



Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council

MN Prairie Recovery Program Phase 13

ML 2023 Request for Funding

General Information

Date: 05/31/2022

Proposal Title: MN Prairie Recovery Program Phase 13

Funds Requested: \$8,322,300

Manager Information

Manager's Name: Neal Feeken

Title: Director, Land Conservation

Organization: The Nature Conservancy

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Location Information

County Location(s): Stevens, Grant, Otter Tail, Douglas, Norman, Becker, Big Stone, Chippewa, Clay, Cottonwood, Kandiyohi, Kittson, Lac qui Parle, Lincoln, Lyon, Mahnomen, Nobles, Murray, Pennington, Pipestone, Polk, Pope, Red Lake, Rock, Roseau, Stearns, Swift, Wilkin, Traverse and Yellow Medicine.

Eco regions in which work will take place:

- Forest / Prairie Transition
- Prairie

Activity types:

- Protect in Fee
- Restore
- Enhance

Priority resources addressed by activity:

- Wetlands
- Prairie

Narrative

Abstract

The project will advance the protection, restoration and enhancement goals for prairie, grassland and wetland habitats as described in the 2018 MN Prairie Conservation Plan. It builds upon the highly successful model established via prior Prairie Recovery Phases and seeks to protect 750 acres in Fee without PILT obligations to be held by The Nature Conservancy, enhance 25,000 acres of permanently protected grasslands, and restore 250 acres of prairie and wetland habitat. Protection and restoration projects will contribute toward state climate goals by sequestering approximately 150,000 metric tons CO₂ equivalent.

Design and Scope of Work

Protect - An estimated 750 acres of prairie, wetlands, grasslands, and savanna will be permanently protected through fee-title acquisition from willing sellers in priority prairie core/corridor landscapes as identified in the 2018 MN Prairie Conservation Plan. Acquired lands will be prioritized using LSOHC approved criteria that include: percentage of native prairie on the parcel, proximity to other permanently protected areas, quality of habitat and species diversity, and suitability for public recreation. Protected acres without PILT will be held by The Nature Conservancy subject to a recorded notice of funding restrictions.

Enhance - An estimated 25,000 acres of grassland/wetland complex will be enhanced on permanently protected lands, including lands purchased with OHF funds and held by the Conservancy; MN DNR Management Units including Wildlife Management Areas, Scientific & Natural Areas, and Native Prairie Bank easements; federal Waterfowl Production Areas and grassland/wetland habitat easements. The primary objectives of these enhancement activities will be to increase native species diversity and improve critical wildlife habitat. A variety of practices and techniques will be implemented to accomplish the objectives such as: prescribed fire; removal of trees and woody species; invasive species control including mechanical, biological, and chemical control; over-seeding degraded grasslands with native seed; and conservation grazing, mowing, or haying. The work will be conducted primarily through contracts with local vendors, Conservation Corps of Minnesota or Student Conservation Association crews and by using Nature Conservancy seasonal and permanent staff. Prairie Recovery Biologists, stationed in four landscapes within the Prairie region are responsible for identifying and prioritizing projects in collaboration with agency land managers; selecting vendors and overseeing contracted work; and managing and directing seasonal staff. The Biologists are also responsible for participating in and leading Prairie Plan Local Technical Team efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of grassland conservation program delivery by multiple partners at the landscape scale.

Restore - Approximately 250 acres of cropland will be restored to diverse local-ecotype grassland and grassland/wetland complexes. Practices to be implemented include those listed as enhancements above and the restoration of original wetland hydrology.

Results to date - Through previous Phases of the Prairie Recovery Program we have protected 7,874 acres of prairies, wetlands, and grasslands, enhanced more than 165,000 acres of permanently protected grasslands and restored approximately 1,900 acres with locally-sourced native seed. All parcels protected directly contributed to the functional integrity of existing habitat complexes. Costs to acquire properties in fee-title have averaged around \$2,500 per acre, though land prices have been escalating rapidly. Our enhancement projects have focused on accelerating the implementation of prescribed fire, woody vegetation removal, building the infrastructure for conservation grazing systems and treatment of invasive species. Costs for enhancement and restoration work vary depending on the practices being implemented and have averaged around \$125 per acre. Labor and supply costs have risen dramatically in the last 18 months.

Collectively these projects have captured approximately 750,000 metric tons CO₂ equivalent and will continue to hold that carbon in prairie soils.

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?

Temperate grasslands are the most endangered and least protected habitat type on earth, and Minnesota's prairies are no exception. Activities identified in this project directly reflect implementation strategies identified in the MN Prairie Conservation Plan. Properties targeted for acquisition are identified and prioritized using MN County Biological Survey Rare Element Occurrences and Biodiversity Significance. The geographies we work within, in addition to being Prairie Plan Core areas, reflect areas with the highest density and highest quality remaining prairie systems left in the state. By focusing our work in these particular landscapes we increase the functionality of the overall prairie/grassland systems, including increasing water retention, improving breeding and nesting habitat and augmenting migratory corridors. While our work focuses on increasing and maintaining system functionality a number of individual species and suites of SPGCN will directly benefit from this project including:

Insects - habitat management and protection specifically for the federally-threatened Dakota skipper butterfly, potential restoration of habitat for the endangered Poweshiek skipperling and the declining regal fritillary butterflies

Mammals - American badger (an indicator species requiring intact blocks of quality habitat), elk (for herd management in NW MN)

Reptiles - hognose snake (primarily in western MN counties of Lac qui Parle, Big Stone and Yellow Medicine), 5-lined skink (rock outcroppings in the upper MN River Valley)

Birds - Grassland dependent birds have experienced precipitous population decline across Minnesota and the northern Great Plains, largely due to habitat loss on the breeding grounds. This project will provide permanently protected and enhanced habitat for a suite of grassland and wetland nesting birds, most notably the Meadowlark, Bobolink, Dickcissel, Grasshopper sparrow, Henslow's sparrow, Upland sandpiper, Black tern, Northern pintail, Greater Prairie-chicken, Sharp-tail grouse, and many others.

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

Less than 2% of Minnesota's original prairies remain and of these only about half are currently protected. The rest remain at risk for conversion to other uses such as row-crop production, gravel mining, and urban development. It is imperative that we permanently protect all the remaining native prairie as quickly as we can. The MN Prairie Conservation Plan sets an ambitious goal of protecting all of our remaining native prairies and annually enhancing significant acres of grassland habitat over the next 20 years. This project represents one tool designed to help the conservation community meet these goals. The enhancement component of the project greatly accelerates habitat improvement on public lands by bringing additional resources to bear, allowing for the treatment of rapidly

expanding invasive species, developing infrastructure that facilitates future management using either conservation grazing or prescribed fire, and building a private vendor industry to accomplish enhancement work.

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:

The project focuses activities on core/corridor complexes as described in the MN Prairie Conservation Plan. The Prairie plan was developed using the best available information for identifying the highest quality/highest density remaining prairie and grassland complexes in the state and is periodically revisited for accuracy and relevance by a core team of State, Federal and NGO prairie biologists.

Individual parcels are prioritized using the attached criteria. Important considerations include % of native prairie on tract; adjacency to other native prairie; proximity to other protected lands; and uniqueness and diversity of species present. MN County Biological Survey data and biodiversity rankings are key tools used to measure these criteria.

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

- H1 Protect priority land habitats
- H5 Restore land, wetlands and wetland-associated watersheds

Which two other plans are addressed in this proposal?

- Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan
- Minnesota's Wildlife Action Plan 2015-2025

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

By focusing our protection work in core/corridor areas identified in the Prairie Plan, this project will target conservation dollars to restore grassland landscapes at functional scales throughout the Prairie region of western Minnesota. The project will accelerate the indicators for enhancement/restoration outlined in the Plan including: increasing native plant diversity condition and cover; stable or decreasing cover of invasive woody vegetation; and supporting diverse populations of native birds and insects. Further, the project will result in decreased coverage of invasive species and increased cover dominated by native plants. Collectively these actions will provide increased acreage and quality of habitat for the prairie obligate species called out in the State Wildlife Action Plan.

Which LSOHC section priorities are addressed in this proposal?

Forest / Prairie Transition

- Protect, enhance, and restore rare native remnant prairie

Prairie

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

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:

The Nature Conservancy has been actively protecting and managing prairies in Minnesota for more than 60 years. Funds available through this program provide critical resources for protecting the approximately less than 2% of

currently unprotected native prairie remaining in the state. Given the continued pressure to convert prairie lands it is imperative that willing sellers of native prairie be given the opportunity to protect these increasingly rare systems. The Minnesota Prairie Recovery Program represents one of the best tools the Conservancy has to afford such protection. Further, many of the lands in public ownership are in need of intensive management to ensure healthy grassland systems. Investment in removing woody species, controlling invasive species and restoring prescribed fire regimes is akin to infrastructure development in that upfront costs are high but ongoing maintenance becomes more sustainable once those investments have been made. This project, and others that support the goals of the MN Prairie Conservation Plan, are critical to ensuring the long-term health and viability of Minnesota's prairie landscapes.

What other fund may contribute to this proposal?

- Other

Does this proposal include leveraged funding?

Yes

Explain the leverage:

We are leveraging state funds with private funds by depositing private donations amounting to 20% of the value of fee-title without PILT obligation acquisitions in a permanent stewardship account that guarantees our ability to maintain acquired properties over time. Further, we track any revenues generated from the acquired properties in the form of lease or CRP payments in a separate restricted account that is used to pay property taxes or management costs on the parcels. This account typically generates less than 30% of our annual property tax obligation, with the remaining taxes paid by the Conservancy using other private funds.

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.

All protection, enhancement and restoration work utilizing OHF allocations is supplemental to core work historically done by the Conservancy. OHF dollars allow us to increase the pace and scale of protection, restoration, and enhancement of native prairies and critical grasslands identified as priorities in the MN Prairie Conservation Plan.

Non-OHF Appropriations

| Year | Source | Amount |
|------|---------------------------|-----------|
| 2010 | TNC Private Contributions | 1,228,100 |
| 2011 | TNC Private Contributions | 1,427,700 |
| 2014 | TNC Private Contributions | 467,400 |
| 2013 | TNC Private Contributions | 1,119,900 |
| 2012 | TNC Private Contributions | 851,000 |
| 2015 | TNC Private Contributions | 173,800 |
| 2018 | TNC Private Contributions | 276,100 |
| 2017 | TNC Private Contributions | 229,900 |
| 2019 | TNC Private Contributions | 193,600 |
| 2020 | TNC Private Contributions | 0 |
| 2021 | TNC Private Contributions | 0 |

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

Protection, restoration, and enhancement are all critical tools for the long-term viability of Minnesota's prairie/wetland systems. The prairie pothole landscape can only be sustained through the regular application of

disturbance, including fire, grazing and haying. A primary purpose of this proposal is to continue a highly successful collaborative and coordinated partnership that accelerates the use of these practices across multiple landscapes. In many cases requested funds will develop infrastructure and enable completion of one-time large expenses such as woody species removal and installation of fencing for conservation grazing. Once the initial activities are completed we expect long-term maintenance costs to moderate. The Nature Conservancy will continue to seek mechanisms that derive revenue from grazing, haying and seed production consistent with our conservation goals. All resulting income will be placed in a dedicated account for future property tax payments and management of properties acquired with Outdoor Heritage Funds. Our past efforts show that revenue generation is insufficient to pay for all associated expenses, therefore we plan to seek future funding from the Outdoor Heritage Fund along with private contributions for long-term stewardship needs.

Actions to Maintain Project Outcomes

| Year | Source of Funds | Step 1 | Step 2 | Step 3 |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------|--------|
| Once every 4-5 years | OHF, TNC private funds | Prescribed Fire | - | - |
| As appropriate | OHF/TNC private funds, lease payments | Conservation grazing | - | - |
| Annually | OHF/TNC private funds | Invasive search/treatment | - | - |

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

We will continue to use the five indicator species/metrics identified by MNDNR to represent the prairie/grassland habitats: pheasant, prairie chicken, bobolink, grasshopper sparrow, and monarch butterfly.

Pheasant

By looking at the ratios of CRP acres in Minnesota to pheasant harvest, we estimate that every three acres of grassland habitat has the potential to produce one harvested pheasant rooster.

Greater Prairie Chicken

According to the literature and professional observations in Minnesota, prairie chickens require a minimum of 320 acres of high quality grasslands with no areas hostile to grassland wildlife (woodlots, farmsteads, etc) near these grasslands. For every 320 acre patch of high quality grassland in the prairie chicken range in the northwest part of the state, we expect there to be a lek, or booming ground. The average size of booming grounds in Minnesota is roughly 11 males.

Bobolink and Grasshopper Sparrow

The breeding territory size of bobolinks and grasshopper sparrows is 1.7 and 2.1 acres respectively in high quality habitat in Wisconsin. If all of the habitat was occupied, 100 acres of habitat could hold approximately 60 and 48 pairs of bobolinks and grasshopper sparrows respectively.

Monarch Butterfly

Research from the University MN shows that it takes approximately 30 milkweed plants to result in one monarch butterfly contributing to the overwintering Mexican population. Grasslands can have between 100-250 milkweed stems per

acre. An acre of restored or enhanced grassland could potentially contribute 3 to 8 monarchs to the population.

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

In addition to the on-the-ground conservation benefits afforded by the work described above, the MN Prairie Recovery Program, through a robust seasonal employee hiring program, serves as a vehicle for training the next generation of conservation professionals. Our seasonal staff is largely comprised of young and aspiring conservationists looking to gain practical hands-on experience, either through short-term summer, or longer-term "1st job in the field", employment. Our recruitment practices are rooted in our Mission and guided by our Values, which includes a Commitment to Diversity and Respect for People, Communities, and Cultures. We know we'll only achieve our Mission by hiring and engaging a diverse workforce that reflects the communities in which we work. Hiring Teams must follow TNC's inclusive hiring practices for all positions. This includes: 1) reviewing position descriptions to ensure language is inclusive, non-gendered and only includes requirements necessary for the job. 2) advertising job openings widely, posting via the Professional Diversity Network among others, and for adequate duration to attract a diverse candidate pool 3) Extending the posting period or reopening a closed position in order to conduct additional outreach should candidate pools lack diversity. 4) Ensuring each interview is conducted with consistent conditions and questions. 5) Ensuring interview panels are diverse and gender balanced appropriately. All panelists receive training to avoid unconscious bias. We are beginning to see more diverse candidate pools resulting in a subsequent diversification of our workforce.

Further, the landscapes where the Prairie Recovery work occurs are in relative proximity to a number of cities with significant BIPOC communities (St. Cloud, Wilmar, Morris, Fargo/Moorhead). BIPOC and diverse communities experience disproportionate access to nature on private lands, meaning open and accessible public lands are even more crucial for recruiting and retaining a diverse next generation of hunters, anglers, nature photographers, writers, artists and nature enthusiasts. Work proposed through the MN Prairie Recovery Program will add to the quantity and quality of public lands available to all Minnesotans, including BIPOC and diverse communities.

Activity Details

Requirements

If funded, this proposal 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:

We will follow the county/township board notification processes as directed by current statutory language.

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

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?

- WMA
- WPA
- Permanently Protected Conservation Easements
- Refuge Lands
- Other : TNC owned lands purchased with OHF dollars

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 or other commercial crops can be used for restorations in order to control weed seedbeds prior to prairie planting. In some cases this necessitates the use of GMO treated products to facilitate herbicide use in order to control weeds present in the seedbank. Neonicitinoide treated seed will not be used. We would not expect agricultural crop use to exceed 3 years on any given OHF acquired property. We continue to explore the viability of alternative restoration techniques to minimize the need to farm restoration sites, including expanded use of cover crops.

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 anticipated

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

Yes

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? |
|-------------|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|-----|
| 2021 | \$2,794,000 | \$2,500 | \$230,000 | - | 10,800 | 0 | No |
| 2020 | \$3,365,000 | \$2,500 | \$539,200 | - | 14,350 | 0 | No |
| 2019 | \$3,058,000 | \$1,525,400 | \$421,200 | \$193,600 | 14,600 | 4,296 | No |
| 2018 | \$2,001,000 | \$2,001,000 | \$280,600 | \$276,000 | 12,950 | 10,431 | No |
| 2015 | \$4,032,000 | \$3,999,200 | \$282,300 | \$173,800 | 6,700 | 25,481 | No |
| 2014 | \$3,940,000 | \$4,032,000 | \$459,200 | \$467,400 | 6,050 | 20,233 | Yes |
| 2017 | \$1,901,000 | \$1,900,962 | \$211,600 | \$229,900 | 7,900 | 10,500 | No |
| 2013 | \$5,310,000 | \$5,310,000 | \$810,500 | \$1,119,900 | 9,250 | 39,714 | Yes |
| 2012 | \$4,610,000 | \$4,607,900 | \$748,500 | \$851,000 | 7,450 | 23,833 | Yes |
| 2011 | \$4,500,100 | \$4,499,500 | \$1,613,800 | \$1,427,700 | 7,450 | 16,552 | Yes |
| 2010 | \$3,653,000 | \$3,653,000 | - | \$1,228,100 | 9,250 | 22,133 | Yes |

Timeline

| Activity Name | Estimated Completion Date |
|--|---------------------------|
| 250 acres restored to native prairie/wetland | June 2028 |
| 250 acres protected in Fee w/out PILT | June 2025 |
| 250 acres protected in Fee w/out PILT | June 2026 |
| 250 acres protected in Fee w/out PILT | June 2027 |
| 5,000 acres enhanced | June 2026 |
| 10,000 acres enhanced | June 2025 |
| 10,000 acres enhanced | June 2027 |

Budget**Totals**

| Item | Funding Request | Antic. Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Personnel | \$1,947,000 | - | - | \$1,947,000 |
| Contracts | \$2,500,000 | - | - | \$2,500,000 |
| Fee Acquisition w/ PILT | - | - | - | - |
| Fee Acquisition w/o PILT | \$2,500,000 | \$500,000 | TNC | \$3,000,000 |
| Easement Acquisition | - | - | - | - |
| Easement Stewardship | - | - | - | - |
| Travel | \$152,000 | - | - | \$152,000 |
| Professional Services | \$176,000 | - | - | \$176,000 |
| Direct Support Services | \$402,700 | - | - | \$402,700 |
| DNR Land Acquisition Costs | - | - | - | - |
| Capital Equipment | \$100,000 | - | - | \$100,000 |
| Other Equipment/Tools | \$211,000 | - | - | \$211,000 |
| Supplies/Materials | \$333,600 | - | - | \$333,600 |
| DNR IDP | - | - | - | - |
| Grand Total | \$8,322,300 | \$500,000 | - | \$8,822,300 |

Personnel

| Position | Annual FTE | Years Working | Funding Request | Antic. Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|-----------------------------|------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Project Management | 0.4 | 2.0 | \$131,000 | - | - | \$131,000 |
| Habitat Crews | 8.0 | 2.0 | \$757,100 | - | - | \$757,100 |
| Grant Administration | 0.12 | 2.0 | \$33,400 | - | - | \$33,400 |
| Prairie Recovery Biologists | 4.0 | 2.0 | \$730,000 | - | - | \$730,000 |
| TNC Science Staff | 0.03 | 2.0 | \$15,500 | - | - | \$15,500 |
| Protection Specialist | 1.0 | 2.0 | \$280,000 | - | - | \$280,000 |

Capital Equipment

| Item | Funding Request | Antic. Leverage | Leverage Source | Total |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|
| Replacement UTV w/tracks | \$35,000 | - | - | \$35,000 |
| Replacement UTV w/tracks | \$35,000 | - | - | \$35,000 |
| Replacement ATV w/utility trailer | \$15,000 | - | - | \$15,000 |
| Replacement ATV w/utility trailer | \$15,000 | - | - | \$15,000 |

Amount of Request: \$8,322,300**Amount of Leverage: \$500,000**

Leverage as a percent of the Request: 6.01%

DSS + Personnel: \$2,349,700

As a % of the total request: 28.23%

Easement Stewardship: -

As a % of the Easement Acquisition: -

Describe and explain leverage source and confirmation of funds:

The leverage offered represents private contributions equal to 20% of acquisition costs for Fee w/out PILT acquisitions. The funds will be placed in an endowment helping to ensuring long-term management and property tax obligations are met.

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?

We would anticipate delivering roughly 30% less acres across the Protection, Enhancement, and Restoration categories respectively.

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

Reduced funding would result in hiring less than a full complement of habitat crews. To ensure consistency in delivery full-time staff including project management and PR Biologists would be kept at approximately the same levels as in a full-funding model. DSS would remain at 7.5% of eligible expenses.

If the project received 50% of the requested funding

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

We would anticipate delivering roughly 50% less acres across the Protection, Enhancement, and Restoration categories respectively.

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

Reduced funding would result in a significant reduction in hiring of short-term seasonal crews. To ensure consistency in programmatic delivery full-time staff including project management and PR Biologists would be kept at approximately the same levels as in a full-funding model. DSS would remain at 7.5% of eligible expenses.

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?

Phase 13 is a component of the larger MN Prairie Recovery Program. Continuity of funding across multiple Phases allows us flexibility when prioritizing parcels for protection or enhancement. Further, it ensures stability in our staffing model and provides the ability to plan and prioritize projects over multiple years. The flexibility provided by stable funding is critically important to achieving conservation goals given the uncertainty and variability of field season weather conditions.

Contracts

What is included in the contracts line?

The entire contract line item is dedicated to enhancement and restoration work. Typical contractors include private vendors and

Conservation Corps of MN/IA.

Fee Acquisition

What is the anticipated number of fee title acquisition transactions?

Anticipated 8 Fee w/out PILT projects. Final number of transactions will vary depending on size of individual acquisition parcels, physical location within the state and corresponding land costs.

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

Travel line item includes funds for short term vehicle rentals, primarily for Project coordinator and Protection Specialists.

Long term truck lease costs for the Prairie Recovery Biologists are reflected in the Other Equipment line item

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 is based on The Nature Conservancy's Federal Negotiated Rate (FNR) as proposed and approved by the US Dept. of Interior on an annual basis. In this proposal we are requesting reimbursement of 7.5% of eligible base costs as determined by our annual FNR and based on suggestions from the Council in prior years' hearings. The amount requested for reimbursement represents less than one-third of the total reimbursable costs allowed under the FNR. Examples of expenses included in the FNR include services from in-house legal counsel; finance, human resources; and information technology support, all of which contribute directly to the implementation of the project. The FNR is not applied to capital equipment over \$50,000 or land acquisition.

Other Equipment/Tools

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

Equipment and tools run the gamut of necessary field supplies ranging from power tools to hand tools. Examples may include chain saws, brush saws, personal protection equipment for prescribed fire, and fencing/watering materials for conservation grazing. The equipment line item also includes herbicide and related application equipment, which are important tools for controlling invasive and noxious weeds in grasslands.

Federal Funds

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

No

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

| Type | Wetland | Prairie | Forest | Habitat | Total Acres |
|--|--------------|---------------|----------|----------|---------------|
| Restore | 50 | 200 | 0 | 0 | 250 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | 150 | 600 | 0 | 0 | 750 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance | 5,000 | 20,000 | 0 | 0 | 25,000 |
| Total | 5,200 | 20,800 | 0 | 0 | 26,000 |

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

| Type | Native Prairie (acres) |
|--|------------------------|
| Restore | 0 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | 0 |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | 500 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 |
| Enhance | 12,500 |
| Total | 13,000 |

Total Requested Funding by Resource Type (Table 2)

| Type | Wetland | Prairie | Forest | Habitat | Total Funding |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|--------------------|
| Restore | \$100,000 | \$200,000 | - | - | \$300,000 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | - | - | - | - | - |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | \$375,000 | \$2,125,000 | - | - | \$2,500,000 |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | \$830,800 | \$4,691,500 | - | - | \$5,522,300 |
| Total | \$1,305,800 | \$7,016,500 | - | - | \$8,322,300 |

Acres within each Ecological Section (Table 3)

| Type | Metro/Urban | Forest/Prairie | SE Forest | Prairie | N. Forest | Total Acres |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
| Restore | 0 | 125 | 0 | 125 | 0 | 250 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | 0 | 350 | 0 | 400 | 0 | 750 |
| Protect in Easement | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Enhance | 0 | 12,500 | 0 | 12,500 | 0 | 25,000 |
| Total | 0 | 12,975 | 0 | 13,025 | 0 | 26,000 |

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 | - | \$300,000 |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | - | \$850,000 | - | \$1,650,000 | - | \$2,500,000 |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | - | \$2,763,500 | - | \$2,758,800 | - | \$5,522,300 |
| Total | - | \$3,763,500 | - | \$4,558,800 | - | \$8,322,300 |

Average Cost per Acre by Resource Type (Table 5)

| Type | Wetland | Prairie | Forest | Habitat |
|------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
|------|---------|---------|--------|---------|

| | | | | |
|--|---------|---------|---|---|
| Restore | \$2,000 | \$1,000 | - | - |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | - | - | - | - |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | \$2,500 | \$3,541 | - | - |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | \$166 | \$234 | - | - |

Average Cost per Acre by Ecological Section (Table 6)

| Type | Metro/Urban | Forest/Prairie | SE Forest | Prairie | N. Forest |
|--|-------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-----------|
| Restore | - | \$1,200 | - | \$1,200 | - |
| Protect in Fee with State PILT Liability | - | - | - | - | - |
| Protect in Fee w/o State PILT Liability | - | \$2,428 | - | \$4,125 | - |
| Protect in Easement | - | - | - | - | - |
| Enhance | - | \$221 | - | \$220 | - |

Target Lake/Stream/River Feet or Miles

Outcomes

Programs in forest-prairie transition region:

- Remnant native prairies are part of large complexes of restored prairies, grasslands, and large and small wetlands ~ *Protection results will be measured against MN Prairie Conservation Plan goals for protected acres of native prairie and associated grassland for each geography.*

Enhancement results will be measured using protocols developed for the multi-agency Grassland Monitoring Network.

Programs in prairie region:

- Remnant native prairies and wetlands are perpetually protected and adequately buffered ~ *Protection results will be measured against MN Prairie Conservation Plan goals for protected acres of native prairie and associated grassland for each geography.*

Enhancement results will be measured using protocols developed for the multi-agency Grassland Monitoring Network.

Parcels

Sign-up Criteria?

No

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

Parcel selection for Protection projects without PILT obligations are prioritized according to the goals found within the MN Prairie Plan and specifically using the attached criteria. Parcels that the Conservancy will own and manage are located within core portfolio sites. Enhancement parcels consist of permanently protected grasslands primarily, USFWS WPAs and MN DNR WMAs, SNAs and Native Prairie Bank easements, and are selected for funding in close consultation with the partner responsible for ultimate management. Parcels proposed on the parcel list do not reflect actual parcels, rather are illustrative of the areas in which our work is to be conducted. Maintaining anonymity of parcels is an important consideration for the organization in order to protect landowner privacy rights and to maintain the integrity of good faith negotiations. All actual protection parcels will be submitted to the LSOHC for approval prior to acquiring through an Accomplishment Plan amendment request. All completed restoration and enhancement projects will be reported to the Council on the Status Updates and the Final Report.

Restore / Enhance Parcels

| Name | County | TRDS | Acres | Est Cost | Existing Protection |
|------|---------------|----------|-------|----------|---------------------|
| NA | Becker | 13942201 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Becker | 13942201 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Big Stone | 12446210 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Big Stone | 12446210 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Chippewa | 11739213 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Chippewa | 11739213 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Clay | 14247204 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Clay | 14247204 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Cottonwood | 10734220 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Cottonwood | 10734220 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Douglas | 13039212 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Douglas | 13039212 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Grant | 13041204 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Grant | 13041204 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Kandiyohi | 12233215 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Kandiyohi | 12233215 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Kittson | 16045206 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Kittson | 16045206 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Lac qui Parle | 11943211 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Lac qui Parle | 11943211 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Lincoln | 10945217 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Lincoln | 10945217 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Lyon | 11243218 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Lyon | 11243218 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Mahnomen | 14642208 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Mahnomen | 14642208 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Murray | 10740210 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Murray | 10740210 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Nobles | 10140225 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Nobles | 10140225 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Norman | 14647203 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Norman | 14647203 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Otter Tail | 13244216 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Otter Tail | 13244216 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |

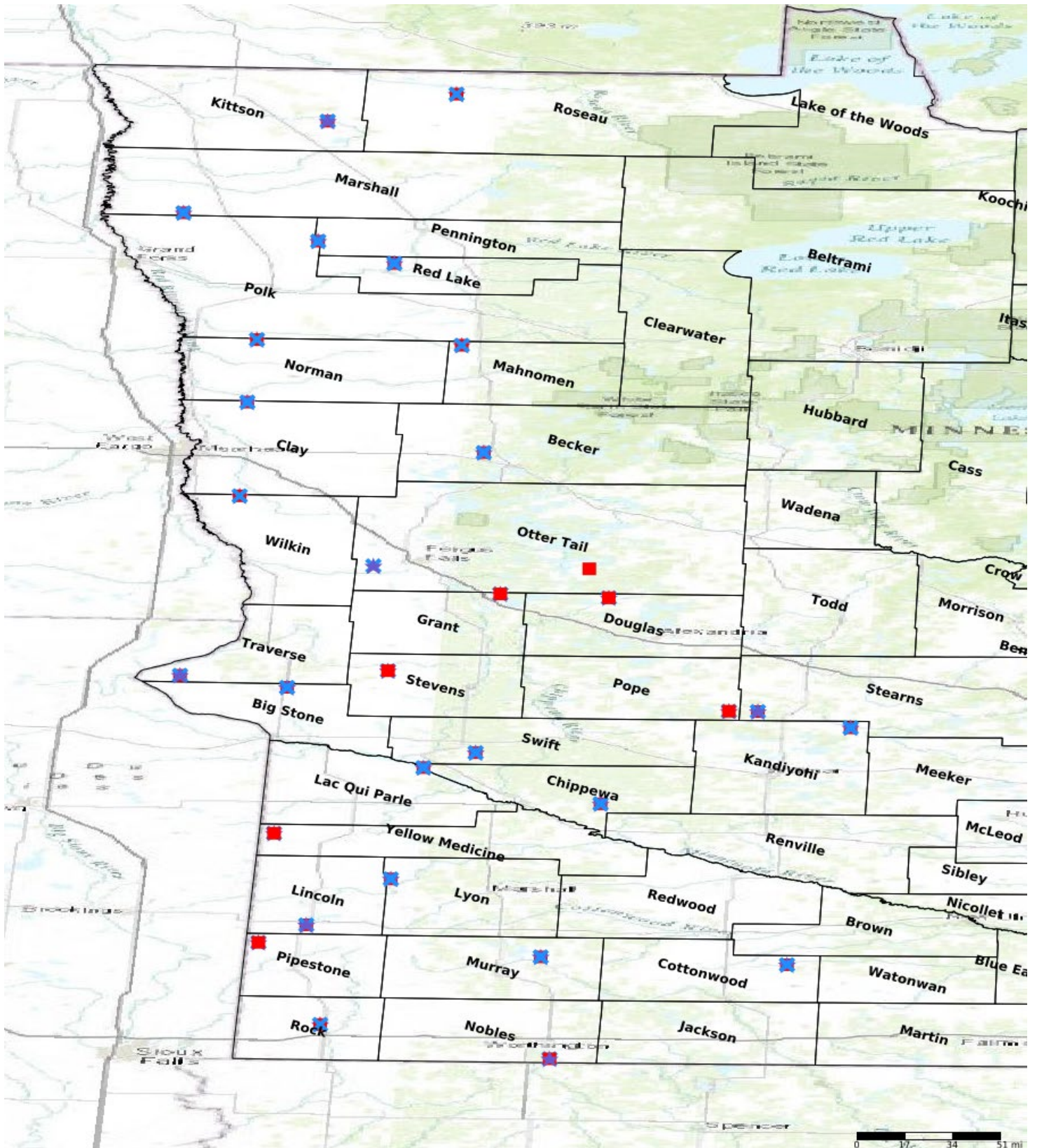
| | | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----------|----|---------|-----|
| NA | Pennington | 15345230 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Pennington | 15345230 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Pipestone | 10846219 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Pipestone | 10846219 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Polk | 15449201 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Polk | 15449201 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Pope | 12336214 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Pope | 12336214 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Red Lake | 15144202 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Red Lake | 15144202 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Rock | 10345227 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Rock | 10345227 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Roseau | 16242207 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Roseau | 16242207 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Stearns | 12335216 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Stearns | 12335216 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Stevens | 12544201 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Stevens | 12544201 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Swift | 12042212 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Swift | 12042212 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Traverse | 12548220 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Traverse | 12548220 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Wilkin | 13647205 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Wilkin | 13647205 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Yellow Medicine | 11546221 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |
| NA | Yellow Medicine | 11546221 | 99 | \$1,000 | Yes |

Protect Parcels

| Name | County | TRDS | Acres | Est Cost | Existing Protection |
|------|---------------|----------|-------|----------|---------------------|
| NA | Becker | 13942201 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Big Stone | 12446210 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Chippewa | 11739213 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Clay | 14247204 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Cottonwood | 10734220 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Douglas | 13039212 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Grant | 13041204 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Kandiyohi | 12233215 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Kittson | 16045206 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Lac qui Parle | 11943211 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Lincoln | 10945217 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Lyon | 11243218 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Mahnomen | 14642208 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Murray | 10740210 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Nobles | 10140225 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Norman | 14647203 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Otter Tail | 13239216 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Pennington | 15345230 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Pipestone | 10846219 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Polk | 15449201 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Pope | 12336214 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Red Lake | 15144202 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Rock | 10345227 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Roseau | 16242207 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Stearns | 12335216 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |

| | | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----------|----|---------|----|
| NA | Stevens | 12544201 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Swift | 12042212 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Traverse | 12548220 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Wilkin | 13647205 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |
| NA | Yellow Medicine | 11546221 | 99 | \$1,000 | No |

Parcel Map



MN Prairie Recovery Project

Phase 13

Funds Requested— \$8,322,300

Objective: To accelerate the protection, restoration and enhancement of prairie and grassland habitat within prairie core and corridor landscapes as identified in the 2018 Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan.

Outcomes

Protect - An estimated 750 acres of prairie, wetlands, grasslands, and savanna permanently protected through fee-title acquisition. All lands will be open to public use per constitutional requirements.

Enhance - Management on permanently protected lands —WPA, SNA, WPA, Prairie Bank— encompassing an estimated 25,000 acres of grassland/wetland complex with the goal of increasing species diversity and improving critical wildlife habitat.

Restore - Approximately 250 acres of marginal cropland restored to grassland and grassland/wetland complexes using diverse local ecotype seed and through restoration of wetland hydrology.

MN Prairie Recovery Program

Results To Date

2012-2022

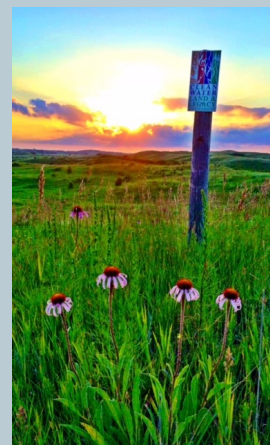
Protected: 7,874 acres native prairie, wetlands and other habitat permanently protected in fee-title. 50 total transactions completed with willing sellers in prairie core/corridor landscapes at an average cost of approximately \$2,500/acre. Permanently sequestered approximately 750,000 metric tons CO₂E.



Enhanced: Over 165,000 acres of publicly owned grassland/wetland habitat enhanced on state and federal conservation lands through prescribed fire, invasive species control, tree removal and conservation grazing. More than 1,500 unique projects at an average implementation cost of \$125/acre



Restored: 1900+ acres marginal cropland restored to diverse plant communities through 46 individual projects at a cost of approximately \$850/acre



**Parcel Selection Criteria used by The Nature Conservancy for
the Minnesota Prairie Recovery project funded by the Outdoor Heritage Fund**

The purpose of the Minnesota Prairie Recovery Project is to accelerate and coordinate conservation activities in the prairie regions of Minnesota, and to ensure that the remaining 200,000 acres of remnant native prairie are protected, that restorations complement these remnants and provide critical buffers and corridors, and that all remnant habitats are effectively enhanced with proper use of prescribed fire and control of undesirable species.

To accomplish this purpose, The Nature Conservancy proposes to acquire in fee key tracts of prairies and associated lands to provide maximum protection and opportunity for restoration and enhancement. In looking at restoring prairie functions at a landscape scale, the following criteria will be considered in our identification of appropriate parcels for acquisition:

1. **Native prairie on all or most of tract, or adjacency to existing native prairie.** Emphasis of the project is protecting and enhancing native prairie, as identified by DNR County Biological Survey or site inspection by trained biologist. Protecting native prairie includes the need to buffer and connect native remnants via restoration of non-native lands. We will identify and work with private landowners to acquire tracts that further our goal of native prairie conservation, and in particular, those that meet the other criteria listed below.
2. **Within core area boundary or in critical corridors between core areas.** The project will attempt to build "functioning landscapes" by concentrating in areas with a good core of existing native prairie. We are using the DNR County Biological Survey as a starting point for identifying these core areas. While CBS has identified 38 possible core areas, we will focus within or adjacent to one of 5 areas including: Tallgrass Aspen Parkland, northern Agassiz Beach Ridge, upper Minnesota River Valley, Ordway-Glacial Lakes area, or the Prairie Coteau. Priority will be given to those parcels that are within core areas or that help form critical corridors to maintain landscape function. Selection of tracts will also be guided by the strategies and objectives outlined in TNC's ecoregional conservation action plans.
3. **Near existing protected lands.** Building larger protected complexes is preferred to simplify and reduce overall management costs. In general, larger protected blocks are more effective at conserving the full array of wildlife species and biological diversity. Tracts near existing protected lands will be prioritized higher than those that are isolated.
4. **Greater habitat and species diversity, or host to unique species.** Parcels that host a rare habitat or a continuum of habitats, such as interconnected upland, wetland, riparian, and stream features, will be recognized as having added ecological value and given greater priority. Tracts with underrepresented, small-scale features (e.g., threatened species), will also be prioritized.
5. **Suitability for ultimate assumption by DNR (WMA or SNA).** The Conservancy is proposing to hold these lands for an indefinite period of time. However, we recognize that public ownership of some or all of the acquired properties may be preferable in the future. In order to facilitate this, we will consult with the DNR prior to acquisition regarding the suitability of proposed acquisition tracts for future consideration as a Wildlife Management Area or Scientific and Natural Area.
6. **No buildings or CRP issues.** Existing buildings pose a challenge because they may not be eligible for Outdoor Heritage Fund use and they require additional effort to demolish or sell. Similarly, lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program can complicate the appraisal and

acquisition process. We will give priority to those parcels that have neither buildings nor existing long term CRP leases.

7. **Suitable for grazing.** A principal element of this proposal is to use conservation grazing as a way to meet ecological objectives and to generate income. Lands that are suitable for grazing, or that have recently been used for grazing, will be prioritized.
8. **Willing seller.** We will only work with willing sellers, and those that can abide by the statutory process laid out for use of public funds.
9. **Suitability for public recreation.** Constitutional language requires that these lands be open to public taking of fish and game. We will prioritize those parcels that can foster those public uses.
10. **Additional restrictions or conditions** as specified by the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, public laws and rules, and program policies that direct acquisition priorities.