

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Fiscal Year 2019 / ML 2018 Request for Funding



Date: May 31, 2017

Program or Project Title: Protect and Restore MN IBAs within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands

Funds Requested: \$4,065,000

Manager's Name: Kristin Hall

Organization: Audubon Minnesota

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County Locations: Not Listed

Regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Forest
- Prairie
- Habitat

Abstract:

Audubon Minnesota and Minnesota Land Trust are requesting funds to protect 1300 acres through conservation easement and restore/enhance 1500 acres of significant wildlife habitat on protected private and public lands. Our project and parcel prioritization criteria places an emphasis on Important Bird Areas and priority areas identified in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, prioritizing the 6 northwestern Minnesota counties associated with the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region.

Design and scope of work:

Audubon Minnesota and the Minnesota Land Trust are requesting \$4,065,000 to advance the second phase of our Important Bird Area Protection and Restoration Program in the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region of Minnesota. This program will continue to advance the Outdoor Heritage Funds legacy of habitat protection, restoration and enhancement for wildlife in Minnesota. With these funds we will: 1) obtain conservation easements on 1,300 acres of private lands, 2) restore 500 acres of habitat on public or private lands, and 3) enhance 1,000 additional acres of habitat within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region of Minnesota.

Our Program places an emphasis on Minnesota's Important Bird Areas as they are essential to maintaining healthy and diverse bird populations in the state. Our aim is to protect and restore/enhance working grasslands, remnant prairies and threatened wetlands within the Program area. Important Bird Areas not only provide a critical tool for targeting and maximizing conservation resources but they also provide an additional and compelling motive to private landowners considering putting their lands into a conservation easement. The Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (TAP) Region of Minnesota supports over 289 birds species (143 regular breeding species, 22 permanent residents, and over 114 migrants or winter residents) including geese, sandhill cranes, a variety of waterfowl, and numerous other grassland and wetland species. Gray wolves, moose, elk, and white-tailed deer are among the other wildlife found in the region.

While protecting existing high quality habitats within IBAs is the ultimate goal of this Program, we also recognize that some of the

greatest conservation opportunities exist within the agricultural matrix of western Minnesota due to the loss of grassland and wetland habitats in recent years. It is in these areas that our complete toolbox of protection through easements coupled with restoration and enhancement activities may deliver their greatest impact. The Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region, a transition area between the prairie and forest, was once dominated by wetlands, prairie grasslands and open woodlands. Today, approximately 64% of the landscape has been converted to row crops.

In phase 2 of this Program, we will expand our habitat focus to include the areas within the 6 northwestern counties that compose the TAP region and emphasize conservation management on working lands to improve water quality and provide better bird habitat. In these areas we will prioritize native plantings, promote participation in the MN Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program, and recommend bird-friendly conservation grazing and haying practices.

Audubon Minnesota will conduct programmatic outreach and engagement with private landowners, assist with habitat identification and prioritization, develop Habitat Management Plans for participating landowners and manage the restoration of 500 acres of lands. The Minnesota Land Trust will procure conservation easements from willing landowners through a competitive landowner-bid process that delivers a cost-effective means of securing the protection of high quality, ecologically-significant land. To date, MLT has protected nearly 9,000 acres through 240 conservation easements in Important Bird Areas throughout Minnesota, demonstrating a longstanding commitment to protecting habitat for birds.

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

Describe how your program will advance the indicators identified in the plans selected:

The MN Prairie Conservation Plan specifically outlines areas for conservation efforts, identified in the plan as Prairie Cores, Habitat Corridors, Strategic Habitat Complexes, and Habitat Matrix Corridors. The plan also outlines specific acreage goals within these focal areas for protection, restoration and enhancement. We have been an active partner in the the implementation of the MN Prairie Conservation Plan and we are working towards accomplishing the goals outlined within the plan for habitat protection on private lands through conservation easements. The MN Blueprint for Bird Conservation is focused on specific habitat types that benefit species identified as "in conservation need" within the region. Guidance from both of these plans has allowed us to pinpoint our efforts towards protecting and improving quality wildlife habitat on both public and private lands within the 6 counties Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region.

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

Forest / Prairie Transition:

- Protect, enhance, and restore wild rice wetlands, shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, aspen parklands, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for game and nongame wildlife

Describe how your program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife as indicated in the LSOHC priorities:

Audubon Minnesota and Minnesota Land Trust will focus their protection, restoration and enhancement work on key wetland, prairie and other habitats within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands area, guided by the Minnesota Prairie Plan, Duck Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan, and Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation. We collaborate with local, state and federal governmental and non-profit conservation partners to ensure our activities are complementary to those undertaken by others in the program area.

We work with willing, conservation-minded landowners in negotiating perpetual conservation easements and restoration projects targeted at IBAs and existing prairie habitat complexes. Targeted outreach to private landowners under this funding will prioritize properties that support species in greatest conservation need and contain sensitive habitat types as identified within the Prairie Plan

and the Minnesota Biological Survey. By doing this, we are building complexes of high quality protected habitat, reducing fragmentation concerns and providing for connectivity between core habitat areas that will enable species to move over time. Both the Land Trust and Audubon Minnesota are deeply committed to maintaining these investments over time.

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

In an effort to protect some of the most unique wildlife habitat in MN, our proposal focuses on Important Bird Areas within the Prairie Conservation Plan and prioritizes the six counties within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (TAP) region. Audubon Minnesota and a wide variety of partners have identified 57 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) 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 IBAs and surrounding areas. We are also using additional plans and analyses, like the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan and the MN Biological Survey biodiversity significance status, to further refine the geographic scope of our efforts to yield the highest conservation return on investment.

In addition to the rigorous process used to designate IBAs, Audubon MN has also developed the Blueprint for Bird Conservation, which is a comprehensive compilation of national, regional and state bird and habitat conservation plans that address Minnesota bird species and Minnesota landscapes. A particular emphasis was placed on bird conservation documents developed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). This Blueprint builds upon existing efforts by identifying the highest priorities in each ecological region and using select conservation focal species; synthesizing the best proven conservation practices for each species; establishing measurable goals for species' population targets; and identifying key sites for conservation work.

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

Through the development of our Blueprint for Bird Conservation, Audubon has identified a group of breeding bird species known as priority species. This group highlights species that have experienced significant declines in the TAP region, are dependent on vulnerable habitat, and have been recognized as priorities by various resource agencies. The purpose of identifying priority species is to be strategic about identifying a small number of species that should be the focus of conservation efforts in the short term. Based on our priority species for the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region, there are 32 Species of Greatest Conservation Need that would benefit from this programs grassland and wetland habitat protection, restoration and enhancement such as the Bobolink, Grasshopper Sparrow, Green-winged Teal and Black Tern. In addition, there are 11 bird species that are MN State Listed Species including the: Horned Grebe, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Baird's Sparrow, Yellow Rail, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Short-eared Owl, Greater Prairie Chicken, Nelson's Sparrow, Marbled Godwit and Trumpeter Swan.

Identify indicator species and associated quantities this habitat will typically support:

In addition to the the SGCN and MN State Listed species previously discussed, we have identified 3 target species to act as indicators for our work within the Prairie Plan Implementation process, they are the Upland Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Grouse and Franklin's Gull. For each of the target species there are outlined state-wide population goals:

1) Upland Sandpiper: Halt the decline of Minnesota's Upland Sandpiper population and increase the population by approximately 35%. Although maintaining Minnesota's current population may be more realistic in the short-term, given the potential loss of significant CRP acres, the Audubon Minnesota Conservation Blueprint adopts the national and regional goals to significantly increase the current population.

2) Sharp-tailed Grouse: Maintain current populations in Minnesota (Minnesota population estimate based on Bird Conservation Regions 11&12 is 29,000) by supporting brushland habitat conservation and management through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Subsection Forest Resources Management Planning process.

3) Franklin's Gull: Maintain a statewide population of at least 50,000 breeding pairs.

Our habitat work within this program will assist in collective efforts that strive toward achieving these goals.

Outcomes:

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced aspen parklands and riparian areas *Protection, restoration and enhancement can be measured by the number of acres/ projects we protect in permanent conservation easements and by the total acreage we restore/ enhance. The quality of work and level of success will be monitored through the MLT stewardship audits as well as by restoration monitoring as outlined in the Habitat Management Plan or specific restoration prescription developed for each project.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Increased participation of private landowners in habitat projects *This outcome will be evaluated not only by the number of conservation easements we achieve but also by the number of landowners we connect with. We will track the number of community members we: host at working-lands habitat enhancement workshops, conduct site visits with, and interact with at education and outreach events. Outreach is a large component of community engagement and we intend act as a valuable conservation resource, providing conservation management recommendations such as haying restrictions to increase nesting bird success, native plantings for buffers and rotational grazing practices, all of which benefit wildlife habitat on private lands.*

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

The land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through the best standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited and insured 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. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget.

In addition, Audubon and Land Trust prepare a habitat management plan for each landowner, providing ecological management recommendations for the property over time. The Land Trust actively encourages landowners to manage their properties in line with the conservation easement, and works with landowners to address any financial or informational obstacles that stand in the way of them doing so.

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

Not Listed

What is the degree of timing/opportunistic 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 programs such as Conservation Reserve Program, are driving the loss of grassland and wetland habitats essential to wildlife and bird populations in Minnesota and throughout the Mississippi Flyway. Likewise, there is a limited window of opportunity to engage the aging landowner population in wildlife conservation and natural habitat protection activities on their lands.

How does this proposal include leverage in funds or other effort to supplement any OHF appropriation:

The Land Trust encourages private landowners to fully or partially donate the appraised value of their conservation easement, thereby receiving less than the appraised value might otherwise allow. This donated value is shown as leveraged funds in the proposal. The Land Trust has a long track record in incentivizing landowners to participate in this fashion.

Relationship to other funds:

- Not Listed

Describe the relationship of the funds:

Not Listed

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

Not Listed

Activity Details

Requirements:

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

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)**

Do you anticipate federal funds as a match for this program - **No**

Land Use:

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

Explain

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 planting. In some (but certainly not all) cases this necessitates the use of GMO treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control weeds present in the seedbank.

The purpose of these conservation easements is to protect existing high quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. As such, we restrict any agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases in which there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either carve the agricultural area out of the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may include a small percentage of agricultural lands if it is not feasible to carve those areas out. In such cases, however, we will not use OHF funds to pay the landowners for that portion of the conservation easement

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

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

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the acquisitions on the parcel list - **Yes**

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

Most conservation easements are established on private lands, many of which have driveways, field roads and trails located on them. Often, these established trails and roads are permitted in the terms of the easement and can be maintained for personal use if their use does not significantly impact the conservation values of the property.

Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition - **Yes**

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished:

All existing trails & roads (walking paths, driveways, field roads) that do not significantly impact the conservation values of the property would continue to be used and maintained by the land owner.

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition - **No**

Accomplishment Timeline

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Conduct landowner outreach (ongoing). Secure conservation easements	June 2021
Implement some of the Habitat Management Plan restoration recommendations on private land easements.	June 2023
Conduct habitat enhancement of both public and protected private lands.	June 2023

Budget Spreadsheet

Total Amount of Request: \$4,065,000

Budget and Cash Leverage

BudgetName	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$356,000	\$38,000	Audubon Minnesota	\$394,000
Contracts	\$475,000	\$0		\$475,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$2,800,000	\$560,000	Landowner donative value	\$3,360,000
Easement Stewardship	\$216,000	\$0		\$216,000
Travel	\$25,000	\$0		\$25,000
Professional Services	\$147,000	\$0		\$147,000
Direct Support Services	\$36,000	\$0		\$36,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$4,065,000	\$598,000		\$4,663,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Staff	0.50	3.00	\$135,000	\$0		\$135,000
Audubon MN Staff	0.81	5.00	\$221,000	\$38,000	Audubon Minnesota	\$259,000
Total	1.31	8.00	\$356,000	\$38,000		\$394,000

Budget and Cash Leverage by Partnership

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$135,000	\$0		\$135,000
Contracts	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Minnesota Land Trust	\$2,800,000	\$560,000	Landowner donative value	\$3,360,000
Easement Stewardship	Minnesota Land Trust	\$216,000	\$0		\$216,000
Travel	Minnesota Land Trust	\$15,000	\$0		\$15,000
Professional Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$147,000	\$0		\$147,000
Direct Support Services	Minnesota Land Trust	\$36,000	\$0		\$36,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Minnesota Land Trust	\$5,000	\$0		\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
DNR IDP	Minnesota Land Trust	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total		\$3,354,000	\$560,000		\$3,914,000

Personnel - Minnesota Land Trust

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Staff	0.50	3.00	\$135,000	\$0		\$135,000
Total	0.50	3.00	\$135,000	\$0		\$135,000

BudgetName	Partnership	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	Audubon Minnesota	\$221,000	\$38,000	Audubon Minnesota	\$259,000
Contracts	Audubon Minnesota	\$475,000	\$0		\$475,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0		\$0

Easement Stewardship	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0	\$0
Travel	Audubon Minnesota	\$10,000	\$0	\$10,000
Professional Services	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0	\$0
Direct Support Services	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0	\$0
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0	\$0
Capital Equipment	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0	\$0
Supplies/Materials	Audubon Minnesota	\$5,000	\$0	\$5,000
DNR IDP	Audubon Minnesota	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	-	\$711,000	\$38,000	\$749,000

Personnel - Audubon Minnesota

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Audubon MN Staff	0.81	5.00	\$221,000	\$38,000	Audubon Minnesota	\$259,000
Total	0.81	5.00	\$221,000	\$38,000	-	\$259,000

Amount of Request: \$4,065,000
Amount of Leverage: \$598,000
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 14.71%
DSS + Personnel: \$392,000
As a % of the total request: 9.64%
Easement Stewardship: \$216,000
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 7.71%

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

In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, Minnesota Land Trust determined our direct support services rate to include all of the allowable direct and necessary expenditures that are not captured in other line items in the budget, which is similar to the Land Trust's proposed federal indirect rate. We will apply this DNR-approved rate only to personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services

Does the amount in the contract line include R/E work?

Contracted line includes estimates for 500 acres restoration @ \$650/acre and 1000 acres of enhanced habitat @ \$150/acre (Restoration/Enhancement acreage proportion is 1:2 and R/E cost proportion is ~4:1 respectively)

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

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

Land Trust and Audubon Minnesota staff regularly rent vehicles for grant-related purposes, which is a significant cost savings over use of personal vehicles.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

Donative easement value from private landowners

Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable? - Yes

Tell us how this project would be scaled and how administrative costs are affected, describe the "economy of scale" and how outputs would change with reduced funding, if applicable:

Because this program endeavors to protect multiple parcels with this funding, it is scalable. Less funding will result in fewer protected acres and lost opportunities. In addition, some of the administrative and outreach costs are more fixed. As such, there is an economy of scale to working within one appropriation.

Output Tables

Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	500	500
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	1,300	1,300
Enhance	0	0	0	1,000	1,000
Total	0	0	0	2,800	2,800

Table 2. Total Requested Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$385,000	\$385,000
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	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,497,000	\$3,497,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$183,000	\$183,000
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,065,000	\$4,065,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	0	500	0	0	0	500
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	1,300	0	0	0	1,300
Enhance	0	1,000	0	0	0	1,000
Total	0	2,800	0	0	0	2,800

Table 4. Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$385,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$385,000
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	\$3,497,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,497,000
Enhance	\$0	\$183,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$183,000
Total	\$0	\$4,065,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,065,000

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$770
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	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$2,690
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$183

Table 6. Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	Northern Forest
Restore	\$0	\$770	\$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	\$2,690	\$0	\$0	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$183	\$0	\$0	\$0

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

I have read and understand Section 15 of the Constitution of the State of Minnesota, Minnesota Statute 97A.056, and the Call for Funding Request. I certify I am authorized to submit this proposal and to the best of my knowledge the information provided is true and accurate.

Parcel List

Explain the process used to select, rank and prioritize the parcels:

The Program employs perpetual conservation easements in collaboration with private landowners to protect important prairie and grassland habitat and associated wetlands, forests and open water. These easements are held by the Minnesota Land Trust. Parcel selection takes place through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, interested landowners within targeted priority areas submit an application for participation in the Program. Submitted projects are initially scored and ranked relative to each other based on two primary factors: 1) ecological value and 2) cost.

The Program Partners have set certain minimum criteria for inclusion into the program:

- Land must be located within the Program area.
- Easements must be at least 80 acres in size or contain remnant native prairie.
- Easements must contain high quality examples of native plant communities (prairies, woodlands, etc.) or land which will be restored to native habitat.
- Agricultural land consisting of row crops, tree farms, wildlife food plots, etc. may not amount to more than 10% of the property; consideration to exceed this cap may be warranted if the easement is donated or if agricultural land is slated for restoration. Agricultural land included within an easement is not eligible for payment unless restored to natural vegetation. Feedlots are not allowed.
- Acres previously enrolled in permanent conservation programs (e.g., RIM) are ineligible.

Additional requirements are stipulated within the body of each conservation easement, as pertinent to the special characteristics of the land and the particular situation of the landowner. (see attached sign-up criteria)

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

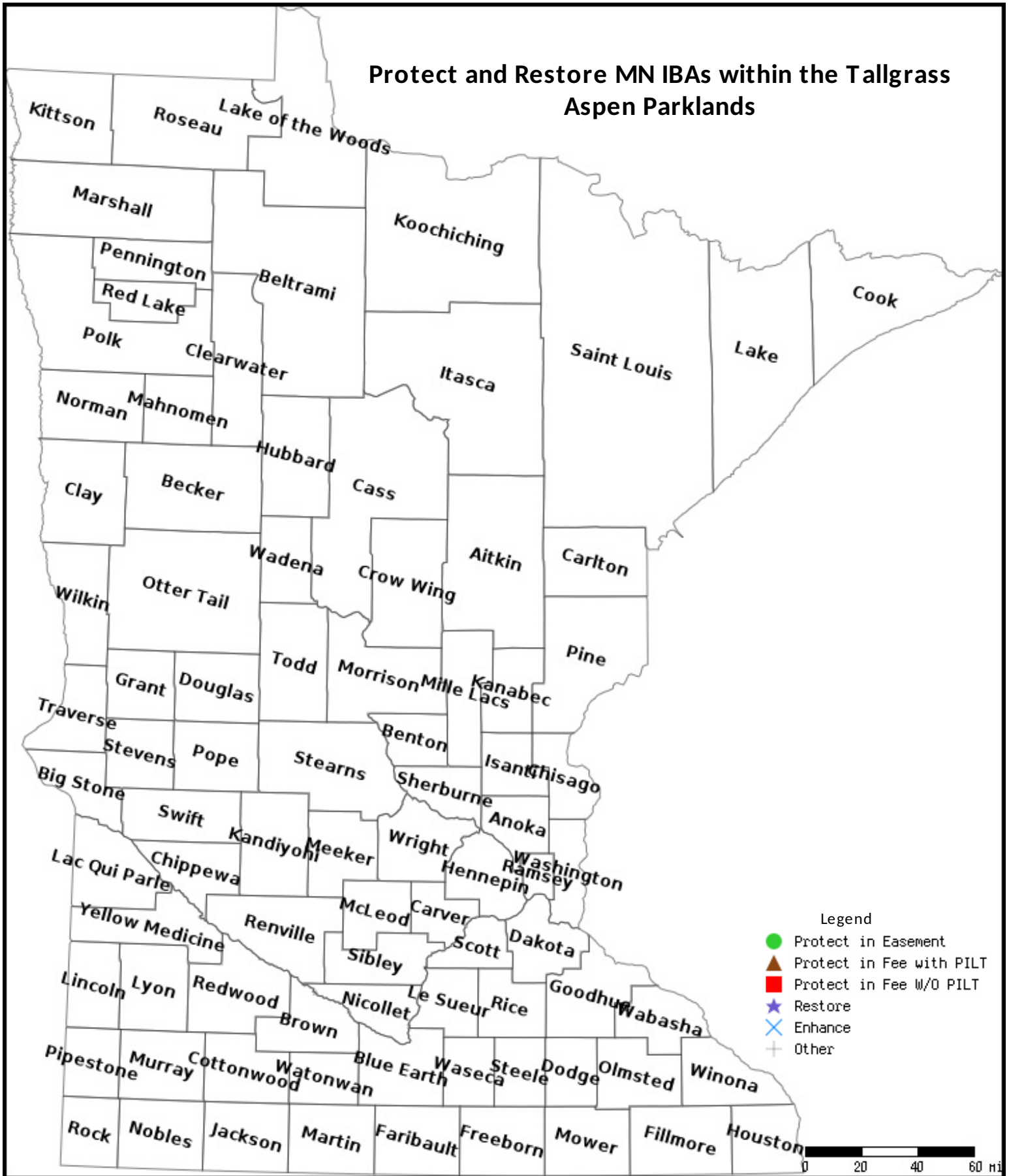
No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Parcel Map

Protect and Restore MN IBAs within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands



Data Generated From Parcel List

Tallgrass Aspen Parklands

Protecting and Restoring Minnesota's Prairie Based Important Bird Areas

AUDUBON MINNESOTA & MINNESOTA LAND TRUST

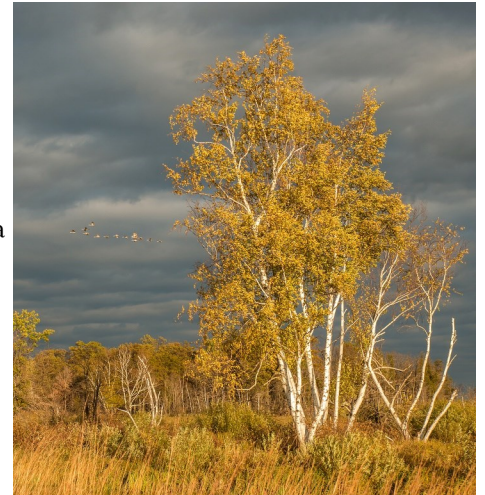
The goal of this Program is to preserve high quality bird and wildlife habitat within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (TAP) region for the benefit of Minnesota's wildlife and native habitat. Audubon Minnesota and Minnesota Land Trust are working with landowners within the Program Area (see map on reverse side) to permanently protect outstanding habitat through conservation easements utilizing a fair market approach.

PARCEL PRIORITIZATION

Eligible properties are ranked initially on the habitat qualities of the land, including: the size of the parcel, the overall condition of natural habitat, and proximity to other natural habitat and protected lands. Landowner applications are scored based on overall habitat quality of the property, desired easement purchase price and potential donative value.

PARTNERSHIP ROLES

Audubon Minnesota is the restoration partner for the TAP program, with on-the-ground staff acting as a local landowner resource, providing science based conservation recommendations to increase grassland bird populations and enhance habitat. Minnesota Land Trust holds the conservation easements and ensures the long-term protection of the land's conservation values through time.



Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Habitat Photo: John Pennoyer

OUTDOOR HERITAGE FUNDS AT WORK

Phase I Progress: 450 acres protected, 140 acres restored by 2020

- * Strengthened partnerships through the Prairie Plan implementation process
- * Hired on-the-ground staff dedicated to community and landowner relationship building
- * Developed specific criteria for weighted prioritization of parcels
- * Contacted over 300 Landowners regarding easement program in our initial RFP
- * Received approximately 30 applications and prioritized 15 properties
- * Increased private landowner interest in conservation and restoration
- * Developing habitat restoration/enhancement plans for projects on public lands.

Phase II: 1,300 acres protected, 500 acres restored & 1000 enhanced by 2022

- * Expand range to include more interested landowners within the TAP region
- * Maintain high quality standards for bird and wildlife habitat using our weighted criteria.
- * Increase working lands focus, aimed at the integration of conservation grazing and improved water quality through native plantings.
- * Leverage OHF funds to enhance wildlife habitat on public and protected private lands.



Sharp-tailed Grouse Photo: Audubon

A Focused Expansion

Geographically, we are expanding the focal area to include 6 northwestern counties in order to consider interested landowners who have quality wildlife habitat on their property but were just outside of our phase I project boundaries. We will continue to employ our weighted criteria selection process with a focus on the Tallgrass Aspen Parkland region, the MN Prairie Conservation Plan and Audubon Important Bird Areas (see map).

We expand our habitat focus by emphasizing conservation management on working lands to improve water quality and bird habitat. Our working lands focus will encourage native plantings, promote participation in the MN agricultural water quality certification program, and recommend bird friendly grazing and haying practices.



Audubon Minnesota is a state office of the National Audubon Society and a nonprofit, tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3). Established in 1979, Audubon MN shares Audubon's 100+ year heritage of working for bird conservation & protecting our environment.

mn.audubon.org/TAP



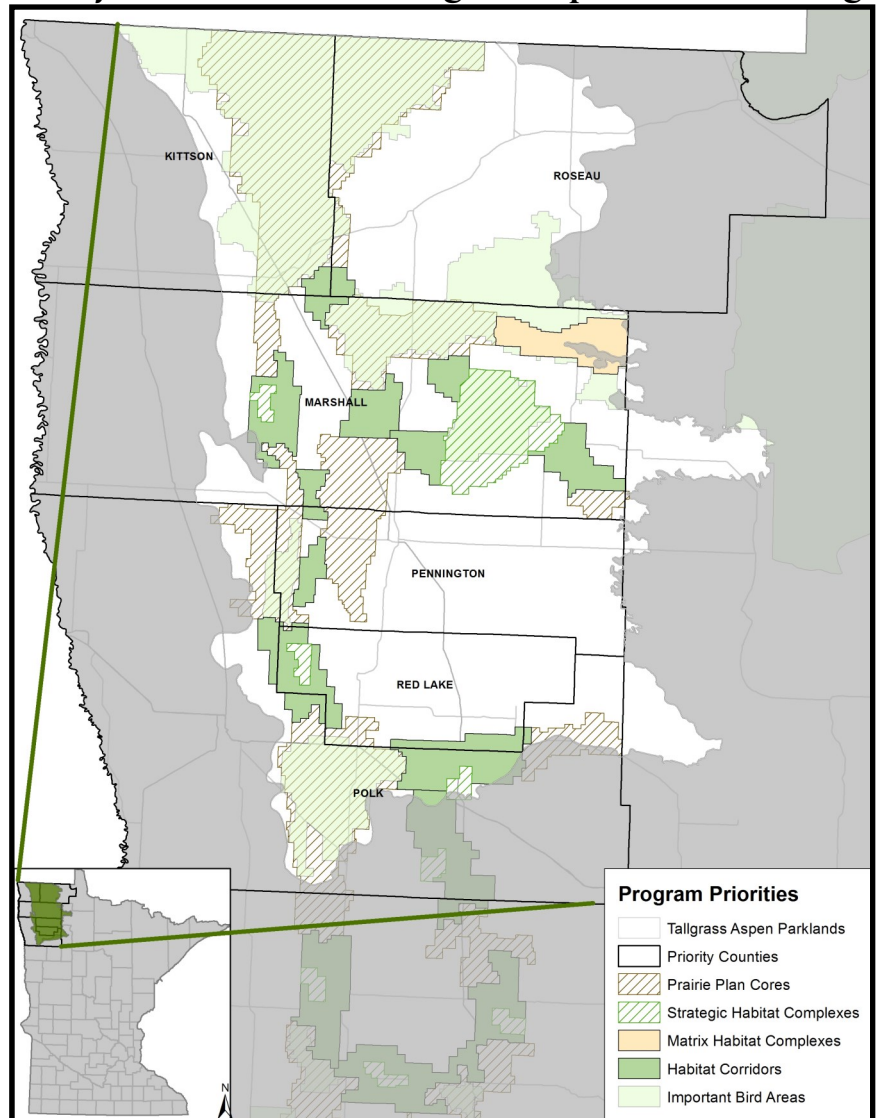
Founded in 1991, Minnesota Land Trust holds more than 500 conservation easements, protecting over 45,000 acres of land and over a million feet of shoreline across Minnesota. One of the first nationally-accredited land trusts in the country, it is a Section 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization.

www.mnland.org



Funding for this program provided by the Outdoor Heritage Fund as recommended by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

Priority Areas within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region



State Conservation Planning at Work

This project supports state driven goals laid out in the Prairie Conservation Plan to protect, restore and enhance prairie landscapes on private lands. With OHF support we will:

- Protect existing bird and wildlife habitat on private lands through conservation easements.
- Restore & enhance degraded wildlife habitat on public and private lands.
- Support wildlife habitat on working lands through region specific conservation grazing and haying practices.



Habitat photos by R. Field

Protecting and Restoring Minnesota's Prairie Based Important Bird Areas

-Conservation Easement Sign-Up Criteria-



The Protecting and Restoring Minnesota's Prairie Based Important Bird Areas Program is a collaboration between Audubon Minnesota and the Minnesota Land Trust (Program Partners) that protects Minnesota's rich array of wildlife habitat within the Prairie and Forest/Prairie Transition zones of Minnesota. Funded through Minnesota's Outdoor Heritage Fund, the Program employs perpetual conservation easements in collaboration with private landowners to protect important prairie and grassland habitat and associated wetlands, forests and open water. These easements are held by the Minnesota Land Trust.

Through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process, interested landowners within targeted priority areas submit an application for participation in the Program. Submitted projects are initially scored and ranked relative to each other based on two primary factors: 1) ecological value and 2) cost.

Ecological Value is determined through an analysis of three subfactors:

- Quantity – the size of habitat and/or native plant communities associated with a parcel, and abundance of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and Threatened & Endangered (T&E) species;
- Quality – the condition of associated habitat and populations of SGCN and T&E species;
- Landscape Context – the extent and condition of natural habitat and amount of protected land surrounding the parcel.

Cost is determined in large part by the bid amount proposed by the landowner, and ultimately substantiated through an appraisal process. Landowners are given additional credit through whole or partial donation of appraised easement value.

Subsequent discussions with each landowner participating in the RFP allow the Program Partners to gain a better sense of the landowner's desires for and expected uses of the property, and to ground-truth the parcel's ecological value. These post-proposal evaluations may result in proposed parcels moving up or down on the prioritization list. This additional evaluation allows for the Program partners to most effectively target priority lands for protection.

The Program Partners have set certain minimum criteria for inclusion into the program:

- Land must be located within the Program area.
- Easements must be at least 80 acres in size or contain remnant native prairie.
- Easements must contain high quality examples of native plant communities (prairies, woodlands, etc.) or land which will be restored to native habitat.
- Agricultural land consisting of row crops, tree farms, wildlife food plots, etc. may not amount to more than 10% of the property; consideration to exceed this cap may be warranted if the easement is donated or if agricultural land is slated for restoration. Agricultural land included within an easement is not eligible for payment unless restored to natural vegetation. Feedlots are not allowed.
- Acres previously enrolled in permanent conservation programs (e.g., RIM) are ineligible.

Additional requirements are stipulated within the body of each conservation easement, as pertinent to the special characteristics of the land and the particular situation of the landowner.

The Land Trust's ranking and selection system is informed by prioritization modules used by the Minnesota DNR, The Nature Conservancy, and nationally by the Natural Heritage Data Center Network. This system enables the Land Trust to secure conservation easements that effectively and efficiently protect Minnesota's natural resources.

A Framework for Evaluating Landowner Submissions via RFP

Initial Ranking of Applications									
Scoring Framework for Prioritizing Applications Received Through an RFP Process									
<i>Existing Ecological Significance</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Factors</i>							
1. Size/Abundance of Habitat Protected by Easement (Maximum 100 pts)									
	0	Total acres of native plant community or extent of target feature within proposed easement							
2. Diversity/Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement (Maximum 100 pts)									
	0	Average quality of existing native plant communities							
	0	Number and quality of rare species populations on parcel; rarity of the species							
3. Landscape Context (Maximum 100 pts)									
	0	Location of parcel relative to biodiversity "hotspots" or priority areas delineated in conservation plans							
	0	Location of parcel relative to other conservation lands							
	0	Location of parcel relative to existing moderate-high quality native plant communities; degree of habitat fragmentation							
Total Score (Maximum 300 pts)									
<i>Cost</i>	<i>Score</i>	<i>Factors</i>							
4. Cost									
	0	Bid amount (\$)/acre							
	0	Estimated donative value (\$)/acre							
Revised Scoring of Applications Following Discussions with Landowner									
<i>Potential Impacts by Landowner</i>	<i>Score Adjustments (+/-)</i>	<i>Enhancement or downgrade of existing biodiversity significance scores based on easement rights retained by the landowner, easement actions required of the landowner, and their potential impact on existing biodiversity.</i>							
5. Size/Abundance of Habitat Protected by Easement									
	0	Total acres of native plant community or extent of target feature impacted by retained rights or proposed actions if exercised.							
6. Diversity/Quality of Natural Resources to be Protected by the Easement									
	0	Estimated potential impact on diversity/quality of native plant community or extent of target feature by retained rights or proposed actions if exercised.							
	0	Estimated potential impact on number/quality of rare species resulting from retained rights or proposed actions if exercised.							
0	REVISED BIODIVERSITY SIGNIFICANCE SCORE								