



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the Southern Red River Valley - Phase IX Laws of Minnesota 2023 Accomplishment Plan

General Information

Date: 08/15/2024

Project Title: Prairie Chicken Habitat Partnership of the Southern Red River Valley - Phase IX

Funds Recommended: \$4,400,000

Legislative Citation: ML 2023, Ch. 40, Art. 1, Sec. 2, subd. 2(d)

Appropriation Language: \$4,400,000 the first year is to the commissioner of natural resources for an agreement with Pheasants Forever, in cooperation with the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society, to acquire land in fee and restore and enhance lands in the southern Red River Valley for wildlife management purposes under Minnesota Statutes, section 86A.05, subdivision 8, or to be designated and managed as waterfowl production areas in Minnesota, in cooperation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Subject to the evaluation criteria in Minnesota Rules, part 6136.0900, priority must be given to acquiring lands that are eligible for the native prairie bank under Minnesota Statutes, section 84.96, or lands adjacent to protected native prairie. A list of proposed land acquisitions must be provided as part of the required accomplishment plan.

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Sabin Adams

Title: MN Project Manager

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Location Information

County Location(s): Clay, Mahnomen, Otter Tail, Pennington, Wilkin and Becker.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee
- Restore

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Prairie

Narrative**Abstract**

This proposal protects and restores 651 acres of land in the Minnesota prairie-chicken range, that will be transferred to the MNDNR as a WMA or to the USFWS as a WPA. All land will be open to public hunting. MN Prairie Chicken Society and Pheasants Forever will be protecting parcels that focus specifically on prairie chicken benefits, which makes this proposal unique and highly focused. All acquisitions will occur within the prairie and prairie/forest planning regions with a focus in Clay, Norman, Mahanomen and Wilkin counties which is the primary range of prairie chickens in Minnesota.

Design and Scope of Work

Greater prairie chickens require large blocks of grasslands, with a minimum of 320 acres at any one site. The makeup of these grassland complexes should include numerous successional states of habitat to sustain a local population. Because of this the greater prairie chickens population in Minnesota is largely restricted to the beach ridges of the Glacial Lake Agassiz region. Greater prairie chickens are a “flagship” species in the sense that if we have greater prairie chickens on the landscape, then we also have met the habitat needs of many additional grassland-dependent wildlife species. Greater prairie chicken habitat has declined dramatically in recent years due to 1) loss of Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acres and 2) conversion of grasslands; (including remnant native prairie), to row crop production.

This partnership protects native and restored prairies, sedge meadows, and other types of grasslands and associated wetlands to promote the growth and stability of greater prairie chicken populations. This is a very focused proposal with the priority of protecting remnant prairies within core and corridor areas of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. Our proposed tracts were identified as high priority greater prairie chicken habitat with willing sellers who have an interest in preserving wildlife values. These tracts were ranked as high priority for greater prairie chicken habitat based on six criteria including: 1) distance to the nearest prairie chicken lek; 2) location in or outside of a core area from the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan (MPCP); 3) distance to the nearest public hunting land (WPA or WMA); 4) tract size; 5) current grassland type (native prairie, restored prairie, brome, or row crop); and 6) wetland density and predicted waterfowl breeding pairs (wetlands can provide important habitat for prairie chickens over their annual life cycle). All projects acquired under this proposal will be restored and/or enhanced to be productive grassland habitat as part of the grant activity.

By protecting, restoring, and enhancing grasslands and wetlands in the right areas, this partnership delivers on many of the goals of stateside conservation plans. In fact, one ecosystem measure of the MPCP success is to have stable or increasing greater prairie chicken populations in Minnesota. The MPCP is ideally suited for greater prairie chicken management with core areas containing large contiguous blocks of grassland and smaller grassland patches scattered across the landscape called corridors that allow birds to maintain populations outside the core areas as well as move across the landscape. In addition to grassland conservation, most tracts have extensive wetlands. Restoring and maintaining these wetlands will have several benefits including water storage,

sequestering and storing carbon, water quality, diversity of flora and fauna, and reducing erosion. Providing secure habitat for greater prairie chickens also provides habitat for a host of other grassland species.

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?

The Greater Prairie-Chicken is an indicator of prairie habitat quantity and quality. As such there are a number of game, non-game, and Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) that benefit from this partnership's results. MN Prairie Chicken Society (PCS) and Pheasants Forever (PF) work with Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff to identify rare, threatened, and endangered species that occur on or near a project. SGCN for the proposal area includes 35 vertebrate animals, 59 plants, and 13 invertebrate animals. Many of the proposed tracts contain native prairie communities as mapped by the Minnesota Biological Survey. Depending on the quality, these native tracts likely have a number of T&E prairie-dependent species on them which will be protected. This proposal aims to increase greater prairie chicken numbers in Minnesota by adding to and creating a connected system of grassland habitats across the landscape. In this way, we are addressing the limiting factor to greater prairie chicken populations, while also building more protected high-quality habitats for rare, threatened, and endangered species. We work in close coordination with partners and land managers on the restoration and enhancement of all acquired tracts as well. When SGCN are located on or near project tracts, this can affect methods used in restoration in order to provide maximum benefit for those species.

Describe how the plan uses science-based targeting that leverages or expands corridors and complexes, reduces fragmentation or protects areas identified in the MN County Biological Survey:

This proposal is fully integrated into the MPCP. Most of the tracts listed are within core areas, have remnant native prairie on them, and are adjacent to existing WMAs/WPAs. Most tracts are within less than a half-mile of known greater prairie chicken habitat and leks. Additionally many of these targeted acquisitions have rare features identified by the MN County Biological Survey. The latest geospatial data, such as that from the USFWS HAPET team, the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan, the MN Wildlife Action Plan among others will be utilized to review potential tracts. We also strive to protect habitat where we will have the best return on investment and have the greatest impact on prairie-chicken populations. Close coordination with local resource managers will further ensure that this partnership is delivering the best results for the investment.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H3 Improve connectivity and access to recreation

Which two other plans are addressed in this program?

- Grassland Conservation Plan for Prairie Grouse
- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan

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 nesting and migratory habitat for waterfowl, upland birds, and species of greatest conservation need ~ *Strategic parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be acquired and restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for pollinators, resident and migratory game and non-game species. Lands will be protected to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by Minnesota DNR of United States FWS. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in the "Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years" and "Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan".*

Programs in prairie region:

- Key core parcels are protected for fish, game and other wildlife ~ *Strategic parcels that increase the functionality of existing habitat will be acquired and restored to functioning wetlands with diverse upland prairie to serve as habitat for pollinators, resident and migratory game and non-game species. Lands will be protected to provide accelerated wildlife habitat and public access, monitored by Minnesota DNR of United States FWS. Protected and restored acres will be measured against goals outlined in the "Minnesota's Wildlife Management Area Acquisition - The Next 50 Years" and "Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan".*

Does this program include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

This proposal will bring \$538,2000 of leverage funds to increase the accomplishments of acquisition and restoration activities. This leverage will come from The Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society, Pheasants Forever, Federal funds, as well as privately raised sources.

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 proposal supplements past investments and is aimed at accelerating the protection and restoration of strategic parcels.

Non-OHF Appropriations

Year	Source	Amount
Annual	-	-

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

All lands will be enrolled into the WMA or WPA system and will be managed in perpetuity by the MNDNR or USFWS, respectively. All acquisitions will be restored and/or enhanced to as high quality as practicable, with the knowledge that quality and comprehensive restorations utilizing native species result in lower management costs. In addition, local PF chapter members and volunteers maintain significant interest in seeing the habitat and productivity of acquired parcels are high. MPCS, PF, MNDNR and USFWS will develop an ecological restoration and

management plan for each parcel. Grant and partner dollars will be used for the initial site development and restoration/enhancement work.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

Year	Source of Funds	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Post Transfer - WPA	USFWS - Federal	Standard long-term maintenance; fire, invasives control, etc	-	-
Post Transfer - WMA	DNR - Game and Fish Funds	Standard long-term maintenance; fire, invasives control, etc	-	-

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

The goal of this program is to protect and restore wildlife habitat and make these areas accessible to all Minnesotans, regardless of cultural background or fiscal standing. Properties acquired under this program will be free and open to access by all. These properties can be recreated on by all levels of income from free hiking/wildlife watching to expensive hunting practices. Some acquisitions will be nearby areas with diverse or low-income communities. This program engages with everyone who wants to participate in public lands and the outdoors.

Activity Details

Requirements

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

Yes

Will county board or other local government approval be formally sought prior to acquisition, per 97A.056 subd 13(j)?**

No

Describe any measures to inform local governments of land acquisition under their jurisdiction:

At minimum, we will notify local government in writing of the intent to acquire and donate lands to the state and follow up with questions prior to the acquisition. In cases where there is interest, we will also indicate our willingness to attend or ask to attend county or township meetings to communicate our interest in the projects and seek support.

Is the land you plan to acquire (fee title) free of any other permanent protection?

No

Describe the permanent protection and justification for additional protection:

Because we are working within priority habitat areas, it is possible that parcels could have perpetual easements on a portion of them. If a parcel has a perpetual easement and is deemed a high priority by the partners, we will follow guidance established by the Outdoor Heritage Fund to proceed, or use non-state funding to acquire the protected portion of the property.

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?

- WMA
- WPA
- Refuge Lands

Land Use

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

Yes

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

This proposal may include initial development plans or restoration plans to utilize farming to prepare previously farmed sites for native plant seeding. This is a standard practice across the Midwest to prepare the seedbed for native seed planting. In these restorations, PF's policy is to use non neonicotinoid treated seed and no herbicides other than glyphosate. On a small percentage of WMAs (less than 2.5%), DNR uses farming to provide a winter food source for a variety of wildlife species in agriculture-dominated landscapes largely devoid of winter food sources. There are no immediate plans to use farming for winter food on any of the parcels in this proposal.

Is this land currently open for hunting and fishing?

No

Will the land be open for hunting and fishing after completion?

Yes

Describe any variation from the State of Minnesota regulations:

No variation from State of MN regulations for WMA acquisitions.

All WPA acquisitions will be open to the public taking of fish and game during the open season according to the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, United States Code, title 16, section 668dd, et seq.

Who will eventually own the fee title land?

- State of MN
- Federal

Land acquired in fee will be designated as a:

- WMA
- WPA

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

4-5

Are there currently trails or roads on any of the proposed acquisitions?

No

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

No

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

Yes

All acquired parcels will be restored to the fullest extent possible before donation to USFWS or MN DNR.

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
Restorations completed	06/30/2028
Close on tracts	01/01/2026
Purchase agreements	09/01/2024
Contract appraisals ordered	04/01/2023
Re-evaluate tract priority	02/14/2023
Purchase agreements	02/01/202
Contract appraisals ordered	09/01/2023
Identify priority acquisitions	07/01/2023

Date of Final Report Submission: 06/30/2031

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, 2027;
- (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, 2031;
- (3) money appropriated for restoring or enhancing other land is available until June 30, 2028;
- (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	\$65,800	-	-	\$65,800
Contracts	\$497,700	-	-	\$497,700
Fee Acquisition w/ PILT	\$1,267,500	\$263,100	PF, MPCS, Private, Federal	\$1,530,600
Fee Acquisition w/o PILT	\$2,240,900	\$263,100	PF, MPCS, Private, Federal	\$2,504,000
Easement Acquisition	-	-	-	-
Easement Stewardship	-	-	-	-
Travel	\$5,300	-	-	\$5,300
Professional Services	\$105,200	-	-	\$105,200
Direct Support Services	\$20,300	\$11,800	PF	\$32,100
DNR Land Acquisition Costs	\$42,100	-	-	\$42,100
Capital Equipment	-	-	-	-
Other Equipment/Tools	-	-	-	-
Supplies/Materials	\$136,800	-	-	\$136,800
DNR IDP	\$18,400	-	-	\$18,400
Grand Total	\$4,400,000	\$538,000	-	\$4,938,000

Personnel

Position	Annual FTE	Years Working	Funding Request	Leverage	Leverage Source	Total
Grants Staff	0.37	3.0	\$21,900	-	-	\$21,900
Field Staff	0.55	3.0	\$28,500	-	-	\$28,500
State Coordinator	0.15	3.0	\$15,400	-	-	\$15,400

Amount of Request: \$4,400,000

Amount of Leverage: \$538,000

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 12.23%

DSS + Personnel: \$86,100

As a % of the total request: 1.96%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

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

We have reduced accomplishments/costs proportionately across the overall program to accommodate the reduced appropriation. As a result of the reduction, we will be able to protect fewer acres. As in past appropriations, we will focus on the most strategic, highest priority tracts.

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

Leverage is expected from multiple sources including but not limited to federal sources, land value donations, contractor donations and PF. Not every source is 100% confirmed at this point. However, PF has an exemplary track record of delivery and over-achievement of match commitments that further stretch OHF funding.

Does this project have the ability to be scalable?

Yes

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

Describe how the scaling would affect acres/activities and if not proportionately reduced, why?

If this project is reduced by 30% we would scale down all acres/activities and dollar amounts proportionately.

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

Personnel and DSS will be scaled down proportionately.

Personnel

Has funding for these positions been requested in the past?

Yes

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

We anticipate all contract funding will be used for restoration, enhancement, and initial development of the protected acres and \$13,200.00 for adjacent protected lands. This could include but is not limited to wetland/grassland restoration, tree removal, prescribed fire, building removal, posts, signs, and other development needs.

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

4-5

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

n/a

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?

PF utilizes the Total Modified Direct Cost method. This methodology is annually approved by the U.S. Department

of Interior's National Business Center as the basis for the organization's Indirect Cost Rate agreement. PF's allowable direct support services cost is 3.97%. In this proposal, PF has discounted its rate to 2.5% of the sum of personnel, contracts, professional services, and travel. We are donating the difference-in-kind.

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?

07/01/2025

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

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Acres
Restore	-	13	-	-	13
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	319	-	-	319
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	319	-	-	319
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	651	-	-	651

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat	Total Funding
Restore	-	\$13,200	-	-	\$13,200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$1,706,700	-	-	\$1,706,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$2,680,100	-	-	\$2,680,100
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$4,400,000	-	-	\$4,400,000

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Acres
Restore	-	-	-	13	-	13
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	159	-	160	-	319
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	127	-	192	-	319
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	286	-	365	-	651

Total Requested Funding within each Ecological Section (Table 4)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest	Total Funding
Restore	-	-	-	\$13,200	-	\$13,200
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$1,096,700	-	\$610,000	-	\$1,706,700
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$877,300	-	\$1,802,800	-	\$2,680,100
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	-	\$1,974,000	-	\$2,426,000	-	\$4,400,000

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

Type	Wetland	Prairie	Forest	Habitat
Restore	-	\$1,015	-	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$5,350	-	-
Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$8,401	-	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

Type	Metro/Urban	Forest/Prairie	SE Forest	Prairie	N. Forest
Restore	-	-	-	\$1,015	-
Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability	-	\$6,897	-	\$3,812	-

Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability	-	\$6,907	-	\$9,389	-
Protect in Easement	-	-	-	-	-
Enhance	-	-	-	-	-

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Parcels

Parcel Information

Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

Parcels are identified and strategically prioritized using the best science and decision support tools (e.g. Prairie Conservation Plan Maps) available. Preference is given to project sites that both help deliver the goals of other recognized conservation initiatives and that build habitat in critical prairie chicken areas. Data layers (i.e. MN Biological Survey, Natural Heritage Database, MN Wildlife Action Plan, Wellhead Protection Areas, Pheasant Action Plan, existing protected land, etc.) are used to help justify projects and focus areas as well as to inform decisions on top priorities for protection and restoration efforts.

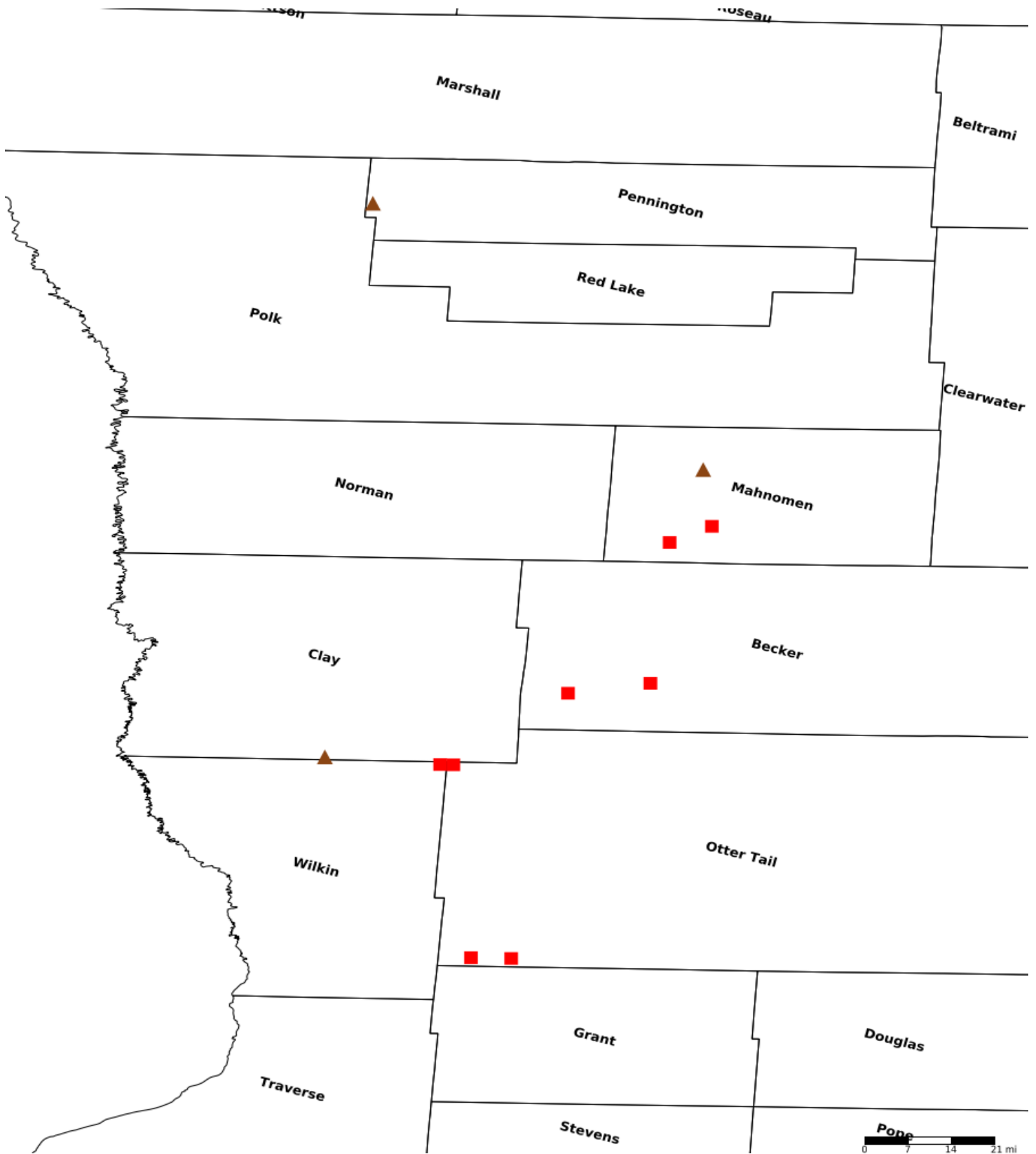
Fee Parcels

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection
Erickson WPA Addn	Becker	13943234	53	\$175,000	No
Audobon WPA Addn	Becker	13942222	198	\$594,000	No
Haymakers WMA	Clay	13746234	320	\$1,300,000	No
Wambach WMA Addn	Mahnomen	14541207	80	\$280,000	No
Moore Lake WPA Addn	Mahnomen	14342214	710	\$2,485,000	No
Haggman WPA Addn	Mahnomen	14441232	401	\$3,286,500	Yes
Julsrud WPA Addn	Otter Tail	13644206	64	\$204,224	No
Rabbit River WPA Addn	Otter Tail	13144228	160	\$560,000	No
Pembina WMA Addn	Pennington	15345219	330	\$825,000	No

Fee Parcels with Buildings

Name	County	TRDS	Acres	Est Cost	Existing Protection	Buildings	Value of Buildings
Dahler Slough WPA Addn	Otter Tail	13144225	100	\$500,000	No	2	\$0
Julsrud WPA Addn	Wilkin	13645201	77	\$246,784	Yes	6	\$0

Parcel Map



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