



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project - Phase IV

Laws of Minnesota 2018 Final Report

General Information

Date: 08/18/2026

Project Title: Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project - Phase IV

Funds Recommended: \$2,998,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2018, Ch. 208, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 5(b)

Appropriation Language: \$2,073,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for agreements to acquire lands in fee and restore wildlife habitat in the Mississippi headwaters. Of this amount, \$73,000 is to the Mississippi Headwaters Board and \$2,000,000 is to The Trust for Public Land. \$925,000 the second year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire lands in permanent conservation easements and to restore wildlife habitat, of which up to \$65,000 is for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of proposed acquisitions must be included as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Tim Terrill

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Partners Contact

BWSR: *No Contact Added*

MHB: *No Contact Added*

TPL: *No Contact Added*

Location Information

County Location(s): Aitkin, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Morrison and Itasca.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

Northern Forest

Forest / Prairie Transition

Activity types:

Protect in Easement

Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

Prairie

Forest

Narrative

Summary of Accomplishments

The Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project Phase IV (ML 18) achieved permanent protection of 1,590 acres of critical fish and wildlife habitat, including 12 miles of shoreland on the Mississippi River and adjacent lakes/tributaries. This accomplishment exceeded the appropriation goal by over 200%. Seven (7) fee-title acquisitions and 12 RIM conservation easements adjacent to public land created or expanded large habitat protection complexes. Acquisitions included 4 additions to county forests and 3 additions to DNR public land. The project is a partnership of the Mississippi Headwaters Board, Trust for Public Land, BWSR and the 8 Headwaters' County SWCDs.

Process & Methods

The Mississippi River is known as “America’s greatest river”, one of the largest in the world. It provides critical habitat for fish, wildlife and migratory waterfowl along its first 400 miles—its Headwaters course through 8 Minnesota Counties from Itasca State Park to southern Morrison County. It also provides drinking water for St. Cloud and the Twin Cities plus varied recreation opportunities for millions of people. Protecting the Headwaters' water quality and adjacent shoreland habitats through strategically placed permanent land protection is critical to maintaining fish, game, and non-game wildlife habitat as well as food and shelter for millions of migratory waterfowl annually on the Mississippi Flyway.

This Program's funding has been expanded beyond the Phase 4 ML18 appropriation to funding through Phase 7 (ML22) resulting in the cumulative protection to date of 10,736 acres and over 50 miles of shoreland on the Mississippi River, major tributaries, and contributing headwaters lakes. Public lands adjacent to the Mississippi River are increasingly in danger of losing habitat connectivity as private lands are under more development pressure potentially causing fragmentation of forests and critical upland and shoreland habitats. This Program's goal is creating or enlarging permanently protected upland habitat complexes to insure game and non-game wildlife have a secure place to raise their young, seek shelter and food, and move around without disturbance; the protection of water quality as necessary fish habitat; and food and shelter for migratory waterfowl. At the same time, the program opens up new opportunities for public recreation along the Mississippi River and within its major watershed. Fee-title acquisition with final public ownership (either the DNR or a Headwaters' County) and RIM conservation easements, held in perpetuity by BWSR, were the land protection tools used in strategic locations to create or expand permanently protected habitat corridors. (see answers to questions below for the scientific methodology used to select priority parcels for land conservation). The targeted

geography for the program was the minor watershed corridor of the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River, its major tributaries, and headwaters lakes. Program partners (MHB, TPL, and BWSR) defined initial priorities for the program that guided the implementation of

Phase IV (ML18) and subsequent phases for the Mississippi Headwaters Habitat Corridor Project. A Technical Committee comprised of partner representatives, representatives from Headwaters' SWCDs, the DNR, and The Nature Conservancy reviewed proposed fee-title acquisitions and easements and approved/disapproved projects according to ranking criteria related to habitat quality, location, size, and supporting field observations. This process insures that critical habitat value was achieved with the funding appropriated.

Completion of Phase IV (ML18) resulted in the permanent protection of 1,560 acres and 12 miles of shoreland achieved through 12 RIM conservation easements with private landowners and 7 fee-title acquisitions that included 4 additions to a county forest, 1 addition to a state forest, and additions to a DNR WMA and AMA. Funding from subsequent appropriations helped achieve these goals.

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 science-based targeting described in the next paragraph 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 minor watershed of the first 400 miles of the Mississippi River and/or along major tributaries, headwaters' lakes and priority sub-watershed areas. 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. Many of these identified priority areas were the geography focused on in selecting parcels for permanent land protection using fee-title acquisition or RIM conservation easements.

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.

A science-based prioritization process called RAQ was used to narrow the field of potential outreach parcels that met program criteria. All parcels within the Program's defined geography were scored using the RAQ process. RAQ includes assessing the riparian nature of the parcel (R), its adjacency to other public land (A) and its habitat quality (Q), which utilized a variety of state and federal databases and natural resource data. The highest cumulative score ($R + A + Q$) possible was a 10. Parcels scoring in the top third (scores 6-10) were used for fee-title acquisition or easement outreach to landowners. Through outreach mailings and word of mouth, interested landowner's parcels were reviewed by the Program Technical Team for approval or disapproval. The Technical Team is comprised of program partners, the 8 headwater's SWCD representatives, and representatives from the Nature Conservancy and DNR. The Team assessed the parcel(s) using a program-specific ranking sheet that looked at the RAQ scoring but also other factors such as size of the parcel, amount of shoreland, urgency for protection, specific forest and other land use conditions, and the professional judgement of the presenter of the parcel(s). The location within the program's designated geography was also considered.

Explain Partners, Supporters, & Opposition

The Program is a partnership of the Mississippi Headwaters Board (administration, coordination, LGU relationship building and outreach assistance); Trust for Public Land (fee-title acquisitions with and without PILT) and BWSR (RIM conservation easements). Supporting organizations included: 8 Headwaters County SWCDs (Clearwater, Beltrami, Itasca, Hubbard, Cass, Aitkin, Crow Wing, and Morrison counties), who provided conservation easement outreach and processing in cooperation with BWSR, the final easement holder. The Nature Conservancy provided

technical support along with GIS-based habitat quality analysis and the Minnesota DNR assisted with technical and land ownership support. A Technical Committee consisting of all project partners, supporters, and participating SWCDs developed ranking criteria for potential acquisitions and easements and reviewed and approved projects. There was strong local government support for fee-title acquisitions since each fee-title acquisition obtained initial county board support for an acquisition before proceeding with due diligence and final county board support before completing a project.

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

The Mississippi Headwaters flows through 8 Minnesota Counties starting at Itasca State Park in Clearwater County to the Southern border of Morrison County. With such a large geography that includes high quality forests, prairies along the southern portion, pristine waters, and a critical part of the Mississippi flyway for migratory waterfowl, there were abundant opportunities for excellent fish and wildlife habitat protection. The challenge was identifying the highest priority lands for protection yet manageable for landowner outreach. This was addressed through the RAQ screening process previously described. The Program not only met its original expectation for acres of protection, it exceeded it by over 250% with a waiting list of interested landowners. A unique aspect of this program was the establishment of strong LGU support and relationships that have continued throughout subsequent appropriations.

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

The lands acquired in fee-title will be managed according to the permanent land holder's (DNR or County) land management plans. Lands placed in RIM conservation easements will be monitored for easement compliance by the appropriate County SWCD according to BWSR's monitoring timetable. Ultimately, BWSR will be responsible for the ongoing stewardship of the conservation easement lands and enforcement of violations, if necessary.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2024 and ongoing	OHF Easement Stewardship Funds	SWCDs under contract to BWSR will conduct conservation easement onsite inspections for 5 consecutive years and every three years thereafter.	BWSR will enforce any violations noted by onsite inspection	BWSR will do required stewardship fund reporting to LSOHC.
2024 and ongoing	County Land Management Funds	Land acquired by Counties via TPL conveyance after purchase with OHF funds will be maintained and managed according to their county land management policies	Land will remain open to the public in accordance with conveyance terms.	County ongoing management.
2024 and ongoing	DNR Land Management Funds	Property acquired by the DNR via conveyance by TPL will be managed according to DNR Land Management Policies.	DNR lands acquired in fee-title will remain permanently protected and open to the public.	Ongoing DNR management

Budget

Grand Totals Across All Partnerships

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$154,200	\$196,600	\$186,400	-	-	-	\$154,200	\$186,400
Contracts	\$91,000	\$71,000	\$62,000	-	-	-	\$91,000	\$62,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,258,800	\$1,009,600	\$1,009,500	-	-	-	\$1,258,800	\$1,009,500
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$500,000	\$767,200	\$767,200	-	\$60,000	-, Land Value Donation	\$500,000	\$827,200
Easement Acquisition	\$762,500	\$762,500	\$752,700	-	-	-	\$762,500	\$752,700
Easement Stewardship	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$65,000	-	-	-	\$65,000	\$65,000
Travel	\$6,900	\$3,900	\$600	-	\$2,300	-, Private	\$6,900	\$2,900
Professional Services	\$60,000	\$17,300	\$17,300	-	-	-	\$60,000	\$17,300
Direct Support Services	\$19,600	\$21,900	\$21,900	\$19,600	\$21,900	-, Private	\$39,200	\$43,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$17,200	-	-	-	\$30,000	\$17,200
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$2,300	\$2,300	-	-	-	-	\$2,300	-
Supplies/Materials	\$700	\$3,700	\$3,000	-	-	-	\$700	\$3,000
DNR IDP	\$47,000	\$47,000	\$14,200	-	-	-	\$47,000	\$14,200
Grand Total	\$2,998,000	\$2,998,000	\$2,917,000	\$19,600	\$84,200	-	\$3,017,600	\$3,001,200

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$71,900	\$71,900	\$72,000	-	-	-	\$71,900	\$72,000
Contracts	\$21,000	\$21,000	\$24,000	-	-	-	\$21,000	\$24,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$762,500	\$762,500	\$752,700	-	-	-	\$762,500	\$752,700
Easement Stewardship	\$65,000	\$65,000	\$65,000	-	-	-	\$65,000	\$65,000
Travel	\$1,600	\$1,600	\$600	-	-	-	\$1,600	\$600
Professional Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$2,300	\$2,300	-	-	-	-	\$2,300	-
Supplies/Materials	\$700	\$700	-	-	-	-	\$700	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$925,000	\$925,000	\$914,300	-	-	-	\$925,000	\$914,300

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Management	0.15	3.0	\$45,000	-	-	\$45,000
Easement Processing	0.13	3.0	\$27,000	-	-	\$27,000

Partner: MHB**Totals**

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$20,000	\$20,000	\$9,700	-	-	-	\$20,000	\$9,700
Contracts	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$38,000	-	-	-	\$50,000	\$38,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$3,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$3,000	-
Professional Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	\$3,000	\$3,000	-	-	-	-	\$3,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$73,000	\$73,000	\$50,700	-	-	-	\$73,000	\$50,700

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Administration	0.1	3.0	\$9,700	-	-	\$9,700

Partner: TPL

Totals

Item	Requested	AP Amount	Spent	Leverage	Received Leverage	Leverage Source	Original Total	Final Total
Personnel	\$62,300	\$104,700	\$104,700	-	-	-	\$62,300	\$104,700
Contracts	\$20,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$20,000	-
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,258,800	\$1,009,600	\$1,009,500	-	-	-	\$1,258,800	\$1,009,500
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$500,000	\$767,200	\$767,200	-	\$60,000	Land Value Donation	\$500,000	\$827,200
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$2,300	\$2,300	-	-	\$2,300	Private	\$2,300	\$2,300
Professional Services	\$60,000	\$17,300	\$17,300	-	-	-	\$60,000	\$17,300
Direct Support Services	\$19,600	\$21,900	\$21,900	\$19,600	\$21,900	Private	\$39,200	\$43,800
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$30,000	\$30,000	\$17,200	-	-	-	\$30,000	\$17,200
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	\$47,000	\$47,000	\$14,200	-	-	-	\$47,000	\$14,200
Grand Total	\$2,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$1,952,000	\$19,600	\$84,200	-	\$2,019,600	\$2,036,200

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Amount Spent	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Protection and Legal Staff	0.15	3.0	\$104,700	-	-	\$104,700

Direct Support Services

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

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

Explain any budget challenges or successes:

No major anticipated budget challenges. Several amendments were made to move funds from contracts and direct support services to fee-title acquisition to cover higher acquisition costs. All appropriated funds for fee-title and RIM easement acquisition were used to build habitat complexes as appropriated. There was strong landowner interest in the Program contributing to its success.

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?

Other : Trust for Public Land provided private funding match of 50% of direct support services and travel expenses;

Parks and Trails Fund

How were the funds used to advance the program?

Funds were used to provide the support services and travel necessary to accomplish fee-title acquisition projects.

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 (Amend)	Total Acres (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	50	0	280	162	0	0	330	330	162
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	135	528	0	0	135	135	528
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	390	910	0	0	390	390	910
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	50	0	805	1,600	0	0	855	855	1,600

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	-	-	\$200,000	-	\$1,268,500	\$1,134,500	-	-	\$1,468,500	\$1,134,500
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	\$568,000	\$842,900	-	-	\$568,000	\$842,900
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	\$961,500	\$939,600	-	-	\$961,500	\$939,600
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$200,000	-	\$2,798,000	\$2,917,000	-	-	\$2,998,000	\$2,917,000

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 (Amend)	Total (Final)
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	50	0	0	0	0	0	280	162	330	330	162
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	135	528	135	135	528
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	207	0	0	0	0	390	703	390	390	910
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	50	207	0	0	0	0	805	1,393	855	855	1,600

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	-	-	\$200,000	-	-	-	-	-	\$1,268,500	\$1,134,500	\$1,468,500	\$1,134,500
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	\$568,000	\$842,900	\$568,000	\$842,900
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$208,000	-	-	-	-	\$961,500	\$731,600	\$961,500	\$939,600
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	\$200,000	\$208,000	-	-	-	-	\$2,798,000	\$2,709,000	\$2,998,000	\$2,917,000

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

12 miles

Explain the success/shortage of acre goals

Due to landowner interest, this appropriation exceeded goals by over 250%.

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

Rivers and streams provide corridors of habitat including intact areas of forest cover in the east and large wetland/upland complexes in the west ~ *The outcome is measured in the number of acres placed in permanent land conservation. For RIM easements BWSR is responsible for monitoring the easements on a regular schedule; monitoring is conducted by the SWCD in the county where the easement is located. Any violations are the responsibility of BWSR. Only easements were placed in the forest-prairie region.*

Programs in the northern forest region:

Increased availability and improved condition of riparian forests and other habitat corridors ~ *The outcome is measured in the number of acres placed in permanent land conservation. For RIM easements BWSR is responsible for monitoring the easements on a regular schedule; monitoring is conducted by the SWCD in the county where the easement is located. Any violations are the responsibility of BWSR. For fee-title acquisitions, the final landholder (either the DNR or the appropriate County) manages and evaluates the use of the land according to their respective land management policies.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Savanna Esker	Aitkin	05023209	63	\$85,374	No
Sissabagamah Creek	Aitkin	04727224	216	\$238,000	No
Crow Wing Forest North	Crow Wing	04729220	64	\$205,000	No
Gilbert Lake AMA Addition	Crow Wing	13428228	64	\$775,000	No
Indian Jack Lake WMA II	Crow Wing	13626234	35	\$135,000	No
Hubbard County Forest Addition - Emmaville - TCF/HF	Hubbard	14234234	88	\$112,137	No
Hubbard County Forest Addition - Schoolcraft - TCF/HF	Hubbard	14434210	160	\$240,000	No

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
01-01-19-13- -	Aitkin	05124227	64	\$50,400	No
01-02-19-13- -	Aitkin	05124227	69	\$55,600	No
01-02-20-15- -	Aitkin	05024223	118	\$46,600	No
01-06-20-15- -	Aitkin	05024223	127	\$70,300	No
01-07-18-13- -	Aitkin	05024234	113	\$63,000	No
18-01-19-13- -	Crow Wing	13329223	20	\$20,900	No
18-05-19-13- -	Crow Wing	04728219	64	\$70,500	No
31-01-19-13- -	Itasca	05324204	91	\$38,600	No
49-01-19-13- -	Morrison	03932212	72	\$102,700	No
49-02-20-15- -	Morrison	03932214	38	\$50,100	No
49-03-20-15- -	Morrison	12830201	76	\$106,800	No
49-04-20-15- -	Morrison	03932214	59	\$70,100	No

Parcel Map

