

Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund: A Process to Define Outcomes and Impacts

Project Concept & Process

November 11, 2016

Context

The Outdoor Heritage Fund is one of four funds that was created by the passage of the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment in 2008. Thirty-three percent of sales tax revenue from the Legacy amendment is distributed to the Outdoor Heritage Fund. As directed by Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) was formed to provide funding recommendations to the Legislature from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Funds must only be spent to, "restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forest and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife."

State statute also required the development of a 10-year plan and 25-year framework to capture the mission, vision, core strategies, and what could be accomplished through fund expenditures over the life of the amendment. The plan and framework document was developed and informed by conservation professionals from a variety of sectors and was presented to the Legislative Coordinating Commission in December 2010.

Outdoor Heritage Fund monies are a significant, long-term investment in the future of Minnesota with approximately \$80 million available for appropriation by the legislature annually. Since 2010, the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council has been consistently measuring several key outputs such as dollars spent, acres acquired, and acres restored. While these are important metrics, stakeholders are highly interested in understanding, in a more comprehensive way, how these important funds are making a difference in Minnesota. Voters also need to understand the environmental, social, and economic outcomes of Outdoor Heritage Fund activities.

Purpose

The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council has proposed a process to identify and recommend appropriate outcome metrics to enable measurement and reporting on the outcomes resulting from the expenditure of the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF).

Goal

Develop recommended outcome metrics for the OHF that would support the demonstration of public benefit and accountability for the use of public money and would be able to inform future discussions in order to maximize public benefit.

Principles

1. The outcome metrics that are developed through the process will support accountability to the Minnesota Legislature and the public.
2. The outcome metrics that are developed through the process can provide useful information for the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council ("the Council") and the Legislature to consider when developing funding priorities.

3. The outcome metrics that are developed through the process will address ecological, social, and economic impacts of funding.
4. The outcome metrics that are developed through the process will drive innovation in methods of evaluation.
5. A single process will account for both technical and political considerations.
 - a. The Council will be engaged throughout the process and will not be surprised by the outcomes proposed by the project work group(s).
 - b. Past, current, and/or future funding recipients will be engaged in a way that that does not allow them to disproportionately influence future funding allocations.
 - c. Independent technical experts will be engaged to provide information on the current feasibility and scientific accuracy of using different outcome metrics.
 - d. Technical experts will be engaged in such a way that ecological, social, and economic expertise is utilized without asking experts to make decisions or set priorities on things that are outside of their field.
6. The process will build buy-in from stakeholders on future allocation decisions.
 - a. All stakeholders will be given opportunities for direct input into the main project deliverables.
 - b. The process will minimize barriers to participation by any given stakeholder group.

Approach

Facilitation

Environmental Initiative staff and leadership would facilitate all project meetings.

Work Group

The Work Group would be the decision-making body of the process and would be the group to officially put forth the recommended outcome metrics for approval by the Council. This group would be made up of not more than 15 members, including independent experts, fund recipients, and key stakeholders. Members would be selected in order to balance across relevant expertise and political interests. The Council would provide three liaisons to the Work Group to observe and participate in discussions, as needed, in order to ensure that the process is guided by the needs and vision of the Council.

Technical Working Groups

Diverse technical expertise would be engaged in this process through three Technical Working Groups (TWGs):

- Ecological Impacts
- Social Impacts
- Economic Impacts

The TWGs would be comprised of neutral and broadly credible experts in each respective field. The TWGs would be tasked with developing options for outcome metrics for consideration by the Work Group. It would be up to the TWGs to propose outcome metrics that would be technically feasible and economical to implement and would be understandable by the “informed public” (including stakeholders Council members, and legislators). TWGs would be facilitated by Environmental Initiative staff with the support of academic experts.

Stakeholder Input Meetings

In order to maximize stakeholder engagement and buy-in, the process would include stakeholder input meetings around the state. These could be divided based on general Minnesota geography (Metro Region, Southern Minnesota, Northeastern Minnesota, Northwestern Minnesota), by LSOHC planning sections, or another means.

DRAFT