

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Fiscal Year 2017 / ML 2016 Request for Funding

Date: May 29, 2015

Program or Project Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition - Phase VII

Funds Requested: \$7,000,000

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County Locations: Big Stone, Brown, Chippewa, Clay, Kandiyohi, Kittson, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Norman, Otter Tail, Pipestone, Pope, Renville, Rock, and Yellow Medicine.

Regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie

Abstract:

The Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service will cooperate to permanently protect native prairie and associated complexes of wetlands and native habitats in western Minnesota by purchasing 2,200 acres of fee title properties and/or habitat easements.

Design and scope of work:

The Council's 25-Year Framework identifies protecting Minnesota's remaining native prairies as a critical priority. Only a small portion of this once vast prairie still exists. The Minnesota Biological Survey (MBS) identifies approximately 249,000 acres of remaining native grasslands. Of these, about half are without permanent protection and at risk of conversion.

A 2015 University of Wisconsin study confirms that the danger of conversion is still very real. This paper showed a 215,000 acre increase in net cropland acres in Minnesota between 2008 and 2012. It estimated that as much as 20% of this increase came from lands that had never been cropped. It's vital that we protect and buffer the remaining native prairies before they are lost.

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established in 2000 to help meet this need. The Refuge's mission is to preserve, restore, and manage a portion of the remaining northern tallgrass prairie and associated habitats at widespread locations through the western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa historic range. The number of acres purchased, however, has been limited by shortfalls in acquisition funding since the establishment of this refuge. The current land acquisition budget cannot keep up with landowner interest in this program.

Funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund will allow The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), working in partnership, to significantly accelerate this progress. TNC and USFWS will cooperate on purchasing approximately 2,200 acres of native prairie and associated habitat in the 49 Minnesota counties within the Refuge boundary. Approximately 1,100 acres will be fee title acquisitions and 1,100 acres will be protected with permanent habitat easements.

The majority of the lands protected will consist of native prairie and associated native habitats including wetlands, streams, and lakes. Because of the nature of parcel ownership, some properties will likely include small areas of converted or degraded lands needing grassland or wetland restoration. Restoration of the lands acquired through this program will be completed where needed.

TNC and USFWS biologists and analysts use the following criteria to review potential acquisitions:

- 1) Is there native prairie on the tract? If not, is it adjacent to existing native grasslands?
- 2) Is the property in a core area or critical corridor identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan?
- 3) Is it adjacent to an existing complex of protected land?
- 4) Was it identified by MBS, TNC, and USFWS biologists as having concentrations of threatened and endangered species and communities?
- 5) Is it suitable for public recreation?

This program has been making significant progress towards our shared goal of protecting and buffering the remaining native prairie. The first property was acquired in March, 2013. Since then, progress has been rapid. 3,029 acres have been added to the Refuge. Of these, 1,821 acres are classified as native prairie. Additional habitat includes 311 acres of wetlands and more than 8 miles of stream and/or lakefront. The average cost has been \$1,820 per acre. Landowners have committed an additional 613 acres, with 491 acres of native prairie. Negotiations are ongoing with a long list of interested landowners. The Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan helps focus this work in areas with concentrations of habitat and existing protected lands.

With continuing support from the Outdoor Heritage Fund, this program will make real and lasting progress towards protecting Minnesota's native prairies and the plants and animals that depend on those lands.

Crops:

Will there be planting of corn or any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program - **Yes**

Explain

No food plots will be established on OHF acquired properties. Short-term use of agricultural crops is an accepted Best Practice for prairie restorations. Occasional use of corn or soybeans could be used for restoration in order to control weed seedbeds prior to prairie plantings. We would not expect agricultural crop use to exceed 3 years on any given OHF acquired property. If needed, GMO treated seeds will be used. No neonicotinoid-treated seeds will be planted.

Are any of the crop types planted GMO treated - **Yes**

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:

Minnesota's remaining native prairies, and the surrounding complexes of wetlands, streams, and lakes, are vital to the wildlife and other species that depend on these lands and waters. This program uses Minnesota Biological Survey data, the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, and research by TNC and/or USFWS biologists to target important places for protecting these resources.

Properties are identified and prioritized using Minnesota Biological Survey information, including: 1) Native prairie sites, 2) Rare, threatened and endangered species locations, and 3) Areas of Biodiversity Significance. The Prairie Conservation Plan identifies where we can build on existing concentrations of prairie habitat and protected lands. Additional survey work is done by TNC and/or USFWS biologists.

Using this information, this program focuses on critical areas. Of the 3,029 acres protected to date, over 60% is identified as native prairie. Rare species found on these properties include Upland Sandpiper, Regal Fritillary, and Least Moonwort. Over 50% of the acquired land has been surveyed by the Biological Survey and identified as having Outstanding, High, or Moderate Biodiversity Significance.

The lands conserved provide the diverse habitats needed by a wide range of wildlife, from game species to monarch butterflies and other insect pollinators.

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

Approximately 249,000 acres of Minnesota's native prairie remain and, of these, only about half are permanently protected. These lands continue to be converted to other uses like row-crop production, gravel mining, and development. This funding will allow us to protect more of these lands before they are lost.

Describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

This program's goals are guided by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan and the NTP Habitat Preservation Area plan. Individual properties are reviewed by TNC and USFWS biologists using the parcel selection criteria described above, including: native prairie, location in prairie complexes, nearby protected lands, and MBS-identified rare species and 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
- Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) Final Environmental Impact Statement

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal:

Prairie:

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

Relationship to other funds:

- Not Listed

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

This program significantly accelerates conservation work in Minnesota’s prairie region. Since the establishment of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Refuge in 2000, USFWS funding from Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds has averaged \$500,000 annually. In some years, no acquisition funding has been available. In 15 years, the USFWS has been able to purchase fee title and easement interests in approximately 5,300 acres. Outdoor Heritage funding for previous phases of this Land Acquisition program has allowed the permanent protection of 3,029 additional acres with signed commitments for 613 more. This is an increase of almost 70%. If approved, this phase will allow the protection of 2,200 more acres.

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

Appropriation Year	Source	Amount
ML 2010	TNC	37700
ML 2010	USFWS	308000
ML 2011	TNC	17550
ML 2011	USFWS	58000
ML 2012	TNC	43600
ML 2012	USFWS	77600
ML 2014	TNC	14100
ML 2014	USFWS	24300

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

Outdoor Heritage Funds will be used to purchase the land in fee title or to purchase perpetual habitat easements. The land and easements purchased will be transferred to the USFWS to become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie NWR. Long term costs for restoration, management, and wildlife, habitat, and easement monitoring will be funded through annual USFWS operations funding.

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

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Annually	USFWS - Annual Service Operating Funds	Monitoring and management by USFWS managers, biologists, field and realty staffs to ensure the long-term health of these habitats. Activities may include burning, mechanical, biological, and sometimes chemical treatments.		

Activity Details:

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

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

Local government approval will not be sought on each individual tract of land. Acquisition goals have gone through a public review process which occurred during the development of the final Environmental Impact Statement by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as required by the National Environmental Policy Act during refuge establishment.

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

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing - **No**

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion - **Yes**

Lands acquired by fee will be open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season according to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, United States Code, title 16, section 668dd, et seq.

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
Identify priority fee and permanent conservation easements acquisitions	December 31, 2017
Purchase agreements/Options for first 550 acres of fee and 550 acres of easement acquisition	December 31, 2017
Purchase agreements/Options for remaining 550 acres of fee and 550 acres of easement acquisition	June 30, 2019
Acquisitions completed	June 30, 2020
Grassland/wetland restoration and enhancement	June 30, 2021

Federal Funding:

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

Are the funds confirmed - **Yes**

Documentation

What are the types of funds?

Cash Match - \$400000

In-Kind Match - \$250000

Outcomes:

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands. This program's top priority is protecting native prairie. The majority of lands acquired will be native prairie and associated native habitats such as wetlands. The parcel selection criteria described above also favor properties located within prairie/grassland/wetland complexes identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan and near existing protected land. The goal is to sustainably protect and buffer native prairies and associated habitats within a context of protected grasslands, wetlands, and other habitats. Results will be reported for the number of acres of native prairie, wetlands, and other native habitats protected and how these properties are connected to other protected lands.

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$7,000,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

Budget Name	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$387,000	\$250,000	USFWS	\$637,000
Contracts	\$264,000	\$0		\$264,000

Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$3,245,000	\$250,000	USFWS	\$3,495,000
Easement Acquisition	\$2,579,000	\$150,000	USFWS	\$2,729,000
Easement Stewardship	\$0	\$0		\$0
Travel	\$11,000	\$0		\$11,000
Professional Services	\$315,000	\$0		\$315,000
Direct Support Services	\$118,000	\$118,000	TNC	\$236,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Supplies/Materials	\$66,000	\$0		\$66,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$7,000,000	\$768,000	-	\$7,768,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Project Manager	0.25	3.00	\$60,000	\$0		\$60,000
Protection Staff	1.20	3.00	\$288,000	\$0		\$288,000
Grants Administration	0.17	3.00	\$38,000	\$0		\$38,000
Science/Stewardship Staff	0.01	3.00	\$1,000	\$0		\$1,000
USFWS In-Kind/Volunteer	0.00	0.00	\$0	\$250,000	USFWS	\$250,000
Total	1.63	12.00	\$387,000	\$250,000	-	\$637,000

Amount of Request: \$7,000,000

Amount of Leverage: \$768,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 10.97%

Output Tables

Table 1a. 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	1,100	0	0	1,100
Protect in Easement	0	1,100	0	0	1,100
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	2,200	0	0	2,200

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	365
Protect in Easement	735
Enhance	0
Total	1,100

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	\$3,900,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,900,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$3,100,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,100,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$7,000,000	\$0	\$0	\$7,000,000

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	1,100	0	1,100
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	1,100	0	1,100
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	2,200	0	2,200

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	\$3,900,000	\$0	\$3,900,000
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,100,000	\$0	\$3,100,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$7,000,000	\$0	\$7,000,000

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Protect in Fee W/O State PILT Liability	\$0	\$3,545	\$0	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$2,818	\$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	\$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	\$3,545	\$0
Protect in Easement	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,818	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

Parcel List

Section 1 - Restore / Enhance Parcel List

No parcels with an activity type restore or enhance.

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Big Stone

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Big Stone #1	12246235	59	\$64,900	No	No	No
Big Stone #2	12145206	40	\$30,500	No	No	No
Big Stone #5	12246235	211	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Brown

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Brown #1	10835229	110	\$311,500	No	No	No

Chippewa

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Chippewa #1	11942218	90	\$187,000	No	No	No

Clay

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Clay #4	13946202	80	\$120,000	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Clay #5	13846210	40	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Kandiyohi

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Kandiyohi #2	12236210	155	\$434,000	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Kandiyohi #3	12236209	190	\$306,400	No	No	No
Kandiyohi #4	12235207	76	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Kittson

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Kittson #1	16245214	200	\$100,100	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Kittson #3	16045235	224	\$149,500	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Lac qui Parle

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lac qui Parle #1	11742201	47	\$55,100	No	No	No
Lac qui Parle #2	11746213	245	\$486,400	No	No	No
Lac qui Parle #3	11943215	126	\$188,000	No	No	No
Lac qui Parle #4	11943226	149	\$178,000	No	No	No

Lac qui Parle #5	11943226	39	\$42,000	No	No	No
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Lincoln

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lincoln #1	10946209	162	\$343,100	No	No	No
Lincoln #3	11346223	71	\$167,500	No	No	No
Lincoln #4	11345210	40	\$84,000	No	No	No

Lyon

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lyon #2	10942222	32	\$73,000	No	No	No
Lyon #3	10943222	74	\$96,600	No	No	No
Lyon #4	10942211	145	\$370,600	No	No	No

Murray

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Murray #1	10839212	60	\$246,100	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Murray #3	10541225	187	\$849,400	No	No	No
Murray #5	10543209	69	\$155,300	No	No	No
Murray #6	10643232	80	\$227,600	No	No	No

Norman

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Norman #5	14445228	145	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Otter Tail

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Otter Tail #1	13244205	58	\$93,900	No	No	No

Pipestone

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Pipestone #1	10546223	174	\$360,500	No	No	No
Pipestone #3	10846201	84	\$155,200	No	No	No
Pipestone #4	10846211	80	\$157,300	No	No	No

Pope

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Pope #5	12337226	21	\$29,700	No	No	No
Pope #6	12640234	124	\$268,700	No	No	No
Pope #7	12438229	447	\$594,200	No	No	No
Pope #8	12439215	107	\$117,900	No	No	No
Pope #9	12337226	31	\$34,300	No	No	No

Renville

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Renville #1	11335207	257	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Rock

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Rock #1	10545218	77	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Rock #2	10345218	5	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Rock #4	10346213	11	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Rock #5	10345218	21	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Rock #6	10345208	11	\$0	No	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

Yellow Medicine

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Yellow Medicine #1	11546229	302	\$393,400	No	No	No
Yellow Medicine #2	11546231	87	\$189,900	No	No	No

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs





Kandiyohi

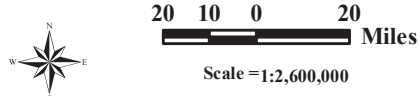
Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	# Bldgs?	Bldg Improve Desc	Value of Bldg	Disposition of Improvements
Kandiyohi #5	12236206	149	\$0		House, Barn, 2 other outbuildings, all in tear-down condition.	\$0	Remove

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition Phase 7 Project Locations

-  Phase 7 Project Locations
-  MN Prairie Conservation Plan - Core
-  MN Prairie Conservation Plan - Corridor
-  County



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