



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase 3
Laws of Minnesota 2022 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 07/13/2023

Project Title: Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase 3

Funds Recommended: \$2,140,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2022, Ch. 77, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 5(s)

Appropriation Language: \$2,140,000 the second year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Audubon Minnesota to restore and enhance wildlife habitat within important bird areas in northwestern Minnesota or Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan Priority areas. A list of proposed land restorations and enhancements must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Alexandra Wardwell

Title: Prairie Project Manager

Organization: Audubon Minnesota

Address: 2355 Highway 36 West, Suite 400

City: Roseville, MN 55113

Email: alexandra.wardwell@audubon.org

Office Number: (218) 687-2229 x11

Mobile Number: (608) 370-1774

Fax Number:

Website: <https://mn.audubon.org/>

Location Information

County Location(s): Polk and Mahnomen.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie
- Forest
- Habitat

Narrative

Abstract

Audubon Minnesota is requesting funds to enhance 1,625 acres and restore 100 acres of significantly important wildlife habitat on public and permanently protected private lands. Our project and parcel prioritization criteria places an emphasis on Important Bird Areas (IBA) and priority areas identified by the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, within the 8 most northwestern Minnesota counties associated with the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region, the Prairie Parklands region, and the northwestern edge of the Eastern Broadleaf Forest.

Design and Scope of Work

Audubon Minnesota will advance conservation in northwestern Minnesota with the third phase of Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas (IBA). This Program will continue to expand the Outdoor Heritage Funds legacy of restoration and enhancement of Minnesota's natural heritage. Our Program places an emphasis on Minnesota's IBAs as they are essential to maintaining healthy and diverse bird populations in the state. The Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (TAP) region alone supports over 279 bird species (143 regular breeding species, 22 permanent residents, and over 114 migrants or winter residents) including sandhill cranes, waterfowl, northern harrier, yellow rail, and greater prairie chicken. Gray wolves, moose, elk, fisher, and the American badger are among other wildlife found in the region. The Prairie Parklands supports 140 regular breeding species, 23 permanent residents, and over 115 species that do not breed in the region but depend on critical habitats for migration. The Prairie Parklands is important to 139 species of greatest conservation need (SGCN). This geography contains the meeting point of three of the four ecological sections in Minnesota creating an array of habitats in close-proximity.

While enhancing and restoring habitats within IBAs is a primary goal, we recognize that some of the greatest conservation opportunities exist within the agricultural matrix of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan due to the loss of grassland and wetland habitats in recent years. In phase three, we will expand our habitat focus to include two Prairie Parkland/Eastern Broadleaf Forest counties (Mahnomen and Norman) and the northwestern counties that compose the TAP (Polk, Red Lake, Pennington, Marshall, Kittson, Roseau).

We will expand the available habitat for priority bird species by utilizing a variety of activities: native seed enhancements, management of brush and tree species, invasive species control, as well as prescribed fire. Projects will be targeted and selected based on a prioritization model that focuses on core habitat, conservation estate, acres of remnant habitat, and habitat condition. Restoration and enhancement projects will include a site assessment, including a rapid analysis of habitat suitability for priority species and habitat condition as well as documentation of prescribed habitat management actions (photo points) and recommended follow up actions for future management.

We will continue to work closely with local U.S. Fish and Wildlife staff to identify habitat needs on public lands in these key geographies. Audubon will write Habitat Management Action Plans, get necessary permits, and complete enhancement and restoration work to create better habitat for target species.

Audubon, with assistance from the MN Natural Resources Conservation Service, will reach out to private landowners and prioritize Wetland Reserve Program Easements (WRP/WRE) that have Wetland Reserve Plans of Operations. These plans are road maps for habitat work for each specific easement. Audubon will assist with habitat identification and prioritization, develop Habitat Management Action Plans for a select number of easements, and conduct habitat work.

These partnership efforts will deliver effective means of enhancing and restoring ecologically significant land for the benefit of birds, wildlife, and people of northwestern Minnesota.

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?

Through the development of our Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation, Audubon has identified a group of breeding bird species known as priority species. This group highlights species that have experienced significant declines in the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parklands regions, are dependent on vulnerable habitat, and have been recognized as priorities by various resource agencies. The purpose of identifying priority species is to be strategic about identifying a small number of species that should be the focus of conservation efforts in the short term. Based on our priority species for the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parkland regions, there are 32 Species of Greatest Conservation Need that would benefit from this grassland and wetland habitat restoration and enhancement program, such as the Bobolink, Grasshopper Sparrow, Green-winged Teal, and Black Tern. In addition, there are 11 bird species that are MN State Listed Species including the: Horned Grebe, Chestnut-collared Longspur, Baird's Sparrow, Yellow Rail, Wilson's Phalarope, Franklin's Gull, Short-eared Owl, Greater Prairie Chicken, Nelson's Sparrow, Marbled Godwit and Trumpeter Swan.

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:

In an effort to protect some of the most unique wildlife habitat in Minnesota, our proposal focuses on Important Bird Areas and the Prairie Conservation Plan boundaries and prioritizes the six counties within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands (TAP) and two counties in the Prairie Parklands/Eastern Broadleaf Forest region. Audubon Minnesota and partners have identified 57 Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Minnesota through a Technical Committee, comprised of bird experts and conservationists from across the state. IBAs have been identified in over 170 countries to provide essential habitat for one or more breeding, wintering, and/or migrating bird species. It is a proactive, voluntary, science-based program that works to identify, monitor and conserve the most essential habitats for birds. In short, these IBAs are the most important areas in which to preserve Minnesota's game and non-game avian legacy. Audubon sees tremendous opportunity for directing conservation resources to protecting habitats within IBAs and surrounding areas. We are also using additional plans and analyses, like the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan, and the Minnesota Biological Survey biodiversity significance status, to further refine the geographic scope of our efforts to yield the highest conservation return on investment. Minnesota County Biological Survey information and Natural Heritage Information System data along with recommendations in the Minnesota Wildlife Action Plan will be crucial to the prioritization of parcels where restoration and enhancement work is undertaken.

In addition to the rigorous process used to designate IBAs, Audubon has developed the Blueprint for Bird Conservation, a comprehensive compilation of national, regional and state bird and habitat conservation plans that address Minnesota bird species and Minnesota landscapes. A particular emphasis was placed on bird conservation documents developed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). This Blueprint builds upon existing efforts by identifying the highest priorities in each ecological region and using select conservation focal

species; synthesizing the best proven conservation practices for each species; establishing measurable goals for species' population targets; and identifying key sites for conservation work.

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

- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds
- H7 Keep water on the landscape

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Other : Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation

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 aspen parklands and riparian areas ~ *Outcomes can be measured by the number of acres impacted and the number of projects Audubon restores or enhances. Habitat Management Action Plans will detail specific restoration or enhancement prescriptions for each project on public lands and permanent conservation easements. The quality of work and level of success of projects on USFWS lands and WRP/WRE easements and other public lands will be monitored through various USFWS monitoring protocols and NRCS stewardship audits, respectively. All of the project work undertaken can be assessed based on the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan goals as well as the Minnesota Blueprint for Bird conservation.*

Programs in prairie region:

- Protected, restored, and enhanced habitat for migratory and unique Minnesota species ~ *Outcomes can be measured by the number of acres impacted and the number of projects Audubon restores or enhances. Habitat Management Action Plans will detail specific restoration or enhancement prescriptions for each project on public lands and permanent conservation easements. The quality of work and level of success of projects on USFWS lands and WRP/WRE easements and other public lands will be monitored through various USFWS monitoring protocols and NRCS stewardship audits respectively. All of the project work undertaken can be assessed based on the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan goals as well as the Minnesota Blueprint for Bird conservation.*

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

Audubon is leveraging state funds with private funds contributed to Audubon. These funds are used to offset un-recovered Direct Support Services. Additionally, in-kind federal matching funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will also contribute in the amount of \$124,880.

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.

LSOHC funding is in addition to other funding sources, and does not supplant this work. Without LSOHC funding, Audubon MN would not have resources to implement vast enhancement and restoration projects for birds and wildlife, and would have greater challenges in funding personnel salaries associated with this work.

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

Audubon is committed to working with our State and Federal partners to ensure management recommendations are understood and implemented to the highest degree. Enhancement and restoration that occurs on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (US FWS) held lands will expand and bolster the habitat work being done on public lands for the benefit of game and non-game bird species and other wildlife. The USFWS and NRCS have very successful stewardship programs that includes annual property monitoring, effective records management, investigating potential violations and defending the land. Likewise, USFWS also monitors their landholdings closely with multiple site visits a year, habitat management prioritization models, and land management. In many cases, this enhancement and restoration work will improve habitat conditons for priority species and increse the efficiency of future actions with regards to invasive species and woody species encroachment. Any Outdoor Heritage Funds allocated will expedite and expand the breadth of the enhancement activities on these conserved parcels.

In addition, Audubon will prepare a habitat management action plan for each property, providing ecological management recommendations for the property over time to maintain and manage the land for grassland and wetland species, including focal species and species of greatest conservation need.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
2027-2030	USFWS, MN NRCS	Plan Udates or Amendments	Future Maintenance or Habitat Management	-
2022-2026	USFWS, LSOHC, MN NRCS	Site Visits, Develop Habitat Management Action Plans, Planning, Habitat Suitability	Conduct Enhancement and Restoration	Follow up Maintenance as needed over grant timeline

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

This work will directly benefit indigenous communities in some of the counties where Audubon will restore and enhance lands including at least one potential project in Mahnomen County (Nelson Prairie WPA in parcel list which is within the tribal boundary). Mahnomen County is the home of the White Earth Nation and the White Earth Reservation. Prairie and wetland restoration and enhancements benefit the overall health of the surrounding ecosystem and creates more a diverse habitat for both game and non-game wildlife species. In the past, indigenous cultures managed wild bison herds and used prescribed fire as an important tool to manage the land for game species. Today, indigenous cultures still manage livestock, use prescribed fire for habitat enhancement, and harvest

many native plants such as wild rice and many wild fruits. Audubon’s restoration activities near the White Earth Nation will complement their own natural resource management activities and help to maximize the clean water benefits, as well as, preserving the cultural importance of the natural landscape for indigenous communities.

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this program will meet all applicable criteria set forth in MS 97A.056?

Yes

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
- WPA
- Refuge Lands
- Other : Public lands as appropriate
- WMA
- Public Waters
- SNA
- State Forests

Land Use

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

Yes

Explain what will be planted:

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 (but certainly not all) cases this necessitates the use of GMO treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control weeds present in the seedbank. No neonicotinoid-treated seeds will be used.

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Complete restoration and enhancement habitat projects. Post-management summary of habitat suitability for targeted species.	June 2026
Conduct habitat restoration and enhancement of both public and permanently protected private lands.	June 2026
Implement a portion of the Habitat Management Action Plans for restoration and enhancement recommendations on private land easements and public lands to benefit	June 2024

targeted bird species.	
NRCS to lead landowner outreach effort for enhancement and restoration on permanent conservation easements (ongoing). Begin prioritization ranking and habitat suitability assessments.	June 2023

Date of Final Report Submission: 11/01/2026

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	\$354,400	\$207,600	Audubon Minnesota, USFWS, Audubon Minnesota	\$562,000
Contracts	\$1,699,200	-	-	\$1,699,200
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$20,000	-	-	\$20,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$41,400	\$60,800	Audubon Minnesota	\$102,200
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$12,500	-	-	\$12,500
Supplies/Materials	\$12,500	-	-	\$12,500
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$2,140,000	\$268,400	-	\$2,408,400

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Prairie Project Manager	0.84	4.0	\$248,500	\$161,400	Audubon Minnesota, USFWS	\$409,900
Conservation Manager	0.13	4.0	\$53,200	\$26,700	Audubon Minnesota	\$79,900
Conservation Director	0.08	4.0	\$39,100	\$19,500	Audubon Minnesota	\$58,600
Grant Administrator	0.08	4.0	\$13,600	-	Audubon Minnesota	\$13,600

Amount of Request: \$2,140,000

Amount of Leverage: \$268,400

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 12.54%

DSS + Personnel: \$395,800

As a % of the total request: 18.5%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

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

This Program will reduce the acres of enhancement and restoration based on the reduction in funding. Less travel

funds will be needed with the reduction in habitat project sites. Personnel funds for project planning and management have been reduced.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

Leverage is funded through other Audubon funds. The Direct Support Service (DSS) leverage is based a federally negotiated rate of 24.66%. The leverage amount is coming from our 14.66% unrecovered DSS. Confirmed in-kind match is provided by the USFWS \$124,880, technical assistance, office space, and vehicle utilization.

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?

Audubon Minnesota's Phase 2 and Phase 3 will overlap slightly, as Phase 2 would be near completion when Phase 3 would potentially begin. The Prairie Program Manager position and Conservation Manager Position have been previously partially funded in our first two Phases. Personnel funds are projected over the course of the grants to ensure staff time is allocated accordingly and for project completion.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

The contracted line includes estimates for 100 acres of restoration and 1,400 acres of enhanced habitat projects in our targeted areas. The funding amount for projects is estimated based on the complexity and scale of each project, using bid estimates from past projects as a guide.

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

Audubon Minnesota staff occasionally rent vehicles for grant-related travel when it is more efficient economically or time-wise to do so.

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?

DSS was calculated on a base cost of \$368,700 (only \$25,000 of contractual costs included) and claiming a 10% DSS rate.

Other Equipment/Tools

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

General field and office supplies (field gear, field guides, office supplies for fieldwork and file management, smartphone applications related to mapping or plant ID, maps, and plat books, etc.) personal protective equipment, an external GNSS receiver.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

Yes

- In Kind : \$124,880

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

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	100	-	-	100
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	1,625	-	-	1,625
Total	-	1,725	-	-	1,725

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$150,000	-	-	\$150,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$1,990,000	-	-	\$1,990,000
Total	-	\$2,140,000	-	-	\$2,140,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	100	-	-	-	100
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	1,425	-	200	-	1,625
Total	-	1,525	-	200	-	1,725

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$150,000	-	-	-	\$150,000
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$1,747,500	-	\$242,500	-	\$1,990,000
Total	-	\$1,897,500	-	\$242,500	-	\$2,140,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	\$1,500	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$1,224	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	\$1,500	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$1,226	-	\$1,212	-

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?

No

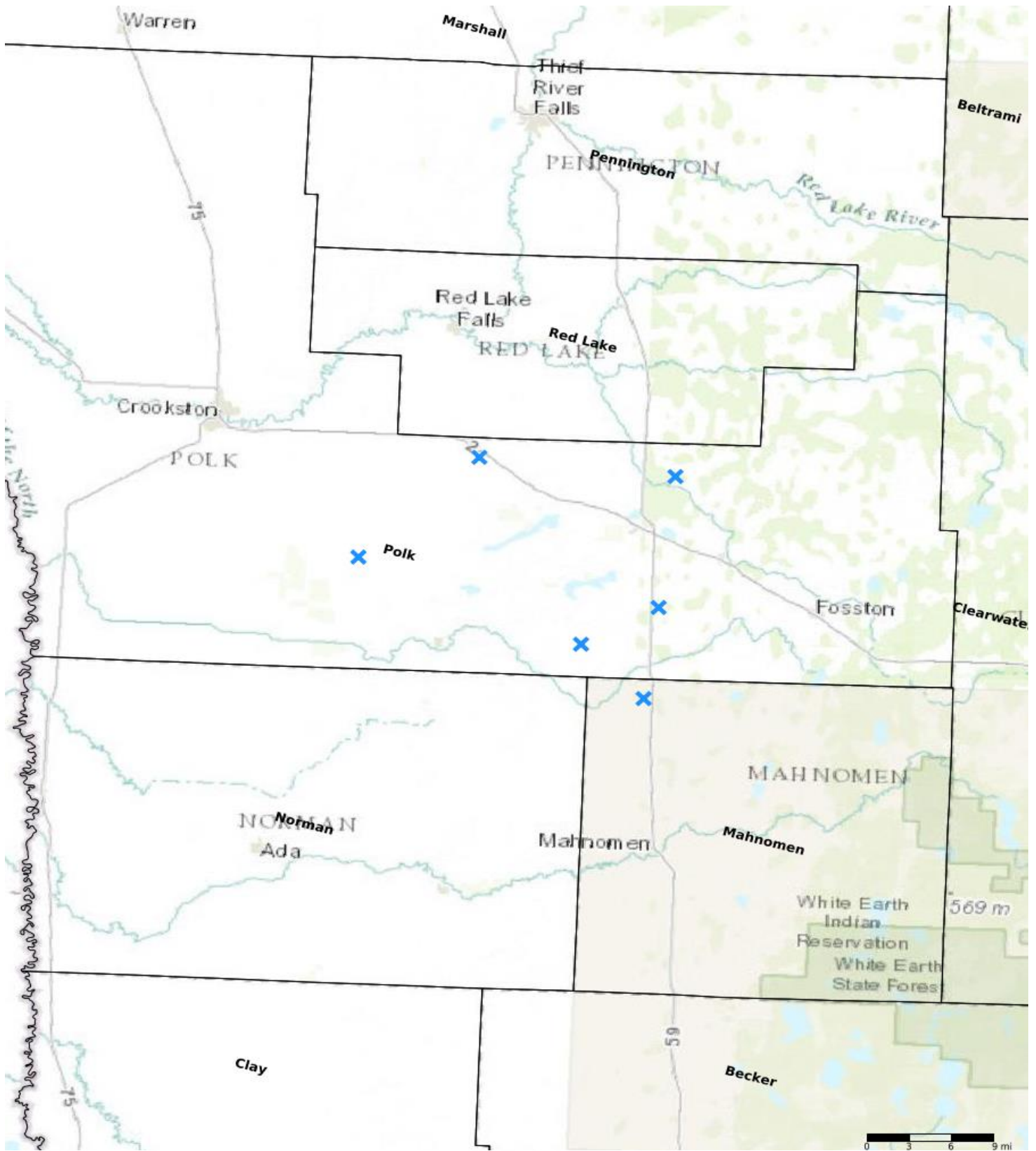
Explain the process used to identify, prioritize, and select the parcels on your list:

Audubon collaborates with partners such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Minnesota Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to identify priority parcels for enhancement and restoration projects. Projects were targeted and selected based on a prioritization model that focuses on core habitat, geography, conservation estate, potential target species suitability, acres of remnant habitat, and current habitat condition. Additional parcels will be added as specific prioritization mapping, site visits, and habitat assessments further narrow our focus. Additional parcels will be added as project areas are further prioritized and partnerships develop.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Nelson Prairie WPA	Mahnomen	14642210	237	\$150,000	Yes
Melvin Slough WPA	Polk	14845221	354	\$300,000	Yes
GR NWR- Grove Park-Tilden Enhancement	Polk	14944212	403	\$100,000	Yes
Clarke WPA	Polk	14941218	450	\$200,000	Yes
Vesledahl WPA	Polk	14743224	200	\$150,000	Yes
Winger WPA	Polk	14742202	200	\$200,000	Yes

Parcel Map



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