

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

Date: December , 2009

Project or Program Title: DNR Accelerated Prairie Grassland Restoration and Enhancement Program

**Manager’s Name: Bill Penning
Title: Farmland Wildlife Program Leader
Agency/organization: DNR – Section of Wildlife
Mailing Address: 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155
Telephone: (651) 259-5230
Fax: (651) 297-4961
E-Mail: bill.penning@state.mn.us
Web Site: www.dnr.state.mn.us**

	Council Recommendation Funding	Out-Year Projections of Needs		
		FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014
Funds Recommended (\$000s)	FY 2011			
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$5,833,333	\$10,000,000	\$10,000,000	\$10,000,000

Appropriation Language

Abstract

This program will acquire and develop approximately 730, acres of new Wildlife Management Area (WMA) lands. New WMA acquisition acre targets by LSOHC Sections will be consistent with the recommendations of The Citizens Advisory Committee report of 2002 “Minnesota’s Wildlife Management Area Acquisition – The Next 50 Years”. Additionally, this program will protect 275 acres of native prairie as state Scientific & Natural Areas (SNAs) and perpetual Native Prairie Bank (NPB) easements. This will provide habitat for rare species, Species in Greatest Conservation Need as identified in the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) and provide habitat for other game and wildlife species. All public SNA’s acquired through this project will be open to all forms of hunting and fishing.

This program will also accelerate the restoration and enhancement of approximately 20,400 acres of native prairie vegetation on Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, Scientific and Natural Areas, and State Forests. This will provide much needed wildlife habitat for a host of grassland and farmland species. Prairie restoration efforts will center on site preparation, seeding of local ecotype seed, post-seed management to assure success, and seed harvest of local ecotype

seed for prairie restoration at other public land sites. Prairie enhancement efforts will center on prescribed burning, managing woody cover encroachment, and interseeding. Goat prairie enhancements are a distinct target in the Southeast Forests.

There is a very significant unmet need for prescribed burning on public lands. We will hire a roving burn crew for 3 years. The crew will be fully equipped and self sufficient and will therefore be capable of burning an additional 7,000 acres per year. Fifty-percent of their time will be spent on burning (this is the entire spring and fall burn season). During the non-burn season the crew will complete 1,000 acres woody encroachment management annually (25%) on WMAs. The remaining 25% will be spent on other WMA habitat management activities. This work is all supplemental to the existing DNR burning and woody cover management programs

Narrative

The availability of public hunting lands does not meet the expectations of a growing Minnesota population. Due to the current recession, land prices have stabilized or declined and a short-term opportunity exists to purchase more value for our expenditures. The Citizens Advisory Committee on WMA acquisitions recommended that due to long-term rising land costs and continued habitat loss, acquisition efforts should be accelerated to 21,000 acres per year for 10 years completing 30% of the 50 year goal of 702,200 acres. This objective has not been met due to inadequate funding. Supplementing our existing program with accelerated WMA acquisition will require additional temporary staff to acquire and develop new lands.

(<://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/strategic-documents/wma-acquisition50year.>)

Temperate grasslands are considered to be one of the most altered ecosystems on the earth. Native prairie and associated species have been targeted as critical habitats by the Minnesota County Biological Survey (MCBS). Since 1987, MCBS has evaluated and mapped about 200,000 acres of remaining prairie in the state as compared to the nearly 18 million acres identified about 100 years ago based on the public land surveys. Only half of this remaining prairie habitat is currently under some form of permanent protection.

Although Minnesota DNR has the training and know-how to restore high quality prairie vegetation, current funding is insufficient to meet all needs. Many sites on state lands are currently not being actively managed to realize full potential as plant communities or wildlife habitat. Re-establishing prairie on public lands requires periodic burning, inter-seeding grasslands with native species, and up to five years of post-seeding management and assessment. Some state-owned grasslands are “problem” sites consisting of monotypic fields of brome of low habitat value. Furthermore exotic and/or invasive plants are encroaching and woody plant encroachment are especially troublesome problems that must be addressed. Portions of newly acquired areas and state-owned marginal croplands also need to be seeded and treated. Use of high quality seed from established prairie sites to plant at other locations has proven to be highly cost-effective.

Conservation Delivery

Acquisitions

The DNR will identify potential lands for sale from willing sellers statewide and determine appropriateness for acquisition as a WMA. Approved potential acquisitions will be identified within each L-SOHC Section to meet acreage targets established by The Citizens Report. Parcels will be prioritized according to criteria tailored for each L-SOHC Section. The DNR will follow established land acquisition procedures and if successful in acquiring will then develop an “Initial Development Plan” (IDP) to be funded with this program to make the new parcel fully functional as a WMA within

the first two years of acquisition. The IDP will include boundary surveys and signage, user access and parking facilities, well and septic closure, building and dump disposal, restoration of shallow temporary and seasonal wetlands and cover bare ground with native vegetation. The SNA program will acquire 100 acres of native prairie in fee and another 175 acres with perpetual easements. DNR acquisition staff will target projects that fall into the one of the “Focal Landscapes” identified by the Division of Ecological Resources. A small amount of additional non-prairie acreage (e.g. crop fields) may also be acquired and reconstructed to provide additional habitat and to buffer the native prairie.

The DNR has an ongoing process to identify potential willing sellers for WMA acquisitions. Upon approval of funding through the Legislature, the DNR will begin appraisals to acquire approximately 50% of the project acquisition goal in year one and 50% in year two. Initial Development Plans will be implemented within the first two years following acquisition. The SNA acquisition projects and associated transactions will be completed by DNR staff. In FY11, funds will be used to acquire sites where landowner interest has already been identified and to initiate new landowner negotiations. The new landowner negotiations initiated in FY11 will lead to additional acquisitions to be completed in FY12 and FY13. Initial Development Plans will be developed by DNR staff. Implementation of IDPAs will be primarily through contracts with the Minnesota Conservation Corps (MCC) and private sector vendors, with contract management by DNR staff.

WMA/AMA Habitat Work

Grassland restoration work will be primarily through seeding either bare ground (e.g newly acquired agricultural fields) or old-field habitat (e.g. smooth brome). Techniques for this work include site preparation such as mowing, herbicide application, or burning when necessary, followed by direct seeding. Seed will be obtained via harvesting of local native or restored prairie when possible and purchase of seed from vendors as necessary.

Enhancement methods to reinvigorate or increase diversity of existing prairie or grasslands include brush and tree removal, chemical treatment, mowing, inter-seeding and burning. Assessment of the outcomes of restoration and enhancement activities will be conducted to determine if future activities need to be adjusted to maximize habitat and ecological benefits.

MCC and contract vendors will be used to the greatest extent possible although DNR staff may perform some work when suitable contractors are not available. One FTE will be hired for three years to manage implementation of projects on both existing WMAs and newly acquired tracts. Responsibilities include working with contracts and contractors, completing on-site inspections, quality assurance (especially seed source) and other tasks to ensure that contracted work is successfully completed and meets DNR standards and L-SOHC expectations. Due to a severe shortage of qualified burn personnel, 6 new DNR FTEs will be hired to address prescribed burning and woody cover encroachment management needs on WMAs.

Ecological Resources Habitat Work

Restoration of prairie will occur on 25 acres of severely altered lands by reconstructing the native prairie plant community. These restorations will be located on in-holdings within a native prairie, or onlands surrounding native prairies. Restoration activities include seedbed preparation, seed harvest, and seed installation. Prairie enhancement activities will be implemented on 860 acres of existing and newly acquired prairies throughout the prairie regions of the State and on goat prairies in the Southeast Forest. Enhancement activities include invasive species treatments (herbaceous and woody species) and prescribed burning. Assessments of the restoration and enhancement activity

outcomes will be conducted so future activities can be adjusted to maximize the ecological benefits (i.e. adaptive management).

Restoration and enhancement practices will be designed and administered by DNR staff, while implementation and assessment will use a combination of DNR staff and contracted services. There is a backlog of management needs on DNR administered lands and implementation of restoration and enhancement can begin immediately upon receipt of funds. Restoration, enhancement and preliminary assessment projects would be completed by the end of FY12.

WMA Roving Crew

A DNR WMA roving crew will be assembled with 6 FTEs consisting ultimately of new limited-term employees. This crew will be capable of burning 7,000 acres per year (at full capacity – less the first year) assuming normal weather conditions and manage an additional 1,000 acres of woody encroachment for a total of 16,000 acres treated over the two year life of this proposal. Twenty-five percent of the crews time will be spent on other WMA habitat management activities. It should be noted that there is a severe shortage of private sector personnel who meet the State of MN burning certification requirements. Furthermore, insurance and other hurdles prevent some contractors from being able to bid on state contracts. Over time we are interested in building private sector capacity as burning is a useful and long-term management strategy.

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

The Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan identifies habitat loss and degradation as the number one driver of change for wildlife in Minnesota. The plan further states that the prairie regions have experienced the greatest amount of habitat loss of any region. This project addresses the following priorities in the *Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan*:

- “Critical Land Protection” recommendations H1 “Protect priority land habitats” (which specifically targets native prairie and savanna as well as landscape-scale complexes centered on concentrations of existing remnant habitat – pp. 63 & 66 of Habitat Recommendations)
- “Land and Water Restoration and Protection” recommendations H5 “Restore land, wetlands, and wetland-associated watersheds” (with emphasis on prairie – p. 80)

Tomorrow’s Habitat for the Wild and Rare - Minnesota’s Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for species in greatest conservation need (SGCNs) has identified (p. 38) significant loss and degradation of habitat as the number one management challenge and one of the principle strategies is to provide protection through selective acquisition of key habitats in each Ecological Section. This proposal directly addresses many of the State Wildlife Action Plan’s Strategies and Priority Conservation Actions to “stabilize and increase SGCN [species of greatest conservation need] populations” for the subsections with prairie ecosystems (pp. 86, 92, 98, 104, 110, 206, 212, 218, 224, 234) and the prairie, savanna, and surrogate grassland habitats (pp. 255, 263, and 265).

Minnesota’s Long Range Duck Recovery Plan lists the objective of restoring a breeding population of 1 million ducks by 2056. The primary strategy is the protection and restoration of 2 million additional acres of habitat.

Minnesota’s Long Range Plan for the Ring-necked Pheasant lists the objective of increasing pheasant population to 1.8 million birds. To accomplish this objective the plan calls for an additional 21,000 acres of grassland to be protected through acquisition of WMAs.

Citizens report Minnesota’s Wildlife Management Area Acquisition – The Next 50 Years recommends acquisition goals of an additional 702,200 acres of WMAs s over the next 50 years.

The national Grassland Conservation Plan for Prairie Grouse identifies habitat needs for prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse in Minnesota.

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Additionally, this project also helps meet goals outlined in the following plans:

- *Scientific & Natural Areas Long Range Plan*
- *Minnesota’s Timber Rattle Snake Recovery Plan*
- *Minnesota DNR’s Nongame Strategic Plan*

Project Design and Evaluation

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

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		1169		
Protect		1005		
Enhance	3283	16,860		

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		Blue Earth Clay Faribault Fillmore Goodhue Hennepin Kittson Lac Qui Parle McLeod Meeker Morrison Polk Red Lake Redwood Sibley Swift Todd Winona		
Protect		Houston, Fillmore, Winona Kittson Lac Qui Parle Lincoln Murray Nicollet Otter Tail Polk Renville, Redwood, Yellow Medicine, Chippewa, Rice Roseau		
Enhance		Anoka Becker Big Stone Brown Brown Chippewa		

		Clay Cottonwood Dodge Douglas Goodhue Houston Jackson Kanabec Kandiyohi Kittson Lac qui Parle LeSueur Lincoln Lincoln Lyon Mahnomen Marshall McLeod Meeker Mower Murray Nobles Norman Otter Tail Pipestone Polk Red Lake Redwood Renville Stearns Swift Todd Wabasha Wadena Waseca Washington Wilkin Yellow Medicine		
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Acres Within Each Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore		80		1089	
Protect		365		640	
Enhance	10	9027	100	10489	94

Funding Per Ecological Section	Metropolitan-Urbanizing Area	Forest-Prairie Transition	Southeast Forest	Prairie Region	Northern Forest
Restore		19,300		605,488	
Protect		801,648		2,393,296	
Enhance	11,300	422,220	120,000	1,399,781	60,300

Indicate what is being funded

Funding Resource Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Restore		\$186,950		
Protect		\$3,194,944		
Enhance		\$2,451,439		

Acquisition and Tax Data	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats for Fish, Game and Wildlife
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability		830 ac		
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability				
Permanent Easement		175 ac		

Budget

Please describe how you intend to spend the recommended funds

Budget Item	Fiscal Year 11	Fiscal Year 12	Fiscal Year 13
Personnel	413,500	413,500	40,000
Contracts	642,518	457,915	
Equipment/Tools	136,580	118,430	
Materials/Supplies			

Fee Acquisition	1,539,000	840,000	415,944
Easement Acquisition	100,000	150,000	150,000
Easement Stewardship			
Travel	36,183	37838	3712
Professional Services	68,960	44,100	30,446
Operational Support	76,174	76,174	34,234
Training	3,125	5,000	
TOTAL	3,016,040	2,142,957	674,336

Relationship to Current Budget

This project comprises 1.5% of the DNRs overall budget. Acquisition dollars are in addition to existing acquisition money. Habitat restoration and enhancement projects are in addition to existing work, much of which will be accomplished through contracts or via the WMA roving crew incorporated into this proposal. Some existing SNA staff will be used to accomplish this work. However, these positions are all on “soft” money and would otherwise be laid-off.

Personnel

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

Position	Name	Amount
NR Spec (2)		114,000
NR Spec Sr.(0.50)		32,500
NR Tech (1)		50,000
Acquisition Specialist (0.25)		17,500
Laborer (5)		175000
<i>Total</i>		<i>389,000</i>

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						
State Wildlife Grants		25,000		25,000		
Nat.Wild Turkey Fed.		60,000				
In-kind/Volunteer						
TOTAL		145,000		25,000		

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								
Enhance						\$170,000		

Accomplishment Timeline

Milestones	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	Budgetary Expenditure
Acquired in fee	456 ac	250 ac	124 ac	\$3,194,944
Easements	44 ac	67 ac	64 ac	\$400,000
Restoration	200 ac	800 ac	169 ac	\$186,950
Enhancements	8,000 ac	8,000 ac	4,143 ac	\$2,004,620

Maintenance and Sustainability

These restorations and enhancements will occur on public lands (primarily Wildlife Management Areas) which are owned in fee title by the state. Long-term maintenance will be incorporated into DNR's regular planning and maintenance schedule. It should be noted, however, that current levels of normal DNR funding for these activities are insufficient to manage the entire WMA system. Therefore, additional management funds will likely be requested from LOHC in the future.