



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase 13

ML 2025 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/03/2024

Proposal Title: Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase 13

Funds Requested: \$6,267,000

Confirmed Leverage Funds: \$15,000

Is this proposal Scalable?: Yes

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie

Title: Director of Land Protection

Organization: Minnesota Land Trust

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Location Information

County Location(s): Winona, Wabasha and Houston.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Southeast Forest

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative**Abstract**

Phase 13 of the Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration program will protect approximately 1,150 acres using conservation easements, and restore and enhance approximately 375 acres of declining habitat for important wildlife species. Work will build upon existing state investments in conservation lands and within strategically targeted, resilient corridors of biodiversity significance within the Blufflands of Southeast Minnesota, Minnesota's Biodiversity Hotspot. Outcomes will include improved, better connected wildlife habitat for the benefit of Minnesota's SGCN.

Design and Scope of Work

The Southeast Blufflands is Minnesota's most biodiverse region. Some 86 different native plant communities have been mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) in the program area, covering nearly 150,000 acres. These communities provide habitat for 183 rare state-listed plants and animals and more Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) than anywhere else in the state. These imperiled species are concentrated within 749 Sites of Biodiversity Significance.

Despite this biological richness, only 5% of the region has been protected to date.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) and The Trust for Public Land (TPL), in partnership, are working to change this circumstance. Through our Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Program, we are working to expand and connect larger contiguous blocks of protected lands, allowing land managers to restore, enhance and maintain high-quality habitats at a scale difficult to accomplish with fragmented ownership. Protecting and managing these lands is not only important for ecological reasons, but also benefits public enjoyment of these lands and the resources they provide. This program is increasing access to public lands to meet the continued high demand for outdoor recreation within the region.

This Program has a long, proven track record of protecting, restoring and enhancing lands that meet both state and local priorities for biodiversity conservation, land access and watershed health. To date, the Partnership has protected 5,332 acres of priority lands and 40.8 stream and river miles, and has restored/enhanced 7,467 acres of habitat.

This 13th Phase of our Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Program continues this body of work. MLT is the sole applicant in this proposal; TNC and TPL have sufficient existing funds for fee acquisition and restoration to put on the ground. MLT's work will focus in two areas:

1. Conservation Easements. MLT will protect 1,150 acres of high-quality private land through conservation easements. MLT will identify potential projects within targeted priority areas through an RFP process coupled with local outreach via SWCD offices and vendors. This competitive landowner bid process will rank projects based on ecological value and cost, prioritizing the best projects and securing them at the lowest cost to the state.

2. Restoration and Enhancement. MLT will enhance and restore 375 acres of high-quality habitat, both on public lands as well as on private lands protected through conservation easements in prior phases of this program. In Phase 13, MLT will expand its partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program, modeled after our collaboration in western Minnesota, where we collectively restore and enhance thousands of acres of habitat annually. Through this partnership, PFW Biologists and MLT staff will restore and enhance habitat on priority MLT easements. With more than 12,000 acres of permanently protected MLT easements in SEMN, we are excited to launch this new phase of our partnership. This partnership will add needed capacity and expertise to restore and enhance these important lands.

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

Working in the biodiversity hotspot of Minnesota, our goal is to expand and improve connected complexes of habitat that support the full diversity of plants, wildlife, and fish in Minnesota's Driftless Area. We target areas of biodiversity significance identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS), and protect and restore connected habitat to give SGCN species new opportunities to expand, migrate, and adapt to changing conditions.

Restoration and enhancement work on bluff prairies is particularly important for these goals. Bluff prairies have never been plowed and therefore contain many rare and threatened plant species. This flora, in turn, provides critical habitat for rare and threatened fauna, including rusty patch bumblebees and timber rattlesnakes.

Sedimentation and erosion are major threats to fish in the region. Protecting and enhancing upland natural communities, especially on the steep bluffs that flank most trout streams, will help prevent additional erosion. Aquatic habitat also benefits from protection of trout stream banks and floodplains. The water quality benefit that comes with the protection of forested upland areas is significant and contributes to improved trout and non-game fish and mussel habitat.

This program has benefited habitat for over 311 documented occurrences of some 110 SGCN identified by the Minnesota Natural Heritage Inventory. This proposal will continue with high impact projects that protect, restore, and enhance habitat for Minnesota's rarest and most vulnerable species. Specific habitats include bluff prairie, oak savanna, barrens prairie, oak-hickory woodland, jack pine-oak woodland, white pine - oak/maple forest and maple basswood hardwood forest. These habitats support species including: tri-colored and northern long-eared bats, timber rattlesnake, Blanding's turtle, western foxsnake, North American racer, American ginseng, great Indian plantain, plains wild indigo and red-shouldered hawk.

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

Habitat fragmentation caused by the continued growth from Rochester and demand for rural residential housing and cropland continues to be a threat. This program has generated several large protection and restoration projects that are increasingly rare in the region; moreover, MLT has seen a major uptick in landowner interest over the past year. When priority landholdings come available, it's crucial we have the resources to move quickly. Expanding existing protected areas through land protection helps improve the efficiency and effectiveness of ecological management and ensures the long-term viability of ecosystems.

Invasive species pose threats to high-quality habitat complexes in the region. Active management is needed to maintain native plant communities. Likewise, the lack of fire on bluff prairies and oak savannas within larger fire dependent habitat threatens the long-term ecosystem viability. Delaying action in those habitats by even a couple years can make future management more difficult.

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

A number of conservation plans covering Southeast MN have identified habitat corridors and complexes with high biodiversity significance and potential to expand areas of protected land. These include watershed-based Landscape Stewardship Plans and DNR's Wildlife Action Network along with the Conservation Focus Areas in the Root River and Whitewater watersheds. Our work will focus on these areas, working towards a long-term vision of high-quality protected habitat complexes within larger connected corridors. Protection projects will prioritize parcels that are either 1) connected to existing protected lands, or 2) are of significant standalone size and have potential for future expansion. These two criteria directly address expanding habitat complexes and protecting large parcels from parcelization and fragmentation. Restoration projects return habitat to fill in gaps within these corridors, increasing landscape connectivity. Enhancement work will focus on improving habitat within the core complexes to the highest quality.

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

- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework

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 described in a recent paper by Anderson, et. al. (2023), TNC has mapped a nationwide network of habitat corridors and complexes with increased resilience to climate change. The priority areas for this proposal are all within resilient and connected complexes identified in this analysis. The steep topography of this region creates many micro-habitats in close proximity, facilitating species movement as climate shifts impact the long-term suitability for species in a given location. Our partnership targets those lands for protection and restoration that provide the best opportunities for maintaining biodiversity and increasing connectivity which are the foundation of a resilient landscape. Protection of larger, connected habitat blocks support the ability of wildlife to move and adapt to stressors, including those accelerated by a changing climate. Enhancement projects maintain that resilience by controlling ecosystem stressors like invasive species and supporting the variety of habitats that drive the biodiversity of the region.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Southeast Forest

- Protect forest habitat through acquisition in fee or easement to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties

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:

To date, roughly 16.2 square miles of critical habitat have been protected through this Program. Over 8.3 square miles have been opened for public hunting and fishing, while allowing increased management within habitat complexes. Approximately 7.9 square miles of permanent conservation easements within priority habitat complexes have been procured. This program has protected habitat for 110 different SGCN, including 9 classified

as Endangered and 22 considered Threatened.

In addition to permanent protection, enhancement work proposed through this funding will return habitat to conditions where the ongoing management needed to maintain high quality is cheaper and easier. Degraded habitats suffer from self-reinforcing impacts. By taking on the hard work needed to reverse these impacts, we will make sustainable management of critical habitat feasible moving forward.

Outcomes

Programs in southeast forest region:

- Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat typical of the unglaciated region are restored and protected ~ *We will track the acres of priority parcels protected within the Conservation Opportunity Areas (COA) identified as priorities in regional planning. Success within each COA will be determined based on the percentage of area protected, restored and/or enhanced.*

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

- Clean Water Fund
- 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.

This proposal does not substitute or supplant previous funding that was not from a Legacy fund.

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

Land protected through conservation easements will be sustained by MLT through a state-of-the art easement stewardship standards and practices. MLT is a nationally-accredited and insured land trust with a successful easement stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring and defending the easements as necessary. In addition, MLT encourages landowners to undertake active ecological management of their properties, provides them with habitat management plans and works with them to secure resources (expertise and funding) to undertake these activities over time.

Habitats cleared of invasive species will be maintained with prescribed fire and other practices depending on funding. Protection and restoration projects will improve future prescribed fire and maintenance activities through economies of scale. The tracts protected and enhanced as part of this proposal also meet the prioritization for Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan. MLT's burgeoning partnership with USFWS PFW program adds additional capacity to address long-term management needs.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Every 4-6 years	US Fish and Wildlife Service	prescribed fire	-	-
2023 and perpetually	MLT Easement Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	-

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

This program focuses on protecting and restoring habitat critical to biodiversity in the most biologically diverse region of Minnesota. While that primary goal does not directly engage specific human communities, protecting, restoring, and enhancing diverse and resilient habitat benefits all Minnesotans. It keeps our air and water clean, mitigates the impacts of climate change, conserves the biological diversity that is every Minnesotan’s natural heritage.

Our program also works to increase public access to opportunities for recreation. Outdoor recreation provides benefits to all people, from the physical, mental, and spiritual health rewards of being in nature to the social benefits of family and group recreation. In Southeast Minnesota, the rising price of land is quickly turning access to natural spaces into a luxury good. With less than 5 percent of the land protected, opening new opportunities for public access to the outdoors helps make sure economic status never becomes a barrier to enjoying the wealth of nature available in the Driftless Area. The opportunities public land provides are especially important to members of indigenous communities who were displaced from the land and other historically marginalized or disadvantaged communities who have had fewer opportunities to access or acquire it. Indeed, public land in Southeast Minnesota is used heavily by members of BIPOC communities who lack places to hunt, fish, or hike closer to home.

Minnesota Land Trust holds a commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice as a core value. Examples of that commitment include, but are not limited to, programs to protect camps and nature centers that serve a diversity of Minnesota Youth; partnerships with indigenous communities to protect and restore culturally important resources like wild rice; and to undertake shared learning around cultural practices like prescribed fire. We are committed to seeking more ways to close the outdoor access gap and support diverse human communities as we continue preserving the biological diversity of Minnesota.

Activity Details

Requirements

Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection?

Yes

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?

- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements

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?

Yes

Explain what will be planted and include the maximum percentage of any acquired parcel that would be planted into foodplots by the proposer or the end owner of the property:

Short-term use of agricultural crops is an accepted best practice for preparing a site for prairie restoration. For example, short-term use of soybeans could be used for restorations in order to control weed seedbeds prior to prairie planting. In some cases this necessitates the use of GMO treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control weeds present in the seedbank, however neonicotinoids will not be used.

The purpose of the MLT's conservation easements is to protect existing high quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. As such, we restrict any agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases in which there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either carve the agricultural area out of the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may include a small percentage of agricultural lands if it is not feasible to carve those areas out. In such cases, however, we will not use OHF funds to pay the landowners for that portion of the conservation easement.

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

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

Yes

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

Lands protected with conservation easements often include private roads or trails used by the landowners on their property.

Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

Landowners with easements may continue to use private trails on their property.

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this proposal's funding and availability?

No

Explain how, when, and source of the R/E work:

Restoration expenses include program development activities in addition to restoration construction expenses. MLT restoration personnel will conduct outreach with easement landowners to evaluate, scope, design and schedule additional restoration projects. These activities will improve the project selection, cost-estimates and outcomes for future OHF funding requests.

Other OHF Appropriation Awards

Have you received OHF dollars through LSOHC in the past?

Yes

Are any of these past appropriations still OPEN?

Yes

Approp Year	Funding Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Funding Remaining	% Spent to Date
2024	\$3,088,000	-	-	-
2023	\$3,675,000	\$7,708	\$3,667,292	0.21%
2022	\$3,883,000	\$628,719	\$3,254,281	16.19%
2021	\$4,068,000	\$2,502,690	\$1,565,310	61.52%
2020	\$2,704,000	\$2,456,208	\$247,792	90.84%
2019	\$5,741,000	\$5,545,718	\$195,282	96.6%
2018	\$2,142,000	\$2,095,567	\$46,433	97.83%
2017	\$2,375,000	\$2,345,269	\$29,731	98.75%
Totals	\$27,676,000	\$15,581,879	\$12,094,121	56.3%

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Restoration/Enhancement on parcels protected with grant	June 30, 2034
Restoration/Enhancement on parcels protected without grant	June 30, 2030
Easement acquisitions completed	June 30, 2029

Budget

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$800,000	\$15,000	USFWS In-Kind	\$815,000
Contracts	\$2,029,000	-	-	\$2,029,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,500,000	\$375,000	Landowners	\$2,875,000
Easement Stewardship	\$308,000	-	-	\$308,000
Travel	\$32,000	-	-	\$32,000
Professional Services	\$370,000	-	-	\$370,000
Direct Support Services	\$216,000	-	-	\$216,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000
Supplies/Materials	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$6,267,000	\$390,000	-	\$6,657,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Total Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.75	5.0	\$300,000	-	-	\$300,000
MLT Restoration Staff	1.0	4.0	\$500,000	\$15,000	USFWS In-Kind	\$515,000

Amount of Request: \$6,267,000

Amount of Leverage: \$390,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 6.22%

DSS + Personnel: \$1,016,000

As a % of the total request: 16.21%

Easement Stewardship: \$308,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 12.32%

Total Leverage (from above)	Amount Confirmed	% of Total Leverage	Amount Anticipated	% of Total Leverage
\$390,000	\$15,000	3.85%	\$375,000	96.15%

Detail leverage sources and confirmation of funds:

MLT encourages landowners to donate easement value; \$375,000 is a conservative estimate of expected landowner contribution. USFWS PFW is contributing \$15,000 in in-kind personnel time toward restoration.

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?

A reduction in funding would reduce outputs (acres/activities) slightly more than proportionately. Some costs related to program development and oversight remain constant regardless of appropriation amount. The costs of many professional services related to land protection also do not scale proportionately, forcing a larger reduction in acres/activities.

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

Program management costs (personnel and DSS expenses) will be reduced as well. However, not exactly proportionately as program development and oversight costs remain consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

If the project received 30% of the requested funding

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

A reduction in funding would reduce outputs (acres/activities) more than proportionately. Some costs related to program development and oversight remain constant regardless of appropriation amount. The costs of many professional services related to land protection also do not scale proportionately, forcing a larger reduction in acres/activities.

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

Program management costs (personnel and DSS expenses) will be reduced as well. However, not exactly proportionately as program development and oversight costs remain consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?

Phase 13 is a component of the larger Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Program. Continuity of funding across multiple phases allows us flexibility when prioritizing parcels for protection or enhancement. Further, it ensures stability in our staffing model and provides the ability to plan and prioritize projects over multiple years. The flexibility provided by stable funding is critically important to achieving conservation goals given the uncertainty and variability of field season weather conditions.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

MLT will use contract funds for three purposes: to complete habitat management plans on new easement acquisitions; for restoration projects, and contracting for outreach.

Professional Services

What is included in the Professional Services line?

- Appraisals
- Other : Environmental assessments, minerals assessments, and mapping.
- Surveys
- Title Insurance and Legal Fees

Easement Stewardship

What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?

The Land Trust expects to close 7-11 projects. The average cost per easement to perpetually fund the Minnesota Land Trust's long-term monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$28,000; in extreme circumstances, a larger amount may be sought. This figure has been determined by using a stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is the industry standard according to the Land Trust Accreditation process. Periodic updates to this cost analysis are provided to LSOHC staff.

Travel

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?

Yes

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging

Vehicle rental is also included.

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:

Yes

Direct Support Services

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

In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, MLT determined our direct support services rate to include all of the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget, which is similar to the Land Trust's proposed federal indirect rate. We will apply this DNR approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of the direct support services.

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?

Equipment and tools to be purchased will be those necessary for protection, restoration and management activities. Examples include Personal Protective Equipment, other field safety equipment, GPS units, and assorted hand tools for restoration/enhancement.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

- Other : In-Kind Contributions

Is Confirmation Document attached?

[Yes](#)

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
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	1,150	1,150
Enhance	0	375	0	0	375
Total	0	375	0	1,150	1,525

How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie? (Table 1b)

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	97
Total	97

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,714,000	\$3,714,000
Enhance	-	\$2,553,000	-	-	\$2,553,000
Total	-	\$2,553,000	-	\$3,714,000	\$6,267,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
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	1,150	0	0	1,150
Enhance	0	0	375	0	0	375
Total	0	0	1,525	0	0	1,525

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$3,714,000	-	-	\$3,714,000
Enhance	-	-	\$2,553,000	-	-	\$2,553,000
Total	-	-	\$6,267,000	-	-	\$6,267,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$3,229
Enhance	-	\$6,808	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	\$3,229	-	-
Enhance	-	-	\$6,808	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

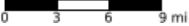
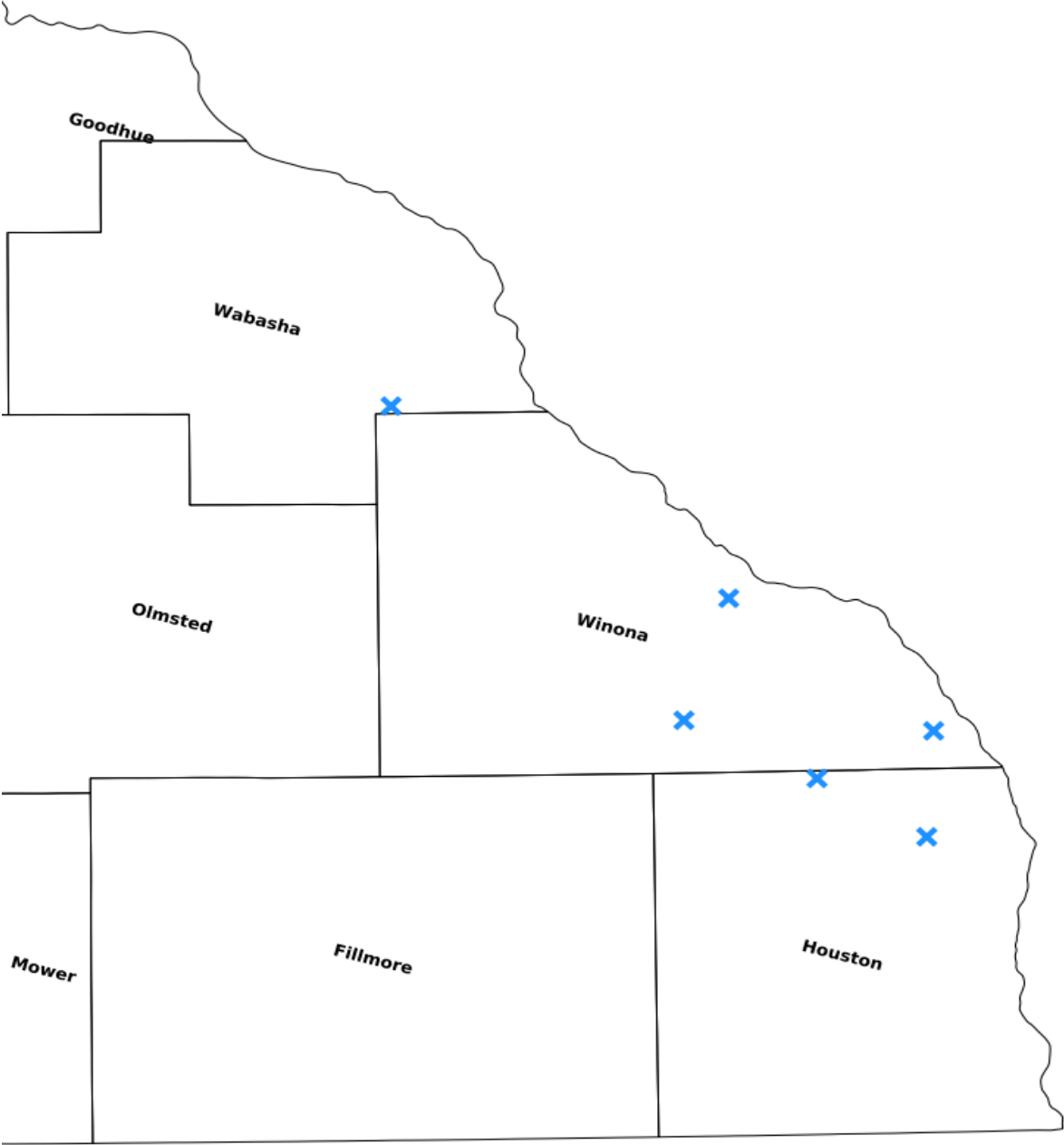
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

The Land Trust uses the attached criteria to prioritize parcels not currently on the parcel list. All protection parcels will be added to the parcel list before incurring any expenses in accordance with LSOHC guidance.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
MLT - Root River (Visger)	Houston	10405225	54	\$270,000	Yes	Enhancement of bluff prairies and surrounding oak savanna and woodlands
MLT - Root River (Gilmer)	Houston	10406202	31	\$155,000	Yes	Prairie enhancements, including bluff prairie acres
MLT - East Indian Creek (Schad)	Wabasha	10910231	44	\$220,000	Yes	Bluff prairie, prairie, and oak savanna enhancement
MLT - Wiscoy Valley (Zephyr Valley Community Cooperative)	Winona	10507217	148	\$740,000	Yes	Enhancement of bluff prairies and surrounding oak savanna and woodlands
MLT - Burns Valley (Goetzman)	Winona	10607202	77	\$385,000	Yes	Enhancement of bluff prairies and surrounding oak savanna and woodlands
MLT - Apple Blossom Drive (Dietmaier)	Winona	10505224	27	\$135,000	Yes	Prairie and oak woodland enhancement

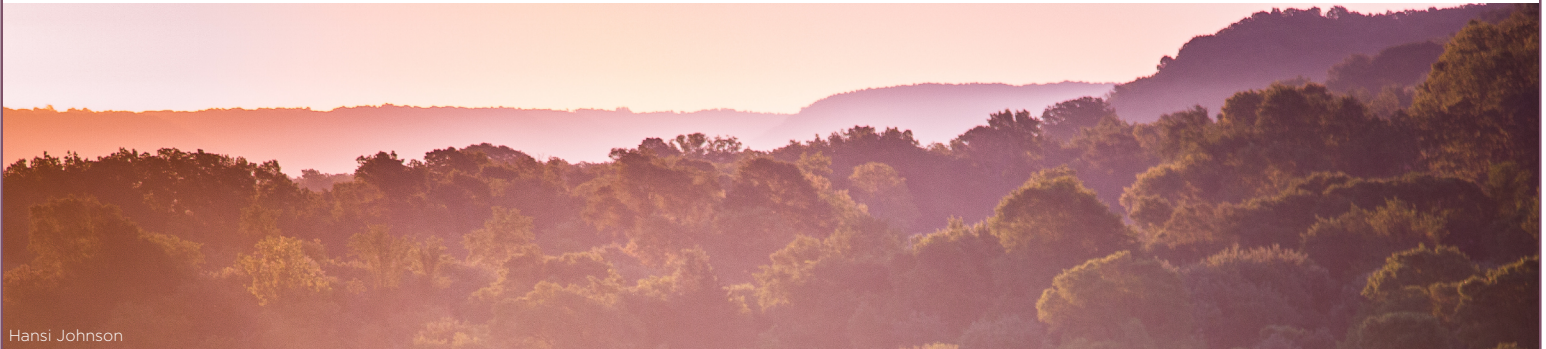
Parcel Map



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

Southeast Minnesota Protection & Restoration

Phase 13



Hansi Johnson

The Southeast Blufflands is Minnesota's most biodiverse region. More rare state-listed plants, animals, and Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) call this region home than anywhere else in the state; yet, only 5% of the region has been protected to date leaving many of them at risk.

Our proven program invests in targeted land protection through conservation easement and restoration of important habitat types. Focusing on areas of Outstanding and High Biodiversity Significance, our actions build on existing protected lands to create habitat complexes and corridors that both improve landscape-scale management to the benefit of SGCN and enable these species to move freely.

How Does the Program Support State Goals?

These actions are supported by watershed-based Landscape Stewardship Plans and DNR's Wildlife Action Network along with the Conservation Focus Areas in the Root River and Whitewater watersheds.

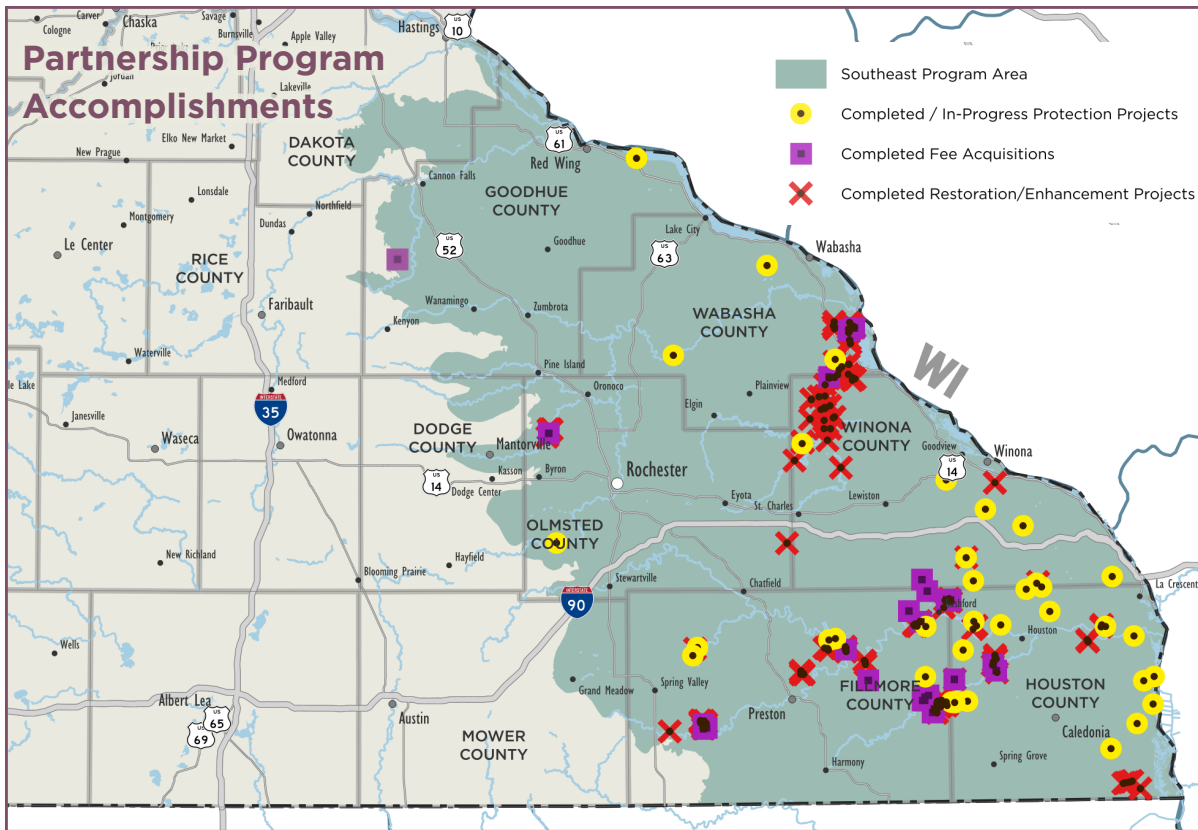
Request	\$6,267,000
Leverage	\$390,000
Acres protected	1,150
Acres restored	375
For more information:	
Mark Van der Linden	
Program Manager	
Minnesota Land Trust	
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What Are the Outcomes?

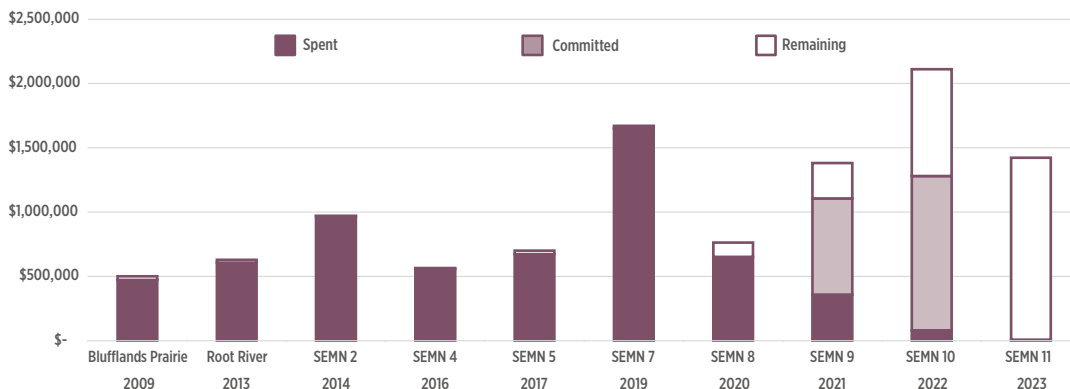
- Permanently protect 1,150 acres of high-quality private land through conservation easements.
- Restore or enhance 375 acres of habitat via an expansion of MLT's existing successful partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Decreased habitat fragmentation.



This Program has a long, proven track record of protecting, restoring and enhancing land. To date, the Partnership has protected 5,332 acres of priority lands and 40.8 stream and river miles, and has restored/enhanced 7,467 acres of habitat. All the while, we have leveraged the \$31.3M investment from the Outdoor Heritage Fund with \$6.1M in funds from other sources.

The Minnesota Land Trust is the sole applicant in this proposal. We have cultured a strong and growing landowner interest in both land protection and restoration. The Land Trust is developing a pipeline of easement projects which will exceed our protection goals and utilize all remaining funds from all open grants. Moreover, our restoration work is amplifying through a growing partnership with the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

Minnesota Land Trust Program Expenditures



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Mission

The Minnesota Land Trust protects and restores Minnesota's most vital natural lands in order to provide wildlife habitat, clean water, outdoor experiences, and scenic beauty for generations to come.





MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

A Decision Support Tool for Prioritizing Conservation Easement Opportunities

The Minnesota Land Trust often employs within its conservation program areas an RFP (Request for Proposals) model to both identify high-quality projects and introduce a level of competition into the easement acquisition process. Below, we briefly discuss how the system works and the framework put in place to sort the varied opportunities that come before us.

How the Ranking System Works

The parcel ranking framework employed through the Minnesota Land Trust's RFP process is intended as a **decision support tool** to aid in identifying, among the slate of landowners submitting bids for conservation easements, the most ecologically significant opportunities for the price. Using this framework, the Land Trust and its partners use an array of weighted data sets tailored to the specific circumstances inherent in a program area to identify those worthy of consideration.

It is important to note that this parcel ranking framework enables the Land Trust to rank projects *relative* to one another. That's important to do, but it's also important to understand how a project (or suite of projects) relates to the ideal situation (i.e., a project that is of exceptional size, condition and superb landscape context). If, for example, an RFP generated 20 proposals in a program area, the framework would effectively sift among them and identify the relatively good from those relatively bad. However, this information alone would not determine whether any of those parcels were of sufficient quality to pursue for protection (all may be of insufficient quality to warrant expenditure of funds). To solve this problem and make sure ranked projects are high priorities for conservation, we step back and evaluate them relative to the ideal - i.e., is each project among the best opportunities for conservation we can expect to find in the program area?

As part of its proposals to LSOHC, the Land Trust included easement sign-up criteria that laid out at a general level the framework utilized by the organization. Below is a more detailed description of the process the Land Trust utilizes in ranking potential parcels relative to one another, and identifying those with which a conservation easement will be pursued. We also include a ranking form illustrating the representative weighting applied to each criteria. These weightings will be refined as we move forward in applying this approach in each program area.

The Framework

We evaluate potential projects based on two primary factors: ecological significance and cost. Both are assessed independent of one another.

Factor 1: Ecological Significance

The Ecological Significance score is determined by looking at 3 subfactors, each weighted equally (as a default). Each of these constitutes 1/3 of the total ecological significance score.

Subfactors:

- **Size or Quantity** – the area of the parcel to be protected (how big is it?), length of shoreline, etc. The bigger the better.
- **Condition or Quality** – the condition of the natural communities and/or target species found on a parcel. The higher quality the better.
- **Landscape Context** – what’s around the parcel, both ecologically and from a protected status standpoint. The more ecologically intact the surrounding landscape the better; the extent to which a parcel builds off of other protected lands to form complexes or corridors, the better.

Note that we have the ability to emphasize one subfactor over another if the specific circumstances warrant it, but we begin with a default standard at the onset. At present, all of our geographies are using the default standard.

Indicators:

A suite of weighted indicators is used to score each parcel relative to each of the above subfactors. Indicators are selected based on their ability to effectively inform the scoring of parcels relative to each of the respective subfactors. Weightings for each criterion are assessed and vetted to ensure that a set of indicators for each subfactor produces meaningful results, then applied across each of the proposed parcels. Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Data sets used for this purpose must offer wall-to-wall coverage across the program area to ensure that bias for or against parcels does not creep into the equation. Where gaps in such coverages exist, we attempt to fill them in to the extent feasible (via field inventory, etc.). Finally, we vet and make improvements to the scoring matrix when we identify issues or circumstances where results seem erroneous.

Factor 2: Cost

Cost is a second major factor used in our consideration of parcels. Although ecological significance is *the* primary factor in determining the merits of a project, our RFP programs also strive to make the greatest conservation impact with the most efficient use of State funds. As such, we look at the overall cost of each project relative to its ecological significance; we also ask landowners to consider donating all or some of their easement value to the cause and to better position their proposals. Many landowners participate in that fashion.

Cost, as a primary factor, is assessed independently of the ecological factors. Given equal ecological significance, a project of lower cost will be elevated over those of higher cost in the ranking. That said, exceptionally high quality projects are likely to be pursued even if no or modest landowner donation is put forward. Alternatively, there are projects offered as full donations that are not moved forward because their ecological significance is not acceptable. The degree to which cost factors into the ranking of parcels relative to one another is made on a case-by-case basis.

SOUTHEAST BLUFFLANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet		SITE 1	SITE 2	SITE 3	SITE 4	SITE 5	SITE 6	SITE 7	SITE 8	SITE 9	SITE 10	SITE 11	SITE 12	Notes
COUNTY														
100 Pts	ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE													
Weighting Factor	Size/Abundance of Habitat (33 points)													
	a) Size (33 pts): Acres of Habitat to be Protected by an Easement													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (33 points)													
	a) Habitat Quality (28 pts): Quality of Existing Ecological Systems (Terrestrial & Aquatic)													
	b) Imperiled Species (5 pts): Occurrence of Documented Rare Species on Parcel													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Weighting Factor	Landscape Context (34 points)													
	Current Status (30 points)													
	a) Protection Context (15 points)													
	i. Size of Contiguous Protected Lands (8 pts)													
	ii. Amount of Protected Lands within 3 miles of Property													
	: Protected Land within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
	: Protected Land 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
	b) Ecological Context (15 points)													
	i. Size of Contiguous Ecological Habitat (8 pts)													
	ii. Amount of Ecological Habitat within 3 miles of Property													
	: Ecological Habitat within 0.5 miles of Property (4 pts)													
	: Ecological Habitat 0.5-3 miles from Property (3 pts)													
	Future Potential (4 points)													
	a) Conservation Plan Context (2 pts)													
	b) Amount of Existing Activity (2 pts)													
	SUBTOTAL:	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL ECOLOGICAL VALUE POINTS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
COST														
	i. Bid amount (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	ii. Estimated donative value (\$)/acre	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
	TOTAL ACQUISITION COST (\$)	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -

KEY	
	Priority
	Possible
	Out

SOUTHEAST BLUFFLANDS PROTECTION PROGRAM

Conservation Easement Selection Worksheet – Scoring and Criteria

Three primary factors when taken together provide a good estimate of long-term viability for biodiversity: 1) **Size** of the occurrence (species population or example of natural community), 2) **Condition** of the occurrence, and 3) its **Landscape context**. This framework is used widely across the world by a large number of conservation organizations and agencies and here in Minnesota by the Minnesota DNR, The Nature Conservancy and others. The Minnesota Land Trust has adopted this practice as well.

In this summary document, we provide an overview of the framework used by the Land Trust in assessing and prioritizing land protection opportunities before the organization.

- 1. Habitat Size (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on acres of habitat to be protected through the easement relative to the largest parcels available for protection in the program area. Although size can pertain to species populations, the size of such populations is often constrained by available habitat. In addition, very little information pertaining to the size of species populations on a given property typically exists, making any determination suspect. Habitat size is a valid indicator in these circumstances.

Scoring: Parcels are scored by how they fall relative to twelve size classes of habitat:

0 pt	1-40 acres
3 pts	41-50 acres
6 pts	51-75 acres
9 pts	76-108 acres
12 pts	109-152 acres
15 pts	153-224 acres
18 pts	225-320 acres
21 pts	321-460 acres
24 pts	461-660 acres
27 pts	661-960 acres
30 pts	961-1380 acres
33 pts	>1380 acres

- 2. Quality of Natural Resources (33 points):** Parcels are scored based on the quality or condition of occurrences of ecological communities (habitat) and imperiled species if known. As with Habitat Size above, population data for imperiled species is often minimal on private lands. As such, the condition of score is heavily influenced by the condition of natural communities on a property. However, we do allocate a modest level of points to the presence of imperiled species if they have been documented on a property.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based on the condition of focal ecological community targets – both terrestrial and freshwater – and presence of imperiled species on the property, as such:

- a) Habitat Quality (28 points)** – The Minnesota Biological Survey natural community element occurrence ranking framework (for terrestrial systems) and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency fish and insect indices of biotic integrity are used to score habitat quality on parcels, as such:

- 0 pts Absence of natural communities; fish/insect IBI = 0-10.
- 4 pts Natural communities averaging D rank; fish/insect IBI = 10-20.
- 8 pts Natural communities averaging CD rank; fish/insect IBI = 20-40.
- 12 pts Natural communities averaging C rank; fish/insect IBI = 50-59.
- 16 pts Natural communities averaging BC rank; fish/insect IBI = 60-69.
- 20 pts Natural communities averaging B rank; fish/insect IBI = 70-79.
- 24 pts Natural communities averaging AB rank; IBI = 80-89.
- 28 pts Natural communities averaging A rank; IBI > 90.

b) Imperiled Species (5 points) – Scoring of the parcel is based on species abundance, as follows:

- 1 pt 1 occurrence
- 2 pts 2 occurrences
- 3 pts 3 occurrences
- 5 pts 4 or more occurrences

3. Landscape Context (34 points): Parcels are scored based current ecological context of the property and protected lands surrounding it; in addition, points are also allocated based on the likelihood that lands around a parcel will be protected going forward based on the identification of these adjacent lands in respective conservation lands.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based as follows:

a) Protection Context (15 points) – Is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous protected land (if any) and amount of protected land within 3 miles of the property. Here, we look at two subfactors:

i) Amount of protected land (acres) contiguous with the parcel. Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of protected land contiguous to the parcel (8 points), as follows:

- 1 pt 0-80 acres of contiguous protected lands
- 2 pts 81-320 acres
- 3 pts 321-640 acres
- 4 pts 641-960 acres
- 5 pts 961-1920 acres
- 6 pts 1921-3840 acres
- 7 pts 3841-7680 acres
- 8 pts >7680 acres

ii) Amount of protected lands within a 3-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby but not contiguous can also play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight protected lands within ½ mile of the parcel higher than those farther removed, and score them separately.

(a) Amount (acres) of protected land within ½ mile of protected property (4 points) – The amount of protected land within ½ mile of the parcel, scored as follows:

- 1 pt 0-80 acres of protected land

- 2 pts 81-360 acres
- 3 pts 361-640 acres
- 4 pts >640 acres

Amount (acres) of protected land ½-3 miles of the protected property (3 points) –

- 1 pt 0-640 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 641-2560 acres
- 3 pts >2561 acres

b) Ecological Context (15 points) – As with Protection context, ecological context is calculated based on two subfactors, including size of contiguous ecological habitat (if any) and amount of ecological habitat within 3 miles of the property.

i) Amount of ecological habitat (acres) contiguous with the parcel, providing species with direct access to larger blocks of permanent habitat (8 points). Scoring of the parcel is based on the amount of natural ecological habitat contiguous to the parcel, as follows:

- 1 pt 0-80 acres of contiguous ecological habitat
- 2 pts 81-320 acres
- 3 pts 321-640 acres
- 4 pts 641-960 acres
- 5 pts 961-1920 acres
- 6 pts 1921-3840 acres
- 7 pts 3841-7680 acres
- 8 pts >7680 acres

ii) Amount of protected lands within a 3-mile radius of the parcel, whether contiguous or not (7 points). Blocks of habitat nearby, whether contiguous or not play a very significant role in the maintenance of biodiversity over the long term. In this assessment, we weight ecological habitat within ½ mile of the parcel higher than that farther removed, and score them separately.

Amount (acres) of protected land within ½ mile of protected property (4 points) – The amount of protected land within ½ mile of the parcel, scored as follows:

- 1 pt 0-80 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 81-360 acres
- 3 pts 361-640 acres
- 4 pts >640 acres

Amount (acres) of protected land ½-3 miles of the protected property (3 points) –

- 1 pt 0-640 acres of protected land
- 2 pts 641-2560 acres
- 3 pts >2561 acres

c) Future Potential (4 points) – The degree to which the area within which a parcel lies has been identified as a priority for conservation action and the degree to which action is being

implemented in that area is a direct indicator of the long-term potential for maintenance of biodiversity associated with a parcel. Lands affiliated with priority areas are more likely to be complemented with additional levels of nearby protected lands than those outside of priority areas. In areas experiencing high levels of development, this factor may carry a significant amount of weight in setting protection priorities.

Scoring: Parcels are scored based on two subfactors: 1) their position relative to priority areas identified in statewide or local planning efforts, and 2) the degree to which action is being implemented within a priority area.

- 0 pts Parcel not within priority area
- 1 pt Parcel within priority area; minimal activity occurring
- 2 pts Parcel within priority area; modest activity occurring
- 3 pts Parcel within priority area; good levels of activity occurring
- 4 pts Parcel within priority area; high levels of activity occurring