

Amanda Brazee

From: Amanda Brazee
Sent: Monday, December 14, 2015 8:57 AM
Subject: Recent editorial in the Star Tribune regarding the LSOHC

Council members:

Below please find a link to an editorial entitled "Lessard-Sams council should sustain momentum on White Earth project" that appeared in this Sunday's Star Tribune:

<http://www.startribune.com/lessard-sams-council-should-sustain-momentum-on-white-earth-project/361625321/>

Sincerely,

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EDITORIAL

Lessard-Sams council should sustain momentum on White Earth project

Legislature should support proposal to preserve 2,034 acres in conservation project.

By Editorial Board Star Tribune | DECEMBER 11, 2015 — 5:55PM

Minnesota lawmakers ought to follow the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council's commendable lead in supporting an important conservation project: the White Earth Nation's proposal to use \$2.2 million in state Legacy Amendment sales tax dollars to protect 2,034 acres of forestland, prairie and wetlands.

The property is in northern Minnesota's Clearwater County and is owned by the Potlatch Corp. The land, once part of the White Earth Reservation, was sold off long ago to private interests. Potlatch now is looking to sell the land and likely will do so in small parcels of 40 to 500 acres if a conservation project fails. Hunting is not allowed on the land now. Buyers likely would use the land for private hunting grounds. In contrast, approving the project would allow all Minnesotans to hunt, trap and fish there.

Preserving property like this and providing access were key reasons why Minnesotans strongly supported the 2008 Legacy constitutional amendment. The 12-member Lessard-Sams citizens council makes funding recommendations for about \$110 million of the funds annually. It has voted twice to move forward on the White Earth project, making it clear that its members understand the voters' vision. It's now up to the Legislature to demonstrate that its members do, too.

The Lessard-Sams council included the White Earth project in the 2015 funding recommendations sent to the Legislature. Lawmakers typically hew closely to its decisions. But the project was stripped out of the spending package at the last session's end. A dubious explanation given — that the project would take the land off property rolls, an objection that hasn't halted other projects that do the same — raised regrettable questions about bias toward American Indian communities.

The White Earth Nation resubmitted the project to the council, and members voted this fall to include it in 2016 funding recommendations. But bitter debate broke out among council members in November, putting the project in jeopardy. Among concerns: tribal members' treaty rights on the land would give them longer hunting seasons. One council member argued that the state should own the land. Under the current proposal, the tribe would buy the land and then transfer to it a federal trust.

Members reached a laudable compromise in December by proposing to equalize the hunting seasons. The council voted 9-3 to move the project ahead with this condition. Stakeholders should find a way to make this solution work. But if it can't, the project is still worthy of support on its merits. The council shouldn't go backward at its next meeting.

Lawmakers also need to move beyond weak excuses for not supporting the project. The amount of money diverted from property tax rolls is \$15,878 — about 0.26 percent of Clearwater County's annual property tax revenue. It's also important to note that White Earth members pay sales tax on and off the reservation — some project critics mistakenly believe they do not.

As for state ownership, why is this suddenly an issue? It's not a requirement. Lessard-Sams data show that 63 percent of acres acquired through June 2015 are state-owned. The remaining land is held by the federal government, counties, cities and nonprofits.

The White Earth Nation's project is vetted and ready to go. Critics have not put forth a detailed alternative. This property is worth preserving, and this project is the most efficient way to make that happen.



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_144987799348671.jpg)
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The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, which oversees the state's Outdoor Heritage Fund, has again recommended supporting the