	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028210	160	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028211	669	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028212	670	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028213	640	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028214	640	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028215	600	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028221	120	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028222	640	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 1	04028228	160	$0	No	No	No
Rum RIver 1	04028223	626	$0	No	No	No
Rum RIver 1	04028224	635	$0	No	No	No
Rum RIver 1	04028227	647	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 2	04128222	52	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 2	04128223	283	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 2	04128224	577	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 2	04128225	320	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 2	04128226	400	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 2	04128227	263	$0	No	No	No
Rum River 2	04128228	10	$0	No	No	No

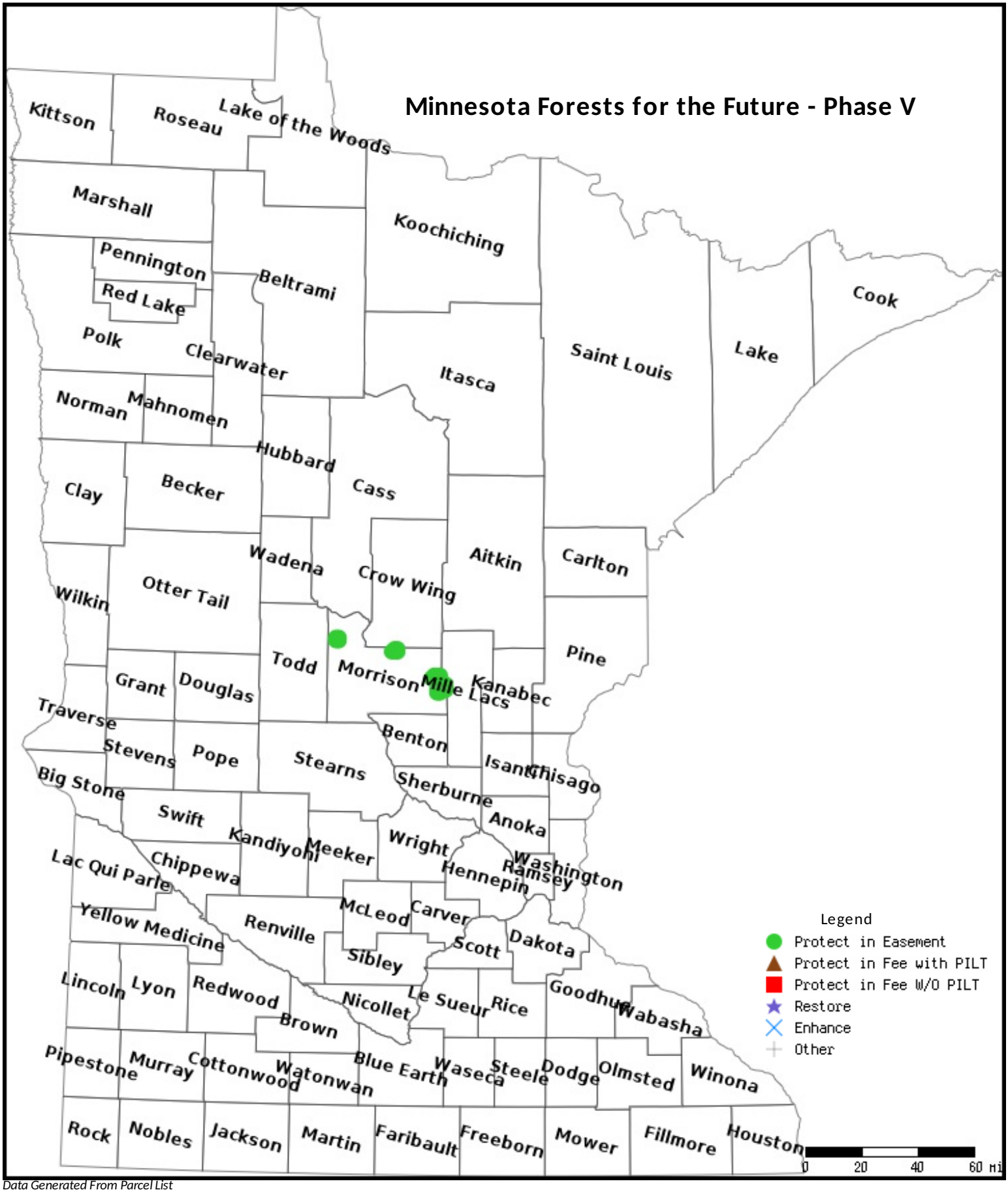
Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Parcel Map

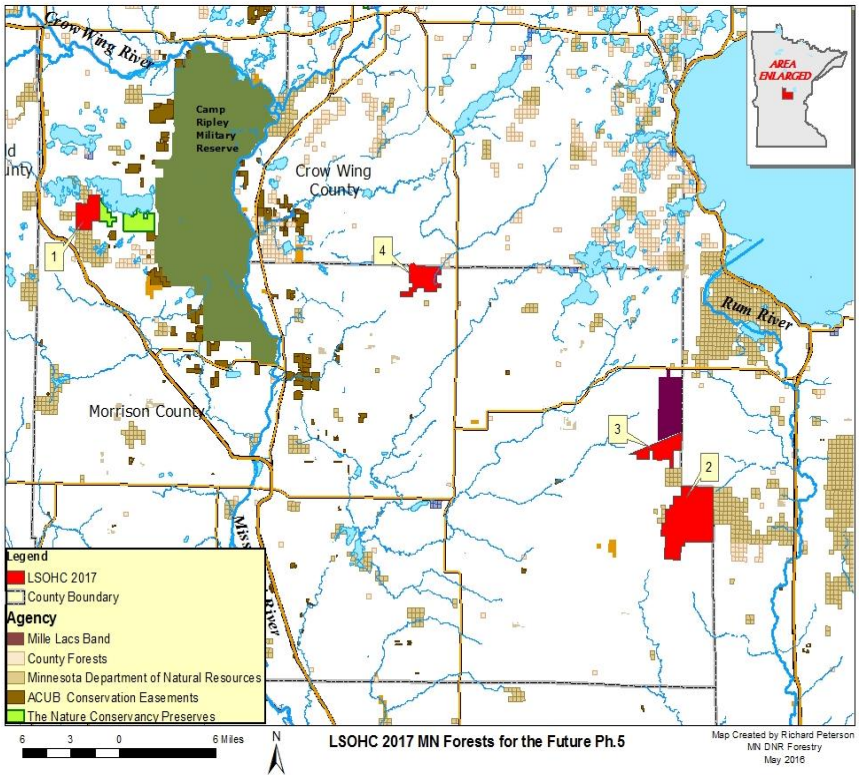


Data Generated From Parcel List

Minnesota Forests for the Future, Phase 5
Protecting Forest and Wetland Complexes
Funds Requested: $8,000,000

Project Overview

The Minnesota Forests for the Future Program is requesting $8 million for conservation easement acquisition to protect large parcels totaling approximately 11,250 acres of forest and wetland habitat in the northern forest region. These lands feature some of the largest privately held parcels in the region, high biodiversity sites, high topographic and habitat diversity, and connectivity with additional protected forest and wetland complexes. These properties provide habitat for a range of game and non-game species including waterfowl, deer, grouse, timber wolves, ovenbirds and golden-winged warblers and contain 6.6 miles of lake shore and 1.3 miles of stream. This project is a partnership effort with The Nature Conservancy who has pledged up to $1,000,000 towards the successful completion of this project.



Parcel Detail: Parcel 1 – 1,483 acres; Parcel 2 – 6,206 acres; Parcel 3- 1,905 acres; Parcel 4 – 1,676 acres.

The Minnesota Forests for the Future Program

The Minnesota Forests for the Future Program's focus is to protect and conserve forest habitat through the use of permanent conservation easements and fee title. The program has protected nearly 360,000 acres of forest since 2000 including over 208,000 acres with funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Our goal is to protect up to 530,000 acres of priority private forest lands with high quality habitat; ecological, economic, and recreational values with a focus on protecting the largest, most intact forest blocks that will result in increased landscape connectivity, forest health, and resilience of Minnesota's lands and waters.

Highly connected uplands and wetlands provide habitat for a range of game and non-game species. (Rum River Watershed).

Contact:
Richard Peterson
Forest Legacy Coordinator
MN Department of Natural Resources
507/333-2012 x222
richard.f.peterson@state.mn.us

Parcel Prioritization

Large parcels within the Forest and Wetland Complexes in Morrison County have been identified through GIS modeling that incorporates multiple benefits criteria to identity the highest priority private lands for permenant conservation. The criteria focus on lands that provide fish and wildlife habitat, sites of biodiversity significance, source water value, and other environmental benefits. Identified parcels support healthy, functioning rivers, lakes, and upland habitat, as well as support sustainable forestry practices. Individual parcels are scored according to Project Scoring Guidance for parcel ranking and selection purposes.

The project features extensive wetland complexes and open water habitat, 6.6 miles of land shore and 1.3 miles of stream.

Red-shouldered Hawk @Kent Mason

Habitats and Species

These four tracts ranging in size from nearly 1,500 acres to over 6,200 acres contain diverse upland and lowland habitats, several small lakes and open water as well as small streams. The forests provide important nesting habitat for forest-interior songbirds such as cerulean warblers and ovenbirds, more general forest songbirds, and ruffed grouse. They also provide speciallized habitat for red-shouldered hawks, bald eagles and golden-winged warblers. Mammal species include timber wolf, black bear, deer, bobcat and beaver. Waterfowl and other species will also benefit from the more than 3,600 acres of open water and wetland habitats. Over 7,000 acres of the 11,250 acre total have been identified as sites of high or medium biodiversity by the MCBS due to the quantity and quality of the native plant communities.

Conservation Easements

Conservation easements secured under this program will be perpetual and prevent the destruction and fragmentation of important forestlands. Easements will prohibit land uses and activities not consistent with the protection and conservation of the forest, aquatic habitats and wetlands. All easements acquired and managed by DNR Forestry under the Minnesota Forests for the Future Program will be monitored annually by the Division of Forestry and enforced as needed to protect the habitat and other conservation values.

Oak, aspen, lowland conifers, and black ash forests, shrub swamps, fens, and wet meadows provide habitat diversity.

The Nature Conservancy
Protecting nature. Preserving life.

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May 25, 2016

Richard Peterson
Forest Legacy Coordinator
MN Department of Natural Resources
1810 30th St NO
Faribault, MN 55021

RE: Minnesota Forests for the Future, Phase Five

Dear Mr. Peterson,

The Nature Conservancy through its Minnesota Headwaters Fund is pleased to support the Minnesota Forests for the Future, Phase Five proposal to protect critical habitat on over 11,000 acres.

The Hardwood Hills/Rum River region's forests and wetlands provide critical habitat to hundreds of species and natural communities, including many species of greatest conservation need. However, habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation are substantially altering the lands and waters of this vital landscape. Wetland loss and deforestation rates in Minnesota are the first and second highest in the country, respectively, with a substantial portion of this loss happening squarely within the Hardwood Hills/Rum River landscape. This land use alteration has a direct and profound impact on habitat and water quality, regional wetlands and associated upland communities.

The Conservancy values the positive impact of this project on many different fronts, including increased habitat connectivity, increased habitat integrity, protection of water quality and stream flow, increased resiliency and redundancy for sensitive species and communities and reduction of ecosystem stressors.

The Nature Conservancy through our Minnesota Headwaters Fund is pleased to be a partner contributing financial and implementation support to this important proposal to protect critical forest and wetland habitat in the Hardwood Hills/Rum River Region.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Douglas T. Shaw
Assistant State Director
The Nature Conservancy, MN, ND, SD