

M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09j Project Abstract
For the Period Ending June 30, 2024

PROJECT TITLE: Preserving the Avon Hills with Reverse-Bidding Easements

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. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09j

APPROPRIATION AMOUNT: \$ 1,600,000

AMOUNT SPENT: \$1,597,346

AMOUNT REMAINING: \$2,654

Sound bite of Project Outcomes and Results

This project permanently protected 383.03 acres of high-quality forest, wetland, and grassland habitat in the ecologically rich Avon Hills while leveraging \$155,341 through landowner donation of easement value. Additionally, we restored/enhanced 321.15 acres of forest, prairie/grassland, and wetland habitat on permanently protected properties in the Avon Hills.

Overall Project Outcome and Results

The Avon Hills area is a 65,000 acre unique natural landscape located in Stearns County just 15 miles west of St. Cloud. The rolling 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. This area is under intense development pressure as it sits right along the Interstate 94 corridor just west of Saint Cloud.

This project utilized education, permanent protection of land through conservation easements, and restoration/enhancement of native plant communities to improve this beautiful landscape in Central Minnesota.

This project invested in community outreach and education to ensure that landowners and other important partners understand the importance of the Avon Hills landscape and options that exist for its protection. A few highlights included a Master Woodland Owner cohort, Minnesota Woodland Owner Weekend, Conservation Field Days, and the Preserving the Avon Hills Conference. We have many examples of these programs building relationships that eventually lead to interest in permanent protection and restoration.

Our goal was to permanently protect 390 acres and restore/enhance 220 acres in the Avon Hills. This project permanently protected 383.03 acres of high-quality forest, wetland, and grassland habitat while leveraging \$155,341 through landowner donation of easement value in the reverse bidding process. We fell just 7 acres short of our conservation easement goal despite significant increases in acquisition costs from 2019 to today. We prepared habitat management plans for all five of the easement acquisition properties funded by this grant. Additionally, I am very proud of the fact that we restored/enhanced 321.15 acres of forest, prairie/grassland, and wetland habitat on permanently protected properties in the Avon Hills exceeding our goal by 101.15 acres! Thank you for investing in this project and its positive environmental ripple effects throughout the Avon Hills of Minnesota.

Project Results Use and Dissemination

Mailings to promote our educational programs and conservation easements were sent to every landowner with over 20 acres in the Avon Hills. We also promoted the project by advertising in local newspapers (Newsleaders and Star Publications), Facebook, University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women’s Woodland Network emails, and Saint John’s Outdoor University print and social media outlets.



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

M.L. 2019 Work Plan

Date of Report: August 15, 2024

Final Report

Date of Work Plan Approval: June 5, 2019

Project Completion Date: June 30, 2024

PROJECT TITLE: Preserving the Avon Hills with Reverse-Bidding Easements

Project Manager: John Geissler

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

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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, Le Sauk, Rockville, St. Joseph, St. Wendel, and Wakefield

Total ENRTF Project Budget:

ENRTF Appropriation: \$1,600,000

Amount Spent: \$1,597,346

Balance: \$2,654

Legal Citation: M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09j

Appropriation Language:

\$1,600,000 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 Minnesota Land Trust to restore and enhance protected lands, provide public outreach, and prepare management plans for and use a reverse-bid ranking system to secure permanent conservation easements on high-quality natural habitat in the Avon Hills area of Stearns County. Of this amount, up to \$168,000 is for use by Minnesota Land Trust in a monitoring fund as approved in the work plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 116P.20. An annual financial report is required for any monitoring, management, and enforcement fund, including expenditures from the fund. A proposed list of acquisitions and restorations must be provided in the work plan. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2024, by which time the project must be completed and final products delivered.

I. PROJECT TITLE: Preserving the Avon Hills with Reverse-Bidding Easements

II. PROJECT STATEMENT:

Use the Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPE) reverse-bid and conservation easement ranking system to protect 390 acres and restore/enhance 220 acres of priority private lands. MMAPE's proven novel method uses precision conservation and a market-based approach to assure the best easement value for the ENTRF.

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 Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' (MN DNR) County Biological Survey. Our landscape goal is to permanently protect 70% of the remaining undeveloped landscape, or about 25,000 acres over the next 20 years. The United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS), the MN DNR and others have invested in protection efforts, signaling the priority for protection. With the assistance of the ENTRF and conservation minded landowners, 6,242 acres of the Avon Hills are protected (over 25% of our ambitious goal).

Using ENTRF grants, the Avon Hills team developed and have proven the effectiveness of this novel ranking system for acquiring easements dubbed the Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements (MMAPE). In the latest round of MMAPE, the \$2086 /acre average payment represents just 52% of the estimated market value of undeveloped land. MMAPE emphasizes the best easement value for the ENTRF.

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 habitat management plans for targeted parcels and supporting enhancement/restoration work on existing easements.

III. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES:

OVERALL PROJECT STATUS UPDATES:

Project Status as of January 31, 2020:

On November 29, 2019 the application period closed for participation in the fourth round of the Preserving the Avon Hills conservation easement program. Eight landowners participated in this round; 3 bids were initially selected before all easement acquisition funding was encumbered. Restoration planning and outreach has begun; a Conservation and Land Management Symposium is planned for late February to promote restoration and enhancement opportunities for landowners owning permanently protected lands in the Avon Hills.

Amendment Request as of 01/29/2020: We are requesting parcel additions for both protection and restoration projects to the approved parcel list.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 2/27/2020

Project Status as of July 30, 2020:

Protection and restoration activities began in earnest upon closing of the application period at the end of November. Easement project development started on the three selected bids coming out of the fourth round, while restoration activities were initiated on an easement site acquired under the ML2017 appropriation. Outreach continues with MN Virtual Woodland Owner Weekend Conference being offered early October 2020.

Project Status as of January 31, 2021:

Project development continued on three potential easement acquisitions under this phase. The Avon Hills (Manion) project is anticipated to close during the month of February 2021. The Avon Hills (Kern) project is anticipated to close in April 2021. Avon Hills (Wood Trust), the third project, is anticipated to close during June 2021. DNR Commissioner approval is being sought for all three potential acquisitions. Planning and prioritization also continued for restoration projects. Additional restoration projects are being lined up for work during 2021. The seeding and restoration of the Avon Hills (Goerger) site was completed during Summer 2020. Outreach continues with targeted mailings about program to Avon Hills landowners, development and delivery of woodland planning virtual series with statewide partners, and winter naturalist virtual series.

Amendment Request as of 02/17/2021: We are requesting a parcel addition to the protection projects on the approved parcel list. The proposed parcel, Avon Hills (Donabauer), was the 5th ranked parcel from the 2019 application round. The parcel is a mosaic of grassland, forest, and wetland habitats and includes frontage along Spunk Creek and Little Rice Lake, a designated natural environment lake.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 3/3/2021

Project Status as of July 30, 2021:

The Avon Hills (Kiryakakis-Manion formerly Manion) project closed in March 2021. Two more projects, Kurtzman (formerly Wood Trust) and Little Watab Properties Partnership (formerly Kern) are near completion but have been delayed because their original appraisals did not meet state requirements; they require new appraisals before they can proceed. Both projects are anticipated to close by the end of December 2021. Development began on an additional project, Little Rice Lake (Donabauer), in March 2021 and the project is expected to close in 2022. Avon Hills (Goerger) prairie restoration project is off to great start despite summer drought (over 15 native species already blooming last week) and our goal is to have more restoration/enhancement projects underway spring 2022. Outreach continued with development and delivery of quarterly woodland planning virtual series with statewide partners and winter naturalist virtual series.

Amendment Request as of 07/30/2021: We are requesting three name modifications on the approved parcel list.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 8/6/2021

Project Status as of January 31, 2022:

Three proposed conservation easement projects remain to be completed under the grant. Issues with appraisals as noted in the previous workplan update have been resolved for both the Avon Hills (Kurtzman) and Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership) easements; both should close by mid-2022. Work related to the Avon Hills (Donabauer) easement is underway, with a closing anticipated by the end of calendar year 2022. Outreach partnerships cultivated by this project continued with development and delivery of quarterly woodland planning virtual series with statewide partners.

Amendment Request as of 1/31/2022:

Due to personnel time constraints at Stearns SWCD, we are in need of professional services to continue communication with local landowners holding easements within Avon Hills to identify potential restoration projects. To fill this void, we would like to shift \$5,000 of the Professional Services subcontract currently under Stearns SWCD to Kanati Land Management. Kanati Land Management is a local consulting company poised to make personal landowner contacts, find potential restoration projects on eased land in the Avon Hills, and create restoration project plans if projects are deemed worthwhile.
Amendment Approved by LCCMR 2/7/2022

Amendment Request as of 5/10/2022:

Due to key personnel transitions at Minnesota Land Trust, we are requesting to extend Activity 1 deliverable deadlines to June 30, 2024 and Activity 2 Outcome 1 deliverable to June 2023. We are also requesting to fund the creation of habitat management plans for Sand Lake (Lindell) and Avon Hills (Riesner) easements (easement acquisitions funded in previous grant projects and already on parcel list) that do not have existing plans; landowners of these properties are interested in restoration and enhancement projects. These plans are important to make sure the restoration/enhancement projects fit the overall goals and align with the terms of the underlying conservation easements. We originally budgeted for 6 habitat management plans for new easement projects but only will require 4 parcels/plans to meet easement acquisition deliverables – this leaves budget for these two proposed plans without shifting funds.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 6/14/22

Project Status as of July 30, 2022:

The Minnesota Land Trust hired Leah Hall as Program Manager overseeing the Avon Hills project, to replace staff that departed the organization and continue work towards completion of Activity 1 and 3 deliverables. Two land protection projects have advanced significantly and are expected to close in the first half of FY2023. Five properties have been identified for potential restoration/enhancement work, with planning around these underway. Planning is well underway for Oct 8, 2022 Conservation Field Day at Saint John's to add to Activity 2 deliverables to increase awareness and stewardship of the native plant communities of the Avon Hills landscape.

Amendment Request as of 10/17/22:

In January, due to personnel time constraints at Stearns SWCD, we were in need of professional services to continue communication with local landowners holding easements within Avon Hills to identify potential restoration projects. We forecasted needing \$5000 but we ended up needing \$9,000 for this subcontract which successfully initiated and created draft plans on 5 potential restoration/enhancement projects. We are requesting to shift additional \$4,000 from Professional Services for Restoration line (mapping described in budget line initiated by Kanati and will be able to be completed internally) to the Professional Services subcontract line with Kanati Land Management.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 11/2/22

Project Status as of January 31, 2023:

Significant progress to report during the current reporting period. The Minnesota Land Trust closed on two conservation easements resulting in permanent land protection totaling over 306 acres. Six restoration/enhancement projects have been identified, prioritized, and scoped. Restoration projects on three properties, totaling approximately 88 acres are contracted. These projects include tree and shrub plantings, prairie enhancement, and invasive species control. Three additional projects, totaling approximately 76 acres are planned, and requests for quotes (RFQs) are out to secure contractors for each project. These projects include a wetland restoration, a wetland enhancement, oak regeneration, and a prairie enhancement. All six projects will be completed in 2023. Over 40 participants attended our Conservation Field Day on Oct 8, 2022.

This hands-on field day included sessions on oak regeneration, pollinator gardens, invasive species removal, tree and shrub identification, trail construction and maintenance, natural shorelines/stormwater retention and pine stewardship. More info at <https://www.csbsju.edu/outdooru/events/fieldday>.

Amendment Request as of 01/31/23: Request to add Avon Hills Sauer parcel to parcel list for wetland enhancement. Avon Hills Sauer parcel is in the Avon Hills project area and is a permanent wetland easement on private land through the US Fish and Wildlife Service acquired in the late 1980's. No ENRTF funds have been previously spent on the property. The wetland enhancement plan was developed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Jason Nordmann – USFWS private lands biologist). Jason Selvog from Stearns County SWCD connected us to this project – he knew of this potential project in need of funding and our goal of restoration/enhancement projects on permanently protected private lands in the Avon Hills.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 2/13/2023.

Project Status as of July 30, 2023:

The Minnesota Land Trust has contracted for six restoration/enhancement projects totaling approximately 170 acres. These projects will all be completed by the end of 2023 and include tree and shrub plantings, prairie enhancement, and invasive species control. One additional project, totaling over 100 acres has been scoped and prioritized. A request for quotes (RFQ) will be going out soon to secure a contractor for this project. The Land Trust has also identified two potential easement acquisitions projects – Avon Hills (Schellinger) and Avon Hills (Scegura). Further development of these projects is set to begin.

Amendment Request as of 07/30/23:

Request to add Avon Hills (Schellinger) and Avon Hills (Scegura) parcels to the parcel list for easement acquisition to finish out easement acquisition deliverables.

The 58.58 acre Avon Hills (Schellinger) property is a mosaic of forested wetlands, upland mesic hardwood forest and grasslands. This property features mature hardwood forest, wetlands, 336' of pond shoreline, 3640' of shoreline on Spunk Creek, and is adjacent to MBS Sites of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance. It is less than 0.25 miles to Schellinger SNA and another MN Land Trust permanently protected parcel. An added benefit is that it would be a highly visible parcel promoting conservation easements in the Avon Hills as this is the home of the Avon Hills Folk School.

(added 3/19/24)

From Rick Johnson appraisal – for Schellinger:

“In Stearns County, building rights can play an important factor in value. The larger parcel is zoned Transition T-20, allowing one Rights building eligibility per 20 acres. These rights can be sold to adjoining properties and transferred to other property owned by the landowner. According to the County, there were three (3) legal entitlements, but one was transferred off the southern side in September 2008. Thus, there are currently two (2) building entitlements, one of which is the existing building site. There are no transferrable building eligibilities.”

One building eligibility is being extinguished for Schellinger.

The 60.61-acre Avon Hills (Scegura) property is a mosaic of sedge meadow, upland forest, and forested wetlands. It features mature hardwood forest, wetlands, 7,002' of shoreline on Spunk Creek plus 291' of shoreline on intermittent streams, and is ~1.25 miles away from conservation easements to the north, east, and southeast.

(added 3/19/24)

From Dwight Dahlen – for Scegura:

“The subject property is comprised of 60.61 acres of low-lying recreational land, historically used for recreation. The property is zoned “A-40” and has two building eligibilities according to the county planner.”

Two building eligibilities are being extinguished for Scegura.

We have already secured \$154,541 in leverage from previous conservation easements in this project – over the \$150,000 promised in proposal. Landowners that fit the parameters above and willing to donate value are difficult to find at this stage. The remaining parcels to fulfill the grant deliverables will most likely be full value purchases based on the appraised value of the conservation easement.

Additionally, we request to increase professional services with Stearns County SWCD by \$176 to \$20,176 and to decrease professional services contract with MLT by \$176 to \$162,708.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 3/22/24

Project Status as of January 31, 2024:

The Minnesota Land Trust completed six restoration/enhancement projects totaling approximately 128 acres during this reporting period. These projects included tree and shrub plantings, prairie enhancement, wetland enhancement, a prescribed burn, and invasive species control – details on parcels worked on in Activity 3 project status. Two additional projects, totaling approximately 245 acres, are underway. These projects include prairie and forest enhancement and will be completed in spring 2024.

On the land protection front, the Land Trust is advancing two potential conservation easement projects. One project (Avon Hills-Schellinger) has the environmental assessment, survey, habitat management plan, baseline report, and appraisal completed. A signed option has also been received. This project is anticipated to close in early spring 2024. The second project (Avon Hills -Scegura) has an environmental assessment and preliminary title work completed. A preliminary survey has been received and the appraisal has been contracted.

Amendment Request as of 1/31/2023

Due to limited restoration/enhancement staff availability at Minnesota Land Trust to perform some of the necessary components of getting the restoration/enhancement work completed (i.e. meeting with potential contractors, facilitating site visits with landowners, and ensuring quality restoration/enhancement work completed by contractors) we would increase professional services with Stearns County SWCD by \$11,655 to \$31,831 and to decrease professional services subcontract with Minnesota Land Trust by \$11,655 to \$151,053.

Due to increased easement acquisition costs, we would like increase easement acquisition conservation easement purchase line by \$138,200 to \$858,200. These funds would be moved from lines where we have already met or exceeded the deliverables of the grant and have excess funds available as follows. Decrease easement restoration/enhancement line by \$34,000 to \$276,000. Decrease long term stewardship costs by \$67,000 to \$101,000. Decrease habitat management plan contract costs by \$700 to \$35,300. Decrease professional services for acquisition line by \$36,500 to \$96,000.

We have been working to close on the Avon Hills (Schellenger) conservation easement and are about to send respective packets for review to LCCMR and the DNR. During this process, MLT staff Bev Rinke discovered a small mathematical error in the appraisal resulting in a \$800 discrepancy between the appraisal document and option agreement versus what the corrected amount would be. We would like permission for the purchase price to be \$800 (0.3%) over appraised value. The \$800 will be paid by MLT, however per session law, LCCMR approval is still required even if ENRTF funds are not used for the overage.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 4/2/2024

Amendment Request as of 6/05/2024

As we finish out the project deliverables and exact forecasted costs are determined, we would like to propose the following budget adjustments.

We would like to increase conference speaker budget line by \$260 to \$2260 and increase the SJU personnel budget by \$994 to \$26,494. These increases will be offset by reducing promotion of easements, conference, etc budget line by \$1,254 to \$12,862.

The Preserving the Avon Hills Conference is an excellent means of continuing interest in conservation and conservation easements among Avon Hills landowners. It is slightly more expensive to book the speakers that attract participants and SJU personnel put in slightly more time to pull it all together than originally budgeted.

We would like to increase the professional services for acquisition by \$1,395 to \$97,395 and the professional services subcontract with MLT by \$6,153 to \$157,206. These increases will be offset by the following decreases. Reduce easement restoration/enhancement by \$1,363 to \$274,637. Reduce easement acquisition by \$4,000 to \$854,200. Reduce long term stewardship by \$200 to \$100,800. Reduce habitat management plan contract cost by \$1,985 to \$33,315.

To complete the final deliverables of the grant in conservation easement acquisitions and restoration/enhancement projects, we are finding that our actual costs will be slightly higher in professional services for acquisition and professional services contract with MLT than currently budgeted and slightly lower in easement restoration/enhancement, easement acquisition, long term stewardship and habitat management plan contract

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 7/16/24

Amendment Request as of 8/08/2024

We would like to increase the professional services for acquisition by \$163 to \$97,558. Reduce the professional services subcontract with MLT by \$163 to \$157,043.

To complete the final deliverables of the grant in conservation easement acquisitions and restoration/enhancement projects, we are finding that our actual costs will be slightly higher in professional services for acquisition and slightly lower for professional services contract with MLT than currently budgeted.

We would like to increase SJU personnel by \$799 to \$27,293. Reduce promotion of easements, conference, etc by \$799 to \$12,063.

SJU staff time to pull together all of the final pieces is taking slightly more time than originally budgeted. We successfully promoted our educational and outreach efforts without all the funds originally budgeted.

Amendment Approved by LCCMR 8/13/24

Overall Project Outcomes and Results:

The Avon Hills area is a 65,000 acre unique natural landscape located in Stearns County just 15 miles west of St. Cloud. The rolling 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. This area is under intense development pressure as it sits right along the Interstate 94 corridor just west of Saint Cloud.

This project utilized education, permanent protection of land through conservation easements, and restoration/enhancement of native plant communities to improve this beautiful landscape in Central Minnesota.

This project invested in community outreach and education to ensure that landowners and other important partners understand the importance of the Avon Hills landscape and options that exist for its protection. A few highlights included a Master Woodland Owner cohort, Minnesota Woodland Owner Weekend, Conservation Field Days, and the Preserving the Avon Hills Conference. We have many examples of these programs building relationships that eventually lead to interest in permanent protection and restoration.

Our goal was to permanently protect 390 acres and restore/enhance 220 acres in the Avon Hills. This project permanently protected 383.03 acres of high-quality forest, wetland, and grassland habitat while leveraging \$155,341 through landowner donation of easement value in the reverse bidding process. We fell just 7 acres short of our conservation easement goal despite significant increases in acquisition costs from 2019 to today. We prepared habitat management plans for all five of the easement acquisition properties funded by this grant. Additionally, I am very proud of the fact that we restored/enhanced 321.15 acres of forest, prairie/grassland, and wetland habitat on permanently protected properties in the Avon Hills exceeding our goal by 101.15 acres! Thank you for investing in this project and its positive environmental ripple effects throughout the Avon Hills of Minnesota.

ACTIVITY 1: Complete 390 acres of Conservation Easements 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 including 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 base payment of \$30,000 plus their MMAPLE per acre bid.

Justification for the Minnesota Land Trust’s proposed travel budget request is as follows. This is an estimate based on a total of 3-7 completed easements for approximately 390 acres. Costs are based on the Land Trust’s 2018 cost analysis with some adjustments made for future projections and inflation in years 2019-2024. 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 5 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 12 potential easement projects are in play from the onset.

12 initial site visits @ 200 miles/site	= 2400 miles
24 visits for easement documentation @ 200 miles/site	= 4800 miles
12 visits for baseline documentation @ 200 miles/site	= 2400 miles
6 visits for recording and closing on easement @ 200 miles/site	= 1200 miles

Total = **10,800 miles**

4,800 miles @ current Federal mileage reimbursement	= \$5,886
	Rounded to \$6,000

To the extent possible MLT tries to bunch up site visits to minimize the amount of trips. MLT also tries to utilize rental car options as these are more cost effective than MLT employees using their personal vehicles to conduct site visits, or meet with landowners. However, this is not always possible. Also, inevitably during the easement acquisition process there are unexpected site visits that occur to complete the acquisition.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 1:

ENRTF Budget:	1,255,162
Amount Spent:	1,255,162
Balance:	\$ 0

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Protect approximately 390 acres completing permanent conservation easements for 3-7 landowners to be held by the MN Land Trust. SJU, Stearns County SWCD, 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. \$720,000 from ENRTF budget.)	June 30, 2024
2. Provide habitat restoration management plans prepared by private sector natural resource professionals. (est. \$36,000 from ENRTF budget.)	June 30, 2024
3. Fund long-term stewardship costs. MLT stewardship costs of \$24,000 per easement. (\$168,000 from ENRTF budget.)	June 30, 2024

Activity Status as of January 31, 2020:

Stearns SWCD coordinated and promoted this fourth round of the Preserving the Avon Hills protection program. The application period closed at the end of November 2019. Eight landowners participated in this round; all applications were scored and ranked utilizing the MMAPLE process. Three applications/bids were selected before all easement acquisition funding was encumbered. All participating landowners were notified of their application status and project development will begin once the accepted bids are placed on the approved parcel list. A summary of the 3 selected applications/bids is provided below:

- Avon Hills (Manion): This easement project is a full donation of the easement value on a 7-acre property which is adjacent to Schellinger Scientific and Natural Area. The property also has frontage on both Schuman Lake, and Schuman Lake Road, which is a designated scenic byway. The entire property is with a Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance and includes a habitat mosaic of forested wetlands and upland mesic hardwood forest.
- Avon Hills (Kern): This easement project is 180 acres in size and is adjacent to an additional 156-acre property with an existing perpetual conservation easement. The property to be protected includes a quarter-mile of frontage on Little Watab Lake and 25 acres of habitat within a Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance. Six building entitlements will be restricted and given up by the landowner under their application and the terms of the easement.
- Avon Hills (Wood Trust): This easement project is 161 acres in size and includes frontage along Lake Wobegon Trail, a designated state trail. The property to be protected includes 135 acres of habitat within a Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance. Five building entitlements will be restricted and given up by the landowner under their application and the terms of the easement.

All eight landowner applications are included as an attachment to this status update. Also included is the bid score summary sheet which shows the scores and rankings of the individual applications.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2020:

Project development has begun on the three top-ranked applications that came through the MMAPLE ranking process in November 2019. Preliminary title work, surveys and appraisals have been completed, while easement negotiations continue. Closings on the three easements are anticipated for Spring 2021.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2021:

Project development is near completion for all three projects. Environmental site assessments were completed while negotiations around easement terms and drafts are in their final stages. The Manion project is anticipated to close in late February 2021, while the Kern project will follow shortly thereafter, in April 2021. The Wood Trust project is anticipated to close sometime in June 2021.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2021:

One top-ranked project (Manion, now named Manion-Kiryakakis) was completed in March 2021. The other two projects (Kern, now named Little Watab Properties Partnership, and Wood Trust, now named Kurtzman) have experienced a delay but remain near completion and should be completed by December 2021. Work began on a next highly-ranked project, Donabauer, which is currently in the title work stage and should be completed in 2022.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2022:

Two projects – Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership) and Avon Hills (Kurtzman) – are near completion and should be completed by June 2022. Avon Hills (Donabauer) is currently in the survey and appraisal stage and

should be completed by the end of calendar year 2022. These three projects will close out the land protection component of this grant.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2022:

Two conservation easement projects are advancing well. The Avon Hills (Kurtzman) – formerly (Wood Trust) – project is expected to close in July 2022; Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership) will follow suit in late summer or fall. The Avon Hills (Donabauer) property was put on the market by the landowner and sold to another individual; as such, a replacement project will be identified to pursue in the near term.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2023:

During the current reporting period, the Land Trust closed on the approximately 158-acre Avon Hills (Kurtzman) conservation easement and the approximately 148-acre Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership) easement, resulting in land protection totaling over 306 acres. The Kurtzman easement was a full value purchase of \$240,400 and the Little Watab Properties Partnership was a purchase of \$321,900 with a donative value of \$113,000. The Land Trust is working on identifying an additional project that will close out the grant protection goals.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2023:

The Minnesota Land Trust has identified two conservation easement acquisition projects – Avon Hills (Schellinger) and Avon Hills (Scegura) - that will close out the grant's protection deliverables.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2024:

Two conservation easement projects are advancing well. The Avon Hills (Schellinger) and the Avon Hills (Scegura) projects are expected to close in spring 2024. It is anticipated that Avon Hills (Scegura) conservation easement will be partially covered by funds from this grant and partially funded by another funding source.

Final Report Summary:

The Land Trust protected five properties with permanent conservation easements under this grant, totaling approximately 383.03 acres. These projects are:

Avon Hills (Kiryakakis-Manion)

The 5.65-acre Avon Hills (Kiryakakis-Manion) conservation easement closed in March 2021. A habitat management plan was prepared as a part of this project. The property contains 3 acres of Southern Mesic Maple-Basswood Forest and 2 acres of Black Ash – (Red Maple) Seepage Swamp. These native plant communities are considered imperiled and critically imperiled in Minnesota by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, respectively. Black Ash – (Red Maple) Seepage Swamp is only found in a few scattered locations in the state. The property falls within the "Upper Spunk Lake" Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) Site of Outstanding Biodiversity Significance. Fourteen (14) separate occurrences of rare, threatened, and endangered species or plant community types have been identified by the MBS within one mile of the property. A habitat management plan was developed for this property. Additionally, the property is adjacent to Schuman Lake. Schuman Lake is considered a high-quality lake ecologically and is designated as "Lake of High Biodiversity Significance."

Avon Hills (Kurtzman)

The 158.8-acre Avon Hills (Kurtzman) conservation easement project closed in August 2022. A habitat management plan was prepared as a part of this project. The property is dominated by wet meadow, with wet forest and upland forest. Much of the property falls within "Partch Woods SNA" Minnesota Biological Survey Site of High Biodiversity Significance. Sites designated as high significance are characterized by very good quality occurrences of rare species, high-quality examples of rare native plant communities, and/or important

functional landscapes. The wet meadow and forests have the potential to provide habitat for Species in Greatest Conservation Need, such as eastern massasauga rattlesnake and two-spotted skipper. A habitat management plan was developed for this property.

Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership)

The 148-acre Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership) conservation easement project closed in November 2022. A habitat management plan was prepared as a part of this project. This property contains primarily wetlands with forests present throughout the upland areas of the property. The property protects 1,075 feet of shoreline along Little Watab Lake, a Natural Environment Lake, and 3,042 feet of shoreline along Watab River South Fork. The property is part of a larger landscape of protected lands as it abuts a 155-acre Minnesota Land Trust easement with additional protected shoreline along Little Watab Lake. The northeastern portion of the property falls within the “Little Watab Lake” Minnesota Biological Survey Site of Moderate Biodiversity Significance.

Avon Hills (Schellinger)

The 58.58-acre Avon Hills (Schellinger) conservation easement project closed in May 2024. A habitat management plan was prepared as a part of this project. This property contains rolling terrain, hardwood forest, restored grasslands, wetlands, and an open water pond. The property also protects 3,640 feet of shoreline along Spunk Creek which flows north into Big Spunk Lake. The property is adjacent, and therefore provides buffer, to the “Upper Spunk Lake SE” Minnesota Biological Survey Site of High Biodiversity Significance, and Kreigle Lake, a Lake of Biological Significance, as identified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. A habitat management plan was developed for this property.

Avon Hills (Scegura)

The 60-acre Avon Hills (Scegura) conservation easement project closed in June 2024 and was partially funded by this grant (12 acres of the total), along with funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. A habitat management plan was prepared as a part of this project. This property contains wet meadows and mesic hardwood forest. The property also protects 7,002 feet of shoreline along Spunk Creek, a tributary to the Mississippi River. Moreover, the Protected Property has been identified by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as a priority candidate for conservation within the Wildlife Action Network under its Wildlife Action Plan, 2015-2025. A habitat management plan was developed for this property.

See project summary sheets for more information.

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: \$ 32,616
Amount Spent: \$ 30,700
Balance: \$ 1,916

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.	June 30, 2024

Activity Status as of January 31, 2020:

Completed delivery of Avon Hills Master Woodland Owner cohort with University of Minnesota Extension. This 6-month blended offering of online and in person content provided more than 80 hours of learning for 22 family

woodland owners interested in becoming better stewards of their property. Modules included goal setting, mapping, inventory, soils, hydrology, non-timber forest products, tree regeneration, silviculture, wildlife, and financial and legacy aspects of woodland ownership.

Program partners have worked on developing and coordinating Conservation and Land Management Symposium to be held at Saint John's University on Sunday, February 23, 2020 from 1-3 pm in the Science Center Room #150. Symposium will feature a hub of information for landowners looking for technical and financial assistance to carry out restoration activities on their lands. Targeted marketing and phone calls to landowners with or soon to be permanently protected lands within the Avon Hills.

The next Avon Hills conference for local landowners has been set for Oct 2-3, 2020. The conference to be held at Saint John's University and will feature collaboration with the Minnesota Forestry Association and MN Women's Woodland Network.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2020:

Due to COVID-19 and the safety of all involved, our MN Woodland Owner Weekend (of which the Avon Hills Conference is a component) has been converted to a virtual event. Nationally recognized keynote speakers and statewide experts will pre-record their presentations so that landowners will be able to view them all at their own convenience. Additionally, landowners will be able to then join live Zoom Q&A sessions with all the presenters on Saturday Oct 3. Keynote presentations include "Nature's Best Hope" by Doug Tallamy and "Conservation of Minnesota's Big Woods" by Lee Frelich. Other presentations include "Choosing the Best Trees to Plant", "Highlights of Minnesota's Forest Products Industry", "Know Your Land for Management Decisions", "Providing for Pollinators in Your Woodlands", "Encourage Native Species/Controlling Invasive Plants", "Financial Assistance Programs for MN Woodland Owners", "Wild Edible Plants that Might be on Your Property", "Herbicide Use to Control Unwanted Plants", "Managing Your Woods with Emerald Ash Borer", "Chronic Wasting Disease: Separating Fact from Fiction" and information on conservation easements and restoration opportunities.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2021:

Over 115 landowners enjoyed our 12 speaker MN Virtual Woodland Owner Weekend in early October 2020 as described above. Building on this outreach momentum we continued our partnership with University of Minnesota Extension, MN DNR, Minnesota Forestry Association, MN Women's Woodland Network, and Minnesota State Horticultural Society to develop and offer a virtual series on Woodland Planning that was delivered January 19, 2021. Presentations with interactive question and answer sessions included "It's Your Woodland Legacy: Getting the Finance Conversation Started", "Woodland Stewardship Plans and Financial Incentives Programs, and "Conservation Easements in Minnesota". Finally, we offered virtual Winter Naturalist Series including "Winter Tracks & Signs" on Jan 16, "Ice Age Megafauna" on Jan 23, and "Winter Tree and Shrub ID" on Jan 30, 2021.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2021:

Over 89 landowners enjoyed our 3 speaker MN Virtual Woodland Owner Workshop in early April 2021 on "Growing Your Dream Forest" through continued our partnership with University of Minnesota Extension, MN DNR, Minnesota Forestry Association, MN Women's Woodland Network, and Minnesota State Horticultural Society. Presentations with interactive question and answer sessions included "How to restore your woodland's understory after removing buckthorn and other unwanted trees and shrubs", "How to select seedlings for your site, plant your seedlings, and protect your seedlings", and "Natural oak regeneration - how and when to harvest, managing understory competition, and protecting seedlings from deer browse". Further, we offered virtual Winter Naturalist Series including "Lichens in Minnesota" on Feb 20, "Squirrels – Little Critters, Big Adaptations" on Feb 27, and "Wintering Wildlife" on March 6, 2021.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2022:

MN Woodland Owner Workshop partnership initially cultivated by this project continue to provide virtual learning opportunities. July 20, 2021 MN WOW offering included “Woodland Habitat Management for White tailed Deer”, “Firewise MN -Wildfire preparedness for homeowners”, “Showing our Lakes Love: Land Care & Shoreline Practices that Protect Water Quality”. October 19 offering included “Timber! Harvesting Trees as a Management Tool”, “Constructing and Maintaining Trails in Your Woodlands” and “Managing for Reptiles and Amphibians on Your Land”. We will utilize this strong partnership and ENTRF funds to plan and implement a landowner conference at Saint John’s slated for fall 2022 focused on native habitat restoration techniques for landowners. It is the hope that this could be an in person event but will be designed to adapt to virtual if needed.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2022:

Finalizing plans for Oct 8, 2022 Conservation Field Day at Saint John’s in partnership with MN DNR, Minnesota Forestry Association, MN Women’s Woodland Network, and Minnesota State Horticultural Society. This will be a field day to inspire and give practical tips for landowners learning to care for native plant communities. Sessions on oak regeneration, pollinator gardens, invasive species removal, tree and shrub identification, trail construction and maintenance, natural shorelines/stormwater retention and more.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2023:

Over 40 participants attended our Conservation Field Day on Oct 8, 2022. A full day of programming featuring expert speakers included sessions on oak regeneration, pollinator gardens, invasive species removal, tree and shrub identification, trail construction and maintenance, natural shorelines/stormwater retention and pine stewardship. <https://www.csbsju.edu/outdooru/events/fieldday>

Activity Status as of July 30, 2023:

Planning has begun for day long Celebrating the Avon Hills Conference in late January 2024.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2024:

The Celebrating the Avon Hills Conference on Saturday Jan 27 was a great success. There were 129 participants, plus 36 speakers and exhibitors, and 15 staff/volunteers for a total involvement of 172 people! Heather Holm delivered our keynote on attracting bees and beneficial insects with native plants, followed by a “Raptors of Minnesota” live bird presentation by the University of Minnesota Raptor Center. The afternoon featured concurrent sessions “Stewarding a Climate Ready Woodland”, “Financial Assistance Programs for MN Woodland Owners”, “Oaks Fire, and Climate Change”, “Life in Vernal Pools”, “Ask a Land Management Consultant”, and “Collegeville and Abbey Arboretum Historical Tidbits”. Field experiences included “Logs to Lumber Abbey Woodworking Shop tour”, “Intro to Maple Syruping”, “Winter Animal Tracking”, “Winter Tree ID”, and “MN Hothouse, Tips for Growing Native Plants”. During all breaks there was an exhibit hall featuring 16 organizations tabling. A kids track allowed parents to enjoy conference while their kids enjoyed environmental education activities.

<https://www.csbsju.edu/outdooru/events/celebratingtheavonhills>

Final Report Summary:

This project invested in community outreach and education to ensure that landowners and other important partners understand the importance of the Avon Hills landscape and options that exist for its protection. A few highlights included a Master Woodland Owner cohort, Minnesota Woodland Owner Weekend, Conservation Field Days, and the Preserving the Avon Hills Conference. We have many examples of these programs building relationships that eventually lead to interest in permanent protection and restoration.

ACTIVITY 3: Easement Site Restoration & Enhancement on 220 acres

Description: Based on property quality, restoration will be conducted to enhance water and habitat benefits on eased sites. The projects will reconnect fragmented habitat complexes by restoring native vegetation, and enhance existing natural habitat on eased lands through activities such as invasive species removal, prescribed burning, and oak regeneration. These habitat restoration and enhancement activities will benefit species of greatest conservation need such as; red-shouldered hawk, Blanding's turtle, and four-toed salamander and pollinators such as bumblebees and yellow swallowtail butterflies. Additional funding for restoration assistance on eased lands is concurrently being requested by this partnership from federal funding sources.

Summary Budget Information for Activity 3:

ENRTF Budget: \$ 312,222

Amount Spent: \$ 311,487

Balance: \$ 735

Outcome	Completion Date
1. Restoration/Enhancement projects selected and designed	June 2023
2. Restoration/Enhancement projects completed on 220 acres	June 2024

Activity Status as of January 31, 2020: No activity has occurred under this portion of the work plan. Conservation and Land Management Symposium is planned for February 23, 2020 to promote restoration and enhancement opportunities funded by the grant program.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2020:

Planning for restoration projects continue after several potential projects were identified as a result of discussions with landowners coming out of the land management symposium in February 2020. Restoration activities began on the Avon Hills (Goerger) easement which was acquired under the ML2017 appropriation. Approximately 18.9 acres were seeded to native prairie species in late June 2020 as part of a prairie and oak savanna restoration of formerly cultivated land within the easement area. Oak tree plantings are planned several years in the future after the prairie has established.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2021:

Mowing was completed on the Goerger restoration site to keep weeds in check as part of the maintenance of the restoration post-seeding. The Avon Hills partnership met during Summer 2020 to start planning and prioritization of restoration projects for 2021. No additional project work has begun, though project work is anticipated to begin during Spring 2021.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2021:

Despite drought, 15 native forb species were blooming on Goerger prairie restoration site. Continued mowing was completed on the Goerger restoration site to keep weeds in check as part of the maintenance of the restoration post-seeding. Tree and shrub planting planned for spring 2022. Key transitions in personnel at SWCD and MLT have delayed progress on restoration/enhancement efforts but we will regain momentum this fall/winter with planning and prioritization of restoration projects for Spring 2022.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2022:

Key personnel loss at Stearns SWCD constrained time of remaining staff and did not allow them to make landowner connections and find restoration projects. Above amendment request to shift professional services funds to Kanati Land Management will get progress towards deliverables back on track.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2022:

With the assistance of contractor Kanati Land Management, five sites protected through conservation easements have been identified as potential restoration/enhancement projects. At two sites, preliminary

restoration/enhancement action plans have been drafted in consultation with landowners and are currently being vetted by Minnesota Land Trust personnel to ensure the proposed work conforms to existing habitat management plans. As approved in last amendment, habitat management plans for Sand Lake (Lindell) and Avon Hills (Riesner) properties are being drafted under contract to WSB; once completed, Land Trust staff will evaluate draft restoration plans to ensure they mesh with the habitat management plans. Restoration/enhancement work is also proposed for the Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership) property once that easement closes in summer/fall 2022.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2023:

Six restoration/enhancement projects have been identified, prioritized, and scoped. Restoration projects on three properties, totaling approximately 88 acres are contracted. These projects include tree and shrub plantings, prairie enhancement, and invasive species control. Three additional projects, totaling approximately 76 acres are planned, and requests for quotes (RFQs) are out to secure contractors for each project. These projects include a wetland restoration, a wetland enhancement, oak regeneration, and a prairie enhancement. All six projects will be completed in 2023.

The Land Trust, St. John's University, and Stearns Soil and Water Conservation District are working to scope a couple additional projects that will close out the grant restoration goals. Additionally, habitat management plans for Sand Lake (Lindell) and Avon Hills (Riesner) properties are finalized.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2023:

The Minnesota Land Trust has contracted for six restoration/enhancement projects totaling approximately 137 acres. Oak regeneration and prairie enhancement on 9.1 of the 61 acre (Avon Hills -Dwyer) property, pollinator plant enhancement and invasive species control on 88 acres (Stumpf Lake – Eich), native shrub planting on 1 acre (Avon Hills – Thomsen), wetland enhancement on 14 acres (Avon Hills – Sauer), wetland restoration, tree planting, and prairie enhancement on 25 acres (Avon Hills – Goerger). One additional invasive species removal project, totaling over 100 acres (Avon Hills – Goerger) has been scoped and prioritized. A request for quotes (RFQ) will be going out soon to secure a contractor for this project. This project will complete the grant's restoration/enhancement deliverables.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2024:

The Minnesota Land Trust completed six restoration/enhancement projects totaling approximately 128 acres. Pollinator plant enhancement and invasive species control on 88 acres (Stumpf Lake – Eich), native shrub planting on 1 acre (Avon Hills – Thomsen), wetland enhancement on 14 acres (Avon Hills – Sauer), wetland restoration, tree planting, and prairie enhancement on 25 acres (Avon Hills – Goerger). Two additional projects, totaling approximately 193 acres are underway including oak forest regeneration and prairie enhancement on 9.1 of the 61 acre (Avon Hills -Dwyer) property plus 184 acres of invasive species control (Avon Hills – Goerger). The 9.1 acre Dwyer project is completing the work mentioned in our previous update; the Goerger project expanded from the 100 mentioned in the previous update to the 184 acres now underway. These projects will be completed in spring 2024.

Final Report Summary:

The Land Trust restored and enhanced 321.15 acres of forest, prairie/grassland, and wetland habitat on five properties across the Avon Hills with funding from this grant. These restoration and enhancement projects were completed in partnership with Stearns Soil and Water Conservation District, USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, and Saint John's University, on lands permanently protected with Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) or United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) conservation easements.

We identified priority, permanently protected properties in this landscape with restoration/enhancement needs that, if restored/enhanced, would have an outsized impact on habitat for wildlife, including SGCN. Upland projects included tree plantings, native seedings, and invasive species control. Wetland projects included enhancing outlet structures, installing a ditch plug, and controlling cattails.

Avon Hills (Goerger) – Date completed: May 2024

This project enhanced a matrix of habitats. A 19-acre prairie was enhanced with a native seeding completed in 2020 and a subsequent prescribed fire completed in 2023. A 5-acre tree planting, which involved planting and caging 900 red oak, white oak, bur oak, black cherry, and red maple trees, was completed in spring 2023; subsequent watering was conducted in summer 2023 due to extreme drought conditions. Invasive species (e.g., buckthorn and Tatarian honeysuckle) were controlled on 184 acres using a combination of mechanical removal, herbicide application, and goat grazing. This work was completed in spring 2024. Finally, a 1-acre wetland was restored in fall 2023 by constructing a ditch plug, installing spillways, and clearing trees.

Stumpf Lake (Eich) - Date completed: October 2023

This project enhanced forest and grassland habitat. Native grasses and forbs were seeded on 16.69 acres and invasives species were controlled on 71.36 forested acres using a combination of mechanical removal, herbicide application, and goat grazing.

Avon Hills (Thomsen) – Date completed: May 2023

This project involved a native shrub planting on 1 acre of upland hardwood forest to diversify the subcanopy and provide additional early season pollen sources for pollinators.

Avon Hills (Dwyer) – Date completed: August 2023

This project focused on a 1.36-acre mesic prairie pollinator enhancement and oak regeneration on approximately 7.74 acres. The oak regeneration involved harvesting select tree species to open the tree canopy in seven select locations, planting and caging 1,000 red, white and bur oak seedlings, and completing follow-up watering due to extreme drought conditions in summer 2023.

Sauer – Date completed: November 2023

This 14-acre wetland enhancement involved cattail control, a prescribed burn, and enhancement of an outlet structure.

See project summary sheets for more information.

IV. 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, Stearns County SWCD, 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.

The Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) will be acknowledged through use of the trust fund logo or attribution language on project print and electronic media, publications, signage, and other communications per the [ENRTF Acknowledgement Guidelines](#).

Activity Status as of January 31, 2020:

In October 2019, Stearns SWCD and SJU sent out a newsletter (included as an attachment to this status update) 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 second round of the Avon Hills easement program, Avon Hills (Dwyer). Stearns SWCD also posted related information on its website and Facebook page highlighting the availability of funding for the program. The Land Trust maintains a webpage on its website dedicated to the Avon Hills program as well, found at www.mnland.org.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2020:

In June 2020, a printed newsletter (included as an attachment to this workplan update) advertising the MN Woodland Owner Weekend was mailed to all landowners in the Avon Hills with ownership of at least 20 acres. This conference was originally planned to be hosted at Saint John's but now will be hosted virtually by Saint John's. This collaborative conference has and will continue to be shared through University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women's Woodland Network emails, MN DNR Forestry social media outlets, and Saint John's Outdoor University print and social media outlets.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2021:

In October, a printed postcard (included as an attachment to this workplan update) advertising our conservation easement program was mailed to all landowners in the Avon Hills with ownership of at least 20 acres. Collaborative virtual education programs continue to be shared through University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women's Woodland Network emails, MN DNR Forestry social media outlets, and Saint John's Outdoor University print and social media outlets.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2021:

Personal contacts with all Avon Hills easement owners to discuss potential restoration/enhancement projects. Collaborative virtual education programs continue to be shared through University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women's Woodland Network emails, MN DNR Forestry social media outlets, and Saint John's Outdoor University print and social media outlets.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2022:

Dissemination activity was quiet through this period. Larger mailings of newsletters celebrating landowners completing easements, illustrating restoration projects in the works, and promoting fall landowner conference will be produced and sent in the next half year.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2022:

Mailings to promote Oct 8 Conservation Field Day plan to be sent in August. Event will also be advertised University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Outdoor News, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women's Woodland Network emails, MN DNR Forestry social media outlets, and Saint John's Outdoor University print and social media outlets.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2023:

Mailings to promote Oct 8 Conservation Field Day plan were to sent to every landowner with over 20 acres in the Avon Hills. Event was advertised by University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women's Woodland Network emails, MN DNR Forestry social media outlets, and Saint John's Outdoor University print and social media outlets.

Activity Status as of July 30, 2023:

Dissemination activity was quiet through this period. Larger mailings promoting January Avon Hills conference will be produced and sent in the next half year.

Activity Status as of January 31, 2024:

Mailings to promote “Celebrating the Avon Hills Conference” were sent to every landowner with over 20 acres in the Avon Hills. Event was advertised in local newspapers (Newsleaders and Star Publications) during the first week of January. Event was advertised on Facebook from Dec 18-Jan 21. Event was advertised by University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women’s Woodland Network emails, and Saint John’s Outdoor University print and social media outlets.

Final Report Summary:

Mailings to promote our educational programs and conservation easements were sent to every landowner with over 20 acres in the Avon Hills. We also promoted the project by advertising in local newspapers (Newsleaders and Star Publications), Facebook, University of Minnesota Extension – My Minnesota Woods email updates, Minnesota Forestry Association newsletters, MN Women’s Woodland Network emails, and Saint John’s Outdoor University print and social media outlets.

V. Additional Budget Information**A. ENRTF Budget Overview: See provided budget sheet.**

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 – 0.80 FTE total (approx. 0.16/year).

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

Habitat Restoration Plan Preparer – approx. 0.02 FTE/yr.

MLT staff 1.6 FTE total (approx. 0.33 FTE/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	\$ 155,341	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	\$155,341	

VI. Project Partners

Saint John's Outdoor University: John Geissler, Kyle Rauch, Sarah Gainey, Jenny Kutter, Jeremy Scegura and staff - Coordinating education and outreach, conferences, workshops, grant management, and budgeting

Stearns County Soil & Water Conservation District: Nate Hylla, Jason Selvog - Meeting and outreach with landowners, managing bidding process for easements.

Minnesota Land Trust: Leah Hall, and staff -Providing easement education, coordinating bidding process, meeting with landowners, developing easement documents, monitoring and enforcing easements, lead on restoration/enhancement effort.

Avon Hills Initiative: local landowners, citizens, volunteers- Working with Saint John's, Stearns County SWCD, and MN Land Trust to achieve project goals.

VII. Long-Term- Implementation and Funding:

The past ENRTF supported phases (ML 2008-03d, ML 2013-04j, ML 2016-09c) 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 390 acres of permanent easements and 220 acres of restoration/enhancement in the Avon Hills, the funding will promote MMAPLE as a cost-saving easement prioritization method as a potential tool for the common circumstances found in the Avon Hills and across the state. We are 25% of the way to achieving our ambitious landscape goal to permanently protect 70% of the remaining undeveloped landscape, or about 25,000 acres over the next 20 years.

VIII. Reporting Requirements

Periodic work plan status update reports will be submitted no later than January 31, 2020, July 30, 2020, January 31, 2021, July 30, 2021, January 31, 2022, July 30, 2022, January 31, 2023, July 30, 2023, and January 31, 2024. A final report and associated products will be submitted between June 30 and August 15, 2024. All elements of this proposal will be completed by June 30, 2024, and likely sooner for the easements.

IX. Additional Work Plan Components

A. Budget spreadsheet - see attached.

B. Visual Component or map – see attached

C. 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.

D. ACQUISITION/CONSERVATION EASEMENT/RESTORATION REQUIREMENTS:

- 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 have three times proven the effectiveness of this 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 latest round of MMAPLE, the \$2086 /acre average payment represents just 52% 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 Habitat Management Plan (HMP) is created by a trained ecologist or other natural resource professional for each acquired easement. This HMP 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 plant community, as well as a suggested timeline for proposed management activities are also included in the plan. The HMP 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 HMP. 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. John's 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.

E. RESEARCH ADDENDUM: N/A

MMAPLE Method (Minnesota Multi-faceted Approach for Prioritizing Land Easements)									
Avon Hills Area Conservation Easement Bid Worksheet									
Formulas updated 30 March 2017 by T. Kroll									
Landowner Code Name:	Example	(Make up a name or code that will be used to identify your property.)							
Date prepared:	30-Mar-17								
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)									
			0 Total acres owned by applicant contiguous to this proposed easement. (For information only)						
0	10 +		0 Acres to be protected by an easement, not including any house site acres within the easement area.						
			0 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.)						
0	10 +		0 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)						
0	150		0 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)						
0	1		0 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	30		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)									
0	10 +		0 Acres to be used for working forest, prairie, preserved forest, savanna, or wetland. (Not intended for agriculture, pasturing, or horticulture.)						
0	5		0 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.						
0	10 +		0 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.)									
		A 40	Current property zoning. Examples A5, T20, A40 - Check with zoning board.						
			1 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.)						
0	2000		0 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.)						
			\$0 \$/acre change to rating for multiple easements. THIS FEE IS NOT CHARGED TO BIDDER. But it costs program \$15,000 per extra easement.)						
0	SUB-TOTAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS POINTS								
Deductions (if any) for Not Extinguishing all Building Allotments (100% protection = no deductions)									
#DIV/0!	= sub-total of Env	#DIV/0!	Percent of land in the easement compared to the next highest "full 40" or government lot. (Protection > 80% has no deductions.)						
#DIV/0!	=(.35+ %): above	0%	Percent of total allotments to be extinguished. (Must be >65% for full credit.)						
#DIV/0!	0%	0	Acres of protected land per homestead or developed cluster. Must exceed 75 acres for 100%. 160+ acres = max of 130%.						
Final Calculations and Examples									
#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	Hand calculate your bid below.						
\$2,000	\$1,000	\$500	#DIV/0! (A) =Your Total Environmental Benefits points						
#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	\$ per acre (B) = \$ per acre you want to be paid for the easement.						
#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0! FYI ONLY - \$/acre needed to pay \$20,000 MLT fee.						
#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	(D) = Your Conservation Value Rating = (A) + (B)						
Conservation Value Ratings = Environmental Benefits Points / (Your bid per acre for the easement + Admin Fee)									
0	0	0	0 (E) = Total acres you are protecting with an easement.						
#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	\$ (F) =Total \$ you could receive if accepted. (F)=(B x E)						
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.									
2016 Assessors Township Average Market Value (ATAMV) per acre (weighted for ag & timber, no homesteads)									
Albany Avon Collegeville Farming St. Joseph St. Wendel Wakefield									
\$4,325 \$3,919 \$4,360 \$4,046 \$4,054 \$3,981 \$4,674									
> 500 Total Environmental Benefit Points = Minimum to participate	#DIV/0!								
< 1,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 20% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.	#DIV/0!	\$865	\$784	\$872	\$809	\$811	\$796	\$935	
< 3,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 30% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.	#DIV/0!	\$1,298	\$1,176	\$1,308	\$1,214	\$1,216	\$1,194	\$1,402	
< 5,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 40% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.	#DIV/0!	\$1,730	\$1,568	\$1,744	\$1,618	\$1,622	\$1,592	\$1,870	
< 10,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 50% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.	#DIV/0!	\$2,163	\$1,960	\$2,180	\$2,023	\$2,027	\$1,991	\$2,337	
< 15,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 60% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.	#DIV/0!	\$2,595	\$2,351	\$2,616	\$2,428	\$2,432	\$2,389	\$2,804	
< 20,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 70% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.	#DIV/0!	\$3,028	\$2,743	\$3,052	\$2,832	\$2,838	\$2,787	\$3,272	
> 20,000 Environmental Benefit Points = Payment NTE 80% of ATAMV nor NTE appraised value of easement.	#DIV/0!	\$3,460	\$3,135	\$3,488	\$3,237	\$3,243	\$3,185	\$3,739	

Attachment A:

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2019 Budget Final Spreadsheet

Legal Citation: M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09j

Project Manager: John Geissler

Project Title: Preserving the Avon Hills with Reverse-Bidding Easements

Organization: Saint John's University

Project Budget: \$1,600,000

Project Length and Completion Date: 5 Years, June 30, 2024

Today's Date: 8/15/24



ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND BUDGET	Budget	Amount Spent	Balance
BUDGET ITEM			
Personnel (Wages and Benefits)	\$ 27,293	\$ 27,293	\$ 0
John Geissler- Project Manager, \$10,500 (71% salary, 29% benefits), 2% FTE.			
Jenny Kutter, Arboretum Office Coord., \$4,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 2% FTE:			
Kyle Rauch, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$5,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 2% FTE			
Sarah Gainey, Arboretum Educ. Staff, \$1,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits), 0.5% FTE:			
TBD, Arboretum Educ Staff, \$2,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 1% FTE			
Jeremy Scegura, SJU Accountant, \$3,000 (71% salary, 29% benefits) 0.5% FTE			
Professional/Technical/Service Contracts			
Conference speakers: speaker fees and honoraria for landowner educational conferences and workshops.	\$ 2,260	\$ 1,500	\$ 760
Professional Services subcontract with 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	\$ 31,831	\$ 31,831	\$ -
Professional Services subcontract with Kanati Land Management to make personal landowner contacts to find potential restoration projects on eased land in the Avon Hills, and create restoration project plans if projects are deemed worthwhile.	\$ 9,000	\$ 9,000	\$ -
Easement Restoration/Enhancement: Includes restoration and enhancement costs on 220 acres of Avon Hills easement land through contracts with USFWS, MN DNR, NPOs and private restoration firms (e.g. Great River Greening, area forestry consultants)	\$ 274,637	\$ 274,537	\$ 100
Professional Services for Restoration: Includes mapping costs to build geodatabase and track projects			
Professional Services subcontract with MLT: Staff expenses including salaries plus eligible benefits and related costs for approximately 55% FTE for each of the 3 years as follows: Conservation directors or other land protection/restoration staff (approximately 40% FTE/yr), legal staff and other support staff (approximately 15% FTE/yr) plus mileage and related travel expenses in Minnesota. Estimated at 10,800 miles for easement acquisition and 5500 miles for restoration/enhancement projects at the current IRS rate (\$0.545 per mile)	\$ 157,043	\$ 156,406	\$ 637
Equipment/Tools/Supplies			
Promotion of easements, conferences, & workshops (newspaper ads, etc.), conference brochures and	\$ 12,063	\$ 10,907	\$ 1,156
Easement Acquisition			
Includes purchase price of conservation easements to protect about 390 acres of land through permanent conservation easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust. Includes . MMAPLE will be	\$ 854,200	\$ 854,200	\$ -
Long-term stewardship costs of \$168,000 (\$24,000 per easement for 7 projects)	\$ 100,800	\$ 100,800	\$ -
Habitat management plan contract costs of \$36,000 (6 projects @ \$6,000 per plan + 1 donated by	\$ 33,315	\$ 33,315	\$ -
Professional Services for Acquisition			
Professional Services for Acquisition: Includes appraisal costs of \$56,000 (8 @ \$7,000 each) and survey costs of \$40,000 (8 @ \$5,000 each), title review and closing costs of \$24,000 (8 @ \$3,000 each), mineral report cost of \$2,500 (1 @ \$2,500 each), and mapping costs of \$10,000 (10 @ \$1,000 each).	\$ 97,558	\$ 97,558	\$ 0
Travel expenses in Minnesota		\$ -	
COLUMN TOTAL	\$ 1,600,000	\$ 1,597,346	\$ 2,654

OTHER FUNDS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROJECT	Status (secured or pending)	Budget	Spent	Balance
Non-State: We anticipate a minimum landowner donation of 20% of the appraised easement values for the overall project. Actual amounts will depend on the outcomes of the bidding process.	Pending based on each bid	\$150,000-\$500,000	\$ 155,341	\$150,000-\$500,000
State:	N/A		\$ -	
In kind: Saint John's inkind: overhead (computer, office space, phones, etc.); volunteer hours and mileage (conferences and landowner outreach)	Secured	\$ 11,000	\$ -	\$ 11,000

PAST AND CURRENT ENRTF APPROPRIATIONS	Amount legally obligated but not yet spent	Budget	Spent	Balance
Past appropriation: \$1,300,000 - ENRTF for ML 2016-09c Conservation Easements in Avon Hills - Phase III - Completed		\$ 1,300,000	\$ 1,110,239	\$ 189,761
Other Past appropriations: \$337,000 - ENRTF for ML 2008-03d Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape; \$772,000 - ENRTF for ML 2013-04j Preserving the Avon Hills Landscape - Phase II		\$ 1,109,000	\$ 1,109,000	\$ -

Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
M.L. 2019 Acquisition/Restoration Parcel List Spreadsheet
Project Title: Conservation Easements in Avon Hills – Phase IV
Legal Citation: M.L. 2019, First Special Session, Chp. 4, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09j
Project Manager: John Geissler
Organization: Saint John's Outdoor U, Saint John's University
M.L. 2019 ENRTF Appropriation: \$ 1,600,000
Project Length and Completion Date: 5 Years, June 30, 2024
Date of Report:8/15/2024

#	Acquisition or Restoration Parcel Name	Geographic Coordinates		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
		Format: [Deg.] [Min.] [Sec.] [Hemis.]	Longitude Latitude										
12	Avon Hills (Manion-Kiryakakis)	94°27'35"	45°34'20"	\$0	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of forested wetlands and upland mesic hardwood forest. Includes frontage along Schuman Lake, Schuman Lake Road (a designated scenic byway), 6 acres of habitat of outstanding biodiversity significance, and is adjacent to Schellinger Scientific and Natural Area. Full donation of the easement value.	Easement Acquisition	5.65		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement . Habitat management plan prepared as a part of project.
13	Avon Hills (Little Watab Properties Partnership)	94°28'55"	45°31'40"	\$391,500	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of sedge meadow and forested wetlands, and upland mesic hardwood forest. Includes quarter mile of frontage along Little Watab Lake, 25 acres of habitat of moderate biodiversity significance, and is adjacent to another perpetual 156-acre conservation easement. 6 building allotments would be extinguished by the conservation easement.	Easement Acquisition	148		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement . Habitat management plan prepared as a part of project.
14	Avon Hills (Kurtzman)	94°23'44"	45°37'22"	\$354,200	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of sedge meadow and forested wetlands. Includes frontage along Lake Wobegon Trail, a state designated trail, and 135 acres of habitat of moderate biodiversity significance. 5 building allotments would be extinguished by the conservation easement.	Easement Acquisition	158.8		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement . Habitat management plan prepared as a part of project.
16	Avon Hills (Schellinger)	94°47'04"	45°57'60"	\$120,000		Stearns	Habitat mosaic of forested wetlands, upland mesic hardwood forest and grasslands. Includes 1,720 linear feet of frontage along Spunk Creek.	Easement Acquisition	58.58		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement . Habitat management plan prepared as a part of project.
17	Avon Hills (Scegurra)	94°42'12"	45°64'92"	\$37,000		Stearns	Habitat mosaic of sedge meadow, upland forest, and forested wetlands. Includes frontage along Spunk Creek.	Easement Acquisition	12		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement . Habitat management plan prepared as a part of project.
15	Avon Hills (Sauer)	94°24'04"	45°31'31"	\$17,740	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands.	Enhancement	14		Private Family	US Fish and Wildlife	Protected under a perpetual conservation easement . Completed a wetland enhancement by controlling invasive cattail, completing an Rx burn, and repairing an outlet control structure on 14 acres.
7	Avon Hills (Thomsen)	94°25'36"	45°33'9"	\$16,500		Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands.	Enhancement	1		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement; Completed 1 acre native shrub planting.
3	Avon Hills (Dwyer)	94°27'38"	45°33'13"	\$30,500	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands, and grasslands.	Enhancement	9.1		Private family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement with a habitat management plan in place. Completed 9.1 acres of Prairie Enhancement and Oak Regeneration.
5	Stumpf Lake (Eich)	94°24'43"	45°34'31"	\$107,500	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested and open wetlands, and grasslands.	Enhancement	88.05		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement; Completed invasive species (buckthorn) removal from forested areas and enhanced prairie - 88.05 acres.
1	Avon Hills (Goerger)	94°26'14"	45°34'6"	\$50,000	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested and open wetlands, and grasslands.	Restoration	209		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement with a habitat management plan in place. 19 acres of prairie enhancement, 5 acres of tree planting, and 1 acre of wetland restoration completed. Removed invasive species (buckthorn) from 184 acres.
2	Avon Hills (Riesner)	94°22'0"	45°38'0"	\$85,000	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands, and grasslands.	Enhancement	170		Private family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement with a habitat management plan in place. No action taken during this grant.
4	Avon Hills (Maney)	94°25'14"	45°33'20"	\$95,500	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested and open wetlands, and grasslands.	Enhancement	191		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement with a habitat management plan in place. No action taken during this grant.
6	Avon Hills (St. Joseph Greenhouse)	94°25'46"	45°33'14"	\$5,500		Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands.	Enhancement	11		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement. No action taken during this grant.
8	St. Wendel Tamarack Bog (Schug-Rule)	94°20'56"	45°37'6"	\$28,000		Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands. Enhancement of forest understory (woody invasive removal and selective thinning) planned for Winter 2020.	Enhancement	56		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement. No action taken during this grant.
9	Sand Lake (Lindell)	94°30'8"	45°31'8"	\$21,500		Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, shoreline along Sand Lake, and grasslands.	Enhancement	43		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement with a habitat management plan in place. No action taken during this grant.
10	Highland Crossing (ATC)	94°25'48"	45°32'17"	\$77,500		Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands.	Enhancement	155		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement. No action taken during this grant.
11	St. Wendel Tamarack Bog (Pierskalla)	94°20'56"	45°38'8"	\$20,500	\$ -	Stearns	Habitat mosaic of mesic hardwood forest, forested wetlands.	Enhancement	41		Private Family	Minnesota Land Trust	Protected under perpetual conservation easement. No action taken during this grant.

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.