



## Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Protect and Restore MN Impt Bird Areas within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands, Phase 2  
Laws of Minnesota 2018 Accomplishment Plan

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### General Information

**Date:** 11/01/2023

**Project Title:** Protect and Restore MN Impt Bird Areas within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands, Phase 2

**Funds Recommended:** \$829,000

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

**Appropriation Language:** \$829,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for agreements to acquire conservation easements and enhance wildlife habitat in important bird areas identified in Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. Of this amount, \$209,000 is to Audubon Minnesota and \$620,000 is to Minnesota Land Trust. Up to \$120,000 to Minnesota Land Trust is for establishing monitoring and enforcement funds as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. 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 permanent conservation easements and enhancements must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

**Additional Legislative Changes:** ML 2021, First Sp Session, Ch. 1, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 10 Carryforwards (a) The availability of the appropriations for the following projects is extended to June 30, 2022: (4) Laws 2018, chapter 208, article 1, section 2, subdivision 2, paragraph (j), for Protect and Restore Minnesota's Important Bird Areas - Phase II, within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands;

### Manager Information

**Manager's Name:** Alexandra Wardwell

**Title:** Prairie Project Manager

**Organization:** Audubon Minnesota-National Audubon Society

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### Location Information

**County Location(s):** Polk and Kittson.

**Eco regions in which work will take place:**

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

**Activity types:**

- Protect in Easement
- Enhance

**Priority resources addressed by activity:**

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

**Narrative****Abstract**

Audubon Minnesota and Minnesota Land Trust are requesting funds to protect 560 acres through conservation easement and to enhance 500 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 will continue with the second phase of our Important Bird Area Protection and Restoration Program in the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region of Minnesota. This program will further advance the Outdoor Heritage Funds legacy of habitat protection and enhancement of habitat for wildlife in Minnesota. With these funds we will: 1) Obtain conservation easements on 560 acres of private lands, and 2) enhance 500 acres of habitat within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region of Minnesota.

Our program places an emphasis on Minnesota's Important Bird Areas (IBAs) 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 and the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan priority

areas 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 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.

### **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?**

Through the development of our Blueprint for Bird Conservation, Audubon Minnesota 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 program's 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.

### **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:**

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 Minnesota 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.

### **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
- Other : Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation

### **Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?**

#### **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

#### **Prairie**

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

## **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, which benefit wildlife and improve habitat quality on private lands.*

## Does this program include leveraged funding?

-

## Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
none	none	-

## 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 Minnesota and Minnesota Land Trust prepare a Habitat Management Plan for each landowner, providing ecological management recommendations for the property over time.

## Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2019 and beyond	MLT: Outdoor Heritage and MLT funds	Secure easement and begin to monitor, manage and enforce the easement through MLTs stewardship process	-	-
2019 and beyond	Audubon: Outdoor Heritage Funds	Develop easement Habitat Management Plans (2019-2024)	Monitor and manage enhancement activities accordingly (2019-2029)	-

## Activity Details

## Requirements

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

Yes

**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

**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?**

- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- Other : Public lands as appropriate

## Land Use

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

Yes

**Explain what will be planted:**

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 weeds 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?**

True

**Will the eased land be open for public use?**

No

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

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 and 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

**Timeline**

<b>Activity Name</b>	<b>Estimated Completion Date</b>
Conduct landowner outreach (ongoing). Secure conservation easements	June 2021
Conduct habitat enhancement of both public and protected private lands.	June 2023

**Date of Final Report Submission:** 08/31/2023

**Availability of Appropriation:** Subd. 7. Availability of Appropriation

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 indirect costs or other 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, 2021. For acquisition of real property, the amounts in this section are available until June 30, 2022, if a binding agreement with a landowner or purchase agreement is entered into by June 30, 2021, and closed no later than June 30, 2022. Funds for restoration or enhancement are available until June 30, 2023, or five years after acquisition, whichever is later, in order to complete initial restoration or enhancement work. If a project receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds, the time of the appropriation may be extended to equal the availability of federal funding to a maximum of six years if that federal funding was confirmed and included in the second draft accomplishment plan. Funds 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 a minimal impact on habitat in acquired lands.

**Budget**

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

**Grand Totals Across All Partnerships**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Funding Request</b>	<b>Leverage</b>	<b>Leverage Source</b>	<b>Total</b>
Personnel	\$203,200	\$30,000	Audubon MN	\$233,200
Contracts	\$278,800	\$30,000	Audubon MN	\$308,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$186,000	\$60,100	-, MLT	\$246,100
Easement Stewardship	\$48,000	-	-	\$48,000
Travel	\$12,000	-	-	\$12,000
Professional Services	\$73,000	-	-	\$73,000
Direct Support Services	\$24,000	-	-	\$24,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
Supplies/Materials	\$3,000	-	-	\$3,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$829,000</b>	<b>\$120,100</b>	-	<b>\$949,100</b>



## Partner: Audubon Minnesota

**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$113,200	\$30,000	Audubon MN	\$143,200
Contracts	\$87,800	\$30,000	Audubon MN	\$117,800
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	-	-	-	-
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$2,000	-	-	\$2,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$209,000</b>	<b>\$60,000</b>	-	<b>\$269,000</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation management and support staff	0.38	5.0	\$113,200	\$30,000	Audubon MN	\$143,200

**Partner: Minnesota Land Trust****Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$90,000	-	-	\$90,000
Contracts	\$191,000	-	-	\$191,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$186,000	\$60,100	MLT	\$246,100
Easement Stewardship	\$48,000	-	-	\$48,000
Travel	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000
Professional Services	\$73,000	-	-	\$73,000
Direct Support Services	\$24,000	-	-	\$24,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
Supplies/Materials	\$1,000	-	-	\$1,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$620,000</b>	<b>\$60,100</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$680,100</b>

**Personnel**

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Minnesota Land Trust Protection Staff	0.31	4.0	\$90,000	-	-	\$90,000

**Amount of Request:** \$829,000

**Amount of Leverage:** \$120,100

**Leverage as a percent of the Request:** 14.49%

**DSS + Personnel:** \$227,200

**As a % of the total request:** 27.41%

**Easement Stewardship:** \$48,000

**As a % of the Easement Acquisition:** 25.81%

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

Our program is scalable; we reduced the number and cost/acre of easement parcels from 9 to 3, reserved stewardship funds for 5 potential parcels, cut personnel funding as much as while possible keeping local expertise in place, and removed the restoration portion, shifting focus to protection and enhancement.

**Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:**

Leverage from MLT on the acquisition is from donative easement value from private landowners. Leverage from Audubon MN is for personnel.

## Contracts

### **What is included in the contracts line?**

The contracted line is about \$96,200 for enhancement and \$18,000 for protection. The protection portion is for developing the Habitat Management Plans required with each easement, the rest is for implementing the HMPs and conducting enhancement on public lands.

## Easement Stewardship

### **What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?**

## 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?**

In a process that was approved by the DNR on March 17, 2017, Minnesota Land Trust determined their 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 applied this DNR-approved rate only to Minnesota Land Trust personnel expenses to determine the total amount of direct support services.

## Federal Funds

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

No

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	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	560	560
Enhance	0	0	0	640	640
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>1,200</b>

**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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$439,900	\$439,900
Enhance	-	-	-	\$389,100	\$389,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$829,000</b>	<b>\$829,000</b>

**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	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	560	0	0	0	560
Enhance	0	640	0	0	0	640
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,200</b>

**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	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$439,900	-	-	-	\$439,900
Enhance	-	\$389,100	-	-	-	\$389,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$829,000</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>\$829,000</b>

**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	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$785
Enhance	-	-	-	\$607

**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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$785	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$607	-	-	-

**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?

[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

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

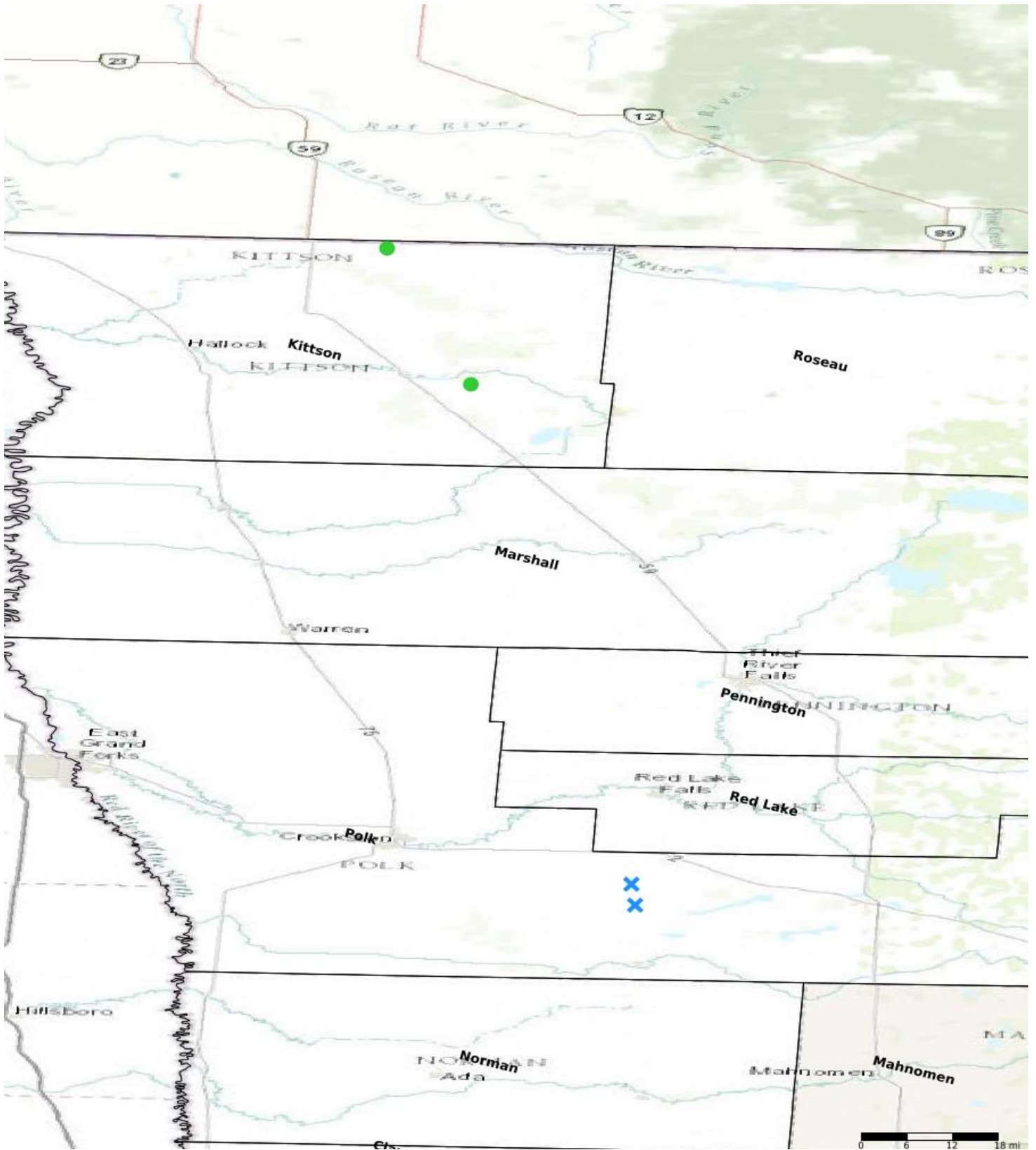
### Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
GRNWR_Lee Large Tree and Brush Removal	Polk	14844208	9	\$15,257	Yes
GRNWR_Wetland Enhancement	Polk	14944228	763	\$72,413	Yes

### Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Skull Lake (Hidden Meadow Tree Farm, LLC)	Kittson	16447235	101	\$66,000	No
Norway Dunes (Johnson-Abrahamson)	Kittson	16046203	335	\$120,000	No

### Parcel Map



- Protect in Easement
- ▲ Protect in Fee with PILT
- Protect in Fee W/O PILT
- ★ Restore
- ✕ Enhance
- ⊕ Other