



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - ML2027  
ML 2027 Request for Funding

---

### General Information

**Date:** 06/22/2026

**Proposal Title:** Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - ML2027

**Funds Requested:** \$8,476,000

**Confirmed Leverage Funds:** -

**Is this proposal Scalable?:** Yes

### **Manager Information**

**Manager's Name:** Annie Knight

**Title:** Executive Director

**Organization:** Northern Waters Land Trust

**Address:** 800 Minnesota Ave W PO Box 124

**City:** Walker, MN 56484

**Email:** AnnieK@nwl-t-mn.org

**Office Number:** 218-547-4510

**Mobile Number:**

**Fax Number:**

**Website:** [www.northernwaterslandtrust.org](http://www.northernwaterslandtrust.org)

### **Location Information**

**County Location(s):** Becker, Otter Tail, Aitkin, Cass, Hubbard, Itasca, Crow Wing and Beltrami.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

Northern Forest

**Activity types:**

Protect in Fee

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Habitat

## Narrative

### Abstract

Northern Waters Land Trust (NWLTT) will permanently protect approximately 875 acres within priority coldwater lake watersheds in north-central Minnesota through fee-title acquisition and transfer to long-term public ownership. These lakes support sensitive coldwater fish species that depend on clean, cold, oxygen-rich water. Working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and regional partners, NWLTT will strategically protect forested shoreline and watershed parcels identified through science-based ecological analysis. By protecting these lands before they are fragmented or developed, the program will help sustain water quality, coldwater fisheries, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation opportunities for future generations.

### Design and Scope of Work

Minnesota is famously known as the “Land of 10,000 Lakes,” but some of its most distinctive bodies of water are its coldwater lakes. A foundation of Minnesota’s angling and cultural heritage, these lakes support coldwater fish communities including lake trout, lake whitefish, burbot, and tullibee (cisco) - important forage fish for walleye, muskellunge, and other sport fisheries. Coldwater lakes are characterized by their ability to maintain cold, oxygen-rich water (oxythermal habitat) year-round.

Over the past 30 years, Minnesota DNR and University of Minnesota researchers have documented steep declines in coldwater fish populations. Cisco populations, important indicators of warming water temperatures, have nearly vanished from portions of their southern range and have disappeared from a substantial share of their native lakes in nearby states (Stanley, 2019). A growing body of research identifies climate change and watershed disturbance from land-use change as major drivers of oxythermal habitat loss. As air temperatures rise and watershed development increases, many coldwater lakes are losing the cold, oxygen-rich conditions necessary to sustain coldwater fisheries.

Reducing watershed disturbance through protection of forested land cover and native shoreland vegetation is critical to maintaining coldwater lake resilience under increasing temperatures and other ecological stressors. Earlier phases of the “Fisheries Habitat” program focused primarily on protecting high-quality tullibee refuge lakes, advancing watershed-scale conservation around some of Minnesota’s most vulnerable coldwater fisheries.

Building on this foundation, updated DNR and Pollution Control Agency analyses now provide a more comprehensive framework for evaluating coldwater lake condition, classifying lakes into Tier 1–3 based on dissolved oxygen levels. This science-based approach maintains focus on protecting remaining refuge lakes while also identifying additional Tier 1 and Tier 2 lakes that still support viable coldwater fisheries but are increasingly vulnerable without proactive watershed protection. Tier 3 lakes, which no longer maintain suitable coldwater habitat conditions, demonstrate the long-term consequences of delayed protection and watershed disturbance. Protecting priority watersheds before further degradation occurs will help sustain resilient fisheries, protect water quality, and maintain ecological function.

In prioritizing watershed lands for protection, NWLTT evaluates ecological value, watershed protection levels, parcel size, landscape context, development risk, partnership opportunities, and prior conservation investments. Parcels are further ranked using a scoring framework considering habitat quality, connectivity, disturbance, urgency, and cost. Priority parcels are mapped using the Clean Water Critical Habitat tool to support science-based decisions. NWLTT has partnered closely with Minnesota Land Trust throughout previous program phases, strengthening regional coordination and impact.

Through this grant, NWLT will permanently protect approximately 875 acres through fee title acquisition within priority coldwater lake watersheds. Acquired lands will be conveyed to long-term public ownership for permanent management and public benefit. NWLT will conduct targeted landowner outreach and collaborate with partners including Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and county land departments. Projects will prioritize willing landowners and opportunities to leverage matching contributions and donated value. Protecting these lands helps prevent fragmentation and sustains water quality, fisheries habitat, wildlife corridors, and recreation opportunities across northern Minnesota.

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

Coldwater lakes support important fisheries for species such as tullibee (cisco), lake trout, lake whitefish, and burbot. These species require clean, cold, well-oxygenated water conditions typically found in deep lakes with healthy, intact watersheds. Tullibee are a critical forage fish supporting prized sport fisheries such as walleye, northern pike, and muskellunge, while lake trout and lake whitefish provide important recreational, cultural, and subsistence value, particularly for Tribal communities. Because coldwater fish species are highly sensitive to warming temperatures, declining oxygen levels, and watershed disturbance, they are important indicators of overall lake ecosystem health.

Climate change, shoreland development, and watershed disturbance pose increasing threats to Minnesota's coldwater fisheries and aquatic habitats. According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, rising air temperatures, increasing precipitation intensity, and changing runoff patterns are already affecting lake temperatures, water quality, and aquatic habitat conditions across the state. Lakes with intact forests, undeveloped shorelands, and protected watershed lands are more resilient to these pressures and provide critical refuge habitat for coldwater fish species as environmental conditions change.

MN DNR Fisheries research has shown that healthy forested watersheds are fundamental to sustaining high-quality fish habitat and aquatic ecosystem function. Shoreland disturbance and watershed development increase runoff, nutrient loading, erosion, and habitat fragmentation, reducing a lake's ability to support sport fish, forage fish, and other aquatic wildlife. By permanently protecting forested watershed and shoreline habitats, this program helps maintain water quality, sustain coldwater fisheries, protect connected wildlife habitat, and support long-term resilience for fish, game, and wildlife populations across northern Minnesota.

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

Now is a critical time to protect Minnesota's coldwater fisheries lakes. These rare and ecologically sensitive systems are under increasing threat from climate change, which is warming deepwater habitats and reducing oxygen levels essential for coldwater fish species. At the same time, shoreline development and land-use pressures continue to degrade water quality and fragment critical forested buffers. Protecting these lakes through strategic land acquisition offers a cost-effective, long-term solution to preserving water quality, sustaining recreational fisheries, and maintaining biodiversity. With public awareness growing and science-based conservation tools in place, this is a unique window of opportunity to secure irreplaceable aquatic habitats before further degradation occurs. Grant support will enable us to act quickly and collaboratively to protect these high-priority lakes for current and future generations.

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

This proposal protects shoreline and forest habitat within priority coldwater lake watersheds in north central Minnesota. Our land acquisition strategy prioritizes parcels adjacent to existing public lands and protected properties in order to expand contiguous habitat complexes and maintain intact, forested shorelines across the broader landscape. By protecting these lands before they are subdivided and developed, this work reduces habitat fragmentation, strengthens watershed resilience, and preserves the long-term ecological integrity of coldwater lake ecosystems.

Research by Timothy Cross and Peter Jacobson in “Landscape Factors Influencing Lake Phosphorus Concentrations Across Minnesota” demonstrates that coldwater fish communities are especially vulnerable to elevated phosphorus levels associated with watershed disturbance and development. As phosphorus increases, deep-water oxygen levels decline, negatively affecting species that depend on cold, oxygen-rich conditions for survival and reproduction. Their findings conclude that protecting intact watersheds before water quality degradation occurs is the most effective and cost-efficient conservation strategy.

Minnesota DNR Fisheries researchers have classified coldwater lakes statewide into Tiers 1-3 based on their coldwater fish habitat quality (TDO3). Our protection efforts are focused on the highest quality (Tier 1 and 2) coldwater lake watersheds, where additional land protection will have the greatest safeguarding effect. Building on this proactive protection framework, Jacobson and Duval, in “Protecting Watersheds of Minnesota Lakes with Private Forest Conservation Easements: A Suggested Strategy,” emphasize that maintaining forest cover in lake watersheds is critical to sustaining water quality. While substantial portions of these watersheds are publicly owned, a significant share remains in private ownership and is increasingly being subdivided and developed. Modeling by the Minnesota DNR Fisheries Research Unit indicates that total phosphorus concentrations remain near natural background levels when approximately 75% of a watershed is protected and left undisturbed.

Since this program's inception, we have made meaningful progress toward achieving this 75% protection threshold on several priority lakes, effectively “moving the needle” on watershed-scale protection across the region. Continued support will allow us to build on this momentum, complete key habitat corridors, and further safeguard Minnesota’s highest-quality coldwater lake systems.

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

Long Range Plan for Fisheries Management

Other : Regional One Watershed One Plans

## **Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?**

### **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

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

Northern Waters Land Trust (NWLTL) is an accredited land trust with a long history of successfully completing complex land protection projects throughout northern Minnesota. Accreditation through the Land Trust Alliance demonstrates NWLT's commitment to permanent land conservation, sound financial management, and long-term stewardship practices.

The long-term sustainability of this work is ensured through fee title acquisitions that provide enduring protection for priority lands within coldwater lake watersheds. Lands acquired in fee will be conveyed to long-term managing entities, including the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, county land departments, Tribal governments, or federal partners, which have the capacity and authority to manage these lands in perpetuity for conservation, habitat protection, and public benefit.

This program also builds upon existing public conservation lands and prior Outdoor Heritage Fund investments, creating larger connected habitat complexes that are more resilient and cost-effective to manage over time. By strategically protecting lands adjacent to existing protected areas, the program strengthens long-term ecological function while reducing future fragmentation and development pressure.

NWLTL maintains strong partnerships with local governments, lake associations, Tribal partners, and conservation organizations to support ongoing coordination, stewardship, and community support for protected lands. In addition, the program's GIS-based prioritization tools, established landowner relationships, and watershed-scale conservation framework position NWLTL and its partners to continue advancing protection efforts beyond the current funding cycle as future opportunities arise.

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

**Outcomes**

**Programs in the northern forest region:**

*Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ Shoreline habitat and forested parcels totaling 875 acres will be permanently protected from development and fragmentation through fee title acquisitions. This outcome will be measured by the number of acres and shoreline miles permanently protected within priority coldwater watersheds, and by the extent to which projects expand connected habitat complexes and reduce fragmentation risk. Acquired lands will also be evaluated for their contribution to public access and recreational opportunities. Properties conveyed to government agencies will be managed according to established land management plans, ensuring long-term conservation goals are met and maintained.*

**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.**

Funding procured by NWLTL through this Outdoor Heritage Fund proposal will not supplant or substitute any previous funding from a non-Legacy fund used for the same purpose.

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

NWLT is an accredited conservation organization that does not depend on Outdoor Heritage Funds to sustain or maintain our work. The majority of financial support for both NWLT must be raised on an annual basis. The work in this proposal allows NWLT to enhance and accelerate ongoing conservation efforts in North Central Minnesota. These grant funds will not substitute for or supplant other funding sources.

The fee-title acquisitions will be owned and managed by a governmental agency.

**Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2031 and in perpetuity	Managing governmental agency	Ongoing management in line with developed management plans	-	-

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

NWLT deeply values inclusiveness, collaboration, teamwork and diversity in all of our programs, projects, and community work. We believe that enduring conservation success depends on the active involvement of people and partners whose lives and cultures are linked to the natural systems we seek to conserve. Currently, NWLT is directly including Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe in these protection efforts by engaging in regular discussions, acknowledging which lands have cultural and ecological significance, and engaging in partnership on conservation projects where possible. NWLT is focused on building relationships based on trust, listening, and mutual respect. We will listen and seek out potential authentic partnerships that can advance our goals of conserving the best of Minnesota’s remaining habitats while building relationships with and working collaboratively with diverse communities such as Tribal Nations, rural landowners, and multi-generational families. 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.

**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?**

No

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

Yes

**Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:**

All fee title acquisitions will be open to hunting and fishing.

**Who will eventually own the fee title land?**

State of MN

County

Local Unit of Government

Tribal

NGO

**Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:**

WMA

AMA

State Forest

County Forest

SNA

Tribal

**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:**

NWLT will not be completing restoration or enhancement work through this grant, however after land is acquired and conveyed to the MN DNR, they will execute initial restoration activities as outlined in the DNR IDP plan. We have allocated the appropriate funds for this in the DNR IDP budget line.

## 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.**

Unspent funds from prior appropriations reflect the multi-year nature of conservation acquisition projects and the variability of landowner readiness, due diligence, and transaction timelines. NWLT continues to actively implement grant objectives under existing appropriations through ongoing outreach, project development, negotiations, and closings. Remaining balances are associated with active conservation projects currently moving through the acquisition process.

## Open OHF Appropriations - Data from Most Recent Status Update

Project	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
ML 2026 - Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - ML2026	\$2,286,000	-	\$2,286,000	0.0%
ML 2025 - Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - Phase XI	\$2,878,000	\$20,400	\$2,857,600	0.71%
ML 2024 - Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - Phase X	\$2,687,000	\$1,384,600	\$1,302,400	51.53%
ML 2023 - Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - Phase IX	\$3,719,000	\$1,948,300	\$1,770,700	52.39%
ML 2022 - Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - Phase VIII	\$4,536,000	\$4,004,900	\$531,100	88.29%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$16,106,000</b>	<b>\$7,358,200</b>	<b>\$8,747,800</b>	<b>45.69%</b>

## Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Landowner outreach for fee acquisition program.	Ongoing through June 2031
Protection of 875 acres via fee acquisition; conveyance to a governmental agency.	June 2031

**Budget**

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$395,000	-	-	\$395,000
Contracts	\$91,000	-	-	\$91,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$7,000,000	\$700,000	Landowners, Lake Associations	\$7,700,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$15,200	-	-	\$15,200
Professional Services	\$502,000	-	-	\$502,000
Direct Support Services	\$106,600	-	-	\$106,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$210,000	-	-	\$210,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
DNR IDP	\$153,200	-	-	\$153,200
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$8,476,000</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>	-	<b>\$9,176,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
NWLT Staff	0.98	4.0	\$395,000	-	-	\$395,000

**Amount of Request:** \$8,476,000

**Amount of Leverage:** \$700,000

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 8.26%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$501,600

**As a % of the total request:** 5.92%

**Easement Stewardship:** -

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** -

**Leverage Funding Table**

	Leverage Amount Committed	Leverage Amount Confirmed (of Committed Funds)	Leverage Amount Anticipated	Total Leverage
Amount:	-	-	\$700,000	\$700,000
% of Total Leverage:	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	

N/A

**Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:**

NWLT: Works with landowners and corresponding lake associations to donate funds. We anticipate \$700,000 of leverage; not confirmed. Any expenses not covered by this grant will be funded through general operating income.

**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?**

This proposal is true to budget and protection goals and would be most effective if funded fully. If 50% funding was received, outputs would be reduced by approximately 50-65%.

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

Personnel and DSS costs would be reduced, but less than proportionally to the reduction in acquisition funding. Certain costs, including landowner outreach, project development, grant administration, and due diligence, are necessary regardless of project size. Some projects also require substantial staff time before feasibility can be fully determined.

### If the project received 30% of the requested funding

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

This proposal is true to budget and protection goals and would be most effective if funded fully. If 30% funding was received, outputs would be reduced by 70-80%.

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

Personnel and DSS costs would be reduced, but less than proportionally to the reduction in acquisition funding. Certain costs, including landowner outreach, project development, grant administration, and due diligence, are necessary regardless of project size. Some projects also require substantial staff time before feasibility can be fully determined.

### 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?**

The FTEs identified in this proposal represent estimated personnel time necessary to complete the proposed program activities and outputs. Staffing levels are coordinated across multiple years and funding sources based on active project workload, anticipated acquisition timelines, and long-term program implementation needs. Because land protection projects often span multiple years, staff may work concurrently on projects funded through different phases of the Outdoor Heritage Fund program.

NWLT tracks personnel time at the individual project and grant level to ensure accurate allocation of costs to the appropriate funding source. Staff use a timesheet-based accounting system to document grant-related activities by property and project, ensuring that only personnel time directly attributable to specific grant deliverables is charged to that award. This approach allows NWLT to effectively coordinate staffing across overlapping grant periods while maintaining clear financial accountability and avoiding duplication of expenses.

Maintaining consistent staffing across funding phases also supports program continuity, landowner relationships, partnership coordination, and efficient project implementation. This continuity is especially

important for complex land protection projects, which often require multiple years of outreach, due diligence, negotiation prior to closing and conveyance to managing entities.[]

## Contracts

### What is included in the contracts line?

Funds in the contract line are for outreach services to connect with prospective landowners and for pre-conveyance site cleanup services, such as well sealing, building removal, snow removal (for site access), and general contracting.

## Professional Services

### What is included in the Professional Services line?

Appraisals

Other : Environmental Assessments, Project Mapping.

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

## Fee Acquisition

### What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

NWLT expects to complete 14 fee title acquisitions through this proposal.

## 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

NWLT's travel budget does not include equipment/vehicle rental. No anticipated expenses outside of the traditional travel costs listed.

### 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?**

In a process annually reviewed and approved by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Grants (most recently in April 2025), NWLT determined our Direct Support Services (DSS) rate to include all allowable direct and necessary expenditures not captured in other budget line items. NWLT also provides MNDNR Grants with a copy of our annual financial audit as additional validation during the DSS approval process.

Internally, NWLT allocates shared support service costs based on documented staff time and grant activity. Staff track time by property and grant using a timesheet-based accounting system, and associated support costs, including fringe and administrative expenses, are proportionally allocated across grants based on actual personnel time charged to each program. NWLT's bookkeeping contractor reviews and calculates these allocations on a regular basis to ensure that only the appropriate share of direct support service costs are charged to the grant. [

## **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	875	875
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>875</b>

### 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	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

### 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	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

### Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$8,476,000	\$8,476,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$8,476,000</b>	<b>\$8,476,000</b>

### 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	875	875
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>875</b>	<b>875</b>

**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	-	-	-	-	\$8,476,000	\$8,476,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	-	<b>\$8,476,000</b>	<b>\$8,476,000</b>

**Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$9,686
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

**Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	\$9,686
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

0.5

## Parcels

### Sign-up Criteria?

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

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

Northern Waters Land Trust (NWLTL) uses a combination of objective criteria and professional judgment to identify, prioritize, and select parcels for protection. A criteria-based scoring system provides a standardized framework to compare projects using consistent data, allowing proposals to be evaluated relative to each other and to a baseline. Local knowledge, program goals, timing, funding availability, organizational capacity, and other qualitative considerations also inform final selections.

NWLTL solicits project proposals through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, targeting landowners with properties on high-priority lakes. Each proposal is reviewed and scored by NWLTL’s Clean Water Technical Advisory Committee, which includes conservation professionals from the DNR, counties, SWCDs, and regional NGOs. This committee brings deep, place-based knowledge to the selection process and ensures alignment with local and regional conservation priorities.

The scoring framework evaluates three main categories:

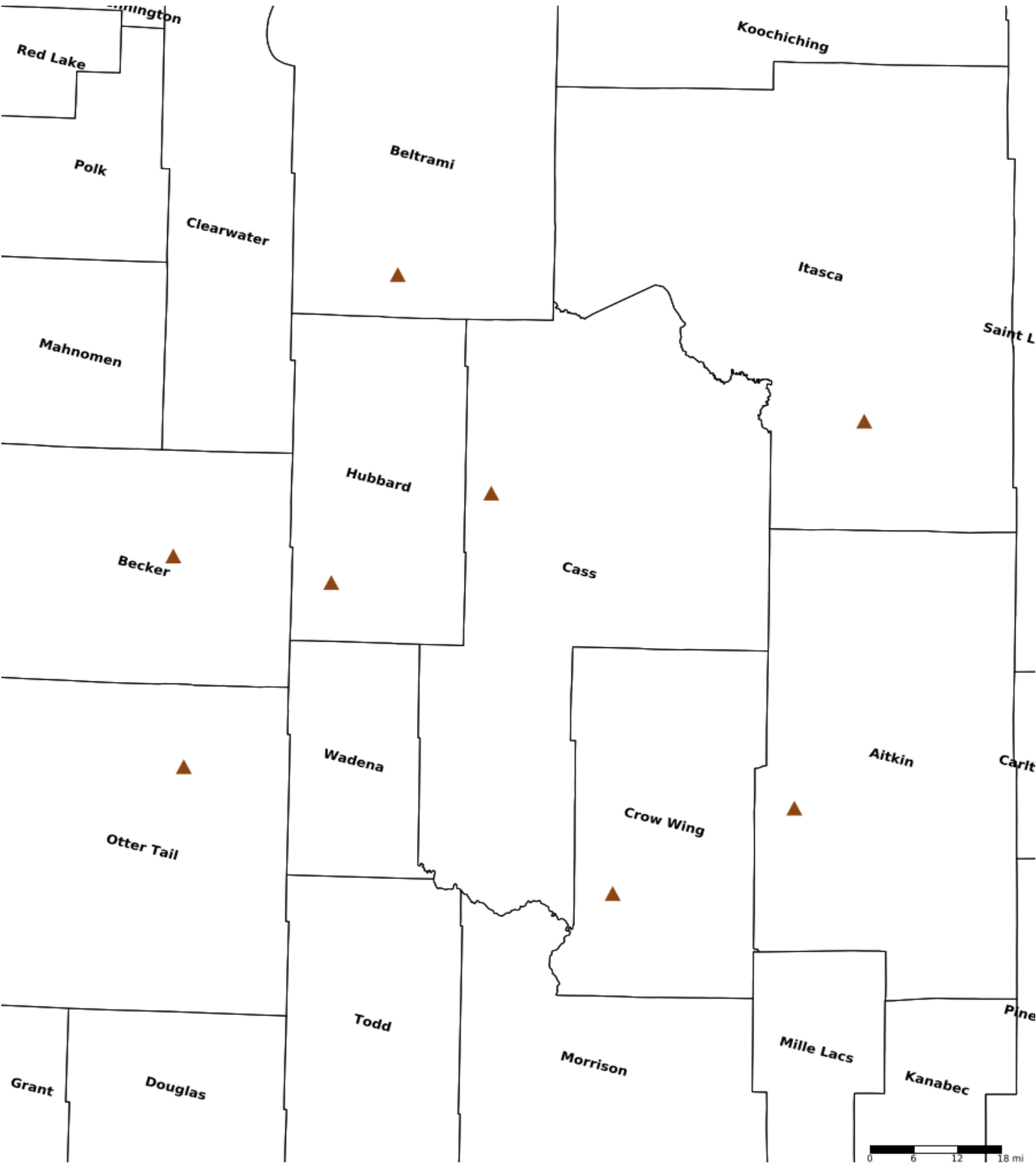
- 1- Ecological Integrity – Measures the current condition of the site, including parcel size, habitat quality, and surrounding landscape context.
- 2- Threat/Urgency – Assesses the potential risk of development or degradation if the property is not protected.
- 3- Cost/Value – Considers the overall conservation value relative to cost, including any donative value offered by the landowner.

By combining these factors, NWLTL identifies parcels with the greatest potential for long-term ecological viability and public benefit. This process ensures that limited resources are directed toward the highest-impact conservation opportunities.

### Protect in Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Aitkin Area Coldwater Lakes	Aitkin	04727236	0	\$0	No
Detroit Lakes Area Coldwater Lakes	Becker	14038208	0	\$0	No
Bemidji Area Coldwater Lakes	Beltrami	14633204	0	\$0	No
Walker Area Coldwater Lakes	Cass	14231227	0	\$0	No
Brainerd Area Coldwater Lakes	Crow Wing	13328209	0	\$0	No
Park Rapids Area Coldwater Lakes	Hubbard	14035225	0	\$0	No
Grand Rapids Area Coldwater Lakes	Itasca	05525222	0	\$0	No
Fergus Falls Area Coldwater Lakes	Otter Tail	13638227	0	\$0	No

Parcel Map



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

# Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes

## 2027



Northern Waters  
LAND TRUST



**Request** **\$8,476,000**

**Leverage** **\$700,000**

**Acres protected** **875**

Shoreline miles protected 0.5

**State Goals Supported:**

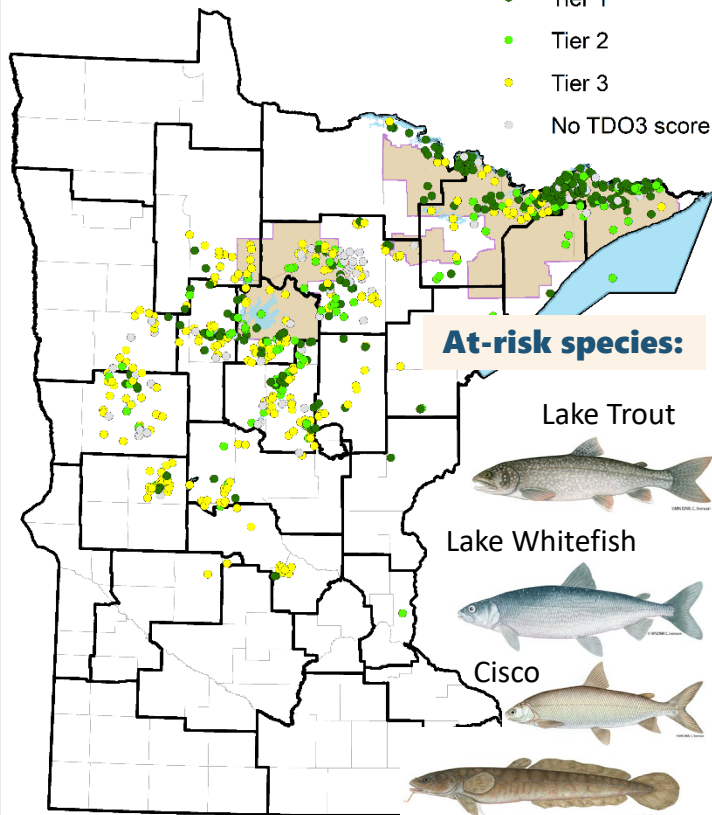
*Long Range Plan for Fisheries Management, Leech Lake River Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan, and regional One Watershed, One Plans.*

**For more information:**

**[anniek@nwlt-mn.org](mailto:anniek@nwlt-mn.org)**

**Coldwater Lakes**

- Tier 1
- Tier 2
- Tier 3
- No TDO3 score



**At-risk species:**

Lake Trout



Lake Whitefish



Cisco



Burbot/eelpout



□ DNR Fisheries: Work Areas

Since 2014, Northern Waters Land Trust and Minnesota Land Trust have partnered through the Outdoor Heritage Fund-supported “Fisheries Habitat” Program to permanently protect forested shorelands and watersheds critical to Minnesota’s coldwater fisheries. Together, the partnership has **protected thousands of acres** within priority coldwater lake watersheds, advancing watershed-scale conservation strategies that help **maintain water quality, shoreline habitat, and connected forest cover** essential to tullibee (cisco), lake whitefish, lake trout, burbot, and the sport fisheries that rely on them.

Although Minnesota Land Trust is not included in this phase’s proposal, they remain a valued partner, and the program’s accomplishments reflect a collective effort.



**7,396**

Acres protected



**40.31**

Miles of shoreline protected



**\$6.16**

Million in leverage achieved



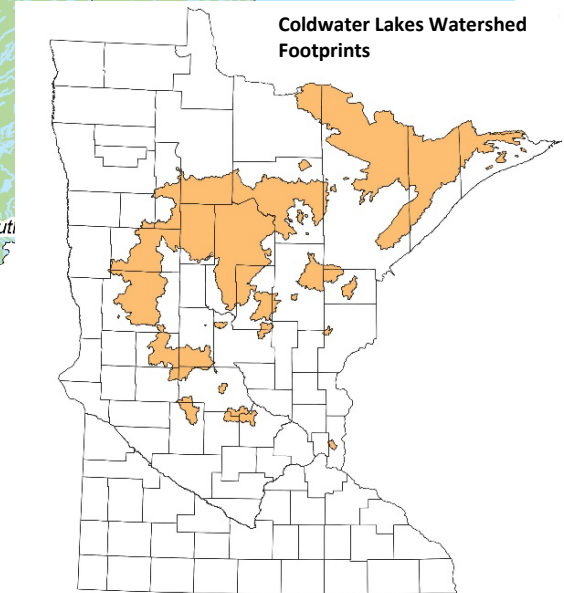
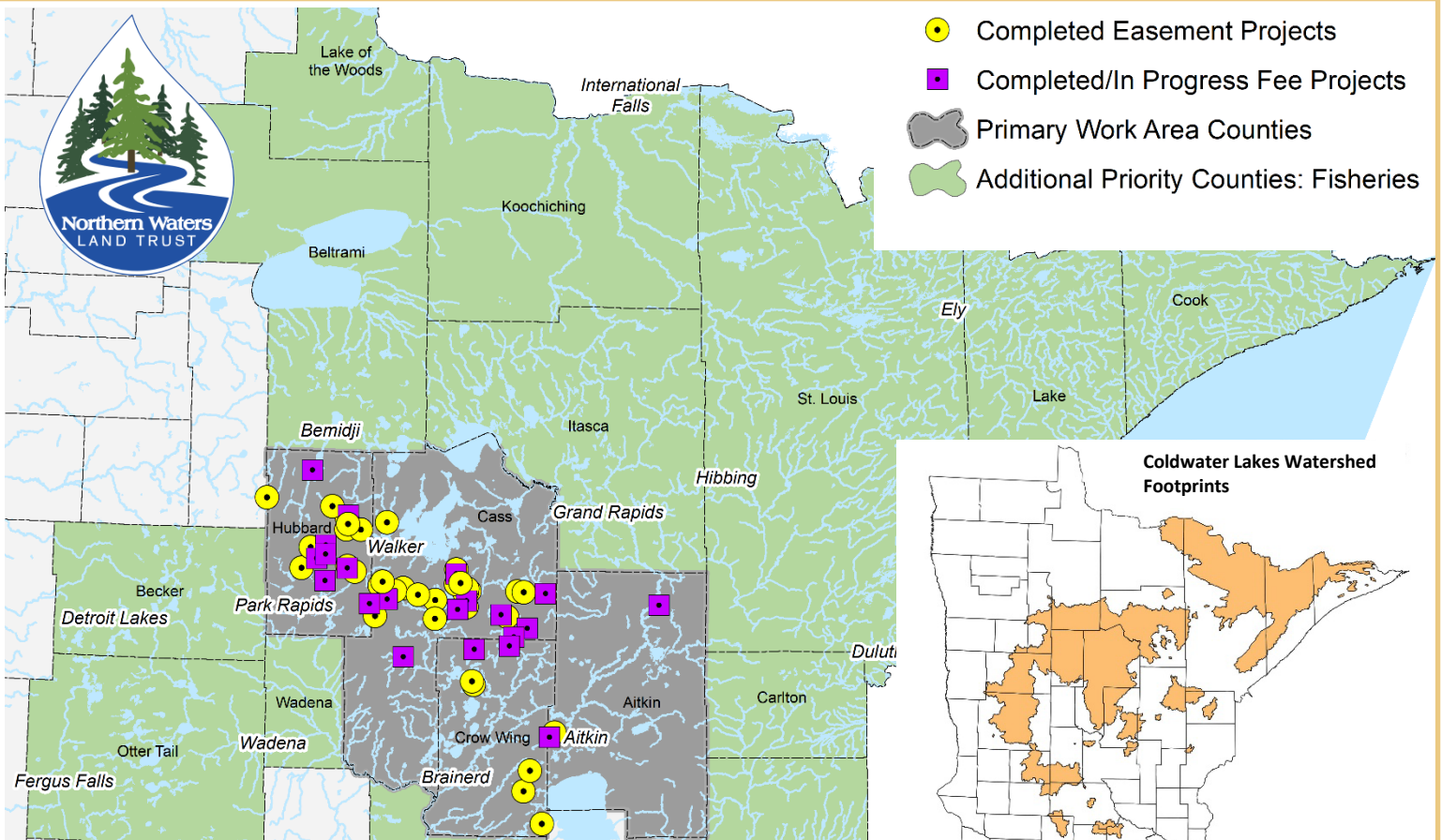
**56**

Projects completed

Efforts will prioritize Tier 1 and Tier 2 coldwater lakes with the highest likelihood of sustaining resilient fisheries under increasing climate and development pressures, **ensuring conservation investments remain proactive, science-driven, and strategically focused** on protecting Minnesota’s remaining high-quality coldwater lake systems while expanding public access.



- Completed Easement Projects
- Completed/In Progress Fee Projects
- Primary Work Area Counties
- Additional Priority Counties: Fisheries



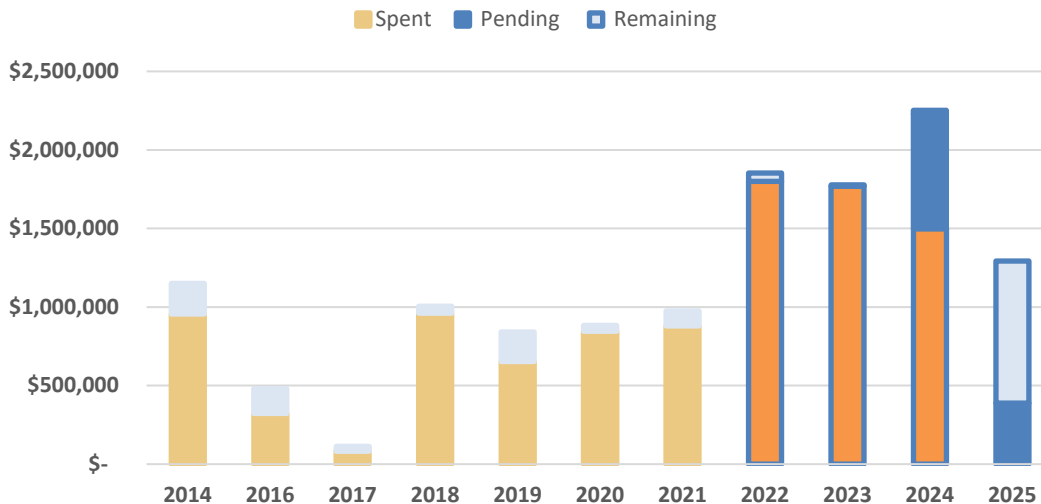
## The Minnesota Star Tribune

As lakes grow warmer, the race is on to save Minnesota's cold-water fish



### Project Spotlight: Upper Bottle Lake

NWLT permanently protected **42 acres and 1,420 feet of shoreline** on Upper Bottle Lake in 2025 using Outdoor Heritage Funds and support from the National Wild Turkey Federation. The property will expand the new Mantrap Wildlife Management Area. Upper Bottle Lake is a coldwater lake that supports cisco (tullibee), walleye, northern pike, and muskellunge in addition to loon and wild rice habitat.



Across prior completed phases, the program has **consistently exceeded** both acreage targets and leverage goals, demonstrating strong implementation capacity and efficient use of public investment. For open appropriations, the majority of available funds are already committed to active projects. As **demand continues** and **implementation opportunities grow**, additional funding is needed to maintain momentum, ensure continuity of delivery, and sustain program scale and effectiveness.

\*Chart reflects only NWLT funds. We have consistently exceeded acreage and leverage goals for previous program phases.