



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Carver County Lake Minnewashta Regional Park Management Unit 1 Old Field Restoration  
ML 2025 Request for Funding

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### General Information

**Date:** 06/03/2024

**Proposal Title:** Carver County Lake Minnewashta Regional Park Management Unit 1 Old Field Restoration

**Funds Requested:** \$863,300

**Confirmed Leverage Funds:** -

**Is this proposal Scalable?:** Yes

### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Jacob Sandvig

**Title:** Parks and Natural Resources Supervisor

**Organization:** Carver County

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**Website:** <https://www.carvercountymn.gov/departments/public-works/parks-recreation>

### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Carver.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

- Metro / Urban

**Activity types:**

- Restore

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

- Forest
- Habitat

## Narrative

### Abstract

Carver County's Lake Minnewashta Regional Park (LMRP), a 340-acre public natural area on the shores of Lake Minnewashta, includes a 27-acre management unit (MU 1) of degraded second-growth forest impacted by the emerald ash borer. This project will restore degraded forest by removing green ash and Eastern red cedar trees and planting more appropriate native species to restore the Mesic Forest ecosystem as well as convert 1.5 acres of turf to Southern Mesic Savanna. These restoration and enhancement efforts will prioritize enhancing biodiversity for wildlife through active management practices, fostering the growth and diversity of native plants.

### Design and Scope of Work

LMRP has experienced significant disturbance, with a history of agricultural activity dating back to 1937. The area has been slowly reclaimed by nature, but invasive species and human-introduced elements have disrupted its ecological balance. This has led to a decline in native biodiversity and the overall ecosystem health.

The primary challenge we face is a high density of mature green ash trees (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), which are under imminent threat from the emerald ash borer. If left unchecked, this threat could lead to access issues for park users, a significant reduction in habitat quality for wildlife, and gaps in the tree canopy. These gaps would allow invasive species like common buckthorn to further dominate the forest.

Restoring the MU 1 to its natural state is a multi-step process. We will begin by conducting a comprehensive inventory and mapping of existing vegetation. This step involves identifying invasive species, high-risk ash trees, and areas with existing native vegetation. Following this, we will use the collected data to develop and implement a removal plan for green ash trees and Eastern red cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) with hand crews. These will be replaced with native tree species, particularly oaks, to restore a more natural forest composition. Carver County will also remove existing pine plantations. The focus will be on diversification and habitat improvement, accompanied by native seeding and planting to enhance the area's biodiversity.

Throughout the project, we will monitor vegetation changes, invasive species recolonization, and native plant establishment to ensure the effectiveness of our restoration efforts over four years. Monitoring will include regular surveys and data collection to track progress and adapt management strategies as needed. We will engage in outreach and education initiatives to raise public awareness about the project and the importance of native habitat restoration.

This project will not only restore this forest to its natural state but also improve the overall ecological health and biodiversity of LMRP. By addressing climate change-driven threats and restoring native vegetation, we will create a more resilient ecosystem that can withstand future challenges. The benefits of this project extend beyond ecological restoration; it will also enhance recreational opportunities and aesthetic values for park visitors.

Proposed project tasks include:

- Collect critical site-level data to draft a comprehensive project plan, ensuring all aspects of the restoration are well-documented and strategically planned.
- Remove pine trees in plantations; and diversify shrub and ground layer vegetation.
- Remove target trees and other undesirable woody vegetation to reduce competition and promote native species growth.
- Remove and control herbaceous invasive species that threaten to outcompete native plants, ensuring the establishment of a healthy understory.
- After invasive vegetation is controlled adequately, conduct native seeding and planting using appropriate species to restore the natural flora.
- Install native trees and other woody plants to restore Mesic Forest, matching adjacent MUs over time.
- Monitor vegetation establishment success and practice adaptive management to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project site, adjusting methods as necessary based on observed outcomes.

## **Explain how the proposal addresses habitat protection, restoration, and/or enhancement for fish, game & wildlife, including threatened or endangered species conservation**

The proposed project could play a crucial role in restoring habitat for several species, including the northern long-eared bat, tricolored bat, monarch butterfly, and rusty patched bumble bee.

The northern long-eared bat, listed as a federal endangered species, relies on mesic hardwood forests for roosting and foraging. Although its presence in the park has not yet been confirmed, presence of northern long-eared bats has been confirmed in nearby protected forests. Efforts to improve summer roosting and foraging habitats at LMRP could benefit the species. Similarly, the tricolored bat, a proposed endangered species, that is possibly roosting and foraging in areas of the park requires specific habitat features for roosting and foraging. Improving the quality and expanding the availability of suitable habitats and hardwood roosting locations within the park could support its conservation. Carver County would take precautions to save any existing roost trees and adhere to US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFW) rules regarding tree removal and prescribed fire during the non-volant pup phase of their life cycle.

The monarch butterfly, a threatened species, relies on areas with abundant milkweed. With confirmed presence in the park, efforts to restore forest edge habitats and restore milkweed-rich areas on the edges of the MU could support its breeding and migratory needs.

Lastly, the rusty patched bumble bee, federally listed as endangered, has been confirmed within one mile of LMRP. This species is known to forage in forests during the spring and increasing the abundance of native plants and floristic species near its nesting sites can help its local population to recover.

In addition to these species, the USFW tracks critical habitats, migratory bird species of particular concern, wildlife refuges, and fish hatcheries. The USFW's Information for Planning and Consultation report identified 18 migratory bird species of particular concern that occur within one mile of the LMRP. These species include long-eared owl, wood thrush, marbled godwit, and black-billed cuckoo all of which could greatly benefit from a forest restoration project in the park.

## **What are the elements of this proposal that are critical from a timing perspective?**

Carver County is one of the fastest growing counties in Minnesota with its population expected to grow to nearly 200,000 residents by 2040. This growth has put significant pressure on land surrounding LMRP, leading to habitat loss and fragmentation. Forested land and wildlife habitat continue to decline quickly throughout this area necessitating quick conservation action.

This reality, coupled with the imminent threats posed by emerald ash borer adds urgency to the need for comprehensive forest restoration efforts. At this time, Carver County does not have the internal resources or expertise available to battle these ecological threats. We are at a period where we can make an impactful change on the landscape while working to turn the forest degradation around. A holistic implementation and management strategy is crucial to addressing these challenges effectively. The current landscape dynamics and development pressures underscore the critical timing of this proposal.

## **Describe how the proposal expands habitat corridors or complexes and/or addresses habitat fragmentation:**

Despite challenges posed by habitat loss and fragmentation, the proposed project offers opportunities to enhance habitat size, quality, and connectivity. Restoration efforts will reconnect severely degraded MUs with higher-quality adjacent areas, supporting observed populations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and larger vertebrates typical of the Twin Cities Metro Area. By restoring and enhancing vegetation in degraded areas and connecting with higher-quality habitats, the project will provide essential habitat for SGCN species, in a place where they need it most. Lake Minnewashta Regional Park, despite its current degraded condition, contains crucial habitat for many SGCN, highlighting its ecological significance. Implementation of this proposal will not only

restore the park's natural habitat but also improve connectivity, benefiting these species.

Monitoring SGCN populations over time will serve as a key performance indicator of the project's success. The project will also create vital corridors for wildlife movement and genetic exchange, which are crucial for species survival. These corridors will help mitigate the effects of habitat loss and fragmentation, promoting the overall health and resilience of the ecosystem. Additionally, the project will provide opportunities for wildlife observation and recreation, enhancing the park's value for visitors.

This proposal aligns with broader conservation goals, including those outlined in the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan, by addressing habitat fragmentation and enhancing habitat quality for SGCN. The project's approach to habitat restoration and enhancement, coupled with its focus on connectivity and long-term monitoring, demonstrates a commitment to effective conservation practices. By implementing this proposal, Carver County can contribute significantly to regional conservation efforts, ensuring that LMRP remains a valuable habitat for wildlife now and in perpetuity.

### **Which top 2 Conservation Plans referenced in MS97A.056, subd. 3a are most applicable to this project?**

- Minnesota Statewide Conservation & Preservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

### **Explain how this proposal will uniquely address habitat resilience to climate change and its anticipated effects on game, fish & wildlife species utilizing the protected or restored/enhanced habitat this proposal targets.**

As mentioned above, forest pathogens including Dutch elm disease and the emerald ash borer have established a strong foothold in the park in recent years. A changing climate will continue to force species to tolerate conditions beyond those in which they have evolved, leading to stressed plants and animals that are more susceptible to disease. By restoring ecosystem functionality and supplementing existing vegetation with more native and climate change-tolerant species in the project area, the habitat will become more resilient to the negative effects of climate change. This enhanced resilience will support higher quality nesting and migratory habitats for wildlife, ensuring that the ecosystem can sustain diverse game, fish, and wildlife species even as climate conditions continue to change.

### **Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?**

#### **Metro / Urban**

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity

### **Describe how this project/program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife, and if not permanent outcomes, why it is important to undertake at this time:**

Our vision is that this project will be the first significant restoration undertaking in a Carver County park, serving as a model for future projects throughout the system. By removing invasive species and reintroducing appropriate vegetation, the project will restore the Mesic Forest ecosystem and provide habitat for diverse wildlife. Enhancing biodiversity by adding a diverse mix of floristic species in the forest and converting 1.5 acres of turf to Southern Mesic Savanna and increasing native plant diversity will support pollinators like the monarch butterfly and the endangered rusty patched bumble bee. The project can also recreate and improve habitats for federally endangered species such as the northern long-eared bat and the threatened tricolored bat, assisting their recovery

and solidifying a long-lasting conservation legacy. Restoring and connecting fragmented habitats with high-quality MUs will create corridors for wildlife to forage and nest in an area with permanent protection. Swift action is critical due to the emerald ash borer threat, which risks canopy loss and invasive species dominance. Carver County’s rapid population growth heightens the urgency to mitigate habitat loss and fragmentation. By restoring ecosystem functionality and introducing climate-resilient species, the project will enhance the park’s resilience to climate change, ensuring continued support for diverse wildlife. The project will improve recreational opportunities and aesthetic values for park visitors while raising public awareness about the services ecosystems provide the community. This project can start a lasting conservation legacy, securing LMRP as a valuable wildlife habitat and enhancing its ecological health for visitors and residents of Carver County.

**Outcomes**

**Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:**

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *This success of the project will be measured by the acres of restored forest and evaluated based on observations of wildlife a in the area as well as evidence and presence of species of greatest conservation need.*

**What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this proposal?**

- Parks and Trails Fund

**Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose.**

- The request is not supplanting or substituting for any previous legacy funds and used for the same purpose.

**How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?**

Carver County Parks Department has a natural resource management plan for Lake Minnewashta Regional Park. This plan provides guidance for how the Parks Department plans to maintain the area after it is planted and after the maintenance period for restoration has concluded. The Parks Department has a professional Parks and Natural Resource Supervisor who will oversees, and directs work needed to sustain the MU 1. This position supervises full-time and seasonal staff in the care of the built and natural environment for the park system. Additionally, the County Parks Department's budgets funds to address environmental stewardship needs.

**Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes**

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2029	County General Fund	Natural Resource Staff Survey for invasive weeds and nonnative species	Address/manage species	Ongoing adaptive management of parcel
2030	County General Fund	Natural Resource Staff Survey for invasive weeds and nonnative species	Address/manage species	Ongoing adaptive management of parcel
2031	County General Fund	Natural Resource Staff Survey for invasive weeds and nonnative species	Address/manage species	Ongoing adaptive management of parcel

**Provide an assessment of how your program may celebrate cultural diversity or reach diverse communities in Minnesota, including reaching low- and moderate-income households:**

Carver County has eliminated all entrance fees into Lake Minnewashta Regional Park, making access to the MU 1 site affordable and the site is accessible via trail. Additionally, the Parks Department offers a number of recreation programs and camps at the park and has set up a fund to assist with paying for programs for those that are financially disadvantaged. The Parks Department has nature-based programs specially to reach diverse populations through partnerships with Eastern Carver County School District (ECCS) which has a diverse youth population through Summer Explores program and Achieve after school program. Further recreation services are provided to the cognitive/physical disabilities groups of Magnifying Abilities, STAR and Holland Life program offered by ECCS, SAIL program by Mount Olivet, and also the St. Davids Center. Additionally, the Carver County Public Works Department, which the Parks Department is a subunit, has a Title VI Plan and Non-Discrimination Implementation Plan dated March 14, 2022.

**Activity Details**

**Requirements**

**Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?**

Yes

**Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 or on lands to be acquired in this program?**

Yes

**Where does the activity take place?**

- County/Municipal

**Land Use**

**Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?**

No

**Will insecticides or fungicides (including neonicotinoid and fungicide treated seed) be used within any activities of this proposal either in the process of restoration or use as food plots?**

No

**Other OHF Appropriation Awards**

**Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC in the past?**

No

**Timeline**

<b>Activity Name</b>	<b>Estimated Completion Date</b>
• Grant Award	June 2025
• Competitive RFP Design and Build Process	August 2025
• Data Collection and Final Project Design	Fall 2025
• Initial Tree removal	Fall and Winter 2025-2026
• Seed and Live plant installation	Spring 2026
• Vegetation monitoring data collection and adaptive management	Spring 2026-2028
• Year 1 Vegetation establishment and replacement	Summer-Fall 2026
• Year 2 Vegetation establishment and replacement	Spring-Fall 2027
• Year 3 Vegetation establishment and replacement	Spring-Fall 2028
• Final monitoring report	December 2028

Budget

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	-	-	-	-
Contracts	\$605,400	-	-	\$605,400
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$48,600	-	-	\$48,600
Direct Support Services	\$2,800	-	-	\$2,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$206,500	-	-	\$206,500
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$863,300</b>	-	-	<b>\$863,300</b>

**Amount of Request:** \$863,300

**Amount of Leverage:** -

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 0.0%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$2,800

**As a % of the total request:** 0.32%

**Easement Stewardship:** -

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** -

**Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable?**

Yes

**If the project received 50% of the requested funding**

**Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

If the project received 50% of the requested funding, the county would reduce the amount and diversity of native plants with lower quality replacements. Planned maintenance and monitoring activities would be reduced to accommodate a reduced budget. We would also reduce the area of tree and grass area removal.

**Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

Progress and on-site meetings would likely be reduced due to the project area being smaller in size requiring less time to accomplish removals, site preparation and replanting. Other overhead for contract development grant administration, grant tracking, communications remain nearly the same if the grant is larger.



### **If the project received 30% of the requested funding**

**Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

- This project would not be able to be scaled to 70% budget reduction as investments made in tree removal would not be effective for the site's long-term ecological viability.

**Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

Not applicable as the project would not be viable at this level of reduction.

### **Contracts**

**What is included in the contracts line?**

The contracts line includes \$809,704 for ecological restoration services performed by qualified vendors selected via competitive request for proposal process. These items include tree and woody vegetation removal with hand crews, vegetation seeding and planting, project management as well as maintenance, monitoring and reporting services throughout the project.

### **Professional Services**

**What is included in the Professional Services line?**

- Design/Engineering

### **Direct Support Services**

**How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?**

This is based on experience with similar type grants and related projects that we have delivered for State Bond Funds and Park and Trails Legacy Funds, and grant funds provided through the Metropolitan Council for Regional Park System.

### **Federal Funds**

**Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?**

No

**Output Tables**

**Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	29	-	29
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>

**Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	\$863,300	-	\$863,300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$863,300</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$863,300</b>

**Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	29	0	0	0	0	29
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>29</b>

**Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	\$863,300	-	-	-	-	\$863,300
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$863,300</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$863,300</b>

**Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	\$29,768	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

**Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)**

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	\$29,768	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

**Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles**

Parcels

**Sign-up Criteria?**

No

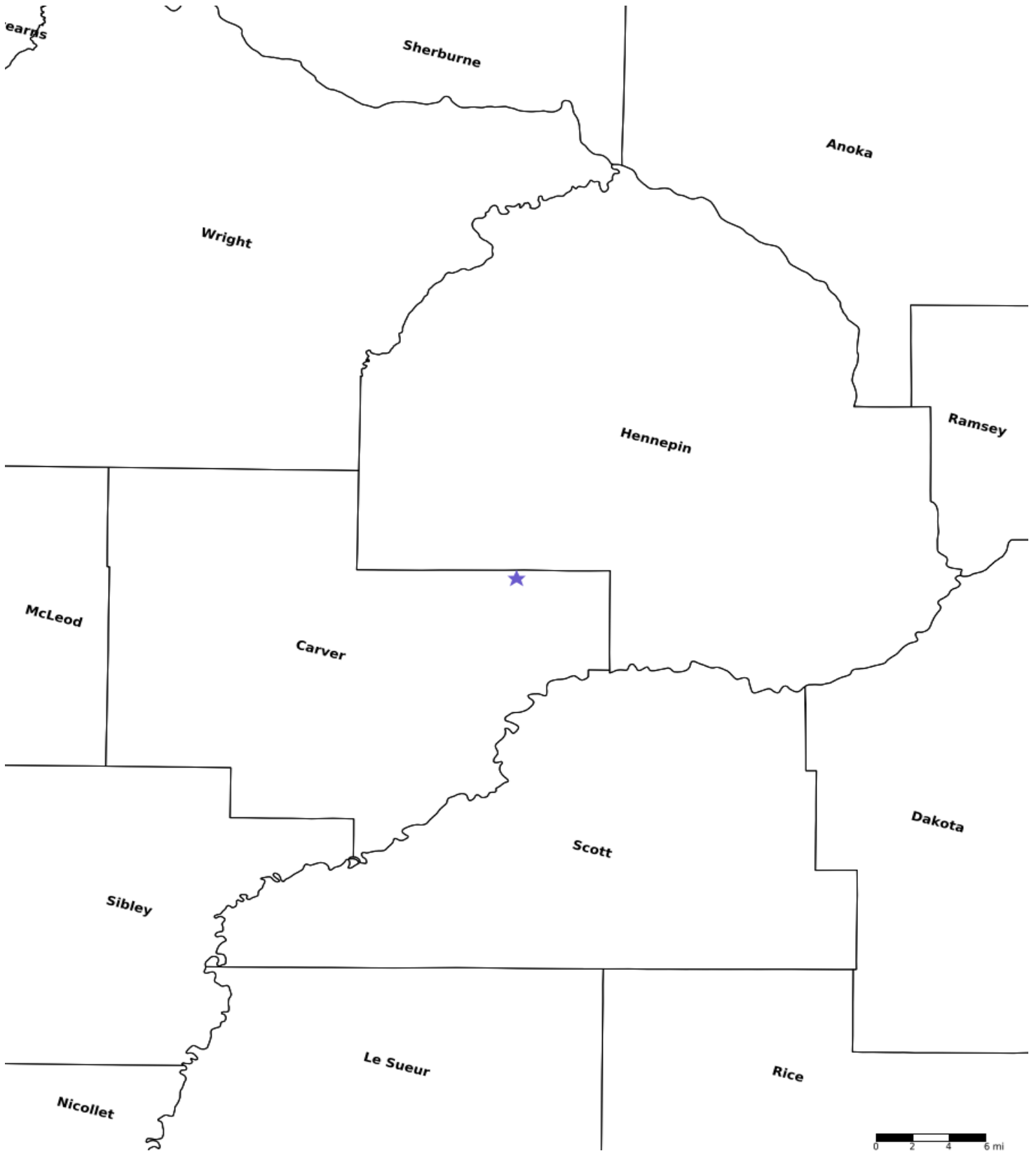
**Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:**

NA

**Restore / Enhance Parcels**

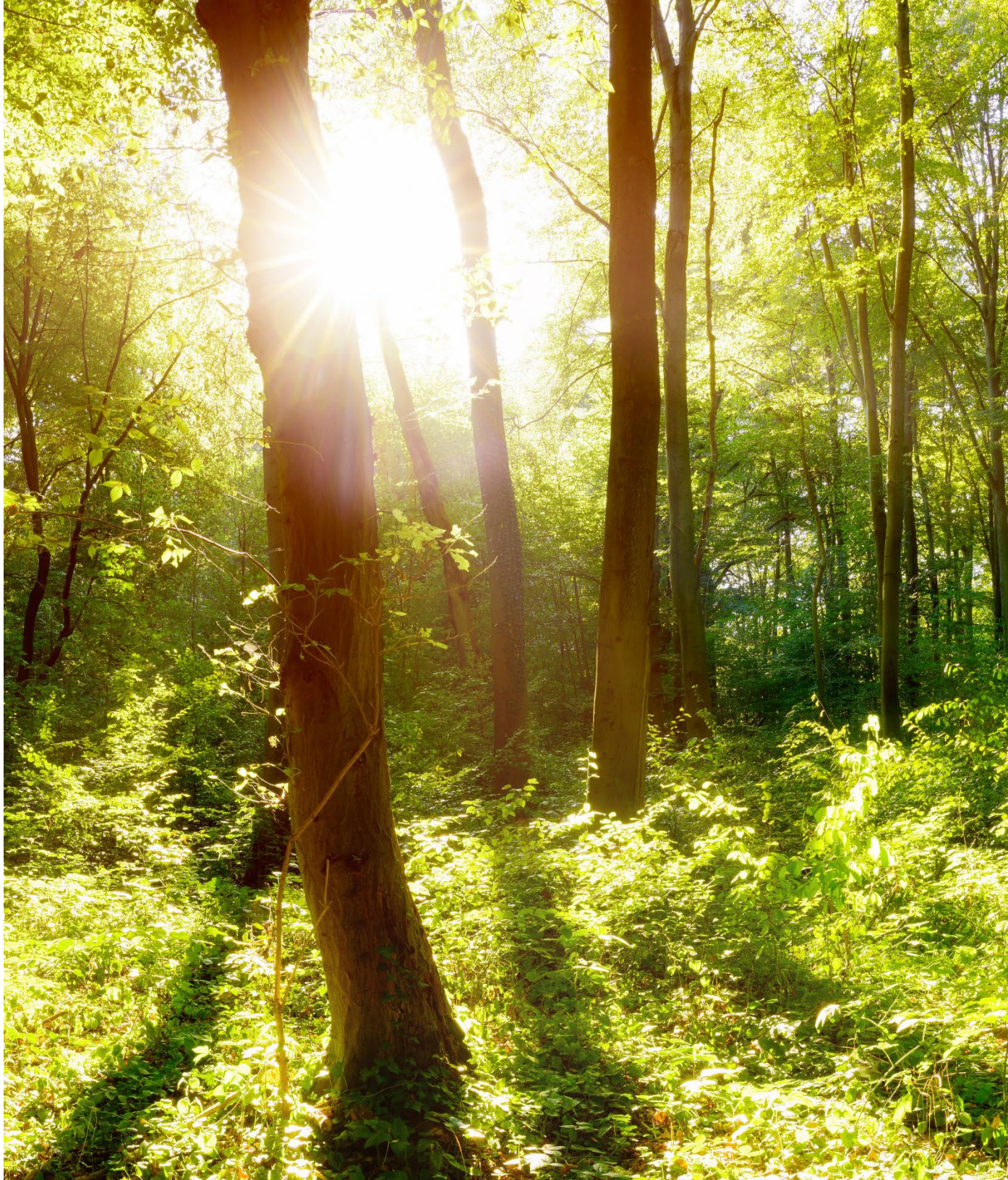
Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Lake Minnewashta Regional Park	Carver	11623N05	29	\$863,300	-	-

### Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- ⊕ Other





## Lake Minnewashta Regional Park Site Restoration

### Where

- Lake Minnewashta Regional Park 6900 Hazeltine Boulevard Chanhassen, Minnesota.

### What

- Restoration of 27 acres of degraded second-growth forests and conversion of 1.5 acres of turf to Southern Mesic Savanna.

### Who

- Carver County Parks.

### When

- June 2025- December 2028.

### How

- Removal and control of woody and herbaceous invasive species.
- After invasive vegetation is adequately controlled, conduct native planting and overseeding using appropriate species.

### Why

- This project will mitigate the effects of habitat loss and fragmentation, promoting the overall health and resilience of the ecosystem and will result in opportunities for wildlife observation and recreation, enhancing the park's value for visitors.





This project will not only restore this forest to its natural state but also to improve the overall ecological health and biodiversity of Lake Minnewashta Regional Park. By addressing climate change-driven threats and restoring native vegetation, we will create a more resilient ecosystem that can withstand future challenges. The benefits of this project extend beyond ecological restoration; it will also enhance habitat for threatened wildlife recreational opportunities and aesthetic values for park visitors.