



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

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### ML 2022 Request for Funding

#### General Information

**Date:** 06/07/2021

**Proposal Title:** St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Phase 3

**Funds Requested:** \$6,658,700

#### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Monica Zachay

**Title:** Director of Programs

**Organization:** St. Croix River Association

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#### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Pine, Washington and Chisago.

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

- Northern Forest
- Metro / Urban

**Activity types:**

- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

- Forest
- Habitat

## Narrative

### Abstract

The St. Croix River Association, Minnesota Land Trust, and The Trust for Public Land will work in partnership to permanently protect approximately 1,320 acres of critical wildlife habitat on the Minnesota side of the St. Croix River watershed through fee-title acquisition and conservation easements. The goals of the program are to protect high quality wildlife habitat, improve conservation connectivity, and provide public access for outdoor recreation opportunities.

### Design and Scope of Work

As one of the nation's first "Wild and Scenic" rivers, the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and surrounding watershed is home to a diverse abundance of native flora and fauna, rivaling any other location within the upper Mississippi River Basin. Boasting of high-quality fishing and hunting, as well as hiking, biking, and boating, the Riverway is also a recreation "hot-spot" for the nearby Twin Cities Metro area and upwards of 750,000 of visitors each year.

Despite its "Wild and Scenic" designation, land just outside the thin Riverway boundary remains highly vulnerable. With upwards of 75% of the watershed's brushland and forest habitat in private holdings, the threat of development, fragmentation, and conversion to agriculture is substantial.

The ML19 St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Phase 1 appropriation marked the beginning of the first ever permanent protection program dedicated solely to the St. Croix River watershed. Since then, partners have quickly learned just how ready landowners are for permanent protection options in such a pristine watershed.

Strategic outreach to landowners within the highest priority areas for habitat, water quality, and recreational opportunities has led to a line-up of people wanting conservation easements, as well as increased interest in selling private land via fee-title for conservation.

To date, the St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration program partnership has four active easement projects totaling over 1,150 acres and one active fee-acquisition project totaling approximately 730 acres. The ML19 funds are largely allocated; moreover, ML21 funds – which will become available in July 2021 – are already largely obligated. The partnership needs additional funding support to continue the program.

Building upon the growing momentum and interest in permanent land protection, we seek to increase the amount of land permanently protected in the St. Croix, resulting in the conservation of well connected, functional forests and rivers that sustain and enhance wildlife habitat. In this partnership consisting of the St. Croix River Association (SCRA), the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), and The Trust for Public Land (TPL), we seek to protect large intact forest patches that are managed for complexity; sustain riparian forests that are managed for connectivity; and restore lands that are important to the 128 listed Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) that are known within landscape.

TPL will protect approximately 420 acres through fee-title acquisition focusing on lands that have been identified as high priority in statewide and regional plans as immediate opportunities for protection. TPL will convey lands to the DNR, except when LGU ownership is appropriate, for permanent ownership, management, and stewardship.

MLT will acquire approximately 900 acres of conservation easements and develop habitat management plans for eased acres. Projects within targeted priority areas will be identified through a competitive RFP process and

subsequently ranked based on ecological value and cost, prioritizing the best projects and securing them at the lowest cost to the state. MLT will negotiate and close all conservation easements.

SCRA will provide overall program administration and landowner outreach and engagement.

### **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?**

The areas targeted by this proposal have been identified and prioritized through state, regional, and local natural resource plans due to their high biodiversity, connectivity, and ability to preserve habitat for species of greatest conservation need.

The project area has a mixed representation of extensive forestland, brushland, and riparian habitats that are home to approximately 128 SGCN including: lake sturgeon, wood turtle, gray wolf, bald eagle, osprey, sandhill crane, trumpeter swan, yellow rail, and sharp-tailed grouse. The St. Croix River watershed is also globally-recognized for its mussel diversity with over 40 known mussels, including 5 federally endangered, and 20 state-listed species, such as the winged mapleleaf and snuffbox. The project area also contains a significant amount of high quality brushland and regenerating forestland habitat critical to the breeding success of the Golden-winged Warbler.

Within this region we have an unparalleled opportunity. The St. Croix River watershed has been classified as containing the best-preserved remnant of pre-settlement natural communities in the Upper Mississippi drainage. But we must protect the rich natural and cultural heritage of the St. Croix River watershed before they too are altered by ever encroaching agricultural and development pressure.

### **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 watershed faces ongoing development pressures in riparian areas from population growth and recreational tourism. From 2000-2016 central MN counties within the St. Croix watershed experienced a 23% increase in population, nearly double the state average. Based on current projections, these trends are expected to continue and accelerate. Increases in housing density and associated development on rural forest lands can be linked to numerous changes to private forest services across watersheds, including decreases in native wildlife; changes in forest health; and reduced water quality, forest carbon storage, timber production, and recreational benefits. Additionally, data released in 2019 shows that Washington County, covering the southern part of the watershed, is within the top five fastest growing counties in the state.

Protecting healthy watersheds with permanent conservation options, such as conservation easements and fee acquisitions, is an effective strategy to ensure that the ecosystem and economic services provided by healthy watersheds remain.

### **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:**

This proposal uses a science-based multiple benefits approach for prioritizing and targeting areas of greatest conservation value. We will utilize The Nature Conservancy's St. Croix Basin GIS-based Priority Protection Analysis which incorporates Minnesota Biological Survey Sites of Biodiversity Significance, Lakes of Biological Significance, habitat complexes and connectivity, along with other data sets to spatially prioritize the most important sites for protection. The intent of this model was to develop and score priorities where multiple benefits overlap – habitat, biodiversity, water quality, water quantity, and resiliency. Evaluation criteria include: 1) aquatic and terrestrial

habitat protection priorities, 2) lands important to drinking water quality and groundwater recharge, and 3) resilience of lands and waters to climate change and other anticipated future changes and disturbance.

More specifically, this approach includes data on habitat quality, target species communities, and habitat complexes for terrestrial species with emphasis on expanding corridors adjacent to public lands. The most heavily weighted component of this approach uses data from the Minnesota Biological Survey focused on fish and wildlife that includes data on biodiversity, wetlands, native plant communities, Lakes of Biological Significance, wild rice catchments, coldwater refuge for trout, proximity to protected lands, and ecological connections. Added benefits for water quality are assessed using data on wellhead protected areas, groundwater contamination susceptibility, private well density, and groundwater recharge.

Using results of this Multiple Benefits approach, areas will be targeted down to the parcel level for landowner engagement and outreach for implementing permanent protection activities. For MLT easements, a competitive request for proposals (RFP) process by which landowners will apply for consideration of a conservation easement will be used. Proposed projects will be scored along ecological grounds, and will also consider donative value from the landowner.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land

### **Which two other plans are addressed in this proposal?**

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

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

According to the Outdoor Heritage Fund: 25 Year Vision, 89% of the Northern Forest region is identified as habitat, but only 55% of it is protected. Additionally, 41% of the Metropolitan Urbanizing region is identified as habitat, with a mere 12% of it permanently protected. This project will protect forestland through acquisition and easements to prevent parcelization and fragmentation, producing multiple enduring conservation benefits, addressing wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and providing access to hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities.

This program will address objectives within the MN State Wildlife Action Plan including: 1) sustaining and enhancing species, habitat and landscape biological diversity and 2) maintaining habitat through acquisition of threatened sites that provide exceptional habitat and ecological values. This program emphasizes work within the St. Croix River watershed priority area, home to 7 target mature upland/lowland forest birds and 5 target reptile species identified in the plan.

## Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

### Metro / Urban

- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)

### 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

## 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:

Through permanent land protection, our program will continue to prevent degradation and loss of quality habitat within the St. Croix watershed. It will improve and increase the amount of available public land for hunting and angling opportunities in the eastern part of the state, within an easy drive from the Twin Cities Metro area. This program will also lead to larger complexes of restored forests, brushlands, and riparian areas that will improve terrestrial and aquatic habitats.

Strong partnerships exist between local, state, and federal agencies; local non-governmental organizations; and willing conservation-minded landowners. High quality lands will be protected through fee title acquisition and conservation easements. Protected lands in fee acquisitions are available for the public for outdoor recreation, including hunting and fishing, thereby addressing the need to provide such opportunities within a short distance from the Twin Cities' growing and diversifying urban population.

## What other fund may contribute to this proposal?

- Clean Water Fund
- Other

## Does this proposal include leveraged funding?

Yes

### Explain the leverage:

Through its market-based RFP process, MLT expects private landowners to donate at least \$600,000 in easement value toward the program, which is shown as leverage.

One-half of TPL's DSS costs and all of TPL's travel costs are provided as privately sourced leverage for this proposal. TPL will attempt to bring various state, local and private funds to acquire additional property and leverage the OHF grant, and will attempt to leverage fee acquisition with partial donations of the appraised value of protected parcels.

## 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.

Funding requested by the Partnership will not supplant or substitute for any previous non-legacy funding used for the same purpose.

## Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
2011	TPL:ENRTF - Metro Conservation Corridors	\$423,000
2013	TPL:ENRTF - Metro Conservation Corridors	\$395,000
2009	MLT:ENRTF - Metro Conservation Corridors 5	\$67,700
2010	MLT:ENRTF - Metro Conservation Corridors 5 Supplemental	\$20,300
2011	MLT:ENRTF - Metro Conservation Corridors 6	\$27,400

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

The land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through state-of-the-art standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. MLT is a nationally-accredited land trust with a very successful stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation. MLT will assist landowners in the development of habitat management plans to help ensure that the land will be managed for its wildlife and water quality benefits. MLT (as easement holders on respective properties) will work with landowners in an ongoing basis to provide habitat restoration plans, resources and technical expertise to undertake ongoing management of these properties.

TPL will convey all fee title land to the DNR or LGUs for permanent stewardship. Once land has been conveyed, initial site development and restoration of these lands will begin. Estimated costs for initial restoration work are included in this proposal. TPL will work with DNR or LGUs to complete a restoration and management plan, and implementation of that plan will be completed in the following years. These properties will be managed and maintained by the respective government entities according to OHF standards.

### Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2026 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of easements in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	-
2023	TPL - OHF and DNR	Post property	Develop restoration/management plan for property	-
2024	TPL - DNR	Develop restoration/management plan for property	Restore and steward property for habitat and public recreation	-
2025	TPL - DNR	Restore and steward property for habitat and public recreation	-	-

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

Several species have been identified by the DNR to represent various forestland and aquatic habitats: Ovenbird, Golden-winged Warbler, white-tailed deer, and trout. The metrics are derived from existing data sources and scientific literature, but are gross averages; they are not accurate at the site-specific scale. Therefore, they are not intended to be used to score or rank requests, but represent the best information we have for immediate support to the Council's objective.

Ovenbird

Typically found in mature forests, Ovenbirds are an indication of the health of mature forest uplands with an average of 16 pairs for every 40 acres.

#### Golden-winged Warbler

Often associated with shrubland habitat and regenerating forests, more current research indicates a variety of forest habitats are required by Golden-winged Warblers. While territories vary in size, quality habitat will support roughly six pairs for every 40 acres.

#### White-tailed deer

White-tailed deer use a wide variety of forested habitats and are an important game species in the State. Covering most of the Northern Forest section, the six-year average (2010-2015) for pre-fawn deer densities across all deer permit areas is 13 deer per square mile of land. This translates to roughly 1 deer for every 50 acres of land.

#### Trout - All Species

Natural populations of trout, including healthy populations with good habitat, vary among locations, and also rise and fall within lakes and rivers; however quality habitat may support up to 40 pound per acre.

### **How will the program directly involve, engage, and benefit BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and diverse communities:**

St. Croix River Association, The Trust for Public Land, and Minnesota Land Trust all hold a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as core values. Examples of that commitment include, but are not limited to: SCRA's partnership with BIPOC communities to improve access to public land through a variety of outdoor experiences; TPL's work with diverse communities to put a park, trail, or natural area within a 10-minute walk of every Twin Cities resident; and MLT's protection of camps and nature centers that serve a diversity of Minnesota youth, as well as coordinating the connections between landowners and diverse community groups leading to increased access to land for cultural or ceremonial use, conservation employment training, and youth mentor hunts.

More specific to this program, there are significant benefits for all Minnesotans, including BIPOC and diverse communities, when land is protected through fee-title acquisition and conservation easements, and otherwise restored (e.g., clean air and water, abatement of climate change, and other ecosystem services). Beyond that, public land provides an opportunity for all people, but particularly for those who do not have access or resources to connect with private natural lands, to directly connect with the outdoors through hunting, fishing, hiking, or other outdoor recreational pursuits. Moving forward, we look forward to continuing this important work in a way that more directly, and authentically, engages diverse communities and partners in an equitable and just manner. This would primarily involve partnering with locally led BIPOC groups focused on outdoor and habitat-based activities. In addition, we could explore partnering with tribal nations to be the permanent steward of the land protected where appropriate.

As each organization in this partnership grows in its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice, we will continue to strive to use these values as a lens in project, partner, and contractor selection. We recognize this as an area where we could do more.

## **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

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

We will follow the County/Township Board notification processes as directed by the current statutory language.

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

Yes

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

Yes

## Land Use

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

Yes

**Explain what will be planted:**

TPL - For lands acquired that are conveyed as WMAs to the DNR, the DNR has indicated the following: 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. Lands proposed to be acquired as WMAs may utilize farming to prepare previously farmed sites for native plant seeding. This is a standard practice across the Midwest. 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.

**Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?**

No

**Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?**

Yes

**Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:**

N.A.

**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:**

MLT - 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.

TPL is not aware of any trails or roads on any of the acquisitions on the parcel list nor are any new trails planned.



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

Yes

**How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?**

MLT - 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.

TPL - N/A

**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 proposal's funding and availability?**

Yes

**Other OHF Appropriation Awards**

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

Yes

Approp Year	Approp Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Leverage Reported in AP	Leverage Realized to Date	Acres Affected in AP	Acres Affected to Date	Complete/Final Report Approved?
2019	\$3,751,000	\$664,200	\$227,900	\$109,000	725	150	No

**Timeline**

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
MLT - Conservation easements completed or options secured	June 30, 2026
TPL - Landowner negotiations, agreements, and due diligence	June 30, 2026
TPL - Land acquired	June 30, 2026
TPL - Initial site development/restoration	Fall 2028

## Budget

### Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$512,000	-	-	\$512,000
Contracts	\$172,000	-	-	\$172,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$2,000,000	-	-	\$2,000,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,000,000	\$600,000	Landowners	\$3,600,000
Easement Stewardship	\$288,000	-	-	\$288,000
Travel	\$16,000	\$3,000	-, Private	\$19,000
Professional Services	\$420,000	-	-	\$420,000
Direct Support Services	\$130,700	\$63,700	-, Private	\$194,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$35,000	-	-	\$35,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
DNR IDP	\$75,000	-	-	\$75,000
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$6,658,700</b>	<b>\$666,700</b>	-	<b>\$7,325,400</b>

## Partner: Minnesota Land Trust

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$247,000	-	-	\$247,000
Contracts	\$72,000	-	-	\$72,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,000,000	\$600,000	Landowners	\$3,600,000
Easement Stewardship	\$288,000	-	-	\$288,000
Travel	\$16,000	-	-	\$16,000
Professional Services	\$340,000	-	-	\$340,000
Direct Support Services	\$67,000	-	-	\$67,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$4,035,000</b>	<b>\$600,000</b>	-	<b>\$4,635,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Staff	0.65	4.0	247000	-	-	\$247,000

## Partner: The Trust for Public Land

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$175,000	-	-	\$175,000
Contracts	\$100,000	-	-	\$100,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$2,000,000	-	-	\$2,000,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	\$3,000	Private	\$3,000
Professional Services	\$80,000	-	-	\$80,000
Direct Support Services	\$63,700	\$63,700	Private	\$127,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$35,000	-	-	\$35,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	\$75,000	-	-	\$75,000
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$2,528,700</b>	<b>\$66,700</b>	-	<b>\$2,595,400</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
TPL Staff	0.34	3.0	175000	-	-	\$175,000

**Partner: St. Croix River Association****Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$90,000	-	-	\$90,000
Contracts	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$95,000</b>	-	-	<b>\$95,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
SCRA Staff	0.3	3.0	90000	-	-	\$90,000

**Amount of Request:** \$6,658,700

**Amount of Leverage:** \$666,700

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 10.01%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$642,700

**As a % of the total request:** 9.65%

**Easement Stewardship:** \$288,000

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 9.6%

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

MLT encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements to the program. The leverage amount is a conservative estimate of value we expect to see donated by landowners. One-half of TPL's DSS and all of TPL's travel costs are provided as privately leverage for this proposal.

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

Yes

**If the project received 70% of the requested funding**

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

A reduction in funding would reduce project activities and acres protected proportionately.

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

Program management costs (personnel and DSS expenses) will be reduced as well. However, not exactly proportionately as program development and oversight costs remain consistent regardless of appropriation amount. These are gross estimates of personnel time.

### **If the project received 50% of the requested funding**

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

A reduction in funding would reduce project activities and acres protected proportionately.

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

Program management costs (personnel and DSS expenses) will be reduced as well. However, not exactly proportionately as program development and oversight costs remain consistent regardless of appropriation amount. These are gross estimates of personnel time.

### **Personnel**

**Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?**

Yes

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

FTEs listed in the proposal are an estimate of the personnel time required to produce the grant deliverables put forward in this proposal. Personnel funds are only used when necessary to achieve the goals of the grant.

An array of staff draw from these funds for legal work, negotiating with landowners, crafting conservation easement and acquisition documents, writing baseline reports, coordinating partners, outreach to landowners, and project management and coordination.

### **Contracts**

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

MLT - Writing of habitat management plans for easement lands.

TPL - Potential site clean-up and initial restoration activities.

### **Fee Acquisition**

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

We anticipate we will close on three transactions and investigate three others.

### **Easement Stewardship**

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

We anticipate 8-12 conservation easements. The average cost per easement to fund the Minnesota Land Trust's perpetual monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$24,000. This figure is derived from MLT's detailed stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is consistent with Land Trust Accreditation standards. MLT shares periodic updates to this cost analysis with LSOHC staff.

### **Travel**

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

Yes

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

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

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

Yes

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

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 MLT's proposed federal indirect rate. We will apply this DNR approved rate only to personnel expense to determine the total amount of the direct support services.

TPL: DSS request is based upon our federal rate which has been approved by the DNR. 50% of these costs are requested from the grant, 50% is contributed as leverage.

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

GPS systems

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

No



## Output Tables

### Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	210	210	420
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	900	900
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>1,110</b>	<b>1,320</b>

### Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	\$1,279,300	\$1,279,400	\$2,558,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$4,100,000	\$4,100,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$1,279,300</b>	<b>\$5,379,400</b>	<b>\$6,658,700</b>

### Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	105	0	0	0	315	420
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	400	0	0	0	500	900
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>1,320</b>

### 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	\$642,200	-	-	-	\$1,916,500	\$2,558,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	\$2,049,500	-	-	-	\$2,050,500	\$4,100,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,691,700</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,967,000</b>	<b>\$6,658,700</b>

### Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	\$6,091	\$6,092
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$4,555
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	\$6,116	-	-	-	\$6,084
Protect in Fee w/o State	-	-	-	-	-

PILT Liability					
Protect in Easement	\$5,123	-	-	-	\$4,101
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

## Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

1

## Outcomes

### Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *This project will be measured by the acres of wildlife corridors protected and evaluated based on the observed use by wildlife populations and evidence of SGCN.*

### Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *This project will be measured by the acres of high quality forestlands that are permanently protected from development and fragmentation. Protected land will also be evaluated by its proximity to existing public lands as well as connectivity to other protected forestlands.*

## Parcels

### Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes](#)

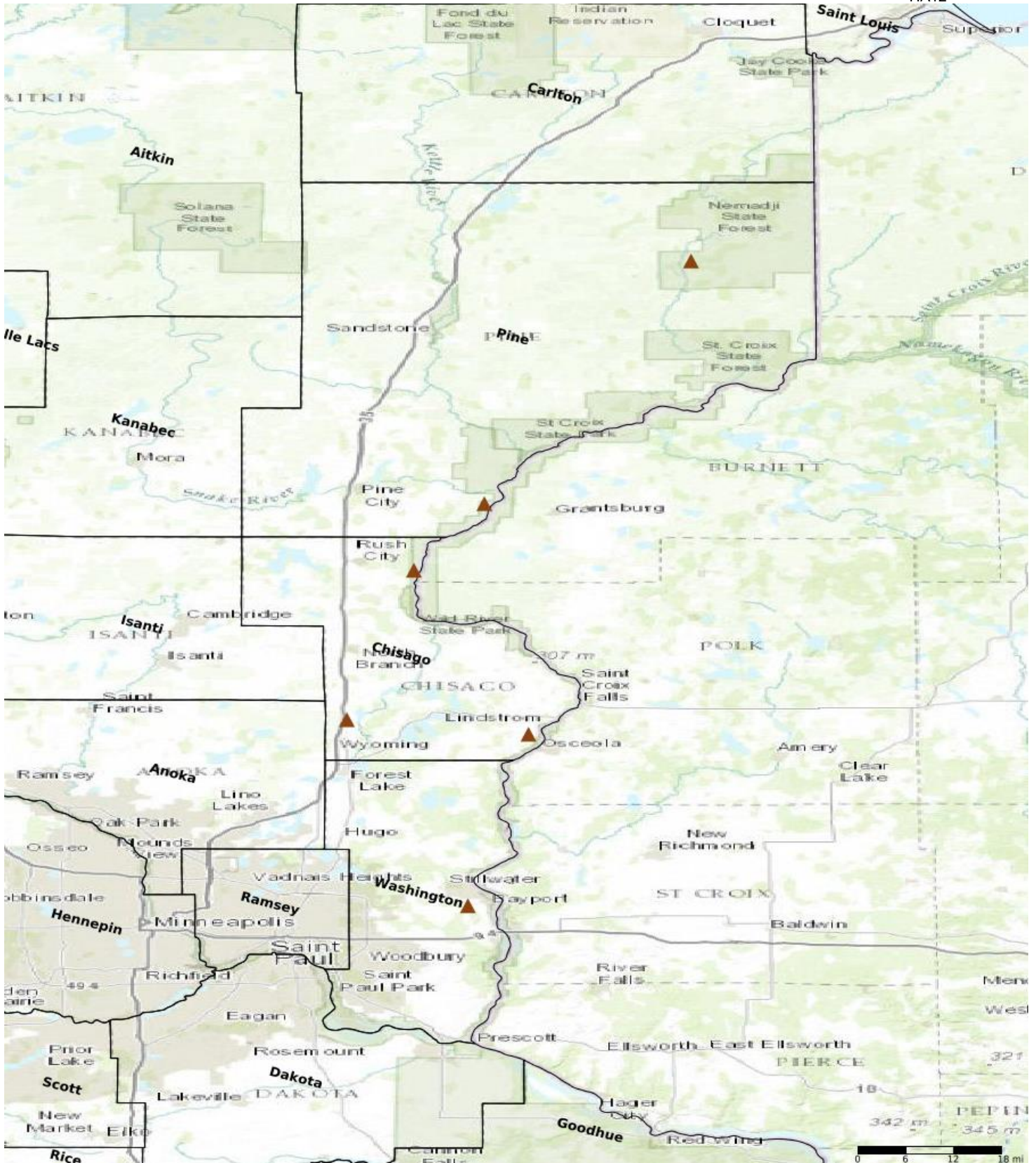
#### Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Minnesota Land Trust uses a competitive, market-based approach through an RFP process to identify interested landowners and prioritize parcels for conservation easement acquisition. All proposals submitted by landowners are evaluated and ranked relative to their ecological significance based on three primary factors: 1) size of habitat on the parcel; 2) condition of habitat on the parcel; and 3) the context (both in terms of amount/quality of remaining habitat and protected areas) within which the parcel lies. We also ask the landowner to consider contributing all or a portion of fair market value to enable our funds to make a larger conservation impact (see attached sign-up criteria). SCRA works to provide outreach services and contracting with county SWCDs as a way to connect effectively with local landowners.

The Trust for Public Land works with its public partners to identify and prioritize projects that meet their objectives and are on their priority lists. Criteria includes whether the land provides critical habitat for game and non-game species, quality public recreational opportunities, presence of unique plants and animal species (including SGCN), goals of conservation plans, adjacency to other public land or habitat complexes, existence of local support, immediacy of threats, land owner willingness and time frame.

### Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Franconia SNA Addition	Chisago	03319216	85	\$400,000	No
Carlos Avery WMA Addition	Chisago	03321205	62	\$150,000	No
Chengwatana State Forest Addition III	Chisago	03720230	160	\$480,000	No
Nemadji State Forest Addition	Pine	04417227	480	\$400,000	No
Chengwatana State Forest Addition II	Pine	03820212	160	\$300,000	No
Bayport WMA Addition	Washington	02920209	196	\$3,000,000	No



**Parcel Map**  
**St. Croix Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Phase 3**  
 (Data Generated From Parcel List)

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



# ST. CROIX WATERSHED

## HABITAT PROTECTION AND RESTORATION PHASE III



Photo by Craig Blacklock

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The St. Croix River Association, Minnesota Land Trust, and The Trust for Public Land will work in partnership to permanently protect approximately 1,320 acres of critical wildlife habitat on the Minnesota side of the St. Croix River Watershed through fee-title acquisition and conservation easements. The goals of the program are **to protect high quality wildlife habitat, improve conservation connectivity, and provide public access for outdoor recreation opportunities.**

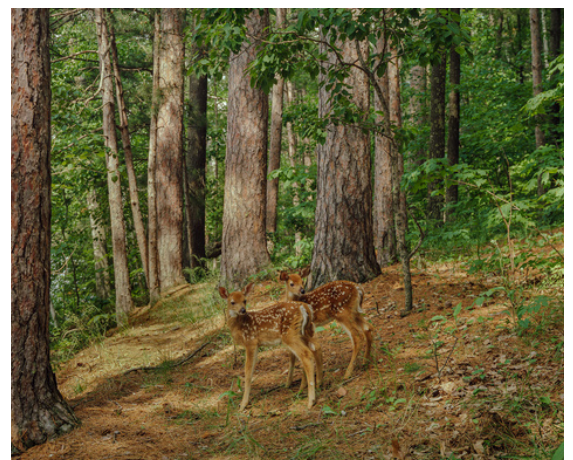
## OUTDOOR HERITAGE FUND REQUEST

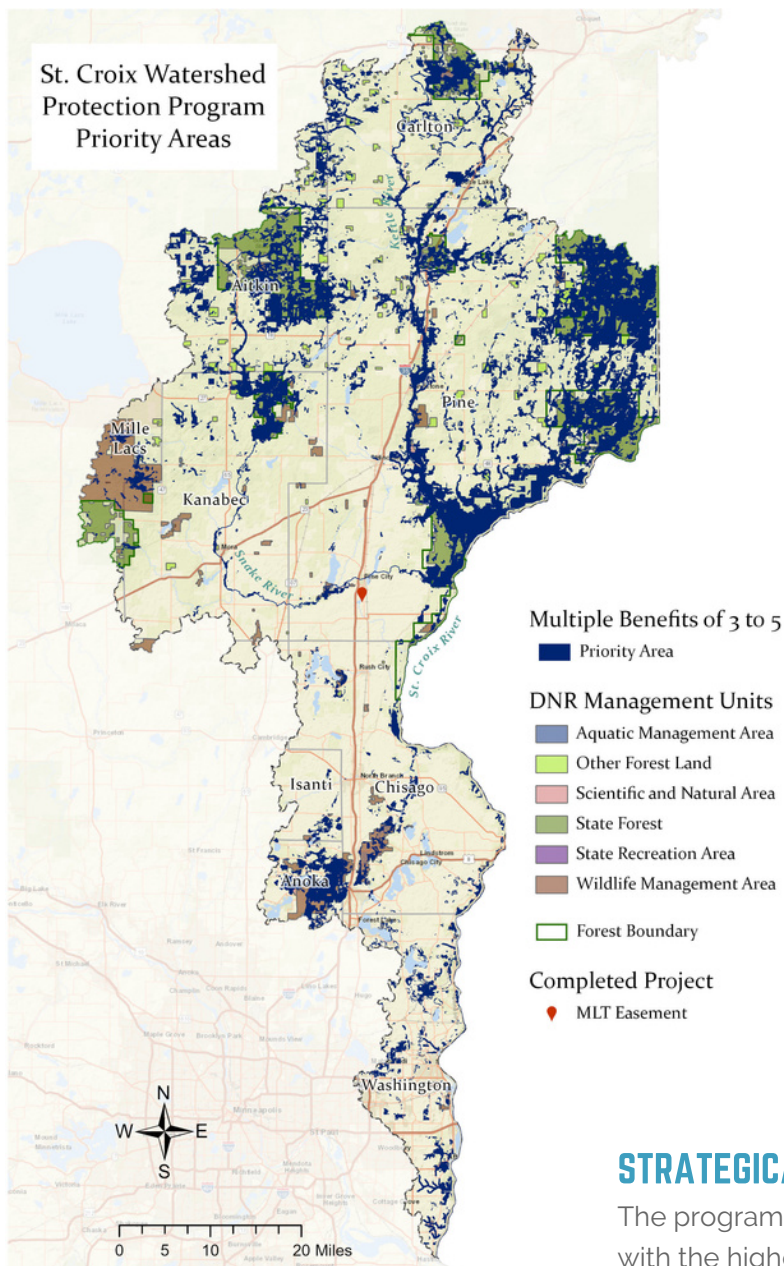
**\$6,658,700 to protect 1,320 acres** through fee-title acquisition and conservation easements.

## TRULY WILD AND SCENIC

The St. Croix River is one of the nation's first "Wild and Scenic Rivers". It is home to a diverse abundance of native flora and fauna, rivaling any other location within the greater Upper Mississippi River Basin.

Beyond the narrow federally protected Riverway boundary, more than 75% of the St. Croix's forestlands remain in private holdings and the threat of development, fragmentation and conversion to agriculture is substantial. We must act now to ensure critical habitats are protected for future generations to come.





## BUILDS UPON MOMENTUM

Four active easement projects totaling over 1,150 acres and one active fee-acquisition project totaling nearly 730 acres are currently underway. ML2019 funds are largely allocated and ML2021 funds - which will come available in July 2021 - are already largely allocated. The partnership is requesting ML2022 funding for Phase 3 of the program to continue this important work.

## SUPPORTS STATE GOALS

This program aligns with the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund priorities:

- **Northern Forests Section** - providing access to manage habitat on landlocked public properties and protect forest land from parcelization and fragmentation through fee acquisition, and conservation easements.
- **Metro Urban Section** - protecting habitat corridors, with emphasis on the St. Croix River.

## STRATEGICALLY TARGETS

The program uses a multiple benefits approach to target areas with the highest quality habitat. Lands adjacent to existing protected lands are of high priority.

## PARTNERSHIP

- **Minnesota Land Trust** is a nationally accredited land trust that monitors, manages and enforces more than 500 conservation easements throughout the state. MLT will be responsible for negotiating the purchase of conservation easements and ongoing monitoring and enforcement.
- **The Trust for Public Land** works to create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come. TPL will be responsible for protecting land in fee.
- **St. Croix River Association** is the only entity working watershed wide to protect, restore, and celebrate the St. Croix River and its watershed. SCRA will be responsible for program administration and landowner outreach.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Monica Zachay, SCRA Director of Programs at 715-483-3300 or [monicaz@scramail.org](mailto:monicaz@scramail.org)





## MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

### A Decision Support Tool for Prioritizing Conservation Easement Opportunities

The Minnesota Land Trust often employs within its conservation program areas an RFP (Request for Proposals) model to both identify high-quality projects and introduce a level of competition into the easement acquisition process. Below, we briefly discuss how the system works and the framework put in place to sort the varied opportunities that come before us.

#### How the Ranking System Works

The parcel ranking framework employed through the Minnesota Land Trust's RFP process is intended as a **decision support tool** to aid in identifying, among the slate of landowners submitting bids for conservation easements, the most ecologically significant opportunities for the price. Using this framework, the Land Trust and its partners use an array of weighted data sets tailored to the specific circumstances inherent in a program area to identify those worthy of consideration.

It is important to note that this parcel ranking framework enables the Land Trust to rank projects *relative* to one another. That's important to do, but it's also important to understand how a project (or suite of projects) relates to the ideal situation (i.e., a project that is of exceptional size, condition and superb landscape context). If, for example, an RFP generated 20 proposals in a program area, the framework would effectively sift among them and identify the relatively good from those relatively bad. However, this information alone would not determine whether any of those parcels were of sufficient quality to pursue for protection (all may be of insufficient quality to warrant expenditure of funds). To solve this problem and make sure ranked projects are high priorities for conservation, we step back and evaluate them relative to the ideal - i.e., is each project among the best opportunities for conservation we can expect to find in the program area?

As part of its proposals to LSOHC, the Land Trust included easement sign-up criteria that laid out at a general level the framework utilized by the organization. Below is a more detailed description of the process the Land Trust utilizes in ranking potential parcels relative to one another, and identifying those with which a conservation easement will be pursued. We also include a ranking form illustrating the representative weighting applied to each criteria. These weightings will be refined as we move forward in applying this approach in each program area.

#### The Framework

We evaluate potential projects based on two primary factors: ecological significance and cost. Both are assessed independent of one another.



### **Factor 1: Ecological Significance**

The Ecological Significance score is determined by looking at 3 subfactors, each weighted equally (as a default). Each of these constitutes 1/3 of the total ecological significance score.

#### **Subfactors:**

- **Size or Quantity** – the area of the parcel to be protected (how big is it?), length of shoreline, etc. The bigger the better.
- **Condition or Quality** – the condition of the natural communities and/or target species found on a parcel. The higher quality the better.
- **Landscape Context** – what’s around the parcel, both ecologically and from a protected status standpoint. The more ecologically intact the surrounding landscape the better; the extent to which a parcel builds off of other protected lands to form complexes or corridors, the better.

Note that we have the ability to emphasize one subfactor over another if the specific circumstances warrant it, but we begin with a default standard at the onset. At present, all of our geographies are using the default standard.

#### **Indicators:**

A suite of weighted indicators is used to score each parcel relative to each of the above subfactors. Indicators are selected based on their ability to effectively inform the scoring of parcels relative to each of the respective subfactors. Weightings for each criterion are assessed and vetted to ensure that a set of indicators for each subfactor produces meaningful results, then applied across each of the proposed parcels. Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Data sets used for this purpose must offer wall-to-wall coverage across the program area to ensure that bias for or against parcels does not creep into the equation. Where gaps in such coverages exist, we attempt to fill them in to the extent feasible (via field inventory, etc.). Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

### **Factor 2: Cost**

Cost is a second major factor used in our consideration of parcels. Although ecological significance is *the* primary factor in determining the merits of a project, our RFP programs also strive to make the greatest conservation impact with the most efficient use of State funds. As such, we look at the overall cost of each project relative to its ecological significance; we also ask landowners to consider donating all or some of their easement value to the cause and to better position their proposals. Many landowners participate in that fashion.

Cost, as a primary factor, is assessed independently of the ecological factors. Given equal ecological significance, a project of lower cost will be elevated over those of higher cost in the ranking. That said, exceptionally high quality projects are likely to be pursued even if no or modest landowner donation is put forward. Alternatively, there are projects offered as full donations that are not moved forward because their ecological significance is not acceptable. The degree to which cost factors into the ranking of parcels relative to one another is made on a case-by-case basis.

MINNESOTA LAND TRUST ST. CROIX WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet		SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3	SITE 4	SITE 5	SITE 6	SITE 7	SITE 8	SITE 9	SITE 10	SITE 11	SITE 12	Notes
COUNTY														
100 Pts	ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE													
Weighting Factor	Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)													
	a) Size (33 pts): Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)													
	a) Habitat Quality (28 pts): Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)													
	b) Imperiled Species (5 pts): Occurrence of Documented Rare Species on Parcel													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Landscape Context (34 points)													
	Current Status (30 points)													
	a) Protection Context (15 points)													
	i. Size of Contiguous Protected Lands (8 pts)													
	ii. Amount of Protected Lands within 3 miles of Property													
	: Protected Land within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
	: Protected Land 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
	b) Ecological Context (15 points)													
	i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat (8 pts)													
	ii. Amount of Ecological Habitat within 3 miles of Property													
	: Ecological Habitat within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
	: Ecological Habitat 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
	Future Potential (4 points)													
	a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)													
	b) Amount of Existing Activity (2 pts)													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	<b>TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
COST														
	i. Bid amount (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	ii. Estimated donative value (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	<b>TOTAL ACQUISITION COST (\$)</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>

KEY	
	Priority
	Possible
	Out