



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

ML 2022 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 06/07/2021

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

Funds Requested: \$3,392,800

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: 651-493-0546

Mobile Number:

Fax Number:

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

Location Information

County Location(s): Mahnommen and Polk.

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 2,800 acres and restore 200 acres of significant 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 conduct outreach to private landowners with 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 in northwestern Minnesota.

How does the proposal 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.

What is the degree of timing/opportunistic urgency and why it is necessary to spend public money for this work as soon as possible?

There has been a significant loss of grassland and wetland habitats essential to wildlife and bird populations in Minnesota and throughout the Mississippi Flyway. With the loss of adequate habitat, bird populations have plummeted. Wetlands, prairie grasslands and open woodlands once dominated the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region, a transition zone between the prairie and forest. Today, approximately 64% of the landscape has been converted to row crops and the hydrology has been highly altered. Habitat loss is even greater in the Prairie Parkland, where an estimated 1/10th of 1% of remnant prairie remains. Prairie and grassland cover, even when protected, are in danger of becoming overgrown by woody species and invaded by exotic cool season grasses when there is a lack of disturbance. Over time, the cost of enhancement and restoration on these lands in need of disturbance becomes more costly.

Describe how the proposal 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 proposal?

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

Describe how your program will advance the indicators identified in the plans selected:

The Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan outlines areas for conservation efforts, identified in the plan as Prairie Cores, Habitat Corridors, and Strategic Habitat Complexes, and specific acreage goals within these focal areas for protection, restoration and enhancement. We have been an active partner in the implementation of the MN Prairie Conservation Plan and area Local Technical Teams (LTT) including serving as a coordinator for the Glacial Ridge LTT. We are working towards accomplishing the goals outlined within the plan for restoration and enhancement on targeted public and private lands.

The Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation is focused on specific habitat types that benefit species identified as "in conservation need" within the region. Guidance from both of these plans has allowed us to pinpoint our efforts towards improving quality wildlife habitat on both public and private lands within the counties in the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands, Prairie Parkland, and Eastern Broadleaf Forest regions.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

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

Describe how your program will produce and demonstrate a significant and permanent conservation legacy and/or outcomes for fish, game, and wildlife as indicated in the LSOHC priorities:

Audubon Minnesota will focus restoration and enhancement work on key habitats within the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parkland areas, guided by the Minnesota Prairie Plan, Duck Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan, and the Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation. We collaborate with local, state and federal governmental and non-profit conservation partners to ensure our activities are complementary to those undertaken by others in the program area and meet their program standards and best management practices.

We work with conservation-minded landowners who have perpetual conservation easements and restoration and enhancement projects targeted at IBAs and existing prairie habitat complexes. Targeted outreach to private landowners with existing WRP/WRE easements in priority areas under this grant will be initially be conducted by MN NRCS. Audubon will serve as the point of contact with landowners regarding enhancement or restoration work during the duration of the projects. Audubon will prioritize properties that support species in greatest conservation need and contain sensitive habitat types as identified within the Prairie Plan and by Minnesota Biological Survey. This work will build high-quality habitat complexes with better connectivity for birds. The USFWS, NRCS, other state and local partners, and Audubon Minnesota are deeply committed to maximizing and building off these habitat investments over time. A recent publication by U.S. Geological Survey on Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge, illustrates the importance of restoration and enhancement for long-term improvements in water quality, ground water recharge, a decrease in nutrient runoff, and well head protection for surrounding communities.

What other fund may contribute to this proposal?

- N/A

Does this proposal include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

Audubon is leveraging state funds with private funds contributed to Audubon. These funds are used to offset unrecovered Direct Support Services. Additionally, in-kind federal matching funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Minnesota Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will also contribute.

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 conditions for priority species and increase 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
2022-2026	USFWS,LSOHC, MN NRCS	Site Visits, Develop Habitat Management Action Plans,Planning, Habitat Suitability	Conduct Enhancement and Restoration	Follow up Mainenance as needed
2027-2030	USFWS, MN NRCS	Plan updates or Amendments	Maintenance/Management	-

Identify indicator species and associated quantities this habitat will typically support:

In addition to the SGCN and Minnesota State Listed species previously discussed, we have identified 4 target species to act as indicators for our work within the Prairie Plan Implementation process, they are the Upland Sandpiper, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Franklin's Gull, and the Grasshopper Sparrow. For each of the target species there are outlined statewide population goals:

1) Upland Sandpiper: Halt the decline of Minnesota's Upland Sandpiper population and increase the population by approximately 35% (Unfortunately an estimate of the number of individuals or breeding pairs in Minnesota is not available. As a result, the Conservation Goal for the Upland Sandpiper can only be stated in terms of a percentage increase). Although maintaining Minnesota's current population may be more realistic in the short-term, given the potential loss of significant Conservation Reserve Program acres over time. Audubon's Minnesota Blueprint for Bird Conservation adopts the national and regional goals to significantly increase the current population.

2) Sharp-tailed Grouse: Maintain current populations in Minnesota (Minnesota population estimate based on Bird Conservation Regions 11&12 is 29,000) by supporting brushland habitat conservation and management through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Subsection Forest Resources Management Planning process.

3) Franklin's Gull: Maintain a statewide population of at least 50,000 breeding pairs.

4) Grasshopper sparrow: Maintain a statewide population of at least 500,000 individuals of Grasshopper Sparrows

Our habitat work within this program will assist in collective efforts that strive toward achieving these goals.

How will the program directly involve, engage, and benefit BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and diverse communities:

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). 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 proposal 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?

Yes

Where does the activity take place?

- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- WPA
- Refuge Lands

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.

Other OHF Appropriation Awards

Have you received OHF dollars in the past through LSOHC?

Yes

Approp Year	Approp Amount Received	Amount Spent to Date	Leverage Reported in AP	Leverage Realized to Date	Acres Affected in AP	Acres Affected to Date	Complete/Final Report Approved?
2018	\$829,000	\$205,400	\$90,000	\$22,267	1,060	142	No
2015	\$1,730,000	\$1,500,300	\$27,900	\$23,806	1,845	1,325	No

Timeline

Activity Name	Estimated Completion Date
Conduct landowner outreach for enhancement and restoration on permanent conservation easements (ongoing). Begin prioritization ranking and habitat suitability assessments.	June 2023
Implement a portion of the Habitat Management Action Plans for restoration and enhancement recommendations on private land easements and public lands to benefit targeted bird species.	June 2024
Conduct habitat restoration and enhancement of both public and permanently protected private lands.	June 2026

Complete restoration and enhancement habitat projects. Post-management summary of habitat suitability for targeted species.	June 2026
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Budget

Totals

Item	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Personnel	\$410,700	\$108,200	Audubon Minnesota	\$518,900
Contracts	\$2,900,000	-	-	\$2,900,000
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	-	-	-	-
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	-	-	-	-
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$25,000	-	-	\$25,000
Professional Services	-	-	-	-
Direct Support Services	\$47,100	-	-	\$47,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	-	-	-	-
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
Supplies/Materials	\$5,000	-	-	\$5,000
DNR IDP	-	-	-	-
Grand Total	\$3,392,800	\$108,200	-	\$3,501,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Antic. Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Grant Administrator	0.07	4.0	12000	\$2,000	Audubon Minnesota	\$14,000
Conservation Director	0.1	4.0	49400	\$8,300	Audubon Minnesota	\$57,700
Conservation Manager	0.25	4.0	100000	\$16,800	Audubon Minnesota	\$116,800
Prairie Project Manager	0.85	4.0	249300	\$81,100	Audubon Minnesota, USFWS, NRCS	\$330,400

Amount of Request: \$3,392,800

Amount of Leverage: \$108,200

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 3.19%

DSS + Personnel: \$457,800

As a % of the total request: 13.49%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

Leverage is provided from Direct Source Service costs and federal in-kind match. Audubon is leveraging state funds with private funds contributed to Audubon. These funds are used to offset un-recovered DSS. Unconfirmed in-kind match is provided by:

NRCS: \$5,000, technology support

USFWS: \$34,200, technical assistance and vehicle utilization

Does this proposal have the ability to be scalable?

Yes

If the project received 70% of the requested funding**Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

This project is scalable; the number of acres could be reduced proportionally. Acres of restoration and enhancement projects would be reduced if the project received 70% of requested funding.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?

Based on our experiences with the first two LSOHC phases, personnel and dedicated support staff are important to project success and more difficult to scale down, though possible.

If the project received 50% of the requested funding**Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?**

This project is scalable; the number of acres could be reduced proportionally. Acres of restoration and enhancement projects would be reduced if the project received 50% of requested funding.

Describe how personnel and DSS expenses would be adjusted and if not proportionately reduced, why?

Based on our experiences with the first two LSOHC phases, personnel and dedicated support staff are important to project success and more difficult to scale down, though possible.

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?

Phases are billed in order as they are completed, including staff salaries. Audubon's conservation staff work together to design and implement habitat plans and on-the-ground restoration or enhancement projects and bill their time to the associated Phase of work accordingly.

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

The contract line item is directed to enhancement and restoration projects. We will use Minnesota-based contractors for aspects of project work, including heavy equipment work, brush mowing, tree removal in prairies, selective herbicide use for invasive species and site preparation, purchasing native seed from growers and vendors, and seedlings.

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 may rent vehicles for grant-related purposes as needed.

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?

Our Direct Support Services is based on Audubon's federally negotiated indirect rate of 24.66%. In this proposal, we are requesting reimbursement of 10% of eligible costs from LSOHC and matching 14.66%. The indirect cost rate only applies to the first \$25,000 of the Contracts line item. Please see attachment for documentation.

Other Equipment/Tools

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

Field gear, field guides, office supplies for fieldwork and file management, smartphone applications related to mapping or plant ID, maps, and plant books.

Federal Funds

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

Yes

Are the funds confirmed?

No

What is the approximate date you anticipate receiving confirmation of the federal funds?

September 30th, 2021

Output Tables

Acres by Resource Type (Table 1)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	0	0	0	200	200
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	0	0
Enhance	0	0	0	2,800	2,800
Total	0	0	0	3,000	3,000

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$312,800	\$312,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$3,080,000	\$3,080,000
Total	-	-	-	\$3,392,800	\$3,392,800

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	0	200	0	0	0	200
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	0	0	0
Enhance	0	2,000	0	800	0	2,800
Total	0	2,200	0	800	0	3,000

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$312,800	-	-	-	\$312,800
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$2,200,000	-	\$880,000	-	\$3,080,000
Total	-	\$2,512,800	-	\$880,000	-	\$3,392,800

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,564
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	\$1,100

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	\$1,564	-	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	-	-	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State	-	-	-	-	-

PILT Liability					
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	\$1,100	-	\$1,100	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

-

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 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 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.*

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

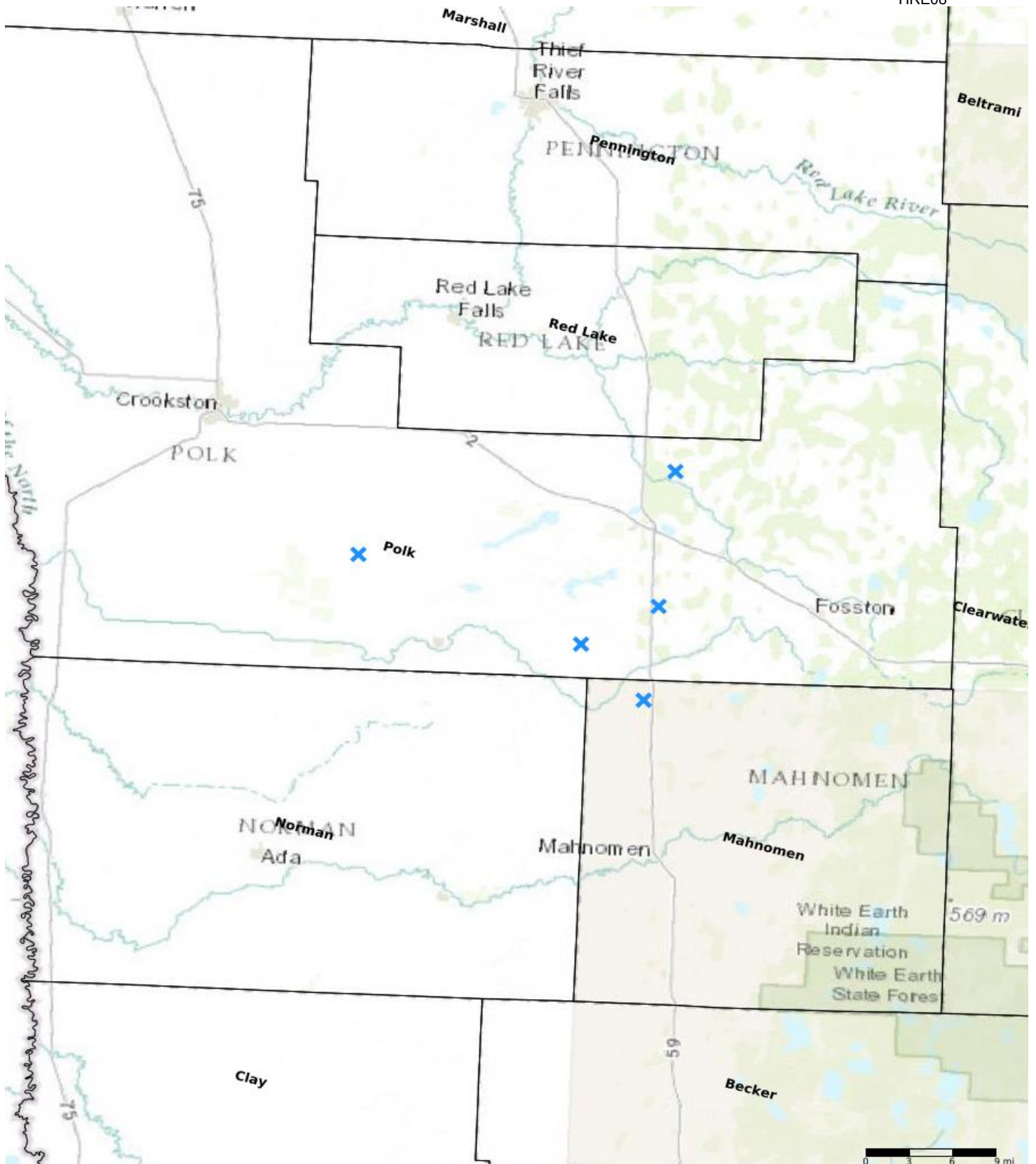
No

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 Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the MN 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.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Nelson Prairie WPA	Mahnomen	14642210	300	\$150,000	Yes
Clarke WPA	Polk	14941218	600	\$200,000	Yes
Melvin Slough WPA	Polk	14845221	468	\$150,000	Yes
Vesledahl	Polk	14743224	300	\$150,000	Yes
Winger WPA	Polk	14742202	300	\$200,000	Yes



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

Parcel Map
Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important
Bird Areas, Phase 3
 (Data Generated From Parcel List)

Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase III



Focused Conservation for Priority Species on Permanently Protected Land

The Tallgrass Aspen Parklands and Prairie Parklands regions of northwestern Minnesota contain a unique mix of wetlands, grasslands, and woodlands that has experienced significant landscape-level change. Through time, the region was been maintained by dynamic cycles of precipitation, fire, and grazing which provide essential habitat to declining prairie and wetland birds species like the sharp-tailed grouse, upland sandpiper, American bittern, least bittern, Franklin's gull, grasshopper sparrow, and countless other wildlife species.

Audubon Minnesota 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 suitability for priority bird species, 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 and recommended follow up actions for future management.

Project Title:

Restoring and Enhancing
Minnesota's Important Bird Areas,
Phase III

Project Manager:

Alexandra Wardwell
Prairie Project Manager

alexandra.wardwell@audubon.org

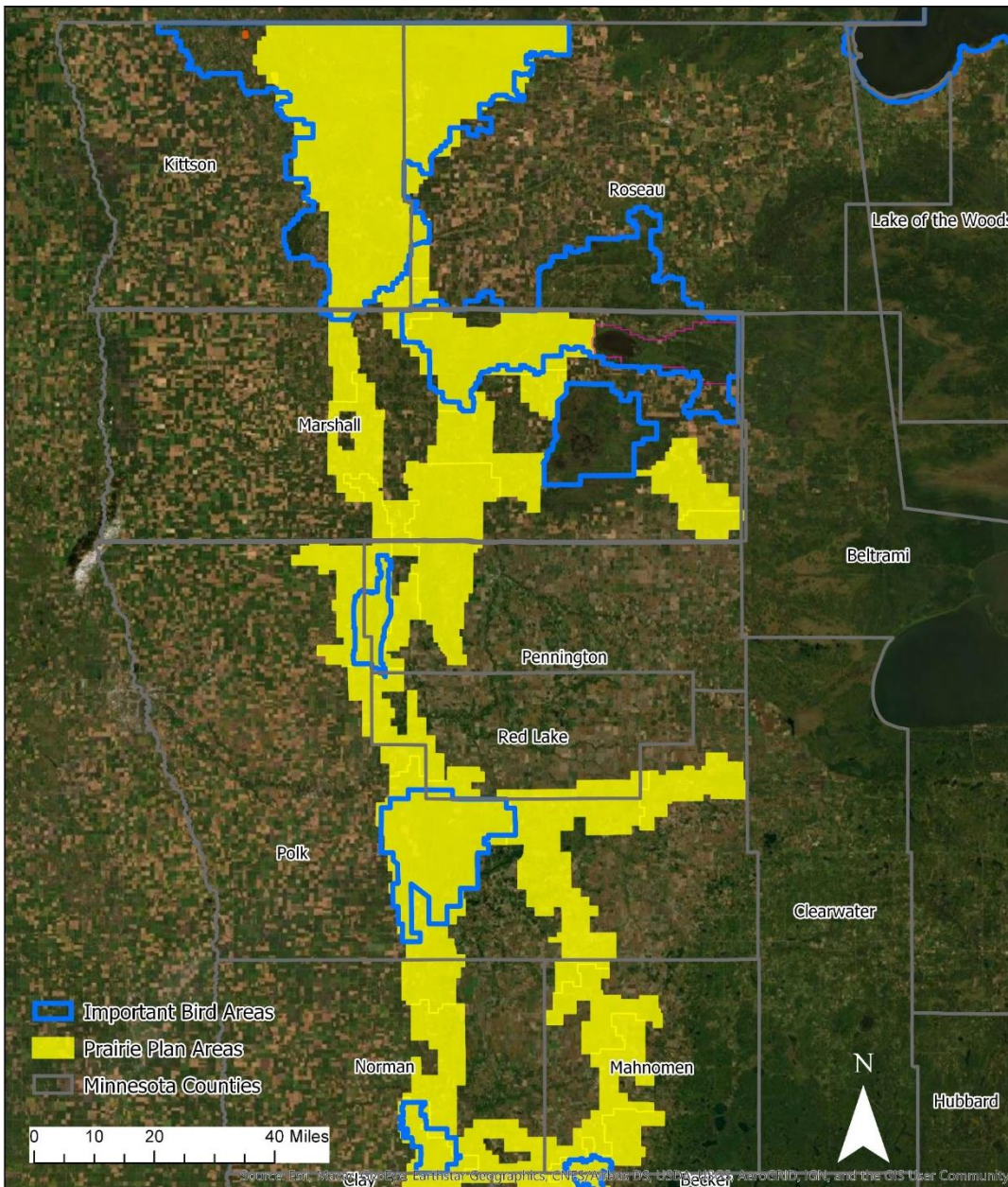
Executive Director:

Rob Schultz

rob.schultz@audubon.org

Audubon Minnesota

2355 Highway 36 West, Suite 400
Roseville, MN 55113
mn.audubon.org



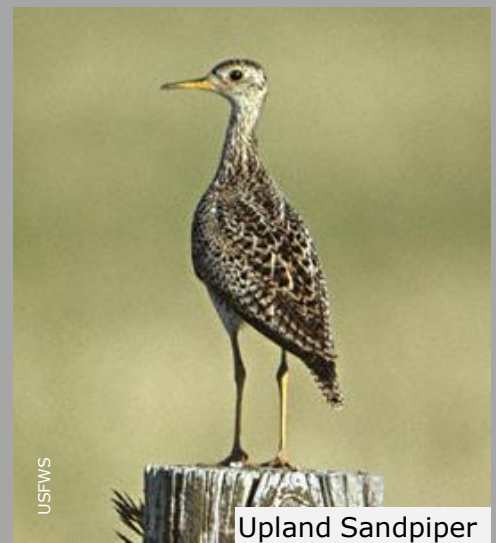
The project area for Phase III will focus on Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan areas located in Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, Pennington, Red Lake, Polk, Norman, and Mahanomen Counties.

Accomplishments to Date (Phase I and II)

- ❖ Conducted direct outreach to 350+ landowners in northwestern Minnesota.
- ❖ Restored over 200 acres of mesic prairie on federal lands in both IBAs and Prairie Cores.
- ❖ Enhanced 1,015 acres of prairies and grasslands on public lands in both IBAs and Prairie Cores.
- ❖ Worked in partnership with Minnesota Land Trust to secure 586 acres of permanent conservation easements.
- ❖ Enhanced over 50 acres of natural lands on permanent conservation easements in western Minnesota with an additional 107 acres underway. Easements are within IBAs and/or Prairie Cores.

Outlook for Phase III

- ❖ Partnerships have been created with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) for project work on potential parcels.
- ❖ Future funding will build on the conservation work already completed from Phase I and II while ensuring project work benefits priority bird species.



USFWS

Upland Sandpiper



Audubon

Sharp-tailed Grouse



Tom Benson

Franklin's Gull



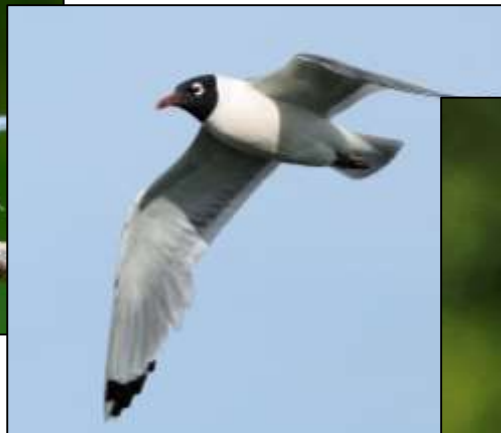
Tom Benson

Grasshopper Sparrow

An Implementation Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation

Executive Summary

Spring 2014



The *Implementation Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation* is a project of Audubon Minnesota written by Lee A. Pfanmuller (leepfann@msn.com) and funded by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. Funding was provided during the FY2011-2012 biennium. For further information please contact Mark Martell at mmartell@audubon.org (651-739-9332).

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Why is a Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation Needed?

Numerous national, regional, and state conservation plans that broadly address Minnesota birds and the landscapes they inhabit have been produced over the past 10-15 years. Most of these plans are strategic in nature, establishing very broad conservation and management goals. Although they compile and summarize important resource information, they rarely provide managers with specific, on-the-ground targets and management tools. Most plans also address such a large number of species that it can be challenging to know which species are the highest priorities, which species, if targeted, can provide the most conservation benefits for other species, and which species can be addressed most effectively.

This effort is designed to build on these previous planning initiatives, not replace them. The goal is to achieve a common bird conservation agenda for Minnesota conservation organizations, agencies, and citizens by creating one clear *operational blueprint that provides specific guidance for Minnesota bird conservation*. It builds upon existing efforts by: identifying the highest priorities in each ecological region 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 in the next decade.

Designed to push conservation beyond broad habitat protection goals, the blueprint will enable everyone interested in the conservation of Minnesota's avifauna to assess whether we are implementing the correct actions to sustain these species as integral components of Minnesota's landscape for years to come.

Blueprint's Foundations

Data Sources

Scores of national, regional and state bird and habitat conservation plans that address Minnesota bird species and Minnesota landscapes were reviewed. A particular emphasis was placed on bird conservation documents developed by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). The latter includes national and regional conservation plans for waterfowl (North American Waterfowl plans), waterbirds (North American Waterbird plans), shorebirds (U.S. Shorebird Conservation plans) and landbirds (Partners in Flight plans).

Other data sources included the Minnesota Ornithologists Union, National Audubon, the U.S. Geological Survey, individual species conservation plans, Minnesota Forest Resources Council landscape plans, the Minnesota Statewide Conservation and Preservation Plan, Minnesota's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy (*Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare*), A Fifty Year Vision: Conservation for Minnesota's Future, bird monitoring reports from the Superior and Chippewa National Forests, Minnesota's Long-Range Duck Plan, Minnesota's Aquatic Management Area Plan, Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Plan, plans prepared by the Minnesota Nature Conservancy, and bird conservation plans from a select number of other states. The primary resources used to develop Audubon Minnesota's Implementation Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation are listed in Appendix 1; the list is not exhaustive but focuses on the bird conservation resources utilized most frequently.

Databases

All the existing plans and documents that were reviewed contain a wealth of information about Minnesota birds, their distribution, breeding biology, vulnerability to climate change, population trends, habitat requirements and status at the global, federal and state level. Data compiled from all these sources were placed into an Excel database designed to summarize relevant information on all Minnesota birds,

including 314 regular species, 42 casual species and 78 accidental species. Over 640 fields of data were compiled and provided the basis for all subsequent analyses summarized in this document. An additional document details the metadata for each field. Nothing similar to this has been compiled in Minnesota or elsewhere in the Great Lakes region. The database is available upon request from Audubon Minnesota.

An additional, smaller database was prepared that compiled the lists of all birds documented for each of Audubon Minnesota's 54 Important Bird Areas (IBAs). Data sources included the nomination forms for each Important Bird Area and documented/published bird lists for managed areas located within the IBA boundaries. The latter included bird lists for Minnesota State Parks, Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas, National Wildlife Refuges, data collected by the Minnesota Breeding Bird Atlas and, on occasion, data from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Rare Features Database.

Bird Conservation Regions

Because Minnesota's landscape is so diverse, ranging from the native prairie and grasslands of western Minnesota to the boreal hardwood forests of northern Minnesota, the Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation examined bird priorities for each of Minnesota's ecological landscapes separately.

We began with the Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) delineated at the national level by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI). These regions were designed to guide bird planning efforts for all North American birds including waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds and landbirds. NABCI delineated bird conservation regions using the Commission for Environmental Cooperation's (1997) hierarchical framework of nested ecological regions. A total of 67 bird conservation regions were delineated for North America, including Mexico and Hawaii (Figure 1). Minnesota includes portions of four of these regions: 1) the Boreal Hardwood Transition Region; 2) the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Region; 3) the Prairie-Hardwood Transition Region; and 4) the Prairie Pothole Region. The majority of quantitative data available on North American birds have been delineated and summarized separately for each of these NABCI regions which is why these were used as a starting point.

In Minnesota, however, resource managers at all levels of government work with the ecological framework for identifying ecological landscapes and native vegetation known as Minnesota's Ecological Classification System (ECS) (*Minnesota Department of Natural Resources 2003, 2005a, 2005b*). This system also delineates four ecological landscapes: 1) the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands; 2) the Prairie Parklands; 3) the Eastern Broadleaf Forest; and 4) the Laurentian Mixed Forest (Figure 2). Although the boundaries are similar to those delineated by NABCI they are not identical. The two most important differences are that the latter does not recognize the Aspen Parklands as a separate region (the vast majority of the parklands were included within the Prairie Potholes Bird Conservation Region and a very small portion is included in the Boreal Hardwood Transition Bird Conservation Region) and the Minnesota ECS does not separate out the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie (BCR22) as a separate province.

Because Minnesota's Ecological Classification System boundaries have become a standard reference for land managers throughout the state, this document adopts those boundaries. They are similar enough to the NABCI boundaries to allow a reasonable extension of all the NABCI quantitative data to the respective ECS province. Specifically:

- Bird Conservation Region 12, the Boreal Hardwood Transition, is nearly identical to Minnesota's Laurentian Mixed Forest Province.
- Bird Conservation Region 23, the Prairie Hardwood Transition, closely corresponds with Minnesota's Eastern Broadleaf Forest Province; the exception is that the latter includes a small portion of Bird Conservation Region 22, the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie, in the southeast corner of

the state (Figure 1). An analysis of birds that occur in this portion of BCR22, along the Mississippi River, demonstrated that the avifauna was not unique from that found within BCR23 and justified combining the two BCRs for the purposes of Audubon's conservation blueprint.

- Finally, Bird Conservation Region 11, the Prairie Potholes, roughly corresponds with Minnesota's Prairie Parkland Province. The primary differences are two-fold: 1) the Aspen Parklands are not delineated separately and the Prairie Parkland includes a small portion of Bird Conservation Region 22, the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie, in the southwest corner of the state (Figure 1). The latter is so small and the area is not characterized by a distinct avifauna so it is reasonably included within the Prairie Parkland Province.

On the otherhand, an analysis of the birds that occur in the Prairie Parkland and Tallgrass Aspen Parklands clarified that the avifaunas of the two regions were distinct enough to warrant delineation of the Aspen Parklands as a separate bird region, thereby respecting the boundaries of Minnesota's Ecological Classification System. Unfortunately, much of the quantitative bird population data for Minnesota has not been broken out for the aspen parklands. As a result, it is assumed that the status of birds in the Prairie Potholes BCR can be reasonably extended to the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands region.

The Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation therefore, adopts the ecological province boundaries of Minnesota's Ecological Classification System. Audubon Minnesota staff, however, decided to adopt the following province names illustrated in Figure 3, i.e.

- Tallgrass Aspen Parklands Region (identical to the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands ECS Province)
- Prairie Parkland Region (identical to the Prairie Parkland ECS Province)
- Prairie Hardwood Transition Region (identical to the Eastern Broadleaf Forest ECS Province)
- Boreal Hardwood Transition Region (identical to the Laurentian Mixed Forest ECS Province)

Species Priorities

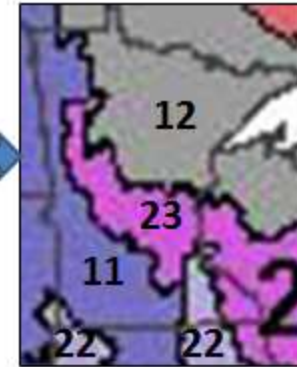
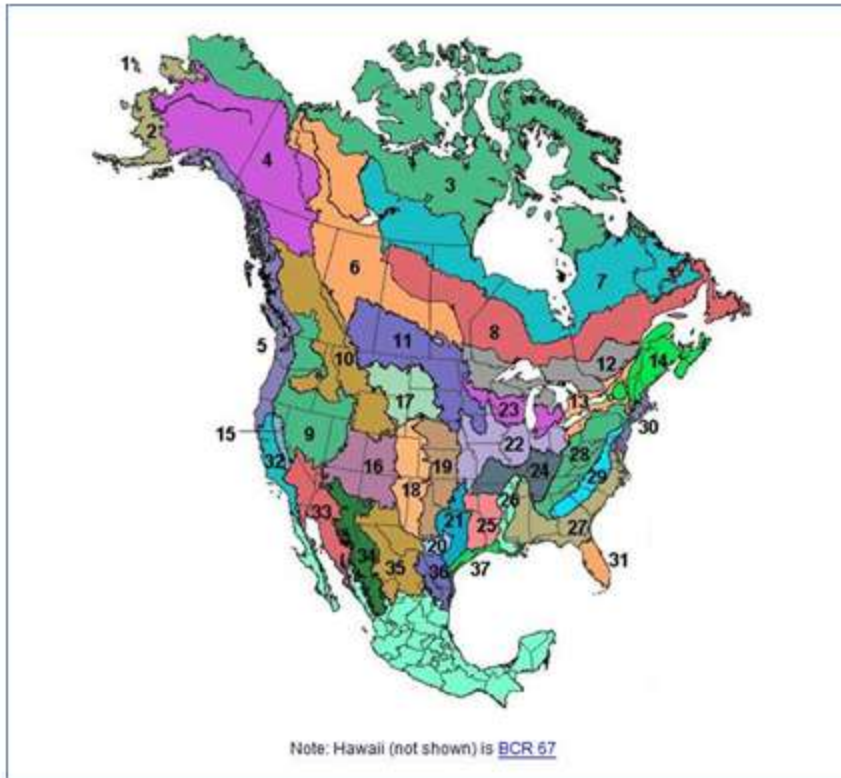
The large database that compiled all known data on Minnesota's birds was integral to the Blueprint's first task which was to assess the status of each species and delineate their relative priority. Following consultation with several key technical advisors, including personnel associated with the University of Minnesota, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Hawk Ridge Bird Observatory, the database was used to develop a preliminary list of priority birds for each bird conservation region.

The preliminary list was presented to several stakeholders and, based on initial feedback, a second approach was designed to delineate species priorities. The first approach relied heavily on identifying species present in manageable numbers that were designated priorities by the National Bird Conservation Initiative (NABCI); the second approach relied more heavily on identifying species present in manageable numbers, with declining populations in Minnesota, and dependent on vulnerable habitats in

Figure 1. North American Bird Conservation Initiative Bird Conservation Regions

Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs)

Delineated by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative



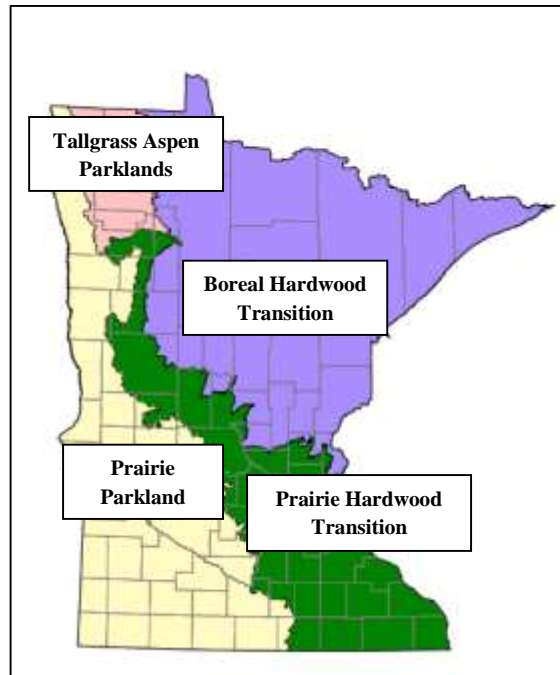
Minnesota includes portions of 4 Bird Conservation Regions:

- BCR 11: Prairie Potholes
- BCR 12: Boreal Hardwood Transition
- BCR 22: Eastern Tallgrass Prairie
- BCR 23: Prairie Hardwood Transition

Figure 2. Ecological Provinces delineated by Minnesota's Ecological Classification System



Figure 3. Bird Conservation Regions for the Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation



Minnesota. The advantage of the first approach is that it relies on data compiled by a team of experts for each NABCI Bird Conservation Region; the advantage of the second approach is that it incorporates more data specific to the species population in Minnesota.

After the second prioritization approach was implemented, the results of the two approaches were compared and collectively used to identify three levels of priority birds in each of Minnesota’s four Bird Conservation Regions: Highest Priority; High Priority and Moderate Priority.

Stakeholder Input

Nine workshops were held from September 2011 through December 2011 and reached over 250 individuals from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (Office of Budget and Management Services, Parks and Trails, Forestry, Fish and Wildlife, and Ecological and Water Resources), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Regional Office, National Wildlife Refuges, Wetland Districts), the National Park Service, the Nature Conservancy, the University of Minnesota, the U.S. Forest Service, conservation organizations, tribes, and county park districts. The workshops were as follows:

Table 1. Conservation Blueprint Workshops

Date	Location	Geographic Focus
September 28, 2011	St. Paul	Boreal Hardwood Transition and Prairie Hardwood Transition
November 1, 2011	Duluth	Boreal Hardwood Transition
November 7, 2011	New Ulm	Prairie Parkland
November 14, 2011	Brainerd	Prairie Hardwood Transition
November 16, 2011	St. Paul	Prairie Hardwood Transition
November 17, 2011	St. Paul	Statewide
November 21, 2011	Grand Rapids	Boreal Hardwood Transition
November 28, 2011	Bemidji	Prairie Parkland and Tallgrass Aspen Parklands
December 2, 2011	Minneapolis	Statewide

In addition to these

workshops, eleven additional presentations were given to solicit further input, including: to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, regional staff of the National Audubon Society, to a statewide gathering of private land managers and to participants to the Department of Natural Resources Fish, Wildlife and Ecological Resources Roundtable.

Blueprint’s Major Products

Minnesota Stewardship Species Brochure

As part of the final *Implementation Blueprint*, Audubon identified Minnesota Stewardship Species. The term ‘stewardship’ is applied to species that reach their greatest abundance in a particular biome, resulting in the biome having a unique responsibility for ensuring the species long-term survival and sustainability. For example, the Greater Prairie Chicken is a stewardship species in North America’s Tallgrass Prairie Biome. The same concept can be applied at the state level. We identified two criteria for identifying Minnesota’s Stewardship Species: 1) $\geq 5\%$ of the species North American breeding range occurs in Minnesota; and 2) $\geq 5\%$ of the species global population occurs in Minnesota. Twelve species, listed in following table, met these criteria.

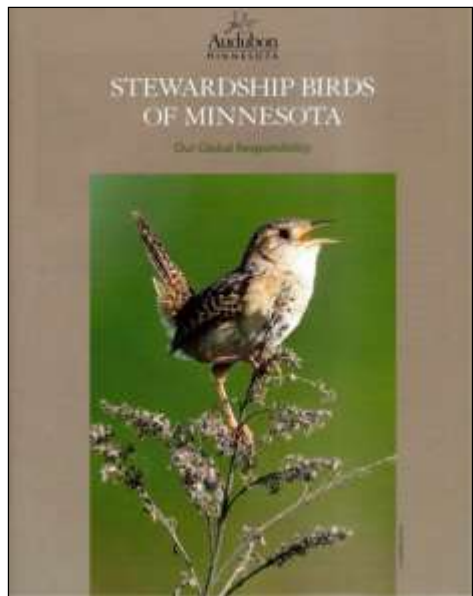
Table 2. Minnesota Stewardship Species

Species	>5% of Global Population in MN	≥5% of Breeding Range in MN
Golden-winged Warbler	42%	12%
Sedge Wren	33%	14 %
American White Pelican	18%	1% *
Bobolink	13%	9%
Trumpeter Swan	12%	11%
Black-billed Cuckoo	10%	10%
American Woodcock	10%	6%
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	6%	10%
Chestnut-sided Warbler	6%	6%
Veery	6%	6%
Baltimore Oriole	5%	8%
Nashville Warbler	5%	5%

*Despite the low percentage of its total breeding range that occurs in Minnesota, the American White Pelican was included because such a significant percentage of its global population occurs here. As a colonial species the pelican’s population has a clumped North American distribution.

To further highlight the significance of these stewardship species, we prepared a 28 page booklet that brings attention to our global responsibility for these birds and provides information on each species distribution, description, habitat, threats/status and conservation.

Figure 4. Audubon Minnesota’s Brochure on Stewardship Birds of Minnesota



Species Accounts for Priority Species

Once the preliminary list of priority species was developed for each Bird Conservation Region, information on the habitat requirements and best management practices for all of the Highest and High Level Priority species in each region (66 species in total) was compiled into a species account; accounts for 6 additional Moderate Priority species were also prepared. Each account includes information on the species' population size, status classifications, distribution, migration status, habitat requirements, climate change vulnerability, best management practices, conservation recommendations, and monitoring needs. These are available on the Audubon Minnesota website (<http://mn.audubon.org/>).

Conservation Blueprints for Target Conservation Species

After identifying a list of Highest, High and Moderate Priority species for each of the four Bird Conservation Regions, the list of priorities was further downsized by identifying Target Conservation Species from among the list of species priorities. Target Conservation Species were selected for the most important key habitats in each of the four regions (as identified by the *Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy for Minnesota: Tomorrow's Habitat for the Wild and Rare*, 2006). Six criteria (level of priority, ecological significance, management significance, cost effectiveness and feasibility of managing, sensitivity to climate change and percent of the species global breeding range in Minnesota) were used to help identify the most appropriate target species. Conservation Target Species selected for each Bird Conservation Region are listed in Table 3. Those that are highlighted in blue also were delineated as Highest Priority Species in the respective region.

Table 3. Target Conservation Species in each of Minnesota's Bird Conservation Regions

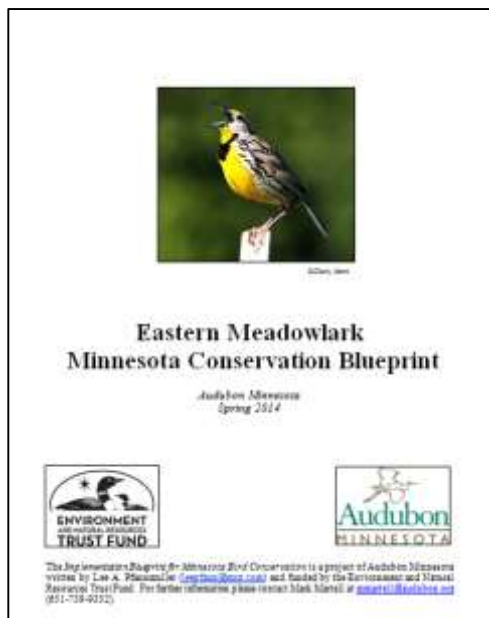
Tallgrass Aspen Parkland	Prairie Parkland	Prairie Hardwood Transition	Boreal Hardwood Transition
Sharp-tailed Grouse	Blue-winged Teal	Forster's Tern	Common Goldeneye
Upland Sandpiper ¹	Upland Sandpiper	Wood Thrush	Boreal Owl
Franklin's Gull	Black Tern	Red-headed Woodpecker	Red-breasted Merganser
	Grasshopper	Louisiana Waterthrush	Common Loon
		Prothonotary Warbler	Northern Goshawk
		Cerulean Warbler	Common Tern
		Eastern Meadowlark	Belted Kingfisher
		Yellow-headed Blackbird	Olive-sided Flycatcher
			Connecticut Warbler
			Spruce Grouse

¹ Species highlighted in Blue are classified as the Highest Priority Species in each respective Bird Conservation Region

A detailed Conservation Blueprint was prepared for nine of the ten Target Conservation Species listed in Table 3 that are identified as among the Highest Priority species in their respective Bird Conservation Region (i.e. the species highlighted in blue). A plan was not prepared for the Blue-winged Teal, a harvested waterfowl species, since it is the focus of significant conservation work by resource agencies. Each Blueprint is divided into two parts. The first provides background on the species, including its

status, distribution, habitat requirements and management needs. The second is a detailed conservation plan that outlines species management recommendations, including a population goal, objective and conservation actions to achieve those goals and objectives.

Figure 5. Example of a Conservation Blueprint for Target Conservation Species



Conservation Blueprints for Bird Conservation Regions

In addition to the Conservation Blueprints for the nine Target Conservation Species, a Conservation Blueprint was prepared for each of the four Bird Conservation Regions: the Tallgrass Aspen Parklands, the Prairie Parklands, the Boreal Hardwood Transition and the Prairie Hardwood Transition. These documents are not written like typical planning documents. Instead, they are designed to provide key information and tools that addresses three primary questions:

1. Which birds are we going to focus on in each region?
2. How are we going to protect these species?
3. Where are we going to work?

Information is provided primarily in tables, brief descriptions about how priorities were selected, and short vignettes that summarize species priorities and goals. Each regional blueprint includes the following:

- Graphs and tables that summarize key characteristics of the avifauna in each ecological region.
- List of Highest, High and Moderate Priority birds in the region.
- Identification of priority habitats to focus conservation actions on.
- Identification of Stewardship Species that should be primary targets in the region.
- Assessment of the monitoring efforts currently underway for the highest priority species and recommendations for future monitoring.

- Identification of habitat protection and restoration efforts in the region; when available, specific habitat protection and restoration goals for each species are provided.
- Identification of habitat management considerations for the highest priority species.

More detailed information on those species that were selected as conservation target species is provided in conservation blueprints for those species.

Figure 6. Example of a Conservation Blueprint for one of four Bird Conservation Regions



Selected Resources for the Blueprint

The primary resources used to develop Audubon Minnesota's Implementation Blueprint for Minnesota Bird Conservation are listed below; the list is not exhaustive but focuses on the bird conservation resources utilized most frequently.

NORTH AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

North American Waterfowl Management Plans

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior and the Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. 1986. **North American Waterfowl Management Plan: A Strategy for Cooperation.**

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Fitzgerald, J.A. and D.N. Pashley. 2000. Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan for the Dissected Till Plains (Physiographic Area 32). American Bird Conservancy and Partners in Flight.

Fitzgerald, J.A., D.N. Pashley, S.J. Lewis and B. Pardo. 1998. **Partners in Flight Bird Conservation Plan for the Northern Tallgrass Prairie (Physiographic Area 40)**. American Bird Conservancy and Partners in Flight.

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Ringelman, J.K., R. E. Reynolds and R.R. Johnson. 2005. **Prairie Pothole Joint Venture: 2005 Implementation Plan, Section II-Waterfowl Plan.**

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Potter, B. A., R. J. Gates, G. J. Soulliere, R. P. Russell, D. A. Granfors, and D. N. Ewert. 2007. **Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Shorebird Habitat Conservation Strategy.** U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Fort Snelling, MN. 101pp.

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United States Department of Agriculture

May 24, 2021

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Minnesota
State Office

375 Jackson Street
Suite 600
St. Paul, MN 55101

Ph: 651-602-7900
Fax 855-823-7656
www.mn.nrcs.usda.gov

Alexandra Wardwell
Prairie Project Manager
Audubon Minnesota
17788 349th Street SE
Erskine, MN 56535

Ms. Wardwell:

This letter is in response to your request for a letter of collaboration from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Minnesota for your upcoming Lessard-Sam's Outdoor Heritage funds regarding Audubon Minnesota's proposal - Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase III.

We are encouraged by your organization's proposal and feel there is value to delivering conservation in a coordinated effort to improve habitat for birds and other wildlife through enhancement and restoration of Agricultural Conservation Easement Program Wetland Reserve Easements.

Minnesota NRCS looks forward to future potential collaborations with Audubon Minnesota to advance conservation along with improvements to habitat for birds and other wildlife.

Sincerely,

TROY DANIELL
State Conservationist



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Rydell and Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuges
17788 349th St. SE
Erskine, MN 56535
218-687-2229

May 18, 2021

Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council,

I would like to express my utmost support for Audubon Minnesota's *Restoring and Enhancing Minnesota's Important Bird Areas, Phase III* proposal. This proposal will focus on restoration and enhancement work on public and privately owned conserved land in western and northwestern Minnesota to benefit breeding and migrating birds. The targeted lands will include Natural Resources Conservation Service Wetland Reserve Easements and on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-owned Waterfowl Production Areas, National Wildlife Refuges, as well as other public conservation lands. The work will be focused within the boundaries of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan and Audubon's Important Bird Areas. Planned conservation work will include pre- and post-assessments of habitat suitability for various species, utilizing Audubon's Blueprints for Bird Conservation documents.

As the manager of two National Wildlife Refuges in northwestern Minnesota and someone who has worked closely with Audubon Minnesota field staff on past conservation efforts, I can speak to the quality of work and level of dedication exhibited by their organization in their work to protect, restore, and enhance natural landscapes throughout this part of Minnesota.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any more information about my experiences working with Audubon Minnesota staff to promote conservation within Minnesota.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gregory A. Knutsen".

Gregg Knutsen,
Refuge Manager
218-686-4329 (cell)
gregg_knutsen@fws.gov