

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2020 Accomplishment Plan



Date: December 13, 2019

Program or Project Title: Accelerating Habitat Conservation in Southwest Minnesota

Funds Recommended: \$ 3,551,000

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Legislative Citation: ML 2020, Ch. X, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd XX

Appropriation Language:

County Locations: Jackson, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, and Nobles.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Enhance
- Protect in Easement
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Forest
- Habitat
- Prairie
- Wetlands

Abstract:

The Minnesota Land Trust proposes to permanently protect 660 acres of high quality habitat in southwest Minnesota by securing conservation easements within scientifically prioritized habitat complexes by filling key unmet gaps in the available land protection toolbox. Working with willing landowners the Land Trust will use its innovative bid model to maximize conservation benefit and financial leverage in project selection. The Land Trust in cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service will restore/enhance 195 acres of wetlands and associated prairies to benefit SGCN and waterfowl populations.

Design and scope of work:

The plight of prairies and wetlands in southwest Minnesota is well-documented; less than 2% of native prairie remains and 90% of wetlands have been lost. Habitat loss and degradation threaten wildlife populations and contribute to the decline of the 116 SGCN that utilize the wetlands, streams and prairies across the region.

Since the inception of Minnesota's Prairie Plan in 2010, targeted land protection and restoration action by a large number of conservation organizations and agencies has resulted in significant conservation gains across southwest Minnesota. Now nearly a decade into its implementation, the Land Trust engaged a broad cross-section of these organizations to identify what challenges remain to realizing that Plan. Through this conversation, several significant challenges were identified: 1) land protection tools currently available are not sufficiently broad to address the full spectrum of need; high priority easement projects at times don't align with the conservation easement programs currently available; 2) restoration and enhancement funding available has been a limiting factor to some key partners, and 3) high priority areas for conservation (identified in Minnesota's Wildlife Action Network [WAN]) do not always align with the Prairie Plan and are not being addressed. This proposal aims to address these gaps in the Southwest Minnesota conservation framework by marrying the Land Trust's unique set of tools and expertise with funding through the Outdoor Heritage Fund.

Working with willing landowners, the Land Trust will protect 660 acres of priority wetland, prairie and associated upland habitat through conservation easements. The Land Trust's conservation easements fill an important gap not addressed by easement programs currently available in Southwest Minnesota through USFWS, MN DNR and BWSR. The Land Trust's easement program has greater flexibility to address key conservation opportunities that otherwise would be left on the table. Land protection actions through this proposal will focus on: 1) priority areas within the Prairie Plan left orphaned by current conservation easement programs, and 2) conservation priorities identified in the WAN that are not encompassed by the Prairie Plan. The Land Trust will employ its criteria-based ranking system and market-based approach to the acquisition of conservation easements. This strategic approach targets projects that help fill gaps in existing public ownership, are of the highest ecological value, and provide the greatest leverage to the State's funding investment. The Land Trust will seek donated easements whenever possible but also may fully purchase easements that help complete key complexes as necessary.

Restoration and enhancement activities will target priority permanently protected lands. The Land Trust in cooperation with USFWS will restore and enhance 195 acres of important wetland, riparian and prairie habitat on permanently protected lands. These projects will increase buffers and provide links to existing protected wetland and upland habitat complexes across the program area.

This program will be closely coordinated with other public agencies (including MN DNR, BWSR, USFWS, and local SWCDs), and other non-profit organizations to ensure multi-agency conservation goals are being met.

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:

This program addresses LSOHC priorities by protecting shallow lakes, wetland/grassland complexes, and shoreland that provide critical habitat for Minnesota's wildlife, especially its migratory waterfowl and associated species. Minnesota's wetlands are essential to our wildlife health and diversity. This project directly benefits SGCN and other important game and non-game wildlife species by minimizing the potential threats to their habitat caused by detrimental agricultural practices, residential or commercial development or imprudent land management. The wetland habitat complexes that will be targeted through the ranking system will include a mosaic of wetlands, grasslands and woodlands. Priority projects will include high or outstanding habitat as identified in Minnesota Biological Survey data. Projects will also be located near other protected lands to help build larger habitat complexes comprised of both public and private lands. The vast majority of this landscape is in private ownership. For that reason, working with private owners on land protection strategies is key to successful conservation in this region. Finally, we will work closely with partners in the region to identify those habitat complexes where private land protection can make a significant contribution to existing conservation investments.

Describe the science based planning and evaluation model used:

This program is focused on procuring conservation easements and restoring prairie and wetland habitats on easement and fee protected lands within priority complexes of wetlands and associated upland habitats, as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan, Duck Plan and Prairie Plan. Specific parcels available for easement acquisition are evaluated relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on three primary ecological factors [1) amount of habitat on the parcel (size) and abundance of SGCN; 2) the quality or condition of habitat; and 3) the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas] in addition to cost. The program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area, expand the footprint of existing protected areas (WMAs, WPAs, etc.), facilitate the protection of habitat corridors and reduce the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats. In addition, the USFWS (a cooperator in this program) will receive OHF funding through MLT to further reduce effects of fragmentation through restoration of prairie, wetlands and other habitats. Minnesota Biological Survey data is a cornerstone to our assessment of potential conservation easement acquisitions. We also conduct field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition because many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

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

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

Which other plans are addressed in this program:

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program:

Prairie:

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

Relationship to other funds:

- Not Listed

Does this program include leverage in funds:

Yes

Through its market-based RFP process, the Land Trust expects private landowners to donate at least \$240,000 in easement value toward the program, which is shown as leverage.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Any state agency or organization requesting a direct appropriation from the OHF must inform the LSOHC at the time of the request for funding is made, whether the request is supplanting or is a substitution for any previous funding that was not from a legacy fund and was used for the same purpose:

Funding procured by MLT from the Outdoor Heritage Fund through this proposal will not supplant or substitute any previous funding from a non-Legacy fund used for the same purpose.

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

Not Listed

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

Land protected through conservation easements will be sustained through state-of-the-art standards and practices for conservation easement stewardship. The Minnesota Land Trust is a nationally-accredited land trust with a very successful stewardship program that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, addressing inquiries and interpretations, tracking changes in ownership, investigating potential violations and defending the easement in cases of a true violation. Funding for these easement stewardship activities is included in the project budget.

In addition, MLT will assist landowners in the development of comprehensive habitat management plans to help ensure that the land will be managed for its wildlife and water quality benefits. MLT (as easement holder) and USFWS (as easement holder and fee owner of respective properties) will work with landowners in an ongoing basis to provide habitat restoration plans, resources and technical expertise to undertake restoration, enhancement and ongoing management of these properties.

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

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2024 and in perpetuity	MLT Long -Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of easements in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	
Every 4-6 years	USFWS, Landowners	Prescribed fire, tree removal, Invasive species control		

Activity Details:

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

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

Explain

Easement Acquisition:

The purpose of the Minnesota Land Trust's conservation easements is to protect and restore/enhance existing high quality natural habitat and to preserve opportunities for future restoration. We restrict agricultural lands and use on the properties. In cases where there are agricultural lands associated with the larger property, we will either exclude the agricultural area from the conservation easement, or in some limited cases, we may target agricultural lands for restoration purposes.

Restoration/Enhancement:

Short-term use of agricultural crops is an accepted best practice for preparing a site for prairie restoration. For example, soybeans on a short-term basis could be used for restorations in order to control weed seedbeds prior to prairie planting. In some cases this necessitates the use of GMO-treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control weeds present in the seedbank.

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

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

Who will manage the easement?

Minnesota Land Trust.

Who will be the easement holder?

Minnesota Land Trust.

What is the anticipated number of easements (range is fine) you plan to accomplish with this appropriation?

We anticipate closing on 1-7 conservation easements with the appropriation depending on the scale and cost of the easements.

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, the conservation easement permits the continued usage of established trails and roads so long as their use does not significantly impact the conservation values of the property. Creation of new roads/trails or expansion of existing ones is typically not allowed.

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

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished:

Existing trails and roads are identified in the project baseline report and will be monitored annually as part of the Land Trust's stewardship and enforcement protocols. Maintenance of permitted roads/trails in accordance with the terms of the easement will be the responsibility of the landowner.

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

Will the acquired parcels be restored or enhanced within this appropriation? - **Yes**

Restoration and enhancement may be completed on some parcels, depending on the the need and condition of each parcel. We have incorporated into the accomplishment plan budget funding for approximately 125 acres of restoration on lands protected through easement.

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 (WPA, Permanently Protected Conservation Easements/Refuge Lands)**

Accomplishment Timeline:

Activity	Approximate Date Completed
Conservation easements closed or options secured	June 30, 2023
Restoration and enhancement projects completed	June 30, 2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/1/2025

Federal Funding:

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

Outcomes:

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species *This program will permanently protect 349 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes and restore/enhance 195 acres of wetlands and prairies in the prairie region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.*

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 reduced outcomes proportional to the reduction in funding relative to the initial proposal. Budget categories reflect the funding necessary to achieve grant program goals given the reduced appropriation.

Total Amount of Request: \$ 3551000

Budget and Cash Leverage

BudgetName	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$250,000	\$0		\$250,000
Contracts	\$422,000	\$0		\$422,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$0	\$0		\$0
Easement Acquisition	\$2,406,900	\$240,000	Landowner Donation of Easement Value	\$2,646,900
Easement Stewardship	\$192,000	\$0		\$192,000
Travel	\$17,600	\$0		\$17,600
Professional Services	\$135,000	\$0		\$135,000
Direct Support Services	\$67,500	\$0		\$67,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$0	\$0		\$0
Capital Equipment	\$0	\$0		\$0
Other Equipment/Tools	\$10,000	\$0		\$10,000
Supplies/Materials	\$50,000	\$0		\$50,000
DNR IDP	\$0	\$0		\$0
Total	\$3,551,000	\$240,000		\$3,791,000

Personnel

Position	FTE	Over # of years	LSOHC Request	Anticipated Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.48	3.00	\$130,000	\$0		\$130,000
MLT Restoration Staff	0.44	3.00	\$120,000	\$0		\$120,000
Total	0.92	6.00	\$250,000	\$0		\$250,000

Amount of Request: \$3,551,000

Amount of Leverage: \$240,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 6.76%

DSS + Personnel: \$317,500

As a % of the total request: 8.94%

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.

What is included in the contacts line?

Restoration and enhancement accounts for \$253,000 of the contract line amount. Additional funds in the contract line are for the writing of habitat management plans via qualified vendors and engaging respective County Soil and Water Conservation Districts for landowner outreach purposes to facilitate communication of the protection program.

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 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:

The Land Trust encourages landowners to fully or partially donate the value of conservation easements to the program. The leverage amount is a conservative estimate of value we expect to see donated by landowners. USFWS has committed cash and in-kind staff time toward restoration/enhancement projects.

What is the cost per easement for stewardship and explain how that amount is calculated?

The average cost per easement to fund the Minnesota Land Trust's perpetual monitoring and enforcement obligations is \$24,000. This figure is derived from MLT's detailed stewardship funding "cost analysis" which is consistent with Land Trust Accreditation standards. MLT shares periodic updates to this cost analysis with LSOHC staff.

Output Tables

Table 1a. Acres by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	0	0	0	195	195
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	660	660
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	855	855

Table 2. Total Funding by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$566,000	\$566,000
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	\$2,985,000	\$2,985,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,551,000	\$3,551,000

Table 3. Acres within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	ForestPrairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	0	0	0	195	0	195
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	660	0	660
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	855	0	855

Table 4. Total Funding within each Ecological Section

Type	Metro Urban	ForestPrairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N Forest	Total
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$566,000	\$0	\$566,000
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	\$2,985,000	\$0	\$2,985,000
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$3,551,000	\$0	\$3,551,000

Table 5. Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type

Type	Wetlands	Prairies	Forest	Habitats
Restore	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$290.3
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	\$452.3
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	\$290.3	\$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	\$452.3	\$0
Enhance	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0

Automatic system calculation / not entered by managers

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

Jackson

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Spirit Lake WPA	10 136236	160	\$200,000	Yes

Nobles

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?
Round Lake WPA	10 139208	104	\$150,000	Yes

Section 2 - Protect Parcel List

Lac qui Parle

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lac qui Parle 1	11645230	31	\$110,000	No	No	No
Lac qui Parle 2	11845223	147	\$390,000	No	No	No
Lac qui Parle 3	11644205	40	\$94,000	No	No	No
Lac qui Parle 4	11943216	5	\$30,000	No	No	No
Lac qui Parle 5	11645204	195	\$500,000	No	No	No

Lincoln

Name	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection?	Hunting?	Fishing?
Lincoln 1	11244235	640	\$2,500,000	No	No	No

Section 2a - Protect Parcel with Bldgs

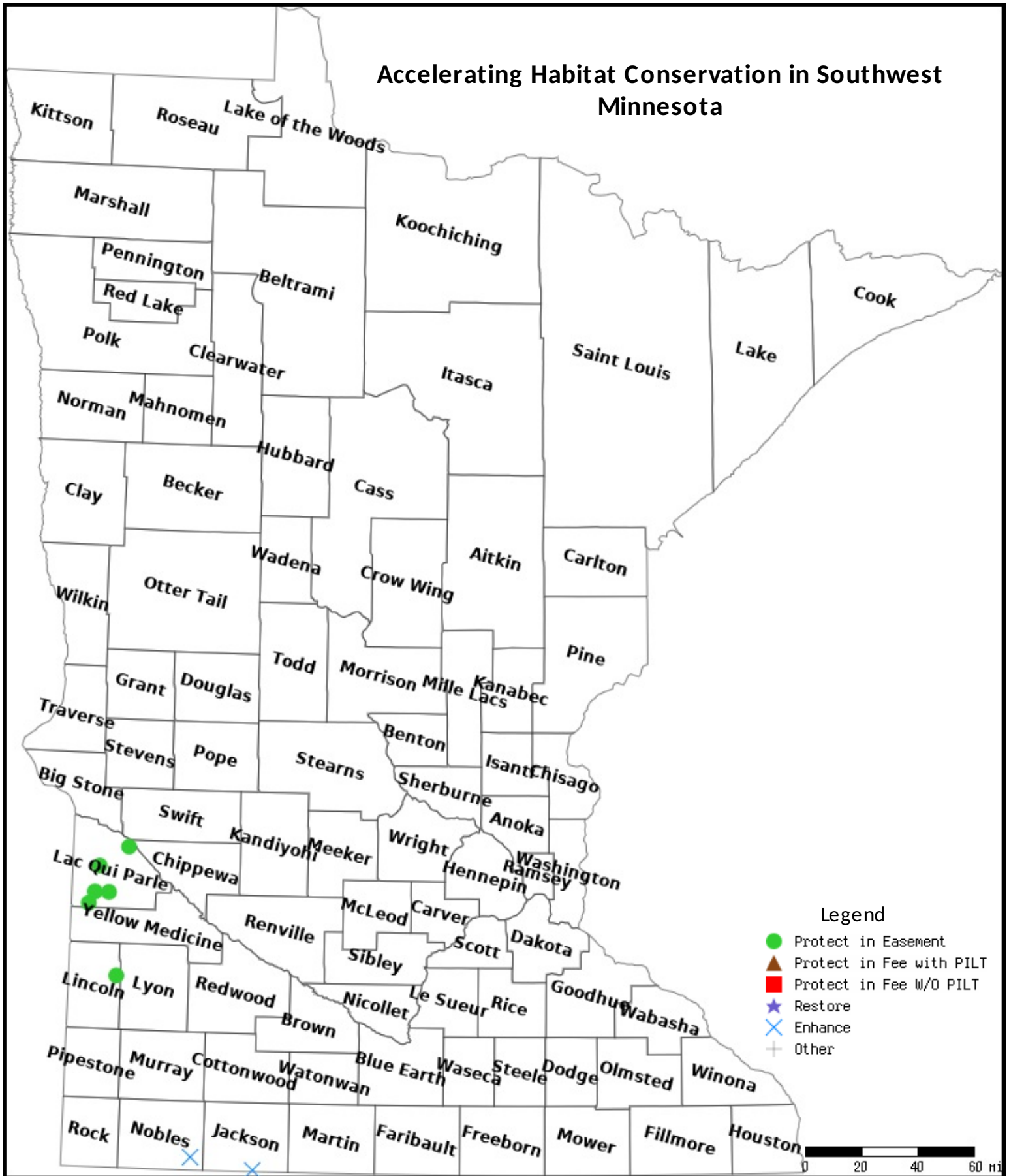
No parcels with an activity type protect and has buildings.

Section 3 - Other Parcel Activity

No parcels with an other activity type.

Parcel Map

Accelerating Habitat Conservation in Southwest Minnesota



Data Generated From Parcel List