



Title: Approve Issuance of Letter of Support for Hennepin County LSOHC Application

Resolution number: 26-048

Prepared by: Kailey Cermak
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Reviewed by: Name/Title: Michael Hayman, Project Planning Director

Recommended action: Staff recommends the Board approves the issuance of a letter of support for inclusion in Hennepin County's upcoming Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage grant application for continued habitat restoration programming.

Schedule: May 22, 2026: LSOHC application deadline
July 2027-June 2032: Funds available to Hennepin County if awarded

Background:

Minnehaha Creek Watershed District's (MCWD) focal geography approach emphasizes the benefits of concentrated and sustained efforts – including monitoring, planning, partnership development, and implementation – in priority areas with significant natural resource challenges. The Painter Creek Subwatershed has been identified as one such geography due to the scale and degree of natural resource issues and its contribution of phosphorus loading to Jennings Bay.

The Painter Creek Subwatershed is a regionally significant landscape characterized by an extensive network of large wetland complexes. These wetlands are interconnected by Painter Creek, which outlets to impaired Jennings Bay on Lake Minnetonka. Wetlands in the Subwatershed have been historically ditched, drained, or otherwise altered to support agriculture and development, resulting in disrupted hydrology, degraded habitat, and poor water quality conditions.

Building on this framework, MCWD initiated a comprehensive subwatershed assessment in Painter Creek in 2025 to advance system understanding of the hydrologic and nutrient drivers contributing to watershed conditions and impairments. This effort, which will continue through 2026, will serve as the technical foundation necessary to identify and guide long-term capital improvement planning within the subwatershed. As findings emerge, MCWD will work with partners to develop a coordinated system-scale implementation strategy for inclusion in the 2027 Watershed Management Plan. A key component of this effort will be identifying opportunities to leverage MCWD's existing strategic land holdings and other publicly held conservation easements within the subwatershed to maximize long-term ecological and water quality outcomes through coordinated implementation.

Hennepin County Letter of Support

Hennepin County is an instrumental public partner in advancing natural resource protection and restoration efforts within the watershed. Specifically, the County's Habitat Conservation Program shares MCWD's commitment to improving ecological function, protecting high-quality habitat, and enhancing water quality through targeted conservation and restoration investments. This alignment is particularly strong within the Painter Creek Subwatershed, where both MCWD and Hennepin County have independently identified the geography as a priority area for investment.

Hennepin County's Habitat Conservation Program works with residents and partner organizations to protect and improve high-quality natural areas across the County through conservation easements and habitat restoration projects. Through this work, the County has established conservation easements totaling 268 acres within MCWD's boundary, representing approximately \$1.89 million in investment, while also advancing on-the-ground habitat improvements. Funding for this work is supported through a combination of County resources and competitive Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) grants, in partnership with organizations such as the Minnesota Land Trust.

MCWD has remained in close coordination with the County's habitat conservation team given shared priorities and overlapping focus within the Painter Creek Subwatershed. This ongoing coordination supports alignment of technical understanding as MCWD continues to develop its subwatershed strategy and helps identify early implementation opportunities that leverage each organization's respective expertise to maximize habitat and water quality outcomes. The County is currently preparing an application to LSOHC to support its fourth phase of program work, focused solely on habitat restoration. If awarded, this funding would be available from mid-2027 to mid-2032 and align well with MCWD's ongoing subwatershed assessment and 2027 Watershed Management Plan update, creating a timely opportunity to coordinate implementation strategies and identify joint opportunities for water quality and ecological restoration projects within the Painter Creek Subwatershed.

A Letter of Support has been prepared for Board consideration to recognize this shared priority focus and MCWD's interest in continued coordination on implementation opportunities within the Painter Creek Subwatershed. Staff requests Board approval to issue the Letter of Support for inclusion in the County's Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council grant application.

Supporting documents:

- Attachment 1: Letter of Support



RESOLUTION

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- WHEREAS Minnehaha Creek Watershed District’s (District) focal geography approach emphasizes concentrated and sustained efforts in priority areas with significant natural resource needs, including investment in monitoring, planning, partnership development, and project implementation;
- WHEREAS the Painter Creek Subwatershed, characterized by large degraded interconnected wetland systems, has been identified as a focal geography due to the scale and complexity of natural resource issues and its contribution of phosphorus to impaired Jennings Bay;
- WHEREAS MCWD initiated a comprehensive subwatershed assessment in 2025 to refine understanding of hydrologic and nutrient drivers contributing to poor water quality and ecological conditions that will serve as the technical foundation as MCWD engages with its partners to develop a coordinated implementation strategy for inclusion in the 2027 Watershed Management Plan;
- WHEREAS Hennepin County’s Habitat Conservation Program, supported in part by grant funding, works with residents and partner organizations to protect and restore high-quality natural areas through conservation easements and habitat restoration projects on public and partner-owned lands, and shares MCWD’s priority focus within the Painter Creek Subwatershed;
- WHEREAS this overlap in mission and geography creates an opportunity to coordinate water quality and habitat restoration investments that leverage respective expertise and maximize ecological outcomes and public return on investment;
- WHEREAS Hennepin County is preparing an application to the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council (LSOHC) to support its fourth phase of habitat restoration work, with funding available from mid-2027 through 2032, creating a timely opportunity to identify and advance coordinated restoration and capital improvement projects within the Painter Creek Subwatershed;
- WHEREAS MCWD staff has prepared a Letter of Support recognizing this shared priority and MCWD’s interest in continued coordination on implementation opportunities within the Painter Creek Subwatershed;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Minnehaha Creek Board of Managers authorizes the issuance of the Letter of Support to Hennepin County for inclusion in its upcoming Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund grant application.

Resolution Number 26-048 was moved by Manager _____, seconded by Manager _____. Motion to adopt the resolution ___ ayes, ___ nays, ___ abstentions. Date: 5/14/2026

 Secretary Date: _____



May 11, 2026

Subject: Letter of Support, LSOHC ML 2027

Dear Members of the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council,

On behalf of the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD), we are pleased to offer our strong support for the proposal titled “Restoring Priority Habitats for Hennepin County’s Sensitive Wildlife.”

MCWD recognizes Hennepin County’s continued leadership in protecting and improving natural systems and habitat across the region. As a watershed organization committed to integrated land-use planning with our partners, we share a fundamental belief that water and natural resources play an essential role in establishing resilient communities and a strong sense of place.

MCWD values our long-standing partnership with the County, and more recently its Habitat Conservation Programming, which has directly benefited MCWD and helped advance our own natural resource goals. Over the past seven years, the County’s work has resulted in the protection of approximately 268 acres of important natural areas within MCWD’s boundary alone, demonstrating a strong and effective track record of implementation.

Our support is grounded not only in past successes with Hennepin County, but also in the strong alignment we see in the next phase of proposed implementation within a shared priority geography. MCWD is currently advancing a comprehensive diagnostic assessment and planning effort in the Painter Creek Subwatershed, a regionally significant landscape characterized by extensive wetland systems that ultimately drain to impaired Jennings Bay on Lake Minnetonka. This area has been heavily altered resulting in disrupted natural hydrology, degraded habitat, and poor water quality conditions.

Within this context, the alignment with Hennepin County’s Habitat Conservation Program is particularly significant. MCWD’s nearly 1,000 acres of strategic land holdings in the subwatershed, combined with the County’s network of conservation easements, create the potential for a near-contiguous ecological corridor where water quality and habitat restoration efforts can be coordinated across property boundaries. This setting presents a rare opportunity to align natural resource planning, leverage complementary expertise, and maximize the effectiveness of public investments.

We strongly encourage the Council to fund this proposal and recognize the significant ecological, hydrologic, and community benefits it will deliver across MCWD and the surrounding region.

Sincerely,

Michael Hayman
Director of Project Planning

We collaborate with public and private partners to protect and improve land and water for current and future generations.