

Request for Funding

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2016 / ML 2015

Program or Project Title: Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase III

Funds Requested: \$4,967,400

Manager's Name: Richard Biske
Title: Southeast MN Conservation Coordinator
Organization: The Nature Conservancy
Street Address: PO Box 405
City: Preston, MN 55965
Telephone: 507-765-2450
E-Mail: rbiske@tnc.org
Organization Web Site: nature.org

County Locations: Fillmore, Houston, Wabasha, and Winona.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Southeast Forest

Activity Type:

- Restore
- Enhance
- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Forest
- Prairie
- Habitat

Abstract:

This project will protect and restore declining habitats and watersheds for important wildlife species in strategically targeted areas of biodiversity significance in Southeast Minnesota. The project will result in increased public access and expanded habitat complexes critical to the state.

Design and Scope of Work:

The Southeast Blufflands region is as rich in habitat for game and nongame wildlife species as it is in aesthetic beauty. Long valleys rimmed with dry prairies and hardwood hills are bisected by coldwater trout streams. Unlike any other part of the state, much of the region and the greater Mississippi River Blufflands have been largely untouched by glaciers for 500,000 years. As a result of this unique geology, no other region in the state demonstrates the diversity and uniqueness of habitats found in the Blufflands. While much of the region has been converted to cropland, pasture and rural development, many of its bluffs and valleys are still home to high quality coldwater trout streams, cliffs, forests, oak savannas, and prairies, including 86 different native plant community types mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) covering nearly 149,670 acres. This diversity is critical to the State's enduring legacy of high quality forests, rivers and prairies. The region is home to 183 species of state-listed rare plants and animals in the region, many of them concentrated in the 749 sites of biodiversity significance mapped in the region by MBS. Thanks to this diversity, the area is highly regarded for turkey and deer hunting along with other recreational pursuits such as trout fishing, hiking and biking. Outdoor recreation is a significant component to the local economy and heritage, drawing visitors from across the upper Midwest. However, unlike Northern Minnesota or other regions, only 5% of the region is open to the public and relatively very little is in any kind of protected status. Rapid growth of nearby cities like Rochester and LaCrosse are increasing rural development with bluff top and remote country homes. More roads, buildings and associated

infrastructure further fragment an already fragmented landscape, disturbing forest habitat and increasing already high erosion rates. In addition, due to the high price of agricultural commodities in recent years, farming practices have increasingly encroached on these unique habitats including tracts in this proposal and have had significant impacts to water quality. To maintain this legacy of the Blufflands' unique natural habitats, there are three primary needs or opportunities in the region: 1) expand the amount of protected land in strategic locations based on existing protected lands and high-quality habitat; 2) maximize the quality of this protected habitat through well executed restoration and enhancement projects; and 3) increase public access to these unique habitats in an area of the state with relatively little public lands. Investment in habitat protection and restoration in the Southeast Blufflands by the Outdoor Heritage Fund would expand and connect larger contiguous blocks of protected lands, allowing land managers to restore and maintain native habitats at a scale difficult to accomplish with fragmented ownership. An example of this is the frequent prescribed fire burns necessary to reclaim the unique "goat prairies" and oak savanna from the cedar and buckthorn hillsides, which is most effective at larger scale. Certain habitat complexes stand out in the region, including the different units of the R.J. Dorner Memorial Forest, state parks and larger blocks of existing conservation easements. These complexes serve as hubs for additional protection through strategic fee title acquisitions. This proposal aims to enhance this prior conservation investment and ensure that the legacy of the Blufflands region is preserved for the future.

Overall Scope of Work:

This project has two primary components: 1) fee title acquisition of approximately 900 acres of forest and 278 acres of prairie along 4 miles of coldwater trout streams near state forest land, scientific and natural areas and a state park; 2) Enhancement of 108 acres of prairie, 25 acres of habitat and the restoration of 174 acres of forest and 137 acres of prairie within these protected habitat complexes. Project collaborators include The Nature Conservancy, Minnesota DNR and the Minnesota Land Trust. Priority will be placed on targeted tracts within high biodiversity conservation complexes identified by project partners as representing the highest quality and most diverse habitat types in the region.

Fee Acquisitions:

The Nature Conservancy will coordinate with MN DNR on all potential fee-title acquisitions. The Nature Conservancy will assist the participating DNR Divisions by conducting all or some of the following activities: initial site reviews, negotiations, appraisals, environmental reviews and acquisition of fee title. In the event the Conservancy comes into the chain of title, it will transfer the property to the DNR. The property acquired with this funding will be owned and managed by the DNR as State Forest, Wildlife Management Area or Scientific and Natural Areas, which will be open for public hunting and fishing.

Restoration and Enhancement:

Restoration plans and activities will be coordinated with DNR Forestry, Wildlife and Nongame leads for specific units. TNC will contract with CCM as much as possible and other local vendors for invasive brush removal and prescribed fire on 108 acres of bluff prairie and oak savanna enhancement, 174 acres of forest planting and 137 acres of native prairie planting and 25 acres of habitat enhancement on new acquisitions.

Results to Date from Phase I, FY 14 Appropriation:

Fee Acquisition - We have a signed option with schedule to close in August 2014 for 272 acres of prairie and forest within a Conservation Opportunity Area (66% of 3 year goal).

Restoration and Enhancement - We have completed brush and tree clearing on 65 acres of bluff prairie and oak savanna and another 26.5 acres is in progress (55% of 3 yr goal).

How the request addresses MN habitats:

Habitat protection and restoration efforts will occur in priority conservation areas within the Blufflands Ecological Subsection, which contains more species of greatest conservation need than any other subsection in Minnesota. Conservation opportunity areas have been identified by The Nature Conservancy, MN DNR and others based on the MN Biological Survey, existing public land assets and the potential to expand and connect habitat complexes. Projects included will protect and improve habitat conditions for rare plants and animals along with popular game species in the region including whitetail deer, wild turkey and ruffed grouse. Most projects are situated along or near trout streams, protection and restoration will maintain and improve trout waters and fishing opportunities.

Please explain the nature of urgency:

Southeast Minnesota continues experience habitat fragmentation from agriculture land use expansion. Habitat conversion from agriculture fluctuates, however rural residential development associated from rapid growth from the City of Rochester will accelerate over the next decade. It is important to protect habitat now, before it is fragmented or is cost-prohibitive.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation

Plans Addressed:

- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- Root River Conservation Action Plan, Root River Landscape Stewardship Plan, Southeast Landscape Management Plan, Blufflands Subsection Forest Resource Management Plan, Zumbro River Watershed Plan, Weaver Dunes Conservation Action Plan

Please describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

Restoration, enhancement and protection projects will take place in conservation opportunity areas identified based on MN Biological Survey concentrations of native plant communities, rare features, existing conservation lands and the potential to expand habitat complexes and link them. Each tract goes through review by TNC and DNR Division teams.

LSOHC Southeast Forest Section Priorities:

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

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts:

Acquisition and restoration projects included in this proposal build on 50 years of land conservation in the R.J. Doer Memorial Hardwood Forest. However, it is widely recognized that much more needs to be done to protect and restore declining habitats. Partners are working together to protect and restore habitat mosaics that include forest, prairie, oak savanna and riparian areas on private and public lands that also protect the watersheds of the region. This proposal accelerates and expands the efforts of partners working in Southeast Minnesota and the Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase I underway since FY14 and Phase II approved for FY15. This will nearly triple the fee acquisitions and restoration included in Phase I and maintain levels included in Phase II. Phase I funding helped leverage federal funds to restore 200 acres of private and 300 acres of public land within priority areas. We will continue to partner with MN DNR and leverage additional federal funds to restore/enhance another 200 acres of private and 300 acres of public prairie, savanna and woodland habitat in FY16. OHF funding has allowed us to engage public and private land managers to protect and enhance large habitat complexes.

Non-OHF Money Spent in the Past:

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
2013	US Fish and Wildlife Service State Wildlife Grant	\$250,000

Sustainability and Maintenance:

Acquisition projects will be adjacent to or within close proximity to existing protected lands, including state-owned lands and lands under conservation easement. This will allow for the expansion of maintenance and restoration activities that are currently taking place on those protected lands and adjacent private lands. Habitats cleared of invasive species will be maintained with prescribed fire. Protection and restoration projects will improve future prescribed fire and maintenance activities through economies of scale. The tracts protected and enhanced as part of this proposal also meet the prioritization for the State Wildlife Action Plan and MN DNR has been successful securing federal habitat enhancement funding for Southeast Minnesota. Each project is within a Conservation Opportunity Area that receives a higher level of coordination and resource priority by many partners for maintaining and enhancing protected habitats.

Maintain Project Outcomes:

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2017	USFWS State Wildlife Grant, Game and Fish Fund, Turkey Stamp	Invasive brush cutting	prescribed fire	
Every 3 to 5 years	Game and Fish Fund, Turkey Stamp	Prescribed fire		
Every 3 to 5 years	Game and Fish Fund, Turkey Stamp	Prescribed fire		

Applicable Criteria:

If funded, this proposal will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056? - Yes

Government Approval:

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition? - Yes

Permanent Protection:

Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection? - Yes

Current Hunting and Fishing Plan:

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing? - No

Future Hunting and Fishing Plan:

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion? - Yes

NA

Best Management Practice:

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program? - **Yes**

Permanent Protection:

Is the activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15? - **Yes (WMA, SNA, State Forests, Perpetual Conservation Easements)**

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Bluff Prairie Clearing	May 15, 2017
Prescribed Fire	May 15, 2017
Grass Establishment	July 1, 2017
Direct hardwood seeding	October 30, 2017
Fee Acquisition	June 30, 2018

Outcomes

Programs in southeast forest region:

- Large corridors and complexes of biologically diverse wildlife habitat typical of the unglaciated region are restored and protected *We will track the acres of priority parcels protected within Conservation Opportunity Areas identified in regional planning. Success within each Conservation Opportunity Area will be determined based on the percentage of area protected.*

Relationship to Other Funds:

- No Relationships Listed

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$4,967,400

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$316,600	\$0		\$316,600
Contracts	\$579,000	\$0		\$579,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$3,843,600	\$0		\$3,843,600
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Professional Services	\$84,000	\$0		\$84,000
Direct Support Services	\$74,200	\$103,900		\$178,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$35,000	\$0		\$35,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
DNR IDP	\$25,000	\$0		\$25,000
Total	\$4,967,400	\$103,900		\$5,071,300

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Negotiator	0.37	3.00	\$92,900	\$0		\$92,900
Project Manager	0.61	3.00	\$133,700	\$0		\$133,700
Data Manager/Technician	0.16	3.00	\$24,700	\$0		\$24,700
Grant Administrator	0.33	3.00	\$65,300	\$0		\$65,300
Total	1.47	12.00	\$316,600	\$0		\$316,600

Amount of Request: \$4,967,400

Amount of Leverage: \$103,900

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 2.09%

Output Tables

Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	137	174	0	311
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	278	900	0	1,178
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	108	0	25	133
Total	0	523	1,074	25	1,622

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

Type	Native Prairie
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	108
Total	108

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$200,000	\$208,800	\$0	\$408,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$1,097,300	\$3,160,500	\$0	\$4,257,800
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$275,800	\$0	\$25,000	\$300,800
Total	\$0	\$1,573,100	\$3,369,300	\$25,000	\$4,967,400

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	311	0	0	311
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	1,178	0	0	1,178
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	133	0	0	133
Total	0	0	1,622	0	0	1,622

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$408,800	\$0	\$0	\$408,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$4,257,800	\$0	\$0	\$4,257,800
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$300,800	\$0	\$0	\$300,800
Total	\$0	\$0	\$4,967,400	\$0	\$0	\$4,967,400

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$0	\$1,460	\$1,200	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$3,947	\$3,512	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$2,554	\$0	\$1,000

Table 6. Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$1,314	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$3,614	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$2,262	\$0	\$0

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

4

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Fillmore 1	10208216	42	\$46,200	Yes
Fillmore 4	10208211	180	\$445,700	Yes

Winona

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Winona 1	10508233	50	\$97,000	Yes

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Fillmore

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Fillmore 2	10408222	165	\$523,500	No	Full	Full
Fillmore 3	10410221	78	\$325,000	No	Full	Full
Fillmore 5	10408220	101	\$390,000	No	Full	Full

Houston

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Houston 1	10204219	274	\$996,500	No	Full	Full
Houston 2	10306230	320	\$1,152,700	No	Full	Full
Houston 3	10307228	145	\$540,000	No	Full	Full

Wabasha

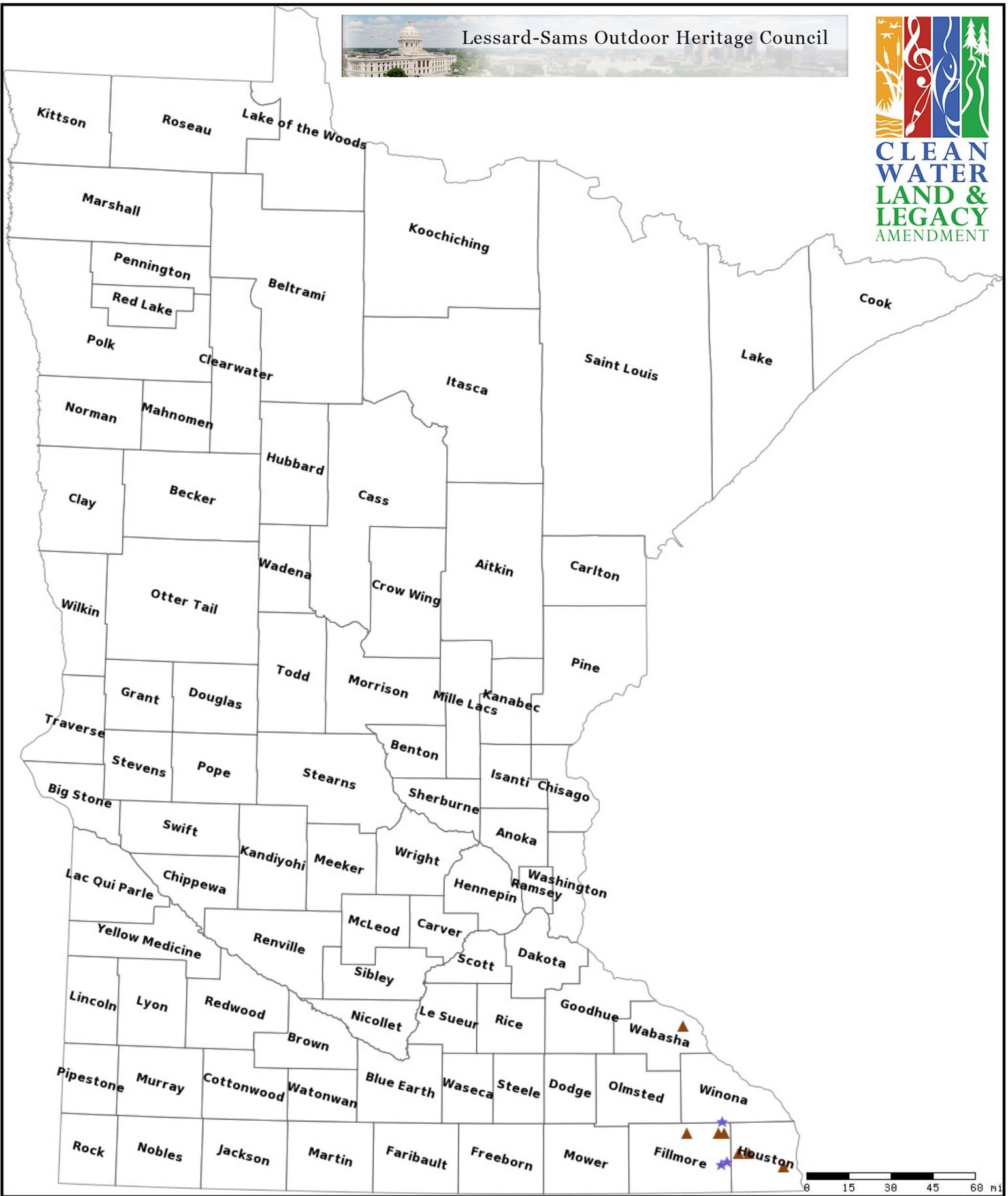
Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Wabasha 1	11010218	191	\$650,000	No	Full	Full

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

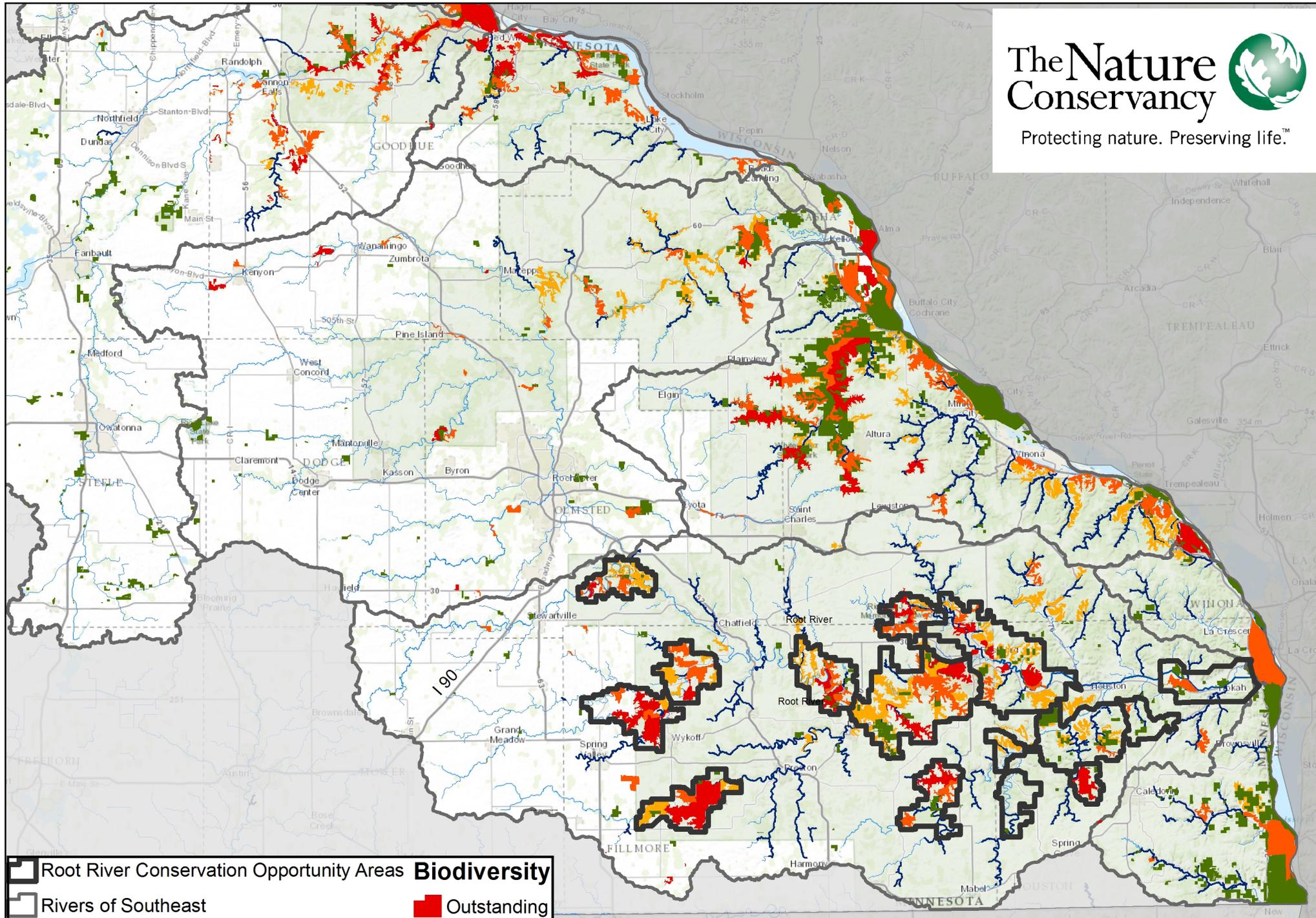
Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.



Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase III

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



Root River Conservation Opportunity Areas	Biodiversity	Outstanding
Rivers of Southeast		High
Public or Conservation Lands		Moderate
Streams		
Bluffland Trout Streams		

Southeast Minnesota Protection and Restoration Phase III

