Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Laws of Minnesota 2021 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 07/06/2021

Project Title: Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection-Phase VIII

Funds Recommended: $884,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2021, First Sp. Session, Ch. 1, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(f)

Appropriation Language: $884,000 the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources to acquire permanent conservation easements to protect and restore native prairie according to the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. Of this amount, up to $120,000 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 must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Judy Schulte
Title:
Organization: MN DNR
Address: 1241 E Bridge Street
City: Redwood Falls, MN 56283
Email: judy.schulte@state.mn.us
Office Number: 507-637-6016
Mobile Number:
Fax Number:
Website:

Location Information

County Location(s): Redwood.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Easement

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie

Narrative

Abstract

Native Prairie Bank will work with willing landowners to permanently protect 235 acres of native prairie and supporting habitat through perpetual conservation easements. Easement acquisition will focus on Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan identified landscapes and target Minnesota Biological Survey identified threatened and endangered plant and animal species, high quality plant communities, and key habitats for Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and other wildlife species.

Design and Scope of Work

The loss of native prairie and associated grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing western and southern Minnesota. Through acquisition of Native Prairie Bank conservation easements, this proposal aims to permanently protect 200 acres of native prairie habitat.

Native prairie is a fragile, unique natural ecosystem that consists of thousands of different organisms, plants, animals, bacteria and soil fungi. Their complex interactions provide the food, water and shelter required by many of Minnesota's rare, threatened and endangered species. Native prairie provides a multitude of benefits to the citizens of the state, such as water filtration and recharge, pollinator and wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, soil health, erosion control, outdoor recreation, etc. High quality native prairies provide the best available habitat for grassland dependent pollinators, birds and animals. Restoration efforts aim to meet the standards set by these original native prairies.

The Minnesota Biological Survey has identified about 249,000 acres of remaining native prairie in Minnesota, approximately 1.3% of what once existed in the state. Of these 249,000 acres, approximately 118,000 acres still have no formal protection. Threats to native prairie continue to be widespread including cropland conversion, mining, development, invasive species, woody encroachment and non-prairie focused land use/management.

Recognizing that protecting grassland and wetland habitat is one of the most critical conservation challenges facing Minnesota, over a dozen leading conservation organizations developed the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. Several outcomes are identified in the plan, one being the protection of all remaining native prairie, largely through conservation easements. One of the primary easement tools for native prairie protection in Minnesota is the DNR administered Native Prairie Bank easement. Native Prairie Bank was established by the 1987 legislature as a tool to protect native prairie in a long-term "bank" by authorizing the state to acquire conservation easements from willing landowners. To date 155 Native Prairie Banks protect close to 14,000 acres. Native Prairie Bank targets the protection of native prairie tracts, but can also include adjoining lands as buffers and additional habitat.

Eligible tracts are prioritized based on several scientific factors including:

1) Size and quality of habitat, focusing on diverse native prairie communities identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey
2) Occurrence of threatened and endangered species or suitability of habitat for Species in Greatest Conservation Need
3) Lands that are part of a larger habitat complex

Native Prairie Bank easements provide enduring, long-term protection by placing restrictions on future land use and grant the DNR the right to monitor and manage the prairie.

Native Prairie Bank coordinates with Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan partners and utilizes the network of established Local Technical Teams (local staff from SWCDs, NRCS, DNR, USFWS, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, etc.) to reach out to landowners and increase enrollment.

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?

Native Prairie Bank gives priority to sites identified by the Minnesota Biological Survey and targets, threatened, endangered, and other rare plant and animal species, high quality plant communities, and key habitats for Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). According to Minnesota Biological Survey staff, based on information gathered during the updating of the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan (formally known as Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare), there are 89 Species of Greatest Conservation Need that occur in the prairie region of the state.

Each native prairie being targeted and protected through this proposal will typically support several Species in Greatest Conservation Need. SGCNs found on native prairies include but are not limited to white-tailed jackrabbit, American badger, northern pintail, short-eared owl, Henslow's sparrow, upland sandpiper, sedge wren, marbled godwit, western meadowlark, greater-prairie chicken, Blanding's turtle, Great Plains toad, plains hog-nosed snake, gophersnake, common five-lined skink, and multiple spiders, dragonflies, butterflies, moths, beetles and bees.

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:

Native Prairie Bank scores and selects easements based on criteria including, the diversity and quality of native prairie habitat as ranked by the Minnesota Biological Survey, size of the prairie, occurrence of or suitable habitat for threatened and endangered species and Species in Greatest Conservation Need, location relative to other native prairie or protected lands (includes Prairie Plan target landscapes), potential for long-term management and other factors that would insure long-term benefits and sustainability for Minnesota's critical wildlife species. Native Prairie Bank's numerical scoring and selection process prioritizes parcels that build on existing habitat complexes, avoids fragmentation and targets Minnesota Biological Survey priority plant communities and areas of biodiversity significance. Please see the Native Prairie Bank scoring criteria uploaded as part of this proposal.

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?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

Prairie

- Protect, enhance, and restore remnant native prairie, Big Woods forests, and oak savanna

Does this program include leveraged funding?

No

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.

This request accelerates Native Prairie Bank protection to a level not attainable but for the appropriation. Prior to receiving OHF, Native Prairie Bank protected an average of 328 acres/year. Since receiving OHF, Native Prairie Bank protects an average of 607 acres/year, almost doubling the rate of acquisition.

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
2018	ENRTF	$1,070,692
2003	ENRTF	$191,600
2017	ENRTF	$1,479,999
2015	ENRTF	$2,750,000
2013	ENRTF	$472,000
2011	ENRTF	$521,000
2010	ENRTF	$94,500

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

DNR's Conservation Easement Stewardship policy is to protect both the conservation values of the protected property and the state's investment in those interests. Stewardship elements include baseline property report creation, enforcement protocols, regular compliance monitoring, effective record keeping and reporting, and maintaining good working relationships with the easement landowners. Native Prairie Bank implements this policy by following DNR Operational Order 128 "Conservation Easement Stewardship" along with the "Ecological and Water Resources Division Conservation Easement Stewardship Plan and Guidelines", which call for annual landowner contact as well as on-the-ground monitoring once every three years. If a violation is found, annual site visits (or more frequently) are conducted until the violation is rectified. Budgeted into this proposal is funding to deposit into an account dedicated to the perpetual monitoring and enforcement of Native Prairie Bank easements acquired under this proposal.

Native Prairie Bank staff in partnership with the landowner will actively seek funding to execute the best on-going prairie management activities. These management activities, such as prescribed burning, invasive species control, woody control, etc., will be completed when feasible through a variety of funding sources.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
FY22-24	OHF	Develop Baseline Property Report to be signed by both the landowner and DNR at time of closing.	Once easement closes, transfer funds to dedicated Conservation Easement Stewardship Account per OHF appropriation and	-

			accomplishment plan for long-term easement stewardship.	
Perpetually/Annually	Interest derived from dedicated Conservation Easement Stewardship Account established with this appropriation.	Ongoing landowner partnership, monitoring, reporting and easement stewardship as laid out in DNR Operational Order 128 and the Division of Ecological and Water Resources Conservation Easement Stewardship Division Guidelines.	-	-
FY22-24 (or within 5 years post acquisition)	OHF	Restore any cropped acres present at time of acquisition to local-ecotype native prairie seed (estimated 15 acres).	-	-
On-Going	Variety of Funding Sources (Landowner, ENRTF, OHF, Game & Fish, USDA Programs, etc.)	Native Prairie Bank staff in partnership with the landowner will actively seek funding to execute the best on-going prairie management activities. These management activities, such as prescribed burning, invasive species control, woody control, etc., will be completed when feasible.	-	-

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 Department of Natural Resources-Division of Ecological and Water Resources

Who will be the easement holder?
State of Minnesota-Department of Natural Resources

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

Historically, Native Prairie Bank easements have ranged in size from 8 acres all the way up to 720 acres. Since large parcels of remnant prairie are less and less frequent, an average parcel size of 40 acres was used when estimating costs for this proposal. Therefore, we anticipate approximately 6 easements through this appropriation.

Land Use

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

> **Explain what will be planted:**
> Native Prairie Bank may acquire a few acres of cropland in order to properly buffer the native prairie acres. Limited farming of these acres may occur until the area is restored into a diverse local-ecotype prairie. Restoration of all cropland acres will occur prior to the end of this appropriation.

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:**
> When necessary, Native Prairie Bank will allow the use of a field road for the landowner to access the site or adjacent land-locked parcel for land management activities. Often times, these non-public field roads are maintained in permanent vegetated cover with little to no trace of vehicle traffic.
>
> **Will the trails or roads remain and uses continue to be allowed after OHF acquisition?**
> Yes
>
> > **How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?**
> > Use of the allowed field road is limited to the landowner for necessary activities only. Field road is documented on the Exhibit A Map that is recorded along with the easement at the county in addition to being photographed and documented in the Baseline Property Report to insure the road does not increase in size or expand from existing necessary location. Through implementation of DNR Operational Order 128 “Conservation Easement Stewardship” along with the "Ecological and Water Resources Division Conservation Easement Stewardship Plan and Guidelines" Native Prairie Banks acquired with these funds will be monitored at least once every 3 years, at which time the field road will be checked for compliance.

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

> Native Prairie Bank may acquire a few acres of cropland (~15 acres) in order to properly buffer the native prairie acres. Restoration of all cropland acres would be completed utilizing this appropriation.

Will the land that you acquire (fee or easement) be restored or enhanced within this program's funding and availability?
Yes

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Enroll 235 acres of Native Prairie Bank Easements	6/30/2025
Restore approximately 15 acres of prairie (inclusion cropped acres acquired with these funds)	6/30/2026

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2026

Budget

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

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	$88,000	-	-	$88,000
Contracts	$4,500	-	-	$4,500
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	$525,000	-	-	$525,000
Easement Stewardship	$120,000	-	-	$120,000
Travel	$13,200	-	-	$13,200
Professional Services	$116,000	-	-	$116,000
Direct Support Services	$15,300	-	-	$15,300
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	$2,000	-	-	$2,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	**$884,000**	**-**	**-**	**$884,000**

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Natural Resource Specialist/Technician	0.28	4.0	$78,000	-	-	$78,000
Project/Acquisition Coordinator	0.03	4.0	$10,000	-	-	$10,000

Amount of Request: $884,000
Amount of Leverage: -
Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%
DSS + Personnel: $103,300
As a % of the total request: 11.69%
Easement Stewardship: $120,000
As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 22.86%

How will this program accommodate the reduced appropriation recommendation from the original proposed requested amount?
The Prairie Bank Program will accommodate the appropriation reduction (plus addition) by proportionally reducing the target goal from protecting 400 acres down to 230 acres. $884,000 is approximately 59% of the original request of $1,500,000, therefore 235 acres is 59% of the original goal of 400 acres.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?
Yes

Please explain the overlap of past and future staffing and position levels previously received and how that is coordinated over multiple years?
This funding will be used to pay project-associated costs for staff paid almost exclusively with special project funds. These positions would not exist, but for special project funding received through the OHF and other funds. Each year these staff code time working on OHF related acquisition and restoration activities using specific funding string codes.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?
There may be circumstances were cropland acres (~15 acres) are included in the easements acquired in order to provide a buffer to the native prairie. In these cases, the cropland acres would be restored resulting in some activities being contracted out to private vendors or the Conservation Corps of Minnesota.

Easement Stewardship

What is the number of easements anticipated, cost per easement for stewardship, and explain how that amount is calculated?
Six easements are anticipated with $20,000 per easement budgeted into this accomplishment plan for long-term stewardship. For each specific Native Prairie Bank easement, initial investment dollars are determined by using a DNR approved Conservation Easement Stewardship Calculator, which estimates the annual stewardship expenses and the investment needed to generate annual income sufficient to cover these expenses in perpetuity. Only the calculated amount, no more, will be invested. These dollars once deposited into the DNR's Conservation Easement Stewardship Account are dedicated to the perpetual monitoring and enforcement of conservation easements. The dedicated stewardship funds will provide the support needed for long-term, ongoing monitoring and minor enforcement activities of Native Prairie Bank easements acquired under this proposal.

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
Most DNR activities tied to this proposal, such as boundary posting, seed harvest, planting, weed control, etc. will require the use of DNR fleet equipment which has standard costs tied to the amount of usage needed. An estimated 60% of the travel costs will go to necessary traditional travel and 40% will go towards equipment costs.

I understand and agree that lodging, meals, and mileage must comply with the current MMB Commissioner Plan:
Yes

Direct Support Services

How did you determine which portions of the Direct Support Services of your shared support services is direct to this program?
The DNR Direct & Necessary Cost Calculator was used to determine Direct Support Service costs. DNR's Direct & Necessary Costs ($15,259) pay for activities that are directly related to and necessary for accomplishing appropriated projects and calculated based on the specific demands of this project. Direct and necessary costs cover HR support ($2,060), Safety Support ($383), Financial Support ($1,246), Communication support ($3,972), IT Support ($4,152) and Planning Support ($3,446).

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	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	235	-	-	235
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**235**	**-**	**-**	**235**

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

Type	Native Prairie (acres)
Restore	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-
Protect in Easement	185
Enhance	-
Total	**185**

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	-	$884,000	-	-	$884,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**$884,000**	**-**	**-**	**$884,000**

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	45	-	190	-	235
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**45**	**-**	**190**	**-**	**235**

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	-	$175,000	-	$709,000	-	$884,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	**-**	**$175,000**	**-**	**$709,000**	**-**	**$884,000**

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	$3,761	-	-
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	-	$3,888	-	$3,731	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

0

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *-Acres of native prairie protected insuring grassland habitat for upland birds*

  -Acres protected within Prairie Plan Core and Corridor Areas

  -Average size of protected complex

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *-Acres of native prairie protected insuring grassland habitat for upland birds*

  -Acres protected within Prairie Plan Core and Corridor Areas

  -Average size of protected complex

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

Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:
Native Prairie Bank easements acquired through this proposal will be targeted within Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan identified landscapes in addition to being ranked and prioritized through the Native Prairie Bank acquisition evaluation process.

The Native Prairie Bank acquisition evaluation process requires that each potential site be scored and selected based on criteria including, the diversity and quality of native prairie habitat as ranked by the Minnesota Biological Survey, size of the prairie, occurrence of or suitable habitat for threatened and endangered species and Species in Greatest Conservation Need, location relative to other native prairie or protected lands (includes Prairie Plan target landscapes), potential for long-term management and other factors that would insure long-term benefits and sustainability for Minnesota's critical wildlife species. Native Prairie Bank's numerical scoring and prioritization process insures that only the top ranked prairie parcels are acquired. Please see the Native Prairie Bank scoring criteria uploaded as part of this proposal for detailed scoring information.

Protect Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Conservation easement acquisition will target protection of the LAST of Minnesotas high quality remnant prairies within MN Prairie Conservation Plan priority areas (please see attached map for more details). Specific parcels will be added to the parcel list as selected through the evaluation and ranking process described above.	Redwood	11437221	200	$0	No

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

Parcel Map
Accelerated Native Prairie Bank Protection-Phase VIII
(Data Generated From Parcel List)