



MINNESOTA VALLEY TRUST
Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc.

May 13, 2024

TO: Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

FROM: Deborah Loon, Executive Director

RE: Request to Acquire Land from a Local Unit of Government with OHF Grant

The Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge Trust, Inc. (MN Valley Trust) has an opportunity to complete a priority acquisition for the St. Lawrence Unit of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge. This 59-acre property is located in Scott County about 2 miles south of Jordan, MN. It consists of two parcels – 56 acres of vacant land and a 3-acre building site with a 1950s rambler and garage.

The C. Nelson property is located within the boundaries delineated by the USFWS for the St. Lawrence Unit of the Refuge. It is within the Minnesota River Valley on a bench above the floodplain and is adjacent to the 452 acres already acquired by the MN Valley Trust for the unit through three previous acquisitions. The 2,250 Minnesota Valley State Recreation Area managed by the DNR is immediately to the west and fronts the Minnesota River.

The habitat in the St. Lawrence Unit consists of rare, remnant mesic prairie, wet meadow and remnant oak savanna. This acquisition and subsequent restoration / enhancement of the remnant communities will protect and improve this rare habitat for wildlife in the Metropolitan Urbanizing Area.

Plant species found in a recent USFWS bioblitz of this unit included many species indicative of wet meadow habitat according to the classification from the Native Plant Communities of Minnesota, MNDNR 2005 -- Swamp milkweed, spotted water hemlock, red-osier dogwood, common boneset, spotted touch-me-not, cut-leaved water bugleweed, water smartweed, Virginia mountain mint, zig-zag goldenrod, stiff goldenrod, prairie cord grass and blue vervain along with others. Species of greatest conservation need observed include the Bobolink, least flycatcher, marsh wren, sedge wren, willow flycatcher and American Woodcock. Other interesting birds include Virginia rails, swamp and pond sparrows, orchard oriole, red-tailed hawk, killdeer, barn swallow and American redstart.

With this parcel addition, USFWS and Trust staff will be able to access the Unit to perform larger scale restoration and enhancement activities on these rare habitats; current access to the Unit is very difficult. The acquisition will also significantly improve public access, as we will be able to locate a Refuge parking area off the local road and close the existing, difficult and dangerous entrance off Highway 169.

The C. Nelson property was recently acquired by Scott County for a Highway 169 improvement project. Initially, the property was needed so the county could put a frontage road from a planned new interchange to the Candy Store property, thereby removing access to that busy commercial establishment from the highway. The frontage road was to pass through part of the C. Nelson property.

Scott County subsequently was able to reach an agreement with the Wagner family (owner of the Candy Store) to complete a land exchange that results in the Candy Store moving in early 2027 to a better location for its operation, thereby vacating its current location where it operates in a wetland / wet

meadow environment. The end result is that Scott County no longer needs to construct the frontage road through the C. Nelson parcel to the Wagner parcel. As a result of these efforts by Scott County, we have the opportunity to acquire fee title ownership to add both parcels to the Refuge – the C. Nelson parcel in 2024 and the Wagner / Candy Store parcel in 2027.

At this time, the Minnesota Valley Trust respectfully requests authorization from the LSOHC to move forward with appraisal and fee title acquisition of the C. Nelson parcel from Scott County using an existing Outdoor Heritage Fund grant (most likely, our existing ML2023 / Metro Big Rivers Phase 13 grant). We anticipate using the full \$700,000 OHF grant plus \$200,000 - \$250,000 in other, private funds.

The Minnesota Valley Trust anticipates returning to the LSOHC in 2026 to request authorization to use a future Outdoor Heritage Fund grant to assist with the acquisition of the Wagner / Candy Store parcel.

**Minnesota Valley
 State Recreation Area
 Lawrence Unit (DNR)
 Appx. 2,250 ac.**

**Minnesota Valley
 National Wildlife Refuge
 St. Lawrence Unit
 452 ac.**

Nelson
 (59.7 ac.)

2.4 ac.

Wagner
 (15.7 ac.)

85.4 ac.

169

59

66

CARVER CO.
 SCOTT CO.

Brouns L.

Minnesota R.

to Jordan

to Belle
 Plaine

St. Lawrence Twp.
 Belle Plaine Twp.

- Minnesota Valley NWR (FWS)
- Minnesota Valley SRA (DNR)
- Refuge Acquisition Boundary
- Private
- County Boundary
- Township Boundary

