

Memo

Date: 09/03/2026

To: Chair David Hartwell, Executive Director Kristina Smitten, Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council

From: Dave Trauba, Wildlife Section Manager, MN Department of Natural Resources

David Trauba Digitally signed by David Trauba
Date: 2026.09.03 16:09:26 -0500

RE: DNR's proposed restoration and enhancement work for shallow lakes and wetlands.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide some clarification and answer the councils' questions about DNR's proposed restoration and enhancement work for shallow lakes and wetlands.

The DNR maintains 6 FTE funded Wetland Habitat Team staff utilizing Game and Fish Funds historically focused on shallow lake projects. With support from the Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC), the DNR added 10 positions (new capacity) to create our Wetland Management Program and to expand our nationally recognized Shallow Lake Program. The DNR accomplishes habitat enhancement through four main categories of work that are supported by Outdoor Heritage Funds (OHF). The table below shows the approximate percentage of staff time working across these four categories for the past five years.

Table 1: Percentage of staff time spent in various categories of wetland and shallow lake work over the last five years.

Category of work	Percentage of staff time
DNR implementation of OHF funded projects	80%
DNR assessment work to develop future OHF project proposals, DNR and partner-led	10%
DNR technical assistance on OHF funded projects by NGO's or local governments	9%
DNR technical assistance to partners on non-OHF funded projects or DNR work on projects not listed in our accomplishment plan (i.e. leverage)	<1%

Key Points

- The DNR has 23 active projects and approximately \$12M in remaining project implementation funds from previous appropriations (note: the remaining funds aren't designated for staff). Funding for staff to implement and complete these projects is needed. Project completion may extend through June of 2031 depending on weather and construction schedules.
- To avoid layoffs the DNR is currently supporting 8 of the 10 (2 are vacant) positions with one time game and fish fund dollars in FY27 to keep progress moving on OHF funded projects. The vacant positions will not be filled until sufficient funding is available to support all 10 positions.
- The ten OHF-supported positions are the workforce that completes the restoration and enhancement work in the four categories described above. Reduced staffing means fewer assessments, fewer designs, fewer management actions, and fewer sites advanced to construction, and less technical assistance for partner projects.
- **Partners are directly affected as well.** Many OHF partner projects depend on DNR technical, engineering, and operational support. Reduced DNR staffing reduces partner output as well.
- **The program has shovel-ready work waiting on capacity.** Our proposal has seven shovel-ready projects covering more than 330 acres, plus additional high-priority projects in the early stages of project development.

Scalability of our Request

- At \$2.7M we would fund 8 shallow lakes positions and focus entirely on OHF projects that are already in the process and various stages of implementation from previous proposals and continue to develop new projects prospects.
- At \$6.3M we would fund 10 shallow lakes positions and complete existing OHF projects, develop 1 new project, and build all 7 shovel ready projects within 3 years.
- At \$10M we would fund 10 shallow lakes positions and complete existing OHF projects, develop new projects, build all 7 shovel ready projects, and implement some of the 11 other projects already surveyed for restoration and enhancement work.

Going forward our request is targeted at maintaining staff capacity to support all four categories of work in similar proportions. We will implement a precise cost coding mechanism to report accurate annual breakdowns by category. We understand the council has concerns about 100% funding for positions and we are willing to redirect enough funding to cover 10% of each position from other funding sources.

In summary, restoration and enhancement outputs for shallow lakes and wetlands for OHF funded and other partner projects is directly proportional to staff capacity and project implementation funds.