



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Sand Lake/7 Beavers Acquisition & Enhancement
Laws of Minnesota 2026 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/08/2026

Project Title: Sand Lake/7 Beavers Acquisition & Enhancement

Funds Recommended: \$7,347,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2026, Ch. 126, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 3(b)

Appropriation Language: \$7,347,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Nature Conservancy to acquire priority forest habitat lands in fee as The Nature Conservancy lands, Rajala Woods Foundation lands, state forests, and county forests. For lands held in perpetuity by The Nature Conservancy and Rajala Woods Foundation, annual income statements and balance sheets for income and expenses from land acquired with this appropriation must be submitted to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council no later than 180 days after each organization's respective fiscal year closes.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Rich Biske

Title: Director of Water and Land Protection

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

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Location Information

County Location(s): Lake and St. Louis.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Wetlands

Narrative**Abstract**

Sand Lake/7 Beavers Forest Conservation project will protect approximately 11,350 acres of forest, wetland and shoreline through fee acquisition in Northeast Minnesota with OHF as part of a larger project. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) will retain ownership of approximately 8,950 acres in Lake County and intends to transfer approximately 2,200 acres to Rajala Woods Foundation for ecological forest management and may transfer approximately 200 acres to Lake County. The acquisition is nearly completely surrounded by public conservation lands allowing for increased recreational use and improved landscape.

Design and Scope of Work

The Sand Lake/7 Beavers Conservation Area is a large unfragmented landscape encompassing the best and the most intact occurrence of a lowland conifer ecosystem in the Superior Mixed Forest ecoregion along with mixed forest. The lowland conifer ecosystem was recognized by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) as one of the 18 most significant peatlands in the state. The conservation area is home to the headwaters of the Rainy River, a major river flowing through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and draining into Hudson Bay and a small portion of the property is in the headwaters of the St. Louis River draining to Lake Superior. The project will protect nearly 2.5 miles of shoreline on Greenwood Lake, Cloquet Lake and all of Source Lake along with portion of Greenwood River and Stony River.

The project is part of a larger acquisition project nearly surrounded by conservation lands including the Sand Lake/7 Beavers Scientific and Natural Area, Superior National Forest, High Conservation Value Forests, County Forest, Finland State Forest and TNC's 6,344-acre Sand Lake/7 Beavers property. TNC acquired the adjacent approximately 12,271-acre tract that along with this proposed project will be additions to the Sand Lake/7 Beavers property owned and managed by TNC and open to the public. This project is the 4th largest unprotected private property and 88% of it is within the Resilient Connected Network and the adjacent acquisition will protect the 5th largest unprotected resilient property, preventing forest fragmentation, expanding outdoor recreation opportunities and allowing for improved forest management.

TNC currently manages the adjacent Sand Lake/7 Beavers property for its biodiversity, watershed, habitat, and climate value. Typical management practices include tree planting and tending to diversify the forest for increased resilience and habitat value, and ecologically-based harvesting to reduce fuel loads and provide opportunities to increase species and structural diversity. We plan to carry out similar practice on the new property.

TNC will transfer tracts near Embarrass, MN to Rajala Woods Foundation (RWF).

TNC and RWF will each develop forest stewardship/management plans that will establish management goals, objectives and management practices.

TNC and RWF will pay property taxes on lands acquired and retained.

TNC intends to transfer individual tracts outside of the core area surrounding the Sand Lake/7 Beavers complex to Lake County and/or the MN DNR Division of Forestry to consolidate existing holdings and improve access for management and public use.

This is a stand-alone project, not part of an existing OHF supported program and is not the start of a new program. TNC invested \$7M of private funds for a recently completed fee acquisition adjacent to this project that will also be open to the public. TNC will also be paying property taxes on this property.

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

Acquisition of the proposed property and another TNC recently acquired property as additions to the Sand Lake/Seven Beavers preserve will protect a total of approximately 23,621 acres of forest, peatland, and wetland including forested wetland, riparian wetland and more, through fee title acquisition. The property has been ranked as high resilience, high flow, and recognized biodiversity by TNC's Resilient and Connected Network. The Minnesota County Biological Survey considers the property to be of moderate biodiversity or high biodiversity and surrounded by mostly high biodiversity lands, presenting an opportunity to improve habitat condition with enhancement. The property will provide additional carbon storage with reforestation and improved management.

Species of note on the property include the following State Rank 3 element occurrences: bog rush, small green wood orchid, small shinleaf, autumn fimbry, Michaux's sedge and adder's tongue. Other species utilizing the property and surrounding area include moose, lynx, ruffed grouse, gray wolf, fisher, boreal owls and numerous important bird species like northern goshawks and Connecticut warblers.

RWF will own and manage the property according to a stewardship plan they develop. RWF intends to enhance upland areas to uneven aged long lived diverse species including white pine, red pine, white spruce and paper birch. Lowland conifer forest will be managed to promote black spruce, white cedar, tamarack and protecting sphagnum moss.

RWF and TNC will manage their respective lands for moose habitat and demonstrate moose herbivory mitigation.

The project also bears significant habitat value as revealed by the Resilient and Connected Network (RCN) analysis. It is part of an expansive network of high resilience, high flow, and recognized biodiversity in the Terrestrial RCN.

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

The property was listed for sale in November 2024. The Nature Conservancy has a signed purchase agreement on the property. However, if TNC is unable to secure sufficient funds to purchase the property and exercise the purchase agreement the property will likely be placed back on the market and could be subdivided for rural recreational development or other uses. TNC has until December 18, 2026 to close on the property. TNC continues to coordinate with potential take-out partners including Lake County and MN DNR Division of Forestry. TNC has been coordinating with Rajala Woods Foundation (RWF) on the tracts to be transferred to RWF.

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

The project will protect approximately 20% of the Stony River Watershed, the other project TNC is acquiring without OHF will protect approximately 23.0% of the unprotected acres, together they will protect approximately 43% of the currently unprotected acres in the watershed. After these two acquisitions, the Stony River Watershed will be approximately 70% protected.

Portions of the project are within the Sand Lake Conservation Focus Area (CFA). As a CFA it is considered one of the best opportunities for working with partners to develop and implement terrestrial or aquatic habitat projects

that address conservation needs, and to report on the effectiveness of management actions, which meet the Wildlife Action Plan objectives of increasing wildlife, habitat and landscape biological diversity with a focus on Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

Protecting this project prevents fragmentation.

Acquiring and transferring outlying inholdings into county and state ownership will reduce fragmentation while improving access for management and public use.

This project along with recently acquired property will protect an inholding within a complex surrounded by the Superior National Forest, Sand Lake/7 Beavers SNA and TNC's Sand Lake/7 Beavers property and Finland State Forest ensuring habitat continuity and the opportunity for larger landscape management. TNC currently works with public land managers including Superior National Forest, MN DNR and Lake County to enhance forest habitat using resilient forest management and tree planting. Acquisition of this project as an inholding will allow for expansion of the current all lands approach to forest management.

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.

This is the 4th largest most resilient unprotected property in Minnesota. Protection and enhancement will maintain a larger resilient habitat complex and allow for resilient forest management to improve resilience on this site and surrounding areas. The project protects significant shoreline along Greenwood Lake, wild rice lakes, peatland and results in approximately 70% of the Stony River Watershed being protected.

This project and another recently acquired property (fully paid for with private funds) will result in the protection of an additional 23,621-acres scattered within a larger complex of conservation lands making public and private conservation land consolidation for access and management possible while reducing fragmentation.

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 ~ *The project will protect approximately 20% of the Stony River Watershed, the other project TNC acquired October 8, 2025, without OHF will protect approximately 23% of the unprotected acres, together they will protect approximately 43% of the currently unprotected acres in the watershed. After these two acquisitions, the Stony River Watershed will be approximately*

70% protected.

This project prevents fragmentation.

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.

NA

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

TNC will retain ownership of that portion of the property adjacent to TNC lands. TNC will raise private funds to establish a stewardship endowment for the property to pay for a portion of property taxes and ongoing management expenses on the property. If revenue is generated from forest harvests necessary for management those revenue would be dedicated to expenses associated with the property including taxes, maintenance, restoration and enhancement. TNC has a resilient forest management team located in Duluth, Ely and Grand Marais that will steward the property as they do the existing Sand Lake/7 Beavers preserve.

The portion of the property transferred to Rajala Woods Foundation will be managed by RWF. Portions transferred to Lake County will be managed by their forest managers.

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

The Nature Conservancy is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion which are embedded in our code of conduct and values. We recognize that conservation is best advanced by the leadership and contributions of people of diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities. Our hiring practices have been updated to be more inclusive. Additionally, we recognize that BIPOC and other marginalized communities experience disproportionate access to nature on private lands, making it essential to provide lands that are accessible to, and safe for, all Minnesotans; and where diverse communities will feel welcome and safe to pursue their passions for hunting, angling, photography, hiking, and simply enjoying all the benefits that nature provides. TNC invites indigenous communities to utilize our lands for traditional uses.

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)?**

No

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

County boards will be notified via letter and staff and partners will be made available to answer questions. TNC and RWF have and will communicate and coordinate with counties early and throughout the project development. TNC will work with the County Land Commissioner if the county is interested in accepting long-term ownership of tracts.

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 and fishing under applicable State of Minnesota Regulations.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

NGO

County

State of MN

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

Other : TNC will own and manage as part of the organization's existing Sand Lake/Seven Beavers property. Land in St. Louis County is intended to be transferred to Rajala Woods Foundation. Disjunct tracts in Lake County are intended to be transferred to county and/or state forest.

County Forest

State Forest

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

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:

There are public and private access roads bisecting portions of the property and interior roads used for management throughout the property. There are also winter use snowmobile trails through portions of the property.

There are also National Forest roads and State Forest roads and trails that bisect portions of the property.

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Roads and trails will be used for ongoing management and public access. Grant in aid snowmobile trails will continue.

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

Yes

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

Temporary roads and/or trails may be created for management purposes.

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Roads will be cleared of fallen trees when management access is required. Erosion control measures will be used along with care to avoid altering hydrology on site.

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

No

No restoration or enhancement funds are included in the LSOHC recommendation.

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:

Enhancement funding was excluded from recommendation. Lands will continue to be enhanced after the funding is completed using revenue generated from forest management activities.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Transfer lands to Rajala Woods Foundation and County and/or State Forest	June 30, 2029
Fee Acquisition	June 30, 2028

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2029

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, 2030;
- (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, 2034;
- (3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2031;
- (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	\$65,000	-	-	\$65,000
Contracts	\$35,000	-	-	\$35,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$7,127,400	\$150,000	private	\$7,277,400
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Professional Services	\$85,000	-	-	\$85,000
Direct Support Services	\$14,600	-	-	\$14,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$7,347,000	\$150,000	-	\$7,497,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Protection	0.15	2.5	\$65,000	-	-	\$65,000

Amount of Request: \$7,347,000

Amount of Leverage: \$150,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 2.04%

DSS + Personnel: \$79,600

As a % of the total request: 1.08%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

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

There will be no forest enhancement on the lands acquired. Fee acquisition with OHF will be reduced proportionately based on the funding appropriated and the per acre cost of acquisition. TNC intends to acquire the entire property, a portion will be acquired with OHF and a portion with private funds.

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

TNC will establish a stewardship endowment with private funds to pay for taxes and future management expenses. TNC has already paid for staff time and appraisal.

Does this project have the ability to be scalable?

No

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

No

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

access improvements

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Appraisals

Other : Forest Stewardship Planning, Environmental Assessment, Mineral Assessment

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

2

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 vehicle rental

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?

DSS is based on The Nature Conservancy's Federal Negotiated Rate (FNR) as proposed and approved by the US Dept. of Interior on an annual basis. In this proposal we are requesting reimbursement of 7.5% of eligible base costs as determined by our annual FNR and based on suggestions from the Council in prior years' hearings. The FNR is not applied to capital equipment over \$50,000 or land acquisition. The amount requested for reimbursement represents 38% of the total reimbursable costs allowed under the FNR. Examples of expenses included in the FNR include services from in-house legal counsel; finance; human resources; and information technology support, all of which contribute directly to the implementation of the project.

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	-	-	0	-	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	11,350	-	11,350
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	11,350	-	11,350

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	-	-	\$7,347,000	-	\$7,347,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$7,347,000	-	\$7,347,000

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	-	-	-	-	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	11,350	11,350
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	11,350	11,350

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	-	-	-	-	\$7,347,000	\$7,347,000
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	\$7,347,000	\$7,347,000

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	-	-	\$647	-
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	-	-	-	-	\$647
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

2

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

The property was identified as the 4th largest most resilient and unprotected properties in Minnesota. It is nearly surrounded by conservation lands open to the public. The 2nd parcel is an inholding within this expanded conservation complex.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Lake County	Lake	05709213	700	-	Yes	County and State inholdings
Lake County Finland	Lake	05709205	500	-	Yes	County and State inholdings
Lake County Northwest	Lake	06011234	1,240	-	Yes	Acquisition and enhancement
Sand Lake/7 Beavers	Lake	05810203	9,823	-	Yes	Lowland hardwood forest, fire dependent hardwood within public land complex
Embarrass	St. Louis	06014206	1,600	-	Yes	Upland aspen, balsam fir, lowland hardwood

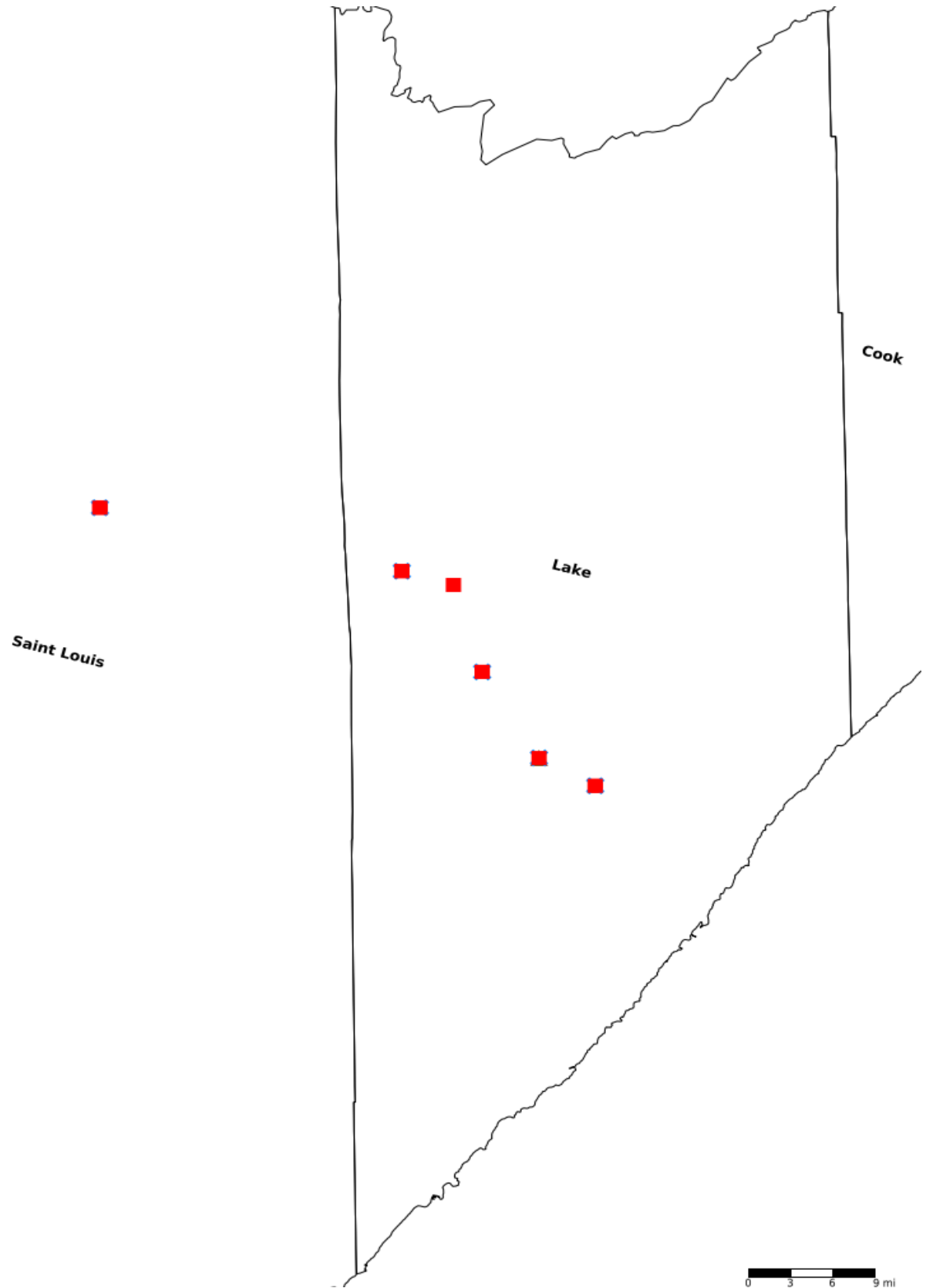
Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Lake County	Lake	05709213	700	-	No
Lake County	Lake	05709213	700	-	No
Lake County Finland	Lake	05709205	500	-	No
Lake County Finland	Lake	05709205	500	-	No
Lake County Northwest	Lake	06011234	1,240	-	No
Lake County Northwest	Lake	06011234	1,240	-	No
Sand Lake/7 Beavers	Lake	05810203	9,823	-	No
Sand Lake/7 Beavers	Lake	05810203	9,823	-	No
Embarrass	St. Louis	06014206	1,600	-	No
Embarrass	St. Louis	06014206	1,600	-	No

Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
SL7B Biker	Lake	05910205	320	\$300,000	No	1	-

Parcel Map



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