

**LAND AND WATER LEGACY PROGRAM
PROJECT EVALUATION CRITERIA
December 2010**

The following criteria are used to identify the highest priority lands for protection and to evaluate projects proposed for funding through the Land and Water Legacy Program. The criteria include natural resource criteria that can be mapped using spatial data and other non spatial factors that cannot be mapped but are considered in evaluating a project. The criteria are organized according to each purpose contained in the November 2006 Preservation of Water Quality, Woodlands, and Other Natural Areas funding referendum: improving water quality of rivers, lakes and streams; protecting drinking water sources; purchasing parkland; preserving wetlands and woodlands; and protecting land along water bodies from development.

The criteria were used to identify the highest priority lands for protection in the 2010 Washington County Land and Water Legacy Program Conservation Priorities Plan. Using spatial data that fit each criterion, a computer model identified and mapped the lands that best met each of the referendum objectives: surface water module, drinking (ground) water module, ecological module, and connectivity module. A fifth map combining spatial data from all four modules identifies lands in Washington County that best fit all the referendum purposes. All data sets were current, contained countywide coverage and had a high degree of accuracy at the parcel scale. The underlying datasets used for the analysis were the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS) and the Department of Natural Resources Regionally Significant Ecological Areas (RSEA). The MLCCS is an inventory and map of the land cover and the quality of the natural resources based on the type of vegetation and the amount of impervious surface on the ground. The MLCCS integrates cultural features, non-native vegetation, and natural and semi-natural vegetation into a comprehensive classification system. The current Washington County MLCCS is based on 2005 aerial photography and ground truthing.

Weights of Criteria by Natural Resource Objective		
Objective	Points	% of Total
Water Resources		
Surface Water	8 points	27%
Drinking (Ground) Water	5 points	17%
Ecological	13 points	43%
Natural Community Buffers	3 points	10%
Connectivity	1 point	3%
TOTAL	30 points	100%

100 meters = 328 feet

50 meters = 164 feet

¼ mile = 1,320 feet or 402 meters

Points are assigned to cells measuring 10 meters on a side.

SURFACE WATER

The surface water criteria evaluate the importance of the parcel to protect the quality and quantity of the county's surface water resources. The points are additive.

Surface Water Criteria
<p>Water Resource Buffers: Land within 100 meters of that have positive drainage to a lake (including shallow lakes), stream, or river. Water bodies are identified using the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS).</p> <p><i>Natural lands (20,000s in MLCCS): 3 points</i> <i>Maintained lands (less than 20,000s in MLCCS): 2 points</i></p>
<p>Tributary Wetlands: Wetlands that form an interconnected complex which drain to a lake (including shallow lakes), river or stream including adjacent land within 100 meters of the complex which also exhibits positive drainage.</p> <p><i>If present: 1 point</i></p>
<p>Unique Water Resources: Water resources such as fens and tamarack swamps, identified using the MLCCS and input from resource management agencies (e.g. watershed districts, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Washington Conservation District, etc.).</p> <p><i>If present: 1 point</i></p>
<p>Highly Erodible Lands: The parcel is identified as being erosion prone or contains steep slopes according to the MLCCS.</p> <p><i>Natural lands (20,000s in MLCCS): 2 points</i> <i>Maintained lands (less than 20,000s in MLCCS): 1 point</i></p>
<p>Flood Prone Lands: Land identified using the Washington County Digital Flood Insurance Rate Maps (DFIRM).</p> <p><i>Classified as flood zone A, AE, or .2 percent annual chance flood hazard: 1 point</i></p>
<p>MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS: 8</p>

DRINKING (GROUND) WATER

The drinking (ground) water criteria identify critical recharge areas in Washington County that affect the quality and quantity of the county's ground water resources. The points are additive.

Drinking (Ground) Water Criteria
<p>Vulnerability Areas: Land identified by the Minnesota Department of Health to be in a drinking water supply management area (DWSMA).</p> <p><i>Low and very low vulnerability ranking: 1 point</i> <i>Moderate vulnerability ranking: 2 points</i> <i>High and very high vulnerability ranking: 3 points</i></p>
<p>Infiltration Potential: Land with high infiltration potential as defined in the Washington County groundwater studies.</p> <p><i>Areas with high infiltration potential: 1 point</i></p>
<p>Upland Depressional Areas: Land serving as a buffer (within 100 meters, but not tributary) to a lake (including shallow lakes), stream, or river. Selected areas are based on the wetlands actual boundaries using MLCCS.</p> <p><i>Depressional area present: 1 point</i></p>
<p>MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS: 5</p>

ECOLOGICAL

The ecological criteria are a modification of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Regionally Significant Ecological Areas (RSEA) model; the criteria were modified to fit at a county-scale. The RSEA identifies land that contains intact native plant communities and/or native animal habitats occur or have a high likelihood of occurring. These areas do not include areas dominated by intensively managed vegetation such as croplands, pastures, orchards, farms, and mowed grasses. Except for Natural Community Buffers to Ecological Patches, each criterion is mutually exclusive; each polygon is given one score based on the predominant land cover type.

Ecological Criteria
<p>Woodlands: Land identified in the MLCCS as high quality woodland or forest, forest/woodland interior, or riparian forest/woodland based on community size, shape, distance to other natural forests, and habitat requirements for select species of birds. Areas coded 30,000 and 40,000 excluding altered or disturbed areas.</p> <p><i>Low ecological significance: 1-2 points</i> <i>Moderate ecological significance: 3-5 points</i> <i>High ecological significance: 6-13 points</i></p>
<p>Grasslands: Land identified in the MLCCS as high quality herbaceous vegetation, tall herbaceous vegetation, or medium tall to dry herbaceous vegetation, based on overall quality, size, maintenance regime, adjacent land use or cover, and habitat requirements for select species of snakes, small mammals, and reptiles.</p> <p><i>Low ecological significance: 1-2 points</i> <i>Moderate ecological significance: 3-5 points</i> <i>High ecological significance: 6-13 points</i></p>
<p>Wetlands: Wetland area identified in the MLCCS based on overall quality, diversity of cover types (wet meadow, shrub, emergent, etc.), and connectivity, based on overall quality, size or complex, connectivity to other wetlands or natural upland grasslands or forested areas, and wildlife lakes identified by the DNR.</p> <p><i>Low ecological significance: 1-2 points</i> <i>Moderate ecological significance: 3-5 points</i> <i>High ecological significance: 6-13 points</i></p>
<p>Native Plant Communities: Land identified using the Mn DNR's Minnesota County Biological Survey information and MLCCS, based on vegetative quality and presence/absence of known listed plant or animal species. The parcel contains one or more native plant communities, is relatively undisturbed and provides habitat for a wide variety of resident and/or migratory wildlife.</p> <p><i>Low ecological significance: 1-2 points</i> <i>Moderate ecological significance: 3-5 points</i> <i>High ecological significance: 6-13 points</i></p>
<p>Natural Community Buffers to Ecological Patches: A natural community (greater than or equal to 30000 and less than 90000) that is within 500 feet of an identified ecological patch.</p> <p><i>Quality ranking of A, B, or AB: 3 points</i> <i>Quality ranking of C, D, or DC: 2 points</i> <i>Lacking a quality ranking or ranks as NA or NN: 1 point</i></p>
<p>MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS: 16</p>

CONNECTIVITY

The connectivity criteria identify areas of land between ecological patches (lands that were identified using the ecological criteria) that form networks of open space. The model first makes connections using lower quality natural lands and then uses agricultural lands; developed lands are not included.

Connectivity Criteria
Ecological Connections: Connect high priority lands identified in using the ecological criteria. <i>Present: 1 point</i>
MAXIMUM POSSIBLE POINTS: 1

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The following factors are used to evaluate individual project requests but are not scored.

Adjacency

- Lands adjacent to or near state, regional or county park land that, if protected, would have a positive impact on the natural resources of the public land (e.g. stream corridors flowing toward a public land, a ravine draining toward a public land, woodland that creates a large block of interior forest, etc.)
- Lands adjacent to lands encumbered by a conservation easement.

Conservation Priorities

- Lands identified as a priority area for protection in an officially adopted plan (e.g. comprehensive plan, conservancy zoning district, local greenways plan, water management plan, public park plan, wild and scenic river district, historic preservation district, scenic roadway).
- Lands located within a corridor designated as scenic by congressional or state legislative action, by local unit of government resolution or ordinance, or some other formal method. Existing corridors include St. Croix Riverway, Mississippi National River Recreation Area and County Road 21.

Public Use/Access

Public access is desired for purposes of education, recreation and stewardship.

- Full public access includes situations where 1. The general public has access to the entire parcel with minimal constraints on when and where access is allowed; 2. Public access is provided over a limited portion of the protected property; or 3. The project provides for the future construction of a recreational facility such as a trail or rest stop over a portion of the protected property.
- Limited public access generally includes situations where the land is not owned by the public but the landowner is willing to provide for limited public access under controlled, prearranged conditions.
- Public access may not be desired in situations such as where 1. The existence of rare species or sensitive habitat or other environmental reasons warrant restricting public access; 2. No public recreational opportunity exists; 3. The parcel's location doesn't allow for public access; or 4. Public access would be incompatible with the current use of the property.

Leveraging Resources

- Financial: Some of the project cost is contributed from non-county sources. A landowner's willingness to accept a payment of less than the market value of the project is considered a non-county source of funds. The difference between the project's market value and the amount the landowner receives in cash is the landowner's match.
- Conservation: Completing the project will be a catalyst for other conservation efforts (e.g. the landowner has a plan to sustain the resource and/or habitat values, including a plan to finance activities; the

landowner has made a commitment to restoration or best management practices; or the project will serve as a demonstration project that might encourage others in surrounding area to undertake conservation efforts).

Managing Risk

- The project contingencies are minimal to allow for timely completion.
- The parcel has no known public health or safety problems (e.g. pollution concerns, abandoned wells, open dump sites, hazardous waste, unoccupied or degraded structures).
- The parcel has no known real estate problems or issues that would prevent reaching an agreement (e.g. title problems, survey problems, property encroachments, boundary disputes).

Imminence of Threat

- The parcel is threatened by development pressure and fragmentation. Only a short period of time may be available to protect an area from being permanently lost or degraded. (E.g. has been offered for sale; offers may be pending; is located in a fast growing community or an area planned for development, etc.).

PARKLAND ACQUISITION PRIORITIES

Land and Water Legacy Program funds will be considered for use to acquire land within county parks in the following situations:

1. For A or B priority parcels as identified in the Washington County Parkland Acquisition Plan.
2. For C or D priority parcels as identified in the Washington County Parkland Acquisition Plan that rank high using the Land and Water Legacy Program Project Evaluation Criteria.

A Priority

Parcel has all of the following characteristics:

- Immediately adjacent to public water or county park land;
- Contains natural features such as woodlands or wetlands;
- Close proximity to already acquired county park land (within 3 or 4 parcels); and
- Has no significant structure (over \$130,000 assessed value).

There may be other unique features that raise a parcel's rating to A priority.

B Priority

Parcel has one or more of the following characteristics:

- Immediately adjacent to public water;
- Close proximity to already acquired county park land (within 3-4 parcels); and
- Contains natural features such as woodlands or wetlands.

C Priority

Parcel has one or more of the following characteristics:

- Immediately adjacent to public water;
- Contains natural features such as woodlands or wetlands;
- Close proximity to already acquired county park land (within 3-4 parcels); and
- Potential for loss to further development if not purchased when it comes up for sale

D Priority

Parcel has one or more of the following characteristics:

- Has no or low quality water frontage;
- Has limited other natural qualities;
- Has limited connection to other county land; and
- Has limited potential for further development in the near future.