MINUTES

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC)

December 9, 2025

Hybrid Meeting – MN State Capitol 120 & Zoom, pursuant to MS 13D

Call to Order: Chair David Hartwell called the meeting to order at 08:43 a.m. (0:11:26)

Members Present	Members Absent
David Hartwell (Chair)	
Ron Schara (Vice Chair)	
Suzanne Baird	
Rep. John Burkel	
Kristin Eggerling	
Sen. Foung Hawj	
Matt Kucharski	
Sen. Andrew Lang	
Darrel Palmer	
Tom Saxhaug	
Ted Suss	
Rep. Samantha Vang	

A quorum was present.

1. Review and Approve Agenda: (0:12:54)

Councilmember Eggerling made a motion to approve the agenda, with the amendment of moving discussion of a draft letter regarding permitting process review from agenda item 8 to the Chair's Comments. – **Motion Prevailed**

2. Review and Approve Minutes: (0:13:38)

Councilmember Suss made a motion to approve the minutes from November 12, 2025 – **Motion Prevailed**

3. Conflicts of Interest Reported: No conflicts of interest were reported. (0:13:55)

4. Chair's Comments: (0:14:03)

Chair Hartwell noted that Executive Director Mark Johnson will be retiring on January 9th and shared that a celebration is planned for January 7th. As a result, the Chair suggested moving the January 7th Council meeting start time from 8:30 a.m. to later that day. The Council agreed by consensus to change the meeting time. Chair Hartwell noted that the incoming Executive Director, Kristina Smitten, is set to begin in the role shortly. Chair Hartwell introduced the upcoming discussion of the November Fiscal Forecast. Chair Hartwell spoke of a draft letter regarding ecological permitting process review listed on the agenda and reported that conversations are ongoing, and that discussion would be revisited at the January Council meeting.

5. Report from the Executive Director: (0:21:25)

Executive Director Mark Johnson reported that the new LSOHC staff position of Analyst is accepting applicants, and hiring is expected to be completed around March 2026. Mr. Johnson noted that he had received a letter from the Executive Director of Minnesota Watersheds discussing related to the topic of permitting process review, which is included in the meeting materials. Mr. Johnson described a letter shared with the Council from the DNR Commissioner relating to ecological permitting process review. Mr. Johnson alerted the Council to the approval of two non-controversial conversions to add utility easements to parcels that are to be conveyed to MN DNR.

6. Presentation/Discussion: November Fiscal Forecast (0:25:21)

Garrett Schoonover, Executive Budget Officer, MN Management and Budget, joined by Nick Lardinois, Director of Budget Policy and Analysis, MN Management and Budget, presented on the changes to the Outdoor Heritage Fund amounts available for ML 2026 programs as a result of the November fiscal forecast. Mr. Schoonover described the primary reasons for the change to available funds: cancellations in previous fiscal years, decreased sales tax revenue projections and increased investment earnings

projections. This year's November fiscal forecast estimates an additional $27,140,000 available for allocation over the previous fund balance estimate.

7. Presentations/Discussion/Action: Review & Progress Accomplishment Plans **(0:31:23)**

The Council heard overview presentations from three DNR-managed administrative programs which were not presented previously at the August hearings: Contracts Management (O1), DNR Core Functions (O2), and Restoration Evaluations (O3).

Executive Director Mark Johnson and Chair Hartwell briefed the Council on the draft Accomplishment Plans and the procedure for Council progression of Accomplishment Plans.

Action: **(1:26:47)**

Councilmember Kucharski made a motion to progress the draft Accomplishment plans as presented without any exclusions.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	**NAY:**	**ABSENT:**
Hartwell		
Schara		
Baird		
Rep. Burkel		
Eggerling		
Sen. Hawj		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Saxhaug		
Suss		
Rep. Vang		

12 AYES, 0 NAYS, 0 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

8. Discussion / Action: Review and Approve Council Funding Recommendations (1:28:33)

Chair Hartwell briefed the Council on the draft OHF Recommendations Bill and described the previously approved Chairs' Proposal which provided guidance on allocation of additional funds made available after release of fiscal forecasts. Chair Hartwell noted that the Adjusted Chair's Proposal recommends proportional allocation of additional funds from the November forecast as well as proportional adjustments after release of the February fiscal forecast, with the caveat that no project be granted funding over 100% of their proposal's funding request, and Restoration Evaluations (O3), receive the statutorily required .01% of forecasted receipts.

Council discussion followed.

Action: (1:32:36)

Councilmember Palmer made a motion to accept the adjusted Chairs' Proposal as presented.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	**NAY:**	**ABSENT:**
Hartwell		Kucharski
Schara		
Baird		
Rep. Burkel		
Eggerling		
Sen. Hawj		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Saxhaug		
Suss		
Rep. Vang		

11 AYES, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

By consensus, the Council choose to hear agenda item #10, “Fee Title Land Acquisition with Buildings in North Central MN”, prior to agenda item #9, “Review and Approval of OHF Recommendations Bill Language”.

10. Discussion / Action: Fee-Title Land Acquisition with Buildings in North Central MN **(1:35:27)**

Chair Hartwell and Executive Director Mark Johnson provided an overview of this agenda item and introduced presenters Annie Knight, Executive Director of Northern Waters Land Trust, and Kathy DonCarlos, Land Conservation Coordinator for Northern Waters Land Trust.

Ms. Knight and Ms. DonCarlos presented to the Council an overview of a 1,095-acre fee-title land acquisition opportunity in Cass County, which would become a new Wildlife Management Area. They described parcels within this proposed acquisition with existing buildings or structures, and the estimated value as related to the Council policy that prescribes limitations on OHF-dollars used for acquisition of parcels with buildings. They shared potential options for use of the habitable buildings by partner organizations, and use of private funds to offset the cost of the buildings beyond 10% of the acquisition price as per Council policy.

Council discussion followed.

After discussion, the Council clarified that the acquisition may proceed in compliance with existing Council policy, provided that private funds are used to offset the cost of the buildings, with the understanding that the buildings would be disposed of notwithstanding future Council approval of an alternate plan. The Council suggested that Northern Waters Land Trust prepare a written proposal that would allow for the preservation of habitable buildings to be presented at the January Council meeting to seek Council approval.

9. Discussion / Action: Review and Approval of OHF Recommendations Bill Language **(2:29:32)**

Assistant Director Joe Pavelko provided an overview of the draft OHF Recommendations Bill. Mr. Pavelko noted one program was moved from the “Habitats” subdivision to the “Forests” subdivision to better represent the work of the program. An additional provision is included in the draft bill to place a timeline on final reimbursement distribution after acceptance of a program’s Final Report. Mr. Pavelko also noted an additional appropriation to the LSOHC budget to account for the addition of a Council staff member.

Action: (2:32:44)

Councilmember Eggerling made a motion to approve the draft OHF Recommendations Bill language as presented allowing for changes in funding amounts pending fiscal forecast release and technical revisions.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	NAY:	ABSENT:
Hartwell		Rep. Vang
Schara		
Baird		
Rep. Burkel		
Eggerling		
Sen. Hawj		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Saxhaug		
Suss		

11 AYES, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

Representative Vang was absent for this vote, but wished to note her support for the draft OHF Recommendations Bill language on the record.

11. Discussion / Action: City of Duluth Property Land Exchange (2:34:32)

Chair Hartwell described the proposed land exchange, which would see the City of Duluth convey a 1.98-acre portion of a parcel within the Forest Hill Cemetery acquisition, purchased with M.L. 2021 Conservation Partners Legacy dollars, to be returned to Cemetery ownership. An adjacent parcel considered to be a suitable replacement would replace the parcel to be returned.

Council discussion followed.

Action: (2:35:47)

Councilmember Palmer made a motion to approve the land exchange as presented.

A roll call vote was taken.

AYE:	NAY:	ABSENT:
Hartwell		Rep. Vang
Schara		
Baird		
Rep. Burkel		
Eggerling		
Sen. Hawj		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Saxhaug		
Suss		

11 AYES, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

12. Presentation / Discussion: Update on DNR Land Acquisition Continuing Improvement Process **(2:37:15)**

Kerstin Larson, Strategic Land Asset Management Supervisor, DNR Division of Lands & Minerals, presented to the Council on continuous improvement processes initiated in order to streamline and shorten land acquisition timelines while maintaining the department's responsibility to steward state resources. Ms. Larson described various aspects of the appraisal and title review process, new initiatives for improvement, and shared data on timeline and number of projects.

Council discussion followed.

13. Presentation / Discussion: Invasive Hybrid Cattail Removal – OHF Accomplishments & Information Gained Through Experience **(3:19:34)**

Haley Smith, Program Manager and Wetland Ecologist, Voyageurs National Park, presented to the Council on the progress of the Voyageurs National Park Wetland Restoration Project – Phase III program funded in ML 2023. Ms. Smith provided background on the habitat types present in the program area, invasive cattails, and treatment methods. Ms. Smith presented data showing relative success of different

invasive cattail treatment methods and long-term outcomes, and shared plans for the future of this program.

Council discussion followed.

14. Discussion: ML2027 / FY2028 Call for Funding Requests **(3:58:03)**

Executive Director Mark Johnson described this agenda item, noting that Council staff reviewed and responded to suggested changes to the Call for Funding Request, hearing criteria, and Proposal and noted staff will present the finalized documents at the January 2026 Council meeting.

Commission Assistant Tom Rebman provided an overview of the suggested changes, explained staff responses, and highlighted several changes to be made to the proposal format and hearing criteria.

Council discussion followed.

No public testimony was heard.

Meeting adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

APPROVED:

1/7/2026

David Hartwell, Chair — Date

1/7/2026

Kristin Eggerling, Secretary — Date