

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Action Agenda Item Memo

DATE: December 12, 2013

SUBJECT: Review and progression of revised PA-01 DNR WMA and Scientific and Natural Area Acquisition

PRESENTER: Pat Rivers

Background:

The Council voted on Sept. 20, 2013 to recommend to the Department of Natural Resources \$4.25 million for the acquisition of parcels to be included in the Vermillion WMA and \$3.895 million for WMA and SNA acquisition.

In a letter dated Oct. 11, 2013, DNR Commissioner Landwehr requested that the council's appropriation recommendation for PA-01 DNR WMA and Scientific and Natural Area Acquisition be combined with HA-03 Vermillion River WMA Acquisition into one appropriation with one accomplishment plan. This request was intended to simplify the administration of all DNR WMA acquisition projects. The council agreed to this request at its Nov. 14, 2013 meeting and the combined accomplishment plan is attached for review and progression.

The proposed appropriation language directs the DNR to use any unspent funds for the Vermillion WMA acquisition on other seven county metropolitan area acquisitions. The language also stipulates that the development of any trail on the Vermillion WMA acquisition must comply with MS 97A.056, sub. 15 and any trail plan must be brought before the council for review and approval.

Suggested Motion:

No motion suggested.

Suggested Procedure:

The draft accomplishment plan is placed before the council for discussion.

Agenda Item: 6a

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Laws of Minnesota 2014 Accomplishment Plan

Date: November 20, 2013

Program or Project Title: DNR Wildlife Management Area and Scientific & Natural Area Acquisition

Funds Recommended: \$ 8,145,000

Manager's Name: Patrick Rivers

Title:

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Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: Chippewa, Clay, Dakota, Kandiyohi, Lincoln, Lyon, Meeker, Murray, Nicollet, Pipestone, Polk, Pope, Redwood, Rice, Steele, Swift, Traverse, and Yellow Medicine.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Metro / Urban
- Prairie

Activity Type:

- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Habitat
- Prairie

Abstract:

Our program will coordinate with partners emphasizing Prairie Conservation Plan implementation through fee title acquisition of priority lands for Wildlife Management Areas and Scientific & Natural Areas for public hunting, trapping and compatible uses consistent with the Outdoor Recreation Act.

Design and Scope of Work:

This proposal will protect 1,175 acres of wildlife habitat through fee title acquisition and development as Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs, 825 acres) and Scientific & Natural Areas (SNAs, 350 acres). Lands will be acquired and developed within the Prairie and Metropolitan/Urbanizing Area Planning Sections with an emphasis on Prairie Conservation Plan core and corridor areas, working toward the long-term goal of a minimum of 40% grassland and 20% wetland in core prairie areas. Lands outside core and corridor areas will be evaluated on their habitat potential and contribution to existing WMA units.

Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)

WMAs are established to protect those lands and waters which have a high potential for wildlife production and to develop and manage these lands and waters for public hunting, fishing and trapping, and for other compatible outdoor recreational uses. While highly successful, the current WMA system does not meet all of the present and future needs for wildlife habitat, wildlife population management, hunter access and wildlife related recreation. This is notably true in the Prairie Ecological Planning section where public ownership in some counties is less than 2 percent.

DNR Section of Wildlife uses a geospatial analytical (GIS) based tool to identify the highest priority tracts for potential WMA acquisitions. This approach uses a quantitative or database approach to score and rank acquisition proposals based on a set of weighted criteria and creates a standardized method for evaluating proposed acquisitions on a statewide level. Criteria and weights are annually reviewed and adapted to changing conditions and priorities. This ensures that funds are used to acquire available lands consistent with the statutory purpose of WMAs. The WMA acquisition program is guided by the 2002 Citizens' Committee report. This committee was composed of a diverse group of eleven major stakeholder groups. A list of potential acquisition opportunities from willing sellers is coordinated with interested stakeholders and partners to eliminate duplication and identify concerns or support.

This proposal includes a rare opportunity to protect and restore significant acres and river frontage to a major WMA in the metro area. The metro parcel of interest is contiguous with the Vermillion Highlands Research, Recreation & WMA to the north and the Vermillion River AMA/WMA to the west. The parcel has long been identified as a key parcel to protect and enhance the overall Vermillion River Complex. By protecting existing habitat and restoring lands that are currently disturbed, the Vermillion River watershed will gain hundreds of acres of perennial cover, keeping water on the landscape, benefitting the Vermillion River and receiving waters downstream. Added habitat will benefit game and non-game species alike. As part of agreeing to sell all 425 acres to the State, Cemstone Products Corporation (CPC) will be allowed to remove gravel from 160 acres of land for a period of up to ten years. CPC will have a mining footprint of 80 acres or less at any given time, and will restore each 40 acres as mining is completed. The appraisal awaiting technical review valued those 160 acres only for their surface "highest and best use" as the gravel may be removed by CPC. The State will not be paying for gravel that may be removed. Acres that are currently being or will be mined for sand and gravel will be restored to prairie or wetland habitat by CPC; a restoration plan is drafted and a mechanism to ensure the State's interests are protected related to the restoration agreement are being investigated. Dakota County and Empire Township have interest in a trail corridor that may run through this parcel and are supportive of the State's purchase. Any trail corridor plans through this parcel would be presented to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council for approval. Outdoor Heritage Funds will not be used to pay for any portion of a trail corridor.

To date, LSOHC funds have paid for more than 6,000 acres of WMA. Coordinating with partners has been successful to ensure we are working cooperatively and on priority parcels. One of the biggest challenges is meeting landowner expectations given rising agricultural land values.

Scientific & Natural Areas (SNAs)

The state SNA Program will increase public hunting and fishing opportunities while providing the highest level of public protection to sites with outstanding natural resource value. About 350 acres will be acquired in fee by the DNR and designated as SNA in order to provide public access and to protect and buffer Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS)-recommended sites of biodiversity significance. Protection will be targeted at high priority opportunity areas identified in the new SNA Strategic Plan (the updated MNDNR SNA Long Range Plan - in progress). To be acquired and designated as SNA, the site must be recommended for SNA designation in an Ecological Evaluation report which serves as the site's baseline assessment for fee acquisitions and be part of a MBS-mapped biodiversity significance site. All such sites are predominantly MBS-mapped native plant communities (native prairie and savanna along with associated wetlands and riparian lands) and contain habitat for wildlife, Species of Greatest Conservation Need, and rare species. In addition, SNA staff uses criteria, such as ease of public access and resource management, landowner readiness and urgency, degree of threat, increasing connectivity/adding public land to existing SNAs, and partnership opportunities, to rank which recommended sites are currently pursued.

Properties acquired through this appropriation require approval of the County Board of Commissioners in the county of acquisition, will be designated as WMA or SNA through a Commissioner's Designation Order, brought up to minimum DNR standards, and listed on the DNR website. Basic site improvements will include boundary and LSOHC acknowledgement signs and may include any necessary site cleanup and restoration of agricultural fields. For any newly established WMAs or SNAs, the basic improvements necessary for public access will include new entrance and rules signs and provision for minimal public parking, e.g., a small gravel parking area. Wherever applicable, the WMA and SNA Programs will work with conservation partners to identify high priority parcels.

Planning:

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H2 Protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation
- H7 Keep water on the landscape

Plans Addressed:

- A Vision for Wildlife and Its Use -- Goals and Outcomes 2006-2012
- Driftless Area Restoration Effort
- Ducks Unlimited Living Lakes Initiative
- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in MN
- Managing Minnesota's Shallow Lakes for Waterfowl and Wildlife
- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota DNR Scientific and Natural Area's Long Range Plan
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Northern Plains Prairie Potholes Regional Shorebird Conservation Plan
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- U.S. Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Plan

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Address Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife, wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions, as well as long-term or permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Attempts to ensure conservation benefits are broadly distributed across the LSOHC sections
- Ensures activities for "protecting, restoring and enhancing" are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work; provides the most cost-effective use of financial resources; and where possible takes into consideration the value of local outreach, education, and community engagement to sustain project outcomes
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model

LSOHC Metro Urban Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity

LSOHC Prairie Section Priorities:

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes
- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna
- Protect expiring CRP lands
- Protect, enhance, and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase

migratory and breeding success

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

For WMAs, traditional sources of acquisition dollars are bonding and a surcharge on individual small game licenses. The most recent bonding appropriations for acquisition was in M.L. 2010 (\$1M for fee title, \$3M for Reinvest in Minnesota). These funds are not sufficient to meet the acquisition goals of 439,000 acres acquired between 2002-2052 (Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years). This proposal will account for 5% of the annual acquisition goal of 8,000 acres per year with potential donated value increasing the total acres acquired.

Acquisition and designation of SNAs is primarily funded through project funds such as OHF (LSOHC) and ENRTF (LCCMR). Occasionally, but not regularly, the state general obligation bonding funds are appropriated for SNA acquisition.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

The DNR Section of Wildlife manages 1,433 WMA encompassing 1.3 million acres of land in 86 of the state's 87 counties. Lands acquired with Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars will add to this system. Management of WMAs is guided by Management Guidance Documents and is funded primarily through the Game and Fish Fund. For SNAs, field staff will monitor project sites and take any necessary actions to sustain the habitat improvements as part of their public land management responsibilities. Ongoing costs for managing SNA sites after initial site development are primarily those needed for management of invasive species and prescribed burning. Management plans for each site will be developed meeting DNR program standards. Site management and stewardship easement monitoring will be carried out by existing staff, CCM crews, temporary project staffing or through vendor contracting. Periodic enhancements will be funded through annual funding requests from a variety of funding sources, including bonding, gifts, federal sources, Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, and Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Government Approval:

*Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition? - **Yes***

Permanent Protection:

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

Hunting and Fishing Plan:

*Is this land open for hunting and fishing? - **Yes***

Hunting and Fishing Regulations Not Listed

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Acquire and designate as WMAs 825 acres	06/30/2016
Acquire and designate as SNAs 350 acres	06/30/2016
Install basic site improvements necessary for public access (e.g., as needed, boundary signs, parking)	06/30/2018
Restore agricultural fields to prairie.	06/30/2020

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need *Acres of habitat and miles of stream acquired and managed as WMA.*
- Improved aquatic habitat indicators *Number of trout per mile.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected *Acres of expiring CRP lands that are acquired & designated as WMA.*
- Protected, enhanced and restored remnants of big woods and oak savanna *Numbers of listed species & species in greatest conservation need recorded on lands acquired.*
- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife *Acres of lands within the Prairie Plan's Core Areas acquired & designated as WMA or SNA.*
- Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered *Acres of native prairie and native prairie buffer acquired & designated as WMA or SNA.*
- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species *Numbers of listed species & species in greatest conservation need recorded on lands acquired.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan

Total Amount of Request: \$ 8145000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$151,000	\$0		\$151,000
Contracts	\$0	\$65,000	RIM	\$65,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$7,600,000	\$2,250,000	RIM	\$9,850,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$1,000	\$0		\$1,000
Professional Services	\$128,000	\$40,000	RIM	\$168,000
Direct Support Services	\$45,000	\$0		\$45,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	\$0		\$1,000
DNR IDP	\$219,000	\$60,000	RIM	\$279,000
Total	\$8,145,000	\$2,415,000		\$10,560,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
FAW Land Acquisition Consultant	0.50	2.00	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Acquisition specialist/coordinator	0.07	3.00	\$17,000	\$0		\$17,000
Field Staff (specs, techs & laborers)	0.17	3.00	\$34,000	\$0		\$34,000
Total	0.74	8.00	\$151,000	\$0		\$151,000

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	750	0	425	1,175
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	750	0	425	1,175

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

Type	Native Prairie
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	350
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	0
Total	350

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$3,895,000	\$0	\$4,250,000	\$8,145,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$3,895,000	\$0	\$4,250,000	\$8,145,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	425	0	0	750	0	1,175
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	425	0	0	750	0	1,175

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	Forest Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$4,250,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,895,000	\$0	\$8,145,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$4,250,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,895,000	\$0	\$8,145,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

1 miles

Parcel List

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Chippewa

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lac qui Parle WMA	11841216	38	\$73,000	No	Full	Full

Clay

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Felton Prairie SNA addition	14145204	400	\$1,070,000	No	Full	Full

Kandiyohi

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Hawick State WMA	12233223	90	\$162,500	No	Full	Full

Lincoln

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Altona WMA	10946236	40	\$100,000	No	Full	Full

Lyon

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Rolling Hills WMA	11140206	19	\$135,000	No	Full	Full
Rolling Hills WMA	11140206	20	\$182,000	No	Full	Full

Meeker

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Hendricson Estate WMA	12132229	240	\$800,000	No	Full	Full

Murray

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Chanarambie Creek	10543203	120	\$454,000	No	Full	Full
Talcot Lake WMA	15029224	160	\$1,120,000	No	Full	Full

Nicollet

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Frtische Creek WMA	11030206	55	\$212,000	No	Full	Full
Swan Lake WMA (Oakleaf)	11027226	25	\$250,000	No	Full	Full

Pipestone

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Eden WMA	10547224	18	\$90,000	No	Full	Full
Prairie Coteau SNA addition	10844233	200	\$980,000	No	Full	Full

Polk

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Glacial Ridge	14945221	300	\$360,000	No	Full	Full

Pope

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Glacial Lakes & Moraine	12336231	300	\$850,000	No	Full	Full

Redwood

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Cedar Rock SNA addition	11436232	80	\$308,000	No	Full	Full

Rice

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Big Woods Forest WMA	11121216	170	\$600,000	No	Full	Full

Steele

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Marsh Wren	10619212	15	\$79,000	No	Full	Full

Traverse

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lake Traverse Prairie	12745233	100	\$420,000	No	Full	Full

Yellow Medicine

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Mound Spring Prairie SNA addition	11546233	160	\$518,000	No	Full	Full

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

Dakota

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Vermillion River WMA	11419224	425	\$6,500,000	10	House and farm buildings	\$268,100	Remove

Rice

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Phelps Lake WMA	11122206	166	\$865,000	3	House, barn, outbuilding	\$128,000	

Swift

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Clair Rollings WMA	12140213	41	\$123,000	1	One-room log cabin	\$0	

Yellow Medicine

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Stokke WMA	11541220	69	\$309,000	5	Outbuildings	\$30,000	

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.