



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program - Phase 3 ML 2023 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/16/2022

Proposal Title: Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program - Phase 3

Funds Requested: \$12,276,600

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s):

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Metro / Urban

Activity types:

- Enhance
- Restore
- Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

Hennepin County, in partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust, is seeking \$12.3 million to permanently protect and connect, through conservation easement, 740 acres of the most important remaining natural areas in the county. We will also initiate habitat improvement activities on 1,342 acres of protected habitat.

Intense development pressure is a persistent threat to remaining habitat and undeveloped land in Hennepin County. This grant will allow this partnership to continue implementation of the conservation actions taken through Outdoor Heritage Fund grants awarded in 2018 and 2021 and keep up with high landowner interest.

Design and Scope of Work

The Twin Cities metro area is rapidly losing ecologically significant and floristically diverse habitat as land development pressure increases. Met Council estimates open space in Hennepin County will decline by 14,000 acres by 2040, resulting in immediate consequences for Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) which rely on critical habitats in Hennepin County.

Since 2018, Hennepin County and MLT have been awarded \$4.6 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund to support the goals of the Habitat Conservation Program (HCP). Across both phases, the partners have completed acquisition of 186 acres of easement, have an additional 364 acres poised for completion, and habitat improvement activities have been initiated on 76 acres of protected land. Phase 1 grant funds have been fully encumbered and will be spent by June 30, 2023.

HCP promotion, outreach, and proposal solicitation efforts have resulted in consistent landowner inquiries and high-quality easement opportunities. Easement projects in development will soon exhaust Phase 2 protection funding. Phase 3 funding is necessary to continue accepting and developing new projects and maintain program momentum.

The sophistication of our tools and our approach has grown with our experience doing this work including:

- In-depth modeling of the entire county to identify priority focus areas.
- A growing focus on easement acquisitions with a restoration focus. Our interest in protecting the best remaining habitat remains, and we will continue to pursue those opportunities. We also know that buffering and connecting those areas and capitalizing on opportunities to create new habitat, is necessary and strategic to creating contiguous core habitat and corridors.
- New engagement and communication strategies devoted to connecting meaningfully with easement landowners and the public with the goal of instilling an understanding of each individual's unique role in lifelong stewardship of natural resources.
- A biological monitoring effort (piloting in 2022) to inventory wildlife and plant communities, measure and evaluate habitat improvement actions, inform adaptive management priorities, and report back meaningfully on the impact of our work on the species that use the protected and improved habitat.

During the period of 2020-2040, Hennepin County plans to add 6,000 acres of permanently protected habitat; resulting in permanent protection of 41 percent (or 24,600 acres) of the best remaining natural areas and the restorable corridors. Combined with our anticipated Phase 1 & 2 outputs, we will be 21% of the way to that goal with this proposal.

The county will continue to work with MLT, watershed organizations, cities, park districts, MN DNR, NPS, and

USFWS to identify easement opportunities and build connections. MLT will bring the experience of its land protection and legal team to negotiate the purchase of conservation easements. An RFP approach will identify high value protection opportunities and encourage a competitive marketplace for scarce monetary resources. All opportunities for easement acquisition will be scored based on six categories: spatial context, size, habitat quality and diversity, water resources, wildlife and plant conservation, and risk of conversion. Management factors, partner involvement, and professional judgement will also be considered.

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?

Hennepin County is located in the Big Woods Subsection of Minnesota and is home to remnants of deciduous forests, oak savannas, prairies, rivers, streams, lakes, and was historically dotted by abundant wetlands of many types; more than 50 percent of which have been lost. The great diversity of habitat types and the resulting fish, game, and wildlife species found in Hennepin County presents unique and unparalleled opportunities for protection, restoration, and enhancement. Some of the county's remaining natural resources include remnant maple-basswood forest, oak woodlands, floodplain forest, oak savannas, bluff prairie, rich and poor peatlands like fens and tamarack bogs, and shallow lakes, all of which are critically essential habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Hennepin County is home to over 350 species of migratory and breeding birds like trumpeter swans and common loons and multiple occurrences of rare animal assemblages like rookeries. Many Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) would be impacted by this proposal including dozens of rare invertebrates like the regal fritillary butterfly and monarchs and a variety of rare vertebrate species like Blanding's turtles, cerulean warblers, mudpuppies, least darters, and several species of rare and declining bats. Additionally, many rare and sensitive plant community types occur in Hennepin County which support rare plants and fungi including kitten-tails and several rare orchids. Wildlife on the federal list of endangered and threatened species that can be found in Hennepin County and that would be impacted by this proposal include the northern long-eared bat, Higgin's eye pearly mussel, and the rusty-patched bumble bee.

Our rigorous selection criteria and scoring methodology considers a variety of datasets, metrics, and professional and partner knowledge, of rare and SGCN species. Furthermore, by focusing on priority areas and emphasizing the expansion of existing natural areas and creating habitat connections, this program is especially well-designed to promote habitat protection that will benefit such species. Restoration project selection and actions of the HCP also focus on increasing and enhancing diversity of sensitive, rare, and important habitat.

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 rapid loss and degradation of ecologically significant and diverse habitat in the county poses immediate consequences for SGCN and other rare species and features. According to Metropolitan Council projections, open space in Hennepin County is expected to decline by 14,000 acres by 2040. If critical corridors and natural areas are not protected, they will continue to be fragmented and eliminated through development, having disastrous consequences for the fish, game, and wildlife species dependent upon them.

HCP promotion, and targeted outreach efforts have resulted in high-quality easement opportunities that will soon exceed our current easement acquisition funding. As a result of our strategic solicitation, we are often receiving program applications from clusters of like-minded neighbors all at once, requiring greater need for accessible funding.

This award will allow this partnership to sustain current momentum by continuing to identify the best, most cost-effective opportunities to protect, restore, and enhance.

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:

Hennepin County's ecologically significant areas and natural resource corridors were established as part of the DNR's Minnesota Land Cover Classification System comprehensive land cover inventory completed in 2008. Natural vegetative communities evaluated as High, Good, or Moderate quality were identified as ecologically significant areas. They contain habitats comprised primarily of native vegetation that have not been significantly altered. These are the best remaining and ecologically intact areas in the county and some of the finest habitat of their kind anywhere in the state. Natural resource corridors were identified by spatial analysis, focused on areas with high concentrations of ecologically significant areas which created connections between ecologically significant areas, and expanded large complexes of high-quality habitat. Additionally, the county has employed zonation modeling to further specify targeted conservation areas.

About 15 percent of the land area in the county - 60,000 acres - are ecologically significant areas and natural resource corridors. Of these, about 41,400 acres are private property that are partially or entirely unprotected. Priority areas for program outreach have been developed using available data related to spatial context, size, habitat quality and diversity, water resources, wildlife and plant conservation, and risk of conversion in addition to local knowledge. The highest priority areas are generally areas adjacent to large core areas of already protected habitat.

All easement opportunities (identified through targeted outreach to landowners and via an RFP process) will be quantifiably evaluated using ecological factors including but not limited to proximity to protected natural areas (e.g., USFW, NPS, and DNR lands, conservation easements, parks and preserves), habitat diversity and quality (e.g., MLCCS ranking, MND Sites of Biodiversity significance), size, proximity to important wildlife areas and rare species occurrences (e.g., MN DNR rare feature inventory, endangered species habitat areas, bird habitat, pollinator habitat, lakes of biological significance, Wildlife Action Network), threats of development (e.g., zoning and potential development), and proximity to important surface and groundwater areas (e.g., shoreland, wetland, floodplain, sensitive groundwater). In addition, donation values, nearness to partner planning areas, community interest, and restoration and management requirements will be considered.

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'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:

HCP priority areas incorporate biologically diverse and remnant habitats critical for the interconnection and buffering of already protected core habitats. Priority areas significantly overlap the State's Wildlife Action Network (Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025) and have strong association to known DNR Native Plant Communities, Sites of Biological Significance, and rare feature occurrences identified in the DNR Natural Heritage

Information System Database.

By targeting protection, restoration, and enhancement activities in priority areas, we will ensure the long-term health and viability of Minnesota's game and non-game wildlife and increase the ecological integrity of important habitats by forming habitat corridors and improving the quality of existing habitat.

By virtue of proximity to population centers, HCP efforts will also increase opportunities to enjoy SGCN and other wildlife. Consequently, our program also addresses all of the OHF Funding Framework's priority actions for the metropolitan and urbanizing areas.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Metro / Urban

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity

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:

Hennepin County is located in the Big Woods Subsection and supports remnant maple-basswood forest, oak woodlands, floodplain forest, oak savannas, bluff prairie, rich and poor peatlands like fens and tamarack bogs, and shallow lakes, all of which are critically essential habitat for a variety of rare and sensitive wildlife and plants.

Hennepin County is home to hundreds of species of migratory and breeding birds and multiple occurrences of rare animal assemblages like rookeries. Many SGCN would be impacted by this proposal including dozens of rare invertebrates like monarchs and a variety of rare vertebrate species like Blanding's turtles and several species of bats. Wildlife on the federal list of endangered and threatened species that can be found in Hennepin County and that would be impacted by this proposal include the northern long-eared bat, Higgin's eye pearly mussel, and the rusty-patched bumble bee.

The great diversity of habitat types and the resulting fish, game, and wildlife species found in Hennepin County presents unique and unparalleled opportunities for protection, restoration, and enhancement. Phase 3 of the HCP will continue the work of placing permanent conservation easements on some of the State's most threatened habitat, ensuring that Minnesota's most populous county retains a critical connection to our state's iconic flora and fauna. By the end of Phase 3, an additional 740 acres of the county's best remaining habitat will be permanently protected, and 1,342 more will be significantly improved through restoration or enhancement.

What other fund may contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

Does this proposal include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

Hennepin County will provide a portion of the staff time required in order to complete grant deliverables, 2.55 FTE over the course of the grant with an estimated value of \$1,177,000. Hennepin County will also provide an

estimated \$504,000 cash toward costs associated with easement acquisition.

The Minnesota Land Trust will encourage private landowners to fully or partially donate the value of their conservation easements, thereby receiving less than the appraised value might otherwise allow. This donated value is shown as leveraged funds in the proposal. The Land Trust has a strong track record of incentivizing landowner to participate in this fashion.

Finally, although it is not quantified in this proposal, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Three Rivers Park District, Watershed Districts, Cities, and the Minnesota Waterfowl Association will be engaged as a restoration partners in this program. All have committed to providing leveraged funds through their services, the amount of which will depend on the specific restoration and protection projects.

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 does not supplant or substitute for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund used for the same purpose.

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
2006	LCCMR (for Natural Resources Inventory)	\$80,000
NA	City of Bloomington, City of Plymouth, Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (for Natural Resources Inventory)	\$160,000
NA	Hennepin County (1 FTE Natural Resource Specialist, 2003-2021)	\$1,995,000
NA	Hennepin County (Stewardship funds for easements co-held with MLT)	\$54,000
NA	Hennepin County (operating budget for natural resources program 2003-2016)	\$180,000
NA	Hennepin County, MPCA, MDH, landowner (special project to restore and conservation easement)	\$180,000

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

Both partners are experienced land and easement managers; co-holding easements provides another level of assurance that the habitat protected and restored will be sustained using the best standards and practices of conservation easement stewardship.

The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited and insured land trust with a successful stewardship program that includes property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation. Hennepin County successfully co-holds 10 conservation easements with the Land Trust, holds or co-holds 11 other perpetual easements, and manages 21 perpetual RIM and flowage easements and 17 perpetual PWP easements.

To ensure that the protected resources will be managed to support biological integrity, Habitat Management Plans and Action Plans are developed for each conservation easement and habitat improvement project.

Hennepin County and the Land Trust are committed to maintaining relationships with project landowners and

securing the technical and financial resources to undertake prescribed activities. The County will also continue to work with MLT, its 11 watershed organizations, 45 cities, two park districts, the MN DNR, NPS, and USFWS to maintain and build landowner connections.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2024 (and in perpetuity)	MLT Stewardship & Enforcement Fun; Hennepin County Enterprise Fund	Annual Monitoring of property in perpetuity	Enforcement as needed	-
2021-2029	Hennepin County Solid Waste Enterprise Fund	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Establishment of project specific habitat improvement standards •Biomonitoring pre and post habitat improvement project actions 	Make adaptive management changes as needed to meet habitat improvement performance standards	Ongoing biomonitoring of easements and habitat improvement projects to assess wildlife and plant communities and ensure objectives are sustained

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

DNR staff, have compiled a select group of indicator species and associated quantities. The metrics are derived from existing data sources and/or scientific literature but are necessarily gross averages. It is important to emphasize the estimates provided are not accurate at a site-specific scale.

Prairie Indicator:

- Bobolink - The breeding territory size of bobolinks is 1.7 acres in high quality habitat in Wisconsin. If all of the habitat was occupied, 100 acres of habitat could potentially hold approximately 60 pairs of bobolinks.

Wetland Indicator:

- Trumpeter swans are strictly territorial on their breeding areas with shoreline complexity and food availability being factors in defining the area being defended. Though reported territories can range in size from 1.5 - >100 hectares, a reasonable expectation is that 1 trumpeter swan pair would be supported by each 150 acres of wetlands protected, restored, or enhanced.

Forest Indicator:

- White-tailed deer use a wide variety of forested habitats, are found throughout Minnesota, and are an important game species in the state. In the 33 forested deer permit areas for which deer densities are estimated, covering most of the LSOHC Northern Forest section, the sixty-year average (2010-2015) for pre-fawn deer densities across all deer permit areas is 13 deer per land habitat, or roughly 1 deer (pre-fawning) for every 50 acres of land. On average, densities within the Metropolitan Area are higher than those in the Northern Forest.

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

Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust share commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as a core value. One relevant Hennepin County example of this is the Tree Trek Nature Trail. This experiential learning project was developed by county staff in partnership with the Voyageur Environmental Center, a property owned and operated by the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Twin Cities, and adjacent to a complex of land protected under conservation easement using Phase 1 & 2 HCP funding. This is an in-person and online (developed during the COVID-19 pandemic) opportunity for Boys and Girls Club participants and the community to learn about the trees,

ecology, and natural history of the Big Woods. It has become a favorite experience of campers and tool for Voyageur staff. Another example is a HCP Phase 1 prairie restoration effort along the Mississippi River at River Park in the City of Brooklyn Park. Objectives of this project are to create a diverse native prairie example in an underserved urban community, and to improve pollinator and wildlife habitat. We hope to work with the city and project partner USFWS to increase educational opportunities and signage in the future. Land Trust examples include projects to protect the camps and nature centers serving diverse Minnesota youth and a partnership with the Fond du Lac Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa on wild rice restoration. Going forward, the partners intend to use diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens in project and contractor selection.

The Land Trust is exploring an "Ambassador Lands Program" which would connect willing conservation landowners to diverse community groups that need access for programming like youth mentor hunts, cultural or ceremonial use, and more. This would add to the variety of universal public benefits of conserved lands.

The biological monitoring program being piloted in 2022 is also an important element to engage the public more broadly in HCP work. In particular, we intend to collect engaging images and video of the critters using protected habitat to help promote greater awareness of the incredible biodiversity that exists in Hennepin County.

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

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?

- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- County/Municipal
- Other : Fee-title or easement area associated with Watersheds (e.g., WD and WMO) and Park Districts

Land Use

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

No

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

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

Yes

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

Conservation easements established on private lands often have driveways, field roads and trails located on them. These established trails and roads will be permitted in the terms of the conservation easement and can be maintained for personal use, provided that they do not interfere with the conservation value of the property. Creation of new roads or 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 will be identified in the project baseline reports and will be monitored annually as part of the Land Trust's stewardship and enforcement protocols. Maintenance of permitted roads/trails 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?
2021	\$3,155,000	\$282,369	\$633,200	\$35,088	383	15	No
2018	\$1,514,000	\$1,352,413	\$488,400	\$518,043	232	258	No

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Acquire conservation easements: 1) identify landowners; 2) negotiate, draft, and complete easements; 3) dedicate fund for stewardship	June 2027
Restoration & enhancement of existing permanently protected areas: 1) select projects; 2) draft restoration plan and performance standards and pre-activity monitoring, 3) perform habitat improvement activities; 4) post activity monitoring; 5) adaptive management and additional restoration activities as needed to meet performance standards	June 2027
Restoration & enhancement of new conservation easements: 1) select projects; 2) draft restoration plan and performance standards and pre-activity monitoring, 3) perform habitat improvement activities; 4) post activity monitoring; 5) adaptive management and additional restoration activities as needed to meet performance standards	June 2027

Budget**Grand Totals Across All Partnerships**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$1,010,000	\$1,177,000	-, Hennepin County	\$2,187,000
Contracts	\$3,679,600	-	-	\$3,679,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$6,400,000	\$1,504,000	Landowner donation, Landowners, Hennepin County	\$7,904,000
Easement Stewardship	\$504,000	-	-	\$504,000
Travel	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Professional Services	\$399,000	-	-	\$399,000
Direct Support Services	\$207,000	-	-	\$207,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	\$60,000	-	-	\$60,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$12,276,600	\$2,681,000	-	\$14,957,600

Partner: MN Land Trust

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$320,000	-	-	\$320,000
Contracts	\$138,000	-	-	\$138,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$6,400,000	\$1,000,000	Landowner donation	\$7,400,000
Easement Stewardship	\$504,000	-	-	\$504,000
Travel	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Professional Services	\$399,000	-	-	\$399,000
Direct Support Services	\$87,000	-	-	\$87,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$7,865,000	\$1,000,000	-	\$8,865,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.8	4.0	\$320,000	-	-	\$320,000

Partner: Hennepin County**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$690,000	\$1,177,000	Hennepin County	\$1,867,000
Contracts	\$3,541,600	-	-	\$3,541,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	\$504,000	Landowners, Hennepin County	\$504,000
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$120,000	-	-	\$120,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$60,000	-	-	\$60,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$4,411,600	\$1,681,000	-	\$6,092,600

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.05	4.0	-	\$27,000	Hennepin County	\$27,000
R/E Project Staff	2.5	4.0	\$460,000	\$690,000	Hennepin County	\$1,150,000
Protection Project Staff	1.5	4.0	\$230,000	\$460,000	Hennepin County	\$690,000

Amount of Request: \$12,276,600**Amount of Leverage:** \$2,681,000**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 21.84%**DSS + Personnel:** \$1,217,000**As a % of the total request:** 9.91%**Easement Stewardship:** \$504,000**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 7.88%**Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:**

Hennepin County Environment and Energy Department operations are funded by the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund (money received from the sale of energy and recovered materials) as allowed by Minnesota Statute. The Land Trust encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements.

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?

In general, we would expect that acres and number of projects would be reduced a bit more than proportionately, as necessary to accommodate fixed administrative, outreach/marketing and other costs (see below).

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

Most personnel and DSS costs are directly project related, however, administrative and outreach/marketing costs are somewhat fixed. There is an economy of scale to doing more projects per appropriation. Personnel and DSS expenses would be reduced a bit less than proportionately, about 20-25%.

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

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

In general, we would expect that acres and number of projects would be reduced a bit more than proportionately, as necessary to accommodate fixed administrative, outreach/marketing and other costs (see below).

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

Most personnel and DSS costs are directly project related, however, administrative and outreach/marketing costs are somewhat fixed. There is an economy of scale to doing more projects per appropriation. Personnel and DSS expenses would be reduced a bit less than proportionately, about 40-45%.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

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

FTEs listed in the proposal are an estimate of the personnel time required to 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. Similarly, although Hennepin has not previously requested funding for positions in the past, Hennepin also uses a timesheet-based approach with codes tied directly to grant activities and deliverables, and has been tracking staffing-related leverage contributions using this system for past appropriations.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

Hennepin County will manage \$3,541,600 worth of restoration and enhancement activities under contracts with restoration partners. Another \$138,000 will be managed by the Land Trust for various needs related to easement development like Habitat Management Plans.

Easement Stewardship

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

The program budget is built around the closing of 21 conservation easements. The average cost per easement to fund the Minnesota Land Trust's perpetual monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$24,000. This figure is derived from MLT's detailed stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is consistent with Land Trust Accreditation standards. MLT shares periodic updates to this cost analysis with LSOHC staff.

Travel

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

Yes

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

From time to time, Land Trust staff may rent vehicles for grant-related purposes.

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 will apply this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services. Hennepin County is currently in the process of getting a DNR-approved DSS rate. For the purposes of this request, we estimated a DSS rate of about 17% based on rates calculated by the county's Office of Budget and Finance. If this proposal is recommended for funding we will adjust this rate in the Accomplishment Plan.

Other Equipment/Tools

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

Field safety gear, GPS units, etc.

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	510	510
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	0	740	740
Enhance	0	0	0	830	830
Total	0	0	0	2,080	2,080

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,956,600	\$1,956,600
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$7,865,000	\$7,865,000
Enhance	-	-	-	\$2,455,000	\$2,455,000
Total	-	-	-	\$12,276,600	\$12,276,600

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	510	0	0	0	0	510
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	740	0	0	0	0	740
Enhance	830	0	0	0	0	830
Total	2,080	0	0	0	0	2,080

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	\$1,956,600	-	-	-	-	\$1,956,600
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	\$7,865,000	-	-	-	-	\$7,865,000
Enhance	\$2,455,000	-	-	-	-	\$2,455,000
Total	\$12,276,600	-	-	-	-	\$12,276,600

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$3,836
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$10,628
Enhance	-	-	-	\$2,957

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	\$3,836	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	\$10,628	-	-	-	-
Enhance	\$2,957	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *With this request, 740 acres of the county's best remaining habitat will be permanently protected, buffered, and connected, and 1,342 more acres will be significantly improved through restoration or enhancement. To measure program impacts and inform adaptive management, Hennepin County staff initiated a biological monitoring program in 2022. Biomonitoring efforts include relevé plots and transect surveys for birds and plants as well as wildlife surveys for pollinators, aquatic invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. By 2027, 5 years of data from this effort will be available to begin evaluating the efficacy of HCP work.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes](#)

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

Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program – Phase 3

An opportunity to permanently protect and connect critical habitat threatened by development

Hennepin County, in partnership with the Minnesota Land Trust, is seeking \$12.3 million to permanently protect and connect through conservation easements 740 acres of the most unique and important natural areas remaining in the county, and restore and enhance 1,342 acres of protected habitat.

This grant will enable the county to continue implementation of the conservation easement and habitat improvement actions supported by two previous grant phases in 2018 and 2021. This program will permanently protect a diversity of habitats, including deciduous forest, oak savanna, native prairie, wetlands, shallow lakes, shoreline, bluffs, and riparian areas.

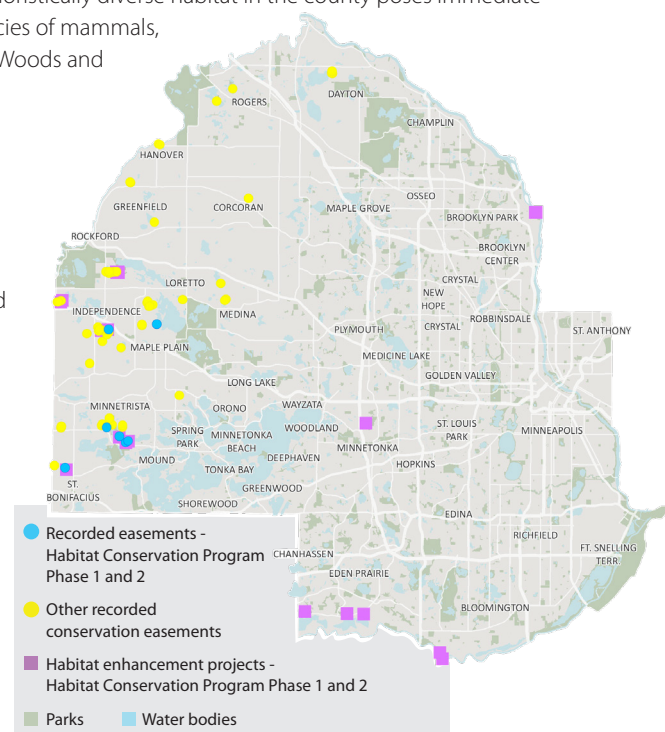
Time is running out to protect these natural areas

The remaining natural areas in Hennepin County are facing increasing threats as land development pressure intensifies, making it imperative to protect these areas now. The rapid loss and degradation of ecologically significant and floristically diverse habitat in the county poses immediate consequences for Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including more than 120 species of mammals, birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates that rely on critical habitats in the Big Woods and Anoka Sand Plain ecological subsections.

Hennepin County is eager to continue land protection, restoration and enhancement initiatives

Since 2018, Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust have been awarded \$4.6 million from the Outdoor Heritage Fund to support the goals and efforts of the county's Habitat Conservation Program. So far, the partners have permanently protected 186 acres across seven easements, and an additional 11 projects totaling 364 acres are progressing toward completion. These projects have fully encumbered all available protection funds from the Phase 1 and Phase 2 grants. We have already exceeded our Phase 1 protection and R/E goals by 13% and 7% respectively.

Program promotion, outreach, and RFP efforts have resulted in consistent landowner inquiries and high-quality easement opportunities that will soon exceed currently available easement acquisition funding. Hennepin County and Minnesota Land Trust are eager to continue this momentum and will use awarded funds to identify the best, most cost-effective opportunities to protect, connect, restore, and enhance remaining natural areas in Hennepin County.



Conservation easements are a critical tool for protecting habitat

Several state plans identify conservation easements as a critical tool for supporting fish, game and wildlife populations. Additionally, landowners have expressed interest in alternatives to development for their land. Continued funding to support the popular Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program will ensure that residents of Minnesota's most populous county maintain strong connections to the habitats, species, and outdoor experiences that make up Minnesota's natural heritage.

Project partners

- **Hennepin County** is responsible for the delivery of conservation programs and services as the Soil and Water Conservation District for the county. The county will manage this program, work to build interest among landowners, and manage habitat restoration and enhancement projects.
- **Minnesota Land Trust** is a nationally accredited land trust that monitors, manages and enforces more than 650 conservation easements throughout the state. Minnesota Land Trust will be responsible for negotiating the purchase of conservation easements and ongoing monitoring and enforcement.

Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust have a strong history of successful partnership and will collaborate closely on this project. The partners will work together to conduct communications and outreach, orchestrate a competitive, market-based RFP process to identify potential easement projects, review and rank applications, procure and co-hold easements, and implement restoration projects.

Alignment with the Outdoor Heritage Fund priorities

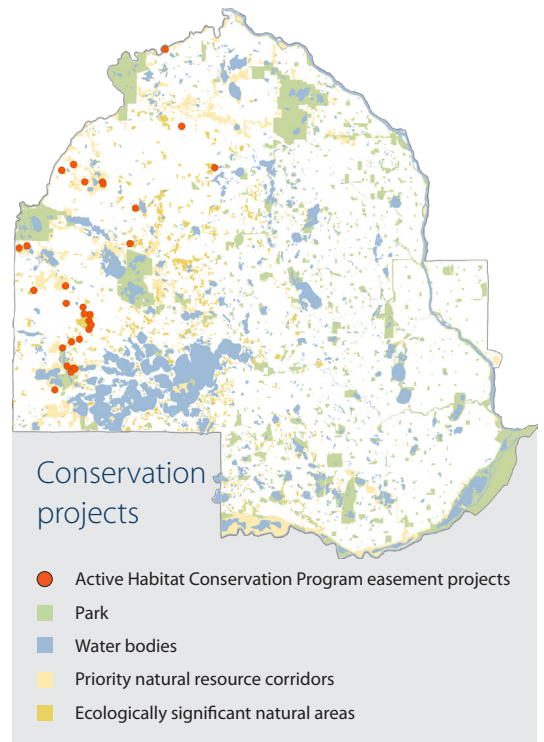
The project aligns well with the following priorities of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council for the Metropolitan Urbanizing Section:

- Ensure long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife by permanently protecting habitats.
- Protect a network of biologically diverse upland and wetland habitat in the county by buffering and increasing connectivity between already protected core habitats, including areas important for the ecological integrity of major rivers and lakes.
- Increase opportunities for recreation and observation of a variety of wildlife species, including numerous Species of Greatest Conservation Need.
- Improve the quality of existing habitat through restoration and enhancement with particular attention to invasive species management and mitigation.

A \$12.3 million investment through the Outdoor Heritage fund will leverage:

- More than \$1.8 million in cash and staff time from Hennepin County for outreach, easement project development, R/E planning, implementation, and monitoring, and long-term stewardship of easements.
- Landowner donation of conservation easement value, which will be encouraged through the application process.
- Restoration assistance from the Three Rivers Park District, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, watershed districts, cities, and nonprofit partners.

For more information, contact Karen Galles at Karen.Galles@hennepin.us or Kristine Maurer at Kristine.Maurer@hennepin.us



A prescribed burn on a newly established Hennepin County and Minnesota Land Trust conservation easement



A great grey owl perched near Crow-Hassan Park Reserve



Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program

[Conservation easement selection criteria summary](#)

The Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program (HCP) is a partnership between Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust that protects the best remaining wildlife habitat within the county's ecologically significant areas and natural resource corridors. This program works with willing landowners to secure conservation easements that protect the county's forests, wetlands, grasslands, and riparian and shoreland areas and the wildlife that rely on these habitats. The program also enhances existing habitat and restores degraded habitat. Easements completed through this program will be co-held by Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust.

Through an open Request for Proposal (RFP) process, landowners submit a simple project application. This application collects basic location information of the proposed project, and asks about the landowner's willingness to donate some or all of the conservation easement value. Program promotion and targeted outreach activities have resulted in a concentration of project applications from our highest priority areas, but any landowner may apply. Project applications trigger initial site visits and landowner conversations, followed by project scoring.

Each proposed project and scores are presented to and discussed with the HCP's Technical Advisory Committee. The entirety of this process guides the partners in deciding to proceed with a proposed parcel, to decline to proceed, or to consider a proposed parcel again at a later time.

[Minimum Criteria](#)

Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust have set the following minimum criteria for inclusion into the program:

- The proposed easement area must contain high-quality native plant communities (e.g., forests, prairies, woodlands, etc.), shoreland along rivers and streams, or rare and threatened species. Consideration may be given to land not containing high-quality areas if it is adjacent to critically important protected properties and restoration is a required element of the easement.
- The proposed easement area cannot be enrolled previously in permanent protection programs, such as the Reinvest in Minnesota program.

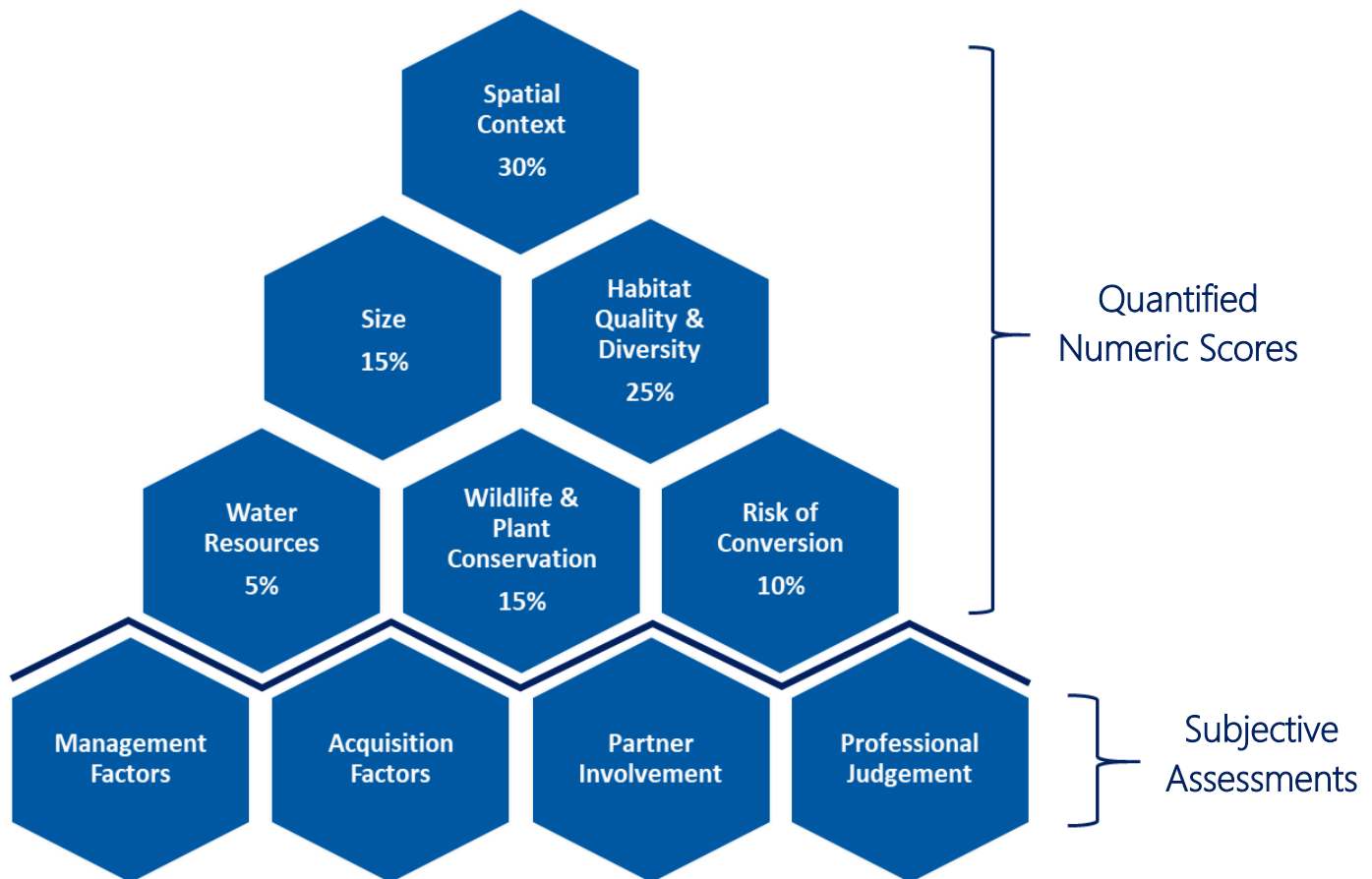
Additional land use requirements will be stipulated within each conservation easement agreement as it relates to the special characteristics of the land and the particular situation of the landowner.

[Selection and Scoring Criteria](#)

The ranking and selection methodology for easement selection is informed by primary literature review of existing prioritization methods used in Minnesota and other states for conservation project selection including the ecological ranking framework used by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, and the University of Minnesota. In addition, methodologies were informed by feedback from the HCP's Technical Advisory Committee. This methodology will continue to evolve as advancements in science, information, and data become available to ensure the selection of the best projects.

Submitted projects are selected based on several quantified factors and also based on professional assessments. Using a ranking system that prioritizes projects based on ecological value and willingness to donate enables this program to secure conservation easements that protect Hennepin County's most critical wildlife resources in the most cost-effective way.

The diagram below depicts the criteria categories considered. Also identified are percent weights of the numerical categories and a description of each selection criteria categories:



Quantitative Numeric Scoring Criteria

- **Spatial Context** *Premise: Identify areas which create local abundance of open space and improves habitat connectivity; aggregation of lands affects local dynamics and occupancy of wildlife populations and results in greater buffering of interior habitat spaces.*

Considers existing protected areas (e.g., conservation easements, wildlife refuges and USFWS lands, regional parks, nature preserves, Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific and Natural Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, National Parks lands, other state and federally protected natural areas) and identified natural areas and open spaces (e.g., Ecologically Significant Natural Areas, Hennepin County Natural Resource Corridors, Mississippi River Critical Area open spaces, and nearness to current and potential easement projects).

- **Habitat Quality and Diversity** *Premise: Identify areas that meet multiple habitat criteria to prioritize high quality resource protection; also affects carrying capacity and ability to support diverse wildlife populations.*
Looks at habitat ranking data (e.g., A, B, and C ranking on Minnesota Land Cover Classification System, Moderate, High, and Outstanding MN DNR Sites of Biological Significance) and diversity indices (e.g., richness, Simpson's Diversity Index).
- **Size** *Premise: Sufficient size such that conservation resources likely to remain intact and provide value, effects carrying capacity of wildlife populations and reduces edge habitat.*
Considers absolute and relative acreage of potential easement area.
- **Wildlife and Plant Conservation** *Premise: Identify areas which likely to provide the greatest benefit to wildlife and protect rare resources.*
Considers rare resources and conservation planning data (e.g., Natural History Information System, Wildlife Action Network, Important Bird Areas, Important Duck Habitat, federal-listed species habitat, Lakes of Biological Significance, pollinator habitat).
- **Water Resources** *Premise: Identify areas which can protect water resources for public and wildlife benefit.*
Considers presence of floodplains (e.g., FEMA data), water resources (e.g., Public Waters and National Wetland Inventory, Shoreland), sensitive waters, and groundwater sensitivity (e.g., springs, recharge rate, contamination susceptibility).
- **Risk of Conversation** *Premise: Identify lands most susceptible to land use change.*
Identifies proximity to existing and future development (e.g., location within MUSA 2040, potential change in development density).

Subjective Assessment Criteria

- **Acquisition Factors** *Premise: Identify land that is affordable with available financial resources and is reasonable relative to other available land.*
This category considers landowner willingness to donate. Landowners are asked whether they are willing to donate none, some, or all of the value of a conservation easement. In project ranking, landowners willing to donate some or all of the value of a conservation easement are given additional consideration, because their donation makes the easement a more cost-effective conservation option. Also considered here is the relative cost and available funds.
- **Partnership** *Premise: Identify areas which foster opportunity for partnership.*
This category considers the proximity to partner planning areas, the neighborhood or community interest and involvement, and partner involvement or matching funds.

- **Management Factors** *Premise: Identify land that is manageable based on available resources.*

This category considers feasibility of restoration and enhancement efforts (e.g. impact to neighbors, level of invasive species infestation) and ongoing management needs (e.g. proximity to neighbors for a property that will need to be burned).

- **Professional Judgement & Other Considerations** *Premise: Sometimes other factors can create important benefits or challenging barriers.*

This category considers potential ecosystem services, ethical and public image concerns, and landowner engagement.

An Example:

Below are example outputs of quantitative scoring for potential easement projects under review by the TAC during one of the project reporting and selection meetings Hennepin County Hosts each year. This figure depicts the sub - category scores (colored bars) that comprise the overall project score (blue number).

