

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

Date: December 20, 2009; Revised January 12, 2010

Project or Program Title: Minnesota Prairie Recovery Project

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	Council Recommendation Funding	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
		FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013
Funds Recommended (\$000s)				
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$3,653,000	\$12,000,000	\$15,000,000	\$15,000,000

Appropriation Language

Abstract

Minnesota is still losing prairies today, with less than 1% remaining. Further, existing prairies are not being managed as intensively as needed to maintain their values. Traditional tools for conserving and managing prairies and savannas will continue to be important, but conservationists are increasingly aware of their limitations. Loss of local tax revenues and economies, inadequate capacity to both protect and manage lands by public entities, the need to strategically focus conservation efforts and maximize collaboration, and a desire to create local conservation businesses require new models of prairie conservation.

We propose a 15-year goal to provide protection to the remaining 90,000 acres of native prairie/savanna, a 20-year goal to restore and protect an additional 500,000 acres of diverse grasslands/savannas, and a 10-year goal to increase management capacity to annually manage 300,000 acres of grassland and savannas per year. This proposal takes the first steps to achieve these goals by initiating a comprehensive, coordinated and collaborative prairie conservation initiative. Annual investments by the LSOHC will be required to realize these ambitious outcomes.

When completed, the outcomes of this proposal will include: protection of 1000 acres of native prairie and/or savanna; restoration of 250 acres of diverse, local ecotype grassland; enhancement of 8000 acres of grassland/savanna by prescribed fire, invasive species removal, and/or conservation

grazing; and development of a new conservation model in 2 parts of the state that will serve as a platform for accelerated conservation across Minnesota.

Narrative

What is the problem to be addressed? The conservation problems facing Minnesota's prairies, prairie potholes, grasslands and savannas are many, and include:

- a. Continued losses of native and restored grasslands due to economic pressures.
- b. Degradation of existing public grasslands and wetlands due to encroachment by woody vegetation and other invasive species that reduces their values to wildlife and people.
- c. Inadequate public access for hunting and fishing in agricultural parts of the state.
- d. Potential loss of local taxes and local incomes when land is acquired by public entities.
- e. Programmatic and staff limitations that reduce efficiencies in implementing diverse conservation programs across multiple partners.

The creation of the Outdoor Heritage Fund finally offers the resources needed to provide adequate conservation in Minnesota's prairie, prairie pothole and savanna landscapes. With the Council's support and the efforts of multiple partners, large and productive grassland landscapes can become a reality in Minnesota.

How will this directly relate to restoring, protecting or enhancing habitat? When completed, the outcomes of this proposal will include: protection of 1000 acres of native prairie and/or savanna; restoration of 250 acres of diverse, local ecotype grassland; and enhancement of 8000 acres of grassland/savanna by prescribed fire, invasive species removal, and/or conservation grazing. The Conservancy will own the fee lands, coordinate with partners and supervise enhancement on public and Conservancy lands, and implement restoration on degraded lands acquired with OHF funds.

Why will this strategy work? There are no new tactics in this proposal; all of these practices are being used by one or more organizations already at work in Minnesota. What is new here is the effort to closely coordinate activities, to bring practices that work in the private sector into the public sector, and to greatly accelerate the use of conservation practices. The conservation community has demonstrated that these protection, restoration and enhancement activities work, but to truly reach the level of conservation that is needed for a comprehensive prairie recovery project, partners must work with a plan, with an open mind for innovation, and with appropriate new tools. We believe this project sets the table for launching the required effort. Finally, by supporting local opportunities to develop grass-based businesses (grazing, biofuels, etc.), we believe there will be reduced incentives for conversion of grasslands on unprotected private lands (i.e., grasslands will be perceived as having economic value).

Describe the nature and extent of any partnerships in this project, stakeholder and public participation processes associated with the project and any anticipated support or opposition to the project? A "Prairie Recovery Project Partnership" will be formed to include representatives of prairie conservation organizations, including: MN Department of Natural Resources (DNR), MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Pheasants Forever (PF), MN Prairie Chicken Society (MPCS) and The Nature Conservancy. This group will identify 2 pilot focus areas and establish other guidelines for project implementation. Local workgroups will then be established to provide on-the-ground planning and coordination of conservation activities. Additional groups that will be contacted for input or representation will include: Ducks Unlimited, MN Waterfowl Association, MN Deer Hunters

Association, Land Stewardship Project, MN Cattleman's Association, local livestock groups, MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and MN Farmer's Union.

In addition to the above the Conservancy proposes the following:

- a. At least semi-annually, at meetings of the Prairie Recovery Project Partnership, the status of funding and leverage will be discussed in detail among all project partners.
- b. At the beginning of the project, a marketing plan will be developed that will identify key audiences (e.g., landowners, local units of government, elected officials) and needed information. This will include elements like project fact sheets, media outreach and annual reports. The Conservancy will provide the technical and financial resources needed for this effort.
- c. Members of the Partnership will be requested to provide informational materials on their websites and in their organizational publications.

For land acquisitions, indicate local government support and approval. No specific tracts have yet been identified, so there has been no contact to date with local governments.

Relationship to *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan* and other published resource management plans.

This project implements strategies identified in at least 5 credible plans, as identified below.

1. *MN Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan*. The strategic framework of this plan has 5 elements in its "Habitat" section: integrated planning, critical land protection, land and water restoration and protection, (identification of) sustainable practices, and (provision of) economic incentives for sustainable practices. Further, while the plan does not go into great detail with respect to prairie conservation, it clearly states that "protection of priority land habitats" is a vital practice, and prairies clearly fall here.
2. *Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare*. The primary objective identified in the MN DNR's plan is to "stabilize and increase populations of "species in greatest conservation need (SGCN)". In the prairies of Minnesota, strategies to achieve this goal include:
 - a. Support incentives that avoid conversion of grasslands into row crops where SGCN occur.
 - b. Use mowing, cutting woody vegetation, prescribed fire, or careful use of herbicides to prevent the invasion of grasslands by trees and shrubs.
 - c. Lengthen the cutting rotations for hay; avoid early-season mowing.
 - d. Use light to moderate, rotational grazing programs to benefit SGCN
 - e. Prevent fragmentation of grassland habitat.
 - f. Avoid soil compaction in areas occupied by mammal SGCN.
 - g. Increase native plant species components
 - h. Control spread of invasive species to adjacent native-dominated sites.

This project proposes to address all but item "f" above.

3. *The Nature Conservancy's Northern Tallgrass Prairie Ecoregional Plan (1998)*. This plan identifies key conservation targets, geographic emphasis areas, threats to native plant and animal communities, and key strategies to mitigate these threats. The proposal is a solid step in the implementation of this plan.
4. *DNR's Pheasant Plan*. This proposal is in full support of the Pheasant Plan goal to add 1.5 million acres of undisturbed grassland to the state by 2025.

5. *DNR's Waterfowl Plan.* This proposal is in full support of the state Long-range Duck Recovery Plan to add 2 million acres of habitat to the state by 2025. It also utilizes establishment of complexes, as per the plan, to achieve multiple conservation synergies and benefits.

Project Design and Evaluation

Describe the scope of the project in appropriate measures (i.e., acreage numbers of lakes, miles of shoreline).

PROPOSER'S NOTE: many numbers in the tables below are estimates (est) as actual tracts for work have yet to be identified pending approval of the grant.

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	<i>37 (estimate)</i>	<i>213 (est)</i>		
Protect	<i>150 (est)</i>	<i>850 (est)</i>		
Enhance	<i>1200 (est)</i>	<i>6800 (est)</i>		

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	<i>tbd</i>	<i>tbd</i>		
Protect	<i>tbd</i>	<i>tbd</i>		
Enhance	<i>tbd</i>	<i>tbd</i>		

Acres Within Each Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore		<i>125 (estimate)</i>		<i>125 (est)</i>	
Protect		<i>500 (est)</i>		<i>500 (est)</i>	
Enhance		<i>4000 (est)</i>		<i>4000 (est)</i>	

Funding Per Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore		<i>\$125,000 (est)</i>		<i>\$125,000 (est)</i>	
Protect		<i>\$1,120,456 (est)</i>		<i>\$1,120,456 (est)</i>	
Enhance		<i>\$581,044 (est)</i>		<i>\$581,044 (est)</i>	

Indicate what is being funded

Funding Resource Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore	<i>\$37,500 (est)</i>	<i>\$212,500 (est)</i>		
Protect*	<i>\$300,000 (est)</i>	<i>\$1,700,000 (est)</i>		
Enhance	<i>\$210,450 (est)</i>	<i>\$1,192,550 (est)</i>		

*Includes only land and easement costs; all transaction and startup costs are included under "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	150 acres (est)	850 acres (est)		
Permanent Easement				

Budget

Please describe how you intend to spend the recommended funds

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	\$201,744	\$230,614	\$0
Contracts	\$160,500	\$268,500	\$250,000
Equipment/Tools/Supplies	\$200,807	\$49,617	\$0
Fee Acquisition	\$500,000	\$1,500,000	\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0	\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0	\$0
Professional Services	\$87,800	\$106,700	\$0
Travel	\$41,581	\$42,444	\$0
Additional Budget Items	\$6,000	\$6,693	\$0
TOTAL	\$1,198,432	\$2,204,568	\$250,000

Relationship to Current Budget

The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota has an annual operating budget of about \$6 million, and has averaged about \$3 million per year in capital investments (land protection expense) in the recent past. The Minnesota Prairie Recovery Project reflects an approximate 10% increase in annual operating expense and an approximate 33% increase in capital expense. All funds received from this grant will be additive to the operating and capital budgets of the Conservancy, so all activities will be net gain in accomplishments. All staffing proposed with this funding will represent new staff capacity (new staff or increase in hours of existing part-time staff).

Personnel

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

Position	Name	Amount
Term biologist (2 FTE)	n/a	\$194,200
Protection specialist (.25 FTE)	n/a	\$41,412

Burn crew (boss, 5 crew, 10 weeks x 2 years)	n/a	\$111,067
Program coordinator (.5 FTE)	n/a	\$85,680

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						
RIM-CHP		250,000		250,000		300,000
LCCMR		125,000		125,000		
Non state						
TNC		383,938		391,617		399,469
NRCS - EQIP		50,000		100,000		100,000
NAWCA				100,000		100,000
Walton Family Fdn.	40,000		40,000			
In-kind/Volunteer						
TOTAL	40,000	808,938	40,000	966,617		899,449

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								
Protect		800,000				1,375,004		
Enhance		250,000				330,000		

Accomplishment Timeline

Milestones	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Budgetary Expenditure
See below				

Protection	Milestone	Date	Measure
	First 150 acres acquired	Mar., '11	Ac/protected
	Additional 150 acres acquired	Jun., '11	Ac/protected
	Additional 150 acres acquired	Sep., '11	Ac/protected
	Additional 150 acres acquired	Dec., '11	Ac/protected
	Additional 150 acres acquired	Mar., '12	Ac/protected
	Final 250 acres acquired	Jun., '12	Ac/protected
Restoration			
	Restoration initiated on 100 acres	Sep., '12	Ac/restored
	Restoration initiated on next 150 acres	Mar., '13	Ac/restored
	Restorations completed	Jun., '13	Ac/restored
Enhancement			
	100 acres woody veg. control	Dec., '10	Ac/enhanced
	2500 acres prescribed fire	Jun., '11	Ac/enhanced
	400 acres invasives control	Sep., '11	Ac/enhanced
	200 acres woody veg. control	Dec., '11	Ac/enhanced
	4500 acres prescribed fire	Jun., '12	Ac/enhanced
	300 acres invasives control	Jun., '12	Ac/enhanced

Maintenance and Sustainability

Please describe how lasting improvement will be maintained/ sustained. For easement acquisitions and fee acquisitions, explain how maintenance and sustaining costs will be paid.

Restoration activities will include grassland and wetland restorations. The prairie pothole landscape is sustained through the regular application of appropriate disturbance, including fire, grazing and haying. A chronic problem for land managers is securing adequate funding to do these conservation practices as frequently as needed (e.g., every 1-4 years). A primary purpose of this proposal is to establish a collaborative and coordinated partnership that can accelerate the application of these management techniques across multiple landscapes. On existing protected conservation lands, an annual infusion of funding will be required unless or until this income/funding model can be more widely applied. For new lands acquired under this proposal, we will establish a new funding model by attempting to secure management funds by generating compatible income from acquired lands. In addition to the conservation value of planned haying and grazing, the income generated by these agricultural leases can help pay for management activities and property taxes. This model has been used on other Conservancy lands, and this project will evaluate whether it is feasible on other types of public/private protected conservation lands.

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Accomplishment Plan
LSOHC

