

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Fiscal Year 2020 / ML 2019 Request for Funding



Date: May 31, 2018

Program or Project Title: Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration

Funds Requested: \$5,416,000

Manager's Name: Scott Henderson

Organization: Sauk River Watershed District

Address: 524 4th Street South

Address 2: 524 4th Street South

City: Sauk Centre, MN 56378

Office Number: 3203522231

Email: scott@srwdmn.org

County Locations: Stearns

Regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore
- Enhance
- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Forest
- Prairie
- Habitat

Abstract:

This project will permanently protect, restore and enhance critical habitat within the Sauk River Watershed, which has experienced considerable habitat loss and is at high risk for more land use conversion. Using conservation easements and fee land acquisition, we will protect approximately 1,400 acres of high priority habitat in Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition area and will restore/enhance approximately 500 acres of wetlands and accompanying uplands to create vital habitat for important waterfowl and SGCN populations. Properties selected will be strategically targeted using an innovative site prioritization model that maximizes conservation benefit and financial leverage.

Design and scope of work:

Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD), Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), and Pheasant Forever (PF), along with technical assistance provided by Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), Todd SWCD, Douglas SWCD, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), will partner to implement habitat protection and restoration within the Sauk River Watershed (SRW). Sites that include top priority habitats, such as existing high quality or easily restorable wetland complexes, upland forests, floodplain forests, and prairies will be prioritized. Prioritized sites will be protected to preserve and enhance critical habitat for waterfowl and other important wildlife species.

This program will protect high caliber habitats and protect and restore degraded habitats in key locations. For example, a wetland adjacent to the Sauk River may be prioritized for protection, and restoration may include vegetation management to increase biodiversity and hydrologic repair to increase water storage. The SRW is in a rapidly growing region of the state that has also experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade. This conversion is expected to increase. Interest by landowners in protecting their land is strong in the SRW, but often these lands do not qualify for CREP. A small

window of opportunity exists to protect these high habitat quality sites now as they are expiring from CRP, before they are developed or converted back to farm land. This year alone in the SRW there are 434 CRP contracts expiring, comprising 3,122 acres of quality habitat.

Conservation Easements:

SRWD, with assistance from local partners such as the County SWCDs, will conduct outreach to landowners within targeted priority areas identified using TNC's Multiple Benefits Analysis that has been completed for protection prioritization in the SRW. Interested landowners will submit proposals to MLT using a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process that will rank properties based on ecological value and cost, prioritizing the projects that provide the best ecological value and acquiring them at the lowest cost to the state. MLT will secure approximately 1,200 acres of permanent conservation easements and develop restoration and habitat management plans for eased acres.

Fee acquisition:

PF will coordinate with MN DNR and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) on all potential fee simple acquisitions. PF will work with willing sellers to protect and restore 200 acres of strategically identified parcels within the SRW and then donate the parcels to the MN DNR as a WMA or FWS as WPA where they will be managed as wildlife habitat and provide public access in perpetuity.

Restoration and Enhancement:

SRWD, with assistance from County SWCDs, will restore/enhance approximately 500 acres of wetland, riparian and associated upland habitat on conservation easements acquired. Specific activities and scope will vary based on quality of parcel but may include performing hydrologic restoration, invasive species management, and installing vegetation to increase site biodiversity. PF will manage all needed restoration activities on fee simple acquisitions.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

Which other plans are addressed in this proposal:

- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

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

In Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda under goal 1, the strategies include identifying lands and waters at greatest risk, managing lands and waters for ecosystem health and resilience, and conservation of natural areas, working habitats, and species in danger of being lost. Our proposed program will prioritize lands for protection that are at greatest risk of conversion, restore and manage lands to maintain quality habitat, improve regional resiliency, and enhance ecosystem services.

The 25-Year Framework expects a future in which ample grasses and other vegetation are on shorelands and higher in the watershed to keep water on the land. It envisions that wetland/upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands, and restored shallow lakes and wetlands. The Framework prioritizes protection, restoration and enhancement of wetland/upland complexes, protection of native prairies, and protection of expiring CRP lands - all of which will be realized in this.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal:

Prairie:

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Forest / Prairie Transition:

- Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

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:

This program addresses LSOHC priorities by protecting wetland/grassland complexes, adjacent forested uplands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for Minnesota's wildlife, especially its migratory waterfowl and associated species. This program will permanently

protect 1400 acres and restore/enhance 500 acres of quality wetlands and associated upland habitat in the SRW. Similar programs to the one proposed have been piloted across the state and have shown to be highly effective at protecting/restoring/enhancing quality habitat. A program like the one proposed has not been previously tried within the SRW. However, prioritization efforts have shown abundant worthy properties for conservation easements and fee simple acquisition. Initial outreach within the watershed for conservation easements has already generated interest and excitement in this proposed program from at least 10 landowners of properties containing high quality habitat.

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 program will utilize TNC's Multiple Benefits Analysis, a science-based process completed in 2017 for the Upper Mississippi River Basin, that prioritized protection sites for the SRW and other parts of this region. The Multiple Benefits Analysis developed and scored priorities according to specific but multiple cross-cutting needs and looks for the "sweet spot", where multiple benefits overlap. It includes four modules: fish and wildlife habitat, drinking water/source water, flooding and erosion control, and groundwater benefits. Each module contains numerous data layers. Sites are prioritized in each module as well as a whole. Size of parcel and proximity to other protected lands are also considered in this analysis.

The vast majority of the SRW landscape is in private ownership. Therefore, once priority parcels are identified, working with private owners on land protection strategies is key to successful conservation in this region. We will also work closely with partners in the region to identify those habitat complexes where private land protection can make a significant contribution to existing conservation investments. Specific parcels available for acquisition of easements will be further reviewed relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on: amount of habitat on the parcel (size), abundance of SGCN, the quality or condition of habitat, the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas, and cost. MBS data will be another important component of potential conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions. Field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition will also occur, as many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

The program will work to build on initial conservation investments in the program area, expanding and buffering the footprint of existing protected areas, such as WMAs, WPAs, AMAs, etc., facilitating the protection of habitat corridors and reducing the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats.

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:

This program will utilize a prioritization framework that uses SGCN and quality habitat as major weighting factors. The SRW region is an important migratory corridor for forest birds and waterfowl. It contains wetlands, upland forests, and shorelands, which are essential habitats to Minnesota's wildlife diversity and health, all of which will be targeted for protection and restoration/enhancement as part of this program.

A variety of SGCN will benefit from this program include Blanding's turtles, bobolinks, veerys, caddisflies, smooth green snakes, Poweshiek skippers, western harvest mice, and jumping spiders (*M. grata*). Other species that will benefit from improved habitat as part of this program include trumpeter swans, sandhill cranes, bald eagles, swainson's hawks, and dickcissels.

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

Ovenbird – Research indicates that there are roughly 16 pairs for every 40 acres, we estimate that our program using conservation easements and fee acquisition will protect and/or restore/enhance approximately 500 acres of upland forest, which can produce an additional 200 pairs.

Pheasant – It is estimated that every three acres of grassland habitat has the potential to produce one harvested pheasant rooster. We estimate that our program will protect and/or restore/enhance approximately 500 acres grassland habitat, which can produce an additional 167 pheasants annually.

Monarch Butterfly - Research from the University of Minnesota has shown that approximately 30 milkweed stems result in one monarch butterfly contributing to the overwintering Mexican population. An acre of restored or enhanced grassland could potentially contribute 3 to 8 monarchs to the population. As outlined in our proposal, we estimate the protection/restoration/enhancement of approximately 500 acres of grassland habitat, which can produce approximately 2,750 monarch butterflies.

Mallard – Using the Prairie Pothole Joint Venture and the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture biological model to estimates 1 mallard pair per 2.47 acres of wetland habitat (noting that upland habitat for nesting is also obviously needed). This proposal looks to protect/restore/enhance an estimated 500 acres of wetland habitat, which can produce an additional 202 pairs of mallards.

Outcomes:

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need *Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat, providing nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and Species in Greatest Conservation Need will be restored and protected. Partners will work together to identify priority lands using existing data and public plans, then coordinate protection, restoration and enhancement activities in those priority areas. Success within each priority area will be determined based on the percentage of area protected, restored and/or enhanced.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Restored and enhanced upland habitats *Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat, providing nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and Species in Greatest Conservation Need will be restored and protected. Partners will work together to identify priority lands using existing data and public plans, then coordinate protection, restoration and enhancement activities in those priority areas. Success within each priority area will be determined based on the percentage of area protected, restored and/or enhanced.*

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

MLT will sustain the land protected through conservation easements using state-of-the-art easement stewardship standards and practices. MLT is a nationally-accredited and insured land trust with a successful easement stewardship program that conducts annual property monitoring, maintains effective records management, addresses inquiries and interpretations, tracks changes in ownership, investigates potential violations and defends the easement in case of a true violation. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget. In addition, MLT encourages landowners to undertake active ecological management of their properties, provides them with habitat management plans, and works with them to secure resources (expertise and funding) to undertake these activities over time.

Acquisition projects will abut or be within close proximity to existing protected lands, including state-owned lands and lands under conservation easement. This will allow for the expansion of maintenance and restoration activities currently taking place on those protected lands and adjacent private lands. Lands outside of this connectivity will be maintained by fee-title land holders (MNDNR, USFWS) and/or the Sauk River Watershed District (conservation land inspections). Habitats cleared of invasive species will be maintained with prescribed fire and other practices.

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

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2025 and in perpetuity	Minnesota Land Trust - long term stewardship and enforcement fund	Annual monitoring of conservation easements in perpetuity	enforcement as necessary	
Every 4-6 years	MN DNR, USFWS, Landowners	Prescribed fire, tree control, invasive species control		

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

The SRW is in a rapidly growing region of the state that has experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade and is expected to increase. Stearns County SWCD has completed preliminary outreach work to gauge interest in this program. Numerous landowners with high priority habitat have shown strong interest, including landowners that have land about to expire from CRP but that does not qualify for CREP. Without this program there is a strong risk for these priority properties to be converted back to land uses that will adversely affect habitat and water quality benefits initially gained from enrollment in CRP.

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

MLT encourages private landowners to fully or partially donate the appraised value of their conservation easement, thereby receiving less than the appraised value might otherwise allow. This donated value is shown as leveraged funds in the proposal and is expected to be 20% of the acquisition cost or \$540,000. MLT has a long track record in incentivizing landowners to participate in this fashion.

Relationship to other funds:

- Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund

Describe the relationship of the funds:

SRWD, along with partners including MLT, Stearns County SWCD, MN DNR, University of Minnesota, and TNC submitted a Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) proposal for FY2019. If funded, this program will protect, restore and enhance wetland complexes in the SRW using a combination of conservation easements and restoration. Properties will be targeted that lie adjacent to the main stem of the Sauk River and that benefit drinking/source water quality.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Any state agency or organization requesting a direct appropriation from the OHF must inform the LSOHC at the time of the request for funding is made, whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose:

Funding procured by any of the Partners through the Outdoor Heritage Fund via this proposal will not supplant or substitute any previous funding from a non-Legacy fund used for the same purpose.

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

Not Listed

Activity Details

Requirements:

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

Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought prior to acquisition? - **No**

Local governments are notified of each proposed land acquisition that will be transferred to the state and program staff are available to discuss projects with local government staff and/or elected officials.

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) free of any other permanent protection - **No**

A limited number of the parcels may have a federal or state easement on a portion of the tract which provides permanent protection for wetlands or grasslands. If a parcel has one of these encumbrances, and is still deemed a high priority by our agency partners, we will follow guidance established by the Outdoor Heritage Fund to proceed, or use non-state funding to acquire the residual value of the protected portion of the property.

Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection - **No**

A limited number of the parcels may have a federal or state easement on a portion of the tract which provides permanent protection for wetlands or grasslands. If a parcel has one of these encumbrances, and is still deemed a high priority by our agency partners, we will follow guidance established by the Outdoor Heritage Fund to proceed, or use non-state funding to acquire the residual value of the protected portion of the property.

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program - **Yes**

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 - **Yes (WMA, WPA, Private Land)**

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program - **No**

Land Use:

Will there be planting of corn or any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program - **Yes**

Explain

For fee acquisitions, the primary purposes of WMAs are to develop and manage for the production of wildlife and for compatible outdoor recreation. To fulfill those goals, the DNR may use limited farming specifically to enhance or benefit the management of state lands for wildlife. This proposal may include initial development plans or restoration plans to utilize farming to prepare previously farmed sites for native plant seeding. This is a standard practice across the Midwest to prepare the seedbed for native seed planting. In restorations, non neonicotinoid treated seed will be used and no herbicides other than glyphosate. On a small

percentage of WMAs (less than 2.5%), DNR uses farming to provide a winter food source for a variety of wildlife species in agriculture-dominated landscapes largely devoid of winter food sources. There are no immediate plans to use farming for winter food on any of the parcels in this proposal.

On conservation easements, MLT may incorporate the short-term use of agricultural crops, which is an accepted best practice in some instances for preparing a site for restoration. For example, short-term use of soybeans could be used for restorations to control weed seedbeds prior to prairie planting. In some cases, this necessitates the use of GMO-treated products to facilitate herbicide use to control weeds present in the seedbank. However, neonicotinoids will not be used.

The purpose of the MLT's conservation easements is to protect existing high quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. As such, we restrict any agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases where there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either carve the agricultural area out of the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may include a small percentage of agricultural lands if it is not feasible to carve those areas out. In such cases, however, we will not use OHF funds to pay the landowners for that portion of the conservation easement.

Are any of the crop types planted GMO treated - **Yes**

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing - **No**

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

Fee-title acquisition land secured as part of this project will be open for hunting and fishing.

Will the eased land be open for public use - **No**

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:

Most conservation easements are established on private lands, many of which have driveways, field roads and trails located on them. Often, these established trails and roads are permitted in the terms of the easement and can be maintained for personal use if their use does not significantly impact the conservation values of the property. Creation of new roads/trails or expansion of existing ones is typically not allowed.

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

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished:

Existing trails and roads are identified in the project baseline report and will be monitored annually as part of the Land Trust's stewardship and enforcement protocols. Maintenance of permitted roads/trails in line with the terms of the easement will be the responsibility of the landowner.

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition - **No**

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Site prioritization and targeted outreach	December 2020
Conservation easement and fee-title acquisition completed	June 2022
Restoration	June 2024

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$5,416,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

BudgetName	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$197,000	\$0		\$197,000
Contracts	\$934,000	\$0		\$934,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$450,000	\$12,500	PF, Federal, Private	\$462,500
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$450,000	\$12,500	PF, Federal, Private	\$462,500
Easement Acquisition	\$2,700,000	\$540,000	Landowner Donations	\$3,240,000
Easement Stewardship	\$312,000	\$0		\$312,000
Travel	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Professional Services	\$257,000	\$0		\$257,000
Direct Support Services	\$59,000	\$0		\$59,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$12,000	\$0		\$12,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Total	\$5,416,000	\$565,000		\$5,981,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
State Coordinator	0.01	3.00	\$3,000	\$0		\$3,000
Field Staff	0.01	3.00	\$3,500	\$0		\$3,500
Grants Staff	0.01	3.00	\$3,500	\$0		\$3,500
MLT Protection Staff	0.60	3.00	\$162,000	\$0		\$162,000
Water Resource Manager	0.04	3.00	\$11,900	\$0		\$11,900
Project Mgmt Supervisor	0.04	3.00	\$13,100	\$0		\$13,100
Total	0.71	18.00	\$197,000	\$0		\$197,000

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Pheasants Forever	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Contracts	Pheasants Forever	\$78,000	\$0		\$78,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Pheasants Forever	\$450,000	\$12,500	PF, Federal, Private	\$462,500
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Pheasants Forever	\$450,000	\$12,500	PF, Federal, Private	\$462,500
Easement Acquisition	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	Pheasants Forever	\$15,000	\$0		\$15,000
Direct Support Services	Pheasants Forever	\$15,000	\$0		\$15,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Pheasants Forever	\$12,000	\$0		\$12,000
Capital Equipment	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Pheasants Forever	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Total		\$1,060,000	\$25,000		\$1,085,000

Personnel - Pheasants Forever

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
State Coordinator	0.01	3.00	\$3,000	\$0		\$3,000
Field Staff	0.01	3.00	\$3,500	\$0		\$3,500
Grants Staff	0.01	3.00	\$3,500	\$0		\$3,500
Total	0.03	9.00	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$162,000	\$0		\$162,000
Contracts	Minnesota Land Trust	\$96,000	\$0		\$96,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Minnesota Land Trust	\$2,700,000	\$540,000	Landowner Donations	\$3,240,000
Easement Stewardship	Minnesota Land Trust	\$312,000	\$0		\$312,000
Travel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Professional Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$242,000	\$0		\$242,000
Direct Support Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$44,000	\$0		\$44,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Minnesota Land Trust	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$3,571,000	\$540,000		\$4,111,000

Personnel - Minnesota Land Trust

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.60	3.00	\$162,000	\$0		\$162,000
Total	0.60	3.00	\$162,000	\$0		\$162,000

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Sauk River Watershed District	\$25,000	\$0		\$25,000
Contracts	Sauk River Watershed District	\$760,000	\$0		\$760,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Direct Support Services	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$785,000	\$0		\$785,000

Personnel - Sauk River Watershed District

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Water Resource Manager	0.04	3.00	\$11,900	\$0		\$11,900
Project Mgmt Supervisor	0.04	3.00	\$13,100	\$0		\$13,100
Total	0.08	6.00	\$25,000	\$0		\$25,000

Amount of Request: \$5,416,000
Amount of Leverage: \$565,000
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 10.43%
DSS + Personnel: \$256,000
As a % of the total request: 4.73%
Easement Stewardship: \$312,000
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 11.56%

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

In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, Minnesota Land Trust determined our direct support services rate to include all of the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget, which is similar to the Land Trust's proposed federal indirect rate. We will apply this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services.

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

Funds in the contract line are for the writing of habitat management plans via qualified vendors.

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental? - Yes

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

Land Trust staff regularly rent vehicles for grant-related purposes, which is a significant cost savings over use of personal vehicles.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The Land Trust encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements to the program. The leverage amount is a conservative estimate of value we expect to see donated by landowners. USFWS staff participation in restoration/enhancement projects is committed and shown as leverage.

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:

Because this program endeavors to protect and restore/enhance multiple parcels, it is scalable. Less funding will result in fewer protected acres and lost opportunities. In addition, some of the administrative and outreach costs are more fixed. As such, there is an economy of scale to working within one appropriation.

Output Tables

Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	500	500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	20	80	0	0	100
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	20	80	0	0	100
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	1,200	1,200
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	40	160	0	1,700	1,900

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	\$785,000	\$785,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$106,000	\$424,000	\$0	\$0	\$530,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$106,000	\$424,000	\$0	\$0	\$530,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,571,000	\$3,571,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$212,000	\$848,000	\$0	\$4,356,000	\$5,416,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	250	0	250	0	500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	50	0	50	0	100
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	100	0	100
Protect in Easement	0	600	0	600	0	1,200
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	900	0	1,000	0	1,900

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$393,000	\$0	\$392,000	\$0	\$785,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$265,000	\$0	\$265,000	\$0	\$530,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$530,000	\$0	\$530,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$1,785,500	\$0	\$1,785,500	\$0	\$3,571,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$2,443,500	\$0	\$2,972,500	\$0	\$5,416,000

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,570
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$5,300	\$5,300	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$5,300	\$5,300	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,976
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	\$1,572	\$0	\$1,568	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$5,300	\$0	\$5,300	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$5,300	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$2,976	\$0	\$2,976	\$0
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:

Not Listed

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Stearns

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Partners WMA	12232203	40	\$180,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
TBDWMA	12331206	125	\$500,000	No	Full	Full
TBDWMA	12331235	80	\$400,000	No	Full	Full
TBDWMA	12636212	400	\$1,800,000	Yes	Full	Not Applicable
WPA/Zion	12332215	160	\$800,000	No	Full	Not Applicable

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

Stearns

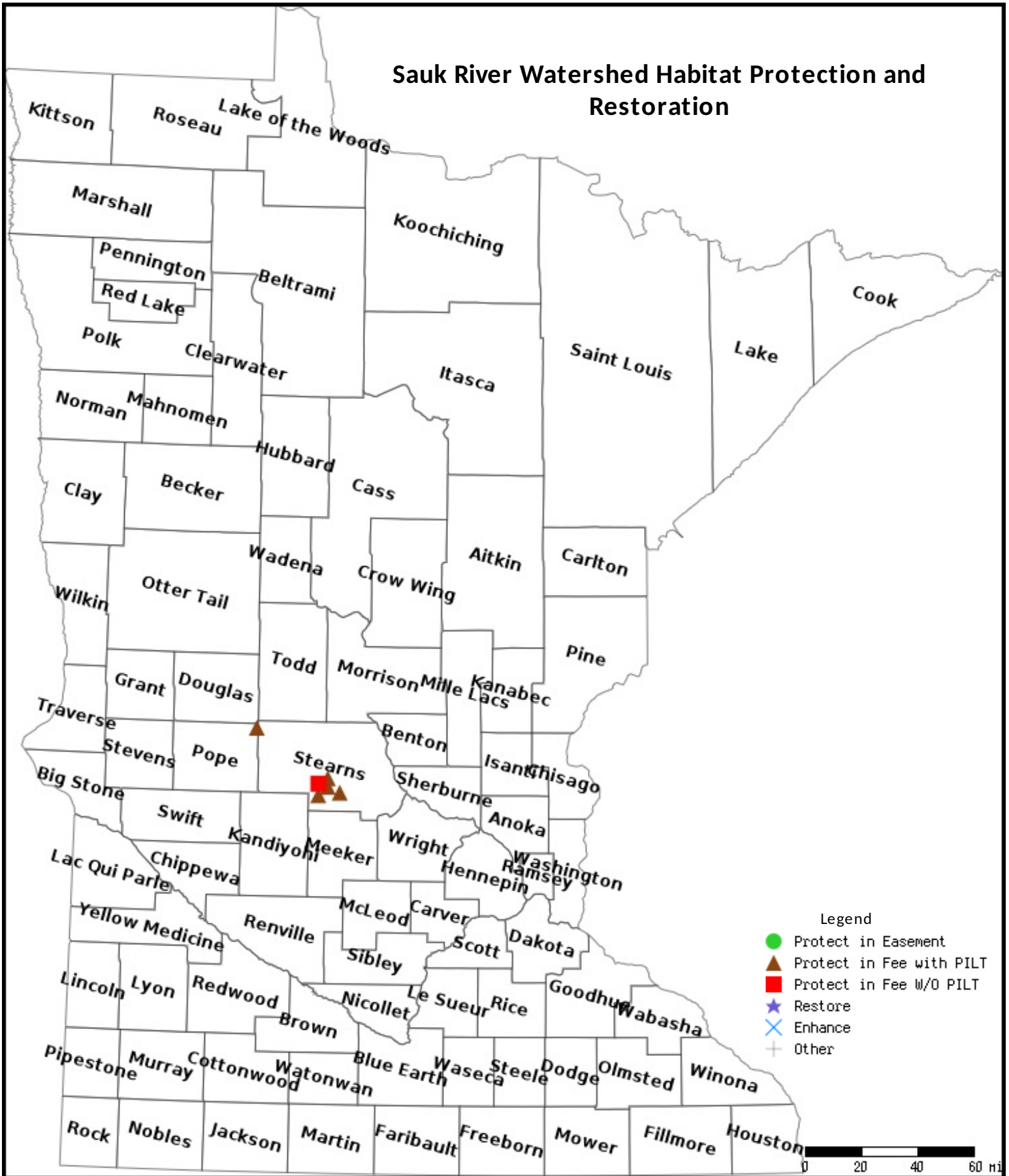
Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
TBDWMA	12331219	300	\$1,200,000	13	2 old farm sites	\$40,000	Remove

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Parcel Map

Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration



Data Generated From Parcel List

Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program

Outdoor Heritage Fund Request

\$5,434,000 to permanently protect **1,400 acres** through conservation easements and fee title acquisition, and restore & enhance **500 acres** of the most important habitat in the Sauk River Watershed.



This program will conserve vital habitat, including wetlands, upland forests, floodplains forests, and prairies within Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition ecoregions for the benefit of wildlife. Properties will be targeted using an innovative site prioritization model that maximizes conservation benefit and financial leverage.

For more information, please contact Scott Henderson, SRWD Administrator, at 320-352-2231 or scott@srwdmn.org.

Program Benefits

- Ensure long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife by permanently protecting and restoring critical habitats and increasing habitat connectivity
- Increase opportunities for fishing, hunting, and observation of a variety of wildlife species, including several SGCN
- Improve groundwater and surface water quality
- Increase citizen's knowledge of the importance of protecting critical habitat



The Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program seeks to protect, restore and enhance the critical wildlife habitat and freshwater resources within this region.

The Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD), Minnesota Land Trust (TNC) and Pheasants Forever (PF), supported by Stearns, Douglas and Todd Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Minnesota DNR, and US Fish and Wildlife Service will protect 1,400 acres and restore/enhance 500 acres of habitat within the Sauk River Watershed (SRW).

- SRWD will provide grant administration and coordinate the outreach and restoration components, with the assistance of Stearns, Douglas and Todd SWCDs.
- MLT will protect 1,200 acres using conservation easements.
- PF will protect 200 acres using fee simple acquisition and complete needed restoration on those acres.

Program Outcomes

This program will protect high quality native wetlands, forests, and prairies in the Sauk River Watershed (SRW), which provide a multitude of ecosystem services that help to maintain watershed health. A wide variety of wildlife, including migratory waterfowl and numerous Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) will benefit from this work. We will target high quality and easily restorable critical habitats to create large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat.

As side benefits, outcomes of this work will also protect water quality in the Sauk River which is a designated canoe route and a drinking water source, and enhance regional wildlife viewing and fishing. Fee title acquisition of 200 acres will create additional public land that will provide hunting and other recreational opportunities for families and youth to spend time in the outdoors.

Urgency

- The SRW lies within a rapidly growing region of the state that has experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade and is expected to increase.
- The SRW has also seen high rates of residential development that has already resulted in the loss of high quality, pristine habitat.
- 434 CRP contracts, comprising 3,122 acres, are expiring in 2018 alone. Many of these contracts do not qualify for CREP. Without this program, there is a high risk that these properties will convert back to land uses that will adversely affect habitat and water quality benefits initially gained from enrollment in CRP.



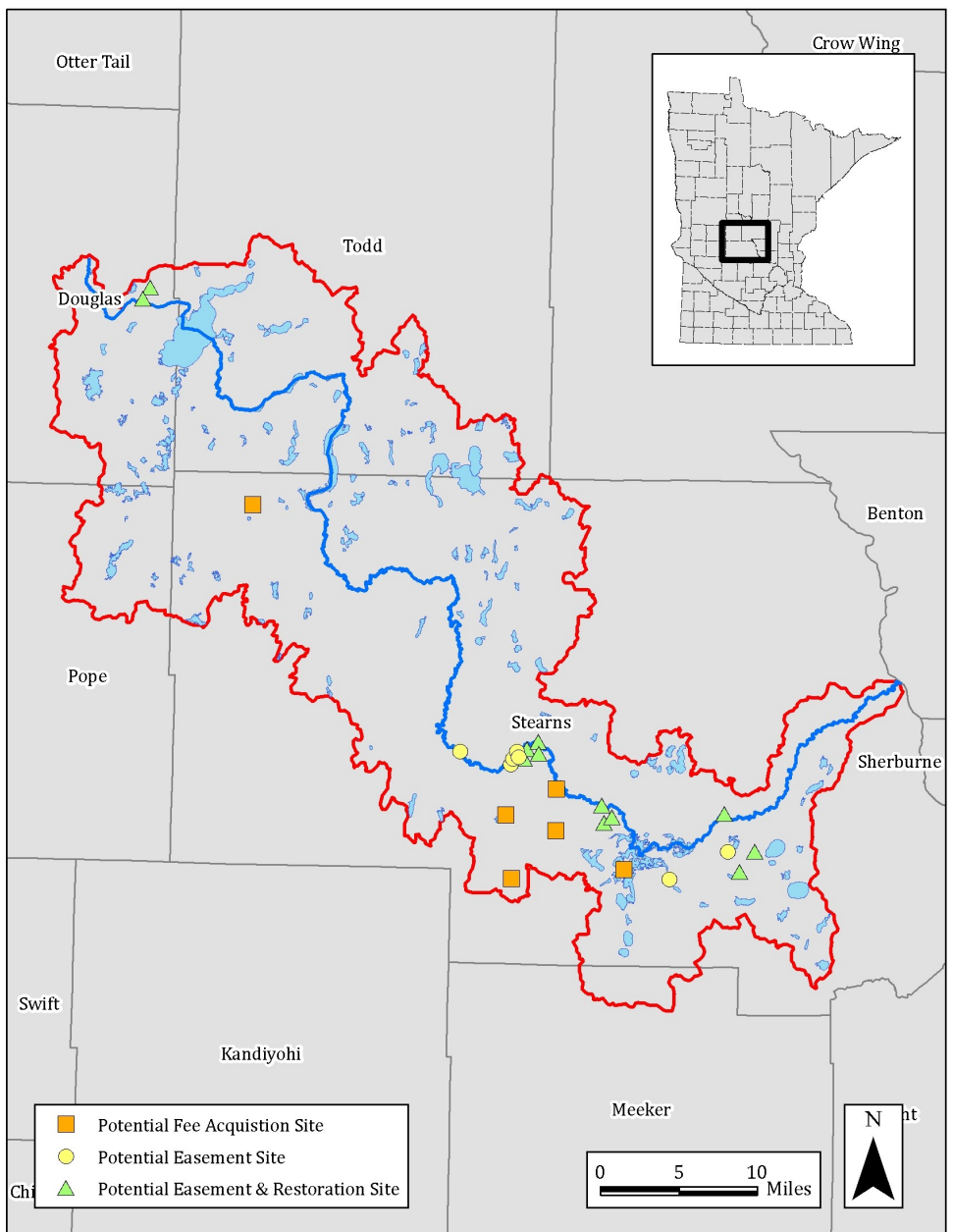
Partners Mission

"Protect, restore and enhance wildlife habitat, groundwater and surface water quality, recreational opportunities and ecosystem services of the Sauk River Watershed"



Contact us

Sauk River Watershed District
 524 Fourth Street South
 Sauk Centre, MN 56378
 Website: www.srwdmn.org
 Phone: 320.352.2231



Project Partners





MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

A Decision Support Tool for Prioritizing Conservation Easement Opportunities

The Minnesota Land Trust often employs within its conservation program areas an RFP (Request for Proposals) model to both identify high-quality projects and introduce a level of competition into the easement acquisition process. Below, we briefly discuss how the system works and the framework put in place to sort the varied opportunities that come before us.

How the Ranking System Works

The parcel ranking framework employed through the Minnesota Land Trust's RFP process is intended as a **decision support tool** to aid in identifying, among the slate of landowners submitting bids for conservation easements, the most ecologically significant opportunities for the price. Using this framework, the Land Trust and its partners use an array of weighted data sets tailored to the specific circumstances inherent in a program area to identify those worthy of consideration.

It is important to note that this parcel ranking framework enables the Land Trust to rank projects *relative* to one another. That's important to do, but it's also important to understand how a project (or suite of projects) relates to the ideal situation (i.e., a project that is of exceptional size, condition and superb landscape context). If, for example, an RFP generated 20 proposals in a program area, the framework would effectively sift among them and identify the relatively good from those relatively bad. However, this information alone would not determine whether any of those parcels were of sufficient quality to pursue for protection (all may be of insufficient quality to warrant expenditure of funds). To solve this problem and make sure ranked projects are high priorities for conservation, we step back and evaluate them relative to the ideal - i.e., is each project among the best opportunities for conservation we can expect to find in the program area?

As part of its proposals to LSOHC, the Land Trust included easement sign-up criteria that laid out at a general level the framework utilized by the organization. Below is a more detailed description of the process the Land Trust utilizes in ranking potential parcels relative to one another, and identifying those with which a conservation easement will be pursued.

The Framework

We evaluate potential projects based on two primary factors: ecological significance and cost. Both are assessed independent of one another.

Factor 1: Ecological Significance

The Ecological Significance score is determined by looking at 3 subfactors, each weighted equally (as a default). Each of these constitutes 1/3 of the total ecological significance score.

Subfactors:

- **Size or Quantity** – the area of the parcel to be protected (how big is it?), length of shoreline, etc. The bigger the better.
- **Condition or Quality** – the condition of the natural communities and/or target species found on a parcel. The higher quality the better.
- **Landscape Context** – what’s around the parcel, both ecologically and from a protected status standpoint. The more ecologically intact the surrounding landscape the better; the extent to which a parcel builds off of other protected lands to form complexes or corridors, the better.

Note that we have the ability to emphasize one subfactor over another if the specific circumstances warrant it, but we begin with a default standard at the onset. At present, all of our geographies are using the default standard.

Indicators:

A suite of weighted indicators is used to score each parcel relative to each of the above subfactors. The Sign-Up Criteria included in the proposal puts forward some general criteria that are used in this process. Include here (attached) are specific examples of the prioritization frameworks used for a three OHF-funded programs during their last RFP rounds to give a better notion of the indicators that have been used for each subfactor and the relative weighting of each.

Indicators are selected based on their ability to effectively inform the scoring of parcels relative to each of the respective subfactors. Weightings for each criterion are assessed and vetted to ensure that a set of indicators for each subfactor produces meaningful results, then applied across each of the proposed parcels. Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Note that raw scores for all indicators associated with a given subfactor often greatly exceed 100 points (maximum allowed for each subfactor). To address this, we tag the highest scoring parcel for each subfactor with the maximum 100 points and proportionately score the lesser-scoring parcels.

Data sets used for this purpose must offer wall-to-wall coverage across the program area to ensure that bias for or against parcels does not creep into the equation. Where gaps in such coverages exist, we attempt to fill them in to the extent feasible (via field inventory, etc.). Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Factor 2: Cost

Cost is a second major factor used in our consideration of parcels. Although ecological significance is *the* primary factor in determining the merits of a project, our RFP programs also strive to make the greatest conservation impact with the most efficient use of State funds. As such, we look at the overall cost of each project relative to its ecological significance; we also ask landowners to consider donating all or some of their easement value to the cause and to better position their proposals. Many landowners participate in that fashion.

Cost, as a primary factor, is assessed independently of the ecological factors. Given equal ecological significance, a project of lower cost will be elevated over those of higher cost in the ranking. That said, exceptionally high quality projects are likely to be pursued even if no or modest landowner donation is put forward. Alternatively, there are projects offered as full donations that are not moved forward because their ecological significance is not acceptable. The degree to which cost factors into the ranking of parcels relative to one another is made on a case-by-case basis.

SAUK RIVER WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet – Scoring and Criteria

Three primary factors when taken together provide a good estimate of long-term viability for biodiversity: 1) **Size** of the occurrence (species population or example of natural community), 2) **Condition** of the occurrence, and 3) its **Landscape context**. This framework is used widely across the world by a large number of conservation organizations and agencies and here in Minnesota by the Minnesota DNR, The Nature Conservancy and others. The Minnesota Land Trust has adopted this practice as well.

In this summary document, we provide an overview of the framework used by the Land Trust in assessing and prioritizing land protection opportunities before the organization.

- 1. Habitat Size (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on acres of habitat to be protected through the easement relative to the largest parcels available for protection in the program area. Although size can pertain to species populations, the size of such populations is often constrained by available habitat. In addition, very little information pertaining to the size of species populations on a given property typically exists, making any determination suspect. Habitat size is a valid indicator in these circumstances.

Scoring: Parcels are scored by how they fall relative to twelve size classes of habitat:

0 pt	≤40 acres
3 pts	41-50 acres
6 pts	51-75 acres
9 pts	76-108 acres
12 pts	109-152 acres
15 pts	153-224 acres
18 pts	225-320 acres
21 pts	321-460 acres
24 pts	461-660 acres
27 pts	661-960 acres
30 pts	961-1300 acres
33 pts	>1300 acres

- 2. Quality of Natural Resources (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on the quality or condition of occurrences of ecological communities (habitat) and imperiled species if known. As with Habitat Size above, population data for imperiled species is often minimal on private lands. As such, the condition of score is heavily influenced by the condition of natural communities on a property. However, we do allocate a modest level of points to the presence of imperiled species if they have been documented on a property.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based on the condition of focal ecological community targets – both terrestrial and freshwater – and presence of imperiled species on the property, as such:

- a) Habitat Quality (28 points) –** The Minnesota Biological Survey natural community element occurrence ranking framework (for terrestrial systems) and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency fish and insect indices of biotic integrity are used to score habitat quality on parcels, as such:

- 0 pts Absence of natural communities; fish/insect IBI = 0-10.
- 4 pts Natural communities averaging D rank; fish/insect IBI = 10-20.
- 8 pts Natural communities averaging CD rank; fish/insect IBI = 20-40.
- 12 pts Natural communities averaging C rank; fish/insect IBI = 50-59.
- 16 pts Natural communities averaging BC rank; fish/insect IBI = 60-69.
- 20 pts Natural communities averaging B rank; fish/insect IBI = 70-79.
- 24 pts Natural communities averaging AB rank; IBI = 80-89.
- 28 pts Natural communities averaging A rank; IBI > 90.

b) Imperiled Species (5 points) – Scoring of the parcel is based on species abundance, as follows:

- 1 pt 1 occurrence
- 2 pts 2 occurrences
- 3 pts 3 occurrences
- 5 pts 4 or more occurrences

3. Landscape Context (34 points): Parcels are scored based current ecological context of the property and protected lands surrounding it; in addition, points are also allocated based on the likelihood that lands around a parcel will be protected going forward based on the identification of these adjacent lands in respective conservation lands.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based as follows:

a) Protection Context (15 points) – Is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous protected land (if any) and amount of protected land within 3 miles of the property. Here, we look at two subfactors:

i) Amount of protected land (acres) contiguous with the parcel. Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of protected land contiguous to the parcel (8 points), as follows:

- 1 pt ≤40 acres of contiguous protected lands
- 2 pts 41-60 acres
- 3 pts 61-100 acres
- 4 pts 101-160 acres
- 5 pts 161-240 acres
- 6 pts 241-400 acres
- 7 pts 401-640 acres
- 8 pts >640 acres

ii) Amount of protected lands within a 3-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby but not contiguous can also play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight protected lands within ½ mile of the parcel higher than those farther removed, and score them separately.

(a) Amount (acres) of protected land within ½ mile of protected property (4 points) – The amount of protected land within ½ mile of the parcel, scored as follows:

- 1 pt ≤80 acres of protected land

- 2 pts 81-360 acres
- 3 pts 361-640 acres
- 4 pts >640 acres

Amount (acres) of protected land ½-3 miles of the protected property (3 points) –

- 1 pt ≤640 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 641-2560 acres
- 3 pts >2561 acres

b) Ecological Context (15 points) – As with Protection context, ecological context is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous ecological habitat (if any) and amount of ecological habitat within 3 miles of the property.

i) Amount of ecological habitat (acres) contiguous with the parcel, providing species with direct access to larger blocks of permanent habitat (8 points). Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of natural ecological habitat contiguous to the parcel, as follows:

- 1 pt ≤80 acres of contiguous ecological habitat
- 2 pts 81-320 acres
- 3 pts 321-640 acres
- 4 pts 641-960 acres
- 5 pts 961-1920 acres
- 6 pts 1921-3840 acres
- 7 pts 3841-7680 acres
- 8 pts >7680 acres

ii) Amount of protected lands within a 3-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby, whether contiguous or not play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight ecological habitat within ½ mile of the parcel higher than that farther removed, and score them separately.

Amount (acres) of protected land within ½ mile of protected property (4 points) – The amount of protected land within ½ mile of the parcel, scored as follows:

- 1 pt ≤80 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 81-360 acres
- 3 pts 361-640 acres
- 4 pts >640 acres

Amount (acres) of protected land ½-3 miles of the protected property (3 points) –

- 1 pt ≤640 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 641-2560 acres
- 3 pts >2561 acres

c) Future Potential (4 points) – The degree to which the area within which a parcel lies has been identified as a priority for conservation action and the degree to which action is being

implemented in that area is a direct indicator of the long-term potential for maintenance of biodiversity associated with a parcel. Lands affiliated with priority areas are more likely to be complemented with additional levels of nearby protected lands than those outside of priority areas. In areas experiencing high levels of development, this factor may carry a significant amount of weight in setting protection priorities.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based on two subfactors: 1) their position relative to priority areas identified in statewide or local planning efforts, and 2) the degree to which action is being implemented within a priority area.

- 0 pts Parcel not within priority area
- 1 pt Parcel within priority area; minimal activity occurring
- 2 pts Parcel within priority area; modest activity occurring
- 3 pts Parcel within priority area; good levels of activity occurring
- 4 pts Parcel within priority area; high levels of activity occurring

SAUK RIVER WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet		SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3	SITE 4	SITE 5	SITE 6	SITE 7	SITE 8	SITE 9	SITE 10	SITE 11	SITE 12	Notes
COUNTY														
100 Pts	ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE													
Weighting Factor	Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)													
33	a) Size: Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)													
28	a) Habitat Quality: Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)													
5	b) Imperiled Species: Occurrence of Documented Rare Feature on Parcel													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Landscape Context (34 points)													
	Current Status (30 points)													
	a) Protection Context (15 points)													
8	i. Size of Contiguous Protected Lands													
7	ii. Amount of Protected Lands within 3 miles of Property													
	: Protected Land within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
	: Protected Land 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
	b) Ecological Context (15 points)													
8	i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat													
7	ii. Amount of Ecological Habitat within 3 miles of Property													
	: Ecological Habitat within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
	: Ecological Habitat 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
	Future Potential (4 points)													
2	a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)													
2	b) Amount of Existing Activity (2 pts)													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
COST														
	i. Bid amount (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	ii. Estimated donative value (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	TOTAL ACQUISITION COST (\$)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

KEY	
	Priority
	Possible
	Out



**DOUGLAS SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

900 Robert Street
Suite 102
Alexandria, Minnesota 56308
Telephone (320) 763-3191

**MINNESOTA
SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

May 30, 2018

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Scott Henderson
524 4th St S,
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2020/ML 2019 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration

Dear Mr. Henderson,

Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District offers our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal is to protect and restore lands targeted within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect and restore are vital habitat for countless species. This program will also benefit the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and is great for fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor recreation. In addition to this proposal benefiting habitat and recreational areas, it will also benefit drinking water quality in our community.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland and forest loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife and maintaining the recreational opportunities in our community.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife and the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,



Jerry Haggemiller
District Coordinator



United States Department of the Interior
Fish & Wildlife Service
434 Great Oak Drive
Waite Park, MN 56387



In Reply Refer to:
FWS/PL

May 31, 2018

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Scott Henderson
524 4th St S,
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2020/ML 2019 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration

Dear Mr. Henderson,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Private Lands Program in Minnesota offers our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal is to protect and restore lands targeted within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect and restore are vital habitat for several species. Additionally, this program will benefit the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and is great for fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor recreation. In addition to this proposal benefiting habitat and recreational areas, it will also benefit drinking water. Smaller communities in the Sauk River watershed depend on the groundwater for drinking water and the Sauk River flows to the Mississippi River and contributes to the drinking water for the City of St. Cloud and the Twin Cities metro area further downstream.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife and maintaining the recreational opportunities in our community.

The Service is in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife and the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Sheldon Myerchin
Minnesota State Coordinator
USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program

May 31, 2018

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Scott Henderson
524 4th St S,
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2020/ML 2019 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration

Dear Mr. Henderson,

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, we would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's proposal. This proposal is to protect and restore lands targeted within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The Sauk River watershed is one of our highest priority watersheds in Minnesota. The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect and restore provide vital habitat to numerous species. The program will also benefit the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and is great for fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor recreation. In addition to this proposal benefiting habitat and recreation, it will also benefit water quality.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife and for maintaining the recreational opportunities within the Sauk River watershed.

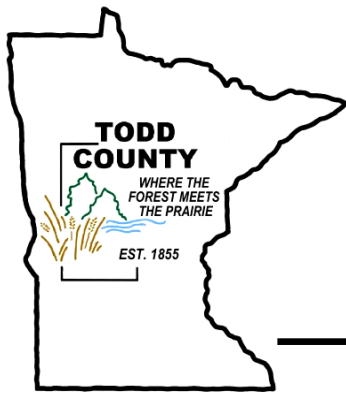
The Nature Conservancy, through our Minnesota Headwaters Fund, is pleased to be a partner contributing financial and technical support. We recognize the importance of this program for protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition and restoration.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Biske
Freshwater Conservation Program Director
Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota



Planning & Zoning

215 1st Avenue South, Suite 103
Long Prairie, MN 56347
Phone: 320-732-4420 Fax: 320-732-4803

May 29, 2018

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Scott Henderson
524 4th St S,
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2020/ML 2019 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration

Dear Mr. Henderson,

Todd Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) offers our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal is to protect and restore lands targeted within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

There is much opportunity and interest in establishing an easement program along the Sauk River. The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland and forest loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife and maintaining the recreational opportunities in our community.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration will improve ecosystem services along the important Sauk River corridor and benefit wildlife and the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Tim Stieber
Division Director
Planning & Zoning
tim.stieber@co.todd.mn.us
320.732.4325