



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Protection/Enhancement of Public Land Forest Habitats Through Strategic Acquisition of Private Land
Inholdings
ML 2023 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 07/28/2022

Proposal Title: Protection/Enhancement of Public Land Forest Habitats Through Strategic Acquisition of Private Land Inholdings

Funds Requested: \$2,785,000

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Scott Johnson

Title: Forest Conservation Coordinator: Minnesota/NW Wisconsin

Organization: Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society

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Fax Number:

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Location Information

County Location(s): St. Louis, Beltrami, Hubbard, Lake of the Woods, Lake, Cass, Pine, Koochiching and Aitkin.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Northern Forest

Activity types:

- Enhance
- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Forest

Narrative

Abstract

This proposal serves to protect 1,760 acres and enhance 500 acres of forest habitats within Minnesota's public forests through fee title acquisition of strategic private forest land inholdings in State, County and National Forests. Successful efforts will 1) greatly increase management efficiencies and effectiveness of surrounding public forest lands, 2) address primary forest habitat management concerns of forest habitat loss, degradation, fragmentation, and 3) serve to address critical forest and recreational user access needs. Grant funding will also be used to ensure acquired land is turned over to a public entity with suitable infrastructure and forest habitat.

Design and Scope of Work

At its most basic level, forest wildlife habitats can be assessed and managed through a thought process that looks at composition (cover types), pattern (stand, patch size and distribution) and structure (age class) of a forest assessed and managed at a site and landscape scale. However, all too often efficiency and effectiveness of this basic process is complicated or unattainable due to private land inholdings that complicate or, hinders forest habitat management efficiencies (boundary, access issues) and reduces forest habitat effectiveness (fragmentation).

To address these overall forest management and related habitat impediments, this proposal would protect strategic forest habitats through the acquisition of private forest land inholdings. Acquisition process would involve input from public forest land agencies as to priority locations, parcels for protection along with a process to vet a potential acquisition as to intent of the proposal and funding source (Outdoor Heritage Fund). While the primary intent of this project is to protect forest habitats through fee title acquisition, a portion of this proposal's budget is also noted for initial development and forest habitat enhancement needs of the parcels acquired. Initial development may include such needs as a property boundary survey, access development or repair, etc. Forest habitat enhancement efforts, coordinated with public land managing agency, may include a forest cover type inventory, tree planting, invasive species control, etc. to prepare for and complement existing sustainable forest management plans.

Process of notifying affected county boards as to tax revenue concerns due to acquisition of private land inholdings will depend on the notification requirements of the public land administrator a parcel is being acquiring for (i.e. State, Federal or County). In all cases the RGS/AWS will notify a county of any acquisition intent or effort instigated by this proposal and will work to address, facilitate any information needs or requests they may have.

***Note: For parcels acquired within a State Forest, this proposal intends to further explore a process to leverage additional benefits to forest management efficiencies and habitat effectiveness through a state land asset management/land exchange process. This concept is to exchange parcels acquired by this process/grant within a State Forest for state School Trust Fund parcel(s) located within a State Wildlife Management Area. This subsequent land asset/exchange process would allow for improved forest resource management and compatibility with primary economic objectives of the State School Trust Fund and wildlife production objectives of a Wildlife Management Area. RGS & AWS is not indicating that timber production and wildlife habitat are not compatible, rather that balancing their integration at landscape scales may be most efficient with this ownership consolidation to improve wildlife habitat and forest health on these acquired parcels.

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?

As identified in the Minnesota's 2015-25 Wildlife Action Plan; habitat degradation, loss, and fragmentation are the predominant stressors impacting SGCN populations. In addition, it notes that habitat fragmentation is one of the top stressors impacting 23% of all SGCN species.

To ensure that acquired private forest land inholdings address SGCN related forest habitat concerns noted in this section, the criteria, prioritization and selection process for parcels to acquire will lean heavily on science-based process in collaboration with receiving public land agency to vet ecological attributes of the parcel being acquired and how it may serve to enhance management aspects of adjacent public land it will be part of.

Depending on forest habitat type acquired and location in the state, SGCN examples positively impacted by this project include four-toed salamander, Blanding's turtle, eastern hog-nosed snake, golden-winged warbler, red-shouldered hawk, American woodcock, black-backed woodpecker, moose, southern flying squirrel, and big brown bat.

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

As referenced in LSOHC's Outdoor Heritage Fund 25-year framework document; forest habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation are noted to occur at an annual rate of ~3,600 acres/year. Also, most all MN Forest Resources Council Regional Landscape Management Plans note a core need to maximize forest connectivity to benefit native plant and wildlife species and to increase landscape resiliency to stressors such as wildfire, invasive species, disease, herbivory and climate change through the use of public land acquisition as a tool to prevent compounding negative impacts of parcelization and eventual forest habitat fragmentation. Both of these references serve to note the timing/opportunistic urgency and need for this proposal.

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 project will utilize numerous science-based conservation plans, resource assessment processes and GIS modeling applications provided by the public agency partners in this effort to evaluate each potential acquisition and determine if it will provide significant forest habitat protection and enhancement benefits. Plans and data sources include MN County Biological Survey information, Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan (2015-25), Minnesota's State Forest Action Plan, and various County and National Forest natural resource plans. To the greatest degree possible, preference will be given to private land inholdings/parcels that serve to expand forest corridors and complexes; reduced fragmentation, protect SGCN conservation focus areas and species hot spots, and align with plans and goals of the future public land agency which the private land inholding is acquired for.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation

Which two other plans are addressed in this proposal?

- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Forest Resource Council Landscape Plans

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

MNDNR's Conservation Agenda (2015-25) notes one of their primary challenges as "Changing land use and ownership patterns" with a strategy to address that being "Connect fragments of high-quality habitat. The intent of this proposal to acquire/protect strategic private land inholdings in public land forests will serve to address both this plan's challenge and suggested strategy. Also, Minnesota Forest Resource Council's most recent East Central Landscape Plan notes an objective to "Promote Spatial Connectivity" with a strategy to "Protect private land in know corridors with tax incentives, easements and/or public land acquisitions as tools to prevent further parcelization and eventual fragmentation". To some degree, this FRC East Central Landscape Plan comment is universal to all FRC landscape planning efforts.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Northern Forest

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

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

Proposal addresses a core need to increase forest and related habitat management efficiencies and effectiveness through targeted acquisition of strategic private land inholdings. All too often forest acquisitions have been large block additions to an existing forest land base, not a targeted assessment and related acquisition process to address strategic private forest land inholdings. Strategic acquisitions noted for this effort not only serve to protect the initial acres acquired, but can also leverage significant property boundary, management/user access, and habitat management benefits to Minnesota's forested conservation estate.

What other fund may contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

Does this proposal include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

As in-kind, RGS will provide ~\$10,000 in personnel salaries and \$1,061,391.5 as waived federal indirect for its portion of direct support services. Also, it is expected that an additional ~\$50,000 as in-kind (personnel salary, support) will be received from various public land administrators through their efforts in parcel acquisitions, related initial development and/or forest habitat enhancement needs and another \$25,000 as agency donated support to enhancement and restoration contracts.

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

This proposal supplements various State Forest, County Forest and National Forest acquisition efforts that have been achieved through previous LSOHC grants and other funding efforts by various public forest land administrator.

Non-OHF Appropriations

| Year | Source | Amount |
|------|--------|--------|
| - | - | - |

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

All parcels will have agreed to initial development and forest habitat enhancement needs addressed and completed as part of a final transfer to a public forest land administrator. Thereafter any and all needs to sustain and/or maintain an acquired parcel after that transfer will be the responsibility of the public forest land administrator and their related funding sources.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

| Year | Source of Funds | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 |
|---|----------------------------------|------------|-------------|----------------------|
| Post transfer to public forest land administrator | Public forest land administrator | Monitoring | Maintenance | Habitat Enhancements |

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

A wildlife indicator species is somewhat difficult to identify in this proposal stage due to the varying forest cover /habitat types that exist across the Northern Forest ecoregion and the related wildlife species that utilize them. Examples noted here are framed by 1) forest cover/habitat type, 2) stand age, 3) Northern Forest ecoregion location, and 4) related wildlife indicator species and estimated response.

***Cover type, age - Aspen, young; Location - north central Minnesota; Indicator species - golden-winged warbler, MN special concern species and a Partners in Flight focal species; Estimated response – acquisition and creation of young deciduous (aspen) forests is a critical habitat component for this species.

***Cover type, age - Oak, mature; Location – south central Minnesota; Indicator species – southern flying squirrel; Estimated response – acquisition and management of mature oak trees serves to provide critical cavity nesting/den sites as well as provide a significant food source (acorns).

***Cover type, age - Northern Hardwoods, multi-aged; Location - east central Minnesota; Indicator species – four-toed salamander, MN listed special concern species; Estimated response – acquisition of this forest cover type and forest management practices that identify and manage multi-aged forests around vernal/seasonal pools will greatly serve to maintain habitat for this species population.

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

Diverse stakeholder communities have been participants in the development of the action and management plans referenced in support of this strategic private forest land acquisition proposal. Additionally, tribal authorities in the forested region of Minnesota will be consulted and a part of all aspects of this effort, including the critical step of identifying and selecting private inholdings for acquisition.

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)?**

Yes

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) 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?

- State Forests
- Other : National Forest and/or county forest lands.

Land Use

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

No

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:

None

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

Yes

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

Unknown at time of proposal, will vary with each private parcel acquired. Detailed trail/road information and maps will be included in information provided to LSOHC with final authorization to acquire a parcel.

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Final road/trail type and level of use will be determined in coordination with recipient public land agency and their existing plans and regulations at the time of identification of a potential acquisition parcel.

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

Yes

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

Depends on desires of the final public land administrator. All efforts will be made to minimize/limit construction of new trails or roads and will be noted in the process to seek final LSOHC authorization for each private parcel at is vetted.

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Future road, trail needs are the responsibility of the public land administrator.

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? |
|-------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2021 | \$1,809,000 | \$139,000 | - | - | - | - | No |

Timeline

| Activity Name | Estimated Completion Date |
|--|---------------------------|
| Engage public forest land administrators, refine selection process | 1/1/23 |
| Identify priority acquisitions | 3/1/23 |
| Final LSOHC review, authorization of parcel(s) to acquire | 6/1/23 |
| Contract appraisals ordered | 7/1/23 |
| Purchase agreements | 1/1/24 |
| Close on parcel(s) | 7/1/24 |
| Initial development, forest habitat enhancements completed | 12/1/24 |
| * Repeat steps noted for all parcels as they are acquired | - |
| Proposal end date | 6/30/27 |

Budget**Totals**

| Item | Funding Request | Antic. Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Personnel | \$105,000 | \$10,000 | Ruffed Grouse Society | \$115,000 |
| Contracts | \$250,000 | \$25,000 | public forest land administrators | \$275,000 |
| Fee Acquisition w/ PILT | \$1,350,000 | \$25,000 | public forest land administrators | \$1,375,000 |
| Fee Acquisition w/o PILT | \$850,000 | \$25,000 | public forest land administrators | \$875,000 |
| Easement Acquisition | - | - | - | - |
| Easement Stewardship | - | - | - | - |
| Travel | \$25,000 | - | - | \$25,000 |
| Professional Services | - | - | - | - |
| Direct Support Services | \$20,000 | \$221,000 | Ruffed Grouse Society waived indirect | \$241,000 |
| DNR Land Acquisition Costs | \$50,000 | - | - | \$50,000 |
| Capital Equipment | - | - | - | - |
| Other Equipment/Tools | - | - | - | - |
| Supplies/Materials | - | - | - | - |
| DNR IDP | \$135,000 | - | - | \$135,000 |
| Grand Total | \$2,785,000 | \$306,000 | - | \$3,091,000 |

Personnel

| Position | Annual FTE | Years Working | Funding Request | Antic. Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|---------------------------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|----------|
| RGS - admin & office staff | 0.1 | 4.0 | \$25,000 | \$5,000 | Ruffed Grouse Society | \$30,000 |
| RGS - Forest Conservation Coordinator | 0.2 | 4.0 | \$80,000 | \$5,000 | Ruffed Grouse Society | \$85,000 |

Amount of Request: \$2,785,000**Amount of Leverage:** \$306,000**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 10.99%**DSS + Personnel:** \$125,000**As a % of the total request:** 4.49%**Easement Stewardship:** -**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** -**Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:**

As in-kind, RGS will provide ~\$10,000 in personnel salaries, \$1,061,391.5 as waived federal indirect for its portion of direct support services. Also, it is expected that an additional ~\$50,000 as in-kind (personnel salary, support), \$25,000 contracts will be received from various public land agencies.

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?
Forest habitat acres acquired/protected and related enhancements would be reduced by 30% to match final grant allotment.

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

Personnel and DSS expenses would also be reduced by 30%, but these expenses may not decrease proportionally to final grant allotment.

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Forest habitat acres acquired/protected would be reduced by 50% to match final grant allotment.

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

Personnel and DSS expenses possibly could be reduced 50%, but these grant admin and overhead expenses will not decrease proportionally to final grant allotment.

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?

RGS is a current sponsor of LSOHC's ML21 Moose Habitat Collaborative, Phase IV grant. In that grant RGS requested grant personnel funding for its Minnesota based Forest Conservation Coordinator (.5 annual FTE, 2.5 years, \$100,000) and RGS admin support (.25 annual FTE, 3.0 years, \$36,000).

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

The amount noted in the contract line is primarily for initial development needs that may be needed for parcels that end up being acquired for a county or National Forest. Initial development needs for a parcel that ends up in a State Forest is noted under the DNR IDP budget.

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

Estimate of 10-30.

Travel

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

No

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

None

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?

RGS/ AWS indirect rate is established at 39.11%. RGS/AWS has waived and offered to leverage as in-kind all indirect related to the acquisition portion of this grant proposal and waived 19.11% of proposed enhancement portion of this grant proposal for a total of about \$1,061,391.5 waived.

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?

If a federal/National Forest parcel meets proposal intent and is selected, amount of federal funds used as a match will be documented in a final parcel authorization request to LSOHC.

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 | 960 | 0 | 960 |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | 0 | 0 | 800 | 0 | 800 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance | 0 | 0 | 400 | 0 | 400 |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 2,160 | 0 | 2,160 |

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

| Type | Wetland | Prairie | Forest | Habitat | Total Funding |
|--|----------|----------|--------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Restore | - | - | - | - | - |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | - | - | \$1,410,000 | - | \$1,410,000 |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | - | - | \$1,175,000 | - | \$1,175,000 |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | - | - | \$200,000 | - | \$200,000 |
| Total | - | - | \$2,785,000 | - | \$2,785,000 |

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 | 960 | 960 |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 800 | 800 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 400 | 400 |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2,160 | 2,160 |

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 | - | - | - | - | \$1,410,000 | \$1,410,000 |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | - | - | - | - | \$1,175,000 | \$1,175,000 |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | - | - | - | - | \$200,000 | \$200,000 |
| Total | - | - | - | - | \$2,785,000 | \$2,785,000 |

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

| Type | Wetland | Prairie | Forest | Habitat |
|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Restore | - | - | - | - |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | - | - | \$1,468 | - |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | - | - | \$1,468 | - |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | - | - | \$500 | - |

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 | - | - | - | - | \$1,468 |

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---------|
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | - | - | - | - | \$1,468 |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | - | - | - | - | \$500 |

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *Strategic parcels that increase forest management efficiencies, recreational access and enhance forest habitat functionality will be acquired and restored so as to provide sustainable and resilient forest ecosystems for forest wildlife species. Parcels acquired will be transferred to appropriate public forest land administrator/agency, managed as part of their respective processes and plans. Proper ecological vetting of parcels acquired will ensure that intent and outcomes noted in this proposal are addressed with each parcel acquired.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

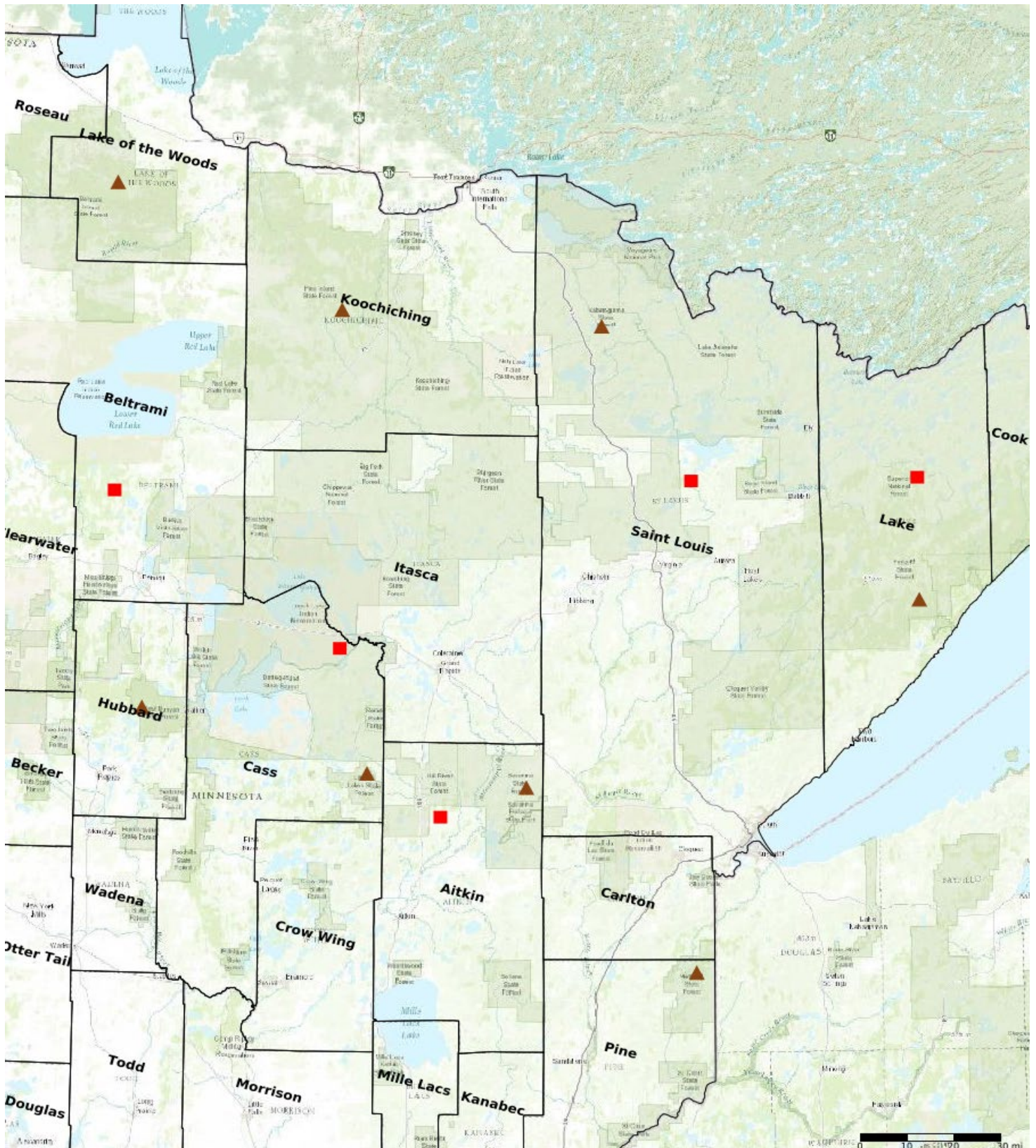
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Parcels will be identified, prioritized, and selected through a collaborative process with public forest land administrators that gathers their inputs and suggestions supported by an ecological vetting process to ensure that parcels chosen meet intent of this proposal and that of the Outdoor Heritage Fund. To demonstrate potential outcomes, Project Parcel list and related Parcel Map note eight of Minnesota's larger State Forests; Chippewa and Superior National Forests; as well as three county-based forest land areas within the Northern Forest Ecoregion where proposal effort may take place. All parcels selected for acquisition through the process noted will be brought to the LSOHC for final authorization to acquire before fee title acquisition efforts are initiated.

Protect Parcels

| Name | County | TRDS | Acres | Est Cost | Existing Protection |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|----------|-------|-----------|---------------------|
| Savana State Forests | Aitkin | 05122216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |
| Aitkin county forest lands | Aitkin | 05025216 | 160 | \$200,000 | No |
| Beltrami county forest lands | Beltrami | 14934216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |
| Land O'Lakes State Forest | Cass | 14025216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |
| Chippewa National Forest | Cass | 14426216 | 160 | \$200,000 | No |
| Paul Bunyan State Forest | Hubbard | 14233216 | 160 | \$200,000 | No |
| Pine Island State Forests | Koochiching | 15526216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |
| Finland State Forest | Lake | 05708216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |
| Superior National Forest | Lake | 06108216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |
| Beltrami Island State Forest | Lake of the Woods | 15934216 | 160 | \$200,000 | No |
| Nemadji Forest | Pine | 04516216 | 160 | \$200,000 | No |
| Kabetogama State Forest | St. Louis | 06619216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |
| St. Louis county forest lands | St. Louis | 06116216 | 120 | \$150,000 | No |

Parcel Map



***Protection/Enhancement of Public Land Forest Habitats Through
Strategic Acquisition of Private Land Inholdings***

Lessard/Sams Outdoor Heritage Council – FY24/ML 2023 grant proposal
Grant Sponsor – Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society

SUMMARY



*Southern Fly Squirrel – Mature Oak,
southcentral Northern Forest ecoregion*

While Minnesota is blessed to have a vast public forest land system within its various State Forest, National Forest and County Forest areas, efficient forest/timber management (i.e. roads, boundary issues), effective enhancement of forest habitats (i.e. composition, patch size, age distribution) and recreational user access is at times complicated and/or hindered by private land inholdings. These issues are noted in MNDNR's Conservation Agenda as *Changing land use and ownership patterns* with a strategy to address that being *Connect fragments of high-quality habitat*. Also, Minnesota Forest Resource Council's most recent East Central Regional Landscape Plan and other similar plans note an objective to

Promote Spatial Connectivity with a strategy to *Protect private land in know corridors with tax incentives, easements and/or public land acquisitions as tools to prevent further parcelization and eventual fragmentation*. Images on the back of this Summary sheet note a private 80 acre inholding example where forest/timber management, forest habitat dynamics and recreational user access has been impacted by this type of concern.

To address these overall forest management and related habitat impediments, **this proposal would protect and enhance 2,260 acres of strategic forest habitats through the acquisition of private forest land inholdings. Successful efforts will 1) increase management efficiencies and effectiveness of surrounding public forest lands, 2) address primary forest habitat management concerns of forest habitat loss, degradation, fragmentation, and 3) serve to address critical forest and recreational user access needs.**

Acquisition process would involve input from public forest land agencies as to priority locations, parcels for protection along with a process to vet a potential acquisition as to intent of the proposal and funding source (i.e. Outdoor Heritage Fund). While the primary intent of this project is to protect forest habitats through fee title acquisition, a portion of this proposal's budget is also noted for initial development and forest habitat enhancement needs of the parcels acquired. Initial development may include such needs as a property boundary survey, access development or repair. Forest habitat enhancement efforts, coordinated with public land managing agency, may include a forest cover type inventory, tree planting, invasive species control, etc. to prepare for and complement existing sustainable forest management plans.

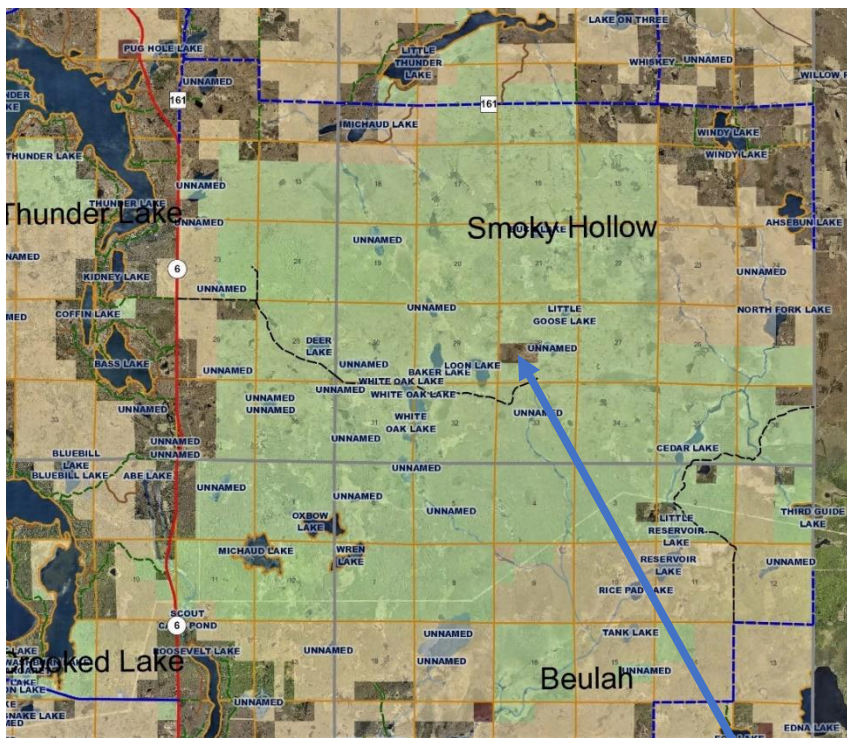


*Golden-winged Warbler – Young Aspen,
northcentral Northern Forest ecoregion*

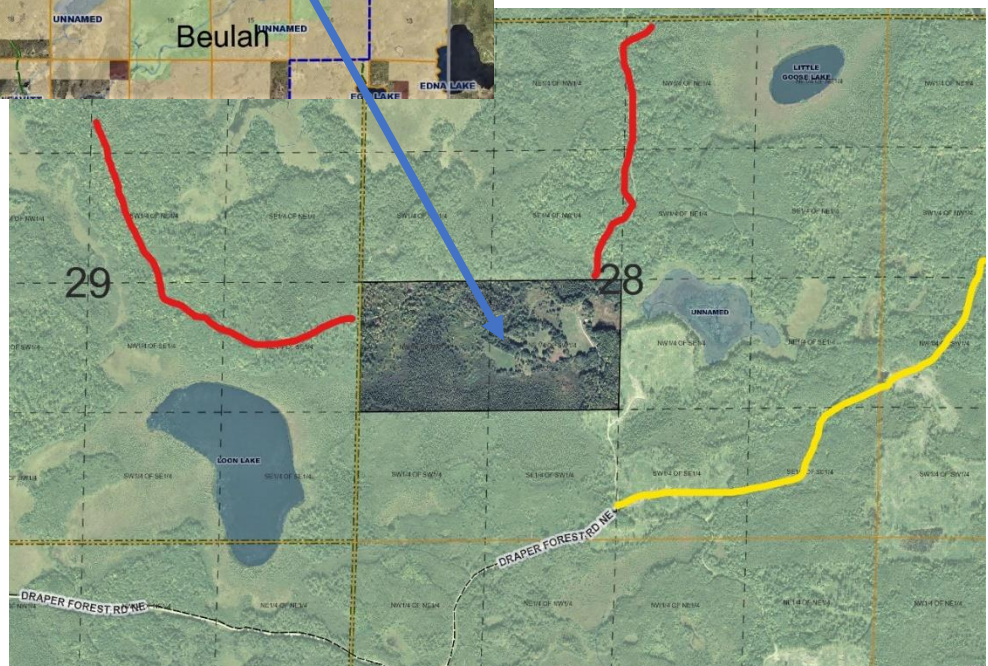
Process of notifying affected county boards as to tax revenue concerns due to acquisition of private lands inholdings will depend on the notification requirements of the public land administrator a parcel is being acquiring for (i.e. State, Federal or County).

(over)

For parcels acquired within a State Forest, this proposal intends to further explore a process to leverage additional benefits to forest management efficiencies and habitat effectiveness through a state land asset management/land exchange process. This concept is to exchange parcels acquired by this process/grant within a State Forest for state School Trust Fund parcel(s) located within a State Wildlife Management Area. This subsequent land asset/exchange process would allow for improved forest resource management and compatibility with primary economic objectives of the State School Trust Fund and wildlife production objectives of a Wildlife Management Area. RGS & AWS is not indicating that timber production and wildlife habitat are not compatible, rather that balancing their integration at landscape scales may be most efficient with this ownership consolidation to improve wildlife habitat and forest health on these acquired parcels.



Four-toed Salamander – Mature Northern Hardwoods w/vernal pools, east central Northern Forest ecoregion



*State Forest land (light green), County land (light tan), Private land inholding (clear)
Red notes forest access trails not accessible to the public, Yellow notes forest access trail built to get around private inholding.*



MINNESOTA FOREST INDUSTRIES

903 Medical Arts Building • 324 West Superior Street • Duluth, MN 55802 • 218-722-5013 • Fax 218-722-2065 • www.minnesotaforests.com

June 2, 2022

Scott Johnson
Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society
100 High Tower Boulevard
Pittsburgh, PA 15205

Scott,

Minnesota Forest Industries is a trade organization representing the primary wood-consuming mills in Minnesota. MFI's member companies, combined with loggers, truckers and secondary wood consuming mills are the fifth largest industry in the state. We provide nearly 68,000 direct, indirect and induced jobs, largely in rural Minnesota, with \$16.8 billion dollars in gross sales and \$7.3 billion dollars in economic benefit within the state of Minnesota.

MFI and its member companies are committed to forest conservation, sustainable forest management, and industry development that fosters sound environmental stewardship. Our forest products economy relies upon a continuous and year-round supply of timber harvested from the forests of the state.

Loggers and forest managers in Minnesota have encountered many instances where private land inholdings within a matrix of publicly held forestland has created problems for forest management activities. Examples range from difficulty securing permission to cross private land to access public timber sales, to difficulties accomplishing landscape-scale objectives, to complaints/opposition to timber sales because the landowner does not want to see change near their land. Certainly, there are landowners who recognize the value of active forest management for wildlife, forest health, forest diversity and wildfire prevention. But others create management issues and inefficiencies best addressed by acquiring the land from willing sellers and adding it to the public land base.

Given that, MFI offers its support for the RGS/AWS Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council project application entitled, "Protection/Enhancement of Public Land Forest Habitats Through Strategic Acquisition of Private Land Inholdings". Working in close concert with the public agencies involved, this project can address the above-referenced issues with inholdings.

Good luck with your application.

Rick Horton
Executive Vice President
Minnesota Forest Industries
218-244-5207
rhorton@minnesotaforests.com

May 16, 2022

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
State Office Building, Room 55
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council,

I am writing to relay my support and enthusiasm for our Ruffed Grouse Society & American Woodcock Society (RGS & AWS) Request for Funding through our "Protection and Enhancement of Public Land Forest Habitat Through Strategic Acquisition of Private Land Inholdings" application.

Established in 1961, RGS is North America's foremost conservation organization dedicated to creating healthy forests, abundant wildlife and promoting a conservation ethic. Together with the AWS (established in 2014), RGS & AWS work with private landowners, forest products industrial partners, and government agencies to develop critical wildlife habitat utilizing scientific management principles. Efficient and impactful implementation of these conservation activities through landscape scale efforts is a primary strategy of RGS & AWS's current forest conservation program. Facilitating improved forest stewardship efficiencies and effectiveness in partnership with Minnesota's public land managing agencies is the primary goal of this grant application's proposed acquisition of strategic forest land inholdings.

With our record of support for forest wildlife habitat, forest health, forest products and forest recreation in Minnesota, the RGS & AWS understand the critical dependence these resources have on efficient, effective forest land management. Minnesota's public forest lands hold particular opportunity and importance in both sustaining and making these resources accessible to the public. However, with ever-increasing complications to their management, along with variable land ownership patterns - promoting unified goals, objectives and planning across larger landscape areas has become increasingly complex and yet critically important in achieving forest stewardship. Acquisition of strategic private land in-holdings (where differing planning authorities, methods and primary management goals and objectives, as well as actual accessibility hinder public land management at efficient and effective scale) is the tactic we are proposing to reduce this forest stewardship obstacle in select public forest land locations.

With our forest conservation history in Minnesota and our mission "To promote forest stewardship for our forests, wildlife, and our future and unite conservationists to improve wildlife habitat and forest health", RGS & AWS feels that it is vitally important to support efficient and effective forest stewardship through landscape scale management- even in these complicated ownership patterns. RGS & AWS is ready to employ creative approaches to improve stewardship success through this strategic land acquisition proposal.

Kindest Regards,



Benjamin C. Jones
President & CEO