



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Minnesota Forests for the Future Phase IX Laws of Minnesota 2022 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 03/05/2025

Project Title: Minnesota Forests for the Future Phase IX

Funds Recommended: \$2,501,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2022, Ch. 77, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 3(c)

Appropriation Language: \$2,501,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources to acquire lands in conservation easements and to restore and enhance forests, wetlands, and shoreline habitat through working forest permanent conservation easements under the Minnesota forests for the future program according to Minnesota Statutes, section 84.66. A conservation easement acquired with money appropriated under this paragraph must comply with Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 13. The accomplishment plan must include an easement monitoring and enforcement plan. Of this amount, up to \$220,000 is to establish a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan. A list of permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Christine Ostern

Title: Forest Legacy Program Coordinator

Organization: MN DNR Division of Forestry, Forest Legacy Program

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Location Information

County Location(s): St. Louis, Isanti, Hubbard, Itasca, Morrison, Otter Tail, Rice and Todd.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Forest / Prairie Transition

Prairie

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Wetlands

Habitat

Narrative**Abstract**

The MN Forests for the Future Program Phase IX will protect 3329 acres of forest, shoreline and wetland habitat in the Pineland Sands Aquifer and other areas of northern, forest/prairie transition and southeastern forest regions through permanent working forest conservation easements on private land. Protecting forest lands provides habitat for wildlife and rare species, conserves water quality and quantity, supports local tourism and timber economies and provides recreation opportunities. This program works with partners to implement protection strategies from local and state plans and initiatives.

Design and Scope of Work

MN Forests for the Future Ph.IX focuses forest and riparian habitat protection located in the northern, forest/prairie and prairie regions; strategically targeting areas of large forest blocks threatened by conversion and parcelization. Forty-four percent of forests in Minnesota, or nearly 7.5 million acres, are privately-owned and at risk of fragmentation or conversion. Since 2008, Minnesota has experienced some of the highest conversion rates in the United States, with some of the highest in the state located in North Central MN. This program protects forests through permanent working forest conservation easements and strategic fee title acquisitions. Protection work achieves multiple benefits by conserving critical habitat, maintaining forested land cover essential for high water quality/quantity and by sustaining the forested landscape critical for local jobs in tourism and timber. This work is critical to conserving wildlife that require large intact forests and provides perpetual protection for fish, game and wildlife that inhabit these forested landscapes.

The program focuses work within the Pineland Sands Aquifer, Mississippi Headwaters, Forest/Prairie Transition and Big Woods remnants of the prairie areas building on existing protection and utilizing strong partnerships including local governments and citizen groups. Land cover and land use directly impacts water quality/quantity; by protecting forests in key areas, this program will also protect drinking water, recharge aquifers, reduce nutrient and sediment to lakes and streams, protect floodplains, sustain fisheries and mitigate climate change. Protection of forested land is critical for local economies including tourism, timber and for outdoor recreation opportunities. Acquisition of permanent working forest conservation easements will protect 3329 acres of intact forests of high conservation value and keep them in private ownership. Conservation easements are strategically focused to build on existing protection, address regional goals and meet private landowner demand. Guidelines developed and

implemented for more than 15 years through the program are followed to ensure protection work is strategically located and stewardship is efficient and sound. A forest management plan is included with each conservation easement with updates required regularly. To ensure permanent protection, ongoing stewardship includes annual landowner meetings, on-site monitoring, landowner response and resolving violations. Communication with local units of government about these projects has occurred so that projects are supported. Discussions and partnership with conservation organizations and local citizen conservation groups are on-going so that protection efforts are informed and efficient.

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?

Targeted habitats of our proposal include: upland conifer forests, upland hardwood forests, forested wetlands, non-forested (shrub) wetlands, open peatlands and stream and lake shoreline. Protection of these forest lands and associated habitat will provide critical habitat for key forest game species including upland birds (turkey, woodcock, ruffed grouse, sharp-tailed grouse), white-tail deer, moose, black bear, fisher, pine marten and waterfowl as well as songbird and other non-game wildlife species. Forested and wetland habitat protection will occur in priority conservation areas as identified in several statewide planning efforts such as The Nature Conservancy's Multiple Benefit Analysis and Resilient Lands Mapping Tool and the state's Forest Action Plan and Assessment of Need.

Several parcels have been identified in the Pine Moraines and Outwash Plains, Chippewa Plains and St. Louis Moraines ecological subsections. In just the Pine Moraines and Outwash Plains subsection, there are 89 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) with 29 of those being federal or state endangered, threatened or of special concern. Wildlife using this habitat include bald eagles, red-shouldered hawks, northern goshawks, gray wolves, sandhill cranes, common loons, black-throated blue warblers, wood turtles, four-toed salamanders and eastern hognose snakes. Several parcels have been identified in the Hardwood Hills and Big Woods ecological subsections. In just the Big Woods subsection, there are 121 SGCN with 55 of those being federal or state endangered, threatened or of special concern. Wildlife using this habitat include cerulean warbler, least weasel, Louisiana waterthrush, wood thrush and numerous species of migratory warblers. In total, this proposal supports protection of habitat with significant value for over 225 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

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:

MN Forests for the Future Program uses GIS analysis to expand protection of large habitat blocks and corridors. The tracts of forest land targeted for protection with this program have some, if not all, of the following traits: are currently unprotected inholdings; large tracts that have been identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey (including identified sites of high quality biodiversity significance); corridors and habitat identified by the State Wildlife Action Plan as significant; presence of rare species and Species in Conservation Need or the habitat that support those species; located in a strategic habitat complex and are adjacent to other protected land so that complexes can be protected and management improved. In addition we consult with local and regional watershed and landscape planning efforts such as The Nature Conservancy's Multiple Benefit Analysis and Resilient Lands Mapping Tool, DNR's Forest Action Plan and Assessment of Need, PCA's watershed planning efforts, BWSR's and local SWCD's One Watershed One Plan efforts, the MFRC's Regional Landscape Plans, and the DNR/BWSR Landscape Stewardship Plans.

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

LU10 Support and expand sustainable practices on working forested lands

LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

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

Northern Forest

Provide access to manage habitat on landlocked public properties or protect forest land from parcelization and fragmentation through fee acquisition, conservation or access easement

Prairie

Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Protected, restored, and enhanced aspen parklands and riparian areas ~ *This project will permanently protect 900 acres through acquisition of conservation easement of forest and riparian areas including many wetlands, shallow lakes, ponds, shoreline and other types of riparian areas. This proposal will protect land which provides biologically diverse wildlife habitat for desirable game species and endangered, threatened, special concern species and SGCN; providing multiple conservation benefits to help mitigate the effects of climate change, invasive species and other major stressors. Forest Protection activities will be assessed, management planning required and documented and properties monitored. Forest composition will be inventoried. Wildlife populations will be monitored.*

Programs in the northern forest region:

Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *This project will permanently protect 2,332 acres of northern forest and riparian areas including wetlands, streams, shoreland, small lakes and ponds. All northern forest parcels included in this proposal are at high risk of conversion from working forests. Forest protection activities will be assessed, management planning required/documented and properties monitored. Forest composition will be inventoried; wildlife populations will be monitored.*

Programs in prairie region:

Protected, enhanced and restored remnants of big woods and oak savanna ~ *This project will permanently protect 97 acres of Big Woods remnants in the prairie region including >½ mile of shoreline along the Cannon R.*

adjacent to a WMA and a parcel <1mile from Nerstrand Big Woods S.P. and adjacent to other protected areas. This is an area of extreme development pressure due to proximity to large cities and conversion to ag. This project will contribute to connections maintained between forests and riparian areas across private and public ownerships. Forest protection activities will be assessed, management planning required/documented and properties monitored; forests will be inventoried; wildlife populations will be monitored.

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

A total of \$944,250 of leverage from a variety of public and private sources will be provided over the life of the program including landowner donated value and RIM Critical Habitat Match credits generated by previous private donations to the program. In addition, \$13,000 of funds from a USFS administrative grant will be used as leverage.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.

This request would fund new projects that would not be implemented but for the appropriation.

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
2020	State Bonding - Minnesota Forests for the Future	\$1,000,000
2016	Wild Turkey Federation, Minnesota Deer Hunters	\$10,000
2015	Wild Turkey Federation, Minnesota Deer Hunters	\$10,000
2014	Wild Turkey Federation, Minnesota Deer Hunters	\$10,000
2014	State Bonding - Reforestation	\$54,827
2013	State Bonding - Reforestation	\$187,687
2012	State Bonding - Reforestation	\$80,320
2012	State Bonding - Minnesota Forests for the Future	\$231,551
2012	Reinvest in Minnesota	\$229,100
2017-2019	US Forest Service	\$40,000
2012	The Nature Conservancy	\$1,437,900

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

All land protected through permanent conservation easements will be sustained through set guidelines for conservation easement stewardship that have been developed and implemented for more than 15 years through the Minnesota Forests for the Future Program. Easement stewardship incorporates annual landowner meetings, annual on-site monitoring of all properties, records management, responding to landowner inquiries, tracking ownership changes and addressing and resolving easement violations. Landowners of land in conservation easement are required to obtain and follow a certified Woodland Stewardship Plan. Funding for easement stewardship is included in this proposal.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
annually/perpetually	OHF - Easement Stewardship Account	Monitor easements annually and enforce easement terms through annual landowner contact and on-site monitoring	Annually review forest management activities and review and update Forest Stewardship Plans periodically	-

Provide an assessment of how your program celebrates cultural diversity or reaches diverse communities in Minnesota, including reaching low- and moderate-income households:

The Program has the following ties to BIPOC and diverse communities:

- Six of the ten proposed parcels are located in environmental justice areas of concern according to a MPCA analysis where at least 40% reported income less than 185% of the federal poverty level. Protecting these properties mitigates environmental justice concerns for this at-risk population.
- Several of the proposed parcels fall within areas identified by EPA in its environmental justice mapping and screening tool as above the state's average for environmental risk factors to at-risk demographic groups. Demographic indicators used are: percent low-income, percent people of color, less than high school education, linguistic isolation, age under 5 and over 64. Protection within these areas will help mitigate the environmental justice issues.
- Program outreach strategies to under-served landowners have begun and will continue including presentations and other outreach to under-served groups to provide more diverse participation opportunities; for example the MN Women's Woodland Network.
- Protection of strategic parcels provide permanent ecosystem services for everyone such as clean drinking water, productive habitat, clean air, climate change mitigation, sedimentation/erosion control and recreation. The DNR has adopted advancing diversity, equity and inclusion as a key priority in its 2020-22 strategic plan; focusing on building partnerships with diverse communities. DNR's OHF projects aim to serve all Minnesotans. At the same time, we are bringing more focus in all our work to BIPOC and diverse communities. Project scoring and implementation benefit BIPOC and diverse communities through recreational opportunities that are close-to-home, culturally responsive and accessible to Minnesotans with disabilities. The DNR has diversity, equity and inclusion strategies that benefit all OHF projects including: public engagement that seeks out BIPOC voices and involves diverse communities, outreach and marketing of projects has this focus as well; and partnerships are at the center of all projects, Tribes in particular are consulted in all pertinent areas of the DNR's work

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Yes

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

Yes

Who will manage the easement?

MN DNR Division of Forestry, Forest Legacy Program

Who will be the easement holder?

MN DNR, Division of Forestry

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

Seven (7) conservation easements

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?

No

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

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

Yes

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

Forest access roads and trails have been developed to aid in forest management practices. These roads will be maintained to provide ongoing access for forestry, fisheries and wildlife management activities on the properties.

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Maintenance of forest access roads and trails will be the responsibility of the landowner (private landowners). Monitoring of roads and trails will be conducted as part of the annual easement monitoring of the eased properties. The DNR has a monitoring and reporting plan in place that involves the Divisions of Forestry, Parks and Trails and Enforcement. This includes annual spring (and other wet season) closures, reporting issues and enforcement actions when necessary.

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?

-

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

No

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

Any future restoration or enhancement will be the responsibility of the landowner (private landowners).

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Acquire new state forest land	June 30, 2025
Develop conservation easement monitoring plans, forest stewardship plans, dedicate easement stewardship	June 30, 2025
Acquire working forest conservation easements	June 30, 2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2026

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7. Availability of Appropriation

(a) Money appropriated in this section may not be spent on activities unless they are directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation and are specified in the accomplishment plan approved by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Money appropriated in this section must not be spent on indirect costs or other institutional overhead charges that are not directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation. Money appropriated to acquire land in fee may be used to restore, enhance, and provide for public use of the land acquired with the appropriation. Public-use facilities must have a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

(b) Money appropriated in this section is available as follows:

(1) money appropriated for acquiring real property is available until June 30, 2026;

(2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this act is available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2030;

(3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2027;

(4) notwithstanding clauses (1) to (3), money appropriated for a project that receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds is available until a date sufficient to match the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if the federal funding was confirmed and included in the original approved draft accomplishment plan; and

(5) money appropriated for other projects is available until the end of the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.

Budget

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

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$75,000	\$13,000	-	\$88,000
Contracts	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$1,956,200	\$944,300	variety of private/public sources	\$2,900,500
Easement Stewardship	\$220,000	-	-	\$220,000
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$240,000	-	-	\$240,000
Direct Support Services	\$8,800	-	-	\$8,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,501,000	\$957,300	-	\$3,458,300

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Forest Legacy Coordinator	0.25	4.0	\$75,000	\$13,000	USFS	\$88,000

Amount of Request: \$2,501,000

Amount of Leverage: \$957,300

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 38.28%

DSS + Personnel: \$83,800

As a % of the total request: 3.35%

Easement Stewardship: \$220,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 11.25%

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

Removal of the proposed fee-title acquisition of the MN Heritage Forest parcels.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

Leverage is from a variety of public and private sources provided over the life of the program including USFS administrative grant funds, landowner donation and RIM Critical Habitat Match credits generated by previous private donations to the program.

Does this project have the ability to be scalable?

Yes

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?

Three conservation easement acquisitions would be removed reducing the protected acres by 900 acres and reducing the leverage by approximately \$60,000.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?

Personnel expenses would not be adjusted since there is only 0.25 of a position supported by this proposal and the workload would not drop significantly enough to affect such a small portion of one position.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Easement Stewardship

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

There are eight conservation easements anticipated. The DNR easement stewardship calculator is used to estimate stewardship costs with a range of \$20,000-\$25,000 per easement.

Direct Support Services

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

DNR Direct and Necessary Cost Calculator (subtractive)

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

Is Confirmation Document attached?

[Yes](#)

Cash : \$13,000

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	3,329	-	3,329
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	3,329	-	3,329

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$2,501,000	-	\$2,501,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$2,501,000	-	\$2,501,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	900	-	97	2,332	3,329
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	900	-	97	2,332	3,329

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$1,240,500	-	\$415,500	\$845,000	\$2,501,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$1,240,500	-	\$415,500	\$845,000	\$2,501,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$751	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$1,378	-	\$4,283	\$362
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

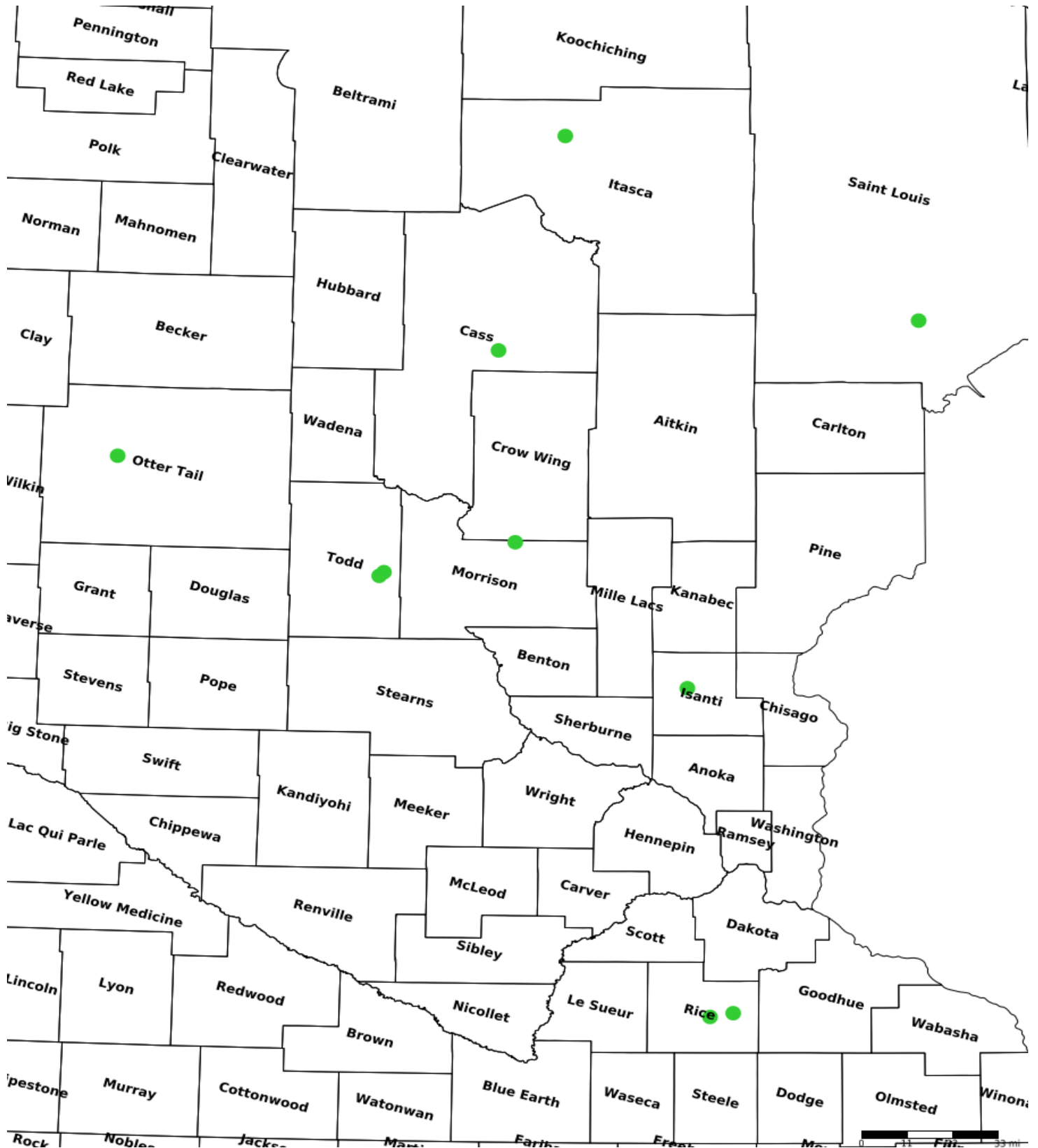
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Applications to the MN Forests for the Future Program are made by interested willing landowners. The Program uses GIS analysis to expand protection of large habitat blocks and corridors. The tracts of forest land targeted for protection with this program have some, if not all, of the following traits: are currently unprotected inholdings; large tracts that have been identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey (including identified sites of high quality biodiversity significance); corridors and habitat identified by the State Wildlife Action Plan as significant; presence of rare species and Species in Conservation Need or the habitat that support those species; are located in a strategic habitat complex and are adjacent to other protected land so that complexes can be protected and management improved. In addition we consult with local and regional watershed and landscape planning efforts such as The Nature Conservancy's Multiple Benefit Analysis and Resilient Lands Mapping Tool, DNR's Forest Action Plan and Assessment of Need, PCA's watershed planning efforts, BWSR's and local SWCD's One Watershed One Plan efforts, the MFRC's Regional Landscape Plans, and the DNR/BWSR Landscape Stewardship Plans.

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Hubbard Tract 3	Hubbard	13928204	500	\$20,000	No
Springvale	Isanti	03624220	49	\$200,000	No
Appel Habitat	Itasca	14926223	157	\$145,000	No
Morrison Tract 1	Morrison	04230204	1,675	\$582,500	No
Maplewood	Otter Tail	13442202	180	\$255,000	No
Cannon River Big Woods 4	Rice	11020217	69	\$200,000	No
Nerstrand Woods 8	Rice	11019207	28	\$95,000	No
Bergen Lake	St. Louis	05216212	37	\$150,000	No
Little Elk 1	Todd	13032233	320	\$330,000	No
Little Elk 2	Todd	12932205	410	\$415,000	No

Parcel Map



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