

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2015 Accomplishment Plan



Date: October 16, 2014

Program or Project Title: Protecting and Restoring Minnesota's Important Birds Areas

Funds Recommended: \$ 1,730,000

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Legislative Citation:

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: Not Listed

Regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie
- Wetlands

Abstract:

Protect and restore 590 acres of significant wildlife habitat through conservation easements and restoration projects on private lands within Important Bird Areas with an emphasis on those located in within priority areas identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Design and scope of work:

Audubon Minnesota and our partner, the Minnesota Land Trust, are requesting \$1,730,000 to obtain conservation easements on 450 acres and restore 140 acres of land within Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of Minnesota, with a special focus on IBAs located in areas which overlap with Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan in western Minnesota.

This program is unique for several reasons: 1) the emphasis on Important Bird Areas, which are essential to maintaining healthy and diverse bird populations in Minnesota; 2) a commitment to protecting and restoring working grasslands, remnant prairies and threatened wetlands within these IBAs; 3) the utilization of the cost-effective, reverse-bid model of evaluating and paying for conservation easements.

Audubon Minnesota and a wide variety of partners have identified 54 Important Bird Areas in Minnesota through a Technical

Committee, comprised of bird experts and conservationists from across the state. Important Bird Areas have been identified in over 170 countries to provide essential habitat for one or more breeding, wintering, and/or migrating bird species. It is a proactive, voluntary, science-based program and works to identify, monitor and conserve the most essential habitats for birds.

In short, these IBAs are the most important areas in which to preserve Minnesota's game and non-game avian legacy. Audubon Minnesota and the Minnesota Land Trust see tremendous opportunity for directing conservation resources to protecting habitats within these 54 IBAs. Using additional plans and analyses, like the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, can help further refine the geographic scope that will yield the highest conservation return on investment.

The Minnesota Land Trust has already protected nearly 9,000 acres through 240 conservation easements in Important Bird Areas throughout Minnesota, demonstrating a long-standing commitment to protecting bird habitats. Important Bird Areas not only provide a critical tool for targeting and maximizing conservation resources but they also provide an additional compelling motive to private landowners considering putting their lands into a conservation easement.

While protecting and restoring habitats within all of the state's IBAs is the ultimate goal of this partnership, we believe some of the greatest needs and opportunities exists in the within agricultural matrix of western Minnesota due to the loss of grassland and wetland habitats in recent years.

For example, five priority IBAs fall within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region, which is a transition between the prairie to the south and west and the forest to the east. This landscape is dominated by prairie, working grasslands and open woodlands. Today, approximately 64% of the landscape has been converted to row crops. The Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region of Minnesota supports over 289 birds species (143 regular breeding species, 22 permanent residents, and over 114 migrants or winter residents) including geese, cranes, Widgeon, Redhead, Ruddy Duck and other ducks, Upland Sandpiper, Franklin's Gull, and Sharp-tailed Grouse and numerous other grassland and wetland species. Gray wolves, moose, white-tailed deer are among the other wildlife found in the region.

Audubon conducted a preliminary GIS analysis which reveals that within these IBAs, there are a total of 339,616 acres of private lands. Of those, 105,000 acres (31%) could be considered wildlife habitat worthy of conservation (eg: wetlands, grasslands or woodlands). More specifically, private lands that are both within an Important Bird Area and a Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan "Core Area" total 195,480 acres, of which 51,576 (26%) could be considered of conservation value. It is this 26% of high priority private lands which this project would target for protection and restoration in the Aspen Parklands. A similar analysis will be conducted for other IBAs further south.

Specific tracts for easements and restoration will be identified through a targeted sign up process as part of this program's innovative scoring system. This program will protect and restore essential cover types within the prairie matrix, including working grasslands, prairie and woodlands. Using lessons learned from the pilot "Grasslands for the Future" initiative, this program will work with producers with a proven track-record of conservation grazing that benefits wildlife. In addition, it will base its evaluation and payment strategies on the successful Avon Hills project and the Wetlands Protection Initiative, which both have used a science-based ranking system and reverse-bid model to leverage landowner's matching contributions and thus extend the State's funding further. We will work with other partners who have engaged in conservation in these regions as partners in Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan and we will attempt to coordinate with RIM, Prairie Bank and other programs focused on that region.

Using this model, Audubon Minnesota and the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) will protect 450 acres through perpetual conservation easements. Specifically, MLT will:

- Identify, contact and negotiate with interested landowners
- Draft and complete perpetual easements
- Document property conditions and develop habitat management plans
- Dedicate funds for the perpetual monitoring and enforcement of those easements

Audubon Minnesota will play two important roles within this project:

- Assist with program management and habitat identification and prioritization
- Assist with landowner identification and outreach
- Manage the restoration of 140 acres of lands which are protected through a conservation easement or in public ownership.

As described above, this program intends to leverage the contributions of landowners to the greatest extent possible. In addition, those projects which have a working grasslands component, may be eligible for matching federal funds under new Farm Bill programs. The USDA is still developing precise rules for these Farm Bill programs, but it is certain that there will be federal funds available in Minnesota dedicated to working grassland easements. Protecting working grasslands fills an important gap in the current efforts to protect prairies and grasslands in Minnesota.

Crops:

Will there be planting of corn or any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program - **No**

How does the request address MN habitats that have: historical value to fish and wildlife, wildlife species of greatest conservation need, MN County Biological Survey data, and/or rare, threatened and endangered species inventories:

Important Bird Areas have been designated by a technical committee which assessed migration patterns, land cover, species diversity and a variety of other factors which indicate what areas of the state are most essential to our bird populations. This funding request directly addresses the priorities set out in these international IBA designations. Moreover, it also addresses the goals outlined in Minnesota's Prairie Conservation Plan and numerous other state and federal plans. Thus the habitats that will be protected and restored, by definition, will be those that have historic value to a great diversity of birds. Specifically, the proposal addresses two habitat types that are disappearing rapidly: grasslands and wetlands. While important for birds, these habitats are also essential for other wildlife.

Audubon Minnesota and the Minnesota Land Trust will work with private landowners to negotiate perpetual conservation easements and restoration projects that will prevent negative impacts to the IBAs, including restricting row crop agriculture, commercial or industrial development, and other threats to habitat. Targeted outreach to private landowners under this funding will include properties that include sensitive terrestrial habitats that support wildlife species of greatest conservation need and significant lands mapped by the MN County Biological Survey.

What is the nature of urgency and why it is necessary to spend public money for this work as soon as possible:

High commodity prices, combined with the volatility of federal conservation programs like CRP, are driving the loss of grasslands and wetlands essential to bird populations in Minnesota and throughout the entire Mississippi Flyway. Additionally, there is a narrow window of time to act with an aging, yet engaged, landowner population.

Describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

IBAs have been designated through a rigorous scientific process. We conducted an analysis looking at critical IBAs within the context of plans such as the Minnesota Prairie Plan and the Minnesota Bird Conservation Blueprint. This allows us to focus on the highest priority IBAs and their associated habitats.

Which sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are applicable to this project:

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

Which other plans are addressed in this proposal:

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal:

Prairie:

- Protect, enhance, or restore existing wetland/upland complexes, or convert agricultural lands to new wetland/upland habitat complexes

Relationship to other funds:

- Landowner donation and possible federal programs

How does this proposal accelerate or supplement your current efforts in this area:

This is new pilot initiative compliments Audubon Minnesota and the Minnesota Land Trust's longstanding commitment to bird and habitat conservation. It supplements our work and that of our partners including work within the context of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. This accelerates Audubon's national, regional and state specific conservation goals.

Describe the source and amount of non-OHF money spent for this work in the past:

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
NONE		NONE

How will you sustain and/or maintain this work after the Outdoor Heritage Funds are expended:

The land permanently protected through easements held by the Minnesota Land Trust will be sustained through the best standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. MLT is a nationally-accredited land trust with a 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. MLT will work with the private landowners who complete an easement to develop land management plans to ensure that the quality of the protected habitat will remain into the future. Funding for these activities is included in the project budget. Audubon Minnesota will work with our partners to maintain restored prairie lands through regular disturbance be it prescribed burns or grazing. Audubon Minnesota will also monitor restored wetlands and with our partners and through agreements and manage them as necessary. Restorations on private lands with easements will include terms that will not allow restored lands to be converted back to other uses. On public lands, the land management unit would be responsible for maintaining the restoration outcome.

Explain the things you will do in the future to maintain project outcomes:

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2015 and beyond	MLT: Outdoor Heritage and MLT funds	Secure easement and begin to monitor, manage, and enforce the easement through MLTs stewardship		
2015 and beyond	Audubon: Outdoor Heritage Fund	Develop and implement restoration plans (2015 - 2020), monitor, and manage accordingly (2015 - 2025)		

Activity Details:

If funded, this proposal will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056 - **Yes**

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

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

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program - **Yes**

Is the activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 - **Yes**
(Private Land, Public lands as appropriate)

Accomplishment Timeline:

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Protect 450 acres through conservation easements	June 2018
Restore 140 acres	June 2020

Date of Final Report Submission: 8/28/2020

Federal Funding:

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program - **Yes**

Are the funds confirmed - **No**

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds - **unk**

Outcomes:

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species *We will be able to account for the number of acres of private lands placed into easements as well as account for the number of acres of uplands and wetlands restored.*

Budget Spreadsheet

Budget reallocations up to 10% do not require an amendment to the Accomplishment Plan

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount

We have reduced the expected number of acres that will be put into easements and restored by an amount proportional to the reduced appropriation recommendation. Similarly we have reduced our budget across the board, by the same proportion.

Total Amount of Request: \$ 1730000

Budget and Cash Leverage

BudgetName	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$249,100	\$36,900	MLT Funds, Audubon Funds, Audubon Funds, Audubon Funds	\$286,000
Contracts	\$208,500	\$0		\$208,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$1,022,000	\$222,400	Donation and/or Federal Funds	\$1,244,400
Easement Stewardship	\$100,000	\$0		\$100,000
Travel	\$13,600	\$0		\$13,600
Professional Services	\$136,800	\$0		\$136,800
Direct Support Services	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$0	\$0		\$0
Supplies/Materials	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$1,730,000	\$259,300		\$1,989,300

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Project and Legal Staff	0.33	3.00	\$90,000	\$9,000	MLT Funds	\$99,000
Audubon Land Conserv. Specialist	0.40	5.00	\$124,700	\$20,900	Audubon Funds	\$145,600
Audubon Director of Bird Conservation	0.07	5.00	\$29,500	\$7,000	Audubon Funds	\$36,500
Audubon Grant Specialist	0.02	5.00	\$4,900	\$0	Audubon Funds	\$4,900
Total	0.82	18.00	\$249,100	\$36,900		\$286,000

Amount of Request: \$1,730,000

Amount of Leverage: \$259,300

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 14.99%

Output Tables

Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	85	55	0	0	140
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	180	270	0	0	450
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	265	325	0	0	590

Table 1b. How many of these Prairie acres are Native Prairie?

Type	Native Prairie
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Easement	0
Enhance	0
Total	0

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$244,800	\$163,200	\$0	\$0	\$408,000
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	\$528,800	\$793,200	\$0	\$0	\$1,322,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$773,600	\$956,400	\$0	\$0	\$1,730,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	ForestPrairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	140	0	140
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	450	0	450
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	590	0	590

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	ForestPrairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$408,000	\$0	\$408,000
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	\$1,322,000	\$0	\$1,322,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$1,730,000	\$0	\$1,730,000

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$2880	\$2967	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$2938	\$2938	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Table 6. Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2914	\$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	\$0	\$0	\$2938	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

Parcel List

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final 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

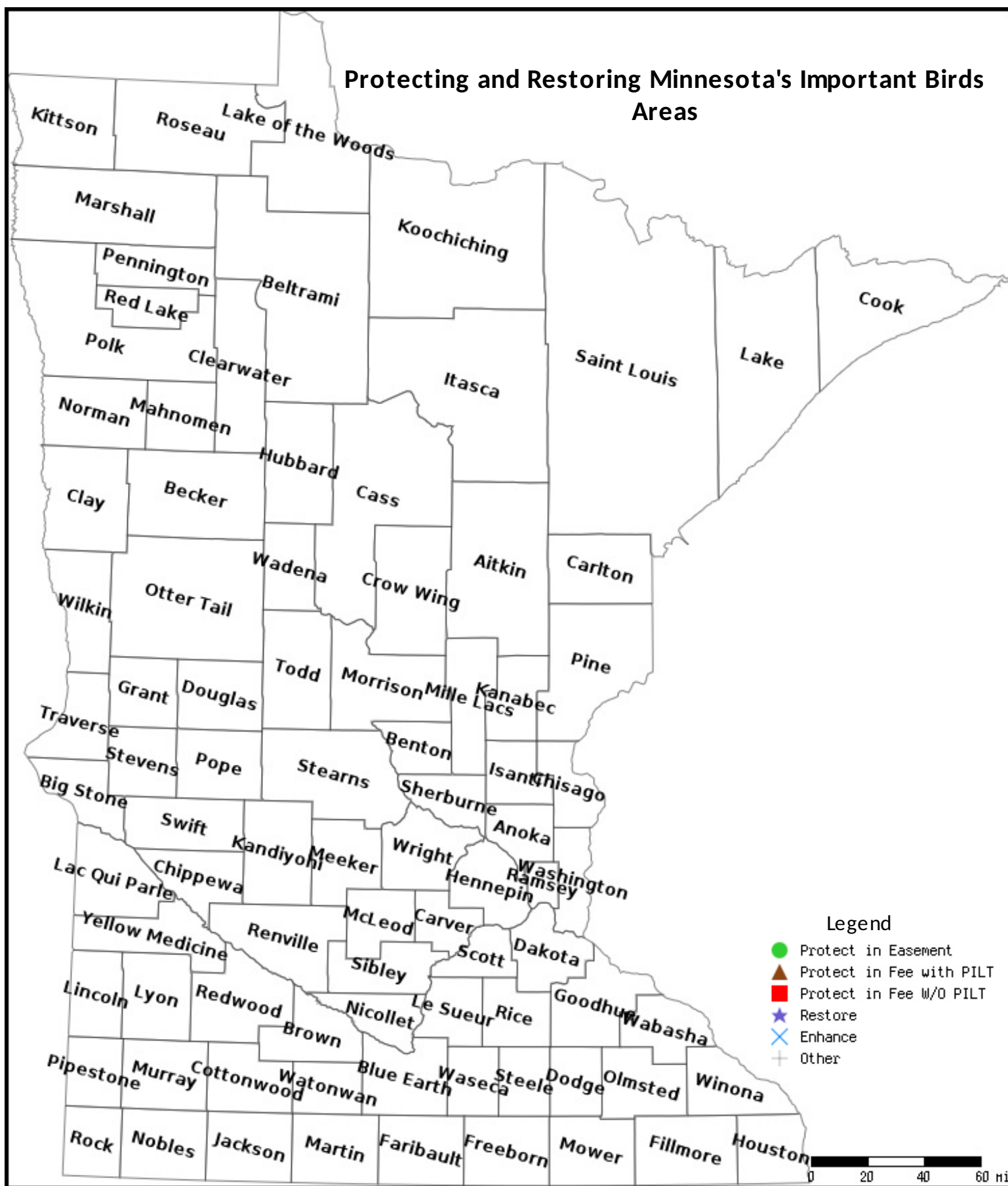
No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Parcel Map

Protecting and Restoring Minnesota's Important Birds Areas



Data Generated From Parcel List

Important Bird Area (IBA) Habitat Protection Program
CONSERVATION EASEMENT BID WORKSHEET

		Example Site #1		Example Site #2		Example Site #3	
Weighting Factor	Size of Property		Score		Score		Score
10	Acres to be protected by an easement, not including any house sites.	120	1200	250	2500	300	3000
Weighting Factor	Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement		Score		Score		Score
50	Acres of Native Plant Communities identified and mapped by the MDCS or key habitats identified and mapped by the DNR	50	2500	0	0	20	1000
100	Acres of Outstanding Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance	50	5000	0	0	0	0
75	Acres of High Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance	0	0	0	0	0	0
50	Acres of Moderate Quality DNR Sites of Biodiversity Significance	0	0	0	0	20	1000
2	Feet of Shoreline on rivers or lakes	1500	3000	0	0	1000	2000
1	Feet of shoreline along perennial streams (not intermittent)	0	0	2200	2200	0	0
10	Acres of natural lands (e.g. grassland, woodland, forest or wetland) not currently used or planned for use for agriculture, pasturing, or horticulture	120	1200	250	2500	200	2000
2	Acres of natural lands (e.g. grassland, woodland, forest or wetland) to be allowed for use as pasturing		0	0	0	100	200
5	Acres of native or restored prairie habitat	25	125	50	250	50	250
	SUBTOTAL:		11825		4950		6450
Weighting Factor	Location of Property to be Protected		Score		Score		Score
2	Feet of protected property boundary which is adjacent to either public land or other permanently protected land	0	0	1000	2000	0	0
2	Feet of protected property boundary which is adjacent to a designated wild & scenic river or scenic byway	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	Acres which are inside the priority complexes or corridors identified by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan	50	250	0	0	100	500
5	Acres which are inside a priority natural area or future park or trail connection identified in the county or local comprehensive plan or county water plan	0	0	50	250	0	0
	SUBTOTAL:		250		2250		500
Weighting Factor	Reserved Rights: Building Allotments, Divisions, and Public Access		Score		Score		Score
1000	Total building allotments (used or unused) that are assigned by zoning	3		6		7	
	Number of building allotments already used or to be retained from above.	1		0		1	
250	Number of building allotments to be extinguished on the proposed easement	2	2000	6	6000	6	6000
	Number of acres which will be allowed for public access.	0	0	20	4000	0	0
	SUBTOTAL:		2000		10000		6000
	TOTAL HABITAT VALUE POINTS		15275		19700		15950
	Cost of Easement for Property to be Protected						
	\$ per acre to be paid for the easement on the Property to be Protected	\$600.00		\$1,000.00		\$1,500.00	
	Total acres to be protected by an easement	120		250		300	
	Total \$ to be awarded if bid is accepted	\$72,000		\$250,000		\$450,000	
	CONSERVATION VALUE RATING (Habitat Value Points / Cost per acre for the easement)	25.5		19.7		10.6	