

Main Request for Funding Form

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

Program or Project Title: Grasslands for the Future

Funds Requested: \$20,000,000

Manager's Name: Kevin Lines

Title: Conservation Easement Section Manager

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County Locations:

Ecological Planning Regions:

- Prairie

Activity Type:

- Protect in Easement

Priority Resources Addressed by Activity:

- Prairie
- Habitat

Abstract

The RIM Reserve Grassland Reserve Easement Initiative (RIM-GRE) will protect and restore 4,500 acres of critical expiring Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and other grassland wildlife habitat. Through partner coordination, this proposal contributes to implementation of the Prairie Conservation.

Activity Detail

Design and Scope of Work

A Conservation Legacy in Jeopardy— Native grasslands are the most threatened ecosystem in Minnesota. The LSOHC-defined Prairie Section has suffered the greatest habitat loss of any of the five sections examined by the Council. Furthermore, only one-third of the remaining habitat in the Prairie Section is permanently protected. To compound the problem, in the next five years nearly 823,000 acres (~60%) of Minnesota's conservation lands enrolled in the federal CRP program will expire. Unless action is taken to continue

protection of these lands by using a combination of conservation programs, they will likely be converted back in to cropland, eliminating the multitude of wildlife benefits and associated water quality benefits of reducing sedimentation and nutrient loading in our waters.

This proposal seeks funding to ensure the permanent protection of 4,500 acres of the most critically vulnerable expiring CRP acres in permanent RIM-GRE conservation easements as well as conservation easements held by accredited non-profit organizations. These acres represent the top one percent of expiring CRP acres. Through partner coordination and focus, this proposal will address the goals and objectives identified in the Prairie Conservation Plan and the five-year implementation guide, which identifies opportunities within the Core, Corridors and Agricultural Matrix areas where bold action can lead to significant grassland conservation on a landscape scale.

The BWSR will develop the new RIM-GRE option which will enroll lands into a permanent grassland easement that may allow managed haying and grazing according to the state approved management plan. The BWSR also will work with its non-profit partners to create options for privately held easements that will protect high functioning grasslands in the Agricultural Matrix Area, as delineated in the Prairie Conservation Plan. In addition, we will develop criteria to rank and score these potential easements on their value as wildlife habitat and grasslands in the targeted priority areas of the Prairie Conservation. The proposal will use the Working Lands Initiative concept to develop local, team-driven partnerships that will provide outreach and local delivery of conservation opportunities to private landowners in the targeted priorities identified in the Prairie Conservation. The need for this private lands approach in the Prairie Section is essential due to the fact that ownership patterns in this landscape include many private landowners with smaller parcels that require custom-tailored conservation solutions. These solutions often involve crafting easements that assure conservation of the grasslands while also working with the landowner to make the management of the grasslands profitable and therefore, sustainable.

RIM-GRE delivery will be supported by Minnesota's Farm Bill Assistance Partnership which includes BWSR, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Minnesota DNR, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, Pheasants Forever (PF) and numerous local partners. Additionally, the RIM program will be will delivered through SWCDs and administered by BWSR.

RIM GRE will be leveraging federal USDA programs and dollars wherever possible, made available through the next Federal Farm Bill. Specifically, we will target expiring CRP acres and contracts with re-enrollment into CRP, CCRP and the RIM-WRP Partnership. We will be overlaying permanent RIM-GRE easements on critically vulnerable expiring CRP contracts.

Significant funding is needed to protect native prairies, grasslands, wetlands and habitat for wildlife such as waterfowl, pheasants, and other grassland-dependent species. This proposal seeks to galvanize the expertise and talents of the public and private sector toward this conservation crisis and focus efforts on the most critically threatened lands. This proposal will leverage millions of dollars of federal funds that are being redirected to stem the tide of grassland conversion. This proposal also seeks to work with the local grassland producers to accomplish community-based goals for a diverse agricultural economy.

This is an opportunity to either create Minnesota success stories or stand by and watch as grassland habitats continue to be lost. ***The choice is ours and the time is now.***

Planning

MN State-wide Conservation Plan Priorities

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H2 Protect critical shoreland of streams and lakes
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation
- H4 Restore and protect shallow lakes
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds
- H7 Keep water on the landscape

Plans Addressed

- A Vision for Wildlife and Its Use -- Goals and Outcomes 2006-2012
- Grassland Bird Conservation Area
- Grassland Conservation Plan for Prairie Grouse
- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Long Range Plan for the Ring-Necked Pheasant in MN
- Long Range Plan for the Wild Turkey
- Managing Minnesota's Shallow Lakes for Waterfowl and Wildlife
- Minnesota DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- National Audubon Society Top 20 Common Birds in Decline
- North American Waterbird Conservation Plan
- North American Waterfowl Management Plan
- Northern Tallgrass Prairie Ecoregion: A River and Stream Conservation Portfolio
- Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) Final Environmental Impact Statement
- Outdoor Heritage Fund: A 25 Year Framework
- Partners in Flight Conservation Plans for States and Physiographic Regions
- Partners in Flight Grassland Bird Plan
- Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare
- U.S. Prairie Pothole Joint Venture Plan

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
- 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
- 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 Prairie Section Priorities

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes
- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna
- Convert agricultural land to wetland/upland to protect, enhance, or restore existing habitat complexes, such as WMAs
- Protect expiring CRP lands
- Protect, enhance, and restore migratory habitat for waterfowl and related species, so as to increase migratory and breeding success

Relationship to Other Constitutional Funds

- Environmental and Natural Resource Trust Fund
- Clean Water Fund

The new RIM-GRE initiative will integrate with many other LSOHC requests and previously funded Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) projects such as The RIM-WRP Partnership and Buffers for Wildlife, which is, funded 50% with Clean Water Funds. In addition, the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership (BAP) with BWSR, NRCS, DNR PF and the SWCDs provides for SWCDs to have Farm Bill Technicians to promote the conservation provisions of the Federal Farm Bill and other conservation program opportunities with private landowners. The Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) provided \$1,000,000 via an LCCMR recommendation in FY10-11, and another \$625,000 in FY12-13. This funding includes partial funding for the Farm Bill Assistance Partnership efforts.

Accelerates or Supplements Current Efforts

The RIM-GRE initiative will accelerate the permanent protection of 4,500 critical expiring CRP acres in the prairie landscape of Minnesota. This request is part of BWSR's CRP Legacy Strategy targeting 80,000 acres of the most vulnerable expiring acres over the next five years. Because this is a five-year effort, additional funds will be needed for implementation beyond FY14 in order to accomplish this important goal. In addition to OHF, BWSR is seeking funds through ENRTF, CWF and Capital Investment Bonding. The RIM Reserve program is not funded by general revenue and is not part of BWSR's agency base budget. All aspects of the program are funded by project funds the agency requests and receives to accomplish program objectives.

Sustainability and Maintenance

The BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified. Any lands protected by the Minnesota Land Trust will be sustained through the best standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited land trust with a very successful stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in case of a true violation.

Will the eased land be open for public use? - No

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

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Conduct sign-ups	Summer-Fall 2013
Make funding decisions	2013-2014
Acquire easements	2014-2016

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region

- Core areas protected with highly biologically diverse wetlands and plant communities, including native prairie, Big Woods, and oak savanna
- Expiring CRP lands are permanently protected
- Increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects
- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need
- Protected, restored, and enhanced shallow lakes and wetlands
- Remnant native prairies and wetlands are permanently protected and are part of large complexes of restored prairie, grasslands, and large and small wetlands
- Water is kept on the land

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$20,000,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$767,000	\$0	-	\$767,000
Contracts	\$280,000	\$0	-	\$280,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$18,000,000	\$0	-	\$18,000,000
Easement Stewardship	\$300,000	\$0	-	\$300,000
Travel (in-state)	\$45,000	\$0	-	\$45,000
Professional Services	\$517,000	\$0	-	\$517,000
Direct Support Services	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$31,000	\$0	-	\$31,000
Supplies/Materials	\$60,000	\$0	-	\$60,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Total	\$20,000,000	\$0	-	\$20,000,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Conservation and legal staff	0.80	3.00	\$65,000	\$0	-	\$65,000
Program Management	0.25	3.00	\$62,000	\$0	-	\$62,000
Project Manager	0.50	3.00	\$100,000	\$0	-	\$100,000
Easement/Database/GIS	3.00	3.00	\$540,000	\$0	-	\$540,000
Total	4.55	12.00	\$767,000	\$0	-	\$767,000

Capital Equipment

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

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	MN Land Trust	\$65,000	\$0 -		\$65,000
Contracts	MN Land Trust	\$80,000	\$0 -		\$80,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
Easement Acquisition	MN Land Trust	\$2,700,000	\$0 -		\$2,700,000
Easement Stewardship	MN Land Trust	\$60,000	\$0 -		\$60,000
Travel (in-state)	MN Land Trust	\$10,000	\$0 -		\$10,000
Professional Services	MN Land Trust	\$85,000	\$0 -		\$85,000
Direct Support Services	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
Capital Equipment	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
Supplies/Materials	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
DNR IDP	MN Land Trust	\$0	\$0 -		\$0
Total	-	\$3,000,000	\$0	-	\$3,000,000

Budget Name	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Cash Leverage	Cash Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	BWSR	\$702,000	\$0	-	\$702,000
Contracts	BWSR	\$200,000	\$0	-	\$200,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	BWSR	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	BWSR	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Easement Acquisition	BWSR	\$15,300,000	\$0	-	\$15,300,000
Easement Stewardship	BWSR	\$240,000	\$0	-	\$240,000
Travel (in-state)	BWSR	\$35,000	\$0	-	\$35,000
Professional Services	BWSR	\$432,000	\$0	-	\$432,000
Direct Support Services	BWSR	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	BWSR	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Capital Equipment	BWSR	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	BWSR	\$31,000	\$0	-	\$31,000
Supplies/Materials	BWSR	\$60,000	\$0	-	\$60,000
DNR IDP	BWSR	\$0	\$0	-	\$0
Total	-	\$17,000,000	\$0	-	\$17,000,000

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	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	4,500	0	0	4,500
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	4,500	0	0	4,500

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	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$20,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$20,000,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$20,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$20,000,000

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	0	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	4,500	0	4,500
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	4,500	0	4,500

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	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000,000	\$0	\$20,000,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$20,000,000	\$0	\$20,000,000

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

No parcels with an activity type protect.

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.