



Council Agenda Item 25-0494R

MEETING DATE: 06/16/2025

SUBJECT/TITLE: RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING THE NOMINATION OF THE LESTER-AMITY-HAWK RIDGE NATURAL AREA TO THE DULUTH NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM.

SUBMITTED BY: Jim Filby Williams, Director of Properties, Parks, and Libraries

RECOMMENDATION: Approve the nomination.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: April 23, 2025 – Natural Resources Commission recommended approval of the nomination to the Planning Commission. May 13, 2025 – Planning Commission approved nomination. May 14, 2025 – Parks and Recreation Commission recommended approval.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION: September 9, 2002 – Duluth City Council approved the [Duluth Natural Areas Program Guidelines for the Permanent Protection of Ecologically Significant Lands in Duluth, Minnesota](#), which describes the designation process, eligibility and criteria, and the management plan requirements for designated natural areas.

The [Duluth Natural Areas Program](#) (DNAP) is also described by City ordinance: [Duluth City Code, Chapter 2, Article XXIX](#). City code outlines a two-step process to designate a specific place as a Duluth Natural Area, where step one is the approval of a nomination, and step two is the development and approval of a land protection and management plan.

BACKGROUND: The DNAP is a mechanism for designating certain lands of environmental value as permanently protected natural places. The criteria for eligibility as lands of environmental value include observed plant and animal communities, habitat for special species, natural water features, important bird habitat areas, and geologic landforms. There are [currently three designated areas](#) in Duluth: Hartley, St. Louis River, and Magney-Snively.

In December 2023, four natural resources partners approached the City to explore the possibility of nominating City-owned lands with high ecological value and low development potential along Amity Creek and in Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve to the Duluth Natural Areas Program. The partner organizations include the Minnesota Land Trust, Minnesota Trout Unlimited, South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District, and Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory. A sequence of meetings between City staff, City administration, and the partner organizations were held to determine appropriate lands for inclusion in the nomination and clarify the nomination process and documentation requirements.

Following the partner organizations' development of the nomination package, the nomination was presented to the Natural Resources Commission (NRC), Planning Commission, and Parks and Recreation Commission. At the April 23, 2025, NRC meeting, Commissioners recommended approval of the nomination to the Planning Commission, which then approved it at its May 12, 2025, meeting. Though not required by code, the Parks and Recreation Commission also recommended approval of the nomination.

Approval of the nomination will grant provisional DNAP approval for the nominated natural area. Then, the partners will have one year to write and finalize a management plan for the nominated area. After the management plan is prepared, it will be brought before City Council for review and approval, which will solidify the designation as a Duluth Natural Area.

BUDGET/FISCAL IMPACT: There is no financial commitment for the City. Partners are bringing \$1.5 million in federal and state funding, plus their own staff time to restoration projects within the proposed Natural Area over the next 2-5 years with more funding expected over the next ten years. These partner-supplied funds will support implementation of management plan activities.

OPTIONS: Approve the nomination as recommended by the Planning Commission to provisionally approve the natural area and the creation of a management plan or reject the nomination.

NECESSARY ACTION: Approve the nomination.

ATTACHMENTS:

Exhibit A: Lester-Amity-Hawk Ridge Designated Natural Area Map

Exhibit B: Nomination Package