



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2021 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 12/11/2020

Project Title: Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 3

Funds Recommended: \$4,034,000

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

Appropriation Language:

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Sarah Boser

Title: Water Resource Manager

Organization: Sauk River Watershed District

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Location Information

County Location(s): Stearns, Pope, Todd and Douglas.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

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

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

This program will permanently protect, restore and enhance critical habitat within the Sauk River Watershed, which has experienced considerable habitat loss and is at high risk for more land conversion. Using conservation easements and fee land acquisition, we will protect approximately 660 acres of priority habitat in Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition Area. We will restore/enhance approximately 224 acres of wetlands and accompanying uplands to create habitat for waterfowl and populations of Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Properties selected will be strategically targeted using an innovative site prioritization model that maximizes conservation benefit and financial leverage.

Design and Scope of Work

Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD), Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), and Pheasants Forever (PF) – with technical assistance from Stearns, Douglas and Meeker Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) – will partner to implement habitat protection and restoration within the Sauk River Watershed (SRW). Site prioritization will focus on protecting and restoring habitat in key locations, such as existing high quality or easily restorable wetland complexes, upland forests, floodplain forests, and prairies. Prioritized sites will be protected to preserve and enhance critical habitat for waterfowl and other important wildlife species.

The SRW is in a rapidly growing region that has also experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade. Furthermore, public access for recreation, including hunting and fishing, is lacking. Landowner interest in conservation land protection and restoration is strong in the SRW. Since July 2019, the Partnership has protected 212 acres through fee title acquisition, 310 acres through conservation easements, and has restored 65 acres, while leveraging \$1,276,805 through landowner donation of easement value and non-state funding sources. Landowners owning approximately 2,400 acres are interested in a conservation easement, in addition to 460 acres that are interested in fee acquisition. Protecting and restoring these strategic parcels will far exceed funding available through the Partnership's first two OHF grants. We anticipate significantly more interested and qualified properties for this program as outreach efforts grow following COVID-19 restrictions.

Conservation Easements:

MLT, with assistance from partners, will conduct outreach to landowners within priority areas. Interested landowners will submit proposals to MLT using a competitive, market-based Request for Proposal (RFP) process. MLT, with project partners, will rank properties based on ecological value and cost, prioritizing projects that provide the best ecological value and acquiring them at the lowest cost to the state. MLT will secure approximately 400 acres of permanent conservation easements and develop restoration and habitat management plans for eased acres.

Fee Acquisition:

PF will coordinate with agency partners on all potential fee simple acquisitions. PF will work with willing sellers to protect approximately 260 acres of strategically identified parcels within the SRW and then donate the parcels to the MN DNR as a Wildlife or Aquatic Management Area or to USFWS as a Waterfowl Production Area. Protected

tracts will be managed as habitat and provide public access in perpetuity within an area of our state where public land for recreational use is lacking.

Restoration and Enhancement:

SRWD will restore/enhance approximately 224 acres of wetland, riparian and associated upland habitat in cooperation with county SWCDs, MLT, USFWS, and TNC. This work will be on permanently protected land and will include at least one large wetland restoration. Specific activities/scope will vary based on selected project sites but may include performing hydrologic restoration, invasive species management, and planting vegetation to increase site biodiversity. PF will manage all needed restoration activities on fee simple acquisitions.

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 utilize a prioritization framework that uses SGCN and quality habitat as major weighting factors for both protection and restoration/enhancement project selection. The SRW region is an important migratory corridor for forest birds and waterfowl.

This program targets the protection and restoration/enhancement of wetlands. This will create excellent habitat for hundreds of migratory waterfowl who will use these basins to refuel and rest. Many species require wetland basins with open water areas and emergent aquatic vegetation to provide nesting habitat and many other use wetlands during their life cycle. This program offers the opportunity to restore a large wetland and protect and enhance smaller wetlands, which will benefit SGCN and can expand a habitat core or corridor. This program will also protect and restore/enhance upland forests, prairies, and shorelands, which are also essential habitats to Minnesota's wildlife diversity and health.

A variety of SGCN will benefit from this program including Blanding's turtle, bobolink, veery, a species of caddisfly, smooth green snake, Dakota skipper, western harvest mouse, and a species of jumping spider (*M. grata*). Other species that will benefit from improved habitat as part of this program include trumpeter swan, sandhill crane, eastern and western meadowlark, bald eagle, Swainson's hawk, and dickcissel.

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:

The program utilizes TNC's Multiple Benefits Analysis, a science-based process completed in 2017 for the Upper Mississippi River Basin, which prioritized protection sites for the SRW and other parts of this region. TNC's Multiple Benefits Analysis developed and scored priorities according to specific but multiple cross-cutting needs and looks for the "sweet spot" where multiple benefits overlap. It includes four modules: fish and wildlife habitat, drinking water/source water, flooding and erosion control, and groundwater benefits. Each module contains numerous data layers. Sites are prioritized in each module as well as holistically by combining scores from all modules. The size of parcels and proximity to other protected lands are also considered in this analysis.

The vast majority (97%) of the SRW landscape is in private ownership. Therefore, once priority parcels are identified, working with private owners on land protection strategies is key to successful conservation in this

region. We will also work closely with partners in the region to identify those habitat complexes where private land protection can make a significant contribution to existing conservation investments. Specific parcels available for acquisition of easements will be further reviewed relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on amount of habitat on the parcel (size), the quality or condition of habitat, the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas, and cost. MBS data will be used to evaluate potential conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions. Field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition will also occur, as many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

The program will also work to build on initial conservation investments in the program area, expanding and buffering the footprint of existing protected areas, such as WMAs, WPAs, and AMAs facilitating the protection of habitat corridors and reducing the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

Prairie

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

MLT encourages private landowners to fully or partially donate the appraised value of their conservation easement, thereby receiving less than the appraised value might otherwise allow. This donated value is shown as leveraged funds in the proposal and is expected to be 20% of the acquisition cost, or \$180,000. MLT has a long track record in incentivizing landowners to participate in this fashion. Pheasants Forever anticipated leverage in the amount of \$118,300 through its fee acquisition work.

To date, our program has leveraged \$1,276,805 through landowner donation and other non-state funding sources. An additional \$180,700 in non-state match is anticipated when an expected acquisition project closes this summer.

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

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

MLT will sustain the land protected through conservation easements using 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 conducts annual property monitoring, maintains effective records management, addresses inquiries and interpretations, tracks changes in ownership, investigates potential violations, and defends the easement in case of a true violation. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget. 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.

Acquisition projects will abut or be within proximity to existing protected lands, including state-owned lands and lands under conservation easement. This will allow for the expansion of maintenance and restoration activities currently taking place on those protected lands and adjacent private lands. Habitats cleared of invasive species will be maintained with prescribed fire and other practices.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2026 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of conservation easements in perpetuity.	Enforcement as necessary.	-
Every 4-6 years	MN DNR, USFWS, Landowners	Prescribed fire, tree control, invasive species control.	-	-

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program 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

Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:

At a minimum, we will notify local government in writing of the intent to acquire and donate lands to the MNDNR/USFWS and follow up with questions prior to acquisition. In cases where there is interest, we will also indicate our willingness to attend or ask to attend county or township meetings to communicate our interest in the projects and seek support.

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

No

Describe the permanent protection and justification for additional protection:

A limited number of the parcels may have a federal or state easement on a portion of the tract, which provides permanent protection for wetlands or grasslands. If a parcel has one of these encumbrances and is still deemed a high priority by our agency partners, we will follow guidance established by the LSOHC to proceed or use non-state funding to acquire the residual value of the protected portion of the property.

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?

Minnesota Land Trust expects to close 3-6 conservation easements through this grant, depending on size and cost of the easements and the level of landowner donation entering the program.

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

Where does the activity take place?

- WMA
- WPA
- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

For fee acquisitions, the primary purposes of WMAs are to develop and manage for the production of wildlife and for compatible outdoor recreation. To fulfill those goals, the DNR may use limited farming specifically to enhance or benefit the management of state lands for wildlife. This proposal may include initial development plans or restoration plans to utilize farming to prepare previously farmed sites for native plant seeding. This is a standard practice across the Midwest to prepare the seedbed for native seed planting. In restorations, non-neonicotinoid treated seed and no herbicides other than glyphosate will be used. On a small percentage of WMAs (less than 2.5%), DNR uses farming to provide a winter food source for a variety of wildlife species in agriculture-dominated landscapes largely devoid of winter food sources. There are no immediate plans to use farming for winter food on any of the parcels in this proposal.

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

The purpose of MLT'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 where 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

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

Fee-title acquisition land secured as part of this project will be open for hunting and fishing.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

- State of MN
- Federal

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

- WMA
- WPA

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

Pheasants Forever expects to close 2 fee acquisitions through this program.

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 MLT’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?

Yes

Depending on R/E need and funding availability, parcels will be restored/enhance through this or a subsequent appropriation.

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

Yes

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Site Prioritization and Targeted Outreach	December 2022
Conservation Easement & Fee-Title Acquisition Completed	June 2025
Restoration	June 2026

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2026

Budget

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

Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$214,200	-	-	\$214,200
Contracts	\$1,173,800	-	-	\$1,173,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$878,000	\$71,000	-, PF, Federal, Private	\$949,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$425,000	\$47,300	PF, Federal, Private	\$472,300
Easement Acquisition	\$900,000	\$180,000	-, Landowner Donation Value	\$1,080,000
Easement Stewardship	\$168,000	-	-	\$168,000
Travel	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Professional Services	\$180,400	-	-	\$180,400
Direct Support Services	\$38,600	-	-	\$38,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$21,000	-	-	\$21,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
Supplies/Materials	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
DNR IDP	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Grand Total	\$4,034,000	\$298,300	-	\$4,332,300

Partner: Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD)

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$83,200	-	-	\$83,200
Contracts	\$950,800	-	-	\$950,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,034,000	-	-	\$1,034,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Water Resource Manager	0.2	4.0	\$83,200	-	-	\$83,200

Partner: Minnesota Land Trust (MLT)

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$115,000	-	-	\$115,000
Contracts	\$36,000	-	-	\$36,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$900,000	\$180,000	Landowner Donation Value	\$1,080,000
Easement Stewardship	\$168,000	-	-	\$168,000
Travel	\$7,000	-	-	\$7,000
Professional Services	\$123,000	-	-	\$123,000
Direct Support Services	\$32,000	-	-	\$32,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,382,000	\$180,000	-	\$1,562,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Land Protection Staff	0.3	4.0	\$115,000	-	-	\$115,000

Partner: Pheasants Forever (PF)

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$16,000	-	-	\$16,000
Contracts	\$187,000	-	-	\$187,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$878,000	\$71,000	PF, Federal, Private	\$949,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$425,000	\$47,300	PF, Federal, Private	\$472,300
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
Professional Services	\$57,400	-	-	\$57,400
Direct Support Services	\$6,600	-	-	\$6,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$21,000	-	-	\$21,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
DNR IDP	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Grand Total	\$1,618,000	\$118,300	-	\$1,736,300

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Grants Staff	0.02	3.0	\$5,800	-	-	\$5,800
Field Staff	0.02	3.0	\$5,800	-	-	\$5,800
State Coordinator	0.02	3.0	\$4,400	-	-	\$4,400

Amount of Request: \$4,034,000

Amount of Leverage: \$298,300

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 7.39%

DSS + Personnel: \$252,800

As a % of the total request: 6.27%

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 reduced appropriation will result in reduced amount of acreage deliverables; however, the partnership is confident that we will still be able to achieve quality protection and restoration goals within the Sauk River Watershed with this allotment.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The leverage source will be the value of land donated by the landowners entering an easement or land acquisition project.

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?

Phase III is a component of the larger Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program. Continuity of funding across multiple phases allows us flexibility when prioritizing parcels for protection, or restoration and enhancement. Further, it ensures stability in the partnership staffing model and provides the ability to plan and prioritize projects over multiple years. As a general rule, the staffing for each entity is existing and only partially funded by OHF and specifically this request. Billing to any appropriation would only be for time spent on direct and necessary costs incurred as outlined in an Accomplishment Plan.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

PF: Restoration, enhancement, and initial development of the protected areas. Could include but not limited to wetland/grassland restoration, tree removal, prescribed fire, building removal, posts, signs, other development activities.

MLT: Complete habitat management plans on new easement acquisitions; restoration plans and projects on existing easements; outreach.

SRWD: Restoration/enhancement.

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

Pheasants Forever expects to close on 2 parcels through fee title acquisition.

Easement Stewardship

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

The Land Trust expects to close 3-6 conservation easements through this appropriation. 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

MLT 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?

PF utilizes the Total Modified Direct Cost method. This methodology is annually approved by the U.S. Department of Interior's National Business Center as the basis for the organization's Indirect Cost Rate agreement. PF's allowable direct support services cost is 5.09% . In this proposal, PF has discounted its rate to 2.5% of the sum of personnel, contracts, professional services, and travel. We are donating the difference-in-kind.

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.

Other Equipment/Tools

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

GPS units, fencepost pounders, other R/E-related tools/equipment as needed.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

No

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds?

07/01/2021

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	54	-	-	170	224
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	35	140	-	-	175
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	17	68	-	-	85
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	400	400
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	106	208	-	570	884

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	\$706,800	-	-	\$327,200	\$1,034,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$218,100	\$872,200	-	-	\$1,090,300
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$105,500	\$422,200	-	-	\$527,700
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$1,382,000	\$1,382,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$1,030,400	\$1,294,400	-	\$1,709,200	\$4,034,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	139	-	85	-	224
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	88	-	87	-	175
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	85	-	85
Protect in Easement	-	200	-	200	-	400
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	427	-	457	-	884

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$865,200	-	\$168,800	-	\$1,034,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$545,200	-	\$545,100	-	\$1,090,300
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$527,700	-	\$527,700
Protect in Easement	-	\$691,000	-	\$691,000	-	\$1,382,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$2,101,400	-	\$1,932,600	-	\$4,034,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	\$13,088	-	-	\$1,924
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$6,231	\$6,230	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$6,205	\$6,208	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,455
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	\$6,224	-	\$1,985	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$6,195	-	\$6,265	-
Protect in Fee w/o State	-	-	-	\$6,208	-

PILT Liability					
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,455	-	\$3,455	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ *Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat, providing nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and SGCN will be restored and protected. Partners will work together to identify priority lands using existing data and public plans, and then coordinate protection, restoration and enhancement activities in those priority areas. Success within each priority area will be determined based on the percentage of area protected, restored, and/or enhanced.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Restored and enhanced upland habitats ~ *Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat, providing nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and Species in Greatest Conservation Need will be restored and protected. Partners will work together to identify priority lands using existing data and public plans, then coordinate protection, restoration and enhancement activities in those priority areas. Success within each priority area will be determined based on the percentage of area protected, restored and/or enhanced.*

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:

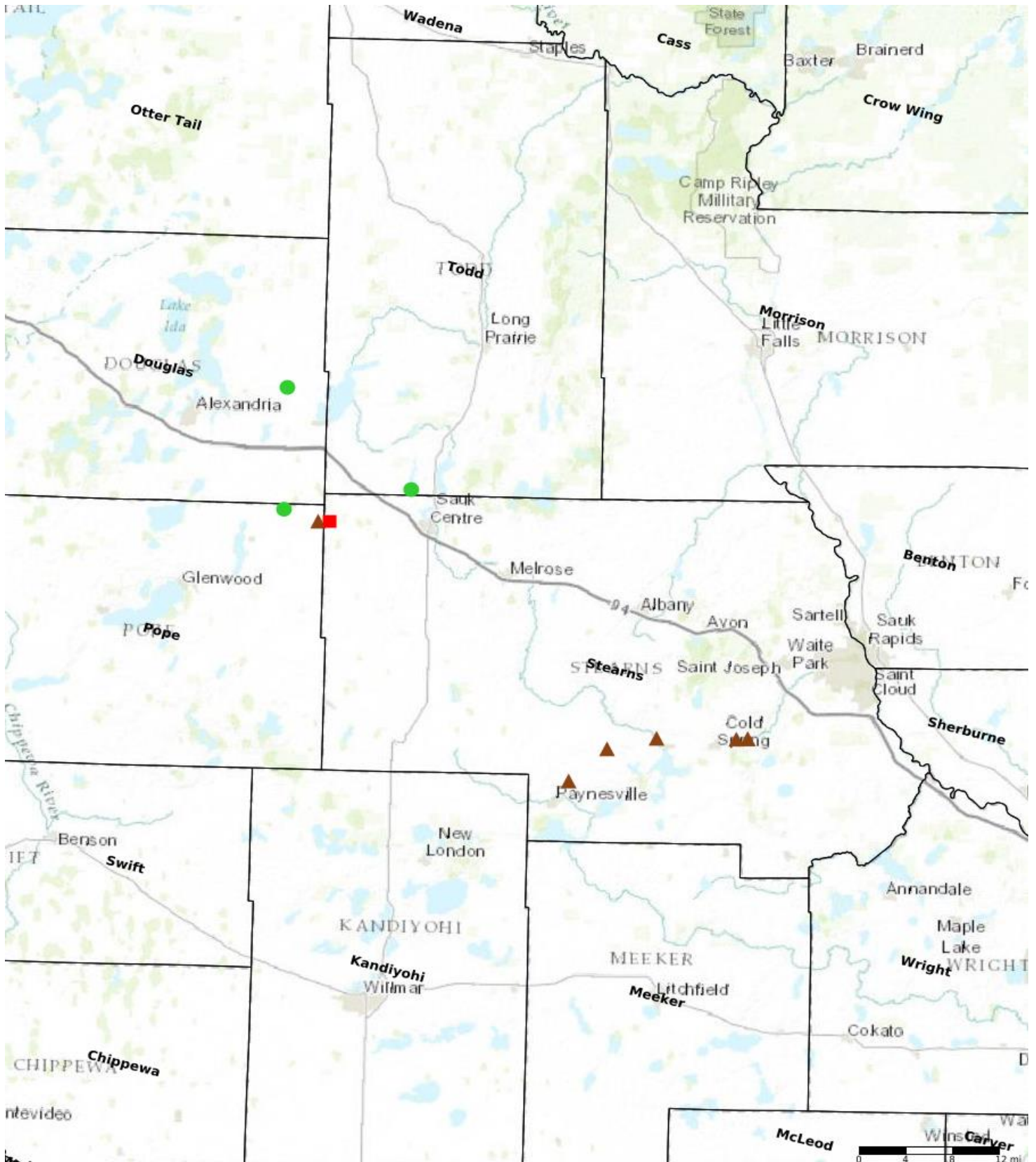
Parcels are identified through TNC's Multiple Benefits Analysis. The size of parcels and proximity to other protected lands are also considered in this analysis. Specific parcels available for acquisition of easements will be further reviewed relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on: amount of habitat on the parcel (size), abundance of SG CN, the quality or condition of habitat, the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas, and cost. MBS data will be another important component of potential conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions. Field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition will also occur, as many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Crooked Lake	Douglas	12836209	37	\$90,000	No
Ellen Lake	Pope	12636204	50	\$84,000	No
TBD WMA	Stearns	12636212	400	\$1,800,000	Yes
Partners WMA	Stearns	12232203	40	\$180,000	No
TBD WPA	Stearns	12635207	388	\$1,350,000	Yes
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12329218	20	\$40,000	No
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12330213	20	\$40,000	No
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12329218	40	\$100,000	No
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12331214	85	\$3,000,000	No
Fairy Lake	Todd	12734229	6	\$24,000	No

Protect Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
TBD WMA	Stearns	12331219	300	\$1,200,000	No	13	\$40,000



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

Parcel Map
Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 3
 (Data Generated From Parcel List)



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Comparison Report

Program Title: ML 2021 - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 3

Organization: Sauk River Watershed District

Manager: Sarah Boser

Budget

Requested Amount: \$8,879,800

Appropriated Amount: \$4,034,000

Percentage: 45.43%

Item	Total Requested		Total Appropriated		Percentage of Request	
	Requested	Leverage	Appropriated	Leverage	Percent of Request	Percent of Leverage
Personnel	\$383,200	-	\$214,200	-	55.9%	-
Contracts	\$1,920,600	-	\$1,173,800	-	61.12%	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$2,000,000	\$150,000	\$878,000	\$71,000	43.9%	47.33%
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$1,000,000	\$100,000	\$425,000	\$47,300	42.5%	47.3%
Easement Acquisition	\$2,700,000	\$540,000	\$900,000	\$180,000	33.33%	33.33%
Easement Stewardship	\$312,000	-	\$168,000	-	53.85%	-
Travel	\$16,000	-	\$10,000	-	62.5%	-
Professional Services	\$356,500	-	\$180,400	-	50.6%	-
Direct Support Services	\$75,500	-	\$38,600	-	51.13%	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$48,000	-	\$21,000	-	43.75%	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$3,000	-	\$1,000	-	33.33%	-
Supplies/Materials	\$26,000	-	\$12,000	-	46.15%	-
DNR IDP	\$39,000	-	\$12,000	-	30.77%	-
Grand Total	\$8,879,800	\$790,000	\$4,034,000	\$298,300	45.43%	37.76%

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

The reduced appropriation will result in reduced amount of acreage deliverables; however, the partnership is confident that we will still be able to achieve quality protection and restoration goals within the Sauk River Watershed with this allotment.

Output

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	500	224	44.8%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	400	175	43.75%
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	200	85	42.5%
Protect in Easement	1,200	400	33.33%
Enhance	0	-	-

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	\$1,494,800	\$1,034,000	69.17%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$2,442,000	\$1,090,300	44.65%
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$1,221,000	\$527,700	43.22%
Protect in Easement	\$3,722,000	\$1,382,000	37.13%
Enhance	-	-	-

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	500	224	44.8%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	400	175	43.75%
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	200	85	42.5%
Protect in Easement	1,200	400	33.33%
Enhance	0	-	-

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	\$1,494,800	\$1,034,000	69.17%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$2,442,000	\$1,090,300	44.65%
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$1,221,000	\$527,700	43.22%
Protect in Easement	\$3,722,000	\$1,382,000	37.13%
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.

SRW PROTECTION & RESTORATION PROGRAM Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet					
		COUNTY			
100 Pts	ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE				
Weighting Factor	Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)				
	a) Size: Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)				
	a) Habitat Quality: Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)				
	b) Imperiled Species: Occurrence of Documented Rare Feature on Parcel				
	SUBTOTAL:	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				
	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)	0	0	0	0
	i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat				
	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) UMB Multiple Benefits Module Score (2 pts)				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS	0	0	0	0

SAUK RIVER WATERSHED 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	≤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
27 pts	661-960 acres
30 pts	961-1300 acres
33 pts	>1300 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 ≤40 acres of contiguous protected lands
- 2 pts 41-60 acres
- 3 pts 61-100 acres
- 4 pts 101-160 acres
- 5 pts 161-240 acres
- 6 pts 241-400 acres
- 7 pts 401-640 acres
- 8 pts >640 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 ≤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 ≤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 ≤80 acres of contiguous 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 ≤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 ≤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