

# Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

## Fiscal Year 2021 / ML 2020 Request for Funding



**Date:** May 30, 2019

**Program or Project Title:** Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase 8

**Funds Requested:** \$12,539,300

**Manager's Name:** Richard Biske

**Title:** Freshwater Conservation Program Director

**Organization:** The Nature Conservancy

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**County Locations:** Dodge, Fillmore, Houston, Wabasha, and Winona.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

- Southeast Forest

**Activity types:**

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

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

- Forest
- Prairie
- Habitat

### Abstract:

This project will protect approximately 3,610 acres using conservation easement and fee land acquisition and restore and enhance approximately 670 acres of declining habitat for important wildlife species. Actions will occur in strategically targeted areas of biodiversity significance within the Blufflands of Southeast Minnesota, resulting in increased public access and improved wildlife habitat.

### Design and scope of work:

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) and The Trust for Public Land (TPL), in partnership, will use Outdoor Heritage Funds to invest in habitat protection and restoration within the Blufflands of Southeast Minnesota. We will expand and connect larger contiguous blocks of protected lands, allowing land managers to restore, enhance and maintain high-quality habitats at a scale difficult to accomplish with fragmented ownership. Benefits of this program include the increased effectiveness of frequent prescribed fire necessary to reclaim "goat prairies" and oak savanna, and regenerate oak hardwood forests at a larger scale. Protecting and managing these lands is not only important for ecological reasons, but also benefits public use and enjoyment of these lands and the resources they provide. This proposal will enhance prior conservation investments and ensure that the legacy of the Blufflands is preserved in a high quality condition for future generations.

There are 86 different native plant community types mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS), covering nearly 149,670 acres within the project area. There are 183 species of state listed rare plants and animals, many of which are concentrated on 749 sites of biodiversity significance. This program has a proven track record of protecting, restoring and enhancing lands that meet both state and local priorities for biodiversity, land access and watershed health.

In addition, despite the area's high demand for outdoor recreation and having more Species in Greatest Conservation Need than anywhere else in the state, only 5% of the region is open to the public.

#### Conservation Easements:

MLT will acquire approximately 1,825 acres of conservation easements and develop restoration and habitat management plans for eased lands. MLT will identify potential projects within targeted priority areas through a RFP process coupled with local outreach via SWCD offices. This competitive landowner bid process will rank projects based on ecological value and cost, prioritizing the best projects and securing them at the lowest cost to the state.

#### Fee Acquisition:

TNC and TPL will coordinate with MN DNR on all potential fee-title acquisitions. TNC and TPL will assist the participating DNR Divisions by conducting all or some of the following activities: initial site reviews, negotiations with the willing seller, appraisals, environmental reviews and acquisition of fee title. TNC and TPL will transfer lands to the DNR except when TNC ownership is appropriate. Fee acquisition of approximately 1,215 acres of forest and 570 acres of prairie along 1.5 miles of coldwater trout stream is planned.

#### Restoration and Enhancement:

TNC will restore/enhance approximately 470 acres of bluff prairie, floodplain, riparian habitat and forest. MLT will restore and enhance 200 acres of habitat on existing and new easements. Ecological restoration enhancement management plans will be developed in coordination with the appropriate DNR staff, landowners and/or hired subcontractors.

#### Results to date:

Conservation Easements: 2,435 acres

Fee Land Acquisition: 4,275 acres

27 miles of stream protected

Restoration and Enhancement: 983 acres

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation

### Which other plans are addressed in this proposal:

- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

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

#### OHF 25 Year Framework

Indicator 1: Protect forest habitat through acquisition in fee or easement to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties. 4,275 acres opened to public hunting, fishing and recreation to date, improving access and management.

Indicator 2: Protect, enhance and restore habitat for wildlife in rivers, cold water streams and associated upland habitat. 27 miles of coldwater trout streams protected, 12.5 opened to fishing.

Restoration and enhancement from bluff to stream on 983 acres.

Indicator 3: Protect and restore bluff prairies. 460 acres protected/enhanced.

Indicator 4: Restore forest based habitat that has experienced substantial decline in area in recent decades. over 500 acres of forest restored or enhanced.

#### Wildlife Action Plan

Indicator 1: Stabilize and increase SGCN populations on: oak savanna, native prairie, cliffs and bluffs and stream habitats. 357 acres of bluff prairies enhanced.

### Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal:

#### Southeast Forest:

- Protect forest habitat through acquisition in fee or easement to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties

### 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:

Over 7 square miles (4,275 acres) have been opened for public hunting and fishing and allowing increased management within habitat complexes. This program has protected habitat for 71 different Species in Greatest Conservation Need, including 5 classified as endangered and 17 considered threatened. The importance of habitat protection in Southeast Minnesota was highlighted recently by new research from TNC scientists. They identified the Blufflands as a resilient landscape that gives native species the greatest opportunity to adapt to a changing climate. Investing in the protection, restoration, and enhancement of resilient landscapes like the blufflands will have a bigger impact on future wildlife, as these areas are expected to remain viable habitat for more of our native species as climate change shifts their historic ranges.

## 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:

Southeast MN benefits from a wealth of conservation planning and biological indices and analyses. Our partnership uses existing plans, like the watershed-based Landscape Stewardship Plans and DNR's Wildlife Action Network to identify priority areas to focus our efforts and resources. Individual projects are assessed based on their significance to biodiversity (according to data from the MN Biological Survey), along with several other important criteria such as:

- location within a priority area
- health and extent of existing natural communities
- areas of significant biodiversity and native plant communities
- proximity to existing conservation lands
- parcel size
- importance for stream quality
- risk of conversion

## 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:

Most of the projects selected for this proposal are located in complexes of biodiversity significance, as identified by MBS. Many are also in close proximity to current state land. Buidling and expanding contiguous blocks of habitat protects habitat continuity in a fragmented landscape.

Sedimentation and erosion are major threats to fish in the region. Protecting and enhancing upland natural communities, especially on the steep bluffs that flank most trout streams, will help prevent additional erosion. Aquatic habitat also benefits from protection of trout stream banks and floodplains. The water quality benefit that comes with the protection of forested upland areas is significant and contributes to improved trout and non-game fish and mussel habitat.

Proposed projects contain 100 occurrences of Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) identified by the Natural Heritage Inventory, including 57 different species/communities/assemblages. Completed projects include a total of 158 occurrences representing 71 different species/communities/assemblages. Specific habitats include bluff prairie, oak savanna, barrens prairie, oak-hickory woodland, jack pine-oak woodland, white pine - oak/maple forest and maple basswood hardwood forest. These habitats support species including: tri-colored and northern long-eared bats, timber rattlesnake, Blanding's turtle, western foxsnake, North American racer, American ginseng, great Indian plantain, plains wild indigo and red-shouldered hawk.

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

Natural populations, including healthy populations with good habitat, vary among locations, and also rise and fall within lakes and rivers. Most fish surveys conducted by DNR produce an index of abundance (catch per unit effort) rather than a population estimate. This project is estimated to benefit 2,500 pounds of brook trout and 3,250 pounds of brown trout. The program also benefits many other species unique to Southeast Minnesota and other species including rusty patch bumblebee, monarch butterfly, timber rattlesnake, bull snake, Blanding's turtle, Louisiana water thrush, wild turkey and whitetail deer.

## Outcomes:

### Programs in southeast forest region:

- Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat typical of the unglaciated region are restored and protected We will track the acres of priority parcels protected within the Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA) identified as priorities in regional planning. Success within each COA 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:

Tracts acquired will be transferred to the state for ongoing management except when TNC ownership is appropriate. Acquisition

projects will be near or adjacent to existing protected lands, including state-owned lands and lands under conservation easement, allowing for the expansion of management activities that are already taking place. Habitats cleared of invasive species will be maintained with prescribed fire and other practices depending on funding. Protection and restoration projects will improve future prescribed fire and maintenance activities through economies of scale. The tracts protected and enhanced as part of this proposal also meet the prioritization for Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan. MN DNR has been successful in securing federal habitat enhancement funding.

Land protected through conservation easements will be sustained by MLT through a 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 includes annual property monitoring and defending the easements as necessary. 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.

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

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Every 4-6 years	US Fish and Wildlife Service	prescribed fire		
Every 4-6 years	Game and Fish Fund	prescribed fire		
2022 and perpetually	MLT Easement Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	

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

Habitat fragmentation continues to plague the region, caused by the continued growth from Rochester and demand for rural residential housing and demand for cropland. This program and partner success has generated several large protection and restoration projects that are increasingly rare to the region due to subdivision. When larger landholdings come available, it's crucial to move fast to protect them before they're split up. Protecting large parcels while expanding existing protected areas helps improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ecological management and ensures the long-term viability of the ecosystem.

**Does this program include leverage in funds:**

Yes

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) State Wildlife Grant funds are used by TNC to enhance oak savanna and bluff prairie on private lands within priority complexes where this project operates. TNC will use US Forest Service funds to work with private landowners adjacent to public ownership to conduct prescribed fire across ownership boundaries, increasing the scale and efficiency of management.

The Minnesota Land Trust encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements as part of its landowner bid protocol. An estimated leverage of \$360,000 of donated value from landowners from easement acquisition is a conservative estimate.

Partners are also leveraging private funds to cover a portion of travel and direct support services cost totaling \$291,700.

**Relationship to other funds:**

- Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund
- Clean Water Fund

**Describe the relationship of the funds:**

This project implements priority activities identified in watershed protection plans developed with support from the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund and Clean Water Fund.

**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:**

This proposal does not substitute or supplant previous funding that was not from a Legacy fund.

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

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
2013	The Nature Conservancy	\$67,661
2014	The Nature Conservancy	\$2,173,459
2015	The Nature Conservancy	\$14,200
2016	The Trust for Public Land	\$250,000
2016	The Nature Conservancy	\$18,110
2017	The Nature Conservancy	\$1,716

## 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, per 97A.056 subd 13(j) - **No**

We will follow the county/township board notification processes as directed by current statutory language.

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

A proposed fee land acquisition project has a trout stream angling access easement on it that was considered in the appraisal. One large fee land acquisition project has a RIM easement on a portion of it that was considered in the appraisal. We will follow guidance established by the Outdoor Heritage Fund to proceed.

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

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, SNA, AMA, Permanently Protected Conservation Easements County/Municipal, Public Waters, State Forests, OHF Acquired TNC Preserve)**

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

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

MLT - The purpose of the Minnesota Land Trust'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 in which 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.

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

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

None

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 - **No**

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

## Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Purchase agreements or options on acquisition of fee land	June 30, 2023
Purchase agreements or options on conservation easements	June 30, 2023
Acquisition of fee land	June 30, 2024
Stream corridor and floodplain restoration	June 30, 2025
Bluff prairie and oak savanna enhancement	June 30, 2026
Easement acquisition	June 30, 2024

# Budget Spreadsheet

**Total Amount of Request: \$12,539,300**

## Budget and Cash Leverage

BudgetName	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$888,500	\$0		\$888,500
Contracts	\$1,431,000	\$0		\$1,431,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$6,850,000	\$0		\$6,850,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$1,800,000	\$360,000	Landowners	\$2,160,000
Easement Stewardship	\$432,000	\$0		\$432,000
Travel	\$39,000	\$2,500	Private	\$41,500
Professional Services	\$664,000	\$0		\$664,000
Direct Support Services	\$226,800	\$235,500	Private,Private	\$462,300
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$70,000	\$0		\$70,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$15,000	\$0		\$15,000
Supplies/Materials	\$3,000	\$0		\$3,000
DNR IDP	\$120,000	\$0		\$120,000
Total	\$12,539,300	\$598,000	-	\$13,137,300

## Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
TPL Protection and Legal Staff	0.30	3.00	\$147,500	\$0		\$147,500
TNC Project Management, Protection and Grants Admin	1.32	3.00	\$392,000	\$0		\$392,000
MLT Protection Staff	0.75	3.00	\$214,000	\$0		\$214,000
MLT Restoration Staff	0.50	3.00	\$135,000	\$0		\$135,000
Total	2.87	12.00	\$888,500	\$0	-	\$888,500

## Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Trust for Public Land	\$147,500	\$0		\$147,500
Contracts	Trust for Public Land	\$300,000	\$0		\$300,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Trust for Public Land	\$3,100,000	\$0		\$3,100,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Trust for Public Land	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Trust for Public Land	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	Trust for Public Land	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	Trust for Public Land	\$0	\$2,500	Private	\$2,500
Professional Services	Trust for Public Land	\$130,000	\$0		\$130,000
Direct Support Services	Trust for Public Land	\$49,800	\$49,800	Private	\$99,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Trust for Public Land	\$40,000	\$0		\$40,000
Capital Equipment	Trust for Public Land	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Trust for Public Land	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	Trust for Public Land	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Trust for Public Land	\$90,000	\$0		\$90,000
Total	-	\$3,857,300	\$52,300	-	\$3,909,600

## Personnel - Trust for Public Land

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
TPL Protection and Legal Staff	0.30	3.00	\$147,500	\$0		\$147,500
Total	0.30	3.00	\$147,500	\$0	-	\$147,500

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	The Nature Conservancy	\$392,000	\$0		\$392,000
Contracts	The Nature Conservancy	\$553,000	\$0		\$553,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	The Nature Conservancy	\$3,750,000	\$0		\$3,750,000

Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	The Nature Conservancy	\$7,000	\$0		\$7,000
Professional Services	The Nature Conservancy	\$150,000	\$0		\$150,000
Direct Support Services	The Nature Conservancy	\$82,700	\$185,700	Private	\$268,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	The Nature Conservancy	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Capital Equipment	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	The Nature Conservancy	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	The Nature Conservancy	\$1,000	\$0		\$1,000
DNR IDP	The Nature Conservancy	\$30,000	\$0		\$30,000
Total	-	\$4,995,700	\$185,700	-	\$5,181,400

### Personnel - The Nature Conservancy

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
TNC Project Management, Protection and Grants Admin	1.32	3.00	\$392,000	\$0		\$392,000
Total	1.32	3.00	\$392,000	\$0	-	\$392,000

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$349,000	\$0		\$349,000
Contracts	Minnesota Land Trust	\$578,000	\$0		\$578,000
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	\$1,800,000	\$360,000	Landowners	\$2,160,000
Easement Stewardship	Minnesota Land Trust	\$432,000	\$0		\$432,000
Travel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$32,000	\$0		\$32,000
Professional Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$384,000	\$0		\$384,000
Direct Support Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$94,300	\$0		\$94,300
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Minnesota Land Trust	\$15,000	\$0		\$15,000
Supplies/Materials	Minnesota Land Trust	\$2,000	\$0		\$2,000
DNR IDP	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	-	\$3,686,300	\$360,000	-	\$4,046,300

### Personnel - Minnesota Land Trust

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.75	3.00	\$214,000	\$0		\$214,000
MLT Restoration Staff	0.50	3.00	\$135,000	\$0		\$135,000
Total	1.25	6.00	\$349,000	\$0	-	\$349,000

Amount of Request: \$12,539,300

Amount of Leverage: \$598,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 4.77%

DSS + Personnel: \$1,115,300

As a % of the total request: 8.89%

Easement Stewardship: \$432,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 24.00%

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

TNC: DSS is based on The Nature Conservancy's Federally Negotiated Rate (FNR) as proposed and subsequently approved by the US Dept. of Interior on an annual basis. In this proposal we are requesting reimbursement of 7.5% of eligible base costs as determined by our annual FNR and based on suggestions from the Council in last year's hearings. The un-recovered portion of the approved rates



through the life of the grant is offered as leverage.

MLT: 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 the direct support services.

TPL: The Trust for Public Land's DSS request is based upon our federally approved indirect rate, which has been approved by the DNR. 50% of these costs are requested from the grant and 50% is contributed as leverage.

**What is included in the contracts line?**

TNC and TPL contract line item are dedicated to enhancement and restoration work. Typical contractors include private vendors and Conservation Corps of MN/IA.

MLT will use the contract budget item for three distinct purposes: to complete habitat management plans on the new easement acquisitions; for restoration plans and projects on existing easements; and for partnering with SWCD's on outreach for easement acquisition.

**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:**

Vehicle rental is also included.

**Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:**

TNC and TPL will leverage privately sourced funds to cover direct support services (DSS) costs not reimbursed.

TPL has leveraged private funds for travel.

The Land Trust encourages landowners to donate value as a participant in the program. This leverage (\$360,000) is a conservative estimate of expected landowner value.

**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:**

Partially scalable- full funding allows larger projects to be completed. Personnel costs are associated with projects. Larger protection, enhancement and restoration projects, despite higher acquisition, easement or contract costs, allow for greater efficiency in personnel and administrative costs.

**What is the cost per easement for stewardship and explain how that amount is calculated?**

The average cost per easement to perpetually fund the Minnesota Land Trust's long-term monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$24,000. This figure has been determined by using a detailed stewardship funding calculator or "cost analysis" which is the industry standard according to the Land Trust Accreditation process. This cost analysis examines seventeen different categories of future annual expenditures related to the management of the easement and then calculates what the Land Trust needs in one-time funding to cover these various expenditures in perpetuity. In addition, the Land Trust seeks private contributions whenever possible to further leverage these state funds. The Minnesota Land Trust reviews and updates this cost-analysis periodically to ensure that the organization will have the capacity to fulfill its ongoing obligations. This cost-analysis is on file with the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council staff and the Land Trust shares a new version with the Council whenever updates are made.

## Output Tables

**Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type**

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	200	200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	570	1,215	0	1,785
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	1,825	1,825
Enhance	0	0	470	0	470
Total	0	570	1,685	2,025	4,280

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

Type	Native Prairie
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	40
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	0
Total	40

**Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type**

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$150,000	\$92,000	\$658,500	\$900,500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$2,873,600	\$5,134,400	\$0	\$8,008,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,027,800	\$3,027,800
Enhance	\$0	\$125,000	\$478,000	\$0	\$603,000
Total	\$0	\$3,148,600	\$5,704,400	\$3,686,300	\$12,539,300

**Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	200	0	0	200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	1,785	0	0	1,785
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	1,825	0	0	1,825
Enhance	0	0	470	0	0	470
Total	0	0	4,280	0	0	4,280

**Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$900,500	\$0	\$0	\$900,500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$8,008,000	\$0	\$0	\$8,008,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$3,027,800	\$0	\$0	\$3,027,800
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$603,000	\$0	\$0	\$603,000
Total	\$0	\$0	\$12,539,300	\$0	\$0	\$12,539,300

**Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type**

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,293
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$5,041	\$4,226	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,659
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$1,017	\$0

**Table 6. Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$4,503	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$4,486	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$1,659	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$1,283	\$0	\$0

*Automatic system calculation / not entered by managers*

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

1.5

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

#### Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Brightsdale State Forest Unit	10309206	25	\$25,000	Yes
Chosen Valley WMA	10412206	10	\$4,000	Yes
Gribben Creek State Forest Unit	10309228	30	\$36,000	Yes
William Pease WMA	10411207	25	\$10,000	Yes

#### Houston

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Chisholm Valley WMA	10307204	35	\$14,000	Yes
Ferndale Ridge WMA	10407232	300	\$120,000	Yes

#### Winona

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Whitewater Prairie 2	10810211	27	\$67,500	Yes
Whitewater Savanna	10810211	65	\$162,500	Yes
Whitewater Savanna 2	10810235	100	\$30,000	Yes
Whitewater WMA	10810202	60	\$180,000	Yes

### Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

#### Dodge

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Middle Fork Zumbro River SNA	10817224	175	\$787,500	No	Full	Full
Middle Fork Zumbro River SNA	10817224	175	\$787,500	No	Full	Full

#### Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Choice	10308211	102	\$102,000	No	Full	Full
Choice WMA 6	10208212	120	\$420,000	No	Full	Full
Choice WMA North 3	10208203	120	\$480,000	No	Full	Full
Choice WMA North 5	10308234	80	\$400,000	No	Full	Full
Deer Creek SNA I	10313212	236	\$705,000	No	Full	Full
Deer Creek SNA II	10313213	159	\$506,000	No	Full	Full
Forestville 2	10212222	130	\$455,000	No	Full	Full
Rushford SB 2	10408222	160	\$500,000	No	Full	Full

#### Houston

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Money Creek South	10406206	100	\$100,000	No	Full	Full
Money Creek South	10406206	100	\$300,000	No	Full	Full
Wet Bark 3	10306230	325	\$1,137,500	No	Full	Full

## Wabasha

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
McCarthy Lake	10909206	138	\$135,000	No	Full	Full
McCarthy Lake 2	10909207	100	\$450,000	No	Full	Full
Watopa Forest	10910210	320	\$1,320,000	No	Full	Full
Weaver Dunes	10909206	231	\$250,000	No	Full	Full
Whitewater WMA Main	10909230	50	\$252,000	No	Full	Full
Whitewater WMA Main II	10909232	210	\$486,000	No	Full	Full

## Winona

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Whitewater WMA Main III	10710209	54	\$277,900	No	Full	Full
Whitewater WMA North I	10710207	41	\$259,000	No	Full	Full
Whitewater WMA North II	10710208	86	\$624,900	No	Full	Full
Whitewater WMA South	10709231	430	\$2,300,000	No	Full	Full
Whitewater WMA South II	10710226	543	\$1,884,000	No	Full	Full

## Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

### Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Choice WMA 7	10208202	570	\$2,000,000	2	Farm buildings and grain sheds	\$	Remove
Rush Creek	10408202	240	\$825,000	1	shed	\$0	Remove

### Winona

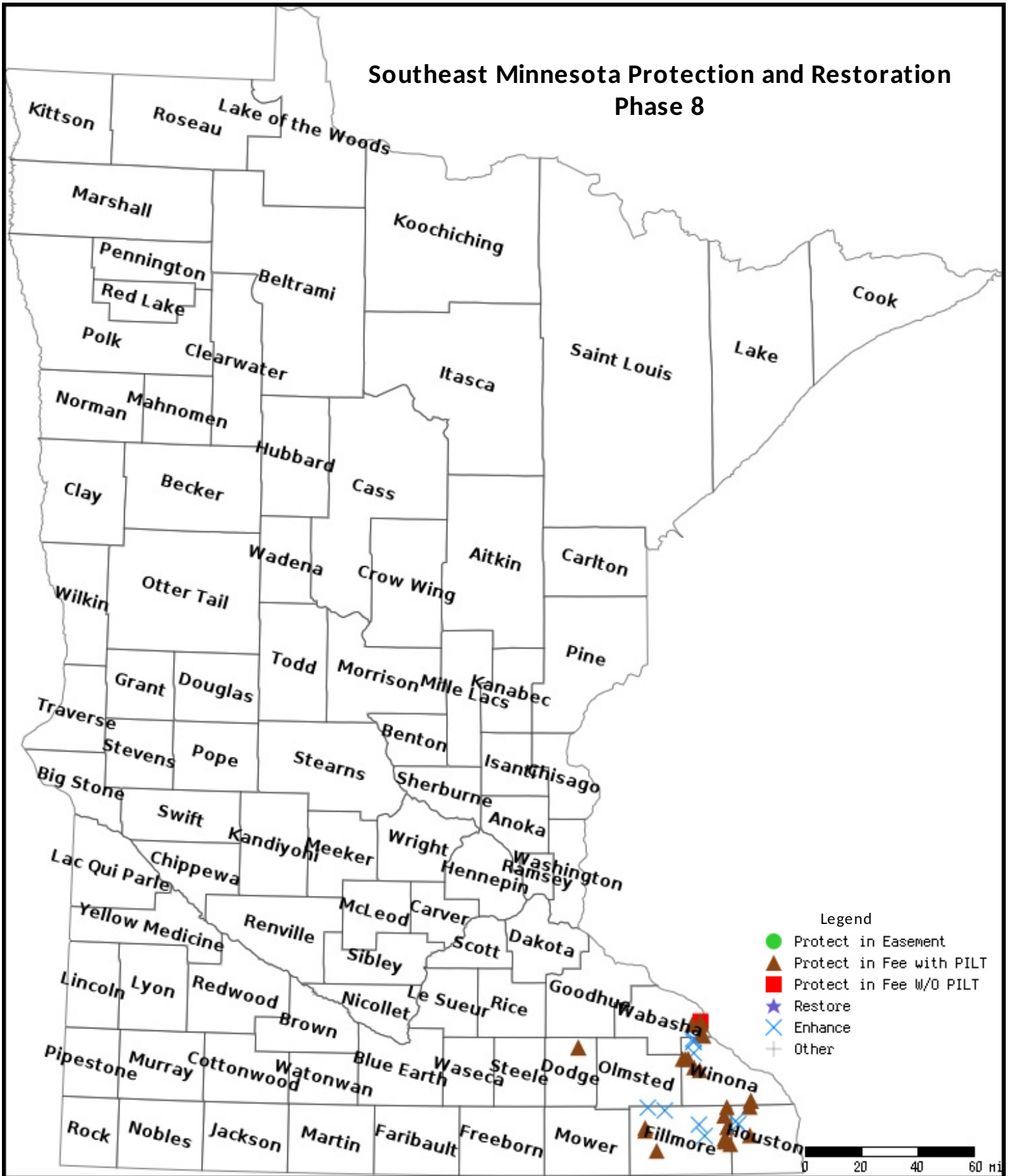
Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Money Creek	10506230	850	\$2,500,000	1	shed	\$0	Remove
Money Creek	10506230	850	\$2,500,000	1	shed	\$0	Remove

## Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

# Parcel Map

## Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase 8



Data Generated From Parcel List



# Southeast Minnesota Protection & Restoration Phase 8

## The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, and Minnesota Land Trust are requesting \$12,593,000 for the Southeast Minnesota Protection & Restoration Program.

The Blufflands Region of Southeast Minnesota contains some of the highest quality, most diverse and least protected wildlife habitat in Minnesota. This project will invest in targeted land protection through fee simple and conservation easement acquisitions and the restoration of important habitat types. Projects will be prioritized to develop significant complexes of protected habitats essential for game and non-game species. All fee simple acquisitions will be open to public hunting and fishing, thereby improving access in this area largely in private ownership. This project aims to protect 3% of the remaining areas of High or Outstanding Biodiversity in the region as recognized by the MN Biological survey.

### Protection

This program will accomplish habitat protection at a meaningful scale to limit fragmentation and improve large landscape management for Species in Greatest Conservation Need. Over 3,000 acres of easement and fee land protection will focus on projects of High or Outstanding Biodiversity Significance, especially those adjacent to existing conservation lands. The 1,785 acres of fee



land acquisition will be added to Wildlife Management Areas, State Forests, and Scientific and Natural Areas.

### Restoration

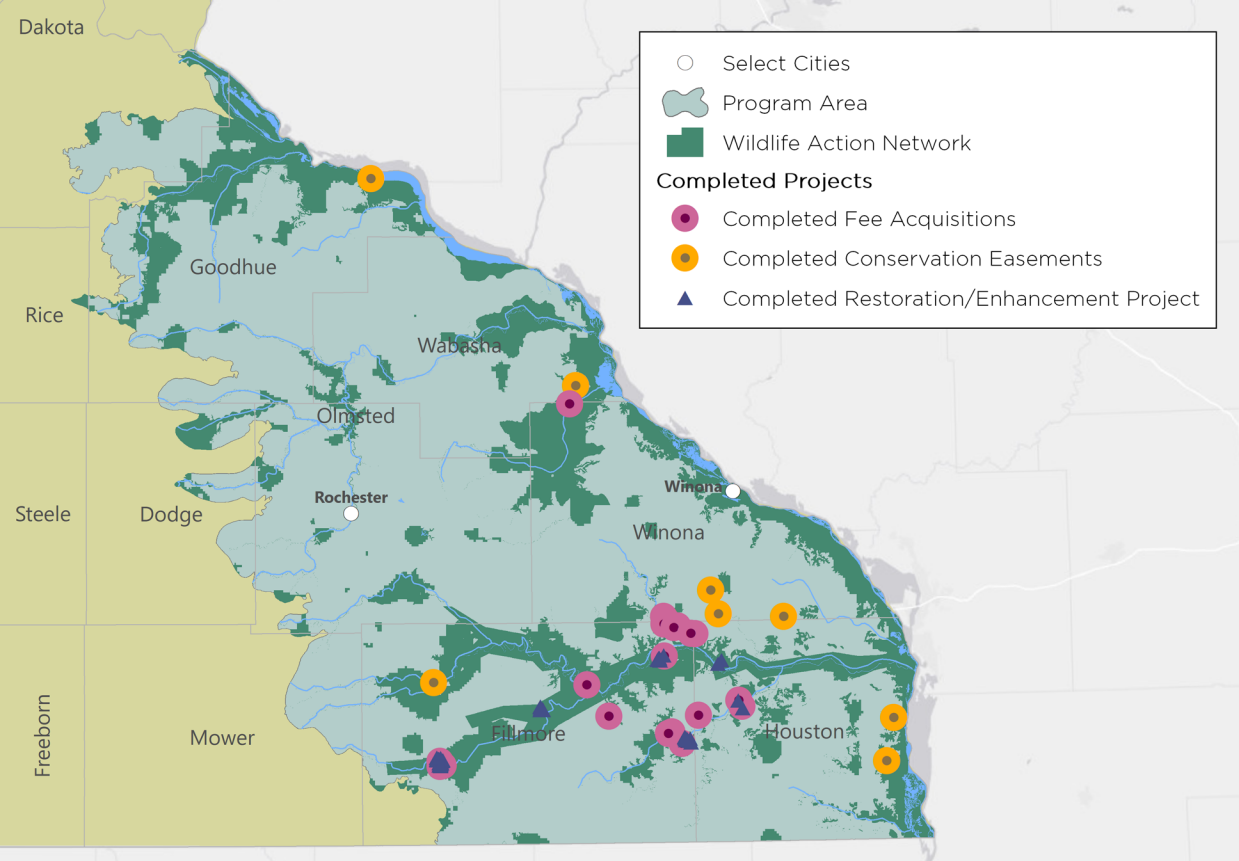
Restoring the wide range of plant communities found in the Driftless Area is essential to maintaining the region's impressive biodiversity. Returning communities to healthy conditions improves their stability, making ongoing management easier and more effective in the future.

### Outdoor Heritage Fund Request:

\$12,593,000 for:

- 1,825 acres of perpetual conservation easements.
- 1,785 acres of fee land acquisition.
- 670 acres of bluff prairie, savanna, forest restoration & enhancement.

**For more information about this proposal**, please contact Rich Biske, Freshwater Conservation Program Director, The Nature Conservancy Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota at [rbiske@tnc.org](mailto:rbiske@tnc.org) or (612) 331-0766



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## Partners

The Nature Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land will complete all fee-simple land acquisitions in collaboration with the Minnesota DNR. Additionally, TNC will also coordinate habitat restoration and enhancement with DNR.

The Minnesota Land Trust will complete the permanent conservation easement transactions in partnership with private landowners and restoration and enhancement projects in partnership with USFWS.

## What has Been Accomplished to Date in the Program?

### Protection

Fee acquisition: Closed or pending on 4,036 acres (105% of goal) including 27.5 miles of trout stream (183% of goal).

Completed 3,025 acres of conservation easements (142% of goal).

### Restoration/Enhancement

Restoration and Enhance completed on 931 acres (96% of goal).

**To date, the Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Project has leveraged \$2.5 million of private funds for acquisitions along with \$200,000 in federal funds and \$172,000 from easement landowners.**





## 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. We also include a ranking form illustrating the representative weighting applied to each criteria. These weightings will be refined as we move forward in applying this approach in each program area.

#### **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. 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.

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.

SOUTHEAST BLUFFLANDS 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)													
	a) Size (33 pts): 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)													
	a) Habitat Quality (28 pts): Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)													
	b) Imperiled Species (5 pts): Occurrence of Documented Rare Species 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)													
	i. Size of Contiguous Protected Lands (8 pts)													
	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)													
	i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat (8 pts)													
	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)													
	a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)													
	b) Amount of Existing Activity (2 pts)													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
COST														
	i. Bid amount (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	ii. Estimated donative value (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	<b>TOTAL ACQUISITION COST (\$)</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>

KEY	
	Priority
	Possible
	Out

# SOUTHEAST BLUFFLANDS 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	1-40 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	961-1380 acres
33 pts	>1380 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 0-80 acres of contiguous protected lands
- 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 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 0-80 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 0-640 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 0-80 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 0-80 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 0-640 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

## Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration

Parcels are reviewed by both a Division of MN DNR and Conservancy to ensure that they meet the priorities of both partners.

Criteria for identification of key conservation parcels.

State-owned properties represent significant blocks of ownership in Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA) in Southeast Minnesota as identified by Landscape Stewardship Plans and present opportunities for targeted stewardship. Where landscape stewardship plans and identified Conservation Opportunity Areas do not exist, core areas are identified by the Areas of Significant Native Biodiversity Significance. State-owned lands containing mapped native plant communities were selected as a starting point. Additional management acreage and contiguous land cover were increased by selecting adjoining parcels of private land that met certain criteria. This initial private parcel selection was made using the following criteria, with each parcel satisfying all points (Figure 1):

- Parcel is within Conservation Opportunity Area or Area of Significant Native Biodiversity (allows for large landscape management and management efficiencies, i.e. large scale Rx fire)
- Parcel contains an Minnesota Biological Survey mapped native plant community
- Parcel was equal to or greater than 80 acres in size
- Parcel property line began within ¼ mile of a state-owned parcel
- A Conservation Partner is willing to accept the property/meets partner objectives (SNA, WMA, Forestry)
- Willing seller

Some land parcels were selected for stewardship activities, while others were chosen for potential acquisition or conservation easement purchase.

Where multiple units of conservation lands exist within a COA , habitat corridors may need to be established to support the larger landscape and identified core areas. Parcels within an identified corridor should meet the following criteria:

- Between 2 conservation land units
- Within ½ mile of existing conservation land unit
- Contain more than 50% habitat



Figure 1. Example of parcels identified for stewardship activities in Pine Creek/Rushford Conservation Opportunity Area. The selected private parcels meet criteria and are considered for acquisition, easement, or management.

