



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

ML 2022 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/08/2021

Proposal Title: Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 4

Funds Requested: \$8,685,000

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Sarah Boser

Title: Water Resource Manager

Organization: Sauk River Watershed District

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Location Information

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

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

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

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Forest
- Prairie
- Habitat
- Wetlands

Narrative

Abstract

This program permanently protects, restores, and enhances critical habitat within the Sauk River Watershed, which has experienced considerable habitat loss and is at high risk for more land use conversion. Using conservation easements and fee land acquisition, we will protect approximately 1,760 acres of high priority habitat in Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition Area. We will restore/enhance approximately 120 acres of wetlands and accompanying uplands, creating vital habitat for waterfowl and populations of Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Properties selected will be strategically targeted using 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 local 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, high-impact 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, upland birds, and other important wildlife species.

The SRW is in a rapidly growing region that has also experienced some of the most intense conversion in Minnesota 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 373 acres through fee title acquisition, 464 acres through conservation easements, and has restored 65 acres, while leveraging \$1,319,340 through landowner donation of easement value and non-state funding sources. As of May 2021, landowners owning approximately 1,600 acres are interested in permanently protecting their properties. Protecting and restoring these strategic parcels will far exceed funding available through the Partnership's previous OHF grants. We anticipate significantly more interested and qualified properties for this program as outreach efforts grow.

Conservation Easements:

MLT, with assistance from SWCD 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. Properties will be ranked based on ecological value and cost, prioritizing projects that provide the best ecological value and acquiring them at the lowest cost to the state. Approximately 1,200 acres of permanent conservation easements will be procured through this proposal, with restoration and habitat management plans developed 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 560 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 wildlife 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 120 acres of wetland, riparian and associated upland habitat in cooperation with county SWCDs, MLT, USFWS, and TNC. Most of the restoration work will occur on conservation

easements in Douglas County. The restorations will focus on building a wetland complex in an area that had historically been known as Crooked Hanford Lake, but was drained by the addition of a public drainage system. The habitat benefits will include general wildlife, fish, and amphibian habitat improvements.

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 phase of the 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 will expand habitat cores and corridors. 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, 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 and urban development in the past decade. There are currently landowners with parcels totaling approximately 1,600 acres interested in the program. 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 partners will utilize the Sauk River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (SRCWMP) which is currently in the final stages of approval. The SRCWMP compiled information from numerous scientific reports and studies regarding the water resources within the Sauk River Watershed. That information was used to create a prioritized and targeted plan of work for the partners with a focus of improvement and protection of water resources. This work was completed through the Board of Water and Soil Resources via its One Watershed One Plan program.

The program also utilizes TNC's Multiple Benefits Analysis, a science-based process completed in 2017 for the Upper Mississippi River Basin, which prioritized protection and restoration sites for the SRW. The Analysis finds the "sweet spot" where multiple benefits overlap.

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 existing conservation easements, WMAs, WPAs, AMAs and County Parks, facilitating the protection of habitat corridors and reducing the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats.

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

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

Which two other plans are addressed in this 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?

Forest / Prairie Transition

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

Prairie

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

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 previously from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF), which together will protect approximately 1,760 acres and restore/enhance approximately 120 acres of quality wetlands and associated upland habitat in the SRW. Our program has already protected 837 acres and restored/enhanced 65 acres. Despite being a young program, we've garnered additional interest from landowners owning approximately 1,600 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, forest, and prairie.

The need and landowner interest are high. We have spent or allocated much of our 2019 and 2020 funding and even with limited/postponed outreach, current applications exceed available and anticipated funding. Additionally, we had 1,051 CRP contracts, comprising 7,853 acres, expire from 2018-2020 in the SRW, and another 191 contracts comprising 1,406 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.

What other fund may contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

Does this proposal include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

MLT encourages private landowners to fully or partially donate the appraised value of their conservation easement. This donated value is shown as leveraged funds in the proposal and is expected to be 20% of the acquisition cost, or \$405,000. MLT has a long track record in incentivizing landowners to participate in this fashion. Additionally, MLT (in partnership with the SRWD and DNR) applied for and received a Midwest Glacial Lakes Partnership Grant for outreach in the Crooked Lake area. The \$30,000 received will also be used as match for this proposal.

To date, our program has leveraged \$1,319,340 through landowner donation and other non-state funding sources.

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.

Sauk River Watershed District, Minnesota Land Trust and Pheasants Forever is not substituting or supplanting existing funding sources for this body of proposed work.

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

MLT, a nationally accredited and insured land trust, will sustain the land protected through conservation easements using state-of-the-art easement stewardship standards and practices. MLT conducts annual property monitoring, investigates potential violations, and defends the easement in case of a true violation. Funding for easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget. MLT also 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.

All fee-title lands will be enrolled into the WMA or WPA system and will be managed in perpetuity by the MN DNR or USFWS, respectively. All acquisitions will be restored and/or enhanced to as high quality as practicable, with the knowledge that quality and comprehensive restorations utilizing native species result in lower management costs. In addition, local PF chapter members and volunteers maintain significant interest in seeing the habitat and productivity of acquired parcels are high. PF, DNR and USFWS will develop an ecological restoration and management plan for each parcel. Grant and partner dollars will be used for the initial site development and restoration/enhancement work.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

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

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 500 acres of upland forest, which can produce an additional 200 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 500 acres of grassland habitat, which can produce an additional 167 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. Each acre of restored or enhanced grassland that includes milkweed and nectar plants could potentially contribute three to eight monarchs to the population. As outlined in our proposal, we estimate the protection/restoration/enhancement of approximately 500 acres of grassland habitat, which can produce approximately 2,750 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 500 acres of wetland habitat, which can produce an additional 202 pairs of mallards.

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

The Sauk River Partnership has a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We seek to use diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens in project, partner, and contractor selection.

St. Cloud, which lies at the bottom of the Sauk River Watershed, has the largest concentration of our state’s BIPOC population outside of the Twin Cities metro. Currently, the BIPOC population comprises approximately 23% of the total population in St. Cloud. This program will benefit this diverse community by increasing close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities. This includes adding more public lands and partnering with Stearns County

Parks on ecological restoration/enhancement projects, which will increase the aesthetic and recreational value for visitors. Our work will also improve water quality – directly benefiting the drinking water quality for St. Cloud due to the city’s drinking water intake being just downstream of the Sauk River confluence with the Mississippi River. Our program will also increase water storage and thereby improve community resiliency by reducing flooding.

Additionally, the restoration component of this proposal will look to identify, prioritize, and reestablish wild rice , an ecological and cultural keystone species, and a critical food resource for human and wildlife communities. For Indigenous peoples, wild rice is sacred, central to ceremony, identity, sustenance, and health (Schuldt et al. 2018, Tribal Wild Rice Task Force 2018). Wild rice has been largely lost from the watershed because of a combination of factors including land use change, altered hydrology, water quality, and other changes including altered ecological/biological community interactions.

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:

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

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

No

Describe the permanent protection and justification for additional protection:

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

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

Yes

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?

Yes

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15?

Yes

Where does the activity take place?

- WMA

- WPA
- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- County/Municipal

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

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

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

The purpose of MLT's conservation easements is to protect existing high-quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. As such, we restrict any agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases where there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either carve the agricultural area out of the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may include a small percentage of agricultural lands if it is not feasible to carve those areas out. In such cases, however, we will not use OHF funds to pay the landowners for that portion of the conservation easement.

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

No

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

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

No variation from State of MN regulations for WMA acquisitions.

All WPA acquisitions will be open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season according to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, United States Code, title 16, section 668dd, et seq.

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

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

Yes

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

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

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

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

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

No

Will the 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?
2020	\$3,927,000	\$520,900	\$249,200	\$181,400	1,007	109	No
2019	\$2,946,000	\$2,037,200	\$293,600	\$1,137,900	1,010	793	No

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Site prioritization and targeted outreach completed	December 2023
Conservation easement and fee-title acquisition completed	June 2026
Restoration completed	June 2027

Budget

Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$419,200	-	-	\$419,200
Contracts	\$1,805,800	-	-	\$1,805,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,800,000	\$150,000	-, PF, Federal, Private	\$1,950,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$1,000,000	\$100,000	-, PF, Federal, Private	\$1,100,000
Easement Acquisition	\$2,700,000	\$405,000	Private Landowners	\$3,105,000
Easement Stewardship	\$312,000	-	-	\$312,000
Travel	\$16,000	-	-	\$16,000
Professional Services	\$365,000	-	-	\$365,000
Direct Support Services	\$77,000	-	-	\$77,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$44,000	-	-	\$44,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
Supplies/Materials	\$125,000	-	-	\$125,000
DNR IDP	\$18,000	-	-	\$18,000
Grand Total	\$8,685,000	\$655,000	-	\$9,340,000

Partner: Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD)

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$113,200	-	-	\$113,200
Contracts	\$1,386,800	-	-	\$1,386,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,500,000	-	-	\$1,500,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Water Resource Manager	0.3	4.0	113200	-	0	\$113,200

Partner: Pheasants Forever (PF)**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$40,000	-	-	\$40,000
Contracts	\$335,000	-	-	\$335,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,800,000	\$150,000	PF, Federal, Private	\$1,950,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$1,000,000	\$100,000	PF, Federal, Private	\$1,100,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000
Professional Services	\$80,000	-	-	\$80,000
Direct Support Services	\$15,000	-	-	\$15,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$44,000	-	-	\$44,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$125,000	-	-	\$125,000
DNR IDP	\$18,000	-	-	\$18,000
Grand Total	\$3,463,000	\$250,000	-	\$3,713,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Grants Staff	0.04	3.0	12000	-	0	\$12,000
Field Staff	0.04	3.0	12000	-	0	\$12,000
State Coordinator	0.05	3.0	16000	-	0	\$16,000

Partner: Minnesota Land Trust (MLT)**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$266,000	-	-	\$266,000
Contracts	\$84,000	-	-	\$84,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,700,000	\$405,000	Private Landowners	\$3,105,000
Easement Stewardship	\$312,000	-	-	\$312,000
Travel	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Professional Services	\$285,000	-	-	\$285,000
Direct Support Services	\$62,000	-	-	\$62,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$3,722,000	\$405,000	-	\$4,127,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Land Protection Staff	0.7	4.0	266000	-	0	\$266,000

Amount of Request: \$8,685,000

Amount of Leverage: \$655,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 7.54%

DSS + Personnel: \$496,200

As a % of the total request: 5.71%

Easement Stewardship: \$312,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 11.56%

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

If the project received 70% of the requested funding**Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

Our planned wetland restoration projects are 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.

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

PF - Personnel and DSS will be scaled down proportionately.

SRWD - Personnel would be scaled to the extent feasible.

MLT - Personnel/DSS will be reduced, but not proportionately. Some costs are fixed. Projects often fail midstream. Donation of easement value may result in more projects, more 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?

Our planned wetland restoration projects are 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.

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

PF - Personnel and DSS will be scaled down proportionately.

SRWD - Personnel would be scaled to the extent feasible.

MLT - Personnel/DSS will be reduced, but not proportionately. Some costs are fixed. Projects often fail midstream. Donation of easement value may result in more projects, more 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?

In general, PF staffing 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.

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

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

MLT: Habitat management plans on the new easement acquisitions; Restoration plans on existing easements; Partnering with SWCD's on outreach for easement acquisition.

PF: Restoration, enhancement, and initial development of protected areas.

SRWD: Working with contractors to complete restoration project work.

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

We anticipate 5 fee title acquisition transactions.

Easement Stewardship

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

Minnesota Land Trust anticipates 10-13 total projects. The cost per easement for stewardship, on average, is \$24,000, although under extraordinary circumstances additional funds may be requested. 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 frequently rent cars for travel to project locations.

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

Yes

Direct Support Services

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

PF utilizes the Total Modified Direct Cost method. This methodology is annually approved by the U.S. Department of Interior's National Business Center as the basis for the organization's Indirect Cost Rate agreement. PF's allowable direct support services cost is 4.84%. In this proposal, PF has discounted its rate to 2.5% of the sum of personnel, contracts, professional services, and travel. We are donating the difference-in-kind.

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

Other Equipment/Tools

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

GPS devices, safety equipment.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

No

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

07/1/2022

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	74	0	0	0	74
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	72	288	0	0	360
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	186	448	0	1,200	1,834

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	\$1,500,000	-	-	-	\$1,500,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$445,100	\$1,780,600	-	-	\$2,225,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$247,300	\$990,000	-	-	\$1,237,300
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,722,000	\$3,722,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$2,192,400	\$2,770,600	-	\$3,722,000	\$8,685,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	74	0	0	0	74
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	180	0	180	0	360
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	854	0	980	0	1,834

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$1,500,000	-	-	-	\$1,500,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$1,112,900	-	\$1,112,800	-	\$2,225,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$1,237,300	-	\$1,237,300
Protect in Easement	-	\$1,861,000	-	\$1,861,000	-	\$3,722,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$4,473,900	-	\$4,211,100	-	\$8,685,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	\$20,270	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$6,181	\$6,182	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$6,182	\$6,187	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,101
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	\$20,270	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$6,182	-	\$6,182	-
Protect in Fee w/o State	-	-	-	\$6,186	-

PILT Liability					
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,101	-	\$3,101	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

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

Programs in prairie region:

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

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes](#)

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

Easement 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 SGCN, 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.

Fee parcels are identified and strategically prioritized using the best science and decision support tools (e.g. Prairie Conservation Plan Maps) available. Preference is given to projects that help deliver the goals of local and state recognized conservation initiatives and that build critical habitat. Data layers (i.e. MN Biological Survey, Natural Heritage Database, MN Wildlife Action Plan, Wellhead Protection Areas, Pheasant Action Plan, existing protected land, etc.) are used to help justify projects and focus areas as well as to inform decisions on top priorities for protection and restoration efforts. Additionally, the partners will use the Sauk River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (One Watershed, One Plan) to guide priority areas.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

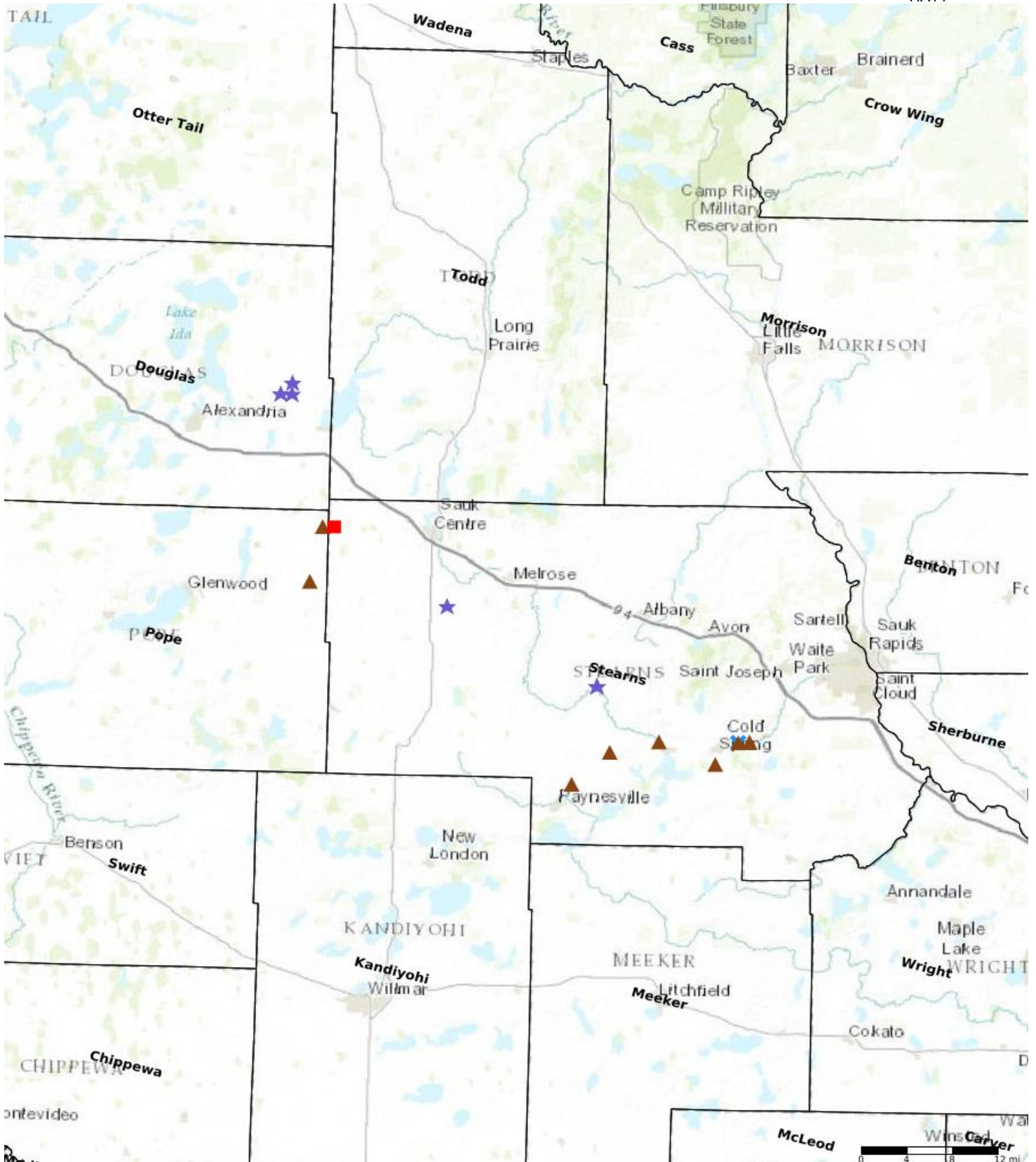
Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Crooked Lake Site 2	Douglas	12836208	15	\$659,761	Yes
Crooked Lake Site 1	Douglas	12836209	60	\$482,634	Yes
Crooked Lake Site 3	Douglas	12836204	20	\$144,636	Yes
Sauk River 1	Stearns	12330213	4	\$10,000	Yes
Spirit Marsh	Stearns	12534214	15	\$25,000	Yes
Sauk River 3	Stearns	12432224	3	\$10,000	Yes
Sauk River 2	Stearns	12432224	1	\$3,000	Yes

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
West Port WMA	Pope	12536202	160	\$675,000	No
TBD WMA	Stearns	12636212	400	\$1,800,000	Yes
Partners WMA	Stearns	12232203	40	\$180,000	No
TBD WPA	Stearns	12635207	388	\$1,350,000	Yes
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12331214	85	\$3,000,000	No
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12330213	20	\$40,000	No
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12329218	40	\$100,000	No
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12329218	20	\$40,000	No

Protect Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
TBD WMA	Stearns	12331219	300	\$1,200,000	No	13	\$40,000
TBD WMA	Stearns	12330227	298	\$3,200,000	No	1	\$30,000



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

Parcel Map
Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 4
 (Data Generated From Parcel List)

Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program, Phase 4

Outdoor Heritage Fund Request

\$8,852,400 to permanently protect 1,760 acres through conservation easements and fee title acquisition, and restore & enhance 120 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 local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), The Nature Conservancy, Minnesota DNR, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will protect 1,760 acres and restore/enhance 120 acres of habitat within the Sauk River Watershed (SRW).

- SRWD will provide grant administration and coordinate the outreach and some restoration components, with the assistance of other partners.
- MLT will protect 1,200 acres using conservation easements.
- PF will protect 560 acres using fee simple acquisition and complete needed restoration on those acres.

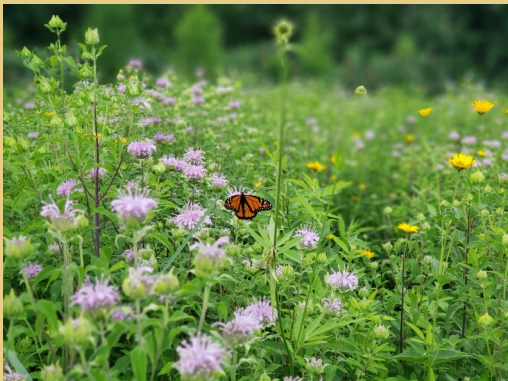
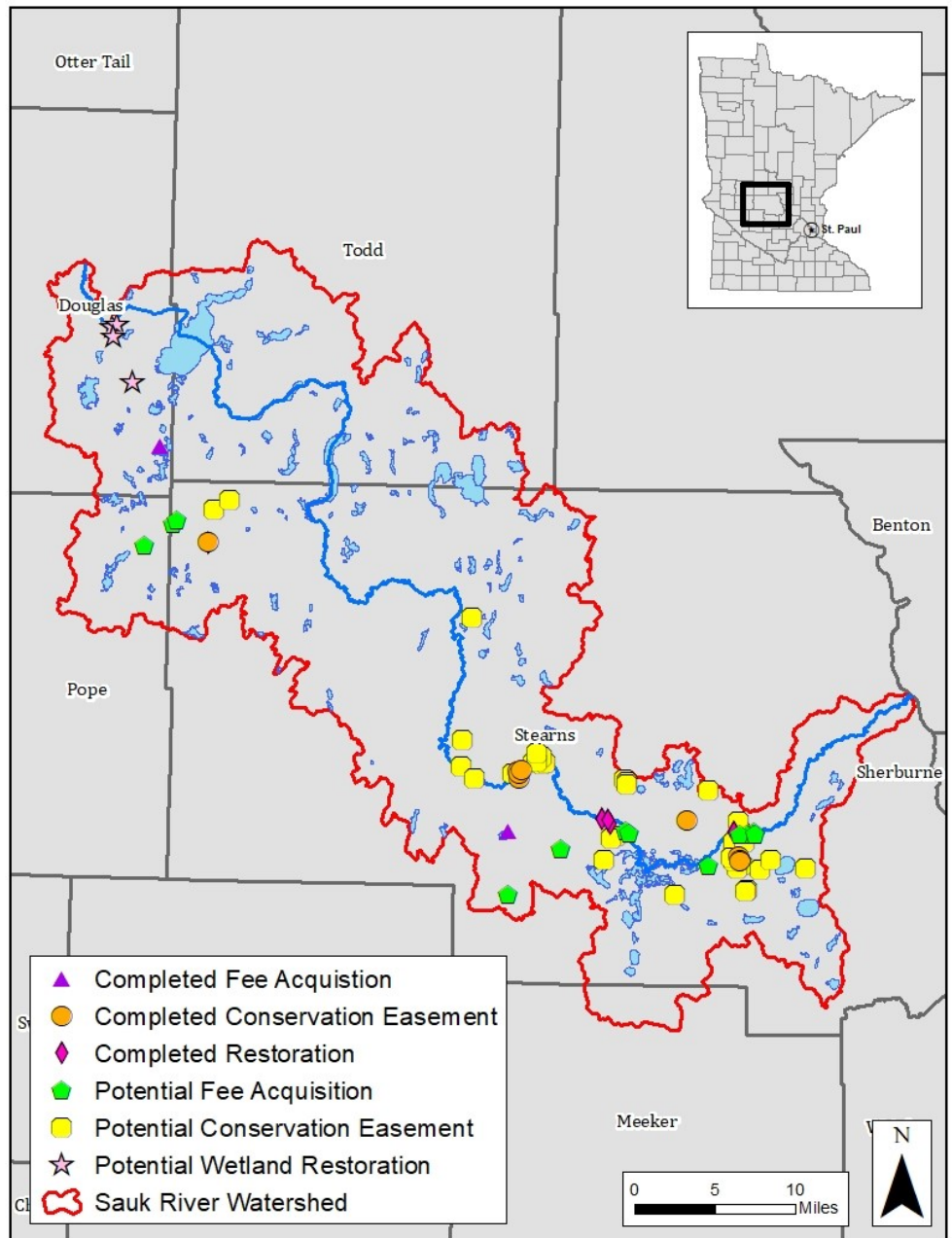
Program Outcomes

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 of 560 acres 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.
- The restoration work will focus on building a wetland complex in an area that had historically been known as Crooked Hanford Lake, but was drained by the addition of a public drainage system. Easements have been purchased and landowners are on board with the restoration.



Mission

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

Contact Us

Sauk River Watershed District
 642 Lincoln Road
 Sauk Centre, MN 56378
 Website: 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	ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE				
Weighting Factor	Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)				
	a) Size: Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)				
	a) Habitat Quality: Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)				
	b) Imperiled Species: Occurrence of Documented Rare Feature on Parcel				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Landscape Context (34 points)				
	Current Status (30 points)				
	a) Protection Context (15 points)				
	i. Size of Contiguous Protected Lands				
	ii. Amount of Protected Lands within 3 miles of Property				
	: Protected Land within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)				
	: Protected Land 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)				
	b) Ecological Context (15 points)	0	0	0	0
	i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat				
	ii. Amount of Ecological Habitat within 3 miles of Property				
	: Ecological Habitat within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)				
	: Ecological Habitat 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)				
	Future Potential (4 points)				
	a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)				
	b) UMB Multiple Benefits Module Score (2 pts)				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS	0	0	0	0

SAUK RIVER WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet – Scoring and Criteria

Three primary factors when taken together provide a good estimate of long-term viability for biodiversity: 1) **Size** of the occurrence (species population or example of natural community), 2) **Condition** of the occurrence, and 3) its **Landscape context**. This framework is used widely across the world by a large number of conservation organizations and agencies and here in Minnesota by the Minnesota DNR, The Nature Conservancy and others. The Minnesota Land Trust has adopted this practice as well.

In this summary document, we provide an overview of the framework used by the Land Trust in assessing and prioritizing land protection opportunities before the organization.

- 1. Habitat Size (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on acres of habitat to be protected through the easement relative to the largest parcels available for protection in the program area. Although size can pertain to species populations, the size of such populations is often constrained by available habitat. In addition, very little information pertaining to the size of species populations on a given property typically exists, making any determination suspect. Habitat size is a valid indicator in these circumstances.

Scoring: Parcels are scored by how they fall relative to twelve size classes of habitat:

0 pt	≤40 acres
3 pts	41-50 acres
6 pts	51-75 acres
9 pts	76-108 acres
12 pts	109-152 acres
15 pts	153-224 acres
18 pts	225-320 acres
21 pts	321-460 acres
27 pts	661-960 acres
30 pts	961-1300 acres
33 pts	>1300 acres

- 2. Quality of Natural Resources (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on the quality or condition of occurrences of ecological communities (habitat) and imperiled species if known. As with Habitat Size above, population data for imperiled species is often minimal on private lands. As such, the condition of score is heavily influenced by the condition of natural communities on a property. However, we do allocate a modest level of points to the presence of imperiled species if they have been documented on a property.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based on the condition of focal ecological community targets – both terrestrial and freshwater – and presence of imperiled species on the property, as such:

- a) Habitat Quality (28 points) –** The Minnesota Biological Survey natural community element occurrence ranking framework (for terrestrial systems) and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency fish and insect indices of biotic integrity are used to score habitat quality on parcels, as such:

- 0 pts Absence of natural communities; fish/insect IBI = 0-10.
- 4 pts Natural communities averaging D rank; fish/insect IBI = 10-20.
- 8 pts Natural communities averaging CD rank; fish/insect IBI = 20-40.
- 12 pts Natural communities averaging C rank; fish/insect IBI = 50-59.
- 16 pts Natural communities averaging BC rank; fish/insect IBI = 60-69.
- 20 pts Natural communities averaging B rank; fish/insect IBI = 70-79.
- 24 pts Natural communities averaging AB rank; IBI = 80-89.
- 28 pts Natural communities averaging A rank; IBI > 90.

b) Imperiled Species (5 points) – Scoring of the parcel is based on species abundance, as follows:

- 1 pt 1 occurrence
- 2 pts 2 occurrences
- 3 pts 3 occurrences
- 5 pts 4 or more occurrences

3. Landscape Context (34 points): Parcels are scored based current ecological context of the property and protected lands surrounding it; in addition, points are also allocated based on the likelihood that lands around a parcel will be protected going forward based on the identification of these adjacent lands in respective conservation lands.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based as follows:

a) Protection Context (15 points) – Is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous protected land (if any) and amount of protected land within 3 miles of the property. Here, we look at two subfactors:

i) Amount of protected land (acres) contiguous with the parcel. Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of protected land contiguous to the parcel (8 points), as follows:

- 1 pt ≤40 acres of contiguous protected lands
- 2 pts 41-60 acres
- 3 pts 61-100 acres
- 4 pts 101-160 acres
- 5 pts 161-240 acres
- 6 pts 241-400 acres
- 7 pts 401-640 acres
- 8 pts >640 acres

ii) Amount of protected lands within a 3-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby but not contiguous can also play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight protected lands within ½ mile of the parcel higher than those farther removed, and score them separately.

(a) Amount (acres) of protected land within ½ mile of protected property (4 points) – The amount of protected land within ½ mile of the parcel, scored as follows:

- 1 pt ≤80 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 81-360 acres
- 3 pts 361-640 acres
- 4 pts >640 acres

Amount (acres) of protected land ½-3 miles of the protected property (3 points) –

- 1 pt ≤640 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 641-2560 acres
- 3 pts >2561 acres

b) Ecological Context (15 points) – As with Protection context, ecological context is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous ecological habitat (if any) and amount of ecological habitat within 3 miles of the property.

i) Amount of ecological habitat (acres) contiguous with the parcel, providing species with direct access to larger blocks of permanent habitat (8 points). Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of natural ecological habitat contiguous to the parcel, as follows:

- 1 pt ≤80 acres of contiguous habitat
- 2 pts 81-320 acres
- 3 pts 321-640 acres
- 4 pts 641-960 acres
- 5 pts 961-1920 acres
- 6 pts 1921-3840 acres
- 7 pts 3841-7680 acres
- 8 pts >7680 acres

ii) Amount of protected lands within a 3-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby, whether contiguous or not play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight ecological habitat within ½ mile of the parcel higher than that farther removed, and score them separately.

Amount (acres) of protected land within ½ mile of protected property (4 points) – The amount of protected land within ½ mile of the parcel, scored as follows:

- 1 pt ≤80 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 81-360 acres
- 3 pts 361-640 acres
- 4 pts >640 acres

Amount (acres) of protected land ½-3 miles of the protected property (3 points) –

- 1 pt ≤640 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 641-2560 acres
- 3 pts >2561 acres

c) Future Potential (4 points) – The degree to which the area within which a parcel lies has been identified as a priority for conservation action and the degree to which action is being implemented in that area is a direct indicator of the long-term potential for maintenance of biodiversity associated with a parcel. Lands affiliated with priority areas are more likely to be complemented with additional levels of nearby protected lands than those outside of priority areas. In areas experiencing high levels of development, this factor may carry a significant amount of weight in setting protection priorities.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based on two subfactors: 1) their position relative to priority areas identified in statewide or local planning efforts, and 2) the degree to which action is being implemented within a priority area.

- 0 pts Parcel not within priority area
- 1 pt Parcel within priority area; minimal activity occurring
- 2 pts Parcel within priority area; modest activity occurring
- 3 pts Parcel within priority area; good levels of activity occurring
- 4 pts Parcel within priority area; high levels of activity occurring



WHERE THE FOREST MEETS THE PRAIRIE
Todd County
● MINNESOTA ● EST. 1855 ●

SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT
215 1st Avenue South, Suite 104
Long Prairie, MN 56347
Phone: 320-732-2644 Fax: 320-732-4803

May 26, 2021

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Sarah Jo Boser
642 Lincoln Road
Sauk Centre, MN 55378

RE: FY 2023/ML 2022 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 4

Dear Ms. Boser,

On behalf of Todd 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 forests, prairies, and wetlands 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, restoring, and enhancing 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 voluntary permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Deja C Anton
Todd County
Soil and Water District Manager



May 24, 2021

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Sarah Jo Boser
642 Lincoln Road
Sauk Centre, MN 55378

RE: FY 2023/ML 2022 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 4

Dear Ms. Boser,

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy, 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 forests, prairies, and wetlands 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 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, restoring, and enhancing these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

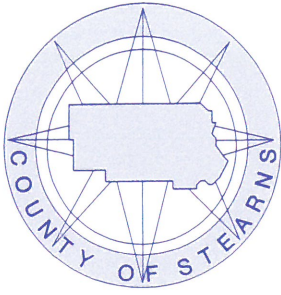
The Nature Conservancy is pleased to be an active partner in this watershed and to offer support to this proposal. We recognize the importance of this program for protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement and fee land acquisition, as well as restoring lands to improve their habitat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

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard L. Biske".

Richard L. Biske
Freshwater Conservation Program Director
The Nature Conservancy - Minnesota



COUNTY OF STEARNS

Parks Department

1802 County Road 137, Waite Park, MN 56387
320-255-6172 ▪ Email: parkinfo@co.stearns.mn.us

May 26, 2021

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Sarah Jo Boser
642 Lincoln Road
Sauk Centre, MN 55378

RE: FY 2023/ML 2022 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 4

Dear Ms. Boser,

On behalf of the Stearns County Parks Department, 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 forests, prairies, and wetlands 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, restoring, and enhancing 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 people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Ben Anderson
Parks Director
Stearns County Parks



**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 19, 2021

**Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Sarah Jo Boser
642 Lincoln Road
Sauk Centre, MN 55378**

**RE: FY 2023/ML 2022 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration,
Phase 4**

Dear Ms. Boser,

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 forests, prairies, and wetlands 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, restoring, and enhancing 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 people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,


**Jerry Haggemiller
District Coordinator**



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/

Mr. Scott Henderson
Administrator
Sauk River Watershed District
524 4th Street S
Sauk Centre, Minnesota 56378

Dear Mr. Henderson:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) in Minnesota offers our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal is to protect and restore lands targeted within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat. The Service will provide technical support for wetland and prairie restoration projects as needed.

The wetlands and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect and restore are vital habitat for several species. Additionally, this program will benefit the Sauk River, which is a state designated canoe route and is great for fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor recreation. In addition to this proposal benefiting habitat and recreational areas, it will also benefit drinking water. Smaller communities in the Sauk River watershed depend on the groundwater for drinking water and the Sauk River flows to the Mississippi River and contributes to the drinking water for the City of St. Cloud and the Twin Cities metro area further downstream.

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 and maintaining the recreational opportunities in our community.

The Service is 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 and the community. Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Suzanne C. Baird
Regional Chief
National Wildlife Refuge System

May 26, 2021

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Sarah Jo Boser
642 Lincoln Road
Sauk Centre, MN 55378

RE: FY 2023/ML 2022 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 4

Dear Ms. Boser,

On behalf of Meeker Soil & 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 forests, prairies, and wetlands 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, restoring, and enhancing 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 people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,



Meeker SWCD