



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Itasca County Memorial Forest Project
Laws of Minnesota 2025 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/09/2025

Project Title: Itasca County Memorial Forest Project

Funds Recommended: \$2,720,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2025, Ch. 36, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 3(b)

Appropriation Language: \$2,720,000 the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Itasca County to acquire priority forest habitat lands in fee as county forests.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Kory Cease

Title: Itasca County Land Commissioner

Organization: Itasca County Land Department

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Location Information

County Location(s): Itasca.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

This project serves to protect 2,720 acres of forest habitats within Minnesota's public forests through fee title acquisition of private forest land surrounded by State, County and Federal forest lands. Successful efforts: 1) ensure this tract of forested land remains intact and prevents potential forest habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation; 2) greatly increase management efficiencies of surrounding public forest lands; and 3) address critical forest and recreational user access. Grant funding will provide for public management by Itasca County. Itasca County has forest management policies in place to protect this habitat in perpetuity.

Design and Scope of Work

Over the past five years, Itasca County has implemented a multi-phase land protection project with Boundary Company in Moose Park and Nore Townships. In 2019, the county secured a public easement to gain access to landlocked public and protected private forest land. A three-phase acquisition project then began with Phase 1 in 2021 through the purchase of 560 acres of Boundary Company land. Phase 2 was implemented in 2023 with the purchase of 1,148 acres of land. Phase 1 and 2 were both accomplished with county funding sources. Phase 3, would be implemented through this proposal. Itasca County proposes the strategic acquisition of the remaining 2,720 acres of Boundary Company land. These conservation lands are located within Itasca County's Memorial Forest program and are managed for sustainable natural resource management purposes based on habitat principles and professional forestry. They are located within the Loucks-Danyluk Memorial Forest, which was designated in 1946 in honor of fallen soldiers Emmet Loucks and Franklin Danyluk, who died in active service during World War II.

The proposed protection of these forest lands will expand/connect core habitats and maintain unique or rare habitats and native plant communities. Lands within the proposal include critical habitat, support climate adaptations/resiliency, protect waters, expand public access, and support local timber and recreation-based economies. Itasca County has also intentionally selected these parcels for the consolidation of and adjacency to county-managed lands, securing and improving public access, and securing and improving forest management access. Itasca County's forest management program has been third-party certified through the Forest Stewardship Council since 2005 to ensure that the lands are managed in an ecologically, socially and economically responsible manner. While sustainable forest harvesting is an important tool in managing forests, additional enhancement projects will also maximize the diversity and productivity of these habitats for both wildlife and people. Itasca County plans to develop and add the proposal area to its network of Ruffed Grouse Management Areas in partnership with the Ruffed Grouse Society.

Specific habitat preserved in this proposal includes upland areas (60%) comprised of Northern Mesic Hardwood Forest communities of different age classes, which are home to an array of game and non-game wildlife species such as wolves, bobcats, fisher, martens, owls, bears, deer, grouses and woodcocks. There are also lowland areas (40%) of Forested Rich Peatland communities interspersed with shallow marshes and wetlands, open water ponds, sphagnum seepages and bogs, seasonal pools, headwater river flowages and conifer peatland swamps. These are beneficial to multiple waterfowl species, eagles, muskrats, mink, otters, beavers, frogs, turtles, and songbirds. The property contains large contiguous blocks of forest habitat with closed canopies, substantial shrub cover, snags and woody debris, as well as shrubland or young open forest habitat mixed with tall shrubs, saplings, and herbaceous cover adjacent to overstory hardwoods.

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

This proposal involves private lands that haven't been surveyed for rare species. Transitioning these lands into public ownership would allow the land to be included in the Minnesota County Biological Survey. This would promote survey for the following rare species, which have been found in Northwest Itasca County on similar forest habitat complexes of the proposal.

The trumpeter swan, a special concern species, has been observed in the proposed area. It uses the open water habitats such as the beaver ponds (84 acres) and the Popple River flowage in the project area for breeding and nesting. The goblin fern, a threatened species, requires the general habitat composition, structure, and soil conditions typical of Northern Rich Mesic/ Northern Mesic Hardwood Forest communities as found within the proposal in the thick accumulated duff layers where the soils are not waterlogged. The four-toed salamander, a special concern species, can be found in mature upland deciduous or mixed forests interspersed with sphagnum seepages and bogs, isolated shallow marshes and wetlands, vernal ponds, or other fish-free habitats. The northern goshawk, a special concern species, requires large contiguous patches of closed canopy forest habitat with substantial shrub cover, large amounts of snags and woody debris, and open flight paths between the canopy and understory layers. The golden-winged warbler, a species of greatest conservation need, relies on shrubland or young open forest habitat with a mix of tall shrubs and saplings interspersed with small areas of herbaceous cover adjacent to intermittent overstory deciduous trees. The white adder's mouth orchid, a special concern species, prefers forest rich peatland swamps, as found within the proposal. These include sphagnum seepages, bogs or mossy hummocks over coarse woody debris at the margins of stream channels or peatlands.

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

This project is supported by local governments and private landowners. However, urgency exists as localized pressure is increasing to convert the land to non-habitat uses on privately owned lands. Itasca County will begin the fair-market appraisal in fall 2024, paid for by county funds. If this proposal is funded by OHF, one bulk purchase would be completed once funding becomes available in July 2025. Itasca County has assisted or purchased 1708 acres from Boundary Company in two separate previous transactions.

In the past 10 years, over 1680 acres have already been parceled and sold to private landowners within the area of this project by the current landowner. At this time, there is a willing seller, and there will be significant savings if the land is purchased as soon as possible. This project cannot be scaled without significantly jeopardizing land availability and increasing costs.

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

The proposal lies within a 12,700-acre contiguous habitat complex in Nore and northern Moose Park Townships of Itasca County. It contains a mosaic of state, tax-forfeited, federal, and UPM Blandin (protected with conservation easements) ownership, with large contiguous blocks of other private ownership. Parcelization and fragmentation of the habitat complexes in large private ownership through the sale of smaller land parcels have already begun in the vicinity of the proposal area. This proposal would help preserve the existing habitat from further fragmentation. The proposal contains the largest contiguous block of unprotected private industrial ownership in this habitat complex and would expand the complex of protected forest and wetland habitat by approximately three miles. Critical habitat complexes in the proposal area can be maintained by preserving habitat corridors, hardwood forest complexes, riparian zones, and wetland buffers in the proposal and adjacent existing protected lands.

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

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

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

Habitat resilience will be accomplished by preserving habitat diversity, structure, and continuity and by protecting natural wetlands, water bodies, and carbon-storing lands from development for public benefit. Maintaining biodiversity and a diversity of habitat conditions will be addressed through forest habitat composition goals that foster species biodiversity, forest, patch sizes, and age class structure. Long-term management for a diversity of successional stages, stand structures, and species assemblies will also serve to protect habitat continuity. The natural climate strategy as a part of this proposal has effectively identified one of the most critical properties in private ownership for protection. Without protection against parcelization and fragmentation, private development and land uses would threaten the unique quality and continuity of the wildlife habitat, wetlands, and waters of these proposed lands for acquisition.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Northern Forest

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

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ This project will permanently protect 2,720 acres of northern forest and riparian habitat, including wetlands, ponds, brushland, and streams. All northern forest parcels included in this proposal are at high risk of parcelization, fragmentation, and development. The strategic protection of these parcels will enhance forest habitat connectivity, increase access for public recreation and forest management, create forest management efficiencies, and protect shoreland and watershed critical habitat in the headwater flowages of the Popple River. The parcels will be acquired to provide resilient forest ecosystems for forest wildlife species.

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

This request would fund new projects that would not be funded and implemented without this appropriation. No funds would be supplanted.

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

Fee acquisition increases management efficiency through improved access to habitat management and connectivity through consolidation with existing county-managed lands. The land acquired will be managed by Itasca County as part of their current forest land portfolio, increasing management efficiency and effectiveness. County funding will be used for the management of these lands.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Annually/perpetually	County funds	Lands are managed by Itasca County per Itasca County Forest Management Plan	-	-

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

This project will benefit communities throughout the entire state of Minnesota by permanently protecting ecosystem services that provide clean drinking water, productive habitat, clean air, climate change mitigation, sedimentation and erosion control, and public recreational opportunities. The close-to-home recreational opportunities will benefit diverse communities in the area, as well as all Minnesotans.

The headwaters of the Popple River, a protected waterway, are located within the project and flow south through the Leech Lake Reservation into Round Lake. Keeping land and water systems intact protects native wild rice beds as well as water quality and quantity, which can have long-term cost benefits related to water treatment and future treatment costs in downstream communities.

The Environmental Protection Agency has developed an environmental justice mapping and screening tool. This tool indicates the proposed area falls within areas identified as environmental justice areas of concern. The tool indicates: 65% are low-income, 29% are people of color, 60% have less than high school education, and 94% are over the age of 64. Protecting these lands mitigates some of the environmental justice concerns for at-risk populations.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

Yes

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?

No

Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this program either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?

No

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:

Land will be open for public hunting, trapping and fishing.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

County

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

County Forest

What is the anticipated number of closed acquisitions (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

1-2

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

Yes

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

Forest access roads and trails have been developed by previous industrial forest landowners for forest management practices. There is a primary access road running north and south through Section 14, currently only open to the current landowner and landowners to the south. All other forest access roads are used primarily for timber management access. After acquisition, these roads and trails will be maintained to provide ongoing access for forestry and wildlife management purposes on the properties. No new trails are planned on the parcels unless needed for forest management and habitat purposes. There is an established grant-in-aid trail easement corridor going through the proposed acquisition parcels. The grant-in-aid trail corridor has been identified on the attached map.

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Itasca County will be responsible for the maintenance of access roads and trails to the extent needed for forest and habitat management. This includes annual spring (and other wet season) closures, reporting issues, and enforcement actions when necessary. Itasca County will also be responsible for monitoring and enforcing issues on properties.

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

No

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation?

No

No restoration or enhancement will be completed with this proposal's appropriation.

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

No

Explain how, when, and source of the R/E work:

No restoration or enhancement will be completed with this proposal's funding and availability.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
County acquires fee simple ownership	December 31, 2025
Execute Purchase Agreement	October 30, 2025
Obtain independent fair market appraisal	August 1, 2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 03/31/2026

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7. Availability of Appropriation

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

(b) Money appropriated in this section is available as follows:

- (1) money appropriated for acquiring real property is available until June 30, 2029;
- (2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this section is available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2033;
- (3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2030;
- (4) notwithstanding clauses (1) to (3), money appropriated for a project that receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds is available until a date sufficient to match the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if the federal funding was confirmed and included in the original approved draft accomplishment plan; and
- (5) money appropriated for other projects is available until the end of the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.

Budget

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

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	-	\$77,100	County Funds	\$77,100
Contracts	-	\$37,800	County Funds	\$37,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$2,720,000	-	-	\$2,720,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	\$2,000	County Funds	\$2,000
Professional Services	-	\$110,400	County Funds	\$110,400
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	\$3,000	County Funds	\$3,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	\$100	County Funds	\$100
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,720,000	\$230,400	-	\$2,950,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Wildlife Specialist	0.25	2.0	-	\$21,200	County Funds	\$21,200
District Forester	0.25	2.0	-	\$21,200	County Funds	\$21,200
Land Commissioner	0.15	2.0	-	\$13,500	County Funds	\$13,500
Real Estate Specialist	0.25	2.0	-	\$21,200	County Funds	\$21,200

Amount of Request: \$2,720,000

Amount of Leverage: \$230,400

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 8.47%

DSS + Personnel: -

As a % of the total request: 0.0%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?

The program will find other funds for non-land acquisition costs of the proposal.

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

County funding sources through their natural resources, environmental and forestry accounts.

Does this project have the ability to be scalable?

No

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

1 is anticipated, but possibly 2.

Federal Funds

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

No

Output Tables**Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	2,720	-	2,720
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	2,720	-	2,720

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	\$2,720,000	-	\$2,720,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$2,720,000	-	\$2,720,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	2,720	2,720
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	2,720	2,720

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	\$2,720,000	\$2,720,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	\$2,720,000	\$2,720,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

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

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

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

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

3,735 Feet

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

The parcels are part of the one of the largest contiguous blocks of unprotected private industrial ownership (2,720 owned by a single landowner) of contiguous forest habitat within Itasca County.

The property will expand the complex of protected forest and wetland habitat by approximately 3 miles.

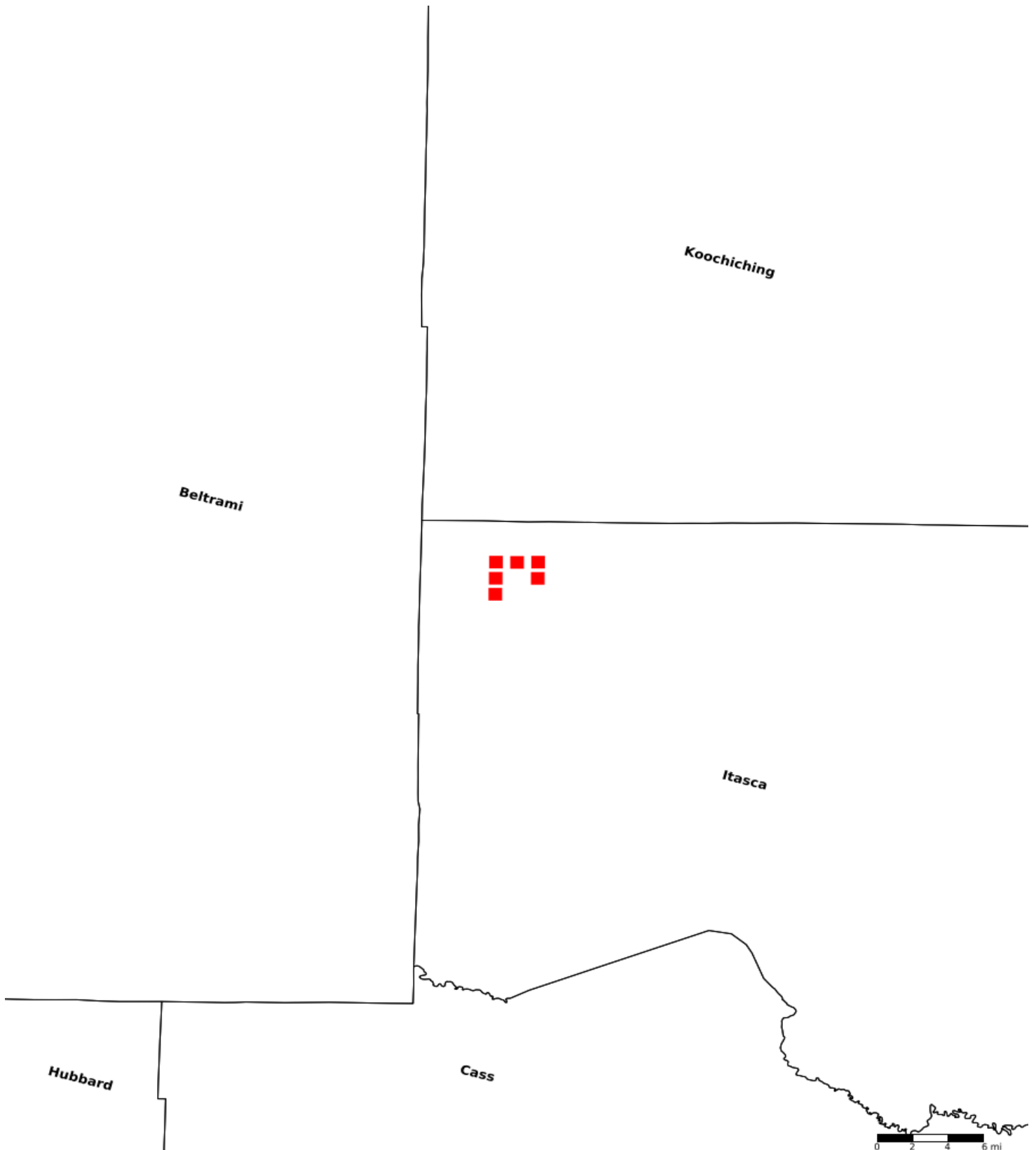
Parcels provide a unique opportunity for significant conservation and creates a permanent conservation legacy for the public.

This acquisition is "shovel ready" with a willing Seller.

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Section 13	Itasca	15029213	640	\$640,000	No
Section 14	Itasca	15029214	560	\$560,000	No
Section 15	Itasca	15029215	480	\$480,000	No
Section 22	Itasca	15029222	280	\$280,000	No
Section 24	Itasca	15029224	200	\$200,000	No
Section 27	Itasca	15029227	560	\$560,000	No

Parcel Map



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