



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Minnesota River Watershed Habitat Conservation Program Phase 2  
ML 2027 Request for Funding

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### General Information

**Date:** 06/24/2026

**Proposal Title:** Minnesota River Watershed Habitat Conservation Program Phase 2

**Funds Requested:** \$9,680,000

**Confirmed Leverage Funds:** -

**Is this proposal Scalable?:** Yes

### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Todd Rexine

**Title:** Conservation Director

**Organization:** Great River Greening

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### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Chippewa, Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Big Stone, Brown, Redwood and Nicollet.

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

Prairie

**Activity types:**

Enhance

Protect in Easement

Restore

Protect in Fee

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Forest

Habitat

Prairie

Wetlands

**Narrative****Abstract**

Funding for conservation in the Minnesota River watershed has been applied unevenly to date, with some priorities receiving significant funding resulting in enormous conservation outcomes; others far less. The Minnesota River Watershed Habitat Conservation Program brings a holistic approach to conservation action within the watershed, targeting resources/actions where they are needed most – priorities insufficiently funded. Great River Greening and Minnesota Land Trust will target action within priority areas identified in Minnesota’s Wildlife Action Network, emphasizing Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), protecting 670 acres through conservation easements and in fee, and restoring/enhancing 1091 acres of priority habitat.

**Design and Scope of Work**

The Minnesota River watershed covers 20% of the state’s land area, stretching from the South Dakota and Iowa borders to the Twin Cities Metro area. Historically, the watershed traversed a great variety of ecosystems ranging from grasslands and prairie pothole regions to Big Woods and oak savanna. Scattered throughout these major systems were over three million acres of wetlands and lakes.

That historic natural landscape has greatly diminished. While prairie once covered one-third of Minnesota, only 1% remains today. Over 90% of wetlands have been drained, 80-85% of the historic Big Woods are lost, and rock outcrops in the region were targeted for mineral extraction. This loss of habitat has had profound impacts on Minnesota’s native species. More than 140 SGCN are known or expected to occur within the watershed.

Protecting these habitats, improving the condition of what remains, and rebuilding connectivity between remnants is key for ensuring the long-term viability of these systems and Minnesota’s SGCN. This is the goal of our program.

To date, significant investment through the Outdoor Heritage Fund has been delivered to portions of the Minnesota River watershed. The Metro Big Rivers partnership has achieved significant outcomes in the lower reaches of the Minnesota River near the Twin Cities. A variety of funded programs – led by Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Minnesota Land Trust and others – have been successful in delivering conservation in the western portions of the watershed.

Building off momentum from Phase 1, program partners Great River Greening (GRG) and Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) will bring their respective expertise to bear in elevating conservation impacts across the watershed with added focus in the central portion of the watershed where OHF and other sources of conservation investments have remained insufficient in comparison to needs. Greening will work with the MN DNR, county municipalities, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to undertake targeted habitat improvement projects. Greening will address the greatest present threats to protected lands within the watershed - cedar and invasive woody encroachment and lack of diversity to support SGCN. Greening will restore and enhance 1091 acres on five state

Wildlife Management Areas, three county parks and one wildlife refuge across six counties.

The Land Trust will protect 670 acres of wetlands, rock outcrops, riparian forest, prairies, prairie streams and associated upland habitat through conservation easements and fee acquisition. Using MLT's uniquely flexible conservation easement, priority parcels within Minnesota's Wildlife Action Network or that build off prior conservation investments will be targeted. The Land Trust will use its market-based approach to conservation easements that incentivizes landowner contribution of easement value as leverage to funding through the OHF. MLT will collaborate with the DNR and other conservation partners to acquire lands in fee that add to existing habitat complexes. The goal with this program is to add needed capacity to the fee acquisition work already underway.

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

The Minnesota River Watershed Habitat Conservation Program directly benefits SGCN and other important game and non-game species by minimizing the potential threats to their habitat caused by agricultural practices, residential or commercial development, mining, and other land management activities. Habitat complexes targeted through this proposal will include prairies, wetlands, woodlands, and rock outcrops. Priority projects will include high- or outstanding-quality habitat as identified in Minnesota Biological Survey data or otherwise located within priority areas of Minnesota's Wildlife Action Network. We will seek to build off prior conservation investments, prioritizing projects located near other protected lands to create larger habitat complexes for the benefit of SGCN.

The vast majority of this landscape is in private ownership. For that reason, working with private landowners on land protection strategies is key to successful conservation in this region. We will work closely with conservation partners in the region to identify those habitat complexes where private land protection can make a significant contribution to existing conservation investments.

We will work to improve lower-quality habitats on federal, state, and county parcels, to the benefit of SGCN. Some examples:

- While protected, some public lands are in need of cedar or buckthorn control, and lack the diversity of vegetation needed for SGCNs, including skipper butterflies, grasshopper and Henslow's sparrow, western meadowlarks, and more.
- Across Nicollet and LeSueur County, two county parcels and the Swan Lake wildlife management complex will receive invasive tree and shrub removal and understory enhancement of big woods habitat.
- Prairie-wetland specialist species are in rapid decline due to tree encroachment, invasive species, and habitat fragmentation. GRG will remove trees on 872 acres on Wildlife Management Areas in the Prairie Pothole Region.
- Acquisition of one parcel for addition to the Bergo WMA will permanently protect native prairie and add to the matrix of lands available to the public in the Minnesota River Valley.
- Acquisition of a conservation easement adjacent to the Picnic Rock WMA will expand on the public investment along the Blue Earth River by creating a large block of permanent habitat benefiting SGCN.

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

Land prices have skyrocketed in recent years, and along with that an increasing demand for agricultural land, mineral deposits, and housing sites. With natural habitat within the Minnesota River watershed already minimized through historic land uses, these demands are placing an inordinate pressure on those that remain. It is more important than ever to protect what remains of the prairies, wetlands, savannas, and forests in the Minnesota River watershed. A short window of opportunity exists to permanently protect previously unavailable parcels as current

land ownership is transitioning from one generation to the next.

Insufficient financial investment into some priority areas for restoration and enhancement is also having an impact. Cedar coverage has increased by 200-300% in just ten years on many rock outcrops and prairies with costs to remove them correlating with the coverage; their expansion continues to reduce habitat quality for SGCNs.

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

This program is focused on procuring conservation easements and restoring prairie, woodland, rock outcrop, and wetland habitats within priority complexes of habitat as guided by Minnesota’s State Wildlife Action Plan and Prairie Plan.

The Land Trust’s protection work will build upon past conservation investments in the program area, expand the footprint of existing protected areas (WMAs, WPAs, etc.), facilitate the protection of habitat corridors, and reduce the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats by providing landowners with alternatives to land uses that degrade or destroy habitat. Specific parcels available for easement acquisition are evaluated relative to each other, with priorities given to those that are adjacent or in close proximity to existing protected lands (among other factors).

Many of the remaining native prairies, forests, and wetlands of the watershed where GRG will perform restoration and enhancement activities are concentrated around unique landforms and steep slopes in the river valleys such as on rock outcrops and ridges making these habitats priority protection and enhancement areas within an existing corridor. Fragmentation created by invasive and woody species like reed canary grass and red cedar further leads to an urgent need for enhancement and natural disturbance management to restore those corridors. Great River Greening also utilizes the Wildlife Action Network and Minnesota County Biological Survey data and proximity to known populations of SGCN to identify priorities for enhancement and restoration work. Within the watershed are 6 of the 36 Conservation Focus Areas identified by Minnesota’s Wildlife Action Network in Minnesota, and 6 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) identified by Audubon. Activities on the prioritized sites will improve and expand high-value habitat.

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

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

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

**Prairie**

Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

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

This program will protect, restore, and enhance high-quality habitat and corridors that will improve resiliency and prevent degradation of prairies, forests, and wetlands throughout the watershed.

Restoration and enhancement activities will improve the experience of those who hunt, fish, or hike through these

natural spaces. The program is built on partnerships with county, state, and federal agencies that will continue beyond this phase of work. Greening is committed to seeing these habitats maintained in the future through consultations, matching funds, and education. Volunteers will be invited to participate in some of the activities and be part of the conservation legacy while learning how to perform similar activities on their own lands.

The Land Trust will focus its protection work on key wetland, prairie, riparian forest, granite outcrops and other habitats within the program area, guided by the Minnesota Prairie Plan and State Wildlife Action Plan. High-quality lands will be protected through acquisition of perpetual conservation easements. We work in partnership with local, state and federal agency and non-profit conservation partners to ensure our activities are complementary across the program area. By doing this, we are building complexes of high-quality protected habitat, reducing fragmentation concerns, and providing connectivity between core habitat areas that will stand the test of time and enable species to move freely.

Lands identified for fee acquisition by the Land Trust have been vetted by DNR land acquisition staff at the regional and state levels for the purpose of adding to the matrix of public lands throughout the program area.

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

### Outcomes

**Programs in prairie region:**

Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *Parcels are prioritized relative to their benefit to SGCN (among other factors). Success will be determined based on the acreage of lands protected, restored, and enhanced.*

**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 is not supplanting or substituting for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.

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

Land protected through MLT conservation easements will be sustained through state-of-the-art standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget.

In addition, MLT will assist landowners in the development of comprehensive habitat management plans to help ensure that the land will be managed for its wildlife and water quality benefits. MLT (as easement holder) will work with landowners on an ongoing basis to provide habitat plans and technical expertise to undertake enhancement and ongoing management of these properties.

Lands acquired in fee will be transferred to the DNR and will be maintained as public lands.

For Restoration and Enhancement (R/E) on protected land, site-specific resource management plans will be developed/adopted to guide effective long-term management. All land managers benefiting from R/E must commit to the long-term maintenance of these sites. A principal goal for each site is to elevate its ecological condition so that on-going management is financially feasible after a grant closes.

**Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2027	GRG-OHF	Perform site evaluation and assessment in collaboration with DNR	Develop R/E plan for property. Begin monitoring	Initiate site preparation from R/E work. Continue monitoring
2028	GRG - OHF	Initiate R/E work	Continue R/E depending on appropriate methods and time of year	Continue R/E and begin stewardship as needed using appropriate methods and dependent on time of year
2029	GRG - OHF	Continue R/E and begin stewardship. Target actions to maintain habitat.	Restorative action to correct damage as needed	Evaluate progress and determine if additional actions are needed
2030 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of easements in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	-

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

Protecting, restoring, and enhancing diverse and resilient habitat benefits all Minnesotans. It keeps our air and water cleaner, mitigates the impacts of climate change, and conserves the biological diversity that belongs to everyone. Public land provides an opportunity for recreation and health to those who do not have access to private natural lands, whether that be for hunting, fishing, hiking, or other outdoor pursuits.

Great River Greening involves, engages, and seeks to benefit diverse communities through focused events that leverage Outdoor Heritage Funds in their programs. Our partners actively encourage residents who live near habitat restoration sites and create programs specifically for people from diverse backgrounds opening up opportunities such as GRG’s Engaging a Diverse Population Program.

One of the MLT’s core public values is a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We have been engaged in a multi-year-long process to assess how the conservation community—and the Minnesota Land Trust in particular—can better address these issues. To date, we have demonstrated this commitment, when possible, given the funding parameters and our unique role in working with private landowners, including numerous projects to protect the camps and nature centers that serve a diversity of Minnesota youth and a long-term partnership with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa on wild rice restoration.

Going forward, GRG and MLT intend to build on this engagement using diversity, equity, and inclusion as a lens to seek out new partnerships, listening to those partners, and collaborating on actions that advance the goals of conserving the best of Minnesota’s remaining habitats. We are eager to expand this important work in a way that more directly, and authentically, engages diverse communities and partners in an equitable and just manner.

## Activity Details

### Requirements

**Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought\*\* prior to acquisition, per 97A.056 subd 13(j)?**

No

**Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:**

We will follow the county/township board notification processes as directed by current statutory language.

**Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) free of any other permanent protection?**

Yes

**Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection?**

Yes

**Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?**

Yes

**Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 or on lands to be acquired in this program?**

Yes

**Where does the activity take place?**

WMA

Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

County/Municipal

### 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?**

Yes

**Explain what will be planted and include the maximum percentage of any acquired parcel that would be planted into foodplots by the proposer or the end owner of the property:**

The purpose of the MLT's conservation easements is to protect existing high quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. We restrict agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases where there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either exclude the agricultural area from the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may include a small percentage of agricultural lands if it is not feasible to exclude those areas. In such cases, however, we will not use OHF funds to pay the landowners for that portion of the conservation easement. These lands will be available for traditional agriculture unless otherwise restricted by the easement.

As for food plots, although MLT prefers no food plots in our easements, we do recognize that these are important to some landowners; an outright restriction against them would greatly diminish our ability to protect quality habitat in some of our program areas. As such, we do allow a limited number of them over

small areas when that's the case. Food plots constitute a very small percent of our total land area protected through conservation easement. Our practice is to limit the area of food plots to no more than 3% of the total easement area of a property, with a preference for less than more. Exceptions to this practice will be very limited. Per our stated policy, MLT will prohibit the use of neonicotinoid-treated seed in the planting of food plots, prohibit the planting of invasive species, and require the landowner to submit seed tags to MLT's Stewardship Team on an annual basis after the planting of food plots.

State Wildlife Management Areas are part of the State's Outdoor Recreation System established by State Statute 86A. Subdivision 8 of that statute defines the purpose of use of WMA's as, " -A state wildlife management area shall be established to protect those lands and waters which have a high potential for wildlife production and to develop and manage these lands and waters for the production of wildlife, for public hunting, fishing, and trapping, and for other compatible outdoor recreational uses."

To fulfill those goals, the DNR may use limited farming on a small percentage of WMA's (<1%) specifically to enhance or benefit the management of state lands for wildlife, recreation or reduce crop depredation from neighboring properties in agriculture-dominated landscapes with limited winter food sources. Commonly planted crops include corn, soybeans, small grains and hay that can include alfalfa or a wildlife mix. Crops are chosen based on a particular wildlife or recreational need and follow crop rotations that adhere to soil health principles. Most food plots occupy a small portion of a particular tract and may include up to 5% of a particular parcel. Percentages are much lower considering the entire WMA system.

DNR does not have any plans to plant food plots on the parcels currently listed in this proposal. However, future management needs may change or additional parcels may be added later that may include food plots.

**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:**

No variation from state regulations.

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

State of MN

County

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

WMA

AMA

County Forest

State Forest

**Will the eased land be open for public use?**

No

**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:**

The Land Trust will assess the R/E needs of each parcel protected through this appropriation. Should R/E needs exist, funding for those projects will be built into a forthcoming proposal.

**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.**

Funding listed below is from February 1 status reports. MLT began spending funds for this grant in July 2025. MLT is advancing two large land protection projects that will both meet our proposed grant deliverables and expend the majority of funds allocated for Phase I.

Restoration and enhancement budgets are on target to spend by end of the grant cycle with 65% of R/E funds are spent or contractually committed for through subcontracts with service providers to perform activities over the duration of the grant. Not reflected in the most recent status update is contracted work that has occurred over the first four months of 2026. R/E projects happen over the course of years on dynamic landscapes, with each portion of the project relying on the completion of the previous step, and on occasion require modification due to project site response to previous management activities. Remaining funds are for supplies and contracts related to seeding and vegetative plantings upon completion of invasive removal and tree thinning operations.

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

<b>Project</b>	<b>Funding Amount Received</b>	<b>Amount Spent to Date</b>	<b>Funding Remaining</b>	<b>% Spent to Date</b>
ML 2025 - Minnesota River Watershed Habitat Conservation Program	\$3,078,000	\$54,400	\$3,023,600	1.77%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$3,078,000</b>	<b>\$54,400</b>	<b>\$3,023,600</b>	<b>1.77%</b>

**Timeline**

<b>Activity Name</b>	<b>Estimated Completion Date</b>
Finalize restoration and enhancement plans	June 30, 2027
Conservation easements completed	June 30, 2030
Acquisitions in fee completed	June 30, 2030
Restoration and enhancement completed	June 30, 2032

Budget

**Grand Totals Across All Partnerships**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Funding Request</b>	<b>Total Leverage</b>	<b>Leverage Source</b>	<b>Total</b>
Personnel	\$879,000	\$12,500	-, Private	\$891,500
Contracts	\$3,493,000	-	-	\$3,493,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,500,000	-	-	\$1,500,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,500,000	\$250,000	-, Landowners	\$2,750,000
Easement Stewardship	\$224,000	-	-	\$224,000
Travel	\$84,000	-	-	\$84,000
Professional Services	\$366,000	-	-	\$366,000
Direct Support Services	\$275,000	\$170,000	-, Private	\$445,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$45,000	-	-	\$45,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$16,000	-	-	\$16,000
Supplies/Materials	\$277,000	-	-	\$277,000
DNR IDP	\$21,000	-	-	\$21,000
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$9,680,000</b>	<b>\$432,500</b>	-	<b>\$10,112,500</b>

**Partner: GRG**

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$479,000	\$12,500	Private	\$491,500
Contracts	\$3,403,000	-	-	\$3,403,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$64,000	-	-	\$64,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$167,000	\$170,000	Private	\$337,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$15,000	-	-	\$15,000
Supplies/Materials	\$267,000	-	-	\$267,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$4,395,000</b>	<b>\$182,500</b>	-	<b>\$4,577,500</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
GRG Personnel	1.17	5.0	\$479,000	\$12,500	Private	\$491,500

**Partner: MLT**

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$400,000	-	-	\$400,000
Contracts	\$90,000	-	-	\$90,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,500,000	-	-	\$1,500,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,500,000	\$250,000	Landowners	\$2,750,000
Easement Stewardship	\$224,000	-	-	\$224,000
Travel	\$20,000	-	-	\$20,000
Professional Services	\$366,000	-	-	\$366,000
Direct Support Services	\$108,000	-	-	\$108,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$45,000	-	-	\$45,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
Supplies/Materials	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
DNR IDP	\$21,000	-	-	\$21,000
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$5,285,000</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	-	<b>\$5,535,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.91	4.0	\$400,000	-	-	\$400,000

**Amount of Request:** \$9,680,000

**Amount of Leverage:** \$432,500

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 4.47%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$1,154,000

**As a % of the total request:** 11.92%

**Easement Stewardship:** \$224,000

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 8.96%

**Leverage Funding Table**

	Leverage Amount Committed	Leverage Amount Confirmed (of Committed Funds)	Leverage Amount Anticipated	Total Leverage
Amount:	\$170,000	-	\$262,500	\$432,500
% of Total Leverage:	39.31%	0.0%	60.69%	

N/A

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

MLT encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements. The leverage amount is a conservative anticipated estimate we expect to see donated by landowners.

GRG has \$170,000 of committed leverage. Ongoing discussions with various regional conservation groups is raising awareness and GRG anticipates additional leverage.

**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?**

Acre scaling will be reduced moderately greater than proportional due to fixed costs and other factors. Activities will be curtailed, but greater than proportional, as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success.

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

Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed.

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

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

Acre scaling will be moderately greater than proportional due to fixed costs and other factors. Activities will be curtailed, but greater than proportional, as some activities are fixed and necessary for program success.

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

Personnel and DSS will be scaled, but moderately less than proportional. Some costs are fixed (landowner recruitment; grant management) and must occur regardless of grant amount. Projects can fail midstream after investment of time. Donation of easement value (high in this program) can inflate the number of projects pursued/completed.

**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 are an estimate of the personnel time required to produce the grant deliverables put forward in this proposal. An array of staff draw from these funds for legal work, negotiating with landowners, crafting of acquisition documents, coordinating with agency partners, working with contractors, restoration and enhancement activities, conducting landowner outreach, and managing the grant. We use only those personnel funds necessary to achieve the goals of the program.

Continuity of funding across multiple phases allows us flexibility when prioritizing parcels for protection or enhancement. Further, it ensures stability in our staffing model and provides the ability to plan and

prioritize projects over multiple years. The flexibility provided by stable funding is critically important to achieving conservation goals given the uncertainty and variability of field season weather conditions.

## Contracts

### What is included in the contracts line?

GRG - Restoration / enhancement contracts with service providers.

MLT - Habitat management plan preparation, landowner outreach, etc.

## Professional Services

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

Appraisals

Other : Phase 2 Environmental Assessments, Mapping, Mineral Reports, etc.

Surveys

Title Insurance and Legal Fees

## Fee Acquisition

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

1 transaction.

## Easement Stewardship

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

Minnesota Land Trust's budget is based on the closing of 8 conservation easements, depending on project cost and size. The average cost per easement to fund the Minnesota Land Trust's perpetual monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$28,000, although under extraordinary circumstances additional funds may be warranted. This figure is derived from MLT's detailed stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is consistent with Land Trust Accreditation standards. MLT shares periodic updates to this cost analysis with LSOHC staff.

## Travel

### Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?

Yes

### Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging

Land Trust and Greening staff regularly rent vehicles for grant-related purposes, which can be a significant cost savings over use of personal vehicles.

### 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?**

GRG - DSS rate has been approved by the DNR in September 2019, GRG's DSS rate includes the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget. A portion, not exceeding 50%, of these costs are requested from the grant and the balance is contributed as leverage.

MLT - In a process approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, MLT's DSS rate includes the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget. This is similar to the MLT's proposed federal indirect rate. MLT will apply this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses.

## **Other Equipment/Tools**

### **Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?**

Hand tools, saws, brush cutters, GPS devices, safety gear and other necessary equipment to complete restoration and enhancement activities.

## **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	60	0	0	60
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	80	40	0	0	120
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	550	550
Enhance	9	872	150	0	1,031
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>972</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>1,761</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.)	0	34	131	758
Non-DNR Lands (city, state, federal, etc.)	-	26	-	142
Easements	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>900</b>

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

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$256,000	-	-	\$256,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$1,177,300	\$588,700	-	-	\$1,766,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,519,000	\$3,519,000
Enhance	\$50,000	\$2,833,000	\$1,256,000	-	\$4,139,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,227,300</b>	<b>\$3,677,700</b>	<b>\$1,256,000</b>	<b>\$3,519,000</b>	<b>\$9,680,000</b>

**Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	60	0	60
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	120	0	120
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	550	0	550
Enhance	0	0	0	1,031	0	1,031
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,761</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,761</b>

**Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$256,000	-	\$256,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$1,766,000	-	\$1,766,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,519,000	-	\$3,519,000
Enhance	-	-	-	\$4,139,000	-	\$4,139,000
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	<b>\$9,680,000</b>	-	<b>\$9,680,000</b>

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

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	\$4,266	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$14,716	\$14,717	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$6,398
Enhance	\$5,555	\$3,248	\$8,373	-

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

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	\$4,266	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	\$14,716	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$6,398	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$4,014	-

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

0

**Parcels**

**Sign-up Criteria?**

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

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

Great River Greening works with land owning entities (public and protected private) and interested stakeholders to identify parcels where there is a need for restoration or enhancement of lands and water resources. Parcels are selected using the following criteria: permanently protected status (WMA, AMA, SNA, Forestry, County Conservation, etc.), ecological and habitat value and potential (biodiversity, SGCN, size, and location), congruence with existing plans and priority areas, willing and committed landowners (demonstrated through leveraged match), and leveraging opportunities. The following table includes state WMA, county, and easement parcels.

The Land Trust uses a competitive, market-based approach through an RFP process to identify interested landowners and prioritize parcels for conservation easement acquisition. All proposals submitted by landowners are evaluated and ranked relative to their ecological significance based on three primary factors: 1) size of habitat on the parcel; 2) condition of habitat on the parcel; and 3) the context (both in terms of amount/quality of remaining habitat and protected areas) within which the parcel lies. We also ask the landowner to consider contributing all or a portion of fair market value to enable our funds to make a larger conservation impact (see attached sign-up criteria).

**Restore / Enhance Parcels**

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
GRG - Big Stone NWR	Big Stone	12145201	24	\$324,000	Yes	Locust removal, siberian elm on outcrop
GRG - Williams Nature Center	Blue Earth	10827216	28	\$357,000	Yes	Buckthorn removal and under seeding
GRG - Rosenau-Lambrecht WMA	Brown	11031217	123	\$300,000	Yes	prairie and wetland enhancement. woody invasive removal, RX burn and seeding
GRG - Vogel WMA	Brown	10835203	56	\$152,000	Yes	Tree removal on grassland and around wetlands
GRG - Lake Washington Regional Park	Le Sueur	10926212	77	\$651,000	Yes	buckthorn enhancement and underplanting
GRG - Ney Nature Center	Le Sueur	10926201	39	\$256,000	Yes	oak release, prairie enhancement
GRG - Swan Lake WMA Complex	Nicollet	10928228	522	\$1,628,000	Yes	Tree, shrub, and invasives removal across 182 acres of forest/oak savanna including cedar and Siberian elm removal, a small prescribed hillside burn, and reseeding; Hillside clearing and burn
GRG - Delhi WMA	Redwood	11336225	128	\$366,000	Yes	Tree removal on grassland
GRG - Two Rivers WMA	Redwood	10938202	131	\$364,000	Yes	Scattered tree removal

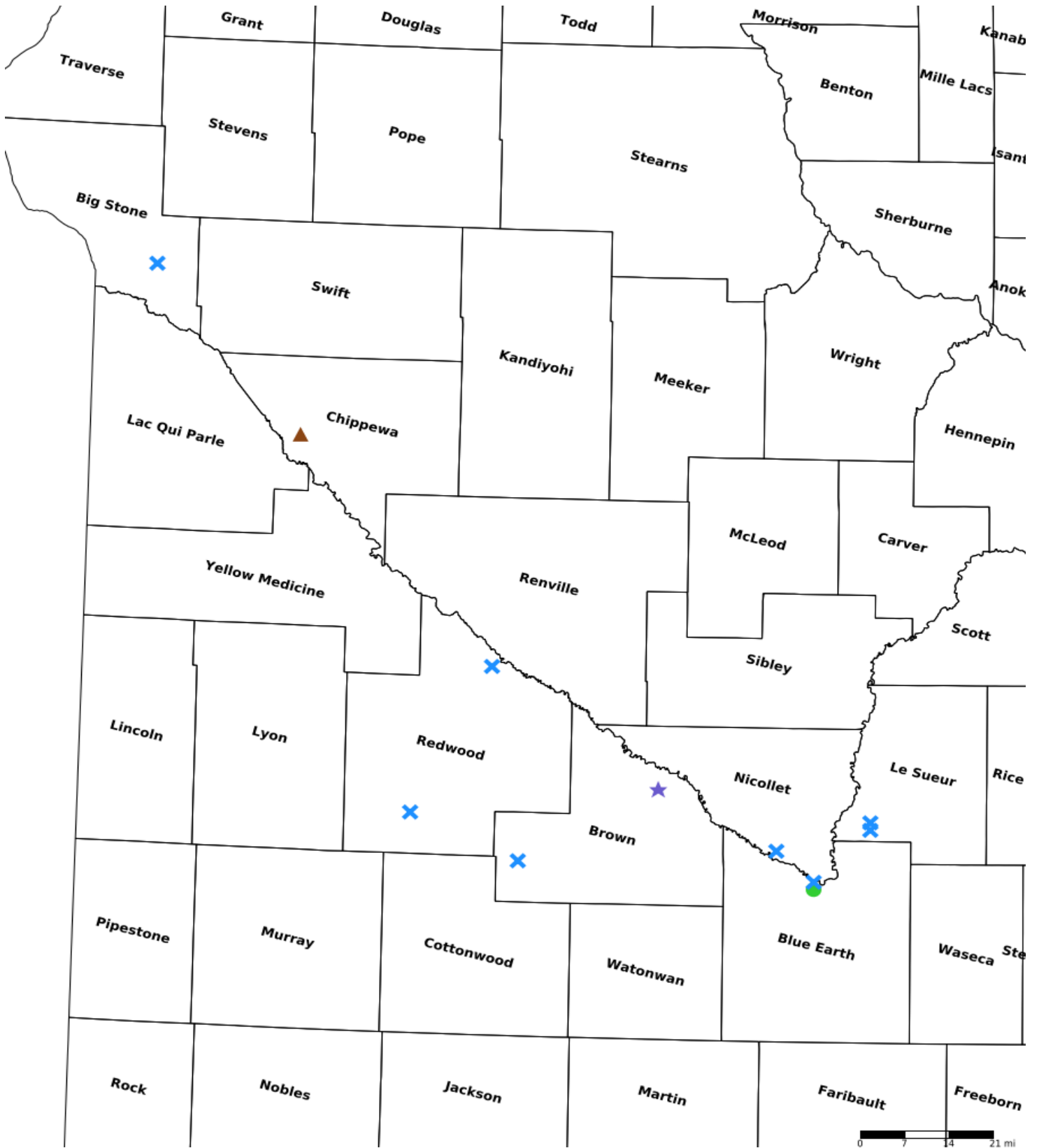
**Protect in Fee Parcels**

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
MLT - Bergo WMA	Chippewa	11841226	58	\$200,000	No

**Protect in Easement Parcels**

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
MLT - Blue Earth River - Picnic Rock	Blue Earth	10827221	155	\$1,300,000	No

### Parcel Map



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

# MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED HABITAT CONSERVATION PROGRAM



For more information, contact **Todd Rexine**  
 Conservation Director Great River Greening  
 trexine@greatrivergreening.org | (651) 272-3992

The 14,800 square mile Minnesota River watershed was once covered by prairies, Big Woods forest, oak savanna, three million acres of wetlands and lakes, and the unique ecosystem associated with the ancient rock outcrops in the Minnesota River valley. Only a small portion remains of that historic natural landscape. This loss of habitat has had profound impacts on the more than 140 Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) that are known or expected to occur within the watershed. Improving the condition of what remains, and rebuilding connectivity between remnants with permanent protection is key for ensuring the long-term viability of these systems and SGCN.

<b>Request</b>	<b>\$9,680,000</b>
<b>Leverage</b>	<b>\$432,500</b>
<b>Total acres underway</b>	<b>820</b>
<b>Acres protected</b>	<b>670</b>
<i>Conservation easements</i>	550
<i>Protect in Fee w/ State PILT Liability</i>	120
<b>Acres restored/enhanced</b>	<b>1,091</b>

## HOW DOES THE PROGRAM SUPPORT STATE GOALS?

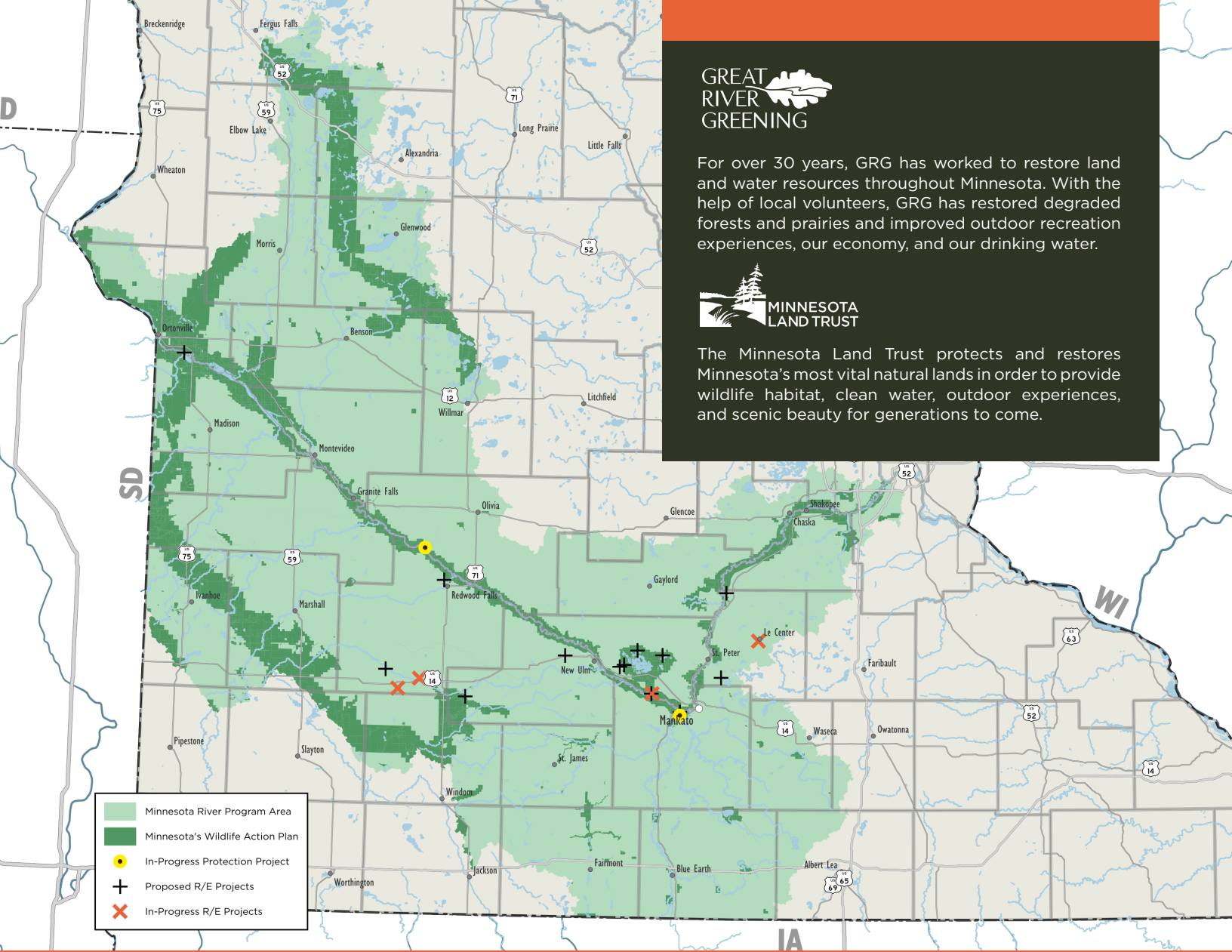
This program is focused on restoring, enhancing, and protecting priority habitats within the Minnesota River Watershed as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan and the Minnesota Biological Survey. The program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area

## WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?

- Expand habitat complexes through permanent easements and fee acquisitions.
- Restore or enhance prairie habitat on 1091 acres within the prairie pothole, increasing migration corridors and nesting habitat for declining grassland bird and waterfowl species.
- Land protection, restoration, and enhancement to directly benefit Species in Greatest Conservation Need.



Blue-winged Teal  
 Photo by Grayson Smith



## GREAT RIVER GREENING

For over 30 years, GRG has worked to restore land and water resources throughout Minnesota. With the help of local volunteers, GRG has restored degraded forests and prairies and improved outdoor recreation experiences, our economy, and our drinking water.



The Minnesota Land Trust protects and restores Minnesota's most vital natural lands in order to provide wildlife habitat, clean water, outdoor experiences, and scenic beauty for generations to come.



Restored Prairie  
Photo by Kristy Cowdin

Great River Greening and Minnesota Land Trust will bring their respective expertise to bear in elevating conservation impact across the Minnesota River watershed, but focusing primarily on the central portion of the watershed where conservation investment has been insufficient relative to the need.

Great River Greening will undertake targeted habitat improvement projects on existing protected lands, and the Minnesota Land Trust will seek proposals from landowners for permanent conservation easements within the Wildlife Action Network or that build off prior conservation easements.

The Land Trust will use its market-based approach to conservation easements that incentives landowner contributions of easement value as leverage to funding through the Outdoor Heritage Fund.