

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Proposal Review Follow-Up: In Proposal Hearing Order

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Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project Phase 11

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project Phase 11

Funds Requested: \$5,000,000

Proposal #: FA02

Manager's Name: Tim Terrill

Title: Executive Director

Organization: Mississippi Headwaters Board

Email: timt@mississippiheadwaters.org

Office Number: 218-824-1189

Mobile Number: 218-838-8563

General Subject: No Public access to RIM conservation easements and their conservation value.

Specific Comments:

Darrel Palmer: "RIM easement is not open to public access"

Matt Kucharski: "Really open for public use?"

Rep: John Burkel: "Strong forest corridor value, but acquisition/permanent protection and limited guaranteed hunting/fishing access moderate the ranking."

The Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project (MHHCP) is a fish, migratory waterfowl, and wildlife habitat protection project focused on priority protection along the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River and its major tributaries in 8 Minnesota counties. **Protection is achieved by targeting parcels for either fee-title acquisition or conservation easements that are adjacent to already protected public land** (county, state or federal) to create permanently protected habitat corridors and complexes. Most parcels acquired under easement with this program are highly forested, which is good fish and wildlife habitat and contributes to water quality. Clean water is fish habitat, protected shorelines provide food and shelter for migratory waterfowl, and large areas of protected upland provides habitat for wildlife to raise young, hide from predators and find food and water for survival.

The fee-title acquisitions increase public land for DNR WMAs, AMAs, and SNAs or county forest lands; these are open to the public for hunting, fishing, and public recreation. The RIM easements are not generally open to the public unless the landowner so desires i.e. fishing easements. However, the protected easement land provides healthy habitat for the wildlife that migrate between the easement land and the adjacent public access lands in the habitat complexes and corridors. Wildlife do not know land boundaries. Hence, the easements add quality to the public recreation within the habitat complexes. Public access for and quality of hunting, fishing and recreation is a benefit of creating habitat protection complexes with healthy and abundant wildlife and game fish. Not all the habitat complexes created/enhanced in this program include easement parcels. The ML27 proposal only asks for easement money because the program still has funds available for fee-title acquisition projects, which are open to the public because the land acquired is always put into final public ownership.

General Subject: Efficiency of spending appropriated OHF funds

Specific Comments:

Darrel Palmer: "slow spending history"

Matt Kucharski: "Big project, lots of phases. Long tail? "

The MHHCP ML27 is a request for funding Phase 11 of the program that started in 2016. It is actually the 10th specific request for funding due to an initial nomenclature issue associated with a similar program. For the first four appropriations closed with final reports on record, 95% of the funds appropriated were spent. Appropriations 5 (ML21) & 6 (ML22) are closed but waiting for the DNR IDP spending amounts to complete final reports; reporting can take up to five years. Those two have spent 90% of the funds appropriated to date. Appropriation #7 (ML 24), #8 (ML25), and #9 (ML26, just received) are open and spending down the appropriated funds at the same rate. Of the final reports submitted, acreage and shoreline miles achieved have exceeded initial goals by over 150%.

Darrell Palmer: Phase 11, last time it was a HA Project?, \$3600/acre of leased land, RIM Easement is not open to public access, slow spending history, no leverage

A RIM conservation easement is not "leased" land. This is not CRP. These are perpetual easements that secure significant land rights by the state.

Ted Sluss: Maps do not specify where exactly easements are being sought. referencing the 75% protected goal, how close are any of these sub watersheds and how much closer will this appropriation get a watershed to that goal. Can an owner retain non easement ownership of one acre to build a house and place the remainder of the property under easement? If so, is there any real benefit to the easement on the remaining property? Is logging permitted on the easement property?

Re: The map on the Project Illustration: the map will be explained in more detail during the hearing to show where priority areas for conservation will be focused going forward and how reaching 75% protection will be measured and achieved.

Re: Composition of an easement and permitted activities:

With a conservation easement, logging is typically allowed when it is recommended in the Forest Stewardship Plan and when it supports long-term forest health, habitat management, or other conservation objectives. During the easement application process the landowner identifies the portion of their land they want to enroll. Existing structures and future planning sites (if desired) are excluded from the easement.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

MN Forests of the Future Phase XI South East Blufflands to Northern Forests Protection

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: MN Forests of the Future Phase XI South East Blufflands to Northern Forests Protection

Funds Requested: \$8,000,000

Proposal #: FA03

Manager's Name: Andy Kernan

Title: Forest Legacy Program Coordinator

Organization: MNDNR Division of Forestry

Email: andrew.kernan@state.mn.us

Office Number: 612-500-6315

Mobile Number:

Dollars from previous allocation spent? Says public access but really? (Matt Kucharski)

ML2022- Expired 6/30/2026 Of the \$2.5 Million allocation we spent \$2,231,498.41 leaving a \$269,501.59 surplus protecting 1,653 acres.

ML2025-Expires 6/30/2029 1,432 acres in process of acquisition for approximately \$3,360,000. This leaves approximately \$1,881,000 left in funding. With the proposed projects in queue, we expect to spend down the total allocation.

Public access is allowed but not mandatory and up to the landowner's discretion. They do receive more points in the review/ranking process if public access is allowed. Of all acres currently in a conservation easement with us 92% of all acres are open to the public.

Phase 11, 3326 acres leased land @\$2405/acre, under 1% leverage, Goal ?? (Darrel Palmer)

Land values vary greatly across the state. Generally, in the SE they are higher value than in the north. Anticipated leverage is \$550,000 making it ~6.8% of funding request. Interdisciplinary strategic long-range planning has established a goal of 500,000 acres of permanently protected working forest through the purchase of conservation easements.

Does working forest equal logging permitted? If yes should some parcels be set aside to permit eventual old growth forest to come into existence? Will entire parcels be acquired or placed under easement or will small areas be excluded to permit the owner to build a house in the woods? Will provision be made to permit non motorized trails in the future if other funding can be found to purchase right of way from private owner and reimburse OHF for easement rights? (Ted Suss)

Forest management is allowed under the guidance of a professional forester and requires the use of best management practices and sustainable forestry guidelines. A forest management plan is required for all acquisitions. Structures such as houses are excluded from eased acres and forest conversion is not allowed on eased acres. We can and have allowed trails to exist on eased acres. Allowable activities such as non-motorized trails must be written into the easement language. The Blandin easement is a good example of this. The North Country Trail runs through part of this easement and is allowed and is written into the legal document.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Pine and Leech Watershed Phase IV Forest Habitat Protection

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Pine and Leech Watershed Phase IV Forest Habitat Protection

Funds Requested: \$4,290,000

Proposal #: FA04

Manager's Name: Melissa Barrick

Title: District Manager

Organization: Crow Wing SWCD

Email: melissa@cwsxcd.org

Office Number: 2188286197

Mobile Number:

Rep. Burkel: Watershed forest protection has habitat value, but fee acquisition/permanent protection and local tax concerns keep it below restoration-focused proposals.

Private land conservation offers a highly cost-effective strategy for expanding habitat, providing significant state-level ecological benefits at a fraction of the cost of public land acquisition. Under these arrangements, private landowners retain the title along with the ongoing responsibility of paying taxes, property management, such as invasive species control and forest maintenance, effectively relieving the public of direct stewardship expenses.

Regarding property tax values on land with conservation easements, per Minnesota Statute 273.117 (a): The value of real property that is subject to a conservation restriction or easement must not be reduced by the assessor if the restriction or easement is for a conservation purpose and is recorded on the property. Thus, the taxable value on any given property shall be the same after an easement has been recorded.

Kucharski: Decent spend of existing funds, Watershed emphasis in forest habitat. Not loving the answers to public use access question in the FA section. Highest CPA in category.

The Pine River and Leech Lake River Watersheds represent a critical intersection of high-quality habitat and elevated development risk, which directly drives our Cost Per Acre (CPA) of \$5,107, relative to the average of other Forest Acquisition category applications at \$3,416.

These watersheds encompass premier, mostly unimpaired, high-value recreational lands for hunting, fishing, boating, and trail access. Because these environmental assets are so desirable, land values in Cass and Crow Wing Counties face intense market pressure, a trend reflected by a population growth rate of over 50% since 1990. Securing permanent protection in these priority corridors commands higher land and easement acquisition costs, but it yields exceptional return on investment by safeguarding vulnerable, high-integrity habitat before these ecosystems are degraded.

Palmer: Phase 4, 840 acres @ \$5107/acre, RIM Easement is not open to public access but has public benefit based on potential protection of habitat.

Although RIM easements are not typically open to public access, they provide public benefits by protecting wildlife habitat, creating habitat corridors, improving water quality, and preserving natural resources and scenic landscapes. Along with these benefits, the taxpayers are also benefiting from the land continuing to be managed, and taxes paid for, by the property owner.

Easement applications are evaluated in part by their proximity to existing public lands. Parcels adjacent to protected lands receive higher scores because they expand and connect habitat, creating larger, more resilient habitat complexes while strengthening long-term conservation.

Also, the RIM application includes a question asking landowners whether they are interested in the DNR's Walk-In Access program. If they are interested, we help them navigate that option, which would make their easement property publicly accessible.

Suss:

Does a forest stewardship plan allow logging?

Forest Stewardship Plans may include timber harvest recommendations. With a conservation easement, logging is typically allowed when it is recommended in the Forest Stewardship Plan and when it supports long-term forest health, habitat management, or other conservation objectives.

Will easements be for entire parcels only or allow an opt out for a house in the woods (Wilderness homestead)?

During the easement application process, landowners identify the part of their parcel(s) they would like to enroll. If there are existing structures on the property, or if the landowner plans to build in the future, those areas are excluded from the easement.

A landowner may have a homestead on a parcel that also contains a conservation easement, provided the homestead area is located outside the easement boundary.

Can these parcels be developed into wilderness homesteads with county zoning providing protection?

While "wilderness homestead" is not a formal land-use definition within the Cass, Hubbard or Crow Wing County zoning ordinances, the ordinances do regulate low-density, open-space, and remote residential uses through specific zoning districts and minimum lot size requirements. County zoning in these two watersheds is predominantly a combination of Shoreland Residential, Rural Residential 2.5, and Agricultural/Forested. There are many larger areas zoned Rural Residential 2.5 that allow for parcel splits down to 2.5 acres without public comment, depending on the total number of parcels being created. The Agricultural/Forested zone has a minimum lot size of 40 acres but is open to reclassification requests. The counties are seeing an increasing number of reclassification requests on Agricultural/Forested properties as development continues. While not all of these reclassification requests are granted, many are approved through the public review process.

Will easements be open to public use?

See Councilmember Palmer's section (above).

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Metro Forests for Minnesota Wildlife and Communities
ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up
08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Metro Forests for Minnesota Wildlife and Communities

Funds Requested: \$2,968,000

Proposal #: FRE03

Manager's Name: Rebecca Tucker

Title: Twin Cities Metro Program Manager

Organization: Great River Greening

Email: rtucker@greatrivergreening.org

Office Number: 651-272-3982

Mobile Number: 651-272-3982

Personnel - **Suzanne Baird - Personnel costs are a little high.**

Great River Greening looks for ways to maximize the state's investment in these programs. We work throughout the full 5 years of funding to thoroughly complete the proposed restorations and utilize our own field crew for some restoration activities that are more efficient and cost effective to complete internally rather than through external contractors.

Scalability - **David Hartwell - NO real answer on scaling that lets us understand.**

We have discussed scaled project options with our eight selected site partners and are prepared to respond to allocations by adjusting the proposal according to partner priorities at that time. A reduction in funding would reduce outputs (i.e. fewer acres / restoration activities / total project sites) in different ways for each of the nine projects. The reduction in these outputs would not be exactly proportional to the reduction in funding as there are some fixed costs such as overall grant management and reporting that do not change based on project size or number.

Public access - **Sen. Andrew Lang - all 264 acres are city state fed? Proposal says easements, but not reflected in the chart and Ron Schara - Is forest land open to the public??**

All land is publicly owned and are open to the public. There are no easement lands in the proposal. The easement response was checked in error on the original application.

Program efficiency - **Darrel Palmer - metro public lands, 9.4% leverage - Go to Metro CPL funds.**

This request would support a full program of known and coordinated projects compared to individually managed projects funded under multiple grant requests. This allows for dollar savings related to the economy of scale for project management and efficiency of state and program reporting.

Cost Per Acre- **(4 member comments – Rep. Burkel, Kucharski, Palmer, and Suss).**

Cost per acre and specific budgets provided are based on the current rates for multi-year forest restoration projects in this region. We have compiled quotes for similar work on prevailing wage rate projects in the Metro and utilized those estimates to build applicable budgets for the restoration activities planned. The restorations are

planned to utilize the full 5 years of the grant to complete initial management of invasive plants, removal of weedy species and thinning of over abundant species, with multiple years of establishment and maintenance of diverse native species through plug planting, seeding and installation of varying size of shrubs and trees. The overall scopes of work were tailored to each site by utilizing Greening's experience partnering with landowning entities to create successful forest restoration conditions that will be managed by the landowner at the end of the grant period.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Minnesota Forest Recovery Project

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Minnesota Forest Recovery Project

Funds Requested: \$9,864,900

Proposal #: FRE04

Manager's Name: Chris Dunham

Title: Associate Director of Resilience Forestry

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

Email: cdunham@tnc.org

Office Number: 218-727-6119

Mobile Number: 218-341-9319

Council Members,

Thank you for your hard work reviewing proposals and for the opportunity to respond to comments and questions. Specifically, we are responding to one comment and two questions:

1) **“Personnel costs are very high. These costs get higher with each year”** -Suzanne Baird

Of the four Forest Restoration and Enhancement proposals submitted this year, the average personnel expense, as a percentage of total budget, is 11%. In TNCs Forest Recovery Proposal, our personnel cost falls slightly below that at 10%. The average for Personnel+DSS is 17%, exactly the same TNC's rate. Over the years, our total for combined personnel and DSS has varied from a high of 23% to a low of 12%. The lowest rate occurred during a year when we had the highest amount of budget dedicated to acquisition, (Phase II), and this lowered DSS because DSS cannot be charged on acquisition funds. We have intentionally varied personnel expenses a bit over time, as we try different approaches to getting work done most effectively and efficiently on the ground by combining staff time and contracting, and as we are able to leverage other funding sources. Optimal balance of personnel and contracting budgets varies among organizations and even within organizations, and we think it makes sense for flexibility in this balance as circumstances, costs, and opportunities evolve. More important than strict percentages is the ability to accomplish goals in a cost-effective manner, and ability to sustain quality and volume of work over time. Over Phases 1-3 of the Forest Recovery Program, we reached 154% of our forest enhancement goal (30,768 acres). During the same time period, we used non-OHF funds to enhance an additional 115,000 acres, demonstrating our ability to leverage OHF funds at a high rate.

2) **“Isn't post burn recovery part of nature taking its course?”** -Tedd Suss

Many forests lack historical diversity of tree species that would serve as seed sources to regenerate a diverse and healthy new forest after fire. After a disturbance like a fire, wind storm, or insect outbreak, we have a restoration opportunity when tree canopy is reduced, and can influence the way the new forest will develop. Planting a diversity of tree species will provide more options for natural regeneration after future disturbances, through restoration of seed trees of a variety of species appropriate for the site. Diversity is what helps a forest bounce back on its own which is the goal of resilience forestry – to restore and enhance forests so that in the future they require less intervention and expense to provide habitat values. Since the forest has been altered over time through fire exclusion and human use, just letting nature take its course will likely result in continuing a trend towards less tree species diversity, more forest health challenges, and declining habitat values.

3) **“Which parcels are actually on tribal land?”** -Tedd Suss

A total of 103 acres of proposed parcels are on the Grand Portage Reservation and 20 acres on the Fon Du Lac Reservation. These are sites for prescribed burns.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerating the Wildlife Management Area Program - Phase XIX

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Accelerating the Wildlife Management Area Program - Phase XIX

Funds Requested: \$15,955,500

Proposal #: PA01

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams

Title: MN Public Lands Manager

Organization: Pheasants Forever

Email: sadams@pheasantsforever.org

Office Number: 320-250-6317

Mobile Number: 3202506317

Hartwell- How do you define what is the goal of restoration in terms of fully functioning wetlands? What does "permanently protected by PF" mean?

PF does not restore these wetlands on our own. We work with MN DNR staff to develop the restoration plans. The assumed end goal for a wetland is to restore historic hydrologic (how much water did it hold) and vegetative conditions. This goal is limited by our requirement not to impact neighboring properties and budget constraints. PF does not intend to hold OHF acquired properties permanently. The ultimate goal of PF HMAs, purchased with OHF, is to acquire the property while it is on the market, but continuously look for the opportunity to get that property to MN DNR or USFWS. PF is committed to holding those properties for as long as that takes. To date we have not purchased a PF HMA with OHF dollars but do have other properties that were donated to us with the same plan. For example, DNR will not take X property because of a shared drainage agreement, however the DNR area manager and PF both agree that the wildlife and public access benefits of the parcel are too great to let the opportunity to purchase pass by. In this instance PF would purchase the parcel and work with the neighbors, for as long as it took, to remove the drainage agreement. A OHF NOGR is also recorded on the property that will outlast PF.

Suss- To what degree will existing field tile be blocked or modified to bypass acquired property? 2) To what degree will historic wetlands be restored naturally or by significant earthmoving work? 3) Will provision be made to permit non motorized trails in the future if other funding can be found to purchase right of way from private owner and reimburse OHF for easement rights? How is PILT or not on which acres determined?"

MN DNR and PF work together to identify which wetlands will be restored and to what extent. The goal is to restore as many wetlands as were historically present to a historical condition regarding plant composition. Often restoration to historical condition requires significant earthwork to remove eroded sediment from wetland basins, fill in drainage ditches, or to remove tile. This goal is limited by our requirement not to impact neighboring properties and budget constraints.

PF gives these properties to MN DNR. Future provisions regarding the permitting of non-motorized trails must be determined by MN DNR. Here is how PILT is determined by MN

DNR- <https://www.revenue.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2026-07/pilt-determination-7-15-26.pdf>

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

DNR Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection-Phase IX
ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up
08/14/2026

Proposal Title: DNR Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection-Phase IX

Funds Requested: \$3,575,000

Proposal #: PA03

Manager's Name: Judy Elbert

Title: Statewide Scientific and Natural Area (SNA) Unit Supervisor

Organization: MN-DNR

Email: judy.elbert@state.mn.us

Office Number: 651-391-3168

Mobile Number:

Native Prairie Bank's Goal

Established in 1987, the Native Prairie Bank Program's main goal has been and continues to be to provide resource protection and management assistance to privately owned remnant native prairies. Native prairies are intricate natural ecosystems that consist of thousands of different species of plants, animals, fungi, and microorganisms that developed over thousands of years. These complex systems serve as critical habitat for a disproportionate number of rare species. Approximately 41% of Minnesota's rare species are associated with native prairie, even though native prairie comprises less than one half of one percent of the state's land area. High-quality native prairies offer the highest tier of habitat for grassland-dependent pollinators, birds, and animals. Despite decades of advancement, grassland restoration efforts still fall short of the diversity and habitat quality provided by native prairies. Native prairies are exceedingly rare in Minnesota with only 1-2% (about 250,000 acres) of the state's original native prairie still in existence.

Previous OHF Native Prairie Bank Acquisition Appropriations

Native Prairie Bank has received easement acquisition funding through eight OHF appropriations. The first three appropriations were joint proposals that included Native Prairie Bank easements and other types of land acquisitions, while the last five appropriations have been stand-alone Native Prairie Bank proposals. All past appropriations are closed, and final reports approved.

2012: Acquisition: WMA, SNA, Prairie Bank Easement, Forest Lands (\$5,136,000)

2013: DNR Wildlife Management Area, Scientific and Natural Area and Native Prairie Bank Easement Acquisition (\$4,940,000)

2014: Accelerated protection of grassland habitat with Reinvest in Minnesota and Native Prairie Bank easements (\$5,450,000)

2015: Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection – Phase IV (\$3,740,000)

2016: Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection – Phase V (\$2,541,000)

2017: Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection – Phase VI (\$2,481,000)

2018: Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection – Phase VII (\$1,490,000)

2021: Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection – Phase VIII (\$884,000)

Cropland and Potential Use of Neonicotinoid-treated Seed

Native Prairie Bank easements sometimes include small cropland areas to ensure easily defined and manageable boundaries, to buffer native prairie from adjacent land use, or to reconnect fragmented native prairie areas. These

small areas (usually a fraction of an acre to a few acres in size) are restored as quickly as possible to prairie vegetation. Restoration of all cropland acres will occur prior to the end of this appropriation.

Allowing the existing producer (usually the landowner) to continue cropping these areas for a few years maintains a positive working relationship and provides free site preparation and weed control until restoration occurs. Producers are encouraged but have not been required to use non-neonicotinoid treated seed in these limited circumstances due to the small size, limited timeframe, and impracticality of cleaning/transitioning large equipment for just a small fraction of the larger field. Former cropland restored to prairie makes up only 1.3% of the 15,840 acres enrolled in Native Prairie Bank.

Long-Term Easement Stewardship

Included in this request are funds to be deposited in an easement stewardship endowment account for each newly acquired easement. Interest generated from this account will be used to pay for ongoing easement compliance, monitoring, and enforcement costs.

Ongoing Native Prairie Habitat Enhancement

Native Prairie Bank easement terms and conditions explicitly give DNR (and those under DNR's control) the right to manage vegetation and conduct maintenance activities. Easement landowners are also encouraged to implement DNR-approved (via a DNR Prairie Stewardship Plan or on a case-by-case basis) prairie management activities on their land. The Native Prairie Bank program actively seeks funding for prairie management activities and has a proven track record of implementing these activities. Since 2010, the program has completed the following enhancement activities on Native Prairie Bank easements:

- Installed 277 miles of firebreaks and completed 11,329 acres of prescribed burns
- Controlled 7,279 acres of invasive and woody species
- Improved management of over 6000 acres of grazed and hayed prairie by implementing conservation grazing and haying plans.

*Please note that enhancement funding is not included in this request.

Public Use

Native Prairie Bank easements remain privately owned land and are not open to the public. However, Prairie Bank landowners may enroll their land in walk-in access programs at their discretion. Prairie Bank easements are also often utilized for ecological research, field training, and public tours.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

DNR WMA & SNA Acquisition, Phase XIV

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: DNR WMA & SNA Acquisition, Phase XIV

Funds Requested: \$10,000,000

Proposal #: PA04

Manager's Name: Jeff Tillma

Title: Division of Fish and Wildlife Acquisition Coordinator

Organization: DNR

Email: jeff.tillma@state.mn.us

Office Number: 218-328-8834

Mobile Number:

Representative Burkel commented that fee title acquisition will impact local taxes. Our proposal is focused in the prairie planning section where most counties have between 1 and 3% DNR-owned land for habitat and recreation. Public land is not evenly distributed throughout the state and it is important to protect and restore habitat in areas of the state where it is lacking. The DNR pays PILT on all acquisitions and public land is used by all Minnesotans and revenue from nonlocal users can help support rural economies.

Council member Kucharski asked how we determine whether a parcel will be designated as a WMA or SNA. While the two designations are similar the SNA program is looking to preserve intact examples of native habitat throughout the state and the WMA program is focused on wildlife habitat and recreation. A parcel of native prairie, intact wetlands and adjacent or near an existing SNA is a good candidate for an SNA, whereas a parcel of cropland close to an existing WMA is a good candidate WMA. Parcels with native prairie are a high priority for both programs, but are in short supply in the prairie planning section.

Council member Palmer asked about leverage. It has been DNR policy that we can't commit to leverage until we have encumbered funds and we can't encumber funds until we know the appraised value of the parcels we're buying. In my proposal I provided recent historical leverage and proposed that we should be able to leverage 10% as a safe estimate. It is our intention to surpass the 10% estimate, but since we can't encumber funds until after we've received our grant, I can only provide a safe estimate of leverage.

Council member Suss asked about tile lines, wetland restoration and regional or state trails. We restore wetlands and either remove or relocate tile lines to the fullest extent possible on our acquired parcels. There are instances where restorable wetlands cross property lines and the cost to construct a berm and restore only half of a wetland is not feasible. We do allow existing snowmobile trails on WMA's, but don't allow new motorized trails on existing WMA's as they are not compatible with managing the parcel for wildlife.

I appreciate the member's comments and would provide more clarification if needed.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP)

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Minnesota Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (MN CREP)

Funds Requested: \$10,000,000

Proposal #: PA08

Manager's Name: Dusty Van Thuyne

Title: Easement Program Coordinator

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Email: dusty.vanthuyne@state.mn.us

Office Number: 651-539-2573

Mobile Number:

Member Baird & Member Hartwell Previous OHF Appropriations. Prior appropriations specifically requested/utilized for this MN CREP were from ML2015 – ML2018. The appropriations have been closed and final reports approved, so they were not included in the table of open appropriations, but we did want to indicate that funding has previously been awarded for this project.

Member Hartwell Wetland Restorations. Wetland restorations occur to the fullest extent practicable. BWSR Engineering staff review all potential RIM/MN CREP wetland restoration easements to determine the level of restoration practicable. This could be as simple as crop cessation or minor tile breaks aimed at restoring local groundwater levels to natural conditions on smaller easements or as extensive as full-scale construction projects on hundreds of acres aimed at restoring multiple larger, deep water depressional basins to pre-settlement conditions. Regardless of the extent of construction strategies, all sites will be seeded with native wetland and/or upland seed mixes that support wildlife and biodiversity. **Cost/Value per acre.** Land enrolled in this program has been determined to be needed and feasible to address a resource concern by the USDA-NRCS. The CREP program uses three rates: RIM Crop for land meeting BWSR's definition of cropland but that is not eligible for CRP enrollment, RIM Non-Crop for land that does not meet BWSR's definition of cropland, and CREP Crop for land eligible for CRP enrollment. Township average values are obtained from the Minnesota Department of Revenue. RIM rates are a percentage of that township average value of like land types. Using rates based on the average township values results in disincentivizing enrollment of prime agricultural land. The CREP Crop Rate is funded with both federal and state funds.

Member Palmer Cost/acre leased land. The MN CREP is a partnership between the USDA and BWSR that provides voluntary conservation easement opportunities for landowners. Landowners enroll in the federally funded Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) for 14-15 years. The same land is also enrolled in a state-funded perpetual RIM conservation easement, managed by BWSR. While CRP may be of limited duration, RIM easements are not "leased land" and are perpetual as required by Minnesota Statute 97A.056 subdivision 15. In this program, BWSR uses the same project funds to both acquire and restore the easement. The Easement Acquisition includes funds for landowner payments and vegetative and wetland restoration. Since the acres restored through this proposal are also placed under easement, the output tables of this proposal only include easement acres to avoid double counting the acres protected and the acres restored. This proposal also accounts for prevailing wage for restoration and archaeological surveys, which has significantly increased BWSR's planned restoration cost. **Public Use.** RIM easements do not require that private land is open for public use; however, this question is also evaluated on public benefit and RIM easements do provide a significant public benefit; often expanding wildlife habitat near

public lands; and do not limit the potential for the land to be open to the public through other programs. If RIM also required public access, the landowner would be retaining almost no private rights to the land and still paying property taxes. RIM easement land is still in private ownership, and the landowner still pays property taxes. This protection fulfills the statutory goals of the Outdoor Heritage Fund. 6,600 acres of BWSR easements (RIM and CREP) were enrolled in Walk-in Access (WIA) in 2025 which equals 22% of all WIA acres in Minnesota.

Member Suss Parcel list. Specific sign-up criteria was attached to the proposal therefore a parcel list was not required to be submitted. Easements and acres are estimated based on the request. MN CREP is available in 66 counties. Proposed parcels are not listed at this time due to the uncertainty of where in the 66-county area applications will be received from. The parcel list will be updated as easements are funded and recorded. **Federal money.** The amount of federal match realized will depend on the number of easements and acres enrolled, as well as CRP soil rental rates. Federal match will also depend on the opportunity for landowners to enroll in Continuous CRP and the national CRP acreage cap. If a landowner is also receiving federal funds, it reduces the amount of funding provided by the state, making the state dollars go further. However, we did not account for federal funds when estimating the number of easements and acres for this proposal due to uncertainties in soil rental rates, the national CRP acreage cap and the uncertainties around a new farm bill.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Minnesota River Watershed Habitat Conservation Program Phase 2

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Minnesota River Watershed Habitat Conservation Program Phase 2

Funds Requested: \$9,680,000

Proposal #: PA09

Manager's Name: Todd Rexine

Title: Conservation Director

Organization: Great River Greening

Email: trexine@greatrivergreening.org

Office Number: 651-272-3992

Mobile Number:

Hartwell: Since both MLT and GRG do restoration work (and it is all contracted out), explain why this proposal includes both organization vs just MLT doing both the acquisition and restoration.

Minnesota Land Trust's restoration capacity is currently allocated to the Prairie Pothole region of Minnesota where we work in partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and to the Twin Cities Metro and Southeast Minnesota program areas – all funded through the Outdoor Heritage Fund. In other areas where we work, such as the Minnesota River, we strategically identify restoration partners who can perform that role in complement to our land protection work; in this case, that is Great River Greening. Elsewhere, other partners like Stearns SWCD and Hennepin County play that role. For the program, Greening focuses on restoration/enhancement on degraded habitat on existing public lands that is beyond current landowner capacity.

Palmer: \$1.8 mill Acq, \$3.5 mill leases, \$4.4 mill restoration, no public use on leased land. Should focus on restoration - all on public lands - before acquiring more? 4.4% leverage

Conservation easements are not leases, but are the acquisition of rights from a landowner that serve to protect the conservation values of a property; these rights are held by the easement holder and enforced in perpetuity.

Wildlife doesn't restrict itself to public lands or to private lands, for that matter. Without participation by private landowners, the State's goals for protecting habitat supporting the most vulnerable species cannot be met.

Effective conservation in Minnesota requires a balanced approach of land protection and R/E working across both public and private lands. Our proposal does that.

Focusing solely on R/E fails to address the broader need within the watershed. At present, <10% of the watershed is in protected status, well below that level necessary to support species long term. Rather than stepping away from land protection, our proposal is advocating for a firm step toward it. That said, our proposal is a reasonable balance of approaches that serves to increase the base of land protection while addressing the restoration/enhancement needs in the watershed to the greatest benefit of wildlife.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

MN Prairie Recovery Program

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: MN Prairie Recovery Program

Funds Requested: \$14,040,000

Proposal #: PA10

Manager's Name: Liz Beery

Title: Associate Director of Grasslands - MN

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

Email: elizabeth.beery@tnc.org

Office Number:

Mobile Number: 551-497-3373

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the comments you provided during your proposal review process. We would like to respond to a few common themes:

Personnel costs (Council members Baird, Kucharski)

Affordable restoration and enhancement projects require people-power either through contractors or employees. Within the MN Prairie Recovery Program (PRP), we've honed cost efficiency and program effectiveness to achieve this work through contractors for large-scale projects and through seasonal Habitat Crews for small-scale projects or work that is too expensive to do cost-effectively via contracts (i.e. prescribed fire, invasive control, woody removal). Both large and small-scale projects provide valuable wildlife habitat benefits. While much of our people costs show up on the personnel line, other R/E programs facilitate their work solely through contractors, rather than staff. PRP has always had a very low cost/acre for prairie enhancement projects due to the efficiency of our program model. Using personnel enables us to deliver more cost-effective R/E conservation accomplishments.

Enhancement Cost/Acre (Chair Hartwell) Many R/E projects can be implemented more cost-effectively with staff field crews. Contractors do great work, but contracts cost significantly more per acre and require a lot of staff time to properly plan and manage from start to finish. We have not yet attempted to upgrade our Habitat Crews to year-round highly-trained crews. That sort of investment in expert conservation practitioners is excellent and it is something that would certainly increase our program accomplishments if council members are willing to fund personnel costs at higher levels.

There is still more R/E work that needs to be done in the prairie region that exceeds the Roving Crews' capacity and the MN Prairie Recovery Program continues to meet those needs. Our program has a balance of both contracts and seasonal crews. While our enhancement cost per acre is higher than Roving Crews, it is still significantly lower than most other R/E programs.

Unspent Funds (Council member Kucharski, Palmer) All of the funds from ML23 and ML25 are obligated or allocated for spend down in the next 12 months.

Likelihood of 300/300 DNR/TNC Acquisition (Council member Kucharski) The 300/300 acre split demonstrates our intention to protect 1-2 parcels to be transferred to MNDNR and 1-2 parcels to be owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy. We will continue to collaborate closely with MNDNR on potential prairie acquisition projects that meet the goals of our program. TNC protection staff will continue to conduct outreach to prairie landowners in key landscapes where TNC preserve additions are a good fit. There is also a possibility that 1 very large parcel comes up for sale and we have the opportunity to protect a very large parcel that will be owned and managed by DNR or TNC.

Enhancement accomplishments, T&E species, remnant prairie inventory (Council member Suss) To date, we have protected 8,981 acres, restored 2,890 acres, and enhanced over 235,000 acres. All of our completed projects are tracked by category and documented in submitted Final Reports. The proportion of prescribed fire, invasive control, woody removal, and seeding projects varies a fair amount between appropriations.

Our overarching goal is to increase the quality of prairie, wetland, savanna habitat to support priority areas of prairie core areas and prairie corridors as identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, an agreement among prairie conservation partners on the key focus areas for MN grasslands. We believe doing so not only supports existing species in these areas, it also attracts the species mentioned in our proposal by restoring or enhancing habitat to a condition that will provide necessary resources for them. We are addressing habitat fragmentation with targeted land protection that expands prairie core areas and prairie corridors to create larger habitat complexes.

The Minnesota Biological Survey has done a great job of inventorying remnant prairie across the state and staff are always re-evaluating lands to further improve their mapping accuracy.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the Southern Red River Valley - Phase XIII

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the Southern Red River Valley - Phase XIII

Funds Requested: \$10,564,400

Proposal #: PA11

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams

Title: MN State Coordinator

Organization: Pheasants Forever

Email: sadams@pheasantsforever.org

Office Number: 320-250-6317

Mobile Number: 3202506317

Hartwell-What happens if a parcel is not appropriate to transfer to a WMA or WPA?

If a parcel is not appropriate to transfer to a WMA or WPA we will not purchase it. We make that determination with DNR or USFWS prior to purchase.

Proposal states prairie chicken habitat should be 320 acres or more but criteria does not list size of complex at all - Why?

In the history of the program we have never needed a specific criteria called out in order to observe that limitation. 22 land acquisitions have been completed and all are adjacent to a grassland complex greater than 320 acres in size, or the parcel acquired is greater than 320 acres in size.

Kucharski- How likely is the 600/600 acre split?

Not likely at all. 600/600 is a rough goal but in reality, with this amount of funding (or a prorated percentage) we will attempt to acquire 1,200 acres or more, of WMAs or WPAs. Some years we only buy WMAs or only WPAs, and some years we purchase a percentage of each.

Suss- There is a reference to 320 acre minimum needed size, three acquisitions are smaller, do they connect to existing WMA?

Yes all acquisitions in this program either exceed 320 themselves or are adjacent to 320 acres of existing grasslands.

Staff seems high, how many PF staff are now on OHF funding?

There are 37 full time PF staff in MN. 9 of those staff spend some percentage of their time working on OHF grants. None of those staff are 100% funded by OHF. Federal funding as well as PF private fundraising covers 10-50% of any given staff's salary. OHF is our biggest funding source and proportionally does pay the majority of staff time for any given staff but not all of it.

Does restoration go beyond removal of invasives and planting desirable natives? Any reshaping of the earth?

Even though this is a program focused on prairie chicken habitat the goals the WMA and WPA program extend beyond chickens. PF works with agency staff to design and restore all drained wetlands to the fullest extent feasible given neighbor and financial limitations. These wetland restoration can include earthwork.

How much existing never farmed Prairie remnant is being acquired.

In the past we have acquired several hundred acres of remnant prairie, however the focus of the program is not on protecting remnant prairie. If a parcel is available that benefits prairie chicken conservation and also contains remnant prairie, we will attempt to purchase it.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water - Phase XIII

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: RIM Buffers for Wildlife and Water - Phase XIII

Funds Requested: \$5,000,000

Proposal #: PA12

Manager's Name: Dusty Van Thuyne

Title: Easement Programs Coordinator

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Email: dusty.vanthuyne@state.mn.us

Office Number: 651-539-2573

Mobile Number:

Member Hartwell & Member Palmer Cost/Acre. Restoration Costs? In this program, BWSR uses the same project funds to both acquire and restore the easement. The Easement Acquisition line of the budget table includes funds for landowner payments and vegetative and wetland restoration. Since the acres restored through this proposal are also placed under easement, the output tables of this proposal only include easement acres. Acres restored are not included in the output tables to avoid double counting the acres protected and the acres restored. This proposal also accounts for prevailing wage for restoration and archaeological surveys, which for planning purposes, has significantly increased BWSR's planned restoration cost.

Member Hartwell Food Plots. Not all RIM easements contain food plots or are suitable for food plots. BWSR has guidance for landowners and SWCDs related to food plots on RIM easements. All requests for new food plots or changes to existing food plots need to be approved prior to installation. Food plots may not exceed 10% of the easement area, with acreage caps dependent on easement size. The 1-3% was BWSR's previous estimate of total easements that have food plots on them and is not a comparable number to the limits per easement described in the response.

Member Palmer Match. The RIM Buffers Program receives funding from both the Outdoor Heritage Fund and the Clean Water Fund. While the intention is to not split fund individual easements, the Clean Water Fund will also support the protection and restoration of riparian areas via the RIM Buffers Program during this phase. **Goal?** The goal is to maintain a voluntary conservation easement program that is available to landowners with riparian lands.

Member Suss Parcel list. Specific sign-up criteria was attached to the proposal therefore a parcel list was not required to be submitted. Easements and acres are estimated based on the request. RIM Buffers is available statewide and accepts applications through batching periods. Proposed parcels are not listed at this time due to the uncertainty of where in the state applications will be received from. The parcel list will be updated as easements are funded and recorded. **Stewardship.** The \$10,000 per easement is invested per Minnesota Statutes § 103B.103 – Easement Stewardship Accounts. This account is managed by the State Board of Investment to maximize long-term gains to help with the cost of easement inspections and management. 5% of the account balance is appropriated each year to BWSR for easement stewardship that includes repair or replacement of structures and monitoring of easements. BWSR is required by this statute to invest financially for each easement acquired. **Trails Reimbursement.** If no reasonable alternative location for the proposed trail, BWSR has an easement alteration policy that would need to be followed for release of acres.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Western Minnesota Prairie and Wetland Protection Program

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Western Minnesota Prairie and Wetland Protection Program

Funds Requested: \$8,340,000

Proposal #: PA13

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie

Title: Director of Land Protection

Organization: Minnesota Land Trust

Email: wostlie@mnland.org

Office Number: 651-917-6292

Mobile Number: 651-894-3870

Kucharski

New program? Evaluate against existing programs -overlap? Heavy on easements

Response: This grant proposal merges the land protection elements associated with two of our past grant program areas (our “Wetlands Habitat Protection and Restoration Program” and our “Accelerating Habitat Conservation in Southwest Minnesota Program”) into a single program covering all of western Minnesota. Merging these two programs provides an opportunity for alignment with the prairie pothole region, efficiencies of working under one grant rather than two, and effectively allocating resources to where the need and opportunities are greatest in achieving our program goals. Moreover, this proposal expands the land protection focus from one focused purely on conservation easements to one that provides an opportunity to secure fee acquisitions as the need exists.

Minnesota Land Trust’s conservation easement program is designed to provide landowners with another alternative to state and federal conservation easement programs in protect habitat on their lands. Some key differences in our program versus many of the state and federal easement programs include:

- Whole farm vs partial - We are able to look at the entirety of a property to find the best solution for wildlife; many government programs are structured so that only portions of a property can be protected. It is not uncommon for the Land Trust to subsequently take on and protect the remainder of a property that was not eligible under a given state or federal program.
- We negotiate terms to meet the needs of landowners while protecting the conservation values of a property; many state and federal programs have very strict, unbending terms. Every property is unique and we are able to craft a “best fit” for each conservation easement we develop.
- We are not government; a certain cross-section of landowners do not trust or want to work with government agencies.
- We incentivize landowners to donate easement value and participate actively in leveraging the funds we’ve received. To date, that translates to \$30M in donated value from landowners participating in our programs statewide; \$12,816,000 of that has come from this program area. For every \$1 provided by the Outdoor Heritage Fund for purchasing a conservation easement, landowners are donating \$0.50.

In addition, our program focus is one that’s complementary with and not duplicative of other conservation easement programs offered by others. We have been working in a complementary manner with all of the various conservation partners working in western Minnesota over the past 15 years and collectively we have our program and processes dialed in (as do they).

Palmer

Phase 12, What is Goal?, 6% leverage, 1400 acres of easements + 120 acres of Acq, Leased land (bulk of \$\$) not open to public, large \$\$ unspent dating back to ML2022, \$15k/acre Acq cost, \$5k/acre easements, What is Goal?

Response: Our program goals align with those identified in the Prairie Conservation Plan, the Duck Plan, and the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan, and are to protect and restore wetland and prairie habitat within the context of Prairie Plan core areas and corridors, Wildlife Action Network priorities, and areas prioritized through the Duck Plan. We do so by building upon existing protected habitat complexes to support Minnesota Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The massive loss of both prairie and wetland systems in western Minnesota has relegated many of these systems to a semblance of themselves; our goal, in collaboration with others working in a complementary way, is to build back these core systems. That won't be achieved anytime soon.

Across all open Wetland and Southwest Minnesota grants, we have spent or committed all but \$3.4M. In addition, we have identified and are beginning project development on projects that will spend down all of the remaining funding by the time those grants close. This proposal is before LSOHC because the demand and need for private lands conservation has outstripped our existing resources. In our former Wetlands program area, we have a waiting list of applicants.

Suss

Will provision be made to permit non motorized trails in the future if other funding can be found to purchase right of way from private owner and reimburse OHF for easement rights?

Response: The Land Trust identifies existing (or planned) trails on a property as it goes through the conservation easement process; those are typically permitted. Once the conservation easement is in place, further trail development is restricted according to the terms of the conservation easement. Allowance for a trail when that provision is restricted is rarely granted.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Enhanced Public Land - Grasslands - Phase X

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Enhanced Public Land - Grasslands - Phase X

Funds Requested: \$8,681,700

Proposal #: PRE01

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams

Title: MN State Coordinator

Organization: Pheasants Forever

Email: sadams@pheasantsforever.org

Office Number: 320-250-6317

Mobile Number: 3202506317

Hartwell- What standard will wetlands be restored to?

PF does not restore these wetlands on our own. We work with MN DNR and USFWS staff to develop the restoration plans. The assumed end goal for a wetland is to restore historic hydrologic (how much water did it hold) and vegetative conditions. This goal is limited by our requirement not to impact neighboring properties and budget constraints.

What control methods are used for cattail?

Pheasants Forever does not prioritize cattail control measures. We are not opposed to the practice, but our focus is on restoring drained wetlands to historic hydrology. A wetland may have eroded upland sediments in the bottom of it that have decreased water depths and allowed cattails to cover the area. We would remove the sediment to restore historic water holding capacity but not as measure to simply remove cattails.

We have done several grazing projects with the focus on upland grass habitat management, where cattle have significantly decreased cattail abundance on small prairie pothole wetlands.

Kucharski- A little more clarity on where work is being done? Public or easements?

Page 5 of the proposal under activity detail. Where does the activity take place? We have only checked public lands. What you cannot see is that in the proposal via dashboard there are many more options including "conservation easements". We did not check that option but in the proposal print out version you cannot see what we did not check.

Suss- does drain tile removal mean actual removal of an entire tileline or simply breaking the line and plugging a few feet with non permeable material?

This depends on a few factors such a elevation and water pressure in the basin. Removing drain tile is expensive so we want to remove as little as possible while still getting to the desired wetland outcome. Typically a minimum of 150ft of tile is removed.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Restoring Minnesota's Prairie Pothole Ecosystem - Phase 1

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Restoring Minnesota's Prairie Pothole Ecosystem - Phase 1

Funds Requested: \$6,960,000

Proposal #: PRE02

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie

Title: Director of Land Protection

Organization: Minnesota Land Trust

Email: wostlie@mnland.org

Office Number: 651-917-6292

Mobile Number: 651-894-3870

A few similarities arose when looking at comments from council members. We have consolidated our responses into four themes.

Is this a new program?:

We would like to be clear that this is not a new program; it does build off of our successful work under the Wetlands and Grasslands program. However, we are re-focusing this proposal in response to the Council's comments about measurable outcomes and "when are we done" that we heard during the Council's Prairie Potholes tour in June 2025. Building from our past work with the USFWS, this program represents a more targeted approach to achieving goal-oriented conservation R/E outcomes throughout Minnesota's Prairie Pothole Region (PPR).

Public Access:

This program will include projects both with and without public access. Our project selection criteria prioritizes historic wetland basins that are part of larger habitat complexes to maximize the ecological benefits to waterfowl and other wildlife populations. Public access is a consideration and with all else being equal we would prioritize a project with public access. This phase includes one project with public access.

Cost Per Acre:

Our cost estimate is based on actual costs from over 150 similar projects over the past 8 years. We have included slight increases to account for the increasing costs for fuel, labor and materials we are currently seeing. Any surplus is used for additional projects if time allows or returned to the State.

Prairie vs Wetland Costs:

Yes, wetlands are typically more expensive per acre. In-field surveys determine whether a basin requires sediment removal, tile removal, ditch plug construction, or tree removal. Each project design is a custom fit rather than a standardized cookie-cutter approach.

Upland and wetland restoration needs vary considerably by project site. All parcels included in this proposal will be subject to full ecological restoration/ enhancement, with the objective of returning native prairie and wetland

communities to their natural ecological function. Prairie restoration will emphasize high plant-species diversity and the establishment of native communities that reflect the composition and function of historic tallgrass prairie. Wetland restorations may include the removal of accumulated sediment from wetland basins when erosion has filled in the wetland, restoring the basin's natural water depth while exposing the buried seed bank to further enhance the reestablishment of native wetland vegetation.

Migratory Bird Funds:

The USFWS has already secured the \$2 million in priority parcels. All of these parcels need restoration/enhancement. However, no R/E funding is currently available for these properties. The appropriations for acquisition have been completed, creating a significant opportunity to now invest in the ecological restoration of these lands.

The \$2M represents a portion of the value of the easements already secured by FWS using MCBA and other non-state funds. The USFWS has covered the cost of protecting these properties, we are wanting to build off that conservation gain by restoring the sites condition for the benefit of wildlife and the public alike.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Program - Phase XIX

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Accelerating the Waterfowl Production Area Program - Phase XIX

Funds Requested: \$14,264,800

Proposal #: WA01

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams

Title: MN Public Lands Manager

Organization: Pheasants Forever

Email: sadams@pheasantsforever.org

Office Number: 320-250-6317

Mobile Number: 3202506317

Suss- how secure is the federal money? is it in a reserve for this type of acquisition?

The federal money is as secure to PF as this OHF money is to PF. We apply for federal funds and a council determine if they think our request is worthwhile. We have a great track record of receiving funding but it is not guaranteed and it is not in a reserve.

How much of this is prime farmland verses marginal?

"Prime" is a qualitative word that means different things to each person. This program does not have the goal of purchasing quality agricultural lands, however occasionally an acquisition that builds on an existing complex of habitat, restores numerous drained wetlands, and provides significant wildlife benefits does overlap with what a farmer might call "prime". I could not provide a qualitative measure for how often this happens.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

RIM Wetlands - Restoring the most productive habitat in Minnesota

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: RIM Wetlands - Restoring the most productive habitat in Minnesota

Funds Requested: \$7,500,000

Proposal #: WA02

Manager's Name: John Voz

Title: RIM Easement Program Coordinator

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Email: john.voz@state.mn.us

Office Number: 218-850-4283

Mobile Number: 218-850-4283

Hartwell Food plots - now up to 10% (higher than other proposals that are 1-3%) or "will not exceed a maximum acreage depending on the size of the easement." What does this mean? Cost per acre seems high but there is no indication of cost of restoration in proposal.

Not all RIM easements contain food plots or are suitable for food plots. BWSR has guidance for landowners and SWCDs related to food plots on RIM easements. All requests for new food plots or changes to existing food plots are approved prior to installation. For an individual easement, food plots may not exceed 10% of the easement area, with an acreage cap dependent on easement size. The 1-3% was BWSR's previous estimate of total easements that have food plots on them and is not a comparable number to the limits per easement described in the response.

The Easement Acquisition line of the budget table includes funds for landowner payments and vegetative and wetland restoration. Since the acres restored through this proposal are also placed under easement, the output tables of this proposal only include easement acres. Acres restored are not included in the output tables to avoid double counting the acres protected and the acres restored. This proposal also accounts for prevailing wage for restoration and archaeological surveys, which for planning purposes, has significantly increased BWSR's restoration costs.

Kucharski CPA highest in category - easements? Higher than acquisition in WA03?

When WA03's leveraged funds are included in the calculation of total cost, cost per acre for WA03 acquisition is higher. WA03 has an identified parcel list with estimated parcel costs. The most expensive parcel in WA03's parcel list is in Murray County and is an average of \$15,000/acre. Because BWSR does not know specific parcels at the time of application and the program is statewide, our budgets are developed from past average payments as well as ensuring that our estimates are sufficient for easement payments in high value counties in SW Minnesota. RIM easement rates for cropland vary across the state by \$12,000. The goal will be to have lower averages and more acres when the project is complete.

Palmer Phase 16, Goal?

The goal is to maintain a voluntary statewide conservation easement program that is available to landowners with restorable wetlands.

Suss Acreage is very specific, did I miss the location list?

Specific sign-up criteria was attached to the proposal therefore a parcel list was not required to be submitted. Easements and acres are estimated based on the request's budget. RIM Wetlands is available statewide and accepts applications through batching periods. The parcel list will be updated as easements are funded and recorded.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Conservation Easement Program

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Accelerating the USFWS Habitat Conservation Easement Program

Funds Requested: \$14,499,000

Proposal #: WRE01

Manager's Name: Logan Shoup

Title: Regional Biologist - NW Minnesota

Organization: Ducks Unlimited

Email: lshoup@ducks.org

Office Number:

Mobile Number: 2184468851

Member Baird: Comments about high/significant personnel costs: We have been working the last several years to accurately dial in the amount of personnel cost it will take to deliver the acreage goals we promise to the council. To this point in the program, contract costs have rarely been our limiting factor, much more often we are limited by how much personnel time we have to spend. With robust personnel budget, we can ensure the delivery of our promises to the council. DU is also one of the few (or possibly only) non-profit NGO that receives OHF appropriations and has Professional Engineering (PE) staff including Engineers, Engineering Techs, Surveyors, Draftsman, etc. A significant portion of our ask is to fund our PE staff to work on large scale wetland restoration projects. If DU did not have this PE staff, we would have reduced personnel ask and instead have to rely on a much more robust Professional Services budget to fund for profit firms to complete the PE work. For profit engineering firms often budget 25% of a project cost to personnel. In spite of the increased percentage personnel ask, due to efficiencies in our program, we are looking at a lower cost per acre delivery with this year's proposal than the ML26 proposal.

Member Suss: "Narrative says land is already protected. If this land is already hayed or pastured and will continue, what will the money be used to accomplish? Are all new easement acres purchased with USF&W money?" This program works entirely on USFWS Easements purchased with Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (a.k.a. "Duck Stamp Dollars"). Many of these easements are working lands easements that are and will continue to be hayed or pastured in a way compatible with wildlife. However, many of these easements have significant wetland and/or prairie restoration and enhancement needs. This is where our program comes in. After the USFWS protects the land, DU, PF, and MJV come in with funds from this grant program and address any habitat needs on the easements. Due to the fact that our program doesn't finance the easement acquisition, it allows us to make the OHF money go further.

Member Schara: "missing question about open to public" These lands are privately held lands eased by the USFWS. Therefore it is up to each individual landowner if they wish to open their lands through programs such as walk in hunting. The majority do not open their land for the public's use.

Member Palmer: "Phase 7, restore & enhance Fed Easement lands, 4300 acres @ \$3372/acre, No Public Use, 12% leverage, large amount of 2023 funding unspent, Goal?? P3/23 Timing - confusing comment about critical timing for landowners wanting to enroll this land in other programs?? Is this not already permanently protected with a Fed Easement??"

In regard to unspent funds in ML23, we are spending through this program at a fast rate that has been accelerating over the past few years, and this proposal is planning out a year and a half/two years out. DU and PF had personnel turnover over the past year and still increased our rate of spending. Most importantly, DU has significantly expanded the personnel working on this program. DU added one full-time biologist working on this program and one MJV biologist also working full time on this program. Once these two get fully onboarded and up to speed, we anticipate spending at a rate of 2-3x faster than the past year.

The comment about critical timing for landowners is that when many landowners have expiring CRP or are otherwise deciding the future of their land, the USFWS easements are a very attractive option. The USFWS is able to sign up easements at the rate they do because of this program and several others that restore and enhance the easements once the USFWS protects these lands. While the specific parcels on this proposal are already protected, the USFWS would have to significantly slow their rate of land protection if this program were not available to restore/enhance the parcels once protected.

