



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Cannon River Watershed Habitat Complex - Phase VII

Laws of Minnesota 2017 Final Report

General Information

Date: 04/24/2026

Project Title: Cannon River Watershed Habitat Complex - Phase VII

Funds Recommended: \$1,436,000

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

Appropriation Language: \$1,436,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Trust for Public Land to acquire in fee and restore lands in the Cannon River watershed for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes 86A.05, subdivision 8. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules 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): Le Sueur and Steele.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Prairie

Activity types:

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Wetlands

Prairie

Forest

Habitat

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

Through fee-title acquisition, Trust for Public Land permanently protected 253 acres (115% of our goal) throughout the Cannon River Watershed. This resulted in two additions to existing Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). 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 Watershed Habitat Complex Phase VII program acquired 253 acres of high-quality wetland, prairie, remnant Big Woods forest, and shoreline habitat for fish, game and wildlife throughout the Cannon River Watershed. The protection and expansion of two large complexes (Murphy WMA and Aurora WMA) provides new opportunities for public hunting, fishing, and wildlife observation.

The Cannon River Watershed program was designed to address the following issues: the degradation and loss of diverse habitat throughout the Cannon River Watershed, and the 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 VII 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, forests, and shorelines. The Phase VII 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, upland birds, white tail deer, and fish. Protection will also provide access for a diversity of recreational experiences including duck, pheasant, turkey and deer hunting, 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 VII funding:

1. Murphy WMA Addition - Le Sueur County:

Trust for Public Land acquired and conveyed 72 acres to the MN DNR 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. Trust for Public Land purchased this property using funds from both the ML17 and ML16 Cannon River grants.

2. Aurora WMA Addition - Steele County:

Trust for Public Land acquired and conveyed 260 acres to the Minnesota DNR as an addition to Aurora WMA in Steele County. Located southeast of Owatonna, this property is a mix of wetland and grassland habitat, and much of the area was in agricultural row crop production. The acquisition of this land not only protects the existing wetland habitat, it protects the headwaters of Turtle Creek and allows for the restoration of the agricultural fields back into prairie grasslands. Permanently protecting this land provides additional public access opportunities. Trust for Public Land purchased this property using funds from both the ML17 and ML18 Cannon River grants.

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 program'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, Le Sueur County, Steele County, respective Township Boards, Great River Greening, and Clean River Partners.

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

The Cannon River Watershed Habitat Complex lands have been acquired and conveyed to the DNR who have completed the 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
2020 and ongoing	DNR Land Management Funds	Property owned by the DNR via TPL acquisitions will be managed according to DNR land management policies.	DNR land 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	\$96,600	\$96,600	\$96,600	\$46,400	\$46,400	Private	\$143,000	\$143,000
Contracts	\$49,000	\$8,500	\$8,500	-	-	-	\$49,000	\$8,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,195,200	\$1,195,200	\$1,195,200	-	-	-	\$1,195,200	\$1,195,200
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$2,100	\$2,100	\$400	-	-	-	\$2,100	\$400
Professional Services	\$28,000	\$28,000	\$28,000	-	-	-	\$28,000	\$28,000
Direct Support Services	\$30,100	\$30,100	\$20,500	\$30,100	\$20,500	Private	\$60,200	\$41,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$14,000	\$14,000	\$14,000	-	-	-	\$14,000	\$14,000
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	\$21,000	\$61,500	\$40,500	-	-	-	\$21,000	\$40,500
Grand Total	\$1,436,000	\$1,436,000	\$1,403,700	\$76,500	\$66,900	-	\$1,512,500	\$1,470,600

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Protection and Legal Staff	0.28	3.0	\$96,600	\$46,400	Private	\$143,000

Direct Support Services

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

Trust for Public Land's DSS request is based upon our federally approved indirect rate, which has been approved by the DNR. 50% of these costs are requested from the grant, and 50% is contributed as leverage.

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

Our budget was primarily successful. However, of the \$75,500 that was budgeted and released for DNR Land Acquisition and IDP costs, only \$54,500 (14,000 + 40,500) was spent on the necessary activities. The remainder will be returned to the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

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.

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

N/A

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	61	115	72	5	43	133	44	0	220	253
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	61	115	72	5	43	133	44	0	220	253

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	\$300,000	\$638,800	\$570,000	\$28,000	\$220,000	\$736,900	\$346,000	-	\$1,436,000	\$1,403,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	\$300,000	\$638,800	\$570,000	\$28,000	\$220,000	\$736,900	\$346,000	-	\$1,436,000	\$1,403,700

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	220	253	0	0	220	253
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	220	253	0	0	220	253

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	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,436,000	\$1,403,700	-	-	\$1,436,000	\$1,403,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,436,000	\$1,403,700	-	-	\$1,436,000	\$1,403,700

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

1,494 Feet

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

Trust for Public Land permanently protected 253 acres (115% of our goal) in the Cannon River Watershed.

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 Watershed Habitat Complex program. 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, 253 new acres and a quarter-mile of shoreline is now permanently protected and accessible for public use.*

Parcels

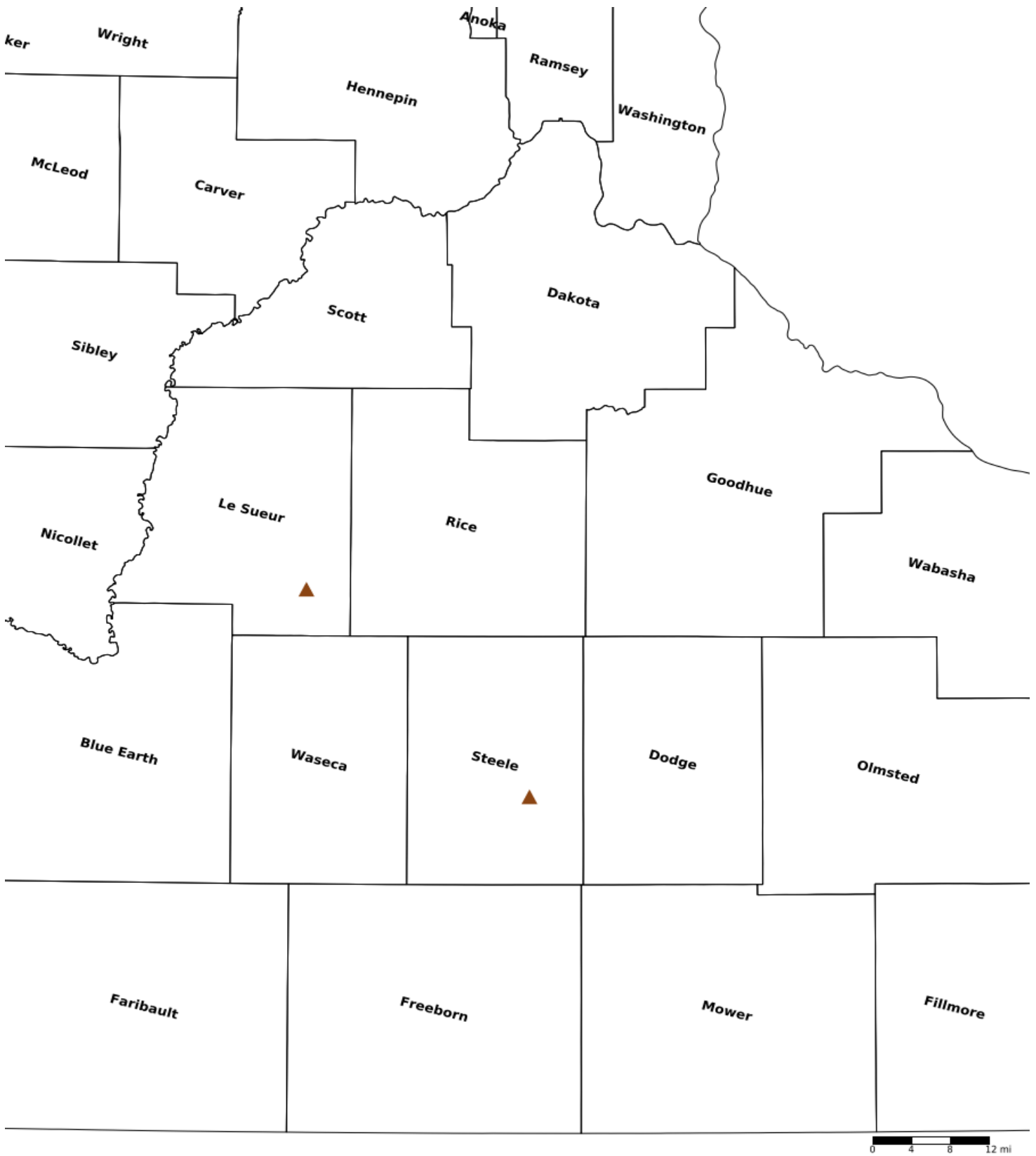
Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Murphy WMA	Le Sueur	10923208	16	\$82,600	No
Aurora WMA	Steele	10619219	237	\$1,108,606	No

Parcel Map



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