

**Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
FY 2011 Recommendation
Accomplishment Plan**

Date: December 22, 2009

Project or Program Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition

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Funds Recommended (\$000s)	Council Recommendation Funding	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Outdoor Heritage Fund	2,041,000	0	0	0

Appropriation Language

\$2,041,000 in fiscal year 2011 is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Nature Conservancy to acquire land or permanent easements within the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area in western Minnesota for addition to the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. A list of proposed fee title and permanent easement acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan. Land removed from this program shall transfer to the state.

Abstract

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) will work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to permanently protect remnant native prairie and associated wetland complexes in western Minnesota by purchasing fee title properties and/or habitat easements. Lands purchased through this program will become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge to be owned and managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The majority of the lands protected will consist of native prairie, however, restoration of wetlands and grasslands will also be completed where needed.

Narrative

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge was established 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 number of acres purchased annually has been limited due to funding shortfalls since the establishment of this refuge. The current land acquisition budget cannot keep up with the landowner interest in this program. This funding will allow us to better meet refuge goals and objectives to protect this vanishing habitat.

The Nature Conservancy will work closely with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to review potential properties within the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area. These properties will be ranked by Service field staff who will work with TNC personnel to permanently protect these tracts.

Relationship to *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 HPA 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.

Project Design and Evaluation

Project Scope	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife (Include Description in Footnote)
Restore				
Protect		Protect approx. 635 acres by fee title purchase, or 1,900 acres with habitat easement purchase, or a combination of the acquisition authorities.		
Enhance				

Counties in which activities will take place	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect		Wilkin, Polk, Red Lake, Mahnomon, Lincoln, Lyon and in any of the other 42 MN counties within the Habitat Preservation Area		
Enhance				

Acres Within Each Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore					
Protect				Approx. 635 acres by fee title purchase, or 1,900 acres with habitat easement purchase, or a combination of the acquisition authorities.	
Enhance					

Funding Per Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore					
Protect				\$1,927,740	
Enhance					

Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition

Funding Resource Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore				
Protect		\$1,927,740		
Enhance				

Acquisition and Tax Data	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability				
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability		Approx. 635 acres for \$1,927,740 (if all funding is used for fee title purchases)		
Permanent Easement		Approx. 1,900 acres for \$1,927,740 (if all funding is used to purchase habitat easements)		

Budget

Please describe how you intend to spend the recommended funds

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	\$56,000		
Contracts	\$56,000		
Equipment/Tools			
Materials/Supplies			
Fee Acquisition	\$1,927,740 *		
Easement Acquisition	\$1,927,740 *		
Easement Stewardship			
Travel	\$1,260		
Additional Budget Items			
TOTAL	\$2,041,000		

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

Please note – the budget above is based upon an assumption of 7 transactions. If fewer but larger transactions are completed, more funding will be available for fee or easement acquisition as less will be needed for personnel, contracts, and travel. Similarly, if more but smaller transactions are completed, additional funding may be needed for those components, making somewhat less available for fee or easement acquisition. The Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service can work with LSOHC staff through regular communication to make sure that the project is meeting the goals set forth in this Accomplishments Plan.

Relationship to Current Budget

Since 2000, the 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.

Personnel

List the positions, name (if known) and anticipated program funds to be paid by this recommendation

Position	Name	Amount
Director of Habitat Protection	Michael Pressman	\$10,070
Land Protection Specialist	Holly Buchanan and/or Linda Bormann	\$29,710
Conservation Information Manager	Sandi Edmunds, Rich Johnson	\$4,073
Land Steward	Multiple	\$2,832
Field Steward	Multiple	\$4,815
Conservation Assistant	Nancy Young	\$4,500
	TOTAL BUDGET AMOUNT	\$56,000*

*Staff names are based on existing staff. The Nature Conservancy may substitute other qualified staff in similar positions for work on this project.

Leverage

List the sources and amounts of leverage you have in hand or anticipate by fiscal year.

SOURCE	FY 11		FY 12		FY 13	
	In hand	Anticipated	In hand	Anticipated	In hand	Anticipated
State						
Non state						
Land and Water Conservation Funds		\$500,000				
US Fish and Wildlife Service funds for restoration costs		\$44,000				
In-kind/Volunteer						
US Fish and Wildlife Service personnel costs	\$28,000					
The Nature Conservancy unreimbursed costs *	\$29,750					
TOTAL	\$57,750	\$544,000				

*The Conservancy's current federally approved negotiated indirect cost recovery rate is 23.05% and is updated annually. The rate applied to this project is 23% and has been applied to all costs except land acquisition.

Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition

Indicate how the leverage will be used

Leverage	State				Non-State			
	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife	Wetlands and Wetland Systems	Prairies and Prairie Systems	Forests and Forest Systems	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore						\$44,000		
Protect						\$557,750		
Enhance								

Accomplishment Timeline

Milestones	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Budgetary Expenditure
<i>Identify priority acquisitions</i>	July 31, 2010			
<i>Appraisals ordered</i>	September 31, 2010			
<i>Easement options finalized</i>	March 1, 2011			Estimated cost of \$1,000 per acre throughout entire Habitat Preservation Area
<i>Easement purchases complete</i>	June 30, 2011			
<i>Purchase agreements finalized for fee title properties</i>	March 1, 2011			Estimated cost of \$3,000 per acre throughout entire Habitat Preservation Area
<i>Fee title purchases complete</i>	June 30, 2011			
<i>Grassland restoration completed</i>			December 2013	\$44,000

Maintenance and Sustainability

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. Service habitat easements are perpetual and managers will work with landowners to maintain and, where needed, restore the native prairie on each tract of land.

Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition

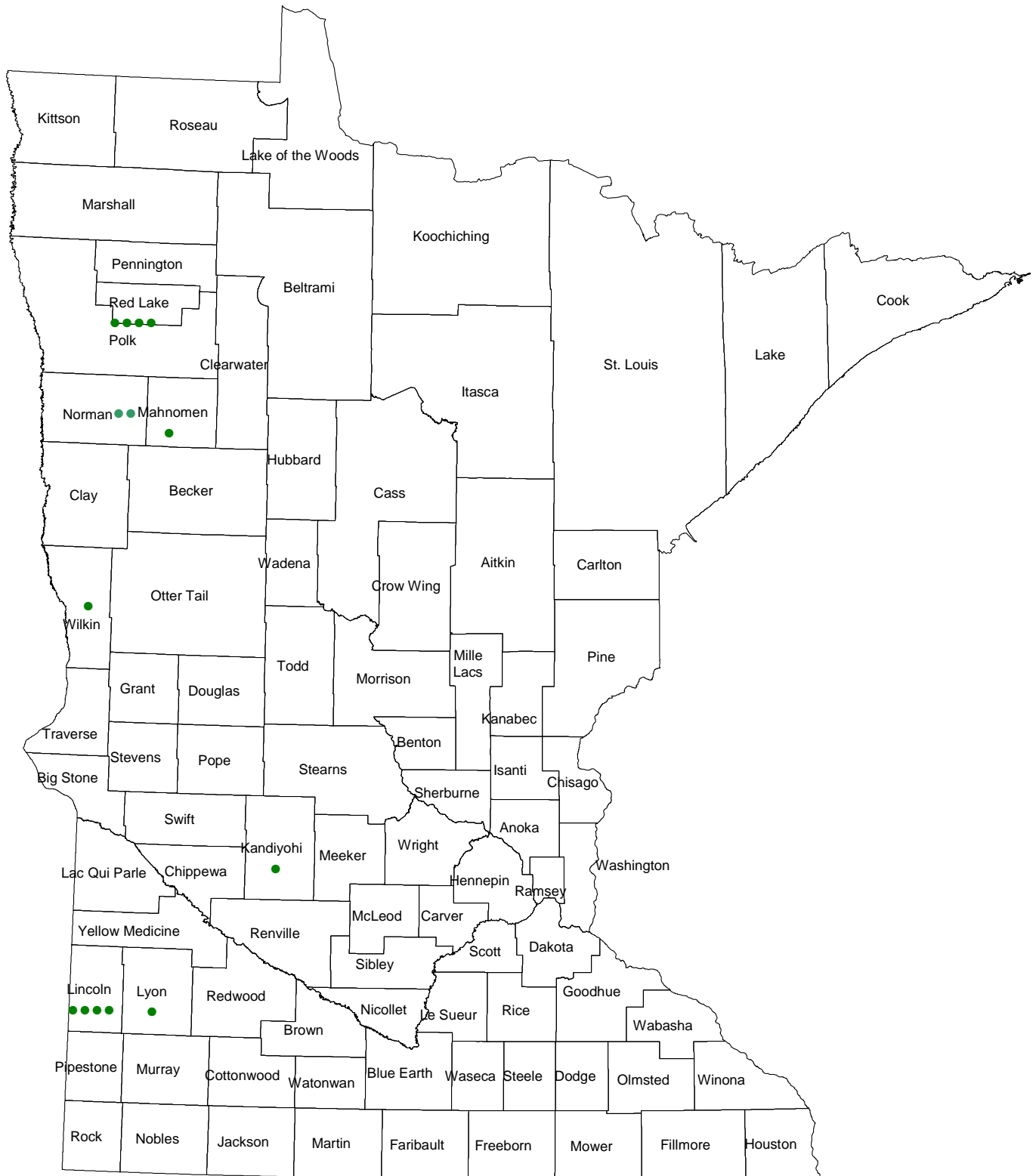
Once the land is in federal ownership, revenue sharing payments will be made for all fee title lands in accordance with federal law. Habitat easement purchases do not impact property taxes as they remain the responsibility of the landowner.

Pending Land Acquisition Properties for the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition Project:

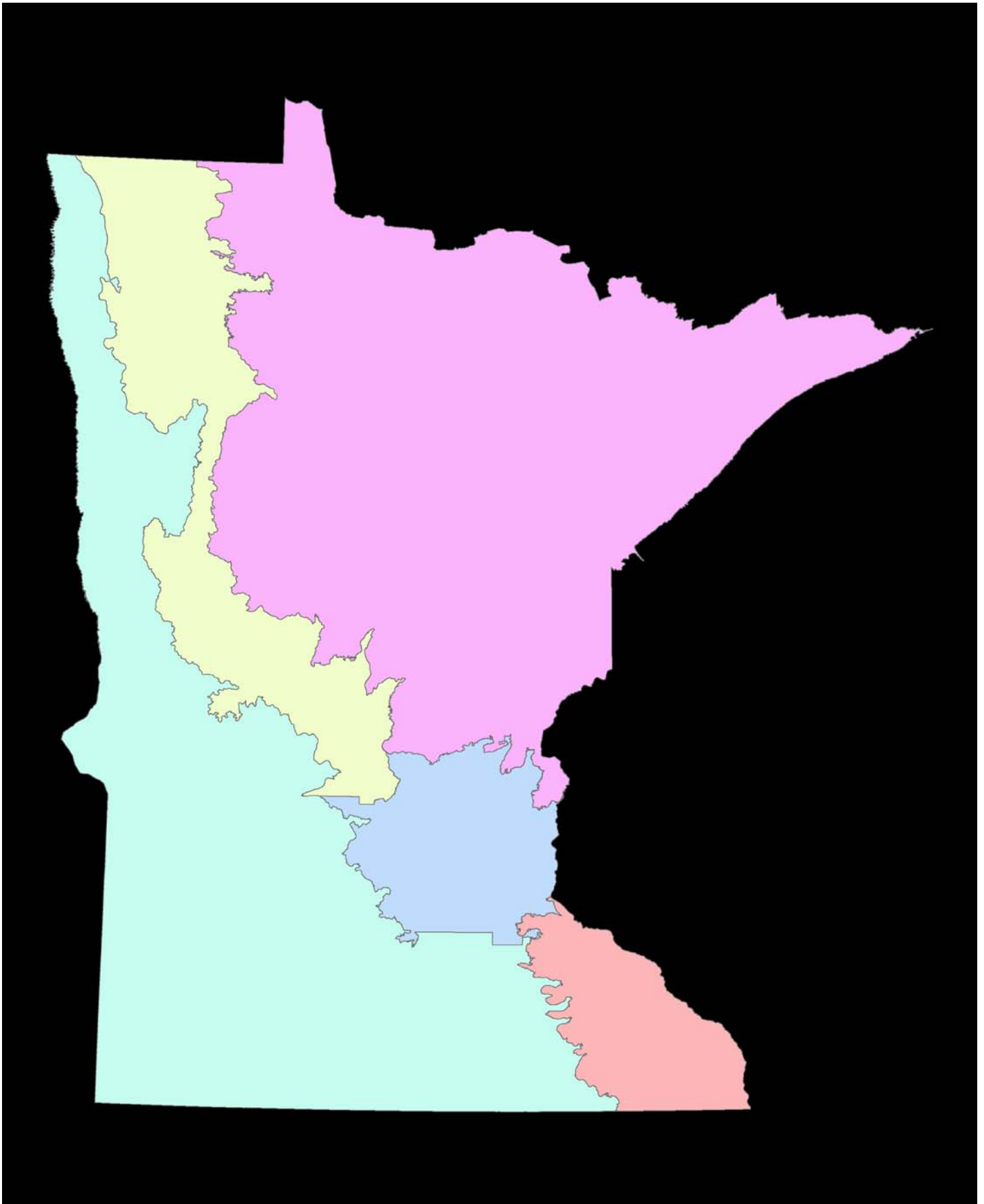
- 1. 790 acre fee title tract in Wilkin County**
- 2. 360 acre fee title tract in Red Lake County**
- 3. 320 acre fee title tract in Red Lake County**
- 4. 110 acre fee title tract in Polk County**
- 5. 400 acre fee title tract in Polk County**
- 6. 145 acre easement tract in Norman County**
- 7. 160 acre easement tract in Norman County**
- 8. 160 acre easement tract in Mahnomen County**
- 9. 240 acre easement tract in Kandiyohi County**
- 10. 118 acre easement tract in Lincoln County**
- 11. 97 acre easement tract in Lyon County**
- 12. 70 acre easement tract in Lincoln County**
- 13. 70 acres easement tract in Lincoln County**
- 14. 40 acre easement tract in Lincoln County**

***Please note that these are a list of potential projects -- completion of these acquisitions is dependent on successful negotiation with the landowners and availability of funding. More projects are listed than budget allocated in order to plan for the possibility that some projects may not come to fruition. Therefore, the total acreage included in the above list exceeds the total acres to be protected pursuant to this grant. In addition, additional projects that meet the strategic objectives of the project may be added upon concurrence of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, and LSOHC staff.**

Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition



Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR Land Acquisition



Accomplishment Plan
LSOHC