



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2021 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 12/11/2020

Project Title: Protecting Minnesota's Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance

Funds Recommended: \$1,477,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2021, Ch. XX, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd.

Appropriation Language:

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie

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Location Information

County Location(s): St. Louis, Cass, Itasca, Lake, Beltrami, Cook and Aitkin.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Northern Forest

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

This program will bring focused conservation to one of Minnesota's priority aquatic resources, Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance. These threatened lakes possess outstanding fisheries and provide habitat for a variety of SGCN; yet, at present, no habitat protection program specifically targets these priority resources. Through this proposal, the Minnesota Land Trust will protect through perpetual conservation easements 1/2 mile of shoreland and 216 acres of habitat associated with the top 10% of these lakes in northeast and northcentral Minnesota.

Design and Scope of Work

Minnesota's lakeshore systems comprise one of the most biologically important habitats in the state for fish, game and wildlife. Yet, these systems are highly threatened due to intense shoreland development and non-compatible management. Development and disturbance of Minnesota's remaining sensitive shoreland continues to be a threat identified in many of the State's resource protection plans, including the most recent One Watershed One Plans that are in development across the state.

In a refinement of the Minnesota Land Trust's successful Critical Shorelands program (recommended for funding across 5 phases by LSOHC), this proposal focuses on a subset of critical lakeshore systems in northeast and northcentral Minnesota – Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance. Although successful conservation programs have emerged around the protection of two statewide lake system priorities – 1. cisco (tullibee) lake protection by the Northern Waters Land Trust and Minnesota Land Trust, and 2. wild rice lakes by BWSR through the RIM Wild Rice program – a major gap in protection exists. A third conservation priority, lakes ranked by the Minnesota DNR as having outstanding biodiversity significance, has no protection program specifically targeting it. It is this gap in the state's lake protection toolbox that our proposal aims to fill.

To preserve this important component of Minnesota's aquatic natural heritage, MLT proposes to target the top 10% of these "Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance" and protect their significant shorelands through conservation easements. These lakes represent the best of the best aquatic and shoreland habitat, and are characterized by exceptional fisheries (both game and non-game), high aquatic plant richness and floristic quality, and populations of endangered or threatened plant species and imperiled lake bird species. This work builds on the past success of MLT's Critical Shorelands Program.

Through this proposal, the Land Trust will protect 0.5 miles of threatened shoreland and 216 acres of associated upland habitat by acquiring permanent conservation easements from willing landowners. Project priorities and conservation opportunities will be informed by a combination of GIS analyses to score and rank high-quality target parcels and consultation with local partners. We will continue to target projects that help complete gaps in existing protected land, contain the highest-quality habitat, and provide the greatest leverage to the state. The Land Trust will employ its market-based RFP system for identifying, prioritizing and completing conservation easements in this program area.

Outcomes from this project include: 1) healthy populations of fish, waterfowl, and Species in Greatest Conservation Need; 2) maintaining water quality of aquatic resources; 3) increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects; and 4) enhancement of prior state and local investments made in shoreland and forest conservation in the region. The Land Trust will strategically target target complexes of protect lands in which these outcomes are maximized.

How does the plan address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species?

This program will preserve critical shoreland and associated upland habitats adjacent to a prioritized subset of Minnesota's Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance in northeast and north-central Minnesota that are essential to maintaining both healthy populations of the region's fish and wildlife populations and maintaining water quality of these aquatic resources. This program will address a noted protection gap associated with these priority lakes, and afford a level of protection to some of the state's highest quality game and non-game fisheries. The program will provide habitat protection for an array of SGCN, including American Woodcock, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, Winter Wren, and Black-backed Woodpecker. Numerous plans have identified the protection of these habitats as a conservation priority for Minnesota, including the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan, DNR Aquatic Management Area program, the State Conservation and Preservation Plan, DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda, and Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework. The central goal of this program is to protect high-quality critical shoreland habitat by securing permanent conservation easements in strategic locations along priority lakes and rivers, leaving a lasting legacy of protected habitat complexes.

Describe how the plan uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:

Approximately 407 lakes within the program area are characterized by the DNR as Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance. Through this program, the Land Trust will focus its conservation work on the top 10% of these lakes. Using the DNR's Outstanding Biological Significance Lakes GIS layer for northeast and northcentral Minnesota, lakes were prioritized based on the following criteria: 1) level of existing protection (% of private/public lands associated with each lake), 2) ecological significance (MBS and NHIS data, % of sensitive shoreline by lake, and Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan), and 3) opportunity (# of private parcels greater than 35 acres for each lake). Sensitive Lakeshore inventories have been completed in Cass, Crow Wing, Aitkin and Itasca counties.

These Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance were subsequently assessed to determine whether they were eligible for protection through existing programs focusing on Cisco (NWL/MLT Fisheries Program) or wild rice (BWSR Wild Rice RIM Program). This prioritized list of target lakes will be further refined in consultation with local partners and resource experts. A scoring and ranking system is being developed that considers factors such as parcel size, ecological context, relationship to other protected land, SGCN, and habitat quality that will be used to prioritize individual parcels. The Sensitive Lakeshore Identification Manual (DNR 2016) will inform targeting of parcels associated with lakes in counties where a sensitive shoreland inventory has not yet been completed.

Which two sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are most applicable to this project?

- H2 Protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes
- H6 Protect and restore critical in-water habitat of lakes and streams

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

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

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Northern Forest

- Protect shoreland and restore or enhance critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

The Land Trust encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements. The leverage portion of the easement acquisition line item (\$180,000) is a conservative estimate of value we expect to see donated by landowners participating in the program.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain 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 request is not supplanting or substituting for any previous funding. This is entirely new work.

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

The land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through the best standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited and insured land trust with a very successful stewardship

program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation. Funding for these

easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget.

In addition, the Land Trust prepares for each landowner a habitat management plan that provides recommendations for use in ecologically managing the property over time. The Land Trust actively encourages landowners to manage their properties in line with

the conservation easement, and works with landowners to address any financial or informational obstacles that stand in the way of them doing so.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2025	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of all easement projects	Enforcement as necessary	-

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?

Yes

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

Yes

Who will manage the easement?

Minnesota Land Trust will manage the easements.

Who will be the easement holder?

Minnesota Land Trust will hold the easements.

What is the anticipated number of easements (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

We anticipate closing on 3-7 conservation easements, depending on size/cost of prioritized parcels, and the level of donative value provided to the program by landowners.

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program?

No

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

Yes

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

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

Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

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

responsibility of the landowner.

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?

No

We do not anticipate R/E needs associated with our parcels. If after prioritization and selection R/E needs exist, we will budget for that work in upcoming proposals.

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this program's funding and availability?

No

Explain how, when, and source of the R/E work:

We do not anticipate R/E needs associated with our parcels. If after prioritization and selection R/E needs exist, we will budget for that work in upcoming proposals.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Acquire conservation easements: 1) identify priority landowners, 2) negotiate, draft and complete easements, and 3) dedicate funds for long-term stewardship.	June 30, 2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2025

Budget

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

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$100,000	-	-	\$100,000
Contracts	\$86,000	-	-	\$86,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$900,000	\$180,000	Private Landowners	\$1,080,000
Easement Stewardship	\$168,000	-	-	\$168,000
Travel	\$13,000	-	-	\$13,000
Professional Services	\$182,000	-	-	\$182,000
Direct Support Services	\$27,000	-	-	\$27,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,477,000	\$180,000	-	\$1,657,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.26	4.0	\$100,000	-	-	\$100,000

Amount of Request: \$1,477,000

Amount of Leverage: \$180,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 12.19%

DSS + Personnel: \$127,000

As a % of the total request: 8.6%

Easement Stewardship: \$168,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 18.67%

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

The funding recommended reflects 29% of that requested. Our budget is more or less proportional to that proposed, but some budget lines, by necessity, cannot be reduced proportionately and are more fixed.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The Land Trust encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements. The leverage portion of the easement acquisition line item (\$180,000) is a conservative estimate of value we expect to see donated by landowners participating in the program.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?

FTEs listed in the proposal are an estimate of the personnel time required to deliver the grant outputs included in this proposal. An array of staff may work on projects to complete legal review, sub-contracts, negotiating with landowners, drafting conservation easements, completing baseline reports and managing the grant. MLT's basis for billing is the individual Protection project we work on, ensuring allocation to the appropriate grant award. And by using a timesheet-based approach we use only those personnel funds actually expended to achieve the goals of the grant.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

The contracts budget line includes funding for the writing of habitat management plans, landowner outreach via SWCD offices and other partners, and conservation easement project management (contracted from BWSR).

Easement Stewardship

What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?

We anticipate closing 3-7 conservation easements depending on easement value/size and the level of donated easement value brought into the program. The average cost per easement to fund the Minnesota Land Trust's perpetual monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$24,000. This figure is derived from MLT's detailed stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is consistent with Land Trust Accreditation standards. MLT shares periodic updates to this cost analysis with LSOHC staff.

Travel

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

Yes

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

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

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:

Yes

Direct Support Services

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

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

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?

Items would include those necessary for the completion of conservation easements, and may including post pounders for erecting signage, GPS devices for use in mapping associated with baseline documentation reports, conservation easement and so forth, etc,

Federal Funds

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?

No

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	216	216
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	216	216

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$1,477,000	\$1,477,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$1,477,000	\$1,477,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	216	216
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	216	216

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	\$1,477,000	\$1,477,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	\$1,477,000	\$1,477,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$6,837
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State	-	-	-	-	-

PILT Liability					
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	\$6,837
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0.5

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Healthy populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species ~ *Shorelands are protected from development and fragmentation This program will permanently protect 216 acres of the most biologically outstanding shoreland in northern Minnesota and approximately 0.5 miles of undeveloped shoreline. Measure: Acres/shoreland protected.*

Parcels

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.

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes](#)

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

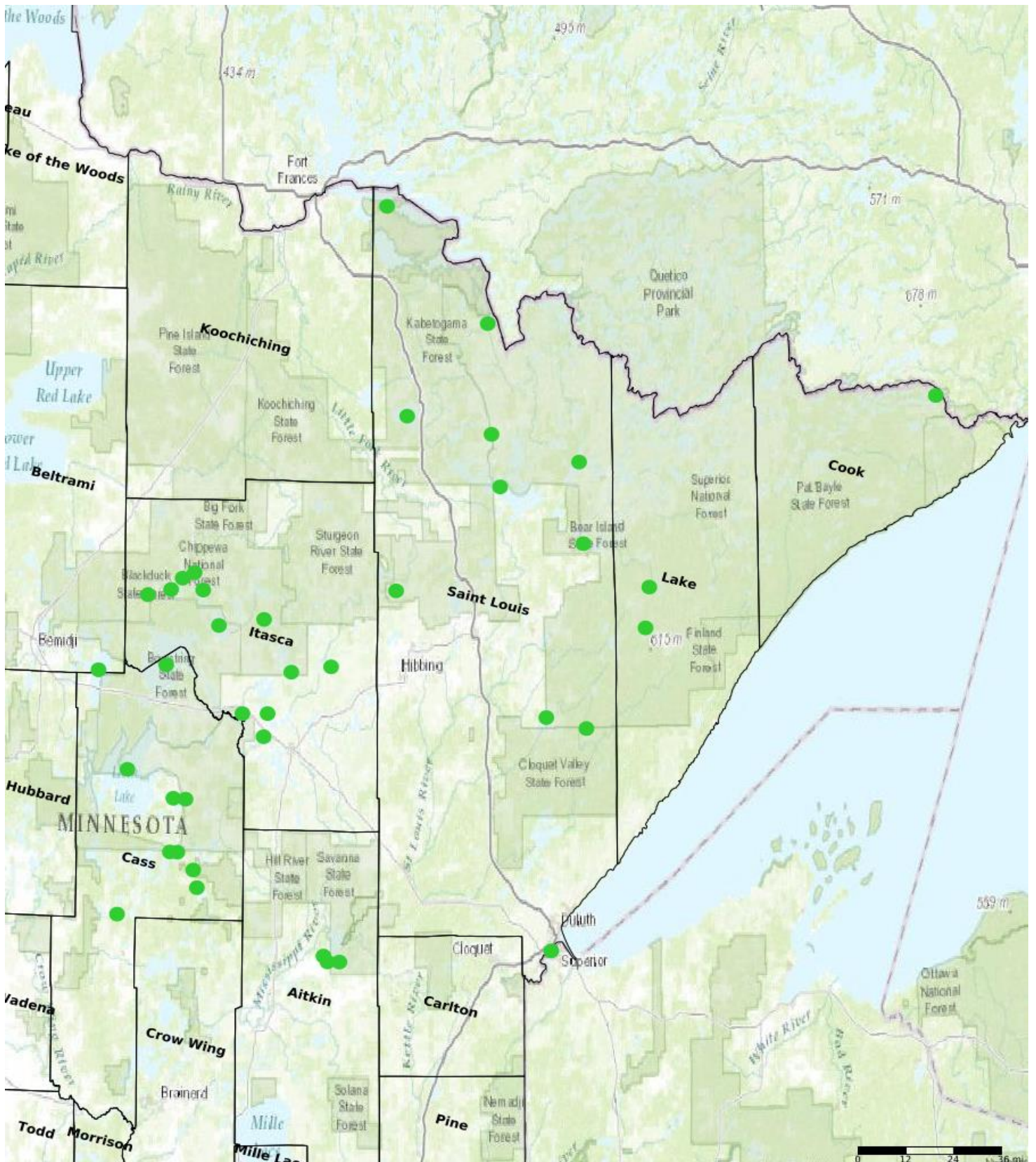
Solicitation for potential projects employs a diverse strategy of direct outreach to landowners in high priority conservation areas and coordinated outreach with conservation partners including lake associations, Soil and Water Conservation Districts and others. Leads for potential projects are pursued following initial assessment and scoring against criteria identified in established conservation plans. Criteria based scoring systems provide a standardized set of data from which multiple projects can be compared relative to each other and individual projects can be compared against a baseline. Scoring systems are a set of data, not a final, complete decision making tool. Local expertise and experience, programmatic goals, timelines, available resources, capacity, and other more subjective factors might also come into play in project selection and decision making.

The attached scoresheet provides an approach to criteria based scoring that considers: 1) Ecological Integrity/Viability as current status; 2) Threat/Urgency as a future scenario if protection is not afforded; and 3) Cost reflecting the overall value realized through the acquisition of a conservation easement (including a reflection of donative value). Ecological Integrity weights property size, condition, and context equally (at least as an initial starting point). The three primary factors, when taken together, provide a good estimate of long-term viability for biodiversity at the site: 1) Size of the parcel to be protected, 2) Condition of the habitat on the parcel, and 3) its Landscape context (both from a protection and ecological standpoint).

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Minnewawa	Aitkin	04923228	0	-	No
Rat	Aitkin	04924223	0	-	No
Flowage	Aitkin	04924225	0	-	No
Cass	Beltrami	14631236	0	-	No
Swift	Cass	14227222	0	-	No
Brockway	Cass	13930235	0	-	No
Rice	Cass	14028201	0	-	No
George	Cass	13926206	0	-	No
Winnibigoshish	Cass	14628226	0	-	No
Boy	Cass	14227219	0	-	No
Inguadona	Cass	14027205	0	-	No
Island	Cass	14027224	0	-	No
Leech	Cass	14329230	0	-	No
Loon	Cook	06503234	0	-	No
Sand	Itasca	14826220	0	-	No
Bowstring	Itasca	14726224	0	-	No
Natures	Itasca	14827209	0	-	No
Bass	Itasca	05626221	0	-	No
Nashwauk	Itasca	05723207	0	-	No
Rice	Itasca	14827201	0	-	No

White Oak	Itasca	14425201	0	-	No
Wabana	Itasca	05725216	0	-	No
Round	Itasca	14828224	0	-	No
Blackwater	Itasca	05526208	0	-	No
Dixon	Itasca	14829225	0	-	No
North Star	Itasca	05926232	0	-	No
Greenwood	Lake	05810208	0	-	No
Stony	Lake	05910204	0	-	No
Whiteface Reservoir	St. Louis	05614230	0	-	No
Wolf	St. Louis	05513202	0	-	No
Birch	St. Louis	06113226	0	-	No
Vermilion	St. Louis	06216205	0	-	No
Crane	St. Louis	06717213	0	-	No
Pelican	St. Louis	06420204	0	-	No
Burntside	St. Louis	06313215	0	-	No
St. Louis River Estuary	St. Louis	04914217	0	-	No
Rainy	St. Louis	07021203	0	-	No
Shannon	St. Louis	05921202	0	-	No
Vermilion River	St. Louis	06417224	0	-	No



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

Parcel Map
Protecting Minnesota's Lakes of Outstanding
Biological Significance
 (Data Generated From Parcel List)



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Comparison Report

Program Title: ML 2021 - Protecting Minnesota's Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance

Organization: Minnesota Land Trust

Manager: Wayne Ostlie

Budget

Requested Amount: \$5,001,000

Appropriated Amount: \$1,477,000

Percentage: 29.53%

Item	Total Requested		Total Appropriated		Percentage of Request	
	Requested	Leverage	Appropriated	Leverage	Percent of Request	Percent of Leverage
Personnel	\$228,000	-	\$100,000	-	43.86%	-
Contracts	\$82,000	-	\$86,000	-	104.88%	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$4,000,000	\$800,000	\$900,000	\$180,000	22.5%	22.5%
Easement Stewardship	\$288,000	-	\$168,000	-	58.33%	-
Travel	\$15,000	-	\$13,000	-	86.67%	-
Professional Services	\$326,000	-	\$182,000	-	55.83%	-
Direct Support Services	\$62,000	-	\$27,000	-	43.55%	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	\$1,000	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$5,001,000	\$800,000	\$1,477,000	\$180,000	29.53%	22.5%

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

The funding recommended reflects 29% of that requested. Our budget is more or less proportional to that proposed, but some budget lines, by necessity, cannot be reduced proportionately and are more fixed.

Output

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	0	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Easement	960	216	22.5%
Enhance	0	-	-

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	\$5,001,000	\$1,477,000	29.53%
Enhance	-	-	-

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	0	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Easement	960	216	22.5%
Enhance	0	-	-

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	\$5,001,000	\$1,477,000	29.53%
Enhance	-	-	-



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.

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance 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
	TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
COST														
	i. Bid amount (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	ii. Estimated donative value (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	TOTAL ACQUISITION COST (\$)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

KEY	
	Priority
	Possible
	Out