



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 5
ML 2024 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 05/31/2023

Proposal Title: Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection & Restoration, Phase 5

Funds Requested: \$16,673,200

Confirmed Leverage Funds: \$49,600

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Steve Zeece III

Title: Water Resources Manager

Organization: Sauk River Watershed District

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Location Information

County Location(s): Todd and Stearns.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

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

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Forest
- Prairie
- Wetlands
- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

This program permanently protects, restores, and enhances critical habitat within the Sauk River Watershed, which has experienced considerable habitat loss and is at high risk for more land use conversion. Using conservation easements and fee land acquisition, we will protect approximately 1,750 acres of high priority habitat in Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition Area. We will restore/enhance approximately 570 acres of wetlands, stream corridors, and accompanying uplands, creating vital habitat for waterfowl, fishes, and populations of threatened and endangered species. Properties will be strategically targeted using innovative site prioritization model that maximizes conservation benefit and financial leverage.

Design and Scope of Work

Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD), Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), Pheasants Forever (PF), and Great River Greening (GRG) - with technical assistance from local Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Stearns County Parks (SCP) – will partner to implement habitat protection and restoration within the Sauk River Watershed (SRW). Site prioritization will focus on protecting and restoring habitat in high-impact locations, including high quality or easily restorable wetland complexes, upland and floodplain forests, prairies, and stream corridors, which provide critical habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, SGCN and other important wildlife species.

The SRW is in a rapidly growing region that has experienced intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland in the past decade. Furthermore, public access for recreation, including hunting and fishing, is lacking. Landowner interest in conservation land protection and restoration is strong in the SRW. Since July 2019, the Partnership has protected 665 acres through fee title acquisition, 888 acres through conservation easements, and has restored/enhanced 198 acres, while leveraging \$2,032,405 through landowner donation of easement value and non-state funding sources. As of May 2023, landowners owning approximately 1,200 acres are interested in permanently protecting their properties. Protecting and restoring these strategic parcels will far exceed funding available through the Partnership's previous OHF grants. We anticipate significantly more interested landowners as outreach efforts continue.

Conservation Easements:

MLT will conduct landowner outreach within priority areas and will accept proposals from landowners using a competitive, market-based Request for Proposal (RFP) process. Properties will be ranked based on ecological value and cost, prioritizing projects that provide the best ecological value and lowest cost to the state. Our goal is to protect 1,150 acres of permanent conservation easements through this proposal, with habitat management plans developed for eased acres.

Fee Acquisition:

Coordinating with agency partners, PF will protect through fee acquisition 600 acres of strategically identified parcels and donate parcels to MNDNR as a WMA or AMA, to USFWS as a WPA, or to counties. Protected tracts will be managed as wildlife habitat and provide public access within an area of our state where public land for recreation use is lacking.

Restoration and Enhancement:

SRWD will restore/enhance approximately 520 acres of wetland, riparian and associated upland habitat in cooperation with county SWCDs, MNDNR, and USFWS. The restorations will focus on building large complexes of improved habitat in the GUS Plus (Getchell, Unnamed, & Stony Creeks) and Osakis Management Units, which are priorities in the SRCWMP. The improved habitat will benefit many species including native bivalves, spawning fishes, and amphibians.

GRG will complete Natural Resource Management Plans and restore/enhance approximately 50 acres of public and/or protected private land, with a focus on three Stearns County Parks, all of which are degraded by invasive species and with inadequate woodland management. Natural Resource Management Plans developed for each park, totaling 399 acres, will advise the County and guide prioritization of needed habitat improvements.

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

This program will utilize a prioritization framework that uses fish spawning habitat, game species, threatened and endangered species, and quality habitat as major weighting factors for both protection and restoration/enhancement project selection. The SRW region is an important migratory corridor for forest birds and waterfowl.

This phase of the program targets the protection and restoration/enhancement of wetlands, stream corridors, and associated uplands. This will create excellent habitat for hundreds of migratory waterfowl who will use these basins to refuel and rest. Many species require wetland basins with open water areas and emergent aquatic vegetation to provide nesting habitat and many other use wetlands during their life cycle. This program offers the opportunity to restore a large wetland and protect and enhance smaller wetlands, which will benefit threatened and endangered species and will expand habitat cores and corridors. This program will also protect and restore/enhance upland forests, prairies, and shorelands, which are also essential habitats to Minnesota's wildlife diversity and health.

A variety of threatened and endangered species will benefit from this program including Blanding's turtle, bobolink, veery, smooth green snake, Dakota skipper, western harvest mouse, and a species of jumping spider (*M. grata*). Other species that will benefit from improved habitat as part of this program include trumpeter swan, sandhill crane, eastern and western meadowlark, bald eagle, Swainson's hawk, and dickcissel, and numerous native mussel species.

A focal point of SRWD's restoration will occur in the Crooked Lake basin in Douglas County. This historic Shallow Lake was drained in the early 1900's from the Long Prairie Watershed and into Lake Osakis, the headwaters of the Sauk River. The shallow lake formerly provided thousand of acres of wetland and upland habitat for fish and numerous SGCN. Fueled by problems occurring in Osakis Lake and the Sauk River, there is currently a strong effort to restore the ecological function of the former Crooked Lake, to improve the habitat and overall trophic health in Lake Osakis and waters downstream.

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

The SRW is in a rapidly growing region of the state that has experienced some of the most intense conversion from perennial cover to cropland and urban development in the past decade. There are currently landowners with parcels totaling approximately 1,200 acres interested in the program. Numerous landowners with high priority habitat have shown strong interest, including landowners that have land about to expire or just expired from CRP

but that does not qualify for CREP. Without this program, there is a strong risk that these priority properties to be converted back to land uses that will adversely affect habitat and water quality benefits initially gained from enrollment in CRP.

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

The partners will utilize the recently completed Sauk River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (SRCWMP). The SRCWMP compiled information from numerous scientific reports and studies regarding the water resources within the Sauk River Watershed. That information was used to create a prioritized and targeted plan of work for the partners with a focus of improvement and protection of water resources. This work was completed through the Board of Water and Soil Resources via its One Watershed One Plan program.

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

The vast majority (97%) of the SRW landscape is in private ownership. Therefore, once priority parcels are identified, working with private owners on land protection strategies is key to successful conservation in this region. We will also work closely with partners in the region to identify those habitat complexes where private land protection can make a significant contribution to existing conservation investments. Specific parcels available for acquisition of easements will be further reviewed relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on amount of habitat on the parcel (size), the quality or condition of habitat, the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas, and cost. MBS data will be used to evaluate potential conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions. Field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition will also occur, as many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

The program will also work to build on initial conservation investments in the program area, expanding and buffering the footprint of existing protected areas, such as existing conservation easements, WMAs, WPAs, AMAs and County Parks, facilitating the protection of habitat corridors and reducing the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats, while also restoring and enhancing the existing public habitat cores.

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

- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

Explain how this proposal 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.

This proposal, which focuses on restoring and protecting wetlands, floodplains, and associated upland habitat will increase habitat resiliency throughout the SRW as changing temperature and precipitation patterns alter the habitats of Minnesota's native plants and wildlife. By restoring/enhancing prioritized floodplains and wetlands, we will add and protect more storage throughout the watershed, which will reduce flooding as well as sediment and nutrient runoff. Additionally, this work will create important sources of water for wildlife during periods of drought and will help to maintain cooler water temperatures as our area experiences increased average temperatures and more extreme heat events. The protection of climate-resilient properties is also necessary to

prevent sensitive species from disappearing. This proposal will prioritize protecting natural habitats that are more connected to other habitats and sites with greater topographic variability, which will enable species to better persist in the face of climate change.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Forest / Prairie Transition

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

Prairie

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

Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife, and if not permanent outcomes, why it is important to undertake at this time:

This program protects wetland/grassland complexes, riparian floodplains and adjacent forested uplands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for Minnesota's wildlife, especially its migratory waterfowl and associated species. This proposal seeks to build on the success of funding received previously from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF). Our program has already protected 1,553 acres and restored/enhanced 198 acres. We have garnered additional interest from landowners owning approximately 1,200 acres. Properties in the application pool include land adjacent to the Sauk River and high-quality lakes and includes exceptional existing or easily restorable critical habitat such as wetlands, forest, and prairie.

The need and landowner interest are high. We have spent or allocated much of our previous funding and current applications exceed available and anticipated funding. Additionally, we had 1,242 CRP contracts, comprising 9,259 acres, expire from 2018-2022 in the SRW, and another 189 contracts comprising 4,639 acres will expire in 2023-2024. A small window exists to protect high quality sites now as they are expiring from CRP and before they are developed or converted back to farmland.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Rivers and streams provide corridors of habitat including intact areas of forest cover in the east and large wetland/upland complexes in the west ~ *Expanded buffers of stream corridors and wetland/prairie complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat, providing nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, spawning areas for fishes, and cover for game species will be restored and protected. Partners will work together to identify priority lands using existing data and public plans, and then coordinate protection, restoration, and enhancement activities in those priority areas. Success within each priority area will be determined based on the percentage of area protected, restored, and/or enhanced.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *Expanded buffers of stream corridors and wetland/prairie complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat, providing nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and cover and forage for game species will be restored and protected. Partners will work together to identify priority lands using*

existing data and public plans, and then coordinate protection, restoration, and enhancement activities in those priority areas. Success within each priority area will be determined based on the percentage of area protected, restored, and/or enhanced.

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

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

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

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

MLT, a nationally accredited and insured land trust, will sustain the land protected through conservation easements using state-of-the-art stewardship standards and practices. MLT conducts annual property monitoring, investigates potential violations, and defends the easement in case of a true violation. Easement stewardship funding is included in MLT's budget. MLT also encourages active ecological management, providing landowners with habitat management plans, and working with them to secure resources (expertise and funding) to undertake these activities over time.

All fee-title lands will be enrolled into the WMA or WPA system to be managed perpetually by the MNDNR or USFWS, or donated to local Counties, respectively. All acquisitions will be restored and enhanced as high quality as practicable, with knowledge that quality and comprehensive restorations utilizing native species result in lower management costs. Additionally, local PF chapter members and volunteers have strong interest in acquisitions with highly productive habitat. Partners will develop an ecological restoration and management plan for each parcel. Grant and partner dollars will be used for the initial site development and restoration/enhancement work.

GRG enters restoration and enhancement projects with the goal of achieving a threshold where continuing maintenance beyond the allocation period is achievable by landowners.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2028 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of conservation easements in perpetuity.	Enforcement as necessary	-
Every 4-6 years	MN DNR, USFWS, Landowners	Prescribed fire, tree control, invasive species control.	-	-

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

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

St. Cloud, which lies at the bottom of the Sauk River Watershed, has the largest concentration of our state's BIPOC population outside of the Twin Cities metro. In recent years, St. Cloud and its surrounding suburbs, such as Waite Park have grown increasingly diverse. Currently, the BIPOC population comprises approximately 32% of the total

population in St. Cloud. This program will benefit this diverse community by increasing close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities. This includes adding more public lands and partnering with Stearns County Parks on ecological restoration/enhancement projects, which will increase the aesthetic and recreational value for visitors. Our work will also improve water quality – directly benefiting the drinking water quality for St. Cloud due to the city’s drinking water intake being just downstream of the Sauk River confluence with the Mississippi River. Our program will also increase water storage and thereby improve community resiliency by reducing flooding.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Yes

Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought prior to acquisition, per 97A.056 subd 13(j)?**

No

Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:

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

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

No

Describe the permanent protection and justification for additional protection:

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

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes

Where does the activity take place?

- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- WMA
- WPA
- County/Municipal

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

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

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

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

Will neonicotinoid pesticide products be used within any activities of this proposal?

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:

No variation from State of MN regulations for WMA acquisitions.

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

Lands to be acquired for county ownership will be open to hunting and fishing with only minimal restrictions when required for public safety.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

- County

- State of MN
- Federal
- Local Unit of Government

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

- WMA
- WPA
- Other

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

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

Yes

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

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

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

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

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

No

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this proposal's funding and availability?

Yes

Other OHF Appropriation Awards

Have you received OHF dollars in the past through LSOHC that are current OPEN appropriations?

Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2022	\$4,091,000	\$181,800	\$3,909,200	4.44%
2021	\$4,034,000	\$1,581,600	\$2,452,400	39.21%
2020	\$3,926,000	\$3,329,600	\$596,400	84.81%
2019	\$2,946,000	\$2,508,800	\$437,200	85.16%
Totals	\$14,997,000	\$7,601,800	\$7,395,200	50.69%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Site prioritization and targeted outreach completed	December 2025

Conservation easement and fee-title acquisition completed	June 2028
Restoration completed	June 2029

Budget

Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$547,200	\$30,000	-, SRWD	\$577,200
Contracts	\$8,000,000	-	-	\$8,000,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$900,000	-	-	\$900,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$2,700,000	-	-	\$2,700,000
Easement Acquisition	\$3,500,000	\$2,185,000	-, Private Landowners, Private Donations, BWSR/USFWS	\$5,685,000
Easement Stewardship	\$312,000	\$100,000	-, Private Donations	\$412,000
Travel	\$22,000	-	-	\$22,000
Professional Services	\$405,000	-	-	\$405,000
Direct Support Services	\$131,000	\$49,600	-, Pheasants Forever, Great River Greening	\$180,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$18,000	-	-	\$18,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$4,000	-	-	\$4,000
Supplies/Materials	\$124,000	-	-	\$124,000
DNR IDP	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Grand Total	\$16,673,200	\$2,364,600	-	\$19,037,800

Partner: Great River Greening

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$90,000	-	-	\$90,000
Contracts	\$246,000	-	-	\$246,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$25,000	\$34,300	Great River Greening	\$59,300
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
Supplies/Materials	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$375,000	\$34,300	-	\$409,300

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Ecologist	0.2	5.0	\$65,000	-	-	\$65,000
Program Manager	0.05	5.0	\$25,000	-	-	\$25,000

Partner: Minnesota Land Trust

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$300,000	-	-	\$300,000
Contracts	\$84,000	-	-	\$84,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$3,500,000	\$525,000	Private Landowners	\$4,025,000
Easement Stewardship	\$312,000	-	-	\$312,000
Travel	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Professional Services	\$285,000	-	-	\$285,000
Direct Support Services	\$81,000	-	-	\$81,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$4,576,000	\$525,000	-	\$5,101,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Lands Protection Staff	0.75	4.0	\$300,000	-	-	\$300,000

Partner: Pheasants Forever (PF)

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$157,200	-	-	\$157,200
Contracts	\$600,000	-	-	\$600,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$900,000	-	-	\$900,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$2,700,000	-	-	\$2,700,000
Easement Acquisition	-	\$100,000	Private Donations	\$100,000
Easement Stewardship	-	\$100,000	Private Donations	\$100,000
Travel	\$2,000	-	-	\$2,000
Professional Services	\$120,000	-	-	\$120,000
Direct Support Services	\$25,000	\$15,300	Pheasants Forever	\$40,300
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$18,000	-	-	\$18,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$120,000	-	-	\$120,000
DNR IDP	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Grand Total	\$4,652,200	\$215,300	-	\$4,867,500

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
PF Field Staff	0.12	5.0	\$49,000	-	-	\$49,000
PF Field Staff	0.29	5.0	\$108,200	-	-	\$108,200

Partner: Sauk River Watershed District (SRWD)

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	-	\$30,000	SRWD	\$30,000
Contracts	\$7,070,000	-	-	\$7,070,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	\$1,560,000	BWSR/USFWS	\$1,560,000
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$7,070,000	\$1,590,000	-	\$8,660,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Water Resources Manager	-	5.0	-	\$30,000	SRWD	\$30,000

Amount of Request: \$16,673,200

Amount of Leverage: \$2,364,600

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 14.18%

DSS + Personnel: \$678,200

As a % of the total request: 4.07%

Easement Stewardship: \$312,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 8.91%

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
\$2,364,600	\$49,600	2.1%	\$2,315,000	97.9%

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

Leverage is expected from multiple sources including but not limited to federal sources, land value donations, contractor donations and PF. Not every source is 100% confirmed at this point. However, the partnership has an exemplary track record of delivery and over-achievement of match commitments that further stretch OHF funding.

Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable?

Yes

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

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

Our planned protection, restoration, and enhancement work is scalable. If scaled back, this proposal would be reduced across all categories of the budget. Scaling would be modestly more than proportional due to inherent efficiencies with greater funding.

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

PF - Personnel/DSS will be reduced proportionately.

MLT - Personnel/DSS will be reduced, but not proportionately. Some costs are fixed. Donation of easement value may result in more projects, more personnel time.

GRG – Personnel/DSS will be reduced, but not proportionally. Some costs are fixed.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

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

Our planned protection, restoration, and enhancement work is scalable. If scaled back, this proposal would be phased over a longer period of time. Scaling would be modestly more than proportional due to inherent efficiencies with greater funding.

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

PF - Personnel/DSS will be reduced proportionately.

MLT - Personnel/DSS will be reduced, but not proportionately. Some costs are fixed. Donation of easement value may result in more projects, more personnel time.

GRG – Personnel/DSS will be reduced, but not proportionally. Some costs are fixed.

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?

PF: Staffing is existing and only partially funded by OHF and specifically this request. Billing to any appropriation would only be for time spent on direct and necessary costs incurred as outlined in an Accomplishment Plan.

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

GRG: This is GRG's first time applying for funds through the Sauk River Watershed Partnership, so there is no overlap of labor in this partnership project. There is some geographic and conservation overlap with GRG's activities in the Anoka Sand Plain Partnership project; we track our staffing costs with unique project identification numbers to properly assign expenses to projects and appropriations.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

MLT: Habitat management plans on the new easement acquisitions; Partnering with SWCD's and other contractors on outreach for easement acquisition.

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

SRWD: Working with contractors to complete restoration project work.

GRG: Restoration and enhancement field services; rare plant surveys.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

- Appraisals
- Other : Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments, mapping, etc.
- Surveys
- Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

We anticipate four fee title acquisition transactions.

Easement Stewardship

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

Minnesota Land Trust anticipates 10-13 total projects. The cost per easement for stewardship, on average, is \$28,000, although under extraordinary circumstances additional funds may be requested. This figure is derived from MLT's stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is consistent with Land Trust Accreditation standards. MLT shares periodic updates to this cost analysis with LSOHC staff.

Travel

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

Yes

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

MLT staff frequently rent cars for travel to project locations. GRG occasionally rents vehicles due to lack of availability in our fleet or POVs.

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

Yes

Direct Support Services

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

PF utilizes the Total Modified Direct Cost method. This methodology is annually approved by the U.S. Department of Interior's National Business Center as the basis for the organization's Indirect Cost Rate agreement. PF's allowable direct support services cost is 4.04%. In this proposal, PF has discounted its rate to 2.5% of the sum of

personnel, contracts, professional services, and travel. We are donating the difference-in-kind.

MLT: In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, MLT 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 apply this DNR approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of the direct support services.

GRG: In a process approved by DNR in September 2019, GRG's direct support services rate includes all allowable direct and necessary expenditures not captured in other line items in the budget. Our DSS request to LSOHC is less than the amount allowed by the DNR approved rate, and less than or equal to 10% of the total allocation request.

Other Equipment/Tools

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

GPS devices, safety equipment.

Federal Funds

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

No

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	320	200	0	0	520
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	15	135	0	0	150
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	45	405	0	0	450
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	1,150	1,150
Enhance	0	20	30	0	50
Total	380	760	30	1,150	2,320

How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie? (Table 1b)

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	20
Total	20

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	\$1,400,000	\$5,670,000	-	-	\$7,070,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$116,300	\$1,046,700	-	-	\$1,163,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$348,900	\$3,140,300	-	-	\$3,489,200
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$4,576,000	\$4,576,000
Enhance	-	\$150,000	\$225,000	-	\$375,000
Total	\$1,865,200	\$10,007,000	\$225,000	\$4,576,000	\$16,673,200

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	520	0	520
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	90	0	60	0	150
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	270	0	180	0	450
Protect in Easement	0	575	0	575	0	1,150
Enhance	0	50	0	0	0	50
Total	0	985	0	1,335	0	2,320

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$7,070,000	-	\$7,070,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$697,800	-	\$465,200	-	\$1,163,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$2,093,500	-	\$1,395,700	-	\$3,489,200
Protect in Easement	-	\$2,288,000	-	\$2,288,000	-	\$4,576,000
Enhance	-	\$375,000	-	-	-	\$375,000
Total	-	\$5,454,300	-	\$11,218,900	-	\$16,673,200

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
------	---------	---------	--------	---------

Restore	\$4,375	\$28,350	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$7,753	\$7,753	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	\$7,753	\$7,753	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,979
Enhance	-	\$7,500	\$7,500	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	\$13,596	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$7,753	-	\$7,753	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$7,753	-	\$7,753	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,979	-	\$3,979	-
Enhance	-	\$7,500	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

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

Easement parcels are identified through TNC’s Multiple Benefits Analysis. The size of parcels and proximity to other protected lands are also considered in this analysis. Specific parcels available for acquisition of easements will be further reviewed relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on: amount of habitat on the parcel (size), abundance of SGCN, the quality or condition of habitat, the parcel’s context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas, and cost. MBS data will be another important component of potential conservation easements and fee simple acquisitions. Field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition will also occur, as many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

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

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Oak Township County Park	Stearns	12532230	33	\$50,000	Yes
Getchell DJT	Stearns	12532233	160	-	No
Getchell AHH1	Stearns	12532232	120	-	No
Getchell HF	Stearns	12532227	63	-	No
Getchell GBT	Stearns	12532227	160	-	No
Rockville County Park	Stearns	12329208	284	\$245,000	Yes
Spring Hill County Park	Stearns	12433224	82	\$80,000	Yes
Getchell RPR 2	Stearns	12432206	37	-	No
Getchell RPR 1	Stearns	12432205	75	-	No
Getchell DLM	Stearns	12432205	130	-	No
Getchell AHH 3	Stearns	12432205	38	-	No
Getchell EMT	Stearns	12532234	120	-	No
Getchell JT	Stearns	12532234	26	-	No
Getchell AHH 2	Stearns	12532233	40	-	No
Getchell KJM	Stearns	12532233	357	-	No
Crooked DM 2	Todd	12835206	9	-	No
Crooked DM 1	Todd	12835207	45	-	No
Crooked JAJ 3	Todd	12835207	5	-	No
Crooked JAJ 2	Todd	12835207	2	-	No
Crooked JAJ 1	Todd	12835206	23	-	No
Crooked JJ	Todd	12835206	147	-	No

Protect Parcels

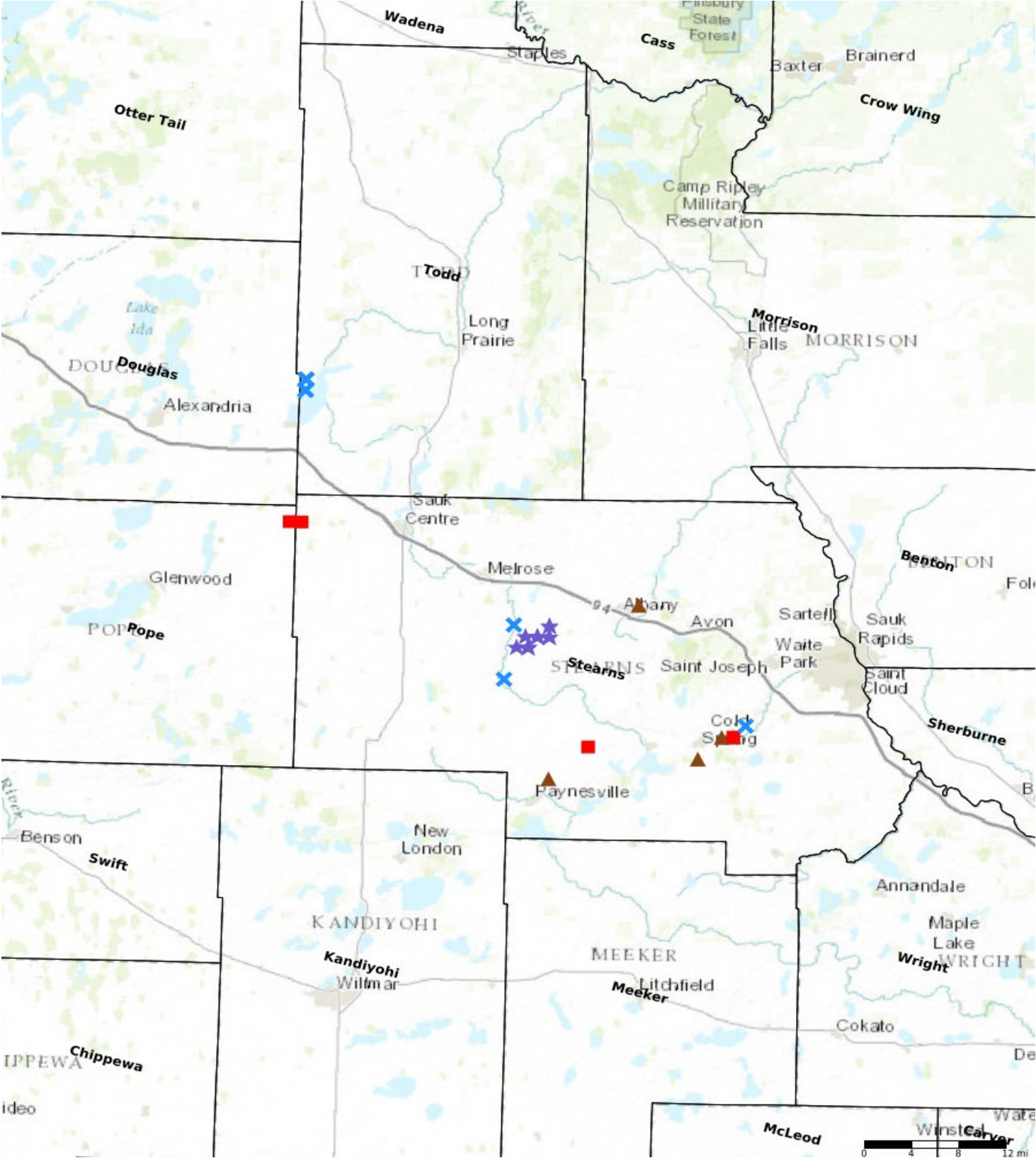
Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12329218	20	\$40,000	No
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12330213	20	\$40,000	No

TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12329218	40	\$100,000	No
TBD WMA	Stearns	12636212	400	\$1,800,000	Yes
Partners WMA	Stearns	12232203	40	\$180,000	No
TBD WPA	Stearns	12635207	388	\$1,350,000	Yes
TBD WMA/AMA	Stearns	12531214	85	\$3,000,000	No

Protect Parcels with Buildings

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

Parcel Map



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

Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program

Phase 5



Request \$16,673,200

Leverage \$2,364,600

Acres protected 2,320

Conservation easements 1150

Protect in Fee w/PILT Liability 150

Protect in Fee w/o PILT Liability 450

Acres restored 570

For more information:

Steve Zeece III

Water Resources Manager
Sauk River Watershed District
642 Lincoln Road
Sauk Centre, MN 56378
Office: 320-352-2231
Direct: 320-527-1049
Steve@srwdmn.org

In Phase 5 of our successful program, we seek to protect, restore and enhance more of the critical wildlife habitat and freshwater resources in the Sauk River Watershed (SRW).

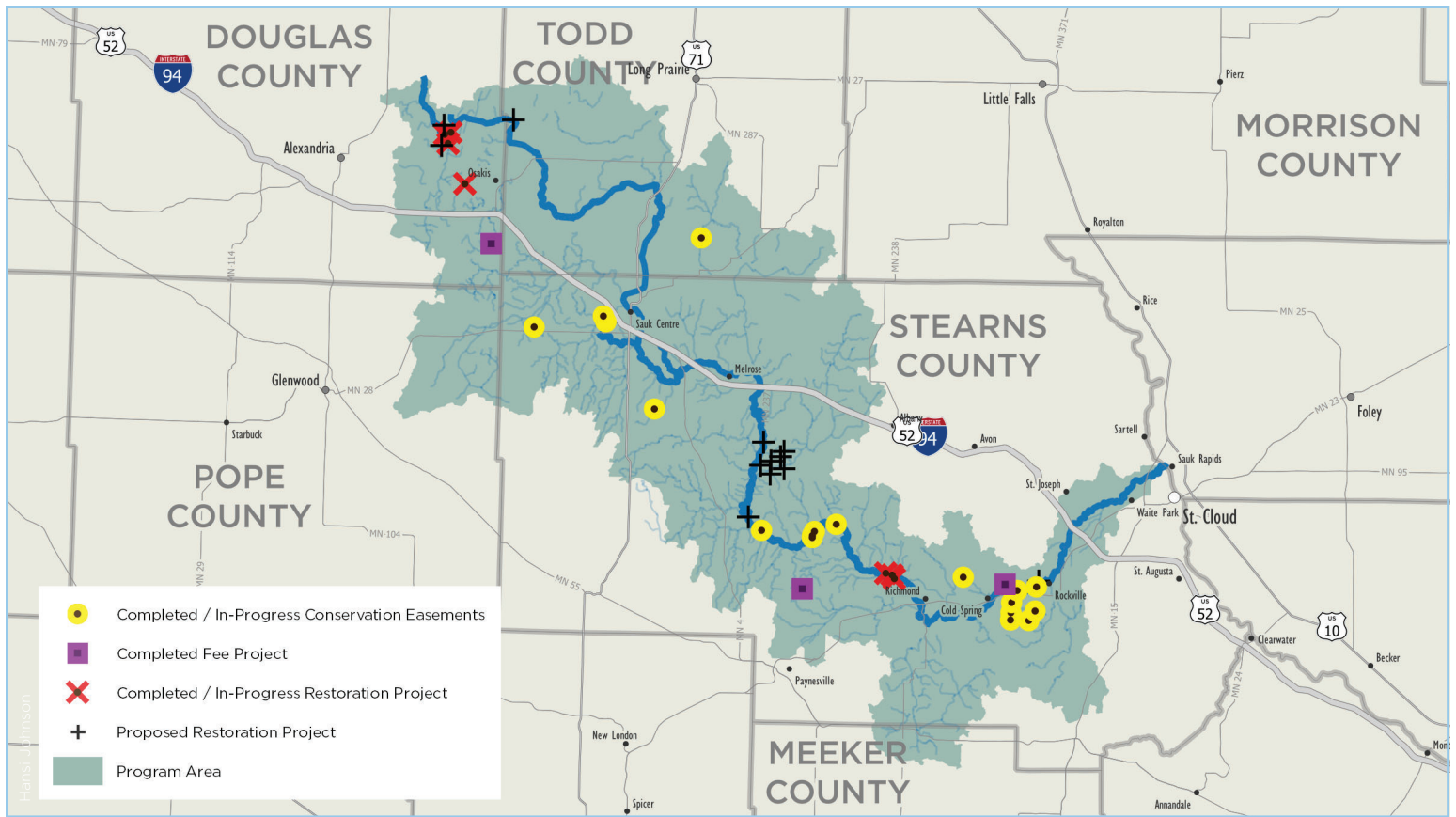
This program targets the protection and restoration / enhancement of wetlands, stream corridors, and associated uplands, which provide a multitude of ecosystem services. We will target high quality critical habitats to create large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat. As an additional benefit, this work will protect and improve water quality in the Sauk River, which is a designated canoe route and an important drinking water source.

How Does the Program Support State Goals?

This program, which targets protection and restoration of wetland/upland complexes, native prairies, and expiring CRP lands, will improve regional resiliency, stabilize Species in Greatest Conservation Need, and enhance ecosystem services. These are primary strategies in the MN DNR's Strategic Conservation Agenda, the Statewide Wildlife Action Plan, and OHF's: A 25-year Framework.

What Are the Outcomes?

- Ensure long-term health and viability of wildlife by permanently protecting and restoring habitats and increasing habitat connectivity.
- Increase opportunities for fishing, hunting, and observation of several Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).
- Improve groundwater and surface water quality.



What has Been Accomplished to Date in the Program?

In Progress (Phases 1, 2, 3, 4):

To date, 13 conservation easements have been completed protecting 888 acres of habitat and over 8.8 miles of shoreline; 665 acres have also been protected in fee. Restoration/enhancement of 196 acres of wetland, forest, and prairie habitats have been completed with additional acres currently underway.

The Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program has generated considerable interest among landowners in protecting these places. **Collectively, private landowners have contributed over \$500,000 in easement value as leverage, which contributes to the \$2 million in leverage realized by the partnership.**

Supporting Partners:





MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

A Decision Support Tool for Prioritizing Conservation Easement Opportunities

The Minnesota Land Trust often employs within its conservation program areas an RFP (Request for Proposals) model to both identify high-quality projects and introduce a level of competition into the easement acquisition process. Below, we briefly discuss how the system works and the framework put in place to sort the varied opportunities that come before us.

How the Ranking System Works

The parcel ranking framework employed through the Minnesota Land Trust's RFP process is intended as a **decision support tool** to aid in identifying, among the slate of landowners submitting bids for conservation easements, the most ecologically significant opportunities for the price. Using this framework, the Land Trust and its partners use an array of weighted data sets tailored to the specific circumstances inherent in a program area to identify those worthy of consideration.

It is important to note that this parcel ranking framework enables the Land Trust to rank projects *relative* to one another. That's important to do, but it's also important to understand how a project (or suite of projects) relates to the ideal situation (i.e., a project that is of exceptional size, condition and superb landscape context). If, for example, an RFP generated 20 proposals in a program area, the framework would effectively sift among them and identify the relatively good from those relatively bad. However, this information alone would not determine whether any of those parcels were of sufficient quality to pursue for protection (all may be of insufficient quality to warrant expenditure of funds). To solve this problem and make sure ranked projects are high priorities for conservation, we step back and evaluate them relative to the ideal - i.e., is each project among the best opportunities for conservation we can expect to find in the program area?

As part of its proposals to LSOHC, the Land Trust included easement sign-up criteria that laid out at a general level the framework utilized by the organization. Below is a more detailed description of the process the Land Trust utilizes in ranking potential parcels relative to one another, and identifying those with which a conservation easement will be pursued. We also include a ranking form illustrating the representative weighting applied to each criteria. These weightings will be refined as we move forward in applying this approach in each program area.

The Framework

We evaluate potential projects based on two primary factors: ecological significance and cost. Both are assessed independent of one another.

Factor 1: Ecological Significance

The Ecological Significance score is determined by looking at 3 subfactors, each weighted equally (as a default). Each of these constitutes 1/3 of the total ecological significance score.

Subfactors:

- **Size or Quantity** – the area of the parcel to be protected (how big is it?), length of shoreline, etc. The bigger the better.
- **Condition or Quality** – the condition of the natural communities and/or target species found on a parcel. The higher quality the better.
- **Landscape Context** – what’s around the parcel, both ecologically and from a protected status standpoint. The more ecologically intact the surrounding landscape the better; the extent to which a parcel builds off of other protected lands to form complexes or corridors, the better.

Note that we have the ability to emphasize one subfactor over another if the specific circumstances warrant it, but we begin with a default standard at the onset. At present, all of our geographies are using the default standard.

Indicators:

A suite of weighted indicators is used to score each parcel relative to each of the above subfactors. Indicators are selected based on their ability to effectively inform the scoring of parcels relative to each of the respective subfactors. Weightings for each criterion are assessed and vetted to ensure that a set of indicators for each subfactor produces meaningful results, then applied across each of the proposed parcels. Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Data sets used for this purpose must offer wall-to-wall coverage across the program area to ensure that bias for or against parcels does not creep into the equation. Where gaps in such coverages exist, we attempt to fill them in to the extent feasible (via field inventory, etc.). Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Factor 2: Cost

Cost is a second major factor used in our consideration of parcels. Although ecological significance is *the* primary factor in determining the merits of a project, our RFP programs also strive to make the greatest conservation impact with the most efficient use of State funds. As such, we look at the overall cost of each project relative to its ecological significance; we also ask landowners to consider donating all or some of their easement value to the cause and to better position their proposals. Many landowners participate in that fashion.

Cost, as a primary factor, is assessed independently of the ecological factors. Given equal ecological significance, a project of lower cost will be elevated over those of higher cost in the ranking. That said, exceptionally high quality projects are likely to be pursued even if no or modest landowner donation is put forward. Alternatively, there are projects offered as full donations that are not moved forward because their ecological significance is not acceptable. The degree to which cost factors into the ranking of parcels relative to one another is made on a case-by-case basis.

SRW PROTECTION & RESTORATION PROGRAM Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet					
		COUNTY			
100 Pts	ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE				
Weighting Factor	Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)				
	a) Size: Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)				
	a) Habitat Quality: Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)				
	b) Imperiled Species: Occurrence of Documented Rare Feature on Parcel				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Landscape Context (34 points)				
	Current Status (30 points)				
	a) Protection Context (15 points)				
	i. Size of Contiguous Protected Lands				
	ii. Amount of Protected Lands within 3 miles of Property				
	: Protected Land within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)				
	: Protected Land 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)				
	b) Ecological Context (15 points)	0	0	0	0
	i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat				
	ii. Amount of Ecological Habitat within 3 miles of Property				
	: Ecological Habitat within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)				
	: Ecological Habitat 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)				
	Future Potential (4 points)				
	a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)				
	b) UMB Multiple Benefits Module Score (2 pts)				
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS	0	0	0	0

SAUK RIVER WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM

Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet – Scoring and Criteria

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Scoring: Parcels are scored based as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District

Stearns County SWCD
110 2nd Street South – Suite 128
Waite Park, MN 56387

Tel. (320) 251-7800 ext. 3
Fax (855) 205-6907
www.StearnsCountySWCD.net

May 16, 2023

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Steve Zeece III
642 Lincoln Rd.
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2025/ML 2024 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration,
Phase 5

Dear Steve Zeece III,

On behalf of the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), I would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands, stream corridors, and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous game and non-game species, including many threatened and endangered species. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will benefit the quality of the Sauk River, a state designated canoe route and important drinking water source.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as all our communities' natural resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Dennis J. Fuchs
Administrator



May 26th, 2023

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Steve Zeece III
642 Lincoln Rd.
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2025/ML 2024 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 5

Dear Steve Zeece III,

On behalf of Todd Soil and Water Conservation District, I would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal.

The wetlands, stream corridors, and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous game and non-game species, including many threatened and endangered species. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will improve the quality of the Sauk River, a state designated canoe route and important drinking water source.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, occurring within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Changes in proximal habitat alter the balance and succession of living species and can result in monocultures often attracting invasives and other less desirable populations. When wetland ecosystems are removed or knocked out of balance, water quality declines, water storage and soil holding capacity are reduced, and soil and aquatic zones de-stabilize, three key concerns affecting the mission of our district.

We are in full support of the Sauk River Watershed District's grant proposal for these reasons. This project, by encouraging and protecting critical land areas through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will benefit wildlife as well as our own living communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Deja C. Anton
Todd Soil and water Conservation District
Long Prairie, MN



**DOUGLAS SOIL AND WATER
CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

900 Robert Street

Suite 102

Alexandria, Minnesota 56308

Telephone (320) 763-3191

**MINNESOTA
SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

May 17th, 2023

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Steve Zeece III
642 Lincoln Rd.
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2025/ML 2024 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 5

Dear Steve Zeece III,

On behalf of Douglas Soil and Water Conservation District, I would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore, and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands, stream corridors, and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore, and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous game and non-game species, including many threatened and endangered species. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will benefit the quality of the Sauk River, a state designated canoe route and important drinking water source.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, which has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

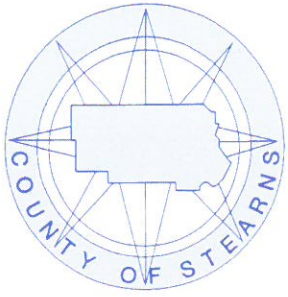
We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,



Jerry Haggemiller
District Coordinator



COUNTY OF STEARNS

Parks Department

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

May 19th, 2023

Sauk River Watershed District
Attn. Steve Zeece III
642 Lincoln Rd.
Sauk Centre, MN 56378

RE: FY 2025/ML 2024 Outdoor Heritage Fund - Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 5

Dear Steve Zeece III,

On behalf of the Stearns County Parks Department, I would like to offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands, stream corridors, and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous game and non-game species, including many threatened and endangered species. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will benefit the quality of the Sauk River, a state designated canoe route and important drinking water source.

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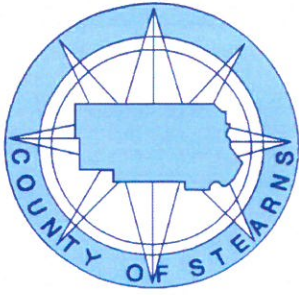
We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as our community.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support.

Sincerely,

Ben Anderson

Parks Director
Stearns County Parks



COUNTY OF STEARNS

Environmental Services Department

Stearns County Service Center • 3301 County Road 138 • Waite Park, MN 56387
320-656-3613 • Fax 320-656-6484 • 1-800-450-0852

May 17, 2023

SAUK RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT
ATTN: STEVE ZEECE III
642 LINCOLN RD
SAUK CENTRE MN 56378

RE: FY2025/ML 2024 Outdoor Heritage Fund – Sauk River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration, Phase 5

Dear Steve Zeece III,

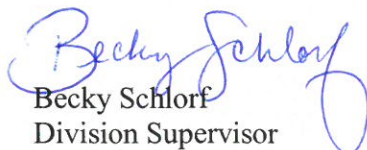
On behalf of the Stearns County Environmental Services Department, I offer our support for the Sauk River Watershed District's Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal. This proposal will protect, restore and enhance lands within the Sauk River watershed, which are identified as important for both terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitat.

The wetlands, stream corridors, and adjacent uplands that this proposal will protect, restore and enhance will provide vital aquatic and terrestrial habitat to numerous game and non-game species, including many threatened and endangered species. It will also benefit recreation throughout the watershed, including fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and other outdoor activities. Additionally, this program will benefit the quality of the Sauk River, a state designated canoe route and important drinking water source.

The amount of land use change, specifically with wetland loss, that has occurred within the watershed has already resulted in a tremendous loss of habitat. Protecting and restoring these habitats is vital for wildlife, maintaining adequate recreational opportunities, and sustaining healthy communities within the Sauk River watershed.

We are in full support of this project. This project, by protecting critical land through permanent conservation easement, fee land acquisition, and restoration, will improve ecosystem services to benefit wildlife as well as our community.

Sincerely,


Becky Schlorf
Division Supervisor