



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Restoring priority habitats for Hennepin County's sensitive wildlife
ML 2027 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/24/2026

Proposal Title: Restoring priority habitats for Hennepin County's sensitive wildlife

Funds Requested: \$6,691,400

Confirmed Leverage Funds: \$1,304,500

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Kristine Maurer

Title: Habitat Conservation Program Manager, Supervisor

Organization: Hennepin County

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Location Information

County Location(s): Hennepin.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Metro / Urban

Activity types:

Enhance

Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

Hennepin County is seeking \$6,691,400 million to complete habitat restoration and management activities on 956 acres of the most important remaining protected natural areas in the county. This work will improve the quality and connectivity of vital ecosystems remaining in the county, support sensitive wildlife, and ensure access to diverse natural systems for residents.

This proposal includes 165 acres ready for implementation. Another 332 acres have already been identified and are actively being planned with public partners and conservation easement owners. This proposal will be generously supported by partner and landowner resources.

Design and Scope of Work

Hennepin County is seeking \$6,691,400 million to restore and enhance 956 acres of protected habitat including big woods forest, remnant oak savanna, native bluff prairies, wetlands, shoreline, and riparian areas. This work will improve the quality and connectivity of vital ecosystems remaining in the county, support sensitive wildlife like Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and federally listed or candidate species, and ensure access to diverse natural systems for residents.

Specifically, work could begin today on the following four shovel-ready projects:

- Restore and enhance 68 acres of remnant prairies and oak woodlands adjacent to Riley Creek on two adjacent Minnesota River bluff parcels owned by project partners, the City of Eden Prairie (40 acres) and the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District (28 acres);
- Enhance 65 acres of floodplain forest, oak maple forest and remnant bluff savanna along the Minnesota River on property owned by the City of Bloomington; and
- Enhance 32 acres of hillside maple basswood forest and native prairie surrounding a pond and tamarack bog at Three Rivers Park District's Kingswood Park in Minnetrista.

This proposal will restore or enhance another 332 acres that have already been identified and are actively being planned with additional public partners and conservation easement owners. The remainder of the 459 acres will be identified within the first year of the grant period.

Our process involves:

- In-depth, data-driven modeling of the entire county to identify priority project focus areas.
- Strong partnerships with nonprofits, watershed organizations, cities, park districts, MN DNR, NPS, and USFWS to identify restoration opportunities and build connections with collaborative decision-making resulting in high-quality project selection.
- A standardized project intake and evaluation process. All opportunities have or will be evaluated using the following criteria: spatial context, ability for landowners or land managers to sustain habitat quality long term, benefit to overall diversity and specific sensitive species, benefit to water resources, and public access or benefit.
- Commitment to identifying and leveraging partner resources to accomplish grant goals and long-term project success.
- Engagement and communication strategies devoted to connecting meaningfully with partners, easement landowners, and the public with the goal of empowering each individual's unique role in the lifetime stewardship of improved habitats.

- Biological monitoring to inventory wildlife and plant communities, measure and evaluate habitat improvement actions, inform adaptive management priorities, and report meaningfully on the impact of our work.

This proposal builds off the momentum of three previous OHF grants that protected 528 acres of land across 16 easements and restored and enhanced 427 acres to date.

We have exceeded our restoration and enhancement goals for two previous OHF grants, and funds to support restoration and enhancement activities from our most recent grant are fully encumbered and will be spent by June 30, 2028. The timing of these funds is essential to accomplish already identified high-value habitat projects for the wildlife and people of Hennepin County.

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

Proposed activities would restore and enhance 956 acres of high-value habitat in Hennepin County to the benefit of many rare plants and SGCN known to occur in the county.

Protected natural areas in Hennepin County include ecologically significant and floristically diverse habitats such as remnant maple-basswood forest, oak woodlands, floodplain forest, oak savannas, bluff prairies, rich and poor peatlands such as fens and tamarack bogs, shallow lakes, and high-value open spaces - all of which are critically essential for wildlife. These critical habitats support around 40 mammals, 320 migratory birds, 96 fish, 17 amphibians, 23 reptiles, and thousands of invertebrates. There are also multiple occurrences of rare animal assemblages such as bat hibernaculums and heron rookeries. Additionally, many sensitive plant community types occur in Hennepin County that support rare plants.

For four years, the county's biomonitoring program has monitored protected properties and habitat improvement projects for plants, pollinators, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals to track the efficacy of our investments and improve restoration and enhancement practices and outcomes. This work has observed 644 different plant and animal species associated with previously OHF-funded conservation projects, including 40 SGCN, including the red-headed woodpecker, American bumblebee, and silver-haired bat, and 3 species that are federally listed or listing candidates, including the rusty-patched bumblebee.

Wildlife and conservation value of four projects ready for implementation:

- Observations of 47 different SGCN and 3 federally listed or listing candidate species within one-half mile of these project areas, including: American kestrel, dickcissel, purple finch, western kingbird, common nighthawk, rusty-patched bumblebee, monarch, gophersnake, mudpuppy, eastern newt, and least darter.
- Improve habitat for the species above within a contiguous protected network of 200+ acres along Riley Creek, 8,000+ acres in the Minnesota River Valley, and nearly 700 acres around the highest quality lake in the metro.
- Encompass over 60 acres of designated DNR native plant communities like bluff prairies, oak woodlands, and mesic hardwoods including documented occurrence of Kitten Tails.
- 2,500 linear feet of riparian area along Riley Creek in the Minnesota River Valley and 2,500 linear feet of lakeshore near the Pioneer - Sarah Creek.

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

The same features that originally attracted people to the metro area in high numbers - the confluence of our region's major rivers and biomes - also make it a critical region for restoration. Multiple crucial natural resource corridors and the interface of Minnesota's prairie and forest ecoregions bring high concentrations of wildlife,

including SGCNs, into close proximity with a rapidly developing region, making the need for resources dedicated to habitat improvement on protected lands more urgent than ever.

This proposal will restore or enhance 165 shovel-ready acres. Another 332 acres have already been identified and are actively being planned with public partners and conservation easement owners. Securing this funding now will allow us to capitalize on partner support for four shovel-ready projects that are available today, and continue to plan and sequence additional projects in a way that ensures high-value projects are also cost-effective.

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

The time to act on conservation in Hennepin County is now to help mitigate habitat fragmentation. Between 2001 and 2021, Hennepin County lost 12,360 acres of open space to development. In addition to threats of development, many protected spaces face fragmentation because of habitat degradation like invasive species encroachment.

The county has employed data-driven modeling to specify targeted conservation priority areas. Priority areas are identified based on spatial context (e.g., nearness to existing protected lands), project size, habitat quality and diversity, water resources, wildlife and plant conservation (e.g., NHIS occurrence), and local knowledge. The highest priority areas are generally adjacent to large core areas of already protected habitat. This modeling is used to evaluate potential restoration and enhancement projects, ensuring projects occur on parcels that meaningfully connect or buffer existing protected and quality habitat. Additionally, Hennepin County uses best available research, partner knowledge, and meaningful outcome tracking to develop management plans and implement actions likely to have success in complex environments.

The projects included in the parcel list illustrate this approach to project selection. Three parcels are within the Minnesota River Valley habitat corridor - improving 133 acres of savanna, forest, and bluff prairies within an 8,000-acre complex. The fourth project will improve 32 acres of native prairies and forest near Little Long Lake within a 700-acre complex of permanently protected public and private lands containing high quality forest and prairie habitat. These projects are all associated with mapped areas of biological significance (MCBS) and Regionally Significant Ecological Areas. Furthermore, several projects are associated with Wildlife Action Network priority areas and significant aquatic biologic areas. Proposed projects will address invasive species management and build habitat resilience by mimicking natural disturbances with prescribed fire and reintroduction of diverse native plants.

An additional 332 project acres have been vetted through the described project selection criteria process and are actively being planned with public partners and conservation easement owners. The remaining 459 acres proposed will be vetted within the first year of the grant to ensure all projects meaningfully contribute to connectivity and expansion of high-quality habitat for wildlife.

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

Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Metro / Urban

Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity

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

Hennepin County supports remnant maple-basswood forest, oak woodlands, floodplain forest, oak savannas, bluff prairies, rich and poor peatlands like fens and tamarack bogs, and shallow lakes, all of which are critically essential habitat for a variety of rare and sensitive wildlife and plants.

Natural Heritage Inventory data indicate nearly 1,400 observations of state threatened, endangered, and special concern species throughout Hennepin County, with 165 of those observations located within one mile of existing protected areas in the county that would receive restoration and enhancement activities as part of this proposal.

Hennepin County is uniquely positioned to track these outcomes through our biological monitoring program. This program monitors pollinators and other insects, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals. In addition, annual inspections, access to a variety of open-source data collected on project sites and ability to leverage partner staff, volunteers, and conservation easement owners to observe wildlife, SGCN, and native plant diversity will allow us to report accurately on the legacy of grant projects for fish and wildlife.

The great diversity of habitat types and the resulting fish, game, and wildlife species found in Hennepin County presents unique and unparalleled opportunities for restoration and enhancement. This grant will continue the work of improving diversity and resilience of some of the state's most threatened habitats, ensuring that Minnesota's most populous county retains a critical connection to our state's iconic flora and fauna. By the end of this grant, an additional 956 acres of permanently protected habitat will be significantly improved through restoration or enhancement. This acreage will provide perpetual, quality habitat and corridors for some of the area's most imperiled species, promoting biological diversity adjacent to an urban center.

The proposal aligns with the following priorities of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council for the Metropolitan Urbanizing Section:

- Restoring and enhancing native prairies, oak savanna and woodlands, big woods complexes, and MCBS sites.
- Restoring and enhancing river floodplain in the Minnesota River and Mississippi River valleys.
- Expanding corridors for wildlife and SGCN through increased habitat quality, reduced invasive species, and native plant diversification.

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

N/A

Outcomes

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *With this request, 956 acres of habitat will be significantly improved through restoration or*

enhancement. To measure program impacts and inform adaptive management, Hennepin County staff initiated a biological monitoring program in 2022. Biomonitoring efforts include relevé plots and transect surveys for plants as well as wildlife surveys for birds, pollinators, aquatic invertebrates, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals.

Annual easement inspections, access to a variety of open-source data, and ability to leverage partner staff, volunteers, and conservation easement owners to observe wildlife, SGCN, and native plant diversity will allow us to evaluate the outcomes for fish and wildlife.

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 proposal does not supplant or substitute for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund used for the same purpose.

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

Hennepin County is an experienced protected-land manager and supports a successful stewardship program that includes project biomonitoring, annual inspections of private conservation lands, effective records and contractor management, tracking changes in ownership and partner contacts, and working through mitigation of violations.

Habitat Management Plans, project-specific Ecological Improvement Plans, and Action Plans (for conservation easements) are developed (and required) for each habitat improvement project. These documents collectively set long-term target community trajectories, implementation strategies, and describe short and long-term monitoring metrics. Tracking metrics over time through biological monitoring allows Hennepin County and partners to adaptively manage toward those target trajectories in an informed and precise way, and ensure that OHF investments are sustained and maintained.

Hennepin County is committed to maintaining relationships with project partners and landowners and securing technical and financial resources to undertake prescribed activities. In the project intake, evaluation, and selection phases, we evaluate each project for the ability of the landowner, manager, or project partner to contribute to and maintain the improved habitat beyond involvement from the county.

The county will continue to work with its watersheds, cities, park districts, NGOs, and other partners to maintain and build partnership and commitment to sustained project outcomes.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2032-2037	Hennepin County Solid Waste Enterprise Fund	Establishment of project specific habitat improvement standards. Biomonitoring before and after habitat improvement project actions.	Make adaptive management changes as needed to meet habitat improvement performance standards.	Ongoing biomonitoring of easements and habitat improvement projects to assess wildlife and plant communities and ensure objectives are sustained.
2032-ongoing	Three Rivers Park District, City of Bloomington, Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed, City of Eden Prairie	Annual or semi-annual monitoring of site for newly establishing encroaching or weedy species.	Managing newly established buckthorn or other aggressive, non-desirable species through staff time or associated volunteer groups.	Future management through Rx burns and grazing. Ongoing monitoring and spot treatments.
2032-ongoing	Partner land managers or landowners	Monitoring and assessment of project areas.	Treatment or management of issues as they arise. Coordination/collaboration with Hennepin Co. for larger issues.	HCP remains available to consult or advise maintaining quality habitat on protected lands.

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

Hennepin County is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion as a core value. Below are several examples of how Hennepin celebrates cultural diversity and reaches diverse communities:

- We use a wide variety of data sources, web tools, books, and partner knowledge to review cultural sensitivity and history ahead of project selection and planning. Several projects are in areas of cultural significance to the Dakota.
- We select projects across a wide array of urban and rural locations with an effort to impact diverse communities. Completed and currently proposed projects are often within or near to mapped environmental justice, red-lined, and climate risk areas. Along with multiple completed projects, three of the four identified projects on this proposal are within 1.5 miles of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency identified areas of environmental justice concern. The fourth project, located in Minnetrista, is adjacent to lands held by the Boys and Girls Club Voyager Environmental Center which caters to diverse and underserved youth. Hennepin County has facilitated restoration and interactive environmental learning initiatives in collaboration with this camp, and the currently proposed project would add publicly accessible, high-quality habitat to the protected corridor near this camp.
- The biological monitoring program allows us to engage the public more broadly in the work and outcomes of restoration and enhancement work. We share engaging images and video of wildlife found in protected habitat to promote greater awareness of the incredible biodiversity that exists in Hennepin County.
- We have engaged over 20 young adults participating in state and county diversity-focused intern programs in biological monitoring and discussion of projects supported by OHF including private conservation easements and restoration and enhancement projects.
- Hennepin County uses diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens in project and contractor selection, preference is given to small, women, and minority-owned businesses.

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?

Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

County/Municipal

Other : Fee-title or easement area associated with Watersheds (e.g., WD and WMO) and Park Districts

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?

Yes

Are there any of these past appropriations still OPEN?

Yes

If needed, please include any explanation of unspent funds.

This proposal builds off the momentum of three previous OHF grants that protected 528 acres of land across 16 easements and restored and enhanced 427 acres of habitat to date.

We have exceeded our protection and restoration and enhancement goals for two previous OHF grants:

M.L. 2018 – Phase 1

- Grant is closed
- Exceeded protection goals by 5% and restoration and enhancement goals by 50%

M.L. 2020 – Phase 2

- Exceeded protection goals by 5% and restoration and enhancement goals by 50%
- Hennepin County has completed with spending on this phase
- Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) plans to spend additional dollars on restoration and enhancement on an easement acquired with Phase 2 funds

M.L. 2023 – Phase 3

- Hennepin County restoration and enhancement dollars are fully encumbered and will be spent by June 30, 2028.
- MLT has completed one conservation easement project under Phase 3, committed \$681,000 to the closing of two other conservation easement projects, and has additional protection funding earmarked to other projects on track to be completed by the grant deadline.

Open OHF Appropriations - Data from Most Recent Status Update

Project	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
ML 2023 - Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program - Phase 3	\$4,649,000	\$318,200	\$4,330,800	6.84%
ML 2020 - Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program - Phase 2	\$3,155,000	\$2,641,700	\$513,300	83.73%
Totals	\$7,804,000	\$2,959,900	\$4,844,100	37.93%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Restoration and enhancement of existing permanently protected areas: 1) select projects; 2) draft restoration plan and performance standards and pre-activity monitoring; 3) perform habitat improvement activities; 4) post activity monitoring; 5) adaptive management and additional restoration activities as needed to meet performance standards	June 2032

Budget

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$1,419,500	\$1,060,800	Hennepin County	\$2,480,300
Contracts	\$4,933,000	\$304,800	Cities, Watershed Districts, Park Districts	\$5,237,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$326,100	\$243,700	Hennepin County	\$569,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$12,800	\$10,000	Cities, Park Districts	\$22,800
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$6,691,400	\$1,619,300	-	\$8,310,700

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
R/E project and partner coordinator, senior restoration ecologist	0.5	5.0	-	\$440,700	Hennepin County	\$440,700
Grant management	0.5	5.0	\$220,300	\$220,300	Hennepin County	\$440,600
R/E project management – forest and woodlands	1.0	5.0	\$599,600	\$199,900	Hennepin County	\$799,500
R/E project management – prairie and wetlands	1.0	5.0	\$599,600	\$199,900	Hennepin County	\$799,500

Amount of Request: \$6,691,400

Amount of Leverage: \$1,619,300

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 24.2%

DSS + Personnel: \$1,745,600

As a % of the total request: 26.09%

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:	\$1,529,300	\$1,304,500	\$90,000	\$1,619,300
% of Total Leverage:	94.44%	80.56%	5.56%	

N/A

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

Hennepin County Environment and Energy Department operations are funded by the Solid Waste Enterprise Fund (money received from the sale of energy and recovered materials) as allowed by Minnesota Statute. Projects on public lands occur in partnership with cities, park districts, and watersheds who have pledged monetary and in-kind contributions.

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?

In general, we would expect that acres and number of projects would be reduced a bit more than proportionately, as necessary to accommodate fixed administrative and other costs (see below).

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

Most personnel and DSS costs are directly project related; however, administrative costs are somewhat fixed. There is an economy of scale to doing more projects per appropriation. Personnel and DSS expenses would be reduced a bit less than proportionately, about 20-25%.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

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

In general, we would expect that acres and number of projects would be reduced a bit more than proportionately, as necessary to accommodate fixed administrative, and other costs (see below).

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

Most personnel and DSS costs are directly project related; however, administrative and costs are somewhat fixed. There is an economy of scale to doing more projects per appropriation. Personnel and DSS expenses would be reduced a bit less than proportionately, about 40-45%.

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 provide an estimate of the personnel time required to deliver the grant outputs included in this proposal. An array of staff may work on projects to coordinate with partners, implement

and manage contracts, and manage the grant. Hennepin County's basis for billing is the individual restoration and enhancement project we work on, ensuring allocation to the appropriate grant award. By using a timesheet-based approach, we use only personnel funds expended to achieve the goals of the grant. This approach uses codes tied directly to grant activities and deliverables. Hennepin County will also use this system to track staffing-related leverage contributions.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

Hennepin County will manage \$4,933,000 worth of restoration and enhancement activities under contracts with restoration partners.

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 that was approved by the DNR on September 15, 2025, Hennepin County determined our direct support services (DSS) rate to include all the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget. Hennepin County submits new data to the DNR annually to set DSS rates to staff expenses incurred in a particular calendar year. The DSS rate currently approved by the DNR is 22.97% for staff expenses incurred in 2024. Data to support rates for staff expense incurred in 2025 and 2026 are currently under review. We will apply this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services.

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	181	181
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	0	775	775
Total	0	0	0	956	956

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.)	0	0	0	-
Non-DNR Lands (city, state, federal, etc.)	0	71	0	408
Easements	110	0	367	-
Total	110	71	367	408

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,375,900	\$1,375,900
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$5,315,500	\$5,315,500
Total	-	-	-	\$6,691,400	\$6,691,400

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	181	0	0	0	0	181
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	775	0	0	0	0	775
Total	956	0	0	0	0	956

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	\$1,375,900	-	-	-	-	\$1,375,900
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	\$5,315,500	-	-	-	-	\$5,315,500
Total	\$6,691,400	-	-	-	-	\$6,691,400

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$7,601
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$6,858

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	\$7,601	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	\$6,858	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

5,000 feet

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

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

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

Hennepin County's Habitat Conservation Program (HCP) identifies, evaluates, and selects projects for restoration and enhancement work using a process of solicitation, ranking, and expert review. Restoration and enhancement projects are identified through ongoing outreach and relationship building with public partners and conservation easement landowners. Interested partners and landowners submit intake forms through the county's website.

Each project must meet the following minimum criteria:

- Alignment with OHF rules and expectations
- Permanently protected
- In or near a priority conservation area
- Has a habitat management plan or equivalent
- Is a qualifying project type identified by program guidelines

Qualifying projects are then evaluated using criteria developed by HCP staff to ensure feasibility, long-term sustainability, and a high return on investment. Criteria include habitat connectivity to high-quality protected complexes, project size and per-acre cost efficiency, public accessibility and benefit, partner capacity for long-term maintenance, availability of matching funds or in-kind contributions, protection of unique remnant features or threatened habitat, and long-term viability.

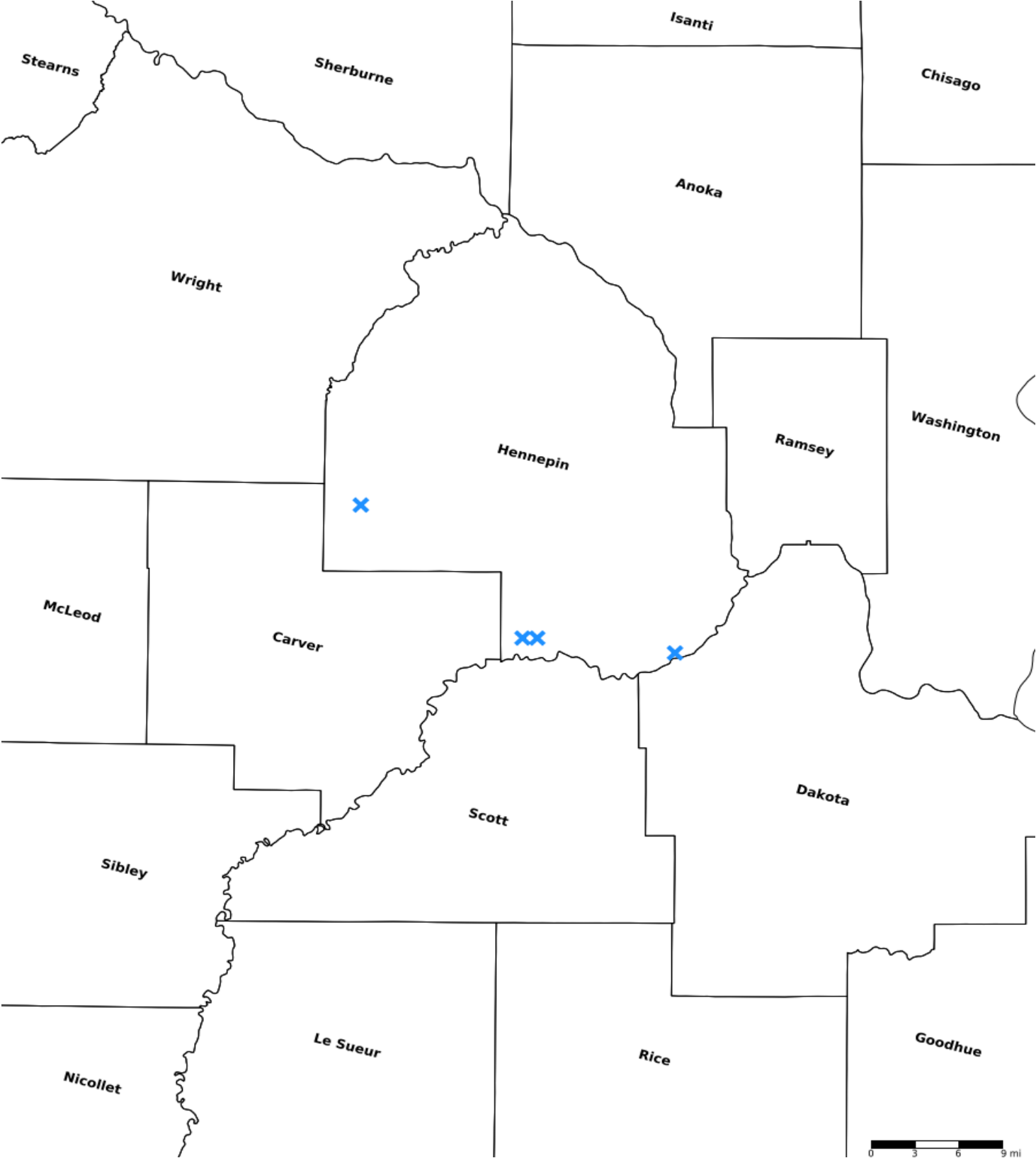
Following ranking, the HCP team conducts a consensus-based review of projects to identify and discuss any potential risks or benefits not captured in the pre-determined evaluation criteria. Each project is then presented at a meeting of the HCP's Technical Advisory Committee, a group of career conservation professionals across Hennepin County.

The four parcels in this proposal score highly across these criteria, each lying within a designated natural resource corridor on publicly accessible land and with a city, watershed or park district partner contributing to the success of the project.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
City of Bloomington - Minnesota River Valley Complex	Hennepin	02724222	65	\$475,000	Yes	Enhancement of bluff prairies and savanna along the Minnesota River.
City of Eden Prairie - Riley Creek Conservation Area	Hennepin	11622229	40	\$280,000	Yes	Enhancement of identified remnant prairie and oak forest along the lower reaches of Riley Creek and within the Minnesota River Valley habitat corridor.
Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed - Riley Creek Spring Road Site	Hennepin	11622228	28	\$215,000	Yes	16 Acres of oak forest enhancement and 12 acres of restoration of prairie directly adjacent to remnant bluff prairie.
Three Rivers Park District - Kingswood Park	Hennepin	11724209	32	\$135,000	Yes	Enhancement of 23 acres of prairie and 8 acres of forest within the Little Long Lake habitat corridor.

Parcel Map



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



Restoring priority habitats for Hennepin County's sensitive wildlife

An opportunity to improve critical habitat for wildlife and recreation

Hennepin County is seeking \$6.69 million to restore and enhance 956 acres of protected habitat. This will improve the quality and connectivity of the most unique and important natural areas remaining in the county, support sensitive wildlife, and ensure access to diverse natural systems for residents of Minnesota's most populous county.

Specifically, work could begin today on the following shovel-ready projects:

- Restore and enhance 68 acres of remnant prairies and oak woodlands along Riley Creek on two adjacent Minnesota River bluff parcels owned by project partners, the City of Eden Prairie and the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District.
- Enhance 65 acres of floodplain forest, oak maple forest, and remnant bluff savanna along the Minnesota River on City of Bloomington property.
- Enhance 32 acres of hillside maple basswood forest and native prairie surrounding a pond and tamarack bog at Three Rivers Park District's Kingswood Park in Minnetrista.

This proposal will restore or enhance another 332 acres that have been identified and are actively being planned with additional public partners and conservation easement owners. The remainder of the 459 acres will be identified within the first year of the grant period.

Hennepin County natural areas are essential to Species of Greatest Conservation Need



For four years, Hennepin County has conducted biological monitoring on protected properties and habitat improvement projects for plants, pollinators, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals to evaluate our investments and improve restoration and enhancement outcomes.

We have observed 644 species associated with previous OHF-funded conservation projects, including 47 different Species of Greatest Conservation Need and 3 federally threatened, endangered, or candidate species, including the monarch butterfly and rusty-patched bumblebee.

Continued funding for our popular Habitat Conservation Program will ensure that residents of the state's most populous county maintain strong connections to the habitats, species, and outdoor experiences that are essential to Minnesota's natural heritage.

Hennepin County is eager to continue restoration and enhancement of critical habitat

Since 2018, Hennepin County and the Minnesota Land Trust have been awarded \$9.3 million in OHF funding to support the goals and efforts of the Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program. We exceeded our protection, restoration, and enhancement goals for two previous grants. So far with OHF funding, 528 acres of land across 16 easements have been permanently protected and 427 acres have been restored and enhanced.

We are eager to build on this momentum by using funding to identify the best, most cost-effective opportunities to restore and enhance remaining natural areas for the benefit of all.

Public and private partnerships are essential for expanding and improving wildlife habitats

Hennepin County has developed strong partnerships with cities, watersheds, and park districts that have increased commitment among local jurisdictions to restore and enhance critical habitats.

Surrounding these public conservation lands are often privately owned conservation easements that play an important role in expanding corridors to and between public conservation lands. Several state plans identify conservation easements as a critical tool for supporting fish, game, and wildlife populations. Completing restoration and enhancement projects on these easements leverages these private resources for broad public good and increases the impact of habitat improvement on public lands.

Project partners

- Hennepin County delivers conservation programs and services as the Soil and Water Conservation District for the county. The county will manage the program, and evaluate, select, plan, and implement restoration and enhancement projects.
- Projects on our parcel list will be planned and implemented in partnership with property owners - Three Rivers Park District, City of Eden Prairie, City of Bloomington, and Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District.
- 52% of the proposed acreage is shovel-ready or already being planned with additional public partners and private conservation easement landowners.

Alignment with Outdoor Heritage Fund priorities

The proposal aligns with the following priorities of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council for the Metropolitan Urbanizing Section:

- Ensure long-term health and viability of Minnesota's wildlife by improving habitat for known populations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need and federally listed species.
- Improve a network of biologically diverse upland and wetland habitats by restoring and enhancing already protected natural areas, including areas important for the ecological integrity of forests, native prairies, remnant oak savanna, and major rivers (the Mississippi River and Minnesota River corridors) and lakes (such as Little Long Lake and Grass Lake).
- Improve the quality of existing habitat with particular attention to increasing biological diversity and eradicating invasive species.
- Increase opportunities for fishing, birding, recreation, and observation of a variety of wildlife species by improving habitat biodiversity and water quality.

A \$6.69 million investment through the Outdoor Heritage Fund will leverage:

- More than \$1.85 million in cash and staff time from Hennepin County for outreach, restoration and enhancement project planning, implementation, biological monitoring, and long-term stewardship.
- Commitment from Hennepin County to engage the public through non-OHF funded outreach and educational opportunities.
- Donation of time and cash from private landowners for restoration efforts.
- Committed in-kind and cash support from Three Rivers Park District, the cities of Bloomington and Eden Prairie, and Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed totaling \$114,750, plus additional anticipated assistance from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, watershed districts, cities, and nonprofit partners.

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