

## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

### Laws of Minnesota 2012 Accomplishment Plan

Date: October 24, 2011

**Program Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition, Phase IV**

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**Funds Recommended: \$1,580,000**

**Legislative Citation: ML 2012, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. 2 (e):** *(to be completed when signed by Governor)*

#### Abstract:

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

#### Program Narrative

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) 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 98.7% 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 landowner interest. This funding will allow US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) to better meet refuge goals and objectives to protect this vanishing habitat.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) 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 protect these tracts. Once ranked, TNC staff will work with LSOHC staff to review individual tracts and have them added to the Accomplishment Plan if approved.

Lands and easements purchased with this funding 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 Service. The majority of the lands protected will consist of native prairie, however, wetlands and grasslands will also be restored where needed.

### Design and Scope of Work

**Only 235,000 acres of the original tallgrass prairie remain in Minnesota. Of these 115,000 acres lack any form of legal protection.** The decline of grassland dependent bird species is among the key indicators of the declining condition of these prairies. These birds have shown steeper, more consistent, and geographically widespread declines than any other group of North American birds.

TNC will utilize the funding for the protection of approximately 500 acres of native prairie in western Minnesota. Because of the nature of parcel ownership, some of this acreage will likely include smaller areas of converted lands in need of grassland or wetland restoration. Acquisition of fee title will be the top priority for the funding. The funding will be used for the purchase of permanent habitat easements if the funding cannot be used entirely on fee title acquisition.

Lands protected will eventually be transferred to the Service and will become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. 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.

If habitat easements are acquired, monitoring and enforcement will be done through the Service's Wetland Management District offices. These offices have extensive experience with monitoring and enforcing habitat easements. They currently monitor over 15,000 acres of permanent habitat easements. The Service's policies and procedures are described in detail in the manual, "U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service, Great Lakes Region (3) and Mountain-Prairie Region (6), Administrative and Enforcement Procedures for FWS Easements".

### 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 and wetlands, this proposal will help keep water on the landscape (permanent vegetation restoration).

This project is also fully in accord with the **Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan**. This plan was the result of a joint planning process that included all of the major prairie conservation agencies and organizations in the state. The Prairie Plan calls for the protection of all native prairie in Minnesota (totaling 31,400 acres in fee and 73,500 acres of easement) within the Prairie Region. The 500 +/- acres protected in this project will reduce the amount of unprotected native prairie by a significant amount.

Priority will be given to tracts located within the 36 identified prairie core areas or within habitat complexes along corridors linking the core areas.

The need for this project is also outlined in the ***Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) 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 provide 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. 4 sq.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 of native prairie remnants and the 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 500 +/- 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 and/or enhancement will be needed. Restoration and/or enhancement needs will be determined on a case by case basis. Funding for needed restoration work appears in Attachment A in the Budget and Cash Leverage table under contracts. In Attachment B, restoration is included in the acres and funding for fee acquisition. The funding for restoration in this program is solely for Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge properties acquired with Outdoor Heritage Fund funding in this or prior phases. Including the restoration accomplishments with fee acquisition avoids double counting these acres and funds.

If it is determined that restoration and/or enhancement are needed, the Conservancy will work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service land manager to determine 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 Conservations 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 typically 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.

Although not tabulated as Leveraged Funds, significant in-kind time will be spent by US Fish and Wildlife Service Real Estate, Refuge, and Field staff on this project.

**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, which will also be transferred to the Service, are perpetual and Service managers will work with landowners to maintain and, where needed, restore the native prairie on each tract of land.

**Outcomes**

Results of the program will include:

- Key parcels of native prairie are protected as fish, wildlife, and native plant habitat.
- Existing complexes of protected native prairie are expanded and better connected
- Greater coordination among agencies involved in native prairie protection

**Accomplishment Timeline**

Activity	Milestone	Date completed
Identify priority acquisitions (fee and easement)	7 potential tracts	Ongoing
Appraisals ordered	5 tracts	December 1, 2011 - October 1, 2012
Purchase agreements finalized	4 tracts	March 1, 2012 - February 15, 2013
Acquisitions complete	500 acres	June 30, 2013
Grassland Restoration/Enhancement completed	2 tracts	June 30, 2015

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**

<b>Name of Proposal:</b>	Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase IV
<b>Legislative Citation:</b>	ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x)
<b>Date:</b>	10/24/2011

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

**Total Amount of Request**      \$      1,580,000 *From page 1 on the funding form.*

**Personnel**

Position breakdown here	FTE	Over # of years	Anticipated Cash		Cash Leverage Source	Total
			LSOHC Request	Leverage		
<i>Negotiators</i>	42%	1	\$ 42,409		\$	42,409
<i>Data Manager/Technician</i>	17%	1	\$ 8,822		\$	8,822
<i>Field Steward</i>	8%	1	\$ 4,720		\$	4,720
<i>Land Steward</i>	4%	1	\$ 3,287		\$	3,287
<i>Grants Assistant</i>	10%	1	\$ 4,260		\$	4,260
<i>position 6</i>					\$	-
<i>position 7</i>					\$	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.81</b>		<b>\$ 63,498</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 63,498</b>

**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	Anticipated Cash		Cash Leverage Source	Total
	LSOHC Request	Leverage		
<b>Personnel - auto entered from above</b>	\$ 63,498	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 63,498
<b>Contracts</b>	\$ 125,000			\$ 125,000
<b>Fee Acquisition w/ PILT (breakout in table 7)</b>				\$ -
<b>Fee Acquisition w/o PILT (breakout in table 7)</b>	\$ 1,339,477	\$ 210,000	USFWS/NAWCA/LWCF	\$ 1,549,477
<b>Easement Acquisition</b>	<i>***Note \$1,339,477 in fee and/or easement total, fee will be preferred approach, but it will depend in part on landowner goals.</i>			\$ -
<b>Easement Stewardship</b>				\$ -
<b>Travel (in-state)</b>	\$ 2,500			\$ 2,500
<b>Professional Services</b>	\$ 40,000			\$ 40,000
<b>Direct Support Services</b>	\$ 9,525			\$ 9,525
<b>DNR Land Acquisition Costs</b>				\$ -
<b>Other</b>				\$ -
Capital Equipment <i>(auto entered from below)</i>				\$ -
Other Equipment/Tools				\$ -
Supplies/Materials				\$ -
	<b>\$ 1,580,000</b>	<b>\$ 210,000</b>	<b>\$ -</b>	<b>\$ 1,790,000</b>

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

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Leverage
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>

## Attachment B. Output Tables

<b>Name of Proposal:</b>	Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase IV
<b>Legislative Citation:</b>	ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x)
<b>Date:</b>	10/24/2011

*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 Fee		500			500
Protect Easement		<i>some of above acres may be easement</i>			0
Protect Other					0
Enhance					0
<b>Total</b>	0	500	0	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

500 *These two cells should be the same figure.*

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

500

**Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type**

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore					\$ -
Protect Fee		\$ 1,580,000			\$ 1,580,000
Protect Easement					\$ -
Protect Other					\$ -
Enhance					\$ -
<b>Total</b>	\$ -	\$ 1,580,000	\$ -	\$ -	-

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)

\$ 1,580,000 *These two cells should be the same figure.*

Total Dollars (sum of Total row)

\$ 1,580,000

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 Fee				500		500
Protect Easement		<i>some of above acres may be easement</i>				0
Protect Other						0
Enhance						0
<b>Total</b>	0	0	0	500	0	0

Total Acres (sum of Total column)

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

Total Acres (sum of Total row)

500

Total Acres from Table 1.

500

**Attachment B. Output Tables**

**Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section**

	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore						\$ -
Protect Fee				\$ 1,580,000		\$ 1,580,000
Protect Easement			<i>some of above acres may be easement</i>			\$ -
Protect Other						\$ -
Enhance						\$ -
<b>Total</b>	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,580,000	\$ -	

Total Dollars (sum of Total column)      \$ 1,580,000 *These two cells should be the same figure.*  
 Total Dollars (sum of Total row)      \$ 1,580,000  
 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**

n/a # 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 w/o State PILT Liability		500			500
Permanent Easement <i>PILT Liability</i> <i>NO State</i>		<i>some of above acres may be easement</i>			0
	0	500	0	0	

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

	Wetlands	Prairies	Forests	Habitats	Total	
Acquired in Fee with State PILT Liability					\$ -	\$ -
Acquired in Fee w/o State PILT Liability		\$ 1,549,477			\$ 1,549,477	\$ 1,549,477
Permanent Easement <i>PILT Liability</i> <i>NO State</i>					\$ -	\$ -
	\$ -	\$ 1,549,477	\$ -	\$ -		

*FYI: should match total in budget table that is auto entered below*



### Attachment C. Parcel List

**Name of Proposal:** Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase IV  
**Legislative Citation:** ML 2011, Ch. X, Art. X, Sec. X, Subd. X (x)  
**Date:** 24-Oct-11

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)
<b>Parcel Name</b>												
All Parcels						500	\$1,580,000		PF/PE			
<i>In the following counties:</i>						Note - At the current time, this project is not parcel specific as specific tracts to be protected have not yet been selected.						
Becker						Properties will be evaluated and considered for inclusion by TNC and USFWS, and reviewed for approval by LSOHC staff.			PF/PE			
Big Stone						Funding will be used to purchase either fee title tracts, permanent habitat easements, or a combination of the two.			PF/PE			
Blue Earth						Properties will be located in those parts of the listed counties included in the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR.			PF/PE			
Brown									PF/PE			
Chippewa									PF/PE			
Clay									PF/PE			
Cottonwood									PF/PE			
Douglas									PF/PE			
Faribault									PF/PE			
Freeborn									PF/PE			
Grant									PF/PE			
Jackson									PF/PE			
Kandiyohi									PF/PE			
Kittson									PF/PE			
Lac qui Parle									PF/PE			
Le Sueur									PF/PE			
Lincoln									PF/PE			
Lyon									PF/PE			
Mahnommen									PF/PE			
Marshall									PF/PE			
Martin									PF/PE			
McLeod									PF/PE			
Meeker									PF/PE			
Murray									PF/PE			
Nicollet									PF/PE			
Nobles									PF/PE			
Norman									PF/PE			
Otter Tail									PF/PE			
Pennington									PF/PE			
Polk									PF/PE			
Pope									PF/PE			
Red Lake									PF/PE			
Redwood									PF/PE			
Renville									PF/PE			
Rock									PF/PE			
Sibley									PF/PE			

