



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

RIM Grasslands Reserve Phase IV
Laws of Minnesota 2022 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 11/09/2023

Project Title: RIM Grasslands Reserve Phase IV

Funds Recommended: \$4,536,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2022, Ch. 77, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(b)

Appropriation Language: \$4,536,000 the second year is to the Board of Water and Soil Resources to acquire permanent conservation easements and to restore and enhance grassland habitat under Minnesota Statutes, sections 103F.501 to 103F.531. Of this amount, up to \$73,000 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 permanent conservation easements must be provided as part of the final report.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: John Voz

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Location Information

County Location(s): Traverse, Rock and Murray.

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**

Using the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program, this project addresses the potential loss of grassland habitats from conversion to cropland and accelerates grassland protection efforts not covered by other programs. Working in coordination with 11 established Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs), and local SWCDs this proposal will enroll 936 RIM acres (approximately 12 easements), focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes. This proposal focus is on protecting non-crop moderate to high quality remnant prairies and associated buffer that can be improved through habitat management.

Design and Scope of Work

In 2021 and 2022 an additional 144,000 acres of the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) will expire. Minnesota was once a land of 18 million acres of prairie. Today less than two percent remains. The few acres of native remnant prairie that remain were once thought of as too rocky or wet for row crops, but not anymore. If the current trajectory of grassland and prairie loss continues it will be devastating to grassland wildlife populations, including pollinator species.

This proposal, working in partnership with Prairie Conservation Plan Local Technical Teams (LTTs) and local SWCD's focuses on protecting current grasslands and buffering native prairie that are within wildlife habitat complexes not covered by other conservation programs. There are programs for native prairie such as MNDNR Native Prairie Bank, Federal Native Tallgrass Prairie (NTP) and programs for cropland, but there are no programs for moderate quality prairies that have the potential for higher quality through protection and management. As Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) and LTTs review these areas for possible enrollment, they may find additional tracts that are native prairie. With this project, some native prairie may be included to square up parcels. In cases where larger tracts are identified, they will contact the DNR's Biological Survey and Native Prairie Bank staff for a more formal botanical survey of the site.

The loss of native prairie and grassland habitat is arguably the greatest conservation challenge facing northwest, western and southern Minnesota. This proposal aims to protect 936 acres of prairie and grassland habitat by coordinating and accelerating the enrollment in Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) through private land easements. This level of acceleration is needed to address today's rapid loss of grassland habitat and meet the goals set forth in the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

A portion of this funding request will be used to contract with the Conservation Corp of Minnesota (CMMI) to encourage young adults from diverse backgrounds to become engaged in conservation, involved in community, and prepare for future employment.

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 grasslands provide important habitat for a wide range of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). Consistent with guidance in The Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan and Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, strategic site selection will be conducted as well as efforts to minimize landscape stressors and plan for plant diversity and long-term resiliency of project sites. More than 150 SGCN use grasslands for breeding, migration, and/or foraging.

Target Species include: Greater prairie chicken, Eastern meadowlark, Western meadowlark, Grasshopper sparrow, Northern pintail, Northern black duck, Burrowing owl, Chestnut collared longspur, Bobolink, Wilson's phalarope, Sedge wren, Plains hog-nosed snake, American badger, Prairie vole, Plains pocket mouse, Eastern spotted skunk, Dakota skipper, Monarch butterfly, Poweshiek skipper, Regal fritillary, Rusty patched bumble bee.

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 prairies are often part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and wetlands. These complexes will be the top priority for this project using the MN Prairie Plan framework. A preference will be given to protecting expiring CRP with enrollment of adjacent remnant prairie as identified in the MN County Biological Survey. This focus on expiring CRP will fill a niche that cannot otherwise be filled by the Native Prairie Bank program. LTTs will help guide restoration strategies such as prescribed burning, conservation grazing and woody tree removal to be used to restore the conditions of moderate quality prairies. In addition, the LTTs will identify remnant prairie sites that are not listed on the MN County Biological Survey and update the survey accordingly. By utilizing the LTTs, parcels will be targeted for protection and resulting acres will be tracked and reportable.

Recent genetic diversity research was conducted on Greater Prairie Chickens by the MNDNR to understand how birds move through the landscape using a new approach called landscape genetics. It found that prairie chickens in the northern part of the sampled area, near Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, are not very connected to prairie chickens in Clay, Otter Tail, and Wilkin counties to the south. Connecting these areas with high quality habitat would allow more genetic mixing, potentially reduce stress and mortality and eliminate the need for birds to travel long distances to find suitable habitat. This "follow the chicken" approach has worked remarkably well in identifying, targeting and protecting areas that have positive impacts on a wide range of species of greatest conservation need.

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

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 ~ *A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and non game species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *A summary of the total acres acquired through this appropriation will be reported. On-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed during the other two years to ensure maintained outcomes. An increase of native grassland habitat availability within a certain region is expected to increase the carrying capacity of grassland-dependent wildlife within that region. This would have a positive impact on both game and non-game species. We expect more abundant populations of endangered, threatened, special concern and game species as these complexes are restored.*

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 funding request is not supplanting existing funding or a substitution for any previous funding.

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

Once a RIM easement is acquired, BWSR is responsible for monitoring and enforcement into perpetuity. BWSR partners with local SWCDs to carry-out oversight, monitoring and inspection of its conservation easements. Easements are inspected for the first five consecutive years beginning in the year after the easement is recorded. Thereafter, on-site inspections are performed every three years and compliance checks are performed in the other two years. SWCDs report to BWSR on each site inspection conducted and document findings. A non-compliance procedure is implemented when potential violations or problems are identified.

Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs are calculated at \$6,500 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship covers costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2022-Ongoing	Stewardship Account	Inspection every year for the first 5 years; then every 3rd year	Corrective actions on any violations	Easement action taken by MN General Office
2022-Ongoing	Landowners Responsibility	Maintain compliance with easement terms	-	-

Provide an assessment of how your program celebrates cultural diversity or reaches diverse communities in Minnesota, including reaching low- and moderate-income households:

A portion of this funding request will be used to contract with the Conservation Corp of Minnesota (CMMI) to encourage young adults from diverse backgrounds to become engaged in conservation , involved in community, and prepare for future employment. See attached CCMI letter of support.

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 easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program in cooperation with local County Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD's).

Who will be the easement holder?

The state of Minnesota through the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program.

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

This proposal will enroll 936 RIM acres (approximately 12 easements), focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes.

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

In certain circumstances food plots for wildlife are an allowable use on RIM easements and must be part of an approved Conservation Plan. Under this proposal no food plots would be allowed on remnant prairies which have never been cultivated (only areas that buffer remnant prairies). Food plots on narrow buffers, steep slopes and wet areas are not allowed but may be offered on any potential surrounding grass buffer on prior cultivated lands. RIM policy limits food plots to 10% of the total easement area or 5 acres whichever is smaller. There is no cost share for establishment of food plots and upon termination and/or abandonment the landowners must reestablish the vegetation as prescribed in the Conservation Plan at their own expense. Food plots are a rarely selected option by landowners, to date only 2.2% of RIM easements have food plots.

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:

Existing trails and roads are identified during the easement acquisition process and are often excluded from the easement area if they serve no purpose to easement maintenance, monitoring or enforcement. Some roads and trails, such as agricultural field accesses, are allowed to remain.

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

Yes

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program which has over 7,450 individual easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first five years and then every third year after that. BWSR, in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

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

Yes

Describe the types of trails or roads and the allowable uses:

Though uncommon, there could be a potential for new minimal use trails, if they contribute to easement maintenance or benefit the easement site (e.g. firebreaks, berm maintenance, etc). Unauthorized trails identified during the monitoring process are in violation of the easement.

How will maintenance and monitoring be accomplished?

The easements secured under this project will be managed as part of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) RIM Reserve Program which has over 7,450 individual easements currently in place. Easements are monitored annually for each of the first 5 years and then every 3rd year after that. BWSR, in cooperation with Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), implement a stewardship process to track, monitor quality and assure compliance with easement terms. Under the terms of the Reinvest In Minnesota (RIM) Easement Program, landowners are required to maintain compliance with the easement. A conservation plan is developed with the landowner and maintained as part of each easement. Basic easement compliance costs are borne by the landowner, periodic enhancements may be cost shared from a variety of sources.

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

Yes

The RIM Grassland Reserve program evaluates each application on its potential to restore upland/wetland functions and values to optimize wildlife habitat and provide other benefits, including water quality. Each site is evaluated on its benefits to the surrounding landscape, ability to build upon existing corridors and complexes, and site-specific features that highlight the benefits of selection for permanent protection and habitat and associated environmental benefits.

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
Final Report Submitted	November 1st, 2028
Enroll 880 acres into the RIM private land easement program	June 30th, 2027

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2028

Availability of Appropriation: Subd. 7. Availability of Appropriation

(a) 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. Money appropriated to acquire land in fee 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.

(b) Money appropriated in this section is available as follows:

(1) money appropriated for acquiring real property is available until June 30, 2026;

(2) money appropriated for restoring and enhancing land acquired with an appropriation in this act is available for four years after the acquisition date with a maximum end date of June 30, 2030;

(3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2027;

(4) notwithstanding clauses (1) to (3), money appropriated for a project that receives at least 15 percent of its funding from federal funds is available until a date sufficient to match 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; and

(5) money appropriated for other projects is available until the end of the fiscal year in which it is appropriated.

Budget

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

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$93,600	-	-	\$93,600
Contracts	\$24,000	-	-	\$24,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	\$4,290,700	-	-	\$4,290,700
Easement Stewardship	\$73,000	-	-	\$73,000
Travel	\$7,700	-	-	\$7,700
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$32,600	-	-	\$32,600
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$11,100	-	-	\$11,100
Supplies/Materials	\$3,300	-	-	\$3,300
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$4,536,000	-	-	\$4,536,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Program Mgmt	0.17	6.0	\$93,600	-	-	\$93,600

Amount of Request: \$4,536,000

Amount of Leverage: -

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 0.0%

DSS + Personnel: \$126,200

As a % of the total request: 2.78%

Easement Stewardship: \$73,000

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: 1.7%

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

Reduction in funding will reduce outputs proportionally. Program management costs are the exception, due to program management & oversight remaining consistent regardless of appropriation amount.

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 is Phase IV of an ongoing program and these funds will pay for staff time spent on new easements associated with this phase.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

The contract line includes costs covered under the SWCD MJPA, \$2000 for staff time per easement acquisition.

Easement Stewardship

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

This proposal will enroll 936 RIM acres (approximately 12 easements), focusing on Minnesota Prairie Plan identified landscapes. Perpetual monitoring and enforcement costs are calculated at \$6,500 per easement. This value is based on using local SWCD staff for monitoring and landowner relations and existing enforcement authorities. The amount listed for Easement Stewardship covers costs of the SWCD regular monitoring, BWSR oversight, and any enforcement necessary.

Travel

Does the amount in the travel line include equipment/vehicle rental?

No

Explain the amount in the travel line outside of traditional travel costs of mileage, food, and lodging

The travel line will only be used for traditional travel 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?

BWSR calculates and periodically reviews and updates direct support services costs that are directly related to and necessary for each request based on the type of work being done.

Other Equipment/Tools

Give examples of the types of Equipment and Tools that will be purchased?

None anticipated at this time but we keep a small amount in this budget line for contingencies.

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	-	936	-	-	936
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	936	-	-	936

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	-	\$4,536,000	-	-	\$4,536,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$4,536,000	-	-	\$4,536,000

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	-	100	-	836	-	936
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	100	-	836	-	936

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	-	\$490,000	-	\$4,046,000	-	\$4,536,000
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$490,000	-	\$4,046,000	-	\$4,536,000

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	-	\$4,846	-	-
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	-	\$4,900	-	\$4,839	-
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](#)

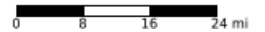
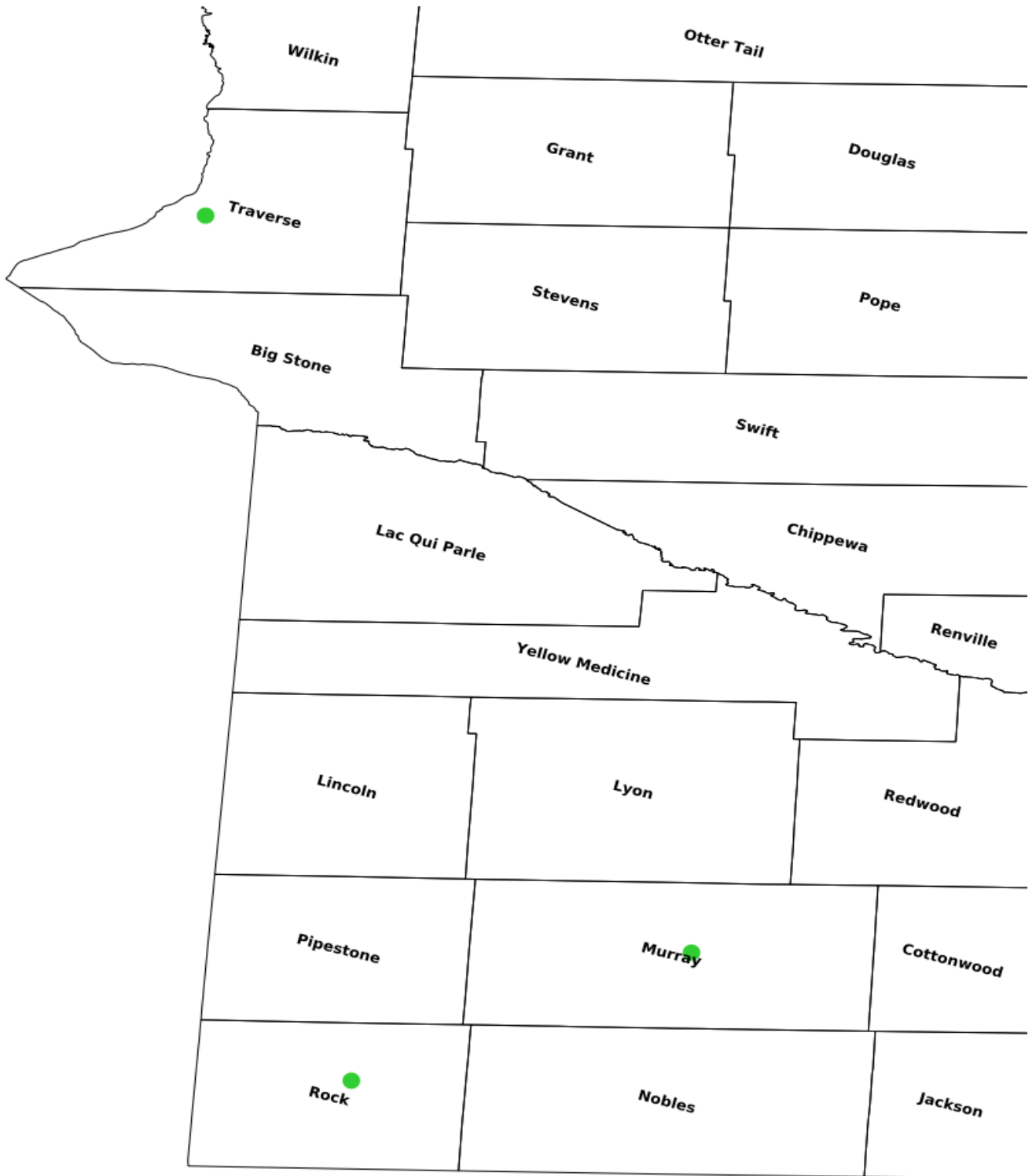
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Through a combination of eligibility screening and a scoring and ranking process, each application will be assessed on its potential to restore functions and values (optimize wildlife habitat benefits) and to provide other landscape benefits. Each site is considered on its benefits to the surrounding landscape, as well as the site-specific features which highlight the benefits of selection for permanent protection. During the application process, a review of adjacent permanent habitat and easement size is conducted to indicate a site's usefulness as a corridor or extension to an existing habitat complex.

Easement Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
51-01-23-14- -	Murray	10741235	37	\$194,604	No
67-01-23-14- -	Rock	10345222	209	\$1,326,921	No
78-01-23-14- -	Traverse	12747234	74	\$278,574	No

Parcel Map



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