



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

### Greenbelt Phase 1

### Laws of Minnesota 2026 Accomplishment Plan

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#### General Information

**Date:** 06/08/2026

**Project Title:** Greenbelt Phase 1

**Funds Recommended:** \$1,467,000

**Legislative Citation:** ML 2026, Ch. 126, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 5(f)

**Appropriation Language:** \$1,467,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District to acquire land in fee and permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance wildlife habitat within the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District boundary.

#### **Manager Information**

**Manager's Name:** Emily Heinz

**Title:** Planning Coordinator

**Organization:** Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

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#### **Location Information**

**County Location(s):** Washington and Chisago.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

Northern Forest

Metro / Urban

**Activity types:**

Protect in Fee

Protect in Easement

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Wetlands

Prairie

**Narrative**

**Abstract**

This program will permanently protect 125 acres of wetland and upland habitat in the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District which has experienced considerable habitat loss and is at risk of more land use conversion. The District will implement a targeted greenbelt and habitat protection program on priority parcels identified in the CLFLWD 10-Year Plan, Floodplain Vulnerability Assessment Action Plan, and Natural Resources Inventory. The District will engage with key landowners and utilize conservation easements and fee title acquisitions to connect fragmented habitat corridors. In addition to habitat benefits, this proposal will protect water quality, mitigate flooding, and promote groundwater recharge.

**Design and Scope of Work**

**Problem to be addressed:** This proposal will address habitat fragmentation and wetland degradation that resulted from urban/suburban development and agricultural activity.

**Scope of work:** The Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District will protect high priority wetlands through fee title acquisition and easements. The District will hold the easement and manage for wildlife and water quality purposes.

**How priorities were set:** The District utilizes a data-driven approach to prioritizing land protection efforts. Priority areas of the Watershed District are defined in the District's 2022-2031 Watershed Management Plan. These areas are defined based on the presence of MN Biological Survey Sites of Biodiversity Significance, native plant communities, wetlands, groundwater dependent natural resources, pollution sensitivity of near-surface materials, lake phosphorus sensitivity, and altered watercourses. The District has collected additional data to further refine priority parcels within these areas: floodplain vulnerability assessment and flood risk modeling, wetland inventory, and groundwater-dependent natural resources inventory.

**Urgency and opportunity:** The Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District contains 9,579 acres of wetland within its jurisdiction, comprising 17% of the District's total land use. Developed areas comprise 14% of land use, and cultivated cropland comprises 12% of land use in the District. By 2040 the City of Forest Lake is anticipating 15% per decade growth in population, adding over 7,000 residents to its population, and adding almost 5,000 new housing units. The transportation infrastructure along Highway 8 and Interstate 35 are expected to expand to account for increased capacity. Highway commercial development and multi-use development are planned along the intersections of Highway 8, I-35, and Highway 61. A spatial comparison of existing and future (2040) land use maps from the 2019 City of Forest Lake Comprehensive Plan indicate 160 acres of new residential development and 375 acres of commercial development. Minnesota's changing climate and increasing spring precipitation levels create an increased need for landscape resiliency. By protecting undeveloped spaces, particularly wetlands which detain, retain, and purify stormwater runoff, this proposal will increase landscape resiliency.

**What habitat will be affected:** This proposal will primarily protect wetland habitat. Forest, prairie, in-lake, and in-stream habitat may also benefit from the proposed easements and acquisitions.

**How actions will directly protect wetlands:** This proposal will directly protect wetlands through permanent easement and fee title acquisition. This phase of the program involves protection (Phase 1); the District will implement subsequent program phases in future years to restore and enhance the habitats on protected sites

(Phase 2+).

Level of stakeholder involvement and partnership: Stakeholder involvement and intergovernmental partnerships are key to program success. The District has strong working relationships with local municipalities and counties. The District will work closely with these partners to ensure efficient program implementation and accomplishment of shared objectives. The District also has strong relationships with local community groups, particularly its lake associations. The District will implement a targeted outreach campaign to engage with relevant stakeholders. See enclosed letters of support from local partners.

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

The project will permanently protect and subsequent phases will enhance a variety of wetland plant community types. These include hardwood swamp, shallow marsh, shrub swamp, riparian, shallow open water, wet meadow, and seasonally flooded basins. A DNR-mapped area of black-ash-yellow-birch-red maple-basswood swamp (WFn55b) is present at the inflow to Comfort Lake, and is a native plant community vulnerable to extirpation (S3). Multiple records of Blanding's turtles are present within the area and vicinity. The varied wetland habitats and adjacent sandy uplands (existing agricultural land) provide a large tract of habitat for this state-threatened species. A lake sturgeon record is also present at near the inlet to Comfort Lake, likely due to connectivity with the Sunrise River which flows through the corridor (DNR Fisheries Survey Report, 2005).

Once the parcels are acquired, the District will begin work to restore and enhance plant communities within the corridor. This work will include a thorough ecological assessment and inventory of the property followed by the preparation of targeted and rigorous restoration and management plan. The District will then execute the management plan with an overarching goal of restoring high quality and diverse native species dominated plant communities. This work will maximize the potential for biodiversity within the site and provided greater opportunity to support SGCN. Proposed work would maintain, enhance, or restore habitat for up to 24 SGCN.

The Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District will own and manage all easements and fee title acquisitions. The District will obtain an appraisal for all easements and acquisitions.

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

It is critical to protect undeveloped natural spaces while they still exist. It is particularly urgent to protect, and ultimately enhance/restore, wetland systems which improve landscape resiliency to climate change. The City of Forest Lake and Interstate 35 corridor are expected to expand in terms of population and impervious surface development between now and 2040.

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

This corridor is identified in the DNR Wildlife Action Network. The northern portion is mapped as a climate resilient and connected landscape by The Nature Conservancy indicating that it is important habitat corridor, valuable under future climate change scenarios. Enhancement of the southern portion would improve quality of this corridor and increase connectivity.

According to the MnDNR's 2013 Fish Habitat Plan, the CLFLWD has a moderate level of watershed disturbance (25-60% disturbed). The Fish Habitat Plan indicates that "lakes with watersheds that have moderate levels of disturbance (25-60%) have a more realistic chance for full restoration of water quality." The proposed project will result in 125 acres of land perpetually protected, which amounts to 2% of the 6,352-acre Comfort Lake watershed.

This proposal is the first in a multi-phase initiative to expand habitat corridors and protect critical open spaces in this watershed.

This work aligns with multiple priorities for the Lower St. Croix (LSC) River One Watershed One Plan. The LSC Watershed Partnership's 10-year Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (CWMP) indicates priority locations are resources considered to be regionally significant, or types of resources or areas where work is needed most in order to realize change and "move the needle" toward improved or protected water resources. This proposal aligns with the following LSC CWMP priority protection areas: the Sunrise River Watershed (due to its size and land use, it is identified as the highest contributor of total phosphorus in Lake St. Croix (Chisago County, MPCA, USACE, 2013)), lands where critical habitat needs protection, groundwater sensitivity, and areas suitable for wetland restoration or creation. This proposal directly supports several goals from the LSC CWMP including: 1B. Protect and restore high quality native plant communities that support Species of Greatest Conservation Need; 1C. Identify, protect, and restore upland habitat that is degraded to expand corridors, connect critical habitat areas and promote resiliency; 1D. Manage climate adaptation through protection and creation of a resilient and diverse landscape. This proposal directly supports activity #40 in the LSC CWMP Implementation Table: measurable output of at least 1,000 acres protected through acquisition/easements.

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

Other : Lower St. Croix 1W1P 2021-2030 Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan and Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District 2022-2031 Watershed Management Plan

### **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.**

Minnesota's changing climate and increasing spring precipitation levels create an increased need for landscape resiliency. By protecting undeveloped spaces, particularly wetlands which detain, retain, and purify stormwater runoff, this proposal will increase landscape resiliency. Prior to July 2026 the Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District will complete a Flood Resiliency Action Plan and a Shoreline Resiliency Action Plan. These targeted plans will supplement the District's Greenbelt and Open Space initiative by providing key climate resiliency priorities and strategies. The District is currently engaged in these planning efforts in order to lay the foundation and be fully prepared to target efforts and show climate resiliency results.

### **Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?**

#### **Metro / Urban**

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

#### **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 metropolitan urbanizing region:**

A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *Number of acres put into perpetual public ownership, number of acres put into perpetual conservation easement, total number of acres open for public use.*

**Programs in the northern forest region:**

Improved availability and improved condition of habitats that have experienced substantial decline ~ *Number of acres put into perpetual public ownership, number of acres put into perpetual conservation easement, total number of acres open for public use.*

**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 does not supplant or substitute for any other funding.

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

The District has a staff of 11 full-time employees. It will utilize its staff and tax levy authority to ensure all acquired properties and easements are maintained in perpetuity. The District will create a Restoration and Management Plan for all lands acquired. The District will erect signage according to Laws 2009, chapter 172, article 5, section 10.

**Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2030	CLFLWD Levy	Create Restoration & Management Plans for each site	Implement Restoration & Management Plans for each site	Annually review progress

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

The Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District values equity, & inclusion, and is committed to accessibility, diversity, and fairness in all actions. We seek to use diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens in project, partner, and contractor selection. As part of its Floodplain Vulnerability Assessment, the District worked with Zan Associates to conduct an equity analysis, and equity was a major factor in the decision-making process of the Floodplain Vulnerability Assessment. The District created a custom social vulnerability layer as part of its Floodplain Vulnerability Assessment in order to prioritize projects in areas with individuals below the poverty line, renter households, lone parents, young children, people aged 75 years and older, population density, individuals without a high school diploma, and persons for whom English is a second language. Acquired lands as part of this proposal will be open to all members of the public for hiking, bird watching, hunting, and other outdoor recreational activities. The District will also implement access/information/educational signs in several languages so as to encourage use of the property by underserved/underrepresented populations. Target languages, based on communities present in the Twin Cities area, include Spanish, Hmong, and Somali.

## 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

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

Yes

**Who will manage the easement?**

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

**Who will be the easement holder?**

Comfort Lake-Forest Lake Watershed District

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

3-6

### 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:**

Hunting/fishing restrictions according to local municipal ordinances may apply. The District will coordinate closely with local municipalities in order to properly communicate hunting/fishing restrictions.

**Who will eventually own the fee title land?**

Local Unit of Government

**Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:**

Other : Nature Area

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

3-8

**Will the eased land be open for public use?**

Yes

**Describe the expected public use:**

To be determined on a site by site basis, as appropriate to surrounding land use and accessibility. The CLFLWD will own and manage all easements.

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

No

**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

Restoration and enhancement will occur in future phases of the program.

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

No

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

This proposal constitutes the first phase of the Greenbelt and Open Space initiative. The District is currently requesting funding for easements and acquisitions only. The District will return to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund with a "Phase 2" grant application in future years in order to fund restoration/enhancement work.

## Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Acquisitions and conservation easements completed	June 30, 2030
Targeted outreach to landowners in order of priority	June 30, 2028

**Date of Final Report Submission:** 06/30/2030

### **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	-	\$50,000	CLFLWD Levy	\$50,000
Contracts	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$868,000	-	-	\$868,000
Easement Acquisition	\$380,000	-	-	\$380,000
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$219,000	-	-	\$219,000
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$1,467,000</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>	-	<b>\$1,517,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Education & Outreach Coordinator	0.01	4.0	-	\$5,000	CLFLWD Levy	\$5,000
Planning Coordinator	0.02	4.0	-	\$10,000	CLFLWD Levy	\$10,000
Project Coordinator	0.05	4.0	-	\$35,000	CLFLWD Levy	\$35,000

**Amount of Request:** \$1,467,000

**Amount of Leverage:** \$50,000

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 3.41%

**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?**

Acres of acquisition and easements have been scaled back, as well as professional services and staff time. The District will still engage with landowners in the priority areas, per the District's indicated process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels.

**Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:**

**Does this project have the ability to be scalable?**

Yes

**If the project received 50% of the requested funding**

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

If the project received 50% of the requested funding we would reduce proposed acres proportionally. The CLFLWD has prioritized parcel list and will focus grant funds on the top priority sites.

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

Not applicable

**Professional Services**

**What is included in the Professional Services line?**

Appraisals

Design/Engineering

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

**Fee Acquisition**

**What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?**

3-6

**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	-	-	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	70	17	-	-	87
Protect in Easement	30	8	-	-	38
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>125</b>

**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	\$836,000	\$203,000	-	-	\$1,039,000
Protect in Easement	\$338,000	\$90,000	-	-	\$428,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,174,000</b>	<b>\$293,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$1,467,000</b>

**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	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	7	-	-	-	80	87
Protect in Easement	8	-	-	-	30	38
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>125</b>

**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	\$69,300	-	-	-	\$969,700	\$1,039,000
Protect in Easement	\$338,000	-	-	-	\$90,000	\$428,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$407,300</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$1,059,700</b>	<b>\$1,467,000</b>

**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	\$11,942	\$11,941	-	-
Protect in Easement	\$11,266	\$11,250	-	-
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	\$9,900	-	-	-	\$12,121
Protect in Easement	\$42,250	-	-	-	\$3,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

Sunrise River

## Parcels

### Parcel Information

#### Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

The District utilizes a data-driven approach to prioritizing land protection efforts. Priority areas of the Watershed District are defined in the District's 2022-2031 Watershed Management Plan. These areas are defined based on the presence of MN Biological Survey Sites of Biodiversity Significance, native plant communities, wetlands, groundwater dependent natural resources, pollution sensitivity of near-surface materials, lake phosphorus sensitivity, and altered watercourses. The District has collected additional data to further refine priority parcels within these areas: floodplain vulnerability assessment and flood risk modeling, wetland inventory, and groundwater-dependent natural resources inventory. The District will use this data to directly reach out to priority landowners and solicit interest in easements and/or acquisitions.

The area of interest is located along the county line between Washington and Chisago counties. We anticipate that most of the easements and acquisitions will occur in Chisago County. Specific parcels are dependent on landowner willingness, pending landowner outreach.

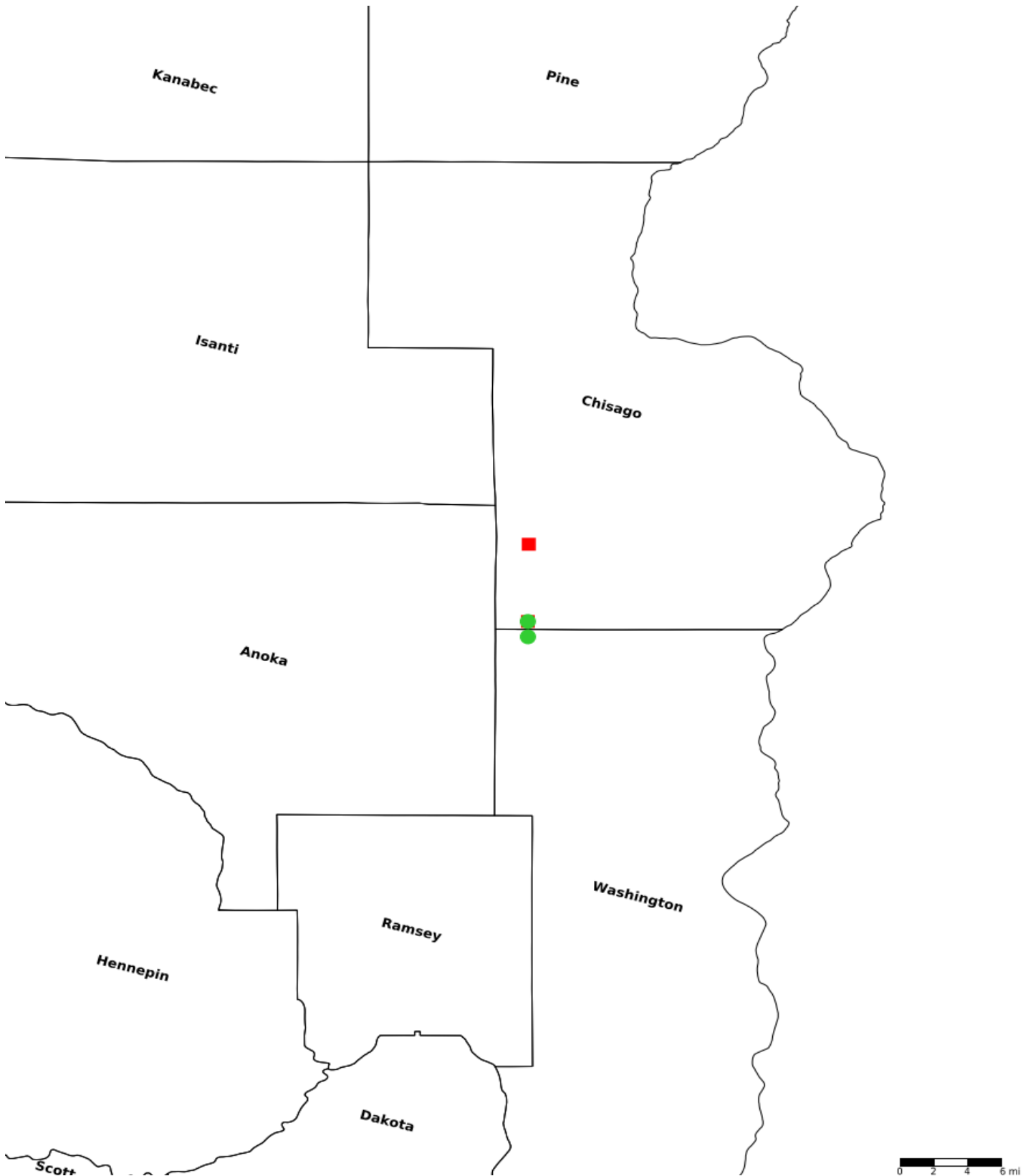
### Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Acquisitions - Chisago County	Chisago	03321232	70	\$700,000	No
Acquisitions - Washington County	Washington	03321205	5	\$50,000	-

### Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Easements - Chisago County	Chisago	03321232	30	\$300,000	-
Easements - Washington County	Washington	03221205	8	\$80,000	No

### Parcel Map



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