



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

Date of Status Update Report: May 7, 2013

Date of Next Status Update Report: January 31, 2014

Date of Work Plan Approval: June 25, 2013

Project Completion Date: June 30, 2016

Is this an amendment request? no

PROJECT TITLE: Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape - Phase II

Project Manager: Thomas Kroll

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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, Wakefield

Total ENRTF Project Budget:

ENRTF Appropriation: \$772,000

Amount Spent: \$0

Balance: \$772,000

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 (MMAPLE) 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, MMAPLE 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 MMAPLE 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:

Project Status as of June 30, 2014:

Project Status as of January 31, 2015:

Project Status as of June 30, 2015:

Project Status as of January 31, 2016:

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: \$ 0

Balance: \$743,500

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 January 31, 2014:

Activity Status as of June 30, 2014:

Activity Status as of January 31, 2015:

Activity Status as of June 30, 2015:

Activity Status as of January 31, 2016:

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: \$ 0

Balance: \$24,500

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 to provide education and promote community involvement in its protection. Budget includes costs of	6/30/2016	\$22,500

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.		
2. Represent Avon Hills Initiative and related projects at community or other public events not directly hosted by AHL. Budget includes estimated costs for personnel and educational materials for such events.	6/30/2016	\$2,000

Activity Status as of January 31, 2014:

Activity Status as of June 30, 2014:

Activity Status as of January 31, 2015:

Activity Status as of June 30, 2015:

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:

Activity Status as of June 30, 2014:

Activity Status as of January 31, 2015:

Activity Status as of June 30, 2015:

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/arboretum/avonhills>. 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:

Status as of June 30, 2014:

Status as of January 31, 2015:

Status as of June 30, 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):	\$ 50,000	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):	\$ 1,000	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 process.	\$105,000	\$ 0	Landowners will essentially match LCCMR funds by reducing the total easement cost by donating part of the easement value.
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

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, June 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 2

Project Manager Name: Tom Kroll

M.L. 2013 ENRTF Appropriation: \$750,000

#	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	Deerhunter 29			TBD	\$0	Stearns	Over 1 mile of shoreline on the last undeveloped lake in the area. 10 acres of DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS). 1/2 mile boundary would be shared with an existing easement.	Conservation easement acquisition	129	1.2	private	MN Land Trust	Potential interest in bidding in the next round of the MMAPLE process.
2	Farm Boy			TBD	\$0	Stearns	.84 miles of shoreline on the same undeveloped lake as above. 26 acres of DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS). 1/2 mile boundary would be shared with an existing easement.	Conservation easement acquisition	200	0.84	private	MN Land Trust	Potential interest in bidding in the next round of the MMAPLE process.
3	Rustic Place			TBD	\$0	Stearns	50 acres of DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) - Mesic oak. Nearly 1/2 mile of shoreline.	Conservation easement acquisition	103	0.46	private	MN Land Trust	Potential interest in bidding in the next round of the MMAPLE process.
4	Lob Pine			TBD	\$0	Stearns	Wooded land adjacent to existing DNR SNA. 1/3 mile of shoreline.	Conservation easement acquisition	55	0.36	private	MN Land Trust	Potential interest in bidding in the next round of the MMAPLE process.
5	Bobolink			TBD	\$0	Stearns	Preserves rural landscape.	Conservation easement acquisition	61	N/A	private	MN Land Trust	Potential interest in bidding in the next round of the MMAPLE process.
6	Whats the name			TBD	\$0	Stearns	Adjacent to US F&WS property. Preserves rural landscape.	Conservation easement acquisition	40	NA	private	MN Land Trust	Potential interest in bidding in the next round of the MMAPLE process.
7													
8													
9													
10													

NOTES: The geographic coordinates are not available at this time and will be provided once the MMAPLE bidding process is complete. This is a list of projects the Avon Hills partnership received in the March 2010 round of MMAPLE bidding, but did not fund due to lack of adequate funding to preserve all of the properties which had the minimum 500 Environmental Benefit points. Other projects will be added to the list as new landowners are identified and contacted and a new round of MMAPLE bidding is used to allocate funds. We know some projects (perhaps some from the list above) will not receive ENRTF easement funding as their ranking priority will drop compared to more ecologically significant projects. Of the 65,000 total acres in the Avon Hills area, 70% are still relatively undeveloped and 90% are privately owned. There are 11,000 acres of DNR identified Sites of Biological Significance. We estimate that at least 25,000 acres would have significant environmental benefits to be eligible to bid for ENRTF funding for easements using the MMAPLE process.

Attachment A: Budget Detail for M.L. 2013 Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Projects											
Project Title: Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape: Phase 2											
Legal Citation: M.L. 2013, Chp. 52, Sec. 2, Subd. 04j											
Project Manager: Thomas Kroll											
M.L. 2013 ENRTF Appropriation: \$772,000											
Project Length and Completion Date: June 30, 2016											
Date of Update: 7 May 3013											
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET	Activity 1 Budget	Amount Spent	Balance	Activity 2 Budget	Amount Spent	Balance	Activity 3 Budget	Amount Spent	Balance	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL BALANCE
BUDGET ITEM	Conservation Easements using MMAPLE			Community Education & Outreach			Management Plans for Priority Lands				
Personnel (Wages and Benefits) - SJU	8,500		8,500	10,500		10,500				19,000	19,000
Tom Kroll - Project Manager & Forester, \$8,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits), 11% FTE.											
Jenny Kutter, Arboretum Office Coord.,\$3,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits)10% FTE:											
John O'Reilly, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$5,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 10% FTE											
Sarah Gainey, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$1,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits), 2% FTE:											
Jeremy Scegura, SJU Accountant, \$2,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 4% FTE											
Personnel (Wages and Benefits) - MLT	50,000		50,000							50,000	50,000
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/Service Contracts -SJU											
Conference speakers: speaker fees and honoraria for landowner educational conferences and workshops.				2,000		2,000				2,000	2,000
TBD-Nat. Resource Professionals: preparing Forest Stewardship Plans for lands acceptable for easements. Plan costs not to exceed \$9/acre.							4,000		4,000	4,000	4,000
Equipment/Tools/Supplies - SJU											
Promotion of conferences and workshops (newspaper ads, etc.), printing conference brochures and materials, participant supplies (folders, printed materials, etc.).				12,000		12,000				12,000	12,000
GIS data layers (not software or hardware) necessary for evaluating properties.	2,000		2,000							2,000	2,000
Easement Acquisition - MLT											
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.	602,000		602,000							602,000	602,000
Easement - Long-term Monitoring, Management, and Enforcement - MLT											
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.	80,000		80,000							80,000	80,000
Travel expenses in Minnesota - MLT											
Mileage and related travel expenses in Minnesota. Estimated at 1,800 miles at the current IRS rate (\$0.555 per mile).	1,000		1,000							1,000	1,000
COLUMN TOTAL	\$743,500		\$743,500	\$24,500		\$24,500	\$4,000		\$4,000	\$772,000	\$772,000

Avon Hills of Stearns County - 65,000 acres

with callout of potential easements on Little Watab Lake (A rare remaining undeveloped lake).

