



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
The State of Minnesota

State Office Building, Room G95 100 Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. Saint Paul, Minnesota 55155

DATE: December 19, 2014

TO: LCCMR Co-Chairs

FROM: David Hartwell, Chair

Dear Co-Chairs Senator Tomassoni, Representative Wagenius, and Ms. Gibson:

On December 11, 2014, the LSOHC received testimony from Susan Thornton, LCCMR Director, regarding LCCMR's letter and request for consideration of a partnership funding to the University of Minnesota for easement evaluative research. As was evident from the subsequent discussion, Council members share a concern about how values are determined and paid for, mostly with state programs which raises the question of whether conservation easements are garnering ample benefits for what is paid for them.

We know that perpetual conservation easements, when properly designed, are definitely beneficial. They eliminate the long term costs of land management and ownership and if properly paid for (or donated completely or partially), reduce acquisition costs while still providing the benefit of habitat protection. We also know that their outputs (acres, miles of shoreline buffered, etc.) are quantifiable. However, like you, we are concerned with how to quantify easement or fee acquisition "outcomes" (healthier wildlife populations, cleaner water, etc.) and their cumulative public and ecological benefits for Minnesota.

The Council discussed obvious statutory restrictions upon use of Outdoor Heritage Funds (OHF). In particular, MS 97A.056, Subd. 1 directs that OHF moneys "must be expended to restore, protect, and enhance wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife." Further, Subd 3(d) directs, "The council may make recommendations to the (LCCMR) on scientific research that will assist in restoring, protecting, and enhancing wetlands, prairies, forests, and habitat for fish, game, and wildlife, preventing forest fragmentation, encouraging forest consolidation, and expanding restored native prairie."

After full discussion, the Council acknowledged that it was restricted by Statute from recommending OHF moneys for research. However, the Council also felt it very important that we provide support for LCCMR as well as advocate for Legislative support. As a direct result of Council action, I will be penning a letter to the Legislature that will accompany our ML2015 Appropriation Recommendations. That letter

will support LCCMR's appropriation recommendation of ENTRF to the University and will underscore to Leadership the need for funding to assess conservation easement valuation and conservation easement outcomes.

On behalf of the LSOHC, I wish to express our appreciation for your interest and involvement toward delineating and quantifying the reach of outcome benefits produced by easements. Without a doubt, permanent conservation easements are an excellent tool for conservation management and for achieving conservation goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hartwell', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David Hartwell
Chairman