



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Cannon River Watershed Habitat Complex - Phase VI

Laws of Minnesota 2016 Final Report

General Information

Date: 08/17/2025

Project Title: Cannon River Watershed Habitat Complex - Phase VI

Funds Recommended: \$583,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2016, Ch. 172, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 2(e)

Appropriation Language: \$583,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Trust for Public Land to acquire land in fee and restore lands in the Cannon River watershed for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquisition of lands that are eligible for the native prairie bank under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.96, or lands adjacent to protected native prairie. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

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Location Information

County Location(s): Rice and Le Sueur.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Forest

Habitat

Wetlands

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

Through fee-title acquisition, The Trust for Public Land permanently protected 69 acres (86% of our goal) in the Cannon River Watershed. This resulted in one new Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and an addition to an existing WMA. These now publicly accessible and protected areas include wetland, prairie, and Big Woods forest habitat. The permanent protection of these places has reversed habitat loss, allowed for habitat restoration, and increased access to public lands for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

Process & Methods

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase VI program acquired 69 acres of high-quality wetland, prairie, remnant Big Woods forest, and shoreline habitat for fish, game and wildlife in the Cannon River Watershed. The protection and creation/expansion of two large complexes (Gray Fox WMA and Murphy WMA) provides new opportunities for public hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation.

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex Phase VI program was designed to address the following problems: degradation and loss of quality and diversity of habitat in the prairie section of the State, degradation of water quality in the Cannon River Watershed; and lack of available public lands for hunting and angling opportunities, especially within an hour's drive for over half of the state's population.

The Phase VI program is a part of a multi-year conservation effort, focusing on the Cannon River Watershed, that includes acquisition, protection, and restoration of core parcels of land that will contribute to a large complex of restored prairies, grasslands, wetlands, lakeshore, and river shoreline. The Phase VI acquisitions were prioritized toward protecting existing large wetland/upland complexes and rare communities (Big Woods forest, oak savanna, tamarack swamp). In addition, landowner willingness to sell and the threat of conversion were also taken into consideration. Protection of these lands provides critical habitat for game species, including migratory waterfowl (mallards, canvasback, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, pintails, lesser scaup), upland birds (dove, turkey, pheasant, and woodcock), white tail deer, and fish (northern pike, black crappies, bluegills, bullheads and walleye). Protection will also provide access for a diversity of recreational experiences including duck, pheasant, turkey and deer hunting, lake fishing, and wildlife observation. In addition, restoration work conducted by the MN DNR has been focused on the degraded portions of the lands acquired and has included restoration of agricultural fields near wetlands and lakes back to native habitat.

Specifically, two acquisitions were completed with Phase VI funding:

1. Gray Fox WMA - Rice County:

The Trust for Public Land acquired the Gray Fox WMA property on October 19, 2018 and conveyed the 78 acre property to the DNR on April 23, 2019 to be managed as a new Wildlife Management Area. This property has rolling topography of wetland and grassland habitat located in the upper reaches of the Cannon River Watershed just west of Shields Lake (the headwaters of the Cannon River). It has great scenic views and natural beauty, and it

will provide much needed public access for dispersed wildlife-based recreation including hiking, hunting, trapping, bird-watching, and general nature observation. The Trust for Public Land purchased this property for a total of \$406,000 using \$69,021 of the Cannon River Phase VI acquisition funds (ML2016 OHF; allocated acreage 13), and also \$336,979 from Cannon River Phase V (ML2015 OHF; allocated acreage 65).

2. Murphy WMA Addition - Le Sueur County:

The Trust for Public Land acquired and conveyed 72 acres to the MN DNR on August 16, 2019 to be managed as an addition to the Murphy Wildlife Management Area. Located directly on the Cannon River just north of Waterville, this acquisition connects the two units of Murphy WMA, squares up boundaries, and provides improved public access for quality outdoor recreation and hunting opportunities within an hour's drive of the Twin Cities. The Trust for Public Land purchased this property for a total of \$375,000 using \$292,407 in funds from Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase VI (ML 2016 OHF; allocated acreage 56), and also \$82,593 from Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Phase VII (ML 2017 OHF; allocated acreage 16).

How did the program address habitats of significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, threatened or endangered species, and/or list targeted species?

The areas protected through this appropriation were identified and prioritized through, state, regional and local natural resource plans due to their high biodiversity, connectivity and ability to preserve habitat for both game species and species of greatest conservation need. Specifically, the shoreline zones protected are one of the most essential, and one of the most threatened, habitat resources in the state. They provide a range of benefits for fisheries, migratory waterfowl and upland game species.

How did the program use science-based targeting that leveraged or expanded corridors and complexes, reduced fragmentation, or protected areas in the MN County Biological Survey.

Our science-based targeting utilized the Minnesota Wildlife Action Network's data along with other state data sets, including The MN County Biological Survey, to identify priority areas for permanent fish and wildlife protection within the Cannon River Watershed. The Wildlife Action Network was developed to help implement the 2015-2025 MN Wildlife Action Plan, which identified species of greatest conservation need and rare, threatened and endangered species. The project's geographic targeting also considered specific areas of species richness and/or biodiversity importance and areas where aquatic and terrestrial habitats have been compromised. These identified priority areas were the primary focus geography in selecting parcels for permanent land protection using fee-title acquisition.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

These acquisitions were supported by a number of partners, including but not limited to; the MN DNR, Rice County, Le Sueur County, respective Township Boards, and Cannon River Watershed Partnership. No opposition occurred on these projects.

Exceptional challenges, expectations, failures, opportunities, or unique aspects of program

The Cannon River Watershed is unique in that its' geography overlaps between three different MN DNR regions. This makes sense in that the Cannon River is located an hour south of the Twin Cities and meanders east from prairie/cropland areas through the historic mill towns (Big Woods area) of Faribault, Northfield, and Red Wing before it empties into the Mississippi River in the southeast bluffs area. However, this unique geography can make coordination with our MN DNR partners more challenging as the regions have different priorities/processes at times.

What other dedicated funds may collaborate with or contribute to this program?

N/A

What is the plan to sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended?

The Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex lands have been acquired and conveyed to the DNR who has completed initial site development and restoration work. Costs for this work are included in the IDPs attached to the completed parcel reports. The properties will be managed for the long term as WMAs and will be maintained by the Minnesota DNR according to their WMA guidelines.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2019 and ongoing	DNR Land Management Funds	Property owned by the DNR via TPL acquisition will be managed according to DNR land management policies.	DNR lands acquired in fee-title will remain permanently protected and open to the public.	On-going DNR management.

Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$92,000	\$92,000	\$92,000	\$44,000	\$44,000	Private	\$136,000	\$136,000
Contracts	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$10,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$422,500	\$383,700	\$383,700	\$25,000	-	Various state, local and private funds	\$447,500	\$383,700
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	-	-	-	\$2,000	\$2,000
Professional Services	\$20,000	\$58,800	\$58,800	-	-	-	\$20,000	\$58,800
Direct Support Services	\$21,500	\$21,500	\$21,500	\$21,500	\$21,500	Private	\$43,000	\$43,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$4,700	-	-	-	\$5,000	\$4,700
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$9,400	-	-	-	\$10,000	\$9,400
Grand Total	\$583,000	\$583,000	\$582,100	\$90,500	\$65,500	-	\$673,500	\$647,600

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Protection and Legal Staff	0.3	3.0	\$92,000	\$44,000	Private	\$136,000

Direct Support Services

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?

Our DSS request is based upon our federal rate.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

No major unanticipated budget challenges. We spent all of our acquisition capital. Unfortunately, the leverage expected in 2016 from either a landowner donation of value, or a RIM match, did not occur.

Total Revenue: \$0

Revenue Spent: \$0

Revenue Balance: \$0

Of the money disclosed above, what are the appropriate uses of the money:

E. This is not applicable as there was no revenue generated.

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Acres (AP)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	23	27	26	23	15	19	16	0	80	69
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	23	27	26	23	15	19	16	0	80	69

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland (AP)	Wetland (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	Forest (AP)	Forest (Final)	Habitat (AP)	Habitat (Final)	Total Funding (AP)	Total Funding (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$122,000	\$228,000	\$230,000	\$194,500	\$89,000	\$160,500	\$142,000	-	\$583,000	\$583,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$122,000	\$228,000	\$230,000	\$194,500	\$89,000	\$160,500	\$142,000	-	\$583,000	\$583,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro / Urban (AP)	Metro / Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	80	69	0	0	80	69
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	80	69	0	0	80	69

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/ Urban (AP)	Metro/ Urban (Final)	Forest / Prairie (AP)	Forest / Prairie (Final)	SE Forest (AP)	SE Forest (Final)	Prairie (AP)	Prairie (Final)	N. Forest (AP)	N. Forest (Final)	Total (AP)	Total (Final)
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$583,000	\$583,000	-	-	\$583,000	\$583,000
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$583,000	\$583,000	-	-	\$583,000	\$583,000

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

.25

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

The Trust for Public Land permanently protected 69 acres, 86% of our goal of 80 acres. While we originally expected to acquire additional acres with this appropriation, unfortunately we did not largely due to the properties having slightly higher per acre values than we expected.

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *Protected parcels were identified in partnership with the DNR as well as partners of the Cannon River Headwaters Habitat Complex. The lands protected with this phase have diverse wetland, upland, and plant communities, and have improved and increased habitat for waterfowl, upland birds and species of greatest conservation need. In total, 69 new acres and a quarter-mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Parcels

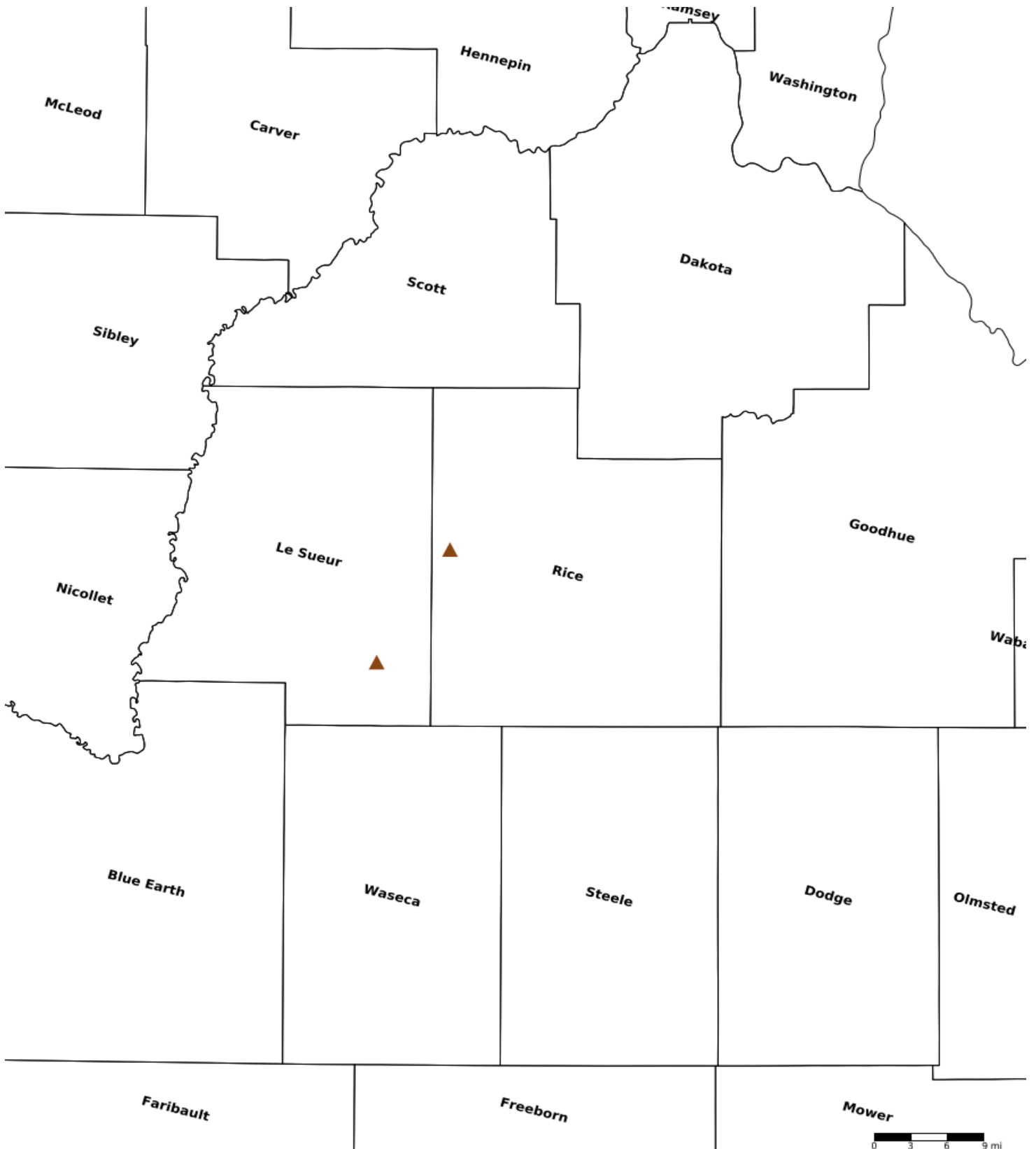
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Murphy WMA	Le Sueur	10923208	56	\$292,400	No
Gray Fox WMA (tract 1)	Rice	11122232	13	\$406,000	No

Parcel Map



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