The Minnesota Land Trust is working on a conservation easement in Lake County under the Critical Shoreland Habitat Protection Program - Phase IV grant, which is funded through the ML 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 3(f). This easement will cover approximately 947 acres of forests, wetlands and streams, and will help protect a significant wildlife habitat corridor between Split Rock State Park and Gooseberry Falls State Park. It is also largely surrounded by public lands administered by Lake County and therefore contributes to a larger block of protected lands. The property contains 38,069 feet of shoreline and more than 300 acres of wetlands in the headwaters of the Gooseberry River. This includes more than 23,000 feet on state-designated trout streams, including Skunk Creek. Overall, with more than seven miles of shoreline and nearly 1,000 acres of northern forest habitat, this easement represents an outstanding candidate for the Critical Shoreland Habitat Program.

In examining the title work, we discovered that a small portion of Skunk Creek (roughly 14%) is covered by a DNR held angler access easement established in 1992. This easement runs 66’ on either side of the creek and allows for public use and access of the corridor for fishing purposes only and allows the DNR access for habitat improvement. Overall, this State’s trout stream access easement covers 4.12 acres of the proposed 947 acres conservation easement, or 0.4% percent. Please see the attached reference map and exhibit maps.

As such, the overall conservation gains afforded with this conservation easement dramatically enhances the prior state investment in the trout stream access. Protecting the surrounding forest and wetland complexes is essential to maintaining the cool water temperature and ecological integrity of North Shore trout streams like the Gooseberry River. These North Shore trout streams are fed primarily by
overland flow (versus groundwater fed), which makes them very susceptible to disturbances to the land cover, wetlands and soils. Thus protecting the property from detrimental forest practices, residential development and other impacts not only protects the high quality wildlife habitat on the property itself, but also the overall quality of the Gooseberry River downstream.

The appraisal of the proposed conservation easement will take into consideration any impacts of the State’s trout stream access easement to the value of the proposed MLT conservation easement. However, because the access easement covers such a minute portion of the property, we anticipate that any impacts would be negligible.

The Minnesota Land Trust respectfully requests approval by the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council of the proposed conservation easement on Skunk Creek.