



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

MN Forests of the Future Phase XI South East Blufflands to Northern Forests Protection
ML 2027 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/22/2026

Proposal Title: MN Forests of the Future Phase XI South East Blufflands to Northern Forests Protection

Funds Requested: \$8,000,000

Confirmed Leverage Funds: \$50,000

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Andy Kernan

Title: Forest Legacy Program Coordinator

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Location Information

County Location(s): Hubbard, Isanti, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Winona, Wabasha, Fillmore, Crow Wing and Todd.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Southeast Forest

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Narrative

Abstract

The MN Forests for the Future Program focuses on protecting high conservation value forest lands and will acquire and steward 3,326 acres of working forest conservation easements on priority forest and riparian habitat in the SE bluffland and Northern forest regions across nine counties focused on private in-holdings and land adjacent to public land. Protecting large blocks of private forest achieves multiple benefits: conserving critical habitat, forested land cover essential for high water quality/quantity, building climate resilience and sustaining the forested landscape critical for local jobs in tourism and timber.

Design and Scope of Work

MN Forests for the Future Ph. XI protects forest/riparian habitat in the Southeast, Central, and Northwest; strategically targeting large forest blocks threatened by conversion and fragmentation. Nearly 7.5 million acres (44%) of MN's forests are privately-owned and at risk of fragmentation or conversion. Since 2008, MN has experienced some of the highest conversion rates in the U.S., with the highest located in North Central MN. This program protects forests through acquiring permanent working forest conservation easements. Protection work achieves multiple benefits by conserving critical habitat, maintaining forested land cover essential for high water quality/quantity, building climate resilience and by sustaining the forested landscape critical for recreation and local jobs in tourism and timber. This work is crucial to conserving wildlife that require large intact forests and provides perpetual protection for fish, game and wildlife that inhabit these forested landscapes. This proposal focuses on the SE blufflands and Northern forest areas building on existing protection and utilizing strong partnerships including local governments and citizen groups. Private in-holdings and land adjacent to publicly owned land are prioritized leveraging larger blocks of protected forest habitat, more protection against fragmentation, multiplying the effects of climate refugia and resilience, and providing habitat corridors especially important for wildlife movement. Land cover and land use directly impacts water quality/quantity; by protecting forests in key areas, this program will also protect drinking water, recharge aquifers, reduce nutrient and sediment to lakes and streams, protect floodplains, sustain fisheries and further mitigate climate change. Protection of forested land is critical for local economies including tourism, timber and outdoor recreation opportunities. Acquisition of permanent conservation easements will protect 3,326 acres of intact high conservation value forests and keep them in private ownership. Work is strategically focused to build on existing protection, address private in-holdings, address regional conservation and management goals and meet private landowner demand. Program guidelines have been developed and implemented for >15 years ensuring protection work is strategically located and stewardship sound and efficient. A forest management plan is included with each conservation easement and updates required regularly; the plans make the land eligible for DNR forest stewardship including technical assistance and cost-sharing for forest BMPs and many conservation easement landowners choose to participate in these programs to better conserve and manage their privately-owned forested habitat. Ongoing stewardship includes annual landowner meetings and on-site monitoring. Local government communication occurs so projects are supported and can continue to grow. Discussions/partnership with conservation organizations & citizen groups are on-going making protection efforts informed and efficient.

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

The predominant threat for wildlife Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and protected species is habitat degradation, loss and fragmentation. Maintaining intact and healthy forest habitat, especially large contiguous tracts, reduces stressors on these populations. Permanently protecting parcels in this proposal as conservation easements maintains core forested areas and connectivity, increasing the resilience to a changing climate, invasive

species and other habitat threats. The proposed project uses science-based targeting methods to leverage and expand existing habitat corridors and complexes, reduce fragmentation and protect areas identified as priorities in several plans and conservation initiatives, including the MN County Biological Survey. DNR's GIS-based Strategic Land Asset Management metrics are used by an inter-disciplinary team of experts from different Divisions to prioritize and select all acquisitions, including conservation easements. The priority tracts of forest land and habitat targeted for protection have some, if not all, of the following traits: are currently unprotected inholdings; large tracts identified by the MN County Biological Survey (including sites of high quality biodiversity significance); habitat identified by the State Wildlife Action Plan as significant; presence of rare species and SGCN or the habitat that support those species; located in a strategic habitat complex and adjacent to other protected land so that complexes can be protected and management improved. In addition, we consult with local and regional watershed/landscape planning efforts: TNC's Multiple Benefit Analysis and Resilient Lands Mapping Tool, DNR's Forest Action Plan, PCA's watershed plans, One Watershed One Plans, MFRC's Regional Landscape Plans, and Landscape Stewardship Plans. Targeted habitats include: upland forests, forested/non-forested wetlands and stream and lake shoreline. Protection of these lands provides critical habitat for key forest game species including upland birds, white-tail deer, moose, black bear, fisher, pine marten and waterfowl as well as songbird and other non-game wildlife species. In total, this proposal supports habitat protection with significant value for over 200 SGCN. SE Blufflands contain 156 SGCN, most of all subsections in the state, of these 82 species are endangered/threatened/special concern; 9 are mammals which are 41% of all mammal SGCN in the state.

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

This proposal will permanently protect strategically important large forest blocks threatened by conversion and fragmentation. Since 2008, MN's forests have experienced some of the highest conversion rates in the U.S. with the highest occurring in North Central MN. Each year, more forest habitat is lost and degraded due to conversion, development, and fragmentation. There is an urgent need to permanently protect our remaining large blocks of high conservation value forest. Nearly 7.5 million acres (44%) of MN's forests are privately-owned. Our proposal is based on working with private landowners who are currently willing to protect strategic high conservation value forest with permanent conservation easements. We may not have another chance to protect these lands in the future so we must act now while we can, working with willing conservation landowners, before it is too late.

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

A serious and significant threat to MN's SE blufflands and northern forests is conversion for other uses: the MN Forest Resources Council has identified parcelization as "the single most important policy issue affecting the economic and ecological health of the state's forests". The OHF: 25 Year Framework cites that "forest land has been converted to other uses...at a rate of 3,600 acres per year". The MN Forest Vision recommends that the "forest land base is enlarged and protected through permanent conservation easements and fee title acquisition" & "contiguous forest complexes should be protected and enlarged...and there should be focus to protect areas with high game populations and high levels of biodiversity". The State Wildlife Action Plan reports that "activities that fragment or degrade habitats can independently or in conjunction with invasive species reduce biological diversity" & "Habitat degradation, loss, and fragmentation are the predominant stressors impacting SGCN populations. Habitats with higher biological diversity and that are less fragmented are expected to have greater climate change resiliency than are systems with lower biological diversity and greater fragmentation." Protection of proposed lands reduces habitat loss/fragmentation & maintains forest habitat complexes. This project would expand permanently protected habitat complexes & avoid habitat conversion/development/fragmentation/degradation. The MN Forests for the Future program provides enhanced connectivity between conservation lands by protecting privately-owned properties linking public land. A key strategy for climate change mitigation is providing corridors/connectivity between different biomes/microclimates allowing species to migrate to find suitable

habitats that replace former habitats lost as the climate changes. However, many species may not be able to migrate over developed/cultivated land; providing habitat corridors for species movement benefits their ability to relocate. The MN Statewide Conservation & Preservation Plan says "forest fragmentation reduces resiliency and habitat quality for wildlife including species such as bears and wolves which need large tracts of undeveloped land". The Plan identifies the need to increase forest ecosystem resilience by maintaining large blocks of forested land. This requires protection of forestlands against conversion to other uses, and conservation of working forestland resources through sustainable management."

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

Minnesota Forest Resource Council Landscape Plans

Other : Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

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

Southeast Forest

Protect forest habitat through acquisition in fee or easement to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties

Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife:

The MN Forests for the Future program acquires and stewards permanent conservation easements that restricts development, conversion, and parcelization protecting wildlife habitat and the ability to manage the forest. In the Southeast Bluffland subsection, there are 156 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), the most of all subsections in the state, of these 82 species are endangered, threatened, or of special concern; and of the total SGCN species, 9 are mammals which are 41% of all mammal SGCN in the state.

Permanent protection of forests will benefit the overall ecology of the area by protecting forests around the cold-water trout streams that feed major rivers such as the Root, Whitewater, Zumbro, and Cannon; mitigate fragmentation of rich hardwood forests that stabilize steep slopes, river valleys, and stream banks providing for wildlife habitat across the protected parcels and provide/protect habitat connectivity. In the northern forests, the ecological benefits of this program will mitigate forest fragmentation resulting in higher quality/quantity of wildlife habitat and prevent cover type conversion resulting in numerous ecological benefits across the landscape. The Minnesota Forest Resources Council recently unanimously passed a "Keeping Forests Forested" resolution conveying the Council's strong support of policies, programs, and funding that provide enduring protection of privately owned forest lands, identifying the MN Forests for the Future Program as key in permanently protecting privately-owned forest land and forested wildlife habitat therefore providing on-going public benefits of fish and wildlife habitat protection, clean water, natural climate solutions through carbon sequestration and storage, cultural values, aesthetic values, and timber products.

If this project/program does not have permanent outcomes, describe why it is important to undertake at this time:

N/A

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *We conduct in person monitoring of the easements on an annual basis to determine if the easement is in compliance, connect with the landowner to develop relationships, and make management suggestions based on current conditions on the ground.*

Programs in southeast forest region:

Forestlands and savannas are protected from parcelization and fragmentation and accessible for resource management purposes ~ *We conduct in person monitoring of the easements on an annual basis to determine if the easement is in compliance, connect with the landowner to develop relationships, and make management suggestions based on current conditions on the ground.*

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 will fund new projects that would not otherwise be implemented but for this appropriation.

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

All land protected through permanent conservation easements will be sustained through set guidelines for conservation easement stewardship that have been developed and implemented for more than 15 years through the MN Forests for the Future Program and the MN Forest Legacy Program. Easement monitoring is conducted annually and stewardship is on-going; according to Department and Division policies and guidelines. Stewardship and conservation easement enforcement is discussed bi-monthly at DNR inter-divisional stewardship team and enforcement panel meetings. Land in conservation easement is required to be covered by a DNR-certified Woodland Stewardship Plan and updated at least every 10 years. Funding for easement stewardship is included in this proposal.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Annually/Perpetually	OHF-DNR easement Stewardship Account	Monitor easements annually and enforce easement terms through annual landowner contact and on-site monitoring	Annually review forest management activities and review and update Forest Stewardship Plans periodically	-

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 all communities throughout the entire state of Minnesota by permanently protecting ecosystem services that provide clean drinking water, productive habitat, clean air, climate change mitigation, and sedimentation/erosion control. Specific project scoring and implementation efforts benefit BIPOC and diverse communities 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. 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

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

Will the eased land be open for public use?

Yes

Describe the expected public use:

Public access may be allowed only with the approval of the landowner and will be written into the easement language.

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved, beyond those used for maintenance and management, as a result of the proposed 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 and when the restoration/enhancement work will be completed and identify the source of funding:

No, if any restoration or enhancement work is done, it will be done by the landowners.

Previous OHF Appropriations

Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC for this program or project in the past?

Yes

Are there any of these past appropriations still OPEN?

Yes

If needed, please include any explanation of unspent funds.

We currently have three conservation easements in-process for acquisition for a total of approximately 1,430 acres at a cost of \$3.6 million. We have a parcel list that exceeds the remaining funding (\$1.64 million) in this appropriation; we will have additional conservation easements from our parcel list moved into the acquisition phase by July 2026 which will deplete the remaining funds by the funding expiration date of 2029.

Open OHF Appropriations - Data from Most Recent Status Update

Project	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
ML 2025 - Minnesota Forests for the Future Phase X	\$5,241,000	-	\$5,241,000	0.0%
Totals	\$5,241,000	-	\$5,241,000	0.0%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Develop conservation easement monitoring plans, forest stewardship plans, dedicate easement stewardship	June 30, 2031

Budget

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$150,000	\$50,000	USFS	\$200,000
Contracts	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$6,399,900	\$500,000	Private funding	\$6,899,900
Easement Stewardship	\$665,000	-	-	\$665,000
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$760,000	-	-	\$760,000
Direct Support Services	\$24,100	-	-	\$24,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$8,000,000	\$550,000	-	\$8,550,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Forest Legacy Coordinator	0.5	4.0	\$150,000	\$50,000	USFS	\$200,000

Amount of Request: \$8,000,000

Amount of Leverage: \$550,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 6.88%

DSS + Personnel: \$174,100

As a % of the total request: 2.18%

Easement Stewardship: \$665,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 10.39%

Leverage Funding Table

	Leverage Amount Committed	Leverage Amount Confirmed (of Committed Funds)	Leverage Amount Anticipated	Total Leverage
Amount:	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$500,000	\$550,000
% of Total Leverage:	9.09%	9.09%	90.91%	

N/A

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

Leverage is from a variety of public and private sources provided over the life of the program including USFS administrative grant funds and RIM Critical Habitat Match credits generated by previous private donations to the program.

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?

Number of conservation easements acquired (and therefore acres protected) would be reduced according to priority based on highest conservation value and available funding.

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

DSS expenses would be proportionately reduced; personnel expenses would be reduced.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

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

Number of conservation easements acquired (and therefore acres protected) would be reduced according to priority based on highest conservation value and available funding.

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

DSS expenses would be proportionately reduced; personnel expenses would be reduced.

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

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?

There has been a past gap and change in staff and so there is no overlap. Time codes specific to appropriations and projects are utilized in order to track staff time for each project and appropriation.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

Appraisals

Other : Closing costs; Recording fees

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Easement Stewardship

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

We have 19 easements on the list for this project proposal with an average of \$35,000 each for stewardship.

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 Cost Calculator

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

Cash : \$50,000

Is Confirmation Document attached?

Yes, on file

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	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	3,326	0	3,326
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	3,326	0	3,326

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

	RESTORE: Lands acquired in this proposal	RESTORE: Lands acquired with previous OHF appropriations (<5yrs old)	RESTORE Total	ENHANCE: Lands acquired in this proposal	ENHANCE: Lands acquired with previous OHF appropriations (<5yrs old)	ENHANCE Total
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: Lands acquired with OHF	RESTORE: Lands NOT acquired with OHF	ENHANCE: Lands acquired with OHF	ENHANCE: 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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$8,000,000	-	\$8,000,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$8,000,000	-	\$8,000,000

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	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	830	0	2,496	3,326
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	830	0	2,496	3,326

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	-	-	\$3,560,500	-	\$4,439,500	\$8,000,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$3,560,500	-	\$4,439,500	\$8,000,000

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	-	-	\$2,405	-
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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$4,289	-	\$1,778
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

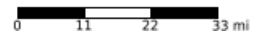
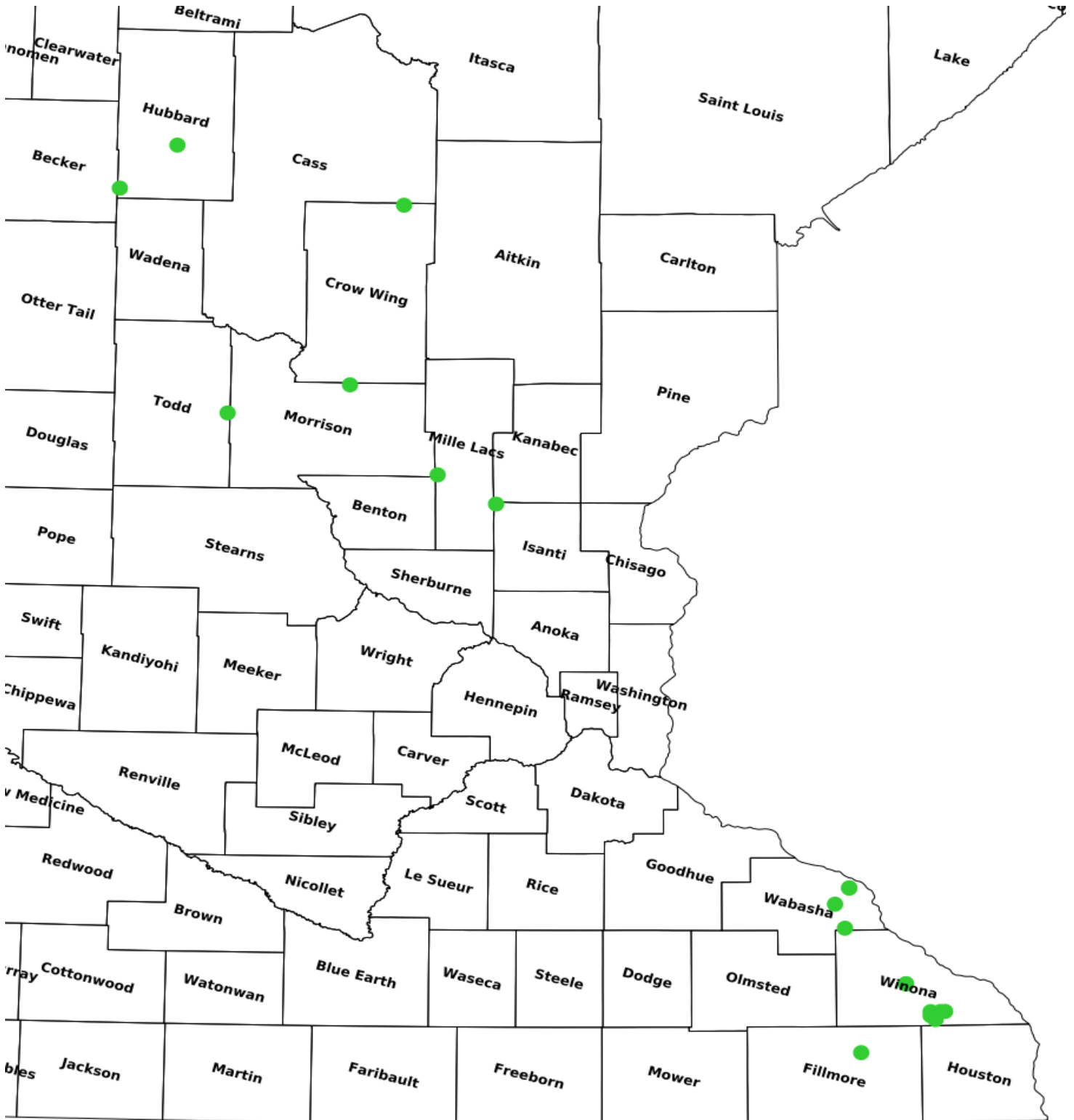
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Applications to the MN Forests for the Future Program are made by interested willing landowners. The Program uses GIS analysis to expand protection of large habitat blocks and corridors. DNR's GIS-based Strategic Land Asset Management metrics are used by an inter-disciplinary team of experts from different Divisions to prioritize and select all acquisitions, including conservation easements. The tracts of forest land targeted for protection with this Program have some, if not all, of the following traits: are currently unprotected inholdings; large tracts that have been identified by the MN County Biological Survey (including identified sites of high quality biodiversity significance); corridors and habitat identified by the State Wildlife Action Plan as significant; presence of rare species and Species in Conservation Need or the habitat that support those species; are located in a strategic habitat complex and are adjacent to other protected land so that complexes can be protected and management improved. In addition, we consult with local and regional watershed and landscape planning efforts such as The Nature Conservancy's Multiple Benefit Analysis and Resilient Lands Mapping Tool, DNR's Forest Action Plan and Assessment of Need, PCA's watershed planning efforts, BWSR's and local SWCD's One Watershed One Plan efforts, the MFRC's Regional Landscape Plans, and the DNR/BWSR Landscape Stewardship Plans.

Protect in Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Pike	Crow Wing	13826201	80	-	-
Jane Peck	Fillmore	10310201	55	-	-
Miller	Hubbard	14133230	291	-	-
Weber	Hubbard	13935219	150	-	-
Anderson	Isanti	03725206	60	-	-
Roehl	Mille Lacs	03927231	155	-	-
Eagle Ranch	Morrison	04230204	1,640	-	-
Little Elk 6-Jim Parent	Todd	13032225	120	-	-
Arrow Head bluffs	Wabasha	11010209	45	-	-
Earnest Walters	Wabasha	11011236	85	-	-
Main street Developments	Wabasha	11010209	24	-	-
Mark Dittrich	Wabasha	10910232	46	-	-
Andrew Beebe	Winona	10507215	20	-	-
Gerald Mueller	Winona	10507228	153	-	-
High Ridge Tree Farm	Winona	10608209	40	-	-
Johnny Michael	Winona	10608209	68	-	-
Kevin O'Brian	Winona	10507220	36	-	-
Wiscoy Community	Winona	10507214	215	-	-
Zephyr Community	Winona	10507217	40	-	-

Parcel Map



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

MN FORESTS FOR THE FUTURE



Funding Request:

\$8,000,000

Proposed Protection:

3,326 acres high conservation value working forest conservation easements in southeast blufflands, northern and central MN

Impact:

Strategically focused to protect critical habitat, build on existing protection, address private in-holdings and address regional conservation/management goals:

* one of the focus areas is the SE Blufflands containing most Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) of all subsections state-wide and 41% of all mammal SGCN state-wide

* adjacency to other conserved lands and/or public lands multiplying protection benefits

Program

Accomplishments:

- 370,000+ acres in easement
- 9,000+ acres fee land

Minnesota Forests for the Future is a voluntary conservation easement program administered by the DNR Division of Forestry focused on protecting and conserving high conservation value private forest habitat lands from conversion and fragmentation throughout Minnesota, achieving multiple benefits including:

- Conserving critical habitat;
- Building climate resilience, sequestering carbon, mitigating climate change;
- Protecting forests essential for high water quality & quantity ;
- Reducing nutrient and sediment to lakes and streams;
- Ensuring continued public access; and
- Sustaining forested landscape critical for recreation, tourism & timber economies.

Threats: Minnesota experiences one of the highest forest conversion rates in the U.S. Forty-four percent (or 7.5 million acres) are at risk of fragmentation or conversion to non-forest uses. Forest land is converted to other uses at a rate of 3,600 acres per year (*OHF: 25 Year Framework*). The highest conversion rates in the state occur in the north central area. The MN Forest Resources Council identifies parcelization as “the single most important policy issue affecting the economic and ecological health of the state’s forests”.

Public Benefits: Lands enrolled in the program protect critical habitat for wildlife and rare species, protect watershed health including drinking water and sustaining fisheries, ensure continued public access, mitigate climate change and increase climate resiliency, and protect forested land critical for local economies including tourism, timber and outdoor recreation.





Crow Wing County Easement



Wabasha County Easement

How it Works: Strategic high conservation value forest lands are identified using science-based targeting methods to expand existing forest habitat complexes, reduce fragmentation and protect areas identified in conservation plans and initiatives. DNR’s GIS-based Strategic Land Asset Management metrics are used by an inter-disciplinary team of experts to prioritize and select all acquisitions, including conservation easements. Private in-holdings and land adjacent to publicly owned land are prioritized leveraging larger blocks of protected forest habitat, providing more protection against fragmentation, and multiplying the effects of climate resilience. Lands protected by these conservation easements stay in private ownership and landowners continue to pay property taxes. Lands can be used and managed but forest conversion to industrial, commercial or residential uses or development/subdivision is prohibited. Landowners work with DNR to establish a Forest Stewardship Plan and keep it updated; conservation easement stewardship is

Matching Investments:

DNR’s MN Forests for the Future pairs funding from the **federal Forest Legacy Program** to leverage State investments that advance working forest land protection.

Non-profit organizations have helped leverage funds in key geographies by matching State investments.

Multiple external partners provide support with landowner outreach and partnership coordination including **NGOs, County SWCDs, BWSR staff and citizen groups.**

Program Contact:

Andy Kernan
MN DNR Forest Legacy Program Coordinator
 (612) 500-6315
 andrew.kernan@state.mn.us

**Forests for the Future:
 Past Accomplishments and Potential Projects**

