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**NEW OUTDOOR HERITAGE FUND DOLLARS TO PROTECT RARE BLUFF PRAIRIE IN HOUSTON COUNTY**

**January 4, 2011, Red Wing, Minnesota** – Thanks to Minnesota voters who approved the Clean Water, Land and Legacy amendment in 2008, new Outdoor Heritage Fund dollars have found their way to Houston County where they will keep 145 acres of rare bluff prairie and forest habitat protected in its natural state.

Bluff prairie, often called goat prairie, is one of the rarest habitat types in Minnesota. Houston County landowner Ken Visger, an avid outdoorsman who is actively managing his bluff prairie for conservation purposes, finalized a conservation easement with the non-profit Minnesota Land Trust that will protect the prairie but keep the land on the tax rolls – a win-win for conservation and the public's investment.

Visger's land is situated just five miles above the Root River and is in close proximity to other protected lands owned by the State of Minnesota, including Mound Prairie Scientific and Natural Area, Root River Wildlife Management Area, and Mound Prairie Wildlife Management Area. The property includes grassland and restored prairie, forest and a small amount of cultivated land. The conservation easement ensures that the protected land cannot be divided and the existing prairie must continue as prairie and be managed in accordance with an approved habitat management plan.

While many people associate prairie with southwestern Minnesota, the landscape of the Mississippi River blufflands contains unique prairie systems found nowhere else in the state. According to the State's Wildlife Action Plan, this region has the highest concentration of species in greatest conservation need. This is based in part on the rich diversity of land cover including bluff prairies.

*Land Trust protects rare bluff prairie*

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Located generally on the south side of the bluffs, the sun-warmed limestone attracts reptiles, including the western timber rattlesnake. Today, these unique prairie and grassland systems are found largely on private land, making private landowners an important partner in the preservation of this rare habitat.

This is the first project of its kind completed under the Minnesota Land Trust's Bluffland Prairie Protection Initiative. This initiative is being funded in part by a grant from the Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC). Funding was used to cover costs associated with the transaction and to ensure that the easement will be enforced in perpetuity.

"Safeguarding the public's investment in this project is a priority," according to Larson. "We visit all our protected properties annually to ensure that these lands continue to be preserved for conservation, just as the public intended. This is the type of project which should make everyone involved very proud—including the voters which helped pass the Legacy Amendment. Thanks to the generosity of the landowners and the vision of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council along with the state legislature, we can all have peace of mind knowing that this unique place is protected for generations."

This public investment was leveraged by additional private funding from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The McKnight Foundation. The Land Trust expects to complete two similar projects in the area in early 2011 and is actively seeking to work with more willing landowners in the region.

The Minnesota Land Trust is a non-profit conservation organization working to preserve Minnesota's natural and scenic heritage through public and private partnerships. It is the state's only nationally-accredited land trust and operates statewide through regional offices in Duluth, Ely, Red Wing and St. Paul. More information can be found online at [www.mnland.org](http://www.mnland.org).

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