



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

DNR Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement, Phase 1  
ML 2027 Request for Funding

---

### General Information

**Date:** 06/22/2026

**Proposal Title:** DNR Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement, Phase 1

**Funds Requested:** \$3,370,000

**Confirmed Leverage Funds:** -

**Is this proposal Scalable?:** Yes

### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Jeramy Pinkerton

**Title:** St. Louis River and Lake Superior Program Supervisor

**Organization:** MNDNR

**Address:** 525 South Lake Ave #415

**City:** Duluth, MN 55802

**Email:** jeramy.pinkerton@state.mn.us

**Office Number:** 2183023253

**Mobile Number:**

**Fax Number:**

**Website:**

### 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 four crossings that are barriers to fish movement with appropriately sized structures, three on the mainstem and one on a tributary. 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.

**Moose Foraging Habitat Enhancement:** This project will build on the successes of the Minnesota Moose Habitat Collective by enhancing up to 270 acres of moose browse foraging habitat within or near the Irish Creek Watershed. The watershed currently supports moose and is adjacent to the Swamp River, which supports aquatic vegetation creating a mosaic of foraging habitat. 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 here, 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 proposal 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. 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 proposal 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 proposal 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 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:**

The proposed project will allow Brook Trout and other cold-water aquatic organisms to utilize the entirety of Irish Creek by removing current barriers to aquatic organism passage (undersized and perched culverts). By connecting 8.9 miles of cold-water habitat, this project will permanently increase the resiliency of this native brook trout population in a stream that is expected to be resilient to climate change. Utilizing aquatic organism passage and natural channel design techniques will also improve stream health and may allow terrestrial organism passage in some cases.

The moose forage habitat enhancements are likely to benefit the resilience of moose populations in the near-term (20-50years), the dynamic nature of forest ecosystems will exert a natural transition that benefits stand diversity over a longer time frame.

**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:**

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.

**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	Regular Survey/monitoring of aquatic habitat	-	-
All years	DNR Roads	Maintaining Crossings	-	-
All years	Cook County Roads	Maintaining Crossings	-	-
All years	DNR Fish & Wildlife Game and Fish Fund	Monitoring/survey of moose habitat and populations	-	-

**Provide an assessment of how your program may celebrate cultural diversity or reach 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

**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 proposal either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?**

No

#### Previous OHF Appropriations

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

No

### Timeline

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

**Budget**

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$640,000	-	-	\$640,000
Contracts	\$1,807,600	-	-	\$1,807,600
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$7,000	-	-	\$7,000
Professional Services	\$800,000	-	-	\$800,000
Direct Support Services	\$92,400	-	-	\$92,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$20,000	-	-	\$20,000
Supplies/Materials	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$3,370,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,370,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Team Supervisor	0.3	3.0	\$155,000	-	-	\$155,000
OAS	0.5	3.0	\$145,000	-	-	\$145,000
Project Manager	0.5	3.0	\$170,000	-	-	\$170,000
Project Manager	0.5	3.0	\$170,000	-	-	\$170,000

**Amount of Request:** \$3,370,000

**Amount of Leverage:** -

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 0.0%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$732,400

**As a % of the total request:** 21.73%

**Easement Stewardship:** -

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

N/A

**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?**

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 30% 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.

### **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?**

FTEs listed in the proposal are based on the current MNDNR SLR-LS Team staffing plan and are an estimate of the personnel time required to deliver the grant outputs included in this proposal and advance the overall mission of the SLR-LS Team. An array of staff may work on projects to complete deliverables and manage the grant. We typically prioritize spending down oldest grants first, however, with different parcel lists and programs in different appropriations we fund our staff using the appropriate funds for the project.

#### **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**

N/A

**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?**

MNDNR Process: 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	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	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	270	4	274
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>274</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.)	-	-	-	272
Non-DNR Lands (city, state, federal, etc.)	-	-	-	1
Easements	-	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>274</b>

### 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	-	-	\$400,000	\$2,970,000	\$3,370,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$400,000</b>	<b>\$2,970,000</b>	<b>\$3,370,000</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	0	0
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	274	274
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>274</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	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	\$3,370,000	\$3,370,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$3,370,000</b>	<b>\$3,370,000</b>

**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	-	-	\$1,481	\$742,500

**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	-	-	-	-	\$12,299

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

**Parcels**

**Sign-up Criteria?**

No

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

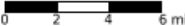
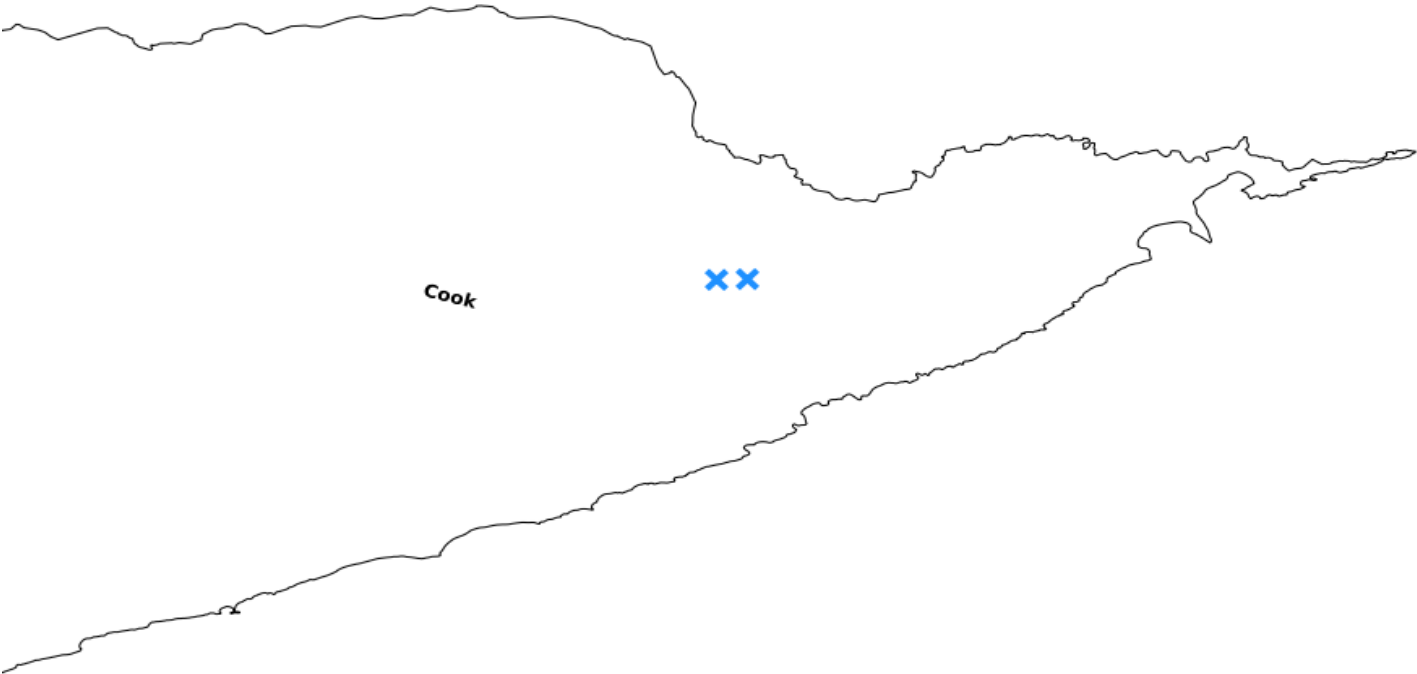
The SLR-LS is a partner to the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) and the Lake Superior Lakewide Action and Management Plan (LAMP), working within the nexus between GLRI, LAMP, and state priorities for habitats and species within the Minnesota portion of the Lake Superior Basin.

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, section with two crossings listed)	Cook	06304118	4	\$2,400,600	Yes	Stream connectivity
Moose Foraging Enhancement (multiple sites, section with highest acreage listed)	Cook	06304117	270	\$200,000	Yes	shearing, cutting, planting, etc to improve moose foraging habitat.

Parcel Map



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

# DNR Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement, Phase 1

## Funding

**Funding request:** \$3,370,000

**Potential sources for additional funds:** Bridge bonding through Cook County, FEMA disaster relief to pay for structures, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

## Summary

The two elements of this project would support the resiliency of moose and Brook Trout in northeast Minnesota by enhancing 270 acres of moose browse foraging habitat and re-connecting nearly 9 miles of Brook Trout habitat within the Irish Creek watershed. Replacing four barriers to fish movement (undersized crossings) with appropriately sized and oriented structures on Irish Creek will also reconnect the stream to its flood plain, thereby reducing the risk of catastrophic failure due to flooding events expected to increase in frequency and severity with climate change. Enhancing moose browse habitat here would provide additional foraging opportunities within proximity to the Swamp River which provides an aquatic foraging area.



Figure 1. A perched culvert on the mainstem of Irish Creek. Photo Credit: Cook County SWCD.

## Our Team and Vision

The St. Louis River and Lake Superior Program is an interdivisional team that includes managers and support staff for Ecological and Water Resources and Fish & Wildlife. We work closely with partners to identify and implement high priority habitat restoration and enhancement projects that achieve a high ecological uplift and are typically funded by OHF and/or GLRI.

On this project, we are coordinating with the DNR Divisions of Forestry and Fish and Wildlife, Cook County, and 1854 Treaty Authority among others.

Contact [Jeremy Pinkerton](#) for more information.



Figure 2. St. Louis River and Lake Superior Program project management staff.



Figure 3. A moose walking on a trail through the woods.

# Irish Creek Watershed Enhancement

