MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

November 5, 2026
Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
658 Cedar Street
Saint Paul, MN 55155

RE: Amendment Request: ML 2020, Ch. 104, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(i): Heron Lake Area Conservation Partnership

Thank you for the opportunity to review and discuss the proposed amendment to Minnesota Land Trust's ML2020 appropriation at the November 5, 2026, Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) meeting.

In 2020, Heron Lake Watershed District (HLWD), in partnership with Ducks Unlimited (DU), Pheasants Forever (PF), and Minnesota Land Trust (Land Trust) received $4,493,000 in funding through Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund to acquire land in fee and through permanent conservation easement, and restore/enhance prairie, wetland, and other within the Heron Lake watershed of southwestern Minnesota. Through that grant, DU and PF pursued fee acquisition of lands, while the Land Trust pursued the protection of private lands through conservation easements; HLWD took on the responsibilities of overall grant management and restoration/enhancement of lands protected by DU, PF, and MLT.

At present, all land protection portions of that grant have concluded; the one activity remaining is a single restoration project at the Land Trust's South Heron Lake (Thompson) conservation project led by HLWD.

Across the past few years, HLWD has experienced significant staff and Board turnover resulting in challenges related to grant management and reporting; Land Trust staff agreed to step in to assist the one remaining HLWD staff person with reporting and providing general grant management assistance. At present, HLWD has no full-time staff, and its office is temporarily closed.

In August 2026, we were made aware of ongoing restoration management challenges associated with a prairie and wetland restoration project at the South Heron Lake (Thompson) project that is underway. Though a considerable amount of the wetland and prairie restoration project was undertaken in 2025, HLWD did not enter into contracts for site management on a routine and timely basis in 2026. A site visit by Land Trust and Minnesota Native Landscapes (restoration contractor hired by HLWD) staff that same month noted tall, dense stands of early

successional plants and low levels of seedling establishment due to ongoing management failures.

It should be noted that the Land Trust agreed to complete a conservation easement on the Thompson property contingent upon a high-quality prairie/wetland restoration of the associated ag lands; HLWD committed to the restoration of those lands. Delays in securing the necessary contracts for ongoing management have placed the restoration project at risk.

In discussion with Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council staff regarding the status of the Thompson project and ongoing challenges in the overall management of the supporting Outdoor Heritage Fund grant by HLWD, the Land Trust has offered to take ownership of the restoration project and to assume remaining grant management responsibilities through the duration of the grant.

We asked Minnesota Native Landscapes to prepare a bid and action plan to salvage the project and deliver a high-quality restoration project in line with our initial goals. The budget amendment before LSOHC for approval today reflects that action plan and associated costs, including project and grant management costs by the Land Trust.

We appreciate your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,



Wayne Ostlie
Director of Land Protection
Minnesota Land Trust