Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2018 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 01/26/2021

Project Title: Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase IX

Funds Recommended: $1,893,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2018, Ch. 208, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 2(d)

Appropriation Language: $1,893,000 the second 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 lands in fee or permanent conservation easements and to restore lands in 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, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquiring 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 the acquisitions must be consistent with the priorities in Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Ruth Thornton
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Location Information

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

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie

Narrative

Abstract

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will cooperate to permanently protect native prairie and associated complexes of wetlands and native habitats in western and central Minnesota by purchasing approximately 540 acres of fee title properties and/or permanent habitat easements. Approximately 270 acres will be native prairie. Work will be focused in areas identified as having significant biodiversity by the Minnesota Biological Survey and located in priority areas in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (Prairie Plan).

Design and Scope of Work

The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) was established in 2000 to address the loss of America's grasslands and the decline of grassland wildlife. The Refuge was created to permanently 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 that conversion is still a very real risk. A drop in crop prices may have slowed this, but the threat isn't gone. It's vital that we protect our remaining native prairies before they are lost.

Progress towards the Refuge's goal has been limited by available acquisition funding. Since 2000, the Refuge has protected 5,101 acres in Minnesota with funding from non-OHF sources. The acquisition budget from these sources falls far short of the landowner interest in working with the Refuge.

Funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund (OHF) will allow The Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service, working in partnership, to significantly accelerate this progress. TNC and USFWS will cooperate on protecting approximately 540 acres of native prairie and associated habitat in the 49 Minnesota counties within the Refuge boundary. Of these, we expect to protect approximately 215 acres in fee title and approximately 325 acres with permanent habitat easements.

This program's work is targeted at protecting high-quality native habitat in areas with existing concentrations of native prairie, wetlands, and protected lands. The lands protected will consist of 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 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 the partners to make significant progress towards our shared goal of protecting and buffering the remaining native prairie. The first property was acquired in March, 2013. 4,320 acres have now been added to the Refuge. Of these, 2,820 acres are classified as native prairie. Additional habitat includes 460 acres of wetlands and 11 miles of stream and/or lakefront. Landowners have committed a further 530 acres. Negotiations are ongoing with a long list of interested landowners.

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

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 4,320 acres protected, most have been in areas surveyed by the Biological Survey and identified as having significant biodiversity. These high-quality lands provide habitat for a 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 26 rare species located wholly or partially on NTP NWR properties protected with OHF-funding. Benefited species include:

Birds – Baird's sparrow (endangered), Wilson's phalarope (threatened), greater prairie-chicken, marbled godwit, and yellow rail

Butterflies – Dakota skipper (endangered), arogos skipper, Pawnee skipper, and regal fritillary. NTP NWR acquisitions with this funding have protected almost 5% of the historical occurrences of poweshiek skipperlings (endangered) in Minnesota.

Fish - Topeka shiner (endangered). This program has protected 13,400' of frontage on streams and rivers identified as critical habitat for this species.

Reptiles - Blanding's turtle (threatened)

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

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 animal and plant species that live there are 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 above demonstrate this program's success at identifying and 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

Does this program include leveraged funding?

-

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
ML 2010	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	$308,000
ML 2015	TNC Private Contributions	$30,800
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	$36,100
ML 2014	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	$67,000
ML 2014	TNC Private Contributions	$35,700
ML 2015	USFWS In-Kind Contribution	$52,200

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 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

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?
Yes

Who will manage the easement?
The USFWS will be responsible for managing and monitoring these easements.

Who will be the easement holder?
All easement interests in land will be transferred to the USFWS to become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.

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?
All fee title interests in land will be transferred to the USFWS to become units of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.

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

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Purchase agreements/Options for the first 100 acres of fee and 150 acres of easement acquisition	December 31, 2019
Purchase agreements/Options for the remaining 115 acres of fee and 175 acres of easement acquisition	June 30, 2021
Grassland/wetland restoration and enhancement completed	June 30, 2023

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2023

Budget

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

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$202,000	$90,000	USFWS	$292,000
Contracts	$68,000	-	-	$68,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	$653,400	$125,000	USFWS NAWCA	$778,400
Easement Acquisition	$808,800	-	-	$808,800
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	$6,000	-	-	$6,000
Professional Services	$83,100	-	-	$83,100
Direct Support Services	$45,000	$45,000	TNC	$90,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	$5,000	-	-	$5,000
Supplies/Materials	$21,700	-	-	$21,700
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$1,893,000**	**$260,000**	**-**	**$2,153,000**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
USFWS In-Kind Staff Support	0.0	0.0	-	$90,000	USFWS	$90,000
Protection Staff	0.53	3.0	$137,300	-	-	$137,300
Science/Stewardship Staff	0.01	3.0	$500	-	-	$500
Project Manager	0.15	3.0	$45,000	-	-	$45,000
Grant Administration	0.07	3.0	$19,200	-	-	$19,200

Amount of Request: $1,893,000
Amount of Leverage: $260,000
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 13.73%
DSS + Personnel: $247,000
As a % of the total request: 13.05%
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 30.6% of the request. The proposed accomplishments were reduced to 29.3% 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 a NAWCA fee acquisition grant. 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. This program targets lands that are already in good condition. The acquired properties may, however, need some work to get them into a condition where they can be sustained into the future using standard prairie management techniques. The most typical activity is tree or woody vegetation removal, with reseeding of the affected areas. The requested amount is based on our experience in earlier rounds of 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:
No

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 on an annual basis. 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 : $125,000
- In Kind : $90,000

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	215	0	0	215
Protect in Easement	0	325	0	0	325
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**0**	**540**	**0**	**0**	**540**

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

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	0
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	65
Protect in Easement	205
Enhance	0
Total	**270**

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	$845,900	-	-	$845,900
Protect in Easement	-	$1,047,100	-	-	$1,047,100
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**$1,893,000**	**-**	**-**	**$1,893,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	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	10	0	205	0	215
Protect in Easement	0	15	0	310	0	325
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**0**	**25**	**0**	**515**	**0**	**540**

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	$42,300	-	$803,600	-	$845,900
Protect in Easement	-	$52,400	-	$994,700	-	$1,047,100
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**$94,700**	**-**	**$1,798,300**	**-**	**$1,893,000**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	$3,934	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	$3,221	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	$4,230	-	$3,920	-
Protect in Easement	-	$3,493	-	$3,208	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

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 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/species in greatest conservation need (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.*

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:

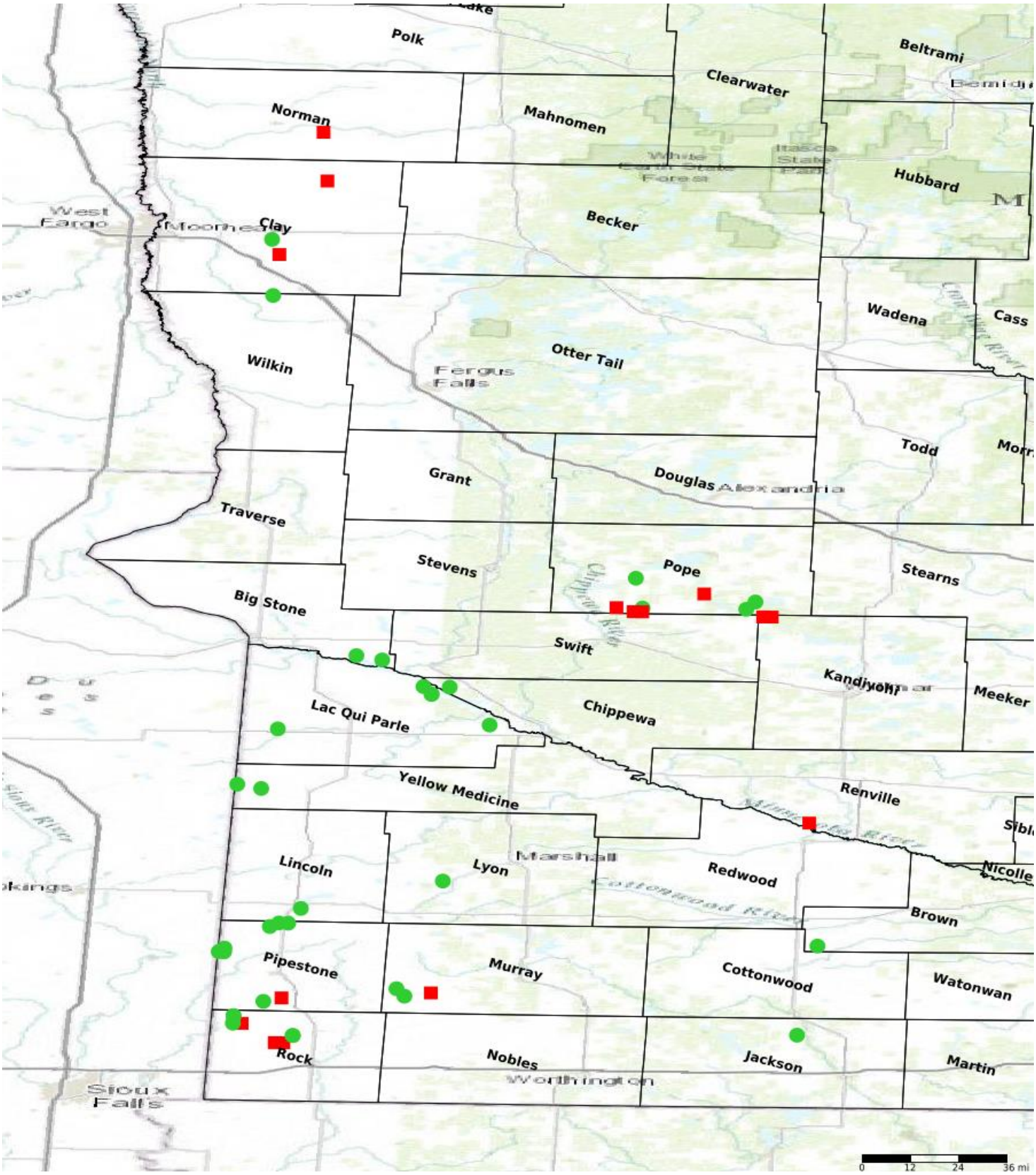
Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Big Stone #7	Big Stone	12044211	69	$0	No
Big Stone #6	Big Stone	12044205	138	$332,000	No
Brown #1	Brown	10835229	110	$0	No
Chippewa #1	Chippewa	11942218	78	$146,000	No
Clay #5	Clay	13846210	40	$0	No
Clay #6	Clay	14245234	304	$547,000	No
Jackson #1	Jackson	10436225	76	$60,000	No
Kandiyohi #6	Kandiyohi	12236205	58	$205,000	No
Lac qui Parle #3	Lac qui Parle	11943215	126	$0	No
Lac qui Parle #5	Lac qui Parle	11943226	39	$0	No
Lac qui Parle #2	Lac qui Parle	11746213	219	$432,000	No
Lac qui Parle #1	Lac qui Parle	11742201	47	$54,000	No
Lac qui Parle #4	Lac qui Parle	11943226	149	$0	No
Lincoln #5	Lincoln	10945216	75	$0	No
Lyon #5	Lyon	11042206	50	$173,000	No
Murray #6	Murray	10643232	80	$229,000	No
Murray #7	Murray	10543209	97	$245,000	No
Norman #5	Norman	14445228	145	$196,000	No
Pipestone #3	Pipestone	10846201	84	$155,000	No
Pipestone #4	Pipestone	10846211	76	$150,000	No
Pipestone #1	Pipestone	10546223	174	$0	No
Pipestone #9	Pipestone	10747213	285	$610,000	No
Pipestone #7	Pipestone	10845206	20	$65,000	No
Pipestone #8	Pipestone	10747212	102	$235,000	No
Pipestone #10	Pipestone	10747214	107	$245,000	No
Pope #17	Pope	12339229	100	$350,000	No
Pope #15	Pope	12337213	111	$120,000	No
Pope #12	Pope	12339235	80	$239,000	No
Pope #10	Pope	12339234	65	$208,000	No
Pope #11	Pope	12337226	18	$23,000	No
Pope #8	Pope	12439215	103	$113,000	No
Pope #16	Pope	12338201	77	$270,000	No
Pope #18	Pope	12339226	200	$185,000	No
Renville #1	Renville	11335207	257	$0	No
Rock #1	Rock	10545218	77	$0	No
Rock #8	Rock	10446207	42	$104,000	No
Rock #2	Rock	10345218	5	$53,000	No
Rock #7	Rock	10446207	90	$251,000	No

Rock #13	Rock	10345205	97	$330,000	No
Rock #14	Rock	10446219	120	$320,000	No
Rock #4	Rock	10346213	12	$0	No
Rock #10	Rock	10345205	111	$180,000	No
Rock #9	Rock	10446220	58	$241,000	No
Wilkin #1	Wilkin	13646204	27	$61,000	No
Yellow Medicine #2	Yellow Medicine	11546231	87	$0	No
Yellow Medicine #3	Yellow Medicine	11446203	111	$135,000	No

Protect Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Clay #9	Clay	13946221	157	$320,000	No	1	$0
Kandiyohi #5	Kandiyohi	12236206	149	$0	No	4	$0
Murray #8	Murray	10543201	165	$575,000	No	2	$0



- Protect in Easement
- Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- Restore
- Enhance
- Other

Parcel Map
Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge, Phase IX
(Data Generated From Parcel List)