



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Protecting Pinelands Sands Aquifer Forestlands - Phase II

Laws of Minnesota 2015 Final Report

General Information

Date: 08/17/2025

Project Title: Protecting Pinelands Sands Aquifer Forestlands - Phase II

Funds Recommended: \$2,180,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2015, First Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 3(c)

Appropriation Language: \$2,180,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources to acquire forest lands in Cass and Wadena Counties for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8, and to acquire land in fee for state forests under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 7. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Christine Ostern

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Location Information

County Location(s): Wadena and Hubbard.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Forest

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

Protected 1,306 acres of at risk, priority forest habitat adjacent and near the Crow Wing River that consolidates and links public forestland parcels, provides management and recreational access and protects surface and ground water quality.

Process & Methods

This project protected with fee acquisition 1,306 acres of priority forestland and associated habitats in west-central Minnesota in an area of significant deforestation as a result of conversion of forests to irrigated agriculture. The project focused on habitat protection within a core area along and nearby the Crow Wing River in an area that also includes the Huntersville State Forest, Crow Wing Chain Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Hunterville WMA, Burgen Lake Prairie WMA, Menahga WMA and Yaeger WMA. Habitats protected include pine, oak, and aspen forests, brushlands, and wetlands. Some river river frontage along the Crow Wing was included; the Crow Wing River is one of the state's best river routes for canoeists, with many rustic campsites and miles of undeveloped wooded shoreline. Parcels acquired are now managed by the appropriate DNR Division as State Forests and Wildlife Management Areas. This is an important public use area that provides a wide range of public recreational opportunities including hunting, hiking, fishing, canoeing, trail riding and camping.

The project protected properties containing high conservation and natural resource values as determined by a team of area staff who used a science based assessment to evaluate resource values on the various tracts. Values considered in the assessment included shoreline habitat, wildlife habitat, terrestrial ecological importance, groundwater protection, watershed protection, access, trails, forest consolidation and forest productivity. The parcels were further evaluated based on their threat of conversion to agriculture using the following criteria: topography, soil drainage, proximity to other irrigated agricultural land, size of parcel and soil survey data.

The project implemented the Minnesota State-Wide Conservation and Preservation Plan priorities to "protect large blocks of forestland" and to "improve connectivity and access to recreation". In addition, it supported other priorities including the "protection of priority land habitats", "protection of critical shoreland of streams and lakes" and "supports and expands sustainable practices on working forest lands". The project also addressed two of the priority actions listed in the Outdoor Heritage Fund: A Twenty Five Year Framework for the Northern Forest Section. The project was completed with the involvement and support of County Land Departments and County Boards.

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?

This area has been the focus of DNR management and protection for many decades and includes a state forest and several wildlife management areas that have provided public hunting and fishing opportunities for decades. The habitat is generally forested with aspen, jack pine, red pines, white pines, and oaks. There are many acres of emergent wetlands and lowland brush. The properties provide habitat for several game species including white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, woodcock, waterfowl, black bears, bobcats, timber wolves and small game. Additionally, the Shell and Crow Wing Rivers that occur here provide habitat diversity, with many miles of bottomland forests interspersed with bogs, swamps and grassy openings. Other featured bird species of the property and surrounding

areas include bald eagles, sandhill cranes, sharp-tailed grouse, and the greater prairie chicken. In addition, 89 species of greatest conservation need are known or predicted to occur within this region and 2 state listed bird species, 1 state listed fish, and 1 state listed mussel have been documented from the property or in rivers adjacent to the property. These properties are currently leased to private individuals and not open to the public. Acquisition and management by DNR will open this property to public.

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.

Parcels were evaluated for resource values and public benefits including wildlife habitat, shoreline habitat, trails, access, forest consolidation, groundwater and watershed protection, forest productivity and terrestrial ecological values by a team of resource professionals to determine overall resource values and priorities. The parcels were further evaluated for conversion risk.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

We worked with the Trust For Public Lands in acquisition for an additional WMA. An inter-Division team of area staff worked together and used a science-based assessment to evaluate the resource values of the various tracts for the project. Also, we worked in collaboration with County Land Departments and County Boards to build support and involvement for the project and ultimately overcome initial opposition. The landowner was actively involved in the assessment process and has a long history of successful natural resource transactions with the DNR and has indicated a willingness to pursue additional land sales with the Department.

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

Assimilating an inter-disciplinary team of professional resource managers to assess and evaluate various portions of the project and ultimately guide tract selection using a science-based approach.

Working extensively over one years time with county staff and decision makers to build county support of the project.

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

Other :

How were the funds used to advance the program?

\$5,000 from the General Fund

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

Parcels acquired are now managed by the appropriate DNR Division as State Forests and Wildlife Management Areas.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
on-going	Natural Resource Fund - FMIA	Manage forests to maximize forest health and wildlife benefits consistent	Maintain boundaries.	Monitor public use and address any issues.

		with guidance documents.		
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Budget

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$30,000	\$7,100	\$7,400	\$5,000	\$5,000	General Fund	\$35,000	\$12,400
Contracts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$2,065,000	\$2,110,200	\$2,110,200	-	-	-	\$2,065,000	\$2,110,200
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$2,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$2,000	-
Professional Services	\$70,000	\$59,300	\$57,900	-	-	-	\$70,000	\$57,900
Direct Support Services	\$12,000	\$3,400	\$2,900	-	-	-	\$12,000	\$2,900
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,000	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,180,000	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400	\$5,000	\$5,000	-	\$2,185,000	\$2,183,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Forest Legacy Coordinator	0.2	2.0	\$7,400	\$5,000	General Fund	\$12,400

Direct Support Services

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

DNR calculator

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

The appraisals came in slightly higher than anticipated but otherwise cost estimates were accurate.

Total Revenue: \$2,185,000

Revenue Spent: \$2,183,400

Revenue Balance: \$1,600

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

D. This is not applicable because the recipient is a state agency or department.

Itemize out how the revenues were spent:

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	0	0	0	0	1,000	1,306	0	0	1,000	1,306
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	0	0	0	0	1,000	1,306	0	0	1,000	1,306

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	-	-	-	-	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400	-	-	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400	-	-	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400

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	0	0	1,000	1,306	1,000	1,306
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	0	0	1,000	1,306	1,000	1,306

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400	\$2,180,000	\$2,178,400

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

We successfully surpassed our target of 1000 acres and actually achieved 1306 acres protected.

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region:

Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation ~ *Forestlands were protected from development and fragmentation; forestlands were permanently protected from conversion to non-forest uses by fee acquisition which will reduce potential development and fragmentation and consolidate public ownership in larger blocks that are sustainably managed by the Department of Natural Resources.*

Parcels

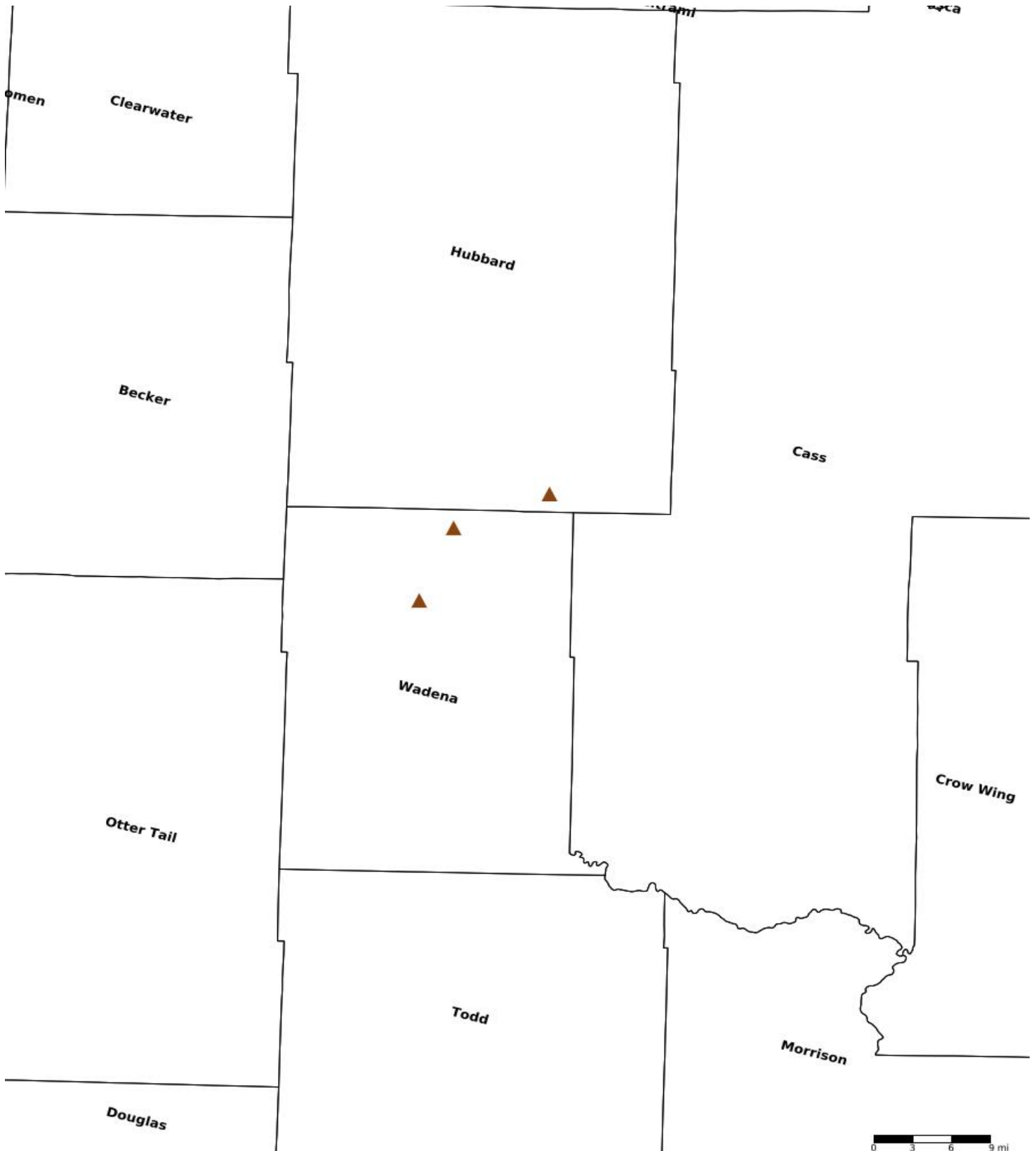
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Pinelands Sands Ph2 (ML 14 also)	Hubbard	13933226	72	\$242,000	No
Pinelands Sands Ph2	Wadena	13834211	1,047	\$800,000	No
Pinelands Sands Ph2 WMA	Wadena	13734209	187	\$380,000	No

Parcel Map



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