

Department of Natural Resources Land Acquisition

Topic Selection Background Information

March 2024

<p>Program Overview</p>	<p>The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) purchases land and conservation easements to protect, conserve, improve, consolidate, and expand recreational and natural resource opportunities throughout the state. DNR’s Lands and Minerals Division coordinates the acquisition process in cooperation with various other DNR divisions (such as Fish and Wildlife, Parks and Trails, Forestry, and Ecological and Water Resources).</p>
<p>Original Evaluation Questions</p>	<p>To what extent has DNR followed legal requirements and applicable procedures when acquiring land? To what extent has DNR conducted proper appraisals for land? To what extent has DNR accurately reported on state-owned lands under its jurisdiction? How well has DNR managed state-owned lands?</p>
<p>Revised Questions</p>	<p>How well has DNR managed the acquisition of state-owned lands? To what extent has DNR followed legal requirements and applicable procedures? How accurately has DNR reported on land acquisitions?</p>
<p>State Resources <i>Unclear</i></p>	<p>The 2023 Legislature appropriated more than \$150 million combined from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, the Parks and Trails Fund, and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to DNR in Fiscal Year 2024 for land acquisition projects, improvement, and management. It is unclear what portion of this sum was dedicated to land acquisition.</p>
<p>State Control <i>Medium-High</i></p>	<p>The Minnesota Legislature established the Land Acquisition Account in 1984 for the acquisition of natural resources lands and interests in land. State law requires DNR to consult with Minnesota tribal governments on matters that have tribal implications.</p>
<p>Impact <i>Medium</i></p>	<p>DNR acquires land to provide recreational and natural resources opportunities at a variety of locations such as state parks and wildlife management areas. While DNR’s land acquisitions benefit the public, they generally do not have a critical impact on the everyday lives of Minnesotans.</p>
<p>Timeliness <i>Medium</i></p>	<p>This topic does not seem urgent given that DNR’s statewide land portfolio has changed by less than one-tenth of a percent over the past five years.</p>
<p>Feasibility <i>Medium-High</i></p>	<p>OLA could complete this evaluation using traditional evaluation methods if it narrows the scope to focus on land acquisition. It is not feasible to review the entirety of DNR’s land management activities.</p>
<p>Balance <i>Medium-High</i></p>	<p>OLA is currently conducting a special review of DNR’s oversight of wildlife management areas. Prior to this special review, OLA last conducted an evaluation of DNR in 2016.</p>
<p>Discussion <i>Potentially valuable</i></p>	<p>DNR’s land portfolio has remained virtually unchanged over the past five years, but it is still important that DNR manage land acquisitions effectively. This evaluation would give OLA an opportunity to follow up on certain recommendations from its 2010 report.</p>