

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 4
Laws of Minnesota 2019 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 10/16/2023

Project Title: Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program - Phase 4

Funds Recommended: \$2,129,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2019, 1st Sp. Session, Ch. 2, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd, 4(c)

Appropriation Language: \$2,129,000 the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Minnesota Land Trust to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance prairie, wetland, and other habitat on permanently protected conservation easements in high-priority wetland habitat complexes in the prairie and forest/prairie transition regions. Of this amount, up to \$240,000 is to establish a monitoring and enforcement fund as approved in the accomplishment plan and subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 97A.056, subdivision 17. A list of proposed conservation easement acquisitions and restorations and enhancements must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Wayne Ostlie
Title: Director of Land Protection
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Location Information

County Location(s): Pope, Kandiyohi, Grant, Otter Tail and Clay.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

Phase 4 of the Wetland Habitat Protection and Restoration Program will result in the protection of 800 acres of high priority wetland habitat complexes in Minnesota's Prairie and Forest-Prairie Transition areas by securing permanent conservation easements within scientifically prioritized habitat complexes. The Minnesota Land Trust will use its innovative landowner bid model to maximize conservation benefit and financial leverage in protection project selection. In addition, a partnership between the US Fish and Wildlife Service and Land Trust will restore/enhance 978 acres of wetlands and associated prairies to benefit important waterfowl and SGCN populations.

Design and Scope of Work

Wetlands and shallow lakes provide the essential backbone for the survival of waterfowl and other important wildlife species. In fact, more than 50% of Minnesota's Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) use wetlands during their life cycle. Most of the plans

developed to protect Minnesota's wildlife—including Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, the Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, and the Long Range Duck Recovery Plan—cite the protection and restoration of the state's

remaining wetlands as one of the top priorities to achieve the State's conservation goals. Moreover, these plans cite the use of conservation easements on private lands as one of the primary strategies to protect important wetland and shallow lake habitat.

Minnesota Land Trust's Wetlands Habitat Protection Program area extends from Meeker northwest to Becker County, located along a vast glacial moraine system at the edge of the of western Minnesota. This prairie pothole country is the core of Minnesota's "duck

factory" and is central to one of North America's most important flyways for migratory waterfowl. Through Phases 1 and 2 of this program, the Land Trust has procured 17 conservation easements protecting nearly 2,500 acres of habitat and 75,100 feet of shoreline, with more on the way.

protection – habitat restoration and enhancement. In a partnership between the Land Trust and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, this proposal will restore/enhance 978 acres of important prairie and wetland habitat on private lands already protected within the Program area. In addition, the Land Trust will protect 800 acres of new priority wetland and associated upland habitat through conservation easements. The Program will be closely coordinated with other public agencies, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders to ensure this Program meets multi-agency conservation goals.

The Land Trust will continue to implement a criteria-based ranking system and market approach for purchasing conservation easements. The Program will continue to target projects that help complete gaps in existing public ownership, are of the highest ecological value, and provide the greatest leverage to the state. The Land Trust will seek donated easements in these areas whenever possible but also may purchase easements that help complete key complexes as necessary.

To focus our easement protection work, we used the Prairie Plan and other data sets and plans to shape our Wetlands Program plan and identify important wetland complexes in this landscape based on the intersection of high-quality habitat, existing protected areas and restorable agricultural lands. These complexes include a mosaic of wetland, prairie/grassland, and forest habitats, as well as agricultural land. Outcomes from this project include: 1) healthy wetland habitat complexes and associated populations of waterfowl, upland birds, and SGCN; 2) improved water quality; 3) increased participation of private landowners in habitat conservation projects; and 4) enhancement of prior public investment in wetland and upland habitat.

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?

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 brought about 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. They will also be located near other protected lands so as to help build larger habitat complexes which will be comprised of both public and private lands. In fact, with the vast majority of this landscape in private ownership, 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.

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.

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 is focused on procuring easements and restoring prairie and wetland habitats on easement 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 acquisition of easements are further reviewed relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on three primary ecological factors (amount of habitat on the parcel (size) and abundance of SGCN; the quality or condition of habitat; and the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas) and cost. As such, the program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area, expanding the footprint of existing protected areas (WMAs, WPAs, etc.), facilitating the protection of habitat corridors and reducing the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats. In addition, our partnership with USFWS will enable us 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, as many private lands were not formally ssessed through MBS.

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?

- Long Range Duck Recovery Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

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 nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ This program will permanently protect 400 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes and restore/enhance 707 acres of wetlands and prairies in the forest-prairie transition region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.

Programs in prairie region:

• Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered ~ *This program* will permanently protect 400 acres of wetland and upland habitat complexes and restore/enhance 271 acres of wetlands and prairies in the prairie region. Measure: Acres protected; acres restored; acres enhanced.

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

The Minnesota Land Trust and USFWS are collaborating in the delivery of this program. The Land Trust will lead all facets of easement acquisition in the Program. Restoration and enhancement activities on easement properties will be coordinated by the Land Trust, which includes design review, subcontracting, and project management; USFWS will provide project planning, restoration design and project oversight assistance for these activities. The USFWS is not a direct recipient of funding through this proposal; their time committed to the Program is an in-kind contribution (leverage) estimated at \$19,800.

The Land Trust encourages private landowners to fully or partially donate the appraised value of their conservation easement, thereby receiving less than the appraised value might otherwise allow. This donated value is shown as leveraged funds in the proposal. The Land Trust has a long track record in incentivizing landowners to participate in this fashion. In Phase 1 of this program alone, \$1,183,400 in easement value was donated to the program as leverage against the \$1,629,000 grant; significant donations are continuing. We expect a significant landowner contribution to continue in phase 4, with our conservative estimate of leverage being \$277,000.

Per MS 97A.056, Subd. 24, Please explain 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 through the Outdoor Heritage Fund via this proposal will not supplant or substitute any previous funding from a non-Legacy fund used for the same purpose.

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
2001-2011	ENRTF	\$2,000,000
2014-2018	McKnight Foundation	\$300,000

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 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 case 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. USFWS and MLT (as easement holders on 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.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2023 and in perpetuity	MLT Long-Term stewardship and Enforcement Fund	Annual monitoring of conservation easements in perpetuity	Enforcement as necessary	-
Every 4-6 years	USFWS, Landowners, MLT	Prescribed fire, tree control, invasive species control	-	-

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 easements.

Who will be the easement holder?

The Minnesota Land Trust will hold the easements.

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

Our budget is based on closing 6-8 (10) conservation easements. However, that number can vary considerably depending on the size and value of respective properties, and the amount of donative easement value contributed by landowners. Our easement stewardship is capped at 10 conservation easements, which reflects the maximum number to be procured.

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

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

Easement Acquisition:

The purpose of the Minnesota Land Trust's 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.

Restoration/Enhancement:

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

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

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

Yes

The Land Trust has earmarked funding for R/E work on easements closed during this appropriation. We expect that some easement properties will benefit from R/E funding, and we have set aside funding through this appropriation to achieve approximately 150 acres of restoration/enhancement on newly-acquired easements.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Conservation easements completed or options secured	June 30, 2022
Restoration and enhancement projects completed	June 30, 2024

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2022

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, 2022. For acquisition of real property, the amounts in this section are available until June 30, 2023, if a binding agreement with a landowner or purchase agreement is entered into by June 30, 2022, and closed no later than June 30, 2023. Funds for restoration or enhancement are available until June 30, 2024, 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 original 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.

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$211,000	\$19,800	USFWS Personnel	\$230,800
Contracts	\$507,000	-	-	\$507,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$1,087,500	\$277,000	Landowner donation of easement value	\$1,364,500
Easement Stewardship	\$96,000	-	-	\$96,000
Travel	\$18,900	-	-	\$18,900
Professional Services	\$131,000	-	-	\$131,000
Direct Support Services	\$57,500	-	-	\$57,500
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other	\$2,000	-	-	\$2,000
Equipment/Tools				
Supplies/Materials	\$18,100	-	-	\$18,100
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,129,000	\$296,800	-	\$2,425,800

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years	Funding	Leverage	Leverage	Total
		Working	Request		Source	
Minnesota	0.5	3.0	\$136,000	-	-	\$136,000
Land Trust						
Protection Staff						
Minnesota	0.28	3.0	\$75,000	\$19,800	USFWS	\$94,800
Land Trust					Personnel	
Restoration						
Staff						

Amount of Request: \$2,129,000 **Amount of Leverage:** \$296,800

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 13.94%

DSS + Personnel: \$268,500

As a % of the total request: 12.61% Easement Stewardship: \$96,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 8.83%

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

To a large degree, outputs submitted in the proposal were reduced proportional to the allocation.

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. In addition, USFWS staff participation in restoration/enhancement projects is committed and shown as leverage.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

The contracts item includes funding for the writing of habitat management plans, outreach services provided by SWCD offices, and restoration/enhancement contracts.

Easement Stewardship

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

The Land Trust's easement stewardship cost is based on a number of factors, including: 1) easement administration & management, 2) monitoring, 3) updating of monitoring workbooks and baseline documentation reports, 4) encouraging voluntary compliance, 5) addressing potential violations, and 6) legal enforcement. The current cost is set at \$24,000/easement.

Travel

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

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 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.

Federal Funds

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

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

Is Confirmation Document attached?

Yes

• In Kind: \$19.800

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	123	0	30	153
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	800	800
Enhance	0	705	0	120	825
Total	0	828	0	950	1,778

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

Туре	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	0
Enhance	152
Total	152

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$102,000	ı	\$53,000	\$155,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	ı	ı	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	ı	ı	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$1,566,000	\$1,566,000
Enhance	-	\$283,000	1	\$125,000	\$408,000
Total	-	\$385,000	-	\$1,744,000	\$2,129,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Туре	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	138	0	15	0	153
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	400	0	400	0	800
Enhance	0	569	0	256	0	825
Total	0	1,107	0	671	0	1,778

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Туре	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$116,000	-	\$39,000	1	\$155,000
Protect in Fee with State	-	1	-	-	-	-
PILT Liability						
Protect in Fee w/o State	-	-	-	-	-	-
PILT Liability						
Protect in Easement	-	\$783,000	-	\$783,000	ı	\$1,566,000
Enhance	-	\$278,000	-	\$130,000	ı	\$408,000
Total	-	\$1,177,000	-	\$952,000	-	\$2,129,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
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Project #: None

Restore	-	\$829	-	\$1,766
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$1,957
Enhance	-	\$401	-	\$1,041

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Туре	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	\$840	ı	\$2,600	ı
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	ı	1	ı
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	1
Protect in Easement	-	\$1,957	ı	\$1,957	ı
Enhance	-	\$488	-	\$507	-

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:

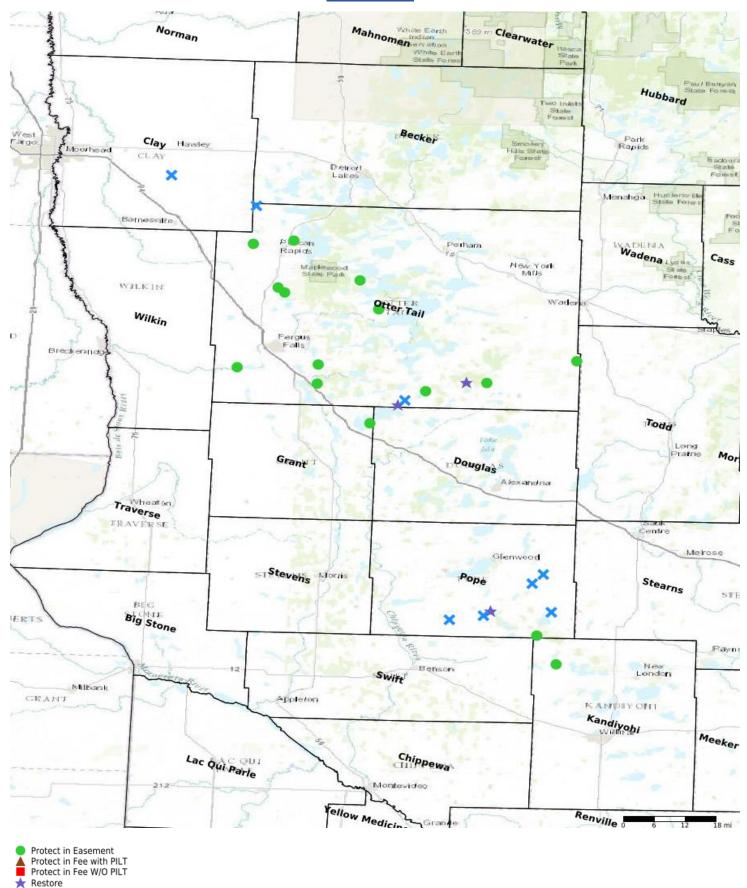
Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing
					Protection
TSch	Clay	13846201	62	\$40,000	Yes
OSor North	Otter Tail	13140234	123	\$77,000	Yes
SSla	Otter Tail	13138205	186	\$125,000	Yes
LWEva	Otter Tail	13140226	309	\$200,000	Yes
DRen	Otter Tail	13743206	200	\$28,000	Yes
TCar	Pope	12536229	331	\$69,000	Yes
Wel HE	Pope	12336204	29	\$15,000	Yes
Schmidgall	Pope	12437201	322	\$70,000	Yes
JGan	Pope	12338211	114	\$29,000	Yes
GLee	Pope	12339213	20	\$11,000	Yes
BMul	Pope	12338201	141	\$33,700	Yes

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing
					Protection
Lake Christina	Grant	13041224	44	\$127,500	No
Rocky Mountain Lake (Rocky Mountain	Kandiyohi	12236234	75	\$128,000	No
Sportsmen, Inc.)					
Minnesota Woman	Otter Tail	13643212	80	\$23,000	No
Spitzer Lake (Raether)	Otter Tail	13139217	55	\$87,000	No
Long Lake (Tuel Family Revocable Living	Otter Tail	13443202	278	\$390,000	No
Trust)					
Long Lake (Vukonich)	Otter Tail	13543234	210	\$300,000	No
Otter Tail River (Lindig)	Otter Tail	13244227	160	\$240,000	Yes
Lake Olaf	Otter Tail	13644213	120	\$180,000	No
Twin Lakes (Bensch)	Otter Tail	13440219	133	\$450,000	No
Star Lake	Otter Tail	13541222	60	\$120,000	No
Pomme de Terre (Wasson)	Otter Tail	13242222	17	\$0	No
Folden Woods (Inspiration Point)	Otter Tail	13138202	142	\$160,000	No
Wing River	Otter Tail	13236212	120	\$200,000	No
Pomme de Terre River	Otter Tail	13142210	78	\$117,000	No
Lake Johanna	Pope	12336231	145	\$138,000	No

Parcel Map



Enhance Other