

M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 09c Project Abstract
For the Period Ending June 30, 2019

PROJECT TITLE: Conservation Easements in the Avon Hills – Phase III

PROJECT MANAGER: John Geissler

AFFILIATION: Saint John's Outdoor U, Saint John's University

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FUNDING SOURCE: Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

LEGAL CITATION: M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 09c

APPROPRIATION AMOUNT: \$ 1,300,000

AMOUNT SPENT: \$ 1,110,239

AMOUNT REMAINING: \$ 189,761

Sound bite of Project Outcomes and Results

Permanently protected 477 acres of forests, grasslands, wetlands, and almost 3 miles of undeveloped shoreline in the Avon Hills of Minnesota through the acquisition of two conservation easements. Provided quality educational programming to over 2000 participants that promoted environmental literacy and illustrated the importance of conservation efforts in central Minnesota.

Overall Project Outcome and Results

Conservation easements to permanently protect private land from development are the main goal of this project located in the Avon Hills 10 miles west of St. Cloud, MN. The project permanently protected 477 acres of forests, grasslands, wetlands, and almost 3 miles of undeveloped shoreline in the Avon Hills through the acquisition of two conservation easements. These two conservation easements continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of a reverse bidding system termed the MN Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPE) to rank submitted easement locations. MMAPE ranks proposed easements by comparing the land's inherent ecological features to the cost per acre for the easement, thereby focusing on the best value. Land which has many inherent ecological values receives a higher score. Conversely, landowners who bid a higher price per acre for the easement receive a lower score.

Using this competitive bidding process, MMAPE again proved its ability to efficiently leverage the grant funding. For example, the Serenity easement acquisition was purchased for \$201,100 below its full market value. Appraised value of the two purchased easements in this phase was \$1,191,000, with the grant providing \$989,900 towards acquisition; donated value of the bargain sale, in conjunction with landowner contributions to the Land Trust's stewardship fund (\$40,000) amounted to \$241,100 of total leveraged funds (almost \$100,000 more than estimates in the original proposal).

The grant also provided funding to support outreach and education to increase landowner awareness of easements and land protection as well as overall conservation. Examples of the varied educational programming offered reaching over 2000 participants included the Living in the Avon Hills Conference, MN Master Naturalist Volunteer trainings, Collegeville Colors, monthly Landowner Learning Series, and an Avon Hills Master Woodland Owner Training.

Project Results Use and Dissemination

The Land Trust shared news of the easement acquisitions on both the Avon Hills (Serenity) and (Redhead) parcels on its website and Facebook page. Multipage newsletters and flyers featuring the easements and

educational programming were mailed to every landowner with over 40 acres in the Avon Hills several times throughout the project. The MMAPLE process used in this project is being advocated for use in other grants and for other funders such as the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and will be presented as a topic at the national conference of the Land Trust Alliance in Raleigh, NC in October, 2019.



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) M.L. 2016 Work Plan Final Report

Date of Report: August 6, 2019

Final Report

Date of Work Plan Approval: June 7, 2016

Project Completion Date: June 30, 2019

PROJECT TITLE: Conservation Easements in Avon Hills – Phase III

Project Manager: John Geissler

Affiliation: Saint John’s Outdoor U, Saint John’s University

Mailing Address: 104 New Science Building

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Web Address: www.csbsju.edu/outdooru

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:	\$1,300,000
	Amount Spent:	\$1,110,239
	Balance:	\$189,761

Legal Citation: M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 09c

Appropriation Language:

\$1,300,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Saint John's University in cooperation with Minnesota Land Trust to secure permanent conservation easements on approximately 500 acres of 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. 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. Funding for the long-term monitoring and enforcement fund must come from nonstate sources for easements acquired with this appropriation. The state may enforce requirements in the conservation easements on land acquired with this appropriation and the conservation easement document must state this authority and explicitly include requirements for water quality and quantity protection. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2019, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

I. PROJECT TITLE: Conservation Easements in the Avon Hills -- Phase 3

II. PROJECT STATEMENT:

Use the MMAPLE reverse-bid and conservation easement ranking system to protect approximately 500 acres of priority private lands. This will be the final test in the Avon Hills using ENRTF for MMAPLE's novel method. MMAPLE uses precision conservation and a market-based approach to assure the best easement value for the ENRTF. In a new tactic, landowners will pay the MN Land Trust's stewardships costs.

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 rare species, 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 USF&WS, the MN DNR and others have invested in protection efforts, signaling the priority for protection. The Avon Hills now has 1,400 acres of easements, most of which were established using the ENRTF.

Using ENRTF grants, the Avon Hills team developed and twice tested a novel ranking system for acquiring easements dubbed the *Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPLE)*. 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 priority for acquisition. In the 2013-2016 round of MMAPLE, the \$1,448 /acre average payment represents just 30% of the estimated market value of undeveloped land.

MMAPLE is being promoted as new approach for combining ecological and economic factors in a reasonably simple ranking system. Using lessons-learned to fine-tune followed by a final successful test will be proof that MMAPLE is a viable model for landowners, funders, and easement holders. MMAPLE emphasizes the best easement value for the ENRTF. Also, landowner payment of the easements' stewardship costs meets a goal of LCCMR and the State Auditor.

In addition, we intend to invest in community outreach and education to ensure that local decision makers, landowners, and others understand the importance of the Avon Hills landscape and the options that exist for its protection. Finally, we will ensure that the land eligible for conservation easements will be managed effectively by supporting the development of land management plans for targeted parcels.

Due to the pending retirement of Tom Kroll (SJU project manager) on May 1, 2017, project management will be shifted to his replacement at that time. Stearns County SWCD will be contracted to do field work as they are more familiar with the local landowners and land than the incoming replacement for Kroll is likely to be.

III. OVERALL PROJECT STATUS UPDATES:

Project Status as of January 31, 2017:

This project has not been started as the fact of Tom Kroll's retirement in May 2017 initiated a round of talks between the funder and the partners over options to best continue the project. It was determined that Saint John's University will continue to be the grant holder and provide the project manager. The only significant

changes will be 1) the handoff of project manager to a new Saint John's employee after Kroll's retirement and 2) Saint John's will shift \$11,000 from the project manager's salary to allow for sub-contracting with Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation district (SWCD) and SWCD will perform much of the field work associated with contacting landowners, evaluating and scoring properties using MMAPLE, assisting with the silent auction process, and ranking of bids.

Amendment Request (01/31/2017):

Tom Kroll (the original project manager) retires in May 2017, project management will be shifted to his replacement. SJU would like to subcontract with Stearns SWCD to perform landowner outreach and engagement, as well as some initial site assessment, scoring of applicant properties and management of the sealed bids by participating landowners.

Amendment Approved: February 13, 2017

Project Status as of July 30, 2017:

The project partners have met several times since January 1, 2017 to coordinate strategic implementation of outreach within the Avon Hills program area. Under the coordination and direction of SJU and MLT, Stearns SWCD has undertaken a substantial amount of outreach and engagement with landowners in the Avon Hills over the past four months, including targeted mailings and meetings with landowners in the program area. The deadline for submission of a bid to the program has been set for December 1, 2017 at noon and must be submitted in a sealed envelope directly to the Stearns SWCD office.

Amendment Request (08/01/2017):

SJU has named John Geissler as the new Outdoor University Director and Land Manager for the Abbey. SJU requests that John Geissler be listed as the new project manager for this grant.

Amendment Approved: August 3, 2017

Project Status as of January 31, 2018:

A first bidding round for landowners interested in participating in the program officially closed on December 1st, 2017, at which time all submitted sealed bids were opened, reviewed, and ranked. The MMAPLE ranking process identified several priority projects to pursue for easement acquisition based upon their project Conservation Value Rating (CRV), available funding and indicated bid purchase price. Easement project development will begin on these prioritized projects within the next several weeks pending review and approval of the proposed parcel list. Additional outreach and education pertaining to the Avon Hills easement program is planned for February 2018 as part of the Avon Hills Initiative conference.

Amendment Request (1/31/2018):

Eight sealed bids were submitted during the open bidding round. Parcels associated with each bid were ranked and prioritized using the MMAPLE process. MLT is currently seeking the addition of 3 parcels to the approved parcel list so that project development can be initiated. MLT will pursue action with the top-ranked properties prioritized for this program.

Saint John's is requesting to shift \$2,000 from the SJU Personnel (project manager) to Professional Services sub-contract with Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation district (SWCD). SWCD personnel took a larger share of the individual landowner outreach than new SJU project manager because of their previous connections with landowners and did a wonderful job. Moving forward, the additional \$2000 will allow SWCD to perform additional general outreach including easement presentations/booth at "Living in the Avon Hills" and be available for continued linkage to landowners with submitted bids. SJU project management is still able to perform necessary functions of grant with shift.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 4/6/18

Project Status as of July 30, 2018:

Project development has begun in earnest on two potential easement acquisitions. To date necessary title, surveys, appraisals, and habitat management plans have been completed or drafted for the two projects. Easement negotiations have also been initiated and closings on these two easement are anticipated to occur in Fall 2018. The owners of a potential third easement project will be approached to see if they will accept the available remaining funding to complete an easement over their property.

Amendment Request (7/30/2018):

MLT is currently seeking the removal of landowner names from the parcels on the approved parcel list so that landowner privacy can be protected to the extent possible under this public process. It has been MLT's practice to exclude landowner names on approved parcel lists for other ENRTF grant-funded projects.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 8/6/18

Amendment Request (10/26/2018):

MLT is requesting to add habitat management plans as another service under the list of activities encompassed by its Professional Services related to Activity 1. This request is intended to provide consistency, specifically with intent to reflect expectations from previous conversations with LCCMR staff regarding the scope and purpose of habitat management plans created for properties that come under easement through the Avon Hills program. Shifting creation and coordination of habitat management plans also provides added continuity; there is a significant linkage between the easement document and the habitat management plan- having the easement holder coordinate the management plan as part of the process of creation of the easement is more practical from the standpoint of both project development and long-term stewardship.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 11/09/2018

Project Status as of January 31, 2019:

The Land Trust closed on the code name "Serenity" easement on 9/28/18. The easement extinguished 7 building entitlements, and was purchased as a bargain sale, leveraging \$200,000 in acquisition costs through donation of easement value on the part of the landowner.

Project development continues on "Redhead", the final easement acquisition projected under this phase of the grant. An option agreement is out to the landowner for review and signature. A closing date is expected sometime before the end of February. The remaining easement project, "KillAzzz", has declined the offer of the remaining funding to purchase a conservation easement over their property. They have withdrawn their bid at this time.

Overall Project Outcomes and Results:

Conservation easements to permanently protect private land from development was the main goal of this project located in the Avon Hills 10 miles west of St. Cloud, MN. The project permanently protected 477 acres of forests, grasslands, wetlands, and almost 3 miles of undeveloped shoreline in the Avon Hills through the acquisition of two conservation easements. These two conservation easements continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of a reverse bidding system termed the MN Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPLE) to rank submitted easement locations. MMAPLE ranks proposed easements by comparing the land's inherent ecological features to the cost per acre for the easement, thereby focusing on the best value. Land which has many inherent ecological values receives a higher score. Conversely, landowners who bid a higher price per acre for the easement receive a lower score.

Using this competitive bidding process, MMAPLE again proved its ability to efficiently leverage the grant funding. For example, the Serenity easement acquisition was purchased for \$201,100 below its full market value. Appraised value of the two purchased easements in this phase was \$1,191,000, with the grant providing \$989,900 towards acquisition; donated value of the bargain sale, in conjunction with landowner contributions to the Land Trust's stewardship fund (\$40,000) amounted to \$241,100 of total leveraged funds (almost \$100,000 more than estimates in the original proposal).

The grant also provided funding to support outreach and education to increase landowner awareness of easements and land protection as well as overall conservation. Examples of the varied educational programming offered reaching over 2000 participants included the Living in the Avon Hills Conference, MN Master Naturalist Volunteer trainings, Collegetown Colors, monthly Landowner Learning Series, and an Avon Hills Master Woodland Owner Training.

IV. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES:

ACTIVITY 1: Complete approximately 500 acres of Conservation Easements (3-10 landowners) using MMAPLE Ranking and Reverse Bidding system.

Description: Help landowners permanently protect land through the use of conservation easements. Saint John's University (SJU) will partner with the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT). SJU will work with experts to "fine-tune" the MMAPLE system and then focus on landowner outreach, the reverse-bid process, and ranking using MMAPLE. SJU will subcontract with Stearns SWCD to perform landowner outreach and engagement performed under previous phases by SJU, including some or all of the following: a) landowner identification and outreach, b) site assessments and GIS mapping, c) scoring of properties using MMAPLE, (d) assisting with organizing a sealed bid session(s) for participating landowners. Ranking of the bids received will be led by SJU and assisted by Stearns SWCD and MLT. MLT will use the ranked parcels to negotiate easements; prepare documents including easements and baseline reports; secure appraisals, title work, and mapping; and conduct long-term easement monitoring and enforcement. The MMAPLE system will prioritize quality woodlands and wetlands and no more than 20% of any easement may be agricultural land. No irrigated lands will be allowed in the easement.

The selection of the successful landowners follows the reverse-bid process, so specific parcels will be described and submitted to LCCMR after the bidding. Landowners with completed easements will receive a payment from ENRTF for the amount they bid. ENRTF funding will be used for MLT costs specified in the budget. No ENRTF will be used for direct stewardship payments to MLT. Landowners will be asked to pay \$20,000 per easement directly to MLT for long-term stewardship costs.

Justification for the Minnesota Land Trust's proposed travel budget request is as follows. This is an estimate based on a total of 3-10 completed easements for approximately 500 acres. Costs are based on the Land Trust's 2012 cost analysis with some adjustments made for future projections and inflation in years 2016-2018. These costs anticipate working on a minimum of 6 potential projects to get to the completed number. It also anticipates working on this grant for 3 years.

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.

On average a round-trip visit to the Avon Hills area is approximately 200 miles. MLT assumes 6 potential easement projects are in play from the onset.

6 initial site visits @ 200 miles/site	= 1200 miles
6 visits for easement documentation @ 200 miles/site	= 1200 miles
6 visits for baseline documentation @ 200 miles/site	= 1200 miles
6 visits for recording and closing on easement @ 200 miles/site	= 1200 miles

Total = **4,800 miles**

4,800 miles @ current Federal mileage reimbursement	= \$2,616
	Rounded to \$2,500

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.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 1:

ENRTF Budget: \$ 1,272,000
Amount Spent: \$ 1,088,787
Balance: \$ 183,213

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Protect approximately 500 acres completing permanent conservation easements for 3-10 landowners to be held by the MN Land Trust. SJU and MLT will promote program, contact landowners, implement the MMAPLE reverse-bidding system, and complete all legal components of conservation easement projects, including assurance of long-term monitoring and enforcement. Payments for easements to landowners will be based on their bids. This will result in the expansion of existing protected areas and will protect working forests, ecological diversity, wildlife habitat, and water quality. (est. \$1,168,000 from ENRTF budget.)	June 30, 2019
2. Create land stewardship plans for landowners who bid land into the project. Provide up to \$9/acre for land stewardship plans prepared by private sector natural resource professionals approved by MN DNR. (est. \$4,000 from ENRTF budget.)	April 30, 2019
3. Fund long-term stewardship costs from non-state funds. Landowners cooperating with MLT to create an easement will pay MLT for the stewardship costs of \$20,000 per easement from non-state funds. (\$0 from ENRTF budget.)	May 30, 2019

Activity Status as of January 31, 2017:

This project has not been started as the fact of Tom Kroll’s retirement in May 2017 initiated a round of talks between the funder and the partners over options to best continue the project. It was determined that Saint John’s University will continue to be the grant holder and provide the project manager. The only significant changes will be 1) the handoff of project manager to a new Saint John’s employee after Kroll’s retirement and 2) Saint John’s will shift \$11,000 from the project manager’s salary to allow for sub-contracting with Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation district (SWCD) and SWCD will perform much of the field work associated with contacting landowners, evaluating and scoring properties using MMAPLE, assisting with the silent auction process, and ranking of bids.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2017:

SJU and MLT (the “partnership”) convened a technical committee meeting in the spring of 2017 to review and refine the MMAPLE ranking criteria and weighting. The technical committee was made up of conservation professionals from local, state, and federal entities who were familiar with the unique ecological factors of the Avon Hills. The partnership targeted parcels through GIS analysis that were located within the Avon Hills program area, were larger than 40 acres in size, and also fell within a MN DNR designated Site of Biodiversity Significance. Mailings describing the program and soliciting interest went out to all the landowners of parcels who met these criteria. Stearns SWCD followed up with face-to-face meetings with 15 different landowners, and phone conversations with another 25 landowners to promote the program and answer questions. Encouragingly, one sealed bid has already been submitted well before the December 1st bid submission deadline. At this time it is anticipated that another 5 to 10 bids will be received by the deadline. Additionally, all past landowner applicants who submitted a bid under previous phases of the program will receive a personalized letter soliciting bids.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2018:

The bidding period for the first round of applications to the Avon Hills easement program under this grant officially closed at noon on December 1st, 2017. Sealed bids received prior to the bid deadline were then opened, scored, and displayed in a public meeting also held on that same day following the deadline. A total of 8 sealed bids were received during the third bid round. Bids were scored using the MMAPLE criteria and ranked by their Conservation Value Rating (CVR). Based upon available funding it appears that the top two highest CVR scores, code names “Serenity” and “Redhead” will be funded should the landowners choose to complete an easement. Both of these parcels have small amounts of agricultural land that will be included within the conservation easement area. Agricultural acreage within the easement will not exceed 20% of overall easement and landowners will not receive payment for agricultural acreage within the easement. For each individual easement terms will include provisions to sunset the agricultural uses on each property permanently. In instances where agriculture uses continue within the easement area easement terms will stipulate that all agricultural practices follow current best management practices (BMPs) established by the State of Minnesota, including any use of chemicals, pesticides, or fertilizers. The habitat management plan created for the easement property will also cross-reference and reinforce adherence to BMPs as stipulated by the easement terms, while additionally directing restoration or enhancement activities to employ current BMPs for pollinator habitat enhancement as established by the State of Minnesota. Preliminary easement negotiations, title work, and site visits will begin once the parcel list is approved. The partnership also met on December 6, 2017 to review submitted bids and discuss roles and responsibilities as grant activities shift from outreach and property ranking to easement project development.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2018:

Project development has begun on both the “Serenity” and “Redhead” easement projects. Title work, surveys, and appraisals have been completed for both projects, while habitat management plans have been drafted and are currently in review. Additionally, easement negotiations continue for each project, but are near final proposed draft status. Signed option agreements for each project are anticipated to be secured by mid-August, with easement closings projected for later this fall. Maps of each easement area are attached to this work plan update and a short summary of each easement project is included below:

Serenity Easement Project

The conservation easement will cover 286 acres of forest, wetlands, grasslands, open water, cultivated land, and also includes 3,905 of undeveloped shoreline along several unnamed open wetlands and an unnamed lake in Stearns County. Portions of the property covered by the easement are within “Upper Spunk Lake SE”, a Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance, and “Collegeville 10”, a Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance, as identified by the MN DNR. The property is adjacent to 77 acres owned by Saint John’s University and within 1 mile of the 2,900-acre Saint John’s Abbey Arboretum, a property of significant importance for the Avon Hills area, which includes 1,800 acres of a MBS Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance and has served as a designated state wildlife refuge since 1933. Within 3 miles of the property there are five (5) other private

properties permanently protected with conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust, two (2) federal Waterfowl Production Areas, two (2) Stearns County parks, and one (1) State of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area. To date easement negotiations will prohibit residential use and development and industrial uses, while restricting agricultural uses to a limited area. Additionally, under the terms of the easement roughly 30 acres of lands currently in cultivation will be retired and restored to natural habitat by the landowner. Permanently vegetated buffers of 150-feet along all waterbodies (including wetlands) adjacent to the remaining cultivated lands on the easement property will also be put into place per terms of the conservation easement.

Redhead Easement Project

The conservation easement will cover 191 acres of forest, wetlands, grasslands, open water, cultivated land, and also includes 10,019 feet of undeveloped shoreline along several unnamed open wetlands and an unnamed lake in Stearns County. The property is identified as a high priority candidate for conservation for the Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas Program based upon that program's *Strategic Land Protection Plan*. The property abuts a 34-acre private property also permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Minnesota Land Trust. A half mile to the northwest of the property is the 2,900-acre Saint John's Abbey Arboretum, a property of significant importance for the Avon Hills area, which includes 1,800 acres of outstanding biodiversity habitat and has served as a designated state wildlife refuge since 1933. Within 3 miles of the property there are six (6) other private properties permanently protected with conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust, two (2) federal Waterfowl Production Areas, two (2) Stearns County parks, and one (1) State of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area. To date easement negotiations will prohibit residential use and development and industrial uses, while restricting agricultural uses to a limited area. Permanently vegetated buffers of 150-feet along all waterbodies (including wetlands) adjacent to the remaining cultivated lands on the easement property will also be put into place per terms of the conservation easement.

With the anticipated closings of these two easement projects, approximately 477 acres of land will be protected. This is a shortfall of 23 acres from the outcomes listed in the approved work plan, however this acreage shortage corresponds with the amount of remaining funding available. The cost of acquisition for both the Serenity and Redhead easements will total \$988,300, leaving approximately \$124,700 in remaining acquisition funding. On the approved parcel list the next highest ranked bid, "KillAzzz", behind Serenity and Redhead will be approached to see if they will accept this remaining amount in payment for an easement, though it is \$252,000 less their easement bid. They will be allowed to either accept this amount, or decline pursuing the potential sale of a conservation easement over their property at this time.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2019:

The Land Trust acquired a conservation easement over the "Serenity" project on 9/28/18 which encompassed 286 acres of forest, wetlands, grasslands, and included three quarters of a mile of undeveloped shoreline along an unnamed lake (known locally as "Winkel Lake") and several unnamed open wetlands. These natural systems are key habitat for several Species in Greatest Conservation Need, including red-shouldered hawk, Blanding's turtle, and American Bittern. Portions of the property covered by the easement are within "Upper Spunk Lake SE", a Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance, and "Collegeville 10", a Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance, as identified by the MN DNR. Sites of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance contain the best occurrences of the rarest species, the most outstanding examples of the rarest native plant communities, and the most ecologically intact landscapes.

Acquisition of an easement on the "Redhead" property is projected for the end of February. Meanwhile "KillAzzz" declined the offer of remaining funding available to purchase an easement and formally withdrew their bid from the program.

Regarding the status of outcome #2 for activity 1, an amendment request transferring habitat management plans as another service under the list of activities encompassed by the Land Trust's Professional Services

related to Activity 1 was approved on 11/9/18. The Land Trust has since created habitat management plans for both the Serenity and Redhead properties-these plans interface with the conservation easement terms and requirements of the grant, and guide any habitat management occurring on the protected properties so as to protect and promote the conservation values of each property.

Regarding the status of outcome #3 for activity 1, the Land Trust received a stewardship contribution from the landowner of the Serenity easement acquisition. This contribution went to the dedicated stewardship fund which the Land Trust utilizes for the long-term monitoring and enforcement of the conservation easement.

Final Report Summary:

Through the Preserving the Avon Hills – Phase 3 program, Saint John’s University, Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Minnesota Land Trust collaborated in realizing the protection of 477 acres of important wildlife habitat through the acquisition of two conservation easements. This outcome was 23 acres shy of that proposed (500 acres). A balance of \$114,190 for easement acquisition was left unused, an amount proportional to the unmet acreage deliverables proposed through the grant. However, deliverables for leverage were significantly exceeded; \$241,100 in donative value was realized as an outcome during this phase of the program, surpassing the proposed amount (\$150,000) by nearly \$100,000. In total, across the two easement acquisitions 477 acres were permanently protected, including almost 3 miles of undeveloped shoreline (14,581 feet) and the extinction of 10 building entitlements via terms of the easement agreement.

The two completed projects – both closed during the last half of fiscal year 2019 – included:

1. Serenity easement – The Serenity easement acquisition is a 286-acre property in Collegeville Township, several miles south of the town of Avon. Of the 286 acres, portions are within “Upper Spunk Lake SE”, a Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance, and “Collegeville 10”, a Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance, as identified by the MN DNR. The acquisition is adjacent to the 2,900-acre Saint John’s Abbey Arboretum, a property of significant importance for the Avon Hills area, which includes 1,800 acres of a MBS Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance and has served as a designated state wildlife refuge since 1933. Within 3 miles of the easement there are five (5) other private properties permanently protected with conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust, two (2) federal Waterfowl Production Areas, two (2) Stearns County parks, and one (1) State of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area. The natural attributes of the easement acquisition include: 156 acres of mesic mixed-hardwood forest, 33 acres of wetlands, 12 acres of grasslands, 8 acres of open water, and 77 acres of cultivated land and includes approximately 3,671 feet of undeveloped shoreline along several unnamed open wetlands and an unnamed lake (known locally as “Winkel Lake”), a MN DNR-classified Natural Environment Lake approximately 29 acres in size.
2. Redhead easement – The Redhead easement acquisition is a 191-acre property in Collegeville Township, approximately 2 miles south of Avon. The natural attributes of the easements acquisition include 120 acres of high-quality mesic mixed-hardwood forest, 23 acres of open water, 17 acres of grasslands, 16 acres of wetlands, 4 acres of woodlands, and 11 acres of cultivated land, and also includes 10,019 feet of undeveloped shoreline along several unnamed open wetlands and an unnamed lake in Stearns County. The property is identified as a high priority candidate for conservation for the Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas Program based upon that program’s *Strategic Land Protection Plan*. The Protected Property is adjacent to a 34-acre private property also permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Minnesota Land Trust which was acquired during the first phase of the Avon Hills program in 2009. A half mile to the northwest of the easement is the 2,900-acre Saint John’s Abbey Arboretum. Within 3 miles of the easement are six (6) other private properties permanently protected with conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust, two (2) federal Waterfowl Production Areas, two (2) Stearns County parks, and one (1) State of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area.

Over the course of the grant period negotiations related to the acquisition of conservation easements were initiated with three landowners. Pursuit of easements was discontinued with only one of the three landowners due to concerns with easement valuation and future tax implications, and land use restrictions imposed by the easement itself. MMAPLE again proved its ability to efficiently leverage the grant funding under this phase of the project; one of the easement acquisitions was a significant bargain sale by the landowner. For the Serenity easement acquisition the easement was purchased for \$201,100 below its full market value. Appraised value of the two purchased easements was \$1,191,000, with the grant providing \$989,900 towards acquisition; donated value of the bargain sale, in conjunction with landowner contribution to the Land Trust’s stewardship fund (\$40,000) amounted to \$241,100 of total leveraged funds.

Baseline property reports were prepared for both easements, detailing the condition of the property for future monitoring and enforcement. The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund did not provide grant funds to the Land Trust’s dedicated Stewardship and Enforcement Fund for this required perpetual obligation during this phase of the program. The Land Trust will report to LCCMR annually on the status of the easements acquired with funds through this grant.

ACTIVITY 2: Avon Hills 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: \$ 28,000
Amount Spent: \$ 21,452
Balance: \$ 6,548

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Increase awareness of the Avon Hills landscape and increase land stewardship by hosting annual conferences and/or other events to provide environmental education and promote community involvement. Assist Avon Hills Initiative Executive committee.	June 30, 2019

Activity Status as of January 31, 2017:

Nothing has been done to date using ENRTF funding as the negotiations with LCCMR were still underway. The Collegeville Colors event was held on October 16 with over 1,000 attendees going for walks in the woods of Saint John’s Abbey Arboretum. <http://www.csbsju.edu/outdooru/education/events/collegevillecolors> . This event meets the intent of Activity 2, but no ENRTF funds were used.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2017:

The annual Collegeville Colors event will be held October 3, 2017. An informational booth which highlights the Avon Hills program will be part of the planned activities hosted by SJU staff. During the last week of July and first week of August 2017 Stearns SWCD will also have a booth at the Stearns County Fair with information available to landowners who might be interested in participating in the program.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2018:

Collegeville Colors was held in early October and an informational booth staffed by members from Stearns SWCD and MLT were present to answer questions about the Avon Hills easement program and process. The upcoming “Living in the Avon Hills” Conference is planned for February, 10 2018, and includes a slate of speakers and presentations that will focus upon issues of land management and stewardship across the Avon Hills, as well as provide additional outreach related to protection of this unique area. The 2018 conference list of speakers and sessions is included in this activity status additional materials enclosure.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2018:

Avon Hills conference held on February 10, 2018 was a grand success. There were 143 participants, 30 speakers, 22 exhibit booths, and all activities supported by 36 staff & volunteers. A list of the keynote and breakout session descriptions can be found here -

<https://www.csbsju.edu/Documents/OutdoorU/avonhills/conference/2018AHConferenceBrochure.pdf>

Activity Status as of January 31, 2019:

Monthly Avon Hills "Landowner Learning Series" developed and offered through Saint John's Outdoor University. Series includes the following offerings January through June 2019: "Intro to GPS and Online Mapping", "Winter Tree and Shrub Identification", "Maple Syrup Production 101 for Landowners", "It's Your Legacy: A landowner's guide to conservation-based estate planning", "Choosing the Right Trees for Your Property and Deer Protection Techniques", and "Identifying and Managing Invasive Plant Species".

<https://csbsju.edu/outdooru/events/landownerlearning>

We are especially excited by the "Its Your Legacy" course in which we have teamed with University of Minnesota Extension. The course will help participants explore the communication process with their family and develop a shared family vision for their land. Landowners will also have the opportunity to discuss with an attorney how they might use different estate planning tools including wills, trusts, and limited liability companies to achieve their goals.

We have further partnered with University of Minnesota Extension to offer a Master Woodland Owner cohort focused on the Avon Hills. We are currently advertising this course that will begin June 2019.

<http://mwop.umn.edu/join-cohort/june-2019-avon-hills>

Final Report Summary:

The examples below illustrate the project was extremely successful in facilitating 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.

Examples of the varied educational programming offered include the Avon Hills Conference (143 participants, 30 speakers, 22 exhibit booths, and all activities supported by 36 staff & volunteers), MN Master Naturalist Volunteer Trainings (Two week long 40 hour trainings focused on the Big Woods and Big Rivers and Prairies and Potholes which reached 44 participants – all of whom commit to 40 hours of natural resource volunteer service annually), Collegeville Colors (Preserving the Avon Hills booth at this large fall event that reaches over 1000 participants from the area), Landowner Learning Series (each workshop reached an average of 12 participants) developed and offered through Saint John's Outdoor University included the following offerings January through June 2019: "Intro to GPS and Online Mapping", "Winter Tree and Shrub Identification", "Maple Syrup Production 101 for Landowners", "It's Your Legacy: A landowner's guide to conservation-based estate planning", "Choosing the Right Trees for Your Property and Deer Protection Techniques", and "Identifying and Managing Invasive Plant Species".

We were especially pleased with the "Its Your Legacy" course in which we have teamed with University of Minnesota Extension. The 6 hour course attended by 8 family groups helped participants explore the communication process with their family and develop a shared family vision for their land. Landowners also had the opportunity to discuss various conservation options including easements followed by a session with an attorney to ask questions about how they might use different estate planning tools including wills, trusts, and limited liability companies to achieve their goals.

We have further partnered with University of Minnesota Extension to offer a Master Woodland Owner cohort focused on the Avon Hills. This intensive 6 month educational program blends online and face to face instruction covering all aspects of woodland ownership (18 participants – June to December 2019). <http://mwop.umn.edu/join-cohort/june-2019-avon-hills>

All of these educational efforts are critical to increase environmental literacy and illustrate the importance for conservation efforts.

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 Saint 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.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2017:

None to date.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2017:

Stearns SWCD and SJU will send one more newsletter to residents in the Avon Hills prior to December 1st advertising the program. Several press releases which feature landowners and easements completed under previous phases of the grant program will follow the newsletter. Press releases will be sent directly to local and regional news outlets, including Minnesota Public Radio, the Saint Cloud Times, and the Outdoor News. Stearns SWCD highlighted the Avon Hills program during its weekly radio show on 1150 AM KASM on June 17, 2017.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2018:

In November, Stearns SWCD and SJU sent out a newsletter advertising the easement program to all landowners in the Avon Hills with ownership of at least 40 acres. This newsletter featured a property that was protected under the first round of the Avon Hills easement program, Sand Lake (Lindell). Stearns SWCD also posted related information on its website and Facebook page (on October 26, 2017) highlighting the availability of funding for the program.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2018: Advertisements for the Avon Hills conference were placed in St. Joe/Sartell Newsleaders (1/19 & 2/2), Cold Spring Record (1/12, 1/19), Facebook advertising (1/10-2/7), and ~4000 piece mailing of the conference brochure including session descriptions to landowners within the 4 townships that make up the Avon Hills.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2019:

In December, Stearns SWCD and SJU sent out a newsletter celebrating and promoting the easement program to all landowners in the Avon Hills with ownership of at least 40 acres. This newsletter featured the “Serenity” property that was forever protected under this round of the Avon Hills easement program.

Final Report Summary:

The Land Trust shared news of the easement acquisitions on both the Avon Hills (Serenity) and (Redhead) parcels on its website and Facebook page. Four page newsletters featuring the easements and educational programming were mailed to every landowner with over 40 acres in the Avon Hills. The MMAPLE process used in this project is being advocated for use in other grants and for other funders such as the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council and will be presented as a topic at the national conference of the Land Trust Alliance in Raleigh, NC in October, 2019.

VI. PROJECT BUDGET SUMMARY:

A. ENRTF Budget Overview:

Budget Category	\$ Amount	Overview Explanation
Personnel (SJU):	\$ 17,500	John Geissler - Project Manager & Forester, \$3,500 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 2% FTE; Jenny Kutter, Arboretum Office Coord., \$4,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 10% FTE; Kyle Rauch, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$5,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 10% FTE; Sarah Gainey, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$1,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 2% FTE; TBD, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$2,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 6% FTE; Jeremy Scegur, SJU Accountant, \$2,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 2% FTE
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts (SJU):	\$6,000	Conference speakers: Estimated \$2,000 for speaker fees and honoraria for 3 landowner educational conferences and workshops; Nat. Resource Professionals chosen from MN DNR approved plan preparer list: \$4,000 for preparing Forest Stewardship Plans for lands acceptable for easements. Plan costs not to exceed \$9/acre.
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts (SJU to Stearns SWCD):	\$13,000	Professional Services subcontract from to Stearns County SWCD for general outreach, personal landowner contacts, site evaluation and mapping, scoring using MMAPLE, assisting with the bidding process, and assisting with the bid ranking.
Equipment/Tools/Supplies (SJU):	\$14,000	Promotion of easements, conferences, & workshops (newspaper ads, etc.), printing conference brochures and materials, participant supplies (folders, printed info, etc.).
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts (SJU to MLT)	\$1,249,500	See details below.
		Easement Acquisition (MLT): \$1,113,000. Includes purchase price of conservation easements to protect about 500 acres of land through permanent conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust. Includes title review and closing costs of \$30,000 @\$3,000 each, and mapping costs of \$10,000 @\$1,000 each for 3-10 easements. MMAPLE will be used to rank the proposed parcels.
		Personnel (MLT): \$ 90,000. Staff expenses including salaries plus eligible benefits and related costs for approximately 33% FTE for each of the 3 years as follows: Conservation directors or other land protection staff (approximately 23% FTE/yr.), legal staff and other support staff (approximately 10% FTE/yr.)
		Professional Services for Acquisition (MLT): \$44,000. Includes appraisal costs of \$40,000 @\$5,000 each, <u>habitat</u>

		management plans @ \$6,000 each, and \$4,000 for surveys @ \$4,000 each for 3-10 easements.
		Travel Expenses in MN (MLT): \$2,500. Mileage and related travel expenses in Minnesota. Estimated at 4,800 miles at the current IRS rate (\$0.545 per mile).
TOTAL ENRTF BUDGET:	\$1,300,000	

Explanation of Use of Classified Staff: Saint John’s University is not a public employer and does not have “classified” staff whose salaries are being shifted from an existing public account to this ENRTF public funding. Saint John’s University would not undertake this project without this additional funding and will hire additional staff or contract or modify/expand the duties of existing staff to complete this project.

Number of Full-time Equivalents (FTE) Directly Funded with this ENRTF Appropriation:
 SJU – 0.33 FTE total (approx. 0.17/year).

Number of Full-time Equivalents (FTE) Estimated to Be Funded through Contracts with this ENRTF Appropriation:

- Natural Resource Plan Preparer – approx. 0.02 FTE/yr.
- MLT staff 1.2 FTE total (approx. 0.40/year).
- Appraiser – approx. 0.02 FTE/yr.
- Surveyor – approx. 0.01 FTE/yr.
- Stearns SWCD -- approx. 0.08 FTE/yr.

B. Other Funds:

Source of Funds	\$ Amount Proposed	\$ Amount Spent	Use of Other Funds
Non-state			
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.	\$150,000	\$ 241,100	Landowners will essentially match LCCMR funds by reducing the total easement cost by donating part of the easement value.
State			
	\$ 0	\$	
TOTAL OTHER FUNDS:	\$150,000	\$241,100	

VII. PROJECT STRATEGY:

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

Saint John’s Outdoor University: John Geissler, Kyle Rauch, 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 Outdoor U and MN Land Trust to achieve project goals

Stearns County: Environmental Services Department and Soil and Water Conservation District

- As needed, assisting with info for easement documents.

- Provision of outreach service to promote the program, educate landowners about the program, and encourage qualifying landowners to submit a bid.
- Conduct site assessments of parcels to provide scoring using MMAPLE.
- Assist with the bid process and ranking of bids received.

Natural Resource Consultants and contractors:

- As needed to further the outcomes of the project.

B. Project Impact and Long-term Strategy:

The past ENRTF supported phases (ML 2008-03d & ML 2013-04j) have opened up a new avenue of conservation easement prioritizing using MMAPLE and reverse-bidding. ENRTF funding of MMAPLE has allowed for innovation that is now being promoted statewide and even nationally. In addition to doing another 450-600 acres of great conservation work in the Avon Hills, we seek ENRTF funding for a final test for MMAPLE. A third successful use will firmly establish this cost-saving easement prioritization method as a potential tool for the common circumstances found in the Avon Hills and across the state. It will then be possible to seek funders from across the spectrum to continue the work in the Avon Hills. Our landscape goal is to permanently protect 70% of the remaining undeveloped landscape, or about 25,000 acres over the next 20 years.

C. Funding History:

Funding Source and Use of Funds	Funding Timeframe	\$ Amount
ENRTF to SJU for Avon Hills Conservation easements	2013-2016	\$772,000
ENRTF to SJU for Avon Hills Conservation easements	2008-2011	\$337,000
		\$1,109,000

VIII. FEE TITLE ACQUISITION/CONSERVATION EASEMENT/RESTORATION REQUIREMENTS:

A. Parcel List: 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.

B. Acquisition/Restoration Information:

Conservation Easement Acquisition

- 1. Describe the selection process for identifying and including proposed parcels on the parcel list, including explanation of the criteria and decision-making process used to rank and prioritize parcels.**

Using ENRTF grants, the Avon Hills team developed and twice tested a novel ranking system for acquiring easements dubbed the Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPLE). 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 priority for acquisition. In the 2013-2016 round of MMAPLE, the \$1,448 /acre average payment represents just 30% of the estimated market value of undeveloped land.

MMAPLE is a good approach for combining ecological and economic factors in a reasonably simple ranking system. MMAPLE emphasizes the best easement value for the ENRTF. Also, landowner payment of the easements’ stewardship costs meets a goal of LCCMR and the State Auditor.

- 2. List all adopted state, regional, or local natural resource plans in which the lands included in the parcel list are identified. Include a link to the plan if one is available.**

Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, 2008. Parcels not identified, but priorities are identified. http://www.lccmr.leg.mn/documents/scpp/scpp_final_plan_v2.html#

Stearns County Comprehensive Plan – Avon Hills Overlay District. 2008 Chapter 3

<http://www.co.stearns.mn.us/Environment/LandUseandSubdivision/ComprehensivePlanning>

- 3. For any conservation easement acquired, a restoration and management must be prepared. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for parcels acquired by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation, including how long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel will be financed into the future.**

A Forest Stewardship Plan (FSP) is created by a DNR-certified professional forester or other natural resource professional for each acquired easement. This stewardship plan is comprised of a general property description, ecological classification, landowner goals, landscape goals, native plant community summary, and stand inventories. Management objectives and recommendations by stand, as well as a suggested timeline for proposed management activities are also included in the plan. The FSP is subject to an approval process by Land Trust staff and then included with the easement document in the Land Trust's files as a guide for current and long-term management of the property. All management activities, if undertaken, are the responsibility of the individual landowners, who must follow the prescriptions of the FSP. Financing for long-term maintenance and management is the responsibility of the landowner, but other state-, federal- and other funding sources may be available.

- 4. For each parcel to be conveyed to a State of Minnesota entity (e.g., DNR) after purchase, provide a statement confirming that county board approval will be obtained.**

N/A

- 5. If applicable (see M.S. 116P.17), provide a statement confirming that written approval from the DNR Commissioner will be obtained 10 business days prior to any final acquisition transaction. A copy of the written approval should be provided to LCCMR.**

The Minnesota Land Trust will request, at least 10 days prior to closing, and obtain written approval by the DNR Commissioner for easement acquisitions under this grant.

- 6. Provide a statement addressing how conservation easements will address specific water quality protection activities, such as keeping water on the landscape, reducing nutrient and contaminant loading, protecting groundwater, and not permitting artificial hydrological modifications.**

The Minnesota Land Trust takes great care in protecting the natural resources, inclusive of surface and ground waters, that underpin each of its conservation easements. Our standard conservation easement template contains fifteen (15) different provisions that specifically afford protection to surface and groundwater resources.

Beyond this, each easement is individually drafted to meet the unique features of the property and affords substantial protection to its water resources. Land uses that may impact water quality – including residential, agricultural, industrial or commercial uses – are significantly curtailed or eliminated. In turn this will help keep water in the landscape, eliminate adverse hydrological modifications, and reduce pollutant nutrient and

contamination loading. In order to enroll, all properties within the ENRTF-funded Avon Hills program must possess >80% natural habitat cover (e.g., forest, wetlands) that afford greatest protection for both biotic and water resources over time; these habitats are further protected in perpetuity through the crafting of easements. No irrigated lands will be allowed in the easements.

Moreover, the project partners (St. Johns University and Minnesota Land Trust) have strategically incorporated water quality issues in its MMAPLE project selection criteria. Conservation easements acquired through the Avon Hills program are targeted toward high-quality natural habitats; those projects that rank the highest include riparian and wetland in addition to forest habitat. Moreover, projects are assessed as to how they contribute to the goals of local comprehensive plans, water plans, State conservation strategies, or other documented public policies which have identified water quality objectives related to the property. Therefore, we are selecting projects which are contributing positively to the health of surface and ground waters and including these features as part of the project's stated public benefits.

Finally, Minnesota Land Trust believes that easement language is only a first step towards effective perpetual conservation. Our easement program includes annual monitoring of all properties, working with landowners to understand and comply with the terms of their easements, effective record keeping, and swift enforcement when necessary. These efforts have contributed to our accreditation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.

7. Describe the long-term monitoring and enforcement program for conservation easements acquired on parcels by your organization, including explanations of the process used for calculating conservation easement monitoring and enforcements costs, the process used for annual inspection and reporting on monitoring and enforcement activities, and the process used to ensure perpetual funding and implementation of monitoring and enforcement activities.

Land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through the Minnesota Land Trust's state-of-the-art standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited land trust with a very successful stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation.

It is the policy of the Minnesota Land Trust to monitor each property protected by a conservation easement once a year – and more frequently if necessary. It is our goal to prevent easement violations; frequent contact with the land and the landowner helps us achieve that goal. Monitoring is typically done in person by a Land Trust staff or certified volunteer monitor walking the protected property.

It is the policy of the Minnesota Land Trust to hold and enforce its conservation easements as written. The organization is prepared to correct violations of easement terms and to legally defend and enforce its easements when necessary. The MLT calculates the costs associated with each easement through an extensive costs analysis which is updated periodically and shared with LCCMR staff. Factors that lead to the overall cost include location of the property, size, and breadth or reserved rights.

Prior to completing any easements under this work plan, the Minnesota Land Trust will work with LCCMR staff to develop appropriate easement language incorporating the State of Minnesota's conservation easement enforcement rights as required by this appropriation.

IX. VISUAL COMPONENT or MAP(S): See attachment

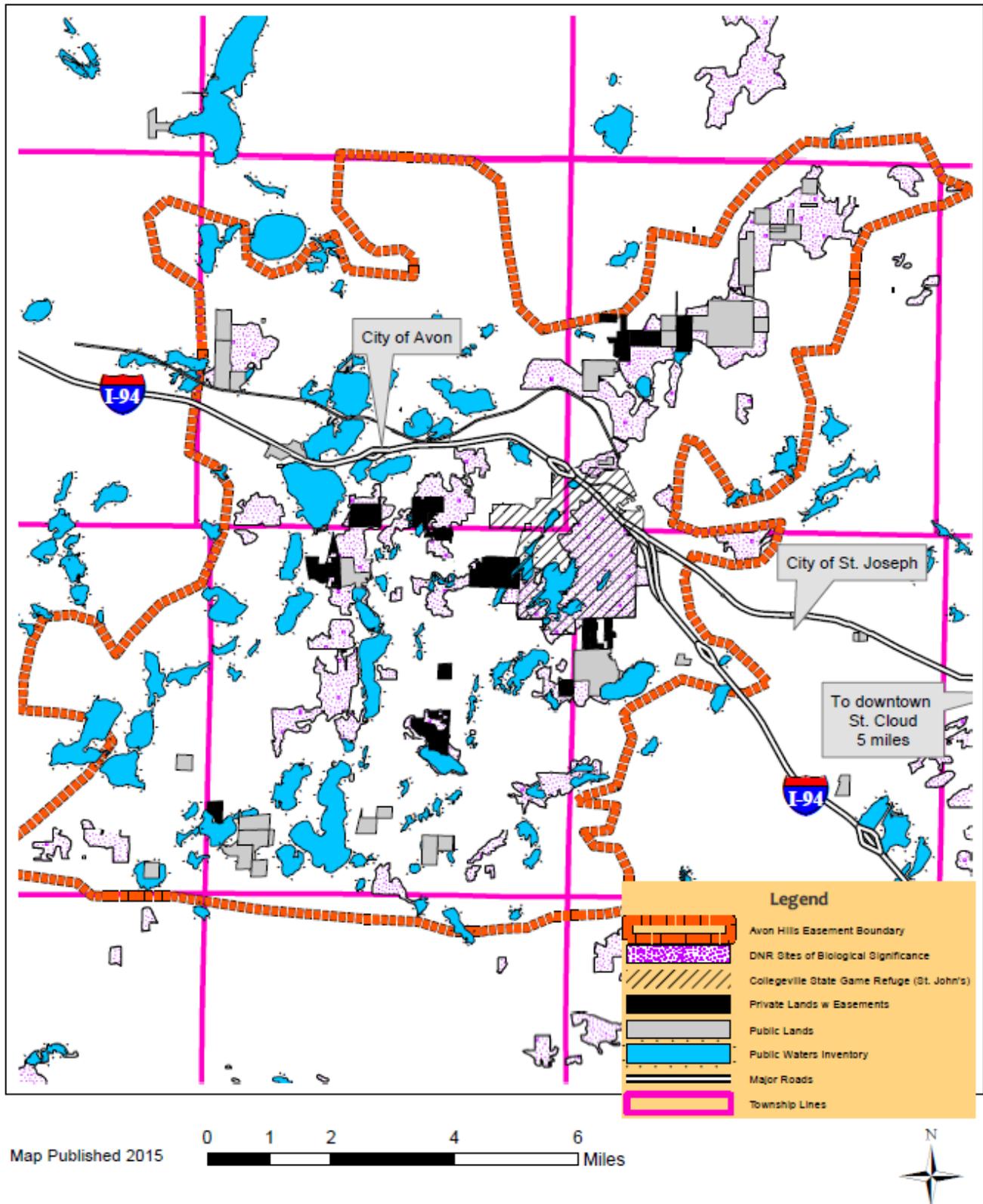
X. RESEARCH ADDENDUM: N/A

XI. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS:

Periodic work plan status update reports will be submitted no later than January 31, 2017, July 30, 2017, January 31, 2018, July 30, 2018, and January 31, 2019. A final report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 15, 2019.

Avon Hills of Stearns County - 65,000 acres

Amazing open space and biological significance within 5 miles of St. Cloud and 60 miles of the Twin Cities



Map Published 2015



MMAPE Method (Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements)											
Avon Hills Area Conservation Easement Bid Worksheet											
Landowner Code Name:		Example			Formulas updated 2 August 2014 by T. Kroff						
Date prepared:		28-Jul-14			(Make up a name or code that will be used to identify your property.)						
Environmental Benefits Points	Environmental Weighting Factor	Units Affected	Enter your actual data in the blocks with the blue and green colors to determine Environmental Benefits Points. Blue is determined by the landowner. Green is determined by the land features in the easement. Purple are calculations. Orange = total Environmental Benefits Points. Red = Conservation Value Rating.								
(EBP) = weighting factor x units											
Size of Property (based on tax statement acres)											
		80	Total acres owned by applicant contiguous to this proposed easement. (For information only)								
815	10	75	Acres to be protected by an easement, not including any house site acres within the easement area.								
		80	Acres of this proposed easement plus those acres outside the easement that would fall within a full "40" or Gov. Lot (i.e. 75 acres in easement + 5 homestead acres = 80 acres. Include only those acres owned by applicant.)								
815	10	75	Total contiguous easement acres or largest block if not all acres are contiguous								
Special Natural & Cultural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (count only those acres covered by the easement)											
0	250	0	Acres of Outstanding Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) (Rounded up to nearest 5 acres)								
6,000	150	40	Acres of High Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) (Rounded up to nearest 5 acres)								
0	75	0	Acres of Moderate Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance (SOBS) (Rounded up to nearest 5 acres)								
538	1	538	Feet of Shoreline on "public waters" (streams, lakes+ wetlands>10 ac) from the Public Water Inventory Map (round up to nearest 10)								
0	1+	0	Feet of the longest contiguous section of shoreline on "public waters" for each lake on which the survey is "meandered." (round up to nearest 10)								
0	100	0	Acres which are designated as a source of public drinking water or aquifer recharge area.								
0	1	0	Feet of protected property boundary which is adjacent to a designated scenic road, river, trail, or other designated scenic feature.								
0	50	0	# of documented sites of historical or cultural significance which will be protected.								
Open Space /Working Forest /Working Ag to be Protected by the Easement (count only those acres covered by the easement)											
256	10	70	Acres to be used for working forest, prairie, preserved forest, savanna, or wetland. (Not intended for agriculture, pasturing, or horticulture.)								
25	5	5	Acres to be allowed for use as agriculture, pasturing, or horticulture.								
0	5	0	Acres for which a current land management plan exists. (i.e. Forest Stewardship Plan or NRCS Farm Plan)								
Location of the Property to be Protected (count only those acres covered by the easement)											
0	100	0	Acres on which unrestricted public access will be allowed.								
0	2	0	Feet of protected property boundary which is adjacent to either public land or other permanently protected land.								
815	10	75	Acres which are inside some kind of specially designated conservation protection area. (Township, county conservation overlay district)								
Building Allotments to be Extinguished, or Retained for Future Use, or are Already Used by the Applicant (within next full "40")											
(Include building areas inside the easement area plus those controlled by the applicant outside the easement that would fall within the next largest full "40" or Gov. Lot.)											
		A40	Current property zoning. Examples A5, T20, A40 - Check with zoning board.								
		2	Total number of building allotments (used or unused) that are assigned by zoning. (Often 1 per 40 acres. Check with zoning board.)								
		1	Number of building allotments already used or to be retained from above. (Include any existing homesteads you own.)								
2,000	2000	1	Number of building allotments to be extinguished within the proposed easement area.								
		1	Clustering: How many unconnected areas will contain building sites? Clustered building sites that have adjoining boundaries are counted as 1 area.								
		Enter 1 above	Boundaries of individual building sites must adjoin on the longest or second longest side to be counted as one cluster.								
		1	How many separate legal easement document sets need to be created? (Multiple bidders or current/future land splits require separate easements.)								
		50	\$/acre Admin fee for multiple easements. (\$15,000 per additional legal easement sets needed /acres protected. \$0 fee for the first easement.)								
11,765	SUB-TOTAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS POINTS										
Deductions (if any) for Not Extinguishing all Building Allotments (100% protection = no deductions)											
11,765	= sub-total of EBP	94%	Percent of land in the easement compared to the next highest "full 40" or government lot. (Protection > 80% has no deductions.)								
10,000	= (35+ %ix above	50%	Percent of total allotments to be extinguished. (Must be >65% for full credit.)								
10,000	100%	75	Acres of protected land per homestead or developed cluster. Must exceed 75 acres for 100%. 160+ acres = max of 130%.								
Final Calculations and Examples											
10,000	10,000	10,000	= TOTAL ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS POINTS for your land.				10,000	= (A) = Your Total Environmental Benefits points			
\$2,000	\$1,000	\$500	\$/per acre you want to be paid for the easement. (Compare 3 bids.)				\$	= (B) = \$ per acre you want to be paid for the easement.			
\$0	\$0	\$0	Extra \$/ac admin fee for bids needing more than one set of easements.				\$0	= (C) Add this admin fee to (B) your total price /acre			
5.0	10.0	20.0	= YOUR CONSERVATION VALUE RATING - Higher is better!					= (D) = Your Conservation Value Rating			
Conservation Value Ratings = Environmental Benefits Points / (Your bid per acre for the easement + Admin Fee)						= (D) Conservation Value Ratings = (A) + (B+C)					
75	75	75	= Total acres you are protecting with an easement.				75	= (E) = Total acres you are protecting with an easement.			
\$150,000	\$75,000	\$37,500	= Total \$ you will receive if your bid is accepted.				\$	= (F) = Total \$ you could receive if accepted. (F) = (E) x (D)			
Maximum Bids must not exceed the lesser of 1) the appraised value of the rights extinguished by the easement or 2) the % of ATAMV from below.											
2013	Assessor Township Average Market Value (ATAMV) per acre (weighted for ag & timber, no homesteads)				Albany	Avon	Collegeville	Farming	St. Joseph	St. Wendel	Wakefield
					\$3,699	\$3,671	\$4,536	\$3,409	\$4,026	\$3,769	\$4,466
> 500	Total Environmental Benefits Points = Minimum to participate										
< 1,000	Environmental Benefits Points = Payment NTE 20% of ATAMV not NTE appraised value of easement.				\$740	\$734	\$907	\$682	\$805	\$754	\$893
< 3,000	Environmental Benefits Points = Payment NTE 30% of ATAMV not NTE appraised value of easement.				\$1,110	\$1,101	\$1,361	\$1,023	\$1,208	\$1,131	\$1,340
< 5,000	Environmental Benefits Points = Payment NTE 40% of ATAMV not NTE appraised value of easement.				\$1,480	\$1,468	\$1,814	\$1,364	\$1,610	\$1,508	\$1,786
< 10,000	Environmental Benefits Points = Payment NTE 50% of ATAMV not NTE appraised value of easement. Your max bid per ac -->				\$1,850	\$1,836	\$2,268	\$1,705	\$2,013	\$1,885	\$2,233
< 15,000	Environmental Benefits Points = Payment NTE 60% of ATAMV not NTE appraised value of easement.				\$2,219	\$2,203	\$2,722	\$2,045	\$2,416	\$2,261	\$2,680
< 20,000	Environmental Benefits Points = Payment NTE 70% of ATAMV not NTE appraised value of easement.				\$2,589	\$2,570	\$3,175	\$2,386	\$2,818	\$2,638	\$3,126
> 20,000	Environmental Benefits Points = Payment NTE 80% of ATAMV not NTE appraised value of easement.				\$2,959	\$2,937	\$3,629	\$2,727	\$3,221	\$3,015	\$3,573

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
M.L. 2016 Project Budget**



Project Title: Conservation Easements in Avon Hills – Phase III

Legal Citation: M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 09c

Project Manager: John Geissler

Organization: Saint John's University

M.L. 2016 ENRTF Appropriation: \$ 1,300,000

Project Length and Completion Date: 3 Years, June 30, 2019

Date of Report: August 5, 2019

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET	Activity 1 Budget	Amount Spent	Activity 1 Balance	Activity 2 Budget	Amount Spent	Activity 2 Balance	TOTAL BUDGET	TOTAL BALANCE	
BUDGET ITEM	<i>Avon Hills Community Ed and Outreach</i>								
Personnel (Wages and Benefits) - SJU	\$5,500	\$5,500	\$0	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$0	\$17,500	\$0	
<i>John Geissler- Project Manager & Forester, \$5,500 (71% salary, 29% benefits), 1.5% FTE.</i>									
<i>Jenny Kutter, Arboretum Office Coord., \$4,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 10% FTE:</i>									
<i>Kyle Rauch, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$5,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 10% FTE</i>									
<i>Sarah Gainey, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$1,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits), 2% FTE:</i>									
<i>TBD, Arboretum Educ Staff, \$2,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 6% FTE</i>									
<i>Jeremy Scegura, SJU Accountant, \$2,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 2% FTE</i>									
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts - SJU	\$17,000	\$13,000	\$4,000	\$2,000	\$1,547	\$453	\$19,000	\$4,453	
<i>Conference speakers: speaker fees and honoraria for landowner educational conferences and workshops.</i>				\$2,000	\$1,547	\$453			
<i>TBD-Nat. Resource Professionals: preparing Forest Stewardship Plans for lands acceptable for easements. Plan costs not to exceed \$9/acre.</i>	\$4,000		\$4,000						
<i>Professional Services subcontract from to Stearns County SWCD for general outreach, personal landowner contacts, site evaluation and mapping, scoring using MMAPLE, assisting with the bidding process, and assisting with the bid ranking.</i>	\$13,000	\$13,000	\$0						
Equipment/Tools/Supplies - SJU	\$0			\$14,000	\$7,905	\$6,095	\$14,000	\$6,095	
<i>Promotion of easements, conferences, & workshops (newspaper ads, etc.), printing conference brochures and materials, participant supplies (folders, printed info, etc.).</i>				\$14,000	\$7,905	\$6,095			
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts-SJU to MLT	\$1,249,500		\$179,213	\$0			\$1,249,500	\$179,213	
<i>Easement Acquisition: Includes purchase price of conservation easements to protect about 500 acres of land through permanent conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust. Includes title review and closing costs of \$30,000 @\$3,000 each, and mapping costs of \$10,000 @\$1,000 each for 3-10 easements. MMAPLE will be used to rank the proposed parcels.</i>	\$1,113,000	\$998,810							
<i>Personnel (Wages and Benefits) - MLT: Staff expenses including salaries plus eligible benefits and related costs for approximately 33% FTE for each of the 3 years as follows: Conservation directors or other land protection staff (approximately 23% FTE/yr), legal staff and other support staff (approximately 10% FTE/yr)</i>	\$90,000	\$35,280							
<i>Professional Services for Acquisition: Includes appraisal costs of \$40,000 @\$5,000 each, <u>habitat management plans @\$6,000 each</u>, and \$4,000 for surveys @\$4,000 each for 3-10 easements.</i>	\$44,000	\$33,697							
<i>Travel expenses in Minnesota - MLT: Mileage and related travel expenses in Minnesota. Estimated at 4,800 miles at the current IRS rate (\$0.545 per mile).</i>	\$2,500	\$2,500							
COLUMN TOTAL	\$1,272,000	\$1,088,787	\$183,213	\$28,000	\$21,452	\$6,548	\$1,300,000	\$189,761	

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2016 Acquisition List

FINAL

Project Title: Conservation Easements in Avon Hills – Phase III

Legal Citation: M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 09c

Project Manager: John Geissler

Organization: Saint John’s Outdoor U, Saint John’s University

M.L. 2016 ENRTF Appropriation: \$ 1,300,000

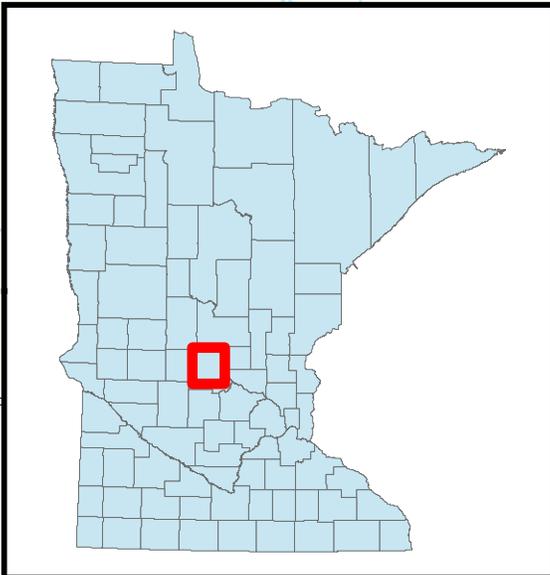
Project Length and Completion Date: 3 Years, June 30, 2019

Date of Report: July 30, 2019

#	Acquisition or Restoration Parcel Name	Geographic Coordinates Format: [Deg.]° [Min.]' [Sec.]" [Hemis.]		Estimated Cost	Estimated Annual PILT Liabilities	County	Site Significance	Activity Description	# of Acres	# of Shoreline Miles	Type of Landowner	Proposed Fee Title or Easement Holder (if applicable)	Status
		Latitude	Longitude										
1	Code = Serenity	94*26'14"	45*34'6"	\$369,600	\$ -	Stearns	Shoreline along undeveloped lake. 79 acres of DNR Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance. Adjacent to Saint John's University property. 7 building entitlements extinguished.	Conservation Easement Acquisition	286	0.74	Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Bid ranked #1 in value and bid accepted. Easement acquired on 9/28/18.
2	Code = Redhead	94*25'14"	45*33'20"	\$624,352	\$ -	Stearns	Shoreline along two undeveloped lakes. 200 acres in Drinking Water Supply Management Area. Adjacent to existing perpetual easement. 4 building entitlements extinguished.	Conservation Easement Acquisition	191	2.02	Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Bid ranked #2 in value and bid accepted. Easement acquired on 3/7/19.

NOTES: Because of the inherent bidding nature of the MMAPLE process, it is not possible to list the potential sites until they have been bid. Once they are bid, this form will be updated and submitted to LCCMR before easements are implemented.

Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape -Phase III Completed Projects-

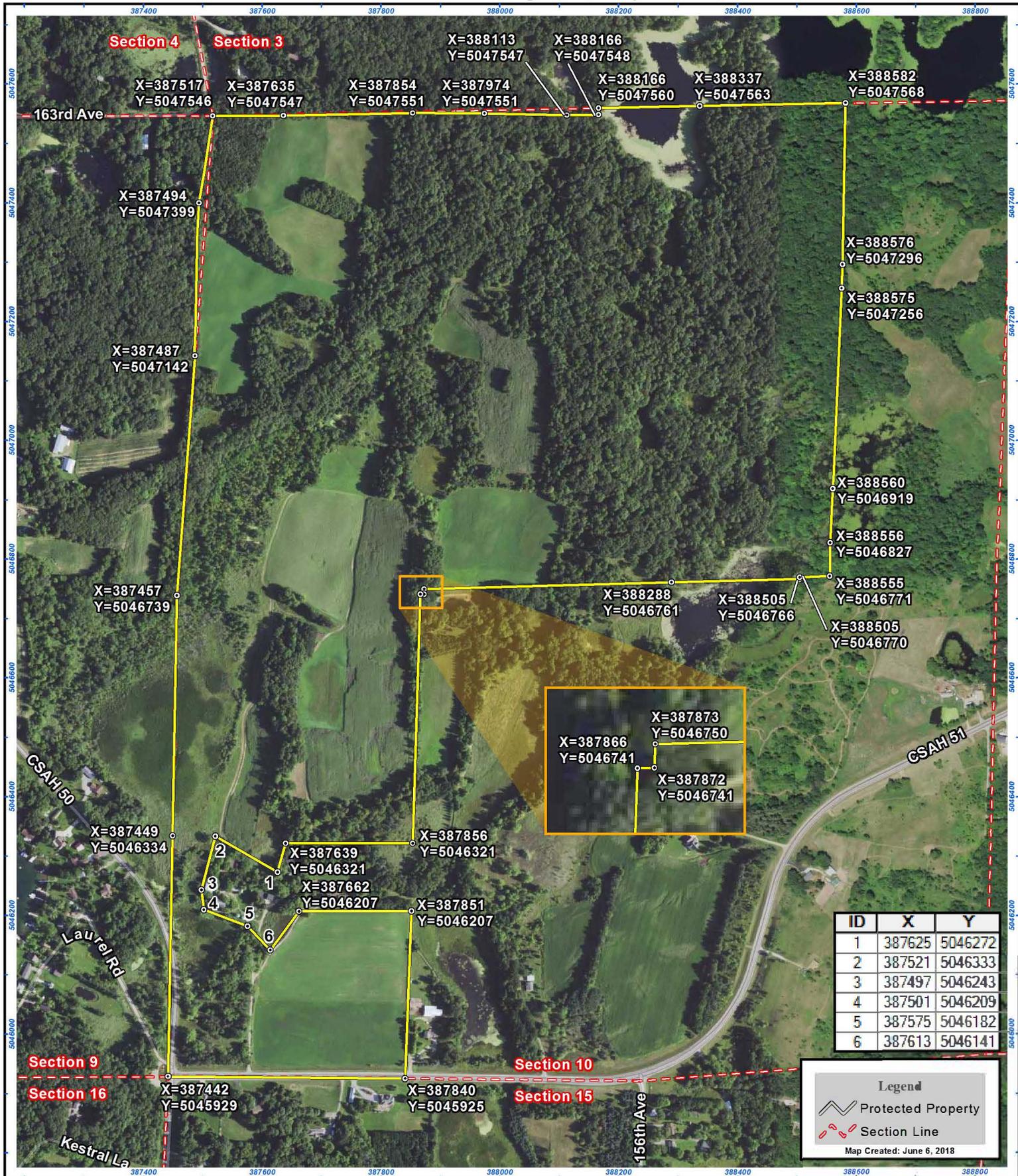


 Avon Hills Phase III Completed

 Avon Hills Boundary



Aerial Photography Map



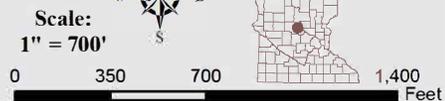
Map Resource Information

Protected Property & Section Lines created by Community GIS Services Inc. All data overlaid 2017 USDA FSA Aerial Photography. Map & labeled coordinates use projection of: UTM, Zone 15, Datum NAD83

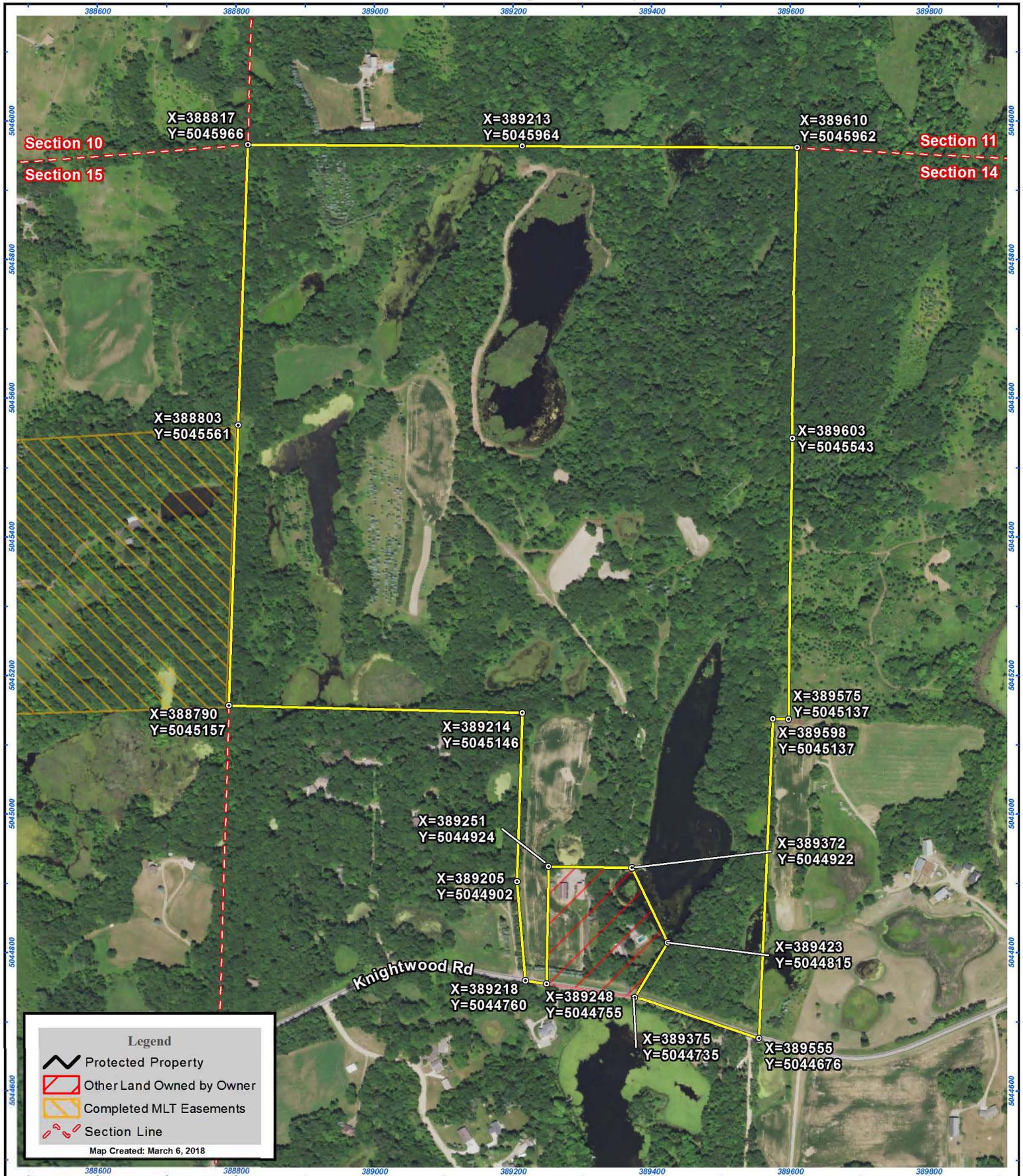
Users of this map agree and acknowledge that Community GIS Services Inc. and the Minnesota Land Trust cannot be held liable for accuracy of GIS material provided. GIS materials should not be relied upon to establish legal title, boundary lines, or locations of improvements.

Site: Avon Hills - Tract: Serenity

Stearns County - Twp. 124 N Rng. 30 W Sec. 9 & 10



Aerial Photography Map



Map Resource Information

Protected Property & Section Lines created by Community GIS Services Inc. All data overlaid 2017 USDA FSA Aerial Photography, Map & labeled coordinates use projection of: UTM, Zone 15, Datum NAD83

Users of this map agree and acknowledge that Community GIS Services Inc., and the Minnesota Land Trust cannot be held liable for accuracy of GIS material provided. GIS materials should not be relied upon to establish legal title, boundary lines, or locations of improvements.



Minnesota Land Trust Completed Projects
Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape 2016
Phase III

Serenity:

This 286-acre property is located within Collegeville Township of Stearns County, approximately 2 miles south of Avon, Minnesota. The property consists of 156 acres of forest, 33 acres of wetlands, 12 acres of grasslands, 8 acres of open water, and 77 acres of cultivated land. The the Minnesota Biological Survey has characterized portions of the easement property as sites of outstanding biodiversity significance and moderate biodiversity significance. The property contains approximately 3,671 feet of undeveloped shoreline along several unnamed open wetlands and an unnamed lake (known locally as “Winkel Lake”), a MN DNR-classified Natural Environment Lake approximately 29 acres in size.

The wetlands, riparian, and forested areas on the property are key habitats for a variety of Species in Greatest Conservation Need, such as the short-eared owl, American Bittern, and Blanding’s Turtle, as established by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (“DNR”) in *Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare; An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife, Minnesota’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, 2006*.

The easement is adjacent to the 2,900-acre Saint John’s Abbey Arboretum, a property of significant importance for the Avon Hills area, which includes 1,800 acres of a MBS Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance and has served as a designated state wildlife refuge since 1933. Within 3 miles of the easement there are five (5) other private properties permanently protected with conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust, two (2) federal Waterfowl Production Areas, two (2) Stearns County parks, and one (1) State of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area.

Redhead:

This 191-acre property is located within Collegeville Township of Stearns County, approximately 2 miles south of Avon. The property consists of 120 acres of forest, 23 acres of open water, 17 acres of grasslands, and 16 acres of wetlands, 4 acres of woodlands, and 11 acres of cultivated land. The easement property includes approximately 10,019 feet of undeveloped shoreline along several unnamed open wetlands and an unnamed lake. This unnamed lake of approximately 6 acres in size is classified as a Protected Wetland under the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (“MN DNR”) Public Waters Inventory.

The wetlands, riparian, and forested areas on the property are key habitats for a variety of Species in Greatest Conservation Need, such as the short-eared owl, American Bittern, and Blanding’s Turtle, as established by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (“DNR”) in *Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare; An Action Plan for Minnesota Wildlife, Minnesota’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, 2006*.

This easement acquisition is adjacent to a 34-acre private property also permanently protected with a conservation easement held by the Minnesota Land Trust which was acquired during the first phase of the Avon Hills program in 2009. A half mile to the northwest of the easement is the 2,900-acre Saint John’s Abbey Arboretum. Within 3 miles of the easement are six (6) other private properties permanently protected with conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust, two (2) federal Waterfowl Production Areas, two (2) Stearns County parks, and one (1) State of Minnesota Scientific and Natural Area.