

Main Request for Funding Form

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council Fiscal Year 2014 / ML 2013 Proposal

Program or Project Title: Northeastern Minnesota Sharp-tailed Grouse Habitat Partnership, Phase IV

Funds Requested: \$2,100,000

Manager's Name: Joe Pavelko

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County Locations: Aitkin, Aitkin , Carlton, and Kanabec.

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Northern Forest

Activity Type:

- Restore
- Enhance
- Protect in Fee

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Habitat

Abstract

This sharp-tailed grouse habitat partnership will protect, restore and enhance up to 1,723 acres, primarily brushland, in northeastern Minnesota for addition to the WMA system, sustaining species in greatest conservation need, increasing public recreational opportunity and providing multiple environmental benefits.

Activity Detail

Design and Scope of Work

Problem and Scope:

Until the 1880s, most of Minnesota was inhabited by sharp-tailed grouse where suitable open and brushland habitat, such as prairies, savannas, sedge meadows and open bogs, occurred. This indigenous grouse was once one of Minnesota's most abundant game birds, with over 100,000 harvested annually in the 1940's. Loss, degradation and fragmentation of open and brushland habitat within Minnesota due to natural succession and conversion to other land uses (cropland and tree plantations) has led to a long term decline in this unique grouse's population (estimated harvest of 10,000 in 2009), causing its listing as a species in greatest conservation need. Today its remaining range in northern Minnesota, which is less than one-third of its historic range, is in jeopardy of additional fragmentation and degradation.

In east central Minnesota, preliminary research results have shown that genetic diversity of the sharp-tailed grouse population may be declining due to increasing isolation of subpopulations. In nearby Wisconsin, genetic diversity (allelic diversity and heterozygosity) has declined so greatly that Wisconsin DNR has translocated sharp-tailed grouse to create a genetic infusion to increase the likelihood that populations will persist. Increasing the amount of protected brushland habitat in northeastern Minnesota will be critical to the sustainability of the local sharp-tailed grouse population and gene exchange between Minnesota and Wisconsin populations.

Specific habitat that will be affected and how actions will directly restore, enhance, and/or protect them:

Specific habitats to be affected will include up to 1,732 acres of openland, brushland, and forest habitat (879 acres wetland and 844 acres upland - hayland, pasture and forest). Acquisition of the habitats and their transfer to MDNR for management under the state WMA will protect them. Natural habitats will include wet meadow, sedge meadow, shrub wetland, bog, grassland, and aspen and northern hardwoods forest. They will be enhanced with prescribed burning, mowing, shearing, timber harvest, and possibly grazing, biomass harvest and occasional haying to maintain open and brushland landscape. Other land includes hay, pasture and crop land that will be restored to open and brushland habitat through establishment of native vegetation, prescribed burning and natural succession.

Multiple benefits:

Multiple benefits of the above protection, enhancement and restoration actions will include increased plant and animal diversity, carbon sequestration, water retention and filtration, opportunities for biomass harvest, access to public lands for recreation, increases eco-tourism opportunities, economic benefits, and secure habitat for sharp-tailed grouse and other open and brushland species in greatest conservation need.

Wildlife species that will benefit:

In addition to sharp-tailed grouse, several other species that use or depend upon open and brushland habitats are also in decline, listed as species in greatest conservation need, and will benefit from this project, including bobolinks, loggerhead shrikes, short-eared owls, yellow rails, eastern meadowlarks, American bittern, northern harrier, golden-winged warblers, Henslow's sparrow, Le Conte's sparrow, Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrow, and American woodcock. Six of these species are state listed as endangered, threatened or special concern.

Game species that will benefit include white-tailed deer, waterfowl (mallards, blue-winged teal, Canada geese, and more species during migration), wild turkey, American woodcock, common snipe, ruffed grouse, cottontail rabbit, snowshoe hare, fox, raccoon, and bobcat. Many nongame species such as the Eastern bluebird, American kestrel, brown thrasher, gray catbird, common yellowthroat, sora rail, sedge wren, and spring peeper will benefit, as well as the sandhill crane which is expanding its range.

Urgency and opportunity:

If not acquired while the opportunities exist (i.e., willing sellers and funding opportunities), the chance to protect these priority tracts permanently from land practices incompatible as open and brushland wildlife habitat, and from fragmentation, parcelization and development may be lost. Incompatible land uses, such as building sites, tree plantings, and uncontrolled natural succession, on a tract not only negatively impacts the tract directly, but also surrounding habitat by fragmenting the open character of the land and impacting area-sensitive wildlife species, such as sharp-tailed grouse that are adapted to large open vistas.

How priorities were set / Parcel selection and scoring process:

For consideration of protection and enhancement efforts by the partnership, open and brushland tracts must be located within or at the edge of an ECS landtype association identified as a priority open landscape through DNR's SFRMP landscape planning process. Further criteria to prioritize which tracts are most critical include a ranking system based upon county location, distance to active sharp-tailed grouse lek, tract size, and distance to protected brushland. A nearly-completed sharp-tailed grouse habitat use model (attached) will soon be ready for targeting brushland habitat for protection, restoration and enhancement efforts.

Science-based strategic planning and evaluation:

This proposal is based on science-based strategic planning and evaluation. Biological planning, conservation design, delivery, monitoring and research, and adjustments in strategies as needed are used to maintain an adaptive approach.

Sharp-tailed grouse leks (dancing grounds) are the essential hubs of subpopulations. Nesting and brooding rearing occur in suitable habitat within approximately a two-mile radius of leks. All but one of the parcels proposed for protection have active leks either located on them or within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile away.

All tracts will be critical to sustaining nesting and brood rearing habitat for subpopulations of sharp-tailed grouse. Research by Stanley Temple in Wisconsin suggests that suitable habitat patches of 4000 ha (roughly 10,000 acres, 15½ sq. miles, or a 2.2 mile radius circle) are needed for a sharp-tailed grouse population to survive. Opportunities to protect and connect suitable patches of this size are dwindling due to development, parcelization and other landscape change pressures.

A pilot study in Aitkin County was conducted in spring/summer 2009 as part of a planned long term study to examine habitat selection, nest success and survival of sharp-tailed grouse. Data from this study and the long term study to begin spring 2013 will provide addition information to improve and keep management adaptive.

Annual spring surveys of sharp-tailed grouse leks allow for monitoring of local populations and the effect that habitat protection and enhancement and other land management activities have on them.

Level of stakeholder opposition and involvement:

No stakeholder opposition to proposed acquisitions has been encountered. Proposals to protect land and manage them as public conservation lands are locally-driven by conservation groups, hunters, conservation agency staff, and willing sellers due to the multiple benefits such land protection and management can provide. Local government has been or will be contacted and their support sought.

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds
- H7 Keep water on the landscape
- LU8 Protect large blocks of forest land

Plans Addressed

- A Vision for Wildlife and Its Use -- Goals and Outcomes 2006-2012
- Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Plans
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Partners in Flight Conservation Plans for States and Physiographic Regions
- State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Strategic Habitat Conservation Model

LSOHC Statewide Priorities

- Are ongoing, successful, transparent and accountable programs addressing actions and targets of one or more of the ecological sections
- Produce multiple enduring conservation benefits
- Are able to leverage effort and/or other funds to supplement any OHF appropriation
- Allow public access. This comes into play when all other things about the request are approximately equal
- Address conservation opportunities that will be lost if not immediately acted on
- Use a science-based strategic planning and evaluation model to guide protection, restoration and enhancement, similar to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Strategic Habitat Conservation model
- Address wildlife species of greatest conservation need, Minnesota County Biological Survey data, and rare, threatened and endangered species inventories in land and water decisions, as well as permanent solutions to aquatic invasive species
- Provide Minnesotans with greater public access to outdoor environments with hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation opportunities
- Ensures activities for "protecting, restoring and enhancing" are coordinated among agencies, non profits and others while doing this important work
- Target unique Minnesota landscapes that have historical value to fish and wildlife

LSOHC Northern Forest Section Priorities

- Protect forestland through acquisition or easement to prevent parcelization and fragmentation and to provide the ability to access and manage landlocked public properties
- Restore forest-based wildlife habitat that has experienced substantial decline in area in recent decades

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

none

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts

This partnership greatly accelerates and supplements protection, restoration and enhancement of brushland habitat. Prior to the availability of Outdoor Heritage grants, very little brushland habitat could be protected and opportunities were lost. Limited funds within DNR for acquisition were typically directed to western and southern Minnesota for protection of wetland and grassland habitat.

Sustainability and Maintenance

Five years after the period of funding has ended, the proposed parcels will be part of the state WMA system, being sustained and managed by local DNR Wildlife Area staff involved in the partnership. Maintenance will be funded through the DNR budget, grants and funds provided by partners. Partner funds will be derived from conservation organization's general membership and grants, such as Outdoor Heritage and Conservation Partnership Legacy grants. Stewardship plans for these tracts entail maintenance as integral portions of priority open landscapes. After initial protection and enhancement is completed, the primary habitat management technique will be prescribed burning. It will be used as needed, roughly once every three to seven years, to maintain their open structure and stimulate native vegetation. Brushland prescribed burn costs range from \$10-30/acre, depending upon burn unit size and equipment and personnel needed. Other habitat management techniques may involve prescribed grazing or haying through cooperative agreements (no cost) or mechanical treatment of woody vegetation such as mowing (\$120/acre), shearing (\$70/acre), timber harvest (no cost), or biomass harvest.

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition? - **No**

Current DNR language requires acquisition partners to notify local government of acquisition. However, where local government approval is already required, or if DNR guidance was to change, we will adhere to all requirements and seek approval.

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

Is this land open for hunting and fishing? - **Yes**

No Variation from State of Minnesota regulations.

Is the activity on permanently protected land and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15? - **Yes (WMA)**

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Funding available - Order appraisals	July 2013
Protection completed - All tracts acquired and transferred to MDNR for addition to the WMA system	March 2014
Enhancement begins- Initial site development completed	Sept. 2014
Enhancement continues - Firebreaks cleared, winter mechanical brushland treatments completed	March 2015
Enhancement continues & Restoration completed - Prescribed burns completed &	June 2015

Native veg. is established.	
Enhancement continues - Summer mechanical brushland treatments completed	Sept. 2015
Enhancement underway - Additional firebreak cleared	March 2016
Enhancement completed - Additional prescribed burns completed	June 2016

Outcomes

Programs in the northern forest region

- Forestlands are protected from development and fragmentation
- Healthy populations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species as well as more common species
- Increased availability and improved condition of riparian forests and other habitat corridors
- Landlocked public properties have increased access for land managers
- Brushlands (of special concern in the Council's vision).

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$2,100,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$20,000	\$0	-	\$20,000
Contracts	\$70,000	\$0	-	\$70,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,875,000	\$25,000	Private Source	\$1,900,000
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Travel (in-state)	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Professional Services	\$45,000	\$0	-	\$45,000
Direct Support Services	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$30,000	\$0	-	\$30,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
DNR IDP	\$60,000	\$26,000	DNR (in kind, labor, fleet)	\$86,000
Total	\$2,100,000	\$51,000	-	\$2,151,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
PF Director of Conservation	0.04	3.00	\$15,000	\$0	-	\$15,000
PF National Grants Staff	0.03	3.00	\$5,000	\$0	-	\$5,000
Total	0.07	6.00	\$20,000	\$0	-	\$20,000

Capital Equipment

Item Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Total	\$0	\$0	-	\$0

Output Tables

Table 1. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	1,723	1,723
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	1,723	1,723

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,100,000	\$2,100,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,100,000	\$2,100,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	1,723	1,723
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	1,723	1,723

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,100,000	\$2,100,000
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,100,000	\$2,100,000

Table 5. Target Lake/Stream/River Miles

0 miles

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Aitkin

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Herlache (Willowsippi WMA)	05025215	40	\$45,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
Lawrence (Willowsippi WMA)	050252	160	\$180,000	No	Full	Not Applicable

Aitkin

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Parchuc (Grayling WMA)	04823213	40	\$44,000	No	Full	Not Applicable

Carlton

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Baars (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920221	40	\$44,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
Bennett (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920228	40	\$52,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
Casey (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920228	40	\$58,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
Eder (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920220	40	\$54,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
French (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920228	40	\$52,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
Graf (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920211	80	\$85,000	No	Full	Not Applicable

Klimek (Wrenshall WMA)	04716207	20	\$42,000	No	Full	Not currently. It will be after it becomes a WMA, however no fishing opportunity is available.
Richards (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920221	37	\$54,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
Senese (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920220	20	\$25,000	No	Full	Not Applicable
T. Olson (new Cross Lake WMA)	04920229	40	\$53,000	No	Full	Not Applicable

Kanabec

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Linder (new Peace Ford WMA)	04223235	806	\$1,200,000	No	Full	Not Applicable

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

