

Main Request for Funding Form

**Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
Fiscal Year 2012**

Program or Project Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition

	Funding Request	OHF Out-Year Projections of Needs		
Funds Requested (\$000s)	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Outdoor Heritage Fund	\$3,500,000	0	0	0

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[.fws.gov/midwest/NorthernTallgrassPrairie/](http://fws.gov/midwest/NorthernTallgrassPrairie/)

County Location: The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge includes portions of 42 counties throughout western Minnesota. This proposal will seek to acquire high priority lands and/or easements from throughout the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Habitat Preservation Area with an emphasis on Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, Pennington, Red Lake, Polk, Norman, Clay, Wilkin, Big Stone, Swift, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, Yellow Medicine, Lincoln, Lyon, Pipestone, Murray, Rock, and Nobles Counties.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Northern Forest Forest/Prairie Transition Southeast Forest
 Prairie Metro/Urban

Activity Type:

- Protect Restore Enhance

Priority Resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands Forests Prairie Habitat

Project Abstract

The Nature Conservancy and the US Fish and Wildlife Service will permanently protect native prairie and associated wetland complexes in western Minnesota by purchasing fee title properties and/or habitat easements.

Project 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.

Lands and easements purchased through this program by The Nature Conservancy will be transferred to the US Fish and Wildlife Service and 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.

Design and scope of work

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.

TNC will utilize the funding for the purchase of approximately 3,000 acres of native prairie in Western Minnesota. Fee title tracts will be the top priority for the funding. The funding will be used for the purchase of habitat easements if the funding cannot be used entirely on fee title tracts. Lands protected will eventually be transferred to the Service and will become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR.

The purpose of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR 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.

Planning

This project correlates well with the recommendations of ***The Minnesota Conservation and Preservation Plan***. Habitat Protection 1 (pages 63-67) states “Protect priority land habitats, while Habitat Recommendation 5 (pages 80-81) states “Restore land, wetlands, and wetland-associated watersheds.” This project 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. Habitat Recommendation 3 (pages 74-78) “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. Habitat Recommendation 7 (pages 84-87) “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 and to buffer remnant prairie. This will establish larger, more viable units of managed prairie and allow travel corridors for wildlife. Future prairie restoration efforts by the US Fish and Wildlife Service could help link existing prairies together.

The basic goals of the Service’s Strategic Habitat Conservation are: 1) accomplish landscape level planning based on quantifiable objectives, 2) implement planned actions, then, 3) evaluate your actions to see if they are addressing the objectives. This is what the Service’s HAPET (Habitat and Population Evaluation Team) office in Fergus Falls does for the Service and its partners in the prairies of Minnesota. The Service’s HAPET office does landscape level planning to meet specific wildlife objectives and conducts evaluation activities (i.e. 4sq.mi. surveys), to see if Service/partners’ activities are meeting Service objectives. The planned actions to be implemented through this grant application are the acquisition and restoration of converted wetland and grassland habitats. Based on HAPET evaluation strategies, modeling predictions can be made on the numbers of nesting waterfowl, grassland nesting birds, and pheasants the acres affected by this grant application will produce. Besides the obvious wildlife

benefits, once restored, the lands acquired through this grant will provide additional water quality, groundwater recharge, and flood abatement benefits.

By purchasing in fee title or through habitat easements 3,000 +/- acres, this project will meet the LSOHC Section Priorities 1. *Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes; and 2. Protect, enhance and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests and oak savanna.*

Although we will strive to acquire lands that already have healthy grassland and wetland complexes, in some cases, restoration is needed. Restoration needs will be determined on a case by case basis. Any such restoration will be performed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service outside of this Accomplishment Plan and may be the subject of future OHF funding requests. In such cases, the US Fish and Wildlife Service land manager will decide which of the current techniques and technologies will be used when restoring the grassland and wetlands of these areas. Grasslands needing restoration will be seeded with local ecotype native grass seed mixtures. Restoration efforts will meet the LSOHC Sections Priority 3 – *“Convert agricultural land to wetland/upland to protect, enhance, or restore existing habitat complexes.....”*; Priority 6- *“Protect expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands”*, if the CRP acres are planted to native grass mixture; and Priority 7 – *“Protect, enhance and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success.”*

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

No other Constitutional Funds will be used on to this project.

Relationship to Current Organizational Budget

This project will greatly accelerate conservation activities in prairie regions of Minnesota. Since 2000, the Service has received annual appropriations of approximately \$500,000 in federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. This annual funding has allowed the Service to purchase smaller sized tracts of prairie during the last 10 years. The addition of Outdoor Heritage Funds will greatly increase the Service’s ability to protect larger tracts of native prairie throughout the 48 Minnesota Counties in the HPA.

OHF funds will be additive to The Nature Conservancy’s budget. The annual Conservancy budget for Minnesota, raised almost entirely from private sources, will help implement the activities in this proposal. Because OHF funds are not available to cover all expenses incurred for this project (e.g., indirect costs such as legal, grants, and human relations staff; office space, etc.), the Conservancy will incur an actual net unreimbursed cash expense of approximately 23% the operational component of this project. We are exploring options for raising these funds.

Sustainability and Maintenance

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

Types of Projects

Fee Acquisition Projects

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition?

Yes No, please explain not applicable

If no, please explain here: Local government approval will not be sought on each individual tract of land. Local MN DNR and USDA offices will be contacted regarding potential fee title/easement purchased to determine if any ongoing programs will affect acquisitions. Acquisition goals have also gone through a public review process which occurred during the development of the final Environmental Impact Statement by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as required by the National Environmental Policy Act during refuge establishment.

Is the land you plan to acquire free of any other permanent protection?

Yes No, please explain not applicable

If no, please explain here:

Easement Acquisition Projects

Will the eased land be open for public use?

Yes No, please explain not applicable

If no, please explain here: The properties where habitat easements are purchased will stay in private ownership and therefore will not be open for public use unless the landowner authorizes those uses.

Will the conservation easement be permanent?

Yes No, please explain not applicable

If no, please explain here:

Restoration and Enhancement Projects

Is the activity on permanently protected land and/or public waters?

Yes No, please explain not applicable

If no, please explain here:

Does the activity take place on an Aquatic Management Area (AMA), Scientific and Natural Area (SNA), Wildlife Management Area (WMA), or State Forests?

Yes, which ones No, please explain not applicable

If so, please indicate which ones:

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Milestone	Date
Identify priority acquisitions (fee and easement)	7 potential properties	August 30, 2011
Appraisals ordered	5 tracts	December 1, 2011
Purchase agreements (fee title) finalized	3 tracts	February 15, 2012
Easement Options finalized	2 tracts	June 1, 2012
Acquisitions complete	3,000 acres	June 30, 2012
Grassland Restorations completed*	3 tracts	December 31, 2014

Note – because not all acquisition efforts are always successful, we will identify more potential properties than available funding. Appraisals will be ordered on the most promising and highest priority tracts (once individual tracts have been approved by LSOHC staff).

* Restoration will be completed by USFWS outside of this Accomplishment Plan and may be funded with future requests for OHF funding.

Attachments:

- A. Budget
- B. Proposed Outcome Tables 1-5
- C. Map
- D. Parcel List

Attachment A. Budget Spreadsheet

[Link Here to definitions of the budget items below.](#)

Total Amount of Request \$ 3,500,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

Personnel

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash		Total
				Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	
Negotiators	42%	1	\$ 38,459	\$ 8,896	TNC	\$ 47,355
Data Manager/Technician	17%	1	\$ 8,848	\$ 2,047	TNC	\$ 10,895
Field Steward	8%	1	\$ 4,281	\$ 990	TNC	\$ 5,271
Land Steward	4%	1	\$ 2,981	\$ 690	TNC	\$ 3,671
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
Total	0.71		\$ 54,569	\$ 12,622	\$ -	\$ 67,191

Budget and Cash Leverage *(All your LSOHC Request Funds must be direct to and necessary for program outcomes.)*

Please describe how you intend to spend the requested funds.

Budget Item	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash		Total
		Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	
Personnel - <i>auto entered from above</i>	\$ 54,569	\$ 12,622	\$ -	\$ 67,191
Contracts				\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT <i>(breakout in table 6 & 7)</i>				\$ -
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT <i>(breakout in table 6 & 7)</i>	\$ 3,388,171			\$ 3,388,171
Easement Acquisition	<i>***Note \$3,388,171 in fee and/or easment total, fee will be preferred approach, but it will depend in part on landowner goals.</i>			\$ -
Easement Stewardship				\$ -
Travel (in-state)	\$ 1,260	\$ 291	TNC	\$ 1,551
Professional Services	\$ 56,000	\$ 12,953	TNC	\$ 68,953
DNR Land Acquisition Costs				\$ -
Other				\$ -
Capital Equipment				\$ -
Other Equipment/Tools				\$ -
Supplies/Materials				\$ -
	\$ 3,500,000	\$ 25,866	\$ -	\$ 3,525,866

Attachment B. Proposed Outcome Tables

Only enter data in the outlined cells

Table 1 and Table 3 column totals should be the same AND Table 2 and Table 4 column totals should be the same

If your project has lakes or shoreline miles instead of land acres, convert miles to acres for Tables 1 and 3 using the following conversion:

Lakeshore = 6 acres per lakeshore mile / Stream & River Shore = 12 acres per linear mile, if both sides

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Describe the scope of the project in acres (use conversion above if needed)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					0
Protect		3,000			3000
Enhance					0
Total	0	3000	0	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

3000

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

3000

These two cells should be the same figure.

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					\$ -
Protect		\$ 3,500,000			\$ 3,500,000
Enhance					\$ -
Total	\$ -	\$ 3,500,000	\$ -	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

\$ 3,500,000

Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

\$ 3,500,000

These two cells should be the same figure.

Check to make sure this amount is the same

as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						0
Protect				3,000		3000
Enhance						0
Total	0	0	0	3000	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

3000

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

3000

Total Acres from Table 1.

3000

These three cells should be the same figure.

Attachment B. Proposed Outcome Tables

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						\$ -
Protect				\$ 3,500,000		\$ 3,500,000
Enhance						\$ -
Total	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 3,500,000	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

\$ 3,500,000

These two cells should be the same figure.

Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

\$ 3,500,000

Check to make sure these amounts are the same

as the Funding Request Amount on page 1 of Main Funding Form.

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

miles of Lakes / Streams / Rivers Shoreline

Table 6. Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in acres)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					0
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability		3,000			3000
Permanent Easement NO State PILT Liability	<i>some of above acres may be easement</i>				0

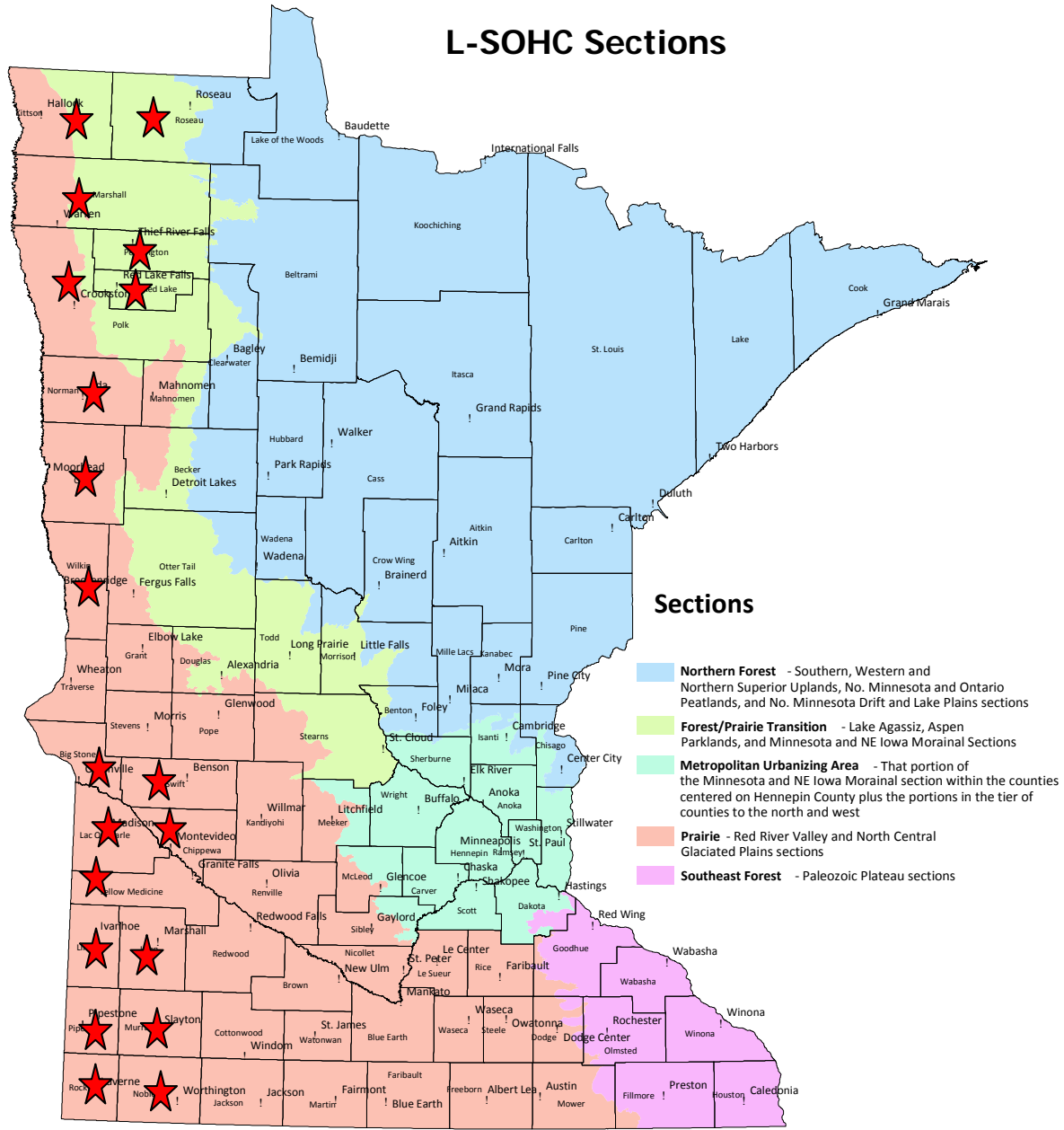
Table 7. Estimated Value of Acquisition by PILT Status (enter information in dollars)

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					\$ -
Acquired in Fee without State PILT Liability		\$ 3,500,000			\$ 3,500,000
Permanent Easement NO State PILT Liability	<i>some of above fee dollars may be easement</i>				\$ -

Attachment C.

Instructions: Double left click to bring up the map editor. Symbols should be on the left side of the pop-up banner at the top of your screen or at the bottom left depending on your software.

If you can't bring up the interactive map editor: 1) Make a paper copy of the map, 2) By hand place symbols on the map corresponding to the location of the projects in your proposal, 3) Scan the marked map to a pdf, 4) Attach to web form.



Attachment D. Parcel List

Program Title

County	Township	Range	Direction	Section	TRDS	# of acres	Estimated Cost to OHF	Description	Activity R=Restore P=Protect E=Enhance	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)
						3,000	\$ 3,500,000				P

Note - At time of proposal - this project is not parcel specific as specific tracts for protection have not yet been solidified. Properties will be evaluated and considered for inclusion by TNC and USFWS, and reviewed for approval by LSOHC staff. Funding will be used to purchase either fee title tracts, habitat easements, or a combination of the two.