

**DRAFT MINUTES**

**Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC)**

**January 7, 2026**

**Hybrid Meeting – MN State Capitol 120 & Zoom, pursuant to MS 13D**

**Call to Order:** Chair David Hartwell called the meeting to order at 12:02 p.m. [\(0:00:07\)](#)

<b>Members Present</b>	<b>Members Absent</b>
David Hartwell (Chair)	Ron Schara (Vice Chair)
Suzanne Baird	Sen. Founq Hawj
Rep. John Burkel	
Kristin Eggerling	
Matt Kucharski	
Sen. Andrew Lang	
Darrel Palmer	
Tom Saxhaug	
Ted Suss	
Rep. Samantha Vang	

A quorum was present.

**1. Review and Approve Agenda:** [\(0:02:30\)](#)

Councilmember Palmer made a motion to approve the agenda. – **Motion Prevailed**

**2. Review and Approve Minutes:** [\(0:02:48\)](#)

Councilmember Suss made a motion to approve the minutes from December 9, 2025 – **Motion Prevailed**

**3. Conflicts of Interest Reported:** No conflicts of interest were reported. [\(0:03:11\)](#)

#### **4. Chair's Comments:**

[\(0:03:18\)](#)

Chair Hartwell introduced the presentation to be given to the Council by MN DNR related to permitting continuous improvements. Chair Hartwell indicated that potential complications with the invasive carp barrier at lock and dam number five may necessitate a special meeting of the Council prior to the scheduled May 2026 meeting. Chair Hartwell and the Council discussed potential options for a revised habitat tour and meeting date in June 2026, which was tentatively rescheduled for June 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. Chair Hartwell thanked outgoing Executive Director Mark Johnson for his service to the Council and introduced a resolution of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council recognizing Mark Johnson for his work. The resolution was unanimously agreed to by the Council.

#### **5. Report from the Executive Director:**

[\(0:11:20\)](#)

Executive Director Mark Johnson noted that he attended a meeting with Pelican Lakes Association attended by DNR fish and wildlife staff and Councilmember Palmer to discuss potential collaborative efforts for new initiatives to support in-lake fish habitat work. Mr. Johnson also shared that he attended a meeting with the Minnesota Forest Partnership to discuss possible opportunities for Outdoor Heritage Fund conservation work and reported on stakeholder frustrations with the application of prevailing wage laws. Mr. Johnson alerted the Council to the upcoming release of an audit completed by the Office of the Legislative Auditor relating to financial management of Outdoor Heritage Fund programs.

#### **6. Discussion / Action: Review of Council Funding Recommendations**

[\(0:17:22\)](#)

Chair Hartwell introduced the agenda item and the first action item: approval of a program amendment to reintroduce Minnesota Land Trust into HA 17, "Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration – Phase 14" project.

#### **Action:**

[\(0:19:16\)](#)

Councilmember Baird made a motion to approve the revision to HA 17, "Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration – Phase 14" as presented.

Nick Banks, Trust for Public Land, explained that Minnesota Land Trust had been a funded partner in the proposal, and was removed due to insufficient funds. Since additional funds were allocated to the project after release of the December forecast, the partnership approached the Council to amend the budget to include Minnesota Land Trust.

Council discussion followed.

A roll call vote was taken.

<b>AYE:</b>	<b>NAY:</b>	<b>ABSENT:</b>
Hartwell		Sen. Hawj
Baird		Saxhaug
Rep. Burkel		Schara
Eggerling		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Suss		
Rep. Vang		

9 AYES, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

Assistant Director Joe Pavelko provided an overview of the final draft Outdoor Heritage Fund bill to be presented to the legislature, including updated funding amounts allocated from partnership budgets to O2, “DNR Core Functions in Partner-led OHF Acquisitions”, pending Council approval. Mr. Pavelko noted any additional changes prior to introduction would be technical in nature.

Council discussion followed.

**Action:**

**(0:31:43)**

Councilmember Baird made a motion to approve the draft Outdoor Heritage Fund bill as presented, subject to required technical corrections as approved by staff.

A roll call vote was taken.

<b>AYE:</b>	<b>NAY:</b>	<b>ABSENT:</b>
Hartwell		Sen. Hawj
Baird		Saxhaug
Rep. Burkel		Schara
Eggerling		
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Suss		
Rep. Vang		

9 AYES, 0 NAYS, 1 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

Council discussion returned to the Report from the Executive Director.

**5. Report from the Executive Director:** [\(0:32:40\)](#)

Executive Director Johnson reported on a memo provided to the Council in accordance with the Guidelines for Acquisition Parcels with Structures/Buildings policy which states the Council will be updated periodically on any parcels acquired with structures or buildings. Mr. Johnson outlined the parcels reported on and explained that all acquisitions complied with Council policy.

**7. Discussion / Action:** Ecological Permitting Discussion and Debrief [\(0:35:06\)](#)

Chair Hartwell provided the Council with background information explaining that the impetus for this agenda item was previous Council discussion on regulatory timelines for stream restorations.

Katie Smith, Director, Ecological and Water Resources Division, MN DNR, presented to the Council on continuous improvement efforts on environmental review and permitting timelines for stream restoration and enhancement projects. Ms. Smith explained the existing regulatory landscape related to these projects and outlined efficiency improvements and efforts to be undertaken to identify potential solutions for improving timelines.

Council discussion followed.

**8. Discussion / Action:** Review and Approve ML2027 / FY2028 Call for Funding

**(1:00:38)**

Chair Hartwell briefed the Council on this agenda item, noting that Councilmember submitted comments on revisions to the Call for Funding Request, Hearing Criteria, and Proposal format.

Commission Assistant Tom Rebman provided an overview of the finalized revisions to these documents based on Councilmember and Council staff input. More significant changes that were highlighted include merging of several related hearing criteria, addition of a public access hearing criteria, and wording changes, as well as additional questions within the proposal template.

Council discussion followed, primarily surrounding the proposed public access criterion as well as revisions being considered to proposal questions surrounding food plots.

**Action:**

**(1:48:53)**

Councilmember Kucharski made a motion to accept the revised Call for Funding and Proposal template as presented, with the exception of hearing criterion #11, which will now read “Proposal provides public access, use, and benefit.”.

A roll call vote was taken.

<b>AYE:</b>	<b>NAY:</b>	<b>ABSENT:</b>
Hartwell		Sen. Hawj
Baird		Saxhaug
Rep. Burkel		Schara
Eggerling		Rep. Vang
Kucharski		
Sen. Lang		
Palmer		
Suss		

8 AYES, 0 NAYS, 4 ABSENT – Motion Prevailed

**9. Discussion / Action: Fee-Title Land Acquisition with Buildings in North Central MN** [\(1:50:05\)](#)

Chair Hartwell and Executive Director Mark Johnson provided an overview of this agenda item, noting that at the December 9, 2025, Council Meeting, the Council suggested Northern Waters Land Trust return to the Council with a specific plan for the parcels with buildings.

Annie Knight, Executive Director of Northern Waters Land Trust, and Kathy DonCarlos, Land Conservation Coordinator for Northern Waters Land Trust, presented to the Council an overview and update on the proposed 1,095-acre fee-title land acquisition in Cass County, which would become a new Wildlife Management Area. Ms. Knight and Ms. DonCarlos proposed that Northern Waters Land Trust would convey or donate the parcels of land that contain the buildings to Minnesota Deer Hunters Association, or a similar non-governmental habitat organization, who would purchase the buildings for 2025 appraised value with any sale proceeds to be returned to the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Council discussion followed.

The Council directed Council staff to evaluate the proposal as presented for possible legal or policy considerations and for Council staff and Northern Waters Land Trust staff to present their findings at a subsequent Council meeting.

**10. Presentation / Discussion: Fish Habitat and Riverscape Management** [\(2:17:52\)](#)

Nicholas Kludt, Ph.D., Red River Fisheries Specialist, MN DNR, presented to the Council on historical and contemporary approaches to fish habitat management, successful fish habitat projects, and future opportunities for fish habitat management initiatives.

Council discussion followed.

**11. Presentation / Discussion: Stream Habitat Restoration Evaluations** [\(2:58:50\)](#)

Doug Dieterman, Ph.D., Research Scientist, MN DNR, presented to the Council on the history of ecological issues facing streams and historical and contemporary approaches to stream restoration. Mr. Dieterman provided information on his ongoing research evaluating the success of various stream restoration techniques and shared preliminary data on length of time a particular stream habitat project can remain functional without intervention.

Council discussion followed.

Council discussion returned to the Report from the Executive Director.

**5. Report from the Executive Director:**

**(3:33:52)**

Executive Director Mark Johnson reflected on his time in service of the Council. Mr. Johnson thanked public and legislative members of the Council for their diligent work and reminded members that they serve as stewards of public dollars. Mr. Johnson thanked Council staff, non-partisan, and partisan support staff. Mr. Johnson spoke of the original vision and intent of the Outdoor Heritage Fund as advocated for by stakeholders and as written in law by former Senators Lessard and Sams. Mr. Johnson thanked the Council for the opportunity to serve the Council.

No public testimony was heard.

Meeting adjourned at 3:44 p.m.