



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Minnesota Statewide Trout Habitat Enhancement & Protection Laws of Minnesota 2026 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 06/09/2026

Project Title: Minnesota Statewide Trout Habitat Enhancement & Protection

Funds Recommended: \$750,000

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

Appropriation Language: \$750,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Trout Unlimited for survey, design, engineering, and permitting of trout stream restoration and enhancement projects throughout Minnesota.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: John Lenczewski

Title: Executive Director

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Location Information

County Location(s): Dakota, Olmsted, Fillmore, Winona, Lake, Cook, St. Louis, Carlton and Pine.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Southeast Forest

Metro / Urban

Activity types:

Enhance

Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

Minnesota Trout Unlimited will complete the planning, engineering, design, and permitting of numerous projects that when constructed will enhance degraded habitat for wild trout and diverse wildlife in and along priority streams. Increasing threats to these scarce resources require accelerating habitat work to fix degraded sections and buffer streams from the increased frequency and intensity of large rainfall and flooding. Project designs will contain blueprints for restoring in-stream habitat, increasing resilience by reconnecting streams to their floodplains and removing barriers to trout movement.

Design and Scope of Work

Badly degraded habitat on those trout streams that are most accessible to the public severely limits their productivity and public enjoyment. This phase of the project will focus primarily on planning, engineering, design, and permitting of design plans that Minnesota Trout Unlimited (“MNTU”) will implement with phase 2 funding. When implemented, projects will directly enhance degraded habitat on priority streams with existing permanent protections.

Planning, engineering, design, and permitting will be completed for habitat enhancements in and along these public waters (in these counties):

1. Vermillion River (Dakota);
2. Hay Creek (Pine);
3. Midway River (Carlton);
4. Anderson Creek (Carlton);
5. Us-Kab-Wan-Ka River (St. Louis);
6. Stewart River (Lake);
7. Greenwood River (Cook);
8. Cobblestone Creek (Winona);
9. Maple Creek (Fillmore);
10. Gribben Creek (Fillmore);
11. Numerous streams statewide (numerous counties); and
12. Additional Enhancement of older projects (numerous counties).

Once planning, engineering, design, and permitting of the design plans is complete, if there are unspent monies within the appropriation we will utilize remaining funds for construction or to purchase trout stream conservation easements to protect important streams such as the Vermillion River (Dakota County), Hay Creek (near Red Wing), Midway River, and Stewart River (Two Harbors) and enable future habitat work there.

We will return to the LSOHC to secure Phase 2 funding for construction and implementation of the designed projects.

Individual project descriptions are provided in an attachment.

Goals and scope of habitat work:

Project goals are to increase the carrying capacity and trout population of the stream, increase climate resilience, increase angling access and participation, improve water quality, and provide benefits to other wildlife. Each project will accomplish one or more of these objectives: (a) increase adult trout abundance, (b) reduce stream bank erosion and associated smothering of habitat (sedimentation) downstream, (c) reconnect the stream to its floodplains to reduce impacts from severe flooding, (d) increase natural reproduction of trout and other aquatic organisms, (e) increase habitat for invertebrates and non-game species, (f) improve connectivity of habitat along aquatic and riparian corridors, (g) improve riparian forest health and function, (h) improve angler access and participation, and (i) protect productive trout waters from invasive species. The scope of work and methods utilized vary by project site conditions and are discussed in the individual project descriptions provided in an attachment.

How priorities were set:

MNTU focuses habitat enhancement and restoration efforts on those watersheds likely to continue to support viable, fishable populations of naturally reproducing trout fifty years and more from now. Work is done only where degraded habitat is a limiting factor for a quality, sustainable fishery. Priority locations are determined through consultations with MNDNR professionals, MNDNR management plans and surveys, other habitat and conservation planning efforts, MNTU's knowledge of watersheds, and science-based criteria. All things being equal, we consider the potential to draw new anglers outdoors, increase public awareness, engage landowners in conservation, foster partnerships, and increase public support for OHF projects.

Stakeholder support:

We continue receiving strong support from anglers, landowners, and local communities.

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

When implemented with phase 2 funding, the projects will restore or enhance degraded habitat for fish and wildlife in and along coldwater streams and rivers which historically supported naturally reproducing trout populations highly valued by generations of anglers. While trout are the apex predator and key indicator species for the health of coldwater ecosystems, a host of rare aquatic and riparian species are uniquely associated with these systems. Well-functioning coldwater aquatic ecosystems are far fewer in number than the 6% of Minnesota's stream and river miles which theoretically can still support trout. Even many streams considered to be the best remaining trout streams have badly degraded segments which disrupt connectivity and significantly impact the productivity and long-term resilience and sustainability of the overall trout population. Streams face growing threats from warming temperatures, increased frequency of severe flooding, and rising demand for groundwater extraction from the aquifers which supply inputs of vitally important cold water. The proposed projects are focused on streams and stream segments which will benefit most from in-stream work and help ensure Minnesota retains at least some high quality coldwater fisheries for future generations. A small portion of an appropriation may be used to maintain and add habitat enhancements to past projects to ensure continuing habitat benefits.

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

Minnesota's trout streams are among the highest quality aquatic systems remaining, but a majority have badly degraded habitat. Leaving degraded segments untreated creates impacts that extends throughout the stream. Degraded sections are no longer providing habitat, clean water benefits, or angling opportunities. A warming

climate and more frequent heavy rains require action now to increase floodplain connectivity and increase durability of in-stream habitat. Increased restoration is needed now to increase long term resilience and sustainability of these rare fisheries. Timely maintenance on older projects will extend habitat function and maximize outcomes well into the future.

Threats to trout streams are growing, but most have no permanent protection. DNR acquisition rates have not increased since passage of the Legacy Amendment, despite a growing list of willing riparian landowners. Securing permanent protection before land is transferred to less enlightened landowners is critical to preserve these scarce resources.

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

In selecting project sites, MNTU reviews MNDNR watershed specific fisheries management plans and other conservation planning efforts, consults with MNDNR professionals, and applies ranking criteria developed by the MNDNR. Projects must have the potential to increase the stream's carrying capacity (fish numbers), the stream must have natural reproduction, and the public must have access to fish it. Improving the connectivity of good aquatic and riparian habitat is an important consideration and the projects are selected to expand complexes or connect gaps in these corridors. We are increasingly targeting stream segments which build off earlier habitat or protection work in the same stream or connected watershed. Projects reverse fragmentation and increases long term resilience of trout and other wildlife.

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

Long Range Plan for Fisheries Management

Strategic Plan for Coldwater Resources Management in Southeastern Minnesota

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.

Our projects directly increase climate resilience by restoring streams' access to more of their floodplains. This allows rising streams to quickly spread flood energy outside the stream channel, preserving in-stream habitat and minimizing impacts on fish and wildlife. Projects are also designed using modeling of the increased flows predicted by NOAA's most recent climate projections. Reconnecting habitat also ensures fish and wildlife can move to areas to escape low, warm water. Tree planting on projects in northern forests utilize a mix a tree species predicted to do well 30 years or more from now under climate projections.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Metro / Urban

Enhance and restore coldwater fisheries systems

Northern Forest

Protect shoreland and restore or enhance critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas

Southeast Forest

Protect, enhance, and restore habitat for fish, game, and nongame wildlife in rivers, cold-water streams, and associated upland habitat

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

Improved aquatic habitat indicators ~ *Measured through surveys of fish, macro invertebrates and/or exposed substrates. Abundance, size structure and species diversity are considered.*

Programs in the northern forest region:

Improved aquatic habitat indicators ~ *Measured through surveys of fish, macro invertebrates and/or exposed substrates. Abundance, size structure and species diversity are considered.*

Programs in southeast forest region:

Rivers, streams, and surrounding vegetation provide corridors of habitat ~ *Enhancement of in-stream and riparian corridor habitat creates miles of connected habitat. Outcomes in aquatic life are measured through surveys of fish, macro invertebrates and/or exposed substrates. Abundance, size structure and species diversity are considered.*

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 or a substitution for previous funding. The work proposed for funding is for new or additional work.

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

MNTU's coldwater aquatic habitat restoration and enhancement projects are designed for long-term ecological and hydraulic stability. Construction contracts include maintenance/warranty provisions to ensure habitat work is well established. After this period and once riparian vegetation is well established, major maintenance work is not typically required in order to sustain the habitat outcomes for decades. Reconnected floodplains allow flood water to quickly spread out and dissipate energy, reducing the destructive impact of a flood. Flood waters typically flatten streamside vegetation temporarily and do not damage the in-stream structures. The tenfold increase in trout populations and threefold increase in large trout which are common following completion of a southeast Minnesota project, are typically sustainable long-term through natural reproduction.

After projects are fully implemented with phase 2 funding, long-term monitoring of the integrity of the improvements will be done in conjunction with routine inspections and biological monitoring conducted by MNDNR and others. This monitoring will not require separate OHF or other constitutional funding. In the event that there are other maintenance costs, potential sources of funding and volunteer labor include MNTU, MNDNR AMA maintenance funding, and other grant funds and organizations. MNTU volunteers may help provide monitoring and periodic labor.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Every 3 years are completion of implementation phase (phase 2)	Agency staff visits and/or MNTU volunteers	Inspect structural elements and vegetation.	If needed, develop action plan with DNR.	Perform or assist DNR with maintenance if needed.

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

Our habitat projects provide easy public access to fishable trout populations in relatively small, approachable streams. These streams are accessible to diverse communities, including low- and moderate-income households. They can be fished from the streambanks and no expensive boat, waders, or special gear is required. In southeast MN there are no natural lakes, so anglers of all economic and cultural backgrounds focus angling on the region’s accessible, productive trout streams.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Yes

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

Yes

Who will manage the easement?

Who will be the easement holder?

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

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?

AMA

Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

County/Municipal

Public Waters

State Forests

WMA

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

Will the eased land be open for public use?

Yes

Describe the expected public use:

Trout angling during the open season.

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

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:

The need or level of enhancement has not been determined yet.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Begin planning, engineering, design, and permitting of habitat enhancements.	July 2026
Complete design and permitting of habitat enhancements.	June 2028 or earlier
Issue bid packages for construction	Upon appropriation of construction funding (July 2028 or earlier)

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2031

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	\$180,000	-	-	\$180,000
Contracts	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Professional Services	\$460,000	-	-	\$460,000
Direct Support Services	\$100,000	-	-	\$100,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$750,000	-	-	\$750,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Habitat enhancement staff	0.5	3.0	\$180,000	-	-	\$180,000

Amount of Request: \$750,000

Amount of Leverage: -

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%

DSS + Personnel: \$280,000

As a % of the total request: 37.33%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

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

This phase of the project will focus primarily on completing planning, engineering, design, and permitting of design plans that Minnesota Trout Unlimited will implement with phase 2 funding.

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?

We anticipate that acre amounts could be proportionately reduced.

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

Personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted downward but not strictly proportionally. Some projects with lower construction costs can require as much or more staff time as projects with much larger construction costs. Program oversight costs also remain consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Design/Engineering

Other : Permitting and construction oversight.

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Travel

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

No

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

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?

The Direct Support Services parallels Trout Unlimited's federal rate, which is approved every two years. It is based only upon the amount of personnel time, travel, and professional services actually expended on the individual habitat projects in this proposal.

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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	2	2
Total	-	-	-	2	2

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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$750,000	\$750,000
Total	-	-	-	\$750,000	\$750,000

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	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	1	-	1	2
Total	-	-	1	-	1	2

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	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	\$395,000	-	\$355,000	\$750,000
Total	-	-	\$395,000	-	\$355,000	\$750,000

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	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$375,000

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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	\$395,000	-	\$355,000

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0.2

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

MNTU focuses habitat enhancement and restoration efforts on those watersheds likely to continue to support viable, fishable populations of naturally reproducing trout fifty years and more from now. Work is done only where degraded habitat is a limiting factor for a quality, sustainable fishery. Priority locations are determined through consultations with MNDNR professionals, MNDNR management plans and surveys, other habitat and conservation planning efforts, MNTU members' knowledge of watersheds, and science-based criteria.

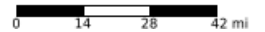
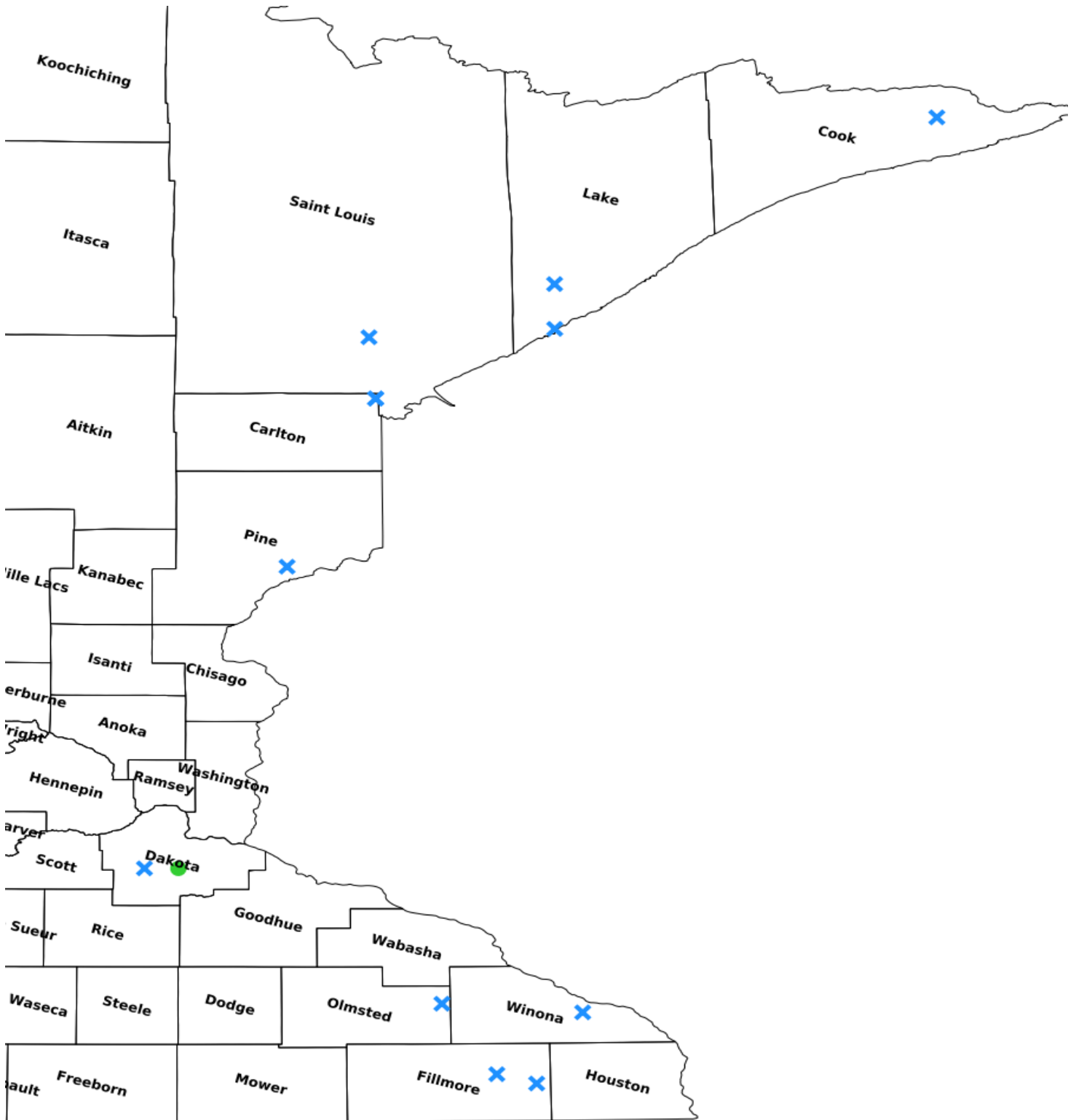
Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Anderson Creek	Carlton	04916212	3	\$0	Yes	Re-meneander cold brook trout stream
Midway River	Carlton	04916212	5	\$0	Yes	Enhance habitat for brook trout in larger area stream
Greenwood River	Cook	06302102	24	\$0	Yes	Restore access to 2 miles of habitat for native brook trout.
Vermillion River	Dakota	11420236	5	\$0	Yes	Enhance habitat on previously straightened section and recapture 1,800 feet of stream channel
Gribben Creek	Fillmore	10309221	7	\$0	Yes	Enhance habitat for wild brown trout
Maple Creek	Fillmore	10208203	10	\$0	Yes	Enhance habitat from recent project down to So Fork Root to connect habitat corridor
Numerous streams statewide - via vegetation esp.	Lake	05510217	12	\$0	Yes	Enhance habitat primarily through riparian vegetation management.
Stewart River	Lake	05310229	7	\$0	Yes	Restore forest canopy to cool river
Additional Enhancements & Maintenance in SE MN	Olmsted	10711235	24	\$0	Yes	Maintenance and additional enhancements on older projects to ensure continued habitat benefits for years
Hay Creek	Pine	04118232	5	\$0	Yes	Enhance brook trout habitat on nearest stream to north metro anglers
Us-Kab-Wan-Ka River	St. Louis	05216202	4	\$0	Yes	Re-meander coldest reach of native brook trout stream
Cobblestone Creek	Winona	10607213	10	\$0	Yes	Enhance habitat for heritage brook trout on entire main stem of cold stream.

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Protect key trout habitat (statewide)	Dakota	11419236	36	\$0	No

Parcel Map



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