Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Phase IX

Laws of Minnesota 2024 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 07/06/2026

Project Title: Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Phase IX

Funds Recommended: $2,042,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2024, Ch. 106, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 4(a)

Appropriation Language: $2,042,000 the second year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire permanent conservation easements on wild-rice lake shoreland habitat for native wild-rice bed protection. Of this amount, up to $110,000 is for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. Subdivision 8, paragraph (b), does not apply to this project. A list of permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Hubbard, Crow Wing, Aitkin, Cass and Itasca.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Forest / Prairie Transition

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Wetlands

Forest

Narrative

Abstract

Phase 9 of the Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Program will utilize permanent conservation easements to protect 678 acres and 2 miles of wild rice shoreland habitat. Development trends pose a serious threat to wild rice habitat. Sites are selected through a ranking process that considers development risk, surrounding land use, habitat value, and other criteria. BWSR will utilize the RIM easement process in partnership with local soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) within the Northern Forest and Forest Prairie Transition to accomplish protection. Previous phases of this project have protected 7,917 acres and exceeded goals by 35%.

Design and Scope of Work

Historically, wild rice occurred throughout Minnesota and extended into northern Iowa. Wild rice has since been extirpated from most of its southern range due to human impacts including changes to water quality and chemistry, sedimentation, drainage, flow alteration, boat traffic and competition from introduced aquatic invasive species. Today, the heart of the state's wild rice acreage falls within this project work area comprised of 14 counties -- Aitkin, Becker, Beltrami, Carlton, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Itasca, Otter Tail, St. Louis, Stearns, Todd, and Wadena.

Recent well-documented population and development trends pose a serious threat to remaining wild rice habitat. These trends were exacerbated by COVID-19 and the subsequent work-from-anywhere culture that still remains in place. This population and development boom has reduced the availability of developable shoreline on recreational lakes, resulting in shallow lakes, rivers, and shallow bays containing wild rice being increasingly targeted for shoreline development. Additionally, land values have increased substantially since 2020 and this trend is expected to continue, lending a sense of urgency to protecting acres now rather than in the future when it will be more expensive. Many wild rice shoreland complexes are still intact with good water quality, but are subject to development pressure that, if allowed, will degrade the resource.

Voluntary, incentive-based conservation protection options for shoreland landowners are few. Unlike the prairie portion of the state where state funded easement options exist for conservation-minded landowners, private land protection options are limited for wild rice shoreland in the forest due to funding constraints. Further, many easement programs are targeted for restoration and not protection. Even though land values are rising, relatively lower land values in the northern forest still allow conservation dollars to stretch further while also leveraging existing public lands. Most wild rice lakes are public waters and offer some form of public access. This proposal will continue to fill a need for shoreland protection on key water bodies supporting wild rice in the Northern Forest and Forest Prairie Transition Sections.

Utilizing permanent conservation easements the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) and fourteen local SWCDs will continue to offer permanent watershed protection on shallow lakes, rivers and shallow bays producing wild rice. BWSR's Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) Program will acquire 678 acres through permanent conservation easements.

Through local SWCD offices, BWSR will purchase RIM easements using rates set by the BWSR Board. Tracts will be

selected based on the degree to which they help permanently protect the land around a given wild rice water body. RIM easements will be acquired through a sign-up process similar to BWSR's other easement programs.

SWCD generated landowner applications will be reviewed and parcels ranked by the project committee with guidance provided by the "Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Criteria Sheet" (attached).

Explain how the plan addresses habitat protection, restoration, and/or enhancement for fish, game & wildlife, including threatened or endangered species conservation

Wild rice shoreland encompasses a complex of shallow lakes, rivers, and shallow bays of deeper lakes that support rice and provide some of the most important habitat for wetland-dependent wildlife species in Minnesota. Wild rice habitat is especially important to Minnesota's migrating and breeding waterfowl. More than 17 species of wildlife listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) use wild rice areas as habitat for breeding, migration, and/or foraging.

Targeted SGCN are as follows: Common Loon, Trumpeter Swan, Bald Eagle, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Red-necked Grebe, Sora Rail, Virginia Rail, Yellow Rail, Black Tern, Rusty Blackbird, Sedge Wren, Lesser Scaup, Northern Pintail, and American Black Duck.

Wild rice is some of the most important habitat for wetland-dependent wildlife species in Minnesota as noted in the MNDNR's Natural Wild Rice in Minnesota report to the legislature (2008). Important game species supported by wild rice include the Ring-necked Duck, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Scaup, and Bufflehead.

What are the elements of this plan that are critical from a timing perspective?

Recent well-documented population and development trends pose a serious threat to wild rice habitat. This population and development boom has reduced the availability of developable shoreline on recreational lakes, resulting in shallow lakes, rivers, and shallow bays containing wild rice being increasingly targeted for shoreline development. Many of these wild rice shoreland complexes currently remain intact with good water quality, but are subject to development pressure that, if allowed, will degrade the resource.

Easement acquisition is critical at this time to head off development and habitat fragmentation along these sensitive lakes. Beyond public ownership, current shoreline protection on wild rice shoreland is limited to county shoreland ordinances, and limited conservation efforts by non-governmental organizations. Shoreland ordinances do not prevent wild rice habitat fragmentation and degradation. Further, even the most stringent ordinances still allow for some subdivision and development, which is detrimental to wild rice shoreland complexes.

Describe how the plan expands habitat corridors or complexes and/or addresses habitat fragmentation:

To target sites, aerial photos of wild rice lakes are reviewed during a preliminary screening to find those that are the most intact, provide the most wild rice, with the most waterfowl use, and can be protected for the least cost. Lakes are sorted into Low, Medium and High categories. Once the lakes have been ranked the SWCD then contacts landowners on the high and some of the medium priority lakes.

Easement selection occurs with a goal of maximum wild rice habitat complex protection along all shoreland of a lake. Easement parcels are further targeted and prioritized by adjacency to current protected lands/public lands and a low level of current lake development. The following additional factors are considered to ensure site selection reflects current science-based measures for wild rice habitat protection: DNR wild rice lake designation, feet of shoreline protected, development potential of site, acquisition urgency, depth from shore, watershed considerations, easement size relative to the parcel, and an analysis of stakeholder support. Sites that contain a wild rice lake outlet are also prioritized for potential DNR management of water levels to ensure protection.

SWCD generated landowner applications will be reviewed and parcels ranked by the project committee with guidance provided by the "Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Criteria Sheet" attached to this proposal. Shoreland protection for wild rice lakes and rivers enjoys widespread support from tribal interests, SWCDs, and other habitat conservation partners.

Which top 2 Conservation Plans referenced in MS97A.056, subd. 3a are most applicable to this project?

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

Explain how this plan will uniquely address habitat resilience to climate change and its anticipated effects on game, fish & wildlife species utilizing the protected or restored/enhanced habitat this proposal targets.

Two of the biggest threats to wild rice are changes to water chemistry, caused by shoreline erosion and excess nutrients from lawns, and wildly fluctuating water levels. Both of which can be exacerbated by climate change that will likely produce more extreme weather phenomenon such as dramatic rain events or prolonged drought. Protecting shoreline and the watersheds of wild rice water bodies can help to mitigate these events by storing water, slowing runoff, and releasing water over time thus reducing the hydrologic curve and stabilizing water levels. In addition land protection will help mitigate water chemistry changes by reducing shoreline erosion and reducing nutrient loading associated with shoreline development.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Forest / Prairie Transition

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

Northern Forest

Protect shoreland and restore or enhance critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas

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 ~ *Healthy populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species. A summary of the total number of wetland acres and associated forest land secured*

under easement through this appropriation will be reported. We expect sustained populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these easements are secured. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes.

Programs in the northern forest region:

Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *Healthy populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species. A summary of the total number of wetland acres and associated forest land secured under easement through this appropriation will be reported. We expect sustained populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these easements are secured. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes.*

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 funding request is not supplanting existing funding or a substitution for any previous funding.

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

Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for maintenance, inspection and monitoring into perpetuity. The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and stewardship costs have been calculated at $10,00 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship covers costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and enforcement.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2026-Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Compliance Checks first 5 years then every 3rd year.	Corrective actions of any violations	Enforcement action by MN Attorney General Office
2026-Ongoing	Landowner Responsibility	Maintain compliance with easement terms	-	-

Provide an assessment of how your program celebrates cultural diversity or reaches diverse communities in Minnesota, including reaching low- and moderate-income households:

Wild rice is a culturally important resource for Native Americans in Minnesota. This proposal specifically works to protect wild rice resources. In addition BWSR is initiating a formal consultation process with Native American bands.

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program 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

Who will manage the easement?
Generally the landowner manages the easement although financial and technical aid from other sources may be utalized over time.

Who will be the easement holder?
BWSR

What is the anticipated number of easements (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?
8-10

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?
No

Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this program either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?
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:
Existing trails and roads are identified during the acquisition process and are often excluded from the easement area if they serve no purpose to easement maintenance, monitoring or enforcement. Some roads and trails, such as agricultural field accesses, are allowed to remain.

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

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?
The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program that has over 7,500 easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first 5 years and then every 3rd year after that. BWSR, in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

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:
Though uncommon, there could be a potential for new trails to be developed, if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (e.g. firebreaks, berm maintenance, etc).

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?
The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program that has over 7,500 easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first 5 years and then every 3rd year after that. BWSR, in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?
No

For the most part land enrolled in this program is not in need of restoration. Some restoration activities may take place on a small scale but R/E is not a major component of this program.

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this program's funding and availability?
No

Explain how, when, and source of the R/E work:
For the most part land enrolled in this program is not in need of restoration. Some restoration activities may take place on a small scale but R/E is not a major component of this program.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Final Report Submitted	November 1, 2028
RIM easements secured on 1100 acres	June 30, 2028

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2028

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7.
Availability of Appropriation
(a) Money appropriated in this section may not be spent on activities unless they are directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation and are specified in the accomplishment plan approved by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Money appropriated in this section must not be spent on indirect costs or other institutional overhead charges that are not directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation. Money appropriated for fee title acquisition of land may be used to restore, enhance, and provide for public use of the land acquired with the appropriation. Public-use facilities must have a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

(b) Money appropriated in this section is available as follows:
(1) money appropriated for acquiring real property is available until June 30, 2028;
(2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this section is available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2032;
(3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2029;
(4) notwithstanding clauses (1) to (3), money appropriated for a project that receives at least 15 percent of its

funding from federal funds is available until a date sufficient to match the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if the federal funding was confirmed and included in the original approved draft accomplishment plan; and(5) money appropriated for other projects is available until the end of the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.

Budget

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan.

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$90,200	-	-	$90,200
Contracts	$27,500	-	-	$27,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	$1,771,000	-	-	$1,771,000
Easement Stewardship	$110,000	-	-	$110,000
Travel	$3,600	-	-	$3,600
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	$33,100	-	-	$33,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$5,100	-	-	$5,100
Supplies/Materials	$1,500	-	-	$1,500
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$2,042,000**	**-**	**-**	**$2,042,000**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.25	4.0	$90,200	-	-	$90,200

Amount of Request: $2,042,000
Amount of Leverage: -
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%
DSS + Personnel: $123,300
As a % of the total request: 6.04%
Easement Stewardship: $110,000
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 6.21%

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?
Work will be scaled proportionately.

Does this project have the ability to be scalable?
Yes

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?
A 30% reduction in funding would reduce outputs proportionately.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
BWSR calculates direct support services costs that are directly related to a necessary for each request based upon the appropriation amount and type of work being done. Personnel and DSS costs would be scaled accordingly.

Personnel

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

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?
The amount listed in the contract line will be used to reimburse SWCDs for work associated with easement acquisition and boundary posting.

Easement Stewardship

What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?
BWSR stewardship costs are $10,000/easement. This is based upon Land Trust Alliance standards that have been modified to fit RIM programs needs. We estimate 11 easements.

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
The travel line will only be used for traditional travel costs.

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?
BWSR calculates direct support services costs that are directly related to and necessary for each request based on the type of work being done.

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?
None anticipated at this time but we keep a small amount in this budget line for contingencies.

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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	678	-	678
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**678**	**-**	**678**

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	-	-	$2,042,000	-	$2,042,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**$2,042,000**	**-**	**$2,042,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	68	-	-	610	678
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**68**	**-**	**-**	**610**	**678**

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	-	$204,200	-	-	$1,837,800	$2,042,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**$204,200**	**-**	**-**	**$1,837,800**	**$2,042,000**

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	-	-	$3,011	-
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	-	$3,002	-	-	$3,012
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

2

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?
Yes - Sign up criteria is attached

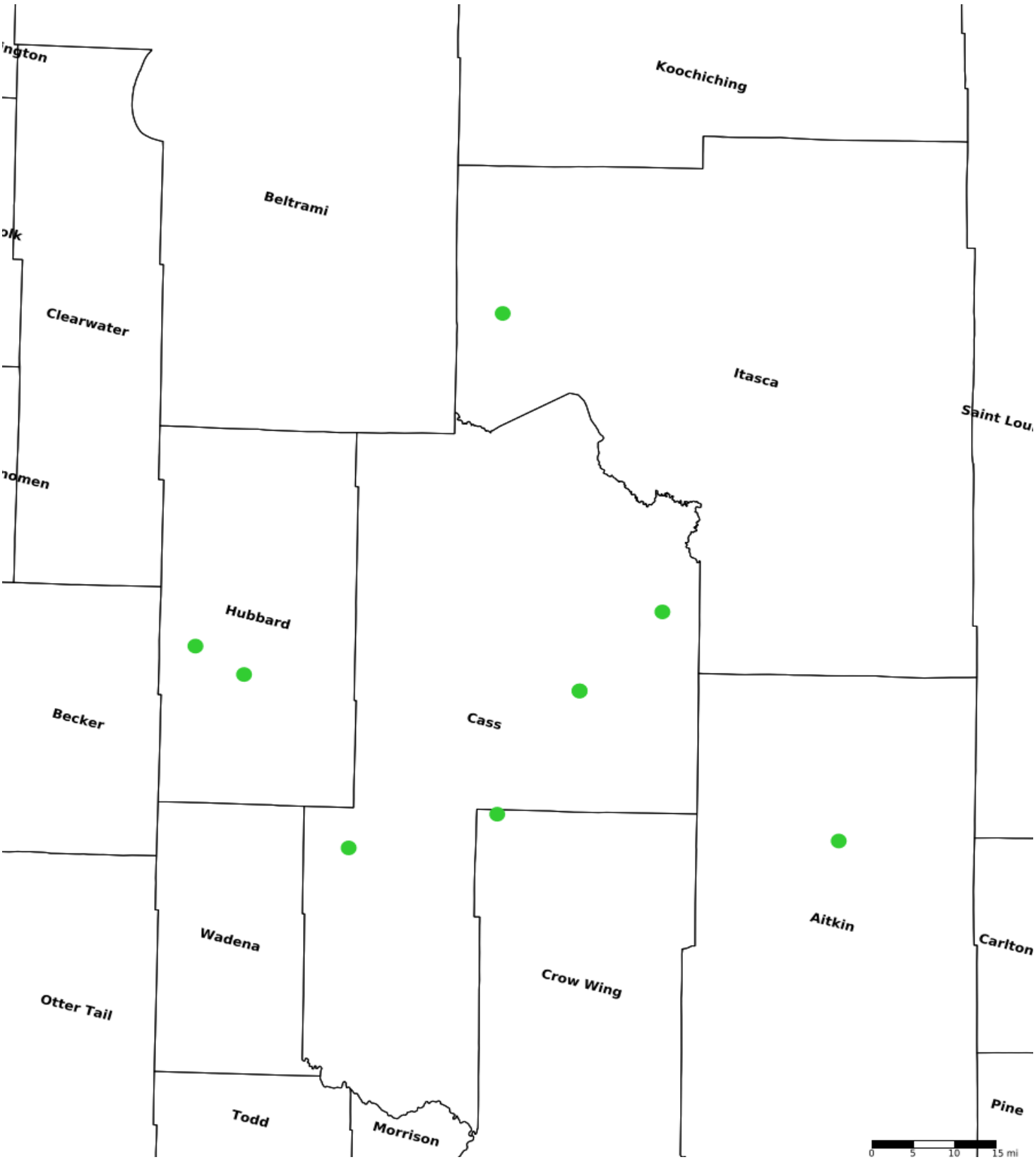
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:
The Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Program utilizes a two tiered screening process to find the wild rice parcels with the highest quality habitat. First, DNR Wildlife staff rank wild rice lakes on a county by county basis. At this preliminary screening aerial photos are used to sort wild rice lakes to prioritize the lakes that are most intact, provide the most wild rice, with the most waterfowl use, and can be protected for the least cost. Lakes are sorted into Low, Medium and High categories. Lakes are dropped or added to the lake list as better information becomes available. Once the lakes have been ranked, the SWCD then contacts landowners on the high and some of the medium priority lakes.

Once the SWCD has an interested landowner, the parcel is presented to the project committee for comments and recommendations. The committee reviews proposals and sorts them for parcels that provide the greatest public benefit possible. Areas with high quality wild rice habitat, where a limited public investment can leverage a larger area of public land are sought after. The result is an increase in resiliency to the habitat base. The parcels that rank the highest tend to be adjacent to public lands, in a river corridor, or both.

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
01-01-25-13- -	Aitkin	04924205	49	$35,536	No
11-01-25-13- -	Cass	14127227	32	$401,569	No
11-02-25-13- -	Cass	13832225	33	$86,968	No
11-04-25-13- -	Cass	14127227	30	$142,610	No
11-05-25-13- -	Cass	14225208	83	$122,644	No
18-01-26-13- -	Crow Wing	13829201	36	$93,355	No
29-01-25-13- -	Hubbard	14135202	116	$161,059	No
29-01-26-13- -	Hubbard	14134223	85	$211,795	No
31-01-24-13- -	Itasca	14829225	14	$214,224	No

Parcel Map


Koochiching
Beltrami
Clearwater
Itasca
Hubbard
Becker
Cass
Wadena
Aitkin
Crow Wing
Otter Tail
Todd
Morrison
Carlton
Pine
0 5 10 15 mi
Protect in Easement
Protect in Fee with PILT
Protect in Fee W/O PILT
Restore
Enhance
Other