

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Agenda Item Memo

DATE: June 17, 2014

SUBJECT: Trails on Outdoor Heritage Fund Acquired Lands

PRESENTER: David Hartwell, Chair, LSOHC

Background:

The Council has recommended funding for land acquisitions in Mississippi Northwoods and Vermillion WMA for which a planned trail has been an issue. In the first instance, the county holds the land as a county forest and the trail is allowable under that designation; in the latter, the trail component was originally part of the proposal, but was then excised from the recommendation and will be funded with other monies. The land, with the trail, will be held by the county.

The DNR made a presentation at the February 13, 2014 council meeting on the Outdoor Recreation Act and described each unit's appropriate uses. This presentation clarified in which ORA units trails are allowed; WMAs, for example, do not allow trails. Given the large amounts of funds dedicated to these acquisitions, the potential for future trails or modifications of use is great.

The legislature has anticipated instances where the intended purposes of the lands would be altered, conveyed, or converted and has procedures to do so (MS 97A.056, sub. 15.) The Council has also adopted procedures to implement MS 97A.056, subd. 15 in its operating procedures.

Given the few opportunities for high quality natural resource lands in some parts of the state, particularly the metro/urbanizing area, it is highly likely that a tension will exist between habitat and trail development. It is prudent for the Council to consider policies and procedures describing the parameters of trail development, including the additional buffer necessary to minimize habitat impact along a trail.

As a straw proposal, I would suggest that the council adopt a policy for all acquisitions where an improved trail is to be installed. The habitat lands affected by a trail corridor must include a buffer of at least 150' on either side of the trail (or if the buffer is not 150' on one side, then 300' total corridor) and must be appraised and purchased at fair market value, with the proceeds returned to the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Suggested Procedure:

Discuss the issue as presented and recommend necessary changes to the Council's operating procedures.