

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

MEMO: ML 2009, Ch. 172, Art. 1, Sec.2, Sub. 2(e) Northern Tall Grass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Protection

Background:

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS) was unable to accomplish the objectives outlined in the appropriation due to contractual challenges with federal government. Future appropriations for this phased program were awarded to The Nature Conservancy. The \$1,583,000 that was appropriated in ML 2009 was turned back to the Outdoor Heritage Fund in 2011. No money was spent from this appropriation, therefore, no final report was received.

Lessard Outdoor Heritage Council

2009 Recommendation Accomplishment Plan

Project or Program Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition

Date: ~~June 9, 2009~~ February 21, 2010

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Funds Recommended (\$000s)	Council Recommendation Funding	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$1,583,000	0	0	0

Summary

Our program will protect, in perpetuity, native prairie tracts in western Minnesota. Fee title tracts will be the top priority for the funding. Funding will be used for the purchase of habitat easements if the funding cannot be used entirely on fee title tracts. The funding will purchase approximately 525 acres of native prairie in fee title, 1,583 acres of habitat easements, or a combination of the two. Lands protected will be within the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) in western Minnesota and will become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.

Background

The purpose of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge is to preserve, restore, and manage a portion of the remaining critical northern tallgrass prairie habitat and associated habitats at widespread locations throughout the western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa historic range. Only 5 percent of the original tallgrass prairie remains for preservation consideration throughout the entire historic tallgrass prairie range. Native prairie declines of 99.9% and 99.6% have occurred in Iowa and Minnesota, respectively. Grassland dependent bird species have shown steeper, more consistent, and geographically more widespread declines than any other group of North American birds.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has specific trustee responsibilities for migratory birds, endangered species, interjurisdictional fish, certain marine mammals, and lands administered by the Service. The HPA is a new way for the Service to cooperatively meet its trustee responsibilities within the tallgrass prairie landscape. The Service works with individuals, groups, and governmental entities to preserve tracts of northern tallgrass prairie.

The Service's goal is to permanently protect and enhance prairie remnants through partnership, incentives, education, and cooperative agreements. Any conservation easements or acquisition of full title will be done by the Service and Service partners.

Relationship to the *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* and Other Published Resource Management Plans

The Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan recommends protecting priority land habitats. This proposal will protect and restore priority native grasslands and their associated wetlands important to grassland dependent wildlife, especially grassland and wetland birds. This proposal will also implement the following habitat recommendations within the plan:

1. Improve connectivity and access to outdoor recreation - All fee title lands acquired and restored will be open to the public for hunting and other activities allowed under the national wildlife refuge system.
2. Keep water on the landscape – by protecting and restoring grasslands, this proposal will help keep water on the landscape (permanent vegetation restoration).

The need for this project is outlined in the ***Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area Final Environmental Impact Statement***, US Fish and Wildlife Service 1998. The primary purpose of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area is to preserve and enhance the remaining remnant tracts of northern tallgrass prairie and aspen parklands habitats within Iowa and Minnesota.

A secondary purpose is to link existing prairie tracts together (Federal, state, tribal, private organization, and private landowner ownerships) into larger blocks plus buffer remnant prairie. This will establish larger, more viable units of managed prairie and allow travel corridors for wildlife. Prairie restoration used to link existing prairies together would utilize the same techniques used in managing existing prairies.

Budget

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 10	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12
Personnel			
Contracts			
Equipment/Tools/Supplies			
Fee Acquisition	\$1,583,000 (1)		
Easement Acquisition	\$1,583,000 (1)		
Easement Stewardship			
Travel			
Additional Budget Items			
TOTAL			

(1) Funding will be used to purchase lands in fee title (top priority), purchase habitat easements, or a combination of the two acquisition authorities.

Personnel Details

Title	Name	Amount.
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Not Applicable

Leverage

Source of Leverage	Fiscal Year 10	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12
Land and Water Conservation Funds	\$500,000		
In-kind Services - US Fish and Wildlife Service (appraisals for fee title lands and Realty division staff time)	\$100,000		
TOTAL	\$600,000		

Accomplishments:

Table 1 Accomplishments	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect		Protect 525 acres by fee title purchase, 1583 acres with habitat easement purchase, or a combination of the acquisition authorities.		
Enhance				

Table 2 Recommend Fund Allocation	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect		\$1,583,000		
Enhance				

Table 3 Counties Impacted				Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	
Restore				
Protect		Rock, Wilkin, Polk, Norman, Mahnomen, Lincoln and in any of the other 42 MN counties within the Habitat Preservation Area		
Enhance				

Table 4 Non-State Leverage \$				Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	
Restore				
Protect		\$600,000		
Enhance				

Table 5 Acquisition Data				Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability				
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability		525+/- acres for \$1,583,000 (if all funding is used for fee title purchases)		
Permanent Easement		1,583 +/- acres for \$1,583,000 (if all funding is used to purchase habitat easements)		

Accomplishment Time Table

Milestone	Date	Measure
Identify priority acquisitions (fee and easement)	May 30, 2009	14 potential properties
Appraisals ordered	June 1, 2009	4 appraisals
Easement Options finalized	December 31, 2009 <u>June 30, 2011</u>	5 options
Purchase agreements (fee title) finalized	June 30, 2010 <u>June 30, 2011</u>	3 options

Relationship to Your Current Budget

Since 2000, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has received annual appropriations of approximately \$500,000 in Land and Water Conservation Funds to acquire lands for the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. This annual funding has allowed the Service to purchase smaller sized tracts of prairie during the last 8 years. The addition of Outdoor Heritage Funds will greatly increase our ability to protect larger tracts of native prairie throughout the 48 Minnesota Counties in the HPA.

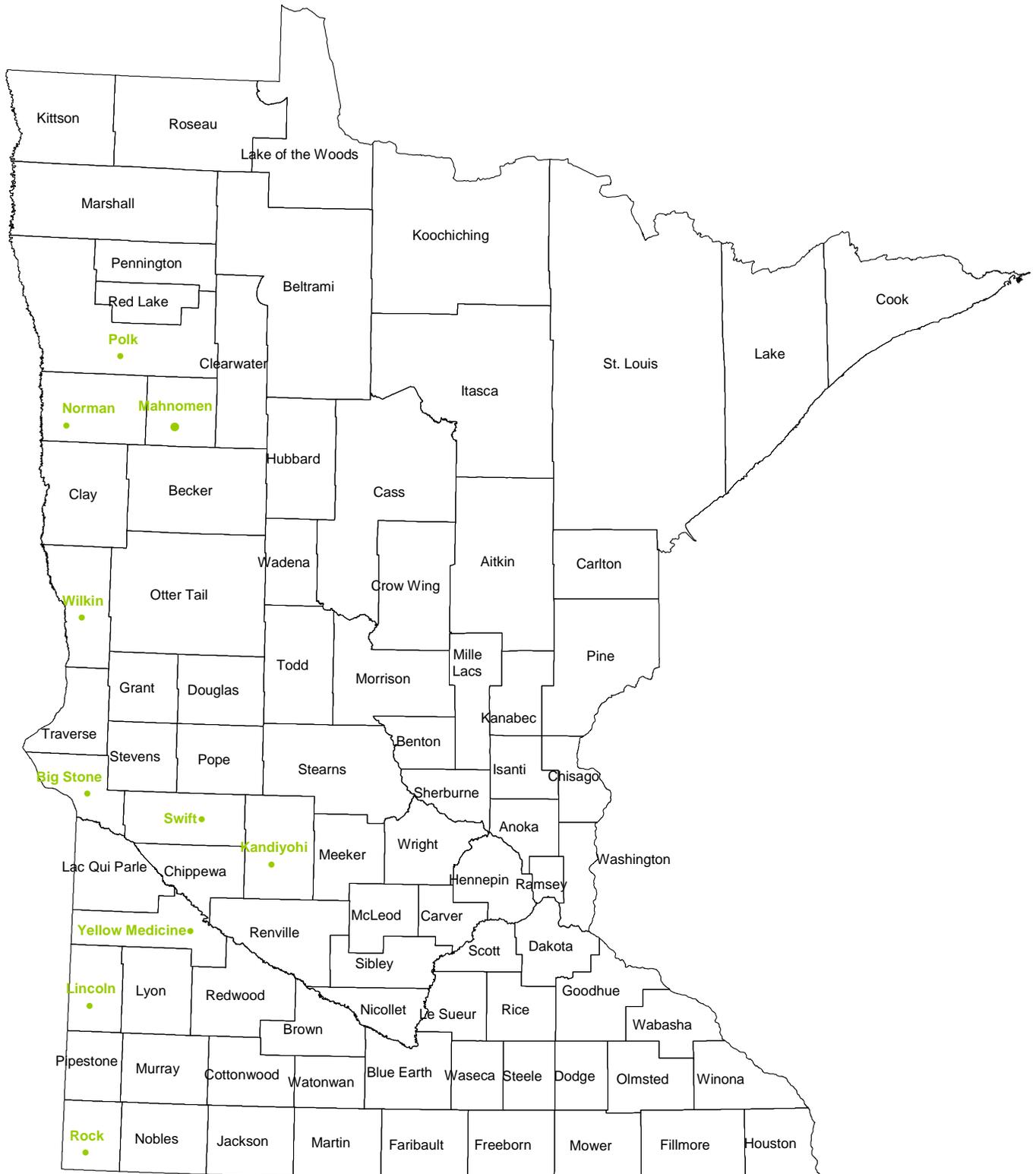
How Will the Habitat Improvements Be Sustained?

Outdoor Heritage Funds will be used to purchase the land in fee title or purchase perpetual habitat easements. The land purchased will become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR. Long term costs for restoration, management, and wildlife and habitat monitoring will be funded through annual refuge operations funding. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Habitat easements are perpetual and FWS managers will work with landowners to maintain and, where needed, restore the native prairie on each tract of land.

Revenue sharing payments (in lieu of taxes) will be made for all fee title lands in accordance with federal law. Habitat easement purchases do not impact property taxes as they remain the responsibility of the landowner.

Pending Acquisition Properties for Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition Project in Priority Order

1. 160 acres for fee purchase in Rock County
2. 790 acres for fee purchase in Wilkin County
3. 120 acres for fee purchase in Lincoln County
4. 563 acres for fee purchase in Polk County
5. 260 acres for easement purchase in Norman County
6. 160 acres for easement purchase in Mahanomen County
7. 70 acres for easement purchase in Kandiyohi County
8. 136 acres for easement purchase in Lincoln County
9. 36 acres for easement purchase in Yellow Medicine County
10. 74.5 acres for easement purchase in Lincoln County
11. 72 acres for easement purchase in Lincoln County
12. 61 acres for easement purchase in Big Stone County
13. 41 acres for easement purchase in Yellow Medicine County
14. 48 acres for easement purchase in Swift



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