



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Grassland Conservation Partnership, Phase III
Laws of Minnesota 2018 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 10/18/2023

Project Title: Grassland Conservation Partnership, Phase III

Funds Recommended: \$1,468,000

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

Appropriation Language: \$1,468,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with The Conservation Fund, in cooperation with Minnesota Land Trust, to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance high-priority grassland, prairie, and wetland habitats. Of this amount, \$69,000 is to The Conservation Fund and \$1,399,000 is to Minnesota Land Trust. Up to \$72,000 to Minnesota Land Trust is for establishing a monitoring and enforcement fund 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 proposed 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.

Additional Legislative Changes: ML 2021, First Sp Session, Ch. 1, Art. 1, Sec. 2, Subd. 10 Carryforwards (b) The availability of the appropriations for the following projects is extended to June 30, 2023: (7) Laws 2018, chapter 208, article 1, section 2, subdivision 2, paragraph (k), for Grassland Conservation Partnership - Phase III;

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Emilee Nelson

Title:

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Location Information

County Location(s): Becker, Kittson, Morrison, Winona, Yellow Medicine and Wadena.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Northern Forest
- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie
- Metro / Urban
- Southeast Forest

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Habitat

Narrative**Abstract**

The Conservation Fund and Minnesota Land Trust will protect 380 acres of high-priority grassland, prairie, and wetland wildlife habitat with working lands conservation easements in western, central, and southeastern Minnesota. Grasslands represent one of Minnesota's most threatened habitat types. Privately-held and well-managed grasslands in strategic habitat complexes have provided lasting benefits for Minnesota's wildlife. This project will permanently prevent the conversion of grasslands to row crops.

Design and Scope of Work

The Grasslands Conservation Partnership project builds upon the success The Conservation Fund (TCF) and the Minnesota Land Trust (MLT) have had in protecting more than 2,000-acres of important wildlife habitats in the two previous phases of this project through privately-held conservation easements that use innovative managed grazing and grassland management as an important conservation tool for Minnesota. These previous projects were completed in the Prairie Region, and more opportunities exist in the central and southeastern parts of the state, where private grasslands complete connectivity between wildlife complexes.

Conservation Easements:

As one of the founding partners in the development of the Prairie Plan, TCF has been working with other non-profits, United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to protect more than 4,000 acres of habitat in the prairie region over the past four years. Part of this effort was working with BWSR, MLT, and DNR to develop strategies to protect working grasslands that are vital for wildlife in the prairie region. This joint effort enabled MLT to establish two privately-held working-grassland conservation easements in the prairie region of Minnesota

protecting over 2,000 acres of grasslands.

Science has proven that proper application of haying and grazing techniques can be used to mimic natural processes necessary for healthy natural grassland communities. Our colleagues at The Nature Conservancy and the USFWS have proven these techniques successful in Minnesota over a significant period of time. Working with these partners, and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, DNR, the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association, the McKnight Foundation, private agriculture corporations and co-ops, we are confident that the time is right to expand our previous efforts to protect even more grassland.

All easements will be held and monitored by MLT. TCF will perform the initial landowner contact and negotiations, in full coordination with MLT, leading to the establishment of a conservation easement.

Lands targeted for conservation easement protection will meet the following criteria:

- Lands with significant existing prairie or grassland habitat.
- Lands adjacent to or in close proximity to permanently protected land (e.g. WMA, WPA, CREP, TNC preserves, etc.).
- Lands which will help establish connections to permanently protected land wherever possible and create larger habitat complexes.
- Lands which may also include low-production cropland that can be converted back into grasslands, thereby increasing overall grassland habitat.

MLT and TCF will use the above criteria to generate a systematic ranking system to vet potential projects and ensure maximum conservation values. We will also screen for producers with a proven ability to successfully implement best management practices for conservation grazing. Project priorities will be those that provide the greatest conservation benefits at the lowest cost to the State.

Capacity:

TCF and MLT are two of only four land trusts operating in Minnesota accredited by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. The Commission awards accreditation to land trusts that meet national standards for excellence.

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 MN Wildlife Action Plan (2015-2025), which directly addresses species in greatest conservation need, lists conservation grazing as a recommended conservation approach in half of all identified Conservation Focus Areas as a means to protect prairie and wetland habitat degradation due to invasive species. Studies have shown that many grassland and migratory birds rely on varying heights of grassland vegetation for parts of their life cycle, and that conservation grazing is a recommended tool to achieve ideal habitat conditions for nesting and rearing chicks.

Connecting fragmented landscapes is listed as a priority in almost every conservation plan. Increasing connectivity within habitat complexes for species that have limited dispersal ability, and among sites for species that require multiple habitats throughout their life history may increase opportunities for those species to adapt to stressors.

Targeted species for this project that have been shown to flourish with the use of conservation grazing include grasshopper sparrow, bobolink, eastern meadowlark, marbled godwit, burrowing owl, golden-winged warbler, northern pintail, northern harrier, greater prairie-chicken, sharp-tailed grouse, upland sandpiper, and loggerhead shrike (Migratory Bird Responses to Grazing, NRCS-USDA 2006). All of these bird species are Minnesota state listed species in greatest conservation need.

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:

We will use existing conservation plans, such as the Prairie Plan, Minnesota State Wildlife Action Plan, and local conservation plans such as One Watershed One Plan, and county water plans to complement and integrate ongoing conservation efforts. In past pilot phases, collaboration with DNR scientists who specialize in grassland game and nongame species prior to project implementation has been instrumental in ensuring robust and resilient projects within larger complexes. Project staff have worked closely with members of the MN Prairie Plan Local Technical Teams and the MN County Biological Survey to construct restoration and enhancement practices that are complementary to adjacent grassland complexes to ensure longevity of the grassland system as a whole.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation

Which two 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?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

Metro / Urban

- Protect from long-term or permanent endangerment from invasive species

Northern Forest

- Restore forest-based wildlife habitat that has experienced substantial decline in area in recent decades

Prairie

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

Southeast Forest

- Protect, enhance, and restore habitat for fish, game, and nongame wildlife in rivers, cold-water streams, and associated upland habitat

Outcomes**Programs in forest-prairie transition region:**

- Wetland and upland complexes will consist of native prairies, restored prairies, quality grasslands, and restored shallow lakes and wetlands ~ *Grasslands, vital to the conservation of many grassland dependent bird species, will be conserved and enhanced through thoughtful conservation grazing.*

Stable presence of grassland birds dependent upon edge habitat, such as Golden-winged Warblers, will be a measure of success.

Programs in metropolitan urbanizing region:

- A network of natural land and riparian habitats will connect corridors for wildlife and species in greatest conservation need ~ *Grasslands, vital to the conservation of many grassland dependent bird and pollinator species, will be conserved and enhanced through thoughtful conservation grazing.*

Grassland plant species diversity and relative health will be the measure of success.

Programs in the northern forest region:

- Increased availability and improved condition of riparian forests and other habitat corridors ~ *Grasslands, vital to the conservation of many grassland dependent bird species, will be conserved and enhanced through thoughtful conservation grazing.*

Stable presence of grassland birds dependent upon edge habitat, such as Golden-winged Warblers, will be a measure of success.

Programs in prairie region:

- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *Grasslands, vital to the conservation of many grassland dependent bird and pollinator species, will be conserved and enhanced through thoughtful conservation grazing.*

Grassland plant species diversity and relative health will be the measure of success.

Pheasant counts, using annual roadside surveys, will be a measure of success.

Programs in southeast forest region:

- Rivers, streams, and surrounding vegetation provide corridors of habitat ~ *Grasslands, vital to the conservation of many grassland dependent bird and pollinator species, will be conserved and enhanced through thoughtful conservation grazing.*

Grassland plant species diversity and relative health will be the measure of success.

Does this program include leveraged funding?

-

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
2015	McKnight Foundation	\$20,000
2016	McKnight Foundation	\$20,000
2017	McKnight Foundation	\$20,000

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

MLT 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 case of a true violation. The conservation easements secured under this program will also require landowners to have robust habitat management plans to guide the ongoing management of the property.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2019	MLT Long-Term Stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring for compliance with terms of conservation easements	Defend easements as necessary	-

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?

The Minnesota Land Trust will manage the easement.

Who will be the easement holder?

The Minnesota Land Trust will be the easement holder.

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

-

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?

-

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

Limited food plots are sometimes allowed on conservation easements. Row crops are a tool to that can be used to establish vegetation for grassland restoration purposes.

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. 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 line 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

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
TCF to initiate landowner contact and negotiate base parameters of the conservation easement	June 2021
MLT to complete acquisition of conservation easements	June 2021

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2021

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

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$174,600	\$10,000	-, Private	\$184,600
Contracts	\$141,000	\$500,000	-, EQIP RCPP Award	\$641,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$935,000	-	-	\$935,000
Easement Stewardship	\$72,000	-	-	\$72,000
Travel	\$9,000	-	-	\$9,000
Professional Services	\$100,000	-	-	\$100,000
Direct Support Services	\$36,400	-	-	\$36,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,468,000	\$510,000	-	\$1,978,000

Partner: MLT**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$114,600	-	-	\$114,600
Contracts	\$141,000	-	-	\$141,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$935,000	-	-	\$935,000
Easement Stewardship	\$72,000	-	-	\$72,000
Travel	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Professional Services	\$100,000	-	-	\$100,000
Direct Support Services	\$31,400	-	-	\$31,400
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$1,399,000	-	-	\$1,399,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Protection Staff	0.27	3.0	\$114,600	-	-	\$114,600

Partner: TCF**Totals**

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$60,000	\$10,000	Private	\$70,000
Contracts	-	\$500,000	EQIP RCPP Award	\$500,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$4,000	-	-	\$4,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	-	-	-	-
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$69,000	\$510,000	-	\$579,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Conservation Associate	0.2	3.0	\$60,000	\$10,000	Private	\$70,000

Amount of Request: \$1,468,000

Amount of Leverage: \$510,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 34.74%

DSS + Personnel: \$211,000

As a % of the total request: 14.37%

Easement Stewardship: \$72,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 7.7%

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

Proposed acres protected through conservation easement have been reduced proportional to the award amount.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The McKnight Foundation supports working landscapes, and funding is in-hand. NRCS RCPP funding is in-hand for EQIP work on protected projects.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

\$100,000 in the contract line is for R/E work to be done by contractors with MN Land Trust as project managers on the protected projects. Landowners often desire to improve the condition of their land as wildlife habitat by

removing woody vegetation and interseeding to improve vegetation diversity. The remaining \$21,000 is to develop grassland management plans specific to each project.

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?

MLT: 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.

TCF: Our real estate support staff keeps hourly time sheets to track direct time spent on projects by grant source. We have used those past metrics to estimate the costs for this grant.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

- Cash : \$500,000

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	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	80	0	302	382
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	80	0	302	382

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	0
Protect in Easement	5
Enhance	0
Total	5

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$100,000	\$100,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$400,000	-	\$968,000	\$1,368,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$400,000	-	\$1,068,000	\$1,468,000

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	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	100	282	382
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	100	282	382

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	-	\$100,000	\$100,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$400,000	\$968,000	\$1,368,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$400,000	\$1,068,000	\$1,468,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
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Restore	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	\$5,000	-	\$3,205
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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$4,000	\$3,432
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

For restoration and enhancement programs ONLY: Managers may add, delete, and substitute projects on this parcel list based upon need, readiness, cost, opportunity, and/or urgency so long as the substitute parcel/project forwards the constitutional objectives of this program in the Project Scope table of this accomplishment plan. The final accomplishment plan report will include the final parcel list.

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

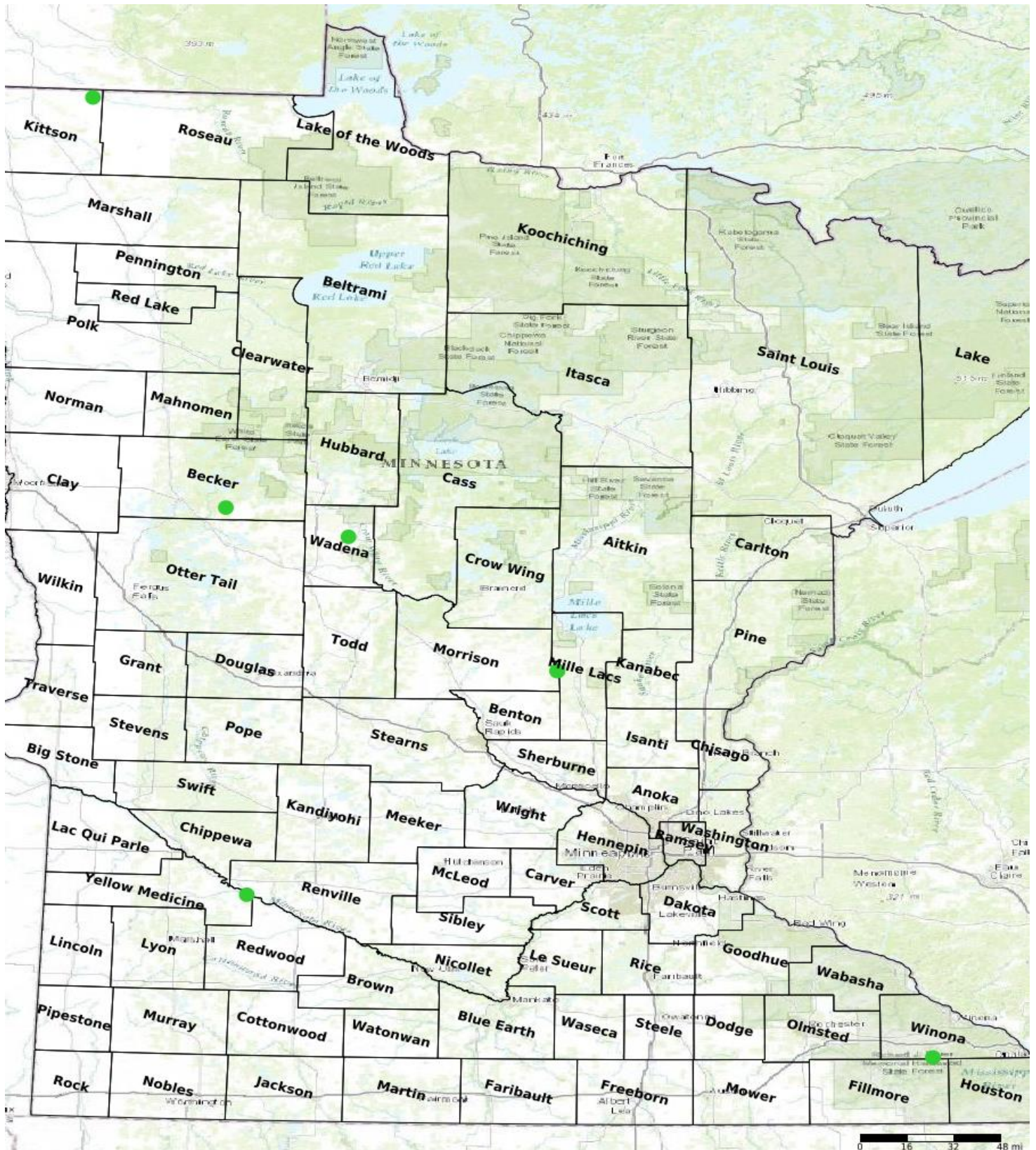
[Yes - Sign up criteria is attached](#)

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

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Hungry Lake (Green)	Becker	13839210	190	\$190,700	No
Caribou Parklands	Kittson	16345210	320	\$150,000	No
Rum River (Kremer)	Morrison	04028225	276	\$249,000	No
Rum River (American Bison Company)	Morrison	04028225	552	\$493,000	No
Easement Parcel 1	Wadena	13734236	540	\$500,000	No
Easement Parcel 4	Winona	10508232	40	\$250,000	No
Easement Parcel 3	Yellow Medicine	11438202	60	\$250,000	No

Parcel Map



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