Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

DNR Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement, Phase 1

Laws of Minnesota 2027 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 10/16/2026

Project Title: DNR Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement, Phase 1

Funds Recommended: $2,103,000

Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Jeramy Pinkerton
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Location Information

County Location(s): Cook.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

MNDNR's St. Louis River – Lake Superior Team leads a collaborative program focused on important habitats in Minnesota's Lake Superior watershed. The Team aims to make strategic investments that protect, restore, and enhance ecosystems across this region to ensure they are diverse, productive, and resilient into the future. The two elements of this project would support the resiliency of moose and Brook Trout populations in northeast Minnesota by enhancing foraging habitat for moose and re-connecting Brook Trout habitat in or near the Irish Creek watershed.

Design and Scope of Work

The St. Louis River – Lake Superior (SLR-LS) Team will enhance priority Brook Trout and moose habitats in and around the Irish Creek Watershed, located predominantly in the Grand Portage State Forest. Our Team utilizes a collaborative approach to restoration and enhancement projects that includes a network of resource managers, researchers, and key stakeholders.

Irish Creek Connectivity: This project would reconnect up to 8.9 miles of Brook Trout habitat in Irish Creek's mainstem and tributaries by replacing two crossings that are barriers to fish movement with appropriately sized structures on the mainstem of Irish Creek and provide funding for design of one additional crossing. This would also allow Brook Trout to utilize habitat in the Swamp River during favorable temperature conditions. The targeted crossings are undersized resulting in conditions that are impassable to fish such as being perched, having shallow flows, or high velocities. They also have the potential to release excess sediment into the stream via overtopping or catastrophic failure. The Trout Unlimited Great Lakes Brook Trout Conservation Portfolio indicates temperatures in Irish Creek will be resilient to climate change, especially in the mid to upper reaches. Enhancing fish passage in this system will make Brook Trout more resilient in Irish Creek and more broadly across Northeast Minnesota. Irish Creek is part of the MPCA long-term biological monitoring program and is classified as having exceptional tiered aquatic life use by the MPCA for fish and invertebrates. The MNDNR Division of Forestry has FEMA disaster relief funds that will likely be used to aid in funding this project. Once we have a firm cost estimate, Cook County will also apply for bridge bonding funds to help cover up to 50% of the costs of one crossing. Additional funding will be sought to implement the third design.

Moose Foraging Habitat Enhancement: This project will build on the successes of the Minnesota Moose Habitat Collaborative by enhancing up to 170 acres of moose browse foraging habitat within or near the Irish Creek Watershed. The area currently supports moose and is adjacent to the Swamp River, which supports aquatic vegetation creating a mosaic of foraging habitat. This watershed is also located within the Arrowhead block of the Moose Habitat Project Implementation Plan. Access to high-quality forage can lead to higher moose survival and benefit regional population resilience. No known OHF funded foraging habitat improvements have been implemented on these parcels, but local area wildlife biologists have identified foraging habitat enhancement as an important management action in and around the Irish Creek Watershed. We will implement approved forest treatments such as shearing, prescribed fire, planting and/or cutting to stimulate re-growth that is more palatable, nutritious, and accessible to moose.

In addition to specific projects mentioned above, the team will continue coordinating with our partners to develop additional habitat 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, but face challenges in the form of habitat fragmentation and rising temperatures due to climate change. Reconnecting Irish Creek and its tributaries will promote natural flows and connect habitat access throughout the entire watershed and to the Swamp River downstream, improving habitat conditions for all life stages of Brook Trout and ultimately increasing the resiliency of this population.

Moose are a state listed species of special concern, and a species of greatest conservation need. Increasing the foraging habitat will add to the resilience of this population.

The Irish Creek watershed is included in the MNDNR's Wildlife Action Network and is generally designated as medium with some low medium and high medium areas for conservation. Approximately half of the watershed has moderate to outstanding biodiversity significance as mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey.

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

We are seeing more frequent high flow events in this area, that add to the risk of catastrophic failure of undersized road crossings that would cause a significant influx of fine sediments into the stream, impacting Brook Trout habitat.

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

This project addresses habitat fragmentation by reconnecting aquatic habitats within Irish Creek, its tributaries and the Swamp River and by aligning different types of moose foraging habitats.

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

Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda

Moose Advisory Committee Report to the Minnesota DNR

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:

Increased availability and improved condition of riparian forests and other habitat corridors ~ *This will be measured by the length of stream re-connected.*

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 and was used for the same purpose.

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

SLR-LS habitat 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 the road that states they own the crossing and have the responsibility to maintain it.

MNDNR Grand Marais Area Fisheries manages Irish 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	Monitoring/survey of moose habitat and populations	-	-
All years	Cook County Roads	Maintaining Crossings	-	-
All years	DNR Roads	Maintaining Crossings	-	-
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:

SLR-LS 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?

State Forests

Public Waters

County/Municipal

Other : Road easements held by the MNDNR on roads that cross public water.

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
Vegetation maintenance	June 2032
Construction of fish passage projects	September 2031
Permitting and environmental review of fish passage projects	April 2030
Design of fish passage projects	March 2029
Project prioritization, integration, and development; site specific coordination	June 2032
Irish Creek Watershed Moose Foraging Enhancement	June 2032

Date of Final Report Submission: 10/01/2032

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, 2031;
(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, 2035;
(3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2032;
(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	$448,000	-	-	$448,000
Contracts	$1,066,200	-	-	$1,066,200
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	$6,000	-	-	$6,000
Professional Services	$500,000	-	-	$500,000
Direct Support Services	$60,800	-	-	$60,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$20,000	-	-	$20,000
Supplies/Materials	$2,000	-	-	$2,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$2,103,000**	**-**	**-**	**$2,103,000**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Project Manager	0.3	4.0	$135,000	-	-	$135,000
Team Supervisor	0.2	3.0	$103,000	-	-	$103,000
OAS	0.3	3.0	$100,000	-	-	$100,000
Project Manager	0.3	3.0	$110,000	-	-	$110,000

Amount of Request: $2,103,000
Amount of Leverage: -
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%
DSS + Personnel: $508,800
As a % of the total request: 24.19%
Easement Stewardship: -
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?
We will complete two crossings, with design on a third, and the funds spent on moose foraging habitat enhancement are reduced proportionately. Personnel costs were reduced to 70%, as getting projects to the point of being construction-ready requires the largest investment of staff time.

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 complete two crossings and the acres of moose foraging 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
NA

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?
The level of Federal Funding depends on the number of crossings we replace. It is likely that we will, at a minimum, have enough federal funds to cover the purchase of the replacement structures on DNR managed roads. We anticipate receiving confirmation of those Federal Funds around July 1, 2027. Our team also 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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	170	2	172
Total	**-**	**-**	**170**	**2**	**172**

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	-	-	$224,000	$1,879,000	$2,103,000
Total	**-**	**-**	**$224,000**	**$1,879,000**	**$2,103,000**

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	-	-	-	-	172	172
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**172**	**172**

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	-	0-	-	-	$2,103,000	$2,103,000
Total	**-**	**-**	**-**	**-**	**$2,103,000**	**$2,103,000**

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	-	-	$1,317	$939,500

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	-	-	-	-	$12,226

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?
No

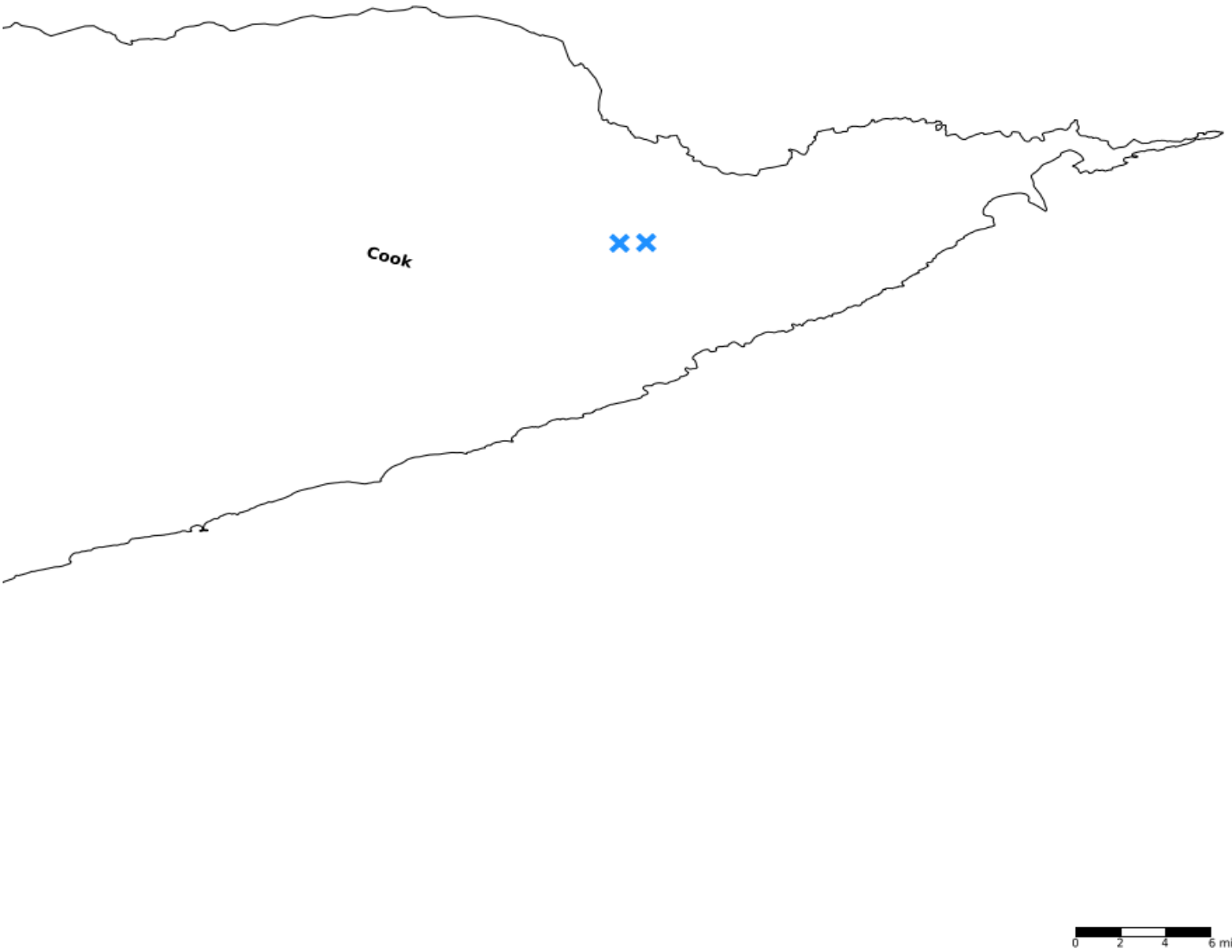
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:
The SLR-LS is a partner to the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and the Lake Superior Lakewide Action and Management Plan (LAMP), working within the nexus between GLRI, LAMP, and state priorities for habitats and species within the Minnesota portion of the Lake Superior Basin.

These parcels were identified, prioritized and selected by working with internal and external partners to identify priority work areas that had multiple needs so we could achieve the highest ecological uplift.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Irish Creek Connectivity (multiple sites, could include adjacent sections)	Cook	06304118	2	$2,400,600	Yes	Stream connectivity
Moose Foraging Enhancement (multiple sites, section with highest acreage listed)	Cook	06304117	170	$200,000	Yes	shearing, cutting, planting, etc to improve moose foraging habitat.

Parcel Map


Cook
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

DNR Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement, Phase 1

Comparison Report

Program Title: ML 2027 - DNR Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement, Phase 1
Organization: MNDNR
Manager: Jeramy Pinkerton

Budget

Requested Amount: $3,370,000
Appropriated Amount: $2,103,000
Percentage: 62.4%

Item	Requested Proposal	Leverage Proposal	Appropriated AP	Leverage AP	Percent of Request	Percent of Leverage
Personnel	$640,000	-	$448,000	-	70.0%	-
Contracts	$1,807,600	-	$1,066,200	-	58.98%	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	$7,000	-	$6,000	-	85.71%	-
Professional Services	$800,000	-	$500,000	-	62.5%	-
Direct Support Services	$92,400	-	$60,800	-	65.8%	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$20,000	-	$20,000	-	100.0%	-
Supplies/Materials	$3,000	-	$2,000	-	66.67%	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$3,370,000**	**-**	**$2,103,000**	**-**	**62.4%**	**-**

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 complete two crossings and the acres of moose foraging 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 a 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	0	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Easement	0	-	-
Enhance	274	172	62.77%

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-
Enhance	$3,370,000	$2,103,000	62.4%

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	0	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	-	-
Protect in Easement	0	-	-
Enhance	274	172	62.77%

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Total Proposed	Total in AP	Percentage of Proposed
Restore	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-
Enhance	$3,370,000	$2,103,000	62.4%