

Friends of the Boundary Waters – Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (OHC) Proposal 2022-2023

Forest Acquisition 01 (FA-01)

Preventing Forest Fragmentation and Protecting Wildlife Habitat at the Edge of the Boundary Waters

- Mr. Chairman and board members, Good Morning. Thank you all, for the work you do on behalf of the residents of Minnesota.
- My name is Rich Sve. I am the chair of the Lake County Board of Commissioners. With me today is Lake County Administrator, Matthew Huddleston.
- I have prepared remarks I wish to share with this council in opposition to the request before you identified as FA-01. I will keep these comments brief.
- First allow me to thank the Friends of the Boundary Waters (FOTBW) for contacting Lake County prior to submitting this application for funding, as well as informing us of their intentions. We appreciate an open dialog.
- I wish to emphasize to the Council that Lake County does not have any concerns if the FOTBW acquires the property identified in this application. However, we do oppose the use of public funds (tax-payer dollars) to purchase or aid in the procurement of this property.
- As I am sure you are aware, Lake County is blessed with a plethora of public land, including the BWCA, the Superior National Forest, Finland State Forest, State Parks and Lake County managed Tax Forfeited lands. That public land makes up 83% of the 1.3 million acres that is Lake County, leaving only 17% of our land base in private ownership. Another way to look at this breakdown is of the 1.3 million acres, only 221,000 acres are privately owned. Please note that these numbers are not exact but are a generally accepted representation.
- This leaves a small amount of private land for development and for our main tax base. As I am sure you can imagine, Lake County pays close attention to potential projects that would effectively remove any properties from the tax rolls or further prevent properties from being developed.
- Three main points brought up in this application are the protection of wildlife habitat, protection of shoreline, and preventing forest fragmentation. Please allow us to share our perspectives.
- Regarding protection of wildlife:
 - We have great diversity in public land management like the DNR and USFS, bringing forward initiatives that work to protect wildlife. Much of that management or

protection is in concert with private entities, such as the MN Deer Hunters Association and Ducks Unlimited, many of which you have interacted with through the OHC.

- In fact, the land in this proposal is adjacent to, or near to, the BWCA, which itself in whole, is comprised of more than 1 million acres of permanently protected wildlife habitat.
 - Allow me once again to highlight that 83% of Lake County property is in public ownership and afforded protection.
 - Lake County has not identified anything unique about the parcels discussed today that would necessitate the protections suggested in this application.
- Protection of Shoreline:
 - There are 2600 miles of shoreline in Lake County.
 - Nearly 1,800 miles of that shoreline is within the BWCA.
 - Much of the shoreline outside the Wilderness is on public land.
 - Two parcels in this application are on Snowbank Lake and together equal 96 acres. This 4600-acre lake's shoreline is over 90% publicly owned and a large portion of it is within the BWCA.
 - South Kawishiwi River parcels in this application are adjacent to a mix of private and public lands. These parcels represent prime real estate in an area of Lake County that has very limited opportunities for growth.
 - Lake County wishes to underscore that the vast majority of these shorelines are already protected.
 - The applicant has not provided any proof that development of these riparian parcels would be detrimental to the environment, surrounding area, or the BWCA.
 - Fragmentation of Forests:
 - Over the years, Lake County has worked with other public land agencies and private entities to consolidate land ownership where it makes sense.
 - An example is the Clair Nelson Memorial Forest; Lake County purchased 6,600 acres of land in 2005, for 2.2 million dollars, to aid with Moose Habitat projection, to consolidate a large tract of land, to allow for better forest management, and to help sustain jobs in the logging industry.
 - Please note not all of the land in this proposal before you, are adjacent to public land and therefore would not have enough impact to warrant the purchase for the purpose of diminishing forest fragmentation in Lake County.
 - In summary:
 - Lake County has and will support case-specific projects. If there is a unique feature or special circumstance, we are open to support. Lake County has many examples of this support over the years, including projects like the Clair Nelson Memorial Forest.
 - Lake County strives to maintain its existing tax base and the potential to enhance this tax base through county permitted and approved development.

- Lake County is very sensitive to projects, like the one before you, that propose to deny future homes, cabins, and businesses. We have limited private land near the BWCA, and we believe it is important to allow for the development of this land in a scrutinized and responsible manner.
 - Further, Lake County is apprehensive should this proposal be funded. Would these lands remain in private ownership in perpetuity? Is this an attempt to create a buffer to the Wilderness?
 - Lastly, we wish to reiterate to this council the fact that Lake County has a finite amount of developable property within our borders and that we do not believe that the FOTBW request demonstrates a clear analysis to necessitate elevating these parcels to added protections, nor do we believe their appeal rises to an urgency or need for tax-payer dollars. Therefore, we suggest this funding request be denied.
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- Mr. Chairman and board members, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on this proposal.
 - Lake County is uniquely aware of the sensitivity of land issues near the BWCA as I am positive this council also is. We are concerned that projects that aim to restrict development using tax-payer dollars, outside of some unique or threatened species or attribute, will create negative consequences in the future.
 - We respectfully request that you take our comments into consideration when finalizing your recommendations to the legislature for approval. Lake County certainly appreciates the funding that has been approved in our county and surrounding area for forest and habitat improvements. We will continue to work with agencies, non-profit organizations, and other interested landowners to continue to make our land and forests better for generations to come.
 - Thank you for hearing and considering our concerns.
 - Mr. Chair, we are happy to address any questions.