



## Council Agenda Item 26-0590R

**MEETING DATE:** 06/29/2026

**SUBJECT/TITLE:** RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING ACCEPTANCE OF THE LESTER-AMITY-HAWK RIDGE NATURAL AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN AND FINAL DESIGNATION AS A NATURAL AREA.

**SUBMITTED BY:** Kate Kubiak, Natural Resources Coordinator

**RECOMMENDATION:** Approve the Management Plan and the final acceptance of Lester-Amity-Hawk-Ridge Natural Area into the Duluth Designated Natural Areas Program.

### **BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:**

- April 23, 2025 – Natural Resources Commission approved the Natural Area nomination and recommended approval of the nomination to the Planning Commission.
- May 13, 2025 – Planning Commission approved nomination.
- June 3, 2026 – Natural Resources Commission approved the Management Plan and recommended approval of the Management Plan to the Planning Commission.
- June 9, 2026 – Planning Commission approved the Management Plan, with minor changes, which have been made.

### **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.

June 17, 2025 – Council approved provisional nomination of the proposed Lester-Amity-Hawk-Ridge Natural Area to the Designated Natural Areas Program, pending completion of an Approved Management Plan (25-0494R).

**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 native plant communities, habitat for and presence of 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. Lester-Amity-Hawk-Ridge would be the fourth.

This Natural Area Designation is being brought forth by four of the City's dedicated natural resource partners: The Minnesota Land Trust, Minnesota Trout Unlimited, South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District, and Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory. These partners are committed to helping the City steward this natural area by bringing funding and expertise to the process. All partners currently have funding or are slated to receive future funding to help implement the Management Plan. Future funded projects include stream restoration, invasive species removal, environmental education and supporting Native Plant Communities.

There are two steps the city's Designated Natural Areas Program – step one is the nomination of an area into the DNAP program, based on the criteria identified in City Code. Step one was completed in 2025. Step two is developing a Management Plan for the area within one year of the approved nomination. The Management Plan has been completed by the partners and approved by the NRC and Planning Commission. Final approval of this Management Plan by the Council will finalize the inclusion of the Lester-Amity-Hawk-Ridge area into the City's Designated Natural Area Program.

The Management Plan provides a list of prioritized preservation and protection actions for the natural area with estimated costs, available partners and timelines. These plans provide critical guidance to the City and its partners in strategically stewarding the forests, wetlands and streams of Lester-Amity-Hawk Ridge and also provide support for grant applications.

**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 or deny the Management Plan or approve the Management Plan with changes. If the Management Plan is not approved, the area will not be accepted into the Designated Natural Areas Program.

**NECESSARY ACTION:** Approve the Management Plan and approve final designation as a Natural Area.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Exhibit 1: Lester-Amity-Hawk-Ridge Management Plan with changes prescribed by the Planning Commission regarding preservation of trails.