

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Proposal Review Follow-Up: In Proposal Hearing Order

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Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

DNR Statewide control and reduction of invasive Phragmites Phase I

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: DNR Statewide control and reduction of invasive Phragmites Phase I

Funds Requested: \$1,422,500

Proposal #: WRE03

Manager's Name: Michael Verhoeven

Title: Aquatic Invasive Species Management Consultant

Organization: Department of Natural Resources

Email: michael.verhoeven@state.mn.us

Office Number: 651-259-5974

Mobile Number:

Rep John Burkel: Net Local Tax Impact Score: 10/10. Invasive Phragmites control is direct habitat protection/restoration with no acquisition or tax-base impact

- Correct, no acquisition in this project. It is worth noting that the project also affords significant value to other wetlands in the form of protection from invasion by controlling existing populations to prevent spread.

David Hartwell: Explain what removal entails.

- Generally on this project there is no physical removal from the sites of control. We do occasionally burn in place to reduce biomass, but removal from the site runs the risk of causing spread via prolific seed, stem, and rhizome growth. The primary method of control is annual herbicide treatment for 2-3 years.

Matt Kucharski: Need to learn more on this - small ask but cost per acre really high for enhancement. Per acre cost second-highest in category. Both way above average.

- The breakdown on cost per site is 54% control, 7% survey, 21% biomass knockdown, 18% revegetation. The cost of the control does tend to be higher than other projects because of its landscape-scale (i.e., the mobilization costs associated with the contractors having to travel to many small, individual sites). A typical site might use less than \$1.00 of herbicide, but have a \$100.00 cost for the crew to visit the site.

Ted Suss: 67 acres? handout says every known stand of phragmites will be controlled but the map suggests that 67 acres would barely touch the surface.

- While the statewide collaborative effort does track and aims to control every stand (we have not previously had the funding to control all), the 67 acres we propose to manage in this project are only stands on public lands not already controlled by another partner. This is to meet the public access and no supplant demands of the RFP.
- In addition, the small acreage here is also due to the fact that we have a very small average patch size, with most of our patches being less than 1/10 of an acre.

Sen Andrew Lang: Leverage? Need additional information

- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding is expected to be acquired for the broader statewide collaborative at a value of about \$125,000 per year. Of this, \$75,000 is used directly on control, and because only 65% of patches are on public lands, we have estimated the value of that leverage to this project at \$50,000 per year for the total project period of 5 years, totalling \$250,000.
- We have also included as leverage the value of .1 FTE (\$16,500) of a DNR staff for 5 years, totalling \$82,500. This value is for coordination of the project including contract development, integration into the statewide collaborative, and direct support of on-the-ground work (e.g., permitting, survey work, contractor administration/observation).

Darrel Palmer: Phase 1, 23% leverage, need to stop the spread before it cannot be contained - can they get CPL funds right now to use in Metro area

- We absolutely agree that some existing LSOHC funding could be tapped to support this work. In fact, DNR and UMN worked closely with Chisago County to acquire CPL-ECP for 2026-2028 to control most of the Phragmites on public lands and waters in Chisago County!
- The leverage reflects Great Lakes regional prioritization of this work, as well as DNR's investment in acting quickly to contain and reverse the invasion in MN.

Ron Schara: Leverage dollars confusing. \$50,000 versus \$250,000???

- See Lang response, above. Sorry it was poorly defined in initial submission.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Living Shallow Lakes and Wetlands Enhancement & Restoration Initiative

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Living Shallow Lakes and Wetlands Enhancement & Restoration Initiative

Funds Requested: \$11,776,000

Proposal #: WRE04

Manager's Name: John Lindstrom

Title: Manager of Conservation Programs - Minnesota

Organization: Ducks Unlimited

Email: jlindstrom@ducks.org

Office Number:

Mobile Number: 3202128018

Members Baird and Suss: "High/significant personnel costs" - DU is one of the few (only?) non-profit NGO that both receives OHF appropriations and has Professional Engineering (PE) staff including Engineers, Engineering Techs, Surveyors, Draftsmen, etc. About half of our personnel request is to fund our PE staff to on work on the type of project described in the proposal. If DU did not have our own PE staff, we would have a reduced personnel ask and instead have a much more robust Professional Services budget request, as some other OHF receiving entities do, to pay for profit engineering firms to complete the same types of work.

Member Schara: "consider amount of unspent funds" - Once our ML26 money comes on board, we will have over \$17 million in unspent funds. This program currently spends \$6 million+ annually of our OHF allocations, spread out over 2-3 open appropriations with an expectation of growth and acceleration of spending as our team settles into their professional roles. As of right now, we already have approximately \$5 million of contract expense for planned work in the current FY to restore and enhance wetlands and grasslands. A large chunk of this work is already under contract and construction has started. That contract expense, plus the cost in personnel, travel, seed materials, equipment, and tools will push us well over the \$6 million mark again this FY. We also have two very large restoration projects that will eat up large chunks of funding next spring/summer too.

Member Schara: "difference between WA03 and WRE04" - WA03 is DU's land acquisition program, buying land from willing sellers and restoring those properties and ultimately transferring them to MNDNR or USFWS as new public property. DU's WRE04 works to improve wetland and grassland habitats on lands and habitats that are already permanently protected as state waters, WPAs, WMAs, AMAs, Park Reserves, easements, NWRs, etc.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Mud River Enhancement Phase II

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Mud River Enhancement Phase II

Funds Requested: \$3,200,000

Proposal #: WRE05

Manager's Name: Tammy Audette

Title: Administrator

Organization: Red Lake Watershed District

Email: tammy.audette@redlakewatershed.org

Office Number: 2186815800

Mobile Number: 2186815800

Burkel - Net Local Tax Impact Score: 10/10. Top tier enhancement/restoration of existing habitat with strong fiscal fit, public **benefit, and no acquisition concerns.** We concur. This project has strong local support.

Eggerling - Not scalable Phase II funding request will complete the project; it will be difficult to further scale this project.

Hartwell - What will happen in flood events greater than the 10 year flood. Will that harm the work being done and the refuge? If full funding is **not granted, what happens?** The project will be inundated and unaffected by floods greater than a 10 year flood. Harmful erosive velocities will be dissipated as the water expands across a wide floodplain. The project will proceed with as much construction accomplished as funding will allow, however, the functional utility of the project will be limited. Phase II funding request allows the project to be completed in its entirety and provide habitat benefits as soon as practical.

Kucharski - Coming back for phase II? Doesn't look like Phase I money has been **tapped??** As of August 2026, the Phase I contract finalization is in process. Leveraged funds are being spent to move the project forward.

Lang - What does the diversion **structure look like?** The diversion structures (2) will be earthen and rock barriers placed in existing ditches to divert flow into the project area.

Palmer - Phase 2, River Flow redesign/meander with flood control structures plus 372 acres of restoration on public lands, **20% leverage.** In consideration of both Phase 1 and Phase II we consider the leverage to be closer to 10% of the total project cost.

Schara - One and done. Correct, when Phase II receives full funding, the project will be complete.

Suss - Problem caused by drainage, yet see no plan component that addresses changing farming practices to reduce runoff and **preserve project benefits.** As part of this project, the RLWD is proactively working with stakeholders within the watershed (e.g. One Watershed One Plan) to address water quality and quantity issues that impact not only the project area and project success, but the watershed as a whole.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Otter and Campbell Lakes Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Phase 1

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Otter and Campbell Lakes Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Phase 1

Funds Requested: \$3,000,000

Proposal #: WRE06

Manager's Name: Michael Stifter

Title: Public Works Director

Organization: City of Hutchinson

Email: mstifter@hutchinsonmn.gov

Office Number: 320-234-4212

Mobile Number: 320-583-4826

The Otter and Campbell Lakes Habitat Enhancement and Restoration Project is a key component of a broader, multiphase effort aimed at improving water quality, restoring ecological function, and protecting long term recreational and environmental value within the Hutchinson-area watershed. Questions regarding ongoing sedimentation, project permanence, upstream conditions, and cost effectiveness are understandable, and this response clarifies how this phase fits into the larger strategy to reduce sediment transport and strengthen ecological resilience.

Addressing Ongoing Sedimentation After Removal

A central concern is how sedimentation will be managed after this phase's sediment removal. While this phase focuses on restoring lake depth and improving habitat conditions, it is not intended to function in isolation. It works in tandem with upstream watershed assessments, shoreline stabilization initiatives, and current and future phases that target sediment sources. One such effort—the construction of an upstream forebay—is in the permit review process and expected to begin in 2026 or 2027. This project is not simply a dredging effort; it is a foundational step within an integrated sediment management system.

Sediment accumulation in the lakes has taken place over decades due to upland runoff, agricultural drainage infrastructure, bank erosion, and stormwater inputs. Restoring lake depth and function now is necessary, but so is reducing the rate of future deposition. This phase includes a detailed sediment budget analysis that will guide future best management practices upstream, such as streambank stabilization, vegetative buffers, optimized crossings, and targeted stormwater improvements. These measures will substantially slow the pace of future sedimentation and help ensure the longevity of restoration investments.

The City continues to collaborate closely with the McLeod County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). Their first upstream project is now in implementation and will create three water and sediment control basins. Additional projects are under discussion with farmers in the watershed, and these efforts complement both the forebay work and this initial lake restoration phase.

Is the Work a Temporary Fix?

A related concern is whether dredging the lakes without upstream improvements would be merely a temporary fix. We agree that upstream work is essential, which is precisely why this project was designed as multiphase from

the outset. This phase “resets” the lake system by removing sediment that now limits aquatic habitat, recreational use, and water quality. Once depth and habitat conditions are restored, upstream improvements can reduce future sediment loading and extend the life and impact of this work.

Importantly, the current degraded condition of the lakes limits the effectiveness of upstream improvements themselves. Reduced depths, higher turbidity, diminished oxygen levels, and compromised vegetation make it difficult for the system to fully respond to upstream BMPs. Restoring essential lake functions now lays the groundwork for greater ecological benefit from future watershed improvements. Without this coordinated approach, watershed scale restoration would be far less effective.

Cost, Scalability, and Acre Based Value

Questions were also raised about cost per acre and scalability. Lake restoration—particularly sediment removal—is inherently more expensive per acre than typical upland projects, but the benefits scale significantly due to the lakes’ central ecological and recreational roles. Enhancing depth, water quality, and habitat conditions in Otter and Campbell Lakes creates downstream benefits, improves overall watershed resilience, strengthens recreational resources, and forms the base for future phases.

The project has also been evaluated for leverage opportunities. With approximately 10 percent leverage already committed, staff continue discussions with partners such as the SWCD to expand non-city funding in future phases. Because this work supports water quality, wildlife habitat, fisheries, recreation, and hydrology, it is well positioned for additional external partnerships.

Upstream Land Management and Re-sedimentation Concerns

Regarding upstream land management, conditions vary widely. Some parcels already have naturalized areas that function effectively, while others include slopes, agricultural lands, and drainage systems with higher sediment contributions. This phase includes assessments to identify priority sites for BMPs. The City is not relying solely on landowner actions; future phases anticipate a combination of voluntary partnerships, targeted restoration, and strategic infrastructure improvements. Although no new public land is included in this phase, the project’s watershed scale approach emphasizes collaboration backed by data gathered through this phase.

In closing, this phase is a necessary and well supported reestablishment of lake function that sets the stage for meaningful, long term sediment control and ecological improvement. By pairing immediate lake level restoration with strategic planning for upstream actions, the project is designed to deliver both near term results and durable resilience for the entire watershed.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

2027 Riparian Habitat Protection In the kettle and Snake River Watersheds

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: 2027 Riparian Habitat Protection In the kettle and Snake River Watersheds

Funds Requested: \$4,000,000

Proposal #: HA01

Manager's Name: Paul Swanson

Title: District Manager

Organization: Pine County Soil and Water Conservation District

Email: paul.swanson@pinecountymn.gov

Office Number: 320-216-4241

Mobile Number:

Member Kucharski Lots remaining from existing fund? The ML2024 appropriation does not have any funds available for additional landowner payments. Easement applications have been accepted for all available funding and easements working towards recording. The ML2026 appropriation was just received on July 1, 2026, and we anticipate applications to be submitted for funding August 2026 that would utilize roughly half of the \$856,000 available for landowner payments.

Member Palmer Phase 3? Prior Phases include ML2021, 2024, and 2026. **Goal 75% of watershed attached land??** It has been shown that once a watershed's lands fall below 75% natural cover, water quality and other resource conditions may begin to decline. By enrolling land in protection programs, like RIM, it assures a certain percentage of land will stay in natural cover. If we can reach 75% protected acres in a watershed or sub-watershed, water quality will be protected while maintaining or improving habitat benefits. Our goal is to help enroll acres into RIM to work towards bringing the Kettle and Snake River Watersheds back towards that 75% mark to help protect and improve water quality. RIM is one of several programs local partners are utilizing to protect acreage in these watersheds. In our visual application attachment, we state we want to increase the protected acres in the Kettle watershed to 58% and the Snake Watershed to 50% in the next 10 years. **What is total amount of acreage in watershed that you are trying to get easements on?** In the next 10 years we hope to add an additional 9,532 acres of protection in the Kettle Watershed, and an additional 7,453 acres of protection in the Snake Watershed. RIM is one of several programs local partners are utilizing to protect acreage in these watersheds.

Member Suss How many parcels would actually be developed in a way that results in construction if not placed under easement? Reducing parcel sizes – regardless of whether they are eventually developed for residential or recreational uses – fragments landscapes, increases the number of people using the land and the variety of management goals and strategies the land sees, which in turn reduces our collective ability to preserve and support contiguous areas of higher quality wildlife habitat. RIM easements permit a narrower set of uses and management activities to occur on the land and involve the assistance of Soil and Water Conservation Districts and often the approval of BWSR staff prior to initiating activities. RIM programs, through their prioritization, scoring, and ranking criteria, seek to create complexes of easements and other protected lands in order to form larger blocks of protected habitat complexes. **Would part a parcel still see construction of a "house in the woods" on non RIM acres?** While the landowner may choose which acres are enrolled in a RIM easement, BWSR works with landowners and SWCDs to create boundaries and complexes that best support habitat protection.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Cannon River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - 16

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Cannon River Watershed Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - 16

Funds Requested: \$12,138,300

Proposal #: HA03

Manager's Name: Jennifer Tonko

Title: Executive Director

Organization: Executive Director

Email: jennifer@cleanriverpartners.org

Office Number: 507-786-3913

Mobile Number:

Unspent Funds

Hartwell - **Do not understand the \$300K remaining** for CRP to do program coordination, administration and outreach on prior appropriations that are for the most part, already spent

Response: Program coordination and administration expenses continue throughout the lifespan of each grant.

Landowner outreach is also ongoing, building relationships and identifying potential future acquisition opportunities that advance the partnership's habitat goals. We are on track to spend the remaining funds within the lifespan of the relevant appropriations.

Project Cost

Palmer - Phase 16, Acq 600 acres @ \$11942/acre plus Restore 471 acres @ \$10558/acre???? **Why so high for restoration costs**, Open to public use, 3% leverage, Goal?? Does this include the Kaplan's Woods area??

Response: Restoration pricing has increased annually, the numbers proposed align with the bids we are receiving for similar work within the watershed. Many of the projects need multiple stages of restoration completed, from initial removal, follow up, corrective work, native seeding, and monitoring. Habitat projects are occurring on ravines, wetlands, and rusty patch bumblebee zones which limits machinery allowed on site creating more hand work/labor hours which increases the price.

Leverage

Burkel - Net Local Tax Impact Score: 6.5/10. Good restoration/enhancement and public access, but 600 acres of fee acquisition and **low leverage limit priority**

Response: This partnership has a strong track record of always meeting or exceeding our leverage goals. The leverage included in our proposal is a conservative estimate of the leverage we expect to provide to this funding request. Applying for LSOHC funding more than a year before funds become available makes it difficult to accurately project leverage amounts, or sources at the proposal stage. We anticipate securing additional leverage to this proposal, however we did not feel comfortable including it as committed or confirmed at this stage.

Kaplan's Woods

Palmer - Phase 16, Acq 600 acres @ \$11942/acre plus Restore 471 acres @ \$10558/acre???? Why so high for restoration costs, Open to public use, 3% leverage, Goal?? **Does this include the Kaplan's Woods area??**

Response: Kaplan's Woods is included in this proposal. Owatonna is looking into regional park designation for Kaplan's Woods. After working with City of Owatonna staff, we have narrowed the work to highly degraded temporal wetlands within the preserve that city natural resource staff has limited knowledge on restoring. Once restoration is completed by Great River Greening on these wetlands, city staff will be able to continue the maintenance work. Temporal wetlands are vital habitat for amphibians, reptiles and waterfowl as well as water holding capacity during floods. The location of Kaplan's Woods in relation to other R/E projects upstream and downstream makes preservation of the biodiversity of Kaplan's Woods vital to the health of the Straight River habitat corridor this program has underway and planning in the future.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Dakota County Habitat Protection/Restoration Phase IX
ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up
08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Dakota County Habitat Protection/Restoration Phase IX

Funds Requested: \$4,942,400

Proposal #: HA04

Manager's Name: Alexander Scurto

Title: Senior Project Manager

Organization: Dakota County

Email: alex.scurto@co.dakota.mn.us

Office Number: 952-891-7827

Mobile Number: 630-577-7767

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to questions/comments in advance. Please see a list of responses below;

Question/Comment: *"Spending restoration dollars on "soon to be protected" land does not fit our criteria. Eased land is not open to public use as the question indicates - it might. Answer should be changed."* (David Hartwell)

Dakota County Response: Restoration dollars would not be spent on parcels until they are permanently protected per grant requirements. A natural resource management plan is developed for each property protected by an easement, which guides restoration activities once the easement is in place.

Through Dakota County's Land Conservation Program, eased land may be open for public use at the discretion of the landowner. This is not captured accurately in a yes/no style question. If given the opportunity when submitting the application, a "Limited" or "Maybe" third option would be the most appropriate answer to this question.

Question/Comment: *"Phase 9, Restore 1361 acres on easements @ \$2693/acre plus 176 acres of new easements @ \$7259/acre, some easements may allow public use?? 36% leverage, history of unspent funds 2018-2022, How much have they had to return - past audit issues?? - Vote no until past \$\$ are spent?"* (Darrel Palmer)

Dakota County Response: The decision to allow public access on a conservation easement is determined by the private landowner. Regarding Dakota County's active, or recently expired, OHF awards, there will be a significant amount of unspent funds that will be returned. Approximately \$875,000 will be returned from Dakota County's ML18 appropriation and approximately \$2,500,000 will be returned via Dakota County's ML22 appropriation. These returns are a result of planned land acquisitions that did not come to fruition late in the grant term. In addition to this, several acquisitions were determined to be ineligible for grant reimbursement due to errors made by Dakota County during the acquisition process. Since ML18 has expired and Dakota County can no longer acquire new easements under ML22, we will not be able to spend down these grants as intended. Dakota County is actively working with LSOHC staff to determine budget availability under ML22 until that award expires on June 30, 2027.

By the time ML27 funds are made available in July 2027, Dakota County will only have one active OHF grant (ML19) which is comparatively in much better shape in terms of anticipated spend down. Meeting and working with both the LSOHC staff and our grants manager at the DNR, we are very confident that corrections have been made in our procedures that will prevent such issues in the future. Evidence of the effectiveness of these changes is that a conservation easement was successfully acquired in June 2026 using ML 22 funding, documentation for which has been submitted to the DNR.

Question/Comment: "***Amount of unspent dollars is a big problem***" (Ron Schara)

Dakota County Response: Dakota County agrees that the amount of unspent funds under previous appropriations is unfortunate and represents missed opportunities for collaboration and further OHF-funded conservation. As mentioned previously, the unspent funds can be attributed to parcels that fell through during acquisition negotiations as well as acquisitions that were disallowed for grant reimbursement. Due to the voluntary nature of Dakota County's program, landowners can and will sometimes back out prior to the acquisitions being finalized. When this happens in the back half of the grant term, it can be challenging to find approved parcel(s) to make up for the loss in planned grant funds. For the acquisitions that were disallowed, these were expenses that would have otherwise utilized available grant funds. Dakota County has met with LSOHC and DNR Grants staff extensively about these past issues and now have protocols in place to prevent errors such as these from happening in the future. A successful easement acquisition in June 2026 demonstrated the effectiveness of internal process improvement.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - ML2027

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Fisheries Habitat Protection on Strategic North Central Minnesota Lakes - ML2027

Funds Requested: \$8,476,000

Proposal #: HA05

Manager's Name: Annie Knight

Title: Executive Director

Organization: Northern Waters Land Trust

Email: AnnieK@nwlt-mn.org

Office Number: 218-547-4510

Mobile Number:

1. Rep. Burkel - Net Local Tax Impact Score: 4.5/10. Strong fisheries science and public access, but entirely fee acquisition with no restoration/enhancement and modest leverage.

Regarding restoration/enhancement: NWLT does not conduct restoration and enhancement work but instead focuses on the acquisition and permanent protection of priority habitat, with properties subsequently conveyed to long-term public managing entities. Those entities are then able to incorporate restoration and habitat enhancement into their ongoing management of the property, consistent with their habitat goals for the broader complex and the requirements of the NOFR.

Regarding leverage: We set a leverage goal of 10% of requested acquisition funds, which we have consistently exceeded in previous phases. Since the program's inception, Northern Waters Land Trust and Minnesota Land Trust have generated approximately \$6.8 million in additional conservation value through landowner contributions and other sources of leverage.

2. David Hartwell - 50% of funds remain from FY 23 FY24 and virtually all of FY25 (and FY 26). Are additional funds double/triple what has been funded in the last 4 years really necessary at this time?

The 50% referenced includes funds awarded to and expenditures by both Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) and Northern Waters Land Trust (NWLT). MLT is not requesting additional funds this year (ML2027) as it works through its remaining balances and grant deliverables.

For NWLT as a standalone recipient, however, only approximately 3% of awarded funds from FY22 and FY23 remain, meaning 97% of those funds have been spent. NWLT has completed its acquisition work under these phases and is currently awaiting completion of DNR IDP work under Phase 8 and MLT's completion of its grant deliverables under Phase 9. ML24 is also 98% spent out presently (80% spent with another 18% of funds committed to pending acquisitions).

While spending under ML25 and ML26 is still getting underway, NWLT has already committed approximately 90% of those funds to active acquisition projects. These commitments include projects with due diligence underway and, in some cases, purchase agreements in place, most of which were identified or advanced after this proposal was submitted.

As of August 2026, approximately 94% of NWLT's open appropriation funds have either been spent or committed. With only about 4% remaining, including funds that just became available in July, the proposed funding would help maintain program continuity and ensure NWLT has sufficient financial capacity to respond when high-priority

conservation opportunities arise.

3. Matt Kucharski - coldwater watersheds, 45% of open funds spent (ok)

See above response

4. Darrell Palmer - Phase 13, Goal??, Acq 875 acres of shoreline, \$9686/acre, open to public use, 8% leverage

The goal of the Fisheries Habitat program is to protect the watershed conditions necessary to sustain Minnesota's highest-quality coldwater fisheries over the long term. More specifically, we are working toward 75% protection of priority coldwater lake watersheds, with an emphasis on Tier 1 and Tier 2 lakes that still retain viable coldwater habitat and are most likely to benefit from proactive protection.

The 75% target is grounded in Minnesota DNR Fisheries research indicating that phosphorus concentrations remain near natural background levels when approximately 75% of a lake's watershed is protected and left undisturbed. This provides a useful watershed-scale conservation target because protecting the land around a lake is one of the most effective ways to maintain the water quality and cold, oxygen-rich conditions that coldwater fish require.

Our goal is not simply to acquire a certain number of acres, but to strategically move priority watersheds toward that level of protection. We therefore focus acquisitions on parcels that fill gaps in existing protection, expand contiguous habitat complexes, protect forested shorelines and hydrologically connected lands, and face meaningful development or fragmentation risk.

The 875 acres proposed in this phase are a strategic increment toward that larger goal. Since the program began, NWLT and its partners have made meaningful progress toward the 75% threshold on several priority lakes. Continued investment allows us to build on that progress, complete important habitat connections, and protect remaining high-quality lands before they are subdivided or developed.

Ultimately, the desired outcome is resilient coldwater lake systems with enough intact, protected watershed to maintain water quality and coldwater fish habitat in the face of increasing development pressure and climate-related stress. The land acquired through the program will be permanently protected and transferred to public ownership, creating a lasting conservation legacy.

5. Ted Suss's trails question - defer to council (respectfully).

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Metro Big Rivers Phase 17

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Metro Big Rivers Phase 17

Funds Requested: \$20,569,000

Proposal #: HA06

Manager's Name: Neal Feeken

Title: Executive Director

Organization: MN Valley Trust (Metro Big Rivers)

Email: nfeeken@mnvalleytrust.org

Office Number: 952-207-0247

Mobile Number: 952-207-0247

If the restoration and enhancement is being contracted out why such a high amount for supplies/equipment/tools??? (Baird)

Supplies/materials costs are largely native seed and plant material associated with restoration work. For FMR, the subcontract line does not include seed and plant material; these costs are separated into the supplies/materials category. This gives FMR more control to create seed mixes that are best suited to each site and to the habitat goals of each project, rather than using standard mixes provided by vendors and incorporating those costs into subcontractors.

FMR using \$ to improve public access (does not seem like a habitat project). (Hartwell)

The goal of FMR's proposed restoration and enhancement funding is first and foremost to restore and enhance habitat. All R/E work follows detailed natural resource management plans designed to benefit wildlife and overall plant and animal diversity. However, benefits of this work also include water quality improvements (largely due to focused erosion work and replacing shallow-rooted invasive plants with deep-rooted native species) and benefits to public recreation, including hunters, anglers, birdwatchers, and other outdoor enthusiasts. This is largely accomplished through removing buckthorn and other invasive shrubs that create barriers to recreation and site use, as well as improving overall site aesthetics through increasing plant diversity. No funding is used for any direct access projects.

MLT's personnel is as much as contracts for restoration. Please explain. (Hartwell)

MLT's personnel costs are conservative estimates based on 25 similar projects over the last 8 years. Land Trust easements are not prescriptive when it comes to land management, and working with private landowners to do R/E projects presents unique challenges that require staff time. A significant amount of staff time is dedicated to dialog and education with the private landowners to bring the landowners along, making sure the project benefits wildlife while meeting the needs of the landowner. This landowner 'hand-holding' often continues over the duration of the project. Additionally, the Land Trust doesn't contract out design or construction management to others. We have in-house capacity and expertise, and our staff time includes:

- 1) Project identification and prioritization
- 2) Pre-construction field mapping
- 3) Project design/scope of work development
- 4) Coordination meetings with Landowners, partners and refuge staff
- 5) Preparing and executing bidding and contract documents
- 6) In-field construction inspection and contractor management
- 7) Status reports, final reports and documentation

Finally, anytime MLT works in the Metro area, where parcel sizes are smaller, there are certain fixed costs per project that skew the cost per acre when compared to larger projects in outstate Minnesota, especially as related to staff time. However, R/E projects are an essential tool for conservation in Minnesota. In particular, MLT's R/E

parcel list for this proposal includes projects that are adjacent to the Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge. Work on these parcels will help buffer and extend the important habitat complex that exists on these prized public lands.

MVT is showing \$350K of DSS as a match but no personnel? (Hartwell)

MVT is proposing to use private funds for all personnel costs. The DSS offered as match represents 21% of the contract line item that would normally be eligible for DSS reimbursement.

BIG ask, lots of opportunity but also need to scale. CPA highest in category (because metro??) Acquisition so maybe OK. (Kucharski)

Opportunities to protect ecologically valuable lands continue to present themselves in the metro area. The proposal represents what we believe is a realistic potential for acquisition projects during the course of the grant period.

Phase 17, Acq 1100 acres @ \$15011/acre plus restore/enhance 864 acres @ 4696/acre, Open to public use, 6% leverage, Goal ?? (Palmer)

The Metro Big Rivers Partnership program goals are not centered so much on a prescriptive number of acres purchased or treated. Rather, our goal is to protect, enhance and restore as many high-quality priority acres as quickly as we can. The pressures on landscapes within metropolitan areas present unique challenges for land conservation. They also present unique opportunities to make new and additional lands more easily accessible to the majority of Minnesota's population. By the nature of their geography many of the MBR projects are smaller by acreage than some other programs. This fact does not negate their value as sources of important habitat, clean water and recreational opportunity, rather the limited amount of metro habitats available make these programs that much more important to complete.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Protecting Minnesota's Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance - Phase 6

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Protecting Minnesota's Lakes of Outstanding Biological Significance - Phase 6

Funds Requested: \$7,330,000

Proposal #: HA07

Manager's Name: Annie Knight

Title: Executive Director

Organization: Northern Waters Land Trust

Email: AnnieK@nwlt-mn.org

Office Number: 218-547-4510

Mobile Number:

Suzanne Baird - Question - Who will eventually own - Federal is listed but no Federal designation is listed - explain who the Federal ownership will be.

At this time, NWLT does not have a specific project identified for federal conveyance. NWLT's primary public land partners are the Minnesota DNR and local counties, and the vast majority of our acquisitions are ultimately conveyed to one of these entities. Including federal ownership in the proposal was intended to preserve NWLT's ability to convey a property to an appropriate federal agency if an opportunity arises during the grant period and the agency is determined to be the best long-term steward of the property. Any such conveyance would be consistent with the grant's conservation objectives and applicable requirements.

Rep. John Burkel - Net Local Tax Impact Score: 5/10. Excellent lake science and county approval, but fee acquisition-only, no restoration, anticipated leverage, and slow spending.

Regarding restoration/enhancement: NWLT does not conduct restoration and enhancement work but instead focuses on the acquisition and permanent protection of priority habitat, with properties subsequently conveyed to long-term public managing entities. Those entities are then able to incorporate restoration and habitat enhancement into their ongoing management of the property, consistent with their habitat goals for the broader complex and the requirements of the NOFR.

Regarding leverage: We set a leverage goal of 10% of requested acquisition funds, which we have consistently exceeded in previous phases. Since the program's inception, Northern Waters Land Trust and Minnesota Land Trust have generated approximately \$1.19 million in additional conservation value through landowner contributions and other sources of leverage.

David Hartwell - Not sure I understand the difference between this and HA05 other than geography - why 2 proposals? Seems like a lost of unspent funds "moving through acquisition process" (but not committed?)

The Fisheries Habitat Protection Program focuses on a relatively small number of deep, clear coldwater lakes that

have the greatest potential to retain cold, oxygenated habitat as the climate warms. The program specifically targets the watersheds of these lakes to reduce nutrient and sediment inputs and protect the deep-water habitat needed by coldwater fish such as tullibees, lake whitefish, and lake trout.

The LOBS Program encompasses a much broader group of lakes identified by the Minnesota DNR as having exceptional biological significance, including outstanding shoreline habitat and water quality. These lakes support a wider diversity of fish, wildlife, amphibians, and unique aquatic plant communities. The LOBS program therefore places greater emphasis on protecting the overall biological integrity of these exceptional lake systems and their surrounding habitats.

There is some overlap between the programs, but they are not duplicative. The Fisheries Program is specifically designed around protecting coldwater fisheries and the watershed conditions that sustain them, while the LOBS Program addresses broader biological diversity and exceptional lake habitat across a larger number of priority lakes. Maintaining both programs allows NWLT to pursue complementary conservation priorities and respond to a wider range of high-value lake protection opportunities.

Please see response to Ron Schara's question below for explanation on unspent funds.

Schara - unspent funds

The awarded and spent funds indicated in the proposal include funds awarded to and expenditures by both Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) and Northern Waters Land Trust (NWLT). MLT is not requesting additional funds this year (ML2027) as it works through its remaining balances and grant deliverables.

For NWLT as a standalone recipient, however, only approximately 5% of awarded funds from FY23 and FY24 remain, meaning 95% have been spent. NWLT has completed its acquisition work under these phases and is currently awaiting MLT's completion of its grant deliverables before closing these out and returning any remaining funds to OHF.

While spending under ML25 is still getting underway, NWLT has already spent or committed approximately 85% of ML25 funds to active acquisition projects. These commitments include projects with due diligence underway and, in some cases, purchase agreements in place, most of which were identified or advanced after the proposal was submitted. While NWLT has not yet begun spending under ML26, the current acquisition pipeline suggests that these funds will likewise be deployed well within the grant timeline requirements.

As of August 2026, including the ML26 appropriation, approximately 65% of NWLT's open appropriation funds have either been spent or committed, with more high-priority projects in the pipeline. This demonstrates that the remaining funds are actively supporting an ongoing acquisition program rather than sitting unused. The proposed funding would help maintain program continuity and ensure NWLT has sufficient financial capacity to respond when high-priority conservation opportunities arise.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

RIM Priority Habitat

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: RIM Priority Habitat

Funds Requested: \$5,000,000

Proposal #: HA08

Manager's Name: Kevin Roth

Title: Easement Programs Coordinator

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Email: kevin.roth@state.mn.us

Office Number:

Mobile Number: 651-539-2521

HA08 RIM Priority Habitat

Hartwell Part time person doing less than 2 easements a year seems high.

For ML25 and ML26, all new funds were committed to new easements within the first month of the appropriation. The ML27 request is for 7 easements and 380 acres; we anticipate demand to remain high. The 380 acres is estimated to be the highest land values in the state in case we only received high scoring applications from Rock County, which is unlikely. It is likely more acres are acquired, but we estimate easement payment costs on the high side not knowing where applications will come in.

The BWSR personnel budget includes staff time for program management, easement acquisition and engineering for potential wetland restorations.

2 easements for 350 acres of prime habitat are being acquired in Douglas and Stevens counties using the ML26 \$1.8 million appropriation and a portion of remaining ML25 funds. The cost per acre for the landowner payments was \$5,831/acre.

Kucharski Seems high on CPA for easements? \$13k/acre?

The cost per acre for statewide programs is an estimate based on both past averages and the most expensive areas of the state to acquire land. We will likely end up with more acres and a lower overall cost per acre than the estimate in the proposal. Since the acres restored through this proposal are also placed under easement, the output tables of this proposal only include easement acres. Acres restored are not included in the output tables to avoid double counting the acres protected and the acres restored. This proposal also accounts for prevailing wage for restoration and archaeological surveys, which for planning purposes, has significantly increased BWSR's planned restoration cost.

Some recent land sales in southern MN have been over \$15,000/acre for prime farmland.

The ML26 appropriation for this program will be funding a parcel in Douglas County at \$4,750/acre and a parcel in Stevens County at \$6,500/acre. To reiterate that our payments don't compete with prime farmland rates, below are some statistics from land sales and values in these same areas:

- Stevens County: A recent land sale was \$8,940/acre.
 - o The MN Department of Revenue (MN DOR)'s data for average tillable land value in Stevens County is \$8,300/acre.
- Douglas County: Tillable land sale in 2025 was , \$7,500/acre.
 - o MN DOR's data for average tillable land value in Douglas is \$6,000/acre.

Lang open to public? Says yes on proposals, but has a explanations of sorts

6,600 acres of BWSR easements (RIM and CREP) were enrolled in Walk-in Access (WIA) in 2025. That means 22% of all WIA acres are on BWSR easements that were open to public hunting in Minnesota.

Priority is given to easements adjacent to or near existing public land helping to increase wildlife benefits in that area, meaning wildlife populations are stabilized and continue to grow even when a landowner is not open to selling the land to expand public property and access.

Palmer Phase 5???, Easements 385 acres @ \$12,987/acre???, RIM Easement is not open to public access but has public benefit based on potential protection of habitat, good spending history, No leverage

See response above for information on cost/acre entails and see response to Lang's comment for Walk-In Access (WIA) land on BWSR easements – 22% of all WIA acres were on BWSR easements in 2025, that's approximately 6,600 acres open to the public.

High demand for private land easements and a successful program has led to fast spending for this program.

Suss: Of the 178,000+ CRP acres referenced in the narrative do you expect to be re-enrolled by owners? Close to prime land price. If property remains in private ownership, how is the \$10,000 per easement spent for stewardship?

In Minnesota, approximately 67% of land was re-enrolled into CRP for 2026. Nationally, 36% of CRP acres are re-enrolled. Of that 36%, nearly 80% of those acres are returned to crop production (USDA stats).

See response to above for information on the cost per acre and comparisons to average land values in MN.

The \$10,000 per easement for stewardship is invested per Minnesota Statutes § 103B.103 – Easement Stewardship Accounts. This account is managed by the State Board of Investment to maximize long-term gains to help with the cost of easement inspections and management. 5% of the account balance is appropriated each year to BWSR for easement stewardship that includes repair or replacement of structures and monitoring of easements. BWSR is required by this statute to invest financially for each easement acquired.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase 15

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase 15

Funds Requested: \$16,585,600

Proposal #: HA09

Manager's Name: David Ruff

Title: Associate Director of Forest Strategies

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

Email: david.ruff@tnc.org

Office Number: (507) 646-9662

Mobile Number: (507) 261-4954

Councilmembers,

Thank you for the time and attention you spent evaluating every LSOHC proposal this year. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to the comments you noted during your review. Specifically, we'd like to clarify three points noted by various Councilmembers.

1. **Unspent funds:** (Councilmembers Schara and Suss)

The table in the proposal that shows nearly \$20M in unspent funds available for our partnership is an outdated picture of our program's financial balance. Our partnership has an urgent need for additional funds. Because of the strong interest in conservation easements among landowners here, Minnesota Land Trust has a pipeline of projects in Southeast Minnesota that significantly exceeds our available funding. The Nature Conservancy has restoration and enhancement projects identified to utilize its full remaining allocations and will need new funding to initiate any new projects. In addition, Trust for Public Land will spend nearly all its existing funding for land acquisition on the Wacouta Bay project. After that project closes in late 2026, there will be no remaining funding for land acquisition in Southeast Minnesota until funding awarded to this proposal becomes available.

The discrepancy between what's included in the proposal and the actual obligated funds is caused by the source of the proposal's figures and the pace of activity our partnership saw in the second half of FY26. The numbers shown in the proposal are based on a reporting period that ended in December 2025. Since that time, our partnership completed several high-value projects. We also have multiple projects with funding either internally allocated or legally obligated that will use up much of our remaining funding in FY27.

Thanks to several fee and conservation easement acquisitions that closed in the final quarter of FY26, our program spent roughly \$5 million from January to July 2026. This included over \$900,000 spent on 4 conservation easements closed by Minnesota Land Trust to protect 416 acres and \$1,426,800 spent by The Nature Conservancy on 2 fee acquisitions protecting 235 acres.

More importantly, we have over \$9 million tied to identified projects, with funds either legally obligated or internally allocated to specific projects. This includes the Wacouta Bay acquisition, which is expected to cost

\$6,175,000.

2. **Leverage:** (Councilmembers Kucharski, Palmer)

The leverage included in our proposal is a highly conservative estimate of the leverage we expect to deliver. We included private funds for unrecovered DSS spending and travel, as well as an estimated 10% of conservation easement value coming from landowner donations. While we did not include any additional public funds at this stage, we intend to leverage these funds with other potential funding sources as the opportunities become available.

As the Council is aware, applying for LSOHC funding more than a year before funds become available makes it difficult to predict leverage amounts or sources at the proposal stage. While the added specificity offered in the proposal template this year helps clarify the status of leverage described, there is funding we anticipate pursuing as leverage that is far enough in the future we did not feel comfortable including it yet. Our program has a proven track record of exceeding our leverage goals. Across completed appropriations we've received in the past, we've delivered 141% of the leverage described in our proposals.

3. **Personnel Spending:** (Councilmember Suss)

In Councilmember Suss' comments, he noted that our proposal's Personnel spending is over 10% of our total budget. Our Personnel spending is almost exactly 10% of our total budget and only exceeds 10% when combined with the DSS budget line.

One major factor in our higher personnel costs is TNC's restoration and enhancement crew, which does direct implementation of restoration and enhancement activities, similar to DNR's Roving Crew. This crew takes on small scale projects with big impacts on wildlife and significantly increases the prescribed fire capacity in Southeast MN. They are the most cost-effective strategy for R/E work.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Phase X

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Wild Rice Shoreland Protection Phase X

Funds Requested: \$3,500,000

Proposal #: HA10

Manager's Name: Kevin Roth

Title: Easement Programs Coordinator

Organization: Board of Water and Soil Resources

Email: kevin.roth@state.mn.us

Office Number:

Mobile Number: 651-539-2521

Burkel: Net Local Tax Impact Score: 10/10. Wild rice shoreland protection uses voluntary easements with no fee acquisition; no restoration and no leverage reduce score.

There may be some forestry practices completed on these easements to improve habitat that would utilize other funding sources. This is not guaranteed so we do not have this listed as match.

Palmer Phase 10, RIM Easements @ \$4166/acre, no leverage, Goal?

This program has been around for over 10 years and will continue to be a voluntary option for landowners as long as demand remains high. There are many wild rice shoreland areas that are vulnerable to development and need protection.

Private land conservation offers a more cost-effective strategy for expanding habitat and providing state-level ecological benefits when compared to the cost of public land acquisition. BWSR easements allow private landowners to retain ownership. Along with the ongoing responsibility of paying taxes, basic management is also the responsibility of the landowner.

Suss: Are the 12 parcels ID'd or is that an estimate of the number these funds will acquire? Are entire parcels placed under easement or just shoreline? How subject are these parcels to development?

Specific sign-up criteria was attached to the proposal therefore a parcel list was not required to be submitted. The 12 parcels is an estimate based on the average cost per easement and average size of those easements from past appropriations and current land values. The total number of parcels may vary depending on the size of the parcels enrolled during this phase.

Larger blocks of habitat are placed under easement to help provide additional protection outside of just the shoreline. Research has been done showing that contributing watershed with 75% protection achieve water quality and habitat goals. Program scoring and ranking puts an emphasis on the percentage of a parcel enrolled so large portions are not left out for high density development. Smaller parcels = more habitat fragmentation.

We are looking for developable shorelines along wild rice lakes. Parcels of land that are a majority wetland or not developable are not a priority for this easement program

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Anoka Sand Plain Habitat Enhancement and Restoration - Phase 11

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Anoka Sand Plain Habitat Enhancement and Restoration - Phase 11

Funds Requested: \$5,502,000

Proposal #: HRE01

Manager's Name: Wiley Buck

Title: Senior Program Manager

Organization: Great River Greening

Email: wbuck@greatrivergreening.org

Office Number: 651-272-3981

Mobile Number: 651-318-8667

Regarding Personnel Request (4 comments - Baird, Rep. Burkel, Hartwell, Kucharski):

ACD Personnel includes crew time (including seasonal staff that are CCMI graduates) to implement projects and staff time to coordinate and implement the ASP Rare Plant Rescue Program.

Greening Personnel includes time for our field crew and grant administration; Greening will reduce our proposed personnel request by 40K.

Regarding Amount Spent (3 comments - Rep. Burkel, Palmer, Suss):

We often have R/E subcontracts extend until the end of the allocation, to maximize the amount of time for quality, sustained R/E work, leading to later reimbursement requests.

Using the Status Update method for amount spent, which includes legally obligated funds, the numbers are as follows:

ASP9 is currently at 40% (728K). One significant reason this Amount Spent remains on the lower end is because the contract cost at Bend in the River recently came in 400K under budget, a welcome development but one that has delayed our Amount Spent. We are in the later stages of moving these remaining Contract funds to treat additional acreage at Quarry Park, with a subcontract legally obligating these funds anticipated to be fully in place by fall 2026.

ASP10 (partners ACD and Greening only) is currently at 33% (632K).

Regarding Parks and Trails alternate funding (1 question - Palmer):

Neither Spirit River Natural Area nor Becker City Park are a designated Greater Minnesota Regional Park (and the LGU landowners are not pursuing that designation) and therefore do not have access to any funding from GMRPTC. Nonetheless, each of these park sites is significant acreage within a larger respective habitat core and corridor.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Beaver Creek Habitat Restoration

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Beaver Creek Habitat Restoration

Funds Requested: \$1,777,000

Proposal #: HRE02

Manager's Name: Jennifer Biederman, PhD

Title: Habitat Program Director

Organization: Minnesota Trout Unlimited

Email: jennifer.biederman@mntu.org

Office Number: 507-313-3428

Mobile Number: 507-313-3428

Better trout habitat is the purpose: Habitat in Beaver Creek is badly degraded and nearly every reach needs major help. Any number of sections of poor habitat could have been selected to begin improving this stream, but selecting these two first will also increase our understanding of how to achieve the best population increases. The purpose of this OHF project is to improve trout habitat on two reaches, both highly accessible to anglers.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Daylighting Phalen Creek - Phase 2

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Daylighting Phalen Creek - Phase 2

Funds Requested: \$6,781,400

Proposal #: HRE03

Manager's Name: Gabby Menomin

Title: Director of Land and Environment

Organization: Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi

Email: gmenomin@wakantipi.org

Office Number: (651) 370-2106

Mobile Number:

Rep. John Burkel: **Net Local Tax Impact Score: 10/10. No acquisition and strong urban habitat/public access value, but significant planning/design costs and unspent prior appropriation reduce priority.**

We did experience a delay in schedule for first appropriation. However, we are currently finishing design details with the Ramsey Washington Watershed District and the City of St. Paul and will be ready to complete that portion of the project in 2027.

David Hartwell: **What is the need for a volunteer coordinator?**

The future sites for this habitat restoration project require preparation. In partnership with the City of St. Paul, we have planned volunteer activities to support the restoration work of these sites and need a volunteer manager to handle the coordination of these activities. Additionally, our organization is responsible for ensuring the establishment of the plants that will be put in along the creek corridor from the first appropriation. A volunteer coordinator would be responsible for managing the volunteers who will help with this work as well.

Matt Kucharski: **Phase 1 predates me - would be good to learn more about progress. Metro. Will point out CPA is huge, but kind of hard to compare.**

We are finalizing the design details of the first appropriation and will begin and complete construction in 2027.

Sen Andrew Lang: **10M total for .25 miles?**

Our first appropriation was in support of daylighting the first ¼ mile of the creek, which will be completed in 2027. Our current request is to fully complete the design for the remainder of the creek channel, which totals 4 miles. A small portion of our current request is to support the first 5-year establishment period of the plants associated with the first appropriation, once construction of the creek channel and surrounding habitat has been completed.

Darrell Palmer: **Phase 2, 5 year habitat restoration project, Restore 9 acres @ \$753,489/acre???????, 14.8% leverage, Is this all considered Public Waters??, funding in 2022 + an extension largely unspent \$\$\$, Is this more of a Clean Waters project?? Seems like a poor place for habitat**

To clarify, the 5-year establishment period for the restored 9 acres is only \$250,000 of the overall project budget.

The additional request is for the design of the remaining creek corridor, which totals 4 miles.

This project is considered Public Waters, as it will all be located within City of St. Paul public property.

Due to the size, scope, and complexity of this project, we were advised to apply for LSOHC funding versus Clean

Waters.

Tom Saxhaug: **What happened to the last 4 years?**

We did experience a delay in schedule for first appropriation. However, we are currently finishing design details with the Ramsey Washington Watershed District and the City of St. Paul and will be ready to complete that portion of the project in 2027.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Enhancing Agate Bay's Coastal Wetland Habitat along the Lake Superior Shore in Lake County,
Minnesota

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Enhancing Agate Bay's Coastal Wetland Habitat along the Lake Superior Shore in Lake County, Minnesota

Funds Requested: \$745,300

Proposal #: HRE08

Manager's Name: Tara Solem

Title: Community Conservationist

Organization: Lake County (MN) Soil & Water Conservation District

Email: tara.solem@co.lake.mn.us

Office Number: 218-834-8514

Mobile Number:

The LSOHC funding proposal is part of a larger initiative in collaboration with various federal, state, and local partners to design and implement a cohesive restored habitat and natural area within the 20+ acre Lake Superior Agate Bay Waterfront. The proposed 6 acre wetland enhancement project is one piece of a larger Agate Bay waterfront plan. LSOHC funding will not be used to design or construct boardwalks, trails, or other infrastructure pieces of the overall design (pictures shown in the proposal are from a larger scale cohesive vision of the property), instead LSOHC funding will be used for design of wetland restoration and enhancement for the 16 acres of coastal wetlands that is in the Agate Bay Waterfront footprint. The wetland design will entail archeological, environmental, soils, engineering, permitting and all of the components needed for a coastal wetland enhancement design completely ready for bid in near future project implementation. The LSOHC funding proposal costs for this design project were determined from a reputable MN firm that followed industry standard accounting methods. The enhancement of habitat from this coastal wetland project provides significant beneficial habitat outcomes for fish, game and wildlife. Coastal lacustrine depressional wetlands like the ones at Agate Bay provide habitat for multiple life stages of insects, amphibians, birds and mammals. Habitat types provided by coastal wetlands include including over-wintering habitat, nesting and rearing sites for offspring, sources of nectar for obligate pollinators, cover from predators, and habitat corridors within the urban setting of Two Harbors. Cleaner water discharging into Agate Bay also provides improved water quality for fish that use Agate Bay for spawning and foraging. The current wetland habitat is degraded and enhancing the entire wetland complex will provide a biodiverse wet meadow, shrub-carr, and forested wetland habitat.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Knife River Habitat Rehabilitation Project-PH VIII

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Knife River Habitat Rehabilitation Project-PH VIII

Funds Requested: \$2,661,000

Proposal #: HRE09

Manager's Name: Blake Francis (RWF); Kevin J. Bovee (LSSA)

Title: Fiscal Manager (RWF); Project Manager (LSSA)

Organization: Lake Superior Steelhead Association (LSSA) w/Rajala Woods Foundation (RWF)

Email: blakefrancis@gmail (RWF); outriderduluth@msn.com (LSSA)

Office Number: 218/391-2487 (RWF); 218/269-7427 (LSSA)

Mobile Number:

Rep. John Burkel

Response: PH VII Status Update has been filed.

David Hartwell

Response: We cannot specifically quantify how improving the groundwater table has improved populations. It stands to reason that anything that can be done to improve the groundwater table connection to the watershed is positive, which is why the MN DNR has required us to raise the streambed to enhance this connection. Please see the following excerpt from an article prepared by the Ex. Director of the Laurentian RC & D Council:

“What was the landscape hydrology like before logging? What path did snow melt and rainfall take as it became the water feeding the flow of the North Shore streams? The original forest with its thick layer of moss and lichens covering the ground surface must have had a major role influencing stream flow at that time. Stream gauging stations didn’t exist back then; we can only make educated guesses.

Here’s my best guess. For thousands of years each pine, spruce and cedar that grew would succumb to old age or wind and finally topple to the forest floor. Many lifted soil, stone and boulders from the till with their root wads as they fell leaving rough depressions. One by one, falling over thousands of years, they left a complex surface with their downed decomposing wood. This surface, as Juni wrote, covered with the thick layer of moss and lichens, intercepted and slowed rainfall and snow melt. The mineral soil below the duff soaked up and carried much of that water slowly off the landscape as shallow groundwater or interflow. The interflow also fed the water bearing till layers supporting deeper groundwater fed springs, seeps and fractures in the bedrock that fed and maintained streamflow. Water usually flows downhill (artesian exception). The slopes carried, leaked, and wept subsurface flow into channels and drainageways also covered with the corpses of big wood to the streams carrying the big dead wood on their banks and beds providing structure, habitat, cover, and stability. The rivers back then flowed clearer, colder, with greater consistent baseflow rates and big coaster brook trout that maybe pulled off successful below barrier reproduction. “

Also: There is much more included in the .5FTE than just contract oversight. With the recent development of the “fraud, waste and abuse” mantra, the DNR/OMB is requesting much more information relating to contracts, invoicing, etc. Many more hours are required by both the Fiscal Manager and the Project Manager to satisfy these requests. Also, the Project Manager performs many more tasks that just contract oversight: arranging for needed project materials (toewood, gravel/boulders, trees for planting, hauling said trees), contacting needed contractors, ie CCM etc.

Matt Kucharski

Response: Since this project began in 2012 there have been two > 4,000 cfs floods and three >2,500 cfs floods, which have resulted in minimal damage to the stream restoration. A ten-year flood is not the worry but in this period of unknown climate changes, the 100 and even 500 year floods will be the issues and once the projects have stabilized and plantings well rooted over time, we stand a great chance of surviving those events. Climate changes also create extended dry periods increasing streamwater temps and evaporation but our projects' deeper pools, undercut toewood benches and riparian zone plantings help mitigate the damage that would be done to trout populations.

Ted Suss

Response: As stated in the Proposal for PH VIII-this will be the last proposal submitted by the Lake Superior Steelhead Association in conjunction with Rajala Woods Foundation. If funded, we should be able to seamlessly slide into PH VIII work from where PH VII ends. All design work and permitting should be complete. This fact alone could shorten the length of the funding by at least a year, possibly more. We estimate that Reach 15 is approximately 6500 linear feet in length and when added to the upstream reaches that have been addressed, there is probably close to five miles of stream affected by our various projects. All of this work has been carried out in the most productive, habitat rich segment of the main stem of the Knife River. Our projects are designed to improve spawning, summer and wintering habitats. Also, we have eliminated thousands of tons of sediment from moving downstream and out into Lake Superior by stabilizing many of the slumping banks in our project areas.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Little Cannon River Stream Habitat Restoration - Construction Phase

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Little Cannon River Stream Habitat Restoration - Construction Phase

Funds Requested: \$4,952,200

Proposal #: HRE10

Manager's Name: John Lenczewski

Title: Executive Director

Organization: Minnesota Trout Unlimited

Email: john.lenczewski@mntu.org

Office Number: 612-670-1629

Mobile Number: 612-670-1629

Timeline

Hartwell -Need better understanding of **timeline. When would construction actually start?**

Response: Construction will start in 2027. We cannot execute a large construction contract to begin construction until construction funding is secured via a ML 2027 OHF grant.

Open to Public Fishing

Schara - **Will stream be open to public fishing?**

Response: The entire length of the project is open to public fishing. MNTU only restores habitat where public angling access is permanently guaranteed. The entire project corridor is permanently protected, and public fishing access is guaranteed on this section of the Little Cannon River. The properties, both fee title and trout stream easement, are owned by the MNDNR and managed for angling as part of the Aquatic Management Area system. This section is the only public fishing access on the Little Cannon River.

Leverage

Burkel - Net Local Tax Impact Score: 10/10. High-quality construction-phase stream restoration with permanent public angling access; cost per acre and **modest leverage keep it behind top projects.**

Response: Unlike land purchases for wildlife, federal funds are not readily available to nonprofit organizations for fish habitat restoration on public lands. Nevertheless, we will continue to pursue leverage of non-OHF funds.

Unspent Funds

Kucharski - **Gave 500k last year (for evaluation? Engineering?) hasn't been spent. Should we move ahead or wait?**

Response: Funding from the LSOHC's previous recommendation became available on July 1, 2026. Grant agreements have not yet been executed by the MNDNR, but MNTU is already in the process of hiring a qualified design firm. Partners have completed some work with non-OHF funds. Design and permitting will move into high gear in September. We anticipate design and permitting work will be completed by summer 2027. Construction can begin in 2027, as soon as a ML 2027 OHF grant for construction funding becomes available.

Phases

Palmer - **Phase?? ???, Restore trout stream in SE MN, Restore @ \$35371/acre , 4% leverage, Open to public**

Response: The ML 2026 grant is limited to survey, design and permitting. This proposal seeks construction funding to begin construction as soon as permits are received in summer 2027.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Minnesota Statewide Trout Habitat Enhancement & Protection - Construction

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Minnesota Statewide Trout Habitat Enhancement & Protection - Construction

Funds Requested: \$4,085,000

Proposal #: HRE12

Manager's Name: John Lenczewski

Title: Executive Director

Organization: Minnesota Trout Unlimited

Email: john.lenczewski@mntu.org

Office Number: 6126701629

Mobile Number: 6126701629

Construction estimates: The 12 projects included in the proposal vary in size and scope. We believe the budget requested is sufficient to construct the projects.

We will be ready for construction in 2027: Funding from the LSOHC's previous recommendation became available on July 1, 2026. Although the grant agreement has not yet been executed by the MNDNR, nevertheless MNTU has been developing RFQs to hire qualified design firms. Design of the Vermillion River project is largely completed and key permit application submitted. Construction of this large project will start in 2027. Design and permitting on other projects will move into high gear in September. We anticipate design and permitting work will be completed by summer 2027. Construction can start in 2027, as soon as a ML 2027 OHF grant for construction funding becomes available.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Restoring priority habitats for Hennepin County's sensitive wildlife

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Restoring priority habitats for Hennepin County's sensitive wildlife

Funds Requested: \$6,691,400

Proposal #: HRE14

Manager's Name: Kristine Maurer

Title: Habitat Conservation Program Manager, Supervisor

Organization: Hennepin County

Email: kristine.maurer@hennepin.us

Office Number: 612-348-6570

Mobile Number: 612-235-1251

Personnel costs

Conservation work of this type, particularly in fully developed areas, requires specialized training and experience. As such, senior and supervisory-level staff are needed for the management and implementation of the grant and of our conservation projects to best ensure successful outcomes. This proposal leverages \$1,304,500 of Hennepin County personnel and DSS and \$314,800 of partner funds in support of contracts and supplies and materials.

Use of CPL?

Our grant request is well over the upper limit of the \$500K allowed for by the forthcoming Metro CPL funds. Our team has identified several other projects, separate from those identified for this funding request, that we are developing with partners in preparations to apply for future CPL grant rounds.

Parcel details

Of the 956 acres proposed for restoration/enhancement, 165 are identified in the four projects on our parcel list. These represent projects for which we have land manager commitments, have discussed restoration plans and methods, and could begin work upon funding availability. These four projects are all on publicly held lands, are within identified natural resource corridors, and collectively contain diverse forests, prairie, and savanna habitat that would greatly benefit from the activities proposed in our application.

An additional 10 projects totaling 332 acres have also been identified. These projects include work on conservation easements and public conservation areas. These 10 projects were identified as high-quality projects using our habitat improvement project selection process. These projects have been discussed with respective landowners and initial plans have been outlined by county staff. However, these parcels are in earlier stages of planning than those included on the parcel list. We anticipate these projects could begin within a year of appropriation availability.

Hennepin County communicates regularly with our conservation easement owners and staff from dozens of municipalities, watersheds, and parks departments in the county to solicit and assess new habitat improvement project ideas. With a regular stream of well-qualified projects on permanently protected lands, funding often becomes the limiting factor. For this reason, an additional 459 acres were included in the proposal for projects that have yet to be identified. If this proposal is funded, we will begin project selection from our existing queue and reach out to our partners and landowners for new project proposals. Projects encumbering all remaining funds

would be identified within a year of appropriation availability.

Spending pace

LSOHF - Phase 2

We have finished our spending on Phase 2 Grant and have exceeded the acreage goals for restoration/enhancement (303%). Hennepin County has requested to close out our portion of the grant for final reimbursement through our recent status update.

LSOHF - Phase 3

The restoration funds for our Phase 3 grant are fully encumbered. As of our most recent reimbursement request, 17% of allocated funds had been spent on Hennepin County's portion of the grant. In 2025 and 2026, our spending was skewed toward personnel as we planned, permitted, and contracted restoration projects. Seven restoration/enhancement projects have either started within the past month or are planned to start before the end of the year. We expect our funds spent on restoration/enhancement for Phase 3 to reach 36% by the end of 2026, 94% by the end of 2027, and 100% by the appropriation availability end date of 6/30/2028.

Public access

Our proposal does not include acquiring new lands to use for public access but does include the restoration/enhancement of several parcels that will benefit the public.

One of the projects would restore 28 acres of oak forest and prairie on rolling hills above the Minnesota River Valley. This land was privately owned for decades before recently being acquired and permanently protected by the watershed district. While not yet publicly accessible, the land manager plans to open the site to the public upon completion of the restoration for recreation, environmental education, and demonstrations of good conservation practices.

Two additional parcels identified projects would occur on public lands which already contain trails and are accessible to the public. These restoration/enhancement projects would provide substantial benefit to the metro communities.

We continue to work closely with partners in the county, including cities, watershed management districts, parks districts, and organizations to identify new restoration/enhancement projects that will enable public access or benefit natural areas that are accessible to the public.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Swift Coulee Channel Restoration/ Enhancement - Phase 2

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Swift Coulee Channel Restoration/ Enhancement - Phase 2

Funds Requested: \$2,043,000

Proposal #: HRE15

Manager's Name: Morteza Maher

Title: Administrator

Organization: Middle-Snake-Tamarac Rivers Watershed District

Email: morteza.maher@mstrwd.org

Office Number: 2187454741

Mobile Number: 2182305703

Mr. Palmer:

Comment:

Proposal says Phase 2?? Isn't this phase 3?, Channel/stream restoration @\$17765/acre - on easements?, This application would complete the 10 mile long project, Leverage @ 36%

Response:

This is Phase 2 and the last phase. We received "PARTIAL" funding for this phase last year. This year's application is simple to supplement the reduced funding from last year and construct the remainder of the project all in Phase 2. If we don't receive additional funds, our great progress in land acquisition, design, and permitting will require us to cut this phase into two which will then create phase 3. Please fund this project fully and the project as currently planned will be constructed in 2 phases!

Mr. Suss:

Comment:

This looks like a drainage system improvement or repair project that should be paid for with assessment to the benefitting property. Construction of a two-stage ditch is supposed to reduce sediment transfer. Good drainage design should minimize sediment transfer and be paid for within the drainage project costs. Narrative states this project will enable farming BMPs, they can be implemented now. I see no enforceable commitment to use BMPs on adjacent ag land. Support funding only for RIM purchase portion of the project which appears to have been done with ML24 funds.

Response:

This project is not a conventional drainage improvement project under Minnesota Statute 103E. Swift Coulee is a public watercourse and is not considered a legal ditch system with an established drainage authority with levied taxation authority for maintenance. As such, the project is being advanced to address broader public benefits, not simply private drainage benefits.

The proposed two-stage channel is intended to improve channel stability, reduce sediment loading, reconnect the stream to its floodplain, and enhance riparian and aquatic habitat. While agricultural drainage will continue to function, the primary purpose of the project is to deliver watershed, habitat, and water quality benefits that align with the objectives of state conservation funding.

The project also provides permanent protection of project benefits. The RIM component secures a perpetual conservation easement on the corridor, while the Watershed District will acquire additional easement rights necessary to access, inspect, and maintain the project as designed and promised. Together, these easements ensure

that both the land protection and long-term management commitments are enforceable.

Finally, while individual BMPs can be implemented at any time, this project creates a permanent stream corridor framework that supports long-term habitat and water quality outcomes at a watershed scale. For these reasons, we believe funding should be evaluated based on the project's substantial public resource benefits rather than solely on its drainage function.

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Tamarac River Enhancement Project - Phase 1

ML 2027 Request for Funding Proposal Review Follow-Up

08/14/2026

Proposal Title: Tamarac River Enhancement Project - Phase 1

Funds Requested: \$7,876,000

Proposal #: HRE16

Manager's Name: Lon Aune

Title: County Engineer

Organization: Marshall County

Email: lon.aune@marshallcountymn.gov

Office Number: (218) 745-4381

Mobile Number: (218) 201-1422

John Burkel/Darrel Palmer

Net Local Tax Impact Score: 10/10. Committee Judgment Override: high cost and phased implementation are concerns, but this district project corrects a state-created ditch impact and creates a permanent prairie river corridor.

Phase 1, Convert an 8 mile ditch into a 9.6 meander stream - restore at @ \$54317/acre on easement lands,(100% of Engineering + 4 of the 8 miles restored), 15.7% Leverage

High project cost due to the overall project scale of the 8-mile project length and shear channel sizing required to accommodate the contributing Tamarac River drainage area of over 360 square miles. This project will correct a state-created ditch impact dating back to the early 1900s with a permanent prairie habitat river corridor in a dominant agricultural area. Almost all pre-settlement prairie & wetland habitats within the western Red River Valley have been drained and converted to agricultural lands. Implementing the proposed Tamarac River Enhancement Project provides the opportunity to reestablish aquatic and upland habitat connectivity to an area that has been heavily altered to accommodate agriculture production.

Matt Kucharski

Ditch remediation (worthwhile). Some leverage. How many phases expected?

The project anticipates two project phases, but phasing will be driven by the amount of funding received. If this application is fully funded, project design, permitting, and the anticipated downstream 4 miles of meandering channel would be constructed. Phase 2 would then fund the remaining upstream 4 miles of meandering channel. If less funding is provided than requested, additional phases will need to be added where construction is broken down into reduced miles constructed pending the amount of funding received. The proposed leverage of purchasing the necessary permanent easements would be executed as phases of construction are targeted and implemented.

Andrew Lang

Interesting project, public vs. the easement portions? Need more info on the surrounding habitat

The easement acquisition is in process and intends to use both the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program and local funding. If RIM can be used, that easement will be private easements between the State of Minnesota and the landowner. The County will also have an easement with the landowners to perform the construction activity and perform long-term maintenance. No public access will be granted through the project easements. It will be up to each individual landowner if they want to allow public access such as the Walk-In Access (WIA) Program for public hunting.

The surrounding area adjacent to this proposed habitat corridor is highly productive agricultural farmland for miles with an occasional farmstead providing the only trees and untilled lands. The only habitat in the surrounding area would be the upstream Tamarac River and downstream Red River of the North corridors that this project would provide connectivity too. Taking advantage of this opportunity to enhance habitat with willing landowners is vital to reestablish a portion of the heavily altered prairie in the northwestern Minnesota Prairie biome.

Ted Suss

This ditch exists for the benefit of the adjacent drained farmland. Collapsing side wall repairs should be handled as maintenance or separable repairs. restoring meander ought to be part of designing a Drainage improvement project that does not negatively affect downstream.

Landowners in this highly valued agricultural area were provided with an array of alternatives through a feasibility study to stabilize the channel, reduce sediment and phosphorus loading downstream, and improve habitat conditions. Through that feasibility study process, the landowners were on board with the meandering channel approach if easements can be purchased and we minimize the overall construction cost to the local tax base. The meandering channel approach would create 290 acres of upland and wetland habitat, reduce the negative effects of sediment and phosphorus transport downstream, provide fish passage connectivity, and sustainability for a stable channel for years to come. This project will correct a state-created ditch impact dating back to the early 1900s, we should take advantage of this opportunity in an area that the LSOHC's strategic view deems needing prairie reestablishment.