

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition - Phase VIII Laws of Minnesota 2017 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 11/20/2023

Project Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Land Acquisition - Phase VIII

Funds Recommended: \$2,683,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2017, Ch. 91, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(d)

Appropriation Language: \$2,683,000 in the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Nature Conservancy in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire land in fee or permanent conservation easements and restore lands within the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area in western Minnesota for addition to the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge. Subject to evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquisitions of lands that are eligible for the native prairie bank under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.96 or lands adjacent to protected native prairie. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan and must be consistent with the priorities in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Chris McGrath **Title:** Habitat Protection Manager

Organization: The Nature Conservancy **Address:** 1101 W. River Parkway Suite 200

City: Minneapolis, MN 55415 Email: c.mcgrath@tnc.org Office Number: 612-331-0752

Mobile Number: Fax Number: Website:

Location Information

County Location(s): Rock, Lincoln, Murray, Pope, Norman, Pipestone, Renville, Wilkin, Yellow Medicine, Big Stone, Chippewa, Clay, Kandiyohi, Lac qui Parle, Lyon and Brown.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

• Prairie

Narrative

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 approximately 770 acres of fee title properties and/or habitat easements, with a target of 385 acres of native prairie.

Design and Scope of Work

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge was established in 2000 to address the loss of America's grasslands and declining grassland wildlife. The Refuge was created to preserve and restore a portion of our disappearing tallgrass prairie. The Refuge encompasses all-or-part of 85 counties in western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa.

A 2015 University of Wisconsin study confirms conversion is still a very real risk. The recent drop in crop prices has slowed this, but the threat isn't gone. Protecting our remaining native prairies before they are lost is critical.

Progress towards the Refuge's goal has been limited by available funding. Since 2000, the Refuge has protected 4,970 acres in Minnesota with funding from non-OHF sources. This falls far short of landowner interest.

Funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund will allow The Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service, in partnership, to significantly accelerate this progress. TNC and USFWS will protect approximately 770 acres of native prairie and associated habitat in the 49 Minnesota counties within the Refuge boundary. This will include approximately 60 acres of fee acquisition and approximately 710 acres of permanent habitat easements.

This program targets high-quality native habitat in areas with existing concentrations of native prairie, wetlands, and protected lands. The majority of protected lands will be native prairie and associated habitats including wetlands, streams, and lakes.

Potential acquisitions are reviewed using the following criteria:

- 1) Is there native prairie on the tract? If not, is it adjacent to native prairie?
- 2) Is the property in a priority area identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (Prairie Plan)?
- 3) Is it adjacent to an existing complex of protected land?
- 4) Was it identified by Minnesota Biological Survey as having concentrations of threatened and endangered species and communities?
- 5) Is it suitable for public recreation?

Because of the nature of parcel ownership, some properties acquired through this program will likely include small areas of converted or degraded habitat needing restoration/enhancement. Restoration/enhancement will be completed where needed.

Previous OHF support has allowed us to make significant progress towards protecting and buffering our remaining native prairie. Since 2013, 3,800 acres have been added to the Refuge. 2,470 acres are classified as native prairie. Additional habitat includes 410 acres of wetlands and 11 miles of stream/lakefront. Landowners have committed an additional 294 acres, including 159 native prairie acres. Negotiations are ongoing with a long list of interested landowners.

The Nature Conservancy (the Conservancy) may be reimbursed for salary and fringe benefits based on a provisional fringe benefits rate consistent with federal regulations and negotiated annually with the Conservancy's cognizant agency. Within 180 days of the end of each Nature Conservancy fiscal year, the Conservancy will provide MN DNR with the actual fringe benefits rate for the prior year and reconcile any overpayment made by the State. This approach is consistent with ML 2016, Ch. 172, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 8 (Payment Conditions and Capital Equipment Expenditures).

How does the plan address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species?

The NTP NWR program takes the approach that specific species are best protected by conserving high-quality habitat in the most critical prairie areas.

This focus on habitat quality has produced results. Of the 3,800 acres protected, most are in areas identified by the Biological Survey as having significant biodiversity. These high-quality lands provide habitat for wide range of species, from game species to those that are endangered, threatened, or in greatest conservation need.

Biological Survey field work has identified populations of 21 rare species located wholly or partially on NTP NWR properties protected to date with OHF-funding. Protected species include:

Birds - greater prairie-chicken, marbled godwit, Wilson's phalarope, and yellow rail

Plants - blanket flower, few-flowered spikerush, hair-like beak rush, Hall's sedge, least moonwort, Missouri milk-vetch, prairie mimosa, slender milk-vetch, small white lady's slipper, sterile sedge, western white prairie clover

Reptiles - Blanding's turtle

Fish - Topeka shiner

Our most exciting success has been in protecting habitat for rare butterflies. Surveys of these properties identified historic/current populations of Dakota skipper, Pawnee skipper, Poweshiek skipper, and regal fritillary. Protected properties included 3% of the Dakota skipper occurrences in the state, 4% for Poweshiek skippers, 7% for regal fritillary, and 15% for Pawnee skippers.

Future acquisition work will be guided by this same focus on high-quality, diverse habitat, benefiting a wide range of species.

Describe how the plan uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:

This program's goals are guided by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan and the Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area plan. Individual properties are reviewed/approved by TNC and USFWS biologists using the parcel selection criteria described above, including: native prairie, location in prairie complexes, nearby protected lands, and Minnesota Biological Survey research.

Biological Survey data is a critical part of this review. Every proposed project is evaluated using Survey information on: 1) Native prairie sites, 2) Rare, threatened and endangered species locations, and 3) Areas of biodiversity significance.

The selection criteria also recognize the importance of building on existing complexes/corridors and reducing fragmentation. If a prairie is small or isolated, the survival of the animal and plant species that live there is at risk. The best approach is conserving larger areas, like the Prairie Plan's cores/complexes/corridors, that have the scale, species diversity, and connectivity to support functioning prairie systems over the long-term.

The numbers shared in the section above help show this program's success at identifying/protecting biologically significant lands located in areas with existing complexes of habitat and protected lands.

Which two sections of the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan are most applicable to this project?

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

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Northern Tallgrass Prairie Habitat Preservation Area (HPA) Final Environmental Impact Statement

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Forest / Prairie Transition

Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

Prairie

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

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

• Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ This program's work is primarily focused on the Prairie region. A small portion of the Refuge, however, falls in the Forest-Prairie Transition region. If work is done in this region, the following outcomes will be measured using GIS tools and reported: 1) Total acres protected, 2) Acres of native prairie, 3) Acres of wetland, 4) Feet of stream- and lake-front, 5) Acres within Prairie Plan priorities, 6) # of endangered/threatened/SGCN on protected properties.

Programs in prairie region:

• Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ The program's top priority is protecting native prairie. The majority of lands acquired will be native prairie and associated habitats including wetlands, streams and lakes. The parcel selection criteria also favor building onto existing complexes of prairie/grassland/wetland and protected land. The following outcomes will be measured and reported for acquisition in this region: 1) Total acres protected, 2) Acres of native prairie, 3) Acres of wetland, 4) Feet of stream- and lake-front, 5) Acres within Prairie Plan priorities, 6) # of endangered/threatened/SGCN on protected properties.

Does this program include leveraged funding?

-

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
ML 2010	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$308,000

ML 2010	TNC Private Contributions	\$37,700
ML 2011	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$144,000
ML 2011	TNC Private Contributions	\$23,200
ML 2012	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$139,400
ML 2012	TNC Private Contributions	\$43,600
ML 2014	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	\$67,000
ML 2014	TNC Private Contributions	\$22,100

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 National Wildlife Refuge. Long term costs for restoration, management, and wildlife/habitat/easement monitoring will be funded through annual USFWS operations funding.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Annually	USFWS - Annual	Monitoring and	-	-
	Service Operating	management by		
	Funds	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

Requirements

If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056? Yes

Will local government approval be sought prior to acquisition?

No

Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:

Local governments will be notified in writing of the intent to acquire and donate lands to the US Fish & Wildlife Service, including an offer to answer any questions.

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) free of any other permanent protection? Yes

Is the land you plan to acquire (easement) free of any other permanent protection?

Who will manage the easement?

The US Fish & Wildlife Service

Who will be the easement holder?

The US Fish & Wildlife Service

Project #: PA04

Will restoration and enhancement work follow best management practices including MS 84.973 Pollinator Habitat Program?

Yes

Is the restoration and enhancement activity on permanently protected land per 97A.056, Subd 13(f), tribal lands, and/or public waters per MS 103G.005, Subd. 15 or on lands to be acquired in this program? Yes

Where does the activity take place?

Refuge Lands

Land Use

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

Explain what will be planted:

No food plots will be established on OHF acquired properties. Short-term use of agricultural crops is an accepted Best Practice for preparing a site for prairie restoration. For example, short-term use of soybeans could be used for restorations in order to control weed seedbeds prior to prairie plantings. In some cases this necessitates the use of GMO treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control weeds present in the seedbank. Neonicotinoid treated seeds will not be used. We would not expect agricultural crop use to exceed 3 years on any given OHF acquired property.

Are any of the crop types planted GMO treated?

True

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

No

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

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.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

The US Fish & Wildlife Service

Will the eased land be open for public use?

No

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

No

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

Timeline

Identify priority fee and permanent conservation easement	December 2018
acquisitions	
Purchase agreements/Options for first 185 acres of fee and	December 2018
185 acres of easement acquisition	
Purchase agreements/Options for remaining 200 acres of	June 2020
fee and 200 acres of easement acquisition	
Grassland/wetland restoration and enhancement completed	June 2024

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2024

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7. Appropriation Availability

Money appropriated in this section may not be spent on activities unless they are directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation and are specified in the accomplishment plan approved by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council. Money appropriated in this section must not be spent on institutional overhead charges that are not directly related to and necessary for a specific appropriation. Unless otherwise provided, the amounts in this section are available until June 30, 2020. For acquiring real property, the amounts in this section are available until June 30, 2021, if a binding agreement with a landowner or purchase agreement is entered into by June 30, 2020, and closed no later than June 30, 2021. Appropriations for restoration or enhancement are available until June 30, 2022, or five years after acquisition, whichever is later, so that initial restoration or enhancement work can be completed. If a project receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds, the appropriation period may be extended to equal the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years, provided the federal funding was confirmed and included in the first draft accomplishment plan. Money appropriated for fee title acquisition of land may be used to restore, enhance, and provide for public use of the land acquired with the appropriation. Public use facilities must have no more than a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

Budget

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

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$214,000	\$125,000	USFWS	\$339,000
Contracts	\$101,500	-	-	\$101,500
Fee Acquisition w/	-	-	-	-
PILT				
Fee Acquisition w/o	\$230,000	\$100,000	USFWS	\$330,000
PILT				
Easement Acquisition	\$1,925,100	-	-	\$1,925,100
Easement	-	-	-	-
Stewardship				
Travel	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Professional Services	\$124,500	-	-	\$124,500
Direct Support	\$53,400	\$53,500	TNC	\$106,900
Services				
DNR Land Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Costs				
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other	\$4,000	-	-	\$4,000
Equipment/Tools				
Supplies/Materials	\$25,500	-	-	\$25,500
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,683,000	\$278,500	-	\$2,961,500

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years	Funding	Leverage	Leverage	Total
		Working	Request		Source	
Science/Steward	0.01	3.0	\$1,000	ı	•	\$1,000
Protection Staff	0.65	3.0	\$153,000	ı	•	\$153,000
Project Manager	0.15	3.0	\$38,000	ı	•	\$38,000
Grant	0.08	3.0	\$22,000	-	-	\$22,000
Administration						
USFWS In-Kind	0.0	0.0	-	\$125,000	USFWS	\$125,000
Staff Support						

Amount of Request: \$2,683,000 **Amount of Leverage:** \$278,500

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 10.38%

DSS + Personnel: \$267,400

As a % of the total request: 9.97%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

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

The Budget and Accomplishments were reduced roughly in proportion to the difference between the original request and recommendation. The recommendation was 43.4% of the request. The proposed accomplishments were reduced to 42.7% of the original. This small reduction is due to economies of scale in a larger program.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The Personnel line item includes USFWS In-Kind support. Fee Acquisition w/o Pilt includes leverage from an LWCF fee acquisition grant. See the Federal Funds tab for documentation. The leverage offered on the DSS line reflects one-half of the Conservancy's federally approved indirect rate. These funds are privately raised.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

These funds are all for restoration/enhancement work on properties acquired with appropriations for this program.

Travel

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?

-

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:

Nο

Direct Support Services

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?

DSS is based on The Nature Conservancy's Federally Negotiated rate as proposed and subsequently approved by the US Dept. of Interior. The portion requested from the grant represents 50% of this rate, with the remaining 50% contributed as leverage.

Federal Funds

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program?

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

Is Confirmation Document attached?

Yes

Cash: \$100,000In Kind: \$125,000

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
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	60	0	0	60
Protect in Easement	0	710	0	0	710
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	770	0	0	770

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

Туре	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	13
Protect in Easement	372
Enhance	0
Total	385

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$149,000	ı	ı	\$149,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	ı	ı	ı	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$270,400	-	-	\$270,400
Protect in Easement	-	\$2,263,600	-	-	\$2,263,600
Enhance	-	-	1	1	-
Total	-	\$2,683,000	-	-	\$2,683,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Туре	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
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	60	0	60
Protect in Easement	0	40	0	670	0	710
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	40	0	730	0	770

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Туре	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$7,500	-	\$141,500	-	\$149,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$13,500	-	\$256,900	-	\$270,400
Protect in Easement	-	\$113,200	-	\$2,150,400	-	\$2,263,600
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$134,200	-	\$2,548,800	-	\$2,683,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Туре	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
------	---------	---------	--------	---------

Project #: PA04

Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$4,506	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$3,188	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Туре	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	ı	-	ı
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	•	\$4,281	1
Protect in Easement	-	\$2,830	ı	\$3,209	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

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.

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing
					Protection
Clay #7	Clay	13745232	144	\$290,000	No
Clay #8	Clay	13946211	75	\$115,000	No
Clay #6	Clay	14245234	304	\$547,000	No
Clay #5	Clay	13846210	40	\$0	No
Kandiyohi #6	Kandiyohi	12236205	60	\$211,600	No
Norman #5	Norman	14445228	145	\$196,000	No
Pope #12	Pope	12339235	80	\$239,000	No
Pope #14	Pope	12640232	85	\$100,000	No
Pope #10	Pope	12339234	65	\$208,000	No
Renville #1	Renville	11335207	257	\$0	No
Rock #2	Rock	10345218	5	\$53,000	No
Rock #12	Rock	10344221	165	\$726,000	No
Rock #1	Rock	10445218	77	\$0	No
Rock #9	Rock	10446220	58	\$241,000	No
Rock #4	Rock	10346213	12	\$0	No

Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Kandiyohi #5	Kandiyohi	12236206	149	\$0	No	4	\$0

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Big Stone #6	Big Stone	12044205	138	\$332,000	No
Big Stone #7	Big Stone	12044211	69	\$0	No
Brown #1	Brown	10835229	110	\$107,000	No
Chippewa #1	Chippewa	11942218	78	\$146,000	No
Lac qui Parle #1	Lac qui Parle	11742201	47	\$54,000	No
Lac qui Parle #5	Lac qui Parle	11943226	39	\$0	No
Lac qui Parle #4	Lac qui Parle	11943226	149	\$0	No
Lac qui Parle #3	Lac qui Parle	11943215	126	\$0	No
Lac qui Parle #2	Lac qui Parle	11746213	219	\$432,000	No
Lincoln #5	Lincoln	10945216	75	\$0	No
Lyon #5	Lyon	11042206	50	\$173,000	No
Murray #6	Murray	10643232	80	\$229,000	No
Pipestone #7	Pipestone	10845206	19	\$60,800	No

Project #: PA04

Pipestone #1	Pipestone	10546223	174	\$0	No
Pipestone #3	Pipestone	10846201	84	\$155,000	No
Pipestone #10	Pipestone	10747214	103	\$234,200	No
Pipestone #4	Pipestone	10846211	76	\$150,000	No
Pipestone #9	Pipestone	10747213	0	\$11,170	No
Pipestone #8	Pipestone	10747212	96	\$235,000	No
Pipestone #6	Pipestone	10747211	93	\$233,800	No
Pipestone #5	Pipestone	10846232	80	\$128,800	No
Pope #15	Pope	12337213	109	\$120,000	No
Pope #8	Pope	12439215	103	\$113,000	No
Pope #11	Pope	12337226	18	\$23,000	No
Rock #7	Rock	10446207	90	\$251,000	No
Rock #14	Rock	10446219	114	\$308,475	No
Rock #11	Rock	10446205	163	\$339,000	No
Rock #13	Rock	10345205	97	\$325,900	No
Rock #8	Rock	10446207	42	\$104,000	No
Rock #10	Rock	10345205	111	\$180,000	No
Wilkin #1	Wilkin	13646204	27	\$61,000	No
Yellow Medicine #3	Yellow	11446203	110	\$135,900	No
	Medicine				
Yellow Medicine #2	Yellow	11546231	87	\$0	No
	Medicine	1			

Easement Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Clay #9	Clay	13946221	155	\$327,100	No	1	\$0



