Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Mission Creek Watershed Connectivity

Laws of Minnesota 2026 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 10/16/2025

Project Title: Mission Creek Watershed Connectivity

Funds Recommended: $1,111,000

Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Jeramy Pinkerton
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Location Information

County Location(s): St. Louis.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

MNDNR's Lake Superior - St. Louis River Team leads a collaborative program focused on important habitats in Minnesota's Lake Superior watershed. Our vision includes strategic investments that protect, restore, and enhance diverse, productive, and resilient ecosystems across this region. The Mission Creek Watershed Connectivity Project will restore one acre of priority, cold water stream habitat by replacing one barrier to fish passage.

Design and Scope of Work

The SLR-LS Team will restore priority habitat in the Mission Creek Watershed utilizing a collaborative approach that includes a network of resource managers, researchers, and key stakeholders.

MNDNR's SLR-LS Team, in coordination with the MNDNR Division of Parks and Trails, will reconnect cold-water habitat above a known barrier culvert to habitat below this barrier to improve passage for cold-water species such as Brook Trout. This initiative will also enhance terrestrial habitat corridors, facilitate downstream sediment transport, and ameliorate the risk of catastrophic habitat degradation due to potential culvert failure. The trail causeway and culverts are approaching 100 years of age, and the tall trail embankment shows signs of sluffing and instability, with at least one nearby crossing showing signs of imminent failure. Monitoring data indicates that many of the tributaries upstream of the trail embankment have excellent thermal conditions for Brook Trout, while thermal conditions are often less ideal downstream. Allowing access to these upstream reaches will make populations of cold-water species in this system more resilient to climate change. Terrestrial and semi-aquatic organisms in the Mission Creek watershed will also benefit from road/trail crossing designs that facilitate movement along riparian corridors in this forested watershed. OHF funding will allow us to design and construct one crossing while we seek funding for additional fish passage barriers in the Mission Creek watershed between Highway-23 and Interstate-35. This funding will be used to leverage recreational trail funds as there are important habitat and trail components to these projects.

In addition to specific project mentioned above, the team will continue coordinating with our partners to develop additional projects that improve fish and wildlife populations throughout Minnesota's portion of the Lake Superior Watershed.

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

Brook Trout are native to headwaters and small streams of northeastern and southeastern Minnesota. Reconnecting the upper reaches of Mission Creek and its tributaries will promote natural flows and open access to cold-water refugia to improve habitat conditions for all life stages of Brook Trout, increasing the resiliency of this population.

The Mission Creek watershed is included in the MNDNR's Wildlife Action Network and is designated as low medium to medium high priority for conservation. This area also has high biodiversity significance as mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey.

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

Aging infrastructure and sloughing trail embankments are a threat to both critical cold-water habitat in Mission Creek, as well as flooding that could impact both habitat and the Fond du Lac neighborhood in Duluth. One nearby

crossing that is currently being replaced showed signs of imminent failure that could have released up to 30,000 cubic yards of sediment into Mission Creek.

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

This project addresses habitat fragmentation by reconnecting aquatic habitats within Mission Creek and its tributaries.

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

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Projects Joint Ventures 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.

Our project directly addresses climate resilience by enhancing hydrologic connectivity to cold water habitats.

Climate change is expected to severely impact cold-water habitats in our region with deleterious ramifications for cold-water reliant species, such as Brook Trout. Currently, Brook Trout in Mission Creek are unable to access colder reaches upstream due to culverts severing hydrologic connectivity. Appropriately designed stream crossings will provide access to cold water refugia, thereby enhancing climate resilience for Brook Trout and other aquatic and terrestrial species. Stream crossings will be designed using aquatic organism passage guidelines and natural channel design to reconnect the creek and its tributaries to the floodplain and appropriately size the culverts for the stream. This will convey higher volume flows and reduce the risk of structural failure from intense precipitation events predicted by climate change models.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

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

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

Healthy populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species ~ *Program monitoring conducted by others including DNR program monitoring and the South St. Louis County Soil and Water Conservation District will evaluate the response of indicator species at project sites.*

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 not supplant previous funding that was not from a legacy fund.

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

SLR-LS habitat restoration projects are designed to be maintained by the natural processes that define these systems. Barring catastrophic events, these projects will not require future adjustment or maintenance. In the case of stream crossings, we will complete an agreement with the entity that owns/manages a road or trail and has the responsibility to maintain it.

The MNDNR Duluth Area Fisheries office manages Mission Creek and its tributaries through regular monitoring, assessment, and regulation.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
All years	DNR Fish & Wildlife Game and Fish Fund	Regular Survey/monitoring of aquatic habitat	-	-

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

Our team is part of the Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership, an emerging initiative to continue existing coordination and collaboration into the future. This initiative seeks to align natural resource management efforts with community health and economic development. Goals and objectives related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) have been established for the initiative.

LS-SLR projects are completed in close coordination with the Fond du Lac Band (FdL) and the 1854 Treaty Authority to ensure that tribal benefits are maximized, and that Traditional Ecological Knowledge is valued. FdL meets all three of Minnesota's primary Environmental Justice criteria: federally recognized Tribal area, 50% or more people of color, and at least 40% of people with reported income less than 185% of the federal poverty level. FdL's Environmental Program maintains a list of culturally significant species, which will be included in restoration and protection plans where feasible.

MNDNR's OHF projects aim to serve all Minnesotans. At the same time, we are bringing more focus in all our work to BIPOC and diverse communities. MNDNR has adopted advancing diversity, equity and inclusion as a key priority in its 2023-27 strategic plan. The plan focuses on increasing the cultural competence of our staff, creating a workforce that is reflective of Minnesota, continuing to strengthen tribal consultation and coordination, and building partnerships with diverse communities.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?
Yes

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 or on lands to be acquired in this program?
Yes

Where does the activity take place?

Other : State Trail

Public Waters

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

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Project prioritization, integration, and development; site-specific coordination	June 2031
Mission Creek Stream Connectivity	December 2030

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	$252,000	-	-	$252,000
Contracts	$560,000	-	-	$560,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	$4,000	-	-	$4,000
Professional Services	$238,000	-	-	$238,000
Direct Support Services	$34,000	-	-	$34,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$20,000	-	-	$20,000
Supplies/Materials	$3,000	-	-	$3,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$1,111,000**	**-**	**-**	**$1,111,000**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Supervisor	0.2	3.0	$90,500	-	-	$90,500
OAS	0.2	3.0	$58,000	-	-	$58,000
Project Manager	0.3	3.0	$103,500	-	-	$103,500

Amount of Request: $1,111,000
Amount of Leverage: -
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%
DSS + Personnel: $286,000
As a % of the total request: 25.74%
Easement Stewardship: -
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?
Personnel was reduced by 64%. The awarded funds will design, permit, and construct one replacement culvert instead of the initially proposed two. We have removed forest enhancement from the accomplishment plan. Funds remaining after replacing one culvert will go towards additional fish passage issues in the watershed.

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 would continue scoping and prioritizing crossings. We would only be able to complete one crossing replacement.

Acres of forested habitat enhancement would be reduced proportionately.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Personnel/DSS expenses would be reduced to 50-70% of the requested amount. Getting projects to the point of being construction-ready requires the largest investment of staff time. Staff time spent on advancing the program as a whole and developing future projects would be most reduced.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?
Yes

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?
Contracts for project implementation (primarily construction contracts).

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Design/Engineering

Other : Profession construction oversight and contract administration

Surveys

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?
Used Direct and Necessary calculator provided by DNR OHF staff.

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?
The Equipment and Tools budget line includes field and safety equipment or tools, space rental, and utilities.

Federal Funds

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

Are the funds confirmed?
No

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds?
Unknown. Our team has a strong history of leveraging federal funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). GLRI continues to be strongly supported. As projects are developed, we anticipate applying for GLRI or other federal funds to supplement OHF budgets.

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	1	1
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**1**	**1**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	$1,111,000	$1,111,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$1,111,000**	**$1,111,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	1	1
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**1**	**1**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	$1,111,000	$1,111,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$1,111,000**	**$1,111,000**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	$1,111,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	$1,111,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

440 feet

Parcels

Parcel Information

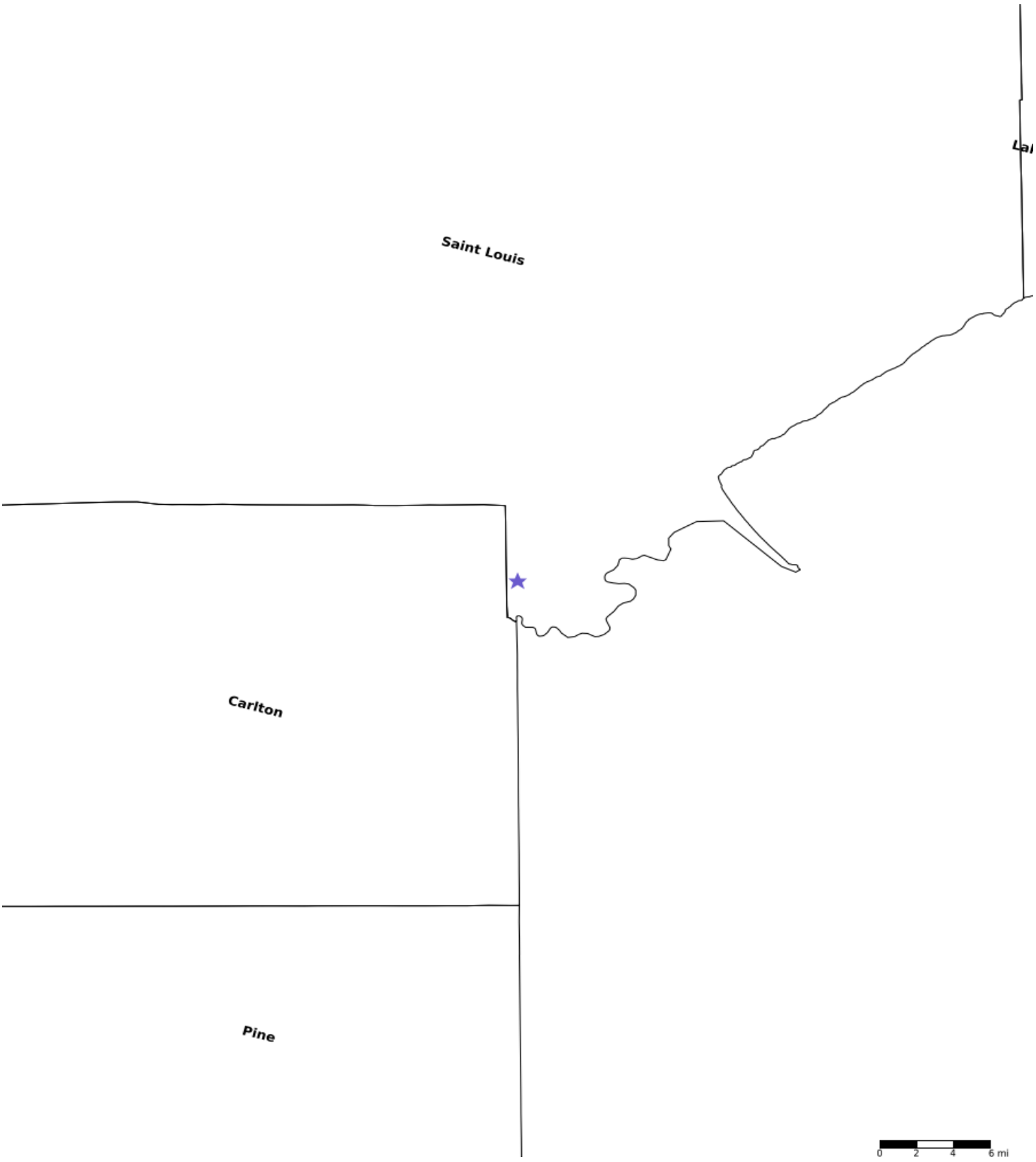
Sign-up Criteria?
No

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:
The SLR-LS is a partner to the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and the Lake Superior Lakewide Action and Management Plan (LAMP), working within the nexus between GLRI, LAMP, and state priorities for habitats and species within the Minnesota portion of the Lake Superior Basin.
We work with partners and stakeholders to develop and implement the following: Lower St. Louis River Habitat Plan, City of Duluth Natural Resources Management Program Plan, and St. Louis River Natural Area Management Plan, and priorities of the Lake Superior Headwaters Sustainability Partnership (Headwaters Partnership). The MNDNR is a founding Forum member of the Headwaters Partnership. The Headwaters Partnership, consisting of local, state, federal, and tribal partners, provides a framework for how partners in the lower St. Louis River region work together to achieve a thriving estuary landscape and community. Projects elevated through the Headwaters Partnership consider ecological integrity, community health, and economic development.
In previous OHF proposals, the AOC Remedial Action Plan largely influenced parcel selection. As AOC projects are completed and the AOC moves closer to delisting, our team and partners select parcels that meet habitat goals and objectives that were outside of the AOC program's limited scope. This area has a strong cohort of partners that help each other manage both aquatic and terrestrial natural resources projects and planning efforts in the western Lake Superior and North Shore Highlands region. We consider partners' needs and priorities when selecting project areas.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Mission Creek Connectivity (Exact location unknown, could also include adjacent parcels within the watershed including in Carlton County)	St. Louis	04915230	1	$800,000	Yes	Crossing prioritization and replacement

Parcel Map


Saint Louis
Carlton
Pine
0
2
4
6 mi
Protect in Easement
Protect in Fee with PILT
Protect in Fee W/O PILT
Restore
Enhance
Other

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Mission Creek Watershed Connectivity

Comparison Report

Program Title: ML 2026 - Mission Creek Watershed Connectivity
Organization: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Manager: Jeramy Pinkerton

Budget

Requested Amount: $3,442,200
Appropriated Amount: $1,111,000
Percentage: 32.28%

Item	Requested Proposal	Leverage Proposal	Appropriated AP	Leverage AP	Percent of Request	Percent of Leverage
Personnel	$700,000	-	$252,000	-	36.0%	-
Contracts	$2,050,000	-	$560,000	-	27.32%	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	$7,000	-	$4,000	-	57.14%	-
Professional Services	$520,000	-	$238,000	-	45.77%	-
Direct Support Services	$135,700	-	$34,000	-	25.06%	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$25,000	-	$20,000	-	80.0%	-
Supplies/Materials	$4,500	-	$3,000	-	66.67%	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$3,442,200**	**-**	**$1,111,000**	**-**	**32.28%**	**-**

If the project received 70% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?
We would continue scoping and prioritizing crossings. We would only be able to complete one crossing replacement.

Acres of forested habitat enhancement would be reduced proportionately.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Personnel/DSS expenses would reduce to 70-85% of the requested amount. Getting projects to being

construction-ready and overseeing construction requires the largest investment of staff time. Staff time spent on advancing the program as a whole and developing future projects would be most reduced.

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?
We would fund the design and construction of one lower value stream crossing. Additional funds could be acquired to implement the full project.

Forest enhancement could be scaled proportionately.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?
Personnel/DSS expenses would be reduced to 50-70% of the requested amount. Getting projects to the point of being construction-ready requires the largest investment of staff time. Staff time spent on advancing the program as a whole and developing future projects would be most reduced.

Output

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	2	1	50.0%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Easement	0	-	-
Enhance	200	-	0.0%

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	$2,659,700	$1,111,000	41.77%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-
Enhance	$782,500	-	0.0%

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	2	1	50.0%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Easement	0	-	-
Enhance	200	-	0.0%

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	$2,659,700	$1,111,000	41.77%
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-
Enhance	$782,500	-	0.0%