Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2012 Accomplishment Plan

Date: October 24, 2011

Program Title: Prairie Recovery Project Phase III

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Funds Recommended: \$4,610,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2012, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. 2 (b): (to be completed when signed by Governor) \$4,610,000 the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Nature Conservancy to acquire native prairie and savanna and restore and enhance grasslands and savanna. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan. Annual income statements and balance sheets for income and expenses from land acquired with appropriations from the outdoor heritage fund must be submitted to Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

Abstract:

This project will: protect 1,200 acres native prairie/wetland/savanna; restore 250 acres prairie/wetland; enhance 6,000 acres grassland/savanna with fire, invasive species removal, and grazing; and continue a new prairie conservation model.

Program Narrative

Design and Scope of Work

- **1. Problems 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 value to wildlife and people.
 - c. Inadequate public access for hunting and fishing in agricultural parts of the state.
 - d. Perceived loss of local taxes and local incomes when land is acquired by public entities.
 - e. Long-term state obligations for management of public lands and payment-in-lieu-of-taxes creates a burden for state budget.
 - f. Programmatic and staff limitations that reduce efficiencies in implementing diverse conservation programs across multiple partners.

- **2. Scope of work:** With the requested funding, and with other funds leveraged by this money and brought by other partners, the following actions and outcomes will be realized.
 - "Phase 3" will build on the success of the MN Prairie Recovery Project Phase 1 and 2 by continuing and expanding enhancement work in 4 focal areas and protection in 5 areas. Project partners, 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 will continue to prioritize and refine guidelines for protection, enhancement and restoration activities within priority landscapes. Regular collaboration will be sought with the partners listed above as well as additional groups including: MN Cattleman's Association, local livestock groups, Ducks Unlimited, MN Waterfowl Association, MN Deer Hunters Association, Land Stewardship Project, MN Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and MN Farmer's Union.
 - An estimated 1200 acres of existing and restorable grassland, prairie pothole complex, and/or savanna will be permanently protected within 5 prairie core areas as identified in the MN Prairie Conservation Plan 2010. Lands will be held by The Nature Conservancy, subject to a recorded notice of funding restrictions pursuant to the grant with the MN DNR. Lands will be open to public hunting and fishing as provided in the Constitution, and basic developments will be implemented (boundary signage, habitat improvement, wetland restoration). Protection efforts will be coordinated with other partner protection programs (e.g., DNR Wildlife Management Area and Prairie Bank programs).
 - A separate and discrete internal fund has been established by The Nature Conservancy to cover
 ongoing land-management costs. Income generated by agricultural leases (grazing, haying,
 native seed harvest, and/or cropping), public contributions and donations will be held in this
 account and used to pay for property taxes and ongoing management costs.
 - An estimated 250 acres of cropland will be restored to diverse, local-ecotype grassland or grassland/wetland complex (part of the above protected acres). Preference will be given to local producers and contractors for provision of seed and establishment of prairies to promote creation of local conservation-oriented businesses.
 - An estimated 6,000 acres of grassland complex will be enhanced on public lands and those
 purchased with OHF funds and held by the Conservancy ("protected conservation lands") to
 increase native species diversity and improve critical wildlife habitat. Management techniques
 will include prescribed fire, conservation grazing and/or haying, removal of woody vegetation,
 and control of exotic species. Much of this work will be accomplished by contract. Maximum
 use will be made of Conservation Corps of Minnesota (CCM), private local businesses and other
 organizations as needed and appropriate.
 - On-the-ground staff provided by this grant will form and lead local coordination and implementation teams; identify protection, restoration and enhancement needs and opportunities within the focus area; work with DNR and FWS staff to delineate conservation projects on public lands; coordinate deployment of contract and staff resources to protected conservation lands; contact and work with private landowners to coordinate agricultural activities/leases on appropriate protected conservation lands (e.g., having, grazing, seed

harvest, cropping); educate lessees on appropriate conservation grazing/haying practices; supervise management of lands acquired above; plan and conduct prescribed burns; secure other funding for conservation practices; and other activities related to prairie conservation in the focus areas. A total of four "term" biologists ("prairie managers") will coordinate activities in the focus areas. Biologists will be employed by the Conservancy and will be located in a DNR or FWS office. This will foster better coordination and collaboration among partners, while accelerating enhancement work on public lands.

- Contracts will be let to provide a high level of enhancement activities to new and existing
 protected conservation lands, greatly expanding current capacity. These activities will improve
 the habitat value of public lands that are not currently receiving adequate management
 treatment, while simultaneously providing jobs for CCM and local businesses. Activities will
 include removal of undesirable woody vegetation, identification and treatment of invasive
 species infestations, removal of abandoned fences and/or other structures, and related
 restoration/enhancement activities.
- To ensure goals and outcomes are consistently achieved across all 4 project areas a project
 coordinator will oversee implementation of the above activities and provide administrative
 support for budget monitoring and reporting. Significant marketing and media outreach will be
 provided by the Conservancy to highlight the goals and accomplishments of the project to local
 and statewide constituents, as well as elected officials.
- Temporary seasonal crews will be retained by the Conservancy or other partners to provide
 additional capacity for public land management during critical periods like spring burn season.
 These crews will create flexibility for enhancement projects and will maximize the ability of
 specialized skilled personnel like burn bosses to increase the number of acres annually
 enhanced.
- **3. How priorities were/will be set**: Prioritization and prioritization criteria vary with the conservation tactic being employed (i.e., protection, restoration, enhancement). Focus areas were selected where there was overlap with MN County Biological Survey prairie "focus areas" and TNC priority areas. Each of the 4 project locations directly correlate to core areas identified in the 2010 MN Prairie Conservation Plan. Because this project is a collaborative effort involving multiple partners, tactical priorities and criteria will be established at both the state and local level by respective coordinating groups. Likely criteria for each of these tactics include:
 - a. Protection: location/proximity to other habitats, location/proximity to other protected lands, presence of rare/endangered species, imminence of conversion, ability to support grazing, size, cost, and likelihood for leveraged funding. A more robust listing of selection criteria can be provided upon request.
 - b. Restoration: feasibility/likelihood of success, location, cost, availability of seed, and availability of restoration technical assistance, proximity to other habitats, and their ability to buffer or increase the conservation value of other protected lands.
 - c. Enhancement: urgency/time since last enhancement, feasibility of success, accessibility, availability of enhancement technical assistance, cost, proximity to other habitats and partnership benefits.
- **4.** Urgency and opportunity of this proposal: Only about 1% of Minnesota's original native prairie still remains (about 235,000 acres of an original 1.8 million), and the remnants are still being destroyed and

degraded. Less than half of those 235,000 acres are currently protected from conversion, and management capacity is unable to address needs on protected lands. Additionally, more than 90% of the original prairie pothole wetlands in the western part of the state have also been lost. These losses threaten the viability of Minnesota's prairie/wetland wildlife and recreational opportunities that depend upon them. Further, huge strides that have been made in supplementing habitat with the Conservation Reserve Program are in imminent danger of being lost as contracts expire. Conservationists have a narrow window of opportunity to protect remaining native grasslands, wetlands and other habitats, restore and protect supplemental grasslands and wetlands, and accelerate enhancement efforts to ensure these habitats are providing optimal value to animals and people. This proposal accelerates an initiative begun in 2010, and continues work in four focus areas.

5. Stakeholder involvement and/or opposition: This proposal continues an initiative begun with OHF funding in 2010. We have worked very closely with conservation interests in developing and maintaining this initiative and will continue close collaboration among partners. Via past and ongoing projects, we are also coordinating with other stakeholders (e.g., cattlemen's associations, Land Stewardship Project, county boards), and will continue to seek opportunities to expand that coordination. Points of opposition that have risen to date include: perceived loss of tax revenues, philosophical opposition to public land ownership, and lack of understanding of processes (ie. prescribed fire) necessary for long-term prairie system health. To address these concerns we have been actively engaged with county boards and other local units of government, local agricultural producers and groups, and local communities. We anticipate continuing to build these relationships in each of the four project areas.

Planning

This project implements strategies identified in at least 6 plans, as identified below.

- 1. The 2010 MN Prairie Conservation Plan (Plan) identifies three distinct strategies and opportunities for targeting protection, restoration, and enhancement of Minnesota's prairie and grassland systems. The plan recommends work in "Core Areas" defined as large landscapes that retain some features of functioning prairie systems. Using MN County Biological Survey data and USFWS Habitat Assessment, Populations and Evaluation Team (HAPET) office analyses the Plan identifies 36 distinct prairie core areas across the western third of the state. Collectively these core landscapes contain 71% of the state's remaining native prairie. All 4 of the project focus areas directly correlate with one or more of these core areas.
- 2. 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.
- 3. 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 prairie regions 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.

- 4. 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. Also, as a step-down from the NTP Ecoregion Plan, the Chapter has completed local level planning (Conservation Action Planning) for smaller geographic units that correspond with the focus areas. Goals within these focus areas are very explicit in identifying conservation targets and actions and are consistent with the activities contained in this proposal.
- 5. 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.
- 6. 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.

This plan helps fulfill multiple priorities specified by the LSOHC "Prairie Section Vision", including permanent protection of existing prairies and wetlands, restoration of prairie and wetland habitats, building grassland/wetland complexes in blocks sufficient to increase migratory breeding bird success, enhancement of public lands for game species and other species of conservation need, and protection of watersheds of shallow lakes. Specifically, this proposal addresses "Prairie Section Strategies" 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 directly.

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

A current LCCMR/ENRTF project (Reconnecting MN Prairies) will provide baseline data and modeling information to guide deployment of conservation practices. It is also expected that local project teams will direct additional expenditures from ENRTF and Clean Water Funds (via BWSR programs) into conservation efforts as they become available and channeled into focus areas.

Relationship to Current Organizational Budget

This project will greatly accelerate conservation activities in prairie regions of Minnesota. OHF funds will be additive to the Conservancy's budget. The annual Conservancy budget for Minnesota, raised almost entirely from private sources, will help implement the activities in this proposal. Under the current model OHF funds are not available to cover all expenses incurred for this project (e.g., shared service costs such as legal, grants, and human resources staff; insurance, etc.), the Conservancy will incur an actual net unreimbursed cash expense of approximately 23% of the operational component of this project. We will continue to engage in conversation with the Council and DNR to negotiate a mechanism that allows for reimbursement of a portion of these costs. We continue to explore options for raising additional funds.

Sustainability and Maintenance

Protection, restoration and enhancement implementation are each critical tools for the viability of Minnesota's prairie/wetland ecosystems. 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 continue to test a new long-term funding model by attempting to secure management funds by generating conservation 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.

Outcomes

Short/Intermediate term

- Key parcels of native prairie are permanently protected as fish, wildlife, and native plant habitat.
- Accelerated and improved management of grasslands on publicly owned lands.
- Native prairie and wetland complexes are sufficiently restored to create new habitat for waterfowl and other migratory species.
- Protected, restored and enhanced prairies increase water holding capacity and improve aquatic habitats and productivity.
- New economic models of prairie/grassland management are demonstrated with increasing adoption and acceptance by Minnesota's agricultural producers.

Long-term

- Core areas within Minnesota's prairie landscape function as grassland systems and provide habitat for a majority of native prairie dependant species.
- A private grass-based agricultural economy exists sufficient to sustain ecologically functional prairie landscapes while supporting rural families and communities.

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Milestone	Date completed
Protection	First 300 acres acquired	June 2013
	Additional 300 acres acquired	Sept. 2013
	Additional 300 acres acquired	Dec. 2013
	Final 300 acres acquired	June 2014
Restoration	Restoration initiated on 125 acres	Sept. 2014
	Restoration initiated on next 125 acres	Mar. 2015
	Restorations completed	June 2015
Enhancement	100 acres woody veg. control	Dec. 2013
	2500 acres prescribed fire	July 2013
	400 acres invasives control	Sept. 2013
	200 acres woody veg. control	Dec. 2014
	2500 acres prescribed fire	June 2014
	300 acres invasives control	June 2014

Attachments (on spreadsheet workbook – 3 separate tabs): A. Budget, B. Proposed Outcome Tables , C. Parcel List - No Map is needed for the accomplishment plan

Attachment A. Budget Spreadsheet

Name of Proposal:	
Legislative Citation:	
Date:	

Prairie Recovery Project Phase 3	
24-Oct-11	

Link HERE to definitions of the budget items below.

Total Amount of Request \$ 4,610,000 From page 1 on the funding form.

Personnel

	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Position breakdown here		•	•	J	J	
Proect Coordinator	1	2	\$ 93,038	\$ 7,024	TNC	\$ 100,063
Term biologists	4	2	\$ 248,102	\$ 18,732	TNC	\$ 266,834
Habitat Crews	2.5	2	\$ 72,893	\$ 5,503	TNC	\$ 78,397
Protection Specialist	1.5	2	\$ 116,994	\$ 8,833	TNC	\$ 125,827
TNC Science Staff	0.4	2	\$ 40,800	\$ 3,080	TNC	\$ 43,880
TNC Land Stewards	0.4	2	\$ 81,473	\$ 6,151	TNC	\$ 87,624
Grant Administrator	0.25	2	\$ 66,626	\$ 5,030	TNC	\$ 71,657
Total	10.1		\$ 719,927	\$ 54,354	\$ -	\$ 774,281

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
Personnel - auto entered from above
Contracts
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT (breakout in table 7)
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT (breakout in table 7)
Easement Acquisition
Easement Stewardship
Travel (in-state)
Professional Services
Direct Support Services
DNR Land Acquisition Costs
Other
Capital Equipment (auto entered from below)
Other Equipment/Tools
Supplies/Materials

	Anticipated Cash			
LSOHC Request	Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	e	Total
\$ 719,927	\$ 54,354	\$ -	\$	774,281
\$ 768,400	\$ 173,274	TNC	\$	941,674
	\$ -		\$	-
\$ 2,460,000	\$ 396,000	TNC/NAWCA/RIM	\$	2,856,000
	\$ -		\$	-
	\$ -		\$	-
\$ 145,344	\$ 32,775	TNC	\$	178,119
\$ 200,400	\$ 45,190	TNC	\$	245,590
\$ 107,989			\$	107,989
			\$	-
			\$	254,830
\$ 1	\$ -	private source	\$	-
			\$	-
\$ 207,940	\$ 46,890	TNC	\$	254,830
\$ 4,610,000	\$ 748,484	\$ -	\$	5,358,484

Capital Equipment (single items over \$10,000 - auto entered into table above)

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Leverage
Item 2 enter here		
Item 3 enter here		
Item 4 enter here		
Item 5 enter here		
Item 6 enter here		
Item 7 enter here		
Item 8 enter here		
Total	-	-

Attachment B. Output Tables

Name of Proposal:	Prairie Recovery Project Phase 3
Legislative Citation:	
Date:	24-Oct-11

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	37	213			250
Protect Fee	200	1000			1200
Protect Easement					0
Protect Other					0
Enhance	500	5500			6000
Total	737	6713	0	0	

7450 These two cells Total Acres (sum of Total column) 7450 should be the same Total Acres (sum of Total row) figure.

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

	Wetlands	Pr	airies	Forest	Habitats	Total	
Restore	\$ 3	7,500 \$	212,500			\$	250,000
Protect Fee	\$ 36	9,000 \$	2,091,000			\$	2,460,000
Protect Easement						\$	-
Protect Other						\$	-
Enhance	\$ 28.	5,000 \$	1,615,000			\$	1,900,000
Total	\$ 69	1,500 \$	3,918,500	\$ -	\$	-	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column) Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

4,610,000 These two cells

4,610,000 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		125		125		250
Protect Fee		400		800		1200
Protect Easement						0
Protect Other						0
Enhance		2000		4000		6000
Total	0	2525	0	4925	0	

Total Acres (sum of Total column) Total Acres (sum of Total row) Total Acres from Table 1.

7450 These three cells 7450 should be the same 7450 *figure.*

Attachment B. Output Tables

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Restore **Protect Fee Protect Easement Protect Other Enhance** Total

	Metro/Urban	Fore	st/Prairie	SE Forest	Praii	rie	Northern Forest	Total	
		\$	62,500		\$	187,500		\$	250,000
		\$	615,000		\$	1,845,000			
t									
								\$	-
		\$	665,000		\$	1,235,000		\$	1,900,000
	\$	- \$	1,342,500	\$	- \$	3,267,500	\$ -		

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

2,150,000 These two cells 4,610,000 should be the same figure.

Total Dollars (sum of Total row) 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)

Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability Acquired in Fee w/o State PILT Liability

Permanent Easement PILT Liability

NO State

Total	Habitats	Forests	Prairies	Wetlands
0				
1200			1000	200
0				
	0	0	1000	200

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

r y i: sriouia match total in budget table that is auto

Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability Acquired in Fee w/o State PILT Liability

Permanent Easement NO State **PILT Liability**

W	etlands	s Prairies			Forests		H	labitats	Total	ente	red below
									\$ -	\$	-
\$	369,000	\$	2,091,000						\$ 2,460,000	\$	2,856,000
									\$ -	\$	-
\$	369,000	\$	2,091,000	\$		-	\$	-			

Attachment C. Parcel List

Name of Proposal: Legislative Citation		Prairie Rec	overy Proj	ect Phase 3						_			
Date:	1.	24-Oct-11								<u>—</u> <u>—</u>			
	County	Township (25-258)	(01-51)	Direction most parcels are 2 with the exception of some areas of Cook County which is 1	Section (01 thru 36)	TRDS	# of acres	Budgetary Estimate (includes administrative, restoration or other related costs and do not include matching money contributed or earned by the transaction)	Description	Activity PF=Protect Fee PE=Protect Easement PO=Protect Other R=Restore E=Enhance	If Easement, what is the easement cost as a % of the fee acquisition?	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)
Parcel Name													
Protection Projects	Polk Red Lake Norman Clay Wilkin Kittson Roseau Big Stone Lac qui Parle Swift Chippewa Pope Kandiyohi Stearns Lincoln Lyon Nobles Rock Murray Pipestone Cottonwood Yellow Medici		and staff negotiati	to identify t	or protection hese and get els will be op	approval p	rior to pu		the Council	PF P			
	Jackson	··· =								PF	ı		1
Restoration Projects	Polk Red Lake		-	-	-			ds are acquired pursua pending any funds.	ant to above	R R	l		
	Norman									R			

Clay Wilkin Kittson Roseau

Attachment C. Parcel List

David Nove	County	Township (25-258)	Range (01-51)	Direction most parcels are 2 with the exception of some areas of Cook County which is 1	Section (01 thru 36)	TRDS	# of acres	Budgetary Estimate (includes administrative, restoration or other related costs and do not include matching money contributed or earned by the transaction)	Description	Activity PF=Protect Fee PE=Protect Easement PO=Protect Other R=Restore E=Enhance	If Easement, what is the easement cost as a % of the fee acquisition?	Any existing protection? (yes/no)	Open to hunting and fishing? (yes/no)
Parcel Name													
	Big Stone Lac qui Parle Swift Chippewa									R R R			
	Pope									R			
	Kandiyohi									R			
	Stearns									R			
Enhancement Projects													
	Polk		Specific	tracts for enh	ancement w	ill be identi	fied in di	scussions with DNR,		E			
	Red Lake Falls		FWS and	l other partne	ers once the l	oiologists a	re in plac	e. We will work with		E			
	Norman		Council a	and DNR to ge	et concurren	ce on these	sites bef	ore funds are expended.		E			
	Clay									E			
	Wilkin									E			
	Kittson									E			
	Roseau									Е			
	Big Stone									Е			
	Lac qui Parle									E			
	Swift									Е			
	Chippewa									E			
	Pope									E			
	Kandiyohi									E			
	Stearns									E			