



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Accelerating Habitat Conservation in Southwest Minnesota
Laws of Minnesota 2020 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 10/11/2024

Project Title: Accelerating Habitat Conservation in Southwest Minnesota

Funds Recommended: \$3,044,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2020, Ch. 104, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd 5(e)

Appropriation Language: \$3,044,000 the second 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 high-quality wildlife habitat in southwest Minnesota. Of this amount, up to \$144,000 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, 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

Organization: Minnesota Land Trust

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Location Information

County Location(s): Murray, Nobles, Lac qui Parle, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Pipestone, Cottonwood, Martin and Rock.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement
- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative**Abstract**

The Minnesota Land Trust proposes to permanently protect 550 acres of high quality habitat in southwest Minnesota by securing conservation easements within scientifically prioritized habitat complexes by filling key unmet gaps in the available land protection toolbox. Working with willing landowners the Land Trust will use its innovative bid model to maximize conservation benefit and financial leverage in project selection. The Land Trust in cooperation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service will restore/enhance 195 acres of wetlands and associated prairies to benefit SGCN and waterfowl populations.

Design and Scope of Work

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

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

Working with willing landowners, the Land Trust will protect 660 acres of priority wetland, prairie and associated upland habitat through conservation easements. The Land Trust's conservation easements fill an important gap not addressed by easement programs currently available in Southwest Minnesota through USFWS, MN DNR and BWSR. The Land Trust's easement program has greater flexibility to address key conservation opportunities that

otherwise would be left on the table. Land protection actions through this proposal will focus on: 1) priority areas within the Prairie Plan left orphaned by current conservation easement programs, and 2) conservation priorities identified in the WAN that are not encompassed by the Prairie Plan. The Land Trust will employ its criteria-based ranking system and market-based approach to the acquisition of conservation easements. This strategic approach targets projects that help fill gaps in existing public ownership, are of the highest ecological value, and provide the greatest leverage to the State's funding investment. The Land Trust will seek donated easements whenever possible but also may fully purchase easements that help complete key complexes as necessary.

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

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

How does the plan address habitats that have significant value for wildlife species of greatest conservation need, and/or threatened or endangered species, and list targeted species?

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

Describe 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 conservation easements and restoring prairie and wetland habitats on easement and fee protected lands within priority complexes of wetlands and associated upland habitats, as guided by the State Wildlife Action Plan, Duck Plan and Prairie Plan. Specific parcels available for easement acquisition are evaluated relative to each other to identify priorities among the pool of applicants. This relative ranking is based on three primary ecological factors [1) amount of habitat on the parcel (size) and abundance of SGCN; 2) the quality or condition of habitat; and 3) the parcel's context relative to other natural habitats and protected areas] in addition to cost. The program serves to build upon past conservation investments in the program area, expand the footprint of existing protected areas (WMAs, WPAs, etc.), facilitate the protection of habitat corridors and reduce the potential for fragmentation of existing habitats. In addition, the USFWS (a cooperator in this program) will

receive OHF funding through MLT to further reduce effects of fragmentation through restoration of prairie, wetlands and other habitats. Minnesota Biological Survey data is a cornerstone to our assessment of potential conservation easement acquisitions. We also conduct field visits to further identify and assess condition of habitats prior to easement acquisition because many private lands were not formally assessed through MBS.

Which 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
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this program?

Prairie

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

Outcomes

Programs in prairie region:

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

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

Through its market-based RFP process, the Land Trust expects private landowners to donate at least \$200,000 in easement value toward the program, which is shown as leverage.

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

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

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

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

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

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

Activity Details

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.

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

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

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?

- WPA
- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- Refuge Lands

Land Use

Will there be planting of any crop on OHF land purchased or restored in this program, either by the proposer or the end owner of the property, outside of the initial restoration of the land?

Yes

Explain what will be planted and include the maximum percentage of any acquired parcel that would be planted into foodplots by the proposer or the end owner of the property:

Easement Acquisition:

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

Restoration/Enhancement:

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

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

Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

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

Will new trails or roads be developed or improved as a result of the OHF acquisition?

No

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

Yes

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

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Conservation easements closed or options secured	June 30, 2023
Restoration and enhancement projects completed	June 30, 2025

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2025**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, 2023. For acquisition of real property, the amounts in this section are available until June 30, 2024, if a binding agreement with a landowner or purchase agreement is entered into by June 30, 2023, and closed no later than June 30, 2024. Funds for restoration or enhancement are available until June 30, 2025, 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 the federal funding was confirmed and included in the original approved 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	\$245,000	-	-	\$245,000
Contracts	\$357,000	-	-	\$357,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$2,122,000	\$200,000	Landowner Donation of Easement Value	\$2,322,000
Easement Stewardship	\$96,000	-	-	\$96,000
Travel	\$10,000	-	-	\$10,000
Professional Services	\$95,000	-	-	\$95,000
Direct Support Services	\$63,000	-	-	\$63,000
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$6,000	-	-	\$6,000
Supplies/Materials	\$50,000	-	-	\$50,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$3,044,000	\$200,000	-	\$3,244,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
MLT Protection Staff	0.44	3.0	\$125,000	-	-	\$125,000
MLT Restoration Staff	0.44	3.0	\$120,000	-	-	\$120,000

Amount of Request: \$3,044,000

Amount of Leverage: \$200,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 6.57%

DSS + Personnel: \$308,000

As a % of the total request: 10.12%

Easement Stewardship: \$96,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 4.52%

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

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

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

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

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

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

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

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

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 lodging

Land 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?**

No

Output Tables**Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)**

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	195	195
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	550	550
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	745	745

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$467,000	\$467,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$2,577,000	\$2,577,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$3,044,000	\$3,044,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	195	0	195
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	0	0	0	0	0	0
Protect in Easement	0	0	0	550	0	550
Enhance	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	745	0	745

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$467,000	-	\$467,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$2,577,000	-	\$2,577,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	-	-	\$3,044,000	-	\$3,044,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$2,394
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$4,685
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	\$2,394	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	\$4,685	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

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:

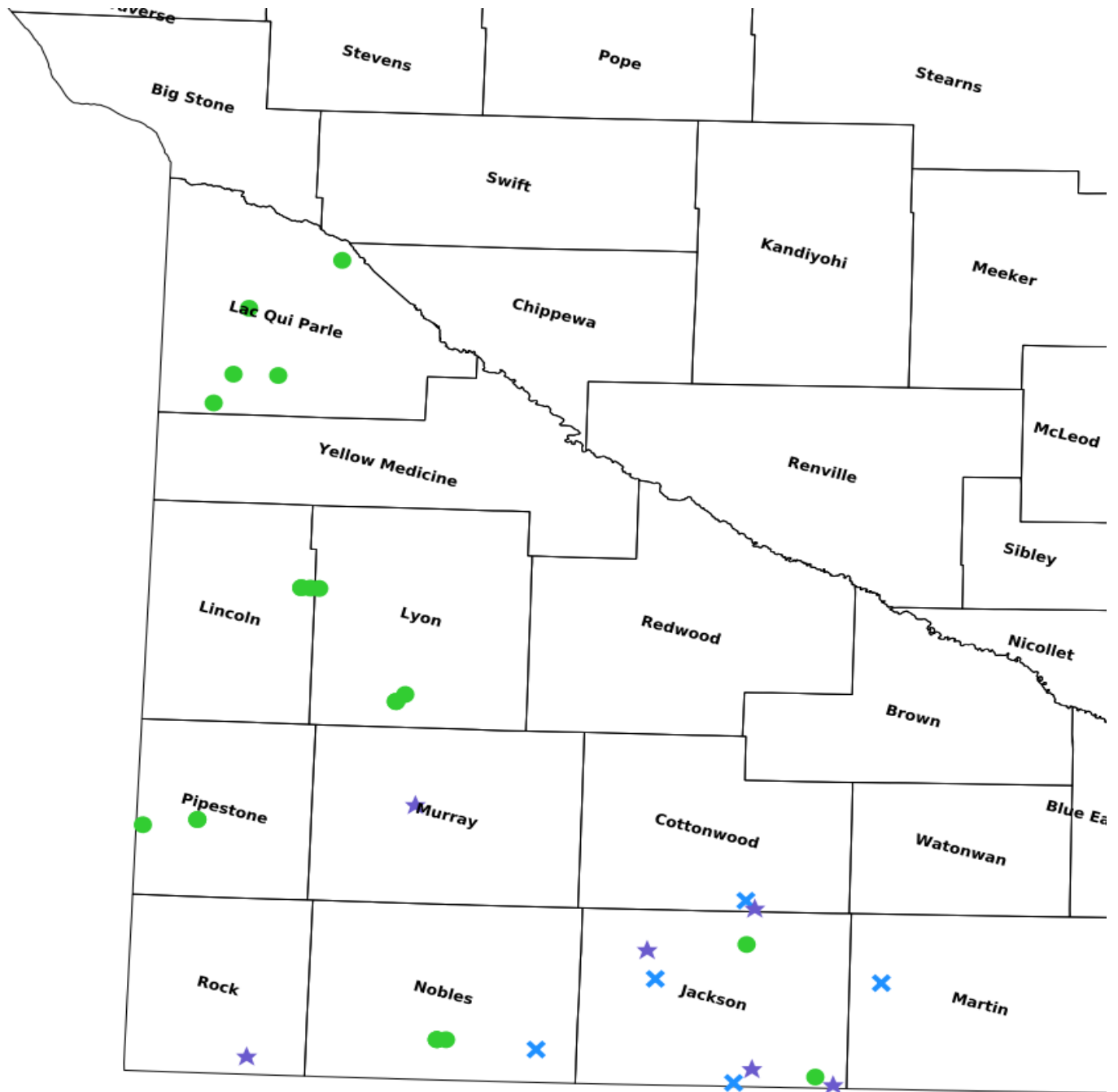
Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Description
Jackson 1	Cottonwood	10535232	10	\$80,000	Yes	Wetland restoration and upland tree removal on USFWS-held perpetual easement adjacent to Wolf Lake WPA
Cottonwood 51G Enhancement	Cottonwood	10535230	36	\$40,500	Yes	Enhance native prairie and wetland habitat by removing woody invasive species. Promote wildlife and pollinators by doing a prescribed fire and interseeding diverse forbs to promote prairie diversity.
Spirit Lake WPA	Jackson	10136236	160	\$200,000	Yes	Enhancement of upland areas and wetland basins
JEnE	Jackson	10134235	60	\$34,000	Yes	Prairie
GRKK	Jackson	10135220	80	\$10,000	Yes	Restore uplands to native prairie.
HERL	Jackson	10437232	3	\$7,000	Yes	Enhance wetland habitat through cattail removal.
Jackson 51G Tree Removal	Jackson	10337221	130	\$20,000	Yes	Enhance native prairie and wetland habitat by removing woody invasive species.
SheE	Martin	10333222	10	\$40,000	Yes	Prairie
JOnk	Murray	10742225	2	\$25,000	Yes	Oxbow- Topeka Shiner and pollinator planting on upland
Round Lake WPA	Nobles	10139208	104	\$150,000	Yes	Enhancement of upland areas and wetland basins
LBos	Rock	10145224	1	\$20,000	Yes	Oxbow- Topeka Shiner

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Des Moines River 1	Jackson	10134228	180	\$810,000	No
Des Moines River 2	Jackson	10435230	120	\$324,000	-
Lac qui Parle 1	Lac qui Parle	11645230	31	\$110,000	No
Lac qui Parle 4	Lac qui Parle	11943216	5	\$30,000	No
Lac qui Parle 5	Lac qui Parle	11645204	195	\$500,000	No
Lac qui Parle 3	Lac qui Parle	11644205	40	\$94,000	No
Lac qui Parle 2	Lac qui Parle	11845223	147	\$390,000	No
Lincoln 3	Lincoln	11244236	186	\$744,000	No
Lincoln 2	Lincoln	11244235	391	\$2,275,000	No
Lincoln 1	Lincoln	11244235	640	\$2,500,000	No
Cottonwood River 3	Lyon	10942215	9	\$7,000	No
Lincoln 4	Lyon	11243231	80	\$320,000	No
Cottonwood River 2	Lyon	10942215	12	\$13,000	No
Cottonwood River 4	Lyon	10942211	200	\$425,000	No
Cottonwood River 1	Lyon	10942215	73	\$100,000	No
Little Rock River 4	Nobles	10141204	74	\$222,000	No
Little Rock River (Johnson)	Nobles	10141203	34	\$241,000	No
Little Rock River 3 (Standafer)	Nobles	10141204	184	\$684,000	No
Little Rock River 1 (Rall)	Nobles	10141204	59	\$301,500	Yes
Pipestone Monument 1	Pipestone	10646212	5	\$35,000	No
Pipestone Creek (Wallin)	Pipestone	10647213	199	\$892,800	No
Pipestone Monument 2	Pipestone	10646212	24	\$190,000	No

Parcel Map



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