



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

State Forest Acquisition, Richard J. Dorer Memorial Forest - Phase IV

Laws of Minnesota 2017 Final Report

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### General Information

**Date:** 04/05/2026

**Project Title:** State Forest Acquisition, Richard J. Dorer Memorial Forest - Phase IV

**Funds Recommended:** \$1,000,000

**Legislative Citation:** ML 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 3(e)

**Appropriation Language:** \$1,000,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources to acquire lands in fee for wildlife habitat purposes in the Richard J Dorer State Forest 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:** Jeff Busse

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### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Houston and Fillmore.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

Southeast Forest

**Activity types:**

Protect in Fee

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

Forest

## Narrative

### Summary of Accomplishments

Phase 4 of the State Forest Acquisition project protected 105 acres of priority forestland habitat in the southeastern ecological section of the state. All parcels have been included in the State Forest program of the Outdoor Recreation System; providing permanent public access for hunting and recreation to sustainably managed forestlands.

### Process & Methods

Working collaboratively with staff from DNR's Wildlife and Ecological sections, and local conservation partners, DNR Forestry staff targeted acquisition opportunities in the Richard J. Dorer State Forest that best aligned with forest management objectives and DNR land acquisition goals. Parcels were selected from area land asset management plans, with priority focus on those that improved public access to state lands, consolidated fragmented ownership boundaries, and provided protection of critical forest habitats. Permanent protection of these parcels is more important now than ever, as they connect to larger forest habitat complexes, and provide a crucial buffer between existing forestlands and the increasing development pressures on adjacent agricultural lands.

Although we were successful in acquiring over 100 acres of important forest habitat, this amounted to only a third of the lands we had sought to protect in this project. In total three new parcels were added to the Richard J. Dorer State Forest system, providing a variety of benefits as described briefly below:

RJD Jefferson 6, Houston County – Acquired 40 acres of high quality mesic hardwood forest habitat; including a vulnerable dry bedrock bluff prairie outcrop that provides crucial habitat for a state listed threatened species of rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*). Protection of this parcel helps provide an important buffer to adjacent agricultural lands, and helps mitigate water quality issues from runoff entering Winnebago Creek, a designated trout stream, less than a mile down slope.

RJD Arendahl, Fillmore County – Acquired 37 acres of valuable lowland hardwoods and forested wetlands situated below steep talus slopes in the Root River catchment basin. Protection of this site is important, as it includes a portion of a rare native plant community (southern dry talus cliff) that is ranked critically imperiled statewide (S1), and provides important habitat for many species of greatest conservation need. Acquiring this parcel also helps improve public access to another 360 acres of state forest land nearby along Torkerlson Creek (a designated trout stream).

RJD Holt 2, Fillmore County – Acquired 28 acres of critically imperiled rare native plant communities (S1 and S2); including dry southern talus bluffs, and a valuable wet mesic blue beech forest along a seasonal tributary to the Diamond Creek (a designated trout stream). These forestlands provide important habitat for several state listed species; including eastern spotted skunk, timber rattlesnake, and the western prairie fringed orchid. The northern portion of this parcel sits adjacent to commercial agricultural lands, and had been managed as a buffer through the CRP program. Forest restoration efforts are underway to further enhance the ecological integrity of this area.

### **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?**

Projects sites selected for protection contain important ecological landscape features and plant communities of high biodiversity significance, including sensitive trout stream tributaries, riparian forests, and dry bedrock bluff prairies. These sites were prioritized in part for the critical habitat they provide for numerous state listed

threatened and endangered species of concern; including: timber rattlesnakes, eastern spotted skunk, and the western prairie fringed orchid.

### **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.**

Project site prioritization included use of many existing science-based conservation habitat plans (MN Wildlife Action Plan), geospatial tools (MN Biological Survey, DNR Natural Heritage database, DNR Ecological Classification System); as well as ongoing consultation and collaboration with conservation professionals, wildlife habitat specialists, and ecologists throughout Minnesota.

### **Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition**

All parcel acquisitions received support from local conservation groups, county and township boards, and DNR staff in the Divisions of Ecological and Water Resources, Parks and Trails, and Fish and Wildlife.

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

This project experienced a series of unexpected setbacks that were a significant challenge in meeting our protection acre goals. Restrictions on travel, hiring freezes, budget uncertainty, and staffing limitations during the pandemic caused delays in work getting done, and made it difficult to communicate effectively with landowners. In addition, the recreational forest and agricultural realty markets in southeast MN has been in flux the past couple years. Several landowners who had been interested in selling their lands, had rejected offers or backed out on agreements without warning. In some instances they described no longer wishing to sell due to an uncertain financial future, and in other instances they had received competitive cash offers far beyond what we could match.

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

All parcels acquired in this project have been fully incorporated into the DNR's State Forest system, and will be included in ongoing planning efforts to determine what/if any management needs exist to maintain and enhance these tracts to meet the multiple use needs of providing quality wildlife habitat, and natural resources based economic and recreational opportunities. Any future required management activities will be funded through the Forest Management Investment Account, and/or state bonding dollars.

## Budget

### Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	-	-	-	\$120,000	-	General Fund	\$120,000	-
Contracts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$896,600	\$896,600	\$339,500	-	-	-	\$896,600	\$339,500
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Professional Services	\$40,000	\$40,000	\$71,200	-	-	-	\$40,000	\$71,200
Direct Support Services	\$2,400	\$2,400	-	-	-	-	\$2,400	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$60,000	\$60,000	-	-	-	-	\$60,000	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	\$1,000	-	-	-	-	\$1,000	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$410,700</b>	<b>\$120,000</b>	-	-	<b>\$1,120,000</b>	<b>\$410,700</b>

### Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Division Coordinator	0.4	4.0	-	\$120,000	General Fund	\$120,000

**Explain any budget challenges or successes:**

**Total Revenue:** \$0

**Revenue Spent:** \$0

**Revenue Balance:** \$0

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

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

Other : General Fund

**How were the funds used to advance the program?**

General fund dollars were used in part to fund DNR Division of Forestry staff in their efforts to identify, analyze, and prioritize important habitat project areas appropriate for this project. DNR staff time spent building support for specific projects with local conservation groups, landowners, local government units and other DNR staff was funded with General Fund monies.

## 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	300	105	0	0	300	105
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>105</b>

### 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	-	-	-	-	\$1,000,000	\$410,700	-	-	\$1,000,000	\$410,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$410,700</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$410,700</b>

### 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	300	105	0	0	0	0	300	105
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
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>105</b>

## 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	-	-	-	-	\$1,000,000	\$410,700	-	-	-	-	\$1,000,000	\$410,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	-	-	-	-	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$410,700</b>	-	-	-	-	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>\$410,700</b>

### Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

### Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

Failed to meet protection acre goal due to landowners rejecting offers because of fluctuating realty market conditions.

### Outcomes

#### Programs in southeast forest region:

Forestlands and savannas are protected from parcelization and fragmentation and accessible for resource management purposes ~ *Outcome is measured by number of acres acquired.*

## Parcels

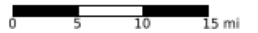
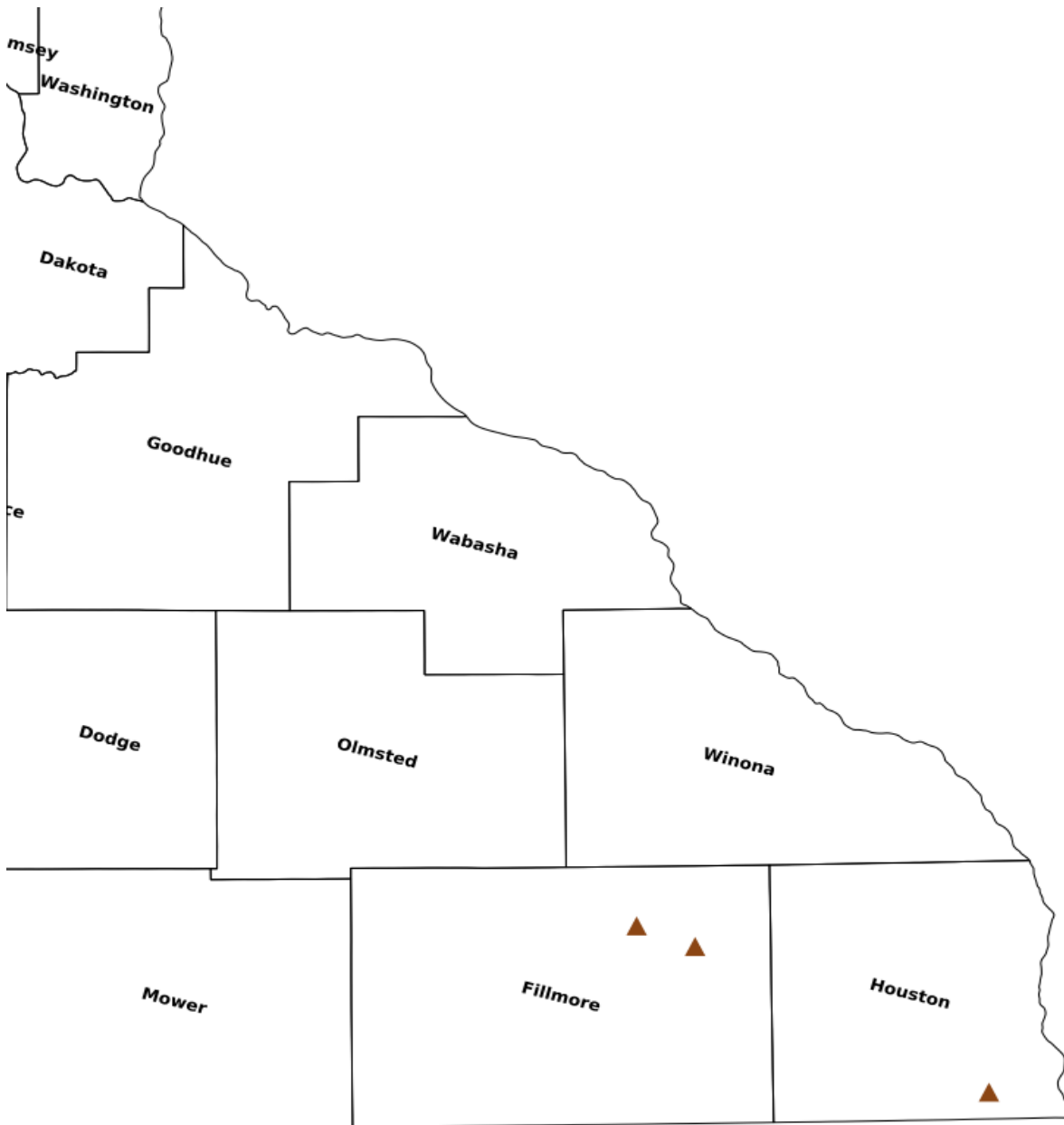
### Sign-up Criteria?

No

### Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
RJD - Arendahl 1	Fillmore	10409231	37	\$130,000	No
RJD - Holt 2	Fillmore	10309212	28	\$100,000	No
RJD - Jefferson 6	Houston	10104219	40	\$110,000	No

# Parcel Map



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