

Request for Funding

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2015 / ML 2014

Program or Project Title: Protecting Pinelands Sands Aquifer Forestlands and Aquatic Habitat Phase 1

Funds Requested: \$4,268,600

Manager's Name: Richard F. Peterson

Title: Forest Legacy Coordinator

Organization: MN DNR Forestry

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Organization Web Site:

County Locations: Cass, Hubbard, and Wadena.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Northern Forest

Activity Type:

- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Forest

Abstract:

Protect up to 2,000 acres of priority forest habitat in the Pinelands Sands Aquifer including high quality dry pine woodlands and riparian areas along the Crow Wing River to prevent habitat loss, protect water quality in the aquifer, and provide access

Design and Scope of Work:

Protecting Pinelands Sands Forestlands and Aquatic Habitat (Pinelands Sands Aquifer Project) will acquire and protect approximately 2,000 acres of forest, rare dry pine woodlands, and Crow Wing River habitat for fish, game and wildlife in the Pinelands Sands Aquifer area within Cass, Hubbard and Wadena Counties. The protection of these parcels will provide opportunities for hunting, fishing and the conservation of forestland habitat.

A combination of forests, agricultural lands, lakes and rivers, fish and wildlife, and quality recreational opportunities characterizes the Pinelands Sands Aquifer Project area of north central Minnesota. The Pinelands Sands Aquifer area covers nearly 1,000 square miles in Wadena, Todd, Becker, Cass, and Hubbard Counties. Expanding and projected acceleration of irrigated agriculture within this area pose challenges to maintain the region's working forests. The sandy soils of the area which form the basis of the aquifer and grows good pine also grow potatoes well when irrigated. Continued development of the industrial forestlands within the area for agricultural purposes will result in loss of forestland habitat including the loss of rare dry pine woodlands, the loss of access to landlocked public forests, and the reduction of hunting and fishing opportunities in the area.

In addition, continued development and conversion to irrigated agriculture within the Pineland Sands Aquifer Project area at rates similar to the rates recently observed likely will result in substantial declines of water-table

altitudes and aquifer thickness, and also result in varying ground-water quality and a reduction in surface-water elevations and stream flow according to a recent study by the U.S. Geological Survey.

DNR staffs have identified an initial set of industrial forest lands priority parcels in the Pineland Sands Aquifer Project area in Hubbard, Wadena and Cass Counties for proposed acquisition and conservation in the region. This project will address the following issues: Loss of forestland and forest land habitat diversity; degradation of water quality and aquatic habitat in the Pinelands Sands Aquifer Project area, and loss of access to landlocked public properties.

The initial acquisitions have been identified through a comprehensive departmental assessment that has incorporated input from multiple natural resource disciplines including fish and wildlife, ecological and water resources, parks and trails and forestry. Key criteria in parcel prioritization included and also considers forest parcels with high wildlife and fish habitat value, parcels most at risk of near-term conversion to row crop agriculture, and parcels adjacent to already publically owned lands that would augment protection for the aquifer. The landowner has indicated a willingness to sell these parcels to the state and to discuss the sale of additional priority parcels in future phases. Additional funds will be sought from the Federal Forest Legacy Program in fall of 2013.

Protection of these parcels will provide critical habitat for game species including white tail deer, black bear, sharp tailed grouse, ruffed grouse, woodcock, grey wolves, and bobcats.

The Pinelands Sands project addresses two of the priority actions listed in the LSOHC Northern Forest Section. The project will “protect shoreland and restore or enhance critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas” and “provide access to manage habitat on landlocked public properties “ and “protect forest land from parcelization and fragmentation through fee acquisition, conservation or access easement.” Protecting of lands along the Crow Wing River will meet the first priority. By protecting parcels that are susceptible to agricultural conversion, the project will prevent parcelization, fragmentation and additionally provide permanent access to landlocked public parcels.

This project is consistent with the Minnesota State-Wide Conservation Plan Priorities to: protect priority land habitats; protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes; improve connectivity and access to recreation; and support and expand sustainable practices on working forest lands.

This project addresses the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda to conserve and protect Minnesota's natural resource lands and habitats.

This project addresses the DNR Scientific and Natural Area plan to prioritize protection of native plant communities (Dry Pine Woodland) because the community is considered imperiled/critically imperiled in Minnesota with only 10 documented occurrences in the state.

The Minnesota Forests for the Future Program was developed in 2008 with a primary goal of conserving Minnesota's working forest lands to meet the state's future recreation, economic and ecological needs. This property is a highly significant and strategic addition to Minnesota's forest conservation program.

Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare: An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife identifies this area as an important location for the conservation of a broad range of Species in Greatest Conservation Need with 89 species known or predicted to occur within this landscape.

Protection of these forest parcels supports the MNDNR fisheries goals of maintaining 75% forest or natural area land use within watersheds that provide critical protection to ground water. The Pinelands Sands surficial aquifer beneath this project is critically important to supply and maintain lake levels and stream flows in the watershed.

The protection of this property supports the West Central Landscape Committee's Forest Resource Management Plan goals of maintaining larger blocks of forest, of maintaining riparian buffers, of supporting natural resources based businesses by providing a source of wood supplies and by protecting the rural land and forest base from unrestricted and unplanned development.

This acquisition is supportive of A Vision for Wildlife and its Use – Goals and Outcomes to work with the people of Minnesota to conserve and manage wildlife populations and habitats, to provide wildlife-related recreation, and to preserve Minnesota's hunting and trapping heritage.”

Protection of the Crow Wing River Recreation Area from development is a conservation priority within the Wadena

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H2 Protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation
- LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land
- LU10 Support and expand sustainable practices on working forested lands

Plans Addressed:

- A Vision for Wildlife and Its Use -- Goals and Outcomes 2006-2012
- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota DNR Scientific and Natural Area's Long Range Plan
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Forest Resource Council Landscape Plans
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- Minnesota Forests for the Future and Federal Forest Legacy Program Plans

LSOHC Statewide Priorities:

- Address Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife, wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions, as well as long-term or permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Attempts to ensure conservation benefits are broadly distributed across the LSOHC sections
- Leverage effort and/or other funds to supplement any OHF appropriation
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model

LSOHC Northern Forest Section Priorities:

- Protect shoreland and restore or enhance critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas
- Provide access to manage habitat on landlocked public properties or protect forest land from parcelization and fragmentation through fee acquisition, conservation or access easement

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds:

- Clean Water Fund

This proposal will seek additional funds from the Clean Water Fund, if possible, as part of its fiscal year 2014 funding cycle.

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

This proposal continues and accelerates the efforts of the Department to identify and protect high priority conservation lands across the state through a multi-disciplinary assessment effort undertaken by a team of

resource professionals from many disciplines. The effort supplements the work of the Minnesota Forests for the Future Project, the Scientific and Natural Area Program and the Wildlife Management Area Program. This does not replace existing funds.

Sustainability and Maintenance:

Once acquired, the property will be managed long-term as State Forest, State Wildlife Management Area and/or Scientific and Natural Area according to State Forest, State Wildlife and Scientific and Natural Area guidelines.

Government Approval:

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition? - **Yes**

Permanent Protection:

Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - **Yes**

Hunting and Fishing Plan:

Is this land open for hunting and fishing? - **Yes**

The lands will be open for full hunting and fishing opportunities in accordance with State of Minnesota Regulations.

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Acquisition of fee title parcels	December 31, 2015

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation *Forest lands will be permanently protected by fee acquisition and under the long term management of the Department of Natural Resources.*
- Healthy populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species *Rare dry pine communities will be protected from conversion to other forest types and regenerated using fire and other means to ensure the long-term viability of these rare natural communities.*
- Increased availability and improved condition of riparian forests and other habitat corridors *Nearly 1/2 mile of shoreline on the Crow Wing River will become available on this state designated water trail.*
- Landlocked public properties have increased access for land managers *Several parcels within this project will provide additional access to landlocked public lands - primarily state and county forest lands.*
- Greater public access for wildlife and outdoors-related recreation *Additional acres of publicly accessible forest land will be added to the state recreation system. Currently, these lands are in private ownership and leased to individuals.*
- Improved availability and improved condition of habitats that have experienced substantial decline *Dry pine woodlands, a critically imperiled/imperiled community in Minnesota, will be protected from further conversion and managed to enhance the native dry pine woodland community.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$4,268,600

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$50,000	\$25,000		\$75,000
Contracts	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$4,000,000	\$0		\$4,000,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Professional Services	\$186,800	\$0		\$186,800
Direct Support Services	\$18,600	\$0		\$18,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$3,200	\$0		\$3,200
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$4,268,600	\$25,000	-	\$4,293,600

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Acquisition coordinator	0.25	2.00	\$50,000	\$25,000	Forest Service	\$75,000
Total	0.25	2.00	\$50,000	\$25,000	-	\$75,000

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	2,000	0	2,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	2,000	0	2,000

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$4,268,600	\$0	\$4,268,600
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$4,268,600	\$0	\$4,268,600

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	2,000	2,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	2,000	2,000

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,268,600	\$4,268,600
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,268,600	\$4,268,600

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

0 miles

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Cass

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Pinelands Sands	13632227	122	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13632228	149	\$0	No	Full	Full

Hubbard

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Pinelands Sands	13932211	399	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13932230	167	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13931211	40	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13932211	355	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13933224	163	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13933226	40	\$0	No	Full	Full

Wadena

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Pinelands Sands	13833214	42	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13733206	82	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13734209	180	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13633221	40	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13734216	41	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13833209	93	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13833227	81	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13833223	161	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13834226	184	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13633229	40	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13834225	78	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13833220	212	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13633209	80	\$0	No	Full	Full
Pinelands Sands	13533210	81	\$0	No	Full	Full

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Pinelands Sands Aquifer Project

