



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Owámniyomni Native Landscape & River Restoration (St. Anthony Falls)
ML 2024 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/23/2023

Proposal Title: Owámniyomni Native Landscape & River Restoration (St. Anthony Falls)

Funds Requested: \$6,000,000

Confirmed Leverage Funds: \$3,230,000

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Kjersti Duval

Title: Project Director

Organization: Friends of the Falls

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Location Information

County Location(s): Hennepin.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Metro / Urban

Activity types:

- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

To transform vacant, inaccessible riverfront land around Minneapolis's Upper Lock into a place of environmental and cultural healing, restoration, education, and connection rooted in two principles: Mní Wičóni (water is life) and Mitakuye Owas'in (we are all relatives). By centering a Dakota way of life and values, this place will demonstrate how to care for the land and water as relatives. Dakota people working with the land and water that the Dakota originated from (Mní Sota) will activate healing for our community and the many relatives who will grow to thrive at Owámniyomni (St. Anthony Falls).

Design and Scope of Work

The site has been used to support US Army Corps operations at the Upper Lock since 1963, and features a parking lot, two buildings, a curb-and-gutter road, and a gravel slope. The scope will include demolition of buildings and hardscapes, environmental hazard removal (if any), grading and earthwork, utility relocation, restoration of indigenous landscape, and the reintroduction of active, flowing, water (Owámniyomni means "turbulent water").

Restoration emerged as the priority through engagement. Early on, stakeholders from over two dozen local organizations embraced transformative change at the Falls. Participants acknowledged that Owámniyomni is sacred to the Dakota, and in 2020, with guidance from NACDI, a Native Partnership Council (NPC) formed to steer the process from an Indigenous perspective, and we engaged the general public through a series of Community Conversations. All of these efforts led to a consensus priority to "restore a story disrupted" on this site, both environmentally and culturally.

We will restore the northerly 2 of the 3 tracts depicted on our parcel map (totaling 3 acres) at the Upper Lock at St. Anthony Falls in downtown Minneapolis. Tract 3 is a future phase.

Timing is important. We anticipate completing design and engineering in 2025, and undertaking the restoration work in 2026-27, with construction timing coordinated with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board's implementation of the abutting park property, Water Works Phase 2.

The project will restore an industrialized section of the Minneapolis Central Riverfront. The original habitat of the site was oak savanna mixed with prairie. Based on the information we have, the habitat abutted the river all the way to the shore and the site did not host river floodplain. Savanna (or oak barrens) was a transitional habitat between hardwood forests and prairie. The prairie habitat in MN is less than 1% remaining, but the oak savanna is less than 1/10 of a % remaining. Both habitats are lacking. This would provide an island of native biodiversity in the metro/urban setting.

From an Indigenous perspective, letting the earth go back to its natural form is what will preserve all of us. Even when natural systems have been gone for a long time, as they have been on this site, they will come back. We will support and sustain the restoration of this place to fulfill its role as a good relative to migratory song and water birds, fish and other aquatic species, pollinators, and native mussels.

Having this habitat as a refuge for migrating wildlife provides needed connectivity in addition to expanding the quality of habitat along the corridor of the river, with particular value to native grassland birds, and as a migratory corridor benefiting those species that need that open habitat to refuel and rest.

Stewardship of the site transforms its future, which, without intervention, has a high potential to become degraded

over time from lack of proper management. Already, the Corps has ceased to maintain the site at the level they did while operating. Deferred maintenance will continue to take its toll.

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

The project will address habitat fragmentation in the urban area of Minneapolis along the Mississippi River, and will introduce new habitat corridor connectivity.

The team has identified 80 species of greatest conservation need in Appendix B of the MN CWCS as potentially direct beneficiaries, in addition to nearly every migratory bird utilizing the Mississippi Flyway.

In general, the relatives who will especially benefit include:

--Migratory song and water birds: the spillway would be a foraging site for numerous migrating birds including the warblers that need to refuel during migration. The waterway (former mill race) will provide adequate insect population for foraging warblers; an envisioned new cascade and narrow spillway stream may provide appropriate habitat for the Louisiana Waterthrush, a rare species that uses small streams and seepages for habitat. Minnows and small fish would provide stopover forage for mergansers and wading birds species like Great Blue Heron, Night-herons, and Great Egret, whose presence are of interest to the recreating public.

--Fish Species – reintroducing flow to the narrow waterway abutting the site would provide refuge and brood-rearing habitat for species like native cyprinids (minnows) and is likely to bump biodiversity. The buffering habitat around the waterways will provide nectar sources for native bees and pollinators as well as provide those cultural resources to indigenous population.

--Pollinators - the site is within the range and less than ½ mile from USFWS delineated High Potential Zone for the federally endangered Rusty-patch Bumblebee. Providing the appropriate habitat conditions (prairie/savanna) creates a high potential refuge for them. Similarly, Monarch Butterfly is on the candidate list for ESA and providing this site as a sanctuary will benefit them as both a brooding and migratory stopover site.

--Native Mussels – the Mississippi is a biodiversity hotspot for native pearly mussels. The abutting spillway has potential for species that prefer more of a small river/creek system. Species with State listing or species of greatest conservation need that would potentially benefit include the Mucket, Ellipse, Black Sandshell, Fawnsfoot, Hickorynut, Round Pigtoe and others. The Mississippi is also home to federally endangered species like the Sheepnose, which could also benefit.

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

The site shares a boundary with Water Works Park Phase II (a Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board project). It is the shared intent of Friends of the Falls and the MPRB to coordinate on design and construction activities such that (1) any grading or underground work such as utility relocation or archaeological work can be coordinated, (2) trail connectivity and design can be seamlessly planned and implemented such that people don't perceive a "line" at the property boundary between the two, (3) the construction activities of one project are not disruptive to the operations of the other, and (4) cost efficiencies of being under construction at the same time can be enjoyed by both projects. Our intent is to be under construction in 2026-27.

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

The original habitat of oak savanna mixed with prairie that would be restored to the site is very scarce. Less than a tenth of one percent of this habitat remains in Minnesota. It is especially rare within the metro/urban context. Having this habitat as a refuge for migrating wildlife provides needed connectivity along the Mississippi River corridor, benefiting migrating species that need that open habitat to refuel and rest, in addition to expanding the quality of habitat for resident species along the corridor of the river, with particular value to native grassland birds.

In addition to the avian and terrestrial beneficiaries, the project will restore flowing water to the site, which could serve as an additional beneficiary to aquatic species and those species that depend on the presence of living, flowing, water and littoral conditions to thrive. Restoration of shoreline, and restoring the presence of shallow flowing water, creates the opportunity for increased biodiversity due to the intensity of resources that those conditions provide. In a river that has been largely engineered and channelized, the presence of a calmer, shallower channel has high habitat and resource value for many relatives.

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

- National Fish Habitat Action Plan
- Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Projects Joint Ventures Plan

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.

The restoration will contribute to mitigating impacts of climate change by increasing the site's ability to sequester carbon. We will replace paved surfaces and buildings with dense plant material. This same change will reduce and mitigate storm event runoff, which will become increasingly important should climate change bring more frequent and more intense storm events. This is a significant factor in protecting the river water quality.

The project will also expand knowledge about how to care for land and water as relatives coping with climate change. More people will have more opportunities to learn traditional ecological knowledge and practices, benefitting Minnesota fish and wildlife habitat. The project will benefit policymakers and agencies seeking to expand their knowledge about less energy-intensive indigenous land management outcomes, and inspire broader public commitment and action to protect the indigenous Mississippi River landscape and the aquatic, terrestrial, and avian species who depend on it.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Metro / Urban

- Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi, and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain)

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 project will be a permanent restoration providing significant conservation outcomes for up to 80 species of greatest conservation need, as well as providing a needed oasis for species migrating along the Mississippi Flyway

through the resource-scarce metropolitan urban region. It is important to undertake at this time to ensure (1) timely improvement of the land once conveyed by the federal government, and (2) substantial and important benefits of coordinating with the neighboring park project (Water Works Phase 2) during both projects' engineering, design and construction phases.

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *Direct measurable impacts of the restoration will include a reduction in hardscape acreage in the metropolitan region, and an equivalent increase in land and shoreline restoration and habitat within the metropolitan urban region along a critical ecological infrastructure: the Mississippi Flyway. We expect to observe greater biodiversity on the site, and greater use of the site by both resident and (importantly) migrating species. These outcomes will be measurable over time. There is the potential for citizen science to take place here based on an expression of interest from the Science Museum. Other agencies (DNR, MPRB) could also partner.*

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

- Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund
- Environment and Natural Resource Trust Fund

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.

The request is not supplanting any other source of funding.

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

The project envisions the natural world itself as the most important active steward, including all relatives: animals, birds, fish, people, insects, water, air, plants. By cultivating an indigenous landscape and allowing water to flow on the site again, the River will nurture a resilient landscape that all relatives will interact with and caretakers will sustain as part of the ongoing mission of Friends of the Falls.

Once the restoration is complete, Friends of the Falls is committed to ensuring that operations and maintenance activities are resourced thereafter. This will be achieved through staffing, volunteers, and partnerships. Stewards and caretakers of the site will also consider a coordinated maintenance agreement proposed by the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board.

There is an intent to teach on the site, expanding knowledge about water, about the plant and animal nations, and about how to be a good relative. The project will serve as intercessor between the land, water, and people (the city, the community):

- Tribal members and experts in indigenous land and water stewardship will be engaged to guide ongoing land management
- Volunteer groups will participate in seasonal management activities, learning by doing
- Other programs will be created, funded, and sustained

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

Guided by deep community engagement and recognizing the site’s incredible significance to Dakota history and culture, the vision for The Falls Initiative has been powerfully transformed by Dakota leadership and centering Dakota voices; and Friends of the Falls has been equally transformed in the process.

To support, inform, and ultimately shape the future direction of the organization and of Owámniyomni, the Friends took important steps to elevate Dakota leadership and Dakota voices by:

- 1) Forming a Native Partnership Council to guide project design and exploration.
- 2) Transitioning to a Native-majority board of directors.
- 3) Hiring Shelley Buck, a Dakota tribal member from the Prairie Island Indian Community as President.
- 4) Initiating conversations with the four Dakota Tribal Nations in Mní Sóta about the future of the site.

The Native Partnership Council set a clear direction for the project, centering on the mission of environmental and cultural restoration for all relatives, and establishing several guiding principles, including that Water is Life. The project will center and build capacity for traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous land management practices, and will be a place where anyone, regardless of means or any other potential barrier, can enjoy, experience, and learn from the natural world and the wildlife we can encounter there.

Owámniyomni is a highly accessible place in downtown Minneapolis, and can be reached on foot, or by bike, transit, or vehicle. The landscape will be accessible to all, providing access to an indigenous landscape for Minneapolis residents, visitors to the River, urban Indians, and tribal members alike.

As the work unfolds, the Friends of the Falls remains committed to centering Dakota voices in all aspects of the project, from design and construction through ongoing operations and maintenance. It will be a place for all, because we are all relatives.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

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?

- Other : Mississippi National River Recreation Area (national) and Central Riverfront Regional Park (regional park)

Land Use

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

No

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

No

Other OHF Appropriation Awards

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

No

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Engineering	October 2025
Design	March 2026
Bid	April 2026
Construction	June 2027

Budget

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	-	-	-	-
Contracts	\$5,350,000	\$9,200,000	2.2 mil ENRTF, 7 mil federal (TBD)	\$14,550,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$650,000	\$4,450,000	Grants & contributions	\$5,100,000
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$6,000,000	\$13,650,000	-	\$19,650,000

Amount of Request: \$6,000,000

Amount of Leverage: \$13,650,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 227.5%

DSS + Personnel: -

As a % of the total request: 0.0%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
\$13,650,000	\$3,230,000	23.66%	\$10,420,000	76.34%

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

2.2 mil ENRTF secured. \$1 mil FOF funds secured and \$30k individual pledge secured (private fundraising). Pursuit: \$7 mil federal appropriation in 2025, \$2.5 mil Bush Foundation grant under consideration (private fundraising), \$6.8 mil other private fundraising through 2026. Total project will be 50/50 public/private.

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?

If we received only 50% of the request, and lacked other sources to fill the gap, we'd limit the area of restoration to Tract 2, south of the Stone Arch Bridge. Tract 1, necessitating expensive site preparation activities such as demolition, utility relocation and earthwork, would become a future phase.

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

No personnel or DSS expenses are requested to be funded.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

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

If we received only 30% of the request, and lacked other sources to fill the gap, we would continue fundraising for the project to ensure it is a project of sufficient scale to merit a bid.

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

No personnel or DSS expenses are requested to be funded.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

The contracts line includes the bid process and General Contractor (including the costs of construction), project management, and indigenous landscape design and management capacity building. These contract costs are informed by two cost estimates by two separate estimators, completed in 2022 and 2023.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

- Design/Engineering

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

No

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds?

December 2025

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	5	5
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	5	5

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$6,000,000	\$6,000,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$6,000,000	\$6,000,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	5	0	0	0	0	5
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	0	0	0	0	5

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	\$6,000,000	-	-	-	-	\$6,000,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$6,000,000	-	-	-	-	\$6,000,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,200,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	\$1,200,000	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Mississippi River (3/4 of one mile)

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

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

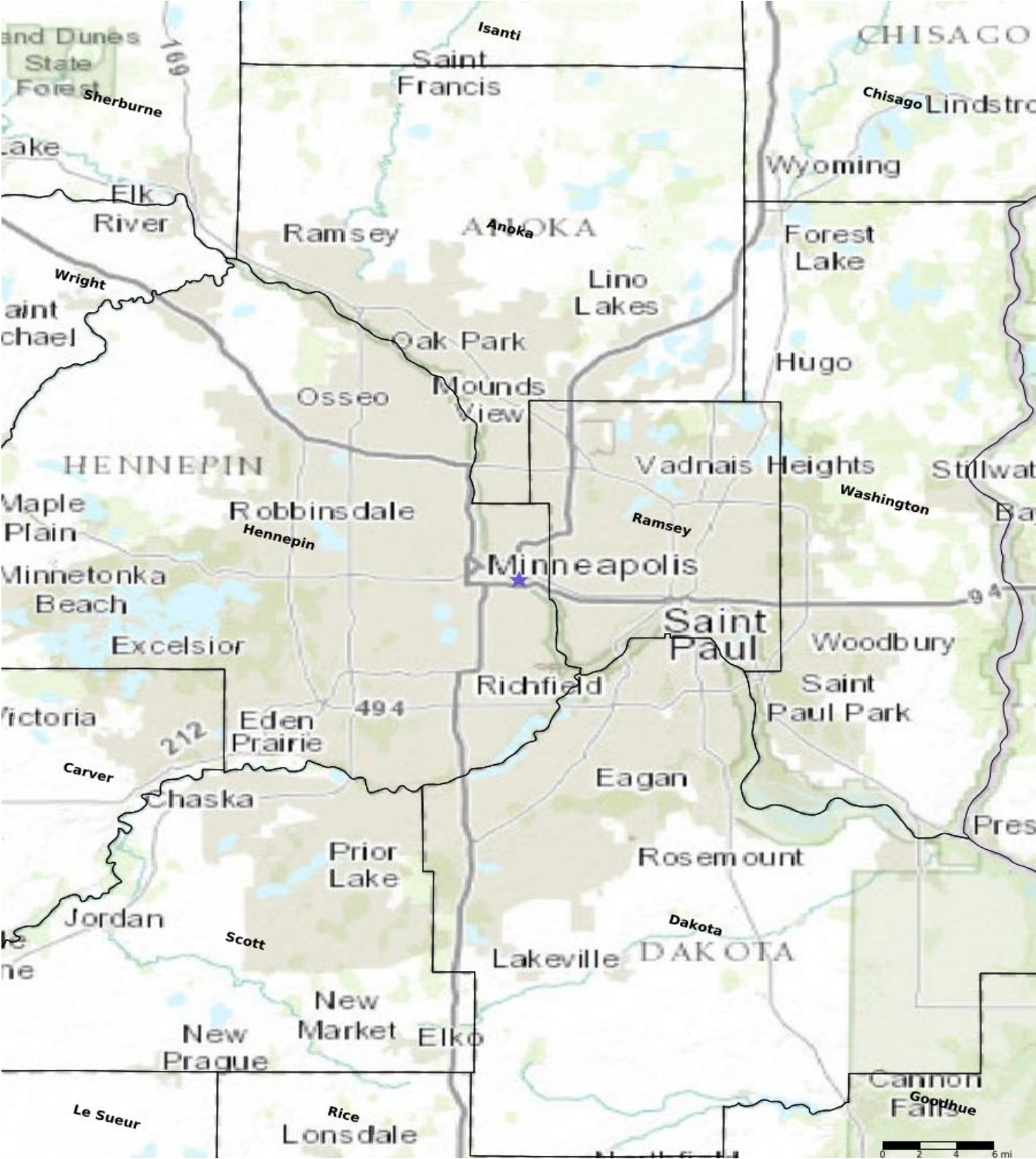
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

The parcels to be conveyed are federally owned land at the Upper Lock at St. Anthony Falls, defined in Hennepin County Property Information as PID 2302924430005, or Tract 1 (land only, not the Lock structure); PID 2302924430004, or Tract 2; and PID 2302924430039, or Tract 3. This funding request pertains only to Tracts 1 and 2 (Tract 3 is a future phase). These parcels have been part of Army Corps operations at the Upper and Lower Lock since 1963, and are characterized by industrial features. After commercial navigation was suspended, the Corps launched a disposition study. Responding to community consensus that the site be repurposed in the public interest, Congress directed conveyance of land at the Upper Lock (but not the Lock itself) to the City or its designee (WRDA 2020). The three parcels comprise 3/4 of a mile of shoreline in downtown Minneapolis, within MNRRA and the Central Riverfront Regional Park, and abut MPRB's Water Works Park and Mill Ruins Park. There is additional federally owned shoreline between Tract 3 and the 35W bridge which is also being studied for disposition, presenting a future opportunity to extend shoreline restoration further downstream. The three parcels comprise 5 acres of shoreline property along the nationally significant Mississippi Flyway, providing a critical resource for migrating species through the metropolitan urban region. The project also honors the cultural significance of Owámniyomni (the Falls), a sacred Dakota site associated with Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires) and home to Unktehi, a River spirit.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Tract 2, PID 2302924430004	Hennepin	02924225	1	\$7,575,000	Yes
Tract 1, PID 2302924430005	Hennepin	02924225	2	\$12,075,000	Yes

Parcel Map



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

Landscape & Shoreline Restoration at *Owámniyomni* (St. Anthony Falls), Looking Downstream



In this illustration, we see an accessible trail meandering through the restored indigenous landscape and shoreline of the Mississippi River at the Minneapolis Central Riverfront. Visitors pass by migrating Monarch butterflies and pass below flocks of birds above as they approach the shoreline where *Wita Wanagi* (Spirit Island) was once visible across the water. As visitors look out across the water, they learn more about the indigenous history of this place from interpretive signage placed on the site.

Owámniyomni Native Landscape & River Restoration Parcel Map (St. Anthony Falls)



The parcel map depicts three tracts. Tract 1 is Hennepin County Parcel ID #2302924430005, and it includes the Upper Lock at St. Anthony Falls, and lands associated with it. Tract 2 is Hennepin County Parcel ID #2302924430004, which abuts Tract 1 below the Falls and features accessible shoreline, unhindered by Lock structures. Tract 3 is Hennepin County Parcel ID #2302924430039, which is shoreline property south of the lock just below the Guthrie Theater on the bluff above. The Stone Arch Bridge crosses overhead as the divider between Tract 1 and Tract 2. Our proposal is focused on Tract 1 and Tract 2, with Tract 3 on the horizon as a future phase.