



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Cannon River Watershed Habitat Complex - Phase V

Laws of Minnesota 2015 Final Report

General Information

Date: 11/09/2022

Project Title: Cannon River Watershed Habitat Complex - Phase V

Funds Recommended: \$1,380,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2015, First Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2(g)

Appropriation Language: \$1,380,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Trust for Public Land to acquire and restore lands in the Cannon River watershed for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquisition of lands that are eligible for the native prairie bank under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.96, or lands adjacent to protected native prairie. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Rice, Le Sueur and Goodhue.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

Through fee-title acquisition, the Trust for Public Land permanently protected 242 acres (88% of our goal) in the Cannon River Watershed. This resulted in one new Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and four additions to existing WMAs. Now publicly accessible, these protected areas include wetland, prairie, and "Big Woods" forest habitat. The permanent preservation of these places has reversed habitat loss, allowed for habitat restoration, and increased access to public lands for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

Process & Methods

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase V program acquired 242 acres of high-quality wetland, prairie, remnant Big Woods forest, and shoreline habitat for wildlife in the Cannon River Watershed. The protection, creation (Trout Lily WMA), and expansion (Gray Fox, Factor, and Warsaw WMAs) of three large complexes provide new opportunities for public hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation.

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase V program was designed to address the following problems: degradation and loss of quality and diversity of habitat in the prairie section of the State, degradation of water quality in the Cannon River Watershed; and lack of available public lands for hunting and angling opportunities, especially within an hour drive for over half of the State's population.

The Phase V program is a part of a multi-year conservation effort, focusing on the Cannon River Watershed, that includes acquisition, protection, and restoration of core parcels of land that will contribute to a large complex of restored prairies, grasslands, wetlands, lake shore, and river shoreline. The Phase V acquisitions were prioritized toward protecting existing large wetland/upland complexes and rare communities (Big Woods forest, oak savanna, tamarack swamp). In addition, landowner willingness to sell and the threat of conversion were also taken into consideration. Protection of these lands provides critical habitat for game species, including migratory waterfowl (mallard, canvasback, wood duck, hooded merganser, pintail, lesser scaup), upland birds (dove, turkey, pheasant, and woodcock), white tail deer, and fish (northern pike, black crappie, bluegill, and walleye). Protection provided access for a diversity of recreational experiences including duck, pheasant, turkey and deer hunting, lake fishing, and wildlife observation. In addition, restoration work conducted by the MN DNR has been focused on degraded portions of the lands acquired, including restoration of agricultural fields near wetlands and lakes back to native habitat.

Specifically, five acquisitions were completed with Phase V funding:

1. Gray Fox WMA - Rice County

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) acquired the Gray Fox WMA property on October 19, 2018 and conveyed the 78-acre parcel to the DNR on April 23, 2019 managed as a new WMA. This property has rolling topography of wetland and grassland habitat located in the upper reaches of the Cannon River Watershed just west of Shields Lake (the headwaters of the Cannon River). It has great scenic views and natural beauty, and it will provide much needed public access for dispersed wildlife-based recreation including hiking, hunting, trapping, bird-watching, and general nature observation. TPL purchased this property for a total of \$406,000 using \$336,979 of the Cannon River Phase V acquisition funds (ML2015 OHF; allocated acreage 65), and also \$69,021 from Cannon River Phase VI (ML2016 OHF; allocated acreage 13).

2. Warsaw WMA - Goodhue County

TPL acquired the parcel on July 31, 2018 and conveyed 18 acres to the MN DNR on August 1, 2018 to be managed as an addition to the Warsaw WMA. Identified as a priority by the Wildlife Action Network this acquisition is adjacent to Hwy 56 and expands the existing WMA, squaring up boundaries, and provides improved public access for quality outdoor recreation and hunting opportunities within an hour drive of the Twin Cities. TPL purchased this property for a total of \$61,900. Several rare features were identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey within one mile of the acquisition which is located within a Site of High Biodiversity Significance.

3. Factor WMA - Le Sueur County

TPL acquired tracts 4 and 6 of the Factor WMA property on July 30, 2018 and conveyed the 54-acre parcel to the DNR on August 28, 2018 to be managed as an addition to the Factor WMA. TPL purchased this parcel for \$272,200, the acquisition helped to square off boundaries and provide an additional access point to the WMA. This property has a significant amount of wetlands which provide high quality habitat for wildlife and help to buffer the adjacent Cannon River near its headwaters. It has great scenic views and natural beauty, and it will provide much needed public access for dispersed wildlife-based recreation including hunting, trapping, bird-watching, and general nature observation.

4. Trout Lily WMA (Phase I) - Rice County

TPL acquired the first phase of the Trout Lily WMA property on August 9, 2017 and conveyed the 112-acre parcel to the DNR on November 6, 2018 to be managed as a new Wildlife Management Area. This property was identified as a high priority for protection by both the State Wildlife Action Plan and SNA Strategic Land Acquisition Plan. The property has deeply dissected wooded ravines and upland which drain to the adjacent Cannon River just upstream of The Nature Conservancy's Trout Lily preserve and the DNR Trout Lily Scientific and Natural Area (SNA), both of which abut this property. It has great scenic views and natural beauty, and will provide a much needed buffer to the Dwarf Trout Lily Preserve, public access for dispersed wildlife-based recreation including hiking, hunting, trapping, bird-watching, and general nature observation. TPL purchased this property for a total of \$602,000 using \$453,321 (ML15 OHF; allocated acreage 84), and \$148,679 (ML14 OHF; allocated acreage 28).

5. Trout Lily WMA (Phase II) - Rice County

TPL acquired the second phase of the Trout Lily WMA property on September 17, 2018 and conveyed the 21-acre parcel to the DNR on November 6, 2018 to be managed as a new Wildlife Management Area. Located within a portion of a Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance this property was identified as a high priority for protection by both the SWAP and SNA Strategic Land Acquisition Plan. TPL purchased this property for a total of \$120,600. The property has deeply dissected wooded ravines and upland which drain to the adjacent Cannon River just upstream of The Nature Conservancy's Trout Lily preserve and the Trout Lily SNA, both of which abut this property.

How did the program address habitats of significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, threatened or endangered species, and/or list targeted species?

All of the areas targeted by the Trust for Public Land have been identified and prioritized through state, regional and local natural resource plans due to their high biodiversity and connectivity. The Cannon River watershed includes Big Woods, oak savannas, wetlands and sensitive shorelines, which provide habitat for a variety of Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Specifically, the shoreline zones protected are one of the most essential and threatened habitat resources in the state. They provide a range of benefits for fisheries, migratory waterfowl and upland game species.

How did the program use science-based targeting that leveraged or expanded corridors and complexes, reduced fragmentation, or protected areas in the MN County Biological Survey.

Our science-based targeting utilized the Minnesota Wildlife Action Network's data along with other state data sets, including The MN County Biological Survey, to identify priority areas for permanent fish and wildlife protection within the Cannon River Watershed. The Wildlife Action Network was developed to help implement the 2015-2025 MN Wildlife Action Plan, which identified species of greatest conservation need and rare, threatened and endangered species. The project's geographic targeting also considered specific areas of species richness and/or biodiversity importance and areas where aquatic and terrestrial habitats have been compromised. These identified priority areas were the primary focus geography in selecting parcels for permanent land protection using fee-title acquisition.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

These acquisitions were supported by a number of partners, including but not limited to; the MN DNR, Rice County, Goodhue County, Le Sueur County, respective Township Boards, and Cannon River Watershed Partnership. No opposition occurred related to these projects.

Exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects of program

The Cannon River Watershed is unique in that it overlaps three different MN DNR regions. Located an hour south of the Twin Cities the Cannon River meanders east from its source within prairie/cropland areas through the historic mill towns of Faribault and Northfield in the Big Woods ecological subsection before it empties into the Mississippi River in the Southeast Blufflands of Minnesota near Red Wing. However, this unique geography can make coordination with our MN DNR partners more challenging as the regions have different priorities and processes at times. Unfortunately, the leverage expected from either a landowner donation of value, or a RIM match, did not occur.

What other fund may contribute to this program?

- N/A

What is the plan to sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex lands have been acquired and conveyed to the DNR who has completed initial site development and restoration work. Costs for this work are included in the IDPs attached to the completed parcel reports. The properties will be managed for the long term as WMAs and will be maintained by the Minnesota DNR according to their WMA guidelines.

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Antic. Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contracts	\$70,000	-	-	\$7,000	-	-	\$77,000	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,300,000	\$1,245,000	\$1,245,000	\$138,000	\$138,000	Landowner Donation, RIM matching funds	\$1,438,000	\$1,383,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$10,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$25,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	\$110,000	\$59,800	-	-	-	-	\$59,800
Grand Total	\$1,380,000	\$1,380,000	\$1,329,800	\$145,000	\$138,000	-	\$1,525,000	\$1,467,800

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

TPL was able to utilize all its funding, pairing the ML15 appropriation with other OHF appropriations for the Cannon (ML14 & ML16) to complete acquisitions. A small amount of funding was left due to unspent IDP funds on the part of the DNR.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

Of the money disclosed above, what are the appropriate uses of the money:

- E. This is not applicable as there was no revenue generated.

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	94	62	72	49	53	22	57	109	276	242
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	94	62	72	49	53	22	57	109	276	242

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$470,000	\$345,700	\$360,000	\$266,000	\$265,000	\$119,700	\$285,000	\$598,400	\$1,380,000	\$1,329,800
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$470,000	\$345,700	\$360,000	\$266,000	\$265,000	\$119,700	\$285,000	\$598,400	\$1,380,000	\$1,329,800

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	276	242	0	0	276	242
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	276	242	0	0	276	242
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Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,380,000	\$1,329,800	-	-	\$1,380,000	\$1,329,800
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,380,000	\$1,329,800	-	-	\$1,380,000	\$1,329,800

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0.09

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The lands protected with this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need. In total, 242 new acres are now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Parcels

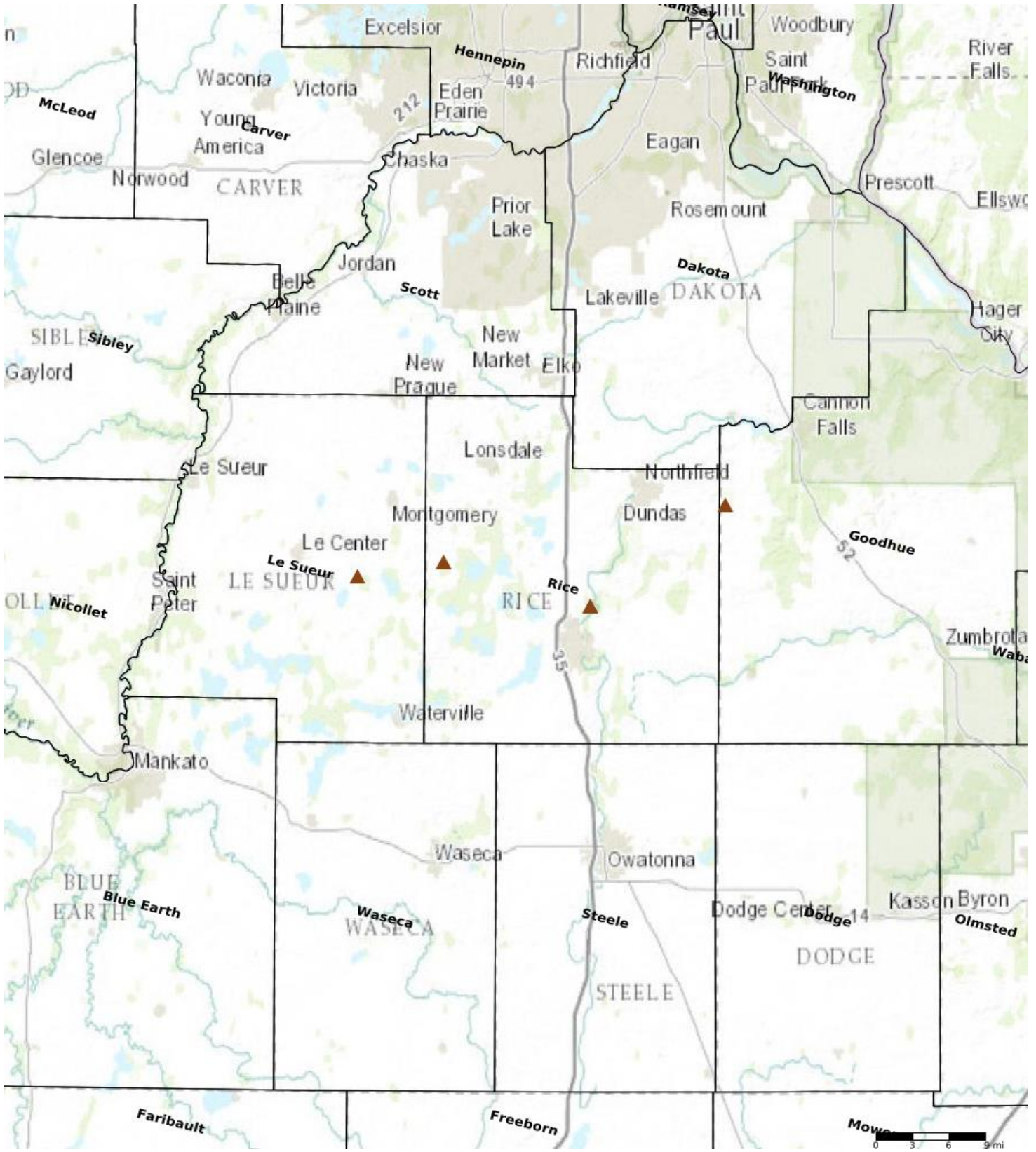
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Warsaw WMA	Goodhue	11118207	18	\$61,900	No
Factor WMA (tract 4 & 6)	Le Sueur	11023206	54	\$272,200	No
Gray Fox WMA (tract 1)	Rice	11122232	65	\$406,000	No
Trout Lily WMA (Phase I)	Rice	11020217	84	\$602,000	No
Trout Lily WMA (Phase II)	Rice	11020217	21	\$120,600	No

Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✦ Enhance
- ⊕ Other