



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

DNR AMA Fee-Title and Trout Stream Easement Acquisition
ML 2026 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/26/2025

Proposal Title: DNR AMA Fee-Title and Trout Stream Easement Acquisition

Funds Requested: \$6,450,500

Confirmed Leverage Funds: -

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Rick Walsh

Title: FAW Land Acquisition Consultant

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Location Information

County Location(s): Houston, Fillmore, Goodhue and Winona.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Southeast Forest

Forest / Prairie Transition

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Habitat

Narrative**Abstract**

We propose a programmatic approach to achieve prioritized aquatic habitat protection for trout streams and sensitive shoreline in Minnesota, with an emphasis on Southeast, Northeast, and North Central Minnesota. We propose to protect approximately 330 acres and 18 miles of trout stream corridor with permanent conservation easements on private land. We additionally propose to protect approximately 195 acres of sensitive shoreline in fee-title. Protected lands will be designated as Aquatic Management Areas (AMA's) administered by the Minnesota DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Design and Scope of Work

Trout fishing in Minnesota is enjoyed by thousands of anglers. The MNDNR Section of Fisheries administers a conservation easement program that has strong stakeholder support, and protects the habitat that is the foundation of our successful trout management program. In addition to protecting the riparian corridor of trout streams, easements provide access for the angling public, and also provide access for restoration and enhancement projects. We propose a programmatic approach to achieve prioritized aquatic habitat protection for trout streams across Minnesota. Most trout streams are found in Southeast and Northeast Minnesota, but conservation opportunities in other areas of the state will be evaluated by scoring and ranking candidate parcels as they become available. Protected lands will be designated as Aquatic Management Areas (AMA's) administered by the Minnesota DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Protection of shoreline on waters other than trout streams would be through fee-title acquisition. The DNR Fish Habitat Plan directs protection efforts and focuses on the north central part of the state with emphasis on watersheds approaching the 75% protection threshold, shoreline identified as Highly Sensitive, and Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance.

The dollar value of trout stream conservation easements is set by formula described in M.S.84.0272 subd. 2. The formula uses the length of stream being placed under easement and the area of the easement footprint. The length of the stream easement in feet (length is measured in GIS from a current aerial photo) is multiplied by \$5 per foot. The area of the easement foot print is also measured in GIS. The area in acres is multiplied by the average per acre estimated market value of Agricultural, Rural Vacant, and Managed Forest Land within the township where the easement lies. Estimated market value and total acres by land type for every township in the state are supplied by the Department of Revenue and revised annually. So, easement price is calculated as (feet of stream under easement x \$5) + (acres of easement foot print x average market value/acre within that township). Values for fee-title acquisitions are set by certified appraisal.

Scoring and ranking candidate parcels for trout stream conservation easement acquisition is based on multiple criteria. Criteria include fishery quality, rare natural features and other ecological attributes, potential to link with existing easements to increase protected corridors, and the need for access to conduct habitat restoration and enhancement projects with potential to improve the fishery. Scoring for fee-title AMA candidates is based on multiple criteria including watershed characteristics, shoreline condition, ability to build on habitat complexes, and lake attributes.

The proposal includes the cost of easements or fee-title, professional services to complete the transactions, a deposit to the Easement Stewardship Account to cover future costs of stewardship, and a budget for contracts and supplies/materials to post the new lands as well as facility needs such as a parking lot and signage. The proposal can be scaled by dropping lower scoring parcels.

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

The focus of the protection work in this proposal is trout streams and their riparian corridor, and sensitive shoreline on other types of water. Although benefits to fisheries are a primary consideration of the program, riparian areas are also important to game and nongame wildlife, including species of greatest conservation need (SGCN). We will use a scoring system that takes into account multiple considerations including Minnesota Biological Survey sites of Biodiversity Significance. Some scoring criteria, such as the potential to expand corridors and protected areas benefit many species. The scoring system for trout streams is described in more detail in the attachment.

The use of scoring criteria allow a programmatic approach that fairly evaluates candidate parcels without eliminating the potential for protection in any geographic region. Because species distribution is not uniform across the state, species benefitting from conservation easements will vary across regions. SCGN's that depend on aquatic and riparian habitat include several turtle species, common mudpuppy, two frog species, and several species of waterfowl and shorebirds.

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

Strong public support helps facilitate successful conservation. Popularity of trout fishing is at an all-time high in Minnesota, and its important to be responsive to the current support for expanding protection of the resource. Expanding protected riparian corridors on coldwater streams reduces risk of habitat fragmentation and degraded water quality, reducing the future costs of restoration and enhancement. Expanding opportunity for outdoor recreation also better connects Minnesotans with the outdoors, increasing awareness of, and support for conserving the water that sustains the state.

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

The scoring criteria include linking with existing easements or fee-title lands to expand protected riparian corridors/complexes. The scoring criteria also award points to parcels with rare natural features identified in the MBS GIS layer. Fee-title acquisitions that guard against future development and habitat fragmentation are prioritized.

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

Other : MN DNR Fish Habitat Strategic Plan

Strategic Plan for Coldwater Resources Management in Southeastern Minnesota

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.

Conservation easements on stream corridors help maintain connectivity. Habitat connectivity is considered to be a primary factor in giving populations of native plants and animals the ability to better adapt to climate change. In NE Minnesota streams, water temperature is affected much more by air temperature than in SE Minnesota. So maintaining healthy riparian cover of perennial vegetation helps shade the streams and keep water temperatures down. Conservation easements protect riparian vegetation by limiting its removal or modification.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Forest / Prairie Transition

Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

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

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:

Trout stream conservation easements and fee-title AMAs provide permanent protection. DNR is committed to easement stewardship, including maintaining positive relations with current and future landowners, monitoring to ensure compliance with conservation terms, and enforcement in the rare cases where needed to ensure compliance. Monitoring of conditions on fee-title lands is conducted by dedicated staff who identify needs for habitat restoration or enhancement. The combination of habitat protection, access for restoration/enhancement work, and public access for angling (and hunting on some AMAs) represents a significant benefit to fish, wildlife, and outdoor recreationists. The program goals for the southeast forest and northern forest explicitly recognize the importance of coldwater streams and rivers.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Other ~ Habitat conditions on fee-title Aquatic Management Areas are regularly assessed. This allows us to identify the need for restoration or enhancement projects, as well as identifying trespass from adjoining landowners.

Programs in the northern forest region:

Improved aquatic habitat indicators ~ MN DNR conducts scheduled monitoring inspections of all conservation easements. Fish populations and habitat conditions are also assessed on a regular basis. These activities allow us to ensure easement terms are being followed, as well as identify the need for habitat improvement/restoration.

Habitat conditions on fee-title Aquatic Management Areas are regularly assessed. This allows us to identify the need for restoration or enhancement projects, as well as identifying trespass from adjoining landowners.

Programs in southeast forest region:

Rivers, streams, and surrounding vegetation provide corridors of habitat ~ MN DNR conducts scheduled monitoring inspections of all conservation easements. Fish populations and habitat conditions are also assessed on a regular basis. These activities allow us to ensure easement terms are being followed, as well as identify the need for habitat improvement/restoration.

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.

OHF funding accelerates trout stream and fee-title AMA acquisition beyond what is possible with other funding sources. It does not supplant or substitute other program funds.

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

The request includes funds to deposit in the Easement Stewardship Account, an interest-bearing account authorized in MS 84.69. Funds will support easement monitoring to be conducted following DNR Operational Order 128 and Division of Fish and Wildlife Easement Monitoring Guidelines. Maintenance of fee-title lands will be partially funded through other state sources, as will restoration of habitat on trout streams.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2027	OHF appropriation (this proposal)	baseline easement report	Future monitoring per MNDNR guidelines	Address any potential violations
2030	Game & Fish, RIM, or other	periodically assess habitat conditions	propose projects to address habitat needs	conduct projects to restore or enhance habitat

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

DNR'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. The Minnesota DNR has adopted advancing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) as a key priority in its 2020-22 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 building partnerships with diverse communities.

The OHF funds high quality habitat projects that provide ecosystem services like clean water and carbon sequestration that support environmental justice. OHF also supports public access and recreational opportunities on these lands. OHF projects and outcomes benefit BIPOC and diverse communities through recreational opportunities that are close-to-home, culturally responsive and accessible to Minnesotans with disabilities.

The DNR has diversity, equity and inclusion strategies that benefit all OHF projects:

- Multilingual and culturally specific hunting and fishing education programs take place on public lands.
- All hiring is equal opportunity, affirmative action, and veteran-friendly. Contracting seeks out Targeted

Group, Economically Disadvantaged and Veteran-Owned businesses.

- Public engagement seeks out BIPOC voices and involves diverse communities. Outreach and marketing of projects has this focus as well.
- Partnerships are at the center of all projects. Tribes in particular are consulted in all pertinent areas of the DNR's work, under EO 19-24.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

No

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

Any lands acquired in fee or easement will be designated as Aquatic Management Areas (AMA). Per state statute, acquisition of AMAs requires notification of local government but not formal approval from local government unless the funding includes Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) money. We do not plan to use RIM for these acquisitions.

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

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?

No

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

AMAs are open to public angling and some AMAs are open to public hunting.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

State of MN

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

AMA

Will the eased land be open for public use?

Yes

Describe the expected public use:

In addition to the conservation terms of the easements, access is provided for angling; other public activities are not allowed.

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 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:

Trout stream easement terms include access for restoration and enhancement work. Although no work specific to the parcel list is currently planned or funded, future work may be done by DNR or partner organizations using funding from various sources, including OHF. Land acquired in fee will be brought up to minimum development standards with this funding, but any restoration or enhancement of habitat would be funded from other sources, including future OHF appropriations.

Other OHF Appropriation Awards**Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC in the past?**

Yes

Are any of these past appropriations still OPEN?

Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2023	\$1,043,000	\$470,400	\$572,600	45.1%
2021	\$500,000	\$435,600	\$64,400	87.12%
2018	\$642,000	\$640,400	\$1,600	99.75%
2016	\$1,578,000	\$1,023,200	\$554,800	64.84%
2015	\$4,540,000	\$4,481,400	\$58,600	98.71%
Totals	\$8,303,000	\$7,051,000	\$1,252,000	84.92%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
final parcel scores and ranks, initiate acquisitions	summer 2026
complete acquisitions	spring 2029
complete baseline easement reports	spring 2029
monitoring and enforcement	ongoing, no end date

Budget**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	-	-	-	-
Contracts	\$25,000	-	-	\$25,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$3,500,000	-	-	\$3,500,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,000,000	-	-	\$2,000,000
Easement Stewardship	\$320,000	-	-	\$320,000
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$560,000	-	-	\$560,000
Direct Support Services	\$10,500	-	-	\$10,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$35,000	-	-	\$35,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$6,450,500	-	-	\$6,450,500

Amount of Request: \$6,450,500

Amount of Leverage: -

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%

DSS + Personnel: \$10,500

As a % of the total request: 0.16%

Easement Stewardship: \$320,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 16.0%

Does this proposal 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?

A 50% reduction in funding would result in an approximate 50% reduction in acres protected.

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

DSS would not likely be proportionately reduced. One of the main factors driving DSS is the number of "allotments" the funding resides in. The number of allotments would not change regardless of dollar amount awarded.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

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

A 30% reduction in funding would result in an approximate 30% reduction in acres protected.

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

DSS would not likely be proportionately reduced. One of the main factors driving DSS is the number of "allotments" the funding resides in. The number of allotments would not change regardless of dollar amount awarded.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

Contracts for this appropriation would most likely be before hiring a contractor to construct parking lots as needed to bring fee title lands up to minimum development standards. If State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) review is needed prior to parking lot construction, those services are provided under contract with SHPO.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Appraisals

Other : document drafting and recording, landowner negotiations, legal description review and preparation, appraisal services, survey services

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

We anticipate 6 to 8 fee title acquisition attempts if fully funded.

Easement Stewardship

What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?

We anticipate approximately 40 easements to be acquired with this funding if fully funded. We have estimated about \$8K per easement (varies based on size and complexity of easement) using a calculator produced by staff in the DNR Lands and Minerals Division. The calculator takes into account frequency of monitoring events and associated staff time and expenses, and probability of future enforcement needs.

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 calculator provided by DNR administrative support staff.

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	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	195	195
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	330	330
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	525	525

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	-	-	-	\$3,650,000	\$3,650,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$2,800,500	\$2,800,500
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$6,450,500	\$6,450,500

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	30	0	0	165	195
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	250	0	80	330
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	30	250	0	245	525

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	-	\$1,215,000	-	-	\$2,435,000	\$3,650,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$2,035,500	-	\$765,000	\$2,800,500
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$1,215,000	\$2,035,500	-	\$3,200,000	\$6,450,500

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$18,717
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$8,486
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	-	\$40,500	-	-	\$14,757
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$8,142	-	\$9,562
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

18

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

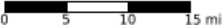
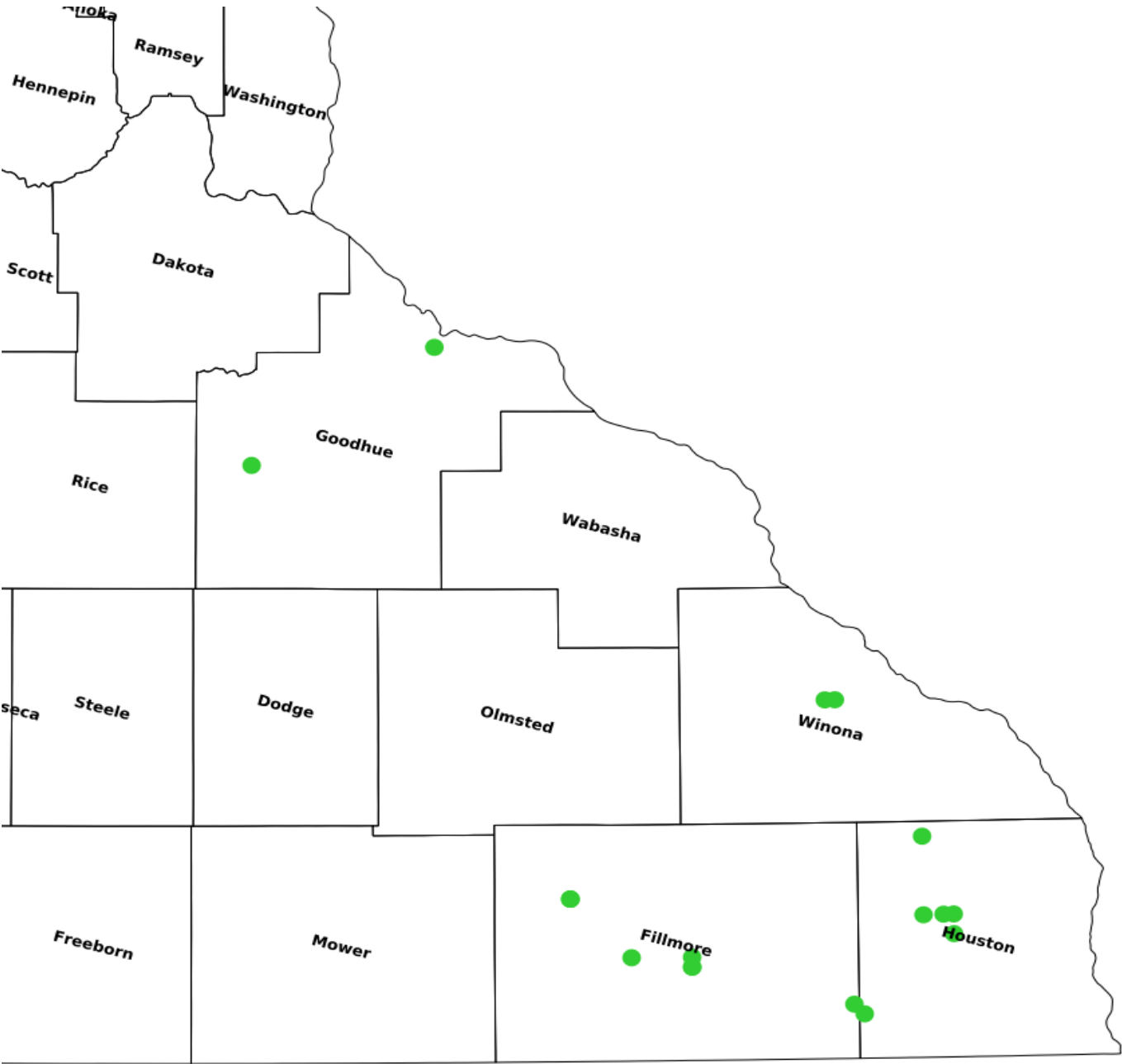
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Candidate easements are proposed by DNR Fisheries field offices. The local knowledge of field staff is invaluable when it comes to acquiring quality easements. We then score each potential easement with an objective set of criteria that generates a score. Criteria are in the categories of Size & Proximity to other protected lands, Stream Habitat conditions, Fish Population Characteristics, Fish Movement, Thermal Conditions, and Anger Use. A copy of the scoring worksheet is attached to this proposal. Fee-title AMA candidates are similarly proposed by field Fisheries staff. They are then vetted and ranked based on score, priority, and alignment with departmental Strategic Land Asset Management (SLAM) goals. Scores for fee-title candidates use different criteria than trout stream easements.

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Camp Creek	Fillmore	10210208	11	\$78,000	No
Camp Creek	Fillmore	10210217	10	\$76,000	No
Camp Creek	Fillmore	10210217	14	\$97,000	No
Deer Creek	Fillmore	10312208	9	\$110,000	No
Deer Creek	Fillmore	10312208	7	\$75,000	No
Deer Creek	Fillmore	10312208	3	\$35,000	No
South Branch Root River	Fillmore	10211208	7	\$70,000	No
Hay Creek	Goodhue	11315236	8	\$75,000	No
Little Cannon River	Goodhue	11118236	4	\$35,000	No
Badger Creek	Houston	10306222	6	\$38,000	No
Badger Creek	Houston	10306234	3	\$23,000	No
Badger Creek	Houston	10306221	7	\$43,000	No
Beaver Creek	Houston	10306219	25	\$150,000	No
Campbell Creek	Houston	10406207	7	\$65,000	No
Riceford Creek	Houston	10108201	5	\$65,000	No
Riceford Creek	Houston	10107207	3	\$35,000	No
Garvin Brook	Winona	10708233	5	\$38,000	No
Garvin Brook	Winona	10708234	3	\$24,000	No

Parcel Map



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

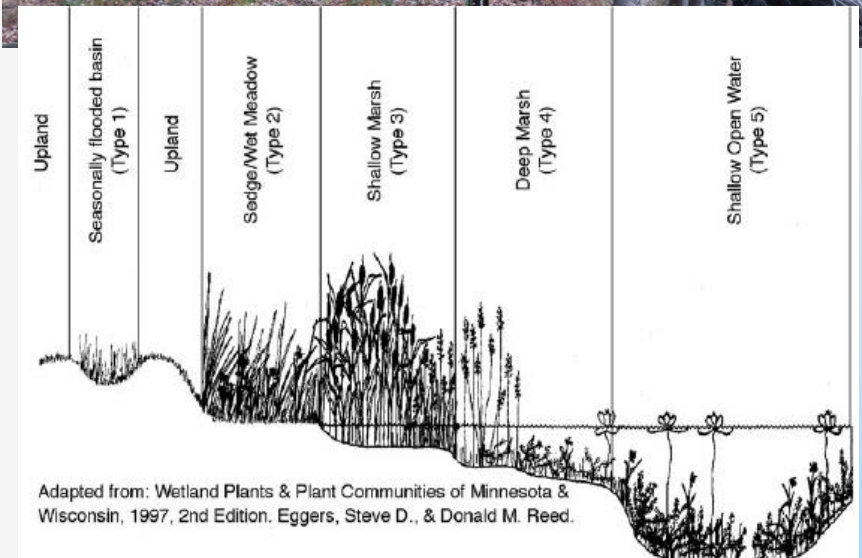
Aquatic Management Areas (AMAs)

Conservation easement AMAs protect the stream corridor and provide angler access. Habitat is protected for the benefit of trout, other fish and aquatic life, and numerous species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates. Easements are open to public angling, and allow for investment of state funding into habitat improvement and bank stabilization projects.

Fee-title AMAs protect sensitive shoreline. Healthy habitat is protected. The land is open to public angling and/or hunting and other compatible uses. Habitat conditions are monitored.

This proposal:

- \$6.45M request
- Protection goal of 525 acres
- Builds on past efforts
- Needed to keep momentum



Program outputs last six appropriations:

- 2014 = 131 acres and 7.8 miles protected
- 2015 = 132 acres and 5.9 miles protected
- 2016 = 22 acres and 1.7 miles protected
- 2018 = 115 acres and 7.2 miles protected
- 2021 = 82 acres and 5.2 miles protected
- 2023 = ongoing with 85 to 160 acres projected

Program leverage FY20-25:

- Trout & Salmon Stamp = \$580,000
- Critical Habitat Match = \$500,000
- Sales & Reinvestment = \$45,000

Highlights

- Healthy shoreline habitat is protected
- Riparian corridor connectivity is protected
- Trout fishing is growing in popularity
- Opportunity for habitat enhancement
- Ground water sources are protected
- Easement values determined by formula
- Fee-title values determined by appraisal
- Emphasis on SE and NE Minnesota streams
- Emphasis on north central Minnesota lakes
- Emphasis on adding to existing AMAs