



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation Program

ML 2023 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 05/31/2022

Proposal Title: Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation Program

Funds Requested: \$4,203,000

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie

Title: Director of Land Protection

Organization: Minnesota Land Trust

Address: 2356 University Ave W, Suite 240

City: St Paul, MN 55114

Email: wostlie@mnland.org

Office Number:

Mobile Number: 6519176292

Fax Number:

Website: www.mnland.org

Location Information

County Location(s):

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Forest

Narrative

Abstract

The Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation Program is focused on the protection of remaining high-quality forest systems and their associated biota within the Hardwood Hills ecological section of west-central Minnesota. Over 60

percent of forests in the Hardwood Hills have been lost to conversion over the past century, with lakeshore development and growth along the I-94 corridor near St. Cloud posing significant threats. In this first phase of the program, Minnesota Land Trust and Saint John's University will protect via permanent conservation easement 1,200 acres of priority forest and wetland habitats within the Avon Hills portion of the program area.

Design and Scope of Work

The Hardwood Hills subsection is an ecologically rich landscape in west-central Minnesota, where forests meet prairies. It encompasses approximately 3.5 million acres and consists of steep slopes and high rolling hills that were formed during the last ice age when massive glaciers sculpted the region. Scattered between these rolling hills are abundant kettle lakes and wetlands; many of these are small, but the region also contains more than 400 lakes larger than 160 acres.

This transition zone includes a diversity of forest, prairie, and savanna habitats, numerous lakes and wetlands, and abundant wildlife, including 85 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Our overarching program goal is to afford protection to the remaining high-quality ecological systems and their associated species in the Hardwood Hills, as represented in the State's Wildlife Action Network.

The Hardwood Hills is under great development pressure, especially in the southern portions of the subsection towards St. Cloud. In this first phase of the Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation program, we are prioritizing the southern portion of the Hardwood Hills, known as the Avon Hills, where threat is greatest. The Avon Hills area is a 65,000 acre natural landscape located just 15 miles northwest of St. Cloud. This hilly glacial moraine landscape rises from the surrounding farmland; it contains the highest concentration of native plant communities in Stearns County, including oak and maple-basswood forests, tamarack and mixed-hardwood swamps, and wet meadows. It harbors numerous rare species, including American ginseng, cerulean warbler, red-shouldered hawk, and Blanding's turtle. The area has been identified as a Conservation Focus Area in Minnesota DNR's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025 and is consistent with conservation overlay district priorities of the Stearns County 2030 Comprehensive Plan. It is also a designated Audubon Important Bird Area.

The Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) and Saint John's University (SJU) have a long-standing and successful partnership to protect and restore the Avon Hills. Our goal is to permanently protect 70% of the Avon Hills (about 25,000 acres) over the next 20 years. With the assistance of the State of Minnesota and conservation-minded landowners, 6,647 acres of the Avon Hills have already been protected (>26.5% of our ambitious goal). The US Fish and Wildlife Service and other conservation entities have also prioritized protection efforts here, which indicates the importance of the region. Much of the Avon Hills is privately owned; high development pressure continues to elevate and threaten critical pieces of the existing ecosystem.

Program partners will secure conservation easements from willing landowners to protect the highest quality wildlife habitat remaining within the Hardwood Hills. Employing a market-based approach to identifying and procuring easements, program partners will encourage landowners to donate significant portions of their easement value, representing a significant cost savings to the state.

Saint John's University will serve as the primary local partner, conducting outreach within our priority areas and assisting with project selection. The Minnesota Land Trust will secure the conservation easements and steward them in perpetuity.

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?

Permanently protecting the unique and threatened forest systems of the Hardwood Hills is critical to maintaining native plant and wildlife biodiversity in Minnesota. This is especially true for migratory songbirds and other avian species that rely on this broadleaf forest system for food and shelter along the larger Mississippi Flyway.

Upland deciduous (Hardwood) and Upland deciduous (Aspen-Oak) forests are considered key habitats for SGCN within the Hardwood Hills. Habitat loss and degradation impact 86 percent of the SGCN occurring within the program area. Land protection efforts will directly benefit a significant percent of the 85 SGCN that occur in the program area, including; red-shouldered hawk, Blanding's turtle, and four-toed salamander, common mudpuppy, red-shouldered hawk, veery, least weasel, fluted-shell mollusk, least darter, smooth green snake, and pollinators such as bumblebees and yellow swallowtail butterflies.

Land protection work will be focused on building complexes of protected habitat by linking together protected lands into a greater whole. With 92 percent of forest lands in the Hardwood Hills in private ownership, conservation easements can play a pivotal role in ensuring long-term protection of these critical forest resources.

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 majority of the Hardwood Hills is privately-owned; high development pressure continues to elevate and threaten critical pieces of the existing ecosystem. Pressures from nearby St. Cloud and along the I-94 corridor make the Avon Hills and the greater Hardwood Hills a highly sought-after development area. Lakeshore and associated recreational land development are having a growing impact across the program area.

Six types of forested communities found in west-central Minnesota are considered "imperiled" statewide by the DNR. It is especially important to protect these natural communities from conversion to other land uses. As the DNR describes: "The greatest threat to the Species in Greatest Conservation Need in this area is habitat loss or degradation, which affects over 86 percent of these species in the Hardwood Hills. The major cause of habitat loss in this region has been the conversion of forests, wetlands, savannas, and prairies."

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 program is focused on protecting priority forest and wetland habitats within Hardwood Hills subsection as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan and the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS). Specific parcels will be evaluated and prioritized for protection among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on three primary ecological factors (1. amount of habitat on the parcel (size) and abundance of SGCN; 2. the quality or condition of habitat; and 3. the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas) and the level of payment the landowner is willing to accept (cost).

The program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area, expand the footprint of existing protected areas, facilitate the protection of habitat corridors and reduce the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats. Minnesota Biological Survey data is cornerstone to our assessment of potential conservation easement acquisitions; we also conduct field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition, because many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

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:

Once secured, conservation easements will protect in perpetuity the important forest and wetland habitats within the Hardwood Hills. Habitat management plans will be developed and provided to the landowners for use in enhancing and maintaining each parcel's important habitat. Protection of these critical habitats advances a primary goal identified by Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan through stabilization of SGCN.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, restore, and enhance habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need

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:

In this first phase of our program, the Minnesota Land Trust and SJU will focus their protection work on key forest and wetland habitats within Avon Hills portion of the larger Hardwood Hills subsection. High quality lands are protected through acquisition of perpetual conservation easements. We work in partnership with local, state and federal agency and non-profit conservation partners to ensure our activities are complementary to those undertaken by others working in the program area. By doing this, we are building complexes of high-quality protected habitat, reducing fragmentation concerns, and providing for connectivity between core habitat areas that will enable species to move freely.

In obtaining conservation easements (whether by donation or through purchase), we work with willing, conservation-minded landowners. Our landowner bid process will be targeted toward specific areas within our Avon Hills program area identified through the plan listed above. Opportunities within the program area are identified and prioritized based on the potential to contribute to build a permanent conservation legacy that includes positive outcomes for wildlife and the public.

What other fund may contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

Does this proposal include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

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

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

Funding provided to MLT and SJU from the Outdoor Heritage Fund through this proposal will not supplant or substitute any previous funding from a non-Legacy fund used for the same purpose.

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. The Minnesota Land Trust 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 cases of a true violation. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget.

In addition, MLT will assist landowners in the development of comprehensive habitat management plans to help ensure that the land will be managed for its wildlife and water quality benefits. The Land Trust and SJU will work with landowners on an ongoing basis to provide habitat restoration plans, resources, and technical expertise to undertake restoration, enhancement and ongoing management of these properties.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2027 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of easements in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	-

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

DNR staff, in consultation with a variety of experts in NGOs and other agencies, have compiled a select group of indicator species and associated quantities to be used by any applicant to answer the question above. The metrics are derived from existing data sources and/or scientific literature, but are necessarily gross averages. It is important to emphasize that the estimates provided are not accurate at a 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.

Indicator: Ovenbird

Ovenbirds (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) are found in upland forests statewide; typically in relatively mature forest but can also be found in younger forests. Deciduous, mixed coniferous-deciduous, and coniferous forests may be suitable. Ovenbirds nest on the ground in leaf litter. While territories vary in size and may overlap, an average of 10 pairs for every 10 hectares may be translated to roughly 16 pairs for every 40 acres.

Indicator: White-tailed deer.

White-tailed deer use a wide variety of forested habitats throughout Minnesota. Deer densities in the Metropolitan Area will be higher than the six-year average (2010-2015) density of 0.02 deer (pre-fawning) per acre of forest habitat in the LSOHC Northern Forest section.

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

One of MLT's core public values is a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Similarly, Saint John's University core Benedictine value of respect for human dignity requires respect to embrace the marginalized, and break down the privileges that exclude those who are different or disadvantaged.

The Land Trust has recently concluded a two-year process to assess how the conservation community—and the Minnesota Land Trust in particular—can better address these issues. To date, we have demonstrated this commitment when possible given the funding parameters and our unique role in working with private landowners, including numerous projects to protect the camps and nature centers that serve a diversity of Minnesota youth and a long-term partnership with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa on wild rice restoration.

Going forward, MLT intends to build on this engagement by using diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens in project, partner, and contractor selection. In each of our program areas, we intend to listen and seek out potential, authentic partnerships that can advance our goals of conserving the best of Minnesota's remaining habitats and, at the same time, being a more inclusive organization. One related program the Land Trust recently launched is the "Ambassador Lands Program" which connects willing conservation landowners to diverse community groups that desire access to private land for a variety of programming purposes, such as youth mentor hunts, cultural or ceremonial use, conservation employment training, nature based education, and much more. This would add greatly to the more universal public benefits of conserved lands such as wildlife habitat, clean water, and climate mitigation.

Saint John's University initiated a campus-wide endeavor in 2018 to support programs focused on inclusive community building. Through that undertaking, SJU assembled an Outdoor U Inclusivity Team which has begun the work of broadening access to Outdoor U's services and programs to underrepresented and marginalized students in a welcoming and safe environment.

Finally, as program partners, we both welcome more conversations with the LSOHC and conservation community about how these values can be better manifested in all our shared work going forward.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Yes

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

Yes

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

The purpose of the Land Trust's conservation easements is to protect existing high quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. We restrict agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases where there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either

exclude the agricultural area from the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may include a small percentage of agricultural lands if it is not feasible to exclude those areas. In such cases, however, we will not use OHF funds to pay the landowners for that portion of the conservation easement.

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, the conservation easement permits the continued usage of established trails and roads so long as their use does not significantly impact the conservation values of the property. Creation of new roads/trails or expansion of existing ones would typically not allowed or require Land Trust approval.

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 Land Trust's stewardship and enforcement protocols. Maintenance of permitted roads/trails in accordance 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?

No

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

Our priority for land protection is intact natural habitats. If some portion of a protected property requires restoration, the property will be evaluated and funding sought after developing the restoration plan and detailed cost estimates.

Other OHF Appropriation Awards

Have you received OHF dollars in the past through LSOHC?

No

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Conservation easements completed	June 30, 2027

Budget**Grand Totals Across All Partnerships**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$330,000	-	-	\$330,000
Contracts	\$150,000	-	-	\$150,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,000,000	\$500,000	Landowners	\$3,500,000
Easement Stewardship	\$360,000	-	-	\$360,000
Travel	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Professional Services	\$253,000	-	-	\$253,000
Direct Support Services	\$76,000	-	-	\$76,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$2,000	-	-	\$2,000
Supplies/Materials	\$20,000	-	-	\$20,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$4,203,000	\$500,000	-	\$4,703,000

Partner: St. Johns University

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$50,000	-	-	\$50,000
Contracts	\$60,000	-	-	\$60,000
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	\$20,000	-	-	\$20,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$130,000	-	-	\$130,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
SJU Staff	0.15	4.0	\$50,000	-	-	\$50,000

Partner: Minnesota Land Trust**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$280,000	-	-	\$280,000
Contracts	\$90,000	-	-	\$90,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,000,000	\$500,000	Landowners	\$3,500,000
Easement Stewardship	\$360,000	-	-	\$360,000
Travel	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Professional Services	\$253,000	-	-	\$253,000
Direct Support Services	\$76,000	-	-	\$76,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$2,000	-	-	\$2,000
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$4,073,000	\$500,000	-	\$4,573,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.7	4.0	\$280,000	-	-	\$280,000

Amount of Request: \$4,203,000**Amount of Leverage:** \$500,000**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 11.9%**DSS + Personnel:** \$406,000**As a % of the total request:** 9.66%**Easement Stewardship:** \$360,000**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 12.0%**Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:**

The Land Trust encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements to the program; this leverage amount is a conservative estimate of value we expect to see donated by landowners.

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?**

Outputs would be reduced by ~30-35 percent. With this reduction, MLT result would be able to complete 9-10 projects totaling approximately 800 acres. Activities will be curtailed, but less than proportional, as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success.

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

Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed.

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

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

Outputs would be reduced by 50-55 percent. With this reduction, MLT result would be able to complete 6-7 projects totaling approximately 550 acres. Activities will be curtailed, but less than proportional, as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success.

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

Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

No

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

Funds in the contract line are for the writing of habitat management plans via qualified vendors and engaging Soil and Water Conservation Districts for landowner outreach purposes to facilitate communication of the protection program.

Easement Stewardship

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

The Land Trust expects to close up to 15 conservation easements under this appropriation. The average cost per easement to fund the Minnesota Land Trust's perpetual monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$24,000, although in extraordinary circumstances additional funding may be warranted. 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

Land Trust staff regularly rents 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?

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 applied this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services requested through this grant.

Other Equipment/Tools

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

GPS devices, R/E tools, satellite communicator, safety gear.

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	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	1,200	0	1,200
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	1,200	0	1,200

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$4,203,000	-	\$4,203,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$4,203,000	-	\$4,203,000

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	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	1,200	0	0	0	1,200
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1,200	0	0	0	1,200

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$4,203,000	-	-	-	\$4,203,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$4,203,000	-	-	-	\$4,203,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$3,502	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,502	-	-	-
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 ~ *This program will permanently protect 1,200 acres of forest and wetland habitat in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

Yes

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

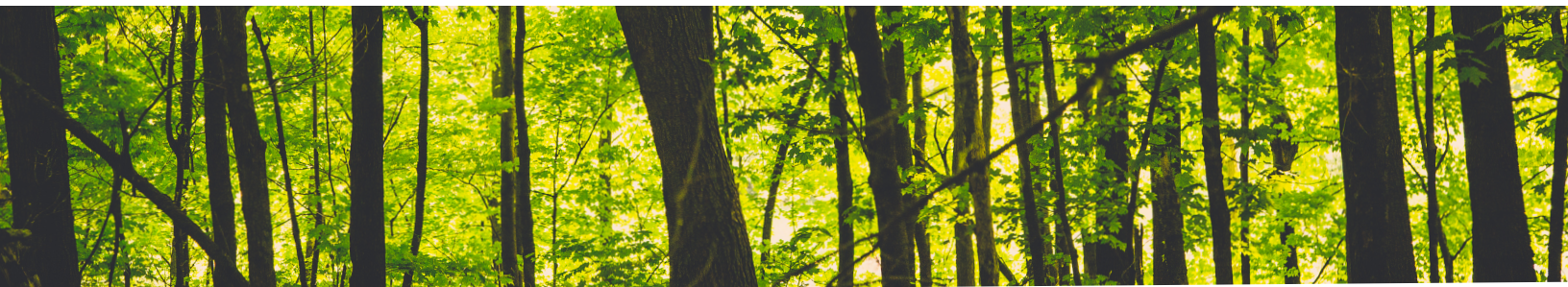
The Land Trust uses a competitive, market-based approach through an RFP process to identify interested landowners and prioritize parcels for conservation easement acquisition. All proposals submitted by landowners are evaluated and ranked relative to their ecological significance based on three primary 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). We contract with a local SWCD office to provide outreach services as a way to connect effectively with local landowners.



Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation Program

Phase 1



Request	\$4,203,000
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Leverage	\$600,000
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Acres protected	1,200
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For more information:

Wayne Ostlie

Director of Land Protection
Minnesota Land Trust
wostlie@mnland.org
(651) 917-6292

John Geissler

Director - Saint John's Outdoor University
Land Manager - Saint John's Abbey
Arboretum
Saint John's University
jgeissler001@csbsju.edu
(320) 363-3126

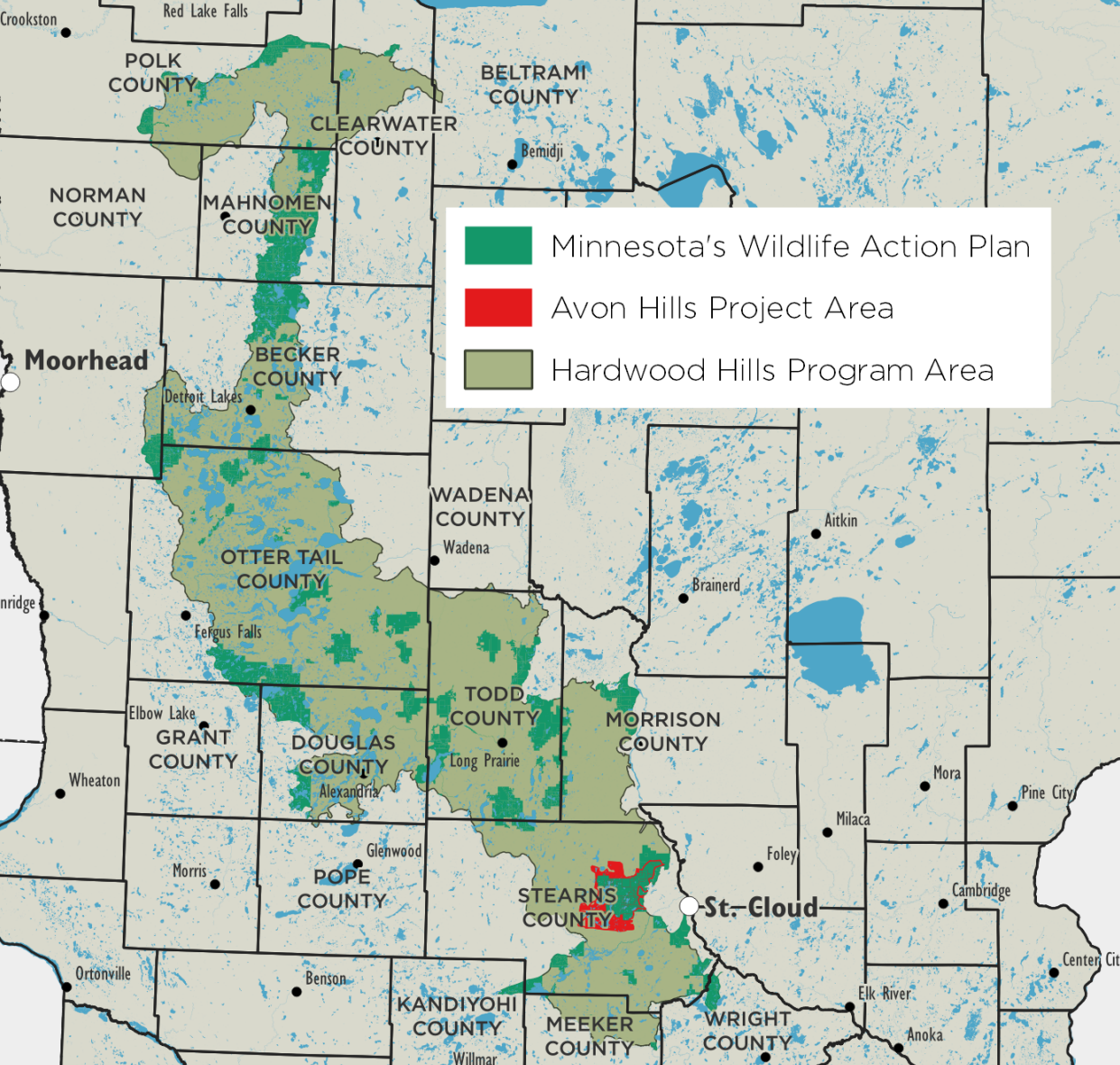
The Hardwood Hills Habitat Conservation Program is focused on the protection of remaining high-quality forest systems and their associated biota within the Hardwood Hills ecological section of west-central Minnesota. Over 60 percent of forests in the Hardwood Hills have been lost to conversion over the past century, with lakeshore development and growth along the I-94 corridor near St. Cloud posing significant threats. In this first phase of the program, Minnesota Land Trust and Saint John's University will protect via permanent conservation easement 1,200 acres of priority forest and wetland habitats within the Avon Hills portion of the program area.

How Does the Program Support State Goals?

This program is focused on protecting priority forest systems within Hardwood Hills subsection as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan and the Minnesota Biological Survey. The program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area, expand the footprint of existing protected areas, facilitate the protection of habitat corridors and reduce the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats.

What Are the Outcomes?

- Permanently protect the unique and threatened forest systems of the Hardwood Hills.
- Increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects.
- Land protection efforts will directly benefit SGCN that occur in the program area.



What has Been Accomplished to Date?

The Minnesota Land Trust and St. Johns University have a long-standing and successful partnership to protect and restore the Avon Hills. With the assistance of the State of Minnesota and conservation-minded landowners, 6,647 acres of the Avon Hills have been protected to date. This represents >26.5% of our ambitious goal of affording protection to 70% of the project's forest resources.

Partners will expand into other priority areas identified in the Wildlife Action Plan in future proposals.



Saint John's
UNIVERSITY

2945 Abbey Plaza
Collegeville, MN
56321-3000
outdooru@csbsju.edu

www.csbsju.edu/
outdooru



MINNESOTA
LAND TRUST

2356 University Ave. W.
Suite 240
St. Paul, MN 55114
(651) 647-9590
mnland@mnland.org
www.mnland.org

MMAPLE Method (Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements)															
Avon Hills Area Conservation Easement Bid Worksheet					Formulas updated 2 August 2014 by T. Kroll										
Landowner Code Name:		Example	(Make up a name or code that will be used to identify your property.)												
Date prepared:		28-Jul-14													
Environmental Benefits Points	Environmental Weighting Factor	Units Affected	Enter your actual data in the blocks with the blue and green colors to determine Environmental Benefits Points. Blue is determined by the landowner. Green is determined by the land features in the easement. Purple are calculations. Orange = total Environmental Benefits Points. Red = Conservation Value Rating.												
(EBP= weighting factor x units)															
		Size of Property (based on tax statement acres)													
		80	Total acres owned by applicant contiguous to this proposed easement. (For information only)												
815	10 +	75	Acres to be protected by an easement, not including any house site acres within the easement area.												
		80	Acres of this proposed easement plus those acres outside the easement that would fall within a full "40" or Gov. Lot)												
			(i.e. 75 acres in easement + 5 homesite acres = 80 acres. Include only those acres owned by applicant.)												
815	10 +	75	Total contiguous easement acres or largest block if not all acres are contiguous												
		Special Natural & Cultural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (count only those acres covered by the easement)													
0	250	0	Acres of Outstanding Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) (Rounded up to nearest 5 acres)												
6,000	150	40	Acres of High Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) (Rounded up to nearest 5 acres)												
0	75	0	Acres of Moderate Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) (Rounded up to nearest 5 acres)												
538	1	538	Feet of Shoreline on "public waters" (streams, lakes+ wetlands>10 ac) from the Public Water Inventory Map (round up to nearest 10)												
0	1+	0	Feet of the longest contiguous section of shoreline on "public waters" for each lake on which the survey is "meandered." (round up to nearest 10)												
0	100	0	Acres which are designated as a source of public drinking water or aquifer recharge area.												
0	1	0	Feet of protected property boundary which is adjacent to a designated scenic road, river, trail, or other designated scenic feature.												
0	50	0	# of documented sites of historical or cultural significance which will be protected.												
		Open Space /Working Forest /Working Ag to be Protected by the Easement (count only those acres covered by the easement)													
756	10 +	70	Acres to be used for working forest, prairie, preserved forest, savanna, or wetland . (Not intended for agriculture, pasturing, or horticulture.)												
25	5	5	Acres to be allowed for use as agriculture, pasturing, or horticulture.												
0	5	0	Acres for which a current land management plan exists. (i.e. Forest Stewardship Plan or NRCS Farm Plan)												
		Location of the Property to be Protected (count only those acres covered by the easement)													
0	100	0	Acres on which unrestricted public access will be allowed.												
0	2	0	Feet of protected property boundary which is adjacent to either public land or other permanently protected land.												
815	10 +	75	Acres which are inside some kind of specially designated conservation protection area. (Township, county conservation overlay district)												
		Building Allotments to be Extinguished, or Retained for Future Use, or are Already Used by the Applicant (within next full "40")													
		(Include building areas inside the easement area plus those controlled by the applicant outside the easement that would fall within the next largest full "40" or Gov. Lot.)													
		A40	Current property zoning. Examples A5, T20, A40 - Check with zoning board.												
		2	Total number of building allotments (used or unused) that are assigned by zoning . (Often 1 per 40 acres. Check with zoning board.)												
		1	Number of building allotments already used or to be retained from above. (Include any existing homesites you own.)												
2,000	2000	1	Number of building allotments to be extinguished within the proposed easement area.												
		1	Clustering: How many unconnected areas will contain building sites? Clustered building sites that have adjoining boundaries are counted as 1 area.												
		Enter 1 above	Boundaries of individual building sites must adjoin on the longest or second longest side to be counted as one cluster.												
		1	How many separate legal easement document sets need to be created? (Multiple bidders or current/future land splits require separate easements.)												
		\$0	\$ /acre Admin fee for multiple easements. (\$15,000 per additional legal easement sets needed /acres protected. \$0 fee for the first easement.)												
11,765	SUB-TOTAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS POINTS														
		Deductions (if any) for Not Extinguishing all Building Allotments (100% protection = no deductions)													
11,765	= sub-total of Env	94%	Percent of land in the easement compared to the next highest "full 40" or government lot. (Protection > 80% has no deductions.)												
10,000	=(.35+ %)x above	50%	Percent of total allotments to extinguished. (Must be >65% for full credit.)												
10,000	100%	75	Acres of protected land per homesite or developed cluster. Must exceed 75 acres for 100%. 160+ acres = max of 130%.												
		Final Calculations and Examples						Hand calculate your bid below.							
10,000	10,000	10,000	= TOTAL ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS POINTS for your land.						10,000	(A) =Your Total Environmental Benefits points					
\$2,000	\$1,000	\$500	\$ per acre you want to be paid for the easement. (Compare 3 bids.)					\$	per acre	(B) = \$ per acre you want to be paid for the easement.					
\$0	\$0	\$0	Extra \$/ac admin fee for bids needing more than one set of easements.						\$0	(C) Add this admin fee to (B) your total price /acre					
5.0	10.0	20.0	= YOUR CONSERVATION VALUE RATING - Higher is better!							(D) = Your Conservation Value Rating					
Conservation Value Ratings = Environmental Benefits Points / (Your bid per acre for the easement + Admin Fee)										(D) Conservation Value Ratings = (A) ÷ (B+C)					
75	75	75	= Total acres you are protecting with an easement.						75	(E) = Total acres you are protecting with an easement.					
\$150,000	\$75,000	\$37,500	= Total \$\$ you will receive if your bid is accepted.					\$		(F) =Total \$ you could receive if accepted. (F)=(B x E)					
Maximum Bids must not exceed the lesser of 1) the appraised value of the rights extinguished by the easement or 2) the % of ATAMV from below.															
									Albany	Avon	Collegeville	Farming	St. Joseph	St. Wendel	Wakefield
2013 Assessors Township Average Market Value (ATAMV) per acre (weighted for ag & timber, no homesites)									\$3,699	\$3,671	\$4,536	\$3,409	\$4,026	\$3,769	\$4,466
> 500 Total Environmental Benefit Points = Minimum to participate															
< 1,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 20% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.									\$740	\$734	\$907	\$682	\$805	\$754	\$893
< 3,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 30% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.									\$1,110	\$1,101	\$1,361	\$1,023	\$1,208	\$1,131	\$1,340
< 5,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 40% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.									\$1,480	\$1,468	\$1,814	\$1,364	\$1,610	\$1,508	\$1,786
< 10,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 50% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.									\$1,850	\$1,836	\$2,268	\$1,705	\$2,013	\$1,885	\$2,233
< 15,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 60% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.									\$2,219	\$2,203	\$2,722	\$2,045	\$2,416	\$2,261	\$2,680
< 20,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 70% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.									\$2,589	\$2,570	\$3,175	\$2,386	\$2,818	\$2,638	\$3,126
> 20,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 80% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.									\$2,959	\$2,937	\$3,629	\$2,727	\$3,221	\$3,015	\$3,573