

## OUTDOOR HERITAGE FUND

### MISSION

The mission of the Outdoor Heritage Fund, as specified in the state Constitution, is to: “protect, restore, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife.”

In pursuit of that mission, the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council used the following statewide criteria and ecological section vision and priorities.

### STATEWIDE PRIORITY CRITERIA

1. Are ongoing successful and transparent programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections. (JC)
2. Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits. (WE – note: Long term benefits trumps short term benefits).
3. Are able to leverage effort and/or other funds to supplement any OHF appropriation.
4. Allow public access. This comes into play when all other things about the request are approximately equal.
5. Address conservation opportunities that will be lost if not immediately acted on.
6. Restore ~~and~~ or enhance habitat on state-owned WMAs, AMAs, and SNAs. (MK)
7. Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service’s Strategic Habitat Conservation model.
8. ~~Consider~~ Address wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions.
9. Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities (DN)
10. Insures activities for “protecting, restoring and enhancing” are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work. (DH)
11. Target unique Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to wildlife. (JC)

### ECOLOGICAL SECTION VISION AND PRIORITIES

#### Northern Forest Section Vision

The Council’s vision for the Northern Forest Section contains clear view of the desired future condition for the section’s forest lands, lakes and wetlands, and wildlife habitat.

Forestland should be universally accessible for forest management purposes as well as protected from development and fragmentation. Private in-holdings in public forests and key properties for habitat and stand management, adjacent to existing ownership should be acquired, with an eye toward ensuring no ~~net~~ loss of forestland. Of special concern is the condition of brushlands within the forestlands. These

lands, along with early successional forest habitat are crucial for game species and non-game species and need restoration and enhancement work so as to ensure ample availability of this habitat type.

Lakes and wetlands supporting healthy fish populations are fundamental to the future of the Northern Forest Section. Lakes and streams with protected shoreland and restored watersheds will produce quality warm and cold-water aquatic systems. Those resources will provide the aquatic habitat required to support excellent fish populations and other aquatic organisms.

The Northern Forest Section is home to both cherished and unique Minnesota wildlife populations. It is imperative that the wildlife habitat of this Section support those populations. Healthy wild rice wetlands and shallow lakes that provide important habitat for a wide range of game and non-game wildlife which are clearly front and center in the Council's vision. ~~We could well see the region's wild rice production as the world's leading crop year in and year out. (DN)~~ These and other key habitats are envisioned to protect habitat for endangered, threatened and species of special concern and more common.

#### Priority Actions for the Northern Forest Section

1. Protect shoreland and ~~restore or enhance~~ ~~improve~~ critical habitat on wild rice lakes, shallow lakes, cold water lakes, streams and rivers, and spawning areas. (MK)
2. Protect forest land through acquisition or easement, to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties.
3. Restore and enhance habitat on existing protected properties, with preference to habitat for rare, endangered or threatened species identified by the Minnesota County Biological Survey.
4. Restore forest-based wildlife habitat that has experienced substantial decline in aerial extent in recent decades. (MK)

#### Forest/Prairie Transition Vision

The Council's future for the Forest/Prairie Transition Section envisions diverse and productive remnant tracts of native prairie, forests grasslands, wetlands, lakes and rivers, and their associated fish and wildlife habitat.

The Council sees a future when ample grasses and other vegetation on shorelands and higher in the watershed keeps water on the land This will yield clean lakes and streams, steady lake and stream levels, and improved aquatic vegetation, providing a plentiful supply of habitat for fish, game and wildlife in the Section, especially habitat for waterfowl and upland birds.

These rivers and streams and their surrounding vegetation will provide corridors of habitat including intact areas of forest cover in the eastern reaches of the Section, and large wetland/upland complexes in the more westerly areas. These wetland/upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands and restored shallow lakes and wetlands.

#### Priority Actions for the Forest/Prairie Transition Section

1. Protect, enhance and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and non-game wildlife. (RB – note: relates to the new DNR Elk Management Plan, draft: [:/files.dnr.state.mn.us/recreation/hunting/elk/elk\\_mgt\\_plan.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/recreation/hunting/elk/elk_mgt_plan.pdf))

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2. Protect, enhance and restore rare native remnant prairie.

### Southeast Forest Section Vision

The Council recognizes the Southeast Forest Section of Minnesota is a unique place, largely untouched by recent glaciers that covered most of Minnesota. The underlying karst geology and overlying remnants of the Big Woods are not found elsewhere in Minnesota. The ages have left a legacy of warm and cold water streams and rivers, floodplains, hardwood forests, remnant bluffland prairies, and striking topographic relief that provides diverse habitat worthy of protection.

In the forested parts of the Southeast Forest Section the Council sees a future of restored and protected oak savanna and mixed deciduous forest lands making up large blocks of protected property, accessible for resource management purposes.

The cold and warm water streams of the region will be protected and enhanced by work in and along streams as well as work streamside to the top of the watershed to slow runoff and keep aquatic habitat clean and productive, with prolific fish, game and wildlife populations.

Southeast Forest Section wildlife habitat will be ~~found-~~ established (DN) in large corridors and complexes of restored and protected, biologically diverse habitat typical of the un-glaciated region. As a result the Section's endangered or threatened species will find habitat, such as goat prairies, in which to survive, alongside more common species of interest to Minnesotans. The Mississippi River and associated floodplain and bluffs, as well as the feeder streams will be an important part of this network of corridors and complexes.

### Priority Actions for the Southeast Forest Section

1. 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.
2. Protect, enhance and restore habitat for fish, game and non-game wildlife in rivers, cold water streams and associated upland habitat.
3. Protect, enhance and restore remnant goat prairies.
4. Restore forest-based wildlife habitat that has experienced substantial decline in aerial extent in recent decades. (MK)

### Prairie Section Vision

The Council sees the future of the Prairie Region as vital to the future of waterfowl, grassland birds and other wildlife dependent on native and restored prairies, shallow lakes, ~~and wetlands,~~ and grasslands, ~~and other habitat of the Section.~~ The prairie region of Minnesota was once home to some of the largest herds of grazing animals the world has ever known. It also contains within its borders, a portion of the Prairie Pothole Region the birthplace of 70 percent of North America's waterfowl. Unique components of this section ~~are~~ are the prairie rivers, large and small, from the Red and Minnesota Rivers to their tributaries in adjacent watersheds, ~~where the future aquatic habitat is enhanced by an increased density of grassland/wetland habitat.~~ This section also contains some of the largest freshwater marshes in North America. (JC)

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~~The Prairie Section of Minnesota is now one of the most altered rural landscapes in the world, with 90 percent of its native prairie and wetlands now under plow. The native prairie and wetlands that remain This is the location of much of the remaining, unplowed native prairie and the Council believes these remaining tracts~~ should be perpetually protected. Where possible these remnant native prairies ~~ought should to~~ be part of large complexes ~~with a goal of, as large as~~ nine square mile parcels. ~~These parcels should include s in size, of~~ restored prairies, grasslands, ~~and large and small~~ wetlands that will create buffers to the native prairie ~~and provide and~~ the density of habitat needed by fish, game and wildlife. Key core parcels should be set aside as areas managed for games, species as well as refuges for fish, game or wildlife, ~~or and~~ endangered or threatened species. ~~Special emphasis should be put on, including~~ extremely uncommon Minnesota species with unique or highly-specific habitat requirements. (JC)

The Prairie Sections water's, ~~now serving as a sewer system for agriculture,~~ will have benefitted from revitalized and expanded shoreland buffers and work to enhance shallow lake productivity for a variety of shorebirds and waterfowl. As a result of concentrated work of this type, combined with restored and enhanced upland habitat, historically significant resources for migratory waterfowl, such as the Heron Lake and Swan Lake Watersheds will once again be important ~~areas- landscapes~~ for ~~all- many species kinds~~ of migrating birds. Likewise the Red River Valley will provide abundant wildlife habitat while ~~simultaneously~~ keeping water on the land to reduce flood potential. (JC)

The Prairie Section is the home to a ~~critical portion large portion~~ of the state's wildlife-related lands. The Council sees these being ~~increasingly fully~~ productive in the future, as the result of restoration and enhancement of native prairie, grassland and associated watershed, including the shallow lakes of ~~the this S~~ection. In the southeastern part of the Section there are precious remnants of the Big Woods and oak savanna ~~they will also be targeted for protection. that will be protected.~~ (JC)

#### Priority Actions for the Prairie Section

1. Protect, ~~enhance, or restore existing~~ wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to wetland/upland to ~~new wetland/upland enhance or restore existing~~ habitat complexes. (MK)
2. ~~Protect, enhance and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests and oak savanna. Convert agricultural land to wetland/upland to protect, enhance, or restore existing habitat complexes.~~ (MK)
3. Restore or enhance habitat on public lands.
4. Protect, restore and enhance shallow lakes.

#### Metro Urbanizing Section Vision

The Council's vision for the Metropolitan Urbanizing Section is a network of natural lands in the Section providing wildlife habitat, quality fisheries, especially cold-water fisheries and a forest land base that contributes to the habitat picture.

These natural lands in the Metropolitan Urbanizing Section include complexes of restored and perpetually protected wetlands, prairies, and forests, providing habitat benefits and access. These will

have core areas with protected highly biologically diverse wetlands and plant communities including native prairies. Where possible, the habitats will connect, making corridors for wildlife and species in greatest need of conservation, and hold wetlands and shallow lakes open to public recreation and hunting. The Section's game lakes will be significant contributors of waterfowl, due to efforts to protect uplands adjacent to game lakes. In the corridors, the streams, rivers and lakes will be protected by vegetative buffers along riparian areas. Remnant oak savanna will be protected and its health restored, as will forests contributing to quality fisheries. As a result cold-water streams and lakes will provide high quality fisheries within an hour's drive of the majority of the state's population. Where possible, invasive species will have been permanently eradicated.

#### Priority Actions for the Metropolitan Urbanizing Area

1. Protect, enhance and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests and oak savanna with an emphasis on areas with high biological diversity.
2. Protect habitat corridors, with emphasis on the Minnesota, Mississippi and St. Croix rivers (bluff to floodplain.)
3. Enhance and restore coldwater fisheries systems.
4. Protect, enhance and restore riparian and littoral habitats on lakes to benefit game and non-game fish species. (RB – note: The urban lakes addresses a hole- warm water fish- that seems to be lacking in our priorities)

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