

DRAFT MINUTES

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC)

May 27, 2026

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

Call to Order: Chair David Hartwell called the meeting to order at 8:47 a.m. [\(0:00:02\)](#)

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

A quorum was present.

1. Review and Approve Minutes: [\(0:01:42\)](#)

Councilmember Palmer made a motion to approve the minutes from January 7, 2026 – **Motion Prevailed**

2. Review and Approve Agenda: [\(0:01:58\)](#)

Councilmember Eggerling made a motion to approve the agenda – **Motion Prevailed**

3. Conflicts of Interest Reported: No conflicts of interest were reported. [\(0:02:17\)](#)

4. Chair's Comments:

[\(0:02:26\)](#)

Chair Hartwell alerted members to a few letters of support related to a proposal that were included as public testimony in the May 27th, 2026 meeting materials. Chair Hartwell welcomed newly hired Council staff, Project Analyst Kara Costanza.

5. Report from the Executive Director:

[\(0:3:34\)](#)

Executive Director Kristina Smitten introduced and welcomed newly hired Council staff, Project Analyst Kara Costanza and noted her background in forestry, grant monitoring, and academia. Director Smitten introduced Jason Ko, Policy and Planning Supervisor, Division of Fish and Wildlife, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and noted he will serve as a liaison to the Council. Director Smitten noted three minor conversion/conveyance requests that were administratively approved after the previous Council meeting. Director Smitten alerted the Council to several upcoming partner-held events related to the Outdoor Heritage Fund. Director Smitten spoke to the ML 2027 Call for Funding Requests release and described the preliminary results in quantity of proposals received and dollar amount requested. The Council discussed possibilities related to proposal hearings to be held in August 2026. Director Smitten thanked the Council and Council staff for discussions and assistance thus far during her tenure.

6. Discussion: Spring Tour and Meeting, Southeast Minnesota, June 16-17

[\(0:12:41\)](#)

Chair Hartwell introduced discussion related to the Spring Tour and Meeting in Southeast Minnesota to be held on June 16, 2026, with a Council meeting to be held on June 17, 2026. Assistant Director Joe Pavelko outlined a selection of the planned habitat tour sites and noted additional details will be made available to Council members in the near future.

7. Discussion: Legislative Session Recap

[\(0:14:33\)](#)

Executive Director Kristina Smitten described the outcomes of the recently concluded 2026 Legislative Session. Director Smitten noted the Council's funding recommendations were incorporated into SF 2077, the Omnibus Outdoor Heritage Fund, Legacy and Lands bill, which was passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor. Director Smitten described all legislative changes to funded projects and administration of the Council, as well as an extension of funding availability for ML 2024, subd. 5(aa): Protecting Upper Mississippi River from Invasive Carp.

Director Smitten outlined legislative changes to ML 2026, subd. 4(g): Roseau Lake Rehabilitation, Phase 3, which amends the availability of funds to begin on January 1, 2027, adds additional reporting requirements, and requires funds not to be expended during any period in which a court order enjoining the project is in effect. ML 2026, subd.

5(aa): Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program: Metro Habitat, was amended to require grants be made only to projects in the seven-county metropolitan area or cities with a population of 50,000 or more. Director Smitten described statutory changes to the governance of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, including term limits for public members and amendments to the Executive Director hiring process which permits the Council to hold meetings that are closed to the public to interview and consider candidates.

Council discussion followed.

8. Presentation/Discussion: Lock & Dam 5 Carp Deterrent Design Update [\(0:44:47\)](#)

Chair Hartwell introduced representatives from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR), U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

Carli Wagner, Invasive Carp Deterrent Project Coordinator, MN DNR, Kelly Pennington, Invasive Species Unit Supervisor, MN DNR, and Grace Loppnow, Invasive Fish Coordinator, MN DNR presented a project update on the lock and dam 5 invasive carp deterrent. Nathan Wallerstedt, USACE, Andrea Fritts and Marybeth Brey, US Geological Survey, Amy McGovern and Rebecca Kneeley, USFWS, Dave Smith and Christa Woodley, Engineer Research and Development Center, USACE, were present to answer questions based on their expertise and involvement with the project.

Council discussion followed.

9. Presentation/Discussion/Action: Outdoor Heritage Fund Grants Performance Audit and Council Review of Allowable Expenses Guidelines [\(1:33:24\)](#)

Executive Director Kristina Smitten introduced this agenda item, noting that a performance audit was released by the Office of the Legislative Auditor (OLA) in January 2026, and noted Council staff have reviewed eligible reimbursable expenses as recommended by the report alongside MN DNR Grants Management staff.

9A. Presentation/Discussion: “Department of Natural Resources: Outdoor Heritage Fund

Grants Performance Audit”, January 2026 [\(1:35:09\)](#)

Lori Leysen, Deputy Legislative Auditor, OLA, and Ryan Baker, Audit Director, OLA presented an overview of the January 2026 performance audit conducted to evaluate the MN DNR’s regulatory compliance as well as grant management and monitoring practices for Outdoor Heritage Fund programs.

Council discussion followed.

9B. Discussion/Action: Approval/Denial of revised guidelines regarding allowable expenses and activities applicable to OHF grants [\(1:49:15\)](#)

Chair Hartwell described the proposed guidelines related to allowable expenses and activities. Sandy Smith, Project Analyst Manager, LSOHC, described past practices related to eligible expenses and the process by which LSOHC staff, in coordination with project partners and MN DNR Grants Management staff, evaluated reimbursable expenses within each budget category. Ms. Smith provided an overview of the proposed allowable expenses guideline documents presented for Council consideration.

Council discussion followed.

Action: [\(1:54:57\)](#)

Councilmember Kucharski made a motion to approve the revised guidelines regarding allowable expenses and activities applicable to OHF grants as presented.

A roll call vote was taken.

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

9 AYES, 0 NAYS, 3 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

10. Discussion/Action: Forests for the Future Land Bank Proposal [\(1:58:34\)](#)

Chair Hartwell introduced this agenda item, noting this proposal would create a land bank to be used to resolve parcel boundary discrepancies within a large easement acquisition funded by the Council in 2009.

Christine Ostern, Forest Legacy Program Coordinator, MN DNR, presented an overview of the proposed Forests for the Future land bank, as well as possible use cases, and expected procedures for usage of the land back to resolve small parcel boundary discrepancies.

Council discussion followed.

Action: [\(2:04:14\)](#)

Councilmember Baird made a motion to approve the Forests for the Future Land Bank Proposal as presented.

A roll call vote was taken.

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

10 AYES, 0 NAYS, 2 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed.

11. Discussion/Action: Accomplishment Plan Amendment Requests [\(2:05:47\)](#)

Executive Director Kristina Smitten described the proposed accomplishment plan amendment requests related to budget shifts from contracts to personnel within Anoka Sand Plain Habitat Conservation Phases 8 and 9, funded in ML 2023 and ML 2024 respectively.

Wiley Buck, Senior Program Manager, Great River Greening, and Carrie Taylor, Restoration Ecologist, Anoka Conservation District, presented an overview of the request to the Council. The presenters described the biochar equipment purchased with program funds, its uses, and cost considerations which resulted in the proposed amendment.

Council discussion followed.

Action:

(2:14:12)

Councilmember Suss made a motion to approve the accomplishment plan amendments as presented.

A roll call vote was taken.

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

10 AYES, 0 NAYS, 2 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

12. Presentation/Discussion: MN Forest Management, Forest Pests, and Forest Wildlife

(2:15:19)

Chair Hartwell introduced the upcoming presentation on forest management.

Ted Dick, Forest Habitat Supervisor, MN DNR, presented an overview of ecological management strategies for forest pests, including spruce budworm and emerald ash borer, as well as forest wildlife habitat.

Council discussion followed.

No public testimony was heard.

Meeting adjourned at 11:45 a.m.