



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) M.L. 2013 Work Plan

Date of Status Update Report: 5/6/16

Date of Next Status Update Report:

Date of Work Plan Approval: June 25, 2013

Project Completion Date: June 30, 2016

Is this an amendment request? YES

PROJECT TITLE: Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape - Phase II

Project Manager: Thomas Kroll

Affiliation: Saint John's Arboretum, Saint John's University

Mailing Address: 104 New Science Building

City/State/Zip Code: Collegeville, MN 56321

Telephone Number: (320) 363-3126

Email Address: tkroll@csbsju.edu

Web Address: www.csbsju.edu/arboretum

Location: Stearns County. The target area is approximately 65,000 acres in parts of the following townships: Albany, Avon, Brockway, Collegeville, Farming, LeSauk, Rockville, St. Joseph, St. Wendel, and Wakefield

Total ENRTF Project Budget:

ENRTF Appropriation: \$772,000

Amount Spent: \$42,319

Balance: \$729,681

Legal Citation: M.L. 2013, Chp. 52, Sec. 2, Subd. 04j

Appropriation Language:

\$772,000 the first year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Saint John's University in cooperation with the Minnesota Land Trust to secure permanent conservation easements on high quality habitat in Stearns County, prepare conservation management plans, and provide public outreach. A list of proposed easement acquisitions must be provided as part of the required work plan. Up to \$80,000 is for use by Minnesota Land Trust in a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the work plan and subject to subdivision 16. An entity that acquires a conservation easement with appropriations from the trust fund must have a long-term stewardship plan for the easement and a fund established for monitoring and enforcing the agreement. Money appropriated from the trust fund for easement acquisition may be used to establish a monitoring, management, and enforcement fund as approved in the work plan. An annual financial report is required for any monitoring, management, and enforcement fund established, including expenditures from the fund. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2016, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

I. PROJECT TITLE: Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape: Phase 2

II. PROJECT STATEMENT:

The Avon Hills area is a 65,000 acre unique natural landscape located in Stearns County just 15 miles west of St. Cloud. The landscape is glacial moraine that rises out of the surrounding farmland; it contains the highest concentration of native plant communities in the county, including oak and maple-basswood forests, tamarack and mixed-hardwood swamps, and wet meadows. It harbors several rare plants and animals, including American ginseng, cerulean warbler, red-shouldered hawk, Blanding's turtle, and least darter. The area has been identified as *ecologically significant* by The Nature Conservancy's Eco-Regional Plan and the MN DNR's County Biological Survey. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the MN DNR and many others have invested in protection efforts within this landscape, signaling its importance as a priority for protection. This landscape includes more than 1,000 acres of conservation easements, many of which were established using 2008 ENRTF funding.

Using this ENRTF funding, the Avon Hills team developed and tested a novel ranking system dubbed the Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPE) to acquire easements. Under this system, each property is given an Environmental Benefits Score based on available data about its ecological qualities (e.g., shoreline, biodiversity, adjacency to protected properties). For properties meeting the minimum environmental threshold, MMAPE uses a market-based approach that asks landowners to submit a sealed bid for the lowest price they will accept for a conservation easement. Those properties with the best ratio of environmental benefits to easement cost become the highest priority for acquisition.

Building on the momentum of our previous successes, we propose to implement a second phase of this project that will permanently protect those lands within the Avon Hills that have state-wide significance. Using the MMAPE approach, we will secure conservation easements on the most strategic and cost-effective properties. In addition, we intend to invest in community outreach and education to ensure that local decision makers, landowners, and others understand the great importance of the Avon Hills landscape and the options that exist for its protection. Finally, we also will ensure that the land eligible for conservation easements will be managed as effectively as possible by developing land management plans for willing landowners.

Easements will be monitored annually and enforced as necessary under the Land Trust's comprehensive conservation easement monitoring, management, and enforcement program. In order to fulfill these stewardship obligations, grant funds may also be requested for the Land Trust's dedicated Stewardship and Enforcement Fund on a project-by-project basis in accordance with LCCMR-approved policies and procedures, the Land Trust's Project Cost Analysis, and as described in the document attached to the initial work plan for this appropriation. The attached Stewardship Overview describes the Land Trust's stewardship program including easement administration and easement monitoring and defense. A copy of the updated 2012 Project Cost Analysis has been separately provided to LCCMR. The Land Trust will report to LCCMR annually on the status and performance of the Stewardship and Enforcement Fund and monitoring activity associated with easements acquired with funds from this grant. This reporting includes submitting an annual financial audit of the Stewardship and Enforcement Fund.

III. PROJECT STATUS UPDATES:

Project Status as of January 31, 2014:

We are using the Feb 1, 2014 "Living in the Avon Hills" conference to roll out this 2013 grant's options for conservation easements. Additional announcements in public media plus personal contacts will be used to assure a broad understanding of the availability of this opportunity to all qualified landowners in the Avon Hills.

Saint John's University and the MN Land Trust (MLT) have been working to define any modifications to land trust contracts that will better assure landowner participation and compliance along with increasing monitoring efficiency and efficacy for the MLT.

The executive board of the Avon Hills Initiative has been advising on the timing and scale of the MMAPLE bid process.

The actual conference has a great agenda and we have high hopes for successful participation.

Project Status as of June 30, 2014:

The MMAPLE easement rating system has been reviewed by a team of conservationists and updated to reflect changes to focus on priorities of biological significance and water protection. Changes also enhance the desired condition of minimizing anyone trying to “game” the system. The public advertisements and person-to-person contacts will begin this fall with all bids due by December 9, 2014.

The February 2014 Avon Hills conference went very well with 267 participants.

Amendment Request (07/24/14)

Request is to change the status update reporting date previously selected as June 30, 2015 to be July 30, 2015 to better align with our field season and fiscal year. The new date has been updated throughout the document.

Amendment Approved: 08/06/14

Project Status as of January 31, 2015:

Promotion of the MMAPLE easement program is in full gear since fall of 2014. A public news release in local media and an Avon Hills Newsletter to 1,500 landowners with more than 20 acres has created widespread knowledge of the program. Sealed bids are due Feb 4th. We have hit a roadblock in promotion. Property taxes are high in this area and landowners are disappointed to find that a recent MN statute specifically targets only easement holders from having their property appraised in the normal ad-valorem process.

We are not holding a February conference this year. The Avon Hills Initiative Executive committee and University staff would like to try as series of smaller workshops and perhaps a field tour later this summer. We would go back to a conference next February, but wanted to mix it up a little.

Amendment Request (01/31/15)

Request is to expand the options for educational events for Avon Hills landowners. We think additional options could diversify the attendees and increase the educational outcomes. *1. Increase awareness of the importance of the Avon Hills landscape by hosting three annual conferences or field days or other events to provide education and promote community involvement in its protection.*

Amendment Approved: Amendment approved by LCCMR April 20, 2015.

Project Status as of July 30, 2015:

The process of creating the easements is underway between the MN Land Trust and the 4 landowners. Since the greatest share of this grant is for the landowner easement acquisition payments, those funds will be used towards the end of the grant period.

The next Avon Hills conference is scheduled for January 2016. Planning is underway.

The land management planning aspect of this grant is well underway with commitments by 3 of the 4 participating landowners to use consulting foresters to prepare plans by April 2016.

Amendment Request as of January 16, 2016 (Originally sent Nov 11, 2015):

The Land Trust is requesting a shift of funding from Personnel to Travel Expenses. Current travel expenses are close to exceeding the original work plan budget allocation. The Land Trust anticipates at a minimum 5 to 6 more site visits in the Avon Hills area before work plan completion.

Justification for the Minnesota Land Trust’s travel budget amendment request is as follows. There are essentially four separate site visits that occur as an easement acquisition moves from a potential easement project to a finalized, recorded conservation easement. There is an initial site visit for assessment and engagement purposes. This is followed by a visit to meet with the landowners to run through the easement documents. Another site visit is necessary for baseline documentation. A final visit occurs upon closing of the easement, when the easement document is recorded. These visits are necessary parts of the easement acquisition process. As the project develops and is determined to not be an eventual easement acquisition it is likely that only several of these visits occur. Initially MLT budgeted for 4-8 easements, but did not fully include the number of necessary visits to complete an easement acquisition. The following is a more complete break-down and estimation of travel necessary to complete acquisition of 4 to 8 easements:

On average a round-trip visit to the Avon Hills area is approximately 200 miles. MLT assumes 8 potential easement projects are in play from the onset.

8 initial site visits @ 200 miles/site	= 1600 miles
6 visits for easement documentation @ 200 miles/site	= 1200 miles
4 visits for baseline documentation @ 200 miles/site	= 800 miles
4 visits for recording and closing on easement @ 200 miles/site	= 800 miles
5 visits for unexpected purposes @ 200 miles/site	=1000 miles

Total = **5400 miles**

5,400 miles @ current Federal mileage reimbursement	= \$2,916
	Rounded to \$3,000

To the extent possible MLT tries to bunch up site visits to minimize the amount of trips. MLT also tries to utilize rental car options as these are more cost effective than MLT employees using their personal vehicles to conduct site visits, or meet with landowners. However, this is not always possible. Also, inevitably during the easement acquisition process there are unexpected site visits that occur to complete the acquisition. The requested budget amendment reflects the precise understanding of the number of anticipated easement acquisitions, with a modest buffer to account for contingencies.

Amendment Approved: Amendment approved by LCCMR January 21, 2016.

Project Status as of January 31, 2016:

Negotiations continue with four separate landowners to purchase conservation easements. The site visit for the baseline documentation report has occurred for all four easement properties. Appraisals also have been completed, though some are still in administrative review, for all four properties. A fifth potential landowner has declined to continue working with MLT to complete an easement at this time.

The four easement acquisitions will protect a total of 317 acres, resulting in a ~10% shortfall relative to our proposed grant acreage deliverable of 350 acres. However, there is insufficient funding remaining to acquire easements on any of the remaining qualifying projects. We will likely return \$82,000 earmarked for easement purchases as a result, approximately 10% of the total grant of \$772,000. In conversation with LCCMR staff this was acknowledged as a constraint of the available funding remaining.

Amendment Request (5/6/2016)

Request is for an addition to the current approved parcel list. We have been unable to close on three potential easement projects (Dean, Glatzel, and Bresnahan) where bids was accepted and negotiations were underway. As a consequence funding is now available to purchase other worthy easement projects that were next in line of bid order. MLT would like to add the Avon Hill (Dwyer) property, also known by code name “Splat”, to the parcel

list. We expect to have a binding contract for acquisition in hand prior to June 30, 2016 and plan to exercise an extension of the grant for an additional year to complete the transaction, pursuant to M.L. 2013, Chp. 52, Sec. 2, Subd. 9.

IV. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES:

ACTIVITY 1: Complete Conservation Easements using MMAPLE

Description:

Help landowners permanently protect land through the use of conservation easements. Saint John's Arboretum will partner with the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT), which will assist in landowner outreach, negotiate conservation easements; prepare documents including easements and baseline reports; secure appraisals, title work, and mapping; and conduct long-term easement monitoring and enforcement. In certain cases as designated by the Project Manager, Stearns County may hold or co-hold easements.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 1:

ENRTF Budget: \$743,500

Amount Spent: \$ 41,962

Balance: \$701,538

Activity Completion Date: 6/30/2016

Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. Protect approx. 350-550 acres, by completing approx. 4-8 permanent conservation easements: contact landowners, implement the MMAPLE reverse-bidding system, complete all components of conservation easement projects, and dedicate funds for long-term monitoring and enforcement. This will result in the expansion of existing protected areas and will protect working forests, ecological diversity, wildlife habitat, and water quality.	6/30/2016	\$743,500

Activity Status as of June 30, 2014:

The MMAPLE easement rating system has been reviewed this spring by a team of conservationists and updated to reflect changes to focus on priorities of biological significance and water protection. Changes also enhance the desired condition of minimizing anyone trying to "game" the system. These changes have been tested to verify that they will correctly rank the easements based on their environmental benefits if the amount paid for easements is equal. The landowners will change the ranking by changing the amount to be paid.

A copy of the Xcel spreadsheet used to rank the projects is attached. Also attached is the form that is reviewed with each landowner to submit with their bid. This form assures that landowners are aware of all of the rules and implications of this MMAPLE conservation easement process.

The public advertisements and person-to-person contacts will begin this August with all bids due by December 9, 2014. Based on word of mouth and the February conference, several landowners have already contacted us wanting to be involved in the bidding.

MLT and Saint John's have also collaborated on optimizing the contract easement language for this area.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2014:

As the Feb 1, 2014 conference is being used to roll out the 2013 ENRTF grant, landowner contacts have been limited to informal meetings. The Collegeville Township Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors did request and participate in a join training session on the project and were supportive of the goals.

Saint John's University and the MN Land Trust (MLT) have been working to define any modifications to land trust contracts that will better assure landowner participation and compliance along with increasing monitoring efficiency and efficacy for the MLT.

The executive board of the Avon Hills Initiative has been advising on the timing and scale of the MMAPLE bid process. In particular, we need to define a set date for closing bids in order to a list of landowners ready for the June 2014 meeting of the LCCMR.

One complication is the 2013 change to MS 273.117 which forbids county assessors from considering the reduced value of property with a permanent easement in assessing for property taxes. This could affect landowner participation. While the loss of the actual value of the reduction could be significant (25% of property taxes in our area), there is also a large factor of landowners believing that they are being unfairly denied an honest and true assessment.

Activity Status as of April 30, 2015:

A news release was completed in August, 2014 with references to the website <http://www.csbsju.edu/outdooru/avonhillsinitiative/events/easements>. In early December, an Avon Hills Newsletter with detailed information about the easement process was mailed to 1,500 homes that had 20+ acres of land in the Avon Hills.

Saint John's University (SJU) hired two local part-time people (on small contracts) to work with individual landowners. This is in addition to the personal contacts that SJU staffer Tom Kroll has been making. We have worked with over 40 individuals so far. At a recent evening meeting with a family, there were 3 generations present from 80 years to an 8 year old who loves the land. Eight sealed bids were received by the Feb 4th deadline.

An issue that arose is the concern with agricultural land. We understand that this grant is targeted to "high quality habitat" and that annual row crops do not meet that definition. However, in this part of MN, a mix of fields, forests, wetlands, and lakes has been the established natural and cultural landscape for 150 years. We certainly do not intend to fund easements that have less than 80% forest, wetlands, prairies, and lakes, and none that have irrigation wells. But many of the landowners we work with do have the historical small fields mixed in the landscape. We also want to eliminate the need for expensive surveys by following normal PLSS survey descriptions. (NW¼ NE¼ SW¼ for a 10 acre example.) We will leave out agricultural land to a great extent and we will always be under 20% ag land. However, many of our easements could have some ag land within the confines of the legal easement. The fields do buffer and protect the adjacent "high quality habitat" from development. To exclude all fields just invites pell-mell development adjacent to or inside our "high quality habitat."

MLT will continue to include language in its conservation easements that prevents ag land that has been removed from ag production from later returning to ag production.

MLT agrees to adopt language in its conservation easements recognizing the conservation of pollinators on ag land for those ENRTF-funded easements in which incidental agricultural use is permitted.

However, ENRTF "stewardship" funds will not be used to pay for monitoring and enforcement of those agriculture acres within an easement. MLT will receive \$15,000 for "stewardship" for each completed easement.

MLT agrees that no ENRTF funding will be used to purchase easements on any ag acres within an approved easement. The appraised value of the non-ag acres is the maximum that can be paid to a landowner for the easement even when the easement includes additional ag acres.

The attached spread sheet shows the range of the 8 bids received.

Bid 1, code named Cloud was accepted. It has 57 total acres adjacent to an existing easement. It has 3,000_ feet of shoreline on a creek. The owner of this property earlier sold 102 acres of the farm to DNR for an SNA. The bid was only \$100 per acre (\$5,700 total) because the owner really wanted to see the land protected. 6 acres (10%) of this bid will remain in agricultural use protected by the easement. No ENRTF funds will be used to pay for those ag acres.

Bid 2, code named Spartan was accepted. It has 173 acres part of which is adjacent DNR property in the St. Wendell Bog SNA on the east. It is also across from DNR land on the west. The land contains 95 acres of "outstanding" quality Sites of Biological Significance (SOBS) as rated by DNR. It has 6,000+ feet of shoreline on a creek. 10 acres (12%) of this bid will remain in agricultural use protected by the easement. No ENRTF funds will be used to pay for those ag acres.

Bid 3, coded named Farm Boy was reviewed by the landowner. This is a 200 acre easement adjacent to an existing easement. It has 4,000+ feet of shoreline on a creek and a lake. It has 30 acres of SOBS. The owner bid \$510,000 for the easement, but as we only have \$248,900 remaining after the first 2 were funded, the owner must decide whether to accept \$248,900 for all 200 acres or pass. The owner chose to reject the offer and will rebid if another round of bidding is held.

Bid 4, code named Schoenwald, was accepted. This 40 acre property is all rated high quality mesic oak forest (SOBS). It is also corners on the Kraemer Lake Stearns county park. The family has owned and carefully used this property for over 100 years. They already have and use a Forest Stewardship plan. Three generations were involved in the bidding process and conservation is firmly held family goal.

Bid 5, code named Zook, was accepted. This easement will cover 98 acres of which 90 are rated as outstanding mesic oak forest (SOBS). Two families combined their property for this bid and both are very conservation oriented. The property is within ½ mile of the Avon Hills South SNA.

Bid 6, code named Splat was bid at \$130,000 for 65 acres. As the majority of the \$602,000 has been allocated to the higher-ranked bids, only \$7,600 remains to be offered. The owner chose to reject the offer and may rebid if another round of bidding is held.

Bid 7, code named Bobolink was rejected as the amount of actively farmed land exceeded 20%.

Bid 8, code named Carrot, was bid at \$155,993 for 69 acres. As the majority of the \$602,000 has been allocated to the higher-ranked bids, only \$7,600 remains to be offered. The owner chose to reject the offer and may rebid if another round of bidding is held.

After all easement and acquisition costs have been expended from this activity, it is expected that \$10,000-\$20,000 will remain unused in this activity. Discussions with LCCMR staff will follow at that point on options to use or return the funding.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2015:

The remaining work on the easements is now the job of the Minnesota Land Trust. (MLT) Saint John's staff continue to spend limited time answering questions even though our budget for this item is expended.

Initial site visits to all accepted bids have been conducted by MLT staff. Staff met with the individual landowners and viewed the proposed easement areas. Discussion of proposed rights and restrictions for each easement were begun with the participating landowners. Environmental site assessments have also been completed for each potential easement area, in conjunction with title work, and initial property mapping.

Bid 2 aka “Spartan” has been reviewed and approved for continued easement work by MLT staff and board. Bids “Cloud”, “Schoenwald”, and “Zook” are still waiting to continue through internal MLT approval processes. It is anticipated that staff and board approval will come in September, 2015.

We expect the Spartan to close by Dec 2015. Schoenwald & Zook could close by Feb 2016 and Cloud would close in about April 2016.

MLT has continued working to define language in its conservation easement that recognizes the conservation of pollinator habitat and species within a fragmented landscape that includes small portions of lands in agricultural production.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2016:

Easement drafts have been reviewed by landowners of all four potential easement acquisitions (Schoenwald, Spartan, and Zook 1 and Zook 2). Currently negotiations over the finer details of the easement is occurring with several of the landowners. All potential easement acquisitions are expected to close by the end of the grant period. Site visits for the baseline documentation report has occurred for all four properties. Appraisals also have been completed, though some are still in administrative review. A fifth potential acquisition mentioned in prior status updates (Cloud) has halted pursuit of an easement at this time.

Parcel acreages have been refined through survey and easement negotiations for each parcel. Modest changes in easement acreage is due to precise mapping and survey work completed by MLT. Initially acreage amounts were based upon the deeded acreage on file with Stearns County which did not accurately account for the geodesic nature of the land, or measurements of a boundary confirmed by a survey:

- Spartan – revised downward from 173 acres to 170 acres.
- Schoenwald – revised downward from 40 to 38 acres.
- Zook 1 & 2 – two separate easement acquisitions; the landowners bid together to strengthen their bid under MMAPLE. Zook has been split to Zook 1 (82 acres) and Zook 2 (20 acres) and the acreage total revised upward from 98 to 102 acres.

Activity Status as of May 6, 2016:

During a meeting held between LCCMR and MLT staff held on 4/13/2016 several procedural and project elements were discussed, of which the following changes were agreed upon continuing forward with all work completed under this phase of the grant:

MLT will include specific language within the easement document and baseline documentation report that addresses the fact that no ENRTF money was used to acquire an easement over any agricultural portion of the Protected Property.

MLT will direct landowners in the approved Habitat Management Plan to follow State-established Pollinator Best Management Practices (BMPs) and specifically avoid the use of neonicotinoids in all habitat management activities.

MLT will address the portion(s) of the Protected Property where the mineral rights have been severed in its easement document.

MLT will now send several documents that originally were to be supplied post-closing of any acquisition per the LCCMR-generated document titled *Requirements for Conservation Easement Acquisition and Monitoring, Management, and Enforcement*, dated August 2014. MLT will now send the approved Habitat Management Plan, Mineral and Environmental Site Assessment, Easement Acquisition value and cost-breakdown, and Landowner Letter (which incorporates the Landowner Bill of Rights) for any acquisition prior to the closing of the easement to LCCMR staff for review.

MLT will also alert LCCMR staff via phone call prior to the sending of any pre-closing materials for review, and will schedule a meeting to review the acquisition project at least 10 days prior to any acquisition but will make every effort to provide the documents with as much time possible prior to closing of the easement.

Final Report Summary:

ACTIVITY 2: Community Education and Outreach

Description:

Facilitate communication among landowners, environmental groups, local units of government, and others within the Avon Hills community to promote land-use education, land protection, understanding of ecological principles, and land stewardship.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 2:

ENRTF Budget: **\$24,500**
Amount Spent: **\$17,237**
Balance: **\$ 7,263**

Activity Completion Date: 6/30/2016

Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. Increase awareness of the importance of the Avon Hills landscape by hosting three annual conferences <u>or field days or other events</u> to provide education and promote community involvement in its protection. Budget includes costs of conference advertising and promotion, keynote speaker, facility costs, participant supplies, and personnel for each conference. Participants are charged a registration fee that covers refreshments and lunch for the day. A limited number (no more than 2 per year) of smaller events, such as topic-specific landowner workshops, may be offered as interest, budget, and time allow.	6/30/2016	\$22,500
2. Represent Avon Hills Initiative and related projects at community or other public events not directly hosted by AHI. Budget includes estimated costs for personnel and educational materials for such events.	6/30/2016	\$2,000

Activity Status as of January 31, 2014:

The annual "Living in the Avon Hills" conference is set for Sat, Feb 1, 2014.

<http://www.csbsju.edu/OutdoorU/Education/Events/LivingintheAvonHills.htm> A strong agenda and past interest should mean a successful outcome. 4,000 flyers were printed and mailed to households in the surrounding area and other interested parties. Promotions in local media and the internet are also underway.

Activity Status as of June 30, 2014:

The February 2014 Avon Hills conference went very well with 267 participants. Nearly all of the attendees are from a 15 mile radius. A copy of the conference brochure is attached. Planning is already underway for the 2015 conference.

Staff from Saint John's have also help organize and have attended monthly to bi-monthly meetings of the Avon Hills Initiative executive board.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2015:

The Avon Hills Initiative Executive committee and the staff of Saint John's Outdoor University elected to not hold a conference in February of 2015. Several factors determined this decision: 1) While the past conferences have been very successful and we will certainly want to do more in the future, we felt that creating an alternative

such as a tour of field sites (using buses) in the Avon Hills would provide a different experience and also could attract new audience members. Field tours provide hands-on examples and learning that some people prefer.
2) We also think it is good marketing strategy to “mix things up” before they get stale.

We have proposed an amendment to allow the option of other types of educational events beyond just a conference in 2015.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2015:

The next Avon Hills conference will be held in January 2015. Planning is underway.

Other scheduled activities for landowners interested in nature include Nature for the Nation, a play about Emerson and Thoreau which will be held outdoor at Saint John’s in September. <http://www.csbsju.edu/fine-arts/performances/nature> .

And Collegeville Colors in October, <http://www.csbsju.edu/outdooru/education/events/collegevillecolors> .

Activity Status as of January 31, 2016:

Final Report Summary:

ACTIVITY 3: Management Plans for Priority Lands

Description:

On lands acceptable for easements, Forest Stewardship or other appropriate management plans will be prepared by a private-sector natural resource professional chosen by the landowner from a MN DNR list. These plans will be based on the terms of the easement, landowner’s goals and the best ecological outcomes. Plan costs are estimated at less than \$9.00 per acre.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 1:

ENRTF Budget: \$4,000
Amount Spent: \$ 0
Balance: \$4,000

Activity Completion Date: 6/30/2016

Outcome	Completion Date	Budget
1. Prepare and implement Forest Stewardship Plans on 350-550 acres.	6/30/2016	\$4,000

Activity Status as of January 31, 2014:

Nothing has been done in Activity 3 as this work will coincide with landowners indicating interest in easements.

Activity Status as of June 30, 2014:

Nothing has been done in Activity 3 as this work will coincide with landowners indicating interest in easements.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2015:

Nothing has been done in Activity 3 as this work will coincide with landowners indicating interest in easements.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2015:

The 4 landowners who are getting easements are the first priority. They were notified of the opportunity to get a plan though this grant. Saint John’s established a fee schedule and solicited 3 consulting foresters who are skilled in hardwoods, approved by DNR, and willing to work in this area. Landowners choose the consulting forester they feel most comfortable and connected with.

Payment levels for stewardship plan preparation are as follows:

Plan size:	Total plan payment from grant directly to consultant:
Includes all non-homesite acres within the easement:	
20-49 acres	\$500
50-89 acres	\$800

90-119 acres	\$1,000
120- 159 acres	\$1,200
160-240 acres	\$1,400

The process is as follows:

- 1) As the landowner, you must contact the consulting foresters and interview one or more of them. It pays to choose a consultant who matches your goals and needs. Think about your goals (birdwatching, timber harvesting, oak regeneration, hunting, hiking,) and ask about their expertise. Get a price for the work and a date for completion. Some may do it for the grant funding I have described below and some may want a little more.
- 2) Meet with the consulting forester at your land and describe your family's goals. Often landowners spend time walking the land with the forester. MLT will provide generic easement terms for the forester to use as well.
- 3) Forester does land inventory and prepares a written plan no later than April 20, 2016.
- 4) Plan mailed or delivered to landowner with copy to MLT.
- 5) Saint John's (Tom Kroll) gets copy of plan and invoice from forester for payment purposes. Saint John's pays forester directly using grant funds at rate described below.
- 6) Landowner pays consultant difference (if any) between Saint John's payment and agreed cost.
- 7) MLT reviews and approves plan as part of easement.
- 8) Landowner and forester (hopefully) establish a long-term working relationship.

Note that this grant payment for a stewardship plan is approved even if for some reason, an easement is not eventually finalized. In any case, the owner may keep and use the plan at no additional cost

PS – For the consultants, at the time it was bid, my records show the following:

"Cloud" has 64 total acres with 57 going into the easement, including 6 acres retained in agriculture. Accepted.
= \$800

"Spartan" has 173 total acres with 173 going into the easement, including 20 acres retained in agriculture.
Accepted = \$1,400

"Schoenwald" has 40 total acres with 40 going into the easement with 0 acres retained in agriculture. Not determined.

"Zook" has 118 total acres (between 2 adjacent owners) with 98.5 going into the easement and 0 acres retained in agriculture. This is a joint 98.5 acres plan with copies to each owner. Accepted. =\$1,000.

Of \$4,000 available, \$800 remains uncommitted which will be promoted to another landowner interested in easements.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2016:

Final Report Summary:

V. DISSEMINATION:

Description: The work and results of this project will be shared in a number of ways including direct outreach to landowners, press releases distributed by St. John's or the Minnesota Land Trust, print and electronic publications of the partners, and through the local media. The Avon Hills website will be a central location for information: <http://www.csbsju.edu/outdooru/avonhillsinitiative>. Finally, we will continue to share results of the MMAPLE method with interested partners as we believe it is a model that could be used more broadly.

Status as of January 31, 2014:

Activity is progressing as described above with current emphasis on the Feb 1 Avon Hills conference described earlier. There was also the public meeting with Collegeville Township officials which allowed an hour for education and input.

On an administrative note, the name Saint John's Arboretum as used at the time of this proposal has been changed due to restructuring at Saint John's. This does not affect the administration of the actual grant in any way as Saint John's University remains the responsible party for the grant. The department of Saint John's University where the program manager Tom Kroll works, will now be called Saint John's Outdoor University. This department handles all of the environmental education outreach programs. (The land associated with Saint John's and owned by Saint John's Abbey is now called the Abbey Arboretum.)

These reports will continue to use the original language to minimize confusion. We are explaining this as visitors to the website for events such as the upcoming Feb 1 conference would likely see announcements that a name change had occurred. All past and current website links are synchronized to go to the same site, so actual use is not affected.

Status as of June 30, 2014:

August 2014 will see a media campaign to advertise the opportunity to participate in the MMAPLE conservation easement bidding process. The sealed bidding process will remain open until December 9, 2014.

Status as of January 31, 2015:

No changes.

Status as of July 30, 2015:

The MMAPLE process used in this project will be presented as a topic at the national conference of Land Trust Alliance in Sacramento, Ca in October, 2015.

Status as of January 31, 2016:

Final Report Summary:

VI. PROJECT BUDGET SUMMARY:

A. ENRTF Budget:

Budget Category	\$ Amount	Explanation
Personnel (SJU):	\$ 19,000	Staff expenses including salaries plus eligible benefits and related costs. Staff will be involved for 3 years of grant activity at 0.10 FTE per year.
Personnel (MLT):	\$ 48,000	Staff expenses including salaries plus eligible benefits and related costs for approximately 20% FTE for each of the 3 years as follows: Conservation directors or other land protection staff (approximately 15% FTE/yr), legal staff and other support staff (approximately 5% FTE/yr)
Professional/Technical/Contracts (SJU):	\$ 4,000	Nat. Resource Professionals: preparing Forest Stewardship Plans for lands acceptable for easements. Plan costs not to exceed \$9/acre.
Professional/Technical/Contracts (SJU):	\$ 2,000	Conference speakers: speaker fees and honoraria for landowner educational conferences and workshops. Contract with private sector natural resource professional to contact landowners as needed.

Equipment/Tools/Supplies (SJU):	\$ 14,000	Promotion of conferences and workshops (newspaper ads, etc.), printing conference brochures and materials, participant supplies (folders, printed materials, etc.). GIS data layers (not software or hardware) necessary for evaluating properties.
Easement Acquisition (MLT):	\$602,000	Includes purchase price of conservation easements and other acquisition expenses, such as title work, insurance, etc.; GIS services (including project mapping by Community GIS); other (including appraisals, surveys, recording fees, etc.) to protect 350-550 acres of land through permanent conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust or Stearns County.
Easement – Long-term Monitoring, Management, and Enforcement (MLT)	\$ 80,000	Funds dedicated to perpetually monitor, manage, and enforce 6 easements acquired and held by the Land Trust. Estimated at an average of \$15,000 per easement.
Travel Expenses in MN (MLT):	\$ 3,000	Mileage and related travel expenses in Minnesota. Estimated at 1,800 miles at the current IRS rate (\$0.555 per mile)
Travel Expenses in MN (SJU):	\$ 0	
TOTAL ENRTF BUDGET: \$772,000		

MLT = Minnesota Land Trust. Stearns County could also be another qualified easement holder.

Explanation of Use of Classified Staff: N/A

Explanation of Capital Expenditures Greater Than \$3,500: N/A

Number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) funded with this ENRTF appropriation:

SJU – 0.37 FTE total (approx. 0.12/year).

MLT 0.60 FTE total (approx. 0.20/year).

Number of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) estimated to be funded through contracts with this ENRTF appropriation:

Natural Resource Plan preparer – 0.02 FTE/yr.

B. Other Funds:

Source of Funds	\$ Amount Proposed	\$ Amount Spent	Use of Other Funds
Non-state			
SJU from Initiative Foundation	\$ 3,000	\$ 0	Contract with local private sector natural resource professionals to contact landowners.
We anticipate a minimum landowner donation of 20% of the appraised easement values for the overall project. Actual amounts will depend upon the outcomes of the bidding	\$105,000	\$ 0	Landowners will essentially match LCCMR funds by reducing the total easement cost by donating part of the easement value.

process.			
State			
	\$ 0	\$	
TOTAL OTHER FUNDS:	\$108,000	\$0	

Add or remove rows as needed

VII. PROJECT STRATEGY:

A. Project Partners: Minnesota Land Trust, Avon Hills Initiative, Stearns County

Saint John's Arboretum: Tom Kroll, John O'Reilly, Sarah Gainey, Jenny Kutter, Jeremy Scegura and staff

- Coordinating education and outreach, annual conference, workshops, grant management, budgeting, meeting with landowners, managing bidding process for easements

Minnesota Land Trust: Conservation staff, staff attorney, and other support staff

- Providing easement education, coordinating bidding process, meeting with landowners, developing easement documents, and monitoring and enforcing the easements.

Avon Hills Initiative: local landowners, citizens, volunteers

- Working with Arboretum and MN Land Trust to achieve project goals

Stearns County: Environmental Services Department

- As needed, developing easement documents, and monitoring and enforcing the easements.

B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy:

In 2008 ENRTF supported Phase 1 of the conservation strategy for the Avon Hills, which included community outreach and education, completion of conservation easements on 400 acres, and work with local governments on ordinances. The Avon Hills landscape still faces multiple land-use pressures and many landowners have expressed keen interest in permanently preserving their land. We plan to seek additional easement funding for subsequent phases of this project from multiple sources to establish cost-effective easements on quality parcels throughout the Avon Hills.

C. Spending History:

Funding Source	M.L. 2007 or FY08	M.L. 2008 or FY09	M.L. 2009 or FY10	M.L. 2010 or FY11	M.L. 2011 or FY12-13
ENRTF to SJU	\$337,000				

VIII. ACQUISITION/RESTORATION LIST: See attached. Parcels will be identified using the MMAPLE process. Once identified and prioritized, these parcels will be brought to the LCCMR on this list for approval.

IX. MAP(S): See attached

X. RESEARCH ADDENDUM: None

XI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Periodic work plan status update reports will be submitted not later than January 31, 2014, June 30, 2014, January 31, 2015, July 30, 2015 and January 31, 2016. A final report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 15, 2016 as requested by the LCCMR.

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
M.L. 2013 Acquisition/Restoration List

Project Title: Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape - Phase II

Project Manager Name: Thomas Kroll

M.L. 2013 ENRTF Appropriation: \$772,000

Updated: May 6, 2016

#	Acquisition or Restoration Parcel Name	Geographic Coordinates		Estimated Cost	Estimated Annual PILT Liabilities	County	Ecological Significance	Activity Description	# of Acres	# of Shoreline Miles	Type of Landowner	Proposed Fee Title or Easement Holder (if applicable)	Status
		Latitude	Longitude										
1	Code = Cloud Schellinger Family	94*28'17"	45*34'36"	\$5,700	\$ -	Stearns	Continues land protected by easements adjacent to DNR Avon Hills South SNA. 1,700 feet of stream.	Conservation Easement acquisition	57	0	Private family	MN Land Trust	Bid ranked #1 in value and bid accepted.
2	Code = Spartan Riesner Family	94*22'0"	45*38'0"	\$311,400	\$ -	Stearns	95 acres of excellent Mesic oak and Tamarack (SOBS). Adjacent to St. Wendell Bog SNA. 3,300 feet of stream.	Conservation Easement acquisition	170	0	Private family	MN Land Trust	Bid ranked #2 in value and bid accepted.
3	Code = Farm Boy Kern Family	94*26'15"	45*31'56"	\$248,900	\$ -	Stearns	Shoreline on undeveloped lake. 30 acres of DNR SOBS. Adjacent to existing easement. 7 Building entitlements extinguished.	Conservation Easement acquisition	200	0.2	Private family	MN Land Trust	Bid ranked #3 in value. Family evaluated whether to accept remaining funds (\$248,900) for all 200 acres or pass. They chose to pass.
4	Code = Schoenwald Glatzel Family	94*23'12"	45*32'55"	\$40,000	\$ -	Stearns	40 acres of high quality Mesic oak. (SOBS) Corners on county park. >100 years of family ownership.	Conservation Easement acquisition	38	0	Private family	MN Land Trust	Bid ranked #4 in value and bid accepted.
5	Code = Zook 1 Bresnahan Families	94*27'19"	45*35'22"	\$ 147,600	\$ -	Stearns	82 acres of outstanding quality Mesic oak. (SOBS)	Conservation Easement acquisition	82	0	Private family	MN Land Trust	Bid ranked #5 in value and bid accepted.
6	Code = Zook 2 Dean Family	94*27'24"	45*35'27"	\$ 36,000	\$ -	Stearns	20 acres of outstanding quality Mesic oak. (SOBS)	Conservation Easement acquisition	20	0	Private family	MN Land Trust	Bid ranked #5 in value and bid accepted.
7	Code = Splat Avon Hills (Dwyer)	94*27'38"	45*33'13"	\$130,000	\$ -	Stearns	55 acres of moderate quality Mesic oak. (SOBS)	Conservation Easement acquisition	61	0	Private family	MN Land Trust	Bid ranked #6. As several projects ahead of family dropped off the family was approached again and their bid was accepted.
8													
9													
10													

NOTES: Estimated cost is landowner payment. Additional costs paid to MLT per easement include about \$12,000 for appraisals, GIS, Title work, surveys, etc and \$15,000 for long-term stewardship. "Farm Boy" was bid at \$501,150, but rejected acres for the remaining funding of \$248,900. attached sheet for details on the other properties bid.