
Department of Natural Resources

Land Acquisition

Project Description

July 2024

BACKGROUND

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) acquires land to protect, conserve, improve, consolidate, and expand recreational and natural resources opportunities throughout the state. DNR can acquire land in a number of ways. Among the more common examples, DNR can purchase land directly from willing landowners or receive donations of land from nonprofit partners who buy land with Outdoor Heritage Fund appropriations or other state dollars.

DNR's Lands and Minerals Division coordinates the acquisition process, in cooperation with four other DNR divisions that acquire land as part of their missions: (1) Ecological and Water Resources, (2) Fish and Wildlife, (3) Forestry, and (4) Parks and Trails.

Once a land-acquiring division within DNR identifies an available property that meets that division's strategic goals, the Lands and Minerals Division evaluates the property in terms of DNR's Strategic Land Asset Management (SLAM) goals. From that point, the Lands and Minerals Division is responsible for all of the steps of the resulting real-estate transaction, including (but not limited to) appraisal, survey, purchase agreement, and title review.

EVALUATION ISSUES

1. To what extent have DNR's land acquisitions satisfied certain legal requirements?
2. How well has DNR conducted the land acquisition process?
3. How accurately has DNR reported on land acquisitions?

DISCUSSION

To determine the extent to which DNR is meeting legal requirements, we will compare requirements in Minnesota statutes and rules to DNR's policies and practices. We will also analyze data from DNR's Land Records System that pertain to certain requirements, such as the timing of particular steps in the acquisition process.

To determine how well DNR has conducted its land acquisition process, we will interview and survey various stakeholders, including staff at DNR; counties, and tribes; land-acquiring partners; and landowners who sold or attempted to sell land to DNR or one of its partners. We will also evaluate the extent to which DNR's proposed acquisitions have met the department's strategic goals according to agency data.

To evaluate the accuracy of DNR's land-acquisition reporting, we will compare DNR's mandated reporting and other published information on land acquisition to Land Records System data. It is outside the scope of this evaluation, however, to determine the extent to which the data in the Land Records System is accurate.

We will focus on the processes that DNR uses to purchase land directly (DNR-led acquisitions) or receive land through a donation from a conservation organization (partner-led acquisitions). To the extent that they are different, we will not evaluate DNR's processes for less commonly used acquisition methods, such as land exchanges.

This evaluation is scheduled to be completed in early 2025. For additional information, contact Sarah Delacueva, evaluation manager, at 651-296-1226 or Sarah.Delacueva@state.mn.us.