

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council 2010 Strategic Planning and Recommendation Development Process

BACKGROUND

This is a guide to the process through which the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (L-SOHC) will develop a strategic plan for the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) and its Outdoor Heritage Fund appropriation recommendations to the 2010 Minnesota Legislature. According to Minnesota Statutes 2009, section 97A.056, subd. 3(a) these recommendations must be submitted to the Legislature by January 15, 2010.

This process relies principally on existing resource and conservation plans to build a strategic framework for achieving priority habitat goals and objectives. It also relies on the state's conservation community and public input to validate and refine the habitat objectives flowing from existing plans.

L-SOHC Process Goal

The goal of this process is to lay the foundation for the ongoing plan for the use of the Outdoor Heritage Fund, and make recommendations for F.Y. 2011 appropriations to implement that plan to the 2010 Minnesota Legislature.

OHF Mission

The mission of the OHF as specified in the state Constitution is to: "protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife."

L-SOHC Recommendation Goal

The L-SOHC, by January 15, 2010, aims to recommend to the Minnesota Legislature appropriations from the Outdoor Heritage Fund:

- Consistent with the Minnesota Constitution and state law;
- Supported by the Legislature, the Governor and the public; and
- Attaining the immediate objectives of the strategic framework and plan for the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Principles Guiding the L-SOHC Process for Developing OHF Expenditure Recommendations

In its planning and recommendation development the L-SOHC will:

- Be transparent to and accessible by the public;
- Protect and advance the public interest;
- Recommend expenditures for protection, enhancement, and restoration projects that are grounded in science and reflect "best practices" for resource management.
- Provide opportunities for, and consider, public input;
- Take into account existing conservation planning efforts and delivery systems;

- Encourage efficient and effective conservation solutions;
- Be understandable by the public; and
- Ensure conservation benefits are broadly distributed around the state, consistent with scientific principles and priorities identified in the state's species-, habitat-, and resource-specific plans as well as its statewide conservation plans.

EXISTING PLAN REVIEW AND INCORPORATION

Minnesota Law informs the process for developing L-SOHC recommendations. By law, the L-SOHC must make recommendations that "... will achieve the outcomes of existing natural resource plans, including, but not limited to, the Minnesota Statewide Conservation Plan, that directly relate to the restoration, protection, and enhancement of wetlands, prairies, forests and habitat for fish, game and wildlife, and that prevent forest fragmentation, encourage forest consolidation, and expand restored native prairies." (M. S. 2009, section 97A.056, subd. 3(a))

Additionally, M. S. 2009, section 97A.056, subd. 3(h) instructs the Council to "...use the regions of the state based upon the ecological regions and subregions developed by the Department of Natural Resources and establish objectives for each region and subregion to achieve the purposes of the fund outlined in the state constitution."

This guidance needs to be considered in the context of two additional planning requirements facing the Council. M.L. 2009, Chapter 172, Article 5, Section 9 requires the legislative committees designated by the House and Senate leadership to, alongside the Council, develop a legislative guide stating the principles for the use and expected outcomes of all funds from the three-eighths – Legacy Amendment. This task needs to be completed by January 15, 2010. Section 9 of the same law requires the same institutions to develop a 25-year strategic plan, by January 15 2011, to be updated every five years. Presumably, this plan is linked to the ten year plan and 25-year framework M.S. 2009, section 97A.056, subd. 3(h) requires the Council to develop. To accomplish all the planning requirements facing the Council the Council must use processes that serve more than one planning objective.

In developing its OHF expenditure recommendations to the 2009 Legislature, the Council reviewed all known Minnesota plans directly relating to the mission as described above. Among the statewide species-, habitat-, and resource-specific plans reviewed are:

- Minnesota Forest Planning
- Minnesota Forests for the Future
- USFWS Wetland Plan
- USFWS Biological Planning
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- Aquatic Management Area Plan
- Wildlife Management Area 50-Year Plan
- National Fish Habitat Plan
- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Long Range Plan for the Ring-Neck Pheasant in Minnesota
- Long Range Plan for Wild Turkey in Minnesota
- Managing Minnesota's Shallow Lakes for Wildlife and Waterfowl

Recommendations from these plans, other plans such as the Scientific and Natural Area Plan, and experts in conservation in Minnesota were synthesized into two statewide, comprehensive conservation plans also reviewed by the Council:

- The Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan; and
- A Fifty-Year Vision: Conservation for Minnesota’s Future.

These two comprehensive synthesizing plans will jointly form the basis of the L-SOHC’s planning and recommendation framework for its recommendations to the 2010 Minnesota Legislature. The process of joining these two plans is outlined below.

The Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan and the Outdoor Heritage Fund

According to the authors, the Minnesota Statewide Comprehensive Conservation and Preservation Plan identifies thirteen actions addressing the Outdoor Heritage Fund’s mission of restoring, protecting, and enhancing wetlands, prairies, forests and habitat for fish, game and wildlife, and preventing forest fragmentation, encouraging forest consolidation, and expanding restored native prairies. These actions arise in three issue areas: habitat, land use and energy. (Jean Coleman before the Council on January 12, 2009)

Habitat Action

Act. Num.	Action	Page
H 1	Protect priority land habitats	pp. 63-67
H 2	Protect critical shorelands of streams and lakes	pp. 67-74
H 4	Restore and protect shallow lakes	pp. 78-79
H 5	Restore land, wetlands, and wetland-associated watersheds	pp. 80-81
H 6	Protect and restore critical in-water habitats of lakes and streams	pp. 81-84
H 7	Keep water on the landscape	pp. 84-87
H 13	Habitat and landscape conservation and training programs for all citizens	pp. 94-96

Land Use Action

Act. Num.	Action	Page
LU 2	Support local and regional conservation based community planning	pp. 104-108
LU 4	As much as possible, transition renewable fuel feedstock to perennial crops	pp. 119-122
LU 6	Reduce upland and gully erosion through soil conservation practices	pp.124-127
LU 8	Protect large blocks of forested land	pp. 130-131

Energy Action

Act. Num.	Action	Page
E 2	Invest in farm and forest preservation efforts to prevent fragmentation due to development – guided by productivity and environmental vulnerability research	pp. 184-185
E4	Develop policies and incentives to encourage perennial crop production projects on a landscape scale	pp. 187-188

These actions will form the L-SOHC planning framework.

A Fifty-Year Vision: Conservation for Minnesota’s Future

This plan resulted from efforts by a coalition of citizens and organizations, brought together by the Campaign for Conservation and committed to developing long term conservation strategies, and funding sources, and policies that will ensure the preservation of Minnesota’s resources for future generations. It was the result of a three-step process:

1. Defined 14 regions for the Fifty-Year Vision, based on the Ecological Classification System (ECS) devised by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.
2. Reviewed over 50 statewide plans and countless regional plans in developing the Vision.
3. Engaged regional teams of conservation experts to review the key findings and goals from existing plans. Thirty-five regional meetings were conducted and over 300 participants provided advice and formed regional visions.

Therefore, the Vision represents a synthesis of the conclusions of the statewide and regional plans and the views of scientific and administrative experts in the field of conservation in Minnesota. These experts represent the gamut of conservation interests and conservation delivery systems.

The 50-Year Vision and long-term habitat and conservation goals were allocated among these 14 regions:

- Red River Valley
- Glacial Lake Agassiz Beach Ridges
- Aspen Parklands
- Minnesota River Prairie
- Prairie Coteau
- Deciduous Transition
- Southeast Blufflands
- Hardwood Hills
- Northern Lakes
- Superior Uplands
- Arrowhead
- Peatlands
- North Shore
- Twin Cities Metropolitan Area

Typical findings for a region include concrete habitat goals recommended to be achieved over the 50-year planning horizon. For example, the findings for Minnesota River Prairie that fit within the guidance of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are:

- Restore and protect 583,000 acres of as called for in the Pheasant Plan
- Restore and protect 656,000 acres called for in the Duck Plan.
- Acquire additional 189,410 acres of WMA lands called for in WMA plan.

These concrete habitat goals from all fourteen of the Vision's regions will be the basis for the L-SOHC habitat targets.

PLANNING AND RECOMMENDATION PROCESS OVERVIEW

The cross-functional flow chart (FIGURE 2) on the page 7 describes how the two statewide conservation plans and the species/habitat/resource specific plans will be integrated into the L-SOHC's strategic plan guiding the FY 2011 recommendations of the Council. Following the flow chart is a brief discussion of the major process points leading up to the development of the Call for Requests.

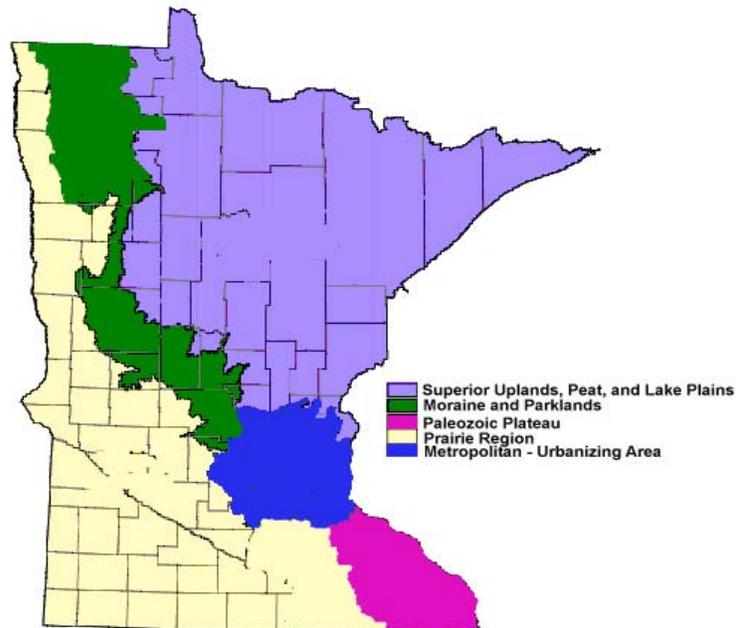
The Regions

Minnesota Law requires the Council to plan using Minnesota Department of Natural Resources approved ecological sections and subsections. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources ecological section framework divides the state into ten ecological sections. Due to time, logistics, resources, and the nature of conservation delivery systems, for the plan and plan-based recommendations to the 2010 legislature, the L-SOHC will combine the ten Ecological Sections into five Outdoor Heritage Council Geo-Eco Planning Sections as follows:

- **Northern Forest** (Southern, Western and Northern Superior Uplands, No. Minnesota and Ontario Peatlands, and No. Minnesota Drift and Lake Plains sections)
- **Forest/Prairie Transition** (Lake Agassiz, Aspen Parklands, and Minnesota and NE Iowa Morainal Sections)
- **Southeast Forest** (Paleozoic Plateau sections)
- **Prairie** (Red River Valley and North Central Glaciated Plains sections)
- **Metropolitan Urbanizing Area** (That portion of the Minnesota and NE Iowa Morainal section within the counties centered on Hennepin County plus the portions in the tier of counties to the north and west)

See FIGURE 1 below, on page 6.

L-SOHC PLANNING SECTIONS



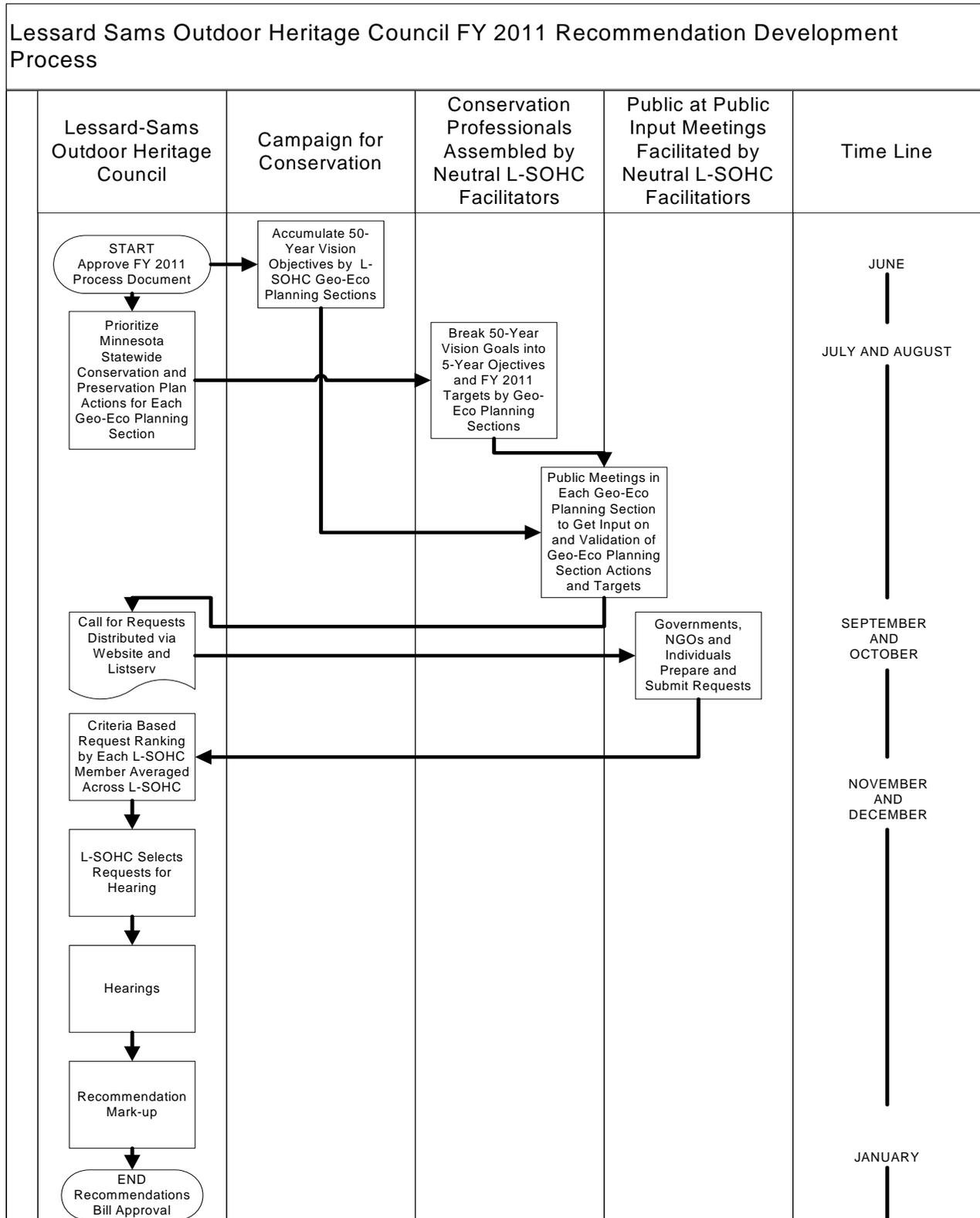
Within each Geo-Eco Planning Section the L-SOHC will undertake a three step planning process that will direct requests for funding and the subsequent development of recommendations for expenditures from the OHF.

The Planning Process

Step One – Planning Section Framework

First the L-SOHC will take the ten Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan actions relevant to the OHF and prioritize them, based on urgency and need, for each L-SOHC Geo-Eco Planning section. Those prioritized actions will be reviewed, amended and revised in a public meeting in each L-SOHC Planning Section. Neutral facilitators hired by the L-SOHC will facilitate review, amendment, revision and consensus development on L-SOHC Planning Section priorities. The general public working alongside conservation experts will develop input and consensus on these priority actions.

FIGURE 2: PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING 2010's FRAMEWORK PLAN AND PRIORITY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



Step Two – Planning Section Targets

Secondly and simultaneous with the review and prioritization of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan actions pertinent to the mission of the OHF, the L-SOHC will ask the authors of the Fifty-Year Vision: Conservation for Minnesota's Future to accumulate, by each L-SOHC Planning Section, the 50-year goals for restoration, protection, and enhancement of prairies, forests, and wetlands. This will become the basis for L-SOHC strategic habitat and conservation targets.

The accumulated goals will be reviewed and validated to be results of species or habitat plans, and based in science and using best practices. Conservation professionals assembled and facilitated by the same neutral facilitators handling the public meetings will do this review and validation. Once the conservation professionals complete review and validation of the 50 year goals, the professionals will break the goals into 5 year objectives. Those five year objectives will be divided into annual habitat and conservation targets by the conservation professionals.

Step Three – Finalization of Framework and Targets

The Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan actions and the five year objectives and habitat and conservation targets of the L-SOHC and natural resource professionals will be taken to one public meeting per L-SOHC Planning Section. There, the public and the conservation professionals will take the actions and targets through a final round of review and amendment and reach consensus on actions and targets for each region.

CALL FOR REQUESTS AND FORMING COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

The L-SOHC will prepare and publish a call for requests based on the consensus habitat/conservation targets and priority actions necessary to meet these targets. The public will be made aware of the Call via the L-SOHC Website, the L_SOHC Listserv, and the press. This call will limit requests to those addressing priority actions and targets developed above. It will carry these screening criteria.

The L-SOHC will only consider funding requests that:

- are consistent with the uses of the OHF as specified in Article XI of the Minnesota Constitution and Minnesota Statutes 97A.056,
- show the ability to produce significant, measurable, and enduring resource and/or habitat outcomes.
- clearly identify specific resource and/or habitat outcomes, performance measures, and a plan for measuring, evaluating and publicly reporting these outcomes over time.
- reflect the best available science regarding resource and/or habitat enhancement, restoration, and protection.
- where possible and appropriate use native plant material.
- restore or enhance resources only on property under permanent protection of fee ownership or conservation easement.
- have a plan to sustain the resource and/or habitat outcomes specified, including a plan to finance the necessary activities.
- identify funding necessary to fully implement the project/programs(s).
- limit the state's exposure for additional funding for the project.

- have a process for ensuring transparency and accessibility in all stages of project/program implementation.
- seek funding to supplement (not replace) customary or usual funding sources.
- only acquire permanent easements, if proposing less than fee simple acquisition in real property.
- ensure that land acquired by fee with money from the OHF is open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season unless otherwise provided by law.
- commit to erect and maintain signage, to a standard to be adopted by the L-SOHC, crediting the OHF with support for protected, restored, or improved sites.
- commit to replace OHF protected resources converted to a use other than that intended in the OHF appropriation on a ten replacement acres for one converted acre basis.
- agree to not transfer the public interest in OHF fee and/or easement protected land without the written approval.
- are proposed by established land acquisition programs, if the request is to acquire fee simple title or a permanent conservation easement of real property.
- Are proposed by established land acquisition programs that use explicit criteria for evaluating the parcel's habitat potential, if the request is to acquire an interest in real property
- Propose restoration or enhancement exclusively on land permanently protected by conservation easement or public ownership.

The call will also contain these screening criteria to be met by requesting organizations. In developing its recommendations to the Legislature for expenditures from the OHF, the L-SOHC will only consider requests from organization(s) that:

- have a record of successful management and implementation of project/program(s) similar in scale, scope, and complexity to the project/program(s) being requested.
- have demonstrated the ability to identify and establish the financial and managerial controls needed to successfully and fully implement the proposed project/program.
- Have an up-to-date external financial audit with no serious negative findings.

Finally, in addition to the action items and targets from statewide conservation plans developed in the L-SOHC's planning process, the L-SOHC will give priority consideration to requests that:

- call for funding ongoing programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the L-SOHC Planning Section or the state as a whole.
- produce multiple conservation benefits.
- produce conservation benefits across a large geographic area.
- are collaboratively developed by multiple stakeholders and interests.
- are able to leverage funds to supplement any OHF appropriation
- identify the status of public access in the case of easement acquisition.
- address one-time conservation opportunities that will be lost if not immediately funded.
- are not eligible for the Outdoor Heritage Fund.
- restore and/or enhance habitat on existing state-owned Wildlife or Aquatic Management Areas.

These criteria will be used by L-SOHC members to rank proposals. This will be a numeric ranking averaged across all members and available to use as a basis for bringing request managers in to present and stand for questions.

Recommendations will be made by motions by members, and may be informed by a mock individual member allocation process averaged across all members responding.

DEFINITIONS

The L-SOHC will use the following definitions in the call for requests for the recommendations to the 2010 Legislature.

Restore: action to bring a habitat back to a former state of sustaining fish, game or wildlife, with an ultimate goal of restoring habitat to a desired conservation condition.

Protect: action to maintain the ability of habitat and related natural systems to sustain fish, game or wildlife through acquisition of fee title or conservation easements.

Enhance: action to increase the ability of habitat and related natural systems to sustain and improve fish, game or wildlife in an ecologically sound manner.

Lead House and Senate conferees affirmed that the above definitions could be used by the Council in developing the round of recommendations destined to go before the 2010 Legislature. Furthermore, these definitions fall within the discretion afforded the Council by M.S. 2009, section 3.3006, that applies the definitions of enhance, protect and restore in M.S. section 84.02 to all funds appropriated and purposes authorized under the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Section 84.02 defines the operative verbs in the constitutional direction of the OHF as follows:

Restore: to renew degraded, damaged, or destroyed ecosystems through active human intervention to achieve high-quality ecosystems.

Protect: to protect or preserve ecological systems to maintain active and healthy ecosystems and prevent future degradation including, but not limited to, purchase in fee or easement.

Enhance: to improve in value, quality, and desirability in order to increase the ecological value of the land or water.