

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2015 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

Project Title:

ENRTF ID: 147-G

Multi-benefit Watershed Scale Conservation on North Central Lakes

Category: G. Land Acquisition for Habitat and Recreation

Total Project Budget: \$ 1,225,750

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 3 years, July 2015 - June 2018

Summary:

Project demonstrates RIM Reserve easements can be used in a forested watershed context in conjunction with other land conservation efforts to permanently protect high quality watersheds with multiple benefits.

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Sponsoring Organization: Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation

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Location

Region: Central

County Name: Cass, Crow Wing

City / Township:

Alternate Text for Visual:

Targeted lake watersheds in Cass and Crow Wing County are highlighted on the map

_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ TOTAL	



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF)

2015 Main Proposal

Project Title: Multi-benefit Watershed Scale Protection for North Central Lakes

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I. PROJECT STATEMENT

This project will utilize RIM Reserve conservation easements, to be held in perpetuity by the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), to permanently protect approximately 600 acres of strategic lands (shoreland and forest lands) within the watersheds of priority recreational lakes in North Central Minnesota to achieve multiple conservation benefits. The RIM Reserve easement is the final land conservation tool that is needed to complete the full suite of conservation tools needed to achieve watershed scale protection of some of the most highly valued forests and water resources in Minnesota.

This pilot will implement the RIM Reserve easement program on a watershed scale, guided by state priorities and local water plans, and will complement other conservation tools (i.e. fee-title acquisition and non-government held conservation easements) currently being used within this region. Each conservation tool is uniquely suited for different types of conservation projects. If success using RIM Reserve easements is demonstrated, a full suite of conservation tools will then be available in the future to protect North Central resources that have already been precisely identified as strategic conservation priorities by local and state government and the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation.

The North Central counties of Cass and Crow Wing are often considered the heart of Minnesota's premier lake region with high quality waters, exceptional fisheries, pristine forests, thousands of miles of recreational trails, and healthy ecosystems. The region is also the source of drinking water for the Twin Cities. Local economies are highly dependent on the legacy of high quality natural resources that draw people to live, work, and play in these counties. Yet, the future of these natural resources is in question. As the economy picks up and baby boomers retire, a population growth of up to 30% is projected for these counties. More land development pressure to accommodate this growth, both on shorelands and second tier development within the watersheds of priority lakes, threatens the future quality of water and forest resources. Additionally, with climate change looming on the horizon, protection of high-quality landscapes that will be adaptable and resilient is ever more important. The protection goals of this project have multiple benefits, which include: protection of water quality, a sustainable sport fishery, reduction of forest fragmentation, wildlife habitat connectivity, source-water protection, world-class recreation opportunities, and vibrant economies.

II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES

This project will focus on a subset of priority recreational lakes in Cass and Crow Wing County that have been designated by the DNR as "tullibee-refuge lakes" in need of further protection. They are deep, cold, well-oxygenated lakes that support high populations of tullibee, the primary food source for game fish. DNR Fisheries research has determined if two conditions are met: 1) the land surface of the watershed is less than 25% disturbed by development or intensive land use; and 2) 75% of the land area of the watershed is permanently protected, these lakes can then generally be assured of continuing high water quality for the survival of tullibee along with recreational benefits and resiliency against climate change. This pilot will focus on land conservation in the watersheds of 4-5 strategic "tullibee-refuge lakes" in Cass and Crow Wing Counties, including such notables as Ten Mile, Roosevelt, Thunder, Washburn, and the Whitefish Chain of Lakes—some of Minnesota's premier recreational lakes. These lakes are near the watershed protection threshold of 75%; additional protection of undeveloped shorelands and forest parcels can measurably move these lake watersheds towards or to full 75% of the land in the watershed being permanently protected.

This pilot will use RIM Reserve easements to permanently protect identified high priority, undeveloped shoreland and forest parcels in select watersheds. Shoreland easements protect fisheries habitat and limit nutrient runoff that can impair water quality. Forest easements further reduce nutrient laden runoff by



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reducing forest fragmentation and allowing infiltration of water to restore hydrology. When consolidated with other protected private and public lands, RIM Reserve easements will help create undisturbed habitat protection complexes. When selecting parcels for RIM easement acquisition, landowners who are willing to accept less than the maximum rate will be given highest priority. Easements will not require public access.

Activity 1: 600 acres permanently protected on 4-5 priority lakes in Cass and Crow Wing County; 12 forest easements; 4 shoreland easements.

Budget: \$1,225,750

Outcome	Completion Date
<i>1. Priority landowners identified; outreach/recruitment materials developed. Landowner recruitment initiated.</i>	<i>January 1, 2016</i>
<i>2. 600 watershed acres are permanently protected with RIM Reserve easements</i>	<i>June 30, 2018</i>
<i>3. Measureable goals towards 75% land protection in selected watersheds are demonstrated.</i>	<i>June 30, 2018</i>
<i>4. Monitoring and management of easement by BWSR</i>	<i>Perpetuity</i>

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation (\$61,750): Project administration; partner coordination; landowner outreach/recruitment; and project assessment/outcome measurement. Board of Water and Soil Resources (\$1,132,000): field oversight; state easement processing/administration; easement acquisition; and ongoing easement stewardship. Cass County and Crow Wing County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (\$32,000): local easement processing and BWSR interface.

B. Project Impact and Long-Term Strategy

Water management at the state and local level in Minnesota is moving towards a watershed scale approach that recognizes all activity on the land within a watershed impacts the quality of the receiving waters. The MPCA’s Watershed Restoration and Protection Projects (WRAPS) for major watersheds in Cass and Crow Wing County will culminate in 2015 in the identification of key water quality concerns and strategies to address those needs to be implemented through local water plans and will be strongly protection oriented. Crow Wing County’s new water plan is a state model for water quality assessment and management on a watershed basis; Cass County is soon to follow. Permanent land protection is a key component of these local plans. Science and GIS-based studies by the DNR, MPCA, and local governments have already strategically identified and prioritized the most significant lake watersheds for conservation efforts in these counties.

Coupled with these state and local efforts, this project will demonstrate that RIM Reserve easements used in a forested watershed context and in conjunction with other land conservation efforts can permanently protect high quality watersheds and provide multiple benefits. This project will demonstrate that measurable goals can be attained towards full watershed protection. A successful pilot can be expanded and funded long term with state Legacy Funds and/or other funds to sustain the ecological integrity of a premier region of Minnesota as development pressure increases. Land will be more cost effective to protect now, especially since the land is in an undeveloped condition and no initial restoration will be needed once permanently protected with the RIM easements. This project demonstrates that cooperative conservation efforts between a regional nonprofit, a state agency, and local governments can create local conservation capacity.

Timeline: The project can be accomplished within the three-year timeframe outlined above.

2015 Detailed Project Budget

Project Title: Multi-benefit Watershed Scale Conservation on Priority North Central Lakes

IV. TOTAL ENRTF REQUEST BUDGET 3 years

BUDGET ITEM (See "Guidance on Allowable Expenses", p. 13)	AMOUNT
Personnel: BWSR Easement Processing and Technical Assistance	\$80,000
Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation: Project Management and Coordination/Outreach/Landowner Recruitment; 0.25% FTE; (75% salary, 25% benefits for three years)	\$56,250
Contracts: (BWSR with SWCDs) 16 easements X \$2,000 per easement; Crow Wing and Cass County Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) for local easement processing.	\$ 32,000
Acquisition (BWSR RIM Permanent Easements): 640 acres, includes: (4) shoreland parcels; 160 acres, acquired at 60% of cty tax-assessed value and (12) forest easements; 480 acres, acquired at 50% of county tax-assessed value. Easements acquired and held by BWSR. Easement title costs 16 X \$750/easement	\$ 972,000
Stewardship: BWSR; 16 easements X \$5,000 stewardship per easement	\$80,000
Additional: (LLAWF) Printing/postage landowner outreach	\$500
Travel: Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation; ~8,000 miles and meals for landowner recruitment.	\$ 5,000
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST =	\$ 1,225,750

V. OTHER FUNDS

SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
Other Non-State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: Landowner donation of land value (bargain acquisitions)	\$100,000	<i>Pending</i>
Other State \$ To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: OHF for ML 2014 (pending legislative approval) for <i>Phase II: Protecting Sensitive Shorelands in North Central Minnesota</i> ; (\$1,090,000) fee-title acquisition of 105 acres on Roosevelt Lake/Crow Wing County and (\$941,000) for acquired easements (NGO held, not government) on properties previously identified where landowners would not donate an easement, but would participate if acquisition possible. This money is targeted for easements on tullibee-refuge lake shorelands where there are existing structures and potential reserved rights; parcels not well suited for RIM reserve easements.	\$2,031,000	<i>Pending</i>
In-kind Services To Be Applied To Project During Project Period: <i>Local level outreach to landowners and project partners -BWSR 10% FTE for 3 years \$27,000 and LLAWF \$8,500;</i>	\$35,500	Committed
Funding History: <i>There is synergism between previously funded land conservation projects (both acquisition and conservation easements) that focused on priority lakes in North Central Minnesota. Landowner data, contacts, and priorities established can be utilized and priorities revisited and criteria further refined to identify target parcels for RIM reserve easements.</i> 1) \$1,098,000 - OHF for ML2011 <u>Protecting Sensitive Shorelands in North Central Minnesota</u> funded donated easements on sensitive shorelands in North Central MN. 2)\$700,000 CWL funds for <u>DNR Forestry's Tullibee Forest Stewardship Program</u> ; landowner incentives to develop forest stewardship plans on parcels within watersheds of tullibee-lakes in North Central MN. 3)ML 2010 ENRTF \$300,000 <u>Protecting Sensitive Shorelands in Cass County</u> "; donated conservation easements on 19 lakes in Cass County where the DNR conducted a science-based assessment of sensitive shorelands.	\$2,098,000	Ongoing; ends June 30, 2014
Remaining \$ From Current ENRTF Appropriation: \$160,000 remaining from ML2010 " <u>Protecting Sensitive Shorelands in Cass County</u> ".	\$ 160,000	<i>Legally obligated</i>

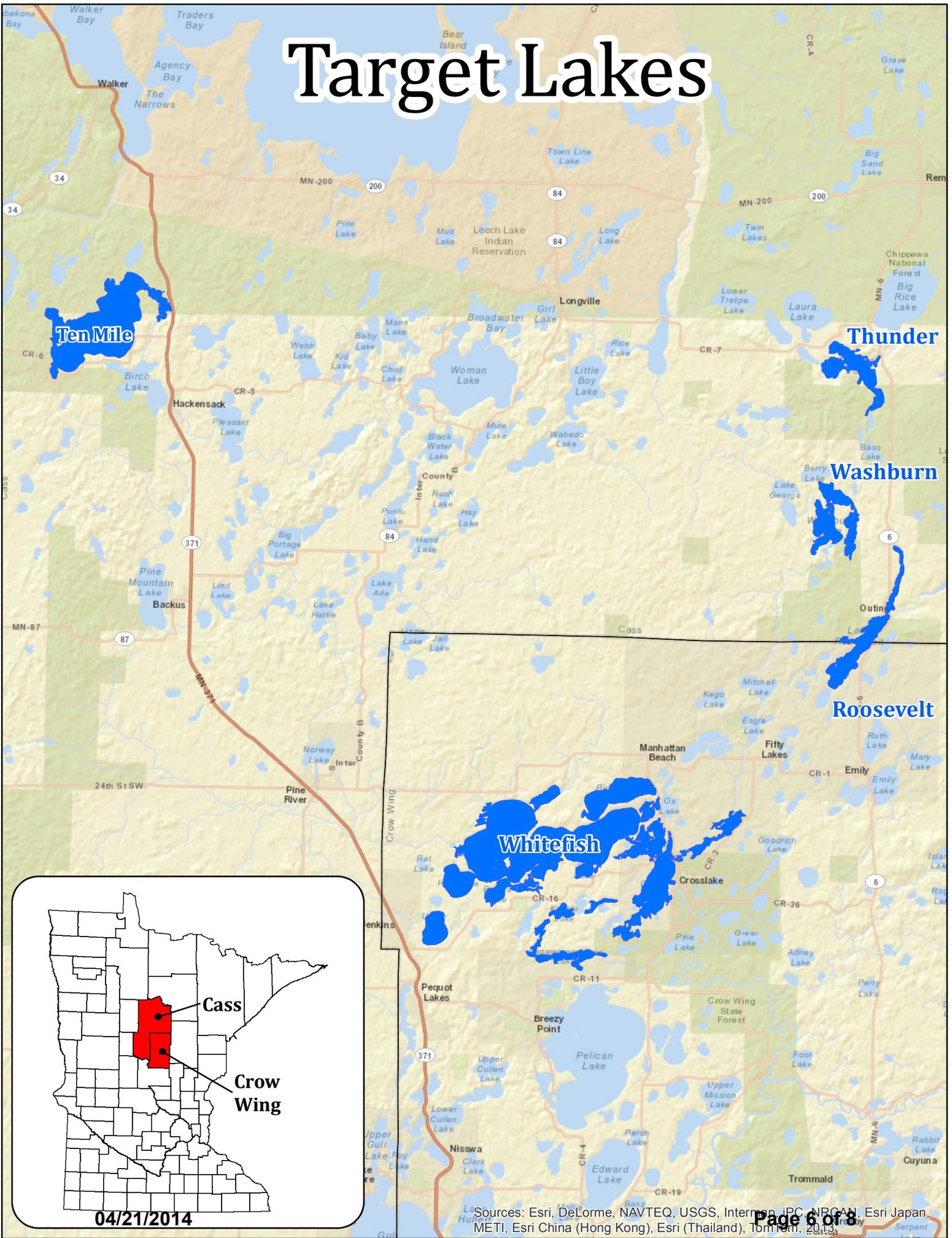
**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2015 Proposed Acquisition/Restoration List**

Project Name: Multi-benefit Watershed Scale Protection for North Central Lakes
Project Manager Name: Paula West, Executive Director
Organization: Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation
ENRTF \$ Request: \$1,225,750

#	Acquisition or Restoration Parcel Name	Geographic Coordinates Format: [Deg.]° [Min.]' [Sec.]" [Hemis.]		Estimated Cost	County	Ecological Significance	Activity Description	# of Acres	# of Shoreline Miles	Type of Landowner	Proposed Fee Title or Easement Holder (if applicable)
		Latitude	Longitude								
1	Ten Mile Lake/Watershed #11041300	TBD	TBD		Cass	Tullibee-Refuge Lake	Easement			Private landowner	BWSR
2	Roosevelt Lake/Watershed #11004300	TBD	TBD		Cass/Crow Wing	Tullibee-Refuge Lake	Easement			Private landowner	BWSR
3	Thunder Lake/Watershed #11006200	TBD	TBD		Cass	Tullibee Refuge Lake	Easement			Private landowner	BWSR
4	Washburn Lake/Watershed #11005900	TBD	TBD		Cass	Tullibee-Refuge Lake	Easement			Private landowner	BWSR
6	Ossawinamakee #18035200	TBD	TBD		Crow Wing	Tullibee-Refuge Lake	Easement			Private landowner	BWSR
7	Star Lake #18035900	TBD	TBD		Crow Wing	Tullibee-Refuge Lake	Easement			Private landowner	BWSR
8	Big Trout Lake Watershed 18031500	TBD	TBD		Crow Wing	Tullibee-Refuge Lake	Easement			Private landowner	BWSR
9											
10	Total			\$972,000				600			

NOTES: Project targets 4 shoreland easements and 12 forest parcel easements in tullibee-refuge watersheds; permanent protection of undeveloped lands. Specific parcels TBD.

Target Lakes



Project Manager Qualifications and Organization

Proposal: Multi-Benefit Watershed Scale Protection for North Central Lakes

Project Manager:

Paula West, executive director of the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation, will serve as overall project manager. Paula has over 30 years professional experience working on water and natural resources protection. She has been executive director of the Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation (LLAWF) since 2007. Prior to that she was executive director for the Minnesota Lakes Association for seven years and has held various other positions working on water resources protection and conservation programs. Paula has a bachelor's degree in biology from Iowa State University and has been an active volunteer with numerous local, state, and federal lake management organizations.

In her current position with LLAWF, she is the project manager for a \$1,039,000 project grant from the Outdoor Heritage Fund and contract manager to Cass County for a \$300,000 donated conservation easement project funded by ENRTF. During her seven years with LLAWF, Paula has coordinated conservation programs that have protected over 10 miles of shoreland and 1,500 acres through fee-title acquisition and conservation easements. She works collaboratively with other NGOs and local, state, and federal colleagues to set land conservation priorities for the North Central region of Minnesota.

Organization:

The Leech Lake Area Watershed Foundation (LLAWF) is a regional 501(c) 3 land trust that focuses on land conservation activities that will conserve the most critical and sensitive land and water resources in the North Central region of Minnesota. Since 1997, LLAWF has permanently protected over 20 miles of critical shorelands and 3,000 acres of critical habitat lands. LLAWF strategically identifies lands and shorelands that need protection. Working with conservation-minded landowners, and often in partnership with local, state, and federal government and other non-profits, LLAWF acquires private land and returns it to public ownership and use; assists private landowners with permanent protection of natural resources; and encourages individual and community stewardship.

Notable projects include: coordination of the Mule Lake WMA project for permanent protection of 3 miles of shoreland and 300 acres now open to the public; multiple conservation projects leading to the full protection of the 120- acre Lantern Bay of Woman Lake to prevent destruction of critical habitat from a proposed development; and protection of critical Muskie spawning habitat areas on Leech Lake. In 2013, the Leech Lake watershed and LLAWF were designated as one of 10 nationally recognized "Waters to Watch" by the National Fish Habitat Partnership. LLAWF is poised to acquire 105 acres on Roosevelt Lake in Crow Wing County with funding recommended by the LSOHC now pending approval in the 2014; the property will be conveyed to the DNR for permanent ownership as an aquatic management area.

