



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Northern Forests Legacy Project
ML 2026 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/26/2025

Proposal Title: Northern Forests Legacy Project

Funds Requested: \$25,105,400

Confirmed Leverage Funds: \$520,000

Is this proposal Scalable?: No

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Christine Ostern

Title: Forest Legacy Program Coordinator

Organization: State of Minnesota DNR

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Location Information

County Location(s): St. Louis.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Narrative

Abstract

The Northern Forests Legacy project seeks to permanently protect 19,140 acres of high-priority forestland in St. Louis County through a partnership between the Minnesota DNR and St. Louis County. These large, intact parcels will help consolidate existing blocks of public forestland, enhancing landscape connectivity and ecological integrity. Currently held by The Conservation Fund, the lands must be secured for public ownership by 2027 or they will be sold in smaller blocks on the private market. This project will conserve critical wildlife habitat, protect water quality, support sustainable forestry and local economies, and expand public access across northern Minnesota.

Design and Scope of Work

The Northern Forests Legacy project aims to permanently protect 19,140 acres of high-priority forestland in St. Louis County through a collaboration between the MN DNR and St. Louis County. This initiative builds on years of partnership and strategic conservation work with The Conservation Fund (TCF). From 2018 to 2022, TCF acquired key forest tracts in the region from PotlatchDeltic Ltd. A subset of these strategically prioritized parcels forms the basis of the Northern Forests Legacy project. Phase 1 is already underway with funding from separate sources. This proposal seeks support for Phase 2. Note: These parcels and this project is separate and different from the 2020 MN Heritage Forest acquisition, where TCF purchased 72,000 acres from PotlatchDeltic Ltd. in a single bargain-sale transaction.

Phase 1 (not OHF-funded): By July 2025, DNR and St. Louis County will complete the acquisition and permanent protection of 9,762 acres of forestland from TCF. This initial phase is fully funded through separate outside sources*, using direct investments from both the DNR and St. Louis County, underscoring their joint commitment and the local support to conserving Minnesota's forest resources. (*This is not the MN Heritage Forest land acquisition.)

Phase 2: This Northern Forests Legacy proposal focuses on protecting an additional 19,140 acres of forestland in St. Louis County from TCF before the organization divests these holdings by Dec 2027. Parcels not secured for public ownership by then will be sold in smaller blocks on the private market. This is a rare and time-sensitive opportunity to conserve some of Minnesota's most resilient, connected, and ecologically valuable forest habitat – all while local support for state and county ownership is in place and ready to act.

The proposed work addresses urgent needs: preventing forest fragmentation, protecting wildlife habitat, conserving water quality, supporting climate resilience, keeping forestlands intact and sustainably managed, and ensuring permanent public access. Forty-one percent of Minnesota's forests are privately owned, with some of the highest conversion rates in the nation. Strategic public acquisition builds on forest blocks and maintains connected landscapes. These lands also support local economies through sustainable forestry and recreation, including hunting, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing.

The DNR and St. Louis County jointly prioritized parcels using a GIS-based analysis to: 1) Assess their habitat quality; 2) Proximity to existing public lands; 3) Opportunities for public access; 4) Potential for long-term forest management. As a result, the DNR is seeking funding to acquire 9,451 acres to expand State Forests and Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). St. Louis County will acquire an additional 9,689 acres for permanent conservation and management. This proposal continues a well-established, locally driven conservation strategy. Investments by DNR and St. Louis County in Phase 1 demonstrate the strong local commitment to completing this project with Phase 2. This project is one of the last and best chances to protect large-scale, ecologically significant forestlands in

Minnesota. Given the time constraints, securing funding is critical to protect and manage these lands for future generations.

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

The Northern Forests Legacy project addresses critical threats to fish, game, and wildlife by permanently protecting over 19,000 acres of high-priority forestland in St. Louis County, Minnesota. This initiative aims to maintain and enhance habitat connectivity, reduce ecological stressors, and bolster resilience against climate change and invasive species.

The targeted parcels encompass a variety of habitats, including upland forests, forested wetlands, non-forested wetlands, and stream and lake shorelines. These areas provide essential habitat for numerous wildlife species, including at least 69 species classified as Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and at least 16 species listed as federal or state endangered, threatened, or special concern. Notably, the Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), a federally threatened species, relies on large tracts of boreal forest for survival. Additionally, the lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*), designated as a species of special concern in Minnesota, inhabits the region's rivers and lakes. The preservation of these habitats is crucial for the continued existence of these and other sensitive species. By preventing fragmentation and conversion of forestland, the project supports the ecological integrity of the region. Maintaining large, contiguous tracts of forest is vital for species that require expansive territories and for the overall health of the ecosystem. The protection of these lands also contributes to the conservation of watershed integrity and water quality, supporting aquatic species and the broader ecological community.

The project aligns with various conservation plans and initiatives, including the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan, which identifies priority habitats and species in need of protection. The strategic selection of parcels for acquisition ensures that conservation efforts are focused on areas of highest ecological value, maximizing the benefits for fish, game, and wildlife.

In summary, the Northern Forests Legacy project represents a significant opportunity to safeguard critical habitats in Minnesota, supporting the conservation of diverse species and the ecological resilience of the region.

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

TCF acquired these lands for conservation and plans to sell the 19,140 acres in smaller blocks on the private market if they are not secured by Dec 2027. To meet this tight deadline, the DNR and St. Louis County acquisition teams would be poised to act quickly and efficiently if funding was recommended and appropriated. The teams are prepared to leverage their expertise and collaborative approach to ensure two swift land acquisitions, minimizing fragmentation and preserving ecological integrity. This expedited timeline is crucial to permanently protect these lands in public ownership before the parcels are sold to private buyers on the open market. Land acquisition and habitat management by the DNR and St. Louis County will safeguard cold-water streams, protect habitat for Species in Greatest Conservation Need, maintain vital connected and resilient ecological corridors, ensure these lands remain forested and managed sustainably, and provide public access opportunities.

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

A significant and growing threat to Minnesota's northern forests is habitat fragmentation and conversion for other uses. This proposal directly addresses these challenges by preventing further habitat fragmentation and conversion. According to the Minnesota Forest Resources Council (MFRC), "parcelization" is one of the most critical challenges affecting the state's forest economy and ecology. In fact, forest land is being converted to non-forest uses at an alarming rate of approximately 3,600 acres annually, as noted in the OHF: 25 Year Framework. MFRC's "Minnesota Forest Vision" advocates for enlarging and protecting the forest land base through permanent

conservation easements and fee-title acquisition, with a specific focus on safeguarding contiguous forest complexes and high-biodiversity areas. Likewise, the State Wildlife Action Plan stresses that habitat degradation and fragmentation are the most significant stressors on Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) populations. By conserving large, intact forest tracts, this proposal seeks to combat these threats and enhance ecological connectivity.

The Minnesota Statewide Conservation & Preservation Plan highlights the critical need to reduce forest fragmentation, particularly for species such as black bears and wolves, which require vast, undeveloped habitats. By conserving and expanding these habitat complexes, this project ensures that the landscape remains functional, resilient, and capable of supporting biodiversity well into the future. Collaboration among DNR and St. Louis County will ensure that these expanded habitat corridors are actively managed and accessible for wildlife and the public alike, creating a robust, landscape-scale conservation effort for northern Minnesota's forests.

The Northern Forests Legacy (NFL) project will significantly reduce habitat fragmentation by expanding permanent habitat corridors and complexes across the region. With the proposed acquisitions, the DNR and St. Louis County will link together important tracts of public land, filling in gaps of private ownership to create a larger, continuous network of protected forest habitat. This approach directly addresses the need for climate-change resilience by providing ecological corridors for species migration and adaptation as climate conditions change.

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 proposal 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 proposal enhances habitat resilience to climate change by permanently protecting and consolidating large, ecologically significant blocks of forestland in St. Louis County—critical for sustaining wildlife under shifting climate conditions. The lands targeted for acquisition lie within a region identified as a high conservation priority by the Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan, the Minnesota Biological Survey, and climate-resilience models. These parcels rank among the highest in Minnesota for resiliency and connectivity, as identified by The Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Network analysis. Protecting this network will preserve habitat and corridors that allow species to adapt and thrive as climate impacts intensify. These forested landscapes support biodiversity, provide migratory corridors, and maintain landscape connectivity. Permanent protection will buffer against climate-driven stressors by maintaining forest cover, supporting natural hydrology, and expanding core habitat areas to help ensure the long-term viability of fish, game, and wildlife.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

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

Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife, and if not permanent outcomes, why it is important to undertake at this time:

This project will permanently protect high-priority forestland and habitat through fee title acquisition by the Minnesota DNR and St. Louis County, ensuring long-term conservation outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife. It represents a rare, large-scale opportunity to protect ecologically significant forestland in Minnesota, led by a strong collaboration among DNR, St. Louis County, and The Conservation Fund. These acquisitions align with multiple state and regional conservation plans and address critical habitat, access, and management priorities.

Lands acquired by St. Louis County will be added to the county-managed forest portfolio, increasing management efficiency, public access, habitat consolidation, and connectivity. DNR acquisitions will become part of either State Forests or Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), improving management efficiency through better access and consolidation with existing public lands. Management funding is secured through a mix of County, Forest Management Investment Account, General Fund, and other WMA funding sources.

The parcels were carefully selected to maximize landscape-level conservation benefits by consolidating fragmented ownerships and protecting contiguous blocks of priority habitat. This collaborative approach will enhance habitat management, biodiversity, and public use.

This opportunity cannot be delayed or scaled down without significant cost increases and risk of land loss. The project is shovel-ready, with a willing seller, completed strategic planning, and parcel prioritization. The land is expected to go on the open market after December 2027. Acting now ensures permanent protection of vital habitat and represents a legacy investment in Minnesota's natural heritage.

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ This project will permanently protect 19,140 acres of northern forest and riparian areas including wetlands, streams, shoreland, small lakes and ponds. All northern forest parcels included in this proposal are at high risk of fragmentation and conversion. Forest protection activities will be assessed, management planning required/documented and properties monitored. Forest composition will be inventoried; wildlife populations will be monitored.

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this proposal?

N/A

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

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

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

Lands acquired by St. Louis County will become part of the county owned and managed forest land portfolio, increasing management efficiency and public access. Funding for managing these lands comes mainly from funds set aside in the County's general fund, specifically designated for county-owned forest land management.

Lands acquired by DNR will become part of the Minnesota State Forest system and Wildlife Management Area (WMA) system. Fee acquisition increases management efficiency through improved access for habitat management through newly acquired state and county lands and consolidation of existing state lands. Funding for state forest management comes from the Forest Management Investment Account and General Fund; funding for management of WMAs comes from a variety of sources.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2027	OHF	St. Louis County and DNR complete acquisitions	-	-
annually/perpetually	various other sources	lands are managed by St. Louis County and DNR	-	-

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

This project will benefit diverse communities throughout the entire state of Minnesota by permanently protecting ecosystem services that provide clean drinking water, productive habitat, clean air, climate change mitigation, sedimentation/erosion control, and public recreational opportunities. Specific project scoring and implementation efforts benefit diverse communities and low- and moderate-income household through recreational opportunities that are close-to-home, culturally responsive and accessible to Minnesotans of all abilities.

The Environmental Protection Agency has developed an environmental justice mapping and screening tool. This tool indicates several of the proposed parcels fall within areas identified as environmental justice areas of concern. Demographic indicators used are: percent low-income, percent people of color, less than high school education, linguistic isolation, age under 5 and over 64. Protecting these lands mitigates some of the environmental justice concerns for at-risk populations. Project partners have prioritized building relations with the Sovereign Tribal Nations in Northern Minnesota. Establishing strong relationships and partnerships takes time and commitment. DNR has discussed the project with Minnesota's Sovereign Tribal Nations in the project area. Project outreach and engagement with Minnesota's Sovereign Tribal Nations will continue as this project continues.

The DNR has diversity, equity and inclusion strategies that benefit all Outdoor Heritage Fund projects including: public engagement that seeks out BIPOC voices and involves diverse communities, outreach and marketing of projects has this focus as well; and partnerships are at the center of all projects.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Yes

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

Yes

Land Use

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

No

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

No

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

The land is privately owned and public access can be restricted by the landowner.

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 hunting and fishing.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

State of MN

County

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

State Forest

County Forest

WMA

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

Yes

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

Forest access roads and trails have been developed by previous industrial forest landowners for forest management practices. Historically these roads and trails have been open to the public. These roads and trails will be maintained to provide ongoing access for forestry, fisheries and wildlife management activities and public use on the properties. There are some existing recreation trails going through the priority acquisition parcels or are bordering these parcels. Details on these trails can be provided upon request.

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Maintenance of access roads and trails will be the responsibility of the DNR on parcels proposed for DNR acquisition.

St. Louis County will be responsible for maintenance of access roads on parcels proposed for County acquisition. St. Louis County will be responsible for monitoring and enforcement issues on properties owned by the County.

Monitoring of roads and trails will be conducted on properties acquired by the DNR; the DNR has a monitoring and reporting plan in place that involves the Divisions of Forestry, Parks and Trails and Enforcement. This includes annual spring (and other wet season) closures, reporting issues and enforcement actions when necessary.

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:

New trails or roads will be developed only if necessary for forest/wildlife management activities. Any new road or trail will be developed and managed consistent with the public entity's land management practices and policies. Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) do not include motorized vehicle use unless allowed by pre-existing access easement. WMA will likely honor existing access easements, but new areas of motorized use are incompatible with WMA public uses.

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

DNR will be responsible for maintenance of access roads and trails on parcels proposed for DNR acquisition. A monitoring and reporting plan is in place and includes participation from the Divisions of Forestry, Parks and Trails, and Enforcement. The plan provides for seasonal closures during spring and other wet periods, as well as procedures for reporting issues and taking enforcement action when necessary.

St. Louis County will be responsible for maintenance of access roads on parcels proposed for acquisition by the County. St. Louis County will be responsible for monitoring and enforcement issues on properties owned by the County.

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

No

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

Initial cursory review of the proposed parcels indicates that the parcels are a condition which does not require restoration or enhancement. However, should further assessment reveal needs for restoration, OHF funds may be used for such purposes. Any future restoration or enhancement will be the responsibility of the landowner: DNR or St. Louis County.

Other OHF Appropriation Awards

Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC in the past?

No

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
DNR acquires new State Forest and WMA	December 31, 2027
St. Louis County acquires land and manages as County Forest lands	December 31, 2027

Budget**Grand Totals Across All Partnerships**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$60,000	\$20,000	-, federal	\$80,000
Contracts	\$272,000	-	-	\$272,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$11,500,000	-	-	\$11,500,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$12,300,000	\$500,000	NFWF Grant	\$12,800,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$800	-	-	\$800
Professional Services	\$759,600	-	-	\$759,600
Direct Support Services	\$7,000	-	-	\$7,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$194,000	-	-	\$194,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$25,105,400	\$520,000	-	\$25,625,400

Partner: MN DNR**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	-	\$20,000	federal	\$20,000
Contracts	\$185,000	-	-	\$185,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$11,500,000	-	-	\$11,500,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$350,000	-	-	\$350,000
Direct Support Services	\$7,000	-	-	\$7,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$185,000	-	-	\$185,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$12,227,000	\$20,000	-	\$12,247,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Forest Legacy Coordinator	0.25	2.0	-	\$20,000	federal	\$20,000

Partner: St. Louis County**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$60,000	-	-	\$60,000
Contracts	\$87,000	-	-	\$87,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$12,300,000	\$500,000	NFWF Grant	\$12,800,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$800	-	-	\$800
Professional Services	\$409,600	-	-	\$409,600
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$9,000	-	-	\$9,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$12,878,400	\$500,000	-	\$13,378,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
SLC staff	0.5	2.0	\$60,000	-	-	\$60,000

Amount of Request: \$25,105,400**Amount of Leverage:** \$520,000**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 2.07%**DSS + Personnel:** \$67,000**As a % of the total request:** 0.27%**Easement Stewardship:** -**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** -

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
\$520,000	\$520,000	100.0%	-	0.0%

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

- 1) \$500,000 NFWF grant to TCF will be applied to the County acquisition, reducing purchase price;
CONFIRMED
- 2) DNR personnel; CONFIRMED
- 3) Pending purchase of the Phase 1 acquisition (9,762 ac) demonstrates a large commitment and investment by DNR and St. Louis County for protection of these lands

Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable?

No

Please explain why this project can NOT be scaled:

This project cannot be scaled due to TCF's required divestment by December 2027, strong private demand, and a joint state-county process that prioritized only top-tier parcels. Reducing the 19,140-acre project would compromise habitat connectivity, public access, and conservation goals. The project has already been scaled to its essentials.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

No

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

St. Louis County: funding for outside project management and grant administration services;

DNR: funding for outside contracts for any site restoration, enhancement and development that is needed.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Appraisals

Other : closing costs, recording fees, property taxes

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

Total of two: one for St. Louis County and one for DNR.

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

Nothing 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?

DNR direct and necessary calculator (additive model). St. Louis County did not include DSS in their budget.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

Cash : \$20,000

Is Confirmation Document attached?

[Yes](#)

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	9,451	0	9,451
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	9,689	0	9,689
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	19,140	0	19,140

Restoration/Enhancement Acres of OHF Acquired Lands (Table 1a.1)

	RESTORE		Total	ENHANCE		Total
	Lands acquired in this proposal	Lands acquired with previous OHF appropriations (<5yrs old)		Lands acquired in this proposal	Lands acquired with previous OHF appropriations (<5yrs old)	
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-

Restoration/Enhancement Acres Breakdown of Existing Protected Lands (Table 1a.2)

	RESTORE		ENHANCE	
	Lands acquired with OHF	Lands NOT acquired with OHF	Lands acquired with OHF	Lands NOT acquired with OHF
DNR Lands (WMA, State Forests, etc)	-	-	-	-
Non-DNR Lands (city, state, federal, etc.)	-	-	-	-
Easements	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	\$12,227,000	-	\$12,227,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	\$12,878,400	-	\$12,878,400
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$25,105,400	-	\$25,105,400

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	9,451	9,451
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	9,689	9,689
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	19,140	19,140

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	-	-	-	-	\$12,227,000	\$12,227,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	\$12,878,400	\$12,878,400
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	\$25,105,400	\$25,105,400

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	\$1,293	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	\$1,329	-
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	-	-	-	-	\$1,293
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	\$1,329
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

The proposed project uses a science-based, multi-step process to identify, prioritize, and select parcels for acquisition. DNR and St. Louis County collaborated to review and prioritize parcels using a GIS-based tool developed by DNR staff, incorporating Strategic Land Asset Management metrics. This joint effort helped identify high-priority areas for forest habitat management, ownership consolidation, and public access.

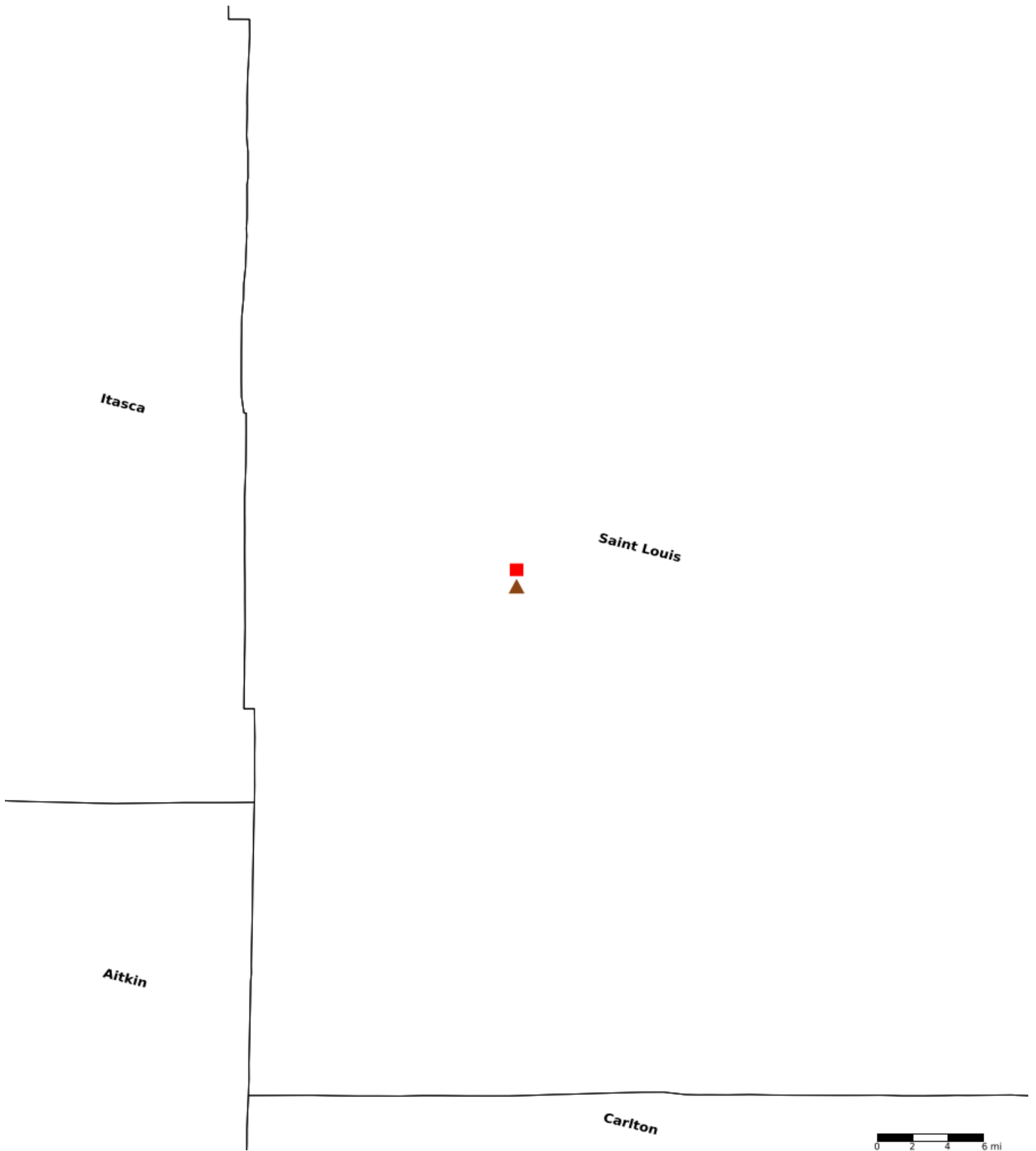
To strategically prioritize parcels, DNR assembled a statewide interdisciplinary team of land acquisition and management experts, who worked with St. Louis County staff. The goal was to protect large habitat blocks and corridors. Priority parcels are generally large, unprotected tracts identified in the Minnesota County Biological Survey, the State Wildlife Action Plan, and other key conservation frameworks. These include areas supporting rare species or those identified as critical habitats for conservation. Additionally, priority lands are located in strategic complexes adjacent to existing protected areas, enabling improved management.

Additionally, the DNR also consulted regional and watershed planning efforts, including The Nature Conservancy's Multiple Benefit Analysis, DNR's Forest Action Plan, PCA's watershed planning, BWSR's One Watershed One Plan, and local SWCD's efforts. These efforts collectively ensured that the selected parcels align with broader conservation goals and help protect interconnected landscapes for long-term habitat resilience.

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
DNR parcels	St. Louis	05519230	9,451	\$11,500,000	No
St. Louis County parcels	St. Louis	05519219	9,689	\$12,300,000	No

Parcel Map



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

Northern Forests Legacy

Protecting 19,179 acres of High-Priority Forestland in St. Louis County

A collaborative proposal from St. Louis County and the Department of Natural Resources

Background

The Northern Forests Legacy project is a two-phase effort to **permanently protect forestland in St. Louis County**. From 2018–2022, The Conservation Fund (TCF) acquired land from PotlatchDeltic Ltd., creating a **rare opportunity for conservation**.*

Phase 1: Currently underway in 2025, will protect **9,762 acres** through funding from the Minnesota DNR and St. Louis County.

Phase 2: The focus of this proposal, seeks to conserve an additional **19,179 acres** for permanent protection, sustainable forest management, and increased public access.

Note: This project is **separate and **different** from the 2020 Minnesota Heritage Forest acquisition, where TCF purchased 72,000 acres from PotlatchDeltic Ltd. in one transaction at a bargain sale.*

Why Now? Not Scalable?

- **The Conservation Fund must sell these lands by December 2027.** Parcels not secured for public ownership will be sold on the **private market**.
- The project has **already been scaled down** to include only the **highest-priority parcels**.
- While partial funding could secure some acres, the **19,000-acre project is not scalable**—reducing acreage would compromise **habitat connectivity, public access, and long-term conservation goals**.
- The **St. Louis County Board strongly supports this effort**. Acting now ensures we leverage **local momentum and investment**.

Contact Us

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Project Overview

	Acres	Request Amount
St. Louis County	9,689	\$12,878,400
MN DNR	9,451	\$12,227,000
Total	19,140	\$25,105,400

**\$520,000 of anticipated leverage*

Strategic Parcel Prioritization

Using shared conservation goals, the partnership conducted a **coordinated prioritization process** to assess:

- Habitat Quality
- Proximity to Existing Public Lands
- Enhanced Public Access
- Long-Term Forest Management Value

Letters of Support

- St. Louis County Board Resolution
- Gentleman Forester
- MN Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
- MN Conservation Federation
- MN Deer Hunters Association
- MN Forest Resource Council
- MN Lakes and Rivers
- National Wild Turkey Federation
- Ruffed Grouse Society
- UMN Natural Resources Research Institute
- Vermillion Lake Association



Northern Forests Legacy Priority Parcels

