

# Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

## Fiscal Year 2022 / ML 2021 Request for Funding



**Date:** June 30, 2020

**Program or Project Title:** Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 3 (HRE07)

**Funds Requested:** \$8,879,800

**Manager's Name:** Sarah Boser  
**Title:** Water Resource Manager  
**Organization:** Sauk River Watershed District  
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**County Locations:** Douglas, Pope, Stearns, and Todd.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

**Activity types:**

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

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

- Wetlands
- Forest
- Prairie
- Habitat

### 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 1,800 acres of priority habitat in Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition Area. We will restore/enhance approximately 500 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 1,200 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 600 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 500 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 proposal 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.

### **What is the degree of timing/opportunistic urgency and why it is necessary to spend public money for this work as soon as possible:**

The SRW is in a rapidly growing region of the state that has experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade and is expected to increase. We currently have landowners with parcels totaling approximately 2,850 acres interested in the program and have yet to have an opportunity to implement our full outreach strategy. Numerous landowners with high priority habitat have shown strong interest, including landowners that have land about to expire or just expired from CRP but that does not qualify for CREP. Without this program, there is a strong risk that these priority properties to be converted back to land uses that will adversely affect habitat and water quality benefits initially gained from enrollment in CRP.

### **Describe how the proposal 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 sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are applicable to this project:**

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

### **Which other plans are addressed in this proposal:**

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

### **Describe how your program will advance the indicators identified in the plans selected:**

In Minnesota DNR's Strategic Conservation Agenda (Goal 1), the strategies include identifying lands and waters at greatest risk, managing lands and waters for ecosystem health and resilience, and conservation of natural areas, working habitats, and species in danger of being lost. Our proposed program will prioritize lands for protection that are at greatest risk, restore and manage lands to maintain quality habitat, improve regional resiliency, and enhance ecosystem services.

The 25-Year Framework expects a future in which ample grasses and other vegetation are on shorelands and higher in the watershed to keep water on the land. It envisions that wetland/upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands, and restored shallow lakes and wetlands. The Framework prioritizes protection, restoration, and enhancement of wetland/upland complexes, protection of native prairies, and protection of expiring CRP lands - all of which will be realized in this proposed program.

### **Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal:**

#### **Prairie:**

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

#### **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

### **Describe how your program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife as indicated in the LSOHC priorities:**

This program protects wetland/grassland complexes, riparian floodplains and adjacent forested uplands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for Minnesota's wildlife, especially its migratory waterfowl and associated species. This proposal seeks to build on the success of funding received in 2019 and expected in 2020 from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), together the first two phases will protect approximately 1,500 acres and restore/enhance approximately 550 acres of quality wetlands and associated upland habitat in the SRW. Through Phases 1 and 2, our program has already protected 522.45 acres, including more than 5 miles of undeveloped shoreline and restored/enhanced 65 acres. Despite relatively limited outreach and a young program, we've garnered additional

interest from 2,850 acres. Properties in the application pool include land adjacent to the Sauk River and high-quality lakes and includes exceptional existing or easily restorable critical habitat such as wetlands, forests and prairie.

The need and landowner interest are high. We have spent much of our 2019 allocation and current applications exceed available and anticipated funding. Additionally, we had 729 CRP contracts, comprising 5,028 acres, expire in 2018 and 2019 in the SRW, and an additional 322 contracts comprising 2,825 acres, will expire this year. A small window exists to protect high quality sites now as they are expiring from CRP and before they are developed or converted back to farmland.

**Relationship to other funds:**

- Not Listed

**Describe the relationship of the funds:**

Not Listed

**Does this program include leverage in funds:**

Yes

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 \$540,000. MLT has a long track record in incentivizing landowners to participate in this fashion.

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, Any state agency or organization requesting a direct appropriation from the OHF must inform the LSOHC at the time of the request for funding is made, 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.

**Describe the source and amount of non-OHF money spent for this work in the past:**

Not Listed

**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.

**Explain the things you will do in the future 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.		

## Identify indicator species and associated quantities this habitat will typically support:

Ovenbird – Research indicates that there are roughly 16 pairs for every 40 acres. We estimate that our program, by using conservation easements and fee acquisition, will protect and/or restore/enhance approximately 600 acres of upland forest, which can produce an additional 240 pairs.

Pheasant – It is estimated that every three acres of grassland habitat has the potential to produce one harvested pheasant rooster. We estimate that our program will protect and/or restore/enhance approximately 1,000 acres of grassland habitat, which can produce an additional 333 pheasants annually.

Monarch Butterfly - Research from the University of Minnesota has shown that approximately 30 milkweed stems result in one monarch butterfly contributing to the overwintering Mexican population. An acre of restored or enhanced grassland could potentially contribute three to eight monarchs to the population. As outlined in our proposal, we estimate the protection/restoration/enhancement of approximately 1,000 acres of grassland habitat, which can produce approximately 5,000 monarch butterflies.

Mallard – The Prairie Pothole Joint Venture and the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture biological model estimate one mallard pair per 2.47 acres of wetland habitat (noting that upland habitat for nesting is also obviously needed). This proposal looks to protect/restore/enhance an estimated 700 acres of wetland habitat, which can produce an additional 283 pairs of mallards.

## Activity Details

### Requirements:

If funded, this proposal 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**

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**

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**

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 (WMA, WPA, Private Lands)**

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**

### Land Use:

Will there be planting of corn or any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program - **Yes**

Explain

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**

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

Will the eased land be open for public use - **No**

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the acquisitions on the parcel list - **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 land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this proposals funding and availability? - **Yes**

## Land Use:

Have you received OHF dollars in the past through LSOHC? - **Yes**

## Past appropriations and spending to date:

Apprp Year	Approp Amount Received	Approp Amount Spent to Date	Leverage as Reported in AP/th>	Leverage Realized to Date	Total Acres Affected in AP	Total Acres Affected to Date	Program Complete and Final Report Approved?
2019	2946000	659600	293600	956100	720	486	No

## Accomplishment Timeline

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

# Budget Spreadsheet

**Total Amount of Request: \$8,879,800**

## Budget and Cash Leverage

BudgetName	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$383,200	\$0		\$383,200
Contracts	\$1,920,600	\$0		\$1,920,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$2,000,000	\$150,000	PF, Federal, Private	\$2,150,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$1,000,000	\$100,000	PF, Federal, Private	\$1,100,000
Easement Acquisition	\$2,700,000	\$540,000	Landowner Donation of Easement Value	\$3,240,000
Easement Stewardship	\$312,000	\$0		\$312,000
Travel	\$16,000	\$0		\$16,000
Professional Services	\$356,500	\$0		\$356,500
Direct Support Services	\$75,500	\$0		\$75,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$48,000	\$0		\$48,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$3,000	\$0		\$3,000
Supplies/Materials	\$26,000	\$0		\$26,000
DNR IDP	\$39,000	\$0		\$39,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$8,879,800</b>	<b>\$790,000</b>		<b>\$9,669,800</b>

## Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
State Coordinator - PF	0.03	3.00	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Field Staff - PF	0.05	3.00	\$12,000	\$0		\$12,000
Grants Staff - PF	0.05	3.00	\$12,000	\$0		\$12,000
MLT Protection Staff	0.70	4.00	\$266,000	\$0		\$266,000
SRWD Water Resource Manager/Administrator	0.20	4.00	\$83,200	\$0		\$83,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.03</b>	<b>17.00</b>	<b>\$383,200</b>	<b>\$0</b>		<b>\$383,200</b>

## Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Pheasants Forever	\$34,000	\$0		\$34,000
Contracts	Pheasants Forever	\$425,000	\$0		\$425,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Pheasants Forever	\$2,000,000	\$150,000	PF, Federal, Private	\$2,150,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Pheasants Forever	\$1,000,000	\$100,000	PF, Federal, Private	\$1,100,000
Easement Acquisition	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	Pheasants Forever	\$6,000	\$0		\$6,000
Professional Services	Pheasants Forever	\$71,500	\$0		\$71,500
Direct Support Services	Pheasants Forever	\$13,500	\$0		\$13,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Pheasants Forever	\$48,000	\$0		\$48,000
Capital Equipment	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Pheasants Forever	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	Pheasants Forever	\$26,000	\$0		\$26,000
DNR IDP	Pheasants Forever	\$39,000	\$0		\$39,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$3,663,000</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>		<b>\$3,913,000</b>

## Personnel - Pheasants Forever

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
State Coordinator - PF	0.03	3.00	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Field Staff - PF	0.05	3.00	\$12,000	\$0		\$12,000
Grants Staff - PF	0.05	3.00	\$12,000	\$0		\$12,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>9.00</b>	<b>\$34,000</b>	<b>\$0</b>		<b>\$34,000</b>

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
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Personnel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$266,000	\$0		\$266,000
Contracts	Minnesota Land Trust	\$84,000	\$0		\$84,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Minnesota Land Trust	\$2,700,000	\$540,000	Landowner Donation of Easement Value	\$3,240,000
Easement Stewardship	Minnesota Land Trust	\$312,000	\$0		\$312,000
Travel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Professional Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$285,000	\$0		\$285,000
Direct Support Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$62,000	\$0		\$62,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Minnesota Land Trust	\$3,000	\$0		\$3,000
Supplies/Materials	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$3,722,000	\$540,000		\$4,262,000

**Personnel - Minnesota Land Trust**

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.70	4.00	\$266,000	\$0		\$266,000
Total	0.70	4.00	\$266,000	\$0		\$266,000

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Sauk River Watershed District	\$83,200	\$0		\$83,200
Contracts	Sauk River Watershed District	\$1,411,600	\$0		\$1,411,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Professional Services	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Direct Support Services	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Sauk River Watershed District	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$1,494,800	\$0		\$1,494,800

**Personnel - Sauk River Watershed District**

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
SRWD Water Resource Manager/Administrator	0.20	4.00	\$83,200	\$0		\$83,200
Total	0.20	4.00	\$83,200	\$0		\$83,200

Amount of Request: \$8,879,800  
Amount of Leverage: \$790,000  
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 8.90%  
DSS + Personnel: \$458,700  
As a % of the total request: 5.17%  
Easement Stewardship: \$312,000  
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 11.56%

**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.

**What is included in the contracts line?**

PF: restoration, enhancement and initial development of the protected acres. 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

**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**

**Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:**

Leverage is expected from multiple sources including but not limited to federal sources, land value donations, contractor donations and PF. Not every source is 100% confirmed at this point. However, PF has an exemplary track record of delivery and over-achievement of match commitments that further stretch OHF funding.

**Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable? - Yes**

**Tell us how this project would be scaled and how administrative costs are affected, describe the "economy of scale" and how outputs would change with reduced funding, if applicable:**

Our planned wetland restoration project is not scalable. The budget requested is the full cost of the project and it could not be restored without full funding. For the other protection, restoration and enhancement work, if scaled back, this proposal would be reduced proportionately across all categories of the budget and output tables.

**What is the cost per easement for stewardship and explain how that amount is calculated?**

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.

**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.

**What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?**

## Output Tables

**Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type**

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	60	0	0	440	500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	80	320	0	0	400
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	40	160	0	0	200
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	1,200	1,200
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	180	480	0	1,640	2,300

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

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

**Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type**

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$655,800	\$0	\$0	\$839,000	\$1,494,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$488,400	\$1,953,600	\$0	\$0	\$2,442,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$244,200	\$976,800	\$0	\$0	\$1,221,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,722,000	\$3,722,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$1,388,400	\$2,930,400	\$0	\$4,561,000	\$8,879,800

**Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	250	0	250	0	500
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	200	0	200	0	400
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	200	0	200
Protect in Easement	0	600	0	600	0	1,200
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1,050	0	1,250	0	2,300

**Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$747,400	\$0	\$747,400	\$0	\$1,494,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$1,221,000	\$0	\$1,221,000	\$0	\$2,442,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,221,000	\$0	\$1,221,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$1,861,000	\$0	\$1,861,000	\$0	\$3,722,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$3,829,400	\$0	\$5,050,400	\$0	\$8,879,800

**Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type**

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$10,930	\$0	\$0	\$1,907
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$6,105	\$6,105	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$6,105	\$6,105	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,102
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

**Table 6. Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest
Restore	\$0	\$2,990	\$0	\$2,990	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$6,105	\$0	\$6,105	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$6,105	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$3,102	\$0	\$3,102	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

*Automatic system calculation / not entered by managers*

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

0

I have read and understand Section 15 of the Constitution of the State of Minnesota, Minnesota Statute 97A.056, and the Call for Funding Request. I certify I am authorized to submit this proposal and to the best of my knowledge the information provided is true and accurate.

# 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.*

# Parcel List

## Explain the process used to select, rank and prioritize the parcels:

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.

## Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

## Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

### Douglas

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Crooked Lake	12836209	37	\$90,000	No	No	No

### Pope

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Ellen Lake	12636204	50	\$84,000	No	No	No

### Stearns

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Partners WMA	12232203	40	\$180,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
TBD WMA	12636212	400	\$1,800,000	Yes	Full	Not Applicable
TBD WMA/AMA	12329218	20	\$40,000	No	Full	Full
TBD WMA/AMA	12329218	40	\$100,000	No	Full	Full
TBD WMA/AMA	12330213	20	\$40,000	No	Full	Full
TBD WMA/AMA	12331214	85	\$3,000,000	No	Full	Full
TBD WPA	12635207	388	\$1,350,000	Yes	Full	Not Applicable

### Todd

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Fairy Lake	12734229	6	\$24,000	No	No	No

## Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

### Stearns

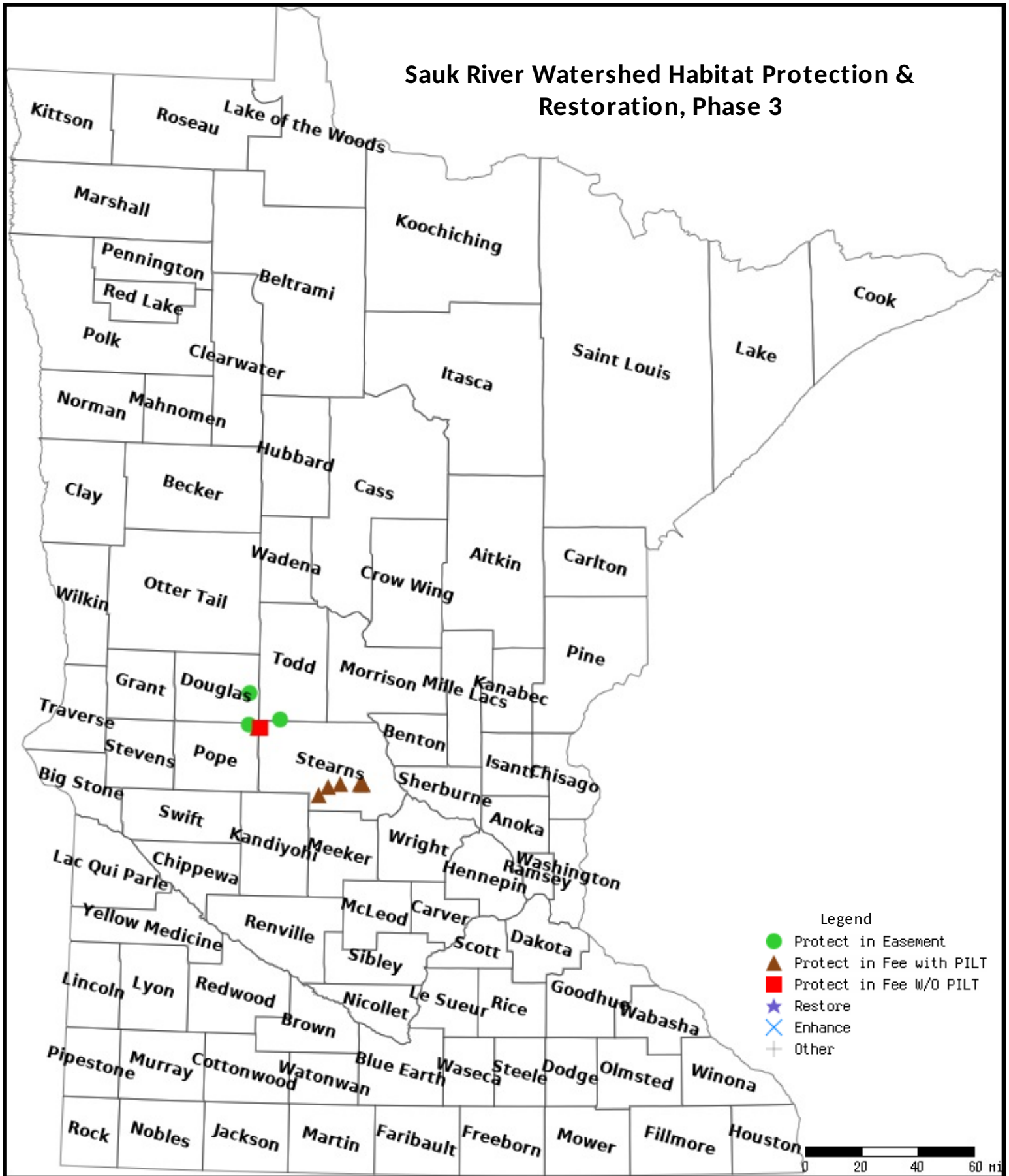
Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
TBD WMA	12331219	300	\$1,200,000	13	2 old farm sites	\$40,000	Remove

## Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

# Parcel Map

## Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 3



Data Generated From Parcel List



# Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program, Phase 3

## Outdoor Heritage Fund Request

**\$8,879,800** to permanently protect **1,800 acres** through conservation easements and fee title acquisition, and restore & enhance **500 acres** of the most important habitat in the Sauk River Watershed.

This program will conserve vital habitat, including wetlands, upland forests, floodplains forests, and prairies within Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition ecoregions. Properties will be targeted using an innovative site prioritization model that maximizes conservation benefit and financial leverage.



## Program Benefits

- Ensure long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife by permanently protecting and restoring critical habitats and increasing habitat connectivity
- Increase opportunities for fishing, hunting, and observation of a variety of wildlife species, including several SGCN
- Improve groundwater and surface water quality
- Increase citizen's knowledge of the importance of protecting critical habitat



**The Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program seeks to protect, restore and enhance the critical wildlife habitat and freshwater resources within this region.**

The Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD), Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), and Pheasants Forever (PF), supported by Stearns, Douglas, and Todd Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), The Nature Conservancy, Minnesota DNR, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will protect 1,800 acres and restore/enhance **500** acres of habitat within the Sauk River Watershed (SRW).

- SRWD will provide grant administration and coordinate some of the restoration components, with the assistance of Stearns, Douglas, and Todd SWCDs and others. This will include at least one large wetland restoration.
- MLT will protect **1,200** acres using conservation easements.
- PF will protect **600** acres using fee simple acquisition and complete needed restoration on those acres.

## Program Outcomes

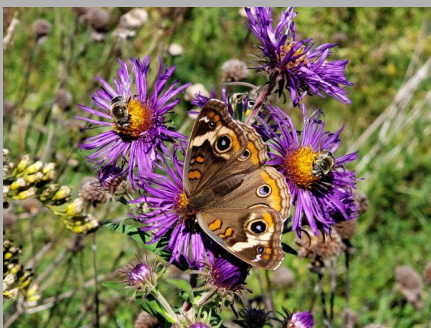
This program will protect high quality wetlands, forests, and prairies in the Sauk River Watershed (SRW), which provide a multitude of ecosystem services. We will target high quality and easily restorable critical habitats to create large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat that will benefit many species including waterfowls and Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

As side benefits, this work will protect and improve water quality in the Sauk River, which is a designated canoe route and a drinking water source. It will also enhance regional wildlife viewing and fishing. Fee title acquisition projects will create additional public land that will provide hunting and other recreational opportunities for families and youth to spend time in the outdoors.



## Urgency

- The SRW lies within a rapidly growing region of the state that has experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade and is expected to increase.
- The SRW has also seen high rates of residential development that has already resulted in the loss of high quality habitat.
- ~1,000 CRP contracts, comprising ~8,000 acres have recently expired. Many of these contracts do not qualify for CREP. Without this program, there is a high risk that these properties will convert back to land uses that will adversely affect habitat and water quality benefits that were initially gained from enrollment in CRP.



## Mission of Partnership

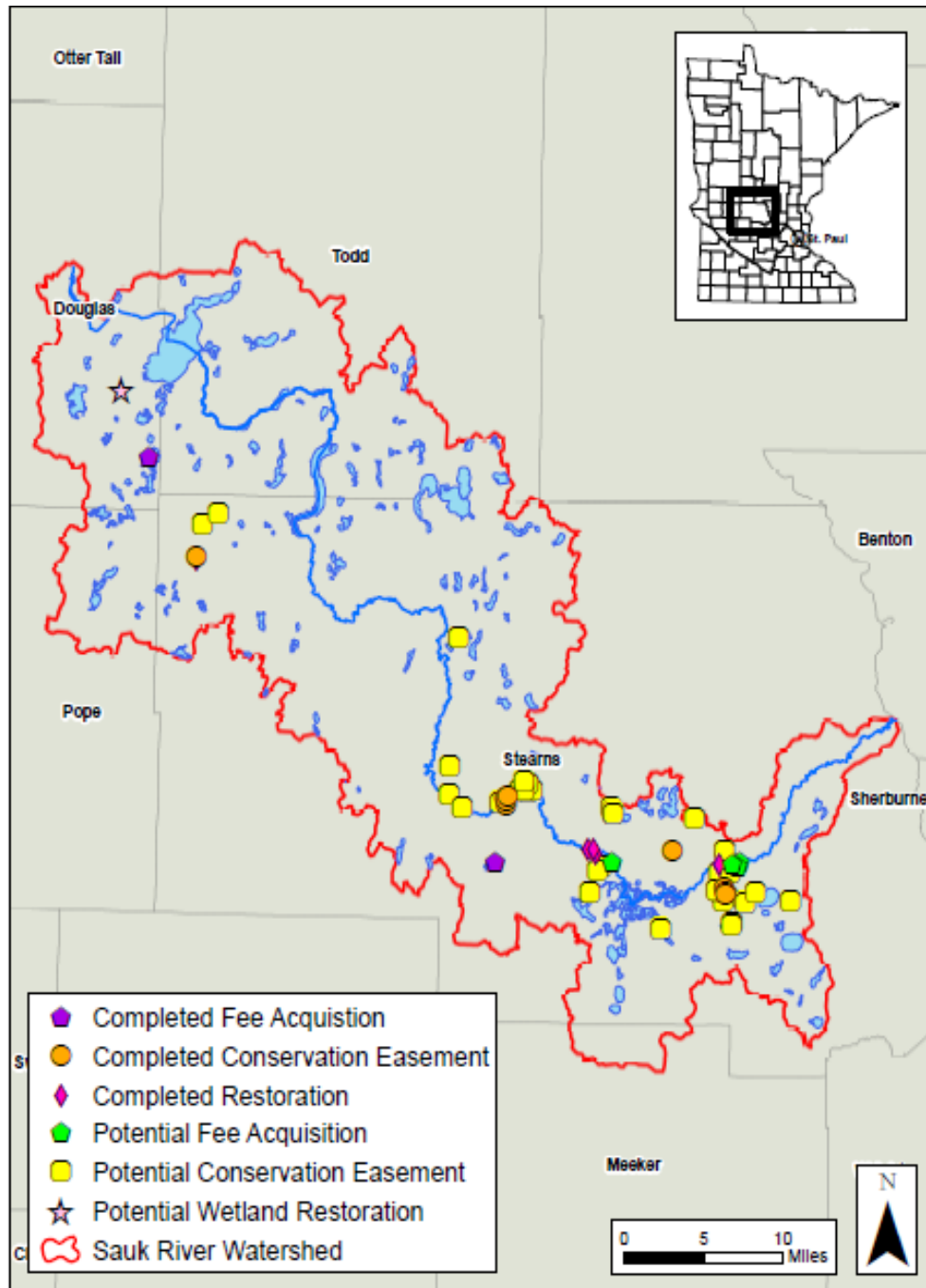
*“Protect, restore and enhance wildlife habitat, groundwater and surface water quality, recreational opportunities and ecosystem services of the Sauk River Watershed”*



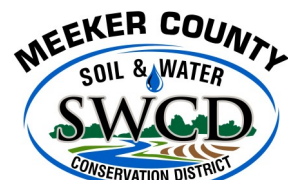
Jill Bauer/TNC Photo Contest 2019

## Contact us

Sauk River Watershed District  
 524 Fourth Street South  
 Sauk Centre, MN 56378  
 Website: [www.srwdmn.org](http://www.srwdmn.org)  
 Phone: 320-352-2231



## Project Partners





## 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	<b>ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE</b>				
Weighting Factor	<b>Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)</b>				
	a) Size: Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement				
	<b>SUBTOTAL:</b>	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	<b>Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)</b>				
	a) <b>Habitat Quality:</b> Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)				
	b) <b>Imperiled Species:</b> Occurrence of Documented Rare Feature on Parcel				
	<b>SUBTOTAL:</b>	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	<b>Landscape Context (34 points)</b>				
	<b>Current Status (30 points)</b>				
	<b>a) Protection Context (15 points)</b>				
	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>b) Ecological Context (15 points)</b>	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)				
	<b>Future Potential (4 points)</b>				
	<b>a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)</b>				
	<b>b) UMB Multiple Benefits Module Score (2 pts)</b>				
	<b>SUBTOTAL:</b>	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS</b>	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





# United States Department of the Interior



## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

5600 American Boulevard West, Suite 990  
Bloomington, Minnesota 55437-1458

IN REPLY REFER TO:

FWS/IR3/NWRS/

Scott Henderson  
Sauk River Watershed District  
524 4<sup>th</sup> Street S.  
Sauk Centre, Minnesota 56378

Dear Mr. Henderson:

On behalf of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Minnesota, I would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore, and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore, and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous species, including many Species of Greatest Conservation Need and Federal trust species. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will benefit the quality of the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and an important drinking water source.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Suzanne C. Baird  
Regional Chief



# Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District

Stearns County SWCD  
110 2<sup>nd</sup> Street South – Suite 128  
Waite Park, MN 56387

Tel. (320) 251-7800 ext 3  
Fax (855) 205-6907  
[www.StearnsCountySWCD.net](http://www.StearnsCountySWCD.net)

May 18, 2020

Sauk River Watershed District  
Attn. Scott Henderson  
524 4th St S.  
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2022/ML 2021 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 3

Dear Mr. Henderson,

The Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District supports the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund Phase 3 proposal. This proposal will protect and restore lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

Phase 1 and 2 of the Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration project have protected and restored wetlands and adjacent uplands vital habitat for several species. In addition, the program continues to benefit the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and is great for fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor recreation. Also, this program can help improve water quality of the Sauk River.

Landowner demand to participate in the program has been overwhelming. The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland conversion and urban sprawl, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife and maintaining the recreational opportunities in our community.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Dennis J. Fuchs  
Administrator



May 28, 2020

Sauk River Watershed District  
Attn. Scott Henderson  
524 4th St S,  
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2022/ML 2021 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 3

Dear Mr. Henderson,

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, we would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The Sauk River watershed is one of our highest priority watersheds in Minnesota. The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore and enhance will provide vital habitat to numerous species, including many Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The program will provide benefit to the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and an important drinking water source, contributing to the drinking water for City of St. Cloud. This proposal will also benefit groundwater, which communities throughout the watershed depend on to supply plentiful, clean drinking water.

The Nature Conservancy is pleased to be an active partner in this watershed and to offer support to this proposal. We recognize the importance of this program for protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement and fee land acquisition, as well as restoring lands to improve their habitat quality.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Shaw".

Douglas Shaw, PhD  
Assistant Chapter Director  
The Nature Conservancy - Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota



**DOUGLAS SOIL AND WATER  
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

900 Robert Street  
Suite 102  
Alexandria, Minnesota 56308  
Telephone (320) 763-3191

**MINNESOTA  
SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

May 20, 2020

Sauk River Watershed District  
Attn. Scott Henderson  
524 4th St S.  
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2022/ML 2021 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 3

Dear Mr. Henderson,

On behalf of Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District, I would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous species, including many Species of Greatest Conservation Need. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will benefit the quality of the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and an important drinking water source.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,



Jerry Haggemiller  
District Coordinator

May 28, 2020

Sauk River Watershed District  
Attn. Scott Henderson  
524 4th St S.  
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2022/ML 2021 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 3

Dear Mr. Henderson,

On behalf of Meeker Soil and Water Conservation District, I would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous species, including many Species of Greatest Conservation Need. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will benefit the quality of the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and an important drinking water source.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,



Joe Norman  
Meeker SWCD